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From Occult Ekphrasis to Magical Art

Transforming Text into Talismanic Image in the Scriptorium of Alfonso X

This essay considers the relationship between texts and images in magical works produced in the thirteenth-century scriptorium of Alfonso X, *El Sabio - The Wise*, King of Castile, León, and Galicia (1221–1284). With the upsurge of translations from Arabic in the twelfth century, the Christian West discovered a vast amount of new material relating to a broad range of knowledge, ranging from medicine, law, and philosophy to astrology, alchemy, and magic. One of the most important new genres of learned magic introduced into the West during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is that of “Image Magic”.¹

1 Introduction

In the Latin High Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Early Modern Period, learned writers on the subject of *imagines magicae* or magical images were aware that the Latin phrase *Imago Magica* was a translation of the Arabic word *Ṭilasm* (i.e., *Talisman*, variously rendered as *Ṭilasm*, *Ṭilsam*, *Ṭelsam*, *Talisma*, *Tilsemon*, etc).² It is important to emphasise that the Arabic word *Ṭilasm*, taken from the Greek τέλεσμα, has a wider set of connotations than the English word *Talisman*.³ These *imagines* could be in two dimensions, as in simple painted figures, such as those found in Alfonso’s manuscripts, in three dimensions, as in statuettes and figurines, or in between the two, as in seals.⁴ In Arabic works, indeed, a *Ṭilasm* “might be many things, including a monumental statue, an engraved ring, a written tablet or scroll, or even an inscribed shirt”.⁵ The early Latin translators of Arabic material evidently had trouble with the word *Ṭilasm*, and there were variant translations as *Prestigium* (illusion or trick) and *Idolum*, before *Imago* became universally accepted.⁶ In any consideration of the relations between image and text, it is worth bearing this ambiguity of the term *Ṭilasm* in mind: although translated by the Latins as *Imago*, it could originally mean image

1 On image magic, see Láng 2008, 79–122; Klaassen 2013, 33–80; Page 2013, 73–92.

2 Hottinger 1659, 209; Frommann 1675, 279; Rutkin 2012, 492.

3 Luck 2006, 49: *talisman* could be an Arabic transformation of Greek *telesma* “initiation”.

4 Weill-Parot 2011, 118; Skemer 2006, 8.

5 Berlekamp 2011, 120.

6 Burnett 2008, 2.

and/or text. Nowadays specialists of medieval and early modern magic tend to draw a distinction between amulets as natural objects (without images), worn on the body, and talismans as man-made objects engraved with images of the planets, signs of the zodiac, symbols of the constellations, and other powerful images.⁷

An author in his own right, as composer of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, some themselves concerning magic,⁸ Alfonso was also a patron of translators.⁹ Between 1250 and 1280 he commissioned a series of translations that made a significant contribution to Western knowledge of astrology and magic in the Middle Ages. One product of his scriptorium was a translation from Arabic into Castilian, the *Libro de los Juegos – Book of Games* (1283), recognised as one of the first works in the West to discuss the game of Chess, but which also contains several astronomical or astrological games.¹⁰ He was also the sponsor of the *Tablas Alfonsies – Alfonsine Tables* (1252), listing revised astronomical positions for the Sun, Moon and five planets of the Ptolemaic system, which became the standard ephemeris in Europe for the next 300 years.¹¹ Most significantly for this essay, he encouraged the translation and production of works on the occult sciences. These included the *Lapidario* (1250/1259) on the magico-medicinal properties of stones,¹² *Libro de las Cruces – Book of the Crosses* (1259) on judicial astrology;¹³ *Libro del saber de astrología – Book on the Knowledge of Astrology* (1276–79),¹⁴ *Libro de las Formas et de las Ymágenes – Book of Forms and Images* (1276–79),¹⁵ *Libro de Astromagia – Book of Astral Magic* (1280),¹⁶ and the kabbalistic *Liber Razielis – Book of Raziël*.¹⁷ The main focus of this essay will be on the *Picatrix*, the Latin translation that Alfonso commissioned of the Arabic collection of astral magic the *Ghāyat al-Hakīm* or *Aim of the Wise Man*.¹⁸

⁷ Luck 2006, 49; Weill-Parot 2002b, 167 note 2; Lecouteux, 2005, 20.

⁸ See Escobar 1992; García Avilés 2006–2007, 64–65; 2011, 105.

⁹ Roxburgh 2009; Boudet 2006, 193; Pingree 1987.

¹⁰ See Goladay 2007, 640sq. concerning a game called “al-falakiyya” in Arabic, or “Kawākib” (stars) in Persian. See also García Avilés 2006–2007, 84–86.

¹¹ Chabás/Goldstein 2003.

¹² On the dating of the *Lapidario*, see Kahane/Kahane/Pietrangeli 1966, 580. On the *Lapidario*, see Dominguez Rodriguez 2007. See too her 2001 general essay on text, image and design in the codices of Alfonso X.

¹³ Muñoz 1981.

¹⁴ See Samsó 2008, Chapter IX “Alfonso X y los orígenes de la astrología hispánica”. See also Fernández Fernández 2010, 52–61.

¹⁵ On the *Libro de las Formas et de las Ymágenes*, see García Avilés 1996a.

¹⁶ On the *Libro de Astromagia*, see d’Agostino 1992 for the original text; Fernández 2013; García Avilés 1996a; García Avilés 1999; García Avilés 2006–2007, 67–80; García Avilés 2010.

¹⁷ On the *Liber Razielis*, see García Avilés 1997; 1999; O’Callaghan 2003; Grégorio 1993, 93. For additional background, see García Avilés 1996b.

¹⁸ See Weill-Parot 2002a, 123–138, “La magie à la cour alphonse et ses énigmes”.

The *Ghāyat al-Hakīm* and its companion alchemical work the *Rutbat al-Hakīm* (*The Step of the Wise Man*)¹⁹ was traditionally attributed to the Muslim astronomer, alchemist and mathematician Maslama al-Majrīṭī (d.c. 1008).²⁰ This claim was made in the *Muqaddima*, the *Introduction* to a planned world history, written in 1377 by the Tunisian cultural and political historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406).²¹ Although the attribution is now disputed by modern scholarship, the author of the *Ghāyat*, whoever he may be, claims to have laboured for six years on compiling information from 224 works, which it is generally agreed were assembled in the eleventh century in Al-Andalus by someone belonging to the religion of the Sabians of Harran.²² Given the fact that the Sabians considered that ancient authority on astrology, magic and alchemy Hermes Trismegistus to be their prophet,²³ one might expect the identity of the *Hakīm*, the Wise Man of the *Ghāyat al-Hakīm*'s title, to be Hermes. It appears, however, to be someone on the surface at least far less magical: the *Hakīm* is lauded as “the true master of the Greeks”²⁴ and in a discussion of the sciences necessary for the exercise of the prophets and wise men, we learn that these include, “logic, contained in the eight books of the first of the *Hakīm* [...] and the 13 volumes of the *Hakīm*'s physics and metaphysics”.²⁵ This can only be that famous teacher of Alexander the Great, the philosopher Aristotle; one of the works that most likely exerted an influence on the *Picatrix* is the pseudo-Aristotelian compendium of political, medical, astrological, alchemical and talismanic lore, the *Sirr al-Asrār*, well known in Latin as the *Secretum Secretorum* or *Secret of Secrets*.²⁶ At the request of King Alfonso, the *Ghāyat al-Hakīm* was translated first into Castilian in the years 1256–1258 and then eventually into Latin.²⁷ A Hebrew version, the *Takhlit he-hakham*, dates from possibly

19 Hamès 2011, 216.

20 Fierro 1996.

21 Garin 1983, 46. On Ibn Khaldūn, see Fromherz 2010, 1. On Ibn Khaldūn and magic, see Asatrian 2003.

22 The Harranian Sabians played a vital role in Baghdad and the rest of the Arab world from 856 until about 1050; playing the role of the main source of Greek philosophy and science as well as shaping the intellectual life. The most prominent of the Harranian Sabians was Thabit ibn Qurra. Pingree 1989, 8; 2002. See also Green 1992, 113. On the attribution of the *Picatrix* to Maslama al-Qurtubi (d. 964), see Saif 2015, 3, 201.

23 Pingree 2002, 22; van Bladel 2009, 96.

24 Pingree 1986, 194.

25 Hamès 2011, 216.

26 Pingree 1980, 2. See Williams 2003, 10–11 for an overview of the contents. For a comparison between the aphorisms of the *Sirr al-Asrār* and those in the *Ghāyat* and in the Latin *Picatrix*, see Parra Pérez 2009.

