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Sophie Page, *Magic in the Cloister: Pious Motives, Illicit Interests, and Occult Approaches to the Medieval Universe* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), x + 232 pp., $82.95 (cloth), $39.95 (paperback).

Sophie Page's *Magic in the Cloister* is an important contribution to the recent wave of scholarship on the history of European magic. Like other titles in Penn State Press's impressive "Magic in History" series, Page's work is driven by meticulous archival research of manuscripts, with close attention to textual transmission, collecting, and copying activities. The innovative contribution of this book is to examine the social and institutional location of medieval magic by focusing on a particular site: St. Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury, England. Historians have long held that the social context of European learned magic was a "clerical underworld" (as Kieckhefer called it) primarily made up of younger clergy, monks, friars, and students at the growing universities. Page provides a case study of this underworld, exploring how magic texts were collected and used by named individuals at a specific monastery. This allows her to evaluate the role of monasteries as centres of magic, and present plausible arguments for why, during the late Middle Ages, monasteries became a safer place for those with magical and occult interest than other places of learning, such as universities.

St. Augustine's Abbey (which traces its tradition as a monastery as far back as 598) was reorganized under the Benedictine rule in the tenth century, and flourished during the High Middle Ages before it was dissolved in 1538, in the midst of the English Reformation. Page focuses on the Abbey's golden age. Drawing on extant library catalogues, abbey chronicles, surviving books and manuscripts (found in the British Library; Corpus Christi, Oxford; and the Bodleian Library, Oxford) and their marginalia, as well as material remains of the abbey buildings themselves, she reconstructs the place of magic texts within the monastery's collecting and copying activities. Identifying donors and individual users of the books through the library's unusually detailed records, Page is able to asses the status of magical practice within the community of monks and explore tensions with church and secular authorities. This impressive reconstruction takes place in chapter one, resulting in a rich picture of what

must have been an important hub in the international circulation and study of magic texts. About thirty books of magic can be identified at St. Augustine's, covering most of the major branches of magic (explicitly demonic, "nigromantic" texts excepted). Page argues that the abbey's liberal acquisition policies, which not only encouraged monks to keep personal collections, but also offered prayers and celebrated masses for those who generously donated books to the monastery, help explain the library's expansion as well as the diversity of its acquisitions.

The rest of the book indulges in close readings of specific texts in the abbey's collection, supported by two appendices with the author's translations of two texts, and an epilogue discussing the interesting aftermath of the collection. Chapter two focuses on natural magic (*magia naturalis*), emphasizing its association with medicine, through the use of stones, herbs, and animal parts. Page pays particular attention to books at St. Augustine's belonging to the genre of *animalia*, which explain how to exploit the occult properties of the parts of animals, for example in amulets to be worn or as concoctions and mixtures to be ingested (e.g. 36–39). She also revisits the old theological chestnut of whether natural magic works through inherent but invisible occult properties, or whether such effects were ultimately caused by the intervention of demons. Charting out the space that monks at St. Augustine's had for navigating these issues of legitimacy is a central, underlying theme of the book, as Page seeks to "explore how particular works could have been integrated within the monastic worldview" (30).

Chapter three turns to the spectacular *Liber vaccae* ("Book of the Cow"), translated from the Arabic *Kitāb al-nawāmīs* in Spain during the twelfth century and found in monasteries across Europe. It is a book of "experiments" for, among other things, producing homunculi and fantastical creatures, elevating the practitioner's soul, securing salvation, and granting powers such as invisibility, walking on water, knowledge about God, and communion with spirits. The techniques include suffumigations and ritual, but also animal sacrifice and medical operations on carcases and living animals. The experiment for creating "rational animals", for example, involves preparing a mixture of (among other things) sap, sulphur, and the operator's semen, placing it in the vulva of a cow, and locking the cow in a dark place to give birth. The monstrous creature thus produced may then be sacrificed, in order to release awesome, wonder-working powers. Seeing that this book is still not particularly well

known outside specialist circles—let alone understood—Page's description of St. Augustine's copy and relation to other genres (such as alchemical and medical texts) is a valuable addition to the literature.

