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“Gypsy Fortune-telling” as Science and as Fraud: Roma as Ambiguous Others in the History of Occultism

Egil Aspren, Stockholm University

In 1892, the self-made American folklorist and first president of the Gypsy Lore Society, Charles Godfrey Leland (1824–1903), published the first monograph dedicated entirely to the subject of Romani magic: *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune-Telling*. Part ethnographic bricolage, part an original work of occultism, it is a bewildering read. Leland held that “Gypsy” fortunetellers had originally pretended to possess magic powers in order to trick the superstitious, but eventually discovered a way to uncover real superhuman knowledge from the unconscious mind. These techniques, Leland argued, had the potential to turn everyone into magicians, and ought to be taught in schools for the betterment of society.

Leland’s book was part of a long tradition in which Romani people were represented as ambiguous Others in matters of occult science. Often understood as a people from Egypt (the origin of the exonym “Gypsies”), Romani ethnic stereotyping revolved in large part around associations with magic. While we have evidence that Romani women were sought-after practitioners tapping into the “common tradition” of service magic, they were also widely accused of fraud. Learned practitioners seeking to defend their own occult arts could thus use “Gypsies” as a contrasting case, signalling distinctions between fraudulent and real, superstitious and learned, foreign and domestic, pagan and Christian, female and male. But what can we say about the practices that Romani women offered to their customers, and how should we understand the accusations of fraud? Finally, what does the “Gypsy fortuneteller” reveal about majority-population Europeans?

*Professor of the history of religions Egil Aspren has specialised in alternative spiritualities, the history of magic and the relations between esotericism and science. He is the co-editor of *New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism* (2021) and author of *Arguing with Angels: Enochian Magic and Modern Occulture* (2013). Aspren is a board member of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE) and presently holds the roles of treasurer and membership secretary within the society. Professor Aspren’s ongoing research focuses on the Roma in the European study of magic within the field of critical Romani studies.*

Midwives and Witchcraft

Laura Hellsten, Åbo Akademi University

My name is Laura Hellsten and I am a post-doctoral researcher in Systematic Theology at the Polin Institute of Theological research at Åbo Akademi University. In my first book *Through the Bone and Marrow : Re-examining Theological Encounters with Dance in Medieval Europe* (Brepols 2021), I examined how practices of dance that were common in the churches of the Latin West during the medieval period came to be seen increasingly as pagan practices and later also associated with witchcraft. My work has specifically centred around how specific social imaginaries inhibit or enable the understanding of practices as theologically meaningful modes of interacting in the world.

In my current project which also includes the co-leading of a study circle within the frame of the Nordic Summer University; *Praxis of Social Imaginaries* with Lindsey Drury, I am examining medieval travel accounts for the changes in presenting views on anthropology and creation in European encounters with “others” from the mediaeval moving into an early modern period.

For the presentation in the *Between Science and Magic Symposium* in Turku in October 2024, I would like to speak on the writing by Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) in his *Muqaddimah* or *Prolegomena* (1377). This text is mainly known as an early work of sociology, however, he is also, very clearly a historiographer and presents an introduction to scientific methods of inquiry that later come to influence many thinkers in the European context. Khaldun has a specific way of categorising crafts and arts within the understanding and development of influential societies. In this particular presentation I would want to focus particularly on his descriptions of the skills of midwifery in contrast to what he describes as practices of witchcraft.

Giordano Bruno and Esoteric Imagination

Heikki Kråkström, University of Turku

Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) and his art of memory have inspired many studies since Frances Yates's seminal studies in 1960's. Interpretations on Bruno's art have varied from hermetic magic to more mundane explanations of memory techniques. In this presentation, I will explore the medieval origins of esoteric imagination by using Giordano Bruno's art of memory as a case study.

Practices formed in the early modern period that focus on imagination have often been labeled and studied under the concept of esotericism. These imagination based esoteric practices have traditionally been considered different from the preceding Christian practices drawing a sharp line between the Middle Ages and the early modern period. In this paper, I will argue that these

esoteric practices were in fact tightly connected to medieval Christian practices. I will do this by comparing Bruno's art of memory to medieval Christian practices by analyzing the various contents and modes of imagination they used. This will show that the role of imagination was very similar in medieval Christian practices and in Bruno's art. This gives empirical support to the hypotheses presented by Egil Asprem of the connection between esoteric imagination and medieval Christianity.

Heikki Kråkström is a Doctoral Researcher in Study of Religion at University of Turku.

