

the Picatrix

Liber Astratus Edition



The Occult Classic of Astrological
Magic Complete in One Volume

Translated and Annotated by
John Michael Greer and
Christopher Warnock

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Picatrix Liber Astratus Edition

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Blessed be thou who is no crook, and cursed be they that steals this book!

To Kathleen & Sara

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Translators' Introduction

In an age when such terms as “classic” are the everyday fare of advertising copywriters, it is difficult to know how to introduce a genuine classic of occult literature, but the book you hold in your hands is impossible to describe in any other way. Originally written sometime in the ninth century by an anonymous Arab wizard in North Africa or Spain, and credited in the fashion of the time to the notable Sufi and scholar al-Majriti, it was originally titled *Ghayat al-Hakim*, “The Goal of the Sage.”

Like so many works of Arabic occultism, it eventually found its way to Europe. It was translated into Spanish and Latin at the court of Alfonso the Wise, King of Castile, in the year 1256, and received the new title of *Picatrix*. Scholars to this day are uncertain what the name means. The explanation that seems most plausible is that it is the Latin version of an Arabic transliteration—perhaps Buqratis—of a Greek original; it is tempting, though unprovable, to suggest that the name may have been Harpocrates, the Hellenistic Egyptian god of silence and mystery. The Latin text makes the mystery more intriguing by claiming that *Picatrix* was the name of the book’s author.

The influence of *Picatrix* on the magical traditions of the western world was immense. Most of the significant scholarly occultists of the late Middle Ages appear to have drawn on it, or on material borrowed from it by other authors. Marsilio Ficino, whose translation of the Corpus Hermeticum launched the Renaissance occult revival, borrowed heavily from it for his pathbreaking *Three Books on Life*; Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa’s *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* was even more extensively influenced by *Picatrix*, and some of the leading figures in the English occult renaissance of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—Simon Forman, Elias Ashmole and William Lilly—used it as a primary source for their own magical work. With the end of the Renaissance and the rise of the scientific materialism that dominated seventeenth-century culture, however, *Picatrix* dropped from sight, and the revival of magic in the western world that began in the middle of the 19th century passed it by. Even today it remains the least known of the major works of western occultism.

the Picatrix



Prologue

In the praise and glory of the highest and omnipotent God, who reveals the secrets of sciences to those predestined for them, and also for the illumination of those learned in Latin who lack books written by the old philosophers, Alfonso, by the grace of God the most illustrious king of Spain and all of Andalusia, commanded that this book, the name of which is Picatrix, be translated from Arabic into Spanish with all zeal and diligence. This labor was brought to completion in the year of Our Lord 1256, of Alexander 1568, of Caesar 1295, and of the Arabs 655. For the wise, noble and honored philosopher Picatrix compiled this book from two hundred books and many philosophies, and named it with his own name.

In the name of the Lord, Amen.² Here begins the book that the most wise philosopher Picatrix composed about the art of magic³ out of many other books. As the wise have said, the first thing that ought to be done in everything in this world is to give thanks to God. I say this because He ought to be praised by those to whom, by His light, secret things are revealed and hidden things made plain, and by His power all miraculous things are accomplished, and by Him all prayers and all sciences are made known, and by His precepts days are distinguished from nights, and by His virtue all things are created from nothing and proceed to their perfection, and by His power every created thing is renewed, and is governed according to the nature that pertains to it.

For He is almighty, and by Him all things are renewed through generation, and He is not contained by any other thing, nor is He separated from anything, for He has no limit, nor is anything outside Him; for He is His own place. All the tongues of this world together cannot relate His works nor declare His powers; for His wonders are without end, and nothing is strange to Him. Therefore is He to be praised, and we should obey Him and His prophets and saints, who by His precepts became illustrious on earth and revealed to humanity the way whereby the knowledge and wisdom of God might be obtained. Wherefore we ask that we might receive His grace and finally be brought to His eternal glory. Amen.

O you who wish to gain the knowledge of the philosophers and to understand and ponder their secrets, know that you must first diligently search their books, in which the great wonders of their art can be found, and seek to discover the wonderful science of magic. First of all, however, you

2 This initial section, the invocation, is traditional in Arabic literature, and includes a brief summary of the central themes of the book.

