

Astral Magic: The Acceptable Face of Paganism

Professor Ronald Hutton, University of Bristol

This paper will look at a topic hitherto equally neglected by classicists and medieval historians: the manner in which medieval scholars (including many churchmen) found a way of fitting the classical pagan deities back into Christianity through the medium of planetary magic. This enterprise lasted from the twelfth to the eighteenth century, and is one of the lost themes of the history of European religion

I am going to commence this essay by outlining four theoretical positions. First, that the visible planets have some influence over earthly affairs. Second, that they are animate, being homes or bodies for divine beings who empower them. Third, that humans can work with these beings to exert some control over those affairs. Fourth, that those beings can be identified with the Graeco-Roman deities whose names the planets concerned traditionally bear in Europe.

Anybody accepting the first of those positions is endorsing astrology. Anybody accepting the first and second of them is endorsing a form of astrology allied to religion. Anybody accepting the first, second and third of them is endorsing the practice of astral magic. Anybody accepting all four of them is endorsing both astral magic and a form of pagan religion, by according to the traditional deities of classical paganism an important role in governing the material world.

The importance of that assertion, and of this subject, is that such a role was found within western Christian culture for about eight hundred years, spanning the whole of the high middle ages and the early modern period. The story of it is fairly well known to historians of astrology and ritual magic, but it has been almost completely neglected by those of what has conventionally been termed religion. Because the latter have been central to the study of European history during these periods, while astrology and magic have been marginalised, this theme of European culture has been virtually ignored by mainstream historians of the middle ages, Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment. Where it has been noted at all, it has tended to be in different contexts, such as the history of art or of science. I would suggest that, because of this neglect, an important dimension to European intellectual and cultural history has been lost.¹

First, it may be helpful to prove my point by looking at the views of a set of prominent western European thinkers in the years between 1120 and 1160, a period of exceptional ferment in European thought and art. It has been traditionally regarded with admiration, as defining the major preoccupations of high medieval culture, and has often been given the name 'the twelfth-century Renaissance'. Here we find Peter Abelard declaring that heavenly bodies could certainly control earthly phenomena and that they could be linked to certain forces hidden in plants and stones. He was not certain whether they were animated by divine beings, though he respected those who believed this.² William of Conches had fewer reservations. He argued that the Christian god had made the human soul but entrusted the forming of the body to planets and stars. He believed that the deities of Graeco-Roman mythology inhabited the planets and had power over particular aspects of the material world, and human life.³ Bernard Silvester calmly called the planets 'gods who serve God in person', and who controlled the world of matter while enjoying a beatific vision of the supreme deity. He also believed that they revealed the future and that pious humans could ascend to them after death, in the manner of ancient pagan heroes, and become celestial bodies in turn.⁴

These, it must be emphasised, were all respectable and accepted thinkers, members of the public world of twelfth-century scholarship. There are also traces of a flourishing intellectual underground in which such ideas were given uninhibited practical application. Some of the best evidence comes from the rantings of the French archbishop William of Auvergne, recalling his mis-spent youth in the last decades of the twelfth century. During that period he had read many books of ritual magic, among which were some that prescribed the drawing down of the power of the planets for human purposes.⁵ One of those that he named, and called *Tot Grecus*, has actually survived, more usually called the *Liber Veneris*, or *De Lapidus Veneris*, and teaches how to draw the influence of the planet Venus, conceived as the classical goddess, into a magical object.⁶ This process of fumigation, invocation and inscription of signs could then be repeated with the other planets, until the object was imbued with the potency of all, and could function as an all-round transmitter of magical energy.

So, having illustrated the vitality of this complex of beliefs in the thoroughly Christian culture of the twelfth century, I need to ask two obvious questions: where did it come from, and where did it go? The immediate answer to the first of these is easy and plain. It came from the Muslim world, as soon as the latter was opened up by the crusading

expansion of Latin Christianity at the end of the eleventh century, into the formerly Muslim-controlled areas of Spain, Sicily, Syria and Palestine. One consequence of this was the systematic rendering of Arabic manuscripts into Latin for the use of Christian scholars. Over a hundred of them were translated or paraphrased in the course of the twelfth century, and more followed in the thirteenth.⁷ At times the process of transmission is very clear, and linked to the remarkable physical mobility of European humanity around the year 1100.

