

Introduction

DAVID J. COLLINS, S.J.

Edward Burnett Tylor minced no words in his seminal work *Primitive Culture* (1871) when he wrote that magic was “one of the most pernicious delusions that ever vexed mankind.” Neither did his intellectual scion James George Frazer when he called magic “the bastard sister of science” in his monumental *The Golden Bough* (1890). Their rousing denunciations of magic as primitive and their placement of it between and below laudably advanced forms of religion and scientific rationalism stand at the origins of the modern scholarly approach to magic, which this volume hopes also to advance. The contributors to this volume are of course not the immediate heirs of Tylor and Frazer. Luminary figures in early twentieth-century sociology and anthropology – Emile Durkheim, Bronislaw Malinowski, Marcel Mauss (too often treated as the by-product of his accomplished uncle, but original and substantial in his contributions to the study of magic), and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, to name but a few – stand between them and us. These researchers developed overarching theories, analytic frameworks, and definitions that redound in the scholarship to this day. The scholarly approach to magic did not just change – as Tylor and Frazer, early social evolutionists, might instinctively expect: it diversified. The developments have in large part corresponded to general trends in the humanities and social sciences toward disciplinary specialization and multi-cultural sensibilities that militate against the application of selective, contemporary characteristics of Western society as universal measures of human accomplishment. The study of magic has won much in the process: errors in the early scholarship have been corrected; subtleties missed have been captured; and the scope of the possible has been opened wide. But the gains have come with loss too, paradoxically including the siloing of scholarship within ever narrowing disciplines and sub-disciplines, on the one hand, and the insurmountable accumulation of new scholarship, on the other. No single work could likely solve this paradox, but the aim of this volume is to attenuate it. It aspires to shed light on magic as a cultural phenomenon in the West

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from Antiquity to the present. Its scope, “the West,” places Europe at center but incorporates both cultural antecedents and global influences. It situates Western Europe, moreover, alongside related civilizations in the ancient and medieval Mediterranean world for comparative purposes. Its goal is, in twenty chapters, to present readers – specialists in the study of magic and witchcraft, scholars in related fields, and advanced students – with the current state of historical knowledge about magic in the West, to recover the rich variety of ways that magic has been understood and practiced, to embody interdisciplinary cooperation, and so to suggest directions for future scholarship.¹

Any digital bibliographic search will speedily indicate the abundance of scholarship about magic that has been produced in the past quarter century. Its quality ranges from the most erudite and judicious to the most superficial and partisan. The challenge to the contributors of this volume has been to discern, synthesize, and build on the best of this abundance. The extent to which they have accomplished that is left to the reader, but by way of introduction, it will be helpful to introduce the reader to the important works already available, specifically in three kinds: the textbook overview; the edited, scholarly reference work; and the monograph and volume of collected essays.

There are several textbook overviews currently in print that address aspects of the history of magic in Europe in well-founded, scholarly ways. The best are R. Kieckhefer’s *Magic in the Middle Ages*, M. D. Bailey’s *Magic and Superstition in Europe*, and B. P. Levack’s *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*. These are commonly used textbooks for undergraduate and graduate students, and scholars in related fields looking for overviews safely rely on them, as well. All three books benefit from the research specialties of their authors, as well as the synthesizing coherence that the individual authors bring to their work. By way of comparison, a goal of this volume is to establish a larger context by bringing together a range of scholars to write in their areas of expertise, by giving substantive consideration to magic as it was understood and practiced in Mediterranean cultures in parallel to Western Europe, and by considering how Europe’s encounters with non-Mediterranean, non-European cultures shaped magic in Europe and around the globe.

The scholarly work to which the proposed volume bears the greatest resemblance is B. Ankarloo and S. Clark’s *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, which appeared in six volumes of eighteen individually authored chapters between 1999 and 2002.² The Ankarloo-Clark volumes are a masterful work and will long remain an essential resource for the study of witchcraft in Europe. The volumes have shaped the more recent scholarship in terms of their overarching chronological structure and thematic organization, and they include individual

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articles that synthesize the latest scholarship and make persuasive new arguments on central points of witchcraft's history. On three key points, however, the current volume has developed in different directions. First, like the authors of the aforementioned textbook overviews, the editors of *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe* limited their geographical and cultural focus to Europe. What this distinction excludes, however, is a potentially very enlightening comparison between magic in Europe and magic in the Mediterranean and colonial worlds. Byzantine, Islamic, and medieval Jewish societies shared with Latin Christendom associations with antiquity that offered them a shared legacy in magic. The legacy, however, was drawn on in quite distinctive ways: the other systems of magic developed in parallel to European magic and at key historical moments influenced it and were influenced by it. The increasing contact and exchange Europeans had with non-European, non-Mediterranean peoples, especially from the fifteenth century onward, likewise warrant our attention for the ways they shaped each other's appreciation of what magic was and how it worked. For these reasons, this volume has expanded its scope to "the West" and has placed a high priority on incorporating the ways that Europe was not isolated from a larger world, even in its understandings of magic.

