

**MAGIC: FRONTIERS AND BOUNDARIES**  
**CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS**  
(Ordered according to Conference Schedule)

**FIRST KEYNOTE LECTURE**

**Marvin Meyer**, Chapman University

Title: **Magic and Miracle: Boundaries of Experience in the Expression of Ritual Power**

In many antique texts of prayer and ritual it is difficult to maintain any consistent distinction between piety and sorcery; the users did not tend to consider themselves practitioners of 'magic,' which was regarded as a pejorative term. Indeed the rituals were often sought rather as an antidote to "magic" than a form of it, and might induce experiences apprehended as divine or miraculous by the practitioner. This talk will investigate a selection of antique texts recording ritual practices which involve overt manipulations of divine power and force, describe extreme emotional states, and are meant to be performed by private individuals in secret, focusing on how boundaries of social and individual experience are revealed in the expressions of ritual power.

SESSION 1.

**Daniel Miller**, Bishop's University, Sherbrooke, Quebec

Title: **Magic and Non-Magic in the Yahwistic Marvels of Elijah and Elisha**

The biblical figures Elijah and Elisha are more frequently referred to as 'men of God' than as 'prophets'. While the latter group is depicted as Yahweh's spokesmen, Elijah and Elisha are connected with feats such as clairvoyance, healing, and resurrection. For the marvels Elijah and Elisha perform, they employ both non-magical means (e.g., prayer) and something that must be termed 'magic.' Indeed, at one point, each man directs both 'magic' and 'non-magic' towards a single objective. This paper examines this methodological interchange of magic and non-magic, revealing how biblical writers may have delimited the ostensibly forbidden phenomenon of 'magic.'

**Gideon Bohak**, Tel-Aviv University

Title: **Science, Magic and Religion in the Cairo Genizah**

Looking at fragments from the "classical" Genizah period (ca. 10th to 13th centuries), one finds the Jews of medieval Cairo using a wide selection of the "occult sciences", including alchemy, astrology, physiognomy, palmomancy (twitch-divination), demonic adjurations, and numerous magical rituals. Some of these texts are written in Arabic (often in the Hebrew alphabet), displaying clear signs of their Muslim origins. Others are written in Aramaic, probably copies of copies of late-antique originals, often displaying a strong Greco-Roman influence. All these fragments raise questions about the relationships between "science", "magic" and "religion" in the minds of medieval Oriental Jews.

SESSION 2

**Serge Cazalais**, University of Laval

Title: **Telestika and Metamorphosis in Gnostic Literature: a Reception of the Garden of Eden Episode in Two Nag Hammadi Treatises**

Two treatises of Nag Hammadi Codex II present a version of the creation of Adam and Eve as if it were a telestika ritual: Adam is modeled by the Archons, which are playing the part

God played in the Bible, as a clay statue with a hope that the likeness of the Celestial Man which appeared in water will animate it and be imprisoned in it. On the other side, Zoe-Eve, a Spiritual Woman (i.e. Life) interfered in the process, awaking Adam. This paper examines the episode, its religious background and its vocabulary (the Coptic version and its Greek background). It will ask how in Gnostic circles the Biblical story of God creating Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden might have been understood as a telestika ritual condemning the creators. It will also ask how Eve was described as having the power to awaken Adam and metamorphose herself.

**Pat Aakhus**, University of Southern Indiana

**Title: Sirens and Skylla: Trophies and Talismans from the Frontier**

The Odyssey locates deadly Sirens and devouring Skylla in Sicily and South Italy, where they are later found as apotropaic emblems on tombs and temples. Their appearance during the Archaic colonizing period reflects a shift in perspective and assimilation of magical/religious ideas from the newly occupied lands. The magical attributes of sirens and Skylla blend with religious (pagan and Christian) attributes as talismans/relics in the Classical and medieval world, persisting into modern times. A cult of the Virgin as Stella Maris remains at the church of Santa Maria della Lobhra, located on the site of the cult of the Sirens in Sorrento. Siren charms were common through the early 20th century. An examination of the transmission and transformation of Sirens and Skylla suggests that monsters are instruments of acculturation, taking on apotropaic powers and challenging boundaries of magic and religion.

