

The Picatrix

accas figuras istas in lapidea sifre **Imago ad recedendi lubionco**
fida facie dhanu ascendere que lapidem ponat in loco
quo voluit nec lubionco vel lubionco ad qm locu magm po
terunt venire quousqz lapis scdit ibi **Ad fugandum miferis**
accas figuras istas in lamina firmi terra ascendente facie scorpions quat lamina
ponat in quocunqz loco volueris et misce
ab eodem loco recedunt et sunt iste **Ut homo curudo veniat ad te**
accas istas figuras in **Ad mactandum inter quosdam volucris**
pino lino quas in die et hora venis facias secunda facie dhanu
ascendente voce dhanu exscute hpaqz hora scribas nome dhanuqz volu
cis ad te venire dhanu ampat caput quous
pino lino igne et firmi veniat ad te
Ad mactandum inter quosdam volucris
Vni aut volucris dicitur duos homines ut magm se admira diligunt facias infra
scriptas figuras in dote tunc magm in die et hora scitur terra facie capricornu
ascendente Saturno dhanu exscute ponas qz
lamina in loco alius coram vel in loco quo
solent sint dhanu et dhanu coru amicaa i
lamina pinnu magm **Ad informandi locum quendam volucris**
accas istas figuras i lamina plumbea cu cerebro pra in die et hora scitur
ascendente fida facie capricornu scitur ante mea
et ponas lamina i loco que voluit dhanu et vobis ma
la scitur infra i in coru magm pinnu quousqz lam scdit ibi
mes aut sex opationes dhanu fuit dhanu pinnu quado pinnu scallacornu
fuit quide et scias qz figure qz fuit amicus scallacornu scitur nisi sex iste
hoc aliquis scipit fuit in pinnu locu quodam in isto libro in hac facie appete
pinnu qz dhanu **Lapicula dca m de lapidibus appias ptoz omz pte et**
de formationibus figurarum
Hanc vero pte pte facie mactandi ad qd quibz pinnu lz tam i metallis et lap
dibus tm dhanu i figuris pinnu et sine opationibus multu admittit **De pino**
De Saturno
atque lz ex metallis firmi et pinnu manv ex lapidibus qz dhanu et dhanu
tamiss et argobedre qz e mif et dhanu et feneo et almagmac et pte lz i lapid
ibus rubris et i amicaa sine aurea nro in sedma **De H**
topiceo ex metallis lz pinnu et de lapidibus ptoz allos et avicos et pinnu
ad nro in smaragdo et in dhanu et in cristallo et i omibz lapidibus allos et dhanu
et lincidus nro et in anro **De F**
atqz ex metallis lz et rubri et omibz mancas sulfuris et lz pte de vitro et i la
pidibus lz pinnu et lapides pinnu et pte lz i aliquet et i dhanu nro et
i omibz lapidibus rubris et mancas guttatis **De O**
ol ex metallis lz vitro qz et in argenteo et lz ex lapidibus allos et dhanu
tam et conis rubris et omibz lapidibus lincis et lincis et pte lz in sedma et i
azmbedre et rubri et i lincis et i margaritis asica et anro **De P**
omibz ex metallis lz crem rubri et pte i argenteo et meo et ex lapidibus lincis et co
rallu et de lincis et pte in almagmac et in almagmac **De F**
coru lz ex metallis argenteo vno et pte i sculo et vitro et ex lapidibus lz smaragdo
in dhanu pte et lz pinnu in amicaa **De I**
vno ex metallis lz argenteo et ex lapidibus margaritis argenteo et dhanu mactand
et pte lz in cristallo et i argenteo et in dhanu et in amicaa **De M**
et magne a pto lz sit fide inflata mactand i lapidibus anro et i lincis qz dhanu
et in lincis pinnu et hor i magne quod inflata pinnu pte et se iste