Adelard of Bath was born in Somerset in the late eleventh century, although his parents may have come from Lorraine. He commenced his teaching career at Bath Abbey and then went on to study at Tours and Laon. He followed this with travels that certainly took him to Italy and Sicily, and probably to Syria and Asia Minor as well. On his return, equipped with a knowledge of Greek and Arabic and a haul of texts, he seems to have worked at Bath, Hereford, Malvern, Worcester, Bayeux and Chartres.⁸ Petrus Alfonsi was born a Jew, in the Spanish Muslim kingdom of Saragossa, where he grew up reading Arabic. In 1106, as Christian armies closed in on Saragossa, he converted opportunely to Christianity. He then began travels across western Europe, giving lessons in Arabic and translating manuscripts. One of the places where he taught was Worcester, where he seems to have encountered Adelard.⁹

The main interest of the documents that were rendered into Latin was what we would now call scientific, especially in the fields of astronomy, medicine and mathematics. These were also, however, heavily populated, in the manner of the time, by works that we would now label as concerned with astrology and astral magic. One of the texts translated by Adelard was the *De Imaginibus* credited to Thabit ibn Qurrah, which described how to make magical statuettes by using rings, seals and conjurations in harmony with the movements of heavenly bodies. Once empowered, these figures could be used for a range of purposes, from keeping away snakes and finding missing objects to destroying cities.¹⁰ That was only one of a number of Arabic works that were rendered into Latin between 1120 and 1260, and which embraced the four postulates that I listed at the opening of this essay. Collectively, they taught a philosophical system by which a supreme god had entrusted the main pagan deities with the management of the world, operating out of the planets. They also taught a set of rituals by which humans could tap into the power of those deities for their own ends. Initially, the philosophical aspect of those teachings provoked remarkably little concern, and the

practical magic only slightly more so. This was because, on those issues, the Church Fathers had actually left the door open.

Most of the key antique texts on which medieval Christians relied for their concept of the universe taught that the heavenly bodies were animate beings. Plato argued for the divinity of the planets and stars.¹¹ Aristotle described them as intermediaries between the One Mover and inferior entities, directly responsible for all life and action in the material world.¹² Cicero declared that they were divinities.¹³ Some Christians had no difficulty in digesting this concept. One was the Roman, Julius Firmicus Maternus, who in the early fourth century wrote a ferocious attack on paganism as false religion.¹⁴ He also published a book in which he referred to the planets as deities, serving the supreme god and carrying out his will, and recommended astrology as a means of discovering that will.¹⁵ This text was rediscovered in the eleventh century, and much copied and discussed thereafter.¹⁶

Augustine, famously, condemned astrology with other forms of divination, but admitted that he could not himself answer the question of whether the planets were divine beings serving his god.¹⁷ When the greatest of all the Latin Church Fathers implied that a view could be permitted, there was little to stop anybody else from holding it. This pattern seems to have signalled to some of the common people, at least, that pagan deities associated with planets were immune from Christian censure. In the 440s citizens of the devoutly Christian imperial capital of Ravenna were celebrating the New Year with parades of people costumed as the planetary gods and goddesses.¹⁸

Thus far the equation is simple: Arabic astral magic falls on medieval Christian soil that is already predisposed to accept it, because the fathers of the western Church had left open a place for pagan deities in the Christian system as planetary spirits. It is also clear that the great contribution of the early medieval Muslim world to the history of magic is the concept that the power of celestial bodies could be drawn down ritually into material objects, fashioned of suitable materials and inscribed with appropriate signs. We still preserve the distinctive Arabic word for these objects: 'talismans'. What is tougher is to work out where Arabic magic using talismans came from in the first place.

