

Stars in the Hand:
The Manuscript and Intellectual Contexts of British Latin Medieval Chiromancy
and its Scholastic and Astrological Influences

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to demonstrate the impact that other intellectual traditions had upon British Latin chiromantic manuals from the art's first extant emergence from popular culture into European written culture in 1160 CE until the end of the medieval period (c.1500 CE) when the art had already begun to return to the popular level, bringing with it scholastic and astrological accretions it gained while transmitted and embellished by the learned elite. In this survey of the 27 extant manuscripts containing British Latin chiromantic texts from this period I have determined the specific intellectual contexts in which chiromantic texts circulated through careful analysis of the manuscript context in which they were transmitted. This allows me to expand and confirm many observations made by other scholars as well as to identify how the specific intellectual streams in which chiromancy circulated influenced the art's development. I engage with the debate as to whether Latin chiromancy originated as a Greek, Arabic, or oral British tradition. Despite most branches of medieval European magic originating in the Greek or Arabic worlds before being translated into Latin following the twelfth-century Renaissance, the findings of this study support the theory, proposed by Charles Burnett, that Latin chiromancy (which holds no clear links to other chiromantic traditions) was recorded in a rudimentary form from oral sources. Once it entered into the learned environment it was shaped both in reaction to authoritative condemnations and the scholastic natural philosophy with which it was associated and bound. Scribal authors and transmitters deliberately anchored the art in accepted cosmographical theories to demonstrate that it was in fact a valid science. I then propose that the learned transmitters then brought this newly processed chiromancy with them out of the learned context, facilitating popular interest in the material which stimulated the production of the many fifteenth-century vernacular translations of chiromantic manuals. These accretions made chiromancy readily integrated with other contemporary branches of magic.

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EPIGRAPH & DEDICATION

...a thing delayed, late of fulfillment, whose fame will never perish.

Homer Oracle, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*

To the members of the Societas Magica, and all scholars internationally who give their lives to the study of historical magic. May sober, grounded scholarship continue to carve out a respectable place for this field within the academy, and may its findings help to reenchant the world.

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Introduction

In an early modern manuscript of the *Key of Solomon* (a late medieval conjuring manual) a passage explains how to produce a magic wand from hazel wood. One of the ingredients necessary is “blood of the finger of Saturn” (that is, the middle finger).¹ The fact that this text assumes its reader would understand which finger was associated with Saturn, an association originating in chiromantic texts, shows how prevalent chiromantic theory had become. It demonstrates how these associations were not merely symbolic, a language to be interpreted by the initiated, but that they were believed to reveal how humans were directly tethered to the universe. From its humble earliest example in a twelfth-century manuscript, chiromancy had become an integral part of magical cosmology and the hand covered with astrological sigils a standard icon of magic. This thesis seeks to expand our knowledge of this remarkable success story.

Chiromancy is simply defined as divining the future or character of a person by interpreting the lines of the palm.² The earliest known European reference to the practice of chiromancy is in the twelfth-century *Policraticus* by John of Salisbury, in which he criticised Becket for believing in soothsayers.³ Thomas Becket, then an agent of the Archbishop of

¹ London, British Library, Lansdowne 1202. See Armadel, “The Key of Solomon,” *Esoteric Archives*, translated by Karl Niedershuh, transcribed by Joseph H. Peterson (2013), accessed February 22nd 2016, <http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/ksol3.htm>

² This definition is simplistic because it implies that chiromancy is a form of divination, when many of its texts explicitly state that they only show the inclination within the individual, not his or her fate. A clear and simple definition is provided by Charles Burnett, “The practice of reading the future, or divining the character and disposition of a person from the lines and other indications in the palm of the hand...” Charles Burnett, “The Earliest Chiromancy in the West,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 50 (1987): 189. Reprinted in Charles Burnett, *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages: Texts and Techniques in the Islamic and Christian Worlds* (Hampshire: Variorum, 1996), X.189.

³ Burnett, “Earliest Chiromancy,” X.191-192. Amusingly John, a bishop, would later become Becket’s aide. Kevin Guilfooy, “John of Salisbury,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed April 17, 2015, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/john-salisbury/> There is another twelfth-century reference to chiromancy. This is not an account of the art being practiced, however. Rather,

Canterbury and favourite courtier of Henry II, was preparing to join a military expedition into North Wales and, fearing for his fate, he sought out a soothsayer who used chiromancy to predict the outcome.⁴ This new divinatory technique became increasingly popular in following centuries.

The first surviving European chiromantic text was written in England around 1160 CE.⁵ This was one of four tributary texts that stand at the beginning of the medieval written tradition of chiromancy.⁶ Chiromancy was largely, although not entirely, ignored by official censorship despite sometimes being numbered among the seven condemned dark arts, and a large corpus of these texts has survived in libraries across Europe.⁷ This study will employ the twenty-seven surviving British Latin chiromantic texts written between 1160 and 1500 CE to illuminate the intellectual world in which chiromancy first emerged as a written tradition. In particular, I examine the corpus of British codices that held Latin chiromantic manuals to reconstruct the various intellectual contexts in which these texts were transmitted and to reveal how its scribes and compilers understood the art to relate to other fields of knowledge and fit into their broader cosmography.

