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Editorial

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Quotidiana: Journal for the Study of Lived Religion, which is the official open-access journal of the Center for the Study of Lived Religion at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, is dedicated to the academic study of the everyday religious practices of people – both past and present – from around the world. The inaugural issue of *Quotidiana* epitomizes this pluralist mission by illuminating manifold dimensions of the academic study of lived religion across diverse periods, traditions, and regions. The articles range in time and space from the late-antique Mediterranean to late-imperial China to present-day Italy. The texts and materials at the center of this issue also vary considerably: e.g., diaries authored by Confucian literati; an early Christian gem and inscribed wooden tablet; late-antique Egyptian spells; and (ethnographic) fieldwork within contemporary ayahuasca religions in Italy. As the essays demonstrate in the aggregate, different primary sources demand different methods, approaches, and hermeneutical frameworks, from ethnography to close philological and historical readings of texts to analytical syntheses of words, images, and materials. What unifies these articles, however, is their shared interest in the everyday practices, performances, and material contexts embedded into sources typically grouped under the category 'religion' or under contiguous scholarly rubrics, such as 'magic'.

The Editor-in-Chief and the Scientific Committee of *Quotidiana* look forward to exploring further aspects of the fascinating field of lived religion in future issues. We, therefore, invite our colleagues from various sub-fields of religious studies and adjacent disciplines to consider publishing their research in this journal.

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Christian Exorcistic Tradition from the Outside
Interpreting the Two Exorcism Spells of the Paris Magical Codex (PGM IV/GEMF 57)

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Abstract This paper places the two unique exorcism spells in PGM IV/GEMF 57 in the contexts of late antique demon-belief, Jewish and Christian exorcistic traditions, and the scribal milieux of late antique formularies. Particular attention is paid to the construction of the demonic, the use of Old Coptic Egyptian in the Excellent Rite, and the use of the name Jesus in both spells. The formulary presents a snapshot of the Jewish/Christian exorcistic tradition as it evolved from the pre- to post-fourth century worlds and spawned these two anomalous additions to the Paris Magical Codex.

Keywords Exorcism. Demon. Ritual expert. Jewish exorcistic tradition. Christian exorcistic tradition. Scribal traditions.

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1 Introduction

This paper addresses the two exorcism spells[1] in the third-/fourth-century Paris Magical Codex (PGM IV/GEMF 57), both of which employ Jewish incantations and both of which invoke Jesus as the principal authority for the expulsion of demons (a feature not commonly seen with exorcisms considered 'Jewish'). Although the procedures they describe for crafting and using material things (an olive-branch whip, an oil concoction, and a tin lamella inscribed with *voces magicae*) resemble ritual instructions throughout Greco-Egyptian formularies, these two spells are unique among the formularies both for their goals in expelling demons and for their use of the name Jesus as an invocation in pursuit of that goal. The first, "excellent procedure [*praxis*] for driving out demons" (ll. 1227-64) is also distinctive for writing (or preserving) its central incantation in Old Coptic. The second, much longer, with a protracted litany of Jewish *historiolae*,[2] is labelled the "tested charm of Pibechis for driving out demons" (ll. 3007-86). I will refer to them henceforth as the *Excellent Procedure* and the *Pibechis Charm*.

These two exorcistic spells have preoccupied scholars since the beginning of the twentieth century for the religious paradoxes they present as part of an extensive formulary manuscript that displays no other Jewish or Christian interests or allegiances. They raise a range of questions, both philological and religious. Is the inclusion of Jesus (or 'Jesus Christ' in the Excellent Rite)[3] in the opening invocations of each spell just an afterthought tacked on by ignorant wizards or heathens, or the move of 'real' Christians? And if you remove Jesus as 'the god of the Hebrews' in the Pibechis Charm, do you then have a genuinely Jewish spell? Why in the Excellent Procedure is the central exorcistic formula in Old Coptic, a language almost never used for Christian or Jewish texts? Finally, if the compilers of the overall Paris Codex were neither Christian nor Jewish themselves,

1 I will use this term to designate the complete 'recipe' or ritual program structurally or verbally set apart in a formulary: from title and function to materials, ritual instructions, and verbal incantations.

2 An historiola is a brief, orally composed/transmitted (or orally imitated) recitation of a mythic scenario that pertains to a (generally medical) crisis in this world. Where the crisis in the human world remains unresolved, the historiola presents a narrative of gods or heroes confronting and resolving an analogous crisis. Thus through recitation (or inscription) the mythic event is supposed to act on the unresolved human situation. See Frankfurter 2001; 2017.

3 The orthography is actually *pe-chrēstos* (lit.: 'the Excellent') rather than *christos* ('the Annointed'). While I am taking this as a common alternate spelling for the same heavenly figure, there has been some discussion about how seriously to take this replacement (which may not have sounded different in antiquity). See Love 2016, 195-6.

why would they include these two ostensibly Christian spells, and where did the spells come from?

It is these spells' uniqueness among Greco-Egyptian formularies of the third and fourth centuries that has motivated this reconsideration of their historical significance. As I noted, The Excellent Procedure and the Pibechis Charm are the only *exorcism* rites in the extensive Paris Magical Codex, although several other rites include instructions to use a protective phylactery to ward off malicious *daimones*.[4] That is, they are the only spells that not only use *daimōn* (rather than, say, 'unclean spirit') to refer to malicious demons, they 'operationalize' that polarized conception of demons by ritually expelling them.[5] Both, in different ways, combine Jewish mythical references and liturgical phrases with mention of Jesus as a feature of God (also unique in Greco-Egyptian formularies of the third/fourth centuries). And apparently the editors themselves regarded these two spells as anomalies, for they each appear in portions of the Paris Magical Codex noted for their particularly 'miscellaneous' contents. The Excellent Procedure stands at the end of the second block of spells, bearing no relation to surrounding materials and succeeded by an empty space; the Pibechis Charm likewise occurs among exceedingly diverse materials (LiDonnici 2022, 182-3, 190). The two spells thus seem to have come into the codex as independent additions, perhaps towards the end of the editorial process – perhaps even as 'filler' material.

In this paper I will argue that, whether or not the spells originated in Jewish or Christian scribal milieux, their final transmission and editing into the Paris Codex took place among Greco-Egyptian scribes who perceived in the spells' claims and verbal structures an unusual approach to spirits and *daimones* and a new sort of ritual to undergird this approach. In this way, the incorporation of the exorcism spells constitutes an outsider's (non- Jewish/Christian) perspective on the Jewish/Christian exorcistic tradition and on the growth of Christian ritual traditions in fourth-century Egypt.

To get to this final proposition, however, I will first offer some observations on the nature of exorcistic language of demons in contrast both to an everyday 'lived' experience of demons and to an exclusively scribal enterprise of 'demonology.' These observations will help to frame the Pibechis spell and the Excellent Procedure as,

4 Ll. 86-87; 2510-20 ("against every evil daimon, whether evil male or female"); ll. 2695-2707 ("guard me against every daimon of the air, of the earth, and under the earth […]") – discussed below.

5 I will henceforth use *demon* to refer to malicious supernatural beings; *daimōn* to refer to the more ambiguous supernatural figures invoked in the Greco-Egyptian formularies; and *demonic being* to refer to the range of spirits, ghosts, and witches that were imagined to bring misfortune in ancient cultures. See Sfameni Gasparro 2001.

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indeed, anomalous in the PGM/GEMF collections, yet rooted in Jewish and Christian traditions.

2 The Background of the Exorcism Spells in GEMF 57/PGM IV

Evidence from Jewish and Christian literature of the early Roman period points to the special interest that both religious traditions (or, more properly, Judaism and its early Christ-oriented formations) showed in exorcism as a 'signature ceremony'.[6] The early texts show that exorcism and exorcistic formulae were shared among specialists – Jewish and Christian – claiming special authority against demonic forces, which were conceptualized as an army under Satanic (or similar) control. In addition, they describe the exorcism of spirits as a process of *expulsion* rather than control or accommodation, or subjection (as is characteristic of spirit adjuration in the Greco-Egyptian formularies).[7]

2.1 Apocalyptic Demonology and Its Associated Rituals in Early Judaism (and Its Christian Formations)

Early Christian texts like the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel Sayings source, and Luke-Acts show that a specialization in exorcism probably distinguished the Christ-movement by the middle of the first century, when it was still very much part of Judaism.[8] Josephus's famous scene of an exorcism of emperor Vespasian by the ritual expert Eleazar, as well as Qumran fragments of exorcistic formulas used in this apocalyptic Jewish sect, both suggest that the notion of an order of specifically evil demons to be expelled had become a specialty of Jewish ritual experts during the Roman period.[9] So the proliferation

6 On the association of Christians with exorcistic performance in the third century, see Origen, *c. Cels.* 1.6; 6.39; 7.4.

7 As most clearly laid out in Lewis 2003, the resolution of spirit possession in many traditional societies involves not expulsion but pacification of the spirit and the training of the possessed person to accommodate the spirit. In the Jewish/Christian exorcistic traditions and rites examined in this paper, a polarization is assumed between subject and demon that can only be resolved through the expulsion of the demon. See Bazzana 2020, ch. 2. Late antique (IV-VI CE) amulets that invoke the tradition of Solomon's control of demons do so in order to *repel* demons: e.g., P. Col. 338, in Jordan, Kotansky 1997; ACM 20 = Vienna G337; ACM 21 = PGM P17; SEG 44.772, in Giannobile, Jordan 2006.

8 Q/Lk 11:24-26; Mk 3:22-27, 6:7-13; Acts 19:11-19.

9 Josephus., *Ant.* 8.45-49. Qumran: e.g., 11QApocryphal Psalms^{a}; 11QPsalms^{a} col. XXVII, in García Martínez 1994, 376-8, cf. 309. Bohak (2008, 88-114) offers a thorough overview of early Jewish exorcistic traditions.

of charismatic experts in exorcism within the early Christ-movement would have been one way in which these apocalyptic movements actually participated, in, rather than diverged from, a Jewish frame of reference. The peculiar interest in exorcism on the part of Christ-groups, and the recollections of their founders as exorcists, probably arose from their apocalyptic orientation: successful combat against demons as a ritual performance signifying the imminence of the eschaton (e.g. Mk 3:24-26; Lk 10:17-19).[10] That is, a typical exorcistic act against a local demon could be transformed both theatrically and in oral tradition into the vanquishing of eschatological forces.[11]

But this interest in the expulsion and vanquishing of the demonic among Jewish ritual specialists and Christ-*ekklēsiai* clearly involved a sharing of verbal techniques. Luke-Acts recalls that from an early point Jewish exorcists outside the Christ-movement were also invoking "Jesus" as a powerful *vox magica*.[12] Christian exorcists themselves, while promoting the name of Jesus as a singular invocation, were also invoking "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob" – so we learn from Justin and Origen. In fact, Origen observes, this formula was often delivered in Hebrew to enhance its magical alterity.[13]

The notable feature in these early texts is that, by virtue of the early Christian interest in (a) the uniform danger of demons, (b) their apocalyptic and Satanic nature, and (c) their ritual expulsion as a signature apocalyptic performance, the name 'Jesus' came to serve as a potent *vox magica* in the ritual field of exorcism. But this apocalyptic, polarized image of demons promulgated in Jewish/Christian exorcistic traditions was *not* the common picture of demons or demonic beings in the ancient world.

10 Depictions of armies of demons: e.g., Mk 5:9; and armies of angels: 2 Macc 5:2-3; 10:29-30; Matt 26:53.

11 The primary articulation of this apocalyptic perspective seems to have been the II BCE Enochic *Book of the Watchers* 9-10, 15-16, which taught that the demons of this world are the remains of the impure giants killed at the time of the flood and will be destroyed at the eschatological judgment.

12 Acts 19:13ff; Mk 9:38-39; Irenaeus, *Adv.Haer.* 2.6.2. Still in the fifth or sixth century CE a Babylonian Jewish apotropaic bowl in Aramaic invokes Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit to seal its spell: Bowl M163, § 10, in Levene 2012, 124, 127, 137.

13 Justin, *Dial.* 85.3; Origen, *c. Celsum* 3.33; 5.45; and the unprovenanced Greek foil amulet using lists of patriarchs presumably against evil forces, in Bohak and Faraone 2018. In general see Rist 1938, 298.

2.2 … against the Background of Popular Demonology in Roman and Late Antique Cultures

How, then, were demons conceived in the wider world of Roman and late antique cultures? If we can talk about a 'lived demon-experience' in the Roman empire and ancient Near East, it would involve the topography of liminal spaces in the local environment, traditions of theriomorphic spirits both capricious and hostile, the creeping night-witch figures who attack women and babies within the home, the ghosts of the untimely dead, and so on.[14] The data from antiquity gives us no reason to assume hard and fast divisions between ghosts, witches, particular beasts, and 'demons'.[15] For one Judah, living in a region of Sicily in the third or fourth century, it was the goddess Artemis and the evil she might bring that he sought to repel (GMA 33). The demonic could cover a very wide spectrum. Gaining a sense of control over these threats may involve avoidance and protective gestures, domestic *apotropaia* posted on the door-frame or worn on the body (Mitchell 2007; Wilburn 2019). It may also involve consultation with a ritual specialist who might use a spirit's theriomorphic features (wolf? snake? mouse?) as a way of identifying and thus controlling the demon by means of an amulet, or he might adjure a part of the body as itself agential or independently malicious.[16] Controlling ambiguous but potentially malicious forces could even extend to diverting them to one's enemies, as a second-century lamella asks: "Demon menacing *here*, menace on my behalf now, now, at the house of Julia Cyrilla" (GMA 23). A malicious demon can thus (hopefully) be deployed elsewhere by the power of the written word and its material vehicle.[17]

This fluidity of environmental dangers, of liminal zones and their supernatural denizens, has been usefully captured in a modern context by the anthropologist Charles Stewart in his 1991 study of the demonic on the island of Naxos, Greece. The demonic is articulated in folklore, sensed in the landscape, and experienced around social behavior and gender propriety.[18] And while Stewart convincingly

14 See Brashear 1990; Frankfurter 2006, 13-15; 2012; 2025.

15 See Kotansky 1995; Johnston 1999, 127-99; Patera 2014; Faraone 2018, 198-220.

16 Kotansky 1995, 243-77; Frankfurter 2018; Faraone 2007. Also on the role of the ritual expert in negotiating an interpretation of demonic attack see Frankfurter 2002.

17 The lamella is itself gold (and found in the remains of a workshop), yet the function of the adjuration leans toward a curse, which would ordinarily use cheaper materials like lead. Gold served more commonly for apotropaic amulets one wears, and it is unclear why one would wear this lamella. I would propose that the gold was chosen for its material efficacy: both to protect the wearer from the demon and to facilitate its diversion to Julia Cyrilla. Cf. Kotansky 1994, 100 ad l.4.

18 Stewart 1991.

describes a cultural system that combines notions of demonic beings with social action and religious location, this is not a system that exists in textual or canonical form (Stewart 1991, 162-91). What is important to recognize in all these kinds of simple ad-hoc apotropaic and exorcistic rituals in folk demon experience is that they do not presume a *demonology* – a cosmic system or hierarchy. They (or their specialists) work ritually, with words and efficacious materials, with *particular situations* of supernatural attack. They might draw on larger myths of authority against demonic beings, like Solomon iconography or Christ-historiolae, but without specifying a class or nature of the demon.[19] Or they aim to list all conceivable dangers one might encounter in one's home and village, as two amulets compile: "sorcery and potions and curse-tablets and the untimely dead and the violently dead and from every evil act" (Heintz 1996, 297); or "evil acts and every (supernatural) visitation and [every apparition] of Hekate and every attack [of a ghost] and [from every] onslaught [of spirits appearing] in sleep [or] mute *daimones* and from […] epilepsy".[20] The ritual scribes' efforts here to list so many dangers aim at a kind of locally-bound comprehensiveness not based in an ideology of cosmic evil – a demonology.[21]

Amulets, intended for people to wear in everyday life, often show more popular or 'lived' traditions of malicious spirits, whereas formularies, apocryphal narratives, and speculative works often display scribal efforts to systematize demon traditions, to construct actual demonologies. When we are talking about popular demonology and the ritual experts who construct images of authority to repel those demons, we are looking at a flexible, ambiguous conception of demonic beings, based in local folklore and local interpretations of authoritative tradition.

The Paris Magical Codex itself includes two elaborate spells, a preliminary component of whose performance involves the preparation of just this sort of apotropaic *phylakterion* to wear during the rite. These are the texts of the amulets as instructed in two recipes of the Paris Magical Papyrus:

19 On the use of Solomon traditions in *apotropaia* see (Boustan, Beshay 2014; Frankfurter 2019a, 737-40; Franek 2025)

20 Daniel 1977, 145-9. Compare Mokhtarian 2025 on lists of all conceivable places and people of vulnerability in the household, and Frankfurter 2023 on lists of vulnerable access points for demonic beings.

21 On apotropaic listing see Gordon 1999; Frankfurter 2006, 15-19; Reed 2020, 46-54.

> MOULATHI CHERNOUTH AMARŌ MOULIANDRON, guard me from every evil daimon, whether an evil male or female.[22]
>
> EPOKŌPT KŌPTO BAI BAITOKARAKŌPTO KARAKŌPTO CHILOKŌPTO BAI Guard me from every daimon of the air, on the earth and under the earth, and from every angel and phantom and ghostly visitation and enchantment, me NN.[23]

These apotropaic formulae could be said to anticipate an interest in exorcism. Yet inscribed amulets were meant preemptively to *repel* various demonic spirits through identifying and listing their dangers, as in the (real) amulets above: male or female daimons, chthonic or aerial daimons, angels or "enchantment [*epipompē*]".[24]

This language of naming malevolent spirits is important, since different exorcistic traditions within and without Judaism and Christianity had different ways of constructing their opponents (see Bazzana 2020, 39-42). But it is always an approximation – a performative experiment in the wielding of words (with, ideally, the voluntary responsiveness of the demon-afflicted to vocalize a demon's name). And the ambiguous sense of the demonic typical of folk experience and evident in these last apotropaic amulets reveals an important difference between the two exorcism spells of the Paris Codex. The Pibechis Charm, reflecting this same kind of ambiguous demonology, initially adjures [*horkizo*] the *daimones* "to say whatever sort you are: […] heavenly or aerial, terrestrial […] or netherworldly […]" (ll. 3037-45). Like the apotropaic amulets, it cannot identify the demonic dangers it will combat; they can only be prospectively listed. In contrast, the Excellent Procedure specifies "this unclean demon Satan" as the object of exorcism (ll. 1238-9) – language familiar from Gospel tradition (Sfameni Gasparro 2001, 163-4). It reflects an early Jewish (and Christian) exorcistic tradition that configured exorcism as an apocalyptic, dualistic battle against particular arch-demonic figures (Satan, Belial, Asmodeus et al.) – a very different sense of the demonic, preserved in scribal milieux, and by the fourth century, most likely Christian.

22 PGM IV.2510-20, tr. GMPT, 84. The plain apotropaic sense of this amulet text does not fit with preceding instructions in the same recipe (ll. 2505-20) that specify that the required *phylaktērion* would protect the ritualist from being thrown out of the sky by the goddess.

23 PGM IV.2695-2707, tr. GMPT, 88.

24 Cf. PGM IV.86-87, another *phylakterion* for *daimoniazomenois* – those 'possessed' by demons or somehow demonically afflicted in body – but without instructional context.

2.3 Scribal Milieux for the Systematization of Demons in the Roman Period

The systematization of this folk or 'lived experience' of demons takes place through the various efforts of institutional and (to a lesser degree) freelance scribes. Historically, temples and priesthoods would define various ranks or types of demons in order to juxtapose them to particular gods: "Demons X, Y, and Z are vanquished by the power of Re-Harakhty of Thebes".[25] In addition, literary works like the *Book of the Watchers* (1 En 1-36; III BCE), the *Book of Jubilees* (I BCE), Tobit (III BCE), *Testament of Abraham* (I-III CE), *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* (I-III CE), *Apocalypse of Peter* (II CE), and the *Testament of Solomon* (IV CE), display various kinds of systematization of demon traditions, from depicting their individual natures (and capacities to be adjured) to narrating their cosmogonic origins and eschatological fate.[26] While modern writers on demonology tend to rely on such works for their reconstructions, these books are better imagined as scribal appropriations of popular demon traditions for theological or speculative purposes. It is also important to remember that neither temple traditions nor fictional narratives supplanted the more fluid folk traditions of the demonic in local cultures of the ancient world, although they might reintroduce authoritative names or traditions into local cultures. This process seems to have occurred, for example, by the medium of amulets, whose scribes would address everyday crises and fears with a range of scriptural, liturgical, and even iconographic elements, communicating authority from religious tradition.[27]

Whereas above (section 2.2) I used apotropaic amulets as evidence for folk demon-belief, here I look at them as the written products of scribes, both freelance and associated with religious institutions, and therefore as carrying a certain normative power to introduce into folk culture traditions about demons and their expulsion. Amulet scribes responded to the exigencies and fears of folk life but then translated those situations into textual and iconographic forms that might draw on scripture, apocryphal folklore, and what Theodore de Bruyn has called the "customary practices" of amulet production in the ancient world, like vowel sounds and *voces magicae*.[28] Indeed, we might imagine amulet-making as a craft tradition in its own right. And in that context we can also see incipient tendencies to systematize

25 E.g., Edwards 1960 and more generally, Frankfurter 2006, 15-26.

26 See esp. Reed 2020. On the complex dating of *Testament of Solomon*, see now Franek 2025, 51-5.

27 In general see De Bruyn 2017; Frankfurter 2019a.

28 De Bruyn 2017, 19, 56-64; Frankfurter 2019b; Kotansky 1995, 266-75; 2019.

demonic beings: e.g., the third-/fourth-century papyrus fragment that lists twenty-four (?) causes of misfortune ("death, darkness, […] evil, evil eye, debauchery, slavery, […]") in two columns surrounded by an Ouroboros: afflictions plucked from the world, systematically inscribed, and symbolically arrested in the space of the amulet.[29]

As products of scribal milieux akin to those who crafted amulets, formularies also show some tendencies to systematize demonic beings, whether through listing or editors' need for demonological consistency.[30] In the Paris Magical Codex, a *daimōn* is an ambiguous figure, associated closely with the untimely dead but functioning both as agent of a god and servant to the ritualist's commands.[31] But the world of the formularies and their collectors also lay at a cultural and religious distance from the popular demonology sketched above. The Greco-Egyptian formularies in general collect few apotropaic and healing spells,[32] while the supernatural dangers that threaten the ritual expert (who is often presumed to be seeking an oracle or vision of a god) tend to have their own esoteric backgrounds, like an oracular goddess who might, if enraged, throw the ritualist out of the sky.[33]

The historian of religions Jonathan Z. Smith once asked, "Why is it that the demonic, associated with the marginal, the liminal, the chaotic, the protean, the unstructured appears cross-culturally as so rigidly organized a realm?" (Smith 1978, 437). But in fact this was not the case, in antiquity or at other times. I have argued here that popular experience of demons in ancient cultures involved a fluidity, ambiguity, and local definition of demonic beings, but that local, inchoate picture could undergo systematization in a number of scribal worlds: temples, literary works, amulet-crafting, and formulary-collecting. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that any demonologies that resulted from such scribal efforts did not thereby reflect popular, 'lived' notions of demonic beings (even though some influence on popular folklore doubtless took place). Demonology

29 PGM CXXI = P. Med. Inv. 71.58, ed. Geraci 1979. See also GMPT, 317. It is, of course, possible that this fragment comes from a formulary's depiction of an apotropaic amulet.