On face value it bears little relationship with the two classic bodies of evidence for magic in the late antique Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds: the Graeco-Roman curse tablets and the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri. The curse tablets are simply irrelevant to the subject.¹⁹ The papyri, with their vast store of recipes for complex ritual magic, do

not contain a single one for the making of talismans using invocations of celestial power.²⁰ It is tempting, therefore, to look to Mesopotamia, the birthplace of astrology, where from the second millennium BCE, if not before, deities were strongly identified with heavenly bodies in a way that was not yet found further west. It was in Mesopotamia, also, that observation of the exact movement of the moon and stars had developed into an important form of divination by the fifth century BCE.²¹

It is true that none of the surviving ancient Mesopotamian magical texts, including the large trove from the royal libraries of Assyria, contain rites for astral magic using talismans, any more than the Graeco-Egyptian papyri do.²² Nonetheless, Arabic astral magic could represent a direct medieval development of native Mesopotamian tradition. This is made especially likely by the fact that the development apparently occurred in the heart of Mesopotamia itself, at Baghdad. One of its key texts, preserved in twelfth-century Latin translation, is the *De Radiis* of al-Kindi, the greatest scholar of mid ninth-century Baghdad. It suggested that all earthly affairs are influenced by rays from heavenly bodies, which interact with mundane materials and sounds. It went on to suggest that magicians could manipulate the world by directing such interactions themselves.²³ If al-Kindi provided the theory, then one of the most notable scholars of the next generation at Baghdad, Thabit ibn Qurrah, is said to have provided the practice. This is in the spells recommended in the work cited above, the *De Imaginibus*, which is attributed to him. During the following two hundred years, astral magic using talismans became the main practice of Muslim sorcerers. It is the central theme in the prototype for H. P. Lovecraft's *Necronomicon*, a wicked book written by a mad Arab. This is the wonderfully amoral *Ghayat al-Hakim*, 'the aim of the wise one', written in Arab Spain in the eleventh century and representing a digest of most of what was written about ritual magic in the Arab-speaking world up to that time.²⁴

At this point, however, the plot thickens further, for claims have been advanced for a provincial city, rather than Baghdad, as the place where the ancient stellar traditions of Mesopotamia were transformed into the medieval tradition of astral magic. This is Harran, situated in the borderland where Mesopotamia and Syria meet. During the ninth to eleventh centuries it became famed among Arab authors as the home of a unique religious sect known as Sabians, who seemed to base their ideas on a mixture of native Mesopotamian religion and Hellenistic philosophy. They acquired a special reputation as magicians, and for venerating planetary deities. David Pingree has therefore argued that it was the

Sabians of Harran who developed the medieval system of astral magic, and passed it on to the Muslim world in general.²⁵ The logic of this argument, strong enough in itself, is reinforced by the fact that al-Kindi is known to have been influenced by books from Harran, while Thabit himself was a Sabian from that city.

There are, however, two separate problems with it. One is that the Mesopotamian emphasis on planetary deities and star lore was only one component of the late antique interest in magic and divination focused on the heavens. By the early part of the Common Era, that interest was firmly based on Hellenised Egypt. There we find all the ingredients of medieval astral magic already formed. It was there that the zodiac was put into its enduring framework. It was there that particular stones, metals, plants and animals became associated with specific planets.²⁶ The texts of ritual magic produced there between the second and fourth centuries include invocations to planetary deities and many procedures for the charging of material objects with divine power.²⁷ Although the seven planets are not prominent in the papyri, they play a major part in the Hermetic texts produced in Egypt at the same time, functioning as the immediate agents of a creator deity.²⁸ Other Hermetic writings teach how to make amulets from substances associated with particular planets, into which the power of the latter will descend: very clear proto-talismans.²⁹ It can therefore be suggested that, by the end of the ancient world, Alexandria had more of the components of the future astral magic than Mesopotamia; indeed it had all of them, ready to be assembled.

