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SACRED AND SECULAR KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS IN THE »ARS NOTORIA« AND THE »FLOWERS OF HEAVENLY TEACHING« OF JOHN OF MORIGNY

Two Medieval Ritual Practices to Attain Knowledge

The Ars Notoria and the Liber florum celestis doctrine of John of Morigny are two exponents of a group of late medieval ritual texts concerned with access to prelapsarian knowledge with angelic assistance through infusion of the Holy Spirit. The Ars notoria was put together by an unknown compositor or compositors and makes its initial appearance in manuscripts of the late twelfth or early thirteenth centuries, emerging in several related versions in the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The Liber florum celestis doctrine, a work with similar structure and purpose, can be seen as an early fourteenth-century response by a user of the Ars notoria both to the condemnation of the Ars notoria by critical theologians and to certain disorderly aspects of the Ars notoria's own liturgical and theological self-presentation. Unlike the Ars notoria, the Liber florum has a confessed author: it is written by John, a Benedictine monk of the abbey of Morigny, who calls himself the first author of the book after the virgin Mary. John petitioned the Virgin for the delivery


2 For an edition of the autobiographical prologue to the Liber florum 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. For preliminary analyses of John's ritual system, its relation to the Ars notoria, and to Jewish mysticism, based primarily on versions in Munich, Bayerische Stadtsbibliothek, Clm 276, and Hamilton, Canada, McMaster University Library, MS 107, see the articles by Nicholas Watson, Claire Fanger, and Richard Kieckhefer in Claire Fanger, ed., Conjuring Spirits (n. 1), pp. 163-265. For an analysis of the text and its Mariology based on Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale, G. II.
of the *Liber florum*’s thirty central prayers for the explicit purpose of supplanting and destroying the *Ars notoria*, a ritual which John had come to regard as demonically corrupt. Like the *Ars notoria*, the *Liber florum* is extant in multiple versions, including two drafts by John himself, and some other adaptations and reworkings of John’s prayers by other people.3

Though John aimed at destroying the *Ars notoria*, he also stated that he wished to preserve what was good and holy in it and that he had plundered its divine words as the Hebrews had plundered the Egyptian treasure.4 The *Liber florum* is thus in part a conscious imitation of its predecessor, and the two texts have many similarities. On the level of detail, they share certain experiments and have many words and phrases in common in the Latin prayers. Both also involve the use of figures as focal points for meditation.

Perhaps the most conspicuous difference between the two is that the *Ars notoria* in all its versions is characterized by prayers using extended strings of syllables which, according to the text, are written in a combination of Hebrew, Greek, Chaldean, and Arabic; and which are said to contain names of angels. These prayers are the feature most commonly noted by critical theologians who, following a patristic tradition of onomastic suspicion, feel there is no reason to assume that they should be the names of unfallen angels despite the text’s claims to the contrary.5 John of Morigny makes a corrective gesture by restricting himself to more easily recognizable and exegetically sanctioned angelic terminology; he also includes more preparatory prayers in a more orderly structure and explains the usage of the prayers in a clearly laid out *Practica* or procedure. However, John’s angelic invocations retain the same primary goals as the *Ars notoria*: to obtain the seven liberal arts, philosophy, and theology.

This reliance on an idea of prelapsarian knowledge which is constituted primarily in a *curriculum* is perhaps the most important common feature of the two texts. Both open with general prayers for the faculties which enable absorption of lear-
ning: memory, perseverance, stability, eloquence. Both proceed via a series of prayers and figures through the seven liberal arts, first the trivium, then the quadrivium, leading to prayers and figures designed to take philosophy, and, in the culminating stage, theology. Julien Véronèse points out that the birth and development of the *Ars notoria* runs closely parallel in time to the institution and development of the medieval universities, and in John of Morigny's autobiographical account, it is clear that John's experiments with the *Ars notoria* and his own text run parallel to, and are partly directed by desire for, his personal quest for education culminating in the university degrees which he ultimately does attain (with the Virgin's help).

In their emphasis on the idea of curriculum, John of Morigny's prayers and those of the *Ars notoria* are clearly distinguishable from modes of access to God described in works of apophatic mysticism. However, in many other ways this identification of divine knowledge and curriculum is of a piece with ideas being expressed elsewhere in many orthodox religious situations in the period. Thus the works should not be seen to render themselves unmystical by failing to be apophatic.

In this paper, I would like to focus on what these texts have in common, both with each other as well as with the late medieval Christian religious and cultural context which they occupied: a conviction of the essentially sacramental character of learning. By approaching the texts through a broad concept of sacramental learning, I hope to illuminate them in a context which allows them to be understood as religious without too much distraction from the ways in which the works might be (and have been) perceived as magical and unorthodox. However, the fact that they were condemned as unorthodox (and magical) with some regularity in the later middle ages and through the early modern period must be briefly noted here because of its historiographic implications.

