The Scent of Ancient Magic

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Cover illustration: Terracotta group of women seated around a well head.
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Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations are those used in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, or, in the case of authors not included in the *OCD*, in the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (Latin authors) or the Liddell-Scott-Jones *Greek-English Lexicon* (Greek authors). In a few cases, shorter abbreviations from the *TLL/LSJ* have been preferred to those in the *OCD*.

Aelian	Ael.
De natura animalium (*On the Nature of Animals*)	*NA*
Aeschylus	Aesch.
Agamemnon	*Ag.*
Choephoroe (*The Libation Bearers*)	*Cho.*
Eumenides	*Eum.*
Prometheus Vinctus (*Prometheus Bound*)	*PV*
Trophoi (*The Nurses of Dionysus*)	
Alcaeus	Alc.
Anacreon	Anac.
Apollonius Rhodius	Ap. Rhod.
Argonautica	*Argon.*
Apuleius	Apul.
Apology	*Apol.*
Metamorphoses	*Met.*
Aristophanes	Ar.
Acharnians	*Ach.*
Ecclesiazusae	*Eccl.*

Equites (*Knights*)	*Eq.*
Lysistrata	*Lys.*
Vespae (*Wasps*)	*Vesp.*
Aristotle	Arist.
De Anima (*On the Soul*)	*De an.*
Athenaeus	Ath.
Aulus Gellius	Gell.
Noctes Atticae (*Attic Nights*)	*NA*
Callimachus	Callim.
Epigrams	*Epigr.*
Hymn to Delos	*Hymn 1*
Hymn to Athena	*Hymn 5*
Cassius Dio	Cass. Dio.
Cato	Cato
De agricultura (*On Agriculture*)	*Agr.*
Catullus	Catull.
Celsus	Celsus
De medicina	*Med.*
Cicero	Cic.
De divinatione (*On Divination*)	*Div.*
De legibus	*Leg.*
De officiis	*Off.*
Epistulae ad Atticum	*Att.*
In Verrem (*Against Verres*)	*Verr.*
Pro Caelio	*Cael.*
Tusculanae disputationes	*Tusc.*
Columella	Columella
De re rustica (*On Farming*)	*Rust.*
Diogenes Laertius	Diog. Laert.
Dioscorides	Dsc.
Ennius	Enn.
Euripides	Eur.
Alcestis	*Alc.*
Medea	*Med.*
Hippolytus	*Hipp.*
Ion	
Troades (*Trojan Women*)	*Tro.*

Eustathius	Eust.
Ad Odysseam (*On* The Odyssey)	*Od.*
Geoponika	*Gp.*
Herodotus	Hdt.
Hesiod	Hes.
Opera et Dies (*Works and Days*)	*Op.*
Theogonia (*Theogony*)	*Theog.*
Hippocrates	Hp.
De mulierum affectibus (*On the Diseases of Women*)	*Mul.*
Nutriment	*Alim.*
Humors	*Hum.*
De natura muliebri (*On the Nature of Women*)	*Nat. Mul.*
Excision of the Fetus	*Foet. Exsect.*
De morbo sacro (*On the Sacred Disease*)	*Morb. Sacr.*
Superfetation	*Superf.*
On Sterile Women	*Steril.*
Homer	Hom.
Iliad	*Il.*
Odyssey	*Od.*
Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite	
Homeric Hymn to Demeter	*Hom. Hymn Dem.*
Homeric Hymn to Hermes	
Homeric Hymn to Dionysus	
Horace	Hor.
Epodi	*Epod.*
Carmina or *Odes* (*Odes*)	*Carm.*
Satirae	*Sat.*
Juvenal	Juv.
Lucan	Luc.
Lucian	Lucian
Philopseudes	*Philops.*
Lucilius	Lucil.
Lucretius	Lucr.
Macrobius	Macrob.
Saturnalia	*Sat.*
Martial	Mart.
Moschus	Mosch.
Europa	

Ovid	Ov.
Amores (*Love Poems*)	*Am.*
Ars amatoria (*The Art of Love*)	*Ars Am.*
Fasti	*Fast.*
Medicamina faciei femineae (*Facial Remedies for Women*)	*Medic.*
Metamorphoses	*Met.*
Remedia amoris (*Cures for Love*)	*Rem. am.*
Palladius	Palladius
De re rustica (*On Farming*)	
Persius	Pers.
Philostratus	Philostr.
Imagines	*Imag.*
Pindar	Pind.
Isthmian Odes	*Isthm.*
Pythian Odes	*Pyth.*
Olympian Odes	*Ol.*
Plato	Pl.
Symposium	*Symp.a*
Theaetetus	*Tht.*
Plautus	Plaut.
Amphitruo	*Amph.*
Aulularia	*Aul.*
Bacchides	*Bacch.*
Casina	*Cas.*
Epidicus	*Epid.*
Menaechmi	*Men.*
Miles Gloriosus	*Mil.*
Mostellaria	*Mostell.*
Pseudolus	*Pseud.*
Pliny the Elder	Plin.
Naturalis historia (*Natural History*)	*HN*
Plutarch	Plut.
Life of Antony	*Ant.*
Life of Cicero	*Cic.*
Life of Themistocles	*Them.*
De Iside et Osiride (*Isis and Osiris*)	*De Is. et Os.*

De defectu oraculorum (*On the Failure of Oracles*)	*De def. or.*
Moralia	*Mor.*
Porphyrion	Porph.
Commentarii in Horatium (*Commentary on Horace*)	*Hor.*
Propertius	Prop.
Pseudo-Apuleius	Ps. Apul.
Quintilian	Quint.
Institutio oratoria	*Inst.*
Q. Serenus Sammonicus	Ser. med.
De re medica	
Sappho	Sapph.
Semonides	Semon.
Seneca the Younger	Sen.
De beneficiis	*Ben.*
Ad Helviam	*Helv.*
Silius Italicus	Sil.
Punica	*Pun.*
Simonides	Simon.
Sophocles	Soph.
Electra	*El.*
Soranus	Sor.
Gynaeceia (*Gynecology*)	*Gyn.*
Statius	
Achilleid	*Achil.*
Thebaid	*Theb.*
Suetonius	Suet.
Divus Augustus	*Aug.*
Divus Iulius	*Iul.*
Divus Vespasianus	*Vesp.*
Theophrastus	Theophr.
Characteres	*Char.*
De odoribus (*On Odors*)	*Od.*
Historia plantarum (*Enquiry Into Plants*)	*HP*
Tibullus	Tib.
Varro	Varro
De re rustica (*On Farming*)	*Rust.*

Vergil	Verg.
Aeneid	*Aen.*
Georgics	*G.*
Anth. Graec.	*Anthologia Graeca*
Anth. Lat.	*Anthologia Latina*
CML	*Corpus Medicorum Latinorum*
FGrHist	*Fragments of the Greek Historians*
LIMC	*Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*
PMG	*Poetae Melici Graeci*
PGM	*Papyri Graecae Magicae*
PDM	*Papyri Demoticae Magicae*

CHAPTER 1

The Breath of the Leopard

Scent and Magic

Aelian, a Roman scholar of the early third century CE, describes a remarkable property of leopards:

> Εὐωδίας τινὸς θαυμαστῆς τὴν πάρδαλιν μετειληχέναι φασίν, ἡμῖν μὲν ἀπορρήτου, αὐτὴ δὲ οἶδε τὸ πλεονέκτημα τὸ οἰκεῖον, καὶ μέντοι καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ζῷα συνεπίσταται τοῦτο ἐκείνῃ, καὶ ἁλίσκεταί οἱ τὸν τρόπον τοῦτον. ἡ πάρδαλις τροφῆς δεομένη ἑαυτὴν ὑποκρύπτει ἢ λόχμῃ πολλῇ ἢ φυλλάδι βαθείᾳ, καὶ ἐντυχεῖν ἐστιν ἀφανής, μόνον δὲ ἀναπνεῖ. οὐκοῦν οἱ νεβροὶ καὶ <αἱ> δορκάδες καὶ οἱ αἶγες οἱ ἄγριοι καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα τῶν ζῴων ὡς ὑπό τινος ἴυγγος τῆς εὐωδίας ἕλκεται, καὶ γίνεται πλησίον· ἡ δὲ ἐκπηδᾷ καὶ ἔχει τὸ θήραμα. (*NA* 5.40)
>
> They say that the leopard has a marvelous fragrance. We cannot smell it, but the leopard knows the advantage it has, and other animals do notice it and are caught in this way. When the leopard needs food it hides in dense growth or thick foliage and is impossible to see; it only breathes. And so fawns and deer and wild goats and similar animals are attracted by its scent as if by a *iunx* and come close. Then the leopard leaps out and takes its prey.

The fragrant breath of the leopard was a favorite topic of medieval writers, for whom it became an allegory for the sweetness of Christ's preaching. In classical Greek, the *iunx* to which Aelian compares the scent can mean two things: a species of bird that can twist its neck uncannily and that the ancients associated with magic, the *Jynx torquilla*, Eurasian wryneck; or a magical implement, a perforated disk with a string through it that whistled as it was spun between the

hands to induce love, called a *iunx* after the twisting bird. But what does it mean for Aelian to say that the smell of the leopard's breath is like a *iunx*? How is a scent like a love charm?

Why Scent and Magic?

Magic is difficult to visualize. It is invisible, intangible, and it works through mysterious means. If magic had an obvious mechanism, after all, it would no longer be considered magic but straightforward technical activity. People contemplating magic cannot easily observe how it produces its effects, the way people can when watching an ordinary activity (say, a tree being cut down). A tree-cutter picks up an axe, chops through the trunk, watches the tree fall to the ground, and then cuts it into logs or boards; all of these steps are clear, observable, and readily comprehensible, and the components that go into tree felling—the human labor, the saws, axes, wedges, and other tools used, and the tree itself—are commonplace. By contrast, when someone in antiquity scratches a curse against a neighbor on a sheet of lead, rolls it and pierces it with a nail, throws it into a well, and then several days later sees the neighbor fall ill or suffer some misfortune, not all of the links in this chain of causation are clear. The activities with which the curser begins are understandable enough: they express in writing a wish for unpleasant things to happen to someone, using ordinary materials and formulaic wording; they roll this up, seal it, and hide it somewhere where they hope it will not be found, using their judgment that people do not usually look at the bottom of wells or inside graves. But between the deposition of the tablet and the neighbor's illness, what does the curse writer imagine to happen? How is that written wish for harm supposed to lead to physical symptoms in the person cursed?

When people in antiquity discuss how magic works, they usually talk about its causes and effects. A *defixio*, a potion, or a chanted spell can be seen, tasted, or heard; they are concrete, familiar magical objects and acts in antiquity. They may alarm or excite people, but they do not confuse them. Likewise, their effects are tangible and easy to comprehend. The "binding" with which a *defixio* restrains the limbs, tongue, or actions of its victim is a physical effect that could be clearly described by people who believed themselves to be victims, and by onlookers. A magical potion is expected to have physiological effects, and the terms used for a magical potion are often identical to the terms for poison or

medicine, categories that overlapped heavily with magic and were often deployed in hopes of similar outcomes. Chanted spells also have supposed observable effects: a victim falls ill or their behavior changes abruptly; wild animals become tame; the moon is drawn down from the sky. But the actual moment of the magic itself, as opposed to the words or acts that set it in motion or the end results, is mysterious. By what means is a chanted spell supposed to work? In a chain of causality that starts with the magician's utterance and ends with a young woman falling in love with a man, how can the middle part be reconstructed? How do the words lead to the effect? What is the stuff of magic itself? This intangibility is one of the reasons magic is frightening: you can treat the causes or the effects—finding and removing the *defixio*, wearing an amulet to counteract curses, killing the magician—but there is no way to see, hear, or catch hold of the magic itself, divorced from the act or object that set it in motion, the way someone might seize the tree-cutter's axe midswing. And you may not know that you are being acted on magically until effects that you attribute to magic appear.

Given this difficult situation, people grasp for ways to conceive of magic. The mechanism of magic was explained in antiquity in a variety of ways: curses work because the gods hear prayers for justice or because ghosts carry messages to the underworld; what the uneducated call "magic" is really the operation of hidden natural laws; magicians know the right actions or words by which to compel the gods; and so forth. But while many theories were offered in antiquity for why and how magic operated, they remained theories: people contemplating magic had to imagine the intervening steps in ways that a tree-cutter's audience could simply observe. Ancient theories of magic and their intellectual grounding in philosophical, religious, and scientific traditions have been the focus of much discussion in recent decades. However, what I intend to discuss here are not the ways in which people in antiquity try to intellectually explain magic, but rather some of the more visceral and unconscious ways in which they imagine it.

There is a pervasive connection in ancient thought between magic and scent, which suggests that the Greeks and Romans found in smells a uniquely appropriate mental model for understanding what magic was and how it worked. Both scents and magic are intangible, and yet can affect us profoundly, often in ways we find mysterious, hard to defend against, and perhaps a bit below the belt. A spell is said to induce love, while an odor can vividly evoke a long-forgotten memory. Greco-Roman antiquity was not unique in associating

scent and magic: anthropological comparanda show that the equation of magic with smell is a widespread human phenomenon.

Ephemeral and powerful, odor and magic came to be linked in the Greco-Roman world in complex and intersecting ways. Magic was imagined to be like a smell, or to be itself a kind of smell, or to be accompanied by a smell, or to be coterminous with a smell that might signal magic's presence. Things considered magical, such as potent herbs, often had distinctive scents, and scented things were more likely than the unscented to have strange powers attributed to them. This habit of equating strong odors with strong powers can disrupt even the tendency to see greater potency in rare, exotic, and costly ingredients, so that an herb as humble as garlic can be identified as Homer's witch-defeating *moly* plant. Magicians themselves, especially women, were believed to have distinctive odors, and perhaps they did: the spells of the magical papyri reveal that Greco-Egyptian practitioners surrounded themselves with clouds of scent during their rituals, perfuming their houses, tools, clothes, bodies, and even their breath. However, the perfumes and incenses that the magicians of the papyri deployed testify to a very different scent of magic than the rotten smells that the poetic tradition came to assign to witches as an undisguisable signal of their inner depravity. Literary witches also deploy smells deliberately as part of their magical arsenal, as with the weaponized perfumes of Apollonius' Medea and Horace's Canidia. The flexible connections between odors and the supernatural suggest that the familiar phenomenon of scent became a model through which people could imagine the more mysterious idea of magic.

Sense and Culture

Scents were largely overlooked in the study of culture until the 1980s, when the coalescence of an "anthropology of the senses" brought new scrutiny to the less-studied senses of taste, touch, and smell. The prioritization of sight and hearing in the European hierarchy of the senses has, in recent decades, been explored as a cultural peculiarity of relatively recent vintage rather than a biological imperative. Before this scholarly interest in scent, ethnographic accounts did not often mention odors; in retrospect, it's a rather remarkable omission, given the insistence with which both good and bad smells intrude on our attention. However pungent, smells were considered largely irrelevant to the serious description and analysis of human societies in mid-twentieth-century anthro-

pological writing. Work done in the last several decades, however, has emphasized that scents can be used in complex symbolic ways—for example, to code gender or social hierarchies, to conceptualize space, and to mediate between ritual and nonritual space and time.

To contemplate scent is to realize that our very concept of the senses is a historical construct. While in English we typically speak of having five senses, the number itself is a byproduct of our classical heritage and is particularly owed to Aristotle, who advocated a list that included the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, in part because they corresponded to five elements (earth, water, air, fire, and aether). Aristotle's desire for a tidy number overrode the fact that he elsewhere classified taste and sight as types of touch. While the Aristotelian attempt to link bodily perception to a cosmological scheme had the most persistence, other similar sensory schemata were proposed over the centuries: Philo wanted seven senses for allegorical reasons, while Origen suggested ten senses, five physical and five spiritual, an idea that remained popular into the Middle Ages.[1] Other cultures configure their map of the senses differently: Nigerian Hausa recognize two senses, sight and all other perception, while Old English used the words *smec* and *swæc* to mean both smell and taste, and struggled to translate Roman works that distinguished between the two.[2] Modern scientists recognize more than the colloquial five senses, many of which we conventionally group together under "touch" in the same way that the Hausa categorize hearing, smell, touch, and taste as one unified sense. Exactly how many human senses exist is subject to debate, but some put the number at over twenty, including senses of proprioception, kinesthesia, temperature, and possibly magnetism.[3] Plato had spoken of senses of hot and cold, pleasure and pain, desire and fear in addition to the five Aristotle would canonize.[4]

Similarly, the Western focus on sight can feel like such an obvious priority to those raised within the Western sensorium that it comes as a surprise to realize that not all societies consider sight the most essential way of perceiving the world. The Western sensory hierarchy that considers sight preeminent had

1. Classen 1993a: 2–3. Arist. *De am*. passim, but succinctly at 3.1; Philo, *On the Creation of the World* 117; Origen *Homily on Leviticus* 3.7.2.
2. Ritchie 1991; Anderson 2001: 117–18.
3. Wade 2003.
4. Pl. *Tht*. 156b. History of the concept of "the senses": Classen 1993a: 1–5; Geurts 2002: 37–38; Howes 2009: 1–52; Howes 2016; Stewart 2005; Synnott 1993: 128–55; Vinge 1975: 15–21. A few examples of work on sensory classifications in different cultures include Kathryn Geurts's work (2005) on proprioception and kinesthesia in West Africa and Majid et al.'s study (2018) of the coding of sensory information across languages.

emerged already in the Greek world, where sight and hearing tended to be considered the higher senses, connected to rationality, and the others to be the more animalistic senses, connected to sensuousness.[5] From the Enlightenment into the twentieth century, science sought to justify its prioritization of sight and denigration of scent, touch, and taste as mediums for rational understanding to the extent that evolutionary and physiological theories came to associate sight with greater cultural advancement and hearing, smell, taste, and touch with progressively more "primitive" cultures.[6] It has been alleged that scent in particular has suffered a loss of status in Western culture in the last few centuries. While in medieval Europe scent was thought to have powerful medical applications and fragrance was taken as a sign of sanctity, modern discussions of scent largely center around pleasure (including the regulation of bothersome odors and the deployment of pleasant ones) and commercial uses, with few acknowledgments of smell's hermeneutical possibilities outside of realms that, like cooking and sexuality, are themselves associated with sensuality and the other "lower" senses. The wave of scholarship on scent in recent decades has pushed back against the twentieth-century depreciation of smell in an attempt to recover its role in other societies and in the history of the West.[7]

In the late 1980s, a number of scholars began to discuss the ways in which human sensory perception is not, as it had been previously regarded, a transparent window onto the world, but rather is culturally constructed and conditioned. At the simplest level, even individuals within the same culture may sense the world very differently. Walking across a Greek hillside, four companions may be immersed in the same landscape and yet perceive it in very different ways: the nature lover may see the plants resolve into identifiable varieties of trees and flowers, and also note signs of passing animals, changing seasons, and the geological history of the Mediterranean; the one who enjoys mountain biking and running may notice the uneven footing and the steepness of slopes, mentally constructing the landscape as a challenging terrain to be surmounted; the classicist's eye is drawn to the traces of the past, moving through layers of time as much as space; the reluctant hiker may focus on more recent cultural

5. Classen 1993a: 1–11; Classen and Howes 2014: 170–74; Stewart 2005.
6. Howes 2005: 11.
7. Decline of scent in the West: Kern 1974; Synnott 1991b; Classen 1993a: 1–36; Howes 2005: 1–17. Despite the growth of interest in the senses and smell in particular, the degree to which seriously analyzing scent feels trivial or odd may be suggested by the tendency of sensory scholarship toward somewhat self-deprecatingly punning article titles: Almagor 1990a; Rasmussen 1999; Chiang 2008; Tan 2016.

monuments, perceiving the landscape in terms of cell towers and the likelihood of finding a café. Our interests shape our attention and our perception. On a grander scale, culture determines our interests as well as issues of perception, such as whether we trust our eyes, our ears, our noses, what we think to taste, and what we associate those tastes with. Sensing is a cultural act, since culture influences how and what we perceive, and what we make of that information; and our perceptions in turn influence culture.

Anthropologists began to advocate for more evocative descriptions of other societies, in reaction to the then-prevailing mode of anthropological writing that aimed for clinical detachment when relating a researcher's experiences in the field, a type of anthropology that had itself been a reaction to early-twentieth-century colonialist descriptions that used richly sensuous descriptions to emphasize the supposed primitivism of their subjects. The early modern evaluation of smell, touch, and taste as lower, animal senses from which more-evolved humans had retreated but that "primitive" societies still fully reveled in led to lurid descriptions of "disgusting" foods, "exotic" scents, overpowering stenches, and so on. "Primitive" art, removed from its context by collectors, could be rehabilitated and appreciated by Western tastes; primitive smells could not be so transposed to museums. In pushing back against this equation of visceral experiences with savagery, midcentury anthropologists erased much of the cultural nuance embodied in flavors, scents, textures, and other sensations. Smell, in particular, was largely ignored, for there was no established discourse into which it could be fit: Tuareg food could be described in terms of foodways, cooking techniques, labor, or habits of social intercourse, but Tuareg perfume remained uncritiquable, fit only for the sensuous or repulsed reactions that anthropologists increasingly suppressed in their written records of cultural contact.

Paul Stoller, in his 1989 book *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*, called for a return to a more sensuous, impressionistic mode of anthropological writing, a "tasteful fieldwork," playing on the notion that older accounts omitted sensory input in pursuit of good taste, but in so doing became bland and tasteless. Stoller objects that the anthropologist cannot meaningfully impose a Western, sight-oriented hierarchy of senses onto other cultures, and that they must instead become immersed in the sense-world of the culture they study and convey those impressions in their writing as much as possible. Stoller puts this method to work in the analysis of the place of vision and sound in Songhay culture, and in *In Sorcery's Shadow* (Stoller and Olkes 1987), an account of his studies with several professional sorcerers and diviners among the Songhay, the

sound of ritual incantations, the taste and sensation of eating a magical paste, and the feeling of being paralyzed by hostile magicians are integral to his descriptions of Songhay magic. In the discussion of sensuousness and how to create an "anthropology of the senses" that emerged, smell was particularly singled out as an understudied mode of sensing.[8]

For the classicist, of course, scents are far easier to ignore than for a visitor to an Azande village or a New York pizzeria. Visual and textual evidence dominate our experience of the past, and the tastes, sounds, textures, and smells of a Greek city often require the intellectual reconstruction of the sensations that filled a fifth-century Athenian's life. The literature on scent in anthropology, sociology, and related fields is now substantial, but in the following pages I sketch a broad overview of the scholarship on scent and the senses that has emerged in the last several decades, focusing on the works of the most interest to classicists wanting a theoretical foundation in the topic. I then turn in more detail to the work that has highlighted the ways in which scent is well suited as a mental model for magic.[9]

Sociological and Anthropological Literature on Scent

Sociological work on scent has focused on how human valuations of smells encode social realities.[10] There are relatively few biological imperatives governing how humans perceive smells—smells of decay and putrefaction are generally considered unpleasant, while sweet smells, such as those of flowers, are enjoyable, but between those poles, smells are mostly ranked as pleasant or unpleasant according to highly varied cultural norms.[11] The smell of cow dung is a telling example. Many urban Americans are likely to consider animal dung an unpleasant scent, or as tolerable only in limited doses or in specific circum-

8. Some of the central works on the anthropology of the senses, including senses other than smell, are Stoller 1989 and Stoller and Olkes 1987; Classen 1993, 1997, 2010, 2014; Classen and Howes 2014; Synnott 1993; Howes 1991, 2005, 2009, 2010. Some other useful entry points for discussion of sensory studies as a subfield in anthropology and beyond include Rasmussen 1999; Geurts 2002; Vannini, Waskul, and Gottschalk 2012. Additional works dealing exclusively with scent are Classen, Howes, and Synnott 1994; Drobnick 2006; and Reinarz 2014.

9. Of the works discussed below, the following contain useful reviews of the then-current scholarship on scent: Classen 1997; Borthwick 2000; Low 2005; Drobnick 2006: 1–9; Brant 2008; Vannini, Waskul, and Gottschalk 2012: 3–22; Classen and Howes 2014: 1–13.

10. For the topic generally, see Largey and Watson 1972; Howes 1987; Synnott 1991a; Classen 1992; Brant 2008.

11. Classen 1992; Synnot 1991a.

stances, such as a visit to the zoo or to the country. The Daasanach pastoralists of Ethiopia, on the other hand, value cattle as a source of wealth and so rank the smell of cattle products highly. Men who can afford to own cattle have traditionally perfumed themselves with cow urine and manure, women with ghee.[12] And our preference in scents can be highly individual even within a culture. In a survey on odor, one American commented that cow manure was one of his favorite smells, since it reminded him of happy childhood vacations on an aunt's farm.[13] Both society-wide and individual associations thus condition how we evaluate scents. The usual American judgment that cow manure has a bad smell is as learned as the Daasanach enjoyment of it.

As in the case of the American fondly remembering the smell of cows, sufficiently good or bad associations can lead us to make exceptions to our usual evaluations of scent, either as individuals or as a culture. Sweat, usually a negative scent in American culture, can be valued in the right context as a sign of hard work or vigorous exercise, while floral scents, usually positively regarded, can also be denigrated as too feminine or as funereal. Stephen Tyler recounts an incident from a visit to Houston during which he had commented on the pervasive smell of the city's oil refineries. A bystander replied that they smelled "like money."[14] The speaker here does not say that the scent is good, but that it smells "like" something else that is scentless but desirable, thus recasting the implicit criticism of his city by an outsider into a positive quality. The "scent" of money overlays the otherwise unpleasant smell. Similarly, one of my own relatives who once worked at a waste treatment plant explained to his fiancée that the sewage "smelled like job security." A person associated with sewage smells is a less enticing romantic prospect than one associated with a steady income in an essential industry, a clever renegotiation of what could have been construed as an embarrassment.[15]

This association of pleasant thoughts with pleasant smells is a particular instance of the near-universal assumption that good things smell good and bad things smell bad. We expect things that we find morally or aesthetically pleasing to smell pleasant (or at least neutral), and things that are immoral or ugly to reveal themselves by their scent, even if their appearance can fool us. Conversely, things that smell bad are assumed to be bad in essence, and things that

12. Almagor 1987: 109.
13. Gilbert and Wysocki 1987, quoted in Synnott 1991a: 440–41.
14. Tyler 1996: 618.
15. Kristina and Matteo Abeyta, personal communication.

smell good to be good. (Witness the use of "that stinks" or "you stink" as a general expression of disapprobation.) Early sociological approaches began as broad musings on how such odors, real or imagined, are used to reinforce social and moral valuations of individuals and groups, particularly ethnic, religious, and class groups. Gale Largey and Peter Watson (1972: 1021), in the first significant sociological consideration of scent, asked "What effects do differences in culture and life style have upon the perception and generation of odors? What social meanings are attributed to such perceived and generated odors?," an approach that Anthony Synnott (1991a, 1993) in particular elaborated on. Among the issues that Largey and Watson consider are the use of perfumes, scent and memory, moral and social judgments predicated on smell, the attribution of foul smells to religious and ethnic minorities, and the use of scent to reinforce social hierarchies. Smell, being immaterial but originating from a material object, gives the illusion that it conveys the essential nature of a thing, and that we can thus smell inner qualities that are otherwise hidden: thus foreigners and other marginalized groups in a society are frequently stereotyped as bad-smelling, providing a visceral justification for learned prejudice.[16] Conversely, we are more likely to assume that a person who smells unwashed is also lazy, uncouth, and unethical than we are to make the same assumption about someone whose scent we like.[17] Moral corruption is often said to be indicated by smell: the Buli believe that adultery and incest will reveal themselves through the resultant bad smell of the guilty, and the Inuit that the violation of taboos results in a foul smell that clings to the goddess Sedna's hair and angers her. Romans thought that bees were supremely sensitive to odors of all kinds and would be disgusted by someone who had recently had intercourse.[18] A foul smell has been attributed to prostitutes and witches and a sweet smell to virgins in many European traditions.[19]

On a less literal level, Susan Rasmussen notes the role of smell as "a means of discovery, warning, or unmasking" in Tuareg folktales and the ambiguity of the Tamacheq verb for smelling, which can also indicate understanding or noticing, much as English speakers can speak of "sniffing something out." Barrie Reynolds gives the example of Nguni diviners who say they can discover cannibals by the smell of corpses that supposedly clings to them, a

16. Classen 1992: 155–57.
17. Largey and Watson 1972; Howes 1987; Synnott 1991a; Classen 1999.
18. Buli: Bubandt 1998: 51. Inuit: Howes 1987: 410. Bees: Verg. *G.* 4.44–50, Columella *Rust.* 9.14.3.
19. Classen 1992: 142–43.

smell that ordinary people cannot sense, so that diviners sniff loudly in company as an advertisement of their powers; and Alfred Gell points to a correlation between the way Umeda hunters use smell as a practical means of tracking prey and the way they use dreams as a way to find out the future, since they believe that portentous dreams are induced by the same ginger perfume supposed to attract pigs.[20]

Scents—both how people themselves smell, and how they value, categorize, create, and share or remove smells—are a point at which many basic social distinctions are articulated: group member/outsider, male/female, urban/rural, old/young, moral/immoral, civilized/wild. Group membership is frequently constructed in part through the scents ascribed to group members and to outsiders. Returning to the Daasanach, who perfume themselves to smell like their cows, this odor of cattle distinguishes the elite pastoralists from lower-class fishermen, to whom the pastoralists ascribe a fishy smell, a scent the Daasanach consider undesirable. The scent distinction reinforces the boundaries of class and occupation. The supposed fishy smell of the fishermen, unlike the smell of the pastoralists, is not deliberately sought out by them, and may be more the imaginary reflection of prejudice against fishermen than an actual scent.[21] A somewhat different ingroup/outgroup distinction involving tolerance for scent can be found in a 2002 news story from Twin Falls, Idaho, that chronicles a local dispute between long-time residents and the industrial dairies that had moved into the area in recent years. The manure tanks of the dairies produced an unbearable smell of waste, prompting residents to complain. One woman interviewed drew a distinction between the reasonable smell-tolerance of a real farmer and the unreasonable emissions of the large dairies: "'I'm not afraid of the smell of cow manure,' says Marilyn Hoke . . . who grew up on an Idaho dairy. But 'these are not dairies. They are factories.'"[22] An appropriate and moderate appreciation for the odor distinguishes the locals from both urbanites and from the industrial farmers intruding on the previous economy of the region.

In other cases, scent categories reinforce other cultural categories within a group, such as gender or age classes. One of the best-discussed examples of scent and social hierarchy is that of the Suya of Brazil, who categorize community members on a scale from inodorate to strong-smelling according to their social proximity to male adulthood and the men's house in the center of the

20. Rasmussen 1999: 56–7, 63; Reynolds 1963: 126; Gell 1977: 33.
21. Almagor 1987: 110; discussed in Classen 1992.
22. Stuebner 2002.

village or, conversely, to the jungle and wildness. Adult men are considered bland-smelling and adult women, as their antithesis, as rotten-smelling, with old people of both sexes smelling a bit worse than men and children worse than the elderly. Children begin as uncivilized and pungent; as boys are acculturated their smell improves, while the smell of girls is only thought to worsen with maturation.[23] Van Beek (1992) discusses distinctions in odor between the blacksmith class of the Kapsiki and the rest of Kapsiki society. Among the Kapsiki, smells differentiate gender and class, separating smiths from nonsmiths and men from women, not only in terms of how group members are said to smell, but in how they themselves perceive and classify odors. For smiths, who for the Kapiski also function as undertakers, neither corpses nor forged metals have an odor, while for nonsmiths, corpses represent one of the worst possible smells and metals smell bad in the same way that the smiths themselves are said to smell bad. (If pressed, smiths will agree that corpses have a smell; but they are not *socially* pungent for smiths the way they are for nonsmiths.) Gender as well as caste influences these odor distinctions, with both smith and nonsmith women making fewer and milder caste distinctions in odor than men. Kapsiki report physical reality in different ways depending on their social reality.[24] Individuals may actively create or mediate associations by deploying scents: Rasmussen notes how among the Tuareg, certain scents such as fragrant teas and perfumes are more likely to be actively shared in intimate settings by close associates, and there is an expectation that people with a certain degree of closeness will share scents. Perfumes or perfumed objects are exchanged or passed around to enjoy at social gatherings. Sharing scents demonstrates friendship and leads to intimates literally conforming in odor. Conversely, the fact that certain groups (such as the old and the young) do not exchange scents in such settings reinforces distinctions between them.[25]

Some notable work on the topic of scent and social divisions is Uri Almagor's (1990a) examination of the physical and cultural factors conditioning how humans use scent to delimit, classify, and define themselves and their environment, and Constance Classen's (1992) look at the construction of social categories through scent diachronically as well as in modern Western and non-

23. Seeger 1981: 88–120, 203; see also Classen, Howes, and Synnot 1994: 95–122 and Steele 2006 for a useful summation of work on social scent codes among the Suya and several other Amazonian peoples.
24. Van Beek 1992. Cf. Kuipers 1991 on the metaphorical extensions of Weyéwa taste vocabulary.
25. Rasmussen 1999: 56–57, 59, 63.

Western groups. More recent work on the topic has been undertaken by scholars such as Lisa Law (2001) and Kelvin Low (2005), who look at social categories, smell, expectations, and the urban landscape in Singapore.

Another strand of scholarship seeks to apply these approaches on a smaller, often personal scale, examining how individual actors negotiate the relationship between their culture's sensory and social structures. C. Nadia Seremetakis (1991, 1994a, 1994b) considers, inter alia, the changing sensescapes of twentieth-century Greece and the negotiation of commercialization and economic forces, the urban and rural, the modern and traditional, and the local and foreign, while Clara Brant (2008) discusses scent, transcendence, and communication within the frame of a personal essay. Less personal phenomenological approaches include those by Almagor 1990b and Bubandt 1998. Social/psychological work also looks at the interaction of the psychology of smell with the social framework.[26]

At the same time, anthropological work on scent, while interested in odor's role in group definitions and sociocultural judgments, was also preoccupied with describing the sensory landscapes, physical and mental, of other cultures, emphasizing that the connotations of scent in general and of specific smells vary widely from culture to culture, and that different societies rank and use the senses quite differently. A large body of work deals with the sensoria of various societies: what senses are emphasized or de-emphasized, how the senses are described and conceptualized, and what synesthetic connections are made between modes of sensing, objects, and concepts.

Cultural differences in how the senses are numbered and ranked were discussed above. As examples of culturally specific linkages between sensory experiences and concepts, we can cite the Andean use of the same term for sweet tastes, pleasant speech, softness, and multicolored textiles (Classen 1990: 727); the Desana belief that colors combine with heat to produce odors and flavors, so that purple is associated with moonlight, rotten smells, and acid flavors; and the traditional Chinese association of the Earth, yellow, sweetness, fragrance, and the musical note *gong* (Classen and Howes 2014: 158, 162–63).[27] This "cultural synaesthesia" (Classen and Howes 2014: 152–74) is hardly an unfamiliar phenomenon. While other people's associations may sound counterintuitive to us, we might consider the American association of the colors white and red

26. Waskul and Vannini 2008.
27. On the concept of "cultural synesthesia" see Classen and Howes 2014: 152–74.

with the flavor peppermint, the description of people with pleasant tempers as "sweet," or the code that associates the flavor and scent of nutmeg, the color orange, certain types of gourds, the smell of smoke, a feeling of plenty, and the appearance of supernatural entities such as ghosts as signs that, appearing together, enable an American to read the seasonal code as "autumn."

As mentioned above, work on the sensoria of other societies has emphasized that the Western sensory preference for sight is not inevitable, but a historical result of Aristotelian and Enlightenment conceptions of the senses. Different cultures rank senses quite differently, so that the Ongee place more emphasis on smell, the Tzotil on temperature perception, and the Suya on hearing.[28] Among the Suya, speaking and hearing are paramount while sight and smell are considered animalistic, uncivilized modes of sensing, and the process of civilizing a child into an adult man involves inserting lip and ear disks, emphasizing the social organs (Seeger 1975, 1981: 80–91). In a series of works on the Andean sensorium (1990, 1993b), Constance Classen has discussed the preeminence of speech and orality and the relatively secondary place of sight for the Inca. She notes the post-Conquest conflict between traditional Andean sound-based value systems and colonial European sight-based systems, and between visual/written and oral/aural modes of communication and remembrance, particularly in the religious realm, where interaction with the deities and the holy objects called *huacas* was conceived of in primarily aural terms. Other work describes the collision of different sensoria in situations of cultural contact, such as Law's (2001) look at Filipino workers and food smells in Hong Kong and Roseman's (2005) discussion of the Malaysian Temiar negotiation of modern objects such as plastic bags through traditional aesthetics.

Moving from how people conceive of and organize the senses to how the senses are used to categorize time, space, the gods, and other aspects of their worlds beyond social roles, a number of studies have shown how sensory codes can be used to map reality and condition our perception of it. The Ongee "scent calendar" has been frequently cited as a demonstration of how odors can be used to mark the passage of time, since the Ongee conceive of both time and space in terms of a temporal and spatial scent map: the cycle of seasonal blooming plants marks the passage of the year, and a village's territory depends on how far the scents it produces reach, and thus expands and contracts depending on activity levels. The movement of humans, spirits, and animals for the

28. Classen 1990, 1993a: 1–9.

Ongee involves regulating the movement, release, and absorption of odors.[29] Similarly, Bubandt (1998) and Howes (1988) discuss Melanesian conceptions of life, the afterlife, physical space, and the movement of souls in terms of odor. The Tzotil, on the other hand, conceive of cosmological order in terms of temperature and associate heat with men and order, and cold with women and disorder; in addition to gender, temperature symbolically codes colors, direction, time, culture vs. wildness, and the human lifespan. Illnesses are thought to involve temperature imbalances in the body and death is conceptualized as a final loss of heat and odor.[30]

Other Approaches to Scent

Historical approaches have investigated the changing role of scent over time and how a culture's sensorium is not fixed but develops in response to historical and cultural events. For example, Alain Corbin's *The Foul and the Fragrant* (1986) examined the scents of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, looking at attempts to deodorize public and private space, bodies, and the social order, and the gradual association of scent with the sensual while sight became the preeminent sense of rationality and science. As people became more sensitized to scent, greater efforts were made to control it, and scent fell in scientific estimation, becoming a problem or an indulgence rather than a useful tool for investigation. Scent and the medical-scientific establishment have been particularly studied, not only the eventual rejection of scent as irrelevant in a post-Pasteurian world in which bad odors were no longer thought to produce disease, but also the medieval and early modern use of scent by doctors in both diagnosis and treatment.[31] The use of scents such as incenses in religious contexts has also received significant attention (James 2004; Pentcheva 2010). A variety of histories have tried to chart the role of odors in particular periods and cultures (e.g., Dugan 2011; Classen, Howes, and Synnott 1994; Howes and Lalonde 1991; Kern 1974).[32]

Of course many historical studies are de facto literary studies as well, particularly as we approach the ancient world, and a great deal of the classical

29. Pandya 1993; Radcliffe-Brown 1964: 312.
30. Classen 1993b; Classen 2005.
31. E.g., Evans 2014; Jenner 2000; Porter 1993; Roberts 1995.
32. See also Corbin's (2005) cautions on historical investigations of the senses.

discourse on scent involves literary approaches. A few philological/historical approaches dealing with other times and places include Shulman's (1987) work on scent and memory in Sanskrit poetry and Carlisle's (2004) examination of Victorian fiction, as well as many of the approaches taken within classical studies, which will be surveyed below.

Approaches drawn from geography and environmental studies have produced sensory studies of landscapes and humans' use, alteration, and experience of their surroundings (Rodaway 2002; Porteous 1985), and can intersect fascinatingly with other approaches such as ritual (Zotter 2015), sociopolitical (Carolan 2007), archaeological (Tilley 2008), or anthropological (Ingold 2000: 40–60; Feld 2005) studies of sensescapes. How does the physical landscape shape the sensorium of a society, and how does cultural perception shape human interactions with the landscape? Classen, Howes, and Synnott have suggested that sight is relatively deprecated in jungle-dwelling cultures such as the Suya and Ongee because sound and smell are often more useful in hunting or navigating in thick forest.[33] Studies of tourism and travel describe ways in which visitors experience a landscape differently from locals, often "seeing the sights" but insulating themselves from local sounds, smells, and tastes; the visitors' preconception of what things are to be experienced there and the goals of their visit change how they experience the real landscape once it is encountered.[34]

Two adjacent subfields of interest are the study of disgust and the anthropology of transcendent experiences, both of which intersect significantly with the study of sensory experiences and of magic. Disgust, as a reaction to the things that a culture places at the reviled end of its sensory spectrum, is a particularly visceral form of sensory reaction and often overlaps significantly with notions of pollution. Sentiments of disgust may be avoided, mediated, or exploited in ritual settings, manifesting in such ways as avoidance taboos or the use of self-consciously revolting ingredients that increase separation from everyday reality through their weirdness. In the Greek magical papyri, examples include the avoidance of fish, pork, and sex in situations where ritual purity is required, but also the conscious use of human eyeballs as components in spells.[35]

On the other end of the spectrum, the study of ecstatic experiences such as trances, visions, and possession is also intimately tied to sensory scholarship

33. Classen, Howes, and Synnott 1994: 97–99.
34. Studies of tourism and the senses: Little 1991; Scarles 2009.
35. A few useful considerations of disgust and its interaction with ritual, the social order, or magic include Douglas 1966; Miller 1997; Bubandt 1998; Menninghaus 2003; Durham 2011.

and holds an obvious interest for the study of ancient magic. The spells of the magical papyri frequently tell the magician to expect a vision of a god, either face-to-face or in a dream. An increasing number of scholars are willing to report on their own transcendent experiences as well as those of the peoples they study, a strand of discussion that draws on sensory studies in particular, with descriptions of altered states of mind, particularly in ritual settings, often being couched in terms of the influences—strong odors, drumming, fasting, heat, unusual foods, etc.—that might produce such experiences. Paul Stoller was one of the earlier scholars who was willing to seriously discuss his own experiences of witchcraft sensations in Niger, both when working magic as an apprentice sorcerer and when sorcerously attacked by other magicians, and his interest in the sensory world of Songhay life is integral to his description of these episodes.[36] Young and Goulet (1994: 7–13, 298–335) discuss the pressure to suppress such experiences in formal academic discourse, something also touched on by Edith Turner in her book *Experiencing Ritual* (Turner et al. 1992: 5), which is largely an in-depth account of a ritual in which she herself reports seeing a spirit being removed from a sick woman, and the sensory and social stresses that culminated in the ritual.[37]

Smell as a Physical Model for Magic

The elusive physical properties and behaviors of scents are the most obvious points on which they provide a useful comparison for magic. Like magic, smells cannot be seen or touched (although they may occasionally be thought of as more or less coterminous with something visible, such as fragrant smoke). And yet, smells remain perceptible, and thus offered a uniquely compelling argument for the existence of the many other incorporeal things that were believed to pervade ancient life—souls, ghosts, spells, natural "sympathies" and "antipathies," the gods.

Moreover, the tenuous nature of scents belies how profoundly they can affect us, both physically and mentally, hinting that the rest of the invisible world can do so as well. The smell of baking cookies can induce an appetite,

36. Stoller and Olkes 1987; Stoller 1989. Stoller 1995 is a deeper thematic study of spirit possession and colonialism in Niger, again including Stoller's own experiences among the *hauka*.

37. Useful starting points for work on the ecstatic are Greenwood 2009 and the collections in Young and Goulet 1994 and Goulet and Miller 2007.

while the smell of garbage can make us nauseous; more insidiously, scents can affect our mood or even our memories, as a whiff of chlorine may suddenly evoke the pool of a long-forgotten childhood vacation. Why should a spell not be able to make someone sick or alter their thoughts in the same way? Classical love spells frequently try to accomplish both of these goals, inducing feelings of erotic attraction where none existed by inducing the pathologized symptoms of love, such as insomnia, loss of appetite, and fever. Two erotic spells to be examined in chapter 3 mention the scent of burning incense as a particularly potent vehicle for inducing love: one envisions the scent entering the target physically, through her side, while the other, more mysteriously, tells the incense to enter "through her soul."

Like magic, a fragrance may emanate from a definite source—a curse tablet in the case of a spell, for example, or a perfume bottle in the case of odor—but once they are set in motion (the tablet is deposited, the perfume bottle is opened) they escape their origin. Smell is pervasive and impossible to recontain: once a bottle is unstoppered, the scent of the perfume can spread to fill a room. Unlike taste, touch, or appearance, smell does not remain tightly connected to a particular object, but escapes its origin and spreads to affect a much larger area, carrying information and causing reactions from a distance. Unlike sound, it is not connected to an event that produces it; a sound stops when the event stops, but scent lingers, making its effects disproportionate to their origin in both time and space. Scent does not merely linger in the air near where it was produced, but can cling to objects, as when clothing is infused with the scent of woodsmoke long after the wearer has left the fire behind. What connection exists between your nose and the perfume bottle in the next room, or between the fire days earlier and the sweater you just pulled out of the drawer? Magic is similarly felt to have effects reaching far beyond the originating object or event, as a *defixio* was thought to be able to harm a victim on the other side of a city or a curse might affect even the target's descendants. How precisely magic can affect things to which it has no apparent connection is one of the questions that puzzles ancient commentators.

Connections between Scent, Magic, and the Supernatural Worldwide

These broad physical similarities between scent and magic have led cultures around the world to connect smells—either particular smells or the phenome-

non of scent in general—with magic, miraculous effects, and supernatural forces. A few examples will demonstrate the variety of ways in which different societies have envisioned a link between the two phenomena.

Bronislaw Malinowski, for example, noted that aromatic plants, especially mint, were favored in magical charms in the Trobriands, where hostile spells involve burning aromatic spell components so that the magic can enter the victim through their nostrils and love can be induced by magic perfumes. In this conception of magic, the force of a spell is conflated with scent itself, or thought to be carried by scent. Unfortunately, despite his interest in both Trobriand magic and olfactory codes, Malinowski had little else to say about the conjunction of the two.[38]

Gell's seminal 1977 article on scent, magic, and dreams, mentioned briefly above, began as a consideration of the relationship between scent and magic among the Umeda people of New Guinea, whose hunters traditionally carry sachets of ginger and other odiferous ingredients. These are thought to both attract pigs for hunting and to induce divinatory dreams *about* hunting and activities considered closely related to hunting, such as sex and eating. The Umeda are explicit that it is the smell of the sachets that makes them efficacious in attracting pigs, and Gell sees dreams that foretell good hunting as an extension of this pig attraction into the realm of sleep, both symbolically and perhaps also literally, as the smell of the sachet surrounds the hunter who uses the bag in which it is stored as a pillow. The word *sap* means both "magic" and "ginger," and the words for "dream" (*yinugwi*) and "smell" (*nugwi*) are closely related, a semantic connection that reflects the similar function of scent and dream omens in revealing what is hidden. Umeda rely heavily on smell for clues about what surrounds them in dense forest, and on dreams for clues about the future.[39] Magic and pungent ginger are thus identical, as are divinatory dreams and smell, linking odor, spells, and dreams into a tightly connected triad.

In many cultures, strongly scented plants are preferred in traditional medicines, the scent being thought to be part of their efficacy. For some illnesses, a pungent odor can in fact be clinically useful or at least soothing, as for example with sinus complaints; but the efficacy of odiferous plants is sometimes assigned a supernatural causality as well, or the same plants are also used in supernatural or magical context. In the Andaman Islands, odiferous herbs have traditionally been used as medicines, and the users say that the scent is responsible for the

38. Malinowski 1929: 449, 480, 541–46; Howes 1992: 241–42.
39. Gell 1977. The nearby Kwoma people also traditionally use wild ginger in magic; Howes 2003: 149.

plants' healing properties; the effects of other herbs that are said to stop storms, keep away spirits, or cause rheumatism are also attributed to their odors.[40] Storms and ghosts are both airy things unaffected by normal human means; perhaps the tenuousness of scent suggests that it is well suited to combatting other incorporeal things, while the penetrating, enveloping nature of odor makes it feel appropriate to either cause or cure nonspecific complaints such as rheumatism, as if it could soak in all over the body. Disease, weather, and spirits are grouped together as difficult problems that scent is capable of affecting.

Among the Warao of Venezuela, too, scents are believed to both cause and cure illness, fragrant scents being applied to the sick in a variety of ways to drive out noxious, disease-causing odors. The Warao theory of disease involves odors entering the patient's head or body, where they expand into gases that affect the internal organs and that must be driven out by more therapeutic odors, which are denser and so able to displace them. Both odors must ultimately leave the body, returning the patient's odor to a neutral, healthy state. This is a fully developed theory of disease causation, pathology, and treatment that relies on observable properties of gases, internal anatomy, and smells associated with disease, but that also interlocks with Warao cosmological and spiritual systems. Herbal treatment by female herbal specialists is itself nonritual, but can be incorporated into shamanic curing rituals by male shamans; these rituals rely more heavily on a theory of supernatural disease causation, and good and bad odors are envisioned as beings with agency, as are curative forest plants and the affected organs. Disease can also be deliberately inflicted by shamans through odors.[41] As we will see, similar practices are found in the classical world, where medicines and spells relied heavily on aromatic ingredients and could overlap substantially with categories such as cooking, cosmetics, and perfumes, and where procedures such as fumigations could have both medical and religious overtones.

Similarly, several Amazonian peoples use fragrant plants to treat illnesses, in preventative medicines, and in love charms. The Matsigenka conceive of illnesses as odors that can be driven out by more healthy smells, while the Yora believe that certain illnesses are caused by unpleasant smells such as urine or burning hair. Among the Yora and the Shipibo-Conibo, the songs of shamans are described synesthetically as "fragrant." Yora shamans sing fragrant songs to

40. Radcliffe-Brown 1964: 311.
41. Wilbert 1987, 1996.

heal illnesses, in which they are helped by fragrant-smelling helper spirits and attempt to counteract the "rotten-smelling" illness spirits. During healing rituals participants inhale the fragrance from herbs steeped in water.[42] Shipibo-Conibo shamans also sing "fragrant" songs, shake bundles of herbs as rattles, and use scents such as tobacco smoke, flowers, and strong-smelling pharmaceutical ointments to simultaneously ward off illness-causing spirits (who sing hostile "stink songs" about feces, flatulence, and gasoline) from patients and to treat symptoms of illness directly by easing breathing and promoting relaxation. Here sound and scents, both intangible media, merge; songs can both discuss scents and are themselves thought to have an odor in order to affect other scents. The geometric designs communicated by spirits and used by shamans in curative rituals are also described as fragrant, and visible traces of scents, such as tobacco smoke, which curls and twists in ways reminiscent of the designs, inscribe a path that leads the healing spirits to the patient. Designs were traditionally used to decorate clothes and many household objects were drawn onto patients' bodies, reifying scent, and were spiritually "projected" onto them by shamans.[43]

A perusal of an American medicine cabinet suggests that Americans find strong odors and tastes as reassuring as any culture. Most throat drops, mouthwashes, sports rubs, toothpastes, soaps and shampoos, ointments, and related products have intrusive odors that reassure us that something is at work, even if we are not sure quite what. We can add other scented means by which we try to protect our health or purify our surroundings, such as aromatherapy, herbal tisanes, cleaning supplies, and home remedies. The fumes of a throat lozenge may help to temporarily relieve your congestion during a head cold as well as soothe your throat, but why should a muscle rub or a dental floss smell like mint? Self-reinforcingly, because that is what medicine smells like to us. American over-the-counter remedies have a strong preference for menthol scents, and a few other favorite smells such as ginger, lemon, and eucalyptus are also common. All have astringent, penetrating qualities that we take to signal freshness, cleanliness (both of which Americans synesthetically equate with health), and efficacy.

These examples go beyond a simple equation of scent with powerful medicinal properties, and include cultures in which scent is part of complex symbolic

42. Shepard 2004: 257–62.
43. Gebhart-Sayer 1985: 162, 165, 171–72.

schemes for ordering, understanding, and controlling the universe. While odor is less central in Greek or Roman culture than in some societies, much of this book will be concerned with scent's symbolic ramifications within Greek and Roman discourses on health, the gods, sex, ghosts, and more, and how this translates to its practical use.

Smell, Transition, and the Supernatural

If scent's physical characteristics make it a useful mental model for the physical operation of magic, we might consider as well the symbolic associations, and whether these offer any useful insights into magic and why scent should be identified with it. The specific connotations of individual scents may be highly dependent on culture, but scent in general does seem to be associated cross-culturally with several broad types of phenomena: above all, transition, and certain processes or states associated with crossing boundaries, such as liminality, death, and otherworldliness.

David Howes notes the frequent association in different cultures between scents and rituals of transition, such as funerals or rites of passage at puberty.[44] He suggests that scent is felt to be symbolically appropriate for moments of social transition because it so frequently accompanies and marks other types of physical transition, as when cooking smells signal the transformation of raw ingredients into food or smells of decay signal the change from life to death.[45] While scents tend to escape spaces and spread out of human control, our experience of them is frequently liminal, as we notice scents far more strongly when first entering their range. You smell baking bread strongly as you enter a house, but after a few minutes inside, you may no longer be able to smell it even with deliberate effort, a physical process known as olfactory adaptation or fatigue. It takes an overwhelming odor to retain our notice after a period of constant exposure. Smells signal transitions through space as well as changes of state, and are thus used to mark socially important moments of change.

Howes also points to smell's ability to produce emotional and mental changes in us, an interior transition rather than an external one, and to Gell's

44. Howes 1987.
45. Almagor (1987) argues that scents associated with the beginnings and maturation of cycles (blooming, ripening, etc.) are generally positively evaluated, while scents associated with endings (decay, etc.) are negatively evaluated.

earlier description of smells as "indefinable," being insubstantial and associated with ambiguous, uncategorizable things in a state of change.[46] Howes suggests that all of this means that scents lend themselves, physiologically and symbolically, to the signification of change in ritual contexts—to evoke contexts in which change is possible, in Gell's terms—and he singles out magic as a particular example of transition and scent being linked, magic being a means of producing whatever changes the magician wants in the world. While Howes considers primarily the symbolic connections between scent and ritual, he also makes the point that beyond the milder psychological effects of scents on ritual participants, strong odors (along with other overwhelming stimuli such as loud noises, heat, fasting, and strong tastes) can produce physiological stresses and ultimately altered states of mind such as visions and possessions. Edith Turner's experiences during a long, hot curative ritual in Zambia will be discussed in chapter 3 alongside the transcendent moments described in the Greek and Demotic magical papyri, many of which were accompanied by the lavish use of perfumes and incenses, which are likely to have helped the magicians enter an altered state of consciousness.

A second broad category with which smells are linked might be loosely termed "otherworldliness": gods, ghosts, demons, and people who come too close to these categories, such as saints or mourners. Odor—an ethereal thing and thus similar to ethereal spirits—can act either as a signal of the presence of the supernatural or as a means of communicating with it. The Yora and Shipibo-Conibo fragrant/rotten-smelling helper/illness spirits have been mentioned, and the foul-smelling and fragrant songs they are said to sing. Howes describes the connection in many societies in Melanesia between the gods and spirits of the dead and the smell of decay, which is believed to announce their presence. The ghost smells like the decaying corpse, and a final whiff of the corpse's odor, toward the end of the mourning period, signals the deceased's final visit to their living kin. In other variations on this belief, the dead person cannot enter the land of the dead until their body has completely decomposed and they have shed its smell, which offends the gods. Mourners, who come into contact with the corpse, and who in some Melanesian groups traditionally keep it in their home until it has decomposed and coat themselves with the liquids produced by the decomposing body, are themselves polluted and corpse-like until the

46. Howes 1987: 404; Gell 1977: 27.

end of the mourning period.[47] At the other pole of the supernatural spectrum of putridity and fragrance, the classicist will note that the Greek gods smell fragrantly of ambrosia. Saints, touched closely by the divine, were said to smell sweet even after death in medieval Europe.[48]

Smell may be used to communicate with spirits. The smell of the burning meat is the part of the sacrifice that pleases the Greek and Roman deities, and incense was widely used to propitiate the classical gods; Tuareg diviners use perfume to communicate with their patron spirits; the Buli use fragrant plants to communicate with and appease ancestors.[49] This function of scents in ritual contexts of course affects the human participants as well, as smells may be used to establish an appropriate frame of mind in worshippers, as incense at a traditional Catholic mass establishes an olfactory separation between worship and nonworship, and also blocks out other scents (much as music in Greco-Roman rituals also helps to mask inappropriate noises). In the rituals of the magical papyri, the desire to please the gods with pleasant smells is clear, but so is the effect on the magician, for whom scent may be particularly important in the absence of other methods of focusing the mind and emotions, such as music, which were available in communal rituals. Paul Stoller records an incident in which a Songhay woman named Fatouma requested that he bring her perfume, which she used to communicate with spirits as part of a cowry-shell divinatory ritual. He recalls both his own clear perception of a scent wafting from the bottle, which they had not opened, and his ambivalent reaction to this conflict of his senses and his expectations.[50] Fatouma tells Stoller to breathe in the perfume deeply, contributing to the atmosphere of mystery which pervades the evening.

