

CHAPTER TWO

THE OCCULT MIDDLE AGES



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This chapter introduces some of the arts and sciences generally subsumed under the notion of occult thought during the Christian Middle Ages, roughly defined as the period from 500 to 1500 CE. As a working definition, ‘occult’ is understood as that which is hidden, secret or concealed, but also that which is insensible, not directly perceptible, indeed at times incomprehensible to the human intellect (Kwa 2011, 104). This encompasses the concept of ‘occult qualities’ (*virtutes occultae*) in nature, as a way of accounting for qualities in an object that were not explicable by knowledge of their manifest physical qualities (e.g., light, heat, motion, taste, colour, odour). Occult qualities at times appeared to be incompatible with the general expectations people had about the normal behaviour of the four elements on which Aristotelian scholastic philosophy was based. Some properties could not be explained in those terms. A popular example was the power of loadstones to attract iron, a property visible to the eye, but its cause occult because magnetic virtue did not result from the specific mixture of the four elements. Other examples were the belief in influences emanating from the planets, the sympathies and antipathies believed to exist between animals, vegetables and minerals, the wondrous (electrical) rays of the torpedo fish, or the occult, i.e., ‘interior’ properties of alchemical substances (Eamon 1994, 24; Newman 1996).

Nature, then, was a repository of occult powers and the studies involved in discovering and harnessing them came to be known as the ‘occult sciences’, knowledge kept secret from the uninitiated and profane. While the list of occult sciences can extend into the many divinatory arts, there are generally three main representatives: astrology, alchemy and magic. The gifted practitioner of these occult sciences, capable of recognizing nature’s secrets, could manipulate them in order to produce wonders surpassing the abilities of his less informed peers.

During the ninth and tenth centuries much Greek material relating to these arts and sciences was translated into Arabic, followed by a flood of translation from Arabic into Latin in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The transmission of Arabic learning to the West, through, for example, the scriptorium of King Alfonso X of Castile (1221–84), introduced scholars to new conceptions of the occult sciences and an impressive new corpus of works on astrology, alchemy and magic (Garcia Avilés

1997; Dominguez Rodriguez 2007; Fernández Fernández 2013). The impact of Arabic knowledge on the West is particularly apparent from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, during the High Middle Ages, and was to have a profound influence on the learned Christian West, indeed the impact of this material was so widespread that European scholars had to ‘undertake fundamental reconsideration of their views on magic’ (Kieckhefer 1989, 18).

While much could be said about the presence of occult theories and practices in the Greek, Arabic and Jewish worlds, the main focus of this essay will be on occult thought in the Latin Christian West: the terrestrial and celestial ‘occult sciences’, alchemy and astrology, and the broad category of learned magic, with the aim of introducing important figures, significant works, and outlining influential themes that were to be of continuing influence in the Renaissance.

ASTROLOGY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

In the Early Middle Ages, there were few developed textbooks on either astronomy or astrology in the Christian West; indeed detailed observations of the heavens appear to have been rare in Europe until the twelfth century (Tester 1987, Chapter 5; Flint 1990). What knowledge there was of classical astrology existed in two main sources, the *Consolatio philosophiae – Consolation of Philosophy* (c. 523) of the Roman Christian and Platonic philosopher Boethius (480–524) and the encyclopedic *Etymologiarum libri XX – 20 Volumes of Etymologies* of Isidore, Bishop of Seville (c. 570–636) (Von Stuckrad 2007, 187–88). These two works were major conduits of late antique thought for medieval Christian scholarship. Isidore’s distinction between *astrologia superstitiosa* and *astrologia naturalis* became the standard argument for medieval scholars to justify ‘licit’ astrology. ‘Superstitious’ astrology makes use of horoscopes and seeks to predict the character and the fate of an individual; ‘Natural’ astrology, on the other hand, concerns itself with meteorological predictions, for instance of flood or drought and includes iatromathematics, or astrological medicine (Tester 1987, 124–26). Isidore’s assertion, in keeping with the classical medical authorities Hippocrates (c. 460–370 BC) and Galen (129–99/217 CE), that every physician ought to be familiar with astrology, which indicates the appropriate times for purgations, venesections, and the preparation and administering of medicine, retained an influence in Christian culture right into early modern times (Pioreschi 2003, 64). A common manifestation of this influence, in medieval manuscripts of astrological medicine, is the presence of the *melothesia*, the image of the astrological man, whose body parts are governed by the signs of the zodiac, from the head ruled by the first sign, Aries, down to the feet ruled by the last sign, Pisces (Clark 1982).