N H I A T Q Y C

Introduction: The Picatrix (P) is perhaps best known as a manual for occultist talismanic magic based on astrological principals. Based primarily on the lunar mansions, a theoretical understanding of the cosmos that divides the sky into twenty-eight sections based on the lunar cycle within a month, the Picatrix guides its readers through a series of methods for attaining an outcome of one's desire through aligning the practitioner with the lunar cycles, sympathetic resonances to material correspondences, and optimum times to perform magical acts based on precise planetary alignments, especially in consideration of the lunar mansions. Despite the fact that the major emphasis of the author's work involves detailed recipes for ritual, he does also express a philosophical foundation with which he justifies his actions. A philosophical foundation that rests largely on the theory of hypostases articulated in Plato's Timaeus. By presenting us with a philosophical basis for his actions, the Picatrix moves out of being merely a cookbook for the occult inclined and gives way to other considerations.

This paper will attempt to explore those philosophical foundations on which the Picatrix rests. What is the purpose for the individual who sees this text? What is gained from utilizing it? The author says he does it all for wisdom. What does this text say about wisdom? This paper will first articulate the issue of authorship and a brief summary of the magical practices found in the text. The various historical and philosophical influences on the text will also be articulated. Once these particulars are addressed, the philosophical foundation as presented by the author of the Picatrix will be explored, along with a brief exploration of Plato's Timaeus. Criticisms and Conclusions will follow.

Authorship

David Pingree claims that Islamic thinkers established the Picatrix as "the most thorough exposition of celestial magic in Arabic". He argues that the author of the Picatrix, though has previously been incorrectly

identified, is actually unknown. We can say with certainty that the text originates from Spain, but any authors who may be attested to be the writers of the Picatrix lived long after its publication. Though many Arabic books in a great variety of hermetic, alchemy, astrology, and various forms of magic, including celestial magic arose during the same time period of the twelfth century, the Picatrix is unique in that it compiles all these systems of thought into one cohesive whole. The author speaks in a voice that is distinctly different than the authors already known. The best that can be surmised is that the Picatrix was influenced by many other texts, and cites many sources (which will be discussed later). Its accurate authorship remains unknown.

The Magical Practices Found in the Picatrix

David Pingree defines magical practices as those that are dependant on the premise that some natural products, such as stones, plants, and animals, have a direct sympathy with and can utilize the powers of spiritual or demonic forces. These spirits permeate the elements and exist on other worldly realms that correspond to our material on earth. This understanding of magical practice and theory has a history of influence that can be comprehended within the Picatrix, otherwise known as Ghayat al-Hakim, or The Aim of the Sage.

By providing an intricate and highly structured philosophical basis for its actions, Pingree argues that the Picatrix operates under the pretension that all the magical instruction contained therein, regardless of how grotesque the performance or how vile the requirement addressed may be, are approved of and perhaps even involve the power of a supreme God, through the intermediaries of His angels and supportive spirits willing to reach a human practitioner and intercede on one's behalf.

The fundamental object of the Picatrix is to teach its reader how to ascertain the appropriate astrological time to contact celestial spirits

and then “draw down” their essence by inducing them into a talisman created with materials which are sympathetic to, or in other words resonate to, that particular spirit. In this way, the talisman becomes infused with that spirit's energy so that the ends of the practitioner match the intention with which the talisman was created. The talisman there on contains the power of the spirit infused into it. This talismanic approach involves rituals, where inducing the spirit is encouraged through the use of various materials including stones, minerals, plants, or animals that correspond to the spirit's celestial sphere of natural residence. An image, words, incenses, and animal sacrifices that also hold to this correspondence are utilized at an astrologically determined time.

