

This year's International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University, May 9th-12th, 1996 features three sessions on the history of magic organized by Claire Fanger for the Societas Magica, all of them scheduled for the first day of the Congress:

No. 13: **Ritual Magic Texts and Manuscripts** (Th 10, Room 203): John B. Friedman, "Safe magic: invisible writing that skirts the dangerous in the *Secreta Philosophorum*"; Elizabeth I. Wade, "A fragmentary 15th-century divination device"; Frank Klaassen, "English books on images, 1300-1500."

No. 49: **Science and Magic** (Th 1:30, Room 202-203): Allen Stairs, "Numbers and the fabric of the world: mathematics and magic"; Kristen Pederson, "Practical demon keeping: the professional sorcerer in the Middle Ages"; Sarah Higley, "The robot, the magus, and the learned man."

No. 88: **Magic and the Beatific Vision: The Sworn Book of Pseudo-Honorius of Thebes** (Th 3:30, Room 202): Robert Mathiesen, "A thirteenth-century magic ritual to attain the Beatific Vision from the Sworn Book of Honorius of Thebes"; Richard Kieckhefer, "Honorius of Thebes and the prehistory of Christian Cabala."

Two other sessions should be of interest to members of the Societas:

No. 228: **Magic and Witchcraft in Anglo-Saxon England and Early Medieval Europe** (Fr 3:30, Schneider Auditorium). Karen Louise Jolly, "The oxymoron 'Christian magic': early medieval medicine, liturgy, and folklore"; Kelley Wickham-Crowley, "Tangled webs: weaving and the supernatural"; Lisa M.C. Weston, "Falling amongst thieves: the Old English charms for the loss of cattle." Organized by Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture.

No. 387: **Medicine and Magic** (Su 8:30, Room 1030 Fetzer). Joel Kaye, "Nicole Oresme: constructing a border between magic and science in the fourteenth century"; Christine Elizabeth Meek, "Men, women and magic: some cases from late medieval Lucca"; Rolande Graves, "The rise of three medieval medical schools: Salerno, Montpellier, and Paris."

Members will also want to note individual papers in other sessions dealing with magic and related subjects:

On Thursday: Elizabeth Carmichael, "'The Devyll and She be Syb': the late medieval witch-craze, heresy, and the demonization of women's communities" (No. 92, 3:30, Room 100).

On Friday: Paul Battles, "Magic, illusion, and poesis in Chaucer's Franklin's Tale and *House of Fame*" (No. 152, 10, Room 1140 Schneider); Alain Saint Saens, "The witch, the

hermit and the priest in early modern Spain" (No. 166, 1:30, Room 314).

On Saturday: Joan Greatrex, "Liturgy and astrology at Norwich Cathedral Priory in the fifteenth century" (No. 267, 10, Room 1055 Fetzer); Thomas N. Hall, "The Old English dough riddle and women's magic: the European context of Exeter Book Riddle 45" (No. 354, 3:30, Room 1045 Fetzer); Maura B. Nolan, "Necromancy, treason, gender" (No. 361, 3:30, Room 1135 Schneider).

On Sunday: Laura Louise Trauth, "Magic and the mysterious in the late Middle Ages" (No. 376, 8:30, Room 310); Debora Schwartz, "Reading as magic in the *Bel Inconnu*" (No. 432, 10:30, Room 1130 Schneider).

Leander Petzoldt of Innsbruck has organized two sessions on **Demonic Beings in Medieval Art, Literature and Popular Tradition** (No. 322, Sa 1:30, Room 1355 Schneider, and No. 358, Sa 3:30, Room 1120 Schneider). There is also a session on **The Demonic in Arthurian Literature** (No. 339, Sa 3:30, Room 205), and Peter Happe will speak on "Devils in the York plays: language and dramatic technique" (No. 114, Th 3:30).

## ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of the Societas Magica will take place at the Kalamazoo Congress, on Saturday, May 11th, at 12:00, in Fetzer Room 1060.