That does not, however, invalidate Harran as the point of assembly, because it is certain that some of the schools of Alexandria were moved to that city by early Arab caliphs. The doctrines imputed to the Sabians, furthermore, show signs of strong Egyptian influence. Here we encounter the second problem, that we have no firm idea of what the Sabians themselves actually believed. We can be sure that Harran became a major centre of the study of ancient Greek learning during the early middle ages, but it was only one of several places to have that distinction. We can be sure that the Sabians actually existed there, as a unique religious sect drawing at least partly on Hellenistic philosophy. As no writings have survived that are definitely by Sabians themselves, however, that is all we can say with certainty. What we do know is what Muslim, Christian and Jewish writers believed about them, and those beliefs may have been wholly or partly myths, constructed for the polemical purposes of authors from those other religions.³⁰ It compounds the problem that the texts of astral magic attributed to al-Kindi and Thabit may never have

been written by those individuals but, like those attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, be the work of later authors using a famous name.

The quest for the origins of astral magic, which seemed for a moment to be reaching a successful conclusion in time and space, must therefore be left indeterminate. It can be said with confidence that it was developed by people in the Arab world during the early middle ages, using ideas current in Greek-speaking Egypt by the end of antiquity, but that is all. The time has come to reverse the flow of investigation, and see what happens to it in Christian Europe after it arrived there in the twelfth century.

Clearly the spectrum of views visible when it first became fashionable was reproduced constantly until the end of the thirteenth century. One author on the subject was Michael Scot, who subsequently acquired a great name as a wizard because of his interest in magic. In his own time he was a trusted clerical diplomat whom one Pope tried to make an archbishop. He declared that wise spirits ruled the planets in obedience to the creator and would respond to human wishes if invoked by name. His compromise was to substitute the names of Hebrew angels for the pagan deities associated with them.³¹ Thomas de Cantimpre made another qualification. He opined both that planetary spirits controlled human behaviour in accordance with the will of the Christian god and that they could be given their pagan names. He thought it possible that all things on earth were generated by the power of Venus. Where he scrupled was to duck the question of whether humans could tap into that power themselves.³² A similar course was taken by Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln. He thought that the heavenly bodies were animate, and that scarcely any human operation should be embarked on without taking their influence into account. While approving astrology, however, he did not take the further step of approving astral magic.³³

That was taken by Albertus Magnus, probably the most prominent theologian of science in the high middle ages. He openly endorsed the idea that marvels could be worked by carving the images of planetary and stellar spirits on metals at the correct moment.³⁴ The same line was followed by the proto-scientist Roger Bacon, who honoured the spirits of the planets as classical deities and held that they ruled human affairs. Above all, he honoured Mercury as lord of wisdom and eloquence, and associated him with Christ.³⁵ Against them was pitted the anonymous *Speculum Astronomiae*, which denied that heavenly bodies were animate, and condemned the making of images of them as talismans, explicitly in the form of icons of ancient gods. This work still, however,

recommended the use of talismans if they were empowered only by astrological conjunctions, and not by direct invocations.³⁶ The debate continued at full pelt into the early years of the fourteenth century. Then Arnald of Villanova tried to steer another middle path. He argued that humans should observe how the planets influenced the earth, and try to work with those influences, but not to gain power over the ruling spirits of the planets themselves. He gave the latter their classical pagan names.³⁷ His contemporary Peter of Abano repeated the argument of Michael Scot, almost a hundred years before, that humans could indeed invoke the power of the planets directly, but by the names of Hebrew angels.³⁸

What must be clear from this was that by 1320 western European intellectuals had been accustomed for about two centuries to accept the argument that the planets were living beings, appointed by the Christian god to govern earthly affairs. What divided them was the issue of what they could do about it. Some argued that the divine beings concerned were the ancient deities, and that humans should observe and react to their workings but not manipulate them. Some believed that it was permissible to invoke them, but in the sanitised form of angels with Hebrew names. Others both accepted them as the ancient deities and believed in the right of Christians to work with their power ritually. It must be emphasised that each of these three different points of view was articulated by churchmen who were equally high-ranking, orthodox and reputable. Furthermore, the complaints of the first two groups and the survival of relevant manuscripts prove that the third position – effectively a revival of rituals dedicated to pagan deities within a Christian cosmology – was very commonly held and acted upon by less celebrated figures.