30 On the relationship between formulary and amulet composition (as well as performance), see De Bruyn 2017, 75-88; Faraone 2022.

31 As spirits of untimely dead: ll. 340-9, 462, 447, 1968; as chthonic: l. 2088; as associated with night: l. 1228; as agents of particular gods: ll. 964, 2987; as subject to the ritualist's commands: ll. 1968, 2088; as having a material image for domestic veneration: l. 1858; as characteristically terrified at the sound of divine names: ll. 358, 2541; as associated with particular herbs: l. 2974. See also Sfameni Gasparro 2001.

32 The Coptic magical codex Michigan 136, also dated to the fourth century, offers an important contrast to the Greek formularies, since it contains predominantly healing spells. See ACM 43 and now Zellmann-Rohrer, Love 2022.

33 GEMF 57/PGM IV.2501-14.

was a phenomenon of the literate elite, sometimes priestly, sometimes of esoteric groups, who might through lists and calculations control imaginatively the world of chaotic forces: *daimones*, planets, fallen angels and their offspring, and so on.[34]

2.4 The Exorcism Spells in the Paris Magical Codex in the Context of Ancient Demonology

We thus have several contexts in which demons – ambiguous or malevolent supernatural beings, night-witches and *biaiothanatoi*, denizens of liminal places or alien temples – arose as (a) threats to negotiate ritually and (b) topics of discussion and speculation. These contexts include: popular demon experience; Jewish and Christian exorcistic traditions; and the literate scribal subcultures of amulet crafters, formulary compilers and authors of apocryphal works. To which context would we attribute the two exorcism spells of the Paris Magical Codex?

It seems clear that they both reflect the Christian exorcistic tradition as it developed within Judaism but apart from either the popular domain of multiple ambiguous demonic beings or a more systematized image of *daimones* such as formulary scribes were developing. The Pibechis Spell and the Excellent Rite both assume a world in which demons are polarized rather than negotiable or ambiguous. They aim for the *expulsion* of spirits, which was a Jewish ritual innovation adopted in the early Christ movement as a signature performance. In these two spells there is no purpose imagined for *daimones* apart from their removal from bodies – *ekbalein*, used three times in the Excellent Procedure.[35] "*Every daimōn* is frightful [*phrikton*],"[36] instructs the Pibechis Charm (ll. 3017-18), which is itself designated to heal *daimoniazomenous*" (l. 3007). Given the anomaly of this exorcistic conception of demons, it is all the more interesting that the editor(s) of the Paris Papyrus included the two exorcistic spells in the formulary at all. Did they incorporate them out of general interest in new *daimōn*-related recipes or simply because they were at hand, evidence of a new type of Christian ritual libretto circulating in fourth-century Egypt?

34 See esp. Frankfurter 2006, ch. 2; Marx-Wolf 2016; Reed 2020, 46-54, 228-46.

35 Compare l. 1245: *exelthe daimon*. In the Pibechis Charm's final note on its efficacy on the possessed body the editor says that the demon will be *eiskrithēsetai*, "expelled" (ll. 3083-4).

36 Cf. P. Oslo I.1.261. The meaning is 'frightful' rather than 'frightened'.

3 The Two Exorcistic Spells of GEMF 57/PGM IV

3.1 Jewish Features of the Exorcistic Spells

The exorcistic tradition that polarizes demons as evil derives from apocalyptic Judaism and Christian groups as part of Judaism. But in so identifying this perspective on demons with Jewish tradition it is important to note that 'Jewish' should not be taken to imply that 'actual' Jews were the transmitters or immediate composers of the spells. Rather, this exorcistic tradition originated in Jewish religious groups, especially those (like Christians) with an apocalyptic orientation, and it would have been associated with Jewish authority: particular names, myths, and verbal formulae.

Both exorcistic spells are assemblages of Jewish verbal techniques to expel demons.[37] Unlike later Christian amulets from Egypt that drew explicitly on the Gospel tradition in formulating their authority, these exorcistic spells use Jewish liturgical and poetic passages.[38] The Excellent Procedure invokes (notably in Old Coptic, to be discussed below) the "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob," a common Jewish magical formula in antiquity, expropriated from liturgical contexts (Rist 1938). The Pibechis Charm invokes stories associated with the Exodus, with Solomon, with the division of the Jordan river, with the destruction of the primordial Giants, with the Temple in Jerusalem, and so on. Its God appears in fire and lives in his own holy paradise. Indeed, one of the adjurations calls for God's "inexorable angel [to] come down and […] expel the lingering demon [*eiskrinetō ton periptamenon daimona*] from this image [*plasmatos*]" (ll. 3024-6).[39] This adjuration draws on Jewish traditions of the human body as the 'image' of God as well as on liturgical traditions of angels as envoys sent down from the heavenly throne.[40] The author of the Pibechis Charm is clearly acquainted with Jewish liturgical tradition and folklore as a repository of efficacious speech.

The Pibechis Charm concludes by adjuring the reader or patient to avoid pork; yet this detail does not secure a Jewish *Sitz-im-Leben*. In fact, the instruction is worded in such a way that Jewish meal purity becomes an exotic mode of ritual preparation, of self-purification, rather than the habitus of an insider (Bohak 2008, 207).

37 Eitrem 1966, 15–30; van der Horst 2006.

38 Compare ACM 17, 21, which both use gospel references to protect from demons.

39 Tr. GEMF (emended).

40 See, e.g., Tobit 3:16-17. *Plasma* implies a figurine or model produced according to a preexisting form; cf. Col 1:15, which uses *eikon* to express Christ's unique nature as image of God, a different idea.

These are, in many ways, quite different exorcistic spells, but they both view Jewish liturgical speech – both what one might hear in a synagogue and what a skilled liturgical poet might improvise from biblical tradition – as singularly efficacious against demons. Considering the added use of the name 'Jesus', to be discussed in the next section, the power imputed to Jewish liturgical speech suggests that, for those who initially compiled these exorcisms, Jewish ritual speech in particular offered a unique resource for anti-demon incantation.

3.2 Anomalous Features

3.2.1 The Name Jesus

It is significant that the only two exorcistic spells in the Paris Magical Papyrus are also the only spells invoking Jesus. As I have argued above, use of the name Jesus in the context of an adjuration does not in itself imply a 'Christian' origin. Christian literature itself recalls others using Jesus's name for ritual. But there is reason to infer a connection between the use of this name and the function of the spells: that is, in the world of the editors and their sources, the practice of specifically expelling demons was associated with the authority of this particular name. Here the two spells diverge, however. In the Pibechis Charm the name is tacked on as the name of the "god of the Hebrews: IĒSOU IABA IAĒ ABRAŌTH […]" (ll. 3019-20): that is, as the first of a string of 'Jewish-sounding' *voces magicae*.[41] In the Excellent Procedure, however, the name is presented as part of a liturgical formula, written in Old Coptic Egyptian (i.e., Egyptian grammar and presumably pronunciation, but, in this case, mostly Greek letters):[42]

> Hail, God of Abraham! Hail, God of Isaac! Hail, God of Jacob!
>
> Jesus, the Christ, the one holy of spirit, the Son of the Father, who is in the upper part of the Seven and who is in the inner part of the Seven.

41 Here I credit the editors of GEMF II for not isolating Jesus's name (as in GMPT) but placing it in small capitals to indicate its inclusion among a set of *voces magicae* (GEMF II, fc). Cf. Betz 1986, 96.

42 On the nature of Old Coptic Egyptian in this passage see esp. Love 2016, 64-5, 220-1.

> Bring Iao Sabaoth. May your [Iao's] power be channelled through[43] NN, until you expel this unclean demon, Satan, who is in him! (ll. 1231-8)[44]

The first element (A) is clearly Jewish in origin (and probably in continuing association, too) – a potent magical formula derived from Jewish liturgy. The second part (B), which seems to conflate Jesus with the Holy Spirit, may draw on an esoteric Christological tradition.[45] The third part (C) returns to an exorcistic invocation by the authority of the Jewish god, expelling a demonic being (Satan) familiar in biblical (and early Christian) folklore (but not, notably, in the traditions of the extant Greco-Egyptian formularies like the Paris Codex). From these details – and even more from its solitary preservation in Old Coptic Egyptian – scholars conclude that this entire passage must have had an independent existence subsequent to its appearance in the Excellent Procedure, although clearly it originated as an exorcistic formula.

3.2.2 The Use of Old Coptic Egyptian for a Liturgical Formula

Why, then, was the incantation preserved in Old Coptic and retained thus in the editing of the Paris Magical Papyrus? Its preservation here occurs too early in time to reflect the promulgation of Coptic in Egyptian Christian institutions (and Old Coptic was not a Christian language in any event). It is likewise doubtful that such a formula would have been put in Egyptian for purely practical reasons (e.g., inclusivity of non-Greek participants) when most liturgical formulae in the fourth century were promulgated in Greek.[46] The Egyptian philologist Edward Love is then surely correct that the use of Old Coptic Egyptian instead of Greek here constituted a "proliferation of efficacy" – a way of amplifying the power of the formula through the exotic sounds of Egyptian.[47]

Yet the proliferation of efficacy based on the alterity of tongues had already surrounded the Jewish liturgical formula (A) for some time,

43 Lit., 'come out from'.

44 Tr. GEMF II, emended to reflect liturgical mode.

45 See in general Love 2016, 58-60; Dosoo 2026, 173-4. In general on the use of liturgical (incl. credal) formulas in exorcistic spells see De Bruyn 2017, 207–8.

46 On the continuing importance of Greek in Egyptian Christian liturgies through the fifth century: Mihálykó 2019, 254-7. Korshi Dosoo has speculated that the formula was originally in Greek and translated into Egyptian for Egyptian Christians: Dosoo 2026, 171-2, 176.

47 Love 2016, 214, 220-1.

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as Origen explains. Writing shortly before the probable compilation of the Paris Codex, he asserts that the power of Hebrew is lost in Greek translation:

> If anyone who utters an invocation or oath names "The God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," he would effect something, either because of the nature of these names, or even because of their power; for daimons are overcome and made subject to him who says these things […]. If we were to translate the name Israel into Greek or another language, we would effect nothing. But if we keep it as it is [i.e., in Hebrew], […] then something would happen in accordance with the power which such invocations are said to possess when a formula of this kind is pronounced. We would say the same also of the word Sabaoth, which is frequently used in spells, […] if we keep it with its own sounds, we will cause something to happen.[48]

Of course, Old Coptic Egyptian is not Hebrew (nor in any way like Hebrew!). But in a world that idealized 'linguistic alterity' – the mysteriously potent sounds of foreign tongues – it is quite likely that the scribes involved in the editing of this exorcistic passage (and its embedding in a more comprehensible Greek spell) regarded Old Coptic Egyptian as possessing the same efficacious Otherness that Origen imputed to Hebrew.[49]

An illuminating *comparandum* comes from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which is roughly contemporaneous with Origen and the Paris Magical Codex. A famous passage asserts that any translation from Egyptian into Greek "will greatly distort the sense of the writings, and cause much obscurity. Expressed in our native [Egyptian] language, the teaching conveys its meaning clearly, for the very quality of the sounds <…>; and when the Egyptian words are spoken, the force of the things signified works in them".[50] The claims here, like the Hermetic composition itself, are thoroughly Greek; yet the attribution of special powers to foreign tongues – and specifically to the Egyptian tongue – is both characteristic of the early Roman period and relevant to the Old Coptic passage. Both Hebrew (for Origen) and Egyptian (for the Hermetic author) were imagined to convey powers in their native sounds, powers that would be obliterated in Greek

48 Origen, *c. Cels.* 5.45, tr. Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, corrected ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 300. See also *c. Cels.* 1.25; 8.37, underlining the same principle. Similar powers are caustically imputed to untranslated foreign tongues in Lucian's depiction of the charismatic performance of Alexander of Abonoteichos: "Alexander the False Prophet", 13.

49 On the numinous alterity of foreign tongues see Miller 1986; Tardieu 2013.

50 *C.H.* 16: *Epistle of Asclepius to King Ammon*, ed./tr. Scott 1924, 1: 262-5.

translation.[51] Could Old Coptic Egyptian have been imagined as interchangeable with (or at least replaceable for) Hebrew by virtue of their similar alterity and antiquity? I would propose that the compiler of the Excellent Procedure had no Hebrew text or form to render the liturgical passage above in mysterious and potent sounds, so Egyptian (rather than *voces magicae*) offered the best substitution.[52]

4 Conclusions: The Two Exorcism Spells as Outsiders' Perspective on a New Ritual Practice

In many ways these two exorcism spells are constructed within the ritual world and discourse typical of the Greco-Egyptian formularies: the incantations alternate with material ingredients and gestures; they use *voces magicae* common to many spells. Indeed, "Jesus" in the Pibechis Charm belongs to a string of *voces magicae* intended to conjure the esoteric name of the Jewish god, while the use of Old Coptic Egyptian in the Excellent Procedure suggests the crafting (at some stage) of linguistic alterity for aural potency (Egyptian in lieu of Hebrew). And yet their overall function to expel spirits, which are depicted as frightful demons, sets both spells apart from the rest of the Paris Magical Papyrus, where *daimones* tend to be ambivalent spirits (often *aoroi*) that can be invoked and subjugated to the ritualist's will. Coupled with the equally unusual invocation of "Jesus the Christ" (Excellent Procedure) and "God of the Hebrews IĒSOU IABA IAĒ ABRAŌTH" (Pibechis Charm), the two spells point to the same ritual link between the name Jesus and the expulsion of malign spirits that Luke-Acts and Origen described. But are these exorcisms, then, evidence of novel ritual practices from within a Christian milieu or from the perspective of others?

It is difficult to determine the religious allegiances of the initial composers of these spells, and it may be presumptuous, even anachronistic, to expect 'religious allegiances' at all in the crafting of apotropaic amulets and spells. The editors of the Paris Magical Papyrus themselves were most likely not Jewish or Christian, in the sense that these religions might determine ritual creativity. At least

51 We are most familiar with Greek depictions of translating from the Hebrew (2 Macc; Ep. Aristeas), but *voces magicae* themselves make clear that Hebrew names and language were also regarded as carrying an archaic potency On the exoticization of Hebrew language, see, e.g.: PGM XIII.80-81; P. Mich. Inv. 599, referring to the power intrinsic to "all the special names that are written in Hebrew" (ACM 133, p. 304).

52 One might also propose, on historical grounds, that in the mid-third century CE, Jews had still not recovered their cultural presence after the massacres that followed the 116-17 Jewish revolt, so that a Greco-Egyptian scribe would have had no recourse to Jewish ritual experts to acquire the necessary words. See Kerkeslager 2006.

in its Old Coptic Egyptian section, the Excellent Procedure may have originated in a Christian milieu; and, by the evidence of its series of *historiolae* from Jewish lore, the Pibechis Charm could have originated in a Jewish milieu (without the superfluous admonition to avoid pork). But these features could as easily have been imitated and cobbled together.[53] What is important to recognize is the way Jewish and Christian details of verbal authority, like liturgical phrases and key divine names, naturally coalesce in the composition of an exorcism spell, for this genre of ritual speech (and therapeutic intervention) seems to have been a common development in both traditions. Moreover, these two spells suggest that exorcism was regarded by outsiders as a common power of Jewish and Christian ritual speech. That is, scribes knew that the efficacy of an exorcistic incantation must derive from Jewish authority – biblical lore, the invocation of the God of the Patriarchs – as well as the name Jesus.

These connections, apparently deemed essential by the scribes, are precisely the historical feature this paper seeks to highlight. In the world of Greco-Egyptian formularies and their scribal milieux, exorcism was itself an anomalous approach to *daimones*; and yet it had an important history as a ritual practice and a scribal (or liturgical) composition distinctive of Jews and Christians. So how, to such a scribe, would such a practice proceed— by what verbal formulae and names? This was the purpose of including these spells, to include and to imagine a ritual form that would have been in ascendance in the fourth century.

Yet there is no evidence that either of these spells had a performative 'life' apart from the libretto itself. They each came into being, like most formulary spells, as ideal depictions of rites, not as records of gestural practice. The Excellent Procedure and Pibechis Charm, both edited in their extant versions by scribes outside Jewish or Christian milieux, show that exorcism here was imagined to work by invoking Jewish lore and formulae and the name Jesus. (For others, it was imagined to work simply by invoking the powers of Solomon.)[54] This evidence does not point to the scribes' acquaintance with Juda*ism* or Christian*ity* (as we might imagine these exceedingly diverse religions in the third or fourth centuries), but simply with an emergent ritual form in the general world of the formulary scribes, one that they treated as a curious and complementary addition to the codex. But

53 On imitations of Jewish magical phrasing see Bohak 2008, 196-209; see also Love 2016, 216-19, on the floating authority of the name Jesus.

54 Note that the Pibechis Charm also invokes the exorcistic authority of Solomon: ll. 3039-42. On the widespread Solomonic exorcistic tradition see Torijano 2002, 41-88; Frankfurter 2019a, 737-40; Franek 2025. See also Boustan, Beshay 2014 on the appropriation of Solomon exorcistic traditions for late antique Christian institutional interests.

that emergent ritual form, exorcism, was an indication of the spread of Christianity in its distinctive demonological interests.

Abbreviations

ACM = Meyer, M.; Smith, R. (eds) (1994). *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.
GEMF = Faraone, C.A.; Torallas Tovar, S. (eds) (2022-). *Greek and Egyptian Magical Formularies, 1-*. Berkeley: California Classical Studies.
GMA = Kotansky, R.D. (ed.) (1994). *Greek Magical Amulets*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
GMPT = Betz, H.D. (ed.) (1986). *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
PGM = Preisendanz, K. (ed.) (1973). *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri, 1-2*. 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Teubner.
RGRW = *Religions of the Graeco-Roman World*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

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Transforming Words into Efficacious Healing Objects: The Case of the Bleeding Woman

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Abstract The miraculous healing of the bleeding woman, *Haemorrhoissa*, as known from Mt 9:20-22, Mk 5:25-34, and Lk 8:43-48, has been reinterpreted and inscribed onto several 'magical' objects to help women recover from gynecological hemorrhage in Egypt (and elsewhere) during the sixth or seventh century. The retelling of the story and the mechanics of healing through these efficacious objects are the focus of this article.

Keywords Haemorrhoissa. Magic. Gospel. Amulet. Gemstone.

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1 Introduction

A story from the Synoptic Gospels recounts Jesus' miracle in Capernaum (Mt 9:20-22; Mk 5:25-34; Lk 8:43-48).[1] A woman who had been bleeding for twelve years, in literature often referred to as *Haemorrhoissa*,[2] touched the garment of Jesus, causing "power to come out from him". Jesus, not seeing her, asked who touched him. The woman came forward, saying she was healed by touching his garment, to which Jesus responded that it was her faith that healed her. The narrative conveys a thought-provoking idea regarding the efficacy of healing through touch and through concepts of 'power' of Jesus Christ and 'faith' of the believer. But what happens when this narrative is materialized, in particular when it is expressed on healing amulets?

The story of the bleeding woman was retold on two 'magical' healing objects from Egypt, dating roughly between the sixth and eighth centuries: a gemstone inscribed in Greek and a Coptic wooden tablet.[3] Both of these objects were likely aimed at regulating menstrual or uterine bleeding. Although the objects ground their efficacy in the Gospel story, the healing methods they reflect were reinterpreted to suit their respective historical contexts; this article explores why and how the narrative, influenced by a later tradition, changed. The first section discusses the gemstone. The second section engages with certain Coptic sources relating to the *Haemorrhoissa*. In the third and final section, I offer a theoretical discussion on the ways the Gospel narrative was expressed on physical objects for the

1 I would like to thank Ágnes T. Mihálykó, the organizer of the conference *Between Magic and Liturgy: Discussing Christian Ritual Texts* (Vienna, 23-24 February 2023) and its attendants for their remarks on the initial version of this paper; I especially thank Joseph E. Sanzo. I also thank Jiří Dynda and Korshi Dosoo for their suggestions, and Rune Nyord and David Frankfurter for their comments on the initial version of this article. Vladimir Ivanovici helped me to find literature on the *Haemorrhoisa* iconography, for which I am grateful. I thank Eliana Dal Sasso for discussing wooden tablets used for bookbinding with me. I also thank Gajane Achverdjanová and Robert Matthew Calhoun who were kind enough to share their work with me. I also thank the Institut français d'archéologie orientale (IFAO) for sharing the images of the wooden tablet IFAO Copte T. 26 with me. Lastly, I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions which have helped to improve this paper significantly.