## NEW JOURNAL FOR THE HISTORY OF THE OCCULT

P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, of the University of St. Andrews, is negotiating with a publisher about the possibility of starting a semiannual journal to deal with astrology, alchemy, magic, and witchcraft. The working title is *Journal of Occult History*.

The intended scope will be the ancient world (especially Greek and Latin), the Byzantine and medieval periods, and the early modern period (mainly the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries).

Those wishing further information may contact Maxwell-Stuart at the University of St. Andrews,  
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North Street,  
St. Andrews, Fife  
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## RECENT PUBLICATIONS, I: MAGIC IN LITERATURE

Margaret Robson, "Animal magic: moral regeneration in *Sir Gowther*," *Yearbook of English Studies*, 22 (1992), 140-53. This article deals only in part with the notion that Gowther magically assumes bestial form--magic being defined here as the art of illusion, or of showing that "things are not always what they seem," and of finding an audience that wishes to see these illusions. The conclusion: "All magic, I suggest, is self-magic, and that is what each of these characters [in *Sir Gowther*] discovers, largely through sin and pain; the moral posited by *Sir Gowther* seems to me to be that man is his own animal and should use his own magic: God helps those who help themselves."

Peter Noble, "Magic in late Arthurian French verse romance," *Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society*, 44 (1992), 245-54. Two late romances, *Claris et Laris* (probably from the 1260's) and *Escanor* (1279-80), differ in their use of magical material. Magic figures less prominently in *Escanor*, but when it occurs it is more significant, involving real danger, and serving to explain characters' antipathies. *Claris et Laris* involves much more use of magic--including that of fairies, who are portrayed in altogether negative terms-- but it is of less consequence to the romance. In general, the magic of these later romances is more sinister and diabolical than that in the works of Marie de France and Chretien.

Joyce Tally Lionarons, "Magic, machines, and deception: technology in the *Canterbury Tales*," *Chaucer Review*, 27 (1993), 377-86. The line between technology and magic, like that between science and pseudo-science, is readily blurred. In the *Canterbury Tales*, technology often seems magical, while much magic turns out based on mechanical devices. Both magic and technology assume knowledge hidden or unavailable to most people; both thus lend themselves to use in trickery and fraud. The Squire's Tale and the Franklin's Tale go beyond the capacities of medieval technology, requiring suspension of disbelief, but also illustrating distrust of technological devices, which, like magic, can deceive the ignorant and tempt people to illicit knowledge.

Peggy McCracken, "Women and medicine in medieval French narrative," *Exemplaria*, 5 (1993), 239-62. In the French romances, women are called enchantresses rather than *miresses* (although this latter form did exist for female doctors). Women practitioners are distinguished from men neither by description of the magical ingredients of their drugs nor by accounts of their actions and effects, but by labeling the women themselves as enchantresses. In this respect Marie de France is exceptional: she describes the old woman in *Les deux amanz* who provides a potion as learned in physic, but she characterizes such a woman neither as a *miresse* nor as an enchantress; thus she adopts a space for woman

healers between these established extremes.

Anne D. Wilson, "The critic and the use of magic in narrative," *Yearbook of English Studies*, 22 (1992), 81- 94. Building upon her book, *The Magical Quest: The Use of Magic in Arthurian Romance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), Wilson explains that, having sought new ways to study irrational systems of thought in certain narratives, Wilson came to recognize "the magical plot" as characteristic of these narratives. She defines magic as "a power created in the mind to bring about desires or dispel fear and guilt." When a plot contains important underlying themes (suggestions, e.g., of a serious crime or a decision inconsistent with the agent's character), the characters are identified as figures in a series of rituals, from which a magical plot is constructed. The plot can be understood once the underlying magical rituals are recognized. Examples are cited from *King Horn*, *Ywain*, *Apollonius of Tyre*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. From the last of these, e.g., the Green Knight's twofold confession can be seen as integral to the magical plot in which each confession has a distinctive function.