Like the *Ars notoria*, whose condemnations have already been noted, the *Liber florum* had its orthodoxy challenged and its theology censured at different phases of its existence. John's decision to embark on a second draft or New Compilation of his text (cutting down the ninety two iconic and geometric figures that originally went with the prayers to a set of seven images of the Virgin) seems to have resulted from an initial set of critiques of the work's orthodoxy by certain «barking dogs» at Orleans (in a set of incidents allusively reported in the third part of the New Compilation text). Some seven years after he had redrafted it to counter problems brought up by the Orleans dogs, John's book is recorded as having been condemned as heretical and sorcerous and burnt at Paris in 1323.7

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6 Ibid., Introduction générale, p. v.
7 The record of the burning in the University of Paris Cartulary entry for that year is very brief, and does not go into the reasons for the burning, nor does it state what parties were involved (see the entry for that year in Denifle et Chatelain: *Chartular. Unius. Paris.*, 2 vols., Paris 1891). A slightly longer (but also somewhat sensationalizing) account of the condemnation is included in the 1323 entry of the *Grandes Chroniques de France* (see the translation of this entry on the opening page in the article by Nicholas Watson in *Conjuring Spirits* [n. 1]). Though this account goes into more detail about the text and offers reasons for the burning (chiefly the fact that the book still appears too much like the *Ars notoria*), it does not mention the parties involved in the condemnation. All later condemnatory accounts of the text that we have found so far
On the other hand, the text continued to be disseminated and is still extant in a significant number of copies which include several variant redactions that are well distributed across Europe. Thus the Orleans and Paris condemnations by no means succeeded in suppressing the text or its transmission. The story told through manuscript evidence, through records of copyists and book owners (where such exist), suggests that those who read and used the book treated it with reverence and forgot, or simply did not care about, the original French condemnations. Here we have, as with the *Ars notoria* itself, two potential histories, which seem to run side by side in different streambeds: the more extensive and complicated history of the use, copying, and redacting of the text next to the generally simpler history of dismissive things said about it.

**Esoteric Knowledge and Normal History**

Perhaps predictably, it is the second kind of reception which has had the most subsequent influence. Indeed, until very recently, the actual textual traditions of the *Ars notoria* and *Liber Florum* have remained unexamined, and knowledge of them has almost completely been omitted from most normal written histories of the middle ages and early modern period. Even the landmark esoteric histories of the last fifty or sixty years have tended to give these practices short shrift. For example, the *Ars notoria* is mentioned only in passing in Frances Yates broad ranging *Art of Memory* and only in order to dismiss it. In this, of course, she echoes the early modern authors, both esoteric and humanist, who themselves dismissed it (esoteric authors preferring to distance themselves from ritual practices of this kind in order to buttress their quest for a religious magic with more evidently respectable authorities). Lynn Thorndike, whose textual tastes were more eclectic, had more to say about the *Ars notoria*; but his remains a preliminary and insular account of medieval curiosity. Because the *Ars notoria* tradition suffers simultaneously from being improper religion and improper intellectual magic, it flops out of both nets the historian might have extended to catch it in. It is easy to see that these early condemnations have had a direct bearing on the long-term reception of these practices. In every area in which they might have become visible, they have tended to remain obscure.

This situation has changed markedly over the last fifteen years, thanks to the diligent manuscript work of younger scholars such as Frank Klaassen, Jean Patrice Boudet, and especially Julien Véronèse, and it is now becoming possible for the first time to see that the early condemnations have had a direct bearing on the long-term reception of these practices. In every area in which they might have become visible, they have tended to remain obscure.

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8 Save perhaps in France where no extant copies have so far been discovered.
9 Frances A. Yates: *Art of Memory*, Chicago 1966; she dismisses it following her sources as »lazy magic« (297, discussing Erasmus); and »a short cut to memory« (388, discussing Giordano Bruno). For its description as a »bastard descendant of the classical art of memory«, see also her comments on the *Ars notoria* ibid., p. 57.
time to put the *Ars notoria* and its avatars into a more coherent social and cultural context. Yet it may still be wondered how such an interesting text escaped scholarly attention for so long. As Véronèse remarks, even Lynn Thorndike’s early citation of 18 extant manuscripts of the *Ars notoria* seems a clearly significant number, especially if the hypothesis is taken into account that texts of pseudo-Solomonic magic on the whole tend to be badly preserved.¹⁰ Véronèse’s current count of 53 extant copies of recognized variants of the *Ars notoria*,¹¹ and my own (smaller but still almost certainly incomplete) count of nineteen extant manuscripts of variants or parts of the *Liber florum* is still more striking.¹² If we add to this the fact that both texts exist in expensive and deluxe copies, it becomes more difficult to imagine how they could have escaped notice so thoroughly and for so long.

Since I will be discussing the status of knowledge in these texts, it seems important to bring up at the outset the problems connected to the status of our knowledge about the way these texts fit into the known histories. This is even more true than it would be in another situation because questions of how the texts relate to *normal* intellectual history cannot be separated from questions of how they relate to esotericism and esoteric history: do we think of these texts as *esoteric* by definition, because they are not part of *normal history*? Do the mechanisms which left them outside normal history play a role in what makes them esoteric? Or are they left out of normal history because they are, in some way still to be defined, *intrinsically* esoteric?

