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DEMONIC MAGIC AND ITS PRACTITIONERS IN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY *EXEMPLA*

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization
in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies.

Central European University Private University
Vienna

June 2024

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Davide Politi

(Italy)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,

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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Author's declaration

I, the undersigned, **Davide Politi**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies, with a specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Abstract

This thesis examines thirteenth-century *exempla* to understand how their authors conceptualized and transmitted the idea of demonic magic, contrasting them with other types of text such as theological treatises and magical handbooks, and exploring how magic was used as a rhetorical tool. The analysis reveals that *exempla*, while generally consistent with the theological doctrines of the time, also diverge from these in some recurring themes. Methodologically, the thesis employs a close reading of selected *exempla*, considering their narrative structure, intended audience, and the context of their composition. It highlights the complexity of these narratives and their role in shaping medieval perceptions of magic, gender, and social norms. The findings challenge the notion of *exempla* as mere intermediaries between theological intellectuals and the masses, proposing instead that they were dynamic texts tailored to specific rhetorical and didactic purposes.

Acknowledgments

Vellem gratias agere meo supervisori, Professori Gabori Klaniczay, pro ingenti auxilio et continua sustentatione. Impossibile mihi esset omnia quae discere potui gratias ei commemorare.

Gratus sum etiam Professori Cristiano Gaspari pro introducendis multis methodis investigandi et pro incitamento ut ponderem momentum verborum in textibus.

Gratias ago Fedori Nekhaenko quod me introduxit in Michaelis Scotis Librum introductorium et communicavit transcriptionem partium textus, quae valde utilis fuit in comparatione meae transcriptionis.

Postremo, sed non minime, gratias ago meis condiscipulis in Facultate Studiorum Medii Aevi, necnon professoribus et administrativis, non solum pro influentiis multis modis et indirecte formanda hac dissertatione, sed etiam, et praesertim, pro amicitia eorum.

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Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

In a treatise that collected his knowledge across multiple disciplines, the thirteenth-century astrologer Michael Scotus also delved into necromancy—a form of magic involving the invocation of demons:

> When the aerial spirits are summoned, the summoner must be in a circle and in a place as prescribed by the appropriate art, and say the names of the spirits with a vigorous face and a strong voice, holding a book or a bare sword in hand and waving it, as if he wanted to strike someone, asserting his words in the following way, after having made the sacrifice and the fumigation of things: […] "Come! Come rush to me you all! […] I bind you all by the virtues and the powers of that highest God who cast you down from heaven […]. May you hear my voice and fulfill my commands […]."[1]

And, as the demon appears, he is expected to respond submissively:

> "[…] Command what you wish, and it will immediately be done […]."[2]

With this description, Michael Scotus illustrates one of the possible ways for humans to interact with demons to achieve a desired outcome, thereby showcasing an instance of demonic magic.

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[1] It is a long tradition, adopted by Christianity since its early days, that demons inhabit the air. Therefore, by writing "aerial spirits," Michael Scotus is referring unequivocally to demons. Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 104–108.

[2] "*Quando vero spiritus aerei convocantur, invocans debet esse in circo et loco secundum debitum artis, et nomina spirituum dicere cum vigore fatiei ac robore vocis, tenendo librum vel hensem nudam in manu et eam vibrando, quasi vellet aliquem percutere, asserens sua verba in hunc modum, facto sacrifitio seu facta suffumigatione rerum, que in arte precipiuntur:* […] *'Currite, currite omnes ad me* [...]. *Vos omnes constringo per virtutes et potestates illius Dei altissimi qui vos de celo propulsit* [...]. *Audiat vocem meam et adimpleat praecepta mea* [...]*.' 'Precipe quod vis, et statim fiet* [...]*.'"* Michael Scotus, *Liber introductorius*. Munich: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 10268, fol. 114va. This manuscript has been copied around 1320, and while the attribution of the whole text to Michael Scotus has been contested by Lynn Thorndike, Glenn Edwards has convincingly argued that there are no significant later interpolations. Lynn Thorndike, *Michael Scot* (London: Nelson, 1965), p. 9; Glenn M. Edwards, "The Two Redactions of Michael Scot's *Liber introductorius*," *Traditio*, 41 (1985), pp. 329–340.

The characteristics ascribed to demonic magic varied widely, largely depending on the writer's perspective and intentions—most often, to condemn the practice. Even among authors with comparable backgrounds, such as the clerical writers and collectors of the *exempla* which I analyze in this thesis, views differed based on the literary character of the practitioner. For example, as I elaborate in the next chapter, women were consistently portrayed as distinct types of demonic magicians compared to men, reflecting contemporary assumptions regarding gender roles.

The aim of this thesis is to examine and analyze accounts of demonic magic in thirteenth-century narrative *exempla*. After introducing the key concepts of my research in this first chapter, I present my observations in the second, organizing them into broad categories based on the types of practitioners involved. These are: necromancers, witches, heretical magicians, and magicians of antiquity. This classification is not intended as a rigid distinction—since, for example, the line between a necromancer and a heretic capable of magic can often get blurred. Instead, it serves as an analytical tool to conceptualize demonic magic and highlight the general differences that emerge among types of practitioners of demonic magic as perceived and portrayed in these texts.

Finally, in the third and conclusive chapter of this thesis, I will outline the common traits of demonic magic as depicted in the *exempla*, consider the roles these narrations could have played within their original contexts, and compare my observations with accounts from different sources on the same topic. I will then discuss what modern scholars can glean from studying *exempla* that feature demonic magic. Specifically, I try to use these texts to gain insights into broader gender ideas that, while perhaps not explicitly stated by the authors, are nonetheless woven throughout their texts.

Through this research, I hope to contribute to the field that studies medieval magic by pointing out some of the complex influences that shaped portrayals of demonic magic. Rather

than merely viewing the *exempla* as more or less distorted windows into historical "facts," I treat them as narratives offering varying perceptions of magic, characterized by both consistent elements and significant variability. Additionally, this study aims to show that the examination of magic and its perceptions can extend beyond the narrow focus of the subject itself. By exploring how (some) medieval people understood and interacted with the concept of magic, historians can also study medieval worldviews, social norms, and cultural values.[3] This is not only aimed at enhancing our understanding of medieval society, but also at offering a unique perspective on our own historical and cultural foundations, helping us learn something more about ourselves.

Before diving into the core of the thesis, an introduction to the key concepts is necessary.

1.2 Defining Magic

In the medieval period, the concept of magic was multifaceted, and its definition could vary depending on place, time, and specific context.[4] Rather than adopting a broad, generalized definition, I have chosen to construct one that is specifically tailored to the scope of my research, following after Richard Kieckhefer's notion that "the most useful definition of magic is the one held by the people, society, or culture under investigation."[5] As a starting point to reflect on this topic, I have used two thirteenth-century scholastic definitions of miracles, which I will now illustrate.

[3] Naturally, this goal to go beyond magic, through magic, has already been shared by many other scholars. A recent work by Michael Bailey, for example, presents an illuminating exploration of "magic's association with certain social factors, such as gender, ethnicity, and education." Michael D. Bailey, *Magic: The Basics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 85–109.

[4] For a comprehensive overview of the many attempts to tackle the problem of defining magic, see Michael D. Bailey, "The Meanings of Magic," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 1, no. 1 (2006), pp. 1–23. See also Bailey, *The Basics*, pp. 6–58.

[5] This is Kieckhefer's perspective as summarized in Bailey, "The Meanings of Magic," p. 5, footnote 9.

In his *Summa theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas addresses the question of whether demons can perform miracles.[6] He clarifies that while demons cannot work "true" miracles—as only God can—they are capable of performing what might be considered miracles in the broad sense: "things that exceed human capability and understanding."[7] Upon experiencing the actions of demons, human beings marvel and cannot comprehend how the effect is produced. Under this definition, humans themselves can perform these "false miracles" as long as their actions exceed the understanding of others.

Thomas Aquinas further elaborates that demons, while incapable of performing true miracles, can nonetheless produce tangible, real effects. For example, he references the biblical episode where Pharaoh's magicians transform their staffs into snakes. Thomas explains that many substances already contain the potential or "germs" for snakes, which typically emerge only after the putrefaction of the object. Demons can accelerate this natural process, so that the staffs seem to transform instantaneously into snakes, which however are real animals and not illusions.[8] Conversely, when magicians appear to perform feats that defy natural laws—such as turning humans into animals—these effects are not to be considered real, but mere illusions crafted by demons and affecting sensitive perception but not the material world.[9]

[6] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, pars 1, q. 114, art. 4.

[7] "*Dicitur tamen quandoque miraculum large, quod excedit humanam facultatem et considerationem.*" Ibidem.

[8] Cf. Jacobus de Voragine, *Sermones aurei*, vol. 1, edited by Adel Figarol (Toulouse: Orphani, 1874), p. 227. Here Jacobus interprets the miracle of the multiplication of bread by explaining that Christ's hands acted as a substitute for the earth, causing the bread seeds to multiply rapidly without needing cultivation, similarly to the process for transforming staffs into snakes: "*Potestas enim erat in manibus Christi, panes autem illi quinque semina erant non quidem terre mandata, sed ab eo qui terram fecit multiplicata*."

[9] Naturally, Thomas' understanding of "natural laws" differed significantly from modern interpretations, and sometimes even from those of other ancient and medieval authors. For example, the influential Isidore of Seville described human metamorphosis as possible. Marina Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 83.

Thomas' broad definition of miracles allows him to accommodate Augustine of Hippo's assertion that magicians can perform miracles akin to those achieved by God's servants. However, Thomas further cites Augustine to emphasize that there are clear distinctions between magicians and religious miracle workers: magicians seek personal gain and operate through private contracts (*privata commercia*), whereas religious figures aim to glorify God through public acts (*publica administratione*) and by divine command.[10] This distinction is not always clear-cut in the *exempla* I have analyzed, as the line between magic and religion can sometimes get blurred. In fact, Thomas's efforts to delineate these categories underscore a recognition, shared with many of his contemporaries, of the potential similarities and overlaps between the two.

The second term of comparison for constructing my definition of magic comes from Ramon Llull, another influential thirteenth-century theologian. In his Latin translation of the *Book Against the Antichrist*, Ramon categorizes miracles into three types.[11] The first two are divine miracles performed by God. The third type of miracles—which he notes will be performed by the Antichrist—involve necromancy and are manifested through illusions and apparitions produced by invoking spirits. According to Ramon, these are not true miracles but are perceived as such by people who do not understand the mechanisms by which spirits bring about these effects.

The words of both Thomas Aquinas and Ramon Llull allow me to synthetize a concept of magic—and specifically demonic magic—that is sufficiently broad to encompass the *exempla* analyzed in this thesis, yet precise enough to avoid excessive vagueness. In the context of this thesis, magic can be understood as the execution of false miracles, which

[10] Augustine of Hippo, *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, edited by A. Mutzenbecher (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975), q. 79, lin. 84.
[11] Ramon Lull, *Liber contra antichristum (opus e textu Catalano translatum et retractatum a Lullo ipso sive Lulli iussu)*, edited by Pamela M. Beattie (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), dist. 2, pars 2, p. 108.

means that the causal link between the magician's actions and the resulting outcome is occult and not readily discernible from the point of view of the narrator. Furthermore, even if the narrator discerns this causality but attributes it to demons or other supernatural entities, I will still consider it as magic, as the sources consistently regard it as such.[12]

A special mention is necessary for those magical practices that turn out to be ineffective. This is consistently seen in *exempla* where the eucharist is used as a magical ingredient. These attempts often yield unexpected results, which are attributed to divine punishment rather than to the effects of magic. For example, in one story from Caesarius of Heisterbach (d. ca. 1240), a priest attempts to use the host for love magic but finds himself unable to exit the church because he has grown to giant size.[13] In cases relevant to my analysis, I will adopt the fictional viewpoint of the practitioners and refer to these practices as magic, even in the absence of actual magical outcomes. However, since demons are typically not featured in these *exempla*, they will be primarily discussed to draw contrast with those *exempla* in which demons, instead, are present.

Finally, a distinction needs to be made for Christian exorcistic rituals aimed at dispelling demons. Exorcism could be strikingly similar to necromancy, and more in general the line between religious figures and magicians could become blurred, as acknowledged in many

[12] Cf. Richard Kieckhefer's definition, similar in some aspects: "In this book, then, the term 'magic' will be used for those phenomena which intellectuals would have recognized as either demonic or natural magic. That which makes an action magical is the type of power it invokes: if it relies on divine action or the manifest powers of nature it is not magical, while if it uses demonic aid or occult powers in nature it is magical." Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 14. A third edition of this book, published in 2021, is also available, but in this thesis I will quote the second edition, which I have at hand.

[13] Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus miraculorum*, vol. 2, edited by Joseph Strange (Cologne, Bohn, and Brussels: H. Lempertz & Comp., 1851), dist. 9, cap. 6, p. 171. While I will refer to Strange's edition for its ease of consultation and online availability, there is also a more recent edition. Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum; Dialog über die Wunder*, edited by Nikolaus Nösges and Horst Schneider (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009).

medieval texts.[14] Yet, in pointing out the similitude between magic and religion, clerical writers always tried to underscore some elements to distinguish between the two. These include the type of relationship with demons, the reasons behind the rituals, and the effective power manifested over demons.[15] However, the variety of stories portrayed in the *exempla* defy these distinctions. Some of them show exorcists engaging with demons to gather information for personal reasons, prioritizing the acquisition of knowledge over the immediate goal of expulsion.[16] Other stories have necromancers acting for the common good

[14] In addition to Augustine's words referenced by Thomas (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, pars 1, q. 114, art. 4.), I can also cite a passage (pars 2-2, q. 90, art. 2) in which Thomas shows some difficulty in distinguishing between religious figures and magicians, especially in his mention of St. James in the latter part of his *responsum*. Another illustrative case is in the writings of the twelfth-century historian William of Malmesbury. In writing of Gerbert of Aurillac (later Pope Sylvester II), rumored to be a magician, William notes that learned men are often mistakenly identified as demonic magicians, citing the example of Severinus Boethius, who was accused of practicing magic. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, vol. 1, edited and translated by R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), lib. 2, cap. 167, p. 282. Additionally, manuals of magic also contributed to blurring the line between exorcists and magicians, as seen for example in a fourteenth-century fragment of the *Liber de officiis spirituum*, which teases its content by appealing both to exorcists and to various kinds of magicians: "Many men, however, have thought and discussed how an exorcist or a necromancer, or even a mathematician, or a hair-trimmer, might reach the summit and the light of the aforementioned things." (*[M]ulti vero viri cogitantes tractaverunt qualiter exorcizator sive nigromanticus, vel mathematicus, vel etiam tricomator posset ad culmen vel ad lucem predictarum pervenire*). Rome: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. Lat. 1363, fol. 53v, lin. 5–6. A book with this title is also mentioned by Roger Bacon in the 1260s. Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, revised edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 105.

[15] E.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa,* pars 1, q. 144, art. 4; and 2-2, q. 90, art. 2. Another insightful perspective is that of Albertus Magnus, who describes the necromancers as unable to perform true exorcisms because they can only dispel demons through the power of other demons, and are incapable of operating by the power of God. Albertus Magnus, *Commentarii in quartum librum Sententiarum*, vol. 13, edited by Auguste Borgnet (Paris: Ludovic Vivès, 1894), dist. 24, art. 22, p. 60b.

[16] For example, Salimbene de Adam describes an exorcism where the primary focus is not merely the expulsion of a demon. Instead, the exorcist takes the opportunity to interrogate the demon, seeking information about the fate of two of his friends who had disappeared. The demon confesses to having killed them and complains that a third youth had escaped–referring to the exorcist himself–but also claims that he will eventually catch him. Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, edited by Giuseppe Scalia (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998-1999), p. 838.

or even for the glory of God,[17] and there are even exempla where demons obey necromancers because God allows it.[18] Despite these complexities, I will maintain the overarching perspective that religious figures performing miracles or fulfilling their official duties, such as exorcism, should not be regarded as magicians.[19] I adopt this stance both not to ignore the implicit distinction always upheld by the clerical authors, and to avoid excessively broadening the scope of this thesis.

This definition of magic is inherently relative; what one author may consider magic, another might not. For instance, if I were to examine manuals of magic that explain their art through links of causality and natural laws, my definition would not hold. If the perception of magic largely depends on the adopted viewpoint, in the context of this research the perspective I will primarily consider is that of the narrators themselves—the authors of the *exempla* under analysis. The key to distinguishing magic within these narratives hinges on how the practices are described, particularly through the use of specific terminology. The choice between words such as *nigromantia*, *maleficium*, *incantamentum*, etc. can be quite insightful, and I will highlight and analyze these critical terms throughout my dissertation.

Finally, the demonic aspect of magic presents an additional challenge in selecting *exempla* for examination, as theologians sometimes labelled all forms of magic as demonic, whether explicitly, like conjuring demons within circles, or implicitly, such as divination in

[17] The most famous example is a story by Caesarius of Heisterbach where a necromancer helps a bishop in defeating two heretics. Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 1, dist. 5, cap. 17, pp. 296–298.

[18] In an *exemplum* first appeared in the twelfth-century chronicle of William of Malmesbury, and later included in various thirteenth-century texts, a frustrated demon exclaims "God Almighty, how much longer will you tolerate the wickedness of Priest Palumbus [a necromancer]?" (*Deus, inquit, omnipotens quam diu patieris nequicias Palumbi presbiteri?*). God allows Palumbus to control demons, but ultimately the necromancer meets his demise at the hands of those very demons. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, vol. 1, lib. 2, cap. 205, p. 281.

[19] I intentionally refer to the nominal aspects of miracles and religious rites, as I prefer not to draw a difference based on divine power and demonic aid. Depending on the perspective adopted, demonic magicians could also operate through divine power. Cf. the excerpt from the *Liber introductorius* at the beginning of this chapter.

its various forms.[20] Yet, some theologians also recognized the legitimacy of what they called natural magic, which was believed to operate through occult but natural processes.[21] These divergent perspectives on what constitutes demonic activity complicate my work, as it is not always feasible to determine with reasonable certainty whether an author characterizes a practice as natural or demonic magic, or even as mere superstition. My pragmatic solution has been to select *exempla* where demonic involvement is explicitly mentioned or can be inferred through established *topoi*, such as a when an ambiguous entity is repelled by the sign of the cross, when supernatural effects cease when God is mentioned, or when the practice or practitioner are named in a manner suggesting demonic affiliation, as with necromancy.

