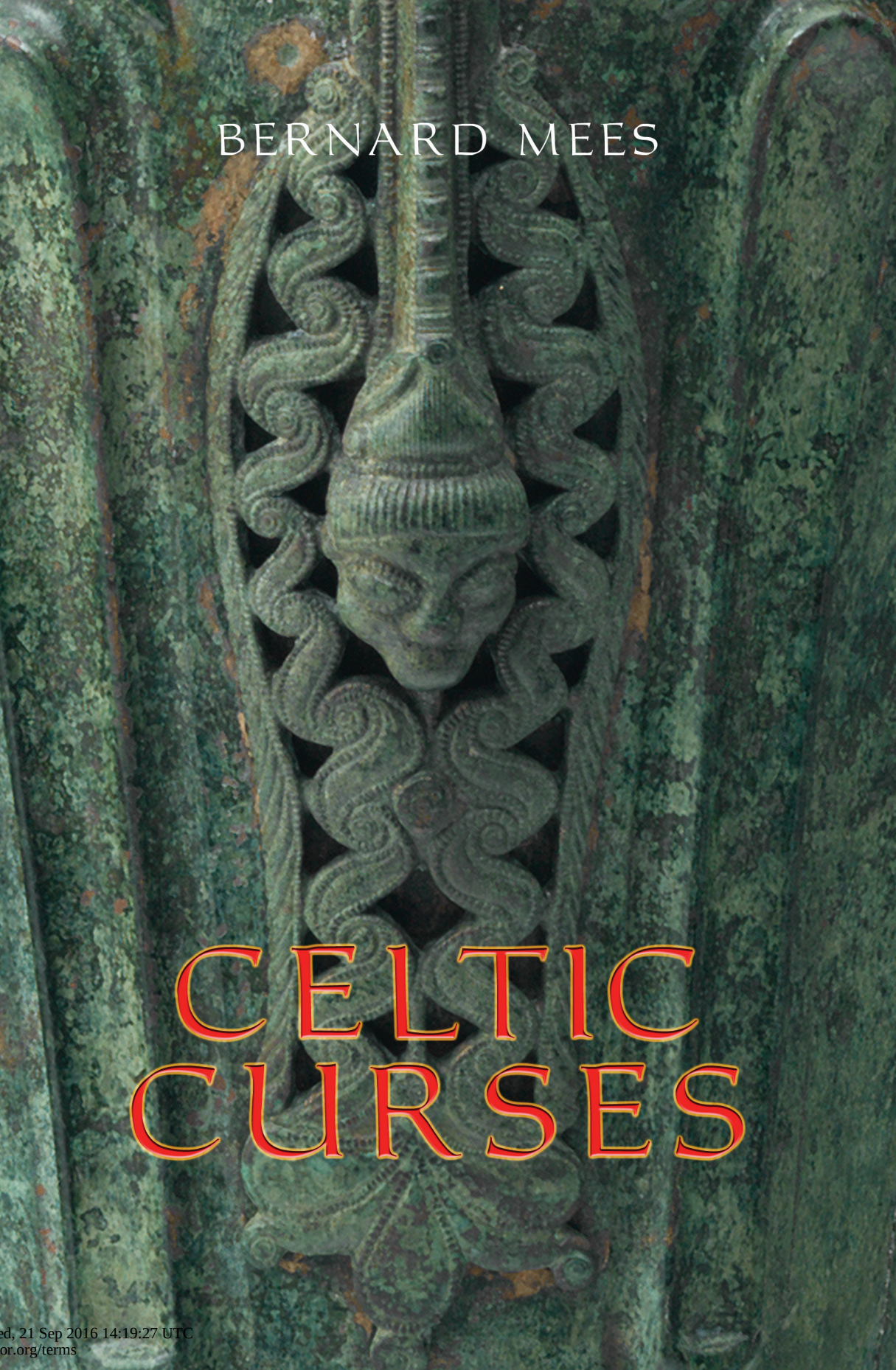

CELTIC CURSES

The first comprehensive study of early Celtic cursing, this work analyses both medieval and ancient expressions of Celtic imprecation: from the binding tablets of ancient Britain and Gaul to the saintly maledictions of the early medieval period, and other traces of Celtic stipulation and binding only speculated on in earlier scholarship. It provides the first full overview and analyses of the ancient Celtic use of binding curses (as attested in Old Celtic and Latin inscriptions) and examines their mooted influence in later medieval expressions. Ancient finds (among them long Gaulish curse texts, Celtic Latin Curse tablets found from the Alpine regions to Britain, and fragments of Old Brittonic tablets excavated from Roman Bath) are subjected to rigorous new interpretations, and medieval reflections of the earlier tradition are also considered.

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CELTIC CURSES

Bernard Mees

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Abbreviations

AE *L'Année épigraphique* (Paris 1888ff.).
CIH *Corpus iuris Hibernici*, ed. D.A. Binchy, 6 vols (Dublin 1978).
CIL *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum*, ed. T. Mommsen *et al.*/Academia litterarum regiae Borussica (and successor bodies), 17 vols (Berlin 1863ff.).
DIL *Dictionary of the Irish Language: based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials*, ed. E.G. Quinn *et al.* (Dublin 1983).
IG *Inscriptiones Graecae*, ed. A. Kirchhoff *et al.*/Academia litterarum regiae Borussica (and successor bodies), 14 vols (Berlin 1873ff.).
IGF *Inscriptions Grecques de la France*, ed. J.-C. Decourt, Travaux de la Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée 38 (Lyon 2004).
PGM *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, ed. H.-D. Betz, 2nd ed. (Chicago 1992).
PL *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina (Patrologia Latina)*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols (Paris 1857–91).
RIB *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, ed. R.G. Collingwood *et al.*, 2 vols (Oxford etc. 1965–95).
RIC *Roman Imperial Coinage*, ed. H. Mattingly *et al.*, 10 vols (London 1923–94).
RIG *Recueil des inscriptions gauloises*, ed. P.-M. Duval *et al.*, XLVe supplément à «*Gallia*», 4 vols (Paris 1985–2002).

1. Celtic curse tablets and related finds from Western Europe

1

Introduction

Ellen MacAuliffe sailed out from County Cork to the Colony of Victoria at the age of sixteen. She did not stay long in Melbourne, however, but instead went north to spend the rest of her life living out in what in Australia today is still referred to as 'the bush'. In her final years, as Ellen Quigg, she was nursed by Eileen, her teenage granddaughter. Eileen Kelly was my grandmother and liked especially to tell us stories about her time in the small Victorian town of Kyneton caring for old Grandma Quigg. The one we all remember best was that Grandma Quigg was dead afeared of banshees; I can still picture in my mind the poor old woman kept awake at night by her strange Irish tormentress. Obviously a woman of the elves had followed young Ellen on the boat that sailed out from Cove Harbour well over a century ago – a supernatural stowaway hiding somewhere in her cabin no doubt, or perhaps hanging on grimly to the aft or the keel.

Celtic studies in the 1960s was especially keen on establishing the nativeness of traditions such as the wailing banshees who haunted Irish families, presaging the deaths of their loved ones much as if they were a curse. A mixture of Irish, Welsh and Scottish nationalism and the naturalism of the folk movement combined to produce a welter of works dedicated to establishing the essential Celticness of folktales, traditions and beliefs. As with the romantic surge in Celticism of the time of the Fenians, claims that early Celtic culture was dependent on foreign, classical and Christian learning were played down, marginalised and all but carpeted over by this kind of learning. Most focus was placed upon the earliest Irish tales, centuries older and more numerous than those of the Welsh, expressions which were now to be celebrated for their archaism, their preservation of what even seemed to be pre-Christian understandings and ancient native truths. Despite stemming from the pens of medieval monks, deep indigenous roots were thought to underlie the practices and sayings ascribed to Cuchulainn and the other early Irish heroes and kings of these famous tales. This new study of the oldest Irish stories was infused with the spirit of cultural theorists such as Sir James Frazer and Carl Jung in its search to reveal the mind of the Iron Age Irish – for it was widely held at the time that the references to early Irish heroes acting in anachronistic ways, riding on chariots (rather than horses), dealing with druids and not to mention euhemerised gods, indicated that it was purely pre-Christian voices that modern readers were hearing; that the early Irish monks who first

wrote these tales down had preserved recollections from centuries earlier, pagan Celtic times.[1] Rather than a poor copy of Latin verse, Irish poetry was even now argued to be original and archaic, as if instead of being typically medieval it was somehow essential and primordial.[2] The growing numbers of neo-pagans, then, modern witches, druids and shamans, could validly exploit these sources in their personal quests to rediscover what was primally Celtic. Yet just as the New Age is often criticised as romantic, dominated by personal fancies rather than principled efforts to reconstruct and recapture the past, thirty years later the nativist tradition seemed to have been eclipsed by a neo-medievalism that emphasised the very Latinate, clerical and Christian nature of even the earliest Irish accounts. The old Ireland of saints and scholars was back and that of archaism and archetype was on the retreat – even the notion of any sort of broader Celtic authenticity was soon to be questioned publicly by a new generation of scholars.[3]

It seems strange that this tempering of the Celticity of the Ireland before Strongbow, the English Pale, or Hell or Connaught has emerged. Irish nationalism seems if anything stronger than it was forty years ago, and in the age of Celtic tigers, the political devolutions in Wales and Scotland suggest that Celtic identity is no less strongly felt in the other ancient colonial fringes of the old empire. Celtic scholarship has become increasingly Latinate and more medievalistically sedate in the last few decades as early medieval Ireland seems evermore European, more Christian, less bardic and druidic, than it did a generation or more ago. In turn, parallels noted in the past between Gauls, Britons, medieval Irish and Scots are increasingly explained away as clichés, misinterpretations, constructs – products of romantic wishful thinking.[4] The appellation 'Celtic' has even retreated to being a solely linguistic matter in some recent accounts of early British history and prehistory as earlier nostrums are tossed aside, disabused or misunderstood. These almost revisionist accounts often work to foster miscomprehensions as the painstaking, detailed and often brilliant work of Celticists past is dismissed in this project to sober-up, to de-romanticise, the early Celts. The

1 J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: a study in magic and religion*, 3rd ed., 12 vols (London 1907–13); C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, The Collected Works of C.G. Jung 9/1 (London 1959). The nativist tradition is especially well represented in J. Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin 1955); A. and B. Rees, *Celtic Heritage: ancient tradition in Ireland and Wales* (London 1961); K.H. Jackson, *The Oldest Irish Tradition: a window on the Iron Age* (Cambridge 1964), B.K. Martin, 'Old Irish literature and European antiquity', in B.K. Martin and S.T. Knight, *Aspects of Celtic Literature*, Australian Academy of the Humanities monograph 1 (Sydney 1970), pp. 9–24; and P. Mac Cana, 'Conservation and innovation in early Celtic literature', *Etudes celtiques* 13 (1972), 61–118.

2 C. Watkins, 'Indo-European metrics and archaic Irish verse', *Celtica* 6 (1963), 194–249; reprinted in idem, *Selected Writings*, ed. L. Oliver, 2 vols (Innsbruck 1994), pp. 349–404; J. Travis, *Early Celtic Versecraft: origin, development, diffusion* (Ithaca 1973).

3 The first summary of the new tradition is K.R. McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, Maynooth monographs 3 (Maynooth 1990). Modern Celto-sceptism is best represented by S. James, *The Atlantic Celts: ancient people or modern invention?* (London 1999).

4 Many classical accounts which describe the ancient Celts are better recognised as influenced by classical ethnographic *topoi* or clichés today; H.D. Rankin, *The Celts and the Classical World* (London 1987).

general public in the main, though, seems unaware of this academic development – the popular fascination with all things tartan, Arthur or La Tène scarcely seems to have abated. The linguistic connection between ancient Celt and medieval scribe is more profound than merely a grammatical relation, though. A comparative approach to Celticity has much more to offer than is often realised in studies of the recent neo-clerical, provincial Latinate sort.

The great contributions to Celtic scholarship were not produced in the spirit of British romanticism, however, but emerged rather in light of a nineteenth-century continental project to rediscover and understand the earliest linguistic remains from all parts of Europe. Indeed, many of the earliest sources that detailed the Celtic contribution to this broader linguistic endeavour were to be found not in the United Kingdom, less still all-British Ireland: some of the most revealing sources were housed in libraries on the Continent, preserved in the form of the writings of early Irish missionaries and emigrant scholars. The leading linguists of the earliest remains of Irish at the time were Central Europeans, most notably the German antiquarian Johann Caspar Zeuss, the author of the first proper comparative grammar of the Celtic languages, and among his successors, most outstandingly, the brilliant Swiss linguist Rudolf Thurneysen of the University of Bonn, the most important of all scholars ever to have investigated early Irish.[5]

All of these university men were classed at the time as philologists – lovers (*philo-*) of *logoi* or words. Along with their more literary-focused counterparts working in France and the United Kingdom, from the German scholar Kuno Meyer at Edinburgh to others such as the Dublin-born lawyer Whitley Stokes working in colonial India, they revealed, very slowly, the great medieval Irish tradition to the world. Early glossaries of Cornish and Breton were also scoured, as were the few ancient Celtic inscriptions unearthed by that date on the Continent. Then Zeuss's *Grammatica Celtica* was revised and updated (by a Danish linguist, Holger Pedersen); the comparative philology of the Celtic languages had now developed into a mature form. Indeed, linguistic scholarship had achieved such a rigour by that time that studies of the early Celtic languages had obtained an almost mathematical precision, and even a predictive quality: the postulates of its leading scholars were increasingly supported by any new finds. Pedersen's *Comparative Grammar of the Celtic Languages* from 1909–13 has never been superseded, however, and with the passing of his generation, Celtic linguistics seemed to slip into a backwater in international terms. Its study was now left mainly to careful and patient medievalist grammarians who rarely seemed able to breach the bindings of their musty handbooks. The researchers who followed in the tradition of Thurneysen and Zeuss seemed incapable of recapturing the spark

5 J.C. Zeuss, *Grammatica Celtica: E monumentis vetustis tam hibernicae linguae quam Britannicae dialecti, Cambricae, Cornicae, Armoricae nec non e Gallicae priscae reliquiis* (Leipzig 1853), 2nd ed. revised by H. Ebel (Berlin 1871); R. Thurneysen, *Handbuch des Altirischen: Grammatik, Texte und Wörterbuch*, 2 vols (Heidelberg 1909); revised edn published as *A Grammar of Old Irish*, trans. D.A. Binchy and O. Bergin (Dublin 1946); idem, 'Why do Germans study Celtic philology?', *Studies* 19 (1930), 20–32; reprinted in idem, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, ed. P. De Bernardo Stempel and R. Ködderitsch, 3 vols (Tübingen 1991–95), pp. 272–84.

and science of yesteryear, and fewer and fewer students now appeared eager to enter the world of the dusty tomes whose comprehension was essential to a principled understanding of comparative Celtic philology.[6]

Although keen and diligent contributions to Celtic linguistics continued to appear after this time, such studies seemed increasingly to represent dry, often romantic antiquarian diversions; much Celtic philological scholarship now became fixed instead on more literary and historical concerns. Influenced by a form of Indophile Aryanism, by the 1960s the nativists who now dominated Celtic studies had turned philology into a form of textual and cultural criticism.[7] Many of the new experts saw this development as a logical consequence – they were building upon the linguistic foundations established by previous generations of Celtic scholars. But all the same, linguistic research in comparative Celtic studies proper seemed increasingly to become an otiose matter – or no longer even a part of Celtic studies. The ambition to rescue a common Celticity drifted into more speculative and less methodologically sound work, and for some, the old tomes of the Pedersens and Thurneysens seemed to have become irrelevant, their approaches to matters Celtic rather tiresome. As the excitable philology of the 1960s declined, however, new theories arose which seemed incompatible with the project of comparative Celtic philology: early Irish culture was now an idiosyncratic brand of Christian learning; genetic testing even appeared to indicate that the insular peoples were not related to their former continental co-linguals at all. The common linguistic background of the various peoples called Celts now seemed almost manufactured, a product of romanticism, their language, for some, perhaps even only a sort of lingua franca developed by early European Atlantic seafarers. Archaeologists now downplayed broader Celtic commonalities in language, religion and even art – grammar was not culture; linguistic similitude did not mean ethnic relation. The philological background to the older picture of common Celtic inheritance seemed of little interest to a new breed of scholar.[8]

After Thurneysen, Celtic linguistics often seemed concerned merely with dry matters, with ironing out grammatical inconsistencies, elucidating early etymologies or establishing the relative ordering of medieval sound changes.[9] Unlike in

6 H. Pedersen, *Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen*, 2 vols (Göttingen 1909–13); abridged as H. Lewis and H. Pedersen, *A Concise Comparative Celtic Grammar* (Göttingen 1937); D.E. Evans, 'The heroic age of Celtic philology', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 54 (2004), 1–30.

7 See especially M. Dillon, 'The archaism of Irish tradition', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 33 (1947), 245–64; also issued as a monograph (London 1947); J. de Vries, *Keltische Religion*, Religionen der Menschheit 18 (Stuttgart 1961); and the Rees's *Celtic Heritage*, pp. 16–17, 41, 53 *et passim*. The main scholar to write in this mode was Georges Dumézil, although he only ever assessed Celtic myth and culture from a broader Indo-European perspective; cf. C.S. Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology: an anthropological assessment of the theories of Georges Dumézil*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley 1982); W.W. Belier, *Decayed Gods: origin and development of Georges Dumézil's "idéologie tripartite"*, Studies in Greek and Roman religion 7 (Leiden 1991).

8 B.W. Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean: the Atlantic and its peoples 8000 BC–AD 1500* (Oxford 2001), pp. 293ff.; James, *Atlantic Celts*, pp. 34ff., 67ff.

9 E.g. K.H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain: a chronological survey of the Brittonic languages, first to twelfth century A.D.* (Edinburgh 1953); C. Watkins, *Indo-European Origins of the*

other areas of comparative philology, Celtic studies did not go on to develop a nuanced tradition of ethnographic linguistics or what the Germans call *Wörter und Sachen* ('words and things') studies. Although there are many words of common Celtic origin shared by Welsh, Irish, Cornish, Manx, Scots Gaelic and Breton, what this common vocabulary might represent in a cultural sense is rarely brought out in the same manner as it is in other comparative philological traditions. Where scores of comparative studies of shared terminology are proposed for, say, Old English and its early Germanic cousins, a similar tradition is not so evident in Celtic scholarship. When such matters are investigated at all they are usually assessed only in (often overly ambitious) Indo-Europeanistic terms or, even worse, are overly simple or narrow. Sober, book-length linguistic studies have been written on topics such as the notion of holiness as it is represented in the early Germanic tongues, while nothing of this extended comparative sort has been written on the common linguistic ethnography of the Celts.[10] Partly this is because the linguistic resources available to scholars such as Germanists are significantly more suited to such a project – they are usually more diverse geographically, but are often less so in terms of time. Yet such a tradition in Celtic studies would offer the very real project of providing an answer to the nativist dilemma: how much of the early Irish and Welsh tradition can reasonably be considered originally Celtic and how much is the result of reinterpretation, reworking and importing by Latin-speaking monks and other, later figures indebted to foreign modalities and concerns. What linguistic ethnography that has appeared in Celtic philology remains mostly confined to titbits, unconnected studies published in learned journals; and even such work of this type as has been produced has usually been practised only as a subsidiary to literary or archaeological concerns. Worse still, comparative Celtic studies are often identified with the shortcomings of the more ambitious scholarship of the 1960s – that is, they are lumped together with the less lasting nativist works, now derided for their failure to follow reliable methods.

One of the sources that would give greater weight to any nativist project is the earliest indigenous testimonies of the Celts, the many inscriptions of native authorship which are unearthed from time to time in the countries of the European Continent. Mostly mishandled when they appear in recent accounts, the earliest of such texts, although quite short, is a sixth- or perhaps even seventh-century BC find from the French Alps, on a potsherd from Montmorot in the

Celtic Verb: the sigmatic aorist (Dublin 1962); K.R. McCone, *The Early Irish Verb*, Maynooth monographs 1 (Maynooth 1997).

10 W. Baetke, *Das Heilige im Germanischen* (Tübingen 1942). The most extensive Celtic *Wörter und Sachen* works to have appeared are the substantially etymologically predicated H. Birkhan, *Germanen und Kelten bis zum Ausgang der Römerzeit: Der Aussagewert von Wörtern und Sachen für die frühesten keltisch-germanischen Kulturbeziehungen*, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Klasse, Sitzungsberichte, 272 (Vienna 1970) and his broader survey *Kelten: Versuch einer Gesamtdarstellung ihrer Kultur*, 3rd ed. (Vienna 1997). For a survey of the more developed Germanistic *Wörter und Sachen* tradition see D.H. Green, *Language and History in the Early Germanic World* (Cambridge 1998). The broader Indo-Europeanist tradition is most intelligently represented by E. Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. E. Palmer, Miami linguistics series 12 (Coral Gables 1973).

Haute Jura. Lengthier early Celtic inscriptions, although still short and mostly comprising little more than names, are also known from southern Switzerland and the neighbouring regions of Italy, especially from the often isolated valleys once inhabited by an ancient tribe called the Leponti. These Lepontic or Alpine Celtic inscriptions, preserved mostly on local ceramics and memorial stones, only hint at early funerary practices and other aspects of Italian Celtic culture, although there is clear evidence that the ancient Celtic inscriptions from this area and the medieval insular languages are related.[11] In fact ancient Italian Celtic names are often constructed from the same elements as those which underlie their early Welsh and Irish counterparts, even to the extent of preserving early forms of names related to such famous insular styles as Boadicea (Boudicca) and Arthur. A handful of more easterly Celtic inscriptions are known also from Slovenia and Austria, and the names of former Celtic habitations, tribes and warrior chieftains are recorded in classical accounts as once present as far east as central Turkey, the home of the biblical Celtic Galatians. The other major native sources for continental Celticity are known mostly from more westerly climes, however: from Spain, Belgium and particularly (and most frequently) France, where hundreds of ancient Celtic inscriptions, varying in length from brief fragments to entire letter-length tablets, are attested, not that all of these are perfectly understood today, their linguistic behaviours well known.

From what can be discerned from these linguistic remnants, however, it appears that the Spanish Celts – the Celtiberians – spoke the ancient Celtic language most removed from the medieval insular tongues. Italian Celtic is obviously less different than Insular Celtic, Gaulish less so again; in fact there are those who have suggested that Welsh and Gaulish are more similar than are Welsh and Irish. Yet the insular branches of Celtic show clear structural evidence of having separated off from Gaulish at much the same preliterate time: the verbal systems of the oldest Welsh and Irish texts show too much in common that they clearly do not share with Gaulish for a closer relationship between Gaulish and Welsh to be likely. Linguistically, then, the Insular Celts seem to have been much more like each other than they were their continental linguistic cousins – common insular developments not shared on the Continent were evidently only local and comparatively late phenomena. Yet those features which are more broadly shared by the Celtic languages must consequently be considered more fundamental and original, a consideration which can only make the evidence of the ancient Celtic inscriptions from the European Continent even more vital to understanding the deepest native roots of modern Celticness.[12]

11 M. Lejeune, *Lepontica*, Monographies linguistiques 1 (Paris 1971); G. Kaenel, 'Les relations transalpines à l'Age de Fer: territoire "lépontien" – Suisse occidentale – Jura', in R.C. de Marinis and S. Biaggio Simona (eds), *I Leponti tra mito e realtà: Raccolta di saggi in occasione della mostra, Locarno 20 maggio–3 dicembre 2000*, 2 vols, 2 (Locarno 2000), pp. 151 and 153; cf. T.L. Markey and B. Mees, 'A Celtic orphan from Castaneda', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 54 (2004), 85.

12 The lack of an absolute/conjunct distinction in Gaulish is the most obvious (and fundamental) dissimilarity; K.R. McCone, *Towards a Relative Chronology of Ancient and Medieval Celtic Sound Change*, Maynooth studies in Celtic linguistics 1 (Maynooth 1996), pp. 67–104; *pace* P. De Bernardo Stempel, 'Language and the historiography of Celtic-speaking peoples', in

Any commonalities shared by Irish and Italian Celtic must be very archaic – some have ventured a date as far back as 1000 BC as the time at which the Celtic languages first diverged. Recent finds such as the Montmorot potsherd suggest that any such relationship could well be older still; and although many archaeological theories have been proposed in the past that might be thought to have been a reliable guide to such matters, archaeological accounts of Celtic settlement have often been shown up when new linguistic evidence has become available. Suggestions that the ancestors of the Irish can be shown to have arrived in the British Isles at any particular date usually turn out to be little more than guesses when inspected closely, as do any claims of traces of pre-Goidelic or pre-Brythonic insular languages, worse still any proposed influences from these linguistic phantoms on the development of the attested insular tongues.[13] Nor is it clear, as is often averred, that the Alps and the German uplands represent the primordial homeland of the Celts – it is important not to confuse, say, the region of the origin of the famous La Tène artistic style with the notion of a prehistoric Celtic homeland. In fact, most of the earliest Celtic inscriptions are found in a region that was once thought by archaeologists not to be Celtic at all. Nonetheless, the earliest Irish texts – inscriptions dating from about the fifth century AD – seem much closer in general form to Gaulish and Italian Celtic than they do any of the insular languages of high medieval date; they much better preserve the ancient endings and other early phonological features that are so plainly preserved in continental finds.[14] The ancient Celtic languages were also markedly distinct from those of their Italic, Germanic, Etruscan, Iberian, Basque and more easterly neighbours, although there have been those who have misunderstood this and forgotten how unlike Latin or Greek the ancient language of the Gauls was. Relatively speaking, Celtic commonality was probably as antique to the inscribers of the earliest Irish Ogham stones as the Oghams are themselves to the modern Irish today. But it remains striking how many cultural practices can

S. Rieckhoff (ed.), *Celtes et Gaulois, l'Archéologie face à l'Histoire 1: Celtes et Gaulois dans l'histoire, l'historiographie et l'idéologie moderne; Actes de la table ronde de Leipzig, 16–17 juin 2005*, Bibracte 12/1 (Glux-en-Glenne 2006), pp. 33–56 and P. Sims-Williams, 'Common Celtic, Gallo-Brittonic and Insular Celtic', in P.-Y. Lambert and G.-J. Pinault (eds), *Gaulois et celtique continental*, Ecole pratique des hautes études. Sciences historiques et philologiques. III. Haute études du monde gréco-romain 39 (Geneva 2007), pp. 309–53. Most of the features called upon to link Welsh (or Brythonic) to Gaulish can be explained by relatively late contact, what linguists usually describe as Sprachbund phenomena, whereas common innovations in the insular verbal systems cannot.

13 The major phonological innovations of the Insular Celtic languages (lenition and syncopation) are pronounced, but unremarkable cross-linguistically. See B. Mees, 'Stratum and shadow: a genealogy of stratigraphy theories from the Indo-European West', in H. Anderson (ed.), *Language Contacts in Prehistory: studies in stratigraphy*, Amsterdam studies in the theory and history of the linguistic sciences; Series IV: Current issues in linguistic theory 239 (Amsterdam 2003), pp. 11–44, more generally for a critique of Celtic substratum studies and cf. also K. Forsyth, *Language in Pictland: the case against 'non-Indo-European Pictish'* (Utrecht 1997).

14 R.A.S. MacAlister, *Corpus inscriptionum insularum Celticarum* (Dublin 1949); D. McManus, *A Guide to Ogam*, Maynooth monographs 4 (Maynooth 1991); S. Ziegler, *Die Sprache der altirischen Ogam-Inschriften*, Historische Sprachforschung Ergänzungsheft 36 (Göttingen 1994).

be gleaned from early continental texts which have quite clear reflections in the early insular traditions. The proper reconstruction and contextualisation of these features is sometimes predicated on understandings gained from early records of Irish or Welsh, but the use of the same words (such as the apparently shared Arthur names) still appears particularly good evidence upon which ultimately to base claims of Celtic nativeness.

One of the most obvious expressions of Celticity shared by both early Insular Celtic sources and the inscriptions of the Continent is names, especially those of persons. Exact equivalents to O' names are not known from Gaul (or even Mac names), but personal names with precise equivalents in Welsh and Irish are.[15] Perhaps the most striking of these stem from Slovenia, where a name is known from an inscription which appears to combine the roots underlying Arthur and Boadicea together into a single form: Artebuds 'Victory-bear'. Names constructed from the same elements as those of Irish heroes such as Fergus and Finn are also known from comparable, often even earlier sources, expressed in ways which are hardly to be ascribed to chance similitude. Instead, such parallels suggest that certain kinds of linguistic evidence can be used to reconstruct common expressions of Celticity, constructions which are based on evidence that can be interpreted with a methodological rigour quite unlike that commonly relied upon in the often nebulous, even romantic supposition that was popular in some of the more adventurous literary scholarship of the 1960s.[16]

Moreover, evidence of this sort is rendered semiotically and interpretatively clearer still the longer the ancient texts which preserve such forms are, the more comprehensively we can judge the immediate linguistic and cultural contexts which informed the creation of such ancient documents. Several quite long, linguistically Celtic inscriptions are now known from Gaul that were not available to scholars such as Thurneysen and Zeuss. Unlike the earliest Irish texts, the memorial Ogham stones and similarly old finds from Britain too (even older if we include the evidence of the earliest British coin legends), the continental inscriptions are often very revealing in terms of ancient Celtic culture – they are not restricted simply to recording names, the consecrating of votive items or memorialising the dead.[17] Many of these are much more complex inscriptions than those which appear on the commemorative stones of ancient Celtic Italy; quite a number clearly record fairly complex and lengthy ancient Celtic spells. Such linguistically and presumably culturally sophisticated expressions represent the best natively expressed evidence we have for understanding the minds of the ancient Gauls – and perhaps too, then, by extension, an early common Celticity based on a study of these and later comparable insular forms.

15 K.H. Schmidt, 'Die Komposition in gallischen Personennamen', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 26 (1957), 33–301; also issued as a monograph (Tübingen 1957); D.E. Evans, *Gaulish Personal Names: a study of some Continental Celtic formations* (Oxford 1967).

16 H. Eichner, J. Istenic and M. Lovenjak, 'Ein römerzeitliches Keramikgefäß aus Ptuj (Pettau, Poetovio) in Slowenien mit Inschrift in unbekanntem Alphabet und epichorischer (vermutlich keltischer) Sprache', *Arheološki vestnik* 45 (1994), 131–42.

17 P. De Bernardo Stempl, 'Die Sprache altbritannischer Münzlegenden', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 44 (1991), 36–55; P. Sims-Williams, *The Celtic Inscriptions of Britain: phonology and chronology, c.400–1200*, Publications of the Philological Society 37 (Oxford 2003).

Indeed, ancient Greek and Roman magic has been a topic of intense research and debate over the last twenty years or so, and an advanced understanding has now been achieved of how expressions such as classical curses and curative and protective charms were thought to work. Reconciling the testimonies of recorded magical practices and their description in literary and historical sources, a consistent picture of ritual formulas, modes, actions and language has been delineated by classical scholars that describes the magical praxis and reasoning which prevailed in much of the ancient world.[18] Rather than relying solely on purely linguistic understandings of the ancient Celtic magical texts which are the main focus of this book, then, particular reference is made to recent developments in the understanding of ancient magic, of the rhetoric, rites and genres which have been elucidated in recent classical research. The main thrust of this study, though, remains comparative and philological – it seems most likely that a linguistically rigorous ethnological approach to these texts promises to be much more revealing than merely remaining content to assess them exclusively in classicistic (or even just grammatical) terms. The principal focus of this book is on Celtic curses and other forms of early charms such as have been preserved. Comparable concerns reflected in medieval insular tradition are also subsequently assessed. But the ultimate purpose of this work is to investigate the comparative philology of Celtic cursing, to see if the depth of time and distance in space that separates the Continental Celts from their insular cousins can be breached in a principled textual and linguistic manner, and whether a contribution can consequently be made to the matter of Insular Celtic nativism in terms of a tradition for which the medieval Celts are particularly famous.

[18] The most important of these studies is C.A. Faraone and D. Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek magic and religion* (New York 1991), but more recent and less technical works include F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, trans. F. Philip (Cambridge, Mass., 1999); B. Ankarloo and S. Clarke (eds), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome* (Philadelphia 1999); and M.W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Graeco-Roman World* (London 2001).

2

Infernal Powers

The modern practice of throwing coins into springs, fountains and wells continues a very ancient tradition, one that has survived until recent times particularly in the form of wishing wells. Especially in those parts of Europe which have a Celtic connection, modern wishing wells continue a legacy known from throughout Europe that is thought to be based on the suggestive nature of deep pools and the therapeutic powers of natural springs. Such was the opinion of Roman thinkers, who recorded that the ancient Celts were renowned for their fascination with springs, rivers and lakes, and for the offering of items for good fortune into watery sites. Many such sites later came to be associated with Christian miracles and saints during the Middle Ages, though, and often any hint of a pre-Christian pedigree in the folklore of these places has long been obscured.[1]

Huge bath and spa complexes dedicated to healing gods were also an enduring feature of Roman life, and although the old Roman custom of bathing and public baths died out in Western Europe at the end of antiquity, healing springs are still patronised in many European countries today, from those with official Christian sanction such as Lourdes, France, to others of a less obviously religious nature. It is also quite common to find offerings in the remains of springs from throughout the ancient world, thermal or otherwise, especially from early Celtic settings. Like the Romans, the ancient Celts obviously felt that many of these springs were holy places; and even the throwing of coins into wells is attested from ancient Celtic and Roman sites. This practice seems to be part of an age-old tradition of depositing all sorts of items into holy wells, springs, ponds, bogs, rivers and lakes. The offerings cast into such ancient sites also have a technical description – they are called votives or *ex voto* (literally, things that have been 'vowed' to the gods) – and sometimes we can even tell specifically why they were deposited as, occasionally, they are also inscribed.[2]

In 1968 such a site was uncovered by French archaeologists at a spring known as Les Roches ('the rocks'), which is near modern Chamalières, a satellite town

1 J. and C. Bord, *Sacred Waters: holy wells and water lore in Britain and Ireland* (London 1985); M.J. Green, *Gods of the Celts* (Stroud 1986), pp. 138ff.; J. Rattue, *The Living Stream: holy wells in historical context* (Woodbridge 1995).

2 F. Yegül, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass. 1992); G.G. Fagan, *Bathing in Public in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor 1999).

of Clermont-Ferrand. The spring lies outside the ancient town of Chamalières, too (or Camelaria as it was known in Roman times), and from the remains which were found about it, the site was obviously the former centre of a healing cult. Thousands of wooden votive items fairly typical of places thought to have had medicinal powers in antiquity were found there over the next few years. It was not until early 1971, however, that an inscribed object was found at Chamalières, and although it was written in Roman handwriting typical of the centuries about the birth of Christ, the text was obviously not Latin in language. Nor was the item it was found on clearly an object concerned with healing; instead it was a flat piece of lead worked into a rectangle, but with a trapezoidal protrusion on one side as if it were a plaque of some sort. Given the location of the find, it was soon surmised that the inscription must have been written in Gaulish; but little else about the text seemed to be clear at first. In fact the language was almost completely incomprehensible to the experts who first tried to read it: only a series of names, many of which were Latin, could clearly be recovered from the text initially.[3]

Numerous wooden plaques were also found at the site, although save for one exception all of them are blank. The exception features the remains of a painting, a silhouette of a woman in blue standing against a beige background. Presumably the others, too, once featured similar representations, perhaps pictures of people whom the dedicators wished to see healed, much as many of the sculptured representations of men and women found at Chamalières, whether full-length figurines or busts, more clearly were. The miniature wooden legs, arms, heads, breasts, eyes and so on which were also found about the ancient spring site are more typical of the offerings left at early healing sanctuaries – they are evidently supposed to represent injured or diseased parts of the body that were to be made whole again by the healing gods. Inscribed plaques are also a quite typical form of *ex voto* even in modern Christian contexts, however. And although the inscription on the Chamalières tablet is too old to make it a Christian find, protrusions of the type found on the plaque (such plaques usually being referred to by classical scholars as *tabulae ansatae*, 'handled tablets') are a traditional feature of ancient Greek and Roman votive finds. The handles (sometimes thought of as wings or ears) are usually considered to have been flanges that nails could be hammered through in order to mount the plaques, and this indeed may once have been their function. But by the time of the deposition of the Chamalières find such tablets, when perforated, are usually pierced elsewhere. In fact the winged shape had become so commonly associated with dedications under the Roman Empire that outlines of *tabulae ansatae* are often found carved even onto dedicatory stones. The single Chamalières 'handle' has not been perforated (nor has the main part of the find), so presumably the tablet was never fixed up anywhere with a nail.

3 M. Lejeune and R. Marichal, 'Textes gauloises et gallo-romains en cursive latin', *Etudes celtiques* 15 (1976/77), 151–71; A.-M. Romeuf, *Les ex-voto gallo-romains de Chamalières (Puy-de-dôme): bois sculptés de la source des Roches* (Paris 2000); eadem, 'La découverte de la tablette de plomb inscrite de Chamalières. Présentation de la fouille', in Lambert and Pinault, *Gaulois et celtique continental*, pp. 85–95; *RIG*, II.2, no. 100.

Moreover, ancient votive plaques are usually made of bronze – lead was not the metal of choice for the recording of votive texts in Roman times.

Interpretations of the Gaulish Chamalières text have ranged from a curse to a prayer, a vow, an initiation ritual or a healing charm. The tablet is also tiny, only 1mm thick and about 60mm by 40mm in length and breadth, but it is fairly typical for ancient votive plaques to be quite small. Both the style of writing and the archaeological context indicate that the inscribed tablet dates to the first half of the first century AD, perhaps even making it contemporary with the life of Christ, and it was clearly created some years after Julius Caesar had conquered this part of Gaul for Rome. It can be seen today proudly on display alongside other items excavated from the site at the Musée Bargoin in Clermont-Ferrand.[4]

In ancient times the sanctuary at Les Roches seems to have been a simple pool featuring two small mineral springs, the marshy valley it was found in being surrounded only by a plain enclosing wall. No evidence of a temple structure was found by archaeologists at the site, although some of the wooden votive figures may once have been set up about the pool, thus forming some sort of ritual enclosure. Coins found in the remains of the pool suggest it was only used as a religious site for a century after the Roman conquest in the 60s BC before being abandoned. The objects found there clearly indicate that the sanctuary was thought of as medicinal, hence the reasonable suspicion of some experts that the inscribed tablet bears a request for healing or some other sort of medicinal expression.

There are several clear features in the inscription which indicate that it does not concern healing, however, but rather that it represents another very common kind of magical find. Many hundreds of magical Greek and Roman texts known as binding spells (called *defixiones* in Latin, *katadesmoi* in Greek) have been recovered from sites very much like Les Roches. Moreover, although early examples of such spells have been found on all sorts of objects, by the first century the usual practice for the recording of binding spells was to write them on sheets of lead. Inscribed metal sheets or *tabellae* of this sort are a fairly common kind of classical archaeological find. 'Tablet' can be a misleading description, however, for although such finds are sometimes called *elasmoi* or 'plates' in Greek, the usual Roman description for them was *laminae* or *lamellae*, terms which might be better translated as 'sheets' or 'leaves'. Paper and papyrus were relatively scarce resources in ancient times and much correspondence in those days was written on wax tablets or on metal sheets. Such tablets or leaves, whether of lead or some other metal, are also the typical medium upon which ancient spells and

[4] L. Fleuriot, 'Le vocabulaire de l'inscription gaulois de Chamalières', *Etudes celtiques* 15 (1976/77), 173–90; P.-Y. Lambert, 'La tablette gauloise de Chamalières', *Etudes celtiques* 16 (1979), 141–69; K.H. Schmidt, 'The Gaulish inscription of Chamalières', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 29 (1981), 256–68; W. Meid, *Gaulish Inscriptions: their interpretation in light of archaeological evidence and their value as a source of linguistic and sociological information*, Archaeolingua; series minor 1 (Budapest 1992), pp. 38–42; J.F. Eska, 'Remarks on linguistic structures in a Gaulish ritual text' in M.R.V. Southern (ed.), *Indo-European Perspectives*, Journal of Indo-European Studies monograph 43 (Washington DC, 2002), pp. 33–59.

magic charms are found inscribed. It is not all that common for them also to be 'winged', but one particularly clear example of such a leaden charm lamella was found in 1972 in the remains of a wealthy Roman house in the ruins of the ancient city of Italica, Spain, and it is clearly inscribed with a charm addressed to a spring – or, rather, to the goddess who was thought to reside within it. Although there are some small gaps in the inscription on the Spanish spell lamella, the second-century AD text, inscribed on a 92mm x 100mm lead tablet with a small (13mm long) protruding 'handle', reads:[5]

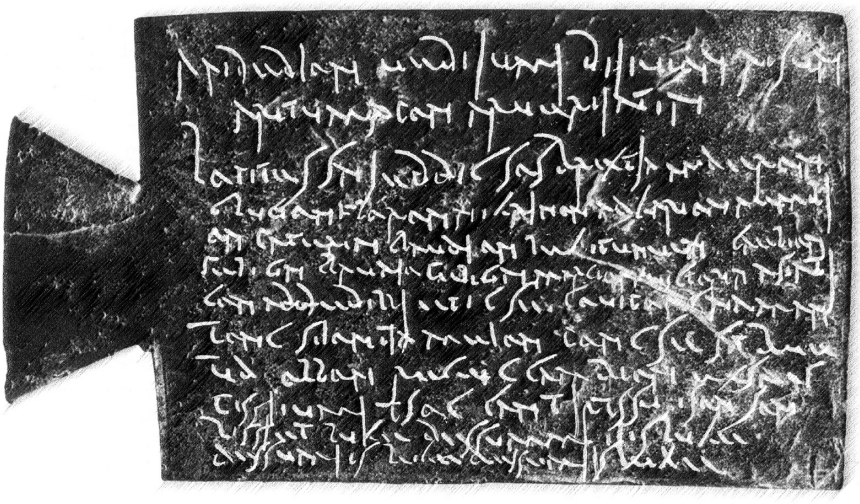
> O Lady Spring Foyi …! I ask that you track down your possessions. Whoever has stolen my shoes and sandals, I ask that you punish them. Whether it is a girl, a woman or a man who stole them … track them down.

The Italica inscription is clearly a type of avenging spell and its intended effect was obviously to have a thief punished by the goddess of the spring named on the lead tablet. How it got into someone's house (rather than a spring) is not clear, but the spell inscribed on the tablet represents a quite common kind of vengeful magical text, such finds constituting a widely attested type of ancient curse called a judicial prayer by experts today. Indeed, many curses from the ancient world are written in a prayer-like manner, and *ara*, the usual Greek word for a curse, could also signify a prayer, much as verbs like Latin *precor* 'pray' can also be used to mean 'curse'. In antiquity a prayer asking for blessing or benefit to be bestowed upon someone was thought of in much the same terms as a modern prayer or blessing is. A prayer asking for vengeance or for the calling down of another form of woe, however, was merely one of several means that could be employed to curse someone in Graeco-Roman times.[6]

The first line of the Chamalières text is written in a manner that makes it stand out from the rest of the inscription, almost as if it were a modern-day heading, and it begins very much in the prayer-like style of the Italica inscription. Presumably, then, the shape of the tablet was meant to emphasise the votive quality of the charm, although the inscription features sentiments quite unlike the kind which typically appear on winged votive plaques. The rest of the text does not seem to flow on so logically from the opening lines, however; instead, the inscription seems to comprise several different parts: the opening invocation

5 J. Gil and J.M. Luzón, '*Tabella defixionis* de Itálica', *Habis* 6 (1975), 117–34; H.S. Versnel, 'Beyond cursing: the appeal to justice in judicial prayers', in Faraone and Obbink, *Magika Hiera*, pp. 60–1; and cf. idem, 'Les imprécations et le droit', *Revue historique de droit français et étranger* 65 (1987), 5–22. The name read by the find's Spanish publishers as *Foyi[* (or perhaps *Foṛi[*) is doubtful, however: although Gil and Luzón have suggested an emendation to *Foṛi[nae]* (i.e. 'fount of Furina'), a form such as *fons foṿe[ns]* 'warming spring' or the like could equally just as well have been intended.

6 Indeed, all of the linguistically Latin judicial prayers known from France seem to have been connected with springs, although each is a quite fragmentary or otherwise difficult inscription; cf. F. Marco Simón and I. Velázquez, 'Una nueva defixio aparecida en Dax (Landes)', *Aquitania* 17 (2000), 261–74; P.-Y. Lambert, 'A *defixio* from Deneuvre, dép. Meurthe-et-Moselle', in K. Brodersen and A. Kropp (eds), *Fluchtafeln: Neue Funde und neue Deutungen zum antiken Schadenzauber* (Frankfurt a.M. 2004), pp. 59–67, and Chapter 3 below for the Amélie-les-Bains finds.



2. Inscribed *tabula ansata* from Sources-des-Roches, Chamalières

is followed by a secondary section which features most clearly a list of names, and the rest of the text is rounded off by two final, heavily stylised sequences which almost seem to be expressions that should be understood as contextually separate from the rest of the inscription. It is also quite clear that the Gaulish charm is metrical in parts – the spell seems to have been composed in a versified manner. This is not typical of the legends of Greek and Latin curse tablets, however, although it is of the curses which appear in classical literature or the pagan hymns which are often recorded in ancient grimoires. Yet the metrical form of the Chamalières text has occasioned the employment of several features typical of poetry, and recognising these helps to explain some of the more troublesome linguistic behaviours of the intriguing Old Celtic inscription.

The best translation for the somewhat contorted opening section of the spell, faithful to its versified form, is:

andedíon uediíumí	Of the infernal, I invoke,
diíuuion ri sunartiu	of the gods, before the powers,
Mapon(on) Arueriíatin	Maponos Arveriatis:
lopites sniéθθic	be quick and spin
sos brixtía anderon	these, with magic, below!

Or, in plainer language:

> Before the powers of the infernal gods, I invoke Maponos Arveriatis: be quick and spin with magic these below!

This first section of the charm is self-contained and seems to be set off by a type of stylisation that is known as ring composition or framing. It is a typical feature of some early European poetry, and particularly of medieval Irish verse, that poems or self-contained sections of poetry begin with the same word (or word

element) with which they end. This practice is called *dúnad* or 'conclusion' in medieval Irish, and the five hexasyllabic lines in this section (i.e. each line is six syllables long) appear to be ringed by the word element *ande-* 'down', the effect perhaps being to contrast *andedío-* 'infernal' (i.e. down in the depths of the earth) with *andero-* 'below' (i.e. hereunder, following on from here). Metrical composition may even explain the omission of the final syllable of the name Maponos – the final *-on* seems to have been lost or elided in front of a word beginning with a vowel, much as is the typical practice in Latin poetry (although it is not usual to omit such metrical elisions orthographically). However, a similar practice is to be noted among some of the names mentioned later on the tablet, so it has often been supposed that this is just a regular form of abbreviation.[7]

Like the Italica inscription, the Chamalières charm clearly opens with an invocation of a god, in this case Maponos, a divinity recorded elsewhere in the Celtic world, but who here seems to have been regarded as the god of the healing spring. He is also invoked 'before' the powers of the infernal gods in a manner reminiscent of an Old Irish expression which uses *ar nert* 'before the power' to mean 'for the sake of the power'. The phrasing at Chamalières has thus been thought to reflect an ancient ritual formulation of a kind also reflected in the Old Irish sentence *ni ar nert in domuin guidmit acht is ar Christ*, 'it is not for the sake of the power of the world that we pray, but for the sake of Christ'. It seems rather far-fetched to link this medieval commentary on a passage from the Bible by an Irish monk with ancient pagan rhetoric, however, and indeed *sunartiu* appears to be a collective noun – that is, the reference at Chamalières is probably to a group or range of powers. Moreover, the literal meaning of the Gaulish preposition *ri(s)* is 'before, pre-, prior to' (in terms of time) not, as is sometimes averred, 'before, in front of, in the place of' (location). Maponos is not being invoked 'on behalf of' or 'for the sake of' the power of the infernal gods here, he is being invoked 'prior' to a similar calling on their collective 'powers'. Usually it is people who are called to stand before (i.e. in front of) gods in ancient prayers and curses. Here, though, a reference seems instead to be being made to the infernal spirits (*numina* or daemons) that are often mentioned in classical curses, beings from the underworld which are sometimes characterised as servants or minions of the infernal gods. It seems likely, then, that Maponos is being invoked before (in terms of time) a group of infernal daemonic powers are – and these lesser figures will be called upon to act at a later stage of the Chamalières charm.[8]

Maponos's epithet Arveriatis 'the Arverian' has similarly been the subject of some debate. It seems literally to mean 'provider', but is usually thought to

7 G. Murphy, *Early Irish Metrics* (Dublin 1961), pp. 43–45; D.E. Evans, 'The Gaulish inscription of Chamalières: a consideration of some of the lingering uncertainties', in W. Meid and P. Anreiter (eds), *Die grösseren altkeltischen Sprachdenkmäler: Akten des Kolloquiums Innsbruck, 29. April–3. Mai 1993*, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft; Sonderheft, 95 (Innsbruck 1996), pp. 11–22; B. Mees, 'Chamalières *sníeθθic* and "binding" in Celtic', *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 35 (2007), 9–29; and cf. idem, 'Early Celtic metre at Vergiate and Prestino', *Historische Sprachforschung* forthcoming.

8 P.-Y. Lambert, 'A restatement on the Gaulish tablet from Chamalières', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 34 (1987), 10–17; E.P. Hamp, 'Gaulish *sunartiu*', *Etudes celtiques* 29 (1992), 215–21; Mees, 'Chamalières', p. 11, n. 1.

be merely a spelling mistake or adjectival variant of the name Arverni, which was that of the local Gaulish tribe. The ending *-atis* typically indicates 'belongs to, pertains to' in Gaulish, so it is often suspected that an *-n-* has accidentally been omitted here and the form was supposed to read Arver*n*iatis, i.e. Maponos the Arver*n*ian. Gaulish gods sometimes bear epithets which feature the names of the tribes who worshipped them; for example, in several inscriptions found in Switzerland and the south of Germany and France Mars is styled Caturix 'Battle-king', much as if he were a member of the Celtic Caturiges (a tribe of the western Alps). A dedication to the *genius* Arvernus is also attested from the Chamalières area, a genius usually being a local spirit or the god of a collective (i.e. a tribe, a guild or the like) in Roman tradition. The Auvergne, the region about Clermont-Ferrand, was also named after the Arverni, so a literal interpretation 'Maponos the provider' seems unlikely. Moreover, rather than a spelling mistake, we may simply be dealing merely with different forms of the same tribal name: Arverni and Arveriates (cf. Englander and English).[9]

Unlike the figure mentioned in the Italica *defixio*, Maponos is also a fairly well-known ancient divinity. He is linked with the Greek sun god Apollo in several inscriptions from northern Britain; dedications to Apollo are often connected with springs in Gaul; and a medieval French source records the site of another former spring of Maponos in the region of Savigny, near the river Rhône. Caesar also remarks in his *Gallic War* that the Gaulish deity he associated with the classical figure of Apollo was known as a protector from diseases. The Celtic Apollo is also called the 'great protector' (Anextlomarus) in inscriptions from Gaul and Britain.[10] Whether the figures venerated under the name of Apollo in Gaul can all safely be equated with Maponos is unclear, though. The Roman writer the Elder Pliny records that it was Mercury that the Arverni held in particular esteem, and several inscriptions from the Rhineland feature dedications to Mercury Arvernus, the title Arvernus seemingly (like Caturix) an indication that Mercury was the Roman name given to the great god (the *genius*, divine patron or the like) of the Arverni. Pliny even describes the making of a colossal statue of Mercury by the Greek artist Zenodorus commissioned by the Arverni at huge expense, which is presumably the reason why Mercury is called Arvernorix 'king of the Arverni' on an altar stone found as far away from the Auvergne as Miltenberg, Germany. Maponos was clearly thought by the Romans to be an ancient British equivalent of Apollo, but none of the Gaulish dedications to Apollo mentions Maponos specifically, so it is not entirely clear whether Maponos was primarily thought of as a Celtic Apollo (i.e. a sun, healing or protecting god) in all parts of the ancient Celtic world. In fact, a fragmentary Latin judicial prayer which came to

9 *CIL* XIII, nos 1462, 5046, 5054, 6474, 11473; H. Nesselhauf and H. Lieb, 'Dritter Nachtrag zu CIL XIII: Inschriften aus den germanischen Provinzen und dem Treverergebiet', *Berichte der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission* 40 (1959), no. 40; and cf. P. De Bernardo Stempel, 'Linguistically Celtic ethnonyms', in J.L. García Alonso (ed.), *Celtic and Other Languages in Ancient Europe* (Salamanca 2008), p. 114.

10 Caesar, *B.G.* 6.17; *CIL* XIII, nos 3190, 1165, 5924, 10010.124; *RIB* nos 583, 1120–22, 2415.56. In fact the attestations vary in spelling between Anextlomarus and Anextiomarus, although it is clear enough that both forms have the same meaning.

light at Deneuvre, Lorraine, in 2002, was found near a spring shrine dedicated to Hercules, and although very little of the spell can be made out, Hercules often bears epithets formed from a root *magu-* meaning 'lad' or 'son' in dedicatory inscriptions found in the area about the Rhine. Consequently, both Mercury and Hercules might have similar claims to being the Roman name under which the original Celtic figure was known in Gaulish Latin. Moreover, there are figures with names comparable to Maponos who appear in Welsh and Irish mythology, although they have no obvious particular connection with springs or healing.[11]

Maponos is echoed by the figure Mabon son of Modron in medieval Welsh tradition, a character from *Culhwch and Olwen* who is clearly of supernatural origin. His name, like that of Maponos, literally means 'Divine Son' and his mother's name means 'Divine Mother'. The style Matrona, a Gaulish equivalent of Modron, is also attested widely in inscriptions from the ancient Rhineland as the designation for a type of tribal goddess as well as being the Gaulish name of the northern French River Marne. Indeed, Mabon son of Modron seems to have given his name to the *Mabinogion*, the principal collection of Welsh mythological tales, but why such a minor character in medieval Welsh narrative should have been singled out in this manner is not immediately clear. In *Culhwch and Olwen* he is also rhetorically called the one 'who was stolen from his mother when three nights old' (*a ducpwyt yn teir nossic y wrth y vam*) and is freed by Arthur's companions from a prison in Gloucester, England, which is clearly supposed to represent an otherworldly gaol. He then helps Culhwch by catching the legendry boar Twrch Trwyth in a manner that some have suggested indicates Mabon was originally a hunter god. But his main function or role in pagan British belief remains unclear. In later Arthurian tales Mabon is mentioned merely as a famous prisoner. His lack of prominence in early Welsh literature seems strangely at odds with the appearance of his name in the title of the *Mabinogion*.

Mabon as the divine son is reflected in Irish myth by Oengus or Angus Og, however, a far more prominent mythic figure who is also known as Mac ind Og (or the Mac Og), 'the Young Son'. Oengus, the son of Ireland's River Boyne, appears in several Irish tales (most prominently in the *Dream of Oengus*) where it is clear that he is the Hibernian god of love. Indeed, the Mac Og is said to have won his palace, the fairy fortress of Brú na Bóinne (Newgrange), from his father the Dagda, the supreme god of the Irish. This winning is surely an indication of the importance of the Mac Og in the pagan Celtic pantheon, perhaps even an indication why his Welsh reflection gave his name to the *Mabinogion*. Moreover, the connection between Mabon and the Celtic otherworld seems to be paralleled by Maponos and the mention of infernal powers in the Chamalières inscription – it has even been suggested that the infernal beings mentioned in the curse were his otherworldly captors. But it is far from clear whether features associated with the mythical 'son god' figures of medieval Celtic literature are of any help in

11 Pliny, *N.H.* 34.7.18; *CIL* XIII, nos 6603, 7845, 8235, 8580, 8709; G. Moitrieux, 'Un siècle de recherches archéologique à Deneuvre', *Revue archéologique de l'est et du centre-est* 32 (1981), 65–88; L. Toorians, 'Magusanus and the "Old Lad": a case of Germanicised Celtic', *NOWELE* 42 (2003), 13–28; Lambert, 'A *defixio* from Deneuvre', pp. 60ff.

understanding the religious beliefs which informed the creation of the ancient Gaulish spring text from Chamalières.[12]

Instead, the connection of Maponos with Apollo seems more rewarding to pursue given that so many of the other items deposited along with the tablet at Les Roches are clearly to be connected with healing. The models of limbs and other parts of the body found at Chamalières are also immediately reminiscent of those discovered at the ancient sanctuary by the sources of the Seine where the northern French river was worshipped as the Dea Sequana, the 'Seine Goddess' or *genius* of the Seine. Inscribed spell tablets are not known from the Seine sanctuary (whose depositions are all a century or two more recent than those from Chamalières) but, much as Mabon was the son of Modron, it may well be that rivers were commonly thought of as being associated with healing goddesses and springs with healing divine sons in some parts of the Celtic world. It might seem, then, that Maponos is being called up from the otherworld to use his magical healing powers on the author of the Chamalières text or others whom the inscriber wished to see such favours brought upon. Exhortations such as 'quick, quick!, now, now!' are particularly common, especially in ancient Greek lamella curses, however, where they are clearly encouragements for the gods to act with some urgency on the author's demands. This connection is also made clear at Chamalières by the request that Maponos will 'spin' (as in spinning thread), as many Greek and Latin spells inscribed on lead tablets or lamellas similarly speak of magical 'tying' or 'binding'. In Irish this term (as *sníid*) has also come to mean 'twist' and has even developed a metaphorical usage as 'struggle', 'vex' or 'bring sorrow'. But *katadesmos*, the usual Greek name for the kind of curse found on inscribed lead tablets, literally indicates a 'tying down', and *hud*, the usual Brythonic term for 'magic', also originally meant 'tying' or '(spell)binding'. Hence a similar connection with magical tying or binding appears likely to have been intended by the reference in the Chamalières spell literally to 'spinning'.[13]

Yet a mention of spinning also brings to mind the traditional role of women in the drawing of thread and the spinning of yarn, an image that was often employed in early European traditions to symbolise prophecy, destiny and cursing. The metaphorical uses of the Irish cognate of *sníeθθi-* suggest an even more grievous form of spellbinding. But the classical tradition of binding magic was focused mainly on restraining and overcoming rather than twisting, vexing or troubling. In fact, two main styles can be discerned in the classical tradition of curse tablets. The first, probably the older type, typically features inscriptions which begin simply with a blunt statement like 'I bind such and such' and are usually charms which were intended to restrain an action, rather than act in a vengeful manner as do many other forms of ancient curses. This type of magical

[12] P. Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology* (Feltham 1970), pp. 32–3; E.P. Hamp, 'Mabinogi', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion* (1974–75), 243–9; revised as idem, 'Mabinogi and archaism', *Celtica* 23 (1999), 96–110; R. Bromwich (ed.), *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: the Welsh triads*, 2nd ed. (Cardiff 1978), pp. 433–5.

[13] S. Deyts, *Les bois sculptés des sources de la Seine*, XLII[e] supplément à «*Gallia*» (Paris 1983). Middle Welsh, Old Cornish and Breton *hud* (< **soitos* 'binding') are related to Old Norse *seiðr* 'magic, prophecy' and Lithuanian *saĩtas* 'cord, chain, binding'.

binding, attested from as early as the fifth century BC, is often accompanied by other expressions, sometimes even calls on the gods to witness the curse, but remains the usual form of most of the earliest ancient curse-tablet texts. Later, however, a subtler form developed, where instead of directly binding the victim, the authors or cursers record that they are 'handing over' or 'registering' the victim of the spell to or with the gods, and the gods are then called upon to do the binding. These spells also often take on more legalistic tones, much as if the charms were conceived of as representations before an underworldly court, and can feature all sorts of magical language and pseudo-legalistic formulas specifying what wrongs are to be righted, how the victims are to be bound, restrained and even punished or the like. By the Roman imperial period, though, these 'handing-over' spells had developed further into the more clearly prayer-like form seen in the Italica inscription, ones where handing over (or devoting) occurs, but actual 'binding' is sometimes not even referred to directly at all. In fact, in late thievery curses it is often only the object rather than the villain that is devoted or handed over to the gods, the robbery consequently being made a crime against the gods and for them to avenge. The type of curse being employed in an ancient magical text is usually best determined most clearly by the verbs being used, but, for example, phrases such as 'quick, quick! now, now!' are more typical of binding charms of the handing-over variety than they are of the more prayer-like expressions which became popular in Imperial Roman times. Consequently the Chamalières text seems to share several features in common with a classical curse of the handing-over type, and despite the opening reference to invoking, does not appear to be an imprecation quite as advanced down the (judicial) prayer-like path as is the Italica find.[14]

The word for 'magic' (*brixtia*) used at Chamalières, though, is more closely related to the Irish word *bricht* 'spell, charm' (and cf. medieval Welsh *lledfrith* 'enchantment' < **lled-brith*, i.e. literally 'partly magic'), a description which, unlike Brythonic *hud*, seems to have originally signified something inspired or heightened. *Bricht* can also refer to a type of Irish verse (one featuring lines eight syllables in length), a connection which might be thought to be reflected in the metrical form of the Chamalières curse. The 'these' (*sos*) to be affected by this magic are also clearly the men named in the next section and it is interesting that there are seven victims mentioned in the enchantment and that at least one is identified by a legalistic-sounding title:

C. Lucion Floron Nigrínon adgarion	Caius Lucius Florus Nigrinus the advocate,
Aemilíon Paterin(on)	Aemilius Paterinus,
Claudíon Legitumon	Claudius Legitimus,
Caelion Pelign(on)	Caelius Pelignos,

14 E. Kagarow, *Griechische Fluchtafeln*, Eos supplementa 4 (Lviv 1929); K. Preisendanz, 'Fluchtafel (Defixion)', in T. Klauser (ed.), *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* VIII (Stuttgart 1972), pp. 1–29; C.A. Faraone, 'The agonistic context of early Greek binding spells', in Faraone and Obbink, *Magika Hiera*, pp. 3–32; Versnel, 'Beyond cursing'; Graf, *Magic*, pp. 118–74; D. Ogden, 'Binding spells: curse tablets and voodoo dolls in the Greek and Roman worlds', in B. Ankarloo and S. Clarke (eds), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome* (Philadelpia 1999), pp. 1–90.

Claudío(n) Pelign(on)	Claudius Pelignos,
Marcion Victorin(on)	Marcus Victorinus,
Asiatícon AθΘedillí	Asiaticus (son) of AθΘedillos.
etic Secoui toncnaman toncsiíontío	And also the Secovi who will destine a destiny.

Seven is, of course, a special number in Celtic tradition (much as it is still felt to be in Western culture today) and often features in enumerations of supernatural beings, circumstances or effects. It was thought to be especially powerful in Greek and Roman magic where it is linked to the seven planets of ancient astronomy, the seven heavens in which they orbited and the seven astral vowels, angels or spheres of influence which were thought to govern earthly affairs. Nine, however, is the especially magical number in Celtic tradition, and it is not clear whether the listing of seven names has any magical significance or not in this passage. Usually when a list of names such as this appears in a Roman or Greek magical text it indicates who the enchantment is to be worked upon, so the number seven might just have been the number of people that the author thought the circumstances warranted be affected. The connection often made between the number seven and magic powers in the classical magical tradition is also usually thought to be a relatively late development of Greek mysticism – too late, perhaps, for it to be found reflected in a first-century Gallo-Roman text.[15]

The first man is named as an *adgarion*, a word which is related to the Old Irish verb *adgair* 'to sue, to claim', and has consequently usually been translated as 'accuser' or 'advocate' – Greek and Roman binding tablets often use legalistic terminology when they call on the gods invoked to pass judgement on those who are claimed by their cursers to have done some wrong. Others, noting how derived forms of Irish *adgair* are also (although rather rarely) used in magical contexts, have even preferred to supply more inventive translations like 'invoker', although such an interpretation would not be well paralleled in comparable Greek or Roman finds.[16] It remains possible that the Chamalières text is a curse similar to that addressed to the spring goddess at Italica – that is, a judicial prayer – but spells of this type (as in the Spanish example) usually have to do with calls for revenge on robbers. There is no suggestion of larceny in the Chamalières inscription, though. Instead, 'advocate' is a description that has important parallels in another well-known type of spell text that is concerned instead with a different aspect of ancient justice.

Invocations of gods from the underworld and lists of names to be affected are typical of a type of binding curse of a juridical nature, a common-enough example of which is the following fourth-century BC inscription which is written

15 D. Frankfurter, 'The magic of writing and the writing of magic: the power of the word in Egyptian and Greek traditions,' *Helios* 21 (1994), 199–205; R. Gordon, '"What's in a list?" Listing in Greek and Graeco-Roman malign magical texts', in D.R. Jordan *et al.* (eds), *The World of Ancient Magic: papers from the first international Samson Eitrem seminar at the Norwegian Institute at Athens, 4–8 May 1997*, Papers from the Norwegian Institute at Athens 4 (Bergen 1999), pp. 239–77.

16 Lambert, 'Tablette gauloise', p. 154; *DIL* s.v. *adgaire*.

on both sides of a lead lamella unearthed in Attica, Greece, over a century ago:[17]

> Hermes of the underworld and Hecate of the underworld. Let Pherenikos be bound before Hermes of the underworld. And I bind Galene, the one who associated with Pherenikos, before Hermes of the underworld and Hecate of the underworld. And just as this lead is lifeless and cold, so may Pherenikos and his things be lifeless and cold; and so too for the things which Pherenikos's collaborators say and plot concerning me.
>
> May Thersilochos, Oinophilos, Philôtios and whoever else is an advocate for Pherenikos be bound before Hermes of the underworld and Hecate of the underworld. And I bind the soul and mind and tongue and plans of Pherenikos, whatever he does and plots concerning me: may everything be contrary for him and for those who plot and act with him.

One of the more common reasons for the production of curse tablets in the ancient world was as supernatural attempts to influence the outcomes of legal disputes. Litigation was a common feature of classical Greek and Roman life, especially among the rich, and as Plato notes in his *Republic*, priests and soothsayers who could compose *katadesmoi* for a fee could be found in many ancient towns. It is common enough for the various victims mentioned in such juridical curses to be described by terms such as 'accuser', 'advocate', 'associate' or 'witness' – the list of names in such instances usually seems to represent a person and his supporters and lawyers who have brought a suit against the author of the curse. A fragmentary example of such a litigation curse written in Greek and found on a sadly damaged lead lamella from Hyères (the ancient Greek colony of Olbia) in the south-east of France merely describes 'adversaries … at trial' (*pantas … tidikous*). But 'advocate' (Latin *advocatus*, Greek *synêgoros*) is by far the most common of legalistic titles used in juridical *defixiones*. Indeed, given they are so similar in form, the Gaulish word *adgarion* may even be calqued on its Roman equivalent *advocatus*. Moreover, a legal dispute is suggested by the concluding line of this section of the Chamalières spell.[18]

The Celtic curse text from the ancient sacred pool then goes on to mention figures called the Secovi, who will 'destine a destiny', using an early form of an expression that also appears in medieval Welsh sources where fates are sworn upon figures such as Culhwch. This key expression, found both in Gaulish and Welsh, is an etymological or logical figure very much like similar English expressions such as *walk the walk* and *talk the talk* – that is, the verb and noun both reflect versions of the same basic word. This represents a form of stylised language, the same kind which typically appears in poetry as well as less formal expressions

17 J.G. Gager (ed.), *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York 1992), no. 40.

18 Plato, *Resp.* 2 (364C) [= Gager (ed.), *Curse Tablets*, no. 140]; *IGF* no. 70; C.A. Faraone, 'Curses and social control in the law courts of Classical Athens', *Dike* 2 (1999), 99–121; also published in D. Cohen (ed.), *Demokratie, Recht und soziale Kontrolle im klassischen Athen*, Schriften des Historischen Kollegs, Kolloquien, 49 (Munich 2002), pp. 77–92.

such as sayings and rounds: compare the use of alliteration and assonance in *the more the merrier* or the repetition and rhyme in *if you can't do the time, don't do the crime*. The notion of 'destining a destiny' also seems to accord with the 'spinning' demanded earlier in the tablet, though. In fact, given the mention of Secovi, a description that seems literally to mean 'Cutters', we may be dealing not just with any destiny, but with a reference to the Fates.[19]

A common connection is made in many European traditions between spinning, cutting and destinies or fates. Indeed, the classical Fates (the Moirae or Parcae) are often depicted in such terms: Clotho the spinner, Lachesis the measurer and Atropos the cutter of the thread of mortal life. Greek words for 'fate' such as *moira* also literally mean 'share' or 'portion' – the classical fates were literally 'apportioners'. No figures quite like the Moirae appear in Irish or Welsh tradition, and the term Secovi is masculine, after all, which suggests that male divinities or powers were meant here. A more profitable comparison than to individual Gaulish 'destiners' or 'apportioners' such as Rosmerta, Smertrios, Atesmerta and Cantismerta (figures known only from inscriptions on ancient altar stones) might instead be to the Celtic *genii cucullati* or 'hooded spirits', male supernatural figures which are often represented in threes when they appear in British stone carvings. Although what they were called in Gaulish is not known (they are only named once, and in Latin, as 'hooded spirits' on an altar stone from southern Austria), they are represented pictorially in several votive contexts (and even on a coin) from Gaul, Britain, the Rhineland and the Eastern Alps. Their description as *genii* suggests they were local or ethnic guardian spirits and, as they are sometimes pictured holding swords, eggs, fruit or scrolls, they are often thought to have been linked with fertility, wisdom, healing and death. Sometimes depicted on stones found near holy springs and wells, and treated by some specialists (without much justification) as if they were ancient brownies or leprechauns, these mysterious spirits are even found on a few occasions in connection with mother goddesses. Whether the Secovi were *genii cucullati* or some other kind of native fatalistic (or chthonic) powers, however, is not altogether clear.[20]

Rather more clearly, though, curses can be used in Greek tradition to try to restrain the actions of gods, and constraining the Fates (or similar figures) would seem to have been especially pertinent in the case of a trial. Some Greek curses even make reference to supernatural figures called the Praxidikai, or 'exactors of justice', who seem to be more explicitly legalistic equivalents to the Fates. Persephone (Roman Proserpine), the goddess who most commonly appears in

19 T.M. Charles-Edwards, '*Mi a dynghaf dynghed* and related problems', in J.F. Eska *et al.* (eds), *Hispano-Gallo-Brittonica: essays in honour of Professor D. Ellis Evans on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday* (Cardiff 1995), pp. 1–15; S. Schumacher, 'Old Irish **tucaid*, *tocad* and Middle Welsh *tynghaf tynghet* re-examined', *Ériu* 46 (1995), 49–57.

