

# *Magic and archaeology: ritual residues and 'odd' deposits*

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## **‘Magic and Archaeology: Ritual Residues and “Odd” Deposits’**

**Roberta Gilchrist**

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The use of archaeology as source material for medieval magic raises a number of methodological and theoretical issues. Many of the rituals of common magic revealed by archaeology were never (or rarely) documented in medieval texts. The lack of correlation between texts and material culture has been regarded as a methodological problem for historians;<sup>1</sup> to the contrary, these complementary sources permit access to social contexts and agents that are under-represented in texts, particularly women and other practitioners who operated in domestic and rural environments. It offers the potential to interrogate the distinction between ‘theory and practice’ in medieval magic and opens up new opportunities to directly access ‘the mental world of the non-literate’.<sup>2</sup> Archaeology renders a wider range of practices visible, but the absence of textual commentary makes it difficult to gauge whether these activities were sanctioned by the church or regarded as illicit magic.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Randles, ‘Material Magic: The Deliberate Concealment of Footwear and Other Clothing,’ *Parergon* 30, Number 2 (2013); Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2000), 47.

<sup>2</sup> Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe. Superstition, Reason and Religion 1250–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6; Richard Kieckhefer, ‘The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic,’ *American Historical Review* 99 (1994): 833.

Archaeological evidence prompts reconsideration of definitions of medieval magic and attention to the permeable borderlines between magic, religion, medicine and heresy. The fuzziness of these categories is highlighted by evidence for material practices such as ‘odd deposits’: the burial, discard or concealment of objects that seems to defy any rational explanation. Such deposits are recorded in domestic and ecclesiastical contexts and across the social spectrum, suggesting both lay and clerical participation. Distinguishing between magic and religion was challenging for medieval people, even educated clerics, and remains an area of contention among medieval historians.<sup>3</sup> Archaeology adds a new perspective to these debates, illuminating the murky space between documented practice and what people were actually doing.

Archaeological sources reach a broader range of social and spatial contexts than texts usually permit, for example, magic practised within the homes, churches and churchyards of medieval England. The archaeology of magic has potential to reveal intimate rites that were never documented in clerical texts, and to explore the close relationship between magic, gender and the body, for example through burial evidence.<sup>4</sup> However, material sources do not provide immediate access to the thoughts and motivations of medieval people. Did they regard their actions as ‘magic’ and why did they perceive certain acts as efficacious? Attention to *spatial context* provides some basis for considering the social identity of the practitioner – for example, whether a priest, craftsman, pilgrim or housewife – and grounds to consider the possible motivations and perceived causation behind the magic ritual. Spatial context may also provide insight to whether a rite was public or private and whether it was regarded as licit or illicit magic. Archaeological interest in *agency* overlaps with the focus on

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<sup>3</sup> Catherine Rider, *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 8–15.

<sup>4</sup> Roberta Gilchrist, ‘Magic for the Dead? The Archaeology of Magic in Later Medieval Burials,’ *Medieval Archaeology* 52 (2008).

*causation* in the study of medieval magic; in other words, the conceptual frameworks that allowed medieval people to rationally attribute the cause of marvels to the intercession of saints, the occult power of nature, or the intervention of demons.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, archaeology's concern with materiality has close affinities with themes addressed in the study of natural magic.

Archaeologists consider the material traces of magic within a 'deep-time' perspective. We work at larger chronological scales and resolutions to most historians, taking a 'stratigraphic' approach which relates medieval evidence to that which comes before and after it. This extended timescale highlights continuities in ritual practice and in the selection and treatment of materials that extended over hundreds of years, across the watersheds of the Christian conversion and the Reformation. Archaeology reveals an enduring repertoire of common ritual actions that may be regarded as traditional or even indigenous to northern Europe; these practices may have been influenced by ideas derived from learned magic texts of Greco-Roman, Arabic or Jewish origin, to forge new beliefs and localised meanings. This process of hybridity can be glimpsed especially in the late Saxon charms: these monastic records of popular belief provide a bridge for understanding later medieval practice in relation to earlier rites.<sup>6</sup>

### **Magic and Archaeology: Text and Object**

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Bartlett, *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Kieckhefer, 'Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic,' 821–24; Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2012), 216–52.

<sup>6</sup> Karen Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England. Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina, 1996); Jolly, 'Medieval Magic.'

The first major archaeological treatment of magic was Ralph Merrifield's, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (1987), which presented an accessible overview of material evidence for ritual practices extending from the prehistoric to modern periods in Britain. Merrifield laid the methodological groundwork for an archaeology of magic, stressing the importance of establishing rigorous chronological and spatial contexts for magical practices and 'odd deposits', such as prehistoric axe-heads discovered in medieval contexts.<sup>7</sup>

Another pioneering contribution to the archaeology of magic was Audrey Meaney's research on amulets in Anglo-Saxon burials. She used the evidence of grave goods to identify the burials of cunning women or seers, based on the presence of objects that were deemed magical by virtue of their substance. She focused on amulets of animal, vegetable and mineral materials, or those which were noteworthy for their exceptional age. Roman or prehistoric artefacts in graves dating from the sixth to ninth centuries were interpreted as *objets trouvés*, 'found objects' that were credited with the power to bring luck or avert evil. Meaney set out two methodological premises that have been followed by much of the subsequent archaeological scholarship on medieval magic: first, the relationship between an object or material and its magical powers should be *documented* in medieval sources; and second, a *direct physical relationship* should be demonstrated between the object and the body in the grave.<sup>8</sup> Her work was pivotal in recognising the agency of women in the practice of magic, through the identification of objects in Anglo-Saxon women's graves including crystal balls worn suspended from the waist, bronze relic boxes that contained scraps of thread and cloth, and bags containing collections of odd objects. Meaney interpreted these

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<sup>7</sup> Ralph Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (London: Batsford, 1987), 6, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Audrey L. Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones* (Oxford: British Archaeology Report 96, 1981), 24–7.

assemblages as women's toolkits for healing or divination, suggesting a significant ritual role for some Anglo-Saxon women as community healers or seers.<sup>9</sup>

I have drawn on Meaney's work to identify the use of magic in later medieval burial rites in Britain (eleventh to fifteenth centuries) and to demonstrate long-term continuities in the placement of apotropaic objects and natural materials with the dead.<sup>10</sup> This recognition of hybrid practices formed by the conversion to Christianity has prompted new study of transitional burial rites and heightened archaeological attention to magic.<sup>11</sup> The 'deep-time' perspective of archaeology provides new insight to the changing practices and meanings of medieval magic: many rituals of common magic had their roots in pre-Christian practices, while medieval rites influenced the practise of early modern magic to protect against witchcraft.<sup>12</sup> Archaeologists often adopt a long-term perspective in which to evaluate magic,

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<sup>9</sup> Audrey L. Meaney, 'Women, Witchcraft and Magic in Anglo-Saxon England,' in *Superstition and Popular Medicine in Anglo-Saxon England* ed. D. G. Scragg (Manchester: Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> Gilchrist, 'Magic for the Dead?'

