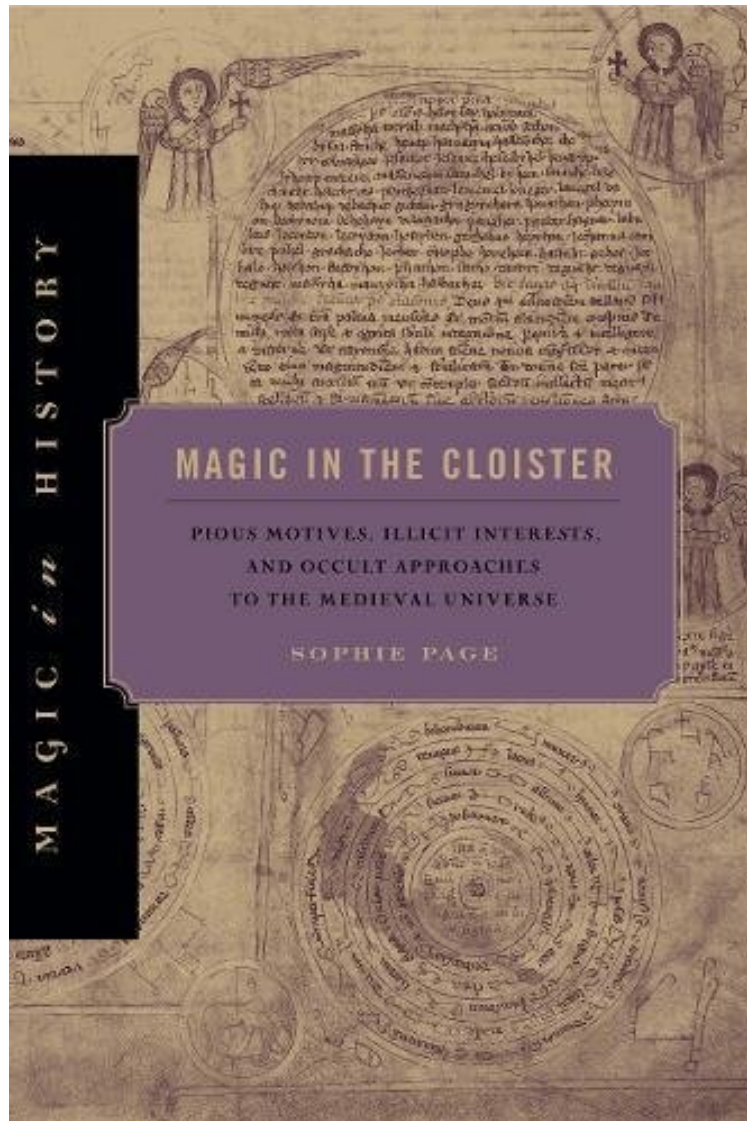


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Magic in the Cloister: Pious Motives, Illicit Interests, and Occult Approaches to the Medieval Universe (Magic in History)

Sophie Page

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Sophie Page : Magic in the Cloister: Pious Motives, Illicit Interests, and Occult Approaches to the Medieval Universe (Magic in History) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Magic in the Cloister: Pious Motives, Illicit Interests, and Occult Approaches to the Medieval Universe (Magic in History):

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Those wacky monksBy JoeyJust when you thought all monks did was lead boring lives in musty monasteries transcribing manuscripts, along comes this book expressing the belief that some of them studied occult practices. The monastery of St. Augustine in Canterbury had a selection of controversial books having to do with magical practices. By labeling the rituals, beliefs and practices in these books "natural magic", the monks were convinced that certain acts of magic were merely part of the natural world, and thus, not illicit. Of course many theologians would have disagreed, but the privacy of the Abby allowed the monks to study in relative isolation. These texts dealt with such ideas as drawing down spirits into talismans, receiving knowledge from angelic visions, and the creation of miraculous/composite creatures using sperm, blood and animal parts! Ewww. With other books in the Magic and History series, reading can be a bit dry in places since these are academic volumes (don't expect the author to translate books with Latin titles into English for us poor slobs who don't know Latin). But the book is rewarding if you stick with it.