Various cultures identify good or bad smells with spirits according to their nature, personify odors *as* supernatural beings, or expect scents to be altered by contact with the supernatural.[51] Among the Bororo of Brazil, polluting smells are associated with bodily fluids, life force, and transformation, while sweet smells are associate with structure and order. Foods with corresponding strong or sweet smells and tastes are offered to the spirits of transformation and order, the *bope* and *aroe*, respectively.[52] In classical Sanskrit poetry scent reveals the

47. Howes 1987 400–401; Howes 1988.
48. Classen 1992: 159.
49. Rasmussen 1999: 57; Bubandt 1998: 64.
50. Stoller 1989: 128–29.
51. Classen 1992: 149–54; Parkin 2007.
52. Crocker 1985: 41–67, 158–61.

divine or monstrous nature of a being, scents can be purified by contact with a god or sage, and particular smells can evoke memories even of past lives.[53] The Greek magical papyri even contain a spell in which the myrrh that is burned as part of the ritual is addressed as a god in its own right.[54]

The Social Context of Scent and Magic

As noted, scents are largely judged as pleasant or otherwise according to their connotations within a particular culture; thus sarsaparilla may be repulsive to one person and pleasant-smelling to another, and smells may be freighted with cultural significance and social effects which are completely lost on an outsider.[55] Gell describes scents as "characteristically incomplete" and suggests that "a smell is completed, not only by the actual source, but also by the context" (1977: 27). This "incompleteness" is possible in part because most human languages have poor vocabularies for scent, so that we often resort to describing smells not as experiences that can stand on their own so much as extensions of other experiences. In English we often apply terms for taste, a closely related sensation, to odors—"sweet" smells, "sour" smells, and so forth—or simply describe odors as smelling like the thing they come from—flowery smells, the smell of coffee, the smell of wet pavement.[56] Scents are perpetually described in terms of other things that are easier to agree on, and the context in which we encounter a scent changes how we interpret its meaning (or whether we pay attention to it at all). Thus the smell of perfume may elicit different reactions at a party, at work, and on a backpacking trip, and depending on whether it is worn by a stranger, a lover, or a friend. While certainly many things are context-dependent (we could substitute "cocktail dress" for "perfume" in those contexts for similar reactions), smell is especially vulnerable to reinterpretation because it is rarely appreciated as an independent phenomenon so much as a signifier of other things, and it is usually those other things we talk about rather than the smell itself.

Similarly, magic consists of whatever objects or actions constitute its source and the social context in which these are believed to have meaning, it

53. Shulman 1987.
54. *PGM* XXXVI.335, discussed in chapter 3.
55. Hertz 2002; Köster 2002.
56. On the linguistic issue, see Classen 1993: 50–76; Almagor 1990a and 1990b.

being an intangible force whose meaning and effects are to a large extent determined by the community. Whether a particular action is judged to be magic or not frequently depends on the social context, such as whether it was done alone or in a group, whether it is done at night or in the day, whether words are spoken or it is done in silence, and whether the performer is liked by their community or not, is of high or low status, or is privy to political power or excluded from it. The fourth-century CE Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus describes (19.12.14) how political upheaval and widespread paranoia resulting from the encouragement of informers under the emperor Constantius II led to a reevaluation of previously innocent actions. People were condemned to death, Ammianus says, for wearing amulets against disease or simply walking past tombs in the evening (for necromantic purposes, their accusers imply). Is an engraved stone on a string an ornament, a protection against magic, a keepsake from a lover, a medical device, or an aggressive spell meant to harm another? What constitutes magic was constantly negotiated and renegotiated in antiquity. And like an amulet, smells and their meaning were contestable and ambiguous, capable of being reinterpreted instantly. Is garlic repulsive or delicious, terrifying or reassuring, a boorish condiment or a witch's drug? For a Roman, it could depend on whether they were dining alone or trying to impress guests, and which particular folk wisdom regarding garlic's properties they subscribed to.

Gell notes that smells are ambiguous, not only because the significance of specific scents changes, but because the meaning of scents, even deliberately deployed scents such as perfumes, are at best general and not specific. He comments that "It does not seem to me that the wearing of perfume is to be accounted for . . . as a purely customary signal, since there is no consistent meaning encoded in perfume, as there is, say, in wearing black (for mourning) or white (for the bride). Perfume does not have a discrete communication function. . . . It does not say 'I love you' 'I am available.'"[57] Smells can evoke moods or memories or contexts, but they lack specific semantic content, and their meaning is contestable and often individual: the smell of pine may suggest Christmas to one person, a camping trip to another, and household cleaning chores to a third. Gell suggests that this ambiguous, allusive nature of smells means that rather than conveying a specific message, they act as symbols of ideal states by evoking contexts in which those smells are appropriate and typi-

57. Gell 1977: 29–30.

cal. Thus a perfume "does not seduce: it sets up a context of seduction."[58] Because perfume is strongly associated in Western cultures with sexuality and marketed in ways that play on this association, we are conditioned to think not of the specific thing the perfume smells of (roses, musk) but of the sort of erotic situations in which we are told wearers of perfume can expect to find themselves. Scents can in that way be aspirational and anticipatory: you put on perfume to create that "context of seduction."

This evocative nature of smell, its ability to create a mental context in which a certain ideal situation has the potential to be realized, is worth considering in relation to magic. The spells of a magician are (at least in some modes of ritual) aimed at creating an idealized framework in which certain desired things are true or can be made true, in which people act in desired ways, and in which the magician has control over the situation. If applying perfume is intended to create a context of seduction in which seduction seems more likely and appropriate, a magical ritual creates a context of transformation, in which a change of states that would otherwise be improbable or difficult seems more attainable. And magic, like smell, tends to be typical rather than specific, for it rhetorically assimilates real people and things to an idealized order so that they can be brought into conformity with the magician's desires. In a magical context, scent becomes a nonverbal technique similar to Tambiah's idea of persuasive analogy.[59] In persuasive analogy, a ritual practitioner aspirationally compares one thing to another. Thus a Greco-Egyptian magician may say "Let her, [name], love me for all her time as Isis loved Osiris and let her remain chaste for me as Penelope did for Odysseus" (*PGM* XXXVI.283–94); the point is not that the woman the magician targets necessarily *is* or will be faithful, but that the magician hopes in doing this spell to make her faithful, bringing her into alignment with the pattern that these notoriously faithful mythological women represent. The real people and their messy lives and personalities are being assimilated to an ideal pattern. In the same way, a scent can idealize a situation; the scent of burning *kyphi*, for example, an incense blend used at many Egyptian temples, may remind magicians of occasions when they have visited temples, thus attuning their at-home ritual practice with their general notion of what occasions smell like when the gods are near: the incense sets up a context of divine communication.

58. Gell 1977: 31.
59. Tambiah 1968.

Scents are also deniable, as Susan Rasmussen demonstrates in relating an anecdote about a visit from a local acquaintance while she was doing fieldwork in Niger. On entering her tent, her friend commented on the smell of the limes that she had bought and eaten earlier that day. Having no more to share with him, she changed the topic, and her visitor politely let it drop. The smell was definitely perceptible, and could prompt oblique suggestions about hospitality; but when the topic proved embarrassing, it was possible for both to tacitly ignore the evidence of their senses, the scent being less tangible than, say, visible and uneaten limes. The evidence was ambiguous to the visitor: were the limes in fact all gone, or did she simply not want to share? Rasmussen comments that scents frequently raise issues of sharing versus private consumption among the Tuareg, in villages where people live close together and scent easily permeates tent walls: when it comes to odor, privacy is conventional rather than absolute.[60] People frequently choose to ignore certain smells, such as flatulence, which would cause social awkwardness if commented on. Scent can be ignored far more easily than sights or sounds, a point that returns us to Ammianus' comments on the prosecution of magic, which often consists of actions, objects, and utterances (such as a protective amulet or a casual imprecation) that are considered innocuous under normal circumstances but may be reevaluated as magical under the right social or political conditions. Magic is deniable and contestable, being identified as such only when it is convenient for some element of society to do so.

Scent and Classical Studies

In Classics, the last decade has seen growing interest in the senses in classical antiquity and theoretical engagement with work on sensory studies in other fields, leading to examinations of the sensory hierarchy in antiquity, ancient discussion of the senses and how sense perception worked, the scentscapes of cities, temples, and countrysides, the symbolic and social connotations of odor in the ancient world, and the economics and production of perfumes and incense. Classicists increasingly appreciate Stoller's call for sensuous anthropology and have responded with the beginnings of a sensuous classicism: an attempt to reconstruct the myriad tastes, textures, sounds, and smells of antiq-

60. Rasmussen 1999: 56.

uity as revealed by texts, artifacts, and landscapes, and an appreciation of the fact that our own sensory preferences and inhibitions are not necessarily those of the ancients.

Two dinners can highlight scent's role in both maintaining hierarchies and social structures and in disrupting them in the Greco-Roman world. In Xenophon's *Symposium*, Socrates objects to perfume on the grounds that it makes free men and slaves indistinguishable (*Symposium* 2.3–4): a citizen of Athens should smell like the gym and olive oil, not of perfume. However, this olfactory confusion is exploited happily in the *Satyricon* by Petronius' Trimalchio, an ex-slave who perfumes himself liberally to smell like a free man.[61] The emperor Vespasian is said to have rescinded an appointment he had just given to a subordinate when the man came to offer his thanks while smelling of perfume, raising the question of who is allowed to obtrude on whose attention via scent. Caesar, meanwhile, dismissively said that his troops could fight just as well when they smelled of perfume, reversing complaints about moral degeneracy and Roman masculinity to suggest that attributing too much significance to scent was the truly trivial concern.[62] The maintenance and disruption of scent hierarchies is a perpetual concern in ancient discussions of odor, and the ancient fondness for good smells fought an ongoing war against accusations of luxury and frivolousness.

Odors could be used to stereotype social groups, whose fragrance or stench was thought to express their essential nature: slaves stink, as do witches; young women smell delightful, while middle-aged ones smell of the expensive but repulsive cosmetics they use to preserve fading beauty, and old ones reek of sweat, decay, and wine. A young Greek man is allowed to smell attractively of myrrh at a symposium, while an old man who smells of myrrh is risible, and a foreigner who is perfumed is suspiciously effeminate and most likely from the East, where luxurious but enervating spices and perfumes grow in the sultry climate. A poet may be perfumed, moderately, while a soldier (*pace* Caesar) should not be.

Scent could also express cosmic or geographical order. Mount Olympus and the gods are fragrant with ambrosia, and their temples and sanctuaries smoke with incense; sacred space is defined as pleasant-smelling, and the odor of smoking incense or meat, rising upward, communicates with the divine.

61. However, this gambit is unsuccessful where Petronius and his narrator Encolpius are concerned, as they smell mostly pretention and overindulgence in Trimalchio's scents.
62. Suet. *Vesp*. 8.2., *Iul*. 67.1.

The magicians of the magical papyri seek to recreate the fragrance associated with sacred spaces in order to make their homes fit places for spirits to visit and converse with them; to this end they burn incense, pour out perfume, and carry or wear cut greenery and flowers. The smells of everyday life are not merely intrusive, but threaten pollution and disorder: hence Hesiod's concern with taboos about when and where urination and defecation are appropriate and not profane.[63]

This raises, of course, the issue of what was culturally defined as bad or good smelling in antiquity and whether it matches our modern expectations. As shown by the example of the Kapsiki and their attitude to the smell of corpses, what smells are physically noticeable and what smells are culturally noticeable can be different things. Historians of ancient religion have noted the stench that must have accompanied animal sacrifice in the sun of an Attic summer: blood, excrement, sweat, and meat.[64] And yet, the Greeks remember Eleusis as redolent with incense.[65] The smell of offal is not religiously pertinent and so is less attended-to than the savor of cooking meat (κνῖση) or of incense (θύος). Similarly, few Americans would characterize Thanksgiving in terms of the smell of raw turkey, potato peels, sweaty socks, or the kitchen drain: it is the finished roast, butter, and nutmeg that stick in our cultural memory, and that are decodable as symbols of Thanksgiving no matter what our particular families actually eat.

Of work done in the field of Classics on scent, an early literary approach is Marcel Detienne's *The Gardens of Adonis* (1972), a structuralist study of perfumes, spices, and other odors in classical mythology, which examines a number of oppositions of fragrance and smell and draws on Levi-Strauss's earlier structuralist approach to the senses and myth in *Le Cru et le Cuit* (1964). Saara Lilja's study *The Treatment of Odours in the Poetry of Antiquity* (1972a) is a traditionally philological survey of the classical discussion of odors of all kinds—perfume, the smells of sweat, the breath, and the body, of animals and cooking, the odor of the gods and temples. (Despite the title, a fair number of prose sources are also included as supporting evidence; see also Lilja 1972b.) From outside the field, the prolific Classen, Howes, and Synnott's collaborative book *Aroma: A Cultural History of Smell* (1994) opens with chapters on the scents of

63. *Op*. 777–79.
64. E.g., Weddle 2013.
65. Ἐλευσῖνος θυοέσσης; *Hom. Hymn Dem*. 490; also Callimachus' description of Delos as θυοέσσα (*Hymn* 1.300).

antiquity and the Middle Ages through the modern period, before moving into thematic cross-cultural examinations. Unfortunately, the chapter on classical antiquity is the weakest section of the book, as the authors' use of ancient sources is frequently uncritical and insufficiently contextualized, particularly in regard to genre. More useful are several recent collections: *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity* (Toner 2014; volume 1 in the five-volume *Cultural History of the Senses*, ed. Classen); *Smell and the Ancient Senses* (Bradley 2015a; in the series *The Senses in Antiquity*, ed. Butler and Bradley); and *Senses of the Empire: Multisensory Approaches to Roman Culture* (Betts 2017). In addition to the papers in these volumes, a number of literary-historical studies have covered aspects of ancient smells such as odor and the social order (Potter 1999; Stevens 2008, 2016), gardens and other spaces where odor can be controlled (Draycott 2015; Platts 2019), cosmetics and perfumes (Johnson 2016; Olson 2009), food (Potter 2015), the divine (Harvey 2006; Green 2011), gender and comedy (Connors 1997; Butler 2010), knowledge via the senses in epic (Mueller 2016), and urban landscapes (Betts 2011). Archaeological approaches also increasingly attend to evidence for ancient odors and the reconstruction of ancient smellscapes (Day 2013; Betts 2011; Hamilakis 2014; Weddle 2011, 2013; Hunter-Crawley 2019). Works on the senses in Byzantium (Pentcheva 2010, 2017; Harvey and Mullett 2017; Betancourt 2018) and ancient Egypt (Pellini 2015; Parkinson 2020; Price 2018) and the Near East (Thomason 2016; Hawthorn and Loisel 2019) are also of interest.

The Scent of Ancient Magic

The study of ancient magic has traditionally been dominated by philological approaches, unsurprisingly, given the textual nature of much of our evidence. However, this focus on textual sources such as the Greek magical papyri, Orphic gold tablets, and lead curse tablets has predisposed classicists toward theoretical approaches that are easy to apply to the ancient corpora, such as Tambiah's concept of the verbal strategy of persuasive analogy. Even when considering nonverbal aspects of magic such as ritual actions and spell ingredients, classicists have tended to think in terms of formal characteristics (such as formulaicness, repetition, registers of formality, and allusion) that have verbal and textual equivalents. Although other approaches to magic, such as archaeological studies (Wilburn 2012), have recently joined the discourse, fresh theoretical

perspectives can offer new insights even on well-studied texts. Sources such as the spells of the *PGM*, poetic descriptions of witchcraft, and scientific accounts of medical and magical plants offer rich sensory descriptions; as I hope to show, the preceding theoretical work from other fields can illuminate ancient magical practices from some less-studied angles.

Sensory approaches push us to consider ancient sensoria and their differences from modern ones. What smells did the ancients appreciate or despise, and for that matter, what smells did they even notice? The burgeoning study of ancient smellscapes has tended to focus on reconstructing dispassionate lists of what scents and scent sources would have been present in, for example, a Roman street scene. To judge this reconstructed olfactory landscape with a modern nose is to potentially miss what an ancient observer would have found notable or not, since which smells we pay attention to out of the many stimuli around us is culturally trained as well as biologically determined. The sensoria of other cultures show that we cannot assume that our evaluations of scents as good or bad were shared by the ancients, or that a Roman, Greek, Egyptian, and Gaul would necessarily agree with each other on how to judge smells. The allegedly disgusting or strange preferences of other cultures in regards to tastes, smells, and so forth is a common joke in ancient literature. Within a culture, too, differences of period, class, occupation, or gender could lead to varying interpretations of sensory input, something the ancients noted. Fullers, whose profession was notoriously smelly, were said to hate perfume, and garlic was beloved of the poor but rejected by the rich at Rome.[66] In ritual, we need to ask whether a penis lotion of hyaena dung and rose oil would have necessarily disgusted the Greco-Egyptian reader as much as it may modern readers.[67]

As importantly, scent can both frame a context and potentially be evaluated differently depending on context. Incense makes an occasion smell like other ritual occasions, and, given the physiological effects of overpowering sensations, can probably help magicians enter a state of mind in which they experience transcendent visions. While many of the rituals of the papyri appear to expect a reaction roughly in tune with what we might expect (as with deliberately repulsive incense made of what a modern reader would consider unpleasant ingredients), in a few cases, reactions to what we might consider revolting ingredients are more muted or even positive.

66. Fullers: Bradley 2015b; Flohr 2017. Garlic: see chapters 2 and 5.
67. *PDM* iv.1194–95.

Scent's ability to evoke memories and emotions was exploited in ritual settings in ways that can either imply a continuity of practice between magic and religion or sharply distinguish magic. Magical ceremonies that hew more closely to normative religious practices in antiquity frequently use incenses and other scents that were also common in those settings: for instance, many of the Greco-Egyptian papyri call for the use of *kyphi*, the traditional Egyptian incense blend burned at temples. The scent would have immediately brought to mind prior ceremonial occasions, placing the magician's ritual in dialogue with temple practice. *Kyphi* smells "religious," and thus to the smeller frames occasions when it is burned as "religious." The sequencing of scent and other sensory stimuli to frame ritual would have helped magicians enter the appropriate frame of mind. The evidence for the real physiological and psychological effects of overpowering sensory stimuli suggests that the strong odors deployed by magicians in the magical papyri may help to explain the reports of transcendent religious experiences in those documents. The magical papyri also suggest that the magicians using them were well aware of the mental effects of odor and deliberately deployed it, to induce dreams, for example.

Scent was associated with gods and other numinous, insubstantial beings in the ancient Mediterranean as elsewhere. The gods themselves smelled of nectar and ambrosia; so did places they frequented, such as Mount Olympus, while places believed to be touched by more infernal powers stank of sulfur. Scent maps out divine geography and provides humans with clues to divine presences and sacred places. Temples and sanctuaries were redolent of incense, roasting meat, and greenery, and incenses and perfumes were used to temporarily transform ordinary space into sacred space. An awareness of the scentscape of the sacred can prompt us to see commonalities between fumigations as used in civic religious processions, medical treatments, and insect-control measures, all of which use similar materials and actions to banish problems, with different rationalities for why they work, a similarity that is invisible when looking at magic from a purely linguistic angle.

Sociohistorical investigations of the senses raise rich questions about scent, status, hierarchy, gender, and ethnicity. Who, again, is allowed to intrude on whose attention via scent? How do people judge scent differently according to the status of the scented—to a Roman, does rose perfume smell the same on a soldier, an unmarried girl, a prostitute, a priest, a Greek freedman, and an emperor? Issues of shifting interpretation such as these are typical of magic as well, where a ritual may be judged to be normative religion when done by the

powerful, but to be unsanctioned magic when done by the disenfranchised. Scent, as a fundamentally subjective experience, can provide socially exploitable ambiguity in the same way the supernatural does. Is a location preternaturally fragrant and thus holy, or is it ordinary? Is the incense smelled in a home a licit incense for a private religious observance or a dreadful, coercive incense used in illicit rites? It may depend on how one feels about the homeowner.

This Book

The central thesis of this book is very simple: in Greek and Roman culture, scent was sometimes equated with magic. As widespread and perhaps, in retrospect, obvious as this fact is, it has not been remarked on in studies of magic, in part because of the prevailing focus on linguistic and visual elements in ancient ritual studies. Magicians, farmers, priests, and doctors all used scented ingredients widely in their attempts to effect changes in both the human body and the wider world: to eradicate disease through fumigations, alter one's mood, induce sleep, please a god, create a ritual atmosphere, or focus the mind.These efforts are sometimes directed inwardly at the self, sometimes outwardly at a patient, victim, or deity. In literature, aggressive uses of scent to attack and overmaster unwilling targets were much more common, and magical scents, assimilated to perfumes and body odors, became a metaphor for female sexuality, pollution, and danger.

There was, however, no central theory of magic in antiquity. People explained how and why it worked in different ways, and the category "magic" was a flexible concept that encompassed a number of beliefs and practices that might or might not be categorized as "magic" by the people who employed them. As Kimberly Stratton notes, "The search for a universal definition of magic diverts one from understanding how local factors contribute to shaping the particular deployment of magic in any given context: why certain representations are harnessed while others are not."[68] I have for the most part deliberately tried to avoid making sweeping statements or universalizing theories about how either magic or scent "worked" in ancient culture, or to give a false impression of uniformity and coherence over the course of centuries of Greco-Roman history. Instead I have tried to highlight the diversity of ways in which

68. 2007a: 177.

one very broad cross-cultural human tendency, the association of smells with the supernatural or uncanny, manifested in the Greek and Roman world in response to specific cultural and historical factors. Many cultures think of scented plants as likely to contain numinous power, but how herbs became the province of professionals called rootcutters in response to fifth-century developments in the professionalization of medicine, and the way the rootcutters became a model for new depictions of enchantresses such as Medea in Athens in the same era, speaks to particular Greek cultural preoccupations around this time. When witches became a major topos of Latin literature, it was in response to specific political developments at the end of the Republic and the beginning of Augustus' reign as well as literary trends among the Augustan poets.

The ways in which the association of scent and magic manifested are not always consistent, nor should we expect them to be. Sometimes garlic is treated as a dangerous magical herb and sometimes as a pedestrian food; myrrh can be an incense or the goddess Myrrh, an aggressive weapon or a reverent offering; *rhizotomoi* can be essential medical professionals or antisocial witches. More than just an issue of individual perspective, the premises on which these ideas are based can be in conflict; the use of incense to coerce goddesses in the magical papyri has little to do on a theoretical level with either the use of sulfur to purify a flock of sheep or with philosophical attempts to explain how the senses worked, although all these worldviews assume that scent is powerful. Nor do literary representations of magic necessarily reflect the same attitudes as the records of practicing magicians. The complex of beliefs and practices loosely centered around odor and magic share a gut-level belief that scent and power occur together, but there is no intellectualized or implicit theory of magic at its heart.

Modern scholarship has veered away from the hard Frazerian categories of magic/science/religion and moved toward an understanding of ritual activity as a fluid category capable of encompassing many types of actions. Some recent work has conceptualized "magic" as a "discourse" centered on nonnormative religious or ritual activity—a flexible and dynamic concept perpetually renegotiated within its cultural and historical context, rather than a hard-and-fast category capable of cross-cultural application.[69] I take a largely similar approach to the ever-fraught question of defining magic in this volume. However, I also diverge from some recent theoretical approaches in the details, particularly concerning whether "ritual" is integral to the identification of magic.

69. Edmonds 2019: 1–32; Frankfurter 2019a: 3–35.

Radcliffe Edmonds, building on Richard Gordon's work, describes the discourse around magic as predicated on four qualities—its "efficacy, its aims, the social location of the performer, or the style of the performance itself": that is, whether a magical procedure works better or worse than a normative procedure (ritual or otherwise), the degree to which the purpose of the action is deviant or socially acceptable, the performer and their degree of social centrality or marginalization, and the degree of weirdness or otherwise distinctive features of the performance.[70] Every instance of magic does not have to have specific features such as a socially marginalized actor or unintelligible and hence weird language, but actions come to be identified as magical when they accrue enough valid cues. Performing an action that is interpretable as magic is thus a matter of selecting from a smorgasbord of potential cues that can make it so. Some cues are strong, so that one or two may be enough to mark an action or object as magic; for example, actions taken by characters stereotyped as witches in imaginative literature are highly likely to be read as magic. Other cues are weak, and several need to be present for an action or object to be understood as magical: sacrifice, prayer, the wearing of amulets, or the burning of incense may each occur in magical contexts and may contribute to their labeling as magic, but are not sufficient to designate a performance as magic.

The fundamental quality marking magic, in this view, is alterity. Is the success rate of the action normal, or significantly better or worse than normal? Is the goal a normal, licit goal or unacceptably antisocial? Are the features of the action familiar, or strange? Is the performer considered "standard" in their social context, or are they marked by class, gender, sexuality, foreignness, *vel sim*., as inherently other? Many of these cues are contextual and interrelated, as when the social position of a performer affects the audience's evaluation of how weird the performance is. For example, divination may be acceptable when performed by a Roman priest, but unacceptable when performed by an enslaved Celt at Rome, even if the procedure is the same. The attribution of magic to the social other is much discussed in theoretical approaches to magic, but it is worth noting that social otherness can also decrease the degree to which something is considered weird. A Roman aristocrat speaking Egyptian is more marked than an Egyptian speaking the same language, and as we will see in chapter 5, garlic has more potential to be marked as magic when served to guests by a rich man than by a peasant, since it was considered a food of the poor. Deviance from expectations is the defining point.

70. Edmonds 2019: 17; Gordon 1999.

I find David Frankfurter's suggestion, that it is desirable and eventually possible to abandon etic definitions of magic, to be impractical; nor do I think that defining magic in antiquity purely in reference to ancient terms such as *mageia* or *goeteia* is sufficient, for reasons I will expand on below.[71] For all the squishiness of using modern English terms such as *magic* to indicate the diffuse and shifting discourse outlined above, it is a useful shorthand where more precise definitions, such as "nonnormative ritual activity," are too restrictive. As Edmonds's cue-based definition of magic as a "dynamic social construct" suggests, there is no essential, ineluctable quality to which we might resort to define magic; in the formulation "nonnormative ritualized activity," I will shortly take issue with both the "nonnormative" and "ritual" aspects.[72] "Magic" is as contestable a term in English as it is Latin, Greek, or any other ancient language, and its modern ambiguity at least reflects the ambiguity of the ancient construct. Similarly, if we follow Edmonds in thinking of magic and science, the two spheres traditionally juxtaposed with magic, as discourses rather than rigid categories into which to file things, the terms retain usefulness. We cannot avoid the fact that category distinctions were drawn in antiquity between, broadly speaking, actions and beliefs that relied on the operations of natural forces, those that relied on normative relations with divine and other nonhuman forces, and those that relied on nonnormative relations with them. Nearly every word in the previous sentence could be and has been unpacked at great length elsewhere, because "the operation of natural forces" in antiquity might involve the actions of gods, because nature itself might be conceived of as divine, and because what constitutes a god or normative relations with a god deserves a great deal more room than I can spare in the confines of this work. However, I will be using terms such as *science* and *religion* to indicate discourses centered on, but not purely restricted to, instrumental/naturalizing beliefs and actions, and beliefs and actions dealing with numinous forces in a more or less socially acceptable fashion, though where the boundaries were drawn between them changed over time, was highly contextual, does not map faithfully onto modern English terms and could be profoundly fraught. In the chapters that follow, I have attempted to highlight the many ways in which these categories overlapped, and the ways in which their boundaries are implicated in the intersection of scent and magic.

The ancients are often aware of these categories and their implications, and

71. Frankfurter 2019a: 10, 20.
72. Edmonds 2019: 5, 7.

are keen to situate themselves in reference to them. The agricultural author Columella, for example, preserves a number of Roman farming methods with ritual elements: for example, the practice of burying a sick sheep upside-down at the entrance to the sheepfold in order to draw disease out of the rest of the flock and into the one scapegoat animal (7.5.17); or the habit, attested in several other places in antiquity, of making an example of one member of a species of vermin such as mice to scare off the rest of its kind (6.17.5–6; 10.348–50); or the method of removing insects from a garden by sending a menstruating woman to walk around it thrice, whereupon the pests will die (11.3.63–64). Columella knows of these folkloric practices and feels that they are effective and worth passing on to his readers; however, he emphatically does not want to frame them as magic. Instead he sets them in an intellectual framework of "sympathies" and "antipathies," natural forces believed to create mutual compatibilities or incompatibilities between different animals, plants, and substances. The theory of sympathies and antipathies became a common way to refurbish traditional folkloric practices for Columella's contemporaries and an audience that wanted modern, scientific-sounding agricultural advice.

In recasting traditional practices with a new natural-historical justification, Columella has stripped away many of the ritual components that would have cued his readers to understand these practices as magic. We know this because other sources transmit some of those ritualizing details. For example, the Byzantine farming handbook *Geoponika* preserves a variety of pest-deterrent practices that resemble Columella's suggestion to kill one member of a pest species to scare off the rest, but these practices rely more explicitly on the assumption that vermin have a human understanding and logic. One passage of the *Geoponika* suggests that you can rid your field of mice by writing them a polite note asking them to vacate, and threatening to make an example of them if they do not (13.5). Columella himself makes it clear that he knows that such vermin-control methods *can* be understood as magic: in the poetic tenth book of his work, he himself rewrites his menstrual garden charm to highlight its magical aspects, comparing it to Medea's spells (10.357–68).[73] He is keenly aware of the distinction between an agricultural technique that relies on natural forces and nonnormative ritual marked by its alterity from ordinary, instrumental farming activity, and he wants to offer his readers the former.

Many of the scents to be discussed here were used in such a way as to

73. On the various charms mentioned, see Ager 2010, 2015.

exploit, highlight, or cross such category boundaries. In one case, the magicians of the Greek magical papyri engage in home rituals, some of which were perfectly licit and normative practices of prayer and worship, but other parts of which constituted illicit ritual outside the boundaries of temple practice. Their use of scent frequently shows an allegiance to or claims the power of temple ritual, as when the spellbooks call for burning *kyphi*, myrrh, or frankincense. At other times, they reject and distinguish themselves from the realm of normative religious practices, as when burning foul-smelling "coercive" incenses. In Gell's terms, we might say that *kyphi* creates a "context of divine cooperation," since it is intended to propitiate the gods and request their aid, while foul-smelling incense creates a "context of divine hostility," since it is intended to compel the gods to help. In Edmonds's terms, we can describe the use of *kyphi* in the *PGM* as part of the discourses of magic and religion. We can certainly see similarities between these procedures, both of which treat incense as a potent ritual component, and both types of incense can be used in the same ritual; but if we overlook that there are broad distinctions between licit ritual action, usually loosely termed "religion," and illicit ritual action, often stigmatized as magic, then we cannot see the ways in which the coercive incense is deliberately framed as an extreme, transgressive measure to be resorted to by a magician when the *kyphi* has failed to win divine aid. Similarly, to ignore the distinction between magic and cooking is to fundamentally miss the point of Horace's *Epode* 3, in which he conflates magical herbs with cooking herbs for a slightly ominous comedic effect. Without the categories of magic/cooking to transgress, the poem collapses into banal complaints about the flavor of garlic. I have tried to highlight the continuities between these types of action while also being sensitive to the ancient categories.

To return to the problem of defining magic, I broadly agree with Edmonds in seeing "magic" as less a rigid category than a label that accrues to actions/objects based on how many criteria for magic they meet. However, the definition of magic as "a discourse pertaining to nonnormative ritualized activity" can be too restrictive. Things that are nonritual or normative may be within the penumbra of magic, and ancient practitioners such as Columella may be well aware of that fact. Rather than thinking in terms of discrete cues that, evaluated in isolation, contribute to the identification of something as magic, it is more flexible to think in terms of cues as part of overlapping webs of associations, circles of related qualities rather than specific qualities that mark magic or nonmagic. An example from, again, Columella, an impeccably respectable author

who offers folkloric advice from which he prefers to strip magic cues, can illustrate this.

When Columella says to cure an unproductive almond tree by boring a hole in it, inserting a stone, and allowing the bark to close over it (5.10.20), there is no reason to take this passage in isolation as an instance of magic rather than mundane farming trivia. It is neither ritualized—that is, there are no performative or unusual aspects to the procedure—nor is it marked as deviant or in any way nonnormative. The goal of greater agricultural productivity is perfectly licit, and Columella, the textual "performer" of the action, is an equestrian agricultural author and thus part of the educated elite. And yet, if we collate all the ancient advice that involves inserting objects into tree trunks, we can see that this bit of advice is in dialogue with magical practices. Various authors from Columella to the *Geoponika* describe procedures in which stones, wooden pegs, nails, and liquids are inserted into holes in trees to affect their growth. The fundamental effect desired is to restrain the tree, which may grow in unproductive ways: inserting a stone can keep a tree from casting its fruit too soon (Pliny 16.198), a nail or oak peg can keep them from succumbing to sickness (*Geoponika* 5.36), or a pine, oak, or wild olive peg can stop it from putting all its growth into leaves instead of fruit (*Geoponika* 9.10; this is probably the point of Columella's insertion of a stone into an underproducing almond tree). Or an insertion may restrain an undesirable or dangerous quality of the plant, as when Pliny (16.51) says that yews are poisonous to people who come into contact with them, but can be rendered harmless by driving a copper nail into the trunk. In the *Geoponika* (10.67), we even get a rare glimpse of malicious agricultural magic when we are told that a tree can be killed by driving a hot nail into it or inserting a peg of tamarisk. (Several other malicious charms are given in the same passage, such as burying a menstrual rag at its roots or biting a branch while fasting and chewing on lentils.) The nails used in this context evoke the more famous binding charms of antiquity, the lead *defixiones*, in which the nails with which lead curse tablets are sealed are part of a similar metaphor of restraining and binding. In the agricultural context, this binding effect has become helpful rather than harmful, and the nail has ramified out into other things you can put into holes in trees. The sources are well aware of the connection, and other non-insertive charms for restraining trees include things like binding a lead water pipe to the trunk to prevent casting fruit (*Geoponika* 10.18).

These charms collectively show an awareness of magical binding charms,

but the binding nail of the *defixio* transforms into pegs and stones that have a similar binding effect when inserted, or into lead pipes (associated with nails by the widespread cursing procedure) that are tied on rather than inserted. These things then transform further, so that stones are planted at the roots of trees or hung on their branches rather than being forced into the wood, but these new extensions still convey a restraining effect. And things that replace restraining nails may have similarities to other spheres originally unconnected to *defixiones*, so that wooden pegs inserted into trees shade into practices such as grafting that are also intended to improve the plant (*Geoponika* 9.8).

To return to Columella's stone in the almond tree, can we call this normative, unritualized, licit activity magic? It is at the very least magic-adjacent. It is not ritualized, but it is in dialogue with other procedures with ritual qualities; it is normative, but it is in discourse with alterity; it has a socially approved goal, but as the hostile charms in the *Geoponika* show, not all such procedures do. When Columella recommends this method, the associations of both stones and things driven into trees, and then the further associations of those things—pegs, nails, and so forth—with trees, are potentially activated for his audience, even if Columella does not acknowledge them. Columella does not self-label this as magic and uses no vocabulary connected with magic in describing it, but that should not prevent us from identifying it as at least available for a Roman to understand as magic; the cues are implicit in the web of associations to which his inserted stone alludes, rather than being present in his procedure itself.

This book deals not only with things that we can reasonably—on emic or etic grounds—identify as magic, but with things such as Columella's almond tree spell that are in dialogue with things we can identify as magic. This expansive rather than restrictive view of the topic centers the concepts of "magic" and "scent" and explores their overlaps, but also ventures into areas that may be identified by us or by ancient peoples as cooking, medicine, normative temple practices, and so forth. The use of odiferous plants by the professionals called rootcutters, and the elaborate rituals they used to safely harvest them, cannot be profitably discussed without looking at the curative properties attributed to such species by the medical authors of the same era, and looking at the scenting of sacred spaces in normative ancient religious practice helps to complete our understanding of the use of incenses and perfumes by magical specialists and the assumption that numinous powers are fragrant.

This study is far from being a complete survey of the complex links between magic and smell in the ancient world. It is, rather, a representative collection of

studies in how they are linked in a series of texts throughout ancient Mediterranean history, ranging from Homer to late antiquity. My hope is that it will serve as a demonstration of how sensory theory can illuminate ritual in the ancient world as in the modern, and can unpack the metaphorical logic of some of the sociocultural and literary tropes surrounding ritual, both as it was practiced and as it was described. While the scents of the Greco-Roman world are increasingly discussed, it is too often in terms that assume that they meant the same thing to the ancients that they do to us. Reconstructing the smells of a Roman house does not necessarily tell us how a Roman *smelled* that house, much less how a visiting Greek, Egyptian, Indian, or Celt might have smelled it. Simultaneously, as a scholar of magic, my goal is to decenter the spoken and written word in the study of ritual in favor of a more holistic view of the ancient ritual experience that incorporates other sensory experiences. The attitudes to magic and odor that will be examined here do not always harmonize, but the central observation that scent and magic are in some way equivalent held true throughout antiquity.

Chapter 2 of this book deals with the widespread equation of scent with power in antiquity. Greek and Roman sources demonstrate the same tendency seen in other cultures to treat scent as an indicator of medico-magical efficacy or as a medium through which efficacy may be conveyed. In particular, this chapter looks at odiferous plants, which were the most common source of fragrances in antiquity and were far more likely to be credited with magical, religious, or medical powers than unscented plants were. Belief in the uncanny properties of plants appears in Greek literature as early as the Homeric epics, as does a tendency to mythologize people such as the rootcutters and doctors who handled plants professionally. Rootcutters' plant-gathering activities included elaborate ritual means of mitigating the dangers thought to be posed by the fumes of medicinal plants; once they had tamed the plants' effluences, doctors could safely exploit the botanical odors in their cures. Rootcutters, exaggerated to supernatural levels of power, influenced early Greek depictions of witches, founding a long tradition of literary witch portraits in which the control and manipulation of powerful odors was a cornerstone of their powers. Meanwhile, the underlying assumption that odor and power coexisted underpinned ancient practices in multiple spheres of life, so that a fumigation with burning spices might be considered a medical cure in one context, a magical attack in another, or a religious purification in a third. Causality might be blurred, deliberately or otherwise, as in later Roman sources in which scent offers a quasiscientific

explanation for the operation of magic. This chapter examines the range of beliefs surrounding odorous plants and their use in medicine and magic.

Chapter 3 explores the uses of scent in the Greek magical papyri—incenses above all, but also perfumes, fragrant woods, flowers, scented inks, stinking ointments, and more. The magical papyri offer remarkable evidence for the practices of elite magicians in Roman Egypt, who used scent extensively as part of their rituals. Fragrance created an ambience reminiscent of Egyptian temple practices and probably aided magicians in entering altered states of consciousness, in which the visions took place of the gods and heavens that they were primed to expect and that they report experiencing. Anthropological work on extraordinary experiences suggests that we should take these transcendent moments as genuine reports of religious experiences more seriously than classical scholarship on magic sometimes has, and that the sensescape which magicians created for their rituals contributed to these visions. Clouds of incense smoke blocked out the smells of everyday life, framing ritual space and time as something set apart, and the use of scents familiar from religious settings such as myrrh, frankincense, and *kyphi* suggested a continuity of practice with the practitioner's memories of participating in other religious events. The sensations of the papyri are not necessarily pleasant ones: strange and disgusting sensory experiences also play a role in setting the scene for magic, partly by, again, marking ritual as different from nonritual by adding weirdness and nonconformity to the former. But the papyri also suggest that a ritual context may cue participants to receive and evaluate stimuli differently than they would in other contexts, and that elements that appear to be revolting outside of ritual may be more positively evaluated within it. However, the magicians of the papyri did not only use scent to create a ritual atmosphere, with themselves as the primary audience; they also used scent as an aggressive weapon to attack victims of love spells and to coerce gods, as a medium for transferring numinous power, and as an element in synesthetic transmissions of magic, as when incenses were turned into inks, used to write visible invocations, and then licked up and turned into scented breath and audible spells. Myrrh was even worshipped as a goddess in the papyri, testifying to the importance of scent to the magicians.

From the actual practices of magicians, chapters 4 and 5 turn to scent in literary depictions of witches. Chapter 4 examines the scent of witches' magic, which is frequently described as odiferous or as if it were a scent itself in ancient sources. The smells of Greek witches' spells encode discourse about women,

covert power that women might wield to influence men in a patriarchal society, and scent. Women were already thought to alter men's minds with the irresistibly sweet smells of perfumes; or, alternately, to be experts in the dangerous craft of the rootcutter, thus knowing how to control dangerous plants and their odors, which they might use for malicious ends. The witches of ancient literature from epic to novels have magic that smells like herbs, perfume, or cosmetics, and that has effects similar to what men feared from all of those things. Early Greek witches are patterned after rootcutters, and characters such as the Medea of Sophocles' tragedy *Rhizotomoi* reflect fifth-century professional trends in the sphere of medicine. Later Greek witches, such as Apollonius' Medea and the Roman witches who were influenced by her, come to use magic that smells not like dangerous, pungent herbs but like sweetly alluring perfumes, which witches use to overcome the better sense of men who would otherwise be able to resist them. Perfume-wielding witches are a supernatural exaggeration of the scheming wives, courtesans, and similar figures who also appear in literature, and of the broader dialogue over gender, persuasion, adornment, and power in ancient society.

Chapter 5 also discusses literary witches, but focuses on the scent of their bodies instead of the scent of their magic, where a stark dichotomy appears between Greek and Roman culture. Greek witches, at least in elevated genres such as epic, are typically young, beautiful, and fragrantly perfumed. Roman witches from Horace on, however, tend to be old, ugly, and bad-smelling. While the scent of witches' deliberately deployed magic echoes the scents of other things, such as perfumes and face creams, which women were expected to use deliberately to ensnare victims, the scent of witches' own bodies depends on the varying socioeconomic positions of sorceresses in Greek and Latin literature (broadly, Greek witches tend to be upper-class and native Roman ones lower-class), and echoes sociohistorical beliefs about the smells of women's bodies, so that menstrual blood, for instance, shares many of the properties of magic spells in Latin literature, as does perfume. Roman witches can be both malodorous and the users of fragrant perfume-spells. The stinking hag-witches of Roman literature emerged in the context of the civil wars that ended the Republic, a moment at which fear of unnaturally powerful women gained immediacy and the fictional witches of Horace and his successors draw on actual accusations of magic leveled at wealthy and politically involved women. This chapter explores the political and sociohistorical realities informing Horace's creation of a new witch stereotype for a new era at Rome and how his successors responded to it.

Chapter 6 looks at odors, gods, and space, and how scent was used as a medium for transferring scientific, religious, or magical efficacy to a locale or an object. Scents, both good and bad, were thought to characterize numinous powers, with the gods and their sanctuaries smelling fragrant, places connected to the underworld reeking of damp or sulfur, and humans deliberately perfuming temples to imbue them with an aura of divinity. Fumigations were used to purify and sanctify sites—but also to kill insects, cure diseases, and affect the weather, with scented smoke conveying power to temples, sheep, and uteruses alike, whether that power was conceived of as medical, religious, or magic that operated without the intercession of the gods.

CHAPTER 2

Fragrant Panacea

Scent and Power

> Hic Venus indigno nati concussa dolore
> dictamnum genetrix Cretaea carpit ab Ida,
> puberibus caulem foliis et flore comantem
> purpureo; non illa feris incognita capris
> gramina, cum tergo volucres haesere sagittae.
> hic Venus obscuro faciem circumdata nimbo
> detulit, hoc fusum labris splendentibus amnem
> inficit occulte medicans, spargitque salubris
> ambrosiae sucos et odoriferam panaceam. (Verg. *Aen*. 12.411–19)
>
> At this Venus, upset by her son's unbearable pain, picks dittany from Cretan Ida, a shoot with downy leaves and a purple flower; that plant is not unknown to the wild goats, when swift arrows are stuck in their backs. Venus brings the herb, her face hidden in a concealing mist; with it, she secretly infuses water poured into a splendid bowl with healing power, and adds the healing juices of ambrosia and fragrant panacea.

Venus' treatment of Aeneas' arrow wound in Book 12 of the *Aeneid* exemplifies the importance of odor in the Greco-Roman curative tradition. She washes her son's injury with three ingredients steeped in water: Cretan dittany, ambrosia, and *panacea*. Rebecca Armstrong notes the delicate balance between real medical advice and mythologizing cures in this passage. Cretan dittany (*Origanum dictamnus*) is a real plant discussed by ancient medical authorities, who credit it with curing diseases, aiding in childbirth and uterine complaints, and expelling weapons from the body.[1] Ambrosia, however, is

1. Theophr. *HP* 9.16.1; Pliny *HN* 8.97, 25.93, 25.101, 26.79, 26.142, 26.153, 26.161; Celsus *Med*. 5.13; Hippocrates *Foet. Exsect*. 4.

the wholly mythological perfume of the gods; its divine scent is its most important quality. *Panacea*, "All-heal," falls midway between them: the medical and botanical authorities use the name *panacea* for a real and easy-to-obtain plant, but Armstrong is right that in the *Aeneid* Venus' *odoriferam panaceam* "occupies the hinterland between the mythical and the real."[2] When imagining a quasi-mythological cure, the only descriptor Vergil uses to emphasize its curative powers is "fragrant."

This chapter deals with the fundamental belief that scent reveals the presence of power that underlies many of the beliefs and practices to be discussed in this book. In particular, the focus is on the many uses of scented plants, which were believed to have powers in both medical and magical contexts, and on how scientific and supernatural discourses regarding odiferous species interacted and overlapped. Scents were thought both to signal efficacious powers and to be a medium through which efficacy could be conveyed, so that in some contexts scented plants were sought out for their healing properties but feared for their dangerous smell, in some contexts they were exploited for their odors, and in some they were burned to provide a particularly enveloping, penetrating means of imbuing a person or object with curative or protective power via their smoke. Fumigations, for example, were used in both medical/veterinary contexts and in religious ones, and while the justifications for why they work differ in each context, neither sphere existed in innocence of the other. Thus the *Geoponika*'s advice to fumigate sheep cotes to drive out vermin is inextricably reminiscent of a similar purification of the flock and sheep pens by burning sulfur, laurel, and olive together at the spring celebration of the Parilia, as well as the many prescriptions for fumigating houses, vineyards, and orchards with burning matter to get rid of pests, other religious purifications via fumigation, and the many medical prescriptions to fumigate bodies to cure disease, as when the Hippocratic corpus suggests a fumigation of fennel and absinthe for uterine prolapse.[3] In these examples pest control, religious purification, and curing applications all rely on the fundamental notion that a cloud of scented smoke can convey an effect; and, as often in antiquity, the action remains the same while the intellectual overlay justifying the action changes.[4] As with Columella's almond tree charm (chapter 1), someone fumigating their sheep cotes with sulfur may understand it as a mechanically curative process akin to medi-

2. Armstrong 2019: 167, where the ancient testimonia on *panacea* are also discussed.
3. *Gp*.18.2; Parilia: Ovid, *Fast*. 4.721–862; Hp. *Mul*. 8.3.
4. Lloyd 1983 discusses the many points of contact between magic and science in classical Greece.

cal fumigations of the body, or they may understand it as a ritual of communication and interaction with the divine, whether they consider that normative or non-normative; but the other associations were available to them and to onlookers, so a farmer who considered this akin to a medical procedure might still be aware that his neighbor could read it as a normative religious procedure. In the discourse centered on the ambiguous concept of magic, plants with strong odors were prized and feared, but this was also true in the discourses of science and religion, and this belief that odor signaled power led, as in the example of farm fumigations, to significant overlaps in practice among people who would explain the efficacy of these methods in different ways (and who might themselves understand it differently in different contexts).

The place of scent in actual magical praxis makes up much of the next chapter. Here I consider primarily the conscious and unconscious equation made in ancient thought between power and scent, and how this manifests in literature, particularly medical and botanical literature. Often the relation of a plant's strong odor to its medical value or magical connotations is implicit; at other times, we find explicit discussion of the quasimagical effects of smells. Here I only briefly touch on the religious connotations and deployment of scent, despite the frequent overlap between religious and scientific uses of odor, an issue I return to in a discussion of scenting places in chapter 6.

Smells or Spells? Three Ancient Confusions of Magic and Odor

A number of ancient authors explicitly compare magic and scent. Aelian, with whom this book opened, is one. In his *On the Nature of Animals*, Aelian frequently describes smells as having the same effect as *iunges*, the magical birds/wheels used to induce erotic attraction.[5] *Iunges* lure their victims into erotically dangerous situations, and in Aelian, smells that are like *iunges* lure animals into traps. To return to Aelian's description of the leopard, he says that the leopard exudes a perfume that humans cannot smell but other animals find irresistible. When the leopard is hungry, it hides in trees and bushes and waits for an animal to be attracted to the smell, and then leaps down onto its prey (5.40, 8.6). Aelian describes the deer and goats and other animals who are lured to the leopard by saying that they are drawn by the scent "as if by the *iunx* of the fragrance" (ὡς

5. On the *iunx*, see Johnston 1995.

ὑπό τινος ἴυγγος τῆς εὐωδίας ἕλεται).[6] Deer (2.9) and Phrygian snakes (2.21) in Aelian also lure their prey to them by the smell of their breath, as if by a *iunx*. Fish (1.23, 13.2) are attracted to the smell of various baits, ram fish (15.2) to the smell of seals, and leopards (13.10) are themselves drawn to the smell of rotting meat as if by a *iunx*. Smells are not the only things that Aelian compares to *iunges*, but they are the most frequent. (Other "*iunges*" in Aelian are music, which lures crabs to be caught; a frog's mating croak; a mysterious force that draws animals to approach a sacrificial chasm without struggling; and an herb by which male tortoises overcome the females' reluctance to mate, although the females know that mating will result in their deaths; 6.31, 9.13, 16.16, and 15.19). The point of a *iunx* is that it inhibits natural caution and makes its target more vulnerable to suggestion—in human terms, people are overcome by erotic passion, while in Aelian's bestiary, a *iunx* results in sex, death, or both. Scents explain suicidal gullibility on the part of animals in the same way that erotic magic explains illogical passion and social embarrassment in humans.

Scents and erotic magic are more tightly equated in the complex of stories surrounding Mentha, "Mint," a nymph who was a lover of Hades.[7] Most of the stories about Mentha involve her conflict with Hades' legitimate wife, Persephone, who takes violent exception to Mentha's threat to her position and dismembers her, leading to Mentha's transformation into the plant that is her namesake. Zenodotus of Ephesus gives an alternate name for the girl: some know her not as Mentha, but Iunx.[8] Mentha/Iunx thus embodies both the sweetly erotic fragrance of a mistress and the magical attraction of the whirling *iunx*-wheel. The specific scent of Mentha is that of a plant that, Detienne points out, was considered fragrant but also cold, wet, sterile, and potentially emasculating.[9] As with concerns that love magic will undermine men's true wishes, subverting their will and putting erotic decision-making in the hands of women, this myth shows a worry that scents can subvert sense and masculinity. Mentha's alternate name of Iunx signals that her scent of mint is dangerously attractive in the same way that a *iunx* is dangerously alluring. The mint plant and Mentha the fragrant courtesan are both erotic dead ends, leading not to a wife and legitimate family but to sterile pleasure.

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6. The leopard was particularly well known for its alluring scent in antiquity. See Connors 1997: 306; Johnston 1995: 187; Detienne 1994: 85–86 for discussion of the leopard and *iunges*, and other *iunx*-like scents.
7. Detienne 1994: 72–98 discusses Mentha's story and the significance of her scent.
8. FGrHist 19 F 4. See Detienne 1994: 83–86 for discussion of Mentha and *iunges*.
9. Detienne 1994: 74–75.

While Aelian compares scents to magic and the story of Mentha equates them, the Byzantine compilation of agricultural advice called the *Geoponika* seems puzzled by how to distinguish them. Amidst other advice for farmers on dealing with animal pests, the *Geoponika* comments that mice have a fondness for artichoke roots and will go out of their way to find them. The gardener can protect artichokes by wrapping them in wool or by putting pig manure or the ash of figs around the roots, because the mice will avoid the manure and ashes "either because of antipathy, or because of an avoidance of the smell" (ἢ κατὰ ἀντιπάθειαν, ἢ κατὰ ἀποστροφὴν τῆς ὀσμῆς, 12.39). The fact that mice are naturally repulsed by these substances is one tidbit out of the much larger body of "sympathies and antipathies" collected in works such as the *Geoponika* and Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, and which underlie those authors' ideas of what magic is and how it works. Sympathies—supposed natural compatibilities between plants, animals, stones, and other substances—are frequently invoked by medical and scientific authorities to explain the curative or otherwise notable properties of natural substances; antipathies, natural incompatibilities, are used to explain why things in nature are harmful to each other or in some way in conflict. Pliny, for example, whose *Natural History* is in many ways constructed as a compendium of sympathies and antipathies, warns his readers not to plant oaks and olive trees close together, or cabbages and vines, because these pairs have such a natural antipathy for each other that they will die if they are placed in close contact (24.1). The latter belief may explain Cato the Elder's advice to eat cabbage before drinking to be able to drink to excess without drunkenness; the cabbage's antipathy to the vine counteracts the effects of wine made from the plant.[10] Pliny and others often treat sympathies and antipathies as a rationalizing explanation for folk beliefs that they say the uneducated consider magic. In invoking the notion of an antipathy to explain the aversion of mice to fig ashes and pig manure, the *Geoponika* does not equate antipathies with smells—indeed, the author explicitly considers them to be separate forces, either of which might explain why his advice on protecting artichokes works. However, he admits that scents and antipathies/magic are functionally indistinguishable to him.

10. Cato *Agr.* 156.1.

Pigs and Perfume

There is a persistent, cross-cultural tendency in human psychology to equate good smells with good things and bad smells with bad things. As seen in chapter 1, this basic principle of the sociology of smell is not universal—sufficiently bad associations can teach us to dislike smells that we would otherwise enjoy, and vice versa, on both an individual and a cultural level. As a rule of thumb, however, we expect people and things that we consider attractive, pleasant, moral, and otherwise worthy of approval to smell good to us, and those that are ugly, annoying, immoral, and so forth to smell bad unless proven otherwise. In medieval Europe, both live saints and their corpses were believed to smell fragrantly of sanctity: a saint is so good that they must smell good, and holiness trumps even the usual processes of bodily corruption.[11] Moreover, we often expect good and bad things to be repulsed by the opposite category of scents: things we approve of will not just smell good themselves, but will enjoy good scents and hate bad ones, while things we disapprove of will prefer malodor and hate fragrance. Pierre Chauvet claimed in 1797 that when Florence's streets were cleaned—drains and sewers were covered, streets were paved, garbage was concealed, and the roads were strewn with fragrant flowers and leaves—the prostitutes who had previously thronged them vanished.[12] Prostitutes, categorized as both immoral and bad-smelling, were thought to vanish along with the previous stench, being incompatible with the newly deodorized thoroughfares.

The sociological scent code that equates moral judgments with sensory ones was extended to the natural world in classical folklore and natural-historical writing, where we find a number of beliefs that approved-of animals are driven off or even killed by unpleasant odors, while animals that are bad-smelling or problematic in some way are repulsed or harmed by odors that humans deem good. Thus Lucretius says that marjoram perfume is poisonous to pigs, while it revives humans (6.973–75). He explains this through the effluence of particles, which humans and pigs receive differently, just as the sun affects earth and ice in different ways (6.962–64). Lucretius is quoting what appears to be a popular proverb recorded by Aulus Gellius as "the crow has nothing to do with the lyre; the pig has nothing to do with amaracine."[13] Butler

11. Classen, Howes, and Synnott 2002: 52–54.
12. Chauvet, *Essai sur la propreté* 10; quoted by Corbin 1986: 145 in a discussion of the stench associated with the poor and socially outcast in nineteenth-century Paris.
13. *NA* Preface 19. On this saying and its afterlife see Butler 2015: 78.

sees this as an over-interpretation on Lucretius' part of a saying that merely expresses a ridiculous juxtaposition of opposites; amaracine, marjoram-scented perfume, is specified because it was particularly prized, while pigs are proverbially dirty.[14] But this is not the only passage in classical literature that suggests that perfume could harm an animal: Aelian (*NA* 1.38, 6.46) says that myrrh and Pliny (*NH* 11.279) that the rose is fatal to beetles; beetles are themselves bad-smelling animals and cannot bear myrrh's pleasant odor. Both authors (Aelian *NA* 3.7, Pliny *NH* 11.279) agree that vultures, carrion-eaters associated with the smell of decay, are killed by perfume, while Pliny adds that they are self-destructively attracted by the smell and seek it out. These beliefs are similar to the classical idea of sympathies and antipathies; the beetles and pigs and vultures are themselves foul-smelling, and sweet smells are so antithetical to their natures that they cannot survive them. Similar aversions can be acquired rather than inborn, since Aelian (*NA* 1.38) says that tanners are so used to foul odors that they hate perfumes.