<sup>11</sup> Dawn M. Hadley, 'Burial, Belief and Identity in Later Anglo-Saxon England,' in *Reflections: 50 Years of Medieval Archaeology*, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 30, ed. Roberta Gilchrist and Andrew Reynolds (Leeds: Maney, 2009); Eleanor R. Standley, *Trinkets and Charms. The Use, Meaning and Significance of Dress Accessories 1300–1700*, Oxford University School of Archaeology Monograph 78 (Oxford: Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford, 2013); Chris Caple, 'The Apotropaic Symbolled Threshold to Nevern Castle – Castle Nanhyfer,' *The Archaeological Journal* 169 (2012); Sonja Hukantaival, 'Finding Folk Religion: An Archaeology of "Strange" Behaviour,' *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 55 (2013); Stephen Gordon, 'Disease, Sin and the Walking Dead in Medieval England, 1100–1350. A Note on the Documentary and Archaeological Evidence,' in *Medicine, Healing and Performance* ed. Effie Gemi-Iordanou *et al.* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Brian Hoggard, 'The Archaeology of Counter-Witchcraft and Popular Magic,' in *Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

particularly in Scandinavia and the Baltic, where nineteenth-century folklore informs the understanding of material practices that were prevalent from prehistory to the modern era.<sup>13</sup> Important regional distinctions arise from the nature and timing of conversion to Christianity; for example in the eastern Baltic, material practices associated with the treatment of the dead are often regarded as ‘syncretic’ or ‘pagan’ survivals, rather than as part of a medieval tradition of magic.<sup>14</sup>

### **Ritual Deposition**

Over the past thirty years, archaeologists have explored the idea that the ‘deposition’ of materials, such as the burial of selected objects in a pit, may have constituted meaningful social practice. It has been argued that ‘odd deposits’ were created as part of ritual practice that was integrated with aspects of everyday life in the past. Such deposits take the form of deliberately made features that seem to defy any rational explanation, such as whole pots or animals buried in ditches and pits, or objects placed at critical points in settlements, such as at boundaries, entrances or the corners of houses.<sup>15</sup> Odd deposits were first discussed in relation

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<sup>13</sup> Ann-Britt Falk, *En Grundläggande Handling. Byggnadsoffer Och Dagligt Liv i Medeltid* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2008); Hukantaival, ‘Finding Folk Religion.’ For the folklore approach in British archaeology see also Amy Gavin-Schwarz, ‘Archaeology and Folklore of Material Culture, Ritual and Everyday Life,’ *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 5, Issue 4 (2001).

<sup>14</sup> Leszek Gordela and P. Duma, ‘Untimely Death: Atypical Burials of Children in Early and Late Medieval Poland,’ *World Archaeology* 45, Issue 2 (2013).

<sup>15</sup> Joanna Brück, ‘Ritual and Rationality: Some Problems of Interpretation in European Archaeology,’ *European Journal of Archaeology* 2, Issue 3 (1999). For a critical review of the two distinct concepts of ‘structured deposition’ and ‘odd deposits’ in archaeology see Duncan Garrow, ‘Odd Deposits and Average Practice. A Critical History of the Concept of Structured Deposition,’ *Archaeological Dialogues* 19, Issue 2 (2012).



to Neolithic and Bronze Age settlements but are now recognised to have occurred in later prehistoric and Classical contexts across Europe. It is only very recently that archaeologists have identified the occurrence of odd deposits in early and later medieval contexts, with similarities in the types of objects and materials selected for use across Europe, from pagan to Christian eras.<sup>16</sup>

Odd deposits in pagan Anglo-Saxon houses and settlements took the form of human and animal remains buried in buildings and at boundaries and entrances, although other objects were also employed, including pottery vessels, brooches, beads, spindle-whorls and loom weights. Close parallels have been drawn with earlier Iron Age and Roman practices, particularly in the deposition of human and animal remains in pits. It has also been acknowledged that these practices extended beyond the pagan period and can be detected in later Saxon (Christian) urban and rural contexts.<sup>17</sup> Odd deposits dating to the Anglo-Saxon period were initially categorised as ‘votive’, but more recent discussions have evaluated this form of ritual practice within the framework of everyday life. Just as Richard Kieckhefer argued that magic should be perceived as ‘an alternative form of rationality’ that was consistent with medieval views of the universe, archaeologists contend that odd deposits were rationally conceived according to past world views, directed towards specific practical purposes such as agriculture and technology.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Helena Hamerow, “‘Special Deposits’ in Anglo-Saxon Settlements,” *Medieval Archaeology* 50 (2006); Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*.

<sup>17</sup> Hamerow, “‘Special Deposits’;” Michael Fulford, ‘Links with the Past: Persuasive “Ritual” Behaviour in Roman Britain,’ *Britannia* 32 (2001); James Morris and Ben Jervis, ‘What’s so Special? A Reinterpretation of Anglo-Saxon “Special Deposits”,’ *Medieval Archaeology* 55 (2011).

<sup>18</sup> Kieckhefer, ‘Special Rationality of Medieval Magic;’ Brück, ‘Ritual and Rationality.’