The Magician and the Asp: Natural history and Ritual Magic in Medieval Europe

Sophie Page, University College London

This paper will compare the approaches of natural history and ritual magic texts and practitioners in medieval Europe. It will focus particularly on the exploitation of animals, the treatment of animals as beings with agency, emotions, and their own sensory worlds, and the possibility of hybrid beings and metamorphosis. By looking at these genres that are rarely compared I aim to reveal new approaches to medieval animals and ways of thinking about the relationship between ritual magic and science.

Professor Sophie Page joined UCL History as a permanent lecturer in 2002 after studying at the Warburg Institute, UCL and Cambridge.

Sophie works in the area of European medieval magic and astrology, especially in relation to religion, natural philosophy, and cosmology. She is also interested in the imagery of medieval magic, especially diagrams, and in the history of animals.

*Sophie's publications include *Magic in the Cloister: Pious Motives, Illicit Interests, and Occult Approaches to the Medieval Universe* (2013), two edited collections, *The Unorthodox Imagination in Late Medieval Britain* (2011) and the Routledge history of *Medieval Magic and two books published with the British Library: *Astrology in Medieval Manuscripts and Magic in Medieval Manuscripts*. Sophie is currently working on a book on *Nature and Magic in Medieval Europe*. Sophie was the curator of *Spellbound: Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* (Ashmolean Museum, August 2018 –January 2019)**

Human–plant relationships in traditional Finno-Karelian magic

Siria Kohonen, University of Helsinki

Using different kinds of plants was rather usual in traditional Finno-Karelian magic. Some plants – like willow – were considered much like medicines whereas others – like alder – were connected with mythic and symbolic meanings. However, usually the different kinds of meanings and interpretations mixed with each other. The forest was often considered as an entity with its own agency, and it was highly respected or feared; however, single plants were faced in many different ways.

This paper takes a posthumanistic perspective to explore the relationship between humans and plants expressed in traditional magical and ritual thinking and behaviour. I concentrate especially on the questions of how people represent the agency of plants and signs of communication between humans and plants.

The paper focuses on folklore materials considering traditional magical behaviour – for instance, magical healing – collected during the 19th century in Finland and Karelia. Most of these materials have been deposited to the Folklore Archive of the Finnish Literature Society in Helsinki.

Siria Kohonen is a folklorist and post-doctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki. Her PhD dissertation focused on traditional Finno-Karelian healing magic in light of cognitive psychology. Currently she is focused on such research topics as embodiment, wellness and human–nature relationships in historical as well as contemporary witchcraft in Finland and Karelia.

Mercury and medicinal adders – The influence of science on folk magic

Sonja Hukantaival, University of Turku

The folk magic practices recorded in 19th-century rural Finland did not exist in a vacuum. It has been widely noted that impacts from the Christian religion appear frequently in incantations, rituals, and magic objects. However, the influence of science on folk magic has been discussed less often. This paper presents some ways in which medieval and early modern science, especially medicine, shaped the materiality of Finnish folk magic in the light of magic object collections in museums and archived folklore accounts. The discussion is set in a wider European context with studies on *materia medica* collections and medicinal treatises as comparative material.

Sonja Hukantaival (PhD) specializes in the archaeology of folk religion, rituals, and magic. Her latest studies have focused on the materiality of magic as shown in museum collections of

magic objects from the late 19th century. She is Title of Docent in the archaeology of ritual at the University of Turku.

‘With salt I redeem the soil, with grains I calm it down’ – Reconstructing the charm repertoire of an 19th-century Savonian healer

Ilona Tuomi, Tuusniemen kotiseutuyhdistys

Kust ‘Vupes’ Ihalainen was known to his contemporaries by many names: witch doctor, snake charmer, magician. The Savonian healer (b. 1830) knew how to staunch blood, cure epilepsy and madness, heal wounds as well as find missing cattle and make people fall in and out of love. He was particularly famous for his ability to handle snakes which he would occasionally also sell to the local pharmacy. Vupes had a variety of means which he used in order to help people: he would take his patients to sauna, mix potions and perform rituals that on occasion took several days. Many accounts mention his use of verbal charms – unfortunately by the time the folklore collectors reached his village it was too late to ask him. There are, however, a few stories told by his family and neighbours which include the actual words he used in his charming.

A case study of the passages under discussion will examine the choice of verbal material used in Savonian charms, and the way in which the existing reserve of linguistic images was able to meet the requirements of precisely defined communication with the otherworld. Special attention will be paid to the choice of motives, combinations of expressions, and the relationship of conventional idiom and innovation in the controlled repertoire of incantations. Finally, questions of transmission are addressed in order to investigate whether it is possible to reconstruct the charm repertoire of Vupes based on these few occasions in which his words were recalled and later recorded.

