

Preprint manuscript of: D. Z. Lycourinos, "Grimoires", *Dictionary of Contemporary Esotericism* (ed. E. Asprem), Leiden: Brill.

Archived at ConTERN Repository for Self-Archiving (CRESARCH) <https://contern.org/cresarch/cresarch-repository/> Aug. 13, 2018.

Grimoires

A "grimoire" is a text providing instruction on how to conjure spirit entities, construct amulets and talismans, methods of divination, spells for healing, curses, protection against other malicious spells, and so on (see → Magic). Instructions are normally infused with mythological motifs, theological convictions, and appropriate types of ritual behaviour. Grimoires are primary source texts for the study and application of magical practice in the sense that they are "constructed to be detachable from the flow of conversation, so that they can be repeated, quoted and commented upon – they are forms of languages... accorded a kind of independent and privileged existence" (Karin 2007, 3). As texts, they are dialogic and intentional, and created to be enacted so that the reader occupies the position of the "I" by following instruction of the original author or subsequent commentary on how to implement and remain attentive to sensory forms of esoteric expression and communication.

Although classified as "books of magic", not all books of magic are grimoires. Some are strictly concerned with the esoteric properties of natural magic (Davies 2015, 603-604). A definitive feature of a grimoire is ritual mediation to inaugurate interaction with intermediary spirit entities that are in somewhat close proximity to humans to obtain knowledge and power beyond human ability. These entities may include gods and daimons, angels and demons, elemental spirits, and the dead (Asprem 2015, 646-656).

Historically speaking, grimoires are essentially a European phenomenon of the thirteenth to the eighteenth century, with influences in parts from non-European sources, such as the *Ghayat al-hakim* (*Picatrix*). Grimoires are usually written in English, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, or Latin.

Authorship was often attributed to people with posthumous notoriety, both mythical (King Solomon) and real (Pope Leo III). Grimoires are not only defined by the writing they contain, but also by the belief that the act of writing has the potential to manifest change, along with certain words of inherent active properties that exist and act independent of the text. Despite the disseminative impact of the seventeenth century print revolution, the operational value of these books still belonged exclusively to the magician through his or her learnedness, innate powers, and pacts with the spirit world (Davies 2009, 5).

The nineteenth and early twentieth century "occult revival" saw a renewed interest in and access to books of magic, setting the scene for a new phase of study and application of grimoires. Frances Barrett's *The Magus: Or Celestial Intelligence* (1801) had a considerable effect, inspiring prominent esoteric authors to translate and publish various grimoires. Arthur Edward Waite published the *Book of Black Magic and of Pacts* (1898) as a collection of conjurations from earlier grimoires, and Samuel Liddell Mathers translated the first English edition of the *Key of Solomon (Clavicula Salomonis)* (1888) and *Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage* (1897). Mathers also translated an edition of the first part of the *Lemegeton, Goetia* (1904), which Aleister Crowley further edited by including some additional ritual formulas not belonging to the original text along with his own psychological interpretation of ceremonial "magick".

Such interest and application set the foundation for a more expansive interest in grimoires. This development is mainly due to some contemporary scholars, such as Joseph Peterson, Daniel Harms, and Claude Lecouteux, along with certain "scholar-magicians", such as →Stephen Skinner and →David Rankine, visiting the archives of the British Library, the Bodleian, and other locations to discover and publish old magical manuscripts or new versions of previously published ones. Many of these new translations and revised manuscripts have been made available to the public through publishing companies, such as Llewellyn, Weiser, Ibis, Avalonia, Golden Hoard, and Inner Traditions. In particular, Peterson's translations and revisions of historical grimoires, many of which have been

disseminated online from 1994 onwards and are available at esotericarchives.com, both in English and their original languages, have spurred both academic and practitioner engagement with these books of magic.