2 *Haemorrhoissa* is a Latin term derived from the Greek <γυνὴ> αἱμορροοῦσα, <woman> who had been suffering from a hemorrhage, Mt 9:20. The earliest reference to the woman as *Haemorrhoissa* I was able to find is from a sixteenth century edition of a sermon by Peter Chrysologus (ca. 380-450), bishop of Ravenna, called *De Haemorrhoissa, et Filia Archisynagogi* (Peter Chrysologus 1534, no. 33), so it is safe to assume this Latin designation has long been established in theological discussions.

3 In this article, I use the term 'magic' as an analytical category, as outlined by Sanzo 2020a, 25. The term 'magical' is used to refer to ritual objects used in non-liturgical healing context.

purpose of magical healing. This essay will primarily attend to the use of this story as it relates to the mechanics of magical healing.[4]

2 The *Historiola* of the Bleeding Woman on a Hematite Gemstone

To explore the use and transformation of narratives about the *Haemorrhoissa* in healing practice, this article focuses on the presentation of two healing objects: a well-studied Greek hematite gemstone and a lesser-known Coptic wooden tablet. Both of these objects likely employed this narrative to prevent, manage, or treat excessive gynecological bleeding. But before discussing these objects, it is useful to cite the fullest account of *Haemorrhoissa*'s healing, which appears in Lk 8:43-48:[5]

> Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you". But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me". When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace".

This story is retold on a hematite gemstone (4.8 × 3.6 × 1 cm), kept under the inventory number 17.190.491 and gifted by John Pierpont Morgan to The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1917. As with most magical gemstones, its findspot and dating are difficult to determine. Nevertheless, it was presumably produced in Egypt in the

4 Accordingly, this essay will not focus on the various literary and theological interpretations of this story which have emerged over the centuries (e.g., Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* 7.18). For references to works of other Church Fathers, see the commentary of the Gospel of Matthew by Saint Thomas Aquinas (pages 316-51 in the 1874 edition); for an analysis of the story in the works of the poets Jacob of Serugh and Romanos Melodos, see Walsh 2022.

5 Unless indicated otherwise, all translations of biblical passages are based on the "New Revised Standard Version" of the Bible.

sixth or seventh century (Weitzmann 1979, 440 no. 398).[6] The object is made of hematite – often associated with coagulated blood in the ancient world (see below) – and was probably used as a pendant, as it is set in a "silver mounting with a loop" (Weitzmann 1979, 440 no. 398). The gemstone has been discussed by various scholars after appearing in the exhibition catalogue of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Age of Spirituality*, in 1979. In 1993, Jacquelyn Tuerk discussed it in more detail, and it has recently been examined again by Robert Matthew Calhoun;[7] this essay partially follows up on both these articles.

The gemstone visually and textually (re)presents the story of the bleeding woman, though interpreted through the lens of its time. On the obverse **[fig. 1]**, Christ is identified by the inscription ιc̄ χc̄. He stretches out his right hand over the woman while he holds a book in his left hand. A woman kneels next to him in a *proskynesis* posture, receiving the blessing. The reverse of the gemstone **[fig. 2]** shows (in the center) the woman in an orant position, flanked by palm trees on the left and right. She appears to be healed. The corrupt text written on the obverse and reconstructed here based on Robert Matthew Calhoun's reading (Calhoun 2024, 47-8), recalls the suffering of the woman before being healed, which roughly corresponds to Mk 5:25-26: "And the woman who was in a flow of blood, suffered greatly and spent <money> without being helped but rather kept on flowing" (καὶ ἡ γυνὴ οὖσα <ἐν> ῥύσει αἵματος ἔτη, καὶ πολλὰ παθοῦσα η(?) καὶ ἐδαπάνησα μηδὲν ὠφεληθεῖσα ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον η(?) δραμοῦσα).[8] The text on the reverse reports the result: namely, healing: "The flow of her blood was dried in the name of her faith" (ἐξηράνθη ἡ πηγὴ τοῦ αἱματησμοῦ αὐτῆς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τῆς πίστεως αὐτῆς), which roughly corresponds to Mk 5:29 and, therefore, incorporates Jesus's proclamation about the woman's faith.[9]

6 However, Jeffrey Spier notes that the gemstone is from the middle Byzantine era, and that the sixth or seventh century dating might be too early (Spier 1993, 44 fn. 111). A Byzantine amulet with Christ in a frontal position blessing the bleeding woman inscribed with Mk 5:25-29 was discovered during excavations at Samos and dated to the seventh century. See Calhoun 2024, 84; ed. pr. W.R. Megow in Kienast 2004, 125 no. 766.

7 Monographs dedicated to the *Hemorrhoissa*: Selvidge 1990; Trummer 1991. The gemstone is discussed by, e.g., CBd-1123; Baert 2010; Baert, Kusters, Sidgwick 2012a; 2012b; Nauerth in Breck, Bol 1983, 560-1 no. 165; Calhoun 2024; Michel 2004, 127-8; Myers Achi 2023, 51 no. 11; Nagy 2012; Sanzo 2024, 65-8; Tuerk 1999; Tuerk-Stonberg 2021a, 6-9; Tuerk-Stonberg 2021b, 87-90; Tuerk-Stonberg, Bardzik 2023; Walsh 2022; Weitzmann 1979, 440 no. 398. Tuerk also suggests the amulet was discussed in Breck, Rogers 1925, 42, but the mention is very brief ("large amulet of hematite with intaglio designs worn as a charm against hemorrhage").

8 I follow Calhoun's reading of τρέχω as 'to flow' rather than the usual 'to run' (Calhoun 2024, 48 fn. 11).

9 For further editions, see Beck, Bol 1983, 560-1; Tuerk 1999, 25-6; Tuerk-Stonberg, Bardzik 2023, 341-3; Lieselotte Kötzsche in Weitzmann 1979, 440 no. 398; Zellmann-Rohrer 2016, 425, no. 5.6.1.2.

Figure 1
Incised healing amulet, obverse. Hematite. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 17.190.491. Courtesy of the Open Access initiative of the MET Museum

Figure 2
Incised healing amulet, reverse. Hematite. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 17.190.491. Courtesy of the Open Access initiative of the MET Museum

Other Late Antique gemstones depicting the *Haemorrhoissa* are also known: one made of rock crystal with frontal-facing Jesus raising a hand upon a crouching woman (who does not seem to be touching the his clothes), bought in Constantinople;[10] another one with an image of a kneeling woman touching the garment of Jesus on one side and a Gorgon on the other, designated by Jeffrey Spier as a bronze token.[11] The Benaki Museum in Athens holds a green chalcedony gem (inventory number 13527) with the *Haemorrhoissa* touching the garment of Christ on one side and the crucifixion on the other.[12] According to Alphonse A. Barb and others, the *Haemorrhoissa* touching Christ's hem is also found in the third row of the reverse of a bronze electrotype of a sixth-century gem (British Museum inv. no. 1938,1010.1).[13] In addition to noting all these gemstones (Calhoun 2024, 49 fn. 15.), Calhoun also pointed out an amulet with Christ in a frontal position blessing the bleeding woman touching the hem of his clothes, inscribed with Mk 5:25-29, discovered during excavations at Samos and dated by context to the seventh century (Calhoun 2024, 84).[14] This latter example closely resembles the gemstone studied here. Remarkably, all these items are dated between the sixth and seventh centuries. That said, Spier proposed that the bronze token and green chalcedony gem might date between the tenth and twelfth centuries.[15] Typically, the decoration on the obverse of these gemstones represents a relationship, and the reverse expresses a state resulting from this relationship. Other iconographical representations of the story of the bleeding woman from the wider Mediterranean area, dating between the fourth and seventh centuries, exist (Baert 2010): a fourth-century wall painting in the catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter in Rome and a sixth-century mosaic in the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna are the most famous examples. Private objects, such as a decorated ivory comb from Mirine, dated to the fourth or early fifth century, also depict the bleeding woman's healing (Achverdjanová, Foletti 2021, 80).

10 Baert 2010, 12, fig. 15; Baert, Kusters, Sidgwick 2012a, 674, fig. 10; Baert, Sidgwick 2011, 327; Garrucci 1880, pl. 479 no. 23; Spier 2013, no. 684. Unfortunately, I am not able to find information regarding the reverse of the gemstone.

11 Baert, Sidgwick 2011, 327; Baert, Kusters, Sidgwick 2012a, 676 fig. 12; Spier 1993, 44 fn. 111 no. 38.

12 Image of this amulet was published by Foskolou 2014, 345 fig. 16; Spier 1993, 44 fn. 111.

13 Barb 1964, 10-1; Baert, Kusters, Sidgwick 2012b, 325; Calhoun 2024, 49 fn. 15.

14 Ed. pr. W.R. Megow in Kienast 2004, 125 no. 766.

15 Spier 1993, 44 fn. 111. Felicity Harley-McGowan also dates the amulet from the Benaki museum between the tenth and twelfth century (Harley-McGowan 2019, 114 fn. 56) and provides the following literature arguing for an earlier date: A. Drandaki, in Papanikola-Bakirtzi 2002, 485 no. 659; Vikan 1984, 81 fn. 106.

The way the amulet plays with time is remarkable. The five-part narrative of the *historiola* (woman approaches Jesus; she touches Jesus; Jesus questions her; the woman admits touching Jesus; Jesus declares the woman's faith) was tailored to the needs of the ritual practice by narrowing it down to two moments: the before and after. The obverse carries the initial event and the reverse its outcome.[16] In terms of visual narrative, the obverse represents a relationship, established through an action happening between the two protagonists, whereas the reverse expresses a state of a single individual. Interestingly, when illustrating action, the characters were depicted in profile (obverse: Jesus blessing the woman), but states were depicted frontally (reverse: the healed woman).

The story told by the gemstone, according to the theory of David Frankfurter, constitutes a *historiola*, "the long-standing term for an abbreviated narrative that is incorporated into a magical spell" (Frankfurter 1995, 438). *Historiolae* do not necessarily draw directly from mythical macro-narratives, but rather from a broader contemporary tradition – in this case, the Gospel story as living within the culture of sixth or seventh-century Egypt. Such a tradition would be the rich and complex combination of gestures, customs, iconography, and stories told, among many other elements, resulting in a blend – Frankfurter borrows the Lévi-Straussian term *bricolage* – of various elements (Frankfurter 1995, 473; Lévi-Strauss 1962, 26-47). So, a *historiola* articulates a myth at a particular point in time; it is not identical to a mythical macro-narrative (Frankfurter 1995, 474). The notion of *historiola* helps explain how it is possible that the Gospel narrative does not match the story as told on the hematite gemstone; the gemstone is a result of *bricolage*, in which the Gospel texts are only one of the elements 'tinkered' with, besides conventional iconography or ritual practice. Frankfurter further points out that a magical object can be any material thing that carries agency (Frankfurter 1995, 676). The hematite gemstone is also an object filled with agency, as it is the material embodiment of the *historiola* rooted in a particular time in history and created for a particular purpose, in Tuerk's words, as a 'vehicle' for the transfer of Christ's healing power. But how did such *bricolage* lead to the creation of the hematite gemstone? The text on the gemstone, the images it carries, its materiality, and its use – but in particular *the relationship between these elements* constituting its efficacy – will be examined to answer this question.

In the words of Roland Barthes, the text provides a simple 'anchorage' for the images, explaining what the image represents

16 Tuerk notes that depictions of a woman in orant position flanked by palm trees is a sign of prayer for salvation in Christian art (1999, 39).

(Barthes 1997, 156). The writing on the object is efficacious in two ways; it is itself of importance, as it refers directly to the Scripture, and it also exists as a *historiola* drawing on a wider tradition living a life of its own, as was suggested earlier (Frankfurter 1995, 464).[17] Paolo Vitellozzi considers the use of, for instance, Gospel passages on gemstones as an 'action' providing a template for the ritual:

> The idea of language as an action rather than a mere description of reality also serves to explain the presence of literary quotations […] the sense of which was thought to change reality by providing a normative model for the expected magical action. (Vitellozzi 2023, 29)

Similarly, Tuerk argues, referring to Clifford Geertz's theory of ritual, that the Gospel story is a model for healing (Tuerk 1999, 37-9; Geertz 1973).

In contrast to some of the other parallel depictions of the bleeding woman's healing and the Gospel narratives, based on both the iconography and the text inscribed on the gemstone, the woman did not touch Jesus. On the gemstone, Jesus' arm is stretched above the woman's head, blessing her. Remarkably, in the amulet's reinterpretation of the miracle, the woman's touch remains ignored. Christ's blessing (absent from the Gospel narratives) and the woman's act of *proskynesis* are visually highlighted, and the role of her faith in the healing is stressed in the inscription and the woman's gesture of prayer. The act of touch disappears from the story as told on the gemstone. As Tuerk suggests, "in the absence of Christ's robe" acting as "a channel for Christ's power", the amulet offered a substitute focus for the historical woman (Tuerk 1999, 32). As the amulet was in contact with Christ through the text and image, carrying its agency, "it acted as a vehicle to transfer healing power from Christ […] to the wearer" (33). Whether this omission was intentional remains an open question; on the Samos gemstone, the closest parallel, the woman is depicted as touching his robe, as well as on several other depictions of the scene. Nevertheless, touch, at least implicitly, was ritually meaningful for the object's efficacy (as is discussed below). Besides the act of touch, the gemstone also omits the moment of dramatic narrative tension when Jesus asked who touched him; in the Gospel

17 The use of biblical passages as healing objects is well-attested (de Bruyn 2010; Sanzo 2014; PCM 25-6), and it is the case of the magical gemstone as well.

story, the woman was distressed by his question.[18] But according to the text and image on the gemstone, Christ blessed the woman as she prostrated herself, expressing the relationship that initiated the healing accomplished through her faith.

Concerning the issue of the discrepancies between the Gospel narratives and the story as told on the gemstone, it is necessary to address the identity of the woman on the gemstone. I would argue, similarly to others before me, that it is neither the woman in Capernaum nor the woman who might have used this amulet. It is a third woman, the ideal of the woman using the gemstone combined with the ideal of the bleeding woman from Capernaum, created through the *bricolage* of iconographical conventions and the Gospel accounts and their interpretation, and immortalized into this depiction, applicable to any woman of the time. This ideal woman represented the complex relationship between the mythical (i.e., the woman in Capernaum) and a historical (i.e., the actual user of the amulet) figure.

Calhoun proposed to understand the gemstone in terms of *metalepsis*:

> If my interpretation of the Met amulet's text and images as both abbreviation and revision of Mark 5,25-34 is correct, however, it establishes an identical – not merely analogical – relationship between the women. The end-user reads or even writes herself into the story, such that the world of the narrative and the real world converge. (Calhoun 2024, 55)

According to Tuerk, by reading the text on the gemstone, the woman "incorporated" the story "within her own body" (Tuerk 1999, 33). Tuerk suggested that the object created a 'persuasive analogy' – a term borrowed from Stanley J. Tambiah signaling that 'magical' relationships are not causal but rather persuasive[19] – between the historical woman and the bleeding woman from the Gospels, and an "encouraging precedent" for its owner (29). I agree with these proposals and further suggest that the image represents the ideal *relationship* of any faithful historical woman who wished to receive healing to Jesus Christ. Faith, as I point out in the last section of this paper, is relational, and faith is what, as the text on the gemstone says,

18 Calhoun suggests that this is the moment that might have been depicted on the obverse and the reverse the praying woman, omitted by the evangelists (2024, 50). I suggest reading the object more directly, the obverse depicting Christ blessing a woman, who, in parallel depictions touches his robe and at that moment receives healing, and the reverse is an expression of the faithfulness and gratitude of the Biblical woman, merging with the notion of the ideal woman, as imagined by the creator of the amulet.

19 More on this theory can be found in e.g., Tambiah 1985, 17-86.

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initiated and brought about the healing; in this sense, faith plays a central role of both the obverse (visual expression of the relationship) and the reverse (depiction of a praying woman combined with the Gospel passage on the role of faith in her healing). The conventional way the woman and Jesus were iconographically represented, the fact that a New Testament passage accompanied the depiction, and the fact that these were reproduced on a hematite gemstone associated with coagulated blood and intended for personal use, made the gemstone comprehensible to most Christians living in Late Antiquity.

As it relates to the materiality of the gemstone, it is useful to consider Rune Nyord's analysis of pharaonic Egyptian cultic images, in which he applies Jane Bennett's concept of 'vibrant substances' to the materials onto which the images are inscribed. According to Nyord, these are not just raw materials, but things with a life of their own (Nyord 2020, 30; Bennett 2010). Nyord's theory serves as an inspiration for my thesis, as it is tailored for the understanding of images in pharaonic Egypt. In their very physicality, such 'vibrant substances' contain an intrinsic connection of one substance to another, which goes beyond simple symbolic association (Nyord 2020, 31). In this case, hematite from which the gemstone was made, was considered to have an intrinsic connection to coagulated blood in Antiquity since this mineral was likened to solidified blood.[20] In this sense, as Nyord argues, transforming hematite into a gemstone is in itself an enactment of the relationship between the raw stone and the coagulated blood. Through text and image, this connection between the blood and the stone was actualized (32). The material from which the gemstone was made manifested coagulated blood (i.e., the desired 'practical' *outcome*) while the text and image on the gem 'anchored' the image and thus explained its *purpose* (i.e., healing blood flow). Furthermore, the image shows the obedient relationship of the woman to Christ, who blesses her and thus *causes* the healing – at least according to the Gospel.

Taken together, the material, the text, and the image 'enacted' the healing and created meaningful relationships between the various actors: Christ; the bleeding woman from the Gospel; the ideal woman; and the historical woman. Thus, the raw hematite was a vibrant substance, actualized to its potential as a healing object by allowing the words of a Gospel, a depiction of Christ, and of the ideal woman to emanate from it. The ritual specialist who produced this object was, in a way, aware of these relationships, knowing that a further step in actualizing the efficacy of the object was its practical use as a healing pendant, tying together its materiality, stylized depictions, canonical text, and traditional practice.

20 E.g., Plin. *HN* 35.37-8. See discussion in Dasen 2015, 34; Tuerk 1999, 30-1.

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The connection between the image and the entities depicted on the gemstone, the signified and the signifier, is created in different ways, according to Nyord. The relationship relevant here is the one that was "meant to induce changes or otherwise influence the entity depicted through the making and/or subsequent manipulation of the image" (54). The gemstone was supposed to bring change – healing – to the person who owns and uses it. Because this user identified with the depicted woman, as suggested by Calhoun, perhaps the object not only provided a focus and encouragement, as Tuerk suggested, but could also have stimulated the healing process on a deeper level. Nyord proposes that it is "the ritual manipulation of the image that can end up influencing the depicted entity". When the gemstone was ritually manipulated (for instance, worn on the body) by someone who identified with the depicted ideal woman, it may have initiated the healing of its owner. As Nyord argues, the relationship between the user of the object and the entities depicted could materialize through a general relationship between the object and its user, through 'presence' and 'proximity' (57). Simply put, the user could have made the relationship between her and Jesus happen by keeping the object that enacts it close to her. So, on the theological and intellectual level, faith created the healing relationship (between any of the three women discussed here and Christ), and on the material, practical, or 'magical' one, of primary interest here, the proximity to the object further enabled it.

To conclude, the hematite as the material substance of the gemstone contains its potential (residing in the intrinsic connection between hematite and coagulated blood), the depiction and text actualize this potential by making the desired relationship between the user and the divine agency apparent, the words of the Scripture and depiction of Jesus gives the object authority, and the ritual manipulation of the object means that it had to remain in proximity to its beneficiary in order to be effective. These elements combined imbue the object with agency.

3 A Coptic Scriptural Amulet

The second object carrying the story of the bleeding woman, IFAO Copte T. 26 (12.5 × 33 × 0.14 cm), edited by René Coquin (1984), is a damaged, undecorated wooden tablet covered by a coating and pierced in the middle on top, likely for suspension.[21] The tablet is

21 For details of this object, see KYP M345. Ed. pr. by Coquin 1984. Coquin suggests that the coating of the tablet was originally white; on the image available to me and provided by the IFAO, a few white dots are visible, perhaps remnants of the paint (1984, 55), but otherwise the tablet appears smooth and slightly shiny, apparently with a coating.

inscribed lengthwise and contains the Coptic version of Lk 8:41-56, a passage in which the healing of the bleeding woman took place as Jesus was going to the sick daughter of Jairus, whom he raised once the bleeding woman was healed. It appears that the object is a palimpsest (55).

Coquin suggests that the object was suspended on the wall as an amulet for healing (60). He writes that the tablet has two other holes for suspension (one of which is partially obstructed by a piece of metal), which are visible on the top. Based on my inspection of the photographs of the tablet kindly provided to me by the Institut français d'archéologie orientale, I suggest the presence of only one additional hole, on the right margin of the tablet, which, as Coquin suggests, seems obstructed, perhaps by a piece of metal. I would argue that these two holes were not – at least initially – intended for suspension on the wall. Rather, their presence could suggest that the object was originally a writing tablet, often used for school exercises. Such tablets were frequently covered with a coating, allowing them to be easily reused, pierced one or multiple times along the top of the longer side of the rectangular tablet, and joined together to form a notebook (called *album* or *leukōma*; Cribiore 1996, 65). IFAO Copte T. 26 carries these characteristics and is also of a similar size to a tablet from such a notebook.[22] Why one of the holes is partially obstructed by metal is unclear to me; another similar object, a tablet from Brussels (Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Historie de Bruxelles E 6801), identified as magical by some and as a school text by others, contains this same feature.[23] Coquin argues, based on the paleography, that the object was produced in Egypt in the seventh or eighth century (Coquin 1984, 55).[24]

As Nathan Carlig and Magali de Haro Sanchez have already noted, amulets are occasionally difficult to differentiate from school texts (Carlig, de Haro Sanchez 2015; cf. Delattre, Martin, Vanthieghem 2020). An argument for IFAO Copte T. 26 being a school exercise, besides the materiality, would be that the text does not seem to contain any 'magical' markers, such as *kharaktēres*. Nevertheless,

22 This is also noted by Coquin (1984, 59-60), who compares it to the tablet Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Historie de Bruxelles E 6801, measuring 12 × 30 × 1.7 cm (ed. pr. Préaux 1935).

