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Western Learned Magic as an Entangled Tradition

Introduction

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ABSTRACT The introduction to this special issue outlines the concept of Western learned magic and suggests to analyse it as an entangled tradition, thus calling for an interdisciplinary, transcultural and transreligious perspective on its history. A working heuristic of seven different types of entanglement in the history of Western learned magic is proposed, whereas special emphasis is placed on processes of ritual hybridisation. Entangled rituals are one of the most unique characteristics of Western learned magic and often mirror millenia-long processes of textual-ritual transmission across numerous cultural and religious boundaries. Inspired by this working heuristic of different types of entanglement in the history of Western learned magic, the introduction summarises the six contributions to this special issue. These contributions represent the fruits of a workshop on *Western learned magic as an entangled tradition* that was held at the Center for Religious Studies (CERES) at the University of Bochum on September 14–15, 2019.

KEYWORDS Western learned magic, History of magic, Western esotericism, Entangled history, ritual hybridity, European history of religions

Introduction

The articles assembled in this special issue of *Entangled Religion* represent the analytical fruits [1]
of a workshop on 'Western learned magic as an entangled tradition' that was held at the Center for Religious Studies (CERES) at the University of Bochum on September 14–15, 2019. The aim of the workshop was to explore the textual-ritual tradition of Western learned magic from an interdisciplinary, longue-durée and cross-cultural perspective. The study of Western learned magic has hitherto been scattered across many different fields of research—such as Egyptology, Classical Studies, Medieval Studies, Arabic, Jewish and Byzantine Studies, Early Modern History and the Study of Western and Contemporary Esotericism—, and the workshop therefore brought together eight acclaimed scholars who have worked on relevant source material from Antiquity to the twenty-first century. All participating scholars were asked to interpret and compare their sources from a bird's eye perspective that takes in the entire

history of Western learned magic and with a particular focus on ritual dynamics. The goal was to highlight cross-cultural and inter-religious routes of transmission as well as the 'entangled rituals' that tend to manifest in scripts of Western learned magic as a consequence of their manifold transmission routes and influences (see Otto 2016, 201–2). The same research foci guided the composition and reviewing process of the articles assembled in this special issue.

[2] In what follows, I will first provide a brief outline and conceptualisation of Western learned magic for readers unfamiliar with the concept. I then go on to offer a more detailed consideration of one of the most basic yet fascinating features of this textual-ritual tradition, namely its striking hybridities and entanglements of numerous sorts. After a brief re-conceptualisation and adaptation of the concepts of entangled history, hybridity and 'entangled rituals,' a typology of different types of entanglement in the history of Western learned magic will be proposed. The articles collected here will then be summarised and analysed with a particular focus on the typology suggested.

Western Learned Magic: A Brief Outline

[3] 'Western learned magic' is a novel and still relatively unknown object of scholarly analysis and historiography. After many decades of neglect, some of its historical sources began to be studied with renewed enthusiasm from the late 1980s onwards both by scholars working in traditional subject areas, such as classical Antiquity and medieval history, and by those interested in the nascent study of Western esotericism. Yet, academic scholars have only recently begun to approach the topic from a longue-durée, cross-cultural and transdisciplinary perspective (see, as exemples, Bailey 2007; Davies 2009; Collins 2015; Copenhaver 2015; and with a narrower focus Page and Rider 2018; Frankfurter 2019). In a lengthy programmatic article published in the journal *Aries* in 2016, I took up this research perspective and suggested the use of a coherent label—'Western learned magic'—for the vast body of disparate material available to us. I also proposed eight core characteristics that scholars might usefully consider if they wish to historicise this textual-ritual tradition in a fruitful and methodologically sound manner: continuity, changeability, hybridity, deviance, morality, complexity, efficacy, and multiplicity (2016).

[4] The main goal of the workshop in Bochum was to set out to meet two pressing needs identified in that article. The first was the need to investigate Western learned magic's hybridity and entanglements from a systematic and cross-cultural perspective (2016, 199–200); the second was to do so within an interdisciplinary framework. These needs could not be met by any single scholar or even by any narrowly focused group, for "the historicisation of 'Western learned magic' challenges the idea of a historiographical 'lone-fighter.' Instead, it calls for the establishment of interdisciplinary study groups or at least the systematic collaboration of a range of scholars coming from all disciplines relevant to its history" (2016, 225). I am grateful to the Käte Hamburger Kolleg *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe* at the University of Bochum for granting me the opportunity—and generous funds—to invite such an illustrious group of scholars to take the first steps towards meeting these needs.