20 R. Egger, *Römische Antike und frühes Christentum: Ausgewählte Schriften von Rudolf Egger; Zur Vollendung seines 80. Lebensjahres*, ed. Artur Betz and Gotbert Moro, 2 vols (Klagenfurt 1962–63), I, pp. 159–71; W. Deonna, *De Télesphore au «moine bourru»: dieux, génies et démons encapuchonnés*, Collection Latomus 21 (Brussels 1955); G. Webster, *The British Celts and their Gods under Rome* (London 1986), pp. 66–70; Birkhan, *Kelten*, pp. 747–50; and cf. P. Schrijver, 'Indo-European **(s)mer-* in Greek and Celtic', in J.H.W. Penney (ed.), *Indo-European Perspectives: studies in honour of Anna Morpurgo Davies* (Oxford 2004), pp. 292–9.

Greek curses, along with (as in the example cited above) Hermes and Hecate, is also sometimes called a Praxidike, and Hecate, too, was considered to be a triple goddess, often being depicted with three faces. In Hecate's case her triplicity symbolised her liminality, her connection with in-between things such as crossroads and graves, much as Hermes's similar identification with the underworld was due to his role as psychopomp, the leader of souls into the afterlife. On the other hand, supplementary supernatural figures are sometimes called upon in classical curses to do the actual punishing after figures such as Persephone or Hecate have bound the victims (and found them wanting), so it might well be that the Secovi were attendant otherworldly powers who were summoned before (in terms of time) Maponos, but were subsequently supposed to perform a supplementary task – that is, they are the 'powers of the infernal gods' referred to in the opening line of the Chamalières spell. Indeed, the Latin inscription on a curse tablet found at Wilten (ancient Veldidina), Austria, in 1954 clearly records such a two-stage process. A Celtic divinity is mentioned in its spell text along with Mercury (the Roman counterpart of Hermes) and the fiery Roman mythical figure Cacus:[21]

> Secundina commissions Mercury and Moltinus concerning whoever has stolen two necklaces worth fourteen pence, that deceitful Cacus remove him and his fortune just as they were taken from her, the very things which she hands over to you so that you will track them down. She hands them over to you so that you will track him down and separate him from his fortune, from his family and from his dear ones. With this she commissions you: you must bring them to justice.

Moltinus is recorded only once otherwise, on a memorial from Maçon, France, where a priest of Moltinus is mentioned in the company of two Roman clerics. Moltinus's name is clearly based on the Celtic word for 'ram', which has entered English (via French) as *mutton*, but the reason for his appearance in a thievery curse is not at all clear. Evidently, however, it is the monstrous, fire-breathing Cacus, famous for having stolen cattle from Hercules, who is being called on to punish the victim of the probably late-first-century AD Wilten find. Cacus, who before being slain by Hercules was thought to live in a gigantic cavern under one of Rome's seven hills, appears to be being called upon at Wilten as an especially terrible chthonic power over whom Mercury and the ram-god Moltinus have influence.[22] Presumably, then, the Secovi were similarly dire supernatural powers who were thought somehow to be under the command of Maponos, their designation as 'Cutters' suggesting that they, like the fiery Cacus, were vengeful or otherwise fateful beings. Consequently, the destining of a destiny, like the spinning at Chamalières, is probably best understood as a form of supernatural intervention, part of the cursing, rather than a reference to terrestrial justice. The

21 L. Franz, 'Ein Fluchtäfelchen aus Veldidena', *Jahreshefte des Österreichischen archäologischen Instituts* 44 (1959), suppl. cols. 69–76; R. Egger, 'Nordtirols älteste Handinschrift', *Sitzungsberichte der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Phil.-Hist. Klasse* 244 (1964) , no. 1; Gager, *Curse Tablets*, no. 101.

22 *CIL* XIII, no. 2878; J.P. Small, *Cacus and Marsyas in Etrusco-Roman Legend* (Princeton 1982).

phrasing *etic Secoui* (literally 'and also the Cutters') presumably indicates 'consequently' or 'thereafter', then – after Maponos had finished his 'spinning' of the seven victims of the curse – rather than indicating that the Secovi were also to be bound by the spring god. Although it seems to have been expressed imprecisely, this section appears to reconcile the opening statement that Maponos is to be summoned 'prior to' the powers of the chthonic gods with an explanation of the role that the infernal 'Cutters' were subsequently to play in the curse: destining the destinies of the victims of the Gaulish spell after Maponos had first 'spun' them.

Chamalières's spinning and a connection with destining or judging (i.e. 'measuring' – the intervening stage between fatalistic 'spinning' and 'cutting' in classical tradition) seems further reflected in the following, although rather more controversial, expressions. The next section of the spell seems to revert more obviously to the stylised form of the opening lines, but is expressed in a less formally rhythmic and syntactically convoluted manner:

meíon ponc sesit	Little, when sowed,
buetid ollon	may it thus become great,
reguc cambíon	and I straighten the crooked.
exsops pissíumí	Blind I shall see,
isoc cantí rissu	and this of charm I have told (?),
ison son bissíet	will ensure this.
luge dessumíis	I prepare them for committing,
luge dessumíis	I prepare them for committing,
luge dessumíis luxe	I prepare them for committing, for committing!

Instead of hexasyllabic verses, this section plainly begins with four main clauses arranged as pairs, the first three of which appear to be deliberately allusive in meaning given that a clear sense of opposition is being articulated here (little becoming great, righting the crooked, seeing although blind). The opening two lines have been read as 'May it destine little so that it may be great' (i.e. reading *toncsesit* instead of *ponc sesit*) and it is not entirely clear what the fifth line means either, although the likely connection of *rissu* to the Old Irish term *ris* 'news, report, a tale, tidings' suggests that it concerns an action connected with the inscribing of the curse. The form *cantí* has generally been connected with Gaulish *cantlos* 'song' and seems to represent an expression which literally means 'magical song, enchantment' – indeed, the term's Irish equivalent, *cétal*, is sometimes used to describe magical charms (such as that sung by the euhemerised god Lugh in the *Second Battle of Moytura*). Consequently, the 'this' seemingly being ensured for what has apparently been 'told' (i.e. recorded on) the tablet appears to be a reference to the *toncnaman* or 'destiny' mentioned at the end of the list of names. It has been suggested that the passage is some sort of mantra to be spoken during the performance of a ritual; others have noted that the expression 'I straighten the crooked' is paralleled by a passage in Greek myth describing the powers of Zeus. Some Greek and Roman curse texts also feature oppositional expressions such as 'may he sow, but not reap' or 'may he not be served, either by the little or the great'. Seeing without eyes, though, is suggestive of a lack of bias, or,

given the references to spinning and fate, fortune telling (soothsayers are often represented as blind in European folklore). Straightening the crooked similarly suggests a moralistic or juridical sentiment much as we might expect to find in a litigation curse. Nonetheless, we may just be dealing with several figurative expressions indicating sowing (the seeds of) doubt, perspicacity and untwisting the truth. Classical curses often contain allusive language of the 'persuasive analogy', 'just as …, so too …' or 'sympathetic' type; in the Wilten curse, for example, Secundina wants her victims to be removed (*ablatum*) by Cacus just as her possessions were taken away (*auferat*). Perhaps a similar sort of reasoning is at hand at Chamalières, then: that is, a kind of oppositional rhetoric is being invoked in this section which was supposed to ensure that things as they currently stood would be reversed.[23]

These lines are then followed, and the inscription completed, by another sentence which clearly also features stylised language. It consists of a tripled expression rounded off by a final and shortened variation of it in what seems to be another instance of the ring composition typical of early Irish poetry. Despite the seemingly unconnected nature of the various sections of the Gaulish curse, parts of it appear to have their origin in versified, oral language rather than in formulas translated or copied out from books of spells. In fact, spells are often thought of as 'sung' in ancient and medieval tradition (both Latin *carmen* 'spell' and Greek *epôdê* 'charm' are literally something chanted or sung), so it may be that parts of the Chamalières text represent refrains taken from originally spoken and hence versified magical spells.

There has been much speculation concerning this final passage, however, and the appearance of a word that looks somewhat like the name of the Celtic god Lugh. Its three-ness also seems typically Celtic, but similar expressions are known in Greek binding spells. One example from North Africa ends with the encouragement 'Now, now, now! quickly, quickly, quickly! bind, bind, bind them!', and calling on the gods three times (for emphasis) is a particularly common occurrence in ancient Graeco-Egyptian magic. The use of a word like *luge* 'for committing' is also well paralleled in Greek and Roman curses of the handing-over or registering variety – those which entrust their victims to the gods to pass judgement on in their unearthly courts. The form *luge* used here is related to English words such as *lock* and *lay*, and of course 'laying' a spell is a typical enough way of describing its effecting. Yet as with *sníeθθic* 'spin', such literal etymological meanings can only serve as a guide to how such a word may have been used in the context of a Gaulish juridical curse. After all, the closest equivalent to *luge* in Irish means 'put' and typically produces meanings such as 'support' (*fo-loing*) and 'claim' or 'possess' (*in-loing*) when used in legalistic contexts. Given the typically juridical nature of the language employed in classical binding spells, it seems likely that *luge* meant to 'put' or 'place' in a legal sense: to commit, contract or arraign, to put someone under an obligation or to put them before a court. The Greek

23 Hesiod, *Op.* 7; E.A. Gray (ed.), *Cath Maige Tuired: the Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, Irish Texts Society 52 (Naas 1982), pp. 58–9 (§129); *PGM* no. VII.215–18; P.K. Ford, 'The blind, the dumb, and the ugly: aspects of poets and their craft', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 19 (1990), 37ff.; Faraone, 'Agonistic context', p. 8; Mees, 'Chamalières', pp. 18–20.

word *tithêmai* 'put' is commonly used in handing-over curses as it could also be used to mean 'assign' or 'give' as well as 'hand down' or 'ordain'. Consequently this final section seems to accord particularly well with the prayer-like invocation and the call upon Maponos to be quick and to spin (i.e. bind) the seven victims, by supplying the last essential characteristic of a Greek or Roman handing-over curse: an indication of the committing or entrusting of victims to the gods (and their attendant powers) in order that they may bind them.[24]

The votive-like shape of the Chamalières tablet at first suggests that it may once have been displayed publicly at the sacred spring, perhaps mounted on one of the wooden votives, rather than having been thrown directly into its waters. Indeed, it is often surmised that the contents of curse texts were occasionally made public, especially those which were based on prayers, much as ancient legal judgements sometimes clearly were. A Greek inscription from a temple on Delos even recalls that part of the reason for the success of the temple's cult had been that the god Serapis had intervened in a legal dispute where he had (*defixio*-like) 'bound the tongues of sinful men' so they were unable to provide testimony harmful to the cult's cause.[25] Curses which seemed to be justified in the minds of their initiators were often not thought of as so sneaky and illicit in ancient times. In fact, a curse might well have been more effective if the victims named in it knew that their suit was unjust and they had been put under divine sanction in this way.

Examples of single-winged *ansata* forms (and notably not double), however, have been found drawn onto classical binding tablets and protective charm lamellas as well as in spells preserved in ancient Greek grimoires that are used to highlight (or mark off) magical formulas, symbols or words. Moreover, two bronze examples of one-handled *ansata* tablets inscribed with Greek charms against hail are also known from the south of Gaul. Such magical use of *ansata* tablets probably provided the direct physical model for the Chamalières find – the 'winged' shape had evidently become more than just symbolic of dedication. Indeed, curse tablets are often found rolled up and otherwise expressed as if they were letters to the gods. Some rolled-up examples of *tabellae defixionum* even have names written on their outsides, addressed just as ancient letters were. There are also a handful of Roman binding spells which are clearly expressed as if they were hymns – versified requests to the gods modelled on solemn rhythmical prayers. The shape of the Chamalières tablet would appear to be not just symbolic, then, of its curse's supplicatory or invocatory nature. Rather, its otherwise impractical single handle appears to be an indication that it is not a votive, but a spell tablet instead.[26]

24 A. Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae, quotquot innotuerunt tam in Graecis orientis quam in totius occidentis partibus praeter Attica in* Corpore inscriptionum Atticarum *editas* (Paris 1904), no. 239; Mees, 'Chamalières', pp. 20–3.

25 *IG* XI.4, no. 1299; Faraone, 'Agonistic context', pp. 19–20.

26 *PGM* no. LVI.1010; Egger, *Römisches Antike* I, pp. 81–97; R. Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets: the inscribed gold, silver, copper and bronze 'lamellae' – Text and commentary*, Papyrologica Colonensia 22 (Opladen, 1994), nos 11 [= *IGF* nos 90–1], 18, 45, 66; J. Blänsdorf, '"Guter, heilige Atthis": Eine Fluchtafel aus dem Mainzer Isis- und Mater-Magna-Heiligtum (Inv.-Nr. 201 B 36)', in Brodersen and Kropp, *Fluchtafeln*, pp. 51–8.

Although the Chamalières inscription begins in a manner typical of those found on Graeco-Roman curse tablets, not all sections of the text have clear parallels in classical finds. Still, it does seem clear that rather than a blessing, an oath, a ritual or a healing charm, the Chamalières find records a curse aimed at seeing off a legal suit brought by one or more of the clients of Caius Lucius Florus Nigrinus and his associates by the author of the binding charm. It features some references to the fixing of fates unlike those usually found on classical curse tablets, as well as verses whose subject matter is at best only reminiscent of elements recorded in Greek and Roman spells. But spell texts on a similar juridical theme are well known from Greek and Roman experience, as are depositions of lead curse tablets into springs and wells. In fact, it may be only the poetic style of the text that often makes the Chamalières spell seem unlike a typical classical find. Some aspects of the curse (and the way it has been recorded) clearly reflect typical Greek or Roman styles; others, however, do not. Thus rather than merely representing a loose adaptation of a typical ancient binding spell, it might equally be thought that some of the key features of Greek or Roman *defixiones* have simply been adopted into an ancient Celtic tradition of spinning and destining fates at Chamalières, some echoes of which can also be perceived in later Insular Celtic texts. This tradition was evidently commuted at Les Roches into a typical classical form, inscribed on a winged tablet and dropped into a cultic spring. But it is to Celtic gods and with Celtic words that the curse is addressed, expressions which seem substantially to have represented aspects of a pre-Roman, indigenous magical tradition. The Chamalières curse is clearly crucially dependent on the ancient genre of litigative binding spells; but it is expressed in a style and with a vocabulary that indicates it is much more than just a simple translation of a Greek or Roman curse.

Clearly, however, it was not just the magical powers attributed to places such as the Chamalières spring that made them likely places for the deposition of ancient spell tablets: it was their connection with divinities to whom the springs were sacred. Supernatural patrons of springs such as Maponos and his female counterpart addressed at Italica were clearly thought to live in or under the earth, and hence holy springs dedicated to such figures were judged ideal places to deposit magical texts which relied on the intercession of otherworldly powers to ensure that their conditions were met. Evidently, one of the worshippers who came to the Chamalières sanctuary in the first century was not only interested in Maponos's powers of healing, but was seeking another kind of favour from the god at his isolated countryside spring. The most remarkable action of the visitor, however, was the language that he used in his written request (assuming that, like the victims and the supernatural figures, the curser was male), not so much the thought that a local Gaulish spring god could be called upon in such a manner.

After all, in classical tradition it was deities who were thought to reside in or under the earth which are called upon most often in curses. The Greek gods were distinguished either as heavenly (celestial or supernal) and earthly (chthonic or infernal), and it was chthonic or infernal deities and their helpers (and especially liminal [i.e. both supernal and infernal] figures such as Hermes, Hecate and Persephone) that were most strongly identified with secret and magical powers. Indeed, the Tuatha Dé Danann, the chief Hibernian gods, were mostly held to

live in fairy mounds and other underworldly or hidden places, and Maponos's Welsh reflection, Mabon son of Modron, even seems to have preserved some aspect of a chthonic connection in the tradition of his otherworldly imprisonment. Mabon's fate is not merely reminiscent of that accorded to Pryderi (or 'Anxiety'), a more important figure in the *Mabinogion*, though, but also seems quite similar to the story of the classical fertility goddess Persephone, the daughter of the earth goddess Demeter, who was stolen away to the underworld where she became the wife of Hades.[27] Maponos appears to have been a lively and bright figure, however, an aspect underlined by his association with Apollo, as well as, apparently, with Oengus, the Mac Og, the rivery Irish god of love. He does not seem to have been a dread or furtive chthonian power – Maponos's Welsh reflection is the only hint that he may have been thought of in similar terms to liminal Greek gods such as Persephone or Hecate. Rather than a god with a chthonic aspect, Maponos's connection with destiny (and hence cursing) might well only be a reflection of his association with healing, a consequence of his reputation for having restorative powers. Apollo never appears in *defixiones* and the Chamalières inscription bears little sign of the vengeful sentiments so clear in the Wilten and Italica finds – the traditions recorded for Maponos's Welsh reflection Mabon may not be a reliable guide to understanding the Gaulish cult of the divine son. Evidently the Celts shared some aspects of the tradition of separating some of their gods off into a category of chthonic divinities, and even (at least at Chamalières, and perhaps also at Wilten) in a belief in chthonic servants who attended the latter. Yet there are other Old Celtic finds which suggest that the ancient Celtic attitude to the divinities who dwelt in the world below was rather different to that held by the Greeks and Romans, and that it was markedly different to the darker and grimmer classical understanding of the ancient infernal powers.

[27] W.J. Gruffydd, *Rhiannon: an inquiry into the origin of the first and third branches of the Mabinogi* (Cardiff 1953), pp. 90ff. In fact, the title *Mabinogion* might well be explained simply as '(tales) pertaining to Mabon (i.e. Pryderi)'.

3

Dark Waters

Aquatic instances of *defixiones* are not restricted to ancient discoveries from the Continent – depositions of curse tablets in watery conduits to the nether regions are also a well-known type of find from Roman Britain. Indeed, Roman Britain has proved an extraordinary source for the discovery of curse tablets since the 1970s, accounting for approximately half of all preserved Latin-language *defixiones* – and of these a significant proportion are spring or river finds. This epigraphic richness is not limited to linguistically Latin curse inscriptions, however, but also extends to Celtic texts: two more ancient Celtic curses came to light with the publication in the 1980s of many Latin curse tablets from the medicinal cultic spring at Bath. Moreover, this south-western English city is the former site of a much more famous, longer-lasting and better-established healing cult than that at Chamalières, although it also had its origin in pre-Roman times. In fact, the complex that was erected about the spring at Bath in antiquity eventually became so important and large that it now has its own museum, an institution which preserves the most impressive of all Roman remains to be seen in Britain today. Legend records that an early British king called Bladud discovered the hot waters and founded the ancient city of Bath, and the site remained famous for its mineral springs throughout medieval and modern times. Its Roman ruins are not the only feature which keeps the elegant Georgian sandstone city one of the most popular tourist attractions in the United Kingdom.[1]

Bath was known in Latin as Aquae Sulis, the 'waters of Sulis', and was named for the Celtic goddess who was especially honoured there in Roman times. Known as Sulis Minerva in the Roman interpretation of her cult, a hot spring has flowed at Bath since the prehistoric period, and the first Roman constructions from the area date from about the time of the Emperor Nero, when Sulis's spring was surrounded by a stonework reservoir and a large temple to the goddess was erected on a podium nearby. These initial works were extended again and again over the next few centuries until by late Imperial times a great complex

1 R.S.O. Tomlin, 'Was ancient British Celtic ever a written language?', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 34 (1987), 18–25; idem, 'The curse tablets', in B.W. Cunliffe (ed.), *The Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath, Volume 2: finds from the sacred spring*, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology monographs 16 (Oxford 1988), pp. 59–270; also published as *Tabellae Sulis: Roman inscribed tablets of tin and lead from the sacred spring at Bath* (Oxford 1988).

of public and religious buildings had been established at Bath, one that dominated the surrounding Romano-British town. In the second century the reservoir had been roofed over and columns and statues erected about the spring; by the fourth century the associated complex included a large colonnaded temple precinct replete with side chapels, an ample ambulatory, a great altar and an elaborate connected suite of baths. Visited by many thousands of tourists today, Roman Bath was also, as is proved by inscriptions on stone from the area, visited by travellers from far and wide during the glory years of the Empire. But very many more and remarkably darker texts were discovered when the reservoir and spring were partially excavated in 1979–80, all of which are clearly curses.[2]

Bathing in Roman times was as much a feature of public life as was the ancient theatre or market-place. The remains of public baths are known from all over the Roman world, the largest, such as at Bath, once featuring series of baths (and even steam rooms) of different temperatures which were tended by slaves who operated sophisticated ducted heating systems. This ancient tradition died out in Western Europe at the end of antiquity, but was continued in the Byzantine East and lives on in the form of Turkish baths. Elaborate bathing complexes were not unique to Roman Bath, then, although few other establishments in the Roman world were quite as elaborate or of comparable size, and neither were they also associated with a healing cult as popular as that of Sulis Minerva.

The spring at Bath daily pumps out over a million litres of hot water, waters which are still today thought by some to have medicinal powers. The 1979–80 excavation was started, somewhat ironically though, after a child had died from a bacterial infection contracted while visiting the Bath museum, and so, as a subsidiary to the restoration work required to ensure public health, it focused mostly on the spring and reservoir. The spring had been partially excavated in the nineteenth century and the more careful 1979–80 investigation proved similarly incomplete, being restricted substantially only to the southern half of the reservoir and spring. Thus only a representative sample of finds has been rescued to date from the depths of the ancient British sacred site.

Yet magical healing is not the only supernatural experience that was commonly associated with ancient baths. Curse tablets are a relatively frequent find among the ruins of ancient bathing establishments, and baths are even sometimes mentioned in classical amatory spells as if there was something inherently uncanny about ancient bathing. The frequency of curse finds at ancient baths has been ascribed to the high rates of larceny experienced at these public institutions where noble and commoner, the rich and slaves could all be found in attendance. But such a dubious reputation, no matter how justified, hardly seems a convincing explanation for the widespread nature of the recurrent ancient connection between baths and magic, especially when the amatory aspect is taken into account. There remains the suspicion that the magical reputation of ancient baths stems from superstitions above and beyond those associated with the therapeutic (and recuperative) powers such places were held to have: in addition to being places of

2 B.W. Cunliffe, *The Book of Roman Bath* (London 1995); M. Green, *Celtic Goddesses: warriors, virgins and mothers* (London 1995), pp. 93–9.

medicinal and religious power, ancient baths also appear to have been seen as sites which encouraged temptation, a feeling so strong that magical defences and redress were sometimes thought to be necessary to combat it. In fact, early Christian sources even record tales of murderous demons who were thought to be present at some ancient bathing houses, macabre stories which suggest that the frequent discovery of curse tablets at such places cannot be explained simply as a reflection of the comparably high rates of crime often noted at ancient bathing establishments. Evidently all sorts of spirits were thought to linger at ancient baths, from the pleasant and helpful to the sinister and dangerous. The curse tablets from Bath, though, are more directly connected with religion than are those from most comparable bathing complexes – they are connected with the cult of the goddess Sulis and her deep and dark perpetually boiling spring.[3]

From a numerical perspective, the 100-plus *defixiones* recovered from the spring at Bath comprise the most significant find of ancient curses to have been published from anywhere in Europe. A substantial trove of largely unedited curse tablets made of talc is known from ancient Amathous, Cyprus, but it is unclear how many actual *katadesmoi* are represented by this reportedly even larger imprecatory find.[4] Yet not only does the excavation of the spring at Bath remain incomplete, some of the tablets which have been retrieved have not even yet been unrolled, and a significant proportion of those which have been investigated properly are too fragmentary or otherwise corrupt for much to be made of the texts they bear. Nonetheless, most of the inscribed curses found in the goddess's watery sanctuary that have been examined and are preserved well enough to be read have proved rather stereotypical: they almost exclusively bear curses of just one type. Just like the spring-goddess text from Italica, they nearly all concern thieves and the retrieval of stolen goods. They are clearly to be categorised, then, as judicial prayers, as they typically feature dedications of stolen goods to the goddess and then calls upon Sulis to avenge their theft. In fact, sometimes these goods were evidently even lost at the goddess's baths. A typical example of such a bathing-related curse is the following letter-like lamella inscription written on a 78mm by 91mm pewter sheet by or for a man called Solinus:[5]

> Solinus to the goddess Sulis Minerva. I give to your divinity (and) majesty (my) bathing tunic and cloak. Do not allow sleep or health to him who has done me wrong, whether man or woman, whether slave or free, unless he reveals himself and brings those goods to your temple …

The rest of this text is too damaged to be read with much surety, but seems to

3 C. Bonner, 'Demons of the baths', in S.R.K. Glanville (ed.), *Studies Presented to F.Ll. Griffith* (Milford 1932), pp. 203–8; *PGM* nos II.49–52, VI.469, XXXVI.69–101 & 334–40, XXXVIII.1–26; K.M.D. Dunbabin, '*Baiarum Grata Voluptas*: pleasures and dangers of the baths', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 57 (1989), 33ff.; Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, no. 52; Fagan, *Bathing*, pp. 36–8.

4 Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae*, nos 22–37; P. Aupert and D.R. Jordan, 'Magical inscriptions on talc tablets from Amathous', *American Journal of Archaeology* 85 (1981), 184; Ogden, 'Binding spells', p. 17.

5 Tomlin, 'The curse tablets', no. 32.

extend the curse to the victim's children and other members of his family, denying them sleep or health, too, 'unless they bring those things to your temple'.

Many of the other robberies mentioned in the curses from Bath have been assumed to represent losses similar to that of Solinus – thefts of items such as bathing robes committed while the victim had been relaxing in the goddess's sacred waters. An essential connection between bath thieves and cursing practice seems undeniable. Nonetheless, most of the curses from Bath show no obvious sign that they have much to do with similarly aggrieved bathers, but seem instead to reflect other all-too-common sorts of larceny. Sometimes the curses betray other evidence, however, that is more revealing still. Perhaps most notably, another fairly typical, but in one aspect unique, curse from the spring at Bath reads:[6]

> I have dedicated to the goddess Sulis the six silver coins which I have lost. It is for the goddess to exact it [i.e. their value] from the names written below: Senicianus and Saturninus and Anniola. The written page has been copied out.

The reverse of the tablet is also inscribed with larger letters which repeat:

> An(n)iola.
> Senicianus.
> Saturninus.

Evidently, many of the curses from Bath were first composed on papyrus or paper before being transcribed onto the surviving tablets, and in one case the act of transmission even seems to have been considered such an important part of the process that the act of copying was explicitly acknowledged on the final imprecatory product. The goddess may have been thought to have looked favourably on such ritualised correctness, the number of curse-tablet finds at Bath alone being suggestive of a highly formalised practice. It seems quite possible, then, that crimes committed at the baths of Aquae Sulis may have been seen as matters which slighted the goddess herself, and if brought to her attention in the form of such careful missives might have been considered matters suitable for divine intervention. Moreover, the other, less-clearly bathing-related curses also found in the sacred spring might similarly have been thought worthy of bringing to Sulis's attention because a reputation had developed concerning the intervention of the goddess in cases of thieves active at her baths. Yet most of the curses are so repetitive in nature that (like the examples cited above) they seem to have been copied out from formularies (i.e. books of curses which detailed the appropriate styles to be used). Unlike examples such as the Chamalières tablet, though, they are also often written in unpractised hands and feature many spelling mistakes (such as Aniola for Anniola), as though they were written not by professional curse-makers but by members of the general public. The formulaic nature of the Bath curses suggests that the 'written pages' or preparatory models used in the manufacture of the tablets may have been prepared by professional curse-composers, but that the individual cursers (or commissioners) of the *defixiones*

6 Ibid., no. 8 [= Gager, *Curse Tablets*, no. 94].

were required to write the texts onto the specially created lamellas themselves. Rhetorically similar instances of cursing are attested widely enough from other parts of the Roman world, and indeed more commonly from sites other than baths – even public places such as amphitheatres have produced lead tablets bearing judicial prayers. Yet when found in similar numbers it is usually quite evident that the curses have been executed by expert writers (and moreover, often only by a single author), not a plethora of comparatively amateur scribes as is so evidently the case at Bath. Finds like the Chamalières *defixio* suggest that the connection between curses and sacred springs was older than that between curse tablets and public bathing, however, much as the references to magical seduction and the intervention of murderous demons point to a less than matter-of-fact reason for the discovery of so many curse tablets in the ruins of ancient baths.

It is perhaps not too surprising, therefore, that Old Brittonic writing has been discovered only among what is one of the largest single discoveries of ancient inscriptions, so many of which seem to have been executed by everyday writers rather than professional stonecutters, plaque-engravers or scribes. Both of the linguistically Celtic finds from Bath are also comparatively early texts – they are written in hands which date them to the earlier of the two periods represented more generally by the spring's *defixiones*. Yet apart from the names which appear in early coin legends, the two curses in the ancient British (or Old Brittonic) tongue that were discovered among the Bath finds represent the only direct attestations of old British Celtic – most of what is known about the ancient British language otherwise is reliant on words and names found in classical accounts or comparison with medieval Breton, Cornish and Welsh. Not much could be made of the Celtic texts from Bath by the first scholars to assess them, though, and neither of them represents a particularly straightforward type of binding charm.

The 130-odd Bath *tabellae defixionum* were found among over 12,000 coins, silver, bronze and pewter jugs, cups, bowls, plates and other votive finds which were recovered during the two excavations of the sacred spring. Many of these items were obviously religious in nature – most of the vessels, for example, seem to have been ritual objects (some even bear inscribed dedications to Sulis) that were thrown into the reservoir when they began to wear. The coins, then, appear to have been deposited in the spring for more particular reasons than just a general sense of good luck (as they are usually intended when thrown into such sites today), as presumably were the other items found in the spring, such as engraved gemstones, a ceremonial flute, a ritual tin mask and an ivory amulet in the shape of a woman's breasts. In fact, it was not only Sulis Minerva who was worshipped at Bath – altars dedicated to several other gods are known from the complex, and several of the *defixiones* are also addressed to deities other than the goddess of the Romano-British spring.

Sulis herself belongs to a category of Celtic aquatic deities who owe their names to celestial features. The form Sulis literally means 'sun' and is paralleled most obviously elsewhere in the Celtic world by the continental spring goddess Sirona who is literally the 'starry-one' (cf. Old Irish *ser* 'star'). The Old Celtic word for 'sun' has come to mean 'eye' (*suil*) in Irish, however, which has led some to claim that Sulis might have been a goddess of seeing or (fore)sight, and hence

of healing eyes. Nonetheless, her heavenly connection is further represented in friezes depicting personifications of the Sun and Moon which have also been discovered over the years in the temple complex at Bath (one over the entrance to the spring, the other facing it from a building across the other side of the temple yard). Moreover, Celtic spring goddesses attested in Gaul are often paired with similarly celestial figures such as Grannus, the bearer of a name comparable to Old Irish *greann* 'sun', and a figure who is usually associated with the Greek sun god Apollo. Indeed, the Gaulish Apollo even sometimes bears suitably spring-like Celtic epithets such as Borvo (or Bormo) 'the boiling one' and his reputation as a protector from diseases may also reflect his association with healing springs. The Celtic connection between springs and astral divinities, however, appears to be a reflection of an understanding also prevalent among the ancient Egyptians that the moon, stars and sun revolve around the earth, and hence, when not up in the sky, travel instead through the chthonic regions (i.e. near to the bottoms of wells and springs). The connection of Maponos with Apollo and cultic springs might be understood in this manner, then, as may also the appeal in some of the *defixiones* found at Bath to other gods linked with the ancient underworld.[7]

At Bath, though, Sulis seems to have been paired with another figure, one who could scarcely be thought of as Apollonian: the face of a masculine being with serpents entwined in his beard and wings protruding from above his ears also once glared down from the pediment over the entrance to the temple of Sulis. Usually thought to be a representation of Oceanus or Neptune (or even a male Gorgon), the great head is surrounded by what seem to be Tritons, victories, a dolphin-decorated helmet and an owl – all features that can either be associated with Minerva or the classical god of the sea. This figure has also been linked with Typhon (Hesiod's Typhoeus), the fiery serpentine monster who was, according to classical myth, subdued by Zeus and bound under Mount Aetna. Nonetheless, Neptune is widely called upon in *defixiones* found elsewhere in Roman Britain much as if he, like Sulis, was somehow thought to be especially linked with cursing. Indeed, representations of aquatic divinities such as Neptune and Oceanus often feature at bathing complexes elsewhere in the Roman world. An association of Sulis with the classical sea god also makes particular sense given the symbolic representation of her celestial aspect by personifications of the Sun and Moon at her spring and temple complex at Bath – the inclusion of the sea god's features on the pediment over the entrance to Sulis's temple presumably complements the celestial imagery of the rest of the temple yard by symbolising the spring goddess's aquatic nature as well.[8]

The first Celtic curse text found at Bath is unique in that it was found on

7 E.P. Hamp, 'Indo-European **aų* before consonant in British and Indo-European "sun"', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 26 (1975), 97–102; Cunliffe, *Roman Bath*, pp. 30–60; J. Zeidler, 'On the etymology of Grannus', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 53 (2003), 77–92.

8 M.W.C. Hassall and R.S.O. Tomlin, 'Roman Britain in 1981. II. Inscriptions', *Britannia* 13 (1982), 408–9 (Norfolk); eidem, 'Roman Britain in 1993. II. Inscriptions', *Britannia* 25 (1994), 293–5 (Suffolk); Dunbabin, '*Baiarum Grata Voluptas*', pp. 25ff.; J. Hind, 'Whose head on the Bath temple-pediment?', *Britannia* 27 (1996), 358–60; R.S.O. Tomlin, 'Roman Britain in 1996. II. Inscriptions', *Britannia* 28 (1997), 455–8 (Hampshire).

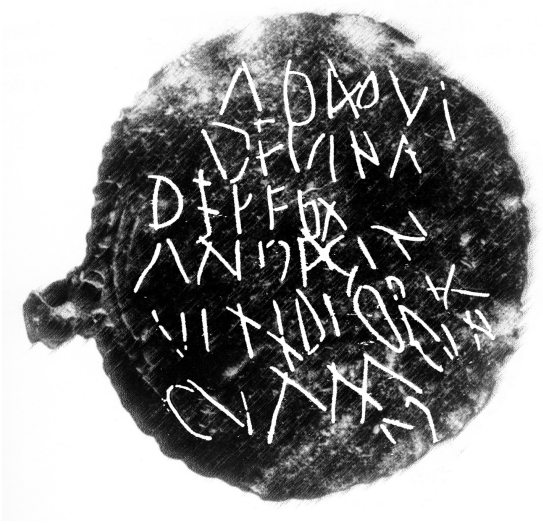
a disc-shaped pendant which is about 35mm or slightly more in diameter and seems to be made of tin (or a tin/lead alloy, pewter or solder) rather than pure lead. Tin had been mined in this area for centuries before the Romans first arrived and the pendant shape is suggestive of an amulet or periapt – an item worn in the hope that it would convey protective magical powers – rather than a regular curse tablet. Most of the other Bath finds had been rolled up in the manner of small letters or scrolls, as is fairly typical of classical curse finds more generally. Its place of deposition and the metal it was made of suggest that the Bath pendant was specifically created for the purpose of cursing; like the winged *ansata* tablets (one of which has even been found at Bath) whose shape was inspired by votive plaques, perhaps the pendant form of the first Celtic Bath find was supposed to suggest the magical quality of the item, if not, say, be a symbolic representation of an object which had been stolen from the curser.

At any rate, the second- or third-century AD inscription on the pewter curse pendant consists mostly only of a list of names – a common-enough type of *defixio* text, and not just at Bath. Evidently some cursers thought that writing down the names of victims and consigning them to the depths was enough for a curse to be fulfilled; similar examples of spell inscriptions which are elliptical in this way are known from throughout the ancient Roman world. It seems quite likely that in such cases the call upon Sulis (or a similar figure) was made orally as part of a ritual which saw the curse tablet thrown into the spring. The Bath pendant text is not quite so plain as many comparable Greek and Latin name-listing finds, though; instead it is headed and ends with Celtic terms which seem more clearly to indicate 'binding':[9]

adixovi	The affixed:
Deuina	Devina,
Deieda	Deieda,
Andagin	Andagin
Vindiorix	(and) Vindiorix
cuamenai	I have bound.

The term that heads this inscription is a plural noun which probably derives from a root *digs-* signifying 'binding' or 'fixing' that has parallels in other ancient Celtic texts. Seemingly continuing an earlier *tigs-* (or *stigs-*), a form related both to the Greek term *stigma* and Modern English *stick*, this root is strikingly similar to *defixio*, the usual Latin description for binding curses, which literally designated something 'stuck' or 'fixed down'. Similarly, the last term is a verb that appears to be related to the medieval Irish expression *·tuidmen* 'binds, affixes' (i.e. *tu-id-men*, rather than *cu-a-men-*), but which more literally seems to indicate 'fixing upon'. Lists of names to be cursed are sometimes headed by descriptions such as 'names given to the infernal gods' or the like, and the first term at Bath similarly appears to indicate that the names which follow are those of the victims of a curse. Comparable concluding expressions are less common, but the final word included on the curse pendant seems to reprise the magical action of the inscriber

9 Tomlin, 'Curse tablets', no. 18 [= *RIG* II.2, no. 107].



3. Inscribed curse pendant from the sacred spring at Bath

through an unambiguous final reference to the performing of the binding. It is not clear from the text what the reason for the cursing was, however – the names describe three women and a man (Vindiorix), an admixture of gender that is not common among ancient curses generally. Such collections are rather more frequently found among the *defixiones* of Bath than they are from other parts of the classical world, though – compare the coin-theft suspects Anniola, Senicianus and Saturninus. Moreover, the context of the more regularly shaped tablets from Bath make it fairly clear what the general intention of this rather minimalistic binding spell was most likely to have been: the names almost certainly represent those of suspected thieves.[10]

The other curse tablet from Bath written in early British Celtic also features a series of names, but more clearly dates to the third century and is written on a more typical object for this kind of find – a thin pewter lamella which originally must have measured 56mm by 46mm, but of which only five fragments of the larger whole are now preserved. Like the other Old Brittonic curse tablet, it is atypical in one significant aspect apart from its language, however: it is incised in at least five different writing styles or hands. With its mixture of lines written all in capital letters and others in the typical Roman cursive handwriting of the period, it seems to have been the work of several inscribers. Moreover, as an extremely fragmentary and probably always complex text, little can be made out for sure today from what parts of it remain other than a handful of masculine names as well as a few key pieces of what seem to be cursing terminology.

10 Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae*, nos 96–102: *(inimicorum) nomina (data) ad inferos* (Kreuznach); Gordon, ‘“What’s in a list?”; B. Mees, ‘The Celtic inscriptions of Bath’, *Studia Celtica* 39 (2005), 176–81.

4. Fragments of a Celtic curse lamella from the sacred spring

Nonetheless, what can be made out of the second Celtic text excavated from Sulis's spring is revealing enough:

luciumio…	I commit …
Citti Mediu[ri]xs…	… (son) of Cittos, Mediurixs …
Vibec…traceos…	Vibec... …traceos …
estaidimaui…	…
tittlemma catacim luci[umio]…	stolen ... I commit …
lendii erandant… nnoa…	…
[l]uc[iu]mio to Vesula ra… [e]rando…	I commit to Vesula …
…m nocta nou[a]m dii…	… nine nights …
…cii …eleu Barra u…	… Barra …
…staginem se…	… tin …
…fer…	…
…r…	…

This seems to be the remains of a more complex Old Celtic spell like that from Chamalières, but it also appears to be quite similar in the parts which have survived to several of the linguistically Latin Bath finds. It features calls to 'lay' or 'commit' (*luciu-*) much as does the Chamalières inscription, once even seemingly to Vesula, a figure whose name literally means 'the good one' and who appears to have been divine. A goddess called Vesunna 'Goodly' was worshipped at Périgeux, France (which was called Vesunna Petricoriorum in Roman times), although it could be that Vesula (as 'the good one') is an otherwise unattested

epithet of Sulis's, rather than representing some sort of deity unknown other than at Bath. There is also mention of stealing in the text, a feature similarly typical of judicial prayers. Moreover, 'tin' (*staginem*) is probably a reference to the material the tablet is made of, much as classical curses sometimes contain expressions which refer to the material they are written on (often in 'just as …, so too …' constructions). The number nine (in the alliterating expression *nocta nou[a]m* 'nine nights') is also often connected with magical practices in Celtic tradition. Nonetheless, this mere snippet of surviving text seems to parallel a fairly common stipulation of the Latin-language curses of Britain: that a crime should be 'redeemed' within 'nine days'. The difference with this instance, though, is that as Caesar records in his *Gallic War* (and as is preserved in both early Welsh and Irish tradition) the Celts traditionally counted time by nights, rather than, as did the Romans, by days.[11]

Other terms which have survived are more difficult to interpret, but *lendii* seems rather similar to Old Irish *lend*, Welsh *llenn* 'cloak'. This may have signified what was stolen, whereas *er-and-* looks like it might be a form that signifies 'burning', bringing to mind references to the blood of victims burning which sometimes appear among the punishments in continental judicial prayers. The parsing of the fourth line is unclear, but *aidim* could be a reference to the temple of Sulis (cf. Latin *aedes* 'temple'). The objective term *catacim* is also very similar to expressions found on some other curse tablets from Gaul, and it may represent a form of the 'linking' or 'weaving' root usually thought to be represented in Celtic by Welsh *cadair* 'fortress' – although given that it seems to be the object of *tittlemma* 'taken, stolen', it could well represent another reference to clothing of some sort.

Despite being only imperfectly understood, this fragmentary and clearly multi-authored text appears to mimic many of the features of the Latin-language *defixiones* which have been found at Bath. Rather than being a slavish copy of a Roman text, however, it evidently features several Celticisms over and above what might strictly have been necessary in a straight translation. After all, the use of the 'lay' or 'commit' verb also seen at Chamalières (albeit here in a slightly different form) suggests a broader Celtic relationship may be at hand: the existence of a shared Old Celtic vocabulary of cursing. Yet the similarities between this text and the phrasing typical of Roman binding spells are rather clearer, in fact clear enough even to suggest that the inscription might once have read (or implied):

'I commit [to Vesula the property I have lost].
(It is for the goddess to exact it from the names written below:)
… son of Cittos, Mediurixs … Vibec[cos]... (etc.)
[He must return it to the] temple (?) [of Sulis] …

11 Caesar, *B.G.* 6.18; *CIL* XIII, nos 949, 956; Tomlin, 'Curse tablets', no. 14 [= *RIG* II.2, no. 108]; Mees, 'Celtic inscriptions', p. 179. The stipulatory 'nine days' of the Bath *defixiones* is probably to be connected with the pre-Julian eight-day nundinal (i.e. inclusively 'nine-day') or market week; see Egger, *Römische Antike* I, p. 87; A. Kropp, '"*Defigo Eudemum: necetis eum*": Kommunikationsmuster in den Texten antiker Schadenzauberrituale', in Brodersen and Kropp, *Fluchtafeln*, p. 86, n. 14.

[Whoever has] stolen the garment (?) I commit …
[whoever has stolen my] cloak (?) […] may they burn (?) …
I commit to Vesula … they burn (?)
[if they do not return it within] nine nights …
[And] … Barra … [etc. are also suspects]
[Just as] this tin [is lifeless and cold, so may they be lifeless and cold].'

The complete text may never be rescued in full; but it seems to have preserved some Old Celtic translations of formulas found on other curse tablets from Bath. In fact, enough have been preserved that it remains fairly clear what the purpose of writing the inscription was: to revenge a robbery by calling up divine help from the goddess's dark waters.

Yet Sulis's spring at Bath was not the only British site of its type that was considered a suitable setting for the deposition of curse tablets. Roman Britain has proved a remarkable province for the unearthing of *defixiones* in votive contexts. There are several important Romano-British religious sites, however, which once featured aquatic cults that have not surrendered curse finds to archaeological enquiry, Coventina's well at Carraburgh on Hadrian's Wall being a noted example. Thus, like the similarly *defixio*-free healing sanctuary at the head of the river Seine, it seems that curse tablets were considered suitable for use only at certain watery cultic centres and not at others. But several other *defixiones* have been unearthed from Romano-British religious settings, and although none is Celtic in language, some do refer to deities whose veneration can probably be linked with pre-Roman practices and hence they may have some bearing on a proper understanding of the more surely Celtic curse-tablet finds.[12]

For instance, another Romano-British centre, a temple complex at Dwarf's Hill, near Lydney, Gloucestershire, has revealed the use of a *defixio* in a medical context. The temple excavated there, some 40km north of Aquae Sulis, featured an associated bathhouse and was evidently similarly visited in antiquity by people seeking supernatural healing. The Lydney site was also a long-standing Celtic establishment – the Roman-era temple built there in the fourth century sits atop a much earlier Iron Age hill-fort, and presumably replaced an old Brittonic cultic sanctuary that had formerly stood atop the hill. In fact, Dwarf's Hill also features a Roman-era iron mine and is often now regarded as one of the key inspirations for J.R.R. Tolkein's Middle Earth books as the Oxford linguist had collaborated on the find report issued after the site was excavated in the late 1920s. The sole curse tablet discovered at Lydney was unearthed during an excavation of the temple more than a century earlier, however, and shows rather less of the subterranean quality usually associated with classical curses. Although its exact find circumstances are not altogether clear, the Lydney *defixio* does not appear to have been deposited in a bath, but rather shows evidence of having once been on public display. It has, therefore, even more of the feeling of being a votive about it than do the Bath and Chamalières finds, a pious religious expression rather than something fundamentally sinister and untoward. Moreover, the

12 L. Allason-Jones and B. MacKay, *Coventina's Well: a shrine on Hadrian's Wall* (Hexham 1985); Green, *Celtic Goddesses*, pp. 99–101.

Lydney curse invokes a British divinity who is not only mentioned in two regular dedications from the site (as well as on two statuettes found over a century ago in Lancashire) but, as with Chamalières's Maponos, is also reflected by figures who appear in medieval Welsh and Irish literature. The inscription on the 75mm by 60mm Lydney lamella appears to be of late-fourth-century date and reads:[13]

> To the god Nodens. Silvanius has lost a ring. He has given half to Nodens. Among those whose name is Senicianus, do not permit health until he brings it to the temple of Nodens. Renewed.

The mention of giving half (rather than all) of the stolen ring being dedicated to Nodens in this text is reminiscent of an episode in the Old Testament Book of Judges concerning a man named Micah and his mother. Micah's mother had uttered a curse over the loss of some silver, but Micah admits to his mother that he was the one who had taken it. In thanks to God, Micah's mother consequently took a portion of the returned silver and gave it to a silversmith, who melted it down and made it into 'a graven image and a molten image' which Micah put in his house. Hence presumably the offering of half of the stolen ring meant that half of its worth (rather than chopping it in half) would be dedicated to the cult of Nodens through a gift to the temple. Indeed, a Judaeo-Christian connection has been taken further by some scholars who point to a golden ring discovered in Silchester in the eighteenth century which bears the legend 'O Senicianus! (Long) may you live in Go[d]!'.The Silchester ring (which can be seen on display today at the National Trust property The Vyne) has even been claimed as the inspiration of Tolkein's malefic ruling 'One Ring'. The name Senicianus is also witnessed on two curse tablets from Bath, however, and may just have been fairly common in the south-west of late Roman Britain. In fact, vowing a proportion of the value of a stolen item is also attested in several other Romano-British *defixiones* unearthed at locations as diverse as Somerset and Nottinghamshire. Rather than indicating a Jewish or Christian influence, such a style of cursing evidently represents a very old and widespread ancient tradition of giving thanks to divinities who fulfilled curses made in their names.[14]

The Lydney inscription also suggests that divinities who, like Nodens and Sulis, could heal were thought to be effective when called upon in binding curses as they could also deny someone their health. After all, much as at Bath, the Lydney temple also features representations of Roman-style sun and water gods as well as an assortment of small figurine votives, including several in the shape

13 R.E.M. and T.V. Wheeler, *Report on the Prehistoric, Roman, and Post-Roman Site in Lydney Park, Gloucestershire* (Oxford 1932); *RIB* nos 305–7, 616–17; Gager, *Curse Tablets*, no. 99.

14 Judges 17:1–4; *RIB* no. 2422.14; R.G. Goodchild, 'The curse and the ring', *Antiquity* 27 (1953), 100–2; J.M.C. Toynbee, 'Christianity in Roman Britain', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 3rd ser. 16 (1953), 19–21; E.G. Turner, 'A curse tablet from Nottinghamshire', *Journal of Roman Studies* 53 (1963), 122–4; M.W.C. Hassal and R.S.O. Tomlin, 'Roman Britain in 1983. II. Inscriptions', *Britannia* 15 (1984), 336, 339; P.C. Finney, 'Senicianus' Ring', *Bonner Jahrbücher* 194 (1994), 175–96; C.A. Faraone *et al.*, 'Micah's Mother (Judg. 17:1–4) and a curse from Carthage (*KAI* 89): evidence for the Semitic origin of Greek and Latin curses against thieves?', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 64 (2005), 161–86.

of dogs (probably because dogs featured in the cult of the Roman healing god Asclepius). Etymologically, Nodens seems to have literally been a god of 'usefulness' (cf. English *need*), but whether this was a reference to a particular potency (such as physical strength) or to the generality of skills enjoyed by some Irish gods such as Lugh or the Dagda is not clear. The later medieval reflections of Nodens, Welsh Nudd and Irish Nuada 'Silver-arm', however, appear to be warrior figures, kings of their peoples, not typical chthonic or healing gods. Most of the main Irish gods are depicted as living in lakes or in fairy mounds, but their sometime king Nuada is, in contrast, healed by another god (Miach) in the *Second Battle of Moytura*.[15] Nonetheless the Roman war-god Mars was sometimes interpreted as a healing god particularly, it seems, in Celtic parts of the Roman world because of his role as a protector. Dedications to Gaulish versions of Mars, from Mars Lenus in both Britain and the Rhineland, to Mars Vorocius in Gaul, are linked with healing cults, often especially of eye ailments. Two dedicatory plaques found at Lydney similarly invoke Mars Nodens (or Nodens Mars), so presumably Nodens, as an old British Mars, developed this aspect to his cult in a similar way, the silver arm of his later reflections originally being symbolic of his role as a protector.[16] So rather than a curse furtively sent to the gods of the underworld, the Lydney judicial prayer has more of the feeling of a regular dedication, a prayer for justice left in the sanctuary of the healing god in the hope Nodens would deny the thief his health until he made amends for his crime.

Vows or oaths were sometimes incised onto tablets and left in ancient Greek and Roman sanctuaries so that the gods could watch over them and ensure that those whose names were mentioned on them would keep to their word. Indeed, the final term 'renewed' at Lydney (which is actually written at the top of the tablet, in a different hand and clearly at a later date) seems to indicate that the curse had been renewed some time after it had originally been written up in this way. Some other curses of the judicial-prayer type were also obviously nailed up and displayed in ancient temples (perhaps this is how Micah learnt of his mother's curse) – and there is even an example of a hymn-like judicial prayer from Mérida (ancient Emerita), Spain, inscribed on a marble pillar that seems formerly to have been on public display, a curse addressed to Proserpine exhibited openly in a temple for all to see. So although rolling up lead tablets and depositing them in springs is typical of binding curses, it has been suggested that judicial prayers were actually only similar to regular *defixiones* – that they were in

15 Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, pp. 67–9. The name Nodens clearly derives from the root **neud-* 'acquire, use' otherwise only attested in the Germanic and Baltic languages; cf. C.-J. Guyonvarc'h, 'Notes d'étymologie et de lexicographie gauloises et celtiques xvii', *Ogam* 15 (1963), 229–37; J. Carey, 'Nodons in Britain and Ireland', *Zeitschrift für celtsche Philologie* 40 (1984), 1–22; and H. Wagner, 'Zur Etymologie von keltisch *Nodons*, Ir. *Nuadu*, Kymr. *Nudd/Lludd*', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 41 (1986), 180–7.

16 *CIL* XIII, nos 3654, 3970, 4122, 4137; *RIB* nos 305, 307, 309; Green, *Gods of the Celts*, pp. 158–9. Lenus probably signified 'steadfast' (cf. Old Irish *lenaid* 'follow' < **lei(p)-* 'remain stuck'), whereas Vorocius (< **u(p)o-rok-i-*; and cf. the Gaulish place name Vorocium) appears to have meant 'counsellor', 'determiner' or 'judge' (cf. Welsh *rhegi* 'curse', Old Irish *ad·eirrig* 'repeat' < **rek-* 'speak, determine') or perhaps (given it is an epithet of Mars) 'commander'.

origin more closely related to the practice of inscribing divinely sanctioned vows on metal tablets. In fact, a clear case of such a vow has been discovered among the curse tablets at Bath on a pewter lamella that was not rolled up, although it bears an inscription which is clearly a form of self-imprecation, one where a group of people will it that any of their member who breaks their vow shall be accursed. In classical tradition thermal springs were sometimes held to burn vow breakers, but, like the deposition of the curse-supported vow in the spring at Bath, the appearance of judicial prayers on lead tablets was undoubtedly inspired by continental binding spells; ancient protective charms or prayers for healing are not found written down in similar circumstances. The use of similar vocabulary such as verbs of the handing-over variety presumably also indicates that judicial prayers were a development on the handing-over binding curses which grew out of the simple 'I bind such and such' form – it is their binding of their victims (through inscribing their names on the medium of pewter or lead) that makes judicial prayers so clearly belong to the broader *defixio* genre. Comparable vengeful expressions are found on ancient Greek gravestones and such sepulchral imprecations may well have influenced the development of some aspects of judicial prayers. Yet, ultimately, the more obviously prayer-like handing-over *defixiones* such as that from Chamalières presumably represent the first stage of the development of judicial prayers, even if the calls for vengeance which typify these later maledictions originally just represented a different way of cursing adopted from a separate imprecatory tradition. Publicly displaying such a curse has also been interpreted merely as representing a twofold strategy: it announced to the thief as well as the gods that the victim so named was under a curse until restitution was made. Nonetheless, like the votive vessels also found in the spring at Bath, the scores, perhaps hundreds of inscribed judicial prayers deposited there seem to have been expressions which were regularly associated with the cult of the spring goddess, just as might be expected of prayers (for good or for woe), rather than illicit intrusions furtively introduced to her sacred waters when the priests were caught unawares.[17]

Moreover, the impression that, at least in the south-west of Roman Britain, the execution of curse tablets of the judicial-prayer type had become a regular part of some local cults is brought out even more clearly by the many finds of *defixiones* unearthed at West Hill, Uley, about 12km east of Lydney. Excavation of an early-second-century Roman shrine to Mercury at Uley in the late 1970s brought to light a large number of metal curse tablets. Large numbers of such finds are not restricted to Roman Britain, of course – apart from the 100-plus talc tablets from Amathous, a cache of 48 *defixiones* was found in an ancient columbarium near Rome in the late nineteenth century and a large number of *katadesmoi* (over 60) were discovered at Caesarea in Israel in 1994 (although unlike the Bath and Uley finds, most of these curses are written in Greek). Much as with the Amathous and Caesarea tablets, however, most of the 87 curse texts found

17 *CIL* II, no. 462 [= Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae*, no. 122]; Tomlin, 'The curse tablets', no. 94; Versnel, 'Beyond cursing', p. 91; idem, 'Writing mortals and reading gods: appeal to the gods as a dual strategy for social control', in Cohen, *Demokratie, Recht und soziale Kontrolle*, pp. 37–76.

at Uley have not yet been edited properly – many are only poorly preserved and difficult to read, and hence have only ever been published in a cursory, notifying manner.[18]

The temple of Mercury at Uley was founded in pre-Roman times – the main Roman structure replaced an earlier timber building erected at the already long-standing religious site in the early first century. And although Mercury is often thought to have been the usual Roman interpretation for the Old Celtic god Lugus, it is not clear what the Brittonic name of the god was whose cult was venerated at Uley before the erection of the Roman shrine.[19] Several pits and ditches have been discovered in the area about the temple, from which archaeologists have unearthed many weapons, bones and other finds typical of Iron Age votive sites. The curse tablets were also not found in the temple, but instead scattered about the surrounding area, albeit in circumstances which suggest that they had been removed from the temple, perhaps during a bout of spring cleaning in the late fourth century. They may have once been stored in a pit or another place reserved for such offerings in the temple. Given that so many were rolled up, though, it seems unlikely that they or their texts were ever on public display. In fact, 140 such tablets were found at Uley in total, although over a third of this number no longer bear any discernable text today (assuming they ever did, that is). Many of the tablets bear writing that obviously dates to the second and third centuries, and are clearly addressed to Mercury, evidently the main god worshipped at the shrine. Four exceptions are addressed to Mars, however, including one text which was addressed to Mars Silvanus (although the original dedication is overwritten with Mercury's name) and another which calls upon Mercury Mars. These are all names of Roman deities, but rather than being addresses to both Mercury and Mars or Mars together with Silvanus, they seem to be names which have been linked as if they somehow represented hybrid figures; they seem to have been attempts to describe local gods through more than one single Roman name:[20]

> A memorandum to the god ~~Mars Silvanus~~ Mercury from Saturnina, a woman, concerning the linen cloth which she has lost, that he who has stolen it should not have rest until he brings the abovementioned property to the abovementioned temple, whether man or woman, whether slave or free. She gives a third part to the abovementioned god on condition that he exact this property which

18 Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae*, nos 140–87; R.S.O. Tomlin, 'The inscribed lead tablets', in A. Woodward and P. Leach (eds), *The Uley Shrines: excavation of a ritual complex on West Hill, Uley, Gloucestershire – 1977–9* (London 1993), pp. 113–30; B. Burrell, '"Curse tablets" from Caesarea', *Near Eastern Archaeology* 61 (1998), 128.

19 H. d'Arbois de Jubainville, *Le cycle mythologique irlandais et la mythologie celtique*, Cours de littérature celtique 2 (Paris 1884), pp. 178, 303–5 [= idem, *The Irish Mythological Cycle and Celtic Mythology*, trans. R.I. Best (Dublin 1903), pp. 100, 171–2]; idem, 'Lugus, Lugoves, le Mercure gaulois', *Bulletin de la Société des antiquaires de France* (1885), 217–20; B. Maier, 'Is Lug to be identified with Mercury (*Bell. Gall.* VI 17,1)? New suggestions on an old problem', *Ériu* 47 (1996), 127–35; K.L. Ovist, 'The Integration of Mercury and Lugus: myth and history in late Iron Age and early Roman Gaul' (Dissertation, Chicago 2004); Birkhan, *Kelten*, pp. 593ff.

20 Tomlin, 'Inscribed lead tablets', no. 2.

> has been written of above. And from what she has lost, a third part is given to the god Silvanus on condition that he exact it, whether man or woman, whether slave or free …

There is some limited evidence (in the form of a few small medical votives) that the temple at Uley was a healing sanctuary, so perhaps the references to Mars indicate that a minor medicinal cult existed at the site, much as a handful of dedications to Mercury, Mars and other Roman figures are also known from Bath. Silvanus, the Roman god of forests, farming and hunting, was venerated throughout the Celtic parts of the Roman world, and under several different guises. He is mentioned, for example, at other British sites with the local epithets Callirius, Cocidius and Vinotonus, none of which, unfortunately, has a clear Celtic etymology. But then it is not even clear that a single figure was meant to be represented by these three British Silvanuses: Cocidius is also attested as an epithet of Mars in Britain, which may explain the dedication to Mars Silvanus at Uley; and Vinotonus is similarly mentioned in some ancient British votive inscriptions as if he were a local god and separate from the other Romano-British Silvanuses.[21]

Indeed, these war-cum-hunting gods may all represent local divinities rather than a more broadly represented Celtic identity comparable to Maponos or Lugus – and although the mooted connection between Mercury and Lugus is often taken for granted, it is far from clear that this pan-Celtic figure was the chief god worshipped at Uley. Lugus is mentioned (often in the plural) in several votive inscriptions from Spain (and once from the Alps), and he bears a name which is prominently reflected in Old Celtic toponymy. Moreover, he is obviously to be linked with the euhemerised god who appears in insular myth as the omnicompetent Irish figure Lugh (as well as the more marginal Welsh character Lleu).[22] Caesar records that the Gauls worshipped Mercury as a similarly omnicompetent inventor of all the arts, and the remains of the cult statue found at Uley clearly shows it was modelled on representations of Hermes, the liminal god associated by the Romans with Mercury. The ancient Gaulish city of Lugudunum is also linked in one classical source to divination (by the flights of ravens), which suggests that the term *lugu-* (and hence also Lugh) was associated with divination and destiny (and hence perhaps also binding spells) – Lleu is even

21 *RIB* nos 194, 602, 732, 993, 1578, 2015; P.F. Dorcey, *The Cult of Silvanus: a study in Roman folk religion* (Leiden 1992), pp. 54–9. The name Cocidius seems unlikely to have much to do with Welsh *coch* 'red' (< Latin *coccum* 'scarlet') as is often claimed; an interpretation as 'fearsome' (< **ĝonk-* 'doubt, sway') might be better justified. Welsh *coll* < **koslo-* 'hazel' and Welsh *celli* 'wood, grove', Old Irish *caill* < **kaldit-* are equally unlikely sources for Callirius, which seems rather closer in form to Gaulish *callio-* 'hard (skin)'. Vinotonus, similarly, although often connected with Latin *vinum* 'wine', might more profitably be connected with binding (cf. Old Irish *-fen* 'weave, entwine' < **ui-n-*) and with firmness (cf. Old Irish *tenn* 'hard, strong', Middle Welsh *tannu* < **ten-* 'to stretch').

22 Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, pp. 420–2; Maier, 'Lug', 127–8; Ovist, 'Mercury and Lugus', pp. 207–57; P. De Bernardo Stempel, 'Theonymic gender and number variation as a characteristic of Old Celtic religion', in M.V. García Quintela *et al.* (eds), *Anthropology of the Indo-European World and Material Culture: Proceedings of the 5th Internation Colloquium of Anthropology of the Indo-European World and Comparative Mythology* (Budapest 2006), p. 41.

subject to 'destining a destiny' at the hands of his mother Arianrhod in *Math Son of Mathonwy*.[23] Nonetheless, as Hermes is also one of the gods who appears most commonly in Greek *katadesmoi*, it could well be that the high number of curse tablets found near the Romano-British shrine at Uley only reflects a local development of the classical tradition that Hermes, as psychopomp, was a particularly good figure to call upon in *defixiones*. After all, Lugus is not mentioned in any of the Old Celtic binding spells, even if his name does seem quite similar to the verbal noun *luge* used at Chamalières to indicate the 'committing' of the victims of the Gaulish juridical curse.[24]

Yet the similarly large number of curses found at Bath does suggest a particularly Old Brittonic connection between judicial curses and local religious practice. It is rare for curse tablets to be found in similar numbers at votive sites anywhere else in the ancient world (some 34 have been found at a Roman sanctuary of Isis and Magna Mater at Mainz, but the Caesarea finds, for example, were unearthed in a well in the courtyard of a palace, and the Amathous *tabellae defixionum* were found in a burial pit).[25] Most of the wordings and themes found at Uley also closely mirror those witnessed at Bath. But then similar textual parallels can be found in *defixiones* from other parts of Britain (as well as on the Continent), so it is not clear that the connection between the epigraphic cursing at Uley and Bath represents an idiosyncratic south-western Romano-British phenomenon. The Caesarea and Rome tablets are both contemporary finds, dating to the fourth century; thus there may just have been a similarly late and rather popular provincial Roman proclivity for this kind of cursing. Indeed, the original Celtic element at Uley has been so thoroughly Romanised it is difficult to tell whether any trace of the original British cult is represented in these finds, and hence whether the Romano-British cursing evidenced by the Uley *defixiones* reflects a particularly Celtic contribution to the late Imperial tradition of judicial prayers.

Nonetheless, there are other British curse tablets of the judicial type that seem more clearly to have called upon native Celtic powers. In 2006, for example, British archaeologists announced that they had discovered a curse table in the ruins of Roman Leicester. A second- or third-century creation, its text reads:[26]

> To the god Maglus I give the wrongdoer who stole the cloak of Servandus. Silvester, Riomandus … that he destroy him before the ninth day, the person who stole the cloak of Servandus …

23 The connection of Lugudunum with ravens in the Pseudo-Plutarch's *De fluviis* (6.4) may well represent a folk etymology, however, as ravens were often considered birds of ill-omen (*lugubris* 'disaster') in classical divinatory tradition.

24 In fact Lugh may well have literally been a god of 'loading' or 'laying': H. Wagner, 'Studies in the origin of early Celtic civilisation', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 31 (1970), 21ff.; A. Ahlqvist, 'Two ethnic names in Ptolemy', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 26 (1975), 145; Birkhan, *Kelten*, pp. 600ff.; Ovist, 'Mercury and Lugus', pp. 180–98; and cf. also the spring divinities Luxovius and Bricta worshipped at Gallo-Roman Luxeuil, ancient Luxovium; *CIL* XIII, nos 5425–26.

25 J. Blänsdorf, 'The curse tablets from the sanctuary of Isis and Magna Mater in Mainz', *MHNH* 5 (2005), 11–26.

26 Anon., 'University of Leicester archaeologists unearth ancient curse', *EurekAlert!* (30 Nov 2006).

The Leicester inscription is then completed by a list of 18 names, a mixture of Celtic and Roman forms, much as is typical of the curses found at Bath.

Unlike a typical judicial prayer, it is the thief, not the thing stolen, that is given to the god Maglus in the Leicester curse. Moreover, the name of the god (which literally means 'prince' in Celtic; cf. Old Irish *mál* 'prince, chief') also appears to be recorded in a variant form, Magalos, in a linguistically Gaulish inscription found at Bourges, central France, in the nineteenth century. Bourges was a longstanding Celtic settlement and the Gaulish inscription unearthed there appears on a vase excavated from a tomb at a site known as Séraucourt. The Séraucourt find, however, merely records that a certain Buscilla dedicated something to Magalos in Alesia (Alise-Ste-Reine), a Gallo-Roman centre over 180km away to the east. Two dedications to a goddess called Magla (i.e. the 'Princess'), each time mentioned in the company of Silvanus, are also known from sites in Austria and Croatia. Indeed, Magalus is further recorded as the name of a chief of the Boii who sent envoys to Hannibal during his march on Rome. But whether Leicester's Maglus represents the title of a god better known under another name or a 'princely' deity in his own right (and hence, given the Bourges form, a pan-Celtic figure) unfortunately remains unclear.[27]

In 1982 a similar find, albeit a lamella that was rolled up this time, was discovered on the foreshore of the Hamble estuary, Hampshire, by an amateur archaeologist using a metal detector. The Hampshire curse is also clearly a judicial prayer, in this case addressing the theft of some coins: a gold *solidus* or shilling and six silver *argentioli* (Roman halfpennies). The principal divinity called upon in the fourth-century text is Neptune, a god who appears in several other Romano-British *defixiones* and may be connected with the cult of Sulis at Bath. Neptune does not appear on curse tablets outside Britain, but neither do well-known classical aquatic figures feature in such discoveries more generally. Indeed, the Hamble estuary text also contains the invocation, almost is it were an afterthought, of another figure, one with a non-classical name:

> O Lord Neptune, I give you the man who has stolen the *solidus* and six *argentioli* of Muconius! Thus I give the names which took them away, whether male or female, whether boy or girl. Thus I give you, O Niskus, and to Neptune, the life, health (and) blood of him who has been privy to that taking-away! The mind that stole this and which has been privy to it, may you take it away! The thief who stole this, may you consume his blood and take it away, O Lord Neptune![28]

Again it is the thief, not the stolen items, that is being given to the classical sea god Neptune here. As at Leicester (and in the second Bath curse), the vengeful nature of this spell is also clear. But instead of giving the thief nine nights to redeem his crime or not letting him sleep or be well until he returns what he has stolen, the curser, Muconius, is not so patient or expectant: he demands that the thief be driven mad and have his blood consumed, his very life taken from him.

27 Livy 21.29; *CIL* III, no. 3963; *RIG* II.2, no. 79; *AE* 2005, no. 95.

28 Tomlin, 'Roman Britain in 1996', pp. 455–8.

Rhetorically based on sympathetic language of the 'just as …, so too…' variety (focused, as at Wilten, on the 'taking away'), this is clearly a much more truculent form of health-depriving curse than that dedicated to Nodens at Lydney.