Historiography

Despite the profusion of chiromantic texts, relatively few scholars have written on the subject. Scholars in the wider field of magic rarely mention chiromancy, and these discussions

chiromancy was merely noted in a list of condemned divination, which may be more reflective of imagined concepts of cosmographical hierarchy than actual practice. For more see chapter two.

⁴ Soothsayer: one who can divine the future, a fortune-teller. It is perhaps ironic that Becket would not go on to die in battle, but in Canterbury cathedral where he became Archbishop. Burnett, "Earliest Chiromancy," X.191-192.

⁵ Charles Burnett, "The Prognostications of the Eadwine Psalter," in *The Eadwine Psalter: Text, Image, and Monastic Culture in Twelfth-Century Canterbury*, ed. Margaret T. Gibson, T. A. Heslop, and Richard William Pfaff (University Park: Penn State Press, 1992), 190.

⁶ Charles Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages: Texts and Techniques in the Islamic and Christian Worlds* (Hampshire: Variorum, 1996), X.1.

⁷ Paul Acker and Eriko Amino, "The Book of Palmistry," in *Popular and Practical Science of Medieval England*, ed. Lister M. Matheson (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1994), 145.

are cursory at best. Lynn Thorndike became the first scholar to undertake a serious historical study of magic as a purely academic subject when he published his 1905 doctoral dissertation.⁸ Although often marginalised, the study of historical magic became more prevalent through the social and anthropological turns of the twentieth century.⁹ The last two decades have witnessed particularly energetic growth in this area. The French historian Julien Véronèse and the American scholars Richard Kieckhefer and Claire Fanger have produced foundational studies of ritual magic texts such as the *Ars notoria*, *Munich Handbook*, *Liber florum celestis doctrine*, and books attributed to Solomon.¹⁰ These were expanded by wider studies of manuscript transmission by Frank Klaassen and Sophie Page, and of magic's general intellectual culture by Jean-Patrice Boudet.¹¹ However, with the exception of Boudet, their focus on dramatic and widely condemned ritual magic has left more common magic and divination like chiromancy understudied despite its widespread transmission in the Middle Ages and the significant body of surviving manuscripts. Although an exhaustive list of European manuscripts containing chiromancy is yet to be compiled, Schmit and Knox have identified 41.¹² This list undoubtedly

⁸ Lynn Thorndike, *The Place of Magic in the Intellectual History of Europe* (New York: Doctoral thesis Columbia University, 1905).

⁹ Nicholas Rogers, "The Anthropological Turn in Social History" in *Approaching the Past: Historical Anthropology through Irish Case Studies*, ed. Marilyn Silverman and P.H. Gulliver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 355.

¹⁰ "Welcome to the Societas Magica" *Societas Magica* 2014, accessed December 1st 2014, http://www.societasmagica.org/?no_refresh=1 Also see Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997). And: Claire Fanger, *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1998). And: Julien Véronèse, "God's Names and Their Uses in the Books of Magic Attributed to King Solomon," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 5, no. 1 (2010).

¹¹ See Frank Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013); Sophie Page, *Magic in Medieval Manuscripts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Sophie Page, *Magic in the Cloister: Pious Motives, Illicit Interests, and Occult Approaches to the Medieval Universe* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013). Jean-Patrice Boudet, *Entre Science et Nigromance: Astrologie, divination et magie dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006).

¹² C. B. Schmitt and Dilwyn Knox, *Pseudo-Aristoteles Latinus: a Guide to Latin Works Falsely Attributed to Aristotele before 1500*, Warburg Institute Surveys and Texts xii (London: Warburg Institute, 1985), 21-24.

only represents a fraction of surviving manuscripts since they include only those texts which were sometimes attributed to Aristotle.

Lynn Thorndike's venerable eight-volume work, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, written between 1923 and 1958, touches upon most aspects of the history of magic in the West from Antiquity to the seventeenth century.¹³ This seminal work includes many references to the subject of chiromancy, especially in his discussion of the sixteenth century.¹⁴ Thorndike may have had a special interest in the art since he provided an invaluable appendix of 33 chiromantic incipits with their variations as well as a discussion of several fragmentary texts and their textual relationship.¹⁵ But his most significant contribution to chiromancy's history was his article specifically dedicated to the subject "Chiromancy in Medieval Latin Manuscripts," published in 1965, making it his last piece of writing before his death the following year.¹⁶ Most of this thirty-four page article is the twenty-three page transcription of a fifteenth- to sixteenth-century chiromantic text. In the first eleven pages he discusses various medieval chiromantic texts from throughout Europe, but he rarely offers a deep analysis, instead summarising the contents of the texts. He notes Hardin Craig's 1916 edition of *The Works of John Metham* where

¹³ Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923-1958).

¹⁴ Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 1, *During the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 386. Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 2, *During the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923), 166-7, 266, 329, 311, 575, 606, 701-702, 804, 890. Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 3, *Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 13, 19-20, 421, 515, 606. Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 4, *Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 64, 117, 143, 165, 278, 294, 324, 400, 440, 462, 492, 528, 611, 703. Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 5, *The Sixteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 39, 42-43, 49-68, 100, 105, 132-133, 160, 165, 232, 252, 261-262, 326-327, 499, 510-511, 521, 527, 564, 575, 580, 582, 586-587, 635, 651, 673-678. Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 6, *The Sixteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 100, 147, 150, 151, 157, 160, 163-164, 167, 169-170, 176-177, 193, 199-200, 360-361, 430-431, 466, 468-469, 483, 496, 502-504, 506-510, 525, 527, 543.