[5] But what is Western learned magic? Essentially, Western learned magic is an analytical construct for gathering a corpus of texts, particularly ritual texts, that "include an etymological derivate, linguistic equivalent, or culturally established synonym of 'magic' as a self-referential and thus identificatory term" (2016, 173). Its conceptualisation has been inspired by critical discourse analysis and particularly the discussion of the so-called insider/outsider

distinction in the study of religion (McCutcheon 1999). It is thus an attempt to cope with the problem that magic has always been, and continues to be, a 'floating signifier'[1] that has frequently been ascribed—usually with a pejorative or polemical impetus—to people, and their practices or texts, who would never have used the label for self-reference. However, the analytical category of 'Western learned magic' is designed to shed light in precisely the opposite direction, in that it focuses on sources that display the *insider* perspectives, performances, and theorisations of people who *themselves* claim(ed) to be practising magic(ians)—in manifold cultural and linguistic contexts. Furthermore, it strives to analyse these sources "as from inside the system" (Pike 1999, 28). At first sight, this might appear to be an odd strategy from a scholarly perspective: on the whole, the scholarly world still tends to focus on anti-magical theological, philosophical or legislative texts, on (anti-)magical stereotypes in poetry, myth or legends, or on magical motifs and topoi in novels and other literary genres, where magic is typically interpreted as narrative trope or plot device (on the latter perspective, see, e.g., Bottigheimer 2014; Zipes 2017). Nevertheless, the methodological shift towards insider, or practitioner, perspectives inherent in our new analytical category reveals an extremely large corpus of sources in a variety of linguistic, cultural and religious contexts, ranging from late Antiquity to the twenty-first century, a corpus that calls for thorough interdisciplinary and cross-cultural analyses. Since the insider perspectives, performances, and theorisations in these texts, as well as their cultural and social contexts, have changed in manifold ways over the past two millennia, the textual-ritual tradition of Western learned magic has no immutable essence at its core. In stark contrast, it is characterised by a high degree of heterogeneity, hybridity, and changeability. The study of Western learned magic is thus part and parcel of what I have referred to as the 'discursive turn' in the study of magic, or the 'discursive study of magic' (e.g., Otto 2017, 43n4, 2018a, 2018b, 516).

[6] The concept of 'magic' is very old, going back to the old Persian (self-) appellation of a Median tribe or priest caste (*ma-gu-š:* 𐎶𐎢𐏁 in Persian cuneiform script). This terminology was then adopted, initially as for the purposes of polemical invective, by Greek authors around the fifth century BCE (Otto 2011, 149–50, 2022). Given this early origin, it is unsurprising that the textual-ritual tradition of Western learned magic is quite extensive. The earliest surviving relevant texts, the corpus known as the *Greek Magical Papyri* (or *Papyri Graecae Magicae*), were written in Koine Greek and circulated in Egypt and surrounding regions between the second and fifth centuries CE (see Otto 2013, 314n29, 332–33, 2016, 173, 185–86; critical editions/translations of this corpus are Preisendanz and Henrichs 1973–1974, and @betz_greek_1996). From that moment on, we must think of a continuous stream—or rather of multiple trajectories or even intercultural networks—of texts that depicted and prescribed an arsenal of different ritual performances as well as theorisations of ritual efficacy or physical causation (for some examples of this continuity from late Antiquity to the twenty-first century, see Otto 2016, 183–89). For the past two millennia, these trajectories or networks have been transmitted in parallel to or entangled with further text-based knowledge traditions including astrology, alchemy, numerology, Neoplatonism, Hermetism, and kabbalah, thereby crossing multiple language barriers as well as cultural and religious boundaries. Accordingly, Western learned magic is characterised by its ongoing and interconnected processes of textual-ritual transmission and reception from Antiquity to the present day (see especially

1 See Chandler (2007, 78): Floating signifiers have "a vague, highly variable, unspecifiable or non-existent signified. Such signifiers may mean different things to different people: they may stand for many or even any signifieds; they may mean whatever their interpreters want them to mean."

the articles by Henrik Bogdan and myself in this special issue, which unveil reception processes from the *Greek Magical Papyri* to present-day practitioners: Bogdan 2023; Otto 2023). At the same time, however, Western learned magic also displays a high degree of adaptability, changeability and innovation, and is hence characterised by a complex interplay of stasis and dynamis. Western learned magic "continuously adopts ritual patterns and techniques from older sources, discards unnecessary or unwanted elements, adapts to novel cultural and religious environments or practitioner milieus, and continuously invents modes of ritual performance or efficacy" (Otto 2016, 189–90). I have suggested that in order to acknowledge this ongoing and complex interplay between continuity and changeability, Western learned magic should be classified as a "coherent (even though not homogeneous) and continuous (even though repeatedly broken) textual-ritual tradition" (2016, 224).