It is not known in what context this 84mm by 128mm curse text was first deposited, although several other isolated Romano-British *defixiones* have been found near rivers. Further afield, though, there are several curse-tablet finds which also seem to mention figures similar to Niskus, all of which were discovered at Amélie-les-Bains in the south of France well over a century ago. Six rolled- or folded-up lead sheets, each of which was inscribed, were unearthed from the same site at Amélie during building works carried out in the 1830s and 40s. None was properly conserved, however – all six instead were spirited away, presumably to be sold on the roaring antiquities market of the day. The inscriptions on the sheets have survived in the form of drawings which were first published in 1847. Moreover, Amélie-les-Bains is, like Bath, a renowned spa town – 22 hot springs are known from the immediate area today – and although the site was not excavated properly at the time, it seems very likely that the tablets were found in the remains of an ancient mineral spring or an associated healing shrine. Some of the degenerate Latin of the *defixiones* seems to have been supplemented by words from another language, perhaps Gaulish (or even Basque or Aquitanian), but only parts of their texts can be read with any certainty today.[29]

Four of the difficult Amélie texts clearly feature the name of figures called Niskas (*Niskae*), followed in three instances by a Latin request *rogamus* 'we ask' (and further, twice probably *et deprecamus* 'and we curse'), typical enough forms for judicial prayers. These appear in slightly odd, perhaps Gallified forms of the verbs, but apart from some more regular Latin terms such as *numene maximus* 'most divine', little else can be discerned from the drawings. The Niskas also appear to be referred to as *dom(i)nas Niskas* 'the lady Niskas' and *Niskas aquis* 'the Niskas of the waters' in the Amélie finds, and it has long been surmised that these Niskas are some sort of local water spirits or nymphs. Comparable styles describe Sulis at Bath as well as other similarly watery figures such as Italica's spring divinity. Indeed, the style Niska has often been compared with the Basque word *neska* 'girl' and hence may be a very similar description to *nymph* (cf. Greek *nymphê* 'bride'). But given the Hampshire Niskus, a less regional focus suggests that the form could be Celtic. Several comparable classical figures, from naiads (cf. Greek *naein* 'flow') to nerids (cf. Latin *no* 'swim') instead have watery names, as do the German water spirits known as nixes or nixies (cf. Old Irish *nigid* 'wash'). Whether a loan from ancient Basque or an otherwise unparalleled native Celtic expression, it nonetheless seems fairly likely that Niska is the feminine equivalent of the Hampshire Niskus and both are some sort of local aquatic divinity or watery power. The British find appears likely to have been another instance of a curse tablet that was originally deposited in a sacred watery site, then, although

[29] J. Coromines, 'Les plombs sorothaptiques d'Arles', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 91 (1975), 1–53; *RIG* II.2, no. 97; cf. W. Meid, 'Pseudogallischen Inschriften', in Lambert and Pinault, *Gaulois et celtique continental*, pp. 284–6.

the find location suggests the place of deposition could have been a sanctuary on or by a river rather than a typical ancient cultic spring or healing shrine.[30]

The longstanding Celtic tradition of deposition of wealth in lakes, bogs and springs is made light of by some classical writers, but the original find-site on Lake Neuchâtel, Switzerland, that gave its name to the La Tène style of art is such a wealthy deposition, and many more similar discoveries are known throughout Europe which date from immediately pre-Roman times. Archaeologists have discovered many sacrificial pits and ditches in ritual enclosures from throughout ancient Celtic Europe where it is evident that the powers venerated there through the sacrifice of livestock and so on were merely those of fertility and fecundity, not death and curses. It thus seems likely that, rather than being somehow morally dubious and dark, as such invocations were clearly thought to be in Greek and Roman society, the calling upon a subterranean god might not have always been thought to be so shady for a Briton or a Gaul. There is some suggestion that classical figures such as Pluto (who is literally the 'wealthy') may once also have been thought of in less shadowy terms, but as far as can be told today, the infernal gods of ancient Celtic tradition had none of the hellishness that was brought to ancient minds by the dark and dangerous figures who populated the underworlds of Greek and Roman myth. The ancient Celtic otherworld, with its gods and goddesses of springs and pools who rest in the deeps when they are not soaring high in the sky, seems to have been conceived in terms quite different from that believed in by the Greeks and Romans. Moreover, the medicinal powers associated with watery sites even seem to have led to the association of non-aquatic healing gods, such as the various Celtic interpretations of Mars, with magical practices otherwise mostly restricted to infernal divinities in the classical tradition.[31]

Yet clearly this picture would have become increasingly subject to influence and change for Celts who had become subjects of the Roman Empire. Druidism had been brutally suppressed in Britain during the first century of Roman rule, and even cults such as that of Sulis seem to have become quite Romanised over time. Indeed, the temple of the spring goddess at Bath is exceptionally Roman – temple layouts in the Celtic provinces of the Empire are otherwise usually quite different from those with a longer history of Roman control. Nonetheless, it was a Romanised religion and cult that developed at each of these sites, even if they enjoyed some provincial peculiarities. There is even an epigraph among the records of the many ancient visitors to Bath which relates that a haruspex, an Italian-style omen-reader and diviner, had once served at the temple there.[32] Similarly, the cult of Sulis (like the pre-Roman god associated with Mercury at Uley) evidently became more typically Roman and classical over time, presum-

30 The antiquity of the Basque form is usually thought to be assured by the ancient Aquitanian name Nescato (cf. Basque *neskato* 'young girl'); *CIL* XIII, no. 314; L. Michelena, *Lengua e historia*, Colección filológica (Madrid 1985), p. 427.

31 J.-L. Brunaux, *The Celtic Gauls: gods, rites and sanctuaries*, trans. D. Nash (London 1988), pp. 8ff.

32 M.J.T. Lewis, *Temples in Roman Britain*, Cambridge classical studies (Cambridge 1966); A.R. Burn, *The Romans in Britain: an anthology of inscriptions*, 2nd ed. (Oxford 1969), no. 82.

ably as did local conceptions of the underworld, healing and curses. At Uley the name of the original Celtic god even seems to have been totally overshadowed by that of the foreign figure Mercury, much as Sulis's sacred spring at Bath was roofed over, hidden from the sun, and housed in a great Romano-British temple complex, the goddess's holy waters exploited for their healing powers by being channelled into the service of an elaborate suite of recuperative Roman baths.

4

Gemma's Tomb

A clear process of religious Romanisation is evident at longstanding Celtic sites such as Bath. In fact, so evidently profound were the changes to cultic traditions under Roman rule that much of what is known today about ancient British and Gaulish religion might rather be understood as Romano-Celtic. Not only were indigenous divinities brought into the Roman pantheon through a form of cultural syncretism, but substantial changes in the ceremony and thinking surrounding Celtic funerary traditions also appear to have occurred under the Empire. Romanisation did not always mean the slavish adoption of Latinate beliefs and practices, however, as the Roman world was cosmopolitan – many aspects of religious Romanisation were as Greek or even Etruscan as they were originally Latin. In fact, the Gauls had been in contact with Greek and Etruscan colonists for centuries before the arrival of Caesar's legions in the 60s BC; the modern city of Marseilles, for instance, was founded by Greek colonists at a time when Rome was still under the rule of Etruscan kings. Moreover, these early contacts are reflected by epigraphic evidence – by texts composed in Celtic adaptations of both the Greek and Etruscan alphabets.

The earliest inscriptional evidence for Celtic language stems from the Alpine regions, and many of these Etrusco-Celtic texts are funerary in nature. Such finds range from very short inscriptions which feature little more than early Celtic names to a short poetic memorial (from Vergiate, Lombardy) which seems to reflect a type of funerary text better known from more southerly parts of the early Italic world. Contemporary archaeological evidence such as tombs covered by burial mounds and rich graves containing inhumed chariots are complemented by short funerary-stone inscriptions which feature indigenous technical language such as verbs for 'setting up' and 'raising' memorials as well as various early Celtic words for 'tombstone' or 'cairn'. There seems to have been a very early and widespread tradition in ancient Celtic society that certain people should continue to be recognised after their deaths through lavish burial customs and that tombstones should be raised for others in a manner more typical of contemporary Mediterranean funerary practice. But such finds present little more than hints of what the early Continental Celts might have held happened to mortals, men or women, rich or poor, after they had crossed the threshold of death. Classical ideas concerning what happened at the end of life are rather more clearly

evidenced, however, and suggest a different set of understandings from those associated by Greek and Roman writers with the ancient Celts.[1]

The ancient Greeks believed in an underworld populated by *psychês* or *nekydaimones*, dark and thirsty apparitions called shades in English. These tenebrous souls of the Greek dead were held themselves to be mostly harmless, but it was thought that they could call upon the gods of the underworld, such as Hades and Persephone, to do the living harm. Etruscan funerary beliefs are less clear, but the ancient Romans, reflecting broader early Italian belief, seem originally to have had a different understanding of where souls went after death, not sharing the conception of an underworld filled with formless shades, but instead believing that the spirits of the dead remained about the place of death or burial until they were forgotten. The elaborate nature of early Etruscan tombs similarly suggests that the Etruscan deceased were thought to live on at the site of their burial, and the early Romans appear to have shared a like conception of the fate of the dead, commemorating their departed loved ones (*lemures* or *manes*) principally in order to ensure that their spirits did not fade away. Later sources from under the Empire recount visitations by fearsome *larvae* – malignant revenants or ghosts. But there is rather less evidence in early Roman tradition that the immortal shades of the dead were thought to be able to influence mortal lives.[2]

The notion of an underworld inhabited by the dead is also known from ancient Near Eastern belief, but such an understanding seems to have been only a late development in the Roman West. Wealthy Celts from the European Continent had long been buried with frequently quite lavish (and often Greek- or Etruscan-made) drinking vessels, however, a practice that is often suggested to be evidence for an early Celtic belief in a great banquet of the afterlife. Fantastic banquets described in early Irish tales (such as the *Feast of Bricriu*) are usually also thought to be reflections of this earlier continental association of death with feasting and drinking. Indeed, Caesar records that the Gauls held they were descended from Dis, the Roman god of the underworld, much as Irish myth has it that an ancestral god Donn ruled over the dead. But the otherworld of medieval Irish and Welsh tradition seems to have been thought of as a much happier place than the gloomy netherworld of classical belief. Some Greek writers even claimed that the Gauls did not fear death because they believed in reincarnation. Greek notions of death and the underworld, however, became increasingly prevalent under the Empire: in Roman Britain, for instance, coins were sometimes left in graves, much as if the souls of the Romano-British dead were believed to need to pay for something – a practice which has traditionally been linked with the classical notion of 'Charon's obols' – that the recently deceased had to pay an

1 Lejeune, *Lepontica*, pp. 436–52; O.-H. Frey, '"Celtic princes" in the sixth century BC', in S. Moscati *et al.* (eds), *The Celts*, trans. A. Ellis *et al.* (New York 1991), pp. 78–92; J.F. Eska and A.O. Mercado, 'Observations on verbal art in ancient Vergiate', *Historische Sprachforschung* 118 (2005), 160–84.

2 F. Cumont, *After Life in Roman Paganism: lectures delivered at Yale University on the Silliman Foundation* (New Haven 1922); H.J. Rose, 'Ancient Italian beliefs concerning the soul', *Classical Quarterly* 24 (1930), 129–35; J.M.C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (London 1971), pp. 33–9; R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*, 2nd ed. (London 2001).

infernal ferryman, Charon, to take them across an otherworldly waterway to the land of the dead.[3]

Yet the Roman poet Lucan, writing in the first century, claimed the druids taught that the souls of the dead did not go to Hades or Hell, but instead to another region, somewhere other than under the earth. He presumably meant that the Celtic dead were not held to travel to an infernal locale reserved specifically for their shades (or were to return in another body), but instead went to another supernatural place, an idea that has often been thought to be in keeping with the Irish tradition that Donn assembled the dead on an island called Tech nDuinn, 'The House of Donn'. Many similarly timeless and unearthly magical islands are known from early Welsh stories too; and from Inis Witrin (the Isle of Glass) to Caer Sidi (the Elfin City), this dislocated and fragmented medieval tradition is partnered by comparable stories of otherwordly faerie realms which Welsh and Irish heroes can enter through caves or prehistoric burial mounds or by going under the sea. Some scholars have tried to explain these insular recollections as reinterpreted Christian notions, inspired by the ultimately Near Eastern tradition of a paradisiacal heaven and a fearsome hell. Nonetheless, such Celtic otherworldly realms seem to be hidden away rather than infernal in the sense of a Hades or hell. Prehistoric burial sites (as forts of the fairies) seem to have become conflated with faraway lands where the dead (and other supernatural forces) were held to live on in medieval Irish tradition. It is clear that there was an idiosyncratically Celtic set of ancient beliefs concerning the fate of the dead. Moreover, an ancient Celtic belief in an afterlife explains key features of another Old Celtic curse tablet, one that in many ways is a more typical kind of ancient spell lamella than are the Gaulish and British *defixiones* that have been found in watery conduits to the pagan Celtic otherworld.[4]

In August 1983 archaeologists excavating an ancient graveyard in the south of France uncovered a Gaulish inscription incised into a sheet of lead. An irregular oblong that was, at its greatest extents, 260mm long and approximately 140mm broad, the sheet is only about 1mm in width and weighs less than 300g. Containing over 160 words, the old Celtic text is much longer than the Chamalières or Bath finds. The inscription is written on both sides of the lamella, and the tablet has broken in two along what seems to have been an engraved margin, and thus today comprises four sides. Much cleaning was required to reveal the text however, and unfortunately it was not possible to recover it fully. The bulk of the inscription has survived, but only a few words remained legible from one lightly scored section of the spell.[5]

Many classical curse tablets are unearthed in the vicinity of ancient graves,

3 Caesar, *B.G.* 6.18; Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, pp. 41–4, 123–9; Green, *Gods of the Celts*, pp. 121–37.

4 Lucan 1.457; S. Reinach, 'Le mot *orbis* dans le latin de l'empire: à propos de l'*orbis alius* des druids', *Revue celtique* 22 (1901), 447–57; C.M. Löffler, *The Voyage to the Otherworld Island in Early Irish Literature*, Salzburg studies in English literature 103, 2 vols (Salzburg 1983).

5 M. Lejeune *et al.*, 'Textes gaulois et gallo-romains en cursive latine: 3. Le plomb du Larzac', *Etudes celtiques* 22 (1985), 95–177; also published as *Le plomb magique du Larzac et les sorcières gauloises* (Paris 1985); *RIG* II.2, no. 98.

and this Celtic example was discovered in a necropolis of over 115 tombs at a site known as La Vayssière, just outside the southern French village of L'Hospitalet-du-Larzac. Necropolises were a classical introduction to Gaulish culture, so the site of the find in itself suggests considerable Romanisation. The graveyard is not far from the ancient road that linked the early Gaulish towns of Luteva (modern Lodève) and Condatomagus (Millau), and the tablet is held today at the Musée archéologique in Millau.

The actual tomb in which the inscription was found also contained several vases as well as a funerary urn. Moreover, the largest of the vases, although (now) broken, is inscribed with a woman's name, Gemma, and was discovered near the foyer of the tomb. The vases and urn were accompanied by some of the personal effects of the deceased, including an iron finger-ring too small to fit a man's finger. The items all date from between about AD 90 and 110: that is, to about the period of the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan (if not a little earlier). Remarkably, however, the lead tablet, its two pieces lying one on top of the other, was found sitting over the mouth of the funerary urn, as if it were purposefully placed there to serve as a lid to cover the cremated remains of the deceased. Either the tablet was a particularly prized possession of the woman whose name doubtlessly it is that appears on the largest vase, or it was deliberately placed over her remains for some magical purpose.

It was quite common in ancient times for things to be placed in the final resting place of a beloved ancestor long after their remains had been entombed. Offerings were made to honour the deceased, most commonly in the form of food and libations, and such funerary practices seem to have been held especially important by ancient Greek and Roman women. Such offerings would be left at the foyer of such a site, however, not, as was the Larzac tablet, in the main chamber of the tomb.

Classical writers also record that the ancient Gauls wrote letters to the dead which were thrown onto their funeral pyres, but the circumstances of the Larzac find do not reflect this practice. Gemma, after all, is not named in the inscription, although it does seem possible that the magical text was left in her tomb because the dead woman was a target of the magic invoked by the text. Greek and Roman curse tablets are sometimes found rolled up or folded in two and deposited at funerary sites. And, much as at Chamalières and Bath, there are also sections in the actual text on the Larzac tablet which are quite similar to those found in Graeco-Roman curses.[6]

Curse tablets found in tombs in Greek and Roman tradition, however, are not usually left there in order to harm the dead, but rather to call on the deceased to help the creators of the spell. Nor do Greek or Roman curse tablets typically refer to the deceased by their names; instead they are sometimes described instead as *ahôroi* 'restless' or 'untimely', and it seems that those who died young or as the result of some sort of accident or violent crime were thought in ancient times to have had special powers. Other kinds of restless dead were the *atelestoi* or 'unfulfilled', those who had not received proper burial rites, and those classed *biaio-*

6 Diodorus Siculus 5.28.5–6.

5. Curse tablet found at La Vayssière, L'Hospitalet-du-Larzac

thanatoi or 'violently slain', the usual description of suicides, but also sometimes of murder victims, fallen soldiers and executed criminals. All three sorts of restless dead can be called upon in classical curses, and in the texts on ancient spell lamellas such restless and malignant shades are typically called upon to deliver the imprecatory message to the gods of the underworld – the restless, unfulfilled and untimely dead of classical experience were thought to be able to act as especially effective intermediaries between the living and the powers of Hades.[7]

The Larzac text itself is inscribed with Roman handwriting typical of the period. Unlike at Chamalières, however, two different writing hands can be discerned in the text, so, much like the second of the Celtic inscriptions from Bath, it cannot be the work of just one author. The principal hand also differs from the lesser by features which suggest the principal author was a more practised writer and also more Romanised than the lesser, both in terms of her spelling and, on occasion, grammatical forms.

The curse is so long and complex in places that it is best considered as comprising four discrete sections, although these are not spaced out evenly across the four sides that the broken lamella now features. Unlike at Chamalières, there is also much more flow between the various parts of the text, and there is considerable repetition of similar expressions. Indeed, there is also good evidence that, much as at Chamalières, the Larzac curse is rhythmical – it features widespread alliteration, just as do early Welsh and Irish poems, charms and prayers. The inscription also features an invocation, a listing of names and several supplementary sentences, some of which loosely mimic Greek and Roman expressions. Yet ultimately it has proved a much more difficult text to analyse than have the Chamalières or Bath finds.

The inscription begins with a long sentence that is fairly clearly punctuated and seems best to be parsed in the following manner:

in sinde · se · bnanom bricto[m]
[i]n eíanom anuana san(a) ander[na]
· brictom · uidluias uidlu[a] tigontias · so ·
Adsagsona · Seue[rim] Tertionicnim ·
lidsatim liciatim eianom ·
uodui uoderce lungetutonid
ponc · nitixsintor si[es] duscelinatia

First hand:
In this, this enchantment of women,
upon their names, those hereunder,
the enchantment of the seeress, the seeress of this binding,
O Adsagsona, look twice upon Severa Tertionicna,
their diviner, their restrainer,
so that she shall commit it (the enchantment)
when they are bound by malediction!

The alliteration and regular rhythms in the Larzac inscription make it clear

7 Ogden, 'Binding spells', pp. 15–23; S.I. Johnston, *Restless Dead: encounters between the living and the dead in ancient Greece* (Berkeley 1999).

that the text is expressed as if was supposed to be spoken. The (emphatic) use of 'this' in the opening line is also common in performative expressions and is comparable to the use of the equivalent word in a phrase such as *with this ring I thee wed* – 'this' is indicating the enactment of the spell, not merely signalling that a particular spell is being used (just as saying *with this ring* traditionally accompanies the action of putting a wedding ring on a bride's ring-finger). In fact, the demonstratives are marked out by the punctuation in this opening section and similarly performative uses of 'this' are repeated throughout the spell. Moreover, the alliterating expression *bnanom brictom* 'enchantment of women', the subject of the 'this' of the opening line, is also usually thought to explain what type of magic is represented by the inscription.[8]

Like the performative use of 'this', *bnanom brictom* is reflected recurrently later on in the text and hence seems to be a key phrase in terms of understanding the spell. The expression is also reminiscent of a similar collocation which appears in several medieval Irish sources, perhaps most strikingly in the words *brechtaib ban mberar* 'taken by the spells of women' from the *Adventures of Connla* or the similar *fri brichtu ban & gobann & druad* 'against the spells of women and smiths and druids' from the *Lorica of St Patrick*. It does not seem merely to be chance, either, that these two words for 'spell' or 'enchantment' and 'woman' are linked together in both Gaulish and Irish: the two words alliterate just as the key expression 'destine a destiny' does in the Chamalières text. Indeed, loricas, early protective prayers like that ascribed to St Patrick, are sometimes connected with ancient curses by modern scholars as if they were originally benedictions ranged against *defixiones*. Nonetheless, the similarity of the Gaulish to the Irish phrases could well be accidental, pairings derived independently in the process of the composition of similarly alliterating poetic forms. Unlike the Celtic curses found deposited in springs, however, the Larzac text is often thought to represent magic of the sort usually characterised as witchcraft. Yet given the feminine gender of most of the names which are later listed as the victims of the curse, a better translation than 'spell of women' (following the Irish examples) would be 'enchantment of women' – i.e. a spell that is enchanting women, not, as has often been supposed, one cast by a group of witches.[9]

This opening sentence is unlike a classical spell in some aspects, however; for example, it is far more common for such a text to 'talk' – that is, to be written in the first person, a typical feature of performative texts. Spells written in the less remarkable third person, though, are known well enough, and seem to represent a more literary approach to cursing – they have taken on a style more typical of writing than of speaking. As with the 'enchantment of women' expression, there has also been some controversy over how to interpret the reference to names. However, Latin curses often include legalistic phrases such as 'against the names written below', some Greek curses similarly speak of binding (victims') names,

8 C.A. Faraone, 'Taking the "Nestor's cup inscription" seriously: erotic magic and conditional curses in the earliest inscribed hexameters', *Classical Antiquity* 15 (1996), 95–6.

9 Lejeune *et al.*, 'Textes gaulois et gallo-romains', 123, 125; B. Mees, 'The Women of Larzac', *Keltische Forschungen* 3 (2008), 177–8.

and great care is usually taken in classical tradition in naming all the possible malefactors against whom a curse is cast.[10]

The third line of the opening sentence then goes on to introduce a more clearly feminine aspect of magic. Here the enchantment is more clearly described as one being enacted by a woman, although she is obviously not a witch. The description *uidlua* 'seeress', or literally 'knowing one', derives from a term meaning 'seeing' or 'knowing' that is also contained in the word *druid* (as *dru-wid* literally means '(one who has) true (in)sight' or 'knowledge') and which is related to the English words *wisdom* and *wise*. Comparable Celtic figures, often described as frenzied women, hags or even druidesses, are mentioned in classical accounts. Moreover, a later form of the same term is borne by Fedelma, a legendary Irish prophetess who appears in the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*. Like the alliteration of *bnanom brictom*, the juxtaposition of *uidluias uidlua* also stylistically highlights the term for 'seeress'. So the *uidlua* of the Larzac text is clearly the author of the spell, and, unlike at Chamalières and Bath, we are also given the name of the curser: Severa Tertionicna.[11]

The seeress Severa bears a typically Roman given name – it is the feminine form of Severus, a name (originally a nickname meaning 'severe' or 'stern') so typically Roman it was borne by an emperor. Her second name, Tertionicna, is clearly a Gaulish expression that means 'daughter of Tertiu', however, and is the ancient Celtic equivalent of a modern O' or Mac surname (Ní in modern Irish). It is not common for the names of cursers to appear in *defixiones* (usually it is only the victims of such expressions who are indicated by name), but the first hand of the text similarly evidences a mixture of Celtic and Roman features, both in spelling and grammar. Severa Tertionicna seems, then, to have been a Gaulish woman, a seeress who was at home writing and speaking Latin.

Severa's two alliterating titles are also plainly Celtic and refer to key aspects of her role in the spell. The first, *lidsatim*, is related to English *learn*, and seems to be akin (as a description of knowing) to the expression *uidlua* 'seeress'. *Liciatim*, on the other hand, appears to be related to the Latin word *licium* 'thread' or 'girdle', which is often used in magical expressions indicating fating and cursing. The Roman poet Ovid, for instance, mentions an ancient form of magic used by a hag that required a *cantatum licium* or 'enchanted thread' to be used with lead: 'She ties the magical thread to a piece of dark-coloured lead.' Ovid's description in his *Calendar*, written a century before the Larzac text was created, seems to refer to the common practice in ancient cursing of tying curse tablets to leaden manikin effigies (voodoo doll-like creations called *kolossoi* in Greek) or other items which symbolically represented victims used as part of the cursing process (bits of hair, scraps of clothing, etc., which are often just called *ousia* 'substance' or 'stuff' in Greek spells). *Licium* is also the word used in Latin to describe the skeins of fate, the threads representing mortal lives that the Fates hold ready to cut or bind as they choose. The connection seen at Chamalières

10 R. Wünsch, *Defixionum tabellae Atticae*, Inscriptiones Graecae 3.3 App. (Berlin 1897), no. 100: *katochos isthi toutôn tôn onomatôn*; Tomlin, 'The curse tablets', no. 8 (and see Chapter 3, above): *a nominibus infrascriptis*; Mees, 'Chamalières', 17; idem, 'Women of Larzac', 177.

11 Lejeune *et al.*, 'Textes gaulois et gallo-romains', 151, 158.

between cutters, destining a destiny and spinning seems near at hand again here, as there was clearly a connection made in ancient tradition between wise women who could see into the future and those who could actually influence future events by means of fixing fates or other forms of blessing or cursing. Thus *liciatim* would appear to be a Latinate Gaulish title equivalent to the Greek cursing term *katachos* 'restrainer' which indicated someone with fating or binding ('restraining') powers. Moreover, the alliteration of the two Gaulish terms suggests that *lidsatim* and *liciatim* are paired or complementary functions (divining and restraining): that is, they describe the powers that Severa Tertionicna was bringing to bear on the 'names' in the Larzac spell.[12]

Another name, Adsagsona, is mentioned before that of Severa, however, and is one which, to judge from its ending, seems to represent that of a goddess (cf. comparable Gaulish goddess names such as Damona, Epona and Ritona). The name Adsagsona is otherwise unknown, but it is clearly related to the English words *seek* and *sage* (*ad-sag-* literally means 'seek at' or 'to'), and a descendant of the word which forms the root of this name, *assach*, is found in a fifteenth-century Welsh legal statute, where it signifies a powerful type of compurgation (a legal recognition of truth or innocence) ensured, as the statute explains, 'by the oaths of 300 men'. Like the Secovi at Chamalières, Adsagsona may be some kind of divine embodiment of justice, although it might also be the case that she is being called upon here as an arbiter of truth and wisdom: that is, acting in a manner closer to the classical goddesses Justice (Dike) or Minerva (Athena). Classical judicial spells often invoke Justice, Nemesis or the Furies (the Erinyes or Eumenides, i.e. vengeance personified) if the purpose of the curse is to right a wrong, so it may be that Adsagsona was understood as a sort of supernatural Gaulish persecutrix. But it is not entirely clear whether Adsagsona is a goddess of 'seeking' for knowledge, truth or justice, or rather some less transcendent thing such as revenge – after all, calls for divine powers to hunt down or persecute those who have done the inscriber some wrong (such as stolen from them) are fairly common in classical curses.[13]

Greek binding spells mostly call on deities associated with magic such as Hecate, Hermes, Hades or Persephone – divinities connected with death and the underworld. In fact, etymologically, Adsagsona's name seems especially similar to

12 Ovid, *Fast*. 2.575 [= Gager, *Curse Tablets*, no. 144]; E. Benveniste, 'La famille etymologique de *learn*', *English and Germanic Studies* 1 (1947), 1–5; Lejeune *et al.*, 'Textes gaulois et gallo-romains', 161; P. Mac Cana, 'Composition and collocation of synonyms in Irish and Welsh', in J.F. Eska *et al*. (eds), *Hispano-Gallo-Brittonica: essays in honour of Professor D. Ellis Evans on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday* (Cardiff 1995), pp. 106–22; C.M. McDonough, 'The hag and the household gods: silence, speech, and the family in mid-February (Ovid, *Fasti* 2.533–638)', *Classical Philology* 99 (2004), 354–69; B. Mees and N. Nicholas, 'Greek curses and the Celtic otherworld', forthcoming.

13 F.W. Maitland, *The Collected Papers of Frederic William Maitland, Downing Professor of the Laws of England* 1, ed. H.A.L. Fisher (Cambridge 1911), pp. 228–29; E.P. Hamp, 'Incidence of Gaulish divine names in *-on-*', *Studia Celtica Japonica* NS 4 (1994), 71–2; W. Meid, 'Zur Interpretation der Inschrift von Larzac', in W. Meid and P. Anreiter (eds), *Die grösseren altkeltischen Sprachdenkmaler: Akten eines Kolloquiums Innsbruck, 29. April–3. Mai 1993*, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft, Sonderheft 95 (Innsbruck 1996), p. 44; P.-Y. Lambert, *La langue gauloise: description linguistique, commentaire d'inscriptions choisies*, 2nd ed. (Paris 2003) p. 169.

Praxidike 'Exacter of Justice', an epithet of Persephone used in classical cursing. It appears that Adsagsona is also being asked to look twice upon Severa (in *uodui uoderce*, another clearly stylised phrase), perhaps in reference to her two titles as *lidsatim* and *liciatim*. 'Twice' is used rhetorically in Irish sometimes just to mean 'more than once, very much, a lot', however, so perhaps *uodui uoderce* represents a call for Adsagsona to look particularly favourably on the caster of the spell. Indeed, 'looking' is often connected with wisdom in Celtic tradition. It may well be, then, that the Larzac expression is an acknowledgement of a traditional function of Adsagsona's, perhaps a reference to her perspicacity or insight. Yet, equally, *uodui uoderce* may just be a customary Gaulish benediction – Severa Tertionicna could have been blessing herself here: 'O Adsagsona! Look twice (favourably) upon me!' After all, it is usually only the *defixiones* which appear to be modelled on hymns that feature comparable alliterative pairs.[14]

However, this long, rhythmical, opening statement also contains words which make clear that the inscription is a curse rather than just an invocation or a prayer. The description *tigontias* and the verb *nitixsintor* are both clearly formed from the root *tig-* 'pierce, stick' which is probably represented at Bath, and that, moreover, with the prefix *ni-* 'down' in *nitixsintor*, seems to be a precise parallel to the Latin word *defixio* 'binding curse' (which literally indicates a 'fixing down'). In fact, classical curse tablets are often found with nails driven through them as if this physical action was complementary to the notion of fixing or binding. The verb used to indicate Severa's action seems to be 'put' or 'commit', though, rather than a more explicit 'pierce' or 'bind', and the 'it' she is committing (or laying) appears to be the enchantment or spell – Severa does not seem to be doing the actual 'binding' at Larzac. Nonetheless, the 'enchantment of women' obviously refers to the victims who are cited in the long list of feminine names which follow in the second section of the text, so it seems that, much as Maponos and the Secovi are the actual agents of the 'spinning' and 'destining' at Chamalières, Severa is handing over the names of the victims she is enchanting to Adsagsona here in order that they may consequently be infernally 'bound by malediction'. Although it is expressed quite differently, the Larzac spell appears to be a curse of the handing-over variety which employs the legalistic verb *lung-* 'put, commit' to transfer Severa's victims to the care of an otherworldly power. Why the victims are being cursed has not yet been made clear, however.

The opening sentence obviously ends, then, with an even more specific description of the binding that the victims are to be subjected to: *duscelinata* or 'malediction'. This term is similar to Irish and Welsh words for 'dirge' or 'elegy' (the element *nata*, instrumental *natia*, clearly means 'poem' or 'song'), but here, rather than a lamentation for the dead, it appears to describe a necromantic curse. The song-like structure of the Larzac spell is not just betrayed by the use of the description *duscelinata*, however, and the several instances of alliterating pairs: there is clear evidence of chaining or stylistic linking throughout its opening section. The prefix *dus-* 'bad' also indicates that the Larzac *dusceli-*

[14] Lejeune *et al.*, 'Textes gaulois et gallo-romains', 159, 175–6; and cf. Blänsdorf, '"Güter, Heilge Atthis"', pp. 56–8: *adsi(s) advenias* 'help, come!', *malam mentum* 'an evil conscience', *vita vixerit* 'a life shall have lived'.

nata (which seems literally to have been an 'evil death song') is not a beneficial funerary charm; rather it is clearly a black magic spell that has been deposited in Gemma's tomb.[15]

The opening section establishes quite clearly what kind of spell the Larzac inscription represents, much as the Chamalières curse begins with an invocation and call for the 'spinning' of its victims. The Larzac curse is rather more classical in the way it mentions 'fixing down' rather than 'spinning', though, even if it does so in an indirect way. The long Gaulish sentence which opens the spell is then followed by a less rhetorically complicated section that begins with a short, ring-like recapitulation of the information given in the first lines, but otherwise substantially comprises only a list of feminine names.

Most of the names given in the second section of the lamella inscription seem to be those of Gaulish women, although many of them nevertheless still alliterate as if there has been a deliberate attempt to continue the text's poem- or song-like form in the list. The naming sequence even begins with a style similar to that with which it ends ('Banona of Vlatucia … Vlatucia mother of Banona') as if another form of ring composition or framing is deliberately being employed, much as at Chamalières. The names also quite evidently represent the 'their' of 'their names' and 'their diviner (and) restrainer' mentioned in the first section of the rhythmic sepulchral spell:

in eianom anuan[a] esi · andernados brictom ·
Bano[na] Flatucias ·
Paulla dona Potiti[us]
Aiia · duxtir · Adieg(i)as
Poti[ta m]atir Paullias ·
Seuera du[xtir] Valentos dona Paullius
Adiega · matir · Aiías
Potita dona Primius Abesias
etic eiotinios
coet[ic] Rufena Casta dona B[a]non(i)us
cuetic diligentir · C Vlationicnom
Aucticnim [m]aterem Potiti(as)
Vlatucia mat[ir] Banonias

Upon their names, the enchantment of them, the group below:
Banona (daughter) of Vlatucia,
Paulla foster-daughter of Potita,
Aia daughter of Adiega,
Potita mother of Paulla,
Severa daughter of Valens, foster-daughter of Paulla,
Adiega mother of Aia,
Potita foster-daughter of Prima (daughter) of Abesia;
and also the fated:
including Rufena Casta foster-daughter of Banona,

15 For *ducelinata*, cf. Old Irish *du-* 'bad', *cel* 'death, dissolution', *nath* 'poem'; Welsh *dy-* 'bad', *cel-* 'false', *-nad* 'elegy'; Lejeune *et al.*, 'Textes gaulois et gallo-romains', 165; Mees, 'Women of Larzac', 179–81.

including Caius Vlationicnos,
(and) Auciticna mother of Potita – they have been bound;
Vlatucia mother of Banona.

As at Chamalières, this section (which continues onto the other side of this part of the tablet) describes a group of people whose names appear in a manner common enough for the victims of a classical spell. The expression *andernados brictom* that follows the repeated phrase 'upon their names' is also reminiscent of that which heads the list of names at Chamalières – *sos brixtia anderon* 'with magic these (here) below' – as well as the 'names given to the infernal gods' of the Kreuznach *defixiones*. But the Larzac spell later describes the women as *ueronados*, 'above', so it is clear that the mention of 'below' here is not, as has sometimes been supposed, a reference to the underworld (or infernal gods). The part of the list on the first side of the tablet is also followed by another enumeration of names, or at least one expressed slightly differently; it alliteratively describes a group of women and a man (*cuetic … Caius*) who seem to represent a further group of victims of the curse. The second group is headed (much as in the list on the pendant from Bath) by a collective description, *eiotinios* 'the fated', and is rounded out with a verb – *diligentir* – which seems to represent a Gallified form of Latin *deligo* 'bind'. It may be that two different groups were intended in this section, but as the second group are all listed on the other side of the first portion of the tablet, their separation might merely reflect a wish of Severa Tertionicna's to indicate clearly that they were also 'fated' for cursing. Given that the lines of this supplementary naming section also alliterate (*etic eiotinios* 'and also the fated', *coetic … Casta* 'including … Casta' etc.), however, the supplementary structure may equally have been introduced for stylistic reasons, as a reflection of the song-like nature of the long Gaulish spell.[16]

After all, the group (or groups) comprise four mother–daughter pairings representing three families (although on two occasions the precise relationship is presumably to be understood) and some additional figures: Severa daughter of Valens (evidently a separate woman from Severa Tertionicna, 'Severa daughter of Tertiu'), another woman, Rufena Casta, and C. Vlationicnos, 'Caius son of Vlatiu', the inscription's only male. As the Celtic man's name Vlatiu is also evidently much the same linguistically as the woman's name Vlatucia, it may be that Caius Vlationicnos was genetically related to Vlatucia and her daughter Banona (who also bears a Celtic name).

Two of the familial groups are linked to women who are not described as mothers or daughters, however, but as what are probably foster-daughters. The description used, *dona*, is related to terms such as Old Irish *denait* 'suck' and *donad* 'consoling', and the name of the goddess *Danu* or *Dana* from whom the chief group of Irish gods, the Tuatha Dé Danann ('People of the Goddess Danu'), took their name. No mention of fosterage is made in the contemporary classical descriptions of ancient Celtic society that have survived, but fosterage was a key social feature of early Irish culture and it presumably represents a very old

16 B. Mees, 'Larzac *eiotinios*', *Historische Sprachforschung* 117 (2004), 298–302; idem, 'Women of Larzac', 181.

expression once shared by all Celtic traditions. It was quite common in medieval Ireland for young boys and girls to be sent away to another (higher-status) family to be raised, for instance, or for the infants of leading families to be fostered out to those of their vassals. Similar practices may well have been customary among the ancient continental tribes; and although the etymological link with suckling here suggests that *dona* indicates infant fosterage (rather than that of adolescents), adopting heirs was also quite common in Greek and Roman society. Whatever the precise type of fosterage involved, it seems likely that Severa Tertionicna is cursing the members of three extended Gallo-Roman families in this section, a cursing that specifically embraces foster-daughters, much as if this feature was somehow of relevance to the circumstances which led to the composition of the find.[17]

The three families of the Larzac curse

			Auciticna	[Abesia]		
			|	|		
	Vlatucia	Adiega	[Valens]	Potita	—	Prima
	|	|	|	|		
Rufena Casta	— Banonia	Aia Cicena	Severa	— Paulla		
Caius Vlationicnos?						

Curse tablets featuring long enumerations of names usually feature those of men, however – when women appear in ancient curses it is usually as wives, daughters and mothers of accursed males. At Larzac the relationships indicated are evidently nearly all through the female line; the women in this list have consequently been described not as several regular family groupings but instead as a witches' coven. It is quite unusual for mothers (or grandmothers) to be mentioned as if they were also being cursed in such formulations, but maternal names are a common-enough feature of curse tablets of imperial date, although such descendence is often indicated rather more explicitly, that is, through expressions such as 'X who gave birth to Y'. Indeed descent was usually represented through the male line in antiquity, so it is often assumed that the common use of maternal naming in ancient spells represents a deliberate attempt to render things topsy-turvy in order to add to the (twisting and confusing) power of a charm. Others have supposed that this feature of ancient magical naming might even represent the principle that only maternity is certain – that it is another instance of the great care usually taken in classical curses when listing victims' names. In fact, it may well be that Severa daughter of Valens is only described in the usual way here (i.e. by her father's name) so as to distinguish her clearly from her namesake Severa Tertionicna – and a similar explanation may account for the distinction that has been made between foster-daughters and natural female progeny in the Larzac listing sequence.[18]

[17] Mees, 'Larzac *eiotinios*', 300, n. 5; P. Parkes, 'Celtic fosterage: adoptive kinship and clientage in Northwest Europe', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48 (2006), 359–95.

[18] J.H.M. Strubbe, '"Cursed be he that moves my bones"', in Faraone and Obbink, *Magika*

The curse inscription then goes on to record a voice that speaks again of Severa Tertionicna, although (again) in what seems to be a rather odd manner. Her name is written split in two, which has caused some to wonder whether in fact two different women, Severa and Tertionicna, are indicated here. This phrasing merely seems to be a reflection of the poetic nature of the text, however, as can clearly be seen in this section by the alliteration of *lissinau[e]* … *licinaue* and *Tertioni[cnim]* … *tiopritom*. At any rate, the third section, although it is fragmentary in parts and runs over to take up the entire third part (the first side of the second portion) of the Larzac lamella, seems in its mannered, rhythmical and alliterating way to detail what Severa is doing to the 'names'. It also contains references to a 'one below' and an 'infernal one' (as opposed to a 'one hereunder'), whose precise identity, though, is not made immediately clear:

ne · incitas · biontutu indas mnas
ueronadas brictas
lissinau[e] Seuerim licinaue ·
Tertioni[cnim] eíabi tiopritom
biietutu se mn[as]
ratet Seuera Tertionicna
ne incitas biontutu s[e mnas]
du[scel?]anatia nepi anda
incors onda [bocca] …
… *donicon* … *incarata* …

[su]a · senit conecto[s] onda bocca
nene[c be]rionti onda bocca
ne[p]on barnaunom
ponc nitixsintor sies eia nepi andigi
ne lissatim ne liciatim · ne rodatim ·
biontutu se mnanom
sagitiontias Seuerim
lidsatim liciatim anandognam
acolututanit andognam
o[n]da bocca diom ne …

These enchanted women above
shall not be unaffected by it.
Either the divining of Severa
or the restraining of Tertionicna
shall be purchased by them through it, this, the women.
Severa Tertionicna ensures that
[the women] shall not be unaffected by it, this …
… by the malediction (?) of the one below,
shut their [mouths] …
… fosterage … enemy …

Hiera, p. 43; J.B. Curbera, 'Maternal lineage and Greek magical texts', in Jordan *et al.*, *The World of Ancient Magic*, pp. 195–204.

'[Just a]s she is holding their mouths tied
so (too) are their mouths no[t
be]aring judgement on anyone
when they are bound by it (the enchantment) of the infernal one.
Neither diviner nor restrainer nor offerer
shall be any one of the women for it, this (the enchantment)
they who are persecuting Severa
the diviner, the restrainer, the stranger,
a local that shall live nearby her.
Power their mouths do not …

Apart from being rhythmical, this long section also appears to be very legalistic. But stipulative language is a common feature in classical cursing. Unfortunately, though, the latter parts of the text on this portion of the tablet are somewhat fragmentary as the handwriting was much less heavily scored into the lead as the inscriber came to the bottom of this side. There is a short sequence of text after the second use of the expression *ne incitas biontutu* 'shall not be unaffected by it' that can probably be restored as *s[e mnas]* 'this, the women' on the model of the other rhetorical 'shall be' plus 'women' forms, and a partial sequence *du-* can clearly be made out at the end of the line before this, suggesting that *du[…]anatia* might be a variant of (or spelling mistake for) *duscelinatia* 'by malediction'. The next section also makes clear that the incomplete command *incors onda* … 'Close their …' can be completed with *bocca* 'mouths'. After that, however, little can be rescued with any certainty except for a few clear individual words.[19]

It is the command to shut mouths that is most obviously reflected in the opening lines of the next side, though. This is a command, moreover, which is clearly reminiscent of a particularly common practice in classical curses. Another line from Ovid's *Calendar*, for example, records witches claiming 'We have bound the tongues of enemies' much as juridical *defixiones* often make references to the silencing of tongues in order to preclude their victims speaking against their curser before a court ('twisted to the point of uselessness' as one ancient Sicilian binding spell puts it). These references, then, probably also explain the appearance of the word *incarata* 'enemy' (literally 'un-friend') in the unclear final lines of the previous side: references to enemies (*inimici*) are a particularly common feature of Latin legal *defixiones*. Hence 'the one below' seems to be being called upon in this section to shut (and hold tight) the mouths of the victims of the curse, presumably Severa Tertionicna's adversaries in some sort of legal case or trial.[20]

The Larzac curse, then, is clearly a litigation spell much as the charm from Chamalières is, and several statements which appear on the third side of the inscription expand further on this judicial theme. This side begins with a lacuna,

19 Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae*, no. 137: *ne quis eum solvat nisi nos qui fecimus*; Meid, 'Zur Interpretation', p. 46; and cf. D.R. Jordan, 'Three curse tablets', in Jordan *et al.*, *The World of Ancient Magic*, pp. 120–3, for similar Greek formulas.

20 Ovid, *Fast.* 2.576 [= Gager (ed.), no. 144]; Lejeune *et al.*, 'Textes gaulois et gallo-romains', 171; Gager, *Curse Tablets*, no. 51; Lambert, *La langue gauloise*, pp. 171–2; Mees, 'Women of Larzac', 176–77.

however, and it is not at first clear what the first word was (*sua* 'thus, so' is a possibility, i.e. as part of an injunctive 'just as …, so too …' expression). The restoration *[be]rionti* 'bearing' for the seventh, on the other hand, is not only suggested by what little remains of the word's first two letters, but also by the mention of *barnaunom* 'judgement', which literally means something 'borne' (as is a common semantic in Celtic) – a figure of speech approaching a grammatical figure seems to be being employed here. The mention of shutting mouths probably indicates that this section aims to pre-empt the possibility that the mouths of the 'names' may 'bear judgement' on someone, much as the opposing side might in a legal case. The wording also suggests that, rather than Severa Tertionicna, the actual performer of the restraining was the one below (or her 'malediction'), much as would be expected in a 'handing-over' *defixio*.[21]

Most juridical binding spells give little indication of the specific matters which led to their creation. Such is not the case with the rather expansive Larzac curse, however. The rest of the third section continues with more information about Severa Tertionicna and the mouths, and suggests more about the circumstances which prompted the resort to cursing, before then, unfortunately, breaking off again. The verb *sagitiontias* (which features the 'seek' element also found in the name of the goddess Adsagsona) seems to refer to a group of women seeking out (or rather persecuting) Severa Tertionicna, and the information that Severa Tertionicna was *anandognam*, literally 'not indigenous (i.e. not born here)' might explain why she felt persecuted: she may have been considered a foreigner, and hence not treated as well as one of the local Gauls. Yet, conversely, this description is immediately followed by what appears to be an indication that Severa was 'local' – the term *acolutu-* seems to represent a Gaulish form of the Latin verb *accolo* 'to live near'. It may be, then, that Severa was a stranger who had become a local after arriving only fairly recently in the Larzac area, or a Celt (a native Gaul) who was just not from the same local tribe (indigenous, but not that indigenous). In ancient times strangers, as non-citizens, typically had fewer legal rights than local people, so perhaps Severa is asserting that although she was not born in the parts about Larzac (*anandognam*), she should still be considered a local (*andognam*) in a legal sense. This is the usual reason that words like 'foreigner' appear in *defixiones*, and given the range of women and fosterlings against whom the Larzac spell was cast, foreignness might have been a particularly important consideration in the context of litigation, particularly if the dispute which first led to the legal action was something like a contested inheritance.[22]

We also receive information on a third type of magic in this sentence that presumably may have been used profitably in such a setting: offering. The noun *rodatim* 'offerer' is clearly related to Welsh *rhodaf* 'give', and almost certainly refers to offerings to the gods. Consequently the three descriptions *lissatim*, *licatim* and *rodatim* – 'diviner', 'restrainer', 'offerer' – seem to encompass the totality of

21 Lejeune *et al.*, 'Textes gaulois et gallo-romains', 141 and 171; and cf. T.L. Markey, 'The institutional and onomastic setting of Gallo-Roman Champlieu', *NOWELE* 49 (2006), 5–6, on the common 'bear … justice' semantics of Celtic.

22 Lejeune *et al.*, 'Textes gaulois et gallo-romains', 173; Mees, 'Women of Larzac', 174, n. 6 and 176–7.

(binding) magic, much as the later expression 'against the magic of women and smiths and druids' embraces all the types of malevolent magic that could be inveighed against in medieval Ireland. In fact, the three Old Celtic descriptions are reminiscent of the designations of the three classes of learned men which classical authorities describe for Gaulish society: seers, bards and druids. Consequently, these descriptions could well have been the three female Celtic titles or functions equivalent to those borne by the trio of Gaulish wise men. But then, things often come in threes in Celtic tradition.[23]

Whatever the case, the sentence seems to indicate that none of the women listed in the second section of the Larzac spell was proficient in casting curses, or at least that Severa Tertionicna was asserting that. Severa's stated foreignness might also explain why the dialects represented in the two hands of the curse seem slightly different. Some experts have suggested that it is likely that the second hand is part of a more recent message and that part of the main text was erased and written over by the lesser hand (which is, after all, so deeply inscribed that some of the first few letters have come right through, and can be seen from the other side of the lamella). It is also equally if not more likely, however, that, much as is surely the case with the longer of the Bath curse finds, the Larzac text is just a joint production. How a later inscription might have been applied after the first writer had finished her section, but before the tablet was placed in Gemma's tomb, seems quite unfathomable otherwise. Indeed, it could be that Severa had the first section written out for her by a more Romanised scribe and subsequently applied a correction at this point. At any rate, the second hand's section is also clearly part of a curse, it is composed in a song-like form, it uses very similar language (and style) to that of the principal hand, and it begins the last section of the curse text which fills up the fourth and last side of the lamella.

The opening sentence of the last section is the only one written in the second of the two hands. It also seems mostly to concern one or two other actors, the first of whom, Aia, the daughter of Adiega, appears to be identical with one of the women mentioned in the group listed above; the other is probably the same figure as the previous section's 'one below':

Aia … Cicena
nitianncobueθ liθatias uolson
ponne antumnos · nepon
n(e) es liciatia
ne os uode
n(e) eia uodercos · nepon

sua biontutu se mnanom
Adsaxsona
doc suet petidsiont sies
peti sagitiontias Seu[er]im Tertio(nicnim)
lissatim [eia]s
anandogna[m] [br]ictontias

[23] Diodorus Siculus 5.31.1–3; Strabo 4.4.4; Lejeune *et al.*, 'Textes gaulois et gallo-romains', 160.

Second hand:
May Aia … Cicena
be restrained by the evil of the diviner,
not that the one in the underworld
is neither a restrainer
nor someone twice,
not someone who looks upon.

First hand:
Just as they shall be for it, this (the enchantment) of the women,
O Adsagsona,
so too consequently will they suffer!
Cause them to suffer the ones (the women) who are persecuting
Severa Tertionicna,
the diviner of it (the binding),
the foreigner of the enchanting!

Aia seems to have been singled out especially as a victim in this part of the spell. Her name is followed by a lacuna, but one of the missing letters appears to be an *a* which points to a short word such as *ad* 'to' or *ari* 'before', or perhaps even an abbreviated Ad(iegias), '(daughter) of Adiega'. Indeed, it is not clear whether the appellation Cicena which follows pertains to Aia or another person. Yet it is evident that this section of the curse has mostly been written by someone who appears otherwise to have been rather less Romanised than the first writer in terms of her spelling, that she was a writer who presumably had an especial dislike (or fear) of Aia, and that she wanted it to be made particularly plain that, above all, Aia could not escape the malediction.

This section, then, seems to indicate finally why it was that the Larzac curse was left in Gemma's tomb. The two magical attributes ascribed to Severa Tertionicna in the opening sentence – divining and restraining – are mentioned again, and the alliteration (and two-ness) in *uode … uodercos* 'twice … looks upon' similarly recalls the request for Adsagsona to 'look twice upon' (*uodui uoderce*) the seeress from the opening part of the spell. Moreover, the 'one below' (and 'she') also seems to be being identified at this point more specifically as 'the one in the underworld'. The 'restrainer', however, is also referred to here as someone with the same power that Adsagsona has – to be able to look (beneficially) twice on someone calling upon her. It seems obvious, then, that the 'one below' or 'infernal one' is Adsagsona, the supernatural enabler of the Larzac spell, and clearly an ancient Celtic infernal power.

Indeed, the appearance of the term *antumnos* 'underworld' is a particularly striking feature of the penultimate section of the spell. Although appearing in what seems to be a contracted form, it is historically the same expression as that used as the name of the mythical land *Annwfn* which features in medieval Welsh stories, a place that is usually thought to be the Welsh 'otherworld'. Both forms are also etymologically very similar to a Greek expression *katachthonios* 'the underworlder' that is particularly common in Greek funerary inscriptions, where it is used as an epithet of chthonian spirits and gods. The connection between the '*antumnos* one' and cursing here suggests that the Gallo-Roman underworld had many similarities to that of Greek belief – enough, at least, that the gods

of the ancient Celtic *antumnos* could play the same role that those of Hades did in the classical tradition of cursing. Adsagsona seems to be being identified in this section, then, as a Celtic Hecate, Demeter or even Persephone Praxidike – much as is in keeping with the kinds of deities whose names are most commonly invoked in Greek and Roman curses.[24]

Finally, the funeral curse inscription reverts back to the principal hand with a last statement concerning Severa Tertionicna, another call on Adsagsona, and a closing request that the victims suffer in a final request for vengeance. The first line is clearly a form of 'just as …, so too …' or *similia similibus* expression, albeit of a rather blunt and injunctive sort. Moreover, the second line, with its use of the verb *petit-* 'suffer' along with *sagit-* 'persecute', is a more subtle form of sympathetic or 'just as … so too …' expression, one imploring that Severa's persecutors will suffer exactly as she has. Presumably Severa Tertionicna was not the instigator of the legal suit but felt that she was the subject of persecution, perhaps given the familial relationships cited for her adversaries from natural and adoptive heirs who had been written out of a will to Severa's financial advantage. The Gaulish spell is then clearly rounded off with a restatement that Severa Tertionicna was a diviner and a stranger, and, although one of the last words (the short space suggests *eia* 'it', i.e. a reference to 'the binding') and the first two letters of the last have been lost, what seems to have been meant as a final explicit reference to the *brictom*, the 'enchantment'.[25]

Thus the alliterating Larzac spell clearly fits into an ancient Greek tradition of cursing or binding involving the powers of the underworld and souls of the dead. It also seems to be a juridical curse, too, just like that from Chamalières, although slipping a curse tablet into a tomb seems a much grimmer and morally fraught practice than dropping an offering into the sacred waters of the god of a spring. With its instances of terms clearly loaned from or based upon Latin words (and probably Greek too), a dependence that even extends to the reproduction of complex rhetorical forms typical of classical cursing, the Larzac tablet is more obviously classicised than the Chamalières find. Yet clearly the Graeco-Roman cursing tradition had been fully absorbed into Gaulish culture and in the process it had been transformed: most tellingly, and unlike most Greek or Roman curses, the Larzac text is composed in a song-like form. Although it echoes some of the styles used in classical *defixiones*, the Larzac *duscelinata* scarcely represents a straight translation from a Greek or Roman grimoire. Instead, it employs a range of quite sophisticated stylistic features, from alliterative linking and ringing to recurrent recapitulation and variation of key expressions such as *biontutu se mnanom*, as it weaves its way through its web of invocations, enumeration of names, implorations and imprecatory commands.

Nonetheless, themes such as Chamalières's 'spinning' and 'destining a destiny'

[24] P. Sims-Williams, 'Some Celtic otherworld terms', in A.T.E. Matonis and D.F. Melia (eds), *Celtic Language, Celtic Culture: a festschrift for Eric P. Hamp* (Van Nuys 1990), pp. 57–84; Mees and Nicholas, 'Greek curses'.

[25] Gager, *Curse Tablets*, no. 75; H.S. Versnel, 'Κολάσαι τοὺς ἡμᾶς τοιούτους ἡδέως βλέποντες "Punish those who rejoice in our misery": on curse tablets and *Schadenfreude*', in Jordan *et al.*, *The World of Ancient Magic*, pp. 125ff.; Mees, 'Women of Larzac', 181–2.

are expressed in more clearly Latinate terms at Larzac – and neither is a benign spring god such as Maponos invoked in the funerary find. Instead, where Hecate or Hermes might have been called upon in a Greek curse, it seems that the name of a Celtic figure like Adsagsona could be called up from the Celtic netherworld in the Gaulish interpretation of the ancient tradition of binding spells. The idea recorded by Lucan in the 60s AD that the Celts did not believe in an infernal realm of the dead does not seem compatible with the clear use of necromancy 50 years or so later in the Larzac spell. Instead, Gaulish funerary beliefs seem to have become substantially classicised by the second century of Roman rule. The description *uidlua* 'seeress' appears to represent the best evidence for a substantial degree of continuation of pre-classical magical practice in the Larzac *defixio* and, clearly, the song-like form of the *duscelinata* is not well paralleled in classical curse finds. But breaking into a tomb was presumably not recognised as a good or respectable thing to do in Graeco-Roman or Celtic tradition – the Gaulish seeress Severa must have been taking a considerable risk in depositing her necromantic tablet in such a way given the opprobrium with which the less salubrious forms of magic were often met in the ancient world. In fact, given the usual Roman legal response to accusations of witchcraft, she may have been risking her life by leaving a curse tablet in Gemma's tomb.

Yet, most of all, just as the term for 'underworld' used in the Celtic spell seems to be based on one from Greek, the Larzac curse suggests that a new conception of the afterlife had developed in Gaul in Imperial Roman times. Some suggestions of a bloody and even shadowy otherworld can be found in Insular Celtic sources – the macabre magical inn of Da Derga, the Irish 'Red God', described in the *Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel*, was clearly thought of in such terms, as was the grim, tenebrous realm of Scath of the *Phantom Chariot of Cuchulainn*. Even the Welsh name Annwfn seems to reflect classical influence in early medieval Celtic understandings of the fate of the immortal souls of the dead. Indeed, the dual nature of the Celtic otherworld represented by wondrous Inis Witrin and fearsome Scath can also be explained in such terms: timeless and blissful on the one hand, baleful and tenebrous on the other. But a more fundamental classicisation of funerary beliefs seems to have occurred in Gaul. Less than a century after the appearance of the Chamalières curse, a fully developed form of ancient necromancy had clearly been introduced to a linguistically Celtic tradition, much as, it seems, had the originally Greek notion of the power of restless shades as well as other dark and furtive features which were associated with the Graeco-Roman underworld. Gemma, then, must have been considered one of the restless dead and the spell tablet was deposited in her tomb so that she could take Severa Tertionicna's juridical curse down into the underworld to present to the infernal Celtic goddess Adsagsona for retributory judgement.

5

Vengeful Prayers

The funerary *defixio* from Larzac ends with a call that Severa Tertionicna's enemies may suffer, just as she evidently was suffering from their legal machinations. It does so using an idiosyncratic form of a 'just as …, so too …' formula, one that repeats several key phrases from earlier on in the find. The Larzac curse is not unique in this manner, however: similar retributory themes are just as clearly expressed in other Gaulish inscriptions that have come to light since the 1970s, not that these texts have always immediately been recognised as recording ancient imprecations. Finds of Latin binding spells from France are usually better appreciated, but not only because the language they are written in is much better understood than Gaulish is today. Latin *defixiones* often feature odd vocabulary, uses and wordings, and hence can sometimes be difficult to make sense of – often it is the appearance of typical magical expressions such as sympathetic rhetoric that is the most obvious feature of such texts. Other times, they are identified as curses principally because they have been found in physical circumstances that are typical of binding spells. Some Latin curse tablets found in France are occasionally so idiosyncratically Gallo-Roman, however, that they even preserve Celtic words, much as if these terms represent evidence for a native tradition of cursing that was not easily translatable into the language of the imperial conquerors.

A particularly intriguing example of such a find was unearthed in 1970 from the remains of a Gaulish hill-fort or *oppidum* at Montfo, some 50km south of L'Hospitalet-du-Larzac. Found in the remains of an ancient well, the mid-first-century Montfo *defixio* begins in a common-enough way for a Roman binding curse. Yet it ends in a unique manner, one which, moreover, appears to be heavily Gallified. Not only does the 100mm by 85mm lead tablet feature at least one clearly Gaulish term, it also refers to a *necracantum* or 'death song', a non-standard, partly Greek description (cf. Greek *nekros* 'corpse') which immediately brings necromancy to mind. But not only does necromancy not make much sense in the context of a well, the term *necromantia* is not known in Latin until it was borrowed from Greek by early Christian writers in the third century – long after the Montfo text was deposited. Indeed, necromantic 'death songs' are not known from the classical cursing tradition. Instead, *necracantum* seems to be a Graeco-Gaulish expression best paralleled by the *duscelinata* or 'evil death song' mentioned in the Larzac inscription.[1]

[1] R. Marichal, 'Une tablette d'exécration de l'oppidum de Montfo (Hérault)', *Comptes rendus*

Much like Larzac's mention of an *antumnos* or 'underworld', curse tablets such as the orthographically Greek Hyères find presumably represent evidence that the Gauls first learnt about binding spells from the early Greek colonists who established southern French towns such as Marseilles and Hyères. Unlike the Larzac *defixio*, though, and despite its mention of a *necracantum*, the Montfo text has obviously been composed in prose rather than in a song-like form. Indeed, there is little in the classical cursing tradition that would explain why the Montfo find should make reference to imprecatory singing and songs. The well curse appears to have been authored by a woman jealous of a certain Secundina as well as a male victim who the anonymous curser evidently had once desired. In fact, the Montfo curse also features the names of some other men – a mixture of Celtic and Roman forms – although the reason for the appearance of these in the curse is not made so clear. The inscription, which features some damage, reads:

> Just as this lead cannot be seen and is buried, so may the youth, skin, life, ox, grain and wellbeing of the ones who have done me wrong be buried. Likewise Asutemeos, Secundina who stole him, and Verres Tearus and Amarantis.
>
> And all this I require of you, gods, with all sortilege, that you celebrate a *masitlatida*, that together you sing a death song (and) a *col*… song, and all the gods … given …

The reference to ox and grain in the *similia similibus* which opens the Montfo *defixio* appears to be allusive (and presumably represents a way of referring to agricultural wealth and sustenance). It also suggests that the deposition was most clearly thought of by the Montfo curser as chthonic or earthly rather than aquatic. Although somewhat damaged and, hence, difficult to read, the latter portions of the presumably amatory find are otherwise unparalleled in classical *defixiones*, and seem even more clearly funeral in theme – infernal even. Indeed, the references to singing and cursing appear rather more clearly to represent a native Gaulish aspect of imprecation. After all, a connection between singing and cursing is well represented in the metrical Old Celtic *defixiones* and the Montfo term *masitlatida* is evidently a native cursing term – one similar to Welsh expressions such as *bachdlawd* 'tiny and needy' and *budrdlawd* 'filthy and mean'. The element *-tlati-* (cognate with Welsh *-dlawd*) evidently means 'needy' or 'diminished' and *masi-* looks to be a similarly negative element comparable to Old Irish *maidid* 'breaks' – a *masitlatida* seems to have been a baleful ritual of 'breaking and diminishing'.[2] The call for the gods to sing a Graeco-Gaulish *necracantum* (along with another form of maledictory song whose name, unfortunately, is mostly obscured by a lacuna) suggests that the infernal gods of Gallo-Roman experience were thought to be able to employ necromantic magic even when curses were sent to them via the medium of a well. Presumably the (linguistically) half-Greek *necracantum* at Montfo represents some sort of reflection of a classical expression – indeed, if it were not for the *col*… song also mentioned in the find, the *necracantum* might well

des séances de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres (1981), 41–52; Mees and Nicholas, 'Greek curses'.

2 Mees and Nicholas, 'Greek curses', n. 24.

otherwise be reasonably interpreted as some kind of magical Graeco-Gaulish funeral dirge. Yet none of the other *defixiones* from watery sites found in Britain or Gaul makes reference to ancient necromancy. Nor do they 'require' (*interdico*) the intervention of the gods. Yet health-depriving magic is associated with Celtic aquatic divinities such as Sulis and Niskus (and cf. the Lydney *defixio* addressed to Mars Nodens) – perhaps Montfo's *necracantum* was only thought to be akin to funerary magic. The link between burial, death and the deposition of a curse tablet in a well suggests that a connection may have been made by the author of the Montfo inscription between curses that could deprive a victim of their life and more clearly funerary expressions such as the infernal *duscelinata* from Gemma's tomb at Larzac.

Unlike with the Bath and Lydney finds, however, there is no indication that the Montfo well was an ancient religious sanctuary. What these texts have most clearly in common, rather, is that they are curses which invoke otherworldly powers. This invocatory development of *defixiones* is particularly evident in most Romano-British and French finds, many of which have developed as far down this invocatory path as to constitute outright (judicial) prayers. Nonetheless, much as the Montfo find makes reference to celebrating a *masitlatida*, Gallo-Roman curse tablets are often idiosyncratic in one way or another. Indeed, it is not merely the language they use that often seems so peculiar – it can even be the manner in which they were deposited that can mark them out as quite unlike more typical ancient cursing finds.

Such oddity can even appear in Gallo-Roman curses that are not at all Celtic in language. For example, a legal curse excavated in the late nineteenth century from an ancient graveyard near Chagnon, Charente-Maritime (near the Atlantic coast some 500km away from Montfo), is particularly odd as not only is it written on two *tabulae ansatae* (which seem once to have been fixed together with a nail), but the diptych-like imprecatory creation features a list of pseudo-words and was found along with the bones of a puppy. Bones of small animals are sometimes found together with classical curse tablets, and such sacrifices seem to have been employed as 'sympathetic' representations of the victims of the spell – at Chagnon the curser's legal adversaries (including their lawyer). Indeed, at Chagnon this symbolism is made quite gruesomely clear. The Gallo-Roman curse was unearthed from a late-second-century grave and its slightly jumbled text reads:[3]

> I give notice to the persons (whose names are) written below, Lentinus and Tasgillus, in order that they may [be taken away by] Pluto and Persephone. Just as this puppy harmed no one, so (may they harm no one) and may they not be able to win this suit. Just as the mother of this puppy cannot defend it, so may their lawyers be unable to defend them, (and) so (may) those opponents be turned back from this suit. *atracatetracati gallara precata egdarata hehes celata mentis ablata.*

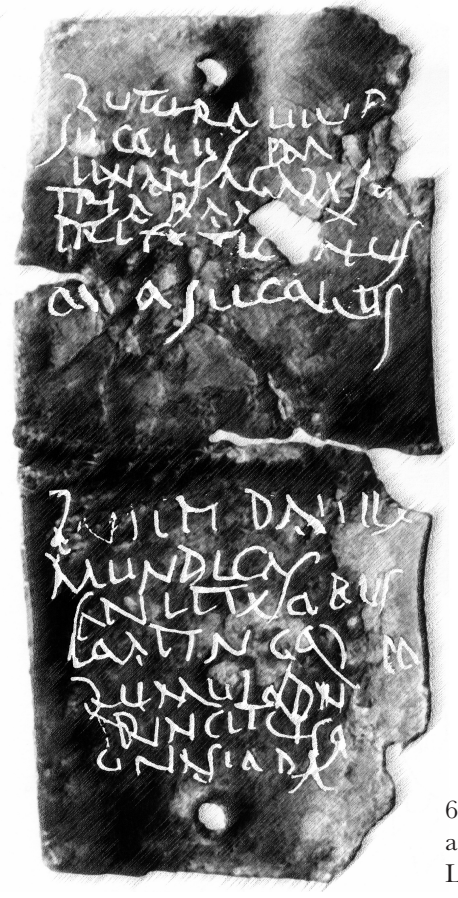
3 C. Jullian, 'Tablette magique de Chagnon (Charente-Inférieure)', *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* (1897), 177–86; *CIL* XIII, no. 11069–70; Gager, *Curse Tablets*, no. 53; and cf. Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae*, no. 241 and Faraone, 'Agonistic context', pp. 21–2, n. 3 and 22, n. 5.

> Just as this puppy is on its back and is unable to rise, so neither (may) they. They are (p)ierced through, just as this is. Just as in this tomb souls have been silenced and cannot rise up, and they (can)not … *atracatetracati gallara precata egdarata hehes celata mentis ablata.*

The Chagnon *defixio* is a considerably less prayer-like expression than many other Gallo-Roman and Gaulish imprecatory finds. But both its use of typically magical sympathetic rhetoric as well as the place of its deposition make its connection with the broader *defixio* tradition nonetheless quite clear. Strange sequences of words like those which appear twice in the Chagnon find are more typically found in Latin healing charms, however: compare the *motas, vaeta, daries, dardares, astataries, dissunapiter* or the *huat, haut, haut, istasis, tarsis, ardannabou, dannaustra* of medical incantations recorded by the Elder Cato.[4] Yet some of the Chagnon expressions are clearly based on meaningful Latin terms which are often reflected in *defixiones* (e.g. *precatus* 'cursed', *mentis* 'of mind', *ablatus* 'taken away'), whereas others seem to be merely rhyming nonsense words. The Chagnon find gives the impression of being a hodgepodge creation, part binding charm, part inverted healing incantation. Presumably the health-depriving rhetoric seen in several of the British *defixiones* led to the use of magical healing expressions of this kind in curses such as that from Chagnon. It does not seem to matter much where an ancient binding curse was deposited so long as the imprecation was correctly expressed (e.g. using sympathetic formulas, magico-legal registering or prayers) and the tablet disposed of in such a manner (i.e. in a tomb, a well or a spring) as ensured it might be properly received by the infernal powers. Therefore, curses which invoke otherworldly powers are not restricted only to cultic sites such as Aquae Sulis but, as the ansate shape of the Chagnon tablets suggests, are sometimes found in other locations that could be seen as suitable conduits for communicating with the gods of the classical underworld.

A more obvious conflation between *ahôrai*-invoking binding charms and curses of the invocatory type typically found in springs and sanctuaries seems to explain a rather more difficult 20-word Gaulish charm text which first came to light in the mid-1970s. While excavating an ancient graveyard at Chassagne (a site in the environs of the southern French town of Lezoux, some 29km east of Chamalières), archaeologists unearthed a Gaulish inscription written on a thin sheet of lead wrapped around a Roman coin. Quite a number of Gaulish graffiti etched into potsherds, plates and the like are also known from the area about Lezoux (ancient Ledosus). But the Lezoux lamella has the look of having formerly been used as part of an amulet – the lead sheet, which is 40mm long and about 20mm wide, is perforated at two points much as if the coin-and-lamella assemblage was once worn as a pendant. Coins were sometimes worn as lucky charms in antiquity – in fact, one amulet found near Angoulême in the west of France (a gold lamella whose inscription is a series of vowels arranged in the form of a square) was found in a lead coffin, along with a small bronze coin hanging from the deceased's bones. The vowels of the Angoulême lamella represent a well-known Graeco-Egyptian style of charm based on the notion that the seven

4 Cato, *Agr.* 160.



6. Gaulish lamella found wrapped around a coin at Chassagne, Lezoux

Greek vowels could represent the seven spheres of influence of ancient astrology. Yet nothing quite like the Lezoux assemblage is known among regular Roman amulet finds. The text associated with the Lezoux coin otherwise shows clear signs of recording a binding spell, however. Consequently, the wrapping of the lamella around a coin seems to have been symbolic, rather than indicating that the Lezoux assemblage was an idiosyncratic Gaulish amulet.[5]

The Lezoux lamella was obviously not deposited in a manner typical of curse tablets and not all ancient spell texts recorded on lead are clearly binding charms; nor are all curses from the ancient world inscribed on plates of lead. Yet lead was clearly the most favoured material upon which to record curses in antiquity. By the Middle Ages it had become common practice to inscribe any sort of charm or amulet text onto items or plates of lead, but this was not the case in Graeco-Roman times. By the Imperial period lead had developed dark,

5 H. Vertet, 'Les nécropoles de Lezoux', *Bulletin du Comité archéologique de Lezoux* (1975), 20–3; L. Fleuriot, 'Inscription gauloise sur plomb de Lezoux', *Etudes celtiques* 23 (1986), 63–70; Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, no. 9; *RIG* II.2, pp. 164ff.

furtive and necromantic overtones (as befits its colour and lustre) and there is even one late classical tradition that stolen lead plumbing was the ideal material for inscribing curses on. In antiquity, charms against disease and other forms of misfortune were, as at Angoulême, typically inscribed on sheets of gold or silver (i.e. metals with positive connotations). In fact, the only amulets from antiquity written on lead are clearly Christian (or at least semi-Christian) finds. Nonetheless, the meaning of the Lezoux inscription has only become clear since the discovery of the Larzac *defixio*, and the rather difficult lamella text appears to have much more in common with the other lead Gaulish magical finds than it obviously does with any well-known type of classical amulet charm.[6]

The Lezoux spell lamella, which was found wrapped around a bronze coin struck with a bust of the emperor Trajan, seems to be an early-second-century creation – it is probably contemporary, as well as having been found in a similarly sepulchral context, with the Larzac inscription. Its inscribed surface was pressed against the coin long before it was revealed by archaeologists (i.e. with the words concealed within the assemblage, much as is typical of *defixiones* that have similarly been folded or rolled up), and the inscription on the lamella is quite hard to make out in parts – its text is both damaged and features often only poorly formed Roman capitals. The best interpretation of the in-parts difficult inscription, which is written over two sections of the small lead sheet, seems to be:[7]

Lutura ieur[u]	Lutura has dedicated
Secoles pom[pon]	to the Secoli whoever
treansa gabxsitu	may have stolen *trientes* –
tri aram[onus]	whether free,
tri catic[a]nus	or slave
o[…]ex Secoles	[they are assigned] to the Secoli.
buetid a[g]ilos	May he thus be persecuted (?);
mi (u)indicas	may you avenge me;
so nitixor us	may you curse this – his
-io atingo nitio	affixing – the one
-dumio dar[--]	that I give up, [the one who?]
rincitu so	has taken this
gnasioda	property.