It was only, however, with the twelfth-century translation of Arabic treatises into Latin that Christian thinkers gained access to essential reading for more sophisticated practice of astrology. This became possible with the Latin translations of the *Almagest* and the *Tetrabiblos*, two of the most famous classical textbooks of astronomy and astrology by the second-century Greco-Roman astrologer Claudius Ptolemy (90–168). The *Tetrabiblos* was translated in 1138 and became one of the most popular astrological manuals of the Middle Ages (Barton 1994; Tester 1987, Chapter 4). There, in addition to Ptolemy’s philosophical arguments in support of astrology, the novice astrologer

learned of the powers of the seven planets of the Ptolemaic cosmos (Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon), the twelve constellations of the Zodiac, and the essentials of both mundane and judicial astrology (on these, see Page 2001).

This boom in translation did not just provide the West with copies of classical Greek and Roman material preserved in Arabic, but also opened up a wealth of knowledge from medieval Islamic culture, with works that introduced new genres of astrology, such as the doctrine of 'Revolutions'. A key proponent of this theory was the Persian philosopher Abu Mashar (Latin Albumasar, 787–886), whose encyclopedic treatment of all aspects of astrological theory and practice in his *Introduction to Astrological Prediction* (known in the West as *Liber Introductorius maior*) appeared in Latin in 1133 (Albumasar 1997). His *De magnis coniunctionibus – On the Great Conjunctions*, was an elaborate treatise on mundane astrology with special regard to the conjunctions of the outermost planets of the Ptolemaic cosmos, Jupiter and Saturn. In this work Abu Mashar set forth his chronosophical theory of the impact that the coming together of these two most slow-moving planets exerted on major natural, political and religious terrestrial events, from the growth and decline of religions and empires to the outbreak of wars, plagues, floods (Albumasar 2000). These ideas were taken up by both Christians and Jews in order to calculate, respectively, the return of Christ or the beginning of the messianic era (Boudet 2005, 61). Whereas the casting of horoscopes of individuals underwent periods of condemnation by the church due to concerns about the question of free will, influential medieval theologians like Thomas Aquinas, Roger Bacon and Bonaventure considered this form of astrology legitimate, arguing that it was in fact easier and more accurate to predict such 'universal' events (Zambelli 1986, 21–22).

By the end of the twelfth century, astrology was prevalent in almost all monasteries, and interest began to spread from the clergy to the court, and other layers of society. It attracted the attention of influential thinkers. The Platonist philosopher Bernardus Silvestris's *Cosmographia* (1147–48), with its two parts, Megacosmus and Microcosmus, concerning respectively the greater world and the creation of man, became one of the most important works of the High Middle Ages for its adaptation of Abu Mashar's ideas to a Christian context (Silvestris 1990). In the *Liber introductorius – Introductory Book*, Michael Scot (fl. 1217–35) presents his readers with a history of astrology stretching back to the first magician, Zoroaster, and instructs them with a great deal of medieval star lore. One of the most famous astrologers of his time, the Italian Guido Bonatti (d.c. 1297) wrote a comprehensive textbook, the *Liber astronomicus*, described as 'the most important astrological work produced in Latin in the thirteenth century' (Thorndike 1929, 826). By the mid-thirteenth century, astrology had been incorporated into the standard philosophical curriculum of Western universities, as part of the quadrivium with mathematics, music and geometry; and was firmly allied with medicine by the fifteenth century (Kusukawa 1993, 34).