SESSION3

**Jan Veenstra**, University of Gröningen

**Title: The Crowned Name of God: The Schemhamphoras in Christian Magic**

Magical beliefs concerning the Sacred Name of God were not confined to the Jewish tradition. In the medieval and renaissance Christian traditions there were several texts known as *Schemhamphoras*, which were clearly inspired by Jewish Kabbala, and dealt with the hidden powers of the Divine Name. The most common version is based on three 72-letter verses from Ex. 14: 19-21 which yield 72 three-letter names to which are added ‘-iah’ or ‘-el’ to produce 72 trisyllabic names (the so-called ‘Vehujah’-list; cf. Agrippa’s *De occulta philosophia* III.25). Yet there were several other systems for generating divine names. This paper surveys medieval and renaissance texts known as *Schemhamphoras* or *Semamphoras*, mainly focusing on (a) the Schemhamphoras-chapters in Berengario Ganell’s *Summa sacre magice* and (b) a pro-Reuchlin and anti-Luther catechism on the Schemhamphoras. The Christian reception of these materials received a new dimension in the context of the development of Christian Kabbala, which caused a variety of medieval and renaissance materials to be brought together in Andreas Luppianus’s 1686 edition of *Semiphoras und Schemhamphoras Salomonis regis*.

**Tom de Mayo**, J Sargeant Reynolds Community College, Richmond, VA

**Title: Caesarius of Heisterbach and the Magical University**

The burgeoning universities of the early thirteenth centuries were breeding grounds for necromancy. A combination of Latin exorcism and Arabic astral magic, necromancy relied upon what Richard Kieckhefer calls a "clerical underground" of surreptitious practitioners with Latin learning and clerical training. Onetime master of novices at the Cistercian monastery of Heisterbach near Cologne, Caesarius (d. ca. 1240), includes several tales in his *Dialogue on Miracles*, wherein students and masters imperil their souls in necromantic dealings. For example, in one tale, a demon gifts a troubled student with a stone that grants mastery of the liberal arts -- a fanciful depiction of a documented aim of necromantic rituals. Only by renouncing the stone and retiring to a monastery does the student escape damnation. I argue that such literary depictions of necromancy reinforce Caesarius' view of the universities as spiritually dangerous competitors for the novices he wished to attract to Heisterbach.

**Laura Mitchell**, University of Toronto

Title: ***Exorciso te: Exorcistic Aspects of Magic in Medieval England***

Exorcistic language was adapted in a variety of ways into late-medieval English magical texts. It was generally inserted into the text without any changes; sometimes it was altered beyond immediate recognition. Such changes ranged from the subtle use of exorcistic phrases in books of hours to their complete absorption into magical conjurations. This paper examines how exorcism was appropriated and used in magic and magic-related contexts, focusing on certain English books of hours and the Middle English *Sworn Book of Honorius*.

This paper suggests that part of the reason for the inclusion and adaptation of exorcistic language was the power behind these particular words. The perceived authority over demons and subsequently over sin could be a powerful motivator in medieval Christianity. Spiritual cleanliness was required in virtually every magic ritual. The inclusion of exorcistic language in these texts is indicative of a broader underlying desire for spiritual purity.

#### **SECOND KEYNOTE LECTURE**

**Richard Kieckhefer**, Northwestern University

Title: **Heinrich Kramer and some 15<sup>th</sup> Century German Witch Trials**

Heinrich Kramer is the author of what may be notorious manual in the history of the early modern witch hunts, the *Malleus Maleficarum*. While Kramer drew on materials from many authorities in composing the *Malleus*, just how consistent was he in the uses he made of his source materials and the conclusions he drew from them about the nature of witches? More specifically, how many of his conclusions were derived from local sources which were in fact at odds with the theology and mythology that set the tone of the work? This paper will look at Kramer's *Malleus* against the background of a set of fifteenth-century German witch trials, in an effort to begin framing an answer to these questions.