There has been some controversy over how best to read some of the terms inscribed on the Lezoux find, but *treansa* looks to be a Gaulish form of Latin *triens* (plural *trientes*), the name of a common Roman coin with the value of a third of an *as* (the Roman mil or jack, worth a tenth of a silver penny). After all, the coin found with the lamella is an *as*, so the reference to money probably explains the presence of the coin around which the lamella was wrapped – it is presumably

6 *PGM* no. VII.398–99; Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, pp. 1ff.; S. Giannobile and D.R. Jordan, 'A lead phylactery from Colle san Basilio (Sicily)', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 46 (2006), 73–86.

7 *RIG* II.2, no. 101; B. Mees, 'A Gaulish prayer for vengeance on a lamella from Lezoux', *Celtica* forthcoming.

a representation of part of what was stolen from the commissioner of the curse text. Coins are often found deposited in ancient graves, though, as if they had been purposefully left there so the dead could pay the infernal ferryman Charon in order to reach the underworld of classical myth. The coin is also reminiscent of the practice seen in some judicial prayers of dedicating part of the value of what had been stolen to the deity called upon to revenge a crime. Yet it is hard to be sure in this case whether funerary beliefs had any particular influence on the Lezoux text beyond those which first led the ancients to the conviction that graves were a particularly good place in which to deposit curse tablets.[8]

Many of the curses from Bath feature claims of stolen money, and these often seem to concern only small amounts (never more than several silver pennies). Rather than a sign of pettiness, however, such small amounts (and similar invocations to punish thieves who had stolen such everyday possessions as cloaks and sandals) indicate how widespread the use of curse tablets was in ancient society. The quotidian nature of ancient cursing might also explain why linguistically Celtic curse tablets are found at all – many were written in the language of the local people, not that of the Roman and Romanised upper classes. Indeed, Gaulish curse texts often seem irregular, composed or written by several authors or associated with idiosyncratic practices (such as being wrapped around a coin). Yet it is not altogether clear whether these oddities represent the continuing legacy of pre-Roman practices employed by Gaulish seers, druids or the like, or whether they are merely novel Celtic reinterpretations of the classical tradition of binding charms.

The Lezoux curse is written in letters which are sometimes damaged or ambiguously formed, but its text clearly begins with a typical-enough cursing form: the victim of a robbery (named as Lutura) offers a dedication to chthonic powers called the Secoli. Unlike in most judicial prayers, the thief appears to be the one who is being dedicated in this case (as is more typical of handing-over curses), although there are some examples of judicial prayers – the Hamble *defixio*, for instance – where it is the victim who is dedicated to the divinity who is called upon to find and punish the thief. The Secoli, the divine figures called upon by Lutura at Lezoux, seem to be much like the Secovi encountered at Chamalières, however: that is, they also appear to have literally been 'Cutters'. It consequently seems that the Secoli were also chthonic Celtic powers, perhaps apportioners of destiny or other supernatural embodiments of justice and vengeance.[9]

After the dedication and the mention of stealing *trientes*, two expressions preposed by *tri* appear, a form which looks to be the Old Celtic word for 'through'. The first noun is unclear, but the second more obviously features another term derived from the 'link', 'grasp' or 'weave' root *cati-* also attested at Bath. Here it appears in a context which suggests it does not signify clothing, however, but rather has a meaning closer to the related Latin word *catena* 'chains': that is, it appears to be nearer in meaning to Old Irish *cacht* 'slave'. Celtic *ar-* can refer to nobles (cf. Old Irish *airech* 'lord'), but also to farmers (*airem* 'ploughman'), perhaps

8 *RIC* II, no. 524; Mees, 'Gaulish prayer'.

9 Mees, 'Chamalières', 12, n. 2.

as a recognition that both were regarded as legally free (in opposition to servants and slaves). Taken together, the two terms preposed by *tri* seem to represent oppositional or contrasting expressions. Indeed, legalistic expressions such as 'whether freeman or slave' are particularly common in judicial prayers (especially at Bath). It thus seems likely that this is an idiomatic Celtic rendering of a formulaic legal expression typically used in Latin *defixiones* to refer to a thief.[10]

The second section of the Lezoux text, similarly, seems to continue on in a manner expected well enough for a classical binding curse. Typically in *defixiones* of the judicial-prayer variety the powers invoked are inveighed on (after the victim has been identified and handed over) to avenge the robbery, to hunt the perpetrator down. These expressions, which seem rather like the vengeful prayers that appear on some ancient tombstones, sometimes even call for punishments to be meted out such as 'great agonies' or 'the worst and most painful horrors', if not just straight out death (as is the case with the Hamble and Wilten finds). The second section at Lezoux thus begins with what seem to be three expressions which parrot stipulations attested in Roman curses: the first clearly begins with 'may he (or she) be' and what may be a nominal form of the 'seeking' verb *sag-* employed at Larzac (i.e. with the late Gaulish loss of *s-* before a vowel); the second is a typical Latin *defixio* formula 'may you avenge me' in an only barely Gallicised form; while the third expression is rather more complex (and fragmentary), but also seems to reflect a fairly common Latin cursing style: the final term, *gnasioda*, is related to Old Irish *gnás* 'custom' and Welsh *(g)naws* 'nature', and seems literally to have been a reference to Lutura's stolen money (cf. the use of *custom(s)* in English to refer to business or border taxes). The reference to *atingo* 'affixing' (cf. Latin *attingo* 'touch, strike') also appears to represent another use of the *tig-* or 'piercing' root known from Larzac and Bath, albeit here in an *-n-* infixed form (cf. English *sting*). Taken along with the typical Celtic imprecatory references to 'piercing' or 'binding', it seems clear that the second part of the Lezoux inscription features a series of vengeful stipulations laid by Lutura upon a coin thief.[11]

There is no obvious sign that the Lezoux curse is metrical, however. In fact, its judicial prayer seems more similar to the curses found at Bath than the longer binding charms from Larzac and Chamalières, both thematically and stylistically. This similarity even appears to extend to the influence of rhetorical styles typical of Latin judicial prayers, much as if the Lezoux charm were a translation of a composition derived from a Roman book of curses. This suggests, once again, that the reason why the Celtic curses which are metrical seem more removed from the forms typically taken by their classical models than those which are prose is because there was an indigenous Celtic tradition that curses, as spells, were things that were usually sung. It could well be that it was the process of adapting the curse types typical of Latin and Greek magic to a Gaulish tradition of versified spells which was mostly responsible for making the longer Old Celtic curse texts seem so unlike the more obviously Latin-parroting prose inscriptions

10 Tomlin, 'Curse tablets', p. 67; Birkhan, *Kelten*, p. 991, n. 7; Mees, 'Gaulish prayer'.

11 Meid, *Gaulish Inscriptions*, p. 47; Mees, 'Gaulish prayer'; cf. Fleuriot, 'Inscription gauloise', 68–70.

from Lezoux and Bath. The longer rhythmic Celtic curses certainly show little in common otherwise with the few surviving examples of *defixiones* written in rhythmic Latin.

A rather more difficult Gaulish inscription that, similarly, seems to bear the typically imprecatory cursing form *tig-* was unearthed in the 1960s in the immediate area of Châteaubleau, 50km east of Paris. A number of Latin inscriptions have been found at the northern Gallo-Roman site over the last half century, but several more are not written in readily readable classical prose. Two of the inscribed tiles found at Châteaubleau bear non-Latin texts that are too short for much to be recovered from them. But a third, discovered in 1969 in one of the settlement's former religious sanctuaries, clearly bears reference to a supernatural power that seems to have been associated with the site in which the inscription was found.

Short texts on tiles or bricks are widely attested in the Roman world, most of which typically feature no more than names (presumably of the tiles' makers). There are some exceptions, such as a tile from Binchester, County Durham, which features a single line of simple hexametric poetry that has been read as 'Armea has taught me to speak well of everyone properly.' A much longer text written in sometimes unclear Latin which seems to record a legal judgement is also known from Villafranca de los Barros, Spain.[12] Tile legends of such an elaborate kind are quite rare in Roman contexts, however. Indeed, one of the other tiles found at Châteaubleau bears what seems just to be a Latin tile-maker's mark mixed perhaps with some Gaulish: 'Saturninos has made 310 tiles …'.[13] Evidently tiles were sometimes used at Châteaubleau to record texts of a type not well paralleled elsewhere in the Roman world. Yet most of the finds from the Châteaubleau site are too fragmentary to be sure what their texts once signified and hence what they were formerly used for.

Châteaubleau was first settled in the Roman period, and the ruins of the ancient town found there have been identified with the settlement Riobe mentioned in this region on an ancient Roman map.[14] Apart from an artisan's quarter (including a mint) and a theatre, though, the most remarkable feature of the Châteaubleau site is its several religious buildings. First uncovered in the 1960s by members of the local archaeological association, these include a row of small temples or fanes, two of which, to judge from votives found there, seem to have been dedicated to Epona (the Gaulish horse goddess) and Mercury Soli-

12 E. Hübner, 'Epistula scripta in latere nondum cocto et nuper inventa in Hispania', *Revue des études anciennes* 1 (1899), 253–6; M.W.C. Hassall and R.S.O. Tomlin, 'Roman Britain in 1977. II. Inscriptions', *Britannia* 9 (1978), 477; J. Mallon, *De l'écriture: recueil d'études publiées de 1937 à 1981* (Paris 1982), pp. 322–5 and 330; B. Mees, 'Words from the well at Gallo-Roman Châteaubleau', forthcoming.

13 P.-Y. Lambert, 'Les autres tuiles inscrites de Châteaubleau (Seine-et-Marne)', *Etudes celtiques* 34 (1998–2000), 127–8; *RIG* II.2, no. 92. The tile is broken and the Gaulish seems limited to a few phrases such as *ci alla tegla* 'this other tile'.

14 K. Müller (ed.), *Die Peutingersche Tafel* (Stuttgart 1961), tab. 2; P.-Y. Lambert, 'La tuile gauloise de Châteaubleau (Seine-et-Marne)', *Etudes celtiques* 34 (1998–2000), 58ff.

tumaros.[15] The tile found in 1969 was unearthed at the northern end of the settlement, however, at a site known as La Tannerie ('the tannery') and it was found in a further religious building, presumably as an expression of the associated Gallo-Roman cult.

The Tannerie complex was built in the early second century and was constructed on the site of a sacred spring. A large edifice, over 900m^2 in area, it formerly consisted of a roofed gallery surrounding a central open-air courtyard, in the middle of which was a basin into which the waters of the spring once flowed. Finds of coins, statuettes and objects shaped like eyes suggest a healing cult was once active at La Tannerie, as such objects are commonly found at ancient spring sanctuaries. And rather than bearing maker's marks or another such text clearly parallelled by Roman tile epigraphs, the sanctuary tile's Gaulish inscription evidently has something instead to do with the local healing cult.

Another inscribed tile found at the Tannerie site simply features two listings of the letters of the alphabet, a type of inscription that is usually considered merely to represent spelling exercises. The discovery of a similar sequence on a pewter tablet from among the Bath curse tablets, however, and the similar use of alphabetic listings in other expressions of classical magic suggests a symbolic use of letters may have been intended at Châteaubleau. A Latin *defixio* of a similar date unearthed in the small German town of Maar (near Trier) in the late nineteenth century features such an alphabet listing inscribed upon a pottery sherd. Hence, like the longer inscription from La Tannerie, the Châteaubleau alphabet tile may have been inscribed for some sort of magical purpose.[16]

The more linguistically sensible tile find from the Tannerie sanctuary has proven somewhat more difficult to read. Its text was inscribed neatly onto the tile, but with somewhat oddly formed Roman cursive letters which were clearly executed before the ceramic was fired. Moreover, the inscription has since suffered some damage, and there has consequently been considerable disagreement over how to interpret much of it. Nonetheless, a minimal interpretation, reproducing the most clearly readable parts of the inscription, is:[17]

…Vener…ad…	… Venus …
… · sua ueío slan…	… (Just) as desiring health …
slanossiíetur · sua lido · ..ntil · ossi	… will be healthy. (Just) as …
…sittur · …na tixso…	… bind …

What seems to be an inflected form of the name of the classical love goddess Venus can clearly be made out in the first line of the Tannerie text, and a Celtic

15 R. Bontrond, 'Découverte de plusieurs statuettes de chevaux en bronze d'époque gallo-romaine à Châteaubleau (Seine-et-Marne)', *Revue archéologique du centre de la France* 37 (1998), 99–108; D. Gricourt *et al.*, 'Le Mercure Solitumaros de Châteaubleau (Seine-et-Marne)', *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 25 (2000), 127–80. Solitumaros probably means 'Great Trader', reflecting Mercury's usual association with merchants (cf. Gaulish *-selva*, Old Irish *selb* 'property' < *$selH_1$- 'need', English *sell* < causative **sol-i-*; and Latin epithets of the Gaulish Mercury such as *negotiator* and *nundinator*; *CIL* XIII, nos 7360, 7569).

16 *CIL* XIII, no. 10008.7; Lambert, 'Les autres tuiles inscrites', 119–20; *RIG* II.2, fig. 131 bis.

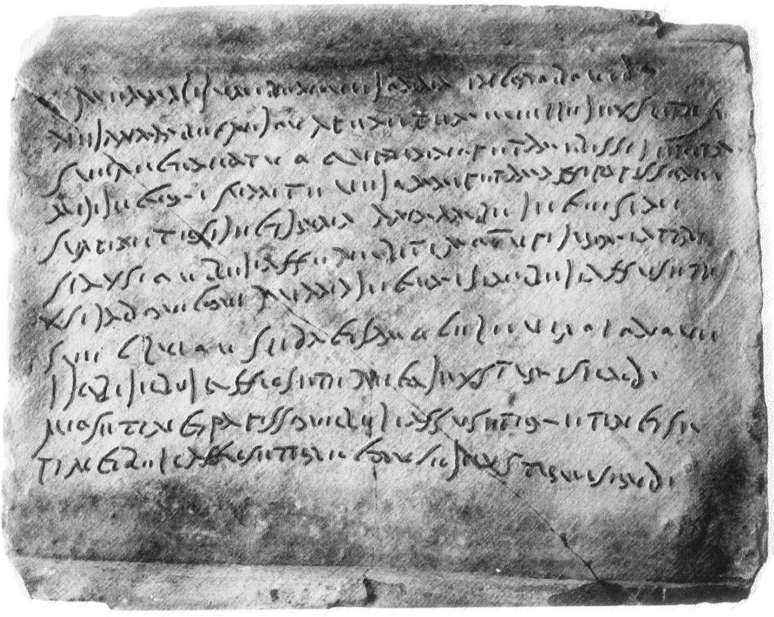
17 Lambert, 'Les autres tuiles inscrites', 120–3; *RIG* II.2, no. 90.

root *slan*-, evidently the Gaulish equivalent of Old Irish *slán* 'healthy', appears on the second and third lines. Elements such as *sua* '(just) as' known from the Larzac curse also seem obvious enough, and the fourth and last line at La Tannerie similarly includes the sequence *tixs*-, usually a good indication that an old Celtic inscription records a binding spell. The Tannerie tile text has been assumed to have formerly comprised part of the building's collapsed roof and has consequently been interpreted as a public notice: 'This is the entrance to the temple of Venus …'. Yet it seems unlikely that the builders of the temple were too cheap to erect a proper monumental dedication, instead allowing a hand-written tile to suffice. Venus is a goddess who is often linked with ancient bathing establishments much as was the pursuit at such places of cleanliness and good health. But rather than a votive or some other sort of religious text, taken together the forms that can be clearly read today suggest that the legend on the Tannerie tile might have been a binding prayer, albeit not one written on the usual material for such an expression. A judicial prayer unearthed from an ancient temple in Mérida, Spain, is written on a piece of dressed stone, and there are, of course, elements of the prayer-like genre of binding spells that suggest that these comparatively late forms of curses were not always seen in the same light as the older types of *defixiones*. Instead of a public notice of a mundane type, the Tannerie inscription appears more clearly to represent some sort of magical text. The readings proposed by experts for the other sequences on the difficult sanctuary tile are so varied it is hard to be sure what its whole inscription truly represented. Nonetheless, given the usual contents of judicial prayers, it seems reasonable to suppose that the Tannerie sanctuary find may once have represented a prayer to Venus that a thief not enjoy his health, but be cursed until he redeemed his crime. After all, *slán* is a common term in Old Irish medicinal charms, and curse tablets are often found deposited either near or in cultic springs.[18]

Yet a judicial prayer that invokes Venus is otherwise unparalleled. Instead, Venus (or rather her Greek equivalent Aphrodite) is called upon most frequently in ancient spells concerning love – albeit not exclusively so: she also features in spells for good relations, harmony and favour. The Tannerie inscription probably has something to do with the recuperative powers commonly attributed to springs, and might even be thought to be a dedication or blessing of the sort typical of all kinds of ancient sanctuaries. The *tixs*- or 'piercing' might even be thought to have been intended as a reference to a wound that the inscriber wished the goddess to heal. But notwithstanding the medium the Tannerie text is written on, the examples of more regular *defixiones* often found at healing springs equally suggest that the goddess worshipped at the Gallo-Roman sanctuary may have been an indigenous figure, one only equated with Venus – much as Sulis was connected at Bath with the Roman goddess Minerva – and that the Tannerie text records a curse that employed health-depriving rhetoric comparable to that found on Britanno-Roman *defixiones* such as that addressed at Lydney to the old British god Mars Nodens.[19]

18 *CIL* II, no. 462 [= Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae*, no. 122]; Versnel, 'Beyond cursing'; idem, 'Writing mortals and reading gods'.

19 Mees, 'Words from the well'.



7. Inscribed tile from the well at Les Grands Jardins, Châteaubleau

A much clearer example of a binding curse at Châteaubleau came to light in 1997 during an excavation at a site known as Les Grands Jardins ('the great gardens'). Found in what evidently was once a private well, the area of the excavations at which the tile inscription was uncovered does not feature religious buildings, but instead has revealed only regular houses. Much longer than the Tannerie find, the Grands Jardins text is also much more readily legible. It is inscribed onto a coloured roofing tile 360mm long and 290mm broad, and clearly features some repetition, especially in its closing lines, as well as several other behaviours well attested in Gaulish lamella inscriptions. The Grands Jardins find was clearly executed by a well-practised scribe and its eleven lines, although featuring some words beginning with capitals, are otherwise written only in neat old Roman cursive letters. An appreciably later inscription than the Larzac or Chamalières curses, the tile appears, like the Chagnon *defixio*, also to date to the late second century AD.[20]

Not all aspects of the longer Châteaubleau text are clearly understood today, although the general tenor and form of the inscription seem evident enough. Its basic syntax is fairly simple to make out, and several minor spelling errors are also obvious in the text. Indeed, its opening lines begin in a common-enough manner for a *defixio*, and make reasonably clear what the circumstances were which led to the resort to cursing by the text's author. There has been considerable confusion among previous interpreters of the find – its language is so difficult in parts that it has variously been characterised as a literary text or even the celebration

20 Lambert, 'Tuile gauloise'; *RIG* II.2, no. 93.

of a marriage. Nonetheless, it evidently has much linguistically in common with the Gaulish lamella texts and features much obvious stipulatory language. It is considerably more truculent in tone than any of the Gaulish *defixiones* written on lead, but clearly opens in a manner similar to the *defixio* from Chagnon:

Nuimna liíumi beni ueíonna in coro bouido
neí anmanbe gniíou ape niteme ueííe
íexsetesi sue regeniatu o quprinno
petame bissiíet (p)etamiíi íegumi
suante ueíommi petamassi Papissone

O Powers, I give notice to the woman who desires the cattle contract!
By the names that know, let her not desire ownership (?).
May you curse the one from the purchasing (?) family.
For the worst suffering it (i.e. this curse) shall ensure, the worst torments I curse.
For wanting I desire, perdition for Papissona.

The verb *liíumi* employed at the outset here literally indicates an accusation or imputation (cf. Old Irish *lïïd* 'to impute'), but appears to serve in the opening line in the same manner as the Latin verb *denuntio* 'give notice to' does in the puppy-sacrificing Chagnon curse. The accusation presumably serves (as at Chagnon) as a legalistic 'registering' of the woman, the victim of the imprecation, with the (infernal) powers – like *interdicto* 'require' at Montfo, *liíumi* is clearly being used in a compulsive, juridical sense. Indeed, the word *coro*, which also appears in the first line, is the continental equivalent of the common Old Irish legal term *cur* 'contract'. The Grands Jardins text clearly opens as if it were a legalistic imprecation.

The mention of suffering (*petame*) in the tile text, however, seems closer in some ways to the 'just as …, so too …' expression which rounds out the Larzac curse (cf. the use of *peti* and *petidsiont* at Larzac), the woman being cursed at Les Grands Jardins evidently having her tribulations piled up rhetorically as the curse progresses. Indeed, the suffering later gives way to punishing, the late Gaulish spell evidently maintaining a focus on vengeance not well parallelled in comparable finds. Nonetheless, the woman who is named at the end of the opening section as Papissona is clearly being registered alliteratively (*petamassi Papissone*) by the curser to face the judgement of the infernal powers (cf. *Nuimna* to Latin *numina* 'gods, powers' and the *sunartiu* or 'powers' similarly mentioned at Chamalières). The similar alliteration of *beni* 'woman' and *bouido* 'cattle, bovine' in the first line even suggests that much of the Grands Jardins curse is song-like. The alliteration clearly highlights both the fate of the victim as well as the reason for the enacting of the curse: the tile's text was evidently commissioned in light of a dispute over an agreement concerning an economic matter.[21]

Disputes over business affairs are often reflected in classical curses. Indeed, the term *quprinno* used to refer to the victim's family seems to be related to the difficult cursing term *tiopritom*, used in one of the stipulations on the Larzac tablet

21 Mees, 'Words from the well'.

8. Inscribed magician's *thuribulum* from Chartres

(cf. Welsh *prinaf* 'buy'). Yet the 'names' referred to in the Châteaubleau curse do not appear to refer to a list of victims (as at Larzac), but seem instead to reflect a recourse especially common in late classical magic: an invocation of the power of holy names. All manner of divine and holy names can appear in spells from late antiquity, and it is also rather common for such expressions merely to address 'names', much as if it were the names of the gods themselves which were held to be powerful, not so much the supernatural figures which were associated with them. Some of these names were evidently held to be secret expressions which could be used to influence the otherworldly powers associated with them. In fact, a magical inscription found in 2005, some 130km away to the east at Chartres, which features a listing of magical names is similarly addressed to *omnipotentia numina* or 'almighty powers'. Moreover, its second-century inscriber (or commis-

sioner) even refers to himself as *vester custos*, 'your guardian', much as if he were the sacred keeper of the mysterious holy names:[22]

> I beseech you almighty powers
> to bring everything favourable
> to C(aius) Verius Sedatus
> because he is your guardian.
>
> *echar aha*
> *dru stna*
> *bros dru*
> *chor drax*
> *chos*
> *halcemedme*
> *halcehalar*
> *alcemedme*

The Chartres inscription was found inscribed four times on fragments of at least two separate cups (or censors) excavated from the ruins of an ancient burnt-out house. The house also featured the remains of vases decorated with snakes, lamps and other objects presumed by its French discoverers to be of magical importance. Indeed, the inscription from this 'magician's house', represented four times in parallel about the sides of the vessel, strikingly betrays the mixed, eclectic nature of much Gallo-Roman magic. The names from Chartres are largely unparalleled elsewhere in classical magic and appear to represent some native Gaulish concoctions (cf. Celtic *dru-* 'true') mixed in with an assortment of Greek and Egyptian magical names, much as if the magician Caius Verius Sedatus named in the inscription thought that he required a smattering of Celtic lexicon in order properly to invoke the almighty Gallo-Roman powers. Although the fourfold nature of the Chartres inscriptions seems most obviously to be explained by references to invocations of the four cardinal directions in some Graeco-Egyptian spells, Sedatus (the bearer of a fully Roman name) seems to have thought it necessary to employ an at least partly nativised tradition. The repeated forms in *(h)alce-* look to be Greek and *chor* and *drax* can scarcely be considered Gaulish. Yet as with many other Gallo-Roman finds, it is not always clear whether the Celtic component of this at least minimally hybrid inscription should be seen as pre-Roman or merely as a Gallification of typical classical magical practice. Nothing quite like the inscribed vessels of Sedatus is known from elsewhere in the classical world: much like the Lezoux assemblage, the Chartres find appears to represent a local reinterpretation of largely classical magical forms. Presumably, though, names such as those found at Chartres could also be used in linguistically Gaulish cursing magic – hence presumably the reference to the 'names that know' at Châteaubleau.

Another reference to names appears in the next section of the Gaulish well-tile inscription, where it is again made fairly clear that the powers associated

[22] D. Joly *et al.*, 'Une prière de magicien sur trois objets rituals découvert à Chartres-Autricum (France/Eure-et-Loire)', *Gallia* forthcoming.

with the names are enabling the curse. The stylisation continues, including what seems to be an etymological figure (*[í]ex(s)etesi íegiúnna* 'may you curse a cursing'), as do more references to the contract and punishing. It now also seems quite evident from the Châteaubleau text that the charm was commissioned in order that the anonymous curser might regain rights to an agreement concerning the bulling of cattle:

sua iex(s)etesi íegiúnna
anmanbe íegu(m)isini
siaxsiou beíiaꜱꜱu ne biti
mon upiúummi aterixsi ín dore core

So may you curse a cursing.
By the names I curse her.
Let her not be seeking (my) punishment!
I declare my binding back into the bulling contract.

The references in the Grands Jardins inscription to suffering, persecuting and names mirror similar descriptions in the Larzac *defixio*, but much of the vocabulary used in the long tile text is not as well parallelled among other Gaulish curse finds. The very word for 'curse' employed, for instance, appears to be related to Old Irish *éigid* 'scream' (and cf. the related Old Irish form *éile* 'incantation') – it does not represent one of the more typical allusions to 'binding', 'fating' or 'fixing' employed more commonly in Old Celtic magic.[23] The repeated references to vengeance, however, are more characteristic of the comparatively late genre of judicial prayers and, indeed, the calls become more frequent (and more formulaic) as the text of the tile curse proceeds. The statement that the punishing may not be for the curser also seems to reflect similar disavowing claims made in classical judicial prayers, and the seeming use of *mon* 'my' in two adjacent lines of the text is a typical feature of poetry (technically called an *apo koinu* construction). Some of the repetition at Les Grands Jardins seems to represent stylistic ringing (or chaining) similar to that used at Larzac, although there is rather less consistent phonological decoration in the Châteubleau spell – nor are its lines as clearly measured as is the case even at Chamalières. Yet, much as at Lezoux, the key 'piercing' or 'fixing' word *ti(n)g-* known also from Bath and Larzac appears again at Les Grands Jardins, employed in what seems to be a reference to the charm itself – and this Gaulish cursing term *par excellence* is similarly attested in an evidently formulaic, repeated manner. Indeed, much as with the Chamalières inscription, this repetition seems particularly to typify the last section of the unceasingly vindictive well-tile binding charm:

Nuana íegumisini
beíiaꜱꜱu sete sue
cluiou se dagisamo cele
uiro íono ueííobiíe
beíiaꜱꜱu sete
Rega íexstumisendi

23 Lambert, 'Tuile gauloise', 95.

me se tingi Papissone
beíiassu sete
me tingi se tingi
beíiassu sete
rega me se íexstumisendi

O Powers I curse her!
May you indeed be punishing!
Hearing this best companion,
just (and) true, is desired!
May you be punishing!
O Straighteners I curse her!
For me, this binding – for Papissona.
May you be punishing!
For me, a binding, this binding.
May you be punishing!
O Straighteners, for me, this I curse her!

Unlike the Lezoux find, then, the text from the well at Châteaubleau appears largely to be rhythmical – deliberately song-like. It also features considerable descriptive variation, the 'Powers' of the outset of the spell (*Numina* – albeit seemingly miswritten as *Nuana*), for instance, also being called *Rega* (presumably judicial) 'Straighteners' in this last section (cf. *regu* 'I straighten' at Chamalières). As with the Lezoux lamella, the Grands Jardins *defixio* is somewhat odd in that it is inscribed on a type of item not often used for curse texts. But its dealing so vengefully with what are clearly economic matters makes it seem rather closer in theme and style to the Gaulish coin-theft curse than it is to any of the other extant Celtic spring or well finds. Like the Lezoux curse, it is rather more clearly to be grouped with the Deneuvre and Dax *defixiones*, which are both evidently connected with larceny. But unlike these quite fragmentary Latin texts, the Grands Jardins inscription was found in a well, not a cultic spring. The overtly truculent nature of the Châteaubleau call for vengeance is also parallelled at Lezoux, as well as in some of the Britanno-Roman judicial finds. Yet, notably, and unlike in the Montfo or Larzac *defixiones*, there is no clear reference to any kind of necromancy on the longer Châteaubleau tile.[24]

Depositing an imprecatory lamella in a cultic spring or a well was evidently thought of by some Gaulish cursers in much the same terms as sequestering a curse tablet in a sepulchre or grave. Funerary finds of judicial prayers are also known from other provinces of the Empire, but unlike the curse lamella from Lezoux the Montfo *defixio* seems quite unique in its overt linking of death (and sung) magic with aquatic cursing. It may well be that the mention of a *necracantum* at Montfo indicates a comparatively late influence of Greek necromancy on an indigenous Gaulish tradition of versified cursing. A further possibility, though, is that, unlike a *masitlatida*, a *necracantum* (or *duscelinata*) was merely a kind of health-depriving Celtic curse, one which was not uniquely tied to funerary magic, but received its connection with death in a manner quite different to that

[24] Mees, 'Words from the well'.

of the curses of Greek and Roman tradition – that is, that Montfo's *necracantum* was merely a murderous charm, a magical (or ritual) song that killed, rather than one which called on the gods of the underworld through the intercession of the spirits of the departed. Indeed, the linking of a *necracantum* with a curse of 'breaking and diminishing' at Montfo suggests that these were two kinds of vengeful native Celtic curses, ones which were quite separate originally to those invoked in classical necromancy. After all, the 'binding song' (*hymnos desmios*) of the ancient Furies which features in Aeschylus's *Eumenides* is not paralleled in epigraphic finds. Hence the songs and rites mentioned in the Montfo curse may, like the Lezoux and Chartres finds, simply represent an eclectic Gallo-Roman admixture of a range of native and classical magical beliefs and practices.[25]

Yet some connection had clearly come to be made between depositing curses in funerary sites and watery conduits to the underworld in Gallo-Roman imprecation. The depositing of curses in the depths of the earth alluded to in the *similia similibus* which opens the Montfo *defixio* makes it clear that a Gallo-Roman tradition had developed already by the first century that associated depositing curses in wells with the secret and dire aspects of classical binding magic. Where the magician Sedatus at Chartres seems to have employed typical classical magical paraphernalia such as lamps and incense burners, at Les Grands Jardins the anonymous curser evidently remained reliant on the older tradition that wells were one of the best locations for the deposition of binding charms. The preponderance of aquatic finds of curse tablets in Britain suggests that the association of binding curses with netherworldly funerary magic was a comparatively late development in Celtic tradition produced under the influence of Graeco-Roman understandings of death and the afterlife. The possibility cannot be discounted that Old British understandings of the powers of the otherworld had always been different from those held by the Continental Celts. But seen in light of the calquing of the term for the 'underworld' witnessed at Larzac (which seems to have later been loaned into Brythonic as well), expressions such as the Montfo *defixio* suggest that this connection of death, watery chthonic conduits and the Celtic otherworld may have been secondary (and hence presumably relatively late). After all, the odd way in which the Lezoux and Grands Jardins curses were deposited and inscribed appears to indicate that considerable idiosyncratic development and adaptation was a characteristic feature of the Continental Celtic continuation of the classical tradition of binding magic.

25 Aesch., *Eum.* 306; Faraone, 'Agonistic context', pp. 4–5.

6

Fragments

Invocation of the restless dead is often not made explicit in *defixiones* discovered in ancient tombs and graves. As at Chagnon, relatively few of the curse texts found in such contexts make reference to their funerary surrounds. In some cases it appears that the agency of a resident restless spirit is just assumed in funerary *defixiones*; on other occasions underworld gods are called upon (Pluto and Persephone at Chagnon), much as if the deposition of the curse in the funerary site itself was sufficient to ensure that the infernal powers would receive and enact it. Some curse tablets are not as simply to be interpreted as are even *defixiones* which are merely laconic in this way, however. Many bear texts which are too short or too elliptical to allow proper interpretation – few funerary binding spells are as well contextualised, say, as are the Celtic finds from Bath. Moreover, lead is not the most durable of materials; it fragments relatively easily. The analysis of many curse lamellas is consequently hampered by poor states of preservation. In other instances, however, it is rather more obviously odd or otherwise unclear features of the spell inscriptions themselves which makes modern understandings of them so fragmentary.

In August 1930, for example, Roman ruins were discovered while gas works were being carried out in the western Austrian town of Bregenz, known in ancient times as Brigantia (i.e. 'the high'), a Celtic name that no doubt referred to the elevation of the Alpine settlement. Among the ancient stonework, bones and fragments of pottery, the remains of a first-century grave was discovered in which a small, rolled-up lead sheet had been deposited. When unrolled, the lamella was 115mm long, 43mm broad and about 0.5mm thick – a typical-enough spell tablet by Roman standards. The text written on it was almost illegible, however: the inscription at first seemed mostly to represent Latinate gobbledygook. Nonetheless, it was later shown mostly just to be written in a strange manner, full of abbreviations, local spelling oddities and lines of Latin which had been written backwards: not with the characters written facing right to left, but with the words spelt in reverse.

The Austrian scholar who deciphered the text was an expert in the interpretation of curse tablets and soon recognised that it was a curse comparable to another funerary *defixio* from Bregenz which had first come to light in 1865. Although physically fragmentary, the earlier Bregenz find had also been unearthed from a

first-century grave, and also appeared to feature a reference to a Celtic divinity: both of the Austrian binding curses seem to mention the Celtic god Ogmios.[1]

Many classical *defixiones* are fragmentary finds or are otherwise difficult to read, and the propensity for technical, riddling and linguistically mixed forms to appear in magical inscriptions more generally only adds to the difficulty encountered in interpreting many Greek and Roman lamella texts. Such difficulties only become more pronounced with most ancient Celtic curses, given that Gaulish is not as well known to modern scholars as are the classical languages. The fragmentary texts on the Bath tablets can be assessed in the light of the scores of well-preserved and legible Latin *defixiones* known from the same site, but many other fragmentary ancient Celtic curse tablets were not unearthed in such revealing contexts – their texts have often seemed quite inexplicable when viewed in isolation, their proper interpretation only becoming evident in light of the formulas and themes which commonly appear in comparable classical finds.

The two Bregenz *defixiones* remain difficult texts, however, and although the name Ogmios seems clear enough on the first tablet, the inscription as a whole is quite difficult to make sense of even when the reversed lines are restored to normal and all the abbreviations are expanded out. The victim's name seems to be indicated by only three letters, *amc*, and although there are clear references to chthonic divinities and their attendant infernal powers, not all of the expressions make clear sense, grammatically or semantically. Evidently, some of the inscription's words were recorded quite carelessly and require some degree of interpretation. A rendering in English gives an indication of how chaotic the eight-line curse text in fact is:[2]

I b(in)d Amc. Thi(s) thin(g) D(is) P(at)-
er with Era(cura) wi(l)l f(i)x. Ogm-
ios, ('er) 'eal(th), 'eart, ankle, ki(dn)-
eys, genita(ls) … ea-
r, lunch box, necess(ities) –
give ('em) over to the spirits
– and obedient to 'im, may sh-
e not get married. Wrath (o' the) god(s).

The italics indicate lines written in reverse, parentheses mark the expansion of abbreviations or other letters missing from the original text, and some colloquialisms of the type thought to lie behind some of the more difficult Latin forms have been used. Underneath all this, however, is a typical-enough curse. The last expression, for instance, seems to be shorthand for 'may Amc… suffer the wrath of the gods' (an expression known from another Austrian *defixio*) and the denial to a victim of their health, heart, kidneys and life's other necessities (also seen at Montfo) is a fairly common feature of binding spells of this date (the mention of an ear may be intended to represent judgement, a fairly common Roman metaphor, and the lunch box similarly to food). The victim of the spell was obviously a woman; moreover, the reference to not being able to marry suggests that this

1 Egger, *Römische Antike*, I, pp. 276–89.
2 Ibid., I, p. 288.

curse was created in similar circumstances to the following fourth-century BC funerary *katadesmos* from Attica, Greece:[3]

> I bind Theodôra in the presence of she who is at Persephone's side [i.e. her daughter Hecate] and in the presence of the unfulfilled [i.e. those who have not received proper funeral rites]. May she be unmarried … I bind Theodôra to remain unmarried to Charias and Charias to forget Theodôra, and Charias to forget … Theodôra and the marriage bed of Theodôra.

Thus the 'thing' at issue in the Bregenz curse that Dis Pater and Eracura are inveighed upon to fix seems to have been a rivalry that the curser had with Amc… (perhaps the bearer of a Roman name like Amica) over a man they both desired. Ogmios, in contrast, seems to be being requested to actually punish the victim, to hand her over to infernal spirits and ensure she cannot marry, almost as if Ogmios was a servant of (or otherwise subservient to) the rulers of the underworld: Dis (Dis Pater or Pluto), the Roman god of the dead, and his wife Eracura (i.e. Persephone or Proserpine).[4]

In fact Eracura (whose name is also recorded as Hericura, Aericura and Aeracura) is sometimes thought also to be a Celtic divinity – her name is, after all, only known from provincial Roman settings (especially the Alps and the Rhineland). Her husband Dis Pater, too, has thus been thought merely to be a Roman interpretation of a local divinity, perhaps Smertrios 'the Apportioner (of Fates)' who is associated with Dis in a local altar-stone inscription. Indeed, Eracura is also sometimes represented figuratively as if she was a fertility goddess, not the queen of the underworld, so her connection with the classical goddess Persephone has been contested. Yet the variation in the forms of her name attested in more regular votive settings suggests that Eracura was a local figure whose cult had spread by word of mouth to other nearby areas (and hence her name, only known verbally, became subject to significant idiosyncratic adaptation and spelling variation). After all, Persephone was also considered to be a goddess of fertility, and the appearance of Eracura in funerary *defixiones* makes her infernal connection rather clear. Her name does not have an obvious Celtic etymology, however – it instead looks rather classical – and she would not be the only Roman deity to have been worshipped in the provinces under what was originally just a relatively obscure Greek or Roman title or epithet.[5]

The other Bregenz *defixio* is written in more regular Latin, but the tablet is rather less well preserved and many of the forms which have survived require some restoration before sense can be made of them. It also seems to have been

3 Gager, *Curse Tablets*, no. 22.

4 I. Kajanto, *The Latin Cognomina*, Commentationes humanarum litterarum 36.2 (Rome 1982), p. 305.

5 Eracura is known from two other *defixiones*, one from Carnuntum, Austria (her name misspelt as *Veracura* – i.e. with an inverted *A*), the other (as an abbreviated *Aer*, much as at Bregenz) from Trier, Germany; M. Besnier, 'Récents travaux sur les *defixionum tabellae* latines 1904–1914', *Revue de philologie* 44 (1920), 5–30, no. 31; Egger, *Römische Antike*, I, pp. 81–97; and cf. Kropp, '"*Defigo Eudemum: necetis eum*"', pp. 85ff. Her name may have developed from Latin titles such as *aeria* 'lofty' and *cura* 'mistress, guardian'.

written or commissioned by a woman who, similarly, appears to be calling on Ogmios in a vengeful manner. The required restorations include the name of the Celtic god, however (a form that would probably never have been recognised except in the light of the other Bregenz *defixio*), as well as several others which make the context of the cursing much clearer. The inscription runs over both sides of the tablet and the restorations made to the text are here, again, signalled in the translation by parentheses:[6]

> Domitius Niger and Lollius and Julius Severus and Severus, sl(a)ve of Niger, the oppo(n)en(ts) of Brutta, and whatever hostile t(h)at one is say(ing), may you all be lost.
>
> (I as)k you all, you (w)ho are (pre)paring misfortune for that one, to be given to …, to be given to O(g)mios, to be co(ns)umed (by) death … of … and Nige(r) …. Valerius … and Ni(g)er.

Evidently, enough of this curse remains to indicate that it was prepared in light of litigation. The curser (presumably Brutta) obviously thought that she required supernatural protection from people – Domitius Niger and so on – who were speaking against her (i.e. in legal proceedings), much as it seems the authors and commissioners of the Chamalières and Larzac curses did. The 'you all' of the second side are not mentioned by name, but were probably a selection of leading chthonic gods, Ogmios again seeming to be called upon here as if he were some sort of secondary or especially truculent infernal power (much like Cacus in the Wilten *defixio*). Moreover, the invocation of Ogmios in both these cases is particularly interesting as he is a figure who has both a medieval Celtic reflection and is described by the second-century AD satirist Lucian of Samosata in a quite striking manner.

Lucian was a Greek-speaking author of Semitic extraction who produced a large number of essays and literary works. He is probably most famous for his description of the life of an ancient sorcerer's apprentice, a particularly rich source for the student of classical magic today, but is also noted for his interest in non-classical oddities, and in one of his short essays he records an encounter with a Gaulish representation of Ogmios:[7]

> The Gauls call Hercules Ogmios in their native tongue, but they represent the god in a grotesque manner. With them he is a decrepit old man, balding with what hair remains extremely grey, his skin wrinkled and weathered like an old sailor. He looks like someone from the underworld, a Charon or Japetus, rather than anything like Hercules. But he is like Hercules in other respects: he carries a lion's skin and holds a club in his right hand, a quiver hanging at his side, and he carries a great bow in his left, very much like Hercules.
>
> Now at first I thought that this was just a slight on the Greek gods, some sort of revenge on Hercules from the time he came into their country and carried off booty when he overran most of the western peoples in search of Geryon's herds. Yet the oddest aspect of this image I have not yet described: this ancient

6 *CIL* III, no. 11882; Egger, *Römische Antike*, I, pp. 284–90.
7 Lucian, *Heracles* 1ff.

> Hercules draws after him a multitude of men, all tied by their ears. The cords by which he does this are small fine chains, worked with gold and amber like the most beautiful bracelets; and although the men are drawn by such slender bonds, none of them thinks of breaking loose, although they might easily do so. Nor do they struggle or tarry at all: instead of planting their heels in the ground and pulling back, they follow their captor willingly, singing his praises. Indeed from their eagerness to hurry after him, to prevent the chains from tightening, they appear to come, although it seems a sorry thing, of their own freewill. What seems to me the strangest of all, however, I will not hide: as the right hand of the god holds a club and the left a bow, the painter had nowhere to fix the end of the chain – so he made a hole in the god's tongue and the people are led from there, the god smiling back at his companions.
>
> For a long time I stood staring at this, bemused – I didn't know what to make of it and was beginning to feel a bit peeved. But then a Gaul standing next to me spoke to me (in admirable Greek), a man who apart from having some expertise in Gaulish mythology, was also acquainted with ours. 'Sir', he said, 'I see this picture puzzles you. Do, please, let me explain. We Gauls associate eloquence not with Hermes as you Greeks do, but with the stronger Hercules. And it need not surprise you to see him represented as an old man: after all, eloquence is something that comes with age …'

This famous image of Ogmios shows some signs of representing an authentic Celtic tradition – it does not seem just to be a satirical fancy, as some of Lucian's literary creations clearly are. For example, although the notion of the producers of words gripping men's ears is known as a motif elsewhere in Lucian's writing, magical chains of gold or silver are also described in early Irish sources where they were clearly meant to symbolise supernatural powers. Indeed, the words of a philosopher are likewise described as akin to 'chains' by a later classical writer. Ogmios is thus often thought to have been an ancient Celtic god of poetry, although the appearance of this pagan Celtic god's name on the two Bregenz *defixiones* may point to another interpretation. The reason that Hermes (or his Roman interpretation Mercury) appears so often in *defixiones* is not because he was associated with eloquence, but because of his role as psychopomp, the leader of souls to the afterlife. It may be, then, that as the third part of the divine trio mentioned in the Bregenz amatory curse (in fact as the instigator of the punishment), Ogmios was seen to have had a chthonian aspect by the (Romanised) Celts who had these Alpine *defixiones* made, just as did Maponos, Sulis, Adsagsona and the other Old Celtic divinities whose names appear in ancient curses. His role as a vengeful god, however, does not quite seem to fit with the pleasant picture described by Lucian, so it has been suggested that Lucian's mention of the underworld ferryman Charon and the titan Japetus (imprisoned in the abyss of Tartarus) indicates that Ogmios was also considered to have a darker aspect, just as the messenger-god Hermes was thought of as both a supernal figure and also (as psychopomp) a chthonic power.[8]

[8] Lucian, *Iupp. trag.* 45; Eunapius, *V.S.* 4.1.6; H. d'Arbois de Jubainville, 'Chronique', *Revue celtique* 25 (1904), 93; A. Ross, 'Chain symbolism in Celtic religion', *Speculum* 34 (1959), 39–59.

Ogmios's later reflection, the mythical Irish champion Ogma, is also clearly chthonic, although only in the same manner as most of the Irish gods are usually held to be: Ogma was given a fairy mound to dwell in by the chief Irish god the Dagda, just as were several of the other main Hibernian divinities when they took up residence in the lakes and mounds of the Irish otherworld. Ogma is also the reputed discoverer of Ogham, the cipher-like writing system used in Ireland and in the Celtic fringes of Britain on funerary memorials erected during the early Middle Ages. Rather than having some special connection with death, however, it seems likely that Ogham writing (whose letters appear to have been thought of as literally 'guides') received its name because letters were carved 'conveyers' of language, just as Ogmios seems to have been the god of 'leading' or 'conveying' poetic language (cf. Greek *ogmos* 'furrow', which appears to derive from *agô* 'to lead, to guide'). A connection of Ogmios with death, then, may be little more than a modern supposition – instead of a conveyer of souls to the afterlife, Ogmios may simply have become linked with curse tablets because the Alpine Celts associated him with Hermes rather than Hercules (as did the painter of Lucian's experience). The Deneuvre *tabella defixionis* was found near a spring dedicated to Hercules, but it is so damaged it is far from clear who its judicial prayer was dedicated to (although it is clear that the Deneuvre curse is written in a retrograde manner much like the Bregenz find). The connection of Ogmios with binding spells has even been thought to be evidence that the continental Celtic god was originally a patron of binding, much as if a relationship similar to that represented by the English term *spell* (which can refer both to writing as well as to magic) were at hand. But with curses such as those from Bregenz it might even be the case that a bastardised, rather than just syncretic, Romanised expression of Celtic tradition is at hand. Ogmios may not have been chthonic at all originally, but might only have become attached to binding spells secondarily. Another Austrian *defixio*, a thievery curse from Carnuntum, seems to cite Hermes only as the magical instigator of its punishment in a spell where, as in the Bregenz amatory find, it is an infernal trio (Dis Pater, Eracura and the underworldly hound Cerberus) who are invoked at the outset of the inscription. At any rate Hermes, the classical messenger god, seems particularly similar to Ogmios, and the Celtic connection between magic and verse seemingly exemplified in the Irish description *bricht* 'magic, charm, octosyllabic metre' might well have made Ogmios a local divinity especially prone to assimilation to Mercury or Hermes rather than Hercules in some parts of the Empire.[9]

The voices of the ancient Celts are better reflected in the surviving curse texts which are actually written in Gaulish and Old Brittonic: it is the *defixiones* that are linguistically fully Celtic which seem to offer the best opportunity to see behind the veil of Romanisation represented by such finds. None has proved much help in understanding the ancient cult of Ogmios, though, nor those of

9 F. Le Roux, 'Le dieu celtique aux liens', *Ogam* 12 (1960), 209–34; Egger, *Römische Antike*, I, pp. 280ff.; Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, pp. 37–41; C.-J. Guyonvarc'h, *Magie, médecine et divination chez les Celtes*, Bibliothèque scientifique Payot (Paris 1997), pp. 393–400; Lambert, 'A *defixio* from Deneuvre'. Ogma's name seems to continue an earlier *Ogəmios, presumably an insular resyllabification; cf. Fedelm(a), similarly < *Vidəlua (Larzac *uidlua*).

many other Celtic figures associated in other contexts with chthonic classical gods. Yet their language alone reveals a picture of continuing classicisation in which older, pre-Roman cursing expressions appear to give way to increasingly Latinate forms. The Chamalières inscription was not the first ancient Celtic curse tablet to be uncovered by archaeologists, however. The most difficult of all the Gaulish curse-tablet finds was unearthed many years before the discoveries of any of the other linguistically Celtic texts to have been considered here so far; in fact, like the Bregenz and Chagnon juridical curses, it was first published well over a century ago.

In 1887 an excavation was being undertaken of the remains of a Roman villa in the environs of Rom (ancient Raurarum) in Poitou, when, led by a local notary, the excavators found a shaft 2m wide and 20m deep filled with all sorts of ancient objects. Such shafts, a common-enough feature of old Celtic sites, are often called ritual pits – places where votive items were deposited – although it is not clear whether the Rom shaft represents an ancient religious site: it has also been surmised that the shaft may once have been an old well (much as at Châteaubleau and Montfo). The only notable discoveries from the excavation at Rom initially were a collection of blank lead tablets, some of which were rolled up and pierced with holes as if made by nails. Much further down in the shaft, however, among the many pottery sherds and other forms of commonplace ancient debris, another lead tablet was also found, this time unrolled, but in this instance also inscribed. From the find circumstances it was clear that the excavators had unearthed several curse tablets, but of what sort and even in what language the sole inscribed example was written have remained controversial ever since that time.

Rom lies on the site of the ancient road from Saintes in Saintonge (the former capital of the Santones tribe) to Poitiers in Poitou (the old capital of the Gaulish Pictones) and was only notable otherwise in antiquity as the site of a villa that belonged to the fourth-century Roman poet Ausonius. The tablet unearthed there, found in what seems to have once been another example of a conduit to the ancient Celtic otherworld, is rectangular, 100mm long and 70mm wide, and weighs about 100g. The lamella is inscribed with a very odd type of Roman script – a mixture of old Roman cursive and early miniscule (the type of handwriting that was to flourish in the early Middle Ages) – and although written in a relatively practised hand, it was executed very quickly and in some aspects rather carelessly. One of the letters used in the text is even quite unknown elsewhere in Gaulish epigraphy, and despite looking like an oddly written *z*, it features a horizontal bar and hence seems to be a local representation of a Celtic sound that the Roman poet Virgil called the tau Gallicum or Gaulish *t*. There is no punctuation in the much-corroded text, either; nor are individual words parsed, separated out by spaces. The tablet is held today in the Musée des antiquités nationales of St Germain-en-Laye and, although found over a century ago, seems to be one of the most recent of all Gaulish finds. It does not obviously display many of the characteristic word-endings of Gaulish (shared by Latin and Greek) such as *-s*, however, and, rather than straightforward Gaulish, some have seen much Latin, Greek, dialectal Celtic or even plain gobbledygook in the inscription. Many of the Rom letters are damaged, oddly formed or just simply difficult to read, and

some of the controversy over the correct interpretation of the text is clearly due to how comparatively recent (not to mention damaged) the find is. The form of writing, strange as it is, appears to date the tablet to the late third or early fourth centuries (i.e. to the reign of Diocletian), which would make it a hundred or more years later than most of the other testimonies of Gaulish to have survived; hence, perhaps, the seemingly odd form of the language. It may be that the inscription is written in a Gaulish tongue that was degenerate, in the process of dying out, or had otherwise become somewhat misunderstood or confused. But despite a notable exception or two, it has been evident to most investigators that the text is linguistically Celtic, although what kind of Celtic (and what it may mean) has not proved to be so clear.[10]

The Rom inscription is not just a comparatively recent creation, though; despite being discovered only some 70km away from Chagnon, it also comes from a part of France (the north-west) where Celtic texts are quite rare. One explanation for the difficult nature of the text, then, is that it is not just a late form of Gaulish, but that it is also a unique attestation of a Celtic dialect or even language unlike that known elsewhere in Gaul. Consequently, the language of the Rom text has been called (somewhat romantically) 'Pictavian' after the Pictones of Poitou and linked with the language of the Picts of Scotland. Many have also harboured the suspicion that the language of the inscription is heavily Romanised, and there do seem to be some Latinisms (and possibly even Graecisms) in the difficult text. But it is not an inscription that clearly switches from Gaulish to Latin and back; nor does it obviously fit into one of the usual types of classical *defixio* – this despite the late date of the artefact which suggests significant Romanisation of the curse might well be expected.[11]

It has also been argued, in one interpretation widely cited by scholars of classical cursing, that this inscription features merely an odd, Gallicised form of Latin. The presence of Latin elements had been suggested by the first Celticists to study the text, but not to any great extent. The Austrian expert who had deciphered the Bregenz amatory inscription, however, concluded that the Rom text was a typical-enough Roman *defixio*, claiming that it was a curse laid against a group of theatrical players. Coming to his conclusion working from photographs, he turned regular Gaulish words such as *sosio* into names and read letters and spellings into the inscription that could not be seen on the object when it was viewed at first hand. His interpretation has been roundly dismissed by Celticists as it relies on several quite odd emendations and reinterpretations of the text, not to mention a basic flaw in epigraphic approach – relying on photographs rather than a first-hand inspection of the tablet. But little of the scholarship that had

10 T. Frank, 'Tau Gallicum, Vergil, Catalepton II, 4', *American Journal of Philology* 56 (1935), 254–6; C. Jullian, 'Inscription gallo-romaine de Rom', *Revue celtique* 19 (1898), 168–76; G. Dottin, *La langue gauloise: grammaire, textes et glossaire* (Paris 1918), no. 52; J. Whatmough, *The Dialects of Ancient Gaul: prolegomena and records of the dialects* (Cambridge, Mass. 1970), pp. 391–2; *RIG* II.2, no. 98.

11 E.W.B. Nicholson, 'The language of the continental Picts', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 3 (1901), 308–33; revised in idem, *Keltic Researches: studies in the history of the ancient Goidelic language and peoples* (London 1904), pp. 129–53.

9. Curse tablet from Sainte-Cécile, Eyguières

appeared regarding the Rom tablet to that date had been much better considered or particularly convincing. Nonetheless, contemporary understandings of Gaulish have been greatly improved by the discoveries of the other long Celtic curse tablets since the 1970s and the further late testimonies of the language of the ancient Gauls which have appeared in recent times.[12]

There are several *defixiones* from the Roman provinces which are written in quite corrupted forms of Latin, yet these are fairly readily recognised as containing not just Latin words but usually also whole phrases, the names of Graeco-Roman deities and so on. Thus while the Chagnon *defixio* features a selection of rhyming gobbledygook pseudo-words and neither the Deneuvre nor Dax finds can be read with much surety today, vulgar spellings attested at Deneuvre, such as *edio* for *etiam* and *quibiio* for *quippiam*, follow fairly well-understood local developments – in fact ones represented in the rise of French. In contrast, none of the Latinate readings of the Rom inscription is so straightforward – all depend on quite an unreal number of spelling mistakes, vulgarisms and Gallicisms. There are what appear to be several obvious Gaulish forms and words in the controversial text, but there are many more which seem indecipherable. More than any of the other long Gaulish lamella inscriptions, only fragments of the Rom *defixio* can clearly be understood. What is clear and half-clear, though, hints at much more.

There are, in fact, other magical tablets from ancient Gaul which sometimes appear to contain a mixture of forms. A good example of this kind of find was,

[12] Egger, *Römische Antike*, II, pp. 348–60, and blithely reproduced as Gager, *Curse Tablets*, no. 16; cf. Lambert, *La langue gauloise*, pp. 176–8; Guyonvarc'h, *Magie, médecine*, pp. 180–6 and Meid, 'Pseudogallischen Inschriften', pp. 277–84.

like the Rom inscription, first discovered in the late nineteenth century, also by a fairly amateur excavation of an ancient villa, this time at a place known as Sainte-Cécile, near the southern French town of Eyguières. Inscribed on a fairly irregularly shaped lead tablet, whose precise find circumstance is not clear, the Eyguières lamella is about 75mm by 66mm in length and breadth, and weighs about 82g. Found several hundred metres away from an ancient necropolis and near a cave featuring a natural spring, it is covered with (at least) two chaotic and seemingly unconnected texts written one over the other, scratched in Greek letters. Conserved today in the Musée de Salon et de la Cru in the nearby regional centre of Salon-en-Provence, its difficult and in parts quite nonsensical writing has been read most recently as:[13]

emsoksigkzio
no aporedito
no eθatd
no apordtdtdt
sk

emer ii
oke oteto
ouinna
tt
mott
ib
aknkatorix
di
orgitorikx
tegorikx
tt k
antorrix

Other interpretations have been proffered for some sections of this text, although none renders it obviously more sensible. For example, the section beginning with *emer* has been read as *smertiioto*, featuring *smer-* 'apportion, fate', a common element in Gaulish theonyms, almost as if this was the name of a god such as Smertrios or some other reference to 'fating' or 'cursing'. Other options, such as *emsolsig-* for *emsoksig-* for the first expression, have also been preferred and *emsolsig* could be read backwards as *Gislos me*, 'Gislos for me'. But such suggestions do not make the text appear more readily interpretable. Still, it does seem likely that the sequence *apordtdtdt* represents a garbled form of the expression *aporedito* that appears two lines above it, and the sequence *eθatd* is even reminiscent of a semantically obscure term, *ezatim*, which appears in the Rom inscription. The form *no* which precedes three of the earlier expressions could well also represent the Gaulish word for 'now'. Yet, on the other hand, *apo* is a Greek preposition (and cf. Greek *aporeoito* 'may fall off') which may indicate a poorly preserved but essentially linguistically Greek text. Indeed, the Hyères *defixio*, found some 120km away to the south-east, is written in Greek, and although it is quite fragmentary, it is nowhere near as textually problematic as is the Eyguières find.[14]

All that is truly clear here is that, like the first Bath tablet, the Eyguières text substantially features only a list of names, many of which admittedly are

[13] C. Jullian, 'Notes gallo-romains: V. Plaque de plomb d'Eyguières', *Revue des études anciennes* 2 (1900), 47–55; *RIG* I, no. 9.

[14] *IGF* no. 70.

a bit scrambled and are written one over the other, but remain fairly evident regardless. Orgitorix, for example, is better known as Orgetorix, the name of the leading Helvetic chieftain whose invasion of Gaul was used as a pretext for his own campaign by Caesar. And the other forms ending in *-rix* are almost certainly also the names of Gaulish men: slightly irregularly spelt forms of Ancaturix, Tegorix and Antorix.[15]

There are much more degenerate examples of *defixiones* of ancient Gaulish provenance, however, than the orthographically quite deficient Eyguières inscription. One was found on the site of the *oppidum* of La Granède, a few kilometres away from L'Hospitalet-du-Larzac, near the remains of a Gallo-Roman sanctuary. Almost nothing can be read of the nine lines of inscription which the spell text, which is yet to be published properly, once comprised; not a single word has been read from the rather damaged Roman-letter text by the French experts who have investigated the find. What might be the Roman numeral *xxi* (i.e. 21) seems evident enough, but little else can be read with any certainty from this lamella, which, like the (other) Larzac *defixio*, can be seen today on public display at the Musée de Millau.[16]

A second example of a poorly preserved Gallo-Roman curse lamella was found in an ancient graveyard discovered in the mid nineteenth century by the Boulevard Arago in the St Marcel quarter of Paris (Gallo-Roman Lutetia). Although it is lost now, probably long since disintegrated away to nothing, a drawing and a gypsum mould of the inscription have survived which preserve its Roman-letter text more or less legibly. Found folded in two and placed over the funerary urn of the deceased (just as was the Larzac tablet), several readings for the text of the Paris find have been proposed over the past century and a half, not all aspects of which have been in accord with each other. The most recent interpretation of the drawing and mould, though, is:[17]

xirimi iall soll uo
socsiuc so ios uisoc
iu
as il na

Almost nothing linguistically meaningful can be made out from these few lines, apart from a sequence *soc* (similar to Chamalières *isoc*), twice, and perhaps a woman's name – *Asilna* or the like (other forms, such as *Asunna*, have also been read here). The text does not look at all Latin, but neither is it clearly Gaulish, and some of the sequences (*socsiu … suisoc*) look somewhat like pseudo-words rather than regular writing. In fact, the sequence the Paris tablet begins with, *xir…* cannot be Gaulish or Latin if it is read in this way, although it is reminiscent of the Celtic naming element *-rix* found so frequently at Eyguières. A name

15 Caesar, *B.G.* 2.1; Egger, *Römische Antike*, I, pp. 272–3; Gordon, '"What's in a list"', pp. 252ff.

16 L. Dausse and A. Vernhet, 'Croyances en Rouergue à l'époque gallo-romaine', in P. Gruat and J. Delmas (eds), *Croyances et rites en Rouergue: des origines à l'An Mil* (Montrozier 1998), p. 204.

17 *CIL* XIII, no. 3051; *RIG* II.2, no. 105.

like *Imi(o)rix* may have been intended here – many, especially Greek curse tablets, bear lists of names that are purposefully scrambled or abbreviated, and some *defixiones* (as at Deneuvre and Bregenz) either feature portions which are, or are completely, written in reverse. Other scrambled names or words may have been intended by *socsiu* and *suisoc*, such as Latin *socius* 'associate, friend' (or even the Roman name Cossius). The twisting and scrambling of names in *defixiones* is often thought to reflect the calls that victims (or their minds and tongues) be 'twisted' which appear in some juridical curses (hence, too, the mention of a *socius*?), although coded writing might well just have been thought especially suitable for a spell that called upon mysterious chthonic powers. On the other hand, like the blank curse tablets deposited along with the inscribed Rom find (and comparable unengraved examples found at Bath and Uley), it is always possible that a text which was meaningful in a normal linguistic sense was not always judged necessary for a curse to be effective – after all, some of the tablets deposited in the sacred spring at Bath seem only to feature unreadable scribble. Some experts are, therefore, suspicious that the Rom inscription, too, may never have been readable in any straightforward linguistic sense.

Another example of a difficult curse tablet was discovered in the early 1920s in the remains of a Gallo-Roman graveyard at Les Martres-de-Veyre, about 18km south of Clermont-Ferrand. Les Martres-de-Veyre was the site of a potters' works in Roman times and the associated graveyard has revealed several interesting items, including some particularly well-preserved pieces of ancient clothing. Two lead sheets were also discovered at the site, one of which, although quite fragmentary, clearly features words which are not Latin. It also seems to include some elements which are Latin, however, although it is not clear whether these represent occasional interpolations or if the Les Martres-de-Veyre inscription preserves a more properly bilingual Latin and Gaulish text. Written rather carelessly, its first- or second-century text runs over both sides of what has survived of the sheet and seems to read:[18]

…	
scoi diuos et i	… divine and …
nolis m	do not allow …
…lona…	…
siiam…	…
totli…	…
et iscessiliiaduoc	and of Iscessilios the advoc(ate)
ietamol…	…
ent an	…
…	
tisco…	
.cs…os litution	… accusation.

[18] A. Audollent, 'Les tombes à inhumation gallo-romaines des Martres-de-Veyre (Puy-de-Dôme)', *Mémoires présentés par divers savants à l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 13 (1923), 275–328; *RIG* II.2, no. 102.

A combination of poor preservation and careless writing has made much of the Les Martres-de-Veyre inscription illegible. Nonetheless, it is fairly clear that it features names in some instances as well as several occurrences of what is probably the Latin conjunction *et* 'and'. One of the names, (presumably) a genitive form of a man's name Iscessilios, even seems to be followed by the Latin form *aduoc(atus)* 'advocate, lawyer': that is, the equivalent title to that used nearby at Chamalières to describe the first of the seven victims of a litigation curse. Moreover, the appearance of Latin *nolis* 'do not allow' suggests the presence of an attested *defixio* formula such as 'do not permit him to live', while the reference to something being *diuos* 'divine' suggests that the text once began with an invocation. On the other hand, the fragmentary inscription also obviously ends with *litution*, a clearly Celtic word related to Châteaubleau's *liíumi* 'I give notice to, I accuse'. Although it is not possible to rescue the full text that was once written on the Les Martres-de-Veyre find, it seems likely that it preserves the remains of a litigation curse, presumably a *defixio* of the handing-over variety: the Les Martres-de-Veyre inscription appears to be a fragmentary and perhaps bilingual form of a type of binding spell also known from Chamalières and Larzac.

A further example which seems to represent a comparably mixed find is the inscription on a lead tablet discovered at Le Mans (ancient Suindunum). Found in a ritual pit during a quick excavation in the medieval judicial centre (as are commonly performed when archaeological finds are discovered during building works today), the oblong tablet is inscribed on both sides. One face features two texts written over each other, one running along the length, the other the breadth of the find; the single inscription on the other side records several prices (e.g. 125, 31, 50, 130 Roman pence) and is evidently a fragment from a much larger specimen – the Le Mans tablet seems to have been cut off from the side of a more substantial lead sheet which originally bore some sort of inventory, perhaps legal or mercantile in nature. The endings of the words that have survived look to be Gaulish names (and are presumably those of debtors or creditors), but it seems likely that this original text had little to do with those which appear on the other side. Instead, the Le Mans tablet appears to have been recycled, cut off from a much larger original which was used for a different purpose from that which the smaller texts reflect.

The two overwritten inscriptions seem much less likely to be mundane, however. Written over each other much as the two texts on the tablet from Eyguières are, one is written in cursive, the other in Roman capitals, and they appear to read, respectively:[19]

mailis x
uado iuxta
abutos…
etantonan
tuodentino
credentes

.ialos dmdm
ets naios uel-
sdo
[e]ts carantiose…
tu comacon…

19 *RIG* II.2, no. 104.

Both of these texts appear to feature Latin expressions, the first three the words *uado* 'I go', *iuxta* 'alike, nearby' and *credentes* 'the entrusted'; the second an abbreviation, *d(is) m(anibus)* 'to the spirits of the departed', one common in Roman funerary inscriptions – and it may be that other similarly Latin forms such as *et* and *tu*, perhaps even a name Antona (or the like) should be recognised here. Some of the Kreuznach *defixiones* make reference to the 'spirits of the departed' (as does a similar find from Frankfurt), much as the untimely dead (or other chthonic beings) are sometimes called upon in Greek *katadesmoi* – and the mention of a group of *credentes* at Le Mans seems likely to be a reference to a list of victims whose fates have been entrusted to the judgement of infernal powers.[20] The text in capitals at Le Mans also just as clearly features Celtic forms, however: *ialos* literally means 'clearing' in Gaulish, *uel[e]ts* would mean 'poet' or 'prophet' (the continental equivalent of Irish *fili*), and *Naios*, *Carantios* and *Comacon* appear to be Old Celtic names. Carantios (which is attested fairly commonly as a man's name elsewhere in Gaul) even seems to be further described by an interpolation written above his name, a fragmentary form which begins with a peculiarly Gaulish spelling (presumably of 'Gaulish *t*') and that is probably to be read as a demonstrative *sdo* 'him, this, the one'. It seems very likely, then, that the Le Mans text represents some sort of bilingual binding curse that, although poorly executed in parts, begins in Latin and ends in Gaulish, some sections of the inscription perhaps even representing a mixture of the two languages. The *filid* were held to have been the original transmitters of law in early Irish tradition – Naios may well have been the equivalent of Caius Lucius Florus Nigrinus, the advocate (*adgarion*) cursed at Chamalières. Adding some other likely identifications, a partial translation of the Le Mans text might consequently be:[21]

Evil (?) …	Field (dedicated?) to the spirits of the departed
I go nearby	… Naios the *fili*,
used up…	the one
… and Antona (?)	Carantios …
you …	… Comacos …
the consigned.	

The previous use of the Le Mans tablet in what appears to have been a fairly mundane context indicates that not all inscribed lead lamellas of Graeco-Roman date need automatically be considered *defixiones*. Yet despite the difficult state of its preservation, it does seem likely that the Le Mans find is a Celtic curse tablet – and a linguistically mixed magical text, much as the Rom inscription is often thought to be.

20 Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae*, nos 94–101; *AE* 1978, no. 545; Mees and Nicholas, 'Greek curses'. One of the Kreuznach texts even seems to conflate the 'spirits of the departed' with the infernal gods: *data nomina ad inferas larvas dis manibus hos v(oveo)*, 'Names given to the ones below, to the ghosts, the spirits of the departed – these I d(edicate)', and cf. Frankurt's *rogo Manes inferi ut…* 'I ask the spirits of the departed, the ones below, that …'.

21 B. Mees, 'Gaulish tau and Gnostic names on the lamella from Baudecet', *Latomus* 66 (2007), 924–6; R.C. Stacey, *Dark Speech: the performance of law in early Ireland* (Philadelphia 2007), pp. 55ff.