Pingree highlights the importance of an astrologically sanctioned time. Pingree states that the author of P believed that it was only at those moments, as articulated by the author, that the corresponding planetary alignment would allow the opening for the spirit to be accessible. It would be only in that moment that an opening in the celestial spheres would take place, which would allow a spiritual being to travel through a specific ray and into the talisman. The practitioner, at this astrologically sanctioned time, took great care to ensure as clear a passage as possible from spiritual power to talisman. Rituals would be performed considering not only supportive celestial alignments, but the practitioner went through great lengths to ensure that their participation in the ritual aided contact and penetration. Practitioners did this through extensive rituals of personal purification, involving but not exclusive to ingesting certain foods, wearing of specific garments, burning incense which correspond to the spirit being called, making animal sacrifices, and verbal recitations of sacred words, said at times either in prayer form, or hymns recited in rhythmic repeated fashion.

This idea of sympathetic chains running from planetary spirits and into material objects is central to the philosophical foundation on which the celestial magic of the Picatrix rests. The text contains tables of extensive correspondences. "Lengthy lists of planetary stones, of the psychological faculty, activities, language, exterior and interior parts of the human body, colour, taste, places... metals, trees, herbs, plants, spices, animals, insects, and birds governed by each of the zodiac signs" were articulated. Such correspondence tables and subsequent images based on decan, a subdivision of every third of each zodiacal sign, as well as correspondences relating to each of the twenty-eight lunar mansions, is provided to its reader. Different segments of the sky, as determined whether by planet, zodiacal sign, decan, or lunar mansion, have different presiding spiritual bodies. The Picatrix maintains that the images representative of a spiritual body, when engraved on an amulet, further assert its magical effect. The amulet stays in sympathetic relation to the ritual, and keeps its connection to the planetary alignment and corresponding spiritual being, under which the amulet was created.

Historical Influences

Pingree is careful to trace the roots of each aspect of the Picatrix. He finds that the aspect of talismanic magic originates from Mesopotamia, where the tablets outlining instructions to create lunar talismans, are the oldest documents to be found on this matter . Dividing the sky into the subdivisions of decans goes as far back as ancient Egypt, where papyrus outlining correspondence tables of material substances to these sections of the sky are documented . The spiritual influences of the planets are suggested in the catarchic astrology of ancient Hellenistic times . Images relating lunar mansions to parallel iconography are found most notable in Indian Sanskrit texts .

Placing images of lunar mansions onto amulets and talismans is most specifically identified as Indian in origin. Pingree asserts it was Indian texts that identified the best activities to undertake and participate in during different days of the lunar cycle. A connection between lunar days and planning one's activities were also expounded on by the Iranians, Persians, Greeks, and Buddhists.

Pingree ultimately sums up the talismanic magic practices and instructions found in the *Picatrix* in two parts. First, entreaty and appeal to the planets and the angles representing or connected to those planets. Second, talismans infused by astral waves with heavenly, divine strength. These practices would have left the author open to persecution in the time the text was written for the perceived desire to reach demonic spirits. Any alterations and elaborate justifications, particularly on Neo-Platonic grounds, would have been well considered of the author.

Philosophical Influences

Pingree outlines the various influences on Arabic scientific thought that were taking place at the time the *Picatrix* was written. Though Neo-Platonism is an obvious influence for Pingree, particularly in Greek and Syrian literature, there was also an influence of Indian and Iranian thought that came together to form the mix of ideas that were taking place in Arabia at the time. This confluence of ideas dated in the region to pre-Islamic times. Pingree argues that although the *Picatrix* states that the magical practices described within are directly Neo-Platonic, which is based on the premise that "all magical powers (come) from the One who is by definition the Good", the magical actions in the text make it clear that the influences affecting the author date back to the ancient cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia, filtered through Hellenistic and Roman systems. The *Picatrix* itself only names three main sources for its knowledge; The Sabians, the Greeks, and the Indians. It uses these

cultures to justify its methods of creating talismans, worshipping the planets, and invoking magically projected characters through spoken phrases.

The Picatrix uses the Neo-Platonic framework of hypostases theory within which to operate when participating in magical practice. By staying within this framework the author assures that no demonic forces will be invoked and only the Good will be invoked. Though a detailed exposition of Plato's hypostases theory is outside the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that in Plato's cosmology all forms, seen and unseen, are connected through a chain that allows sympathy to occur. From "God, intellect, soul, nature, motion, heat, and the elements" there exists a parallel that allows the basis of magical practice.