On the other side of the coin, what happens when we start to pull such texts back into normal history – to make them part of the understood, the given, cultural, intellectual, and religious history of the middle ages? (This is in fact very much the current project around these texts, and it will be my project here.) Will they cease to appear esoteric at the point where they become (as eventually they must) part of medieval religion, so understood? These questions remain unsettled; but the point is that until very lately, not enough was known about these texts to frame them as esoteric in any terms other than those of rejected knowledge: this particular knowledge had not yet been sufficiently uncovered, even for the history of esotericism, to know the texts as anything else.

In the opening pages of *Imagining Religion*, Jonathan Z. Smith comments on the tension between *religion imagined as an exotic category of human experience and expression, and religion imagined as an ordinary category of human expression and*
activity. 13 In his opinion, it is more productive to seek to know religious experience as ordinary, »for this implies, as well, that there is no privilege to the so-called exotic. For there is no primordium – it is all history. 14

All history. Indeed, I would hold that the perception of the Ars notoria as exotic (a curiosity; a condemned text, both improperly religious and improperly magical: thus, a text with no antecedents and no descendants) lies squarely behind the way it has seemed to resist history until now. In order to understand whether there is more to it – whether there is anything in it that can be regarded as intrinsically esoteric rather than simply esoteric by default (if indeed there is any difference between these things), the Ars notoria and its avatars must be considered against a background of other things like them, as affiliated with ordinary categories of medieval thought. In order to become history, that is, their filiations with known parts of history need to be made visible: they need to cease to be their own deep secret. This is a project as important for the history of religion as for the academic study of esotericism.

Emanations and Similitudes in Medieval Neo-Platonic Sources

It is no secret that the valorization of learning is a persistent feature of the cultural habitus of late medieval intellectuals, supported not only in the philosophy but also in the iconography of Chartres, where John of Morigny lived and went to school. John's own point of departure for his autobiographical narrative provides an illustration of how closely this iconography is tied to John's work at the outset. The first vision he had as a youth at Chartres, which he places at the beginning of the Liber visionum15 as a thema or theme for the book is described as follows:

When I, John, was about fourteen years old and lived in the city of Chartres in the close of the blessed Mary, very close to the church, about a stone's throw away, this vision was shown to me [...] On a certain night I was placed in a kind of ecstasy, whether in the body or out of the body I know not, God knows. And lo, I saw a certain horrible figure, and it seemed to me absolutely certain that it was the enemy of the human race. And that figure rose up against me, wishing and craving to suffocate me. When I saw it I fled aghast in great fear from its terrible face, and it pursued me hither and thither, and could not catch me, and yet pressed upon me as it followed, so that I left the house I was in, fleeing from the face of my persecutor. And when I went outside it did not cease to pursue me; and when it rose up hugely I stopped in my tracks and ran towards the church of the blessed Mary. I entered it through the right hand door of the main entrance on the west front, and when I was in the church, I immediately lifted my eyes – I was next to the door at some distance from it – towards

14 Ibid., p. xiii.
15 The Liber visionum is John's title for the visionary autobiography which opens the Liber florum; it has been translated by Claire Fanger and Nicholas Watson: »The Prologue to the Liber visionum« (n. 2), at a time when we incorrectly understood Liber visionum as the title for the whole work.
the image of the blessed virgin Mary. And lo, suddenly the devoted virgin Mary coun-
seled me sweetly with a sign of her arm that I should come to her. After seeing this I ran
to her quickly and fled as though to the true comfort and refuge of sinners, [...]. And I
did not see my persecutor the devil any more after that. 16

Placed at the opening of the prologue as a \textit{thema}, this vision serves to guide to
the reader through the more enigmatic and complicated acts of redemption
from the \textit{Ars notoria} and necromancy which occur later in the narrative. But
even at this early stage of the story, there is an iconic connection between Mary
and the liberal arts in John's specifica-
tion of the door by which he enters the
Cathedral in this dream: the »right hand
door of the main entrance on the west
front« (see figure 1). 17

The tympanum over this portal is
carved with images representing the in-
carnation (see figure 2). In the centre at
the top of the picture, the Virgin is sea-
ted with the child on her lap, flanked by
two angels. Running around the archi-