23 For the most recent discussions of the object, see Carlig, de Haro Sanchez 2015, 77-8; Delattre, Martin, Vanthieghem 2020, 14-21. Another potential explanation for the presence of metal on the tablet could be that at some point, it might have been reused for bookbinding. However, without further examination, this cannot be confirmed. I would like to thank Eliana Dal Sasso for discussing this issue with me. For instance, the Inv.T.021 from the Cologne collection (16.7 × 27.8 × 0.7 cm) is an inscribed wooden tablet, originally used for bookbinding, published by Koenen 1974.

24 See also Bélanger Sarrazin 2020, 195-6; Worp 2012. A possible parallel for the hand is, for instance, PCM 10.

there are also arguments for the tablet being reused to function as a scriptural amulet: the single hole on top suggests suspension (for the significance of this, see below). Furthermore, the chosen passage is significant, as both stories address women's issues. The text is written in a quick, informal hand, similar to that of amulets,[25] and the last line on the recto is very irregular (it was perhaps uncomfortable for the scribe to write the last line, given the thickness of the tablet). School texts often have lines to ease regular writing and tend to be repetitive, features this object lacks (Cribiore 1996, 65-9). Most importantly, there are at least two other magical texts written on very similar tablets.[26] Last but not least, magical texts are very often written over other texts and on reused materials, so the use of a wooden tablet originally intended for other purposes is not surprising.[27] I would argue that the last scribe effaced an older text and wrote this passage over it to serve as an amulet to be affixed on a wall.

The tablet tells the story of the bleeding woman according to Luke's version. Jesus asks the woman, bleeding for twelve years: "Who (m. sg.) touched me?" (recto l. 7 ⲛ̈ⲓ̈ⲙ ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁϥⲭⲱϩ ⲉⲣ[ⲟⲓ]). "For I myself know that a power came out from me" (recto l. 10 ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲁ̈ⲓ̈ⲉⲓⲙⲉ ⲉⲩⲃⲟⲙ ⲉⲁⲥⲉ̈ⲓ̈ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̀ϩⲏⲧ), he further explains. When he discovered it was the woman, he concluded: "My daughter, it is your faith that saved you. Go in peace" (verso ll. 13-14 ⲧⲁϣⲫⲉⲣⲉ [ⲧⲟⲩⲡⲓⲥⲧⲓⲥ ⲧⲉⲛⲧⲁⲥⲛⲁ̀ϩⲙⲉ ⲃⲱⲕ] ϩⲛ ⲟⲩⲉⲓⲣⲏⲛⲏ).[28] This narrative is followed by the story of the daughter of Jairus: when Jesus took the hand of his deceased daughter and commanded her to get up, she was healed.[29] The very last line on the verso contains a few letters which are difficult to read, the remainder being damaged; indeed, it might be the key to understanding the

25 E.g., PCM 10; PCM 15; O.Crum ST 398 (KYP M124).

26 P.Ryl.Copt.Suppl. No. 50 (KYP M734; ed. pr. Giversen 1959), pierced with two holes, 11 × 44 × 1 cm, suggesting that this could also have originally been part of a notebook, and later affixed to a wall (?). Besides the nature of the text – the Jesus-Abgar correspondence exists often within magical contexts (Bélanger Sarrazin 2020, 191-3) – the existence of a colophon suggests that this is an amulet rather than a school exercise. PGM T1 is another example of a magical text written on a wooden tablet, 7.2 × 13× 0.8 cm, and pierced similarly with two holes, indicating reuse of a school notebook. P.Kellis I 88 (KYP M1105) is a liturgical text, a prayer, perhaps written on a notebook. Other possibly magical texts on wooden tablets with holes, possibly for suspension: T.Varie 13 (KYP M107); P.Bad. IV 60 & 65 (KYP M519 & 630); Paris, Louvre M.N.D. 552 b (KYP M1077; ed. pr. Passoni dell'Acqua 1980; Warga 1988 (KYP M1808); PGM T2b (KYP M2139).

27 For instance, PCM 15, a re-used wax tablet, also seems to be a palimpsest.

28 Edition from Coquin 1984, 56-7, translation of the author.

29 Coquin suggests that the stories about the bleeding woman and the story of Jairus' daughter appear together because of their connection with the number twelve – Coquin proposes it could have been suspended above the bed of a sick twelve-year-old girl; a hole on top of the tablet suggests it could have been suspended as an amulet (1984, 60).

nature of the text. Coquin presumes that after a staurogram, the text is dated as indiction year 13 (ιг) (Coquin 1984, 59). While possible, the traces of the text are not fully legible.[30] However, if it is a colophon, then it was likely an amulet, as a date would not be expected in a school exercise or even in a copy of the biblical passage used, for instance, for liturgical purposes.[31]

If it were used as an amulet, the tablet would have presumably targeted gynecological issues.[32] But how could it have been used? The practice of affixing an amulet to a wall for protective purposes is attested in magical documents from Late Antique Egypt. Towards the end of a Coptic prayer of Gregory from the seventh or eighth century, a 14-page text containing many adjurations of God to repel evil influences and protect its user, the prayer directs its reader as to how it should be used:

> The Holy Trinity spares everyone who has with them this seal, and those who have with them this prayer, and every place in which it will be affixed (ⲙⲁ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲛⲁⲧⲟⲩⲥ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ), so that it will be for them a phylactery and a remedy and every healing in (?) every pain of every sort (PCM 11, p. 13 l. 23-p. 14 l. 4).

The Coptic Jesus-Abgar letters, correspondence allegedly exchanged between King Abgar of Edessa and Jesus, who supposedly granted healing through his reply, also contain a similar passage describing their use (Bélanger Sarrazin 2020, 192; Preininger forthcoming). A copy of the letter is reproduced in the same as the prayer of Gregory and ends with the following passage:

> The place to which this manuscript will be affixed (ⲡⲙⲁ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲛⲁⲧⲱϫⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ), no power of the Adversary nor unclean spirit will be able to approach nor to reach into that place, and forever. (PCM 11, p. 25 ll. 13-20)

The Jesus-Abgar letters (Bélanger Sarrazin 2020, 192) and a prayer of Gregory (PCM 11, p. 13 ll. 28-9) both state that wherever the amulet (alternatively called a prayer; Sanzo 2020b, 110-13) is affixed, no evil will be able to approach it; thus, the practice of attaching an amulet

30 I was unable to find a document in which the year would be indicated after a staurogram in this way. I am not sure the traces correspond to Coquin's reading; perhaps these were ritual instructions or 'voces magicae'?

31 A magical amulet with the Jesus-Abgar correspondence is signed (P.Ryl.Copt. Suppl. no. 50, ed.pr. Giversen 1959), as well as PCM 23, which includes a colophon. On colophons in liturgical texts, see Mihálykó 2019, 75.

32 As Coquin, the first editor of the wooden tablet points out, this might have also been a writing exercise (1984, 59-60).

to the wall as a protection from evil influences is attested within the context of Christian Egypt in the seventh or eighth centuries at least. Although in this case, we are not dealing with images but with text, Nyord's notion of proximity as the crucial element in establishing the desired relationship between the user and the entity depicted on the object remains relevant. The effectiveness of the ritual use of the wooden tablet and the gemstone lies in their proximity to the owner. The healing efficacy of the tablet is increased or reduced depending on its proximity to the beneficiary – as with the gemstone.

However, there are principal differences between the wooden tablet and the gemstone. The physical boundaries of efficacy of the objects were likely intuitively defined by their users; in the case of the gemstone (or any amulet attached to the body), this boundary was the body itself. In case of a suspended amulet, the boundaries might have been defined by the walls of a room or of the entire house. Both objects gain agency principally from their reference to the Gospel; the material efficacy of the scriptural amulet stemmed from the text written on it, not from the support it was written on, in contrast to the gemstone. Perhaps, as the inscribed gemstone originated in a more professional setting – and was likely more expensive – it draws from other sources of efficacy besides just the Gospel citation, such as the hematite and the carved image, in order to enhance its impact. As the tablet comes from a more modest context, the text was its main source of efficacy. Nevertheless, the nature of the text remains unclear, and the evidence suggesting that it was affixed to a wall is only circumstantial.

4 Power, Faith, and Touch in the New Testament and Late Antique Magical Traditions

In this section, I analyze the story of the bleeding woman as it appears in the New Testament, before assessing its reflection in later theological and amuletic traditions. In the Gospels, touching the garment of Jesus was an established healing technique, an efficacious act on its own (Mt 14:36; Mk 6:56) and, as Lk 6:19 indicates, "And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them". But in Capernaum, only the bleeding woman – ritually unclean when hemorrhaging, according to the rules laid out in Leviticus (15:20-28)[33] – was healed, even though the crowd was pressing against him. As Jesus points out, it was her faith that cured her.

33 Ritual pollution in this context was discussed by Feinstein 2014, 191; Klawans 1998.

Mk 5:28 explicitly lays out the bleeding woman's motivation: "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed".[34] She is right to think so, as touching the garment of Jesus will heal her (at least based on the stories that she might have heard). So, why is this particular moment different? Why is the touch not enough? Christ did not seem to take any action to heal the woman; he was not even aware of her touch at first. Almost as if his power were mechanically transferred; "Power had gone out from me" (δύναμιν ἐξεληλυθυῖαν ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, Lk 8:46). Perhaps it was the woman's faithful thought that set her apart from the crowd.[35] On other occasions, Jesus said, "according to your faith let it be done to you" (Mt 8:13; 9:29), suggesting that faith is an important and occasionally the sole factor for the potential healing. The *act* of touching the garment, combined with the faithful *thought*, resulted in the bleeding woman's cure; Jesus did not need to perform any specific action.

To further understand how the woman was healed, other curative mechanisms appearing in the New Testament should be discussed. According to the Gospel, Jesus healed the sick (1) by utterance ("[H]e then said to the paralytic – "Stand up, take your bed and go to your home". And he stood up and went to his home," Mt 9:6),[36] by (2) touch ("[H]e touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up," Mt 8:15),[37] and (3) as a consequence of faith ("And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; let it be done for you according to your faith". And the servant was healed in that hour," Mt 8:13).[38] Furthermore, combinations of these methods appear as well; (4) touch and utterance,[39] (5) and faith of the worshipper together with touch (Mt 9:29). Only two narratives document the latter healing mechanism, one of them is the story of the woman in Capernaum, and the other is Mt 9:29, "Then he touched their eyes, and said 'According to your faith let it be done to you.'" But in the case of the bleeding woman, it is the woman, out of her own will, who touches Jesus; it is not Jesus who takes the initiative. Consequently, the case of the woman of Capernaum is unique in this context.

34 In Mt 9:21, the woman thinks "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well".

35 I would like to thank Jiří Dynda for pointing this out to me.

36 Mt 8:16; 8:32; 12:13, 15:28; Mk 1:25; 2:11; 3:3; 5:12-13; 7:29; Lk 4:24; 4:39; 5:24; 6:10; 8:30-33; 9:42; Jn 4:53; 5:8; 11:43. This type of healing, together with the one described in (3) is a performative utterance (see Frankfurter 2017).

37 Mt 8:15; 9:25; 14:36, 20:34; Mk 1:31; 3:10; 8:22-25. Cases where Christ heals with saliva and clay fall within this category, Mk 7:23; Jn 9:6.

38 Mt 8:13; 15:28; Mk 10:52; Lk 7:9; 17:19; 18:41-42. This category is very similar to healing by utterance, but the proclamation of faith of the sick by Christ seems to be at the forefront.

39 Mt 8:2-4; Mk 1:41; 5:41; 7:33-34; 9:25-27; Lk 5:13; 7:11-14; 8:54; 13:12.

Power (Greek δύναμις/Coptic ϭом) and faith (Greek πίστις/Coptic ⲡⲓⲥⲧⲓⲥ) are key terms reoccurring in the story of the bleeding woman. Power appears in the accounts of Mark (5:25-34) and Luke (8:43-48). Firstly, it is as an entity that 'goes out' (ἐξελθυῖαν) from Jesus (Grundmann 1985, 189; Zweip 2019, 267-8). As this happens without his knowledge, Jesus does not seem to be actively controlling it in that moment. Secondly, the power affects the woman in a very limited way. The target of the power is solely her medical problem, the bleeding; she cannot control the power in any way. This power is a *healing* power. The question now is, why was only the woman affected? How did she make herself the target of the effect of the power?

To answer this, the concept of faith should be discussed. The word appears regularly in both the New and Old Testaments, and it is challenging to grasp all its nuances depending on the context; I do not attempt to do so here.[40] As others have proposed, faith is a relational term referring to the loyalty between Christ and the people (Morgan 2015; Oakes 2018), suggesting intentionality. *Pistis* is not only a state of the mind but also praxis.[41] The faith of the woman, specifically her conviction that if she touched the garment of Jesus, she would be healed (Mk 5:28; Mt 9:21), seems to be a compass for or an attractor of this power, the embodiment of this faith, which is intentional and relational. Borrowing from philosophical conceptions of 'essence' and 'accident', originally based on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, in the very short instant of the healing touch, an *essential* property of this power – healing – *accidentally* affected the bleeding woman.[42] Thus, the act of touch guided by faith and resulting in a 'transfer of power' is the efficient healing mechanism described in the story of the bleeding woman.

Fast forward a few centuries, this Gospel narrative resonated with Christians living in Egypt. The Coptic *Life of Bishop Pisentius* by John the Elder contains a reference to the story of the bleeding woman, introducing it as a testimony of the 'power of faith' (ϯϭом ⲛ̄ ϯⲡⲓⲥ†ⲥ) of the woman.[43] In this account, Pisentius combined the notions of power and faith, clearly differentiated in the original Gospel narrative and the New Testament in general. While acknowledging the importance of the touch, he also highlights the immaterial efficacy of faith, locating the 'power' within 'faith' itself, making

40 For a detailed discussion of the term, see Frey, Schliess, Ueberschaer 2017; Hay 1989; Morgan 2015; Oakes 2018; Spicq 1979.

41 For 'faith' in the earliest Christian writings, see Morgan 2015, 212-61.

42 The topic is discussed in various passages of Arist. *Metaph*. 5.30 can be cited as an example of accidence versus essence. For a comprehensive summary, see Roca-Royes 2011.

43 The copy of this manuscript (Brit. Mus. Ms. Oriental 7026) dates to the eleventh century; the manuscript is dated by a colophon (Budge 1913, xxxii). Budge 1913, 85, 271.

any intermediaries for power (such as the garment of Jesus in the Gospel or any amulet) irrelevant. Shenoute of Atripe, abbot of the White Monastery in Egypt, also cites the story, and his interpretation addresses the question of whether Jesus knew that it was the bleeding woman who touched him or not:

> Perhaps also he did not know who had touched the edge of his garments so that her flow of blood ceased and dried up? Likewise, when the wickedness of your father Satan burst, did it burst in your heart, O pagan, and all the more fill you with lack of faith? I will speak and confess the truth: not only did he know that the flow of blood had been with her for twelve years, but he knew her from when she was in her mother. If a potter is ignorant of the vessel that he created with his own hands in his own life, Jesus nonetheless knows the ones whom he formed in the womb. Those who know that […]. (Brakke, Crislip 2015, 271)

Shenoute diminishes the narrative tension of the story. He does not use the story in the same way as Pisentius – that is, as a testimony of the 'power of faith' – but to present Jesus as the creator of life who knows everyone whom he created. According to Shenoute, Jesus Christ knew all along who touched him, so no mystery, from which the story draws its appeal, occurred, diminishing the role of the woman's faith and of her touch.

I now propose to ask whether the healing methods used in the New Testament – touch, proclamation of Jesus, and faith – are present in the later healing traditions in Christian Egypt, and if so, how they have changed. Within the Coptic magical corpus, the healing touch of Jesus was considered efficacious, and this is especially evident in scriptural amulets against fever. P.MoscowCopt. 36 is a parchment amulet from the eighth or ninth century to heal Theōnaia of her fever:

> And after Jesus came to the house of Peter, he saw his mother-in-law lying down feverish, and he touched her hand and the fever left her. She arose and she served him. […] The prayers of Patriarch Severus, Saint Theodoros the general, Saint Thekla, invoke God that he graces Theōnaia with healing![44]

This text, as well as two other healing amulets against fever from the corpus, draws from Mt 8:14-15, but is personalised for a historical

44 P.MoscowCopt. 36 recto ll. 14-20, ll. 30-6 (KYP T717): ⲓ̅ⲥ ⲇⲉ ⲛⲧⲉⲣⲉϥⲉⲓ ⲉⲥⲣⲁⲓ ⲉⲡⲏⲓ ⲙⲡⲉⲧⲣⲟⲥ ⲁϥⲛⲁⲩ ⲉⲧⲉϥϣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲥⲛⲏⲭ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲥⲉⲏⲙ ⲁϥⲭⲱⲥ ⲇⲉ ⲉⲧⲉⲥⲃⲓⲝ ⲁϥⲕⲁⲁⲥ ⲛ̀ⲟⲓ ⲛⲉⲥⲙⲟⲙ ⲁⲥⲧⲱⲟⲩⲛ ⲁⲥⲇⲓⲁⲕⲟⲛ[ⲉⲓ] ⲛⲁϥ […] ⲛⲉϣⲗⲏⲛ ⲙⲡⲡⲁⲧⲣⲓⲁⲣⲭⲏⲥ ⲥⲉⲩⲏⲣ \ο/ ⲡⲋⲁⲓⲟⲥ ⲑⲉⲟⲇⲱⲣⲱⲥ ⲡⲉⲥⲧⲣⲁⲧⲏⲗⲁⲧⲏⲥ ⲑⲁⲓⲁ ⲑⲉⲕⲗⲁ ⲡⲁⲣⲁⲕⲁⲗⲓ ⲛ̀ⲛⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛϥⲭⲁⲣⲓⲍⲉ ⲙⲡⲧⲁⲗⲃⲟ ⲛⲑⲉⲟⲛ̀ⲁⲓ̀ⲁ. Jernstedt 1959b, no. 36.

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woman, Theōnaia.[45] A different manuscript containing a prayer for healing deafness refers to the story of Malchus, the High Priest of Caiaphas (Mt 26:51; Mk 14:47; Lk 22:50-51; Jn 18:10-11). Simon Peter cut off the ear of the servant Malchus, likely to prevent the arrest of Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesus healed Malchus by touching his ear. The Coptic prayer using this story calls upon Jesus to do as he had done with Malchus: "But now, Lord Jesus Christ, stretch out your right hand and touch this deaf!" (BnF Copte 129.20 fol. 178 (135), verso ll. 1-7: ⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩ ⲇⲉ ⲡ̀ⲭ̀ⲟ̄ⲉ̄ⲥ ⲓ̄ⲥ̄ ⲡⲉ̄ⲭ̄ⲥ̄ ⲉⲕⲉⲥⲟⲟⲩ̣ⲧ̣ⲛ̀ ⲛ̀ⲧⲉ̣ⲕ̀ⲥ̀ⲓ̀ⲭ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲟⲩ̣ⲛⲁⲙ̣ ⲛⲉⲕⲭⲱⲥ · ⲉⲡⲉ̀ⲓⲁⲗ) (Preininger 2022, 353-4). So, not only is the touch of Jesus mentioned in scriptural amulets, but also in prayers that do not contain direct quotations of the New Testament. Thus, the efficacy of Jesus Christ's healing touch extended not only to the Gospel but was part of a larger contemporary healing tradition, and this concept was creatively employed in prayers.

Concerning the proclamation of Jesus, it remained effective in the Coptic magical material through the scriptural amulets. Rarely, however, were the amulets conceived as the direct speech of Jesus, with the notable exception of the amuletic letters supposedly written by Jesus to King Abgar (Bélanger Sarrazin 2020, 191-3). Lastly, concerning faith in Jesus, πίστις does not typically occur in the magical material written in Coptic as a concept efficacious for healing, apart from direct citations of the Gospels on scriptural amulets, gemstones, or other 'magical' objects. However, as Sanzo pointed out, in a group of amulets for protection against fever from Oxyrhynchus, written in Greek and dated to the fourth century, faith of the clients is mentioned "as a prerequisite for ritual efficacy" (Sanzo 2024, 57).[46] I carefully suggest that the concept of faith played an implicit role in magical practices, in which the rituals and objects played an explicit one, as they were 'material' or 'tangible' additions of sorts to the ephemeral faith.

5 Conclusion

The research question posed at the beginning of this paper concerned understanding the healing effects of the hematite gemstone and the wooden tablet, both of which reference the Gospel story about the *Haemorrhoissa*. Faith, while allegedly sufficient for the biblical woman according to the Gospel narratives and perhaps also for the

45 P.HermitageCopt. 65 (Jernstedt 1959a, no. 65; KYP M55); British Library MS Or 6948 (2) (Crum 1922, no. 3; KYP M334). See also PGM Christian 18 for a Greek written amulet with the same motive.

46 P.Oxy. 6.924; P.Oxy. 82.5306; 82.5307.

ideal woman, was not enough for the historical one; that is where magical practices come into play. In both the New Testament narratives and in the practical ritual use of the objects referring to them, a 'power' emanated; in one case from Jesus, in the other from the objects representing or even enacting this narrative. In the Gospel miracles, the woman received an 'accidental' property of the 'essence' of power that came out from Jesus Christ through her touch. In the ritual use of amulets, their users, by being in their proximity, participated in the representation of the healing relationship enacted through the objects.