ALCHEMY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Two early Latin references to the 'science of alchemy' can be found in the works of the scholastic philosophers Dominicus Gundissalinus (fl. 1150) and Daniel of Morley (c.1140–1210). In *De divisione Philosophie – On the Division of Philosophy*,

Gundissalinus introduces the ‘sciencia de alquimia’ as one of the eight parts of natural science, while in Morley’s *Liber de naturis inferiorum et superiorum – Book on the Natures of Lower and Upper Things* we discover that the ‘scientia de alckimia’ is, apparently, one of the eight parts of astrology (Forshaw 2013, 147).

The West’s initiation into the mysteries of alchemy begins in 1144 with Robert of Chester’s *Liber de compositione alchemiae – Book on the Composition of Alchemy*, a translation of instructions on how to make the Philosophers’ Stone, allegedly given by the Christian monk Morienus Romanus to the Umayyad prince Khalid ibn-Yazid (Principe 2013, 51f). The work is presented in at times highly allegorical language, which leaves open the possibility that there are various levels of interpretation at play in the text, particularly with the presence of such assertions as that the matter needed for the work ‘comes from you, who are yourself its source’, alongside discussions of alchemical terms and procedures (Morienus 1974, 27).

Another early alchemical work to become available to Western readers in the twelfth century was the short enigmatic text known as the *Tabula Smaragdina* or *Emerald Tablet*, attributed to the legendary Hermes Trismegistus, alleged author of hundreds of treatises on astrology, magic and alchemy. There the reader is introduced to the classic Hermetic formulation ‘What is below is like what is above; and what is above is like what is below’, to the notion that the sought-for goal of the alchemical ‘operation of the sun’, be that the elixir or the Philosophers’ Stone, has, for example, the sun as its father, the moon as its mother, and the earth as its nurse (Principe 2013, 32; Kahn 1994; Ruska 1926). Such opaque, poetic language was to represent a major style of transmission of the occult science of alchemy for the rest of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. Although some alchemical writers chose to express themselves in down-to-earth language, alchemical forms of communication in many medieval works can be particularly ‘occult’, in the sense that their authors made use of cover-names to conceal the identity of the substances and processes employed in the Great Work from the profane. Hence, rather than discuss work with quicksilver, an alchemist would write about the ‘dragon’, or simply speak of the necessary ‘water’; instead of advising the use of volatile salts, an author would speak of eagles with bows in their talons. Colour changes would be implied by the mention of black ravens, white swans, multicoloured peacocks, and golden eagles, much to the puzzlement of the uninitiated (Ferrario 2009; Read 1995, Chapter 4). Given the highly visual nature of alchemical metaphor, it was only a matter of time before the emergence of a new genre of alchemical images in the Late Middle Ages, one of the earliest examples being Constantine of Pisa’s *Book of the Secrets of Alchemy* (c. 1257), succeeded by far more elaborate image sequences in such fifteenth-century manuscript works as the *Aurora consurgens – The Rising Dawn* and *Buch der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit – Book of the Holy Trinity* (Constantine of Pisa 1990; Obrist 1982; Gabriele 1997). The occultation, as it were, of alchemical communication was deepened by the substitution of signs for substances and processes. The alchemical symbols for the seven metals (gold, silver, copper, etc.), were shared with the astrological signs for the planets (sun, moon, venus, etc.), but other signs or ‘hieroglyphs’, such as those for minerals like antimony, sulphur and cinnabar were specific to alchemy. A further method contributing to the concealment of knowledge was ‘dispersa intentio’ (dispersion of knowledge), when instructions for an alchemical operation would be written in the wrong order, some parts only

fragmentary, sometimes with the full process distributed in different books. A major exponent of this approach is the medieval author Geber, who in his *Summa perfectionis magisterii – Summation of the Perfection of the Magistry* (c. 1300), generally agreed to be the most influential medieval work of practical transmutational alchemy, writes of scattering information here and there in different chapters of his work and has ‘hidden it where we have spoken most openly’ (Newman 1991, 784f; Principe 2013, 45).