1.3 The Demons

The Devil, in his various forms, emerges as a recurring character across the *exempla* I have analyzed. In Christian mythology, demons are considered fallen angels, rebelling against God due to their pride. The medieval notion of demons was influenced by biblical descriptions—where they were not yet viewed as fallen angels—and by the Greco-Roman concept of daemons, capricious spirits thought to roam through the air.[22] As Christianity spread across the Roman Empire and Germanic territories, pre-existing supernatural

[20] The most famous representative of this view was Thomas Aquinas. See Michael Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, and Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2007), pp. 98–99.
[21] One of these theologians was, for example, William of Auvergne. See Thomas B. de Mayo, *The Demonology of William of Auvergne: By Fire and Sword* (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), pp. 150–153.
[22] On the biblical influences, see Dale Basil Martin, "When Did Angels Become Demons?" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 129, no. 4 (2010), pp. 657–677. For the influence of Greco-Roman *daemones*, see Flint, *Rise of Magic*, pp. 101–116.

entities—whether gods or local spirits—were often reinterpreted by Christian clergy as demons seeking to lead humans into demonolatry.[23]

Christian theologians agreed that demons were intelligent creatures who could influence the world. Many other aspects, however, were matter of debate. Discussions ranged from whether demons possessed incorporeal bodies made of air or were entirely bodiless,[24] to their abilities to manifest in various forms—be it monstrous, elemental, animal, or human-like.[25] Debates also concerned the extent of the possible interactions between demons and humans, including the contentious issue of whether demons could procreate with humans. A notable case, often cited in discussing this point, was that of Merlin from Arthurian legends, who was regarded as a historical figure and was believed to have been half-demon. One solution proposed by William of Auvergne (d. 1249), bishop of Paris, was that demons could steal semen from men, or create it themselves by transmuting water, and use it to inseminate human women. William maintained that demons, being spirits, would not simulate sexual acts out of lust, but to lead into sin. Even then, according to him, demons would avoid sodomy, which he considered as outrageously unnatural.[26]

Demons were believed to inhabit various places: hell, where they tormented sinful souls and were themselves tormented; the air, drawing on classical influences of daemons; and on Earth, particularly unclean places like latrines, which served to remind their lowly status.[27] Theologians often described demons as in a hierarchical structure similar to that of angels,

[23] Juanita Feros Ruys, *Demons in the Middle Ages* (Kalamazoo and Bradford: Arc Humanities Press, 2017), pp. 79–80.
[24] Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 133, footnote 12; de Mayo, *Demonology*, pp. 125–130.
[25] Russell, *Lucifer*, pp. 49–50.
[26] De Mayo, *Demonology*, pp. 169–173.
[27] On the aerial spirits, see Flint, *Rise of Magic*, pp. 101–116. On demons in unclean places, see Martha Bayless, *Sin and Filth in Medieval Culture: The Devil in the Latrine* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).

but inverted, with Satan usually positioned as a prince among them.[28] Despite their considerable powers, medieval theologians believed that demons were constrained by the laws of nature.[29] They could influence thoughts, possess people's bodies (but not souls), and create illusions.[30] Their great knowledge and swiftness allowed them to act with apparent foresight, contributing to their reputation as originators of magic, heresy, and superstition. Ever since the beginning of monasticism, demons also played a significant role as spiritual adversaries of monks.[31] They were opposed by various means, including holy symbols and rituals, or even by just talking to them and reminding them of their status as fallen angels.

In the stories I examine, demons are more than mere narrative tools inserted in the *exempla* to connotate magic as a diabolical practice. Their presence not only affirms the reality of Christian mythology, but also serves to highlight the spiritual authority of religious figures and to reinforce the validity of Christian sacraments. Sometimes portrayed sympathetically, at other times as cunning or wrathful, these demons reflect a complex blend of theological and folkloristic elements. By illustrating how different societal groups engage with demonic entities, these *exempla* actively participate in delineating the spiritual hierarchy of the Christian worldview. Literary interactions between humans and demons not only clarify which behaviors and beliefs are to be considered orthodox and hegemonic, as for example when saints defeat the demons, but also identify those that are deemed deviant, as for instance, when heretics are depicted as in league with the Devil.

[28] De Mayo, *Demonology*, pp. 135–138; Russell, *Lucifer*, pp. 189–190.
[29] Russell, *Lucifer*, p. 206.
[30] On the limits of demonic possession, see Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 195–196.
[31] David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge and London: Harward University Press, 2006).

1.4 What Shaped the Medieval Perceptions of Magic

In medieval western Christianity, the concept of magic was influenced by a myriad of sources. In this subchapter, I briefly highlight those I find most significant to allow the reader to follow my reasoning and recognize them in the *exempla* I detail in the next chapter.[32]

Firstly, the practice of engaging with supernatural forces to achieve desired outcomes is well-documented in the Roman era, as evidenced by archaeological records.[33] This is further supported by legislation throughout Roman history that sought to curb harmful magic, as well as by Pliny the Elder's descriptions of various magical practices.[34] Simultaneously, the "Nordic territories," from a Mediterranean perspective, harbored their own magical beliefs, often clashing with Christian missionaries during and after the Christianization of these regions.[35] These concepts persisted and evolved, with medieval manuscripts documenting a

[32] While this subchapter does not aim to be a comprehensive discussion on the history of magic, I can refer to some seminal texts for an in-depth review for the period up to the thirteenth century. For a comprehensive and general outlook at medieval magic, see Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*. For an overview of the whole academic field, with an in-depth explanation of its key concepts, see Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (eds.), *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019). For a recent and comprehensive treatise on witchcraft, see Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft*. For a detailed examination of late antique magic and its influence on Christianity, see Flint, *Rise of Magic*; and Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, translated by Franklin Philip (Cambridge and London: Harward University Press, 1997). For an overview of the main theological views on magic in the Middle Ages which, despite its age, still represents a great starting point on the topic, see Lynn Thorndike, "Some Medieval Conceptions of Magic," *The Monist*, 25, no. 1 (1915), pp. 107–139.

[33] The most famous examples are the *tabellae defixionum*, lead tablets with curses written over them which were widely used in the Mediterranean area. Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft*, p. 46; Bailey, *The Basics*, p. 86. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, pp. 118–174.

[34] As early as the Twelve Tables, the first Roman legal code, harmful charms were condemned, although the specific concepts referred to by the legal text remain unclear. During the Roman Empire, there is attestation of laws against poisoning, a practice associated with magic, but a more decisive legislation condemning almost all forms of magic was articulated after the Christianization of the Empire, in the Theodosian Code, and later copied in the Justinian Code. Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft*, pp. 48–54, and 69–71. For Pliny, see Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, pp. 49–60.

[35] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 44–55.

variety of magic formulas and recipes intended for harm or healing, even within a Christian framework.[36]

Classical literature of Greek and Roman authors significantly contributed to this shared tradition on magic. They wrote of humans capable of transforming others into animals or speaking to the dead through elaborate rituals, as seen in figures like Circe and Erichto.[37] While today we think of these as fictional characters, medieval readers would often regard these accounts as factual.[38] The lasting impression left by these literary characters can be found in many of the *exempla* I will describe in the next chapter.

Biblical texts also played a crucial role, portraying magicians typically as antagonists to divine representatives. Notable figures include the Pythoness of Endor, who, at King Saul's request, summoned the spirit of the prophet Samuel. The latter, however, foretold Saul's demise as punishment for his disobedience to God.[39] Also from the Old Testament are the magicians at Pharaoh's court who challenged Moses with their feats—the same magicians mentioned by Thomas Aquinas to describe and conceptualize demonic magic.[40] In classical literature and the Old Testament, magicians of both genders are described, yet female magicians seem to have exerted a more profound influence in later centuries. This pattern might stem from prevailing societal perceptions of gender and power dynamics, with female

[36] For a description of two types of medieval spell books, the Wolfsthurn Manuscript and the Munich Necromantic Handbook, see Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 2–8, and 70–72.
[37] Circe is a character in Homer's *Odyssey*, while Erichto appears in Lucan's *Pharsalia*. Both characters are discussed in Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft*, pp. 11–16 and 41–44. The entire first two chapters of this work provide an extensive examination of classical literary depictions of magic and witchcraft.
[38] Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft*, pp. 5 and 94.
[39] In the *Biblia Vulgata* this passage is in 1 *Reges* 28. Today, however, it is 1 *Samuel* 28. For a detailed overview of early medieval interpretations of this passage, which served as the basis to condemn divination and magic, see Klaas A. D. Smelik, "The Witch of Endor: I *Samuel* 28 in Rabbinic and Christian Exegesis Till 800 A.D.," *Vigiliae Christianae*, 33, no. 2 (1979), pp. 160–179. See also Owen Davies, "The Witch of Endor in History and Folklore," *Folklore*, 134, no. 1 (2023), pp. 1–22.
[40] *Exod*. 7:10–13.

magicians challenging these norms more directly than their male counterparts, thereby generating greater societal anxieties.[41] However, it is noteworthy that during the Middle Ages the perception of magic shifted to be viewed more as an ungendered concept or, in some forms, as a predominantly masculine practice.[42]

In the New Testament, the Magi who paid homage to Jesus posed a theological challenge for medieval scholars, who had to reconcile the notion that these positive characters could have been practitioners of a forbidden art.[43] Another influential magician from the New Testament is Simon Magus, who opposed the Apostle Peter and became a foundational myth for representing magicians and heretics alike. Throughout the Middle Ages, numerous legends arose around Simon Magus, integrating the biblical narrative and illustrating the perceived similarities and differences between magicians and miracle workers.[44]

Pre-Christian religious practices, what Christians called "paganism," also influenced medieval perceptions of magic. These included various forms of divination, such as examining the organs of sacrificed animals, observing the movement of birds in the sky, or the shape of flames. Prominent Christian thinkers like Augustine of Hippo and Isidore of Seville vehemently opposed these practices. Augustine labeled them all as demonic, whether explicitly or implicitly, and Isidore consolidated this stance by describing and categorizing a wide array of divinatory and magical practices, linking them to demonic pacts.[45] Isidore's

[41] Cf. Bailey, *The Basics*, pp. 90–95.
[42] Referring to late Middle Ages, Kieckhefer writes, "It was men who were more likely to arouse anxiety by actually standing in magic circles and conjuring demons; it was women who were far more likely to be burned in the ensuing bonfires." Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. XI.
[43] "Magi" literally means "magicians." The biblical passage is in *Mattew* 2:1–12. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 34.
[44] Simon Magus' only canonical mention in the *Gospel* is in *Acts* 8:9–24, but his tale was greatly expanded by apocryphal legends. Flint, *Rise of Magic*, pp. 338–343.
[45] Fritz Graf, "Augustine and Magic," in *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, edited by Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra (Leuven: Peeters, 2022), pp. 87–103. Isidore's description of magic is in *Etymologiae*, lib. 8, cap. 9: *De magis*. Flint, *Rise of Magic*, p. 50.

classification was extensively referenced and remained influential well beyond the Middle Ages, serving as a foundation for conceptualizing magic.

In classical Latin, the term for necromancy was *necromantia*, derived from the Greek *νεκρός* (dead) and *μαντεία* (divination). During the Middle Ages, the spelling evolved to *nigromantia*, translating literally to black magic. Medieval authors were generally aware of the term's original etymology thanks to Isidore of Seville's explanation. However, the connotations of the practice also shifted together with its spelling. While initially associated with communicating with the dead, necromancy increasingly became regarded as the quintessential form of demonic magic, primarily revolving around the conjuring of evil spirits. Another term frequently used to denote evil magic was *maleficium*, which literally means "evildoing." However, as I illustrate in the next chapter, *maleficium* and *nigromantia* do not seem to have denoted the same concept. In medieval sources, "*maleficium*" typically describes magic practiced by uneducated or superstitious people, often women, while "necromancy" almost always refers to a learned kind of magic practiced by the literate elites.

The twelfth-century introduction of texts from the Islamic world brought new concepts to Latin Christianity.[46] These texts, translated in the liminal regions between Europe and Africa such as Spain and Southern Italy, detailed practices like alchemy, astrology, natural magic, and spiritual magic—the latter involving the aid of spirits, often not explicitly characterized as demons.[47] Prominent theologians of the time, influenced by Augustine's views, tended to label these new disciplines as demonic. However, the situation had grown more complex than in previous centuries, and some Christian intellectuals sought to rescue this newfound knowledge by clearly defining the boundaries of each discipline, distancing what they

[46] See Charles Burnett, "Arabic Magic: The impetus for translating texts and their reception," in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, pp. 71–84.
[47] The most famous example is the *Picatrix*, written in Arabic around the eleventh century and translated in Spanish and then Latin in the thirteenth. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 133.

considered useful sciences from the condemned practices of demonic magic.[48] Furthermore, by the thirteenth century, the association of sorcery with heresy, already present in some form in earlier centuries, became more pronounced. Yet, magicians and heretics were still generally considered as distinct categories during this period. It was not until the fourteenth century that inquisitors began increasingly targeting sorcerers, treating them as heretics, although a complete conflation of the two categories may have never been fully achieved.[49]

Christian exorcistic rites also influenced the perception and the portrayal of ritualistic demonic magic.[50] Throughout this thesis, I will show how many *exempla* framed and described demonic magic by drawing implicit analogies with exorcism practices. At the same time, however, the opposite process can be observed, with exorcists borrowing techniques and attitudes from the repertoire of demonic magicians.

Although I have focused on perceptions of magic, it is important to note that demonic magicians were not merely fictional creations of medieval writers. The existence of necromancers, in particular, is well attested by texts directly written by them and dating back to the late fourteenth century, although sixteenth-century necromantic texts are much more abundant. Thirteenth-century authors also describe similar books, suggesting that necromancy was already a reality at that time, impacting clerical perceptions of demonic magic.

Late medieval necromantic manuals describe the conjuration of spirits through various rituals and techniques: demons were invoked, sacrifices such as animal meat or human blood were offered, and the necromancer asked or compelled the demons to fulfill their requests. Most necromantic books claim that demons can be controlled and instruct practitioners to do

[48] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 117–119.
[49] Richard Kieckhefer, "Witchcraft, Necromancy, and Sorcery as Heresy," in *Chasses aux sorcières et démonologie: entre discours et pratiques, XIVe-XVIIe siècles*, edited by Martine Ostorero, Georg Modestin, and Kathrin Utz Tremp (Florence: SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2010), pp. 133–154.
[50] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 153–155, and 165.

so through formulas borrowed from exorcistic rituals. Astrology was also closely linked to necromancy, with texts often advising to consult the stars before acting. As in *exempla*, the real practitioners of necromancy were mostly clergymen, a category familiar with exorcistic rituals and educated enough to access books on various esoteric topics.[51]

In this intricate and nuanced landscape, magic was generally accepted as real to varying extents. Debates centered on the scope of magic's power and the distinction between genuine effects and sensory illusions, as shown by Thomas Aquinas' passages I have mentioned.[52] Nonetheless, outright denial of magic's existence was untenable, given its biblical attestation and its description by authoritative figures. Indeed, in theological reasoning, demonic magic could serve as proof of the existence of demons, and therefore of angels too, while the existence of the magical arts themselves did not need to be proven.[53] Magic, thus, and especially demonic magic, was an integral part of the medieval worldview.

1.5 Defining *Exempla*

The definition of *exemplum* that has been most influential among scholars in the last few decades, and that remains generally accepted even today, was formulated by Jacques Le Goff in 1982: "a brief narrative, presented as true, intended to be inserted into a discourse (usually

[51] Julien Véronèse, "Solomonic Magic," in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, pp. 187–200; Frank Klaassen, "Necromancy," in *The Routledge History of Medieval* Magic, pp. 201–211; Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, pp. 102–117.

[52] For example, the twelfth-century *Explanatio in Prophetia Merlini Ambrosii*, attributed to Alain of Auxerre, contrasts with Thomas' opinion and suggests that the snakes conjured by Pharaoh's magicians were not real and alive, but illusions as well. Alain of Auxerre, *Prophetie und Politik: Die "Explanatio in Prophetia Merlini Ambrosii,"* edited by Clara Wille (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), lib. 5, cap. 45.

[53] Ramon Lull, *Liber principiorum philosophiae*, edited by M. A. Sánchez Manzano (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pars 1, dist. 3, *prima pars*: *De rationibus ipsius D, tertia ratio*, p. 184.

a sermon) to convince an audience to accept a salutary lesson."[54] Although many alternative definitions have been proposed both before and after Le Goff's, his definition continues to serve as a crucial starting point in discussing *exempla*.[55] In this thesis, while acknowledging the value of this and other definitions, I found it necessary to further discuss *exempla* and develop a definition tailored on the specific objectives of my research.

My goal is to examine the texts of selected *exempla* to try and understand how their authors conceptualized and transmitted the concept of demonic magic, particularly in contrast to other types of texts such as theological treatises or magical handbooks. Beyond merely describing these depictions, I also intend to explore some critical questions: Were the authors of these *exempla* solely discussing magic, or was magic also a rhetorical tool for them? Consequently, what could have been the goals they were trying to accomplish by writing about demonic magic in the way they did?

With these research questions, I also intend to challenge views of *exempla* as mere intermediaries between influential theological intellectuals and the Christian masses. Indeed, many of the analyzed *exempla* contradict not only the most widely accepted theological doctrines on demonic magic, but also exhibit significant variations from one another, albeit still presenting some generally recurring *topoi*. This variety suggests that the authors and collectors of exempla did bring something new to the table, selecting, writing, and adapting their texts to their specific intentions. Furthermore, it is plausible that their sources were not

[54] "*Un récit bref donné comme véridique et destiné à être inséré dans un discours (en général un sermon) pour convaincre un auditoire par une leçon salutaire*." Claude Bremond, Jacques Le Goff, and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *L'"exemplum"* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982), pp. 37–38.
[55] For a general overview on definitions of *exemplum*, see Nicholas Louis, "L'*exemplum* en pratiques. Production, diffusion et usages des recueils d'*exempla* latins aux XIIIe-XVe siècles" (PhD Diss., University of Namur, 2013), pp. 28–31.

limited to theological discourses or to their own inventive, but were also informed by direct contact with actual magical practices and by circulating oral tales.[56]

With these goals in mind, I will discuss the single points of Le Goff's definition to show how they relate to my selection of *exempla*.[57]

The first aspect of Le Goff's definition highlights that *exempla* are narratives. This is not an obvious point, as there can be non-narrative *exempla* too: purely rhetorical devices that refer to some well-known event or fact to help prove a point.[58] In this thesis, I have adopted Le Goff's view, as the *exempla* I have considered are all narrative texts featuring a beginning, a development, and an end. They portray dynamic, non-static situations. Typically, they feature one or several characters engaged in actions that lead to a specific outcome, marking a transformation from the story's beginning.

The second aspect of Le Goff's definition addresses the length of the *exempla*, which he characterizes as brief. In my research, however, I prefer to see the criterion of length elastically, and the view that I have adopted is that *exempla* can have varying length, but generally tend toward brevity.[59]

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[56] Regarding oral tradition, I have deliberately refrained from distinguishing between folkloristic tales and the oral network of educated clergyman, as it remains to be proven that there was ever a clear distinction between the two when dealing with tales of magic. Conversely, the notion of a "common tradition of medieval magic" as not specific to any particular subgroup (literate rather than illiterate) has been convincingly argued by Kieckhefer through *Magic in the Middle Ages*, esp. pp. 56–94.

[57] These points are listed in Bremond, Le Goff, and Schmitt, *L'"exemplum,"* pp. 36–37.

[58] Louis, "L'*exemplum* en pratiques," p. 21.

[59] In this aspect, I have partially adopted the definition proposed by Teresa Szostek: "[The *exemplum* is] a form of a narrative proposition of varying length, including the bare reminiscence of events, of persons, fictional and historical alike, and of situations related to the natural world. [An *exemplum*] is used in the first place for didactic purposes: to present a desirable model of human behavior or its antithesis, designed to discourage imitation." Teresa Szostek, *Exemplum w polskim średniowieczu* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL, 1997), p. 13; cited and translated in Marcin Polkowski, "The *Exemplum* in the Literary and Religious Culture of the Late-Medieval Netherlands," in *Literatura renesansowa w Polsce i Europie*, edited by Jakub Niedźwiedź (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2016), p. 406.

Thirdly, the *exempla* I have analyzed are consistently presented as factual, often with explicit references to the source, and/or the time and place where the events described supposedly took place. Conversely, these narratives are never portrayed as fictitious, despite containing fantastical elements. This claim for reality excludes from consideration narratives that incorporate impossible elements, even by medieval standards—such as fables featuring anthropomorphic animals.