The story was transformed to fit the material constraints of the hematite object; for instance, it was simplified into a two-part narrative to correspond to the double-sided form of the gemstone. The constraints of the tradition from which this object emerged, and which shaped it, are complex. Iconographically, the story must have been told in a way that was understandable at first glance, according to the contemporary conventions. At the same time, the role of the images was (in addition to other elements such as materiality) to ensure the object's efficacy. A literal iconographical depiction of the story would likely not suit the needs of the user of the amulet; something is unsettling about this miracle in Capernaum, as Jesus had his back turned to the woman when she touched him, resulting in him questioning her. This moment is not only omitted on the object, but its role is also minimized in Shenoute's and Pisentius' interpretations of the narrative, one putting forward Christ's knowledge of all creation, the other highlighting her 'power of faith'. The act of touch was minimized, and faith combined with the act of blessing gained prominence. The woman being in a *proskynesis* posture and blessed by Jesus is the proper and ideal relation of these two figures, which cannot be misinterpreted, and, more importantly, incorporates the attitude of the user of this amulet, creating the already-mentioned ideal woman to suit the particular historical context.

So, the object enacted the relationship of the ideal woman with Jesus, to which the historical woman directed her intention in the hopes of being healed. Therefore, the Gospel narratives and the episode as conveyed through the amulet seem different; the story was re-told to suit an object of specific use belonging to a particular historical tradition, to which the initial healing method of the Gospel miracle (i.e., making a power emanate from Jesus through the act of touch and faith) did not belong anymore. But the story of the *Haemorrhoissa* was also reinterpreted on the tablet, simply by copying it onto a surface intended for specific, perhaps amuletic, use. This recontextualization is also a reinterpretation of the text, now referring not only to the bleeding woman in Capernaum but also implicitly to a suffering historical individual for whom it was intended. Similarly to the gemstone, it operated through proximity

and drew efficacy from the text itself. To conclude, not only did this story of the bleeding woman resonate in the theological discourses of Shenoute and Pisentius, but it also resonated in folk traditions, precisely in ritual practices, among the Christians living in Egypt.

Abbreviations

CBd = Nagy, Á.M. (ed.). *Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database*. Budapest: Museum of Fine Arts. http://cbd.mfab.hu/cbd/1123.

KYP M = Dosoo, K.; Love, E.O.D.; Preininger, M. (eds). *Kyprianos Database of Ancient Ritual Texts and Objects*. Würzburg: University of Würzburg. https://www.coptic-magic.phil.uni-wuerzburg.de/index.php/manuscripts-search/.

KYP T = Dosoo, K.; Love, E.O.D.; Preininger, M. (eds). *Kyprianos Database of Ancient Ritual Texts and Objects*. Würzburg: University of Würzburg. https://www.coptic-magic.phil.uni-wuerzburg.de/index.php/texts-search/.

PCM = Dosoo, K.; Preininger, M. (2023). *Papyri Copticae Magicae*. *Coptic Magical Texts. Volume 1: Formularies*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

P.Oxy. 6 = Grenfell, B.P.; Hunt, A.S. (1908). *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 6. London: The Egypt Exploration Fund.

P.Oxy. 82 = Gonis N.; Maltomini, F.; Henry, W.B.; Slattery, S. (2016). *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 82. London: Egypt Exploration Society.

PGM = Preisendanz, K.; Henrichs, A. (1973-74). *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri*. Stuttgart: Teubner.

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Diaries as a Window on the Private Religious Lives of Late Imperial Chinese Literati
Two Nineteenth-Century Case Studies

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Abstract This essay surveys diaries (*riji* 日記) as a source to explore the private, quotidian religious lives of late imperial (1550-1900) Chinese literati. Large numbers of such diaries (some running to several thousand pages) exist, sometimes published, often in manuscript form. Some have been used (to a limited extent) for intellectual or political history, but almost never to study religiosity. They nonetheless contain rich information about their authors' public and private participation in rituals, domestic devotion and various sorts of spiritual exercises. This essay will introduce the genre then focus on two case studies, showing how they document private religious practices and regular spiritual exercises.

Keywords Chinese religion. Buddhism. Daoism. Confucianism. Diaries. Weng Tonghe.

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1 Introduction

Studies of religion in Chinese society before the revolutions of the twentieth century have largely focused on institutions (temples, monasteries), state policies, large-scale cults and pilgrimages, with their attendant literary and artistic productions, and more recently text production and spirit-writing. By contrast, personal religion in everyday lives has attracted less attention and, with the exception of a few articles devoted to one notable figure, we still know very little about the religious life-world of late imperial (1550-1900) individuals.[1] Available sources, however, are abundant and await the curious scholar.

My focus here is the religious practices, in particular in domestic and individual contexts, of the late imperial educated men and women. Women are less documented than men yet deserve a separate study, which I hope to contribute to in a separate piece. I will focus here on two men.[2] Many of these educated people (or literati) belonged to what Chinese historiography calls gentry, that is, people who had prepared for and passed at least the first of the three degrees of the civil service examinations; by the late nineteenth century, these men and their families represented several million persons.

My overarching research question is to identify the most common religious practices engaged in by Chinese educated persons in everyday life, especially in domestic contexts. While large-scale communal events are most frequently discussed – whether commemorated, simply described, or criticized, in historical sources – I aim to shed more light on the less visible realm of personal religiosity. In doing so, I hope to show that regular ritual and devotional practices were not the exclusive province of a small class of highly religious figures but were largely shared.

This essay surveys diaries (*riji* 日記) as one type of sources allowing to explore the private, quotidian religious lives of these literati. I will first introduce the genre of diaries, and provide a rapid survey of their contents as far as religious practices are concerned. I will then focus on two case studies, one of a short diary held by an unknown rural man in the middle of wars, the other of a very high official who recorded his everyday activities over forty-six years. This is a limited and by no means representative sample, but it allows for relatively close reading of their contents. The choice of these two particular diaries is not driven by any intention to compare two diarists

1 For studies of the religious lives of late imperial literati, see Liu 2004; 2016; Goossaert 2023-24.

2 On late imperial female domestic devotion, see among other important recent works Li 2019.

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who share certain characteristics (be they social, intellectual, or regional), but rather to look at extremely different cases to offer a sense of the large range of the practices documented in this genre. The contrast between these two sources will allow us, in conclusion, to offer preliminary observations on what diaries have to tell us about the religious lives of their authors.

2 Diaries

Diaries have a long history in Chinese culture, and hundreds of extant diaries from imperial times have been preserved and made available through various reprint collections, allowing historians to mine them for all sorts of questions. One recent major reprint collection, the *Lidai riji congchao* 歷代日記叢鈔 (Anthology of diaries through the ages) comprises 358 diaries found in various Chinese libraries, and the corpus was digitized through OCR in the commercial database Pudieku 譜牒庫 of the Beijing-based Airusheng 愛如生 company; my institutional access to this database allowed me to search the corpus and certain long diaries in particular, and this forms an important part of the data mobilized in the present essay.[3] This database also includes other types of self-narratives, such as autobiographical chronicles (*nianpu* 年譜), which also provide rich evidence of personal religious lives, but I will only focus on diaries as they provide evidence for regular, everyday practice.

Most extant diaries are manuscripts (some in cursive script very demanding for the untrained eye) and were not intended for publication, but a substantial number were published by the author himself (very rarely herself) or their family or disciples, presumably after some editorial work was conducted to sort out what should be made public from what should not. They also cover a wide variety of subgenres, from a diary kept everyday over decades, and in some cases running to four or five thousand pages, to a short one devoted to a particular moment, such as travel (many Chinese officials sent to Western countries in the late nineteenth century published the diaries of their mission abroad) or a particular event; we will see that some Chinese caught in the dramatic events of the Taiping war (1851-64) kept diaries of their traumatic experience.

Historians of late imperial and modern China have long used diaries for various purposes, including climate history (most diaries

3 I hasten to add that while the Pudieku database helps scholars find relevant passages and get a sense of the frequency of certain terms, one needs to check the digital text against the original for OCR mistakes; all passages quoted in this essay have been thus checked.

begin each daily entry with information on weather), political history, and more. Very little effort in this direction has so far been made by religious historians, however. I would like to mention some major notable exceptions here; I will only discuss works that engage thoroughly with the genre of diaries, rather than enumerating works that simply occasionally refer to them. I will also not survey the much larger field of late imperial religion among the elites, but will mention in the following sections works pertaining to specific practices discussed in diaries.

A cluster of important recent works that systematically use diaries to explore private religious lives concerns the late Ming period (1550-1644). In her 2019 monograph on late Ming elite philanthropy, Joanna Handlin Smith makes great use of the published diaries of two very different figures: the noted official Qi Biaojia's 祁彪佳 (1602-1645) *Qi Zhongmin gong riji* 祁忠敏公日記 (Diary of Mr. Qi Zhongmin) and the poor scholar Lu Shiyi's 陸世儀 (1611-1672) *Zhixuelu* 志學錄 (Record of my efforts to learn, 1641) (Smith 2009).[4] The former was an institutional leader, who provides a top-down view of rituals and other private and collective endeavors in and around the groups of religiously devoted men who ran charities. By contrast, the latter was a lower-level participant and executant, also more prone to self-examination and doubt. Another remarkable study of a late Ming diary is Erik Zürcher's introduction and translation of the *Kouduo richao* 口鐸日抄 (Diary of oral admonition), a daily record of the interactions of Jesuit missionary Giulio Aleni (1582-1649) and his local converts in Fujian province (Zürcher 2007). In addition, Wang Fansen has published a more general assessment of diaries as sources for the inner worlds of late Ming and early Qing Confucian scholars.[5]

A second case is Liu Yonghua's recent book about the world of local Huizhou merchants (modern Anhui province) seen from the diary-cum-account book (often called *pairizhang* 排日賬, 'daily account book', in local Huizhou usage) of one man between 1841 and 1899 (with interruptions in the extant manuscript record). While his work is largely a socio-economic history, Liu also accounts for the diarist's involvement with local temples, ritual cycles, and his regular pilgrimages to the local Daoist sacred site of Qiyunshan 齊雲山.[6]

The third work deserving special attention is Henrietta Harrison's study of the diary of Liu Dapeng 劉大鵬 (1857-1942), a poor scholar from Shanxi province who maintained his Confucian values and

4 In her study of late Ming religious networks, Eichman (2016) focuses on letters but occasionally draws on diaries.

5 Wang 2004, chapter "Ripu yu Mingmo Qingchu sixiangjia" 日譜與明末清初思想家. See also Lü 2016.

6 Liu 2024. I am grateful to Zhang Xiaoyu for bringing my attention to this book.

practices throughout the challenging times of the Republican period. Liu's testimony belies the idea of late imperial and modern Confucian scholars as atheists, as he was a deeply pious man, involved in the religious institutions of his hometown, fearing Heaven, and dreaming of Confucius's epiphanies (Harrison 2005).

One of the themes that these various studies illuminate is that, for many scholars who kept a diary, it was not simply one way of recording religious activities among others, but writing the diary was in itself a religious endeavor, or, more precisely, a spiritual exercise. Many late Ming scholars were engaged in daily moral self-cultivation routines; some kept ledgers of merits and demerits, *gongguoge* 功過格, that took the form of account sheets on which they computed every night the good and bad actions of the day. Others, such as moral philosopher Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周 (1579-1645), criticized what they saw as a mechanistic approach. Instead, they encouraged self-examination through a free-form model of composition in a diary. Such an approach continued until the contemporary period. To take only one famous example, the towering statesman Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811-1872), in a letter he wrote to his brothers in 1843, outlined a program of daily self-cultivation regimen (*kechengbiao* 課程表), including meditation, study, and the keeping of a diary.[7] While not all diaries equally reflect this moral dimension, it is important to keep in mind that such a dimension informed what was (or was not) recorded in them.

3 Religious Life in Diaries

The present essay is mostly devoted to two case studies of nineteenth-century diaries of a very different nature. At the same time, it is also informed by a larger exploration of the digital corpus as well as selected readings of passages of other diaries. For that reason, I would like to begin with a general survey of the kinds of information on religious life that is found in this body of literature.

First, most diaries are replete with mentions of collective rituals of various sorts: official, communal, and familial. Officials had to attend and sometimes organize and officiate numerous sacrifices to gods found on the register of state sacrifices, ceremonies at court, or in the local temples and altars. They were also responsible for other tasks such as praying for rain. Local territorial communities and guilds also organized large rituals. Lineages and families (lineages being alliances of families) also had a very dense schedule of regular

7 "Zhi zhudi" 致諸弟 (Letter to my brothers), *Zeng Wenzhenggong quanji*, vol. 21 (*jiashu* 家書), 3:8-11.

(sacrifices to ancestors) and life-cycle rites; gentry members routinely attended the family rituals of their neighbors, friends, and in-laws. Family rituals – in spite of all the Confucian propaganda about not having anything to do with Buddhists and Daoists – typically involved inviting clerics to the home, some of whom were regular visitors and sometimes friends. In general, as far as my readings of various diaries allow me to infer, they do not point to competition between Buddhists and Daoists for access to and patronage of literati, but rather to highly singular networks of familiarity and cooperation with various clerics in each individual case. One finds occasional anticlerical remarks. Nevertheless, more often the extant record reflects regular interactions.

The second type of religious activities noted in diaries were outings and visits to temples, monasteries, and other sacred sites. Such places were venues for social gathering, poetry and calligraphy meetings, retreats, and more. Diaries frequently include descriptions of the sites and the interactions with resident clerics and other visitors. The gentry also visited temples and other religious institutions as part of their involvement in charitable activities, as temples were often the largest public space and a nexus for organizing communal efforts of different kinds.

On a more private level, diaries are an essential source for understanding individual and domestic practices, including cults to ancestors and household gods. Of particular significance in this regard is the stove god (Zaojun 竈君) who was the divine guardian reporting on the household's morality (Chard 1995), as well as life-cycle rituals: births, weddings, funerals, and religious responses to personal crises, primarily illnesses. In addition, many literati also voluntarily chose to engage in various spiritual exercises and noted them in their diary. My research interest is particularly focused on these private spiritual exercises (including devotion, confession, psalmody, fasting, and meditation) and private spaces for such endeavors (such as meditation rooms, *jingshi* 靜室). That said, I will attempt to place them in the larger variety of religious practices documented in diaries.

Literati often commented on their readings, including religious scriptures, and events, such as communal rituals. They also recorded and commented on their dreams, which in some cases involved encounters with dead people and gods.

4 Case Study 1: Pan Jitai

The first case study is a rather short and incomplete manuscript, apparently kept in a unique exemplar, titled *Yangcun caotang riji* 楊村草堂日記 (Diary of my hermitage in Yang village) by Pan Jitai 潘基泰 (1815-?). Its 58 pages cover almost the whole of one year, Tongzhi 1, from New Year (30 January 1862) to the fifteenth day of the twelfth lunar month (2 February 1863). There is no way of knowing whether Pan had kept a diary before and after that date; this part only happened to find its way into a public library. Nothing is known about Pan Jitai other than what he reveals in his diary; there is no published scholarship discussing him and his diary – at least, as far as I am aware.

Pan appears to have been a reasonably wealthy landowner living in Yang village, very close to the township of Bacheng 巴城, within Kunshan 昆山 district (Southern Jiangsu province). He went to town very regularly for business and for visiting friends. He was well educated and writes about his readings, which covered a large array of classical literature and history. He was not an ascetic and was not even particularly pious in his daily habits: he ate meat regularly and enjoyed drinking alcohol with his friends, sometimes in large quantities (alcohol, *jiu* 酒, is mentioned 67 times). And yet, religious practices are found very frequently in his diary.

Pan was writing his 1862 diary and mentioning his religious practices in the very particular context of the Taiping war (1851-64). The Taiping rebels had established a puritan, Christian-inspired regime with its capital in Nanjing, not very far north of Pan's village, and were threatening to topple the Qing dynasty in what is likely, to date, the bloodiest civil war in the history of humanity. From 1860 onward, the Taiping armies turned to the Jiangnan region which they laid to waste, killing civilians and burning down all temples along the way.[8] Pan notes the destruction of temples after Taiping raids near his village in the fourth, fifth, eighth, and ninth months, and he once had to briefly escape. He also notes how he and others heard the souls of the recent dead howl at night. All this goes a long way to explain the intensity of religious practices (including community rituals) to plead the gods for help, and spirit-writing to obtain advance information and guidance from the gods. Indeed, there are other cases of diaries written by local scholars in the same Jiangnan region during the war, recording the dramatic events and the frequent interaction with the gods as humans beseeched their help to survive day after day; one such

8 For detailed studies of the impact of the Taiping war on the Jiangnan literati's lives and their religious reactions, see Meyer-Fong 2013; Alexander 2025.

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is the anonymous *Gengshen binan riji* 庚申避難日記 (Diary of surviving disasters in the *gengshen* year [1860]) (Goossaert 2021, 279-8).

Spirit-writing was also part of Pan's experience of the war. Spirit-writing (*fuji* 扶乩, *feiluan* 飛鸞, *jiangbi* 降筆, and many other terms) is a large family of ritual techniques of Daoist origin allowing one or several mediums to invite gods to control a writing implement and reveal didactic messages, either as answers to questions or as direct instructions (Schumann, Valussi 2023; Goossaert 2022). Pan was not himself a regular participant in spirit-writing séances, but he mentions four times spirit-written messages revealed at nearby places and brought to him by friends, and he was obviously an avid reader of them. In one case, he thanks the friend by giving him scriptures revealed by the god Wenchang 文昌 – Pan does not mention a personal devotion to this god, one of the most important ones in spirit-writing milieus, but he has extra copies of such scriptures to give:

> 3/16:[9] Chen Yiying came and showed me a text revealed by spirit-writing at the Sanjian altar in Zhitang: the god who wrote it was the Transcendent Officer Six-One. The text is all Confucian in content. When (Chen) left, I gave him a volume with five Wenchang scriptures.
>
> 陳姨瑛来示直塘三緘壇降乩書一則，其神乃六一真官也。所云皆儒者言。別去，余贈文昌五經一卷。

In two cases, Pan is invited to join a session held at an acquaintance's home. For instance:

> +8/1: Together we went to the house of Chen Xizhi, at Lancao. In the ritual arena, we performed the Daoist liturgy of the Big Dipper litany. On that day, they were doing spirit-writing, and Ma An was noting down (the revelations).[10]
>
> 同至瀾漕陳錫智宅，壇中禮玄科斗懺。是日扶乩，馬安叟書記。

These notes document the ordinariness of interactions with the gods through spirit-writing, as well as the intertwining of spirit-writing with other devotional practices. They also demonstrate the

9 All dates are given, as per the original sources, in the traditional calendar, that is lunar month/day: thus 3/16 means sixteenth day of the third month, falling, depending on the year, between late March and early May.

10 '+8' means that in that year there was an intercalary month between the eighth and ninth months.

circulation (copying, giving) of scriptures in the lives of nineteenth-century gentry, which is also found in many other diaries.

4.1 Pan Jitai's Participation in Collective Rituals

Pan Jitai frequently mentions domestic rituals, primarily to ancestors (but also household gods). Most frequently, he discusses the Stove god and the wealth gods of the Five directions, Wulu (caishen) 五路(財神). He also often notes visits to temples and monasteries, notably several Buddhist monasteries and the City god temple, Yimiao 邑廟 (that is, Chenghuangmiao 城隍廟). These visits are always, in Pan's accounts, about socializing and meeting friends, not about joining rituals.

Pan nonetheless actively joined community rituals, notably the grand Daoist offerings (*jiao* 醮) that were organized in major temples. He recounts three such cases within three months – an impressive number, considering the massive mobilization of labor and resources that went into such large-scale rituals. In the sixth month (6/1 to 6/4), a community offering (*gongjiao* 公醮) took place, and Pan notes the various rites performed on each successive day. He was invited at the beginning to join in the preparation of the ritual documents that will be sent to the gods, and to check the names of the community members on these documents. On the following two days (6/5-6) he joined in a Buddhist ritual in another temple, where the group worshiped the Dipper (*lidou* 禮斗) and performed the Litany of Great compassion (*Dabeichan* 大悲懺). Another Daoist offering took place the following month (on 7/22), and Pan notes that he paid his monetary contribution (*fu gongjiao qian* 付公醮錢) and was present at the altar (*ru gongjiaotan* 入公醮壇). Finally, he joined yet another *jiao* offering on 8/28 and took part in the Litany of the Jade Emperor (*bai Yuhuangchan* 拜玉皇懺). It is likely that this intense schedule of communal Daoist rituals was caused by the anxiety of the war, but in any case, Pan, as a landlord personally more interested in Buddhist practices (as we will shortly see) nonetheless took an active part in all of them.

Rituals are also frequently mentioned in cases in which Pan and his family invite religious specialists to their home for domestic purposes, or attend such rituals in other families' homes. On one occasion (3/26), he goes with his wife and a child to someone's home to join in a session of reciting the Buddha (Amitābha)'s name, *nianfo* 念佛, and brings large amounts of food for the whole assembly. In some cases, a funeral was the occasion for inviting clerics: on 6/21 seven Buddhist monks from a local monastery came to his residence to perform a Water Litany for a dead child (寺僧七人來禮水懺荐亾兒) and on 12/2, Daoists performed the "Breaking the gates of hell" rite (是夜道士法事破獄), a key, and spectacular part of funerals.

