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052162228X - John Dee's Conversations with Angels: Cabala, Alchemy, and the End of Nature

Deborah E. Harkness

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## John Dee's Conversations with Angels

John Dee (1527–1608/9) was a Cambridge-educated natural philosopher who served Queen Elizabeth I as court astrologer and who wrote works on many subjects including mathematics, alchemy, and astronomy. His most prolonged intellectual project, however, was conversations with angels using a crystal ball and a variety of assistants with visionary abilities. Dee's angel conversations have long puzzled scholars of early modern science and culture, who have wondered how to incorporate them within the broader contexts of early modern natural philosophy, religion, and society. Using Dee's marginal notes in library books, his manuscript diaries of the angel conversations, and a wide range of medieval and early modern treatises regarding nature and the apocalypse, Deborah Harkness argues that Dee's angel conversations represent a continuing development of his natural philosophy. The angel conversations, which included discussions of the natural world, the practice of natural philosophy, and the apocalypse, were conveyed to audiences from London to Prague, and took on new importance within these shifting philosophical, religious, and political situations. When set within these broader frameworks of Dee's intellectual interests and early modern culture, the angel conversations can be understood as an attempt to practice natural philosophy at a time when many thought that nature itself was coming to an end.

Deborah E. Harkness is an associate professor of history at the University of California, Davis. She is the recipient of the Renaissance Society of America's Nelson Prize and the History of Science Society's Derek Price Award. Professor Harkness has also received fellowships from Fulbright, the National Science Foundation, ACLS, and the Huntington Library/NEH. Her articles have been published in journals such as *Renaissance Quarterly* and *Isis*.

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# John Dee's Conversations with Angels

Cabala, Alchemy, and the End of Nature

DEBORAH E. HARKNESS

*University of California, Davis*



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– To My Guiding Spirits –

Olive R. Harkness

John C. Harkness

and

Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs

(1930–1994)

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## *Abbreviations and Conventions*

The following abbreviations are used in the notes for frequently cited works. Full information on these titles can be found in the Select Bibliography.

Agrippa, <i>DOP</i>	Henry Cornelius Agrippa, <i>De occulta philosophia libri tres</i> (1533)
Clulee	Nicholas H. Clulee, <i>John Dee's Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion</i>
Dee, <i>AWS II</i>	John Dee, <i>John Dee's Actions with Spirits</i> , edited with an introduction by Christopher Whitby. 2 vols. Vol. II
Dee, <i>CR</i>	John Dee, <i>Compendious Rehearsal</i> (1592), in <i>Autobiographical Tracts of Dr. John Dee</i> , edited by James Crossley
Dee, <i>MH</i>	John Dee, <i>Monas hieroglyphica</i> (1564), translated by C. H. Josten
Dee, <i>MP</i>	John Dee, "Mathematical Preface," in <i>The Elements of Geometrie of . . . Euclid of Megara</i> (1570), translated by Henry Billingsley
Dee, <i>PA</i>	John Dee, <i>Propaedeumata Aphoristica</i> , edited and translated by John Heilbron and Wayne Shumaker
Dee, <i>PD</i>	John Dee, <i>Private Diary of Dr. John Dee</i> , edited by J. O. Halliwell
French	Peter J. French, <i>John Dee</i>
Roberts and Watson	Julian Roberts and Andrew Watson, <i>John Dee's Library Catalogue</i>
<i>TFR</i>	John Dee and Edward Kelly, <i>A True and Faithful Relation of what happened for many years . . .</i> , edited by Meric Casaubon

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- Thorndike      *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*. 8 vols.
- Whitby, AWS I      John Dee, *John Dee's Actions with Spirits*, edited with an introduction by Christopher Whitby. 2 vols. Vol. I

**Quotations**

When quoting from the angel conversations, I have retained the original spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Any marks of emphasis that appear are Dee's own. Carets indicate text that has been inserted above the line in the manuscript. Additional letters have been supplied in square brackets when Dee's spelling might lead to a misreading of the text.

**Dates**

Based on the evidence from the angel diaries, Dee began each new year as we do, on the first of January. When he was on the Continent from 1583 to 1587, Dee began gradually to incorporate the new calendar into his entries, noting both "stylo novo" and "stylo veteri." For clarity of reference, the date that Dee recorded in his diary entries has been maintained, even though this may cause some chronological confusion.

**Items from Dee's Library**

When reference is made to one of Dee's books, a notice is made of the number assigned to it by Roberts and Watson. Bibliographic details are thereby kept as brief as possible, and readers are directed to Roberts and Watson for more information on a given title, multiple editions, present location, shelfmark, and so on. For Dee's books that contain marginalia cited in this work, full bibliographic information, including current location if known, is included in the Select Bibliography.