Magic and Crusading Propaganda: Muslim Enchanters in the *Chansons de geste*

In his 1982 monograph *Les Musulmans dans les chansons de geste*, Paul Bancourt noted that Muslims are repeatedly identified as practitioners of magic in the *chansons de geste* that proliferated in the twelfth century.[1] In the most widely read – and the earliest surviving – representative of the genre, *La Chanson de Roland*, a Muslim who is given the name Siglorel is identified by the poet as 'the enchanter who had been in hell': 'L'encanteür ki ja fut en enfer'. Corsalis, the king of one of the Muslim peoples who unite to ambush Charlemagne's army in the poem, is said to be a habitué of what the poet calls 'evil arts': he is 'mult de males arz'.[2] *Fierabras*, a slightly later *chanson de geste*, tells how one of the 'Saracens' whom Charlemagne fought in Spain worked a magic charm on the Franks whom Charlemagne commanded, making them fall asleep. In *La Chanson de Guillaume*, the queen of France observes that Guibourc, a female Saracen who has converted to Christianity, knows many of the arts of magic; this, the queen claims, is only natural for somebody who, like Guibourc, has been born in '"paganism"', which is what the queen thinks Islam is. In *Floovant*, a female Saracen called Maugalie boasts that nobody on earth knows more about 'enchantment' than she does ('"Tant sai d'anchantemant, n'an ai soz ciel mon maistre"').[3]

The practice of magic often overlaps with the religious practices that are attributed to Muslims in the *chansons de geste*. For example, in *La Chanson d'Antioche*, which retells the events of the First Crusade (although not necessarily accurately), the Muslims of Antioch are said to have made a devil enter an idol of Mohammed 'par encantement' ('through enchantment'). In *La Chanson d'Aspremont*, the Saracens who populate Calabria in this poem are said to have made the images and statues of their gods speak 'par nigromance et par encantisson' ('through black magic and through incantation').[4] As is the case in *La Chanson de Roland*, the

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[1] Paul Bancourt, *Les Musulmans dans les chansons de geste du cycle du roi*, 2 vols. (Aix en Provence: Université de Provence, 1982). On representations of Muslims as magicians in *chansons de geste*, see especially vol. I, 463-73, and vol. II, 600-20 (which considers female Muslim magicians: 'les Sarrasines magiciennes').

[2] *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. F. Whitehead (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), ll. 1391 and 886 respectively. Whitehead's edition is of the 'Oxford' version of the poem, as preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 23, the oldest manuscript in which the poem has survived. The date of composition of *La Chanson de Roland* is usually thought to have been the end of the eleventh century, or the beginning of the twelfth; the Digby manuscript dates from the twelfth century, perhaps from its second quarter. For other texts of the poem as well as the version in Digby 23, see *'La Chanson de Roland'/'The Song of Roland': The French Corpus*, gen. ed. Joseph J. Duggan, 3 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005). The inclusion of Corsalis and Siglorel amongst the Muslims of *La Chanson de Roland* is noted by Bancourt in *Les musulmans dans les chansons de geste*, I.467.

[3] Bancourt, *Les Musulmans dans les chansons de geste*, I.467; II.600; and II.602.

[4] *La Chanson d'Antioche*, in *The Old French Crusade Cycle*, vol. 10: *Godefroi de Buillon*, ed. Jan Boyd Roberts (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996), p. 46; *La Chanson d'Aspremont, Chanson de geste du XIIe siècle: Texte du manuscript de Wollaton Hall*, ed. Louis Brandin, 2 vols, Classiques français du moyen âge 19 and

Muslims who are the enemies of Christians in these *chansons de geste* are conceptualised as idolaters. Why this should have been so has been explored by a number of scholars, conspicuously Michael Camille and Suzanne Conklin Akbari.[5] Why Muslims should also have been represented as practitioners of magic in the *chansons de geste*, however, has not been investigated.

I argue here that the recurring, indeed insistent, association of Muslims with the practice of magic in the *chansons de geste* is the product of a confluence of factors. For one thing, Islam was thought of as a religion of the East, and magic, as I shall show, as an essentially Eastern practice. It was hardly surprising, then, if people who were regarded as Easterners should have been thought of as practitioners of magic. Magic was one of the things that people from the East 'did'. But magic, I shall also suggest, had always been represented in the Christian faith – and in the Jewish one too – as a practice of people who did not subscribe to that faith: as a practice of people who were 'other' than Christians, or than Jews. In the era in which the *chansons de geste* were composed, the most obvious people who were 'other' than Christians were the Muslims whom Christians fought, repeatedly, in the Crusades that they undertook from the end of the eleventh century onwards.

Less straightforwardly, I wish also to suggest that in associating Muslims with the practice of magic, the poets of the *chansons de geste* were transferring to them what early Christian apologists, notably the third-century Greek-writing Christian Origen, had said about the religious practices of people who subscribed to faiths other than Christianity. According to Origen, magic was what these people were performing when they thought that they were calling on their gods. By this means, early Christian apologists entrenched the suggestion of their Scripture that magic was something that people other than Christians or Jews did. The thinking of these early Christian writers contributed to the association of Muslims with magic in the *chansons de geste* of the twelfth century (slightly earlier, in the case of *La Chanson de Roland*).

I also explore here some of the implications of associating Muslims with the practice of magic in the Middle Ages. Since the eighteenth century, the 'Orient' has been represented as a place of magic, an image of it that the *Arabian Nights* helped to create.[6] The idea that the Orient is a place of magic has contributed to its exoticism for people in the West, exciting in them what Edward Said called – famously – 'the

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25 (Paris: Champion, 1919 and 1921), l. 3816. On this line in *La Chanson d'Aspremont*, compare Bancourt, *Les Musulmans dans les chansons de geste*, I.467; Bancourt does not note the 'enchantment' credited to the Muslims of Antioch in *La Chanson d'Antioche*. For a recent discussion of the representation of the First Crusade in *La Chanson d'Antioche*, see Bernard Guidot, 'Quelques caractéristiques d'épisodes saillants de la *Chanson d'Antioche*', in *Croisades? Approches littéraires, historiques et philologiques*, ed. Jean-Charles Herbin and Marie-Geneviève Grossel (Valenciennes: Presses universitaires de Valenciennes, 2009), pp. 51-70.

[5] Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), especially pp. 129-64; Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

[6] On magic and magicians in *The Arabian Nights*, see, for example, Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*, 2nd ed. (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2005), especially pp. 178-213.

blandishments of curiosity' about the Orient.[7] But in the Middle Ages, what Christian Scripture said about magic often hung heavily over how it was represented in vernacular writing. In Christian Scripture – Judeo-Christian Scripture, in fact – magic is represented as a loathsome practice, one that is hated by God. People who practise magic are defying God, and risk having God's wrath visited upon them. When the poets of the *chansons de geste* portrayed Muslims as practitioners of magic, therefore, they were signalling that Muslims were doing something that was displeasing to God – something that added to the displeasure that Muslims were causing God when – as the poets of the *chansons de geste* also suggested – they worshipped gods other than him, and worshipped their gods through idols. In practising magic, Muslims were doing something that courted God's wrath just as much as their alleged idolatry did. The poets of the *chansons de geste* told how God's wrath had been visited on Muslims in the past, via the Christians who defeated them in battle. In the Crusades, Christians would defeat Muslims (Christians hoped) once again.

The study of magic in medieval literature has been somewhat atomised, directed in the Anglophone world mostly to discussion of magic (or of what modern scholarship has perceived to be magic) in romances in Middle English.[8] In order properly to understand the ideological weight that the practice of magic carries in medieval literature, I argue that it is necessary to take a 'long view' of the subject: to go back to its origins in the very earliest medieval vernacular literature, and then to the writings – further back still – that shaped the ideas that this literature expresses. Historians of magic in the Middle Ages have argued that representations of magic in medieval vernacular literature are expressions of the fervid imaginations of its authors.[9] I argue instead that the ideas that surround magic in medieval literature reflect authors' engagement with writing that preceded their own, and with some of the thinking that this writing institutionalised.

