Over the last two centuries, the history of Mormonism has been bifurcated by two primary depictions of the religion’s founder, Joseph Smith Jr. According to the hagiographic depiction, Joseph Smith, a young man who was once involved in the questionable practice of treasure seeking, experienced a divine vision in the early 1820s, followed by a second visionary experience in 1824 when he was visited by an angel. The angel declared itself to be a former Hebrew prophet who had lived among the remnants of a lost civilization founded by people fleeing the destruction of Jerusalem. This civilization had experienced several rounds of righteousness and wickedness, and their prophets recorded their history for future generations of mankind. The angel, who was called Moroni, abridged these records on metal plates and left them buried in upstate New York for a young Joseph Smith to discover. According to the angel, Smith had been divinely called to restore the Church of Jesus Christ, millennia after the Great Apostasy destroyed true Christianity. Joseph Smith Jr. eventually claimed to have found the plates, translated the record, and published it as *The Book of Mormon: Another Testimony of Jesus Christ*. Subsequently he claimed to have restored the true Church of Christ. In the hagiographic tradition, Smith’s prophetic calling resulted in a diabolical conspiracy against the young prophet, taking the form of personal and legal persecution that hounded him mercilessly both through the court system and in the form of extrajudicial mob violence. This persecution began in New York State and Pennsylvania but it followed Smith to Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois, where he was martyred by a mob of fanatical bigots who stormed Carthage Jail in 1843 and killed Smith in cold blood.¹

The historical counternarrative is just as dramatic, though far less flattering. Smith, a notorious necromancer and fraud, had spent his youth swindling his neighbors out of their money through the satanic practice of treasure-hunting, which was sometimes described as a sham and other times described as involving demonic spirits. Similarly, this counternarrative focuses on Smith’s use of a seer stone for finding lost and stolen goods, and then later for producing the *Book of Mormon*
Sam Van Schaik’s *Buddhist Magic: Divination, Healing, and Enchantment Through the Ages* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2020)

Sam Van Schaik’s *Buddhist Magic* is a relatively short but informative read on the history and practice of magic in Buddhism. Magic is an area which, as Schaik notes, is often overlooked in relation to Buddhism, partly due to the Western idealized picture of Buddhism as a rational religion that leaves no room for belief in magical or superstitious practice. To Schaik, Buddhist magical practices do not stand in opposition to Buddhism as a rational religion but have a “specific role in the wider context of Buddhist practice” (8).

The book comprises five chapters, with an introduction and afterword. In the opening chapter, “Magic across cultures,” Schaik offers an overview of a number of practices found worldwide that tend to be considered magical. In relation to these he defines Buddhist magic as that which has a “family resemblance” (17) to other types of practice classified as magical. He sidesteps defining a singular type of Buddhist magic as doing so would be impossible. Instead he suggests that magical practices in Buddhism share basic features: “they are focused on worldly ends, including healing, protection, divination, manipulation of emotions, and sometimes killing” (38). What separates these practices from other Buddhist rituals is the clear relationship between the ritual and results. In magic this relation is swift, direct, and clear. Further, Buddhist magic is not connected to the by-products of the path to enlightenment or the accruing of merit. So, magic in Buddhism, as Schaik treats it, comes down to the practical and everyday manifestations of the religion. His presentation is a “ground up” (12) approach as it gives insight into the everyday and lived experiences of Buddhist communities.

Chapter 2, “Magic, Medicine and the Spread of Buddhism,” looks at how magical practices are deeply tied to the geographical spread of the religion and the cultures it influenced and was in turn influenced by. Buddhist magic is in a unique place, comprising regional collections of...
methods for dealing with a charlatan/necromancer. These dual historical narratives are largely irreconcilable, a problem that led historian of Mormonism Jan Shipps to conclude that the largest problem in Mormon history was the fact that there were two Joseph Smiths in the historiography of Mormonism. Two opposed camps of record keepers each forged a history sidelong the other camp’s opposing evidence. Shipps dubbed this the “prophet puzzle,” and argued that until it was resolved, the historiography of Mormonism could not meaningfully move forward. Numerous attempts have been made to resolve the prophet puzzle both shortly before and long after Shipp’s definition of this problem. Thus far, however, the historians of Mormonism have not deeply engaged the history of witchcraft and magic in the picture, though John Brooke called upon historians of witchcraft to investigate the second great awakening as early as 1992.

