THE FEMALE JEWISH MAGICIAN:

THE PHENOMENON IN THE GRECO-ROMAN PERIOD

by

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ABSTRACT

In his poem, *Satire VI,* the late first-century and early second-century C.E. Roman poet Juvenal describes a Jewish sorceress, a woman who is religiously knowledgeable and whose magical ability seems to be inherent to her gender. This thesis examines Juvenal's passage within the larger framework of female Jewish magicians, beginning with its Biblical antecedents and Exodus 22:17, which states, מְכַשֵּׁפָה לֹא תְחַיֶּה, or "You shall not tolerate a sorceress [to live]." It continues by evaluating *Satire VI* within its Greco-Roman socio-historical context as found in intertestamental Jewish sources, pagan and Christian literature, archaeological evidence, and the Jewish rabbinic written corpus. Like Juvenal and other Greco-Roman sources, the rabbis felt that sorcery was intrinsic to women's natures. They felt undeniably threatened by female magic practitioners, but also recognized and respected the power they held within society.

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And finally, to Jonathan: this is for you. You have supported me unconditionally, always, and are my muse and my sounding-board all in one. I could not ask for a better husband, co-parent, or friend. *Todah rabah,* and I love you.

ABBREVIATIONS, TRANSLATIONS, AND EDITIONS

Unless otherwise noted, English quotations from the Hebrew Bible are taken from the *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* (JPS Publishing 1999), and New Testament quotations are from the Revised Standard Version (1952). All translations of the Babylonian *Talmud* derive from G. Zlotowitz, et al. (eds.), *Talmud Bavli: The Schottenstein Edition* (New York 1997), and translations of the Palestinian *Talmud* are from J. Neusner, *Talmud of the Land of Israel* (Chicago 1984).

ABD	D. Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York 1992)
EDRL	A. Berger, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law* (Philadelphia 1983)
EJMMM	G. Dennis, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic, and Mysticism* (Woodbury, MN 2007)
GLAJJ	M. Stern (ed.), *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism,* II (Jerusalem 1980)
JAAR	*The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JAGNES	*The Journal of Associated Graduates in Near Eastern Studies*
JWAS	*Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences*
LCMAM	P. Michalowski (ed.), *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (Atlanta 1997)
NIB	L. Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville 2001)
TDOT	G. Botterweck et al. (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids 1995)

Biblical, pseudepigraphic, and rabbinic texts and the works of Greek and Latin authors are cited according to the list of abbreviations in P. H. Alexander et. al (eds.), *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Peabody, MA 1999).

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

I have always been, and probably always will be, fascinated by magic. As a child, I read and reread Joan Carris' *Witch-Cat*; in college, I played a sorceress in a weekly game of *Dungeons & Dragon*; and as an adult, friends have been jokingly referred to me as *Hermione* after the character in the *Harry Potter* series. I am a strident feminist, love Roman history, and as a student rabbi, am passionate about the importance of understanding and maintaining interfaith and interdenominational relationships in the larger community.

The fact that this thesis revolves around female Jewish magicians in Greco-Roman times, comparing and contrasting Jewish, pagan, and Christian viewpoints, should thus come as a surprise to no one.

The following pages address the phenomenon of the sorceress in Jewish society in the Greco-Roman period, roughly from the first to the fifth centuries C.E. The Roman poet Juvenal, dateable to the late first-century and early second-century C.E., writes in his *Satire VI: On the Ways of Women* of "a trembling Jewess,"

> An interpreter
> Of the laws of Jerusalem, high priestess with a tree
> As temple, a trusty go-between of high heaven. And she
> Fills her palm, but much less full, for at bargain prices a Jew
> Sells you the answer to any dream you'd like to come true.[1]

This small description is, to my knowledge, the lengthiest non-rabbinic passage on a Jewish female magician in all of Greco-Roman literature. Juvenal writes of Jewish women sorceresses as if they are a routine part of life, a fixture in Greco-Roman society.

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[1] Juvenal, *Sat. VI:* 542-547 [trans. H. Creekmore, in *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, and Monastics: A Sourcebook on Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. Ross S. Kraemer; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988)], 41-42.

They seem commonly accepted, and even worthy of ridicule. The passage implies that sorcery was inherent to Jewish women as part of their very nature. At the very least, it attests to the fact that they clearly existed.

This thesis, then, attempts to go backwards and forward in time in order to examine the legitimacy of Juvenal's claims. The following chapters encompass Biblical, inter-testamental, and pseudepigraphal material, pagan poetry and historical collections, Roman legal material, and the majority of the Jewish interpretative writing codified by the rabbis in Palestine and Babylonia. I also include physical artifacts as part of my analysis of "cultural texts," and so comment upon incantation bowls, amulets, and *lamellae* that archaeologists consider to be magic-related.

Chapter Two introduces the term כשף, or "magic," and analyzes the phenomenon of the Jewish sorceress at the time of the Hebrew Bible. The primary relevant text in the Bible is that of Exodus 22:17, which states, מְכַשֵּׁפָה לֹא תְחַיֶּה. This translates to either, "You shall not tolerate a sorceress," or, "A magician [feminine conjugation] shall not be allowed to live." I explain this remark in light of its socio-historical context, as well as its later interpretations by rabbinic authorities. I then survey the remaining other instances of the feminine use of כשף, as found in II Kings 9:22, regarding the highly unpopular queen, Jezebel, and Nahum 3:4 on the city of Jerusalem. The chapter ends with a discussion of Ezekiel 13:17-23, on "the women of your people, who prophesy out of their own imagination,"[2] and Samuel 28:7-25, on the encounter with the so-called "Witch of Endor." It concludes that women were labeled "sorceress" if they deviated

[2] Ezek 13:17

from mainstream Israelite religious practices, especially if they were did not adhere to strict monotheism.

Chapter Three examines the non-rabbinic portrayal of magic that is practiced by women in the 3rd century B.C.E. to the 5th century C.E. Beginning with the definition of "magic" in the Greco-Roman world, I place Juvenal's *Satire VI* in its pagan and Christian context, characterizing the Jewish sorceress of the poem as a *saga,* an itinerant gypsy who is known alternatively as a wise-woman, soothsayer, and healer. I then examine the interpretation of Exodus 22:17 and all other references to women magicians in the two most famous Jewish authors of the era, first-century C.E. authors Philo and Josephus. After addressing sorceresses in Jewish and Christian early narrative literature, primarily in *The Book of Enoch,* various *Testaments,* and *Joseph and Aseneth,* I summarize archaeological findings of amulets and incantation bowls from this time period that provide a glimpse into the "magical" practices of Jewish women.

Weighing Juvenal, archaeology, and mentions of Jewish sorceresses in pagan and Christian literature against Exodus 22:17, it becomes easily apparent that the view of women magicians as based upon Biblical law did not impose itself over the course of the centuries. Female magic-workers were thought to be prevalent in the whole of society, not just the Jewish sphere, and trials against them are even recorded in Roman law. This chapter explains how, in a similar fashion to Biblical times, those who were called "witch" in the Greco-Roman world were usually not women who performed acts of sorcery, but women who did not adhere to the constraints placed upon them by their socially-accepted gender roles.

The fourth chapter discusses female practitioners of magic in rabbinic sources, and explains that magic in rabbinic literature was largely characterized by ambivalence:

> Magic in the Babylonian Talmud could connote either divine power or subversive danger, depending on context... In Mesopotamia, where many of the practices Greeks considered to be magic originated, the use of apotropaic incantations, amulets, and figures constituted an ordinary part of the culture. These practices were regarded *neutrally* and did not contribute to the formation of a metadiscourse on alterity such as magic. On the other hand, Jews in Palestine and other parts of the Mediterranean encountered Greek discursive constructs, including magic, and assimilated many of them. For this reason, two distinct attitudes toward magic exist side by side in the Talmud. On the one hand, ideas that magic is foreign, illicit, and dangerous appear. On the other hand, rabbis are sometimes depicted as masters of these same or similar arts.[3]

I clarify this confusing magical binary in rabbinic literature, and describe why men were depicted as "masters"[4] of magic, while women were not: from the rabbinic viewpoint, men who performed magic did so with God's blessing, while women were thought to do so with God's condemnation.

While the rabbis of the *Mishnah, Talmud, Tosefta,* and various other texts believed, as did Juvenal, that women were naturally inclined to sorcery, the sorceress was rarely depicted in rabbinic literature as the grizzled older woman like the *saga.* Instead, she was most often described as the average Jewish woman. This chapter scrutinizes multiple verses and stories on female Jewish magicians as found within the Babylonian and Palestinian *Talmudim, Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai, Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer, Aboth d'Rabbi Nathan,* and other rabbinic sources, and determines that magic performed by women was acknowledged as being both negative *and* positive, and that the magic practitioners were respected as possessing great power.

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[3] Kimberly Stratton, *Naming the Witch: Magic, Ideology, and Stereotype in the Ancient World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 143-144.
[4] Ibid.

My goal in this thesis is to place Biblical and classical pagan, Jewish, and Christian texts side-by-side alongside secondary scholarship in order to show that Jewish female magic as found in rabbinical literature was influenced by, and in turn influenced, contemporary Greco-Roman culture. Juvenal's reference to Jewish sorceresses in *Satire VI* did not exist in a vacuum; it reflected an understanding of Jewish women performing magic that was shared not only by the rabbis, but by pagan and Christian authors in the Greco-Roman world, as well. The rabbinic perspective on women performing magic was both similar and different from its pagan and Christian counterparts, and cannot, I believe, be separated from its historical context.

CHAPTER 2: The Female Jewish Magician in the Bible

Although the focus of this thesis is on the female Jewish magician in Greco-Roman times, it must be noted that the decisions of the Talmud are based on the Bible, and the former's references are very often formed, judged, and examined in light of Biblical text. This thesis, therefore, would be remiss without an examination of the phenomena of the female Jewish magician from the Biblical time period. As such, this chapter aims to introduce women's magic according to linguistic and societal context of the Ancient Near East. I will briefly define the term כשף, or "magic," and survey the instances of women's magic in the Hebrew Bible, explaining throughout why women's magic was considered different than magic rendered by men. Beginning with the primary text of Exodus 22:17, I will continue with the only other instances of the feminine use of כשף, II Kings 9:22 on Jezebel and Nahum 3:4 on Jerusalem, and close with two texts that refer to sorceresses but do not mention them explicitly, Ezekiel 13:17-23 and Samuel 28:7-25.

2.1 Defining Magic in the Hebrew Bible

Before one can even explore the basic elements of what constitutes a female Jewish magician in the Hebrew Testament, much less in Greco-Roman society, one must define the term "magician" in and of itself. Linguistically, instances that the Jewish Publication Society translates as the term "magic" or "sorcery" derive from the Hebrew word כשף. According to the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament,* in the Hebrew Bible, the root *kšp* "is cognate with the Akkadian *kašāpu, kaššupu,* 'bewitch,

enchant,' and its nominal derivatives *kišpu,* 'magic, witchcraft,' and *kaššupu / kaššuptu,* 'magician, witch."[1] While the precise meaning of the term is unknown, "it usually appears with other terms denoting various forms of magic and divination."[2]

Yet, no matter the exact meaning, the nuances of the term are known and are generally negative. As a whole, magic and sorcery are considered detrimental to a proper relationship with God. Numerous examples abound in which sorcery is looked down upon by God: in Malachi 3:5, the root is the first word in a long list of transgressors who do not fear God, while Jeremiah 27:9 uses the root in a list of false prophets to whom good God-fearing Israelites should pay no heed. Micah 5:9-14 lists those who practice *kšapim* as part of a litany who God will destroy, along with idols and sacred pillars.

The most obvious citation of *kšapim* as negative comes in Deuteronomy 18:9-11, which reads, in an instruction to the Israelites,

> When you enter the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations. Let no one be found among you who consigns his son or daughter to the fire, or who is an augur, a soothsayer, a diviner, a sorcerer [וּמְכַשֵּׁף] one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits, or one who inquires of the dead.

In this case, the word appears in a list of practices that are "abhorrent" to God. As Jeffers explains, *měkaššēpîm* "are an 'abomination' to Yahweh because of their heathen connections which spoil the proper connection with Yahweh."[3] Ricks goes one step further, and states that the magician is any outsider, both Israelite and non-Israelite,

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[1] G. Andre, כָּשַׁף. *TDOT* 7: 361.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ann Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria,* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 68.

whose religious practices differed from the cultural norm. He believes that their acts "were perceived as being performed through a power other than Israel's God."[4]

Sarna agrees with Jeffers and Ricks. He explains that:

> within the intellectual system of polytheism, the reality of a realm of existence independent of the gods and ultimately in control of them was a logical inference. The attempt to activate and manipulate to one's advantage the mysterious supernatural forces inherent in this realm constituted the essence of magic... Biblical monotheism, with its uncompromising insistence on the absolute omnipotence of one universal, sovereign, creator God, was totally irreconcilable with the underlying postulates of magic.[5]

These scholars exemplify the stream of thought in which magic, in any form, is frowned upon by the Biblical authors. The early precursors to Judaism believed magic to be a form of religious subversion due to its pagan source, which would ultimately undermine the foundations of the monotheistic early Israelite religion.

Of course, the very fact that magic is mentioned so many times in the Bible is proof that it was widely accepted by the populace as a holdover of an indigenous religion and its pre-Yahwistic practices. Some scholars believe that magic, then, is not wholly negative. Instead of merely "survivals" of earlier practices into later historical times, magic can be more integrated into Israelite religion, and be part of an integral and indigenous culture: "Defining magic broadly and positively, these scholars see a 'magical' underpinning for a variety of 'religious' figures (prophets, 'men of God,' priests, kings) and 'religious' practices."[6] Such an example of a positive magical world-

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[4] Stephen D. Ricks, "The Magician as Outsider in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 132.
[5] Nahum M. Sarna, ed., *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 136.
[6] J.A. Scurlock, "Magic," *ABD* 4: 464-471.

view can be found in the story of the Witch of Endor in Samuel 28, which will be explained later in this chapter.

2.2 Exodus 22:17

The main source for every specific rabbinic injunction against women practicing sorcery is Exodus 22:17, מְכַשֵּׁפָה לֹא תְחַיֶּה. Interestingly enough, in most Biblical references the root כשף is rendered in the male form. It is only in Exodus 22:17 that the *piel* word is found in its feminine conjugation. The line has typically been translated two ways, either "Thou shall not tolerate a sorceress," or more literally, "You shall not suffer a witch to live." The crime, sorcery, is clear, as is the punishment of death.

Modern interpretations of this verse have been fairly consistent. They are twofold: one, the punishment is not aimed at women who practice *magic*, but women who are overtly sexual, in line with the Exodus verses preceding our sorcery prohibition. Two, it is thought that the verse is not aimed at *women* who practice magic, but directed toward the judges who might put them on trial.

Exodus 22:15-16, directly before the verse on sorceresses, decrees that "If a man seduces a virgin for whom the bride-price has not been paid, and lies with her, he must make her his wife by payment of a bride-price. If her father refuses to give her to him, he must still weigh out silver in accordance with the bride-price for virgins." Though this verse seems to address *men* who are seducers, it has been speculated that in fact, the women were overly seductive as well, and they convinced the men to share their beds in order to marry. The Dutch scholar Houtman, for example, in *Exodus: Historical Commentary on the Old Testament,* implies that since Exodus 22:17 immediately follows

the content of seducers, it is not directed toward women magicians, but against any women who are particularly sexually attractive, and "possess hidden powers on account of the irresistible pull she had on others."[7] She is an adulteress, the woman "the wisdom teachers warn against, because she destroys men."[8]

The German Biblical scholar Ehrlich agrees with him, and observes that the root *kšp* appears alongside verbs connoting sexual activity in the cases of 2 Kings 9:22, Nahum 3:4 and Malachi 3:5.[9] Sarna, too, states that the placement of Exodus 22:15-16 alongside 22:17 as well as next to 22:18, which prohibits bestiality, does fit the context of actions that are forbidden to Israelites due to a ban on immorality and deception.[10]

The other modern interpretation, that Exodus 22:17 is directed at the judges, is considered in light of ancient Near Eastern law. If a woman is accused of witchcraft, put on trial, and convicted, a judge may be tempted to spare her life, "whether out of fear, compassion, or a desire to use her services."[11] The law commands severity to negate the judges' possible temptation.

Whether this interpretation is correct or not, scholars do compare this verse to a similar law code from the reign of the Babylonian ruler Hammurabi, dating to around 1780 BCE. Thought by some scholars to be the Biblical Amraphel, King of Shenar

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[7] Houtman, *Exodus: Historical Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 3: Chapters 20-40* (trans. S. Woudstra; Walpole, Mass.: Peeters-Leuven, 2000), 212.
[8] Ibid.
[9] *Randglossen zur Hebräischen Bibel; textkritisches, sprachliches und sachliches;* transl. and ref. in W.H.C. Propp, *AB: Exodus 19-40* (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 2006), 255.
[10] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus,* 136.
[11] Propp, *AB: Exodus 19-40*, 256. The most blatant violator of this law is King Saul, who consults the Witch of Endor in I Samuel 28:7-25.

mentioned in Genesis 14,[12] the law code could be a (relatively) contemporary document and therefore a valid basis of comparison:

> If a man charges another man with practicing witchcraft but cannot bring proof against him, he who is charged with witchcraft shall go the Divine River Ordeal, he shall indeed submit to the Divine River Ordeal; if the divine River Ordeal shall overwhelm him, his accuser shall take full legal possession of his estate; if the divine River Ordeal should clear that man and should he survive, he who made the charge of witchcraft against him shall be killed; he who submitted to the divine River Ordeal shall take full legal possession of his accuser's estate.[13]

Although this law code addresses men and not women, scholars do believe that it applies to both. "If either a man *or a woman* should be discovered practicing witchcraft," claims the Anchor Bible, and they are found guilty, that practitioner of witchcraft should be killed.[14] Sorceresses thus deserve death according to Babylonian law, and so it is logical that such a punishment would be cemented in the Biblical judges' minds as well.

However, while Hammurabi's code addresses itself toward men, at the very least, and only possibly relates to women, Exodus 22:17 distinctly speaks to women alone. While admittedly there is not a legal context in all passages to provide an accurate comparison, it seems as though there is a markedly unequal gender balance between the accusation of sorcery and the various forms of punishment for men and women in the Hebrew Bible. The מְכַשֵּׁפָה (female) in Exodus 22:17, for example, is sentenced to death, but references to the same *piel* root in the masculine form are much more lenient.

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[12] See discussion in Norman K. Gottwald's *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 164-165.
[13] Code of Hammurabi §2 (trans. Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor,* Second Edition [ed. Piotr Migchalowski; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997], 81.
[14] Propp, *AB: Exodus 19-40,* 256.

The מְכַשֵּׁף (male) in Deuteronomy 18:10 has no precise punishment given, while the punishment for the מְכַשֵּׁף in Jeremiah 27:9 and Malachi 3:5 is left up to God. [15]

The reason for this is simple: in the Ancient Near East, and especially later in rabbinic times (as will be addressed in Chapter 4), "women's magic" was considered a different entity than was "men's magic." The gender roles were so clear, and the divisions between the men's and women's spheres were so clear-cut, that men had no way of understanding the spirituality practiced by women. As Ilan, the historian of Jewish women in antiquity, explains, "The link between woman and sorcery arose out of their experience with childbirth, healing, the preparation of potions and medicines, and even lamentation at the grave – all of which occupations were foreign to men and seemed to them perilously close to the invocation of evil forces."[16] Men and women had different daily life experiences, and what was unknown to men, the recorders of history and the authors of the Bible and rabbinic literature, became an institutional source of fear.

Ilan details this difference between women and men's magic even further. She refers to women in Greco-Roman times, but makes it clear that this applied to women in Biblical times as well:

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[15] Deut 18:10-12:

> Let no one be found among you who consigns his son or daughter to the fire, or who is an augur, a soothsayer, a diviner, a sorcerer, one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits, or one who inquires of the dead. For anyone who does such things is abhorrent to the LORD, and it is because of these abhorrent things that the LORD your God is dispossessing them before you.

Jer 27:9:

> As for you, give no heed to your prophets, augurs, dreamers, diviners, and sorcerers, who say to you, "Do not serve the king of Babylon."

Mal 3:5:

> But first I will step forward to contend against you, and I will act as a relentless accuser against those who have no fear of Me: Who practice sorcery, who commit adultery, who swear falsely, who cheat laborers of their hire, and who subvert the cause of the widow, orphan, and stranger, said the LORD of Hosts.

[16] Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine: An Inquiry into Image and Status* [Tubingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1995]: 225.

> Since they [women] could not practice it [Judaism] with men in public prayer, in the Temple and then in the synagogue, they practiced their version at home. Jewish men, who viewed their actions, did not approve of what they saw. They (perhaps rightly) failed to identify in women's actions the same religion they practiced and concluded that since it was not pure Judaism, it must be witchcraft. The sources in this respect are particularly clear, reserving witchcraft accusations almost entirely to women.[17]

In Ilan's view, women did not practice the same Judaism as did men, for their worship had customs and practices that were unfamiliar to the priestly cult. This formation of a women's religion was through necessity, for with "the prophetic rejection of pagan deities and the consolidation of the all male priesthood of Yahweh, women were barred from any leadership role in Israelite worship."[18] Participation in mainstream Israelite religious society was voluntary, not mandated, and women were limited for much of their lives by male-created menstrual taboos.

Women thus lived on the edges of religious society, and so formed their own unique practices. As Harari claims, "Magic is the potent ritual activity carried out on the fringe of society, whilst religion is the potent ritual activity carried out by the institution. The threat embodied by non-institutional foci of power was that which made their ritual activity, 'magic,' that is, forbidden."[19] In this case, "their ritual activity" refers to the way women practiced their Israelite religious culture. They lacked modern medicine, psychology, economics, and political science; what they did have was magical practices that offered them a sense of control over what happened to themselves and their families.

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[17] Tal Ilan, "Cooks/Poisoners; Healers/Killers; Religion/Witchcraft: Jewish Women's Religious Life at Home," in *Haushalt, Hauskult, Hauskirche. Zur Arbeitsteilung der Geschlechter in Wirtschaft und Religion* (ed. E. Klinger; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2004), 122-123.

[18] Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990), 43.

[19] Yuval Harari, "What is a Magical Text? Methodological Reflections Aimed at Redefining Early Jewish Magic," in *Officina Magica: Essays on the Practice of Magic in Antiquity* (ed. Shaul Shaked; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 100. Emphasis mine.

"Magic, therefore, should be acknowledged as a valuable and important aspect of religious life for Israelites. If women are particularly implicated in the use or practice of what is deemed magic, then their practices must be understood as religious in nature and must be accordingly recognized and evaluated."[20] The men at that time did not understand this, however, and called it evil. This explains why the accusation of magic came with such a high price to pay.

As such, the specific injunction against women sorceresses, but not male sorcerers, found in Exodus 22:17 is most likely a historical relic of the patriarchal system within Israelite society. "The feminine speculation here [in the grammar of the verse] probably reflects a historical reality that the clandestine operators of this officially outlawed cult were mostly women."[21] They had no access to mainstream religion, so practiced their own conception of spirituality. The men who wrote the Bible did not understand this societal configuration and called it "magic." They decreed that *women,* who practiced magic, but not men who did so, were deserving of death. The English as well as the Hebrew language used supports this theory whole-heartedly. As detailed in the Anchor Bible, Exodus "22:17 might be a veiled attack on empowered women and female cultic practices in general. Most male thaumaturgies are called "prophets," with a few exceptions; most female thaumaturgies, are called 'witches,' again with a few counterexamples."[22] Exodus 22:17 is thus not a comment on magic alone, but also presupposes a woman's role, and the lack thereof, in mainstream Israelite religion.

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[20] Carol Meyers, *Households and Holiness: The Religious Culture of Israelite Women* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 22.
[21] Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus,* 136.
[22] Propp, *AB: Exodus 19-40*, 256.

While the modern commentators discuss the socio-historical perspective, and read Exodus 22:17 in light of its Ancient Near Eastern context, the same cannot be said for those who wrote in rabbinic and medieval times. I will put aside all remarks on rabbinic commentary for the moment, as women magicians in rabbinic literature is the subject of Chapter 4, but I will here briefly explain the medieval perspectives. Rashi and Ibn Ezra feel that the verse applies to both men and women, Rashbam to only women, and Nachmanides, Gersonides, and Bekhor Shore leave the issue unaddressed. They instead focus on the harsh punishment for transgressing.

Rashi, the French *pshat* commentator who lived from 1040-1105 C.E., believes that it is not up to any random person to kill a witch, but that she can only be put to death by a court. He further states that he believes the law applies to both sexes equally, although women will be accused of it more often than men: "Both men and women who practice witchcraft are included in this law but in using the feminine term מְכַשֵּׁפָה Scripture speaks of what is usually the case; for it is women who mostly practice witchcraft."[23]

Ibn Ezra, who lived from 1092-1116, feels the exact same way about both latter points, and he gives a long linguistic explanation as to why: "This *heh* [in מְכַשֵּׁפָה] does shift the accent, and the word is therefore grammatically feminine... when the Torah gives us a rule about the 'sacrificer' to other gods, we know that it also applies to the 'sacrificer-ess.' The same is true here. The rule speaks of a 'sorceress,' but applies to a 'sorcerer' as well. The feminine form of the word is used here because women are more

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[23] Rashi, *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary: Exodus* (trans. M. Rosenbaum and A.M. Silbermann; New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1972), 119a.

occupied with magic than men."[24] He continues on to explain that לֹא תְחַיֶּה may actually *not* mean "put to death," but instead could mean merely that one may not do business with a witch. He agrees that witches are social pests, for lack of a better term, given to harmful magic and should be punished, but he does not believe that the crime warrants death.

