

## MEDIEVAL MAGIC & RENAISSANCE MAGES

Spring 2003

Newberry Library, Room 380

Richard Kieckhefer

E-mail: [kieckhefer@northwestern.edu](mailto:kieckhefer@northwestern.edu)

Fridays, 2:00-5:00 p.m., 4 April to 6 June 2003

Jakob Burckhardt's celebrated but problematic notions of the Renaissance individual are borne out no more and no less in the realm of magic than in that of art or politics. Magical texts written in Western Europe up to the fifteenth century tend to be anonymous or pseudonymous (with exceptions); from the later fifteenth century onward there is a greater tendency for them to be intellectual property claimed by their actual authors. But shifting attitudes toward mages are not necessarily correlated with shifting perceptions of magical practice and assumptions about the operations of magic. The first part of this course will examine the magical texts and practices of medieval Europe. The second will seek to tease out correspondences and discontinuities between medieval and Renaissance magic.

Readings (available at the Newberry):

Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, eds., *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, vol. 3 (*The Middle Ages*) (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). [paperback, 0-8122-1786-1, \$24.95]

Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1998). [paperback, 0-2710-1751-1, \$17.84]

Claire Fanger, ed., *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1998). [paperback, \$21.95, 0-7509-1382-7]

Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, trans. James Freake, ed. Donald Tyson (St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn, 1993). [paperback, 0-8754-2832-0, \$29.95]

D.P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: From Ficino to Campanella* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2000). [paperback, 0-2710-2045-8, \$19.95]

Noel L. Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter in the Controversy over Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998). [paperback, 0-7914-3962-3, \$24.95]

Plus a photocopy book, available from the instructor.

### Schedule of lectures, discussions, and reading

Apr. 4th: Introduction

Apr. 11th: Does magic have a history?—The history and historiography of medieval magic.  
Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, eds., *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*.

Apr. 18th: Does magic have a definition?—The varieties of medieval magic. Photocopy book.

Apr. 25th: How does clerical necromancy relate to other forms of magic—and to the witch trials?  
Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*.

May 2nd: How does clerical necromancy relate (more specifically) to other forms of ritual magic? Claire Fanger, ed., *Conjuring Spirits*.

May 9th: [Kalamazoo]

May 16th: Does magic have a history?—The history and historiography of Renaissance magic.  
D.P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*.

May 23rd: The 1480s as watershed—Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.  
Photocopy book.

May 30th: Magic and humanism—Johannes Trithemius. Noel L. Bram, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*.

Jun. 6th: The Renaissance harvest of medieval magic—Agrippa. Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*.

Jun. 13th (?): Conclusion

## Written assignments

A. Weekly reports. Each week, students taking the seminar for credit are asked to submit written reports of roughly 2,000-3,000 words on the assigned readings. A report should consist of (1) a study of some important theme or problem in these readings (e.g., the role of gender, the relationship between Latin and the vernacular, alternatives to the author's interpretations of the evidence, etc.), and (2) a series of questions raised by the readings.

B. Term paper. Each student taking the seminar for credit is expected to write a term paper of approximately 5,000 words on a topic approved by the instructor. Examples of possible topics:

The relationship between magic and superstition in German and French writings of the fifteenth century

The use of magic as a literary device in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*

The abdication of magic among mages of the early sixteenth century

The ways Agrippa makes use of medieval material in his synthesis of magical practice

But these are merely topics, and ideally the starting point for a term paper should be not so much a topic as a problem or question. Thus, for example:

Was there a difference between German and French writers of the fifteenth century in the way they conceived the relationship between magic and superstition?

How could Malory valorize the fictional use of magic in *Morte d'Arthur* at a time when the actual use of magic was increasingly problematic?

Has Frank Borchert adequately explained the abdication of magic among mages of the early sixteenth century?

Was Agrippa more of a compiler than a creative synthesist in his appropriation of medieval magic?

## Grades

Students taking the seminar for credit will be graded on class participation (33%), reaction papers (33%), and term papers (33%).