

Astrologies in the British ‘occult revival’ of the late 19th century

Timeline of 'occult astrology' in the mid-19th-early 20th centuries

- The spiritualist movement (1848)
- The Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (1866)
- The Theosophical Society (1875)
- The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (1888)
- The Fraternity of the Inner Light (1922)
- A profusion of splinter groups from both the Golden Dawn and the Fraternity of the Inner Light which still maintain a powerful presence in contemporary spiritualities

Definitions of astrology

- Patrick Curry defines astrology as ‘the practice of relating the heavenly bodies to lives and events on earth, and the tradition that has thus been generated’ .

[Patrick Curry, ‘Astrology’ , in *The Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, ed. Kelly Boyd (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), pp. 55-57]

- Alexander Ruperti states: ‘There is not one Astrology with a capital A. In each epoch, the astrology of the time was a reflection of the kind of order each culture saw in celestial motions, or the kind of relationship the culture formulated between heaven and earth.’

[Alexander Ruperti, ‘Dane Rudhyar: Seed Man for the New Era’ , *The Astrological Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1986), p. 57]

Definitions of magic

- Magic is specifically concerned with developing and maintaining, through human intention, 'the system of bonds and relationships between the revealed and concealed worlds'.

[Rachel Elior, 'Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology: The Perception of Angels in Hekhalot Literature', *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 1 (1993), pp. 3-53, on p. 16]

- E. R. Dodds distinguishes between magic and theurgy, the latter being 'magic applied to a religious purpose'.

[E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1951), p. 291.

- Peter Schäfer asserts that 'magic cannot be distinguished or separated from religion'.

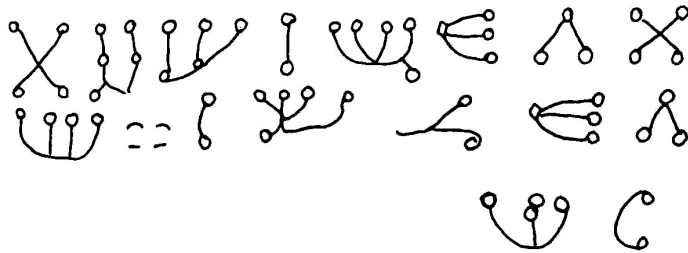
[Peter Schäfer, 'Merkavah Mysticism and Magic', in P. Schäfer and J. Dan, eds., *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism 50 Years After* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), p. 73.]

- Recent scholarship based on the theories of Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss postulates magic as the 'religious Other': magic is a perjorative reference to ritual practices that oppose the established communal religion.

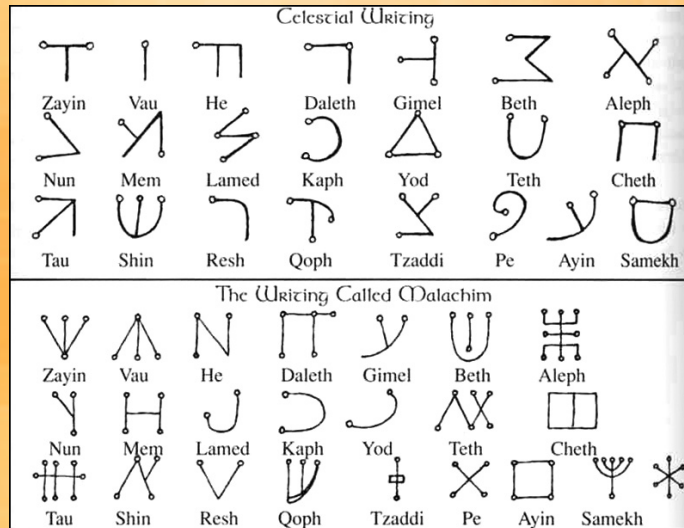
Astral magic or magical astrology

- The astral magic of the occult revival has its roots in Greco-Egyptian Hermetic texts and Jewish magical literature, including the Kabbalah
- Hermetic astral magic developed the technique of creating talismans to invoke specific planetary or astral deities or 'forces', based on the idea of correspondences
- Late antique Jewish astral magic relies on a hierarchy of angelic powers associated with the stars, planets, and signs of the zodiac, which can be invoked and commanded through the use of the Divine Names and the manipulation of the letters of the alphabet to create adjurational rituals
- The traditions of Jewish magic were incorporated into the medieval *grimoires*: recipes of magical spells and rituals intended to adjure astral angels to acquire secret knowledge and manipulate events
- Late Victorian occultists used the grimoires, the Hermetic materials, and early Jewish texts to create their ritual invocation of astral forces and make astral talismans

