



Issue 9

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## John of Morigny's *Liber visionum* and a Royal Prayer Book from Poland

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Written between 1304 and 1318 by a monk named John at the Benedictine monastery of Morigny, the *Liber visionum* is a compilation of prayers addressed to the Virgin, God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the nine orders of Angels, comprising a ritual system for the acquisition of knowledge that is laid out in a series of steps moving from sensory knowledge through the seven liberal arts, philosophy and theology. Loosely modeled on the well known and widely condemned ritual text, the *Ars notoria* of Solomon, the *Liber visionum* was, according to John, delivered by the virgin Mary and, unlike its Solomonic predecessor, was pleasing to God and free of any taint of demonic corruption. The purity of John's system was not equally obvious to all, however, and the text was burnt as heretical and sorcerous at the University of Paris in 1323.<sup>1</sup> Though information about the text of the *Liber visionum* has only gradually become available to scholars over the last fifteen years,<sup>2</sup> evidence continues to accumulate not only of its dispersal in a wide variety of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscript contexts, but also of the adaptation of extracts from John's prayers to different uses by other people in the same time period.<sup>3</sup>

One of the more interesting instances of such an adaptation has just been discovered by the present authors in an illuminated prayer book now preserved in the Bodleian Library (MS Rawlinson liturg. d. 6; Summary Catalogue #15857). Originating in fifteenth-century Poland, this is one of the eight prayer books known to have belonged to the Jagiellonian dynasty.<sup>4</sup> Eighty parchment folios supply the reader with a number of prayers of various provenance (mostly deriving from prayers in common use), addressed to Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> Many of the individual prayers have been altered by insertion of a formulaic petition, varied to suit context, concerning a divinatory operation by means of a crystal. Wladislas, the unworthy sinner and servant of God, prays for the angels to clarify and illuminate (sometimes to enter, open and amplify) the crystal in order that he may learn all the secrets of the world.

On the appearance of the crystal (which may have been an existing object since we do not get any instruction on how to prepare it) we only have conjectures. At one point it is described as a quadrangular object, and divine names, such as Agla, Sabaoth, Tetragrammaton, Emanuel, and Messias (which may have been engraved around its perimeter in the manner of the crystal described in the last issue of this newsletter) are mentioned as powerful catalyzers of the process. Manuscript illuminations reinforce both the royal and magical aspects of the text: one of them depicts a young crowned man with a sword (an important part of the magician's inventory) and with a white eagle on a coat of arms (the symbol of the Jagiellonian family) standing next to a table with a strange object on it which might be identified with the crystal.

The fate of the codex is as mysterious as the text and its miniatures. In 1630 we find it in Besançon in the possession of Jacobus Prive (see f. IIr). Twenty-four years later it is still in the same town, owned by doctor Guerinet who asks for the Jesuit Johannes Ferrandus' opinion on the manuscript (the latter's answer can be read on f. 78v-79v); and finally Richard Rawlinson purchased it between 1719 and 1726, when traveling on the continent. While it is not definitely known who may first have commissioned the compiling of this text, it is certain that this manuscript was prepared for and circulated in a courtly context. Originally the text was written or copied for one 'Wladislas', who can be identified most probably with the Jagiellon king of Poland and Hungary (who died in 1444, in the battle of Varna).<sup>6</sup> Other attributions, however, cannot be ruled out. In contrast to the script, which dates from the 1430's, the thirteen

miniatures seem to come from the 1490's;<sup>7</sup> thus, the text can also be linked with Wladislas II, king of Bohemia and Hungary (d. 1516). Certain passages of the text, however, seem to imply that the practitioner is not a king, only a *dux*, so our manuscript might be a copy of an earlier compilation serving the goals of Wladislas, a duke of Opole (d. 1401).