GOALS OF MEDIEVAL ALCHEMY

There have been many different interpretations of the *Emerald Tablet*, ranging from readings of it as a text of *Chrysopoeia* (Gold-Making), *Chymiatría* (Chemical Medicine), or indeed Spiritual Alchemy. The first of these represents the major form of alchemical endeavour in the Middle Ages, the amelioration of base-metals with the aim of their ultimate transmutation into gold. Most medieval practitioners were concerned with this *Opus Magnum* (Great Work), the production of precious metals through the art of transmutation by means of a series of laboratory processes, involving, for example, calcination, dissolution, sublimation, coagulation, fixation, and projection, and the quest for the *Lapis Philosophorum* (Philosophers’ Stone) and the *Elixir*, for the healing of either ‘sick’ metals or human beings. These ideas were taken up by Pseudo-Lull, whose *Testamentum* (c. 1330) spoke of metallic transmutation, the enhancement of human health, and the production of artificial stones and precious stones (Principe 2013, 47, 72; Pereira & Spaggiari 1999). In his *Liber de consideratione quintae essentiae omnium rerum – Book on the Consideration of the Quintessence of All Things* (1351–52), the Franciscan John of Rupescissa (c. 1310–c. 1362) described the distillation of quintessences of various things, including the preparation of alcohol distilled from wine, to produce the paradoxical ‘fiery water’ of the alchemists. Rupescissa’s popular work is one of the most widespread of the Middle Ages (DeVun 2009). Lest anyone think, however, that alchemy was always considered purely natural, it is worth mentioning that Petrus Bonus, the author of another popular work, the fourteenth-century *Pretiosa margarita novella – New Pearl of Great Price* (1330), claimed that alchemy was natural, supernatural and divine, and that a knowledge of the generation of the Philosophers’ Stone enabled pagan philosophers to predict the virgin birth of Christ (Crisciani 1973; Principe 2013, 68).

MAGIC IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The Latin West inherited a rich tradition of magical literature from antiquity. Although far less documentary evidence survives from the early Middle Ages, some important early classifications of magic are available. In Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies*, for example, we read that mankind learned the magical arts from bad angels. Despite his overall negative attitude towards magic, Isidore’s entry on ‘magi’ contains a catalogue of magical arts that would remain a standard topos in medieval writings: necromancy, the forms of divination linked with the four elements (hydromancy, pyromancy, aeromancy, geomancy), well-known methods of classical divination, including observation of the flight of birds (augury), the entrails of

sacrificial animals (haruspicy), and the positions of stars and planets (astrology) (Kieckhefer 1989, 11).

As with astrology and alchemy, magical literature was profoundly influenced by the influx of new learning in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Arabic philosophical and astrological corpus provided Western scholars with a theoretical framework well suited to supporting numerous forms of magical practice. The focus of the following sections will be on the diversity of learned magic in the Middle Ages, an introduction to the most important genres: natural magic, astral magic and ritual magic.

NATURAL MAGIC

Despite the opposition of theologians like Hugh of St Victor (c.1096–1141) to the idea that any type of magic should be included in the curriculum of legitimate learning (Eamon 1994, 59), the influence of newly translated Arabic treatises in the domain of natural philosophy almost inevitably introduced the concept of a new branch of science, ‘natural magic’, to learned discourse. Rather than simply rejecting all magic as demonic, after the manner of Saint Augustine (354–430), some writers argued for a distinction between a licit form of natural magic and an illicit demonic magic. Natural magic enabled human beings to know and make use of the occult virtues of natural things, the properties of stones, metals, plants, and animals, the sympathies and antipathies existing in the whole of nature, without the assistance of or manipulation by demons. Not only could discerning scholars know about these natural virtues, and offer naturalistic explanations for the phenomena, but they could apply the knowledge for the benefit of mankind through a practical magic that made use of the things of nature (Lang 2008, 51–78; Page 2013, 31–48).