¹⁵ He lists 42 manuscripts which contain examples of the 33 incipits, many of which include more than one chiromantic text. He also refers the reader to other articles and manuscript catalogues that include many more examples of chiromantic texts. Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 5, 673-678.

¹⁶ Lynn Thorndike, "Chiromancy in Mediaeval Latin Manuscripts," *Speculum* 40, no. 4 (1965), 674-706.

yet more chiromantic texts are listed and classified in the introduction.¹⁷ Although his analysis is superficial, he drew attention to the value of these texts as windows into the social world of those who wrote and used them.¹⁸

Thorndike also spends much time exploring chiromancy's origins through a broad survey of the manuscripts. He describes how most of them claim to have originally been written by Aristotle or Albertus Magnus (d.1280) or to have been translated from Arabic into Latin by John of Spain or Adelard of Bath.¹⁹ While expressing reasonable doubt in the accuracy of these claims, Thorndike does assume that the texts were translated into Latin from Arabic

¹⁷ Hardin Craig, *The Works of John Metham Including the Romance of Amoryus and Cleopes* (London: Early English Text Society, 1916), xxv-xxix.

¹⁸ Thorndike expressed the great potential of this material for social analysis when, preceding his transcription, he wrote that the following text contains “not only... good and bad fortune in general, but [the relation of lines] to the clergy, crime, and punishment, and to sexual life and vices in particular. Thus, it is sociological as well as superstitious” (Thorndike, “Chiromancy in Mediaeval Latin Manuscripts,” 683). Unfortunately, he generally fails to elaborate on the social implications of these texts. For example, Thorndike relates how one late thirteenth-century chiromantic text is unusual for going beyond the lines of the palm to take into account the shape of the hand. The example he offers is that “If the fingers are broad, he is faithful and writes well (*bene scribens*). If a woman, she has a deep womb and much seeks a man (*et multum appetit virum*)” (Thorndike, “Chiromancy in Mediaeval Latin Manuscripts,” 677). His discussion completely overlooks the highly gendered nature of these texts, despite the fact that his example shows how the author of the text conceptualised women and men's gender roles. The text associates men with learning and reason, and women with the body, reproduction, and sexual temptation. It is also interesting to note Thorndike's translation that “If man or woman has a small table in the hand and large fingers, he or she will die of an apostume, and she will have a wide womb near the matrix but narrow at the mouth of the womb. And such women are disposed to prostitution because of the width near the matrix” (Thorndike, “Chiromancy in Mediaeval Latin Manuscripts,” 677). Although Thorndike does not explore it, this clearly demonstrates how connected the writer believes women's personalities to be with their physical bodies. The fact that prognostications for women are offered by the chiromantic text at all is just as exciting as the window chiromancy offers into medieval gender construction. This indicates that women's palms were being read by chiromancers (or, at least, were interesting to those who were interested in chiromancy). Therefore, although Latin chiromantic texts were likely written and used by men, they shed light on the broader demographics of the chiromancers' clients. While the focus of this project is not on the clients, I aim to be sensitive to the gendered nature of the material and make note of these implications where possible. A study focused on the gendered nature of chiromantic texts may be a fruitful avenue of research for future scholars.

¹⁹ All of these claims of connection to great philosophers and translators would have given greater authority to the texts in the minds of learned readers. Thorndike, “Chiromancy in Mediaeval Latin Manuscripts,” 674-675.

antecedents.²⁰ The lack of any known Latin chiromancy prior to the period of translation lends credence to this claim.²¹

In 1969, only a few years after Thorndike published his piece on chiromancy, Roger Ambrose Pack wrote an article and edition of a printed pseudo-Aristotelian chiromancy.²² Pack went on to write multiple articles on the subject, producing at least three editions of medieval chiromantic texts.²³ In his 1972 “On the Greek Chiromantic Fragment” he observed that neither Craig nor Thorndike mention Franz Boll’s 1908 edition of purportedly ancient Greek chiromantic fragments.²⁴ Pack argues that the evidence for chiromancy’s Arabic translation is weak and that the Latin chiromantic texts share a “common ancestry” with the Greek fragments.²⁵ He supports the argument that astrological theory was a part of chiromantic texts since ancient Greece by noting that Boll’s fragments are almost exactly Greek versions of the *Summa chiromantia* with elements in common with several other Latin chiromantic texts.²⁶ By this logic, the *Summa chiromantia* is a relatively faithful translation of these ostensibly ancient Greek fragments, and less detailed chiromantic manuals which leave out planetary associations are presumably watered down versions of this ancient tradition. Pack argues that the text’s

²⁰ Thorndike, “Chiromancy in Mediaeval Latin Manuscripts,” 674.

²¹ At the time Thorndike wrote this article the earliest known Latin chiromantic texts dated to the thirteenth century. Thorndike, “Chiromancy in Mediaeval Latin Manuscripts,” 674.

²² Roger A. Pack, “A Pseudo Aristotelian Chiromancy,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et litteraire du moyen age*, 36 (1969). Pack was the University of Michigan’s professor of Greek and Latin from 1938 to 1975. See The Faculty History Project, “Roger Ambrose Pack,” *The Millennium Project, University of Michigan* (2011), accessed April 18th, 2015, <http://um2017.org/faculty-history/faculty/roger-ambrose-pack> See also Regesta Imperii Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz, “Roger A. Pack,” *RI-Opac: Literature Database for the Middle Ages*, accessed April 16th, 2015, http://opac.regesta-imperii.de/lang_en/autoren.php?name=Pack%2C+Roger+A

²³ For example see Roger A. Pack, “Pseudo-Aristoteles: Chiromantia,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et litteraire du moyen age*, 39 (1972).

