

Chapter 2

Medieval Magic

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In the early Middle Ages people used and feared magic for the same reasons they used or feared any other sacred ritual: magic was thought to strengthen or sever relationships between people, to overcome material obstacles, and to spread good or evil by protecting a community or introducing sickness and death. But magic was the name given to a class of *inappropriate* sacred rituals, which were excluded from normative Christian practice. Magical activities used objects and language that were not obviously part of Christian material culture or the liturgy, or in ways, or for purposes, which made Churchmen uneasy. An unauthorised sacred ritual was thought to express its practitioner's ignorance of appropriate sacred forms, adherence to heathen practice or association with the Devil.

The heartlands of Western Europe had been Christianized in the fifth and sixth centuries, and Christendom continued to expand into pagan lands in Europe. In these newly converted pagan lands the beliefs and practices of Christians were scrutinized constantly; as earlier beliefs and practices began to disappear in favour of Christianity, some fragments of their mythology and ritual survived in magical sources, detached from their belief systems but still ascribed some kind of power. In a tenth-century manuscript, a "Nine-Herbs Charm" to combat poison and infection includes an invocation to Woden (Odin); its user may have known nothing about the pagan god, but may still have accepted that it was a powerful name to invoke. Practitioners also responded to the spread of Christianity by replacing pagan sources of power with Christian ones: an early medieval Germanic spell to heal a lame horse has Balder's horse being injured and the god Woden healing it, but in later versions it is Christ who heals his own horse. Similarly, most surviving copies of the popular fifth-century Pseudo-Apuleius *Herbarium*, a work on the powers of herbs, open with the Lord's Prayer rather than with the original invocation to 'Holy goddess Earth.'

The early medieval triumph of Christianity over paganism instilled confidence in the superiority of divine over demonic power. In early medieval hagiographies the magician was often the counterpoint to the saint: a figure who revealed the powers available to humans in the cosmos but against whom the merits of saints could be demonstrated. In the Christianized cosmos, certain key powers associated with magical practitioners were appropriated for the saints, such as control over the elements – a valuable ability in an agrarian community. The appropriation of positive supernatural powers for saints was accompanied by negative characterizations of magic as an antisocial and even demonic activity. Two categories of magic which become prominent in hostile sources in this period – *sortilegium* (sorcery) and *maleficium* (literally ‘evil practice’) – present it as a harmful force aimed at causing sickness, death, poverty and material destruction. But in order to legislate against magical practices, secular and religious authorities needed to define and describe them. The most comprehensive early medieval attempt to do this is found in the eighth book of the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville (c.560-636), which discussed religion and religious sects, thereby suggesting that magic was a deviant form of religion. Isidore described specific varieties of magical practitioners and diviners; these included the *malefici* (evil-doers), who had power over the elements and men’s minds, killed by the power of their incantations and summoned demons to help them, and the *incantatores* (enchanters), who worked magic by the power of words. Throughout the medieval period secular rulers legislated harshly against magic in order to express their piety and emphasise their role as protectors of Christian communities, and as the Christian territories of Europe became stronger and more consolidated such legislation could have a broader impact. The Emperor Charlemagne, for example, made a sweeping legal condemnation of magic in 789 in his *Admonitio generali* (General Admonition), which required magicians and enchanters throughout his kingdom to repent or be condemned to death.

Early medieval sermons also condemned magic harshly and urged men and women to more appropriate Christian actions such as prayer. Condemned magical activities included the use of unorthodox words (often distinguished from prayer as invocations or diabolical charms), of images (such as metal talismans or amulets made from natural objects), of physical actions (for example picking herbs at a particular time, or putting a child in an oven to cure fever), of religious actions like invoking deities or sacrificing to demons, and of the body or body parts (such as hair or saliva but also the malevolent gaze of the evil eye), and making concoctions

from natural ingredients in order to harm or inappropriately influence others. There could be more than one reason for a given practice attracting suspicion: an inappropriate practitioner, intention or source of power, or the inappropriate use of orthodox religious power. Particularly suspicious was an adaptation of sacred ritual: adding to or subtracting from what had been established by the Church, even if (sometimes especially if) it was Churchmen themselves who initiated the deviations.

Critics of magic did not accept that its practitioners drew on natural powers in the cosmos like those of herbs, stones or stars, but assumed that their actions expressed an association with demons or the remnants of heathen religious practice. However, local Church authorities seem to have had some sympathy with the motives that led people to perform magic in order to solve domestic crises (such as the sickness of a child) or to try to improve their lives by making their fields and animals more fertile. Men and women at all social levels would have known the difference between calling on the aid of God or the saints and calling on demons, but they may not have worried about the source of power when they performed a ritual that might save their child or their crops.

Penitentials – books of church rules in circulation from the sixth century, which described the penances that a priest should apply for a range of transgressions – assign harsher punishments for priests (who should know better) than lay people, and view some intentions as more worthy of condemnation than others. The Burgundian Penitential (c.700-725) prescribes seven years of subsisting only on bread and water for magic that had destroyed someone, but fewer if the practitioner had been motivated by love and no harm had resulted. The passage in this penitential and others on magical practitioners inspired by love refers specifically to clerics, deacons and priests. This may imply that they were sometimes motivated by pastoral concerns to perform rituals that departed from normative sacred rituals in order to help their communities. For example, a long and complex Anglo-Saxon ritual for restoring fertility to fields ruined by a sorcerer or poisoner required a priest to sing masses in a church over four sods of earth from the field, alongside ritual actions, the invocation of sacred assistance from the mother of the earth and the ritual gathering and use of various fruits of the earth. Other prayers and remedies from this period surviving in monastic manuscripts reveal the popularity of unorthodox angel names for specific areas of concern, such as Panchiel for crop protection or Dormiel for stomach ache.

Many magical activities could be performed by anyone: early medieval sources describe how words or incantations were used to transform everyday objects like knots, bread, cloth and even grass into magical tools. The bishop Burchard of Worms claimed in his *Corrector* (c.1008-12) which drew on earlier writings about magic, that these activities were frequently performed by swineherds and ploughmen and sometimes by hunters. In penitentials magical activities tended to be treated as the foolish errors of uneducated people who were able to redeem themselves through relatively light penances. Exceptions to this general leniency occur in cases where the magical practitioner intended harm, since ignorance of appropriate ritual forms was not an excuse for violence. Magical experts were also singled out as they were more threatening to the Church than ordinary people engaged in magical activities, experts such as male enchanters who were thought to use incantations to arouse storms and female practitioners who specialized in inciting love and hatred. The strong association of magic and language was characteristic of a religion of the book, whose leaders believed strongly in the power of the sacred word but were afraid of its improper use.

In the late Middle Ages there was a dramatic rise in the number and complexity of magic texts in circulation, which had significant implications for how people thought about celestial and spiritual power in the medieval universe and how it could be manipulated. Nevertheless, this period saw the continuation of three significant aspects of early medieval magic. Rituals continued to be easily adaptable to changing circumstances; in the later Middle Ages this was expressed in the translation and adaptation of Jewish and Arabic magic texts.

The strong association of magical practices with churchmen remained: increasingly the evil of magic was thought to lie not in a resurgence of pagan practices but in learned clerics using their priestly powers to the wrong ends. Finally, the stereotype of the evil magician in league with demons continued to be significant, though the nature of the relationship between demons and humans, especially women, changed towards the end of this period with a new emphasis on the demonic pact.