Access to these manuscripts in print or via the internet has inspired a new generation of practitioners with the freedom to choose resources and recreate accordingly, and who, as Asprem has observed, are often "unaffiliated magician[s], aiming to reconstruct Elizabethan ritual magic, goetic demon conjurations, or rituals from the Greek magical papyri" (Asprem 2015, 386). Furthermore, Asprem also identifies the emergence of a "magical purism" claiming authority from engagement with "authentic" pre-modern textual resources (Asprem, 2012, 80-81). In particular, authors exhibiting purist agendas and anti-New Age sentiments, such as Joseph Lisiewski, even claim that different systems of magic and components of grimoiric texts should never be mixed (Lisiewski 2004, 76-80).

Many contemporary grimoiric practitioners legitimise their esoteric ideas and ritual practices as continuities of historic paradigms of Western magic, some of the most notable belonging to the *Key of Solomon* tradition, the *Lemegeton*, *Heptameron*, *Arbatel*, *Grimorium Verum*, and *Book of Abramelin*. However, some scholar-magicians, such as Skinner, have begun to draw upon older manuscripts as "proto-grimoires", such as the *Greek Magical Papyri* and the *Hygromanteia*, the latter recently presented by Golden Hoard Press (2011) as the possible thirteenth century original Greek source of the *Key of Solomon*. In addition, Rankine's translations of *A Collection of Magical Secrets* (2009), *The Book of Gold* (2010), and *The Complete Grimoire of Pope Honorius* (2013) demonstrate how the worlds of learned magic become intertwined with popular, folk, and village cunning, as well as other, older books of magic.

Most grimoire revivalists deny any "psychologisation" of magic, emphasising that the magic of the grimoires is entirely about dealing with spiritual creatures to acquire extraordinary results. Skinner argues that such results require the cooperation of spiritual creatures – gods via prayer or invocation, or daimons

and spirits via evocation – rather than esoteric methods of visualisation. As demonstrated in *Techniques of Graeco-Egyptian Magic* (2014) and *Techniques of Solomonian Magic* (2015), Skinner argues that unlike religion, which is public and focused on the worship of gods, or the mystery schools, which emphasise self-purifications and introducing the initiate to the gods, magic is mainly a solitary affair that seeks to command the assistance of spiritual creatures for terrestrial affairs. This is achieved by implementing traditional methods of being cautious and precise during spirit evocation as described in grimoires.

Skinner maintains that the core of Western magic can be found in the historical transmission of mainly Solomonian grimoires from Byzantium to Europe. Throughout this transmission, magic remained a spiritual technology evolving from the *Greek Magical Papyri* via the *Hygromanteia*, perpetuating a definitive Graeco-Egyptian operational rationale with the only major difference being the theological character of the spiritual creatures, and various *nomina* and *materia magica*. However, this technology has been partly lost due to centuries of persecution. Skinner seeks to restore the core of Western magic by tracing it back to its roots.

Another contemporary search for the origins of Western magic via the grimoire tradition is → Jake Stratton-Kent's *Encyclopedia Goetica* (2009, 2010, 2014), which seeks to revive an interest in both the history and practical application of manuscripts such the *Greek Magical Papyri*, *Picatrix*, *True Grimoire* or *Grimoirium Verum*, and *Great Book of Saint Cyprian*. In his *True Grimoire* (2009), Stratton-Kent stresses the importance of conjuring and forming a pact with an intermediary spirit, who in turn invites a company of gods, spirits, or the dead to feast and celebrate, and whom the magician can call upon. For Stratton-Kent, the grimoire tradition encompasses the survival of "pagan" magical practices, yet dressed up in Judeo-Christian lore and symbolism. He traces the grimoire tradition back to the *Greek Magical Papyri* and beyond, restores the centrality of ritual conjunctions with spirits of the dead, and further explores the use of grimoires in Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Brazilian contexts (see → **Vodou**). In conclusion, Stratton-Kent contends that the foundation of the grimoire tradition