An influential voice in this natural magic worldview was the theologian William of Auvergne (c. 1180–1249). In *De Legibus – On the Laws* (1228–30), William introduced the term ‘natural magic’ as the eleventh part of natural philosophy, justifying its inclusion by arguing that it operates merely through natural virtues, inherent in the objects of nature. In the slightly later *De Universo – On the Universe* (1231–36), he discussed *experimenta* related to these occult powers and the notion of magical correspondences, implying an underlying network of secret relationships between the three kingdoms of nature (animal, vegetable and mineral), celestial configurations and the parts of the human body (Lang 2008, 25). The Dominican theologian and natural philosopher Albertus Magnus (ca. 1193–1280) similarly acknowledged the possibility of natural magic in philosophical writings, such as *De animalibus – On Animals*, though in his theological work he was cautious about distinguishing it from the demonic kind (Thorndike 1929, Chapter LIX, esp. 548–60). Probably the most widespread medieval treatise on natural magic was the *Experimenta*, frequently, if falsely, attributed to Albertus, and later known as the *Liber aggregationis seu secretorum de virtutibus herbarum, lapidum et animalium – Book of Collection or of Secrets of the Virtues of Plants, Stones and Animals*. Another pseudo-Albertan work, *De mirabilibus mundi – On the World’s Marvels*, likewise contributed to an interest in the hidden properties of nature. Indeed, a whole culture of popular books of secrets developed, containing collections of *secreta*, *experimenta* and recipes, predominantly concerned with practical recipes for producing cosmetics

or dyeing textiles, preparing drugs or brewing beer. The *Liber Secretum Secretorum* – *Book of the Secret of Secrets*, pseudonymously attributed to Aristotle, a work that has been called ‘the most popular book in the Middle Ages’ (Thorndike 1929, 267), its full translation dating from the mid-thirteenth century, is filled with material from the occult sciences, on alchemy, information from lapidaries and herbals, medical astrology and the fabrication of talismans (Eamon 1994, 45ff; Williams 2003).

ASTRAL MAGIC

With this reference to talismans we enter the domain of one of the most important new categories of learned magic introduced into the Christian West from mainly Arabic sources during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a genre that has been variously termed astral, astrological, celestial, or image magic, a set of practices that occupy a midpoint between tolerated natural and illicit demonic magic.

The ninth-century works of the Iraqi mathematician, physician and ‘first philosopher of the Islamic world’, Abu Yusuf Ya-qub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi (d. c. 870), in particular his influential combination of Platonism and Aristotelianism in *De radiis stellarum* – *On the Rays of the Stars*, were to have a profound impact on Western theories of occult influence (Al-Kindi 1974). In *De radiis*, which circulated widely in Latin translation from the thirteenth century through to the Renaissance, Al-Kindi promotes the theory that not only do all material things in the natural world, the stars included, send out rays, but so too do words and actions, such that ritual, prayer and sacrifice can all be powerful magical ways of influencing the cosmos (Travaglia 1999). Here astral magic is presented as working through a cosmic harmony of interconnected rays, with the informed practitioner having the ability to direct the virtues of the celestial bodies (planets, constellations, fixed stars) down into terrestrial objects for magical purposes, on a natural rather than supernatural basis.

Al-Kindi’s theoretical work on magic was complemented by another ninth-century work, *De imaginibus astrologicis* – *On Astrological Images* by the Sabian scholar and philosopher Thabit ibn Qurra (826–901). By ‘Astrological Images’, Thabit means ‘talismans’ (hence the frequent reference to this genre as ‘Image Magic’) and his book is a work dealing with the practical issues of creating astral magical talismans, an activity that Thabit declares is the height and summit of the science of the stars. In Al-Kindi, there is no suggestion of rituals directed to planetary spirits, but instead an emphasis on the creator of talismans drawing down celestial virtue. Such is the case, too, if the reader consults the Latin translation by ‘Magister John of Seville’; if, however, the reader possesses the translation by Adelard of Bath, made slightly earlier in the twelfth century, there one finds prayers to spirits (Burnett 1996, 6). Here, then, we have slightly ambiguous instructions for rituals to be performed over a three-dimensional object (image, talisman or statue) in order to induce a spirit or heavenly body to imbue it with power under well-defined astrological circumstances. Some argued that these were purely natural talismans, incorporating the combined power of a star, stone, herb and character; others, however, were more dubious.