For the last several years I have been researching Smith’s life and incorporating relevant material from a subdiscipline of history that should have been involved in this conversation decades ago. By looking at Joseph Smith’s life through the cultural conversation of 19th century America’s particular forms of skepticism and belief in witchcraft it is possible to resolve many of the more significant problems in the prophet puzzle. In this brief article I want to present some important implications of my discoveries for historians of witchcraft and magic, recently published in journals of Mormon history.

Drawing upon Johannes Dillinger’s work, I have shown how New York and Pennsylvania were a location of cultural collision in early Jeffersonian and Jacksonian America. Among the Germanic population of these areas, depictions of treasure seeking are in accord with Johannes Dillinger’s observation that for treasure seekers, the treasure quest was viewed as a Christian practice for the deliverance of ghosts. By contrast, among the Puritan immigrants of the New English
diaspora, treasure-seeking was seen as a form of black magic and conflated with diabolical witchcraft. Thus, New English accounts depicted treasure-seekers as necromancers and frauds engaged in villainous Teutonic traditions; while accounts by Pennsylvania German writers depict treasure-seekers as Godly Christians.

Building on Alan Taylor’s research, my article shows that unorthodox New Englanders adopted Teutonic-American folk-religion and practiced treasure seeking as an extension of the New English diaspora’s nascent evangelical Christianity. Those who condemned it imagined it as witchcraft. Thus, it is possible to navigate hostile narratives about treasure seeking written by those who were not present during treasure-seeking events. In Smith’s religious environment, it is likely that treasure seeking was his earliest interaction with proxy-Christian rituals for the benefit of the dead, seen as being in an intermediary state between heaven and hell; important aspects of the religious cosmology and practices Joseph Smith would teach as a religious leader. Smith’s accusers, however, to many of whom the practice was alien, used common tropes about the witches’ sabbath in their allegations against Smith. Taking into account both views helps researchers understand Smith’s practice of treasure seeking in its full Christian context.

One of the tap roots of the prophet puzzle consists of Joseph Smith’s disorderly person charges in 1826, 1829, and 1830. Traditionally these events have been treated as legal charges of fraud tied to Joseph Smith’s allegedly deceptive practice of treasure-seeking. However, when we view these events within their larger context the story changes dramatically. As I noted in my article “Cunning and Disorderly: Nineteenth Century Witch Trials of Joseph Smith,” New York’s 1813 disorderly person statute used language that came from the King George Witchcraft act of 1735. Like similar legislation aimed at traditional religious practices among Afro-Caribbean, African, Aboriginal Australians and Polynesians. Thus, charges of pretended powers used to tarnish these practices tell us little about the genuine beliefs of those involved in the practices these laws were designed to eliminate.

“Cunning and Disorderly,” goes on to analyze the two primary narrative accounts of the 1826 disorderly person trial in the broader context of Joseph Smith’s religious leader. Smith’s accusers, however, to many of whom the practice was alien, used common tropes about the witches’ sabbath in their allegations against Smith. Taking into account both views helps researchers understand Smith’s practice of treasure seeking in its full Christian context.

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life, demonstrating that those who brought Smith to court were motivated by their real belief that he was a necromancer with diabolical power, a role they equated with witchcraft. They used the “pretended witchcraft” legislation as the most readily available tool for prosecuting a witch at a time when the legal system did not recognize diabolical magic as a reality, much less a crime. My article argues that a later account of the 1826 hearing was a fabrication concocted by someone working with the original trial notes which redacted credulous sounding allegations of diabolical witchcraft and fabricated more disenchanted allegations of pretended powers. The author of the account, a Methodist missionary to the Mormons named Emily Pearsall, was thus able to increase the hearing’s value as a weapon against Smith and his followers long after most Americans had adopted skepticism about witchcraft as the status quo of intellectual respectability.