Bees, goats, and horses offer a more complex pair of associations. The classical authorities on bees are unanimous that bees hate perfumes, but this signifies not that bees are dirty or bad-smelling, but that their virtue is superior. Bees were considered particularly pure and moral creatures in antiquity, and unable to bear either physical or moral corruption: their environment must be kept scrupulously clean and free from both dirt and traces of improprieties such as sex, drinking, and other self-indulgent pleasures. They enjoy fragrant smells, as Vergil advises in the *Georgics* (4.30–32): beekeepers should plant herbs such as rosemary, thyme, savory, and violets near the hives. But perfume, as a symbol of luxury and decadence, repulses them, and they will sting people wearing it.[15] Goats are the opposite of bees: they were proverbially rank-smelling and lecherous animals for the ancients, and unlike bees, they enjoy perfume. According to Aelian, goatherds smear perfume on the nostrils and chins of male goats to incite them to mate.[16] While bees are aligned with virtuous people who distain

14. There may be a sexual overtone to the saying as well, as "pig" was slang for female genitalia in both Greek and Latin. Marjoram perfume was associated with Venus and was also sometimes applied to female genitals for medicinal and perhaps erotic reasons (Butler 2015). Amaracine is thus appropriate to the female genitals, but also inappropriate to pigs/genitals, perhaps capturing the ambivalence over women as fragrant objects of erotic fascination and as foul-smelling deceivers, which figures heavily in chapters 4 and 5.
15. On bees, perfume, and cleanliness: Varro, *Rust*. 3.16.5; Columella *Rust*. 9.56, 9.14.3; Pliny *NH* 11.44, 11.61; Aelian *NA* 1.58, 5.11; *Gp*.15.2; Vergil, *G*. 4.30–32. I discuss these passages in more detail in connection with menstrual blood and garlic in chapter 4 and 5.
16. Goats as exemplars of stench in classical literature: Lilja 1972a: 132–37, 151–52, and many references passim. Goats and perfume: Aelian *NA* 9.54.

perfumes and goats with sexually vigorous men who are aroused by perfumes, mares of certain breeds fall between them in their enjoyment of scents (Aelian *NA* 16.24): they want to appear beautiful to their owners and grooms, and they bathe themselves and enjoy fragrant unguents and perfumes as much as brides do. Aelian goes on to quote Semonides' (fr. 7.57–70 Diehl) condemnation of "horse women" who wash, perfume, and ornament themselves excessively, but Aelian's description of the mares, who are described as particularly loyal and affectionate animals, lacks Semonides' bitter edge. Like a bride, these horses are entitled to a certain vanity and indulgence.

These compatibilities of good animals with good odors and bad animals with bad ones are often rationalized in natural-historical sources as "sympathies" and "antipathies" such as the one the *Geoponika* tries, with difficulty, to distinguish from smell: for example, Pliny records the antipathy between deer and snakes (*NH* 8.118–19, 28.149–50). Stags can attract unwilling snakes out of their holes through the smell of their breath, and the smell of a burning stag's horn will drive away snakes, while burning a stag's upper vertebrae, or its blood together with several plants, will collect snakes in one place.[17] The smell of snakes, meanwhile, is fatal to chickens (Varro *Rust*. 3.9.14).

Even humans can have sympathetically magical smells. In Pliny's account of Nile animals (*NH* 8.38.93), a tribe living on the island of Tentyrus not only dares to ride crocodiles, but their smell can drive the animals away. The African tribe called the Psylli and the Italian Marsi were supposedly immune to snakebite and could repel serpents and cure venomous bites.[18] Pliny attributes snakes' aversion to the Psylli to their smell (*NH* 8.38.93). Elsewhere (*NH* 7.13–15), he says the bodies of the Psylli contain poison that is deadly to snakes, the smell of which puts the snakes to sleep; the Marsi have the same property. But here again, smells and natural antipathies are hard to disentangle. In another passage on people whose bodies have magical powers such as the evil eye, Pliny (*NH* 28.30–31) returns to the theme of people who repel dangerous animals. He says that the Ophiogenes, another tribe, smell foul in the spring and that their sweat has curative properties; snakes will not bite them. Here Pliny describes the Tentyrites as frightening crocodiles through the sounds of their voices instead of by smell, and says that all of these people—Ophiogenes, Tentyrans,

17. I will return to fumigations in chapter 6. The attraction of snakes to burning spinal bones may reflect the same belief as a passage in Pliny (*NH* 10.188) in which he claims snakes can be born from the spinal cord of a human. This belief that similarly shaped things must be connected, called the doctrine of signatures, is reflected in much ancient medico-magical advice.

18. Janowitz 2013; Ogden 2013: 209–14.

Psylli, and Marsi—have a strong natural antipathy to snakes, disease, and poison. Elsewhere the Marsi are said to gather snakes together with charms, to soothe snakes and cure their bites with charms, herbs, and their own saliva, and to split snakes in half through magic songs, a list that makes it clear that in ancient authors the Marsi have a status ambivalently between magicians and a people with strange bodily properties; they were reputed to be descended from Medea.[19] In Pliny's treatment, it seems that smell is merely one vehicle for the underlying antipathy, as are voices and bodily fluids such as sweat and saliva. People can also acquire such antipathies: someone bitten by a snake or dog makes wounds worse simply by proximity; the snake-repelling tribes cure poison on their arrival at the victim (Pliny 28.32), because their body's antipathy to the poison drives it out of the patient's body.

What these bits of natural-historical trivia have in common is a belief that the meanings and sensory values humans assign to things are inherent and natural—vultures and pigs are distasteful to human aesthetic values and therefore they cannot stand perfumes that smell sweet to us; strange people in distant regions must possess strange bodies with uncanny properties, including strange smells; the industrious producers of honey will have no truck with overly fragrant human luxuries. This sociological interpretation of scents underpins many of the ancient uses of scents in magic, medicine, and purification.

Odiferous Plants with Uncanny Properties

Plants with strong or distinctive odors are more likely to have healing, harmful, or simply odd powers attributed to them than less highly scented species. As already seen, this is true worldwide, as with the Ongee and Warao use of fragrant herbs in healing and the American preference for menthol-scented hygiene and medicinal products. In a general sense, the belief that odor signals power is well founded, since botanical scents often signal the presence of compounds with pharmacological effects. Ancient herbals, medical treatises, rituals, and spellbooks liberally use ingredients such as myrrh, rose, and cumin that were also valued in cooking or perfuming for their taste and odor, or that

19. Marsi: Pliny *NH* 7.13–15, 28.19; Vergil *Aen*. 7.753–58; Lucilius 575–76 Marx; Horace *Epod*. 17.29, 5.75–76.

were instead, like *Peganum harmala* ("stinking rue"), notorious for their repulsive smell. A single species can often be found used in all of these spheres.

Among the uses of the laurel, for instance, Pliny the Elder enumerates the religious and ceremonial uses for laurel branches and garlands, the tree's use as an ornamental plant by landscapers, fumigations with laurel leaves, medical applications (it was thought to be good for the sinews and internal organs), culinary uses (laurel leaves are better known as bay leaves in culinary contexts), and the belief that the laurel could protect against lightning. To this list we could add Columella's recommendations that the leaves make good fodder and are helpful in veterinary cures, pickling olives, fumigating wine vats, and preserving eggs from thunder; the plant's use as a scenting agent in ancient perfumes; and the many mentions of the laurel in the Greek magical papyri.[20] This constellation of uses for the laurel tree shows the ways in which medical, religious, magical, and other contexts overlap: laurel's widespread Greco-Roman religious significance probably influenced the belief, derided as superstitious by some ancient authors, that it can protect against lightning, which underlies Columella's otherwise obscure idea that laurel, placed under a hen's nest, can stop thunder from spoiling eggs. We might also wonder if people wore laurel-scented perfume or planted laurel hedges out of a similar concern, as well as for pleasure, as Tiberius was said to wear a crown of laurel during lightning storms.[21] Laurel, fragrance, and power thus occur together in multiple ancient discourses. The best-attested species are those that, like laurel or myrtle, were thought to be particularly beloved of gods and therefore had greater religious and social visibility, but many other more obscure species, some of which cannot be securely identified from their ancient names, also have both powerful scents and powerful properties attributed to them.[22]

Pliny collects a great deal of similar folklore amid his discussion of medical cures derived from plants. To give a few more examples of plants reputed for both their odor and their unusual properties, myrtle was credited with numinous power. Pliny says that myrtle branches were used in early Roman purifications, that an incense used for cleansing fumigations is made from them, and that myrtle trees in the shrine of Quirinus at Rome once gave an augury. Travel-

20. Pliny *NH* 15.127–38; Columella 6.7, 6.13, 8.5, 11.2, 12.25, 12.48. Laurel perfumes: Theophr. *Od*. 28. On laurel in the magical papyri, see chapter 3, but in brief, laurel branches are held and shaken, laurel wreaths are worn, and laurel leaves are chewed by the magicians of the papyri. On magical properties of laurel, see Ogle 1910; McCartney 1929.

21. Pliny *NH* 15.135.

22. On plants with a divine connection, see Armstrong 2019.

ers carry springs of myrtle as an unspecified aid (*prosunt*) in their journey, and rings made of myrtle that had never been touched with iron cure swellings in the groin (15.119–24). Anise cures a variety of ailments, makes the face look younger, relieves insomnia, improves the appetite, and stops hiccupping. Just holding anise can prevent epileptic fits, and smelling it aids in childbirth (20.182–92). The smell of dracunculus, however, is so terrible that it causes miscarriage (24.143). Aconite touched to the genitals kills women, and the smell kills rats and mice (27.4). Mint cures all poisons, prevents amorous dreams, and prevents chafing when it is merely held in the hand; Pliny gives a charm to cure diseases of the spleen in which the patient goes out to the garden and bites a mint plant without picking it, while saying what they are curing (20.144–51). The magi say that people who anoint themselves with chicory juice become more charismatic (20.74). The link between odoriferous species and power in Pliny is persistent, and many more examples exist in the agricultural, botanical, zoological, veterinary, and medical treatises of antiquity.

Healing Odors

Pliny comments that "there is much use in medicine of flowers and scents generally" (*florum odorumque generi est magnus usus in medicina*, 21.116), which is borne out by the medical/botanical literature, in which scented plants are frequently credited with powers to treat patients, both human and animal. Sometimes it is explicitly the scent that effects a cure; in other cases odor appears to merely coexist with or signal the plant's curative properties. Some cures exemplify physiological beliefs about the body and its workings; in other cases, scent seems more symbolically efficacious as a vehicle for religious or magical power.

I will not attempt to survey the enormous amount of relevant medical and veterinary literature here, and will merely give some examples in which authors call attention to the scent of a plant as a pharmacologically effective part of it. This includes remedies in which the plant is taken orally as a food or drink, applied externally in an ointment or poultice, used in a fumigation, herbal bath, or sauna, and applied through various other methods.[23] For the quick nourish-

23. Totelin 2015b highlights the blurry lines between drugs and food, and the practice of dietetics and pharmacology, in fifth- and fourth-century Greek texts. Many treatment regimens included strongly flavored and scented foods alongside fumigations, aromatic baths, etc. On herbal baths, Alakbarov 2003.

ment of a patient, the Hippocratic treatise *Nutriment* (50) recommends smells, which the Hippocratic *Humors* lists among the external remedies (10). Onions are said to cure vision by making the eyes water (Pliny 20.20). Mandrake is used to cure insomnia, some people finding the smell alone to be enough to put them to sleep, although too much can bring on aphasia or death (Pliny 25.150). The gladiolus is smoked by foreigners to cure spleen complaints (Pliny 21.116). Pliny ranks the medicinal value of certain plants, such as *heraclium* (20.177) and *git* (20.182), according to how good the smell is, although the list of maladies that he says they cure and the ways they are applied may or may not have anything to do with odor; a pleasant odor thus signals curative properties, even if they are applied through avenues other than scent. The smell of pennyroyal protects the head from heat, cold, and thirst, and so people spending time in the sun carry sprigs of it behind their ears; it cures aphasia and tertian fevers if sniffed, and so Xenocrates recommends that patients strew their bed with it or carry a sprig of it wrapped in wool. If burned, the smell of the plant kills fleas (Pliny 20.152–55). The line between medical ointments and lotions and perfumes could be very thin, as when Galen describes bathing patients' bodies with oils in which he has cooked wormwood, apple blossoms, tree resins, or spikenard—the same procedure and many of the same ingredients by which perfume oils were created.[24] Fumigations of the body or its various parts, especially the uterus, were extremely common in ancient medicine, as when *On the Nature of Women* (4) suggests that in treating a woman whose uterus has become displaced, you should fumigate the uterus with fragrant substances to lure it back down into its proper place, and conversely, hold foul-smelling substances to her nostrils to force it away from the wrong end of her body.[25] Both fragrant and noxious fumigations are very common in the gynecological literature. The Hippocratic *Regimen II* suggests that the smell of apples helps with nausea (55) while that of anise stops sneezes (54), and the smell of a vegetable signals how it will pass through the body most easily, those that smell sweet being warming and passed through urine while those that smell strong being cold and moist, and passed through stool (54). As this last passage shows, uses of scent in medicine were related to theoretical understandings of the body and its workings in complex ways that cannot be adequately discussed here.[26]

Ritual cures, like naturalizing medical ones, incorporated scented ingredi-

24. Galen *Method of Medicine* 11.16 (=789–91 Kühn).
25. Totelin 2015b; Faraone 2011.
26. Faraone 2011; Totelin 2015b; Nutton 2013.

ents. Cato (*Agr*. 70) gives a preventative remedy for sick oxen that, whatever his understanding of the benefits of the plants involved, is hedged around with ritual prescriptions: combine three each of salt grains, laurel leaves, leaves and shoots from two kinds of leek (*porrum* and *ulpicum*), garlic shoots, grains of incense, Sabine herbs, rue leaves, bryony stalks, white beans, live coals, and pints of wine. This mixture is to be administered to each ox three times over three days, out of a wooden vessel, with the ox and the doctor both fasting. While most of these ingredients—all of the plants, the salt, the wine—occur in remedies in medical sources as well, the use of incense in remedies tends to signal cures that are farther toward the ritual end of the magico-medical spectrum of ancient treatments. The live coals, the repetitions of the number three, and the need to fast and use a particular vessel corroborate the sense that Cato's remedy has, in Malinowski's term, a high "coefficient of weirdness."[27] Several prescriptions in Columella's agricultural handbook confirm that incense, as a drug component, often signals oddity. Among a number of other cures for oxen, he suggests making a potion of cinnamon, myrrh, frankincense, sea tortoise blood, and wine and pouring it through the animal's nostrils (6.5.3). Elsewhere he recommends a suppository of either a live fly, a grain of incense, or bitumen (6.30.4), and mixing incense with the animal's fodder in a list of remedies that range from aromatic herbs (e.g. savin juniper, garlic, bryony, horehound) to a snakeskin (6.4.2–3). On the other hand, ingredients such as myrrh and frankincense can also be found in other authors as fairly unremarkable components of cures.[28] The professional medical authors tend to treat incense ingredients as ordinary components of drugs, while authors such as Columella and Cato who give home remedies for anyone to compound on the farm are more likely to treat incense as an unusual ingredient reserved for the more unusual cures.

A major category of medico-magical treatment was the use of amulets, which the medical authorities sometimes scoff at and sometimes recommend.[29] In addition to the amulets made of durable materials that have survived from antiquity, many more-transient amulets were made by fastening parts of plants and animals to the body. These are frequently treated as functionally equivalent

27. Malinowski 1935: 221–22.
28. E.g., Celsus 5.11–12; Hippocrates *Superf*. 33; Galen, *Method of Medicine* 2.7 (134 Kühn).
29. There is a large literature on amulets. For medical amulets, especially unsophisticated plant and animal amulets, see Bohak 2015; Faraone 2018; Parker 2019.

to other medical applications of the same ingredients, as when Pliny says to either drink radish juice or to wear a radish as an amulet (20.24). The medical authors sometimes deride overtly magical amulets as superstitious nonsense (e.g., Sor. *Gyn*. 3.42, where Soranus says that amulets have no effect but should be allowed because they make the patient feel better). But they also see a value in botanical and zoological ingredients that they think may act through contact or scent, as with the springs of pennyroyal that Pliny and Xenophon suggest wearing behind the ears or carrying; adding a fastening with which to bind cures like this to the body merely made them more convenient. Galen, pondering why an amulet made of a peony root should have prevented seizures—which he says he proved to his own satisfaction via experimentation—suggests that the boy wearing it may have breathed in particles flowing off the root, or that the root altered the air around it.[30]

However, these rudimentary biological amulets, while explained in medical terms by Galen, were understood in the context of magical discourse by others; a number are described in the magical corpora, and authors such as Pliny make it clear that they were created and used with ritual. When Pliny says that an amulet of mallow root is believed to cure sores (20.29), it is not simply a root on a string; the mallow is to be dug up before sunrise, wrapped in natural-colored wool from a ewe that has given birth to a ewe lamb, and then tied to the affected body part. Some people, he adds, think that a golden tool should be used to dig, and that the plant should not be allowed to touch the ground. This suggestion comes in the middle of list of liniments and decoctions made from the plant to cure bowel problems, beestings, and gout. As with Columella's pest-removal charms (chapter 1), it is clear that multiple explanations for the efficacy of the same amulets existed—some relying on a physical causation, as with Galen's belief that a peony amulet exuded healing particles, others relying on divine causation that required a plant to be collected with ceremony. It is also clear that authors who align themselves with an explanation of medical cures that eschews divine causation are often using much the same methods as healers who do offer divine explanations for disease and curing, but stripping out or minimizing the ritual elements.

30. *On Simple Drugs* 3.10 = 11.856–60 Kühn.

Rootcutters and the Dangerous Scents of Plants

Powerful plants, the Greeks and Romans believed, needed special handling to tame and contain them before they could be used. If the plant were harvested carelessly, it could be rendered inefficacious, or worse, could sicken or kill those picking it, even if the plant, once collected, could be used curatively. This fear of herbs at the critical juncture of their harvesting was often attributed to the noxious odors of the plants, which needed to be avoided or neutralized. The medical and natural-historical sources record procedures used to safely harvest efficacious species, including prayers, libations, magic circles drawn around the plant, and similar ritual precautions. It was considered a dangerous business best done by skillful professionals.

Experts in gathering and preparing medicinal drugs were called rootcutters (*rhizotomoi*) or drug sellers (*pharmakapolai*), and are occasionally cited as sources of information by the botanical writers.[31] Such herbalists not only specialized in the botanical knowledge that enabled them to locate, identify, and harvest many types of useful plants, but were also experts in the ritual procedures they believed were necessary to cut them. *Rhizotomos*, as a term, seems to encompass professionals from a wide spectrum of social and intellectual prominence, from village herbalists to highly regarded public figures. Nor were they a clear-cut category of professionals; the lines between priests, purifiers, botanists, rootcutters, doctors, philosophers, and related types were very blurry. On the illustrious end of the spectrum, Epimenides, the Cretan purifier and religious expert hired by Athens to expiate the guilt of the Cylonian massacre of 632 BC, was said to have withdrawn from society for part of his life to gain expertise as a *rhizotomos*; and the fourth-century-BCE doctor Diocles and the first-century-BCE physician and botanical writer Crateuas both titled their medical works *Rhizotomikon*.[32] Theophastus names a number of specific *rhizotomoi* as sources.[33] But they are at other times referred to in the aggregate, and Theophrastus sometimes appears to mean *rhizotomoi* he considers less respectable, given his dismissive comments on their lore; there is also a suggestion that they could be showmen, perhaps bordering on charlatans. Theophras-

31. Lloyd 1979: 38–39. On the rootcutters and their practices, see Scarborough 1978, 1991, 2006; Gordon 2011.
32. Epimenides as *rhizotomos*: Diog. Laert. 1.10.112; Diocles: fr. 204 van der Eijk = Scholia to Nicander's *Theriaka* 647b; Crateuas: Dsc. Introduction.1. On these authors see Hardy and Totelin 2005: 55.
33. *HP* 9.16.8, 9.17; 9.18.4. On the *rhizotomoi* cited by Theophrastus, see Lloyd 1983: 120–21.

tus relates several stories about *pharmakapoloi* who publicly took poisonous hellebore to amaze people with their resistance to it (*HP* 9.17). He describes one man, a Eudemus, who sat at his market stall and publicly drank twenty-two cups of hellebore over the course of the day, apparently to public acclaim. This sort of *pharmakapolos*, putting on a performance for a crowd in the agora, is a rather different figure from doctors such as Diocles, the personal physician of Mithridates VI. *Rhizotomos* also, as we will see, became a word for a witch in early Greek literature, suggesting that some of the real rootcutters Theophrastus refers to may have been women.

G. E. R. Lloyd outlines the ways in which the *rhizotomoi* were placed in rhetorical opposition to doctors (*iatroi*) by the fifth century, as the latter tried to distinguish their profession as a separate, modernizing field free from what they framed as the superstition attendant on temple medicine and other traditions of healing.[34] Richard Gordon has suggested that the *rhizotomoi* were equally interested in distinguishing themselves from other claimants to medical expertise in the increasingly crowded medical marketplace of the fifth century, and that they increased the ritual complexity of their plant-harvesting rituals as a way to add value to the services they provided, thus setting themselves up as professionals on the same level as the new *iatroi* but from a different branch of the curative tradition. I think that Gordon is probably correct that the plant-harvesting rituals developed significant complexity in this period, but earlier Greeks certainly saw some plants as dangerous and needing to be approached carefully, such as a plant in the *Odyssey*, *moly*, which is said to be difficult for humans to pick but not for the gods, or the hypnotically fragrant narcissus flower that lures Persephone to her kidnaping in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.[35] The Hippocratic authors exclude all mention of the rituals with which the *rhizotomoi* surrounded the act of cutting or picking plants. Nor are the medical writers overall much concerned with the identification, taxonomy, or gathering of the drugs they use; their manuals focus on compounding and administering such remedies to patients rather than obtaining them. Professionals such as the *pharmakapolai* and *rhizotomoi* existed in part to supply such *iatroi* with the drugs they needed. Botanical authors, however, frequently refer to the *rhizotomoi*. Theophrastus, the earliest botanical authority to discuss the *rhizotomoi* and their rituals, stands midway between the traditions of the *rhi-*

34. Lloyd 1979: 37–49; Lloyd 1983: 119–35.
35. Gordon 2011. *Od.* 10.275–306. *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 1–16; I will return to Persephone's narcissus and its heady fragrance in chapter 4.

zotomoi and the *iatroi*. He records a great deal of ritual material that he attributes to the *rhizotomoi* and allied professionals, and suggests that he finds some of their advice potentially useful but at other times expresses skepticism over it.

The recorded plant harvesting rituals of the *rhizotomoi* show three concerns: to correctly propitiate the gods, the earth, and the plant itself to avoid retribution for picking it; to preserve the plant's efficacy; and to avoid the dangerous physical effects of the plants, particularly their odors, this last being of the most interest here. To give a few examples of the former concerns before moving on to the ones involving dangerous odors, the *panaces* (a variant of *panacea*, "all-heal") is said to be good against everything; when the root is pulled up, Pliny describes it as a religious obligation (*piamentum*) owed to the earth to fill the hole with cereals.[36] According to a collection of plant-picking rituals that Theophrastus scornfully attributes to drug merchants and *rhizotomoi*, the peony should be gathered at night because Mars' woodpecker will attack the gatherer's eyes during the day.[37] Anyone wanting to gather *selago* must wear white and have clean, bare feet, make a sacrifice of bread and wine, and pick it without iron, with their right hand pushed through their tunic's left armhole "like a thief" (*velut a furante*), perhaps to surprise the plant and seize it before its properties can escape it.[38] Other spells, instead of trying to trick the plant, try to persuade it to be helpful, as in a "Spell for Picking a Plant" found in the magical papyri, which tells the harvester to address the herb in this way: "I am picking you, such and such a plant, with my five-fingered hand, I, so-and-so, and I am bringing you home so you may work for me for a certain purpose. I adjure you by the undefiled name of the god . . ." (αἴρω σε, ἥ βοτάνη, χειρὶ πενταδακτύλῳ, ἐγὼ ὁ δεῖνα, καὶ φέρω παρ᾽ ἐμαυτόν, ἵνα μοι ἐνεργήσῃς εἰς τήν τινα χρείαν. ὁρκίζω σε κατὰ τοῦ ἀμιάντου ὀνόματος τοῦ θεοῦ).[39] (The specific details of plant species, intended use, and so forth are to be filled in by the user.) Some plants were considered too dangerous for humans to harvest at all. Aelian (14.27) tells a story about the peony, which kills those who try to uproot it: instead, they tie a hungry dog to the plant with a rope, and offer it food. When the dog lunges forward for the meat, it pulls the plant out of the ground, and immediately dies ("when the sun sees the roots," ἐπὰν δὲ ὁ ἥλιος ἴδῃ τὰς ῥίζας). The dog is buried on the spot with mysterious ceremonies, and the plant is

36. Pliny *NH* 25.30–31; cf. Theophrastus *HP* 9.8.7.
37. Theophr. *HP* 9.8.6, Plin. *NH* 25.29.
38. Plin. *NH* 24.103.
39. *PGM* IV.286–95.

rendered safe to pick up. While these rituals are sometimes attributed to foreigners, strange tribes like the Marsi, or *rhizotomoi* in our sources, they were also used by people marked as more normative in Greek and Roman society; thus Pliny quotes Sabinus Tiro's practical gardening book, in which he advised his readers to not let certain garden herbs come into contact with iron (19.177). Such precautions seem to have been varied, widespread, and in common use among both professional *rhizotomoi* and amateurs.

The idea that the odor of the plant being harvested could be dangerous was common and is reflected in many of the gathering rituals, which describe the measures harvesters should take to protect themselves from the fumes by either avoiding the smell or overpowering it with a stronger odor. Theophrastus is sometimes dismissive of the rituals of the *rhizotomoi* and *pharmakapoloi*, but also says that some of their advice on harvesting is valid, and singles out their odor-related concerns as particularly worth heeding, for "the properties of these plants are harmful; they [the *rhizotomoi*] say that they take hold like fire and burn" (ἐπισινεῖς γάρ τινων αἱ δυνάμεις· ἐξάπτειν γάρ φασιν ὥσπερ πῦρ καὶ κατακαίειν; *HP* 9.8.6). He goes on to describe how people digging up mandrake stand upwind of the plant and first trace a magic circle three times around it with a sword, and should dance around the plant saying as much as possible about love.[40] People cutting *thapsia* (one of several poisonous species known as "deadly carrot" in English) should coat themselves with oil and stand upwind as well, because their bodies will swell up otherwise.[41] Pliny (25.124–25) adds that the plant is so poisonous that it injures harvesters if even a slight breath of air blows from it onto them; their bodies swell and their faces are attacked by the skin infection erysipelas. He says that to help contain the danger they grease the plant with wax before they begin. Pickers should stand upwind of wild roses, too, or their eyes may be damaged.[42] The scent of hellebore is so dangerous that the harvesters cannot work long, as their heads grow heavy; to counteract this they chew cloves of garlic and drink neat wine, the smell and taste of which overpowers the dangerous scent of the hellebore.[43]

An unusually well-described ritual in a fourth-century CE papyrus spellbook (*PGM* IV.2967–3006) describes a process by which the author says the

40. Theophr. *HP* 9.8.8; see also Plin. *NH* 25.148 and Dsc. 4.75.
41. Theophr. *HP* 9.8.5; Dsc. 4.153; Plin. *NH* 13.124.
42. Theophr. *HP* 9.8.5.
43. Theophr. *HP* 9.8.5; Plin. *NH* 25.50. Dsc. 4.162. While English speakers who are not oenophiles are likely to think of wine primarily in terms of taste, see Lilja 1972a: 110–19 on the cultural emphasis placed on the scent of wine in ancient literature.

Egyptians obtain herbs. Whatever kind of plant they want to gather is sprinkled with natron (traditionally used for purifications in Egypt) and then provided with burning pine resin incense, which the harvester carries around the plant three times. The sacred Egyptian incense called *kyphi* is burned and the plant is then pulled out of the ground with libations and prayers.[44] The description includes the text of the prayer, in which the plant is addressed as a sentient entity to be propitiated, and suggests a different understanding than we find in the medical authors of why the plant is to be surrounded by scent. Throughout, the plant is treated in much the same way as Egyptian cult statues, which were fumigated with incense, a similarity that the spell itself notes, when the text comments "I am washing you in resin as I also wash the gods. . . . Be purified by prayer" (ἐγὼ νίζω σε ῥητίνῃ ὡς καὶ τοὺς θεούς. . . . συναγνίσθητι ἐπευχῇ; 2996–98).[45] While the medical and botanical authorities envision the plant as a dangerous natural force whose odor needs to be suppressed, this spell treats the herb as a minor deity who is properly worshiped through the use of incense and other purifying and propitiatory scents. Whether the drug sellers and rootcutters whose expertise Theophrastus drew on would have explained the procedure in the way that he does or in the way the magicians of the papyri do is unclear. Despite the attribution of this procedure to "the Egyptians," it is unusual insofar as it is recorded by and for practicing magicians who might want to use this method themselves. While the plant is conceptualized differently than in the medical authors, the ritual actions taken are very similar to the rituals described by skeptical authors such as Theophrastus and Pliny, suggesting that despite their criticisms of the *rhizotomoi* they transmit accurate information about the methods of the latter.

All of these plants—hellebore, wild rose, *thapsia*, mandrake—are prescribed for use in medical cures by ancient authors, and it is only at the moment of picking that their odor is considered virulently dangerous to the rootcutters; the plants can generally be safely approached before they are disturbed, like the *thapsia* that pickers wax before uprooting it, and the cut herbs can be used safely later. Some passages emphasize the release of the plants' dangerous exudations during the harvesting process. Depending on the species, a plant may simply be pulled out of the ground or dug up, but other plants are cropped with

44. On *kyphi*, a complex and culturally important incense blend, see chapter 3.
45. For other examples of addresses to plants, see *Anth. Lat*. 4–5; Antonius Musa, *De Herba Vettonica Liber* 181–91 (= *CML* IV: 11); Pseudo-Apuleius, *CML IV*: 287–98; *PGM* IV.2967–3006, II.82–91, VI.1–47. On the connection with cult statues, Betz 1992: 95 n. 385.

tools, picked, milked for their sap, or even bitten off, methods more likely to release scents. Pliny, for example, describes the process of harvesting *thapsia*: sometimes cuts are made in the plant to let the sap ooze out, or the plant is pounded to release the juices (13.124–25). Particularly in the case of draining juices from a plant, the perilous miasma that it releases is emphasized. Sophocles, in his fragmentary play *Rhizotomoi*, describes the witch Medea as a *rhizotomos* who is collecting magical drugs with the aid of a chorus of other root-cutters. She drains juices from roots into bronze vessels while covering her eyes and averting her face from the dangerous odor they give off.[46] The collection process for medico-magical herbs was a moment of crisis when their power was unlocked but not yet controlled, and it needed to be ritualized to harness the plant for human use. The rituals used by *rhizotomoi* and other professional and amateur herb gatherers underpin some of the literary portraits of witches I examine in chapters 4 and 5, where there is concern that witches will weaponize the dangerous odors of plants rather than neutralizing them.

Garlic, Moly*, and Magic*

One plant notorious for its smell, garlic, will serve to more fully illustrate the connection between a plant's scent and its reputation for strange effects. However, similarly complex series of associations could be traced for many species.[47] Garlic was not only a cooking herb that was loved and despised for its pungency in the ancient world, but was also considered medicinally useful and a powerful magical or apotropaic plant that might act either as a witch's drug or as a means to combat such drugs. Its eye-wateringly powerful odor was often cited as the reason for its efficacy.

Like other members of the allium family (bulbous plants such as leeks, chives, and onions), garlic is known for its distinctive, overpowering odor and taste, which are produced by sulfur compounds in the bulb. The smell of garlic and garlic-eaters was familiar enough in antiquity for garlic breath to form the punchline of jokes in comedies, and garlic acquired a reputation as a food of the poor and rustic, while the rich could afford more refined seasonings.[48] Garlic

46. Fr. 491.1–3 Nauck. I will return to the *Rhizotomoi* in chapter 4.
47. A few examples of plants whose folklore would reward olfactory analysis include mint, rue, agnus castus, fennel, and cumin.
48. Lilja 1972a: 106–7, 125–28.

appears frequently in the ancient medical authorities, who prescribe it for everyday complaints such as animal bites, asthma, skin diseases, and intestinal parasites.[49] (It is in fact an antiseptic, thanks to the compound allicin, and various traditional medical uses of garlic seem to be borne out by clinical studies.[50]) It was thought to make people and animals excitable, vigorous, and pugnacious, and, depending on the source, to have either aphrodisiac or anaphrodisiac effects—aphrodisiac because the taste is warming and arousing, anaphrodisiac because the smell is anything but romantic.[51] It was believed that the smell of the plant was protective and could drive away animals such as snakes and scorpions.[52]

Garlic's medical and apotropaic value continued into the supernatural realm, and it could be seen as both a means of warding off magical danger and a cure for diseases that straddled the border between ordinary afflictions and supernatural ones. The second-century BCE comic poet Titinius, as summarized by the Severan medical author Serenus Sammonicus, claimed that garlic could keep witches at bay as well as snakes and scorpions:

> Praeterea si forte premit strix atra puellos
> virosa inmulgens exertis ubera labris,
> alia praecepit Titini sententia necti,
> qui veteri claras expressit more togatas. (Ser. med. 1044–8 = Titinius fr. 22 Ribbeck)

> Moreover, if a spiteful witch happens to seize children, milking her masculine teats into their open lips, in Titinius' view garlic should be attached [to the child as an amulet]—Titinius, who put on his famous toga plays in the old-fashioned way.

Garlic's protective powers were said to keep spirits out of the body and to cure madness, which was itself often interpreted as a case of possession. Persius says that foreign priests of Cybele and Isis will "beat in gods which will make the body swell" (*incussere deos inflantes corpora*) if you have not eaten garlic

49. E.g., Plin. *NH* 20.50–57; Dsc. 2.152; Celsus *Med*. 3.12, 4.4, 4.10. Totelin 2015b discusses garlic in the Hippocratic corpus.
50. See Block 2010: 69–73 for the antiseptic properties of allicin, and *passim* for the medical uses of garlic. Totelin 2015b: 32 cites recent medical studies.
51. Gowers 1993: 280–310; Block 2010: 148–49; and Lilja 1972a collect numerous classical and other anecdotes about the effects of garlic.
52. Plin. *NH* 20.50.

that morning (5.186–88), while Pliny reports that raw garlic was fed to the insane (20.52).[53] It protects against more nebulous dangers, too, such as thunderstorms, which were frequently treated as numinous phenomena. While discussing poultry, Columella records ways farmers tried to protect unhatched eggs against thunder, which, like other ancient authors, he believed would harm the developing chicks. He says a bit dubiously that many people lay laurel branches or heads of garlic pierced with iron nails under the hens' nests, and that this preserves the eggs (8.5.13). Garlic's use as an apotropaic charm has persisted into modern times in Greece and elsewhere in Europe, the most familiar instance for most English speakers today being its reputed ability to fend off vampires; but it is also a traditional remedy against the evil eye, and in Greek, garlic was a euphemism for that other apotropaic symbol, the phallus.[54] Thus garlic's ability to repel human noses has been extended into an ability to repel pests, illness, weather, and supernatural dangers. The basic repulsory quality of its sulfurous scent is the same even as the target changes, and is grounded in the assumption that our experience of garlic is universal and shared by animals, gods, and inanimate forces.

Intriguingly, garlic is one of the species with which the ancients persistently tried to identify a magical plant in an episode of the *Odyssey* that suggests root-cutting was a very old profession in Greece; in it, although the term *rhizotomos* is not used, Hermes acts as a plant specialist with the same function as a *rhizotomos*. Hermes intercepts Odysseus, who is on his way to the hall of Circe to retrieve his missing crew members. He warns Odysseus that Circe is a witch, and gives him a plant called *moly*, which will prevent her from transforming him into a pig as she has his men. The plant has a black root and a milk-white flower; the gods call it *moly* (μῶλυ), and Hermes says that it is difficult for humans, but not the gods, to pick.[55]

Moly is certainly a magical plant, although in the *Odyssey* it is prized for its power to counteract magic. (As usual in antiquity, the best protection against

53. On the other hand, in the Hippocratic treatise *On the Sacred Disease* garlic is among the foods that certain ritual specialists tell epilepsy sufferers to avoid eating, much to the author's scorn (1.16). According to him, these healers claim that epilepsy is an effect of divine possession, but their view is evidently that garlic will not help to cure it, contrary to what we might expect from the rest of the folklore on this point.

54. Megaloudi, Papadopoulos, and Sgourou 2007: 938. See Opie and Tatem 1989 s.v. *garlic*; Simoons 1998: 136–57; and Block 2010: 33–59 for discussions of worldwide folklore, dietary restrictions, and customs involving garlic. Garlic as an apotropaic: Pitre 1981: 137; Hardie 1981: 110–11; Lawson 2012: 14, 140; Dionisopoulos-Mass 1976: 48–51. Garlic and the phallus: Gowers 1993: 296–97.

55. *Od*. 10.275–306.

magic is other, stronger magic.) Several tropes typical of the treatment of herbs by doctors, botanists, *rhizotomoi*, and magicians are already present here. The fact that *moly* is hard for humans to dig up was the most famous instance of the wider belief that magical and medicinal species could be difficult or dangerous to gather. The text of the *Odyssey* as it stands does not explain why humans have a difficult time gathering *moly*, but whatever the danger or impediment is, the gods can safely ignore it.

Second, *moly* is described as the plant's secret, divine name. What humans might call it is left as an exercise for the reader.[56] The idea that a plant might have a hidden name has later parallels: many magical herbs and other spell ingredients had secret names, used by magicians, that were distinct from their common names, and the magical papyri preserve some glossaries in which the secret nomenclatures are revealed.[57] One spellbook prefaces such a list with a description of how Egyptian priests deliberately encoded plants under other names to prevent curious amateurs from dabbling in magic.[58] The papyri also describe plants called by fanciful names such as "Foam of the Moon" or "Blood of Ares" without giving a common equivalent, if one existed; in other cases, it is ambiguous whether some of the more recherché ingredients mentioned in the papyri are intended to be taken literally or are again intended as the secret names of much more common ingredients. *PGM* XII.401–44, for instance, explains that by "blood of a hyrax" the author does actually mean the blood of a hyrax.[59]

A great deal of ingenuity has been expended by both ancient and modern scholars on identifying Homer's *moly* with a real species. While *moly* is ultimately an unidentifiable fantasy, the ancient conjectures are interesting and indicative of what plants people thought had unusual, potentially magical properties. The two most frequent ancient suggestions were that *moly* was some type of allium or that it was *Peganum harmala* (called stinking rue, wild rue, Syrian rue, or harmala in English). The eye-watering sulfurous smells of garlic

56. Clay 1972 discusses this and other instances of *dionumia* in Homer.
57. On a more mundane level, the botanists were well aware that plants could be known under several names, and that one name might be applied to several species; specifying precisely which plant he means is a major concern of Theophrastus, for example.
58. *PGM* XII 401–44.
59. For a few examples, *PGM* XII 401–44 is a glossary of dual plant names. *PDM* xiv 415–16 describes the "Anubis plant"; *PDM* xiv 886–910 describes magical herbs with names such as "Eyebrow of the sun" in Demotic; *PDM* xiv 933–34 gives magical names in Demotic for plants and minerals whose common names are given in Greek; *PGM* II 64–183 gives a recipe using spell ingredients including laurel, bayberries, cumin, nightshade, and "Hermes' finger."

and its cousins are familiar; although less well-known to modern Western readers, *Peganum harmala* is also very pungent.[60] These identifications of the Homeric *moly* with plants known above all for their odors were not made purely by natural historians, but apparently had some degree of popular currency, since several authors describe plants that they say were called *moly* or names derived from *moly* by ordinary people. However, none of these uses of *moly* and related terms seem to have had widespread acceptance; the ancient writers present plants called *moly* as idiosyncratic local instances of the Homeric word being appropriated for plants reminiscent of the Homeric *moly*.

In the earliest of these passages, Theophrastus comments in his *Historia Plantarum*:

> Ἡ δὲ πανάκεια γίνεται κατὰ τὸ πετραῖον περὶ Ψωφίδα καὶ πλείστη καὶ ἀρίστη. τὸ δὲ μῶλυ περὶ Φενεὸν καὶ ἐν τῇ Κυλλήνῃ. φασὶ δ' εἶναι καὶ ὅμοιον ᾧ ὅ Ὅμηρος εἴρηκε, τὴν μὲν ῥίζαν ἔχον στρογγύλην προσεμφερῆ κρομύῳ τὸ δὲ φύλλον ὅμοιον σκίλλῃ· χρῆσθαι δὲ αὐτῷ πρός τε τὰ ἀλεξιφάρμακα καὶ τὰς μαγείας· οὐ μὴν ὀρύττειν γ' εἶναι χαλεπόν, ὡς Ὅμηρός φησι. (Theophr. *HP* 9.15.7)
>
> All-heal grows abundantly and best in the rocky ground about Psophis; "moly" around Pheneos and on Mount Cyllene. They say that it is like the *moly* which Homer mentions; that it has a round root like an onion and a leaf like squill; that it is used against spells and magic; but that it is not difficult to dig up, as Homer says.

Because Theophrastus describes a bulbous plant with the long, thin leaves common to garlic and squill, the Cyllenian *moly* is often taken to be a variety of garlic or some other member of the allium family, and Homer's additional description *moly*'s dark root and pale flowers does fit a number of alliums.[61] Other writers give the same impression. Dioscorides describes the *moly* flower as milk-white and its bulb as dark and like garlic.[62] Erotian and Pseudo-Galen

60. Despite its common name, *Peganum harmala*, "wild rue," is unrelated to *Ruta graveolans*, the plant ordinarily known as rue in English. Flattery and Schwartz 1989; Hassan 1967; and Merlin 2003 give some examples of the ancient and modern use of and folklore surrounding *Peganum harmala*. Stannard 1962 and Amigues 1995 discuss the identification of *moly* with both *Peganum harmala* and garlic. A gloss on Myrsilos of Methymna identifies *Peganum harmala* as one of Medea's herbs; see Detienne 1994: 93–94.
61. Stannard 1962: 256–59.
62. Dsc. 3.47.

each contain a passage that identifies a plant with the derivative name of *moluza* as identical with a type of garlic with a solid head not divided into cloves.[63] Pliny describes a plant called *molon*, which he compares to garlic (26.33). Pseudo-Apuleius describes *moly* as the size of an onion, and gives a recipe for its use as a remedy for uterine pains, for which garlic was also frequently prescribed.[64] The tradition that identified *moly* with *Peganum harmala* coexisted with the identification of *moly* with garlic, with some authors, such as Pliny and Dioscorides, distinguishing two types of *moly*, one corresponding to rue and the other to garlic or to alliums in general.[65] There was, then, widespread identification of the magical plant *moly* with two real plant groups, both of them known for their strong smell; to look at it from the other direction, the familiar, pungent alliums and wild rue were identified as the mythically potent *moly*. The equation of moly with garlic proved tenacious enough to influence scientific nomenclature: the variety known as golden garlic is officially *Allium moly*.

When Odysseus comes to Circe's hall, she attempts to transform him into a pig by offering him a potion to drink and tapping him with her wand, as she has done to his companions. Since Odysseus has received Hermes' protective *moly*, however, he escapes the spell, draws his sword, and rushes at her. Most artistic depictions of this scene show Odysseus with his weapons, often in the act of drawing them and pursuing Circe, and her with her cup and wand. What Odysseus is imagined to have done with the *moly* is unclear—has he eaten it? Hidden it in his clothes? Hermes gives no instructions. One sixth-century Pseudo-Chalcidian vase, however, may hint at both *moly*'s role in the story and its identification with the allium family. Between the figures of Odysseus drawing his sword, Circe, and two half-transformed pig men are floral decorations that look very much like the twisting stems and pointed heads of garlic scapes and the flower globes common to alliums.[66]

Circe herself is called *polupharmakos*, "knowing many herbs," in the Odyssey (10.276)—although the epithet is also used of doctors in the *Iliad* (16.28)—and it is with a combination of drugs and with her wand that she transforms Odysseus' men into pigs. Odysseus escapes the same fate thanks to his posses-

63. Erotian s.v. moluza; Pseudo-Galen 19.124 Kühn.
64. Ps. Apul. *Herbarius* 48 (= *CML* IV p. 28). Uterine remedies: Hp. *Superf.* 27 and 37 and *Nat. Mul.* 2, 8, 85, 91.
65. For the complicated ancient tradition surrounding *moly* (and plants with derivative names such as *molon*, *moluza*, and *moleon*) and for the bibliography on the many modern conjectures, see Stannard 1962 and Amigues 1995.
66. *LIMC* VI.2: 26, plate Kirke no. 19.

sion of a stronger herb. Both the *moly* and Circe's drugs are called *pharmaka*; Odysseus' *moly* is only distinguished from Circe's as a "good" *pharmakon* (φάρμακον ἐσθλόν, 10.292). If we follow the equation of *moly* with garlic that many later Greeks evidently made, why should garlic prove so confounding to a demigoddess like Circe? Aside from garlic's symbolic status and its reputed power to avert illness, pests, and spirits, its strong odor may be thought to overpower the effects of Circe's own herbs. Garlic is explicitly used as a protection against the smell of other plants in the medical and scientific literature, as in Theophrastus' description of hellebore gatherers chewing garlic and drinking wine to protect themselves from the hellebore's odor. Garlic also had a reputation as a magical herb in its own right; more than simply countering Circe's herbs, it might be imagined to have an aggressive effect of its own, as it will in some later sources. Third, at least part of the danger Odysseus faces is Circe's sexual allure. While the danger is only vaguely hinted at, Hermes tells Odysseus that Circe will try to entice him to her bed, and that he must make her swear not to leave him unmanned (ἀνήνορα) before agreeing (10.299–301). Garlic's reputation as an anaphrodisiac may be worth considering in this context if part of its value is to prevent Odysseus from losing his head and succumbing to Circe's wiles.

The scent of witches, and of women more generally, is a major topic of chapters 4 and 5. As Apollonius' Medea will demonstrate, the odor of witches is frequently a reification of the smell of ordinary women's perfumes and cosmetics and their supposed ability to overcome men's better judgment. Another quasi-witch in the Odyssey, Calypso, inhabits a cave that smells enticingly of the fragrant woods she burns and the cypresses that surround her home (5.59–64). Elsewhere in Greek literature, thyine and cedar are burned in household fires for their enjoyable scent and are particularly associated with women's spaces such as bedrooms.[67] Odysseus, who is unable to leave Calypso's island for reasons not specified in the extant version of the text, looks very much like he has succumbed to the fate that Hermes warned him about in the case of Circe.[68] Coming full circle, Vergil's Circe burns cedar wood in an echo of her Homeric double Calypso.[69]

Theophrastus knew of garlic's association with the inhuman powers, for a

67. Lilja 1972a: 33, 47–48.
68. For the dangers of sleeping with witches, see also Apul. *Met.* 1.7, where Socrates is enslaved to the witch Meroe after a night of sexual pleasure.
69. *Aen.* 7.13.

difficult passage in his *Characters* describes how the Superstitious Man has himself purified:

> κἄν ποτε ἐπίδῃ σκορόδῳ ἐστεμμένον τῶν ἐπὶ ταῖς τριόδοις, ἀπελθὼν κατὰ κεφαλῆς λούσασθαι καὶ ἱερείας καλέσας σκίλλῃ ἢ σκύλακι κελεῦσαι αὑτὸν περικαθᾶραι. (Theophr. *Char*. 16.13)
>
> If ever he observes [someone wreathed with garlic] at the cross-roads, he goes away, pours water over his head, and, summoning priestesses, tells them to thoroughly purify him with squill or a puppy.

What the Superstitious Man sees here is not entirely clear. Some have taken σκορόδῳ ἐστεμμένον τῶν ἐπὶ ταῖς τριόδοις to mean a person wearing a wreath of garlic on his head, perhaps stealing the food offerings left for Hecate and wearing garlic as an apotropaic measure to avert the goddess's anger.[70] Others have thought that he sees someone eating garlic left at the crossroads as an offering to the goddess or that the crossroad marker itself is crowned with garlic.[71] (Garlic would be a strange offering for most Greek deities, but not out of character for Hecate.[72]) Either way, garlic at the crossroads looks like a sign of uncanny activity to the Superstitious Man. The passage is a useful illustration of the fluid and contextual connotations of many magical symbols: from being a reassuring sign of protection against the supernatural, garlic has become a somewhat alarming signifier of the supernatural's likely presence. Garlic's rustic associations perhaps also contribute to the comedic atmosphere of the sketch: who but a bumpkin is afraid of the sight of garlic heads?

Garlic was also used by magicians, in addition to protecting others against them. It appears occasionally in the magical papyri, as at *PGM* IV.930–1114 line 936, where a magician wanting to produce a divine vision is told to wear an olive crown with a single-shooted garlic tied into it. The garlic may be apotropaic here, as spells to summon gods or produce visions sometimes include precautions to protect the magician from the reprisals of irritated divinities, and the same spell later gives instructions for a more elaborate phylactery against the god's anger at being summoned. Garlic is a component of several deliber-

70. Zografou 2010: 115 n. 128; Amigues 1995: 17; Navarre 1924 ad loc.
71. Megaloudi, Papadopoulos, and Sgourou 2007: 938; Navarre 1924 ad loc. Borthwick 1966: 106–19 likes both possibilities.
72. Zografou 2010.

ately malodorous incenses in the papyri: it is burned along with a snakeskin as part of a chariot curse in *PGM* IV.2211, and it is an ingredient in the bad-smelling compulsive incenses in *PGM* IV.2441–2621 (lines 2570–83, 2639–50, and 2680–87).[73] It is also an ingredient in a prescription to stop menstrual blood in *PDM* xiv.961–65, along with myrrh, gazelle gall, and old scented wine, and as part of another magico-medical prescription in *PGM* CXXIII.a–f. Another "god's arrival" spell in *PDM* xiv.232–38 uses a clove of three-lobed garlic pierced with iron needles, which the magician summoning the deity places in front of himself while reciting the summoning spell. It is not stated whether the garlic in this instance is meant to be apotropaic or coercive, but the parallel with the garlic heads pierced with iron nails, which Columella suggests will protect eggs from thunder, is obvious.

Garlic's magical connotations are at issue in a striking poem by Horace, *Epode* 3, in which he complains that Maecenas has served him garlic, a food for the poor, at what he expected to be a nice dinner. Horace objects that the garlic-contaminated dishes are inedible for a man of his refinement (hard-gutted peasants may be able to eat it, but not him), and that garlic is actually poisonous and a *venena*, a word that can ambivalently be used of poisons, drugs, medicines, potions, and spells. He wonders whether Canidia, a witch who appears in several of his poems, has touched the food and thus rendered it poisonous; the implication is that the evil smell of Canidia's body manifests as a repulsive garlicy flavor in things she has come into contact with. He also claims that garlic was the magical herb Medea used on several occasions. I will return to this poem in more detail in chapter 5, but for now Horace's equation of garlic with a witch's herbs, like the Superstitious Man's fear of it, testifies to the ambiguous nature of garlic. Garlic is at once the helpful countercharm *moly* and itself a dangerous magical herb; it is an everyday food for peasants and a tool for sorcerers.

Garlic, whether fondly regarded or despised, was a deeply mundane and familiar item for Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians alike, and the miraculous powers attributed to it are merely extensions of its familiar properties into the realm of the otherworldly. In particular, garlic is notorious for its ready absorption by the body and the propensity for its smell to linger on the breath.[74] A

73. The goal of an evil-smelling incense is to either irritate a deity and send their wrath against someone else, or to compel them. These and more standard pleasant incenses in the papyri are discussed in chapter 3.

74. Lilja 1972a: 124–28.

whiff of garlic can even appear on the breath after it is absorbed through skin elsewhere on the body, a fact reflected in an ancient fertility test which suggests that a woman insert a garlic clove in her vagina overnight: if garlic can be smelled on her breath in the morning, she will be able to conceive.[75] When Horace says that Canidia's touch alone could render food garlicky, the joke relies at least in part on his audience knowing that the flavor of garlic does transfer so readily—that it contaminates, as contact with pollution or the supernatural could contaminate. Garlic becomes a physical metaphor for the witch's moral contagion. Horace's poem highlights the weirdness and ambiguity of garlic's reputation. With the right contextual cues, even something as common as garlic can become infused with uncanny power.

In poems like the *Odyssey* or *Epode* 3, literary cues such as the presence of witches or gods can recast even the everyday in a new light. Garlic becomes not an everyday food, but an unnerving magical drug. In a scientific/technical context, Theophrastus and Columella show some of the contextual clues that could cause people to reinterpret garlic not as simply a strong-smelling herb but as a sign of the supernatural at work. Garlic is unremarkable in the kitchen (if not in Maecenas' upper-class kitchen), but in other settings is more ominous—at Hecate's markers at the crossroads it conjures the thought of the goddess herself for the Superstitious Man. Note the specificity of Theophrastus' description—while all manner of offerings might be left there for the goddess, it is the food with the apotropaic function that alarms a passerby, suggesting as it does that there is something to be warded off. Garlic's apotropaic connotations are activated by the setting at the crossroads, when they are not activated in, for example, the pseudo-Vergilian *Moretum*, a poem about a peasant making a cheese-and-garlic dish for breakfast. Similarly, garlic was familiar on the Roman farm, but it becomes something weirder, more strangely effective, in Columella's description of bulbs pierced with nails and placed under hen's nests. This is not something passed off as an insect repellant or poultry cure with a purely pharmacological effectiveness; it is a ritual object closer to a curse figurine pierced with needles, and it is meant to ward off the quasi-numinous phenomena of lightning and thunder. Enough cues are present to evoke magical contexts, whether Columella would describe this as magic or not.

The secret names of plants common in the *PGM* are a deliberate strategy of adding weirdness to the pedestrian. While *PGM* XII.401–44 claims that priests

75. Hippocratic corpus, *Steril.* 214.

originally did this to foil the curiosity of ordinary people and prevent them from ineptly using spells, the obvious benefit to the magicians is that ordinary things are removed to the ritual sphere by renaming them, so that instead of dill, wild garlic, and turnip juice, we have "the semen of Hermes," "an eagle," and "a man's bile." Does plain dill smell the same to a magician as the semen of Hermes? In *Epode* 3, Horace is in some ways using the same gambit, adding drama and weight to a fairly minor anecdote by removing it to the realm of the otherworldly. Instead of mere garlic, Maecenas has now fed him magical drugs. That garlic is unusual on the table of a rich Roman is the moment of alterity that lays the situation open to reinterpretation. And Horace's urbane pretense of unfamiliarity with garlic balances, if it does not resolve, the tension he deliberately highlights between garlic as food and garlic as a magical herb. To a man of his sophistication, he implies, the food of peasants is as mysterious and dangerous as Medea's plants.

Odiferous plants were considered powerful throughout Greco-Roman history. They could be exploited for their odor, but needed to be handled with care. The easy slippage between explanations is notable: the same fragrant plant, like the laurel, might be explained as possessing pharmacological properties, normative religious significance, extra-divine numinous powers, or its own agency, according to the worldview of the user, but all draw on the fundamental belief that scent signals efficacy, however that belief is intellectualized. When the *Geoponika* admits that a smell and a natural "antipathy" are functionally indistinguishable, or Aelian compares a panther's breath to a love charm, we can see the ways in which scent could be either assimilated to magical causality or instead separated out as a naturalistic force. It also highlights the reality that many people probably did not care much about the mechanism: as long as pig dung and fig ashes protect your artichokes, does it matter why? Our literary sources tend to intellectualize folkloric beliefs in ways that may not always reflect how people interacted with them on a practical level. The mosaic of overlapping and contradictory beliefs about plants and odors seen in this chapter reflects the great diversity of popular attitudes stretching from Homer to Byzantium, but also the underlying tenet that odor equals power.

CHAPTER 3

Scent in the Magical Papyri

A spell of the fourth and fifth centuries CE, a rite for summoning a supernatural assistant, offers the following instructions:

> . . . δι]ώκων τόνδε τὸν ἱερὸν λόγον, ἐπιθύων λίβανον ἄ[τμητον] καὶ ῥόδινον ἐπισπένδων, ἐπιθύσασ[ἐπὶ γηί]νου θυμιατηρίου ἐπ' ἀνθράκων ἀπὸ ἡλιοτροπίου β[οτάνης]. . . . ὀψίας δὲ ἀνελθὼν εἰς τὸ δωμάτιόν σ[ου πάλι]ν καὶ στὰς πρὸς αὐγὴν τῆς θεοῦ ἄντικρυς λέγε τὸν ὑμ[νικὸν λόγον] τόνδε ἐπιθύων πάλιν τρωγλῖτιν ζμύρναν τῷ αὐτῷ σχήμ[ατι. πῦρ] δὲ ἀνάψας ἔχε μυρσίνης κλάδον [.ι. . . . .]ǫ̣ σείῳ[ν καὶ χαιρ]έτιζε τὴν θεόν. (*PGM* I.42–195 lines 61–73)[1]
>
> . . . recite this sacred spell as you burn uncut frankincense and make a libation of rose oil, making the sacrifice in an earthen censer on charcoal from heliotrope. . . . But in the evening, go up to your housetop again and, facing the light of the goddess, address to her this hymnic spell, again burning myrrh troglitis in the same manner. Kindle a fire and hold a myrtle branch . . . shaking it, and greet the goddess.

The ritual is meant to summon a supernatural falcon and a god who will eat with the magician and do their bidding. The odors of frankincense, rose, heliotrope, myrrh, and myrtle are present in this brief vignette, conveyed as incenses, perfumes, aromatic wood, and fresh branches. The spell also adjures the magician to bathe, purify themselves, put on clean clothing, and abstain from

1. *Papyri Graecae Magicae* = *PGM*; *Papyri Demoticae Magicae* = *PDM*. Both are translated by various scholars in Betz 1996. See Dieleman 2019 for a recent overview.

sources of pollution before beginning the rite, and to have appropriate food prepared, with an uncorrupted boy to serve it to the divine guest. In keeping with this emphasis on cleanliness and ritual purity, the scents that the magician is to deploy will block out the everyday smells of life in an Egyptian town and substitute an aura of sweet perfumes more appropriate to a god's visit.