Merrifield noted that animal skulls, pottery vessels, clothing and shoes were frequently found in extant buildings of later medieval and early modern date, usually placed in the foundations, walls or chimneys.<sup>19</sup> Similar practices have since been detected in excavated structures dating to the medieval period across Europe, and spanning domestic and ecclesiastical contexts. In medieval Sweden, for example, odd deposits comprise animal remains, tools and utensils, pottery vessels, coins, personal items, prehistoric lithics and fossils; deposits of coins are particularly common finds in parish churches.<sup>20</sup> Odd deposits identified in medieval English churches include paternoster beads of bone and amber, silver spoons, pottery vessels, pilgrim badges and disused baptismal fonts.<sup>21</sup>

In medieval English houses, pottery vessels have been found buried near hearths and objects have been recovered from post-holes, including special materials such as fragments of glass and quartz crystal. There are two possible cases of gaming boards deliberately buried as odd deposits: three limestone slabs with marks for ‘nine men’s morris’ were excavated from a single tenement at the hamlet of West Cotton (Northants), dating from the thirteenth to fourteenth century. Excavations at Nevern Castle (Pembrokeshire) revealed the special treatment of a late twelfth-century entrance to the castle: the threshold was formed by inverted slates with inscriptions on one or both faces. Amongst the symbols inscribed on the slates were warriors, crosses, a pentagram and three boards for ‘nine men’s morris’. It has

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<sup>19</sup> Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*.

<sup>20</sup> Falk, *En Grundläggande Handling*, 207–8.

<sup>21</sup> Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 230–6; Brian Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges: Medieval Finds from Excavations in London* (London: HMSO, 1998), 20.

been suggested that the grid pattern of the game may have been intended to trap or detain malevolent spirits.<sup>22</sup>

Eleanor Standley has drawn attention to the use of personal objects of medieval dress such as buckles and brooches as deliberate deposits. She argues that items were specially selected for their apotropaic value: for example, at the village of West Hartburn (co Durham), a silver brooch inscribed with the Holy Name (IESUS NAZARET/IHUS REX IUDEO) was recovered near a circular hearth within a structure. The context was dated to around the fourteenth century and Standley proposes that the deposit may have been made in response to the fourteenth-century crises of famine and plague.<sup>23</sup>

[insert fig. 1 here – portrait]

**Figure 1: Silver brooch inscribed with the Holy Name from West Hartburn, diameter 30 mm.**

*Source:* Standley 2013; reproduced with permission of Eleanor Standley.

Ritual deposition in medieval England was not confined to domestic and religious buildings, but extended to the deliberate discard of certain types of object in the landscape. Pilgrims' badges have been found in large quantities in rivers in England, France and the Netherlands, with particular concentrations recovered at the locations of bridges and river crossings.<sup>24</sup> Pilgrim badges were selected for deposition as special objects because of their

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<sup>22</sup> Andrew Chapman, *West Cotton, Raunds. A Study of Medieval Settlement Dynamics AD 450–1450.*

*Excavation of a Deserted Medieval Hamlet in Northamptonshire 1985–89* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2010), 157–61; Caple, 'The Apotropaic Symbolled Threshold,' 446–7.

<sup>23</sup> Standley, *Trinkets and Charms*, 83.

<sup>24</sup> Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges*; Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 109.

apotropaic value to the owner. Pilgrim souvenirs were blessed at saints' shrines like a relic; they acquired the status of quasi-relics or consecrated objects and were worn as amulets on the body, or alternatively, fixed to bed-posts or fastened to textual amulets and books of hours.<sup>25</sup> A large number of these mass-produced, tin-alloy badges were deposited in watery places, possibly as part of the performance of a charm to mark the completion of a vow of pilgrimage, or as a thanks-offering to a saint for a cure or miracle. The act of depositing a pilgrim badge in water was clearly a common practice but not one that was documented in medieval texts.

Medieval swords and daggers were also deposited in rivers and bogs, extending an ancient prehistoric practice into Christian times. Merrifield argued that the medieval deposition of swords was not votive but instead part of the transition to Christian funerary rites.<sup>26</sup> Because the burial of weapons was not allowed in the consecrated ground of churchyards, their disposal in water provided an alternative mode of disposal. Archaeological evidence for this practice appears to correspond with rural areas dominated by monasteries, possibly indicating that religious houses may have controlled the ritual disposal of weapons as part of their provision of funerary rites. Medieval weapons have been found in the Witham Valley (Lincolnshire), which was densely settled by monasteries that were linked by ten causeways across the fenland. Artefacts recovered from the causeways confirm that the deposition of weapons had continued in the region from the Bronze Age right up to the later medieval period. A total of 32 medieval weapons were found, including 10 swords, five daggers/long knives, six axe-heads and six spearheads. David Stocker and Paul Everson

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<sup>25</sup> Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words. Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 68.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Bradley, *The Passage of Arms: An Archaeological Analysis of Prehistoric Hoards and Votive Deposits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*.

surmise that this practice ceased in the late fourteenth century, when it became acceptable to display military equipment around the tomb in the church.<sup>27</sup>

The archaeological recording of odd deposits in medieval houses, churches and monasteries confirms that the act of ritual deposition was widely practised in both lay and religious contexts, and likely executed by both lay and religious practitioners. Paradoxically, the burial or concealment of objects and clothing, or their disposal in rivers or bogs, was rarely documented in medieval texts. Such practices operated outside the highly prescriptive categories of medieval writing: they were invisible to financial records, chronicles and hagiography. The motive behind odd deposits has been interpreted as broadly apotropaic or protective; however, the act of burial was more frequently documented in relation to illicit rites of harmful magic. Burial of special creatures or objects was sometimes documented in relation to malignant sorcery: for example, a lizard buried under the threshold stone of a house was intended to harm the fertility of householders and their animals.<sup>28</sup> The interment of animal parts in wall foundations or at boundaries is also documented in the practice of natural magic and medieval recipes record the use of buried earthenware pots for distilling or fermenting ingredients to be employed in medical preparations.<sup>29</sup> The ubiquity of odd deposits is in stark contrast to the rarity with which the practice was documented. This

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<sup>27</sup> David Stocker and Paul Everson, 'The Straight and Narrow Way: Fenland Causeways and the Conversion of the Landscape in the Witham Valley, Lincolnshire,' in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300–1300*, ed. Martin Carver (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer/York Medieval Press, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Michael D. Bailey, 'From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conception of Magic in the Later Middle Ages,' *Speculum* 76, Number 4 (2001): 981.

<sup>29</sup> Sophie Page, *Magic in the Cloister. Pious Motives, Illicit Interests and Occult Approaches to the Medieval Universe* (University Park PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 47; Stephen Moorhouse, 'Documentary Evidence for the Uses of Medieval Pottery: An Interim Statement,' *Medieval Ceramics* 2 (1978): 10.

dichotomy challenges previous archaeological methodologies for medieval magic that begin with *documented* associations between objects or materials and their magical powers.<sup>30</sup> The archaeological elucidation of magic also requires a parallel approach which takes *archaeological context and pattern* as its starting point.