Magic and the East

Etymologically, magic is what the Magoi did. The Magoi were a tribe that Herodotus wrote about in his *Histories* in the fifth century BCE, giving magic a name for future centuries. Herodotus claimed that the Magoi were a tribe that were amongst the Medes, a people who lived in Asia. They provided lower-class Persians with

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[7] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), p. 159.

[8] See especially Corinne Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), and, before that, Helen Cooper, 'Magic That Does Not Work', *Medievalia et Humanistica* N.S. 7 (1976), 131-46, reprinted, with revisions, as a chapter in Cooper's *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Saunders has pursued the subject of magic in romances further, most recently in 'Magic in Literature: Romance Transformations', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), pp. 355-70.

[9] See, for example, Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): Kieckhefer writes of the 'at times quite fanciful notion of magic' that characterises products of French 'courtly culture', including romances, from the twelfth century onwards (p. 17).

priests, who both interpreted dreams, and performed sacrifices. They cast spells to make a storm subside – 'or maybe', Herodotus suggested, the storm subsided 'of its own accord'.[10] Herodotus attributed to the Magoi practices that distinguished them from other peoples.[11] He also associated them – and what they did – with the world that lay beyond Europe: a world that people in Europe thought of, nebulously, as 'the East'.

We see Herodotus's association of magic with the East echoed in later writing in Latin. In his *Natural History*, notably, Pliny the Elder said that magic had its origins in the East. But for Pliny, it was not the tribe of the Magoi who were first responsible for magic. It was an individual called Zoroaster, who had invented magic in Persia, Pliny claimed, six thousand years before the death of the philosopher Plato.[12] Pliny regarded the East as the hotbed of magic still in his own day. He observed that 'the kings of kings' in the East were in thrall to it. But Pliny knew that magic was no longer confined to the part of the world in which it had originated. He recorded that it was especially popular in Thessaly, a region of Greece that was notorious for the practice of magic in the ancient world. Pliny claimed that magic was practised in 'the Gallic provinces' too. And in Britain, it had come to be practised 'with such grand rituals that it might seem that she [Britain] had given it to the Persians'.[13] Pliny was overtly contemptuous of magic, and of those who practised it. He thought it was utter quackery, and in his *Natural History* he repeatedly, even obsessively, made fun of the claims that were made for it, contrasting these with the genuine wonders that were to be found everywhere in the natural world.

When the Christian gospeller Matthew told of the *magoi* (in Matthew's Greek) who had come from the East to visit the newly born Christ in Bethlehem, he too was perpetuating the association of magic with the East that Herodotus had established several centuries earlier. Matthew's *magoi* had seen the star that marked Christ's birth in the East, and – since people who practised magic were often thought to be able to understand what the stars betokened – the *magoi* of Matthew's gospel knew what the star signified. They travelled to Jerusalem from their home in the East, and then on to Bethlehem, where the star had come to rest above the place where the infant Christ was lying.[14] The *magoi* fell down, and worshipped Christ – a passage of Scripture that led the influential second-century North African Christian apologist Tertullian to claim that when the *magoi* effectively became the very first Christians, they abandoned the practice of magic that had defined them previously.[15] Magic, as we shall see, was incompatible with being a Christian – and being true Christians, the *magoi* instantly recognised the error of their former ways.

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[10] *The 'Histories' of Herodotus of Halicarnassus*, trans. Harry Carter (London: Oxford University Press, 1962); Herodotus writes about the Magoi in Books I, III and VII of his *Histories*. For his account of Magoi's attempts to quell a storm, see VII.191.

[11] Ibid., I.140: 'The Magoi differ much from other men, and are not like the priests of Egypt'.

[12] Pliny, *Natural History*, Book XXX, II.3, in vol. VIII of the 10-volume Loeb edition and translation of Pliny's work, ed. and trans. W.H.S. Jones (London: Heinemann, 1963).

[13] Ibid., Book XXX, I.2, II.6, and IV.13.

[14] Matthew 2:1-11.

[15] Tertullian, *De idolatria*, ed. and trans. J.H. Waszink and J.C.M. van Winden (Leiden: Brill, 1987), p. 37.

Both the writings of classical antiquity and Christian Scripture, then, taught people in Europe that magic was essentially a practice of geographical otherness, something that was performed by people who lived in, and came from, a place that was not part of the West. For people in Western Christendom in the era of the Crusades, Muslims were associated with this same place.

When Islam first arose as a faith, Christians who commented on it did not associate it with any particular part of the world. Writing in the first half of the eighth century, the monk John of Damascus associated it instead with other faiths that deviated from orthodox Christianity: faiths that he regarded as Christian heresies, belief systems that diverged in their teachings from what 'proper' Christianity taught. John noted that Christ figured in Islam, but that what Islam taught about him was laughably erroneous: that its teachings about Christ constituted what John called 'risible doctrines'.[16] John told his readers that Islam claimed that Christ had been created; all good Christians knew that God, of whom Christ was a person, was uncreated. Islam taught that Christ was a prophet of God; he was, rather, true Christians knew, God himself, incarnated. Islam even claimed that Mary, Christ's mother, was the sister of Moses and Aaron, the two brothers who, according to Exodus, had outdone the magicians of Pharaoh by performing true miracles, not just conjuring tricks. John categorised Islam as an 'Ishmaelite' heresy: a faith subscribed to by descendants of Ishmael, the son of Abraham and his wife Sarai's handmaid, Hagar. Ishmael's marginal existence had been prophesied to Hagar before his birth, and it materialised after the pregnant Hagar had been ejected from the household in which she had been employed.[17] Marginal faiths were what Ishmael's marginalised descendants adhered to; for John of Damascus, Islam was just such a faith. John clinched his claim that Islam was an Ishmaelite heresy by explaining – fictively – the etymology of the alternative name by which Muslims were known: 'Saracens'. John claimed that Saracens derived their name from Sarai, Abraham's wife, who had cast out Hagar, Ishmael's mother, from her home.[18] This gave the 'Saracens' some association with the Scripture that was the foundation of the Christian faith. But Saracens had gone awry in their beliefs, as their deviant ancestor, Ishmael, had more or less ensured that they would.

John of Damascus wrote about Islam from his home in Syria. When people in the West came to evoke Islam in the era of the Crusades, they did so by associating it with the East. When, in 1095, Pope Urban II called on Christians to take Jerusalem back from the Muslims into whose control the city had fallen, he is reported to have called Muslims '"a race from the kingdom of the Persians"'.[19] In his account of the First Crusade, written initially in 1108 and then modified in 1121, Guibert of Nogent,

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[16] Jean Damascène, *Ecrits sur l'Islam*, ed. and trans. Raymond le Coz, Sources chrétiennes 383 (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1992), p. 211. Islam is Heresy 100 for John in his *Liber haeresorum* (*Book of Heresies*). For a discussion of John's perceptions of Islam, see Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The 'Heresy of the Ishmaelites'* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

[17] Genesis 16:1-16.

[18] Jean Damascène, *Ecrits sur l'Islam*, p. 21.

[19] *The 'Historia Iherosolimitana' of Robert the Monk*, ed. D. Kempf and M.G. Bull (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013), p. 5. Robert wrote his history of Jerusalem, which includes an account of the speech that Pope Urban made at the Council of Clermont, around twenty-five years after the speech was delivered; whether it represents accurately what Urban actually said is unclear.

a monk from northern France, identified Islam as a faith to which 'Easterners' subscribed.[20] Guibert's conceptualisation of Islam overlapped with John of Damascus's, because, like John, Guibert represented Islam as a heresy. But for Guibert, Islam was 'the pagan heresy', a label that equated its adherents with 'pagans', just as the poets of the *chansons de geste* identified Muslims as 'pagans' also.