The Author of P's Philosophical Basis

The author of the Picatrix begins his preface with an elaborate praise to God and the prophet of Islam, thus identifying himself as a Muslim philosopher. He goes on to say that he was encouraged by the interest of his time in the matters in which he speaks, mainly those of talismanic magic. He says that it was those of his generation that were unsure as to the approach they should take and lacked a manual of methodology in these matters who inspired him to write his treatise. He declares that philosophers before him intentionally presented their material in a manner that was hidden within symbols and articulated in a vague manner. Those other philosophers did this because they understood that the material being presented could be used for ill. The author of P is confident that this would not happen with his text because God sanctions what he has written and God protects the world. He does acknowledge that some knowledge must still be presented in a vague manner in order that it only is accessible to those who have done the initial work of being worthy of this knowledge. That is, that if someone has gone through the lengths to gain the preliminary knowledge of

understanding symbols and secret alphabets, then these secrets would rightly reveal themselves to them. In this way, the revelation of knowledge, particularly the knowledge he presents in this manual, is the kind that reveals itself slowly, through a practitioner doing the initial work of seeking knowledge. As more work is done to understand the symbols and codes, more is understood, and thus more is revealed.

Though the roots of the author's practice may have had polytheistic origins, as identified by Pingree earlier in this essay, the author makes it clear that his stand is completely monotheistic. His monotheistic basis is an important one for it connects to his understanding and justification of the Neo-Platonic model on which his practices are based. The author of P explains that it is the One who sits on top and has knowledge of all beings. He explains that there are ranks of reality, and that through effort, one can ascend through these ranks and elevate oneself in status, thereby bringing one's rank up higher on this hierarchy of reality. To know these ranks and to experience and accept their existence is "wisdom in reality".

The author of P believes that the ultimate goal and purpose of his task is the cultivation of wisdom. It is, according to him, "broad and noble, and seeking it is an obligation, as well as a virtue". To attain a degree of wisdom has benefits that include an enlightening of the intellect and a revealing of the spirit with an eternal, ceaseless, and magnificent luminosity that comes from the search for understanding the wisdom available by connecting to the beings of these various ranks. Significantly as well, paying less attention and giving less credence to the visible world of matter and material lead to the greatest benefits.

By sheer seeking does one begin to live in this elevated state where the wisdom of the One is more readily available. This allows a more personal relationship with the One and grants wisdom that is superior to those who do not do the work to cultivate this form of wisdom. It allows

the reality of the whole of existence, with its various realms and manifestations, to become more clear and transparent. By having this connection to the One, the practitioner, or rather cultivator and seeker of wisdom would have a foreknowledge of things to come. A better understanding of the relationship between cause and outcome, between source and consequence, thus being better able to see the variety of influences on the cause.

Wisdom seems to be the central theme and foundational basis for what motivates the author of P in his search and practice of the magical arts. He goes on to identify three subjective, personal, and particular features of wisdom. First, he explains that wisdom contains the inherent quality of growth and is undying, unending, and everlasting. Secondly, the cultivation of wisdom leads to an inner chastisement, and inner reprimand, that allows one to discipline, restrain and control one's self. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, wisdom is something that must be cultivated by the individual. It will not come uninvited and will not come within reach or move towards anyone who does not express interest or make some sort of appeal in the direction of its cultivation.

The author states that his whole intention for writing this manual to talismanic magic, as well as the philosophical basis, is to inspire and stimulate the reader towards the actions that may lead to the attainment of knowledge. This thirst, this desire, this wish to attain wisdom is what the author of P hopes to stimulate within the reader. It is the cultivation of knowledge that will lead to the attainment of wisdom that is the noblest goal of humanity.