In the 1320s, however, this third position struck a very sharp rock, in the shape of an all-out attack on ritual magic mounted by Pope John XXII. He launched it in 1322, and within five years it had claimed a spectacular victim, a professor at Bologna called Cecco d'Ascoli. He was first sacked from his chair and then actually burned at the stake by a regional inquisition. Scholars of the case have agreed that Cecco's opinions were not particularly extreme; he had defended the use of planetary magic using talismans in a way that had provoked no such reactions during the previous two centuries. It seems that he was just unlucky enough to make some unusually determined local enemies.³⁹ Nonetheless, his fate does seem to have had a dramatic effect on the debate, for public discussion of astral magic halted abruptly. Over the

following 150 years, the typical position was that advocated by the famous early fifteenth-century French theologian Jean Gerson: that the planets were ruled by angels accountable to the Christian god, and could be invoked only by devout prayer, making no use of talismans or invocations.⁴⁰

It is possible to make three qualifications to this picture. One is that astral magic certainly continued to be practised in private, because the texts prescribing rites for it continued to be copied and recopied. The second is that a very occasional intellectual still published a defence of it. The clearest case is that of another professor at Bologna, half a century after the unfortunate Cecco. This was Antonio de Monte Ulmi, who advocated planetary magic with talismans in both theory and practice. His own favourite working was with Mercury, drawing its power into an icon of the Graeco-Roman god, and his only sop to opponents was to insist that a priest should bless the image beforehand.⁴¹ He got away with it. My third qualification is that to some extent such practices had permeated at least well-heeled lay culture. One piece of evidence for this is a tray made as a wedding gift for merchants' children at Florence in the 1420s. It is painted with a nude Venus, floating in the sky and shedding her radiance over happy humans on the earth below.⁴² This neatly conflates the classical image of the goddess with the planet, and is effectively a talisman in itself, presented to bless the nuptial union.

Still, the profile of astral magic in the later middle ages is still relatively low, until it comes roaring back up again in the Florentine Renaissance. Thanks to D. P. Walker and Frances Yates, this has become one of the few well-studied episodes in the history of European magic. It resulted from the convergence of three forces, brought together by the Renaissance project of a renewed and increased effort to recover ancient knowledge. One is the medieval Latin tradition, with which I have been dealing. Another was an infusion of Greek manuscripts brought by refugees from the dying Byzantine empire, especially Hermetic texts. The third was a fresh dispersal of translated Arabic books, especially the *Ghayat al-Hakim* itself, translated into Latin under the name of *Picatrix*.

The individual who launched the new effort was of course Marsilio Ficino, seconded by his friend Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. They attempted in general to reassert the place of the classical pagan deities in religion, as embodiments or symbols of cosmic forces such as love, creativity and wisdom: above all, Mercury, Apollo and Venus. They also, however, explicitly defended astral magic, especially in the context of healing. Their basic argument was that the animation of talismans was the

result of the manipulation of celestial influences decreed by God Almighty, and not the conjuration of demons. The talismans themselves were not to be worshipped but used in magical operations, and the latter were designed to make humans more receptive to the natural power of the planetary divinities.⁴³ Their arguments inspired a large number of friends and followers. Some indeed went further, such as the poet Pontano, who depicted God the Father as entrusting the seven planetary spirits with the work of creating the material world.⁴⁴

They also aroused much opposition, but it is interesting to note how qualified this was. The newly restated case for astral magic was formally condemned by Pope Innocent VIII, but absolved with equal formality by a new Pope, Alexander VI, six years later.⁴⁵ At the time of the initial papal condemnation a Spanish bishop, Pedro Garcia, set to work to provide a semi-official refutation of the arguments of Pico in particular. He agreed that the Christian god had entrusted the planets to good spirits, and that the latter controlled earthly phenomena. He even supported the idea that humans could work with them reverently, and admitted that great medieval thinkers had endorsed the use of astral talismans. His only qualification was the traditional fear that to invoke celestial power into material images ran the risk of calling in demons instead.⁴⁶ The ruling of Alexander VI, therefore, represented a direct snub to even Garcia's moderately expressed doubts. Three years after Alexander pronounced, the physician to the queen of Naples tried to make his name with a further reasoned defence of the making of images of planetary deities to utilise their influence.⁴⁷

