**Concepts of Magic in Medieval Europe**

From ABC-CLIO’s World History: Ancient and Medieval Eras website

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Web: 11 September 2013

ancient Iranian religion

The Catholic Church (the only expression of Christianity in the Western world at the time)

adversary or foe

forbidden behavior

non traditional

a spell, charm

ointment

In medieval times, the ability to read the stars and know charms and spells was originally associated with the Zoroastrians and wise men (Magi) of the East, so it was called "magic." The Church and the civil authorities outlawed and prosecuted the practice of magic, but there were few trials. Most common superstition and magic went on as part of daily life.

"Real" magic in the Middle Ages came in two forms, although it was not always easy to tell them apart. Natural magic was just a part of nature, while other beliefs were harmless superstitions. The other kind of magic was occult, demonic magic that called on spirits. It was not accepted by most of society, and certainly not by the Church.

**Natural Magic**

Normal medical practice involved natural magic: a medicinal herb could have more strength if it was picked at dawn or at midnight. Its magic was increased by using it in combination with other herbs or substances or by preparing it with certain rituals. If a plant looked like a snake, its sap would help with snakebite—that was natural magic. The principles of natural magic were sympathy and antipathy. Sympathy meant that things worked on or cured what they resembled or had some affinity for. Antipathy was the opposite; if two animals were antagonists in the natural world, then a remedy from one could help cure wounds caused by the other.

Natural magic blurred quickly into a more explicit magic that was in a gray area between what the Church encouraged and what it condemned. Some felt that superstitious rituals and taboos merely drew on the principles of the stars and the world, while others felt that they amounted to calling on spirits and invoking supernatural power in unorthodox ways.

Incantations had to be spoken over the preparation or use of medicine. There were many variants on Latin and other languages that created magical phrases to add power to a medicine or salve. Charms were special incantations to speak over ailments, usually phrases with reference to the Christian religion.

Amulets were objects carried to give magical protection against certain problems. A hare's foot was a common amulet that protected its wearer from danger. Rosemary could keep away venomous snakes and evil spirits. Mistletoe could ward away conviction in a court of law.

Exorcisms were rituals to drive out demons that were causing illness. They could be carried out by priests under rituals prescribed by the Church, but they were done more often as folk remedies.

Astrology, the magical science of the stars, came to Europe through Arabic books of lore. It appeared to be very scientific, and medical schools began to incorporate its teachings. Astrology was a part of natural magic, rather than occult magic; the stars had certain powers, and these powers were morally neutral. It was a matter of scientific study to learn what the stars were influencing or predicting. Many European kings, including the scientific emperor Frederick II, had astrologers to tell them when they should do various things.

Alchemy was a form of natural magic that evolved into the true science of chemistry. In early forms, alchemy invoked stars and spirits or used charms and amulets. While the goal of the alchemist was to produce gold, the actual practice of alchemy involved many practical techniques still used in chemistry. Alchemists distilled, melted, classified, and observed. Their laboratory equipment began as the apparatus of natural magic but became the tools of science.

**Occult Magic**

Occult magic often had its roots in pre-Christian pagan religion. Just as Christians had prayer rituals to invoke the help of the saints, pagans had used rituals to invoke the help of their gods and spirits. The chief aims of occult magical practices were usually love charms, charms to become pregnant, or charms to inflict death on an adult or unborn baby. While there are records of both men and women using charms and potions, women had a greater reputation for this knowledge.

Since the early Middle Ages, European rulers had tried to outlaw occult magic. Since they themselves believed in natural magic, they did not try to outlaw the simple use of folk remedies and charms. They did try to regulate charlatans who traveled about performing exorcisms or curses.

polytheistic (worshipping many spirits/deities)

an imposter, a fake

period of Church trials against non-believers

distortion

The Church listed sins of magic in its manuals for penance, and both theologians and preachers spoke strongly against magic…. Theologians tried to define the line between natural magic and occult magic. The Church also condemned magical use of herbs or even holy relics in ways that seemed superstitious rather than properly faithful.

During the Inquisition in Toulouse, the inquisitors asked about magic. Some people accused others of witchcraft. The accused confessed, often under torture, that they had used wax images to inflict pain and death, had carried out rituals to dedicate themselves to the devil, and had made charms and potions to harm others. The inquisitors recorded their testimony and permitted them to repent of these things as sins, but the civil authorities tried them as witches, and most were executed.

Necromancy was different from superstitious common magic in that it intentionally called on the devil and demons. The most common kind of necromancy was a perversion of the rites of exorcism so that instead of chasing away demons, the ritual invoked their power. While some of the rites invoked demons' names or used magical actions similar to medical magic, other rites explicitly worshiped demons by making images and praying to them. Some magic rights used circles or triangles, and some sacrificed animals or other substances.