²⁴ Roger A. Pack, “On the Greek Chiromantic Fragment,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 103 (1972), 367, 370. The Greek fragments were outlined by F. Boll in *Catalogus codicum astrologorum Graecorum VII* (Brussels: Lamertin, 1908), 236-237.

²⁵ Pack, “Greek Chiromantic Fragment,” 369.

²⁶ Pack, “Greek Chiromantic Fragment,” 370-380.

internal evidence indicates that it precedes a Christian Byzantine context, giving chiromancy the ancient roots that many of its texts claim.²⁷ While most chiromantic texts that divide the hand into sections associated with the planets do not appear in the early manuscripts, Pack argues that the presence of astrological associations in the Greek fragments is evidence that they originated in the earlier Greek tradition.²⁸

Over a decade later, in 1987, Charles Burnett challenged both of these primary theories about chiromancy's origin.²⁹ He dates Boll's Greek chiromantic fragments to the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.³⁰ Although Boll demonstrates that ancient writers mention chiromancy, indicating that there was certainly some form of chiromantic tradition in antiquity, Burnett insists that its practice is not mentioned in Latin between antiquity and the twelfth century when the earliest extant chiromantic text was written in the back of the Eadwine Psalter. Therefore, despite Aristotle's endorsement of a rudimentary form of chiromancy, Burnett argues that it had remained a popular cultural practice and that the roots of Western chiromancy were not learned.³¹

In response to the more prevalent argument that chiromancy was translated from Arabic sources Burnett concedes that while Arabic (as well as Sanskrit and Hebrew) chiromantic texts

²⁷ Pack, "On the Greek Chiromantic Fragment," 367.

²⁸ The following chapters will demonstrate the fallacious nature of this argument since the astrological aspects were in fact a later (and gradual) addition to the chiromantic tradition.

²⁹ Burnett is professor of the history of Islamic influences on the West at the Warburg Institute University London. See Charles Burnett, "Charles Burnett," *The Warburg Institute* (2014), accessed November 15th 2014, <http://warburg.sas.ac.uk/index.php?id=424> Burnett, "The Earliest Chiromancy."

³⁰ Burnett, "Earliest Chiromancy," X.189. He notes that the extensive manuscript lists of Schmitt and Knox, Craig, and Thorndike do not uncover any chiromantic text earlier than the thirteenth century. Schmitt and Knox produced a list of forty-one chiromantic texts pseudonymously attributed to Aristotle, and their incipits. See Schmitt and Knox, *Pseudo-Aristoteles Latinus*, 21-24.

³¹ Burnett, "Earliest Chiromancy," X.189. Aristotle does make a single remark about how certain lines on the hand indicate a long or short life. For a detailed examination of the transmission of this sentence into medieval Europe, its interpretation, and its reception, see Roger A. Pack, "Aristotle's Chiromantic Principle and its Influence," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 108 (1978): 121. I expand on this further on page 12.

exist, they have no connection to the Western tradition. He recognises that “the word *chiros* (from Greek *kheir* [*cheir*]) for hand” is used throughout Latin chiromantic texts. Since no Greek antecedents of the tradition can be found, however, he argues that this was in emulation of the twelfth-century trend among translators to replace Greek words for Arabic ones in scientific writings. Burnett goes on to argue that the use of the word *chiros* does not necessarily indicate some yet unknown Arabic antecedent. Instead he pushes back the known date of chiromancy in the West by a century with his discovery of a previously unnoticed text in the back of the twelfth-century Eadwine Psalter.³²

The Eadwine Psalter chiromancy shows clear evidence of being produced in an ecclesiastical context.³³ Burnett observes that this text offers chiromantic interpretations to tell such things as whether the subject will become a bishop, noting that this, in addition to the manuscript context, supports the theory that chiromancy was first written down in an ecclesiastical context. Later texts became more universalised, instead using the same sign on the palm to indicate “that he will have honour according to his estate.”³⁴ Burnett notes the repetitive, disjointed, and rudimentary nature of the Eadwine chiromancy (along with other evidence) to argue that the Eadwine Psalter’s chiromancy is an early copy of a chiromantic manual recorded from an oral tradition.³⁵ The Eadwine Psalter is not the sole source of later chiromantic texts, however. Burnett identifies four mutually exclusive sources from which later chiromantic texts drew, further suggesting that chiromancy was a popular oral tradition which was written down at

³² Burnett, “Earliest Chiromancy,” X.189-190.

³³ The Eadwine Psalter was written in Canterbury c. 1160 CE. Burnett, “Earliest Chiromancy,” X.191.

³⁴ Burnett, “Earliest Chiromancy,” X.191.

³⁵ A scribal error indicates that the Eadwine chiromancy is at least one generation away from the oral tradition and was itself copied from an earlier text. Burnett, “Earliest Chiromancy,” X.191.

different times.³⁶ In any case, these four tracts do not appear to have any common antecedents, although later scribes drew from them when compiling new chiromantic texts.³⁷ Thus Burnett posits that Latin chiromancy is distinct from other chiromantic traditions because it does not develop from passages about “the hand in physiognomic texts” (as does Sanskrit chiromancy) but rather from oral traditions in England where its earliest Latin texts are found.³⁸ If this is so, chiromancy is unique among medieval esoteric arts, which were at least partially imported from Arabic and Hebraic sources.