From Arabic into Latin: Translating activity and learned magic

In the eleventh century Europe entered a period of expansion, centralization and creativity. One of the areas of political expansion was Spain, where Christian kingdoms began to gain territories from Muslim rulers. After the capture of Toledo in 1085 the Pope sent foreign clerics into Spain to impose ritual uniformity on churches that had spent a long period under

Muslim rule. In the newly captured territories Christian clerics discovered an extraordinary wealth of Greek philosophy and science that had been preserved in the Arabic world, and Arabic texts whose authors had already wrestled with many of the difficulties of reconciling pagan ideas with monotheism. A great translation movement was instigated as scholars from across Europe flocked to centres in Spain, Sicily and the Middle East to translate works from Arabic into Latin, often collaborating with local Jewish scholars who had linguistic expertise in Arabic, Latin and Hebrew. The ensuing extraordinary influx into Europe of magic texts from the Greek, Arabic and Jewish traditions transformed the status of late medieval magic from an illicit activity into a branch of knowledge.

The intellectuals involved in translating activity did not form a distinct community. They had disparate backgrounds and contacts but shared a common openness to the diverse offerings of the new learning, which included works of medicine, philosophy, cosmology, geometry, astronomy, mathematics and the occult sciences. In Muslim Spain (al-Andalus) the exact sciences were inextricably mixed up with astrology and magic, and many Latin translators followed this pattern of interests. For example, the Arabist Adelard of Bath (c.1080-c.1152) translated Euclid's *Elements* (a mathematical and geometrical treatise), al-Khwārizmī's astronomical tables and several works of astrology and magic. Altogether about twenty works of Arabic magic were translated into Latin in the twelfth century. The names of several of their translators are known, but many authors were pseudo-epigraphic (attached to such biblical or legendary authorities as Hermes, Adam or Solomon) or anonymous. This was partly because rituals, invocations and signs were not supposed to be mere human inventions, and partly because theological condemnation in both Islam and Christianity made authorship potentially dangerous. But Arabic magic's association with the prestigious and more acceptable arts of astronomy and astrology aided its reception in the Latin West.

In late Medieval Europe Latin was a transnational language of scholarship, which enabled magic texts to be quickly and widely disseminated. By the end of the Middle Ages many had also been translated into vernacular languages like French, English, German and Italian, thus reaching a wider audience that included lay people. An important centre for the compilation and translation of occult texts into vernacular languages was the scriptorium of Alfonso X of Castile and León (r.1252-84), which employed Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars to translate texts from Arabic and Hebrew into Latin and Castilian. Five magic works were composed or translated under Alfonso's patronage: the *Lapidario*, the *Picatrix*, the *Libro de*

las formas et las ymagenes, the *Libro de astromagia* and the *Liber Razielis*. These reveal Alfonso's particular interest in networks of natural forces in the universe and how to manipulate them, as well as in Hebrew angelology. The preface to the *Liber Razielis* negotiates Alfonso's collection of potentially suspect texts by drawing parallels between his quest for valuable knowledge in diverse traditions and Solomon's pursuit of wisdom from distant lands.

There was also, through the transmission of original texts in Greek and texts derived from Arabic sources, a significant Greek contribution to Medieval Latin astrology and magic. This source of occult texts is much less studied than the translation movement in Spain, but at least two Greek works of magic reached the Latin West in the early Middle Ages: a lapidary (a work on the magical powers inherent in different stones) by Damigeron or Evax, and a book attributed to Thessalus von Tralles on the medicinal uses of plants assigned to the signs of the zodiac and the planets. In the twelfth century a further group of texts on the magical properties of animals, plants and stones was translated – probably by Pascalis Romanus, a priest, medical expert and compiler of a book on dream interpretation working in Constantinople – and proved popular with Latin readers. In the Byzantine world, as in the Latin West, magical activities were a common feature of daily existence, but they often took distinctive local forms. Although the Orthodox Church and secular authorities in Byzantium made an effort to define and describe magical practices and to legislate against them like their Western counterparts, the boundaries with Christian practices were less precise than in the Latin West. The greater cultural continuity between the pagan and Christian periods of the Greco-Roman world meant that non-Christian popular practices were less threatening, and there were far fewer cases of witchcraft in medieval Byzantium than there were in the West. The occult sciences (alchemy, astrology, magic and divination) were part of the learned culture of the medieval Byzantine world, as they were in late medieval Europe. They attracted a similar class of educated bureaucrat, but learned magic had a much more discreet profile: almost all surviving magical and divinatory texts are anonymous and undated. Nevertheless, Byzantium was geographically well situated to promote the transmission of treatises on the occult sciences from and into Greek, Latin and Arabic. Travel, written and oral exchanges and competence in foreign languages facilitated these exchanges, but also gave learned magic a bad reputation as something mainly practiced by foreigners. In the twelfth century a Byzantine nobleman, Alexios Axouch, was accused of consulting a Latin sorcerer who summoned demons to ask them about the future and provided Axouch with

potions that would deprive the Byzantine emperor of a male heir. As we shall see, the same kinds of anxieties at courts, about factions, fertility, and the use of magic to further political goals, were common in the Latin West.

The arrival of Greek and Arabic science through these various routes influenced Christian conceptions of nature and the cosmos and provided scholars in the Latin West with a new technical vocabulary to describe their universe. These intellectual developments form part of a movement of cultural renewal in the Latin West, commonly labelled the 'twelfth-century renaissance' during which interest in learned magic grew, though intellectuals were cautious about defending any specific practice that looked like magic. The twelfth-century renaissance increased confidence in the power of human reason to comprehend the secrets of the universe, which in turn changed the way people thought about their relationship with nature. There was a rapidly growing awareness of the regularity of the natural order, incited by the study of Aristotle in particular, and a new interest in investigating particular aspects of the natural world, from comets and rainbows to animal behaviour and human anatomy. Learned magic texts attracted the serious interest of scholars because they were supported by theories familiar to readers of other genres and because they offered the tools to reveal and exploit the secrets of nature.

In the early Middle Ages people could be described as performing magical actions, but there was little or no sense of a 'magical art' as an organized body of knowledge. After the translation and dissemination of learned magic texts, magic began to be taken more seriously and even its critics engaged with its claims of offering knowledge of the cosmos, if only to condemn them. The Abbess of the Hohenburg Abbey in Alsace, Herrad of Landsberg (1130-95), included magic in an image of the seven Liberal Arts, which was part of her illustrated encyclopedia, the *Hortus deliciarum* (Garden of Delights). In this image Queen Philosophy is surrounded by personifications of the seven Liberal Arts and placed above Socrates and Plato, who are seated in conversation. She holds a scroll which proclaims the divine origins of her art: 'all philosophy comes from God, only the Wise are able to fulfil their wishes.' At the bottom of the folio are poets or magicians, excluded from true philosophy because they are guided by impure spirits and capable of producing only tales and fables, frivolous poetry or magic formulas. The evil spirits perch behind the heads of the poets and magicians and whisper in mockery of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Unsurprisingly, the relationships between philosophy, magic and spiritual inspiration are presented differently in learned magic texts. One of the most complex works of learned magic circulating in late Medieval Europe was the *Picatrix*, the Latin translation of the *Ġhāyat al-Hakīm*, an Arabic compendium of magic composed in Spain in the eleventh century and falsely attributed to Maslama al Majrīfī. For the author of the *Picatrix* the practitioner of magic was a perfect philosopher (*philosophus perfectus*) who had mastered natural philosophy, metaphysics, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. This exemplary magician had acquired his wisdom from a study of the cosmos and of books, but he derived his power from celestial spirits and from the planets dominant in his nativity (the astrological chart drawn up for the moment of his birth). In the *Picatrix* the art of magic and the art of spirits are of equal importance, even indistinguishable. The text describes the founder of magic, Caraphzebiz, as the first person to have a “familiar” (a spirit who remained with him as his companion). This familiar spirit performed marvels for him, helped him understand the secrets of nature and the sciences, and came when invoked with sacrifices.