“Cunning and Disorderly” confirms Smith’s claims that he was persecuted in the early stages of his career and demonstrates that Smith’s persecutors were not primarily concerned with fraud or for that matter pretended witchcraft, magic, and religion. Instead, they were clearly motivated by their belief that Smith was a diabolical necromancer. They utilized the only available legislation against witchcraft to penalize Smith for his claims of prophecy. Overall, this suggests that 19th century victims of witchcraft allegations have been hiding in plain sight, as Thomas Waters, Stephen A. Mitchel, Owen Davies, and Mike Slater have suggested.

Disenchancing allegations of witchcraft would continue to follow Smith throughout his life. This is explored in my third article, “Cunning Distortions.” This article updates Mormon studies on the advancements in the historiography of witchcraft. Several decades of research have confirmed that witchcraft belief and persecution continued in 19th century Europe and America. The article evaluates a broad spectrum of allegations made against Joseph Smith in both magical crime and corresponding disenchanted crimes. While Smith’s accusers often used language of pretended witchcraft to protect the credibility of their claims, in their less guarded moments they display a stunning array of early modern diabolical witchcraft beliefs alongside disenchanted charges associated with witchcraft. Collectively, Smith’s enemies accuse Joseph Smith of over 30 categories of magical and disenchanted misdeeds associated with witchcraft.

“Cunning Distortions” ends by acknowledging that Smith’s enemies preferred the terms money-digger and necromancer over the less frequently used word “witch.” However, when we look at what they were accusing him of doing, it becomes clear that allegations of demonic necromancy were used evasively in order to avoid the highly stigmatized terminology of the diabolical witch. This pattern of evasion also includes an emphasis on pretended witchcraft and magic. By actively disenchanting their allegations, Smith’s enemies were able to extend the reach of
In hopes of a higher rate of involvement by all members, we are planning a fully hybrid conference September 2-4.

The deadline for paper proposals is EXTENDED TO JUNE 30th, 2022. See below for description of themes.

Showcasing recent cross-cultural and interdisciplinary advances in the history and anthropology of “magic,” this international conference will provide a forum for wide-ranging conversations on this often embattled but perennially vital category and its myriad deployments over time, space and genre. What is it, how does it work, how does it look, how does it feel, what does it mean, and to whom?

“Magic Un/disciplined” pays special attention to communities and generic forms that are typically under-represented in scholarship, with emphasis on new alternatives to still-endemic colonialist approaches underlying both the study of particular traditions and of the history of religion, magic and science as distinct disciplines. Its format reflects these commitments: in lieu of a keynote, the conference will open with a roundtable discussion on the state of the discipline(s), past and present; it will close with one on the future of the study of magic.

More generally, roundtables and panels will highlight the work of emerging and under-represented scholars in the field, very broadly construed, considering where we have been and imagining where we ought to go from here. To foster such constructive conversations, there will be no parallel sessions, and the program will be as culturally, historically, and disciplinarily inclusive as possible. All participants, in short, are invited to meditate on the current shape of magic studies—then imagine, or re-imagine, its futures.

To that end, we invite proposals on the following and related topics:

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<tr>
<th>Roundtable I: Past Magics</th>
<th>Roundtable II: Future Magics</th>
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<td>Materializing Magic</td>
<td>Magical networks and communities</td>
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<td>Black Magic/Afrofuturisms</td>
<td>Decolonizing the Study of Magic</td>
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<td>Islamic Occultism</td>
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<td>Magic in Politics</td>
<td>Magic and moral panics</td>
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<td>Ufology and magic</td>
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**Logistics:** The conference will be held in person at Gambrell Hall, University of South Carolina. A block of rooms, for a special group rate, will be reserved at the Sheraton in downtown Columbia, which features a rooftop bar. Many restaurants and some hiking and kayaking options are in easy walking distance from the hotel and conference venue. The Columbia airport (CAE) is only 15 minutes away (cheap direct flights are available from LaGuardia), and shuttles are also available from the Charlotte international airport (CLT) for those traveling from further afield.