Although, following Al-Kindi, image magic ostensibly depended on occult powers in nature, especially those of celestial origin, ‘many of its sources of power – words, characters, images and spirits – were more controversial’ and astral magical techniques and practices could also be identified with far more subversive genres

such as necromantic texts and manuals, creating affinities between astral magic and the invocation of demons (Page 2013, 48). Such was certainly the case with the most complex work of astral magic available to the West, the Arabic compendium drawn from 224 magical sources, the *Ghayat al-Hakim* or *Goal of the Wise*, composed in Spain in the eleventh century. This work, better known in the Christian West in its Latin translation as the *Picatrix*, introduces itself as a book of necromancy and includes far more dangerous practices, including animal sacrifices directed to spirits and rituals using human blood, although the translator omits certain passages, such as one for creating a divinatory head from a decapitated prisoner (Boudet et al. 2011, 156).

One of the most important medieval works on astrology, the *Speculum astronomiae* – *Mirror of Astronomy* (1255–60), usually attributed to Albertus Magnus, contributed to learned interest in astral magic with its survey of newly translated Greek and Arab astronomical and astrological practices (Zambelli 1992; Paravicini Bagliani 2001). The author's primary interest is in establishing the philosophical legitimacy of astrology, in accordance with both Aristotelianism and Christianity. In the process he differentiates between useful and innocent astrological texts and dangerous necromantic works concerning images, characters and seals (Zambelli 1992, 241ff; Lang 2008, 27). The *Speculum's* eleventh chapter, devoted to the *Scientia Imaginum* (Science of Images) distinguishes three categories of texts, respectively 'abominable' Hermetic images, 'detestable' Solomonic images, and acceptable astrological images. The first group, represented by such Hermetic works as the *Liber praestigiorum* – *Book of Talismans* and the *Liber Lunae* – *Book of the Moon*, constitutes the most dangerous category, being idolatrous, including rites that require suffumigations and invocations to spirits. The second group, including *De quatuor annuli Salomonis* – *On the Four Rings of Solomon* and the *Almandal of Solomon*, is 'less unsuitable', avoiding ceremonies, but nonetheless encouraging the use of unknown characters of dubious origin, and performed by inscribing characters and the use of demonic seals, which are to be exorcized by certain names (Véronèse 2012). What remains is a third group of two acceptable works: Thabit's *De imaginibus* and Pseudo-Ptolemy's *Opus imaginum* – *Work of Images*, works that provide practical information about fashioning images at a suitable astrological moment, concerned (according to the author of the *Speculum*) solely with utilizing stellar influxes without any suggestion of resorting to idolatrous rituals, suffumigations or invocations, exorcism or inscription of characters.

A decade or so later, similar concerns about discriminating between licit and illicit forms of talismanic magic were discussed by Thomas Aquinas (1225–74). In *De occultis operibus naturae* – *On the Occult Works of Nature*, Aquinas conceded that some bodies, such as magnets, have workings that cannot be caused by the powers of the elements and their actions must be traced to higher principles (either to heavenly bodies or to separated intellectual substances). In *Summa contra gentiles* (esp. Book 3, Chapters 104 & 105), he appears to accept that some power from celestial bodies may be present in natural, unfashioned amulets, he rejects talismans that include signs, figures or images, for they receive their efficacy from an intelligent being to whom the communication is addressed, and that being is most likely demonic (Thorndike 1929, 602ff; Walker 2003, 43; Skemer 2006, 63f).

RITUAL MAGIC IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

The later middle ages was witness to increasing numbers of a new kind of work, manuals of ritual magic, concerned with the conjuring of spirits, be that the summoning of infernal demons or the invocation of celestial angels. The reliance on spiritual, demonic, or angelic assistance and the magicians' use of prayers and conjurations as means of communicating with these supernatural powers clearly differentiates this genre of magic from its more licit natural and astral forms. The boundaries between these various genres, however, are permeable, indeed it is extremely common to find ritual magicians, busy with their angelic, theurgic or demonic operations, incorporating astrological practices, ranging from simple attention to specific planetary days and hours, or the transits of the moon through the zodiac, to more sophisticated calculations of planetary events; likewise, a knowledge of the *materia magica* of natural magic was essential both for the sacrifices employed in certain forms of necromantic ritual and for the fabrication of the at times elaborate instruments and weapons employed in some ceremonies.