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16 »Ego enim Johannes, dum esset circa etate xiiiij annorum et morarer apud ciuitatem Camo-
censium in claustro beate Marie, satis prope ecclesiam, quasi per iactum unius lapidis, michi
[...] talis visio est ostensa. Nota quadem enim nocte eram quasi in corpore vel extra corpus
nescio Deus scit in extasi positus, et ecce, vidi quandam horribilem figuram; valde et pro certo
uidebatur michi quod erat inimicus humani generis. Et ecce, figura illa insurrexit contra me,
ulens et cupiens me sufocare. Qui cum vidisset tanto timore perterritus fugi a facie eius ter-
ribili, et persequabatur me huc et illuc, et comprehendere non valebat, et tamen me infestauit
persequendo, quod domum in qua eram a facie persecucionis exiui. Et dum exiui non cessauit
persequi me; et se surgendo maximo, areptus cursu cucurri versus ecclesiam beate Marie. Et
eam subintraui per portam dexteram a latere maioris postiam a parte occidentis, et dum fui in
ecclesia statim leuaui oculos meos – iuxta predictam portam positam a Lange – uersus ymaginem
beate virginis Marie. Et ecce, statim pia virgo Maria cum signo brachii ut ad ipsam uentirem
me dulciter advocavit. Quo viso cicius ad ipsam cucurri et fugi tamquam ad verum solamen et
refugium peccatorum[...]. Deinde amplius dyabolum persecutorem meum non vidi, - a \textit{Liber
florum} I.I. Text and translation from the online edition by Nicholas Watson and Claire Fanger:
«The Prologue to John of Morigny's Liber Visionum» (n. 2), p. 3.

17 Both images are from the archive of the Digital Research Library (DRL) at the University of
right) and jumping over to the left hand side continuing with dialectic, rhetoric, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music (the only one on the inner archivolt). The liberal arts and classical learning are thus visually and iconically very close to the substance of John’s «theme» vision even though they are not mentioned there. Beneath the figure of each art is carved the classical writer or thinker most closely associated with it: Priscian, Aristotle, Cicero, Euclid, Boethius, Ptolemy and Pythagorus, respectively.

This sequence of figures on the tympanum corresponds to the order of the liberal arts established by the late antique writer Martianus Capella. However, the thinkers exemplifying the arts have been identified according to the correspondences given in the *Heptateuchon* by the twelfth century writer Thierry of Chartres, a leading exponent of the neo-platonism of the school of Chartres. Thierry was also Chancellor of the Cathedral school during the time Chartres was being rebuilt after a disastrous fire had destroyed most of the city – the time period when the sculptural program now visible in the stonework of the cathedral was begun. According to art historian Adolf Katzenellenbogen, Thierry’s writings may also have been responsible for the arrangement of Geometry and Arithmetic at the top of the Archivolt, for in the *Heptateuchon*, Thierry had used Geometry and Arithmetic to define the creation of the Son and his equality with the Father. Hence, to Thierry and to others who knew his writings, these might well have seemed the most appropriate arts to crown a tympanum concerned with the incarnation.18 It is typical

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of the spacial precision of John of Morigny's visionary writings that he should provide us with such an irrefragable link between himself and the neo-Platonism of twelfth-century Chartres.

Indeed there are many features of neo-Platonic cosmology which would have appeared transparent in the structure of the *Ars notoria* ritual to its late medieval operators. In a most basic way, the idea of an intrinsic congruence and similitude between the human mind and divine archetype of the world is a recurrent feature of twelfth-century neo-Platonic thought. Thus, Thierry of Chartres notes that »the soul is proportioned to the nature of the universe«; and in a similar vein, Hugh of St Victor, another prominent twelfth-century writer in the same neo-Platonic tradition, says at the beginning of his *Didascalicon* that »similar things are comprehended by similars; [...] in a word, the rational soul could by no means comprehend all things unless it were also composed of all of them [...] the soul grasps the similitude in and of itself, out of a certain native capacity and proper power of its own«.

But this is a similitude which traverses the spiritual cosmos as well as the human mind. Hugh explains in an appendix to the *Didascalicon* that knowledge emanates from God in such a way that ideas subsist in themselves only after they are created in the minds of the angels:

What exists in actuality is an image of what exists in the mind of man, and what exists in the mind of man is an image of what exists in the divine Mind [...] For the angelic nature first existed in the divine Idea as a plan, and then afterwards it began to subsist in itself through creation. The other creatures however, first existed in the Idea of God; next they were made in the knowledge of the angels; and finally they began to subsist in themselves.

In other words, all created things necessarily proceed, from highest to lowest, through the subsistence of creatures who have the capacity for ideas. The divine transmission of the world's pattern through angelic minds of which Hugh speaks here is rendered visible in the presence of angels mingled with the liberal arts on the Chartres archivolt and rendered functional in the association of the angelic orders and liberal arts in the *Ars notoria* prayers.