In other cases, however, the occasion is not mentioned and it seems that the reason was to pray for the family's general welfare. On the night of 5/17, Pan invited eight Buddhist monks to chant the Buddha's name (夜請八僧來念佛) and the following week, on 5/25, he invited seven Daoists to perform a litany of the *Ganyingpian* (道士七人來懺《感應篇》全卷). This last reference is intriguing since this ritual is otherwise unknown (and I am aware of no related liturgical manual). Nevertheless, the ritual does in fact make sense. Litanies are liturgical texts, performed as solo or collective recitation, alternating lists of sins with expressions of repentance and vows to reform, with additional lists of Buddhas and gods to which the performers bow, asking for their pardon. They are ritual performances of moral values expounded in morality books (*shanshu* 善書), and in late imperial times, the *Taishang ganyingpian* 太上感應篇 (The Supreme Lord's tract on action and retribution) was the most revered morality book. Rituals mentioned in diaries are typically common ones, familiar to present-day scholars. Occasionally, however, we hear of a kind of ritual that we are not aware of (as in this case). This is one of the ways in which diaries can enrich our understanding of the social history of rituals.

4.2 Solo Ritual Practices

The most remarkable religious element in Pan Jitai's diary is his practice of psalmody, *song* 誦. Usually translated as "chanting" or "reciting", *song* refers to a ritualized slow rhythmic and solemn oral performance of a sacred text, either alone or collectively, sometimes with a percussion instrument providing the rhythm without melody; psalmody is the closest technical term in English. Regular solo psalmody was a very common practice among late imperial Chinese, and down to the present day. Many prescriptive and narrative sources mention a large array of scriptures (Confucian, Buddhist, or Daoist) thus performed in solo (Goossaert 2019).

Pan mentions his practicing psalmody 29 times, usually but not always in the morning. The scriptures he performed are varied, with Buddhist standard short sutras in the majority. In a few cases, he is not specific, only mentioning "Buddhist scriptures" (*foke* 佛課 on 10/14, 10/25; *fojing* 佛經 on 6/22, 10/29, 11/2-3-4, and 11/15). Most of the time, however, he specifies the scriptures and sometimes the number of times (incantations and short scriptures that take only a few minutes to perform can be repeated many times). Thus he performed the Diamond sutra (*Jin'gangjing* 金剛經) on 1/1, 4/10, 6/1, and 8/30; the Great Compassion litany of confession (*Dabeichan* 大悲懺) plus the Great Compassion incantation (*Dabeizhou* 大悲咒) (8/21: 21 times; 11/12: both litany and incantation 10 times). On 10/16 at

dawn, he performed the Great Compassion litany and incantation ten times, and the Diamond sutra, the Heart sutra, the King Gao sutra (a scripture on Guanyin) once each (晨誦大悲懺咒十徧、金經一卷、心經、高王經各一卷); on 10/21 he had a shorter program with Great Compassion litany once, incantation ten times, and Diamond sutra once (誦大悲懺一卷、咒十卷、金剛經一卷). This also confirms the popularity of personal practices of incantations, Buddhist and Daoist, in lay domestic settings, which is now beginning to attract scholarly attention (Lei 2025).

On some dates, Pan provides a much longer and varied list of texts. On 6/25, after dinner, he performed a combination of the Diamond sutra, the Great Compassion litany, the Maitreya sutra, the Heart sutra, the King Gao sutra, the Stove god scripture and litany, the *Ganyingpian*, the *Yinzhiwen* 陰騭文 (Text on hidden rewards, the most revered morality tract revealed by Wenchang), the *Jueshijing* 覺世經 (True scripture on Awakening the World, another short morality tract revealed by Guandi 關帝 in the first decades of the Qing), and the Family instruction by Neoconfucian master Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200); all of these once each (飧後誦大悲懺、《金剛經》、《彌陀經》、《心經》、《高王經》、《竈經》、竈懺、《感應篇》、《陰騭文》、《覺世經》、朱子家訓各一遍). On +8/4, he performed again the same list but some of these texts he performed several times. This list thus combines Buddhist standard sutras with morality books of predominant (but not exclusive) Daoist origin, and Confucian tracts. Both the list of texts he performed on each occasion, and the variations allowed by repeating some of them several times, show the great leeway Pan had in devising his own regimen of psalmody performance, and the way he expressed his personal preference for certain texts.

Finally, Pan also engaged in hand-copying scriptures, although much less frequently (two mentions) than psalmody. On 6/7 he copied the Litany of Great Compassion until night, after which he "studied how to perform it" (抄大悲懺至晚竣，夜學禮大悲懺).

One of the questions Pan's regimen of psalmody raises is their temporality: periods of more intense practice alternate with weeks without a single mention. As a result, the total number of psalmody performances (29) is both great and not great – it is significantly higher than what is found in most diaries; yet, it is also less than once every ten days (in contrast to the frequently attested daily regimen). Also, the dates when Pan engaged in psalmody do not match well with the common religious calendar, beginning with the 1st and 15th day of the month (new and full moon) which are times of more sustained piety. What we see here is not someone following closely the calendar for religious practices, but choosing his own moments for engaging in spiritual exercises. It is likely that the war context is part of the story, and that Pan engaged in more intense psalmody when feeling

particularly anxious or vulnerable – but this must remain speculative, as Pan hardly discloses his feelings.[11]

The brevity of Pan's account leaves many questions unanswered, but we can make a few observations. He seems to have been an average rural landlord with an intense social life who attended major communal rituals in his hometown as a matter of fact. Yet quite frequently, but not on a very regular schedule, he engaged in rather extensive sessions of psalmody alone at home. At the same time, he does not mention any personal devotion to a particular god – which of course does not mean he did not sustain any such devotion. For instance, he quite often performed litanies, incantations, and sutras devoted to bodhisattva Guanyin; however, we do not know whether he had a Guanyin shrine at home and had any personal relationship with her. We also do not learn much about the women in his family, and the division of ritual labor in the household; on one occasion (9/24), he mentions that his wife performed the Stove god litany.

Pan also does not draw a line between personal, family, and communal practices. For instance, on New Year's Day, he notes a combination of domestic worship and spiritual exercises: at dawn, he burnt incense and lit candles for Heaven, Earth, and the Stove god – a standard domestic worship involving the whole family, and then performed the psalmody of the *Diamond sutra* twice (1/1: 晨起於天地家堂竈君杰香然燭樓任，誦《金剛經》二卷). Some of his favorite practices, such as performing the Great Compassion litany, could take place either in a temple or in the domestic space. This invites us to approach our analytical distinctions between personal, familial, and communal, which I have been using here, with a degree of caution.

5 Case Study 2: Weng Tonghe

The second case study is very different in all regards from Pan Jitai's short diary. It is the mammoth diary kept without interruption by Weng Tonghe 翁同龢 (1830-1904) between 1858 and 1904, covering 2,448 pages in the modern, large-format typeset edition I use here.[12] Because of the earlier history of publishing illustrious officials' diaries, Weng may have been aware some part of his diary would one day be made public (in contrast to the clearly entirely private work of Pan). Nevertheless, it was not published before the contemporary period.

In contrast to the obscure Pan, Weng is a very well-known historical figure, one of the highest officials of the last decades of the empire. Weng was born in a family originating from Changshu 常

11 On the calendars, see Goossaert 2024.

12 Another modern punctuated edition was published in Beijing in 1989.

熟 (near Suzhou) but spent his whole life in Beijing in close proximity to the Forbidden City. His father Weng Xincun 翁心存 (1791-1862) had been the teacher of two of the Daoguang emperor's (r. 1820-50) sons. Weng Tonghe rose to fame in 1856 when he not only succeeded the *jinshi* examination (the topmost level in the examination system) but was ranked first (*zhuangyuan* 狀元). He then embarked on a stellar career. In 1865 he was appointed tutor to the young Tongzhi emperor (born 1856, r. 1861-75), and a few years later in the same capacity to the infant Guangxu emperor (born 1871, r. 1875-1908), who had acceded the throne in 1874 after his cousin's premature death. He was minister of various boards and was twice member of the Grand Council (Junjichu 軍機處), the very core of the Qing state, first in 1882-84 and again in 1894-1898. Weng was a highly educated man but did not leave much of a name as an author.[13] His diary, by contrast, has been consistently mined by historians of late Qing politics.

Weng was not by any definition a very religious man; 'religious' contents, even by an extensive definition, are but a tiny part of his diary. His mediocre religiosity, however, is what makes him a very good case study if one wishes to go beyond the minority of highly committed individuals who wrote at length about their intensive self-cultivation regimens, and probe into the quotidian religious activities of the average elite person. I have, in an earlier publication, charted the religious involvements of late imperial elites according to two dimensions: personal commitment and culture (the latter defined as the ability to understand the religious activities of others). On that chart, Weng, with limited commitments but apparent familiarity with religious life in Beijing, would be near the cluster I termed "ethnographers", that is, literati not much personally involved but curious and objective enough to write informed descriptions of religious practices around them (Goossaert 2017, chart on p. 8).

5.1 Weng's Diary as a Source on Public Religious Life in Beijing

Weng's family originated from Jiangnan like Pan, but he spent almost his whole life in the capital, and his notes therefore shed light on northern Chinese religious life; I have not identified any specific Jiangnan religious practices in his entries. In my earlier work on Daoists in pre-1949 Beijing, I have already used Weng Tonghe's diary for passages where he noted visits to major Daoist temples (Goossaert 2007, 147, 152 *passim*). For instance, Weng mentions six visits to the largest Daoist monastery in the capital, the Baiyunguan 白雲觀; and eight visits to the large Eastern Peak temple, Dongyuemiao

13 He has one collection of poetry published, *Pinglu shigao* 瓶廬詩稿.

東岳廟. Such visits to temples had many different reasons, from simple sightseeing to visiting someone (either a cleric or a friend or colleague). In some cases, Weng provides short descriptions and appreciative judgments on the rituals performed, such as this note on the massive Daoist monastic ordination taking place every few years, which was a public event:

> I left the Inner city through the Xibian gate and passed by the Baiyun Monastery. There was an ordination ceremony at the time. The abbot is Mr. Gao, a man from Jining (Shandong province), but I could not see him.[14] There were over five hundreds Daoists in yellow robes; after the meal, they all walked in perfect order to their room; their discipline was impressive.
>
> 1884, 9/2 : 行出西便門，過白雲觀，值其放戒之期。方丈高姓，濟寧人，未見。道流黃衣者五百餘，齋罷魚貫各入住處，頗齊整。

On another visit to the Baiyun Monastery (in 1875, 11/10), Weng also failed to meet a Daoist dignitary he was hoping to visit, but comments on a group of lay people who were doing meditation in the courtyard. More generally, Weng had various interactions with Daoists (the term Daoist priest, *daoshi* 道士, is used 54 times), including a friend who was a Daoist and a painter and who did portraits for his family. One of his most sustained interactions was with a Daoist named Cao Heyi 曹合一 who was the manager of a temple, Yuantong Monastery 圓通觀, where Weng and other elites funded and ran a soup kitchen (*zhouchang* 粥廠) for the urban poor; Weng has only kind words for Cao's work and their collaboration. During an outing in 1901 (1/5), he came across a Daoist engaged in ascetic fundraising, enclosed in a small cage in public view where he stayed for days without eating (*liguan muxiu* 立關募修). Weng was curious enough to enquire about that mendicant cleric and found out that his father was a military official – and, apparently, he was so surprised to see a son of a good family playing that role that he wrote it down.

Most rituals Weng Tonghe mentions as having taken part in (aside from the countless state sacrifices he attended in his official capacity) are salvation rituals for the dead, either within his family or among friends and acquaintances. But such rituals extended beyond the immediate context of relatives passing away. In the following entry, he discloses his personal involvement:

> I went to the Baoguo Buddhist Monastery. Tonight was a ritual for saving the burning mouths (of the souls suffering in hell). My late

14 That abbot, Gao Rentong 高仁峒 (1841-1908), was a major figure of late Qing Beijing.

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> wife, when she was still alive, asked me to organize a ritual for offering food (to suffering souls) each year in the seventh month.
>
> 1866, 7/15：至報國寺。今日晚間放燄口一壇。余亡妻生前為余言年年七月當為施食道場也。

Such rituals, held on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (the "ghost festival") are a major node of the yearly calendar in Beijing as in the whole Chinese world. Indeed, the Buddhist liturgy for saving the hapless "burning mouths", *yankou* 燄口 /焰口, is one of the most frequently mentioned rituals in the whole diary (with 18 occurrences). Yet, it is remarkable that in the private context of his diary – and in spite of all the discourses found among the writings of late imperial Confucians about distancing themselves from Buddhist and Daoist rituals – Weng reveals that he paid for and attended such rituals in Buddhist temples every year, in memory of his late wife.

Such salvation rituals for the dead took place either in temples or at home, and Weng repeatedly mentions inviting Buddhist and Daoist priests to officiate at his residence. For instance, he mentions inviting Daoists to perform a *liandu* 鍊度 ritual (the alchemical salvation of the dead) for a relative on three successive nights (1902, 8/29 to 9/1); this at the very least shows that he knew what specific Daoist ritual was being performed and what was the proper technical term for it. He is also fully cognizant of the ways rituals are customarily done (he frequently mentions these customs, *suli* 俗例) and notes when his own practice somehow deviates from them. Buddhists and Daoists performed in his home. In some cases, Weng mentions them by name, thus evincing interpersonal familiarity. These were clerics he knew and respected personally:

> Today is the birthday of my late mother; I presented offerings to her. It was also the fourth seventh[15] of my late concubine. Monks Sanfeng and Yufeng came to present condolences. […] That night, I presented offerings to the stove god: my wife had been doing this year after year, but now she is unable to (and I did it in her place).
>
> 1904, 12/23：先母誕日，設奠。是日亡妾爲四七日。三峯，玉峯和尚來弔 […] 夜祀竈，年年老婦事之，今不可得矣。

On another occasion (1901, 1/5), he visits a Buddhist monk and they looked at paintings and calligraphy together. But beyond such

15 Chinese funeral rituals are organized in a cycle of ten nodes, with a rite held every seventh day for seven weeks (so Weng mentions the fourth week here), followed by the hundredth, one year, and three years.

cultural companionship, Weng also remains aware of his relationship to clerics as service providers and occasionally mentions the amount he pays to them (1904, 12/24).

5.2 Spirit-Writing

Weng Tonghe mentions spirit-writing thirteen times. Although this is not a high number (and he was clearly not an enthusiastic adept), his mentions still indicate that he was familiar with the practice, and that it had at several points made a significant impact on his personal life. The earliest mention constitutes an untypically long story. In 1860 (1/27) he recounts a visit to a friend, who told him how he had earlier been together with a high official in Zhejiang province who had set up a spirit-writing altar in his residence. A god writing at this altar arranged a marriage – forcing the two families to agree to it – and the daughter born from that union became Weng Tonghe's first wife. In this matter-of-fact account, Weng thus admits that his own intimate life had been preordained by the gods.

More accounts of spirit-writing are related to Weng's visits to temples in Beijing that ran a public spirit-writing altar. In 1887 (4/7), he visited one such temple, the Sanshengguan 三聖觀, where he observed crowds waiting to obtain spirit-written medical prescriptions (*jifang* 乩方); he noted that this popularity explained how the temple had managed to raise funds for a recent renovation. He also found that the writing did not look to him like the brushwork of immortals (觀乩筆, 似非仙人者所為也). Despite his somewhat dismissive attitude, Weng was thus curious enough to look closely at the writing of the gods.

Moreover, his generally negative posture did not prevent his family from making use of such spirit-written medical prescriptions. For instance, he notes in 1895 (9/22) that the wife of his nephew took such a divine prescription, along with a human one, and got much better (大姪婦昨服朱方，并服乩仙所示方，得眠，稍進粥飲). In 1901 (1/5), he visited a Daoist who offered spirit-written cures, which he describes as "highly efficacious" and mentions that one of his relatives was cured there previously (閣奉乩壇仙方甚靈，去年之廉屢禱於此). Most mentions of spirit-writing healing are related to the divine figure of Lüzu 吕祖, i.e. the immortal Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓 (1881, +7/21, 1900, 5/3).

In other cases, his tone becomes truly deferent:

> Mu Du has set up a spirit-writing altar (at his home) and obtained revelations from the gods: he thus learnt that his father has ascended to the Jade Bureau. The Jade Bureau is an office in Heaven, attached to the Wenchang palace. I was moved by this.

1864, 4/12 : 慕杜定乩壇降筆，先公已升玉局，玉局者天上官府，文昌宮内僚屬也，為之感動。

This rare reference to postmortem divinization is intriguing, especially since the father mentioned here may be Weng's colleague Mu Du's (as I have translated above) – though it could also be his own father. Ever since spirit-written revelations about the Jade Bureau in the late seventeenth century, it has been familiar with scholars as the heavenly administration where the god Wenchang welcomes his dead devotees and enlist them as gods in his divine mission to save the world (Burton-Rose 2020). Contrary to many of his contemporaries, Weng did not publicize any personal devotion to Wenchang, but was nonetheless entirely familiar with his cult. He once (1864, 3/17) drew an oracle (於文昌閣占一籤) at a Wenchang temple that predicted future success in the examinations for his brothers. In 1875 (9/15), he also copied in his own calligraphy Wenchang's morality tract *Yinzhiwen* to gift to a friend (為人書《文昌陰騭文》).

5.3 Fasting

Weng Tonghe mentions periods (both single days and longer periods) when he engaged in fasting. By attending to this aspect, we can catch a glimpse of his inner world. The term he uses is *rusu* 茹素 (39 occurrences), literally "eating vegetarian", not the more religiously explicit *chizhai* 持齋 (observing purity rules). Nevertheless, it is likely that the meaning is the same, referring not only to the avoidance of meat, but also of alcohol and sex. Whereas permanent fasting was uncommon and even objectionable among late imperial elites (Weng indeed notes as a remarkable fact a few cases of persons he knew who became permanent vegetarians), observing periodic fasts was almost universal (Goossaert 2024). On a few occasions, he notes that fasting was imposed by the court on all officials in imitation to the emperor's own fasting. Most of the time, however, he mentions fasting as a result of a personal choice. Weng's own fasting practices shed light on his private religiosity and that of his family. One common occasion was New Year's Day:

> I got up at the *yin* hour (before dawn), lighted incense to pray Heaven, and then went to the court audience. […] Leaving the palace, I visited the Shrine to Sage and Virtuous men and bowed to the tablet of my father there. […] I fasted for the whole day, as is the custom in my family.

1867, 1/1 : 同治六年丁卯元日。寅正起，升香告天，卯初入朝。 […] 出詣賢良祠先公位前行禮。 […] 茹素一日，此吾家舊例也。

A second occasion for fasting was when taking part in a Buddhist or Daoist ritual:

> Today, we invited Buddhist monks to perform the Great Compassion incantation for three days; I observed the fast.
>
> 1899, 11/11 : 是日起延僧誦大悲咒三日， 余茹素。

Weng likely notes this because, even though it was customary for all participants in a ritual to purify themselves by fasting, as a high official and head of the household, he could have skipped this rule without being reproached. Yet he still chose to observe it. In other cases, the decision to fast was purely personal and related to his own inner feelings (rather than any collective event). Notably, for seven days (1875, 11/2 to 11/8), he decided to fast to deal with his anxiety:

> Today, I stayed home, feeling tired. Everything I do seems to fail. Since the beginning of the month, I feel sorry about the whole world, so from yesterday I started fasting.
>
> 1875, 11/2 未出門，殊倦，百事都廢，入此月來，覺天地愁慘，從昨日起茹素。

His practice of fasting on the birthdays and deathdays (death anniversaries) of his parents, while still emotional, differ to a degree from the deeply felt need for personal purification (expressed in spiritual, not medical terms); his father is mentioned more often than his mother in this regard. For instance:

> Today is my late father's birthday; I observed the fast and copied scriptures, so as to express my sorrow. Over the last few nights I have dreamt of my being at my father's side, and yesterday he looked angry and reproachful; I know that I am an unworthy son who has somehow failed to be virtuous.
>
> 1874, 5/14 : 是日先公生忌，茹素寫經，以寄其悲。前數夕皆夢在先公旁，昨夕夢有怒容詬責，知不肖子隱有失德矣。

On these special days, fasting is combined with other spiritual practices. For instance :

> Today is my father's deathday: I worshipped the Buddha, observed the fast, and meditated. I have never failed to do so on this day over the last twenty years.
>
> 1886, 11/7 : 先公諱日，禮佛，茹素，默念。廿年來，無此一日也。

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And yet, he sometimes admits – surely with guilt – that he has failed to fast on such a birthday or deathday (竟未能茹素).

Finally, Weng Tonghe also observed fasting for his own birthday. While this may seem surprising for a contemporary Westerner for whom birthday means celebrating with good food and drinks, it makes sense. Birthdays were not celebrated in pre-twentieth century China before the age of sixty. Instead, they were occasion for worshipping the stellar god responsible for that day, and hence one's own destiny (*benming* 本命). On many occasions, Weng simply mentions his pious attitude on that day:

> Today is He's (my) birthday. I observed the fast, kowtowed in the ancestral shrine, and meditated in solitary peace.
>
> 1886, 4/27 : 是日穌生朝, 茹素, 祠堂叩頭, 静念牢落。

Weng also honestly notes when he fails to observe the fast he felt he should have held, showing how such practices were less the result of any social pressure than of personal commitment:

> Today is He's (my) birthday. Getting up at dawn, I kowtowed toward Heaven. In previous years, I observed the fast (on that day) but this year I was unable to; all affairs are accumulating, and this made me uneasy.
>
> 1877, 4/27 : 是日穌生朝也。晨起向上叩頭。往年茹素, 今年獨未然, 盖百事填集, 此中不安耳。

As noted above, on special days when he fasted, Weng also engaged in other practices. He mentions various forms of quiet reflection.[16] Weng frequently uses the term *jingzuo* 靜坐 (sitting in tranquility), which is the most common term for meditative practices in late imperial Confucian contexts.[17] In some instances Weng may refer to meditation, but in other cases, he seems to mean simply quiet reading and thinking.