While these texts of ritual magic, like those of other forms, clearly show the influence of earlier Greek, Arabic Neo-Platonic, and Jewish traditions, the extant manuscripts draw for the most part on Christian biblical and liturgical texts and practices, most notably exorcism, for their structure and justification. In contrast to many of the practices of natural and astral magic, one identifying characteristic of this genre is that the rituals are often long and complex, sometimes taking months to complete (Fanger 1998 a, vii–ix; Lang 2008, 162–88).

Ritual magic manifests in two fundamental forms, along the lines of classical distinctions between *theurgia* and *goetia*, namely, a magic concerned with angelic powers and another involving angelic and demonic powers.

The first form of ritual magic, angelic or theurgic, described rituals concerned with revelation, techniques for inducing dreams and visions, for speaking to spirits, for a direct infusion of knowledge and experience of the celestial realm, for the development of the practitioner's memory, eloquence and understanding, with the ultimate aim of improving the practitioner's chances of salvation. This normally involved intensive and extensive rituals for the purification of the practitioner's soul, preparations in the form of fasting, confession, periods of silence and meditation, lengthy prayers to the Holy Trinity and accompanying angels (Page 2011; Page 2013, 93–129; Klaassen 2013, 89–113).

Although the word 'magic' is not found in the text, one of the most important representatives of this angel magic is the *Ars notoria* – *Notory Art*, with its claim to enable the solitary practitioner, the student intent on bettering himself in his studies or the monk earnestly hoping for visionary experience, to acquire spiritual and intellectual gifts from the Holy Spirit by means of angelic intermediaries. According to the *Ars notoria* it is a set of holy prayers revealed to Solomon by an angel in order for the successful practitioner to become the beneficiary of a divine infusion of knowledge of the liberal arts, philosophy, theology, medical and divinatory knowledge. This involves the recitation of prayers, some recognizably orthodox, others containing mysterious *verba ignota*, purificatory rituals, contemplative exercises involving the inspection of *notae* – complex figures composed of words, shapes and magical characters – drinking of special decoctions, and so forth,

extending over a four-month period (Véronèse 2007; Camille 1998). The earliest version of the *Ars notoria* probably originates in Northern Italy and dates from the latter half of the twelfth century; its influence can be seen in the fourteenth-century *Liber visionum – Book of Visions* of John of Morigny (Fanger 1998 b, 216–49), as well as other forms of Christianized magic, like the *Anacrisis* and the *Ars crucifixi – Art of the Crucifix*, both attributed to the Majorcan hermit Pelagius (d. 1480). The latter text, for example, in a combination of magic technique and pious devotion, provides a ritual of dream incubation in order to grant the earnest practitioner a vision of Christ during sleep (Gilly & van Heertum 2002, vol. 1, 288–89; Véronèse 2006). In general, these manuals of Christian ritual magic are so orthodox in tone that manuscripts of the *Ars notoria* and its derivatives have been mistaken for prayer formularies.

The same could not be said, however, of another influential treatise of angel magic, the *Liber sacer sive iuratus Honorii – The Holy or Sworn Book of Honorius*, an original composition in Latin dating from probably fourteenth-century southern France. This work claims to provide a twenty-eight day ritual that will result in no less than the Beatific Vision (Hedegård 2002; Mesler 1998); the complete Honorius ritual, however, requires seventy-two days! In the prologue to the *Liber iuratus*, we learn of a general council of eighty-nine Masters of Magic from Naples, Athens and Toledo, who defend the magical art and reject the unjust charges of misguided bishops and prelates who have been led astray by demons (despite the fact that the magic in question is one of binding and loosing spirits). Their argument is that such spirits are constrained only by pure men, not the wicked. What follows is a detailed set of instructions for fashioning a *Sigillum Dei* (Seal of God), directions for the rituals of consecration (involving blood of a mole, dove, bat or hoopoe), and the requisite prayers and invocation of a set of around one hundred divine names, so that the operator can conjure angels and demons for various purposes, the highest activity being the *opus visionis divine*, an operation leading to the radical transformation of the practitioner with a vision of God, while still in mortal frame (Mathiesen 1998). Subsequent parts of the manual include further rituals for conjuring planetary, aerial and terrestrial spirits, the construction of a magic circle, use of magical equipment, such as a hazel wand, swords, a whistle, use of *voces magicæ* and so forth. Significant parts of this material are also found in the impressive fourteenth-century compendium of magic, the *Summa sacre magie*, by the Spanish scholar Berengarius Ganellus, which similarly assures the operator that the use of the *Sigillum Dei* will grant a vision of God, knowledge of God's power, the absolution of sins, sanctification, and dignification over all spirits (Veenstra 2012; Klaassen 2013, 102).