Chapter four discusses the genre of image magic, focusing on texts in the abbey's collection, while chapter five focuses on a single text, the *Liber de essentia spirituum*. This text is interesting because it deals explicitly with (planetary) spirits, the trapping of spirits in matter (akin to the animation of statues), and with gaining revelations of the workings of the heavens (e.g., 103–08). The book bears some relation to the *Ars notoria*, of which the abbey owned at least two copies, which are discussed in chapter six. Page notes that the monks appeared to view the *Ars notoria* as licit; the cataloguing and shelf placement of these texts indicate that they may even have been considered as continuous with sacramental and devotional literature (p. 123–25).

Page spends the concluding pages of chapter six broadening the perspective and making observations of a more general import. As she notes, "the study of magic in universities was becoming more dangerous" by the end of the fourteenth century (128). For example, the faculty of theology in Paris issued a list of forbidden tenets and practices in 1398 which proved right out deadly: few weeks after its publication, the magician Jean de Bar was executed after confessing to several of the banned beliefs (128). In this tightening intellectual climate the monasteries may have provided safe haven. Bigger monasteries like St. Augustine's wielded significant power and were often able to govern internal affairs independently of ecclesiastical authorities. With intellectual networks already connecting monasteries and universities, Page's suggestion that autonomous monasteries may have provided refuge for certain heterodox scholars experiencing hardships at universities seems worthy of further exploration.

The book ends with an epilogue on the diffusion of St. Augustine's magic library following the Dissolution of the Monasteries. A big chunk of it was acquired by John Dee and through him exerted influence on Renaissance "occult philosophy". Studying Dee's extensive marginalia in these manuscripts reveals a scholar who is consciously seeking out monastic literature in search of magical knowledge. Dee's perusal of texts such as *Liber de essentia spirituum* may have influenced the Elizabethan philosopher's famous angel scrying sessions. Thus, the epilogue contributes to the important trend of documenting continuities between the medieval and

renaissance practice of magic. While humanist scholars were certainly selective when deciding which magic texts to borrow from in printed works, it is beyond doubt that this new class of knowledge specialists—working under the secular patronage of emperors, aristocrats, and an emerging merchant class—had monastic literature at hand.

The key strength of this book is to place magic texts in a specific social and material context, providing portraits of individuals, reconstructions of the concerns of the monastic community, and the monastery's relationships with the outside community. One point of criticism lies in the book's insistence, in the introduction and a few places throughout the book, that there is an *orthodoxy* to magical practice in the Middle Ages, and that a normalization process is taking place (1–2). This is a claim that, to the present reviewer, does not seem to be supported by the evidence that the book brings to light. It is asserted that the late Middle Ages saw a "gradual shift toward positive attitudes to magic" (2), but this is, as Page in fact demonstrates, at best a truth that must be modified by specifying whose attitudes are shifting. Even though some practitioners started authoring magic texts under their own names during this period (131–33), it is clear that they did so at their own peril (as shown by the burning of John of Morigny's *Liber florum* [1323], and the executions of magicians Cecco d'Ascoli [1327] and de Bar [1398]). If the monastery is an "orthodox" (in the sense of elite) institution that became a safe haven for magic texts, this happened precisely against a background of increasing condemnations and persecution from *other* (and, perhaps, competing) elite institutions, including dioceses, secular judiciaries, and universities. The extremely interesting connections between these institutions, and the intricate policing of orthodoxy/orthopraxy in the late Middle Ages, should be theorized much more thoroughly. While one could have wished for more of that in the present study, this does not detract from the fact that Page's portrayal of monasteries as centres of magic puts us in a much better position to assess the complicated institutional context of "magical" heteropraxy.

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