If Muslims were 'Eastern' people for those in the West in the Middle Ages, then, it was hardly surprising that Muslims should be thought of as practising magic: magic was one of the things that people in the East 'did'. It was in the East that magic had been invented, and it still exerted even more of a fascination in the East than it did anywhere else, as Pliny had noted. Geographically, Muslims were outsiders to the West, and so, essentially, was magic, even if, as Pliny claimed, it had put down very strong roots in the West as well. Magic came to be associated with Muslims, however, not just because it, like they, belonged in the East. Magic was associated with Muslims because it had long been represented as a practice of people who were not Christians – who were 'other' than Christians religiously, not just 'other' than people (Christians) in the West geographically. In the era of the Crusades, Muslims were *the* religious 'other' for Christians.

Magic and Religious 'Others'

Judeo-Christian Scripture represents magic as something that people other than the children of Israel did. Or at least, in the Greek version of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint – the version of the Old Testament that was read by the Fathers of the Christian Church – practices that were routinely thought of as ones that magicians performed are practices performed by people who were other than the children of Israel. These practices include the administration of drugs – the means by which Circe worked her magic in classical myth – and enchantment, a staple of magical activity in every age. They also include necromancy, the practice of summoning the spirits of the dead in the belief that those spirits could divulge what was going to happen in the future. All of these activities are ones that Moses, according to Deuteronomy, forbade to the children of Israel, telling them that they must not do what was endemic amongst the people who were currently occupying the land that God had promised to the Israelites:

> 'you will not learn to act in accordance with the abominations of those peoples. There will not be found in you a man who purifies his son or his daughter through fire, a man who practises divination, a man who observes presages of the future and auguries, a drugger [*pharmakos* in the Septuagint], an enchanter, an oracle inspired by spirits, or an interpreter of prodigies, a man who interrogates the dead. Because the man who acts in this way is an abomination [*bdelygmata*] for the Lord, your God; indeed, because

[20] Guibert of Nogent, *'Dei gesta per Francos' et cinq autres textes*, ed. R.B.C. Huygens, Corpvs Christianorvm Continuatio Mediaeualis 127A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), pp. 89-94: Islam, according to Guibert, is a faith 'Orientalium' ('of Easterners'). For an English translation of Guibert's *Dei gesta*, see Robert Levine's *'The Deeds of God through the Franks': A Translation of Guibert de Nogent's 'Gesta Dei per Francos'* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1997).

> of these abominations, the Lord will extirpate them from your presence. You will be perfect before the Lord, your God; for these peoples, the men you are being given as your inheritance, will listen to presages and predictions; but the Lord, your God, has not allowed you to act in this way.'[21]

Moses identified the people who were occupying the Promised Land according to their ethnicity: in the Greek of the Septuagint, the word that is used for what is translated above as 'peoples' is *ethnoi*. But those 'peoples' were also ones that did not subscribe to the same religious beliefs as the children of Israel: above all, to the belief that there was a single God. And so what Moses is reported as saying here in Deuteronomy establishes magical practices as endemic amongst people who adhered to faiths other than the faith to which the children of Israel adhered, not just people who were different ethnically from them. Magical practices were not to be engaged in by those who subscribed to the faith of the children of Israel; they were practices of people who subscribed to other faiths, who angered the one, true God by persisting in their practices.

Moses' injunction to the children of Israel in this passage in Deuteronomy is complemented by other passages in Judeo-Christian Scripture. According to Leviticus, God wanted the children of Israel to avoid 'enchanters' (*epaoidai* in the Septuagint), who would spoil the purity of God's chosen people if they had anything to do with them: '"Do not pursue diviners, and do not turn to enchanters, to be polluted by them"' (Leviticus 19:31). Exodus reported God's command to the children of Israel to destroy any magicians whom they came across – an injunction that would later be used by the prosecutors of witchcraft to justify what they were doing: '"You will not allow magicians [*pharmakous*] to remain alive"' (Exodus 22:18).[22] Anybody who disobeyed God's commands and did indeed meddle with people who practised magic courted God's wrath: '"If somebody turns to diviners or enchanters, and prostitutes himself with them, I shall set my face against that person, and shall destroy him from the midst of his people"' (Leviticus 20:6). Such verses in Scripture made very clear that not just practising magic, but exerting any curiosity about it was entirely incompatible with abiding by God's laws. Adherents of Judeo-Christian Scripture were not to be contaminated by magic in any way; magic was to remain outside the fold of those who worshipped God. Magic was unsuitable for those who worshipped God; it was a practice of those who did not, not of those who did.

This was why Tertullian in the second century had to redefine who the *magoi* of Matthew's gospel were. When they became Christians, the *magoi* could no longer be *magoi*. Being a Christian meant abjuring the magic that, the Scripture of Christians

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[21] Deuteronomy 18:9-14. For the Septuagint, see the two-volume edition by Constantin Von Tischendorf (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1887); this has been translated into modern French (as *La Bible d'Alexandrie*: the Septuagint was produced in Alexandria) under the general editorship of Marguerite Harl, Gilles Dorival and Olivier Munnich (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1986-2005).

[22] I translate *pharmakous* as 'magicians' here as I would argue that it is being used as a synonym for these. In the Latin 'Vulgate' version of Christian Scripture that was produced in the fourth century, *pharmakous* was translated into the singular *maleficus*, 'somebody who commits evil deeds', implicitly through magic. In the English version of Scripture 'authorised' by James I, Exodus 22:18 reads 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live'.

made clear, God deplored. The *magoi* became ex-*magoi* – even if Scripture did not make explicit that this is what had happened.

There was an additional reason why, for early Christians, magic had to be a practice of people who were not Christians – why it was not something that was suitable for Christians themselves. This was that people who performed magic effectively competed with Christ, because they performed feats that resembled Christ's miracles – the chief proof of his divinity for people who believed that he was indeed divine. The feats performed by magicians jeopardised other people's faith that Christ alone was divine, perhaps even that Christ was divine at all. After all, it could be hard to differentiate the feats that a magician performed from the miracles that Christ had performed.[23] Multiple apocryphal books of Scripture told how Simon *magus* had led people to think that he was a god when he performed his feats, especially his signature feat of flying over Rome.[24] Acts of the Apostles (8:9-24) told how Simon had adopted the Christian faith, and yet he was so captivated by the miracles that he saw Peter perform that he wanted to be able to do the same things, and offered Peter money in return for the ability to do them. In apocryphal accounts of Simon's activities, his backsliding extended to his resumption of his practice of magic after he had nominally become a Christian – something for which God punished him by bringing one of his displays of flying to an abrupt end. The narrative made clear that Christianity and magic were not compatible with each other.

Magic, then, was always a practice of people other than Christians. During the first centuries of the Christian faith, however, it also became assimilated to the religious practices that people who were not Christians performed – or rather,

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[23] The difficulty of distinguishing divinely inspired miracles from feats of magic worked the other way too: just as a magician could look like God, or a god, so God could be thought a magician. In the second century, the pagan Celsus wrote an attack on people who believed that Christ was divine, claiming that the supposed miracles that he had performed were just the conjuring tricks of a magician. To confuse matters further, early Christian iconography identifies Christ by having him hold a wand in his hand. This was not intended to signify that he was a magician; rather, it was Christian sculptors' way of conveying to people that Christ had been a miracle-worker. Celsus's attack on Christians has been lost, but it has been reconstructed from Origen's response to it, his *Contra Celsum*: see Celsus, *On the True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians*, trans. R. Joseph Hoffmann (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). On Christian iconography depicting Christ holding a wand, see Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, revd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), especially pp. 54-91; and on competing beliefs about who was a magician, who divine, Robert Knapp, *The Dawn of Christianity: People and Gods in a Time of Magic and Miracles* (London: Profile Books, 2017). Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1978) continues the debate about whether Jesus *was* a magician or divine.