[7] In contrast to other, more 'institutionalised' religious traditions, Western learned magic is characterised by some unusual, if not unique, features. Apart from its ongoing tendency to change and innovate, Western learned magic was, for most of its history, perceived as an extremely precarious and contested form of praxis-knowledge. As a result, reactions in powerful elite discourses tended to oscillate between outright fascination and horrified repudiation (on the issue of deviance, see Otto 2016, 203–7). At least until the repeal of laws against the "crimen magiae" from most European legal codes during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (see Levack 2004, esp. 181-182), we may think of Western learned magic as a shadowy, ostracised and often criminalised underground tradition which depended strongly on manuscript transmission (even in an age of print: see Bellingradt and Otto 2017; and Davies' article in this special issue for further thoughts on the relationship between manuscript and print cultures of learned magic: Davies 2023). Due to its typically being situated in hostile cultural environments (with few exceptions, such as some premodern Islamicate contexts, see Otto 2018b; and further Saif and Leoni 2020), Western learned magic rarely developed proper 'institutionalisations,' such as a recognisable architecture, a fixed canon of 'holy' scriptures, a group of authorities who determined and monitored its orthodoxy or orthopraxis, continuous lineages or teacher-pupil relationships across several generations, or an educational infrastructure (such as schools or colleges). Even processes of group formation only properly began from the nineteenth century onwards, with a few earlier exceptions (see Otto 2016, 184; and Page's article in this special issue for some thoughts and observations on medieval groups of practitioners: Page 2023).

[8] There are two further crucial features of Western learned magic that may enrich this brief outline. First, practitioners of Western learned magic often invert(ed) the polemical stereotypes conceived by the powerful anti-magical cultural and religious discourses that surround(ed) them. The three basic anti-magical stereotypes that have informed Western elite perspectives from Antiquity onwards paint magic as (1) anti-religious; (2) inefficacious; and (3) immoral (see Otto 2019, 199–200). By contrast, practitioners of Western learned magic typically perceive(d) their art as (1) spiritually valuable, even the peak of all religious aspiration; (2) absolutely powerful and efficacious; and (3) morally legitimate, even divinely ordained. This 'stereotype reversal' is one of Western learned magic's most intriguing strategies of self-legitimisation and self-justification and can be found throughout its texts and ritual scripts from Antiquity to the twenty-first century (on stereotype reversal, see also Otto 2021, 335–36). Secondly, the millenia-long multicultural transmission history of Western learned magic is striking, given that large parts of this history took place in hostile cultural, religious, and legislative environments, not seldom with life-threatening implications for its practitioners.

Even when these life-threatening circumstances gradually receded from the late seventeenth century onwards, magic remained in the firing line of Enlightenment authors and has since functioned as a popular target for rationalist and modernist anti-magical rhetorics and ideologies (see Styers 2004). Yet, despite being continuously devalued, ostracised, and criminalised throughout Western history, Western learned magic has proven to be strikingly resilient and remains so in the present day, a capacity that is still not thoroughly understood (see the conclusions in Otto 2023 for some thoughts on its recent popularity, and 2022).

[9] I have suggested that this tradition of Western magic should be referred to as 'learned' because it is, first and foremost, a textual (and not an oral) ritual tradition which was, therefore, accessible to only the small literate portion of the population for large parts of its premodern history. What is more, its texts and ritual scripts typically require(d) rather high degrees of literacy and often multiple language competencies, as well as a thorough understanding of conceptual and ritual patterns coming from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds (such as late ancient polytheisms, Judaism, Islam and Christianity). Texts of learned magic tended to accumulate over time, partly resulting in extremely lengthy ritual scripts—and procedures (that could endure months or even years: see Otto 2016, 188)—, and they sometimes delve(d) into complex theorisations of ritual efficacy (for a telling example, see Noble's article in this special issue: Noble 2023). As a consequence, practitioners often required significant commitments of time and monetary resources. Thus, at least until the eighteenth century, Western learned magic had little to offer to the masses and largely remained—early modern democratisation processes notwithstanding (see Davies 2023 for further details)—the domain of literate, educated and thus 'learned' practitioners.