10. Inscribed curse tablet from Rom

The Rom inscription, however, is much more difficult to interpret than the only fragmentarily legible Gaulish texts from Le Mans and Les Martres-de-Veyre. It is not even entirely clear where to begin to read it at first, as it is written on both sides of the lead tablet. One side begins with *ape*, which some scholars have interpreted as a cognate of Latin *atque* 'and to'; the other is characterised by several statements that seem to begin with the pronoun *te* 'you'. Yet the expected development of *atque* is attested in Gaulish as *-ac* and even the reading *te* has been disputed by some scholars.[22] Indeed, the proper reading of individual letters in several instances has similarly been a matter of conjecture. Nonetheless, a parsed form of the most recent expert reading of the Rom inscription is:

ape ci alli garti
-esti heiont cati cato
ata demtisse botu
-cna se demtiti cato
-bi cartaont dibo
-na sosio decipia
sosio pura sosio
eoe[…]eiot et
sosio pura h…
sua de[..]ia[.]o[.]cn
-a uataontio diseia

te uoraïimo
ihža atat o te hi
-zo atant atecom
-priato sosio berti
-n oipommio ateho
-tisse po te atepri
-auimo atant ate
-ont ezatim ezo
-zia te uoraïimo
ape sosio berti
-m[…] demtiss[..]
ueie[…]

22 O. Haas, 'Zu den gallischen Sprachresten', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 23 (1943), 291; *RIG* II.2 no. 65; Meid, 'Pseudogallischen Inschriften', p. 281.

Sometimes it is difficult to be sure how to parse the Rom text precisely, but early investigators of the inscription established a reading that has generally proved in accord with more recent understandings of Gaulish. The term *ape*, for example, is now known also from Châteaubleau much as the expressions *ci*, *se*, *sua* and *sosio* are paralleled elsewhere in ancient Celtic. Some clear verbal forms can also be discerned, although not all can be translated with certainty, and the text obviously features some repetition, as do the Chamalières, Châteaubleau and Larzac curses.

Past investigators of the Rom text have suggested the presence of all sorts of possible words, from odd forms of Latin *precor* 'pray, curse' and *oro* 'speak, pray' to a slightly irregular spelling of Divona, the name of a Gaulish goddess. Literally meaning 'Divine One', Divona is mentioned by Ausonius as the name of a spring in Bordeaux (and seems to be replicated in several other place names which reflect cultic springs), so such a goddess would presumably have the necessary chthonic credentials for a binding curse. Yet the word on the tablet reads *dibona*, which might more faithfully be read as 'from' or 'not good' (*di-bona*), and the sequences sometimes read as a corrupt or dialectal forms of *precor* seem much more credibly to be linked with the Gaulish root *pri-* 'buy', also used in the Châteaubleau and Larzac curses. Similarly, the form interpreted as related to *oro* is more obviously to be read as *uoraïimo* 'we bestow on', with *te uoraïimo* 'we bestow on you' presumably a Celtic expression of the handing-over type. The only sequence that looks clearly to be a name is *Botucna*, a form which seems to crop up twice on the *ape* side (the second time probably on a damaged part of the tablet).[23]

Rather than attempting to read all sorts of corrupt or misspelt non-Celtic forms, it would seem better to accept that the scribe who wrote the Rom text was competent. After all, there are several words similar to those found on other curse tablets evident on the Rom lamella, although these do not necessarily appear in contexts which make their meanings completely clear. For instance, although their precise interpretation remains somewhat problematic, the sequences *cati*, *cato* and *catobi* are reminiscent of the 'weaving' or 'shackling' forms *catacim* and *catic[a]nus* seen at Bath and Lezoux, and hence appear likely to be references to enslavement or binding. The forms in *eio-* and *heio-*, which are evidently verbs, also appear likely to be related to the Larzac description *eiotinios* 'the fated', much as would be expected in a Gaulish binding spell.[24]

More straightforwardly, the singular pronoun *te* appears to refer to the divinity invoked in the Rom curse. That is, after all, the usual use of pronouns in *defixiones*. The section which follows the first instance of the phrase *te uoraïimo* also seems to feature the Gaulish pronouns 'she' and 'he', perhaps in reflection of another

23 Ausonius, *Ordo nob. urb.* 20; J. Rhŷs, 'Celtae and Galli', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 2 (1905–6), 107–18; also issued as a monograph (London 1905); J. Pokorny, 'Miscellanea celtica', *Celtica* 3 (1956), 306; Haas, 'Zu den gallischen Sprachresten', 285–95; idem, 'Die gallische Fluchtafel von Rom (Deux-Sèvres)', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 27 (1958/59), 206–20; G. Olmsted, 'Gaulish, Celtiberian, and Indo-European verse', *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 19 (1991), 282–6, 293–302; Mees, 'Women of Larzac', 170, n. 1.

24 Mees, 'Larzac *eiotinios*', 298; idem, 'Celtic inscriptions of Bath', 178.

style well known from *defixiones*: 'whether male or female' (or 'whether man or woman' etc.). This difficult form may mirror the indeterminate 'whoever you may be' phrasing found in classical binding spells and may be being used in this instance to refer to unnamed chthonic powers, masculine or feminine.[25] Indeed, references to 'you' in ancient magic are nearly always reserved for the enabling powers rather than the victims of a curse or a charm; cf. the Hamble *defixio*'s '(O Lord Neptune), I give you' and the '(I as)k you all' of the juridical Bregenz find. The use of the plural first person ('we'), however, is not common in classical binding charms (most of which are written in the singular), but in light of the multiple authorship evident at Bath and Larzac as well as the similar usage at Amélie-les-Bains (in *rogamus* 'we ask') plural subjects (i.e. cursers plural) seem to be more frequent among Celtic finds.

The better-known possessive form *sosio* 'his, its', on the other hand, is followed each time by a series of short statements referring to *sosio* this and *sosio* that in a manner reminiscent, instead, of the way pronouns are used of victims in Greek and Latin *defixiones*. Both of the forms which clearly follow *sosio* in this manner on the *ape* side of the text, *decipia* and *pura*, have also been interpreted as loanwords: *decipia* as related to Latin *decipio* 'ensnare, deceive, beguile' and *pura* to Greek *pyr*, *pyra* 'fire, fever'. Moreover, Latin *decipio* is one of the verbs used to indicate 'taking away' in the Hamble *defixio*, and as the apparent reference to burning (*er-and-*) on the second of the Celtic finds from Bath suggests, connecting the Rom form *pura* with burning or fire would also have good parallels in ancient binding charms.[26]

The phrasing *sosio X* in itself, though, suggests repetition of a kind that is particularly typical of classical binding texts. One of the most distinctive rhetorical devices used in *defixiones* is, once the name of the accursed has been given and what they have done to deserve the cursing has been described, the description of the parts of the victims' bodies, their actions or other attributes which are to be bound as part of the curse. The Bregenz amatory curse mentions a victim's health, heart, kidneys, genitals and so on, for example, but the original employment of this kind of expression seems to have been in spells where a different kind of targeting was intended. A Greek inscription from Nemea (near Corinth), which has been dated to the late fourth century BC, exhibits a typical, although early, use of this type of anatomical or listing rhetoric. A spell that was found with five other spell tablets whose texts were evidently composed by the same individual, it clearly refers to an erotic relationship:[27]

25 Tomlin, 'The curse tablets', p. 66; Mees, 'Chamalières', 19, n. 9. Such formulas are more commonly used to refer to thieves in judicial prayers, but can appear, e.g. as 'whether god or goddess' in Latin sources.

26 The feminine Latin adjective *pura* 'clear, unadulterated, pure' has also been invoked here, but would not be as well paralleled in classical curse texts.

27 Gager, *Curse Tablets*, no. 25; H.S. Versnel, 'καὶ εἴ τι λ[οιπὸν] τῶν μερ[ῶ]ν [ἔσ]ται τοῦ σώματος ὅλ[ο]υ[.. (… and any other part of the body there may be …): an essay on anatomical curses', in F. Graf (ed.), *Ansichten griechischer Rituale: Geburtstagsymposium für Walter Burkert, Catelen bei Basel, 15. bis 18. März 1996* (Stuttgart 1998), pp. 217–67; and cf. Gordon, '"What's in a list?"', pp. 266ff.

I turn away Eubola from Aineas.
From his face,
from his eyes,
from his mouth,
from his breasts,
from his soul,
from his belly,
from his penis,
from his anus,
from his entire body.
I turn away Eubola from Aineas.

The purpose of this spell is to separate two lovers, much as the *defixio* from Bregenz features a stipulation that another woman may not be able to marry her (and of course the author's) beloved. These two charms each represent spells which illustrate magical responses to sexual rivalry. The rhetoric of description used in both spells, however, seems to have originated in binding charms where various parts of the body (connected with love and sex) were specifically to be restrained from acting – and such references even came to be represented in some cases by tying to curse tablets small lead manikins (*kolossoi*) akin to modern voodoo dolls which have needles piercing (i.e. figuratively 'fixing') the parts of the body to be affected: tongues, hands, hearts, eyes and so on (cf. the coin found with the Lezoux lamella). Other spells of this type bind laughter, dancing and other less immediately physical expressions of a victim's attractiveness, much as the Bregenz *defixio* more ominously commands the cursing of vital organs, health, food and so on, and the Montfo curse targets its victims' youth, skin, life, cattle, crops and wellbeing. It is also quite common for erotic curses to demand that their victims be consumed by dizziness, fever or fire (literally, not just as if with desire) until they submit to the entreaties of their magical suitor – one erotic charm from a Graeco-Egyptian grimoire is even described as an excellent *empyron* or 'inflamer'. And although the victims of such curses are usually women in Greek and Roman spells, this is far from being exclusively the case.[28]

It seems quite likely, then, that the Rom *defixio* represents an erotic charm. It may consequently be thought similar to a clearer example of a bilingual amatory charm from an area of France much better known for its Gaulish finds. In 1870 an inscribed lead lamella was discovered near the site of an ancient villa in the environs of the town of Le Monastère, Aveyron, about 40km north-west of L'Hospitalet-du-Larzac. The Le Monastère inscription was unearthed at a place called Le Mas-Marcou by an excavation team led by a prominent local antiquarian. A general survey of the excavation was published at the time, but the nineteenth-century report does not make the precise circumstances of the lamella find clear – the text may have been unearthed from a well or a small cemetery a short distance away from the villa that was also being excavated at the time. The findings of the nineteenth-century dig passed into the keeping of the

[28] *PGM* nos IV.296–329 [= Gager, *Curse Tablets*, no. 27] and XXXVI.69–101; Gager, *Curse Tablets*, nos 18ff. and the manikin pictured ibid., p. 98; B. Mees, 'Fate and malediction in early Celtic tradition', *Journal of the Australian Early Medieval Association* 4 (2008), 147–8.

Aveyron Society of Letters, Sciences and Arts, and the lamella, whose text was not published until as late as 1993, is held at the Musée Fenaille in the provincial capital Rodez today.[29]

The Le Mas-Marcou inscription, which is almost invisible today under normal light, seems to date from the first century and appears on a (mostly) rectangular lead sheet 107mm long and 69mm wide. It is written in a rather clumsy form of old Roman cursive, a clumsiness which extends even to the appearance of some evident spelling mistakes. One appears to be the deficient use of the letter usually associated with the 'Gaulish *t*', an affricate sound evidently quite similar to English *ts*. Yet rather than just mimicking a Latin (or even Greek) text, this time the Gaulish of the Le Mas-Marcou inscription is clearly supplemented by a (repeated) sentence in Latin:

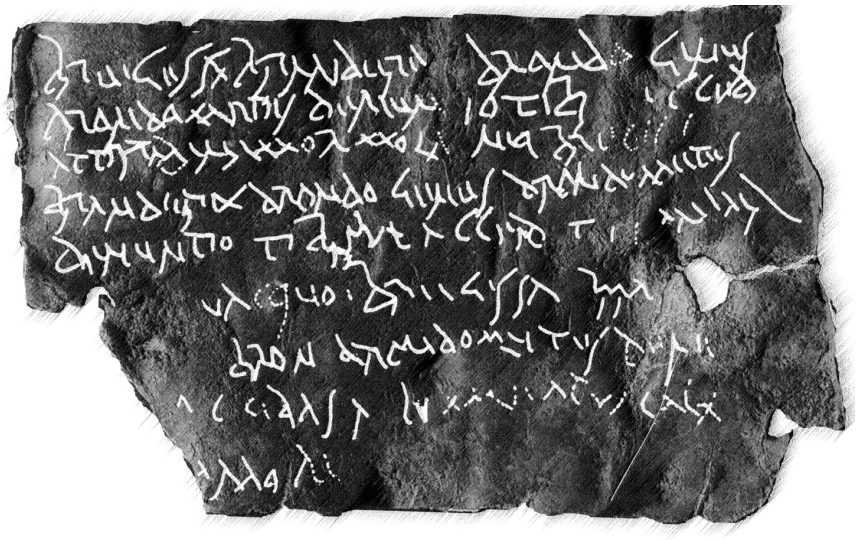
Bregissa Branderix drondo genes drondo međis denuntio tibi ne accedat Termina me Mo…ius
Bregissa Branderix drondo genes drondo metis denuntio tibi ne accedas Termina mea Mol…
Breigissa … dron… drondo metes den… accedas …mina me… a Mol…

Apart from the two Celtic names, Bregissa and Branderix, the only sections which are immediately clear in this triple lamella text are the Latin portions. The spellings vary slightly from line to line, but the Latin section clearly consists of the repeated phrase 'I give notice to you: Mol[…]ius (you) may not approach my Termina'. The verb *denuntio* 'I give notice' is also found opening the *defixio* from Chagnon where it is the two victims of the spell, Lentinus and Tasgillus, who are being 'notified' (much as it is the victim Papissona who is being 'registered' at Châteaubleau). Thus the Le Mas-Marcou charm clearly belongs to the imprecatory tradition of binding spells which legally register their victims for judgement by the infernal powers. Mol[…]ius appears to have been a man's name, Molinius, Molatius, Moltinius or the like, and the anonymous author of the Le Mas-Marcou find seems to have wanted Mol[…]ius kept away from 'his' Termina.[30]

On the other hand, the alliterating Celtic names Bregissa and Branderix seem to represent those of the otherworldly powers being called upon at Le Mas-Marcou. Like that of the Irish goddess Brigit, the Gaulish name Bregissa literally means the 'High' or 'Powerful One', and the style Branderix, which means 'Raven King', sounds rather similar to that borne by Brân, a supernatural king recorded in medieval Welsh tradition. *Branwen Daughter of Llyr*, a tale from the *Mabinogion*, records that, after his death in Ireland, Brân's gigantic head was buried in London (facing France) in order to protect Britain from foreign diseases, and Brân's mutilation at Irish hands is reflected in the wounds borne by the like-named figure who appears in Arthurian legend as the Fisher King. The Gaulish part of the text from Le Mas-Marcou clearly alliterates, assonates and

29 P.-F. Cérès, 'Compte rendu sur les fouilles pratiquées à la villa romaine de Mas-Marcou', *Mémoires de la Société des lettres, sciences et arts de l'Aveyron* 10 (1868–73), 198–214; L. Dausse, 'Le plomb de Mas-Marcou', *Procès-verbaux des séances de la Société des lettres, sciences et arts de l'Aveyron* 46 (1993), 459–65; *RIG* II.2, no. 99.

30 Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae*, no. 111; Kajanto, *The Latin Cognomina*, p. 345; Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, no. 11.



11. Triply inscribed spell lamella from Le Mas-Marcou

seems to be metrical, and appears to represent a charm calling upon Bregissa and Branderix to effect the spell.[31]

The text following the alliterating names clearly features two repeated forms which seem to be developments of the Celtic word for 'true'. The two instances of *drondo* are then followed by terms of which only the latter seems absolutely clear: the Gaulish word for 'judge' (cf. Latin *metior* 'to measure, to judge', Old Irish *mess* 'judgement'), which is also attested as the root of the common Gaulish man's name *Meθθilos*. The reference to judging appears to be a further sign that the notification of the Latin section of the spell is to infernal judges. Moreover, the preceding expression, *genes*, looks as if it may be a form of the Irish verb *gnin*, *·gén* 'to know' (cf. the use of *gniíou* 'know' at Châteaubleau and the compound *dru-wid* 'true knower'). The whole, obviously stylised and presumably metrical Gaulish expression appears to represent a short prayer-like charm:[32]

Bregissa, Branderix:	Bregissa, Branderix:
drondo genes,	may you know truly,
drondo međis.	may you judge truly.
Denuntio tibi:	'I give notice to you:
ne accedat Termina(m) mea(m) Mol…ius.	Mol…ius may not approach my Termina.

This is clearly a magical text, its triplicity and verse-like form bringing to mind the latter parts of the Chamalières *defixio*. The Le Mas-Marcou find seems most

31 H. Newstead, *Bran the Blessed in Arthurian Romance*, Columbia University Studies in English and Comparative Literature 141 (New York 1939); Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, pp. 284–6.

32 Mees, 'Early Celtic metre'.

likely to be an amatory charm aimed at warding off a rival suitor, a certain M., from a woman called Termina – it appears to be an agonistic amatory spell like the more obviously binding expression from Bregenz which calls on Ogmios – that is, one used by a (male) suitor against a rival. Sometimes the 'separating' aspect of comparable classical amatory spells is less than explicit. Witness, for example, an erotic charm from Attica, Greece, which merely records: 'On Aristokudes and the women who will be seen with him. May he not marry any other woman or young maiden' (i.e. except the curser).[33] The Le Mas-Marcou charm is quite different rhetorically from most other erotically separating finds, although the calling on divine help, giving notice to the names and then following this with a stipulation is a common-enough style in ancient magical practice. Amatory charms thus seem to have been known to the ancient Celts, much as more prosaic types of binding spells were; hence the evident idiosyncrasy at Le Mas-Marcou may merely represent a different type of Celtification of a typical classical tradition.

Ancient erotic inscriptions come in several general categories, however, and it is *agôgai* or 'leading' charms which are the most common type of Graeco-Roman amatory spell. Leading (or attraction) charms are the opposite, in effect, of what are called *diakopoi* or 'separation' charms in ancient Greek (i.e. for spells like the Nemean and Bregenz finds), and usually indicate a form of beckoning, influencing or pointing of a lover toward the author of the charm. A good example of an ancient leading charm is the following quite subtle Latin example, of third-century date. Written on both sides of a lead tablet found at Mautern, Austria, it is quite reminiscent of a *defixio*; in fact, it almost seems to be a deliberate variation on a typical binding curse:[34]

> Pluto, or we should call him Jupiter of the underworld, and Eracura, the Juno of the underworld, have already hastily summoned the one named below and surrendered the shade of Aurelius Sinnianus Ceserianus.
> Thus, O Silvia, you will see your husband returned, much as his name is written here.

This spell begins with a mention of infernal deities very much in the style of a *defixio* – in fact, it features the same pair of chthonic gods as appear along with Ogmios in the amatory curse from Bregenz. But rather than featuring handing over, registering or binding, the Mautern inscription instead clearly uses a form of analogy (a 'just as …, so too …' construction) in order to win (or lead) Aurelius Sinnianus Ceserianus back to his wife Silvia. The getting back nature of the spell is even emphasised by writing the man's name upside down (i.e. so it is, in effect, back to front). Often *agôgai* are rather more forceful than this, though, urging, for instance, that the victim be dizzy, unable to sleep or for their mind to be consumed with fire until they succumb to the author's advances. In fact, some *agôgai* recorded in ancient grimoires were claimed to be so strong they suggest

[33] Gager, *Curse Tablets*, no. 23.

[34] Egger, *Römische Antike*, II, pp. 24–33; J.J. Winkler, 'The constraints of Eros', in Faraone and Obbink, *Magica Hiera*, pp. 214–43; C.A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999).

(hyperbolically) that the casters leave their doors open so as not to harm their victims when they come running (with uncontrollable desire) to their magical suitors. Yet there is considerable rhetorical crossover between amatory spells and *defixiones* (so much so that *agôgai* are usually claimed to have developed out of the tradition of binding charms), so it may well be that the Rom terms *decipia* and *pura*, although suggestive of an *agôgê*, could have been used in another type of ancient spell.

A third type of classical amatory charm, erotic binding curses (*philtrokatadesmoi*), usually have a stronger feeling of arresting, subjugating or restraining a lover than an *agôgê*: for example, to first win them or (latterly) to force them to desist from their wandering ways. The boundary is often unclear, but agonistic spells which concern love in an overt binding context are typically more demanding than their leading or separating counterparts, and can often even be quite explicit, being insulting and coarse with their wording. A particularly striking example is the Maar *defixio*: featuring an enumeration of the alphabet as well as Celtic names, this late first- or second-century Latin *philtrokatadesmos* simply reads: 'I bind Artus, son of Dercomognus, the fucker, Artus Aprilis Celsius the fucker'.[35] The language used in ancient amatory magic is often full of graphic and even overblown descriptions. Yet perhaps more representative of an erotic binding charm is the following second- or third-century Graeco-Egyptian example:[36]

> I bind you, Theodotis daughter of Eus, by the tail of the snake, the mouth of the crocodile, the horns of the ram, the poison of the asp, the hairs of the cat, and the penis of the god, that you may not be able to have sex ever with another man, either frontally or anally or orally, or to take pleasure with another man except me, Ammonion son of Hermitaris … Make use of this *philtrokatadesmos*, employed by Isis, so that Theodotis daughter of Eus may no longer try anything with any other man save me alone, Ammonion. And may she be subservient, obedient, eager, flying through the air seeking Ammonion son of Hermitaris. And bring her thigh close to his, her genitals close to his, in unending intercourse for all the time of her life …

Other erotic *defixiones* are more still elaborate, calling on gods, their infernal servants or the spirits of the dead, mentioning penises, vaginas and the like and, as in the separation charms, wishing selective amnesia, estrangement or spinsterhood on their victims. Nothing quite so punitive or lurid is suggested by what can be made out of the Rom charm, but then very little is known about ancient Celtic attitudes to sex or other matters of this nature.

It appears plausible, though, that the Rom inscription is a love charm of some kind. Indeed, the words *ci alli gartiesti* at the beginning of the *ape* side evidently represent a reference to 'this other' (i.e. a rival suitor?) being 'called' (cf. Old Irish *gairid* 'to call'). The sequence *ueie*, too, which rounds off the *te* side, is clearly a form of the 'desire' word seen at Châteaubleau. Given the reference to a woman, Botucna, and certain qualities associated with a man, the Rom text may well

35 *CIL* XIII, no. 10008.7.
36 Gager, *Curse Tablets*, no. 34.

be some sort of separation charm cast by, as is typical of such expressions, an unnamed (second) man.

Yet rather than separating, there is more of a feeling of taking and redeeming, even of stealing, in the Rom inscription. The forms in *dem-* seem to be related to Old Irish *do·eim* 'covers, protects', but this term originally indicated 'taking into (one's protection)' or more simply (as with the Latin cognate *demo*) 'taking away from', while the forms in *ate-pri-* and *ate-com-pri-* literally seem to indicate 'buying emphatically' or 'buying again' (i.e. they probably indicate commissioning or redeeming). References both to 'taking away' and 'redeeming' also have good parallels in Latin thievery curses. Yet both themes could just as easily be interpreted in erotic terms – especially if amatory rivalry was concerned. In fact, one of the difficult forms in *dem-* is even preposed by a demonstrative *se* 'this', much as if a magical action is indicated here (comparable to Larzac's recurrent use of 'this' in reference to the *defixio*'s 'enchantment' or 'binding'), suggesting that a *diakopos*-like 'taking away' is the key feature of the spell. With its juxtapositions such as *cati cato* and *atant ateont* reminiscent (also) of the use of *uidluias uidlua* or *lidsatim liciatim* at Larzac, the Rom text appears to be similarly rhythmical and poetically stylised. Indeed, *cati cato* seems to represent much the same grammatical variation as is represented by *uidluias uidlua*, and the difficult, also evidently stylised sequence *ezatim ezozia* appears as if it may be related to the similarly obscure sequence *eθatd*, which appears on the Eyguières tablet.

Who the subjects and objects of the separating in the Rom charm are is not particularly clear, however. The 'they' referred to several times in the text, for example, are the subject of several commands, including one which seems to represent a reference to 'cleansing' (*cartaont* – cf. Old Irish *cartaid* 'cleanses, scours'); the other, *uataontio*, is perhaps a verbal development of Gaulish *vates* 'soothsayer' (cf. Old Irish *fáith* 'prophet, seer'). The 'they' are thus presumably the unnamed chthonic powers who have been magically assigned the victim on the *te* side, a figure who seems to be being separated from the curser's beloved. In fact, the name Botucna looks as if it may be related to Old Irish *bot* 'penis' (which in turn is related to Latin *futuo* 'fuck'), so it may be that the spell is being directed at a woman (derisively, as at Maar, referred to as a 'fucker' or the like) who has seduced the 'he' mentioned again and again in this largely anonymous, but clearly quite complex Old Celtic spell. The evidently diminutive name also appears to be related to Welsh *bod* 'sweetheart', though, so Botucna could equally have meant 'Little Kisser', 'Little Lover' or the like: that is, the style could well represent some sort of pet form. The term *bertim* which follows *sosio* (twice) on the *te* side appears to be related to Old Irish *bert* 'burden, load', which again suggests a 'burden' or 'impost' supernaturally 'laid' or 'put upon' a victim – a reference to 'his' binding. The verb *oipommio* might, similarly, be linked with Latin *vincio* 'bind', much as might be expected in a binding spell.[37] A comprehensive interpretation of the agonistic Rom text remains somewhat illusive, but an indicative

[37] I.e. as *uip-* < **ui(n)k^{w}-*, *pace* W. Meid, 'Zur Lesung und Deutung der Inschrift von Rom (Deux-Sèvres)', in Meid and Anreiter, *Die grösseren Altkeltischen Sprachdenkmaler*, p. 123, who prefers a connection with Greek *oiphô* 'to fuck'.

(albeit necessarily tentative) translation of the inscription, with the correction of some its spelling oddities (and supplying some likely reconstructions) is:

ape ci alli gartiesti	About this other be called!
eiont cati cato ata	They fate that it is a binding of a binding (i.e. the best of bindings?).
demtisse Botucna se demtiti	Botucna was taken away by it (i.e. the binding), this (spell) of taking away.
catobi cartaont dibona	By bindings may they cleanse the ungood:
sosio decipia	his beguiling,
sosio pura	his burning,
sosio e(i)o… eiot	his fating it fates;
et sosio pura [eiot]	also his burning it fates.
sua de[mt]ia [B]o[tu]cna	(Just) as Botucna was taken away,
uataontio dis eia	(so too) may they who destine do to her.
te uoraiimo	'We bestow on you,
iza ata(n)t	whether they be
o te izo atant	a she or a he.
atecompriato	Commissioned,
sosio bertim	his burdening,
oipommio	the one that I bind
ateotisse po	it was by it (i.e. the binding).
te atepriauimo	We have commissioned you.
atant ateont	They are, they were;
ezatim ezozia	…
te uoraiimo	We bestow on you,
ape sosio bertim	about his burdening
… demtiss[e] ueie…	… desire was taken away by it (the binding) …

Yet it remains hard to reconcile convincingly the switches of person, of singular and plural and even the sentiment of the Rom curse which seems to change from burning to deceiving (or stealing) to taking away and buying. It could well be that this is a complex charm, say, combining a call to separate a victim from her lover and a range of stipulations and punishments for the 'thief' who the author thought had stolen him away – perhaps even in a manner influenced by judicial prayers of the larceny-punishing kind. The Mautern spell combines the chthonic rhetoric of a binding curse with the 'restraining' or 'leading' of a typical amatory charm, and there are also a few examples of late classical spells which were obviously thought to be counter-*defixiones*, ones which employ binding magic to curse someone who is suspected of already having used such magic against the caster.[38] Several of the key readings are doubtful, but it seems quite possible that it is a previous charm (real, symbolic or imagined) laid by Botucna on the caster's beloved which is being 'cleansed' at Rom as part of an erotic separation spell. The loanwords which appear in the inscription might then be explained by the use of a Greek or Roman formulary or grimoire as a guide, although

38 Gager, *Curse Tablets*, pp. 218–42; Ogden, 'Binding spells', pp. 51–3.

the rhythmical style of the text has presumably occasioned much contortion of its classical model, much as is the case with the Chamalières and Larzac finds. Indeed, classical amatory spells of such a comparatively late date are usually not as unimaginatively reliant on formulas as are, for example, typical judicial prayers – they are often more elaborate and idiosyncratic compositions, sometimes even having something of a story-telling nature to them. It at least seems safe to assume, given the number of parallels there are between the terms used in the Rom inscription and what is known of other curse and charm inscriptions (as well as, and perhaps especially, the stylised nature of the text), that it is an inscription written in a language somewhat changed from earlier Gaulish, using a vocabulary not as well paralleled in other Gaulish curse finds, but is a text written somewhat hastily, and one that has also suffered some damage at crucial points. Many of the unclear forms and phrasal fragments at Rom only hint at meanings, some of which even seem somewhat contradictory. But rather than assume an incompetent or mixed text, it is probably better to admit that if ignorance is to be attributed to anyone, it should not be assumed that it was the author of the Rom inscription whose linguistic and orthographic knowledge and ability was fragmentary.

7

Breastplates and Clamours

The first Graeco-Roman curses to be written down were those of the conditional type: 'Whoever steals this, may he be accursed'. These expressions are evidently quite different from the more complex tradition of binding magic and represent a both widely attested and rather basic kind of imprecation. Nonetheless, the originally Greek practice of binding with spells changed over time, first developing into curses of the handing-over type, then into judicial prayers, *diakopoi* and erotic binding and leading charms. Classical spellbinding remained a certain magical type, however – a developed form of sorcery preserved in a supernatural written tradition, expressed in particular genres of magical finds. The surprisingly persistent classical tradition of *defixiones* is represented in most provinces of the Empire, from very early to even quite late classical contexts, curse tablets often being found singularly, but sometimes in quite large numbers as well. In fact, it is also often claimed that their influence was so widespread, popular and long-lasting that the legacy of binding spells can be seen in aspects of medieval Celtic tradition, albeit in somewhat curiously transformed usages and manners.

The earliest classical mention of an Insular Celtic curse appears in a second-century account. In his *Annals*, still unfinished at the time of his death in the year 117, the Roman historian Tacitus describes the reception faced by Imperial soldiers sent to confront the native defenders of Anglesey in AD 60:[1]

> On the beach stood the opposing host, a serried mass of arms and men, with women darting about between the ranks. In the style of Furies, in robes of deathly black and with dishevelled hair they brandished their torches while a circle of druids, lifting their hands to heaven and showering curses, struck the troops with such an awe for the extraordinary spectacle that, as though their limbs were paralysed, they exposed their bodies to wounds without making any attempt to move.

The Roman campaign to Anglesey was slightly later than the deposition of the *defixio* from Chamalières, and this passage presumably represents a reliable description of a substantially native expression of Celtic cursing. The Imperial troops were not long paralysed by the fearsome old Brittonic druids they faced, however,

1 Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.29–30.

but at the behest of their leaders rushed instead into battle. Tacitus records that the soldiers massacred the torch-bearing women and druids, destroying their sacred places in a brutal quest to stamp out all vestiges of resistance to Roman rule in Britain: the druids' curses proved no protection from the force of Roman arms. Many of the same troops were themselves to die in Boadicea's famous revolt that had just broken out that year and which culminated in the razing of the Roman provincial capital at Colchester. But brutal as such ancient pacification could be, Romanisation was typically a more peaceful process than it was in the case of the cursing druids of ancient Anglesey.[2]

Yet centuries of Roman domination would eventually mean the extinction of Celtic language and culture throughout much of Europe; and those parts of the Celtic world which lay outside the bounds of the Empire had to face the onslaught instead of Germanic invaders. These northern tribes would eventually overrun even the Empire itself at the end of the ancient period. But by that time the Gauls, Celtiberians, Galatians and other conquered Old Celtic peoples had gradually given up most of their traditional linguistic, social and religious peculiarities after generations of exposure to the cosmopolitan culture of Rome. The only remaining Celtic-speaking populations as the Middle Ages dawned were confined to the furthest (and poorest) outskirts of Gaul and the British Isles – and among them only the Goidels could be said to have not been substantially Romanised by that time. Outposts of Celtic speakers survived long enough on the European Continent to be mentioned by late classical figures such as St Jerome and for some of their words to enter the accounts of ancient naturalists, the works of a few late Roman glossators and even some forms of Latin, French, Italian and German. But the first substantial, post-classical records of Celtic language and culture stem from the surviving part of the Celtic world that never felt the heel of Imperial Rome. These earliest records mostly appear only after the conversion of Ireland, however, a process that represented a Celtic adoption of the most lasting of all late Roman phenomena – Christianity.[3]

Just as the last evidence of Celticity is falteringly preserved in continental sources, insular stonecutters began to record the first epigraphic evidence of the Irish language. Little more than funerary monuments, the inscriptions preserved on the earliest Ogham stones represent the first written expression of what would soon prove to be an extraordinary literary culture. With the conversion most strongly associated with the continental missionary St Patrick, an explosion of Irish and Hiberno-Latin writings emerged. And one of the most remarkable features of the tales told of these early Irish pioneers of Christianity was their ready, frequent and characteristic use of curses.

One of the accounts of the conversion of Ireland has St Patrick curse two bays from which his companions could not catch fish, but then bless a third which he had found more fruitful. Likewise, Patrick later blesses those who help him in his religious mission and blasts those who obstinately will not. Yet Patrick was

2 G. Webster, *Boudica: the British revolt against Rome AD 60*, rev. ed. (London 1993); R. Hingley and C. Unwin, *Boudicca: Iron Age warrior queen* (London 2005).

3 Hieron., *Comm. in epist. ad Galatos* 2.3 [= *PL* 26.379–80]; Lambert, *La langue gauloise*, pp. 187ff.

not the only saint of the early Celtic church who seemed particularly ready to pronounce curses on secular figures who got in his way. Medieval tales from both Ireland and Britain are full of stories of saints cursing kings and similar figures who err and will not submit to God's will. The British king Vortigern was cursed by St Germanus, according to the account of Nennius, and Hibernian saints such as Columba and Adamnan are recorded in some early traditions cursing similarly wayward Scots. Indeed, the heroic age of conversion recounted in medieval Irish hagiographical literature is one of constant struggle between St Patrick and his clerical fellows on the one hand, and errant druids and more dangerously recalcitrant traditional lords on the other. In fact, Irish saints sometimes even cursed each other such was their apparent willingness to resort to such tactics, according to the tales transmitted by later writers. Such tales of clerical cursing seem to represent a peculiarly Celtic medieval tradition.[4]

So remarkable is the medieval Irish tradition of cursing that some scholars have suggested that the maledictions put in the mouths of these saintly heroes of the early Celtic church by later storytellers drew upon a model of druidic cursing. After all, scenes where saintly missionaries best druids in magical contexts are commonplace in early Irish sources. It is not the druids of Anglesey who are usually cited in such comparisons, however, but instead the supposedly druidic practitioners of the ancient Celtic tradition of satire (Old Irish *áer*). Druids are often represented chanting metrical charms in Irish tales and it does seem likely that the study of poetic technique would have been a part of ancient druidic training. Yet satire is not associated with druids by classical authorities; instead it is accorded by ancient writers to the purview of Gaulish bards. The scornful words of an Irish poet, so the early insular tales recount, could cause the face to boil, lead to loss of reputation, eventually even to ruin. The cunning words of an Irish poet were evidently something to be feared, and, much as the druids of Britain and Gaul are described by classical writers as if they were ancient priestly figures, some modern commentators have assumed that a similar way with dangerous words was learned by early Christian saints from their pagan insular adversaries.[5]

What the *Second Battle of Moytura* accounts the first satire used in Ireland, that of Cairbre son of Etaine, is clearly articulated much as if it is a damning saint's curse. Indeed, the very words used by Cairbre mimic those employed by St Patrick in his similar exchange with the usurper Brecan, recounted in the *Colloquy of the Ancients*. The Patrician curse has a biblical model, though – St Patrick's earth-devouring malediction is clearly modelled on a similar curse ascribed to Moses – and Cairbre's cursing of the half-Fomorian king Bres is quite unlike satire as it is usually described in early Irish literature. Cairbre's curse presumably represents, as the original satire, a suitably enhanced, supernaturalised form.

4 Nennius, *Hist. Britt.* 47; W. Stokes (ed.), *The Tripartite Life of Patrick: with other documents relating to that saint*, Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores 89, 1 (London 1887), pp. 34–7; L.K. Little, *Benedictine Maledictions: liturgical cursing in Romanesque France* (Ithaca 1993), pp. 162–3.

5 Diodorus Siculus 5.31.2; C. Plummer (ed.), *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae, partim hactenus ineditae, ad fidem codicum manuscriptorum* 1 (Oxford 1910), pp. clxxiii–iv; T. Ó Cathasaigh, 'Curse and satire', *Éigse* 21 (1986), 10–15; cf. Little, *Benedictine Maledictions*, pp. 162–8.

The curses used by early Irish saints do not seem to have been native expressions like *áer*, but instead were named by a word of biblical Latin origin, *mallacht* in Irish (earlier *maldacht*, a loan of Latin *maledictio*). This Latinate word for 'curse' was also adopted by other Celtic Christians in Britain and on the Continent (as *melltith* in Welsh, *malloc'h* in Breton), largely to the exclusion of any earlier, native cursing terms. Instead of obviously continuing an older Celtic tradition, in early medieval times Insular Celtic curses were rather more clearly both named for and modelled on those which featured in the literature of the Latin-speaking Roman church, not an inherited pre-Christian tradition.[6]

Maledictus (literally 'ill-speaking') is the word used by St Jerome in his Latin translation of the Bible for Hebrew and Greek terms for 'curse' such as *'alah*, *me'erah*, *klalah* and *katara*. First used to describe curses by earlier classical authors, *maledictus* is nonetheless a description quite foreign to the context of *defixiones*. Curses sworn by secular figures in Old Irish tales such as the *Feast of Bricriu* are similarly described by Latinate Irish terms such as *mallachtae* (the equivalent of Latin *maledictus*) rather than *áer* or the like. Yet these Latin loanwords not only have counterparts in Breton and Welsh, they are also used in typically Christian Gaelic formulations such as *mac mallachtan* 'son of a curse', an expression used to describe Judas and even Satan in some medieval Irish sources. Less common Irish terms for 'curse' employed in similar contexts, such as *tríst*, *anoráit* and *miscad*, also evidently had originally Christian Celtic origins – indeed, *tríst* (literally 'sorrow', cf. Latin *tristis*), *anoráit* (a negation of *oráit*, a loan of Latin *oratio* 'prayer') and *miscad* (literally 'bad saying', i.e. a calque on *maledictus*) are all clearly Latinate expressions. As the complementary curses and blessings of St Patrick suggest, the insular malediction words are also mirrored by the loaning of Latin *benedictio* as Old Irish *bendacht* and Welsh *bendith* 'blessing' (whereas, in contrast, synonyms for *áer* are usually native terms such as *ainmed* 'blemishing', *rindad* 'cutting' and *imdergad* 'blushing'). The various Irish cursing terms are often even linked in expressions such as *mallacht & trist & anorait naem nErend*, 'malediction and curse and imprecation of the saints of Ireland', or *tríst & miscad Patraic*, 'curse and imprecation of Patrick' – they all seem to have been largely synonymous in early Celtic Christian contexts, much as were the various biblical cursing terms translated by St Jerome as 'malediction'.[7]

Yet it was an ecclesiastical, rather than merely biblical, background that seems most strongly represented in insular malediction. Indeed, excommunication (*excommunicatio*), a form of ecclesiastical imprecation deriving from Christian penitential practice, can even be seen behind some expressions of Hibernian

6 Numbers 16:30–34; W. Stokes (ed.), 'Acallamh na Senórach', in W. Stokes and E. Windisch (eds), *Irische Texte* 4.1 (Leipzig 1900), p. 16 (§45); Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, pp. 34–5 (§39); M.C. Randolph, 'Celtic smiths and satirists: partners in sorcery', *ELH* 8 (1941), 184–97; L. Breatnach 'On satire and the poet's circuit', in C.G. Ó Háinle and D.E. Meek (eds), *Unity in Diversity: studies in Irish and Scottish Gaelic language, literature and history* (Dublin 2004), pp. 25–35; idem, 'Satire, praise and the early Irish poet', *Ériu* 56 (2006), 63–84.

7 F.N. Robinson, 'Satirists and enchanters in early Irish literature', in D.G. Lyon and G.F. Moore (eds), *Studies in the History of Religions: presented to C.H. Toy by pupils, colleagues and friends* (New York 1912), pp. 104–8; R.C. Elliot, *The Power of Satire: magic, ritual, art* (Princeton 1960), pp. 25–6; *DIL* s.v. *mallacht*.

cursing. Linguistically, the curse sworn on Tara by St Ruadan, Abbot of Lothra, the proverbial 'curse of Ireland' (*escaine Hérenn*) of the Irish triads, literally seems to have been a 'casting out' (cf. Old Irish *esconn* 'unclean, common'), much as medieval Welsh *ysgymunaf* 'excommunicate, curse' is similarly (literally) an excommunication, a casting out from the (Christian) community. The description of St Ruadan in his *Life* chanting cursing psalms (*sailm escaine*) in the company of a troop of fellow monks against King Diarmait certainly brings the cursing druids of Anglesey to mind. Yet the mention of *sailm escaine* underlines the essentially Christian nature of this form of imprecation, as it was no doubt the case that insular monks did sometimes chant maledictory psalms against their enemies. Various psalms of the Bible call down curses on wrongdoers and unbelievers (e.g. 'Let ruin come upon them', 'May his days be few' or 'You will destroy their offspring from the earth') and it is especially striking that these biblical expressions are literally called 'excommunicating psalms' in Irish tradition – their use seems to have been modelled on early ecclesiastical rites or pronouncements of excommunication.[8]

Most of the curses of the saints which appear in early insular hagiography can readily be linked with biblical expressions, although none of these stories represents a first-hand text, one recorded straight from the mouth of a Hibernian saint. Instead, all are preserved in manuscripts centuries more recent than the events which they purport to describe. When the author of one of the seventh-century lives of St Patrick has the saint say 'May this impious one who blasphemes your name now be lifted away and quickly slain', it seems unlikely that he was working from a reliable fifth-century tradition. But not only is St Patrick described as raising his left hand (as opposed to the right – the usual hand raised in Christian benediction), the words the saint uses appear to have been modelled on a passage from one of the cursing psalms (where it is God who is called upon to lift up his hand and blast blasphemers). A similar scepticism must also apply to the words put in the mouth of St Berach when the sixth-century disciple of St Kevin is recorded as trumping a druid in an imprecatory exchange with the words: 'May that wretched cursing man lose the use of his tongue lest he should try to offer even more blasphemous words to the true and living God.' Biblical maledictions are not limited to the cursing psalms, though: similar expressions are also attributed in Christian scripture to figures such as prophets. Curses as they appear in Irish saint's lives are often considerably stylised – they seem to represent literary expressions rather than actual historical phenomena. It seems quite likely, then, that such instances of insular cursing mostly represent monkish hagiographers putting biblical expressions in saintly mouths. Yet there are some examples of insular maledictions recorded in more contemporary and hence

8 K. Meyer (ed.), *The Triads of Ireland*, Royal Irish Academy Todd lecture series 13 (Dublin 1906), no. 20; C. Plummer (ed.), *Lives of Irish Saints (Bethada náem nÉrenn)*, 2 vols (Oxford 1922), xii (36); L.M. Bitel, 'Saints and angry neighbours: the politics of cursing in Irish hagiography', in S. Farmer and B.H. Rosenwein (eds), *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society. Essays in honor of Lester K. Little* (Ithaca 2000), pp. 139ff. There are twenty or so biblical cursing psalms, among which Psalms 35, 69 and 109 are usually held to be the strongest; cf. D.M. Wiley, 'The maledictory Psalms', *Peritia* 15 (2001), 261–79.

more historically reliable documents than the often rather truculent, moralising expressions which commonly appear in Irish saint's lives.[9]

One non-literary source which brings out the Christian background to insular curses particularly clearly is the ninth-century *Law of the Innocents*, attributed to St Adamnan, the great seventh- and eighth-century Irish abbot of Iona. The *Law* uses the common Irish expression *mallacht Dé*, 'God's curse', a recurrent phrase in Hibernian literature, which has a clear equivalent in the similar expression *melltith duw arnat*, 'may the curse of God be on you', found in early Welsh tales such as *Math Son of Mathonwy*. Adamnan's work also speaks of guarantors giving 'three shouts of malediction' (*mallachtan*) and 'three shouts of benediction' (*bennachtan*), a practice also attested in some Irish literary accounts. More strikingly, however, after giving a list of the names of 90 witnesses to the *Law* (all nobles and senior clerics), it also features a general benediction and then a curse: *nach óen loittfis Cháin nAdamnán … rosuidigestar Adomnán ordd n-escoine*, 'whoever shall break the Law of Adamnan … Adamnan has set down an order of malediction (*escaine*) for them.'[10]

The order that follows in the *Law* is a list of 20 cursing psalms, ones which also feature in a later Irish poem and have consequently been thought to have formed a standard Hibernian collection. The Old Testament was a rich source for curses, especially those accorded to God (hence, presumably, the commonness of expressions such as *mallacht Dé*) and it seems quite likely that collections such as that which features in the *Law of the Innocents* are the source of many of the curses of the Irish literary tradition. Biblical curses could also be used in other ways in early insular practice, however: the *Law* also records an angel who had appeared to Adamnan setting out (in Latin) a series of fines and other penalties for those who would attack women – and the final of these penalties, again, takes the form of a curse:

> He who from this day forward puts a woman to death and does not do penance according to the Law shall not only perish in eternity and be cursed (*maledictus erit*) for God and Adamnan, but all shall be cursed (*maledicti erunt*) that have heard of it and do not curse (*maledicent*) him and do not chastise him according to the judgment of this Law.[11]

The ultimate model for the medieval usage here seems to have been the laws of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy, each of which is expressed in terms of a curse: 'Cursed (*maledictus*) be the one that does not honour his father and mother … Cursed (*maledictus*) be the one that does not abide by the words of this law …' Curses used to enhance laws are also attested in both pagan Greek and Roman sources, but the language used in early medieval Celtic imprecations

9 Psalm 10:12–13; Plummer (ed.), *Vitae* 1, p. 84; L. Bieler (ed.), *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 10 (Dublin 1979), pp. 88–9 (I.17.16.6); Bitel, 'Saints and angry neighbors', p. 138.

10 K. Meyer (ed.), *Cáin Adamnáin: an Old-Irish treatise on the law of Adamnan*, Anecdota Oxoniensa: Mediaeval and modern series 12 (Oxford 1905), nos 18, 23, 31–2; Wiley, 'The maledictory Psalms', 264–5.

11 Meyer, *Cáin Adamnáin*, no. 33.

seems too biblical for earlier (and pre-Christian) cursing practice to be reflected in such accounts. The maledictions of Irish saints are rather more clearly to be connected instead with the scriptural tradition that the will of God (and by extension his church) could be expressed in terms of a curse; hence the particular use of saintly curses against blasphemers and the like. The New Testament prohibits the use of curses by mortals, however – so it has been assumed that these saintly maledictions were thought of as excommunications rather than curses proper (the technical usage presumably preserved in the literally 'excommunicating' psalms, Adamnan's order similarly being an *ordd n-escoine*). Few of the actual words used in other early insular maledictions have survived, though, other than the questionable evidence of those recorded in literary sources – and several of those which are preserved have even taken the form of poems when they appear in medieval literary accounts. But it is evident that the expressions that recur in Irish tales (most commonly beginning *Is cet duit*…, 'It is permitted to you …') are usually only similar to secular expressions such as satire simply because they are found in literary contexts: they cannot as readily be associated thematically or functionally with any pre-Christian Celtic tradition as they can a strictly biblical or ecclesiastical model.[12]

Indeed, it is evident that several other curses which appear in early Celtic sources similarly represent reflections of the ecclesiastical cursing tradition – even those which are attributed to pagan figures such as druids in early Irish stories often seem to be described merely as if they were the maledictions of paganised saints. The saints themselves often appear more to be hagiographical versions of Old Testament prophets than early Irish figures.[13] It is almost as if the introduction of so many Latinate terms for 'curse' into Irish occasioned the eclipse of the native tradition of cursing (excepting, of course, the poetic form of satire which seems, ultimately, to represent a quite different practice). The language of early insular malediction is so overwhelmingly Latinate it can scarcely be doubted that it is a biblical, Christian tradition which most obviously informs the curses of the early insular saints. It seems, then, that Insular Celtic imprecation has little to do in origin with such Old Celtic curses as have survived – above all there does not appear to be any reflection of the ancient notion of binding in any of the medieval Celtic words for 'curse' or in such accounts of early insular imprecation as have survived.

Nonetheless, it has been supposed for quite some time that the early Insular Celts did know of one late expression of the classical tradition of binding spells: charms designed to ward off the effects of *defixiones*. The relatively late antique tradition of the counter-curse or anti-*defixio* has long been suspected to have retained a reflection in early insular Christianity, much as the medieval Christian image of the demon-summoning magician is usually thought to represent a remembrance of the ancient use of binding spells. Several counter-curses are known from various reaches of the classical world which are, moreover, quite

12 Deuteronomy 27:11–26; Romans 12:14; Wiley, 'The maledictory Psalms', 271ff.; D.A. Bray, 'Malediction and benediction in the lives of the early Irish saints', *Studia Celtica* 36 (2002), 51ff.

13 McCone, *Pagan Past*, pp. 195–6 and 231.

evidently informed by the rhetoric used in late *defixiones*. In some cases they merely constitute binding spells cast on people who had (or were suspected to have) already cursed the authors of the counter-spells. More formal protective charms are also known from ancient Gaulish and British contexts, although most of these are expressed in terms of the late type of classical magic often (and usually misleadingly) associated with the early Christian heresy of Gnosticism by scholars today, as they often feature expressions taken from Jewish or early Coptic Christian magic (such as citations of the titles and names of God) – at least one such find, a golden lamella from Belgium, even includes what appear to be some brief words in Gaulish. Yet none of these finds from ancient Britain or Gaul represents an anti-*defixio* or shows much sign of influence from the ancient tradition of binding charms: most of the evidence this time for a Celtic use of counter-curses comes from early medieval rather than ancient sources, the earliest instances stemming from early Christian Ireland.[14]

A peculiarly Celtic feature of early Western Christianity is the use of metrical protective prayers which were described as *loricae*. Literally 'cuirasses' or 'breast-plates', many of these medieval expressions feature rhetoric which is strikingly similar to that found in classical binding spells. Although they obviously gain their name from two passages in the New Testament,[15] loricas commonly feature a rhetorical device that is particularly reminiscent of classical curses – and hence, too, some counter-*defixiones*. Consider, for example, the following counter-spell from Rome, which has been dated to the last century BC. After beginning with an alliterating, hymn-like section which invokes the infernal trio Proserpine, Pluto and the three-headed hell-hound Cerberus, it largely consists only of an anatomical curse:[16]

> Proserpine the Saviour, I give over to you the nostrils, lips, ears, nose, tongue and teeth of Plotius so that he may not be able to say what is causing him pain;
> the neck, shoulders, arms and fingers so that he may not be able to aid himself in any way;
> his breast, liver, heart and lungs so that he may not be able to discover the source of his pain;

14 Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, nos 1–2 [= *RIB* nos 436, 706], 3, 8 [= *RIG* no. L-110] and 11 [= *IGF* nos 90–91]; *RIG* no. L-109; R.S.O. Tomlin, '*Sede in tuo loco*: a fourth-century uterine phylactery in Latin from Roman Britain', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 115 (1997), 291–4; idem, 'A bilingual Roman charm for health and victory', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 149 (2004), 259–66; Mees, 'Gaulish tau'; and cf. Romano-British amulet gemstones such as *RIB* nos 2423.1, 12, 15–17 and 33.

15 Ephesians 6:11 and 16: 'put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil … put on the breastplate of righteousness'; 1 Thessalonians 5:8: 'put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation'; L. Gougaud, 'Etudes sur les loricae celtiques et sur les priéres qui s'en rapprochent', *Bulletin d'ancienne littérature et d'archéologie chrétienne* 1 (1911), 265–81, and 2 (1912), 33–41, 101–27; E. Campanile, 'Appunti sulla storia e la preistoria delle loriche celtiche', *Annali della Scuola normale superiore di Pisa, Classe di lettere e filosofia* 33 (1964), 57–92.

16 Besnier, 'Récents travaux sur les *defixionum tabellae* latines', no. 33 [= Gager, *Curse Tablets*, no. 134]: *Bona pulchra Proserpina, Plutonis uxsor* … 'Good, beautiful, Proserpine, wife of Pluto …'; cf. Blänsdorf, '"Guter, Heilige Atthis"', pp. 56–8.

his intestines, stomach, navel and sides so that he may not be able to sleep;
his shoulder blades so that he may not be able to sleep soundly;
his sacred organ so that he may not be able to urinate;
his rump, anus, thighs, knees, shanks, shins, feet, ankles, heels, toes and toenails so that he may not be able to stand by his own strength.
No matter what he may have written, whether great or small, just as he has written a proper spell and entrusted it (i.e. to the infernal gods), so I hand over and consign Plotius to you …

This cataloguing of parts of the body to be cursed is a typical device of *defixiones*, one which seems to have had its origin in individually targeting each part of the body that the author found attractive in erotic separation spells, but which, nonetheless, by the end of antiquity could appear in all sorts of curses. Yet not only does the same sort of anatomical listing appear in some Irish loricas, in Irish use it is taken to extremes not witnessed in comparably verbose ancient examples like the Roman counter-spell laid on Plotius. For example, in the long versified Latin lorica traditionally ascribed to the British monk Gildas (but which has more recently been connected with the later Irish cleric Laidcenn mac Baíth Bannaig), a similar listing of body parts begins with the words:[17]

O God defend me everywhere,
with Thy impregnable power and protection.

Deliver all the limbs of me, a mortal,
with Thy protective shield guarding every member,
lest the fell demons hurl their shafts
into my sides, as is their wont.
My skull, head with hair, and eyes,
mouth, tongue, teeth and nostrils,
neck, breast, side and limbs,
joints, fat and two hands.

Be a helmet of safety to my head,
to my crown with hairs;
to my forehead, eyes and triform brain,
to snout, lip, face and temple,
to my chin, beard, eyebrows, ears,
cheeks, chaps, septum, nostrils,
pupils, irises, eyelids (and) the like,
to gums, breath, jaws, gullet.

To my teeth, tongue, mouth, uvula, throat,
larynx and epiglottis, cervix,
to the core of my head and gristle
and to my neck be a merciful protection.

17 W.M. Lindsay, *Early Welsh Script* (Oxford 1912), p. 23; C. Singer, *From Magic to Science: essays on the scientific twilight* (London 1928), pp. 111–32; M.W. Herren, 'The authorship, date of composition and provenance of the so-called Lorica Gildae', *Ériu* 24 (1973), 35–51; idem (ed.), *The Hisperica Famina: a (new) critical edition with English translation and commentary*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies: Studies and Texts 85 (Toronto 1987), pp. 23ff., 80–3 and cf. 118–28.

This lorica, which appears to be of early-seventh-century date, does not stop there, however, but continues on with its almost medical listing of another hundred or so such bodily parts, this hyperbolic verbosity obviously an attempt to indicate completeness. Yet such expressions of protective overstatement are not just strikingly similar to the anatomical listings found in many *defixiones*: the mention of shafts in the *Lorica of Gildas* (and later 'invisible nails of the shafts that the foul fiends fashion') also brings to mind the leaden manikins (or *kolossoi*) of classical cursing practice fixed with nails in their heads, limbs and so on which are often compared by modern scholars with Caribbean voodoo dolls. Much as the infernal daemons called upon in binding tablets (and other forms of ancient magic) became the perfidious demons which possessed epileptics, tempted the weak and undid the unwary of late antiquity, it may well have been the case that one of the most characteristic rhetorical features of ancient binding spells entered early Christian tradition through the medium of charms and prayers which were originally intended to stave off harmful supernatural influences.[18]

Indeed, 'shot' of various kinds associated with malicious magical beings is often referred to in comparable medieval passages, although these may not strictly represent, as has usually been assumed in the past, invisible projectiles. A range of supernatural creatures are blamed as being responsible for sickness-related shot in medieval sources: trolls, dwarfs, hags and elves are all associated with cases of such malignancy in medieval tradition. Yet the word used for such blights in Anglo-Saxon use literally seems to have indicated a painful 'stitch' rather than some sort of supernatural dart. This might at first seem to represent a fine distinction in light of the clear testimony for demonic darts given in sources like the *Lorica of Gildas*. But the widespread nature of references to supernatural shot (from medieval Ireland and England, and in Europe from Germany to Scandinavia) does at least suggest that such malignant magical expressions were originally an indigenous north-western European tradition, one quite separate from the classical notion of 'fixing' various parts of a victim's body and representing this symbolically by plunging nails into manikin effigies, voodoo-doll style. After all, references to shot never appear in association with medieval amatory expressions, although there is at least one clear example of a *defixio*-like listing that appears in a medieval erotic charm.[19]

A medieval manuscript now in Leiden, Holland, features an odd form of lorica that is often dismissed as only an imitation of one of these characteristically Irish early medieval prayers. Evidently a Welsh recension of an Irish original written in a late-ninth- or early-tenth-century hand, the Leiden lorica is clearly related textually to the *Lorica of Gildas* as it mimics some of the pecu-

18 V.I.J. Flint, 'The demonisation of magic and sorcery in late antiquity: Christian redefinitions of pagan religions', in Ankarloo and Clarke, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, pp. 277–348.

19 A. Hall, 'Getting shot of elves: healing, witchcraft and fairies in the Scottish witchcraft trials', *Folklore* 116 (2005), 19–36; idem, '"Calling the shots": the Old English remedy *gif hors ofscoten sie* and Anglo-Saxon "elf-shot"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 106 (2005), 195–209; idem, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: matters of belief, health, gender and identity*, Anglo-Saxon England 8 (Woodbridge 2007), pp. 6–7 and 96ff.; M. MacLeod and B. Mees, *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects* (Woodbridge 2006), pp. 36 and 116ff.

liar vocabulary found in the latter. The *Lorica of Gildas*, in turn, was evidently influenced by the early Irish poems known as the *Hisperica Famina*, a collection of long, linguistically Latin compositions which use so much obscure vocabulary and hyperbole that they almost seem to have been written as products of learned Latin poetry competitions. The Leiden lorica is clearly a development of the breastplate tradition, but rather than a protective prayer it has generally been recognised as an amatory expression – in fact, it seems strikingly similar to an ancient erotic binding charm.[20]

The main body of the Leiden lorica is a series of adjurations of religious figures: of angels, apostles, martyrs, heaven and earth, and of other personages and expressions often called upon in loricas and medieval protective charms. Its use of the Latin verb *adiuro* at first seems odd, but 'adjure' is the usual translation for the Greek term *exorkizô* 'conjure, exorcise', which appears quite commonly in ancient daemon-invoking charms. Perhaps most remarkably, however, the Hiberno-Latin love-lorica begins from the outset in a quite evidently *philtrokatadesmos*-like, anatomical style:[21]

> Let my love descend on her.
> May all her limbs be hunted out for my love's sake.
> May all her limbs be hunted out for my love's sake.
>
> From the top of her head to the soles of her feet,
> hair, skin, crown, brow,
> back, brain, eyes, eyelids,
> nostrils, cheeks, ears, lips,
> teeth, gums, face, tongue,
> the voice and the epiglottis,
> jaws, throat and breath …

Seen in this light, a connection between *defixiones* and loricas seems undeniable. Nothing like such listings (which technically seem to represent extended forms of rhetorical merism) appears in traditional Christian sources such as the Bible.[22] Nevertheless, there is some evidence which suggests that the immediate source of the anatomical listings so typical of early breastplate prayers is to be sought elsewhere.

Defixiones are referred to in some early Christian sources of Eastern Mediterranean origin, but the rhetoric for protecting so many parts of the body in loricas is also attested in other early medieval literary sources of a more obviously insular Christian pedigree. Lists of parts of the body from which demons are to be warded appear in early Irish exorcistic sources: exorcistic prayers were used in baptismal services, and an example of an exorcism which features an anatomical

20 Herren, *The Hisperica Famina*, 2 vols.

21 Campanile, 'Appunti', 70–2; Herren, *Hisperica Famina* 2, pp. 14–18, 90–3, 138–44; P. Dronke, 'Towards the interpretation of the Leiden love-spell', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 16 (1988), 61–75.

22 A.M. Honeyman, '*Merismus* in biblical Hebrew', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71 (1952), 11–18; J. Krašovic, *Der Merismus im Biblisch-Hebräischen und Nordwestsemitischen*, Biblia et orientalia 33 (Rome 1977); Mees, 'Fate and malediction', 144–5.

listing is recorded in a seventh-century antiphonary or collection of hymns and prayers ('antiphons') from Bangor Abbey, County Down. The Bangor exorcism has even been called Hisperic, much as if it were textually associated with the *Lorica of Gildas*. It is rather abbreviated, however, only recording the first few lines of the prayer. Yet a complete version of the exorcism is recorded in the ninth-century *Stowe Missal*, another early Irish religious work often connected with Bangor Abbey, along with a fuller version of what is essentially the same baptismal rite:[23]

> O Lord, holy Father, all-powerful and eternal God, drive away devils and the ilk from this man. From the head, hair, crown, brain, brow, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, tongue, below the tongue, throat, gullet, neck, breast, heart, everything within the body and without, hands, feet, all the limbs, the joints of each of the limbs and the thoughts, words, deeds and all the conversations now and in the future through Thee Jesus Christ who reigns.

This may not be quite as old a prayer as the *Lorica of Gildas* and it is not evidently composed as verse, but a connection between exorcisms of this sort and breastplate prayers can hardly be denied. Moreover, Hisperic Latin is obviously influenced by sources such as St Isidore's *Etymologies*, and many of the stranger anatomical terms used in the *Lorica of Gildas* seem to be Isidorian in origin. Yet the claim that a similar influence can be seen in the vocabulary of the Irish anatomical exorcisms is quite dubious – they were practical baptismal prayers, not learned hyperbolic literary expressions. It is probably also going too far to call loricas 'self-exorcisms'; they are much more than merely exorcistic lists of parts of the body. In fact, even the poetic forms taken by such listings in loricas can be seen as continuing a practice attested among ancient *defixiones* (and not medieval exorcisms), as several examples of ancient imprecatory listings of this type alliterate, much as if they were meant to be metrical.[24] Yet loricas also share several parallels with biblical expressions. Consider, for example, the martial language of Psalm 35, one of the cursing psalms. It begins with a series of protective implorations before listing a range of curses: 'Take hold of shield and buckler and rise for my help … Let them be like chaff before the wind!' It is easy to imagine how an expression of this sort might inspire an early Christian prayer based on the reverse of a traditional style of curse. On the other hand, one tenth-century

[23] F.E. Warren (ed.), *The Antiphonary of Bangor: an early Irish manuscript in the Ambrosian Library at Milan*, Henry Bradshaw Society publications 10 (London 1895), pp. 28–9 and 71–2 [= *PL* 79.605]; G.F. Warner (ed.), *The Stowe Missal: Ms. D II 3 in the library of the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin*, Henry Bradshaw Society publications 32 (London 1915), p. 24; Gougaud, 'Etudes sur les loricae celtiques', 106; Campanile, 'Appunti', 72ff.; P. Sims-Williams, 'Thought, word and deed: an Irish triad', *Ériu* 29 (1978), 89–93; J. Stevenson, 'Bangor and the *Hisperica Famina*', *Peritia* 6–7 (1987–88), 202–16.

[24] Besnier, 'Récents travaux sur les *defixionum tabellae* latines', no. 33: *corpus, colorem, vires, virtutes*, 'body, complexion, powers, strengths'; J. Corell, 'Defixionis tabella aus Carmona (Seville)', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 95 (1993), 261–8: *caput, cor, co(n)s[i]lio(m), valetudine(m) vita(m)*, 'head, heart, judgement, health, life'; Blänsdorf, 'The curse tablets', nos 5 and 11: *mentum, memoriam, cor, cogitatem*, 'mind, memory, heart, feelings'; *fama fides fortuna faculitas*, 'reputation, good name, misfortune, ability to act'.

lorica, attributed to Mugron the Coarb (or clerical successor) of St Columba, even links anatomical naming with a benedictory formula 'Christ's cross' which is often used in medieval protective expressions:[25]

> Christ's cross over this face
> and thus over this ear
> Christ's cross over this eye
> Christ's cross over this nose
>
> Christ's cross over this mouth.
> Christ's cross over this throat
> Christ's cross over the back of this head
> Christ's cross over this side …

The language of exorcism is commonly used in medieval spells, and early Irish exorcistic prayers could well represent the original inspiration for loricas. If the demonic darts of the breastplate attributed to Gildas are to be accepted as unrelated, only the amatory lorica from Leiden points otherwise to any direct influence of *defixiones* on loricas. Anatomical listings seem to have had their origin in erotic binding magic, and the rhetoric exhibited by both early Irish exorcisms and the more clearly metrical protective breastplate prayers remains strikingly similar to that used in classical binding spells. Medieval exorcisms owe much to the tradition of binding charms as even the term *exorkizô* (and its Latin equivalent *adiuro*) commonly appear in ancient spells such as those recorded in the magical papyri. It is only *defixiones* and loricas which clearly feature versified meristic listings, however, and both are much more commonly attested than anatomical exorcisms. A direct, even if only contributory relationship consequently seems rather likely, if perhaps not categorically demonstrable, between ancient curses and these early medieval Irish expressions of Christian prayer.

The *Lorica of Gildas* employs more than one rhetorical feature of a kind which often appears in later magical charms, though. Most noteworthy of these (other than its anatomical listing) is its use of expressions taken from the song of the three biblical youths, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who, according to the Book of Daniel, were thrown into a furnace by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar for refusing to worship an idol. Prayers based on the biblical canticle recorded for the three youths in the Old Testament are also found in early Irish clerical sources such as the *Antiphonary of Bangor*. In fact, their story often also features in medieval magical sources, from spells which repeat the celestial blessing rhetoric of their song to healing charms which cite the names of the three youths as protection against burning diseases such as ophthalmia. In this case it is quite obvious that the direction of textual influence is from liturgical to magical. Yet loricas have so much in common with later expressions of magic that they are often seen as an early example not of a new genre of Christian prayer but rather of a medieval magical charm.[26]

25 Gougaud, 'Etudes sur les loricae celtiques', 106–10; G. Murphy (ed.), *Early Irish Lyrics: eighth to twelfth century* (Oxford 1956), no. 14.

26 Daniel 3:52–90; G.S. Mac Eoin, 'Invocation of the forces of nature in the loricae', *Studia*

Despite their considerably earlier dates of attestation, loricas clearly have much in common with later medieval magical expressions; in fact, so much so that even their anatomical rhetoric is reflected in incantations known from later medieval collections of charms. A simple, presumably lorica-inspired charm of English provenance recorded in medieval Latin brings out the adjuring quality of such anatomical listings especially clearly. A tenth-century charm against elf shot (and hence presumably based on an expression like the *Lorica of Gildas* rather than just an anatomical exorcism), it is essentially an enumeration of the parts of the body much as if it were a protective breastplate based on the inverse of an ancient binding charm:[27]

> Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the imposition of this writing, drive out from your servant NN every attack of spirits, from the head, the hair, the brains, the forehead, the tongue, from under the tongue, from the throat, from the pharynx, from the teeth, the eyes, the nose, the ears, the hands, the neck, the arms, the heart, the soul, the knees, the hips, the feet, the joints and all limbs within and without. Amen.

The body part-naming style so obvious in the *Lorica of Gildas* does not appear in all medieval breastplates, however – other sorts of listings often seem to substitute for anatomical rhetoric in other loricas and lorica-based charms. Usually thought equally as old and perhaps a more famous example of the early Irish breastplate genre, for instance, is the *Lorica of St Patrick*, which instead of listing parts of the body features enumerations of another sort. *The Lorica of St Patrick* (also known as the *Deer's Cry*) is recorded in an eleventh-century Irish book of medieval prayers called the *Liber Hymnorum*, and it has much less of the anatomical form typical of many ancient binding spells. Nonetheless, it still contains rhetoric suggestive of an ancient curse.

According to the notes of the compiler of the *Liber Hymnorum*, the *Deer's Cry* was composed by St Patrick in the early fifth century to protect him and his monks against ambushes laid for them by the men of Loegaire mac Neill, the Irish high king, lying in wait 'as if they were wild deer having behind them a fawn'. The themes assessed in the *Lorica of St Patrick* do not reflect the context of this story, though – its language instead appears to date the lorica to the early eighth century: unlike the lorica traditionally attributed to Gildas, it is composed in medieval Irish. St Patrick's lorica is perhaps most striking in terms of ancient curses, however, for its inclusion of the following passage, one which follows on from an opening invocation of the Trinity (much as the *Lorica of Gildas* does) and several other expressions which call upon the aid of God, his angels, the apostles and the patriarchs:[28]

Hibernica 2 (1962), 212–17; Campanile, 'Appunti', 83–4; MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets*, pp. 155ff.

27 G. Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (The Hague 1948), no. 17.

28 J.H. Bernard and R. Atkinson (eds), *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*, Henry Bradshaw Society 13–14, 2 vols (London 1898), I, p. 135 and II, p. 51; W. Stokes and J. Strachan (eds), *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus: a collection of Old-Irish glosses, scholia and prose*, 2 vols (Cambridge 1901–3), II, p. 357; D.A. Binchy, 'Varia iiii', *Ériu* 20 (1966), 234–7.

Tocuiriur etrum indiu inna huli nert so fri cech nert namnas nétrocar fristái dom churp ocus
domm anmain,
fri tinchetla sáibfáthe,
fri dubrechtu gentliuchtae,
fri sáibrechtu heretecdae,
fri himcellacht nidlachtae,
fri brichtu ban & gobann & druad,
fri cech fiss arachuiliu corp & anmain duini.
Crist domm imdegail indiu
ar neim, ar loscud,
ar bádud, ar guin,
condomthair ilar fochraice.