27 For the Latin critical edition, see Pingree 1986. See Bakhouché/Fauquier/Pérez-Jean 2003 for a modern French translation of the Latin and a useful introduction that identifies the important additions and suppressions between the original Arabic and the Latin translation. For a German translation of the Arabic *Ghāyat* and extremely useful prefatory matter, see Ritter/Plessner 1962. On the

the late thirteenth century.²⁸ The reason for the choice of *Picatrix* as the title of the Latin translation remains something of a mystery, though some scholars believe it to be an Arabic deformation of either Harpocrates, author of the Greek magico-medical treatise the *Kyranides*, or even perhaps Hippocrates, as “Buqratis”.²⁹

Whatever the mysteries of its name, the *Ghāyat/Picatrix* certainly enjoys a reputation. Writing in the fourteenth century, Ibn Khaldūn shows himself to be well informed about literature on magic and the occult sciences in both his *Muqaddima* and in a treatise on the Sufis, “The Cure for One who Asks, for the Improvement of Questions”.³⁰ In both works he engages in discussions of the talismanic art, alchemy, astrology and dream interpretation, one of the sources from which he draws his information being none other than the *Ghāyat al-Hakim*, which he considers to be the “most complete and best written treatise on magic”.³¹ The oldest external reference to the *Picatrix* in the Christian West dates from 1456 in *Das Buch aller verbotenen Künste, des Aberglaubens und der Zauberei – Book of All Forbidden Arts, Superstition and Sorcery* of the physician Johannes Hartlieb (c. 1410–1468), a work famous in some circles for containing the first known record of a recipe for witches’ flying ointment (*unguentum pharelis*).³² There we read that “*Picatrix* is the most perfect book that I have ever seen on the art [of magic]”.³³ Modern scholars, in their turn, consider the *Ghāyat* to be the “most famous work of magic in the Islamic world”,³⁴ and “the most thorough exposition of celestial magic in Arabic”,³⁵ with the *Picatrix* being described as “a most complete text-book for the magician”.³⁶

The anonymous author of the *Ghāyat/Picatrix* claims to have exposed “the roots of the magical art” (*radices magice artis*).³⁷ In the light of his claim to have drawn from 224 sources, it quickly becomes apparent that the magical art has quite a complex root system, one that draws nourishment from extremely heterogeneous sources.³⁸

Spanish translation, see Pingree 1981. On “Manuscripts of *Picatrix*,” see Thorndike 1929, 822–84; Pingree 1986, xvi–xxiii; Ritter/Plessner 1962, ix–xi (Arabic), xi–xii (Hebrew); xii (Latin).

28 Ritter/Plessner 1962, xi–xii. See also Idel 2005, 183; Leicht 2006, 316sq.; Leicht 2011, 295f.

29 Thomann 1990; Kahane/Kahane/Pietrangeli 1966 576; Caiozzo 2003, 135. On the *Kyranides*, see Kahane/Kahane/Pietrangeli 1966.

30 Asatrian 2003, 74, 94.

31 Garin 1983, 46.

32 On Hartlieb, see Kieckhefer 1997, 32f, on the *unguentum pharelis*, Kieckhefer 1997, 54.

33 Ritter/Plessner 1962, xx: “Es ist noch gar ain mercklich püch jn der künst nigramancia das hebt sich an: ‚ad laudem dei et gloriosissime virginis Marie‘, haisst picatrix. das ist das vollkommnest püch, das jch ye gesach jn der kunst.“ See also Hartlieb 1465, f. 22^f.

34 Vesel 2011, 80: “l’ouvrage le plus célèbre de magie dans le monde islamique”. See also Kieckhefer 1989, 133.

35 Pingree 1980, 1.

36 Yates 1964, 53; Tester 1987, 215.

37 Pingree 1986, 30, 191. But see also, Thorndike 1929, 815: “the science of the stars is the root of magic”, as found in Pingree 1986, 32: “*radices magice sunt motus planetarum*”.

38 Boudet 2011, 161.

Certain parts of the *Picatrix* must have been written in Spain at the time of compilation but the origin of the material is undeniably Eastern and reveals the influence of Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Persian, Zoroastrian, Sabian, Nabataean, and Indian sources.³⁹ The compiler's basic intention seems to have been to juxtapose different traditions of astral magic, in order to provide the reader with a strong theoretical and practical resource.⁴⁰ The four books of the *Picatrix* are full of diverse (and at times conflicting) philosophical theories, explanatory models and significant variants in ritual.⁴¹ In the prologue the author provides a summary of their contents: Book 1 concerns the heavens and their effect on account of the images (*ymagines*) in them; Book 2 speaks in general of the figures of heaven (*figuris celi*) and the motion of the eight spheres and their effects in this world; Book 3 considers the properties of the planets and signs, and of their figures and forms (*figuras et formas*) and how it is possible to speak with the spirits of the planets and “of other nigromantic things”; Book 4 speaks of the properties of spirits, things that should be observed in the art, and how it is helped by images (*ymaginibus*), suffumigations and other activities.⁴² The *Picatrix* contains practices from both main branches of astral magic, the talismanic and the liturgical, the former intent on drawing down celestial spirits or virtues into material objects so that they become imbued with magical powers; the latter making use of elaborate formulas to induce the planetary deities to send angels to fulfill the magician's requests.⁴³

It is likely that the *Picatrix* was influenced by the writings of the ninth-century student of Sabian lore, the Iraqi mathematician, physician and “first philosopher of the Islamic world”, Abu Yūsuf Ya'qūb al-Kindī (c. 801–873), whose influential combination of Platonism and Aristotelianism *De radiis stellarum – On the Rays of the Stars*, also known as *De theoricis artium magicarum – On the Theory of the Magical Arts*, described both talismanic and liturgical forms of astral magic in detail. *De radiis* propounds a naturalist theory of radiations in which not only do all material things in the cosmos emit rays, but so too do words, actions, and images, such that ritual, prayer, and sacrifice all become powerful magical ways of influencing the cosmos.⁴⁴ Astral magic is presented as working through a cosmic harmony of interconnected omnidirectional rays, with the informed practitioner having the ability to direct the virtues of the celestial bodies (planets, constellations, fixed stars) down into terrestrial objects for magical purposes, on a natural rather than supernatural basis. It is probable that the *Picatrix* was also influenced by Al-Kindī's friend, the astrologer Abū Ma'shar (787–

³⁹ Pingree 1980, 3.

⁴⁰ Boudet 2011, 161: “Il n'y a pas une seule sorte de magie, ni même une seule sorte de magie astrale dans le *Picatrix*, mais plusieurs.”

⁴¹ Vesel 2011, 81; Pingree 1980, 2f.

⁴² Pingree 1986, 2.

⁴³ Pingree 1980, 4.

⁴⁴ Pingree 1980, 4f.; Lehrich 2003, 116sq.; Travaglia 1999. See also al-Kindī 1974.

886) whose *Greater Book of Introduction [to Astronomy]* includes descriptions of the images of the astrological decans, a subject of importance in the *Picatrix*,⁴⁵ and whose *Book on Great Conjunctions* was to make such a strong impression on the history of Western astrology.⁴⁶

A purely naturalistic interpretation of the magic in the *Picatrix*, however, is contradicted by a great deal of its material, particularly the work's opening declaration: "Here begins the book on the necromantic arts that the most wise philosopher Picatrix compiled from very many books."⁴⁷ Much of the material in the *Picatrix* may well belong to the genre of astral magic, but there is the undeniable presence of more illicit practices. What on some occasions appears to belong safely within the realms of licit natural magic, knowledge of the occult properties of animals, vegetables and minerals, at other times strays into the realms of ritual magic, with explicit address to intelligences (angels, spirits, and demons) through invocations, divine, angelical and planetary names, magical signs and seals. For many readers, the description of the *Picatrix* as a "necromantic" work would immediately evoke visions of practitioners conjuring up the dead in order to prophesy or the even less licit ritual practice of exorcisms and the summoning of demons and spirits.⁴⁸ What we do not really find much of in the *Picatrix* is the kind of neoplatonic theurgic magic in order to facilitate communication of the soul with God and its ascent to union with the divine.⁴⁹ The magic of the *Picatrix* is far more pragmatic and the Picatrixian magician aims for domination over the world and over other men (and women). As such, the *Aim* (or Aims) of the Wise man are the usual suspects of Love, Sex, Friendship, Health, Wealth, Knowledge, Power, Hate, Discord and Death.⁵⁰ The necromantic magus accomplishes these aims by focusing on three particular themes: 1) the powers that one takes from the planets; 2) the best way to pray to the planets by invoking their spirits in order to obtain from them the benefits desired; 3) and the fashioning of *ymagines*, that is, talismans.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Vesel 2011, 91.

⁴⁶ Pingree 1980, 7. The *General Estoria*, a universal history of the world written by Alfonso and his collaborators in the scriptorium, provides a definition of magic very much in tune with the naturalistic, celestial magic propounded by al-Kindī and Abū Ma'shar. "Magic", we learn, "is a mode and part of the art of astronomy" (*General Estoria*, II, 2, 340b), "he who knows the art of magic is a magus, and the science of magic is an art of knowledge used by those who know about it to guide themselves according to the movements of the heavenly bodies in order to know earthly matters" (II, 1, 86a). See Martinez 2010, 69. On Abū Ma'shar's theory of Great Conjunctions, see Albumasar 2000.