In contrast, Rashbam, Rashi's grandson, thinks that Exodus 22:17 applies to women alone. Samuel ben Meir lived from 1085-1158 in France, and states that "sorceresses generally ply their trade in secret hiding places, like caves [like the story in *m. Sanh.* 6:4, to be explained in Chapter 4]... that is why the Torah says, 'Do not let [them] live,' i.e. 'Do not abandon the investigation after them, do not let them stay alive because you are too lazy; rather investigate about them, so you may put them to death.'"[25] Unlike his grandfather, Rashbam posits that it *is* an individual's responsibility, and not the courts', to kill a witch. Women are deceitful, perform their magic in secret, and cannot be trusted, and one must take great pains to rout them out, "lest even one survive through negligence."[26]

Ramban, or Nachmanides, lived around a century later in Spain, from 1194-1270, and he does not discuss the intended gender of the verse at all. Instead, he focuses on the merits of fulfilling a positive versus a negative commandment, then comments on sorceresses themselves: "To 'not suffer a sorceress to live' is a prohibition, and violation of a prohibition is more serious than failure to perform a positive commandment. Because she is 'besmirched of name' and 'laden with iniquity' and fools are easily lured

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[24] Ibn Ezra, *The Commentator's Bible: The JPS Miqra'ot G'dolot: Exodus* (Trans. M. Carasik; New York: Jewish Publication Society, 2005), 190.
[25] *Rashbam's Commentary on Exodus: An Annotated Translation* (Trans. M. I. Lockshin; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 263.
[26] Propp, *AB: Exodus 19-40,* 256.

after her, the text is more severe with her. Similar prohibitions apply to... the enticer and the murderer."[27] In this case, Ramban compares sorceresses to the utmost evil, quotes Ezekiel 22:5, in which the "she" referred to is not a female magician, but rather a fallen Jerusalem about to be sacked by an angry God. He then mentions two other categories of people who are shown no mercy in their death sentence, the enticer in Deuteronomy 13:9 ("Show him no pity or compassion, and do not shield him) and the murderer in Numbers 35:31 ("You may not accept ransom for the life of a murderer"). Neither comparison, it is noted, is flattering to women.

Rashbam's pupil, Joseph ben Isaac Bekhor Shore, flourished in the second half of the twelfth century, and comments on the legal ramifications of the verse, not the gender issues. Following in the footsteps of his teacher, he believes that individuals must take it upon themselves to kill a witch, but he expands on Rashbam's reasons. Instead of listing the negative personality traits of a woman, he mentions the pragmatic: לֹא תְחַיֶּה means that one does not make her stand trial. Rather, because she is a known witch, anyone who promptly killed her would be meritorious. For if one brought her before a court, she would perform sorceries in order to save herself or work some harm."[28] He then supports his interpretation by comparing the verse to a decree directed toward the Canaanites in Deuteronomy 20:16, "Let not a soul live," which also refers to prompt execution without a trial.

Gersonides, or Ralbag, who lived in France from 1288-1344 C.E., has little to add save that Exodus 22:17 refers only to the practice of *magic,* and not to tricks done by

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[27] Nahmanides (trans. Carasik), *Commentator's Bible,* 190.
[28] Propp, *AB: Exodus 19-40,* 255.

sleight of hand.[29] He wants to be clear to whom the verse applies so that no one is mistakenly killed, by either individuals or the courts. This parallels the Code of Hammurabi, which also admits the possibility of a false accusation. The views of both Ralbag and Bekhor Shore echo that of some modern-day commentators, for they believe that verse addresses the judges who would name a witch, whether as an individual or in a court of law.

The various interpretations of מְכַשֵּׁפָה לֹא תְחַיֶּה have, over the centuries, covered bases ranging from linguistic to socio-historical to legal to gender-specific. It is no surprise that only the modern commentators, and not the medieval, take into account the definition of women's magic. Yet, as a whole, the interpretations cover wide ground. Their very variety confirms the puzzling nature of the verse, and proves that it is puzzling to every generation.

2.3 Other Biblical Sources: II Kings 9:22, Nahum 3:4, Ezekiel 13:17-23 and I Samuel 28:7-25

Aside from Exodus 22:17, there are only two other instances in the Bible which utilize the feminine form of the root כשׁף. These are found in II Kings 9:22 and Nahum 3:4, where both references are very short and straightforward. However, there are two other references to witchcraft in the Hebrew Bible, in Ezekiel 13:17-23 and I Samuel 28:7-25. This section aims to explore all four passages in light of the definition of "Jewish women's magic."

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[29] Gersonides (trans. Carasik), *Commentator's Bible,* 190.

II Kings 9:22 takes place within the Omri dynasty, from 880-841 B.C.E. The author of the Deuteronomic History is thought to have compiled the information around the 8th century B.C.E. Historically at this time, Solomon's united kingdom has divided, and Omri and then his son Ahab rule the kingdom of Israel. Archeologically, there is much evidence that Omri and Ahab were active, prosperous kings, building up the northern cities of Dan, Hazor, Megiddo, and Tirzah.[30] The Deuteronomic Historian, however, focuses not on their political acumen, but on their religious "downfalls" as recorded by the prophets.

The material on Ahab begins with the announcement of his diplomatic marriage to Jezebel, the daughter of King Ethbaal of Sidon. The prophets Elijah and Elisha mount increasing criticisms of Jezebel, for "in accord with this alliance, Ahab is reported to have placed an altar and a temple for Baal worship in Samaria, together with an *asherah* – a pillar representing the tree sacred to the goddess Asherah, a consort of Baal. Jezebel was the patron of this establishment, Ahab the accomplice."[31] Jezebel and Ahab then have a son, named Joram.

It is in this context that we must weigh the words of the Deuteronomic Historian. II Kings 9:22 reads, "When Joram saw Jehu, he asked, 'Is all well, Jehu?' But Jehu replied, 'How can all be well as long as your mother Jezebel carries on her countless harlotries and sorceries [וְכִשְׁפֶּיהָ]?'" Jezebel was a Phoenician, not an Israelite woman, and worshiped the gods and goddesses with whom she was brought up. Though it is unknown how far this worship penetrated among the Israelites, "the very espousal of Baal

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[30] Edward F. Campbell Jr., "A Land Divided: Judah and Israel from the Death of Solomon to the Fall of Samaria," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (ed. Michael D. Coogan; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 206-241.
[31] Ibid., 221.

and Yahweh worship side by side in the royal court was… abhorrent to these exclusive Yahwists"[32] who wrote the Biblical text. From this point on, according to historian Edward F. Campbell, Jr. "Jezebel, and Ahab through her, will be used by the Deuteronomic Historian as the symbolic violator of norms."[33] To put it bluntly, Jezebel is called a harlot and a sorceress for no other crime than worshiping on the fringes of Israelite religion.

The setting of the Book of Nahum is approximately two hundred years after that of II Kings. The prophet is thought to have lived from 663 and 613 B.C.E., and his work focuses entirely on a negative moral judgment on Assyria and prophecy of its and Judah's fall.[34] Nahum 3:1 calls Nineveh a "city of crime, utterly treacherous, [and] full of violence." As the passage continues, horsemen will find heaps of corpses and stumble over dead bodies "because of the countless harlotries of the harlot [זוֹנָה], the winsome mistress of sorcery [כְּשָׁפִים] who ensnared nations with her harlotries and peoples with her sorcery [בְּכִשָּׁפֶיהָ]."[35] While the Hebrew word for sorcery is masculine, not feminine, the city of Nineveh is considered female, and, like Jezebel in II Kings, is disloyal to Yahweh. The verse also implies a link between sexual immorality and witchcraft: as stated by Bar-Ilan, harlotry and female sorcery are two "qualities' or 'professions;' which were possibly on the fringe of society, but which men needed."[36]

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[32] Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible,* 344.
[33] Campbell, "A Land Divided," 223.
[34] See discussion in Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible,* 390-392.
[35] Nah 3:4.
[36] Meir Bar-Ilan, "Witches in the Bible and in the Talmud" in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism n.s. 5: Historical, Literary, and Religious Studies* (ed. H.W. Basser and S. Fishbane; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 2. Cited 12 December 2011. Online: http://faculty.biu.ac.il/ ~barilm/witches.html.

Besides Exodus, II Kings, and Nahum, the phenomenon of female sorcery is mentioned twice more, in Ezekiel 13:17 and I Samuel 28. The prophet Ezekiel was among those who were deported with King Jehoiachin to Babylon in 597 B.C.E. "In exile, he ministered to the Judeans in Tel-abib, a town in southern Babylonia... for close to thirty years."[37] His main rallying point was that of a revival of both houses of Israel and a rebuilt Temple and Jerusalem. In his pragmatism, he was afraid of losing the Yahwistic Israelites to Babylonian assimilation, and so he hammered home the point that "the Lord's distancing himself from his people was part and parcel of their punishment."[38] If the Israelites wanted to remain in God's favor and return to God's land in Jerusalem, they had to remain loyal.[39]

Ezekiel 13 begins with a warning toward those who are false prophets, using all masculine language, who "prophesy out of their own imagination"[40] and do not heed the true word of God. These people did not lead their people well nor stand up to battle against the Babylonians, and they let Israel fall. According to 13:6, "They prophesied falsehood and lying divination; they said, 'Declares the LORD,' when the LORD did not send them, and then they waited for their word to be fulfilled." They are to be punished harshly, and never again return to Israel.

Women, too, take part in this false prophecy in 13:17-23. Both the practices described and the terms used to describe them are "drawn from the world of sorcery and

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[37] Mordecai Cogan, "Into Exile: From the Assyrian Conquest of Israel to the Fall of Babylon," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (ed. Michael D. Coogan; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 271.
[38] Ibid.
[39] This is apparent in the early chapters of Ezek, especially 8:6: "And He said to me, 'Mortal, do you see what they are doing, the terrible abominations that the House of Israel is practicing here, to drive Me far from My Sanctuary? You shall yet see even greater abominations!'"
[40] Ezek 13:2

witchcraft, shroud these women in the magical practices of ancient Mesopotamian society."[41]

> And you, O mortal, set your face against the *women of your people, who prophesy out of their own imagination.* Prophesy against them and say: Thus said the Lord GOD: Woe to those who sew pads [כְּסָתוֹת] on all arm-joints and make bonnets for the head of every person, in order to entrap! Can you hunt down lives among My people, while you preserve your own lives? You have profaned My name among My people in return for handfuls of barley and morsels of bread; you have announced the death of persons who will not die and the survival of persons who will not live - lying to My people, who listen to your lies. Assuredly, thus said the Lord GOD: I am going to deal with your pads, by which you hunt down lives like birds, and I will tear them from your arms and free the persons whose lives you hunt down like birds. I will tear off your bonnets and rescue My people from your hands, and they shall no longer be prey in your hands; then you shall know that I am the LORD. Because you saddened the heart of the innocent with lies, when I would not inflict suffering on him, and encouraged the wicked not to repent of his evil ways and so gain life -- assuredly, you shall no longer prophesy lies or practice divination! I will save My people from your hands, and you shall know that I am the LORD.

The term *keset* is related to the Akkadian *kasu,* meaning, "to bind," and is invariably translated as "magical band," considered to be a protective amulet worn on one's person for apotropaic purposes.[42] Though the precise nature of כְּסָתוֹת is unknown, they were placed on the wrists and "are almost certainly magical appurtenances."[43] Ezekiel mocks the women's ritualistic garb, both arm bindings/amulets and veils, but at the same time, acknowledges their power to kill the innocent and preserve the lives of the guilty. He also refers to materials of their trade, breadcrumbs and barley, which were either

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[41] Keck, *NIB* 6: 1203.
[42] Ibid. The word *keset* is also related to the later Greek word *kastu,* "protective amulet."
[43] Moshe Greenberg, *AB: Ezekiel 1-20* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 240. Greenberg explains that the attachments of these trappings to a person's head and arms could be seen as a mockery of *tefillin,* which were originally also apotropaic amulets.

rendered as payment for divination or were used in the actual rituals.[44] To Ezekiel, wearing and using these items is the tantamount to profaning God and "degrading Yahweh in the public's eyes to the level of the Babylonian deities and demons, who let themselves by manipulated by divination and witchcraft."[45]

Bowen makes clear that the reason for Ezekiel's criticism of the women is again related to men's limited knowledge of women's roles and subsequent label of "magic": "These women may have functioned, in part, as medical and religious professionals whose services were important during childbirth and other sorts of 'illnesses.'"[46] Ezekiel condemns them because he does not understand their roles and because they represent a more archaic, non-Yahwistic religious tradition which he abhors. In his view, their practices "must perish in order that... [Israel's] new, post-judgment identity [can] become reality."[47] The vision Ezekiel has for the people of Israel is, like the Deuteronomic Historian, purely monotheistic. As a result, he is intolerant of any religious practices that are not condoned by the priestly cult.

Unlike the tale of the false women prophets in Ezekiel, the tale of a necromancer, found in I Samuel 28: 7-25, is explicit in its definition of witchcraft. King Saul is searching for supernatural information about the upcoming battle against the Philistines the next day, and having had no success with dreams and prophecy, decides to surreptitiously visit a woman from En-Dor who "consults ghosts":[48]

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[44] Greenberg opines that they were used in Mesopotamian rituals; W. Zimmerli ascribes to the latter. See *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24* (trans. R. E. Clements; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1997), 297.
[45] D. I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 416.
[46] Nancy R. Bowen, "The Daughters of Your People: Female Prophets in Ezekiel 13:17-23," *JBL* 118 (1999): 422-423.
[47] Ibid.
[48] 1 Sam 28:7

> [7] Then Saul said to his courtiers, "Find me a woman who consults ghosts, so that I can go to her and inquire through her." And his courtiers told him that there was a woman in En-dor who consulted ghosts. [8] Saul disguised himself; he put on different clothes and set out with two men. They came to the woman by night, and he said, "Please divine for me by a ghost. Bring up for me the one I shall name to you." [9] But the woman answered him, "You know what Saul has done, how he has banned the use of ghosts and familiar spirits in the land. So why are you laying a trap for me, to get me killed?" [10] Saul swore to her by the LORD: "As the LORD lives, you won't get into trouble over this." [11] At that, the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" He answered, "Bring up Samuel for me." [12] Then the woman recognized Samuel, and she shrieked loudly, and said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!" [13] The king answered her, "Don't be afraid. What do you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I see a divine being coming up from the earth." [14] "What does he look like?" he asked her. "It is an old man coming up," she said, "and he is wrapped in a robe." Then Saul knew that it was Samuel; and he bowed low in homage with his face to the ground.... [Samuel speaks to Saul, telling him he will lose his battle, his own life, and that of his sons.]
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> [21] The woman went up to Saul and, seeing how greatly disturbed he was, she said to him, "Your handmaid listened to you; I took my life in my hands and heeded the request you made of me. [22] So now you listen to me: Let me set before you a bit of food. Eat, and then you will have the strength to go on your way." [23] He refused, saying, "I will not eat." But when his courtiers as well as the woman urged him, he listened to them; he got up from the ground and sat on the bed. [24] The woman had a stall-fed calf in the house; she hastily slaughtered it, and took flour and kneaded it, and baked some unleavened cakes. [25] She set this before Saul and his courtiers, and they ate. Then they rose and left the same night.

Communing with the dead is banned by the King in accordance with Exodus 22:17, so the woman of En-Dor at first suspects a trap. Once her fears are assuaged and she is convinced to conjure the ghost of Samuel, the prophet shares with Saul the unfortunate news about the battle and the demise of his royal dynasty. The woman of En-dor thus raises the ghost of Samuel, supports Saul during their encounter, and then serves as hostess at the end, preparing a meal for him and his companions.

Taken socio-historically, this story is a perfect example of how a woman's ritualized religious actions could be called "women's magic." Women dealt with

preparing the dead for burial, graveyard lamentations, and mourning on a far more involved level than did men. Necromancy, therefore, and any relationship with the dead was mostly under the purview of women. Meyers discusses how this could be:

> Ethnography also establishes that women were especially skilled in invoking the dead in service of the living. As recently as the 1980s elderly Middle Eastern Jewish women living in Jerusalem were found to have a special relationship with deceased ancestors. They petitioned, visited, and negotiated with dead ancestors... These elderly women often lit candles as part of their relationship with ancestral spirits. Their chief reasons for performing such rituals were to secure fertility for daughters and granddaughters, to request protection for those women during pregnancy and childbirth, and to enlist their aid in safeguarding the health and souls of unborn and newborn children. Such activities may be analogous to some functions of the female necromancers in the Biblical period and perhaps also to the presence of lamps and pillar-figurines [to Asherah] in Iron-Age tombs.[49]

Meyers' anthropological approach toward religion helps prove that Biblical women who were necromancers were *not* witches, but were merely expressing their own form of religious culture. "Women's religious practices can thus be seen as strategies, akin to preventative and restorative medical procedures of the modern world, to intervene with the divine forces believed to impact the well-being [of the woman's family]... and to influence them in order to assure their benevolent and protective presence or to avert their destructive powers."[50] The woman of En-Dor lived her spiritual life in the liminality of the world of the living and the dead, and in so doing her necromancy became known as witchcraft.

It must be noted, however, that in the Bible itself, the woman of En-Dor is never *once* called a sorceress or magician. Instead she is named a אֵשֶׁת בַּעֲלַת־אוֹב, a woman who is a necromancer. Yet despite this label, as well as the fact that she is very helpful to

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[49] Meyers, *Households,* 53-54.
[50] Ibid., 17.

Saul, she is still demonized in post-Biblical literature. Commentators label her a "witch" and write of her in an entirely negative fashion. Rashi maintains that she deceived the people of Israel with her sorcery for forty years.[51] Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities,* written sometime during the first century C.E., calls her Sedecla, meaning "unrighteous."[52] It is only according to *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer*, the aggadic-midrashic text attributed to Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (80-118 C.E.), that the name of the woman has no immoral connotation, but is Abner's mother Zepheniah, "the hidden one."[53]

Why is she called a witch, then, if she does nothing wrong and only what Saul asks of her? The answer parallels that of the persecution of named sorceresses: because she exemplifies the Biblical "Other," and is viewed by the men in power as seeming to undermine the established religion. Witches "infringe on the prophets' control over wonders and divination. Saul, for example, turns to the witch of Endor because Yahweh has cut him off, sending no prophetic messengers, no revelatory dreams and no response by Urim and Thummim [an unclear reference to something having to do with divination]."[54] Saul has tried to play by the Yahwistic rules and glean information from all the accepted religious sources. It is only after he fails that he sneaks away to talk to a foreign necromancer in secret.

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[51] Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews: Volume 6* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 236.

[52] *L.A.B.* 64.3. On the page prior, in 64.1, the text comments that Saul "scattered all the sorcerers out of the land" not out of zeal for God, "but that he might make himself a name." God disapproved of his motives in destroying the sorcerers, and as punishment he was denied access to God's prophets and was thus forced to resort to sorcery himself.

[53] *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer: The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great According to the Text of the Manuscript Belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna* (trans. Gerald Friedlander; New York: Hermon Press, 1916), 244. The name Zephaniah is also found in the biblical commentary of Rabbi David Kimchi, the Radak, who lived from 1160-1235.

[54] Propp, *AB: Exodus 19-40,* 256.

The woman of En-Dor is even labeled as Other due to her origin: En-Dor is in the land of Canaan, not Israel (this is, however, historically fitting as scholars believe that Israelite necromancy originally derived from the Canaanites).[55] When Saul visits her, he violates the Israelite religious culture being promoted by the prophets. Schmidt explains in "The 'Witch' of Endor, I Samuel 28, and Ancient Near Eastern Necromancy" that

> crucial to deuteronomistic theology was the general premise that the land and its blessings were dependent upon complete separation from foreign religious practices. Viewed in this light, the legend of Saul demonstrates that when the leaders of the nation embrace religious beliefs of the foreigner – like Saul in his rendezvous with the Canaanite woman of En-Dor – the nation's rights to the land and its blessings are jeopardized.[56]

From this perspective, Saul's actions were more than merely visiting a necromancer; they were akin to violating the covenant with Yahweh and blaming it on the woman of En-Dor.

The last reason the woman of Endor is sociologically Other derives from I Samuel 28:13, when Saul asks her what she sees. She answers: רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים מִן־הָאָרֶץ, "I see gods [*plural]* coming up from the earth." On the one hand, it has been speculated that in early Israelite religion, the dead were worshiped as divine beings, and so the "gods" she sees could be Samuel and other dead.[57] Yet it is equally likely that the woman of En-Dor *did* see supernatural deities, plural. This would then be more proof that the woman of En-Dor was polytheistic, and on the fringes of accepted Israelite religious culture.

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[55] Brian B. Schmidt, "The 'Witch' of En-Dor, 1 Samuel 28, and Ancient Near Eastern Necromancy," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 112. Schmidt and his collaborators believe that Biblical necromancy is Canaanite in origin because references to it are not found in any Ugaratic, Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, or Egyptian textual sources.
[56] Ibid., 128.
[57] Ibid., 111.

2.4 Conclusion

Exodus 22:17, II Kings 9:22, Nahum 3:4, Ezekiel 13:17-23 and Samuel 28:7-25 all explicitly or implicitly reference witches and witchcraft. In all cases, the "witches" are labeled as such for one of two reasons: one, they have a predilection toward religious practices that are foreign to men, or two, their beliefs may not ascribe to the monotheistic norm promoted by the deuteronomist Yahwists. Their actions are considered "magic" and then often become linked with sexual immorality. Either way, the social consequence is the same: accusations of sorcery, and vilification.

CHAPTER 3: The Female Jewish Magician in Non-Rabbinic Sources

In Chapter Two, it was explained that women were called "magicians" or "sorceresses" in the Bible if they strayed from strict monotheism or adhered to religious practices unfamiliar to Israelite men. They were looked down upon, vilified, and actively destroyed. Yet, centuries later, literature and archaeology testify that they, in fact, had a permanent place in non-Jewish and Jewish society of the Greco-Roman period. This chapter attempts to reconcile this discrepancy by examining evidence of Jewish sorceresses in non-rabbinic sources from approximately the 3rd century B.C.E. to the 5th century C.E.

I first define the term "magic" in its Greco-Roman context, then, beginning with the portrayal of Jewish women through pagan eyes, I assess the female magician in Juvenal's *Satire VI* and Zosimos' "Maria the Jewess." I then segue into Jewish Hellenistic depictions of the women magician as found in Philo, Josephus and archaeological evidence. Next, I address sorceresses in Jewish pseudepigrapha as found in *The Book of Enoch,* various *Testaments,* and *Joseph and Aseneth,* and finally, I close with material on female sorcery as found in archaeological evidence.

The survey leads to only one conclusion: like in Biblical times, women in Greco-Roman society who were labeled as "witches" were women who did not fit into mainstream society. They were healers, alchemists, midwives, jealous lovers, and even cult priestesses, but they were very rarely, if ever, true "magicians" specializing in the occult.

3.1 Defining Magic in the Greco-Roman World

Historically, the Greek term *mageia* derives from *magos,* the term for a Persian priest. The fifth-century C.E. historian Herodotus is the first to discuss the *magoi* as those in a secret society "whose members perform the royal sacrifices and the funeral rites... and who practice divination and the interpretation of dreams."[1] The term then evolved from Greek to Latin, and became *magi.* One of the first references to *magi* in Latin is found in the first-century B.C.E. philosopher Cicero, who labeled *magi* very matter-of-factly as "augurs and diviners among the Persians."[2]

Although Herodotus and Cicero give the word a neutral connotation, the meaning began to change around the time of Augustus in the first century C.E. As Fritz Graf explains, "Roman society started to differentiate between magic on the one hand and both religion and science on the other, in order to marginalize it."[3] With few exceptions, the term *magi* became entirely negative, and *magi* and *mageia* became "umbrella term[s] for any and all suspect uses of supernatural powers."[4] While it is not the place of this thesis to examine the details as to why this happened, it is sufficient to state that by the second century C.E., the jurist Iulius Paulus records in his *Sententia* that practicing *mageia* is an offense punishable by death.[5]

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[1] Fritz Graf, "Excluding the Charming: The Development of the Greek Concept of Magic," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 30.
[2] Cicero, *Div.* 1:41.90-1
[3] Graf, "Excluding the Charming," 41.
[4] Naomi Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews and Christians (Religion in the First Christian Centuries)*(New York: Routledge, 2001), 9.
[5] The code states "that it be decided that persons who are addicted to the art of magic shall suffer extreme punishment. Magicians themselves shall be burned alive." *Sententiae* V. 23.17, as translated in Ibid. 11.

Like the term "magician,"[6] the term "witch" in Greco-Roman times was one that was entirely negative. To label someone a "witch" was to imply an indictment of an illegal act. The reasons women could be accused of witchcraft or *magicae artes* were many: Adolf Berger lists such varied acts as using astrology, magical formulae, writing a slanderous poem, using magical liquids, or even enchanting crops.[7] The first-century C.E. Roman historian and senator Publius Cornelius Tacitus, for example, records in his *Annals* no less than thirty-nine trials prosecuted against women for the crime of utilizing *magicae artes.*[8] Trials were based upon accusations "under a number of different guises, unfortunately all of which are often translated into English as 'magic' or 'sorcery': *maleficium, venificium* [potions for healing or love], *venena* [poison], *artes, carmina, devotiones,* and asking questions of *Chaldei* and *Magi.*"[9] There is no specific legal code for magic, nor was there one definition in this time period. Accusations, and understandings of what magic entailed, were fluid.

There were three main "types" of witches found in Greco-Roman times: one, prostitutes and courtesans who resorted to magic for economic gain, two, women slaves who served as mediums to sorcerers, and could be called sorceresses themselves, and three, *sagae,* or mendicant wise women.[10] I shall briefly describe all three, although it is

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[6] Other terms for female magicians are *goetides, pharmakides, pharmakeutria, cantatrices,* and *veneficae.* There is much speculation on the difference in terminology, but no consensus among scholars. For the purpose of this thesis I will consider all above terminology as interchangeable with *magae.*

[7] A. Berger, *"Magia," EDRL* 43:570.

[8] As a sampling, the *Annals* record a trial against Matrona Munatia Plancina in 2.69-83, 3.10-18, 6.26.4, 20 C.E.; Aemilia Lapida in 3.22-3.23, 20 C.E.; Fabia Numantina in 4.21-2, 24 C.E.; Claudia Pulchra in 4.52, 26 C.E.; Lollia Paulina in 12.22, 49 C.E.; Vibia in 12.52, 52 C.E.; Domitia Lepida in 12.64-5, 54 C.E.; Junia Lepida in 16.8-9, 65 C.E.; and Servilia in 16.30-33, 66 C.E. Of these nine women accused, seven were convicted, one acquitted and in one the verdict was unclear. During this same century, there are also recorded 122 trials against men for using magic. Tacitus, *Ann.*

[9] Elizabeth Pollard, "Magic Accusations Against Women in the Greco-Roman World: From the First through the Fifth Centuries C.E." (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2001), 110.

[10] Dickie, *Magic and Magicians,* 245-250.

only in the last category that anecdotal evidence is found relating specifically to Jewish women.