It was only in the middle of the sixteenth century that learned opinion began to turn back against it. This was mainly because of that hardening and narrowing of attitudes that was a general feature of the contest between Reformation and Counter-Reformation. In particular, since it had been Italians who had been most prominent in rehabilitating astral magic, the new intolerance and suspicion of Tridentine Catholicism was a major factor. The papal index of forbidden books issued in 1559 included works on talismans, and in 1586 Sixtus V prohibited astrology. In 1570 the local inquisitors arrested Giorolamo Cardano, a professor at that old stronghold of planetary magic, Bologna. He had tried to compromise by calling the planetary powers angels, and suggesting that talismans might be fashioned to absorb their influence if no invocations were used. He still lost his job and his books were banned. In the same decades attacks on this form of magic, by both Protestant and Catholic theologians, greatly increased.⁴⁸ It is also true that it suffered from the taint of keeping

bad company, most obviously that of the author of the first full survey of Renaissance magic, Cornelius Agrippa. His underground classic, *De occulta philosophia*, published in 1533, trampled all over the subtleties and cautions of the apologists for planetary talismans. It emphasised that the spirits of the planets were the deities of ancient paganism and revelled in the fact, and in the details of the incantations and fumigations that were needed to draw down the power of each. To those who had feared such operations he returned the robust reply that any Christian magician worth the name should be able to control demons.⁴⁹

Nonetheless, the open practice of it continued among avant-garde intellectuals, three of whom achieved considerable distinction, or notoriety. Their differing fates illustrate the hazards now attending these rites, and the potential open to those who used them. One was the Welshman, John Dee, better known as a mathematical genius with a habit of trying to talk to angels. He believed in the efficacy of astral magic, and has left a gorgeous manuscript now in the Warburg Institute that gives precise directions on how to draw down the power of Venus, portrayed as the classical goddess.⁵⁰ Dee, famously, died in his bed, although he died poor and after a few attempts by the papal authorities to capture him on his travels. The second was Giordano Bruno. Frances Yates has drawn attention to the works that he published in the 1580s, recommending rites to the planets, whom he characterised as 'the sacred gods'. They were based on those by Agrippa, and involved the same material correspondences. Bruno was, of course, arrested by the Venetian inquisition when he was stupid enough to get himself into its territory in 1591. He was sent to Rome for final judgement, where, after eight years in which he refused to admit the error of his call for a religion mixing Christianity and Hermetic paganism, he was finally burned. He was the only martyr of the Renaissance love affair with antiquity.⁵¹

The third celebrated intellectual was Tommaso Campanella, who has traditionally been called the last of the Italian Renaissance philosophers. Like Bruno he was a rogue Dominican friar from southern Italy, but one who embarked on political revolution, trying to overthrow Spanish rule and to reform the Church in Calabria. After his capture he only apparently escaped execution by feigning madness. He officially regained his sanity after a few years in prison, and obtained his freedom after many more by reversing his politics while retaining his ideals. He still called for a reformed Christianity, but this time one led by the Pope and the king of Spain. This was clearly the right answer, and gave him a chance to promote his vision of an ideal state based on a combination of

Christian and solar religion, with temples to the planetary deities. His reputed expertise in the powers of the latter led in 1628 to one of the most remarkable episodes in the history of the Counter-Reformation papacy. It was brought about when Pope Urban VIII felt himself to be personally threatened by the malevolent influence of some impending solar eclipses. He asked Campanella to devise a way of protecting him, and the Pope duly found himself talked into participating in a rite of planetary magic at the Vatican. The two of them sealed themselves into a room which was then sprinkled and censed with appropriate aromatics, hung with appropriate decorations, and stocked with a sympathetic combination of musical instruments, gems, odours, colours and flavours. The object of all this was to draw down the power of Venus and Jupiter to protect the Pope. Needless to say, it worked.⁵²