So far, there is no significant difference between my understanding of *exempla* and that of Le Goff. However, point four, five, six, and eight of his definition do not perfectly align with my observations. The fourth and fifth aspects of Le Goff's definition suggest that the *exemplum* is inherently linked to a discourse, typically a sermon intended for preaching. The sixth, eighth, and ninth aspects, instead, relate to the finality of an *exemplum*: for le Goff *exempla* have the goal to persuade, in a didactic and pedagogical manner, of a salvific message (to be intended in the Christian sense).

I have omitted the seventh point of Le Goff's definition because I intend to discuss it separately. It concerns the "who" who is persuaded by the *exemplum*: a specific audience which the *exemplum* links to a speaker—intended as the one who conveys any kind of message, not just in the oral form. This distinction implies that *exempla* are not all universally intended for the same type of audience: some might be directed at the uneducated masses, while others, for example, could be aimed at the novices of a monastery. Rather than thinking in terms of just one intended audience for each *exemplum*, I prefer to discuss, in plural terms, of intended and/or possible audiences. In the final chapter of this thesis I will try and define the scope of the analyzed *exempla*, highlighting also how the same story can, at the same time, convey different meanings to different audiences, and how the authors themselves might occasionally have been aware of this possibility.

Concerning points four, five, six, eight, and nine of Le Goff's definition—which emphasize the dependence of *exempla* on a discourse (usually a sermon) and their persuasive use to transmit a salvific lesson—I found it difficult to apply them too literally. This is because I have encountered narratives that, while formally possessing the characteristics of *exempla* and holding the potential "to be inserted into a discourse (usually a sermon) to convince an audience to accept a salutary lesson," do not explicitly display such finality in the way they are written down. For instance, there are *exempla* included within the chronological narration of chronicles which do not appear to relate to any specific discourse; or *exempla* found in theological treatises which seem primarily intended to demonstrate a doctrinal point, and were not necessarily composed for preaching purposes.[60]

In these instances, the dependence on a discourse and the persuasive, didactic, and salvific elements emerge only as potential aspects. This leaves the reader with the opportunity to repurpose these *exempla* and include them within a sermon or other discourses, tailoring them to convey a variety of possible salvific messages.

I do not regard such *exempla* as exceptions, nor do I believe that framing these stories as *exempla* requires the assumption that the author's true intentions were for them to be eventually preached.[61] It is sufficient, I think, that these stories could have been seamlessly

[60] E.g., in his chronicle, Helinand of Froidmont includes an *exemplum* from the *Gesta Regum Anglorum* by William of Malmesbury. *Helinandi Frigidi Montis monachi Chronicon*, PL 212, edited Jacques Paul Migne (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1863), lib. 46, ann. 1051, col. 945 (From now on cited as "Helinand of Froidmont, *Chronicon*"). An *exemplum* used in a *distinctio* to substantiate a theological argument on the power of the eucharist, instead, is in Roger Bacon, *Moralis philosophia*, edited by Eugenio Massa (Zurich: Thesaurus Mundi, 1953), pars 4, dist. 3, pp. 225–226.

[61] The notion that *exempla* must necessarily relate to preaching has sometimes led to historical inaccuracies, such as the erroneous renaming of Salimbene de Adam's *Cronica*, which contains a number of *exempla*, to *Cronaca sive Liber exemplorum ad usum praedicantium*. This misconception first appeared in Antonio Ivan Pini "Bologna e la Romagna nella *Cronaca sive Liber exemplorum ad usum praedicantium* di Salimbene de Adam," in *Salimbeniana. Atti del convegno per il VII centenario di fra Salimbene* (Bologna: Radio Tau, 1991). The lack of rationale for such a title has been noted in Michèle Brossard-Dandré, "Le statut de l'*exemplum* dans la *Chronique* de Fra Salimbene de Adam," in *Les*

used for preaching, though this should not be considered a necessary outcome. The salvific message of an *exemplum* should also be seen as a flexible element: some *exempla* lack a singular, fixed meaning, and those which have one can have it shifted through subsequent interpretations by other authors, sometimes acquiring meanings not present in the original form.

For example, in the *Treatise on Various Predicable Matters* by Stephen of Bourbon (d. 1261), there is an *exemplum* titled "The Emperor Made by Incantation."[62] In this story, a master necromancer tests his disciple by making him believe he has become the emperor. Dazzled by the illusion, the disciple forgets his master and refuses to share with him any of his newfound wealth. Having acknowledged his disciple's unfaithfulness, the master revokes the illusion just as easily as he had granted it, and the disciple is left with nothing. In this intriguing *exemplum*, the literary character of the necromancer has been portrayed not to be condemned; rather, as Stephen clarifies at multiple points in his text, he symbolizes God who bestows wealth to men, but can take it away any moment.[63] Stephen does not explicitly state any other intended meaning, yet the story is open to various interpretations. This flexibility was recognized by Arnold of Liège (d. ca. 1309), who included this *exemplum* in his collection, the *Alphabet of Narrations*, and noted down that it can also pertain to themes of

exempla médiévaux. Nouvelles perspectives, edited by Jacques Berlioz and Marie-Anne Polo de Beaulieu (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1998), p. 84, footnote 4. Despite being unfounded, this erroneous title is still occasionally used, for example in Armando Bisanti, "La fortuna della *Cronica* di Salimbene de Adam fra Trecento e Quattrocento," in *Salimbene de Adam e la "Cronica." Atti del LIV Convegno storico internazionale* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2018), p. 164, footnote 1.

[62] "*Exemplum de imperatore facto per incantationem*," in Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus de diversis materiis predicabilibus*, vol. 1, edited by Jacques Berlioz and Jean-Luc Eichenlaub (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002-2006), tit. 4, cap. 8, lin. 1631 (From now on, "Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus*"). The moral of the story is stated by Stephen himself: "*Sic facit Christus diuitibus*" (Thus does Christ to the rich).

[63] The *exemplum* and its intended moral are mentioned again in Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus*, vol. 3, tit. 6, cap. 7, lin. 708.

fidelity, enchantment, deceit, and false friends.[64] These interpretations, while not privileged by the original author—assuming Stephen was the creator of the *exemplum*—were evidently ripe for being explored by the right interpreter.

Therefore, the *exempla* analyzed in this thesis are narratives of varying lengths (generally brief) whose factuality is never challenged. They have the potential to resonate with one or multiple types of audiences, but they do not necessarily hold a univocal, fixed meaning. What these *exempla* always hold is the potential for one or more meanings to be selected in order to persuade, demonstrate, and teach salvific messages. Likewise, they have the potential to be integrated into a broader discourse as rhetorical tools, although this is merely a possible aspect, ultimately dependent on the intervention of an interpreter.

In the thirteenth century, *exempla* were more than just a means to an end. Their widespread usage had rendered them integral part of the mental framework of clergymen, or at least of some of them, functioning as tools to rationalize ideas, construct discourses, and ultimately shape perceptions of reality.[65] Therefore, *exempla* are relevant to this thesis as they represent means to conceptualize and convey the concept of demonic magic in a concrete and non-abstract manner.[66]

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[64] "*Sic faciet Deus diuitibus. Hoc etiam ualet ad fidelitatem et incantationem et falsitatem. Amici ficti sunt multi*." Arnold of Liège, *Alphabetum narrationum*, edited by Elisa Brilli, Colette Ribaucourt, Jacques Berlioz, and Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), p. 37. Arnold's interpretative flexibility extends beyond this singular case and is recurrent in his collection. He routinely gives cross-references to his *exempla*, suggesting that they fit any of several themes.

[65] One fascinating example of opposing arguments being asserted through *exempla* can be found in the writings of Lucas of Tuy (d. 1249), who argues against the *exempla* of those he perceives as heretics with *exempla* of his own, emphasizing their veracity: "Therefore, when a Christian hears such a sacrilegious fable from someone […] the Christian proposes not a fable, but a true story: 'A certain knight [etc.]'" (*Unde cum talem sacrilegam fabulam ab aliquo audierit Christianus […] proponit Christianus aliam non fabulam, sed rem gestam: "Quidam miles* […]"). Lucas of Tuy, *De altera vita*, edited by Emma Falque Rey (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), lib. 3, cap. 6, p. 198, lin. 19. On *exempla* used by friars even simply to argue among themselves, see Louis, "L'*exemplum* en pratiques," p. 72.

[66] Cf. Mark Reul Silk, "*Scientia rerum*: the place of example in later medieval thought" (PhD Diss., Harvard University, 1982), pp. 7–8. Cited in Louis, "L'*exemplum* en pratiques," p. 30.

Scholars have also proposed many criteria for categorizing *exempla* based on varying aspects. However, I will not address these classifications in this chapter. Instead, in the next chapter I will present my own categorization of *exempla* which is based on how they portray demonic magic. Nevertheless, further clarification is necessary to outline the parameters I have used in selecting the *exempla* for this study.

1.6 Language, Cultural Sphere, and Chronology

The *exempla* analyzed in this thesis are drawn from texts written in the thirteenth century by clerical authors.[67] The timeframe should not be interpreted too rigidly, as literary styles and conceptual frameworks do not abruptly change at the turn of a century. In fact, while the earliest source I analyze, Gervase of Tilbury's (d. ca. 1220) *Otia imperialia*, was composed in 1215, the most recent, the *Historiae memorabiles*, has been dated to 1304.[68]

There are two primary reasons for choosing this long period for my sources.

The first reason relates to the medium of transmission: the *exemplum*. Historiography typically considers the period between thirteenth and fourteenth century as the one in which *exempla* usage reached its peak. During the thirteenth century, *exempla* circulated widely, and integrated deeply into religious practices, particularly spurred by the Church's efforts to render confession mandatory for everyone. The preaching of *exempla* served as a primary method to fulfill this objective. *Exempla* were produced and collected extensively, achieving

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Louis synthesizes Silk's views as follows: "The *exemplum* is therefore not a content, but a type of use. More precisely, it is a mode of knowledge and of making known: a *scientia rerum*" (*L'exemplum n'est donc pas un contenu, mais un type d'utilisation. Plus précisément, il est un mode de connaissance et de faire connaître*).

[67] While I did not initially exclude secular authors from my research, I have not been able to find secular *exempla* that meet my criteria, assuming such texts do exist for the thirteenth century.

[68] Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*: *Recreation for an Emperor*, edited by S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002); Rudolf of Schlettstadt, *Historiae memorabiles. Zur Dominikanerliteratur und Kulturgeschichte des 13. Jahrhunderts*, edited by Erich Kleinschmidt (Cologne and Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1974).

a certain level of stylistic consistency as short, versatile narrations ready to be tailored to specific needs.[69]

Not all the *exempla* analyzed in this thesis were originally conceived in the thirteenth century. Some trace back to earlier sources, potentially centuries old, such as the *vitae* of saints.[70] Thirteenth-century authors often collected and revised these texts to various extents, continuously revitalizing them. Whenever possible, I will try to determine whether an *exemplum* is presented in its first documented redaction, or if it represents a copy or retelling. In doing so, I will attempt to consider how individual authors, influenced by their specific milieu, rewrote or rearranged pre-existing *exempla* within their texts. Nevertheless, I will include retellings of *exempla* for two reasons: first, it is often challenging to pinpoint when an old motif ceases to be central to the narrative and a new story emerges from the old one. Second, stories with ancient origins circulated as widely as new ones, largely due to the revitalizing efforts of the *exempla* collectors. These stories played a significant role in shaping perceptions of demonic magic during the thirteenth century, alongside the newly conceived narratives.

This approach to retellings also implies that I do not view authors and collectors of *exempla* merely as links in a chain of transmission; rather, I see them as individuals who have impacted their texts in more or less intentional ways. By examining even minor details, such as how *exempla* are arranged relative to each other, and attributing authorial intent to these choices, the concept of authorship is significantly magnified. Within the constraints of such a short thesis, and insofar as my interpretive sensibility allows me, I will try to discover and investigate these nuances.

[69] Louis, "L'*exemplum* en pratiques," pp. 69–73.
[70] *Exempla* analyzed in the following chapter will also relate to the stories of Cyprian and Theophilus, whose stories are attested in fourth- and ninth-century texts, respectively.

The second reason for focusing on the thirteenth century relates to the subject matter of my research: demonic magic. As I have already noted, this period marked a significant transformation, characterized by the clash of traditional views of magic—consistently categorized as demonic by patristic authors—with emerging concepts of natural magic and scientific practices. This evolution was spurred by the influx of new knowledge from the Islamic world, contributing to more complex debates about magic, also thanks to the rationalizing influence of scholasticism. One of the results of this tension between different perceptions of magic was an increased effort to condemn demonic magic proper, motivated both by authorities wary of the newly introduced texts and by intellectuals striving to legitimize certain disciplines by dissociating them from demonic practices.

Moreover, modern historians generally recognize that, from the fourteenth century onward, demonic magic began to be persecuted more systematically and treated as a greater concern than in earlier periods, often being associated, to varying degrees, with heresy.[71] In contrast, the thirteenth century seems to have been a transitional period, characterized both by theoretical efforts to conceptualize and condemn demonic magic and by relatively little interest in actual persecution by the authorities.[72]

These growing tensions between contrasting perceptions add another layer of complexity to the period's discourses on magic, which is evident in the *exempla* analyzed in this thesis. For these reasons, the thirteenth century stands out as a pivotal era, offering diverse and evolving perceptions of magic, and particularly of demonic magic. These perceptions, illuminated through the texts central to this thesis, provide a unique opportunity to explore a crucial moment in the transformation of the idea of magic in western Christianity.

[71] Kieckhefer, "Witchcraft, Necromancy, and Sorcery as Heresy."
[72] Alain Boureau, *Satan the Heretic: The Birth of Demonology in the Medieval West*, translated by Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: The University Press of Chicago, 2014).

As for the area in which these *exempla* were composed, I have considered the so-called Latin Christianity: the region in which Christianity, under the Pope's hierarchical authority, was the official religion, and Latin was the primary language among the learned. I have specifically excluded *exempla* written in the vernacular, which are not only much fewer in number during this period but also present linguistic challenges that extend beyond the scope of an MA thesis. Yet, some Latin *exempla* retain traces of their vernacular origins, evident in peculiar sentence structures or in hints that they were translated from or intended for translation into vernacular languages, the latter for preaching purposes.

It is also noteworthy that the widespread use of Latin in Western Christianity likely fostered a shared cultural identity, at least among the educated, religious elites. This common linguistic and cultural framework allowed for a diverse array of perspectives to converge in the *exempla* analyzed. These narratives reveal influences from various milieus, personal inclinations, specific historical moments, and intended audiences. Yet, they also convey some generally shared ideas, which I will explore in the subsequent chapters.

1.7 The Main Primary Sources Used for this Thesis

By operating a selection through the parameters I have detailed, I have gathered sources ranging from anecdotes in chronicles and theological treatises to *exempla* and short hagiographies used for preaching. Whenever possible, I have been able to read the full texts containing the *exempla* of interest, to glean insights into the author's style. However, it wasn't always possible to dive into every source in such detail, so I mostly relied on secondary literature to help me understand the main features and the context of my sources.

I came across some of the *exempla* in this thesis on my own during past research experiences, but most of them were found by surveying secondary literature mentioning demonic magic and by consulting online databases. I used in particular the *ThEMA* project,

managed by Jacques Berlioz, Marjorie Burghart, Pascal Collomb, and Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu; the *Library of Latin Texts* on the *Brepolis* website; and the *Corpus Corporum* developed at the University of Zurich.[73] I have thoroughly scanned these databases by utilizing various keywords. The list is too long to repeat here in full, but it includes terms such as "nigrom*," "malefic*," "incant*," "magic*," and so on.

I will now list those texts which I've used throughout the dissertation. Each entry includes author, title, date in which the work was completed, and a brief contextualization, along with the reasons why I chose to include the work in my study.

- **Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia* (1215)**[74]

This encyclopedic work was composed for the Holy Roman Emperor Otto IV (d. 1218) and reflects the knowledge Gervase gathered during his travels from England to southern Italy. It features many tales of wonders, including several on magic. However, Gervase seldom connotates magic as explicitly demonic. This may be due to folkloristic influences, as many of his tales follow local legends describing magic as a form of occult knowledge of the natural world rather than a demonic practice.[75] Nevertheless, Gervase does occasionally describe demonic magic directly, and I have examined in this thesis one of such stories where Mahomet is portrayed as a demonic magician.

[73] "ThEMA: *Thesaurus Exemplorum Medii Aevi*," https://thema.huma-num.fr/; "Library of Latin Texts," https://clt.brepolis.net/llta/pages/QuickSearch.aspx; "*Corpus Corporum*. *Repositorium operum Latinorum apud universitatem Turicensem,*" https://mlat.uzh.ch/home. These websites have been accessed on May 11, 2024.

[74] I have used the 2002 edition by Banks and Binns (Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*). Details about Gervase and his work come from the introduction to this edition.

[75] The most recurring magician in the *Otia imperialia* is Vergil. In the Middle Ages the Roman poet Publius Vergilius Maro was commonly considered to have been a magician and to have operated many wonders in the city of Naples. Gervase, however, never links him to demons.

- **Helinand of Froidmont, *Chronicon* (ca. 1223)**[76]

Helinand (d. ca. 1237) was a Cistercian monk who resided at the monastery of Froidmont, in northern France. Before embracing monastic life, he was a minstrel and a poet. His main work, a chronicle up to his times, includes moral treatises, sermons, and narrative excerpts. Like many medieval chroniclers, Helinand incorporates within his work texts by various preexisting authors, and for the purposes of this thesis I have primarily focused on those stories that Helinand adapted from William of Malmesbury, many of them featuring demonic magic. As I will show, Helinand sometimes adheres strictly to William's text, while at other times he introduces subtle alterations, which may reflect his own views on demonic magic.[77]

- **Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus miraculorum* (ca. 1223)**[78]

Caesarius was a Cistercian monk from the monastery of Heisterbach, in Germany, where he served as the master of novices. This role influenced his collection of nearly 800 *exempla*, which are structured as a dialogue between a monk and a novice. His *Dialogue on Miracles* is organized into twelve thematic sections: Conversion, Contrition, Confession, Temptation, Demons, The Virtue of Singleness of Heart, The Blessed Virgin Mary, Diverse Visions, The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, Miracles, The Dying, and The Afterlife. Drawing heavily from his personal experiences, this work gained popularity already in the thirteenth

[76] The edition I have used is the one edited by Migne in 1863 (Helinand of Froidmont, *Chronicon*). For life and works of Helinand, see Beverly Mayne Kienzle, *Cistercians, Heresy and Crusade in Occitania, 1145-1229* (York: Boydell & Brewer, 2001) pp. 175–182.
[77] Cf. chapter 2.4 of this thesis.
[78] In this thesis I refer to the 1851 Strange's edition (Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*) but I have also consulted the apparatus criticus of the 2009 edition by Nösges and Schneider. For Caesarius' life and works, see Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu, Victoria Smirnova, and Jacques Berlioz, "Introduction," in *The Art of Cistercian Persuasion in the Middle Ages and Beyond: Caesarius of Heisterbach's Dialogue on Miracles and Its Reception*, edited by Victoria Smirnova, Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu, and Jacques Berlioz (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 1–30.

century, not only educating monks but also serving as a resource for preaching to laity. Caesarius is frequently cited when discussing medieval necromancy, with his text containing numerous contemporaneous stories on this subject. As detailed in the subsequent chapters, he consistently portrays necromancy as a form of servitude to the Devil, with practitioners paying homage to him as if he were a feudal overlord.