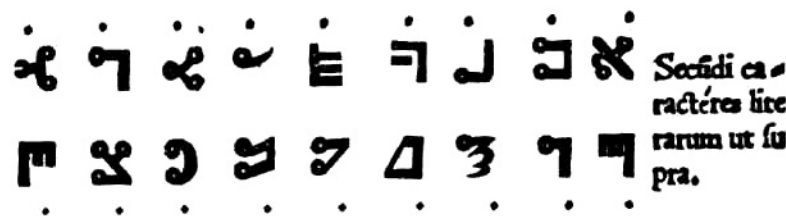
Early angelic alphabets and magical sigils



Charactères for the astral angels of the second firmament (of seven), from the *Sefer ha-Razim* (3rd c. CE)

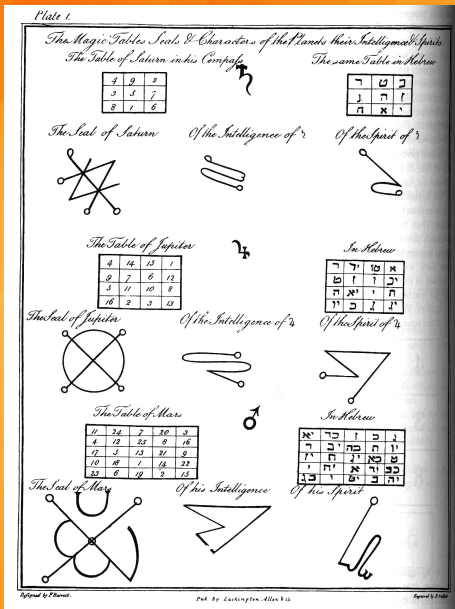


Henry Cornelius Agrippa's 'Celestial Writing', from *De occulta philosophia*, 16th century

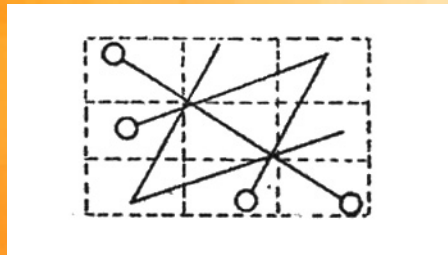


John Dee's angelic alphabet, from the early 17th century

19th-century sigils for the astral angels and the planetary 'intelligences'

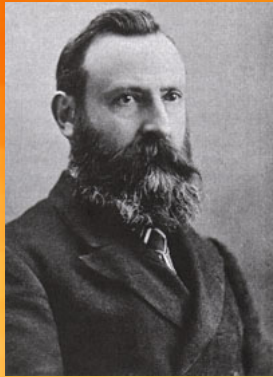


Francis Barrett's 'Seals and Characters of the Planets', from *The Magus, or Celestial Intelligencer* (1801)



Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers' sigil for the 'intelligence' of Saturn, in 'Talismanic Magic: Saturn, the occult signification of his Square, Seal and Sigils', in *Lucifer*, Vol. 2 (1888), p. 14

Views of British occultists on magic



- William Wynn Westcott, one of the founders of the Golden Dawn, believed that the power of magic was derived from the angelic hierarchies.



- Samuel Liddell Macgregor Mathers, the second of the Golden Dawn's founders, defined magic as 'the Science of the Control of the Secret Forces of Nature' but believed in the invocation of angelic entities to convey occult knowledge about the manipulation of these 'secret forces'.



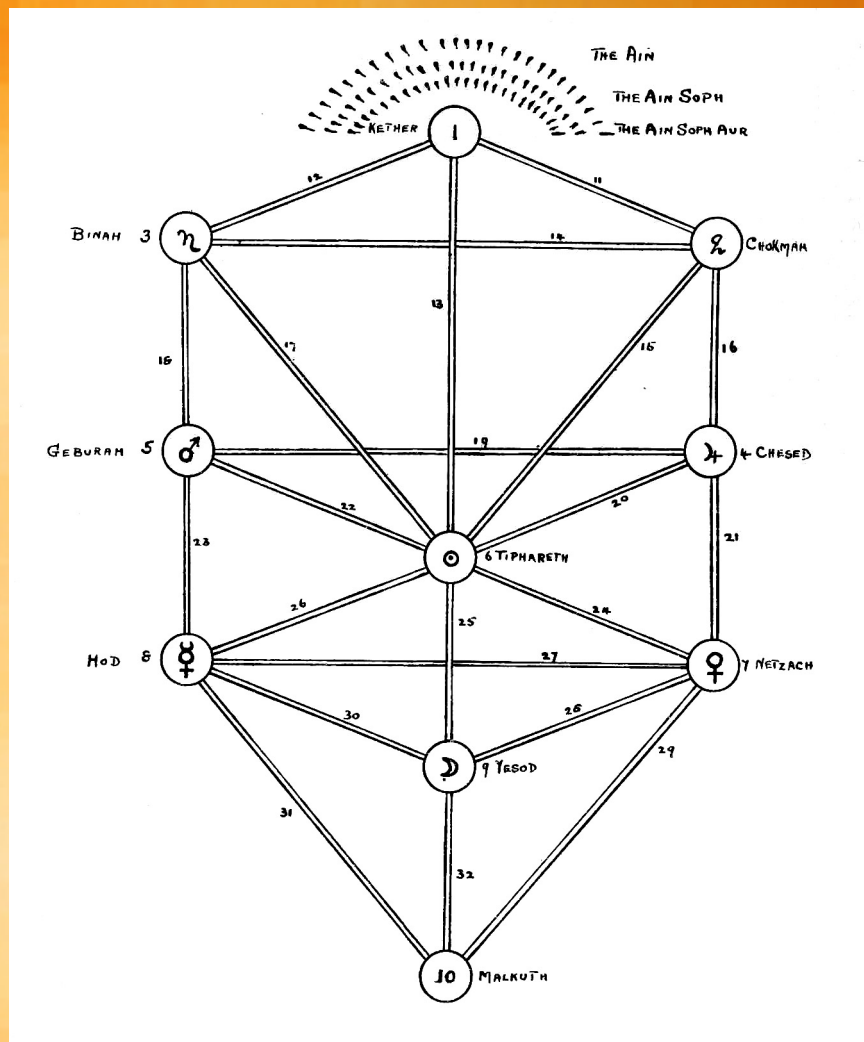
- A. E. Waite, the most scholarly of the Golden Dawn adepts, defines the basis of magic as 'the doctrine of unseen, intelligent powers with whom it is possible for prepared persons to communicate'.