⁴⁷ Pingree 1986, 1: "Incipit liber quem sapientissimus philosophus Picatrix in nigromanticis artibus ex quampluribus libris composuit."

⁴⁸ Burnett 1996. See too Fanger 1998.

⁴⁹ Perrone Compagni 2011, 366. For a useful working definition of theurgy, see Fanger 2012, 15; Page 2013, 93–129; Klaassen 2013, 89–113.

⁵⁰ Cf. Peters 1978, 110.

⁵¹ Caiozzo 2011, 60, 67.

2 *Picatrix* and Talisman

The creation of talismans is the practice that dominates the *Picatrix*.⁵² This is the ultimate “Aim” of the Wise Man. Al-Kindī’s theoretical work on magic was complemented by another ninth-century work, *De imaginibus astrologicis – On Astrological Images* by the Sabian scholar and philosopher Thābit ibn Qurra (826–901), one of the *Picatrix*’s cited sources.⁵³ By *Astrological Images*, Thābit means “talismans” and his book deals with the practical issues of creating astral magical talismans, an activity that Thābit, chief of the Harranian community and guardian of its traditions, declares is the “noblest part of astronomy”.⁵⁴ The author of the *Picatrix* gives some sense of how he philosophically categorizes the creation of talismans in a brief reference to three types of magical practices: “And part of this science is in practice, on account of which its works are about *spirit in spirit* [...]. And the composition of images is *spirit in body*, and the composition of alchemy is *body in body*.”⁵⁵ Only by consulting the Arabic manuscript do we learn that the first and highest, supercelestial kind of magic, the union of *spirit* and *spirit*, is the art of *nīranj*, the intermediate celestial magic concerns itself with talismans, i.e., the union of *spirit* and *body*, while the terrestrial art of alchemy practices the union of *body* and *body*.⁵⁶ The *Picatrix* continues by providing an intriguing definition of talisman: “And [these] images the wise call *telsam*, which is interpreted [as] “violator” because whatever an image does it does through violence and in order to conquer it does that for which it is composed.”⁵⁷ This linking of talisman practice with violation appears to be particular to the Latin *Picatrix* and is not what is found in the original Arabic of the *Ghāyat*, where we instead learn that if we read the letters of the word „Talisman“ (*t̤ism*) in reverse order we get the word *musallat* (*m̤sl̤t̤*),

⁵² Vesel 2011, 81.

⁵³ Weill-Parot 2011, 130; 2002a, 62–72.

⁵⁴ Burnett 2007, 17.

⁵⁵ My italics. See Pingree 1986, 5: “Et pars istius sciencie est in practica propter quod sua opera sunt de spiritu in spiritum, et hoc est in faciendo res similes que non sunt essencia. Et ymaginum compositio est spiritus in corpore, et compositio alchimie est corpus in corpore.”

⁵⁶ Cf Ritter/Plessner, 7: “Es gibt aber auch einen praktischen Zauber; denn sein Gegenstand ist [die Wirkung von] Geist auf Geist. Diese aber liegt vor beim Nirendsch und der Phantasmagorie, während der Gegenstand der Talismankunst [die Wirkung] von Geist auf Körper, und der der Alchemie [die von] Körper auf Körper ist.” See too Saif 2011, 66. On *Nīranj*, see Burnett 2008, 7–8: “The *nīranj*, then, is a magical practice which includes the mixing and processing of ingredients, the recitation of magical words, the burning of incense, and the making of figurines, in order to manipulate spiritual forces. [...] Although there are many overlaps in the making of *nīranjāt* and talismans the starting points are different. With a *nīranj* one starts with the mixture of a variety of ingredients; whereas with a talisman one starts with an object that can be engraved or written upon, whether this be a mineral, a stone, a piece of incense, or even a cloth.”

⁵⁷ Pingree 1986, 5: “Et ymagine sapientes appellant *telsam*, quod interpretatur violatur quia quicquid facit ymago per violenciam facit et pro vincendo facit illud pro quo est composita.”

which denotes „one who is given power over another“.⁵⁸ The origin of this interpretation appears to be the Sufi alchemist Jābir ibn Ḥayyān (c. 721–815),⁵⁹ who in his *Book of the Passage of Potentiality to Actuality* explains that *musallaṭ* means “endowed with power, by reason of its mastery and its force”.⁶⁰ True, both *Ghāyat* and *Picatrix* share Jābir’s sense of talisman as something that has or enables power over another, but the Latin text’s emphasis on violation takes this power to an extreme and must surely have contributed to the suspicions of those already dubious about necromancy.⁶¹ The fact that both the *Ghāyat* and *Picatrix* draw an analogy between the powers of a talisman and that of poison, “which by flowing through bodies, by altering reduces them to its nature, on account of which a body is converted into another body by the force (*vis*) of composition existing in it”,⁶² cannot have helped the *Picatrix*’s reputation at a time when a synonym for witchcraft was *veneficium* (poisoning).⁶³ It is worth comparing the *Picatrix* interpretation to a later Arabic source, Sufi philosopher Ibn ‘Arabī’s (1165–1240) *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya – The Meccan Revelations*, which returns to the same relation between *talisman* and its reverse reading *musallaṭ* in a chapter “Concerning the true knowledge of the way-station of three talismanic mysteries, which are formed and governed by the Muhammadan Presence”. Although Ibn ‘Arabī is not speaking here of physical talismanic objects, but instead using the term metaphorically, with the first talisman (Reflection) having power over rational faculties, while the second (Imagination) “embodies meanings and places them within the mold of sensory forms”, while the third (Habits), has power “to rule over rational souls”, we nevertheless have a similar interpretation to the *Ghāyat*, that “everything given power to rule is a talisman, as long as it keeps its ruling power”.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Ritter/Plessner 1962, 7f.: “Über die Bedeutung von Talisman aber ist zu sagen, daß sie die Umkehrung seines Namens ist, nämlich *musallaṭ* (*mstl*) (dasjenige, dem Macht über ein anderes gegeben ist).”

⁵⁹ See Pingree 1986, 58sq., 196, where Jabir appears in the *Picatrix*, respectively, as “Geber Abnehayen” and “Geber Abenhayen”.

⁶⁰ Kraus 1931, 28; Kraus 1989, xxxvi–xxxvii: “[...] voici qu’il signifia *musallaṭ*, c’est-à-dire doué de pouvoir, en raison de sa maîtrise et de sa puissance”.

⁶¹ Ritter/Plessner 1962, 8 later adds “Denn aus den Substanzen der Macht und der Gewalt heraus übt er auf das, wofür er zusammengesetzt ist, eine Wirkung der Überwältigung und Übermächtigung aus durch Zahlenbeziehungen und sphärische Geheimnisse, die in bestimmte Körper zu geeigneten Zeiten gelegt sind, und durch stärkende Räucherungen, die das dem betreffenden Talisman zugehörige Pneuma anziehen.”

⁶² Pingree 1986, 5: “et sic ymagines faciunt que omnia faciunt per violenciam. Et similiter operatur venenum quod discurrendo corpora, alterando ea reducit ad suam naturam, propter quod corpus convertitur in aliud corpus per vim compositionis in eo existentis.”

⁶³ Jolly/Peters/Raudvere 2002, 189.

⁶⁴ Chittick 1989, 184: “*musallaṭ* (written *m.s.l.ṭ*) which means ‘a thing given ruling power (over something else)’”. For more on Ibn ‘Arabī and the word talisman, see Chodkiewicz 1993, 85.

3 *Picatrix*: Three Kinds of Images

The *Picatrix*, however, is concerned with the creation of physical images, of three kinds: 1) Planetary Images (Book 2, Chapter 10); 2) Decanic Images (Book 2, Chapters 11 and 12) and 3) Images of the Lunar Mansions (Book 1, Chapter 4 and Book 4, Chapter 9).⁶⁵ Textual descriptions of all three kinds of images can be found in the surviving Arabic and Latin manuscripts, though there is no surviving medieval copy of the *Picatrix* that includes visual images. Fortunately, other magic works have survived from Alfonso's scriptorium, including the *Lapidario* and the *Libro de Astromagia*, which contain substantial amounts of material either directly from the *Picatrix* or drawing from shared sources.⁶⁶ The *Lapidario* provides descriptions of a multitude of stones, their links with individual degrees of the signs of the zodiac, working from Aries to Pisces. We learn, for example, that the diamond is associated with the first degree of Taurus, while amber is connected with the eighteenth degree. We learn of their Arabic and Latin names, their elemental qualities (hot, cold, dry, wet), their colours, their properties, and which star has particular power over which stone. Each of these descriptions is accompanied by a miniature illustrating one of the stones. The *Lapidario* is further graced with illuminated initials, containing images of miners digging up stones, under the influence of particular stars, each miner accompanied by a sage scrutinising the stone. More striking are the zodiac wheels or Moirogeneses that occupy whole pages of the manuscript, each divided into 30 degrees, radiating from a central medallion, pedagogically representing the "core idea" of the zodiac sign, with its various aspects occupying each of the radial fields.⁶⁷ A second series of figures can be seen at the outer circumference of the wheel, representing the celestial angels assigned to each degree of the sign.⁶⁸

The later *Libro de Astromagia* contains very rare representations of a magus or necromancer performing magical ceremonies. In some cases, such as that of empowering a magical ring with celestial rays what we see is a fairly safe, licit practice; at other times, however, the magician is engaged in far more dangerous necromantic ritual. In one miniature, for instance, a magician is shown standing in a magic rectangle and invoking a Mercurial Spirit, which appears to him riding on a winged elephant

⁶⁵ Thorndike 1929, 820: "[*Picatrix*] lists images for forty-eight figures made from the fixed stars, for the twenty-eight mansions of the moon, for the signs of the zodiac and for the planets".