Twelfth-century thinkers who were involved in the translations movement were excited by the claims of learned magic to manipulate and provide insights into the cosmos. An unusually sympathetic interpretation of the place of magic within classifications of knowledge is found, for example, in the *De divisione philosophiae* (On Divisions of Philosophy) of Dominicus Gundissalinus, an Archdeacon of Segovia who had played a prominent role in the translating activities in Toledo in the twelfth century. Under the general heading of ‘natural science’ Dominicus proposed two categories of magic: ‘necromancy according to physics’ and the ‘science of images.’ The idea that magic could be a part of natural science gained increasing credibility in the thirteenth century as a result of attempts by scholars to understand and classify the properties of natural objects and bodies that were difficult to explain using Aristotelian physics or logic.

Natural magic

The category of ‘natural magic’ emerged as a branch of natural science that studied properties and processes that were extraordinary but natural marvels. It was articulated most clearly by the theologian and Bishop of Paris William of Auvergne (c.1180/90-1249), who suggested that natural magic included the spontaneous generation of such animals as frogs, lice and worms, the actions some souls exercised on bodies outside themselves, and the *sensus*

naturae or *estimativa* by which, for example, the sheep divined that the wolf was its enemy. William wanted to distinguish the marvels produced by occult properties in nature from the trickery of prestidigitators and the illusions of demons. The concept of occult properties – properties whose effects were not explained by the *complexion*, or elemental constitution of a natural object, body or substance – was inherited from Greco-Roman notions of occult powers in the natural order. William emphasised, however, that these virtues had been assigned by God. Today some of these properties are understood, such as magnetism, and others, such as the basilisk's power to kill with its gaze, are known to be fantastical.

Among the Arabic and Greco-Roman magic texts translated into Latin were works which drew on the natural powers of stones, plants, parts of animals, and celestial bodies. The influential fifth-century philosopher and theologian Augustine had assumed that practices of this kind relied implicitly on the power of demons. But Arabic texts brought with them more sophisticated theories to defend their efficacy and licitness, such as cosmological theories of celestial influence, discussions of the placebo effect and arguments using the magnet's ability to attract iron to demonstrate that some striking properties could be witnessed but were difficult to explain. Magical operations that made use of occult powers in nature could now be defended as licit on the grounds that their effects were observable, even if their processes were controversial or not understood. Natural magic also expressed the new post-Aristotelian relationship between man and nature, since magical practitioners saw the harnessing of powers in the natural world as an expression of man's rightful dominance over nature. Many medieval writers disapproved, however, of the use of natural objects to influence a person's personality or emotions, for example by giving them courage or causing them to fall in love. They argued that recipes for achieving goals like this either would be ineffective, or that they could only be achieved with the assistance of demons. Nevertheless, such recipes are very common in natural magic texts. A fifteenth-century illustration of the herb *lunatica* (honesty), drawn on one of the final folios of a mid thirteenth-century collection of herbals and other medical texts (Wellcome MS 573, f. 149v), is accompanied by a description of its magical uses.. These include how to find treasure guarded by demons, have sex without getting pregnant and predict the time of death of a man or woman..

In fact, natural objects with occult properties were ubiquitous in medieval culture. They were incorporated into personal jewellery for daily protection, kept for specific purposes such as childbirth or a long journey, and even placed with the dead to protect them in the afterlife. In

the later Middle Ages the relationship between sacred and natural powers became less distinct. The number and complexity of personal prophylactic objects increased, and these often combined sacred sources of power – Christian relics, formulae and images – with the natural virtues of precious stones and other materials. The treasuries of Cathedrals and Princes came to be repositories for all kinds of objects of power and value, mingling the relics of saints with exotic marvels like ostrich eggs and crocodile skeletons and objects with specific marvellous properties such as precious stones and fragments of unicorn horn. St Alban's Abbey, for example, possessed a large Late Roman imperial cameo (now lost) called Kaadmau, which was part of a collection of gems catalogued by the monk Matthew Paris in 1250-4. The cameo was used to induce overdue childbirths; slowly lowering it on its chain down the woman's cleavage while saying a prayer to St Alban was believed to cause the infant to flee downwards. This gem derived its power from its exotic imagery (incomprehensible to Matthew Paris, who interpreted the Emperor in his military kilt as a man wearing rags), precious materials (chalcedony, sardonyx and onyx) and the sacred invocation of the saint. It was also thought to be empowered by its sacred residence: although it might be lent by the Abbey to favoured lay women, it would lose its power if taken by violence or fraud.

Image magic

The combination of rare natural materials, engraved representations and a supernatural source of power was central to image magic. Image magic was the most common genre of magic translated from Arabic into Latin and consisted of rituals to be performed over a three-dimensional object (an image or talisman) in order to induce a spirit or heavenly body to imbue it with power. The magical object could be created by sculpting metal or wax, inscribing a piece of parchment or cloth, or engraving an object like a ring, mirror or knife. Rituals including the invocation of spirits and suffumigations (the ritual burning of incense) were then performed over the image. When the rituals were complete the image was placed somewhere appropriate to the operation, for example on a merchant's stall to increase trade or on the body to protect it from harm. In some cases God was also asked to help the practitioner achieve his goal, allowing the Christian practitioner to express his piety in the form of a prayer.

An example of such a petition to God can be found in the instructions for using the magic square of Mercury from the *Liber de septem figuris septem planetarum* (The Book of the Seven Figures of the Seven Planets). This Arabic magic text was translated into Latin in the twelfth century and surviving in Arabic, Latin and Greek versions. A magic square is a set of numbers arranged in a square which give the same total when added in a straight line in any direction. In some magic texts this mathematical curiosity was assigned marvellous powers. The planet Mercury was associated with science, knowledge and philosophy. According to this magic text the operator could increase his memory and make learning easier for himself by drawing the magic square of Mercury on a ring, dish, knife, white glass or pewter bowl, then effacing the figure with water and drinking the liquid which he had used to rub it out. If he wished to give his enemy spasms and paralysis and make him lose his sight or mind he should engrave it on a steel mirror, which would then afflict all those who gazed in it. If the operator wanted to acquire knowledge, he was told to fast for one day or three days continuously, eating nothing except bread with honey and raisins. At the end of this period he should draw the square on a cloth of saffron or yellow silk and fumigate it with aloe wood saying: 'O God by the virtue of this figure, reveal this thing to me.' When he placed the cloth under his head before going to sleep everything he had asked for would be revealed in a dream.

Arabic magic texts began to attract increasing scrutiny from the mid-thirteenth century, with theologians such as William of Auvergne concerned about whether their goals were accomplished using natural or demonic powers, and whether the rituals addressed to magical objects constituted planetary idolatry. But not everyone condemned the texts. The curiosity about the natural sciences newly translated from Arabic, and an intellectual concern with the influence of occult powers, especially those of celestial origin, attracted thinkers of the stature of Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus to defend and debate the licitness of image magic. Some translators of magic texts tried to escape censure by adjusting texts to fit the requirements of orthodoxy. John of Seville omitted prayers to spirits in his Latin translation of an Arabic image magic text, Thabit's *De imaginibus* (On images), so that the magical rituals drew only on natural celestial influences, and his version of the text was subsequently viewed as licit. Another approach was to adapt the Islamic spirits to more recognizably Christian figures. An Arabic work of magic called the *Liber Almandal* was rewritten in a version which Christianised the djinns, while the fourteenth-century scribe of a Christian text strongly influenced by Arabic magic, the *Liber de essentia spirituum*, wrote 'angelus' (angel)

in the margin beside the term ‘spiritus’ (spirit) so that the reader would interpret the spirits of this text as good angels.

As learned magic texts spread, it became more important to the authorities to determine which texts constituted legitimate knowledge and which were illicit. In the mid thirteenth century, an influential work called the *Speculum astronomiae* (Mirror of Astronomy) tried to lay out some guidelines. The author of this text was motivated by the defence of astrology to condemn certain kinds of magic which, in his opinion, were besmirching its reputation and working “against the honour of the Catholic faith.” He categorised two works of image magic as licit because they depended solely upon astronomical calculations, and identified two kinds of illicit image magic – “abominable” Hermetic magic texts, which explicitly invoked spirits, and “detestable” Solomonic magic texts, which instructed the operator to inscribe characters on objects and exorcise them with certain names. Hermetic magic (also called ‘astral magic’ to include works not specifically attributed to Hermes) was considered more deplorable because the prayers, invocations and suffumigations offered to planetary spirits seemed to express a cult of planetary idolatry.