The Greco-Egyptian practitioners who used the magical papyri liked to conduct their rituals in a highly scented atmosphere, and this procedure is far from unique. Spells in the papyri include instructions to burn incense and scented lamp oils, compound special incense blends, sprinkle perfume, shake fresh-cut branches from odiferous plants, acquire fragrant herbs, wear garlands, pluck flowers, burn fragrant woods, write with scented inks, and chew on aromatic seeds as they work.

This chapter explores two distinct ways in which the magicians of the *PGM* used odor. First, by perfuming themselves and their surroundings, they created a sensory experience that differentiated ritual space and time from their everyday lives. Anthropological work on extraordinary experiences suggests that the overwhelming aromas of incenses and oils may have helped them to enter a frame of mind in which they were more likely to experience trance states, divine epiphanies, and dream visions. A few papyri suggest that magicians were consciously aware of the link between scent and transcendent encounters, and deliberately created the right olfactory conditions for divine encounters. Second, odors are treated instrumentally in the papyri, as vehicles by which magicians believed they could send spells to attack enemies and coerce gods. These aggressive uses for scent will be echoed in the literary witch portraits of the next two chapters.

The Egyptian Background of the Spellbooks

The corpus of ritual texts surviving from Greco-Roman Egypt that are collectively called the Greek and Demotic magical papyri date mainly from the second century BCE to the sixth century CE, and range from substantial magical codices to small papyrus amulets inscribed with magical words and drawings. Several of the longest and most important texts may have belonged to the collection of a single magician from Thebes.[2] The longer texts testify to a tradition

2. For a recent discussion of the Theban magical library, see Dosoo 2016.

of magic practiced by highly literate bilingual magicians fluent in Greek and multiple stages and writing systems of the Egyptian language (Demotic, Old Coptic, hieratic, and cipher scripts).[3] The requirements of the spells also suggest that they were relatively well off, with the leisure and money for time-consuming rituals and expensive ingredients. Papyrus amulets and similar short texts are also found and must have been written by professionals for poorer and less-literate clients. The sort of magic found in the papyri thus seems to have been widely employed by the populace but more narrowly created by an elite class of specialists, of whom the Roman and Egyptian literary traditions offer examples.[4] The papyri belong to a larger tradition of magic reflected in objects and texts from across the ancient Mediterranean, but also show local peculiarities within that tradition, being a complex fusion of Greek and Egyptian culture and religious traditions that included traditional Greek and Egyptian religion, Christianity, Judaism, and more. The majority of the preserved examples are written in Greek, but Egyptian ritual practices and beliefs predominate in them.

The use of fragrance in the papyri is a typical example of this merging of traditions. Scent in the magical papyri draws on both Egyptian and Greek culture, but especially traditional Egyptian ritual and funerary practices, in which perfumes and incenses had a central role. Egyptians identified incense with various secretions or body parts of the gods, including tears, sweat, spit, bone, and menstrual blood; and deities such as Chesmou, Nefertum, and Osiris were patron deities of or involved with incense and perfume production.[5] Wise describes the practice of censing cult statues in temples as "offer[ing] the god to the god" and incense as "the sensory equivalent of the cult statue—a manifestation in scent that complements the visual manifestation in gold or wood."[6] Censing a statue was intended to animate it, and in the same way, mummies were incensed to imbue them with divine eternal life, as Osiris was reanimated by his

3. Johnson 1992: lv summarizes the linguistic complexity of the papyri.
4. On the socioeconomic status of the *PGM* magicians, see Frankfurter 1997, 2002, 2015; LiDonnici 1999, 2001: 90–91; Edmonds 2019: 314–77. A few notable examples of figures with reputations, historical or fictional, as educated magicians: Prince Khamwas (Lichtheim 1980: 27–38); Democritus (Kingsley 1994); Apollonius of Tyana (Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*); Apuleius' persona (?) in the *Apology*, despite the claims of the speaker that he is not a magician; Nigidius Figulus and Publius Vatinius (sources collected in Dickie 1999). Edmonds (2019: 322) makes the oft-neglected point that a number of female theurgists are known.
5. Wise 2009; Price 2018; Tatomir 2016: 685 fn. 8; see also Parkinson 2020 on the senses in ancient Egypt more broadly and Manniche 1999 and Byl 2012 on fragrance in Egypt.
6. Wise 2009: 70.

son Horus through incense. Incense was also used to cleanse temples and objects and make them fitting places for deities to inhabit.[7] Incense was both an invitation to the gods and a sign of a divine presence, as well as a medium of divine transference.

Scenting the Scene for Ritual

Many of the spells in the *PGM* involving scent aim to perfume the magician's surroundings, creating an appropriate ritual atmosphere for their practices, as in the summoning spell with which this chapter began. In these spells, clouds of scent are created primarily through the burning of aromatic ingredients, including incense, fragrant woods, perfumed lamp oil, and even lamp wicks made from scented materials.[8] Seasonal flowers or other fragrant plants are set out on altars or tables; these may also be burned as offerings.[9] Perfume oils are occasionally poured out.[10] In many spells, magicians are instructed to hold scented branches or to wear crowns or wristlets of odiferous plants, which must have wafted a more subtle fragrance to them as they went about the ritual.[11] There are occasional instructions to shake branches, encouraging the release of scent, as with the myrtle in the spell quoted above.[12] Even the tools used in a rite might emit a subtle odor, as with the juniper-wood shrine specified in *PGM* I.21.

Scenting agents are sometimes applied directly to the magician as part of the ritual preparations. *PGM* II.1–64, for instance, has the magician chew

7. Wise 2009: 75, 72.
8. Incenses: myrrh and frankincense, *PGM* II. 1–64, 64–184, *PGM* IV.1265–74, *PGM* IV.1496–1595, *PGM* IV.1275–1322; unspecified incense, *PGM* IV.214–15; "armara" incense, *PGM* IV.1294, *PGM* IV.1990; sulfur and seeds of Nile rushes, *PGM* VII.490; the Egyptian compound incense *kyphi*, *PGM* V.214–21; Cretan styrax resin, *PGM* IV.2640–41. Fragrant woods: cypress, *PGM* XIII.9; cedar and balsam *PGM* XIII.343–48; juniper *PGM* IV.2639–40. Scented lamp oil: rose oil, *PDM* xiv.150–231; rose or spikenard oil, *PGM* 1.277–84; sesame lamp oil and scented wick, *PGM* VIII.85–89; cedar oil, *PGM* XII.121–43. In most cases, examples from the papyri are selective.
9. Fresh plants: flowers, *PGM* IV.1859–67; unspecified aromatic plants *PGM* XII.17–18. Flowers burned as offerings, *PGM* IV.2231–33.
10. Pour "all kinds of perfumes except frankincense," *PGM* XII.309–10; and *PGM* I.61–64, quoted at the beginning of this section, in which rose oil is poured. In an idiosyncratic case in *PGM* II.55–56, radish oil is to be poured over a pure boy and re-collected to burn in a lamp or to pour over an altar.
11. Crowns: flowers, *PGM* III.381; laurel, *PGM* II. 64–184; marjoram, *PGM* VII.727–39; myrtle, *PGM* VII.740–55; olive and garlic, *PGM* IV.930–35. Branches held in hands: laurel, *PGM* I.262–347, *PGM* II.1–64, *PGM* II.64–184; myrtle, *PGM* I.72–73. Laurel branch held and later made into a crown: *PGM* VII.795–845. Flower wristlets, *PGM* XIII.734-1004-6, *PGM* LXII.24.
12. Apollonius' Medea uses a juniper branch in a similar way (4.156–59). See chapter 4.

frankincense gum to "incense" (προλιβανωτίσας, *PGM* II.19) the mouth and, later, chew cumin seeds. Three versions of an initiation ritual (*PGM* XIII.1–343, 343–646, and 646–734) tell the magician to wear cinnamon on a cord around their neck as an amulet, "for the deity is pleased by it and gave it power" (αὐτῷ γὰρ ἥδεται τὸ θεῖον καὶ τὴν δύναμιν παρέσχετο, *PGM* XIII.101). Others say to wear perfume or to wipe a hand with rose oil (*PGM* VIII.109).[13] Some say merely for the magician to anoint themselves in preparation, without specifying what scent to use (*PGM* Va.1–3).

The most common incense in the papyri is pure myrrh, followed by pure frankincense. Oil of roses and oil of lilies are the favored perfumes, and the most common fresh plant used in rituals is laurel. Most of the perfumes and oils found in the papyri are floral, and most incenses belong to the spicy-sweet or the pleasantly bitter and sharp range of scents. However, a wide variety of other odors are also found, and some papyri show idiosyncratic preferences. Cumin, for instance, occurs several times in the spells of *PGM* II and IV but not in any other magical papyri.

Many spells call for commercially available incense preparations, such as pure myrrh or the traditional Egyptian incense called *kyphi*.[14] *Kyphi* (Egyptian *kap-t*) is known from recipes preserved in multiple Egyptian and Greek sources, since it was important in temple ritual, and is a typical example of the compound incense blends found in the papyri.[15] It includes ten to sixteen ingredients, depending on the recipe, including cinnamon, cassia, saffron, juniper, mint, and other components, some of which can no longer be securely identified. The spices and herbs were mixed into a sticky base of honey, wine, and raisins. The *PGM* spells assume that the magician can either buy or make *kyphi* with no difficulty and so do not give recipes for it, but other spells require special incense blends that magicians would have to mix themselves. These range from the very simple and inexpensive, such as a mixture of sulfur and rush seeds (*PGM* VII.490–504), to complex blends requiring expensive spices, such as an incense called *armara* (*PGM* IV.1308–14) that included myrrh, cassia leaf, frankincense, white pepper, bdellium, asphodel seed, amomon, saffron, terebinth styrax, wormwood, vetch, hieratic *kyphi*, a black ram's brain, Mendesian wine, and honey. Another *PDM* xiv.395–427 is a typical example in which

13. Styrax perfume, *PGM* IV.1331–89 l. 1339–40, *PDM* xiv.309–34; myrrh, *PGM* CXXII.1–55; unspecified perfume, *PGM* II.64–183, XXXVI.211–30.
14. *Kyphi* recipes: Tatomir 2016: 691; LiDonnici 2001: 78–79.
15. McGovern et al. 2009: 7365; Scarborough 1984: 230–31; Ebers 1874.

frankincense, oil, ammoniac, another incense, and dates are pounded with wine and the resulting mixture is rolled into pellets for use. Other magicians, meanwhile, are less nice about their incenses; *PGM* I.286, for instance, says merely to sacrifice whatever spices are valuable. Incenses could also include ingredients that were magically significant for reasons other than their scent, such as the black ram's brain above or the magnet ground up in an incense blend for summoning a deity in *PGM* III.187–262 lines 187–89, used for the sake of its attractive powers.

The resulting incense mixtures were rolled into small balls or lozenges and dried for later use. The balls, which the recipes suggest should be about the size of beans, made a convenient portion size that could be burned on an altar or in the flame of a lamp.[16] Incense was an inherently ephemeral product, meant for consumption, but care was taken with its physical form nonetheless, and the shape could add extra ritual force to its effect. One spell for coercively summoning Selene (*PGM* IV.2622–707) gives a recipe for a bad-smelling "hostile" incense, which should be rolled into pellets and stamped with the image of Hecate and the *voces magicae* BARZOU PHERBA, perhaps to protect the user when Selene is forced to appear against her will, since the magician is also told to wear an amulet with Hecate's image as a protection.

While the papyri pay far less attention to perfume than to incenses, a few recipes for custom-made perfume blends are also found, such as a marjoram perfume (*PGM* IV.3007–86) or a compound perfume involving oil, styrax, myrrh, and a plant called "great of love," which is supposed to bring the wearer favor from those around them (*PDM* xiv.309–34). Ancient perfumes consisted simply of aromatics steeped or boiled in an oil base, and so would have been quite feasible to make at home as long as the ingredients were available.

As the recipes for specialized incenses and perfume blends suggest, getting the right scent was important. There was a concern to use an odor appropriate to the god and the occasion, in keeping with Egyptian tradition in which certain gods had their proper scents; the god was more likely to listen if they were summoned with a scent that pleased them, and might be offended or even aggressive in response to the wrong scent. *PGM* XIII.16–20 gives a table of the incenses to be offered to various gods. Myrrh is appropriate to Selene and frankincense to Helios, and the popularity of these gods in the papyri may

16. A few instructions for making incense: *PDM* xiv.395–427, *PGM* IV.2622–2707 lines 2674–83, *PGM* III.187–262 lines 187–92, *PDM* xiv. 93–114.

explain the overwhelming preference for these fragrances (or perhaps more accurately, the popularity of those gods and the popularity of those incenses naturally led to their association). The proper incenses for Kronos, Zeus, Ares, Aphrodite, and Hermes are also listed, for seven gods in total. The same spell names seven flowers that are said to correspond to seven stars, with instructions to grind and dry the flower blossoms for use as incense in an initiatory ritual. The scents prized in the papyri were loved by both Greeks and Egyptians, although the occasional scent or scent component can be identified more strongly with one culture or the other, such as laurel, which is not native to Egypt, or animal fats, which were more often used as a perfume base in Egypt than in Greece, where olive oil predominated.[17]

The dangers of using the wrong incense are made clear in some of the slander spells, procedures in which a magician attempts to make a deity enraged at another human by accusing them of having committed various affronts to the god. In *PGM* IV.2622–2707, the magician is to complain to Selene that their intended victim has burned for the goddess a "hostile incense" (ἐχθρόν τι θυμίασμα) compounded of a spotted goat's fat, blood, "uncleanness," a dog's embryo, the menses of a dead virgin, a boy's heart, barley, vinegar, salt, deer's horn, mastic, myrtle, laurel, crab claws, sage, rose, pits, onion, garlic, mouse droppings, baboon blood, and ibis egg (*PGM* IV.2643–55). Not all of the ingredients would be out of place in an ordinary incense recipe—the myrtle and rose, for instance, are classic floral incense ingredients. Others, such as the menses, are obviously unusual and intended to insult the goddess. Put together, they form a disgusting, parodic incense, which mimics the basic components of a normal blend, using binders such as blood and barley in place of the honey or raisins in other blends, vinegar instead of wine, and aromatics, but inappropriate ones.

Despite the awareness that using such a compound was grounds for a goddess's anger, the same spell goes on to provide instructions for actually making a hostile incense, minus a few of the more extreme components that the victim is accused of including in the slander-spell's imaginary incense. As is typical of the spells in the papyri, the magician is to try to persuade the goddess to help them first: on the first and second days on which the rite is attempted, they are to try a "beneficent offering" (ἐπίθυμα τὸ ἀγαθοποιόν) of incense compounded of frankincense, laurel, myrtle, fruit pits, stavesacre (a type of larkspur), cinnamon leaf, and kostos, pleasant-smelling florals and spices that make a standard-

17. On animal fats in perfume, see Byl 2012: 89–90; Lucas 1930.

enough incense blend (*PGM* IV.2675–84). If the goddess does not provide her aid, however, on the third day the magician is to try a "coercive offering" (ἐπίθυμα ἀναγκαστικόν) to force her hand. This consists of incense made of a mouse, goat's fat, "material" (*ousia*) from a dog-faced baboon, ibis egg, crab, a moon beetle, wormwood, and garlic pounded together with vinegar (*PGM* IV.2681–94). This mixture is to be rolled into balls and stamped with an iron ring on which an image of Hecate and *voces magicae* are engraved. The coercive incense omits both the pleasanter components (myrtle, laurel) of the fictitious hostile incense in the slander spell, but also the impractical requirements for a boy's heart and a dead virgin's blood, which appear to be a bridge too far for actual use. Another coercion spell involves a sacrifice of sage, a cat's heart, and horse manure (*PGM* IV.3086–3124).

Another spell from the same papyrus, *PGM* IV.2785–2890, tells the magician to use incense of styrax, myrrh, sage, and frankincense to accomplish good, while to do harm, *ousia* of a dog, spotted goat, or a dead virgin are appropriate. (This spell has no specific goal; instead the passage accompanies a hymn to Selene that is said to be useful in accomplishing anything the magician wishes.) In the latter example the point is not, at least explicitly, to compel the goddess, but to select a scent generally in keeping with the goal, a pleasant smell for a pleasant intention and a terrible smell for an evil one. In other cases, repulsive ingredients are used to make incense for spells that are not obviously coercive, and not all compulsive spells use bad-smelling incense (e.g., *PGM* XIII.1–343), so the thematic suitability of the smell was not at the forefront of every magician's mind despite the clear logic driving the choice of scent in other cases.[18]

Transcendent Encounters

The spells in which atmospheric scents feature most prominently are, by and large, part of the ritual tradition called "theurgy," which attempts to initiate an

18. *PGM* VII.478–90, for instance, calls for an offering to the Bear of dirt from the magician's sandal, resin, and the droppings of a white dove. The spell is a request to Eros to send the magician a personal assistant, and seems to be in equal parts a request to Eros and a compulsion of the daimon. The white dove is appropriate to Eros, and that association seems to be more important here than to obtain a nice smell. In the same papyrus (*PGM* VII.528–39), an invocation of Helios requires the magician to mix ordinary incense with the brain of a black ram and meal from the plant known as κατανάγκης ἄλευρα.

encounter between human and divine beings, and the fragrances with which the magicians surrounded themselves in the hopes of a divine meeting may have played an important role in mediating their experience of theurgical rituals.[19] These *sustasis* ("personal encounter") or *autopsia* ("direct vision") spells were meant to bring the magician into contact with gods and spirits for various purposes, such as to acquire the deity as a supernatural assistant, to initiate the practitioner into their mysteries, or to ask them questions. There is also an emphasis on cleansing and purifying in the spells using incense, flowers, and other aromatics, for the magician must make their home and their own body an appropriate place for a god to visit. Incense often accompanies instructions to purify the house, to use clean utensils, to bathe, to put on clean clothing, and to avoid contamination from sources of pollution such as sex or foods such as fish and pork. Johnston emphasizes that the theurgists believed in the sympathetic operation of "like attracts like"; to receive a pure, divine being, or to themselves ascend to divine realms, they had to bring their physical state as close to that of divinity as possible.[20] Fragrance, which characterizes the gods in Greek and Egyptian thought, brought human places and human bodies into an ambiguous state where the scent of incense could invite and also signify divine presence.[21]

The papyri describe to their users in reverent and sometimes fearful terms what to expect from such a face-to-face meeting with a divine entity. *PGM* I.42–195, the spell for acquiring a divine assistant with which this chapter began, tells the magician to perform a nighttime ritual on their rooftop, burning incense and pouring out perfume. A god will descend to the rooftop like a falling star; the magician should take his hand and kiss him, ask him to swear an oath of friendship, and then bring the god into their home for a meal together. If the god is asked, he will provide a banquet, make the magician's house appear to have marble walls and gold ceilings, and supply servants, food, and wine; or he can carry the magician into the sky, freeze rivers and seas, stop the sea waves, call down stars, or do anything else the magician asks. The "Mithras Liturgy" (*PGM* IV.475–829), an elaborate initiation ritual, describes the ascent of the initiate into the heavens, where he observes everything among gods and humans; he will meet a golden-haired, youthful god with lightning flashing from his eyes and stars from his body, and they will speak; the papyrus

19. The theurgical practices seen in the *PGM* reflect a larger religious and philosophical tradition. On theurgy, see Edmonds 2019: 314–77; Johnston 2019.
20. Johnston 2019: 711.
21. On the consecration of matter in theurgical contexts, see Edmonds 2019: 343–50.

warns the magician that "you will feel weak in your soul and will not be yourself, when he answers you" (ὑπέκλυτος δὲ ἔσει τῇ ψυχῇ καὶ οὐκ ἐν σεαυτῷ ἔσει, ὅταν σοι ἀποκρίνηται, *PGM* IV.475–829 lines 726–27). One of the spells that shows the greatest concern for compounding and using the correct scent is *PGM* XIII.1–343, an initiatory rite.[22] Here the initiate is separated from their previous life by a cloud of scent in which they become an intimate of the god, who reveals mysteries to them. The spells appear to be quite sincere in expecting a god or a divine messenger to manifest to the magician visibly, audibly, or even by touch. Assuming that at least some magicians had such an experience—as they report, like magicians and shamans from many cultures—scent appears to be a major precondition in the papyri for having such a transcendent encounter. Other spells offer more modest expectations of meetings in a dream, or through a divinatory medium such as a lamp flame or a bowl of water in which the god appears, while others describe hearing a god who remains invisible, or feeling a blow from an invisible force.[23]

Fragrances—especially those like incense that practitioners were already conditioned to associate with temple rituals—probably helped to set the scene and to influence the magicians to enter a receptive state of mind in which communication with the supernatural felt more likely. Many of the fragrances that the papyri call for are not merely strong, but have particular associations with gods and temple practices, which are part of the atmosphere the magician evokes by perfuming their house with *kyphi*, laurel, myrrh, or frankincense.[24] As discussed in chapter 1, scent is well known for its ability to trigger vivid memories, even ones long forgotten. The magician burns incense, and in smelling it remembers the occasions on which they have smelled the same incense elsewhere, echoing the ritual world of the community in the context of their private rite.[25] At the same time, the distracting scents of everyday life are excluded, enveloping the magician in a ritual atmosphere insulated from ordi-

22. Two more versions of this text, with variations, are given at *PGM* XIII.343–646 and XIII.646–734.
23. E.g., dream revelation, *PGM* VII.664–85; lamp divination, *PGM* I.262–347; saucer divination, *PGM* IV.154–285; god who remains invisible, *PGM* IV. 3086–3124; a blow from an invisible force, *PGM* II.59.
24. The religious context of incense is explicitly invoked in *PGM* IV.2967–3006, although that purports to be an ethnographic account of how Egyptian herbalists pick plants.
25. Turner 2015 and Barwich 2018 discuss sensing as a complex ongoing process of acculturation from biological and neurological perspectives, in which sensations, emotions, and expectations teach us what to associate with various sensations. Turner's argument focuses on ritual as an embodied method of teaching these cultural associations. See also Craffert 2017 on sensing spiritual beings as a learned process.

nary reality. We may speculate that within the aromatic cloud surrounding the ritual, a magician would feel displaced from their ordinary life, focused entirely on signs of the god's imminent presence.

Rodney Needham, in a 1967 article entitled "Percussion and Transition," asked why percussive instruments are so often found during rituals that mark category change of one sort or another, such as rites of passage or funerals. One of his suggestions is that percussive noises produce psychological and physical stress, and that this stress overrides logical reasoning with emotion and synchronizes group sentiment and reactions, putting us in a state where we accept and expect change more readily.[26] David Howes, taking Needham's work as a model, has proposed that scent has a similar function in delivering overwhelming sensations, thus inducing a state in which we are prepared for transition to occur and helping to unify the mood of participants. Studies confirm that smells, even barely perceptible ones, do profoundly affect our thought processes.[27]

In this context, Edith Turner's report of her experience during a curative ritual in Zambia is of interest as an encounter of a skeptical participant with a spirit being. An *ihamba*, a dead hunter's tooth/spirit, was being removed from the body of a woman named Meru, where it was said to be causing pain and illness. In the course of the healing ritual, both scents and percussion (among other influences) contributed to the emotional and psychological effects of the long, hot ritual on the participants, culminating in a moment in which Turner herself saw the disease-causing spirit that had been described to her by her informants.[28] The *ihamba* doctors began by collecting a variety of roots and leaves from forest plants, many of them notable for bright colors and strong lemony or fruity scents, and the roots were used to make a tea that the doctors and patient drank. Turner notes that it made her head swim and imparted a "loosening effect" similar to alcohol. The leaves were crushed and rubbed on ritual equipment, such as a cupping horn, as well as on the patient's body. Drumming and singing accompanied the ritual and were seen by participants

26. Needham 1967: 610–11.
27. Howes 1987: 401–4. Hertz 2002 gives an overview of how odors affect memory, emotion, and psychology, contending that responses to specific scents are mostly learned, not biological. Aubert 2011 summarizes some further research on the effects of scent on cognition. A few specific studies of the impact of scent on behavior and perception include Demattè, Osterbauer, and Spence 2007; Holland, Hendriks, and Aarts 2005; and Zemke and Shoemaker 2007. Craffert 2017 deals with sensation, altered states of consciousness, and religious experiences.
28. Turner et al. 1992:129–58.

as central to the procedure: one person commented that "It's so difficult to make the ihamba come out if the people don't sing." The ritual culminated in a moment at which participants, including Turner, saw the *ihamba* leave the patient's body:

> Clap, clap, clap—Mulandu was leaning forward, and all the others were on their feet—this was it. Quite an interval of struggle elapsed while I clapped like one possessed, crouching beside Bill amid a lot of urgent talk, while Singleton pressed Meru's back, guiding and leading out the tooth—Meru's face in a grin of tranced passion, her back quivering rapidly. Suddenly Meru raised her arm, stretched it in liberation, and I *saw* with my own eyes a giant thing emerging out of the flesh of her back. This thing was a large gray blob about six inches across, a deep gray opaque thing emerging as a sphere. I was amazed—delighted. I still laugh with glee at the realization of having seen it, the ihamba, and so big! We were all just one in triumph. The gray thing was actually out there, visible, and you could see Singleton's hands working and scrabbling on the back—and then the thing was there no more. Singleton had it in his pouch, pressing it in with his other hand as well.[29]

Anthropologists in recent years have become more willing to report ecstatic experiences, however they explain (or abandon attempts to explain) what happens at such moments. Much of Turner's book, *Experiencing Ritual*, is an attempt to come to terms with her encounter with the *ihamba*, and she considers the role of both the drumming and the medicinal tea in inducing something like a trance state in the ritual participants. Scent was a smaller component of her experience, though she does find the scent of the medicines noteworthy. Paul Stoller's experience during a divinatory ritual, during which he smelled the scent of perfume wafting from an unopened bottle, was mentioned briefly in chapter 1. His teacher in cowry-shell divination, a woman named Fatoumah, had told him to bring perfume (a commercially available bottle from the nearby village) to his lesson as an offering to her patron deity. The first perfume Stoller brought was rejected as the wrong scent. Fatoumah placed it inside a covered pot in her house to see if the god would accept it anyway, and Stoller relates with bafflement that he and Fatoumah, sitting outside a little later, heard the bottle shatter and returned to open the pot and find

29. Turner et al. 1992: 149.

the bottle, still inside it, in pieces. Stoller came back later with a bottle of the correct scent, which was also placed, unopened, in the pot as an offering. Stoller and Fatoumah sat outside to cast divinatory cowry shells, and a while later, both distinctly smelled the scent of the perfume on the air. Fatoumah instructed him to breathe in the perfume deeply to set the scene for his casting. Or did the ritual setting encourage Stoller to smell the perfume he had been told to expect? Stoller himself is unclear on what happened and how, but scent is central to this episode in his fieldwork. Other reports of ecstatic experiences could be cited, but the point is that overwhelming sensations from music, tastes, odors, and other stimuli tend to accompany and probably help to induce altered states of consciousness in participants.[30]

Given the variety of sensory stresses attested to in these and similar reports, why do the spells place such importance on fragrance? While sound, taste, and texture would also provide compelling topics for investigation in the magical papyri, scent is paramount. Turner and Stoller's respective experiences are illuminating here, for in the *ihamba* ritual that Turner attended, singing, clapping, and drumming were performed by the rest of the crowd in addition to the *ihamba* doctors, leaving the specialists free at times to attend to other parts of the ceremony while providing an avenue for nonspecialists to participate. When Stoller learned cowry-shell divination, on the other hand, he was alone with his teacher, and the scent of perfume that enclosed them needed no attention while they threw shells; indeed, Stoller is unclear how the scent was even released from its bottle where it had been placed inside the ritual vessel inside the house. Stoller's experience is closer to that of the magicians of the papyri, who are generally solitary practitioners, or have at most one or two assistants, such as the boys frequently used as mediums in divinatory rituals. Once perfume is released or incense burned, it requires no further attention and frees the magician's hands and mind for complex ritual actions, unlike a musical instrument or noisemaker. As Stoller demonstrates, scent can come to seem mysterious even to the person who has provided it.

The magicians of *PGM* themselves seem to be conscious of the mind-expanding qualities of the smells they manipulate. *PGM* II.1–64, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, not only calls for the magician to wear a laurel crown and to hold a laurel branch while praying, but to purify their bed and to sleep

30. Stoller 1989: 128–29. Hume and Drury 2013: 21–37 give an overview of recent anthropological approaches to ecstatic experiences. Some other accounts include Grindall 1983; Greenwood 2009; Stoller and Olkes 1987; and the essays in Young and Goulet 1994.

with a laurel branch either beside them, held in their hand, or under their head, according to the stage of the ritual. The laurel leaves have themselves been covered with magical formulae written in ink made of aromatic ingredients (on scented inks, see below). This spell, which is to be performed just before going to sleep, expects a revelation to come to the magician in dreams. Subsidiary spells enable the mage to remember the encounter, including a charm to hold in the mouth during sleep. It is reminiscent of the Umeda ginger sachets that Gell suggests help induce divinatory dreams. *PGM* VII.628–42, although very compressed, seems to expect Asklepios to appear to the magician in their sleep. The procedure involves burning incense in the bedroom, so that the magician falls asleep to the odor of frankincense, hoping for a divine visitation. The "Mithras Liturgy" (*PGM* IV.475–829 lines 478–85), which contains an elaborate account of an initiatory spell and the ascent to heaven and the vision of the gods and cosmic order that it will produce, is clear that the herbs and spices used in the rite are essential for producing the vision.

This relaxing effect of incense is noted by Plutarch, who cites Aristotle as saying that the fragrant smells of perfume, flowers, and meadows are good for the health, since they are warm and light and gently relax the brain, which is naturally cold.[31] Plutarch goes on to discuss *kyphi* and its composition and effects, commenting on its soporific and dream-inducing effects.[32] *Kyphi* gives off, he says, a sweet aroma that changes the air and makes the body ready for sleep, relaxing it and easing stress. Besides *kyphi*'s physical benefits, it "polishes" (ἀπολεαίνει) a person's faculty for dreams just as a mirror is polished. Plutarch compares the physical effects of *kyphi* to those of wine, and the mental effects to those of the lyre-playing by which Pythagoreans claimed to be able to induce sleep and remove emotional and irrational impulses from the soul. Dioscorides less positively claims that frankincense induces madness when drunk in wine by the healthy or in excess (1.68.3). Modern pharmacological studies suggest that frankincense may in fact have some psychoactive effects.[33]

Apuleius, too, describes odors and music together as mind-altering. When discussing how boys are placed in trances for divinatory rituals, he explicitly notes that sweet smells and music can help to charm and lull the soul into a receptive state (*Apol.* 43). We find just such a ritual in *PDM* xiv.1–92, in which

31. *De Is. et Os.* 79 (= *Mor.* 383D).
32. *De Is. et Os.* 80 (= *Mor.* 383F–384A).
33. Tatomir 2016: 693 discusses the relevant work. See also Luck 2006: 479–92 on psychoactive substances in Greco-Roman religious and magical contexts.

divination is performed by filling a bowl with "oasis oil" and making a boy lie down with his face over it and with a cloth covering both his head and the bowl. What oasis oil consisted of is unclear, but the procedure strongly suggests that it was scented and that the cloth is to enclose the boy with the fumes as part of the rite, during which he is placed in a trance to act as a medium.[34] (Many oils used in antiquity, such as olive or sesame oil, would have had a distinctive odor even without added perfumes, but "oasis oil" suggests a special blend like *kyphi*.) In addition to the spells in which scents are deployed elsewhere in the room, a number of rituals to induce divine encounters involve filling a lamp with scented oil or placing incense directly on its wick. This is especially common for lamp divination spells, in which the god is supposed to appear in the lamp's flame.[35] Thus scent is used in a way connected as closely as possible with the desired appearance of the god. *PDM* xiv.150–231 prescribes different oils for different goals: butter and wick of sailcloth to summon a divine assistant, rose oil for an erotic summoning spell, and so forth. Scents are deliberately deployed to induce and mediate the magician's experience of the supernatural.

Incense Inks

One last type of ritual component defies normal smell categories: the scented inks that many recipes say to use in writing magical words and symbols. The burned remains of incenses were used as the blackening agents in ink blends, an Egyptian practice also attested in magical contexts in the *Book of the Dead*.[36] As with incense, there are a few standard types of scented ink that the papyri do not feel a need to describe in detail, and also special blends for which recipes are given.[37] Myrrh ink is by far the most common, enough that while some papyri describe it more explicitly, many say merely to write "with myrrh" (ζμύρνῃ) or to "myrrh" (ζμύρνισον) a paper, and expect the reader to understand where to get or how to make such an ink.[38] One of the full recipes, for

34. Oasis oil also appears in *PDM* xiv.150–231 and xiv.750–71; see Griffith and Thompson 1974 38 n. on l.10.
35. Perfumed lamp oil: *PGM* 1.277–84, *PGM* VIII.85–89, *PGM* XII.131–33, *PGM* LXII.1. Incense burned on the lamp's flame: *PGM* II.12–14.
36. Tatomir 2016: 690.
37. Myrrh inks: *PGM* II.34–42, *PGM* III.165–86, *PGM* IV.813–19, *PGM* V.304–18, XII.121–24. Cinnabar ink: *PGM* III.15–24, *PGM* VII.822–27. Special compound inks: *PGM* VII.222–31, *PGM* VII.993–1009, *PGM* XII.96–106.
38. See Smith 1995 on incense ink and LiDonnici 2001:66–67 on myrrh ink and myrrh more generally

"Hermaic" myrrh ink, says to burn myrrh troglitis, figs, dates, pinecones, wormwood, and wings of the Hermaic ibis, add spring water, and use the resulting liquid to write (*PGM* I.232–47). As in this example, the ingredients of ink blends are quite similar to those in the recorded incense blends, except that for ink the spices are burned and the ashes mixed with liquid, rather than the fresh ingredients being compounded with binding ingredients as for incense. In *PGM* XIII.133–34 (cf. *PGM* XIII.433–35) the ink is explicitly to be made from the incense and flowers burned earlier in the ceremony, which themselves had symbolic associations with particular deities.

Whether any of these inks would retain a perceptible odor after the ingredients are burned and diluted is unclear—the idea of the scent, and the magical connotations of the ingredients, may have been more important than any actual smell remaining in it (though perfumed inks would not be historically unprecedented; and several companies today offer scented fountain pen inks). Here scent is perhaps more symbolic than actual. These inks are sometimes used to write on other odiferous things—laurel branches or crowns, for example, often have magical symbols and words written on the leaves, layering scent upon scent, at least in theory. Magicians may have been interested in the taste as well, as some spells require them to write and then lick up the spell words or to dissolve them into a liquid to be drunk.[39] In the case of *PGM* IV.781, for instance, honey is also used with myrrh and plant sap in the ink used for writing a magical name on a leaf. Fritz Graf considers spells in which texts are ingested, pointing out that it constitutes an appropriation of the sacred texts into the body of the magician.[40] Other Egyptian and Near Eastern examples of people eating sacred texts show that the contents of the book were sometimes thought to be absorbed by the bibliophage. We might think of fragrant or flavored inks as synesthetic experiences that impart scent and taste to the graphic and tactile experience of writing; similarly, frankincense or cumin used to "incense" the breath adds an olfactory dimension to the act of speaking, letting the gods smell the magician's speech as well as hear it and perfuming every significant aspect of the ritual.[41]

in the papyri.

39. Scented inks used to write on fragrant leaves: *PGM* II.28–40, *PGM* IV.779–86, *PGM* IV.2206–8, VII. 795–847, *PDM* lxi.63–78. Scented inks licked off after writing: *PGM* IV.785, *PGM* VII.524–28, *PGM* XIII.434–37.
40. Graf 1997: 111–13.
41. Culturally specific synesthetic complexes of colors, tastes, temperatures, sounds, etc., are discussed by Classen 1990, such as the Andean equation of colorfulness, softness, sweetness, and pleasant

Scents as a Vehicle for Magical Effects in Smoke, Potions, and Sacred Oils

In other contexts, fragrances are important as components of magical potions, ointments, and other preparations, rather than to perfume the magicians themselves or the atmosphere in which they work; in other words, the tangible vehicle for the magic is scented, rather than the space and time in which the magician works.

This has already been seen with the coercive incenses, which straddle the boundary between atmospheric and more instrumental uses for scent. In some spells, bad-smelling incenses seem to be selected simply as thematically appropriate scents (e.g., *PGM* IV.2785–2890, which offer a good-smelling incense to do good and a bad-smelling incense to do bad). In others, however, an incense, usually but not always a foul-smelling blend, is treated as an instrument by which a deity can be compelled to follow the magician's wishes. Thus in *PGM* IV.2622–2707 the magician is to try a pleasant incense while invoking Selene for two days, but to move on to a coercive, bad-smelling incense on the third day if the goddess does not heed them. Many of the coercive summoning and dismissal procedures used in *PDM* xiv.1–92 involve burning similar unpleasant things like ape's dung, crocodile bile, or a hyena's heart, mixed with pleasanter components such as myrrh or saffron. The scented smoke in these spells has become a magical weapon that can compel gods, spirits, or living people to obey the magician, with a foul smell being more compulsive than the usual fragrant invocations of the gods. The same belief in the instrumental power of scent is seen in several spells discussed in more detail below in which burning myrrh is addressed as a goddess and told to enter the victim's body as smoke and physically attack them.

Many of the recipes for ointments and potions in the papyri would have had strong odors, both good and bad, although here it becomes harder to find unambiguously good smells. Most of the recipes would have been pungent, at minimum. *PGM* II.64–184, for instance, a spell to meet with Apollo in a dream, has the mage rub themselves with a compound of laurel berries, cumin, nightshade, and "Hermes' finger" (lines 75–78). The mixture is applied as part of the ritual preparations, which also involve a laurel sprig and garland, a libation of

speech (727). A distant but interesting parallel for the fragrant inks and breath of the *PGM* spells is offered by the "fragrant" songs and line drawings of the Yora and Shipibo-Conibo peoples of the Amazon: Gebhart-Sayer 1985; Shepard 2004.

wine, and the burning of incense. This is a rather unusual case, as most ointments applied to the mage themselves are supposed to contain the magical effect (such as inducing invisibility or erotic attraction), rather than being merely a preparatory part of the ritual to greet the god.

Most of the ointments in the papyri sound, at least to modern American tastes, fairly vile. *PGM* I.222–31 suggests that a mixture of the fat or the eye of a nightowl, a ball of dung rolled up by a scarab, and olive oil can make someone invisible if smeared on the body. The mixture of lily oil, rose, and human eyeball in *PGM* I.247–62 is also meant to be applied to the face. Two erotic potions to be applied to a man's penis are made from weasel dung in honey and hyena dung in oil of roses.[42] As in these cases, pungent ingredients are often paired with better scents, possibly in an effort to cover the odor of animal droppings and decomposing eyeball. Perfume oils are used to preserve or to compound other, less-attractive ingredients, such as the eye of a corpse rubbed with oil of lily in *PGM* I.247–62, or a lizard drowned ("deified" in the parlance of the papyri) in the same kind of perfume (*PGM* VII.628–42). A Nile fish is drowned in rose oil in *PDM* xiv.355–65; in *PGM* VII.411–16, the heart of a hoopoe is preserved in myrrh. *PDM* xii.108–18, although the text is problematic, offers a compound of dung, hair, and something dead mixed with fresh flowers.

The bad scents in unpleasant-smelling mixtures mostly appear to be incidental, while pleasant odors are deployed deliberately. Smelly ingredients generally have other connotations that are more important than their scents, and the bad smell is probably an unfortunate side effect (as with the scarab's dung ball, associated with the sun and rebirth, or the eyeball, which has obvious symbolism in an invisibility spell); unlike in the hostile incenses, there seems to be no compelling reason why an invisibility potion should smell bad. This assumes that the less savory ingredients are even what they claim to be, since tables of correspondences in the papyri reveal the exotic names under which quite ordinary ingredients were disguised. In *PDM* xiv.1–92, the compiler of the papyrus, who is transcribing instructions, says that when the original author whose text they are copying says "egg of a scarab" and "heart of a baboon" he actually meant myrrh and oil of lilies. *PGM* XII.401–44 gives a table of thirty-seven ingredients—"crocodile dung," "Semen of Hermes," "lion's hairs," etc.—and their more mundane real identities, which include many aromatics such as dill, chamomile, garlic, and cedar. So perhaps some of the ingredients did not smell

42. *PDM* xiv.1188–89 and 1190–93.

as bad as they sound, or even have a scent at all. But the same papyrus assures us that by "blood of a hyrax" actual hyrax blood is meant, while "a lion's semen" merely means human semen, and "the blood of a Hamadryas baboon" is actually gecko blood, so it is likely that in many spells real eyeballs, insects, and drowned lizards are intended.

We cannot take it for granted, however, that smells that sound unpleasant to us would necessarily disgust the magicians, or that disgusting components, even if deployed incidentally, did not contribute meaningfully to the effect of the rituals. When the magicians consciously create a perfumed atmosphere, the pervasive fragrance can heighten the weirdness when dissonant sensations are allowed to intrude. A particularly striking case involves a taste, rather than a scent. In *PGM* I.1–42 the magician is told to combine milk and honey and then drown a falcon in the mixture. They should then drink the remaining milk and honey before dawn, and then "there will be something divine in your heart" (καὶ ἔσται τι ἔνθεον ἐν τῇ σῇ καρδίᾳ, *PGM* 1.1–42 l. 20). Graf (1997a: 113–14) usefully discusses the symbolic resonances and repercussions of this procedure: the passage of the animal's spirit into the milk and thence into the magician, the alienation from society that the murder of the sacred bird produces and the subsequent meeting with divinity. But on a more visceral level, what is it like to drink sweetened milk in which a bird has been drowned? Does it taste muskily of the falcon's feathers, of dust, of the panicked bird's excrement? Modern readers with whom I have raised the question of birdy milk are invariably disgusted at the idea; and yet, the magician will feel "something divine" in their heart. Simple answers are that perhaps the milk does not actually take on a flavor of bird, or that an ancient person would be less repelled by it than a more fastidious modern person. More intriguing answers are that in the context of the ritual—a nighttime rite in which the bird is drowned, mummified in frankincense and wine, and ensconced in a juniper-wood shrine, *voces magicae* are recited and written in myrrh ink, and a prayer spoken before a god appears to dine with the magician—emotion and sense perception are so altered that a taste that would normally disgust does not, either because the overwhelmed senses do not register it as disgusting or because the symbolic connotations and emotional pressure of the ritual combine to make it instead appealing. Lastly, it may be that the sheer oddity of bird-flavored milk and any reaction it produces—disgust, novelty, anticipation?—actively contribute to the experience of the ritual. The transcendent feeling which the magician is told to expect may be heightened by the weirdness of drinking such a mixture, which emphasizes to

the tongue and nose that the magician is for the moment divorced from ordinary human norms. A meal at which the magician dines face to face with the god and tastes ordinary human food again concludes the ritual.

Incenses, perfume oils, and other fragrant mediums are applied to objects such as rings and amulets to purify them or to imbue them with power, transferring to them their magical odor and effects. A lead curse tablet in *PGM* VII.429–58 is "consecrated" (τελέσας) with myrrh, bdellium, styrax, aloes, thyme, "harsh aromatics" (ἀρώμασιν φαιοῖς), and river mud before being deposited. These are rubbed on or, more likely, used to incense it. In *PGM* VII.740–55 a strip of foil is crowned with myrtle, carried around frankincense smoke, and put under a mage's pillow. A laurel branch is written on with cinnabar ink, incensed with frankincense, and worn around the mage's head while sleeping (*PGM* VII.795–847); a lead tablet to be worn as an amulet is covered with magical writing and fumigated with incense (*PGM* VII.925–39). Dough figures are shaped, incensed, and then eaten (*PGM* XIII.32–37). *PGM* V.213–303 has the magician burn myrrh and *kyphi* and scatter olive twigs during a ceremony in which a scarab ring is lowered into a vessel of oil of lilies, myrrh, or cinnamon. The ring remains in the oil for three days, at the end of which the magician performs another ritual to remove it. They then put the ring on, anoint themselves with the oil in which it has soaked, and say a prayer to Helios. Another ring is soaked in oil of lilies in which a lizard has been drowned, and when removed, is smoked in incense (*PGM* VII.628–42). The consecration of a ring in incense smoke is also the centerpiece of an elaborate ritual in *PGM* XII.201–69. Even scented herbs could be fumigated or perfumed. A spell that claims to record a Egyptian rootcutting ritual (*PGM* IV.2967–3006) says that the person cutting the herb purifies themselves, sprinkles natron around the plant, and "washes" the herb (ἐγὼ νίζω σε ῥητίνῃ, *PGM* IV.2996) by carrying burning pine resin in a circle around it three times, before they make a prayer and pull the plant out of the ground.

Similar practices are noted by Susan Rasmussen in Tuareg culture, where jewelry and religious amulets are rubbed with perfume.[43] The Tuareg wear perfumes on their own to protect against illness and spirits, but by layering them on amulets, the aromas are thought to provide a pathway by which the religious power of the jewelry enters the wearer's body. Rasmussen notes that people thus combine and intensify protective measures, in a useful reminder that

43. Rasmussen 1999: 60.

when looking at the magicians of the *PGM*, we should probably understand there to be a constellation of overlapping practices and rationales in which a ring soaked in perfume may derive power from the metal out of which it is made, the image and magical words engraved on it, the connection to a deity invoked by those linguistic/symbolic components, the perfume oil in which it is soaked, the symbolic connotations of the ingredients of which that is made, the lizard previously drowned in it and its symbolic connections, the prayer said to a god during its ritual placement and removal, the incense in which it is smoked and the symbolic connotations of the incense's ingredients, etc. Different magicians probably located the rationale for the spell in different combinations of these elements and their symbolic ramifications, while paying less attention to others, and scholars of ancient magic should not put too much faith in any one of these as the "true" way in which a spell was thought to operate, so much as we should see an array of symbolic options among which magicians locate significance in their own practice. Rasmussen's discussion of perfumed amulets offers a further caution for us in that for the Tuareg, the amulets themselves are not considered inodorate, as an American might classify them; rather, the metal jewelry itself has an odor that the Tuareg consider beautiful. In the magical papyri, how many objects such as metal rings would have had an objectively present scent that we pass over, thanks to our cultural training in which scents to notice and ignore; and how many scents in the papyri did the ancient magicians consider far less significant than we might?

Divine Odors

The smell of the gods is rarely described in the papyri, which is perhaps surprising, given the emphasis on the ambrosial and incense smell of deities in both Egyptian and Greek literature. Apollo's ambrosial lips are mentioned in a hymn (*PGM* II.84–7) to the laurel, which also says that Apollo tasted this plant, perhaps modeling magical behavior for the reader; this spell does not have the magician lick off the magical symbols written on their laurel branch's leaves, but another spell does (*PGM* XIII. 1042–54). A variant hymn in *PGM* VI.1–47 adds that Apollo wreathed himself with laurel (VI.6–9), as we see magicians do repeatedly in the papyri. One spell (*PGM* VII.779) refers to a "coercive emanation" (ἀναγκαστικὴ ἀπόρροια) as a sign of Selene; on the parallel of *PGM* IV.2622–2707's "coercive offering" we might guess that this is a dreadful scent. Other than these few examples, divine odors are ignored.

Instead, a number of spells address hymns and prayers *to* scents, much as the glyphs called *charakteres* began as magical symbols but came to be addressed as gods in their own right. The hymnic addresses to the laurel at *PGM* II.82–141 and VI.1–47 have already been mentioned. The prophetic plant is addressed as a prelude to invoking Apollo himself, and the god's use of the plant—in these hymns, Apollo is said to taste, crown himself with, and perhaps shake laurel branches—offers a paradigm for the ritual actions that magicians are told to carry out in the spells.[44] In a third hymn, *PGM* III.235–56, laurel is addressed along with the myrrh tree. In the laurel hymns, the plant's association with music—both Apollo's songs and the rustling of its own leaves—is more prominent than its scent. *PGM* III.252 exhorts the laurel, as Daphne, to shake her branches, providing another mythological paradigm for the magician's ritual behavior. (Instructions for the practitioner to shake their laurel bough are not found in this spell text, which is almost entirely taken up by the hymns, but is explicit in others.)[45]

In a similar case, another hymnic address in *PGM* CXXII.1–55 speaks to both the myrrh and to Isis, who is said to have perfumed herself with myrrh before an erotic encounter with her brother. The myrrh is remined of that moment, and the magician is told to perfume their own face as part of their spell of erotic attraction. Addresses to myrrh as a sentient entity are more common than addresses to laurel, and magicians speak directly to the incense and make requests of it as if it were a deity. A love spell gives the following invocation to be spoken while burning myrrh over coals:

> σὺ εἶ ἡ Ζμύρνα, ἡ πικρά, ἡ χαλεπή, ἡ καταλλάσσουσα τοὺς μαχομένους, ἡ φρύγουσακαὶ ἀναγκάζουσα φιλεῖν τοὺς μὴ προσποιουμένους τὸν Ἔρωτα. πάντες σε λέγουσιν Ζμύρναν, ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω σε σαρκοφάγον καὶ φλογικὴν τῆς καρδίας. οὐ πέμπω σε μακρὰν εἰς τὴν Ἀραβίαν, οὐ πέμπω σε εἰς Βαβυλῶνα, ἀλλὰ πέμπω σε πρὸς τὴν δεῖνα τῆς δεῖνα, ἵνα μοι διακονήσῃς πρὸς αὐτήν, ἵνα μοι ἄξῃς αὐτήν. (*PGM* IV.1496–1595 lines 1498–1510)
>
> You are Myrrh, the pungent, the difficult, the one who reconciles quarrelling people, who burns and forces those who ignore Eros to love. Everyone calls you Myrrh, but I call you Flesheater and Scorcher of the Heart. I am not sending

44. At *PGM* VI.1–47 lines 9 and 15, both the scepter/branch that Apollo shakes and the magician's laurel branch are conjectural, but based on clear parallels.

45. Shaking laurel branches: e.g., *PGM* V.172–212, *PGM* V.447–58. Cf. also *PGM* I.42–195 lines 61–73, with which this chapter began, in which a myrtle branch is shaken.

> you to distant Arabia, I am not sending you to Babylon, but I am sending you to her, NN, daughter of NN, so that you may serve me regarding her, so you may attract her to me.

The sympathetic logic of using the burning myrrh to incite burning passion is clear (and is stated more explicitly later in the spell: "As I burn you up and you are potent, inflame her brain, NN, whom I love; inflame her and turn her guts inside out"; ὡς ἐγώ σε κατακάω καὶ δυνατὴ εἶ, οὕτω ἧς φιλῶ, τῆς δεῖνα, κατάκαυσον τὸν ἐγκέφαλον, ἔκκαυσον καὶ ἔκστρεψον αὐτῆς τὰ σπλάγχνα; IV.1540–45). The invocation parallels the invocations to gods and daimones in other erotic and binding magic. Another spell (*PGM* XXXVI.333–60 l. 335) calls upon Myrrh "who serves at the side of the gods" (Ζμύρνα, ἡ παρὰ θεοῖς διακονοῦσα). Both of these examples comment on how the myrrh is to enter the target: the first tells it not to enter through the woman's eyes or side or nails or navel or frame, but through her "soul" (διὰ τῆς ψυχῆς, *PGM* IV.1526), while the second, conversely, says to open her side and enter like thunder, lightning, and burning flame. Interestingly, the spell that prescribes physical entry into the woman's body focuses on inducing physical weakness in the target (she should become pale, weak, and incapable of action), while the spell that prescribes a more metaphysical entry through the soul focuses on the desired psychological effects. Another hymn addressed to a plant is a generic template that the Greek author claims Egyptians use when picking any herb, and can be adapted to any species, presiding god, and intended use (*PGM* IV.2967–3006). It describes both the plant's qualifications as a magic herb ("You were sown by Kronos, you were conceived by Hera . . ."; ἐσπάρης ὑπὸ τοῦ Κρόνου, συνελήμφθης ὑπὸ τῆς Ἥρας) and the magician's performance of the appropriate rites for picking it ("I am Hermes. I am acquiring you with Good Fortune and Good Daimon at a propitious hour and on a propitious day . . ."; ἐγώ εἰμι Ἑρμῆς. λαμβάνω σε σὺν Ἀγαθῇ Τύχῃ καὶ Ἀγαθῷ Δαίμονι καὶ ἐν καλῇ ὥρᾳ καὶ ἐν καλῇ ἡμέρᾳ). As part of the ritual that precedes the gathering of the plant, it is to be "cleansed" (νίζω, *PGM* IV.2996) with pine resin, which is carried around it thrice, as if the plant is a cult statue being purified with incense. A Demotic lamp divination spell (*PDM* xiv.150–231) addresses several spell objects as conscious agents: the lamp and (separately) the lamp wick, the box of myrrh the magician holds, and a number of gods; and it includes a demand that "O perfume of SALABAHO NASIRA HAKE, arise!"[46] Two spell fragments address the plant mustard,

46. Translation by Janet H. Johnson in Betz et al. 1992.

which otherwise gets very little attention in the papyri.[47] Lastly, an address to a lamp filled with cedar oil adjures the fire to "dissolve into your own nature and mingle with the air, and go to her, NN . . ." (ἀναλύθητι εἰς τὴν σεαυτοῦ φύσιν καὶ μίγητι τῷ ἀέρι καὶ γενοῦ πρὸς τὴν δεῖνα; *PGM* LXII.1–24). Possibly also related is a fragmentary spell that says to write the words "onion," "rue," and "frankincense" on a tin plate, as if merely invoking the idea of the scents is sufficient (*PGM* CXXIIIa–f), possibly a usage similar to the Greek exclamation σκόρδο ᾽στὰ μάτια σου, "garlic in your eyes," to ward off the evil eye.[48]

Magical Synesthesia

One complexity of charting scent in the *PGM* is that scent may exist as a *concept* in rituals even when it may or may not have existed (and it is sometimes very hard to judge this) in actuality. When a ring was soaked in perfume, did enough scent cling to the object later to be perceptible, as in the parallel of Tuareg perfumed amulets, or was it thoroughly cleaned before wearing? Did myrrh ink smell of myrrh by the time the incense had been burned and its ashes diluted with water? These aspects of the ritual process were clearly important to the magicians, and the fact of having been soaked in perfume or written with myrrh imbues the jewelry or the written words with power. The scent lingers in the practitioner's mind, at least.

Scents were also made from or transformed into other sensory experiences. The process of making incense could be a matter of transforming concepts or words into smells, as in the incense balls stamped with an iron ring with Hecate's image and the words BARZOU PHERBA; these take the image, and the concept, of Hecate and her protection and translate them into a scent powerful enough to protect the user from Selene's anger when she is summoned (*PGM* IV.2622–707). An incense made from a pulverized magnet along with dried fruit, honey, and date oil reifies the concept of attraction as odiferous smoke (*PGM* III.187–262 lines 187–89).

In the other direction, ritual scents can be captured and transformed into visual, auditory, tactile, and gustatory sensations, to which the memory and the ritual importance of the scent lends importance. Incense inks, made from the burnt remains of a scenting agent such as myrrh, are used to transform the

47. *PGM* CXXVIa.1–21 and b.1–17; mustard is mentioned in the table of magic names for plants in *PGM* XII.401–44, and possibly in *PDM* xiv.805–40. See Griffith and Thompson 1974: 158 n. to l.10.
48. Lawson 1910: 14.

sacred fragrance into the visual representation of sacred words. In the same way, the frankincense gum or the cumin (*PGM* II.1–64) chewed by a magician to "incense" their mouth infuses their breath and their spoken invocations with the smell, translating a scent into an aural experience. For that matter, one spell suggests that a scented ink will aid in aural perception: a spell for a dream revelation says to compound an ink out of myrrh, cinquefoil, wormwood, laurel, cumin, and nightshade and to put some of it into the user's ear before they utter an invocation and go to sleep (*PGM* II.1–64.34–40). As with many dream-revelation spells, the concern seems to be to perceive and remember the dream encounter with a god vividly.