[insert fig. 2 here – portrait]

**Figure 2: Sword with possible magical inscription of unknown meaning in Roman and Lombardic lettering from the River Witham, dated c.1250–1330.**

*Source:* © The Trustees of the British Museum

### **Magic and Materiality**

The archaeological study of magic frequently focuses on the use of natural materials that were considered to possess occult properties, or objects that were perceived to hold sacred power acquired through a process of ritual consecration or physical proximity to relics. The scholastic concept of natural magic emerged in the thirteenth century as an explanation for materials and objects that possessed extraordinary properties (such as magnetism). These were regarded as natural marvels within God’s universe, in contrast with magic conjured through the power of demons.<sup>31</sup> The boundary between natural and sacred magic was not distinct within later medieval terms of reference: objects such as pilgrim souvenirs were treated similarly to objects made of occult materials and ‘found objects’ such as prehistoric lithics. Even mundane objects and personal garments could acquire sacred power for use as quasi-relics. Sarah Randles discusses the widespread practice of concealing shoes and

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<sup>30</sup> Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones*.

<sup>31</sup> Page, *Magic in the Cloister*, 31.

garments in the fabric of medieval domestic and religious buildings in these terms, proposing that concealment was part of a broader range of magic practices linked with cloth and clothing. She argues that the permeable quality of a garment offered ‘the ability to absorb virtue from its location, which it can then retain and pass on to the wearer’. She quotes a fifteenth-century French vernacular literary text, *The Distaff Gospels*, in which women are encouraged to secretly place their husbands’ shirts under the altar-stone when the priest is celebrating mass. A husband wearing a garment treated in this way will be easy for a wife to rule over and he will never beat her.<sup>32</sup> It is very likely that local priests would have regarded as illicit any acts which utilised the holy spaces in which the mass was performed or the consecrated materials of the Eucharist.

The most powerful objects combined both natural and sacred properties, for example paternoster beads made from amber or jet and blessed by the priest for use in personal devotion.<sup>33</sup> Jet and amber share inherent physical properties which may have been perceived as evidence of occult power: when rubbed, both substances develop a static charge and emit a smell. These characteristics were stressed in medieval lapidaries, alongside the powers of many minerals and gemstones including coral, rock crystal and sapphire, which were incorporated into jewellery for wearing as amulets or used to embellish reliquaries and other religious material culture.<sup>34</sup> The most influential medieval lapidary was the late eleventh-century *Book of Stones (De Lapidus)* written by Bishop Marbode of Rennes, which formed the basis for many later texts. The particular materials revered by medieval people for their occult properties had been prized traditionally for millennia: archaeological evidence

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<sup>32</sup> Randles, ‘Material Magic,’ 119.

<sup>33</sup> Standley, *Trinkets and Charms*, 67; Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 235.

<sup>34</sup> Joan Evans, *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (London: Constable, 1922); Standley, *Trinkets and Charms*, 86–8; Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 157–8.

confirms the enduring significance of materials including jet, amber, quartz and rock crystal as well as animal materials such as antler and boar tusk.<sup>35</sup>

Jet was one of the most extensively utilised of such materials, a fossilized coniferous wood, deep black in colour and easily carved. According to Marbode, jet was efficacious if worn on the body, consumed as a powder, ingested through water in which the material had been steeped or burnt to release beneficial fumes. The healing and anaesthetic properties of jet were recommended for easing conditions ranging from childbirth to toothache, and it was believed to possess powerful apotropaic value to protect from demons and malignant magic.<sup>36</sup> Jet occurs principally in two locations – near Whitby in North Yorkshire and in Galicia in northern Spain – and in both regions it was used to manufacture holy objects and pilgrim souvenirs. It has been suggested that small, jet crucifix pendants were produced in workshops at Whitby Abbey: a distinctive corpus of 22 crucifix pendants with ring and dot motif can be dated stylistically to the twelfth century, including four recovered from graves. Damaged pendants and raw materials have been excavated from Whitby Abbey, indicating a possible source of production in monastic workshops.<sup>37</sup> Jet and amber were luxury commodities and it is possible that monasteries actively controlled both access to raw materials and the production of amulets in occult materials.

Jet was used to manufacture a wide range of medieval objects including beads, pendants, rings, brooches, pins, chess pieces, dice, dagger handles and bowls for possible magico-medical use.<sup>38</sup> This distinctive material may have been used for other types of magic,

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<sup>35</sup> Chantal Conneller, *An Archaeology of Materials* (London: Routledge, 2011); Andrew M. Jones, *Prehistoric Materialities: Becoming Material in Prehistoric Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Evans, *Magical Jewels*.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Pierce, 'Jet Cross Pendants from the British Isles and Beyond: Forms, Distribution and Use,' *Medieval Archaeology* 57 (2013).

<sup>38</sup> Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 267–71.



such as divination. Bowls, dice and knife-handles are noteworthy in this respect as objects used in divination rituals by medieval necromancers, who called upon spirits to guide them in forecasting or decision-making.<sup>39</sup> The archaeological distribution of jet dice and knives is biased towards ecclesiastical sites, including the cathedrals and vicars chorals at Winchester, Beverley and York. Divination was often associated with the clergy and this archaeological distribution may indicate the use of objects made from occult natural materials for practising clerical magic.<sup>40</sup>

Animal parts were also used in natural magic, with archaeological evidence for the use of boar tusks and antler tines possibly as fertility amulets: animal *material medica* was documented especially for use in relation to sex, conception, contraception and birth.<sup>41</sup> Both animal and human bodies were materials for magic, with documented practices including divination from the shoulder blades of animals, human corpses and the clothing of the dead.<sup>42</sup> Infant corpses were evidently regarded as an especially powerful substance, possibly used in rites of sympathetic magic to prevent infant death, or as an occult material in witchcraft. Kieckhefer has suggested that outside learned circles, substances regarded as repugnant or taboo are likely to have been perceived as having occult power. He has noted evidence that midwives and other women accused of witchcraft used infant body parts, either buried as part of a charm or used as an ingredient.<sup>43</sup> However, it is not clear whether such practices actually

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<sup>39</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (Stroud: Sutton, 1997), 97.

<sup>40</sup> Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 167.

<sup>41</sup> Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 240–41; Page, *Magic in the Cloister*, 40–41.

<sup>42</sup> Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 113; Sophie Page, *Magic in Medieval Manuscripts* (London: The British Library, 2004), 56.