Hermes Trismegistus (‘the thrice-great Hermes’) was a mythical authority originating in a fusion of Greek and Egyptian esoteric traditions. In the Greek and Arabic world he was believed to be the author of a large number of works of astrology, magic, alchemy and philosophy. The Arabic occult texts had their origins in Persian and ultimately Indian sources, and, possibly, in the Sabaeans community of star worshippers at Ḥarrān in northern Mesopotamia. An intellectual branch of the Sabaeans was set up in Baghdad in the ninth century and included Thābit ibn Qurra, the author of several image magic texts translated into Latin. Although medieval magic texts did not explicitly encourage the magician to worship the planets, it is not hard to see how this suspicion arose. The *Picatrix* provides prayers to the planets and describes which animals are appropriate to sacrifice to them. Ritual sacrifice of an animal before invoking the spirits of a planet also forms part of the instructions to speak to the spirits of Mercury in a magic text produced at the court of Alfonso X, the *Libro de Astromagia* (Book of Astral Magic, c.1280-1). In the image accompanying instructions for obtaining a magic ring from these spirits the practitioner kneels beside a goat he has sacrificed and receives a magic ring from an angel who is accompanied by a horse. A smaller enclosure on the left of the larger image represents Mercury as a man riding a peacock and the zodiac sign Leo, under which the prayer and sacrifice have been made.

The esoteric characterization of Solomon became popular in some currents of late antique Judaism and Christianity. Solomonian magic texts claim to have been written by Solomon, who is said to have received a revelation of their contents directly from God. Magic rituals in this tradition included prayers to angels and instructions for using magic circles, characters and sacrifices to compel spirits. The cosmologies of Solomonian and Hermetic magic appear superficially different. Hermetic magic texts presented the universe as integrated by a harmonious web of connections across the celestial and physical worlds and described how the practitioner should bring together things with corresponding natures in his ritual – spirits, names, images, prayers, times, locations and materials – so that power could be transferred from higher to lower bodies and be intensified by the harmony of all the parts of the operation. The practitioner of Solomonian magic dominated spirits through knowledge of their names, which he used to invoke the spirits to be present and obey him. But both Hermetic and Solomonian texts emphasised that the success of magical operations depended on the will of God.

The appeal of magic texts undoubtedly lay in the accessibility of their cosmologies. Whereas for Medieval theologians precise knowledge of celestial realms and spirits, and of the means for humans to harness their power, was inappropriate and dangerous, expressing what was beyond the reach of men to know for certain, Arabic and Jewish magic texts extended and elaborated the Christian Universe, populating it with a host of named spirits with particular cosmological roles, and spatial and temporal inhabitations. Although vast numbers of angels were believed to exist – Augustine had posited an angel for every visible thing in the world – most of these angels were deliberately unnamed in mainstream religious sources. But in magic texts spirits were assigned to the air, winds, sea, earth and fire, and to the celestial bodies of various heavens and parts of the heavens. Similarly, the days and hours and seasons and their names, characteristics, and powers were described so that the magical practitioner could use this knowledge to persuade or command them to help him. For example, Asymor, an angel of Mars, appears in several magic texts with mainly Jewish origins which were compiled under the patronage of Alfonso X, King of Castile. He was a useful angel to invoke when someone wanted to inspire love and passion between two people, obtain grace and love from all men or speak with the moon and stars, the dead and demons.

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The dissemination of Arabic and Jewish magic texts across Europe encouraged Christian authors to write their own texts to better reflect their religious beliefs, desires and prejudices. The Christianization of illicit rituals was often a subtle matter. For example, the author of the *Liber iuratus* (Sworn book), a ritual magic text which was influenced by both Jewish and Islamic angelology, forestalled criticism of this appropriation by describing a magic seal which could be used against the 'sect of Mohammad', and by claiming that Jews were unable to use the magic arts to achieve a vision of God or gain truthful responses from spirits because they had rejected Christ. Most Christian-authored magic texts reflected the gulf between good angels and evil demons in Christian cosmology, and focused primarily on one or other group of spirits.

Angel magic

Angel magic or theurgy was intended to persuade angels to confer knowledge and power as well as spiritual benefits on the practitioner. In order to be worthy of spiritual renewal the practitioner had to undergo demanding ascetic practices to purify his body and soul; the rituals to induce a spiritual experience could take several months to perform. If these were completed successfully some texts describe how he would receive a divine transmission of wisdom; others speak of the ascent of his soul while his living body remained on earth, and in others angels descended to speak to him and be his teachers or companions. Some aspects of angel magic relate very closely to mainstream Christianity. The idea that angels could confer spiritual benefits on ordinary humans was popularized in the late medieval cult of guardian angels, who watched over individual souls and after death presented the case for them to enter heaven. Angel magic texts also catered to the thirst for spiritual experience which had spread across society by the end of the Middle Ages; they used many of the same techniques as orthodox texts to achieve this goal, such as prayer, fasting and meditation on images.

The most significant work of angel magic, surviving in over fifty medieval manuscript versions, was the *Ars notoria*. This complex treatise claimed to miraculously endow the practitioner with knowledge of all the liberal arts, philosophy and theology, by means of angelic revelation and a divine infusion of wisdom. It was written by a Christian in Northern Italy in the second half of the twelfth century and was popular with clerical and monastic readers because it incorporated prayers from the liturgy and largely avoided offending mainstream Christian religious sensibilities. The practitioner was required to recite prayers

while 'inspecting' the *notae* (figures composed of words, shapes and magical characters), which looked like mystical diagrams. But their exotic names, magical characters and unusual shapes aroused the suspicion that they were actually tools for communicating with demons. In some manuscript copies angels were placed beside the *notae* to reassure readers and critics of the work's orthodoxy. Magical diagrams like this could have more than one function. They acted as blueprints for the construction of ritual spaces and magical objects, and they were carried on the body and placed under the sleeping head for revelatory dreams. They acted as conduits for supernatural communication and repositories of power, and occasionally they were placed on the flyleaf of manuscripts to preserve their potency.

The prefaces of angel magic texts tried to persuade the reader that they contained knowledge that came directly from God and had first been received and transmitted by such figures as Adam, Solomon, biblical patriarchs or prophets. Angel magic texts gave hope to the practitioner that like Solomon and Adam, he would receive the mercy of God. This redemptive theme is particularly prominent in the *Liber Sameyn*, one of seven magic texts of mainly Jewish origin that were brought together as the *Liber Razielis* by the scribe of Alfonso X. The *Liber Sameyn* opens with Adam weeping on the banks of the river Paraiso having just been expelled from Paradise, but the text relates how God took pity on his creation and sent the angel Raziel to give him a book – the *Liber Razielis* – containing knowledge of the workings of heaven and earth. The owner of this magic text had to undergo his own redemptive ritual to be able to perform its rituals. After seven days of ritual cleansing, he was told to sacrifice two white doves and name the angels assigned to the appropriate month. Three days later, he had to sleep in the ashes of the burnt intestines of the doves inside a house which was lit with burning candles. Angels would then visit him in the night and teach him how to use the magic text.