⁶⁶ García Avilés 2011, 106. Domínguez Rodríguez 2007, 323 the *Segundo Lapidario* occupies itself with the figures and faces of the signs, in parallel with one of the lists of the *Ġāyat*. On the *Segundo Lapidario*, see Domínguez Rodríguez 2007, 325sq.

⁶⁷ Domínguez Rodríguez 2007, 55.

⁶⁸ For monochrome reproductions of many of these images, see Domínguez Rodríguez 2007, 218–279. For more on the *Lapidario*, see García Avilés 2011, 107f.; Fernández Fernández 2010, 61–68. For a comparison between talismanic images in the *Picatrix* and *Lapidario*, see Kahane/Kahane/Pietrangeli 1966.

(fig. 1).⁶⁹ Like the *Lapidario* it also includes visual images that relate to those described in the *Picatrix*: 1) Planetary Images; 2) Decanic Images, 3) variant forms of wheels of the Talismans of the 28 Lunar Mansions; and 4) the Moirogenesis for each of the signs. In the *Libro de Astromagia*, the central image of the Moirogenesis is the Zodiac sign, with two rings, the outer of images representing each degree, the inner ring including a brief description of the fate of anyone born in that degree of the sign.⁷⁰

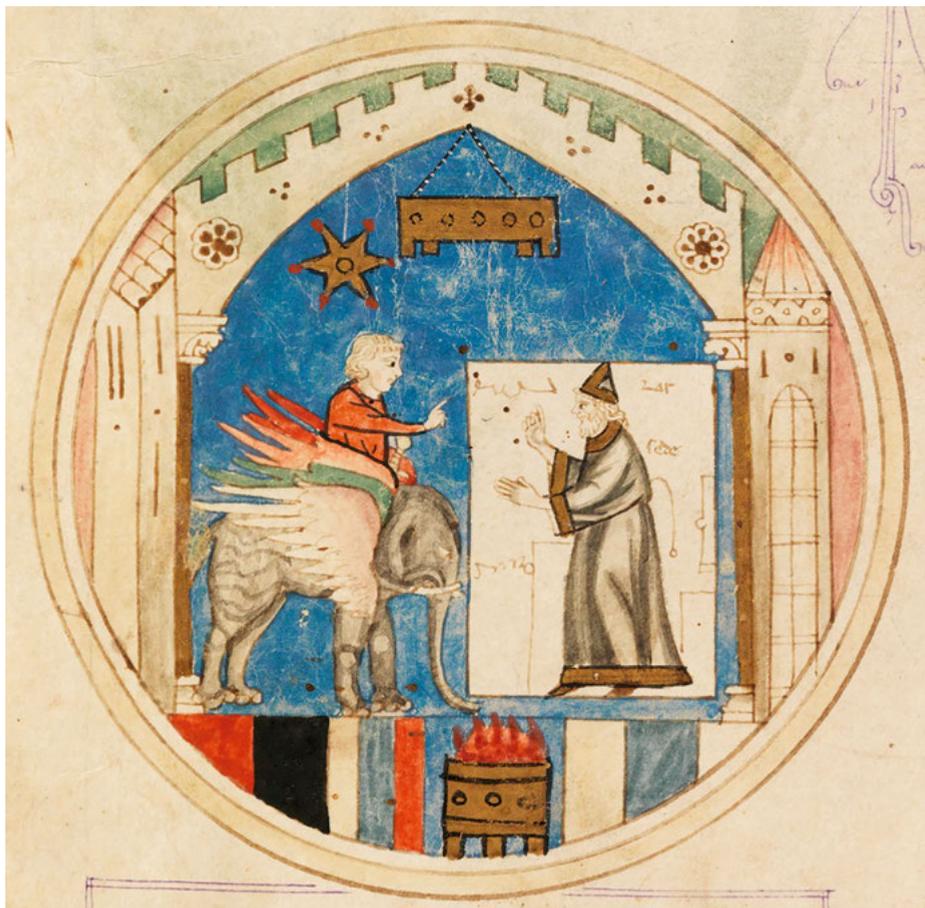


Fig. 1: Magician in a magic rectangle invoking a Mercurial Spirit, Alfonso X, *Libro de Astromagia*, Biblioteca Vaticana, MS Reg. lat. 128³, f. 36^r.

⁶⁹ For the text, see d'Agostino 1992. On the *Libro de Astromagia*, see García Avilés 1996. See also Boudet 2006, 194–195.

⁷⁰ d'Agostino 1992, 98. For example, for Taurus, the first degree shows a man leading a bull. Whoever is born in this degree of Taurus will be unhappy and unlucky. If however they are born in the second degree, represented by a woman holding a tambourine in her hand, they will love entertainment, musical instruments and all that brings joy. For more, see Lippincott/Pingree 1987.

Although no illustrated medieval manuscript of the *Picatrix* is known, there is a fifteenth-century manuscript copy in the Jagiellonian Library in Krakow, a manuscript unique for two reasons: 1) it is the only codex of the *Picatrix* that has illustrations and 2) it is the first version that is longer than a short fragment.⁷¹ It dates from 1458–1459, appears to have been copied by a professor at the University of Krakow,⁷² and is bound with many other works connected with astrology and astral magic, including Pseudo-Alkindi's *De planetis sub radiis*, Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's *Secretum de Sigillo Leonis*, Albumasar's *Electiones planetarum*, Thābit ibn Qurra's *De Imaginibus* (two versions), Pseudo-Ptolemy's *Opus Imaginum*, the *Lapidary of Mercury*, and the *Centiloquium* of Hermes. The *Picatrix* is the fifty-fourth and final work in the collection.⁷³

4 Planetary Images – Saturn and the Moon

By the end of the thirteenth century, the planetary prototypes were already well established, but the *Ghāyat* and the *Picatrix* represent earlier material and draw from disparate sources. The Latin text begins by informing us that “these are the figures of the planets as we find them handed down in the *Lapidary of Mercury* and the *Book of Beylus* (i.e., of Apollonius of Tyana), and in the *Book of Spirits and Images*, transcribed by the sage Picatrix”.⁷⁴ The text then provides descriptions of talismans for each of the seven planets. It begins with the outermost planet Saturn, and moves inwards, geocentrically speaking, through the standard sequence, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury and Moon.⁷⁵ Between three and five different talismanic images are described for each planet, though not all are illustrated in the manuscript.⁷⁶ The Krakow manuscript contains descriptions of four talismans of Saturn (fig. 2): 1) the first image follows the description of Picatrix himself, the figure of a man with a raven's head and

⁷¹ *Picatrix* 1458–1459. Láng 2008, 83–104; Láng 2004; Láng 2006.

⁷² Láng 2011, 137; Láng 2006, 29.

⁷³ For the complete list, see Láng 2006, 33.

⁷⁴ Pingree 1986, 65: “He sunt figure planetarum quemadmodum translatas invenimus in Lapidario Mercurii et in libro Beylus et in Libro spirituum et ymaginum quem transtulit sapiens Picatrix.” Note that the Krakow volume includes the *Lapidary of Mercury*.

⁷⁵ The sequence is different in the Arabic *Ghāyat*. See Ritter/Plessner 1962, 115–119: Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars.

⁷⁶ Described/Illustrated: Saturn (4/4); Jupiter (4/4); Mars (3/3); Sun (4/3); Venus (5/4); Mercury (4/4); Moon (4/4). The final images of the Sun and the fourth image of Venus on f.191^r and 191^v, which would have been back to back on the two pages, are missing, with a more recent piece of manuscript pasted in place. It is likely that the image of Venus “according to Ptolemy”, described as the form of a nude woman bearing on her neck the image of Mars holding a chain, was the cause of the removal, rather than the image of the Sun “according to Picatrix”, the form of a king sitting on a throne, wearing a crown, having the form of a crow before him, and under his feet the figure of the Sun.