The other, potentially far more subversive form of ritual magic, frequently accused of idolatry, is most often referred to as necromancy, literally translating as 'divination by the dead', but generally understood as the conjuring of demonic beings, through practices inspired by religious rites of exorcism, in order to constrain them to do the operator's will. The aims of necromantic practitioners range from the relatively anodyne goals of locating hidden treasure and stolen goods (or the thief), or discovering secret information, through gaining invisibility, creating illusions, to the more malign desires to manipulate human emotions, cause physical or mental harm, dominating others to gratify sexual desires (Klaassen 2013, 115–55; Kieckhefer 1989, 151–75).

The early history of necromancy, however, is fragmentary and the earliest surviving British dedicated manuscript collections date from the fifteenth century (Klaassen 2013, 123). As with angelic magic, necromantic rituals are also derived from the liturgy, with multiple invocations of God, the Virgin Mary, the saints and angels. The operations, loosely based upon exorcism, conjure and bind demons through the power of the Christian operator, who has ritualistically prepared himself through a strict regimen of abstinence, prayer, confession, communication, and penance. The fifteenth-century *Liber Consecrationum*, for example, advises fasting and prayer, providing many pages of prayers replete with divine names and words of power, to be said over periods of weeks. These are followed by pages of adjurations and conjurations of Satan, details on how to obtain knowledge from a magical mirror, lists of demons, and detailed instructions for conjuring spirits (Kieckhefer 1997). Far more visible, moreover, in these goetic rites, is the use of suffumigations, creation of magic circles with pentagrams, astrological characters, demonic seals, and the inclusion of an impressive array of *instrumenta magica*: the rings, mirrors, wands, swords, knives, lances and so forth found in works like the *Clavicula Salomonis – Key of Solomon*, of which few copies survive from the middle ages, but which was to become the most popular magical manuscript in Europe from the eighteenth century onwards.

CONCLUSION

The Middle Ages received a wealth of occult material from antiquity, particularly so due to the industrious programme of translation of Arabic texts, although it should be said that texts translated into Latin in the twelfth century and initially seen as repositories of valuable new knowledge and useful practical arts were already being treated with suspicion by the end of the thirteenth century. The Dominicans issued condemnations of alchemy in 1272, 1287, 1289, and 1323 (Newman 1989, 439). In 1312, all members of the Franciscan order were forbidden to possess occult books of any kind, or to engage in alchemy, necromancy, or the invocation of demons, or face the consequences of prison or excommunication. Just five years later, in 1317, a papal Bull banned the practice of alchemy (Page 2013, 30).

Fortunately, a great deal of manuscript material survives in the archives, many of the treatises from these different occult currents (astrological, alchemical and magical) can be found bound together, although some genres, such as the conjurations of ritual magic, tend to follow their own separate stream of transmission. This being said, many of these occult practices were clearly interrelated, sometimes in an obvious way: for example, a fashioner of talismans would doubtless benefit from the products of the alchemical laboratory; likewise at least some alchemists paid attention to the specifics of correct astrological timing, seeking the most propitious celestial moment for their 'lower astronomy'. At other times the connections are less obvious: many historians of alchemy would be surprised to discover that the necromantic *Picatrix* provides insights into some of the enigmatic terms in the *Emerald Tablet*. All this material was waiting for the next stage of assimilation when, in the Renaissance, it was finally dignified with the name 'Occult Philosophy'.

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