#### SESSION 4

**Christopher S. Mackay**, University of Alberta

Title: **Henricus Institoris, the Scientific Witch Hunter**

Henricus Institoris, infamous as one of the authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, also wrote the *Nuremberg Handbook* (1491), a treatise on the legal procedures for dealing with accusations of witchcraft. Here he attacks the legal procedures of his time (the use of torture to extract confessions and the release of anyone who failed to confess), advocating instead the use of "conjecture" to divine the truth of an accusation. This use of conjecture is based on regular legal presumptions, but an accusation of witchcraft has the added difficulty that it was impossible to have witnesses to the crime. According to Institoris, his method was infallible, so far preferable to the legal practice of the day, which could absolve the guilty and convict the innocent. Institoris advocates a 'hermeneutics of witch hunting' based on logical deduction. This paper discusses Institoris' criticisms of regular legal practice and the procedure that he wishes to use instead.

**Jason van Boom**, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA

Title: **Gendered Epistemology in Ritual Magic and Witchcraft**

In the late Middle Ages, almost all ritual magicians were male. Why were 80% of accused witches female while ritual magicians were almost always conceived as male? This paper compares witchcraft and ritual magic to find the basis for this divergence in gender construction, arguing that its basis is epistemological. The ritual magician and the witch approach the spirit world from different cognitive positions. The magician communicates with spirits from a position of knowledge and power. He acquires a complex body of learning that is strongly gendered as masculine. He converses with spirits as an autonomous self, able to command or

negotiate with spiritual entities. The witch, however, is naked, both cognitively and physically. She lacks any special knowledge that would give her leverage in dealing with spirits. Hence, she enters into a relationship of servility. This contrast between the knowledge/power of ritual magic and the nakedness/servility of witchcraft corresponds to later medieval patterns of gendering of knowledge and authority.

**Adam Jortner**, University of Virginia

Title: **Witches as Liars: Magic and Power in the Early United States**

There were no witchcraft trials in the early U.S. republic (1783-1834), but there was a witchcraft problem. Witches were not a problem because what they did was real, but rather because it was false. New England thinkers held that witches and sorcerers of the past had only been stage magicians and ventriloquists, who controlled social, religious, and political life through the fear they inspired. Witchcraft was therefore a problem for the state, even though it was false. The threat to the new republic was twofold: the “jugglers” had to be exposed, and the people had to be educated, or better still, kept from voting booths. Liberty could only be maintained by restraining magic or by restraining democracy. This conclusion placed these thinkers in competition with the new religious sects of the republic—Shakers, Cochranites, Mormons—and provided a rubric whereby those claiming supernatural powers became the voice of the people.

#### SESSION 5

**Ayse Tuzlak**, University of Calgary

Title: **The Bishop and the Prophetess: Rival Ritual Experts in Third-Century Cappadocia**

In a letter to Cyprian of Carthage, dated 256, a bishop named Firmilian described some troubling events that had happened about twenty years earlier. Earthquakes had wrecked buildings all over Cappadocia. Worse, local Roman authorities blamed Christians for the damage, bringing about a persecution that took the Christian community by surprise. In the midst of this upheaval, a woman who, according to Firmilian, presented herself as a prophetess entered the scene; her powers enabled her to mislead many well-meaning Christians. Firmilian read these powers as demonically granted.

The prophetess is a rich source of Otherness against which the bishop could define good ritual: she is a woman, an ecstatic, a worker of *admirabilia*, and, oddly, a “heretic” (despite the fact that her orthodoxy is beyond reproach even by Firmilian’s own admission). This paper will trace the way these elements bring into sharp relief the vision of ritual expertise that Cyprian and Firmilian were developing, providing a tantalizing glimpse of other, minority viewpoints available in that time period

**Deborah Lea**, University of Liverpool

Title: **Confessional Conflict and Possession in Sixteenth Century Lancashire**

In 1594, an instance of demonic possession would cause a stir both in Lancashire and further abroad. Beginning as the tribulations of one family, the actions of ‘The Seven in Lancashire’ would become a conflict not just on the personal level but would also feature in a wider national conflict between the established church and puritan dissidents. This case demonstrates how the issues of witchcraft, possession and exorcism became weapons in the confessional armoury of both Protestant and Catholic. For puritans of a certain ilk, the ability to expel demons proved their claims to be Christ’s successors, yet the established English church relied on such ‘superstitious’ rituals merely proved the fraudulent nature of their, and similarly the Catholic church’s, claims.

