INTRODUCTION:
THE METAMORPHOSIS OF MAGIC

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The term 'magic' is commonly used to designate a whole range of religious beliefs and ritual practices, whereby man seeks to gain control over his fate and fortune by supernatural means. In this respect magical artifice does not differ significantly from what is usually associated with religion or even premodern learning, but the concept itself is nevertheless veiled in ambiguity. Flourishing in the shadow of both religion and science, its appeal to either faith or reason often met with fierce opposition. Religious and political authorities regularly frowned upon magical practices because they were deemed secretive, anti-social and manipulative, and were associated with demonic powers. Likewise, scientific authorities condemned magical beliefs as irrational. Yet no religion has ever been without a fair amount of magic, and magical beliefs could easily merge with philosophical and cosmological ideas. It is hence justified to argue that the ambiguity of the term 'magic' mainly derives from the changing appreciations of the beliefs and practices denoted by this concept.

Beliefs and practices cherished and commonly accepted in one cultural or religious context are liable to incur derision and condemnation with a modification of the context or a change of culture. As a number of the essays in this volume shows, this is precisely what happened to magic. Stemming from an earlier, alien or indigenous culture, elements of magic were reinterpreted, rivalled, absorbed, usurped and condemned to fit new contexts and new religious settings. In this volume the reader can witness the rivalry between magi and apostles or priests who vie for the monopoly on miracle and wonder; one encounters the impact of theological condemnation and legal persecution of magic and its practitioners; but beyond absorption and condemnation, one also beholds how the development of magic is in large measure a development of man's changing attitudes towards the spirit world.

Deities, demons, and angels became important protagonists in the magic of the Late Antique world, and were also the main reasons for the condemnation of magic in the Christian era. Supplicatory incantations, rituals of coercion, enticing suffumigations, magical prayers and mystical songs drew spiritual powers to the human domain. Next to the magician's desire to regulate fate and fortune, it was the communion with the spirit
world that gave magic the potential to purify and even deify its practitioners. The sense of elation and the awareness of a metaphysical order caused magic to merge with philosophy (notably Neoplatonism). The heritage of Late Antique theurgy would be passed on to the Arab world, and together with classical science and learning would take root again in the Latin West. The metamorphosis of magic laid out in this book is the transformation of ritual into occult philosophy against the background of cultural changes in Judaism, paganism and Christianity.

The volume begins with Jan Bremmer’s discussion of the rise of the term 'magic'. The origin of the word lies in ancient Greece, where the term mageia was coined in the last decades of the fifth century BC. The word derives from the Magi, the priestly tribe of the Medes whose wisdom was proverbial. Yet practices of wandering magoi (perhaps of Persian origin) were occasionally looked upon in Greece with some condescension, and thus magic came to have an ambivalent meaning, ranging from plain sorcery to esoteric wisdom – an ambivalence that has always complicated a proper understanding of the term. As Bremmer points out in the Appendix to this volume, the opposition between magic and religion, so hotly debated in modem scholarship, is in fact a late nineteenth-century invention, relying on preconceptions that derive from the earlier mentioned ambiguity.

The volume continues with two papers on the prominent, but still insufficiently recognised, role of Jewish magical lore, which has regularly enriched the Western magical tradition. This Jewish magic first becomes visible in the texts of the intertestamental period, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Testamentum Salomonis. Florentino Garcia Martinez shows that, despite the condemnation of magic in the Old Testament, the Dead Sea Scrolls contain at least two types of magic, exorcism and divination, that were not only tolerated but actively practised. The Qumran community’s view of the spiritual world was essentially dualistic and this dualism legitimised certain practices. Thus incantations and exorcisms were applied in defending the Sons of Light against the Powers of Darkness, and astrology and physiognomy were used in analysing a person’s soul by finding out how many particles of light and darkness it consisted of. Compared to biblical prohibitions, the dualistic world view of the community caused a change in Jewish perceptions of magic. Well before the Christian era, this learned and secluded society at Qumran placed magic firmly in the spirit world.