[24] See, for example, *The Acts of Peter*, and *The Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Peter*, in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, trans. J.K. Elliott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 399-421, and 421-3; and *The Acts of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul*, trans. Alexander Walker, in *The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, The Clementina, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syriac Documents, Remains of the First Ages*, Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325, vol. 8 (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1886), pp. 477-86.

perhaps, the religious practices of such people became assimilated to magic. The processes by which this conflation of ideas came about are complex. They go back to another of the things that was stated in the Old Testament. And they involve one of the teachings of Plato too.

For both Jews and Christians, there is only one God. And so the gods that were being worshipped by people who did not subscribe to the Jewish or Christian faiths could not be gods at all. In Psalm 95:5, what these gods were was redefined for the children of Israel: 'All the gods of the peoples [*ethnōn* in the Septuagint] are demons [*daimonia*]'. The idea that people who did not worship God were worshipping demons was reiterated in the New Testament, in the first of the letters that St. Paul wrote to the Christians of Corinth: 'What the peoples sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God' (I Cor. 10:20).[25] Paul made Christianity incompatible with worship of the demons that were what the gods being worshipped by people other than Christians were. As God himself had told the children of Israel, he was a jealous God – one who did not tolerate worship of deities other than him (which were not in fact deities at all).[26] 'I do not want you to be made associates of demons', Paul told the Corinthian Christians; 'you cannot drink the chalice of the Lord and the chalice of demons; you cannot be partakers of the table of the Lord and the table of demons' (I Cor. 10:20-21). The 'peoples' that Paul referred to were the polytheists of the Roman Empire, in whose religion, Paul insisted, Christians were not to dabble. They were the contemporary instantiation of the 'peoples' to whom the Psalmist had referred – and the 'peoples' to whom Moses had alluded in Deuteronomy also.

But what were 'demons', exactly? In ancient Greek philosophy, demons had been conceptualised as beings that were half-divine and half-human, thus bridging through their very nature the ontological distinction between mortals and immortals. Since they were between mortals and immortals in their nature, demons readily served as intermediaries between the gods and men, men and the gods. They communicated to men anything that the gods wanted to say to men, and they transmitted, equally, men's prayers and petitions to the gods. The demons might even mediate the gods' powers to men, if they were asked to do so in the right way. Morally, demons were neutral. They might do bad things, but they could just as well perform deeds that could be considered good.[27] Understood in this way, the demons figured in Plato's *Timaeus*, where they were listed amongst the orders of creation that Plato described.[28] It was in the *Symposium*, however, that Plato provided the fullest account of what the demons were, and what they might do. What Plato said about the demons in the *Symposium* was well known to early Christians, as we shall see, although those Christians rather filtered Plato's thinking about these intriguing creatures.

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[25] Paul was ascribing to people other than Christians what God, according to the Old Testament, had identified as a former practice of the children of Israel: see Leviticus 17:7, in which God is said to have told Moses that the children of Israel must not '"offer their sacrifices to demons"' any more.

[26] Exodus 20:5; 34:14.

[27] On pre-Christian (and Christian) thinking about demons, see Dale B. Martin, *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[28] Plato, *Timaeus*, in *Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles*, ed. and trans. R.G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library 234 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 40a-e.

There was an obvious reason why Christians could not accept everything that Plato had said about the demons. This stemmed from the fact that for Christians, divinity resided exclusively in God – the God whom they worshipped. This meant that no other being could be divine, or even half-divine, which is what Plato had claimed the demons were. If the demons could not be the creatures that Plato had claimed they were, however, there was not immediate consensus amongst Christians about what they were instead. Tertullian came to the conclusion that the demons had to be the souls of dead people who had been wicked during their lifetimes – a conclusion that was not unreasonable, since the Second Epistle of Peter stated that God had consigned to Tartarus the angels that had sinned, and in classical mythology (which Tertullian knew well), Tartarus was the area of the underworld that was reserved, precisely, for the souls of people who had been wicked while they had lived.[29] But Peter's epistle did say that the angels that had fallen into Tartarus *were* angels: not human beings, whether they had been wicked or not. And so finally Christianity accepted that the demons were, in fact, the angels that had rebelled against God – the ones that had sinned, as Peter's epistle specified.[30] Tertullian's alternative understanding of the demons (which suggested that they had been people, rather than angels) persisted amongst some Christians ('Tertullianists'), but the Church eventually branded their thinking heretical.[31]

The decision that demons were the angels that had fallen had important repercussions for what Judeo-Christian (and just Christian) Scripture had said concerning the demons. If demons were what people who did not believe in God were worshipping, as the Psalmist had asserted, it was not just that people who did not believe in God were worshipping gods that were not gods. They were worshipping the very beings that were God's eternal enemies – the beings that had not only rebelled against God, but that were sworn to extending their fight against him into all eternity. The 'peoples' were worshipping beings that wanted to lure human beings to perdition, as a means of avenging themselves on the God who had expelled them from heaven. Demons, as the Christian apologist Lactantius put it, writing in the fourth century, were 'defiled and desperate spirits which roam all over the earth, and work for the perdition of people as solace for their own perdition'.[32] They were, St. Augustine affirmed, early in the fifth century, 'spirits whose only desire is to do harm, who are

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[29] See especially *Tertulliani 'De anima'*, ed. J.H. Waszink (Amsterdam: J.M. Meulenhoff, 1947), chapter LVII, and compare 2 Peter 2:4.

[30] The details of Scripture that invited the equation of demons with the fallen angels are discussed in David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[31] Compare Isidore of Seville's seventh-century *Etymologies*, in which Tertullianists ('Tertullianista', 'who believe the souls of human sinners are turned into demons after death') are included amongst Isidore's long list of Christian heresies (VIII.v.60). See the English translation of Isidore's work by Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and for the original Latin *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi 'Etymologiarvm' sive 'Originvm' libri XX*, ed. W.M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911).

[32] Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, trans. Anthony Bowen and Peter Garnsey, Translated Texts for Historians 40 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), II.14.11. For the original Latin, see Lactance, *Institutions divines*, Livre II, ed. and trans. (into modern French) Pierre Monat, Sources chrétiennes 337 (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1987).

completely alien from any kind of justice, swollen with arrogance, livid with envy [of human beings, who had a chance of entering the heaven that the demons themselves had forfeited], and full of crafty deception'.[33] In defining the demons in this way, Augustine was refuting the understanding of them that had been promulgated by Apuleius, best known now as the author of the second-century proto-novel *The Golden Ass*, but the *bête noire* of Augustine primarily because he had written a treatise that subscribed to what Plato had claimed about the demons, *The God of Socrates*. In this work, Apuleius had repeated Plato's claim that the demons were semi-divine.[34] Augustine, as a Christian, knew otherwise. And so when Augustine claimed that the gods that were being worshipped by polytheists in his own day were demons, echoing what the Psalmist had said when he did so, he meant that those demons were what his Christian faith had decided they were, not what Apuleius had represented them as being. Augustine told a correspondent that he had written *The City of God* 'against those who maintain that the worship of the gods – I would rather say, of the demons – leads to happiness in this life'.[35] These demons were the fallen, depraved beings that previous Christians had decided they were.

Armed with this understanding of what the demons were, early Christians attacked polytheists by claiming that it was demons that were doing everything that polytheists believed was being done by their gods. Polytheists liked to think that their gods sometimes deigned to speak to them through oracles. Christians affirmed that it was not any god that spoke to people through an oracle: it was a demon.[36] Sometimes, polytheists thought, their gods impelled the idols through which the gods were worshipped to act in prodigious ways: to quiver, for example, or to weep, perhaps even to emit words. Christians claimed that it was demons that were animating the idols, or speaking through them. Attracted to the smell of the sacrifices that were presented to idols, like the carnal creatures that they were to Christians, demons skulked round about idols, often entering them, so that they could not be seen by the

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[33] Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans* III: Books VIII-XI, ed. and trans. David S. Wiesen, Loeb Classical Library 413 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), VIII.22 (p. 101).