Gisli Palsson, "The name of the witch: sagas, sorcery and social content," in Ross Samson, ed., *Social Approaches to Viking Studies* (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1991), 157-69. The Family Sagas, which deal with the period ca. 9th-11th centuries, contain numerous tales of sorcery, with at least seventy-eight people named as witches. (Palsson analyzes the forms of sorcery and types of person identified as witches.) Witches and accusers both are creative agents acting in particular contexts, not instruments of a culture, *pace* Boas, Geertz, and Saussure.) In contrast, the Sturlunga Sagas, which concentrate on the more recent events of 1230-62, have little to say about such matters. Sahlin's distinction between "big men" and "chiefs" may be applied here: the earlier society of rising and falling "big men" involved much effort to secure positions and reinforce loyalty, but in the later Commonwealth period "chiefs" had more firmly consolidated power and their relations with followers were more asymmetrical; the former context was more likely to involve the kinds of sorcery and accusation found, e.g., in the *Eyrbyggja saga*.

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS, II: BYZANTINE MAGIC

Two major books have appeared in recent years on the magic of Byzantium and countries in the Byzantine orbit: Henry Maguire, ed., *Byzantine Magic* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), and Richard P.H. Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1988).

The first of these titles includes papers given at a colloquium at Dumbarton Oaks in 1993. Matthew W. Dickie, "The Fathers of the Church and the evil eye" (pp. 9-34), argues "how difficult even the most highly educated and sophisticated Christians of the late fourth and

early fifth centuries found it to rid themselves of the idea that envy lends a malign power to men's eyes." James Russell, "The archaeological context of magic in the early Byzantine period" (pp. 35-50), discusses amulets against the evil eye found at Anemurium on the coast of Turkey. Henry Maguire, "Magic and the Christian image" (pp. 51-71), examines "magical" themes on textiles before and after the iconoclast controversy.

Three articles in the collection focus on the broader cultural context in which Byzantine intellectuals reacted to magic. Alexander Kazhdan, "Holy and unholy miracle workers" (pp. 73-82), argues that the relationship between holy and unholy miracles was ambiguous. John Duffy, "Reactions of two Byzantine intellectuals to the theory and practice of magic: Michael Psellos and Michael Italikos" (pp. 83-97) suggests that Psellos's grounding in the study of philosophy made him relatively open toward Chaldaean material. Marie Theres Fogen, "Balsamon on magic: from Roman secular law to Byzantine canon law" (pp. 99-115), traces the differences between fourth-century secular law and later canon law against magic, and finds that canon law "domesticated" and routinized the offense, with more detailed characterization of crimes and offenders.

Richard P.H. Greenfield, "A contribution to the study of Palaeologan magic" (pp. 117-53) and Robert Mathiesen, "Magic in Slavia Orthodoxa: the written tradition" (pp. 155-77), the articles in the volume covering by far the broadest range of material, both give overviews: Greenfield surveys the forms of magic in the late Byzantine period, and Mathiesen discusses the types of source available in Slavic lands. Mathiesen also gives a concise survey of natural causes that have been adduced for the effectiveness of magic.

Greenfield's *Traditions of Belief* argues most basically a distinction between the "standard orthodox" tradition of demonology (which sees demons as immaterial, ranked beneath a single leader, having no power of their own, etc.) and the "alternative" traditions (which on these and other grounds challenge the orthodox interpretation). He recognizes the fluidity of these categories, and shows that in the rituals of exorcism these competing traditions became largely fused.

In addition to Greenfield's book, he has published a series of articles on aspects of Byzantine magic. "Sorcery and politics at the Byzantine court in the twelfth century: interpretations of history," in Roderick Beaton and Charlotte Roueche, eds., *The Making of Byzantine History* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1991), 73-85, examines three cases: an attempt to save the life of an imperial family member named Zoe (reported by Theodore Balsamon); allegations of magic used by Alexios Axouch against Manuel I (discussed by Niketas Choniates and John Kinnamos); and suggestions of "demonic works" perpetrated by Isaac Aaron (recounted by Choniates). Greenfield emphasizes that the beliefs in question were found in the highest circles of society, that attitudes toward magic and its efficacy were somewhat variable, and that to understand such cases as these we must focus our attention

on the context, and in particular on the situations of the accused and the accusers. Alexios Axouch and Isaac Aar on were both prominent in controversy at Byzantium regarding influence of the Latin West; proceedings against them may be connected with this political conflict.

