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**Editor Nicholas Campion**

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## Editorial

The papers in this volume of *Culture and Cosmos* were originally presented at the 2013 University of Wales Trinity Saint David/ Sophia Centre conference on Celestial Magic. As is well known, the annual Sophia Centre conferences explore the variety of topics covered by the umbrella term ‘cultural astronomy and astrology’, as explored through the research and teaching of the Sophia Centre, including the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology. The purpose of the conference was to explore aspects of the relationship between the theories and practices of magic and astrology. Arriving at a single definition of astrology is difficult enough, but magic is equally problematic: as Owen Davies wrote, ‘Defining “magic” is a maddening task’.<sup>1</sup> We know the origins of the word. ‘Magic’ is derived from the Greek *mageia*, which originally referred to the ceremonies and rituals performed by a *magos*. In the mid–fifth century BCE Herodotus wrote about the *magi* as a priestly caste.<sup>2</sup> The *magi* then performed their most celebrated task over four hundred years later by presenting their gifts to the infant Christ, participating (in Christian theology) in the transformation of the entire world to a new phase of existence. But what actually is the practice to which the *magi* gave their name?

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<sup>1</sup> Owen Davies, *Magic: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans, Aubrey de Sélincourt (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972), 1.132.

Definitions of magic vary. Ronald Hutton wrote that it may be conceived of as ‘embracing any formalised practices by human beings designed to achieve particular ends by the manipulation and direction of supernatural power or of spiritual power concealed within the natural world’.<sup>3</sup> Manipulation is the key in this view, suggesting that the actor, the magician can be separate to the thing being acted on. A different slant places the magician within the system. For example, according to Rachel Elior, magic consists of those practices specifically concerned with ‘developing and maintaining’, through the application of human intention, ‘the system of bonds and relationships between the revealed and concealed worlds’.<sup>4</sup> For once in such questions there is fair agreement between the academic specialists and the skeptics. For example, *The Sceptic’s Dictionary*, considering the term ‘magical thinking’, rather than ‘magic’, contains the following passage:

magical thinking involves several elements, including a belief in the interconnectedness of all things through forces and powers that transcend both physical and spiritual connections. Magical thinking invests special powers and forces in many things that are seen as symbols.<sup>5</sup>

Magical thinking is a participative mode of thought where participation can be understood as a basic human awareness of the interrelatedness of all things in the world. Ariel Glucklich extends this discussion:

Magic is based on a unique type of consciousness: the awareness of the interrelatedness of all things in the world by means of simple but refined sense perception. This awareness can be called ‘magical consciousness’ or less ambiguously, the ‘magical experience’... Magic does not seek to ‘fix’ an objective world; it addresses an awareness of a bind that is neither subjective no objective. It straddles the line between the perceiver and the world because the two are part of a unified system, a mental ecology.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ronald Hutton, *Witches, Druids, and King Arthur* (London: Hambledon, 2003), p. 106.

<sup>4</sup> Rachel Elior, ‘Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology: The Perception of Angels in Hekhalot Literature’, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 1 (1993): pp. 3–53, on p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Carroll, ‘Magical Thinking’ in *The Sceptic’s Dictionary*, <http://skepdic.com/astrology.html> [accessed 14 November 2016].

<sup>6</sup> Ariel Glucklich, *The End of Magic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 12.

The concept of magic as mental ecology takes us far away from any assumptions that it has to be overtly occult, esoteric or mystical. What I would term ‘mundane magic’ is developed by Yannick St. James, Jay M. Handelman, and Shirley F. Taylor. In the abstract to their paper on ‘Magical Thinking and Consumer Coping’, they wrote:

The analysis of interview and blog narratives of consumers attempting to lose weight reveals how they adopt practices imbued with magical thinking in the form of creative persuasion, retribution, and efficient causality. Magical thinking allows participants to construct a space of uncertainty and ambiguity that transforms impossibilities into possibilities, thus sustaining their hope in the pursuit of goals. In so doing, consumers demonstrate a chimerical agency where they creatively blur fantasy and reality to cope with cultural expectations of control.<sup>7</sup>

Given that the assumption of a binary distinction between fantasy and reality may raise more problems than it solves, the notion of magic as an act of will then is firmly embedded in the mundane world. The writer William Burroughs would have agreed. He wrote that

Since the word ‘magic’ tends to cause confused thinking, I would like to say exactly what I mean by ‘magic’ and the magical interpretation of so-called reality. The underlying assumption of magic is the assertion of ‘will’ as the primary moving force in this universe—the deep conviction that nothing happens unless somebody or some being wills it to happen. To me this has always seemed self-evident. A chair does not move unless someone moves it. Neither does your physical body, which is composed of much the same materials, move unless you will it to move. Walking across the room is a magical operation. From the viewpoint of magic, no death, no illness, no misfortune, accident, war or riot is accidental. There are no accidents in the world of magic. And will is another word for animate energy.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Yannick St. James, Jay M. Handelman, and Shirley F. Taylor, ‘Magical Thinking and Consumer Coping’, *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 38, no. 4 (December 2011), pp. 632–49, on p. 632.