Fig. 2: Four Images of Saturn. *Picatrix*, Biblioteka Jagiellonska, f. 189^v.

camel's feet, sitting on a chair, holding a spear in his right hand and a lance or rod in his left.⁷⁷ Here the visual image closely follows the verbal description. 2) In the second image, however, there is already some slippage in interpretation: although the Latin text “according to the image of the wise man Beylus”, describes an old man sitting upright in a tall chair, instead we have him standing.⁷⁸ 3) The third image is according to Hermes and shows a man standing with his hands raised above his head, holding a fish and beneath his feet a large green lizard.⁷⁹ The illustration shows a rather feline lizard and not at all green, the colour instead transferred to Saturn's tunic. 4) Only with the fourth image do we have anything resembling what came to be the standard image of Saturn, depicted “according to the opinion of other wise men”, in the form of an upright man on a dragon, holding a scythe in his right hand and a spear in his left, wearing black clothes and shoes.⁸⁰ The illustration is fairly close to the description but the colours are off.

It is clear that the Latin text expects images to be present from the repeated phrase “Et hec est eius forma” (And this is its form); something not found in the Arabic version. The layout of the text on the page, however, and its relation to the images doesn't really give us any sense of the relation of text to image. The format is generally that the first two images described appear at the top of the page on the margins, framing the central text, vaguely calling to mind medieval biblical manuscripts in which the commentary surrounds the central text.⁸¹ For the two subsequent images, the text is above with the images below, which at least allows for the possibility that such layouts imply the “ideal” textual description above, followed by the “real” visual image below.⁸²

Following the images of Saturn come those of Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, and so forth. By the time we reach the images for Mercury, the Polish scribe has stopped copying the text of the *Picatrix*. All we have in the manuscript from then on are the illustrations, whose descriptions we can check against the text in other *Picatrix* manuscripts. Finally, we have the Moon (fig. 3), though it is unlikely that many readers of the Krakow manuscript would have recognised her in the absence of the textual descrip-

⁷⁷ Pingree 1986, 65: “Forma Saturni secundum opinionem sapientis Picatricis est forma hominis corvinum vultum et cameli pedes habentis et super cathedram sedentis, in dextra manu hastam habentis, in sinistra vero lanceam vel dardum tenentis. Et hec est eius forma.”

⁷⁸ Pingree 1986, 65: “Forma Saturni secundum opinionem sapientis Beylus est forma hominis senis super altam cathedram sedentis erecti. Et hec est eius forma.”

⁷⁹ Pingree 1986, 65: “Forma Saturni secundum opinionem sapientis Mercurii est forma hominis erecti. suas manus supra caput ipsius erigentis et in eis pisces tenentis et infra eius pedes similem unius lagari (id est racani) habentis. Et hec est eius forma.”

⁸⁰ Pingree 1986, 65: “Forma Saturni secundum opinionem aliorum sapientum est forma hominis super draconem erecti, in dextra manu falcem tenentis, in sinistra vero hastam habentis, et nigris pannis et pardis induti. Et hec est eius forma.”

⁸¹ Sirat 2002, 60.

⁸² On this notion of layout in relation to “real” and “ideal”, see O'Donohoe 2007, 11.



Fig. 3: Image of the Moon. *Picatrix*, Biblioteka Jagiellonska, f. 192^v.

tion. From other, non-illustrated manuscripts we learn that, according to Hermes/Mercury, the Moon should be represented as a woman with a beautiful face, with a dragon bound around her waist, a horn on her head (crescent moon, perhaps, or head-dress), with two snakes winding round it, a snake twined around each arm, a seven-headed dragon above her head and another beneath her feet. According to

the text the Moon should also have two snakes above her head as well as the dragon, but the illustrator has instead chosen to position them in front of her at waist height, along with the dragon that should be encircling her waist.⁸³ Although there are few specific instructions in the manuscript on how to pose the figures, it is interesting to note that almost all the faces of the personifications of the planets are in profile; the only ones to confront the viewer head-on are those of the female Lunar gaze. Why this should be is not stated, but it is striking. Perhaps as the planet closest to the earth, as the funnel for all the other planetary energies, she has a more personal relationship with the magician and thus regards him with a direct gaze?⁸⁴

5 Decanic Images and Divergences

In the Krakow *Picatrix* we initially encounter visual representations of the first decans in Book 2, Chapter 2 (f. 180^v). These are extremely unsophisticated depictions that only vaguely follow the descriptions given in the text. It looks as though there may have been two scribes involved in copying this manuscript. It is certainly difficult to imagine that these three crude images were created by the same artist who did the later planetary and decanic images. These initial images are meant to be the three decans of the first zodiac sign, Aries, according to the opinion of the Indians. The first is meant to be the first face of Aries: a man with red eyes and a great beard, wearing a loose white garment, looking grim and standing on guard on one leg. The second decan: a woman with one leg wearing a red dress, a linen cloak, and with a face like a horse; the third: a man coloured red and white, having red hair, dressed

83 Pingree 1986, 67: “Forma Lune secundum opinionem Mercurii est forma mulieris formosum vultum habentis. cincte dracone, et cornua in capite habentis duobus colubris circumvoluta. et super eius caput duos colubros et in quolibet brachio unum colubrum circumvolutum, et super eius caput unum draconem et alium draconem sub eius pedibus; et quilibet istorum draconum septem habet capita. Et hec est eius forma.” Compare the *Ghāyat*, in Ritter/Plessner 1962, 116–117: “Nach dem *Buche des Nutzens der Steine* von ‘Utarid ist der Mond gleich der Gestalt einer Frau mit einem schönen Gesicht, umgürtet mit einem Drachen, auf ihrem Haupte sind zwei Schlangen, sie hat Hörner, sie trägt als Armringe zwei Schlangen, um jedes Handgelenk eine Schlange, über und unter ihrem Haupte sind zwei Drachen, deren jeder sieben Köpfe hat.” Compare these descriptions to that found in Agrippa 1992, 362: “[...] figura erat mulier cornuta, equitans supra taurum vel draconem septicipitem vel cancrum, habeatque in dextra sagittam, in sinistra speculum, vestibus induta albis vel viridibus habensque in capite duos serpentes cornibus circumvolutos et cuilibet brachio unum habens serpentem circumvolutum et cuilibet pedi unum similiter.” For the English, see Agrippa 1651.

84 Although the Moon is the exception in the *Picatrix*, see Lippincott 2006, 13–14 who mentions a prescription stipulated by Hipparchus that all the constellations in the sky should be configured as if they were facing towards the earth and then remarks that according to this logic, the constellations on a celestial globe should also be depicted as if they are facing inwards, towards the centre and towards earth.

in red clothes, having a sword in his right hand and a staff in his left.⁸⁵ The scribe has done his best with the first two decans, but apparently doesn't know the word "pertica", and has possibly confused it with the verb "pertexo" (to weave), with the result that rather than holding a staff the third decan has a piece of cloth in his left hand. The full sequence of all 36 decans can be found at the end of the Krakow manuscript, clearly by another hand, as simple but effective line drawings (ff.193^r–197^r). The Planetary Images in Book 2 are immediately followed by the Decanic Images, minus the descriptive and instructive text that constitutes Chapters 11 and 12 in other manuscripts. Each Zodiac sign has 3 decans, of 10 degrees each, making 36 decans in total. While the original Egyptian iconography included zoomorphic figures, the European tradition generally represents the decanic spirits with human figures. The *Picatrix* text contains not only descriptions of the decanic images but also predictions concerning the profession and future virtues of the person born under the influence of a given decan.⁸⁶ As mentioned above, verbal descriptions of the decans could be found in Abū Ma'shar's *Greater Book of Introduction*, but the *Picatrix* appears to be the first manuscript to include visual representations.⁸⁷ It is apparent, however, that these decanic images caused some difficulty for artists, for there are verbal ambiguities within the text and visual divergences from the text in some of the decanic depictions in the Krakow *Picatrix*. The best example is that of the second decan of Aries (Fig. 4), where the text (in other manuscripts) describes "a woman wearing green clothes and holding a bone or flute (the Latin says *tibia* which could be either)".⁸⁸ Francesco del Cossa's fifteenth-century image of the second decan of Aries in the frescoes of the Salone dei Mesi in the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara shows a woman wearing a red dress, with nothing in her hands. There is already some slippage in the dress colour, from green to red, presumably the artist finding red more appropriate for fiery Aries, especially since this decan of Aries is ruled by the Sun, and the image is meant to

85 *Picatrix* 1458–59, sig. 180r. Pingree 1986, 33–34: "ascendit in prima facie Arietis homo habens oculos rubeos magnamque barbam et pannum lineum album convolutum, faciens gestus magnos in incesso sicut coopertus magna clamide alba ac fune precinctus, stans in uno pede ac si aspiceret quod tenet ante se. Et ascendit in 2 facie Arietis mulier clamide cooperta linea, rubeis vestibis induta, unum tantum habens pedem; et in sui figura est similis equo, habens in animo iram, et querit vestimenta, ornamenta ac filium. Et ascendit in 3 facie Arietis homo colore albo et rubeo, capillos rubeos habens, iratus et inquietus, habens in dextra ensem et in sinistra perticam, vestibis rubeis indutus; et est doctus et perfectus magister laborandi ferrum, et cupiens facere bonum, et non potest."