Second, the issue of periodization has become a debated one in the study of magic, as it has in other topics in Western intellectual and cultural history. There are several important disputed moments in the overarching periodization from antiquity to the twentieth century. One example has to do with the significance of the Renaissance and the Reformation to developments in attitudes toward and the actual practice of magic in Europe. The Ankarloo-Clark volumes incorporate that debate by including contributions that fall on both sides: the third and fifth volumes explicitly presuppose a fundamental caesura around 1500 in this history of magic; the fourth volume, in contrast, makes a strong case against dividing analysis of witchcraft around 1500 or taking the sixteenth-century Reformations as a turning point in the intellectual and social history of the witch trials. On this particular question of periodization, this volume has followed a periodization that holds the eleventh to the eighteenth centuries, dubbed "Old Europe" here and in other historiographical contexts, to stand on its own as a coherent epoch in the study of magic in general and diabolic witchcraft in particular. In this volume, the significance of Christianization in late antiquity has also been carefully reconsidered, and the influence of the seventeenth-century Enlightenment on the following two centuries has been critiqued.

A third way that this volume aims to advance the overarching conversation on the practice of magic in the West is to attend, through the historical literature, to the practitioners. At points, this means highlighting their significance

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and at other times, attenuating it. The “Renaissance Magus,” for example, is a looming figure in Western traditions of magic, and he offers the modern scholar an entrée to address the vexed relationship – theoretical and practical – of magic to science. He – and he was always male – comes naturally into the foreground in Chapter 11 on learned magic in Old Europe, and his analogs in other periods surface in several other chapters, especially with an eye to the boundaries and connections between magic and science in a historical context. In contrast, the witch – that practitioner of harmful magic whose diabolic form is so peculiar to the West – figures less prominently than common knowledge would lead one to anticipate. The “burning times” were, to be sure, a horrific episode in the legal, religious, and social history of Europe, but they are hardly emblematic of Europe’s attitudes toward magic in the first and second millennia CE. Ankarloo and Clark addressed this dissonance between what is conventionally thought to be true of the period of witch hunts and what research has over the past half century found to be true when they wrote in the introduction to their volume on the witch trials, “the successful recognition of a topic’s significance always runs the risk of exaggerating that significance.” In response to this problem, specialized scholarship on witchcraft in the past decade generally includes a warning against or an apology for any distortive impressions it might leave. This volume takes this caveat very much to heart; it aims to examine the phenomenon of witchcraft, its late medieval diabolization, and its persecution directly; but it limits witchcraft to one chapter and therefore situates its significance appropriately within the broader framework of magic’s history in the West.

Third, in the past fifteen years, a large number of noteworthy monographs and edited volumes, to say nothing of scholarly articles, have brought to light new historical phenomena and contributed to the reframing of fundamental questions. It would be impossible to list, let alone describe, all of these works; the following sampling represents directions that scholarship has moved in the past fifteen years: T. Abusch has ensured continued interest in magic in ancient Near Eastern contexts with his own research and important edited volumes. P. A. Mirecki and M. Meyer have brought together some of antiquity’s most learned scholars to make new sources available and to challenge numerous conventional understandings of their subject in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*. The essays in J. N. Bremmer and J. R. Veenstra’s *The Metamorphosis of Magic* have also called for a reassessment of magic’s relationship to religion from antiquity to the early modern period. A. Boureau’s *Satan hérétique* has redefined the origins of demonology as a medieval field of study and its relationship to heresy. S. Clark’s *Thinking with Demons* and W. Stephens’s *Demon*