- **Jacques de Vitry, *Sermones vulgares* (ca. 1240)**[79]

After studying theology in Paris, Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240) joined the Augustinian Order and later became the bishop of Acre, in Palestine. He was a prominent figure of his time, serving both as a military leader and as renowned preacher, fervently opposing the Albigenses and Islam. His literary works include a world chronicle and several collections of sermons categorized into *Sermones dominicales*, for Sundays and feast days; *Sermones de sanctis*, focusing on saints; *Sermones vulgares*, targeted at both clergy and laity; and *Sermones communes*, of disputed authorship and intended for general use. In this thesis, I have analyzed the *exempla* from the *Sermones vulgares*, some of which describe witchcraft practiced by women. However, the majority of these *exempla* focus on magic conducted through the eucharist, which typically does not involve the Devil as a direct presence.

[79] For consulting the text I have used *The Exempla or illustrative stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry*, edited by Thomas Frederick Crane (London: David Nutt, 1890) (From now on cited as "Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*"). For Jacques' life and works, other than Crane's introduction, I also have consulted Marie-Claire Gasnault, "Jacques de Vitry, *Sermones vulgares et Sermones* communes," in *Les Exempla médiévaux. Introduction à la recherche, suivie des tables critiques de l'Index exemplorum de Frederic C. Tubach, edited by Jacques Berlioz and Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu (Carcassonne: GARAE/HESIODE, 1992),* p. 121; and the introduction in Jacques de Vitry, *Sermones vulgares vel ad status*, vol. 1, edited by Jean Longère (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. I–XXXVI.

- **Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, *Chronica* (ca. 1251)**[80]

Alberic (d. ca. 1252) was a Cistercian monk who resided at the monastery of Clairvaux and, later in life, at the monastery of Trois-Fontaines, in Champagne. His chronicle, as it was typical in the Middle Ages, recounts history from creation to his contemporary era, specifically up to 1241. This work did not achieve widespread diffusion and is known from only one manuscript, which is likely an autograph. Alberic drew on various sources, including Helinand of Froidmont's chronicle, and even literary works such as epic poems and *exempla*, which he treated as historical sources. I have included this text in my thesis because, in a short narrative passage, it offers a remarkably detailed account of a necromantic ritual set in Maastricht.[81]

- **Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale* (ca. 1260)**[82]

The French Dominican Friar Vincent of Beauvais is best known for his monumental encyclopedic work, the *Speculum maius*, which he composed over a period of nearly three decades and dedicated to King Louis IX of France (d. 1270). Vincent was responsible for the theological education of the monks at Royaumont Abbey, and he also oversaw the education of the royal princes. The *Speculum maius* reflects the author's pedagogical inclination and

[80] *Chronica Alberici monachi Trium Fontium*, MGH, Scriptores 23, 14, edited by Paul Scheffer-Boichorst (Hannover: Hahn, 1874), pp. 631–954 (From now on, "Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, *Chronica*"). For works and biography, see Stefano Mula, "Exempla and Historiography. Alberic of Trois-Fontaines's Reading of Caesarius's Dialogus miraculorum," in *The Art of Cistercian Persuasion*, pp. 143–145.

[81] See chapter 2.1 of this thesis.

[82] In absence of a modern critical edition, I have relied on Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum maioris* (Douai: Valthazar Bellère, 1624), reprinted in *Speculum quadruplex*, *Historiale* (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1964) (From now on, Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum*). For works and biography, see Karl Young, "The *Speculum Majus* of Vincent of Beauvais," *The Yale University Library Gazette*, 5, no. 1 (1930), pp. 1–13; Rebecca J. Jacobs-Pollez, "The Education of Noble Girls in Medieval France: Vincent of Beauvais and *De eruditione filiorum nobilium*" (PhD Diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 2012), pp. 20–41; Fausto Ghisalberti, "Vincenzo di Beauvais" in *Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani*, 1937, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vincenzo-di-beauvais_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/ (accessed on May 12, 2024).

encompasses all branches of medieval knowledge. The work is structured into three parts: *Speculum naturale,* covering natural phenomena, geography, astronomy, anatomy, zoology and similar topics; *Speculum doctrinale*, focusing on sciences and arts such as logics, politics, commerce, poetry, arithmetic, physics, and medicine; and *Speculum historiale*, detailing history up to 1254. In this latter historiographical work, Vincent incorporates excerpts from earlier authors, including stories of demonic magic from William of Malmesbury. These stories were relayed to thirteenth-century audiences through the *Speculum historiale*, and sometimes they include crucial alterations to the original texts.[83]

- **Gerard de Frachet, *Vitae fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum* (ca. 1260)**[84]

Gerard de Frachet (d. 1271), a French Dominican friar, was the author of a chronicle and of a collection of hagiographical anecdotes about the most distinguished members of his Order. In this thesis, I focus on this latter work, titled *The Lives of the Friars of the Order of Preachers*, which he compiled for the purpose of edification and for educating novices. Gerard's text has been particularly valuable for my research, as it has provided me with a miracle story depicting the relatively rare motif of magical heretics.[85]

- **Roger Bacon, *Moralis philosophia* (1267)**[86]

Roger Bacon was an English scholar who studied at Oxford and taught at the University of Paris before joining the Franciscan Order. His principal work is the *Opus maius*, an

[83] Cf. chapter 2.4 of this thesis.
[84] Gerard de Frachet, *Vitae fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum*, edited by Benedikt Maria Reichert (Louvain: E. Charpentier & J. Schoonjans, 1896). The biographical notes come from the introduction.
[85] See chapter 2.3 of this thesis.
[86] I have relied on the 1953 edition by Eugenio Massa (Roger Bacon, *Moralis philosphia*). For biographical notes and work, see the introduction to this edition and Jeremiah M. G. Hackett, "Moral Philosophy and Rhetoric in Roger Bacon," *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 20, no. 1 (1987), pp. 18–20.

encyclopedic study of sciences, philosophy, and religion. The seventh and final part of this text is dedicated to moral philosophy, linking scientific discussion to the moral implications of human actions, while also delving into theological themes. This work has been included in my thesis because it contains a *distinctio* in which Bacon discusses the power of the eucharist and supports his argument with an *exemplum* involving a necromantic ritual where a demon shows reverence for the eucharist. This exemplum is fascinating not only in its own right, but also for illustrating how short narratives can serve multiple purposes beyond mere preaching. Additionally, it demonstrates the strong perceived factuality of *exempla*, as Roger expects his audience to accept his story as valid evidence in favor of his argument.[87]

- **Anonymous, *Liber exemplorum ad usum praedicantium* (ca. 1279)**[88]

This collection of 213 *exempla*, preserved in a single manuscript, was authored by an anonymous Franciscan friar from England who spent several years in Ireland and studied in Paris, where he also met Roger Bacon. The *Liber exemplorum* features two *exempla* of necromancy set in Paris, one of which mentions Roger himself.[89] It also includes two adaptations of older stories of demonic magic involving Josaphat and Theophilus, as well as several accounts of eucharist magic performed by women.

[87] Roger Bacon, *Moralis philosophia*, pars 4, dist. 3, pp. 225–226.
[88] *Liber exemplorum ad usum praedicantium saeculo XIII compositus a quodam fratre minore anglico de provincia Hiberniae*, edited by Andrew George Little (Aberdeen: Academic Prints, 1908) (From now on, simply "*Liber exemplorum"*). Considerations on the author and on the work come from the introduction.
[89] *Liber exemplorum*, cap 38, p. 22.

- **Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus de diversis materiis predicabilibus* (ca. 1261)**[90]

Stephen of Bourbon was a French Dominican friar who studied in Paris and served as a preacher and inquisitor, roles through which he combated heresy and enforced church doctrine throughout France. His *Treatise on Various Predicable Matters* is the largest collection of *exempla* of the thirteenth century, containing over 3000 *exempla*. He composed this work towards the end of his life, designing it as a resource for preachers to utilize in crafting sermons on virtually any subject. His enormous work has yet to be edited in its entirety, and my research is based on the first three volumes edited by Jacques Berlioz and on a nineteenth-century edition that includes only selected *exempla*. As the new critical edition progresses, it is likely that new *exempla* on demonic magic will become available to scholars, enriching the current understanding of this subject. Nevertheless, the material currently available has already provided me with various stories on necromancers, witches, and magicians of antiquity.

- **Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica* (ca. 1288)**[91]

Salimbene (d. ca. 1288) was a northern-Italian Franciscan friar deeply involved in the politics of his time and well-acquainted with powerful Italian lords. His only surviving work, a chronicle of his era, is particularly relevant for its rich narrative digressions, many of which formally qualify as *exempla*. Salimbene was both a preacher and a proficient narrator, and he displays a tendency to comment on the events he describes. His work is especially valuable

[90] For Stephen's work I have used both the three volumes published between 2002 and 2006 and edited by Berlioz and Eichenlaub (Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus*); and *Anecdotes historiques, légendes et apologues tirés du recueil inédit d'Etienne de Bourbon, dominicain du XIIIe siècle*, edited by Albert Lecoy de La Marche (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1877) (From now on, "Stephen of Bourbon, *Anecdotes*"). The biographical notes are based on the introduction to the first volume by Berlioz.

[91] I have used Scalia's 1998-1999 edition. For Salimbene's biography and work, see *Atti del LIV Convegno storico internazionale*.

for its inclusion of three *exempla* featuring ferocious necromancers, as well as various reflections on demonic magic and general demonic activity.

- **Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea* (ca. 1298).**[92]

Of the authors I have examined, Jacobus de Voragine (d. 1298) is likely the one who achieved the greatest success, as his main work, the *Legenda aurea*, was widely copied through the Middle Ages. Jacobus was a Dominican friar and Bishop of Genua. His *Legenda aurea* is a collection of hagiographies organized into short narratives and includes various tales of saints interacting with magicians, such as the stories of Hermogenes versus St. James, Cyprian versus Justina, St. Basil and Heradius, among others.

- **Rudolph of Schlettstadt, *Historiae memorabiles* (ca. 1304).**[93]

This collection of 56 *exempla* was composed by an anonymous Dominican friar at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Erich Kleinschmidt curated a critical edition which he based on the only manuscript known at the time (1974) and attributed the work to Rudolph of Schlettstadt. In 1997, however, a second manuscript has been discovered, containing the *Historiae memorabiles* and an additional 54 *exempla* by the same author. A preliminary analysis by Stefan Georges has reopened the discussion on the authorship of the *Historiae*,

[92] Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea*, edited by Johann Georg Theodor Grässe (Leipzig: Arnold, 1850). Although in this thesis I refer to Grässe's edition, I have also consulted the apparatus criticus of Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea. Con le miniature del codice Ambrosiano C 240 inf.*, edited by Giovanni Paolo Maggioni and translated by Francesco Stella and Giovanni Paolo Maggioni (Florence: SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2007). For Jacobus' life and his work, see Jacques Le Goff, *Il tempo sacro dell'uomo: La "Legenda aurea" di Iacopo da Varazze*, translated by Paolo Galloni (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2012).

[93] I have used Kleinschmidt's 1974 edition (Rudolph of Schlettstadt, *Historiae memorabiles*). The manuscript containing the unedited *exempla* is the Sigmaringen: Fürstlich Hohenzollernsche Hofbibliothek, Codex 64. For the work and its authorship I have referred to Kleinschmidt's introduction and to Stephan Georges, "Graf Wilhelm Werner von Zimmern als Historiensammler: Die Wundergeschichtensammlung des neuentdeckten autographen Sigmaringer Codex' 64" (Ma Diss., University of Freiburg, 1999).

with Georges attributing it to the author of a Colmar chronicle. This collection includes stories of necromancy that echo those from Caesarius' *exempla* but depict necromancers as controlling rather than being controlled by demons. Additionally, the *Historiae* also contain *exempla* describing demonic witchcraft, introducing motifs that would become prevalent in the early modern period. In addition to the critical edition, I have also been able to examine some stories from the unedited manuscript, finding narratives involving demonic prophets and, notably, nuns being accused of raising the dead.[94]

[94] Sigmaringen, Cod. 64, fol. 122v-123r, and 130v-131r.

Chapter 2

2.1 Necromancers

In thirteenth-century *exempla*, the demonic magician *par excellence* is the necromancer. The term "necromancy" itself, however, could sometimes be used broadly to describe various forms of magic, irrespective of the methods employed or the type of practitioner involved.[95] Nonetheless, in most cases the Latin word "*nigromantia*" is understood in these texts to specifically mean the magical conjuration of demons.

Necromancers are not ordinary individuals, but are consistently portrayed as literate, learned males. The gendered exclusivity of the practice likely reflects the broader societal structures of western Christianity, where educational opportunities were predominantly available to men. In fact, the only female necromancer I have encountered in my studies belongs to a monastery, as nuns had access to books and would be often taught to read.[96] If the background of the necromancer is mentioned, it invariably links him to one of two milieus: they are either clergymen, or they are related to medieval university as students or masters. These two categories—churchmen and scholars—were not mutually exclusive. Typically, medieval students who enrolled in a university would formally assume a clerical status for the duration of their studies. Furthermore, members of the mendicant orders—Franciscans and Dominicans—would frequently train in theology and canon law in the major university centers like Paris and Bologna.

Aside from their shared educated background, necromancers in medieval *exempla* are depicted with a variety of social standings and economic conditions. For example, a story by Caesarius of Heisterbach involves a clergyman and necromancer who is so poor that he even

[95] For example, "*nigromantia*" is used with the generic meaning of "magic" in Helinand of Froidmont, *Chronicon*, lib. 46, ann. 1048, col. 942, lin. 20.
[96] This story features nuns accused by their abbess to be summoning the dead. *Historiae*, Sigmaringen, Cod. 64. 122v–123r.

travels to hell to obtain a reward.[97] In this *exemplum*, the Landgrave of Thuringia, Herman I (d. 1217), desires to learn the fate of his father's soul and offers to reward anyone would bring him any verifiable information. Upon learning this, an impoverished knight persuades his brother, a clergyman and a former necromancer, to use his skills for completing the task. Initially, the clergyman is unwilling. While he sometimes used to call upon the Devil through prayers and ask him whatever he wanted, he now intends to abjure him and his arts.[98] However, reminded of their dire financial state, he ultimately succumbs to his brother's request. He summons his demon and humbly apologizes to him for having neglected him in the past. He then asks the demon to escort him to hell to speak with the soul of the Landgrave's father, but the experience proves so terrifying that eventually it leads him to renounce his sinful ways and to become a monk.

In other stories, necromancers could produce illusory wealth, such as in the *exemplum* by Stephen of Bourbon I have mentioned in at chapter 1.5, in which a necromancer makes it so that his apprentice believes to be emperor. In another tale from the same author, a poor young nobleman promises to apprentice himself to Melchita, a master necromancer in Toledo, in exchange for the latter's generosity. However, when pressured to pledge allegiance to a magical king implied to be the Devil, and to renounce the Holy Trinity, the young man resists and makes the sign of the cross, causing the Devil and Melchita to sink into the ground.[99]

In another medieval story, recorded by William of Malmesbury in the twelfth century and then included by thirteenth-century authors in their texts, Gerbert of Aurillac, future Pope Sylvester II (d. 1003), is portrayed as a necromancer, and his pupils are said to be sons of

[97] Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 1. dist. 1, cap. 34, pp. 40–43.
[98] "*Bone frater, diabolum aliquando per carmina vocare consuevi; sciscitabar ab illo quae volui; diu est quod eius colloquiis artibusque renunciavi*." Ibidem.
[99] Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus*, pars 2, tit. 5, cap. 7, lin. 1080–1120.

kings and emperors, underscoring the elite circles within which a magician could have been imagined to operate.[100]

The *exempla* also depict necromancers in more mundane roles—encountered in taverns or as part of the retinue of a wealthy cleric.[101] Some, like a parish priest in Salimbene's chronicle, even combine their dark arts with official church roles such as performing exorcism.[102] While sometimes these diverse portrayals could reflect the real experience of the narrators, in most cases it clearly serves the narrative needs of the stories, illustrating necromancers as either wielding formidable power to awe the audience or as pitiful figures to underscore the futility of their art.

Toledo holds a unique place in the lore of necromancy, so much so that the mere mention of the city could evoke associations with demonic magic. Many of the analyzed *exempla* are either set in this city, or feature magicians who come from it. This *topos* originates from Toledo's historical role as a center for cultural exchange between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, fostering the translation of texts from various languages into Latin. I have already mentioned how these translations, which included works on magic, introduced new ideas to Latin Christianity which would often be met with suspicion from most of the clergy, leading to Spain being considered the homeland of magic schools.[103] Despite the prominence of Toledo in stories involving necromancy, most tales are still set throughout Western

[100] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, vol. 1, lib. 2, cap. 167, pp. 282–283. This story can also be found in Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum*, lib. 24, cap. 98, p. 997b, toward the end of the chapter. On the Gerbertian legend in Willam of Malmesbury's work, see Elly R. Truitt, "Celestial Divination and Arabic Science in Twelfth-Century England: The History of Gerbert of Aurillac's Talking Head," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 73, no. 2 (2012), pp. 201–222.
[101] Rudolph of Schlettstadt, *Historiae*, cap. 42, pp. 103–105, and cap. 49, pp. 112–113.
[102] Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, pp. 831–832.
[103] See Jaime Ferrero Alemparte, "La escuela de nigromancia de Toledo," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 13 (1983), pp. 205–268.

Christianity. Other cities commonly associated with necromancers are Paris, likely due to its university, where forbidden books circulated, and Rome, with its rich classical heritage.[104]

A story from the chronicle of Helinand of Froidmont, based on the *Deeds of the Kings of the English* by William of Malmesbury, recounts the case of a young man in Rome who playfully places his wedding ring on the finger of a statue of Venus.[105] As the hand magically closes, the young man does not manage to take back his ring. Upon returning home, he also proves unable to have sex with his wife, as every time he tries he can feel the invisible body of Venus in-between them. Following the advice of his relatives, the young man then seeks help from a clergyman and necromancer, Palumbus, who gives him a letter with a sigil and instructs him to deliver it to a specific crossroads at night. There, the young man encounters a procession of human-like figures, ending with a large man on a chariot, implied to be the Devil. As instructed by the necromancer, the man remains silent and gives the letter to the Devil. Upon looking at the sigil imprinted on the letter, the Devil cries out to God: "how much longer will you tolerate the iniquity of Priest Palumbus?" Nonetheless, he complies with the necromancer's orders, sending his demons to wrestle the ring from Venus's grasp so that the young man can have it back. Palumbus, however, upon learning the demon's words, understands that his end is near, and indeed the narrator recounts that he is ultimately dismembered by demons, a typical end for those who dabble with magical arts.[106] This story shows how the Roman setting impacted tales of magic, connecting these with ancient motifs:

[104] For Paris, for example, see *Liber exemplorum*, cap 38, p. 22, and cap. 104, pp. 59–60. For Rome, other than the story of Palumbus which follows in the text, see also Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, p. 45.

[105] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, vol. 1, cap. 205, p. 281; Helinand of Froidmont, *Chronicon*, lib. 46, ann. 1051, col. 945–946. The same story can also be found in the twelfth-century Herbert of Clairvaux*, Liber visionum et miraculorum Claraevallensium*, edited by Giancarlo Zichi, Graziano Fois, and Stefano Mula (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), cap. 112, pp. 213–215; as well as in Arnold of Liège, *Alphabetum narrationum*, cap. 446, pp. 414–415, lin. 1–29.