[10] Why do I suggest that we use the fuzzy notion of 'Western' in demarcating this analytical category? This notion is clearly unable to provide us with a clear-cut chronological or geographical boundary line. Yet it is nonetheless useful to differentiate *this* particular textual-ritual tradition—that of Western learned magic—from other ritual traditions deemed 'magical.' For instance, European scholars from the nineteenth century onwards have studied plenty of ritual traditions situated in specific ethnographic contexts, such as those of the Australian Aranda (Durkheim 1995 [first publ. 1912]), the Polynesian Trobriand islanders (Malinowski 1965 [repr. 1935]), or the Sudanese Azande (Evans-Pritchard 1958 [repr. 1937]), which have significantly influenced the scholarly debate concerning how to define and theorise magic (for an overview of this debate, see Otto and Stausberg 2013). Yet the traditions of the Aranda, the Azande, and the Trobriand people are neither historically nor conceptually related to Western learned magic. This disconnect lies at the root of my claim that "the classical arsenal of scholarly definitions and theories of 'magic'—which had mostly been deduced from anthropological sources and theorizing—appears to be mostly useless for the study and analysis of 'Western learned magic' " (Otto 2016, 165–66). What is more, the notion of 'Western' helps to demarcate the textual-ritual tradition of Western learned magic from other text-based and seemingly 'similar'—but historically largely unrelated—ritual traditions in, say, East Asian contexts (for some illuminating juxtapositions of the Indian *Atharvaveda* and the second-century ritual text *Arthaśāstra* with Western notions of magic, see Frenschkowski 2016, 42–49). Even if it may be possible and reasonable to conceptualise and analyse such traditions in, say, India, Tibet, China, or Japan, it is crucial to acknowledge that these traditions are historically largely unconnected to Western learned magic, and that they may therefore encompass, despite all

seeming similarities, a large number of culture-bound differences.[2] In my eyes, a 'global' or 'universal' perspective on the history of magic is not a viable option, so the analytical label 'Western learned magic' helps to indicate both the historical and geographical situatedness of its subject matter as well as its manifold specifics. Studying 'Western learned magic as an entangled tradition' also brings home the point that the notion of 'Western' can itself be thought of as entailing, or pointing towards, a large number of historical, cultural and religious entanglements—all contributions to this special issue therefore include numerous cross-references, and are analysed on the grounds of a seven-fold typology of entanglements (see below).

To conclude, 'Western learned magic' certainly has its weaknesses as a signifier (for further thoughts on its problems, see Otto 2016, 179–80), yet "I would suggest that the historiographical value and plausibility of this category should be measured against its final product, i.e., its narrated history to come, and not against hasty methodological objections" (2016, 182). That said, the articles assembled in this special issue illustrate the fruitfulness of interdisciplinary, comparative research into Western learned magic and thus point to future ways of studying this fascinating, and still in large parts unexplored, textual-ritual tradition. [11]

Western Learned Magic as an Entangled Tradition

When I suggest in this special issue that we should consider Western learned magic as an entangled tradition, my focus is not primarily on the literature and methodology surrounding *entangled history* (e.g., Haupt and Kocka 2009) or *histoire croisée* (e.g., Werner and Zimmermann 2004). To be sure, these methodologies may also be fruitfully applied to the history of Western learned magic, especially with regard to the vast quantity of transcultural trajectories and interchanges associated with its texts and practices (see, for instance, Owen Davies' telling example of the Japanese manga film *Akuma-kun* in this issue: Davies 2023). However, the notion of 'entanglement' on which I draw predominantly refers to one of the most interesting and eye-catching characteristics of Western learned magic, namely its hybridity. With a particular focus on the ritual art outlined in many of its source texts, my programmatic 2016 article suggests that hybridity is one of Western learned magic's core features and points to two different types of hybridity prevalent in the sources, which I refer to as 'ritual hybridity' and 'religious hybridity.' The former refers to the combination of a "vast array of ritual (micro-) techniques in prescriptions of 'learned magic' " (2016, 199), which is a typical feature not only of the lengthier scripts, such as those from the vast corpus of the so-called *Claviculae Salomonis*. The latter refers to the fact that texts of learned magic often display motifs and ideas taken from variegated cultural and religious backgrounds which coalesce in more or [12]

