

Syllabus for
University Course 82:
Magic in the Middle Ages



Prof. Robert Mathiesen

Fall, 2004/5

MWF 12:00-12:50 pm

Bio-Med Center, room 139

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Grading Policy

Be advised that I only rarely give a grade of A. In general, if you have received an A in your other humanities courses at Brown, then expect to receive a B in this course; if a B, then a C. If you are unwilling to risk receiving a B or a C, you should choose the S/NC grade option.

In general, to receive even a B on a written assignment, you must show a complete and perfect mastery of the mechanics of formal, academic written English (in spelling, punctuation, grammar and lexicon), and your thought must be expressed with great precision and clarity. Even small flaws can lower your grade to a C, however excellent your ideas might otherwise be.

The grade of A is reserved for those very few assignments that exhibit a depth of wisdom and learning far beyond the usual run of student work at Brown. It cannot be earned by any amount of extra effort or time that one might put into the work for this class, but signifies an excellence that arises from other causes than hard work alone.

Calendar

Week	M	W	F		M	W	F	
1	--	8	10	Sep.	10	8*	10	12
2	=	13*	15		11	=	15	17
3	=	20*	22		12	=	22	--
4	=	27*	29		13	=	29	1
5	=	4*	6	Oct.	14	=	6*	8
6	=	--	13				10*	
7	=	18	20					
8	=	25	27					
9	=	1	3	Nov.				

* Written assignment due

Discussion in class

Reading Period will not be observed.

Office Hours

Office hours: On Wednesdays, 2:00-4:00 pm (or by appointment), in 022 Marston Hall.

The Goals of the Course

... are (1) to examine how magic developed during the Middle Ages, with some consideration of its Late Antique antecedents and its Modern survivals, and (2) to understand how Medieval magical practices can have seemed to work, and in some cases truly to have worked.

Disclaimer

Any comprehensive course on Magic in the Middle Ages has to examine a certain amount of Medieval (and pseudo-Medieval) material that deals with – or even promotes – sex, violence and sexual violence. This material is mostly textual, but also includes a few images. Some of this material may offend or intimidate some people. Please consider this possibility before you enroll. If you choose to enroll, you do so at your own risk.

Late Arrival to Class

Class begins promptly at 12:00 am, and ends at 12:50 am. **Arriving late, especially if it is frequent or disruptive, may lower your grade.**

Late Assignments Not Accepted, Graded or Excused

Each written assignment is due by 5:00 pm on the day indicated in the syllabus. As a general rule, **I will not accept, grade or excuse late assignments.** I will not excuse late work because of conflict with any other commitment, such as an assignment or examination in another course, or an obligation to attend a practice, rehearsal, performance or athletic meet. In such cases, I expect you to complete your work early. It is your responsibility to anticipate all such conflicts. If you anticipate that some other professor, director or coach may put such obligations on you without much advance notice, you should tell him or her about my policy as soon as possible.

Requirements and Grading

In general, your grade will be based on your assigned papers and your participation in class, roughly as follows:

Short papers (assignments #2-5)	1/3
Long research paper (assignments #5-6)	1/3
Class participation (esp. Friday Discussions)	1/3

The professor reserves the right to change the proportions as the course progresses, as may seem advisable to him. He will announce any such change in class.

Friday Discussions. On three Fridays (indicated in the calendar and in the schedule of classes and assignments) the class will consist of student discussion of a text that has been specifically assigned for that day. Every student is expected to have read the assigned text with great care well in advance of the discussion, and to have thought about it at some length before class.

Written Assignments. All papers for this course **must** be printed (or typewritten). Handwritten papers will be returned without credit and without a grade (unless prior permission has been obtained from me).

Papers must be double-spaced, in a 12-point font, with 1.25" right, left and bottom margins and 1" top margin, to leave room for the professor's comments.

I require two copies of each written assignment.

I will grade your papers primarily on the **quality of your thought** and the **clarity of your writing**. I also require that you have mastered all the **mechanics of writing formal, academic English** (spelling, punctuation, grammar, lexicon), and I will downgrade you for lapses in any of these areas.

Research essays **must** include a full formal bibliography of your sources, and **must** use footnotes or internal citations **wherever** you draw on these sources, whether you quote them directly or merely paraphrase their language, arguments and trains of thought. Consult the most recent edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* for a detailed treatment of the standard conventions.

Plagiarism. Failure to cite all your sources in detail, throughout your entire paper, is considered **plagiarism**, and is a serious violation of the Academic Code. Brown is very strict about such things, and may even expel a student for such a violation.