The author of P's definition of magic corresponds to his understanding of wisdom. He gives a definition of magic that can be considered rather all-encompassing when he articulates magic as language, verbal skill, actions and activities that are utilized, either individually or together, in a manner that can catch the attention and interest, mesmerize, or charm

a person or spirit. One is able to be a magnet for and create a centre of attention through expressive demonstration, monitoring, paying attention, and demonstrating appreciation. He acknowledges that what he is cultivating and articulating is a "vague discipline", but there is a heavenly power that can lead one to a depth of understanding required to appreciate the truth of his explanation. One can be lead to the layers of meaning he alludes to through examination, study, and imagination. These requirements make it challenging and demanding to understand for almost all people.

The author of P cites several philosophers throughout his text, and states he has modelled his own work after such notables as Plato and Proclus (elsewhere he also cites Aristotle, Ptolemy, and several Arabic thinkers of his time). He believes that both Plato and Proclus deliberately wrote in a manner that was unclear, ambiguous, elusive, and nebulous in order to guard and shield their work, and the wisdom contained therein, from people who would not be cognizant nor conversant. This indistinctness and ambiguity is what sets Plato apart and indicates his strength as a philosopher. It is the abstraction of his material that necessitates and obliges one who has the desire to know to be motivated to do the required contemplation, consideration, rumination, and meticulous assessment in order to find the wisdom buried behind what appears to be clearly stated. Of all the arts of wisdom there are essentially two categories. The first type of wisdom is obvious, and the second type is concealed. It is the concealed art which is most worthy of attainment because it requires personal deliberation and the effort of analysis, both of the self and of the text, in order that the wisdom may be earned.

Plato's Timaeus

Considering that Plato's influence is so important to the author of P, enough so that he cites Plato on several occasions, and in particular,

justifies his pursuit of wisdom through aligning with the hypostases, perhaps it would be best to look to Plato's classic text *Timaeus* itself for what insight it offers on the philosophic justification of the pursuit of wisdom through talismanic magic.

Plato's *Timaeus* does spend many paragraphs on the description and deciphering of the various spheres, or realms, of existence which complement the view that the magic found in the *Picatrix* is indeed Neo-Platonic, in that it relies on this articulation of ranks of reality to physical correspondences. As said before, a full articulation of Plato's enunciation is outside the scope of this paper. The question on the attainment of wisdom as it relates to the philosophical foundation of the *Picatrix* is the focus of the discussion presented here.

Plato speaks of wisdom on several occasions in this text. Plato writes:

"Then as to wisdom, do you observe how our law from the very first made a study of the whole order of things, extending even to prophecy and medicine which gives health, out of these divine elements deriving what was needful for human life, and adding every sort of knowledge which was akin to them. All this order and arrangement the goddess first imparted to you when establishing your city; and she chose the spot of earth in which you were born, because she saw that the happy temperament of the seasons in that land would produce the wisest of men. Wherefore the goddess, who was a lover both of war and of wisdom, selected and first of all settled that spot which was the most likely to produce men likest herself. And there you dwelt, having such laws as these and still better ones, and excelled all mankind in all virtue, as became the children and disciples of the gods."

This passage from *Timaeus* first speaks to the organization of all of existence that takes the totality into consideration and acts as a connecting principal. This connectivity is divinely bestowed and unites

all matter on earth, all the elements, and all people within a connected and fated whole.

Plato goes on to say:

“But he who has been earnest in the love of knowledge and of true wisdom, and has exercised his intellect more than any other part of him, must have thoughts immortal and divine, if he attain truth, and in so far as human nature is capable of sharing in immortality, he must altogether be immortal; and since he is ever cherishing the divine power, and has the divinity within him in perfect order, he will be perfectly happy”.

This section of Timaeus speaks of the promise of wisdom to one who develops the skills of contemplation and reflection, through the implementation of one’s intellect. To a person who would have an enthusiasm for learning and a drive towards true wisdom, the promise of immortality waits as the potential to be fulfilled. Perhaps it is this experience of immortality that the author of P seeks when he supports the practice of his brand of astrological magic, and the deep understanding of the philosophical foundations to the practice of talismanic magic, that could lead to a life of contentment and satisfaction.