Paul Acker and Eriko Amino’s 1994 chapter “The Book of Palmistry” focuses on early English translations of chiromantic texts, although it includes a broader overview of the tradition with a manuscript list divided by language.³⁹ They mention Burnett’s discovery of the Eadwine Psalter chiromancy, emphasising that it coincided with growing references to chiromancy’s practice by twelfth-century Latin authors.⁴⁰ They notably omit Burnett’s theory that this manuscript was the transitional text between an oral and literate tradition, instead stating that this was the period when many magical texts were translated into Latin from Arabic.⁴¹ They bolster this theory by noting that the Latin chiromantic technical term for “wrist” was *rasceta*, which “is a Latin borrowing from Arabic ‘rahah,’ meaning ‘palm.’”⁴² Acker and Amino then qualify this argument, observing that it is possible that this word “entered the chiromantic vocabulary by way

³⁶ Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.1.

³⁷ This process will be explained with greater detail in the following chapter.

³⁸ Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.4.

³⁹ Acker and Amino, “Book of Palmistry,” 153-157.

⁴⁰ Although this is done begrudgingly. It appears that they favour the older theory that it was translated by Arabic texts. Acker and Amino, “Book of Palmistry,” 143-144.

⁴¹ In a footnote they relate Burnett’s observation that Latin chiromantic texts do not appear to be related to Arabic ones. Acker and Amino, “Book of Palmistry,” 144.

⁴² Acker and Amino, “Book of Palmistry,” 144.

of Latin translations of Arabic anatomical and medical texts.”⁴³ Indeed, according to the *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* the term *rasceta manus* was already used in the eleventh century by the medical author Constantinus Africanus, with whose works chiromantic texts were occasionally bound.⁴⁴ For example, the first chiromantic text in Ashmole 399 was bound between two of his gynaecological works. Acker and Amino’s arguments, therefore, remain inconclusive. They cite Thorndike for support, while admitting his hesitancy in definitively asserting chiromancy’s Arabic roots due to the lack of evidence. They carefully state that Arabic roots for Western chiromancy are “yet to be proved.”⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Acker and Amino implicitly oppose Burnett’s popular origin thesis by claiming that chiromancy began as a learned tradition and did not enter popular culture until the Renaissance.⁴⁶

The foundational manuscript work on chiromancy has made possible two key areas of scholarly inquiry, neither of which has been explored in a systematic manner: the question of how chiromancy was treated and understood by its scribes and compilers, and the related questions of how scribes and compilers negotiated authoritative⁴⁷ evaluations of the art (which

⁴³ See footnote 17 in Acker and Amino, “Book of Palmistry,” 144.

⁴⁴ Walther von Wartburg, *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 19, *Orientalia* (Basel: Zbinden, 1967), 144. Accessed through Atilf, “Volume 19: Orientalia, Page 144,” *The FEW Reader*, copyright 2018 by Atilf, accessed January 23, 2018, <https://apps.atilf.fr/lecteurFEW/index.php/page/lire/e/210359>

⁴⁵ Acker and Amino, “Book of Palmistry,” 144.

⁴⁶ They support this by drawing attention to popular poetry and plays where chiromancy was mentioned but no knowledge of how it worked was included. Acker and Amino, “Book of Palmistry,” 146. Burnett, “Earliest Chiromancy,” X.191-190.

⁴⁷ Throughout this thesis I use the term “authoritative” in this manner to refer to the opinions or condemnations of prominent theologians or scholars. To do otherwise is often either awkward or unclear. For example, “...compilers negotiated authoritative evaluations of the art...” is less wordy than, for example, “...compilers negotiated how the evaluations of the art, put forward by scholastic and theological authorities...” The term “authoritative” is clearer (in the context of this study) than “orthodox,” “official,” or “elite.” Describing “orthodox condemnations” might be taken to indicate condemnations from Orthodox Christianity as opposed to Catholicism. Both “official” and “elite” might be taken to refer to high/elite/learned, as opposed to low/popular/unlearned, culture. This traditional divide between high and low culture is anachronistic in the case of the present study since a trend might be shared between the secular elite and the lower classes but not the learned elite, thus complicating this traditional binary. Therefore, when I discuss “authoritative” condemnations or opinions I am often referring to the condemnations or opinions of political and religious authorities, such as the church fathers, influential scholars/theologians like Thomas Aquinas, legal precedents, and orthodox church teachings.

were frequently negative) and how this affected their treatment of it. Although some scholars have noted that chiromancy is generally adjacent to tracts of physiognomy and is often found in books of popular science, none have systematically assessed chiromancy with regards to its manuscript context.⁴⁸ They have opted instead to provide ever more extensive manuscript lists and occasional editions.⁴⁹ Lynn Thorndike, for example, only mentions the texts with which chiromancy was bound when he observes that chiromancy was often preceded by tracts on physiognomy or astrology.⁵⁰ So too Burnett says only that to find a chiromantic manual in a psalter was initially surprising since most other texts on chiromancy “are found in manuscripts of popular science and divination, and are often adjacent to physiognomies.”⁵¹ Although Hardin Craig makes no comment on the texts with which chiromancy was bound, he does note that scribes often wrote prefatory material which framed the art as a science and emphasised its connection to physiognomy.⁵² Few of these scholars have mentioned the material chiromancy was bound with, instead focusing on internal evidence contained in the chiromantic manuals themselves or condemnatory texts written by those outside of the circle of readers and

⁴⁸ Physiognomy was the art of examining the human body to determine people’s inner personalities.