## WORK IN PROGRESS

John Leland reports that he has intermittently been concerned with a group of three successive noblewomen: Joan, duchess of Brittany; her daughter-in-law (though they never met) Joan of Navarre, wife of Henry IV of England; and her daughter-in-law, Eleanor, duchess of Gloucester. All were powerful women who lost power under mysterious circumstances, the second and third due to charges of witchcraft. So far, he has given papers on the first two, and he hopes at some point to do the third and perhaps other court ladies similarly charged, e.g. Jacquetta of Luxembourg and Elizabeth Woodville.

Regarding Joan of Navarre, his more interesting finds included evidence that (contrary to Brian Vickers) Duke Humphrey of Gloucester was probably not on Joan's side; his quasi-wife Jacqueline of Holland gained income from Joan's lands during her disgrace, but Joan continued to fight her case in court and was able to regain her property before the death of Henry V. Also, as a French scholar wrote some time ago, Joan was involved in trying to persuade a notable French astrologer to come to the English court, so she may well have had a real interest in the occult, and not have been merely the victim of Henry V's need for cash. He has obtained copies of some of the astrological works of John Randolf, the English astrologer/magician she allegedly employed,

Claire Fanger is working on a book, *Potent Signs, Rationalist Rhetorics, and the Construction of the Problem of Magic*, which is a revised and expanded version of her doctoral thesis. Fanger argues that theories of magic cannot be understood apart from the anti-magical theories against which they are articulated. Fanger examines the rhetoric surrounding pro- and anti-magical arguments in works by St Augustine, a variety of thirteenth-century writers, the fourteenth-century *Confessio amantis* of John Gower, and the writings of twentieth-century occultist Dion Fortune. In keeping with her emphasis on rhetoric, Fanger pays special attention to the power of words and signs, and contrasts magical signs to hagiographical miracles, where miracles as signs of power constitute an anti-magical thaumaturgy subject to particular kinds of rationalization as they are narrated. Fanger argues that while magical and anti-magical theories have changed with time, there is nevertheless a strong historical continuity to the problematization of magic and the rhetoric in which it is encapsulated in diverse kinds of texts; in particular she holds that the rift between medieval and modern magic--at least so far as rhetorical problematization is concerned--is much less complete than modern arguments normally presuppose.

Richard Kieckhefer is nearly finished with an analysis and edition of the necromancer's

manual from Clm 849, a fifteenth-century manuscript. The pertinent sections are from Germany; they are bound with related materials of diverse provenance. This is a manuscript that Lynn Thorndike knew but evidently did not fully examine; Kieckhefer cites it at several places in his book *Magic in the Middle Ages*, but here provides fuller analysis. In his description of its contents he endeavors to place each form of necromancy (or "nigromancy"--black or explicitly demonic magic) into its own context in late medieval culture and ritual practice: he argues that illusionist, psychological, and divinatory experiments are somewhat different in their conception and use. He suggests that the compiler of this material began with a keen interest in illusionist magic, with which he may have attempted to allure the interest of a court patron, but that as he continued his work he became increasingly drawn to the divinatory magic which could more easily be represented as holding practical utility.

## SPRING 1996 ISSUE

The next issue of this Newsletter will include surveys of recent literature on charms and on witchcraft. Pertinent information about publication in these fields, or about ongoing research in any area of the history of medieval magic, as well as other information of interest to the Societas Magica, should be sent to Richard Kieckhefer, Department of Religion, Northwestern University, 1940 Sheridan Road, Evanston, Illinois 60208-4050.