I summon today all those powers between me and every cruel, merciless power
that may oppose my body and my soul,
against the incantations of false prophets,
against the black laws of paganism,
against the false laws of heresy,
against the deceit of idolatry,
against the spells of women and smiths and druids,
against every evil knowledge that is forbidden man's body and soul.
Christ for my guardianship today
against poison, against burning,
against drowning, against wounding,
so that there may come to me a multitude of rewards.

As was noted in Chapter 4, the expression *brichtu ban* 'the spells of women' used in this section of the *Deer's Cry* is particularly similar to the phrasing *bnanom bricto[m]* 'enchantment of women' from the Larzac *defixio*. Although it does not feature the anatomical rhetoric typical of erotic binding charms, this line of the *Deer's Cry* does seem rather reminiscent of a key expression used in one of the Gaulish litigation curses (and indeed a similar 'magic of women' expression is found in another lorica, one from the library of the Austrian monastery of Klosterneuburg). Yet this linguistic parallel might merely have arisen independently as a reflection of the poetic nature of each of the texts – apart from considering similar themes, they both make widespread use of alliteration (because they were both composed in typical Celtic metrical style). After all, the Old Irish term *brichtu* is not a precise equivalent to Gaulish *brictom* and the alliterating Klosterneuburg lorica uses the Hibernian description *ipthai* to indicate 'magic' while alliterating *ban* 'women' with *mbáeth* 'foolish'.[29] Loricas continued to be produced well into later medieval times, however, and represent an especially striking survival from the heyday of early Irish Christianity, a time when Hibernian learning was famous throughout Western Christendom. The demons and other fell creatures that they are ranged against represent an inheritance from the supernatural vision of classical times,

29 D. Stifter, 'Die Klosterneuburger *lorica*', in H. Birkhan (ed.), *Kelten-Einfälle an der Donau. Akten des 4. Symposiums deutschsprachigen Keltologinnen und Keltologen. Philologische – Historische – Archäologische Evidenzen. Konrad Spindler (1939–2005) zum Gedenken. (Linz/Donau, 17.–21. Juli 2005)*, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse. Denkschriften 345 (Vienna, 2007), pp. 503–27.

and it seems quite possible that the anatomical listings used in ancient binding spells influenced the language used in early Christian exorcisms. Loricas show no absolutely clear evidence of being direct reflections of *defixiones*, although they do seem so similar that at the very least it seems reasonable to assume that, if not directly linked expressions, they instead inherited some of their key features from early medieval exorcising prayers which mimicked some of the daemon-adjuring rhetoric of late classical magical tradition.

There can be no doubting how popular loricas soon became however. Apart from being taken by Irish missionaries to places as far afield as German-speaking Central Europe, loricas also spread to England and north even into Icelandic use, where they were employed both as protective prayers and as magical charms recorded in manuscripts from the fifteenth until as late even as the nineteenth century. The influence of loricas can be seen in all sorts of English and Anglo-Latin religious poems, charms and prayers, although few feature the anatomical rhetoric that is so clearly represented in the *Lorica of Gildas*.[30] On the other hand, Icelandic breastplate prayers (*brynjabaenir*) preserve this device quite clearly, as do, especially, the loricas (and lorica-based expressions) which appear in both English and Scandinavian magical collections, where they serve as protective charms.[31] By the later medieval period, however, listing the parts of the body in a lorica-like formation had become a tradition used in all sorts of European magic, a connection particularly obvious in Icelandic loricas, which tend also to repeat formulations otherwise only found in Old Norse magical spells. The most obvious case is the (alliterating) Scandinavian *bak ok brjóst* or 'back and breast' expression, which is evidenced in several Norse contexts and is clearly to be linked originally with protective prayers.

Perhaps clearest among the instances of the appearance of this style is the one attested earliest. It is part of a metrical healing charm inscribed in runes on a short staff or stick that was found in the medieval trading centre of Ribe, Denmark. Written in a manner which betrays characteristically Norwegian orthographic features, the late-thirteenth-century charm against malaria begins:[32]

I pray earth to guard	and high heaven,
the sun and holy Mary	and the lord God himself,
that he grant me leech-hands	and a healing tongue
to heal the trembler	when a cure is needed.
From back and from breast	from body and from limb
from eyes and from ears	from wherever evil can enter …

The same expression is more broadly reflected in an early-fourteenth-century valkyrie spell recorded at Bergen, Norway, which is said to have been used by a witch, *diakopos*-like, to dissolve her lover's marriage. The anatomical listing has

30 K. Hughes, 'Some aspects of Irish influence on early English prayer', *Studia Celtica* 5 (1970), 48–61; T.D. Hill, 'Invocation of the Trinity and the tradition of the *Loricae* in Old English poetry', *Speculum* 56 (1981), 259–67; M. Amies, 'The *Journey Charm*: a lorica for life's journey', *Neophilologus* 67 (1983), 448–62.

31 G.S. Mac Eoin, 'Some Icelandic loricae', *Studia Hibernica* 3 (1963), 143–54.

32 MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets*, pp. 123ff.

been reduced to a minimal form of parts to be attacked by the magical minions of the evil valkyrie Gondul:[33]

> I send out from me the spirits of Gondul
> May the first bite you in the back
> May the second bite you in the breast
> May the third turn hate and envy upon you.

The magical Norse 'back and breast' sequence also appears more clearly and this time more expansively in an anatomical Icelandic lorica attested only in a nineteenth-century manuscript. Despite the late date of its recording, it is clearly composed in one of the old medieval alliterative styles typical of the earliest period of Nordic poetry:

> Protect me O Lord inside and out,
> above my head to below my feet,
> from back and from breast, and on both sides,
> to the right and to the left …
>
> Be, O Lord, my shelter, my shield and breastplate,
> in sleeping and waking, in sitting and lying,
> in standing and walking, in speech and silence …

This phrasing has in turn been directly compared with a sequence from the *Lorica of St Patrick* that immediately follows on from the section cited previously:[34]

> Christ with me, Christ before me,
> Christ behind me, Christ in me,
> Christ under me, Christ over me,
> Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
> Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down …

Indeed, there are so many features of this Icelandic lorica which can be linked with the *Lorica of St Patrick* that it can scarcely represent anything other than a late Norse version of the old Irish breastplate prayer still held dear by some Christians today.[35]

A comparable sequence to the Norse 'back and breast' formula does not figure in the *Deer's Cry*, however, although a similar passage to that of the Patrician and later Icelandic loricas is recorded in a charm from a fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Icelandic grimoire:[36]

33 Ibid., p. 37.

34 Bernard and Atkinson (eds), *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*, I, p. 135 and II, p. 51; Mac Eoin, 'Some Icelandic loricae', 152.

35 St Patrick's lorica was put to music in 1902 by the Anglo-Irish composer Charles V. Stanford, from an English rendering by Cecil F. Alexander, wife of the Anglican bishop of Derry and Raphoe.

36 N. Lindqvist (ed.), *En isländsk svartkonstbok från 1500-talet* (Uppsala 1921) [= S. Flowers, *The Galdrabók: an Icelandic grimoire* (York Beach 1989)], no. 17.

Be Thou a breastplate and a shield for my soul,
my life, and my body, inside as well as outside,
for seeing and hearing …

Protect me, my Lord, on the right and left sides,
forward and backward, above and below …

when I am walking, standing, sitting,
in sleep and while awake, in silence and while talking …

The alliterating 'back and breast' phrase appears to be a distinctively Norse development, although it is clearly used in circumstances which betray its origin in anatomical and other protective listings typical of breastplate prayers. Moreover, the manner of its transmission, from protective prayer to healing charm even to an erotic separation spell, well shows how magical rhetoric could develop in medieval Europe more generally, much as the transmission of the alliterative anatomical formula between different types of incantations and prayers can be seen as representative of how loricas originally developed out of similar late classical magical and religious expressions, expressions which (unlike loricas) are attested in their hundreds from all parts of the Greek and Roman worlds.

The use of anatomical sequences in medieval exorcisms may also have contributed to the widespread adoption of comparable meristic rhetoric in medieval charms. Yet anatomical listings are not particularly common or characteristic features of early medieval exorcism litanies. It seems instead to have been the common employment of comparable enumerations in loricas that is most obviously reflected in the magical listing inscriptions and literature that has survived from western medieval Europe. Indeed, when they do appear in more respectably Christian clerical sources, such enumerations feature more commonly in ecclesiastical imprecations, the earliest examples of which stem from the Continent and date to the late ninth century. These early French forms of Christian cursing might also have been thought closer to baptismal exorcisms than breastplate prayers. But again, the new written maledictions of Carolingian times have also been argued to have had a Celtic origin in the past, although not in terms of a maledictory pedigree quite as ancient as that of the Old Celtic *defixiones*.

A new imprecatory practice that arose in the early medieval period is the early French tradition of clamours. These are ecclesiastical curses that were expressed in manners which make it clear that they represent a tradition separate from the earlier Christian imprecatory genres of excommunication and anathema. They do show much in common with these similar expressions of ecclesiastical proscription (and quickly become conflated with them). But having their origin in the same part of Europe as is particularly noted for the influence of Irish missionaries and scholars at the time, clamours have been ascribed an Irish origin based on the well-known earlier Hibernian tradition of saintly cursing – especially in the form of the use of the cursing psalms. Where ecclesiastical clamours actually came from is not immediately clear, however – the Latin term *clamour* is connected in a tenth-century Irish glossary with a type of satire (*glám*) as well as curses (*escaine*), but the description is used in earlier continental sources just to indicate secular legal complaints. Yet it is evident that from the end of

the ninth century these Carolingian curses began to be written down in formularies which circulated widely in the clerical communities of northern France. Moreover, although similar in some aspects to exorcism rites or even some of the charms known from later medieval sources, the most striking feature of this new cursing tradition is their inclusion of lorica-like listings.[37]

A good example of such a clamour comes from Fécamp Abbey, Normandy, and was recorded in the late tenth or early eleventh century. It begins with an invocation of the authority of the Trinity, the church, Mary, a collection of angels, apostles, evangelists, martyrs, the confessors, all the virgins and the 144,000 innocents. Then follows an excommunication of unnamed thieves, some allusions to curses from the Bible, and promises of death and damnation for the curse's victims. The elaborate ecclesiastical thievery clamour subsequently continues with what is evidently a typical lorica-like anatomical listing, complemented by another rhetorical form which also appears commonly enough in breastplate prayers:[38]

> … we curse them and we separate them from the company of the holy mother church and of all faithful Christians unless they change their ways and give back what they unjustly took away … May their bodies be cursed. May they be cursed in the head and the brain. May they be cursed in their eyes and their foreheads. May they be cursed in their ears and their noses. May they be cursed in fields and in pastures. May they be cursed in the mouth and the throat, cursed in the chest and the heart, cursed in the stomach, cursed in the blood, cursed in the hands and feet, and in each of their members. May they be cursed in towns and in castles. May they be cursed in streets and squares. May they be cursed when sleeping and when awake, going out and returning, when eating and drinking, when speaking and being silent. May they be cursed in all places and at all times.

An earlier example of an excommunicatory clamour recorded at Rheims from about the year 900 displays this second, situational listing style in a rather clearer manner. Somewhat removed from ancient anatomical listings in that it does not specifically feature body parts, the situational rhetoric of the Rheims curse nevertheless obviously aims to convey a similar sense of completeness:[39]

> In the name of the Lord and by the power of the Holy Spirit and the authority divinely granted bishops by blessed Peter, prince of the apostles, we separate them from the bosom of the mother church and we condemn them with an anathema of perpetual malediction, that they might not have help from any man or contact with any Christian. May they be cursed in the town and cursed in the fields. May their barns be cursed and may their bones be cursed. May the fruit of their loins be cursed as well as the fruit of their lands, their herds of cattle and their flocks of sheep. May they be cursed going out and coming

37 K. Meyer (ed.), *Sanas Cormaic: an Old-Irish glossary; compiled by Cormac úa Cuilennáin, King-bishop of Cashel in the tenth century*, Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts 4 (Halle a.S. 1912), p. 58 (§695): *clamor .i. escaine*; Little, *Benedictine Maledictions*, pp. 20ff. and 154–85.

38 Little, *Benedictine Maledictions*, p. 9 and cf. p. 256.

39 Ibid., p. 36 and cf. pp. 12, 43, 260–1.

> in. May they be cursed at home and may they be fugitives outside their home. May they drain out through their bowels, like the faithless and unhappy Arius. May there come upon them all those maledictions which the Lord through Moses threatened transgressors of the divine law …

Several versions of the situational section of this clamour are known from ninth- and tenth-century ecclesiastical curses, all stemming from northern France. Indeed, dozens more forms and types of these medieval Latin clerical maledictions have survived, which taken together represent a clearly identifiable genre of ecclesiastical imprecations. Typically featuring the same stock expressions (including appeals to the Trinity, the saints, angels and martyrs as well as references to the unhappy fates of heretics, pagans and other enemies of Christianity, biblical curses such as those of the laws of Deuteronomy and the cursing psalms), this written tradition of ecclesiastical clamours soon became so widespread in the medieval Western church that one such curse that has survived is even ascribed to a tenth-century pope. Often mixed in with calls to excommunicate and anathematise, the curses of these formularies feature rhetoric of forms which can usually be linked with fairly well-known prayers, rituals or other liturgical traditions of the time. Yet, strikingly, no clear model of such a kind has been found for the meristic listings recorded in these clerical maledictory works.

Most of the 50 or so manuscripts of this type remain French expressions, but clamours also continue to appear in sources from much later centuries. One clamour recorded in a manuscript from Toul, for example, even preserves the listing passage seen in the Rheims curse considered above in a fifteenth-century French version.[40] Yet perhaps the most famous curse of this ecclesiastical type comes from rather further north and west than Toul, and similarly preserves an example of the listing rhetoric common to *defixiones*, loricas and medieval French ecclesiastical imprecations: the curse commonly associated today with the northern English city of Carlisle.[41]

This early modern malediction was sworn against the Border Reivers – brigands who roamed the English–Scottish borderlands, outlaws perhaps otherwise most infamous as the introducers of the notion of blackmail into English. The curse of Carlisle (properly a monition – a public ecclesiastical 'warning') is attributed to Gavin Dunbar, Archbishop of Glasgow, who had it publicly proclaimed throughout the Borders region in the year 1524. After calling upon the 'auctorite of Almichty God', a slew of angels and saints, and enumerating the many crimes of the Reivers, the curse features the following lorica-like passage much as if it were based on a medieval French clamour:

40 Ibid., pp. 266–7.

41 In fact in 2001 the curse was engraved on a granite boulder by an artist commissioned by Carlisle City Council which is housed in the Millennium Subway between Carlisle Castle and the Tullie House Museum. Superstitious residents were unsuccessful in their attempts to have it removed in 2005 after a series of local calamities had befallen the city, from flooding to pestilence and factory closures, and even the relegation of the local football team to a lower division.

> I curse thare heid and all the haris of ther heid; I curse thare face, thare ene [i.e. brain], thare mouth, thare neyse, thare tounge, thare teith, thare cragis [forehead], thare shulderis, thare breystis, thare hartis, thare stomokis, thare bakis, thare waymes [womb], thare armys, thare leggis, thare handis, thare feyt, and everilk part of thare bodys, fra the top of ther heides to the sole of ther feyt, before and behynde, within and without.

This is then followed by another listing passage which features a series of participles (Scots English *-and* being the equivalent of *-ing* in the modern standard), another style well-enough known from both loricas and less obviously prayer-like medieval protective charms. In this case it is also mostly expressed in what are clearly oppositional terms:[42]

> I curse thame gangand [going], I curse thaim rydand [riding], I curse thame standand, I curse thame sittand; I curse thaim eittand, I curse thaim drynkand; I curse thaim walkand, I curse thaim slepand, I curse thaim rysand, I curse thaim lyand, I curse thaim at hame, I curse thaim fra hayme, I curse thaim within the houssis, I curse tham without the houssis, I curse thare wyiffis, thare bayrnis [children], and ther servandis participant with thame in thare evil and myscheiffus deides. I wayry [bring woe on] thare cornis, thare catall, thare woll, thare scheip, thare horsis, thare swyne, thare geyse, thare hennis, thare cokkis and all ther quyk gudis [livestock]. I wayry thare hallis, thare chalmeris [rooms], thare kechynis, thare stabillis, thare bernys, thare byris [cowsheds], thare berneyardis, thare cailyardis [cabbage-patches] thare pleuchis, thare harrowis and all the gudis and houssis that are necessar for thare sustentatioun and welefare.

The archbishop's monition then goes on to mention a series of biblical curses, declares the Reivers outside the protection of the law, bans them from participating in all Christian rites and condemns them all to hell, their souls to be lost and their bodies to be torn by wild dogs 'quhill [until] tha forbeire ther oppin synnis foirsaidis [aforesaid] … and ryise fra this terrible cursing and interdiction and mak satisfaction for ther misdedis.' It is clearly modelled on a medieval clamour, and equally as clearly preserves much of the anatomical rhetoric typical of Irish breastplate prayers.

It seems quite possible, then, that much as some early Irish exorcisms feature rhetorical expressions otherwise best known only in loricas, that the blessings of loricas subsequently influenced the development of ecclesiastical curses of this kind. Rhetoric typical of loricas does not appear in the descriptions of saintly Irish curses that have survived, nor in more historically reliable documents such as the *Law of the Innocents*: hence any borrowing of such listings from loricas would seem to be best seen as a continental innovation – influenced by both Irish use of the cursing psalms as well as by the Celtic tradition of protective breastplate prayers (if not some lost early French exorcism liturgy). The similarity of

42 W.C. Dickinson *et al.* (eds), *Source Book of Scottish History* 2, 2nd ed. (London 1958), pp. 100–3; G.M. Fraser, *The Steel Bonnets: the story of the Anglo-Scottish Border Reivers* (London 1971), pp. 225–6, 382–5; and see MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets*, p. 130 for a Scandinavian sickness-banishing charm of this repeating-participle type.

the curse of Carlisle to earlier Celtic protective expressions is striking, as is its use of an anatomical listing such as occur in ancient curses from a thousand or more years before. In this light a similar (although reverse) development as led to the rise of clamours on the Continent might well be thought to have occurred at the time of the creation of the earliest loricas themselves; but there is rather better textual authority for the origin of the curse of Carlisle in medieval clamours than there is for clamours in insular loricas or early exorcism prayers in *defixiones*.

Other sections of the Scottish archbishop's monition of the Border Reivers appear to reflect rhetoric commonly found in medieval spells, and it could well be that lorica-like formulations first entered the tradition of ecclesiastical clamours in a similar manner, rather than being introduced directly to this new imprecatory tradition in the form of protective prayers brought over to France by Irish monks. In fact, the suggestion that (like loricas) ecclesiastical curses have anything to do with ancient binding charms boils down mostly to only a single claim: the rhetoric of listing parts of the body is the only feature of loricas that is clearly reminiscent of *defixiones*. Nonetheless, one of the less expected features of medieval spells is how traditions and styles known from long-dead ancient traditions seem to recur in later forms. Indeed, a spell which looks surprisingly like a classical *defixio* has even been preserved on an early modern English leaden lamella find, much as if magicians of the late and immediately post-medieval period had some sort of access to now-lost copies of ancient magical grimoires.

Found in a wall recess in an old manor house in the village of Dymock, Gloucestershire, in the late nineteenth century, the squarish (79mm by 81mm) early modern lead curse tablet is inscribed with letters written in a seventeenth-century hand. The inscription it bears begins with the name of the curse's victim, Sarah Ellis, written backwards (*defixio*-like) at the top of the tablet. This is then followed by a series of magical (lunar) symbols and the number 369, much as many late classical binding spells similarly feature mystical characters. These are accompanied, moreover, by a selection of demonic names (including Hasmodat – i.e. the demon Asmodeus of the Book of Tobit and the *Testament of Solomon*); then follows the tablet's actual curse, which reads: 'Make this person to Banish away from this place and countery Amen to my desier Amen.'[43]

Although it is strikingly similar to an ancient *tabella defixionis*, there is nonetheless little evident sense of binding in the Dymock curse. Moreover, two similar lead curse plates of a slightly earlier date, which were found in a heap of stones on Gatherly Moor, Yorkshire, evidently feature many of the same symbols and supernatural names. The Gatherly tablets are obviously linked and bear the curses: 'I did m[a]ke this the James Phillip Jhon Phillip and all The Issue of them shall be Come to utter Beggery and no thinge joy [or] prosp[er] w[ith] them [in] Richemondshire' and 'I do make this that James Phillip Jhon Phillip his son Christopher Phillip and Thomas Phillip his [?] shall fle[e] Riche[mondshire] and

[43] E.S. Hartland, 'On an inscribed leaden tablet found at Dymock, in Gloucestershire', *The Reliquary and Illustrated Archæologist* NS 3 (1897), 140–50; R. Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (London 1987), pp. 147–8; Gager, *Curse Tablets*, p. 28.

nothing [prosper] wtt any of the[m in] Richemondshir[e].' The Phillip family are mentioned living in the area in the late sixteenth century.[44]

Rather than representing direct descendants of ancient binding curses, however, these early modern imprecatory expressions all appear to be taken instead from a noted sixteenth-century book of occult philosophy written by the German scholar Heinrich Agrippa von Nettesheim. Such renaissance texts usually represent early modern revivals of the Neoplatonic and Hermetic magical–philosophical traditions also represented in the magical Graeco-Egyptian papyri; indeed, Agrippa von Nettesheim's book (which was translated into English in 1651) seems to have drawn on several ancient and otherwise lost compilations of occult (and medicinal) lore. These early modern English curse tablets probably do not represent a true continuation of a particularly ancient tradition, then; they instead seem merely to witness a Renaissance revival of magical traditions which ultimately reflect inheritances from late classical times, but substantially constitute early modern reinterpretations of the ancient belief in the power of magical symbols, the magical qualities associated with the medium of lead and a continuing faith in the efficacy of secret and powerful demonic names.[45]

Descriptions of what seem to have been binding spells feature in early Christian sources until as late as the sixth century, and lead continued to be used as a surface upon which to record all sorts of charms well into early modern times. Nonetheless, no *defixiones* of later than fifth-century date have yet been found, and certainly none from Ireland, the home of the earliest loricas. Despite sharing much in common with exorcistic rhetoric, loricas have no clear textual predecessors in Latin or Irish apart from the *Hisperica Famina* and some passages from the Bible. Indeed, the hyperbolic Hisperic tradition could even be an indication that the early Insular Celtic expressions reminiscent of ancient binding curses are only coincidentally similar to binding charms – they may equally be purely an invention of monks or even Christianised bards, medieval Irishmen attempting to outdo each other by coming up with all sorts of forms of superlative blessing (and cursing) speech. Popular in some Christian traditions even today, loricas might well be thought ultimately to stem from early expressions of Irish clerical blarney, perhaps meristic compositions developed in the light of early medieval exorcistic practice and not direct rhetorical borrowings from late Graeco-Roman magic. But, like the Dymock and Gatherly tablets, the similarities shared by *defixiones*, exorcisms, loricas and clamours may just as well be genetic, much as the demonic darts of the Gildas lorica and the north-western European concept of malignant sickness-causing supernatural beings could well be related. There is no clear indication that *defixiones* have anything to do with the forms of cursing for which early insular churchmen were so famous, though, nor have examples of

44 Hartland, 'On an inscribed leaden tablet', pp. 148–9.

45 H.C. Agrippa von Nettesheim, *De occulta philosophia libri tres* (Antwerp 1531) [= idem, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, trans. J.F. (London 1651)]; C.G. Nauert, *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought*, Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences 55 (Urbana 1965); W.-D. Müller-Jahncke, 'Magie und Wissenschaft im frühen 16. Jahrhundert: Die Beziehungen zwischen Magie, Medizin und Pharmazie im Werk des Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535)' (Dissertation, Marburg 1973), pp. 29ff.

ancient Irish daemon-summoning curses or any other clear examples of ancient binding spells survived from pre-modern Ireland. Whether this is due to a lack of preservation, however, or simply non-use of similar expressions by druids or other early Irish magical or religious figures, remains unclear. Yet there is another type of medieval Irish stipulatory expression that has some claim to being equally if not even more ancient than classical binding magic, and it too bears revealing parallels with the Graeco-Roman and Old Celtic tradition of imprecatory spellbinding.

8

Geases and Binding

> You were born unlucky, the gods willed it so;
> no star was helpful or kind at your birth.[1]

When taken in the light of sources such as the maledictory formularies of medieval clerics, the stories of curses found in early Insular Celtic accounts often seem to be more the products of literary imaginings than faithful representations of actual cursing practice. These Celtic literary maledictions thus appear closer in style to a third type of Greek and Roman imprecation – other than *katadesmoi* and conditional curses – one known only from ancient literary sources. Usually styled *arae*, or curse poems, there has long been a suspicion that these highly stylised and sophisticated classical expressions are somehow related to binding spells. Close examination of the *arae* has revealed, however, that they were exclusively literary expressions with no equivalent in classical grimoires or on ancient spell tablets. They share some parallels in terms of how ancient curses were conceptualised, featuring justifications for cursing, for example, and rhetorical devices such as sympathetic and oppositional expressions. But they do not show any clear textual linkage with conditional curses or binding charms. Perhaps the most famous of these classical literary curses, the curse poem *Ibis* by the Roman poet Ovid, is clearly based on a now-lost Greek *ara* and it is evident that the curse poems of antiquity have more in common with other literary writings than they do ancient magical finds. On the other hand, supernatural expressions similar to ancient imprecations, linguistically and in literary context quite separate from the quasi-biblical maledictions of Irish saints, are also known from early Celtic tales, not that they are always described in particularly clear terms. Yet the earliest of these descriptions are also centuries later than the most recent of the Old Celtic *defixiones*, and hence they, too, might be thought to have had little to do with the antique practice of cursing.[2]

1 Ovid, *Ibis* 209–10.

2 C. Zipfel, *Quatenus Ovidius in Ibide Callimachum aliosque fontes imprimis defixiones secutus sit* (Leipzig 1910); A. La Penna (ed.), *Publi Ovidi Nasonis Ibis: prolegomeni, testo, apparato critico e commento*, Bibliotheca di studi superiori: filologia latina 34 (Florence 1957), pp. xx–xxxi; L. Watson, *Arae: the curse poetry of antiquity*, ARCA: Classical and medieval texts, papers and mono-

Simple secular maledictions such as *Mallacht a gascid fair!*, 'A curse on his weapons!' or *Fognad dúib ág is ernbas!*, 'May danger and destruction attend you!' appear commonly enough in early insular literature. It is also clear that some forms of early Irish satire were thought of in much the same terms as biblical curses were. Yet there are also some references to binding in some of the charms recounted in early Irish tales. Most of these concern matters other than cursing, however. For example, the *dáil n-asdadha* or 'decree of binding' referred to in the poem chanted by Lugh after the Tuatha Dé Danann's defeat of the Fomorians in the *Second Battle of Moytura* seems to be a reference to the establishment of law and order rather than some sort of agonistic magic. The *sithcura* or 'peace-binding' of a poem recorded in the *First Battle of Moytura* similarly appears to refer to the ideal nature of the coming reign of the euhemerised Irish gods. Perhaps more tellingly, though, the blind druid Mug Ruith's attack on the forces of the Irish high king Cormac mac Airt in the *Siege of Druim Damhghaire* is more clearly concerned with a magical struggle, and two of the spells that the druid uses in the tale feature clear references to magical binding. In fact, the spells cast by Mug Ruith to overcome the fairy allies of the invading high king are but two of many charms recorded in the Middle Irish *Siege*, and both of Mug Ruith's druidic spells feature statements which are reminiscent of the types of expressions commonly found in ancient binding charms.[3]

The *Siege of Druim Damhghaire* features several legendary Irish figures in its account of the invasion of Munster by the Hibernian high king. Mug Ruith himself is accorded a biblical pedigree in the tale and, like many other Irish works of its date, the *Siege* is dotted with short poems representing spells, songs and the like reputedly spoken by the main protagonists. Indeed, the *Siege* is filled with descriptions of druidic magic – illusions, watery enchantments, encounters with fairy folk and people being turned to stone – even Oengus, the Mac Og, makes an appearance near the outset of the tale. The story reaches its climax, however, with its recounting of how Mug Ruith defeats the legendary high king's forces, and especially his besting of King Cormac's fearsome fairy druids. Moreover, the spell that Mug Ruith uses to counter the illusion which has been woven over Druim Damhghaire (a ridge in County Limerick, modern-day Knocklong) is recorded as one of the poems included in the *Siege*, and it begins with several statements which proclaim the ancient druid's ability to 'turn' all sorts of powers (including the *bricht* or 'charm' used on the ridge): the spell is clearly a kind of counter-charm. The turning spell also features several references to subjugation (*traethfat*, *leacais*), while other parts describe Mug Ruith's use of his magical 'druidic breath' (*Seidim-si Druim nDamh…* 'I blast I do Druim Damh(ghaire) …').

graphs 26 (Leeds 1991), pp. 194–216; G. Williams, *The Curse of Exile: a study of Ovid's* Ibis, Cambridge Philological Society supplementary volume 19 (Cambridge 1996).

3 E. Gwynn (ed.), *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, Royal Irish Academy Todd lecture series 3 (Dublin 1906), pp. 90–1; J. Fraser, 'The First Battle of Moytura', *Ériu* 8 (1915), 18 (§20); C. O'Rahilly (ed.), *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension 1* (Dublin 1976), p. 54 (l. 1745); Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, pp. 64–5 (§141).

But most strikingly, the spell also features several spoken commands particularly reminiscent of expressions commonly found in *defixiones*:[4]

Soeiim atsoeim muna	'I turn, I again turn tricks:
soeim dluma doirche.	I turn the dark mass –
soeim bricht, soeim brechta,	I turn the charm, I turn the spells,
soeim dechta doiche …	I turn the magical oppression …
Danum danum	'I bestow, I bestow,
neim im nert	poison in my power,
ua Cuinn cur …	on the (Leath) Cuinn a binding …'

The idea of 'druidic breath' used in the *Siege* presumably developed from the notion that the breath used to incant magical spells could itself be seen as magical. Similarly, the word translated as 'binding' in this passage is *cur*, a term sometimes glossed as *stipulatio* 'contract' in Old Irish sources, but which literally signifies only a 'putting' or 'placing'. *Cur* seems to have developed its secondary binding sense because it was commonly used to indicate 'putting (a bond on)' something or someone, and it is a key expression in Old Irish law. Indeed, given that a Gaulish cognate of *cur* appears twice on the Châteaubleau tile, it must have been a common Celtic legal expression. Yet *cur* clearly serves in the *Siege of Druim Damhghaire* as a description for the counter-spell Mug Ruith is using against his opponents' *bricht*, not as a more mundane stipulation as is the case in the economic curse from ancient Châteaubleau.[5]

Nonetheless, the word for 'power' used in Mug Ruith's spell (*nert*) is also related to the one (*sunartiu*) used in the opening line of the Chamalières curse, and the Rom inscription also features a verb that indicates 'bestowing' (*uoraiimo*) used in a similarly fundamental way. Not much else in Mug Ruith's turning charm can be seen to represent a reflection of an ancient binding spell, though – much of his turning charm merely describes Cormac's fairy druids and how their enchantment of Druim Damhghaire will be undone. Moreover, there are several key practical differences which appear to separate this medieval literary charm from its epigraphic Gaulish counterparts. For example, 'bestowing' (or 'granting') when it appears in *defixiones* is usually not a reference to the curser bestowing (handing over or laying) a supernatural effect, but instead to the committal of victims to the infernal gods for them in turn to (judge and) bind. The Larzac spell seems to be an exception here (it features a command to 'lay' or 'commit' the curse), but when 'power' is referred to in *defixiones* it is typically the power of the infernal gods which is mentioned (or as at Chamalières, that of their attendant chthonic daemons), not an attribute of the caster. There is no use of 'just as …, so too…' rhetoric, nor are Mug Ruith's opponents listed by reference to their

4 M.-L. Sjoestedt, 'Le siège de Druim Damhghaire', *Revue celtique* 44 (1926), 161 (§80); cf. S. Ó Duinn, *Forbhais Droma Dámhgháire: the Siege of Knocklong* (Cork 1992), p. 75 (with spell omitted). The Leath Cuinn (or Quinns) are the followers of Cormac, the grandson of Conn of the Hundred Battles.

5 F. Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, Early Irish law series 3 (Dublin 1988), p. 158. The Irish tradition that links *cur* with lips (Old Irish *cor bél*) would seem to represent a folk etymology.

(maternal) parentage (or even bodily parts), as is typical of *defixiones*. None of the ancient counter-*defixiones* that have survived deals so clearly, either, with contests focused so purely and directly on overcoming through personal magical prowess. Instead it seems that this passage from the *Siege* at best only dimly reflects any possible memory of ancient binding charms, its use of comparable terminologies probably evidence that such usages reflect a common Celtic magical semantics and vocabulary, ones which are seemingly employed in Mug Ruith's turning spell in a manner quite different from how similar descriptions and employments are attested in ancient Celtic magical practice.

Subsequent to his countering of the illusion placed on Druim Damhghaire, however, Mug Ruith also prepares a magical stone for his student Ceann Mór to use against Colpa, the leader of Cormac's fairy-druid allies. The spoken enchantment the blind druid uses is, again, recorded in a poem, one that begins and ends with a request to enable what is clearly a form of binding magic:[6]

Ailim mo lic laime.	I request that my hand stone
narub thaidbhsi thaidhi.	may not be a fleeting phantom –
Bidh breo brisfes bairi.	may it be a brand to break goals,
re cath crodha Clairi.	before the bloody battle of (Ceann) Cláire.
mu chloch thein tac then.	My fiery stone that brought fire:
bidh nathair derg dhobhair.	May it be a red water-snake!
mairg cus bhfillfe a foruim …	Woe to him it coils around! …

After a series of references to the druid's adversaries, Mug Ruith's stone-enchanting spell then moves into a more obviously operative stage where the binding is articulated rather more clearly:

in trascradh nos trascrann.	The overthrowing I overthrow.
is fasdar no fastann.	The holding I hold.
is nascad nos nascann.	The binding I bind.
Mar bhís feith im crann.	Like a spiral vein in my staff.
Coiscfider a bhfoghuil,	Their ravages will be checked,
methfaider a monair …	their deeds will fail …

The reference to binding in the great druid's charm, however, clearly relates to the constriction of a fiery serpent. Indeed, after Mug Ruith has chanted the spell, Ceann Mór throws the stone into a stream (as he has been instructed) and the magical eel (*eascann*) which is summoned by his action then constricts Colpa, destroying his weapons and allowing the Munstermen to kill their enemy. In a scene presaged in the *Cattle Raid of Regamna*, the Morrigan similarly takes on the form of an eel and binds Cuchulainn's feet as he fights an enemy in a ford in the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*; Mug Ruith's spell evidently reflects a similar theme, then, of the binding power of magical eels. Yet even though *eascann* 'eel' is phonologically similar to *escaine* 'curse', this constricting is evidently not magical binding in the sense employed in *defixiones*. After all, even the words used in this medieval

6 Sjoestedt, 'Siège', pp. 161–2 (§84); Ó Duinn, *Forbhais Droma Dámhgháire*, pp. 77–8 (partial translation). Ceann Cláire is the name of the hill where the king of Munster had gathered his men, according to the *Siege*. It may have been modern-day Glenbrohane.

description appear to have little to do with those attested on the Old Celtic curse tablets. For example, *nascad*, the word used to indicate 'binding' in Mug Ruith's 'hand stone' spell, is related to English *net* and hence its use seems comparable to the ancient notion of magical tying or binding. But the term is also used earlier on in the *Siege* merely to indicate the legally binding nature of the contracts agreed on to tempt Mug Ruith to emerge from his home on Valentia Island (in Kerry). It is a very old Celtic word (with cognates in several other Indo-European languages), but seems just to be a description taken from legal vocabulary. Indeed, the *fasdar* or 'holding' similarly represents another contractual term, and even though it is related to the expression *asdadha*, which is used to describe Lugh's decree of binding on the Fomorians in the *Second Battle of Moytura*, the term is also the regular Irish word for 'employment' – for giving someone a job. Even the rhetorical 'request' seems rather different from those which appear in the Gaulish and Old Brittonic judicial prayers (which are always addressed to named divinities). None of the key terms used in Mug Ruith's hand-stone spell seems to have a clear connection with those used in the ancient cursing tradition reflected in the Old Celtic *defixiones*. Despite the frequency of the displays and descriptions of druidic magic in the *Siege of Druim Damhghaire*, there seems little evidence of any lingering functional connection between the descriptions of magic it so richly exhibits and those attested by the practical evidence of the Old Celtic curse tablets.[7]

Another form of magical binding seems to be represented in the *Wasting Sickness of Cuchulainn*, in a key passage of verse that describes the effect of a powerful charm. Unlike in the *Siege of Druim Damhghaire*, however, in this case it is the hero of the story who has been struck down by a binding enchantment, one visited on Cuchulainn after he had fallen into a magical sleep. The tale of his wasting sickness seems rather older than the Middle Irish *Siege*, both linguistically and thematically – indeed, it is full of only weakly euhemerised gods, even Cuchulainn himself often being thought of as more divine than human by some interpreters today. Sent by a fairy woman, Fand, a daughter of the Dagda, the sleep-inducing charm is also central to the early Irish tale: its sending is the key episode in the story and establishes the nature of the relationship between Cuchulainn and Fand. Having recently been left by her divine husband, Manannan mac Lir, Fand first encountered Cuchulainn when he had injured Fand and her sister Li Ban while they were out flying about in bird form – they first appear to Cuchulainn as magical birds linked together by a golden chain. Despite her injury at his hands, Fand found herself smitten by Cuchulainn, however, and hoped, through the use of the wasting charm, to separate the great Ulster hero from his wife Emer. The second part of the story deals with how Emer reacts to Fand's successful wooing of Cuchulainn and gives the tale its alternate title: *The Only Jealousy of Emer*. It is clear, then, that the episode which provides the principal name of the tale, where Cuchulainn is stolen from his wife by Fand, is the main device upon which the plot of the *Wasting Sickness of Cuchulainn* depends. Much as in the *Siege*

7 *Nascad* is a nominal form of *naiscid* (< **Hnₑdh-ske-*) 'bind' (cf. its verbal noun *naidm* 'enforcing surety'); *fasdar* and *asdadha* are similarly derived forms of the verb *ad-suidi-* (< **ad-sod-i-*) 'fixes, sets to' (the former prefixed by *fo* 'upon'); cf. Kelly, *Early Irish Law*, pp. 171–2 and 277.

of Druim Damhghaire, where Mug Ruith's confrontation with the high king's fairy druids provides the climax to the story, Fand's fairy charm is the most important narrative feature of the tale of Cuchulainn's fairy binding. Yet her magical intervention is not unique in this way as a motif in Celtic (and Celtic-influenced) literature – encounters with otherworldly women are also typical features of Arthurian tales. Indeed, Cuchulainn's erotic binding is not closely paralleled in any other early Irish work. Instead, his amatory affliction seems most closely reflected (in a functional sense) by the arresting love potion that is so pivotal to the early French tradition of *Tristan and Isolde*, or the equally essential sorcerous attraction which has a similar role (as the hero's main motive for action) in the medieval Welsh story of *Culhwch and Olwen*.

The magical sleep and wasting sickness sent by Fand are also described in terms which are reminiscent of the threats of fevers and sleeplessness which often appear in classical erotic charms. The tale records Cuchulainn dreaming that he is being whipped by Fand and Li Ban, and has him waken from his eldritch reverie in a weakened state. Fand's enchantment has sometimes been compared with instances in medieval Norse tales of men being ridden (or trampled) by nightmare spirits sent by women with magical powers, but these dangerous women are never characters as sympathetic as is the enticing Irish fairy-woman. Nor do the reveries ascribed to saints in some medieval sources, or even the parallels often seen here between Cuchulainn's dream and those of shamans, seem to represent much more than attempts by modern interpreters to read foreign motifs into this early tale. The theme of sleeping and weakness may be influenced by the physical phenomenon of sleep paralysis, but a key passage included in the story, a short poem spoken by Cuchulainn's servant Laeg, describes the main features of Fand's charm in terms which seem to have much in common with those of classical binding spells. In fact, Laeg's poem uses the word 'lie' or 'lay' (*laigi*) in a key way, employing a form of a term which features in an essential manner in several of the Old Celtic handing-over charms. More centrally, however, *serglige*, the description of the 'wasting sickness', is itself a compound which appears literally to designate 'sickness lying':[8]

Mór espa do	*láech*
laigi fri súan	*serglige*
ar do-n-adbat	*genaiti (.i. mná)*
áesa a Temag	*Trogaigi (.i. a Maig Mell)*
condot rodbsat,	
condot chachtsat,	
condot ellat,	
eter bríga	*banespa*

8 M. Dillon (ed.), *Serglige Con Culainn*, Medieval and Modern Irish Series 14 (Dublin 1953), p. 11 (ll. 316–23); J. Carey, 'Cú Chulainn as ailing hero', in R. Black *et al.* (eds), *Celtic Connections: Proceedings of the 10th International Congress of Celtic Studies* 1 (East Linton 1999), pp. 190–8; Hall, *Elves*, pp. 137–40; and cf. the reference to Cuchulainn as 'a man who lies wasting away' (*fer seirges i lligu*) in the *Feast of Bricriu*; G. Henderson (ed.), *Fled Bricrend: The Feast of Bricriu*, Irish Texts Society 2 (London 1899), p. 28 (§24).

Great folly for	a warrior
to lie under the sleep	of a wasting sickness
for it shows that	spirits (i.e. women),
the folk of Tenmag	Trogaigi (i.e. of Mag Mell)
have overwhelmed you	
have captured you	
have taken possession of you	
through the power	of womanish folly.

This has proven a difficult passage for modern interpreters, though, as two of the verbs used in the critical triple 'have … you' sequence appear to be somewhat irregular. It has been translated as 'have injured you, have captured you, have harmed you', but the translation given here seems to suit the main purpose of the passage better: that is, it is a triple description of magical binding.[9] Where 'putting' is reflected in the first of Mug Ruith's spells in the *Siege*, moreover, here it is obviously 'laying' that is the essential operative feature of the charm sent by Fand and Li Ban, the supernatural binding folk of Tenmag Trogaigi. Nonetheless, Laeg's poem otherwise shows very little else in common with an Old Celtic *defixio*. The use of 'lay' in several key descriptions in the poem echoes the employment of the 'lay' terms *luciu-* at Bath and the forms *luge* and *lungetu-* employed on Gaulish curse tablets. But the description of Fand's fairy charm in the *Wasting Sickness of Cuchulainn* does not display clear evidence of handing over, leading or separating, nor any of the other main semantic or rhetorical features typical of ancient binding spells. Even allowing for some literary embellishment, much as is evident in the binding spells of the *Siege of Druim Damhghaire*, there seems little in Cuchulainn's debilitative fairy binding that suggests it represents anything more than a medieval literary representation of a captivating enchantment. Amatory charms of a similarly agonistic type are known well enough from Old Norse sources (in both literary accounts and in terms of such spells as have been directly recorded) as well as in the angel- and apostle-adjuring love lorica from Leiden. In fact, the notion of 'womanish folly' which provides the ring which rhetorically frames this part of Laeg's poem is a trope also known from the Klosterneuburg lorica. Yet rather than being a direct reflection of some sort of Celtic *philtrokatadesmos* or *diakopos*, or even a more recent expression linked to the ancient binding genre (such as a lorica-like erotic charm), although striking, Fand's amatory wasting enchantment may well represent a medieval description of erotic spellbinding quite unconnected with classical love charms.[10]

Fand's fairly enchantment is, however, clearly the key narrative element in the *Wasting Sickness of Cuchulainn*, and similar supernatural effects quite often occur as the pivotal issue or provide the central motive for the leading protagonist's

9 The attested forms *rodbsat* and *ellat* mean 'destroyed' and 'visited' respectively (cf. *ad-ellat* and **(p)elH*$_2$- 'come near' – neither 'injured' nor 'hurt' are meanings attested otherwise for these verbs), but a meristic *robdsat* 'overwhelmed' and *ella(ch)t* 'occupied, claimed, possessed' (< **eni-lung-*) would make somewhat better sense; M. Dillon, 'On three passages in Lebor na Huidre', *Speculum* 15 (1940), 280–5; idem (ed.), *Serglige Con Culainn*, pp. 64, 82; Mees, 'Chamalières', 21–2.

10 MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets*, pp. 34ff.; Stifter, 'Die Klosterneuburger *lorica*', p. 521.

action in early Celtic tales. Magical effects like Fand's erotic charm are typically essential elements in medieval Welsh and Irish narratives (and even the originally Brythonic but by the High Middle Ages broader Arthurian tradition), much as are encounters with euhemerised gods, strange beasts and denizens of the fairy otherworld. More commonly in Irish tradition, however, it is geases which have the magical narrative function – the effects or events which explain or provoke the actions of the hero of a medieval Irish tale. Geases have much in common with compulsive enchantments such as that of Fand, and indeed have sometimes been linked with *álǫg*, Norse binding (or rather 'imposing' or 'burdening') charms which commonly appear in late medieval Icelandic stories. Icelandic *álǫg* do not seem to have any reflection in such actual Old Norse spells as have survived, though (i.e. those charms preserved on contemporary amulets, inscribed into rune-sticks or recorded in early modern Scandinavian grimoires). Somewhat like classical *arae*, *álǫg* instead appear mostly to be literary devices; although they are of less clear origin and form, it has been argued that Icelandic binding charms were even originally modelled on geases. Yet oddly enough (and unlike the charms of Fand or even Mug Ruith), Hibernian geases and their like-named Scottish counterparts seem to have no obvious parallel in Welsh or the wider Arthurian tradition. Precisely what geases represent has long been a matter of contention among Celtic scholars: they are a particularly difficult feature of Gaelic tradition. Indeed, they seem so peculiar in some respects that they appear to be essential parts of what makes some early Irish tales seem so very Irish.[11]

Geases are usually seen as stipulations that if violated inevitably lead to the undoing of the hero. Often these mysterious requirements also appear to have much of the quality of a taboo about them: Cuchulainn, for example, is subject to a geas never to kill a dog, much as befits his name – he was literally the 'Hound of Culann'. Cuchulainn took this name in his youth after slaying the dog of Culann, his uncle's weapon-maker, swearing as an act of repentance to serve from that day on in the late dog's stead. Cuchulainn's uncle was Conchobar, the legendary ancient king of Ulster, and the tale of Cuchulainn acting as his weapon-maker's dog symbolises the Irish hero's role in other medieval tales as the chief guardian of Ulster. Cuchulainn's geas never (again) to kill a dog seems a logical extension of the vow by which he took his name and thereby symbolically took on his broader watchdog role. His ultimate undoing, which is the main theme of the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*, comes after the Ulster hero violates his many geases, the last of which is his killing of a dog. But interpreting geases as taboos does not explain them all that well, as taboo is a quality that is usually immanent in an object, act or animal, not in an individual; and it is clear that it is Cuchulainn who has the geas, not the dogs he slays. Using a swear word – a modern taboo – may be a bad thing to do, but the taboo exists in the word and its swearing: it is not an idiosyncratic feature of the person who uses it. Geases can be attached to objects, as in the case of the spear of Aillil Olomm which was not to be used to kill a woman, to strike a stone or to be straightened by

11 E.Ó. Sveinsson, 'Keltnesk áhrif á íslenzkar ýkjusögur', *Skírnir* 106 (1932), 100–23; J.R. Reinhard, *The Survival of Geis in Medieval Romance* (Halle a.S. 1933); R. Power, '*Geasa* and *álög*: magic formulae and perilous quests in Gaelic and Norse', *Scottish Studies* 28 (1987), 69–89.

someone's teeth (all of which Aillil, the king of Munster, eventually does, dying as a result). Bricriu's geas on the Ulstermen in the *Feast of Bricriu* which required them to repair the damage done to his house also shows that geases could be imposed on groups of persons. But most geases seem closer to personal supernatural stipulations than to taboos. In fact, the more powerful or famous the Irish hero or king, the more geases they usually seem to have attracted; it is almost as if geases were some sort of reflection of the level of responsibility (or honour) held by the person subject to them – it was only Cuchulainn who would be undone if he slew another dog because dogs were animals with which he had become especially linked. Indeed, his death, defending the people of Ulster, seems to have been fated by the geases he acquired after he had decided to become a hero, to seek fame rather than a long life, and had relinquished his birth name Setanta to become known instead as the 'Hound of Culann', the watchdog of the weapon-maker of the king of Ulster.[12]

Cuchulainn's taking of a new name was clearly supposed to indicate more broadly the new role he had adopted: a champion and defender of Ulster. His anthroponymic geas can be interpreted, then, as symbolic – by killing another (watch)dog, he would symbolically be undoing himself. On the other hand, his canine restriction appears close to the notion of an animal totem, much as some American Indian tribes traditionally have particular respect for certain animals. But few other Irish geases have much to do with animals (other Irish figures with similarly canine names are not subject to similar restrictions), so geases seem to have had little connection with this kind of identification generally, at least not in a fundamental way. Conaire Mór, another high king of Ireland, had a geas never to kill a bird because his father was of avian stock (much as, apparently, were other Irish fairy folk like Fand and Li Ban). Conaire also had more obviously logical regal geases, however, such as not being allowed to spend more than nine nights away from the royal capital Tara and never to allow plundering during his reign. Similarly, a further Ulster champion, Fergus mac Roech, was not allowed to refuse an invitation to a feast, and the Fenian hero Dermot of *Dermot and Grania* was under a geas not to refuse protection to a woman. These geases often seem to represent established social obligations, matters of early Irish honour and duty, almost as if they were expressions of custom, politeness or good form that have been transformed into exigencies of fate by means of some sort of supernatural injunction.[13]

Taboos, of course, often have a similar social function in many societies – they enforce desirable societal norms. But geases are too personal to be interpreted only in such terms. Although some of them, such as the animal geases, seem to reflect supernatural symbolisms, most geases have more of the quality of fateful

12 E. Hull, 'Old Irish tabus, or *geasa*', *Folk-Lore* 12 (1901), 41–66; M.-L. Sjoestedt, *Gods and Heroes of the Celts*, trans. M. Dillon (London 1949), pp. 70ff.; Guyonvarc'h, *Magie, médecine*, pp. 91ff.

13 Henderson, *Fled Bricrend*, pp. 10–11 (§11): 'Cuchulainn is no nickname for you today, for you are the champion of the Ulstermen'; P. O'Leary, 'Honour-bound: the social context of the early Irish heroic *geis*', *Celtica* 20 (1988), 85–107; and cf. J. Borsje, 'Fate in early Irish texts', *Peritia* 16 (2002), 214–31.

personal contracts and so they are often thought to have reflected some sort of pagan religious practice. Conaire's geases were given to him by one of his father's bird-folk kindred just before he became high king and hence may reflect an old tradition about the proper duties of early Hibernian monarchs. The first of his geases that Conaire violates is even the most obviously regal: his duty to prevent plundering in Ireland during his reign. Geases are also connected in one Irish source with the 'gifts' (*búaida*) enjoyed by some Irish kings and champions, such as Cuchulainn's salmon leap and battle fury. They may have originally been connected with rites undergone by young nobles in early Irish society – geases were clearly not voluntary undertakings – and obviously have a feeling of fate, honour and justice about them. In fact, some have sought to connect them with the Irish notion of *fír* 'truth', an almost platonic sense of correctness or responsibility (i.e. in terms of remaining true) epitomised in the *fír flatha* or 'truth of kings' associated with just monarchs. In such interpretations geases are seen as fatalistic supernatural correctives which act to maintain social and natural order. Nonetheless, geases remain a difficult phenomenon and why they may have developed in Gaelic tradition but not in Welsh has long remained especially unclear:[14] Welsh heroes are sometimes driven by supernatural compulsions, but never by stipulations quite like geases.

Irish heroes frequently have several geases on them, the fate of the hero sometimes being determined by an irreconcilable dilemma that arises when their geases come into conflict. For example, Cuchulainn's connection with dogs also included a geas never to eat dog meat, but he was also compelled by another to observe a more common social duty: never to refuse a meal he was offered. The beginning of the end for Cuchulainn comes when the Morrigan offers him a meal of dog meat and the hero therefore was bound to break one of his geases. Cuchulainn was undone by an irreconcilable conflict forced upon him by the euhemerised Irish goddess of slaughter.

Geases are so difficult to pin down precisely and appear in such varying contexts that it has been suggested that they are mostly just plot devices, magically dressed up superstitions or moralities, rather than reflections of an underlying social reality. Some geases do seem to be later magical accretions to an older tradition – for example, the spells which Grania uses to make Dermot fall in love with her are accounted geases in *Dermot and Grania* – a development particularly evident in later Irish and Scottish stories where all sorts of magical impositions are described by the term. Late geases seem so mutable and aggrandised it been supposed that the social understandings that originally informed the belief in geases may have been very different from those which seem to apply when they appear in many of the earlier medieval tales. Conaire's geases

14 M. Dillon, 'The taboos of the kings of Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 54 C (1951), 1–36; J. Borsje, *From Chaos to Enemy: encounters with monsters in early Irish texts. An investigation related to the process of Christianization and the concept of evil*, Instrumenta patristica 29 (Turnhout 1996), pp. 65ff.; T. Sjöblom, 'Before *geis* became magical – a study of the evolution of an early Irish religious concept', *Studia Celtica* 32 (1998), 85–94; idem, *Early Irish Taboos: a study in cognitive history*, Comparative Religion 5 (Helsinki 2000); T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Geis, prophecy, omen, and oath', *Celtica* 23 (1999), 38–59.

have even been supposed in this light to have been the model for the subsequent literary appearances, a logic that if followed would make those of Cuchulainn little more than embellished or bowdlerised echoes of an original concept that was formerly only connected properly with kings. Magical effects often serve as little more than supernatural flourishes in many comparable medieval tales – episodes included in order to underline the greatness of a hero or the gravity of the challenges he faces. Much like Cuchulainn's fairy binding, geases often play central roles in early Irish tradition, however, a feature which suggests that they reflect an important social phenomenon represented mythically; more than just narrative decoration, it seems likely that they originally served to express (or indicate) important cultural lessons, ethics or essential roles – hence the suggestion of a connection with the idea of 'truth'. Yet in this way, and more so than the maledictions pronounced by saints in early insular tales, geases seem to have much in common with the curses which are central to the plots of many ancient Greek tragedies, curses which often stem from violations of important social taboos. It may well be, then, that geases appear in many Irish tales mostly as literary (and mythic) expressions much like classical *arae*, but originally represented a rather more essential mythic or cultural principle than do many comparable uses of magic in medieval literature, much as the events described in Homer are usually understood by classicists today to have been key socially meaningful expressions.[15]

The downfall of the house of Thebes, the subject of Sophocles's Oedipus trilogy, was fated after the inadvertent breaking of one of ancient Greece's strongest social taboos – when Oedipus unknowingly killed his father and married his mother Jocasta. Exactly how the cursing came about is not as well explained in the early Greek sources for Sophocles's famous plays, however. It is recorded in Homer's *Odyssey* that it was Jocasta's Erinys that brought this curse down on Oedipus and his children just before she died, but what this means in a practical sense remains somewhat unclear. Curses are often uttered by dying people in Greek stories (curses were obviously thought to be stronger when linked with finality in this way), and an Erinys is usually thought to be a divine embodiment of retribution – the term used in the plural refers in later texts to the Furies. It thus seems from the passage from Homer that the curse on the royal house of Thebes was a divine (or cosmic) manifestation of revenge for a wrongdoing, not a curse actually pronounced by the dishonoured Jocasta on her son and descendants. Erinyes are often represented as if they were connected to certain families, much as if they were personifications of the idea that a certain bloodline might be accursed. A personal, fatalistic curse of the type which is predicated on the wrongful action of a character (i.e. rather than a spoken curse) is reminiscent of a geas, as a particularly dire reflection of impersonal fate. Yet it seems unlikely that the story of the death of Conaire Mór in the *Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel* could have been modelled on a Greek original or that the plot of the *Cattle Raid of Cooley* reflects a knowledge of the works of the great Attic tragedians (or even

15 D. Greene, 'Tabu in early Irish narrative', in H. Bekker-Nielsen *et al.* (eds), *Medieval Narrative: a symposium* (Odense 1979), pp. 9–19 (and cf. discussion pp. 130–1).

of Homer). Nor does killing a dog or not preventing plunder in one's kingdom seem to be on a par with the psychologically infamous actions of the ancient king of Thebes.[16]

Instead, geases as personal obligations seem rather more reminiscent of ancient Greek and Roman oaths which included provisions that a curse would strike any who did not keep to them. In addition, the curses which feature in Greek tragedies are usually sworn by someone rather than being reflections of fate, an inherent sense of stigma or dishonour, or the workings of divine law (Oedipus, for example, swears his own curse on his sons in Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus*). Yet geases also share several characteristics in common with curses of the conditional type. Cuchulainn is not said to have sworn an oath never to kill another dog (less still one that was accompanied by a curse that he would be undone if he broke his word), but the breaking of his geas, his failure to uphold his honour, does seem to result in what might be considered a curse. There is, after all, a widespread ancient European tradition (preserved in Hittite texts from as early as the second millennium BC) of laws and oaths which included curses on any who failed to uphold them. Curses were used to ensure that oaths and laws were maintained in both early Greek and Roman custom, an originally religious tradition that seems to have developed from the notion that the gods could be called upon to police important laws and oaths. Several references to 'curses enshrined in the laws' or the like are found in Greek sources, and there is widespread ancient testimony to curses prescribed as punishments for criminals such as swindlers and thieves. Curses were also employed to ensure that civic officers like magistrates carried out their duties properly, and similar imprecations were used in ancient Greek practice to protect holy places from vandals, as well as to prevent lying at public meetings or in legal proceedings. In fact, curses were so widely used in ancient Greek society that the great Greek orator Demosthenes commented in the fourth century BC that ancient Athenian democracy was based on three bulwarks: the people, the laws and curses.[17]

The curses uttered by saints in insular tradition often evidently have such a socially normative role – they established the boundaries of Christian right and wrong. Similar curses are also well known from early Roman tradition, the expression *sacer esto* 'let him be accursed' being particularly widely used in (early) legal contexts. Yet the word *sacer* 'accursed' so commonly used in expressions of this type makes clear what the original meaning of such an imprecation was: Latin *sacer* is also the word that gives us the modern English term *sacred* – the word indicates that the agency of the cursing was thought to be divine; it reflected a sense of divine inviolability. Hittite curses commonly talk of 'gods of the oaths' (or even just oaths themselves) taking revenge on oath-breakers. By classical times, however, such imprecations had mostly been reduced merely to sentiments such as 'but should I do anything opposed to this oath or out of keeping with what I have sworn, I utter a curse against myself and my person'. This style of curse (or self-imprecation) is attested from places such as Bath, and it is also found in early

16 Homer, *Od.* 11.280; Watson, *Arae*, pp. 14–17, 27 and 74ff.

17 Demosthenes, *Lept.* 107; E. Ziebarth, 'Der Fluch im griechischen Recht', *Hermes* 30 (1895), 57–70; Watson, *Arae*, pp. 8–9 and 19–22; Faraone, 'Curses and social control'.

Christian tradition, where it is called anathema. Curses were so widely used in early European societies and in so many contexts that a peculiarly Celtic development on such a notion seems quite likely to have informed the 'stipulations' of early Irish heroes and kings. Geases could well have represented a pre-Christian Irish interpretation of the idea that certain social and personal expectations were subject to policing by the gods.[18]

Legal curses from antiquity often include the pronouncement of dire fates on their violators such as the utter and complete destruction of family lines or denial of a proper burial (which would, of course, doom the villain to becoming an *atelestos*, or restless dead). They are also often described in ways which suggest binding, although there seems to have been a fairly widespread tendency to connect laws, oaths and binding in early European cultures. Not only did the early Norse, for example, 'fasten' (*strengja*) vows, the Old Norse *Lay of Sigrdrifa* has the wakened valkyrie Sigrdrifa counsel the hero Sigurd:[19]

> Secondly, I advise you to swear no oath, unless it be true.
> Severe cords lead to a breach of faith; evil is an oath-thief.

These 'grim' or 'severe cords' (*grimmar símar*) represent a very old theme known in many European traditions. For instance, in Old English a *sema* was an arbiter or judge, a description that was clearly derived from the Anglo-Saxon word *sima* 'cord, chain' (cf. the variant form of the word that survives today in modern English as *seam*). The Irish legend of Moran's collar or *sin* (which would tighten if the wearer lied) similarly appears to represent a Celtic reflection of this association between justice and cords. The metaphorical extension of 'cord' to oaths or (as 'corders') to judges and justice, however, has perhaps its most revealing parallel in ancient Greek tradition. The equivalent 'cording' word in Greek is *hima* and it usually refers to a cord or leather strap. As a verb, however, *hima* produces two separate analogical meanings, both of which are rather more suggestive of Celtic magical expressions.[20]

It has long been recognised that the ancient Hittite story of the binding of the dragon Illuyankas is closely paralleled in Greek myth. Yet it is now understood, too, that the parallels between the Hittite myth of the divine binding of Illuyankas and the Greek legend of Zeus defeating the fiery monster Typhon also include a linguistic aspect. Both the Hittite and Greek versions of this monster-subduing story use the same expressions to refer to what the gods do to the monster: the Hittite expression *išhimanta kaleliet* 'bound with cords' used to describe the fettering of Illuyankas is reflected in early Greek versions of

18 H. Bennett, '*Sacer esto*', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 61 (1930), 5–18; H. Fugier, *Recherches sur l'expression du sacré dans la langue latin*, Publications de la Faculté des lettres de l'Université de Strasbourg 146 (Paris 1962), pp. 224–47; K.M. Reichardt, 'Curse formulae in Hittite and Hieroglyphic Luwian', in K. Jones-Bley *et al.* (eds), *Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference*, Journal of Indo-European Studies monograph 35 (Washington DC 2000), pp. 127ff.

19 *Sigrdrífumál* ed. G. Neckel and H. Kuhn, *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg 1962–68), §23.

20 Wagner, 'Studies in the origins', ff.; T.L. Markey, 'Icelandic *símí* and soul contracting', *Scripta Islandica* 51 (2000), 133–9.

the Typhon myth by Zeus vanquishing and 'lashing' (*himassô*) the monster. The Greek verb *himassô* 'lash', like the Hittite form *išhimanta*, derives from the noun *sima-* 'cord'. It seems likely that Zeus originally bound ('corded') Typhon and that this meaning became confused when *himassô* came to signify 'lashed with a (whip made of a) leather thong or cord' later in Greek. A similar development might explain why Fand and Li Ban flogged (or rather *dobert béim* 'beat' and *slaid* 'struck') the hero of the *Wasting Sickness of Cuchulainn* with horsewhips in an attempt (erotically) to bind him (i.e. to subdue him by 'cording' him with their 'cords'). In the Greek case, however, it is the hostile elemental forces represented by Typhon (and Illuyankas) which are successfully subdued – both the Greek and Hittite stories seem to have been origin myths which explained how cosmic order was established (or ensured) by the gods. In fact *išhiul* 'cording' is a key term in Hittite oaths: the typical Hittite oath formula first speaks of 'cordings' (or stipulations), then the swearing or enactment of the oath (*lingai-*, to uphold the 'cordings'), and finally a curse (*hurtai-*) upon any who would break the oath, any who would violate the 'cordings'. The notion that law and order were expressions of divine binding seems very old and profound in ancient Mediterranean belief.[21]

Hittite curses often make references to 'cording' or 'binding', but not in the clearly magical manner attested in *katadesmoi*. They do make wide use of 'just as …, so too …' expressions, however, and any number of them are conditional. But the closest a Hittite curse comes to a classical binding spell is that which appears in the first Hittite military oath, a conditional curse from the second millennium BC which contains the following typically magical sympathetic clauses:[22]

> Whosoever breaks these oaths … may these oaths seize him … Let them [i.e. the oaths] fetter their feet with foot fetters below and bind [*išhiandu*, i.e. 'cord'] their hands above. And as the gods of the oaths bound [*išhier*] the hands and feet of the troops of Arzawa and piled them in heaps, so may they bind [*išhiandu*] his army and pile them into heaps.

A very early European connection between oaths, curses and divine binding is quite clear here. Moreover, it also seems likely that this notion that curses were somehow related to binding (or 'cording') explains another early Greek use of the verb 'to cord'. A variant form of the 'cording' verb appears in the Law of the Eleans, an archaic legal inscription on a tablet from Olympia, where *hima-* cannot mean 'lash', although what it does mean exactly has been a matter of some dispute. The verb is employed in one of the penalties prescribed for violating a general principle of Elean law:[23]

21 Homer, *Il.* 2.457; Hesiod, *Theog.* 857; *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 340; W. Porzig, 'Illuyankas und Typhoeus', *Kleinasiatische Forschungen* 1 (1930), 379–86; G. Beckmann, 'The Anatolian myth of Illuyanka', *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 14 (1982), 11–25; C. Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon: aspects of Indo-European poetics* (New York 1995), pp. 448–59; Reichardt, 'Curse formulae', pp. 119ff. In fact Hittite *išhiul* is clearly related to English *soul*, i.e. as something supernaturally 'contracted' or 'corded'; Markey, 'Icelandic *sími*', 138.

22 N. Oettinger, *Die militarischen Eide der Hethiter*, Studien zu den Boğasköy-Texten 22 (Wiesbaden 1976); Reichardt, 'Curse formulae', pp. 127–8.

23 C.D. Buck, *The Greek Dialects: grammar, selected inscriptions, glossary*, 2nd ed. (Chicago 1955), no. 61; Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon*, p. 458.

> But if anyone bind [*himaskoi*] the accused concerning restitutions, let him likewise be caught up in [a fine of] ten *minae*, if he bind [*himaskoi*] knowingly.

The verb *himaskoi* is clearly employed in this text in a *similia similibus* construction with a meaning similar to 'caught up' (*enechoito*). The ten *minae* (a thousand drachmas) fine has therefore been interpreted as a penalty for spellbinding, but if so a monetary sanction seems rather odd in light of the much more truculent kinds of punishments usually prescribed for those judged guilty of using black magic in comparable instances of ancient law. One of the words in Greek for love, *himera*, seems also originally to have literally indicated 'cording' or 'binding', though, and Aphrodite's magical girdle, the *himas* which she lends to Hera to compel Zeus to be faithful to her, was clearly thought of in similar terms to an erotic binding spell. Fand's charm does not seem to be too far away again here, then, although the Elean Greek 'just as …, so too…' stricture against the use of binding or cording in legal matters more readily brings to mind a litigation spell (or even Moran's collar) than an amatory curse. A more convincing interpretation of the binding referred to in the Law of the Eleans might be that it is just a reference to a more prosaic matter, however, such as restricting someone from being able to make just restitution through the use of some sort of legal (or contractual) duress – tying them up in legal knots, restraining them with contractual cords – rather than with magic spells.[24]

Nonetheless, the metaphorical notion that laws and oaths were forms of 'cords' seems epitomised in binding spells, particularly those used in juridical contexts, and it is this aspect of the *defixiones* that seems to represent the most characteristic feature of this type of classical imprecation. Some features of classical cursing (such as the use of manikin effigies) are mirrored in earlier Babylonian tradition, but not so much the sense of binding that seems so essential both to the first Hittite military oath and the later *katadesmoi*. The development from the older Greek conditional curses of the 'may he be accursed' variety to the early, directly binding *katadesmoi*, and, moreover, those of the infernal handing-over type, also seems to have reflected the old Hellenic and Hittite idea that laws were divinely (or otherwise supernaturally) sanctioned 'cords', a connection that could only be strengthened by the use of curses to make oaths and laws more strongly binding.[25]

The common early Mediterranean notion of legal and magical 'cording' or 'binding' does not just seem to be reflected in Old English, Irish and Norse, however, but also in the semantic development which underlies *hud*, the usual Brythonic word for 'magic'.[26] Also reflected in Cornish and Breton, a cognate of *hud* is not attested in Irish, but it is reflected precisely in Baltic and Norse, and hence must be a very old word. Its literal meaning 'binding' also seems comparable to the reference to magical 'spinning' (*sní-*) on the Chamalières *defixio*, but

24 Homer, *Il.* 14.214 and 219; M. Weiss, 'Erotica: on the prehistory of Greek desire', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 98 (1998), 47–56; Markey, 'Icelandic *sími*', p. 137.

25 Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, pp. 169–74; Ogden, 'Binding spells', pp. 79–81.

26 Indeed, *hud* is a very productive form in Welsh producing forms such as Middle Welsh *hudaf* 'conjure, enchant', *hudol* 'charming, enchanting' and *hudlath* 'magic wand'.

whether this Gaulish form represents an Old Celtic reference to binding (in the sense of 'cording') or a more classical allusion (i.e. to the fateful threads of life) is not certain. The other Chamalières expression *toncnaman toncsiíontío* 'who will destine a destiny' and its Middle Welsh equivalent *tynghaf tynghet*, however, seem to have their closest etymological parallels otherwise in words which instead indicate legal concepts: for example, Old Irish *·thoicther* 'may determine' and Middle Irish *techtae* 'lawful' (i.e. all represent developments of **tenk-* or **tonk-*).[27] Indeed, *tucaither*, the Irish cognate of this common Celtic 'destining' verb, is only ever used in passive constructions – unlike in Brythonic, people are only ever impersonally 'fated' in medieval Irish tradition; they neither destine destinies nor have them sworn upon them. Yet the common appearance of legalistic rhetoric in the Old Celtic *defixiones* is paralleled in the use of everyday Irish contractual terms such as *naiscid* and *cur* in the druidic spells of the *Siege of Druim Damhghaire*; rather than magical cording or fatalistic threading, it is a legal connection that seems to be most obviously represented in the language of Celtic fating and spellbinding. In fact, the concept of destining as something that is spoken (rather than tying or binding) is probably reflected in Welsh *rheg* 'curse' (which is historically the same word as *reckon*; cf. a *reckoning*), much as the Old Norse cursing term *banna* literally indicates a spoken prohibition, a *ban*. The 'druidic breath' of the *Siege of Druim Damhghaire* presumably represents a further development on the notion of the power of magically framed words. Yet the ancient parallels between *hud*, legal 'cording' and Chamalières's *sní-* 'spin' seem to be more directly represented by the use of the term *seiðr*, the Norse cognate of *hud*, to mean 'prophecy' (and cf. its verbal form *siþi* 'prophesise'), a fatalistic Norse development of metaphorical 'cording' perhaps more patently to be seen in the compound *ørlǫg-símo* 'thread of destiny'.[28]

Seen in light of the verbal 'cording' words of Greek (and Norse), the use of rhetorical expressions such as Hittite *išhimanta kaleliet*, 'bound with cords' has also been argued to indicate that an etymological figure 'to cord a cord' was once common to all the Indo-European languages. No clear lexical remnant of such an expression is preserved in Celtic – both Old Irish *sin* (< **sinos*) and Welsh *hud* (< **soitos*) appear to represent only similar forms to *hima-*, *sima-* 'cord'. Nonetheless, a longstanding Celtic connection of destiny with cords also seems likely in light of the 'severe cords' of the Old Norse *Lay of Sigrdrifa*. The direct equivalent to Old Irish *fír* 'truth' is used in the Old Norse *Lay* as *vár* 'oath': that is, as the subject of the warning concerning 'severe cords'. In fact, Old Irish *fír* can also mean 'vow', evidently the original meaning of the Celtic term. It may well be, then, that curse-enhanced oaths or vows lie behind the notion of the *geis*-supported *fír* of early Irish tradition: that is, that geases were originally comparable to the curses which fell upon those who did not remain true to 'severely bound' oaths they had sworn. Indeed, the gnomic 'cording' passage

[27] Schumacher, 'Old Irish **tucaid*, *tocad* and Middle Welsh *tynghaf tynghet* re-examined', 51–2, presents the traditional connection of *tynghaf* with **temk-* 'congeal, make solid' (cf. modern English *thick*), but even if this is correct, the development was probably 'make solid' > 'determine' > 'destine'.