[34] For *The God of Socrates*, see Apulée, *Opuscules philosophiques ('Du dieu de Socrate', 'Platon et sa doctrine', 'Du monde') et fragments*, ed. and trans. Jean Beaujeu (Paris: Société d'Edition 'Les Belles Lettres', 1973), pp. 19-45. On the (semi-)divinity of the demons, see especially p. 26. Augustine's reaction to Apuleius's Platonism is discussed in, for example, Robert H.F. Carver, *The Protean Ass: The 'Metamorphoses' of Apuleius from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[35] Augustine was writing to one Firmus, to whom he sent a manuscript of *The City of God*. See C. Lambot, 'Lettre inédite de S. Augustin relative au *De civitate Dei*', *Revue bénédictine* 51 (1939), 109-21.

[36] See, for example, the treatise *On the Vanity of Idols* by Cyprian (*c.* 200-258), in *The Writings of Cyprian*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325, vol. 8 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1868), pp. 443-51. See p. 447 for Cyprian's claim that it is demons that inspire oracles, mixing 'falsehood with truth' in the process. Compare also Marcus Minucius Felix's late second-century *Octavius*, ed. and trans. (for example) Gerald H. Rendall, Loeb Classical Library 250 (London: William Heinemann, 1960). The pronouncements of oracles are amongst the many works of demons that Minucius Felix lists in section xxvi of his work.

people who were worshipping them – them, the demons, not the gods that the people thought they were worshipping.[37] Christians even thought that demons might control the flight patterns and the cries emitted by birds, or manipulate the entrails of animals that had been sacrificed.[38] How birds flew and what cries they emitted were interpreted by augurs, in the belief that these phenomena were means by which the gods imparted information to mortals about what was going to happen in the future. Haruspices read meaning into the patterns formed by the entrails of sacrificed animals, believing that through these too the gods signalled information that was not otherwise discernible by human beings. But for Christians, again, it was not any gods that were manipulating these phenomena: it was demons, which delighted in encouraging people to persist in the false faith that the people who were worshipping them were adhering to. When people called on their 'gods', perhaps tried to persuade them to be present in a shrine or a sanctuary that was dedicated to them, they were actually, Christians thought, calling on demons. And that is where Christians came to perceive an overlap with what magicians were doing when they practised magic.

The idea that when people practise magic, what at least some of them do is call on demons is so familiar to us – especially because of different retellings of the legend of Faust – that it is easy to lose sight of where the idea originates. The seminal statement of the notion is, in fact, in Plato's *Symposium*, in which Plato has the priestess Diotima explain to Socrates what a *daimonion* is. The topic crops up in the text because via the format of a dinner party conversation, the guests whom Plato imagines present at the party, including Diotima and Socrates, try to define what love is, and Diotima defines love as a *daimonion*, a demon, in Plato's understanding of that concept.[39] Having established the intermediate nature of demons – that their nature is between that of mortals and that of the gods – and the intermediate role that demons play, as agents of the gods to men, and of men to the gods, Diotima affirms that it is by means of a demon that '"every kind of magic and wizardry [*magganeian ... kai goēteian*]"' is performed, as well as any feat of divination. The demons are the means by which feats of magic are fulfilled. In saying that they are also the means by which people perform divination, Diotima was claiming something that Christians' thinking on the demons subsequently would converge with perfectly. Christians, as we have seen, thought that when augurs and haruspices divined the future, it was the demons (not the gods) that inspired their prophecies. Diotima claimed that the demons were behind any divinatory pronouncement that was made too. But what Diotima also said established that what the demons were was different from what Christians would come to believe them to be. According to Diotima, the demons were semi-divine creatures. For Christians, they were the angels that had fallen.

If it was demons that enabled feats of magic – as well as feats of divination – then anybody who wanted to perform a feat of magic would do well to call on the

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[37] Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, xxvii; Cyprian, *On the Vanity of Idols*, p. 447. On demons' fondness for the smell emitted by sacrifices, see Tertullian, *Apology*, ed. and trans. T.R. Glover in the same Loeb volume as Minucius Felix's *Octavius*. Tertullian claims that 'the blood, the smoke, the stinking holocausts of dead beasts [*putidis rogis pecorum*]' constitutes the diet of demons (pp. 128-9).

[38] Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, xxvi; Cyprian, *On the Vanity of Idols*, p. 443; Tertullian, *Apology*, p. 165 (section xxxv).

[39] Plato, *Symposium*, in *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*, ed. and trans. W.R.M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library 166 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925; reprd 1991), 202e-203a.

demons in the hope that he could cajole them into helping him. This was the essence of the practice of magic as far as Platonists were concerned. It was what magic consisted of for the Platonist Apuleius in the second century CE; in his own pursuit of magic of this kind, he found himself under arrest, suspected of using his camaraderie with the demons to kill his wife, so that he could help himself to her fortune.[40] From the fifteenth century onwards, neo-Platonists such as Marsilio Ficino revived the strategy of appealing to demons in the hope that the demons would assist in achieving whatever feat of magic the person who appealed to them wanted to accomplish.[41] But calling on demons for Christians was not the exalted exploit that Platonists thought it was. It meant calling on the degraded creatures that Christians thought the demons were: on the beings that human beings should be doing everything in their power to avoid.

It is the case that in both the Jewish and the Christian faiths, magic had always been connected with the demons (understood more or less as Christians came to think of them). In *The Book of Enoch*, a Jewish work that exerted a huge influence on early Christian apologists, including Tertullian and, later, Augustine, magic is said to have first been taught to human beings by the angels that had fallen.[42] This was a different origin for magic from the Eastern origin that classical writers had claimed for it. It does not seem to have been the case, however, that Christian writers initially thought of feats of magic (or at least of all feats of magic) as being *fulfilled* by the demons, so that one would do well to call on those demons if one had a feat of magic to perform. In part, these ideas emerged in Christians' writings because educated Christians knew what Plato had said in the *Symposium* about the role played by the demons in feats of magic.

Tertullian also played an important part in convincing Christians that feats of magic relied on the demons. This was because of Tertullian's unique 'take' on what the demons were: the souls of people who had been wicked during their lifetimes. This meant that if somebody was calling on the spirits of the dead in the hope that he or she (necromancers were often female, as the necromancing woman of En-dor in the Old Testament illustrates) might be told something about the future, the necromancer was calling on demons. The demons were the same thing as the spirits of dead people – or at least of those dead people who had been wicked while they were alive.[43] Magicians were often thought of as performing necromancy, as we have seen. And so sometimes a magician called on demons. But it is clear that Plato's *Symposium* also played an important part in making Christians think that magicians relied on demons

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[40] The accusations against Apuleius are represented in his defence of himself, his *Apologia*, in which he distinguishes his 'Platonic' magic from the kind of magic practised by other people. The treatise can be read in modern English in *The 'Apologia' and 'Florida' of Apuleius of Madaura*, trans. H.E. Butler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909).

[41] For a recent discussion of Ficino's use of Plato and philosophers who developed Plato's thinking, see Brian P. Copenhaver, *Magic in Western Culture: From Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[42] See the version of *The Book of Enoch* known as *1 Enoch*, translated in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1: *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, trans. James H. Charlesworth (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983), chapter 7.