The events of 1594-7 became the subject of numerous pamphlets which clearly illustrate how the supernatural could be manipulated to both discredit and legitimate a confession’s claim to spiritual supremacy.

## SESSION 6

**Kyle Fraser**, University of King's College, Halifax NS

Title: **Daimonology and the Legitimation of Ritual in Pagan Monotheism**

The early Christian preoccupation with demarcating legitimate and illegitimate sources of ritual power is usually viewed as foreign to paganism, on the grounds that it implies an exclusive monotheism, whereas paganism was polytheistic. However, the 'magic-religion' dichotomy cannot be reduced to a polemical evaluation of pagan polytheism from the privileged standpoint of Christian monotheism. Christianity did not *impose* monotheism onto pagan religious culture: the late pagan world had already shifted in the direction of an *inclusive monotheism*, in which the traditional divinities were reconceptualised as subordinate ministers of One Supreme God. This monotheistic turn necessitated a rethinking of the pagan cults and their *legitimacy*: does it make sense to offer sacrifices to an utterly transcendent God? Late pagan spirituality was deeply preoccupied with the reconciliation of theology and cult, monotheistic piety and ritual action. Indeed, the anti-magical polemics of Augustine and the early Fathers *derive directly from* these pagan monotheistic discourses. In this paper I highlight sources of late paganism in which ritual action becomes a theological *disputandum*. In these contexts, two key aspects of later Christian anti-magical polemics are already in play: the problem of coercion and the uncertain status of *daimons* as mediating agencies of ritual power.

**Shya Young**, University of Alberta

Title: **Disrupting Boundaries: Theurgy and Knowledge in Reuchlin's *De arte cabalistica***

This presentation examines Johannes Reuchlin's *De arte cabalistica* (1517), where he claims that practices associated with the power of the devil could also be a form of higher knowledge used altruistically for saving souls. Reuchlin juxtaposes false magic perpetrated by sly magicians using Egyptian spells, secret signs, and the names of ghosts and evil spirits, against what the reader can only suppose was the true magic of Kabbalists who were able to perform miracles with the help of divine names and the blessed angels.

His primary strategy in attempting to gain acceptance for his conflation (here labelled 'theurgy') of contemplation, magic, and salvation was to position his methodology as the kabbalistic art. Theurgy itself is a *disputandum* because it disrupts a binary classification system that judges knowledge acquired through reason superior to knowledge acquired through ritual.

### THIRD KEYNOTE

**T.M. Luhrmann**, Stanford University

Title: **Absorption, Magical Power, and the Art of Hearing God**

Modern magic and modern evangelical Christianity both use similar prayer practices as a means to generate intense emotional and sensory experience which is understood to be the presence of an external spiritual reality. This presentation draws on earlier ethnographic fieldwork in magic, current ethnographic fieldwork in an experientially oriented evangelical church, and psychological experimental work to discuss the role of 'absorption' as a practice which may encourage sensory override and intense sensory experiences among participants.

## SESSION 7

**Graham Jones**, Princeton University

Title: **Regimes of Enchantment: Magic, Knowledge and Power on the Colonial Frontier**

This paper explores the vexed meaning of magic as a genre of illusionary performance in the historical context of colonial encounters. In 1856, France sent its most famous stage magician, Jean-Eugene Robert-Houdin, on a military mission to colonial Algeria. According to field intelligence, Sufi holy men called "*marabouts*" were fomenting anti-French rebellions by using

conjuring tricks as evidence of their supernatural powers. Robert-Houdin's mission was to perform modern, secular magic for Arab leaders in order to demystify local forms of conjuring and thereby assert the superiority of French secular materialism over African "magical thinking." The ensuing cross-cultural misunderstandings about the meaning of illusionary performances reveal much about the collision of different cultural understandings of the relationship between illusion and reality, falsity and truth, secrecy and knowledge, and entertainment and ritual.