Dion Fortune's contribution to magical astrology



- Fortune (1890-1946), like other Golden Dawn adepts, believed that the Kabbalistic Tree of Life provided 'the ground-plan for the 'Western Esoteric Tradition' [Dion Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah* (London: Ernest Benn, 1935), p. v]
- Fortune appropriated the psychologies of Freud and Jung to provide a 'modern' language for her magical astrology
- Seven of the ten *sefirot* on the Tree of Life are equated with the seven planets; the lowest *sefira*, *Malkuth*, is equated with Earth, and the two highest with supra-planetary realms
- 'The Tree of Life, astrology, and the Tarot are not three mystical systems, but three aspects of one and the same system, and each is unintelligible without the others'.
[Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah*, p. 6]

Fortune's Kabbalistic Tree with planets



[Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah*, p. 311]

‘Each symbol upon the Tree represents a cosmic force or factor. When the mind concentrates upon it, it comes into touch with that force; in other words, a surface channel, a channel in consciousness, has been made between the conscious mind of the individual and a particular factor in the world-soul, and through this channel the waters of the ocean pour into the lagoon. The aspirant who uses the Tree as his meditation-symbol establishes point by point the union between his soul and the world-soul. This results in a tremendous access of energy to the individual soul; it is this which endows it with magical powers.’

[Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah*, p. 18]

Jung's 'active imagination' and Fortune's 'ritual meditation'

- Jung first discussed 'active imagination' in *Psychological Types* (CW6, 1921, published in English in 1923), and elaborated on it at a series of lectures given at the London Tavistock Clinic in 1935, the same year in which Fortune's *The Mystical Qabalah* was published
- 'Active imagination' involves establishing a relationship with specific images emerging in dreams or spontaneously in waking states. The images should be given 'free play' and allowed autonomy. This creates access to the archetypal patterns of the collective psyche and can result in the transformation of the personality. (See *Psychological Types*, ¶722, for one of Jung's many lengthy definitions)
- Fortune applied Jung's technique to the planetary-sefirotic correspondences on the Tree of Life

Fortune's mode of meditation on the *sefirot* and their accompanying Divine Names, archangels, choirs of angels, and planets:

'I would commence my mental rehearsal of the sacred names, and would suddenly find that I was aware of mental pictures only, to the entire exclusion of physical sense impressions...I maintained my concentration on the images arising in consciousness, and did not allow it to wander...Out of the sky over the water a vast angelic figure began to form, and I saw what I felt to be an archangel bent above me in a vast curve.'

Out of these meditations, according to Fortune, the material for *The Mystical Qabalah* was revealed.

[Dion Fortune, cited in Gareth Knight, *Dion Fortune and the Inner Light* (Thoth Publications, 2000), pp. 213-214]

Some comments about the magical astrology of the British occult revival

- What are the rituals and meditations meant to accomplish?
- How 'modern' is Fortune's approach to astrology? Is it a 'stellar religion', a 'religious psychology', or a 'psycho-religion'?
- Although originally rooted in the idea of angelic beings governing the planets, the astrology of the occult revival does not require 'belief' in either astrology or angels, as it was couched in neutral psychological language by both Crowley and Fortune in the early 20th century
- Horoscopic astrology for character analysis and divinatory purposes was seen as valid and useful in the British occult revival, but was deemed to be only the 'exoteric' aspect of the study