<sup>43</sup> Kieckhefer, 'Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic,' 834; Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 59, 62.

occurred or whether these stories were intended to fuel the fifteenth-century witchcraft stereotype.

Archaeological evidence reveals that infant corpses were sometimes buried outside consecrated ground, interred in medieval rural and urban houses dating from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. These infant burials were located in spaces that were in daily use as domestic or associated working areas; the burials were usually dug against the exterior walls of the main living rooms and sealed by later floor deposits, indicating that the buildings were still occupied when the interments took place. In some cases the infant remains were judged to represent stillborns, but others were weeks or months old at the time of death; these infants would surely have been baptised and carried the right to burial in consecrated ground. The infant domestic burials were carefully laid out and some were accompanied by grave goods: animal parts were placed with an infant at Tattenhoe (Bucks) and a spindle-whorl and an exotic shell were deposited with an infant at Upton (Gloucesters). I have suggested that the interment of infant corpses in the house may have been linked to rites of fertility, drawing on the evidence of charms for safe childbirth that were recorded in the eleventh-century *Lacnunga*. These charms involved the recitation of words and the performance of actions, such as jumping over a grave or collecting grave soil from an infant who had been stillborn.<sup>44</sup> Did the infants buried in medieval houses serve as materials for rites of sympathetic magic, rituals that were intended to protect future births?

### **Magic and Performance**

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<sup>44</sup> Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 219–23, 284–5.

The burial of odd deposits can be likened to a charm, a ritual performance that combined words and actions and sometimes involved the use of supporting herbs and objects. The efficacy of the charm was strengthened by performances of the body; for example, apotropaic formulae were written on the body and on substances such as wax to be consumed orally. Portability was also important to facilitate close contact with the body, with textual amulets enclosed in capsules, sacks and purses to be worn on the body.<sup>45</sup> A comparison can be made with devotional jewellery, such as reliquary rings and pendants that were relatively common in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>46</sup> Charms were worn on the body by people at all social levels: devotional words were inscribed on brooches, buckles, buttons, girdles, pendants, pouches and rings, as well as on objects carried on the body, such as knives, spoons, seals and mirror cases.<sup>47</sup> The most common devotional inscriptions invoked the name of Christ, either in the abbreviations IHS or IHC or INRI (*Jesus Nazarenius Rex Judaeorum*). Euan Cameron observed that such invocation of the names of God ‘wanders into the realm of the occultist grimoire or spell-book of the intellectual magician’.<sup>48</sup> But material culture demonstrates that words and letters held an integral mystique for the non-literate: ‘mock inscriptions’ or false lettering were also common on items such as brooches. These were made and purchased by those who believed in the power of words, but could not read or write them.<sup>49</sup>

The performance of magic also involved the modification or deliberate mutilation of objects, for example the bending of coins and pilgrim badges. This practice can be likened to

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<sup>45</sup> Skemer, *Binding Words*, 1–2.

<sup>46</sup> David Hinton, *Gold and Gilt, Pots and Pins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 245.

<sup>47</sup> Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 272–4.

<sup>48</sup> Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 53.

<sup>49</sup> Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 162–4.

the folding of charms written on parchment, lead or communion wafers: the act of folding increased the efficacy of the charm by preserving its secrecy and containing its magic.<sup>50</sup> The folding or bending of pilgrim souvenirs can also be compared with the deliberate destruction of magico-medical amulets, such as fever amulets thrown into the fire after the afflicted person had recovered.<sup>51</sup> The destruction of the amulet guaranteed that it was specific to the individual and could not be reused, but the act of folding or mutilation was also part of the ritual performance of magic. This premise is documented in relation to the practise of bending coins: miracles recorded at saints' shrines refer to the custom of bending the coin in the name of the saint invoked to heal the sick person.<sup>52</sup> Richard Kelleher notes the frequent mutilation of medieval English coins through bending, piercing and cutting, citing 130 examples of folded coins.<sup>53</sup>

There is growing archaeological evidence that magic was performed in rural communities as part of agricultural practices linked to the fertility of fields. Later medieval practices extended traditions recorded in the *aecerbot* charm, dating to the late tenth or early eleventh century, in which land believed to have been cursed by a sorcerer was cleansed through an elaborate ceremony involving the blessing of turves.<sup>54</sup> Recent archaeological study of metal-detected objects in England has identified a pattern in which ampullae dating to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were deliberately damaged before being discarded in

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<sup>50</sup> Lea T. Olsan, 'Charms and Prayers in Medieval Medical Theory and Practice,' *Social Theory of Medicine* 16 (2003): 362.

<sup>51</sup> Skemer, *Binding Words*, 188.

<sup>52</sup> Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 91; Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London: Dent, 1977), 94–6.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Kelleher, 'The Re-Use of Coins in Medieval England and Wales c.1050–1550: An Introductory Survey' *Yorkshire Numismatist* 4 (2012): 130.

<sup>54</sup> Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England*, 6–12.

cultivated fields.<sup>55</sup> Ampullae were pilgrim souvenirs in the form of miniature vessels used to contain water, oil or dust collected from saints' shrines and holy wells. While pilgrim badges were commonly discarded in watery contexts in towns (discussed above), ampullae are more typically recovered from rural contexts and particularly from cultivated fields. They were deliberately damaged by crimping or even biting, presumably to open the seal in order to pour the contents on the fields before discarding the vessel. Folded coins are also found especially in plough-soil, suggesting the possibility of a deliberate act of discard as an offering to protect or enhance the fertility of fields.<sup>56</sup> Ceremonies for blessing the fields are recorded in which the parish priest sprinkled holy water and recited the biblical passage of Genesis 1: 28.<sup>57</sup>

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

The archaeological evidence of discarded coins and ampullae suggests that such liturgies in the field were complemented by the performance of ritual deposition.

[insert fig. 3 here - portrait]

**Figure 3: Deliberately damaged ampullae; from top to bottom PAS nos IOW-ED2A21, NCL-44A762 and LVPL-50FD62.**

*Source:* reproduced with permission of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

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<sup>55</sup> William Anderson, 'Blessing the Fields? A Study of Late-Medieval Ampullae from England and Wales,' *Medieval Archaeology* 54 (2010).

<sup>56</sup> Kelleher, 'The Re-Use of Coins,' 195.

<sup>57</sup> Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 58.