In both the mystical and the magical traditions, achieving a vision of angels or God demanded a pure soul. In the *Liber munditie et abstinentie* ('Book of cleanliness and abstinence', also part of the *Liber Razielis*) the practitioner is told to guard against dirtiness, evil, wine, eating anything with blood, feeling or expressing desire, touching someone or something dead, and speaking evil or unclean words. If he fulfils the requirements for internal and external purity he will ascend to a spiritual level, which is separated from earthly things, he will be loved by angels, and good spirits will associate with him. Angelic magic texts guided the practitioner towards achieving the love and friendship of angels, and benign spirits

were asked or expected not just to appear in human form but as human companions. A famous experiment in the *Liber Razielis* which originates (via Hebrew sources) in a Greek prayer to Helios describes how to see the sun at night and ask him anything. The practitioner requests that ‘he will speak to me as a man with his friend.’

Like saints and mystics, magical practitioners were spiritually transformed by their companionship with spirits. The author of the *Liber de essentia spirituum* claims to have lived with spirits in the desert for thirty years, and through them to have attained the ranks of the blessed. The *Almandel* states that angels of the first altitude will render a man perfect after he has spoken with them only once, so that ‘he will not need to fear eternal damnation or death without the grace of the saviour’. It is likely that many practitioners of angel magic accepted the sacred origins claimed by these texts and performed their rituals with pious intentions. But orthodox visions required God’s grace, while magic texts offered the practitioner the ability to generate visions himself. The devotion of the magical practitioner can, therefore, seem ‘performative’ (i.e. to be following a text) and lacking in interiority.

Late medieval enthusiasm for spiritual experience became an increasing concern for the Church. In the early fourteenth century a monk named John of Morigny wrote a book called the *Liber florum celestis doctrine* (the Book of the flowers of heavenly teaching), which was a practical manual for achieving a visionary ascent to the presence of God and acquiring knowledge of all the arts and sciences. The *Liber florum* was a revised version of the *Ars notoria*, which John had tried to make more acceptable to ecclesiastical authorities. In effect, John offered a democratization of the vision of God, and his work was intended for women as well as men – his sister Bridget was one of its first users – although like other angel magic texts its users had to have the leisure and inclination to undergo ascetic training and recite lengthy sequences of prayers. John’s claims to have had revelatory experiences were viewed with suspicion and his work was burnt at the University of Paris in 1323. Nevertheless, his pragmatic approach to such experiences was attractive to many readers, particularly monks whose vocation had instilled in them an expectation that they could be spiritually close to the orders of angels. The more than twenty surviving manuscripts of the *Liber florum* so far found suggest that its use was thriving after 1350, especially in monasteries.

Angelic magic texts were always open to the criticism that they were instructing the practitioner to invoke demons who had taken the guise of more benign spirits to trick him

into giving up his soul. But there were also more subversive magic texts in circulation that directed their rituals explicitly to demons: necromantic (or nigromantic) texts. Necromancy originally meant ‘divination by the dead’ – from the Greek, *nekros* (dead) and *manteia* (divination). In the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, however, the Latin *necromantia* was often used to translate the common Arabic word for magic (*sihr*), and from this route found its way into classifications of knowledge made by scholars linked to the translations movement like Daniel of Morley (c.1140-1210), who brought Arabic learning back to England. Later in the thirteenth century discussions of appropriate and inappropriate magic – for example, those by William of Auvergne and the author of the *Speculum astronomiae* – used necromancy as a critical label for all illicit rituals directed to spirits, in contrast to natural magic or ‘astronomical’ image magic. From this general association with “illicitness,” necromancy began to be more specifically applied to experiments, texts or manuals which involved conjuring demons to do the operator’s will.

Angels could elevate the practitioner’s soul, but demons were consumed with a desire to drag human souls to hell, a malevolence summed up in the title of a notorious (and possibly invented) lost magic text *Mors anime* (The death of the soul). Illustrated copies of the *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* (1331, revised 1355) by the Cistercian monk Guillaume de Deguilleville depicted the personification of necromancy holding a book with this title. The *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* is an allegory of the Christian life: a man dreams he is a pilgrim journeying to the Heavenly City, and Necromancy is one of the many hostile malefactors who try to disrupt his journey. She is an old and terrible woman with huge wings, seated in a tree (an allusion to the tree in the Garden of Eden and the disaster which follows the pursuit of forbidden knowledge) and holding a sword that she uses to slay her followers. Because demons were unremittingly hostile to humans, necromantic rituals were designed to protect the practitioner as well as compel the demon to help him. Surviving necromantic experiments reveal that the practitioner would invoke the names of Christ and other holy beings to force demons to be compliant and truthful, construct magic circles to act as zones of safety, and offer animals such as cocks, black cats, and hoopoes as sacrifices to placate demons and coax them into his presence. But demons still needed to be handled with care. The author of the *Liber iuratus* describes the spirits of the earth as so full of wickedness and depravity that the practitioner is advised to write his request to them on a tile with a piece of charcoal and then leave it inside the magic circle rather than risk speaking to them directly. In spite of the dangers involved, summoning demons was attractive because of the great powers

fallen angels were thought to possess, and because magic texts imagined the possibility of more beneficial relationships between humans and demons than mainstream orthodoxy accepted; even a fallen angel might use its power in service of a necromancer.

Demonic magic

As with angel magic, many of the ideas and practices of demonic magic were shared with mainstream Christianity. First, the rituals were an extension of the valid and conventional ritual of exorcism through which a priest gained control of a spirit by commanding it by the names of Christ and the saints. The difference between exorcism and necromancy lay in the fact that necromancers aimed to summon and keep demons present rather than expel them. Secondly, the powers of demons which necromantic rituals described conformed to powers which were accepted by medieval theologians. This is significant because it increased the attractiveness of necromancy to practitioners while also making the alliance between humans and demons a frightening prospect to critics of magic. Theologians had to decide whether necromantic practices only caused violence to the practitioner's soul or whether the alliance of human and demon had wider implications for the safety of the Christian community. **One of the most detailed discussions of demons** occurs in the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas (1265-74), the most important theologian of the late Middle Ages. Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* was intended to be a complete system of thought that encompassed all previous Christian learning and combined it with Aristotelian philosophy. It summarises a body of existing literature on demons by authors such as Augustine, Rabanus Maurus and Gratian, to explain how necromancy worked and why it was not permitted. Aquinas argues that the ability of demons to perform marvels derived from their superior knowledge of nature and natural causes: men could understand demonstrable truths of science, but the demonic mind was keener and able to exploit natural causes more effectively, even though demons also operated within the limits of created nature.

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The most significant powers of demons accepted by theologians – to reveal knowledge, move bodies to different locations very rapidly and to create illusions – were among the most common goals of necromantic experiments. Necromantic handbooks contained instructions to compel demons to reveal hidden treasure or future events, to bring the practitioner beautiful women or magic horses that could carry him to any destination in an instant, and to create extraordinary illusions of boats, castles, marvellous feasts and fighting armies. Some

necromantic experiments seem to push at the boundaries of the theologically accepted limits of demonic power, however. In rituals intended to fill women with burning desire or passionate love for the practitioner, it is not clear how the demon would inspire such emotions. But love was such a popular goal for magic experiments that this difficulty was ignored.

A manuscript of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (Canticles of holy Mary), 420 religious songs honouring the Virgin that were commissioned and partly written by King Alfonso X of Castile, depicts the story of a priest of Auvergne who used necromancy to make a girl fall in love with him. The priest threatened to trap demons in a bottle if they did not help him. According to the cantiga the demons did succeed in causing the girl to feel an overwhelming desire for the priest, but the Virgin Mary miraculously intervened to save her virtue and the priest was carried off to hell. The *Cantigas* reveal that King Alfonso, who had a great interest in learned magic, was concerned to distance himself from rituals for summoning demons. The magic circle became a familiar visual reference for necromancy in the thirteenth century, but in this case it proved to be insufficient protection against the swarming hordes of demons.