⁴⁹ Editions of the primary chiromantic manuals covered in this study (see Chapter One for more details on these texts) can be found in: I) Burnett, “Earliest Chiromancy,” X.192-195; II) Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.6-9; III) Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.8-17; IV) Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.18-29; V) Pack, “Pseudo-Aristoteles,” 306-320; VI) Pack, “Pseudo-Aristotelian Chiromancy,” 204-238; VII) Lynn Thorndike, “Chiromancy in Mediaeval Latin Manuscripts,” *Speculum* 40, no. 4 (1965): 684-706; VIII) Derek J. Price, *An Old Palmistry: Being the Earliest Known Book of Palmistry in English* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1953); IX) Craig, *Works of John Metham*, xxvi; sadly chiromancy “X” which begins “*Secantur scientiae*” has not yet been edited or translated. This would be an excellent contribution to the study of chiromancy by future scholars. Several of the invaluable lists, and various classifications, of chiromantic texts can be found in the works of Craig, Thorndike, Pack, Schmitt and Knox, Acker and Amino, as well as Burnett. Then there is Thorndike’s helpful list of incipits, see Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 5, 673-678.

⁵⁰ Thorndike, “Chiromancy in Mediaeval Latin Manuscripts,” 679-680.

⁵¹ Burnett, “Earliest Chiromancy,” X.191.

⁵² Craig, *Works of John Metham*, xxi.

practitioners.⁵³ Furthermore, no systematic survey of the art's treatments in natural philosophy or condemnatory writings has been conducted.

The association of chiromancy with natural philosophy has also been explored in part. Pack (who makes no reference to accompanying texts in the manuscripts) explains that these apologies for chiromancy, together with the texts' pseudonymous self-attribution to authoritative philosophers, were used to justify the practice of the art as natural and not divinatory, thus defending it from authoritative condemnations against divination.⁵⁴ The attribution of chiromancy to ancient authorities was bolstered by an off-hand comment made by Aristotle in his *Historia animalium* when he wrote that "the inner part of the hand is called the palm; it is fleshy and divided by strong lines. Long-lived persons have one or two lines which extend through the whole hand; short-lived persons have two lines not extending through the whole hand."⁵⁵ This, which Pack dubbed the "chiromantic principle," indicates that there was some form of chiromancy in the ancient world. Whether or not this was so, this passage lent credibility to medieval claims about the scientific nature of chiromancy. Pack also noted that a medieval person might carve out a legitimate place for chiromancy since it was left out of earlier pre-twelfth-century lists of condemned divination and was described as possibly legitimate by the

⁵³ Although he was not focused on chiromancy, in his book *Unlocked Books* Benedek Lang mentions chiromancy at several points and offers some interesting examples of chiromancy's manuscript context in Central Europe. He notes its popularity and that in Central Europe chiromancy was sometimes bound with alchemical and scientific tracts, geomancy, astrology, magical formulas, and texts indicating a university context. He also observes that Krakow University possesses records of its students practicing chiromancy and necromancy around the turn of the fifteenth century, for which they received moderate fines. Most significantly for the present study, he observes that Central European chiromantic tracts rarely include the elaborate theoretical material and opening apologies for the art. The present study offers a point of comparison to his work by assessing the manuscript context of chiromancy in Britain. See Benedek Lang, *Unlocked Books: Manuscripts of Learned Magic in the Medieval Libraries of Central Europe* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 128-131, 148, 186, 226-227, 278.

⁵⁴ Pack, "Pseudo-Aristoteles," 289. Pack, "Greek Chiromantic Fragment," 380.

⁵⁵ Aristotle, *History of Animals: In Ten Books*, trans. Richard Cresswell (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1862), 17. This is the passage to which Pack refers in Pack, "Aristotle's Chiromantic Principle," 121-122.

Speculum astronomiae (an influential commentary on astrological texts).⁵⁶ This link with astrology and natural philosophy would be very important to the treatment of chiromancy in the long term. By the early modern period Paracelsus valued chiromancy highly as a science which cogently demonstrated the “link between the human microcosm and the universal macrocosm.”⁵⁷

In summation, it is evident that thus far the primary thrust of scholarly discourse about chiromancy’s history has focussed upon its origins. Craig observed that earlier chiromantic texts were more rudimentary and over time they gained more elaborate planetary associations.⁵⁸ Later scholars accepted this observation, as did Pack at the beginning of his 1969 article on chiromancy.⁵⁹ However, as we have seen, by 1972 Pack drew upon Boll’s Greek chiromantic fragments to conclude that these Greek fragments were copies of ancient Greek texts, from which Latin chiromancy originated.⁶⁰ No scholar since has taken up the Boll-Pack theory that astrological chiromancy originated in antiquity and was translated into Latin. Burnett dated the Greek fragments to the late Middle Ages and observes that no earlier Greek or Arabic texts remain extant to indicate that they were survivals of a tradition preserved from antiquity. Instead Burnett proposes that it survived at a popular level in the West and did not enter the learned context until the mid-twelfth century.⁶¹ Although Acker and Amino do implicitly challenge Burnett’s theory of Latin chiromancy’s British origins, they do not question that its astrological elements were later additions.⁶² The scholarly focus upon chiromancy’s origin has eclipsed the

⁵⁶ I expand upon this topic at greater length in chapter two. Pack, “Pseudo-Aristoteles,” 290-293.