[106] For example, Gerbert of Aurillac also meets a similar gory ending. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, vol. 1, lib. 2, cap. 167, p. 282, lin. 10–15.

the demonic procession, complete with a chariot, resonates with the imagery of Roman triumphs, and classical statues and pagan relics provide a suggestive narrative tool for setting up the story.[107]

The settings and timings of necromantic rituals within *exempla* seem to be designed to underline the secretive and forbidden nature of this practice. It is a recurring *topos* that necromancers convene in secluded locations such as crossroads (*bivia*) by night, fields, forests, or other unspecified solitary places (*loca solitaria*).[108] The most common timing for these rituals is midnight. However, there are some variations to the theme, with the *Historiae memorabiles* mentioning dusk (*crepusculum*), and Caesarius of Heisterbach describing a ritual conducted at midday, when the meridian demon was believed to be particularly active.[109]

Michael Scotus, who was likely initiated into necromancy, does mention that the conjuring of spirits should align with astrological conditions, recommending that practitioners consult the stars to determine the most auspicious days and hours.[110] In the

[107] A similar fascination for classical heritage, and statues in particular, can be found in the Virgilian stories of the *Otia imperialia* and in the Gerbertian Legend. Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, lib. 3, cap. 13, pp. 582–585; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, vol. 1, lib. 2, cap. 169, pp. 285–289. See also Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft*, 99–103. Besides Roman triumphs, this procession is probably also inspired by accounts of the *familia Herlechini*, related for the first time by Ordericus Vitalis. He described a procession of the dead and demons, preceded by a giant. Ronald Hutton, "The Wild Hunt and the Witches' Sabbath." *Folklore*, 125, no. 2 (2014), p. 166.

[108] Crossroads have historically been associated with magic rituals, as they are "intervals between spaces." In antiquity they were dedicated to Hecate, and millennia later the same motif can be found in late-medieval necromantic manuals as well. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, p. 107. Cf. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 162; and de Mayo, *Demonology*, p. 197.

[109] The meridian, or noonday demon is mentioned in *Psalm* 90:6 of the *Vulgate* (today, *Psalm* 91:6), and was often associated with tedium in monastic life. Rudolph of Schlettstadt, *Historiae*, cap. 42, p. 103; Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 1, dist. 5, cap. 2, p. 277. Cf. Feros Ruys, *Demons in the Middle Ages*, p. 15.

[110] In the *Liber introductorius*, Michael cites various books of necromancy, implying to have read them. Among these, the *Book of the Perdition of Soul and Body* (*Liber perditionis anime et corporis*), of which he writes "That book indeed discusses all the functions and names of the demons in an orderly manner" (*Ille quidem liber tractat ordinate cuncta officia demonum*

exempla I have analyzed, however, no specific days for conducting necromantic rituals are detailed, although the *Liber exemplorum* does suggest that the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary may be an inauspicious time for conjuring demons, since on this holy day they are less cooperative due to their increased suffering.[111] This, however, is very likely to be a narrative choice functional to the intended message of its *exemplum*—to demonstrate the power of Virgin Mary against demons—rather than an actual piece of information for the practicing of necromancy.

The necromancers in the *exempla* perform their craft similarly to Michael Scotus' description included at the beginning of this thesis, engaging in rituals that involve drawing protective circles, using books, and occasionally swords to summon demons for various purposes. Most *exempla* do not elaborate beyond these elements, but one of the few exceptions is in the chronicle of Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, which includes the detailed description of a necromantic ritual.[112]

In this story, a master necromancer from Toledo arrives in Maastricht, and promises to fulfill the desires of several local clergymen. Eight of them agree to participate, and the master draws a large protective circle complete with magical signs (*fecit maximum circulum cum caracteribus suis*), so that they all can fit in it. Within the circle, he arranges three empty seats, which he claims to be intended for the three Magi from the *Gospel*. Outside the circle, he prepares another seat which he decorates with flowers. At midnight, he begins the ritual by skinning a cat and bisecting two doves. He then summons three demons, whom he regards as his kings (*tres demones illos advocavit, quod habebat pro regibus*), together with their prince, Epanamon, under the pretense of hosting a dinner for them.

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et nomina erorum). Munich, Clm 10268, fol. 114rb, lin. 9–11. The recommendation to consult the stars for necromantic rituals is on lin. 19–34 of the same folio. See also Lynn Thorndike, *Michael Scot*, pp. 119–120.

[111] *Liber exemplorum*, cap. 38, p. 22.

[112] Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, *Chronicon*, ann. 1234, p. 932.

As the ritual continues, the skinned cat is offered to the demons, who devour it. Next, the necromancer places a glass jar before the demonic prince, adjuring him to shrink and enter it. Once the demon is inside, the necromancer seals the jar with wax, inscribing it with the symbols "α" and "ω." The clergymen then make their requests: one seeks the attention of a noblewoman, another the trust of the Duke of Brabant, and so on. However, when a cleric requests the homoerotic favors of a noble young man, the demon rejects it as illicit and beyond his power to grant.

After the ritual, the clergymen overhear the master speaking with the demons, slandering Christ and Christianity. The participants are only allowed to leave the circle after sunrise, each reciting, "God was made human, I live because of this honor," (*Deus homo factus est, in hoc honore vivo*) or they would have been abducted by the demons. Alberic connotates this as a cult in honor of Lucifer, and explains that the story was relayed by some of the clergymen to an individual who later conveyed it to him. He also explains that the master, wanting to relocate to England, drowned at sea, finally joining his demonic overlords in hell.

Many of the elements described in this story align with rituals included in necromantic manuals, suggesting a basis in real ritual practices.[113] However, there are narrative elements that likely are here only to serve thematic purposes, such as depicting the demons as masters over the necromancer and framing the gathering as that of a satanic sect. Notably, even such a detailed description lacks any reference to astrology, a key component of necromancy according to magical handbooks.[114]

[113] For example, a fifteenth-century necromantic manual prescribes the use of doves as sacrifices and mentions the sealing of demons within glass vessels. *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century*, edited by Richard Kieckhefer (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1997), pp. 61 and 108. See also Véronèse, "Solomonic Magic," p. 188. Michael Scotus, too, mentions both practices in his *Liber introductorius*. Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, p. 103.

[114] Kieckhefer, Magic in the Middle Ages, pp. 165–166.

Astrology is notably absent in necromantic *exempla*, with the sole exception I found being the tale of the already mentioned Gerbert of Aurillac. Gerbert, a necromancer, is described as proficient in using the astrolabe, measuring the stars, and interpreting fate. However, this character's association with astrology is also linked to the narrative goal of underscoring his exceptionality, as he is clearly depicted as a magical jack-of-all-trades: he also learned the songs of birds, the mysteries of their flight, and how to summon spirits from the underworld. It is almost as if this description follows Isidore of Seville's listing of the various kinds of magic, and further adds to it, as Gerbert is also said to have imported into Christianity the arts of *quadrivium* and the abacus.[115] William of Malmesbury also mentions that Gerbert consulted the head of a statue which, by astrological virtue, could give answers about everything. Gerbert asked it if he would die before celebrating mass in Jerusalem, and the statue replied that he would not. However, the prophecy was deceptive, as Gerbert eventually died after celebrating mass in the Church of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem, in Rome.[116] While this anecdote is included, in a summarized form, in Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Historiale*, Helinand of Froidmont does not mention it when writing of Gerbert, and instead makes just a general remark about the deception of demonic prophecies.[117]

The element which is, instead, most recurring is the circle, which in these stories always serves as a means of protection against demons. However, some texts closer to actual necromantic practice seem to have regarded the circle not as a barrier but as a catalyst for the

[115] Helinand of Froidmont, *Chronicon*, lib. 46, ann. 991, col. 917, lin. 24–30. Cf. Truitt, "Celestial Divination and Arabic Science," p. 203. The reference to birdsongs also seems to be inspired by Isidore of Seville, who writes that "Augures [one of the types of magicians he lists] are those who observe the flight and calls of birds" (*Augures sunt, qui volatus avium et voces intendunt* […]). Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, lib. 8, cap. 9, pars 18.

[116] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, vol. 1, lib. 2, cap. 172, pp. 292–293.

[117] Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum*, lib. 24, cap. 101, p. 998b; Helinand of Froidmont, *Chronicon*, lib. 46, ann. 991, col. 918, lin. 3–11. Although Helinand cites William of Malmesbury as his source for the Gerbertian legend, in this particular passage he seems to have been inspired by an earlier version by Sigebert of Gembloux (d. 1112), whom Helinand also knew. Sigisbert describes the prophecy as demonically inspired, without correlating it to astrology. See Truitt, "Celestial Divination and Arabic Science," pp. 217–221.

ritual.[118] For example, a fifteenth-century magical handbook instructs the necromancer to stand inside the circle and summon demons *into* it.[119] On the other hand, Michael Scotus describes the circle as clerical authors do—as a protective tool for the magician.[120] While Michael could have been influenced by contemporary clerical discourses, he also seems to have had access to genuine necromantic texts, suggesting that two traditions, one using the circle as a catalyst and the other as protection, coexisted in medieval magical texts. It is likely that the authors of *exempla* always subscribed to the second viewpoint because, in this way, they could have emphasized the necromancer's precarious relationship with demons, discrediting the practice.

However, necromancers are not the only ones to use the circle for protection against demons. In an *exemplum* by Caesarius of Heisterbach, a wandering knight draws a circle on the ground with his sword to keep himself safe from a demonic apparition of the Wild Hunt.[121] In the *Liber exemplorum*, instead, a man draws a circle of crosses around himself utilizing his axe, in order to fend off a demonic beast. Immediately, a circular wall rises from the ground, saving him.[122] Laymen are not the only ones depicted as utilizing a circle as a defensive tool. In another *exemplum* by Caesarius, even a cleric draws a circle when he encounters apparitions along his way.[123] In these stories, the characters drawing protective circles are not magicians, nor are they portrayed negatively. This suggests that the description of the circle as a protective device may not have been only a deliberate attempt to vilify

[118] This distinction is proposed in Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 161. However, Sophie Page describes some magical circles as having protective functions too. Sophie Page, "Medieval Magical Figures," in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, p. 447.
[119] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 161.
[120] "[The magician] will have done a circle around [the area] so that they [the spirits] cannot approach him thanks to the power of the circle's perfection" ([…] *fecerit circum in circitu, ne valeant sibi ipsi appropinquare virtute perfectionis circi*). Munich, Clm 10268, fol. 114rb, lin. 22–24.
[121] Caesarius, *Dialogus*, vol. 2, dist. 12, cap. 20, p. 330.
[122] *Liber exemplorum*, cap. 95, p. 51.
[123] Caesarius, *Dialogus*, vol. 2, dist. 12, cap. 17, p. 328.

necromancers, since circles could also have been viewed by some clerics as legitimate tools that anyone could use.

The origin of the idea that a circle could function as a tool for dealing with demons is unclear. It can be found in Islamic texts such as the *Picatrix*, translated in Latin in the second half of the thirteenth century.[124] However, texts predating this translation, such as Caesarius's *Dialogue on Miracles*, feature this motif extensively. I suggest that the Western concept of the circle, especially when depicted as a protective device, may also have been influenced by the exorcistic tradition, where multiple exorcists would sometimes stand in a circle around the demoniac to encircle the demon and attack him from all sides.[125] In his *Dialogue*, Caesarius describes an inversion of such motif. In a dream, a monk sees his brethren standing in a circle, repelling the Devil in the form of a lion by kicking it.[126] However, these circles are made of people, not drawn on the ground, so they could possibly represent a separate tradition not strictly related to magical imagery.

In addition to circles, books are also central to the necromantic art. Sometimes they are depicted not as mere tools for learning the practice, but as active elements, necessary for the ritual. In a story by Salimbene de Adam, a young man, Filippo Fontana, leaves Italy and travels to Toledo to learn necromancy. There, he is introduced to a master of that art, a deformed old man wearing a cloak. The master hands Filippo a book, instructing him to study it, and locks him in a room. As Filippo begins to read, demons appear before him, first as animals, then as young men and women. Terrified, Filippo fails to say anything to react to the apparitions, and finds himself magically transported to the middle of the street. The master,

[124] Sophie Page has detailed the roots of the motif of the magical circle in Islamic texts and its later developments in western Christianity. Michael Bailey also suggests that the motif could have originated from China and then spread westward. Page, "Medieval Magical Figures," p. 445–451; Bailey, *The Basics*, p. 47.

[125] Examples can be found in the *vitae* of Hildegard of Bingen and of Francis of Assisi. Florence Chave-Mahir, *L'exorcisme des possédés dans l'Église d'Occident (X^e^-XIV^e^ siècle)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 261–262.

[126] Caesarius, *Dialogus*, vol. 1, dist. 6, cap. 36, pp. 388–389.

disappointed, advises him to go study theology in Paris, predicting that he would have a great career in the Church. Italians like him should better leave necromancy to Spaniards, who—the necromancer says—are as fierce as demons.[127]

The primary goal of this story may not have been to impart a salvific lesson, but rather to provide an origin story for Filippo (d. 1270), who would later become a formidable archbishop and military commander.[128] Despite this, the story still holds exemplar value in that it demonstrates the appropriate behavior for interacting with demons so as not to be dominated by them. This lesson could have been valuable not only for necromancers but also for any religious figure.[129] This story also illustrates quite well the intended relationship between necromancers and demons: according to the necromancers themselves, demons were to be controlled and forced to serve the magician—a viewpoint that can usually be found in magical handbooks. Many of the authors I have examined rule out this possibility, insisting instead that necromancers serve demons, even when this perspective contradicts other elements in the narrative. In the aforementioned tale by Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, which describes a necromantic ritual in Maastricht, the author repeats several times that the necromancer considers the demons to be his masters, even though the ritual seems to include Christian elements (the three Mages; the alpha and the omega) and it effectively depicts the necromancer as luring demons with offerings and then trapping one in a glass container for him to do his bidding—a practice which would align with instructions found in grimoires.[130]

Some authors, such as Salimbene or the Franciscan author of the *Liber exemplorum*, are less concerned with showing the necromancers in a state of subservience to demons, and

[127] Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, pp. 568–569.
[128] See chapter 3.2 of this thesis.
[129] Indeed, exorcists in Salimbene's chronicle exhibit a similar type of reactiveness as boasted by the Spanish necromancer. For example, one of them asks a demoniac to speak in Latin and, when the demon performs poorly, the exorcist mocks him: "The brother insulted him [the devil], saying that he had a bad grammar" (insultavit ei frater, dicens quod malam fecisset gramaticam). Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, p. 826.
[130] Véronèse, "Solomonic Magic," p. 188.

instead have the former controlling and commanding the latter.[131] Even in Caesarius' case, perhaps the most consistent of the analyzed authors in presenting necromancy as a form of vassalage to the Devil, there is sometimes a glimpse of the contrasting tradition, as his stories always depict necromancers obtaining from demons what they demand. I suspect that Caesarius operated on pre-existing stories, changing them to the extent that they could show that demons were in control, so as to characterize the practice in a more markedly negative way. However, in changing these elements, he did not change the outcome of the stories themselves, lest he alter their meaning. Consequently, the Devil in Caesarius' stories is on the whole a very reasonable overlord, always ready to accommodate the necromancer's will, even when that means ratting out his own heretical servants or forcing his minions to return a human they had kidnapped.[132]

Thanks to their rituals and to demonic aid, whether gained by force or supplication, the necromancers in these stories gain access to a vast array of powers that basically overlap with whatever a demon was believed to be capable of. They can create illusions, gather information about the present or the future, send demons to kill their adversaries, and call back spirits from hell (or can visit hell themselves). In some *exempla*, necromancers are displayed as practicing love magic, ensuring a successful pregnancy, healing from impotence, or securing the love of a woman for their client or for themselves.[133] However, there are also *exempla* in which it is claimed that necromancers themselves must abstain from sexual acts

[131] *Liber exemplorum*, cap. 38, p. 22.
[132] Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 1, dist. 5, cap. 4, pp. 279–281, and cap. 18, pp. 296–298.
[133] Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus*, pars 2, tit. 6, cap. 22, lin. 2780–2797; Rudolph of Schlettstadt, *Historiae*, cap. 49, pp. 112–113; Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus*, pars 2, tit. 5, cap. 7, lin. 935–978. Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda*, cap. 26 (*De sancto Basilio episcopo*), par. 5, pp. 122–125; Helinand of Froidmont, *Chronicon*, lib. 46, ann. 1051, col. 945–946; Roger Bacon, *Moralis philosophia*, pars 4, dist. 3, pp. 225–226.

for three days prior to their rituals, because the sin of lust displeases even the demons.[134] This occasional distancing from sexual acts partly differentiates necromancy from other types of magic, such as the one usually attributed to women, whom are more often described as practicing magic with the purpose of gaining someone's love for themselves.[135]

Although in general necromancers are the demonic magicians who receive the most attention in the analyzed texts, this does not necessarily indicate a primary concern with necromancy. Many of the *exempla* featuring necromancy use it primarily as a plot device to dramatize demonic apparitions or to condemn other types of sins. Demonic magic was most likely a topic capable of generating curiosity and interest but, relatively speaking, it was not the most popular topic for *exempla*. Stories of demonic magic are not the most numerous within these texts, nor are they the most widely transmitted.[136] Rather, what all these texts have in common is the display of a broader concern for interactions involving demons, positioning demonic magic, and necromancy within it, as a mere aspect of this broader category.

2.2 Witches

In this subchapter I use the word "witches" to refer to practitioners of demonic magic who are not educated necromancers. The term is somewhat improperly used, given that it evokes associations that were not necessarily present in the thirteenth century. I hope to

[134] London: British Library, Add. 27909B, cap. 38, fol. 8. Consulted through *ThEMA: Thesaurus exemplorum medii aevi*, https://thema.huma-num.fr/exempla/TE006526 (accessed on May 6, 2024).
[135] The association of women with love magic is frequent in the sources I have analyzed. E.g., Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, cap. 270, p. 113; Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 2, dist. 11, cap. 59, pp. 310–311, and dist. 12, cap. 27, p. 339; Rudolph of Schlettstadt, *Historiae*, cap. 26, pp. 82–84.
[136] E.g., Jacques Berlioz, "Maître Melchita, magicien de Tolède. Un *exemplum* inédit (conte type 817*) du dominicain Etienne de Bourbon," in *Formes et difformités médiévales*, edited by Florence Bayard and Astrid Guillaume (Paris: Presses universitaires de la Sorbonne, 2010), pp. 300–302.

remedy to this risk of misunderstanding with a detailed description of the character of these witches. In Latin, the words predominantly used to indicate these magicians are *malefici*, *incantatores*, *auguratores*, and *phitonissae*. These terms are not always rigorously used, as not infrequently *maleficus* is applied to learned magicians too. Only in a few instances, however, is the term *nigromantia*, as a generic term for magic, associated to these figures, reflecting, I believe, a distinction in the perception of magic between the learned necromancers and these uneducated practitioners. Stephen of Bourbon, for example, contrasts the two groups by noting that while enchanters employ demonic trickery (*artificium demonum*), necromancers operate through the direct adjuration of demons.[137] Michael Scotus, instead, identified the *maleficus* as "he who interprets characters and philacteries, incantations, dreams, and makes ligatures of herbs."[138]

Regardless of the misconceptions that may accompany the term "witch," I still preferred to use it in order to maintain a gender-neutral narrative (as opposed to the feminine *maleficae*), while still underscoring that, just as the name suggests, although male practitioners are present, the usual practitioner of non-learned magic in these narratives is a woman.