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Theologians argued that it was foolish for a man to think that he could have the upper hand in any interaction with demons, because even when demons gave true responses or performed true marvels they only did so to make men and women more trusting and thus lead them towards damnation. Some magic texts subverted the theological emphasis on demonic malevolence, however, by requiring the demon to become the companion, teacher or servant of the practitioner. A necromantic experiment attributed to the infamous astrologer and magician Michael Scot (1175-c.1232) – placed by Dante in hell – describes how to acquire a demonic teacher of all the arts and sciences who will give the practitioner lessons for thirty nights in his sleep. The experiment requires the spirit teacher to teach his pupil with love and only chastise him gently, but nevertheless the spirit is kept under firm control: the magical practitioner can summon or dismiss him at will and he will only be freed when his services are no longer required.

Necromancers may have been just as enticed by the prospect of spiritual experience as the practitioners of angel magic were, but by choosing to summon demons rather than angels they expressed a bold and flamboyant disaffection with social and religious norms. Many practitioners of necromancy were clerics who had the knowledge of Latin and liturgical

rituals needed to perform the rituals but were disaffected with the religious establishment and used magic to try to fulfil their thwarted ambitions. But how serious were their subversive activities? It has been argued that necromantic experiments were sometimes a vehicle of youthful rebellion in which describing one's magical activities could be seen as a kind of 'manly brag,' where the danger and illicit nature of these activities was part of their appeal. It is equally arguable, however, that the typical goals of necromantic rituals were in fact socially conformist, expressing a longing to be part of the establishment. The beautiful women, magical horses, treasure and spectacular (if illusory) castles with which necromantic experiments are filled reveal the insecurity of clerical masculinity and a longing for status, political influence and recognition from secular peers.

Konrad Kyeser's *Bellifortis* (1405) was an illustrated manual of military and magical technology written to promote the writer's skills and get him employment at court. Some of Kyeser's designs mingle horror with playfulness, presumably in an attempt to combine the theatrical appeal of the creation of marvellous illusions with the use of occult powers (in this case clear allusions to sorcery) to intimidate an enemy. Of the three goblins depicted in an illustration of a magical castle (Gottingen, Univ. bibl., cod. Phil. 63, f. 94), one is sounding a trumpet to attract spirits, another is riding a broomstick, and a third is carrying a torch made from a noose.

From a theological perspective, necromantic texts undermined the orthodox positions that there was a strong boundary between good and evil spirits, that detailed knowledge of the world of spirits was hidden from man, and that most men were unworthy to interact with angels and unable to control demons. Yet necromancy was valuable to theologians in one sense: it provided useful evidence for the existence of demons. These malevolent beings were an integral part of the ethical system of Christianity due to their role in testing human virtue during the lifetimes of men and women and the threat of the terrible punishments they would inflict on the wicked after death. When the Abbot Caesarius of Heisterbach wrote his work of instruction for novice monks, the *Dialogus miraculorum* (1220-35), he worried that the demonic presence on earth was not taken seriously enough and tried to make demons more vivid in the imagination of his contemporaries by telling stories in which hapless laypeople and clerics dabbled in necromancy. In one story a knight called Henry, who doubts the existence of demons, urges a necromancer out of curiosity to summon some. The Devil appears, in a huge, shadowy, terrifying form and reveals to Henry that he has travelled a great distance from beyond the sea and has knowledge of all the sins committed in the world,

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including the knight's own. After he narrowly survives this encounter, Henry no longer doubts either the importance of virtuous living or the existence of demons. Through didactic tales such as this ecclesiastical authorities sought to control the narratives of spiritual experience while not denying to medieval people curious for interaction with spirits that such experiences were possible.

The lay elite who were fascinated by supernatural interactions could turn to chivalric romances, a literary genre popular from the twelfth century that described the adventures of legendary knights. Chivalric romances celebrated an idealized code of civilized behaviour which was often demonstrated in encounters with marvellous or supernatural objects and beings. In the early thirteenth century *chanson de geste* entitled *Maugis d'Aigremont* (the story of the youth of Maugis) the enchanter Maugis is told by his fairy mother to prove his knightly qualities by capturing the marvellous horse Bayard. This progeny of a dragon and serpent is imprisoned on a volcanic island and Maugis succeeds by disguising himself as a demon and killing the serpent. In literary contexts the representation of magic and magical practitioners was often used to provide playful subversions of the normative world view. In this case the subversive image of a magician pretending to be a demon to battle his enemy, whose serpent-like form would have evoked the Devil to a medieval audience, is an ironic element in the narrative. The mingling of magic and poetry was intended to stimulate playful debate and conversation, and many literary representations of magic used it as a vehicle for a moral lesson, for example, as in Maugis's case, winning or being given a magical object might express the hero's worthiness.

In chivalric romances marvellous horses appear as worthy steeds and companions to the hero, as Bayard does, in spite of being of monstrous ancestry. The magical horses of necromantic experiments are a rather different kind of creature, demons in disguise who have to be subdued with sacred adjurations. In a surviving fifteenth-century manuscript (Wellcome MS 517) an experiment to conjure a magical horse advises the practitioner to go at dusk to a silent house where no one is living and write demonic names on the wall with bat's blood, then conjure four demons by the names of God and by Christ to bring him a horse: 'I command that the horse comes very quickly to me prepared for riding and without delay or deception to that safe place and it carries me with power and enjoyment and without deception, fear or terror.' Outside the house the practitioner will find a beautiful black horse prepared for riding. It will carry him wherever he wishes and back again, but just before he

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leaves on a journey he must conjure it by Christ, God and the Virgin Mary to be sure that it will carry him safely and cheerfully.

In the early Middle Ages demonic powers were mostly limited to trickery, temptation and deception, but popular fear of demons and their human allies grew as stories about the ways humans and spirits could be bound together through possession, invocation and pact became more credible and significant. These three forms of bond had different implications. Firstly, the openness of the human subject implicit in the idea of possession became a striking feature of the late Middle Ages. Men and women were thought to have the potential to undergo incorporation and inhabitation with the divine, but they were also thought to be vulnerable to possession by the Devil, sometimes merely by the utterance of an ill-judged wish. A second development was the new emphasis found in learned magic texts on the ability of humans to compel, persuade and manipulate spirits. Finally, the theory of a strong and heretical pact between human and demon was developed by theologians and canonists, particularly during the papacy of John XXII (1316-34).

Heresy, sorcery and witchcraft

The late medieval responses of ecclesiastical authorities to magic must be placed in the context of widespread and diverse heretical groups, which emerged in the eleventh century and reached their medieval apogee in the Cathars and Waldensians. A variety of religious opinions could and did exist in late Medieval Europe, and an opinion or doctrine at variance with religious authority only became heresy when it was declared to be intolerable and explicitly or implicitly condemned by the Pope. But the Cathar and Waldensian heresies spread widely and in such numbers from the second half of the twelfth century that they incited significant repression. A Crusade was launched against Catharism in 1209, and in the 1230s the Inquisition (a group of decentralised institutions within the justice system of the Church) was founded to combat heresy. The Inquisition consisted of a system of investigation, accusation, trial and punishment; its formidable and destructive powers derived from the fact that its personnel were responsible only to the pope and often combined spiritual zeal with a blatant disregard for normative legal processes.

The practice of magic did not involve significant deviance from Christian doctrines and it was not publicly disseminated in the way that heretical ideas often were, but fear of heresy

and its targeting by the Inquisition drew attention to magical activities in two significant ways. Firstly, the rhetoric against heresy borrowed from – and influenced– the rhetoric against magic. Heresy, like magic, was viewed as the work of the Devil and an expression of pride (heretics did not accept the opinion of the Church), ignorance (heretics were unable to understand their errors) and fraud (heretics pretended to be pious but were guilty of terrible sins). Heretics were often accused of practising sorcery, and magical practitioners were accused of not being true Christians.