We have seen that on his father's birthday, Weng engaged in hand-copying scriptures, *xiejing* 寫經: this is mentioned about twenty times across the years. In most cases, Weng does not say anything about which scriptures he is hand-writing; however, on one occasion, we learn that it is a Buddhist sutra. In 1872 (10/30), he writes that he

16 I have translated such instances as "meditation", even though the contents of the practice remains unclear.

17 Gernet 1981; Taylor 1979, both discussing earlier periods.

starts copying the *Lotus sutra* (*Miaofa lianhuajing* 妙法蓮華經) out of grieving:

> This same day last year, I was joyfully together with mother. But now, she has left (this world) and I am alone. Heaven! Heaven! So I vowed to hand-copy the *Lotus sutra* entirely, starting from tomorrow.
>
> 去年今日母與兒嬉。今年此日，母棄兒去久矣。天乎天乎。發願寫《法華經》一部，自明日始。

The *Lotus sutra* is long, and it took five days for Weng to complete his vow; he notes the progress he made each day until its completion on 11/5. Here again, in the solitude of his private space, this prominent Confucian statesman engaged in Buddhist practices moved by his own intimate feelings and relationships to the women closest to him.

The sheer amount of information contained in Weng Tonghe's diary cannot be satisfactorily surveyed here. Nevertheless, I would like to offer a few preliminary remarks. First, most mentions of his practices (outside of his official capacity), either individual or collective, are found in the context of household cults and family life-cycle rituals, especially funerals. These are the contexts when he most readily expressed affects and made vows to copy scriptures or fast. The medical context also emerges as an important site; his prayers and interactions with gods through spirit-writing, direct or indirect, are related to illnesses and healing. Like Pan Jitai discussed in the previous case study, Weng does not disclose a personal cultic relation to any specific god.

Second, Weng's notes evince familiarity with a large array of religious practices. By familiarity, I do not mean active, voluntary, emotionally charged involvement. Instead, it would seem that Weng had seen such practices before, was not surprised when he witnesses them, understood them. Moreover, he mentions them as a matter of fact, using terms that are standard for that practice. Among such familiar practices are the Wenchang cult, spirit-writing, and Buddhist and Daoist salvation rituals. Consequently, if even someone who has spent his whole life in the rarefied atmosphere of the highest levels of officialdom at court was familiar (and seemingly at ease) with the larger religious culture, then it is likely that most Chinese were familiar with it as well.

6 Conclusion

The two case studies discussed above hardly do justice to the variety of information found in late imperial Chinese diaries about

the daily religious life of literati. The differences between the two are notable, even though neither of their authors can be described as a spiritual virtuoso or even as a particularly religious person. Pan Jitai, having more free time on his hands than the high official Weng Tonghe, and also living through exacting and highly stressful times in the middle of a war, spent more time performing rituals, especially solo psalmody of scriptures. Their differences – as it relates to personal, domestic practices – seem to reflect social status and personal engagements rather than regional differences. Despite the differences, however, we also find important commonalities: both men engaged in domestic and communal rituals and used religious methods to deal with grieving or anxiety, such as fasting, psalmody, scripture copying, or meditation. Both accounts also support a fact scholars of modern China know in the abstract but rarely analyze in full: the late imperial gentry spent a considerable part of their time participating in rituals (of all sorts), and many had a keen interest in them. Of course, the specific rituals varied from person to person, as individuals had agency over their ritual lives.

More generally, our two case studies also suggest the contribution and limitations of diaries to our understanding of the personal, quotidian religion and inner worlds of the late imperial Chinese.[18] A first remark is that diaries, counterintuitively at first sight, do not seem to mention truly daily activities, that is, the type of practice that one engages in each and every day. In a sense, this point is logical: one tends to note what is special about each day. In any case, the types of practice often described in other kinds of sources (e.g., biographies and autobiographies, paratexts to religious books that often contain personal testimonies), such as daily psalmody of a short scripture at dawn, and moral self-examination at night, are rarely mentioned in diaries. I also found relatively few mentions of the liturgical calendars and the birthdays of the gods, on which many people observed fasting or visited temples. At least based on our two case studies, therefore, it would seem that, while diaries shed much light on ritual involvement with gods, spirits, and things religious, they are not exhaustive in their descriptions of everyday practices and attitudes. Consequently, they must be combined with other types of narrative, notably biographical testimonies (paratexts, letters, spiritual autobiographies[19]) and accounts of events in collections of anecdotes (*biji* 筆記).[20] More research is certainly required. But, as I hope is clear from this analysis, diaries are useful sources for exploring the variety and richness of lived religion in late imperial China.

18 On inner worlds, see Benn, Brose 2025.

19 Wu Pei-yi 1990; Bauer 1990.

20 For a study of the religious world seen though anecdotal accounts, see Goossaert 2010.

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The Santo Daime without Daime
Tactics, Agency, and Ritual Change in Ayahuasca Religions under Prohibition in Italy

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Abstract This article examines how ayahuasca religions in Italy have reconfigured their ritual practices following the 2022 legal ban on ayahuasca, including replacing the brew with water and creating new forms of religious travel. The Amazonian psychoactive brew ayahuasca, traditionally used in Indigenous rituals and healing, is at the centre of transnational religions that have spread globally. Drawing on anthropology, lived religion, and ritual studies, the article explores the interplay between lived religion, ritual change, and law in the use of controlled substances, and therefore how prohibition reshapes ritual practice and everyday life.

Keywords Ayahuasca. Lived religion. Practice. Agency. Ritual change. Italy.

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1 Introduction

Ayahuasca is an Amazonian psychoactive brew widely used by indigenous groups in shamanic contexts for ritual and healing purposes.[1] There are three religions founded on the sacramental use of ayahuasca in Brazil, each with its ritual structure and doctrine: Santo Daime (Saint Daime), União do Vegetal (Union of the Vegetal, UDV) and Barquinha (Little Boat). These all emerged in the Amazonian region in the first half of the twentieth century, and then spread and diversified, settling in several countries around the world (Assis, Labate 2017; Labate, MacRae 2010). In recent decades, ayahuasca preparations have been incorporated into a wide range of ritual and healing practices, including shamanic ceremonies, religions, contemporary spiritual movements, and therapeutic treatments (Labate, Cavnar 2014; 2018). In this heterogeneous landscape, ayahuasca is regarded as a plant medicine, a sacrament, and a teacher, but also as a commercial product, a chemical compound, and a drug. The Dutch scholar André van der Braak (2023) argues that Western ontological categories are too narrow to grasp the multiple discourses on the nature and function of ayahuasca.

Ayahuasca compounds vary depending on the plants used and their modes of preparation, though it is most commonly brewed from the native Amazonian *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine and the leaves of the *Psychotria viridis* shrub. As ayahuasca has spread beyond its traditional Amazonian context, it has undergone numerous transformations. Ayahuasca materialities are adapted for international circulation and developed into various ayahuasca analogues. Its plants have been acclimatised to grow outside the Amazon (Labate et al. 2017).

Ayahuasca's legal status differs significantly between South America, where it is in many cases legal for ritual and healing purposes, and other parts of the world, where it is often criminalised (Labate, Cavnar 2023; Labate, Jungaberle 2011). Ayahuasca is frequently confiscated by customs officers or national drug enforcement agencies in countries where it circulates, and individuals are arrested for possession and transportation of the brew (ICEERS 2017; 2019). These regulatory regimes reduce ayahuasca to "illicit drug use and drug trafficking", isolating its chemical compounds from the broader contexts in which it is embedded, such as ritual practices, communities, health systems, cosmologies, and politics (Blainey 2015). This raises complex questions about religion, culture, and law,

1 Ayahuasca derives from the Quechua *aya* (dead, soul) and *waskha/huasca* (vine, liana), meaning 'the vine of the souls'. Ayahuasca is known by various names among Amazonian indigenous groups. In the Santo Daime religion, it is called Daime or Santo Daime. In this text, I use sacrament and Daime interchangeably.

particularly in light of the increasingly transnational dimension of such practices (Groisman 2009; Labate, Feeney 2012; 2014).

On 14 March 2022, the Italian Ministry of Health publicly announced a new law banning the use of ayahuasca in the country. The decree,[2] signed on 23 February of the same year, classifies ayahuasca, its extracts, ground and powdered forms, the plants *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis*, as well as the alkaloids harmine and harmaline, as Schedule I illicit drugs (Berazaluce 2022; Casolaro 2022; Labate et al. 2023). DMT (N,N-Dimethyltryptamine), ayahuasca's principal active compound, has been classified as a Schedule I substance by the United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances since 1971 (De Loenen et al. 2017).[3]

Two days after the publication of the Decree, the news reached the Italian Santo Daime religious groups with whom I am in contact, as well as scholars and specialists nationally and internationally.[4] I was also among those who received the news that day, witnessing the shock, bewilderment, and distress of those involved. Sabrina,[5] an artist in her fifties and a Santo Daime member for ten years, told me: "Suddenly, you become an outlaw, punishable simply for gathering to praise God, singing and using the vehicle Santo Daime, which is our sacrament". According to Franco, a forty-year-old teacher, his world immediately collapsed beneath him: "From one evening to the next, my spiritual life was forbidden". Emanuele, a sixty-year-old lawyer, stated: "The Santo Daime is a school. These rituals are meant to help you grow spiritually and prepare for the passage (death). This law seriously compromises my freedom of religion".

Due to legal prohibition, many ayahuasca practitioners have ceased their rituals, gone underground, or replaced ayahuasca with other substances in their ceremonies, as ethnographically documented in the Netherlands (Talin 2024). Larger institutionalised religions, like Santo Daime in Italy and in France, and the UDV in the US, have pursued legal action and paved a legal way to continue their practices (Labate et al. 2023). The board of the ICEFLU Italia,

2 Gazzetta Ufficiale Serie Generale, 61, 14-03-2022. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2022/03/14/22A01608/sg.

3 Ayahuasca and other plants and preparations containing small percentages of DMT were excluded from the United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances in 1971 (De Loenen et al. 2017). The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) does not consider ayahuasca to be under international control and advises national authorities on the interpretation of the treaty in relation to ayahuasca (Tupper, in Labate et al. 2017). However, some states have classified ayahuasca and its constituent plants as controlled substances (ICEERS 2022).

4 https://www.iceers.org/italys-decision-schedule-ayahuasca/.

5 All participants' information has been anonymised, and their names replaced with pseudonyms.

composed of Italian Santo Daime leaders, convened shortly after and agreed to respond to the decree through legal action, continuing their ritual practices, temporarily suspending the use of ayahuasca and replacing it with water. One of the religious leaders and board members explained to me:

> The choice to conduct the rituals with water is a conscious decision to maintain the firmness of the Santo Daime spiritual work in Italy, even in the absence of the sacrament. Our spiritual school requires our sacrament, Santo Daime.

Alice, a teacher and a member for twenty years, added: "The doctrine is done by drinking Daime. You can keep the ritual alive and be together, but it is not like drinking Daime. Our sacrament is missing".

This article examines the impact of the 2022 legal change on ayahuasca users in Italy, focusing on how legal restrictions currently shape the lived experience of the Santo Daime in Italy, affecting both ritual and daily life. From 2022, Italian Santo Daime members practice their rituals in the absence of ayahuasca, their sacrament and ritual foundation of ayahuasca religions. This article argues that, in this specific context, lived religion consists of temporary and multi-layered forms of agency and practice, which reconfigure ritual forms in fluid and transitional ways, particularly when practised in restrictive or oppressive contexts.

This research is based on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork conducted between August 2024 and March 2025, specifically focusing on 25 semi-structured interviews with Santo Daime members. This study is informed by long-term ethnographic research on the Santo Daime religion, involving participant observation of ritual and social activities in Daimist communities in Brazil and Italy (Talin 2012; 2024; Talin, Sanabria 2017). More broadly, it is grounded on multi-sited ethnography on the circulation and reinvention of ayahuasca rituals and materialities in Brazil and Europe (Talin 2024).

I provide a historical contextualisation of the diffusion of the Santo Daime religion in Brazil and abroad. Then, I outline the history of Santo Daime in Italy and the key legal proceedings that have taken place since the 1990s. Following this, I analyse personal experiences, temporary adjustments of ritual forms, and the creation of new ritual practices, such as the preparation of water used in ceremonies, and the development of new forms of religious travel.

Looking at this ethnographic context is particularly significant because it sheds light on how religion is practised when it is associated with the use of controlled substances. Drawing on literature at the intersection of anthropology, lived religion, and ritual studies, this article analyses ritual and everyday practices, materialities, and participants' experiences. This ethnographic example demonstrates

how religion-as-lived is continually shaped by the interplay between multiple factors, as its transnational dimensions and ever-changing legal status across different countries. The relationship between religion and broader social context, particularly the dynamics between individual agency and social structure, is central to the analysis of lived religion. Nevertheless, it is still partly addressed in this field, requiring further investigation (Knibbe, Kupari 2020).

Ayahuasca literature extensively describes Santo Daime rituals, detailing their structure, uniforms, performances, music, and associated experiences and meanings.[6] Building on this rich literature, the present article focuses on unexplored aspects, specifically the adaptation of Santo Daime rituals in the absence of the central ayahuasca sacrament. While the Italian Santo Daime is not the only group to have replaced ayahuasca with water during legal proceedings (see also, for instance, the UDV in the US), scholarly attention to these ritual adaptations remains limited. This article offers an original examination of the use of water and how ayahuasca religions adapt their practices to different legal regimes in their international expansion, focusing on the lived dimension of such changes in Italy. Doing so, it advances the study of transnational religious movements and circulations of psychoactive substances and ritual uses.

Although there is a wide range of scholarship on ayahuasca religions, these are relatively unexplored in the field of lived religion, with the notable exception of Paulina Valamiel (2023), who explicitly engages with the lived religion theoretical approach in her study on the feminisation of the Santo Daime religion. The present article is set on this literature and aims to contribute to this field of study, as much as to anthropology of religion and ritual studies, expanding the discussion on ritual change, agency, practice, bodily experience, and materiality.

2 The Circulation of Ayahuasca Religions from Brazil Worldwide

The three *religiões ayahuasqueiras* (ayahuasca religions) emerged in the Brazilian Amazon in the first half of the twentieth century.[7] These progressively developed inside Brazil until the 1980s, spreading to metropolises in the south of Brazil, and diversifying in the new contexts with innovative characteristics and adaptations.

6 For a helpful introduction to Santo Daime rituals, see, for instance Blainey 2021; Cemin 2006; Groisman 1999; Moreira, MacRae 2011 among others.

7 The term ayahuasca religions distinguishes Santo Daime, União do Vegetal, and Barquinha from *neo-ayahuasca* groups (*grupos neo-ayahuasqueiros urbanos*), which emerged in urban contexts with ayahuasca's diffusion in the 1990s (Labate 2004).

In the 1990s, this expansion gained an international dimension, expanding to Europe, the US, China, and Australia, among other countries (Assis, Labate 2017; Gearin 2024; Labate, Cavnar 2023). The international expansion of the ayahuasca religions exemplifies the major role of Brazil in the transnational circulation of modern religiosities, together with other Brazilian religious expressions travelling around the world, like Umbanda and Vale do Amanhecer, among others (Csordas 2009; Oosterbaan et al. 2019).[8] According to the Brazilian anthropologist Alberto Groisman, the first informal Santo Daime ritual outside Brazil occurred in the United States in 1987 (Groisman 2009). The first *trabalho official* (official ritual) occurred in Spain two or three years later (Labate, Goulart 2005; Menozzi 2021).[9]

3 The Diffusion of the Santo Daime Religion in Italy

According to Menozzi (2021), the first Santo Daime ritual in Italy took place in 1990, with approximately fifty participants, including several psychologists. It was organised in collaboration with a Spanish group and the psychiatrist Claudio Naranjo. In 1991, the Santo Daime religious leader *Padrinho*[10] Alfredo Mota de Melo visited Italy for the first time, followed by his brother, Padrinho Valdete Mota de Melo, in 1993. In the following years, the Santo Daime religion grew around two locations: near Genoa and in Assisi. The Santo Daime group Caminhos das Estrelas (Path of the Stars) was founded in 1995, and it later developed into the Santo Daime group Luce di Vita (Light of Life) in the Liguria region. Casa Regina della Pace (Home of the Queen of Peace), now Fondazione Casa Regina della Pace, in Assisi, is the most well-known Santo Daime community in Italy. It was founded in 1985 by a group of *suore laiche* (laywomen) inspired by the values of St Francis, and still today the community is very active, collaborating with the municipality and the Catholic church to provide shelter and support to vulnerable people.

From the second half of the 1990s onwards, visits by Brazilian Santo Daime religious leaders to Italy and the rest of Europe became increasingly frequent, and the Italian Santo Daime community gradually expanded. In 2003, the Italian Santo Daime groups made

8 The Barquinha religion remains more local, with few groups spreading outside the Amazonian context.

9 'Official ritual' means a Santo Daime ritual following the official calendar of this religion, a fixed structure, with *fardas* (ritual uniforms), division between men and women, and a prescribed spatial arrangement.

10 *Mestre* (Master), *Padrinho* (godfather) and *Madrinha* (godmother) are the names given to religious leaders' roles in the ayahuasca religions.

an initial attempt to initiate the procedure for registering their religious organisation, the Italian branch of the Brazilian Santo Daime religious institution CEFLURIS (now ICEFLU), in the Albo degli Enti di Culto del Ministero degli Interni (Register of Religious Entities of the Ministry of the Interior). Five years later, the Italian Santo Daime groups founded their religious association, CEFLURIS Italia.

There are around ten Santo Daime groups in Italy, ranging from a few members to several dozen. The ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in 2024-25 indicates that the 2022 legal change significantly reduced the number of participants, causing some groups to dissolve or temporarily suspend activities.

4 Legal Proceedings Over the Years

Ayahuasca religions, since their beginnings, have consistently navigated legal processes to legitimise their ritual use of psychoactive plants (Labate, Feeney 2012; Labate, Jungaberle 2011; Meyer 2014). In Italy, the Santo Daime has faced legal persecution at various times. This section outlines the main legal proceedings involving this religion. In 1995, the police first intervened during a Santo Daime ritual in Italy. They entered the space at the beginning of the ceremony, pointing firearms at the participants, who were already seated in ritual formation: some meditating, others praying, and some conversing quietly while awaiting the arrival of the remaining attendees. On this occasion, police seized thirty litres of Daime and searched the homes of three event organisers. In 2004, one of the Italian Santo Daime religious leaders was stopped at Perugia airport, where the police seized thirty litres of Daime from his luggage. The investigations continued for several months, leading to the seizure of Daime from the other centres. At the beginning of 2005, he was arrested, and the following day, twenty other active members of Santo Daime were also taken into custody on charges of international drug trafficking, criminal conspiracy, incitement, proselytism, drug possession, and distribution. Arrests lasted from a few days to four months of house arrest. In the same year, the Supreme Court of Cassation overturned the arrests and all precautionary measures, and the case was dismissed in 2006. Through a further legal action, Santo Daime requested the return of its sacrament, which was handed back in 2008. Another significant legal proceeding took place in 2012 when a Santo Daime leading figure received ayahuasca by post. The judge, considering the legal precedents of Santo Daime cases in Italy, dismissed the case at the preliminary stage. The ritual leader was released, and the seized Daime was returned (Menozzi 2021).

Over the years, the Italian Santo Daime has won five legal cases, and on three occasions, the Daime was returned to them. According to information gathered from my interviews, in at least five instances, airport police allowed Santo Daime members to travel with Daime and their relative documents. Despite ayahuasca not being regulated in Italy, "these legal precedents indicated a favourable situation rather than a mere legal grey area", as one of the board members stated. This favourable condition shaped the trajectory of the Santo Daime and other ayahuasca uses in the last years. Sara, a thirty-year member of the Santo Daime, recounts her personal experience of these legal processes:

> This news reflects the increasing restrictions in our country. But I feel fortunate that, until 2022, we could hold rituals freely and travel back and forth from Brazil without issue. It felt like a miracle, a respite. I've been in Santo Daime for 30 years, and there have been tougher times. In 1995, I couldn't attend my first ritual because the police came and seized the Daime. For a while, we continued without it, as it had been confiscated. We felt like early Christians in the Catacombs. For me, it was beautiful to sing together. In 2005, several members were arrested. I was one of the few who weren't, but Marika [another active member] and I feared we'd be next. Our children were young, and my ex, my son's father, was among those arrested. We prepared our families, even giving them instructions on how to raise our kids if we were arrested too.

In response to the 2022 Decree, the Italian Santo Daime, União do Vegetal, and a small ayahuasca group in southern Italy filed an appeal with the Regional Administrative Tribunal (TAR) of Lazio, requesting a temporary suspension of the ministerial measure. The TAR rejected the appeal, so they lodged an appeal against this ruling with the Council of State. The Council of State likewise rejected the appeal, but indicated that, rather than the annulment of the decree, the religious groups should ask for a controlled and regulated use of the substance through an exemption-based authorisation. When the Ministry of Health finally received these groups, all proposals for collaboration were rejected again. At this point, the Santo Daime submitted an appeal to the TAR against the Ministry's refusal. A Santo Daime leader explained to me that "under Italian law, the Ministry of Health was required to consult religious institutions such as ours before issuing the decree". The interviewees also stated that the Ministry of Health did not adequately consider the extensive international and interdisciplinary scientific literature on ayahuasca.

For the participants, it has been a significant challenge to understand how to continue the Santo Daime doctrine without their sacrament. One of the Italian Santo Daime leaders told me, "We

don't agree with it but respect the law". Indeed, adherence to legal frameworks reflects the core values of the religion, such as harmony, love, truth, and justice. For Sara, the purpose of continuing Santo Daime practices in Italy is "to keep open something that is not in the system. This is not just about the Santo Daime". Differently, many members, both *fardados* (official members) and regular participants, disagreed with the decision to suspend and replace the Daime with water, and so they left.