[28] In fact *ørlǫg* literally indicates a 'pre-laying'.

from the Old Norse *Lay of Sigrdrifa* has been argued to preserve evidence that a very old semantic connection existed between oaths, truth and binding cords in north-western European tradition, the legend of Moran's collar (or *sin*) seemingly representing the equivalent Celtic literary expression to the 'severe cords' of medieval Nordic experience.[29]

Yet it is perhaps the Chamalières construction *toncnaman toncsiíontío*, with its clear parallels in medieval Welsh use and the relationship between fate and cursing represented in the Old Celtic curse tablets, which most strongly suggests that a semantic field was once present in each of the Celtic languages which embraced a metaphorical connection between binding, destining and legal compulsion. After all, insular *tynghaf tynghet* seems to be an especially important expression, as it has a particularly striking role in Welsh literature. *Tynghet* clearly indicates a 'wretched' destiny when used in the *Gododdin* and the Llywarch Hen poems (much as if it described the effects of a curse). The doubled form is also employed to indicate the threefold conditions the wronged Arianrhod lays on her illegitimate son Lleu in *Math Son of Mathonwy*. Yet, perhaps most tellingly, *tynghaf tynghet* also describes the supernatural action which drives the magically smitten Brythonic hero of *Culhwch and Olwen*.

The destiny that Culhwch's stepmother destines upon him is to fall in love with Olwen, a woman he has not even met. And rather than a legal determining, this form of destining a destiny, which leads Culhwch on his quest (in which he frees Mabon son of Modron, among other feats), is clearly a kind of love charm – a type of enchantment which appears as a geas (or geases) in the Irish tale *Dermot and Grania*, but as a debilitating fairy curse in the *Wasting Sickness of Cuchulainn*. Very similar tales also featuring stepmothers sending heroes on supernatural quests in order to find a wife are known from Scottish sources, where the enchantments are reckoned geases (as well as in Icelandic stories, where they are called *álǫg*) – and although a belief in love magic is a feature of many societies, the spell which sends Culhwch on his journey is expressed using vocabulary mirrored in a Gaulish binding spell, much as if a prior use of the phrase in Old Brittonic *defixiones* is reflected in the medieval Welsh passage. Admittedly it is cast by a third party (a stepmother – usually portrayed as strict or uncaring figures in European tradition), but the destining of Culhwch seems strikingly similar to an *agôgê* or erotic leading spell. It might be thought that the connection is fortuitous, but it is clear from the finds at Uley and Bath that *defixiones* were once well known in the west of Britain (if not quite as far west as ancient Wales). It seems quite possible, then, that the language used in the Chamalières charm not only reflects a magical etymological figure semantically similar to the 'cord a cord' expression apparently reflected in Hittite, Greek and Nordic (magico-legal) use, but above all that it preserves a linguistic trace of a similar notion: that there was a common Celtic connection made between destiny and both medieval and ancient spells

[29] Wagner, 'Studies in the origins', 1ff.; Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon*, pp. 457–9; Markey, 'Icelandic *simi*'.

which bind, a connection which furthermore suggests a more nuanced explanation for the origin of Irish geases than has previously been proffered.

Geases are clearly described in the earliest Irish tales in terms which connect them with fate – like Irish destinies, they are often expressed as if they were passive acquisitions of heroes and kings. It is not just the way in which geases were obviously felt to be binding that makes them so reminiscent of ancient Celtic curses, though: a geas seems literally to have been a 'prayer' – the term appears to be related to the verb *uediúmi* used in the Chamalières *defixio*.[30] As one of the Old Irish glossaries claims, *geis* seems merely to be a variant of *guide* 'a prayer' – grammatically *geis* appears to have represented an abstract or generic description originally (i.e. prayer in a general sense), *guide* a more instrumental expression (something to be prayed with). After all, a prayer used for ill rather than for good is by definition a curse according to ancient pagan tradition, a matter especially clear with judicial prayers, the late kind of supplicatory *defixio* that is especially prevalent among ancient British finds. It seems likely, then, that as *guide* came to be associated with Christian praying in post-Patrician Ireland, the description *geis* became restricted to another, inherited, type of prayer.[31] In fact, the negative supplicatory connotations of the originally abstract term seem evident in the compound expression *ailgeis* 'a request of dishonour' (literally a 'geas-request'), and it is quite obvious that the ill which befalls an Irish hero or king who is not *sogeis*, or literally 'geas-good' (i.e. one who is in breach of his geases), can be considered the effect or outcome of a curse – the condition or result of an imprecation, not the words (or action) which usually accompanies the laying of a malediction itself. The ancient connection between laws, oaths and binding seemingly exemplified in old European metaphorical 'cording' also seems at hand, though, in what appears to be the closest Irish literary equivalent to a classical binding spell. It could be that geases were literally '(malevolent) prayers' merely because the result of their violating was thought of as a curse. Yet the notion of binding and of obligations enshrined in traditions, laws and personal pledges suggests that the term also reflected an earlier notion – the binding nature of contracts, oaths, customs and responsibilities, and the divine (or even cosmic) sanction which, it was thought in many early European societies, would ensure that they were upheld. Geases in this sense appear to be very similar to Jocasta's Erinys and rather less idiosyncratic in an ancient European sense than they are often portrayed to be. Their role has been greatly expanded in Irish literature, but they originally seem to have been supernatural bindings which reflected several aspects of the divine and cursing features represented not just by the Old Irish concept of 'truth', but also by the very early and widespread pre-classical European notion of (legally and magically) 'cording (a cord)'.

30 Charles-Edwards, 'Geis, prophecy, omen, and oath', pp. 47ff.

31 R. Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage bis zum siebzehnten Jahrhundert* (Halle a.S. 1921), pp. 80–1; Meyer, *Sanas Cormaic*, p. 7 (§62); P. De Bernardo Stempel, *Nominale Wortbildung des älteren Irischen: Stammbildung und Derivation*, Buchreihe der Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie 15 (Tübingen 1999), p. 210, n. 71; Mees, 'Fate and malediction'; and cf. E.P. Hamp, 'Varia III.4: *geis*', *Ériu* 32 (1981), 161–2, and Charles-Edwards, 'Geis, prophecy, omen, and oath', p. 54, n. 96.

It could well be that a geas originally represented a curse-enhanced stipulation – one suggestion is that they were originally coercive oaths sworn by fathers on their sons. But there is little evidence to suggest that geases were any different from early classical imprecations of the Homeric type. The Christian Church had introduced a new understanding of cursing to Insular Celtic tradition, one that seems mostly to have eclipsed earlier native maledictory expressions (certainly linguistically, and presumably in other ways as well). Geases, *rheg* and 'destining a destiny' appear to have been all that remained of the pre-existing Celtic conception of cursing in the medieval literary tradition. Indeed, the imprecatory stipulations of early Irish heroes and kings are preserved only in popular tales and literature – geases make no appearance in the Old Irish laws. Compulsive expressions linked with honour and responsibility, geases seem originally to have represented a pre-Christian aspect of prayer that was not properly compatible with the new religious tradition. As is so often seen with the introduction of new terminology to a language, it seems that the loaning of new cursing terms into Irish and Welsh led to the marginalising of the older descriptions (and even understandings) of the traditional Celtic use and role of imprecations in early medieval insular society.[32]

Moreover, it is even possible that a word which was first used to represent *defixiones* was reinterpreted in this way – to come to indicate a similar form of supernatural binding in prehistorical Irish. Although an expression like **uediúumi ueθθim* 'I pray a prayer', 'I curse a curse' is not attested in Gaulish, the connection of stipulatory geases with praying points quite obviously to the world of judicial prayers, the type of *defixio* that is so overwhelmingly prevalent among Romano-British magical finds. The closest to such an etymological figure in Gaulish otherwise is the use of the verb *lung-* 'lay, put' at Larzac and its nominal form *luge* employed at Chamalières to signify the 'committing' or 'enacting' of a *defixio*. Such expressions would seem only weakly paralleled (at best), however, by the wasting lying brought upon Cuchulainn by the fairy woman Fand. It seems strange that an immediately comparable expression to geases (apart from 'destining a destiny') has not been detected elsewhere in Insular Celtic tradition. But then the ambit of a geas appears to have become much expanded in Irish literary accounts (in contradistinction to the quite restricted sense of 'destining a destiny' attested in Welsh, but somewhat more akin to the late development of Icelandic binding charms). Geases seem essentially distinct from the Christian practice of ecclesiastical cursing (and the Irish tradition of satire too), if not so much other forms of both ancient and medieval stipulation or binding. Presumably the judicial role of early Celtic curses (reflecting a broader archaic European tradition) is reflected in the saintly (and druidic) use of malediction on the one hand, but (in terms of agency) a less personal and performative use seems to have become the principal purview of geases on the other. Much as the active sense of destining in Welsh is reflected linguistically only as the passive working of fate in Irish, geases mostly represent stipulations which were both personal and

[32] *CIH* 1553.11; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 20; Charles-Edwards, 'Geis, prophecy, omen, and oath', 58; Sjöblom, *Early Irish Taboos*, pp. 166–7.

inescapable, but are often acquired mysteriously and even unwittingly by Hibernian kings and heroes at the same time – so characteristically Irish, geases had become supernatural obligations linked to certain early types of customary social and political responsibility (and perhaps the oaths and other rituals that may have once been associated with them) which brought ruin comparable to that of Jocasta's Erinys upon any who did not respect them. Like the Homeric curse on the house of Thebes, geases remained curses of an agentively ambiguous early European kind, although they were described, if not directly influenced, by a term very much at home in the more obviously personal and agonistic ancient tradition of *defixiones*, whose use is so widely evidenced in most other parts of the pre-Christian Celtic world.

9

Incantations

'You will be one with the birds' was the curse put upon King Sweeney by Bishop Ronan Finn. This story of Mad Sweeney and his cursing by Ronan was written down as late as the seventeenth century, but is often thought to date as far back as the Old Irish period – in fact, it seems to recall an incident with a much broader pedigree. The madness of the king of Ulster, linked in the *Frenzy of Sweeney* to the battle of Mag Rath of the year 637, has a close reflection in early Welsh recollections of the madness of Merlin. At the sixth-century battle of Arthuret, the Celtic magician *par excellence* is also supposed to have gone mad, and was likewise left for a time to wander in the wilds. Merlin recovered from his madness, however, seeing out his strange ordeal, one that in the surviving, moreover, won him prophetic powers. A different fate awaited the wretched Sweeney: he spent the rest of his life madly hopping about Ireland and Britain as if he were a bird. Yet the two tales are often thought to be linked – one (perhaps the Welsh) having influenced the genesis of the other. Indeed, it is almost as if the concept of destining a destiny has somehow been inverted in the Welsh Merlin tales: a curse has given its victim prophetic powers instead of such powers being used to destine a curse. How Merlin's madness came about is not clearly explained in the early Merlin poems, however.[1]

The usual approach in medieval literary studies until the 1960s was to focus mainly on how early tales first emerged and developed over time. Nowadays, however, the approach is usually to focus instead on what such tales meant from a day-to-day perspective. Consequently, strange episodes such as these Celtic madnesses are often linked in more recent works with shamanistic practices – rites and rituals which induce altered states of consciousness. Such psychologically transformative experiences are commonly promoted by contemporary anthropologists as representing universal features of magical practice; and, indeed, both of

1 K.H. Jackson, 'The motive of the threefold death in the story of Suibhne Geilt', in J. Ryan (ed.), *Feil sgríbhin Éoin mhic Néill/Essays and Studies Presented to Professor Eoin MacNeill D.Litt., on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, May 15th, 1938* (Dublin 1940), pp. 546–50; J. Carney, '"Suibne Geilt" and "The Children of Lir"', *Éigse* 6 (1949), 83–110 [= idem, *Studies*, pp. 129–64, with an afterword, pp. 385–93]; A.O.H. Jarman, 'The Merlin legend and the Welsh tradition of prophesy', in R. Bromwich *et al.* (eds), *The Arthur of the Welsh: the Arthurian legend in medieval Welsh literature* (Cardiff 1991), pp. 117–45.

the instances of madness suffered by these early Celtic literary figures are suggestive of some of the rituals which are recorded of medieval Finnish and Lappish magicians and seers. Moreover, an anthropologically predicated interpretation of this type would seem particularly resonant in light of the many otherworld journeys of medieval Celtic tales, and the common early Irish connection of figures such as Fand and Conaire with birds – animals often proposed in such studies to be spirit creatures, symbolic representations of shamanistic flights of out-of-body imagination. But the artificiality of the relationship often promoted between geases and taboos suggests that an over-reliance on cross-cultural theorising of this type may ultimately be as unsatisfactory as the claims of previous universalist theories have usually proved. After all, the late classical tradition that the ancient Celtic town of Lugudunum (Lyons) was named for the ornithomancy of its founders (and other, similar references to the great respect given to avian omens by the ancient Celts) is surely reason enough to suggest why some semi-divine Irish characters might be linked with birds. It has similarly been claimed that the origin of Sweeney's madness in a curse is to be understood as a later accretion to a Celtic literary tradition of men going mad and wandering off into the wilds when faced with the horrors of war – Sweeney even goes to Britain at one stage to meet Alladan, another wild man whose madness is ascribed in the tale to three curses cast upon him by armies which Alladan had laid geases on (as if to underscore the central nature of the underlying theme of madness brought upon by war). This episode in the *Frenzy of Sweeney* is more clearly borrowed from another story of a Welsh military madness, however (one also often linked with the early Merlin tradition); and again, like the geases, the motif of the (triple) curse seems to be a late innovation to the story of the peripatetically accursed Irish king.[2]

Yet madness and prophecy are often thought to go together in magical practice, as reflections of a universal shamanistic tradition of ritually induced out-of-body experiences. Indeed, the frenzied women of Anglesey slaughtered by Roman legionaries in the first century could well be seen in this inspirational light. But despite the recurrent overtures to a Celtic form of shamanism in many recent commentaries, intimations of madness or frenzy do not seem to be particularly obvious features of Celtic magic as it was actually practised. Rather than innately frenzied or wild (or even accursed or avian), the image of wizards and

2 N.K. Chadwick, 'Geilt', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 5 (1942), 106–53; B. Beneš, 'Spuren von Schamanismus in der Sage *Buile Suibhne*', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 28 (1960/61), 309–34; J.F. Nagy, 'The wisdom of the Geilt', *Éigse* 19 (1982), 44–60; idem, 'Introduction to 1996 edition', in J.G. O'Keefe (ed.), *Buile Suibne (The Frenzy of Suibhne), being the adventures of Suibne Geilt: a Middle Irish romance*, Irish Texts Society 12, 2nd ed. (Dublin 1996); M. and S. Aldhouse-Green, *The Quest for the Shaman: shape-shifters, sorcerers and spirit-healers of ancient Europe* (London 2005); A. Bergholm, 'Academic and neo-pagan interpretations of shamanism in Buile Suibne: a comparative approach', *Studia Celtic Fennica* 2 (2005), 30–46; B.K. Slavin, 'Liminality in early Irish literature: the madness of Suibhne Geilt', *Journal of the Australian Early Medieval Association* 2 (2006), 209–24; and cf. N.K. Chadwick, *Poetry and Prophecy* (Cambridge 1942); M. Eliade, *Shamanism: archaic techniques of ecstasy*, trans. W.R. Trask (New York 1964) and M. Winkelman, *Shamanism: the neural ecology of consciousness and healing* (Westport, Conn. 2000).

druids presented in Insular Celtic tales is instead usually one of clever sorcerer-poets who, although they sometimes carry magic wands and other wondrous objects such as druid stones, rely principally on their clever, versified magical spells – they are more likely to send their enemies mad than suffer bouts of mental instability themselves. The early Celts valued inspiration gained from study: it took many years of training before a novice could be admitted to the ranks of the learned (it could take up to 20 years to become a druid, according to Caesar). Most of the features cited as evidence for Celtic shamanism come from Christianised literary accounts, not always the most reliable of sources for understanding inherited magical beliefs. In contrast, such medieval Irish and Welsh wisdom literature as has survived usually seems quite incompatible with the notion that knowledge could also be gained during traditional Celtic magic ceremonies which induced altered states of consciousness.[3]

The spells recorded in medieval literature as being used by druids further this picture of magical rationality. They are often only poorly understood today and frequently remain untranslated in modern editions, so obscure is their language. Yet what can be gleaned from them scarcely suggests practices of the type usually associated with shamanism. These often evidently quite archaic Irish literary spells have no parallel in comparable Welsh tales, however, although they are usually versified in the style of early poetry customarily indicated by medieval Irish redactors as *r.*: that is, as *retoiric* 'rhetoric' or *rosc* 'wisdom'. The Irish spells and poems investigated in the last chapter are all of this type, but do not obviously show much in common with such earlier Continental Celtic magical expressions as have survived. Neither are early Irish druids (such as Mug Ruith) depicted as wearing white robes or harvesting mistletoe with sickles, as is recounted by classical witnesses for their Gaulish counterparts. Instead they are more commonly described as wearing typical medieval sorts of attire even if, sometimes, these are complemented by such suggestive oddities as rainbow cloaks and feathered headdresses. The occasional Irish mentions of druids using Ogham writing similarly seem quite contrary to Caesar's recollection that the druids of Gaul so valued oral learning they were averse to writing things down. Medieval Welsh wizards such as Merlin and Math are often more clearly literary or mythic figures rather than reflections of historical personages There are considerable grounds for the suspicion that the druids of early Irish literature are not much more than monkish imaginings of figures from a lost pre- or only partly Christian past. It is perhaps only the difficult and seemingly archaic language used by these literary representatives of lost paganity that provides any reliable clue as to whether there is much historical truth to be found in the descriptions of druids and druidry or any other sort of Insular Celtic magic that is recorded in medieval narrative accounts.[4]

3 Caesar, *B.G.* 6.14; P.W. Joyce, *Social History of Ancient Ireland: treating of the government, military system, and law; religion, learning, and art; trades, industries, and commerce; manners, customs, and domestic life, of the ancient Irish people*, 1 (London 1903), pp. 224ff.

4 Caesar, *B.G.* 6.14; Pliny, *N.H.* 16.249; Murphy, *Early Irish Metrics*, pp. 1ff.; P. Mac Cana, 'On the use of the term *retoiric*', *Celtica* 7 (1966), 65–90; D.A. Binchy, 'Varia Hibernica', in H. Pilch and J. Thurow (eds), *Indo-Celtica: Gedachtnisschrift für Alf Sommerfelt*, Commentationes

Much has similarly been made by modern commentators of mentions of practices accorded to the learned Irish class of *filid* such as the ritual called *imbas forosnai* or 'inspiration which illuminates' that is described in *Cormac's Glossary*. Indeed, this remarkable account traditionally ascribed to the tenth-century king–bishop of Cashel is certainly suggestive of out-of-body inspiration. Its reference to the eating of the raw flesh of animals might even be understood as the ingesting of some sort of shamanistic fairy food prior to entering a ritual divinatory trance:[5]

> *Imbas forosnai*, i.e. it reveals whatever things the *fili* likes and what he desires to be revealed. It is carried out as follows: the *fili* chews a piece of raw meat of a pig, a dog or a cat, and he puts it on the flagstone behind the door. He chants a spell over it, and offers it to pagan gods, and he calls them to him, and he does not leave it on the next day. Then he chants over his two palms, and he summons pagan gods to him so that his sleep may not be disturbed. He puts his two palms around his two cheeks, and falls asleep. There are usually people watching over him so that he should not be able to turn himself over and so that no one should disturb him. And what is in store for him is revealed to him at the end of the nine-day period, or twice that, or three times that – however long he should estimate at the offering. And thus it is called *imm-bas*, i.e. a palm (*bas*) on this side and a palm on that around (*imm*) his head.
>
> Patrick banished that and the *teinm láida* ('breaking the marrow'), and he declared that anyone who will do that should not be of heaven or earth; for it is a denial of baptism. *Dichétal do chennaib* ('incantation from ends'), however, that was left as a proper part of the art; for science causes that, and they do not make offerings to demons, but a declaration from the ends of his bones at once.

This account is certainly suggestive, even striking, but it is not clear if the description in *Cormac's Glossary* can be trusted. The apparent banning of *imbas forosnai* had evidently occurred five centuries before the glossary was compiled, and the etymology of *imbas* given in the entry (mirroring a similar etymology proposed in the contemporary *Collection of Druim Cett*) is clearly a learned fabrication. Indeed, further early medieval sources indicate that *imbas forosnai* was still being practised by *filid* at the time so it may well have been the case that only the ritual practices associated with *imbas forosnai* in *Cormac's Glossary* had been banned. *Imbas forosnai* is one of several forms of divination ascribed to the *filid*, figures who thus have long been seen as seers as well as poets (and jurists). Like the dubious etymology given for *imbas* in early Irish glossaries, however, this description may not be

Societatis linguisticae Europaeae 2 (Munich 1972), pp. 29–38; L. Breatnach, 'Zur Frage der *Roscada* im Irischen', in H.L.C. Tristram (ed.), *Metrik und Medienwechsel – Metrics and Media*, Scripta Oralia 35 (Tübingen 1991), pp. 197–205; Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon*, pp. 255–64. Sometimes glossed as 'chant', *rosc* (< **(p)ro-sk*^{w}*o-m* 'very perceptive, sees much') is clearly related to Old Irish *árosc* 'saying, maxim' (< **ad-ro-sk*^{w}*o-*) and Middle Welsh *dihaereb* 'proverb' (< **dē-ad-ro-sk*^{w}*o-*).

5 Meyer, *Sanas Cormaic*, p. 64 (§756) [= trans P. Russell, 'Notes on words in early Irish glossaries', *Etudes celtiques* 31 (1995), 199]; N.K. Chadwick, '*Imbas forosnai*', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 4 (1935), 97–135; J.F. Nagy, *The Wisdom of the Outlaw: the boyhood deeds of Finn in Gaelic narrative tradition* (Berkeley 1985), pp. 24–6; Guyonvarc'h, *Magie, médecine*, pp. 285ff.

much more than a monkish imagining of what a long-outlawed pagan practice might have been. In fact, the description in *Cormac's Glossary* shows some parallels with one of the accounts of Finn practicing *imbas forosnai* (by sucking his thumb shortly after the Fianna had thrice stolen food from a fairy mound as it was being cooked), so it has been thought that the account given in *Cormac's Glossary* was deduced piecemeal from literary sources of this nature rather than first-hand knowledge of the practices of contemporary *filid*. Moreover, the description of *imbas forosnai* in *Cormac's Glossary* also seems similar in some ways to *tarbfeis* or 'bull feast', the Irish ritual kingship ceremony described in both the *Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel* and the *Wasting Sickness of Cuchulainn*. (At the beginning of the *tarbfeis*, a man would eat the flesh of a bull, drink the broth from its cooking, and then go to sleep after a prayer or spell was cast over him to ensure he would later speak the truth; he would then have a vision while he dreamt that would reveal the rightful heir to the kingship to him.) *Imbas forosnai* is accounted one of the abilities of the seeress Fedelma in the *Cattle Raid of Cooley* and the practice is also mentioned in medieval legal and metrical accounts. Yet none of these much briefer mentions of this practice of Finn, Fedelma and the *filid* features any suggestion of sleeping, eating or sacrificing to pagan gods. It may consequently be suspected that the description of *imbas forosnai* in *Cormac's Glossary* ultimately confuses a traditional ability of contemporary *filid* with a banned Irish kingship ritual from the distant pre-Christian past.[6]

The magical sleep which comes upon the hero of the *Wasting Sickness of Cuchulainn* suggests that there was a longstanding Irish literary tradition of associating dreams with magical experiences. Yet rather than somnolent out-of-body ceremonies, ancient writers record that the Gauls performed divinations of sorts which were relatively common in antiquity. Studying the flight and calls of birds, for instance, seems to have been a particularly favoured traditional practice among the Continental Celts, as were, according to classical accounts, omen-readings linked with various kinds of animal and even human sacrifice. Ancient writers clearly thought that the Continental Celts were overly prone to such superstitions, although they do not record the Celtic employment of types of divination comparable to *imbas forosnai*. Nonetheless, not only do the Gaulish *vates* or soothsayers mentioned in some Greek and Roman accounts appear in medieval Irish sources as *fáith* 'diviners', there is one medieval Irish description of a divination ceremony that has been connected with a well-known type of ancient proph-

6 Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage*, pp. 66–70; idem, '*Imbas for·osndai*', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 19 (1933), 163–4; M.E. Byrne (ed.), '*Airec Menman Uraird Maic Coisse*', in O. Bergin et al. (eds), *Anecdota from Early Irish Manuscripts* 3 (Halle a.S. 1908), p. 76 [= L. Breatnach (ed.), *Uraicecht na Ríar: the poetic grades in early Irish law*, Early Irish law series 2 (Dublin 1987), p. 92]; Meyer, *Triads of Ireland*, no. 123; Chadwick, '*Imbas forosnai*', 127; E. Ettlinger, 'Precognitive dreams in Celtic legend', *Folk-Lore* 59 (1948), 97–119; Mac Cana, 'On the use of the term *retoiric*', 77ff., *CIH* 1533.26–28 and 2219.17–18 [= Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar*, pp. 36–7]; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 44–5; Ford, 'The blind, the dumb, and the ugly', 37–9; McCone, *Pagan Past*, p. 168; Russell, 'Notes on words in early Irish glossaries', 198–200.

esising. It is not one ascribed to Irish *fáith* or *filid*, however; nor is it one whose use is ascribed in classical descriptions to the ancient Celts.[7]

In a scene from one of the recensions of the *Wooing of Etaine* a druid, Dalan, uses four Ogham-inscribed sticks or wands to discover where Etaine has disappeared to. By his 'keys of knowledge' (*eochraib écsi*), the tale relates that the druid is able to divine that Etaine had been carried off into a fairy mound by the supernatural figure Midir. But it is not so much Dalan's 'keys of knowledge' that are so reminiscent here of ancient magical practice: the *Wooing*'s *crandchur*, one of the terms often used to describe prophecy in medieval Irish, literally indicates 'casting wood' – that is, using wooden lots to divine future events (the term is used in modern Irish to describe lotteries today). In fact, not only are comparable expressions known from Brythonic sources (e.g. medieval Welsh *coelbren* 'lot, portion, fate', literally an 'omen stick'), casting inscribed wooden lots is a widely attested form of divination in ancient tradition. From ancient Greece and Rome, and north even to the wilds of Germany, classical commentators record that similar lot-casting procedures were used in all sorts of ancient divinatory contexts. Moreover, the description usually used by classical authors for this kind of prophecy is *sortes* 'lot-casting', a term used in the Montfo *defixio* to refer to singing a *necracantum*, much as the Latin word is reflected in the modern English terms *sortilege* and *sorcery*. Lots are used in one early Irish source to settle disputes over inheritances. But given the clear evidence for similar divinatory procedures in classical times, the description of Dalan's clairvoyant ceremony could well represent a genuine memory of a typical ancient form of divination that employed written characters inscribed on wooden lots.[8]

More inspirational forms of divination relying, say, on the physiological effects of burnt herbs or smelling salts are recorded from classical antiquity. Yet the types of divination used by the ancient Celts which are recorded by Greek and Roman writers seem a world away from the intuitive, ecstatic, and even 1960s counter-cultural kind of out-of-body experiences promoted in some recent interpretations of magical phenomena. Rather than mechanical systems such as wooden lots, however, most of the forms of divination ascribed to the Gauls and Galatians clearly fall instead into the typical ancient prophetic category of *auspices* (auspice): reading portents by examining entrails or the sounds or flight of birds.

7 Cicero, *Div.* 1.41.90; Diodorus Siculus 5.31.3; F. Le Roux, 'La divination chez les Celtes', in A. Caquot and M. Leibovici (eds), *La divination: etudes recueillies* 1 (Paris 1968), pp. 233–56; Guyonvarc'h, *Magie, médecine*, pp. 275–80.

8 Cicero, *Div.* 2.41 and 85; Tacitus, *Germ.* 10; A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité*, 4 vols (Paris 1879–82), I, p. 195 and IV, pp. 145–59; E. Windisch (ed.), *Irische Texte* 1 (Leipzig 1880), p. 129 (§18); J. Loth, 'Le sort chez les Germains et les Celtes', *Revue celtique* 16 (1895), 313–14; V. Ehrenberg, 'Losung', *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* XIII.II, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart 1927), pp. 1451–504; J. Vendryes, 'L'écriture ogamique et ses origines', *Etudes celtiques* 4 (1948), 106–9; *CIH* 2193.22; Marichal, 'Une tablette d'exécration de l'oppidum de Montfo', 49: *in omnibus sortebus*, 'by all *sortes*'; McCone, *Pagan Past*, p. 208; B. Mees, 'Runes in the first century', in M. Stoklund *et al.* (eds), *Runes and their Secrets: studies in runology* (Copenhagen 2006), pp. 208ff. and cf. R. Thurneysen, 'Zum Ogom', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 61 (1937), 197–8 [= idem, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, pp. 301–2] for the connection of the four sticks with the four 'families' of the Ogham signage.

The ceremony of *imbas forosnai* seems a better candidate for being considered a shamanistic practice – and indeed its use by Fedelma, the triple-irised seeress of the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*, brings to mind her continental counterpart Severa Tertionicna, the *uidlua* of the Larzac *defixio*. Yet again, *imbas forosnai* is merely accounted a characteristic of the best poets in less fantastic (and often demonstrably older) insular accounts such as legal tracts – and it is more clearly to be considered in light of other Celtic traditions concerning poetic learning and inspiration rather than the suggestive, apparently universal, psychic spirit realm theorised as a world-wide human experience by many modern anthropologists.[9]

It is instead in Celtic metrical charms where prophecy, poetry and insight seem more straightforwardly to meet in terms of the Irish *filid*. Indeed, just like the title *fili*, Welsh *awen* 'poetic inspiration' is also a description that literally indicates seeing, much as does the Welsh term *gwawd* 'poetry', the Brythonic cognate to Irish *fáth* 'prophecy, prophetic wisdom'. This term, in turn, reflects the same etymon from which Gaulish *vates* 'soothsayer' and medieval Irish *fáith* 'seer' have traditionally been held to derive. Prophecies are also typically expressed as poems in Irish literature – in fact, it has been argued that the archaic phrase *co cloth* 'it is heard' which sometimes accompanies such descriptions represents a traditional ritual expression used to begin the poetic prophecy of an inspired *fili*. Both Gaulish *druid* (Old Irish *druí*) and *uidlua* 'seeress' ultimately represent words which literally indicate (in)sight too. Consequently, the preservation of Old Celtic metrical forms (as well as references to fate and destining) in magical expressions such as *defixiones* seems particularly significant when seen in such a pan-Celtic semantic light. In fact, the early Irish literary *retoiric* or *rosc* charms have been connected in this manner with the dreamy utterances of the prophesising *fili* of *Cormac's Glossary*, almost as if these archaic metrical forms should be understood much as Coleridge wished his public to believe that *Kubla Khan* was transcribed straight after he had experienced Xanadu in an opium-laden dream. After all, Fedelma, the medieval counterpart of Larzac's Severa Tertionicna, is called both a seeress (*banfáith*) and a *fili* (or rather a *banfili*) in the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*, and the Chamalières, Châteaubleau and Larzac inscriptions exhibit stylistic features typical of ancient poetry.[10]

As with ancient divination, however, the magic that is attested epigraphically as being practised by the Continental Celts often seems to be mostly similar to typical forms of classical sorcery. Indeed, ancient Celtic epigraphic magic often shows signs of being fundamentally dependent on foreign models, much as the ancient Britons and Gauls were reliant on other cultures for new technologies such as coinage, weaponry and writing. Magic appears to have been as much

9 Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 44; and cf. McCone, *Pagan Past*, pp. 167ff. and 228.

10 Mac Cana, 'On the use of the term *retoiric*', 79ff.; Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon*, pp. 117–18, *pace* Wagner, 'Studies in the origin', 46–57; and cf. A.A. Korolev, 'The *co-cloth* formula and its possible cultural implications', in J.P. Mallory and G. Stockman (eds), *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Belfast and Emain Macha, 8–12 April 1994* (Belfast 1994), pp. 251–3. See also Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 375–87, for Watkins's connection of this root with an inherited adjective **u̯ōt-ó-* 'having shamanic wisdom'.

12. Golden amulet lamella from Baudecet

a form of professional supernatural service as it was a reflection of religion in many ancient societies – if it worked (or merely if it just seemed to make sense) differing cultural understandings and backgrounds rarely seem to have proved much of a barrier to the importation of new forms of magical ritual or technique. The descriptions of magical practices recorded by Christian writers such as the king–bishop of Cashel often suggest a different picture, although many of the Old Celtic adaptations of classical magical practices do show some evidence of nativisation, and such testimony as is witnessed – for example, by the indigenous vocabulary and style used in some of the versified, song-like Gaulish binding curses – seems best explained as reflecting pre-existing Celtic traditions. Peculiarly Gallo-Latin terms such as *masitlatida* and *necracantum* similarly appear to reflect earlier native traditions of imprecatory magic. In some instances, though, rather than preserving pre-Roman notions, such apparent idiosyncrasies might well merely represent local and comparatively late developments upon common classical practices. Such seems to be the case, for instance, with the Chagnon juridical *defixio* with its sacrificed puppy and pseudo-words, and the Lezoux curse lamella found wrapped around a coin. A clearer case still of a (largely) idiosyncratic type of ancient Celtic magical find, however, would appear to be the inscribed golden lamella discovered by archaeologists in 1989 at an ancient Gallo-Roman religious site near the modern-day Belgian village of Baudecet.

Two well-preserved pieces of a magical golden lamella were discovered near Baudecet among finds excavated from a cultic refuse ditch by a small Gallo-

Roman fane. Such ditches, known in Latin as *favissae*, are a common feature of ancient religious sites, and usually served as places for the disposal of sacred items which had worn or were otherwise judged no longer suitable for cultic use. Found along with some old incense burners, lamps and other objects typically used in ancient religious ceremonies, the cultic objects found in the Belgian *favissa* made it obvious that the Baudecet lamella was thrown away some time in the second century AD. When unrolled and put back together again, the two sections of the lamella also clearly revealed some sort of magical text. Indeed, lamellas like that from Baudecet are a well-known type of ancient magical find, protective items which were usually described in Latin as amulets (*amuleta*).[11]

The Baudecet inscription is written in Roman capitals, although not all of its characters are well formed and the break in the middle of the find has made some of the words so affected somewhat harder still to read. Nonetheless, the lamella was originally 48mm long and 42mm broad, and the best reading of its legend seems to be:

e[x]imo	I remove.
sdet iutsa bautio	It is a salve, thorn
ruti duo esana	from (?) rue, two (and) these:
Tara⟨ni⟩ P(h)anou(el)	Taranis Phanu(el) (?)
Dir(a) Font(ana) Mem(phatice)	Dir(a), Font(ana)
Miθr(e) · Marmar	Mem(phaticus), Mithr(as)
-eui Iabo · uiii · Mu	Marmarevi, Iabo – 8;
-mulcoi Carbru · x	Mumulcoi, Carbru – 10.

The inscription is written inside a temple-like figure, an example of what is called a stele in the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri: the sequence most probably to be read as *e[x]imo* is written in the gable- or pediment-like triangular top, the rest appears within the rectangular body of the outline. Steles were cartouche-like figures which were employed in ancient magical texts in order to highlight especially important sections and it is quite rare for them to surround an entire text. Yet they seem to have just been drawings of spell tablets originally and they can take on all sorts of forms: several found on amuletic lamellas and even on a curse tablet from Carnuntum, Austria, replicate the typical *ansata* shape of a classical votive plaque (and of course some *defixiones* are written on ansate tablets). At Baudecet the temple-like stele seems even more deliberately religious, much as, evidently, is most of its text. The lamella inscription is not completely Gaulish in language, however, but appears to represent a mix of Latin, Celtic and some oriental styles: *e[x]imo* is probably Latin, for instance, although most of the words which follow it (*sdet*, and so on) seem more obviously to represent Celtic forms. Yet Marmarevi is not Gaulish, but appears instead to be an ultimately Syriac style that means 'Lord of Lords' (i.e. a reference to God): forms of this expression known from classical magical texts include Marmar, Marmaraôth, Marmarei, Marmarere, Marmariau and Marmariô. Iabo, on the other hand, is rather more categorically to be understood as one of the various renderings

[11] S. Plumier-Torfs *et al.*, 'La plaquette en or inscrite de Baudecet (Gembloux, Belgique)', *Latomus* 52 (1993), 793–825; *RIG* no. L-109; Mees, 'Gaulish tau', 919ff.

(often considered to be Samaritan in origin) common in late classical spells for the Tetragrammaton Yhwh (Yahweh), a Hebrew name for God which is more commonly rendered in magical texts as Iaô. The Baudecet inscription is clearly partly Middle Eastern or Judaeo-Christian, then, but not completely so.[12]

Many of the other names on the tablet are obviously not Christian or Jewish forms, however: not only is the name of the Persian god Mithras evident enough on the find, Memphaticus ('the one from Memphis'), the most likely expansion of the abbreviation *mem*, appears to be a reference to another oriental god (perhaps Ptah, the great god of Memphis).[13] Moreover, Taranis (miswritten as *Tarain*) is the name of a Celtic divinity recorded in several epigraphic finds (albeit usually as Taranus); also mentioned by the Roman poet Lucan, his name appears literally to mean 'thunder'. However, what seems most likely to be read as Dira (from a Latin perspective) – that is, 'Ominous' or 'Dire' – is the Roman name for Ara, the Greek goddess who is literally a curse personified, and Fontana (the most obvious expansion of *font*) is the name of another Roman goddess, one of wells and springs. The mention of curses and wells is immediately suggestive of Celtic *defixiones*, but a listing of such a type would otherwise be unknown in ancient experience. In fact it may be (given the connection with Fontana) that an expansion Dir(ona) would better suit the context of the first form here, as similar spellings are commonly recorded for the name of the Gaulish spring goddess Sirona.[14]

Panou, though, looks similar to *p(a)noute*, the usual Coptic word for 'God'. But a better-attested parallel from a similar context would probably be the name of the archangel Phanuel of the apocryphal Book of Enoch, whose Hebrew name literally means 'Face of God' (and compare the similar form Paneê, which appears along with better-known magical forms, including Iaô, on a mixed Greek and Latin amulet found at Billingford, Norfolk, in 2005). The numerals eight and ten, then, seem to count out the number of divine names employed in the text, much as is probably also indicated by the use of the Gaulish description *esana* 'these' (i.e. 'these (names)') – the list may have represented an ogdoad (as a collection of eight gods was called in Graeco-Egyptian tradition) supplemented by two less linguistically clear forms in order to bring the number of divine names to ten (i.e. a divine decad). The proper interpretation of Mumulcoi and Carbrou is less certain, but the former does seem quite similar to Phoenician *mmlk-* 'king' and the latter is reminiscent of some rather obscure styles found in Graeco-Egyptian magical works. Rather than a Christian or even Jewish amulet, then, such a

12 S. Lowy, *The Principles of Samaritan Biblical Exegesis*, Studia Post-Biblica 28 (Leiden 1977), pp. 268ff.; W.M. Brashear, 'The Greek magical papyri: an introduction and survey; annotated bibliography (1928–1994)', in W. Haase (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.18.5 (Berlin 1995), pp. 3591–2; Mees, 'Gaulish tau', 922–3. There is also some evident influence from nominal derivatives of the Greek verb *marmairô* 'flash, sparkle' (cf. *marmareos*, *marmarugê* 'flashing, gleaming') on some of the *marmar*-names.

13 The attested forms were probably supposed to represent vocative or invoking styles (i.e. *Mithre* and *Memphatice*), much as is usually the case for divine names found on amulet lamellas.

14 Lucan 1.422–65; *CIL* XIII, nos 3663, 4498, 11243; *RIG* I, no. 27; Mees, 'Gaulish tau', 923–4.

mixture of biblical and pagan names is clearly to be associated with late Graeco-Roman magical tradition and the beliefs of the semi-Christian Gnosts.[15]

In the second century St Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons, wrote a book attacking the purveyors of such magic, declaring Gnosticism and the cult of divine numbers and names both heretical and absurd. The tradition of calling on daemonic powers in classical magic had been developed in the Greek-speaking east by his time to the point where all sorts of divine names and styles could be called upon by classical magicians – compare the names invoked by Sedatus at Chartres and presumably also in the anonymous Châteaubleau curse. Long lists of names of all sorts of origins are a characteristic feature of late classical magic, and, following St Irenaeus, the use of such names is often connected with the Gnosts, early semi-Christians who are sometimes compared today with the proponents of the New Age. But other mystical traditions from the early centuries AD also employed similar magic, including those associated with Hermes Trismegistus, a Hellenised form of the Egyptian god Thoth (i.e. the Hermetic tradition), the Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagorus as well as the Neoplatonic Greek practice of theurgy. Similar also in some aspects to the Jewish Cabbala, representatives of this late expression of classical magic are often found on ancient lamellas, especially ones made of lustrous metals such as copper, silver and gold. The texts found on these types of lamellas are also always remedial or protective and were worn in small cases about the body, just as were other types of ancient amulets: rings, pendants and inscribed gemstones.[16]

Unlike most of the spells written on golden lamellas, however, the Baudecet tablet seems to feature a reference to thorns and the medicinal herb rue. Renowned as the 'herb of grace', rue often features in traditional European medicines. Indeed, the Elder Pliny records in his first-century compendium of naturalistic knowledge that rue is 'one of the principal ingredients employed in antidotes, that of Galatia more particularly.' He mentions 84 different medical uses of rue known in his day, including, perhaps most relevantly in the present context:[17]

> It is good, too, for injuries caused by scorpions and spiders, the stings of bees, hornets, and wasps, the noxious effects produced by cantharides and salamanders, and the bites of mad dogs … It is said that people rubbed with the juice of rue, or even having it on their person, are never attacked by these noxious creatures, and that serpents are driven away by the stench of burning rue.

15 1 Enoch 40:9; Brashear, 'The Greek magical papyri', pp. 3593, 3601–2; Tomlin, 'A bilingual Roman charm'; Mees, 'Gaulish tau', 923.

16 Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.*; H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: the message of the alien God and the beginnings of Christanity* (Boston 1958); G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: a historical approach to the late pagan mind* (Cambridge 1986); Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*; G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, Penn. 1995); G.W. Macrae, 'Gnosticism', in B.L. Marthaler *et al.* (eds), *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* 6, 2nd ed. (Detroit 2002), pp. 255–61; F. Ebeling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus: hermeticism from ancient to modern times*, trans. D. Lorton (Ithaca 2007).

17 Pliny, *N.H.* 20.51.

Thus the Baudecet inscription seems to have been a medicinally based charm – a protective amulet text, just as most of the gold-lamella inscriptions of Roman provenance are. Presumably it was disposed of in the Baudecet *favissa* because, although it had outlived its usefulness, it was still seen to have been a religious item as it was divinely blessed.

In fact, the golden tablet find seems strikingly similar to a comparable linguistically mixed silver amulet lamella text from Gaul which also appears to feature a slightly confused medicinal recipe. Discovered at Poitiers (ancient Limonum) in 1858, it is probably of fourth-century date and was found this time intact in its carrying case. It is more clearly inscribed with a mixture of Latin and Greek, although it does feature what seems to have been some sort of linguistic (and thematic) Celtification. On this occasion the herb used in the amulet charm appears to have been centaury, a plant which is also described by Pliny as a particularly efficacious healing herb. Especially used in the staunching of wounds, it appears to be described as *gontaurion* on the lamella, presumably a local rendering of Greek *kentaurion* 'centaury'. Moreover, the mostly Latin Poitiers text (only its verbs 'pick' and 'lay hold of' are written in Greek) features other descriptions which are reminiscent of those on the Baudecet find (although the correct reading of all parts of the lamella inscription is not completely clear):[18]

bis gontaurion analabis bis	Twice you should pick centaury, twice.
gontaurio suce	O juice (?) from centaury!
analabis bis gontaurios	You should pick centaury twice.
katala(p)ses vims anima(m)	You will lay hold of the strength, life,
vims paternam	paternal strength.
asta magi ars se	Assist the magus's art itself! (?)
tutate Iustina(m) quem peperit Sarra	Protect Justina whom Sarra bore!

Taken together, the two Gallo-Roman lamellas presumably represent examples of a type of medicinal amulet based on herbal lore similar to that preserved by Pliny, but which also shares key features in common with expressions like the Chartres spell as well as the somewhat grimmer tradition of binding charms. There are some spells in ancient Graeco-Egyptian grimoires which recommend that herbs be carried along with protective lamellas; yet recordings of medicinal formulas on amulets are unparalleled apart from these Gallo-Roman examples. The Poitiers and Baudecet inscriptions appear to represent a peculiarly Gaulish or Gallo-Roman type of amulet lamella text, the Gauls having taken the association of healing herbs with protective lamella charms one step further than is attested elsewhere in ancient experience and actually inscribing abbreviated (or stylised) forms of healing recipes on amulets. Perhaps more remarkably still, though, both charms feature stylisation which seems best explained as tell-tale signs that both texts are also metrical.

Most of the divine names on the Baudecet lamella alliterate and appear to be expressed as if they constituted metrical lines: witness especially the verse-

18 Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, no. 8; *RIG* L-110; and cf. H. d'Arbois de Jubainville in H. Gaidoz, 'Chronique', *Revue celtique* 1 (1870–72), 499, and Mees, 'Gaulish tau', 927–8.

like structure of the unambiguously alliterative sequence *Mem(phatice) Mithr(e) / Marmarevi Iabo*. The formulism is even more evident at Poitiers, where the repetition of some of the key expressions of the charm can hardly be explained other than as deliberately rhythmical and stylised. Yet, much as with *defixiones*, the appearance of verse is rare in classical lamella finds. The use of metre is a late development of the broader ancient magical tradition, and is a feature that is evidenced most commonly in Graeco-Roman medicinal charms.

More regular types of ancient lamella amulets inscribed with mixtures of Greek, Hebrew and Latin prose have been found in both France and Britain, so it seems likely that the ancient Celtic peoples were just as happy employing protective lamellas as they more clearly were curse tablets. Whether this tradition lived on long enough to influence later insular magical or religious expressions (such as loricas) is unclear – the examples of ancient amulets that have been found to date in France and Britain do not share any textual features in common with medieval protective charms or prayers. This is not the case, however, with another kind of ancient Celtic magical expression that is similarly known from late classical times. Moreover, it is in these late antique expressions where an abiding Celtic connection between metre and magic seems particularly evident.

Several Old Celtic healing charms were recorded in an influential book of medical knowledge that was produced in Gaul towards the end of the Roman period by a Latin-speaking native of Gaul who compiled a collection of medical cures which were popular in his day. The writer, Marcellus Empiricus, a native of Bordeaux (ancient Burdigala), was following in a well-established classical tradition of making a compilation of medical knowledge of all sorts – magical, learned, traditional and mundane. But, unlike his predecessors, Marcellus also included some charms written in the local language: several of his charms are Gaulish.

Marcellus's Celtic charms, though, represent little more than short metrical and stylised magical refrains. Later Latin copyists of Marcellus's original manuscript (which has not survived) have clearly introduced some errors into their texts (whose language they presumably did not know). But the original forms of the Celtic incantations seem simple enough to rescue. For example, Marcellus records a native charm with the Latin title 'For removing something that has entered an eye by accident' which seems both to rhyme and to alliterate. In the version that has come down to us today, Marcellus's text reads:[19]

> Close the eye that you want to enchant, rub it open, and say this charm three times and spit just as often:
>
> *In mon dercomarcos axatison.*

The forms *derc-* 'look' and *ison* 'this' found in this charm also feature in the curses from Larzac and Chamalières, so it is fairly clear that later scribes have unwittingly run two pairs of words from the original Gaulish text together in the surviving rendition of this incantation. It is not entirely clear, though, how

19 Marcellus 8.171; Guyonvarc'h, *Magie, médecine*, pp. 260ff.

to separate out *dercomarcos*: *Marcos*, after all, is a man's name (Mark) as well as a Celtic word for 'horse', but reading *dercomarcos* as 'looking-horse' (or looking-Mark) makes little linguistic sense. A simpler alternative would seem to be to assume that a name *Arcos* was formerly to be found here and that an original *dercom* 'looker, eye' was intended be read immediately before it. Presumably, the charm originally both rhymed and alliterated, then, its two lines forming a couplet, best to be scanned metrically as:[20]

In mon dercom,	In my eye,
Arcos axat ison.	may Arcos take it away.

The form *Arcos* is otherwise unknown in Gaulish, although it might literally have meant 'bright' (compare Latin *argentum* 'silver', literally 'the bright metal' – *arg-* is sometimes written *arc-* in Gaulish) and it would make some sense that a god associated with brightness would be called upon to cure a malady of the eye. Indeed, in Greek myth Argos was the name of a giant with 100 eyes who was slain by Hermes while he was guarding his sister Io from the delectations of Zeus, and the cult of Hermes (in his Roman form Mercury) is particularly well represented in Gaul. Hera is subsequently held to have preserved 'all-seeing' Argos's eyes in peacocks' tails, so it could well be that the name of the slain panoptical Greek giant (invoked from the underworld?) is intended here. Nonetheless, Old Celtic healing gods often have similar names: Mars, for example, is called Loucetius 'Brightener' in several inscriptions from Gaul, the Rhineland and Britain, and Apollo was worshipped with the Gaulish epithet Vindonnus 'White One' in the ancient Côte d'Or. In fact, Lugh, the divinity who (as the Gaulish Mercury) is usually assumed to be Hermes's closest Celtic counterpart, is similarly recorded in the *Second Battle of Moytura* as slaying Balor, a giant with a huge eye, so it could even be that Marcellus's Arcos (cum Argos) represents a classicised form of a Celtic eye god. However it is read, though, this is clearly a well-composed metrical charm, a brief yet stylistically (and presumably symbolically) sophisticated example of ancient magical Celtic verse.[21]

Another example of a metrical Gaulish charm similarly recorded by Marcellus seems instead to call upon the Celtic god Esus. Esus is a more securely known divinity, also being mentioned on a large votive monument found in the environs of Paris in the nineteenth century as well as being mentioned briefly by Lucan. His name is spelled by Marcellus as *Aisus*, which is probably an older form of the god's name. Otherwise, however, little is known about him apart from the fact that he is represented figuratively on the Paris pillar cutting down a tree connected with a bull and three cranes, and that his name seems literally to

20 L. Fleuriot, 'Sur quelques textes gauloises', *Etudes celtiques* 14 (1974), 57–66; W. Meid, *Heilpflanzen und Heilsprüche: Zeugnisse gallischer Sprachreste bei Marcellus von Bordeaux*, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft: Vortrage und kleiner Schriften 63 (Innsbruck 1996), pp. 44–5; Lambert, *La langue gauloise*, p. 180.

21 *CIL* XIII, nos 3087, 5644–46, 6221, 7212, 7241–42, 7249, 7252 and 11605; J.C. Hoppin, 'Argos, Io, and the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 12 (1901), 225–45; *RIB* no. 140; Mees, 'Early Celtic metre'; cf. K. Dowden, *Death and the Maiden: girls' initiation rites in Greek mythology* (London 1989), pp. 117–45.

mean 'honoured' (cf. the archaic Italic term *aisu-* 'divine'). His link with the tree with the bull and three cranes has led to all sorts of speculation about his cult, none of which seems of much help in understanding his appearance in Marcellus's charm. The charm does, however, exhibit a principle that was to become a feature of much medical magic of the Middle Ages. Entitled 'A remedy for something stuck in the throat', the charm employs, apart from an invocation that Esus help the afflicted spit the something out, a series of euphonic expressions:[22]

> If something has got stuck in your throat, say while rubbing:
>
> *xi exucricone xu criglionaisus scrisumiouelor exugricone xu grilau.*

The first element, *xi*, is not obviously meaningful in Gaulish or Latin (except as the numeral 11) and does not seem to belong here (it may originally have been the number given to the charm in an earlier compilation or have something to do with the eleven words of the text it precedes). What follows *xi*, however, is rather more clearly an only slightly malformed and much stylised octosyllabic charm – a metrical form which in Irish would be described as *bricht*:[23]

Exu cricon! Exu criglion!	'Out *cricon*! Out *criglion*!
Aisus scrisumio uelor!	Esus I want to spit it!
Exu gricon! Exu grilau!	Out *gricon*! Out *grilau*!'

This charm is reminiscent of a type of Greek and Roman medicinal spell that (much like an exorcism) urges illness to flee. But Marcellus's throat-clearing incantation seems rather more clearly to represent an instance of the use of words built up much as a euphonic expression, such as *a peck of pickled peppers*. The words *cricon*, *criglion*, *gricon* and *grilau* may once have been meaningful, but only *cricon* appears clearly to be so today – it is the Old Celtic equivalent of the English word *crick* (cf. Welsh *cryg*, Cornish *creg* 'hoarseness, phlegm, difficulty speaking'). Marcellus's work contains magical sequences which are even more clearly euphonic: one rhyming example that he records for use against toothache, for instance, reads *argidam*, *margidam*, *sturgidam*, and may similarly have once been based on Gaulish expressions such as *arg-* 'bright' or *marga* 'marl'.[24] Yet the 'nonsense' charms of Marcellus's *On Medicine* have their equivalent in Graeco-Roman sequences such

22 Lucan 1.422–65; Marcellus 15.106; H. d'Arbois de Jubainville, 'Esus, Tarvos, Trigaranus', *Revue celtique* 19 (1898), 245–51; A. Ross, 'Esus et les trois "grues" ', *Etudes celtiques* 9 (1960/61), 405–38; *RIG* II.1, no. 14; Meid, *Gaulish Inscriptions*, pp. 33–7; J. Untermann, *Wörterbuch des Oskisch-Umbrischen*, Indogermanische Bibliothek, I. Reihe: Lehr- und Handbücher. Handbuch der italischen Dialtekte 3 (Heidelberg 2000), s.v. *aisos*; Lambert, *La langue gauloise*, pp. 107–8.

23 O. Haas, 'Aus Sprache und Religion der Festlandkeltischen', *Die Sprache* 1 (1949), 50–5; E. Vetter, 'Ein gallischer Heilspruch bei Marcellus Empiricus', in E. Pulgram (ed.), *Studies Presented to Joshua Whatmough on his Sixtieth Birthday* (The Hague 1957), pp. 271–5; G. Must, 'A Gaulish incantation in Marcellus of Bordeaux', *Language* 36 (1960), 193–7; Fleuriot, 'Sur quelques'; Lambert, *La langue gauloise*, p. 179.

24 Marcellus 12.24; Meid, *Heilpflanzen*, p. 56. Cf. also *margan* in a similar, although more clearly Latinate formula on an eye-charm amulet from Picenum; Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, no. 31.

as the Ephesian letters, six mystical words which often appear on Greek protective amulets – *askion*, *kataskion*, *lix*, *tetrax*, *damnmeneus*, *aison* – forms that were reputedly, originally engraved on the cult statue of Artemis at Ephesus. Indeed, it was relatively common to add linguistically vacuous sequences to healing charms and other types of spells in late classical practice in lieu of more regular divine formulas or lists of names – and many of these are clearly also euphonic creations. Nonetheless, in the original Gaulish form it seems to be the presence of the name of the Celtic god Esus that gives Marcellus's throat-clearing charm its real power. In fact, *bricht* means 'charm, spell' as well as 'octosyllabic metre' in Irish, a nomenclature which has often been seen to represent more evidence for a key Celtic relationship between magic and metrical form.[25]

Such a connection between spells and poems need not be connected solely with the practices of figures like *filid*, however. Indeed, it may not even be a particularly Celtic development which is witnessed by the metrical spells of Marcellus. The growing prevalence of metrical charms is a pronounced feature of most of the better-known magical sources of late antiquity, Gallo-Roman or otherwise. All sorts of classical writers seem to have become particularly interested in preserving metrical charms in the later years of the empire. Yet Marcellus's book is by far the richest source for such expressions, and hence his *On Medicine* is often taken as the most important resource for the interpretation of such charms – sometimes even to the exclusion of inscribed healing amulets or even the works of other classical writers. His compilation does seem to include a selection of charms which are broadly representative of the types of curative enchantments common in his day, though, and not just of the kinds of magical medicinal expressions which were used in Roman Gaul.

Marcellus's work features a wide range of charms, some of which obviously reflect broader and common aspects of classical magical practice, others that seem to represent quite novel or particular developments and forms. For example, one of his spells features the following, almost comical, versified charm that is obviously modelled not merely on the acoustic effect of the repetition and alliteration of its opening lines, but also on other forms of magical rhetoric such as the 'just as …, so too …' analogical style so commonly found in *defixiones*:[26]

Tres virgines
mensam marmoream
duae torquebant,

in medio mari
positam habeant;
una retorquebat.

Quomodo hoc numquam
sic numquam
Gaia Seia

factum est,
sciat illa
corci dolorem.

25 R. Kotansky, 'Incantations and prayers for salvation on inscribed Greek amulets', in Faraone and Obbink, *Magika Hiera*, pp. 107–37; MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets*, pp. 116ff.

26 Marcellus 21.3; Dronke, 'The Leiden love-spell', 62–3, and see R. Heim, 'Incantamenta magica Graeca Latina', *(Fleckeisen's) Jahrbücher für classische Philologie* 19 (1892), supplement, pp. 463–576, for a collection of similar charms.

Three maidens in the midst of the sea
had set down a table of marble;
two bent it this way, one bent it that.

Just as this never has come to pass
so may she never know, that woman,
Gaia Seia, pain in the abdomen.

Other Latin charms preserved by Marcellus, however, appear to represent traditions quite separate from the kind of sorcery represented by the Graeco-Egyptian grimoires. Newly developed or perhaps merely not often recorded before his time, many of these expressions would continue to be popular in later, medieval practice. Short healing charms are peppered throughout the works of earlier Roman writers such as Pliny too (works which were rather more obviously popular with medieval writers), many of these incantations evidently being thought to derive their effectiveness principally from decorative acoustic features such as assonance and rhyme. Metrical charms thus seem merely to represent a different type of ancient magical expression from those usually found in the magical papyri or on ancient lamellas: although the rhythmic Celtic *defixiones* seem to represent some kind of middle form, the short medicinal charms of antiquity were clearly quite removed in origin from the type of magic (or magical genre) usually represented in classical binding spells.

Yet, unlike most ancient healing charms, it is the employment of divine names that usually seems particularly important to the operation of early medieval Celtic magical expressions. Even more so than the alliterating supernatural names of the Baudecet lamella, the versified invocation of Bregissa and Branderix of the Le Mas-Marcou *diakopos* brings out this aspect of Old Celtic incantatory magic particularly well. But a similar practice is not restricted only to ancient epigraphic and manuscript charms. Several Old Irish incantations are likewise known from continental clerical sources which appear to continue this magical tradition. A manuscript from St Gall, the Swiss monastery founded in the seventh century by the early Irish missionary of the same name (a follower of St Columba), has preserved a number of similar medieval Irish medical incantations which clearly depend on the invocation of divine or legendary figures to ensure that their remedies work.

Several of the charms which feature in the eighth- or ninth-century Hiberno-Swiss St Gall manuscript are self-evidently based on non-Celtic models, however, a dependency perhaps most obvious in the St Gall charm against headache, which is thoroughly Christian in theme. Beginning in Latin, it features an alliterating and rhythmical jumble of attributes associated, lorica-like, with pious names, before switching to Old Irish prose and describing a fairly unremarkable Christian remedy or salve:[27]

27 Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* 2, pp. 248–9; and cf. R.I. Best, 'The St. Gall incantation against headache', *Ériu* 8 (1915), 100, for another early Irish charm which features much the same Latin section (including *fons Helie*, *nasus Noé*, *labia Iob* etc.) and wishes *neam & sægul & ana donti gebus fo lige & erge*, 'Heaven and long life and riches to him who will sing it, lying down and rising up'.

Caput Christi *oculus Isaiæ*
frons nassium Nóe *labia lingua Salomonis*
collum Temathei *mens Beniamín*
pectus Pauli *iunctus Iohannis*
fides Abrache.
Sanctus sanctus sanctus *dominus deus Sabaoth;~;~;~.*

Canir anisiu cach dia imduchenn archenn galar · iarnagabáil dobir dasale it bais & dabir imduda are & fortchulatha & cani dupater fothrí lase & dobir cros ditsailiu forochtar dochinn & dogní atóirandsa dano · U · fortchiunn;-;-;-

Head of Christ, eye of Isaiah,
bridge of the nose of Noah, lips and tongue of Solomon,
joy of Timothy, mind of Benjamin,
breast of Paul, attachment of John,
faith of Abraham.
Holy holy holy Lord, God, Sabaoth.

This is to be sung every day about your head against headache. After singing it, though, put spittle into your palm and put it round your two temples and on the back of your head, and sing then your *Our Father* thrice and put a cross of your spittle on the crown of your head, and then make this sign, U, on your head.

Similar charms can be found in many other manuscripts of medieval date as a widespread trade in such medical knowledge was transacted throughout Western Europe at the time. Most of these curative expressions also appear in fairly standard and predictable forms, although sometimes they are peppered with local additions. The opening section of the St Gall headache charm, for instance, is clearly based on a type of Christian chant or prayer that was quite common in its day, and medieval clerics sometimes even argued that pagan healing formulas should be replaced by Christian prayers – so despite the *defixio*-like anatomical styling, it is not clear that any trace of pre-Christian practice is to be recognised in the St Gall headache charm.[28] Nor is there much that can be called particularly Irish in such an expression except, of course, for the handwriting and the language used in the second part, the description of how to apply a headache salve made of sanctified spittle. Indeed, such is probably also the case with another of the St Gall incantations, one which this time is ranged against a thorn, but that, in contrast, is completely Irish and also appears to feature the influence of traditional Celtic lore:[29]

Ni artu ní nim *ni domnu ní muir*
arnóib bríathraib *rolabrastar Crist assach(oich)*
dúscart dím an delg

28 V.I.J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Medieval Europe* (Princeton 1991), pp. 240ff.; E. Peters, 'The medieval church and state on superstition, magic and witchcraft: from Augustine to the sixteenth century', in Ankarloo and Clark, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, pp. 196ff.; E. Bozóky, *Charmes et prières apotropaïques*, Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, 86 (Turnhout 2003), pp. 36ff.

29 Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* 2, p. 248, with the rhythmical section not translated.

delg díuscoilt
crú ceiti
méim méinni
bé ái béim
n-and dodath scenn
toscen todaig
rogarg fiss Goibnen
aird Goibnenn renaird
Goibnenn ceingeth ass:-

Focertar indepaidse inim nadtét inuisce & fuslegar de immandelg immecuáirt & nitét foranairrinde nachforanálath & manibé andelg and dotóeth indalafiacail airthir achin;~;~;~:·

Nothing is higher than heaven,
nothing is deeper than the sea.
By the holy words
that Christ spoke from his cross,
remove from me the thorn.
A thorn which damages,
a blow's blood,
a blemishing kiss.
May it be his blow,
an unseemly fright,
yes a fright, yes a pain.
Very sharp is Goibniu's science,
let Goibniu's goad go out
before Goibniu's goad!

This charm is laid in butter which goes not into water and some of it is smeared all round the thorn and it (the butter) goes neither on the point nor on the wound, and if the thorn is not there one of the two teeth in the front of his head will fall out.

Like the St Gall headache charm, this is a two-part text: it features a versified magical formula, part-Christian, part-other (although, like the headache incantation, it is not parsed as poetry in the actual manuscript), and an explanation of how to use the charm (replete with typically magical hyperbole). Like the Latin charm from St Gall, the incantation is clearly rhythmical, although it displays quite archaic metrical features – that is, it is a form of *retoiric* or *rosc*. Indeed, part of the central, alliterating section of the thorn charm is so mannered it has proven difficult to translate. Nonetheless, the pentasyllabic 'go out' structure used in the incantation is a rhetorical form quite commonly found in medieval magic; and rather than representing a clear sign of a more fundamental paganism, it seems likely that the mention of Goibniu, the old Irish god of smithing, only serves here as a local accretion to a Christian original. After all, saints or biblical figures often appear in this way in more thoroughly Christian charms. For instance, an incantation recorded at the back of the *Stowe Missal* calls on the intercession of Ibar, one of the first four bishops of Ireland, to heal eye injuries and illnesses. A two-part charm (much like those from St Gall), the text of the probably ninth-century part-Irish, part-Latin healing spell is corrupt in parts, but what can be made out reads:[30]

30 Warner, *Stowe Missal* 2, pp. 39 and 42 [= Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* 2,

Admuiniur escop n-Ibar iccas … arrár (?) róicca do súil sen de ecc … r gi crist conclerc lais sid conasellais … rosc slando sulo:·

Haec cum dixisset exspuit in terram et fecit lutum ex (s)puto et lin(i)vit lu[tum] super oculos eius & dixit ei vade et lava in natatoria Siloe quod interpretatur misus abiit ergo et lavit et venit videns:~

I invoke Bishop Ibar who heals … against … heal your eye. May the blessing of God and … of Christ's … heal your eye … the whole of your eye.

As he said this, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay, saying to him 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

The Latin portion of this charm is a quote from the Gospel of St John that describes a scene where Christ heals the eyes of a blind man. It is clearly recounted here as a form of sympathetic (or just as …, so too …) magic, a widespread type of healing device known from both ancient and medieval spells which is usually called a *historiola* or narrative charm. Its inclusion is quite unremarkable from a broader medieval Christian perspective (and may explain the sanctified spittle of the St Gall headache charm). Bishop Ibar, on the other hand, was a contemporary of St Patrick's who is said to have brought up St Fillan, and is presumably invoked in the *Stowe Missal* eye charm because of pious insular sayings such as the verse 'The light of Bishop Ibar who smote heresy's head' that appears in a contemporary Irish martyrology.[31] Indeed, Goibniu and the other Celtic gods are described in euhemerised forms in medieval Welsh and Irish literature, so it could well be that Goibniu was included in the St Gall incantation because, like Bishop Ibar, he was considered a legendary figure rather than a pagan god by the monks who wrote the thorn-removing charm down. Otherwise it would have been simply too pagan to cite his name in Christian magic: papal proclamations from the period warn the clergy not to traffic in pagan tricks and incantations, and it seems unlikely that the monks of St Gall would have consciously dabbled in paganism. Goibniu's status as a renowned smith probably explains his appearance at the end of the St Gall charm – he seems to appear more as a secondary accretion rather than an essential agent in the thorn-removing incantation. In fact, it is clear from sources such as the *Lorica of St Patrick* that smiths were held to have magical powers in Irish tradition, much as Bishop Ibar was connected with the *Stowe Missal* eye charm because he was associated with (seeing the Christian)

p. 250]; K. Meyer, 'An Old Irish prayer for long life', in O. Eton (ed.), *A Miscellany Presented to John Macdonald Mackay, L.L.D., July, 1914* (Liverpool 1914), p. 229, n. 1.

31 John 9:7–8; W. Stokes (ed.), *The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee* (London 1905), p. 108; E. Bozóky, 'Mythic mediation in healing incantations', in S.D. Campbell *et al.* (eds), *Health, Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture* (New York 1992), pp. 84–92; D. Frankfurter, 'Narrating power: the theory and practice of the magical *historiola* in ritual spells', in M.W. Meyer and P.A. Mirecki (eds), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 129 (Leiden 1995), pp. 451–76; D.C. Skemer, *Binding Words: textual amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, Penn. 2006), pp. 105–7; cf. also J. and M. Carney, 'A collection of Irish charms', *Saga och sed* 1960, 146–8 and Mark 8:23 for similar instances of healing with holy spittle.

light. There is a very ancient European tradition of linking blacksmiths with magic, one perhaps epitomised in the Greek figure Hephaestus, who is as much a creator of magical objects as he is a god of the forge. So, although continental incantations such as those of Marcellus sometimes feature similar sympathetic or analogical calls on pagan Celtic powers (e.g. with Argos presumably filling the role assumed by Ibar in the *Stowe Missal* eye charm), it seems that very little of the St Gall thorn-removing incantation needs be considered properly pre-Christian despite the mention of the name of an early Celtic god at the end of the Old Irish charm.

After all, a similar explanation seems likely for a third of the St Gall incantations, one that also appears to mention a pagan divinity only secondarily. The incantation is a catch-all charm used to ward off various ailments, but it follows another fairly common medieval magical style. The mention of a euhemerised Celtic divinity also seems again to be merely an accretion, a legendary reference tacked on to the end of a pre-existing expression. The text additionally shows the same two-part structure of (metrically archaic or otherwise irregular) incantation and prose application seen in the three previously translated early Irish charms:

Tessurc marb · bíu ·
ardíring · argoth · sring ·
aratt díchinn · arfuilib · híairn ·
arul · loscas · tene · arub(al) · hithes · cú ·
rop achuhrú · crinas ·
teora cnoe · crete · teora féthe · fichte ·
benim · agalar ·
arfuch fuili · guil ·
Fuil · nirubatt · Rée ·
rop slán · frosaté ·
admuiniur · in slánicid ·
foracab · dian · cecht ·
liamuntir · coropslán ·
ani forsate · ;

focertar inso dogrés itbois láin diuisciu ocindlut & dabir itbéulu & imbir indamér atanessam dolutain itbélaib cechtar ái áleth ·

'I save the living dead.
Against eructation, against spear-thong,
against sudden tumour, against bleeding caused by iron,
against oil which fire burns, against the app(le) (?) that a dog eats.
Beaten be that which withers:
three nuts that tremble, three sinews that weave (?).
I strike its disease,
I vanquish weeping blood.
Let it not be a chronic tumour.
Whole be that whereupon it goes.
I invoke the salve
which Diancecht left with his family
that it may be whole
that which upon it goes.