One of the major figures in Jewish magical lore was the legendary King Solomon who, next to unparallelled wisdom, was believed to have the power to constrain and exorcise demons. Sarah Johnston follows the vicissitudes of this fascinating figure well into the modem period in her contribution on the Testament of Solomon. The Testament is a milestone in the tradition of Solomonic magic, since it embodies, in a sense, the friction between magic and orthodoxy as it was felt in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.
Solomon has the power to conjure demons, to contain and constrain them, but he can only do so by means of a magical ring that he received from God through the angel Michael. It is in the name of the one true God that he can command the spirits, and this probably made Solomon the magus a relatively acceptable figure. Even later Christian censorship of pseudo-Solomonic magic, as voiced in the Speculum astronomicae (discussed by Nicolas Weill-Parot), approached the orthodox fringe of this demonic magic with some degree of reserve.

In the period between the birth of Christianity and the arrival of Constantine and the Christian Empire, magic and miracle were strong competitors for attention. By concentrating on the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, a rich yet long neglected genre, Jan Bremmer shows that early Christians tended to see their spiritual leaders, in this case the apostles, as rivals of popular magicians; the most tellingly instance is the confrontation between the apostle Peter and Simon Magus. Apostolic miracles came to replace popular magic, and exorcisms and resurrections (clear echoes of Christ’s mission) were performed with as much public display as the tricks of the competing magi. In the Apocryphal Acts, the distinction between magic and miracle was addressed mainly on a narrative level. Intellectual reflections on magic would gain prominence in the patristic era.

It was in the towering figure of Augustine, as Fritz Graf argues, that Christianity acquired an intellectual authority who greatly determined Christian ideas on magic. Augustine, siding with imperial legislation against magic, shifted the focus of critique from the anti-social to the demonic. He defined paganism in terms of magic, divination and idolatry, phenomena which (however close to Christian cult and creed) he radically separated from the world of true Christian religion. The miracle-maker who is a true believer, works his wonders through God and His angels. The miracle-maker who is a pagan does not: he performs magic and his helpers are demons. Augustine takes his criticism even further by revealing what he believes to be the aims of magic. All magical ritual strives for the purification and elevation of the soul, and is essentially theurgy; but what for Neoplatonists like Iamblichus and, much later, Renaissance magi is a way of touching on the divine, is for Augustine communication with perfidious demons.

Augustine’s conviction that magic was based on communications with the spirit world was well founded. Augustine based himself on Apuleius, but there are many other sources, such as the magical papyri, which back up his claim. Ancient magic had one last flourish in Late Antique Egypt, where many magical papyri were found. Anna Scibilia concentrates on the emergence of the parhedros, the demon assistant of the magician, which she interprets as a sign of the increasing need for divine assistance that became apparent in Late Antiquity. The spirituality of the Hellenistic period was marked by the aspiration to establish contact with the divine (communio loquendi cum deis, in the words of Apuleius), and the Greek magical papyri supply many
telling instances of this desire. In her analysis of the Berlin Papyrus 5025, Scibilia draws attention to one of the more remarkable aspects of the *parhedros*: the magical assistant can also function as a mediator of salvation. This soteriological dimension of magic, whereby the magician can effect his own deification with the help of the *parhedros*, was precisely the source of Augustine's apprehension and the objective of his condemnation. Nevertheless, this theurgical and soteriological aspect of magic would re-surface in the Western tradition, as the contributions on the *Almandal* and Christian Kabbalah show.

With the advent of the Christian empire, intellectual and theological condemnation was joined by institutional repression. Magic was marginalised and driven underground, although, of course, it never disappeared entirely. As Bernard Stolte shows, the Byzantine church would deal with magic through pastoral care and advice, but also through the formal channels of the ecclesiastical courts. The church, relying on patristic authority, would stress the incompatibility of magic and orthodoxy and point to the threat that magical practices posed to public order. Secular authorities, relying on *Justinianic* legislation, followed suit and declared magic a criminal offence. Yet because of the continuity of the Greek tradition, several aspects of ancient magic would remain alive and well in the East until the fall of Constantinople to the Turks.