It was, however, a Pyrrhic victory for Campanella and those with his interests and beliefs. For one thing Pope Urban was so impressed that he proceeded to impose a new and more savagely worded ban on astrology, feeling that if the heavenly bodies were so powerful, then humans should not try to pre-empt the divine will by reading it in them. For another, Campanella's own defence of planetary magic, published in 1638, seems to be the last to be produced by a leading intellectual figure.⁵³ By contrast, the number of works condemning it increased still further in the course of the seventeenth century. Significantly, those that held the practice to be impious were now reinforced by a new kind, of those that held it to be contrary to the laws of physics. The new science was starting to reject astral magic and astrology together.⁵⁴

This said, the power of the planetary deities did not disappear in the course of that century; they just ceased to interest prominent members of the intelligentsia. The quantity of works written against their invocation suggests in itself that there were plenty of people around who still needed persuading. In the early eighteenth century it was still believed by some scholars that the planets were animate beings, and a hundred years later doctors could still be found who were confident that they influenced human health.⁵⁵ While it was getting hard, if not impossible, to find reputable people who practised invocation of them, one of the most exuberantly disreputable personalities of the eighteenth century certainly did. This was Casanova, who was imprisoned by the Venetian inquisition in 1755, not for his amorous escapades, nor for his tendency to confidence trickery, but for his possession of various works of ritual magic, including *Picatrix*, the Latin version of the *Ghayat al-Hakim*. Having made his escape, Casanova proceeded to work absolutely classic

rites of planetary magic using talismans for the benefit of French aristocrats.⁵⁶ The tradition survived, of course, to enter workings of the magicians of the Golden Dawn and to have a lingering presence in modern ritual magic.

Nonetheless, by 1700 it had retired to the margins of acceptability and visibility, after six centuries in which it had represented one of the major ways in which western Christianity had absorbed and revitalised classical pagan ideas. Indeed, it was *the* way in which Christian thought had come closest to finding an orthodox manner of perpetuating belief in, and reverence for, the old deities. As such, it throws down a challenge to anybody concerned with the limitations of conventional academic perspectives. The problem is not merely one of the neglect of the study of magic and divination in general, but of the dichotomy that has commonly been drawn between Europe's classical heritage and its Christian heritage. With the (arguable) blessings of the planetary deities that represent communication, generosity and compassion, both barriers may at last be starting to dissolve, and this collection of essays is one sign of such a development.

Endnotes

1. This argument may be found elaborated, and better contextualised, in Ronald Hutton, *Witches, Druids and King Arthur: Studies in Paganism, Myth and Magic* (London, 2003) [hereafter Hutton, *Witches*], pp. 136-92.
2. *Opera hactenus seorsim edita* (Paris, 1849), ii. 647-9.
3. William of Conches, *Philosophia* (Basle, 1531), pp. 24-37.
4. Bernard Silvester, *De mundi universitate sive Megacosmus et Microcosmus*, ed. in *Bibliotheca Philosophorum Mediae Aetatis* Vol. 1 (Innsbruck, 1976), lines 1.36-7, 1.3.33, 2.4.49-50, 2.6.47.
5. William of Auvergne, *Opera Omnia*, edited by Damian Zenaro (Venice, 1591), p. 895.
6. David Pingree, 'The Diffusion of Arabic Magical Texts in Western Europe' in *La Diffusione delle Scienze Islamiche nel Medio Evo Europeo* (Rome, 1987), pp. 76-7.
7. Charles Burnett, *The Introduction of Arabic Learning into England* (London, 1997) [hereafter Burnett, *Introduction*], pp. 2-39.
8. Adelard of Bath, *Conversations with his Nephew*, ed. and trans. Charles Burnett (Cambridge, 1998), pp. xi-xix.
9. Burnett, *Introduction*, pp. 11-39.
10. *The Astronomical Works of Thabit b. Qurra*, ed. Frank Carmody (Berkeley, 1960), pp. 167-97.
11. Cited in S. J. Tester, *A History of Western Astrology* (hereafter Tester, *Astrology*), p. 17.
12. In the *Metaphysics*, book 12.