3 Magic: *nigromancia* in the Latin text, literally “black divination.”

must understand that this science has been hidden by the philosophers, and they have not wished to disclose it to humanity; nay, they have rather hidden it with all their might, and whatever they have said about it was phrased in secret words, and indeed in signs and similitudes, as though they spoke of other sciences. And they did this on account of their honesty and goodness, because if this science were revealed to all humanity, the universe would be thrown into confusion. And it was for this reason that they spoke of it figuratively, that no one would be able to obtain it unless this science was first revealed to them.

In the midst of all these concealments, therefore, they left ways and rules by which sages could attain it, and become proficient in all that they discussed secretly. For this reason I have compiled this book, intending in it to reveal the highways and byways of this science, and give voice to everything the wise have said about this science, and reveal all that they have hidden in their books in words by means of winding paths and deceptive words.

Therefore I pray to the most high Creator that this book of mine might come only into the hands of sages, who are able to follow what I am about to say herein, and maintain it in goodness, and that whatever will be done by its means be performed for good and in the service of God.

This book, moreover, is divided into four parts, and each of these divided further into chapters as needed. The first book treats of the nature of the heavens and the effects caused by the images in them. The second book speaks in general of the figures of heaven and the motion of the eighth sphere⁴ and their effects in this world. The third book teaches the properties of the planets and signs, and their figures and forms displayed in their proper colors, and how to converse with the spirits of the planets and many other magical workings. The fourth book, finally, treats of the properties of spirits, and of those observances necessary in this art, and how it may be furthered by images and incenses and other things.

⁴ The sphere of fixed stars, eighth in order counting up from the earth.



Book One

Book One

Here follow the chapters of the first book:

Chapter One: How you may know your place⁵ in the universe.

Chapter Two: What magic is and what its properties are.

Chapter Three: What the heavens are and of their substance.

Chapter Four: The general theory and composition of the heavens for making magical images.

Chapter Five: Of examples of the theory of images, and of those things needful for making magical images.

Chapter Six: In what degree everything exists in the universe, and how it is known that man is a lesser world and corresponds to the greater world.

Chapter Seven: In what degree everything in the universe exists, and many other profound things, hidden by the wise, that we intend to reveal in this book of ours.

⁵ *Gradus*, “degree” or “rank,” in Latin. The concept of the Great Chain of Being, in which every created thing has its place, underlies the worldview of *Picatrix*.

Chapter One

How you may know your degree in the universe



ou should know, my dearest brother, that the best and most noble gift that God has given to humanity in this world is knowledge.

By knowledge we become acquainted with ancient things, and the causes of everything in the world, and what more immediate causes are the causes of other things, and how one thing corresponds to another. By this we can know everything that is and why it is, and why one thing is raised above another in due order, and in what place exists the root and beginning of all the things of this world: that thing by which all things are dissolved, and through which everything new and old is made known.

For this is truly the first, and it lacks nothing, nor does it need anything else with it except itself; it is the cause of all other things, and does not receive its qualities from another. It is not a material body, nor is it compounded of material bodies, nor is it mixed with anything other than itself, but rather is all things in itself. Therefore it may not be called anything except the One.

Properly speaking, it is the sole truth and unique unity, and from it, anything united receives its unity. It is also the primal truth, and does not receive its truth from another; rather, everything receives truth from it. Everything apart from it is imperfect, while it alone is perfect. Nor is there perfect truth or unity apart from it, but it alone can be rightly called perfect unity and truth. All things are under it, and receive from it truth and unity, generation and corruption, as it is the cause of these things.

Because of this it may be known what part of anything receives its properties from it, and how this occurs, and why. For the One alone comprehends the order and relation of the generations and corruptions of all created things, and which of them are first, which are of a middle station, and which are last.⁶ The last are the cause of their own corruption, and are not the cause of generation in any other thing; the middle have the cause of corruption in them, and are the cause of corruption in all things that exist beneath them; the first is the cause of the generation and corruption of all other things that exist beneath them, and nothing is higher or more perfect than it, so as to be the cause of its generations and corruptions.

Nor is anything other than the One capable of perfect knowledge of the order of created things, and how and why the last is raised up by similarity, step by step, until it corresponds to the first, and descends again from the first in due order until it corresponds with the last. For the first alone is

⁶ These are the three worlds of medieval and Renaissance magic, the spiritual, celestial, and material worlds respectively.

the perfect philosophy and the knowledge of truth. You should know that knowledge is a perfect and noble thing, and you ought every day to study God—that is, to study His commandments and His goodness—because from him knowledge, perception, and goodness proceed. And His spirit is a noble and exalted radiance. Whoever intends to study Him ought to despise the things of this world, which have an end, and no stability exists in them. From Him, as from a higher world, the human spirit descends, and it ought to desire to return to the place whence it came and where its root abides. There, indeed, it has the capacity to know what the world is and what its powers are, and in what manner it was made by its Creator. The source of this knowledge is true wisdom.