[43] Tertullian writes of necromancy as the practice of summoning demons (the souls of dead wicked people) in *De anima*, chapter LVII. For the woman of En-dor, to whom Tertullian refers, see 1 Samuel 28:3-25.

for what they did – in fact, everything that they did. In his *Divine Institutes*, written early in the fourth century, Lactantius quoted what Diotima says in the *Symposium* regarding the nature of demons. He then paraphrased what Diotima says in that work regarding the crucial role that the demons have in the feats that magicians perform: 'all the skill and power of *magi* depend upon the influence of these beings [demons]'.[44] Lactantius knew the *Symposium* because – like other Christian apologists – he had been educated in classical philosophy, as well as in classical literature.[45] He treated the claims made by Diotima in Plato's work selectively, disputing what she had said about the nature of demons, but restating what she had said about one of the things that demons do.

One reason why Christians embraced what Diotima had said about the demons' role in magic was because what the demons were for them fitted so well with what magicians were thought to do. Magicians were notorious – outside Christian circles as well as inside – for doing things that looked other than they really were: for producing illusions.[46] As the angels that had fallen, demons, for Christians, were renowned for their deceitfulness, which was one of the major ways in which they lured human beings into their traps. The deceptiveness of the feats that magicians performed was therefore the perfect forum for the deceptiveness by which the demons were characterised. As Cyprian, a third-century Christian apologist from North Africa, claimed, it was the 'impure and wandering spirits' that the demons were that gave magicians (*magi*) the 'power either for mischief or for mockery'[47] – something for which they were famous.

The idea that somebody might well call on the demons to assist him if he wanted to conduct some magic – since it was the demons that fulfilled all feats of magic – entered the consciousness of Christians. But Christians also thought, of course, that people who worshipped gods other than the one, true God called on the demons when they called on those gods, because demons were what the gods of people other than Christians were. There was very little – if any – difference, then, as Christians saw matters, between what people who were not Christians were doing when they called on their gods, and what people might do when they were practising magic. What non-Christians were doing when they were practising their religion could even be regarded *as* magic, as far as Christians were concerned. This is exactly what Origen suggested, when he controverted Celsus, the Greek philosopher who had

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[44] Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, II.14.10. The Latin reads 'Magorum … ars omnis … potentia horum adspirationibus constat'.

[45] The classic work about the classical education of the Christian apologists, specifically Augustine, is Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, Bibliothèque des Ecoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 145 (Paris: Editions de Boccard, 1938). Specifically on Augustine also, see too Harald Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics*, 2 vols (Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1967); and on the Christian apologists more widely, Hagendahl, *Latin Fathers and the Classics: A Study on the Apologists, Jerome and Other Christian Writers*, Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia 6 (Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1958).

[46] Celsus appears to have typified magicians as making 'the dead heroes of the past appear – indeed sitting at long tables and eating imaginary cakes and dishes', and as making things move about 'as if they were alive': see Hoffmann's reconstruction of *On the True Doctrine*, p. 60.

[47] Cyprian, *On the Vanity of Idols*, p. 447

ridiculed the Christian faith in the second century. Origen said that when people who were not Christians asked their gods to be present in the idols through which they worshipped their gods, they invoked those gods through 'certain magical spells [*hypo tinōn magganeiōn*]'.[48] By means of these spells, demons were called into the idols – not the gods that the people thought they were summoning into them. When the holiest sites of the 'pagan' religion had been dedicated, Origen claimed, 'curious spells' had been recited. These spells had summoned demons to the sites – again, not any god that the people thought they might be persuading to be present. The 'curious spells' were what 'those who devote their time to worshipping demons by means of magical arts [*magganeion therapeia*]' had uttered.[49] Thus Origen conflated the religious worship of people who were not Christians with the practice of magic. As Moses had established in Deuteronomy, 'magical arts' had always been associated with people who were other than the children of Israel. When those magical arts became associated with the practice of calling on demons, they could be blended with the invocation of demons that was what the religious rituals of pagans comprised for Christians.

In the *chansons de geste*, the religious practices of pagans are assimilated to magic also. But the 'pagans' here are Muslims, whom the poets of the *chansons de geste* conceptualise as just like the pagans who were living when the Christian apologists – including Origen – were writing. Like those pagans, Muslims in the *chansons de geste* are polytheists, although the gods that they worship are not always the same gods as were worshipped by pagans when the Christian apologists were writing. In particular, Muslims are portrayed as worshipping Mohammed, whom the Muslims in the poems regard as a god. Like the other gods that the Muslims worship, Mohammed is worshipped via an idol. Thinking that they are calling on him as a god, the Muslims of Antioch in *La Chanson d'Antioche* in fact, as the poet represents matters, call on a 'devil', which enters the idol of the 'god'. The poet suggests that the Muslims' act of calling on this devil constituted magic: it was 'par encantement', he says – 'through enchantment' – that the Muslims made the devil enter the idol.[50] In *La Chanson d'Aspremont*, the 'Saracens' in Calabria make the idols of their gods speak 'par nigromance et par encantisson' – 'through black magic and through incantation'.[51] Incantation ('encantisson') – rather than enchantment ('enc(h)antement') – is a practice that spans religious devotion and magic; it is fundamental to both. But 'nigromance' – black magic – makes clear that the poet conceptualised the Saracens' invitation to their gods to speak through their idols as magic. The poets of both *La Chanson d'Antioche* and *La Chanson d'Aspremont* represented the religious practices of Muslims as magic. They were portraying what Muslims were doing in the conduct of their religion in the same way as Origen conceptualised the religious practices of the pagans against whom he was defending his faith in the third century.

Christians had always been encouraged to associate some of the religious activities of pagans with magical practices. In Deuteronomy, Moses had mentioned

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[48] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), VII.64. For Origen's Greek here, see Origène, *Contre Celse*, tome 4 (Livres VII et VIII), ed. and trans. (into modern French) Marcel Borret, Sources chrétiennes 150 (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1969).

[49] Ibid., VII.69.

[50] Compare above, p. 1 and note 4.

[51] Ibid.

augury in more or less the same breath as the magical practices that, he said, God did not want the children of Israel to perform.[52] Augury was intrinsic to the religion of pagans; the magical practices that Moses included in his list of activities that he proscribed to the children of Israel were not. After centuries of being closely associated with magical activities in the writings of Christian apologists (including Augustine), augury was finally turned into a magical practice, in the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville, written early in the seventh century. In this enormously widely copied work, Isidore claimed that augurs *were* magicians: they were one of the many different kinds of magicians that he listed in the section of his *Etymologies* 'about magicians' ('De magis'). Haruspices were magicians for Isidore too.[53] But we can see from what is said in the *chansons de geste* that what is crucial for the identification of the religious practices of pagans with – and as – magic for the poets of these works was the idea that when pagans called on their gods, they were calling on demons. This was also what people did in magic. The involvement of both pagans and magicians with demons is pivotal to the identification of the religion of pagans with magic in the *chansons de geste*. This conflation of the pagan religion with magic is a product of Christians' processing of both Judeo-Christian Scripture and Platonic philosophy in the early centuries of the Christian faith. The poets of the *chansons de geste* represented the 'pagans' who Muslims were for them as doing the same thing in their religious practices as the pagans of many centuries earlier had been represented as doing in theirs: performing magic when they summoned the demons that they worshipped as gods.

The conflation of Muslims with the pagans of much earlier times is a phenomenon that is familiar to students of various different expressions of the thinking of people in the Middle Ages. Pictured in visual arts, Muslims are represented as the idolaters that pagans in the Roman Empire were – or, for that matter, as the 'peoples' referred to in Judeo-Christian Scripture had been before them.[54] In the *chansons de geste*, Muslims are conceptualised as idolaters too. The merging of the pagans of earlier centuries with Muslims works the other way as well. As Michael Camille noted, a fifteenth-century manuscript of the French translation of Augustine's *City of God* pictures the pagans, whom Augustine wrote his work to

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[52] Compare above, p. 6.

[53] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, VIII.ix.17-20. In Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*, the various arts practised in magic are grouped with augury and haruspicy as instances of 'things instituted by humans' (as opposed to ones instituted by God) that are 'superstitious', because they involve 'consultations and pacts … arranged and ratified with demons'. See Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans. R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), II.73-4.