Secondly, the founding of the Inquisition against heresy put magical activities under scrutiny as well. At first magic was not considered as dangerous as heresy: in 1258-60 Pope Alexander IV ordered inquisitors to pay attention to *sortilegium* (sorcery) and divination only when heresy was clearly involved. But in the fourteenth century fear of magic had become more widespread. Trials for sorcery increased especially at the French, English and papal courts, where they often had a vicious political character. John XXII had to deal with multiple cases of sorcery in the early years of his papacy, including several in which defendants were accused of plotting to take his life. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he became particularly paranoid about sorcery. Although many of the papal trials for sorcery involved high-ranking individuals such as the Bishop of Cahors Hugues Géraud, and Galeazzo Visconti of Milan, the main impact of John XXII's aggressive stance towards magic was on popular magical activities. In 1326 John issued a decretal, *Super illius specula*, which assimilated magical practices (the making of images, rings, mirrors, phials or other things for magical purposes) with heresy, asserting that magical practitioners 'who are Christians in name only' sacrificed to demons, worshipped them, bound themselves to them with a pact and fulfilled their most deprived lusts. Magic – in the terrifying shape of idolatrous, licentious demon-worshipping sorcerers – was now very much a focus of Inquisitorial activity.

It is worth noting that the kinds of magical activities which John XXII's decretal condemned were ubiquitous at all levels of late medieval society, took similar forms in both learned and non-learned contexts, and were often part of rituals that combined orthodox and unorthodox elements. Both literate and illiterate practitioners made rings and talismans, inscribed knives and pieces of clothing, prepared ritual concoctions and performed rituals which drew on the natural powers of celestial bodies, herbs, stones and animal parts. Magical invocations, charms and curses were collected by literate users into their manuscripts, circulated orally and were inscribed onto parchment or objects where their power could be accessed by

illiterate owners. Many magical activities should thus be viewed as belonging to a 'common magical tradition,' which was accessible to different social groups and indeed transmitted between them. The prayers, images and magical seals inscribed on 'prayer rolls' that were wrapped around a woman's body to protect her as she gave birth would probably have been commissioned from a cleric, but the transmission of magical knowledge was not all top down. Adelard of Bath, the translator of several works of Arabic image magic, said that he had learned the craft of making talismans from a wise old woman skilled in this art.

Surviving examples of late medieval textual amulets (writings worn on the body for protection) show how people at all levels of society trusted in the power of sacred and magical words. An amulet to protect against the plague in a late fifteenth century English medical manuscript (Wellcome MS 404, f. 32) has pleas for Christ to save the bearer of the amulet inscribed in its inner circle. The outer inscription gives the amulet pious authority by claiming that it was delivered into the hands of the Abbot of Corby by an angel on the order of Jesus Christ, and in the centre of the figure are signs of the cross and abbreviated symbols of Christ's names. An example of a more magical image is the 'Abraham's eye' experiment. The earliest known version of this experiment to reveal the identity of a thief comes from an early fourth-century Greek papyrus. An early fourteenth-century example recorded in a compilation of learned medical texts (Munich, CLM MS 13057, fol. 106r) depicts the eye in a circle inscribed with angel names, and a key, hammer and knife are also represented. The operator is instructed to paint the eye on a piece of parchment and take it to a public place where he suspects the thief will be present. He prays to God for assistance, invokes the names of spirits and drives the point of a knife (or bangs the key with the hammer) into the eye. At that moment the thief will cry out that he has been wounded and his identity will be discovered.

Activities in the common tradition of magic were brought into disrepute by being labelled *sortilegium* (sorcery). This term originally meant the power to promote harm or prosperity, but its negative connotations dominate medieval sources, reflecting the ecclesiastical rhetoric against magic and (at the end of the Middle Ages), the motives for magical practice expressed by those tortured by the Inquisition. Guillaume de Deguilleville's *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* has the personification of Sorcery exclaim 'I am beloved of all folk', to express the numerousness of her practitioners and that they come from all levels of society. According to Guillaume, Sorcery inflicted physical and devastating violence on the bodies and material

wealth of her victims and caused ruin, illness and death. Popular practitioners were usually illiterate women who had learned their trade through an apprenticeship and worked closely with natural materials, especially herbs and animal parts. Conversely medieval sources suggest that the typical practitioner of learned magic was male, literate and a cleric. He used complex rituals described in manuscripts to invoke spirits and needed to understand the workings of celestial bodies.

Before the fourteenth century it had been difficult for clerics to believe that women, who were deemed physically, mentally and spiritually weaker than men and lacked clerical training and literacy, could control powerful, threatening demons. But this paradox was resolved by an increasing theological emphasis on the satanic pact, a formal written contract which involved the complete and explicit submission of the witch to demons. In exchange for surrendering their souls, witches could call on the assistance of demons using only simple gestures or spells. Late medieval trials of female magical practitioners reflect perceptions of the roles of demons in their rituals. For example, at the 1324 trial of Lady Alice Kyteler in Ireland she was accused of having sex with a demon called Robin Artisson, while in 1391 a French peasant woman called Jeanne de Brigue, who had acquired a reputation in her village for finding lost objects, identifying thieves and healing the sick, confessed to invoking a demon called Haussibut and was burned at the stake.

The theology of witchcraft drew together ideas about demons, sorcery and necromancy. A late fifteenth-century painting of love magic (*Liebezaupe*, now at the Leipzig museum) reflects this new vision of the female practitioner. A young, naked and beautiful woman is depicted in the act of shaking liquid concoctions onto a heart in a wooden chest. Some objects in the room evoke the practice of learned magic: the book, the mirror, the 'blank' incantation scrolls (perhaps the painter was afraid to fill them with real spells) and the fire lit ready for suffumigations. Others – the woven cloth, the fan, the carefully delineated flowers and vessels of oils and ointments everywhere – are more feminine tools of magic. The lapdog and parrot, elite women's pets, are more suitable to a female practitioner than the black cat and hoopoe of necromancy, and also suggest that this woman is from a higher social group than the village practitioner. There is no sign of a demonic helper in this painting, but the late medieval witch did not need one to be present for her operations because she had already pledged her soul to the Devil and been granted powers. Her boldness and capacity to

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dominate men is indicated by the man entering at the back of the room with the submissive air of being a client or servant; certainly she does not appear to be afraid of his scrutiny.

Another vivid portrayal of a female magical practitioner is found in the 1499 play *Celestina* by Fernando de Rojas, at the time of its publication a law student at the University of Salamanca. Celestina is a witch and procuress and a specialist in love magic, the arts of beautification and the reconstruction of lost maidenhoods. Her remedies for ‘invigorating passion’ and ‘mesmerising objects of affection,’ use herbs, animal parts (deers’ hearts, vipers’ tongues, pheasant heads and so on), bread, cloth and hair. She makes clay and lead images, paints letters on her clients’ hands and gives her clients wax hearts filled with broken needles. These magical activities are derided as ‘all mockery and lies,’ yet Celestina’s erotic magic is shown to be successful when she performs a necromantic ritual to conjure Pluto, lord of Hell, with incantations and magical signs written in bat’s blood. The girl Melibea is subsequently filled with such uncontrollable love for the witch’s client Calisto that she submits to his desires and later throws herself from a tower when she discovers he is dead. Celestina’s ritual closely follows a necromantic format, except that it omits the invocation of demons by the names of God, Christ and other orthodox figures; witches did not need to command demons in this way because demons helped them willingly, according to the terms of their pact.

A high proportion of the people tried in medieval courts for using erotic magic – rituals to secure desirable partners for sex, love or marriage or to destroy partnerships that were obstacles to passion or ambition – were women. Female sexual powers were considered more threatening than men’s, particularly in relation to political and religious concerns over the stability of marriage. There may occasionally have been tacit approval of a woman in a socially appropriate relationship using love magic to prevent her husband from straying, but the use of magic to seduce someone outside marriage, make a man impotent or reduce him to erotic dependence on a mistress was subversive of a stable, patriarchal Christian community. Clerics warning against erotic magic suspected that women used their menstrual blood and their own hair in rituals, and the nakedness of the female practitioner in many contemporary depictions expresses a presumed alliance between seductive female bodies and malign demonic powers.