Ilona Tuomi is a PhD candidate at the Department of Early and Medieval Irish, University College Cork. Her doctoral research focuses on the manuscript contexts and ritual performance of Old Irish charms. Tuomi is a graduate from University of Helsinki, where she studied theology and folklore, specialising in comparative religion. Her publications include, for example, Charms, Charmers and Charming in Ireland: From the Medieval to the Modern (edited by Ilona Tuomi, John Carey, Barbara Hillers ja Ciarán Ó Gealbháin; Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019). At the moment she is working as a researcher for the Wilderness Heritage Museum Foundation of Finland in a project centering on the intangible cultural heritage of Southern Karelia.

Medicine and magic in early modern English witchcraft pamphlets

Carla Suhr, University of Helsinki

Witchcraft and medicine were inextricably connected in the early modern period. By definition, bewitching induced in its alleged victims behavior and ailments that were considered unnatural, and which therefore could not be explained or cured by natural, medical means. While theologians focused on discussing the roles of God and the devil in witchcraft or the value of exorcism, medical doctors weighed in on the interpretation of symptoms of witchcraft. Doctors like John Cotta (1616) emphasized the role of the medical professional in determining whether a suspected bewitching was caused unnaturally by a witch or naturally by a medical condition. Spurred by an infamous case of possession, Dr. Edward Jorden (1603) argued that in many cases of suspected witchcraft the alleged victim of possession was in fact suffering from a medical condition known as the Suffocation of the mother, or hysteria. Influences of Glover's descriptions of hysteria have been seen in, for example, some of Shakespeare's female characters (Peterson 2016; Laghi 2021).

In this paper, I analyze accounts of bewitching described in popular witchcraft pamphlets. How do these accounts change over the course of the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries? Can we see the influence of medical writings on witchcraft in descriptions of symptoms? The primary material for the study consists of the Corpus of Early Modern English Witchcraft Pamphlets (Suhr 2011).

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Dr Suhr's research focuses on historical (corpus) pragmatics, genre studies, and discourse analysis. She has a strong interest in combining book history with her research into historical English texts. Her PhD (2011) dealt with the development of the genre of witchcraft pamphlets, and currently she works with early modern news pamphlets more generally and medical texts from the period 1500 to 1800. Since 2000, she has been a member of the Scientific Thought-Styles project – a part of the VARIENG research group – which has compiled a large corpus of historical medical writing, the Corpus of Early English Medical Writing (CEEMW).

The Holy Office, Friars, and the Stars: Astronomy, Astrology, and the Borders between Science and Superstition in Early Colonial New Spain, 1530-1630

Jacqueline Holler, University of Northern British Columbia

New Spain's conquest and subsequent early colonial encounter occurred during a century of great change for human beings' longstanding relationship with the stars. Both astrology and astronomy underwent significant transformation, in which one milestone was the ban of divinatory astrology by Sixtus V's Bull *Coeli et terrae creator Deus* (1586), which redefined this form of astrological practice as heresy. In New Spain, male religious held a particularly significant role with regard to the stars; they served as conduits of European learned knowledge to the Indigenous population, and as students (and repressors) of Indigenous astrological traditions.

Scholarship on astrology in New Spain has focused on the seventeenth century, with emphasis on its racial connotations (Canizares-Esguerra) or close readings of particularly significant Inquisitorial trials from mid-century (Avalos). In this paper, studying both printed texts and Inquisition proceedings, I focus on the relationship between friars and the stars. I examine friars as purveyors and arbiters of "scientific" astronomy and licit astrology--and as defendants before the Holy Office accused of "magical practices" for their study and use of forbidden forms of astrology. I ask: what role did male religious have as both establishers and breachers of the ever-moving borders between science and magic?

Dr. Jacqueline Holler is Professor of History and Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Northern British Columbia. She is author of books, book chapters, and journal articles on early colonial New Spain and contemporary gender studies. Her current research project on women's healing networks in colonial New Spain is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2020-2025).

Imitation of Faith: Magic and science in Paracelsus's late writing on St Vitus Dance

Lindsey Drury, Freie Universität

Paracelsus's last address of the St Vitus dance in *De Causis Morborum Invisibilium* (1531) proposed that the dancers' ceaseless dancing manifested a real disease through a projected imagination that could infect other bodies. As a part of Paracelsus's larger work on 'invisible diseases,' his late medical writing on the St Vitus dance thus linked the forgery of miracles with emergence of disease through imaginative enactment. Paracelsus argued that human imagination had its own astral schema of influence, and this is exposed through his notion of a microcosmic version of astral influence that, while body-based, enacted inter-body influence

that could project the imagination of one dancing performer into a collective experience of social contagion. With this argument, Paracelsus re-conceived the trope of cosmic dance from antiquity, reinventing it within a vision of human bodies whose power over the bodies of others is – like that of the stars – partially (yet inexorably) derived of motion.