[54] See especially Camille, *The Gothic Idol*, 73-164. On the assimilation of Muslims to pagans of earlier centuries, see also John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), especially pp. 105-34; Wilfrid Besnardeau, *Représentations littéraires de l'étranger au XIIe siècle: Des chansons de geste aux premières mises en roman*, Nouvelle bibiothèque du Moyen Age 83 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007), chapter 1; and Armelle Leclercq, *Portraits croisés: L'image des Francs et des Musulmans dans les textes sur la Première Croisade. Chroniques latines et arabes, chansons de geste françaises des XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, Nouvelle bibliothèque du Moyen Age 96 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2010), especially pp. 185-98.

confound, as men wearing headdresses that look like those worn by Muslims.[55] In English mystery plays from the end of the Middle Ages, the (pagan) Roman soldiers who crucified Christ are assimilated to Muslims: they repeatedly swear by Mohammed – as does Herod, even though historically he was not a pagan. Even the Devil swears by Mohammed: he is associated with Muslims, and Muslims with him.[56] In depicting Muslims as practising magic, the poets of the *chansons de geste* were representing them in a way that pagans in the Roman Empire – and much earlier pagans too – had been represented also.

The polytheism and idolatry that were transferred to Muslims in the Middle Ages were real practices of the earlier pagans with whom Muslims were conflated. The idea that pagans were practising magic when they conducted their religions, however, was one that early Christians confected. They confected it because they wanted to add to the catalogue of wrongs that pagans were committing, in Christians' eyes. Passed on to Muslims in the *chansons de geste*, magic added to the wrongs that those Muslims were portrayed as perpetrating. This justified the fate that Muslims were so often represented as incurring in the *chansons de geste*. And it justified the fate that Christians might inflict on the Muslims whom they were being encouraged to fight in the era of the Crusades.

The Wrongfulness of Magic

Judeo-Christian Scripture made clear that magical practices were abhorrent to God. Moses had called magical practices 'abominations', and anybody who cultivated them an 'abomination' himself.[57] Magical practices compounded the wrongs that people other than the children of Israel were committing. Foremost among these was the worship of gods other than the one, true God; and the worship of those gods via idols. But some of the practices that were auxiliary to the religion of the 'peoples' – people other than the children of Israel – were wrong too: augury, as we have seen, was on the list of the practices of these peoples that Moses forbade to the children of Israel, along with the magical practices that those peoples also cultivated.

Magic was wrong for Christians additionally because it had the potential to disrupt the spread of their faith. Magic, as we have seen, could produce effects that might closely resemble the miracles that Christ had performed by way of proof of his divinity – or the miracles that the disciples of Christ had performed, by way of proof that they represented the true divinity that had been incarnated in Christ. A magician could present himself as a fake Christ, or at least as some kind of god, inviting other people to believe that he was divine. In this way, a magician could take people away from the true faith of Christianity, inducing them to believe in a god who was not a god – just as pagans did.

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[55] Ibid., 130-31. The manuscript is Philadelphia Museum of Art, MS 45-65-1, which depicts 'les paiens' wearing what Camille calls 'distinctly Eastern-looking headgear' (as well as being idolaters) on fol. 64r.

[56] See, for example, the plays 'The Crucifixion', 'Moses and Pharaoh', and 'The Harrowing of Hell' in *The York Plays: A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play as Recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290*, ed. Richard Beadle, 2 vols, EETS SS 23 and 24 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 and 2013).

[57] Compare above, p. 6.

If the practice of magic involved the invocation of demons, then, for Christians, the wrongs that magic already represented were compounded. To invoke demons was to invoke the angels that had fallen, and to invoke those angels implied that one was making oneself subservient to them. One was showing those angels respect at the very least, and it might even be thought that one was doing something that was very close to worshipping them. The invocation of demons in magic thus meant a dereliction of God, and – worse – subjecting oneself to God's antagonists. This is another way in which in magic, one was doing (as far as Christians were concerned) what pagans were doing when they worshipped the gods in which they believed. They too were subjecting themselves to demons (Christians thought).

Transferred to Muslims in the *chansons de geste*, the practice of magic added to the wrongs that Muslims were committing in their religion, as the poets of the *chansons de geste* represented this. The poets portrayed Muslims as worshipping multiple gods, rather than God, and as worshipping those gods through idols, just as earlier 'pagans' had done. The wrongs that they were perpetrating in their religion invited retaliation, and the *chansons de geste* told just how retaliation had been taken on them, through Christians who had fought against, and overcome, them in the past.[58]

Like idolatry – which is represented as a truly heinous practice in Judeo-Christian Scripture, one that is as offensive to God as anything else that human beings might do[59] – magic is represented in Judeo-Christian Scripture as something that is courting the enactment of God's wrath at its performance. Moses had promised the children of Israel that God would extirpate people who practised magic (as well as the other activities that Moses enumerated to the Israelites) from their presence. Early Christians thought that God had done what he had said he would do, according to Moses in Deuteronomy, when he had caused certain magicians to come to sticky ends. The apocryphal accounts of what happened to Simon *magus* told how he had fallen from the sky when the apostles Peter and Paul begged God to put an end to his flying once and for all. This caused Simon to break multiple bones, and to sicken from his injuries so much that he eventually died from them.[60] Acts of the Apostles told of another magician, Elymas, who was a Jew, whom God struck with blindness after he performed feats of magic before the proconsul of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus.[61] The fates of these two magicians persuaded Tertullian, writing in the second century, that the practice of magic had invariably attracted God's retribution since he had been incarnated as Christ.[62] No doubt this was because following Christ's incarnation, magicians were not only doing something that was offensive to God. They were

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[58] The interest in the punishment of wrongdoing in the *chansons de geste* is discussed in the various essays in *Crimes et châtiments dans la chanson de geste*, ed. Bernard Ribémont (Paris: Klincksieck, 2008). The essays here do not, however, consider the 'crime' that the practice of magic represents, and give little attention to the punishment of transgressions of God's laws in the *chansons de geste*.

[59] God's abhorrence of idolatry is expressed in, for example, Exodus 34:17; Leviticus 19:4, 26:1, and 26:30; and Deuteronomy 5:8-9.

[60] See especially *The Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Peter*, in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, trans. Elliott, pp. 421-3. Simon's fall from the sky at the instigation of Peter and Paul is also depicted visually – splendidly – in the mosaics of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, Sicily.

[61] Acts 13:6-12.

[62] Tertullian, *De idolatria*, p. 37.

potentially impeding the spread of the Christian faith, as we have seen. There was more reason to stop the practice of magic following Christ's incarnation than there had been prior to this.

Scripture also sanctioned the destruction of magicians by men: '"You will not allow magicians to remain alive"', God had ordered the children of Israel, according to Exodus (22:18). And so when, in *La Chanson de Roland*, the Muslim 'enchanter' Siglorel meets his end at the hands (or the sword) of Turpin, the legendary fighting archbishop of the emperor Charlemagne, Turpin is enacting what the Scripture of Christians told them they should do. 'The enchanter who had been in hell', Siglorel, the poem goes on to tell us, had been in hell because Jupiter had led him there 'through his magic' ('Par artimal l'i cundoist Jupiter').[63] In this line is mingled the whole complex of thinking that I have been exploring in this discussion. The poet is evidently thinking of Jupiter as a demon, with which Siglorel has involved himself in his magic, his 'artimal'. As a demon, Jupiter resides in hell, which is where he took Siglorel after Siglorel consorted with him through his practice of magic. But Jupiter was also the king of the gods in the religion of Romans, and so he is implicitly the focus of Siglorel's 'pagan' worship as well as his 'contact' that he makes through his practice of magic. For the poet, Jupiter, as a god worshipped by Siglorel, is a demon just as much as he is a demon that has been invoked through Siglorel's magic. As a god, since he is really a demon, in the poet's consciousness, Jupiter belongs in hell just as much as he does by dint of being a demon that makes himself useful to a magician such as Siglorel. The same interplay of demons being used in magic and demons being worshipped as gods is implicit in the poet's conceptualisation of the Muslim Siglorel as it had been in earlier Christians' thinking about the pagans amongst whom they lived.