86 Pingree 1986, 75sq.

87 Vesel 2011, 91.

88 Pingree 1986, 76: "Et ascendit in secunda facie Arietis mulier viridibus pannis induta et una tibia carens. Et hec facies est altitudinis, nobilitatis, precii et regni. Et hec est eius forma." Note that the green colour of the dress contradicts the previous description from Book 2, Chapter 2, mentioned above, of the second decan of Aries in a red dress.

represent nobility and dominion.⁸⁹ What is bizarre is that the Krakow illustrator (who has already ceased copying the text), has opted for the dissonant interpretation of the Latin *tibia* as “bone”, literally as shin-bone, and has drawn a young woman raising her skirt and bearing her leg, thereby transforming an image of nobility into the traditional symbol for a prostitute.⁹⁰ This moment of confusion suggests a scribe working in isolation, perplexed by his material. The result is that the scribal rendering of the pictorial image subverts the message of the text.⁹¹ If the illustrator truly believed that his image of the prostitute was what the text intended, perhaps this is one of the contributing factors in his decision not to copy the rest of the text?⁹²



Fig. 4: 2nd Decan of Aries. *Picatrix*, Biblioteka Jagiellonska, f. 193^r.

⁸⁹ On the decanic images in the Palazzo Schifanoia frescoes, see Lippincott 1990; Lippincott 1994. On the suitability of the colour red for fiery Aries, see Bakhouché/Fauquier/Pérez-Jean 2003, 92.

⁹⁰ Láng 2011, 140.

⁹¹ On errors of interpretation in Alfonsine manuscripts, see Cárdenas-Rotunno 2000, 86; more generally in astrological manuscripts, Lippincott 2006.

⁹² For more on misinterpretations of text and the iconographic hybrids that can ensue, see Lippincott 2006.

6 Abominable, Detestable and Acceptable Images

Scholars have looked for a key to the enigma of the *Picatrix* manuscript in the Jagiellonian Library in Krakow, seeking a reason for why the copyist, who it is suggested was a professor at the university, first begins to diverge from the text in Book 2 and then abruptly stops copying the words at all at the moment when the *Picatrix* touches on the talismans of the decanic images.⁹³ One suggestion is the “doctrinal ambiguity” of the images, that perhaps the decanic images simply appeared too strange, too close to images of demonic beings to the eyes of a Christian anxious about orthodoxy.

Much of the medieval and early modern anxiety about magic texts and images arises from the influence of a work traditionally ascribed to Albertus Magnus (d. 1280), the *Speculum Astronomiae*, which in the middle of the thirteenth century, at the very time when Alfonso’s scriptorium was busy with its translation of the *Ghāyat al-Hakīm*, drew a dividing line between licit natural talismans and nigromantic or demonic practices. This widely distributed work divided the “Science of Images” (*Scientia Imaginum*) into 3 kinds: “the *abominable* and the *detestable*, on the one hand, whose images derive their power from demonic influences, and the *acceptable*, or ‘natural’, on the other, whose images obtain their virtue solely from the celestial figures”.⁹⁴ The material in the books that are absent from the Krakow manuscript – the third and fourth books of the *Picatrix* – is precisely the kind of matter condemned as abominable by the *Speculum Astronomiae*, for these two books are where the perilous rituals are evoked: suffumigations, rituals, and sacrifices destined for spirits.⁹⁵ The judgments of the *Speculum Astronomiae* are reinforced, furthermore, by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), who in the *Summa contra gentiles* distinguished between what Nicolas Weill Parot terms “destinative” and “non-destinative” talismans. If they included marks, i.e., signs or words, they could only be directed to another personal intelligence, by which he meant an evil spirit. Such “destinative” talismans were condemned. If the marks, however, were pictures, their activity did not necessarily involve sentient beings.⁹⁶ Such “non-destinative” talismans, by which the magus sought to draw down celestial power by cosmic sympathy, were considered acceptable.⁹⁷

⁹³ Láng 2006, 29.

⁹⁴ Burnett 1996, 3; Láng 2008, 29; Weill-Parot 2002a, 27–62. For the original text, see Zambelli 1992, 241sq.

⁹⁵ Boudet/Caiozzo/Weill-Parot 2011, 19.

⁹⁶ Copenhaver 1984, 531.

⁹⁷ See Weill-Parot 2011; 2002b. On Aquinas, see Weill-Parot 2002a, 223–280.

7 Relations Between Text and Image

Perhaps anxiety about the kinds of powers that might be invoked lies at the heart of the Polish scribe's decision to stop copying the text; indeed, for an apparent demarcation between text and image in our surviving illustrated *Picatrix*. Unlike later talismans found, for example, in the works of Paracelsus (1493–1541), in the *Picatrix* we find none that include combinations of both picture and text.⁹⁸ The talismanic *imagines* have become images in the strictest sense: pictures with no words, for none of the figurative images, the personifications of planets and decans in the Krakow *Picatrix* contain any magical words. Although we can see magical signs and words in the *Libro de Astromagia's* illustration of the magician in his magic rectangle, no such image can be found in the *Picatrix*. Reading the Latin text, it is easy to find instructions for the creation of talismans that include magic figures and “forms of images”, as in Book 2, Chapter 9, where anyone wishing to banish flies from a place is advised to inscribe certain abstract figures of the stars on a lamina of tin, when the third decan of Scorpio is rising, and then to place the lamina wherever you wish to dispel the flies.⁹⁹ The following chapter includes details on the “formation of figures” of the planets in Chapter 10, but these are planetary symbols rather than figurative images.¹⁰⁰ Book 4 contains a series of 26 “figures” in the form of abstract geometrical shapes that should be engraved on a ring in order to be well received by royalty,¹⁰¹ but nowhere do we see these combined with images.

At first sight, then, there seems to be a strict segregation of pictorial image from text in sense of word of power in the Latin *Picatrix*. However, if we look more carefully, some indication is there for the creation of talismans that combine figurative images and abstract signs. One such example is the image of the goddess Venus holding an apple in her right hand and a comb in her left (fig. 5).¹⁰²

A few pages later we find a variant of this image, apparently a combination of the image recommended by *Picatrix* and one from *Hermes*:

If from the forms of Venus you make the form of a woman whose body is human, but with the head of a bird and eagle's feet, holding an apple in her right hand and in her left holding a

⁹⁸ Cf. Paracelsus 1605, 159sq.

⁹⁹ Pingree 1986, 63. For other examples of these abstract images or characteres, see *ibid.*, 68–73, 179, 181, 187f.

¹⁰⁰ Pingree 1986, 65; see *ibid.*, 210 for these figures of the planets.

¹⁰¹ Pingree 1986, 222.

¹⁰² Pingree 1986, 67: “Forma Veneris secundum opinionem sapientis Picatricis est forma mulieris tenentis in eius dextra manu malum et in sinistra pectinem similem tabule et istis figuris scriptum: OAOIOA. Et hec est eius forma.”

wooden comb like a tablet with these kinds of letters written on it: $\circ\lambda\circ\gamma\circ\lambda$, he who carries this image with him will be well received and loved by all.¹⁰³

That is the description that we get in the Latin instructions in that place in the manuscript that includes the illustration (f. 191^v). Elsewhere in the text, though, we learn that the comb that Venus is holding should resemble a tablet on which the following Arabic numbers $\lambda\circ\gamma\circ\lambda\circ$ (851585) should be written. What is immediately obvious, when we compare these instructions with those in the Arabic *Ghāyat*, is that the artist has written these numbers back to front ($\circ\lambda\circ\gamma\circ\lambda$ – 585158).¹⁰⁴ Similarly, with one of the talismans of Mercury, we have the initial description of Mercury as a man sitting on a chair, who should have a cockerel on his head, a torch in his left hand, his feet like those of an eagle, and certain signs (*signa*) should be drawn beneath his feet.¹⁰⁵ We have to look elsewhere, however, to discover what these signs look like.¹⁰⁶ As the Polish scribe has not copied this text, the aspiring magus will look in vain.



Fig. 5: Image of Venus. *Picatrix*, Biblioteka Jagiellonska, f. 191^v.

¹⁰³ Pingree 1986, 70: “Ymago Veneris. Si ex formis Veneris feceris formam mulieris cuius corpus sit humanum. caput vero avis necnon et pedes aquile, in dextra manu malum, in sinistra vero pectinem tenentis ligneum similem tabule talibus figuris scriptum: OAOIOA, qui hanc ymaginem secum portaverit bene recipietur et ab omnibus diligitur.”

¹⁰⁴ Pingree 1986, 70. Cf. Ritter/Plessner 1962, 121, n. 6: “Dies sind die arabischen Ziffern 851585.”

