

**CHAPTERS ON MAGIC IN  
SPANISH LITERATURE;  
EXTRAIT DE LA REVUE  
HISPANIQUE, TOME XXXVIII**

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**SAMUEL M. WAXMAN**

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CHAPTERS ON MAGIC  
IN SPANISH LITERATURE

BY

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# CHAPTERS ON MAGIC IN SPANISH LITERATURE

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## CHAPTER I.

### SCHOOLS OF MAGIC AT TOLEDO AND SALAMANCA.

#### I. THE RODERICK LEGEND AND THE CAVE AT TOLEDO.

The study of magic during the Middle Ages was regarded as a legitimate intellectual pursuit. It was even sometimes classed as one of the seven liberal arts. Petrus Alphonsus in his *Disciplina Clericalis*<sup>1</sup>, after naming six of the arts says. « De septima diversae sunt plurimorum sententiae, quatenam sit, Philosophi qui prophetas non sectantur ajunt nigromantiam esse septimam. » In the *Pseudo-Turpin*, the seventh art is astrologia which has a daughter in nigromantia. « In aula regis depictus non fuit, quoniam libera ars minime habetur. Sciri enim libere potest, sed operari nisi daemonorum familiaritate nullatenus potest<sup>2</sup>. This subtle distinction between the study and the practise of magic seems to have been universal in the Middle Ages and it was probably responsible for the two classifications, white and black magic.

There were schools for the study of magic, where the great

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1. VI, 7.

2. Chap. XXXI. *De septem artibus quas Karolus depingi fecit in palatio suo.* Cf. ed. F. Castets, Montpellier, 1880.



magicians were reputed to have learned their art, at Naples and Padua in Italy, at Orléans in France, but the most renowned of all were in Spain at Toledo, Seville, Cordova, and Salamanca. It is easy to understand why Spain should have been looked upon as a centre for the study of the black arts during the Middle Ages. There the Arabs and Jews kept the torch of learning aflame through the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, and since such sciences as mathematics, astrology, astronomy, and alchemy were closely associated with magic both black and white, Spain very naturally acquired this reputation. Toledo, Seville, and Cordova were the great seats of learning of Arabic Spain where magic was alleged to have been taught. Consequently when Salamanca became a famous seat of learning of Christian Spain, it was natural that this city too should be associated with the study of magic.

That Toledo was the most universally known of the three Arabic Spanish cities is shown by the fact that *ars* or *scientia toletana* were frequently used as terms for magic. The association of Toledo with magic dates from the twelfth century, when after the reconquest of the city, Christian, Moor, and Jew, under an enlightened rule, worked together there for the advancement of learning. At this period there flourished at Toledo a famous school of translators headed by Archbishop Raimundo to which flocked scholars from all parts of Europe<sup>1</sup>. Toledo became an academic centre and the schools of Cordova and Lucena were moved there. The books translated were mainly those of Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew writers. They dealt with metaphysics, astronomy, and mathematics.

The Jews were at this time deeply engaged with their cabalistic works, and their mystic signs and figures were popularly

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1. Cf. V. Rose: *Ptolomaeus und die Schule von Toledo*, in *Hermes, Zeitschrift für Classische Philologie*, vol. VIII, 1874, p. 327.

regarded as belonging to the paraphernalia of magic. The Arabs had brought along with them from the East their traditions which had a strong magical flavor. Most of the magicians of the early Middle Ages were either Moslems or Jews; the Christian magician came later. Moreover the Arabs and Jews in Spain studied and wrote works on judiciary astrology, on the power of talismans and amulets, and on the interpretation of dreams. Menéndez y Pelayo speaks of a catalog which gives a list of 7700 books written by Moors and Jews on this last subject alone<sup>1</sup>. This number must have seemed prodigious to the mediaeval mind, but when we consider that the famous library of Al Hakem at Cordova is said to have contained 600,000 works, it is not unbelievable. Even assuming that these figures represent the padded lists of Arabic chroniclers, nevertheless the widespread learning manifested by Moors and Jews in Spain must have sent travelers away with wondrous tales which were soon exaggerated and embellished.

Archbishop Raimundo's principal translators were Juan Gundisalvo, and the Jew Juan Hispalense. The latter is credited with having translated many books on magical subjects, and was described as being « insigne en arte mágica y en ciencia astrológica »<sup>2</sup>. Among the books on magic written by the Arabs in Toledo at this period is a work entitled *Picatrix* ascribed to a certain Norbar and translated into Latin by command by Alfonso el Sabio<sup>3</sup>. The work is divided into four books. I. *De Caelo*, II. *De Figuris Caeli*, III. *De Proprietatibus Planetarum*, IV. *De Proprietatibus Spiritum*. This treatise gives an excellent insight into the close relations that existed between magic, astrology, meta-

1. *Historia de los Heterodoxos Españoles*, Madrid, 1880, vol. I, p. 574.

2. Menéndez y Pelayo: *Op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 576.

3. There are two extant versions of this work in the Bib. Nazionale at Florence, XX, 20 and 21. Cf. J. W. Brown: *Life and Legend of Michael Scot*, Edinburgh, 1897, chap. IX. p. 183.

physics, and alchemy. Mr. J. W. Brown tells us that the text deals mainly with explanations of reactions and their transformations or magical changes in three different regions of being<sup>1</sup>; (1) reactions among elemental spirits, (2) reactions of one kind of matter on another, as in alchemy. The second book is elaborated at great length. The influence of matter upon heavenly spirits is admitted, and Aristotle is often quoted. We have in this work a dissertation on what was known as white magic, but since it was written by an infidel and in Arabic characters it would of course become black magic in the popular eye.

The name Picatrix is especially interesting because it appears in Rabelais. Panurge tells Frère Jean about a « reverend père en diable, Picatrix, recteur de la faculté diabolique » at Toledo<sup>2</sup>. Since the name Picatrix is used by Rabelais to designate the head of a school of magic at Toledo, the book must have been known or its title at least connected with black magic at Toledo in his time.

Whenever a European scholar, desirous of adding to his stock of learning, went to Spain, he was immediately classed as a magician and dabbler in the black arts. Two famous examples are Gerbert, who subsequently became Pope Sylvester II., and Michael Scot. Gerbert suffered in after ages because of his great mathematical knowledge. He was far more advanced than his brother priests, and his sudden rise to power coupled with his profound learning earned for him the title of magician. The fact that he had been to Spain only served to reinforce this belief. There is no doubt that he visited Spain, but he made a very short stay there and probably did not get beyond Catalonia<sup>3</sup>.

For the purposes of this study only the legendary matter concerning his sojourn in Spain interests us. William of Malms-

1. *Pantagruel*, I, III, 23.

2. Cf. A. Olleris: *Œuvres de Gerbert*, Paris, 1867; A. Graf: *Miti, Leggende, e Superstizioni del Medio Evo*, vol. II, chapter on Gerbert. Cf. also Menéndez y Pelayo: *Op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 575.