The first type of sorceress, women who sold their bodies for money, is well-documented in pagan sources. For example, the writings of the playwright Plautus, who lived from 254-184 B.C.E., "strongly suggest that prostitutes and the women who ran them were in the early second century BC believed to practise magic against men and to be expert at it."[11] His works *Mostellaria* and *Epidicus* both involve plots denouncing a prostitute as *venefica*.[12] Likewise, the second-century satirist Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans* discusses sorcery at length as a means of a courtesan's self-promotion, with women drugging potential clients with magical love potions.[13]

Not all female sorcerers in Greco-Roman times were independent operators, however. Many other mentions of female magicians link them to households of the rich and powerful. In perhaps the most famous example, Luke, in the first-century C.E. Acts of the Apostles tells the story of a soothsaying female slave, who, "in analogy to the Gospel narratives of exorcism, counts as possessed."[14] She is often interpreted as both the victim of and proponent of magic:

> As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by soothsaying. She followed Paul and us, crying, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul was annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the rulers; and when they had brought them to the

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[11] Ibid. 164.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid. 248.
[14] Hans J. Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity: The World of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 66.

> magistrates they said, "These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice."[15]

The point of the tale is that Paul, in Jesus' name, banishes the spirit within the young woman and is later attacked by an angry mob, imprisoned, and then freed through Jesus' power. The woman herself is forgotten in the crush. Yet, she possesses a "spirit of divination"[16] and is obviously exploited by her owners. Luke here is possibly describing "a not-uncommon phenomenon... [in that] many female magic-workers with special gifts worked for a master or a mistress and provided them with an income from the fees they collected."[17] Again, there is no evidence that Jewish women took on such roles, although again, there is a plethora of such stories in pagan and Christian literature.

Jewish female magicians are most likely found in the third category, that of *saga.* According to Pollard, the Latin terms *maga* and *saga* may be equivalent to the English term "witch." Yet, *maga* has "the accusatory sense of [a] female user of *magicae artes. Saga*... might simply translate as 'wise-woman.'"[18] These women were knowledgeable in the healing arts, created potions, poisons, and provided "supernatural" protection for their clients.[19] These "magical" actions were performed for pay. According to Cicero's *De Officiis,* however, taking money for providing a service was considered vulgar and sordid,[20] making the very act of selling magical services grounds for disdain and marginalization. As McGuire explains in "Did Women Use Magic in Ancient Roman Society," "Among the Romans, especially those of the lower classes, sorcery, though

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[15] Acts 16:16-21.
[16] Acts 16:16.
[17] Dickie, *Magic and Magicians,* 247.
[18] Pollard, "Magic Accusations," 15.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Cicero, *Off.* I:150-151.

illegal, was often practiced or hired as a service by people who were in situations of competition or uncertainty."[21] It is entirely likely that magic was an occupation taken up by the freeborn older female Jew as a result of financial need, which "already suggests their [low] place in Roman society."[22]

Pagan sources testify to the "the widespread presence of wise women"[23] in the first few centuries C.E.: the first-century writer Columella, for example, advises in his agricultural work *De Re Rustica* that a farm manager or steward must never admit *sagae* to the grounds, no matter how convincing they may be, lest they negatively influence the household slaves towards magic. [24] Unfortunately for later scholarship, he does not say where the *sagae* themselves come from. They may have been gypsy-like, "going from farm to farm trying to sell their services,"[25] or more permanent fixtures in an area, making their base in the nearest village or town.

Socio-historically speaking, it could be that *sagae* were outcast based on their understanding of the world in an area foreign to men. Pollard states in relation to the term *saga* that "[t]he implication by the translator, and maybe the initial intent of the original author, when suggesting that *saga* equates to 'witch,' is that a woman with knowledge is dangerous."[26] As described further in Section 3.3 of this chapter, the Jewish philosopher Philo was fearful of the magic worked by "professional" magicians

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[21] Alan Segal, "Hellenistic Magic – Some Questions of Definition," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his Fifty-Sixth Birthday* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 358.
[22] L.H. McGuire, "Did Women Use Magic in Ancient Roman Society?" n.p. [cited 6 January 2011]. Online: http://www.interdisciplinary.net/wp-content/ uploads/2010/02/lindapaper.pdf.
[23] Dickie, *Magic and Magicians,* 191.
[24] Ibid.
[25] McGuire, "Did Women," n.p.
[26] Pollard, "Magic Accusations," 19.

such as *sagae*,[27] which implies that he believed that they *did* contain knowledge, and that their potions and remedies actually worked. *Sagae* threatened what men perceived to be the established social order, and so by labeling them magicians, men found a way "marginalizing them, casting doubt on their practices and beliefs."[28] It thus makes sense that *sagae* were looked down upon by Philo and Columella, and the word became associated negatively as "sorceresses" rather than positively as "wise-woman." [29]

3.2 Pagan Sources: Juvenal's *Satire VI* and Zosimos' "Maria the Jewess"

While Columella's reference to a *saga* is religiously non-descript, one specific reference to a Jewish *saga*-like figure does exist in pagan literature. Juvenal, the late first-century and early second-century C.E. Roman poet, mentions what is most likely a *saga* in his work *Satire VI: On the Ways of Women.* The second, and only other, pagan source of Jewish women magicians in this time period concerns the tale of "Maria the Jewess" as recorded by the late third/early fourth century C.E. alchemist Zosimos.

The surviving works of the poet Juvenal comprise of at least sixteen satirical works, in five books. They are scathing critiques of Roman society, addressing the elite as well as the downtrodden, and as such, their words cannot be taken as historical fact. *Satire VI: On the Ways of Women* is by far the largest of his works and encompasses the entire second book of his collection, containing a commentary on Roman wives' lust, arrogance, cruelty, unfaithfulness, and insatiability. "He identifies wealthy women as sexually promiscuous, encroaching on male territory, overly assertive, dominating, and

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[27] Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic,* 80.
[28] Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World,* 3.
[29] Philo also had great influence in how contemporary and later writers saw *sagae*; the mid-second century Christian theologian Clement of Alexandria, for instance, in his work *Paedagogus* (3.4.28.3) bases his discussion of rich women consorting with magicians and sorceresses largely upon Philo.

finally, engaging in magic."[30] Amongst their crimes are indulging in superstition and dubious religious practices, and Juvenal skewers the practitioners who help these wicked women achieve their magical goals. Following the description of Greek and Egyptian priests is a short mention of a Jewish woman:

> *Cum dedit ille locum, cophino fenoque relicto*
> *arcanam Iudaea tremens mendicant in aurem,*
> *intrepres legume Solymarum et magna sacerdos*
> *arboris ac summi fida internuntia caeli.*
> *Implet et illa manum, sed parcius; aere minuto*
> *qualiacumque voles Iudaei somnia vendunt.*[31]

> When he [Osiris] has taken his leave, a trembling Jewess, whose
> Reed basket and hay are left behind, is begging her,
> Whispering in her ear – this one's an interpreter
> Of the laws of Jerusalem, high priestess with a tree
> As temple, a trusty go-between of high heaven. And she
> Fills her palm, but much less full, for at bargain prices a Jew
> Sells you the answer to any dream you'd like to come true.[32]

This purveyor of the divine comes last in Juvenal's list of suspicious religious workers and is called "a trusty go-between of high heaven," an exegete of the "laws of Jerusalem."[33] This leaves no doubt as to her identity as a Jewish female practitioner of magic. She is a wandering *saga,* to echo Columella, living outdoors with a "tree as temple,"[34] a second-rate citizen in society who makes her way through life by selling dream interpretations for a reduced fee. The existence of Jewish women magicians is a fact; contrary to Biblical assertions, Jewish sorceresses for hire have *not* been destroyed, but exist on a level of common acceptance that lends them to be worthy of parody. She is

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[30] Stratton, *Naming the Witch,* 96.
[31] Juvenal, *Sat. VI:* 542-547 (*GLAJJ* Vol. 2, 100-101).
[32] Juvenal, *Sat. VI:* 542-547 [trans. H. Creekmore, in *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, and Monastics: A Sourcebook on Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. Ross S. Kraemer; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988)], 41-42.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

portrayed as a beggar, again corresponding to scholarly analysis of Roman *sagae* which categorizes these women as poor and socially marginalized by their profession.

The very fact that a Jewish woman is included in Juvenal's satire, albeit amongst a list of people promoting religious corruption, proves that the female Jewish magician was regarded as a valid resource for the *magicae artes.* According to Dickie, "Much ink has been spilled over the interpretation of these words. What can be usefully extracted from them is that the authority of the woman rested on her being taken to be a holy woman of some sort."[35] She was held in low esteem by the Roman elite, yet her services were still valued enough to become fair game for parody.

This, unfortunately, is all we know. Scholarship is undecided as to what Juvenal's mention of the Jewish sorceress means in terms of its larger ramifications. As Kramer explains, "To date, there is little research that would enable us to consider what kinds of authority and prestige [these Jewish] women practitioners of magic [described by Juvenal] commanded in antiquity."[36] A few pages later, she continues her analysis, responding to D'Angelo's article "Women in Luke-Acts":

> Mary Rose D'Angelo sees this passage as evidence that the woman "thinks of herself as a prophet and an interpreter of the law (scribe?), the very role most contemporary scholars deny to women in antique Judaism," and that Juvenal assumed that Jewish women thought "of themselves as students of the law." This interpretation is intriguing and worth further consideration, although I am not sure we can move easily from Juvenal's rhetoric to the self-understanding of a mendicant sooth-sayer.[37]

According to both Dickie and Kramer, attempting to speculate on the Jewish female magician's role in mainstream Judaism based on Juvenal alone is a wild goose chase.

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[35] Matthew Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 192.
[36] Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions Among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 90.
[37] Ibid. 109.

Any conclusions reached would be dubious, for scholars have little other information on Jewish *sagae* upon which to base our speculations. Yet, Juvenal's mention of the Jewish woman magician is still immensely important: it proves their physical presence in the Greco-Roman world, gives a glimpse into their socio-economic condition, and highlights the recognition that their profession was accorded by the Roman elite.

The only other author besides Juvenal who explicitly mentions female Jewish magicians is Zosimos, a late third- and early fourth-century writer. A Gnostic philosopher who was born in Panopolis (present-day Akhim) in southern Egypt, he later moved to Alexandria and lived all over the Hellenic world.[38] Zosimos is most famous for writing 28 treatises on various gods, however, he was also an active practitioner of alchemy and metalworking, and compiled numerous alchemical treatises.[39] While all of his actual books have been lost, knowledge of his work today comes from passages and quotations found in other writings, either in the original Greek or translated to Syriac and Arabic.[40]

Zosimos often cites a source he labels "Maria the Jewess," alternatively known as Mary. At some points he refers to a specific treatise she is supposed to have penned called "On Furnaces," while at other times he cites her work without naming her specifically.[41] According to Janowitz, "the numerous citations from Maria found in Zosimos offer a portrait of a practitioner with a distinct personality and intriguing set of concerns. Maria was the technician's technician, offering criticism and improvements on

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[38] H.S. El Khadem, "A Translation of a Zosimos' Text in an Arabic Alchemy Book," *JWAS* 84 (1996): 169.
[39] Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World,* "Using Natural Forces for Divine Goals: Maria the Jewess and Early Alchemy," 59-69; Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, "Alchemy," 435-456; El Khadem, "A Translation."
[40] Khadem, "A Translation," 169. Arabic translations of Zosimos' works are listed in the Arabic encyclopedia, *Kitab Al-Fihrist,* published in Baghdad in 987 C.E., by Ibn Al-Nadim.
[41] Naomi Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews and Christians* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 62.

accepted modes of operation, many of which became standard practice after her."[42] She is mentioned by many later alchemists and writers, among them "the later Arabic writer Al Habib, [who] stated 'No philosopher has taught the truth in clearer form.'"[43]

Her date is uncertain; Zosimos refers to her as "ancient," while later alchemists call her the sister of Moses.[44] Historically, the scientific theories with which she is credited date her after the writings of Ps-Democritus, meaning that she most likely lived between the first- and second centuries C.E.[45] Among her many accomplishments are the distillation process, the glass still, the discovery of hydrochloric acid, and the invention of the double boiler (still today called a *bain-marie* in French).[46]

Maria, or Mary, was one of the first proponents of alchemy as it was known in medieval times, or the "Sacred or Divine Art," as it was called in the first centuries C.E.[47] Although alchemy later became the grandparent of chemistry, the "Sacred Art" first emerged as "an occult philosophy or science that sought to bring the macrocosm (the universe) into a close relationship with the microcosm (the human being). It was based on the law of cosmic sympathy and contained elements of astrology, mysticism, religion, and theosophy."[48] According to Luck, alchemy most definitely counts among the occult and magic because its operations "can be understood as sacrificial offerings, as ceremonies to be accomplished after the alchemist himself has been initiated into some higher mysteries.... The ultimate goal of this process, as in the mystery religions, is

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[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] See note 34.
[45] "In addition, her name is also well-attested in the list of Jewish women's names from the first centuries as compiled by Tal Ilan." Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World,* 62.
[46] Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World,* 62; Luck, *Arcana Mundi,* 438; "Alchemy" in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (1906). Cited 28 November 2011. Online: http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1094-alchemy.
[47] Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World,* 60.
[48] Luck, *Arcana Mundi,* 435.

salvation. Thus alchemy appears to be a Hellenistic form of mysticism."[49] Human beings, animals, plants, stones, and metals were thought to be "the carriers of mysterious forces which had the power to cure sickness and suffering and to procure men riches, good luck, honor and wonderful potencies."[50] This seems to mean that harnessing of these forces through alchemy overlapped greatly with the role of the healer/magician.

According to those who wrote about her, Maria's Judaism was in no small part the very reason for her success. A work concerning Zosimos that is attributed to Olympiodorus the Younger, a Neoplatonist who lived from approximately 495-570 C.E., mentions that Maria is a stellar alchemist specifically *because* of her Jewish heritage:

> It is the law of the Egyptians that nobody must divulge these things in writings... The Jews alone have attained a knowledge of its practice, and also have described and exposed these things in a secret language. This is how we find that Theophilus son of Theogenes has spoken of all the topographic descriptions of the gold mines; the same is the case with the description of the furnaces by Maria and with the writings of other Jews.[51]

Zosimos, too, writes that Maria's knowledge is "divine," and that she and other Jewish women excel at metalworking because angels came down to Jewish ancestors and "taught them all operations of nature."[52]

This seemingly-magical power provided by Judaism is reflected by the words of Maria herself, who incorporates Jewish notions of ritual purity into her work. She warns those who experiment with her, "Do not touch it with your hands. You are not of the nation of Abraham. You are not our nation."[53] Using "magical texts" that are also

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[49] Ibid. 440.
[50] M. Nilsson, *Greek Piety* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), 105.
[51] Olympiodorus "On the Sacred Art," 2.4.35. Trans. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World,* 63; recorded in Marcellin Berthelot, *Les origins de l'alchimie* (Paris: Steinheil, 1885), 170-174.
[52] Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World,* 63-64.
[53] Olympiodorus, "On the Sacred Arts," 2.4.54.

classified as alchemistic recipes,[54] she gave her work a tone of sacrality and cemented her historical legacy as a Jewish female alchemist and magician. Her life and work, so different from the *sagae* recorded in Juvenal, is crucial in understanding that strong, independent women who lived outside of convention were often thought to have engaged in magic. While Maria serves as a positive example of this phenomenon, she is most often compared to the outspoken fourth-century mathematician and philosopher Hypatia of Alexandria, who was stoned to death for, among other things, accusations of witchcraft.[55]

3.3 Jewish Hellenistic Literature: Philo and Josephus

While Maria the Jewess gained accolades for her accomplishments in the magical arena, most women known as witches were not so lucky. Jewish women who practiced what was called sorcery were considered to be on the lowest rung of society, and were treated by the male elite with scorn and contempt. That said, they could also be very popular with rich Roman matrons and the lower classes in general. In addition to Juvenal and Zosimos, proof of the existence of Jewish sorceresses and this standing in society is found in the work of two Jewish Greco-Roman historians, Philo of Alexandria and Flavius Josephus, who both analyze the Biblical verse Exodus 22:17 in their respective treatises on Jewish law.

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[54] Luck, *Arcana Mundi,* 442.
[55] Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World,* 96.

Before the exploration of Philo and Josephus, however, it must be noted that while the language of "magician" is gender-neutral in the Greek Exodus, one Biblical reference does actually single women out specifically. The contention against sorcerers in Malachi 3:5 is against men and women both, in the Hebrew: "'First I will step forward to contend against you, and I will act as a relentless accuser against those who have no fear of Me: Who practice sorcery [בַּמְכַשְּׁפִים], who commit adultery, who swear falsely, who cheat laborers of their hire, and who subvert *the cause of* the widow, orphan, and stranger, said the LORD of Hosts.'"[56] The Hebrew conjugation is in the general plural tense, encompassing both genders. The Septuagint, on the other hand, translates the word as *specifically* with a feminine pronoun, as *tas pharmakous,* meaning that those who practice such sorcery are women and women only.

The Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, who most likely lived from 10 B.C.E. to 45 C.E., did not necessarily use the Book of Malachi in his writings, but he does address the art of magic at length in his interpretation of the commandments of Mosaic law, *The Special Laws.* Following a section on the treatment of murderers in the Bible, he comments that Moses executed those who practiced magic in the Land of Israel:

> But there are others [aside from those who would take another's life with swords or physical weapons], the worst of villains, accursed both in hand and will, the sorcerers and poisoners, who provide themselves with leisure and retirement to prepare the onslaughts they will make when the right time comes, and think out multiform schemes and devices to harm their neighbors. And therefore he [Moses] orders that poisoners, *male or female,* should not survive for a day or even an hour, but perish as soon as they are detected, since no reason can be given for delay or for postponing their punishment.[57]

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[56] Mal 3:5

[57] Philo, *Spec.* 3.93-94 (trans. Colson). Emphasis mine.

Philo treats both genders equally, making it clear that both male *and* female sorcerers should be executed based on the commandment in Exodus 22:17, מְכַשֵּׁפָה לֹא תְחַיֶּה. Like Rashbam, Philo feels that one should never hesitate to kill a sorcerer or witch, but act the moment that one is identified (meaning, when they are accused).

Interestingly, however, he discusses punishment for "poisoners," not sorcerers or sorceresses. Bernhard Ritter, in his 1879 work on Philo and the *halacha,* states that Philo formed this opinion conflating the two as a direct result of a Greek translation from the Hebrew text, the Greek Septuagint.[58] While Hebrew reads, מְכַשֵּׁפָה לֹא תְחַיֶּה, "You shall not tolerate a sorceress to live," the Septuagint translates the verse as φαρμακοὺς οὐ περιποιήσετε, "You shall not preserve poisoners." Weyl also argues that *pharmakoi* can also mean "enchanters" instead of "poisoners," and that Philo really does intend to use the term to mean "maker of magical poisons," so that *pharmaka* later became *venefica* in Latin.[59]

This fact of translation supports the view that "women's magic" was related to professions in women's domain, especially cooking and the use of herbs. Murray states that "[t]he association of female knowledge of botany, and use of such knowledge in witchcraft, is frequently reflected in literature from the ancient world in those narratives in which women are described as having used magic to poison the food of enemies. This likely reflects the degree of vulnerability males felt about having to eat food made by

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[58] Bernhard Ritter, *Philo und die Halacha: Eine Vergleichende Studie unter steter Berücksichtigung des Josephus,* 28 [Steve Mason, ed. and Louis H. Feldman, trans., *Antiquities of the Jews, Book 4. Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, Vol. I* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 449 n. 938].

[59] H. Weyl, *Die jüdischen Strafgesetse bei Flavius Josephus*, 65 n. 5 (Feldman, *Flavius Josephus,* 449 n. 938).

(mostly) female cooks, and their sense of powerlessness over women in the kitchen."[60] Ilan comments, as well, that the word *phamarkoi* is the same term used for "poison," "spell," and "medicine." Therefore, she believes, "the Greek language leaves us in no doubt: medicine (probably also beneficial medicine) and poison and charms and spells are one and the same thing."[61] When Philo refers to magicians as poisoners, it is because to him, that is how sorcery manifests itself.

Following the above excerpt from *The Special Laws*, the ensuing discussion details the ramifications of sorcerers who are able to poison the populace at will, and then returns to the classification of magic itself. Philo divides the *magicae artes* "into the 'true' magic of the Magi and a counterfeit, 'false' magic of cheats, women, and slaves."[62] This distinction is based not on the Biblical verse of Exodus 22:17, which gives no such difference, but upon the history of the Greek word *mageia* and its original meaning of Persian priests who performed arcane Zoroastrian ritual practices. He states:

> Now the true magic, the scientific vision by which the facts of nature are presented in a clearer light, is felt to be a fit object for reverence and ambition and is carefully studied not only by ordinary persons but by kings and the greatest kings, and particularly those of the Persians, so much so that it is said that no one in that country is promoted to the throne unless he has first been admitted into the caste of the Magi.[63]

This Persian magic is not negative, but is an "an enhanced form of vision that enables its practitioners to see more clearly into the workings of nature,"[64] such as the magical

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[60] Michele Murray, "The Magical Female in Graeco-Roman Rabbinic Literature," *R&T* 14 (2007): 300.
[61] Ilan, "Cooks/Poisoners," 109.
[62] Bohak, *Ancient Magic,* 81.
[63] Philo, *Spec.* 3.100.
[64] Dickie, *Magic and Magicians,* 234.

alchemy practiced by Maria the Jewess. These *magi* are respected for their "attempts to learn the truth" of the oft-misunderstood universe.[65]

This positive perception of Persian magic is also found in pagan literature as well, most notably in a work by Platonist writer Apuleius of Madaura. Living in the mid-second century C.E., Apuleius was accused of seducing and luring his rich wife via *maleficia.* In his courtroom defense *Apologia: De Magia,* given in North Africa in 158-9 C.E., he points to the positive meaning of *magos* as that of procurer of knowledge.

> For if, as I read in many authors, a magician means in the language of the Persians, the same thing that the word 'priest' does, I put, what is the crime, pray, in being a magician? What is the crime in properly knowing, and understanding, and being versed in the laws of ceremonials, the solemn order of sacred rites, and religious ordinances?[66]

To Apuleius and Philo both, *magi* are foreign worshipers of strange gods, but they are not wrong in any fashion, nor are they worthy of death. Their magic is culturally accepted and their rituals are mainstream, even if uncommon. This lends them an aura of propriety and decorum.

This is distinctly not the case with the practitioners of Philo's second category of magic, that which includes magicians of both genders. *Their* magic is considered false, and Philo is quite vehement in his admonition of punishment of such practitioners:

> But there is a counterfeit of this [true magic], most properly called a perversion of art, *pursued by charlatan mendicants and parasites and the basest of the women and slave population,* who make it their profession to deal in purifications and disenchantments and promise with some sort of charms and incantations to turn men's love into deadly enmity and their hatred into profound affection. The simplest and most innocent natures are deceived by the bait till at last the worst misfortunes come upon them and thereby the wide membership which unites great companies of friends and kinsmen falls gradually into decay and is rapidly and silently destroyed.

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[65] Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World,* 10.
[66] Apuleius, *Apol.* 25.26.

> All these things our lawgiver [Moses] had in view, I believe, when he prohibited any postponement in bringing poisoners to justice and ordained that the punishment should be enacted at once. For postponement encourages the culprits to use the little time they have to live as an opportunity for repeating their crimes, while it fills those who already have misgivings as to their safety with a still more horrifying fear, as they think that the survival of the poisoners means death to themselves. So just as the mere sight of vipers and scorpions and all venomous creatures even before the sting or wound or attack us at all leads us to kill them without delay as a precaution against injury necessitated by their inherited viciousness, in the same way it is right to punish human beings who though they have received a nature mellowed through the possession of a rational soul, whence springs the sense of fellowship, have been so changed by their habits of life that they shew the savageness of ferocious wild beasts and find their only source of pleasure and profit in injuring all whom they can.[67]

He rants against both "professional practitioners, who wander around from place to place and sell their services... and of a more popular magic, as practiced by women and slaves (some of whom, however, may also have become professionals)."[68] In focusing specifically on actions of erotic magic, known to be the purview of female magicians, Philo makes it clear that female sorceresses are far, far below both *magi* or even run-of-the-mill male sorcerers. Bohak comments that "he singles out aggressive, and especially erotic magic – to separate lovers and unite haters – apparently because he saw this as the most socially destructive form of magic... he refers to some of the rituals involved, such as purifications, potions, and incantations."[69] Love potions were almost always concocted by women, and the "professionals" to which Bohak refers could easily have been *sagae.*

Like Philo, the other major Jewish historian of the first century, Flavius Josephus (37 C.E.-100 C.E.), comments at length on magicians in general but rarely speaks of

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[67] Philo, *Spec.* 3.101-103. Emphasis mine.
[68] Bohak, *Ancient Magic,* 80.
[69] Ibid.

sorceresses specifically. Josephus states a firm belief in male prophets who can work miracles and complete incantations,[70] but refers to them as *goêteis,* a Greek word which could mean "sorcerers," but which he uses, and English translations render, as "imposters," "charlatans," or "deceivers."[71] Bohak comments that "[i]n spite of the obvious opportunity to do so, he never even implies that these *goêteis* dealt in sorcery and witchcraft (or even in *pharmaka)* or that they should have been put to death in line with the biblical legislation on *keshaphim.*"[72] In *The Jewish War,* his *magnum opus* dated between 75 and 79 C.E., he is fine with exorcisms, brags that water from the spring of Jericho blessed by the prophet Elisha brings fecundity to women, and even seems to be proud of his own abilities as a dream-interpreter and a prophet.[73]

Josephus' sole possible reference to women comes in *The Antiquities,* a twenty-volume work composed in 93-94 C.E. that both records Jewish history and interprets the Bible.[74] He writes obliquely on Exodus 22:17, remarking "Let not even one of the Israelites have poison [*pharmakon]*, whether deadly or one of those made for other injuries; and if, having acquired it, he should be discovered, let him die, suffering that which he would have inflicted upon those for whom the poison was prepared."[75] Ritter and Weyl disagree on whether or not Josephus derived this view from the parallel

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[70] See discussion of Solomon as prophet who deals with incantations in *Antiquities* 8.39-49; discussion of the imposter prophet Theudas who parted a river in *Antiquities* 20.97-98; and discussion of the false "deceivers and imposters who under the pretense of divine inspiration" incited rebellion in *Jewish War* 2.258-263.

[71] See numerous references in Bohak, *Ancient Magic,* 83-85.

[72] Bohak, *Ancient Magic,* 84.

[73] See *J.W.* 4.459-673, 8.351-52 and 3.399-408.

[74] Harold W. Attridge, "Josephus and His Works," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. Michael E. Stone; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 210.