In this paper, I will explore Paracelsus’s understanding of the St Vitus dance as a case study that exemplifies his unique Reformation-era medical scientific address of embodiment, imagination, magic, and divine intervention. Paracelsus’s life’s work aimed to harmonize science with a Christian cosmology. In his pursuit of this goal, Paracelsus critiqued and pathologized the embodied altered state of dancing by proposing a fundamentally alternative status of human embodiment.

*Dr. Lindsey Drury is a dance scholar and historian who works on early modern and colonial ideations of embodiment and physical practice, and the legacies of these in the field of dance. She lives in Berlin where she works as a postdoc within **Critical Dance Studies at the Institut für Theaterwissenschaft, Freie Universität Berlin**. She further coordinates the research project *Praxis of Social Imaginaries* with medievalist dance historian and theologian Dr. Laura Hellsten, and is an affiliated researcher of the Cluster of Excellence “Temporal Communities” and metaLAB (at) Harvard & FU Berlin. She received the 2022 Gertrude Lippincott Honourable Mention for best English-language article in the field of dance studies and was awarded a prestigious Erasmus Mundus Fellowship for her doctoral work in early modern studies (2015-2019).*

Dream-imagery and the Supernatural, 1560-1900

Louise S. Milne, Edinburgh University: Napier / School of Art

In the 16C, artists developed a visual language for representing dream-imagery as monstrous shifting forms, and this set of stylistics became reified and used as a shorthand for bad dreams into the 19C. At the same time, the even older idea of the nightmare as an attack from outside, by a supernatural antagonist, remained strongly rooted in folk and elite culture, even as its religious framework withered. This paper discusses how these two traditions were represented and debated, focussing mainly on the period between Francisco Goya (1746-1828) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). I argue that mainstream art conventions played an important role in the process of “relocating” supernatural threat in dreams, integrating it into imaginary dream environments, rather than, as before, embodying it in the persona of a dream antagonist. However, the nightmare-antagonist dream-type did not disappear; it was repackaged and translated, for instance, in popular genres such as the gothic.

These developments can be traced through contemporary dream accounts – drawn from diaries, letters, fiction, and medical literature – and through visual examples in popular illustration and fine art. The changes in imagery reflect and express wider changes in mentality, culture and habitus among city-dwellers, which tended to privilege psychological (i.e. scientific)

explanations over magical ones, but were equally keen to retain the supernatural as a creative repertoire. Similar cognitive assumptions informed the emerging fields of parapsychology and psychoanalysis. The experience and stresses of the first century of industrialisation, the polarisation of attitudes to the supernatural between classes, as well as the growing dominance of scientific discourse, were the major forces behind the rapid evolution of dream-cultures and conventions in the 19C.

Louise S. Milne is a visual comparative mythologist and film maker. Her research focus is the history of dreams and nightmares. She is the author of numerous articles, and a monograph on Pieter Bruegel, Carnivals and Dreams. Her most recent book, Terrors of the Night. Essays on Art, Myth and Dreams is due to be released in May. She is Professor of Film at Edinburgh Napier University and Reader in Critical Theory in the School of Art, University of Edinburgh.

Celebrated but Forgotten: Female Magicians in Northern Europe, 1880s—1890s

Pauliina Räsänen, University of Turku

In the late nineteenth century, many female magicians such as Viennese Sidonie Roman, Danish Pauline Schmidt and Italian Nina Bosco, traveled the Northern European countries of Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Russia, and beyond. These women captivated audiences with their magical illusions, feats and advancements in technology. They not only incorporated the latest technological innovations and scientific developments into their repertoire, but they also drew from the nineteenth century fascination with occultism and mysticism. Especially new religious movements such as spiritualism provided interesting content and theatricality for their popular magic performances.

Despite their remarkable careers and groundbreaking contributions to the art of magic, these women have been overshadowed by their male counterparts in the annals of history. By researching digitalised newspapers archives, it is possible to trace the lives of these professional women. This presentation will explore the theme of magic, science and occultism within the context of forgotten female magicians, particularly the ones who traveled in Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, and Russia. Through an examination of their lives, careers, and achievements, I aim to shed light how these women participated in the revival of the occult via their performative practises on popular stages. By highlighting the significance of women's contribution as performers in shaping our perception of the past, we can attain a fresh feminine perspective on the diverse history of magic and science at the threshold of the modern.