is ancient → shamanism in the form practiced by pre-Classical goetic ritualists and wandering magicians. Emphasis is on a chthonic, operative, and "natural" appreciation of magic rather than a celestial, philosophical, and "revelatory" theurgy. Furthermore, as archaic goetia was superseded by the Olympian religion, the character and meaning of many of the older gods were transformed and given lower rank in the new pantheons and demonological classifications. On a final note, Stratton-Kent discusses the eschatological dimensions of Western magic involving underworld initiation, spirit pact-making and various spells from the *Greek Magical Papyri* (l. 42-195) that seek to bring the magician into conjunction with a divine spiritual entity that will assist him to ascend to the heavens upon death.

The hypothesis that ancient shamanism is the root of grimoiric magic has also been conveyed by Aaron Leitch in *Secrets of the Magickal Grimoires* (2005). Unlike Stratton-Kent, who refers to the works of Walter Burkert in relation to archaic goetia, Leitch makes reference to Mircea Eliade's study of shamanism to portray the "shamanic" nature and objective of spirit operations in various historical grimoires.

Another prominent feature of grimoire revivalism is the perception that grimoires are not monolithic texts, but the product of evolving esoteric ideas and ritual technologies. For example, Skinner and Rankine's research into a collection of manuscripts allegedly authored by Dr. Thomas Rudd (1583–1656) demonstrate how one magical technique has been developed by an intelligent operator striving for the most efficient way to call and control spiritual creatures. Furthermore, central to their understanding of the magical practitioner in these manuscripts, and quoting Aphorism 17 of the *Arbatel*, is the idea that a "magician" and a "magic-user" should be differentiated: "he that is a true magician, is brought forth a Magician from his Mother's Womb, and whoso is otherwise, ought to recompense that defect of nature by Education".

These revivalist approaches have also inspired some practitioners to create and publish their own forms of grimoires, replete with ritual instructions and

personal reflections on spirit operations. A notable example is Frater Ashen Chassan's *Gateways Through Stone and Circle* (2015), which draws upon the author's own experience of "The Art of Drawing Spirits into Crystals", as found in Barrett's *The Magus*, to evoke each of the seven planetary archangels to visible and auditory presence. Another is Michael Cecchetelli, whose *Book of Abrasax* (2014) is a personal collection of rites and spells drawing on Greco-Egyptian, Coptic, and Gnostic sources promising to obtain both terrestrial prosperity and transcendent power. In addition, publishing companies such as Anathema, Nephilim, and Aeon Sophia are increasingly marketing highly personalised monographic grimoires with an emphasis on →Left Hand Path esotericism, Luciferianism, and Sabbatic witchcraft (see →Luciferian witchcraft), typically drawing from the works of Austin Osman Spare, →Kenneth Grant, and →Andrew Chumley. These grimoires are usually available as fine illustrated editions depicting dreamlike extraterrestrial entities and dimensions, along with operational stylistic sigils. These grimoirists rely more on personal gnosis and esoteric ritualisation, rather than drawing upon historical manuscripts, and promise self-deification and empowerment of the practitioner, and imaginative explorations of more tenebrous and obscurantist worldviews associated with Qlippotic forces, demonolatry, and Sabbatic conjunctions.

Despite contemporary claims of an unbroken tradition of Western magic, evidence is scant at times (Asprem 2015, 382-383). However, this does not imply that there is no continuity whatsoever, with certain books of magic and ritual formulas authored in different historical periods and cultural contexts inspiring a continuity of praxis by "fleshing out" the contents of historical grimoires in contemporary fields of scholarly inquiry and ritual performance (Otto, 2016). Through "disembedding" definitive grimoiric elements from one historico-cultural context and "reembedding" them in new ones (Asprem and Granholm, 2014, 4-6), a new generation of magic scholars and practitioners have created a grimoiric revival. This process of disembedding and reembedding is characteristic of Western magical narrative, recognised by scholars and practitioners alike, and exhibits a pragmatic approach to merging a diversity of

cosmological motifs, esoteric discourses, and ritual performances into an operational system "that works".