13. In *On the Nature of the Gods*, book 2, section 15.
14. *De errore profanarum religionum*, ed. K. Ziegler (Leipzig, 1907)
15. *Mathesis*, ed. W. Kroll and F. Skutsch (Leipzig, 1896).
16. Tester, *Astrology*, pp. 132-42.
17. Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science. Volume Two* (London, 1923) [hereafter Thorndike, *Magic*], p. 5.
18. Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 15.
19. *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, ed. John G. Gager (Oxford, 1992).
20. *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz (Chicago, 1986).
21. Tester, *Astrology*, pp. 11-14.
22. R. Campbell Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia* (London, 1903); F. A. M. Wiggerman, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits* (Groningen, 1992).
23. Al-Kindi, *De Radiis*, ed. M. T. D'Alverny and F. Hudry, *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 41 (1974), pp. 139-260.
24. *Picatrix: Das Ziel des Wissen von Pseudo-Magriti*, ed. Hellmut Ritter and Martin Plessner (London, 1962).
25. David Pingree, 'Some of the Sources of the *Ghayat al-Hakim*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 43 (1980), pp. 2-15 [hereafter Pingree, 'Sources']; and 'Indian Planetary Images and the Tradition of Astral Magic', *Ibid.*, 52 (1989), pp. 8-11.
26. Tester, *Astrology*, pp. 11-29.
27. *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, passim.
28. *Corpus Hermeticum II and XVI*, and *Asclepius I*, ch. 3, ed. Walter Scott in *Hermetica*, (Oxford, 1924).
29. Pingree, 'Sources', pp. 5-6; Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London, 1964) [hereafter Yates, *Bruno*], pp. 47-9; Henry and Renee Kahane and Angelina Pietrangeli, 'Picatrix and the Talismans', *Romance Philology*, 19 (1966), pp. 574-93; Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science. Volume One*. (London, 1923), pp. 582-7.
30. Argued at length in Hutton, *Witches*, pp. 137-58.
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32. British Library, Egerton MS 1984, fos. 1-98.
33. Ludwig Baur, *Die Philosophischen Werke des Robert Grosseteste* (Munster, 1912), pp. 1-7.
34. Albertus Magnus, *De Causis*, ed. A. Borgnet (Paris, 1899), Book II.iii.3-5.
35. *The Opus Maius of Roger Bacon*, ed. J. H. Bridges (Oxford, 1897), i. 138-9, 381-99.
36. *Speculum Astronomiae*, chs. 6-12, in *Albertus Magnus, Opera Omnia*, ed. A. Borgnet (Paris, 1899), x. 629-73.
37. Bibliotheque Nationale, MS 6971, fos. 65-82.

38. Thorndike, *Magic. Volume Two*, pp. 900-1.
39. Knowledge of the affair does not seem to have progressed beyond the debate summarised in Thorndike, *Magic. Volume Two*, pp. 948-68.
40. Thorndike, *Magic. Volume Four*, pp. 117-23.
41. Bibliotheque Nationale, MS 7337, pp. 1-9, 26.
42. Reproduced in Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* (London, 1956), p. 91.
43. D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (London, 1958) [hereafter Walker, *Magic*], pp. 35-51; Yates, *Bruno*, pp. 56-107; Nesca A. Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance* (London, 1935), pp. 47-104; Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London, 1967), pp. 81-123; Marsilio Ficino, *Opera Omnia* (2nd ed., Basle, 1576), pp. 532-72, 1326-27.
44. Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and its Place in Humanism and Art* (New York, 1961), pp. 80-3.
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55. E.g. David Boyd Haycock, *William Stukeley* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 57, 97-8.
56. S. Guy Endore, *Casanova: His Known and Unknown Life* (London, 1930), pp. 78, 119-25, 208-19, where the accounts in Casanova's *Memoirs* are checked against contemporary records.