Stories of uneducated characters attempting to practice magic abound in the texts I have examined, but in most of them the Devil does not figure, not even implicitly, nor is the intended magical effect usually produced.[139] The general motif of these stories is that the main character, often a woman, attempts to take the eucharist from the church and use it for

[137] "*Sicut audivi quod quidam incantatores artificio demonum faciunt et nigromantici per adiuraciones demonum*." Cited in Berlioz, "Maître Melchita," p. 296, footnote 25.
[138] Thorndike, *Michael Scot*, p. 119.
[139] There are some exceptions in which eucharist magic does produce the intended effect, such as when it is sprinkled on crops. This, as explained by Caesarius, happens because sometimes the worms refuse to eat it, recognizing in it the body of Christ. The woman who did it, however, is punished by paralysis. Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 2, dist. 9, cap. 9, pp. 173–174.

some ritual.[140] In my sources, the eucharist is never associated with demonic magic. On the contrary, demons are shown in multiple *exempla* as paying homage to it or as otherwise acknowledging its power against them.[141] When the eucharist is stolen, then, the supernatural power which intervenes is always divine in nature and acts to expose the crime or to punish it.

Other narratives, instead, describe what appear to be human magicians, but turn out to be demons in disguise. For example, Caesarius recounts the tale of two knights encountering a woman by a stream on the eve of the feast of St. John the Baptist. They immediately suspect her of practicing magic and try to capture her (*putantes quia maleficia exerceret, ut quibusdam mos est in nocte illa*). Yet, despite their efforts, the figure escapes with supernatural agility and disappears when the knights make the sign of the cross, confirming that she was indeed a demon.[142]

The association of water sources with feminine magical practices also appears in non-narrative texts, such as in Burchard of Worms' eleventh-century penitentiary, which describes rituals intended to invoke rain:

> Have you done what some women are accustomed to doing? When they have no rain, and they need it, then they gather many girls. […] And each girl holding a rod in their hands, they lead the aforementioned virgin, dragging the herb behind her, into the nearest river, and with the rods, they sprinkle the virgin with river water, and thus with their incantations, they hope to have rain.[143]

[140] E.g., *Liber exemplorum*, cap. 99, pp. 55–57; Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 2, dist. 9, cap. 6, p 171, cap. 9, pp. 173–174, cap. 23, pp. 181–182; Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, cap. 270, p. 113.

[141] E.g., Roger Bacon, *Moralis philosophia*, pars 4, dist. 3, pp. 225–226; *Historiae*, Sigmaringen, Cod. 64, fol. 131r–133r.

[142] Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 1, dist. 5, cap. 30, p. 315. An analogous example of witches which turn out to be demons can be found in Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus*, pars 2, tit. 5, cap. 7, lin. 1036–1063.

[143] Burchard of Worms, *Decretorum libri viginti*, PL 140, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1880), lib. 19, cap. 5, col. 976, lin. 25–52.

It is possible that Caesarius was alluding to similar beliefs, although given the conciseness of this passage it is difficult to move beyond mere speculation. Still, the fact that the woman is a demon in disguise implicitly condemns these practices as demonic. Other stories, however, associate witchcraft with demons in a clearer way, especially when magic is described as producing tangible effects.

In the *Historiae memorabiles*, for example, a traveler asks an Alsatian woman for hospitality. At midnight, however, she is seen taking an ointment and applying it to a vase while reciting a magical formula. The vase begins to levitate, and the woman rides it into the night. Her guest, curious to see where she has gone, imitates her and anoints his donkey's saddle. When he catches up with the woman, she greets him peacefully, but warns him that once they will be arrived where they are going, he must not drink, eat or talk. They arrive in a meadow where they find a festive gathering of lords, ladies, boys and girls. After a while, the woman, concerned for the man's safety, takes him back home. However, on the return flight, just before dawn, the man inadvertently breaks the spell by invoking God's name, falling into the mud, while the woman continues on her way.[144]

Here demonic agency is still not explicitly mentioned, but the nocturnal flight, the banquet with menacing human-like figures who are implied to be demons, and the breaking of the spell by mentioning God make the demonic nature of this witch very clear.[145]

In another *exemplum* from the same collection, the presence of demons is even more explicit. In this tale a woman from Basel cannot win a man's affection either by begging him, or with gifts. She then seeks the advice of an elderly woman, an enchantress and pythoness, who provides her with a recipe for a demonic enchantment (*incantacio demonum*) intended to secure the man's love. The list includes ingredients such as a piece of altar, the rib of a

[144] Rudolf of Schlettstadt, *Historiae*, cap. 33, pp. 93–94.
[145] The medieval iconography of demons often includes human-like figures of deceivingly noble appearance. E.g., Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus*, pars 2, tit. 5, cap. 7, lin. 1108–1118.

hanged thief, and other things the writer does not dare to mention. The young woman buys all the ingredients, but once she begins the ritual (which, in the text, is alternatively called *massa* and *maleficium*) a tall, black demon appears and breaks her neck. The story ends with the woman's relatives hiding the cause of her death so that she can be buried in a cemetery.[146]

With two stories on necromancy and two on demonic witchcraft, the *Historiae memorabiles* devote a relatively significant attention to the latter, even when compared with the considerably longer text of the *Dialogue on Miracles*.[147] This difference may originate from the later redaction of the *Historiae*, in a period already showing early signs of proto-discourses on demonic witchcraft that, in a more elaborate form, would dominate the following centuries.[148] Indeed, the witches of the *Historiae* are still quite different from later characters. The aforementioned flying woman, for example, is described more as a marvelous being that as condemnable figure. In fact, she is even presented as a caring host who preserves her guest's life.

Even earlier texts, however, sometimes include stories of explicit witchcraft. In an *exemplum* by Caesarius, for instance, a woman places her feet in a basin and jumps backward out of it, symbolically performing an inverted baptism. As she does so, she recites: "Here I leap from the power of God into the power of the Devil." The Devil immediately lifts her into the air, and they disappear beyond the forest, never to be seen again.[149]

[146] Rudolph of Schlettstadt, *Historiae*, cap. 26, pp. 82–84.
[147] The two stories on necromancy are in Rudolph of Schlettstadt, *Historiae*, cap. 42, pp. 103–105, and cap. 49, pp. 112–113. The *Historiae memorabiles* also include one story of non-demonic magic which seems closer to folkloristic motifs than to a preaching *exemplum* (cap. 46, pp. 108–109). As I have already mentioned, however, the current critical edition of the *Historiae* contains only roughly half the known *exempla* by the same author.
[148] Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft*, pp. 99–123.
[149] Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 2, dist. 11, cap. 60, pp. 311–312. This is the only instance of clearly discernible demonic witchcraft in the *Dialogus*. Although the text is abundant with narratives concerning the misuse of the eucharist or with love magic, superstition rather than the Devil is implied to play a part in these stories.

Unlike necromancers, who are at times described as controlling demons, and other times as being their subjects, whenever witches interact with demons, the former are invariably portrayed in a position of submission to the latter. The status of the witch is often shown to be precarious, and frequently culminates in them being killed or abducted by the demons.[150] Overall, however, witches have less direct interaction with demons compared to necromancers. While the latter need to converse with demons to set their magic in motion, witches are consistently shown to operate by combining various ingredients, ranging from natural herbs to human bones. These concoctions are prepared through rituals accompanied by magical incantations, but the process seems to be relatively uncomplicated and does not seem to require specific skills. In fact, if other characters witness witches at work or receive their instructions, they can easily imitate them, even without being initiates to their art. This again distinguishes them from necromancers, whose knowledge comes from their studies and who, normally, are not imitated by laypersons.

The magical abilities attributed to witches in medieval *exempla* are diverse. They are depicted as having the power to curse and heal, and, drawing on classical motifs, some stories show them transforming people into animals.[151] Additionally, some witches are shown to possess the ability to divine the future.[152] Flight is another common attribute, as we have seen, as is love magic.

[150] While necromancers too often meet an untimely death, they also frequently repent, and when they do so, they are saved. This never seems to happen for female magicians. In one famous *exemplum*, originally by William of Malmesbury, a witch is taken by the Devil even after her corpse had been chained inside a church. Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum*, lib. 25, cap. 26, p. 1011.

[151] Helinand of Froidmont, *Chronicon*, lib. 48, ann. 1150, col. 1056–1057, and lib. 46, ann. 1051, col. 945 lin. 3–28.

[152] The *Historiae memorabiles*, for example, tell the tale of a farmer who, after making a demonic pact, gains the power to prophesize the future and acquires renown in this way. Stephen of Bourbon, instead, narrates the story of a nun who was regarded as a prophetess by her abbess but was actually acting under the counsel of a demon. *Historiae memorabiles*, Sigmaringen, Cod. 64, fol. 200r-201r; Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus*, pars 2, tit. 6, cap. 20, lin. 2465–2506.

As Michael Bailey points out in *Magic: The Basics*, several explanations can be given for trying to understand why women across different cultures are often associated with love magic.[153] This connection likely reflects cultural biases that tie women to their sexual and reproductive roles, and these stories, written and collected by men, adhered to such assumptions and perpetuated gender stereotypes. Usually, such prejudices not only shape the way women are perceived within societies, but may also cause women themselves to subconsciously conform to these roles, keeping the trope alive and inspiring new similar stories.[154] In any case, while women are linked to love magic, these kinds of spells are also not absent in tales featuring male magicians, particularly clerics who break their vow of celibacy, suggesting that many of these stories are primarily focused on condemning perceived violations of socio-religious norms.[155]

The *topos* of the witch's flight echoed ancient beliefs about nocturnal flights to join the pagan goddess Diana, which are notably described in the famous tenth-century canon *Episcopi*:

> […] Some wicked women, led astray by Satan, seduced by illusions of demons and by phantasms, believe and profess that, during nocturnal hours, they ride upon certain beasts with the pagan goddess Diana, or with Herodias and a countless horde of women, and traverse great distances of land in the silence of the dead of night, to obey her commands as their mistress, and to be summoned to her service on particular nights. […] Indeed, Satan himself, who transforms himself into an angel of light, when he has captured the mind of any little woman, and has subdued her to himself through unfaithfulness and disbelief, immediately transforms himself into the appearances and likenesses of various persons, and, deceiving the mind that he holds captive in dreams, shows now joyful, now sorrowful, now known, now unknown persons, leading her through every wrong path. And while the spirit alone endures this, the faithless mind thinks that these things happen not in the spirit but in the body.

The author of the canon *Episcopi*, however, does not accept the reality of such flights and reputes them to be delusion, as he states:

[153] Bailey, *The Basics*, pp. 92–101.
[154] Bailey, *The Basics*, p. 105.
[155] Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus*, pars 2, tit. 6, cap. 22, lin. 2780; Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 2, dist. 9, cap. 6, p. 171.

> Who is so stupid and foolish as to think that all these things that are done in the spirit are done in the body […]?[156]

Some of the *exempla* I have analyzed connotate these flights as a reality, a position which, while always debated, gained traction in the following centuries.[157] However, there are also some *exempla* that present the flights as illusions.

Jacques de Vitry recounts the story of an old woman who tells her priest that by night she would ride flying beasts in company of some noblewomen. She also explains that one night the group entered into the priest's room while he was sleeping, and that her companions would have harmed him, had not the old woman intervened. The priest asks how they could have entered through a locked door, and he is told that they can enter through any door or lock. Wanting to test this, the priest locks the church door and beats the old woman with a wooden cross, telling her, "Get out the church, and flee if you can, since no lock or door can hold you." As the woman is unable to do so, she is revealed to have been deluded by demons in her dreams.[158]

It is notable that the witches described in these *exempla* are not connoted as social outcasts or particularly deviant individuals. In most cases, they follow mistaken beliefs out of superstition or by demonic inspiration. They are described as having families, participating in their community, and sometimes even as being relatively wealthy.[159] For instance, the woman from Basel, from the *Historiae memorabiles*, has the means to buy gifts for the man she desires, as well as to purchase ingredients for the ritual. She also holds social connections

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[156] Burchard of Worms, *Decretorum libri viginti*, lib. 10, cap. 1, col. 831–832.
[157] Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft*, p. 198; Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, translated by Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), pp. 89-91; Werner Tschacher, "Der Flug durch die Luft zwischen Illusionstheorie und Realitätsbeweis. Studien zum sog. Kanon Episkopi und zum Hexenflug," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung zur Rechtsgeschichte*, 85, no. 1 (1999), pp. 225–276.
[158] Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, pp. 112–113.
[159] For a story of a witch with a family, his children being a monk and a nun (story originally featured in William of Malmesbury's chronicle), see Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum*, lib. 25, cap. 26, p. 1011.

within the city that allow her to receive a respectful burial regardless of her misdeeds. Even in the *exemplum* of the flying woman from the *Historiae*, the gathering, although ominous, is not marked by extreme deviant behaviors such as sexual promiscuity, idolatry, or infanticide. These elements were more commonly associated with heretics or Jews during this period, and only later became linked to witches, starting from around the fifteenth century.[160]

In conclusion, the *exempla* portray a gendered and social distinction between practitioners of learned demonic magic, necromancers, and those practicing a less complex demonic magic, witches. This distinction ultimately hinges on their respective relationships with demons. Male necromancers directly influence demons to achieve their goals, exhibiting a degree of control and expertise that is not easily replicated by others. This contrasts with witches, usually women, who are depicted as less interactive with demons, instead relying on objects or concoctions to perform their magic in a more material and less spiritual manner.

2.3 Heretical Magicians

While necromancers and witches are the typical practitioners of demonic magic in medieval *exempla*, there are exceptions, one of which is the heretical magician. The motif of the heretic capable of performing magic is mainly featured in Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogue on Miracles*. In two *exempla*, he describes heretics performing apparent miracles, such as walking on water or resisting fire, which common people mistakenly interpret as signs of sanctity.

In the first of these *exempla*, two heretics arrive in the city of Besançon and start performing miracles, converting the local population to their faith. Their beliefs remain

[160] For cases of orgies and infanticide allegedly committed by heretics and Jews, see Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 1, dist. 5, cap. 24, pp. 307–308; and Rudolph of Schlettstadt, *Historiae*, cap. 17, p. 66–67. See also Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, pp. 35–78 and 144–161. Classical culture and folkloristic motifs also associated extremely deviant acts with feminine creatures, but such accusations were extended to human witches only later. Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft*, p. 165.

unspecified, characterizing these two heretics as mere anti-Christian archetypal figures. To expose them, the local bishop enlists a clergyman who used to practice necromancy. After being promised absolution, the clergyman summons the Devil, renews his homage to him, and learns that the heretics have demonic pacts concealed beneath their skin. Once these pacts are removed, the heretics lose their powers and are finally burned at the stake.[161]

In the other *exemplum* by Caesarius, instead, the heretics are identified as Albigensians, but their doctrines remain unexplored. Thanks to demonic aid, they can walk on water, but the local priest disrupts their powers by throwing the eucharist into the river, resulting in their drowning. The eucharist, instead, is retrieved by angels and returned to the priest.[162]

In addition to portraying some heretics as magicians, Caesarius also does the inverse, associating his necromancers with heresy. Firstly, like many contemporary authors, he portrays necromancers as renouncing Christ in favor of the Devil, yet this alone is insufficient to characterize them as heretics. Judging from *exempla* such as the two I have just summarized, heresy was perceived as a public act of subversion against social and religious order, whereas necromancy, though dangerous to the soul, seems to have been seen as a more private concern.[163] Indeed, even when the necromancers of these *exempla* indulge in demonolatry, they still practice their art in secret places and rarely do they proselytize for the Devil.[164] In contrast, heretics are depicted in more negative terms, for example by describing them as indulging in deviant sexual behaviors and by having them ending up burned at the stake, a fate rarely shared by necromancers, both in reality and in fiction.[165] This distinction

[161] Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 1, dist. 5, cap. 18, pp. 296–298.
[162] Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 2, dist. 9, cap. 12, pp. 175–176.
[163] A similar concept is described by Richard Kieckhefer for a later period in regard to "conspiratorial witchcraft." Cf. Kieckhefer, "Witchcraft, Necromancy, and Sorcery as Heresy," pp. 133–154.
[164] One partial exception is the story of the Maastricht necromancer recounted at chapter 2.1, where the ritual is characterized as that of a Luciferan sect.
[165] One of the few non-heretical magicians burned at the stake in the *exempla* is in Caesarius' *Dialogus*, where a priest accused of having bewitched a woman is executed in this way.

is perfectly exemplified by the story set in Besançon, which strongly suggests that, despite its inherent dangers, involvement in necromancy is still preferable to allowing heretics to pass as holy men.

However, Caesarius does not stop at characterizing necromancers as demonolaters; he also recounts a story were themes of heresy, necromancy, and demonic pact overlap.[166] The protagonist, Everwach, is the treasurer of the bishop of Utrecht. Accused of poor stewardship and unable to prove his innocence due to the loss of his records, he conjures the Devil in a solitary field, renouncing Christ and the Virgin Mary to gain, in return, demonic assistance to clear his name.

The initial part of this story follows the familiar motif of the demonic pact, where characters pledge themselves to the Devil in exchange for fulfilling their immediate desires. However, the story continues by recounting how, for the next eleven years, Everwach serves the Devil. During this period, he spreads slander against Christianity and even physically attacks preachers. He also becomes a magician, "so skilled that any practitioner of that art would have paid to learn from him."[167] After his death, he is condemned to hell, but is ultimately granted a second chance by Christ to repent on earth. Everwach then returns to life, terrifying those present at his funeral, and joins a crusade to atone for his sins.

The intertwining of necromancy and demonic pacts shown in this story is not exclusive to Caesarius, and can be found in other texts too. However some authors, such as the Dominican friar who wrote the *Historiae memorabiles*, clearly differentiate between the two motifs. In this work, those who sign demonic pacts are always subservient to demons and

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Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 1, dist. 4, cap. 99, p. 270. For orgiastic heretics see Caesarius, *Dialogus*, vol. 1, dist. 5, cap. 24, pp. 307–308; and Stephen of Bourbon, *Anecdotes*, cap. 367, pp. 322–323. Cf. Klaassen, "Necromancy," p. 204.

[166] Caesarius, *Dialogus*, vol. 2, dist. 12, cap. 23, pp. 332–335.

[167] "*[T]otus deditus erat artibus magicis, ut si aliquem nosset scholarem eiusdem disciplinae, nummis eum redimeret, uta liquid ab illo discere posset*." Ibidem.

receive from them only one single favor.[168] Necromancers, on the contrary, are characterized as practicing their art thanks to their studies, and appear to control demons whenever they wish, not just once. The theme of the heretical magician, instead, although present in Caesarius's work, appears less frequently in other thirteenth-century *exempla*, suggesting a preference for portraying heretics not as powerful magicians but as deceivers and conmen.[169]

In the majority of stories involving heretics, the miracles are performed not by the heretics themselves but by the clergymen who oppose them, who usually represent the ideal role models proposed by the authors. In some stories, these miracles even resemble curses. Gerard de Frachet recounts the tale of a Dominican friar in Milan approached by a heretic who intends to mock him. The heretic requests a blessing to cure a fever he pretends to have, but the friar warns that if the man is not genuinely ill, God will make him so. Unperturbed, the man insists that a holy man should refrain from such pronouncements, to which the friar resolutely responds, "what I said, I said." As the man leaves the church, he is immediately struck by a fever that only abates after he repents and confesses his heretical sins to the friar.[170]

In summary, while in thirteenth-century *exempla* heretics are often portrayed as being in league with the Devil, they are rarely depicted as magicians. Heretics were a genuine concern for clergymen, and for the authors of these texts it was likely more effective, in order to diminish their authority, to portray them as frauds who do not even believe in their doctrines

[168] Rudolph of Schlettstadt, *Historiae*, cap. 31, pp. 89–91, cap. 36, pp. 96–97, cap. 55, pp. 120–121.