2 As I have argued elsewhere, the Arabic-Islamic realms functioned as an important transmission bridge in the history of Western learned magic and is hence included in the notion of 'Western' employed here (see 2016, 181n89, 2018b, 527). As a consequence, Western learned magic occasionally implemented specific ritual techniques from Indian or even Chinese sources—an example being the numerological cell square—, which were part of or in contact with the medieval Arabic-Islamic world (see, for instance, some chapters in the *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm*, which was translated into Old Castilian and Latin as *Picatrix* in the early thirteenth century: Ritter and Plessner 1962; Pingree 1986). Yet, even if such transmissions occured, there is a vast number of premodern ritual texts belonging to Chinese Daoist traditions—such as the *Wufu xu* (see Raz 2012)—or Indian Tantric traditions–such as the *Mantramahodadhi* (see Bühnemann 2000)—to name only two examples which illustrate different ritual logics and procedures, different underlying concepts of ritual efficacy, and hence largely independent historical trajectories. In my understanding, the notion of 'Western' helps to distinguish the textual-ritual tradition of Western learned magic from such traditions, even if the geographical, cultural and language boundaries between them were partly permeable.

less subtle ways, leading to the general impression that "sources of 'Western learned magic' often appear as inter-cultural/religious patchwork rugs, thus differing largely from most other religious text genres composed in Western history" (2016, 201). This is, of course, a direct consequence of Western learned magic's complex inter-religious and trans-cultural reception history. Examples of both types of hybridity are manifold (for a list of examples, see Otto 2016, 200–202) and also pervade the contributions to this special issue.

[13] As a culmination of these two types of hybridity, I suggest that we can speak of 'entangled rituals' as one of Western learned magic's most interesting features, drawing on Richard Burke's concept of 'hybrid practices' (Burke 2009, 21–22). While Burke points to Brazilian Umbanda and Candomblé, as well as to the Vietnamese religion Cao Dai, as telling examples of 'hybrid practices,' I believe that texts of Western learned magic are often extreme cases, or end products, of preceding processes of hybridisation. Clearly, many practitioners of Western learned magic were, and often still are, driven to combine and amalgamate diverse templates, ritual techniques and artefacts, concepts and ideas, theories of ritual efficacy, and even languages of power, instead of relying on one approach or perspective solely, presumably with the goal to heighten the presumed efficacy of their practices. Usually positioned at the margins of their respective cultural or religious environments, practitioners also tend(ed) to appropriate ideas and practices from other contested or foreign knowledge traditions or cultures. Given that Western learned magic could "well be interpreted as a neglected or marginalised side-product or 'spin-off' of the Western history of religions" at large (Otto 2016, 167n24), it might be reasonable to interpret its high degree of hybridity as the result of an inclusivist or 'ecumenical' counterstrategy pursued by practitioners in order to cope with their own perceived marginality.

[14] However, one of the principal insights of the workshop in Bochum, and thus also of the results published in this special issue, is that Western learned magic is an entangled tradition not only in the domain of texts and ritual practices, but also, or even more so, in a range of further domains. A working heuristic or typology of entanglements prevalent in Western learned magic emerged during the workshop, which helped us fine-tune our perspectives and compare the material. Notably, we did not employ the notion of 'entanglement' only as a methodological perspective within our own historical analyses. Rather, we also treated it as a *process category* that helps to indicate certain strategies or decisions of historical actors (i.e., authors and/or practitioners of Western learned magic) aimed at amalgamating, weaving together, or transcending boundaries by merging what was not meant to be merged before. Hence, our understanding of entanglement resembles features of Bhaba's concept of hybridisation (see, e.g., Bhaba 1994, 1996). To be sure, such processes of entanglement—or hybridisation—can be active or passive, conscious or unconscious, and they can also be synchronic (short-term interchanges between contemporaneous discourses) or diachronic, thus taking place over long periods of time.