In the introduction to his edition of the text (published in 1928),<sup>8</sup> Ryszard Ganszyniec identified sources for roughly two thirds of its prayers. Most of these were standard liturgical texts, though he did identify one prayer as deriving from the Solomonic *Ars notoria*. The remaining prayers he could not find sources for, though he seems to have felt confident in declaring (more accurately than he could have known at the time) that none of the prayers was original.<sup>9</sup> More recently Urszula Borkowska noted that in this prayer book "Marian devotion is particularly developed ... and the angelological texts, rarely developed in prayer books, are extremely interesting."<sup>10</sup>

Neither Ganszyniec nor Borkowska had access to the source of most of the remaining prayers in this book,<sup>11</sup> John of Morigny's *Liber visionum*, which turns out to be the point of origin not only of the more unusual of the Marian prayers, but also of all the angelological ones. The compiler of the royal prayer book used John's prayers in a way that seems to indicate a knowledge of John's complete text (that is, the prayers were probably not taken from a partial copy or book in which some of John's prayers had been excerpted). Particularly noteworthy is the fact that one of John's autobiographical narrative passages, in which he comments on his conversion away from the *Ars*

*notoria*, has been adapted and made into a prayer in its own right by the compiler of Wladislas' book. The compiler inserts this prayer early on in his text, immediately after the prayer taken from the Solomonic *Ars notoria*, and it seems likely that the compiler wished to stress, in imitation of John himself, the importance of the operator's passage through the method of the *Ars notoria* to a mode of divination more securely in touch with the angelic presences the system was designed to call upon. The text thus preserves not only the individual extracts from John's prayers (which, though culled from widely divergent locations, appear in something like their original order), but also the underlying structure of the ritual system dictated by John's psychological and visionary experience of the *Ars notoria*.

Among other things, this manuscript provides evidence that John's work circulated in Central Europe,<sup>12</sup> and that it had a royal audience in addition to the lay and monastic audiences witnessed by information in other manuscripts. Besides the information it offers about the circulation and reception of the *Liber visionum*, this remarkable Polish text also seems likely to provide new insights into late medieval crystallomantic practices, which achieve a remarkable state of elaboration here. The conceptual and contextual links forged between crystallomancy, prayers from the *Ars notoria* and its avatars, and the concept of angelic communication, seem more thoroughly developed in this text than most other known crystallomantic experiments before Dr. Dee's well-publicized conversations with angels in the 1580s. For these reasons, Wladislas' prayer book seems a text worthy of being brought to the attention of scholars in this field.

## Appendix:

### Manuscripts Discovered to This Point Containing John of Morigny's Work

Since new manuscripts of John of Morigny have been turning up at the rate of one or two per year it is difficult to state with certainty the total number of extant manuscripts of the *Liber visionum*. To date, seven manuscripts are known to exist containing more or less full texts of the *Liber visionum* (that is, texts with the whole autobiographical prologue and some or all of the ancillary materials at the end). These include the versions found in the following manuscripts:

- Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, MS 680
- London, British Library, Additional 18027
- Torino, Biblioteca Nazionale, G. II. 25
- Wien, Schottenkloster, MS 140 (61)
- Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS 13859
- Salzburg, Studienbibliothek Salzburg, M I 24
- Seitenstetten, Seitenstetten Stiftsbibliothek, MS 273

Partial texts, containing the entire *Book of Mary* and the *Book of Thirty Prayers*, but not containing the autobiographical prologue or the full array of ancillary materials include:

- Hamilton, Canada, McMaster University Library, MS 107
- München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm 276

Texts in which some of John's prayers are found adapted to another purpose include:

- Oxford, Bodleian, MS Rawlinson liturg. d. 6 (Crystallomancy of Wladislas)

Mainz, Stadtbibliothek Mainz, MS I 138 (The *Septem dietas*, a selection of John's prayers adapted to enhancement of grammatical understanding)

München, Universitätsbibliothek, oct. Cod. MS 213 (Preserves some of the same prayers as the *Septem dietas*, though whether it is the same or a related text remains to be seen)

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> According to chronicle records for that year; see *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, ed. Jules Viard, vol. 9 (Paris: Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, 1937), 23-4.

<sup>2</sup> Identification of the text in München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm 276 with the chronicle account of the condemnation was first made by J. DuPèbe, "L'ars notoria' et la polémique sur la divination et la magie" in *Divination et controverse religieuse en France au XVIe siècle, Cahiers V.-L. Saulnier*, 4 (Paris: l'É.N.S. de Jeunes Filles, 1987), 128, note 22. Subsequent discoveries of different manuscripts of this text were made independently in the 1990s by Sylvie Barnay in France and Claire Fanger and Nicholas Watson in Canada. For analysis of the text and its Mariology based on Torino, Biblioteca Nazionale G. II. 25, see Sylvie Barnay, "La mariophonie au regard de Jean de Morigny: magie ou miracle de la vision mariale?" in *Société des Historiens Médiévistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur Public, Miracles, prodiges et merveilles au Moyen Age* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1995), 173-90, and "Désir de voir et interdits visionnaires ou la 'mariophonie' selon Jean de Morigny (XIV siècle)" in *Homo Religiosus* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 519-26. For analyses of John's ritual system, its relation to the *Ars notoria*, and to Jewish mysticism, based primarily on versions in München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 276 and Hamilton, Canada, McMaster University Library MS 107, see articles by Nicholas Watson, Claire Fanger, and Richard Kieckhefer in C. Fanger, ed., *Conjuring Spirits: Texts*