[169] The only *exempla* with heretical magicians that I have been able to find outside of the *Dialogus* are Stephen of Bourbon, *Anecdotes*, cap. 367, pp. 322–323; and Gerard de Frachet, *Vitae fratrum*, pars 4, cap. 23, par. 1, pp. 211–212. This latter story features a Dominican preacher dispelling the illusions of a heretic through the eucharist. Lucas of Tuy, instead, recounts of a group of heretics who polluted a spring to make it look as if they had operated a miracle, turning it into blood. They also pretended to heal lame and blind people who had been previously bribed by them. Their demonic association, however, is implied to be real, since once their sanctuary is destroyed a demonic trumpet is heard. Lucas of Tuy, *De altera vita*, lib. 3, cap. 9, pp. 202–205.

[170] Gerard de Frachet, *Vitae fratrum*, pars 4, cap. 25, par. 7, pp. 225–226.

and who have the only goal of luring others into demonolatry. In contrast, their opponents are the true miracle workers of these stories.

Even when depicted as magicians, heretics are distinguished from other practitioners of demonic magic because their powers derive mainly from a demonic pact. They have not learned their art in the conventional way, and therefore their powers can be taken away by severing their connection to demons. In contrast, necromancers, even the subservient ones in Caesarius' *Dialogue*, display a greater degree of agency in their magic, which derives from their extensive knowledge and from their ability to perform rituals to summon demons.

The separation between heretics and magicians seems even more pronounced in other texts. In one of his *exempla*, for instance, Salimbene recounts that Pope Innocent III sought the services of a necromancer (described as able to "resurrect the dead and preach to demons") to conjure the spirit of a bishop, leading to a cautionary tale about the torments of hell for those who prioritized wealth in life. Salimbene explicitly describes Innocent as the greatest adversary of heresy, so had the necromancer been considered a heretic, it would have been incongruous for the Pope to engage with him.[171]

2.4 Magicians of Antiquity

In thirteenth-century *exempla*, magicians contemporary with the authors generally exhibit the consistent characteristics that I have highlighted along this chapter, showing relatively little variation. On the other hand, stories set centuries before the authors' time tend to be more multifaced, often deviating from typical motifs. Many of these older tales were composed centuries earlier, but continued to circulate widely in thirteenth-century collections of *exempla*, influencing other contemporary narratives about magicians.

[171] The reference to Innocent being a champion against heresy is in Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, p. 31. The reference to the necromancer as able to "*mortuos suscitare et demonibus [predicare]*" is at p. 45.

For instance, e*xempla* derived from the life of St. Basil of Caesarea (d. 378) recount of a young man, Heradius, seeking a magician's help to win a woman's love. In Jacobus de Voragine's version of this story, the magician tells Heradius that he cannot fulfill the request but can direct him to seek help directly from the Devil, his lord. He gives Heradius a letter in which he asks the Devil to grant the young man's request, which would in turn bring more followers to the Devil's side. The magician also gives Heradius instructions on summoning the Devil: he must visit a pagan tomb at night, invoke the demons, and raise the letter in air. Heradius does as he is told, and the Devil appears to him, agreeing to grant his wish on the condition that he signs a pact renouncing Christianity. The love spell is successful, and Heradius wins the woman's affection. However, he later repents and is ultimately saved by St. Basil through a prolonged exorcism.[172]

The demonic magician in this story is referred to as *maleficus*, a term used here in its generic sense of "evil magician," but in thirteenth-century terms, he could also be described as a necromancer. However, unlike most stories set in medieval times, where the conjuration requires a series of rituals performed by an expert, this magician can quickly instruct others on how to summon demons.

This story may have influenced the tale of Palumbus recounted at chapter 2.1 of this thesis, in which a necromancer similarly uses a letter to command demons on behalf of a young man. In that story, however, there is no conjuration by proxy, Palumbus is not a servant of the Devil, and he does not attempt to promote demonolatry as a pagan or heretic might be depicted as doing.

Another story similar to that of Heradius, and often recounted by thirteenth-century *exempla*, is that of Theophilus of Adana, set in the sixth century. Theophilus, a deacon who desires to become bishop, turns to a Jewish magician who introduces him to the Devil.

[172] Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda*, cap. 26 (*De sancto Basilio episcopo*), par. 5, pp. 122–125.

Theophilus is asked to sign a pact renouncing Christ and Virgin Mary, and in return he obtains a temporary success. Eventually, he too repents and is rescued by the Virgin Mary herself, who retrieves the demonic contract from the Devil.[173]

While in the story of Heradius the magician is associated with paganism, as implied by the tomb where the Devil is summoned, in Theophilus' tale he is a Jew, both characters belonging to an outgroup from a Christian perspective.

Jewish magicians have been a recurring trope in Christian tradition, both as fictional characters and as alleged real practitioners mentioned in various texts.[174] However, Jewish magicians are surprisingly rare in thirteenth-century *exempla*. They feature prominently in stories set in the past, such as that of Theophilus, with few exceptions.[175] In most medieval stories, even those that echo older motifs, the learned magician is usually not a member of the outgroup but a clergyman.

For instance, Stephen of Bourbon writes of a clergyman desiring a woman, and conjuring a demon for the purpose. At the demon's request, he signs a pact renouncing, as usual, Christ and the Virgin Mary. However, Mary later appears in the dreams of the clergyman and leads him to repent.[176] The influence of the story of Theophilus, and possibly Heradius as well, is palpable in this *exemplum*. Unlike these older tales, however, the magician and the person seeking the ultimate result of the spell are the same individual. This results in the merging of the motifs of demonic magic and of the diabolical pact, which were often otherwise depicted as distinct. The most notable aspect, however, is that the magician is now a clergyman, likely

[173] Flint, *Rise of Magic*, pp. 334–347; Boureau, *Satan the Heretic*, pp. 69–74.
[174] Katelyn Mesler, "The Latin Encounter with Hebrew Magic," in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, pp. 85–98.
[175] These exceptions are a very brief *exemplum* in Helinand of Froidmont, *Chronicon*, lib. 45, ann. 724, col. 817, lin. 9–10; and a tale by William of Malmesbury included in Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum*, lib. 24, cap. 100, p. 998a, toward the end.
[176] Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus*, pars 2, tit. 6, cap. 22, lin. 2780–2797.

reflecting contemporary concrete concerns about magical deviancy among the Church's members.[177]

I have already illustrated earlier in this chapter how heretics practicing demonic magic are not a frequent occurrence in thirteenth-century *exempla*. The same holds for other outgroup representatives. Pagans, naturally, were not a significant concern for thirteenth-century Christianity, at least not as organized groups. Jews, on the other hand, are often slandered in *exempla*. Among the texts I have analyzed, the *Historiae memorabiles* has the most pronounced anti-Judaic character, depicting Jews as murdering children or as stealing hosts to perform magic rituals.[178] However, even in such stories, they never interact with demons. The depiction of eucharist magic in these stories is aimed to evoke the killing of Christ, slandering Jews by associating them with a crime commonly laid on them by medieval theologians. As previously explained, however, in every instance where the eucharist is involved in magic, it is not the Devil but God or his representatives to intervene and punish the perpetrator.

A similar scarcity can be observed for Muslims. The only tale featuring a Muslim demonic magician I have found in thirteenth-century texts depicts Mahomet as a practitioner, trapping a legion of demons within a giant statue in Spain.[179] Going back a century, William of Malmesbury also wrote of Gerbert of Aurillac travelling to Spain to study magic under a Saracen master, eventually stealing his book of magic and fleeing with it.[180] This story achieved considerable success and was included by other authors in their works. Among these, the chronicle of Helinand of Froidmont and the *Speculum historiale* by Vincent of

[177] Cf. de Mayo, *Demonology*, p. 121–122.
[178] Rudolph of Schlettstadt, *Historiae*, pp. 41–68, 79–82, and 99–101.
[179] Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, app. 2, cap. 1, pp. 878–879.
[180] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, vol. 1, lib. 2, cap. 167, pp. 280–282.

Beauvais. These authors, however, retell the story without mentioning the Muslim identity of the magician, referring to him merely as a philosopher.[181]

We have seen how old stories often influenced new ones and how, at times, they contained motifs that didn't seem to resonate with a thirteenth-century sensibility and thus faded from narratives. There are also instances where old stories gained new elements that more closely aligned with medieval expectations of magic. For example, Stephen of Bourbon dedicates various parts of his *Treatise on Various Predicable Matters* to the story of St. Cyprian of Antioch (d. 302).[182] Before his conversion to Christianity, Cyprian was a demonic magician who unsuccessfully tried to sway St. Justine. Each time he sent demons after her, they were repelled by the sign of the cross, demonstrating the superiority of Christianity over the Devil and over the paganism he represented.

In one passage, Stephen also details the magical powers of Cyprian: he could transform himself into a bird, and women into horses; he would poison and sacrifice innocent people; and he served the demons to please them.[183] Particular focus is given to a book he possessed, containing the images of 365 demons and a description of the powers of each one of them.

Even in older versions of this story, there were mentions of Cyprian books, which he burned after his conversion, echoing a passage from the Acts of the Apostles where Ephesian magicians burn their books after having witnessing the miracles of St. Paul.[184] However, the specifics details about Cyprian's book appear to be a later addition, possibly by Stephen of

[181] Helinand of Froidmont, *Chronicon*, lib. 46, ann. 991, col. 917, lin. 32–42; Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum*, lib. 24, cap. 97, p. 997b.
[182] Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus*, pars 2, tit. 5, cap. 7, lin. 936–978, cap. 9, lin. 1373, and pars 3, tit. 4, cap. 8, lin. 842–861.
[183] Stephen of Bourbon, *Tractatus*, pars 3, tit. 4, cap. 8, lin. 842–861.
[184] The burning of Cyprian's books is mentioned in the Greek version of the legend. It probably mirrors *Acts* 19:19. *Apocrypha arabica*, edited by Margaret Dunlop Gibson (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1901), p. 70, lin. 8-10.

Bourbon himself, and indeed the description he provides aligns with magical books documented around the same period.[185]

In conclusion, these tales of ancient magicians often exhibit distinct motifs. They link magic with demonic pacts while still maintaining a clear distinction between the magician, who serves as an intermediary to the Devil, and the signer of the pact. Magicians in these stories typically belong to an outgroup—pagans, Jews, or other non-Christians—reflecting either a different focus of Christian concern at the time they were made, or a different way of slandering marginalized groups when compared to the thirteenth century. The stories conceived in this latter period, in fact, tend to depict magicians, and particularly necromancers, as deviant clergymen who, despite their forbidden practices, retain a fundamental connection to the Christian community and often reintegrate into religious life after repenting.

These old stories were widely copied and circulated in many forms. During their transmission, they were sometimes altered, but at the same time they provided narrative elements for newly conceived stories.[186] In their function as *exempla*, these stories of ancient origin were not mere illustrative tools to be used to support a specific message; their perceived factuality and their authority meant theologians had to consider them when discussing topics such as exorcism and demonic magic, adjusting their arguments to account for the exceptional nature of some of these narratives.[187]

[185] E.g., the *Liber de officiis spirituum* and the *Liber perditionis* mentioned in footnotes 14 and 110 of this thesis.

[186] An example of a medieval alteration of the story of Cyprian can be found in the *Legenda aurea*, where Cyprian is no longer a magician employed by another man but acts out of his own lust. This shift seems to influence his characterization, as he is depicted as relatively more aggressive toward the Devil than in other versions. Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda*, cap. 142 (*De sancta Justina virgine*), pp. 632–636.

[187] For example, Thomas Aquinas explains that it is unlawful to adjure demons, but adds that perhaps some holy men are an exception to this rule, as St. James assumed control of the demons sent against him by the magician Hermogenes. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, pars 2-2, q. 90, art. 2.

Chapter 3

3.1 Demonic Magic and its Conceptual Construction

The analysis in the previous chapter reveals that depictions of demonic magic in *exempla*, while differing in various aspects, also follow a common pattern. One significant distinction among these stories is whether necromancers are portrayed as controlling demons or as their servants. This difference is less about the practitioners themselves and more about the authors and their main concerns. Stories where necromancers are submissive make the greatest effort to condemn the practice, while those stories where they are in control make use of demonic magic primarily as a narrative device to convey a different message. Even in these latter stories, however, where necromancy is less directly attacked, it is still not favorably viewed, nor it is ever claimed to be a legitimate practice.

Despite this variation, all authors have in common that they use a simplified depiction of necromancy, emphasizing some elements and omitting others. Direct interactions with demons, involving circles and books, are a frequent motif, while other elements commonly found in non-narrative texts, such as bloody sacrifices, invocations to God, reflective surfaces, and the use of virgins as mediums (usually boys), are absent.[188] In particular,

[188] Sacrifices of human blood and animals are described in Augustine and Isidore of Seville, and in various medieval non-narrative texts, such as the *glossae* to the *Decretum Gratiani*. Michael Scotus' text cited at the beginning of this thesis also mentions such sacrifices, together with invocations to God. Graf, "Augustine and Magic," p. 88. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, lib. 8, cap. 9, pars 11; Patrick Nold, *Marriage Advice for a Pope, John XXII and the Power to Dissolve*, Latin edition (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. LXII, footnote 159. Reflective surfaces were used to try and observe spirits in them, and virgins, male or female, were sometimes reputed to be the only ones capable of seeing such reflections. For example, Gervase of Tilbury, in a non-narrative part of his text, writes that "necromancers claim that in the experiments of the sword, the mirror, the finger-nail, or the circle, only a virgin's eyes are effective" (*asserunt nigromantici in experimentis gladii vel speculi vel unguis aut circini solos oculos virgineos prevalere*). Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, lib. 1, cap. 17, pp. 96–97. Cf. *Forbidden Rites*, pp. 61 and 108. Kieckhefer also mentions, at p. 101, an exception to the absence of rituals with reflective surfaces in *exempla*, as a story by Stephen of Bourbon features a magician using the surface of a sword and a young boy looking into it as a means

astrology, often closely related to necromancy in other texts, is rarely mentioned in narrative sources.[189]

Of course, there are rare exceptions. The story of the Maastricht necromancer, for example, is the only one describing bloody sacrifices, featuring a cat and two doves as offerings to demons. Such detailed descriptions, and the presence of conflicting motifs, suggests that this story retained some real aspects along fictional additions. In other cases, omission of this and other ritual elements can be explained by various reasons. First, authors may have excluded overly complex descriptions to keep their stories straightforward and effective. Second, excluding elements resembling official religious rituals, like invocations to God, helped distinguish necromancy from legitimate religious practices. Third, authors sometimes left out specific details to discourage imitation.[190] The only essential element in these stories was the conjuring of demons, while other ritualistic elements were unnecessary or potentially dangerous.

However, these points are still insufficient, I think, to explain astrology's consistent omission from *exempla* on demonic magic, even in cases where it is separately criticized in the same text.[191] The authors of *exempla* did likely have access to texts linking astrology and necromancy, and we have seen how this *topos* can also be found in the widely copied story of Gerbert of Aurillac by William of Malmesbury. Yet, I have not been able to find other thirteenth-century stories which replicate the motif of a necromancer who is also skilled in astrology, as Gerbert's character was.

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to catch a thief. Interestingly, this is claimed by Stephen to be an *exemplum* derived from direct experience.

[189] Munich, Clm 10268, fol. 114rb, lin. 19–34; cf. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 165–166.

[190] The Franciscan author of the *Liber exemplorum*, for instance, narrates an *exemplum* on eucharist magic but cautions the preachers by writing: "Let everyone consider what they should prudently say in such matters" (*Videat quisque quod sane dicat in talibus*). Indeed, he suggests that, in re-narrating the *exemplum*, the preachers take out any reference to the host, to discourage imitation. *Liber exemplorum*, cap. 99, pp. 56–57.

[191] E.g., Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, pp. 239, 785–786 and 796–797.

A plausible explanation, in addition to the others already mentioned, is that the clerical authors framed necromancy using the familiar conceptual framework of interacting with demons through exorcism—a practice many of them plausibly witnessed or practiced. This framework could have influenced their representation of necromancy, leading them to characterize it as an inversion of exorcism. In Caesarius' *Dialogue*, for example, exorcists wield divine power to exercise power over demons, ultimately repelling them, while necromancers submit to them.[192] When juxtaposing these two types of characters, it becomes evident that they are at least partially constructed by analogy.

Even in texts where necromancers control demons, such as Salimbene's chronicle, there remains a discernible relationship between the two practices. I have already mentioned how, in Salimbene's text, a Spanish necromancer claims that magicians should be as ferocious as demons. Other necromantic characters within this chronicle reinforce this dominating attitude, presenting themselves as preachers of demons or being described as enchanters of demons, epithets which clearly delineate an intended hierarchy, with the magician above the demons.[193]

This mirrors the way exorcists in Salimbene's chronicle dispel demons aggressively, by arguing with and shaming them. In fact, even the necromancer described as enchanter of demons, a clergyman, conducts such an aggressive exorcism, dispelling a demon with ferocity and thus fulfilling his role as a parish priest. However, his wicked nature leaves him vulnerable to demonic revenge, leading to his demise.

Positive exorcists, too, argue with demons aggressively, as shown in an *exemplum* featuring a Franciscan friar named Benintende—literally, "He Who Understands Well." He begins exorcising a woman by prompting a demon to name all the angelic orders. The demon

[192] For an example of an exorcist dominating a demon, yet ultimately proving unable to expel him because God does not allow it yet, see Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 1, dist. 5, cap. 29, pp. 312–315.
[193] Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, pp. 45 and 831–832.

is unable to list them all because the memory of his former status causes him pain. Frustrated, he vows to punish the woman he was possessing—whom he calls a prostitute. The friar quickly retorts by insulting the demon: "See now how low you have steeped: you who were to live in heaven, now because of your pride dwell inside a prostitute." He then orders the demon to abandon the woman's body and dispels him in the name of the Holy Trinity, leaving the demon confounded and screaming.[194] Similar examples abound in Salimbene's text, where demons are exorcised through insults, being called pigs, reminded that they dwell in latrines, or mocked for their poor Latin.[195]

In these stories, exorcists and necromancers share a similar attitude toward demons but differ because the latter do not act on behalf of God. This relationship between the two groups could possibly arise from the narrator, Salimbene, using exorcism as a conceptual framework to depict necromancy, borrowing elements from exorcism and altering them to portray necromancy as its deviant counterpart. As already mentioned, protective circles, sometimes implied to be legitimate defensive measures against demonic attacks, might also relate to exorcism. Conversely, those elements which are excluded from necromancy stories are for the most part those entirely unrelated to exorcistic rituals. Thus astrology, which was not present in legitimate exorcisms, could not have been reshaped and used to represent their deviant inversion.

Real necromancers themselves often likened their practice to exorcism, claiming to constrain demons by God's power, following after the example set by King Solomon.[196] They presented this view as insiders, projecting it toward those outside the practice. I suggest that a similar discourse also worked in the opposite direction, emerging from clerical authors

[194] Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, pp. 828–829, *De fratre qui expulit demonem de muliere obsessa, cum demone sapienter loquendo* (The friar who expelled a demon from a possessed woman, by speaking wisely with the demon).
[195] Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, pp. 826 and 830.
[196] Julien Véronèse, "Faire société avec les démons? Le magicien et la question du pacte aux derniers siècles du Moyen Âge," *Philosophical Readings*, 12, no. 1 (2020), p. 278.

who were outsiders to necromancy and framed it through the lens of exorcism, borrowing elements to fill the gaps in their narratives and, therefore, emphasizing demonic interaction as necromancy's primary focus. Although it is likely that both discourses, stemming from the same clerical milieu, influenced each other, it is challenging to determine whether they originated from one another, and which originated first.[197]

For witches too, a similar pattern can be observed. However, in their stories, practical elements like concoctions, ointments, and talismans are linked not to exorcism, a learned and masculine practice which did not pertain common people. Rather, the conceptual framework used for these stories derives from classical motifs acquired by clergymen through their formal studies. Thus, witches are often portrayed as transforming men into animals or flying at night. This may partly explain why women have less direct interactions with demons than necromancers and exorcists, though medieval patriarchal views on women's agency remain a significant factor.