## Magic, Craft and Technology

A connection between magic and technology can be demonstrated particularly in medieval monastic contexts. For example, the monks of St Augustine, Canterbury, collected medical, alchemical, craft and technical recipes and had access to facilities for making magical objects: they kept equipment and utensils in the infirmary, used the plumber's workshop and commissioned work from metal craftsmen in the town.<sup>58</sup> Archaeological evidence for such activities includes specialist vessels of glass and pottery. At Glastonbury Abbey, for example, two perforated pottery jars, four distilling bases and two crucibles were linked with specialist scientific and technical activities.<sup>59</sup> It has been suggested that the perforated pottery jars would have been used for the production of white lead and for a variety of distillation and fermentation processes, while the distilling bases may have been used in the production of medicines or in alchemical practices.

It has recently been demonstrated that monasteries drew from more popular traditions of magic to aid technical production. The workshops at the monastery of San Vincenzo Maggiore (Isernia, Italy) have produced over one hundred prehistoric stone tools, many in structural contexts including floor surfaces, post-holes and furnace linings.<sup>60</sup> The tradition of collecting prehistoric lithics was prevalent across medieval Europe. These objects were not

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<sup>58</sup> Page, *Magic in the Cloister*, 8.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen Moorhouse, 'Medieval Distilling Apparatus of Glass and Pottery,' *Medieval Archaeology* 16 (1972); Oliver Kent, 'Wares Associated with Specialist Scientific and Technical Activities,' in *Glastonbury Abbey: Archaeological Investigations 1904–1979*, Roberta Gilchrist and Cheryl Green (London: Society of Antiquaries Monograph, in press).

<sup>60</sup> Karen Francis and Mother Philip Kline, 'Prehistoric Stone Tools in Medieval Contexts,' In *San Vincenzo Maggiore and its Workshops*. Archaeological Monographs of the British School at Rome 17, ed. Richard Hodges *et al.* (London: The British Academy, 2011).

recognised as ancient artefacts by medieval people; instead, stone axes were regarded as the physical residue of thunder and flint arrow-heads were considered to be ‘elf-shot’ or fairy weapons. They were believed to provide protection against lightning strikes and were employed as odd deposits in medieval domestic and ecclesiastical contexts.<sup>61</sup>

The prehistoric stone tools at San Vincenzo Maggiore were deposited with workshop demolition and occupation deposits dating to the eighth and ninth centuries and including semi-precious gemstones and craft residues.<sup>62</sup> They seem to have been employed in the production of high-status craft objects and possibly in the protection of the workshops against fire. It is suggested that a miniature greenstone axe may have been used in a manner described in a craft-working treatise dated to the twelfth to thirteenth century and attributed to Eraclius, in which green glass, burnt copper and ‘burnt thunder-bolts’ are mixed with ground clear glass to create a green glaze for pottery vessels.<sup>63</sup> A large igneous axe dated to the copper age was discovered beneath a collapsed roof-tile deposit in a granary. The excavators suggest that this may have been suspended from the roof as a thunder-bolt amulet, in the manner described by Bishop Marbode. The majority of prehistoric stone tools from San Vincenzo Maggiore were recovered from areas which were at high risk from fire, such as the glass foundry, metalworking workshops and bell-casting pit. The excavators suggest that the prehistoric lithics at San Vincenzo may have been employed as sympathetic magic – on the

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<sup>61</sup> Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 10–16; Peter Carelli, ‘Thunder and Lightning, Magical Miracles. On the Popular Myth of Thunderbolts and the Presence of Stone-Age Artefacts in Medieval Deposits,’ in *Visions of the Past: Trends and Traditions in Swedish Medieval Archaeology*, Lund Studies in Medieval Archaeology 19, ed. Hans Anderson *et al.* (Stockholm: Central Board of National Antiquities, 1997); Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 247.

<sup>62</sup> Francis and Kline, ‘Prehistoric Stone Tools in Medieval Contexts.’

<sup>63</sup> Eraclius, *De Coloribus et Artibus Romanorum* III.1; Mary P. Merrifield, *Original Treatises on the Arts of Painting* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), 204–5.

basis that objects believed to protect against lightning may also have been used to guard against fire.<sup>64</sup> The evidence from San Vincenzo indicates the use of prehistoric lithics as magic objects both for specialist technical production and for apotropaic use.

[Insert fig. 4 here - portrait]

**Figure 4: Location of stone axes from the workshops at San Vincenzo Maggiore.**

*Source:* Hodges *et al.* 2011; reproduced with permission of Richard Hodges and John Mitchell.

The compelling evidence from San Vincenzo demonstrates the potential for future investigation of magic in the practice of medieval technology and broader craft production. Tools in common use were sometimes associated with magic, especially those linked with the transformation of materials. Whetstones are a good example: these utilitarian objects were used to sharpen iron tools in the home and workshop; they were also favoured objects for concealing as odd deposits in buildings in Finland and Sweden.<sup>65</sup> Whetstones were noted as magical objects by Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History*, and they occur in Old English and Old Norse literature as symbols of authority. The connection between power and the act of sharpening may have derived from the ritual significance of the iron smith: the act of transforming metal was regarded as magical in many societies, for example in the British Iron Age.<sup>66</sup> The smith's craft was also associated with ritual deposition: a cache of smith's tools

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<sup>64</sup> Francis and Kline, 'Prehistoric Stone Tools in Medieval Contexts,' 398.

<sup>65</sup> Hukantaival, 'Finding Folk Religion,' 111–2.

<sup>66</sup> Stephen A. Mitchell, 'The Whetstone as Symbol of Authority in Old English and Old Norse,' *Scandinavian Studies* 57 (1985); Melanie Giles, 'Making Metal and Forging Relations: Ironworking in the British Iron Age,' *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 26, Number 4 (2007).



was excavated from a late Saxon building at Bishopstone (E Sussex), interpreted as an act of ritual closure when the building was abandoned.<sup>67</sup>

A comparison can be made with the female domestic craft of textile production, culturally associated with magic and the spinning of spells.<sup>68</sup> Spindle-whorls seem to have been particularly significant among weaving tools, used with a drop-spindle for spinning flax and wool; these common domestic objects were occasionally placed in later medieval coffins and graves, including a domestic infant burial at Upton.<sup>69</sup> Utilitarian objects of stone, pottery, wood, bone or lead were sometimes transformed by magic words: a lead spindle-whorl excavated from the village of West Hartburn (co Durham) was cast with the reversed letters ‘Rho’, referring to the Christian symbol *Chi-Rho*, the monogram for *Christos*. Standley notes a corpus of at least 30 lead spindle whorls from medieval England that were marked with lettering.<sup>70</sup>

**[insert fig. 5 here – portrait]**

**Figure 5: Lead spindle-whorl cast with reversed ‘Rho’ from West Hartburn, diameter 25 mm.**

*Source:* Standley 2013; reproduced with permission of Eleanor Standley.