In the Latin West the medieval Christian church was likewise confronted with a strong and resilient tradition of indigenous non-Christian magic. By studying the competing practices of magic and miracle in Saints' lives, Valerie Flint shows how the church sought to neutralise contemporary magic, mainly by absorption. It required a revision of the role of the bishop who, as a bishop-magus, came to replace the regional magicians of old. Flint draws her material from England in the thirteenth century – a period highly prolific in the production of bishop-saints, and she deals centrally with the canonisation dossier of St Thomas Cantilupe. The supernatural powers of the saint mainly extended to resurrecting the dead (especially those who were killed by a miscarriage of justice) and to fighting injustices in secular law. These miracle-stories provide an interesting index of the functions that local magi formerly had and which were now taken over by Christian priests (as was done previously by the apostles in the *Apocryphal Acts*).

This process of cultural transition, whereby Christianity fed upon ancient magical and cultic beliefs is further pursued in Jan Veenstra's contribution on *lycanthropy*. His survey of werewolf lore from Late Antiquity to the early modern period shows that with the rationalisation of religion and the christianisation of Western Europe the metamorphosis from man into beast was approached (notably by Augustine) with new philosophical questions. In answer to these, Christian thinkers predominantly forwarded demonological interpretations; these speculations on the capacity of demons
to manipulate perception and nature, would eventually lead to the *demonological* theories that fuelled the witchcraze.

The spiritual dimension of marvel and miracle became a dominant preoccupation not only for those who believed in the intercession of the saints or who feared the assaults of demons, but also for those who were interested in the influence of the stars and the occult powers of nature. The great scientific and philosophical developments of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which were mainly brought about by the Aristotelian corpus newly recovered via Arabic sources, were also shaped and informed by textbooks on astrology and occult science, hitherto unknown to the West. It was through these works that inquisitive readers and magi were introduced to the world of astral spirits.

In his contribution on astrological images, Nicolas Weill-Parot studies the impact of astral magic, mainly by analysing the Speculum *astronomiae* (commonly attributed to Albertus Magnus). The Speculum distinguishes between the licit use of stellar influence, which relies on natural causation, and the illicit use of the stars which is allied to the practices of Hermetic or Arabic astral magic and Solomonic magic. Weill-Parot coin’s the term ‘addressativity’ to clarify the nature of these types of magic that either directly or indirectly address the spirits of the stars, which were considered angels by some and demons by others. He concludes his contribution by pointing out that in the Renaissance period the concept of magic underwent an important transformation when next to ‘addressativity’, it also incorporated Neoplatonism and natural philosophy.

This enhancement of the prestige of magic is further explored by Jan Veenstra in his study of the *Almandal*, a practical magical text on the invocation and conjuration of angels. Through an examination of some of its fifteenth-century adaptations (in Middle High German), Veenstra outlines the *Almandal*’s theurgical, redemptive and even intellectual aims which place the text within a tradition of theurgy and soteriology that already found expression in later Neoplatonism and some of the magical papyri. Angelic magic would soar to unprecedented heights in the Renaissance, especially in those quarters where *Neoplatonic* hierarchies and their concomitant theurgical rituals would couple with traditions of Jewish magic.

In his contribution on Christian Kabbalah, especially as it was developed by Johannes Reuchlin, Bernd Roling provides a comprehensive reconstruction of the mystical and magical texts from Jewish occult traditions that, together with several Christian adaptations, helped to shape the concept of the natura *completa*, man’s deified nature. Roling covers a wide field, ranging from the mystical 3 Henoch, which outlines the transformation from a human into an angelic being (as in Henoch who was transformed into Metatron) through the mediation of a personal daimon, to the *Picatrix*, a philosophical book of magic that gives directions to the philosopher on how to achieve the 'complete nature'. Magic and theurgy acquire a
distinctly redemptive function, since they strive to reverse Adam's fall and to join human nature to the divine. Roling traces these and other influences in the fields of Renaissance magic and Christian Kabbalah, notably in the works of Johannes Reuchlin and Paolo Ricci, where human nature attains its perfection in Christ.

With every change of culture, magic underwent its own transformation. The metamorphosis of magic outlined in this collection of essays essentially follows man's dealings with the angelic and demonic realm. By moving from the Sons of Light at Qumran to the Renaissance magi's quest for the complete nature of Christ, we have, in a special sense, come full circle.

All in all, the contributions in this volume shed new light upon several old obscurities; they show magic is a significant area of culture, and they advance the case for viewing transformations in the lore and practice of magic as a barometer with which to measure cultural change.