The schematic of curricular learning found in the *Ars notoria* and *Liber florum* is a part of this cosmological picture both structurally, as an earthly refraction of the divine idea of human nature, and practically, as a corrective or restorative of damage caused by the fall. For Hugh, the active pursuit of philosophy beginning with the liberal arts is an activity instrumental in returning the soul to its lost Adamic state, for

the mind, stupefied by bodily sensations [...] has forgotten what it was, and, because it does not remember that it was anything different, believes that it is nothing except


21 Ibid., appendix III, p. 155. The editor notes (ibid., p. 152) that some manuscripts place this in front of the preface.
what is seen. But we are restored through instruction, so that we may recognize our
nature, and learn not to seek outside ourselves what we can find within. 22

For Hugh, studying philosophy is a remedial act and an act of purification; he
emphasizes that it must be undertaken in a disciplined manner, in a spirit of true
humility, for learning which is not acquired through virtue is without merit. 23

In the paragraph from Hugh just quoted, the idea of restoration through learn­
ing is prescriptive: we study in order to burnish the divine mirror. But the corolla­
ry idea that knowledge could be accessed or restored through essential or acquired
purity was also available as a mode of explanation for certain phenomena in this
period and later. The thirteenth century philosopher William of Auvergne attests
to the fact that the notion of recovered knowledge was available to explain why
virginal children sometimes seemed to have the ability to see hidden things, such as
hidden treasure, lost or stolen objects in reflective surfaces such as mirrors or scry­
ing stones. Describing the Platonic theory of recovered knowledge in terms similar
to Hugh’s, William writes:

that which is called »reading« among us is called »recovered knowledge« among the
Greeks: so, what is in our souls through teaching or discipline or experience is not
new knowledge; but old and innate in us, which, having been, as it were, buried or
covered up, is uncovered by the exercise or experience of learning; and there appears
in us that which we formerly saw not in ourselves. 24

However, in order to release this knowledge fully, what is required, as in the Ars
notoria and its avatars, is the purity of the purged or virgin soul. If the soul is suf­
ficiently pure, then in principle the luminosity of the instrument (the reflective sur­
fase) prohibits the viewer from turning or directing the force of his mind on exter­
or things and repels and turns it inward, so that he is forced to gaze within himself.
Therein, according to the opinion of Plato, if the mind is clean, and washed free
from the filth which comes from the corporeal part and clings to the human soul,
as in a mirror bright and clean he sees either all things clearly and plainly, or some
part thereof, or the hidden thing which is sought for. 25

While William himself doubts the truth of this theory, the fact that purity of
soul could be offered as an explanation (for how distant or hidden things might be
known in a scientific sense) as well as a prescription (for how things needed to be

22 Ibid., I.1, p. 47.
23 On discipline and humility see ibid., III.12 and 13.
24 »Unde & quod apud nos vocatur lectio, apud Graecos vocatur reperita cognitio. Non igitur
fiunt in animabus nostris novae scientiae per doctrinam aut disciplinam, aut experimentiam,
sed vetere, ac innatae nobis, quae quasi sepultae fuerunt, & obiectae, deteguntur per exercitia­
tiones doctrinales, aut experimentias; & appareat ei am nobis ipsius, quod pristus apud nos esse non
videbamus.« William of Auvergne: De Universo, II, III, c 18,1050, A f, in: Opera Omnia, idem,
25 »... luminositas instrumenti ipsum aspiciens factem mentis in exteriora intendere, seu diri­
gere, & repellit eam, atque reflectit in se propter quod cogit tur intueri in semetipsa: in qua, juxta
sententiam Platonis, si purgata sit, & tersa a sordibus que a parte corporis adventiun, & adha­
erent animae humanae, velut in speculo claro, & terro, videt vel omnia occulta, & manifesta,
vel partem eorum, vel occultum, quod quaeritur ... « Ibid., II, III c 18,1049 B c-d.
known in a spiritual sense) suggests how deeply the idea of an innate birthright of
divine knowledge was implanted in the ground of twelfth and thirteenth century
learning. Study of the liberal arts, philosophy, and theology, could be seen as reme­
dial for the soul - a mode of humility and discipline which might lead to illumina­
tion. Knowledge of the arts and sciences might be seen as an effect of the discipline
and humility of study, or equally, within the neo-Platonic scheme just visited, an
effect of contrition and penance which purified the soul so that, by God’s grace,
the hidden likeness to God became manifest. Either way, if the student worked
with proper humility and discipline and was aided by God’s grace, the acquisition
of knowledge could easily be seen to involve a transformation of the soul. To the
extent that this was true, learning had a place in this neo-Platonic Christian cosmo­
logy which was parallel to, and affiliated with, the idea of the sacraments.

Tracing the Pattern of the Archetype

Works like Thierry’s *Heptateuchon* and Hugh’s *Didascalicon* are witnesses to a rene­
wed concern with the shape of human learning and its connection with access to
sacred knowledge. But this concern is manifest not only in written treatises of this
kind, but, as R. W. Southern points out, in schematic maps or charts of knowledge
that proliferate in schools in the mid-twelfth century. Two different charts from
this time period give an idea of the kinds of crossover these charts could show, but
also the kinds of differences that could be represented in them.

In Figure 3, the tree of knowledge from the school of Hugh of St Victor shows
a map of knowledge very similar to that which can be extrapolated from Hugh’s
*Didascalicon*. At the top of the diagram the human excellences and evils are laid
out, with eloquence, philosophy, virtue, and the practical sciences, all represented
at the same layer of the diagram as ‘remedies’ for the evils or insufficiencies of
humankind. The breakdown of sciences and sub-sciences below this is very simi­
lar to Hugh’s, including the division of philosophy into theoretical and practical
branches. As in Hugh, the trivium is set off to the side of philosophy, and the me­
chanical arts are represented as remedies or aids for bodily weakness or infirmity.