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<sup>67</sup> Gabor Thomas, ‘The Symbolic Lives of Late Anglo-Saxon Settlements: A Timber Structure and Iron Hoard from Bishopstone, East Sussex,’ *The Archaeological Journal* 165 (2008).

<sup>68</sup> Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones*, 185; Randles, ‘Material Magic,’ 122; Gilchrist, ‘Magic for the Dead?’ 132–3.

<sup>69</sup> Roberta Gilchrist and Barney Sloane, *Requiem: The Medieval Monastic Cemetery in Britain* (London: Museum of London Archaeology Service, 2005), 102–3.

<sup>70</sup> Standley, *Trinkets and Charms*, 84.

## Magic and the Dead

Material evidence for magic in Anglo-Saxon graves has been used to identify the individual burials of female *practitioners* of magic (discussed above); in contrast, material evidence in later-medieval graves has been used to identify the *recipients* of magic, and from this to infer possible motivations and agents.<sup>71</sup> The vast majority of later-medieval Christians were wrapped in a shroud and buried in a simple earth-cut grave. But a small minority of burials included special materials in the preparation of the grave-lining, placed within the grave or coffin, or within the shroud. Archaeological analysis of excavated burials from medieval England suggests that around two to three per cent had objects placed in close contact with the corpse.<sup>72</sup> The true figure is likely to have been much greater: a high proportion of these items were organic materials – including textiles, bone, wood and even beeswax – and most would have perished in the ground. Mortuary practices were highly localised, with significant variations observed between monastic and lay cemeteries, and customs varying chronologically and regionally.

Despite these caveats, distinctive patterns can be detected in the selection of grave goods placed with the dead in later-medieval England. These included personal objects (dress accessories and grooming tools), domestic and devotional items, and natural materials and antique objects (or *objets trouvés*). Some of these objects were associated with magic in domestic contexts, such as spindle-whorls, or connected with pilgrimage and rites in the fields (pilgrim souvenirs and folded coins). Occult materials are relatively rare, but jet pendant crosses have been recovered from graves in monastic cemeteries.<sup>73</sup> A striking

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<sup>71</sup> Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones*; Gilchrist, 'Magic for the Dead?'

<sup>72</sup> Gilchrist and Sloane, *Requiem*; Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 200–215.

<sup>73</sup> Pierce, 'Jet Cross Pendants'; Standley, *Trinkets and Charms*.

number of these objects may be regarded as traditional grave goods, continuing practices prevalent in prehistoric, Roman and pagan Anglo-Saxon burials, such as the deposition of beads, coins, fossils, animal teeth and quartz pebbles with the dead. The number of ‘found objects’ is striking: tiles, pottery, coins and bracelets of Roman date were buried with the medieval dead. The placement of such grave goods was targeted at certain social groups, in particular children in both monastic and lay cemeteries.<sup>74</sup>

Potential evidence for the use of childbirth amulets has also been detected in the graves of women who may have died in childbirth: a folded lead parcel was founded near the abdomen of a female skeleton at the Benedictine monastery of St James in Bristol, which contained granular material likely to be parchment; a female burial at the hospital of St Mary Spital, London, had a textile bundle placed between her legs, also thought to contain parchment.<sup>75</sup> It has been suggested that the material residues of charms may have been deposited in graves in the form of wooden wands or rods. Willow, hazel or poplar wands or rods were placed in graves in England and Scandinavia, dating from the eleventh century right up to the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, and found with men, women and children. These have been interpreted as objects connected with journeying or healing charms, for example, as indicated in an Old English metrical charm recorded in an eleventh-century manuscript given to Exeter Cathedral by Leofric (d. 1072). This invokes protection by means of a staff: ‘I chant a victory charm; I carry a victory staff; victory by means of words, and victory by means of an object’.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Gilchrist and Sloane, *Requiem*; Gilchrist, ‘Magic for the Dead?’ Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, 277–83.

<sup>75</sup> Reg Jackson, *Excavations at St James’ Priory, Bristol* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2006), 141; Gilchrist and Sloane, *Requiem*, 200.

<sup>76</sup> Gilchrist and Sloane, *Requiem*, 126, 171–4; Gilchrist, ‘Magic for the Dead?’ 128; Felix Grendon, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Charms,’ *The Journal of American Folklore* 22 (1909): 176–9.

I have argued that traces of magic in later medieval graves were intended primarily to support the vulnerable dead on their journey through purgatory, and to protect or heal the corpse in the grave, perhaps to assist with its reanimation on judgement day. It may be suggested that magic for the dead was practised by women in the care of their families, based on evidence from visual sources that it was women who stripped and washed corpses and wrapped them in the shroud for burial. But there are also indications that magic may have been used to protect the living from the restless dead – to guard against revenants. Stephen Gordon has argued that the act of lining graves with burnt materials may have been a strategy targeted at corpses that appeared unusual and were therefore feared. He cites the use of burnt materials in *Bald's Leechbook*, dating to the ninth century, as a remedy against swelling. He extends this argument to the inclusion of burnt materials in graves, suggesting that the rite was reserved for cadavers that exhibited bloating and swelling, and which were therefore regarded as candidates for revenants.<sup>77</sup>

### **Future Directions**

Archaeological discussion has focused on the intersection of magic with religious devotion and the use of special materials for healing and protection. Archaeological evidence reveals a range of rites that were not documented in medieval texts, including the placement of objects with the dead, the burial or concealment of odd deposits in houses and churches, and the deliberate discard of weapons, pilgrim souvenirs and coins in water or on cultivated land. How should we classify these practices according to definitions of medieval magic? For example, can we regard odd deposits as the material residues of charms? It is likely that these

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<sup>77</sup> Gordon, 'Disease, Sin and the Walking Dead,' 64–5.

rituals appealed to Christian agents and the occult power of nature and therefore would have been regarded as acceptable magic. Indeed, it is therefore debateable whether they should be regarded as magic or instead as ‘unofficial’ Christian rituals.<sup>78</sup> The practise of burying infants in the home is an important exception – it seems inconceivable that medieval clergy would have sanctioned such rites. Should we regard infant burials in medieval homes as evidence for illicit magic?