You should likewise know that God is indeed the Shaper and Creator of the whole world and everything that exists in it, and that this world and everything in it were created from on high. Yet the mind of God is too deep and potent to be comprehended, and what little can be comprehended of it can be grasped only through study and knowledge. This is the greatest gift that God gave to humanity, that they might seek to know and understand. To study, therefore, is to serve God. Note also that knowledge has three properties, of which the first is that it always gains and never diminishes, the second that it fosters virtuous habits, and the third that it does not increase unless the knower wills it and delights in it, and seeks after it with the reason and will.

Wherefore you should know that the secrets we intend to reveal in this book of ours cannot be won unless you obtain knowledge first. Whoever desires to know ought to acquire a passion for the sciences and thoroughly scrutinize their rules, for it is ordained that these secrets cannot be won except through wisdom and study in the sciences. In these secrets, however, is a great purity with which you will be able to help many.

Chapter Two

What magic is and what its properties are

You should know that this science is named magic. We call magic whatever is done by man, by which sense and spirit follow by its action in all their parts, or by which marvelous things are done so that the senses are led by them, contemplating and marveling.⁷ Magic is

⁷ That is, magic can either bind the human mind and spirit by its own subtle power, or the magician can make the appearance of something wonderful and use that appearance to catch and guide the mind.

difficult to understand because it uses connections hidden from our senses and sight. This is because these connections are divine powers placed before things to lure them upwards, as said before; and this science is too deep and strong for the intellect.

Part of this science is practical because it operates on spirit by spirit, and this is done by making things similar that are not so in essence. The composition of images does this with spirits and bodies, while the composition of alchemy does this with bodies and bodies. More generally, we use the word magic for all things hidden from the senses, and those things that most people do not know how to do nor whence their causes arise.

By sages, magical images are called talismans,⁸ which may be translated “violators,” because whoever makes an image does so by violence, and makes it by conquering the substance of which it is made. To work victoriously he makes it with mathematical proportions and influences, and uses celestial writing. These images are made from their proper substances in order that they might receive the aforementioned influence, and this is done at appropriate times. By suffumigation⁹ they are strengthened, and spirits are drawn into these images.

Know, then, that this is similar to the elixir¹⁰, which conquers bodies and by transmutation changes them to other, purer bodies. Magical images similarly work in such a way that they accomplish all things through violence. Poisons work in a similar way, when they course through a body and change it, reducing it to its nature, because one body is changed into another by the power of the compositions that exist in it.

You should know also that the power of purification that is called the elixir is made from earth, air, fire and water. These four powers become one in it, reduced to a common property and nature, because when it enters and penetrates a body it spreads through all its parts so that the body might better be altered and more readily obey and be transmuted under the elixir’s power. Similarly, also, the elixir in alchemy works by quickly converting a body from one nature into another, nobler one, first overwhelming its harsh and hissing spirit, and removing its qualities and its dregs. This is the secret of the elixir according to the sages of old.

The word elixir may be translated “fortitude,” because it shatters other fortitudes by conquering them, and transmutes them from one property to nother until it reduces them to its own.¹¹ The elixir cannot be made except

8 The Arabic word *tilsam*, “talisman,” appears here as *telsam* in the Latin text.

9 Suffumigation: the act of exposing a talisman to the smoke of incense, so the magical qualities of the incense enter into the talisman.

10 Elixir: the philosopher’s stone, which has the power to change base metals into silver or gold.

11 This passage is reminiscent of the *Emerald Tablet*, a classic alchemical text,

by compounding animals, plants, woods, and minerals into one, as they imply who say that the elixir is made in the same way as the world, since the world is compounded out of all the things we have named. Similarly, the elixir ought to be compounded out of similar things, so that every part of it is joined together and enters into every other part, so that the woods are not able to remain by themselves, nor are other vegetable or animal things able to remain separate from vegetables, and similarly minerals desire coction¹² and the power of fire together with moisture and the power of air, and then are satisfied. We have found all this in a book called the *Book of Ordinances*. For now, however, we return to our subject.