The one salient difference between this chart of knowledge and the one that
can be extrapolated from Hugh’s work is that this chart includes five magic arts,
listed (in the lower right hand corner) as parallel to the mechanical arts. Hugh
himself does not allow the magical arts to be included among the arts and sciences
at all, setting them off in a special category as false knowledge in an appendix to
the *Didascalicon*. In the *Ars notoria* and *Liber florum*, there is a category called
the exceptive arts, which is comprised of the magic arts (including necromancy,
ydromancy, pyromancy, aeromancy, geomancy, cyromancy, and geonegia). Both

27 Figures 3 and 4 based on figures ibid., pp. 254.
rituals have instructions directing how both the mechanical and exceptive arts can be attained if the operator wishes to do so. Though I have no direct evidence for the derivation of the term *exceptive arts* (or *artes exceptive*, which, so far as I have been able to determine, occurs only in the *Ars notoria* and works directly influenced by it), it is my hypothesis that the term derives from Hugh of St Victor’s *exception* of the magic arts from the register of legitimate learning. In any case, as is clearly seen here, the inclusion of magic arts in a schematic diagram of knowledge is not unique to the *Ars notoria*, as it is included here even in a scheme clearly abstracted from Hugh’s own work.

The second tree of knowledge in figure 4 (school of Abelard) starts from the perspective of theology and is more inclusive than the first in the sense that the whole chart takes in more than the nature of man. At the top, we see man’s nature, with the angelic and divine natures along the same axis, and the curriculum (in the
lower left hand corner, the chart of natural knowledge) appears at the same level as, and parallel to, the supernatural knowledge which is constituted in the old and new covenant sacraments. Both natural and supernatural knowledge are shown as part of the map of man's restoration after the fall, and both types of knowledge have parallel paths leading to the virtues. In this broader diagram, the parallel role of natural knowledge and the sacraments in human restoration is more explicit.
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<tr>
<th>LIGHTS</th>
<th>CREATION DAYS</th>
<th>OBJECTS OF KNOWLEDGE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Superior light (saving truth)</td>
<td>Theology</td>
<td>Scripture (literal, allegorical, tropological, anagogical)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interior light (intellectual truth)</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>Moral Philosophy / Ethics (ethical, economic, political)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Day 2</td>
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<td>Day 3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Natural Philosophy / Physics (physics, mathematics, metaphysics)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Day 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower light (natural forms)</td>
<td>Sense Perception</td>
<td>Things sensible to the five senses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exterior light (artifacts)</td>
<td>Mechanical Arts</td>
<td>lanificium, arma-tura, navigation, agricultura, venatio, medicina</td>
</tr>
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Figure 5

Both of these knowledge maps offer a more or less static representation of knowledge, depicting the arts as part of a remedy for the fallen human condition. However, they do not arrange the liberal arts hierarchically as a series of steps from lower to higher knowledge or as a ladder leading, as it were, upward and outward from the human condition. There were, however, knowledge schemes which did so. Figure 5 outlines a scheme extrapolated from a thirteenth-century work, St Bonaventure’s *Retracing the Arts to Theology* (written about one hundred years after the Hugh’s *Didascalicon*). This chart moves from the *exterior light* of artifacts (associated with the mechanical arts) to the *superior light* of saving truth (associated with theology). Bonaventure also aligns different types of knowledge with the first six days of creation, proceeding from the first day at the top down to the sixth day.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRAYER #</th>
<th>ART OR DISCIPLINE</th>
<th>CELESTIAL BEINGS</th>
<th>MIRACLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 21       | GRAMMAR           | ANGELS          | Christ’s conception  
                                      Star leading magi  
                                      Miracle at Cana  
                                      Creation 1st day |
| 22       | DIALECTIC         | ARCHANGELS      | Christ’s undoing fall on cross  
                                      Redemption of souls from hell  
                                      Division of waters 2nd day |
| 23       | RHETORIC          | THRONES         | Dividing light/dark 1st day  
                                      Harrowing of Hell  
                                      Raising of dead  
                                      Appearance to Mary Magdalen  
                                      Emergence of land & water, &  
                                      Germination of seeds 3rd day |
| 24       | ARITHMETIC        | POWERS          | Division of bread before disciples at Emmaus after resurrection  
                                      Arrangement of sun, moon, & stars 4th day |
| 25       | MUSIC             | VIRTUES         | Arrival via locked doors before disciples at Emmaus  
                                      Creation fish & birds 5th day |
| 26       | GEOMETRY          | DOMINATIONS     | Saving Peter when he could not walk on water  
                                      Creation of animals & humans 6th day |
| 27       | ASTRONOMY / ASTROLOGY | PRINCIPALITIES | Eclipse at passion  
                                      God’s rest 7th day |
| 28       | PHILOSOPHY        | CHERUBIM        | Christ’s ascent to heaven (for all subdivisions of philosophy) |
| 29       | THEOLOGY / CONTEMPLATIVE PHILOSOPHY | SERAPHIM | Imagery from Apocalypse  
                                      Pentecost (for all senses of scripture) |