Pauliina Räsänen (MA) is a female illusionist and doctoral researcher at the Culture History Department, University of Turku, Finland. She aims to uncover the history of forgotten women in the field of magic and circus arts.

“Ȝyffe þy wytte be noȝte dull”: Audience positioning in *The Mirror of Alchemy*

Sara Norja & Sirkku Ruokkeinen, University of Turku

In this paper, we conduct a linguistic analysis of audience positioning within an alchemical work known as *The Mirror of Alchemy* (*MoA*). *MoA* is an English translation of the Latin work *Speculum alchemiae*, a well-known alchemical work formerly attributed to Roger Bacon (c. 1214–1292?). There are seven extant manuscript copies of *MoA*, dating from the 15th to 17th centuries; we focus on four closely related copies of the work, all part of the same translation tradition (Norja 2021). *MoA* consists of a prologue and seven chapters instructing the reader in the science of alchemy. *MoA* is notable for its frequently derisive audience address, in which the reader is berated for their ignorance in alchemy.

To analyse the audience positioning in *MoA*, we apply the Appraisal Framework, a method developed specifically for the classification of linguistic expressions of emotion and opinion, and to describe the manner in which these are negotiated with the reader (Martin and White 2005). The analysis reveals that the reader is evaluated for their skill in alchemy using both positive and negative *capacity judgements*, i.e., evaluations of their ability to interact in the world. The author negotiates the proposition using *irrealis* structures, allowing the reader to choose between potential states in an attempt to manipulate the reader to maintain the facade of effective transmutation.

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The witch in the Old English religious prose of Ælfric and Wulfstan

Ida Meerto, University of Turku

Ælfric of Eynsham and Wulfstan the Archbishop of York are among the most prolific and famous authors of early medieval England. Their religious writing covers a wide range of topics, including that of witchcraft. A mention or more detailed discussion of witches is included in several sermons and saints’ lives by Ælfric and Wulfstan. In this paper I examine the differences, and the similarities, of how the two authors discuss witches in their religious writing. Due to their widespread influence, we can gain a better understanding of the views on

witches in the late 10th and early 11th century English society by studying the works of Ælfric and Wulfstan in particular.

The two authors lived at the same time, in the same world, and even were in contact with each other (Godden 2000, xxi). Their approaches to instructing the clergy and the laity differ, however, as Ælfric appears to have had a more pedagogical approach and Wulfstan relied on more intense preaching. Additionally, Wulfstan strikes as more severe in his views concerning paganism and Christianity than Ælfric (Jolly 1996, 76). In this paper I explore, for example, how these differences in their respective approaches and views are manifested in their discussions of witches in their vernacular religious prose works.

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Ida Meerto is a doctoral researcher in the TiTaRa: Between Science and Magic project funded by the Kone Foundation. In their dissertation, they examine the various lexical items denoting practitioners of magic in Old and Middle English, their use, and the change the group of items experiences when moving from Old English to Middle English. Meerto identifies as a philological linguist with a special interest in all things medieval and magical. She is based at the Department of English at the University of Turku.

Conjurors and texts of lesser value: Incantations and ritual specialists in the scientific discourse of turn of the century

Tuukka Karlsson, University of Helsinki

Kalevala-metric poetry, a Finnic oral-poetic system of various genres, has received much attention from Finnish scholars since 18th century. During the 19th century, when the efforts for collecting especially myth poetry from the areas of Eastern Finland, Karelia and Ingria were in their heyday, the meter was actively used to communicate in various genres. In some geographic areas, mythic themes and meanings carried with the poetic system retained their social relevance until the advent of modernization during the first decades of the 20th century.

The paper examines registers used by two collectors of oral tradition, A. A. Borenius (1849-1931) and Iivo Marttinen (1870–1934), in their travel accounts and reports to Finnish Literature Society. I am interested in how the two collectors working to expand the scientific knowledge in their time discussed and presented performers and performances of magic. Although coming from different backgrounds and working during different times, the two shared a skeptical

approach to incantations and their performers; especially towards ritual specialists called the *tietäjät* (those who know).

As research material, the paper will use archived Kalevala-metric poems, biographical information on ritual specialists, and meeting minutes of Finnish Literature Society. The paper will thus contribute to discussions concerning language of magic and science and ideologies of register usages.

Tuukka Karlsson, PhD, works as a researcher at University of Helsinki, folklore studies. He is interested in incantations, their performers, and ideologies of discourses surrounding them.