The practice of magic amongst Muslims in the *chansons de geste* – both *La Chanson de Roland* and other poems – helps to justify the defeat of Muslims by Christians that the poems so often recount. It is not just that Muslims are depicted as deserving their annihilation in the poems because of the deceitfulness with which they so often conduct their relations with Christians. Muslims in the poems infringe many of the commands that God had issued to the children of Israel in Christian Scripture, and they do many of the things that, God had made very clear to the children of Israel, offended him greatly. It is well known that Muslims in the *chansons de geste* are portrayed as worshipping false gods (including Mohammed), and as worshipping them through idols. When the poems tell how Christians triumphed over armies of Muslims, they are thus showing how Christians were agents of God's fury at the perpetration of practices that were so offensive to him. But in associating Muslims with the practice of magic, the poets of the *chansons de geste* were suggesting another way in which Muslims had earned the fate that Christians meted out to them. The practice of magic added to the offences that Muslims had committed, and justified their defeat by Christians all the more.

Such had been the fate of Muslims in the past (according to the *chansons de geste*, which do not always recount events that actually happened, far less recount them in the ways in which they actually happened). But in portraying Muslims as practitioners of magic, as well as worshippers of the wrong gods, and idolaters, the *chansons de geste* were creating an image of Muslims that added to the reasons why Christians in the twelfth century should strive to overcome Muslims who were living in their present. In associating magic with Muslims, the poets of the *chansons de*

[63] *La Chanson de Roland*, l. 1392.

geste were enhancing their audiences' motivation to hate Muslims, to view them as doing things that God detested, and to regard them as meriting the curbing of their activities that the Crusades promised to provide. In suggesting that magic was being practised in Islam, the poets of the *chansons de geste* were stoking the propaganda that aided the Church's call to crusade.

Christians in the twelfth century made clear that magic was a practice not only of Muslims who had lived in the past, in the times when the events commemorated in the *chansons de geste* occurred. Magic was practised in Islam also in the crusading present. When he told – at a considerable remove – what had happened during the First Crusade, which lasted from 1096 to 1099, William of Tyre, a Christian who was born and lived his whole life in the Holy Land, described how a group of female Muslims inside Jerusalem worked some magic on the particularly powerful siege engine that the Christians were using to try to storm the city. The Muslims in Jerusalem employed the magical services of the women as a last resort – but, William recounted, like other magicians before them, the women met an untimely end:

> It does not seem right … to pass over in silence a notable event which is said to have happened on that day [when the Christians were besieging Jerusalem]. Among their other machines outside the walls, the Christians had one which caused dreadful slaughter among the defenders by the violent impetus with which it hurled forth rocks of immense weight. When the infidels perceived that no skill of theirs could prevail against this, they brought two sorceresses [*maleficas*] to bewitch it and by their magic incantations [*magicis carminibus*] render it powerless. These women were engaged in their magic rites and divinations on the wall when suddenly a huge millstone from that very engine struck them. They, together with three girls who attended them, were crushed to death and their lifeless bodies dashed from the wall. At this sight great applause rose from the ranks of the Christian army and exultation filled the hearts of all in our camp. On the other hand, deep sorrow fell upon the people of Jerusalem because of that disaster.[64]

William's narrative – like the *chansons de geste* – shows that God was on the side of the Christian crusaders. He wanted them to take Jerusalem from the Muslims who were occupying it, rather as God had wanted the children of Israel to inhabit the land that he had promised to them, displacing from it the 'peoples' who had been occupying it in the process. The magic that William recounts was wrong, implicitly, because it aimed to impede the Christians' reconquest of Jerusalem, which was something that, in William's partisan narrative, God willed. But magic still resonated with the proscription of its practice that Christian Scripture contained. The wrong that magic constituted provided an additional justification for the fate that befell the Muslim women who deployed it in Jerusalem.

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[64] William, Archbishop of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, trans. Emily Atwater Babcock and A.C. Krey, 2 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), VIII.15 (pp. 365-6). For the original Latin of the passage quoted, see Guillaume de Tyr, *Chronique*, ed. R.B.C. Huygens, with the assistance of H.E. Mayer and G. Rösch, Corpus Christianorvm Continuatio Mediaeualis 63 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1986), pp. 406-7. On the concept of the *maleficus*, the word used by Guillaume (in its feminine plural form) to designate the 'sorceresses' in Jerusalem, see above, note 22.

When William wrote about the Muslims whom Christians confronted during the First Crusade – to the extent that he did write about them, very much focused as he is on the experience of the Christians – he did not claim that they worshipped multiple gods, or that they directed their religious worship to idols. Nor did he claim that the Muslims whom Christians confronted in the First Crusade practised magic when they were performing their religious devotions. William's account dispenses with the transference to Muslims of practices that characterised much earlier religions – and Christians' perceptions of what those practices constituted: magic, in the case of the invocations of their gods that people who worshipped those gods performed. But magic, fascinatingly, survived the jettisoning of other representations of Muslims. There is no evidence that this is because – unlike polytheism and idolatry – magic really was a practice of Muslims, or at least that it was a practice that Christians saw being performed by Muslims. Perhaps, rather, it was a practice that Christian Scripture had so indelibly associated with people who were other than Christians that, without clear evidence that magic was not practised by such people, the idea that it was persisted. Polytheism and idolatry clearly were not really practised in Islam; there was less evidence that magic was not. Magic remained a powerful tool in Christians' campaign to denigrate Islam, when other ways of denigrating it became less easy to maintain.

In the course of the thirteenth century, Latin Christendom might be thought to have acquired more ballast for thinking of Muslims as practitioners of magic. Many texts were translated from Arabic into Latin that, as far as some Christians were concerned, offered instruction on how magic might be performed.[65] However, the evidence that Christians perceived these texts to be the writings of Muslims, specifically, is scarce. The texts were not identified as expressions of the practice of magic in Islam: by adherents of a faith – *the* faith – that was other than Christianity. In any case, the idea that Muslims were practitioners of magic predates the translation of 'magical' texts into Latin from Arabic: a major milestone in the history of magic in Western Christendom. The idea that magic was practised in Islam is a product of perceptions of the East, with which Islam came to be associated just as magic had been for a very long time. But it is, more than anything, a product of the perception that magic was a practice of people who were not Christians. In the *chansons de geste*, this idea was directed to the Muslims whom the poems construe as the enemies of Christians in the poems. This had repercussions for the Muslims whom the Church construed as the enemies of Christians in the era in which the poems were written. And it had repercussions for the representation of Muslims in writing that is not as conspicuously fictional as the *chansons de geste* undoubtedly are.

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[65] For the opinion that texts translated from Arabic were telling their readers how to perform magic, see, in particular, the thirteenth-century Latin tract known as the *Speculum astronomiae*, which may have been written by the great Paris-based scholar Albertus 'Magnus'. The *Speculum* laments what it perceives as the degradation of the art of astronomy through its application to what it calls 'necromantia' (meaning here 'black magic'). The text is edited, translated, and discussed in Paola Zambelli, *The 'Speculum Astronomiae' and its Enigma: Astrology, Theology and Science in Albertus Magnus and his Contemporaries* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992). For a recent overview of the phenomenon of 'magical' texts translated into Latin from Arabic in the Middle Ages, see Charles Burnett, 'Arabic Magic: The Impetus for Translating Texts, and their Reception', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, pp. 71-84.