¹⁰⁵ Pingree 1986, 67.

¹⁰⁶ Pingree 1986, 72; Ritter/Plessner 1962, 123. N.B. the characters in the Arabic and Latin are very different.

8 Illustrations and Illuminations

What, then, is the relation between these abstract and figurative images and the accompanying text? Clearly on one level they are illustrations, examples of what image to engrave on a talisman, lamén or ring, although the very notion of them as simply illustrations supporting the primary text breaks down when the scribe ceases to copy the text. Is it possible that the images have other functions? As concretizations of the text, perhaps they should be understood as having instructional value too, similar to the pedagogical images of the *Moirogeneses* in the *Lapidario*? The figurative images train the apprentice magician, perhaps, iconographically instructing him through the itemisation of attributes of each of the planetary gods, so that he can identify them in other material? They certainly facilitate the comparison and contrast between different textual traditions, the varying descriptions of images, according to Hermes, Apollonius and other authorities. Moreover, from the example of Venus, there seems to be a certain flexibility or fluidity between the components of images, and new hybrids can apparently be generated from the models provided. On another level, could these images be considered “illustrations” or “illuminations” in both a primary and secondary sense? If we follow Al-Kindī and Roger Bacon after him, then images emit rays that can make powerful impressions on other objects, including the minds of those intently inspecting them.¹⁰⁷ After all, at the start of the *Picatrix* we read “O you who wish to understand and know the sciences of the philosophers and to inspect (*inspicere*) their secrets”.¹⁰⁸ Could some form of “inspectival” magic be intended? Or perhaps the very incompleteness of the images is a way of avoiding the risk of making too powerful an impression on the viewer?¹⁰⁹ Likewise, the absence of the last two books of the *Picatrix* means that the would-be magician has no idea of how to animate the images.¹¹⁰

9 Occult Ekphrasis

In ancient Greece, the term *ekphrasis* could mean any detailed visual description, when a verbal text describes a visual art. In her work on medieval dream visions, Claire Barbetti takes the idea of ekphrasis further by asking “what about putting into words something that everyone has not seen – such as a dream or vision – but

¹⁰⁷ Marsh/White 2003. On Bacon’s optical theory, see Barbetti 2011, 8.

¹⁰⁸ Pingree 1986, 1: “O tu qui ciencias philosophorum intendere vis et scire ac eorum secreta inspicere [...]”.

¹⁰⁹ On the notion of “inspectival knowledge” and magic, see Clucas 1998.

¹¹⁰ On representations of deities and spirits *in effigie*, reanimated and called into being by prayer to live *realiter* for the duration of a magical ceremony or as long as the magician desired, see Brashear 1992, 48f.

whose constitutional elements are nonetheless common and familiar?”¹¹¹ Her introduction of John Hollander’s idea of “notional ekphrasis”, the representation of an *imagined* work of art, such as the shield of Gawain in the fourteenth-century romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or the carved ivory saddle bows in Chrétien de Troyes’ twelfth-century *Érec et Énide*,¹¹² encourage a consideration of the concept of *ekphrasis* in the context of talismans – images described, some perhaps never physically created, others most definitely surviving in museum collections. True, the descriptions of the talismans in the *Picatrix* are not as detailed or intricate as the objects described in these two famous works of medieval literature, but they nevertheless partake of a similar interplay between verbal and visual, image and text.

In his consideration of “magical and mystical theories of eloquence”, Ryan Stark argues that ekphrasis has the power to transport “the audience into a different meta-physical awareness”.¹¹³ He goes even further:

Writers of magical ekphrases do not aim to represent an unrepresentable reality. They instead attempt to instantiate a reality, or transmogrify a reality with supernatural *enargia*, and, perhaps, transport onlookers into a spiritual realm. In the world of occult rhetoric, magical ekphrases participate in metaphysical realities.¹¹⁴

Although Stark does not have the production of talismans as his primary focus, one particular declaration seems extremely apposite: “In occult philosophy, charmed ekphrases conjure the world. Description is not simply a form of representation, but rather it is a form of substantiation: it is constitutive of reality.” The magic relation between verbal and visual is brought out particularly well in the statement that “For Renaissance sorcerers, the verbal image carries with it the same force as other types of talismans, for example, charms carved from wood or forged with metal. The verbal charm is a magical object, not a representation of reality, but rather an instantiation of reality – an instantiation of truth.”¹¹⁵ As dramatic as Stark’s arguments may sound, if such is the case, perhaps this too is another reason why the Polish scribe ceased copying his descriptions of magic images, even *before* he stopped the illustrations. Maybe the “verbal image” was enough to disquiet his conscience; perhaps the combination of both verbal and visual components or ingredients was a risk that he did not wish to take.

My introduction of the adjective “occult” as a qualification of this kind of ekphrasis in the title of this essay is because the complete instructions for fashioning tal-

¹¹¹ Barbetti 2011, 2.

¹¹² Barbetti 2011, 8. For the description of Gawain’s shield with its pentangle painted in gold, a sign devised, we are told, by Solomon, see Battles 2012, 58f., including the footnotes. For the description of Énide’s ivory saddlebows, carved with the story of Aeneas and Dido, see Staines 1993, 66.

¹¹³ Stark 2009, 185.

¹¹⁴ Stark 2009, 188.

¹¹⁵ Stark 2009, 189f.

ismans are there in the *Picatrix* text, but the information is at times dispersed and in need of collection and reconstruction by the attentive practitioner.¹¹⁶ Looking closely at the surviving Latin copy of the *Picatrix* that does contain visual images, we see that it also includes non-figurative material, including glyphs for the planets and abstract characters for a magic ring. This visual information, however, is scattered throughout the text, partly because the *Picatrix* is a compilation of practices from different textual traditions of astral and ritual magic, but also, perhaps it could be argued, there is an intentional dispersal. At the very beginning the *Picatrix* warns the incautious reader that “the philosophers have concealed this knowledge”, they have “veiled it [...] with abstruse words”.¹¹⁷ One of his stated intentions in the prologue is “to show that which they have hidden (occultaverunt) in their books with words in wandering ways and with very light words”.¹¹⁸ This calls to mind the level of secrecy found in alchemical works, both in the elaborate use of *Decknamen* or cover names for alchemical substances and processes, and the practice of dispersion of knowledge (*tabdīd al-‘ilm*) in the texts attributed to Jābir ibn Hayyān, where he states: “My method is to present knowledge by cutting it up and dispersing it into many places.”¹¹⁹ Rather than present this secret knowledge all at once, Jābir prefers to scatter an idea or process throughout one or indeed several books. It does not seem too far-fetched to suggest that similar practices could apply to the visual as well as the verbal. Nor should we think that Jābir is the sole example of this kind of practice. In the early modern period, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535), author of the best known compendium of magical thought, *De Occulta Philosophia* (1533) – which includes extracts from the *Picatrix* – describes his practice of “Dispersal of Knowledge”, in order to keep mysteries safe from “wicked and incredulous men”:

Some of these things are written in order, some without order, some things are delivered by fragments, some things are even hid, and left for the search of the intelligent, who more acutely contemplating these things which are written, and diligently searching, may obtain the compleat rudiments of the magical Art, and also infallible experiments. [...] You therefore sons of wisdom and learning, search diligently in this book, gathering together our dispersed intentions, which in divers places we have propounded, and what is hid in one place, we make manifest in another, that it may appear to you wise men [...]¹²⁰

116 For use of the term “occult ekphrasis”, see Stark 2009, 190. See too Eco 2003, 112 who also uses the term, though there it concerns the tacit use of visual descriptions of physical works of art, with the aim of providing additional pleasure for educated readers who recognise the original work.

117 Pingree 1986, 1: “hanc scienciam philosophi celaverunt [...] pro viribus velaverunt, et cum verbis absconditis.”

118 Pingree 1986, 2: “illud quod in eorum libris occultaverunt verbis peregrinis viis et verbis levioribus.”

119 Principe 2013, 44. On these alchemical “procédés d’occultation”, see too Obrist 1982, 141.

120 Agrippa 1651, 555.

10 Alfonso X's Magical Art

The texts that describe these images do not seem to have been illustrated in Arab works that predate the *Picatrix*. Abū Ma'shar's *Introductorium maius*, for example, provides verbal descriptions of the astrological decans, but no visual image exists in manuscripts prior to the *Picatrix*.¹²¹ Given the prevalent belief that painting is unlawful in Islam, perhaps the absence of pictured images is not so surprising, although that was to change in the thirteenth century.¹²² The development of this “magical art” in thirteenth-century Castile occurred around the same time as the beginnings of illustrations in alchemical texts. Like astral magic, alchemy entered the Christian West via translation from Arabic in the twelfth century, the earliest known work being Robert of Chester's 1144 *Liber de compositione alchemiae – Book on the Composition of Alchemy*, a translation of instructions on how to make the Philosophers' Stone, allegedly given by the Christian monk Morienus Romanus to the Umayyad prince Khālid ibn Yazīd.¹²³ The earliest known manuscript to include pictorial forms, however, Constantine of Pisa's *Book of the Secrets of Alchemy*, was compiled in 1257, at the very time that Alfonso's scriptorium was busy with the production of the *Picatrix*.¹²⁴ Barbara Obrist observes that Constantine of Pisa's text and images have been conceived as a unity: the text announces the images and depends on them in the course of the development of the treatise.¹²⁵ Furthermore, the visual image is not simply a new adornment to the text, but acts as a focus: “opposed to the multiplicity to which discursivity linked to the word leads, the image must bring the reader to the essential, to the truth”.¹²⁶ This could be argued to be the case with productions of Alfonso's scriptorium like the *Lapidario* and *Libro de Astromagia*; such is probably the case, too, with the *Picatrix*, but in a less systematic way.