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Figure 6
at the bottom. Note that day seven, the day of rest, which is not represented here in the chart, aligns for Bonaventure with the illumination of glory, which is simultaneously the annihilation of natural knowledge. Bonaventure says that there are only six illuminations possible in this life. But if day seven were depicted here, it would most logically have to be at the top of the chart (above theology); hence Bonaventure’s alignment of day seven with the beatific vision suggests that the apparent ladder is also a circle: it ends where it begins, at rest in God.

Bonaventure’s scheme brings us a step closer to the schemata which can be abstracted from the prayer systems of the *Ars notoria* and of John of Morigny. Figure 6 shows the more elaborate scheme extrapolated from the last sequence of John of Morigny’s *Book of Thirty Prayers*. Though clearly different from Bonaventure’s, John’s scheme is similar in apparently taking the form of a ladder and in the fact that each of the arts is associated with a day of creation. But while Bonaventure obscures day seven, aligning it with the illumination only available to the elect after death, John aligns day seven with astrology and goes on to configure two other important moments in biblical history beyond this, the ascension of Christ and the apocalypse, aligned with philosophy and theology respectively. John’s scheme, unlike Bonaventure’s, but like that of the *Ars notoria*, and other theurgic texts of his period, including the *Sworn Book of Honorius* (a fourteenth-century angel magic text which is dependent on the *Ars notoria* and almost contemporary with the *Liber flororum*), suggests that the illumination at the end of days may have an analogy in a type of illumination attainable to the elect here on earth.

In fact, the master of the *Sworn Book* explicitly argues that the teaching that divine visions are prohibited to the living is false; or rather, that there may be a kind of death of the body in a vision which nevertheless allows for a resurrection in this life. I quote this passage from the *Sworn Book*:

> But someone will say, »Since the Lord says »A man will not see me and live,« it therefore follows that if someone sees God, it is necessary that he should die in the body; and so he will not rise again afterwards, all the way to judgement day, because no one dies twice in the body.« But this is false, because one may die in the body in a divine vision, but the spirit is seized up to heaven, and the body is refreshed by angelic food on earth. For there are readings [in Scripture] concerning many rapt in spirit, to whom many celestial secrets were revealed; and also in the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ many bodies were resurrected, as it says.

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The book goes on to emphasise the absolute necessity of mental and bodily purity, for anyone who attempts to pursue these visions of God in a polluted condition will be insane for the rest of his days. 31

In a different but related vein, John of Morigny argues that the fact that future things are seen in divine visions is proof of the immortality of the soul, presumably because they witness the possibility of a visionary escape from the embodied dimension of time itself:

Furthermore, the heresy of those who said and say that the soul is mortal is dismissed and condemned through diverse visions, since even in the absence of the body, future things are seen [in visions] as though they were present. But there is no way that this could be if the soul were not immortal. 32

Both of these arguments attempt to make clear to their readers the scriptural and theological grounds for the practices they advocate. While the master of the Sworn Book may differ from Bonaventure on the issue of illumination after death, he nevertheless writes out the same universe of knowledge, proving his counter-doctrine through the authority of scripture.

The Liberal Arts and Transformative Knowledge

Clearly, the way in which the liberal arts relate to divine salvation, to the sacraments, to an eternal divine idea of the humanum and the world, are intertwined issues for the neo-Platonic thinkers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries whose knowledge maps we have just looked at, just as they are for the masters of the Ars notoria and John of Morigny. It is possible to frame these relations in different ways within different knowledge paradigms, but all express a conviction that there are operative linkages between natural (curricular) knowledge, divine knowledge, and human salvation. In other words, mutatis mutandis in each case, curricular knowledge becomes connected to (and instrumental in furthering) »a process of spiritual transmutation by which the inner man is regenerated and re-connected with the divine«. 33 I quote the call for transformation from one of the Ars notoria prayers for theology:

31 »Set cavendum est operante, ne sit in peccato mortali, quia de cetero esset insanus«. Ibid., p. 115.

32 »Preterea per uarias visiones remouetur et condempnatur heresis illorum qui dixerunt et dicunt animam esse mortalem, cum tamen in absencia corporis futura uidentur tamquam presencia, quod nullo modo posset esse nisi esset et anima inmortalis. Preterea, quecumque de uisionibus in scriptis proposutimus declarare, eorum mysteria nostris temporibus sine dubio vidimus euenire.« Claire Fanger and Nicholas Watson: »The Prologue to John of Morigny’s Liber Visionum« (n. 2), 1, 2.