PGM XIII.1–343 is a lengthy and complex initiation ritual that demonstrates the synesthetic permutations of scent.[49] The magician must prepare for the initiation well in advance. Twenty-one days before, the initiate is to take seven flowers (marjoram, white lily, lotus, *erephyllinon*, narcissus, *leukoinon*, and rose), which are equated with seven planets/gods. The flowers are ground to make incense and then left to dry until the day of the ceremony. The flowers' own individual scents—and they are species known for fragrance—thus take on astrological and religious significance, and are combined into a scent which can be controlled and released at the right time. On the day of initiation, the magician sets up an earthen altar on which fragrant cypress wood is burned, imbuing the focus of their practice with the tree's resinous smell. They fill lamps with high-quality oil and set out sacrificial offerings of pinecones[50] and white roosters, and burn the "secret incenses" of the seven gods: styrax for Kronos, malabathron for Zeus, kostos for Ares, frankincense for Helios, spikenard for Aphrodite, cassia for Hermes, and myrrh for Selene. They make three dough figures with animal heads, incense them (with which incense is unclear), and eat them. The incense has been turned into smoke, then captured on the figures, and then eaten, with the smell becoming at once a taste, a texture, and a visual symbol. Having taken the incense into their body via the dough figures, the magician then recites a spell, and the spellbook assures them that "you will have been made their initiate" (ἔσῃ <τε>τελεσμένος αὐτοῖς; l. 37). The ashes remaining from the spices and flowers burned as incense are saved and later used to make an ink, with which the magician is to write a spell on a slab of natron. They then lick the words off one side of the plaque, and wash them off the other side with wine, which they drink, consuming the magical words writ-

49. Variant versions of this ritual follow in the same collection, at *PGM* XIII.343–646 and 646–734.
50. On pinecones in the *PGM*, which may have also been burned for their fragrance, see LiDonnici 2001: 79–83.

ten with the remains of the magical scent.[51] After they consume the wine, they utter a spell, returning the scents, flavors, and written words back to the auditory realm. The incense is composed of literal scents (of flowers and spices) and imbued with astrological and divine symbolism, and arguably a sense of time (the magically significant twenty-one days it is dried). It is transformed into ashes and smoke, then food and drink, and thence into the magician's body and breath, and into written and spoken words. It is ultimately a flavor, texture, sound, and sight as well as a scent. It also is the point at which several overlapping systems of meaning interlock—divine symbolism, the symbolic connotations of different spices, and astrological symbolism. The *idea* of incense and its scent remained, whether the literal scent did or not.

Conclusion

Smell in the magical papyri is about control: of the environment in which the magicians work; of the gods, whom they hope to please or control via scent; of other people, in the erotic spells; of themselves and their experience of ritual. Scent remains under the control of the magician, who is not surprised by it; gods' arrivals are largely not signaled by otherworldly perfumes, as they can be by noises or blows. Working with fragrances forms a substantial component of many rituals, from compounding incenses to perfuming the ritual space to retrieving the remains of scent, such as the ash of incense, to store for later use. The example with which I began this chapter shows a ritual in which the magician must constantly renew and change the odor of their environment. The ethnographic parallels suggest that the curation of scent in the magician's space could, along with other stimuli, powerfully affect the magician's own perceptions of reality. It is probably not a coincidence that the spells meant to induce encounters with gods, whether face to face, through objects, or in dreams, are the rituals in which scent is deployed most liberally. The visions of the gods and their messengers that the papyri report have not, perhaps, been taken seriously enough by classicists as sincere reports of experiences, rather than metaphors, hopes, or deliberate exaggerations.

This chapter has been mostly concerned with how scent contributes to magician's rituals, but on a last, rather impressionistic note, we might consider how scent transcends the boundaries of the ritual itself in space and time. Many

51. On magical words dissolved in water, see Frankfurter 2019b.

of the incenses, perfumes, spices, and other scent agents (as well as other ritual components) must have required some time and trouble to obtain, such as the water from a shipwreck called for in *PGM* V.54–69, the blood of a crow and a dove in *PGM* VII.218–21, or the mysterious oasis oil of *PDM* xiv.1–92. Buying incense, finding a Circean falcon, choosing seasonal flowers for a rite, obtaining a corpse's eye: the magician had to put effort into preparing. Other rituals require significant preparation in advance, such as those that ask the magician to compound incense, ink, or perfume from a particular recipe for ritual use. As the magician carried their lily oil and myrrh home and stored them away for later, did occasional whiffs of fragrance remind them, with pleasure or nervousness, of their coming meeting with a god in dreams? Did pounding a mouse together with goat's fat, *ousia* from a baboon, an egg, a crab, a beetle, wormwood, garlic, and vinegar for a coercive incense excite the magician, increase their determination, or spend their anger prematurely; did the pungent smell on their hands after rolling and stamping it into balls remind them of their purpose? After the ritual with which this chapter began, did the scent of myrrh and frankincense, rose perfume, and the smoke of heliotrope cling to the magician, reminding them for days to come of their meeting with the goddess, extending the transcendence of the encounter back into their ordinary life, leaving them feeling changed? For that matter, would the scents of rose perfume or myrtle, met unexpectedly, remind them of that night for years to come? Does the smell of perfume and incense emanating from a magician's house or wafting from them as they walk through town advertise to their neighbors that they have been engaged in mysteries?[52]

While the practitioners are deeply concerned with the literal smells that they must obtain and deploy—many of them, it would appear, at substantial expense—scent also becomes an idea detached from its literal, experienceable odor, so that fragrant flowers can be made into incense and the incense into ink in a process that becomes less about the scent of the flower than the memory of the scent of the flower. The idea that scent can be directed outward instead of inward to become a weapon of, for example, erotic attraction, brings us to the next chapter and to Medea's hostile herbs.

52. Susan Rasmussen's comments on scent and its abilities to cross the conventional boundaries of dwellings in a Tuareg settlement are instructive, as are Classen, Howes, and Synnott's discussion of perfumes, hospitality, and the reaction of others to clinging scents in the United Arab Emirates. Rasmussen 1999; Classen, Howes, and Synnott 1994: 128–29.

CHAPTER 4

Perfumed Enchantments

The Smell of Witches' Magic

In this and the following chapter, we turn from the practices of real doctors, herbalists, and magicians to stereotypes of magic users in the imaginary literature of antiquity, where magicians use scent in very different ways from real Greco-Egyptian practitioners. The poetry and novels of antiquity tell us less about scent's real uses in ritual than about its metaphorical uses and how both scent and magic were conceptualized. Above all, these chapters discuss how magical odors encode ideas about gender, sex, pollution, and danger in ancient literature, where a reversal of genders highlights the often stark disparity between literary portraits of magicians and ancient reality: the magicians of the *PGM* seem to have been predominantly male, while magicians in literature from Homer's Circe on are mostly female. In a cultural context in which both magic and perfume can make women monstrously other, the conceptualization of magic as a scent made odors a useful proxy for talking about the dangers of femininity.

Scent's importance in the ancient witch portraits manifests in two importantly different ways: witches are strongly scented themselves, and they wield odiferous spells, tropes that are linked but should not be conflated. Some witches smell alluringly of perfume, while others smell like rot, grave dirt, and garlic. Their spells, too, may be sweetly fragrant or dangerously pungent, and they deploy odors aggressively to subdue monsters or enchant victims. While the *PGM* texts suggest that real magicians would have often been redolent of perfumes and spices, the smell of their bodies is only occasionally a point of interest in the spellbooks, and is only discussed in terms of adding fragrance, not in terms of stench; in contrast, the rancid smell of witches' bodies becomes

important in poetic depictions. And while a few *PGM* spells show scent being used as an aggressive weapon, it is unusual there, while odors become a major weapon of witches.

While the literary witch portraits draw some inspiration from real figures such as *rhizotomoi* and the scents associated with them, they are fundamentally about stereotypes and the social construction of femininity, not ethnographic reality, although images of real professionals sometimes contribute, especially in the early Greek witch portraits. Witches are exaggerations of ordinary stereotypes of women, and the emphasis on the smell of magic in portrayals of witches derives from broader male discourse over female smells, particularly discussion of women's perfumes and body odors. When the magic of witches is fragrant, it is depicted as something that turns the head, overcoming normal vigilance and sense, in much the way that perfumes were expected to addle a man's mind, making him foolishly receptive to a woman's will against his better judgment. Perfume and magic are both confusing and alluring forces in ancient thought, making a fragrant witch the logical extension of the small, seductive wiles that ordinary women were thought to deploy.

Witches themselves are stereotyped as smelling either strongly good or strongly bad, in keeping with their broader portrayal as young and seductive or old and ugly. Greek witches predominantly smell fragrant, and Roman witches predominantly stink. The perfumed bodies of Greek witches and the rancid bodies of Roman witches are, like the fragrant smells of their magic, exaggerations of their status as desirable or undesirable sex objects and of the smells stereotypically associated with different types of women.

Scent is fundamentally at issue with witches in a way that it is not with male magicians, who are typically inodorate as far as our texts are concerned. Male magicians' bodies are neutral, while those of witches smell strongly good or bad; men's magic smells like whatever its ingredients smell like, while women's magic smells like perfume, or, less often, like aggressively pungent things like garlic. And the smells of witches—their perfumed, head-turning magic, the good smells of good witches and the bad smells of repulsive ones—are inherently constructed through a male lens according to how the witches affect the male characters around them.

Chapter 4 deals with Greek witches, who are most often depicted as young, beautiful, and pleasant-smelling, if also powerful and dangerous. Early Greek witches are based on *rhizotomoi*, and like *rhizotomoi*, use magical herbs with dangerously strong scents. Later Greek witches, however, use potions, herbs,

and other magic that smells confusingly, enchantingly sweet, a trope developed by Apollonius in his depiction of Medea. Chapter 5 moves to Roman witches, whose complex literary antecedents lend them a more monstrous odor. In Roman literature, established characters like Medea tend to remain young and attractive, as they are in the Greek models that Roman authors followed; new native Roman characters, however, such as Horace's witch Canidia, had a much greater tendency to be described as old, sexually unappealing, and bad-smelling. Ancient witches reflect the literary tradition far more than they do the daily reality of magic in the ancient world, and a diachronic discussion of the development of the witch trope in literature helps to clarify why scent means something quite different for witches in Sophocles than for those in Apuleius.

Rootcutting Witches

Rhizotomoi ("rootcutters")—professionals, including women, who gathered plants for medicinal and other uses—influenced the development of witch tropes, particularly the early Greek tradition, and offer the most direct impingement of reality on witch stereotypes. As seen in chapter 2, *rhizotomoi* observed ritual precautions when gathering plants, many of which were considered dangerous, and often dangerously odorous in particular. The spells of witches are sometimes described in the same herbal, pungent terms as the herbs of the *rhizotomoi*—medicinal, sometimes harmful scents, rather than the seductive perfumes that would predominate in later depictions of witches and their magic. This ethnographic component of witch stereotypes, in which witches are essentially female rootcutters who gain more than ordinary power from their herbs, underlies our earliest portraits of Circe and Medea. Men who worked as herb-gatherers do not acquire the same mystique, and the concern that the scents of dangerous plants might be unleashed instead of contained by those with expertise was reserved for portraits of female magic users.

Circe, the first great witch of Greek poetry, is associated with herbs in the *Odyssey*, but not explicitly with their smell. Odysseus' use of *moly*, frequently identified as either garlic or *Peganum harmala* by later Greeks, is the relevant scent, at least in later Greek readings of their encounter.[1] Homer himself does not attribute an odor to either *moly* or to Circe's herbs. However, Circe is called

1. On Homer's Circe episode, see chapter 2.

polupharmakos, "knowing many herbs/drugs" (*Od*. 10.276), and it is *pharmaka* that she puts in Odysseus' and his companions' drinks to turn them into pigs.[2] The insistence on Circe's skill with herbal magical drugs (*pharmaka*) demonstrates the antiquity of the Greek portrayal of witches as frightening exaggerations of female herbalists.[3] Odysseus protects himself with *moly*, another *pharmakon*, one that, like the *pharmaka* of later *rhizotomoi*, is hard to gather, and Circe returns his companions to their human forms by means of a third *pharmakon*.[4] Circe fits the picture of the *rhizotomos*, although the word is not explicitly used of her, as does Hermes, who provides Odysseus with the difficult *moly*.

Circe is also an attractive demigoddess, whose hair and voice are described as lovely (*Od*. 10.220–21), and whom Odysseus is quite willing to go to bed with once she has sworn not to harm him (10.345–47). Hermes has warned him to make Circe swear an oath not to "unman" (ἀνήνορα, *Od*. 10.301) him before he consents to have sex with her, and it is strongly implied that if Odysseus does not take this precaution, she can in some way bespell him, as she has already tried to do with her potion and spells. Greek witches in general tend to follow this stereotype: attractive, alluring, and young, or at least not elderly; as will be seen with Apollonius' Medea, they may be fragrant as part of their sexual charms. Roman witches, on the other hand, would become the opposite: old, physically and morally repulsive, and often malodorous.

While the Circe episode provides no direct evidence for the enmeshment of odors and magic in early Greek thought, Circe's depiction as a gatherer and user of *pharmaka*, and the use of *pharmaka* by other characters within the *Odyssey*, shows the degree to which rootcutting was considered a dangerous and supernatural business, a skill to be suspicious of, especially in a woman's hands. Circe's expertise in gathering and preparing drugs is not described beyond her epithet *polupharmakos*, and the fact that her *pharmaka* have always worked until Odysseus' arrival (*Od*. 10.325–28); there are none of the elaborate scenes of cutting and preparing plants that later poets linger over. But the offhandedness with which Circe deploys her herbal charms is itself frightening in the context of the poem and suggests an audience very familiar with the trade and powers of the *rhizotomos*.

2. *Od*. 10.213, 236, 317, 326–27, 394.
3. *Pharmakon* (pl. *pharmaka*) can mean an herb or an herbal concoction, whether good or bad, including medicinal cures, magic potions, poisons, and eventually, by extension, spells, whether those are herbally based, incantations, etc.
4. *Moly* as a *pharmakon*: *Od*. 10.287–306; Circe's restorative *pharmaka*, *Od*. 10.392. On *moly*, see chapter 2.

The most immediate point of comparison is Hermes' interception of Odysseus to give him the *moly* that Odysseus will apparently not be able to find or gather for himself, since it is hard for mortals to dig up but not for gods (*Od.* 10.302–6). Circe, like Hermes, is divine, and there are other indications in the poem that *pharmaka* are best left to the gods. Besides his use of *moly* as defense against Circe, Odysseus is connected with *pharmaka* in another incident: Athena, disguised as Mentes, tells Telemachos that Odysseus once sought out *pharmaka* from her supposed father Anchialos. Odysseus wanted the drugs to poison the tips of his arrows, and had first gone to Ephyra to ask Ilos, son of Mermerus, to give him some; Ilos refused out of fear of the gods, but Anchialos gave some to Odysseus out of fondness (*Od.* 1.252–66). This odd bit of backstory suggests several things about *pharmaka* in the world of the *Odyssey*: they are difficult to obtain; the gods have reservations about humans using them; and they are dangerous, probably supernaturally so, since the pious Ilos is the great-grandson of Medea.[5] The possibility of deadly *pharmaka* from Ephyra is raised again by Penelope's suitors, who wonder if Telemachos has gone there to get *pharmaka* to put in their wine to kill them (*Od.* 2.329–30). The only other successful use of *pharmaka* in the *Odyssey* is Helen's addition of *pharmaka* to the wine in Sparta during Telemachos' visit there. She puts an Egyptian herb, νηπενθές, "sorrow-banisher," into the drinks being mixed when the company is grieving at the memory of lost friends (*Od.* 4.219–32). Despite the cheerful use to which she puts it, the drug is alarmingly overpowering, preventing someone who drinks it from feeling sorrow even if their family members die in front of them. Helen is not a witch per se, but like Circe she is a dangerous woman with access to powerful herbs, and the mind-altering qualities of her *pharmaka* are similar to the enchantments later witches cast over men's minds with perfumed drugs.

In contrast to Circe, the scent of magical herbs is at the center of the earliest surviving depictions of Medea, and it is on Medea that this chapter mostly focuses. Medea's mastery of magical herbs is a constant in depictions of her and forms the basis of her magic; their scent is frequently alluded to as a danger or an advantage. Archaic evidence for Medea is highly fragmentary, although what survives already shows a well-developed narrative of her alliance with Jason, the preserved details of which are broadly in agreement with later, fuller

5. According to Eustathius *Od.* 270.

versions of the story.[6] In early sources Medea is already Jason's wife and helper throughout his trials and wanderings, the mother of two children who die, usually at her hands, and a powerful witch.[7] Artistic depictions and literary fragments show her performing familiar deeds such as taming the serpent guarding the Golden Fleece and rejuvenating elderly people, including her husband and father-in-law. When her methods are described, her magic is usually based in her knowledge of herbs and drugs. However, until the fifth century we lack an extended literary depiction of her comparable to Circe's appearance in the *Odyssey*, when she seems to have been a popular figure. Portrayals of Medea proliferate on Athenian pots in the late sixth and early fifth centuries, when Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, in addition to many lost authors, dedicated plays to aspects of her myth.[8]

The fragments of Sophocles' tragedy *Rhizotomoi* provide the earliest known portrayal of Medea in which the scent of her herbs is mentioned.[9] The *Rhizotomoi* of the title were presumably a chorus of women, most likely assistants to Medea, though since most of the play has been lost the plot remains unknown. The fifth-century-CE Roman scholar Macrobius, who quotes a few lines of the *Rhizotomoi*, says that Sophocles' Medea harvests herbs while averting her face so that their odor will not kill her and drains their juices into collection vessels while covering her eyes with her hand.[10] There are chests full of roots, which Medea cut with bronze sickles while naked and uttering wailing cries. The image of the naked, howling witch is certainly sensationalizing, but the idea of herbs potent enough to harm the gatherer is familiar from descriptions of other *rhizotomoi* in antiquity.

Sophocles' rendition of Medea, scanty though our knowledge of it is, demonstrates the influence of *rhizotomoi* on the evolving literary figure of the witch in the fifth century.[11] Sophocles makes it clear that Medea is a *rhizotomos*, accompanied by other *rhizotomoi*, and the dangerous scents in which she traf-

6. See Ogden 2008: 30–32 for a discussion of pre-Euripidean versions of Medea, including artistic evidence; and Colavito 2014 passim for versions of the Jason story.
7. See Graf 1997b; Griffiths 2006; and Ogden 2008: 27–35 for overviews of the history of Medea's story.
8. Aeschylus, *Trophoi*; Sophocles, *Rhizotomoi*, *Colchides*, and possibly *Skythai* and *Aegeus*; Euripides, *Medea*, *Peliades*, and possibly *Aegeus*.
9. The date of the *Rhizotomoi*, as with most of Sophocles' plays, is unknown and could plausibly fall anywhere within the period of his career, 468–406 BCE.
10. *Sat.* 5.19.9–11.
11. The same play is an early witness to Hecate's transformation from a minor beneficent goddess into the patroness of witches around this time: the scholia on Apollonius' *Argonautica* 3.1214 give us a further fragment of the *Rhizotomoi*, in which the chorus invokes Hecate, described as a goddess of crossroads, crowned with oak and snakes.

fics are those of her herbs. Depictions of male magicians tended to remain closer to historical reality over time, and while those of witches sometimes, as here, drew heavily on observable reality, the stereotypes of female *rhizotomoi* acquired a thicker veneer of the fantastic than their male equivalents when they were transported into the supernatural realm, even when purporting to be anthropologically descriptive.

The *Rhizotomoi* is usually believed to depict Medea's promised rejuvenation of Jason's uncle Pelias, in which she promises to make him young again through the power of her herbs, demonstrating the process by slaughtering an old ram and boiling it in a pot with her drugs; a young lamb leaps out of the pot at the end. Pelias' daughters are convinced to kill their father so Medea can rejuvenate him in the same way, but Medea then withholds the crucial ingredients that would have revived him. However, Medea was known for successfully restoring to youth a number of other characters, including her husband Jason, his father Aeson, and the old nurses of Dionysus. These fulfilled rejuvenations are more common topics in archaic and earlier classical portrayals of Medea than the aborted rejuvenation of Pelias—Aeschylus' lost *Trophoi* (*The Nurses of Dionysus*), for example, treated Medea's charitable fulfillment of the god's request; Simonides dealt with Medea's rejuvenation of Jason, as do a number of vase paintings; and fragments of the *Nostoi* mention her rejuvenating Aeson.[12] Whether the *Rhizotomoi* ultimately ends with a murder or a celebration affects how we read the tone of the surviving fragments. Given the uncertainties over the plot, it is unclear how ominous Sophocles' Medea is supposed to be.

Macrobius calls Medea's herbs "evil" (*maleficas*), but it is uncertain whether they are *maleficas* for Macrobius because they are definitely cast as evil by Sophocles, or because Macrobius, in late antiquity, is comfortable categorizing all witches and their herbs as *maleficas* in a way they had not been a millennium earlier. For Sophocles, Medea's actions as a *rhizotomos* may signal expertise of a sort valued by doctors and other professionals who relied on the services of *rhizotomoi* for supplies. This is definitely a portrait of a witch, but herbal expertise and the dangerous odor of the plants are not inherently marked as malicious at this period of Greek literature; the activity of cutting roots and the accompanying precautions about herbs are well paralleled in more anthropological descriptions of *rhizotomoi* at work in antiquity, while also acquiring a

12. The date of Aeschylus' *Trophoi* is unknown, and it is unclear whether it was a tragedy or a satyr play. Simon. F548 *PMG*. For pots, see Ogden 2008: 31–32.

veneer of witchy attributes (bronze implements, nakedness, caskets of herbs). It is also Macrobius' commentary that tells us that Medea is trying to protect herself from the dangerous *scent* of the herbs by averting her face. Some have suggested that Macrobius may be reading into the scene detail that Sophocles did not intend.[13] Given that rootcutters taking precautions against dangerous odors are attested in other classical Greek sources, I am inclined to trust Macrobius on this point, but the larger concern that Macrobius is editorializing is perhaps warranted, coming as he does after a long tradition of horrific descriptions of herb-witches, particularly in Latin literature; the default witch is more likely to be evil for Macrobius than for Sophocles.

Pindar also offers us a *rhizotomic* Medea, who "gave [Jason] remedies [*antitoma*] for cruel pain compounded in oil, for anointing himself" (σὺν δ' ἐλαίῳ φαρμακώσαισ' / ἀντίτομα στερεᾶν ὀδυνᾶν / δῶκε χρίεσθαι), this being the ointment that made him invulnerable during her father's dangerous trials.[14] Her "remedies in oil," while vague, sound not unlike the cures described by doctors such as Galen, who describes cooking aromatic ingredients like wormwood, spikenard, apple blossoms, and aromatic resins in oil with which to anoint his patients.[15] Cooking or steeping aromatics in oil was also how perfumes were made, and Galen's spikenard in oil is functionally indistinguishable from a basic ancient perfume oil. The *antitoma* that Medea compounds in oil are literally "things cut against" (i.e., as a remedy against something). Pindar and Sophocles' Medeas both date to the fifth century BC, an era in which Gordon proposes that the *rhizotomoi* were placing new emphasis on their gathering rituals and medico-magical expertise with plants. This stress on herbalism and drug compounding in depictions of magic users (as opposed to Circe, who uses drugs but is not shown actually preparing them) seems to be a popular reflection of the trends in the medical tradition of the fifth century.

As depictions of Medea evolved, the scents important to her portrayal retained the connection to herb craft, but were also increasingly abstracted into alluringly good scents more akin to perfume than to pungent herbal smells. Sophocles' Medea had to be wary of her own plants; later Medeas came to be unaffected by the scents they wield, but able to target others with them with increasing precision.

13. E.g. Dickie 2001: 94.
14. *Pyth.* 4.221–22.
15. Galen *Method of Medicine* 11.16 (= 789–91 Kühn); see chapter 2.

The Perfumed Spells of Apollonius' Medea

The fullest portrayal of Medea in Greek literature is that in Apollonius' *Argonautica*. Scent and magic intertwine at several key moments of the epic, and Apollonius pays a great deal of attention to smells throughout. His Medea is both interestingly scented herself and an aggressive wielder of magical drugs that work through smell. In two episodes, she uses scent to accomplish her goals: her acquisition of the Golden Fleece with Jason, and their murder of her brother Apsyrtos. In addition, Medea's scents are a reflection of her status as an object of erotic desire, with her magical herbs becoming identical with her scent as a young and beautiful maiden. On the other side of the coin are the Harpies, who befoul Phrixus' meals with their putrid scents until the Argonauts chase them off.

Medea does not appear until the second half of the *Argonautica*, when the Argonauts arrive in Colchis and Hera first suggests to Athena that Medea might be useful to them in their efforts to aid Jason on his quest. The goddesses agree to ask Aphrodite to make Medea fall in love with Jason so that she may help him face her father's trials and win the Fleece. In Apollonius' version of the story, Medea is the daughter of the Colchian king Aietes and niece to Circe, and thus the granddaughter of the sun god Helios. She also serves as a priestess of Hecate. Medea's kinship with Circe and her own skill with magic drugs is on display immediately, since when Hera first proposes to Athena that Medea be made to provide Jason with her aid, she refers to Medea only as κούρην Αἰήτεω πολυφάρμακον, "Aietes' drug-wise (*polupharmakos*) daughter" (3.27). The epithet *polupharmakos* is used of Circe in the *Odyssey* (10.276), and here it both hints at and elides Medea's character.[16] That Medea is a witch is immediately obvious to anyone familiar with the Homeric Circe,[17] and *polupharmakos* makes it clear, if the epic form did not, that this will be a witch in the epic tradition and not, despite Apollonius' occasional Hellenistic tendency toward ethnographic aetiology, a historicizing account such as that of his contemporary Dionysus Schytobrachion, a historian who wrote an *Argonautica* from which he removed all supernatural elements.

Despite sharing Circe's ability with herbs, Medea differs notably from her aunt, whose portrait in Apollonius broadly accords with Homer's. Circe has

16. On this passage, see discussion in Clare 2002: 242–44; Campbell 1994 *ad* 3.28–29; Belloni 1981.
17. Though Medea herself also receives similar epithets; cf. Pindar *Pyth*. 4.233, in which she is παμφάρμακος.

rejected other human company, leaving her brother's palace to take up a solitary residence on Aiaia, surrounded by the misshapen forms of her male visitors, whom she transforms into animals with her herbs. Homer made her a creature of unprovoked hostility toward men, who must be overmastered by Odysseus, but once he has avoided both Circe's transformations and the hinted-at dangers of her bed, she becomes friendly and acquiescent.[18] Hera's Circean description of Medea as *polupharmakos* is ominous, and suggests that Jason will have to both protect himself from her and exert considerable charm or force to win her aid. The basic problem is, in fact, correctly signaled—Medea is not inherently friendly to Jason—but it is Hera and Athena who overcome the problem, enlisting Aphrodite's and Eros' help to enchant Medea into falling in love with Jason, her father's enemy. In other versions of the story, too, Jason requires an explicitly erotic magical intervention to win over Medea. Pindar's Aphrodite gives Jason a *iunx*, the spinning wheel used in erotic spells (*Pyth*. 4). Apollonius' Jason, however, is unaware that he has benefited from divine intervention, and is not on hand to hear Hera's warning echo of Homer.[19]

Although Medea will ultimately be Jason's downfall, her introduction to Jason in Colchis avoids the earlier allusive threat of *polupharmakos* while still making it clear that she is powerful and dangerous. The first discussion of Medea by humans is at 3.477–78, when Medea's nephew Argos describes her to Jason as a girl who uses drug magic that she learned from Hecate (φαρμάσσειν Ἑκάτης Περσηίδος ἐννεσίῃσιν, 3.478). Jason in turn describes her to the crew as "a girl . . . to whom the exalted goddess Hecate gave clever knowledge of all the drugs that the land or broad sea bring forth" (κούρη . . . τὴν Ἑκάτη περίαλλα θεὰ δάε τεχνήσασθαι / φάρμαχ' ὅσ' ἤπειρός τε φύει καὶ νήχυτον ὕδωρ; 3.528–30). While Medea is still clearly a master of herbal drugs and is associated with the alarming goddess Hecate, the Circean overtones of earlier are muted. Jason has already encountered Medea in Aietes' palace, in a scene in which she is largely overlooked in the midst of her sister Chalkiope's reunion with her sons and Jason's initial confrontation with Aietes over the Fleece. When she steps onto the scene in 3.248, it is as a girl who, until overpowered with love for Jason, has remained within the boundaries of her family, her duties as priestess, and normative behavior for a high-born young woman, albeit one whose role as priestess of Hecate gives her magical expertise and adds some alarming fore-

18. *Od*.10.325–571.

19. Does Hera know that her first, Circean-tinged description of Medea is a more accurate guide to Medea's ultimate role in this story? A perceptive reader certainly will.

shadowing to her demure behavior. The reader knows that Medea stands at the beginning of a trajectory toward revenge and murder, but from Jason's perspective, he is initially introduced only to a reticent girl, the aunt of several of his crew members. While the fragmentary pre-Euripidean tradition emphasizes Medea's power and her dangerous nature as a witch, Apollonius reframes her as a girl in a love story. His portrayal of her as a conflicted maiden broadly agrees with the events of earlier surviving versions but differs greatly in tone, emphasis being placed on Medea's emotional dilemma between, on one hand, loyalty to her family and care for her own reputation, and on the other hand, love and anxiety for the heroic stranger.[20]

The reorientation of the narrative toward emotion and erotic desire in *Argonautica* 3 is reflected in Medea's toilette, as she is repeatedly described as fragrant. Fragrance is typical of virginal girls in Greek poetry, emphasizing their youth and attractiveness.[21] Medea's breast-band (μίτρη) is twice called *thuodes* (θυώδης), smelling like a *thuos*, a sacrifice (3.867, 3.1013), and the breasts around which it is wound are called ambrosial (ἀμβρόσιος, 3.867). As part of her dressing routine, Medea also freshens herself with a perfume described as like nectar (νεκταρέῃ, 3.831). Ambrosia and nectar proper belonged to the gods and were typically thought of as sweet-smelling; a nectar-like perfume is particularly appropriate for a demigoddess like Medea, who is descended from Helios through her father.[22] That the breast-band, and by extension Medea, smell like sacrifice offers more complex possibilities.

The *thuodes* breast-band is appropriate to Medea's character, as a spicy smell of sacrificial incense is both alluring and a reminder of her divine ancestry and her role as Hecate's priestess. The abodes of the gods were frequently described as *thuodes*, smelling of incense and aromatics, particularly as burned in sacrificial contexts (in contrast to the savory smell of burning animal sacrifice, which is κνίση).[23] *Thuodes* could be used of a number of different specific odors, but usually indicates scents within the sweet-spicy-pungent range typical of incense, the original *thuos* being the *thuon*, the thyine tree, whose wood is aromatic. In Homer, *thuos* and its compounds are still used particularly of fragrant

20. Medea's portrayal in the *Argonautica* has been extensively discussed; see Clauss and Johnston 1997; Spaeth 2014. The many echoes of Nausicaa, in particular, highlight Medea's youth and uncertainty; see Hunter 1989 passim, but especially *ad* 3.4–5, 616–32, 869–86, 876–86, and 1069.
21. Lilja 1972a: 58–96; see esp. 74 for this passage.
22. On ambrosia and nectar, see Lilja 1972a: 19–25.
23. Lilja 1972a: 25–27.

woods such as cedar.[24] Apollo's sanctuary has already been described in the Argonautica as *thuodes* in a passage in which Jason, leaving his home for the voyage, is compared to the god leaving his temple (1.307–8). Medea's breast-band might initially suggest her service in the temple, where she spends the majority of her days before the arrival of the Argo (3.250–52).[25]

However, Medea herself is a demigoddess, and her sacrificial aura is suggestive of her ancestry as well. The house of her father Aietes, the son of Helios, contains a fountain said to flow with perfume, *thuodes* oil (3.224, the only occurrence of *thuodes* in the poem that does not refer to either Jason or Medea). Jason, while he is compared to a god emerging from his fragrant temple, does not himself have a distinct scent. Medea's dangerous fragrance and the incense-scented but perilous palace where she lives can be read as other warning signs, which Jason fails to heed, that Medea will not be as easily dealt with as he expects. Jason, as he does frequently, comes close to the divine without fully apprehending it. Outside of Aietes' palace Colchis is more dubiously fragrant. The first thing Jason and his companions encounter is the plain of Circe, where corpses hang from the treetops according to the burial customs of the Colchians (3.200–209); the smell is not commented on, but the sepulchral atmosphere heightens the sense of Aietes' palace, and Medea in particular, as fragrant and civilized aberrations in a barbaric land.

The description of Medea's breast-band as *thuodes* acquires additional significance as the place where she secrets an unguent that she plans to give to Jason. She has determined to aid him despite the demands of loyalty to her family, and she takes a substance derived from a magical herb from her stores and hides it from her companions in her breast-band before going to meet Jason, as if by accident, outside of her father's halls at the temple of Hecate. The band is twice described as *thuodes*, when she hides the potion and takes it out again, and it should probably be assumed that the breast-band is *thuodes* because the ointment itself is *thuodes*.

Apollonius does not explicitly comment on the scent of the ointment itself, a surprising omission in light of both the tradition that magical drugs are pungent and the detailed description he provides of the plant from which it is made. Despite the beneficent use to which it will be put in making Jason invulnerable, Medea's herbal charm is described in gruesome and frightening terms. The

24. Lilja 1972a: 33.
25. Lilja 1972a: 34–44 on the smells of sacrifice, both burned animal offerings and incense.

drug is called "the Promethean charm," since the plant from which it is made grew from the blood of the Titan Prometheus; the flower resembles saffron, its sap is black, its root has the texture of raw flesh, and an unearthly scream is heard from underground as it is severed (3.844–66). Medea has gathered the sap after worshipping Hecate in nocturnal rites. The description of this ritual recalls aspects of both Sophocles' Medea collecting sap in bronze jars and Homer's description of *moly*, and Apollonius' version of Medea clearly arises from the *rhizotomos* witch tradition. We might expect a pungent, dangerous scent like the one from which Sophocles' Medea averts her face, or the garlic and stinking rue with which *moly* was identified.[26] In Apollonius, however, the Promethean herb's scent is only hinted at obliquely by Medea's breast-band smelling of aromatics. If we accept that the scent of the band and the ointment are connected, then Apollonius implies that the herb is pleasanter-smelling than we might expect from previous traditions about witches, which is appropriate to a version of Medea that draws heavily on the tradition of love poetry, and also that Medea herself is perfumed by her fragrant and yet ominous magical drugs. This merging of the elegiac with the chthonic is typical of Apollonius' version of the character.

Besides her breast-band, Medea's chambers are also *thuodes*. Bedchambers and storerooms, as well as things stored there such as bedclothes and garments, are frequently described as good-smelling in Greek poetry. A variety of other words meaning "fragrant" (e.g. εὐώδης, κηώδης, κηώεις) are often used, but *thuodes* is not unparalleled; the room of Demophoon's mother Metaneira, Penelope's stored clothes, and Helen's bedroom are all *thuodes*.[27] Lilja points out that goods such as clothing were stored, if possible, in chests of fragrant woods such as cedar to protect against moths and other vermin, and further sweet-smelling things might be added to perfume the contents. Aristophanes, for example, mentions quinces placed in clothes chests for the sweet smell (*Vesp*. 1056). Lilja also suggests that storerooms may have been fumigated with incense for similar reasons. Fragrant woods seem to have been burned in houses purely

26. There may have been a version of the story in which Medea's ointment for Jason did smell pungent, as an epigram of Lucilius (*Anth. Graec*. 11.239) refers to both Aietes' bulls and to the equally fire-breathing Chimaera as malodorous. In this case a pungent ointment, besides making Jason invulnerable to wounds, would protect him from being overcome by the scent of the bulls, much as Theophrastus' hellebore-gatherers chew garlic and drink wine to prevent the dangerous smell of the plants from harming them (*HP* 9.8.6).

27. Metaneira's room: *Hom. Hymn Dem*. 224, 288; Penelope's clothes: *Od*. 10.52; Helen's bedroom: *Od*. 4.121.

for their enjoyable scent, something particularly mentioned in scenes with erotic overtones, such as Calypso's cedar-wood fire in her cave.[28] Medea's bedroom, then, is part of an extensive tradition in which women's spaces were typified as fragrant, reflecting real practices of storage, incensing, and fumigation. However, as with her breast-band, in the *Argonautica* the specific *thuodes* scent of Medea's rooms seems to be attributable to her *pharmaka*, which she stores in chests in her chambers. When debating whether to help Jason or to commit suicide, Medea takes a cask of her drugs of all sorts, helpful and deadly, onto her knees and opens it (3.802–12). Later, having chosen her course, Medea opens it again and takes out the Promethean drug (3.843–45). The scene echoes those in which other women fetch more harmless objects from scented chests, while implying that Medea's herb craft is responsible for the specific fragrance of her person and her belongings, marrying erotic and epic images of fragrant women and women's spaces with the discourse on witchcraft.[29]

Medea's personal scent, which is also the scent of her magical drugs, is in the forefront throughout Book 3. It is not until Book 4 of the *Argonautica* that we see her put her *pharmaka* to use. When she does it is their odor, only hinted at in the case of the Promethean herb, that makes them effective. At the beginning of Book 4, Jason has completed Aietes' task thanks to Medea's ointment, and Medea, aware that her father must guess that she helped the strangers, decides to flee with the Argonauts. Abandoning the more covert and passive role she played until that point, she takes her drugs and, with the help of incantations, flees the palace alone. Unlike in her earlier trip to Hecate's temple with her handmaidens, when she maintained the facade of duty to meet Jason secretly, Medea is now alone and without pretense.

Medea first works scent magic during her acquisition of the Golden Fleece with Jason. When they approach the dragon who guards the grove where the Fleece hangs, Medea uses four different means to overcome it: first she forces it down with her gaze, then calls upon Sleep and Hecate for help, then chants spells, and finally drizzles drugs into its eyes. It is the drugs, and specifically their odor, that finally put it to sleep:

ἡ δέ μιν ἀρκεύθοιο νέον τετμηότι θαλλῷ,
βάπτουσ' ἐκ κυκεῶνος, ἀκήρατα φάρμακ' ἀοιδαῖς

28. *Od.* 5.59; Lilja 1972a: 47–49.
29. Fantuzzi 2008 considers the thematic connection between love and magic in the *Argonautica* more broadly.

ῥαῖνε κατ᾽ ὀφθαλμῶν, περί τ᾽ ἀμφί τε νήριτος ὀδμή
φαρμάκου ὕπνον ἔβαλλε· (4.156–59)

But she, dipping a freshly cut branch of juniper in her potion and chanting spells [*aoidai*], sprinkled her potent drugs in its [the dragon's] eyes, and the overpowering smell of the drugs enveloped it in sleep.

Medea's gaze, her patron deities, and her incantations are all important at other points of the poem, but here Apollonius makes it clear that the scent of the potion is the decisive factor in subduing the serpent.[30]

This use of scent as a weapon would become common in literary portraits of witches, but as seen in chapter 3, was unusual in the magical papyri, where scent is more often used to set the scene for ritual. However, a few *PGM* spells do show an awareness of more aggressive magical uses for odors. In two spells of attraction, myrrh is used to attack women, in whom the burning incense is supposed to induce burning feelings of desire. *PGM* IV.1496–1595, speaking to Myrrh as a goddess, requests that "As I burn you up and you are potent, inflame her brain, NN, whom I love; inflame her and turn her guts inside out" (ὡς ἐγώ σε κατακάω καὶ δυνατὴ εἶ, οὕτω ἧς φιλῶ, τῆς δεῖνα, κατάκαυσον τὸν ἐγκέφαλον, ἔκκαυσον καὶ ἔκστρεψον αὐτῆς τὰ σπλάγχνα; ll. 1540–45). Sympathetic magic formulae ("as x is, let y be") are common in the papyri and *defixiones*, but here the myrrh is envisioned as directly, physically attacking the target: the magician is "sending" it to his target (πέμπω σε πρὸς τὴν δεῖνα), where it is to enter her, not "through her eyes or through her ribs or through her fingernails or even through her navel or through her limbs, but rather through her soul" (μὴ εἰσέλθῃς αὐτῆς διὰ τῶν ὀμμάτων, μὴ διὰ τῶν πλευρῶν, μὴ διὰ τῶν ὀνύχων μηδὲ διὰ τοῦ ὀμφαλοῦ μηδὲ διὰ τῶν μελῶν, ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς ψυχῆς; ll. 1523–26); and it is to "remain in her heart and burn her guts, her breast, her liver, her breath, her bones, her marrow" (ἔμμεινον αὐτῆς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ καὶ καῦσον αὐτῆς τὰ σπλάγχνα, τὸ στῆθος, τὸ ἧπαρ, τὸ πνεῦμα, τὰ ὀστᾶ, τοὺς μυελούς; ll. 1527–30). A similar attraction spell (*PGM* XXXVI.333–60) asks myrrh that is burned in a bathhouse fire to "go into every place and seek her out, NN, and open her right side and enter like thunder, like lightning, like a burning flame" (ὕπαγε εἰς πάν<τα> τόπον καὶ ἐκζήτησον τὴν δεῖνα καὶ ἄνοιγον αὐτῆς τὴν δεξιὰν πλευρὰν καὶ εἴσελθε ὡς βροντή, ὡς

30. Medea's eyes and her destruction of Talos, 4.1661–72; her use of incantations, 4.42. Hecate's patronage of Medea is important throughout Books 3 and 4.

ἀστραπή, ὡς φλὼξ καομένη; ll. 354–56). These spells envision the incense, once burned, as leaving them and going to find their target; the second one is probably to be performed at a bathhouse to get close to the woman when she is particularly physically vulnerable, to enable the incense to do its work. Elsewhere, "coercive" incense is used to force the cooperation of various gods if they have not been responsive to normal incense and requests for aid.[31] These unusual examples of aggressive scents in the papyri use language that emphasizes penetration, pain, and coercion; it may not be accidental that they mostly, though not exclusively, target women and goddesses.[32] Poetic witches, on the other hand, seem to reflect men's fears of women's wiles more than male fantasies of dominance. Witches' scented spells, like Medea's enchantment of the serpent, are usually alluring and seductive rather than searing or repulsive, and they usually target men, monsters, and gods rather than other women.

The crucial role of the drugs and their scent makes the scene more ominous, since Medea, while using several magical strategies, is predominantly a *rhizotomos* witch here, strengthening the echo of earlier versions of the story in which she is nakedly powerful and in which her herbs are her defining characteristic as a witch. Hera's description of her as *polupharmakos* is fulfilled. The *aoidai*, magical incantations, on the other hand, seem to be more incidental to her success. They are interesting nevertheless, as magical song has in the *Argonautica* so far been the responsibility of Orpheus, who was a major character in Books 1–2 and whose songs played an important role there. Orpheus, as a musician, can charm rocks, trees, wild animals, and people, but is never associated with a *rhizotomos*'s herbs, as Medea is an herb user but is not, as far as we can tell, portrayed as a user of incantations in the earlier tradition. With the arrival of the Argo in Colchis, Orpheus takes a secondary role, and Medea partially supplants him in the second half of the epic as a solver of difficulties that need a more-than-human solution.[33] Her use of incantations here and at 4.42, where she uses *aoidai* to unlock the door bolts of her father's palace as she flees, signal her assumption of Orpheus' place as singer of incantations on the Argo. The collision of *pharmaka* and *aoidai* at the end of line 4.156 marks Medea's merging of her traditional use of herbs with Orpheus' use of magical song in Book 4.[34]

31. E.g., *PGM* IV.2622–2707 ll. 2681–94, IV.3086–3124 ll. 3095–96. The latter example involves foul-smelling incense in a coercive spell, but may or may not be intended specifically as coercive incense.
32. *PGM* IV.3086–3124 is a coercive ritual for summoning Kronos. The magicians who used the magical papyri were probably mostly men; Frankfurter 1997; Frankfurter 2002.
33. Ager 2015.
34. Clare 2002: 231–60 is a study of Orpheus and Medea as inversions of one another in the *Argonautica*.

The exact identity of Medea's magic herbs remains unspecified; unlike the Promethean plant, we learn nothing about the provenance or properties of the *pharmaka* that put the serpent to sleep. Although the scent is overpowering, we are not told what it smells like or even whether it is overpoweringly good or overpoweringly bad. Medea's soporific drugs, however, are in keeping with ancient medical and magical practices, where the use of pleasant scents to induce sleep or dreams is found a number of times in the medical literature and the papyri. One divine summoning spell, for example, recommends burning frankincense in the bedroom in the hope of meeting a god in a dream, and Plutarch comments on *kyphi*'s soporific benefits.[35] Most likely, we are meant to envision Medea's potion as a pleasant-smelling soporific in keeping with these examples, not a repulsive odor that would energize the serpent. It is also noteworthy that Medea's herbs are here in the form of a liquid preparation that she can sprinkle or drizzle rather than the thicker unguent she gave to Jason earlier, reflecting the pharmacological reality that both medicines and perfumes came in many forms in antiquity, including powders, lotions, liquids, solids, smokes, and more. Apollonius' Medea, despite her superhuman abilities, is well grounded in day-to-day practices that Apollonius' Hellenistic audience would have been familiar with. On some vases Medea is shown holding a bowl for the serpent to lick or smell, so perhaps Apollonius is not the first to envision this mechanism for her magic.[36]

In contrast to the herbs, Medea's juniper branch is precisely described, and as a newly cut branch of a strongly fragrant species we should imagine it as contributing its specific odor to the spell. Juniper was thought to be good against snakes and their poison, but is also found several times in the magical papyri.[37] Other types of fresh branches, especially laurel, occur in the *PGM* spells as things to be held during rites, shaken, written on, and slept with, diffusing scent through their rituals. It echoes as well the wand that Medea is occasionally shown using on vases that depict this scene.[38]

Scents are a significant part of Medea's arsenal in a second scene in Book 4, in which Medea and Jason ambush and murder Medea's brother Apsyrtos. Caught by the pursuing Colchian fleet that Apsyrtos leads, Medea and Jason

Clare sees Orpheus as an embodiment of order and Medea as one of disorder.

35. *PGM* II.1–64 ll. 25–26; Plut. *De Is. et Os.*; see chapter 3.
36. Ogden 2008: 30–33; *LIMC* IV s.v. Kirke.
37. Hunter 2015 *ad* 156. In the papyri: juniper wood burned, *PGM* IV.2441–621, 2622–707; a shrine of juniper wood, *PGM* I.1–42, IV.2372–440, IV.3125–71; an amulet of juniper, *PDM* xiv.295–308.
38. Ogden 2008: 31–2; *LIMC* IV s.v. Kirke.

plot to lure him into an ambush and kill him, hoping they can escape while the rest of the fleet is leaderless and in confusion. To get Apsyrtos alone, they dispatch his messengers back to him with bait: rich gifts from Jason, and a covert request from Medea that her brother meet her alone and in secret, supposedly so that she can escape from the Argonauts and return to Colchis with him.

Among the things Jason sends to Apsyrtos—the only gift Apollonius describes, although he says vaguely that they sent many other valuable objects as well—is a purple robe that once belonged to Dionysus. Jason had earlier received this from Hypsipyle, the Lemnian queen with whom he dallied in Book 1, who had gotten it from her father Thoas, Dionysus' son.[39] The robe is said to smell ambrosial, a lingering reminder of the night when a drunken and aroused Dionysus lay on it with Ariadne. It has a heady effect on those who encounter it:

> οὔ μιν ἀφάσσων,
> οὔτε κεν εἰσορόων γλυκὺν ἵμερον ἐμπλήσειας.
> τοῦ δὲ καὶ ἀμβροσίη ὀδμὴ πέλεν ἐξέτι κείνου,
> ἐξ οὗ ἄναξ αὐτὸς Νυσήιος ἐγκατελεκτο
> ἀκροχάλιξ οἴνῳ καὶ νέκταρι καλὰ μεμαρπὼς
> στήθεα παρθενικῆς Μινωίδος . . . (4.428–33)
>
> You could never get your fill of touching it or gazing upon it, and it had an ambrosial scent, ever since the time the lord of Nysa himself stretched out on it, drunk on wine and nectar and clutching the beautiful breasts of the daughter of Minos.

We might take the alluring smell of the cloak to symbolize the distilled essence of sex, wine, and divinity, all things that alter the mind and cloud the judgment. The scent is not only overpowering, but more than mortally persistent: it has lasted for several generations, long enough for the cloak to be passed to Dionysus and Ariadne's granddaughter.[40] This hypnotizingly fragrant cloak

39. Is this the same cloak that Jason wears at 3.1204–6, which is merely described as dark, and which was given to him by Hypsipyle as a memento of their love? Perhaps. In that scene, Jason engages in necromantic rites to Hecate, which adds an ominous frisson to the scene in Book 4 if a reader recalls it. Cloaks in general are freighted objects in Apollonius; Hunter 2015 s.v. 3.423–34.

40. Cloaks are persistently associated with eroticism in Apollonius. This particular cloak, besides its Dionysiac history, was given to Jason by his former lover Hypsipyle, whom he dazzled while wearing another splendid mantle, described in an ecphrasis at 1.721–67. Jason is wearing an apparently note-

is referred to as a *dolos* (4.438), a bait or snare, for Apsyrtos, who will shortly thereafter be compared to an animal who is irresistibly drawn to a scent. Apsyrtos is Medea's much older brother, the captain of Aietes' forces, and crafty enough to have outmaneuvered Jason and the *Argo*, and yet he falls for Medea's trap. In an intriguing parallel, in a fragment of the comic playwright Strattis, Medea also sends perfume to Creon's daughter along with the poisoned robe that kills her, though the preserved lines are too short to tell whether it was intended to have a similarly hypnotic effect on the victim.[41]

Medea's ensnarement of Apsyrtos via scent is an uncomfortable instance of a longer tradition in which men and women are attracted and caught by alluring scents, especially in unwelcome sexual situations.[42] In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Persephone is picking a variety of flowers renowned for fragrance (roses, saffron, violets, iris, and hyacinth) when Zeus causes the Earth to produce a particularly fragrant narcissus as a trap for her:

> νάρκισσόν θ', ὃν φῦσε δόλον καλυκώπιδι κούρηι
> Γαῖα Διὸς βουλῆισι, χαριζομένη Πολυδέκτηι,
> θαυμαστὸν γανόωντα, σέβας τό γε πᾶσιν ἰδέσθαι
> ἀθανάτοις τε θεοῖς ἠδὲ θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποις.
> τοῦ καὶ ἀπὸ ῥίζης ἑκατὸν κάρα ἐξεπεφύκει
> κηώδης τ' ὀδμή· (*Hom. Hymn Dem*. 8–13)
>
> . . . a narcissus, which the Earth put forth as a trap (*dolos*) for the flower-faced girl by the will of Zeus, a favor to Hades. It gleamed marvelously, an amazing thing for deathless gods and for mortal men alike to see. From its root a hundred heads grew out, and the smell of incense.

Like the cloak Medea sends to Apsyrtos, the narcissus is a *dolos*. While Odysseus' *moly* had been something the gods could deal with more easily than humans, this flower amazes both mortals and immortals, and the root is par-

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worthy cloak when he meets Medea for the first time, although this time it is not described—we are only told that it is one of the things she obsesses over later (3.454), replaying it in her mind along with his looks and behavior. The irresistibility of Jason's cloak collection faintly parallels the variant tradition in which he used a *iunx*, a visually and magically mesmerizing gift from Aphrodite, to erotically attract Medea; cf. Pind. *Pyth*. 4.

41. Strattis fr. 33 Kock 1: 720.

42. Hunter highlights the uncomfortable eroticism of Medea's attraction of her brother. Hunter 2015 s.v. 444, 445–49.

ticularly cited as the origin of its incense-like fragrance. Both sight and smell occupy Persephone's attention, allowing Hades to carry her off. In the *Odyssey*, the island of the nymph Calypso, which Odysseus is mysteriously prevented from leaving despite his longing for home, is perfumed, with the scent originating from the cave in which Odysseus unwillingly lies with Calypso. She burns cedar and thyine wood, the smell of which spreads throughout the island (5.59–61), and around the cave grow many plants, including violets, celery, and cypress trees, all of which are singled out as odiferous (5.63–73). In Moschus' much later *Europa* (90–92), the bull that is Zeus in disguise lures Europa and her companions to him through his beauty and his ambrosial fragrance, which makes them yearn to come close to him.

After dispatching both the gifts and the message via the heralds (who are perhaps also rendered more biddable by their enticing package), Medea deploys one more scent to ensure that her brother, his senses confused, will be foolish enough to come to the rendezvous:

> τοῖα παραιφαμένη θελκτήρια φάρμακ᾽ ἔπασσεν
> αἰθέρι καὶ πνοιῇσι, τά κεν καὶ ἄπωθεν ἐόντα
> ἄγριον ἠλιβάτοιο κατ᾽ οὔρεος ἤγαγε θῆρα. (4.442–44)
>
> . . . after beguiling [the messengers] thus, she scattered enchanting herbs to the wind and air, drugs which could bring a distant beast of prey down from the high mountain.

Either Apsyrtos will be drawn by Medea's magical herbs *like* an animal following a scent down a mountain, or else he *is* actually drawn by the scent itself, that being, as with the soporific herbs that overcome the dragon, the means through which the *pharmaka* work. The scene resembles Aelian's much later description of leopards being drawn down from a mountain or out of a ravine or forest into a trap by the tantalizing smell of rotting meat (*NA* 13.10), which Aelian compares to the attractive force of the magical *iunx*. Other records of charms to lure animals in via magical scents are found in the ancient agronomists. The *Geoponika* (14.3) says that you can attract pigeons to join your flock in several ways: you can smear your existing pigeons with perfume, which will make wild ones follow them home; you can feed your pigeons cumin seed, which will both make them return home and attract new ones by the smell clinging to them; or you can make cakes of chaste-tree seed, wine, and vetch, which will entice

pigeons in by the smell. Fumigating the pigeon house with sage and frankincense will also make them readier to come inside. Other scents in the *Geoponika* are meant to attract vermin and predators so they can be killed. If you dig a hole and put pounded oleander leaves in it, flies will collect in that spot (13.12); it also works on fleas (13.15). You can draw wolves in to be killed by making a bonfire upwind of where they live (18.14). On this fire, burn a mixture of the fish called *blenni*, which the text notes are also called "wolves," and chopped mutton, and the smell will draw all the wolves in the area to the fire and put them to sleep, when you can kill them. Pliny (*HN* 28.149–51) similarly notes that snakes will be drawn to a fire on which stag's blood or the upper bones of a deer's neck are burned. Medea's lures work as intended: Apsyrtos comes to meet his sister, is ambushed by Jason, and is killed.

One sequel to the episode of Apsyrtos' murder may use odor obliquely to highlight the horror of Medea's deception and the pollution that clings to her and Jason. The Argonauts, depressed by the knowledge that Zeus has seen the crime and will oppose their progress until Circe cleanses them of guilt, spend a day making slow progress up the Eridanos, an eerie landscape that highlights the limbo into which their quest has fallen.[43] The region is polluted by the death of Phaethon, who had been struck out of the sky by Zeus' thunderbolt and plunged into the Eridanos, which at the time the Argonauts pass by still breathes out fumes that reek unbearably of Phaethon's burning wound. Phaethon's sisters, transformed into poplars, drip tears of amber into the water. The perpetual mourning of the Heliads for their brother highlights Medea's culpability in the murder of Apsyrtos, and the unending reek of the Eridanos is not lessened by their tears. The force of this scene is rather muted for modern readers, who are not accustomed to considering amber a perfume, but it was well known in antiquity that a lump of amber, held in the hand, would give off the piney, resinous fragrance of fossilized tree resin as it warmed.[44] Thus Martial compares the breath of a beloved slave girl to a lump of amber held in the hand (*sucinorum rapta de manu gleba*; 5.37.11) The tears of the Heliads should be fragrant, and yet do nothing to ameliorate the stench of the Eridanos. We might take this to imply that Medea's grief for her brother, if she feels any, is similarly pointless, or as a reminder of Medea's isolation from her kin by way of parallel with the Heliads, whose tears fall into the water with no one to hold them and release their

43. Hunter 2015 *ad* 619–26.

44. Lilja 1972a: 93–94 describes not only the ancient testimonia, but her own verification of this property.

fragrance. The Argonauts are nauseated and listless from the stench and unable to eat, recalling an earlier scene in which stink made eating impossible, the episode in Book 2 of the Thracian king Phineos and the Harpies.

The Harpies, horrific bird-women, appear every day to punish Phineos for his offenses against Zeus by carrying off his food or by leaving it so defiled by stench that it is inedible. The Argonauts encounter them and permanently chase them off during their voyage to Colchis (2.155–294). While Apollonius leaves it ambiguous, later authors make it explicit that it is the Harpies' excrement that creates the awful stink that leaves Phineos' food inedible.[45] As monstrous inversions of femininity, the Harpies prefigure the frightening, destructive side of Medea's perfumes and the figure of vengeance that readers, if not the characters, know she will become to Jason long after the end of the poem. Along with the Furies, the Harpies would later be incorporated into the evolving stereotype of Roman witches, who, unlike their Greek sisters, typically smelled vile, uncivilized, and dirty.

Perfume, Blood, Witches

Apollonius' Medea has been worth lingering on because her portrayal in the *Argonautica* is a critical moment at which the scent of magic in Greek witch portraits shifts from the smell of herbs to the smell of perfume. Medea's personal smell is pleasantly ambrosial in a way that is appropriate to her character as a young woman. But her personal smell is also entwined with the smell of the herbs on which her magic is based, and this smell is powerful but undescribed. While still recognizably arising from the *rhizotomos* witch tradition, Medea's Promethean charm does not have the pungent or dangerous odor that Sophocles' Medea must avoid. Instead of averting her face from its fumes, Apollonius' Medea tucks her magical plant into her clothing, where, it is hinted, it gives her breast-band the odor of sacrificial incense. This meeting of the ambrosial girl, the ambiguously pungent magical herb, and the incense-scented breast-band links Medea's magic intimately with the scent of her body. Medea's magic works in part through its odor, and it functions as if it were an alluring perfume or one of the other entrancing odors found in contexts such as the *Hymn to Demeter*: it soothes, charms, and lulls its victims into complacency, an effect that verges

45. E.g., Verg., *Aen.* 213–17. Felton 2013: 405–18 suggests that in Vergil they are instead menstruating.

on the erotic in scenes such as Medea's attraction of her brother to their fateful meeting. Following Apollonius' innovative portrayal of the enchantress, the smell of witches' magic increasingly became the sweet odor of perfume instead of the pungent botanical odor of plants, and its effects became a reification of male anxieties about the mind-altering effects of women's scents, rather than a concern about dangerously noxious herbs being misused by women.