One of the Spanish specialists of the magic works of Alfonso X, Alejandro Garcia Avilés, has argued that Alfonso's scriptorium, for the first time and probably with very few figurative models, had a program not simply of translating Arabic magical material, but indeed of transforming the *textual* astral magic of the Arabic manuscripts into a *visual art*,¹²⁷ an art capable of showing step by step the stages of the magical process, from the collection of the minerals and metals necessary for the physical substrate of the talismans, the images that one should engrave on them, and the

¹²¹ Vesel 2011, 91; García Avilés 2011, 109.

¹²² Motoyoshi Sumi 2013, 92.

¹²³ Principe 2013, 51.

¹²⁴ Obrist 1990, 1 on the dating of the manuscript; *ibid.*, 44–49 on the figures; Obrist 1982, 67sq. on the work. See too Obrist 2003 on questions of the uses of imagery in alchemical literature.

¹²⁵ Obrist 1982, 85

¹²⁶ Obrist 1982, 87: “Opposée à la multiplicité à laquelle mène la discursivité liée au mot, elle [l'image] doit ramener le lecteur à l'essentiel, à la vérité.”

¹²⁷ García Avilés 2011, 111.

rituals necessary to attract the power of the planetary bodies or celestial spirits in order to empower the magical object, each performed at its own propitious astrological moment.¹²⁸ While such is not apparent in the one surviving illustrated manuscript of the *Picatrix*, this notion is clearly visualised in the *Lapidario*, in a series of vignettes that synthesise each activity in its series of synoptic images. With his insertion of the wise men scrutinising the stones in the illuminated capitals, the illustrator of the *Lapidario* even goes beyond the information provided in the text; thereby further reassuring the reader of the success of the procedure.¹²⁹ Alfonso attempts, too, to make the magical rituals in the *Picatrix*, *Lapidario* and *Libro de Astromagia* acceptable to the Christian West by sanitizing them: the supernatural intermediaries are no longer ambiguously natured spirits or demons, but instead are angels, licit intermediaries for the action of God's power in the world (and consequently in the magician's ritual practice).¹³⁰ Here the image undoubtedly adds an extra dimension to the experience. As the author of the *Libro de Astromagia* says, "I've already said and explained everything. Now understand it thanks to the images."¹³¹

11 Receiving the Images

As an epilogue, I'd like to mention, briefly, the fate of the *Picatrix* in the early modern period. Although Frances Yates sets up a contrast between the "dirty old magic" of the medieval "necromancer studying his *Picatrix*" and the "new elegant magic" of the Florentine Renaissance philosopher, Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499),¹³² famed for his contribution to the revival of Platonism and Hermetism, it is now well known that Ficino made clandestine use of the *Picatrix* in his magical guide for melancholy scholars, *De Vita libri tres – Three Books on Life* (1489).¹³³ In a somewhat similar manner to the copyist of the Krakow manuscript, Ficino introduces descriptions of the images of the planets and of the zodiac into his work, but abstains from describing the decanic spirits, the faces of signs, presumably because of anxieties about avoiding accusations of demonic magic.¹³⁴ It is clear that Ficino is anxious about many of the practices

128 García Avilés 2011, 108. According to Ana Domínguez Rodríguez 2007, 178, 181 this was utterly novel at the time and there are no illustrated manuscript precedents known for the *Lapidario*, either in antiquity or in the Islamic world.

129 García Avilés 2011, 111.

130 García Avilés 2011, 107–109.

131 García Avilés 2011, 113: "Todo he dicho e fablado. Por figuras entiende."

132 Yates 1964, 107: "Who could recognise the necromancer studying his *Picatrix* in secret in the elegant Ficino with his infinitely refined use of sympathies, his classical incantations, his elaborately Neoplatonised talismans?"

133 On Ficino and the *Picatrix*, see Zambelli 2007, 9; Ficino 1989, 45, 340–43; Walker 2000, 36.

134 Láng 2011, 146f.

he discovers in medieval magic and is always careful to suggest that the effectiveness of talismans is due to natural rather than supernatural causes. He describes talismanic images but is careful to omit any linking with magical characters or words; he even suggests that it might be better simply to strike and heat talismans rather than engrave them;¹³⁵ nor does he include any illustrations of these talismans in his work. Indicative of Ficino's caution is his well-known statement in his "Exhortation to the Reader" in the third book of *De vita*: "If you do not approve of astronomical images, albeit invented for the health of mortals – which even I do not so much approve as report – dismiss them with my complete permission and even, if you will, by my advice."¹³⁶

Despite his apparent fascination for magical manuscripts, Ficino's younger contemporary, the German abbot Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516), expressed his reservations concerning the *Picatrix* in his *Antipalus maleficiorum – Scourge of the Witches* (1508), for he believed it contained "many things that are frivolous, superstitious, and diabolical, [...] even though certain natural things seem to be interspersed".¹³⁷ Trithemius's protégé, the less cautious, but influential Agrippa, whose *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (1533) exerted such an influence on the magical thought of early modernity, does draw from the medieval work, and while he does not go so far as to include illustrations from the *Picatrix*, he does include descriptions of talismanic images of the planets which clearly reveal the influence of Book 2, Chapter 10.¹³⁸ Elsewhere, it had a rather mixed reception and a rather notorious reputation. The French medical doctor Symphorien Champier (1471–1538), known to scholars for his slightly lukewarm writings on Cabala, considered it "a very vain book, full of superstitions and made like a ladder to idolatry".¹³⁹ François Rabelais (1483–1553) ironically mentions "the reverend Father in the Devil *Picatrix*, rector of the diabolical faculty" in the third book of *Pantagruel* (1546).¹⁴⁰ The witchhunter Nicolas Rémy (1530–1616) took matters far more solemnly, and numbered *Picatrix* one of three "masters in damnable magic".¹⁴¹

135 Ficino 1998, 343.

136 Ficino 1998, 239.

137 Brann 1999, 67; Véronèse 2011, 167; Zambelli 2007, 103.

138 See Agrippa 1992, 358–362; Agrippa 1651, 298–302.

139 Perrone Compagni 2011, 359.

140 Boudet/Caiozzo/Weill-Parot 2011, 14; Sez nec 1995, 62.

141 Davies 2009, 68; Rémy 1595, 210: "Qua de re Agrippa, Petrus de Abano, & *Picatrix tres damnatae Magiae proceres plura, quam e re hominum sit praecepta reliquere.*"

12 Conclusion

Alfonso X's scriptorium undoubtedly provided the Christian West with rich new material for the study of magic, not only with the valuable translations of Arabic sources, but also with the highly instructive images of zodiac wheels, illustrations of stones connected with particular planets and stars, the figures to engrave on talismans, and the at times dramatic new images of magicians at work. In some of the manuscripts the images complete and clarify the indications in the text, at times they even seem to supplant the text; at other times the text contributes to the sense of the images, but does not exhaust the possibilities for meaning. In the way that a verbal exegete can find multiple layers of meaning in even one word, such as is the case with the word *Talisman*, so too the illustrator as "visual exegete" can doubtless discover the polysemic possibilities in the images, and an anxious scribe perhaps suspect the ambivalent and ambiguous nature of what he is copying.¹⁴² As Karl-Ferdinand Schädler argued, "Originally, 'Image Magic' meant magic using images, i.e., with the aid of these. But in the flow of time this type of magic developed into magic emanating from the images themselves, i.e., from the power inherent in an image qua image."¹⁴³ In any consideration of the relation between the text and image we should bear in mind that the Polish scribe decided against copying the text that provided instructions and prayers for consecrating the images. In so doing he deprived any future owner of their use: they might have their occult technology, but it came without batteries, some of the components were missing and no user's guide provided. In any consideration of possible competition between text and image, in the case of the Krakow *Picatrix*, the images won, but it was a pyrrhic victory.¹⁴⁴

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¹⁴² On art as visual exegesis, see Hughes 2006, 183sq.

¹⁴³ Schädler 1984, 5.

¹⁴⁴ On this notion of competition, see Lippincott 2006, 10.

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