> This is laid always in your palm full of water when washing, and put it in your mouth, and insert the two fingers that are next to the little-finger into your mouth, each of them apart.

The reference to the living dead at the outset of the charm is not a feature known from other medieval incantations, and the metrical list of illnesses warded against which follow appears to be equally idiosyncratically Irish. The term *admuiniur* 'I invoke' that comes after the listing, however, is also found as the opening word of the Ibar charm, a wording which underlines the impression that the mention of Diancecht which follows is a relatively late addition to the incantation. Diancecht, though, is the Irish god who is especially famed for his healing powers in insular mythology and is the reputed author of an Irish medical tract, the *Judgements of Diancecht*, which seems to be an originally pre-Christian composition. With Goibniu the smith, Diancecht is accounted one of the four 'craft gods' in Irish tradition, as a patron of leechcraft, the medieval art of healing. A salve named for him would consequently be expected to be particularly efficacious. Like Goibniu, Diancecht has obviously been strongly euhemerised in such sources, however, so it seems that expressions like these are scarcely more pagan than the tales of druidic curses in insular literary texts are – they are semi-Christian ultimately, but appear to have been only secondarily so, composed as they are after the pagan Irish gods had long been Christianised. Similar figures are not called upon in comparable later medieval incantations, though, and like Marcellus's Gaulish charms these are metrical expressions, much as the longer Old Celtic *defixiones* are. Consequently the mention of figures such as Diancecht presumably does represent some sort of carry over from pagan times, much as does the versified form taken by such charms.[32]

Another early Irish metrical expression, a blessing entitled a *Prayer for Long Life* (*cétnad n-áisse*), begins, again, with *admuiniur* but, rather than calling on a clearly pagan divinity, instead invokes the aid of a group of figures, ones reminiscent of both the 'three maidens / in the midst of the sea' of Marcellus's charm against abdominal pain as well as the seven sisters (*septem sorores*) which appear in several continental and Scandinavian medical incantations as embodiments of disease. The Irish blessing is not known from a monastic source, however, although it does seem more like a lorica (or even a counter-*defixio*) than a healing charm – not only does it begin with an invocation, it makes a reference to binding (*nasc(th)ar*), (good) fortune (*tacid*) as well as featuring a clearer reference to the notion that mortal lives are threads (*snáthe*), which is essential to the classical image of the spinning, measuring and shearing Fates. This verbal echoing of several of the key themes of the Chamalières curse (*snáthe* is a derived form of *snúd* 'spin', *tacid* of *tucaither* 'destine') is not the only feature which marks the *Prayer* out as archaic, however: rather than being from an obviously clerical source, the *Prayer for Long Life* is preserved in a manuscript which was evidently prepared in order to help train tenth-century Irish poets, one of several helpful prayers or blessings (a *cétnad* is literally a 'first' or 'inaugural poem') to be learnt in a *fili*'s ninth year of study. The *cétnad n-áisse* otherwise has very little in common with other early Celtic

32 D.A. Binchy, 'Bretha Déin Cecht', *Ériu* 20 (1966), 1–66.

magical or religious expressions, though, apart from its use of supernaturally significant numbers and its clear metricality. The *Prayer* is also mostly written in the typical seven-syllable or *claidemnus* metre of the oldest Irish poetry (rather than one of the more difficult styles of *retoiric* or *rosc*), and features three main sections, each of which begins with *admuiniur*. The first of these reads:[33]

Admuiniur secht n-ingena trethan	I invoke the seven daughters of the sea,
dolbte snáthe macc n-áesmar	who fashion the threads of the sons of long life.
trí bás úaim rohuccait[er]	May three deaths be taken from me!
trí áes dam doratait[er]	May three lives be granted to me!
secht tonna tacid dam dorodalt[er]	May seven waves of fortune be poured for me!
nímchoillet messe fom chúairt	Ghosts will not harm me on my journey
i llúrig lasrién cen léniud	in radiant breastplate without hindrance!
Ní nasc(th)ar mo chlú ar chel	My fame will not be bound in death!
dom(thí) áes nímthí bás corba sen.	Let old age come to me! – death shall not come to me until I am old!

Travel was one of the great uncertainties of medieval life, not merely because of the dangers posed by the relative lawlessness of the day, but also the threat of disease and foul weather, and the prevailing sense of discomfort usually concomitant with visiting foreign places and climes. Journey charms are thus a fairly common feature of magical collections from the early Middle Ages. Rather than representing such a charm, however, the Irish *Prayer for Long Life* instead adopts the notion of a journey as an allegory for life, much as do well-known Christian expressions such as loricas. Indeed, the other two stanzas of the blessing continue in a similar manner, making more references to perils and vicissitudes as well as the lucky number seven, before ending with a final appeal to the holy Trinity.[34]

In parts the *Prayer for Long Life* reads more like a psalm than it does a healing incantation (or even a counter-*defixio*). Its call upon the Trinity may well be a secondary accretion, but its mention of a breastplate (with Irish *llúrig* clearly a loan of Latin *lorica*) surely indicates that it is a composition of Christian (perhaps eighth-century) date – the mention of 'binding', after all, appears to be a reference to the ancient heroic theme of fame which outlives mortal life. Evidently the *Prayer* was learned by *filid* because it was considered a particularly excellent form of blessing. It was not an everyday benediction or charm, but seems to have been especially valued for its rich gnomic and allegorical style. *The Prayer for Long Life* seems more comparable to a modern expression such as Max Ehrmann's famous

[33] R. Thurneysen, 'Mittelirische Verslehren', in W. Stokes and E. Windisch (eds), *Irische Texte* 3 (Leipzig 1891), pp. 53–4 and 117–18 [= idem, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, pp. 393–4 and 456–7]; Meyer, 'An Old Irish prayer for long life', pp. 226–32; E. Campanile, 'Mittelirische Verslehren II, 96–98', *Studi e Saggi Linguistici* 6 (1966), 160–5; MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets*, pp. 133–4; Mees, 'Fate and malediction'; and cf. Borsje, 'Fate in early Irish texts', 230–1.

[34] For an Irish journey charm (also of a lorica-like type), see K. Meyer, 'Four religious poems', *Ériu* 6 (1912), 112, and cf. pp. 114–15. Other members of the *cétnad* genre, such as the *cétnad tige núi* 'blessing of a new house' recorded as part of the curriculum of a *fili*'s ninth year of study, are clearly comparable to medieval Latin benedictions such as a *benedictio mansionis*; MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets*, pp. 201–2.

Desiderata ('Go placidly …') than it does a pagan spell, the *cétnad*'s imagery drawn from a range of sources: biblical, classical and medieval, as well as indigenous insular tradition.[35]

Yet the use of versified charms and spells would still seem to be a good indication of continuity in Old Celtic magical practice, much as the appearance of pagan gods in some of the medical incantations recorded by early Irish clerics more obviously is. In fact, one of the archaisms which is characteristic of the *roscada* is the comparative paucity of Latin loanwords they preserve, a feature which particularly underlines their claim to archaism. Yet there are also examples of medieval incantations and prayers other than loricas or pagan god-invoking charms which appear in more regular, and presumably more recent, poetic forms.

There are a handful of clearly Christian medieval Irish incantations which are written in more easily recognised and regular metres. None appears in *bricht*; but, for example, a heptasyllabic tooth charm recorded in the fifteenth-century compilation the *Speckled Book (Leabhar Breac)* reads:[36]

Ordu Thomais togaide	May the thumb of (St) Thomas the chosen
i toeb Crist cen chinaid	in the side of Christ without sin
ron·ícca mo déta cen guba	heal my teeth without lamentation
ar chruma is ar idhain.	against worms and against pangs.

This is clearly a Christian charm against the worms which were thought in premodern times to burrow into rotten teeth, but it is composed in a typical syllable-counting metre of a much earlier day. To be said in between two *Our Father*s, according to a short accompanying Latin explanation, the charm is versified in a regular Old Irish metre, its form rather unremarkable in terms of the Christian Celtic tradition. Indeed, it is clear that the alliteration of *togaide* 'thumb', *Thomais* 'Thomas' and *toeb* 'side' and the next line's *Crist* 'Christ' and *chinaid* 'sin' provides the phonological model for *déta* 'teeth' on the one hand, and *guba* 'lamentation' and *chruma* 'worms' in the final two verses on the other. There can be little doubt that St Thomas and Christ are the most essential parts of this charm; they scarcely seem likely to represent late replacements for similar pagan figures.

Other Irish incantations recorded at late medieval dates are often more clearly formulaic, though – some feature repeated, stylised sequences as well as better-parallelled, more regular poetic lines. Another charm written in one of the margins of the *Speckled Book*, for example, although clearly a fully Christian formulation, witnesses a nine-syllable-long alliterative listing (much as occurs in one of the charms from St Gall) as well as several similarly expressed lines of Old Irish *claidemnus*. It even calls itself an *éli* 'incantation', although rather than representing a native Celtic word, this term may be a loan of the Old Norse description *heill* 'omen, amulet, healing charm':[37]

35 See Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon*, pp. 12–13 and 173–8 on the enduring Indo-European theme of everlasting fame.

36 W. Stokes, 'Irish folklore', *Revue celtique* 5 (1882), 391–2.

37 H. Zimmer, 'Keltische Studien', *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 33 (1895), 144; and cf. Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* 2, p. 250, and Warner, *Stowe Missal*, II, pp.

niploch, nipcru, nipatt, nifallsiu
anni frisicuirither mofhele

bennacht forinngalursa,
bennacht forin corp hita,
bennacht forinhélesa,
bennacht forcách rotla;

Matheus, Marcus, Lucas, Johannes et pater prius et post.

May it not be a hole, may it not be gore, may it not be swelling, may it not be cancer that my incantation is applied against.

A blessing on this sickness,
a blessing on the body which it is in,
a blessing on this incantation,
a blessing on every one of you which it is applied upon.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and say an *Our Father* before and after.

With its meristic repetition, the *Speckled Book* charm seems more akin to a lorica than an expression like the bishop-, saint- or even pagan-divinity-invoking incantations from the *Stowe Missal* or St Gall. Indeed, the *Our Father*s to be said before and after and the repetitions of 'may it not' and 'a blessing on' of the charm are characteristic of a later type of Irish incantation, evidence for which is not restricted to Irish sources.

Much as with Hibernian loricas, several linguistically Irish charms also feature in early medieval English (and even Anglo-Scottish) contexts. Most of these magical expressions are so scrambled, however, it is hard to make much sense of them today. Suitably medical phrases such as *sruth fola* 'stream of blood' can be made out from them readily enough, and some even appear in the context of what are clearly typical magical rhetorical styles. An Irish charm against parasites preserved in the Old English collection the *Lacnunga*, or *Remedies*, for instance, clearly begins with a triple Old Irish expression, *gono mil, orgo mil, marbu mil*, 'I wound the beast, I strike the beast, I kill the beast', and some alliteration, as well as forms featuring *marb* 'kill', is clear in what else is recorded of the charm: *marbsai ramum tofeð tengo docuillo biran cuiðær cæfmiil scuiht cuillo scuiht cuib duill marbsiranum*. The accompanying eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon text describes it as a *wyrm (…) gealdor* 'worm charm', and much as with the two incantations from the *Speckled Book*, the Old English commentary indicates that the procedure is to be rounded out with the recitation of an *Our Father* (albeit one to be whispered, as is the corrupt Irish, into the patient's ear).[38]

39 and 42, for a charm against a thorn (*ar delc*) from the *Stowe Missal* which has a similar sequence: *nip hon, nip anim, nip at(t), nip galar, nip crú cruach, nip loch liach, nip aupaith*, 'may it not be a spot, may it not be a blemish, may it not be swelling, may it not be an illness, may it not be clotted gore, may it not be a lamentable hole, may it not be an enchantment.' A connection of *éli* with Aramaic *hely* 'my God', a common medieval magic word of New Testament origin (*DIL* s.v. *éle*) appears little more than a guess; cf. MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets*, pp. 4, 190 and 193.

38 Zimmer, 'Keltische Studien', 141–53; R. Thurneysen, 'Grammatisches und etymolo-

Perhaps more strikingly, though, one of these Irish passages, recorded in different, largely corrupt versions in a tenth-century Anglo-Saxon compilation, the *Leechbook of Bald*, is also recorded on three finger-rings, all of which have been found in the north of England. The charms – almost completely nonsensical in the forms recorded on the rings – are even inlaid not with Roman letters but instead with Old English runes, the example from Bramham Moor, West Yorkshire, for instance, reading *ærkriufltkriuriþonglæstæpon tol*. Indeed, a further Irish charm, recorded in both the *Lacnunga* and the *Leechbook of Bald*, has made its way into Scandinavian tradition where, much like loricas, it is recorded on runic amulets as well as in an orthographically Latinate manuscript collection of charms (as *acræ*, *ærcre ærnem* and *akrǣr krerman*). Both examples of these largely now unreadable sequences presumably once represented incantations which began with the adjuration *ar crú* 'against gore', an expression comparable to the imploration 'may it not be gore' in the *éli* from the *Speckled Book* described above, while the *ærnem* sequence is paralleled by *ar neim* 'against poison', one of a selection of ailments warded off in the *Lorica of St Patrick*.[39]

Thus medieval Irish charms seem to have been valued in other countries just as much as were other expressions of early Hibernian lore. They have evidently been so corrupted in such sources, however, that it appears unlikely that they were understood as much more than euphonic expressions, clever-sounding rhythmic sequences such as are recorded by ancient authors like Marcellus and Pliny. Yet, seen in the light of Marcellus's Gaulish charms (and notably unlike many of the Latin incantations he records), they often seem to represent the earliest examples of what would later become the commonest of medieval forms of medical incantation. Consequently, the widespread later tradition of healing charms which name diseases (or other illnesses) and call upon divine or legendary powers to cure them may well have been another distinctly Celtic contribution to broader European experience, a legacy of the medical lore of late antiquity preserved in the popular healing tradition of early medieval times.

Yet despite the preservation of Irish incantations dating back as far as the ninth century, evidence for an indigenous Celtic magical tradition has often been sought instead in the form of the charms put in the mouths of characters in often substantially later Irish literary sources. These passages rarely seem to have much in common with the Celtic spells that have otherwise survived, however, and given the way in which saintly curses are represented in insular tradition, such literary expressions of early Celtic magic might similarly be dismissed as little more than narrative flourishes, inventions that at best only vaguely reflect contemporary incantatory practices. Healing charms (or, rather, *iptha & éle & arthana* 'spells and incantation and charms') are mentioned in sources such as the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*, but the words of the incantations used in such episodes are not usually given. The passages of *retoiric* or *rosc* that other kinds of literary charms are generally recorded as do, however, often feature evidence that suggests

gisches', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 13 (1919–21), 106; H. Meroney, 'Irish in the Old English charms', *Speculum* 20 (1945), 172–82.

39 Meroney, 'Irish in the Old English charms', nos 2 and 4 [= Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, nos 19 and 73; and cf. 70 and 76–7]; MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets*, pp. 139–41.

they are quite archaic, perhaps even of pagan pedigree. They may well represent evidence more faithful to an indigenous tradition than do the substantially Christian or Christianised incantations which appear in the *Stowe Missal*, the St Gall manuscript, in Anglo-Saxon sources or even the somewhat later compilation of the *Speckled Book*.[40]

The most-often cited of these archaic insular literary expressions are those ascribed to the legendary Irish poet Amairgin. He is the reputed author of three passages which feature verses that seem to record a very early form of Hibernian language. In fact, it was obviously thought in medieval times that the poems which have come down to us as creations of Amairgin represented the earliest literature of Ireland, if not the whole of the British Isles.

Amairgin may be no more than a mythical figure, however, a brother of Evir, Ir and Eremon, the sons of Mil who, according to the *Book of Invasions*, colonised Ireland in dim prehistory. After all, it is not at all clear that the *Book of Invasions* records a particularly ancient tradition.[41] Yet it is the poet Amairgin who is said to have apportioned to the Irish gods, the Tuatha Dé Danann, their otherworldly homes after Ireland had been conquered by the Milesians, the legendary ancestors of the Irish. Furthermore, the verses ascribed to Amairgin in the *Book of Invasions*, although recorded only in comparatively late medieval Irish forms, also seem quite essential and basic, as if they were truly of some antiquity. It has been claimed that they are of ancient Irish composition – that they are contemporary with the earliest Ogham inscriptions. Amairgin's verses could well represent the oldest recorded Irish metre, then, and it has long been supposed that they might be the earliest surviving lines of formal poetry in any vernacular literature in Europe outside the classical tradition.

Much has been made particularly of the first of the Amairgin poems, one of several hymns and charms cited in one of the medieval Irish metrical tracts as to be learned in a student *fili*'s twelfth and final year. The hymn features the repetition of numerous 'I am' statements reminiscent of similar *ego eimi* or 'I am' formulas used in ancient spells where magicians symbolically take on the voice of supernatural powers:[42]

Am gáeth i m-muir,
am tond trethan,
am fuaim mara,
am dam secht ndirend,
am séig i n-ail,

40 C. O'Rahilly (ed.), *Táin Bó Cuailnge: from the Book of Leinster*, Irish Texts Society 49 (Dublin 1967), pp. 87 and 224 (ll. 3167–8).

41 T.F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin 1946), pp. 195ff.; R.M. Scowcroft, 'Leabar Gabhála – part II: The growth of the tradition', *Ériu* 39 (1988), 12ff.

42 Thurneysen, 'Mittelirische Verslehren', pp. 60–3 and 119 [= idem, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, pp. 399–401 and 458]; R.A.S. Macalister (ed.), *Lebor Gabála Érenn* 5 (Dublin 1956), poem no. lxix, pp. 110–13 [also trans. D.F. Mela, in D.G. Calder *et al.*, *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry II: the major Germanic and Celtic texts in translation* (Cambridge 1983), p. 105]. Romantic speculation concerning the poem is epitomised by R. Graves, *The White Goddess: a historical grammar of poetic myth*, 3rd ed. (London 1952), pp. 205ff.

am dér gréne,
am cain lubai,
am torc ar gail,
am he i l-lind,
am loch i m-maig,
am brí a ndai,
am brí dánae,
am gái i fodb, *feras feochtu*
am dé delbas *do chind codnu.*

I am wind on the sea,
I am a stormy wave,
I am a roar of the ocean,
I am a stag of seven (antler) tips,
I am a hawk in a cliff,
I am a tear of the sun,
I am a flower fair,
I am a boar for valour,
I am a salmon in a pool,
I am a lake in a plain,
I am a word of poetic art,
I am a word of skill,
I am a spear in cutting that pours out savagery,
I am a god who makes antlers for the head.

It also ends with a clutch of rhetorical questions of a similarly grandiose gnomic style, the majority of which are composed in *bricht*:

Coiche nod gleith clochur slébe?
Cia on co tagair aesa éscai?
Cia du i l-aig fuinid gréne?
Cia beir buar o thig Techrach?
Cia buar Téthrach tibi?
Cia dam, cia dé delbas faebru a ndind ailsiu?
Cáinte in gai, cáinte gaithe?

Who smooths the stones of a mountain?
Who knows the age of the moon?
Who sees where the setting sun rests?
Who takes the cattle from the house of Tethra (i.e. the chief of the Fomorians)?
At whom do the cattle of Tethra smile?
Who is a stag, who is a god that sharpens a spike of sore?
Enchantments in a spear? Enchantments of a wind?

Yet the claim to antiquity for the Amairgin poems is based in part on features particularly clear in the second Amairgin passage, the *Incantation of Amairgin*. Composed (mostly), in addition to its same-line alliteration, using a chain-like style known in Irish as *conachlonn* (i.e. the last word of most lines is repeated as the first of the next), it is stichic (continuous) rather than stanzaic (separated into discrete sections or verses), and despite being preserved only in comparatively late forms of medieval Irish, it exhibits features which suggest it is a very old

composition. But it is not only these quite striking stylistic features which help to make it appear to be so archaic, it is a peculiar metrical behaviour evident in the text that makes it particularly unlike most other examples of early Irish poetry: it also uses an odd poetic rhythm, a word-foot trimetre – that is, each line is always exactly three words long. This is a simple metrical form which is mostly restricted to incantations when it is used in Latin, and is, moreover, the very rhythmical style taken by Marcellus's eye charm. Indeed, comparable triplicity is especially well represented in all sorts of early magical formulas, not just the incantations recorded by Marcellus or the ancient binding curses which appear on Gaulish spell tablets.[43]

The *Incantation of Amairgin* is particularly well suited thematically to its context: the invasion of Ireland by the early Celts. It is said to have been used in the *Book of Invasions* to overcome a magical storm sent by the druids and poets of the Tuatha Dé Danann to stop the sons of Mil returning to Ireland after they had agreed to retreat briefly back into the sea. It features references to the capital Tara, to Bres, the subject of the curse of Cairbre, and to the ships of the sons of Mil, while all along praising the beauty of Ireland in what seems to be a typically Celtic manner:[44]

Ailiu íath nhÉrenn,	I request the land of Erin:
hÉrmach muir mothach,	coursed be the sea fertile,
mothach sliabh srethach,	fertile the mountain a-strewn,
srethach caill cíthach,	a-strewn the wood so showery,
cíthach aub essach,	showery the river of water-falls,
essach loch lindmar,	of water-falls the lake of deep pools,
lindmar tór tipra,	of deep pools the hill-top well,
tipra túaith óenach,	a well of people, an assembly,
óenach rígTemrach;	an assembly of the king of Tara;
Temair tór túathach,	Tara the hill of the people,
túatha mac Míled,	the people of the sons of Mil,
Míled long libern;	of Mil, of ships, of barks,
libern ard Éiru,	of barks lofty, Erin,
Éiru árd díglass,	Erin lofty, darkly sung,
díchetal rogáeth,	an incantation of great cunning,
rogáes bán Breise,	great cunning of the wives of Bres,
Breise, bán Buaigne,	of Bres, of the wives of Buaigne;
bé adbul Ériu,	the great lady Erin,
Éremón artus,	Eremon has harried her,
Ir, Éber, ailsius –	Ir and Evir have requested her;
ailiu íath Éirenn.	I request the land of Erin.

The *Incantation* begins with the same verb (*ailiu*) as opens Mug Ruith's hand-stone spell and describes itself as a *díchetal*, a derived form of the regular Celtic word for 'song'. Apart from featuring three words, however, each line of the *Incantation* is also five syllables long, a typical-enough metrical form in early Irish verse (called

43 J. Travis, 'Elegies attributed to Dallan Forgaill', *Speculum* 19 (1944), 98–100; idem, *Early Celtic Versecraft*, pp. 4 and 6.

44 Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, V, poem no. lxxii, pp. 114–16.

claenre 'uneven in its termination' in medieval poetic primers); in fact, the *Incantation* is even cited as an exemplar of rhyming poetry in one medieval Irish metrical tract. Pentasyllabic lines also feature in several of the Irish medical incantations. But whether this composition accredited to Amairgin was really supposed to be a charm or just a narrative poem is not immediately clear – poems often appear at important points in early Irish tales as if they served to highlight certain incidents or to enhance the tension surrounding particularly dramatic events.[45] The triple-word structure and the stichic nature of the *Incantation of Amairgin* do seem to mark it out as somewhat odd – double word-foot measure is used often enough in early Irish poems, but not such triple forms. The pentasyllabic *Incantation* seems rather close metrically to short Gaulish poems like Marcellus's (rhyming and alliterating) charms as well as sections of the St Gall and *Stowe Missal* incantations (although none of these so consistently features lines of five-syllable length). Three-word structure is more obviously to be seen in some of Marcellus's other formulas, such as *argidam, margidam, sturgidam*, though, or in some of the triple repetitions of the early Irish manuscript charms. Moreover, such a metre is also common in Latin magical sources: for example, in the following rhyming and alliterating charm for foot pain recorded in the last century BC by the Roman scholar Varro:[46]

Ego tui memini,	I think of you,
medere meis pedibus:	heal my feet:
terra pestem teneto,	let the earth restrain the pest!
salus hic maneto	let health abide this
in meis pedibus.	in my feet!

It could well be that similar Roman charms influenced Marcellus's magical Old Celtic couplets. After all, several Latin charms of this metrical three-word type are known, including a number of nonsensical expressions (Cato's *huat haut haut* charm, for instance, begins with a clear trimetre). Nonetheless, similar expressions are also found in casual Latin verse; for example, the emperor Hadrian is said to have composed the following simple, alliterating and rhyming, largely trimetrical poem on his death bed:[47]

Animula vagula blandula	Sweet little soul, flitting away,
hospes comesque corporis,	guest and friend to my frame,
quae nunc abibis in loca	where are you going now, to what place
pallidula rigida nudula?	bare and ghastly, without grace?
nec ut soles dabis iocos!	no longer together to joke and play!

45 Thurneysen, 'Mittelirische Verslehren', pp. 35–6 [= idem, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, pp. 374–5]; R.M. Scowcroft, 'Leabar Gabhála – part I: The growth of the text', *Ériu* 38 (1987), 90.

46 Varro, *Rust.* 1.2.27; G. Calder (ed.), *Auraicept na n-Éces: the scholars' primer* (Edinburgh 1917), p. 111.

47 Aelius Spartianus, *Vita Hadriani* 25.9; A.A. Barb, 'Animula vagula blandula … Notes on jingles, nursery-rhymes and charms, with an excursus on Noththe's sisters', *Folklore* 61 (1950), 15–30.

Hadrian's biographer Aelius Spartianus cites this poem in order to impugn the Graecophile emperor's reputation, recording this composition as evidence of how unsophisticated Hadrian's efforts at poetry were. Many of the versified charms which appear in late medical compilations (such as Marcellus's) take similar simple forms, quite unlike the more elaborate styles considered proper among poets who had received a full classical training. Such expressions (especially Hadrian's three-word rhyming lines *animula vagula blandula* and *pallidula rigida nudula*) suggest, then, that the triple-word foot structure seen in several Latin healing charms is merely a sign that they are typical-enough popular expressions – that they represent little more than verse lacking the sophistication of the more formal style of ancient poetry originally adopted by the Romans from the Greeks.

The *Incantation of Amairgin* may be quite archaic, but, much as is the case with similar Roman verse, there need not have been anything inherently magical about the Irish composition's use of word-foot trimetre. Such a line was quite rare in medieval Irish, but a functional linkage with the kind of triplicity to be seen, say, in expressions such as the 'holy holy holy' of the St Gall incantation against headache seems unlikely. The Chamalières curse ends with a triple metrical form, much as the versifications from Rom and Larzac often seem to take on comparable word-foot measures. But many early Irish poems are composed in double word-foot metres, so the triple-word structure of the *Incantation of Amairgin* may merely represent a variation on a fairly common early form of insular composition. Indeed, expressions of this comparatively simple type seem to represent forms of popular verse attested also by some rather more evidently archaic Old Irish poems – they stand in contrast to the more refined syllable-counting styles which became predominate in the learned tradition of the Irish monks and *filid* of later times. Yet a prophetic charm ascribed to the Morrigan recorded in the *Second Battle of Moytura* is clearly composed in a quite similar style, and not only does the *Prophecy of the Morrigan* feature mostly trisyllabic triple-word feet, it is also mostly composed in *conachlonn* (or at least using similar, linking, alliteration):[48]

Síth co nem,	Peace up to heaven,
nem co doman,	heaven to earth,
doman fo nim,	earth under heaven,
nert hi cách.	strength in everyone.
Án forlánn,	A cup overfull,
lán do mil,	full of honey,
mid co sáith,	mead aplenty,
sam hi ngam,	summer in winter.
Gai for sciath,	Spear on a shield,
sciath for dunad,	shield on a fort [i.e. a warrior],
dunad lonngarg;	a fort bold and fierce,
longait[er] tromfoíd	great grieving is banished.
Fod(b) di uí,	Fleece from sheep,
ross forbiur,	wood [i.e. game] on a spit,
benna abu,	horned beasts in a yard,
airbe im(m)eatha.	fenced-in abundance.

48 Gray (ed.), *Cath Maige Tuired*, pp. 70–1 (§166), with incomplete translation.

Mess for crannaib,	Nuts on trees,
craob do scís	a branch drooping down,
scís do áss.	drooping from growth.
Sáith do mac,	Wealth for a son,
mac for muin,	a son on a shoulder,
muinél tairb,	the neck of bull,
tarb di arccoin.	a bull for slaughtering.
Odhb do crann,	Knot to a wood,
crann do ten,	wood to a fire,
tene a nn-ail,	fire in a stone,
ail a n-uír	a stone in the soil [i.e. a memorial].
Uích a mbuaib	Salmon [i.e. wisdom] their winning,
Boinn a mbrú.	the Boyne [i.e. Newgrange] their dwelling.
brú lafefaid	a dwelling bounded by prosperity fair.
Ossglas i(n)aer	Green growth in the air,
errach foghamar	[in] spring [and in] autumn,
forasit e(a)tha.	crops abound.
Iall do tir,	Held secure the land,
tir co trachd	land as far as the shore,
lafeabrae,	surrounded by a foreshore fair,
bidruad rossaib	[with] ever-sturdy woodlands,
síraib rithmár.	extensive and ranging far.
Nach scel laut?	'Have you any you news?'
Síth co nemh.	Peace up to heaven.

Such prophecies have long been linked with *imbas forosnai* and other early Irish expressions which suggest that there was a longstanding connection between the *filid* and divination, the simple form of the *rosc* or *retoiric* they evidence putatively a sign that such expressions are based on dreamy mantic utterances. The *Prophecy of the Morrigan* appears mostly to be a praise poem which lauds the coming peaceful and fertile rule of the Tuatha Dé Danann, however; it is obviously couched in different terms from those of the *Incantation of Amairgin*, but is particularly similar metrically (and in its naturalistic way somewhat thematically as well) to the second Amairgin poem. Its *conachlonn* passages such as 'knot to a wood / wood to a fire / fire in a stone / a stone in the soil' have a driving quality to them, although, much like the mention of salmon (i.e. the legendary salmon of wisdom), these seem to have been gnomic expressions originally, much as appear in Old Norse poems such as the Odinic *Sayings of the High One* (*Hávamál*). The *Prophecy of the Morrigan* is quite close in form to Irish poetry of the archaic *retoiric* or *rosc* types, but these were also used to record maxims, legal aphorisms and the like: that is, expressions which are clearly neither prophetic nor magical. Of the Amairgin poems or early Irish literary prophecies, none clearly evidences characteristics which obviously make it more magical than any other specimen of Old Irish verse composed in such an archaic form. Despite the use of simple word-foot structures, they bear little in common linguistically or thematically with the ancient Celtic curses and early medieval incantations that have survived. Their similarity to charms recorded in both ancient and medieval manuscripts seems little more than a reflection that they have their origin in relatively unsophisticated poetry, just as is the case with linguistically Latin charms. It is hard

to be rid of the suspicion that both the *Prophecy of the Morrigan* and the Amairgen poems are just literary creations, verses employed in order to enhance narrations invented by poets with little knowledge of (or perhaps merely little interest in faithfully representing) how pagan Irish magic actually worked.[49]

After all, other Celtic incantations recorded in early Irish literature can take quite different forms. Most obviously, the short charm chanted by Diancecht's son Miach to heal Nuada's arm in the *Second Battle of Moytura* is paralleled by a very common type of spell. The words Miach uses – *Alt fri alt ocus féith fri féith!* 'Joint to joint and sinew to sinew!' – seem particularly similar to those which appear in several other healing incantations, perhaps most famously at the end of the second of the two ninth-century German Merseburg charms:

> Phol and Wodan rode to the wood;
> then Balder's foal sprained its foot.
> Then Sinthgunt sang over it and Sunna her sister,
> then Frija sang over it and Volla her sister,
> then Wodan sang over it, as he well knew how,
> as for this bone-sprain, so for blood-sprain, so for limb-sprain,
> bone to bone, blood to blood, limb to limb, as if they be glued together.

This 'joint to joint' or 'limb to limb' expression appears in many later medical incantations and is echoed in such diverse traditions as Scottish, Finnish, Estonian, Lithuanian and Russian folklore. Evidently, the chanting of charms while wounds were dressed with bandages was a relatively common practice in many European cultures, and the charms chanted often made reference to putting broken like together with like. Indeed, an immediately comparable expression (featuring 'marrow to marrow' and 'joint to joint') is even known from ancient Indian use. This instance, often thought to be connected with the Merseburg charm and Miach's words in the *Second Battle of Moytura*, appears in a source over a millennium and a half older than the Western European texts, however, and although there have been those who have attempted to link the Sanskrit horse-leg-healing charm from the ancient *Atharva-Veda* with the similar, although much later (and geographically removed) European expressions, such a common retention may be too chronologically (if not geographically) fraught to be true. The German charm and the Irish example (as well as the later Christian reflections) do appear to be much the same sort of magical expression, though, and presumably do represent some sort of reflection of a regular, medieval and quite widely recognised form of magical like-with-like healing rhetoric.[50]

49 J. Carney, 'Three Old Irish accentual poems', *Ériu* 22 (1971), 23–80.

50 A. Kuhn, 'Indische und germanische segenspruche', *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung auf dem Gebiete des Deutschen, Griechischen und Lateinischen* 13 (1864), 49ff.; W. Krause, *Die Kelten*, Religionsgeschichtliche Lesebuch 13 (Tübingen 1929), p. 42; R. Ködderitzsch, 'Der Zweite Merseburger Zauberspruch und seine Parallelen', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 33 (1974), 45–57; MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets*, p. 154; and cf. R. Renehan, 'The staunching of Odysseus' blood: the healing power of magic', *American Journal of Philology* 113 (1992), 1–4; and Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon*, p. 539.

Rather more reminiscent of an Old Celtic incantation, however, is the alliterating battle song or charm chanted by the euhemerised god Lugh, also in the *Second Battle of Moytura*. More clearly metrical than the short formula ascribed to Miach, it is of a much less regular style than most of the other reputedly magical expressions known from such sources. Moreover, not only is Lugh's Old Celtic counterpart Lugus often associated with the classical magical gods Mercury and Hermes, the actions said to be taken by Lugh while he recites the medieval Irish incantation are also striking. Lugh chants the song, according to the tale, while standing on one leg and with one eye closed, actions which seem to replicate those attested in descriptions of prophesising in Irish tradition. Again, this description may well indicate a literary confusion between the act of prophesising and casting a charm rather than represent a genuine magical tradition, although Lugh does seem to be especially linked with prophecy – not only is his Welsh reflection Lleu subjected to a triple destining of destinies in *Math Son of Mathonwy*, the ancient city of Lugudunum which appears to bear his name is connected with divination in classical tradition. Prophecy and other kinds of future-affecting magic might not have been thought so separate in medieval Ireland, and presumably the closing of one eye (and the sympathetic, emphasising practice of standing on one leg) was supposed to indicate a special form of viewing or seeing, much as *filid* were literally 'seers'. Lugh's action is also often connected in medieval sources with *glam dícenn*, though, a particularly dire form of satire. In fact, when the action is accompanied by the further sympathetic gesture of the subject holding one arm behind his or her back, the posture is called *corrguinecht* 'pointed wounding' and seems (as an even more emphatic form of looking) to be particularly linked with casting the evil eye: that is, with cursing. One of the Irish metrical tracts even describes a ritual whereby a group of *filid* go to the top of a hill to chant their *glam dícenn*, each holding a thorn from a whitethorn bush in hand – and another source still, apparently describing this ceremony both as *congain comail* or 'binding wounding' as well as sorcerous *corrguinecht*, indicates that the thorns are to be used to pierce (or rather wound: *guin*) a clay effigy of the victim of the satire, *kolossos*-like:[51]

> *cantain in aircetail co nguin a deilbi … deilb do-gnither do chinaidh, (&) co ndentar a guin (co ndelgaib) a cantain na glaime dicinde.*
>
> chanting the composition, together with piercing his likeness … a likeness which is made of clay. And it is pierced with thorns while the *glám dícenn* is chanted.

Yet the charm Lugh speaks in the *Second Battle of Moytura* has no suggestion of imprecation, satire, piercing or binding – or even of prophecy, the other kind of magical seeing associated with the one-eyed, one-legged posture in Irish accounts.

51 Thurneysen, 'Mittelirische Verslehren', pp. 96–7 [= idem, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, pp. 435–6]; W. Stokes, 'O'Davoren's glossary', *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* 2 (1904), 257 (§383), and cf. p. 269 (§457); *CIH* 1564.27–1565.19; Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar*, §24 (pp. 114–15 and 140); Guyonvarc'h, *Magie, médecine*, pp. 368ff.; J. Borsje and F. Kelly, 'The evil eye in early Irish literature and law', *Celtica* 24 (2003), 21ff.; Mees, 'Fate and malediction', 151–2.

Lugh's action instead seems rather more reminiscent of the distorting transformation that Cuchulainn undergoes during his battle rage in the *Cattle Raid of Cooley* – and, indeed, one of Lugh's feats in the *Second Battle of Moytura* is his besting of Balor, the one-eyed champion of the Fomorians. Yet, rather than martial matters, Lugh's name is more often linked with words indicating contracts or oaths, much as if he was originally conceptualised as some sort of old Celtic god of contracts or stipulations; hence, perhaps, his particular link with magical spells (over and above his general omnicompetence) in Irish mythology.

The *Song of Lugh* may well also represent an older composition than the narrative that appears about it. Another form of *retoiric* or *rosc*, it is metrically quite unlike the poetic genre of *cétal* or 'song' which is described in medieval metrical tracts as on the twelfth year of the curriculum of student *filid* (one of which is the *Song of Amairgin*). Lugh's battle chant is also difficult to translate surely, but it clearly features ring composition and contains several instances of a metrical form that is otherwise only known in the earliest clearly datable Irish verse. His literary incantation begins:[52]

> *Arotrai cath comartan!*
> *Isin cathairgal robris comlondo for slecht slúaig*
> *silsiter ria sluagaib sioabrai iath fer fomnai.*
> *Cuifecithai fir gen rogain lento gala …*
>
> Arise O battle clashing!
> The battle-strife broke with fury on a hewing host.
> Before the phantom host will be laid low the wary land of men.
> Men have come together compulsively, furies are being followed …

Metrically the *Song of Lugh* is a more sophisticated expression than the poems ascribed to the Morrigan and Amairgin. It begins with a standard-enough heptasyllabic line, but the longer verses which follow with their double linking alliteration (*cathairgal … comlondo … slecht slúaig* and so on) appear to exhibit the extended three-measure colometry characteristic of the earliest datable Irish compositions. *The Elegy of Columba*, for instance, can clearly be dated to shortly after St Columba's death (i.e. to the late seventh century) and features similar alternations between standard lines and extended tricolonic metres. *The Elegy of Columba* appears to have been preserved because, although its language was unclear to later audiences, it was thought to be a lucky composition, praising as it does the famous founder of Iona, the first monastery in Scotland. Not only does the *Song of Lugh* feature comparable archaic lines, however, it is also evidently built up by using a device similar to the *conachlonn* of the *Incantation of Amairgin* and the *Prophecy of the Morrigan*: the word *cath* 'battle' of the opening line is reflected in the compound *cathairgal* 'battle-strife' of the second; the (*slecht*) *slúaig* '(hewing) host' of the second line is repeated in the *sluagaib* (*sioabrai*) '(phantom) host' of the

52 Thurneysen, 'Mittelirische Verslehren', pp. 61–4 and 119 [= idem, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, pp. 400–3 and 458]; Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, pp. 58–9 (§129).

third; and *fer* 'of men' recurs as *fir* 'men' in the metrically less regular following line too.[53]

Unfortunately, some parts of the middle section of the *Song of Lugh* are quite difficult to make out, the text appearing to have been slightly garbled by one of the scribes who copied it from a much earlier manuscript. But the final sections are clearer. Apart from the ring composition, they mostly feature different rhetorical forms (seemingly as logical quatrains) and are also obviously composed as a form of alliterating and rhyming *retoiric* or *rosc*:

Fornem airces	Such splendour which slays
forlúachoir loisces	bright brilliance which burns
martál suides	great gushing which sits
martorainn trogais.	great thundering which births
Incomairsid fri cech naie,	You may ask by each learning,
go comair Ogma sachu	with the help of Ogma and also
go comair nem & talom,	with the help of heaven and earth,
go comair grioan & ésqu.	with the help of sun and moon.
Drem niadh mo drem-sie duib.	My troop is a troop of warriors for you.
Mo sluag so sluag mor	My host is a mighty host
murnech mochtsailech,	tumultuous, fleet of foot,
bruithe nertoirech	seething, mightily noble.
rogenoir et[ir] dachri	Having chosen between two bodies,
ataforroi cath comortai.	begin O battle clashing!
Arotrai.	Arise!

The Song of Lugh is evidently a much older composition than the eleventh-century (or thereabouts) prose which surrounds it, each section of the charm displaying typical Old Irish poetic features. Yet despite probably being older than the rest of the *Second Battle of Moytura* as well as containing the reference to Ogma and the help of cosmic features, Lugh's battle incantation does not evidence features which could be said to be obviously magical. Unlike Miach's healing charm, it instead has rather more of a narrative feeling to it, much as might be expected of a poem which was included in order to highlight the tension of the coming battle between the Fomorians and the euhemerised Irish gods. Its apparent archaism may well merely be a sign that the version of the *Second Battle of Moytura* that has survived is merely based on a much earlier tale of which passages like the *Song of Lugh* were originally part. Indeed, Lugh is the reputed source of another charm recorded in early Irish tradition which does not feature the Irish counterpart of Ogmios, but that does begin in a similar manner. Moreover, this time the poem is actually called an 'incantation' (*éli*), although it is composed in a rather simpler and commoner Irish literary form.

In the recension of the *Cattle Raid of Cooley* in the *Book of the Dun Cow*, Lugh chants a spell (*éli Loga*) over Cuchulainn which heals his wounds as he sleeps. The

[53] Watkins, 'Indo-European metrics', 242–4 [= idem, *Selected Writings*, pp. 397–9]; T.O. Clancy and G. Márkus, *Iona: the earliest poetry of a Celtic monastery* (Edinburgh 1995), pp. 96ff.

poem that is recorded as if it were Lugh's charm does not seem to have much to do with healing, however – like many other poetic interpolations in these prose tales, it appears instead mainly to be narrative in style, highlighting part of the tale by reprising the scene it appears in poetically rather than supplying new information. It is more clearly composed in *claidemnus*, the common Old Irish heptasyllabic metrical style, but it is again written in such an archaic manner that it is difficult to translate fully. Nonetheless, it is clearly quite similar in several aspects to the *Second Battle of Moytura*'s rhythmically more sophisticated *Song of Lugh*:[54]

Atraí, a meic mór Ulad	Arise, O son of mighty Ulster
fót sláncréchtaib curetha	now that your wounds are healed.
fri náimtiu fer melldarath	Against hostile men …
móradaig todonathar	exalting …
dia ferragaib sligethar	two excellent men strike;
slúaig immenard ner(t)ethar	the weakness of the host encourages.
fortacht a síd sóerfudut	Help from the fairy mound will set you free.
issin mruig ar conathaib	It is farmland for …
cot anmuin arfucherthar	until misfortune proclaims.
fóchiallathar óengillae	A single lad is on his guard.
arclich ar búaib baífedae	Defend against overpowering blows.
slig delb silsa ríut.	Strike well and I shall strike with you!
Ní fil leó do nertsáegul	They have no strong length of life,
fer do baraind bruthaigte	so wreak your furious anger
co niurt for do lochtnamtib	mightily on your enemies vile.
cing it charput comglinni	Mount your safe chariot,
is iar sin atrai.	so then arise!

Despite its name and the claim it represents a healing charm, the *Incantation of Lugh* is rather more clearly just another narrative poem. The two incantations ascribed to Lugh in medieval tales show little in common with more formulaic Irish expressions such as loricas or healing charms. Indeed, unlike the *Incantation of Amairgen* and the *Prophecy of the Morrigan*, they do not even share much in terms of metrical form with non-literary charms or protective prayers. Many of the incantations ascribed to figures such as Lugh in early Irish literature instead appear substantially to represent only literary creations – sometimes they are merely narrative compositions; on other occasions they are evidently just laudatory or gnomic expressions. Charms often take on archaic or simple forms, just as do proverbs and nursery rhymes, but this is usually merely a sign that their composers were not particularly learned or accomplished poets rather than evidence of a deliberate strategy concerning metrical structure. Lugh's battle spell is more clearly a literary construction and displays a more sophisticated poetic form. But the only things it has in common with Old Celtic charms are its description as a *cétal* or 'song' and its use of typically Celtic stylistic features such as ring composition, alliteration and chaining. Unlike the incantation ascribed

54 O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cuailnge: Recension I*, pp. 65 and 184 (ll. 2118–34), with partial translation.

to Miach, none of these literary expressions shows much evidence that suggests it faithfully represents pre-Christian Celtic magical practice.

There is a type of Irish metrical line (an octosyllabic) that is actually called *bricht*, of course: that is, literally a spell or a charm. Yet, unlike the similarly named *galdralag* metre or 'incantation measure' of Old Norse poetry, it does not feature in Irish metrical charms, and the seemingly magical name of *bricht* poetry may have a rather plainer origin. Octosyllabics were clearly used as extended forms of the commoner *claidemnus* or heptasyllabic Old Irish line, and the various medieval Irish metrical tracts which have survived make no mention of any connection between *bricht* and magical charms. In fact, the *Scholar's Primer*, a medieval schoolbook full of mnemonics to be learned by budding Irish poets, explains the description *bricht* as a contraction of *bri ocht* 'eight words', and another similar metrical source calls *bricht* the 'height of knowledge' (*dru(i)mne suithe*). Given that *bricht* literally means 'heightened' the term may have originally signified that octosyllabic lines were extended forms of *claidemnus* rather than reflecting any underlying magical connection.[55]

It is in this light, then, that several other references to Insular Celtic charms connected with poetry should no doubt be seen. For example, *imbas forosnai* is accounted one of the special abilities of a *fili* with eight years' study in one of the Irish metrical tracts – it is called upon as magical know-how by Fedelma and Finn, but may originally simply have been a description of a style or feature of Irish poetry that became linked with divination only secondarily. Other talents ascribed to *filid* in metrical and legal tracts, such as the *dichétal do chennaib* 'incantation from ends' and the *teinm laegda* 'breaking the marrow' (i.e. chewing the thumb?), are similarly accorded accomplishments of a *fili* with eight years' training, and appear in comparable magical manners in some literary sources. But the rhetorics or wisdoms which are represented as charms of these sorts are often evidently merely narrative or gnomic poems. All of these descriptions seem to refer to relatively mundane things in the poetic primers: they originally appear merely to be have been descriptions of accomplishments associated with the best poets. The accounts we have of these expressions in the tales of figures such as Finn are all quite evidently fantastic; the statement of one medieval law code that a *fili* was still entitled to a fee even if his *dichétal do chennaib* was monotonous can hardly be squared with the treatment of this expression in sources such as *Cormac's Glossary*. Indeed, *dichétal do chennaib* appears to be referred to in one metrical tract as if it were just another name for the *Incantation of Amairgen*. Another records that *imbas forosnai* was merely a type of gnomic nature poetry. Similarly, *teinm laegda* is associated with *laid* in one of the early Irish poetic texts, a metre that is cited as used in certain styles of satire in another of the tracts which outlines a curriculum for student *filid*. Even the *Lorica of St Patrick* under its title the *Deer's Cry* (Old Irish *Feth Faida*, Scots Gaelic *fith-fath*) is accounted a magical ability (variously shape-changing or invisibility) in later Irish and Scots Gaelic sources, much as if St Patrick had first composed it in order to evade King

55 Thurneysen, 'Mittelirische Verslehren', p. 22 [= idem, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, p. 361]; Calder, *Auraicept na n-Éces*, p. 111; MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets*, pp. 30 and 35.

Loegaire's men through sorcerous means. Expressions such as *imbas forosnai* seem just to have been descriptions of aspects of poetic learning associated with the best and most advanced *filid* that later became associated with magical lore in popular tradition. Like the *fith-fath*, their titles appear to have only come to refer to magical rites after the proper meanings of these technical poetic descriptions had been reinterpreted (or just plain forgotten) in some of the more imaginative expressions of medieval Irish popular tradition.[56]

After all, poetic wisdom is described in several suggestive ways in early Irish sources: *coir sofis* 'a cauldron of knowledge', *cuill crinmoind auisa* 'hazels of the science of poetry', *imbois na hecsi* 'inspirations of knowledge' – and it seems likely that Dalan's druidic 'keys of knowledge' and the divinatory 'inspiration which illuminates' of *Cormac's Glossary* developed in similar ways. The idea that poetic insight and talent meant that *filid* were also masters of magical foresight is well represented in medieval sources. But it is not clear whether this supernatural tradition reflected a practical divinatory development or was merely a superstitious folkloric accretion with little basis in reality. The blessings, songs, incantations and so on that are recorded in the teaching tracts of the *filid* are hardly suggestive of such mantic behaviour – indeed, the mention of a *uelets* on the Le Mans tablet suggests that the Gaulish counterparts of the insular *filid* were lawyers or some other sort of expert that could be called upon in a trial, not some kind of rival to the soothsaying Old Celtic *vates*. The propensity for medical charms and other like expressions to be typically versified can have done little to hinder the emergence of a reputation for supernatural powers among the learned classes of early Christian Ireland. But there is no altogether reliable evidence that the poetry-loving scholars of the Irish Middle Ages actually ever employed the divinatory rituals which some of their contemporaries attributed to them, unlike figures such as the prophetess Fedelma, whose magical standing appears to be assured by the cognate title *uidlua* attested for the author of the Larzac curse.[57]

Instead it is the evidence of *corrguinecht* that seems most obviously to represent a continuation of the ancient practice of binding magic in Irish tradition. Presumably the form of *corrguinecht* associated with piercing a clay effigy with thorns was accounted a form of *glam dícenn* because the oral part of the curse was to be uttered in verse, much like the satire of Cairbre and St Patrick's similar cursing of Brecan. After all, the hyperbolic tradition of *glam dícenn* could serve in a geas-like manner in some Irish tales – in Cairbre's case it was used to usurp

56 Thurneysen, 'Mittelirische Verslehren', pp. 50, 58, 102, 119 and cf. p. 35 [= idem, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, pp. 389, 397, 441, 458 and cf. p. 337]; A. Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica: hymns and incantations, with illustrative notes on words, rites and customs, dying and obsolete; orally collected in the highlands and islands of Scotland and translated into English* 2 (Edinburgh 1900), pp. 22–5; Joyce, *A Social History of Ancient Ireland*, I, p. 386, n.*; E. Hull, 'The ancient hymn-charms of Ireland', *Folk-Lore* 21 (1910), 442–4; O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History*, pp. 323–40; *CIH* 2199.11–12; Guyonvarc'h, *Magie, médecine*, p. 410; J. Carey, 'The three things required of a poet', *Ériu* 48 (1997), 41–58.

57 W. Stokes, 'The prose tales in the Rennes Dindsenchas', *Revue celtique* 15 (1894), 456; L. Breatnach, '"The Cauldron of Poesy"', *Ériu* 32 (1981), 45–93; Nagy, *Wisdom of the Outlaw*, pp. 128ff.; McCone, *Pagan Past*, pp. 22–8, 166–7 and 232.

an unjust ruler, much as if Bres had lost his royal 'truth'. The evidence of sung curses such as the *necracantum* from Montfo, the *ison canti* from Chamalières or the *duscelinata* from Larzac suggest that a similar connection between magical 'piercing' and rhythmic language was shared by the Continental Celts. Yet none of the Old Celtic binding spells can be read as if it were an insular poem – as one of the expressions based on or influenced by loricas or even a verse of poetic satire. The rhythmical Gaulish binding spells would even be exceptional in terms of the often freer Irish compositions called rhetorics or wisdoms by medieval scribes. Although they show some broad features in common in terms of accent, syllabification and stylisation, in general the Old Celtic metrical charms exhibit verse structures which are significantly different in other respects from those employed in insular poetry; stylistic forms similar to those commonly employed in early Welsh and Irish verse are used to build up incantations of quite different rhythms and styles in the versified Gaulish *defixiones*. Indeed, the Larzac charm itself represents a relatively sophisticated composition: filled with alliterative pairings, chaining, ringing and stylistic variation, it is in many ways quite different from insular *retoiric* or *rosc*. Rather than being a sign that the metres used in the Old Celtic charms represent peculiarly magical styles, Gaulish verse had presumably merely evolved from a similar font of Celtic poetic techniques and forms, but had developed in a different direction (and employed different kinds and understandings of what constituted proper metrical sophistication).

There is a clear distinction in Roman poetry between the older accentual forms used in traditional hymns, legal sayings and the older 'Saturnian' poems, and the Hellenised quantative style of the classical schools; and again, the less sophisticated rhythmical forms of the popular poetry and charms which became more common under the Empire. Such a metrical distinction is not so clear in Celtic tradition, where rhythmic expressions such as rhetorics and wisdoms can appear in all sorts of contexts – literary, legal, Christian and magical. Like the use of dithyrambic *rosc* in the Old Irish legal tracts, the aesthetic effect of a versified charm seems likely to have been seen as a sign of greater profundity (and hence effectiveness) in a society that so valued oral learning and the art of the spoken word. Yet all that the earliest Irish and Old Celtic magical expressions clearly have in common with the charms which appear in literary sources is a proclivity for them to assume typically Celtic versified forms – much as do many instances of classical and medieval medicinal incantations.

Verse, however, is rare in classical spells such as *defixiones*. What poetry that does appear in classical magic of the sophisticated Graeco-Roman binding style usually takes the form of quotes from Homer or pagan hymns. The charms collected by writers such as Marcellus are often more poetic and can feature irregularities or metrical variations not commonly found in such aesthetically refined and sophisticated compositions as the *arae*. But the metrical form taken by the Old Celtic *defixiones* remains striking evidence for a longstanding Celtic connection between enchantment and verse nonetheless, one reflected in the simple metrical charms recorded by Roman authors such as Cato and Marcellus, but not so well in the spells of the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri. This accommodation seems particularly evident at Le Mas-Marcou, where a simple three-line Gaulish charm appears alongside a single-sentence, prose, linguistically

Latin curse, each repeated a magically emphatic three times. Although magical words were thought in some Greek traditions to have developed out of the songs of the legendary poet Orpheus, the song-like nature of Old Celtic *defixiones* such as the *duscelinata* from Larzac is the feature that makes them stand out most from the learned tradition of classical magic. Indeed, it has been argued that one of the most characteristic features of ancient Greek magic was its obsession with the written word, not the kind of oral tradition that would naturally have been expected to value the metrical composition of spells. The metrical Gaulish *defixiones* clearly continue a Celtic tradition that magic spells were to be composed in song-like forms. The hymn-like *defixiones* aside, the originally Greek tradition of binding magic was not one that lent itself readily to incantation – chanted verbal magic – unlike the less formal versified charms of ancient times which represent a different classical magical tradition, and one that, moreover, is attested more and increasingly commonly on medieval amulets and in contemporary post-classical compilations of early European medical lore.[58]

The Gaulish titles *vates*, druid and bard survived into Irish much unchanged, as even, seemingly, have *uelets* (*fili*) and *uidlua* (Fedelma). But unlike these descriptions of the members of the ancient Celtic learned classes, the incantations of early Irish experience do not show much in common with such Gaulish spells as have survived. Even the key terms which are used in insular magic often cannot be linked clearly with such linguistic counterparts as appear in continental spells. The root of the Irish verb *admuiniur* 'I invoke', for example, appears to be attested in Gaulish, but it is not employed in a magical spell, but rather in a piece of casual amatory posy: *Moni gnata! Gabi buđđuton imon!* 'Come daughter / give me a kiss.' Similarly, the accounts of satirical 'wounding' (*guin*), although obviously to be connected with magical *corrguinecht* (and even 'just as …, so too …' manikin effigies), seem only comparable to the sticking or fixing (*tig-*) magic of the ancient *defixiones*. In fact, the insular form *ailim* 'I request' recorded in the literary incantations ascribed to Mug Ruith and Amairgin is not known from Continental Celtic sources at all, and despite the shared Irish and Gaulish use of *adgar-* (literally) 'call to (account)' in the legal sphere, the words used for 'calling' or 'invoking' in the Celtic *defixiones* from Chamalières (i.e. *uediíumî*) and Rom (*gartiesti*) are used in quite different manners in Irish. Even such religious vocabulary as is attested in Gaulish often has no clear reflection in Insular Celtic – the closest form to the common Gaulish term *ieuru* 'dedicated' in an insular tongue, for instance, is Old Irish *ro·ír* 'granted', an expression with the inverse of a supplicatory semantic. Yet *admuiniur* is reminiscent of the Latin verb *adiuro* in the way it is used in the amatory Leiden lorica, *adiuro* being a particularly frequent word in ancient spells (where it signifies the summoning and constraining of daemons and gods) – and of course the notion of invoking divine names in medical magic is evidently quite ancient and old. Consequently, it may be that a pagan expression was replaced in this role at the time of the Irish conversion because of the Christian notion that only God should be prayed to (*guidid*) – hence perhaps, too, the lack of a precise insular parallel to the common Gaulish dedicatory verb *ieuru*. Indeed,

58 Frankfurter, 'Magic of writing', 189ff.

much as fate only acts passively in Irish tradition, magic spells generally seem to have been imploring (rather than performatively commanding) in insular practice, much as most of the Old Celtic curse tablets are supplicatory and indirect, especially those which are obviously influenced by (or just plain are) ancient judicial prayers.[59]

Most of the references to magical inspiration in insular accounts appear to have more to do with understandings of what constituted poetic learning than being reliable evidence for shamanistic or prophetic practices. Such expressions may well have been present in medieval Irish and Welsh society, but in terms of the practical evidence that has survived, Celtic magic largely seems rather less dreamy and exotic than it has often been supposed to be. Among the versified expressions recorded in literary sources, only loricas appear to have much in common with the practical evidence of Old Celtic binding curses and early Irish healing incantations. But then many of the versified prophecies and other similarly poetic passages which appear in literary sources seem to be best understood as gnomic, narrative or affective natural poems rather than properly mantic expressions. *Tarbfeis* and Dalan's Ogham divination have some claim to being supported by more strictly historical accounts, such as descriptions of the sacrifice of bulls in early regnal ceremonies or the ancient tradition of *sortes*. But many of the supernatural abilities associated with early insular figures such as *filid* seem more to represent medieval imaginings of what such learned practices might have been than they do recollections founded in incantatory reality. The evidence of the curse tablets suggests that the Gaulish counterpart of a *fili* was an everyday legal figure who stood quite in contrast with those men and women who were considered to have fatalistic powers. Like their Irish counterparts, they may have been expected also to have had poetic training. But the only connection outside the legal sphere between figures such as Severa Tertionicna and Naios the *uelets* appears to have been their shared use of superlative oral language – their employment of Celtic poetry in the performance of their professional duties: pleading cases before mortal courts on the one hand, adjuring eldritch powers on the other.

[59] J. Loth, 'Remarques aux inscriptions latines sur pesons de fuseau trouvés en territoire gaulois et, en particulièr, à l'inscription celtique de Saint-Révérien (Nièvre)', *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des inscription et belles-lettres* (1916), 182–5; G.R. Isaac, 'Two Continental Celtic verbs', *Studia Celtica* 31 (1997), 161–71; *RIG* II.2, no. L-119; Mees, 'Larzac *eiotinios*', 299; P. De Bernardo Stempel, 'Indogermanisch und keltische „geben": Kontinentalkelt. *Gabiae, gabi/gabas*, keltib. *gabiseti*, altir. *ro-(n)-gab* und Zugehöriges', *Historische Sprachforschung* 118 (2005), 195–6.

10

Conclusion: Cursing Wells

Holy springs, pools and wells are dotted all across the British Isles – and similarly thought-of watery sites, like the ancient French shrine at Chamalières, are known from right across the European continent. Often more a concern of antiquarians than believers today, some such localities have also been traditionally associated with more sinister effects. Several wells which cursed rather than blessed are recorded in local Celtic folklore, much as if they represent a reflection of an age-old connection between watery sites and imprecation. At first blush, the preservation of such superstitions in local traditions seems to represent extraordinary evidence for the enduring nature of ancient Celtic imprecatory beliefs.

A particularly well-known example of a site of this type is Ffynnon Elian, the Well of St Elian at Llanelian-yn-Rhos, Clwyd. Local tradition has it that St Elian's Well was celebrated originally as a place of healing, but this was no longer the case by modern times. During the eighteenth century a whole business had grown up about the old Welsh well dedicated to cursing and charging those who wanted to use its powers to slight someone. For a curse to be effected, the name of a victim could be written on a piece of parchment or slate and placed in the well. The 'guardian' of Ffynnon Elian would then read from the Bible, dispense some water from the well to the curser, the ritual being performed three times. Sometimes a wax effigy was also made and stuck with pins, much like a classical *kolossos*. On top of all this the custodian of the well would charge the cursers a fee of one shilling, one such individual reputedly earning up to £300 a year from this seemingly quite ancient practice. In 1831 a Welsh 'conjuror', John Evans, who charged seven shillings for removing a curse thought to be on a person under the influence of Fynnon Elian was sentenced to six months' hard labour for deception. Yet hundreds of local believers are reported to have used or been cursed by St Elian's Well before it was covered over upon the instruction of a local magistrate.[1]

Rather than some sort of deep sense of historicity, however, such expressions more obviously seem to show how a lasting popular belief in the healing power

[1] E. Peacock, 'A Welsh conjuror, 1831', *Folk-lore* 1 (1890), 131–3; F. Jones, *The Holy Wells of Wales* (Cardiff 1954), pp. 119–23; Bord and Bord, *Sacred Waters*, pp. 64–7.

of holy wells could also produce strongly felt understandings concerning the magical antithesis of health and good luck, long after the classical tradition of imprecatory binding had been largely forgotten. Dualistic supernatural reasoning of this type could represent a continuity in ancient Celtic modes of thought or might just as simply represent a broader feature of human experience: wishing at some wells for evil reflecting wishing at others for good. Since the 1960s, the tendency has been to assume that a broader humanistic approach is more satisfactory: that is, that the emergence of such beliefs represents universal, perhaps even common cognitive and biological human responses to such situations, as if any notion of a common Celtic culture and experience has been rendered somehow invalid by modern anthropologists. But anthropologically predicated research on native traditions has too easily strayed into over-interpretation in some expressions of Celtic scholarship. History of the empirical sort has always been best practised through close attention to sources, 'hover[ing] so low' as one leading anthropologist famously described cultural theory (i.e. eschewing the kind of universalist presumption that has broken in waves from time to time along Celtic shores).[2] The nineteenth-century empirical tradition of representing the past 'as it actually was' had been overtaken by other forms of historical learning, of historical intuition and idealism, not to forget older anthropological approaches of the evolutionary kind. On the other hand, the literary New Criticism of the 1960s proved an especially welcome tonic to the kind of romantic historicism that had come to dominate much of the nativist Celtic scholarship of previous decades, as notions of textuality – pronounced understandings of how texts are constructed and represent rather than objectively depict – came more strongly to inform historical study more generally. Yet no matter how modern such approaches may seem, they are not a substitute for basic empirical understanding, of getting as close to historical source material, no matter how linguistically difficult, as is scholarly practical.

A stronger emphasis on the textuality of early sources would suggest that evidence such as that of the Gaulish curse tablets is crucial to any proper understanding of the imprecatory world of the early Celts. The discovery of *tabellae defixionum* in sites such as the ancient spring at Chamalières better informs modern understandings of the nature of the similar depositions at Bath than do the curses of insular saints or of Ffynnon Elian. Similarly, the funerary finds from places such as Gemma's tomb at L'Hospitalet-du-Larzac reveal more about pagan Celtic notions of the underworld and death than the speculations of modern scholars derived from anthropological theory – or even vague claims of influence from early Christian sources. The early *defixiones* from Gaul also show much evidence of native practice, of concepts and wordings otherwise unparalleled in the classical genre of binding spells. Some of these expressions seem best paralleled only in Insular Celtic tradition and hence appear to represent common Celtic imprecatory understandings and practices. Extending the conceptual landscape of ancient cursing practice west in this way even suggests

2 C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: selected essays* (New York 1973), p. 23.

that geases, those strangely lasting and peculiarly Gaelic forms of supernatural stipulation, were originally curse-enhanced traditional responsibilities, reflections of the heroic and kingly notion of remaining true concomitant with increased status and honour. The linguistic and textual evidence for Celtic cursing indicates that the pagan Irish, British and Gauls shared a rich native tradition of magical fixing and fating, one comparable to, but still in some ways crucially distinct from, those which once also existed in other early European traditions.

Universalist thought is often inadequately founded evidentially, allergic to nuance, conceptually blunt – and although bowdlerised understandings of traditional African, Asian or Oceanic practices have been readily mapped onto native Celtic magical expressions in the past, such interpretations often seem rather less useful when close readings are made of the surviving practical evidence for Celtic magic. More caution should presumably be shown in general among historians and philologists who seek to engage with some of the more ambitious claims of modern anthropology when investigations of early Celtic culture are concerned. Broader European parallels should not be passed over so readily simply because an increasing focus has developed on analyses predicated on the traditional practices of non-European peoples in recent historical theory.

A close textual approach to Celtic cursing also makes it clear that early insular imprecation has little to do with poetic instances of satire, but that a largely biblical model informed the saintly maledictions of insular hagiography. It is popular today to encourage the crossing of boundaries in intellectual and artistic production, but it is not so clear that significant rhetorical and conceptual slippage between traditional discursive modes and genres should be assumed for earlier Western societies. A demarcation existed between Christian and pagan tradition that was particularly strong where demons, idolatry and magic were concerned. For historians of religion it can be a frustrating fact that modern understandings of pre-extant beliefs and rituals have been so strongly obscured by adoption, rejection and euhemerisation. But the boundary between Christian and pagan remains too textually fraught in proto- and prehistorical Britain, Gaul or Ireland for historians to pretend that universalist speculation is a substitute for achieving a closer understanding of what is recorded in all sorts of early Celtic texts.

Above and beyond the limits of the textual approaches of modern anthropologised history and philological literary criticism, however, there remains the theoretical foundation upon which post-war anthropology and the New Criticism were originally based: that is, the recognition of the existence of linguistic structures. A linguistic investigation of the terms, collocations and usages of common Celtic cursing terminology suggests that a deeper historical understanding of the Celtic traditions of cursing and fating can be won, not to mention Celtic understandings of magical influencing more generally. Yet apart from the continued reference to the 'laying' of magical effects, only some of the names for magic and spells, such as *cétal*, *hud* and *bricht*, and the various insular descriptions of magical destining and stipulatory binding can be shown to reflect particularly ancient Celtic magical forms and notions. Much as the metrical styles of early insular practice are only descriptively rather than structurally or systematically similar to the ancient Celtic verse that has been preserved on the Continent, Old

Celtic forms and expressions of magic seem only dimly reflected in early Irish and Welsh tradition and practice. The Insular and Continental Celts evidently retained much socially and culturally in common with each other, as the preservation of shared titles such as *fili*, bard and druid attests. Moreover, similar lexical reflections are evident in Insular Celtic magical use, although this commonality is often rather less simple to discern. Yet it may only be the foreignness of the ancient tradition of binding curses – the kind of magic that the Old Celtic lamella texts express – which makes the ancient Celtic magical tradition often seem so different from what is preserved in early Irish and Welsh sources. The relationship of Insular Celtic magic to that attested for the ancient Britons and Gauls seems rather more like that which connects conditional curses and binding spells: they share much in general in common, even in linguistic terms, but represent quite different genres of magical practice. Much as the notion of 'seeing' forms the etymological nexus around which much of the semantic field of 'poetic inspiration' and 'knowing' is arraigned in Celtic tradition, the various words for fating, spinning, beseeching, laying and enchanting shared by each of the three best attested main Celtic traditions appear to reflect a common Celtic linguistic culture of magical stipulation, destining and binding, even if the insular notion of cursing seems to have been largely supplanted by a biblical and clerical model upon the Christian conversion. In this light it comes as no surprise to find several collocations of common Celtic magical features reflected in both Continental and Insular Celtic forms: from the etymological and stylistic equivalence represented in 'destining a destiny' to the broader imprecatory relationship suggested by 'pointed wounding', such expressions are evidence that Gaulish understandings of enchanting and spellbinding were sometimes very similar to those shared by the early Insular Celts.

Many of the literary expressions of medieval Celtic magic must be seen as akin to the ancient tradition of curse poems or *arae*, however – literary creations which only dimly reflect the incantations and spells of actual contemporary magical practice. Indeed, the Celtic healing charms that are preserved seem to have more in common with later pan-European forms of magic, a tradition first represented in the form of the enchantments recorded by classical authors such as Marcellus of Bordeaux. Earlier expressions of Celtic magic lived on mostly only in terms of geases and other literary expressions of supernatural tradition that seem to have already been quite removed from any practical magical reality as may once have informed them at the time they were first recorded. However, some echoes of ancient magical practice may have survived in loricas, idiosyncratically Celtic forms of early Christian prayer. But even if so, any such Old Celtic magical pedigree must have been long forgotten by the Middle Ages. Classical magic was exceptionally prone to outside influence and change, and few of the charms recorded in medieval times show much continuity with the kinds of practices recorded in ancient grimoires. Nonetheless, the common Celtic magical vocabulary and shared basic metrical repertoire suggest that much earlier forms of binding and fating were faithfully preserved in prehistorical insular tradition, even if they were substantially marginalised and transformed with the conversion to Christianity. The old druidic customs and rites stamped out so brutally by the Romans in first-century Britain have left little other discernable trace in

the written records from early Christian Wales or Ireland. But the Celtic use of curses and other sorts of magical charms clearly still lived on to become a central part of European life in late antiquity, the Christian Middle Ages and even, in some aspects, down until early modern times.

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