Classical witch portraits had always evinced concern about the danger, especially sexual danger, that women represented for men. Already in Homer Circe transforms unwary men into animals, and Odysseus has to make her promise not to "unman" (ἀνήνορα, *Od*. 10.301) him before he can safely enter her bed. Ancient ideas about perfume and perfume-wearing women show a similar fear, and perfumes and their wearers were believed to be dangerously seductive, capable of entrancing men and making them act in ways in which they would otherwise not. Apollonius' innovation was to conflate the danger of witches and their odiferous herbs with the danger of women and their perfumes. Later poets, particularly the Augustans, would develop this idea much farther.

The semiotics of odor in both Greek and Roman culture made it natural to conflate perfume, dangerous women, and magic. Scents were used widely by men and women, and it was expected that both, but especially women, deployed scents deliberately to attract lovers. Thus Juvenal, in his diatribe on female beautification (6.465), describes a wife's application of perfume for her lover, and Plautus' courtesan Erotium arranges for incense before her client arrives, because elegance entices lovers (*munditia inlecebra animost amantium*; *Men*. 353–55). Plato says in the *Symposium* that Eros is attracted to sweet scents, and Meleager that Eros himself perfumes his targets, while his torch shines with perfume.[46] A fresco in the House of the Vettii at Pompeii shows Cupids actually manufacturing perfumes.

Perfumes were particularly associated with young women, often with pleasantly erotic connotations. Sappho and Alcaeus describe unguent used by young women, and Catullus describes Lesbia's perfume as a gift from Venus and Cupid. (Propertius, on the other hand, reverses this conceit: he will smell not artificial perfume on Cynthia, but the natural perfume which Amor has granted her).[47] Moderately applied fragrance seems to have been customary and gener-

46. Plin. *NH* 13.20; Pl. *Symp*. 196b; *Anth. Graec*. (12.132, 12.83). For more on the erotic connotations of scent, see Lilja 1972a: 63–88.

47. Perfumes and young women: Lilja 1972a: 63. Sapph. 94.18–20 Lobel and Page; Alc. 45.7 Lobel and Page; Catull. 13; Prop. 2.29.

ally approved of for women, and ointments and perfumes are already used in Homer by both human women and goddesses.[48] For young women, being attractive and fragrant was considered appropriate and necessary, and authors who criticize perfume use, far from suggesting that a young woman should smell bad, tend like Propertius to ascribe an inherently pleasant body odor to maidens that artificial perfumes are criticized for covering up.[49] Perfumes were approved of for men in more restricted circumstances, including symposia and explicitly erotic encounters.[50]

While perfumes were commonly used and widely available, they were also subject to moral censure as pointless luxuries. Athenaeus, for example, says that Sparta banned the manufacture of perfume entirely, on the grounds that perfume makers merely spoiled olive oil, while Solon banned the sale of perfume by men at Athens (15.686–87). Perfume-selling's categorization as a disreputable trade will be encountered again, and Athenaeus' comments point to the common ancient nostalgia for a distant, more upright past, in which people disapproved more strongly of such fripperies. Pliny, too, envisions a time before perfume:

> . . . erantque parum per se mira singula, iuvitque luxuriam omnia ea miscere et e cunctis unum odorem facere: ita reperta sunt unguenta. Quis primus invenerit non traditur. Iliacis temporibus non erant, nec ture supplicabatur: cedri tantum et citri suorum fruticum et in sacris . . . noverant. (*HN* 13.1–2)

> [The forests'] various products were not marvelous enough by themselves, and luxury delighted in mixing them to make a single odor: thus perfumes were invented. Who first discovered this idea is not recorded. In the days of the Trojan War they did not exist, and supplications were not made with incense: even in sacred matters people only knew the scent of juniper and thyine wood, trees of their own country . . .

For Pliny, perfume represents a confusion of the natural order: separate scents are mixed together, and exotic spices are imported at great expense, unlike in the distant past when people were satisfied with the simple fragrance of native aromatic trees, a critique that parallels the complaints that young

48. On perfumes, see Lilja 1972a: 58–96; Lee 2015:62–65; Faure 1987; Potter 1999.
49. Lilja 1972a 147–48.
50. Lilja 1972a: young women, 144–48; men, 61–65.

women's natural odor is being replaced with artificial smells. Pliny goes on to give a history of perfume use in which it is described as an intrusive foreign decadence: the Persians invented perfume, and wear it to cover their body odor in lieu of washing; the Greeks discovered perfume when Alexander captured Darius' camp and found a chest of perfumes amid the spoils. From there perfumes spread throughout Greece and Rome (13.3). Pliny gives an extensive account of different perfume blends, their recipes, and their origins (13.1–26) and returns to his moralizing theme:

> Haec est materia luxus e cunctis maxume supervacui; margaritae enim gemmaeque ad heredem tamen transeunt, vestes prorogant tempus, unguenta ilico expirant ac suis moriuntur horis. summa commendatio eorum ut transeunte femina odor invitet etiam aliud agentes—exceduntque quadringenos ₰ librae! tanti emitur voluptas aliena, etenim odorem qui gerit ipse non sentit. (*HN* 13.20–21)

> Perfumes are the most pointless luxury of all. Pearls and gems at least are passed down to an heir, and clothes last for some time, but perfumes immediately evaporate and perish the moment they are used. For perfumes, it is the highest compliment if a the scent of a passing woman distracts even people minding their own business—and they cost more than 400 denarii per pound! That's how much is spent for other people's pleasure, since a person wearing a scent does not smell it themselves.

Pliny's description of perfume as a pointless expense and a distraction is mirrored in other moralizing Latin sources.[51] Perfumes on women were considered particularly alluring and distracting, and some writers criticize perfumed women as recklessly luxurious and often as lustful, suggesting that they spend their husband's money on costly perfumes to attract other men. The evaluation of a woman's perfume as pleasant and erotic or wasteful and decadent often seems to come down to who gets to enjoy it. Semonides, in a famously scathing poem in which he equates different types of women with different animals, describes the horselike woman as someone who bathes two or three times each day, applies perfume, and wears flowers in her hair. The point is that,

51. E.g. Lucr. 4.1123–32; Juv. 4.108, 8.159, 8.86, 8.113, 6.297, 15.47, 6.462; Pers. 2.64; see Johnston 2016: 6–8; Wyke 1994; Edwards 1993: 68–69, 186–88.

like a horse, keeping her is an expensive luxury, something other men enjoy but ruinous for her own husband.[52] Women who apply perfume for their own husband's pleasure are often presented as scheming; two examples are when Hera perfumes herself before seducing Zeus in the *Iliad*, and the aptly named Myrrhina in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, who puts off her husband's advances by fussing about finding just the right perfume.[53]

On men as on women, perfume lends erotic attractiveness, and its use at an inappropriate occasion or time of life was criticized. Thus in Plautus' *Casina* an old man makes himself ridiculous by applying perfume and chasing after the titular slave girl, to his wife's chagrin; Anacreon and Horace also criticize perfumed old men, who should leave lovemaking to the young.[54] Thus, in ancient sources perfume tends to make women dangerous but men risible. Women apply it to seduce the unwary and cuckold their husbands. Men can wear perfume without censure in certain situation, but these contexts, such as symposia and erotic situations, are rife with potential for them to make fools of themselves anyway, and a man can embarrass himself by misjudging whether he should wear perfume in a particular situation, or at all.

This association of perfumes with eroticism, and particularly with deliberate female erotic strategies, betokens a concern that scents can induce attraction where it otherwise would not exist, and thus that men, who should be free to choose their sexual partners, are victimized by scent-wearing women, who should not have the same freedom and who subvert men's free will with the power of perfume. A similar belief in the power of scent to alter a mind is found in Apuleius' comment that the soul can be lulled and charmed into a receptive state by sweet smells or music (he is discussing placing boys in trances for divinatory purposes; *Apol.* 43), and in Athenaeus' discussion of the soothing effect of good smells on the mind and heart (15.687d–f). The perfumes of witches become an extension of this belief that scents can charm the mind.

Besides its heady qualities, scent may have been especially suspect because of its nebulous, uncontainable nature and its invasiveness. To perceive a scent is to have already inhaled it. Many ancient theories of the senses described smelling as a process of physical contact in which tiny particles are breathed in and

52. Semon. 7.57–70.

53. *Il.* 14.170–77; Ar. *Lys.* 938–46. See also *Lys.* 47, where Lysistrata lists myrrh among women's allurements along with cosmetics and attractive clothing, and *Eccl.* 523–26, where Praxagora equates perfume with sex.

54. Plaut. *Cas.* 226–40; Anac. 9 Bergk; Hor. *Epod.* 5.57–60.

fit into receptors of the same shape in the nose.[55] The magical papyri that treat scent as an aggressive weapon envision it as physically invading a target, entering a woman and inflaming her brain and her body to overcome her resistance. "Arouse yourself, Myrrh," says one erotic attraction spell, "open her right side and enter like thunder, like lightning, like a burning flame, and make her thin, [pale], weak, limp, powerless . . ." (ἔγειρε σεαυτήν, Ζμύρνα . . . ἄνοιγον αὐτῆς τὴν δεξιὰν πλευρὰν καὶ εἴσελθε ὡς βροντή, ὡς ἀστραπή, ὡς φλὼξ καομένη, καὶ ποίησον αὐτὴν λεπτήν, χ[λωρ]άν, ἀσθενήν, ἄτοναν, ἀδύναμον, *PGM* XXXVI.333–60 ll. 353–58). This physical model for scent means that smelling and being smelled raise questions of bodily integrity and the maintenance of boundaries. Applied to a woman's body, perfume reaches the nose of her purported victim and is breathed in, becoming a part of him. Women and women's bodies were broadly conceptualized as boundary-crossing and polluting, and their perfume can be read as an example of the dispersal of the female body into potentially alarming places, particularly into the bodies of citizen men, which were defined by their rejection of penetration.[56] Nor would perfume be the only woman's scent to threaten men.

Amy Richlin (1997) has pointed out the ways in which various secretions of Roman women—breast milk, saliva, sweat, and above all menstrual fluid—were considered either beneficial or polluting, or sometimes both.[57] Menstrual blood, for instance, was considered profoundly dangerous: it was said to kill men and plants, dry up seeds, dull mirrors, cause miscarriage, fade dyes, and make dogs rabid.[58] The danger went beyond contact with the blood itself; a menstruating woman's mere touch, glance, or proximity could kill plants and insects, drive bees to swarm, blacken linen, blunt razors, tarnish brass, and make horses and women miscarry.[59] Menstruating women are leaky, their danger uncontrollable. The pollution of the menstrual blood surrounds them in a miasma that affects those nearby, much as an aura of perfume does. The contaminating aura of menstruation, while frightening, could be weaponized. Menstruating women were employed to kill destructive insects by walking

55. Baltussen 2015.
56. Women as penetrated and boundary-crossing, and men as not subject to penetration without loss of status: Carson 1999; Walters 1997; Cole 2004: 33–37, 104–13. Bradley 2015b: 136 notes a different link between penetration and odor in Roman thought: "Those who allowed their orifices to be compromised and used inappropriately—particularly promiscuous women, passive homosexuals, drunkards and gluttons—could be identified by the telltale whiff of their bodies."
57. See also von Staden 1992.
58. Plin. *NH* 7.64–65 and 28.77, 80–82, 84.
59. Plin. *NH* 28.77.

around or through an infected area, sometimes while exposing themselves; similarly, a menstruating woman who exposed her genitals to a storm or wild animals could drive them away, and menstrual blood was said to cure a wide variety of diseases and to nullify other charms when smeared on a house's doorposts.[60] While Pliny's discussion does not describe this in terms of smell, but rather in terms of his theory of natural sympathies and antipathies (28.84), it would be foolish to divorce the ancient belief in menstrual contamination at a distance from the belief in the unpleasant odor of menstrual blood and vaginas.[61] Discussions of menstrual blood and menstrual/vaginal odors are infrequent in ancient sources, and the authors who do raise the topic refer to the shame that attends speaking of such things.[62] However, the occasional reference makes it clear that Romans considered vaginal effluences malodorous: Pliny refers to menstrual blood's horrible smell (*odorque dirus*) and a character in Plautus' *Menaechmi* refuses to sniff the lower part of a woman's mantle, saying that if you smell that spot, your nose will be filled with a stench you can't get out.[63] Women stink, in ancient thought, and this smell is probably often thought to emanate from their vaginas even when the source of the smell is often elided in our texts; femininity and stench are fundamentally intertwined.[64]

In the context of men's anxieties about the dangers of the female body, we should perhaps understand the liquid, oily perfumes of antiquity as almost a bodily fluid once applied to the female form. Perfume has some of menstrual blood's ambiguous nature—on the face of it, pleasurable instead of frightening, but perhaps too seductively or distractingly enjoyable; and associated particularly with women and their wet bodies, while also escaping them as a miasma

60. Insects: Columella 10.357–68, 11.3.63–64, Plin. *NH* 17.266–67, 28.77; Ael. *NA* 6.36. On this charm, see Ager 2019 and Richlin 1997. The storm charm: Plin. *NH* 28.77; *Gp*. 1.14. Diseases and charms: Plin. *NH* 28.82–86.

61. The belief in vaginal/menstrual stench is sufficiently pervasive in Western culture that it is worth reiterating that this is a culturally constructed *belief*, and not one that all cultures share. The Daasanach of East Africa, for instance, consider menstrual blood inodorate: Almagor 1987: 115. This is not to say that menstrual blood does not have an odor; but whether this is considered pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, and whether any odor ascribed to it is socially significant, is culturally determined. See also Felton 2013: 411 n. 33.

62. On the silence of our sources, see Lennon 2010. Even in genres such as Old Comedy that make frequent jokes about body odors, excrement, and similar smells, menstrual blood remained largely taboo.

63. *Men*. 167–68. Felton 2013 argues that the stench of Vergil's Harpies (*Aen*. 3.216–17) is also a reference to menstrual odor.

64. E.g., Mart. 6.93, in which Thais' exquisite stench is something revealed when she disrobes, or 9.62, in which Philaenis attempts to cover her own rotten smell with the rotten smell of murex-dyed clothing.

that men could not guard against.[65] Pliny's (13.20) discussion of the dangers of a menstruating woman's mere presence recalls his complaints about the head-turning effect of a woman wearing perfume, who similarly poses a danger or at least a distraction to men, even from a distance. The uncontainability of scent parallels the inability to fully restrain or guard against women's bodies. Magical perfumes, by combining the fear of contamination from women's bodies with alluring sensations, suggested a particularly invasive type of attack that men could not only not avoid, but might take pleasure in seeking out.[66]

Ancient discourse on witches reflects, inevitably, both persistent literary tropes and the immediate concerns of the era in which it is written. As they emerge in fifth-century-BCE Athenian literature, witches incorporate the older epic associations of figures like Circe with herbal expertise, but they are also a product of the contemporary fifth-century professionalization of medicine and accompanying ritualization of the craft of the rootcutter. As depictions of witches became a popular literary trope, the scents of the plants they wielded became conflated with the scents of perfumes, and with broader ideas about the dangers of female bodies. In the next chapter, I turn to the question of how witches' bodies, as opposed to their magic, smelled to the ancients, a matter of much more dubious and foul odors than their seductively fragrant spells. When the Augustan poets adapted Greek witch tropes, they did so with an eye to contemporary political discourse about women, danger, and luxury, reinvigorating Apollonius' Hellenistic version of Medea for a Roman audience.

65. Menstrual blood, too, could have erotic significance, as in the accusations leveled at Mamercus Scaurus that he enjoyed drinking the menstrual discharge of enslaved women. Sen. *Ben*. 4.31.3. See Lennon 2010: 74–75; Lowe 2013.

66. Stratton 2014.

CHAPTER 5

Rot and Roses

The Smell of Witches

The Roman poets adopted the trope of the dangerously sweet smell of magic from Apollonius with gusto. Greek witches were young, beautiful, seductive, and, at least in Apollonius, nice-smelling. Apollonius also made Medea's magic scented, and implied that the smell of her magic drugs was connected to the ambrosial smell of her body, making the magic seductive and attractive in the same way that Medea herself was attractive, instead of herbally pungent and repellent like earlier witches' drugs. Roman witches, as developed by the Augustans and their successors, come to use magical drugs and potions that are explicitly called perfumes, whose sweet smells seduce and entrance their victims. Their potions are also increasingly assimilated to cosmetics, which in Roman discourse on adornment had mind-altering effects not unlike witches' spells. The Roman focus on love magic in witch portraits encouraged this identification of ordinary women's self-beautifying regimes with witches' enchantments.

However, Roman witches are significantly more frightening and odiferous than Greek ones. The Augustan poets were the first classical authors to imagine witches who are both hideous and powerful, and thus quite unlike the young, seductive enchantresses of Greek tradition, such as Medea and Circe, and also unlike the women who may be associated with erotic magic and prostitution in Republican literature, who are at best minor characters who seem generally more risible than frightening. The Augustans developed witches who are old, ugly, lower-class, and dissolute women, often ex-prostitutes or procuresses. These hag-witches tend to have bad-smelling bodies, but they still use fragrant

perfumes as weapons, and the dissonance between their scents is part of the horror inherent in their portrayals. Their magic smells like makeup and perfume, seductive distractions for men, while underneath they themselves smell like disorder, corruption, pollution, societal rupture, and civil war.

Constance Classen has highlighted the olfactory triad in which fragrance/stench, prostitutes/courtesans, and witches/enchantresses have been traditionally linked in European literature.[1] Women who are sexually dangerous, alluring, and taboo-violating but not necessarily sexually available (such as high-class courtesans) tend to be ascribed odors that are pleasant, often overpoweringly so, especially "heavy," spicy, and musky scents. Similar scents are attributed to high-class witches—enchantresses, in Classen's terminology—who are often depicted as sexually dangerous and enticing in the same way as courtesans, of whom they are exaggerations. The fragrances of enchantresses are sexually irresistible or literally bewitching. We have seen aspects of this sex-magic-fragrance triad in several Greek witch portraits: Circe is first a magical danger and then a sexual danger to Odysseus, before being subdued by garlic; Medea is erotically fragrant and magically dangerous, although fitting less into the seductress type than Circe. On the other hand, lower-class prostitutes and other sexually promiscuous women as well as lower-class witches both tend to be ascribed foul smells symbolic of their social and sexual violations. Witches and prostitutes are, structurally, the same threat to society.

With Roman witches, we move into the realm of foul-smelling, lower-class prostitute-witches who threaten men with both their magic and their sexual wiles, enticing especially upper-class men to violate class boundaries and to ruin their health, fortunes, and morals, if not lose their lives. These malodorous, perfume-wielding hag-witches began to emerge in the literature of the civil war period, and were particularly the innovation of Horace, whose character Canidia will have a starring role in this discussion. The Augustan poets took a great deal more interest in the witch as a character type than earlier Roman poets had, probably in part because of their affinity for the Hellenistic poets, whose works contained several notable witch portraits, and in part because the witch offered a useful symbol of civil chaos and corruption, which took on a new interest in the wake of the civil wars.

1. Classen 1992: 142–49.

Republican Witches

The witches of Greek literature were originally exaggerations of *rhizotomoi*. Apollonius added erotic tropes to his portrayal of Medea, as did Theocritus in a portrait of contemporary Hellenistic magic to be discussed shortly. To a far greater extent than their Greek counterparts, Roman witches from the Augustan period on are artificial literary confections, in which many disparate literary stereotypes are combined. These literary antecedents include mythological monsters such as the Furies and the Harpies, stereotypes of human women such as prostitutes and seductresses, earlier Greek and Roman witches and male magicians, and shape-changers. While the development of the Augustan witch has been more fully discussed elsewhere, it is worth disentangling the constituent elements here to see what each contributes in terms of smell.[2]

Earlier Latin literature offers nothing comparable to the extended witch portraits we find in the Augustan poets. Female magic users appear only in brief and usually offhand references in Republican literature, under a variety of names, such as *veneficae* (herb/drug users), *sagae* (wise women), *praecantrices* (enchantresses, users of magical songs), and *manteis*, *hariolae*, *haruspicae*, and *coniectrices* (terms for various sorts of female fortune-tellers). *Venefica* is the closest equivalent to the Greek *pharmakis* or *pharmakeutria*, and has the same problematic range of meanings; like *pharmaka*, a *venena* in Latin can be an herb, a poison, a drug, or eventually any kind of spell. *Praecantrix* and the other terms show that early Roman witches were not limited to rootcutting and herbal magic, but were envisioned as using incantations, divining, reading entrails, and interpreting dreams. Other women probably lurk behind grammatically male terms such as *sortilegi* for groups that may have included female specialists (many of the terms above, such as *hariola*, also have male equivalents).[3] The problem is that few Republican sources give much detail about these sorts of professionals. Cicero may complain about "Marsian augurs" and Cato about Chaldeans and haruspices, but they tell us nothing beyond what the terms suggest about who these people were or what they did.[4] Nor is it always clear whether those words are being used literally to indicate actual

2. Literature on the development of Augustan witches: Ogden 2008: 39–76; Spaeth 2014; Gordon 2009; Paule 2017.
3. For an overview of the Republican evidence and terminology, see Dickie 2001: 162–68.
4. Cic. *Div*. 1.132; Cato *Agr*. 5.4.

magic users, or as figurative terms of abuse. In Plautus, for instance, male characters *use Venefica* and its compound *trivenefica* to refer to women with whom they are angry, but there is no indication that the women in question are actually magicians.[5] Plautus also uses *veneficus* as a generic insult for men with no apparent magical context.[6]

In general, though, it is very difficult to tell much about Italian magic users until the late Republic, either actual ones or literary stereotypes, because they were simply not objects of much interest in Republican literature. What is clear is that a great variety of female ritual specialists existed. In Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*, the titular soldier complains about the many women a wife would want him to give money to every month: the incantation-sayers, dream interpreters, prophetesses, entrail readers, and the woman who reads omens from eyebrows (as well as the wife's mother, a midwife, a mattress-maker, and the nurse for their young slaves).[7] Some scholars, such as Matthew Dickie, want to see a connection already in Plautus between possible "witches" such as these and prostitutes and procuresses, and thence to stereotypes of old and bibulous women.[8] This picture is not inherently unlikely—when we reach the Augustan witches, they are often elderly, drunken hags who are prostitutes or former prostitutes, and fragments of Lucilius and Turpilius suggest an identification of witches (*sagae*) with go-betweens employed in love matters.[9] However, the Republican evidence is very slight. The best we can say is that witches in Republican comedy and satire were at most minor characters, who were not impressive sorceresses; that they exist within the contemporary world rather than myth; and it is possible that they were associated with erotic matters and perhaps wine. They are certainly not the powerful sorceresses of Greek epic and tragedy. The only extended witch portrait of which anything survives from Republican literature is Ennius' tragedy *Medea Exul*, which from the surviving fragments appears to have been closer to a translation of Euripides' *Medea* than an independent work.

5. *Mostell.* 218–19; *Epid.* 221; *Aul.* 85–86.
6. *Amph.* 1041–44; *Bacch.* 812–13; *Pseud.* 868–72. *Veneficus* is also used as general abuse/accusation in other Republican sources. L'hoir 2000: 474.
7. *Mil.* 692–94. On this passage and the eyebrow-diviner, see Santangelo 2013: 150–51 and Santangelo's citations of Hoffmann 1985 and Montero 1993.
8. Dickie 2001:164–65, 178–91.
9. Lucilius 271 Marx; Turpilius, *Boethuntes* fr. 6 Ribbeck; see Dickie 2001: 131–32.

Vergil's Eclogue *8 and the Beginnings of Augustan Witch Poems*

With the witches of the Augustan poets we are on firmer ground. They are far more powerful and threatening as well as more self-consciously literary and influenced by Greek models than their tenuous Republican predecessors. If Augustan witches retain any perceptible influence from witches in Plautus, Lucilius, and Turpilius, it is that they often inhabit the contemporary world of the poets and are relatively low-class figures. They may owe these aspects to a Greek model as well: the first major witch portrait of the Augustan poets is Vergil's imitation of Theocritus' *Idyll* 2 in *Eclogue* 8, probably published in 39 BC.[10]

Besides the *Argonautica*, *Idyll* 2 is the other major portrait of a witch to survive from the Hellenistic period. In it, Theocritus describes the spell cast by a young woman, Simaetha, who has been deserted by her lover Delphis, as she performs nighttime rites and calls on Selene to help her win him back. Only two brief moments in the poem are of interest regarding scent: Simaetha burns bay leaves (23–26), and she sends her servant girl to rub flowers or herbs on Delphis' doorposts (59–61). The scent is not commented on in either case, but the use of laurel leaves in ritual is common in the papyri,[11] including in incense mixtures, and doors are a common place to deposit charms meant to affect the inhabitants of a house.[12] Throughout, Theocritus shows a detailed awareness of magical practices, and focuses far more on the details of the procedure than Apollonius had in the *Argonautica*.

Idyll 2 was influential with the Augustan poets, in whose poetry the picturesquely extended catalog of the witch's powers that Theocritus models became a popular set piece. Theocritus set the tone for the Augustans in two important ways: he relocates his witch from the distant mythological past to a contemporary Greek city, and he focuses on love magic. Although Augustan witch poems tend toward a tone of horror instead of the pathos of *Idyll* 2, they take up Theocritus' use of the contemporary world as a setting and his focus on a witch who is not a demigoddess, heroine, or aristocrat like Medea and Circe, but an ordinary girl.[13] Apollonius had refocused the narrative of the Argo around Medea's

10. The *Eclogues* actually date to the triumviral period, as do most of Horace's witch poems.
11. E.g., *PGM* V.172–212 l. 199, V.447–58, VI.1–47, 1.262–347, II.1–64, IV.2622–2707 ll. 2649, c. 2679.
12. See Ov. *Fast*. 2.573; *PGM* IV.1716–1870 ll. 1852–58, *PDM* xii.50–61, *PGM* XIII.1–343 ll. 239–42; Jerome, *Life of St. Hilarion the Hermit* 21.
13. Simaetha's exact status has been the subject of debate; see Faraone 1999: 153–54; Dickie 2001: 99–104. The cautions in Ogden 2008: 43 are salutary. She is in any case not from the highest strata of her society.

love for Jason, but despite the importance of Eros within the *Argonautica*, Medea never performs love magic. Nor does she in other versions of her myth, an oddity noted by Ogden.[14] Simaetha's preoccupation with love magic was absorbed by the Augustan poets, whose witches are above all concerned with the performance of erotic charms. Although many other powers are attributed to them, such as control over the stars or the weather, they rarely actually perform feats using such abilities.

Vergil's imitation of *Idyll* 2 is the most obvious Roman echo, although Theocritus' influence is felt strongly if less directly throughout the Augustan witch poems. In *Eclogue* 8, Vergil writes a fairly straightforward imitation of Theocritus' scene of witchcraft, embedded in the larger poem as a shepherd's song. An unnamed young woman attempts magic to bring her lover, Daphnis, home from town. Vergil has removed all but the bare suggestion of the lovers' backstory. While in Theocritus Simaetha describes in detail her affair with Delphis and his eventual abandonment of her, Vergil cuts all of the narrative sections of his model and focuses almost entirely on the description of the young woman's magic working. Following Vergil, scenes of magic rites would become a popular trope with the Roman poets.[15] Vergil's version of Simaetha gives scarcely any personal details, but hews so closely to the Theocritean model that she is best understood as, like Simaetha, an attractive young free woman from neither the highest nor the lowest levels of society. The witch of *Eclogue* 8 began a fad for witch poems, but remained herself something of an outlier at Rome.

Horace's Canidia Poems

Horace, who took up the theme of magic from Vergil, retained Vergil's treatment of the witch as contemporary, non-elite, and focused on erotic magic. His witches, however, are physically repulsive and much less sympathetic than the witch of *Idyll* 2/*Eclogue* 8. Horace's main witch character is a woman named Canidia who appears, briefly or at length, in eight of Horace's poems, sometimes accompanied by other witches.[16] She is a major character in *Satire* 1.8, in which

14. Ogden 2008: 32.
15. Vergil seems to have been preceded in this by the Neoteric poet Laevius. A fragment of Laevius (fr. 27 Courtney) preserved in Apuleius' *Apology* (30) catalogs different sorts of charms.
16. The poems in which Canidia appears are *Epod.* 3, 5, 17; *Carm.* 1.16, 1.17; *Sat.* 1.8, 2.1, 2.8. Scholarship on Canidia: Paule 2017; Freudenburg 1995; Ogden 2008: 46–51; Paulin 2008; Prince 2013; Tupet 1976: 284–329; Watson 1993; Watson 2003: 135–36, 174–250, 266–86; Mankin 1995: 108–36,

she engages in necromancy; *Epode* 5, in which she sacrifices a boy for ingredients for an erotic spell; and *Epode* 17, in which she attacks the poet himself for his poems about her. Canidia is the prototypical Roman hag-witch. She is elderly and gray-haired; her teeth are blackened, her breath smells, her nails are long and used to dig up graves; her hair and clothing are disheveled; she is sexually voracious and has an illegitimate child. Horace associates her with rot, grave dirt, blood, garlic, and poison. But she is also a master of magical perfumes, with which she attacks her victims. This picture of the witch as an elderly, frightening hag is now a familiar one in the Western tradition, but was startling and innovative in Horace's day. Vergil had taken up Theocritus' Hellenistic interest in the witch as a relatively humble figure invested with pathos as an occasion for a picturesque scene of everyday magic, but Horace creates something new and uniquely Roman. Canidia is a character quite different from the seductive and powerful enchantresses of Greek tradition, Theocritus' young and pretty but less frightening contemporary witch, or the possible lower-class, minor witches of the Republican Latin tradition. As a woman who is both grotesque and powerful and who stands outside the established order, Canidia spoke to an Augustan audience, and was much imitated by Horace's contemporaries and successors. Smells play a large part in Horace's portrayal of her.

Vergil's *Eclogues* had probably been published in 39 BC. Horace's earliest witch poem, *Satire* 1.8, is dated a few years later, to 35 BC. In it Horace takes up Vergil's challenge to make something of scenes of contemporary magic in Latin poetry, but Canidia, one of the great recurring characters of Horace's oeuvre, is not yet fully realized as the horrific character she will become in the *Epodes*. *Satire* 1.8 is narrated by a wooden statue of Priapus, the phallic god who was used as a scarecrow in gardens to frighten away birds and thieves. This Priapus stands guard over Maecenas' newly renovated public gardens on the Esquiline hill, but reminisces about a time when this area was a pauper's graveyard, and how he has often seen witches come to dig up bones. He recounts an anecdote about a night when Canidia and her colleague Sagana came to raise ghosts there. Following a description of their necromantic ritual comes the punchline, as the wooden Priapus splits with a noise like a fart and the witches run away in fright.

The two witches are described primarily in physical terms, which leave no doubt that they are hideous figures: they dig a pit in the ground with their fin-

272–93, 299–301; Gowers 2012: 263–80; Oliensis 1991; Oliensis 1998: 68–90; Richlin 2014: 73–74; Stratton 2007a: 80–82; Ingallina 1974.

gernails, tear apart a lamb with their teeth, and pour its blood into the pit to attract ghosts (26–29). Their clothes are black, their hair is loose, and they go barefoot (23–25); they are pallid and horrible to see (25–26). Canidia's name, "Gray Hair," suggests that she is an older woman. They call on Hecate and the Fury Tisiphone, and their ritual makes the moon turn red and snakes and infernal dogs wander the cemetery (33–35). However, they ultimately prove to be more ridiculous than powerful. When Priapus farts and they run off, they shed their herbs and bracelets, Canidia's false teeth, and Sagana's wig in their flight (48–50).

Horace returned to his witches, especially Canidia, in the *Epodes*, published a few years after the *Satires* (29 BC). In *Epode* 5, Canidia is fully developed into Horace's conception of the hag-witch, and echoes Apollonius' Medea in her use of scent as a weapon. In this poem, Canidia and the witches Sagana, Veia, and Folia bury an unnamed child up to his neck in a garden in order to starve him to death, while placing food in front of him, just out of reach. The child is a boy, a *puer* (12), a term that firmly classifies him as a child; and he comes from a good family, as suggested by the reference to his purple-bordered child's clothing (7). They intend to use his marrow and liver, infused with longing for the food he cannot eat, in love potions that will induce similar longing in their targets. Canidia eventually explains that she is resorting to such measures because her previous love potions have failed her. Her former lover, Varus, was once enthralled by her, but he has been freed from her enchantments by a more powerful witch (55–72). The four witches perform a variety of preparatory rites while burying the boy, and the poem ends with the death curse that he hurls at them.

The witches are far more horrific figures in *Epode* 5 than they were in *Satire* 1.8. Snakes are twined through Canidia's disheveled hair, and she calls for spell ingredients such as the feather and eggs of a *strix*,[17] frog's blood, and poisonous herbs (15–24); she is savage (*saeva*) and chews her uncut thumbnail with black teeth (47–48). She is clearly the ringleader, and issues commands (*iubet*, 17) to the others. Sagana's hair stands up like a sea urchin or a boar's bristles, and she sprinkles water from Lake Avernus, the rumored location of a route to the underworld (25–28). Veia exerts herself, groaning, to dig up the ground in which to bury the child (29–31). Folia has a man's sex drive (*masculae libidinis*, 41) and a Thessalian voice with which she can pull the moon and stars from the

17. The Latin term *strix* (pl. *striges*) could refer to either an owl or a nocturnal spirit thought to attack children.

sky (42–46). The boy's death is ostentatiously gruesome: he will waste away in sight of food that is kept fresh in front of him until his desiccated liver and bone marrow can be cut out, and his eyes will liquify (33–40). There is no indication that Canidia and her friends will be thwarted in the murder of the boy as they were in their rites on the Esquiline.

Canidia has lost her lover, Varus, to another, and must prepare stronger charms to reacquire him. Although the exact sequence of events is confused, perfumes are a key tool in this contest of witches.[18] Canidia has anointed Varus with a preparation of spikenard, the best she has ever made (59–60). Varus' rest has also been perfumed: he "sleeps in a bedroom anointed with forgetfulness of all mistresses" (*indormit unctis omnium cubilibus oblivione paelicum*; 69–70). Canidia uses perfume—here specifically made from spikenard, a favorite Roman scent[19]—as a weapon in her magical arsenal. She uses it for erotic goals, forefronting the association of perfume with seduction that more subtly underpinned earlier witch portrayals such as in the *Argonautica*. Notably, she does not perfume herself to enhance her charms; instead, she perfumes her victim and his surroundings, attacking him with the scent. However, Canidia's magical perfume no longer works, as Varus has been freed by the spell of a more learned witch (*veneficae scientioris*, 71–72). Canidia compares her first perfume to the *venena* of Medea, with which she soaked the garment she gave to Creon's daughter (63–66). The equation of Canidia's scents with Medea's herbs also appears in *Epode* 3, as does the reference to the murder of Glauke, and the implication that the same scent (or scented potion, or unguent, or whatever form we imagine the *venena* taking here) may have very different effects when used to attack a man or a woman.[20] Medea's drugs burned Glauke alive, but Canidia's perfumes, made with the same *venena*, are to make Varus burn with love for her. Following the failure of her first perfumes, Canidia's plan is to prepare something yet stronger, which will bring Varus back to her when she pours it on him (75–82). In the meantime, there is a hint that the perfumes with which Varus is smeared make him risible. Canidia imagines him wandering the Subura, Rome's notorious commercial/red light district, at night, and wishes for

18. The passage has attracted much scholarly attention in an attempt to clarify the story; Mankin 1995: 124–33; Gowers 2012: 263–80; Kraggerud 2000. I find Paule's (2017: 57–61) translation and discussion (56–94) a reasonably clear rendering that captures the ambiguity of these difficult lines.

19. Spikenard or nard (*nardus* or *nardum* in Latin) is an essential oil extracted from *Nardostachys jatamansi*, a plant in the valerian family, by crushing and distilling its roots. The Greek νάρδος can mean either spikenard or several other species (*LSJ* s.v. νάρδος).

20. See Prince 2013 for discussion of the link between Canidia and Medea in this passage.

him to be humbled: "Let the bitches of the Subura bark at the old adulterer—something everyone mocks—perfumed with spikenard, more perfect than which my hands have not made" (*senem, quod omnes rideant, adulterum / latrant Suburanae canes, / nardo perunctum, quale non perfectius / meae laborarint manus*; 57–60). Wearing perfume is an action typical of lovers who want to make themselves attractive in Latin literature, and a comic accusation against old men who are inappropriately philandering.[21]

The connection of Canidia with perfumes seemed significant enough to the second-century commentator Porphyrion that he identifies the "real" Canidia as a Neapolitan woman, Gratidia, a perfume-seller by trade.[22] Gratidia is a fairly obvious metrical substitution for Canidia and Porphyrion is drawing on the association of the witch Folia's connection to Naples in *Epode* 5.43. As tradespeople dealing in luxury goods, *unguentarii* did not have a much better reputation than witches. Cicero ranks it among the least respectable ways to make a living, and Antony's propaganda campaign against Octavian included allegations that his great-grandfather had run a perfume shop and a bakery.[23]

In *Epode* 17, a poem in which Horace claims that he himself has been magically debilitated by Canidia as a punishment for his constant slander of her, we have another demonstration of her scents in action. Horace complains that his youth has vanished, and so has the color in the sallow skin still clinging to his bones; his lungs and heart strain; he cannot sleep; Samnite and Marsian charms attack him (21–29). Among his other pains, Horace says that his hair has gone white from Canidia's odors (*tuis capillus albus est odoribus*; 23). Horace does not specify whether the *odoribus* are good or bad, but the effects are ranked with those of the Marsian spells and Sabellian incantations that she has also used against him. *Epode* 17 extends our picture of Canidia with further details about her personal charms, often phrased as ironic reversals. Horace promises that if she relents, he will claim in poetry that his previous slanders of her were false: she is actually chaste and respectable, kind and pure, beautiful as a star, well-off instead of impoverished, and the mother of a legitimate child (37–52). Canidia refuses Horace's pleas for mercy, and boasts of her own powers. She will con-

21. Lilja 1972a: 72; Connors 1997.
22. Porphyrion, *Hor*. ad *Epodon* 3.8, 5.43.
23. Cic. *Off*. 1.150. See Watson 2003 ad *Epod*. 5.59–60 for a discussion of Porphyrion's comment and the profession of *unguentarius*. Octavian's great-grandfather: Suet. *Aug*. 4.2. Accusations that one's family had been contaminated by a disreputably pungent-smelling trade seem to have been typical political gibes; Cicero was himself accused of being the son of a fuller (Cass. Dio 46.4–5; Plut. *Cic*. 1.1). See Bradley 2015b: 140; also Bond 2016 on elite opprobrium for smelly trades.

tinue to torment him with her magic, as she can manipulate wax figurines, pull the moon from the sky with her voice, raise the dead, and brew love potions; she will certainly not be stymied by him (76–81).

Canidia makes a surprise final appearance in *Satire* 2.8, final both in the sense that she appears in the last line of the poem and that it is the last time she appears in Horace's poetry. In *Satire* 2.8 a narrator describes his attendance at the dinner party of Nasidienus, a tedious bore of a gourmet who desperately wants to impress his guests, among whom is Maecenas. Nasidienus holds forth on the source of every dish brought to the table and how it was caught and prepared. As yet another course is brought out, the narrator Fundanius and his companions finally flee from the grilled blackbirds and pigeons "as if Canidia had breathed on them, worse than African snakes" (94–95). Canidia's breath here contaminates food, rendering it poisonous. Her touch will also make food inedible in one further poem, *Epode* 3.

Epode 3 is a joking complaint addressed to Maecenas, who, Horace says, has played a mean trick on his dinner guests by serving them garlic, a food more fit for peasants than poets. This poem, and Canidia's role in it, have received relatively little interest in scholarship on Canidia, but the equation of Canidia's body odor and Medea's herbs with garlic and the parallels between Canidia and Maecenas that Oliensis has noted open up some interpretations of interest for both the intersections of scent and magic in Roman poetry and the larger programmatic place of scent within Horace.[24]

Horace's complaints about garlic are dramatic: he has been poisoned, he is on fire, garlic is worse than hemlock and is a food fit for parricides. He suggests that the food supposedly seasoned with garlic was actually cooked in viper's blood or that Canidia has handled it and her touch has made it inedible. Canidia's body, like her breath in *Satire* 2.8, is contaminating; she smells and tastes of garlic.

Horace also claims a more ambiguous status for garlic as one of Medea's herbs as well as the smell of Canidia's poison, saying that garlic was the plant with which Medea anointed Jason before his trial with her father's bulls, and the drug with which she coated the poisoned garment she sent to Jason's new wife Glauke. *Epode* 3 contains many parallels with *Epode* 5: Canidia is juxtaposed with Medea and with poisonous snakes (which occur in *Satire* 2.8.95 as well), both witches are associated with the same magical herbs (Medea because she

24. Oliensis 1991 and 1998: 64–101.

uses them; Canidia uses them in *Epode* 5 and smells like them in *Epode* 3), and the herbs are given a guarantee of efficacy involving the murder of Jason's young bride. In *Epode* 5 Canidia's fragrant *venena* were wholly used for evil, to ensnare Varus, but Horace's equation of garlic with Medea's herbs in *Epode* 3 is not a blanket condemnation of the plant, despite his previous castigation of it as poisonous and inedible. Instead it hearkens back to the long tradition that garlic is *moly* or otherwise magical, and capable of either helping or harming.

The assertion that garlic was the drug with which Medea killed Creon's daughter is in line with Horace's other complaints about it. As something pungent and burning, garlic is hyperbolically described as a more deadly burning substance, the potion which kills Glauke when it touches her skin. The first and second Vatican mythographers echo this idea, saying that Medea laced with poison and garlic the robe she sent to Glauke.[25] Unlike Medea's soporific drugs in Apollonius or Canidia's magical perfume in *Epode* 5, her use of garlic in *Epode* 3 is not sweet-smelling and seductive, but burning and aggressive, and directed not at men or monsters like the Colchian serpent, but at another woman.

Garlic is given a more positive spin in the other half of Horace's claim in *Epode* 3, that garlic is the herb Medea gave to Jason to protect him from her father's bulls. This is odd. Superficially, identifying garlic as the Promethean herb is a comment on its pungency, power, and fitness to be in a witch's arsenal, part of the pervasive tradition identifying odiferous plants as powerful. Unlike the other uses for garlic in the poem, however, it is put to a beneficent use, protecting Jason from the fire-breathing bulls, perhaps in a case of like-fights-like in which garlic's burning scent and odor ward off the burning breath of the bulls, or reflecting the common belief that garlic made men and animals pugnacious, invigorating Jason with its scent.[26] As Watson notes, Horace is being humorous, not scientific, and we should not try to apply too strict a logic to this scene, but it is still interesting that despite the bad smell of Medea's drugs they are here mustered usefully to save Jason's life.[27] For Horace, witches' scents are more complex than in Apollonius, and they can be pungent as well as dangerously fragrant, at least where Medea is concerned. A similar slippage between harmful and protective uses for herbs is found in Seneca's *Medea* (705–19), where Medea's drugs, this time specifically named as the Promethean herb that

25. First Vatican Mythographer 25; Second Vatican Mythographer 138.
26. Garlic as invigorating: Ar. *Eq*. 494, *Ach*. 161–66. The breath of the Colchian bulls is malodorous in Lucilius (*Anth. Graec*. 11.239).
27. Watson 2003: 137.

protects Jason in the *Argonautica*, are listed as a component in Medea's poisonous assault on Glauke. What was good for the gander is not, apparently, good for the goose.

The idea that Medea used garlic as a quasi-poisonous magical drug to burn Glauke is intriguingly paralleled in a story of Medea and the Lemnians related by the 3rd-century-BCE paradoxographer Myrsilos of Methymna. Myrsilos says that Medea attacked the Lemnian women out of jealousy over Jason's past affair with their queen Hypsipyle. Sailing past Lemnos in the Argo, Medea throws unspecified drugs into the ocean near the island, which according to Myrsilos is the origin of the terrible odor with which the Lemnian women were afflicted after their murder of their husbands.[28] In this story, as in Horace's garlic poem, a sorceress wields stench without herself smelling; instead, she inflicts stench on others, particularly other women, in both cases out of sexual rivalry. While Medea's fragrant drugs mimic seductive effects in Apollonius, in these alternate versions of her story they remove seductive effects from her rivals (quite permanently, in Glauke's case). When targeting men, witches in classical literature are likely to use good scents; when targeting women, bad ones. A gloss on Myrsilos' version suggests that the *pharmaka* with which Medea attacked the Lemnians was *Peganum harmala*, "stinking rue," a plant that, like garlic, was frequently identified as Homer's *moly*; this is doubly interesting in light of *moly*'s shielding effect, protecting Odysseus from Circe's seductive hospitality and potentially emasculating offer of sex. As *moly* wards off witches, we can plausibly read it as protection against their more fragrant charms. A similar anaphrodisiac effect for garlic concludes *Epode* 3, as Horace wishes that the next time Maecenas serves it, his girlfriend will push him away in bed.

In the Canidia poems, garlic and perfume are structurally similar threats. Garlic is equated with the smell of Canidia's person, while perfume is the smell of her magic; one is a bad, contaminating smell, associated with poverty, dangerous magic, and sexual revulsion, while the other is alluringly sweet and associated with luxury and seduction. But both debilitate men equally—Horace's complaints that he is dying from eating Maecenas' garlic in *Epode* 3 are paralleled by his complaints that he is being murdered by Canidia's scents in *Epode* 17.

Horace's work is not the only place in Latin literature where garlic and per-

28. Myrsilos: FGrHist 477 F 1a. Detienne 1994: 90–96 discusses the smell of the Lemnians extensively, and this explanation for it in particular.

fume are treated as interchangeable. To them, we can add menstrual blood, whose contaminating miasma, as I suggested in chapter 4, was thought to be similar to the cloud of scent arising from a woman wearing perfume. Several natural-historical passages on insects attest to a belief that this triad of substances pose similar threats.

Bees were considered naturally pure creatures who could not stand filth, corruption, immorality, or impurity of any kind; thus the ancient works on beekeeping emphasize that beehives must be kept clean and beekeepers must themselves be clean and free from polluting influences. Perfume, menstrual blood, and garlic are all mentioned as dangers to the hives. In his agricultural manual, Varro notes that bees dislike perfume as much as they do bad odors, a moralizing stance that equates luxurious fragrances with repulsive smells: on the well-run estates that Varro's interlocutors describe, the goal is to make a profit, and frivolous indulgences such as perfume are as much a sign of trouble as filth is.[29] Aelian makes the connection with luxury, especially female luxury, explicit: bees are like urbane and intelligent girls who both hate bad smells and despise perfumes.[30] Pliny says that bees hate foul smells (*foedos odores*), even artificial (*et fictos*) ones, and this is why they attack people who wear perfumes. Other things bees hate, according to Pliny, are dirt and menstrual blood, which is why honey gatherers must wash before they go to the hives. Menstrual blood, besides its many other dangers, kills bees, and at the touch of a woman who is menstruating, bees will swarm and leave their hives.[31] Columella (9.14.3) gives a slightly different set of instructions for honey gatherers: when they handle the hives they must be clean, must not have drunk wine or had sex recently, and must not have eaten strongly scented things such as pickled fish, onions, or garlic. The *Geoponika* (15.2) agrees that bees will sting people who smell like wine, sex, or perfume. Menstrual blood, perfume, and garlic, plus sex, drunkenness, and uncleanliness are problematic along several different axes of pollution: perfume, sex, and wine denote moral laxity; menstrual blood, garlic, and dirt are natural but physically contaminating; and menstrual blood and sex involve religious taboo.

A similar cluster of associations is found in the *Geoponika* regarding insects,

29. *Rust*. 3.16.5. Cf. Cynulcus in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists* 15.686c–d, who is smeared with perfume as a prank when he nods off at dinner, and disgustedly asks the slaves for a sponge to wash off the "dirt."
30. *On Animals* 1.58.
31. Foul smells: *NH* 11.61; dirt and menstrual blood 11.44; menstrual blood kills bees, 7.64; touch of a menstruating woman, 28.77.

especially caterpillars, pests that Pliny, Columella, and Aelian all recommend destroying by having a menstruating woman walk around an infected garden. As she passes, the caterpillars will die. In the *Geoponika*, caterpillars can be killed or deterred by rubbing the vines or the vine-pruning knives with garlic, or by the smell of roses. In these passages we see another structural equivalence between menstrual blood, garlic, and perfume scents.[32] Horace's witches are not so far divorced from the everyday concerns of life on a Roman farm.

The Components of Horace's Witches

Greek witches could be frightening, but remained charming and attractive, and could be helpful when won over. Horace's witches, however, are aggressively evil child murderers and are portrayed as ugly and bestial. Canidia uses perfumes as aggressive weapons, but she herself stinks—her touch is like garlic, and her breath is like poison. To realize this new image of the witch, Horace drew on a large number of pre-existing stereotypes of monsters and women. A full discussion of all of these influences is impossible here. Instead I would like to highlight a few of the stereotypes that, when built into Horace's witch trope, contributed their peculiar odors to the image of the stinking hag-witch that developed.[33]

Horace's engagement with prior witch portraits, Greek and Roman, is obvious. Canidia and Sagana's first appearance on the Esquiline in *Satire* 1.8 and the tableau of their erotic and necromantic rites evokes Vergil's *Eclogue* 8 and its Theocritean model in *Idyll* 2, while Canidia is made heir to Medea's herbs in *Epode* 5 (61–66) and juxtaposed with her in *Eclogue* 3. Canidia's use of the powerful spikenard perfume in *Eclogue* 5 suggests, more subtly, the influence of Apollonius' Medea on Horace's conception of magic. Canidia's use of herbs inherently places her within the extensive *rhizotomos*-witch tradition going back to Circe, although we never hear about her gathering herbs herself.

Formal literary models aside, what general character types did Horace borrow elements from? "Gray Hair," Canidia's name, already suggests one answer: old women, who were considered especially likely to smell strong compared to younger women.[34] Age had not been a major component of earlier witch por-

32. Garlic: *Gp*. 5.30, 5.48, 10.80; roses 13.16.
33. For discussion of other elements in Horace's witches, see Mankin 1995: 108–36; Gowers 2012; Oliensis 1998: 68–90; Paule 2017.
34. See for example Plaut. *Mostell*. 273–79; Hor. *Epod*. 12.

traits. The characters called *veneficae* in Plautus can be older, like the courtesan's servant Scapha, herself a former courtesan; but they may also be younger, like the courtesan Acropolistis.[35] Greek witches are typically younger women; even when they are older, there is no suggestion that they are elderly. Canidia's bad-smelling breath and touch point to larger misogynistic stereotypes, since women were frequently said to smell bad regardless of their age, even if they tried to cover it up with perfume (on which, see below), although older women were more likely to be called bad-smelling than young girls.

Sexually promiscuous women such as prostitutes and adulteresses were particularly likely to be accused of stench.[36] Those who take a strong view of the relationship between prostitutes and Roman witches might see Horace's characters as older prostitutes or procuresses.[37] Canidia is described as a lover of sailors and sellers (*amata nautis multum et institoribus*; *Epod*. 17.20), and *Epode* 5 and *Satire* 1.8 show the witches performing erotic magic with potions and dolls. While a connection between prostitution and witchcraft would emerge in Latin elegy, one is not indisputably clear yet in Horace. However, his witches are certainly promiscuous; to the passages already mentioned, we can add Canidia's illegitimate child (*Epod*. 17.49–52) and Folia's "masculine lust" (*masculae libinins*; *Epod*. 5.41). Even licit sex was polluting in Roman thought, as in Columella's (9.14.3) comment that the man who tends a villa's beehives must abstain from sex for a day before handling them; as seen, bees were thought to be sensitive to pollution of all kinds, and strong smells in particular. In regard to Canidia's bad breath, it is also worth noting that the ancients believed that oral sex made the breath smell.[38]

The witches' other vigorous activities, while not explicitly connected to stench in Horace, are suggestive of it: Canidia and Sagana dig up the ground with their nails and rip apart a lamb with their teeth; Veia digs vigorously enough to groan; they are all unkempt and apparently bloody, sweaty, and dirty. They are also animalistic—Sagana is compared to a sea urchin and a boar (*Epod*. 5.27–28); Canidia is persistently associated with snakes (*Sat*. 1.8.34, 2.8.95; *Epod*. 5.15, 3.6), which had a reputation for poisonous stench; and Canidia and Sagana's Esquiline rite attracts dogs and snakes.[39]

35. Plautus, *Mostell*. 157–292 (*venefica*: 218–19); *Epid*. 221–35 (*venefica*: 221).
36. Lilja 1972a: 72, 132–34; Classen 1992; Butler 2015: 82; Bradley 2015b: 140.
37. Dickie 2001: 178–81.
38. Lilja 1972a: 129; Bradley 2015b: 126.
39. The reputation of poisonous snakes for odor is exemplified by Mart. 4.4, where a viper's den is included in a list of proverbially smelly things.

Horace borrows aspects of a wide variety of mythological monsters for his witches. Paule discusses the Canidia of *Epode* 5 as a child-killing demon like Lillith, a *strix*, and a *lamia*, and the Canidia of *Epode* 17 as an *empusa*.[40] Other animal-women hybrids include the Erinyes or Furies, to whom Canidia and Sagana are compared (*Sat*. 1.8.45), and one of whom, Tisiphone, Canidia calls on for aid (*Sat*. 1.8.34). Tisiphone is a thematically appropriate but religiously unusual patron divinity for Canidia to summon; she is an appropriately dreadful reference, but also calls attention to Canidia's resemblance to the Furies, particularly Aeschylus' version of them. Aeschylus' Eumenides are wingless, terrible, and black; their eyes ooze, their clothing is ragged, and their breath stinks (*Eum*. 46–59). Like dogs, they track Orestes by the smell of blood (*Eum*. 244–53). Clytemnestra refers to their bloody breath as well (*Eum*. 137). They wear black, and like Gorgons have snakes in their hair (*Cho*. 1048–50). Canidia matches much of this description: the black clothing (*Sat*. 1.8.23), the bloody mouth (*Satire* 1.8.27), the snakes twined in her hair (*Epod*. 5.15), and most interestingly for this discussion, her terrible breath (*Satire* 2.8.95). Like those other animal-women, the Harpies, Canidia's touch contaminates food (*Epod*. 3.8).[41]

Canidia's horrific aspects—her pallor, unkempt hair and clothes, filth, and shrieking (*Sat*. 1.8.25)—also assimilate her to female mourners, a similarity discussed by Paule.[42] Women in mourning wore dark clothing, which they tore or disarranged to show distress; they went unwashed or actively smeared themselves with dirt or ashes; and they beat or scratched themselves. Women might leave their hair unbound and untended, while men might go unshaven. Smell, both the body odor of the mourners and the smell of the corpse, probably characterized mourning.[43] Paule also notes the similarity between mourners, the corpse, and various supernatural dangers.[44] Ghosts were sometimes depicted as filthy, emaciated, ragged, and otherwise abject in classical literature.[45]

Canidia, then, possesses affinities with a wide range of supernatural and human stereotypes, which potentially contribute the smells of unwashed bodies, bad breath, sex, corpses, and filth to her general aura; she specifically has

40. Paule 2017: 56–137.
41. Paule 2017: 66–67 notes the overlap between child-killing demons and the Harpies, and the priestess of Apollo in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* initially identifies the Erinyes as Harpies (50–52) before realizing they are wingless. Whatever sort of monster Canidia evokes, she is part of a complex of terrible women/monsters associated with stench.
42. Paule 2017: 29–30.
43. See Bond 2016: 59–96; Hope 2017 on the sensory experience of mourning.
44. Paule 2017: 30.
45. Apul. *Met*. 9.30; Lucian *Philops*. 30–31.

poisonously bad breath and a garlicky, contaminating touch. But why? The juxtaposition of perfumed spells and stinking witches in Horace is innovative. He equates Canidia's spells with perfume far less ambiguously than Apollonius had Medea's, and despite the evident influence of Vergil's *Eclogue* 8 when Horace composed his first scene of contemporary urban magic in *Satire* 1.8, Horace makes a radical break with Vergil's imitation of Theocritus, which might otherwise have set the tone for the extensive witch literature of the early imperial age.

Perfumed Monsters: Clodia, Cleopatra, and Canidia

Horace's witches do not exist in a political vacuum. They surely owe some of their appeal—and they were immediately, and widely, imitated in Latin literature—to the fact that they embodied, and exaggerated to supernatural levels, a stereotype of the bad, dangerous, state-disrupting, corruptingly seductive, perfume-wearing women of whom late Republican political discourse offered several notable examples. Canidia's antecedents among the harpies and *lamiae* of Greek literature have been well demonstrated in the scholarship, but her similarity to women like Clodia Metelli and Cleopatra, as Horace's contemporaries painted them, deserves more discussion than it has received. Like Canidia, women like Cleopatra were accused of enchanting men through perfume, a paradigmatic luxury good that rich women were thought to use both to indulge their own wasteful tastes and to wield as a tool of sexual dominance against others. Accusations of witchcraft also tended to accompany other charges leveled against women like Clodia, such as murder, conspiracy, adultery, and poisoning. And while Canidia, the dirty and bestial hag-witch of the Esquiline, looks superficially very different from these perfumed and glamorous rich women, women like Clodia could be reframed by men as being actually repulsive, lower-class figures like Canidia at heart, as when Catullus bitterly imagines Lesbia haunting a low tavern and having sex with all comers.[46] Perfumed women, in Rome as in Greece, were thought to be a distracting, corrupting influence who disrupted Roman life in much the way that Horace's witches disrupt the city.