⁵⁷ Craig offers many citations which demonstrate Paracelsus’ interest and valuation of chiromancy in footnote 3. See Craig, *Works of John Metham*, xxiii.

⁵⁸ Craig, *Works of John Metham*, xxv-xxvii.

⁵⁹ Pack, “Pseudo-Aristotelian Chiromancy,” 189.

⁶⁰ Pack, “Greek Chiromantic Fragment,” 367, 380.

⁶¹ Burnett, “Earliest Chiromancy,” X.189-190.

⁶² Acker and Amino, “Book of Palmistry,” 143-144, 148.

study of its development and place in the intellectual history of the West. This thesis does not determine from which cultural tradition chiromancy came, instead it explores the art's development and significance once it entered the Latin written tradition.

Thesis Aims, Parameters, and Overview

This thesis aims to provide a coherent account of chiromancy's Latin textual tradition and to discuss the art's relationship with other intellectual traditions which appear in the same manuscript context. Close examination of manuscript evidence indicates that chiromancy did not appear with a fully formed astrological apparatus, as one would expect from a tradition transmitted from Greek or Arabic sources (and as was certainly the case with other traditions such as astral magic). Instead astrological elements were added to chiromantic texts in a gradual process, which naturally resulted from the intellectual contexts in which they were transmitted and the heuristic associations formed by the compilers who collected these manuals in codices with other texts. Through this same careful analysis of the manuscripts and their context I argue that chiromancy first entered the Latin written tradition in an ecclesiastical context and was rapidly transmitted to a university setting. Once in the university environment, scribes (or scribal authors) directly responded to scholastic critiques of the art by demonstrating that chiromancy had a firm scientific basis. This demonstrates how magic and divination were constructed in discourse with critical and authoritative voices, and cannot be separated from them.⁶³ Finally,

⁶³ A modern example of this process is the "scientification" of magic. A few examples of this would be referring to magical forces as "energy," the shift from viewing ritual magic conjurations from objective realities to powerful subjective experiences within the mind, or the emergence of "psychics" whose purported power is claimed to be rooted in yet unexplained powers of the brain. This shift is significant because these powers would (hypothetically) one day be explainable using scientific methods, and popular explanations of them often employ partial aspects of scientific discoveries or terminology. This is a modern case of using the official worldview, which is critical of a marginal belief, to validate it.

this thesis documents a third stage in the development of this art in which chiromancy was brought into the popular literature of secrets by university-trained clerics. In this new setting chiromancy retained its scholastic-astrological accretions and its assertion that it was a valid form of natural philosophy. The astrological elements it had acquired ultimately made it possible to integrate chiromancy with other forms of magic in its increasingly curious, and lenient, intellectual environment.

The scope of this project does not permit a European-wide survey, although it remains open to how continental intellectual trends interacted with insular ones. This thesis focuses on Latin chiromantic texts, so those written in vernacular languages have been omitted from this study. Although chiromancy became particularly popular during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when many vernacular translations were produced, it first appears in the Western written tradition as a Latin text, and (despite the many translations that were produced) Latin chiromantic texts retained a strong presence even in multi-lingual fifteenth-century manuscripts.⁶⁴ Manuscripts that were completely compiled after c.1500 CE are also excluded from this study. This is generally accepted to be the approximate end of the Middle Ages, although this periodization is arbitrary. By cutting off c.1500 CE this paper does not take into account the changes that chiromancy underwent during the early modern period when it became more accessible due to vernacularisation and the printing press which was able to produce more texts at a far lower cost.⁶⁵ This study will exclude vernacular texts, despite their value, to enable a clear focus on chiromancy's development within the learned context that first recorded it.

⁶⁴ Acker and Amino, "Book of Palmistry," 145.

⁶⁵ I do offer some general observations about this in the final concluding chapter, however.

To this end, this thesis provides a survey of the twenty-seven extant manuscripts of British origin which contain Latin chiromantic manuals. These books date from the Eadwine Psalter of 1160 CE (Trinity College Ms. R.17.1, James catalogue 987) to the fifteenth century. They include approximately⁶⁶ one from the twelfth century, five from the thirteenth century, eight from the fourteenth century, and thirteen from the fifteenth century.⁶⁷ In addition to my own catalogue research, this list has been produced using the lists of manuscripts containing chiromancy compiled by Craig, Thorndike, Pack, Schmitt and Knox, Acker and Amino, as well as Burnett, all of whose thorough work has paved the way for future researchers. These manuscripts are housed throughout the United Kingdom (although one is preserved in the United States), with the majority held by the British Museum, Oxford, and Cambridge Universities. Since throughout this thesis I assess the types of texts that accompany chiromancy in the original medieval manuscript context I have done my best to vet out any manuscripts that were compiled after the medieval period, as well as those which did not originate in the insular context.⁶⁸

Chapter one shows the impact of scholasticism upon chiromantic texts. It begins with a short descriptive overview of the primary texts that circulated in the genre of chiromancy. This draws upon the lists and work of previous scholars, in particular Charles Burnett, to offer a clear overview of these tracts, how they relate to one another, and their distinctive characteristics. The purpose of this chapter is largely to provide general knowledge about medieval chiromancy and, in particular, a description of its interweaving textual traditions. The chapter then explores some

⁶⁶ This is an approximation because several manuscripts are catalogued as being written either at the end of one century or the beginning of the next. This is an unfortunate result of the imprecision of manuscript studies. All numeric assessments of manuscripts by century throughout this paper are therefore approximations. I include them only to show general trends and give a sense of how these manuscripts changed over time.