Teacher’s Guide

Name of Text: **Concepts of Magic in Medieval Europe**

Question Composers: Temoca Dixon and Marcia Motter

Standards

Nevada State: H1. [6-8].16 Identify characteristics of a civilization

CCSS: R17.1, .2, .3, .5, .6, .8, .10; RH 6-8.1, .2, .5, .6, .10; WHST.6-8.2

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| Text Dependent Questions | Teacher Notes and Possible Textual Evidence for Student Answers |
| What do we learn about magic in the first paragraph? | Line 7: “Magi” were wise men from the east and used magic. Line 7” it developed from an ancient Iranian religion called Zoroastrianism . People who followed it were Zoroastrians. Lines 6 and 7: they could read the stars, and know charms and spellsLine 8: The Church and civil authorities outlawed and prosecuted the practice of magic but there were few trials. Line 9/10: common superstition and magic went on as part of daily life. Reason: provides historical background |
| Identify the two types of magic and explain the difference between them.  |  Lines 13-15: 1. Natural magic was just part of nature…, common, acceptable.2. Occult Magic: demonic magic called on spirits, not accepted by the ChurchReason: Orients Students to the two types of magic discussed in the text |
| What are the principles of natural magic? | Lines 13-14: Natural magic was just part of nature, while other beliefs were harmless superstitions. Lines 20-24: a medicinal herb could have more strength if it was picked at dawn or midnight; Its magic was increased if used in combination with other herbs or substances; The principles of natural magic were sympathy and antipathy. Reason: Students identify the characteristics of one form of magic. Reason: Students identify the characteristics of one form of magic.  |
| Using context clues, find a synonyms for the following words: sympathy and antipathy.  | Sympathy: support, assistance, cooperation.Antipathy: antagonism or oppositionReason: Students find/create meaning for unfamiliar words within the text.  |
| Using lines 35-62, list and describe the five types of natural magic. Make 3 connections between 2 or more types of natural magic.  | 1. Incantations: spoken over the preparation or use of medicine. Added power to medicine or salve.2. Amulets: Objects carried to give magical protection against certain problems. 3. Exorcisms: rituals driving out demons causing illness. 4. Astrology: science and power of the stars, natural magic, provided timing for certain actions5. Alchemy: invoked stars or spirits and used charms and amulets. They distilled, melted, classified, and observed. -Incantations and Amulets worked by adding power to a situation or object for healing or protection. -Alchemy and Astrology both invoked power from the stars and approached the subject from a scientific point of view-Alchemy and Amulets employed objects from the natural world-Incantations and Exorcisms were both rituals and were both mixed with references to Christian tradition-Incantations and Exorcisms were spoken over an object or person-Amulets and Alchemy used objects from the natural world-  |
| How did alchemy magic evolve into present day chemistry? | Lines 60-62: Alchemists distilled, melted, classified, and observed. Their laboratory equipment began as the apparatus of natural magic but became the tools of science. Reason: Students link historical practices to present day.  |
| Using what you learn about occult magic in lines 66-82, provide evidence for the author’s claim in lines 12 and 13. (“Real” magic in the Middle Ages came in two forms, although it was not always easy to tell them apart.”) | Natural Magic versus Occult Magic: 68-71: both used folk remedies and charms to induce healing/ occult magic charms also induced to cause harm73-74: Church did not outlaw folk remedies or charms- both permitted, difficult to regulate41,42,66, - Both used herbs and objects (i.e. amulets, rosemary, mistletoe and relics)79 “Tried to define” infers that it was difficult.  |

**Writing Prompt:**

The use of magic became common practice during the Middle Ages. Write a detailed informational paragraph that describe the conflict between

magic and the Church during this time period.

Use 2 pieces of evidence and reasoning from the text to support your answer. Cite the evidence correctly by using line numbers (e.g. Lines24-25) at the end of the sentence. Connect the evidence to the claim with reasoning that explains the evidence.

**Some possible answers to this question are:**

* Magic was outlawed, but not strictly enforced as common superstitions and magic was a part of daily life
* Occult magic was not accepted by the Church and most of society
* Natural magic was borderline between what the Church encouraged and what it condemned
* The Church condemned the magical use of herbs or holy relics if it seemed superstitious

**In their writing students should:**

* Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories
* Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, and quotations
* Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts
* Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone
* Provide a concluding statement that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented
* Quotations or paraphrases are cited correctly using line numbers from the text (Lines 8-9) at the end of the quote.