<sup>8</sup> William Burroughs, ‘Rock Magic: Jimmy Page, Led Zeppelin, and a Search for the Elusive Stairway to Heaven’ *Crawdaddy*, 1975, <http://arthurmag.com/2007/12/05/willima-burroughs-onled-zeppelin/> [accessed 18 October 2014]

For Burroughs magic is a fundamental quality of life. Our ability to walk across a room may be an act so necessary to our survival that it is considered the very opposite of magic as an exceptional phenomenon, but Burroughs reminds that the fact that we can walk across a room, even that we are here at all as reflexive, consciousness beings, is remarkable. So where does that leave celestial magic? For Burroughs the act of travelling to the Moon in 1969 would be likely magical. But let's consider astrology in particular. Many historians look at classical astrology as belonging to the same suite of activities as divination and magic. For example Bertrand Lançon (echoing Hutton's definition of magic as manipulation) wrote that in the Roman world,

Nature worked on man and, by magic, men could take action in return and alter their destiny. So they assiduously visited diviners, magi and astrologers in order to lift curses, know their future or read their horoscope.<sup>9</sup>

The most mundane application of astral magic is for personal advantage, and personal advantage was often best served by medicine, and the use of amulets, talismans and sigils. This example from a Greek text makes the point:

Another amulet for the foot of the gouty man: You should write these names on a strip / of silver or tin. You should put in on a deerskin and bind it to the foot of the man named, on his two feet: 'THEMBARATHEM OUREMBRENOU TIPE / AIOXTHOU SEMMARATHEM MOU NAI OOU, let NN, whom NN bore, recover from every pain which in his knees and two feet'. You do it when the moon is [in the constellation] Leo.<sup>10</sup>

The key point here is one of timing. The Moon is in Leo for around two and a half days every month: all other aspects of the healing ritual are therefore enclosed within a framework in which time is qualitative as much as quantitative, and magical actions can only be effective at certain times.

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<sup>9</sup> Bertrand Lançon, *Rome in Late Antiquity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2000), p. 96.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek magical papyri in translation, including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), xiv.1003–14, p. 244.

No matter how powerful the magician, a ritual will be ineffective if performed at an inauspicious moment.

From the Islamic world the tenth/eleventh century text known as the *Picatrix* was translated into Latin in the thirteenth century, and included remedies such as this means of gaining relief from a scorpion sting:

Carve a picture on a stone of Besoar in the hour of the Moon and while the Sun is in the first degree of it and the ascendant is Leo or Aquarius. Mount the stone on a golden ring and stamp it with resin of Kundur in the designated hour and with the Moon in Scorpio. Give the bitten person a dose of it and he will be cured from his ailment.<sup>11</sup>

Such remedial magic constituted one sub-genre of the wider practice. Magic designed to facilitate the soul's ascent might be another. From the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries we find this example from the practices of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. One ritual designed to facilitate astral travel held in 1900, began as follows:

We sat in a semi-circle at the north side of the Altar, facing the South, when Mars was in Virgo at the time. Deo Date then made the Invoking Hexagrams of Mars around the room, and the Pentagram of Virgo and the Mars symbol towards the South.<sup>12</sup>

Is astral magic, or astrological magic if we prefer, distinct from astrology as an interpretative and predictive practice based on the use of horoscopes? It certainly has a separate existence to judge from much of the literature: the vast majority of modern western astrological texts concentrate on the reading of horoscopes, rather than activity, whether magical or otherwise. But what if all astrology is magic? This is certainly the way skeptics see it. As Robert Carroll wrote, 'In all forms, astrology is a manifestation of magical thinking'.<sup>13</sup> While Carroll's absolutist statement 'in all forms' is

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<sup>11</sup> Anon. *Ghayat Al-Hakim. Picatrix: The Goal of the Wise*, trans. Hashem Atallah, (Seattle: Ouroboros Press, 2002), chap V, p. 40. Bezoar is an antidote obtained from goats or antelopes and kundur is incense.