*and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1998), 163-265. For an edition of the autobiographical prologue to the *Liber visionum* based on the version in Graz, University Library MS 680, see Claire Fanger and Nicholas Watson, "The Prologue to John of Morigny's *Liber Visionum*: Text and Translation," *Esoterica* 3 (2000), <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu>. An edition of the complete text based on Graz, University Library MS 680 is currently in progress by Claire Fanger and Nicholas Watson.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to the instance described in the present article, there is an adaptation of excerpts from John's prayers for the enhancement of grammatical learning in the *Septem dietas* contained in Mainz, Stadtbibliothek. MS I 138.

<sup>4</sup> For a published edition of the Latin text and a detailed analysis (in Polish), see Ludwik Bernacki and Ryszard Ganszyniec (eds.), *Modlitewnik Władysława Warneńczyka w zbiorach Biblioteki Bodlejańskiej (Władysław Warneńczyk's Prayer Book Kept in the Bodleian Library)*, Krakow: Anczyc i Sjó»ka, 1928.

<sup>5</sup> For a description of the content of this and the other Jagiellonian prayer books, see Urszula Borkowska, *Królewskie Modlitewniki (Prayer Books from Krakow)*, Lublin, 1999, especially: 64-76.

<sup>6</sup> A noteworthy correspondence supporting this assumption is that a respected figure of the royal court of Wladislas "of Varna," Henricus Bohemus, was accused of keeping necromantic books and pursuing crystalomancy. He was jailed for his inclination to Hussite ideas in 1429, but in the 1440's he lived free in Krakow.

<sup>7</sup> Wladislas Podlacha, "Minjatury modlitewnika Warneńczyka" ("On the Miniatures of the Prayer Book"), in *Modlitewnik Władysława Warneńczyka*, 93-141.

<sup>8</sup> Ryszard Ganszyniec, "O Modlitewniku Władysława" ("On Wladislas' Prayer Book"), in *Modlitewnik Władysława Warneńczyka*, 25-93.

<sup>9</sup> We are grateful to Jolanta Szpilewska for allowing us to consult her unpublished

draft translation of Ganszyniec's introduction.

<sup>10</sup> Borkowska, p. 346.

<sup>11</sup> There still remain two or three prayers in the collection with unidentified sources; these may yet turn out to be original with the compiler.

<sup>12</sup> All manuscripts of the *Liber visionum* that have come to our attention up to this point are of North Italian, German, or Austrian provenance.

# Call for Papers

The Societas Magica has proposed to sponsor four sessions at the 38th annual International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 8-11, 2003.

Titles of sessions are as follows:

1. **The Magic of the Medieval Church: A Reconsideration of Keith Thomas**
2. **Magic, Politics and Economics**
3. **Magic and the Manipulation of Spirits: Angels, Demons, and their Kin**
4. **Magic, Dreams and Visions**

People doing research on material appropriate to these sessions and interested in presenting a paper at the 2003 Congress are invited to contact

Claire Fanger, cfanger@bmts.com (RR#1, Elmwood, ON NOG 1S0).

Deadline for abstracts is September 15, 2002. Papers presented should not exceed 20 minutes in length.



## The Societas Magica invites proposals for essays to run in future issues of the newsletter.

We are looking for essays of 1500 to 2000 words covering recent research in the history of magic and related topics. Essays may be bibliographic in orientation but need not be. Some of the topics we are considering for future issues include

**Arabic, Renaissance, and Jewish Magic.**

We are also looking for smaller pieces for our notes and queries column; news about dissertations in progress or completed, manuscript discoveries or other such items are all welcomed.

Proposals for essays, smaller pieces, or notes on all topics of potential interest to members of the Societas Magica will be welcome. Please contact Lea Olsan, ENOLSAN@ulm.edu.