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Lovers have proposed new ways of understanding how and why demonology attracted so much scholarly attention in the late medieval and early modern centuries. R. Kieckhefer's *Forbidden Rites* and M. D. Bailey's *Battling Demons* have shed new light on the demon-conjuring and demon-combating clerical cultures of the late Middle Ages. É. Pócs and G. Klaniczay's three-volume essay collection, *Demons, Spirits, Witches*, enriches the current discussion with its cooperative multidisciplinary approach, as well as its attentiveness to the Central and Eastern European dimensions of the topic. C. Gilly and C. van Heertum, A. Paravicini Bagliani, J. R. Veenstra, N. Weill-Parot, G. S. Williams and C. D. Gunnoe, P. Zambelli, and C. Zika, among many others, have turned their attention to the relationship between magic and developments in late medieval natural philosophy and early modern science. B. Copenhaver, R. Feldhay, and H. D. Rutkin addressed related topics in chapters of the recent early modern volume of the *Cambridge History of Science*. By attending to the relationship of certain kinds of magic to medieval and early modern natural philosophy, F. F. Klaassen has proposed a significantly revised approach to early modern ritual magic. He, B. Láng, and O. Davies have encouraged the closest look at the literature of magic. A. Games has drawn concepts of witchcraft into the burgeoning new field of the Atlantic World. In *Witchcraft Continued* and *Beyond the Witch Trials*, W. de Blécourt and O. Davies have pointed our attention to ways the Enlightenment should and should not be understood to mark a break in Western thought and practice concerning witchcraft; and Occultism, Neopaganism, and especially Wicca have received new scholarly attention in the past decade in critical studies of modernity and the modern disenchantment thesis, as in the works of D. A. Harvey on nineteenth-century France, A. Owen on nineteenth-century Great Britain, and S. Magliocco on the twentieth-century United States. M. D. Bailey in *Fearful Spirits* and E. Cameron in *Enchanted Europe* investigate the relationship between Western thinking on superstition and on magic. R. Styers's *Making Magic* and B. Meyer and P. Pels's *Magic and Modernity* represent new attempts – the former from a religious studies perspective, the latter from anthropology – to synthesize the latest historical scholarship and reframe magic's significance against notions of Western modernity. Lastly, it bears mentioning that scholars of witch hunting have had a helpful new resource at their disposal since 2006 in the first complete English/Latin critical edition of the *Malleus maleficarum* translated by C. Mackay. The same year saw the appearance of R. M. Golden's much-anticipated *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft*. Moreover, B. P. Levack's collection of article reprints in *New Perspectives* in 2001 and B. Copenhaver and M. D. Bailey's founding editorship of the journal *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* in 2006 have

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created invaluable repositories for specialized scholarship on magic. These works represent a small portion of the newest scholarship that informs and inspires the contributions to this volume.³

This volume consists of twenty chapters. A challenge for such an edited volume is ensuring suitable coherence and consistency across the individual contributions. A number of issues are particular to the study of the history of magic. A first set of problems revolves around the much-discussed and highly contested question of how to define magic. Since the outset of scholarly reflection on magic, it has commonly been defined in relation to religion and science, sometimes as their more primitive, less rational, or incipient manifestation. Dissatisfaction with triangulating definitions as well as with simple dichotomies has several causes. For one, the terms simply enjoy no univocal definition across scholarly disciplines and subfields; and for another, their crafting and application have often entailed considerable historiographical bias, even arrogance. In consequence, some scholars have proposed rejecting the term “magic” altogether, most usually by subsuming magic into religion. The most obvious problem with erasing the distinction between magic and religion is that in all of the cultures under consideration in the proposed volume, historical actors from all walks of life discussed, debated, defined, and redefined their sense of what magic was vis-à-vis religion and acted according to that distinction. Moreover, the premise that magic had (and has) coherent, rational significance in relation to discourses of religion has so far proven itself more elucidative of the historical phenomena than has the alternate premise that magic and religion cannot be rationally distinguished at all. The contributors in this volume have largely aligned themselves in favor of the former premise, even as they acknowledge the terminological slipperiness across cultures and through time. Accordingly, contributors address within the relevant historical, cultural contexts the problem of magic’s definition, its conceptual and practical relationship to religion and science, and the qualifications and characteristics of its practitioners, both self-described and authoritatively recognized as such. Contours of difference also follow disciplinary lines, and inconsistencies point toward interdisciplinary challenges and development.

A second hallmark of the volume is its analytical framework, which consists of roughly designated historical periods within which magic is organized taxonomically. The three epoch-dividing watersheds adopted in the volume are: first, the Christianization of the Mediterranean world and the barbarian north (Celtic, Germanic, and Slavic tribes); second, the legal and intellectual revolutions of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries; and finally, the Enlightenment in conjunction with the French Revolution, industrialization, and secularization

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around 1800. The corresponding parts of the volume address magic in antiquity (until the fourth century), early Latin Christendom (until the eleventh century), “Old Europe” (until the eighteenth century), and the modern West (up through the twentieth century). This structure diverges most markedly from a periodization of the West that sharply distinguishes the medieval from the early modern periods. To these chronological sections are added the two thematic parts: one on alternate traditions found in Greek Christianity, Islam, and Judaism; the other on Europeans’ colonial encounters with magic.

