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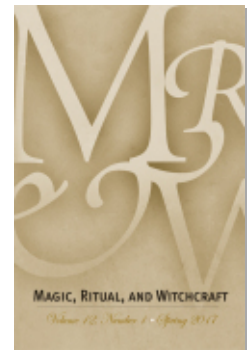
The Astronomer and the Witch: Johannes Kepler's Fight for his Mother by Ulinka Rublack (review)

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modern Spiritualist movement's debts to, and influence on, the Anglo-American popular culture industry and the new modes of consumption it encouraged; some of Natale's greater theoretical ambition might have further galvanized Lingan's approach here.

As this comment suggests, and quite understandably in light of its status as the first study of its kind, *The Theatre of the Occult Revival* necessarily assumes, in places, the character of a survey. Accordingly, it bears the strengths and weaknesses of that expository mode. Some religious studies-based scholars of esotericism might find themselves frustrated by the lightness of touch with which Lingan approaches central conceptual debates about the meanings of esotericism and its manifestations in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries; does esotericism constitute a distinct intellectual tradition, a form of thought, a category of deviant knowledge, or, as Kocku Von Stuckrad suggests, "a structural element of Western culture"?² I was not myself overly troubled by the speed with which Lingan moves through these questions, as it seems to me that his work's real contribution lies elsewhere. He demonstrates with supreme conviction that, for many of his focal figures, theater was the *sine qua non* for the transmission and experience of gnosis. They aimed to continue this esoteric tradition both by exoteric productions of canonical plays reinterpreted to foreground the occult beliefs they felt that playwrights such as Shakespeare and Goethe had secretly held, and by creating new participatory rituals open only to initiates whose goal was less to teach spiritual truths than to induce mystical transport in their participants. Whether ecstatic, pedagogical, or both, the performances Lingan studies demonstrate the absolute centrality of theater and spectatorship to the occult revival's philosophical beliefs and cultural significance. Lingan provides us with a broad-based, testable hypothesis about the ambitions of occult and neopagan performance that can be further nuanced in the subsequent studies it is sure to inspire.

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ULINKA RUBLACK, *The Astronomer and the Witch: Johannes Kepler's Fight for his Mother*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xxxii + 359, 42 ill.

The Jesuit Friedrich Spee, a fierce opponent of the witch persecutions, wrote in his *Cautio Criminalis* (1631) that "the only way trials are conducted

2. Kocku Von Stuckrad, "Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation," *Religion* 35 (2005): 78.

is so that in the end the truth does not shine brightly throughout Germany, but bonfires.”¹ However, Ulinka Rublack’s monograph describes a remarkable witch trial in which the truth ultimately did cast its brilliant shine, thanks to the accused woman’s stout defendant: the astronomer Johannes Kepler, famed for his discovery of the three laws of planetary motion. As a man of science, Kepler was skilled in defending his astronomical insights and refuting his academic opponents, but upon learning that his aged, illiterate mother, Katharina Kepler, had been accused of witchcraft, he put his telescope aside and used his brilliant analytical and rhetorical skills to conduct her defense, which eventually led to her release.

In this thoroughly researched and beautifully written study, Rublack offers the reader a welcome balanced treatment of the Kepler case, one of the best documented witchcraft trials in Germany, which lasted from 1615 until 1621. Having dusted off the rich archival sources, Rublack atmospherically and vividly paints a picture of Katharina’s world and beliefs. Adopting the microhistorical approach, Rublack not only gives voice to Katharina, but also to the rest of her family and the community she lived in, at a time when the witch craze was ravaging early modern Germany. Rublack reconstructs a haunted world in which bad events were explained as the work of the Devil and his band of witches. No one was safe from the Devil’s temptation, and paranoia reigned. The reader thus gains an in-depth understanding of how the witch craze impacted ordinary people in a small Lutheran community in the Duchy of Württemberg. Most originally, Rublack presents Katharina’s trial as the hitherto untold story of how witchcraft accusations transformed family dynamics. Subsequently, her monograph does not just focus on Kepler, his mother, and their relationship, but also on the witch trial as a family tragedy.

Rublack sets the scene by guiding the reader through early modern Leonberg, Katharina’s hometown. She explains in rich detail how communal life was governed by daily patterns and seasonal rhythms. Thanks to Rublack’s engaging and vivid writing style, the reader gets a real sense of what life must have been like for Katharina in this bustling market town. Despite her middling wealth, Katharina faced much hardship because her husband—unwilling to settle down—had left her to raise their four children, and was never heard of again. Katharina nevertheless managed to fend for herself, thereby showing great resilience and resourcefulness. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, she finally seemed to have entered calm water.