<sup>12</sup> R. A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn, Twilight of the Magicians: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Order* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1983), p. 132. See also Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 156–57.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Carroll, 'Astrology' in *The Sceptic's Dictionary*, <http://skepdic.com/astrology.html> [accessed 14 November 2016].

easy to falsify (there is no necessity for magical thinking in the financial astrologer's plotting of financial graphs in relation to planetary cycles), the general definition of magical thinking is surely compatible with many modern western astrologers' definitions of astrology, particularly what Carroll called the 'belief in the interconnectedness of all things'.<sup>14</sup> For example, Charles Carter, one of the most influential astrologers in the English-speaking world from the 1930s to the 1960s wrote 'Astrology is the science of certain cryptic relations between the celestial bodies and terrestrial life'.<sup>15</sup> Regarding the consideration of magic as action, as proposed by William Burroughs, the following statement was written by the popular American astrologer Donna Cunningham in 1978:

To believe that you are being buffeted by Pluto or held back by some bad aspect is very short-sighted. What you should see from the various chapters in this book is that every difficult thing in the chart can lead us to positive, constructive insights and actions that will help us move along on the spiritual path. We generally grow through the mastery of the adverse circumstances, inner conflicts and difficult times that we go through. With that in mind, you can regard difficult aspects, transits, and sign placements as opportunities to grow. The true usefulness of a chart, as I see it, is to get a better perspective on yourself, to appreciate your own individuality and potential, and to work toward your most positive expression of self. Your chart is only an instrument panel where you take readings on the course of your life. YOU ARE THE PILOT.<sup>16</sup>

This is stirring stuff; a call to action and a complete rejection of any assumption that fate has to be passively accepted. Like Burroughs, Cunningham talks about an act of will taking place in the mundane world, rather than the manipulation of occult forces. While it be absurd to argue that all astrology is magical, for to do so would be to exclude all other possibilities, it seems clear that some astrology is magical. But, then, if William Burroughs is correct, is anything *not* magical?

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Carroll, 'Magical Thinking' in *The Sceptic's Dictionary*, <http://skepdic.com/astrology.html> [accessed 14 November 2016].

<sup>15</sup> Charles Carter, *The Principles of Astrology*, revised edn., (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1963 [1925]), p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Donna Cunningham, *An Astrological Guide to Self-Awareness* (Reno: CRCS, 1978), p. 9.

## The Themes in this Volume

All the papers published here deal with the human relationship with the sky, for that is the brief of *Culture and Cosmos*. Faced with the task of organizing the papers into themes, it became clear to me that one practice pervaded most of the submissions: alchemy. And one process was dominant: transformation. Magic is then above all a practice, a word which reminds us that it has practical consequences. And that consequence, our contributors conclude, is personal transformation. Such transformation may take us closer to the divine, or make us more self-aware, or may enhance good fortune. But it always locates the individual within the transformative process, rather than apart from it.

We begin with two papers which I have categorized as ‘Theory’. Michael Harding muses on the meaning of magic in relation to Wittgenstein and Heidegger, while José Manuel Redondo takes us back to the Platonism of Late Antiquity on which so much of the European tradition is based.

We then move on to ‘Practice’, beginning with Liz Greene’s sweeping account of ‘Gemstone Talismans in Western Magical Traditions’, Claire Chandler’s examination of one text in the collection we know as the ‘Greek Magical Papyri’. M. E. Warlick then focuses on the alchemical ‘Transgendering of Mercury’, and Karen Parham considers the key alchemical text, the *Aurora Consurgens*.

The section on ‘Transformation and Ascent’ represents a different kind of practice. Alison Greig begins with an exploration of ‘Angelomorphism and Magical Transformation in the Christian and Jewish Traditions’, and Christine Broadbent moves to Islamic mysticism in her paper on ‘Celestial Magic as the “Love Path”: The Spiritual Cosmology of Ibn ‘Arabi’. Hereward Tilton moves into the early modern world in his study of ‘the Invocation of Planetary Spirits in Early Modern Germany’, and Joscelyn Godwin in his paper on ‘Astral Ascent in the Occult Revival’. Sue Lewis completes this section with a paper on a little known (outside the community of students and practitioners of modern western astrology) school of astrology, popularly known as ‘Huber Astrology’.

Finally, staying in the modern world, we conclude with two papers on ‘Ritual’, Jane Burton’s research into the magical rituals of modern spirit mediums and witches, and Lilan Laishley’s observations on rituals designed to dispel negative karma in modern Indian astrology.

It is hoped that this volume will provide a valuable addition to the scholarly literature on astrology and magic. It also contributes to our

understanding of the emerging discipline of cultural astronomy in both the ancient and modern worlds.

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Finally I would like to give my deep thanks to Dr Liz Greene, my friend and colleague. Liz was a guest lecturer on the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology at Bath Spa University from 2002, a member of staff at the University of Wales Lampeter/ University of Wales Trinity Saint David from 2007–13, and my partner in the conception and organisation of this conference.

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