Every essay **must** be the product of your own **unaided work**. It is also considered plagiarism, and a serious violation of the Academic Code, to work on your papers (or even on the outline or the arguments or the bibliography for your papers) together with anyone else, unless the professor specifically authorizes such joint work. *I do not authorize any joint work on papers for this course.*

However, *I do authorize you to consult as needed with people who can help you improve your mastery of formal academic English and its mechanics* (grammar, punctuation, lexicon, style).

Written Assignments

Assignments #1 and #7 are **brief personal essays**, perhaps 2 pages long. No research is needed here, just knowledge of yourself and good writing.

Assignments #2-4 are **short papers**, perhaps 3-5 pages long. What is required above all is profound thought and deep insight into the material. It is possible, but difficult, to write a superb paper of this sort with little or no scholarly research or bibliography. However, if you do rely on other sources, you must cite them.

Assignments #5-6 are, respectively, a detailed outline and bibliography, and a final version of a **long research paper**, perhaps 15-25 pages long. This work must be the result not only of profound thought and deep insight, but also the result of your outside reading and extra research (i.e., beyond what in in the books assigned for the course).

Assignment #1 (due 9/13). Write a **brief essay** about the personal and/or academic interests that led you to enroll in this course, also what you hope to get out of it, and what previous exposure (if any) you may have had to magic or magical religion. Please include anything which will shed

light on your choice of this course. *This brief personal essay will not be graded, and will remain CONFIDENTIAL. Please keep this essay on your computer, as you may wish to revise to it at the end of the course (see assignment #7 below).*

Assignment #2 (due 9/20). Short Paper. Practitioners of magic commonly believe that words (incantations, true names, etc.) are very useful tools – perhaps the most important tools of all – for working magic, and that these words become more powerful the more unlike every-day speech they are. **Explain why** the use of words should be so wide-spread and so important in magic.

Assignment #3 (due 9/27). Short Paper. Magic spells and rituals commonly speak of binding and unbinding, knotting and unknotting, locking and unlocking. At times, too, binding or unbinding, knotting or unknotting, or locking or unlocking is actually carried out as a part of some spell, ritual or practice in magic. **Explain why and how** this has been so common in magic throughout the ages.

Assignment #4 (due 10/4). Short Paper. Design a well-crafted magic spell or ritual for the purpose of ensuring that you will get a grade of A on this assignment. (You are not required to perform this ritual or spell, just to design it!) *Note: if you feel uncomfortable actually designing a spell or ritual, you may analyze an actual Medieval spell instead. See the professor for a copy of that spell.*

Assignment #5 (due 11/8). Hand in a detailed **outline** and full **bibliography** for your **long research paper**. (See #6 below.)

Assignment #6 (due 12/6). Hand in the **final version** of your **long research paper**.

Assignment #7 (due 12/10). Critically re-read your initial personal essay (assignment #1 above), and write a second brief essay explaining what you have learned since you wrote that first essay. *This essay, too, will not be graded, and will remain CONFIDENTIAL.*

The Long Research Paper

Your long research paper may be on any topic that you like, provided that I have approved it in advance. You should have chosen your topic and gotten it approved by Monday of the seventh week of the semester (10/18), as a detailed outline and bibliography will be due three weeks later (11/8). (Any change in topic after this date will require

the advance submission of a new detailed outline and a new bibliography.) Here are two examples of possible topics:

1. Investigate some magical or divinatory practice that you have *personally* witnessed (or have carried out *yourself*). Consider its historical antecedents, its effectiveness (if any), and the very difficult question of just how one might determine that effectiveness.

2. Trace the history of some magical or divinatory practice from Antiquity up to the end of the Middle Ages, or even up to modern times. Show how it changed over that period of time. What factors contributed to these changes in the given practice? What factors caused it to survive – despite these changes or because of them – for all those centuries?

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

An asterisk (*) marks the days on which a written assignment is due.

Week

1 *Introduction*

W. [Administrative Matters.] The Middle Ages.
F. What is Magic?

2 *The Sources of Medieval Magic, I*

M.* History of Magic to the End of Antiquity.
W. Late Antique Syncretistic Magic: Its Origins, Proscription and Survival.
F. [Discussion:] A Sex Spell from Late Antiquity.

Required by Monday of this week:

Kieckhefer Magic in the Middle Ages (ch. 1-2)
Cavendish History of Magic (prologue, ch. 1)

Recommended:

Luck Arcana Mundi (all the introductions)
Betz The Greek Magical Papyri (pp. xli-lviii)
Gager Curse Tablets and Binding Spells (skim)
Meyer & Smith Ancient Christian Magic (skim)

3 *The Sources of Medieval Magic, II*

M.* The Hermetic Writings.
W. Theurgy.
F. A Scholarly Controversy: Was Jesus a Magician?