**Alison Butler**, St Francis Xavier University, Nova Scotia

Title: **Caught Between Sciences: the "Scientific" Magic of British Occultism**

Occultists of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain made concerted efforts to associate their magic with new scientific developments. Some did so by criticizing the domineering influence of materialism and scientific naturalism, offering instead magico-theological systems which claimed to adhere to the new rigorous scientific method. Others were quick to ally their magic with the new science, maintaining that specific magical procedures produce predictable results, just as scientific procedures do.

An analysis of these claims concerning the close relationship between 19th-century magic and science reveals that, despite hopes of the occultists, the two are not closely aligned. This paper examines the efforts by occultists to define their magic in relation to contemporary scientific developments and offers possible reasons for their failure. The actual magical system and the contents of several prominent magical libraries of the era demonstrate that Victorian occultism relied upon, and had much more in common with an earlier science.

#### SESSION 9

**Yvonne Petry**, Luther College, University of Regina

Title: **Magical Causation and the Practice of Medicine in the Early Modern Era**

Early modern physicians lacked the means to understand mechanisms of infection. They worked to grapple with new illnesses (syphilis), and to treat recurring ones (plague). They were called as expert witnesses in witch trials to determine the origins of sudden illnesses and worked alongside priests to investigate cases of demonic possession. At the same time, they were beginning to define professional boundaries and to make distinctions between legitimate medicine, quackery and sorcery. Their failure to do so in this era reflected their inability to explain how and why disease spread.

This paper argues that in their attempts to examine why people became ill, sixteenth-century physicians drew on concepts borrowed from Renaissance neoplatonism and natural magic. By using notions like subtle influences and occult mechanisms, they began to refine the Hippocratic explanation that "bad air" was the primary cause of contagion. This paper provides two examples to show how physicians worked through the problem, by looking at their ideas regarding the evil eye as a cause of disease, and the use of amulets to cure disease.

**Edward Bever**, SUNY Old Westbury

Title: **Descartes' Dreams, the Neuropsychology of Disbelief, and the Making of the Modern Self**

In 1619, René Descartes had a series of dreams that he considered to have played a crucial role in the foundation of the new philosophy he was developing. This philosophy is generally considered to be the foundation of the modern dualist understanding of the world in which the boundary between the natural and the supernatural was elevated to the point that, for educated modern Westerners, magic ceased to exist at all.

Descartes' dreams provide insight into the mechanisms by which disbelief is engendered and sustained. Disbelief, the unwillingness to credit experiences that seem magical, involves the deliberate "tuning" of the nervous system in order to suppress such experiences as well as the refusal to accept them intellectually.

The broader implications of Descartes' experience suggest how the European elite during the Enlightenment repressed magical beliefs and experiences, and the role this played in fostering the modern, individualistic concept of self.

**Maria Balfer**, Brunel University, West London

**Living Magical Realism: Fluid Boundaries in Modern Western Paganism**

Other studies of modern Western paganism have usually investigated it either from a sociological/anthropological, religious or psychological point of view. In contrast, this essay, drawing on participant observation in the pagan scene in London and on six life-history interviews, presents an analysis of the phenomenon which simultaneously takes into account aspects of social organisation, cognition and the symbolic system.

It will make the argument that the social structure of this scene exhibits one important characteristic, which is also central to pagan cosmology, epistemology and cognition: Just as group boundaries within it are extremely fluid and easily transcended, so too, are the boundaries between rational and irrational knowledge and the domains of the sacred and the profane, gods and humans. Thus paganism presents a prime example of Mary Douglas's hypothesis (1973) which predicts an important and intimate connection of a group's social structure, worldview and preferred ways of thinking.