1. Friedrich Spee von Langenfeld, *Cautio Criminalis, or A Book on Witch Trials*, ed. and trans. M. Hellyer (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 159.

However, Katharina's life took a dramatic turn in August 1615 when, at the age of 68, she was accused of being a witch. She had allegedly given the local glazier's wife a poisonous brew which had made her ill. All of a sudden, the illiterate aged widow was caught up in the machinations of the witch persecutions, instigated by an overzealous ducal governor. What follows is a gripping account of a six-year legal battle in which Katharina narrowly escapes physical torture, which most likely would have resulted in a confession, and consequently, the death sentence.

In great detail and with painstaking effort, Rublack reconstructs the six-year-long case and the anxiety it causes among Katharina and her children. Throughout those years Johannes tirelessly confronts the judicial system, exposing some of the causes of the German witch craze in the process, such as the deeply embedded cultural fear of old women. However, although the trial unfolds against the backdrop of the scientific revolution with Kepler himself being a man of science, Rublack rightly does not describe the case as a conflict between superstition and reason. The boundaries between the two were still very much blurred, and even the intellectual elite at universities and royal courts attributed power to the supernatural. Alchemical experiments were conducted at the ducal court in Württemberg, and Kepler himself did not shy away from using astrology to explain human behavior.

Heroine or half-crazed crone? Innocent herbal medic or sharp-tongued villainess? The current views of Katharina Kepler are often diametrically opposed. Rublack leaves it to the reader to decide. The monograph certainly does not read like a hagiography, nor does it vilify Katharina. Instead, Rublack has skillfully and with convincing authority unraveled the myths and rumors surrounding Katharina, such as the unfounded yet persistent accusation that her aunt had been burnt as a witch. In a certain respect, Katharina indeed seems to have been "the author of her own lamentable misfortune," as Johannes himself put it. Her attempt to bribe the ducal governor and her wish to have her father's skull dug up certainly did not work in her favor. Yet one cannot help but admire Katharina's strength of character and her steadfast refusal to sacrifice the truth, even under the threat of torture.

Rublack not only restores nuance to Katharina's portrayal, but also to that of her son. Thanks to Johannes Kepler's hoarding tendency, the author had access to a wealth of material, which allowed her to rectify the customary view of Kepler as a cold, reclusive scholar. Instead, the reader gets to know him as an emphatic man with an optimistic worldview, who boldly put his own career on hold to take up his mother's defense. This was an extraordinarily brave move given the fact that—despite his Lutheran upbringing—Kepler was already under scrutiny because of his alleged Calvinist sympathies.

In order to protect his reputation, he could have easily distanced himself completely from Katharina, toward whom he had an ambivalent attitude. Moreover, had his mother been condemned, not only would his career have been in ruins, but even more worrisome, he himself might have been suspected of witchcraft because it was commonly regarded as a hereditary crime.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading Rublack's enthralling and gripping study, and thanks to the generous amount of illustration the main characters and the world they lived in are brought even more to life. Given Rublack's multifaceted and original approach, the book will appeal to a wide audience, and deservedly so. With *The Astronomer and the Witch*, Rublack has delivered a triumphant tour de force.

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STEVEN P. MARRONE. *A History of Science, Magic and Belief: From Medieval to Early Modern Europe*. New York: Palgrave, 2015. Pp. xvi + 317.

Steven Marrone has been known for decades as one of the leading experts in thirteenth-century European intellectual history, with special reference to the meeting points within that history of the traditions of learning later called theology, science, and magic. For some years now he has been working toward an examination of the impact of those high medieval ideas and debates on later centuries, and this book is the very welcome result. It is essentially a study of the relationship between learned attitudes to religion, science, and magic between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries, with a naturally heavy emphasis on the high medieval period and also a prelude exploring the intellectual and legal backdrop to that in late antique and early medieval texts. In the process it links up two major and as yet largely separate areas of scholarly expertise: the intellectual history of the central Middle Ages, and the early modern witch trials. A large part of its interest lies in the manner in which it shows how the former established the ideological preconditions for the latter. This is a theme that has been voiced by scholars ever since Jacob Grimm, and given reinforced significance by Norman Cohn in the 1970s, but here it becomes the subject matter of a historian with an unusually deep knowledge of the relevant medieval authors.

The overall argument of the book is as follows. In late antiquity, Christian authors, above all Augustine, condemned any use of the practices that the late Roman world had defined as magic, or that involved a conscious or