[75] Josephus, *Ant.* 4: 279.

passage in Philo,[76] but nevertheless, the statement narrows all Biblical references to sorcery down to the word *pharmaka.* It is also remarkably similar to Sulla's Roman republican law *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis* codified in 81 B.C.E., which mandates severe punishment for anyone convicted of *veneficia,* the Latin *pharmaka.*[77] Regardless of the origins of Josephus' words, it is unclear if Josephus intends the passage to refer to male and female poisoners, or male and female magicians. He is surprisingly neutral.

In fact, Josephus actually relates a relatively positive story regarding (potential) sorceresses, in which five women are falsely accused of murder and then vindicated of the accusation. In both *The Jewish War* (Book 1 §571-608) and *The Antiquities* (Book 17, Chapter 4) he tells the story of the wife of Herod's brother Pheroras, who was blamed for the fatal poisoning of her husband. According to her accusers, it was a conspiracy involving five women: an Arab woman who introduced the potion, a relative of the lover of Herod's enemy, Sylleus, who prepared it, the mother and sister of Pheroras' wife who brought it into the household, and Pheroras' wife herself, who gave it to Pheroras. As retold in Book One, §582 of *The Jewish War,* the real culprit was found to be not a woman, but a man, Herod's son, Antipater:

> But now the punishment was transferred unto the original author, Antipater, and took its rise from the death of Pheroras; for certain of his freed-men came with a sad countenance to the king, and told him that his brother had been destroyed by poison, and that his wife had brought him somewhat that was prepared after an unusual manner, and that, upon his eating it, he presently fell into his distemper; that Antipater's mother and sister, two days before, brought a woman out of Arabia that was skillful in mixing such drugs, that she might prepare a love potion for Pheroras; and that instead of a love potion, she had given him deadly poison; and that

[76] Feldman, *Flavius Josephus,* 449 n. 938.
[77] Bohak *Ancient Magic,* 84; Pollard, "Magic Accusations," 105; Weyl and Goodenough as explained in Feldman's *Ant.*, 449 n. 938.

> this was done by the management of Sylleus, who was acquainted with that woman.[78]

In the end, it was not women, but entirely men who drove the assassination plot: a male physician in Egypt had given the poison to Antipater's brother, who had brought it into Palestine and subsequently gave it to Antipater's uncle, who then gave it to Pheroras. Pheroras had then given it to his wife, and it was ultimately found in her possession.[79] The falsehood was "fabricated by men who knew that a plot which combined preparation of poison and women would be easily believed,"[80] since the concoction of poisons, closely related to the production of medicinal remedies, was considered to be a woman's domain.

While the story of Pheroras' wife explains how the image, if not the reality, of women as sorceresses affected the writing of history, the entire episode is a good example of Josephus' neutrality on the subject of both women and magic. He gives no judgment to the women, only to the magic, separating the harmful effects of the love potion from the person who created it. Roman society may automatically assume that women were responsible for such negative magic,[81] but Josephus himself is gender-neutral. He approves or detests magic based on the type of magic alone and its place in Jewish law, not based on the gender of the magician: "When we read his account of the philters and *pharmaka* in Herod's court, his great displeasure with such practices is quite

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[78] Josephus, *J.W.,* 1.582, in *The Works of Flavius Josephus* (ed. William Whiston, 1898).
[79] Josephus, *J.W.* 1.592-600; *Ant.* 17.69-76.
[80] Ilan, *Jewish Women,* 224.
[81] Evidence for this is prevalent. See, for instance, *Ep.* 188.8, written ca. 360 C.E. by Basil of Caesarea on issues of canon law regarding the question of distinguishing between involuntary and voluntary homicide. Basil includes among the latter category the preparation of spells *(pharmaka)* which cause death: "This is the sort of thing that women frequently do, who endeavor to attract a love to themselves by means of spells and tablets and who give to them [their targets] charms that make their thinking cloudy." John Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), §161 on 260.

evident; aggressive magic was disruptive and evil, but apotropaic and medicinal magic apparently were not seen by Josephus as incompatible with the Mosaic legislation."[82] Josephus does not comment on gender in his interpretation of Exodus 22:17 because he was most likely using the Septuagint in his writing, which was grammatically neutral on the subject. To both him and Philo, as per the Septuagint's translation of Exodus 22:17, the sex of the poisoner is irrelevant. It is the poisoning itself that must be stopped.

3.4 Jewish Pseudepigrapha: *The Book of Enoch, The Testament of Reuven, The Testament of Job,* and *Joseph and Aseneth*

While a study of female Jewish sorceresses through pagan, Christian, and Jewish Hellenestic depictions in the pre-rabbinic era is illuminating, it is not complete without examining the references found within the Jewish *narrative* tradition. This section endeavors to explore a genre of Jewish post-exilic literature[83] that is categorized by Nickelsburg as stories that are very closely related to the Biblical texts, but that expand, paraphrase, and comment upon them.[84] As Nickelsburg explains, "the authors of these works used settings in biblical history and built stories around biblical characters, but, for the most part, their plots and the accounts recounted in them had no real counterparts in the biblical accounts."[85]

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[82] Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic,* 85.

[83] Each text to be examined is considered pseudepigrapha, a book that is written in a Biblical style and ascribed to an author who did not truly write it. No texts discussed are considered apocryphal writings, inter-testamental works canonized by some traditions but not by others. This is not coincidental, because for reasons unknown, the "links between women and witchcraft is [sic] mentioned very little in the Apocrypha" (Bar-Ilan, "Witches in the Bible and in the Talmud," 2).

[84] George W. E. Nickelsburg, "The Bible Rewritten and Expanded," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. Michael E. Stone; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 89.

[85] Ibid.

Interspersed in this analysis will be references from *The Book of Enoch, Joseph and Aseneth,* and various *Testaments,* discourses told to an audience by the testaments' namesakes "in anticipation of [the namesakes'] imminent death."[86] In all cases the mentions of sorceresses found within confirm the theories already discussed: women's magic served as marginalizing force by men who did not understand women's religious rituals and gender-specific occupations.

The Book of Enoch, also known as *I Enoch* or the *Ethiopian Apocalypse of Enoch* (because it is found extant in full only in the Ge'ez language), is composed of five sections, and is a collection of apocalyptic writings dating from the third century B.C.E. until the first century C.E.[87] Its first section, *The Book of the Watchers,* tells the story of the fallen angels who came down to earth and consorted with human women. It is, in a sense, a *midrash* of Genesis 6:1-4, which reads

> When men began to increase on earth and daughters were born to them, the divine beings [בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים] saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took wives from among those that pleased them. The LORD said, "My breath shall not abide in man forever, since he too is flesh; let the days allowed him be one hundred and twenty years." It was then, and later too, that the Nephilim [הַנְּפִלִים] appeared on earth -- when the divine beings cohabited with the daughters of men, who bore them offspring. They were the heroes of old, the men of renown.[88]

These brief four lines are the entirety of the account of the "divine beings" or "Sons of God"[89] consorting with human women, and their subsequent children the "Nephilim," or

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[86] J.J. Collins, "Testaments," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. Michael E. Stone; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 325.

[87] Nickelsburg, "The Bible Rewritten," 90.

[88] Gen 6:1-4.

[89] בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים is rendered "divine beings" according to the JPS 1985 translation, "Sons of God" according to the King James and Revised Standard Versions.

"giants,"[90] for already in Genesis 6:5 is begun the tale of Noah. Yet the *Book of Enoch* explains this in more detail. After the chief angelic rebel Semihazah (also transliterated as Shemhazi and Semjaza) takes two hundred angels down to Mount Hermon, the angels commence mating:

> [They] took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and they began to go in unto them and to defile themselves with them, and *they taught them charms and enchantments, and the cutting of roots, and made them acquainted with plants.* And they became pregnant, and they bare great giants, whose height was three thousand ells: Who consumed all the acquisitions of men. And when men could no longer sustain them, the giants turned against them and devoured mankind. And they began to sin against birds, and beasts, and reptiles, and fish, and to devour one another's flesh, and drink the blood. Then the earth laid accusation against the lawless ones.
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> And Azazel taught men to make swords, and knives, and shields, and breastplates, and made known to them the metals of the earth and the art of working them, and bracelets, and ornaments, and the use of antimony, and the beautifying of the eyelids, and all kinds of costly stones, and all colouring tinctures. And there arose much godlessness, and they committed fornication, and they were led astray, and became corrupt in all their ways. Semjaza taught enchantments, and root-cuttings, Armaros the resolving of enchantments, Baraqijal taught astrology, Kokabel the constellations, Ezeqeel the knowledge of the clouds, Araqiel the signs of the earth, Shamsiel the signs of the sun, and Sariel the course of the moon. And as men perished, they cried, and their cry went up to heaven...[91]

While much could (and has been) written on the character of the half-breed giants who slaughter humanity, the most important part of this passage for our purposes is that the angels taught women "charms and enchantments, and the cutting of roots, and made them acquainted with plants."

The word that the translator renders "charms and enchantments" is the Greek word *pharmakeiai,* familiar to us from Philo with its dual meaning of "enchantment" and

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[90] הַנְּפִלִים is rendered "Nephilim" according to the JPS 1985 translation and Revised Standard Version, and "giants" according to the King James Version.

[91] *1 En.* 1, Chap. 7-8. Robert H. Charles, *The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch Translated from the Editor's Ethiopic Text* (London: Oxford Press, 1912), 18. Emphasis mine.

"poison." The use of plants, roots, and herbs is again seen here as synonymous with magic and incantations. Ilan explains that "We learn from the book of *Enoch* that the study of witchcraft was linked to the knowledge of roots and plants. Women's knowledge of the plant world is what led to the identification of the concoction of drugs and remedies from plants with sorcery."[92]

This theme is also reflected in *The Testament of Joseph, the Eleventh Son of Jacob and Rachel,* a section of the late second- or early third-century C.E. writing *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs:*[93] when Potiphar's wife threatens to kill her husband with poison so that Joseph can marry her, and he refuses, she attempts to use a love potion in his food in order to seduce him.[94] Conflation of herbal knowledge and witchcraft was commonplace at this time, ranging from such Biblically-based narratives to the story of Pheroras' wife and countless pagan references to *pharmaka.*

Yet, no matter what the origin of the herbal magic taught unto women by the angels, what has had the longest-lasting ramifications for Second Temple Jewish tradition is the assumption that the *angels taught magic to women.* Unlike in pagan references, Jews and Christians used this story to explain the origin of sin. Witchcraft first came into

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[92] Ilan, *Jewish Women,* 223. Emphasis mine.

[93] The provenance of this text is unknown: "Much of the material in the Greek *Test. 12 Patr.* is compatible with either of Jewish or Christian authorship." J.J. Collins, "Testaments," 343.

[94] Sparks, *T. Jos.* 5:1-6:6:

> And again, at another time she said unto me: If thou wilt not commit adultery, I will kill my husband by poison; and take thee to be my husband. I therefore, when I heard this, rent my garments, and said unto her: Woman, reverence God, and do not this evil deed, lest thou be destroyed; for know indeed that I will declare this thy device unto all men. She therefore, being afraid, besought that I would not declare this device. And she departed soothing me with gifts, and sending to me every delight of the sons of men. And afterwards she sent me food mingled with enchantments. And when the eunuch who brought it came, I looked up and beheld a terrible man giving me with the dish a sword, and I perceived that (her) scheme was to beguile me. And when he had gone out I wept, nor did I taste that or any other of her food. So then after one day she came to me and observed the food, and said unto me: Why is it that thou hast not eaten of the food? And I said unto her: It is because thou hast filled it with deadly enchantments; and how saidst thou: I come not near to idols, but to the Lord alone.

the world as it was taught to women, not men, so that "in this myth women serve as vehicles of sin and magic."[95] Or, as Bar-Ilan puts it, more bluntly: "From this [story] one can see that the source of evil in the world is women."[96] Bernard P. Prusack, comparing the treatment of women in *The Book of Enoch* to the portrayal of the sirens[97] in Greek mythology, comments that "as in Genesis and the *Odyssey,* evil, women and knowledge are a package deal. War, jewelry, cosmetics, and sex are Azalel's lessons,"[98] in addition to magic. Women are sinful, and bring so much suffering to the world through their evil magical knowledge and their giant, malevolent progeny that God must wipe all humanity from the earth with a worldwide flood.

The *Testament of Reuben,* the first text found in *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs,* adds to this theme and makes women the instigators' of the angels', or Watchers', fall:

> For ye heard regarding Joseph how he guarded himself from a woman, and purged his thoughts from all fornication, and found favour in the sight of God and men. *For the Egyptian woman did many things unto him, and summoned magicians, and offered him love potions*, but the purpose of his soul admitted no evil desire. Therefore the God of your fathers delivered him from every evil and hidden death. For if fornication overcomes not your mind, neither can Beliar overcome you. For evil are women, my children; and since they have no power or strength over man, they use wiles by outward attractions, that they may draw him to themselves. *And whom they cannot bewitch by outward attractions, him they overcome by craft.* For moreover, concerning them, the angel of the Lord told me, and taught me, that women are overcome by the spirit of fornication more than men, and in their heart they plot against men; and by means of their adornment they deceive first their minds, and *by the glance of the eye instill the poison,* and then through the accomplished act they take them captive. For a woman cannot force a man openly, but by a harlot's

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[95] Ilan, "Cooks/Poisoners," 109.
[96] Bar-Ilan, "Witches in the Bible and in the Talmud," 8.
[97] Charles, *1 En* 19:2: "The women also of the angels who went astray shall become sirens."
[98] Bernard P. Prusack, "Woman: Seductive Siren and Source of Sin? Pseudepigraphal Myth and Christian Origins," in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. Rosemary Ruether; New York: Simon and Schuster Publishing, 1974), 91.

> bearing she beguiles him. Flee, therefore, fornication, my children, and command your wives and your daughters, that they adorn not their heads and faces to deceive the mind: because every woman who useth these wiles bath been reserved for eternal punishment. For thus they allured the Watchers who were before the flood; for as these continually beheld them, they lusted after them, and they conceived the act in their mind; for they changed themselves into the shape of men, and appeared to them when they were with their husbands. And the women lusting in their minds after their forms, gave birth to giants, for the Watchers appeared to them as reaching even unto heaven. Beware, therefore, of fornication; and if you wish to be pure in mind, guard your senses from every woman.[99]

Women here are the prime culprits for what happens to the Watchers, and they "are directly responsible for the subsequent spread of evil because of their seductive wiles. Whereas in Enoch I, Azalel, the fallen angel, taught the use of cosmetics and beauty aids after the molestation, women here use these means to seduce the angels."[100] Even staring at a man can "instill the poison" because "many ancient authors claim that the gaze of a woman was sexual and highly dangerous to men."[101] Proper women, therefore, should never look at men, because they will use their female wiles to ensnare.

If women do not succeed in their seductions through natural means, they use "craft," meaning witchcraft. Stratton states that "writings from the Second Temple period and later perpetuate this association between women and magic. For example, elaborating on the story of the fallen angels from Genesis 6:1-2, texts such as *1 Enoch* (6.1; 19.1), *Testament of Reuben* (5.1, 5-6), *Jubilees* (4.22; 5.1), *2 Baruch* (56.10), *Tobit* (6.14; 8.3) and Josephus' *Antiquities* (1.73)[102] describe how the angels mingled sexually with human women and taught them various forbidden arts, among which magic figures

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[99] Charles, *T. Reu.* 4:8-5:7. Emphasis mine.
[100] Prusack, "Woman," 93.
[101] Ross Shepard Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 195.
[102] Mason, *Ant.* 1:73: "For many angels of God accompanied with women, and begat sons that proved unjust, and despisers of all that was good, on account of the confidence they had in their own strength; for the tradition is, that these men did what resembled the acts of those whom the Greeks call giants." This passage is not analyzed in the section on Josephus because it does not relate to magic specifically.

prominently."[103] The patriarchal society of the time wrote about women in this way because they "had been excluded from any public role that men might assume and thereby retain dominance over civil and religious society. The religious writers of that time created myths that flowed from and buttressed their prejudices."[104] Men were afraid of women's power and influence, so created a story in which, through magic, they become the source of all sin.

The Testament of Job, composed in Greek between 100-150 C.E., does not explicitly state that women are the source of sin, but neither does it credit women with any magical wisdom of their own. Job on his deathbed gives his daughters three bands "from heaven," saying that they are "protective amulets of the Lord" and will sustain them in life, leading them into "a better world to live in the heavens."[105] Each daughter is then said to chant angelic hymns:

> When one of the three daughters <called> Hemera arose, she wrapped herself just as her father had said. And she received another heart, so that she no longer thought about earthly things. And she chanted verses in the angelic language, and ascribed a hymn to God in accord with the hymnic style of the angels. And as she chanted the hymns, she permitted "the Spirit" to be inscribed on her garment.
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> And then Kassia girded herself and had her heart changed so that she was no longer anxious about worldly things. And her mouth received the dialect of the archons, <and glorified the creation of the exalted place.> Wherefore if anyone wishes to know "the creation of the heavens," he will be able to find it in the "Hymns of Kassia."
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> And then the other one also, called Amaltheias-keras, girded herself and her mouth chanted verses in the dialect of those on high, since her heart also was changed by withdrawing from worldly things. And she spoke in the dialect of <the> cherubim, glorifying the master of virtues by exhibiting their splendor. And the one who further wishes <to grasp the

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[103] Kimberly Stratton, "The Rhetoric of 'Magic' in Early Christian Discourse: Gender, Power, and the Construction of Heresy," in *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses* (eds. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 96-97.
[104] Ibid., 106.
[105] Charles, *T. Job* 46.8; 47.11; 47.3.

> poetic rhythm of "the paternal splendor"> will find it recorded in the "Prayers of Amaltheias-keras."[106]

The three daughters of Job are not magicians who perform rituals or incantations, but they are included here in discussions of magic because they are still agents of angelic dialogue. They chant hymns in an angelic language, and have crossed over the boundary between the earthly and the supernatural worlds.

That said, they are still not autonomous agents in the same way as *sagae* or other female magicians we have looked at previously. The women only possess their powers after being granted them by their father. Their acts of "magic" are to glorify God, and they do nothing else. Their activities, historically, "may reflect the prophetic, ecstatic activities of some Jewish women in the Greco-Roman period."[107] If this is the case, *The Testament of Job* would be a rare example of a literary narrative preserving a facet of women's religion hereto unknown by scholarship. The fact that the hymns are professed to be recorded in the Testament, but cannot be found, possibly supports this view; either the hymns were lost, in which case the point is moot, or they were never written down. This would mean that, despite the intertextual profession of the hymns' sanctity,[108] the author of the Testament did not think them worthy of posterity.

Lastly, the interpretation of the daughters' lack of magical autonomy could also suggest yet another indication of women's second-class status. J.J. Collins states in his historical survey of Testaments in the Second Temple period that "womankind in *Test.*

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[106] Charles, *T. Job* 48.1-50.3.
[107] Kraemer, *Her Share,* 109.
[108] Charles, *T. Job* 51.1-51.3:

> And after the three had stopped singing hymns, while the Lord was present as was I Nereos the brother of Job, while the holy angel was present, I was sitting near Job on the couch. And even I heard the magnificent compositions, as each [sister] noted things down for the other. And I wrote out the book <of notations for most of the hymns that issued from the three daughters of my brother,> so that these things would serve as a safeguard along with those, for these are the magnificent compositions of God.

Job symbolizes... the human state of ignorance, which is transformed at the end through the mediation of Job into heavenly knowledge and heavenly life."[109] He compares this portrayal of women lacking "heavenly insight... in accordance with Philo's use of female imagery for the irrational soul."[110] As depicted in Section 3.3. of this thesis, Philo does not offer the most flattering portrayal of women, much less women magicians. Taking Collins' interpretation into account suggests that Job's daughters did not become magical because of any inherent gift in themselves nor their gender. They needed the amulet because, being women, they possessed no supernatural power of their own, and, like any regular non-magical person, needed a physical object in order to help access the divine.

The only exception to this general rule in Jewish narrative literature is found in the first century B.C.E. to fourth-century C.E. Greek text, *Joseph and Aseneth,* also called *The Conversion and Marriage of Aseneth.* This text is based on three verses in the Torah describing Joseph's marriage to the daughter of an Egyptian priest during the seven years of plenty in Exodus.[111] Although Aseneth herself is Egyptian, her tale in included in this thesis because it offers a Jewish account of women's daily religious life, including a section in which either an angel appears to her, or she summons an angel. If one follows the latter interpretation, this firmly places Aseneth's actions under the category of "magic." As Kraemer explains, "The perception of *Aseneth* as fundamentally a tale of conversion has so dazzled earlier scholars... that we have largely failed to see the encounter between Aseneth and the angelic figure for what it is: a tale of the adjuration of

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[109] Collins, "Testaments," 353.
[110] Ibid., 353 n. 123.
[111] *Gen 41:45:* "Pharaoh... gave him for a wife Asenath daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On." *Gen 41:50:* "Before the years of famine came, Joseph became the father of two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On, bore to him." *Gen 46:20:* "To Joseph were born in the land of Egypt Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath daughter of Poti-phera priest of On bore to him."

an angel by a woman."[112] Like Job's daughters who communed with angels, Aseneth's conjuring of the angel Michael with her prayer of repentance gives her autonomy and power.

In the story, Aseneth is beautiful, virginal, deeply entrenched in idol worship, and does not believe that Joseph is a suitable match. Yet when she sees him for the first time, she is overwhelmed by the godly power that emanates from him and recants her previous judgment. She retreats to her room, renouncing Egyptian gods, and spends the next seven days weeping, fasting, and repenting, culminating in a prayer calling upon God to hear her and answer her pleas. Although the portrayal of Aseneth in different text recensions and editions differ greatly,[113] her calling of the angel follows the same pattern: first, she separates from everyone she knows in isolation, then she changes her clothing into purer attire. She abstains from food, drink, sexual behavior, and social interaction, and finally, prays:

> And she stretched her hands out towards the east, and her eyes looked up to heaven, and she said, "O Lord, God of the ages, that didst give to all the breath of life, that didst bring into the light the things unseen, that hast made all things and made visible what was invisible, that hast raised up the heaven and founded the earth upon the waters, that hast fixed the great stones upon the abyss of water which shall not be submerged, but to the end they do thy will. O Lord, my God, to thee will I cry: hear my supplication; And unto thee will I make confession of my sins, and unto thee will I reveal my transgressions of thy law. [114]

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[112] Kraemer, *When Aseneth,* 90.

[113] There is much discussion on the reconstruction of the text: the version edited by Christoph Burchard "more consistently denigrates Aseneth and brings her into conformity with a patriarchal view of women. Burchard's text emphasizes Aseneth's sexuality, and attributes to her not only a heightened use of father imagery, but intense guilt and remorse over her initial hatred of men and rejection of marriage. [Marc] Philomenko's Aseneth is a far more autonomous woman, who represents God's chosen and sees her past sins primarily in terms of idolatry and blasphemy against God's physical representative on earth, Joseph." Kraemer, *Her Share,* 111.

[114] Sparks, *Jos. Asen.* 12:1-4.

This prayer is "similar in structure, theme, and content to biblical prose prayers... both have the same general structure of invocation, self-description, and petition and the same general function of establishing a bond between a petitioner and the deity in order to procure the desired result."[115] In Biblical prayer, however, encounters between God or divine entities and human beings are never initiated by the human, no matter how convincing the prayer. "Indeed, some fascinating biblical passages, such as the story of Saul's consultation of the dead seer Samuel through the agency of a female medium, convey the stance of biblical writers that human attempts to initiate contact with the divine for the purpose of securing knowledge of the future and power for themselves were illicit and dangerous."[116] Aseneth, on the other hand, has agency, and implores God herself, initiating the encounter.

An angel of God appears, informing her that her repentance is acceptable to God. Yet when he manifests in her room, she does not immediately bow in awe, but demands to know the angel's identity:

> And as Aseneth finished her confession to the Lord, lo, the morning star rose in the eastern sky. And Aseneth saw it and rejoiced and said, "The Lord God has indeed heard me, for this star is a messenger and herald of the light of the great day. And lo, the heaven was torn open near the morning star and an indescribable light appeared. And Aseneth fell on her face upon the ashes; and there came to her a man from heaven and stood at her head; and he called to her, "Aseneth." And she said, "Who called me? For the door of my room is shut and the tower is high: how then did anyone get into my room?" And the man called her a second time and said, "Aseneth, Aseneth;" and she said, "Here am I, my lord, tell me who you are." And the man said, "I am the commander of the Lord's house and chief captain of all the host of the Most High: stand up, and I will speak to you." And she looked up and saw a man like Joseph in every respect, with a robe and a crown and a royal staff. But his face was like lightning, and his eyes were like the light of the sun, and the hairs of his head like flames of fire, and his hands and feet like iron from the fire.

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[115] Kraemer, *When Aseneth,* 99.
[116] Ibid., 90.

> And Aseneth looked at him, and she fell on her face at his feet in great fear and trembling.[117]

Finally, the angel tells Aseneth to wash, put on fresh clothing, and then instructs her in certain mysteries regarding honeycombs:

> And she came back to the man; and when the man saw her he said to her, "Take now the veil off your head, for to-day you are a pure virgin and your head is like a young man's." So she took it off her head; and the man said to her, "Take heart, Aseneth, for lo, the Lord has heard the words of your confession. Take heart, Aseneth, your name is written in the book of life, and it will never be blotted out. From to-day you will be made new, and refashioned, and given new life; and you shall eat the bread of life and drink the cup of immortality, and be anointed with the unction of incorruption. Take heart, Aseneth: lo, the Lord has given you to Joseph to be his bride, and he shall be your bridegroom. And you shall no more be called Aseneth, but 'City of Refuge' shall be your name; for many nations shall take refuge in you, and under your wings shall many peoples find shelter, and within your walls those who give their allegiance to God in penitence will find security.[118]

The angel not only leads her to Joseph, whom she happily marries, but makes her into an angel herself. "She is both woman and city, proselyte and congregation of proselytes. Her immortality is promised to all who follow her example and thereby become citizens of her city."[119] Aseneth's ability as magician enables her to initiate the encounter with the angel, even compelling it to occur, and in the end, she receives her dearest wish and more: she marries the man she loves, attains whole purity, and becomes the idealized Jew.