During the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries a group of monks with occult interests donated what became a remarkable collection of more than thirty magic texts to the library of the Benedictine abbey of St. Augustine's in Canterbury. The monks collected texts that provided positive justifications for the practice of magic and books in which works of magic were copied side by side with works of more licit genres. In *Magic in the Cloister*, Sophie Page uses this collection to explore the gradual shift toward more positive attitudes to magical texts and ideas in medieval Europe. She examines what attracted monks to magic texts, works, and how they combined magic with their intellectual interests and monastic life. By showing how it was possible for religious insiders to integrate magical studies with their orthodox worldview, *Magic in the Cloister* contributes to a broader understanding of the role of magical texts and ideas and their acceptance in the late Middle Ages.

In addition to exploring manuscripts and their contents in detail, *Magic in the Cloister* is original in its focus on a known group of men who owned and read these books and perhaps tried out some of the rituals in them. This is unusual because many manuscripts of magical texts have been lost, or we do not know who owned them. The book therefore presents much new information about the readers of magical texts. It also approaches this issue from a new angle. Sophie Page shows that magical texts could appeal to people who were part of the religious establishment (monks in a wealthy monastery) and who had a monastic vocation. Catherine Rider, University of Exeter *Magic in the Cloister* offers a fascinating picture of learned monks reading and even putting into practice magical texts that were kept in the library of their monastery. St. Augustine's, Canterbury, offered not only a haven for prayer but also a laboratory for occult activity. Charles Burnett, The Warburg Institute, University of London *School of Advanced Study* There is something thrilling for the researcher about working in a library for the first time, familiarizing oneself with its contents, both their riches and their lacunae, figuring out its organizational principles, stumbling upon evidence of past users and important benefactors, and then by ever more extended use, discerning the patterns and trajectory of the library's development over time. . . . As Sophie Page demonstrates in *Magic in the Cloister*, the thrill is not limited to a summer spent in a scrupulously maintained Fachbibliothek at a twenty-first-century university institute, but can also be won through a more constructed visit to a library in the distant past. The library in question in *Magic in the Cloister* is the late-medieval library of the Abbey of St. Augustine in Canterbury, especially its collection of learned magic. . . . *Magic in the Cloister* is a stimulating work: its research is meticulous, its insights compelling, and its prose limpid. For this reviewer, the first visit to the library of St. Augustines was thrilling indeed. David J. Collins, S.J., *Catholic Historical Page* contextualizes licit and illicit forms of magic and the reasons for their classification in the medieval mind, focusing upon magical practice in the monastery. Each chapter is thoroughly researched enough to be of interest to the specialist in the field but also provides enough details regarding the texts and concepts in question to appeal to the non-specialist as well. . . . *Magic in the Cloister* is well worth the read, particularly for the academic audience who is coming to these texts for the first time. Michael Heyes, *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* Sophie Page's insightful and absorbing contribution to the study of Western learned magic brings together many strands that comprise approaches to the medieval universe to focus on the place of magic within it; and in so doing, she demonstrates how the monks at St. Augustines were able to incorporate the study of magic into their traditionally Christian view of the world. Elizabeth Wade-Sirabian, *Preternature* Pages work marks a significant contribution to an emerging area of the study of the history of magic, one that has the potential to bridge a gap between what we know of magical texts, and what we can infer about magical readers and practitioners. As such, it has earned a welcome place in my own magical library at home. Nancy Mandeville Caciola, *Renaissance Quarterly* Engages from the start. . . . Delivers beautifully clear guidance through a complex and technical body of material. Anne Lawrence-Mathers, *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* An important contribution to the recent wave of scholarship on the history of European magic. . . . Pages portrayal of monasteries as centres of magic puts us in a much better position to assess the complicated institutional context of magical heteropraxy. Egil Asprem, *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* All histories have limits, but the core of this study is full of rich detail and judicious analysis. Page deftly illuminates not just the contents of a major library of medieval magic but

also the intriguing intellectual and spiritual contexts in which it took shape. Michael D. Bailey, *American Historical*
About the Author Sophie Page is a lecturer at University College London.