For the most part, the chapters are then organized around kinds of magical practice. The chapters within the parts and the parts within the whole are held together by a series of logical and chronological questions: What were the taxonomies of magic in antiquity? How did they change with the coming of Christianity? Within Christianity, how did taxonomies differ in the East and the West? What were the taxonomies within coeval Islamic and Jewish understandings of magic, and how were they independent from or derivative of magic in antiquity? How were they imported and reinterpreted in the Latin West? Within the West, how did taxonomies change between the early and late medieval periods? Witchcraft, to take a particular issue from Part IV, can then be treated according to how it was classified within the broader contexts of magical practice and perceptions of magic rather than according to how it was persecuted: What was witchcraft in the West before its diabolization? How and why was “diabolic witchcraft” constructed? How fully did it ever supersede other kinds of magical practice? How did that particular taxonomy break down and become rejected? Such an approach will also prove enlightening in the discussion of the “end of magic,” an issue that connects and distinguishes the periods of “Old Europe” and the “modern West.” It is, on the one hand, axiomatic to understand that the Enlightenment precipitously furthered Europe’s “disenchantment.” On the other hand, the Enlightenment can also be understood as having committed itself to the Christian project of defining all magic in a univocal way, condemning it, and eradicating it. Magic might no longer be immoral, irreligious, or demonic, as it was considered by Christian lights, but magic was, to the *Lumière*, still a superstition in the sense of being irrational and unscientific.

Part I: Antiquity. Part I’s topic is magic in ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean societies up to Imperial Rome. Building on recent studies of the Mediterranean world’s Platonization and Christianization in later antiquity, this volume proposes a noteworthy discontinuity between understandings of magic up to Imperial Antiquity and those thereafter. Part I thus functions in certain respects as an analytical prologue to the remainder of the volume.

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It consists of three chapters: Chapter 1 on magic in Ancient Near Eastern societies (D. Schwemer); Chapter 2, in Egyptian society (F. Hoffmann); and Chapter 3, in pagan Greek and Roman societies (K. B. Stratton). Although the earlier of these societies may generally not be considered “Western,” their ideas, social customs, and written texts surely were integral parts of the cultural legacy inherited by the West.

Part I takes as its own the following four goals: first, to address the particular difficulties of using modern categories of “magic,” “science,” and “religion” to organize and describe ancient understandings of magic and its practice, with special attention paid to the ambiguous and contested lines separating the healing arts, divination, and magic; second, to describe the spectrum of sacred and natural powers that various specialists, authorized and unauthorized, accessed in a range of ways in the ancient cultures that eventually converged in Western Europe from the early Middle Ages onward; third, to define and trace the development of key concepts – *mageia*, *magia*, and *superstitio* – that the early Christians adopted, but also transformed, from pagan antiquity; and fourth, to establish a reference point for later comparison with the recurrent claims in the West of a rediscovery of “ancient” magic.

Part II: The Early Latin West. Part II focuses on magic as it was understood and practiced in the northern Mediterranean world and on the Western and Central European peninsula as these regions underwent, at various levels and in various ways, both a Platonization and their first Christianization. By “Christianization” is understood the establishment of basic theological and philosophical doctrines, the shaping of common beliefs and practices, and the corresponding revision of social and political structures. Christianization included complex appropriations of and expansions on the notions of magic outlined in Part I. This process continued as Celtic, Germanic, and Slavic tribes were brought to Christianity throughout (and beyond) the period covered in Part II.