[15] On these grounds, we decided to distinguish between (1) textual entanglements (texts may be transferred across time and space and translated into different linguistic, cultural, and religious frameworks, thereafter being amalgamated and interwoven with texts from the 'new' cultural environments); (2) ritual entanglements (ritual scripts may combine and encompass a vast number of ritual patterns and micro-techniques from multiple inspiring templates or frameworks); (3) conceptual and/or linguistic entanglements (terms and concepts from different linguistic backgrounds, times, spaces are interwoven, potentially leading to onomasiological shifts, odd combinations of 'languages of power', or even the creation of novel languages);

(4) theoretical entanglements (different large-scale worldviews, theories of causation, concepts of efficacy from diverse cultural or religious backgrounds may be combined, negotiated or interwoven); (5) media entanglements (encounters and interrelations between different media in the history of Western learned magic, e.g., between oral and written traditions, between manuscript and print cultures, between texts and images, etc.); (6) discursive entanglements (encounters and interrelations between anti-magical and affirmative discourses of magic, between different social strata, practitioner milieus, or further cultural discourses, and also: discourses at the crossroads of intercultural and interreligious transfer and exchange); and (7) spatio-temporal entanglements ('glocalisation', i.e., foreign ritual scripts may be translated and adapted to local lore, thus meeting the specifics and demands of local practitioners). Notably, each of these entanglements is often *directly visible* in the sources of Western learned magic, and they also tend to manifest in the constantly changing ritual art that is outlined therein ('entangled rituals').

The Contributions to this Special Issue

[16] All these different types of entanglement in Western learned magic are reflected upon in the contributions to this special issue. Michael Noble's chapter on the works and deeds of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) and Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191/2) highlights theoretical, discursive and spatio-temporal entanglements (2023). Noble carves out sophisticated theoretical entanglements in his analysis of al-Rāzī's attempt to merge Avicennan philosophy (especially the latter's celestial kinematics and psychology) with his own vision—and practice—of talismanic, or astral, magic. Discursive entanglements are apparent in the attempts of al-Rāzī and al-Suhrawardī (through the adoption of Avicennism) to justify and legitimise astral magic in response to powerful anti-magical Islamic polemics. While al-Rāzī succeeded in gaining the political patronage and protection of the Khwārazm-Shāhs (who were eager to employ the talismanic sciences for political purposes), al-Suhrawardī was less fortunate in that his occult political doctrine, as well as his closeness with Saladdin's son, stoked the suspicion of powerful antagonists, leading to his execution in 1191 or 1192. Most striking, however, is the spatio-temporal entanglement that becomes apparent when connections are drawn between Noble's article and other contributions in this special issue, in particular to my own article on the planetary conjurations of the contemporary practitioner Frater Acher (2023). The similarities, and also the differences, between al-Rāzī's year-long ritual (outlined in his *al-Sirr al-maktūm / The Hidden Secret*, written no later than 1179) to invoke each of the celestial spheres in order to ultimately become 'self-talismanised,' on the one hand, and Frater Acher's twenty-first-century conjurations of planetary spirits, with the goal of 'theurgic' communion and the achievement of psycho-spiritual maturation by rising up the 'hermetic ladder,' on the other, are nothing short of striking.

[17] Sophie Page's contribution (2023) is not only a fine introduction to medieval European learned magic at large, but it also sheds light on the textual, ritual, conceptual and theoretical (especially cosmological) entanglements that underlie medieval learned magic. After all, the medieval Latin corpus of learned magic was, from the eleventh century onwards, in large parts the result of a trans-cultural textual-ritual exchange and translation movement based on earlier Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew traditions of learned magic, and accompanied by ongoing processes of 'Christianate' adaptation, negotiation and innovation. Beyond these rather typical types of entanglement, however, Page sheds new light on discursive entanglements of a

particular kind, namely between medieval sympathisers and critics of magic. Page succinctly outlines the extent to which these sympathisers and critics engaged in a continuous process of response to each other's perspectives. She also shows how the surviving Latin texts of learned magic, as well as their underlying cosmologies, themselves changed significantly over the centuries, as a direct consequence of the dynamic entanglement between positive and negative medieval perceptions of magic. In addition, Page demonstrates that medieval learned magic was, even though continously ostracised and criminalised, embedded within a vibrant culture of textual exchange between different social and discursive stratas, e.g. between actors coming from monastic, clerical, university, or lay milieus.