Rich women were objects of suspicion at Rome. Skinner has discussed the emergence of anxiety over female expenditure as a result of the influx of wealth

46. Catullus 37.

to Rome during the Punic Wars; far from being a matter of private budgeting, women's spending threatened the state itself by giving women economic power and the potential to alienate the property of elite families and thus destabilize the traditional hierarchy.[47] While all overindulgence in luxury was at least theoretically condemned by Roman mores, it was more censured in women, and more often seen as wasteful and threatening. Thus Lucretius' angry portrait of the luxuries a woman demands:

> labitur interea res et Babylonia fiunt
> unguenta, et pulchra in pedibus Sicyonia rident,
> scilicet et grandes viridi cum luce zmaragdi
> auro includuntur, teriturque thalassina vestis
> adsidue et Veneris sudorem exercita potat;
> et bene parta patrum fiunt anademata, mitrae,
> interdum in pallam atque Alidensia Ciaque vertunt.
> eximia veste et victu convivia, ludi,
> pocula crebra, unguenta, coronae, serta parantur . . . (4.1123–32)
>
> Meanwhile the family fortune crumbles, and becomes Babylonian perfumes; lovely Sicyonian slippers smile on her feet; huge green jewels set in gold catch the light, and purple garments are used as everyday dress and, hard worn, are soaked with the sweat of Venus. An honestly earned family fortune is transformed into headbands and hair ornaments, into an Alindan or Cean cloak. Banquets are put on with exquisite courses and accoutrements, entertainments, constantly refilled cups, perfumes, crowns, garlands . . .

Lucretius draws a clear line from women's adornment to the downfall of noble families. Sumptuary laws such as the *Lex Oppia* attempted to curb such spending. Perfumes, jewelry, and fine clothing were particularly emblematic of female luxury. The luxurious wife in this passage is also implied to be adulterous, or at least to be behaving in a way that leaves her husband suspicious (4.1137–40).

Luxury itself did not necessarily raise eyebrows by the late Republic, when aristocratic women like Clodia were expected to keep up a certain style. However, if their behavior was called into question for other reasons, a particular cluster of accusations tended to be leveled at rich women that fit them into the

47. Skinner 2011: 33–51.

stereotype of the *bad* rich woman. This list of female vices includes profligate spending, adultery and promiscuity, corruption of Roman men (especially young ones), political involvement, poisoning, witchcraft, and illicit religious observance.[48] A common element of underhandedness and stealth runs through this list: Romans generally thought of both poisoning and political meddling by women as things done in secret.

These covert vices were closely enough linked in Roman thought that a woman accused of one was likely to be accused of others by association; hence Cato the Elder bluntly declared that an adulteress was a poisoner, and accusations of witchcraft were made that to a modern observer look a bit tacked-on to the real issues.[49] In the *Pro Cluentio* of 66 BC, Cicero castigates the defendant's mother, Sassia, as a promiscuous adulteress who stole her own daughter's naïve young husband (12–15); induced another one of her husbands to murder his own infant sons (26–28); used her wealth to persecute her own son, the defendant (176–92), including by bribing witnesses in his trial (193); and performed impious nocturnal prayers and sacrifices (194). Cicero does not elaborate on this last charge regarding illicit ritual, which might indicate witchcraft or simply inappropriate religious ceremonies; it seems included in the peroration mostly to add some titillating color to the picture of a woman accused of adultery, child murder, and attacking a vulnerable young man.[50]

Canidia is an extreme example of this stereotype of the bad rich woman, albeit a rather odd one, in whom some of the usual elements are distorted. Looking at how this trope shaped the reputations of women like Clodia will help to highlight in what respects Canidia embodies it, and how the stereotype of the rich, perfumed adulteress who ruins Roman youths informs the scentscape of Horace's witch poems. Physically and socially, the lower-class, ugly Canidia does not fit the stereotype, but her use of perfumes to attack men signals her relation to the same trope of the luxurious, seductive rich woman that was used to shape Roman responses to notable women like Cleopatra, merely with the aristocratic elements decreased and the accusations of witchcraft emphasized. Like the Lesbia of Catullus 37, whom Catullus improbably

48. See L'hoir 2000 on the connections between adultery, poison, and magic in Roman declamation and historiography.

49. Cato: quoted by Quint. *Inst*. 5.11.39.

50. This passage is frequently taken as magic; see Skinner 2011: 50, L'hoir 2000: 489–93. But Cicero also inveighs against *nocturna mulierum sacrificia* in the *De Legibus* (2.21, 35–37), where he discusses the Bacchanalian affair of 186 BC, in which women were discovered to be participating in scandalous (but not magical) nighttime worship. See Santangelo 2013: 40 on this passage.

envisions hanging around a seedy tavern having sex with hundreds of men, Canidia embodies the inner nature of the rich seductress as envisioned by hostile men.

Of the notorious rich women of the late Republic, Horace's animosity toward Cleopatra, the *fatale monstrum*, is famous from *Ode* 1.37, and it is not much of a stretch to imagine her as an influence on his poetry already in *Epode* 5, which was probably written in the lead-up to Actium.[51] Cleopatra, whose taste for luxury was famous (although undoubtedly luridly exaggerated by hostile Roman authors), is associated with magic in Plutarch's *Life of Antony*, in which Plutarch describes (25) Cleopatra's reliance on the charms (μαγγανεύμασι) and sorceries (φίλτροις) of her person during her first meeting with Antony. During Plutarch's description of her encounter with Antony, Cleopatra arranges herself on a river barge with purple sails and silver oars, dressed as Venus, accompanied by music and with "wondrous odors" (ὀδμαὶ δὲ θαυμασταὶ) filling the riverbanks from incense burners (26), and attempts to dazzle Antony via sight, sound, and smell in order to entrap him. While Plutarch uses the terms μαγγανεύμασι and φίλτροις metaphorically, he alludes to accusations of witchcraft that go back to Cleopatra's lifetime and to her posthumous Augustan reputation at Rome, when Propertius (3.11) placed her in the same ranks as Medea, Penthesilea, Omphale, and Semiramis as examples of powerful foreign women. Plutarch also notes Octavian's propagandistic claim that Antony had been overcome by drugs/spells (*pharmaka*, 60).[52] It has been recognized that Cleopatra and other powerful women accused of using seductive magic to ruin noble Roman men served as inspiration for the elegiac *lenae* of Horace's successors, figures who are often witches as well as procuresses and poetic foils for the elegiac narrator.[53]

The other woman whose prominence in the late Republic lent some urgency to Horace's picture of dangerous female influences in Rome was Clodia Metelli, "noble but notorious" in Cicero's summation.[54] Like Cleopatra, Clodia's reputation was that of a rich, urbane, and politically involved woman who presented a sexual and physical danger to Roman men. As with most Roman women, the reality of Clodia's life and character can only be tenuously reconstructed

51. *Fatale monstrum*: *Carm*. 1.37.21. The *Epodes* were published c. 30 BC, but the dating of the composition of individual poems is much debated.

52. Wyke 1992 discusses the competing propaganda of the Augustan age, both the scanty traces of Cleopatra's own self-presentation as a queen, daughter of queens, and mother, and her radical refigurement in post-Actium Roman sources as the *meretrix regina Canopi*. Also see Stratton 2007b: 95, who notes the connection between Cleopatra and magic in a larger discussion of gender and witchcraft accusations in Roman literature.

53. Myers 1996: 6.

54. *Cael*. 31: *Clodia mulier non solum nobili, sed etiam nota*.

through the writing of her male contemporaries. We know her primarily through Cicero's *Pro Caelio*, a court speech of 56 BCE in which Clodia is attacked as the supposed brains and motivation behind the prosecution of the well-born young man Caelius on a variety of charges, and through Catullus' poetry, assuming the usual identification of Clodia with Catullus' poetic mistress Lesbia is correct.[55]

If we see a hint of Clodia behind Canidia, Horace would not have been the first to compare Clodia to a witch, since in the *Pro Caelio*, Cicero famously dubs her the "Palatine Medea" (31). Cicero plays extensively with theatrical tropes throughout the *Pro Caelio*, but this equation of Clodia with Medea was particularly emphasized, since Cicero mentions that Crassus, another lawyer on the defense team, had opened his speech with a quotation from Ennius' *Medea Exul*.[56] The repeated allusions to Medea were more pointed than a mere reference to a dangerous and frightening woman, since Clodia was already rumored to have poisoned her husband, Quintus Metellus Celer, who had died suddenly in 59 BC; Cicero makes much of this suspicion without ever quite crossing the line into an open accusation.[57] Since Medea was the mistress par excellence of poisons and drugs, comparing Clodia to her was another sly allusion to this gossip. If Horace demonstrates how stereotypes of bad women could be mythologized into witches, Cicero shows us that process in reverse, by overlaying a mythological paradigm on a live woman. Another point of comparison that ties Clodia to the lustful Roman witches of Latin poetry is the sexual license and rapacity in preying on young men for which Cicero and Catullus claim she had a reputation.[58] And Horace links the Lesbia of Catullus, assuming she is to be identified with Clodia, with Canidia in *Epode* 17, in which Horace slyly echoes Catullus' addresses to Lesbia in poems 7 and 8, giving them a bitter twist that makes Canidia "a debased version" of Lesbia.[59]

The point of noting ancient comparisons of such women to witches is not to

55. For recent appraisals of Clodia, see Hejduk 2008; Skinner 2011.
56. Enn. fr. 103 Jocelyn. The prosecution had ill-advisedly referred to Caelius as a *pulchellum Iasonem*, "pretty little Jason," an allusion the defense made the most of. Caelius himself apparently called Clodia a *quandrantaria Clytemnestra*, a "two-bit Clytemnestra," for further tragic flavoring. On these ripostes, see Skinner 2011: 105–6, 166 n. 51.
57. *Cael. passim*, but see especially 59–60.
58. When Caelius called her a *quandrantaria Clytemnestra*, it was a reference to an incident involving Clodia's young men lurking in the Senian baths to ambush her would-be poisoners; a *quadrans* was the price of bathhouse admission. Plutarch (*Cicero* 29.4) explains the term with a story that one of her young admirers sent her a pouch of forty copper coins, suggesting it was her price as a prostitute (Skinner 2011: 166 n. 51). Plutarch's version is at any rate an interesting testament to the evolution of Clodia's memory. See also Catullus 11, 37, 58 on Lesbia's supposed promiscuity.
59. Oliensis 1991: 115.

prove that they directly inspired Canidia, although I think it likely.[60] Rather, Cleopatra and Clodia represent (and are forced by authors like Cicero to fit) a type familiar to late Republican audiences, one that spoke to the preconceptions and fears of Horace's readers regarding rich, luxurious, wasteful women who attack men with spells, drugs, or perfumes; who ruin or attempt to ruin the characters of men like Antony, Caelius, and Cluentius; who are sexually promiscuous; and who engage in depravity such as child murder, conspiracy, and impious rites. They can thus help to explicate what Horace's witch poems say, and in what respect Canidia is another frightening and powerful woman who touched on the same sore points in the Roman psyche.[61]

Like Clodia or Sassia, Canidia embodies disruption. In *Satire* 1.8, she invades the Esquiline cemetery, which Maecenas has turned into gardens. Commentators disagree on whether the action of the poem takes place before or after Maecenas' renovations of the Esquiline: Is Canidia an unwelcome memory of the past, like the cemetery that Priapus reminds us still underlies Maecenas' new gardens? Or is she a current disruption to Augustus' new Rome who appears at night to literally unearth the skeletons buried under the new promenades, infesting the city with witches, snakes, and infernal dogs?[62] Similarly, Canidia appears, although only as an allusion, at the end of Nasidienus' feast in *Satire* 2.8, as the guests flee from another tedious course of food. Here she does not cause the disorder and the social rupture between guest and host, but she does emblematize it, the stench of her breath suggesting that under the glitz of Nasidienus' party the food is poisonous. Elite society, even in 30 BCE in the wake of Actium and Augustus' new order, has something wrong at its heart. Canidia and poison appear at a more intimate gathering in *Epode* 3, where her touch is said to have contaminated Maecenas' food as well, and a witch again

60. The correspondences between Clodia and Canidia were already noted early in the last century, but in scholarship that was preoccupied with locating biographical truth behind Horace's poems; see Hahn 1939. Little more has been done with the possible connections to elucidate Canidia and her place in Horace's poetry. Paule 2017: 4–6 discusses attempts at historicizing Canidia.

61. Although I have emphasized Canidia's similarities to elite women who were slandered, more or less facetiously, as witches in the late Republic, elite men occasionally attracted accusations of illicit magic too. Clodia's brother Appius Claudius Pulcher was himself called a necromancer by Cicero on account of his interest in augury (Cicero *Div*. 1.132; *Tusc*. 1.37; on which, Rawson 1985: 309–10; Skinner 2011: 60). Accusations of witchcraft leveled against women tended to be connected to their sex lives, while for men the charge was, as with Appius, more often predicated on their intellectual interests. The senatorial Pythagoreans Publius Vatinius and Publius Nigidius Figulus, for instance, were also accused of illicit occult interests. L'hoir 2000: 474–75 discusses the feminizing effect of describing men as *venefici* in late Republican forensic contexts, where it appears to have been a somewhat regular insult.

62. Gowers 2012: 263–65; Edmunds 2009; Johnson 2012.

stealthily disrupts conviviality. In *Epodes* 5 and 17, she directly menaces Roman society, murdering a child and attacking the poet himself with her smells in settings that appear to be the contemporary Rome of the 30s BC. The good and bad scents of Canidia and her friends persistently disrupt the Augustan calm.

Despite Horace's close ties to the Augustan regime, his poetry contains a dissonant thread suggesting that Rome is less orderly and less purged of corruption than those in power might like to claim. Would Horace's audience read Canidia's menace as purely fictional and distant from their lives? The contemporary setting—for Horace's witches are specifically localized in places such as the Esquiline and the house of Maecenas—suggests that Canidia is meant to be a more immediate threat than the allusions to the Eumenides, Harpies, and other mythological monsters in her makeup might imply. If we read Canidia as a woman who, like Clodia or Cleopatra, threatens Rome's stability and integrity, it makes her a more frightening figure, one who evokes not just a general fear of disorder, pollution, and unruly lower classes, but some of the same specific fears that powerful women raised in late Republican discourse.

The specific connections of Clodia, Cleopatra, and Sassia with witchcraft have been laid out; powerful and independent women like the so-called Palatine Medea could easily be assimilated to witch tropes in Roman discourse. But how do literary witches, and specifically their scents, tap into fears of powerful women?

The boy whom Canidia and her friends murder in *Epode* 5 has been read as a symbol of many things, including an intertextual reflection of the *puer* of Vergil's fourth *Eclogue*, a modern avatar of Remus, or the poet himself.[63] As a *puer*, he is a young, a prepubescent child, apparently from an elite family; emphasis is placed on the child's insignia (5.12, presumably his *bulla*), his "childish body" (*impube corpus*, 5.13), and his purple-bordered toga (5.7), which boys exchanged for a pure white *toga virilis* at around the age of fifteen or sixteen. The threat to Rome and its future is clear enough in Canidia's attack on a young Roman, cutting off his family line before he can reach adulthood and join the Roman state as a full member.[64]

Witchcraft slanders against prominent women at Rome tended to accompany charges of corrupting Roman men and youths. In the *Pro Caelio*, Clodia is portrayed as an older woman who preys on younger men. Cicero emphasizes

63. Jones 2016: 87; Paule 2017: 64; Mankin 1995: 110; Fitzgerald 2009: 154–55.
64. Skinner 2011: 51, 115–16.

Caelius' youth throughout the speech, and describes him as a young man fresh from his father's house (18) who is susceptible to the sorts of youthful vices young men were expected to indulge in—affairs with prostitutes, luxurious dinner parties, overspending, and similar frivolity, which he is said to have since outgrown. Clodia, Cicero says, took advantage of Caelius' tender stage of life, and became bitter when he outgrew it and her. Caelius' youthful hijinks aside, Clodia is described as a woman who had many younger lovers and hangers-on, and who bought riverside pleasure gardens near a popular swimming spot on the Tiber to better enjoy all the glistening youthful bodies on display.[65] In Cicero's reconstruction of events, she attempts to tie Caelius to her with a gift of money (51–53), as she has obligated other young men to her, so that they are willing to be embroiled in embarrassing schemes on her behalf (63, 67). Meanwhile, Augustan propaganda and later sources sometimes emphasized Antony's corruption by Cleopatra, sometimes painting him as a naïve younger man who was in no position to withstand her wiles.[66] Antony's wife Fulvia's masculine demeanor was also said to have accustomed him to submitting to a woman: Plutarch comments that Cleopatra was indebted to Fulvia for passing him along already tamed.[67] Wyke points out that Cleopatra herself was construed in Augustan propaganda as a fundamental threat to Roman male *libertas*.[68] Similarly, Canidia wants to demean her lover Varus, whom she hopes will wander the Subura, enchanted by the ointment with which she has perfumed him, while dogs (or perhaps prostitutes, if we take "bitches" euphemistically) bark/laugh at him. Varus' debasement from Roman man to "an elderly adulterer, something everyone laughs at" (*senex, quod omnes rideant, adulterum*, *Epod.* 5.57) makes him the second victim of witches in the poem, along with the *puer*, who at least is allowed to end the poem in a position of dubious power by voicing his final, ominous death curse.

Location is at issue in all of these stories of conniving women who kidnap or entrap Roman males. While the location of *Epode* 5 is left vague, Canidia

65. The gardens: *Cael.* 36. Clodia's urban gardens are surprisingly well documented, since Cicero was eager to buy them in 45 BCE as a location for a memorial to his daughter, and the possible sale looms large in his correspondence with Atticus that year; *Att.* 12.38, 12.41–44, 12.47, 12.52, 13.26, 13.29, 14.8.

66. Wyke 1992. Plut. *Ant.* 10. Despite already having nearly adult sons, Antony is persistently described by Plutarch (28–29) as indulging himself in Egypt like a young man of leisure who is easily flattered by Cleopatra, whom he moons after disgracefully while her charade of loving him is transparent to those around him (53.3–6, 55.1, 58.4–6).

67. Plut. *Ant.* 10.

68. Wyke 1992: 108.

and the other witches are within an (apparently fairly large) house, but with open ground in which to bury the boy; we are probably meant to envision a house with an interior garden space.[69] Clodia's riverside gardens figure repeatedly in the *Pro Caelio* as a place of seduction to which she lures young men.[70] Cicero classifies the gardens (27), along with dinner parties, perfume, and Baiae, as censurable pleasures, and specifically lists (38) Clodia's *horti* among the places to which "everyone's libido had access whenever they wanted" (*cuius in hortos . . . iure suo libidines omnium commearent*).[71] Cleopatra, too, prepares a snare for Antony in Plutarch's description of their meeting, with herself as bait.[72] She refuses repeated demands from Antony and his friends to appear before him to discuss charges of aiding Cassius. Instead, she first displays herself to Antony in her river tableau (discussed above); then, she refuses his invitations to dinner, instead demanding that he come to her. Antony complies, and is dazzled by her arrangements: not only the food, but the scintillating show of hanging lights that she has prepared. Plutarch describes Cleopatra as deliberately mirroring Antony's manners and speech, so that he found her conversation inescapably fascinating. Plutarch emphasizes that this was a deliberate stratagem on Cleopatra's part, while Antony bumbles goodnaturedly into the trap, dazed by her Eastern luxury and sophistication.[73] In other stories regarding dangerous women, too, the *domus*, instead of being a safe refuge, becomes a perverted base of power for the would-be poisoner, adulteress, or witch.[74]

Marilyn Skinner discusses how Clodia's debasement of Roman youth is intended to evoke a horror of disrupted family lines and sons removed from the influence of their fathers.[75] Canidia kills a young man (the *puer*) and pursues an older one sexually (Varus) while Clodia is said to pursue younger ones sexually (Caelius et al.) and kill an older one (Metellus), but the linkage of sex, murder, and a sexually aggressive older woman is the same. One of the frequent talking points about Cleopatra, too, was her corruption of Roman men

69. Paule 2017: 152. Johnson 2012: 21–22 suggests that the witches have returned again to the Esquiline in this poem, based on the locations mentioned.
70. *Cael.* 27, 38, 49.
71. Skinner 2011: 117–20 speculates, fascinatingly, that Clodia may have hosted Cleopatra herself in the same *horti* when the latter visited Rome in 44 BC.
72. *Ant.* 25–27.
73. Plutarch prefaces the episode (25) with "This is how Antony was caught," (ἁλίσκεται δὲ τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον).
74. L'hoir 2000: 486–89.
75. Skinner 2011: 112–16.

with Eastern luxury, seducing first Caesar and then Antony. Sassia is supposed to have married her son-in-law, corrupted the impressionable young man, contrived against her own son, and induced her fiancé to murder his children before she would marry him. Adultery raised the specter of broken family lines and illegitimate children. Skinner notes that concern over female infidelity intensifies in this period, and Canidia echoes Cleopatra in having (as Augustan sources see Cleopatra's offspring) an illegitimate child.[76] Clodia's infidelity is taken for granted by Cicero throughout the *Pro Caelio*, as Lesbia's is throughout Catullus' oeuvre.

Without necessarily seeing a specific allusion to Clodia et al. in the perfumes that Canidia uses to attack Varus, perfume and cosmetics were among the wiles that sexually voracious women like these were expected to use to lure men in—especially older women, who then as now were thought to need artificial help to supplement their charms, while younger women possessed naturally dewy complexions and fragrant bodies.[77] In Horace's poems and in Roman thought more broadly, perfumes are only treated as aggressive weapons when in the hands of a woman, who may use them to debilitate men's wills, their fortunes, and their health, as Canidia enthralls Varus and prematurely ages Horace himself with her scents in *Epode* 17. Used by men, meanwhile, perfume can have an equally enchanting effect, but a positive one: in *Epode* 13 Horace calls for perfume, wine, and song to banish the cares of civil war.[78]

Canidia's physical ugliness is not only due to the influence of monsters like the Harpies; it is an aggressive rejection of the claims of women like Clodia to be attractive. The dichotomy between Canidia's attractive perfumes and her unattractive appearance and body odor is the same dichotomy that Roman authors frequently play with between the appearance of an apparently beautiful woman wearing makeup or perfume, and how she looks or smells without it. It is a commonplace in Latin literature that the beautiful woman, in private, is repulsive in face and odor.[79] Martial summarizes this suspicion:

> Tam male Thais olet quam non fullonis avari
> testa vetus media, sed modo fracta via,
> non ab amore recens hircus, non ora leonis,
> non detracta cani transtiberina cutis,

76. Skinner 2011: 77. Canidia's child: *Epod*. 17.50–52.
77. See chapter 4.
78. Mankin 1995: 214 on the ambiguous dating and setting of this poem.
79. See below, "Witches and Cosmetics in Ovid," for further instances of the trope.

pullus abortivo nec cum putrescit in ovo,
amphora corrupto nec vitiata garo.
Virus ut hoc alio fallax permutet odore,
deposita quotiens balnea veste petit,
psilothro viret aut acida latet oblita creta
aut tegitur pingui terque quaterque faba.
Cum bene se tutam per fraudes mille putavit,
omnia cum fecit, Thaida Thais olet. (6.93)

A greedy fuller's stale jar just broken in the middle of the street smells no worse than Thais; a goat fresh from sex doesn't; nor a lion's mouth, a skin torn from a dog on the banks of the Tiber, a chick rotting in a dead egg, a rotten jar of spoiled fish sauce. In order to trickily change her stench into another smell, when she takes her clothes off and gets into the bath, she turns herself green with a depilatory or hides under chalk dissolved in acid or covers herself with three or four thick layers of bean paste. But even when she thinks she has made herself safe with a thousand tricks, when she has tried everything . . . Thais smells like Thais.

Canidia's appearance and smell merely externalize the ugliness, stench, and eventual old age believed to be potentially lurking under any elegant woman's fragrant facade. It is her perfume that is meant to lure Varus in despite her unattractiveness and depravity.

Canidia initially appears to be a force of random chaos who murders and enthralls at will. The *puer* of *Epode* 5 is bewildered by his unjust and unexpected fate. But a second reading of the Canidia poems invites Horace's audience to consider whether Romans are collaborators in Canidia's odiferous contamination of the city. Maecenas, in particular, is an ambiguous figure, and frequently paired with Canidia; Oliensis discusses Canidia as his warped double.[80] This is most obvious in *Epode* 3, in which Maecenas' garlic-laced food is compared to Canidia's touch, Medea's poisons, and hemlock. The specter of Canidia may appear at his feast, but Maecenas has invited her there and has himself become a *veneficus* by serving the garlic that is equated with witches' herbs. In this light, *Satire* 1.8 also asks for reappraisal. Why has Maecenas put his pleasure gardens on top of a graveyard anyway? Whatever straightforward historical justifications there might be for this piece of urban renewal, Horace's poem involves a

80. Oliensis 1991, and 1998: 64–101, especially 88–90.

deliberate choice to shift the reader's attention from the pleasant modern gardens to the seedier past history of the Esquiline, and to link Maecenas' use of the site with Canidia's.[81]

Rome's complicity in its own destruction is a recurrent theme in Horace's work, most notably in *Epode* 16:

> Altera iam teritur bellis civilibus aetas,
> suis et ipsa Roma viribus ruit . . . (1–2)
>
> impia perdemus devoti sanguinis aetas
> ferisque rursus occupabitur solum.
> barbarus heu cineres insistet victor et Urbem
> eques sonante verberabit ungula,
> quaeque carent ventis et solibus ossa Quirini,
> (nefas videre) dissipabit insolens. (9–14)
>
> Now another generation is worn down by civil wars,
> And Rome itself is being ruined by its own might . . .
>
> Our impious generation, of cursed descent, will destroy [what enemies could not],
> And the land will return again to the wild beasts.
> A victorious barbarian, alas, will trample the ashes
> And horsemen will trample the city with resounding hoofs,
> And the bones of Quirinus now sheltered from wind and sun
> They (a horror to see) will insolently scatter.

The wild animals that will here reclaim the land are also seen in the wild dogs and snakes that roam Maecenas' gardens in *Satire* 1.8. Both poems also feature bones left unburied: the bones of the paupers buried under Maecenas' gardens, which used to lie openly around the Esquiline hilltop, and Quirinus' bones, which Horace prophesies will be dragged from their tomb and scattered on the ground. As Marguerite Johnson points out, *Epode* 16 also stresses that Medea and similar occult forces will be absent from the Blessed Iles to which it urges

81. Johnson 2012 discusses the fear invoked by this landscape and the unstable and problematic nature of Maecenas' new civic space.

Romans to retreat, and equates their evil with the evils of the current age and civil war (57–58).[82] The witch poems offer several other moments that echo themes also found in Horace's civil war poems, such as the recurrence of unburied corpses and wild scavengers in *Epode* 5. The boy, who will die before his parents, envisions the witches of that poem being stoned to death by a crowd of Roman citizens and then left unburied on the Esquiline for birds and wolves to dismember. Maecenas' garlicky prank in *Epode* 3 has also been read as a potentially more serious rupture: as Mankin puts it, "Maecenas' joke, however lightly meant, seems to come dangerously close to disrupting his friendship with H., and thus parallels the poisons of Canidia and other malignant forces that are setting Romans against each other."[83]

Witches, then, are consistently coded as emblems of social dissonance in Horace, but these poems also contain a number of men who seem to have a hand in their own problems: Maecenas' various collaborations with Canidia (*Epode* 3, *Satire* 1.8), Jason's acceptance of Medea's garlic/baneful drugs (*Epod*. 3.9–12), Priapus' claim to helplessness in the face of witches (*Sat*. 1.8.20–22), and Varus' perfumed dalliances with Canidia (*Epod*. 5).[84] Varus is presented in *Epode* 5 as the butt of a joke, a man so bespelled, first by Canidia and then another witch's perfumes, that he is helplessly in thrall to them, despite Canidia's physical repulsiveness. But Canidia's serpent-coiffed, black-toothed, long-nailed horror is paralleled by that of the woman whom Horace depicts himself in bed with in *Epode* 12, repulsed and unaroused: she sweats and smells revolting, like goats or polyps, while her crocodile-dung makeup slides off of her face. It is a vicious portrait; but one that begs the question of what Horace, like Varus, is doing with her in the first place. The *Epodes* as a whole end in *Epode* 17 with Horace's apparent invitation of his own destruction and offer to hypocritically retract his attacks and give Canidia a respectable reputation to save himself from her spells (*Epod*. 17.39–41).[85] Canidia calls Horace the high priest of Esquiline *veneficia* (*Esquilini pontifex venefici*; *Epod*. 17.58), echoing her own use of *venena* on the Esquiline in *Satire* 1.8. With his debilitated form, premature aging, and whitened hair, all thanks to Canidia's scents (*Epod*. 17.21–26), the

82. Johnson 2012: 34–35.
83. Mankin 1995: 88. See also Fitzgerald 2009: 149.
84. See also Gowers 2012: 264–65 for Priapus' affinities with both Maecenas ("the buffoon custodian is a gnome-sized version of Maecenas the enlightened mayor of Rome") and Horace himself ("Priapus/H. is a man of straw, as 'flaccus' as his name, an informer, literally a syco-phant, servile *scurra* or 'footstool' to Maecenas.").
85. Cf. Catullus' (36) promise to burn his iambs on Lesbia.

priest of Esquiline magic has turned into her male counterpart by the end of the *Epodes*.[86] Canidia's deployment of perfumed magic associates her with other rich seductresses who enchant men with scent, money, or sex and then destroy them in late Republican and Augustan discourse, while her personal stench and appearance link her to monsters, corpses, prostitutes, animals, civil war, and other dangers that men ignore to their detriment in Horace's poems.

Witches and Cosmetics in Ovid

To the category of "perfume" should be added women's cosmetics, which were often deliberately or incidentally scented with pleasant odors (sometimes the same ones, like roses, used in perfumes proper), or conversely were said to be bad-smelling when made from less savory ingredients. Cosmetic recipes were composed of a wide variety of ingredients: ground minerals, flower petals, oils, vinegar, bread, animal droppings, spices, plant juices, milk, grease, and more.[87] Ovid gives a recipe for one face mask composed of frankincense, natron, resin, myrrh, and honey; on the other end of the spectrum, Juvenal describes a woman wearing a greasy, smelly face mask made from moistened bread, to which her unfortunate husband sticks when he tries to kiss her.[88]

As with perfumes, some authors approve of women's use of cosmetics and others condemn it.[89] Ovid suggests that a young woman who does not wear makeup may be rustically charming, like ruddy-cheeked Sabine daughters of old, but a sophisticated modern woman needs more *cultus*.[90] However, he elsewhere implies that cosmetics lend only temporary charm to a woman and can easily make her repulsive, with overtones, as we will see shortly, of Roman witch tropes. Seneca praises his mother for never having used cosmetics, and lauds her fresh complexion, undamaged by makeup.[91] What would be charmingly naïve in a younger woman becomes a sign of character and beauty in an older one.[92] By contrast, Horace's *Epode* 12 depicts the unattractive older pros-

86. For readings of Canidia as the embodiment of the *Epodes* as a whole, Barchiesi 2009: 242; Paule 2017: 126–37. See also Gowers 2012: 273 for a reading of Canidia as a stand-in for Horace in *Satire* 1.8.
87. See Olson 2009 on Roman cosmetics, including extensive bibliography.
88. Ov. *Medic*. 83–90; Juv. 6.461–63.
89. On the anti-adornment tradition, see Wyke 1994; Johnson 2016: 4–8.
90. *Medic*. 11–26.
91. *Helv*. 16. On this passage see Johnson 2016: 5–6.
92. For more on the aesthetics and ethics of makeup in antiquity, see Wyke 1994; Olson 2008; Shumka 2008; Johnson 2016.

titute with whom he finds himself in bed, whose chalk and crocodile-dung makeup runs during sex while she berates him for not being more vigorous.

In this context, perfumes and cosmetics could both be equated with magic and presented as an alternative to it. Ovid is particularly interested in the relationship between women's use of these products and witchcraft, and his *Medicamina faciei femineae*, *Ars amatoria* 3, and *Remedia amoris* comment extensively on the benefits and pitfalls of makeups and scents. He variously describes beauty treatments as an alternative to, an extension of, or as antithetical to witchcraft. Sometimes presented as a way to enhance natural charms, sometimes as a deceptive means of covering up a woman's appearance and scent, cosmetics shared magic's erotic frisson.

In the fragmentary poem *Medicamina faciei femineae* (*Facial Remedies for Women*), Ovid takes a generally positive view of cosmetics and scents, which he recommends as a nice girl's alternative to love spells. Looking and smelling good will attract a man honestly, with no need for herbs or incantations:

> Sic potius nos urget amor quam fortibus herbis,
> quas maga terribili subsecat arte manus.
> Nec vos graminibus nec mixto credite suco,
> nec temptate nocens virus amantis equae.
> Nec mediae Marsis finduntur cantibus angues,
> nec redit in fontes unda supina suos.
> Et quamvis aliquis Temesaea removerit aera,
> numquam Luna suis excutietur equis. (*Medic*. 35–42)

> Thus it is more likely that passion drives us rather than powerful herbs,
> which the sorceress plucks with her terrible skill.
> Do not depend on grasses or mingled saps,
> or try the dangerous secretion of a mare in heat.
> Nor are snakes split through the middle by Marsian chants,
> and a wave does not curl backward to its source.
> And even if someone has put away the Temesaean bronze,
> the Moon will never be knocked from her chariot.

Apparently a young woman is destined to resort to wiles of one type or another, and makeup is more wholesome and effective than spells. Although here Ovid is focused primarily on the visual aesthetics of his *medicina*, which he says will

produce smooth, shining skin and pale faces, the cosmetic recipes he gives are full of fragrant ingredients, including honey, iris, frankincense, myrrh, fennel, rose petals, and poppies. These are used to make skin lotions, face masks, face powders, and blushes, some to be worn in private as skin treatments (such as face masks used while sleeping) and some in public (such as skin whiteners and blushes). Unlike the later *Ars amatoria* and *Remedia amoris*, the *Medicamina* does not suggest that either skin treatments or the woman wearing them are in any way repulsive.

But of course, by juxtaposing spells and cosmetics at all, Ovid invites us to compare them. The overt point of similarity is that women use both things to attract men's attentions. More pointedly, Ovid is talking about two types of potions: beauty potions (which induce love) and magical potions (which also induce love, but more forcefully). *Medicamina*, the word Ovid uses here of cosmetic remedies, can also mean magical concoctions and poisons, as when Ovid uses it in a description of Medea's boiling potion in the *Metamorphoses* (7.262), or disgusting substances, as when he uses it at *Remedia amoris* 355.[93] Here in the *Medicamina*, Ovid does not use the word *medicamina* directly for magical potions, but does recommend cosmetic preparations made from the herbs (*herbis*), grasses (*graminibus*), and juices of plants (*suco*) he lists among the dubious magical ingredients in his warnings about witchcraft. The diatribe on magic within the *Medicamina*, while a standard topos of love poetry by Ovid's day, is here given in negative form as Ovid objects that magic does not work rather than the usual elegiac complaint that powerful witches have opposed the poet.[94] The cosmetic *medicamina* that Ovid will teach to girls, however, are sure to bewitch.[95] The poet has set himself up as a *rhizotomos* who knows the right *sort* of herbs, grasses, and saps—and, incidentally, relocates beautification expertise from the realm of female knowledge (things a girl might learn from a *maga*) to male knowledge (things a girl should learn from a poet).[96]

93. See Johnson 2016: 128 on the post-Augustan resonances of the word.
94. Cf. Ovid *Amores* 1.8, Tib. 1.5, Prop. 4.5, in which *lenae* with magic powers turn the poets' mistresses against them, although with encouragements to seek richer lovers, not with their actual spells. Propertius 4.5.5–18 suggests that the *lena*/witch has previously aided him with magic in his adulterous affairs.
95. And intriguingly, as the magic herbs of the witchcraft excursus are echoed in the herbs of the recipes, the moon and bronze implements are perhaps echoed in Ovid's claim that, if she uses his recipes, a woman's face will shine brightly at night (51–52), and, more tenuously, like a (bronze?) mirror (68).
96. Women who invent cosmetic recipes, on the other hand, are stigmatized (or more likely, stigmatized women have cosmetic recipes attributed to them). Cleopatra and Poppea were both later reputed to have developed skin treatments: a face mask and bath of bread and asses' milk in Poppea's case, and a book of cosmetic recipes in Cleopatra's. Poppea: Juv. 6.462–70. Cleopatra's *Kosmetikon* is cited by Galen (12.404 Kühn).

Elsewhere, however, Ovid takes a more critical view of cosmetics, and expresses his disapproval partly with a wrinkle of the nose. In *Ars amatoria* (*The Art of Love*), he still recommends cosmetics to women, but says to complete the toilette in private: a lover does not want to see a girl with her dripping face mask on, or know what makes her skin pale (3.205–234). The lanolin used in face treatments stinks, and goop sliding off the face onto the chest is an ugly sight. The few specific ingredients he mentions here are more bestial than in the *Medicamina*: muck (*faex*), wool grease (*oesypum*), and hind marrow (*cervae medulla*).[97] Cosmetics in the *Ars* are necessary, but ugly and unappetizing.

A passage of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, in which Lucius and the slave girl Photis spy on the witch Pamphile, makes a similar comparison of cosmetics and magic potions:

> Iam primum omnibus laciniis se devestit Pamphile et arcula quadam reclusa pyxides plusculas inde depromit, de quis unius operculo remoto atque indidem egesta unguedine diuque palmulis suis adfricta ab imis unguibus sese totam adusque summos capillos perlinit multumque cum lucerna secreto conlocuta membra tremulo succussu quatit. Quis leniter fluctuantibus promicant molles plumulae, crescunt et fortes pinnulae, duratur nasus incurvus, coguntur ungues adunci. Fit bubo Pamphile. (*Met*. 3.19–21)
>
> First of all Pamphile took off all her clothes, opened a particular chest and removed several little containers. She took the lid off one and scooped out some ointment, and after rubbing it for a while between her hands[98] she completely coated herself with it from tip to toe and spoke inaudibly with her lamp. She shook her limbs with a tremulous quivering. As they rippled, soft down shone out and strong feathers grew, her nose curved down and grew hard, and her toenails grew together into curved talons. Pamphile became an owl.

The effects of Pamphile's ointments are more transformative that those of Ovid's face masks, but this is clearly a scene of cosmetic application. Pamphile sequesters herself in the secrecy that Ovid recommends for a girl applying her makeup. (Photis emphasizes that her mistress is habitually secretive about her magic; 3.20.) She takes her ointments from the little pyxides in which cosmetics were kept, and transforms her appearance. Like girls applying Ovid's facials, Pam-

97. Marrow in magic: Mankin 1995: 121.
98. Pamphile's ointment is made with a base, such as beeswax, that needs to be warmed in the hands to make it spreadable.

phile works her transformation at night. Ovid recommends that a girl let her lover believe that she is sleeping when she is actually engaged in her beauty routine; perhaps part of the joke in Apuleius is that Pamphile's oblivious husband thinks she is beautifying herself when she is actually working magic. The point here is erotic as well: Pamphile becomes an owl in order to fly off to see a lover, after magical attempts to summon him have failed. The sequel to this scene, in which Lucius transforms himself into a donkey with another one of Pamphile's ointments, can be read as a comment on the different effects of cosmetics on men and women.[99] Lucius seems unpracticed at using them: in contrast to Pamphile's careful application, he comments that when given the ointment box "I . . . plunged my hand eagerly inside, scooped up a big handful and smeared it all over my body" (*avide manus immersi et haurito plusculo uncto corporis mei membra perfricui*; 3.24). Pamphile's ointment turns her into a rapacious bird of prey; Lucius' only makes him into an ass.[100]

In the *Remedia amoris* (*The Cure for Love*), where he speaks to men instead of women, Ovid disparages cosmetics. He recommends that the man who wants to fall out of love should unexpectedly invade the privacy in which Ovid has previously told his girlfriend to tend to her appearance. If he surprises her in the middle of applying face creams and powders and masks he will be repulsed by the sight and smell.[101] Ovid repeats his disgust over wool grease and drippy face masks, and describes these things as *compositis venenis*, compounded *venena*, a word that, like *medicamina*, crosses the fuzzy boundaries between different types of mixtures. *Venena* is most commonly used to mean a poison or a magical potion, but comes to also indicate a spell more generally (whether herbal, incantatory, or of some other type), and it can also be used for other potent substances. In the *Amores* Ovid uses it of his mistress Corinna's hair dye, playing with the meanings of poison/witchcraft, since the dye has left her bald. He points out that no rival has poisoned or bewitched her: she applied the *venena* herself (*Am*. 1.14.39–44). In Augustan poetry, with its fascination with witches, *venena* has inevitable magical overtones, which are strengthened in the *Remedia* by a subsequent comparison of the smell of cosmetics to the stink of the Harpies: "Those remedies, Phineos, smell like your table: this has

99. On men's cosmetics and perfumes, see Johnson 2016: 17–18, 53–54, 132–35; Colin 1955; Edwards 1993: 68–69.

100. Perhaps also worth noting is that he is returned to human form by eating rose petals, a common cosmetic ingredient.

101. Cf. Lucretius 4.1171–91.

made my stomach turn more than once" (*illa tuas redolent, Phineu, medicamina mensas: / non semel hinc stomacho nausea facta meo est*; *Rem. am.* 355–56). While the cosmetics of the *Medicamina* are fragrant, like erotic spells, the cosmetics of the *Remedia* make women into repulsive, stinking monsters.

The difference is not just in the makeup, but the women. The girls Ovid addresses in *Medicamina* are cast as potentially young, innocent, and concerned to guard their morals, or at the very least as girls who want to give that impression and who still please men. They should smell nice, and men should fall for their pleasing looks and scent. The *puellae* of the *Remedia* are those with whom the men Ovid addresses are disenchanted: bad women, unfaithful, and beginning a downward slide from *puella* to *lena*, the old, ugly procuresses who inhabit elegiac poetry and exist there to frustrate the poet/lover. In Augustan poetry, *lenae* are sometimes also witches and are characterized as immoral, repulsive, bibulous, and sometimes ridiculous.[102] The *puellae* of the *Remedia*, in putting on cosmetics, are making themselves bad-smelling, ugly, and monstrous, and seem to be trying out the role that, as courtesans no longer young and attractive enough to please their clientele, they will take on later in life.[103] Girls are thus warned that they need cosmetics to be attractive, but also that cosmetics will probably do the opposite, making them smelly, bald, dripping with greasy residues, and increasingly resembling the virulently unattractive witches they may eventually become. Ovid may set cosmetics in opposition to love magic in the *Medicamina*, but by the *Remedia* cosmetic usage is instead a signifier of potential witchiness.

Young women may be praised for their *cultus* and old ones for their lack of *cultus*, but there is no clear path from one to the other, for a lovely *puella* to become a lovely *anus*. Either a woman is unsophisticated (if praiseworthy and attractive in her own way) if she avoids cosmetics when young, or she is repulsive when old if she does use them. A sharp dividing line marks the point at which women cease to be attractive to men, and cosmetics signify the boundary but do not determine it. Roman witches, for whom erotic magic is paramount, transgress that boundary—they demand to still be desirable when old—and their erotic spells, like cosmetics hiding an unattractive woman's blemishes, demand that men transgress it too by desiring them.

102. E.g. Tib. 1.5; Prop. 4.5; Ov. *Am.* 1.8. On elegiac *lenae* and their connection with the supernatural, see Myers 1996.

103. The *faex* of the *Ars Am.* 3.211, an ingredient in a face mask, may hint at a *lena*'s fondness for wine as well: one meaning for *faex* is wine lees.

Cosmetics, in anti-adornment views, may bring a woman closer to the realm of hags, old *lenae*, and witches, but witches themselves occupy an ambivalent position vis-à-vis cosmetics and perfumes. Greek witches such as Medea and Circe, who are young and attractive, are frequently shown engaged in beautification routines. Apollonius' Medea, for instance, is seen arranging her hair, rubbing fragrant ointment on her face, and putting on attractive clothing and jewelry (3.828–35). The fragrance and care for their looks is in keeping with their sexual attractions. Roman witches, on the other hand, tend to reject personal *cultus* or engage in it in a way that makes them less attractive. Horace's witches are dirty and unkempt despite being engaged in erotic attraction spells. The only concessions to conventional grooming standards that we see them make are the wig and false teeth that Canidia and Sagana drop when running away in terror at the end of *Satire* 1.8, rendering them ridiculous. As we will see shortly, Ovid's Medea goes off into the wilderness while rejuvenating Aeson, her clothing untied and her hair streaming (*Metamorphoses* 7.233–93); her magic has become something that requires solitude and dishevelment, the rejection of society and *cultus*. The witch Erictho in Lucan's *Bellum Civile* is outstandingly gruesome and also lives in the wilds, haunting battlefields, crags, and tombs (6.507–76).

Ovid's Medea

Ovid's poetry contains several other portraits of witches at work.[104] Of these, the most interesting in regard to scent is the compressed version of Jason and Medea's story with which Ovid begins Book 7 of his *Metamorphoses*. In it, Medea is a typical *rhizotomos* witch, albeit with certain Roman flourishes. Ovid draws heavily on earlier Greek portrayals of Medea, with Apollonius and Euripides the preeminent models, but with a probable debt to Sophocles as well. Apollonius and Euripides' Medea, while fundamentally a *rhizotomos*, does her rootcutting offstage. Ovid instead makes it the centerpiece of his portrayal, focusing on Medea's preparations to rejuvenate Jason's father Aeson and then her sham of rejuvenating Jason's uncle Pelias. Medea departs into the wilderness to collect ingredients for her youth-restoring potion, flying in a chariot pulled by winged serpents, then returns with a variety of magical herbs, which

104. See e.g. *Am.s* 1.8; *Fast*. 2.571–83.

she boils together in a nighttime ritual reminiscent of the fragments of Sophocles' *Rhizotomoi*. The scent of the finished potion is not described, and Ovid focuses heavily on its visual effects (such as the old branch with which Medea stirs her pot bursting into leaves, and flowers springing up in the grass where drops of the potion spatter). However, the scents of the herbs used in the potion are mentioned, in a way consistent with Ovid's fascination with the peripheral signs of the brew's potency. As Medea is returning home with her harvest, the dragons that pull her chariot slough off their old skins, although they have only smelled the herbs she carries:

> Et iam nona dies curru pennisque draconum
> nonaque nox omnes lustrantem viderat agros,
> cum rediit. Neque erant tacti, nisi odore, dracones,
> et tamen annosae pellem posuere senectae. (*Met*. 7.234–7)
>
> And, having viewed all the lands she circled for nine days and nights from her chariot and dragon wings, she returned. The dragons had not even been touched by anything except the odor, but they still shed their skins of many years.

In the herbs strong enough to rejuvenate the serpents by smell alone, we may have traces of Sophocles' Medea, turning her face away from the scent of the plants she is cutting while draining sap into bronze jars. Ovid's Medea shares bronze sickles and jars, an invocation to Hecate, the gathering of herbs and saps, and a certain dishevelment with Sophocles' Medea. (Sophocles' Medea is naked; Ovid's merely lets her hair down). If we can speak of a strong correspondence with a play of which barely a few lines remain, Ovid owes a noticeable debt to Sophocles (and to who knows what other lost works; there are many Medea plays among the surviving titles of lost works).[105]

If the smell alone is enough to rejuvenate the serpents, why Medea's elaborate preparation of the herbs in her cauldron? In one respect, this is applying too strict a logic to the scene: Medea must prepare her herbs because Ovid wants a picturesque scene of the witch at work. On the other hand, our familiarity with the image of the witch at her cauldron may obscure the degree to which this portrayal was something new. The preceding literature offers us witches who cook, like Circe, but no elaborate scenes of brewing to match

105. See also Bömer 1976 *ad* 236–37; Wright 2016 on the many lost *Medeas* of Greek tragedy.

Ovid's. What does it add to the story, and does it complicate our reading of the odor of the herbs?

Ovid's Medea is less a perfumer than a cook. She stews her ingredients in a pot (7.262–84), stirring and seasoning it, and feeds the brew to Aeson, pouring it both into his mouth and, after cutting his throat, directly into the wound (7.288), rather than anointing him with herbs. The energizing scent of her ingredients is perhaps more the appetizing smell of food than a seductive perfume smell. Ovid uses traditional components of witch portrayals, but combines them into something closer to a parody of a dutiful young wife tending to her infirm father-in-law. Medea is trying to please her husband by restoring his father to youth, and in so doing, she cooks him a meal like a good daughter-in-law—even if she does so as part of a necromantic ritual in which Aeson lies on a bier of herbs like a corpse and has his throat opened with a sword. Perfume on women is dangerously threatening to men's control, but cooking smells are reassuringly normative, and Medea relies on this appearance that she is complying with social norms in the following episode, in which she persuades Pelias' daughters to murder their father through a similar demonstration of her rejuvenation ritual.

Lucan's Erictho and the Stench of Civil War

Lucan makes relatively little mention of scent in his epic *Pharsalia*, although he mentions the ritual burning of incense at sacrifices and funerals in passing throughout the work. However, he only lingers on scent at all in three episodes, a trio that again demonstrate thematic links between witchcraft, civil unrest, and dangerous women. In Book 6, Sextus Pompey famously consults the Thessalian witch Erictho in an extended necromantic scene that is one of the most gloriously gruesome depictions of the witch at work in Latin literature. Erictho is very clearly a literary descendent of Canidia: she is pallid and gaunt (6.516–17), her hair is uncombed (6.518), she scoops eyeballs from corpses with her fingers (6.541–42) and chews nooses and limbs from them (6.544–49). She lives in tombs (6.510–13) and, when Sextus finds her, is haunting the vicinity of a battlefield full of unburied corpses, which she can desecrate for magical materials (6.577–88). Erictho is associated with stench, her own and that which surrounds her: her footstep withers seed in the ground and her breath poisons the air (6.521–22), and she collects decaying corpses and gore described in lurid

terms. For her necromantic rite, she takes Sextus to a cave where the air is so stagnant and full of decay that it cannot be distinguished from the border of the underworld (6.639–53). The gore-filled, putrescent battlefield scene in which we find Erictho is echoed a book later in the description of the field of corpses that Caesar leaves to rot unburied after the battle of Pharsalia (7.820–72). Lucan describes the stench of the decaying dead, which draws scavenging animals to the area (7.829–40); the wolves and vultures eating the corpses of Pharsalia were found on Erictho's battlefield as well (6.626–27), where they helped her dismember corpses (6.550–53), and also recall the scattered bones and scavengers of Horace *Epode* 16 and *Satire* 1.8. Like Erictho's footsteps, the blood drenching Pharsalia pollutes the ground (7.844–52). Johnson (2012: 33) notes the connection between Lucan and Horace's scenes of witchcraft, and how in both, civil war and witchcraft are conflated. Lastly, in the only other significant description of scent in the *Pharsalia*, Caesar learns to appreciate the luxury of Cleopatra's court: he and the other diners at a feast wear garlands of spikenard and roses, and drench their hair with cinnamon and cardamom (10.164–68). Perfume and corpses both embody civil ruin in the *Pharsalia*, and are embraced willingly by Lucan's characters, all of whom are complicit in the Republic's downfall.

In the last two chapters, I have argued that ancient authors found scent a powerful model for the magic of witches. For the many reasons discussed in chapter 1, scent was a useful mental model for magic. But beyond the common equation of scent and power that led to the attribution of supernatural qualities to odiferous plants and substances, odor took on particular levels of meaning when in the hands of women. The scented plants that could be controlled and utilized therapeutically by male *rhizotomoi* became more frightening in the hands of female *rhizotomoi* such as Sophocles' Medea; and women's perfumes and cosmetics, already considered dangerously alluring fragrances, were abstracted into magical potions, ointments, and charms that witches used to ensnare and kill men in a supernatural exaggeration of the seductive dangers attributed to ordinary women. At the same time, witches themselves came to be described as foul-smelling in Roman literature, their unpleasant body odors reflecting the incorporation of stereotypes of prostitutes, monsters, adulteresses, and other threatening women, whose stink reveals the inner corruption they try to hide behind a facade of makeup and aromatics.

CHAPTER 6
Scented Space, Scenting Space

Pliny describes a temple of Athena at Elis that was noteworthy for its unusual plaster:

> Elide aedis est Minervae, in qua frater Phidiae Panaenus tectorium induxit lacte et croco subactum, ut ferunt; ideo, si teratur hodie in eo saliva pollice, odorem croci saporemque reddit. (*HN* 36.177)
>
> There is a temple of Minerva at Elis which they say Panaenus the brother of Phidias surfaced with a plaster mixed with milk and saffron; even today, if you lick your finger and rub the building, the smell and the taste of saffron are noticeable.

Plutarch mentions a similar saffron-flavored temple of Artemis, so the temple at Elis was not an isolated curiosity.[1] Why would anyone indulge in such a fantastically costly way of decorating a building? Some have conjectured that the saffron would have given the plaster a pleasantly creamy tint,[2] but even if we accept this as a cost-effective way of coloring a building, Plutarch comments on the whiteness of the marble, which only reveals a saffron orange hue when it is rubbed, and for both Plutarch and Pliny it is the scent and taste of the spice that make these temples notable. And whatever the architect's reason was for incor-

1. Plut. *Them.* 8.2. Plutarch seems to think that the saffron color and scent revealed by rubbing are a natural property of the stone; in light of the more explanatory Pliny passage, I take this as a misunderstanding.
2. Middleton 1892: 73.

porating saffron and milk into the plaster, why would a Roman tourist want to lick the sacred building?

These saffron-infused buildings signal the tight connections between fragrance and the divine in antiquity. Religious sites, where incense and burnt sacrifices acted as means of communication with the gods, were expected to be redolent of spices and perfumes, while the gods both smelled good themselves and were pleased with the odors from human worshippers. Scents, both good and bad, could reveal places that the gods favored or where the supernatural was close at hand.

This chapter considers, on the one hand, interactions of scent and physical space, and on the other, scent as a vehicle for power—issues that are intertwined in showing the use of odor to create, maintain, and identify powerful spaces. In ancient thought, naturally occurring fragrance may reveal the birthplace of a deity, or stench may signal a place where contact with less benevolent forces, such as the dead, is particularly likely; worshippers also deliberately shaped the scents of religious landscapes, filling them with fragrant incenses in order to communicate with the gods, who were expected to delight in sweet smells and to themselves smell sweet. This odor of the gods and their sacred places could induce communication in the other direction as well, with human worshipers inspired to prophecy by odors. Sacred places were created in part by the deployment of scent, which marked their boundaries—either lastingly, as at sanctuaries such as Eleusis, which is repeatedly called "fragrant Eleusis" in hymns, or more transiently, as when a processional route was marked by the scent of burning incense. On a sociological level, scent operated to enforce participation in or at least awareness of communal rituals among all those whom it reached, and could raise questions, as seen in chapter 3, about the performance of private ritual.

Odor was thought to convey power, however it was explained—either magico-religious power, as when the goddess Myrrh is asked to attack the victim of a love spell, or a religious procession carried burning aromatics around a farm; or natural power, as when doctors fumigated patients with the same herbs they might apply as a poultice or give as a compound to be taken internally, methods that are treated as equally useful in the medical treatises. Smoke, enveloping a patient, bore the efficacious qualities of the herb to them through their breath or skin; in the same way, burning frankincense protected a field, imbuing it with religious protection for the coming year. Nor are these categories always easy to distinguish—different authors may according to their incli-

nation categorize the same procedure, such as fumigating a flock of sheep with sulfur, as either a hallowed religious purification or as a modern veterinary procedure. What remains constant is that scents were thought to convey powerful effects. Forms of scent that have visible manifestations, such as smoke, were especially favored as a medium for transferring powerful effects to some being or object. These visible scents reified the invisible natural or supernatural forces thought to be at work.

Scent and the Numinous

Scent is strongly associated in ancient thought with the broad category of the numinous—gods, traces of their influences, and places and times of contact with the otherworldly. Scent owes its association with ethereal beings to its own ethereal nature, being something clearly present and powerful and yet invisible, much as the gods and spirits were often imagined to be, and to its ability to inhabit and imbue other objects with properties, as when the smell of perfume clings to a garment or smoke infuses meat. It thus offered a universally comprehensible model for how tenebrous things like souls or a god possessing a human might inhabit and depart from a body, for how a god's presence might leave lingering traces in a sacred place, and for how something invisible and intangible might be a powerful force. Odor was taken as a sign that humans could apprehend of the presence of influences that they could not see. Moreover, scent was accessible in a way that the divine was not: it was easy to create and manipulate odors, and thus from being a sign of the presence of numinous power, scent became a medium through which humans could deliberately manipulate and control similar powers, whether these procedures were explained as communication with the gods, religious purification of spaces, medico-scientific cleansings and treatments, naturally operating magic, or something else.