The association of late antiquity’s burgeoning Neo-Platonism with changing understandings of magic is not meant to distract from the well-established thesis that the spread of Christianity led to fundamental developments in a condemning direction vis-à-vis magic but rather to broaden our understanding of developments in late antiquity to encompass a growing hostility and condescension toward magic identifiable in late antiquity among decidedly non-Christian, although sometimes monotheistic, segments of Imperial society. The analysis in this volume is thus driven by a slight revision of two stimulating, seemingly contradictory theses that have shaped recent scholarship on magic in early Latin Christendom. On the one hand, the process of Christianization is argued to have included creative appropriations of common pagan ritual

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practices that to a modern observer would qualify as magical, even given the various ways in which such practices were “Christianized.” This thesis of hybridization between ancient Christianity and indigenous paganisms thus emphasizes a range of continuities between pre- and post-Christianized European tribes and peoples. On the other hand, Christianization indisputably disrupted beliefs in, the practice of, and judgments about magic within the Roman Empire and on the European continent, especially insofar as magic’s effectiveness was reassigned from the morally ambiguous daemon to the demon, the fallen angel, appeal to whom could by Christian reckoning only be repugnant. This latter development was, however, not entirely original to Christianity, but in the moment, it tapped into a homologous hostility toward magic emerging out of a decidedly non-Christian philosophical tradition that had, of course, influence on Christianity in innumerable ways.

Part II consists of three chapters. Chapter 4 examines attitudes toward magic in Imperial Rome, especially insofar as a growing hostility toward magic emerged from centers of the new Platonist thought (K. A. Fraser). Chapter 5 considers how magic was understood and practiced within the once-pagan, Roman Mediterranean world with its cultic priests, civic piety, and private cults (M. Kahlos). And Chapter 6 examines the corresponding issues within the context of the once-heathen world of the Celts, Germans, and Slavs (Y. Hen).

Part II derives its two overarching goals from this tension: first, to sketch how magic was understood, who practiced it, and how it was practiced in late antiquity and early medieval Latin Christendom; and second, to demonstrate the length, complexity, and ambiguities of the processes of magic’s appropriations and condemnations. Part II also lays the groundwork for the evaluation of certain propositions about the later history of magic in the West: for example, that a heightened association between magic and heresy (or even apostasy) drove the frenzied concern in later centuries about diabolic magic and set the stage for the witch hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and that the Enlightenment condemnation of magic as irrational and unscientific was different in substance but parallel in form to the early Christian hostility toward it as demonic, immoral, and irreligious.

Part III: Parallel Traditions. Part III addresses magic as it was conceived and practiced in Mediterranean cultures following the disintegration of the Western Roman Empire in cultural milieus outside of the Latin West. The chapters in Part III cover magic as it was found in early Greek Christian culture and Byzantium (Chapter 7, A. Walker), in Islamic culture and the Arab world from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries (Chapter 8, T. Zadeh),

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and in medieval Judaism (Chapter 9, G. Bohak). Magic in these milieus are already familiar to students of European magic to the extent that they influenced European thought and practice at key historical moments: for example, the high medieval appropriation of learned texts from the Islamic world via the Castilian court of King Alphonse and the inspiration Renaissance mages derived from Kabballic mysticism. The chapters of Part III have, however, as their first task the sketching of magic as it was understood and practiced in these other cultural milieus on its own terms. Magic in these other milieus was a more significant phenomenon than what was at crucial moments adopted into Latin Christendom. Moreover, they had in common with the Latin West the shared legacy of antiquity. Part III's contribution to the volume as a whole rests on these simple but heretofore underappreciated premises, namely, that all four cultural milieu were antiquity's heirs as regards magic and that all four appropriated antiquity's understanding and practices differently. Part III's goals are consequently twofold: to enhance appreciation of the specific ways that Latin Christendom appropriated antiquity's legacy of magic by encouraging comparison between how it happened in the Latin West and in the three principal historical alternatives; and to enhance the appreciation of the medieval, Renaissance, and modern appropriations of magic from these parallel traditions by offering a vantage as much on what was not appropriated as on what was. This part of the volume arguably counts as quite experimental and, in terms of the achievement of its goals, both the most promising and the most prolegomenous.

Part IV: Old Europe. Part IV's coverage begins with the legal and intellectual revolutions of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries and ends with the secularization and cultural "disenchantment" that came about with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Of the four chapters in this part, the first three are organized around kinds of magic, namely, common, learned, and demonic. The fourth examines the medieval and early modern critiques of Catholic priestcraft as magic. The first three chapters address a number of common issues: Who practiced and patronized these kinds of magic? To what extent did these kinds of magic represent appropriations of classical, pagan, Islamic, or Jewish traditions of magic? Who were the practitioners and clients? To what extent did they understand what they were doing as magic? How did they understand what they were doing in terms of Christian thought and cultic norms? How did civil and ecclesiastical authorities understand these same forms of knowledge, belief, and practice? How did the authorities view their own responsibilities vis-à-vis this magic – defining, fostering, patronizing, and condemning it and its practitioners? How did the authorities cooperate