Damon Zacharias LYCOURINOS

Bibliography

- Asprem, Egil. 2012. *Arguing with Angels: Enochian Magic & Modern Occulture*. Albany: Suny Press.
- Asprem, Egil and Granholm, Kennet. 2014. "Constructing Esotericisms: Sociological, Historical and Critical Approaches to the Invention of Tradition". In E. Asprem and K. Granholm (eds), *Contemporary Esotericism*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Asprem, Egil. 2015. "Intermediary Beings". In C. Partridge (ed.), *The Occult World*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Barber, Karin. 2007. *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chassan, Ashen. 2014. *Gateways Through Stone and Circle*. Timmonsville, SC: Nephilim Press.
- Cecchetelli, Michael. 2012. *The Book of Abrasax*. Timmonsville, SC: Nephilim Press.
- Davies, Owen. 2015. "Grimoires". In C. Partridge (ed.) *The Occult World*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Lecouteux, Claude, Graham, Jon E. (trans.). 2013. *The Book of Grimoires: The Secret Grammar of Magic*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.
- Leitch, Aaron. 2005. *Secrets of the Magickal Grimoires: The Classical Texts of Magick Deciphered*. Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications.
- Lisiewski, Joseph C. 2004. *Ceremonial Magic and the Power of Evocation*. Tempe, AZ: The Original Falcon Press.
- Marathakis, Ioannis (trans.). 2011. *The Magical Treatise of Solomon or Hygromanteia: The True Ancestor of the Key of Solomon*. Singapore: Golden Hoard Press.
- Mathers, Samuel Liddell MacGregor (trans.), Crowley, Aleister (ed.). 1997. *The Goetia: The Lesser Key of Solomon the King (Clavicula Salomonis Regis)*. Boston, MA: Red Wheel/Weiser.
- Otto, Bernd-Christian. 2016. "Historicising 'Western Learned Magic' Preliminary Remarks". *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 16 (2016), 161-240.
- Peterson, Joseph H. (trans.). 2009. *Arbatel: Concerning the Magic of the Ancients*. Lake Worth, FL: Ibis Press.
- Rankine, David. 2004. *Becoming Magick*. Mandrake Press.
- Rankine, David. 2005. *Climbing the Tree of Life: A Manual of Practical Magickal Qabalah*. London: Avalonia Books.
- Rankine, David and Skinner, Stephen. 2008. *The Goetia of Dr. Rudd (Sourceworks of Ceremonial Magic Series Volume IV)*. Singapore: Golden Hoard Press.
- Skinner, Stephen and Rankine, David. 2007. *The Veritable Key of Solomon (Sourceworks of Ceremonial Magic Series Volume III)*. Singapore: Golden Hoard Press.
- Skinner, Stephen. 2012. *Dr. John Dee's Spiritual Diaries: 1583-1608, A True & Faithful Relation*. Singapore: Golden Hoard Press.
- Skinner, Stephen. 2014. *Techniques of Graeco-Egyptian Magic*. Singapore: Golden Hoard Press.
- Skinner, Stephen. 2015. *Techniques of Solomonic Magic*. Singapore: Golden Hoard Press.
- Skinner, Stephen. 2015. *The Complete Magician's Tables* (5th expanded edition). Singapore: Golden Hoard Press.
- Stratton-Kent, Jake. 2009 *The True Grimoire*. London: Scarlet Imprint Press.
- Stratton-Kent, Jake. 2010. *Geosophia: The Argo of Magic*. London: Scarlet Imprint Press.
- Stratton-Kent, Jake. 2014. *The Testament of Cyprian the Mage*. London: Scarlet Imprint Press.
- Stratton-Kent, Jake. 2016. *Pandemonium: A Discordant Concordance of Diverse Spirit Catalogues*. Hadean Press.