SESSION 9

**Daniel Harms**, SUNY Cortland

**Title: Reviving Dead Names: the Necronomicon as Re-envisioning of the Grimoire Tradition**

Magic and its literature has been re-envisioned and remarketed time after time in accordance with new ideologies, trends, and social movements, as well as the changing demands of the market. Grimoires, or texts of magic, have maintained their popularity for centuries, but the genre lost much influence after the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to secularization and the devaluation of the Judeo-Christian framework on which they were based. Following the work of Olav Hammer and others on strategies for seeking legitimacy, I focus on the *Necronomicon*, a more recent grimoire which emerged from the New York City occult scene of the 1970s. This re-envisioning of the genre was a bricolage incorporating archaeological discoveries, Wiccan and Satanist beliefs, as well as science fiction and horror literature and film. The book's impact on magical practice and popular culture will also be examined.

**Bruce Retallack**, University of Toronto

**Title: Sorcerer's Apprentices: Transformational Magic and the Western Psyche**

For pre-Enlightenment audiences, stories of transformational magic were considered an account of simple fact. In the age of secular humanism, most people understand these tales as being fictional and metaphorical, yet the basic premise has not lost its cultural potency. One of its most important principles, that outward appearance reflects inner worth, provided the conceptual foundation for the 19<sup>th</sup> century passions for physiognomy, 'scientific' racism and eugenics. Similarly, Western theatrical conventions of 'realistic' acting assume an acceptance of the underlying trope of transformation. The twinned practices of advertising and consumption are also built on our belief in self-transformation through a magic potion or a special talisman.

Using examples from Homer to Harry Potter, this presentation highlights the centrality of transformational magic in the Western imagination, arguing that the practical effects of its evaluative function continue to make a real difference in how we respond to the world around us.

SESSION 10

**Benedek Láng**, Budapest University of Technology and Economics

**Title: A Question in the Epistemology of Magic**

The original compilers of medieval magic texts were learned monks, court intellectuals, and university masters: intelligent individuals capable of reflection. Were these persons never faced with the problem that the methods they copied did not work in practice? Did they not see that the mechanisms of natural, talismanic and ritual magic were ineffective, something easily demonstrable through simple experiments? Or should we suppose that the methods did actually work in their time? Such questions about the past might seem somewhat present-minded and thus illegitimate, everyone dealing with medieval texts of magic will sooner or later ponder on them. This paper enumerates several reasons why the methods of magic described in the handbooks could not be falsified. Some skepticism may have occurred regarding certain methods, but there is no reason to doubt that most of the sources were copied with the strong conviction that the methods written in them were efficacious.

**Marco Pasi**, University of Amsterdam

**Title: Ernesto De Martino, Antimagical Polemics, and the Doubtful Pleasures of Critical Ethnocentrism**

Ernesto De Martino (1908-1965) was an Italian anthropologist and historian of religion, best known in Italy and abroad (especially in France) for his work on Italian folklore. But he also published books addressing problems related to the study of magic from both an anthropological and an historical point of view. His first attempt came with *Il mondo magico* (1948), where he advanced a theory of magic that would take into account the suggestions of both philosophical existentialism and parapsychology. Towards the end of his life he published another book, *Magia e civiltà* (1962), in which he presented his ideas about the 'antimagical polemic' as a fundamental, recurring factor in the history of western culture. By doing this, he anticipated an approach for the study of magic that would become fashionable decades later, and which has found its most accomplished interpreter in Randall G. Styers with his *Making Magic* (2004). This paper will assess the utility of De Martino's works today, especially in relation to the problematic aspects of contemporary 'postmodern' approaches, and will also make some suggestions for future research.

**Randall Styers**, UNC Chapel Hill

**Title: Bad Habits: How Superstition Disappeared in the Modern World**

This paper explores the genealogy of the modern notion of "superstition." Through the early modern period, older theological understandings of the term were supplanted by newer psychological ones. As this transformation was consolidated in various forms of modern social science, superstition was reduced to a species of "magical thinking." The paper examines this modern convergence between superstition and magic, with particular attention both to the social and intellectual context within which it emerged and to the assumptions about religion and human cognitive functioning that underlie this formulation.

Many prominent psychological theorists conclude that almost all habitual, non-instrumental human behavior is fundamentally magical and therefore irrational. Contemporary cognitive approaches to the study of religion adapt this psychological perspective in their efforts to account for the persistence of human religiosity. Superstition and magical thinking are framed as comparable forms of bad habit that violate essential principles of rational behavior.