Unaffiliated or untenured presenters who are members of Societas Magica are eligible to apply for a travel bursary to help with expenses; for more information look for the travel bursary at https://societasmagica.org

Please send abstracts or proposals for full sessions simultaneously to Matt Melvin-Koushki at mmelvink@sc.edu and Marla Segol at marla.segol@gmail.com by June 30, 2022.
ARTICLES

The Place of Sorcery in the Thought of a Seventeenth-Century Moroccan Astronomer and Alchemist
Justin Stearns

The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic: Toward a New History of British Wicca
Julia Phillips

“So that the Errors of Magicians and Witches Might be Made Evident to Ignorant People”: An Early European Witchcraft Treatise from the 1430s
Michael D. Bailey

MATERIA MAGICA

Compiling Magic in the Seventeenth Century: Frans Anthoni Büchler’s Amulet Roll
Don C. Skemer

ARTICLES

Looking Back, Looking Forward: Fifteen Years of Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft
Michael Ostling

Wearing God, Consecrating Body Parts: Berengar Ganell’s Summa sacre magice and Shi’ur Qomah
Gal Sofer

Distorted, Dismembered, Diffused: Rethinking the Body in Old Norse Material Culture
Andrea C. Snow

FORUM ON VEXED ISSUES: AFTER DISENCHANTMENT

With Jan Machielsen, William Pooley, Kristof Smeyers, Helen Cornish, Michelle Pfeffer, Claire Fanger

Rituals pervade human life. From small or mundane rituals like brushing our teeth or making one’s daily coffee, to grand ceremonies that mark important life stages, rituals are everywhere. This has prompted reflection on what rituals are, on what can be considered as ritual. Ceræ invites essays that analyze rituals of all kinds: public and private, communal and solitary, secular and religious, rapidly changing and long-lasting. It also welcomes theoretically- or methodologically-focused contributions.

Authors may address, but are not limited to:
• Royal rituals: coronations, births, or marriage consummations etc.
• How rituals can be used as an element of identity and alterity
• Subversive and subverted ritual: witchcraft trials, historical (mis)perceptions of Jewish rites etc.
• Sacred landscapes and rituals focused on/in the natural world
• Ritual as a medium for memory and memorialisation
• Sacrifices, magic, religious rites and their intercultural reception
• Medieval and early modern political rituals such as guild processions
• Ritual represented in medievalism, including film, fantasy, literature, and art

We invite submissions encompassing all aspects of the late classical, medieval, and early modern world. There are no geographical restrictions. As an interdisciplinary journal, Ceræ encourages submissions from archaeology, art history, historical ecology, literature, linguistics, intellectual history, musicology, politics, social studies, and beyond.

Full length articles should be 5000-8000 words, excluding references. Ceræ also accepts short notices of up to 3000 words. Themed submissions must be submitted by 30 May 2022. For submission instructions, please visit our page on submission guidelines. We also accept non-themed submissions throughout the year. Ceræ particularly encourages submissions from postgraduate and early career researchers, and offers a $200 (AUD) annual prize for the best postgraduate/ECR essay. Further information on our annual essay prize can be found here.

Joseph Smith, cont’d

While this might seem anti-climactic to historians of witchcraft, these arguments are an absolute necessity for historians of Mormonism and early American religion. In Mormon Studies it is still common to treat many of these allegations as if they were trustworthy accounts of Smith’s activities.14 What historians of witchcraft will gain from these studies is a road map of the allegations of witchcraft used against Joseph Smith and how they fit into his life. Because so many of Smith’s 19th and 20th century critics and historians took these allegations at face value, Smith is perhaps the most well documented victim of witchcraft allegations in the 19th century.

Cont’d on page 8
anglophone world. His life, as well as the lives of his closest followers and most vocal enemies have been studied meticulously. For the historiography of witchcraft, Joseph Smith poses a unique opportunity to study how witchcraft allegations were woven into charges of fraud and disenchanted crimes associated with witchcraft. His life allows us to see in minute detail the way enchanted and disenchanted allegations sparked the violence that impacted 19th century victims of witchcraft allegations and their associates.

Endnotes
2 For good measure we are informed that Smith probably stole these items himself.

Call for essays for future newsletters

We invite proposals for essays to run in future issues of the newsletter. We are looking for short essays (1500-2500 words) announcing new developments deriving from research in the study and teaching of magic and its related topics. We are interested in relevant articles dealing with all regions and time periods.

We are also looking for smaller pieces, such as interviews or announcements for our notes and queries column. News about dissertations in progress or completed, manuscript discoveries, or other such items are welcomed.

Send your proposals to the editors at newsletters@societasmagica.org
Endnotes, cont’d