The gods themselves were believed to smell fragrant. They perfumed themselves with sweet nectar and ambrosia, as well as eating and drinking them, in Greek literature from Homer on. Thus, for example, Hera uses ambrosia as both a cleanser and a perfume in the *Iliad*, and her hair and clothing also smell ambrosial:

ἀμβροσίῃ μὲν πρῶτον ἀπὸ χροὸς ἱμερόεντος
λύματα πάντα κάθηρεν, ἀλείψατο δὲ λίπ᾽ ἐλαίῳ
ἀμβροσίῳ ἑδανῷ, τό ῥά οἱ τεθυωμένον ἦεν:
τοῦ καὶ κινυμένοιο Διὸς κατὰ χαλκοβατὲς δῶ
ἔμπης ἐς γαῖάν τε καὶ οὐρανὸν ἵκετ᾽ ἀϋτμή.
τῷ ῥ᾽ ἥ γε χρόα καλὸν ἀλειψαμένη ἰδὲ χαίτας
πεξαμένη χερσὶ πλοκάμους ἔπλεξε φαεινοὺς
καλοὺς ἀμβροσίους ἐκ κράατος ἀθανάτοιο.
ἀμφὶ δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ἀμβρόσιον ἑανὸν ἕσαθ᾽ . . . (14.170–78)

First she washed all the dirt from her lovely skin with ambrosia, and touched it with rich oil, ambrosial and sweet, which she had ready perfumed: if this were shaken in the bronze-floored palace of Zeus, the fragrance would reach the earth and sky alike. With it she anointed her lovely skin, combed her hair, and with her own hands she braided the locks—shining, lovely, ambrosial—of her immortal head. She put on an ambrosial robe . . .

Lilja notes that fragrance is the chief characteristic of ambrosia and nectar in ancient literature and that in some cases they may even be thought of as fundamentally embodiments of scent.[3] In other cases, they are more obviously a divine analogue of human perfume, as in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*. In it, Aphrodite arrives in her temple at Paphos, where the Graces aid her in her beauty routine:

ἔνθα δέ μιν Χάριτες λοῦσαν καὶ χρῖσαν ἐλαίωι
ἀμβρότωι, οἷα θεοὺς ἐπενήνοθεν αἰὲν ἐόντας,
ἀμβροσίωι ἑ<δ>ανῶι, τό ῥά οἱ τεθυωμένον ἦεν. (61–63)

There the Graces bathed her and rubbed her with ambrosial olive oil, as arises upon the eternal gods, sweet ambrosial oil that she had ready perfumed.

Here, ambrosia is both a rare, divine substance, characteristic of the gods (οἷα θεοὺς ἐπενήνοθεν αἰὲν ἐόντας) and also an ordinary perfume made from

3. Lilja 1972a: 20. Lilja gives extensive citations on the fragrance of ambrosia and nectar, 19–30.

scenting agents added to olive oil, such as humans wear. Similarly, wine is compared to ambrosia and nectar in the *Odyssey*, where the Cyclops is delighted with the wine Odysseus gives him. Wine is frequently described in terms of its fragrance in ancient literature, and like perfume provides a real-world model for how the audience of the *Odyssey* might imagine the intoxicatingly divine aroma of ambrosia and nectar.[4]

The remarkable smell of deities is often commented on, as in the above passages. Fragrance is sometimes a sign of an invisible divine presence, revealing that a god is at hand but is disguised or choosing not to be seen.[5] Odysseus' dogs, for example, smell Athena when she is invisible to everyone but Odysseus, in a scene that echoes the common belief that animals, especially dogs, are able to sense things that humans cannot.[6] Euripides' Hippolytus, when severely wounded and on the brink of death, recognizes the presence of Artemis because of her scent, and says that her fragrance lightens his pain.[7] Demeter conceals her sweet smell along with other signs of her divinity when she disguises herself as a nurse in the house of Celeus and Metaneira; when she reveals herself as a goddess, she begins to shine and a sweet fragrance flows from her clothing.[8] Vergil's Venus similarly reveals herself through scent when she turns away from her son and drops her previous disguise.[9] Aeschylus' Prometheus, smelling someone approach his rock, wonders who they are, and whether the scent is that of a god, a mortal, or a hero, who as a demigod will smell like both the divine and the mortal scents mixed together (τίς ἀχώ, τίς ὀδμὰ προσέπτα μ' ἀφεγγής, / θεόσυτος, ἢ βρότειος, ἢ κεκραμένη).[10] In Moschus' *Europa*, the bull that is actually a disguised Zeus lures Europa to him in part through his ambrosial smell.[11] Isis in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* exudes ambrosia and sweet Arabian fragrances when she appears to Lucius, which along with her celestial beauty and promise of hope fills him with fear and joy.[12] Gods, in other words, smell different from humans. Ovid imagines a conversation with Flora, at the end of which the goddess vanishes, leaving a lingering scent of her flowers

4. See Lilja 1972a: 19–25 for many more examples of divine fragrance.
5. Recognition of deities through scent occurs in Egyptian literature as well; Price 2018.
6. Hom. *Od*. 16.159–65. Animals do, of course, often have sharper senses than humans; however, animal perception is often exaggerated to supernatural levels, as here.
7. Eur. *Hippolytus* 1391–94.
8. *Hom. Hymn Dem*. 275–81.
9. *Aen*. 1.403–4.
10. *PV* 115–16.
11. *Europa* 91.
12. Scent: Apul. *Met*. 11.4; Lucius' reaction, *Met*. 11.7.

behind. "You would have known it was a goddess" (*posses scire fuisse deam*), he comments.[13]

This belief that scent is a sign of invisible presences is found in many cultures, with some peoples conceiving of spirits as, fundamentally, beings of scent.[14] The Greco-Roman gods are more often imagined as solid entities who merely smell especially good. However, in ancient literature there are also myriad ways of representing their supernatural nature: when they want to, the gods can be invisible, intangible, able to move swiftly between places at will, and generally not bound by human physical constraints. Athena vanishes from Telemachus like a bird and Circe passes invisibly and impossibly quickly by Odysseus and his men in the *Odyssey*; for who, Odysseus asks, could see a god against their will?[15] Apollonius' rendition of the sea goddess Thetis is capable of appearing to her husband Peleus alone while the other Argonauts remain unaware of her presence; she has also previously left his house in fury, passing through the hall "like a wind, like a dream" (αὐτὴ δὲ πνοιῇ ἰκέλη δέμας, ἠύτ' ὄνειρος, / βῆ).[16] A variety of metaphors for divine incorporeality and swiftness are thus employed from the earliest Greek literature. A more ethereal way of conceptualizing divinity is also found in Heraclitus' description of god as like an oil to which many scents can be added to make different perfumes.[17] Zeus, while he is not himself made of mist, shrouds himself in a fragrant cloud in the *Iliad* (15.153). Democritus, perhaps having this passage in mind, suggested that ambrosia was a vapor that nourished the sun, which he identifies with Zeus.[18]

Other insubstantial entities, such as the soul, could be imagined as scents; thus Lucretius compares the soul to the smell of perfume, the bouquet of wine, or the flavor of food, all of which are intangible things that can disperse and leave the substance from which they came no lighter but devoid of their essence, as the soul departs from the person and leaves the body behind unaltered, yet with its essential part missing (3.208–30). Heraclitus, too, may have conceived of souls as a sort of smoke, scent, or exhalation, and also appears to have commented that the dead retained their sense of smell in Hades, although as ever the fragmentary state of the Presocratics makes his meaning ambiguous.[19]

13. *Fast*. 5.375–76.
14. See chapter 1.
15. *Od*. 1.319–20, 10.570–74.
16. *Argonautica* 4.852–55, 4.865–79.
17. Heraclitus fr. 67 Diels. See Frankel 1938.
18. Democritus fr. 25 Diels.
19. Heraclitus fr. 36, 98 Diels-Krantz. See Robinson 1986.

Lucretius and Heraclitus are being metaphorical, not literally describing the soul as an odor; however, the repeated comparison of the soul's intangibility to that of smells testifies to what people found similar, and similarly mysterious, about the supernatural and odors.

This comparison of divine/human essences to scents is reflected in the many stories in which scent is used instrumentally to imbue a person with immortality or their body with incorruptibility, the odor transferring something divine to them. In the *Hymn to Demeter*, Demeter raises the infant Demophoon without food, instead rubbing him with ambrosia "like the child of a god" and breathing "sweetly" on him to make him immortal (Δημήτηρ / χρίεσκ᾽ ἀμβροσίηι ὡς εἰ θεοῦ ἐκγεγαῶτα, / ἡδὺ καταπνείουσα καὶ ἐν κόλποισιν ἔχουσα; 236a–38).[20] Similarly, as part of the procedure to make Aeneas immortal in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Venus washes away his mortality in water, purifies him with a "divine odor," and then anoints his face with ambrosia and nectar (*lustratum genetrix divino corpus odore* / *unxit et ambrosia cum dulci nectare mixta* / *contigit os fecitque deum*; 14.605–7); Adonis is also changed into an anemone when Aphrodite sprinkles him with fragrant nectar (10.731–34), and Leucothoë's corpse, touched with nectar, melts away in fragrance as she becomes the frankincense plant (4.252–55). Theocritus' fifteenth *Idyll* praises Aphrodite for making Berenike immortal with drops of ambrosia on her breast (15.106–8). Scent can preserve the bodies of the dead as well as make the living immortal; in the *Iliad*, Thetis makes Patroclus' body incorruptible by pouring ambrosia onto or perhaps into his nostrils (19.38–40). Aphrodite anoints Hector's body with a perfume of roses which, although it is called ambrosial, is explicitly an olive-oil-based rose unguent such as humans used (ῥοδόεντι δὲ χρῖεν ἐλαίῳ/ ἀμβροσίῳ; 23.186–87). This protects his corpse not only from decay, but from physical damage as he is dragged behind Achilles' chariot.

The divine scents used in all these passages are simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, being mythologized representations of the familiar human scent of perfume, wine, spices, plants, and similar olfactory experiences. There is little consistency in them; nor for that matter in ancient representations of the gods more generally, who sometimes eat and drink, but sometimes do not need to, sometimes use ambrosia as a food and sometimes as a perfume, and sometimes have bodies like humans and sometimes are incorporeal. We can see potential fantastic reflections of many real uses of scent, from the curative applications of odors and scented plants seen in chapter 2 to mummification and embalming

20. Cf. the infant Aristaeus being fed nectar and ambrosia in Pindar *Pyth*. 9.62–64.

practices perhaps reflected in Thetis' application of perfume to Patroclus' corpse—or perhaps instead, that passage reflects the fact that scents still pleased the dead, as reflected in offerings of incense and flowers at grave sites.[21] What is clear, however, is that pleasant odors signal immortality and incorruptibility in ancient literature.

Places connected with gods, such as their birthplaces, homes, or favored cities and islands were also described as naturally fragrant (as distinct from temples and sanctuaries that humans deliberately perfume, to be discussed below). The *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* describes Aphrodite's island of Cyprus, as well as her temple and altar there, as fragrant (εὐώδεα Κύπρον; 66); Mount Olympus is incense-scented (θυώδης) in the *Homeric Hymns* to Demeter (331) and Hermes (322), while the caves in which Hermes (*Hymn to Hermes* 65, 231) and Dionysus (*Hymn 26 to Dionysus*) were raised are good-smelling (εὐώδης). In a fragment of Theognis, Delos is filled with the scent of perfume at the moment of Apollo's birth.[22] Callimachus makes Athena's grove and altars by the river Coralius fragrant (*Hymn* 5.63), while Propertius imagines Naxos running with sweet-smelling streams of wine in a hymn to Bacchus (3.17.27).[23] Diodorus Siculus, telling the myth of Persephone's abduction (5.2.2–3), says that the same sweet-smelling flowers that bloomed to lure Persephone to Hades' trap still bloom in Sicily, so that hunting dogs, overcome by the odor, cannot follow tracks there. Scent becomes a lingering memorial to the gods' presence, marking spots of divine visitation on the landscape through time. If fragrance identified a spot potentially numinous, so could certain bad odors, particularly sulfurous smells, which are a common feature of the landscape in volcanic regions like Campania. Lake Avernus owed its reputation as one of the entrances to the underworld to its dark waters and sulfurous odor, and the underworld itself was sometimes characterized as dank or sulfurous-smelling.[24] (The Elysian fields and similar abodes of the blessed dead, by contrast, include fragrant blossoming meadows.)[25]

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21. Lilja 1972a: 54–57 collects sources on funerary uses of incense.
22. Theognis fr. 8 Bergk.
23. For more examples, see Lilja 1972a: 25–30.
24. Lake Avernus as the entrance to Hades: Lucr. 6.738-65, Verg. *Aen.* 6.201–4, 236–41; Sil. *Pun.* 13.381–465, 562–76. In Horace *Epode* 5.26, Sagana scatters waters from Avernus through the house as part of the preparations for the sacrifice of the boy. The underworld is dank and musty in early Greek sources: Hom. *Il.* 20.65 and *Od.* 10.512, 23.322; Hes. *Op.* 153 and *Theog.* 739. Roman depictions sometimes place more weight on the sulfurous associations with Avernus and other volcanic spots; e.g. Silius Italicus (*Pun.* 13.562–76) gives a lurid description of the sulfurous and poison-laden waters of the underworld.
25. Hom. *Od.* 11.539, 573, 24.13; Pindar *Ol.* 2.59–75; Verg. *Aen.* 6.658.

Humans, of course, used scent to communicate with the divine, in effect providing the good smells that were expected to accompany contact with gods. Instead of nectar or ambrosia, the dominant smells of normative Greco-Roman religious occasions—as the ancients describe them, a point to which I will return—were incense and roasting sacrificial meat. The smoke from a burnt offering rose up to the heavens and pleased the gods, who "ate" the sacrifice in this way, a point to which the Greeks appear to have given significant thought. While many versions of myth show the gods dining on human foods or feasting alongside human worshippers, some raise concerns about the potential contamination of the divine thereby, as in the story of Tantalus feeding his son Pelops to the gods. The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* suggests that the gods can eat human food, but consider it inappropriate (130–36): the infant Hermes is tempted by the savory smell of roasting cattle, but ultimately resists tasting the meat. The smell alone is supposed to be enough. This method of communicating with and pleasing the gods was accompanied by prayers and other ritual, but the smell of sacrifice was expected to help in attracting the gods' attention and persuading them to do as the worshippers asked.

Divine-human communication could work through scent in the other direction as well, with inspired prophecy being envisioned as a process in which a god breathed inspiration into (*inspirare*) a person or possessed their body. At Delphi, the prophetic trances of the Pythia were sometimes explained as the effect of vapors arising from cracks in the rocks under the temple of Apollo, which the Pythia breathed in and was inspired by. Plutarch notes an indescribably sweet smell that sometimes filled the temple, coming from the inner shrine, "like the best and costliest myrrh" (οἵας ἂν τὰ ἥδιστα καὶ πολυτελέστατα τῶν μύρων ἀποφορὰς), proof that the vapors were strong that day.[26] Similar explanations were offered for the Sibyl's prophecies at Cumae.[27] Statius connected prophetic inspiration to the smoke of burning fumigants, depicting the prophets Calchas and Tiresias breathing in smoke from altar fires in order to enter ecstatic trances.[28] In other cases, scent acts as a metaphor for prophecy, as when Cassandra claims, just before Agamemnon's death, that his palace smells of blood and murder.[29]

Because of the abundant use of incenses and other scents in religious con-

26. Plut. *De def. or*. 50 = Moralia 437C.
27. Luc. 5.82–84.
28. *Theb*. 10.604–5; *Achil*. 1.509–22.
29. Aeschylus *Ag*. 1309–12. See also Hdt. 1.47 and Lilja 1972a: 207 on these passages.

texts, sanctuaries, temples, and altars are typically described as fragrant in ancient literature. The *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (58) describes the goddess's temple on Paphos as a θυώδηα νηόν, "incense-scented temple," and refers to her τέμενος βωμός τε θυώδης, "fragrant altar and precinct" (59); mild variations of this phrase occur several times in Homer and the *Homeric Hymns*.[30] For a sacred precinct or altar to be described as θυώδης ("smelling of incense") signifies that it smells of the incenses and aromatics burned there in sacrificial contexts. The smell is distinct from the smell of roasted meat from an animal sacrifice, the term for which is κνίση. Other examples of temples, altars, and precincts characterized as sweet-smelling are numerous. Terms used for them include θυώδης, θυόεις ("full of incense"), θυοδόκος ("receiving incense"), and εὐώδης ("good smelling").[31] As we have seen, divine places such as Mount Olympus and the caves of Hermes and Dionysus were often described as fragrant thanks to their connection with the gods; in describing sanctuaries, however, the focus on the scent of burning incense emphasizes that these places are artificially pleasant-smelling because they are places where humans engage in worship. Entire cities and islands were described as filled with the smoke of their sanctuaries' incense: thus Eleusis is repeatedly Ἐλευσῖνος θυοέσσης, "incense-filled Eleusis," in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*; Cyprus is εὐώδεα Κύπρον, "sweet-smelling Cyprus," in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*; and Delos is Ἀστερίη θυόεσσα, "incense-filled Asteria" in Callimachus' hymn to the island.[32]

Fragrance was so fundamental to the experience of Greek religious sites that Philostratus repeatedly mentions the scents of Dodona in his *Imagines* ("*Artworks*"). The *Imagines* consists of a series of short descriptions of art pieces, so Philostratus is describing, not Dodona itself, but a painting of Dodona, and yet he claims that this visual medium is capable of conveying the scent of the site—it is "painted as smelling of incense" (καὶ τὸ χωρίον δὲ αὐτὸ θυῶδες, ὦ παῖ, γέγραπται) and the priestesses of Zeus "seem to give out the scent of incense and libations" (ἐοίκασι γὰρ θυμιαμάτων τε ἀναπνεῖν καὶ σπονδῶν).[33] Even when Ovid imagines a primitive Roman ceremony at the Agonalia, he does not describe it as inodorate, but rather as perfumed by native

30. *Il.* 23.148; *Od.* 8.363; *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 87.
31. E.g., θυόεις: Pind. fr. 75.3; Eur. *Tro.* 1061; θυοδόκος: Eur. *Ion* 511, 1549; εὐώδης: Pindar *Ol.* 7.32–33.
32. *Hom. Hymn Dem* 97, 318, 490; *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 66; Callimachus, *Hymn* 1.300.
33. Both *Imag.* 2.33.

Roman scents such as laurel, juniper, and violets instead of imported scents such as myrrh or saffron.[34] The description of places like Mount Olympus as incense-scented evokes, recursively, this expectation that holy places will smell nice: while the expectation is often that the divine presence naturally fills the place with a good scent, that view is expressed in terms appropriate to the more familiar human religious sites in which the incense-laden atmosphere recreates the sweet smell of the numinous.

In private worship, people deployed smells to recreate the experience of a sanctuary in miniature at home. Incenses and perfumes were among the offerings made in domestic ceremonies, but the perfuming of space at home went beyond simple burning of incense on home altars, to include practices such as hanging dried quinces on statues of deities in the bedroom for the sweet scent.[35] Some of the more interesting examples of recreating divinely perfumed atmospheres at home come from the magical papyri, in which, as I discussed in chapter 3, magicians liberally scented the areas in which they conducted rituals. Not all uses of scent in magical contexts specifically mimic temple practices, but some elements in the papyri, such as the frequent use of *kyphi*, are probably meant to evoke the atmosphere of public ritual at home.

A visitor might encounter other scents at an ancient sanctuary besides incense and roasting meat. Plants in the form of wreaths, garlands, cut flowers, and branches would have shed the scent of fresh-cut greenery around worshippers who wore, held, shook, or deposited them on an altar. Libations of wine were poured; wine itself was known for its fragrance.[36] At some sanctuaries sacred trees contributed their odor. Statues of the gods were anointed with perfume oils, smoked with incense, or decorated with flower wreaths and garlands, as in an epigram in which Callimachus compares a newly dedicated statue of Berenike to the Graces; he describes it as newly cut and still wet with perfume.[37] Nor was burning incense the only way to offer it to the gods; sometimes spices were decoratively presented as votive offerings meant to be kept rather than consumed. Pliny (*HN* 12.94) describes two such offerings made in temples at Rome: Vespasian dedicated crowns made from cinnamon surrounded with

34. *Fast*. 1.337–46. Nostalgia for the simple scents supposedly used by earlier Romans instead of expensive modern incenses is a recurring theme in Roman religious discourse; see also Pliny *HN* 13.2.
35. Lilja 1972a: 37–47 discusses religious uses of incense. Quinces on statues: Pliny *HN* 13.27–28.
36. Lilja 1972a: 110–19; note the smell of wine that is said to perfume Naxos from its streams, above, Prop. 3.17.27.
37. Callimachus *Epigr*. 51. See also the humorous anecdote in Babrius 48, in which a statue declines a dog's offer to "anoint" it.

embossed gold at the Temples of the Capitol and Peace; and in the temple of Augustus on the Palatine, Pliny says that he himself saw a huge cinnamon root placed in a golden bowl, which still distilled droplets of spice, and which was kept there for years until the temple was destroyed by fire.[38] But the smell of smoking incense, above all, was considered the basic scent of sanctuaries; while the savor of roasting meat is frequently mentioned, it is usually described in conjunction with specific moments of sacrifice rather than seen as characteristic of the atmosphere of the site.[39] Animal sacrifice, as the centerpiece of ancient worship, is treated as a critical moment, while the constant smoke of incense offerings is described as a pervasive backdrop for religious landscapes.

Scholars have rightly pointed out that animal sacrifice must have produced an overpowering stench of blood, excrement, and offal, especially in the warmer months.[40] However, the ancients still thought of their sanctuaries fundamentally as perfumed places. It is worth reconsidering the ancient religious landscape not in terms of all scents, but in terms of which scents were considered noticeable and memorable by ancient visitors. As Candace Weddle has pointed out, the ancients "would have perceived the sensory by-products of sacrifices somewhat differently than would a modern observer. . . . [W]hen repeatedly exposed to such sensory cues, individuals may become inured to them to the point that such stimuli recede into the sensory background and no longer elicit a conscious response; it is certainly true that a modern urbanite may tune out the sound of constant car traffic."[41] This habituation to certain sensory inputs is a familiar biological phenomenon, but it is also a matter of acculturation, as a society cues its members about what scents, sounds, and so forth are culturally salient and thus to be taken more notice of. Without denying the value or reality of the religious scentscapes we can tentatively reconstruct for the ancient world, the ancient experience of these religious spaces depended on not just the stimuli present, but on how people were culturally trained to perceive and interact with these stimuli.

To compare a modern event in which a strong cultural narrative shapes our experiences, we might think about how we remember and describe the scents of holidays: Christmas, for example, to take a case which is especially culturally

38. See Rehak 1990 on the dedication in the Temple of Augustus.
39. See for example Pindar *Ol.* 7.80; *Isthm.* 4.66; Eur. *Alc.* 1156.
40. See especially Weddle 2013 on smell and Weddle 2017 on other sensory experiences of ancient sacrifice.
41. Weddle 2013: 155.

pervasive in the US. Thanks to advertising, movies, seasonal products, family traditions, and so forth, a modern American is likely to associate certain smells with Christmas, whether or not they personally celebrate it: peppermint, pine scents, cinnamon, candles, roast meat, chocolate, snow, baking cookies, etc. None of these are exclusively associated with Christmas, but they are part of a recognizable complex of odor associations surrounding it, and they take on meaning as part of that matrix of associations, so that baking smells can signal "Christmas" in December in a way that they do not in July. We could just as easily think of the holidays as smelling like raw turkey, burnt gravy, mud, car exhaust, and sweaty boots—seasonal things we may also encounter—but these are not part of the cultural narrative; confirmation bias, encountering a tray of cinnamon cookies in a kitchen that also contains a wet dog, reiterates that Christmas smells like cinnamon and not the dog. In the same way, I would suggest that the ancients probably ignored many of the smells we know were present and probably objectively powerful at sanctuaries, and focused on other, pleasanter ones that they had been conditioned to expect. As we try to imaginatively reconstruct the scentscapes of the past, offal sounds like it would provide an overpowering stench in the heat of a Greek August, but it does not make an impression on the ancients in their discussions of religious sites. Eleusis—Ἐλευσῖνος θυοέσσης—smells like incense and not like blood or offal or even like roasting meat, perfume, or olive trees in the Greek and Roman cultural memory.

Scent functioned to create and delimit ritual space and occasions. Since fragrance characterized a sanctuary in the mind of the ancients, it marked the transition into sacred space and time, just as visible boundary markers delimited a *temenos*. Although the physical boundaries of a site were fixed and observable, the scent boundaries shifted, sometimes obtruding on the attention of the wider community via smoke and odor, at other times vanishing. This is true not only of permanent religious spaces such as precincts and temples, but of temporary and transient ritual spaces such as makeshift altars and the routes of processions through cities, where scent could be deliberately deployed to create ritual space.

When statues of gods were carried in processions, burning incense might be carried in front of them or placed along the route of the procession to welcome the god and make the place propitious for them. Livy describes the procession welcoming the cult stone of Cybele to Rome in 204; he says that incense burners were placed before the doors of houses along the route taken by the

procession from the ship to the goddess's waiting temple, and as she passed by, people lit their incense and prayed that the goddess would be gracious to Rome, creating a fragrant welcome for her.[42] This was a special occasion, but people carrying smoking incense were a regular feature of processions, as in Dionysius of Halicarnassus' description of the annual Ludi Romani, which opened with a procession of athletes, dancers, musicians, and other entertainers and officials (7.72.13), in which people carrying lit censers and vessels made of precious metals immediately preceded the cult images of the gods. It is perhaps noteworthy that the incense precedes the cult statues but not the athletes or dancers, with the musicians and censers in the middle of the procession enforcing a separation between the less-sacred and more-sacred aspects of the games; the athletes did not need to have their route olfactorily purified and sanctified for them. The procession of Isis in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* involves, among much other pageantry, women scattering flowers, perfumes, and balsam before the goddess's statue.[43] Cicero relates a scene in which a cult statue went, in effect, into exile: when forced by the corrupt governor Verres to hand over their statue of Diana, the Segestan women perfumed it, decorated it with wreaths of flowers, and accompanied the goddess to the borders of their territory while carrying burning incense, emphasizing the sacred character of the statue in protest of Verres' sacrilegious theft.[44]

In military contexts as well, perfume marked sacredness: the eagles of Roman legions, kept in the center of the camp with the images of the gods and emperors, were anointed with perfume on holidays, marking out a fragrant ritual space next to the camp altar, on which incense and sacrifice were also offered. Pliny the Elder (*HN* 13.23) describes this with indignation as a degenerate modern indulgence: what have dusty and sharp-pointed standards to do with perfume? But the association between magico-religious potency and fragrance meant that the presence of perfume and incenses at the heart of the camp was appropriate so that the military, as well as religious, center of operations was perfumed, an olfactory reminder of the locus of power that aided the identification of divine might with the army hierarchy.[45] The standards, images,

42. Livy 29.14.13.
43. Apul. *Met.* 11.9.
44. Cic. *Verr.* 2.4.77.
45. Derrick 2017 discusses the sensory geography of the fort at Vindolanda and suggests that an olfactory gradient was maintained between the more deodorized and fragranced *principia* building (in which the standards themselves were kept) and its surroundings and the outer areas of the fort, in which bad smells were more prevalent.

and sacrificial altar would be replaced in the center every time the army made camp, making this a portable olfactory scentscape.

Scent could perpetuate sanctity through time as well as space, as lingering scents of sacrifice and incense clung to places. On revisiting a modern site at which sacrificial cattle had been slaughtered, Weddle describes how even fifty days after they had been cleaned a smell still clung strongly to areas that had been drenched with blood.[46] In places such as the fifth mile marker on the Via Claudia at Rome, site of an annual sacrifice to the mildew god Robigo, the odors of blood, incense, and wine might prompt recollections of the site's periodic but not constant ritual observance and the purpose of the rites done there.[47]

While the well-off might afford perfumes that made use of scents such as frankincense, myrrh, saffron, or spikenard, many people would encounter these luxuries primarily in ritual contexts and would associate them strongly with such places. Despite Ovid's comments on the ancestral use of laurel and juniper in ceremonies, frankincense probably smelled more "sacred" to many people at Rome because of its remove from the smells of everyday life. By evoking past experiences at which they had smelled the same odors, scent helps to immerse a worshipper in the occasion, and blocks out other distracting odors in the same way that music was used to mask unpropitious noises during ceremonies. While many of the perfumes and incenses encountered at temples used the same scents that the rich might wear as perfumes, some blends were particularly associated with ritual contexts, such as Egyptian *kyphi*, which was strongly associated with worship at temples. By enveloping worshippers in a sweet cloud of scents, incenses and perfumes insulated them from the odors of everyday life and emphasized the liminal, potentially transcendent character of the site.

Odor also prescribes a certain level of communal involvement in ritual matters. A procession that inscribes the route on the air in clouds of frankincense smoke enforces that all who smell it are, in a way, participants, while the reputation of Delos or Cythera for fragrance highlights the sacredness of the entire island. Rather than requiring active participation, as in the act of sacrifice or prayer, incense could enjoin an awareness of passive participation—or conscious rejection of participation—in communal rituals.[48] And strong sensations of all kinds, as discussed in chapter 1, can help to synchronize the mood of participants in a ceremony.

46. Weddle 2013: 146.
47. Ovid, *Fast*. 4.901–42. See Scullard 1981: 108–10 on the location of this rite.
48. Cf. the discussion of this in a modern context in Dronkers 2012.

To return to Pliny's saffron-flavored temple and the questions with which I began: Why would the Eleans build such a thing, and why would anyone want to taste it? On the Elean side, such a profligate use of an expensive spice certainly demonstrates the wealth of the site. Perhaps more importantly, though, to build a perfumed temple is an attempt to infuse the building itself with sacredness, fragrance being both pleasing to the goddess to whom it was dedicated and a perceptible sign of her presence. When the building was new, we might wonder if the saffron-scented plaster smelled strongly enough to perfume the entire structure. By Pliny's day, however, a visitor had to actively seek it out—perhaps as a curiosity, perhaps to become a participant in the contact between gods and humans that fragrances enabled.

Magical, Religious, and Medical Fumigations

If scents signaled the presence and transference of invisible powers, clouds of incense provided a reassuringly visible reification of scent at work. Smoke from burning animal, plant, and mineral matter was used to fumigate people, animals, buildings, and fields, often providing another method for applying odiferous substances that were also mixed into potions for drinking or applied topically.[49] Fumigations were used to cure or avert diseases, to drive off noxious pests, or in purifications to guard against more supernatural dangers. They were a way to transfer to a target through the air the effective powers of plants such as hellebore, a method capable of visibly enveloping the target and, in the case of living things, being breathed in and thus taken directly into the body. Fumigations offered the advantage of being able to affect large areas, groups of multiple patients, and very small or hidden targets such as insects at the cost of fairly little effort, and as such, they were a frequent method of purifying and cleansing. However, ease of use was not the only thing recommending them; sometimes fumigations were used even when relatively difficult to apply, as when smokes were introduced into patients' throats or uteruses through pipes. Fumigations were a form of action that was intellectually justified in varied ways—sometimes fumigations are described in religious terms, sometimes in scientific or magical ones. As is often the case, the ritual methodology remains the same while the explanation of the method changes.

49. Also see chapter 2.

Among the earliest references to fumigations in Greek literature is a passage of the *Odyssey* (22.480–94) in which Odysseus, following the murder of the suitors and the slave women, calls for a fire and sulfur, which he uses to purify the areas where the slaughter took place. Lilja explains this as essentially a cleaning operation, and also points to the repeated description in Homer of spaces such as storerooms and the things stored there, like clothing, as fragrant, suggesting that they were regularly fumigated with incense against vermin.[50] But the *Odyssey* hints at a more nebulous danger as well: as the site of a number of violent deaths, Odysseus' house would in Greek thought be vulnerable to haunting by the restless ghosts of those slain by violence, the *biaiothanatoi*. Although this concern is not raised explicitly, Odysseus' other precautions in this scene suggest that he and his household want to ward off supernatural dangers: in killing Odysseus' unfaithful goatherd Melanthius, among other abuses they cut off his hands and feet, a procedure called "armpitting" (*maschalismos*) that was used to render ghosts harmless toward their enemies after death (*Od*. 22.477).[51] Odysseus also refuses to change into the clean clothes his nurse Eurycleia offers to replace the rags he is wearing until he has cleansed the hall with sulfur (*Od*. 22.486–92), suggesting either a need to purify himself from blood contamination first or a belief that hostile ghosts will not recognize him once he fully resumes his proper identity and garments. Whether we should view this scene as a physical or a metaphysical cleansing, Odysseus treats the fumigation as a matter of urgency.

Lilja's suggestion that the fragrant storerooms and clothing of the Homeric epics were fumigated against animal pests is bolstered by the many later Greek and Roman instructions for smoking out vermin in the house, garden, chicken coop, sheepcote, or fields. While fumigation can genuinely help to drive out, for example, unwanted insects, many of the procedures recorded veer into the realm of the folkloric, particularly drawing on the quasiscientific, quasimagical theory of natural sympathies and antipathies.[52] Snakes, a perpetual concern of

50. Lilja 1972a: 48–49, 53, 203.

51. The extremities cut off were sometimes tied under the armpits of the corpse with string; hence the term. *Suda* s.v. *maschalismos*. See Johnston (1999: 156–59) for a summary of the bibliography and a discussion of *maschalismos* and this passage in the context of *maschalismos*; Johnston sees the mutilation of Melanthius as a related practice of dishonoring a corpse, but not a case of averting a ghost. I agree with her interpretation of the text as it stands, but suggest that it is a remnant of earlier versions of the story in which the supernatural had more prominence. Other classical-era examples: Aesch. *Cho*. 439; Soph. *El*. 444–46.

52. See Lilja 1972a: 52–54, 203–5 for examples of fumigation; many more occur in the agricultural and natural historical sources.

the ancient agronomists, are said to be driven out by the smell of burning stag's horn or women's hair.[53] Deer and snakes were thought to have a natural antipathy to each other, so that snakes would flee even from the smell of burning deer horns, or from someone carrying a stag's tooth, or rubbed with the marrow or suet of a fawn or stag. Drinking deer rennet or even just handling it was supposed to prevent snakebite.[54] But deer also attracted snakes, to the snakes' detriment: the breath of stags, like that of panthers, was supposed to lure snakes out of their holes so that the deer could eat them, while others say that it scorches them.[55] They are attracted to a fire on which a stag's blood is thrown or to the topmost bones of a deer's neck when burned.[56] Fumigations with deer horn, then, are not a simple mechanical suggestion that snakes will flee smoke, but an attempt to harness the hidden natural forces that people like Pliny believed operated in the world. Similarly, the specification of women's hair rather than any hair points again to a belief in the toxicity of women's bodies and is part of the complex of superstitions suggesting that menstrual blood, or the mere proximity of a menstruating woman, will affect plants and animals in the garden.[57]

The category of garden and field fumigations is large, so I will only give a few representative examples here. To rid the garden or orchard of caterpillars, the *Geoponika* (12.8) suggests burning asphalt and sulfur, mushrooms gathered from under walnut trees, or bat droppings and garlic stems; these suggestions accompany another repetition of the menstruating woman charm.[58] The same work (5.48) suggests that you can protect the vineyard against worms and other pests by smoking it with cow dung, galbanum, hartshorn, goat hooves, ivory dust, lily root, women's hair, peony, or burdock. Here again we see that the same odiferous substance may be thought to be effective when applied in a variety of ways to a variety of ills; the *Geoponika* says in an aside in this passage that the smell of burning women's hair can also avert miscarriages in progress and cure out-of-place uteruses, and also that some people, instead of fumigating vineyards with peony and burdock, plant them among the vines, which will also expel pests from the vineyard. A large group of fumigations in the *Geoponika* seem to operate less on a logic of sympathies and antipathies than on an

53. Columella *Rust.* 7.4.6, 8.5.18; Pliny *HN* 8.119; Palladius *De re rustica* 12.13.
54. Pliny *HN* 28.149–51.
55. Ael. *NA* 2.9, 8.6; Pliny *HN* 28.149–51, 11.279.
56. Pliny *HN* 28.149–51.
57. See chapters 4 and 5.
58. On which, see chapter 5.

assumption that animals are capable of understanding when an example is made of one of them. To get rid of pests you can catch a snake (13.8), scorpion (13.9), or ant (13.10) and burn them outside the boundaries of the farm, which will cause other members of their species to avoid your farm.[59] Here the form is similar to that of a fumigation, but the logic is social and treats pests as bad neighbors capable of human reason. (The most extensive of the pest charms in the *Geoponika* advises writing a letter to mice politely asking them to move elsewhere on pain of death; 13.5.)

People and animals could be fumigated to avert or cure disease and other physical ailments such as venomous bites, and fumigations are a regular feature of treatment in the Hippocratic corpus and other ancient medical treatises, particularly for female complaints.[60] Home remedies also call for fumigation, as when Pliny suggests fumigating someone stung by a scorpion with calf's dung.[61] This form of curing slips easily between medical, religious, and magical causality in our sources. In a poem to his mistress Delia, Tibullus reminisces about how he once saved her from illness in a ritual that involved incensing her with burning sulfur while an old woman chanted a magic spell (*ipseque te circum lustravi sulphure puro, / carmine cum magico praecinuisset anus*; 1.5.11–12). The sulfur is akin to both the medical fumigations of the Hippocratics and religious cleansings from pollution, where sulfur was treated as an agent capable of removing religious pollution.[62] Meanwhile, the old witch adds an element of less-licit ritual. Medico-religious purification is found as well in Ovid's description of the spring festival of the Parilia, when Pales, the god of sheep and shepherds, was celebrated. Ovid describes fumigations with calves' blood and ashes saved from the sacrifices of the Fordicidia earlier in the month, along with sulfur, olive wood, pine, juniper, and laurel; the shepherd is to sweep out the sheepfold, clean it with water, and decorate it with branches and garlands before fumigating the flock with the pungent smoke. Then the human participants are to leap over the bonfire, cleansing themselves in the smoke as well.[63] The accompanying prayer lists a number of rural disasters to be warded off, but above all, the shepherd asks the god to "drive away disease; let men and the flocks be healthy" (*pelle procul morbos; valeant hominesque gregesque*; 4.763).

59. See also Ager 2019.
60. See, e.g., the numerous fumigations recommended in the Hippocratic *Diseases of Women*.
61. Pliny *HN* 28.155.
62. E.g., Juv. 2.157–58; Prop. 4.8.81–88. See Lennon 2011 on purifications.
63. Ov. *Fast*. 4.721–862.

This sort of purification of livestock seems to have been common; Pliny records a Greek practice of fumigating houses and sprinkling sheep with black hellebore, which has to be gathered via rhizotomic ritual.[64] Columella suggests fumigating henhouses against disease, and fumigating beehives that have been opened and cleaned out, with a fascinating sympathetic rationale for using burning ox dung to do so: this type of smoke, he says, is particularly suited to bees, as if there is some sort of affinity between them: an echo of the belief that bees arose from the corpses of oxen.[65]

Fumigations also protected against more miasmic dangers, such as mildew, blight, and weather conditions such as fog that harmed plants. Like insect fumigations, these could be practical measures in some situations, but also had elements of folkloric magic to them. Columella advises that in the spring you should keep piles of chaff ready in the vineyard, and when it is unseasonably cold, light them on fire, a method still used in modern vineyards and orchards to avoid frost damage to spring growth. Pliny notes that some people burn three live crabs or roast a sheat-fish to ward off blight from trees and vines.[66] The *Geoponika* agrees with the suggestion of burning crabs or sheat-fish to protect against blight, but also recommends the left horn of an ox, and says to burn cow or goat dung and straw along with them.[67] In these examples, like fights like: an enveloping smoke is used to ward off dangers as enveloping and frustratingly mysterious as mist and disease. A tantalizing few sources even suggest that fumigations can be used to *produce* weather conditions. Pliny at one point in the *Natural History* (28.114) comments that Democritus had claimed that a chameleon's head and throat, if burned on oak coals, could produce thunder storms; the liver, if burned on a tile, could do the same. Pliny distances himself from this advice and says that he will not record the rest of what Democritus had to say on the subject, as it is sorcerous (*reliqua ad veneficia pertinentia quae dicit*), and this is part of a section in which Pliny discusses magical beliefs, many of which he disparages. It is likely that this sort of advice was more common in antiquity than it is in our surviving agricultural sources, which like Pliny usually shy away from suggesting remedies that are too openly supernatural.[68]

64. Pliny *HN* 25.49.
65. Henhouses: *Rust*. 8.5.21; Bees: *Rust*. 9.14.1.
66. Pliny *HN* 18.294.
67. *Geoponika* 5.33.
68. On agricultural magic, Ager 2010, and in particular 124–51 for weather magic.

It is easy to become mired in classification issues with these rituals. Are they scientific procedures? Religious practices? Magical rituals? But from another perspective, the problem is illusory. What we can say with certainty is that odiferous smokes were thought useful for combating a range of difficult, destructive forces such as disease, insects, religious pollution, and weather, which would have been extremely difficult to target by other methods, and that this method remained the same while being explained differently by different users. Such fumigations, which removed danger, are the other side of fumigations and perfumings that imparted power to objects such as the perfumed eagle standards of the Roman army or the rings or other objects smoked in incense or soaked in perfume in the magical papyri.[69]

Later Roman Witches and Scented Spaces

In his first-century-CE *Argonautica*, Valerius Flaccus continues the association of magic with odiferous ingredients, although he pays less attention to smells than Horace or Ovid do, and in the case of his Medea, the smells of her herbs seem more incidental than essential. The only mention made of the scent of Medea or her magic occurs while she debates whether to aid Jason or not, when the room in which she keeps her herbs and poisons is described as "exhaling" magical *venena* (*magicis spirantia tecta venenis* 7.327). The description that follows is of a chamber filled with uncanny ingredients gathered from the bottom of the sea, Hades, and the moon, including the Promethean herb from Apollonius. However, no mention is made of the scent when she uses her drugs. This is typical of Augustan and post-Augustan trends in depictions of magic in which poets move toward amassing detail, with an emphasis on the lurid and weird. For this version of Medea, scent is not a weapon; it is merely an atmospheric detail. Her bedroom, breathing out the odor of magic, echoes Medea's incense-scented (θυώδης) room in Apollonius or Calypso's fragrant cave, or more generally, the more mundane but equally feminine and secluded incense-scented chambers of women in Homer and the *Homeric Hymns*.[70] Scent here sets the scene for the witch, but is not otherwise used. Similarly, Statius' *Thebaid* (4.404–645) contains a lengthy scene of necromancy in which a cleansing fumigation with sulfur and herbs is used to prepare the site for the rites to follow:

69. Chapter 3.
70. See chapter 4.

Lethaeaque sacra
et mersum Ismeni subter confinia ponto
miscentis parat ante ducem, circumque bidentum
visceribus laceris et odori sulphuris aura
graminibusque novis et longo murmure purgat. (4.414–18)

He prepares the rites of Lethe and the ruler immersed below the borders of the Ismenos, mingling with the sea, and he purifies all around with the slashed entrails of sheep and with the breath of pungent sulfur and fresh herbs and long murmuring.

The scene is unusual in Latin poetry both in that the officiant here, the diviner Tiresias, is male, and in that this preliminary rite is clearly set in the tradition of Latin witch literature and yet is used only for purification. Elements of normative religious experience are present (fumigation, animal sacrifice, the incantation) but are made ominous (the sheep's entrails are mutilated, the incantation is muttered). Here too the scent of the sulfur and herbs seems to be added more for atmospheric flavor, with overtones of the real purificatory rites used at rites like the Parilia. In Valerius Flaccus and Statius, what matters is that their magicians have an appropriately ominous setting in which to work.

I have argued that in the rituals of the magical papyri, as in ancient religion generally, the use of perfumes, incenses, flowers, and other scents functioned to frame ritual for the participants as distinct from nonritual moments. In a poem such as the Latin *Argonautica*, scent is equally scene-setting, but for the reader, not the magician. How do *descriptions* of smell frame a reader's experience, and how do they function in scenes of magic in particular? Descriptions of scent are simultaneously very specific and very general. Olfactory memory is powerful: mention the scent of cardamom, pool chlorine, or lilacs, and a reader who has smelled them in the past is likely to immediately recall the odor, whereas a reader who has never encountered those smells is left with only the vaguest conception of them (spice, chemical, flowers) and may use mental placeholders from the same broad categories (e.g., cinnamon, bleach, and roses), or perhaps simply a hedonic impression of pleasant/unpleasant. The vivid recall that actual scents can provoke is much discussed, but it is similarly present, if weaker, when scents are merely described. For all that Proust's madeleine has become a cliché of flashbulb memory in discussions of the senses, it is for most of us a general example, not a specific one—how many readers of Proust or scholarship on Proust know the specific taste of a madeleine in tea? It is the general

experience of a taste prompting a memory, not the particular experience of that taste, that speaks to us. The "smell" of any text is dependent on the reader, and authors exploit the possibility for ambiguity in different ways. Statius, above, describing Tiresias' ritual, gives his audience a combination of specificity (the roasting entrails and the pungent sulfur, both burned frequently enough in Roman rituals that a reader was very likely to know the smell) and vagueness (the "fresh herbs," which could be anything the reader wanted to envision). When Medea's chambers breathe out magical *venena* in Valerius Flaccus, the scent is left entirely to the imagination.

Space, rather than the magician, is perfumed in the anonymous fourth-century-CE *Orphic Argonautica*, where the grove in which the Golden Fleece is kept breathes out scents (912–1015). The grove is described as a walled garden, the sort of space in which vegetables, medicinal herbs, or magic plants might be grown; it is surrounded by seven walls, bronze gates, and towers and battlements, and only Medea knows the rites needed to gain entrance. Inside is a grove of laurels and the oak in which the Fleece hangs, among which grow a variety of herbs, twenty-three in all, plus "other noxious plants which are born from the earth" (ἀλλά τε δηλήεντα κατὰ χθόνα πολλὰ πεφύκει). Many of those listed are odiferous, often pleasantly so (including verbena, sage, honeysuckle, chamomile, basil, and saffron, which the poem specifically describes as fragrant) and have associations with either magic or medicine.

Despite Medea's magical expertise, she falls into the role of assistant to Orpheus, who takes the lead in the propitiatory rites to Artemis that are necessary before opening the gate. Orpheus digs a pit and kindles a fire in it, burning juniper and cedar and other woods. Medea brings him drugs from a fragrant (θυώδεος, 954) chest. While the drugs are probably the origin of that scent, the author does not make this clear, instead focusing on the perfumed atmosphere and space rather than perfumed ingredients. Orpheus kills three puppies and stuffs them with a mixture of blood, herbs, and copper sulfate before burning them on the fire and calling on the Furies. The guardian goddess relents, and the gates open.

The grove breathing out scents has here taken the place of Medea's scented bedroom in Apollonius and Valerius Flaccus, and the ritual in the *Orphic Argonautica* to enter the grove involves creating competing clouds of scent. Before they can enter, Orpheus and his helpers must make the atmosphere as strongly scented outside the grove full of magical herbs as it is inside; it is not clear whether we should see this as enveloping them in scents that protect them from

the dangerous herbs inside, overwhelming the herbal scents with stronger ones, matching the magical atmosphere inside, or simply as a touch of ritual ambience. Either way, both Valerius Flaccus and the author of the *Orphic Argonautica* imagine mysterious locations redolent with the smell of magical herbs, and in particular, odiferous spaces that are the domain of women: although the scent of Medea herself is not commented on in either poem, her storeroom in Valerius Flaccus and the grove she tends in the *Orphic Argonautica* are perfumed by magical ingredients. We have come full circle to the Homeric association of fragrance with the secluded and feminine inner space of a house such as storerooms and bedroom, with, in a Roman twist, the addition of a garden to the list of scented spaces that women curate.

The Colchian grove itself is strange in this poem. Gardens are problematic spaces for Romans, potential locations of unseen licentiousness and indulgence, especially when women are involved; they are also capable of being either highly profitable, and thus acceptable, or luxurious indulgences, and thus morally and economically suspect.[71] A useful comparison can be drawn between the grove in the *Orphic Argonautica* tended by Medea and Book 10 of Columella's *On Farming*, in which the author abandons prose to describe the perfect villa garden in verse, which emulates (and is meant to supplement) Vergil's *Georgics*. Columella's garden is presented as wholly charming: a vibrantly productive patch of ground that the gardener fills with flowers, herbs, fruit trees, and vegetables that bring him both pleasure and profit. Columella's hexameters overflow with lush descriptions of plant life and mythological allusions, and while profit is not heavily emphasized, it is clear that the products of this garden are destined for the market (10.309–17), the landowner's table (10.117–18), or in the case of some fragrant flowers, a temple (10.261–62). Medea's garden, by contrast, is dubiously productive: while some of the plants mentioned in it are useful culinary or medicinal herbs, others are poisonous, and they all seem to grow wild and without purpose in a grove guarded by Artemis, goddess of wild spaces. Columella's garden is overseen by the male reader he instructs, and is heavily identified with female fertility;[72] Medea's is entered only by women, and is closed off to men. Columella's is enclosed with sturdy walls or a hedge to keep cattle and thieves out (10.27–28); Medea's is surrounded by a river, seven walls, towers, iron blocks, gold battlements, bronze

71. Boatwright 1998; Beard 1998: 29; Pagan 2006.
72. Milnor 2005: 278–81.

gates, and an animate statue of Artemis and her dogs with flaming eyes. While these defenses are intended to deter thieves, they also keep a monster in, the serpent guarding the Fleece. The Colchian serpent is oddly present, though miniaturized, in Columella as well: the poet compares caterpillars, one of the dangers that threaten his plants, to the serpent (10.367–68), which in the Medea legend is the garden's proper guardian.[73]

The many ways in which the Colchian grove inverts Columella's model farmer's garden throws into relief the oddity of the way in which it does *not*. The list of plants that grow there is surprisingly unthreatening: laurels, oak, "asphodel, beautiful maidenhair, rushes, galingale, delicate verbena, sage, hedge-mustard, purple honeysuckle, healing cassidony, flourishing field basil, mandrake, hulwort; plus downy dittany, fragrant saffron, nose-smart; and also lion-foot, greenbrier, chamomile, black poppy, alcua, panacea, white hellebore, aconite, and the many harmful plants which the earth bears" (913–21). For a garden that the Orphic narrator has gone to some trouble to describe as foreboding and dangerous, this list of familiar and mostly benign garden and field plants is anticlimactic. A few plants—mandrake, hellebore, aconite—were used as poisons or had a reputation as magical ingredients, and might merit the label "harmful" (δηλήεντα, 921), but basil and honeysuckle? The grove belongs to the tradition of the poetic *locus amoenus*, but ambiguously and without much coherence. Its outside is unwelcoming, but its inside is fragrant with saffron and basil—but then, as if realizing that they have digressed too far from their ominous Colchian theme, the poet tacks on the notice that the plants are actually dangerous. This garden setting thus functions in the opposite way from Columella's garden, which tames the plants that are placed in it. Persian citrons, Columella says (10.405–8), were once poisonous, but now, cultivated in gardens like his, they give ambrosial juice. The Colchian garden, however, makes even harmless domesticated plants at least nominally poisonous; the clash of clichés, *locus amoenus* meeting Roman witch tropes in the hands of a not especially gifted poet, is probably in part to blame. At the same time, however, it is not unprecedented: as seen, Canidia was ambiguously associated with both stench and entrancing fragrance.

In the two *Argonauticas* discussed here, the dangerous magical smell of the witch herself has become the smell of the witch's space. This identification of gardens with women's bodies had a long life in Latin literature as a narrower

73. Ager 2019.

version of the trope of Earth-as-female or the image of women's wombs as fields to be plowed and planted. Columella persistently describes his poetic garden as a woman and describes its luxurious growth in terms of female fecundity, with hoeing and planting described in terms of violent rape:

> . . . eia age segnes
> Pellite nunc somnos, et curvi vomere dentis
> Iam virides lacerate comas, iam scindite amictus.
> Tu gravibus rastris cunctantia perfode terga,
> Tu penitus latis eradere viscera marris
> Ne dubita, et summo ferventia caespite mixta
> Ponere . . . (*Rust.* 10.68–74)
>
> Come, drive away torpid sleep, and now rip earth's green hair with the curved tooth of the plow, now tear away her dress. Break up her stubborn back with heavy rakes; do not hesitate to scrape deep inside her inmost parts with broad hoes, and turn them to the top with the warm sod mixed in . . .

The products of Columella's garden, Kristina Milnor points out, also "appear as both monstrous and sexual," with pregnant cucumbers and gourds described in faintly alarming terms, the latter metaphorically becoming a snake that creeps through the garden grass. All in all, Milnor suggests, "the rampant production and reproduction of the *hortus* threatens to outstrip the ability of both gardener and text to contain it."[74] Palaestrio in Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus* is more explicit that a woman is herself a garden of evils: if a woman is bad, he says, she never needs to ask the grocer for anything, since she has in herself a garden and spices for all evil practices.[75] This metaphor of woman as garden and garden as woman, producing dangerous fruits, emerges again in the *Orphic Argonautica* embellished with the Augustan insistence on the frightening smells of witches and their herbs.

74. Milnor 2005: 280, 258.
75. *Mil.* 191–94. On this passage and connections to *veneficium*, see Dutsch 2005.

Epilogue

The Scent of Ancient Magic

> Now the Witch said nothing at all, but moved gently across the room, always keeping her face and eyes very steadily towards the Prince. When she had come to a little ark set in the wall not far from the fireplace, she opened it, and took out first a handful of a green powder. This she threw on the fire. It did not blaze much, but a very sweet and drowsy smell came from it. And all through the conversation which followed, that smell grew stronger, and filled the room, and made it harder to think. Secondly, she took out a musical instrument rather like a mandolin. She began to play it with her fingers—a steady, monotonous thrumming that you didn't notice after a few minutes. But the less you noticed it, the more it got into your brain and your blood.[1]

The scented magic of antiquity cast a long shadow, as this image of the incense-wielding enchantress in C. S. Lewis's *The Silver Chair* reminds us. Millenia after Apollonius' Medea put a serpent to sleep with her aromatic potions, Lewis's witch similarly lulls her victims via scent, as well as music. The witch holds a prince captive, and mentally enslaved to her: like Medea's brother Apsyrtos or Canidia's Varus, she embodies fears that men could be emasculated and their wills overcome by a domineering woman. The solution in this case is to fight the witch's sweet, mind-muddling fragrance with another odor; one of the characters stomps the witch's fire out and, as Lewis wryly describes the scene, "what remained smelled very largely of burnt marsh-wiggle, which is not at all an enchanting smell."[2]

1. Lewis 1953: 173.
2. Lewis 1953: 181.

This study has only scratched the surface of the rich possibilities that sensory studies hold for examining ritual in the ancient Mediterranean. Setting Greco-Roman magic in a more sensual, embodied context is possible and produces fascinating questions. How, for example, did the differing sensoria of the various cultures and subcultures throughout the ancient Mediterranean affect how groups used and understood scents in ritual, and how does this intersect with the ancient dialogue on magic, a category frequently used to locate the alien other? Along the same lines, how did class, gender, or occupation affect a Greek's history of sensory experiences and thus condition them to react to scents in ritual situations—did a city dweller experience the smells of butchery at a sacrifice in the same way as a country dweller, or did a rich person with access to perfumes and spices react to incense at a festival in the same way as a poor person who encountered them only in that context? Ann-Sophie Barwich (2018) suggests that learning to experience a smell is an active, ongoing process; would a magician who made their own incense from one of the recipes in the magical papyri have experienced the odor in the same way as a casual passerby, and how did that affect their experience of ritual, whether their own spells at home or their future attendance at public ceremonies? Did the *kyphi* of an Egyptian temple now remind them of the summoning ritual they performed on their rooftop as much as it had reminded them of temple practice when they were at home? What else does smell encode in the imaginative literature of antiquity?

The core feeling—that scent equals power, and power has a scent—is a fundamental-enough human reaction that we can document it worldwide, in a variety of cultures spanning millennia. Anyone who encountered C. S. Lewis's Green Lady and her sweet-smelling smoke as a child knows how readily understandable is this attribution of mysterious, entrancing force to a scent. The familiar experience of being affected by smells—whether they relax us, make us hungry, or remind us of a long-ago autumn day—provides an immediate understanding of how something invisible and intangible can overwhelm us.

The vagueness of smell, its lack of agreed-upon meaning and its susceptibility to reinterpretation, made it a perfect metaphorical complement for magic, which is a similarly malleable conceptual tool. Perfume, for example, was a signal that could be reinterpreted according to the needs of the smeller: it might be taken as a sign of urbanity and sophistication, luxury and moral depravity, or it might be ignored entirely in a way that visual or auditory stimuli could often not be. What perfume "meant," if anything, changed according to conve-

nience. Similarly, magic's reality depended entirely on the beholder: as with divination, signs of magic at work, being fundamentally ambiguous, could always be found to confirm someone's desires, whether to bolster accusations of illicit spell-casting or to offer hope that a ritual was producing the desired outcome. Scent, as something real but insubstantial and profoundly ambiguous, provided a perfectly contestable sign, ready to interpret however people wanted. Ancient magic smelled like garlic and myrrh, roses and dung, blood, mint, and frankincense, and ultimately anything and everything at all that the ancients might point to as magic.

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