[18] In his discussion of Reginald Scot's work *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (first publ. 1584), Owen Davies provides another fine analysis of the discursive—now early modern European—entanglements between polemical and identificatory perspectives on magic (2023). These coalesce in peculiar ways within Scot's text itself, in that the *Discoverie of Witchcraft* encompasses both lenghty ritual prescriptions as well as anti-magical polemics. Davies also sheds light on media entanglements while pondering the relationship and reciprocal influences between early modern manuscript and print cultures of learned magic. The spread of literacy and, therefore, the ongoing 'democratisation' of learned magic in early modern Europe (with new practitioner milieus emerging among groups such as merchants, soldiers, and peasants) can also be interpreted from the perspective of discursive entanglements which, in turn, affected the contents of circulating texts of learned magic – through dynamics of ritual complexity-reduction, for example (see also Otto 2016, 212–17). Davies' last example is particularly striking in that it reveals textual, conceptual and spatio-temporal entanglements all the way from the early modern French text *Poule Noir through* to the Japanese manga artist Shigeru Mizuki (1922–2015) and his *Akuma-kun* films and television series.

[19] Dirk Johannsen's chapter on William Butler Yeats sheds particular light on ritual, conceptual and theoretical entanglements (2023). Yeats' highly innovative 'dual theory of magic and poetry,' outlined in Johannsen's article, is, first of all, a fine example of ritual entanglements, in that Yeats systematically bridged or merged two forms of practices that had previously only been associated rather loosely: ritual practice, on the one hand, and poetic writing, on the other. He also engaged in conceptual and theoretical entanglements in his attempt to merge metaphysical and naturalist understandings of human moods, and of the imagination in particular, in order to ultimately formulate a novel and, as it were, 'entangled' theory of magic that does justice to the cultural domains of both magic and poetry (thus framed as "talismanic poetry": see Johannsen 2021). Yeats was also an innovator in his amalgamation of literary and folkloristic perspectives within his theory of magic, thus paving the way for what has become known as the 'psychologisation of magic' in the twenty-first century.

[20] Aleister Crowley is certainly one of the most pivotal figures in the history of Western learned magic, and it is unsurprising that a wide variety of textual, ritual, conceptual, and theoretical entanglements can be detected in his works and deeds. Henrik Bogdan's contribution reflects on the telling example of the practices, ideas and texts surrounding Crowley's ongoing attempts to contact and converse with his 'Holy Guardian Angel' (2023). The example is particularly noteworthy, as, over the years, Crowley amalgamated a vast range of texts stemming from diverse traditions and origins. These included the late ancient (Egyptian) *Greek London Papyrus 46* (*PGM V*); early modern grimoires such as the *Abramelin* and the *Goetia*; John Dee's system of Enochian conjurations of 'aethyrs'; and nineteenth-century initiatory and masonic rites, based on the kabbalistic tree of life, which had manifested in the Her-

metic Order of the Golden Dawn. The manifold textual and ritual entanglements, but also the on-going conceptual and theoretical re-interpretations that underlie Crowley's life-long quest for his 'Holy Guardian Angel', are all valuable examples that illustrate the agenda of this special issue. Crowley's last prescriptive manual for achieving his goal—his *Liber Samekh* (composed ca. 1920)—includes a modified version of a late ancient Egyptian conjuration formula, in which we can again also observe longue-durée spatio-temporal entanglements that still inform present-day Thelemites, such as members of the Ordo Templi Orientis.

Finally, my own chapter on Frater Acher's *Arbatel experience*—a series of conjurations of [21]
planetary spirits performed in a Bavarian barn by a (in the scene) well-known contemporary practitioner between 2010 and 2013—can be read along similar lines (2023). Acher, in his year-long ritual endeavour to encounter planetary spirits (just like al-Rāzī 800 years before), combined and amalgamated texts and techniques from multiple contexts, among them late ancient Egypt (again *PGM V*), early modern grimoires (*Arbatel*, *Clavicula Salomonis*), Paracelsian, Hermetic and masonic traditions, as well as modern imagination and 'Chaos magick' techniques. The outcome was strikingly 'entangled ritual' that, in stark contrast to Acher's 'traditionalist' self-understanding, was highly innovative, creative, adaptive and, even within the ritual series itself, in constant flux. As with Crowley's *Liber Samekh*, Acher's *Arbatel experience* implies not only a large number of textual, ritual and conceptual entanglements, but also various spatio-temporal entanglements, especially through his systematic adoption of textual-ritual patterns from the *Greek Magical Papyri* and the early modern ritual script *Arbatel*. Consequently, I make a passionate plea in the article to take experience reports of contemporary practitioners of magic(k) more seriously, to make use of such reports in the analysis and interpretation of premodern texts of learned magic, and thus to systematically compare practitioner strategies, practices, and mindsets from different centuries and sociocultural frameworks.

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