The main reason that Aseneth's prayer is considered "magical" is because her process of purification before prayer, complex clothing changes and preparation, and words spoken in prayer reflects much of the rituals for conjuring angels that is found in

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[117] Sparks, *Jos. Asen.* 14:1-10.
[118] Sparks, *Jos. Asen.* 15:1-6.
[119] George W.E. Nickelsburg, "Stories of Biblical and Early Post-Biblical Times," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. Michael E. Stone; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 69.

two other texts, the fourth-century Jewish magical handbook *Sepher ha-Razim,* or "Book of Mysteries," and the ancient Greek "magical" papyri from fourth-century C.E. Egypt.[120] The form of the reconstructed text of *Sepher ha-Razim* is "marked by seven sections based on a sevenfold heaven cosmology. Each firmament is described according to its nature and function, and for each section there is a magical praxis described that can be affected by invoking the angels listed in that subdivision and by following the prescribed rites."[121] The description of Aseneth's prayer and then the angel's appearance, with a face like lightening, eyes "like the light of the sun, and the hairs of his head like flames of fire"[122] is extremely reminiscent of both *Sepher ha-Razim's* and papyrii's instructions and description of the conjuration of the sun, Helios.[123] In each case, the conjurer summons the sun using precise formulaic rituals. Aseneth shares these rituals in *Joseph and Aseneth,* rendering her an unconventional, but powerful, female Jewish magician in the realm of mythical literature.

3.5 Archaeological Evidence

One last piece of historical evidence must be mentioned in our survey; namely, archaeological remnants of amulets and curse tablets. Interestingly enough, the creation of these physical objects was extremely prevalent in secular culture. Men and women alike were the clients and consumers of this type of magic, and as a result, the phenomenon was not known as the domain of either sorcerers *or* sorceresses. It was commonly accepted, and therefore belied no need to become known as "women's

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[120] See Kraemer, *When Aseneth,* 91-105. The late dating of *Sepher ha-Razim* also supports Kraemer's view that *Joseph and Aseneth* is dated to the fourth century B.C.E. and not earlier.
[121] Aubin, "Gendering Magic,"172.
[122] *Jos. Asen.*14:9.
[123] See Kraemer, *When Aseneth,* "Chapter 4: Aseneth and the Adjuration of Angels."

magic." That said, archaeological examples of tablets and amulets mentioning women and women's issues abound, whether or not their creators were exclusively women.

According to Ogden, amulets "were the most pervasive of magical tools in antiquity. At the simplest level, they were a protective or empowering magical bond: the basic Greek term for amulet, *periamma* (or *periapton),* literally means 'object tied around."[124] They ranged from literal threads or woven material tied around the wrist, to texts inscribed on silver lamellas or thin papyrus strips "rolled up, like curse tablets, and then worn in a bronze tube or fabric pouch around the neck."[125] Once they were crafted, they had to be consecrated with ritual words, "in analogy to the consecration of cult objects and holy substances in religion."[126] Their use was exceedingly common among both Jewish and non-Jewish men and women, [127] with scholars going so far as to state that

> it is now beyond dispute that nearly everyone – 99 percent of the population is not too high an estimate – believed in their power. That great fact gatherer, Pliny the Elder, was certainly correct when he observed that "there is no one who does not fear to be spellbound by curse tablets." More precisely, this belief [in amulets and curse tablets] seems to have transgressed every significant ancient boundary – social, cultural, linguistic, geographical, and religious.[128]

Most amulets have been found in the eastern Mediterranean, and were written on sheets of metal (or even potsherd) in Aramaic and Hebrew.[129]

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[124] Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts,* 261.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Luck, *Arcana Mundi,* 219.
[127] See discussions in Luck, *Arcana Mundi,* 219; Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, 287-290; Kraemer, *Her Share,* 108; Michael Swartz, "Jewish Magic in Late Antiquity," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism, Volume 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period* (ed. Steven T. Katz; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Philip Alexander, "Jewish Elements in Gnosticism and Magic c. CE 70-CE 270," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism, Vol. 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period* (ed. Steven T. Katz; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[128] Gager, *Curse Tablets,* 244.
[129] Swartz, "Jewish Magic," 708.

Shared traditions and Greco-Roman syncretism flourished within this area of magic. In early Palestine, Christian men actually came to the synagogue to be given healing amulets, [130] and in Babylonia, many "magic bowls" (food bowls inscribed on the inside with incantation texts in spirals) were written by Jews for non-Jewish clients.[131] Amulets were for everyone, as even the Jewish "sages regarded amulets and other similar protective devices to be a normal part of their culture and not something illicit; amulets constituted an accepted part of science and medical technology in that day."[132]

In terms of who physically *created* the amulet with its written incantation, it is a fact that all amulets were recorded and written by male scribes. Even those Jewish women "who belonged to the higher strata of society and owned property themselves were often unable to sign [their names in letters] and had to rely on the assistance of literate males."[133] This meant that women in the lower classes had little to no chance of being literate, leaving all metal amulets found through archaeological research to be written by men, whether sorcerers or not.[134] While there is the custom in most Jewish amulets of identifying the client by the mothers' name instead of the fathers,' [135] it is unknown if this was the custom for was all practitioners, or only in amulets written for or

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[130] Dickie, *Magic and Magicians,* 289. As further proof of their common acceptance, the Jewish men granting the amulets were not "magicians who happened to be Jews and who traded on their Jewishness to impress their clientele, but men who had some recognized role in the synagogue or connection with it."
[131] Swartz, "Jewish Magic," 713.
[132] Stratton, *Naming the Witch,* 155.
[133] Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine: Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 81* [Tubingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2001], 483.
[134] Hezser, *Jewish Literacy,* 482: "One can imagine that the amulet business flourished in Roman-Byzantine Palestine and that many of those who could write a few letters in whatever language would take advantage of people's belief in the magical quality of writing and set themselves up as amulet writers. Whether they were successful will have ultimately depended on their reputation as effective magicians rather than on their writing capacities."
[135] An incantation from a silver amulet found in Tiberias is typical in its statement to "Eradicate from the body of Ina daughter of Zeiri a[ll] hectic fever and illness and sickness in the name of YHWH who is enthroned among the cherubim." Shaul Shaked and Joseph Naveh, eds., *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1993), 50-7, Amulet no. 17. The words in brackets are reconstructions suggested by the editors.

requested by women. Jewish women's amulets and incantation bowls from the time of the Talmud will be explored at length in the next chapter; what follows regards early evidence only.

There is only one extant text from this time period that discusses Jewish women's sorcery, a love charm dated to approximately 271 C.E. Found in Hadrumetum, North Africa, the item was written in a mixture of Greek and Latin, and found inscribed on a sheet of lead that was rolled up and deposited in a tomb in a Jewish cemetery.

> *I bind you by oath, divine spirit who is present here, in the holy name.* Aoth Aboath, the god of Abraam, (Abraan), Iao of Jacob (Iakos), Io Aoth Aboath, the god of Israel (Israma). Hear the honored, the fearful and great name and lead him to *and to depart from and [to go] to Urbanus, whom Urbana bore, Domitiana, whom Candida bore,* bring him to her, full of love, raging with jealousy and without sleep over his love and his passion for her, and make him ask her to return to his house as wife. I bind you by oath, great, eternal, ever-eternal, all-powerful god who is superior to the gods above. I bind you by oath, creator of the heaven and sea. I bind you by oath, the one who has passed through the pious. I bind you by oath, the one who has separated the sea with the staff, to lead and yoke Urbanus, whom Urbana bore, to Domitiana, whom Candida bore, full of love, tormented and sleepless on account of his passion and desire for her, in order that he may lead her back to his house as his wife. I bind you by oath, the one who made the ass stop giving birth. I bind you by oath, the one who separated light from darkness. I bind you by oath, the one who shattered the rocks. I bind you by oath, the one who broke the mountains asunder. I bind you by oath, the one who formed the earth upon her foundations.
>
> I bind you by oath in the holy name which is not to be uttered. I shall it by name with an equal number and the daimons will be raised and become astonishingly fearful, to lead and yoke the husband Urbanus, whom Urbana bore, to Domitiana, whom Candida bore, full of love, and to beg her. Now Quickly.
>
> I bind you by oath, the one who made the luminaries and stars in heaven through the voice of command so as to bring light to all men. I bind you by oath, the one shook the entire world, who both over-turned and spewed out the mountains, the one who made all the earth tremble and renewed all the inhabitants. I bind you by oath, the one who made the signs in heaven, on earth and in the sea, to lead and yoke Urbanus the husband, whom Urbana bore, to Domitiana, whom Candida bore, full of love, raging with passion for her, begging her and asking her to come back

> to his house as his wife. I bind you by oath, the eternal god, the great god, the all-powerful, whom all the mountains and valleys in all the world feared, you through whom the lion releases his prey, the mountains, the earth and the sea tremble... "appear each fear which he has" (meaning unclear) of the eternal, immortal, all-watching, evil-hating one who knows all good and evil things in the sea, in the rivers, in the mountains and on land, Aoth Abaoth, the god of Abraam and the Iao of Jacob, Iao Aoth Aboath, the god of Israel. Lead, yoke Urbanus, whom Urbana bore, to Domitiana, whom Candida bore, and bring him back full of love, sleepless and tormented by his love, his desire and his passion for Domitiana, whom Candida bore. Yoke them in marriage and [make them] live together in love for the rest of their lives. Make him her obedient slave, desiring no other woman or maiden, but Domitiana alone, whom Candida bore, and to have her as his wife for the rest of their lives. Now, Now, Quickly, Quickly.[136]

The purpose of this amulet is to inspire Urbanus to have undying love for Domitiana, utilizing in the process matrilineal descent in references to their names, and a variation of the Jewish formula "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Much of the Greek wording reflects the *Septuagint,* which "may indicate that Domitiana herself or the professional to whom she turned was Jewish."[137] On the surface, it seems like the perfect example of Jewish women's sorcery.

However, as Ogden explains, due to cultural syncretism the amulet is corrupt, and is possibly a "Judaeo-Greek recipe in the hands of a pagan copyist."[138] Alexander explains further:

> There are no straightforward quotations from the Old Testament, only allusions. But this is revealing. Whoever composed this piece was at home in the Bible: he was not mechanically copying out verses from an unfamiliar sacred text for magical purposes, but drawing on a well-stocked memory. This, together with the fact that there is nothing overtly pagan, or even Christian, in the text, indicates that it must be Jewish in origin. However, there is no reason to suppose that the client Domitiana, for whom it was written, was Jewish: neither she, nor her beloved Urbanus,

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[136] "A Tablet Inscribed by a Young Woman, Compelling a Divine Spirit to Bring Her the Man She Desires to Marry, Using Language Reminiscent of the Septuagint." Kraemer, *Maenads,* §54 on 108.
[137] Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts,* 329.
[138] Ibid.

> bear typically Jewish names, nor can there have been many Jews in Hadrumetum. Doubtless Domitiana would not have bothered about the origin of the charm – so long as it worked. The magician who wrote out the version of the charm which we now have was almost certainly not Jewish. It is surely inconceivable that a Jewish (or Christian) copyist would have seriously misspelt the names Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not once, but twice (1-3 and 38-9), or written such a garbled sentence [about Moses' parting of the Red Sea with his staff]... The text, then, as we have it, was written by a pagan magician, who probably took it from a book of magical recipes... without any thought for its Jewish origin. To the magician it was simply a sonorous and effective incantation with which to impress a client.[139]

While the amulet was most likely written by a non-Jewish man at the request of a non-Jewish woman, its importance to this thesis remains: it is originally Jewish text about a woman, enacted by a woman, for a woman's issue.

Although the love-charm from Hadromentum or any other archaeological amulet was not physically shaped by a Jewish sorceress, this does not mean that no such person ever existed. It must be noted that the majority of amulets were most likely *not* metal and did not contain writing. "One may assume that the poorer sections of the population did not use such jewelry-like amulets at all, but resorted to cheaper amulets of papyrus or leather or in the form of found objects or produce which would hardly have survived."[140] Women such as *sagae* came from the lower classes and so most certainly were illiterate and could not afford metal. Amulets of their creation therefore would not have lasted through the centuries, but could easily have been prevalent at the time.

Since we cannot affirm this truth through archaeology, in order to gain any knowledge of lower-class women creating amulets, we must turn to literature describing their use. In Roman writer Petronius' late-first century novel *Satyricon,* for example, a beautiful woman, Circe, has offered herself to the protagonist, Polyaenos. In an

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[139] Alexander, "Jewish Elements," 1075.
[140] Hezser, *Jewish Literacy,* 444.

embarrassing episode, he proves impotent, and after all conventional cures fail him, Circe's maid, Chrysis, attempts to fix the problem herself. She brings her own personal witch to a rendezvous with Polyaenos, acting on Circe's behalf. Told from the point of view of Polyaenos, it reads, rather saucily:

> The old woman [the witch] meantime drew from her pocket a hank of plaited yarns of different colors, and tied it round my neck. Then puddling dust and spittle together, she dipped her middle finger in the mess, and disregarding my repugnance, marked my forehead with it.
>
> *Never despair! Priapus I invoke,*
> *To help the parts that make his altars smoke.*
>
> The incantation ended, she bade me spit out thrice, and thrice toss pebbles into my bosom, which she had wrapped up in purple after pronouncing a charm over them. Then putting her hands to my privates, she began to try my virile condition. Quicker than thought the nerves obeyed her summons, and filled the old lady's hand with a huge erection. Then jumping for joy, "Look, Chrysis, look," she cried, "how I've started the hare for other folk to course." This accomplished, the old woman handed me back to Chrysis, who was overjoyed at the recovery of her mistress's treasure; with all haste she led me straight to the latter, whom we found in a most delightful spot, adorned with everything that fairest Nature can show to charm the eyes. [141]

The amulet itself is made of yarn, a material which disintegrates and which has no surface for writing. Yet the witch ties it over the protagonist's neck and chants an incantation, throwing possibly ordinary stones over him, but more likely minerals thought to have herb-like magical properties.[142] The "purple cloak wrapped around them is supposed to enhance their power to form another amulet,"[143] and after this double amulet is completed, the spell works instantly.

This story typifies how amulets were in "women's domain"; they used herbs, very often had to do with erotic magic, and contained no writing. Although the evidence is no

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[141] Petronius, *Satyricon,* Chapter 131.
[142] Luck, *Arcana Mundi,* 126.
[143] Ibid.

doubt circumstantial, from the archaeological evidence of women using Jewish amulets, and the story of a lower-class pagan sorceress utilizing an amulet for her "women's magic," we can easily extrapolate Jewish *sagae* performing similar incantations. This indeterminate archaeological evidence affirms that historically, female Jewish sorceresses antiquity were present, active, and served a vital role in the Greco-Roman conception of magic.

3.6 Conclusion

Contrary to Biblical prohibitions as found in Exodus 22:17, Jewish women are found as sorceresses all throughout Greco-Roman times. Juvenal's *Satire VI,* Philo and Josephus give the strongest evidence for so-called *sagae,* but evidence for Jewish women in other "magical" contexts exist through Zosimos and Jewish narrative literature, as well as archaeological evidence. Female Jewish magicians played a vivid role in everyday Greco-Roman life, for they were midwives, healers, alchemists, gypsies and fortune-tellers, women who did not fit the mold of the sociological norm. History repeats the same tale, in that time and again, whether because of personality, economics, or profession, certain women in some society have been cast out and labeled "witch." In Biblical times they were known as מְכַשֵּׁפָה, and in the Greco-Roman world, as *pharmakoi*. In truth, however, their label is simpler: in all times, they were simply the "outsider."

CHAPTER 4: The Female Jewish Magician in Rabbinic Sources

Juvenal's *Satire VI* implies that Jewish women were inherently associated with magic, and the goal of this chapter is to confirm that this prejudice was not pagan alone. Instead, this view was widespread, and built upon by all mentions of women's magic in rabbinic literature. I will begin by surveying past scholarship on the subject, then I will examine rabbinic literature that attests to an automatic link between women and sorcery, linking this notion back to Juvenal's perspective in *Satire VI* and other pagan and Christian works.

Next I will explore the actual definition of "women's magic" and provide a brief taxonomy that classifies its nuances as negative or positive, followed by a comparison of the general treatment given to men and women in rabbinic literature as they practiced magical acts. To the rabbinic viewpoint, men did not practice "magic," for that would undermine God, but instead were considered to only manifest God's power in a positive fashion. The opposite held true for women, who were thought to practice magic in *violation* of God's will. This left men's magical acts always described as morally and supernaturally superior to that of those performed by women.

Moving from generalities to specifics, I will next dissect the taxonomy of women's magic piece-by-piece, analyzing rabbinic literature for all instances and mentions of Jewish women performing magic. The majority of rabbinic literature considers it to be overwhelmingly negative, however, a minority of the written corpus, as well as archaeological evidence as found through amulets and incantation bowls, attests

to a positive perception. Women's magic was both acceptable and welcome if it functioned in the realms of healing or protection.

This leads to the conclusion that although both Juvenal and the rabbinic community thought that women were intrinsically associated with magic, they cannot be said to have been misogynistic. The fact that both pagans and Jews acknowledged Jewish women as holders of such magical abilities meant that the larger Greco-Roman community acknowledged, and in some cases even respected women, as bearers of great power. Women who performed magic in Greco-Roman times were therefore not only "tolerated," in contrast to Exodus 22:17, but can also be said to have performed a valuable function in society.

4.1 Review of Past Scholarship

Chapters Two and Three contain many references to secondary sources, yet the majority stand alone and are not in dialogue with one another. This is not the case, however, for scholarship regarding the association of women and sorcery in rabbinic literature. A large body of work already exists on this topic,[1] and before I can forward my own opinions, I must do justice to the work of others. This section thus aims to summarize the existing scholarly corpus on the subject.

Until the last two decades, past scholarship seems to overwhelmingly paint a misogynistic picture of women sorceresses. As Lesses explains, "Women who do magic are [considered]... outside the constraints of the rabbinic halakah and social convention. They are almost always those who disturb society, not those who defend society from

[1] I will not list full book and article information here, but see the bibliography for the writings of Melissa Aubin, Simcha Fishbane, Meir Bar-Ilan, Tal Ilan, Naomi Janowitz, Rebecca Lesses, Michele Murray, Leo Mock, and Jonathan Seidel.

dangers."[2] This is because "magic," to the rabbis, exemplified the concept of Other, which was then associated with the female gender in general:

> The definition of sorcery as belonging essentially to women's nature is part of the overall rabbinic project that defines gender. Women's subordinate role in the rabbinic religious community makes them suspect. *Kišuf,* as a halakhic category, defines ritual activities that are outside the bounds of the observance of the *miṣvot* ("commandments"). [Since women engaged in such activities]... the rabbinic definition of *kišuf* and those who engage in it serve to distance both the actions and the performers from the community that accepts rabbinic authority and rabbinic definitions of the correct actions (*miṣvot*) to perform.[3]

In rabbinic literature, one who practices magic (and was not a rabbi himself), was automatically separated from the community, and looked down upon as lesser. Thus, women as a whole were cast aside.

One perspective in scholarship, as exemplified by Fishbane and Bar-Ilan, has interpreted this to mean that the rabbis saw women as either subversive or manipulative.[4] They hold that analyzing rabbinic depictions of sorceresses can help name the role and position of women in rabbinic society. Bar-Ilan does this through psychologizing witchcraft's appeal to women, claiming that women sought out power through witchcraft as a result of their own desire to rule:

> If the normative society did not permit the women within it to attain leadership positions, the women tried, nevertheless, to rule in the society, if not by the customary means, then by other means, i.e. witchcraft. In other words, the preoccupation by women with witchcraft in the ancient era expressed their desire to attain leadership positions not through the customary social means of the time, for that was barred to them.[5]

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[2] Rebecca Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power: Women as Sorceresses Exorcists, and Demonesses in Babylonian Jewish Society of Late Antiquity," *JAAR* 69 (2001): 369.
[3] Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power, 364.
[4] Simcha Fishbane, "Most Women Engage in Sorcery: An Analysis of Female Sorceresses in the Babylonian Talmud," in *Deviancy in Early Rabbinic Literature: A Collection of Socio-Anthropological Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 67-84; Bar-Ilan, "Witches in the Bible and Talmud," 7-32.
[5] Bar-Ilan, "Witches in the Bible and in the Talmud," 10.

Fishbane, on the other hand, makes no claims about women's motivations, but states that "the Talmud, because it represents a patriarchal society which perceives women as being liminal in its social order or on the fringe of male-centered society and thus excluded from most central rituals, regards them as a threat to the patriarchal social structure."[6] Both writers assume that female magicians were members of the lower class, and seem to say that the rabbis, whether intentionally or unintentionally, granted women power at their discretion, but that the women held no power themselves.

On the other end of the spectrum, Aubin, Murray, Lesses, and Ilan come to a very different conclusion: although they all agree that women were marginalized by the rabbis, they provide different nuances on the topic and all maintain that women's roles were much more variegated than previously believed, and that they *did* possess power in their own way.[7] According to both Murray and Ilan, who examine rabbinic discourse, the rabbis attempted to "establish and maintain rabbinic authority by labeling women as witches and practitioners of magic"[8] because they did not understand Jewish women's religious culture. Lesses analyzes archaeological finds in order to show that the reality of Greco-Roman Jewish women's religious life was different than rabbinic literature portrays, since some women are recorded as performing protective magic.

Aubin focuses on the representation of gender in rabbinic texts, stating that "a recognition of power operations that belie the labels assigned to the feminine in rabbinic literature undermines the validity and absolutism of rabbinic notions of gender."[9] All

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[6] Fishbane, *Deviancy,* 68-69.
[7] Melissa M. Aubin, "Gendering Magic in Late Antique Judaism" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1998); Murray, "The Magical Female"; Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power"; Ilan, *Jewish Women* and "Cooks/Poisoners."
[8] Murray, "The Magical Female," 284. Also see Ilan, *Jewish Women,* 225.
[9] Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 221.

hold that the rabbinic claims to women and magic do not speak necessarily to women's status as a whole, but instead, is an ideological formulation, "a locative category indicating measure of distance between rabbinic voices and their 'others.'"[10]

However, the focus of the above scholars is on the placement of women and the labeling of magic only *within Jewish society* in the Greco-Roman period. A comparably large body of research has also been compiled that addresses Jewish magicians (but not specifically *female* Jewish magicians) within Greco-Roman society,[11] with Pollard providing details on women and magic in Greco-Roman times.[12]

Only two academics have included all four elements of my interest – Jewish, female, magician, and Greco-Roman times – within their scholarship: Stratton and Janowitz.[13] Both include analyses of female Jewish magicians in their overarching surveys of magic in the larger Greco-Roman world. Stratton seeks to uncover the stereotyping process of women as witch, and "to illuminate the specific motivations and ideology underlying the use of magic as an Othering strategy in these [rabbinical] depictions."[14] She identifies the lack of rabbinic control over women's cooking to be a threat to rabbinical authority, one which asserted itself through rabbinic legal innovations in dietary practices.[15] Janowitz analyzes Jewish witchcraft though the lens of menstruation and rabbinic purity laws, and believes that when "Biblical prejudices merge

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[10] Ibid.
[11] See Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); George Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Collection of Ancient Texts* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985); Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Routledge, 2001).
[12] Pollard, "Magic Accusations."
[13] See Stratton, *Naming the Witch* and Naomi Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World.*
[14] Stratton, *Naming the Witch,* 166.
[15] Ibid., 179.

with Greco-Roman ones, filter[ed] through rabbinic anxieties about women's unclean bodies... it is possible to see every woman as a potential witch."[16]

The rest of this chapter references the perspectives of all secondary authors above in order to bolster my claim that Jewish women in Biblical and Greco-Roman times *did* have power in their own religious lives, but it was often not recognized as such by the men who held structured religious authority.

4.2 Women and Sorcery: An Intrinsic Connection

The writing of Juvenal in the first and second centuries, as described in the last chapter, depicts Jewish women as purveyors of magic. Scholarship has examined the passage in detail in order to determine its historical authenticity[17], but has not placed it within the context of other pagan literature that attests that, in widespread Greco-Roman culture, sorcery was thought to be inherently *in women.* Juvenal's Satire VI passage speaks about one specific woman, the "trembling Jewess" who is

> an interpreter
> Of the laws of Jerusalem, high priestess with a tree
> As temple, a trusty go-between of high heaven. [18]

This particular magician is a Jewish woman, one who is learned about the laws of Jerusalem, but who can perform magic as well. She represents her religion as well as her gender, for

> at bargain prices a Jew
> Sells you the answer to any dream you'd like to come true.[19]

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[16] Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World,* 96.
[17] See Dickie, *Magic and Magicians,* 192; Kraemer *Her Share,* 90; among others.
[18] Juvenal, *Sat. VI,* trans. Creekmore in *Maenads* (ed. Kraemer), 41-42.
[19] Ibid.

Though the form of "Jew" in the Latin is plural, it is clear that Juvenal speaks about women alone. The Jewess of the passage can sell any Roman woman the answer to her dreams, for every Jewish woman is somehow associated with magic.

This correlates quite nicely with the overall Greco-Roman attitude that assumed that women were magicians. Pagan and Christian literature is rife with such connotations, beginning with the fourth century B.C.E. playwright Euripides' depiction of the mythological Medea, who murders her brother and children. "Medea, while not directly called a witch in the early texts, is involved in all sorts of antisocial and destructive actions which make it clear that women with supernatural powers are active threats to everyone... she is presented in such a way as to make her path seem to be the natural one for women."[20] She is, as Janowitz explains further, a fantasy of "femininity gone wrong,"[21] with all the nurturing and loving instincts considered inherent to women turned on their ear.

Other examples of witchcraft being natural for women abound. Aubin divides these representations of women-as-witch into four distinct categories: the heretical woman, especially that found in fourth-century Christian writers such as Alexander of Alexandria and Jerome[22]; the witch hag, as evidenced by the aged, evil witches in first-century Lucan and Horace, and the second-century Apuleius[23]; the superstitious

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[20] Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World,* 89.
[21] Ibid.
[22] The categorization is found in Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 12. For depictions of women as heretics, see (among others), Alexander of Alexandria, *Epistula ad Alexandrum,* 13; Jerome, *Epistulae* 22.38; Epiphanius, *Panarion,* 1.26.4-5, 1.35.3, 1.37.2.
[23] For descriptions of older women as witches, see the witch Erictho in Lucan's *Belli Civilus,* vi. 5115-529; the night rituals of witches in Horace's *Sermones,* 1.8; the elderly witch in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses,* 2.15f, 3.21f; also Plutarch, *Superst.,* 116a; and John Chrystostom, *Ad illuminandos catecheses,* 2.5, among others.

woman,[24] and the teller of 'old wives' tales.'[25] "What links these poetic, dramatic, and satirical texts," she opines, "are negative depictions of magic and its association of magic with old, young, single, married, educated, ignorant, and upper-class and lower-class women... [it] is so widespread as to suggest that magic was chiefly women's enterprise.[26]

Janowitz explains further that one reason women were generally associated with magic was because of the special powers granted to their menstrual blood.[27] The blood itself can be used for either positive or negative ends. On the positive side, Columella writes that infested olives can be cured after a menstruating woman walks around the field three times around, barefoot.[28] Plutarch believes that menstrual rags can be used in averting hail crops,[29] and Josephus records its usefulness in uprooting a lethal plant that can later be used in exorcisms.[30] In addition, Tacitus, Josephus, and Strabo all state that menstrual blood can be used as a removal agent for bitumen off the bottom of boats,[31] with Strabo even citing a first-century C.E. source associating the action particularly with Jews.[32]

Menstrual blood as a whole, however, was considered highly dangerous in Greco-Roman times, and women, as the ones who menstruate, were thus thought to have

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[24] For descriptions of the superstitiousness of women, see Plutarch, *Superst.* 168d; Strabo, 7.3.4; and for superstitiousness in older women, particularly, see the first-century to fourth-century C.E. astronomer Cleomedes, *De motu circulari corporum caelestium,* 208; Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanorum, 17.4;* Servius, *in Aeneidem,* 8.187.