Criticisms

Brian Vickers, though citing the historical importance of the text, criticizes the Picatrix for not having anything at all to do with wisdom or the attainment of knowledge, or even for a desire to know the One better through the practice of working with beings of different ranks. Instead, he believes the Picatrix alters, misrepresents, and distorts the Neo-Platonic model in order to justify the fundamental purpose of the text, which is to serve as a manual that would allow one to seek and act

on one's own behalf for personal gain. Such "base" desires as "money, power, and women" are cited as some of the aims of a text, which is clothed in the robe of science. Magic is, and was even at the time of the writing of the Picatrix, fundamentally a practice towards the fulfilment of individual aims and personal power.

Willy Hartner expresses his first impression of the Picatrix as being a bizarre amalgamation of incongruent, unrelated, and contrasting ideas. He found the text unsophisticated and vulgar, and bordering on the offensive. His main criticism seems to be that the text seems to desire a unity where none exists. The Picatrix attempts to merge its Neo-Platonic foundation with ancient and archaic superstitious practices that are not necessarily relevant to the aim of the Neo-Platonist. What the text does accomplish is that it serves as an illustration of our human desire of cohesiveness and the desire to feel that efforts to affect our fate are pious and divinely noble and sanctioned.

Aside from the criticism that the main purpose of the text is to support the expression of personal will upon the world, another obvious question that can be raised involves the philosophical foundation of which the Picatrix rests, that is, as a manual that is written primarily to aid in the development of knowledge, in the ultimate aims to earn wisdom. Questions around the many other possible definitions of wisdom, and the methods and approaches to experiencing wisdom in one's life can arise. The full extent of what "wisdom" means, and how people went about articulating its attainment within the same cultural context as the time and place of the Picatrix's writing are perhaps outside the scope of this essay. It is, however, a valuable area of exploration and consideration in a more protracted exploration than the one found in this paper.

The Author of P himself suggests, "Knowledge can only be obtained by those who are well versed in all arts of wisdom". He goes on to list such

diverse activities as religious revelations, asceticism, Arabic-Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and logic as a part of these arts. He goes so far as to allude that each of these arts are a part of ascension on the ranks of being, in line with the Neo-Platonic spheres of hypostases that his whole philosophical foundation is based upon. It appears that the author of P recognizes that there are many ways to develop knowledge that could lead to wisdom, though he suggests that one needs to be a well-rounded person and develop all of these skills within oneself. The limited English translation utilized for this paper, and the outline of the complete Latin translation, suggests that, in his writing, the author of P focuses almost exclusively on the “celestial sciences”, or astrological occult practices.

Conclusions

I began this paper with a brief introduction to the Picatrix. It's question of authorship and a brief summary of the magical practices found within the text followed. The historical and philosophical influences have been explored. I began my thesis in the hopes of elucidating some key critical questions in this academic exploration: What is the purpose for the individual who sees this text? What is gained from utilizing it? The author says he does it all for wisdom. What does this text say about wisdom?

The text itself says that the author hopes to inspire within the reader a thirst for knowledge that would lead on to wisdom. Wisdom is the highest ideal. The definition of wisdom for the Author of P appears to arrive within a Neo-Platonic framework. What one gains from wisdom is a closer relationship to the One, a direct experience of the divine itself. By dedicating oneself to the arts of wisdom, one is able to move more fully in the various spheres of existence and ever closer to understanding the immortal nature within, thus that realization would lead one to immortality.

Though he states that occult practices are only one piece in this ultimate goal, it is the main focus of the Picatrix. The text relies on a conscious connection with Plato and other Neo-Platonists, and unconscious connections with the confluence of occult practices from various ancient cultures, to justify its belief that wisdom is something that is ultimately felt. Wisdom is something to be experienced. Most importantly perhaps, wisdom is to be earned through contemplation, reflection, and the effort to understand oneself through the intellect and through esoteric experience.

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