Some of the earliest prosecutions of magic took place in the royal and princely courts of Europe, where it was often condemned as a malicious practice used by relatives of the ruler, especially women, to gain improper advancement. Medieval courts were rife with succession anxieties and intense competition between formal and informal sources of power, and it was not uncommon to use the services of an occult practitioner (or accuse a rival of doing so) to gain political advantage. As early as the twelfth century, works of political philosophy, such as John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* (1159), were warning that magicians, diviners and soothsayers were particularly tempting to courtiers. Accusing someone of practising magic allowed a courtier to criticize those who were otherwise untouchable, and it could also help to explain political misfortune, inappropriate attachments and the failure to provide an heir. At the same time, fear of sorcery was real and it was viewed as a point of vulnerability for the State, just as heresy was for the Church. The presence of magicians at court threatened the king personally, and even created a risk that God might bring his wrath down on his kingdom, which is why the crime of treason was often linked to the crime of political sorcery. Practitioners offering occult services could be readily found in the *demi-monde* of court retinues and hangers on. Elite women involved in political sorcery were often thought to draw on the magical expertise of male accomplices, and sometimes women of a lower social group. Eleanor Cobham, the Duchess of Gloucester (c.1400-52) was accused of commissioning predictions of King Henry VI's death so that her husband could take political advantage of this knowledge. She and her supposed accomplices, the clerics Thomas Southwell and Roger Bolingbroke and the 'witch of Eye' Margery Jourdemayne, were said to have conspired to kill the king with necromancy, and Bolingbroke and Margery Jourdemayne were executed. Clerics and members of religious orders were often among the accused in cases of political sorcery, which suggests that contemporaries recognized that these were the most likely groups to be practising learned magic.

At the end of the fourteenth century the frequency of political trials for magic had decreased slightly in France and England, but in Germany and Italy sorcery accusations began to spread to lower social groups in towns and rural areas. The threat of sorcery became further magnified around 1400 as the Pope and certain inquisitors and lay judges accepted the idea that a real sect of sorcerers and sorceresses existed who were participating in a vast plot against Christianity. Sorcerers were not implicated in the natural disasters of the fourteenth century but by the second quarter of the fifteenth they had become scapegoats for the misfortunes of their time. In this period various stereotypical features of witches, such as their

night flights also became fixed. Late medieval witchcraft persecutions were concentrated in France, Germany-Austria and above all in Switzerland, partly because this was where the remnants of the Waldensian heresy lingered and partly because in these territories the temporal powers were seeking more control in legal areas including sorcery (which had previously been under the Church's remit), so that magical activities were increasingly coming under the scrutiny of both religious and secular authorities. Nevertheless, compared to the early modern period relatively few of the men and women found guilty of sorcery at this time were condemned to death.

The defence of magic

In the late Middle Ages, magic was condemned with increasing vigour and precision at universities and in legal codes. The development of the concept of the demonic pact and the involvement of the Inquisition in investigating magical practices widened the scope of persecution and contributed to the construction of an emergent theology of witchcraft. But the translation of learned magic texts from the Greco-Roman, Arabic and Jewish traditions, and the discovery of their intellectual resonances with Greek and Arabic philosophy and science, led also to a gradual shift towards more positive attitudes to magical texts and ideas in western Europe. By the end of the Middle Ages the number of defensible magic texts had grown and works of angel magic were being increasingly widely disseminated. Moreover, some magic texts had been written which had 'real' authors, whose ideas relied on philosophical justifications, and which even integrated necromancy within compendia of different kinds of ritual magic. Since theological condemnation made authorship dangerous, the fact that authors were becoming confident to put their real names to works of magic is a striking development. Unlike John of Morigny in the early fourteenth century, who had described his work as the product of personal revelations, later medieval authors took a more 'scholarly' approach to magic, providing general theories and philosophical justifications and producing summaries of texts and genres. This proved a successful strategy into the Renaissance.

The first half of the fourteenth century saw the burning at the stake of one author-magician but the unhindered emergence of others. Cecco d'Ascoli, who had incorporated necromancy into his commentary on a cosmological text, the *Sphere* of Sacrobosco, was burnt at the stake by the Florentine Inquisition in 1327. But those who followed him published with impunity:

the Catalan scholar Berengario Ganell, author of a colossal compendium of magic, the *Summa sacre magice* (1346); the philosopher and physician Antonio da Montolmo, whose late fourteenth century *De occultis et manifestis* drew on magic texts from the Hermetic and Solomonic traditions; and the physician and scholar Giorgio Anselme da Parma, whose *Opus de magia disciplina*, written in the first half of the fifteenth century, discussed theories of magic and divinatory techniques and gave detailed descriptions of the ceremonies of ritual magic. In fifteenth-century Italy a new intellectual climate allowed magical practitioners to confidently assert the human capacity to manipulate the forces of the universe. Learned magical practitioners like Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) successfully incorporated previously illicit images within the licit category of ‘natural magic,’ thus providing them with philosophical validation.

How did learned magic survive and flourish in the difficult conditions of the late Middle Ages? Three factors are particularly important. The first is that the strategies with which the authors of learned magic texts appealed to the intellectual curiosity and the spiritual thirst of medieval men and women were to a large extent successful. Those who supported magic thought that it could be harnessed to pious goals, combined with orthodox rituals and used to improve human understanding of the cosmos. The second, less positive reason, was that the theology of witchcraft shifted the inquisitorial gaze onto female popular practitioners and away from the male practitioners of learned magic. And finally, censorship was difficult to enforce in the manuscript culture of the late Middle Ages.

Magic texts advocated the practitioner’s secrecy in order to create a sense of their power and to conceal suspicious texts from scrutiny. They were kept and circulated in ways that were intended to avoid censorship. In medieval libraries they might be concealed in secret rooms to which only the owner had access, a tactic the cleric, surgeon and writer Richard de Fournival (1201-c.1260) employed with his collection of occult texts at Amiens. Sometimes works of magic were simply concealed in plain sight in the licit subject areas of the library. This was the case with the collection of over thirty magic texts at St Augustine’s, Canterbury in the late Middle Ages, which were fairly typical in being compiled with more acceptable genres such as astronomy, medicine, devotional literature and natural philosophy. At this Abbey the common tactic of encouraging donations to the library – offering annual prayers for the souls of donors – also gave the books a pious association that probably discouraged criticism of their contents. Monks could argue that their pious vocation enabled them to safely handle suspicious texts and even draw out useful things from them. Powerful secular

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rulers may not even have needed to conceal their occult interests, however. The Marquis of Mantua, Francesco Gonzaga, owned a magic text openly identified as necromancy in the 1407 inventory of his books.

In manuscripts, tactics to evade suspicion took the form of cautionary marginalia or even notices condemning magic, which allowed the piety of the owner to be expressed while the usability of a ritual was unaffected. An owner of the fifteenth-century necromantic handbook, Wellcome MS 517, noted that some magical operations were ‘not worthy of the faith’ but nevertheless did not destroy them. Some magical experiments were written in code, others were rendered useless to anyone except the owner and his preferred confidants by the erasure of a vital name. There were more significant interventions such as parts of rituals being cut out of manuscripts, or magical characters being altered to turn them into crosses, but these were often not so much acts of censorship as attempts to preserve the viability of other rituals in the manuscript. The ownership of occult texts could clearly cut both ways – the piety of an owner might diminish the suspiciousness of a magic text, but there was always a risk that the illicitness of a text would undermine its owner’s reputation or safety. Since summoning spirits, especially demons, was itself a dangerous pastime, the practice of magic must have attracted the interest of specifically those men and women whose curiosity, quest for knowledge, power and salvation, and perhaps even pleasure in risk-taking, made it too tempting to resist.