[25] Those who use the term 'old wives' tales' as an expression of contempt include Herodas, 1.74; Lucan, *Philoposeudes* 9; Julian, *Oratio* 5, 161b; Horace, *Sermones,* 2.6.76-77.

[26] Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 15.

[27] Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World,* 92-93.

[28] Columella, *Rust.* 11.3.64.

[29] Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 7.1-2.

[30] Josephus, *B.J.* 7.180-5.

[31] Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.6; Josephus, *B.J.* 4.480; Strabo, *Geogr.* 16.2.43.

[32] In discussing the asphalt found at the Dead Sea, Strabo writes in *Geogr.* 16.2.43 (Jones, LCL):

> According to Poseidonius the people [Jews] are sorcerers and pretend to use incantations, as also urine and other malodorous liquids [including menstrual blood], which they first pour all over the solidified substance, and squeeze out the asphalt and harden it, and then cut it into pieces.

innately negative magical abilities. Nowhere is this connection made more clear than in the writing of the first-century C.E. natural philosopher Pliny the Elder. An entire chapter of his *Naturalis Historia* is entitled "Facts Connected with the Menstrual Discharge," and though Pliny does describe *some* positive attributes of menstrual blood, the majority of his chapter details its harmful effects. He begins the chapter with a firm statement of women's intrinsic capacity for magic:

> *There is no limit to the marvelous powers attributed to females.* For, in the first place, hailstorms, they say, whirlwinds, and lightning even, will be scared away by a woman uncovering her body while her monthly courses are upon her. The same, too, with all other kinds of tempestuous weather; and out at sea, a storm may be lulled by a woman uncovering her body merely, *even though not menstruating at the time*... If the menstrual discharge coincides with an eclipse of the moon or sun, the evils resulting from it are irremediable; and no less so, when it happens while the moon is in conjunction with the sun; the congress with a woman at such a period being noxious, and attended with fatal effects to the man. At this period also, the lustre of purple is tarnished by the touch of a woman: so much more baneful is her influence at this time than at any other...
>
> Young vines, too, it is said, are injured irremediably by the touch of a woman in this state; and both rue and ivy, plants possessed of highly medicinal virtues, will die instantly upon being touched by her....Much as I have already stated on the virulent effects of this discharge, I have to state, in addition, that bees, it is a well-known fact, will forsake their hives if touched by a menstruous woman; that linen boiling in the cauldron will turn black, that the edge of a razor will become blunted, and that copper vessels will contract a fetid smell and become covered with verdigrease, on coming in contact with her. A mare big with foal, if touched by a woman in this state, will be sure to miscarry; nay, even more than this, at the very sight of a woman, though seen at a distance even, should she happen to be menstruating for the first time after the loss of her virginity, or for the first time, while in a state of virginity.[33]

Females have "marvelous powers,"[34] for, as menstruation is innate to women, and is not shared by women, so too is magic largely a women's domain. A woman in the midst of her menses can cause great destruction in the world, whether it be her first menses or her

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[33] Pliny, *Nat.* 28.23 (Bostock and Riley, LCL). Emphasis mine.
[34] Ibid.

last. And a woman, even if she is *not* menstruating, still possesses the power to tame storms at the glimpse of her naked form. The ability to do magic is given by nature, and thus lies inert within her at all times, from birth until death.

Not surprisingly, the rabbinic worldview reflected that of its pagan and Christian context. "Rabbinic anecdotes overlap very closely with both the Biblical texts and the Greco-Roman attitudes exactly on the general suspicion that women are more likely to engage in magic."[35] *Mishnaic*, *Talmudic*, and other rabbinic writings echo the belief that witchcraft was somehow intrinsic in women's natures. In rabbinic works, women's actions and actions of sorcery are often conflated, with over fifty percent of the occurrences of the root כשף in rabbinic literature referring to women.[36]

To the rabbis, it is not merely that most women were *potentially* sorceresses, but rather, in the words of *b. Sanhedrin* 67a, "most women *are* sorceresses."[37] It is clear that in the rabbis' eyes, the art of practicing witchcraft was fundamental to a woman's identity. *B. Pesachim* 111a offers a glimpse into why this is so, combining the ability to do witchcraft with the power of menstrual blood:

> If a menstruant woman passes between two [men], if it is at the beginning of her menses she will slay one of them, and if it is at the end of her menses she will cause strife between them. What is the remedy? Said R. Papa: Let them commence [a verse] with *el* and end with *el.* When two women sit at a crossroad, one on one side of the road, and one on the other side of the road, facing each other, they are certainly engaged in sorcery [*keshafim*].

A menstruating woman will kill a man by whom she passes, whether she means to or not. The power is inherent in her body, simply by virtue of her menstruation. After offering a

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[35] Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World,* 90.
[36] Tal Ilan, "Women in Jewish Life and Law," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism. Volume IV: The Late Roman-Rabbinic History* (ed. Steven T. Katz; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 643.
[37] Emphasis mine.

remedy fraught with superstitious repeats of God's name, the next line states that women sitting across from the other on the road are engaged in sorcery, regardless of their menstrual status. Thus, women's bodies are implied to be a direct cause of their innate capacity and will to do sorcery.

Quotes abound in which sorcery is considered to be intrinsic to the female form: the first century C.E. sage Rabbi Hillel says in the Mishnah, for example, that "the more flesh, the more worms; the more possessions the more care; the more women the more witchcrafts [מרבה נשים מרבה כשפים]."[38] The Palestinian *Talmud* proclaims, "It was taught: R. Shimeon b. Yoḥai says... even the most decent woman practices witchcraft *[keshafim]*."[39] Sorceresses are so common that in one reference in *b. Pesachim*, they are even thought to have an official sisterhood, complete with a leader with whom a fourth-century rabbi could negotiate![40]

Regarding the verse in Deuteronomy which says "There shall not be a man able to stand against you,"[41] *Sifre Deuteronomy*, a compilation of exegesis from around 300 C.E., asks, "This applies to a single man; what about a nation, a family or even a woman plying her witchcraft?"[42] If anyone stands up against the people of Israel "with the aid of

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[38] *m. Avot* 2:7.
[39] *y. Qidd.* 4:11, 66c.
[40] As recorded in *b. Pes.* 111a:

> Amemar said: The chief of the sorceresses told me: "He who meets sorceresses should say thus: "Hot dung in perforated baskets for your mouths, o ye witches! may your heads become bald [because they practiced witchcraft with their hair], the wind carry off your crumbs, your spices be scattered, the wind carry off the new saffron which ye are holding, ye sorceresses; as long as He showed grace to me and to you, I had not come among [you]; now that I have come among you, your grace and my grace have cooled."

Rashbam holds that the passage on crumbs being scattered refers back to Ezekiel 13:18, witches who "have profaned My name among My people in return for handfuls of barley and morsels of bread."
[41] Deut 7.24
[42] *Sifre Deut.* 52 (Finkelstein 118).

sorcery, it will be a woman,"[43] not a man, for sorcery is by definition part of a woman's very nature. The link between women and magic is so strong that it seems to have "an element of inevitability about it, as though being prone to practice magic were inherently part of being female."[44]

This concept can be derived from the rabbis' interpretation of Exodus 22:17, as found in *b. Sanhedrin* 67a:

> תנו רבנן מכשפה אחד האיש ואחד האשה א"כ מה ת"ל מכשפה
> מפני שרוב נשים מצויות בכשפים

> The rabbis taught in a *baraita*: When Scripture states, 'you shall not permit a sorceress to live,' it refers to any sorcerer, whether a man or a woman. If so, why does Scripture state *sorceress,* in the female conjugation? Because it is mostly women who are involved in sorcery.

The rabbis note that מְכַשֵּׁפָה is in the female form, and ask why since male sorcerers are most likely persecuted as well. Their answer is unambiguous: it is mostly women who engage in witchcraft.

The Palestinian Talmud, unsurprisingly, has a parallel to this answer. Regarding the same Biblical passage, it states, "It is all the same whether it is a sorcerer or a sorceress [for both are to be put to death], except the Torah meant to teach you the ways of the land [*derech eretz]*, because most women are inclined to sorcery."[45] In this case, women's proclivity toward כִּשּׁוּף is almost inevitable. "The use of the phrase *derech eretz*," explains Murray, "undergirds the statement about women and magic by asserting that this was the way things were, i.e. that is, the reality that most women practice

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[43] Ilan, *Jewish Women,* 222.
[44] Murray, "The Magical Female," 285.
[45] *y. Sanh.* 7:19 (Neusner).

magic."[46] By interpreting the Bible in such a fashion, the rabbis' argument encompasses both nature and divine authority. As a result, it legitimates "sweeping conflation of the outlawed female witch from Exodus with the majority of women."[47]

Five hundred years later, the sixth-century *midrash Mekhilta de R. Shimeon bar Yoḥai* proclaims, also in an analysis of Exodus 22:17, that "*sh'rov k'shafim b'nashim,* most sorcery is in women."[48] The rabbis believe that Exodus employs a female noun to describe who should be put to death because most witchcraft is found in women; it derives from the "natural order of the world,"[49] cementing the association between women and magic.

In discussing a quotation by this very same second-century *tanna* R. Shimon bar Yoḥai, *b. Erubin* 64b continues the linkage. The *halacha* questions what one should do with food found by the wayside; do the rabbis pick it up or ignore it? R. Simon bar Yoḥai instructs the sages "not to ignore discarded foodstuff,"[50] but "R. Johanan stated in the name of R. Simeon bar Yoḥai: 'This applies only to the earlier generations when the daughters of Israel did not freely indulge in witchcraft [*keshafim]*, but in the later generations when the daughters of Israel freely indulge in witchcraft [*keshafim]* one may pass them by.'"[51] Men may not touch food by the side of the road because that food may have been potentially used by Jewish women in a spell of some sort.[52] The daughters of

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[46] Murray, "The Magical Female," 292.
[47] Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 142.
[48] *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai* 74.4 (Nelson).
[49] Ilan, "Cooks/Poisoners," 121.
[50] *b. Eruv.* 64a
[51] *b. Eruv.* 64b
[52] In the parallels to this passage (*y. Abod. Zar.* 1:9, 7b; *y. Demai* 3.3, 13b; *t. Pesah.* 2.15; *Lev. Rab.* 37.3) there is no mention of the "daughters of Israel performing magic." Bar-Ilan notes that the bread mentioned here could have been thought to be associated with using dough to create a figure to cause the death of one's enemy ("Witches in the Bible and in the Talmud, 4). Lesses states that the claims that the daughters

Israel are here condemned as sorceresses, and the sages are taught to watch even the mundane acts of picking up food by the road lest they be contaminated by women's witchcraft.

Another similar warning is found in *b. Berakhot* 53a, this time regarding spices. "Our rabbis taught: If one was walking outside the town and smelled an odor [of spices], if the majority of inhabitants are idolators he does not say a blessing. R. Jose says: 'Even if the majority are Israelites he says a blessing, because the daughters of Israel use incense for sorcery [*l'keshafim.]*'"[53] Again, this sweeping generalization inextricably intertwines women with the use of magic. The editors/redactors of the Talmud immediately continue their deliberations, and do attempt to soften their words: "Do all of them use incense [only] for sorcery [*keshafim]*? The fact is that a small part is used for sorcery and a small part of scenting garments..."[54] In its social context, this meant that woman could possibly exercise "powers beyond her assigned boundaries by engaging in sorcery... The Rabbis could hardly sanction a daughter of Israel whose deviant behavior threatened the social order."[55] This behavior was threatening to the established social order created by the rabbis, relegating the "daughters of Israel" to a class of people whose activities, even the seemingly mundane ones like scenting garments, were always watched carefully lest they overstep their social or religious bounds.

The passage is a microcosm of a trend found in almost all rabbinic literature: every woman has the potential for witchcraft within her, whether she intends to use it or not. Women menstruate, and so are directly linked with witchcraft. The rabbis' writings

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of Israel "might have engaged in sorcery with food found by the road seems to have originated in the Babylonian Talmud ("Exe(o)rcising Power," 351 n. 4).

[53] *b. Ber.* 53a

[54] Ibid.

[55] Fishbane, *Deviancy,* 80.

reflect the attitude of Juvenal and other pagan and Christian authors in the Greco-Roman period, for in all cases, women are thought to have inherent magical powers.

4.3 Defining "Women's Magic" and Rabbinic Attitudes Toward It

Within scholarship in general, women and the magic they perform are classified as a subcategory of magician within the male rabbinic realm. Mock, for example, speaks of the hero-magician, the healer-magician, the dream-interpreter, the scholar-magician, and, as its own category, the female witch.[56] Dickie speaks of "wandering Jewish exorcists," male mendicants such as those found in Acts who perform not only exorcisms, but also divination, necromancy, and conjuring tricks.[57] He includes two categories of women, as well: mendicant holy women and prostitutes.[58]

Yet, while a taxonomy of the types of magic *men* perform has been documented,[59] a specific taxonomy for women's magic has never yet been delineated in scholarship. I would correct this, and categorize magic used by women, as viewed through the lens of rabbinic literature, according to its function. I see "women's magic" as being utilized for two primary purposes: one, trickery, including idolatry and illicit sexual practices, and two, protective "mothering" measures, such as healing and defense against demons. While I will not go into the details of this classification now (it is found in the next section), it is important to note that to the rabbis, the power of magic performed by women, regardless of classification, was always lesser than that of men. Male rabbis,

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[56] Leo Mock, "Were the Rabbis Troubled by Witches?" *Zutot* 1 (2001): 36-40.
[57] Dickie, *Magic and Magicians,* 229-242.
[58] Ibid. 245-250.
[59] For an example of such classifications, see Bohak in *Ancient Jewish Magic,* 357-385. He lists the following exceptions to the prohibition against magic as laid out in Exodus 22:17: the study of magic, magic as is used in the art of creation, in the use of medicine, as defense against an evil magician or spell, as a means for necessary social control, and in protective amulets. There are also various ways in which magical uses of the name of God are acceptable.

and not women, had the true power of God on their side, so witches and sorceresses were "depicted as impotent magicians"[60] and seen as relatively harmless.

As shown in Chapter Three, many writers of the Mishnaic period and later, both Jewish and non-Jewish, testify to Jewish involvement in magic.[61] As a whole it was very present in rabbinic life (very much like superstition[62]), if not always accepted as a valid form of knowledge. Alexander plainly states that "although magic in most of its forms is roundly condemned in the Torah, there is incontrovertible evidence that Jews practised magic in the Mishnaic era, and, indeed, enjoyed something of a reputation for being good at it."[63] Conversations in rabbinic literature often involved demonology, angelology, folk medicine, and divination, and "the rabbi's charisma derived partially from his reputation as a wonder-worker."[64]

Yet, as a scholarly elite, rabbis questioned the "magician's claim to be able to change reality,"[65] because the magician's work could run contrary to common experience and the laws of nature. They tried to integrate these esoteric arts into Jewish culture,

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[60] Mock, "Were the Rabbis?" 40.

[61] Aside from Juvenal's description of the Jewess, general descriptions of Jews and magic abound: Paul in Acts 19:13-20 tells of Jewish exorcists at Ephesus, while Josephus describes an exorcism he saw performed by a Jewish man named Eleazar in the presence of Vespasian (*Ant.* 8.46.9). Origen quotes Celsus as saying that "Jews worship angels and are addicted to sorcery, of which Moses was their teacher" (Origen, *Cels.* 1.26). Lucian mocks non-Jews who use Jewish incantations in order to cure gout. Justin Martyr states that Jews "employ fumigations and incantations," and "make use of craft" in exorcisms (*Trypho* 85).

[62] The rabbis disapproved of what they considered to be superstitious acts generally. For details see the list of "the ways of the Amorite" in chapters 6 and 7 of *t. Sabb.* It contains a lengthy catalog of forbidden superstitious customs. The name of the customs comes from the idolatrous biblical Amorites who were conquered by Moses and Joshua, literal foreigners and historical Others. Yet while labeled as such, the acts mentioned "do not refer to practices executed by non-Jews, but practices that were familiar and native" (Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 117). Regarding the gender usage of the ways of the Amorites, of the practices in the list, "the language used to describe 25 in chapter six and another ten in chapter seven uses the male forms, whereas for only ten in chapter six is the female gender used. These ten activities fall into areas in which women were normally occupied" connected to women's roles as mother, baker, cook, and provider for the family (e.g. related to the responsibility of raising chickens) (Ilan, *Jewish Women,* 223).

[63] Alexander, "Jewish Elements," 1067.

[64] Swartz, "Jewish Magic," 700.

[65] Giuseppe Veltri, "Magic and Healing," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (ed. Catherine Hezser; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 594.

while at the same times trying to define and unveil the strategies or tricks which made them work.[66] Classification of magic in general in rabbinic literature is built on the outcomes of the magical act and the nature or source of the magic used, i.e. with "good" magic or dangerous magic.[67] If not granted by divine power, sorcery is thought to be evil because it "challenges religious beliefs and seeks to have human control or coercion of nature."[68]

To the rabbis, any "magic" that they performed was not considered a form of sorcery. A sorceress' powers were condemned because they seemingly represented demonic powers, but "the rabbis' supernatural powers were sanctioned because they represented 'purity' or sanctity"[69] as empowered by the Torah. Practices labeled as "magical" were discredited by the rabbis, "often on the basis that such rituals compromised the monotheistic demands of the tradition."[70] Similarly, the rabbis declared that whispering any incantations other than the Divine name over wounds was illegal,[71] as was calculating appointed times through any means they deemed improper.[72]

Rabbinic literature is full of stories in which the rabbis use magic to increase their stature and authority. It was completely acceptable, for example, for men to practice sorcery for the sake of learning, as Rabbi Eliezar explains in *b. Sanhedrin* 68a:

> Much Torah have I studied, and much have I taught. Much Torah have I learnt, yet have I but skimmed from the knowledge of my teachers as much as a dog lapping from the sea. Much Torah have I taught, yet my disciples have only drawn from me as much as a painting stick from its tube... Moreover, I have studied three hundred, (or, as others state, three thousand laws) about the planting of cucumbers [by magic] and no man,

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[66] Veltri, "Magic and Healing," 595; Swartz, "Jewish Magic," 700.
[67] Mock, "Were the Rabbis?" 33-43.
[68] Fishbane, *Deviancy,* 68.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 107.
[71] *b. Sanh.* 65a
[72] Ibid.

> excepting Akiba b. Joseph, ever questioned me thereon. For it once happened that he and I were walking together on a road, when he said to me, "My master, teach me about the planting of cucumbers." I made one statement, and the whole field [about us] was filled with cucumbers. Then he said, "Master, you have taught me how to plant them, now teach me how to pluck them up." I said something and all the cucumbers gathered in one place."

The tale focuses on how learned Rabbi Eliezer is amongst rabbis, and then specifically states that he does magic in order to gain new wisdom. Another version of this story, found in the eighth to tenth-century text *Avot de-Rabbi Natan,* actually sets the story in the context of Exodus 22:17:

> I can recite three hundred (another version: three thousand) *halakoth* on the prohibition, *Thou shalt not suffer a sorceress to live,* yet no one has ever questioned me about them except Akiba b. Joseph. For on one occasion he said to me, "Master, teach me how cucumbers are planted [and uprooted]." So I pronounced a word and the entire field (about us) was filled with cucumbers. He then said to me, "You have taught me how they are planted, now teach me how to uproot them." I again pronounced a word and all the cucumbers were gathered in one place.[73]

On this occasion, Rabbi Eliezer is boastful that he can provide three hundred, or even three thousand *halakhot* justifying why sorceresses can be put to death, and then without any sense of contradiction, works magic of his own. "Engaging in *kishuf* is not problematic for rabbis, it seems, as long as it was for the purpose of teaching."[74]

A *midrash* found in *b. Sanhedrin* 67b explains why any miraculous deeds other than that executed by God are invalid:

> דברים ד) אין עוד מלבדו אמר רבי חנינא אפילו לדבר כשפים
> הוא איתתא דהות קא מהדרא למשקל עפרא מתותי כרעיה
> דרבי חנינא אמר לה אי מסתייעת זילי עבידי אין עוד מלבדו
> כתיב איני והאמר רבי יוחנן למה נקרא שמן מכשפים
> שמכחישין פמליא של מעלה

[73] *Abot R. Nat.* 27a (Cashdan).
[74] Murray, "The Magical Female," 297.

> *There is none else besides Him* (Deut 4:35). R. Hanina said: Even by sorcery. A woman once attempted to take earth from under R. Hanina's feet. He said to her: If you succeed in your attempts, go and practice it [sorcery]: it is written, however, "There is none else besides Him." But that is not so, for did not R. Johanan say: Why are they called *mekashefim?* Because they lessen the power of the divine agencies.[75]

First, it is clear that not even sorcerers have the power to oppose God's decrees. Second, R. Johanan's choice of words in שמכחישין פמליא של מעלה means that *mekashefim* "lessens the power of the divine agencies,"[76] but another meaning is that it "lessens the family above." The rabbis, as God's devotees, are like the children in a family in which God is patriarch. Stressing this image of the divine house, "*[k]ishuf* signifies not only perverted and deviant behavior in an earthly context but a disruption of the cosmic 'family' as well."[77] The magician is portrayed as malevolent and Other, someone who "might be seen as a perverted or subversive theurgist who is jealous of Rabbinic power, as an envious outsider whose powers can indeed humiliate or injure the Rabbinic elite."[78] The actions of any magician, then, and especially that of women, would be "constructive as disruptive to rabbinic social and ideological systems."[79]

Another tale in this same folio delineates when and how rabbinic "magic" can be touted, even if *keshafim* are forbidden:

> Abaye said: the laws governing magic (*keshafim)* are like the laws governing the Sabbath. Some transgressions are punishable with stoning,

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[75] *b. Sanh.* 67b
[76] Ibid.
[77] Jonathan Seidel, "Charming Criminals: Classification of Magic in the Babylonian Talmud," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 152.
[78] Siedel, "Charming Criminals," 153.
[79] Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 109. A famous male Other in rabbinical literature is Jesus, described in *b. Sanh.* 43a: "On the eve of the Passover Yeshu the Nasarean was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'He is going forth to be stoned because he has practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostacy. Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favor he was hanged on the eve of the Passover." For details, including how Christians saw Jesus as a sorcerer, see Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1978).

> others are exempt from punishment but forbidden none-the-less, and some are permissible from the start. Doing an actual act of magic is punishable with stoning; performing a sleight of hand is exempt but forbidden. And which acts are permissible from the beginning? Those such as Rav Hanina and Rav Oshaia did; they spent every Sabbath evening engaged in the laws of creation, by means of which they created a third-grown calf and ate it.

These two rabbis were able to create a *living animal* through the power of Torah study. God granted them access to divine power, and, as demonstrated by the passages following this one,[80] determines that rabbinic magic is superior to any magic attempted by gentiles.

Whenever a male and a female magic-worker have an encounter in rabbinic literature, the woman loses. This is easily exemplified in a quote from the Babylonian Talmud that deals with the same third-century rabbi as before:

> Abaye also said: At first I thought the reason why one should not eat vegetables from the bunch which was tied up by the gardener was because it had the appearance of gluttony, but now my Master has told me, it is because one lays oneself open thereby to the dangers of magic [*k'shafim*]. R. Hisda and Rabbah b. R. Huna once were travelling on a ship. A certain lady [*matrona*] said to them, "Take me with you"; but they would not. She then pronounced a spell [*milta*] and the ship was held fast. They [in return] pronounced a spell [*milta*] and it was freed. She said: "What power have I over you? Seeing that you do not cleanse yourselves with a potsherd [after using the toilet], neither do you crush a louse on your clothes, nor do you eat vegetables from a bunch tied up by the gardener."[81]

In this story, magic is primarily the domain of a hostile woman, possibly Roman. She is antagonistic toward the rabbis for no apparent reason. Yet, the rabbis surpass the woman with their knowledge of magic. She utters a *milta,* a word or spell, and the rabbis say the

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[80] *b. Sanh.* 67b continues on to tell instances when gentiles attempt and then fail to create any living beings from acts of magic, ranging from barley corn to donkeys.

[81] *b. Hul.* 105b. This narrative of a magical contest between R. Hisda, Rabba bar Rav Huna, and a *matrona* appears in almost identical form in *b. Sab.* 81a, where the quote says that one should avoid wiping oneself with a potsherd after using the toilet on Shabbat because someone could have used the shard to write down a curse. For archaeological evidence, see John Gager, *Curse Tablets,* and Shaul Shaked and Joseph Naveh, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1985).

same word as a counter-spell and undo her work. "Nothing about this passage suggests that the rabbis draw on a power distinct from hers – there is no explicit claim that they access the power of God or Torah while she draws on demons, nor is there a semantic distinction between her act as magic and their act as miracle, as operated in early Christian writings."[82] Instead, the text simply says the rabbis' spell is superior. The sorceress is bitter that she has no hold on the rabbis because they participate in apotropaic practices that protect them from magical attack, like not wiping themselves with pottery shards (which could contain written curses), not crushing lice on their clothes (mentioned in connection with ghosts in Babylonian incantations), and not eating vegetables tied by the gardener (again, a ritual used in Mesopotamian incantation rituals).[83]

While the rabbis obviously consider the *matrona* to be dangerous, they themselves have a good working knowledge of magic in this tale, enough to take precautionary measures and possess superior powers. "These two functions of magic – namely, demonstrating power and marginalizing a social danger – emerge throughout the Bavli and form a pattern that characterizes magical discourse in the Talmud."[84] The rabbis first wanted to show that they, as the correctly gendered link to the divine, possessed the power of God. It is only the woman who "successfully performs the ungodly deeds of sorcery and not the rabbinic man."[85] Women could not hold such power, so in all cases,[86] were bested by the rabbis.