5 Lived Religion and the Ritual Use of Ayahuasca

Religions are social forces operating within a landscape of multiple actors and counterforces and intersecting with other religious and broader social contexts (Lambek 2013). Religions are neither static nor "self-contained spheres", but rather, their ontologies, practices, and cosmologies are constantly evolving, as Knibbe and Kupari (2020) explain. Religions are made by a diverse range of agents, including laypeople, specialists, scholars, and policymakers, whose activities, possibilities, and limitations in framing the religious field are based on their socio-cultural conditions (Hall 1997; Knibbe, Kupari 2020). Therefore, individual actions and social structure dynamically interact in constructing religion-as-lived (Orsi 1985). In particular, Orsi (1985) demonstrates individuals' crucial role in shaping religion through their everyday lives.

If what we call 'religions' are inherently shaped by multiple factors, both religious and secular, and by a variety of actors, analysing this field becomes even more complex when domination, repression, or legal prohibitions impede religious practices, such as the ritual use of psychoactive substances.

Ayahuasca religions, particularly due to their transnational presence, legal status, and cross-cultural dimensions, serve as compelling examples for examining the dynamics between religion, culture, and controlled substances law (Antunes 2021; Labate, Feeney 2014). This article discusses these topics through the lens of the interplay of social structure, ritual practice, and agency. According to Valamiel (2023), ayahuasca religions challenge Western conceptions of religion. Santo Daime members refer to it as a 'spiritual school' and a 'doctrine' rather than a religion. In some ways, Santo Daime departs from institutional religion, yet it needs to be considered a religion to secure its legitimacy in using ayahuasca (Valamiel 2023). Ayahuasca religions have undergone institutionalisation, developing structured forms of order and hierarchy in their ritual and social dimensions to a greater extent than indigenous and other hybrid or urban ayahuasca practices (Sztutman 2003). Institutionalisation has sustained the existence of these religions since their inception and

throughout their diffusion, while striving to avoid being labelled as a drug sect, delegitimisation, and the prohibition of ayahuasca use in different countries. Recognising these processes is essential to understanding agency and practice in the studied contexts, especially how Santo Daime has shaped its space and identity over the years.

A central, albeit debated, topic in lived religion concerns the distinctions between prescribed, institutionalised religion and individuals' trajectories, practices, and experiences within the religious sphere; in particular, how religion is practised beyond prescriptions, official texts, and recognised ritual and sacred spaces. As Nancy T. Ammerman (2016) states, a simplistic juxtaposition between everyday life and organised religion is not necessarily helpful in the analysis of lived religion. A dichotomic perspective about the differences between religion-as-prescribed by institutions and religion-as-practised by individuals produces a partial view of the dynamics at the core of individual religiosity (Knibbe, Kupari 2020).

Joseph E. Sanzo (2024) argues that in late antiquity, individuals were situated within multiple religious and cultural contexts, with overlapping hierarchies and power structures, which placed them as both 'orthodox' and 'heretical', depending on social relationships and context. Rather than a dichotomous distinction between elite and non-elite groups, Sanzo's (2024) notion of boundaries highlights the intrinsically ambivalent nature of interreligious practices. Based on these approaches, in this research, I examine the actions of members of an institutionalised yet ostracised religious group, challenging dichotomous perspectives on laypeople's everyday lives and traditional religious institutions.

Since its foundation, the field of lived religion has been deeply connected to theories of practice, especially with Bourdieu's theorisations of how personal and collective daily life is intertwined with structures of power (Knibbe, Kupari 2020). Focusing on practice is crucial to understanding the complex interplay between social structure and individual agency, which underpins both the reproduction and transformation of social systems (Giddens 1984; Vorhölter 2024). Practice reveals social structures and relationships, expresses forms of resistance, alters and reproduces practitioners' social statuses. Therefore, it is essential in understanding the relationship between identity and power (Bourdieu 1977; de Certeau 1984).

Michel de Certeau (1984) theorises the relationship between practice and power, distinguishing between strategies and tactics. Strategies are actions put into practice by groups in power, constantly adapting actions to ever-changing conditions, to reproduce established and dominant structures of power. Tactics are the actions people use to appropriate their spaces in contexts dominated by powerful others. People who are subjected to the

conditions imposed by other dominant groups are not passive or completely without power; they use tactics to create their own space and to resist oppression. Examining the ritual practices studied here, such as the suspension of ayahuasca use, its replacement with water, and new travels, through the lens of tactics highlights how these actions are both adaptations, negotiations, and forms of resistance.

6 Replacing Ayahuasca with Water

When the ICEFLU Italia board decided to interrupt ayahuasca use, local groups adapted logistics, calendar, and ritual practices according to their specific circumstances. Most of the Santo Daime members I interviewed use *acqua diamante* (diamond water) in their rituals, while some drink spring water from their local mountain area or simply tap water.

Acqua diamante and *acqua informata* (informed water) are names given to natural water, which people elevate energetically, raising its vibrational frequency through prayers, words, crystals, and images, based on the principle of water memory. According to the interviewees, these waters have a higher energetic vibration than regular water, and there are several ways to prepare them. Some participants follow the lunar phases, while one person simply placed a jug of water next to a small bottle of Daime, letting it be influenced by its proximity to the sacrament for two hours. Germana, a fifty-year-old member, is responsible for preparing the water used in the rituals in one of the larger groups. She explained that water is a special medium and retains intentions. I interviewed Germana in her kitchen, and she told me that, long before the current legal situation, she had a dream:

> More than ten years ago, I had a dream: there was a Santo Daime ceremony, and I was sitting at the table. The only participants were children between five and eight years old, and I thought, "What do we do now?" I then poured the Daime into a jug of water and gave it to the children. This dream had a profound impact on me, so I asked the ritual leader for three drops of Daime. Using a dropper, we measured three drops of Daime and added nine drops of acqua diamante. While praying, I multiplied this mixture up to one litre and stored it, calling it *acqua di Daime* (Daime water). It is a kind of homoeopathic dosage. In 2022, following the new regulations, we retrieved it, and the water was still fresh. From that original Daime water, I have continued to multiply it using only diamond water, five litres at a time. You can't achieve with water what Daime provides due to its chemical composition, but it is all about a vibrational level.

The fact that the practice of diluting the Daime with water originates from a dream is particularly significant within the Santo Daime conceptions.

Figure 1-2 Bottles of acqua diamante at the homes of two interviewees. Italy, 2024-25. Photos by Piera Talin

Serving is a fundamental moment of the ritual. Like the Daime, water is served at different moments during the ritual – at the beginning, in the middle, and towards the end. While Daime is typically served two to four times, depending on the length of the ritual, water is given only once or twice. "Water is so potent that you only need one or two servings!" one of the ritual leaders joked with a laugh.

One of the small groups I studied has fewer than six members and uses only the central table, where they sit during the ritual and where the serving also takes place. They used to keep the jug of Daime on the central table, and they now do the same with water. Large groups maintain the usual ritual structure as much as possible, including the *mesa do despacho* (the table where the Daime is served). On this table, placed on the opposite side of the entrance, there are typically jugs of Santo Daime, small glasses, sacred images, flowers, candles, and a basin for washing the glasses. In orderly lines, men approach the table from the right side and women from the left. Mirka, a member for over thirty years, explained:

> For me, it's really important to keep the moment of lining up at the table where the Daime is usually served. Water is poured by someone in charge, just like the Daime. You stand in line, focusing on your intentions before Mestre Irineu. When your turn comes,

> they look at you and pour water into a small glass. Many make the sign of the cross before drinking, just as they do with the Daime. These same gestures and bodily sensations are like an anchor.

Most interviewees emphasise that when they first started drinking water, they maintained the usual ritual structure, wearing *fardas* (ritual uniforms), and even fasting just as if they were drinking Daime. This led some to realise how powerful Santo Daime ritual settings are, as Ester remarks: "It felt as if I had drunk Daime". Differently, others said, "Are they crazy? I don't feel anything".

Several of them told me that they didn't immediately realise how exhausting it could be without Daime: "The first ritual with water was a very beautiful experience from an energetic point of view, but we had not taken into account the tiredness". Indeed, Santo Daime rituals require sitting in silence or engaging in hours of dancing, singing, and live music, ranging from six to twelve hours for the longest rituals.

Groups gradually adjusted the ritual form to accommodate the logistics and physical needs, rather than spiritual purposes. Adjustments involve various aspects of the ritual, such as shortening its duration, rescheduling official dates to facilitate weekend participation, holding rituals during the day instead of in the evening, and simplifying the decoration of the ritual space: "After two or three rituals, many stopped attending, so we had to rethink the organisation and logistics to keep things simple. Now, we can't spend hours setting up and taking down decorations anymore. We used to have our star-shaped table and large icons, and now they're stored in my cellar".

As part of these adjustments, there have also been changes in the music, which is a crucial aspect of Santo Daime. The two musicians I interviewed, both guitarists, affirmed that playing long *hinários* (hymnals) without the sacrament is extremely exhausting. "After three or four hours, halfway through the ritual, you're completely drained, with intense pain in your hands and fingers". Such bodily experiences have brought the members to reframe rituals by singing only part of Mestre Irineu's *O Cruzeirinho* (Little Cross) at the end of concentration rituals – from the hymn *Flor das Águas* (Flower of the Waters) onwards – or dividing long hinários into smaller sections, singing fifteen hymns per ritual in the months leading up to festivals. "By the time the official date arrives, we have already sung 100 hymns, and on the official day, we complete the remaining ones".

This ethnographic example highlights the theme of ritual reinvention and how the studied ritual practices are temporally reframed through adjustments to their bodily, material, and structural characteristics in response to legal change.

Rituals are still often perceived as falling into two distinct categories: fixed and authentic forms versus reinvented and flexible ones (Coombes, Brah 2000). Anthropologist Charles Stewart (2011) stresses the importance of analysing the politics and temporalities of rituals to contextualise these dichotomies within specific historical and situated contexts. Politics and temporalities are central to the ritual transformations, practices, and experiences of the Italian Santo Daime examined in this study. Despite the clear intentions behind the suspension of ayahuasca use and participation in rituals with water, continuing Santo Daime rituals without the sacrament is challenging for many of the participants, causing doubts and reflections about the significance of these adaptations: "Why do we sing the hymns of the despacho of the Daime while merely serving water? What is the meaning of this?" Eugenia shared with me:

> I faced it head-on – I had to go, partake in the rituals. My bond with the group is strong, and I didn't want to give up. But deep down, I never accepted it. A part of me wished the leader would tell us to stop with Santo Daime rituals. Each ceremony reopens the wound of having my spiritual life taken away. So, will I stay home on January 5th?[11] No, I'm a fardada, an Italian Daimist. That's how it is. Distance never bothered me before, but now I wonder: why drive 800 km? Yet, I do it, but *obtorto collo* (against my will).

Beyond these doubts and reflections, Santo Daime members hold diverse opinions and judgments about the members who have left. Fabio told me: "From the very beginning, there was some judgment towards those who left because there was no Daime – too easy, some said. I didn't feel like judging them. The whole doctrine revolves around the Daime, and without the sacrament, it is very difficult to keep the doctrine standing. I felt it too". These interviews reveal the diverse, and at times conflicting, emotions and reflections of Santo Daime members as they navigate their religious practice without ayahuasca. These ethnographic examples highlight, in Sanzo's (2024) terms, the boundaries between proper and improper practices and behaviours within the studied group.

The analysis of individual agency frequently highlights creativity and subversion (Knibbe, Kupari 2020). For Laura Leming (2007), religious agency is "a personal and collective claiming and enacting of dynamic religious identity", which examines how individuals participate in the ongoing processes of structuration and change within social structures, including religious institutions.

11 Eve of the *Dia de Reis* (Kings Day) on the 6th of January, one of the most important celebrations in the Santo Daime calendar.

Anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2005), for example, argues that agency, intended as the "capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable", is not solely manifested in acts of resistance and transgression but can also be found in actions that support and reinforce hegemonic structures and social norms. Alexandra Probst (forthcoming) demonstrates these relations within young Catholic women. Sanzo (2024) argues that, in the dynamics between orthodoxy and heresy, the heretical use of dominant elements targets not the orthodox or powerful but other deviant or less powerful groups, highlighting the multifaceted, blurred, and contextual nature of agency and religious differentiation. In examining the agency and practices of Santo Daime members, it becomes clear that agency is multilayered, arising from the complex interaction of individual and collective dimensions, motivations, bodily experiences, beliefs, and relationships, and materiality, among other factors. These elements collectively shape both personal and communal religious experiences.

7 Pilgrimages: Gender, Family, Time and Money

Another significant change brought about by the 2022 Decree concerns travel as a central part of the Santo Daime culture. Coleman and Elsner (1995) stress the need to look at pilgrimage in the context of culture, not solely as religious events. As a new religious movement, travelling has always been a central dimension of the Santo Daime religion and its transnational and cross-cultural dimension. While the largest Santo Daime groups ceased renting venues within Italy in 2022, they have, in turn, started renting spaces and organising trips abroad to countries where ayahuasca is permitted.

Generally, two types of travel characterise the long-term experience of Santo Daime members. One involves journeys to Santo Daime communities in Brazil, where members can participate in the harvesting and preparation of the sacrament and "know the doctrine from the source", told me Sara. This includes spending time with the Padrinhos and Madrinhas, learning from their knowledge, and practising the doctrine as it is lived in Santo Daime communities, where multiple families reside and engage in daily activities and regular gatherings. These gatherings include the rosary at dawn or in the late afternoon, the collective cleaning of public spaces, and rituals beyond those in the official calendar, among other practices.

The other type of travel entails visiting other local groups, both nationally and internationally. This occurs during events such as the *Encontros Europeos* (Santo Daime European Meetings), when Brazilian ritual leaders visit Europe, attracting larger gatherings, as well as for personal reasons such as holidays, international study

exchanges, or business trips. Depending on these circumstances, *visitantes* (members from other churches) participate in one or more rituals in another Santo Daime church. The current legal situation has led Italian Daimistas to increase their travel, visiting other European churches more frequently when they are able.

A new way of travelling has emerged from these legal changes, as Italian Santo Daime churches now organise some rituals abroad. This involves renting a venue, transporting all necessary ritual objects, such as pictures, tables, and buckets, setting up the *salão* (ritual space), and preparing for the ceremony. These gatherings are typically held on weekends to facilitate participation, and they are economically accessible events, ensuring that members with limited financial resources can participate.

The ethnography reveals various factors influencing travel to Santo Daime churches in Europe and Brazil, including gender roles, caregiving duties, finances, and work flexibility. Some Italian members have never travelled abroad, while most visit European churches two to three times a year today. Travelling requires financial means, planning, time off work, and family coordination, as Marika explains: "My husband and I can only participate in a ritual with Daime every six months. We have to plan far in advance, set a budget, make sure other family members can take care of our elderly parents, and take time off work. Before, we used to attend every ritual. Our participation was taken for granted". Despite her joy of travelling (even to the oldest and largest Santo Daime communities in the Amazon) Marzia emphasised: "I like the Santo Daime in my everyday life. I like my community and the place where I live". Fabiano highlights the role of hospitality within the doctrine: "When you travel to other churches, it's not just about you getting to know the others. They also need time to get to know you and understand how you behave in rituals and daily life".

The Italian Santo Daime groups examined in this article carry out actions that can be interpreted as tactics, as defined by de Certeau (1984). Although the religious practices I studied do not defy but respect legal norms, they become political acts in ritual spaces. I argue that they are ritual tactics and that these ritual spaces become a site of resistance. Ritual change is both imposed by the legal prohibition and chosen as a means to keep the religion alive and to affirm the Santo Daime identity in front of the law. This underscores the multiplicity of factors, meanings, and actors involved in these ritual transformations and how they are practised. In this sense, agency is multi-layered, as well as distributed. The interruption of ayahuasca use by the Santo Daime religion in Italy carries significant implications. By halting the use of their sacrament, the Italian Santo Daime groups demonstrate their respect for the law, despite their disagreement with it, and protect themselves from potential legal

issues. However, in doing so, participants also highlight that, until 2022, the use of ayahuasca was permissible and that the religious practice operated within the bounds of legality. The current moment in Italy is perceived as a possibility to regulate the use of ayahuasca. Sara told me: "Even in Brazil, there was no legality of Santo Daime and we got there. Now we do not drink it because we are fighting for our rights". For these reasons, in this context, lived religion can be analysed using Orsi's (2010) framework, described as a "dialectical stance", where religion, as it is practised every day, constantly shifts "back and forth between structure and agency", and between vision and reality.

8 Impacts on the Physical, Psychological, and Spiritual Dimensions of People

This final section focuses on the personal experiences of Santo Daime members, specifically examining the physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of these adaptations.

When I asked about the physical impact of not drinking Daime after many years of nearly weekly participation in Santo Daime rituals, every interviewee stated that the absence of ayahuasca does not lead to any withdrawal symptoms or cravings. As Mirka explained: "The Daime doesn't create physical, psychological or religious dependence". Rather, individuals have noted a diminished psychological and physical well-being. Fernando, a ten-year member, explained: "When I used to drink Daime, it alleviated tensions in my stomach, almost like a medicine. Now, without it, I feel its absence in my body". According to the interviewees, this affects both everyday life and ritual performance. From a psychological and mental health perspective, Sabrina explained that her participation in Santo Daime is both a spiritual and therapeutic journey:

> For me, Santo Daime was truly the saint who lifted me out of a recurring depression. I struggled with feeling like I didn't belong in this world, but Santo Daime helped me re-enter the world and also start going to church again. Now, I pray daily and attend Mass every two days. Even though they took away the Daime, I don't want to distance myself from God for any reason. At first, after stopping Daime, things felt normal, but then depression knocked on my door again, bringing back a taste I hadn't felt in a long time. I see it is looming again. Now I have more tools to cope, but when I was drinking Daime, this didn't happen. It's not just an antidepressant; it also brings social connection through our ritual practices.

The relational and communal dimension is, in fact, central in the Santo Daime religion (Talin 2012). Interviewees shared that, at first, they felt deeply saddened that many members left, as these were people they used to see regularly and considered important relationships, part of their *irmandade* (brotherhood). On the other hand, some of the participants in this research saw the positive side of having more time for other activities and projects, such as spending more time with family and friends, and sharing meals and drinks with them. As Cinzia explained: "I used to follow the rule of three days of abstinence before and after each ritual and participated in every scheduled ritual, plus any additional ones. This meant I had no opportunities to drink alcohol. Now, I do the things that most people do: I have a social life and more occasions to drink".

From the perspective of spiritual practice, some of the interviewees intensified other ritual practices, such as attending church, reading the Gospel and the Koran, and practising yoga. Others did not engage in any other spiritual path. They continue to participate in the Santo Daime, living their faith despite the lack of the Daime. As Sara told me: "Some say that in any case the spirit is the spirit, even without Daime. But for me the two things are not separated". This also pertains to their interpretation of the current situation and the spiritual 'work' involved: Emanuele added: "The absence of the sacrament forces us to a greater depth, which is not induced by its effects but by our own will. This situation helps us draw closer to the Holy Spirit".

These ethnographic examples stress the embodied nature of religious practice (Knibbe, Kupari 2020; McGuire 2007). In ayahuasca religions, as well as in other traditions where altered states of consciousness are sought through music, dance, physical deprivation, and the use of psychoactive substances. Therefore, the body plays a crucial role in ayahuasca's experience and ritual performance. Marika stresses that ayahuasca rituals are embodied practices: "With the legal change, I felt the Santo Daime lacked its essence. This is a practice; only faith is another thing". Embodiment and experience lie at the core of lived religion and its contribution to understanding how religion is practised and situated in social life (Ammerman 2016). For McGuire (2007), embodied practices are "ritual and expressive activities in which spiritual meanings and understandings are embedded in and accomplished through the body", expressing and reproducing different kinds of spiritual experiences. She stresses that intense bodily experiences are considered integral to achieving heightened spiritual awareness (McGuire 2007). For Merleau-Ponty, the body is the vehicle through which individuals engage with the world, meaning that the "lived body", emotions, and extraordinary experiences are essential to the analysis of how religion is situated within social life (according to McGuire 2007). In rituals with water, the bodily experience, deprived of ayahuasca's effects, is still at the

core of the experience. In these adjusted ritual forms, the body serves as an indicator of what is needed for participants to tolerate the fatigue and physical pain of performing long rituals crafted around ayahuasca's effects, without using ayahuasca.

9 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has examined the lived dimension of the Santo Daime religion in the wake of the legal ban on ayahuasca in Italy, exploring how practitioners navigate continuity and change in their ritual practices and everyday lives. In response to the legal prohibition, the group has pursued legal action and reconfigured its ritual practices, suspending the use of ayahuasca and replacing it with water, even though ayahuasca plays a central role in the group's religious ceremonies.

This has also led them to develop new forms of religious travel to countries where the use of ayahuasca is legally permitted. Rather than simply accepting the legal prohibition, this study demonstrates that these modifications serve as *ritual tactics* aimed at preserving the stability of the Santo Daime doctrine in Italy and advancing the legal struggle for religious rights. In this way, members also actively negotiate their religious identity with the State.

The analysis highlights a creative engagement with their religion, while revealing various consequences for members and their religious practice, including the impact of legal changes on their mental health, social life, and financial ability to travel abroad to participate in their religion. The analysis of these contexts shows that agency is multi-layered, functioning both as a means of resisting and adapting to repressive legal frameworks and as a way of shaping and reinforcing identity in front of legality and other ayahuasca users.

This study demonstrates that lived religion, particularly when practised in restrictive or oppressive contexts, consists of temporary and multi-layered forms of agency and practice, which reconfigure ritual forms in fluid and transitional ways. The studied adaptations of ritual forms and embodied practices show how ritual change can be temporary and malleable due to legal, social, and cultural factors. The body is central to ayahuasca ritual experiences as well as to the modifications of ritual forms without ayahuasca. Practitioners' lived experiences highlight the intertwinements between ayahuasca's effects, ritual time, and performance, and thus provide insight into religion-as-practised.

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