Magic presents a conceptual and methodological challenge for archaeology due to the inherent difficulty in identifying material evidence as the residue of magical intent. Historians grapple with ambiguities in the definition of medieval magic but their starting point can be found in normative categories of magic as defined by the authors and critics of magic texts. The starting point for archaeologists is in the material record, which has no direct voice; the subtleties of meaning, intention and agency can only be unlocked by developing theoretical frameworks for interpreting archaeological evidence.<sup>79</sup> Magic as ritual practice lacks ‘visibility’ in the archaeological record, in the same way that social categories such as gender, age and disability were seemingly invisible in material evidence until appropriate frameworks for investigation were applied. A further barrier is that the prevailing method of archaeology is to identify and interpret *dominant* patterns in material evidence. This presents a paradox for the archaeology of medieval magic, where some of the most fruitful avenues of research have developed from reflection on ‘odd deposits’ and statistically insignificant patterns, for example in relation to objects and materials placed in a small minority of medieval graves or found occasionally as concealed deposits in surviving buildings. Archaeologists may find it

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<sup>78</sup> Rider, *Magic and Religion*, 11; Kieckhefer, ‘Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic,’ 833.

<sup>79</sup> Aleksandra McClain, ‘Theory, disciplinary perspectives and the archaeology of later medieval England,’ *Medieval Archaeology* 56 (2010).

productive to consider magic as ritual practice that is by definition exceptional and alternative to normative categories and dominant patterns.<sup>80</sup> To render magic ‘visible’ in the archaeological record, we must be alert to the *anomalous, unusual and odd*.<sup>81</sup> The archaeology of magic is found in practices which are rarely detected in the archaeological record, such as intentional or ‘odd’ deposits which may be hidden or involve the use of special materials, mysterious words or symbols.

Archaeology reveals the ritual significance over the *longue durée* of the use of certain natural materials and old or ‘found objects’ (*objets trouvés*). Such objects were employed in medieval magic as ‘odd deposits’ buried in sacred and domestic contexts, placed with the dead or employed in performances linked to healing, protection, fertility and technology. How should we interpret evidence for apparent continuities in ritual practice over hundreds or thousands of years? We must be sceptical in interpreting material evidence as proof that ancient belief systems survived or that pagan practices persisted.<sup>82</sup> However, it is clear that some material practices continued after the conversion to Christianity, such as the apotropaic use of found objects and natural materials and the creation of odd deposits. Such similarities of practice do not necessarily constitute evidence for the direct continuity of *beliefs* across time, but they perhaps indicate a longstanding, common repertoire of *ritual actions*. Future research on the archaeology of magic should focus closer attention on the local experience of the conversion process: how ritual actions took on new meanings in Christian contexts, how they were communicated between generations, and how they were transformed over time.

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<sup>80</sup> Karen Jolly, ‘Medieval Magic: Definitions, Beliefs, Practices,’ in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe. The Middle Ages*, ed. Karen Jolly *et al.* (London: Athlone, 2002), 1.

<sup>81</sup> Jones, *Prehistoric Materialities*, 2; Brück, ‘Ritual and Rationality’; Garrow, ‘Odd Deposits and Average Practice’.

<sup>82</sup> Stephen Mitchell *et al.*, ‘Witchcraft and Deep Time – a debate at Harvard,’ *Antiquity* 84 (2010), 864–79.

The archaeological documentation of medieval magic is just beginning. It is not yet clear whether material practices were consistent across all social levels: for example, what is the archaeological evidence for the practise of magic in castles and other elite settlements?<sup>83</sup> What is the evidence for ‘crisis magic’: did social crises such as the Black Death lead to an increase in common magic within local communities? There is also scope to consider love magic in relation to material culture worn or carried on the body.<sup>84</sup> Comparative studies are needed between categories of medieval settlement, and within and between regions, to chart the incidence of particular rites, their chronological currency and the relative influence of literate magic *versus* traditional practices. For instance, is there broader evidence for monasteries controlling the production of amulets in occult materials or the disposal of weapons in water (as indicated at Whitby and in the Witham Valley)? Can we chart additional patterns in the deliberate discard of metal artefacts and whether these practices focused on particular points in the landscape? Study of magic in the landscape has been accelerated by new sources of evidence, in particular the study of metal small finds that have been reported by metal-detectorists under the terms of the UK Portable Antiquities Scheme

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<sup>83</sup> Candidates for odd deposits have been suggested at Barnard Castle, co Durham, and Nevern Castle: Cople, ‘The Apotropaic Symbolled Threshold;’ Standley, *Trinkets and Charms*. An important magic object recently identified at the Dutch castle of Doornenburg – a late medieval *Sigillum Dei* – is likely to have originated in an urban context and to have been reused as building material in the reconstruction of the castle after its destruction in 1945: László Sándor Chardonnens and Jan R Veenstra, ‘Carved in lead and concealed in stone: a late medieval *Sigillum Dei* at Doornenburg Castle,’ *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* 9.2 (2014), 123.

<sup>84</sup> There is a growing literature on the material culture of love but little explicit discussion of love magic. See Standley, *Trinkets and Charms*, Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, Malcolm Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages. Discovering the Real Medieval World* (Stroud: Sutton, 2002); Gemma Watson, ‘Medieval Mentalities and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Courtly Love, Gender and Sexuality in London, c.1100–1500’ (MA diss., University of Reading, 2007).

(from 1997).<sup>85</sup> These data have illuminated patterns in the use of material culture in the medieval countryside, balancing the increase in urban evidence that has resulted from the growing number of archaeological excavations linked to commercial developments.

There is rich potential for the archaeological examination of literate magic, particularly in the elite context of castles and monasteries. Does archaeological evidence survive for image magic, divination and necromancy? How does the archaeological study of monastic medicine and industry illuminate clerical attitudes at the intersection of religion, science and magic? Can we detect a broader connection between magic, technology and craft-working (as evidenced at San Vincenzo Maggiore)? The foundations for the archaeology of magic have been established by working from documented associations between objects and materials and their magic powers. A more contextual approach is now needed, a framework which takes archaeological context and pattern as its starting point, working from the odd, unusual and exceptional to probe the boundaries and definitions of medieval belief.

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<sup>85</sup> <http://finds.org.uk/>



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