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[82] Stratton, *Naming the Witch,* 146.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Fishbane, *Deviancy,* 77.
[86] This chapter is a survey of women's magic in the *Talmud*, and is not exhaustive. There are at least four equally significant stories of men's rabbinical magic triumphing over a woman's, including but not limited to: *b. B. Bat.* 153a, in which Rava is cursed by a woman but he overcomes it; *b. Git.* 45a, where women are not as successful as a man in performing miracles; *b. Sanh.* 67b where a woman is turned into a donkey for magically humiliating a man; *b. Yoma* 83b, where men offer a cure to the bite of a rabid dog that was made

4.4 "Women's Magic" as Negative: Literature and Social Reality

Unlike in the early Christian tradition, in which men held the power of sorcery and women became the victims,[87] Jewish rabbis held that women were the proponents of sorcery. The Talmud represents a compilation of the thoughts of a patriarchal society which, as Fishbane has asserted, views women (and especially powerful women) as a threat to the existing social order.[88] As a result, their attitude toward women's magic was almost wholly negative. That said, it must be remembered that Talmudic and rabbinic passages do *not* necessarily represent the social reality of what women were actually doing in the fourth to seventh centuries C.E. Rather, they present an "ideologically motivated view that opposes rabbis, as the holders of legitimate supernatural power, to women, illegitimate claimants to similar power."[89]

Rabbinic writings never refer to miraculous acts of the rabbis as sorcery or magic; instead, they merely demonstrate the powers gained through their virtuous devotion to Torah. In Jewish literature of the time, which was written by men, "women who are reputed to perform the same acts as the rabbis are condemned for practicing magic or sorcery because they do not belong to the same structure of outside authority and, in fact, threaten it because of their outsider status."[90] They are Other, and not only do not belong, but are cast out based on gender alone. As Fishbane explains,

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mad by a woman's sorcery; *b. Pesah.* 110a-b and *b. Sab.* 66b where men offer protective measures against women's sorcery; *b. Qidd.* 39b-40a where a man uses sorcery to resist a woman's immoral demands and subsequent spell on him; and *b. Pesah.* 111a, *b. Sab.* 81b-82a, and *b. Hul.*105b in which men are immune to women's magic.

[87] "Christian writing from the first two centuries portray men rather than women as sorcerers. Women figure in representations of magic as the *victims* of male magical predation" (Stratton, *Naming the Witch,* 108).

[88] Fishbane, *Deviancy,* 68.

[89] Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power," 352.

[90] Ibid.

> When a woman becomes marginal in her society and adopts a deviant role (even in addition to her accepted functions [as wife and mother]) she can become a threat to her social order. An example of such deviance (or threat) is to be found in the case of sorcery. Thus the issues for the Talmudic editor are first, being a woman in the rabbinic society, which coincides with their low and potentially threatening status, and second, the possible consequence of women deviating from the accepted norm, as is the case with the practice of sorcery.[91]

If a man practices sorcery, he is still fully grounded in the controlled world of rabbinical culture, and has only "transgressed a law[,] not threatened the social order."[92]

Scholarship in this area of research has proven that women are specifically linked with witchcraft as a way of marginalizing them as a group. The rabbis repeatedly "associated the activities of women with magic as part of their campaign against all cults other than their own."[93] Murray explains the phenomenon beautifully:

> The rabbis, themselves experiencing exclusion from power in the aftermath of the failed Jewish revolts against Rome in 70 C.E. and 135 C.E., were attempting to establish their authority, and there were aspects of women's religious culture that they found threatening. Their response was to exclude women from certain cultic activities and to charge them with engagement in magic – a strategy employed in the Graeco-Roman world for undermining and delegitimizing the activities and power of the threatening Other.[94]

Palestinian rabbis associated women with sorcery as their way of polemicizing against women's religious culture. As explained in the last chapters, women engaged in activities that were foreign to men "such as food preparation and participation in the mysteries of childbirth, illness, and death,"[95] all of which seemed strange and thereby dangerous. This fear of the Other, coupled with men's misunderstanding of the then-

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[91] Fishbane, *Deviancy,* 69.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ilan, "Women in Jewish Life," 643.
[94] Murray, "The Magical Female," 284.
[95] Ibid.

mysterious menstrual cycle, manifested itself in the labeling of every woman as either a sorceress, or a potential sorceress.

This same fear also led magic performed by women to be considered shameful and compared to prostitution. Like Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans* in which sorcery and prostitution are linked together as a matter of course,[96] Jewish literature juxtaposes idolatrous, evil magic with illicit sexual behavior.[97] In regard to the Second Temple, for example, *m. Sotah* 9:13 states that "harlotry [*zanoot]* and witchcraft [*v'keshafim]* destroyed everything."[98] The rabbis conflate promiscuous women with sorceresses, and blame both for the destruction of Jewish way of life as they know it. *Sifre Deuteronomy* shares this conflation as it tells a parable. A king condemns the eating of figs of the sabbatical year, and a woman does so. She does not question her punishment, but merely asks that her fault be made plain, "lest people in this country say: It seems that they have caught her in adultery or they caught her in sorcery."[99]

Perhaps the most famous story regarding witches and illicit sexual activity comes in the numerous variations of the story of Simeon ben Shetah and the witches of Ashkelon. As found in its earliest source in the *Mishnah*, it is set in a discussion of the methods of stoning and hanging criminals, specifically women:

> All that have been stoned must be hanged; this is the view of R. Eliezer. But the Sages say: None is hanged save the blasphemer and the idolator. A man is hanged with his face to the people and a woman is hanged with her face toward the gallows; this is the opinion of R. Eliezer. But the Sages say: a man is hanged but a woman is not hanged. R. Eliezer said to them, "Did not Shimon ben Shetah hang women in Ashkelon?" They

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[96] Dickie, *Magic and Magicians,* 248.
[97] Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 11.
[98] *m. Sotah* 9:13
[99] *Sifre Deut.* 26 (Finkelstein).

> answered, "He hanged eighty women, whereas two [persons] ought not to be tried [on a charge involving capital punishment] in the one day."[100]

There is no mention here that the women are specifically practicing magic, nor is there correlating evidence in any other *tannaitic* material.[101] The women are not Jewish, as well, but since a Jewish sage plays the central role in this story, and it is included in rabbinic literature, it demonstrates how later Palestinian rabbis "used the ostensible connection of women and magic to highlight the differences between the women and men in the story."[102]

The Palestinian Talmud elaborates greatly on the story, transforming the eighty women into eighty witches, and providing the only episode in rabbinic literature where the rabbis affirm the use of capital punishment for the practice of witchcraft:[103]

> Now that day it was raining. Simeon b. Shetah took with him eighty young men and dressed them in eighty clean cloaks. He took with them eighty new pots, with covers. He said to them, "When I whistle once, put on your garments. When I whistle a second time, all of you come out at once. When each of you comes out, lift up one of the [witches], and hold her off the ground, because the witchcraft [of those women] does not work if their feet are not touching the ground." When he went and came to the mouth of the cave, he said, "Hello, hello! Open up for me. I am one of yours." They said to him, "How did you come on such a rainy day?" He replied, "I ran between the raindrops." They said to him, "And what did you come here to do?" He said to them, "To learn and to teach." When he came in, one of them said something and produced bread. One of them said something and produced cooked food. One of them said something and produced wine. They said to him, "And what can you do?" He said to them, "I can whistle twice and produce eighty handsome young men, dressed in clean clothes, who will have pleasure with you and give you

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[100] *m. Sanh.* 6:4

[101] See the *Sifre* on Exod (Piska 221), the *Sifre* on Deut 22:1, *b. Sanh* 45b-46a. Even Maimonides discusses the hanging of 80 women in Ashkelon by Simeon ben Shetach without alluding to witchcraft in *Mishneh Torah, Sanh.* 14:4.

[102] Murray, "The Magical Female," 294.

[103] While the tale is obviously retold in several settings, the rabbis' hesitation to applaud Simeon's action can "reflect a discomfort with such extreme application of executions without trial. It might also reflect a post-Christian embarrassment with the manner of the execution of the witches and consciousness of the charges that were laid against Jesus in Rabbinic tradition" [Jonathan Seidel, "'Release Us and We Will Release You': Rabbinic Encounters with Witches and Witchcraft," *JAGNES* 3 (1992): 57].

> pleasure too." They said to him, "We want them! We want them!" He whistled once, and they put on their clean clothes. He whistled a second time, and they all came out at once. He signaled to them, "Each of you pick up a partner and lift her up off the ground." At that point what the witches could do would not work. He said to the one who produced bread, "Bring forth bread," but she produced none. He said, "Take her and crucify her." "Bring forth cooked food," but she could not produce, and he said, "Take her and crucify her." "Bring forth wine," and she could not do it, and he said, "Take her and crucify her." And so he did to all of them. This is [the background of that which we have learned: *Eighty women did Simeon b. Shetah hang in Ashqelon. They do not judge two capital cases on the same day* [*m. Sanh.* 6.6], but the times required it.[104]

The exact details of this case are numerous and interesting enough to have spawned articles on it alone; for our purposes, it is enough to note that the women's desires for bread, cooked food, wine, and sex show a distinct lack of self-discipline when it comes to bodily matters. "The allusions to the practice of mass prostitution [or at least mass sex] by the witches symbolizes the Rabbinic linkage of witchcraft to prostitution."[105] The women are over-sexed, gluttonous magicians. They lack control over their bodies and have thus "slipped away from true piety into the anarchic and libertine world of magic."[106] Grounded in the earth, their powers are also unable to work when not in contact with nature. This sharply contrasts the ethereal bases of God or Torah, the correct, normative sources from which the male rabbis derive *their* power.[107]

In a twist of irony, the rabbis actually engage in behavior exceedingly similar to that of the condemned women before the story even begins. Rabbi Yosé ben Hanina encourages Rabbi Eleazer ben Yosé, *by way of magic,* to warn Simeon about his appointed task. Rabbi Yosé tells him, "Now if he [Simeon] does not believe you

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[104] *y. Hag.* 2:2, 77d. Paralleled in *y. Sanh.* 6:9, 23c.
[105] Seidel, "Release Us," 57
[106] Michael Satlow, "Fictional Women: A Study in Stereotypes," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture III* [ed. Paul Schafer; Tubingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2002], 238.
[107] Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 189

[Eleazer], do this as your sign before him: Put your hand in your eye and remove [your eye] and hold it in your hand... He [Eleazar] took out his eye and put it in his hand. They said to put it back, and he put it back."[108] Rabbi Eleazar ben Yosé goes to Simeon ben Shetah as instructed, but does not need to perform the trick. With just a reference, Simeon is persuaded to rid Ashkelon of witchcraft. "In this way, a licit magic trick transmitted two times through rabbinic channels convinces Simeon to go forward with plans to squelch the entirely *illicit* magic of the eighty witches."[109] To the rabbis, there is no contradiction, for rabbinical magic comes from God and is acceptable; women's magic is demonic, or at the very least not from God, and so must be stopped.

Historically, the story is intriguing as well. Although it is told in rabbinic sources originating from *tannaitic* and *amoraic* times and later, in the first five centuries, Simeon ben Shetah was a pre-rabbinic figure, thought to have lived from 120-40 B.C.E. during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.E) and his wife Alexandra Salome (76-67 B.C.E.). Its historicity is thus doubtful, and is further compromised "by its clearly late, popular-*aggadic* character."[110]

Nevertheless, the tale is very likely based in reality. Murray argues that the women were most likely executed under trumped-up charges of sorcery, for, as expressed by Ilan, "the notion that women would be slaughtered for allegedly practicing witchcraft is not farfetched, as this has happened throughout history."[111] One such contemporary parallel is found in the writings of Titus Livius, or Livy, who lived from 59 B.C.E.-17

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[108] *y. Hag.* 2:2
[109] Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 188, emphasis mine.
[110] Ilan, *Jewish Women,* 224.
[111] Murray, "The Magical Female," referencing Tal Ilan's Hebrew article "A Witch Hunt in Ashkelon," in *Ashkelon: A City on the Seashore* (eds. Avi Sason, Ze'ev Safrai and Nahum Sagiv; Tel Aviv, 2001: 135-146), 294.

C.E. He writes in *The History of Rome* 8.18 that 170 witches were executed for attempting to poison leading Roman citizens:

> When the principal persons of the state were dying of similar diseases, and all generally with the same result, a certain maid-servant undertook, before Quintius Fabius Maximus, curule ædile, to discover the cause of the public malady, provided the public faith would be given to her by him, that the discovery should not be made detrimental to her. Fabius immediately lays the matter before the consuls, and the consuls before the senate, and with the concurrence of that order the public faith was pledged to the informer. It was then disclosed that the state was afflicted by the wickedness of certain women, and that certain matrons were preparing those poisonous drugs; and if they wished to follow her forthwith, they might be detected in the very fact. Having followed the informer, they found women preparing certain drugs, and others of the same kind laid up. These being brought into the forum, and several matrons, to the number of twenty, in whose possession they had been detected, being summoned by the beadle, two of them, Cornelia and Sergia, both of patrician rank, maintaining that these drugs were wholesome, were directed by the informer who confronted them to drink some, that they might convict her of having stated what was false; having taken time to confer together, when, the crowd being removed, they referred the matter to the other matrons in the open view of all; they also not refusing to drink, they all drank off the preparation, and perished by their own wicked device. Their attendants being instantly seized, informed against a great number of matrons, of whom to the number of one hundred and seventy were condemned. Nor up to that day was there ever an inquiry made at Rome concerning poisoning. [112]

Like in the case of the witches of Ashkelon, the witches in Rome are unveiled by a trick of the informer, and are condemned by trusting someone who they thought was a friend. Their power comes from the earth as well, in poisons created through the female domain of cooking. Ilan asserts that while the executions of these women also certainly occurred, as in the women approached by Simeon b.

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[112] Livy, *The History of Rome by Titus Livius: The First Eight Books* (trans. Daniel Spillan; London: Bohn, 1923), 527-528.

Shetah, "the accusations were drawn from stereotypes and probably were false."[113]

Returning to rabbinical literature, another example of women who perform ungodly magic linked to sexuality can be found in the tale of the daughters of Rabbi Nahman. Rabbi 'Ilish, who tells the story, at first thinks that he has finally found women so pious that they can successfully perform God-sanctioned magic:

> The daughters of R. Nahman used to stir a cauldron with their hands when it was boiling hot. R. 'Ilish was puzzled about it, saying, "It is written *One man among a thousand* [seekers of wisdom] *have I found, but a woman among all those have I not found* [Eccl. 7:28], and here are the daughters of R. Nahman!"[114]

As the story continues, however, the women are taken captive. Following a series of events in which Rabbi 'Ilish shows that he can perform magic acts such as understanding the language of the birds in order to eavesdrop on the ransomers, he goes to visit the women and changes his mind:

> [Rabbi 'Ilish] then [said to himself], I will go and see the daughters of R. Nahman; if they have retained their virtue, I will bring them back. Said he to himself: "Women talk over their business in the privy [so I will eavesdrop on them there]." He overheard them saying, "These men are [our] husbands just as the Nehardeans [were] our husbands [before we were taken captive]. Let us tell our captors to remove us to a distance from here, so that our husbands may not come and hear [where we are] and ransom us." R. 'Ilish then rose and fled, along with the other man. A miracle was performed for him, and he got across the river, but the other man was caught and put to death. When the daughters of R. Nahman came back, he said, "They stirred the cauldron by witchcraft."[115]

Rabbi 'Ilish can perform miracles granted by God. But since the women choose to stay with their captors, "preferring illicit sex to licit sex... [and] transgressing borders

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[113] See note 95.
[114] *b. Git.* 45a
[115] Ibid.

delineated by the Orthodox Jewish community,"[116] Rabbi 'Ilish abandons them and calls them witches. The stirring of the cauldron can only be done through womanly demonic powers, not the licit, God-granted miracle that was given to the rabbi. The women are consigned to lives as foreigners because of their choice to have illicit sex, and when they return home, they are branded as magical outsiders.

In an even racier example, the rabbis in *b. Yoma* 83b discuss what to do if one comes across a mad dog. The redactors discuss the statements of two third-century *amoraim*, Rav and Shmuel, in context of how to heal someone from a mad dog's bite. Then the rabbis move to identifying the possible sources of the madness itself, and unsurprisingly, witches may be a potential culprit:

> תי״ר חמשה דברים נאמרו בכלב שוטה פיו פתוח וריר נוטף ואזניו סרוחות וזנבו מונח על ירכותיו ומהלך בצידי דרכים וי״א אף נובח ואין קולו נשמע ממאי הוי רב אמר *נשים כשפניות משחקות בו* ושמואל אמר רוח רעה שורה עליו
>
> Our Rabbis taught: "Five things were mentioned in connection with a mad dog. Its mouth is open, its saliva dripping, its ears flap, its tail is hanging between its thighs, it walks on the edge of the road." Some say, "Also it barks without its voice being heard." Where does it [the madness] come from? — Rab said: *Witches are having their fun with it.* Samuel said: An evil spirit rests upon it.[117]

In the most generous interpretation of this passage, women are accused of causing a dog to go crazy for their own amusement. If one reads this more closely, however, the root שחק can also imply erotic overtones, "conjuring notions of bestiality along with the peculiar idea that women's magic produces madness in dogs."[118] Either way, the ruling regarding women's magic is the opposite of flattering, and may even be considered pernicious.

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[116] Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 158.
[117] *b. Yoma* 83b, emphasis mine.
[118] Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 154.

One last instance of associating magic with prohibited sexual activity is found in *b. Berakhot* 53a: in discussing the prohibition against reading *Ben Sira*, the rabbis mention that "A daughter is a vain treasure to her father: through anxiety on her account, he cannot sleep at night. As a minor, lest she be seduced: in her majority, lest she play the harlot; as an adult, lest she does not marry, lest she bears no child; if she grows old, lest she engage in sorcery [*keshafim*]."[119] They here express their belief that any woman who is older could become a sorceress. Just as in Greco-Roman pagan and Christian literature,[120] the Talmud links elderly and barren women especially to the practicing of witchcraft.[121]

The reasons for this are twofold: one, in a society in which women were protected by their extended families, a woman who lacked a large family was thought to need to protect herself by the only means available to her, namely magic.[122] Two, in contrast to an elderly male who was revered as a sage, an elderly woman was seen as a potential threat because she was not involved with either having or raising children. This meant that she was a social threat, for her status "coincides with the anthropological findings that in a controlled patriarchal society, as the Talmud's, the older the woman, the more powerful she may become."[123]

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[119] *b. Sanh.* 100b

[120] See Plutarch, *Superst.* 166a; Lucian, *Philops.* 9 and *Dial. meretr.* 4.1, 3, 5; Tibullus 1.8.17-18; Horace, *Sermones* 1.8; Ovid, *Am.* 1.8; Petronius, *Satyricon* 131; John Chrystostom, *Ad illuminandos catecheses* 2.5, *Hom. 1 Cor.* 11.7, *Hom. Col.* 8.5, among others.

[121] *b. Sotah* 22a references the woman Yohani bat Retivi, who is referred to by the notes in the Soncino edition as "a widow who by witchcraft made childbirth difficult for a woman and then offered prayer for her." Rashi comments centuries later that she, as a midwife, would "close the wombs of women in labour through sorcery and release them later under the guise of prayer and piety."

[122] Fishbane, *Deviancy,* 72.

[123] Ibid.

Bernadette Brooten's scholarship has demonstrated that women were "significant donors in the financing of the construction of synagogues,[124] and Ilan points out that they often participated in synagogue life, even donning *tefillin*[125] and *tzitzit*.[126] It is thought that one reason that the rabbis created the concept of exempting women from time-bound commandments, for example, is because it would "limit considerably the time spent by women in synagogues."[127] In a similar vein, it is noted that female heads of synagogues are often recorded in Diaspora settings,[128] but not in areas where the rabbis held sway. This correlates the absence of female leadership in synagogues in Babylonia and Palestine with the authority of the rabbis in these geographical areas. "The rabbis would certainly have discouraged placing women in positions of influence in the synagogue,"[129] and as older or childless women had more time to actively involve themselves, they became an even greater threat to rabbinic power.

This threat to rabbinic power, then, ultimately led to one rabbinic attitude of negativity toward magic performed by women. Associated with sexuality and considered inherent to every woman, magic performed for and by women was a constant reminder to

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[124] Bernadette Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982): 5-14, 41-46.

[125] Mikhal, daughter of Kushi, used to don *tefillin* according to *Mek. de Rabbi Ishmael,* Piska 17. "The text in the *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael* that records this event negates the opinion that women should not don phylacteries and may indicate that in the school that produced this text the rabbinic injunction regarding women and time-bound commandments had not yet become authoritative" (Ilan, "Women in Jewish Life," 640).

[126] *Tzitzit* were not always included in the list of exemption of women from time-bound commandments. See discussions in *t. Qidd.* 1.10; *y. Qidd.* 1.7, *b. Qidd.* 33b.

[127] Ilan, "Women in Jewish Life," 641. Other examples of women being denied power in the Jewish cultic sphere are well-documented, such as rabbis retroactively exempting women from undertaking Temple pilgrimages, even though all relevant sources from rabbinic and non-Jewish literature states that they did, in fact, do so in Second Temple times. See, for instance, *b. Ned.* 36a in which daughters outran sons in a race to the Temple, or Luke 2:41-50 when Jesus' mother travels to the Temple. Obviously this is a reconstruction of the past on the part of the rabbis, but it serves as good example of the rabbis' exclusion of women from all formal Jewish life.

[128] Brooten, *Women Leaders,* 35-36.

[129] Ilan, "Women in Jewish Life," 641.

the rabbis that their power was not all-encompassing over Jewish society. Its very presence served as a thorn in the rabbis' side, yet it *was* important; had it not been, it never would have been commented upon, or recorded in such ubiquity.

4.5 Women's Magic as Positive: Literature and Archaeology

The rabbinic attitude toward women who could do magic was not black or white, however. While rabbinic literature does, in general, look down upon magic performed by women, in some cases women are explicitly mentioned as being *positive* sources of magic. As explained in Chapter Two, magic through amulets and incantations were considered normal in Greco-Roman culture at the time of the rabbis[130]: the only magic that was tolerated from women was that which took place in the realms of protection from demons and healing, referred to by Dennis as "beneficent sorcery."[131] This section explains the details of this magic, especially as told in the numerous stories regarding Em/Abaye's foster-mother in the Babylonian Talmud, then as found in rabbinic references to amulets, and finally, in archeological evidence of said amulets and incantation bowls.

An oft-retold tale of women's magic with a positive spin takes place in the Palestinian Talmud and is later expanded upon in the 14th century *midrashic* compilation, *Midrash Ha-gadol.* A woman is punished by her husband for staying out late to listen to Rabbi Meir, and he tells her that he will not let her into the house until she spits in the rabbi's face. Rabbi Meir used his divinely-inspired magic and "saw what was happening

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[130] Stratton, *Naming the Witch,* 143.
[131] Geoffrey W. Dennis, "Witches and Witchcraft," *EJMMM,* 279.

by means of the spirit of holiness."[132] He pretended to be suffering from sore eyes and put out a call asking that "any woman who knows how to cure a sore eye by charm, come forth and charm for me."[133] The woman in question appears, and he begs her to work a charm and spit in his eyes seven times. She, of course does so; not only is he now miraculously cured, but he has solved the woman's problem and enabled her to have peace with her husband. The tale is meant to explain Rabbi Meir's wisdom in creating *shalom bayit,* peace in the household, but it also has the accidental effect of informing readers that Rabbi Meir respected women as workers of charms and as healers.

In addition to the above, other rabbinic sources explicitly link women with medical practice. The Palestinian Talmud, for instance, in debating a piece of *halakha* regarding whether illnesses can be treated on Shabbat or not, mentions that "Rabbi Yohanan had [an illness] and was receiving treatment from Timtinis in Tiberias. On Friday he went to her."[134] The gender of Rabbi Yohanan's doctor is not important to the point of the story, and "because it excited no specific comment in its time, we may assume that it was not an unusual phenomenon for a woman to be a doctor."[135] Women's roles as healers were commonly accepted in Greco-Roman times, and this story is most likely one example of many.

The identity of the most famous female healer in rabbinic literature is actually uncertain; scholars disagree on whether she was Abaye's foster-mother, or was a healer

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[132] *y. Sotah* 1.4, 16d; Solomon Fisch, *Midrash Ha-Gadol on the Pentateuch: Numbers* (London: Manchester Publishing, 1940), 308.
[133] Ibid.
[134] *y. Sabb.* 14:4, 4d; also retold in *y. Abod. Zar.* 2.2, 40d. A similar story is found in *b. Yoma* 84a-b, where "a matron" gives Rabbi Yohanan a cure for scurvy on Thursday and Friday.
[135] Tal Ilan, *Silencing the Queen: The Literary Histories of Shelamzion and Other Jewish Women* [Tubingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2006], 168. To some this story is problematic, because Timtinis' religion is unclear in the story. I choose to follow Ilan's interpretation that she is Jewish.

unrelated to any of the rabbis.[136] The facts are thus: a fourth-century woman named אם ("Em") is mentioned in seventeen separate incidents in the Babylonian Talmud, with only one repeat/parallel story. The woman "is described in ways that make it clear that she was regarded as a valued member of the community, both for her knowledge of health and healing and for her knowledge of incantations."[137] Her name appears in the exact same formula each time she is mentioned: a famous rabbi states, "Em said to me..." and then the subsequent words give authoritative, practical advice.

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[136] See Rebecca Lesses, "Exe(or)rcising Power," 362-364; Charlotte Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 151-159; Tal Ilan, "Female Personalities in the Babylonian Talmud," n.p. [cited 18 December 2011]. Online: http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/female-personalities-in-babylonian-talmud. Tal Ilan summarizes the argument nicely in her Encyclopedia article:

> Because in fourteen of these traditions the person who quotes her is the fourth-century Babylonian amora Abbaye (278–338), it is usually assumed in scholarly circles that she was his mother, and that Em is a description (mother) rather than a name. The Babylonian Talmud itself already voices this explanation. The editors of the Talmud, however, knew that this woman could not have been Abbaye's mother, since according to another tradition, his mother had died while giving birth to him (BT Kiddushin 31b). They solved the contradiction by assuming that the woman in question was his adoptive mother.
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> However, one tradition in the Babylonian Talmud suggests that when a sage quotes his mother he does not say "(a) mother said to me" but rather "my mother said to me" (BT Pesaḥim 112a). Furthermore, one other rabbi, aside from Abbaye, his late contemporary Ravina (the editor of the Talmud) is also mentioned as quoting Em authoritatively in the same way (BT Berakhot 39b; BT Menaḥot 68b). This suggests that Em was perhaps a famous, authoritative woman known to the rabbis of Babylonia.