Magic is divided into two parts, that is, theoretical and practical. The theoretical part is knowledge of the places of the fixed stars, because from these are composed the celestial figures and forms of the heavens, and of how their rays project into the planets that move of themselves, and of understanding figures of the heavens when they wish to make them. In this is included all that the sages of old have said about the elections of hours and times to work with images. You should know that those who have equaled the ancients in making images know that the virtue of images consists wholly in the election of hours and times of the proper constellations, and in appropriate substances from which the images are made. Words also form a part of magic, because words themselves have magical virtues. Plato says the same thing, that just as a friend can become an enemy through wicked and insulting words, good and friendly words can turn an enemy into a friend. By this it is clear that words have magical power in them. The greatest strength is achieved when several strengths are joined together to overcome, and this is the perfect virtue in magic. This comprises the theoretical part.

The practical part, in turn, is the combination of the three natures with the virtue infused by the fixed stars. This is what the sages call virtue, but they do not know how or in what manner this virtue comes to be imparted. When things that have such virtues are brought together at the same time, they have need of elemental heat. This is done by suffumigation, which helps to complete the incomplete virtue. Similarly, it ought to have natural heat, that is, by digestion. These two cannot be complete, nor are they able to function, without the presence of human and animal spirit.

You should know also that magic is gained by actions and works in one way, and more subtly in another. That which is gained by actions and works is gained from the magistry that is performed by the sage in the world

which says of the elixir: "This is the strong fortitude of all fortitudes, penetrating every solid and overcoming every subtle thing."

¹² Coction: literally "cooking," the steady application of heat that forms the chief working method of the alchemist.

of the circle of the Moon and the sage who is mentioned in the *Nabatean Agriculture*,¹³ as it says in that book, in the place where it says that you ought to accept the four birds. And the part that is gained subtly is from works performed by that sage who works in the motion of the sphere of Saturn, and also the sage who works in the motion of the sphere of Venus. And these two sages also are spoken of in the aforesaid book.

The ancient Greek sages used to work in subtle ways to change appearances, and to make those things appear to be so which were not. They named the science of images *Yetelegehuz*,¹⁴ which is translated “the attraction of celestial spirits,” and this name is applied to every part of magic. No one is able to attain this science except by astrology, nor are they able to proceed beyond the study of astrology unless at least they know the figures that exist in the eighth sphere, and their motion, as well as that of the other spheres, and the division of the twelve signs of the Zodiac with their degrees and their natures, and the qualities of each sign and their correspondences in this world, and the divisions of the planets in these twelve signs, and the movement of the Zodiac, and when other things are said to be conjunct with them, and the nature of the seven planets and the Head and Tail of the Dragon¹⁵ and their places in the heavens and their correspondences among the things of this world, and how to predict their risings and settings, and which ones rise and set before others, and their radical significations. These are the fundamentals of astrology, and knowing which of the seven planets rules a figure and understanding the order in which they rule, and how to extract the planetary parts from the Zodiac.

These are the things without which it is impossible for anyone to achieve mastery of this science, and all of it may be found in books of astrology. This is what the first sage says who is described in the aforesaid *Nabatean Agriculture*, when he says, “They have raised me above the seven heavens.” He means by this anyone who knows all the motions of the heavens and their qualities by the power of the understanding and the senses. This is likewise what God meant when He said, “Let Us exalt him on high.” He means by this, “Let Us give to him senses and intellect, so that he might be able to penetrate the highest of sciences.”

13 This work, the *Kitab al-filaha al-Nabatiya* in Arabic, was compiled by Ibn Wahshiyyah in the late 9th century of the common era, and was one of the primary sources of *Picatrix*. The Latin text refers to it here as *Liber de Alfilaha* (from Arabic *al-Filaha*, “agriculture”). It is called the *Chaldean Agriculture* elsewhere in *Picatrix*.

14 An Arabic attempt at the Greek word *entelechia*, “that which completes or manifests.”

15 Head and Tail of the Dragon: the north and south nodes of the Moon, respectively.

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The Picatrix is the most famous grimoire of astrological magic and one of the most important works of medieval and Renaissance magic. With all four books complete in one volume, translated and annotated by the noted scholars, magicians and astrologers John Michael Greer and Christopher Warnock, Picatrix takes its rightful place as an essential occult text for modern esotericists. Picatrix is an encyclopedic work with over 300 pages of Hermetic magical philosophy, ritual, talismanic and natural magic. Greer & Warnock's complete translation is clear and lucid with numerous annotations.

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