Required by Monday of this week:

Cavendish History of Magic (ch. 2)
Luck, "Theurgy" [xerocopy]

Recommended:

Smith *Jesus the Magician* (skim)

4 *Germanic Traditions in Medieval Magic*

- M.* Sagas and *Seidhr*
W. Spells and Charms
F. **[Discussion:]** An Anglo-Saxon Magical Ritual
Required by Monday of this week:
Kieckhefer *Magic in the Middle Ages* (ch. 3-4)
- 5 ***Celtic Traditions in Medieval Magic***
M.* Second Sight.
Last day to change your grade option to S/NC
W. Celtic Magical Prayers.
F. The Holy Grail.
Required by Monday of this week:
Kieckhefer *Magic in the Middle Ages* (ch. 5)
- 6 ***Magic and the Medieval Educated Elite, I***
M. **[no class]**
W. Astrology.
F. Alchemy.
Required by Wednesday of this week:
Kieckhefer *Magic in the Middle Ages* (ch. 6)
- 7 ***Magic and the Medieval Educated Elite, II***
M. The Influence of Islamic and Jewish Magic.
W. Al-Kindi's *On Stellar Rays*
F. Geomancy and Other Means of Divination.
Required by Monday of this week:
Kieckhefer *Magic in the Middle Ages* (ch. 7)
- 8 ***Magic and the Medieval Educated Elite, III***
M. The Clerical Underground and Ritual Magic.
W. The *Sworn Book* of Honorius of Thebes.
F. The Great Witch-Hunt.
Required by Monday of this week:
Kieckhefer *Magic in the Middle Ages* (ch. 8)
Mathiesen "A 13th-Century Ritual" [xerocopy]
Recommended:
Peters (intro.; ch. 1, 4-6; skim ch. 2-3)
- 9 ***Medieval Magic in the Modern Era, I***
M. The Renaissance Synthesis of Magical Traditions.
W. Agrippa's *On Occult Philosophy*.
F. **[Discussion:]** *The Key of Solomon* and Related Texts.
Required by Monday of this week:
Cavendish *History of Magic* (ch. 3)
Mathers *Key of Solomon*
Agrippa *On Occult Philosophy* (Consult the
special study guide for Agrippa.)
- 10 ***Medieval Magic in the Modern Era, II***
M.* The *Grimoires*.
W. Freemasons and Rosicrucians.
F. The Rise of Modern Occultism and Paganism.
[continued on the next page]
Required by Monday of this week:

Cavendish *History of Magic* (ch. 4)
 Hutton *Triumph* (ch. 1-10)
 Leland *Aradia* (1990 basic edition)
 Mathiesen "Charles G. Leland" [xerocopy]

Recommended:

Waite *The Book of Ceremonial Magic* (esp. pt. I,
 ch. 1-4; skim pt. II)

11 *Modern Magical Movements and Methods, I*

M. Orders and Lodges.
 W. Wicca and its Origins
 F. Modern Magical Methods

Required by Monday of this week:

Hutton *Triumph* (ch. 11-20)
 Greer *Inside a Magical Lodge* (esp. ch. 1-5, 12-13)

Recommended:

Luhrmann *Persuasions* (ch. 1-17)

12 *Modern Magical Movements and Methods, II*

M. Modern Magical Methods (continued)
 W. [no class]
 F. [no class]

Required by Monday of this week:

Farrar & Farrar *A Witches' Bible* (esp. pt. I, pp.
 11-57; pt. II, pp. 105-280)
The Book of Shadows

13 *The Effectiveness of (Medieval) Magic*

M. Material Causes.
 W. The Mind-Body Link.
 F. States of Consciousness.

Required by Monday of this week:

Neher (ch. 1-5, 8; just skim ch. 6-7, 9)
 Magliocco *Witching Culture* (ch. 3-5)

14 *The Effectiveness of Medieval Magic*

M.* Interpersonal Causes.
 W. Other Causes.
 F.* Why Study Magic? Retrospect on the Course.

Required by Monday of this week:

Leland *Gypsy Sorcery* (ch. 11-12) [xerocopy]
 Seabrook *Witchcraft* (selected chapters) [xerocopy]
 Luhrmann *Persuasions* (ch. 18-23)

Recommended:

Leland *The Mystic Will* (just skim)

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Books Required, Recommended, or Simply Relevant

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- Richard **Godbeer**. *The Devil's Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.
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- John Michael **Greer**. *Inside a Magical Lodge: Group Ritual in the Western Tradition*. St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1998.
- Graham **Harvey** & Charlotte **Hardman**, edd. *Paganism Today*. London: Thorsons, 1995.
- Philip **Heselton**. *Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival*. Freshfields, Chieveley, Berks: Capall Bann, 2000.
- Ellen Evert **Hopman** & Lawrence **Bond**. *People of the Earth: The New Pagans Speak Out*. Rochester, VT: Destiny, 1996.
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