Compare this view to that of the scholars at "The Melammu Project: The Intellectual Heritage of Assyria and Babylonia in East and West," chaired by Dr. Tzvi Abusch of Brandeis University. They do not believe that the person known as "Em" or "Abaye's mother" is even a woman:

> We would suggest another possible interpretation to Abaye's frequently repeated statement that his 'mother told him', that the word for mother (*'m*) in these contexts could have been an abbreviation for the word 'expert' (*'wmn'*), corresponding to Akkadian *ummānu*, 'professor, expert, craftsman', the schoolmaster of the scribal school. In general, however, the term *'wmn'* in Aramaic lacked the prestige of its Akkadian counterpart *ummānu*. Hence, Abaye's phrase attributing his knowledge to his "mother" (*'m*) might have been an allusion to a secular, non-rabbinic expert of master, an *'wmn'*, but the redactors of the Talmud would have found this term unacceptable or incomprehensible and the tradition was altered. Such a suggested solution would explain why Abaye's knowledge of Babylonian medicine seemed far superior to that of his contemporaries, and it resolves the thorny problem of explaining how a woman would have been in a position to impart such technical knowledge, which is unexpected in other sources.

(Mark Geller, "Abaye's Mother or Master?" n.p . cited 18 December 2011]. Online: http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/ melammu/database/gen_html/ a0000927.php)

[137] Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power," 365.

Em's expertise is, unsurprisingly, found in traditional women's occupations, and ranges from the nature of diet and medicinal folk remedies[138] to gossip[139] to amulets.[140] She seemingly specializes in medical knowledge regarding children: in *b. Shabbat* 133b-134a, her name is preserved in a set of information relevant to healing circumcision, while in *b. Yoma* 78b she advises the rabbis on what age a child can fast on festival days. In *b. Ketubot* 50a, she even influences a rabbi's *halakhic* decision on the age at which children can study.[141]

Em's medicinal prowess is often intertwined with her magical ability, especially her knowledge of protective spells. *B. Shabbat* 66b says that in regard to a certain plant, "three arrest [illness], five cure [it], seven are efficacious even against witchcraft (לכשפים)."[142] Em's magical prowess is not only undisputed, it is used as a rabbinic resource against other negative magic. Similarly, in *b. Brachot* 62a, Em is credited with helping Abaye overcome the danger of encountering evil spirits in an outhouse, "train[ing] for him a lamb to go with him into the privy"[143] as protection. Her ability is actually contrasted a mere four *mishnayot* later, on the exact same Talmud page, with a negative reference to women's sorcery. In this case, it is not evil spirits that may accost someone in the bathroom, but human practitioners of magic:

בן עזאי אומר השכם וצא הערב וצא כדי שלא תתרחק משמש
ושב ואל תשב ותמשמש שכל היושב וממשמש אפיי עושין
כשפים באספמיא באין עליו ואי אנשי ויתיב ואח"כ משמש מאי

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[138] *b. Erub.* 29b; *b. Ketub.* 10b; *b. Git.* 67b, 70a; *b. Abod. Zar.* 28b
[139] *b. Mo'ed Qat.* 12b
[140] *b. Sabb.* 66b
[141] *b. Ketub.* 50a: "Said Abbaye: Em said to me: At the age of six [a boy is fit] for Scripture [study], at the age of ten for Mishnah [study] and at the age of thirteen for fasts once in a while. And a girl [is ready] at the age of twelve."
[142] *b. Sabb.* 66b
[143] *b. Ber.* 62a

תקנתיה כי קאי לימא הכי לא לי לא לי לא תחים ולא תחתים
לא הני ולא מהני לא חרשי דחרשא ולא חרשי דחרשתא

> Ben 'Azzai said: Go forth before dawn and after dark, so that you should not have to go far. Feel yourself before sitting, but do not sit and then feel yourself, for if one sits and then feels himself, should witchcraft be used against him even as far away as Aspamia [name for a far-away place] he will not be immune from it. And if he forgets and does sit and then feels, what is his remedy? – When he rises he should say, thus: 'Not for me, not for me; not *tahim* nor *tahtim* [unknown words of incantation]; not these nor any part of these; neither the sorceries of sorcerers nor the sorceries of sorceresses![144]

This passage utilizes two words for magicians, כשפים ("magic") in the plural, meaning we cannot tell the word's gender, and the female forms of חרש, "magic/magician." The disparity between the positive role of female Jewish sorceresses in the preceding *sugya* and the negative role of female (and male) sorcerers in the latter passage is striking; like in *b. Shabbat* 66b, the rabbis' view of magic is here determined not by gender, but solely by the magic's purpose. Female magic, if it is meant to help and not hurt, is wholly acceptable, but sorcery done by either gender for the purpose of evil is not tolerated and warrants equalizing magical protection.

One last passage in which Em is mentioned is *b. Shabbat* 66b, where Em is quoted on the right way to perform a spell:

> Abaye said: "Em told me, 'All incantations which are repeated several times must contain the name of the patient's mother, and all knots must be on the left side.'" Abaye also said: "Em told me, 'of all incantations, the number of times they are to be repeated, is as stated; and where the number is not stated, it is forty-one times.'"

Like we saw in Chapter Two, "many incantations and amulets from the ancient world, both Jewish and non-Jewish, name the client or practitioner by his or her mother's name

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[144] Ibid.

rather than by the father's name."[145] Em's specificity in explaining how many times to say the incantation is also important, for in ancient societies, numerical accuracy was a crucial factor in determining the efficacy of any incantation.[146] Em's knowledge thus serves as yet another indication of her wisdom.

The amulets and incantations to which Em refers were extremely common in the Greco-Roman world. Like in the first few centuries of the Common Era, "Aramaic-inscribed bowls and lamellae[147] were used by Jews and provide information about late ancient Jewish ritual."[148] Obviously written and used "in a milieu where the Bible was the sacred scripture, and quoting it, or at least pretending to quote it, was deemed to be of special magical power,"[149] they are found in numerous archaeological sites as well as referenced and discussed in rabbinical literature. *B. Yoma* 84a, for example, states that the remedy for a mad dog's bite is the following:

> Abaye said: Let him [who is bitten] take the skin of a male hyena and write upon it: "I, So-and-so, the son of that-and-that woman, write upon the skin of a male Hyena: *Hami, kanti, kloros. God, God, Lord of Hosts, Amen, Amen, Selah.*" Then let him strip off his clothes, and bury them, in a grave [at cross-roads], for twelve months of a year. Then he should take them out and burn them in an oven, and scatter the ashes. During these twelve months, if he drinks water, he shall not drink it but out of a copper tube, lest he see the shadow of the demon and be endangered. Thus the mother of Abba b. Martha, who is Abba b. Minyumi, made for him a tube of gold [for drinking purposes].

Abaye recommends that Abba b. Martha use the skin of a hyena as an amulet, refer to himself by his maternal lineage, and then follow a certain set of protocols to protect

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[145] Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power," 363.
[146] Ibid.
[147] While it is thought that many, if not the majority, of amulets, were made of plants, cloth, leather, or other materials, lamellae are the type of amulet that has most survived the centuries and can thus be analyzed: they are "thin strips of metal (copper, gold, or silver) frequently inscribed with incantations, invocations to deities, and brief prayers for protection often including the owner's name" (Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 203).
[148] Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 212.
[149] Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets,* 36.

himself from demons for the next year. His *mother,* a woman engaging in magic, is trusted to provide the proper protective apparatus.

The use of amulets, their criteria for being approved by the rabbis, and those who are condoned to use them make up the entirety of the folios of *b. Shabbat* 61a-62a. The rabbis decide that in the end, the making of amulets is permitted for the sake of health, albeit with a few caveats:

> R. Papa said: Do not think that both the man [issuing it] and the amulet must be approved; but as long as the man is approved, even if the amulet is not approved. This may be proved too for it is stated [in the Mishnah], NOR WITH AN AMULET, IF IT IS NOT FROM AN EXPERT; but it is not stated, if it is not approved. This proves it.
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> Our Rabbis taught: What is an approved amulet? One that has healed [once], a second time and a third time; whether it is an amulet in writing or an amulet of roots, whether it is for an invalid whose life is endangered or for an invalid whose life is not endangered. [It is permitted] not [only] for a person who has [already] had an epileptic fit, but even [merely] to ward it off. And one may tie and untie it even in the street, providing that he does not secure it with a ring or a bracelet and go out therewith into the street, for appearances sake [lest it be thought of as jewelry]. But it was taught: What is an approved amulet? One that has healed three men simultaneously? — There is no difficulty: the one is to approve the man; the other is to approve the amulet.
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> R. Papa said: It is obvious to me that if three amulets [each with a different charm and written by the same person are successful for] three people, each [being efficacious] three times, both the practitioner [who prepared them] and the amulets are [henceforth] approved. If three amulets [are successful for] three people, each [being efficacious] once, the practitioner is [henceforth] approved, but not the amulets. If one amulet [is efficacious] for three men, the amulet is approved but not the practitioner. [But] R. Papa propounded: What if three amulets [are efficacious] for one person? The amulets are certainly not rendered approved: but does the practitioner become approved or not? Do we say, "Surely, he has healed him!" Or perhaps, it is this man's fate to be susceptible to writings [written amulets, not oral charms]? The question stands over.
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> The scholars propounded: Have amulets sanctity or not? In respect of what law? Shall we say, in respect of saving them from a fire? Then come and hear: Benedictions and amulets, though they contain the [divine] letters and many passages from the Torah, may not be saved from a fire [by taking it out of the *eruv*], but are burnt where they are. Again, if in

> respect to hiding [in a *geniza*], — Come and hear: If it [the Divine Name] was written on the handles of utensils or on the legs of a bed, it must be cut out and hidden. Rather [the problem is] what about entering a privy with them? Have they sanctity, and it is forbidden; or perhaps they have no sanctity, and it is permitted? — Come and hear: NOR WITH AN AMULET, IF IT IS NOT FROM AN EXPERT. This [implies that] if it is from an expert, one may go out [with it]; now if you say that amulets possess sanctity, it may happen that one needs a privy, and so come to carry it four cubits in the street? The reference here is to an amulet of roots. But it was taught. Both a written amulet and an amulet of roots? — The reference here is to an invalid whose life is endangered [if the amulet was removed. He may take it into a privy even if it possesses sanctity]. But it was taught: "Both an invalid whose life is endangered and one whose life is not endangered"? — Rather [this is the reply]: since it heals even when he holds it in his hand, it is well [permitted as a cure].
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> But it was taught: R. Oshaia said: Providing one does not hold it in his hand and carry it four cubits in the street? But the reference here is to [an amulet that is] covered with leather [and may be taken into a privy]. But tefillin are leather-covered, yet it was taught: When one enters a privy, he must remove his tefillin at a distance of four cubits and then enter? There it is on account of the [letter] shin, for Abaye said: The shin of tefillin is a *halachah* of Moses at Sinai. Abaye also said: The daleth of tefillin is a *halachah* of Moses at Sinai. Abaye also said: The yod of tefillin is a *halachah* of Moses at Sinai.[150]

The rabbis not only approve of amulets, they believe in them so strongly that they spend valuable time and space discussing their attributes, deciding that approving an amulet has different criteria than approving the creator of said amulets. In terms of sanctity, if an amulet contains the name of God, it must burnt with other holy documents; on the other hand, it is not sacred enough to actively remove from the *eruv* on Shabbat, which is an honor reserved only for holy writings.[151] That said, amulets are so important to saving one's life that they may be taken into the privy, unlike tefillin,[152] no matter whether the amulet consists of a written lamella or a root which was given oral incantations. The

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[150] *b. Sabb.* 61a-62a, repeated in the *Tosefta.*

[151] *b. Sabb.* 115a

[152] The *shin, daleth* and *yod* of *tefillin* here refers to the shapes the *tefillin* make upon the hand and head when worn, together making up the name of God and thus comprising its inability to be worn into the privy.

very existence of such debates in the Talmud proves that ancient Babylonian and Palestinian practices and beliefs survived concurrently with the rabbinic form of Judaism taught in the academies. Amulets and incantation bowls were a form of magic that were not *preferred* by the rabbis, but were accepted nonetheless for purposes of healing and protection.

This conclusion is supported by archaeological evidence, as well. Gordon, Naveh and Shaked, and Montgomery have done thorough excavations in then-Palestine, Babylonia, and the Diaspora, examining lamellae in order to ascertain their cultural context and attempt to identify their creators and intended recipients. Their deductions are largely uniform: Though they vary in purpose, most amulets and incantation bowls in the rabbinic period ask a divine power for, as the rabbis discussed, either healing or protection. The inscriptions ask various powers to remove either general or specific illnesses,[153] to banish bad dreams[154] and evil spirits[155] from the wearer's person or place of residence, to ward off the evil eye[156], and to adjure would-be lovers to the amulet bearer.[157]

In terms of gender, it appears that either the gender division of those who used amulets was "roughly equal,"[158] or that more men created or utilized amulets than women.[159] Of the known Hebrew and Aramaic amulets and bowls that are inscribed with personal names and titles, forty-two list men only, twenty-five list women only, and

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[153] Naveh and Shaked, *Magical Spells,* 43-50, 60-67.
[154] Ibid., 50-57.
[155] Ibid., 57-60.
[156] Ibid., 99-101.
[157] Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets,* 84-90.
[158] Heszer, *Jewish Literacy,* 442.
[159] Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 215.

twenty-nine list both men and women.[160] Although women were more likely to be illiterate than men,[161] "women as well as men could have written the incantation texts, either as professionals traveling from town to town," like the *sagae* of centuries earlier, "or as practitioners for people in their local area."[162]

This means that both men and women engaged in magic as defined by the rabbis, a contradiction which "highlights the constructedness of magic in rabbinic literature and undermines the naturalized notions of gender that had been used to argue that magic was the domain of women."[163] The rabbis' essentialist nature of women as sources of magic is questioned, and even negated, by the evidence. In addition, there is no general difference in the incantation formulas between amulets written for female or for male clients, only specifically gendered objectives, "such as the protection of a pregnant woman and her unborn child or the guarding of a woman's child on the one hand, and the invocation of God to subdue one's local adversaries on the other."[164] Rabbinic stereotypes linking women to magic with no similar universal stereotypes for men are thus rendered null and void, contradicted by personalized, gender-specific evidence for amulet use.[165]

Of the amulets specifically written to address women's concerns, authorship is still (and will most likely remain) unknown. It is much easier to identify amulets that are written *for* women than those that are written *by* women, for most amulets were addressed in the third person, giving little to no information as to who wrote, or asked the scribe to write, the incantation. A sixth-century silver amulet from Irbid, Jordan, for

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[160] Ibid.
[161] Mock, "Were the Rabbis?" 38.
[162] Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power," 361.
[163] Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 217. Also see Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power," 365-367.
[164] Heszer, *Jewish Literacy,* 443.
[165] Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 216.

example, was inscribed in Aramaic for Marian, daughter of Sarah. It asks that Marian and her fetus be protected from every evil assailant "by the rod of Moses and by the front-plate of Aaron, the High Priest and the signet-ring of Solomon."[166] This amulet, while addressing Marian, could have been written by either a man or a woman; there is no way to know.

Another sixth-century Irbid bowl, however, this one in bronze, suggests that "some of the ritual practitioners could have been women."[167] The bowl asks that the pregnant woman's fetus "not emerge except in its proper time"[168] and says in the first person, "I have been revealed and have spoken with him who placed the fetus in my belly. 'I was brought low' [Psalm 116:6]... The newborn child of Surah, daughter of Sarah, the newborn children of all the daughters of Eve... emerges from me."[169] The fact that the bowl was written in such a fashion implies that either Surah, daughter of Sarah, wrote the amulet herself, or dictated the formula (known through oral tradition) to scribes.[170]

Likewise, one incantation bowl found in Nippur states that "I, Komes bath Mahlapta... have dismissed thee, thou [demon] Lilith... hear and go forth and do not trouble Komes b. M. in her house. Go ye forth altogether from her house and from Kalletha and Artasria her children."[171] Two other instances of similar bowls in Nippur use the exact same formula but are found in the third person. "Given that the other instances of this formula do not name the practitioner in any obvious fashion, it is

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[166] Naveh and Shaked, *Magical Spells,* 91-95, lines 1-2.
[167] Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power," 362.
[168] Naveh and Shaked, *Magical Spells,* 101-105, line 1.2.
[169] Ibid., lines 5-10.
[170] Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power," 362. For a discussion on written versus oral magic and its ramification on gender, see Mock, "Were the Rabbis?" 37-38.
[171] James A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia: Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, 1913), 190, bowl 17.

particularly striking that Komis speaks in the first person, and it is possible that she was actively involved in creating this bowl, either reciting the incantation in a ritual, inscribing the incantation on the bowl herself, or dictating it to a scribe."[172] Either way, she would have been an antagonist of demons rather than someone working with them, as often portrayed in rabbinic literature. In this incantation bowl and others, women are "active against *kesafim* rather than as practitioners of it."[173] The depiction of women as enemies of evil is no different than the depiction of men, again contradicting the perspective on women and *kesafim* usually found in rabbinic literature.

When the entirety of the archaeological evidence is compared to rabbinic statements such as "most women are sorceresses,"[174] we see that there is no true strict reality of women's roles to which we can adhere. Stories like that of Em/Abaye's foster-mother, plus evidence of amulets and incantation bowls, show that women possessed both "magical" knowledge of healing and the power to fight off ritual attacks by demons. Women can "wield the protective weapons of incantations and ritual power [in bowls and amulets]... to save themselves, their husbands, and their children from... dangers, disease, and sudden death,"[175] and their words are sometimes given weight by men in the Talmud, such as in the case of Em. Women were thus *not* "monolithically... the magical adversaries of the rabbis,"[176] no matter the reality portrayed in rabbinical literature.

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[172] Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power," 362.
[173] Ibid., 367.
[174] *b. Sanh.* 67a
[175] Ibid.
[176] Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power," 364.

4.6 Conclusion

Living in the Greco-Roman culture of the years 70 C.E. to 500 C.E., and echoing sentiments found in Juvenal and other pagan and Christian sources, the rabbis who wrote the *Mishnah*, *Talmud*, *Tosefta*, and other rabbinic literature felt that magic was intrinsic to women. By their very nature, women were powerful: the status of the sorceress was important enough to be recorded in history, at multiple times, and in multiple forms. The fact that these stories exist two thousand years after the time they supposedly took place means that in some form or the other, they *mattered* to their rabbinic authors. Unlike the proclamation in Exodus 22:17, rabbis could not have wanted to put all sorceresses to death, nor to have been misogynistic in their rulings regarding women's magic.

In one sense, sorceresses posed a danger to the rabbinic world: religiously, magic by women was not granted by God, and so undermined divine power. Socially, sorceresses threatened the status quo of a strictly gendered system. Women who practiced magic in the rabbinic world were seen as operating outside the constraints of social convention, and as breaking *halakhically*-constructed gender roles. As a result, they are portrayed as associated with trickery, sexual promiscuity, and even, at times, demonic forces.

Yet, at the same time, archaeological evidence and minor Talmudic passages about Em show that sorceresses were valued by the rabbis for their protective functions, as well. Their intrinsic power enabled them to be feared, by demons and rabbis alike. On the whole, it is true that sorceresses in rabbinic literature were marginalized as a way of retaining patriarchal control over society. However, one cannot forget that they also tolerated, and sometimes even respected, magic performed for and by women.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

This project began with the assertion that Juvenal's *Satire VI* told a historical truth about the status of female Jewish magicians in Greco-Roman times: they existed, catered to the Roman elite and others, were gypsy-like, and were thought to have special magical powers based on an essentialist perspective of gender. The entirety of this work has striven to corroborate Juvenal's claims, considering his work in light of pagan, Christian, and Jewish literature.

The second chapter sought to define כשף in its Biblical context, especially that of Exodus 22:17, and analyze the reasons why women were labeled as witches. Although witches were found to have power, such as Queen Jezebel, if they did not fit into the social strata of the time they were thought to be Outsiders and Other, and so were vilified and linked with sexual immorality.

The same holds true for women who stand outside the male-defined norm in Greco-Roman times, as explored in the third chapter. Pagan, Christian, and non-rabbinic literature attests to the existence of *sagae,* the female Jewish magicians in Juvenal, and Zosimos' writings confirm Juvenal's implication that sorcery was intrinsic to women. Like in Biblical times, religion as a whole was controlled by male authority; Cicero points this out in *Treatise on the Laws*, in which he comments that women should not be allowed to practice ritual other than that what is state-sanctioned.[381] As Graf interprets

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[381] Cicero, *Leg.*, in *The Political Works of Marcus Tullius Cicero: Comprising his Treatise on the Commonwealth; and his Treatise on the Laws* (trans. F. Barham; London: Edmund Spettigue, 1841-42), II.21:

> *noturna mulierum sacrificial ne sunto praeter olla quae pro populo fient. Neve quem initaianto nisi ut adsolet Cereri Graco sacro.*

his words, "It is the people and the senate that have the monopoly over strange rites, and they want to control the ritual behavior of the marginal group of women."[382] These marginal women were most often portrayed as involved in erotic magic, and instead of מְכַשֵּׁפָה, were labeled *pharmakoi.*

The fourth chapter detailed stories of female Jewish magicians as found in rabbinic sources. As Dennis describes,

> In general, witches in biblical and rabbinic literature are thought to be engaged mostly in malevolent activities, from interfering with fertility and healthy births to cursing rivals and killing the unsuspecting.... [Yet] witches in rabbinic literature are rarely portrayed as demonic creatures... witchcraft is seen more as a vice that every woman will indulge in. With few exceptions, it is regarded rather just as something inappropriate that women do.[383]

Like the Biblical authors and Juvenal, the rabbis felt that sorcery was inherent to the female form, and associates them with a proclivity for sex, trickery, and religious inferiority. However, the rabbis' interpretation of gender also meant that sorceresses *could* practice positive magic as well, as long as it was related to healing or protection; these traits were still "womanly" and "mothering," and fell into the stereotypical gender roles assumed by the men in power.

Juvenal's perception of female Jewish magicians was shaped in a socio-historical context, one that also shaped the perspectives of the rabbis. It is a fallacy to discuss one without the other, because neither existed on its own. In order for research on *any* historical topic to be accurate, one needs to look at its parallels in contemporary culture in

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> Let nocturnal sacrifices be interdicted to women, except those they offer according to popular custom—and let none be initiated in the mysteries except by the usual forms consecrated to Ceres, according to the Grecian ceremonials.

[382] Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (trans. F. Philip; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 60.

[383] Dennis, "Witches and Witchcraft," 279.

order to determine its full context and potential influences. Female Jewish magicians were marginalized, but their actions were also feared and respected by men, otherwise they would not have been recorded for posterity.

The ramifications of this topic of female magicians for today's Jewry should not be underestimated. If scholarship can provide proof for what should be obvious, that rabbinic reality reflected that of its contemporary culture and that women did possess power of their own, then perhaps much of rabbinical decisions that influence today's *halakha* may be looked at historically, and not as religious truth. Reform Judaism attempts this in many ways, but much remains to be done. In the realm of leadership, for example, "[t]he same ancient rabbinic rhetoric that aligned the feminine with heterodoxy and distanced women from orthodox rapport with the divine has been re-used in twentieth century polemics designed to prevent women from pursuing rabbinical careers."[384] Women were only ordained as rabbis in the liberal Jewish movements in the past forty years,[385] and the Orthodox movement still does not recognize women as clergy.

Socially, attitudes that derive straight from the rabbis contribute to keeping women marginalized in a variety of ways in Jewish culture. Orthodox Judaism in Israel, which bases its political decisions on *halakhically*-based modern *responsa,* is currently roiled in controversy regarding its governmental policies, with "public discourse... suddenly dominated by a new, high-toned Hebrew phrase, 'hadarat nashim,' or the exclusion of women."[386] Even in the Reform Jewish movement, while it is true that

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[384] Aubin, "Gendering Magic," 221.
[385] Sally Priesand became the first female Reform rabbi in 1972, Sandy Eisenberg Sasso the first female Reconstructionist rabbi in 1974, Lynn Gottlieb the first female rabbi in the Jewish renewal movement in 1981, and Amy Eilberg the first female Conservative rabbi in 1985.
[386] Ethan Bronner and Isabel Kershner, "Israelis Facing a Seismic Rift Over Role of Women," *The New York Times* (Published 14 January 2012, cited 21 February 2012. Online:

"women's professions" such as midwifery and cooking no longer lie outside the status quo, and what were once known as "women's rituals" have been largely accepted by the mainstream,[387] women still consistently earn less money than men in almost all areas of business, management, and synagogue life. In 2009, it was reported that women comprised 75% of the workforce in U.S. non-profit Jewish organizations, but were only 14% of the leaders.[388] One year later, the same survey recounted that women only held 12% of the national leadership positions, and earned 62.5 cents for every dollar earned by men.[389]

This data, of course, must be considered in its own cultural context, and it is unquestionable that American society as a whole influences and reflects this gender inequity. However, it is my hope that if scholarship in the vein of this thesis continues, women's possession of power in rabbinic times can become an accepted historical reality. When that is the case, then perhaps the lesser role of women in Jewish religious life can finally be institutionally examined, and changed for the better.

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http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/15/world/middleeast/israel-faces-crisis-over-role-of-ultra-orthodox-in-society.html?scp=1&sq=israel%20faces%20crisis%20over%20role%20of%20ultra%20orthodox%20in%20society&st=cse#

[387] A quick glance at a Reconstructionist website for modern ritual that is utilized by the liberal Jewish movements, www.ritualwell.org, shows rituals to be used on the occasion of coming out as gay or lesbian, at the onset of menses and menopause, following a separation of marriage, for the promotion of healing from sexual violence, and after the loss of pregnancy or stillbirth, among others (Deborah Glanzberg-Krainin and Roni Handler, eds. "Ritualwell: Tradition and Innovation." Kolot: The Center for Jewish Women's and Gender Studies of Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Cited 21 February 2012. Online: www.ritualwell.org).

[388] Jane Eisner and Devra Ferst, "Jewish Women Lag Behind Men in Promotion and Pay," *The Jewish Daily Forward,* 4 November 2009. Cited 20 February 2012. Online: http://www.forward.com/articles/147568/ ?p=all#ixzz1my0Lp1xc.

[389] Jane Eisner and Maia Efrem, "Gender Equality Elusive in Salary Survey: Men Lead Most Jewish Groups and Earn More Than Women," *The Jewish Daily Forward,* 14 December 2011. Cited 20 February 2012. Online: http://www.forward.com/articles/118323/.

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