3.2 Gender and Necromancy[198]

Much has been written about gender and witchcraft, even regarding male witches, and illuminating studies have explored how real necromancers presented their masculinity in their own texts.[199] However, the gendered portrayal of necromancers as literary characters has been less explored. This subchapter aims to contribute to this topic by reflecting on how

[197] Cf. Richard Kitchener et al. "Responses," in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, p. 59, esp. point 8.

[198] This subchapter includes rewritten extracts from my unpublished end-term paper titled "The necromancers and their gender: two cases in comparison," submitted for a Gender History class at CEU in 2022.

[199] E.g., Michael D. Bailey, "The Feminization of Magic and the Emerging Idea of the Female Witch in the Late Middle Ages," *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 19 (2002), pp. 120–134; Catherine Rider, "Magic and Gender," in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, pp. 343–354; Laura Apps and Andrew Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Frank Klaassen, "Learning and Masculinity in Manuscripts of Ritual Magic of the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 38, no. 1 (Spring 2007), pp. 49–76.

medieval gendered perceptions influenced the authors' construction of the necromancers' character. Specifically, since these necromancers are male, I will explore how their masculinity is depicted.

But what does it mean to be a man in the milieu these thirteenth-century authors belonged to? Following Christopher Fletcher's approach on medieval masculinities, and wanting to avoid projecting modern assumptions, I will not use sexual proactivity as a criterion, which after all is not even central to most of the stories I have described. Instead, I will use the concept of *virilitas*, which Fletcher relates to the English word "manliness," describing it as the reactiveness a man should exhibit when faced with a challenging or confrontational situation.[200]

As a case study, I will focus on Salimbene and Caesarius, who portray necromancers in contrasting ways: Salimbene as controlling demons, and Caesarius as being controlled by them. These authors either use the term *virilitas* in military contexts or associate it with religious men and, sometimes, even women.[201] The general meaning they normally ascribe to this word seems to be that of "manly courage."

Virilitas does not seem to be, in these texts, a prerequisite for being a man. It is an appreciated value, but "men" and "those who display *virilitas*" are not fully overlapping categories. Nonetheless, *virilitas* is tied to the male gender both by recognizable etymology and by the fact that it was encouraged primarily among men. As such, it can at the very least allow for a moral hierarchization: he who acts *viriliter*, i.e., in a manly way, is considered a better man than he who does not.

[200] Christopher Fletcher, "The Whig Interpretation of Masculinity? Honour and Sexuality in Late Medieval Manhood," in *What is Masculinity? Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World*, edited by John H. Arnold and Sean Brady (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 57–75.
[201] E.g., Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 1, dist. 4, cap. 54, p. 221, and vol 2. dist. 11, cap. 13, p. 281; Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, pp. 38, 56, 58 and 547.

So, assuming *virilitas* was a manly virtue, do necromancers in these two works display it?

The necromancers in Salimbene's chronicle are proactive and generally ferocious, and, as I have illustrated, they practice their art in a manner similar to how Salimbene conceptualizes spiritual combat, which friars conduct manfully.[202] However, despite their aggressivity, overconfidence, and proactive attitude, I doubt Salimbene would have described them as embodying *virilitas*. Firstly, *virilitas* carries positive connotations, and although Salimbene does not openly condemn necromancers, he does not praise them either. After all, portraying the practitioners of a forbidden art in a positive light would have been hardly appropriate. Secondly, Fletcher describes manliness as defending one's honor rather than aggression for its own sake, and Salimbene too associates *virilitas* with displays of valor, a quality which would be difficult to recognize in the character of these necromancers.

The story of the pupil of the Spanish necromancer, Filippo Fontana, can clarify my doubts and help me define my theory.[203] Filippo would later become a papal legate in northern Italy and a close acquaintance of Salimbene himself. The narration of his life continues in the chronicle and is constructed in such a way to impart an implicit moral lesson: as we have already seen, in his youth Filippo failed to show reactiveness when confronted by demons. He was expected to say something to them, but did not, and many *exempla* in Salimbene's text make it clear that one must act proactively toward the Devil.[204] However, Filippo seems to learn this lesson in his mature years, when he undertakes a military struggle against the Ghibelline lord Ezzelino da Romano (d. 1259), whom Salimbene portrays as extremely cruel and demon-like. To contrast the "devil" Ezzelino, Filippo becomes a general

[202] Cf. "male gendered nature of spiritual-combat." Fletcher, "Honour and Sexuality," p. 62.
[203] I have detailed the narrative construction of Filippo Fontana's character in Salimbene's chronicle in my BA thesis. Davide Politi, "La negromanzia nella *Cronica* di Salimbene de Adam," (BA Diss., *Alma Mater Studiorum* of Bologna, 2022), pp. 23–30.
[204] These *exempla* are mostly grouped in the last part of the *Cronica*. Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, pp. 823–840.

for the Church and is described as successfully fighting fire with fire, becoming so used to violence that he even misdirects it toward his own servants. For this excess in correcting his former passivity, he is even punished. According to Salimbene, God teaches him a lesson by allowing him to be captured by Ezzelino, before ultimately allowing for his escape once he has been reminded how to behave in a courtly way.[205]

Filippo's life can then be read as a path to achieve *virilitas*. He fails to display it when he is young, in a context where, however, his manliness would not have been directed toward a proper goal. He, instead, achieves it later in life. In fact, after Filippo's death, Salimbene describes his complex figure, characterized by excesses in both virtues and sins, by quoting a gendered metaphor from Bernard of Clairvaux: bishops like Filippo are compared to men returning home from war, while other religious figures are likened to wives spinning wool at home. The husband, i.e., the bishop, may not have behaved blamelessly, but he nevertheless acted *viriliter* and for the common good, and therefore cannot be judged by anyone other than God.[206]

This passage seems to substantiate my interpretation: that for Salimbene the Spanish necromancer was wrong in suggesting that the Church was a place for spineless men. Instead, the Church is where Filippo achieves true *virilitas*. He is not a failed necromancer, an incomplete Gerbert of Aurillac, but his correct opposite, a positive model endorsed by the author. He is someone who follows the right path despite a bad start, and eventually meets a

[205] Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, pp. 569–583. On the importance of courtly virtues for Salimbene, see Cinzio Violante, "Motivi e carattere della Cronica di Salimbene," *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Lettere, Storia e Filosofia*, 22, no. 1/2 (1953), 108–154. Cf. Fletcher's description of manliness, which reminds of courtly attitude. Fletcher, "Honour and Sexuality," pp. 61–62.
[206] Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, pp. 628–630.

good death, unlike Gerbert, who according to William of Malmesbury ends up being dismembered.[207]

True *virilitas* can then be seen not just as merely displaying proactiveness, but to do so for a cause recognizable as legitimate. In lacking a proper goal, the necromancers in Salimbene's chronicle seem not to be fully qualifiable as manly, even if they struggle against demons in a manly way. Would this interpretation be accepted, the natural consequence would be that, for Salimbene, there is no better way to be virile than to fight the Devil for a righteous purpose, i.e., by being a religious man. Indeed, every manly person in Salimbene's text fights for a broader, non-individual cause, whether Salimbene himself, who *viriliter* resists his father's attempts to bring him back into secular life, or soldiers, who *viriliter* conquer cities.[208]

In Caesarius' *Dialogue*, instead, there is no ground at all to even consider whether the necromancers are displaying true *virilitas*. Caesarius consistently uses this word to denote resistance to temptation, whereas the necromancers willingly submit to demons, doing the exact opposite. This, however, still leaves a question to be answered: by presenting necromancers as submissive, a feature sometimes linked to femininity, is Caesarius undermining their masculinity? In other words, are these necromancers behaving not as men were expected to, but more like women were believed to act?[209]

[207] Gerbert "gave orders that he should be cut in small pieces and cast out limb by limb. 'Let him have the service of my body', he cried, 'who sought its obedience; my mind never accepted that oath, not sacrament but rather sacrilege'" ([*M*]*inutatim se dilaniari et membratim foras projici jussit; "Habeat, inquiens membrorum officium qui eorum quaesivit hominium; namque animus meus nunquam illud adamavit sacramentum, imo sacrilegium"*). William of Malmesbury, *Gesta*, vol. 1, lib. 2, cap. 172, p. 295.

[208] Salimbene de Adam, Cronica, pp. 40 and 56.

[209] Cf. Jacqueline Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?" in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe*, edited by Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 36. Murray cites Jo Ann McNamara and writes that "unmanly servility pressed impotent men down toward the female, inferior end of the scale," relating this concept to clergymen too.

To answer, I must first contextualize the necromancers' attitude: though they are submissive, this trait alone does not make them closer to female characters from the same text. Their submissiveness, in theory, is displayed in ways formally acceptable for men because it resembles both prayers to God and vassallatic homages.[210] The link with the latter practice seems to be especially strong: the Devil himself refers to the sorcerous heretics as "his own men," an expression which could be used to refer to one's knights.[211] Similar *exempla* from other authors even make the relationship between necromancers and demons more straightforwardly inspired to that between vassals and their lord.[212] In return, the Devil in these stories acts as a magnanimous overlord, always listening to the necromancers and granting their requests. We are far, here, from the *topos* of the obscene kiss which, few centuries later, would be associated with witches and heretics in order to disparage them.

Thus, Caesarius seems to denigrate necromancers not by showing submissiveness *per se* but by emphasizing that they direct it toward an illegitimate target, the Devil. As a result, they are portrayed as an inversion of legitimate men, who instead pay homage to God and despise the Devil.

As I have mentioned, in the *Dialogue* it is Benedictine exorcists who act most proactively toward demons, dominating them. They represent Caesarius' ideal model, connotated by *virilitas*, which they use to counter the Devil. For this reason, there may be ground to define the Benedictine monk, especially the exorcist, as the hegemonic male in

[210] E.g., a necromancer says to the Devil "I regret having departed from you. And because I desire to be more obedient to you than I have been, I ask you to tell me […]" (*Poenitet me recessisse a te. Et quia de cetero magis obsequiosus tibi esse desidero, quam fuerim, rogo ut dicas mihi* […]). Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 1, dist. 5, cap. 18, p. 297.
[211] "*Mei sunt, et a me missi*," and "*hominia mihi*." Ibidem. In fact, even the English edition of the *Dialogus* translates *hominia* as "vassals." Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, vol. 1, edited by G. G. Coulton and Eileen Power, translated by H. Von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), p. 339.
[212] The motif of the vassallatic homage to the Devil is especially developed by Stephen of Bourbon in the story of Melchita described at chapter 2.1 of this thesis. Cf. Berlioz, "Maître Melchita," p. 299: "*L'hommage que rend le jeune homme au roi respecte les formes du rite de l'entrée en vassalité*."

Caesarius' view.[213] It is not a mistake if, after all, when these necromancers repent, they always join a monastery: they cease being "deviants" and adopt the values of socially acceptable men.[214]

If the virile Benedictine monk is superior to the Devil, and the Devil is the necromancer's overlord, it's then just a matter of simplifying the equation to understand the intended relationship which, in Caesarius' mind, links the two figures: the necromancer is a distorted image of proper masculinity—not because of his submissiveness, but because he serves the Devil.

In conclusion, while the necromancers' masculinity is diminished by their behavior, they are still portrayed as men, albeit lacking *virilitas*. Since their masculinity is not denied overall, there would be no ground to assume that just a diminished masculinity equates to increased femininity. What we can still say, however, is that necromancers are "men of inferior quality." The hierarchy established by Caesarius in this way is not so much social as it is moral. Ranking in *virilitas* pertains the cosmical order perceived by the author, and the ultimate goal of this hierarchization is still to discern how close one is to the supreme good: the salvation of the soul.

Though I am not entirely satisfied with my answer to whether necromancers were manly figures for these authors, I still think that, in trying to solve this problem, I have shed some light on what might have been Caesarius' and Salimbene's idea of *virilitas*, which seems also to partly depend on the pursued goal. Furthermore, this idea of *virilitas* seems also to be influenced by how the authors perceived themselves, suggesting a self-image far removed

[213] Cf. John Tosh, "Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender," in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, edited by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 41–58.
[214] Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus*, vol. 1, dist. 1, cap. 33, p. 40, cap. 34, p. 42, and dist. 5, cap. 4, p. 281.

from the "cooler, less virile, and more feminine" temperament sometimes ascribed to clerics by modern historiography.[215]

I also hope to have demonstrated how asking questions about gender can allow for new interpretations of such narratives. For example, the framework of moral manliness—truly fulfilled only when aimed at a positive goal—can offer new insights into the hagiography of Justina and Cyprian in Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*. In this version of the story, Cyprian is not acting on behalf of another man but is directly in love with Justina. He is also dismissive of an insecure and petulant Devil—even as his servant—perhaps because his character is modeled on the *topos* of the irreverent student.[216] When the Devil fails to secure Justina's love, Cyprian converts, rejecting a misguided idea of manliness (chasing women) in favor of true manliness within the Church—a moral amplified by the fact that Jacobus portrays Cyprian not as an intermediary, but as directly in love.[217]

3.3 Conclusions

As discussed in the introduction, the thirteenth century can be seen as a transitional period in which perceptions of demonic magic were evolving under new influences. This may explain why harsh condemnations by scholastic theologians coexisted with diverse narratives that sometimes portrayed demonic magic as merely marvelous, without clear moralizing intent.[218] And while magicians were often portrayed as deviants, they were still rarely described as a social threat, suggesting a relatively low level of concern about demonic magic during this period. These features could then be interpreted as highlighting a difference in

[215] Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?" p. 49.
[216] In medieval narratives, students are often characterized by their sexual proactivity, irreverence, and sometimes by practicing demonic magic. E.g., Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, p. 45; Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, day 8, tale 7.
[217] Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda*, cap. 142 (*De sancta Justina virgine*), pp. 632–636.
[218] For an overview of scholastic views on magic, see David J. Collins, "Scholasticism and High Medieval Opposition to Magic," in *The Routledge History of Medieval* Magic, pp. 461–474.

perception between the thirteenth century and the fourteenth century and beyond. Modern historians have observed that in the period that followed, both secular and religious authorities increasingly associated various forms of demonic magic with heresy and, to varying degrees, actively persecuted them, partly due to beliefs in their dangerous effects.[219]

However, rather than attributing the characteristics of these *exempla* solely to changes in time and general perception, I argue that the medium through which these ideas were transmitted played a crucial role. Constructing narratives is different from formulating theological *distinctiones* in that it requires the balancing of several factors: condemning demonic magic, characterizing individuals through their interactions with demons, captivating audiences, and establishing causal links between the narrated events.

Nor can the difference between these narratives and contemporary theological treatises be attributed simply to differences in milieu. Many of the collectors and writers of *exempla* were learned men, some of whom wrote theological treatises and served as inquisitors or bishops. And while their role as preachers likely led them to adopt some motifs from other narrative traditions, such as folk tales and secular literature, which often emphasized the marvelous aspects of magic rather than its nature, there are valid arguments against characterizing medieval society as neatly divided into low, lay, and clerical cultures.[220]

Therefore, it seems more reasonable to argue that the medium of transmission shaped the content of these stories and determined their characteristics. When framed in narratives, magic acquires features that are unnecessary in theological treatises or loses those which are

[219] Boureau, *Satan the Heretic*; Kieckhefer, "Witchcraft, Necromancy, and Sorcery as Heresy"; Véronèse, "Le magicien et la question du pacte."
[220] See Gábor Klaniczay, "'Popular Culture' in Medieval Hagiography and in Recent Historiography," in *Agiografia e culture popolari. Hagiography and popular cultures*, edited by Paolo Golinelli (Bologna: CLUEB, 2012), pp. 17–43. Cf. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 56–94.

not apt to being transmitted in narrative form.[221] It is even likely that narrative texts influenced abstract theological discourse in some way, with each medium impacting the other and fluidly reshaping old motifs.[222]

Even centuries later, these stories continued to be used as a way of conceptualizing magic. For example, in one of the manuscripts containing the *Historiae memorabiles*, the copyist–the sixteenth-century German scholar Willhelm Werner von Zimmern (d. 1575)– juxtaposed the medieval narratives with other stories from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century texts, including the *Malleus maleficarum*, thus infusing the old tales of wondrous witchcraft with new meanings shaped by the context of witch hunts and of the Counter-Reformation.[223]

Returning to the content of the analyzed *exempla*, they depict a demonic magic which is understandably highly fictionalized, with some stories almost caricaturing the actual practices as attested in more informed texts. These narratives serve primarily as devices through which authors depict demons, sins, and miracles, ultimately conveying their beliefs about the right and wrong ways to be. In this sense, demonic magic can be understood as a subcategory of a broader narrative genre: stories that focus on interactions between humans and demons. Indeed, the interactions between magicians and demons often form the core of the analyzed stories.

Although the authors consistently claim their stories are true and passed down as heard, it is clear they manipulate them in order to convey specific meanings. Therefore, the authors

[221] It is also important to note that we historians tend to essentialize scholastic views by focusing on a few major authors whose works are better known and more easily accessible. An extended inquiry into the works of "minor" scholastic authors would likely yield more nuanced insights into their views on magic. Collins, "Scholasticism and High Medieval Opposition," p. 472.

[222] For example, part of Albertus Magnus' *responsum* on whether magicians can perform true exorcisms is derived from a narrative source: the *Vita* of St. Bartolomew. Albertus Magnus. *Commentarii in quartum librum Sententiarum*, dist. 24, art. 22, p. 60b.

[223] The extracts from the *Malleus maleficarum* are in Sigmaringen, Cod. 64, fol. 10r–30r. See Georges, "Graf Wilhelm Werner von Zimmern als Historiensammler."

and collectors of *exempla* can hardly be considered mere transmitters of stories: even when they use preexisting stories, they often alter them to express their worldview.

The point of view all these stories portray is that of a hierarchically ordered world, with God at its pinnacle and demons positioned above some humans and below others. At the top of the human hierarchy are those who act for God and receive divine endorsement. They are superior to demons and capable of exerting exceptional charisma over them. Necromancers, on the contrary, are depicted as lacking charisma or misdirecting it. In this context, demons function as narrative tools to establish and illustrate perceived hierarchies in the medieval Christian spiritual, social, and cultural landscape.

These dynamics hint at the intended audiences for these stories. Caesarius served as master of novices in the monastery of Heisterbach, and most of his *exempla* seem to be aimed precisely at educating novices to monastic life, a goal that is not incompatible with the other texts I have examined in this thesis. Young monks and friars would look at these stories to find negative and positive models of the correct behaviors they were expected to hold. In fact, many of the analyzed *exempla* focus on deviant clergymen, conveying messages only loosely applicable to laypeople. However, being possibly included in sermons, these narratives also reached a wider audience, showing the reality of Christian teachings and highlighting the usefulness and exceptional qualities of religious orders.

In this way, various identities were constructed and projected in different directions. The authors themselves would be shaped from these stories, as well as their peers, monks and friars, who could use them to construct both their individual and their collective identity, as members of their orders. Laypeople were expected to acknowledge and accept these identities as legitimate, but even their self-perception could have possibly been influenced by *exempla*. We can then use these stories not only to try and reconstruct, to a certain degree, the real practice of demonic magic, but also to discern how their authors chose to emphasize specific

elements, trying to understand the reason why they did so. These stories then can become windows into perceptions of magic, of identities, and of worldviews.

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