



Martha Rampton, *Trafficking with Demons: Magic, Ritual, and Gender from Late Antiquity to 1000* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2021) ebook, 480 pp., USD 42.99, ISBN 9781501735318

Review

Trafficking with Demons: Magic, Ritual, and Gender from Late Antiquity to 1000 by Martha Rampton is an ambitious book that attempts to offer new arguments for a field that has already garnered much attention. Rampton makes the book accessible to those unfamiliar with medieval magic, particularly ritual magic and offers great detail and context in her arguments. *Trafficking with Demons* is divided into four parts. The introduction explains that the book will examine the ‘intersections between magic, ritual, and gender in late antiquity Christendom and the early medieval Latin West’, beginning with ‘the development of the church in the first century and end[ing] with the writings of Bishop Burchard of Worms’ (p. 2). The project seems ambitious as the subject matter spans a millennium and could easily lose a reader unfamiliar with the era or the subject matter. Thankfully, Rampton provides sufficient context and is kind enough to quickly repeat concepts that were given more depth in early chapters.

Part one, titled ‘Studying Magic,’ offers sufficient historical, social, and political context, focusing on the Carolingian era. First, and most importantly, Rampton attempts to define magic, witch, sorcerer, and terms central to her study by arguing that scholars, and thus the reader, can ‘endeavor to observe magic

through the eyes of a medieval individual' (p. 26). Aspects of the book focus on Frankish and English history, though Rampton does mention other geographical locations.

Part two focuses on the first five hundred years CE and, specifically, the relationship that Christianity had with magic, both in terms of theory and practice. Rampton discusses the connection between rituals and spaces, noting that Christian rituals are connected to a church, an enclosed space away from the elements. Christians created metaphors grounded in the city of Jerusalem, while pagan rituals were connected to open spaces and grounded in nature (p. 97). Furthermore, the church, or more specifically, the altar, became a male-gendered space; the night, more specifically, the moon, became gendered female due to its connection with pagan goddess worship (pp. 98, 206).

In addition to discussing Christianity's attempts to forge an identity in contrast to pagan worshippers, much of part two emphasises the role of divination and the connection of death to magic. Women have been connected to death and liminal spaces since antiquity, whether for good or ill reasons (p. 152). Despite the rivalry between Christianity and paganism, there was some agreement between the two ideologies; for example, while necromancy was not necessarily shunned by Christians and pagans alike, both ideologies agreed that the dead should not be used for divination (p. 161).

This book is extensive but not exhaustive. The first half of the book offers a thorough introduction to magic and, more specifically, demonic magic and provides details about specific cases of magic or important historical events that tie into magic or the fear of women going outside social norms.

While the first half of the book lays down the contextual background, part three begins to discuss how magic traffics, or uses, demons in more detail, including how Christianity interacted with magic, specifically demonic rituals. For example, a prophecy given by a lay person was possible, but that prophesy was usually not provided by demonic powers rather than the divine; thus, the demons gave knowledge to humans (p. 222). One way the humans trafficked demons was through the use of healing magic. Rampton indicates when texts directly mention women or when specific magic can be assumed to be connected to women (magic involving childbirth, menstruation, or abortion). Despite its generally positive title, healing magic was not viewed positively by the Christian Church, as the church preferred the use of prayers and other approved rituals to heal others. In the eyes of the Church, healing magic was still demonic and was a step below secular remedies (p. 244). The purpose of this part of the book is to set up the more in-depth arguments of part four. Part three shows the progress of attitudes towards magic after 500 CE when magic changed from 'magic-as-sin' to 'magic-as-communal-disruption.' There was a change in legal records and religious ideology; there was no longer a need to convert pagans, only a need to continue the church's control.

The last section of the book, part four, discusses the second half of the first millennium and focuses on the early Middle Ages within the Romanized areas of Europe (p. 273). It is difficult to generalise the transformations that magic underwent in the last half of the millennium, as magic depends heavily on geographical and cultural settings. In addition to examining the changes that magic underwent between 750 and 1025 CE, Rampton focuses predominantly on the role of women and gender in magic in this section. Rampton notes that there was an early medieval belief that women could not manipulate demons; therefore, any woman claiming to practice magic through the use of demons was not a serious threat to the social order (p. 311). This belief contrasts with an earlier belief that women's magic was sinful and powerful enough to be taken seriously: the belief that magic could be used to empower women (p. 270). Women practising magic opposed the Carolingian ideal that women should be submissive and only occupy supporting roles, not primary roles, such as that of a magic practitioner (p. 313). The latter portion of this section gives two case studies, one of Empress Judith (d. c.843) and the other of Theutberga and Waldrada. Both cases involved women accused of magic and women stepping beyond the supportive and submissive role expected of women. The cases highlight the male anxiety surrounding women gaining power.

Rampton's book is an ambitious project, attempting to cover a millennium of historical, social, and political contexts. While the book covers a broad span of time and geographical area, it helps the reader understand how views on magic changed

drastically depending on where and when magic was discussed. The point of this book is to bring new attention to the least studied period in European history: the long early Middle Ages (p. 8). The book fills a gap in scholarship and does so in a way that engages the reader and highlights the depth of the research presented.

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