This prayer is to be said seven times before the second figure of theology: I adore you, King of kings and Lord of lords, king eternal and unchangeable, grasp today my cry and the lament of my spirit and my heart that I might respire in thee, my God and my savior, with my intellect changed, and with a heart of flesh having been given me in place of a heart of stone. Wash clean, Lord, my interior, with your new spirit in place of my evil carnal intellect; set lord, your good and holy intellect in me and take away from me what is evil, changing me into a new man; and reform me in that delight with which you reformed the world; and may your holy salvation give to me an increase of good understanding [...] so that today I may sing about the scriptures, which I desire and adopt, with understanding and knowledge; and let me understand, and stand in the immaculate road, and let come today from heaven something of the Holy Spirit’s grace and rest in me; Amen.34

Knowledge of theology, as represented through this prayer, involves a complete transformation of the inner man – it is the replacement of normal human understanding with a God-given understanding. Theology is that toward which all knowledge (beginning with sensory knowledge, moving through liberal arts and other forms of knowledge) is aimed, and from which it is elaborated. In the more philosophical representation of Bonaventure’s Retracing the arts to Theology, too, we find many articulations of the basic premise that all creation is ordained for sacred understanding, for the ultimate return of the soul:

Moreover, just as all those creations had their origin in one light, so too are all these branches of knowledge ordained for the knowledge of Sacred Scripture; and by means of it they are ordained for eternal illumination. Therefore, all our knowledge should end in the knowledge of Sacred Scripture, and especially is this true of the anagogical knowledge through which the illumination is reflected back to God whence it came. And there the cycle ends; the number six is complete and consequently there is rest.35

There is nothing in this that would seem unfamiliar to the operator of the Ars notoria or its avatars. The theology of this cluster of texts, with their dynamic divinity upheld by neo-Platonic cosmology, reveals an assumed system of correspondences between earth and heaven, between the Bible and natural knowledge, and between the liberal arts and the divine idea of the world.

34 »Ista oratio proferatur septies ante secundam figuram theologie: Adoro te, rex regum et Dominius dominantum, rex eternus immutable, intellectum meum et spiritus mei et cordis mei gemirem, ut commutato intellectu meo et dato mihi corde carne pro lapideo respirem in te. Deum meum et salvatorem meum, laua, Domine, interiora mea spiritu tuo nouo pro intellectu carnis mee malo, pone, Domine, intellectum sanctum tuum in me, et auster a me quod malum est, commutatis me in hominem nouum et delectione qua reformasti mundum reformes me, et salus tua sancta michi bone intelligentie tribuat incrementum, [...] ut de scripturis quas desidero et adopror hodie psallam cum intellectu et scientiam et intelligam, et stem in uia immaculata, et ueniit hodie de celo gratie Spiritus Sancti et requiescat in me, amen.« J. Veronese: L’Ars notoria au Moyen Âge (n. 1), p. 963; English translation mine.

35 St Bonaventure: St Bonaventure’s De reductione (n. 28), § 7, p. 29.
Conclusions: History and Exegesis

Clearly, the understanding of the liberal arts visible in these texts has its background in the same cosmology, the same textual community, as the neo-Platonic writers of the twelfth century, whose spiritual cosmology is carried forward in different ways by William of Auvergne and St Bonaventure in the thirteenth century. It is based in a neo-Platonic, emanationist cosmos, built to enable the return of the souls which are hindered from divine knowledge by coarse matter and personal sin. This is a cosmology and anthropology which indeed exists in a constant stream through Christian thought from a much earlier time, though its specific adumbration in relation to the liberal arts, as we see it here, does seem to experience a distinct rise in popularity from the twelfth century. What is key here is that the *Ars notoria* and its avatars need not depend in any way on their status as rejected knowledge to appear to us as esoteric; they fall easily into the neo-Platonic stream of thinking which was going on all around them and which flows visibly into the history of early modern esotericism as well.

But the *Ars notoria* and the *Liber florum* do exhibit a key generic difference from the philosophical writings reviewed above: at their basis, they are liturgies, not philosophies. They depict their own points of origin most importantly as mythic deliveries of their respective salvific texts from God or the Virgin to the human race through human intermediaries (respectively Solomon/Apollonius and John of Mo-rigny). Although John surrounds his liturgical text with a considerable amount of discursive writing in which he offers many philosophical and exegetical comments on his own work, the fact remains that its first aspect is liturgical and visionary. It is therefore perhaps not as immediately or easily situated in relation to the obvious of intellectual history as a philosophical text would be.

I took as my starting point an idea of *ordinariness* in religion provided by Jonathan Z. Smith. In pursuit of this idea, he proposes that *a prime object of study for the historian of religion ought to be theological tradition, taking the term in its widest sense, in particular, those elements of the theological endeavor that are concerned with the canon and its exegesis*. I have tried to provide here a broad and general relation of these liturgies to a more central and less exotic (if still esoteric) Christian neo-Platonic doctrine, which is suggested by the prayers of both texts as well as their ancillary materials. I hope that this brief analysis may further the work of making them more visible and mentionable in broader esoteric and exoteric histories.

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