⁶⁷ See Appendix 1.

⁶⁸ See Appendix 2 for several examples of manuscripts that either did not qualify for this study or were not accessible to me, the reasons for this, and what we can learn from them in any event.

theoretical developments in chiromantic texts that were the result of scholasticism. It concludes with a short overview of the medieval learned understanding of the body and how the stars related to it. This should explain why, of all the subjects chiromancy travelled with, astrological elements were those that ultimately entered into chiromantic manuals.

The second chapter deals with how chiromancy was framed by contemporaries. This chapter opens with an overview of authoritative condemnations of chiromancy, and divination in general. It then assesses how scribes and compilers of chiromantic texts framed them as natural philosophic/scientific texts in response to authoritative condemnation. This chapter lays out the wider intellectual/social discourse surrounding chiromancy. This positions the chiromantic texts, and the manuscripts which contained them, into the wider medieval intellectual context.

The third chapter demonstrates the intellectual contexts in which manuscripts containing chiromancy actually circulated. By assessing the texts chiromancy was frequently bound with, I determined several primary learned settings in which the subject travelled throughout the latter Middle Ages. Each of these contexts will be explored through the lens of an exemplary manuscript with frequent references to others containing similar texts.

Methodology

“Scribes” were those people who physically wrote texts and manuscripts. They had to be educated enough to read and write, and were therefore mostly male clerics.⁶⁹ While they did produce original material, they oftentimes simply copied previous texts. It is sometimes possible

⁶⁹ Richard Kieckhefer has proposed that many clerics received some education but were unable to ascend the social hierarchy. This led to low order clerics redirecting their literacy and competence in official rituals toward the study of magic to gain power and influence. He suggests that this “clerical underworld” was the primary demographic of magic, and especially necromantic, practitioners. For more see his discussion of the subject in Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 12.

to track which books the scribe copied from by tracing the perpetuation of identical scribal errors. Scribes who copied texts, as opposed to producing new material, were not without agency. Some would collect and copy from several tracts on a subject, choosing which section from each tributary text to include in their own. Furthermore, slight changes in wording can reveal profound changes in thought.⁷⁰ In this way even copied texts can reveal much about how the scribe understood his writing to fit into his worldview.⁷¹

Often multiple individual tracts written by a scribe (or various scribes) would be collected and sewn together to produce a codex. By assessing manuscripts produced in this manner one does not discover how the original scribe (who wrote or copied the text) conceived of his writing, but how the assembler understood it to relate to other subjects. Thus, determining the date of compilation is imperative. For example, imagine a manuscript, entirely composed of medieval texts, that was compiled in the seventeenth century. Assessing how the texts related to each other would not elicit how medieval people understood the content to relate, but how early modern compilers did.⁷² Determining when the texts were bound together is like sifting through archaeological layers. Sometimes detailed scrutiny of a manuscript allows historians to interpret the book as an artefact to reconstruct its history.⁷³ The foundational work done by cataloguers of

⁷⁰ For instance, in the early modern *Antiphonary Notebook* (a collection of magical recipes), the scribe copied segments of charms which were related as examples of superstition in Reginald Scot's *The Discovery of Witchcraft* (a book written *against* magic). While the scribe is faithful to Scot's text in almost all respects, where Scot writes "charm" the scribe has favoured "prayer." This shows the scribe's re-appropriation of anti-magic texts for the purpose of magic manuals, as well as the possession of a more lenient line between spell and prayer. Frank Klaassen and Christopher Phillips, "The Return of Stolen Goods: Reginald Scot, Religious Controversy, and Magic in Bodleian Library, Additional B. 1," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 1 (Winter, 2006): 148-149.

⁷¹ I will use the unqualified male pronoun when referring to scribes not out of insensitivity, but because they were almost entirely a male group during this period.

⁷² It is for this reason that MS Rawlinson D. 1362 has been excluded from this survey. For a discussion of this manuscript please see Appendix 2.

⁷³ For example, if a manuscript has a hole made by a bookworm that burrowed through the entire text, but at one point the hole jumps then a section of the book was likely removed. Conversely, if a bookworm hole went straight through a book but a section of the manuscript is unmarred, then it was likely a later addition inserted after the damage was done.

the medieval manuscript collections across the world is an invaluable aid and has paved the way for present and future scholars.

At times the attitudes toward a text held by the scribe and compiler are notably different. While the scribe of a text may have taken the subject seriously, if it is bound in a manuscript of games or what the compiler deemed “silly superstitions” then clearly the subject was treated light-heartedly by the compiler. This is an especially important point with respect to magic. In the Middle Ages, just as today, some saw dabblers in the occult as either charlatans or fools. An archetypal medieval example of this is the art of alchemy. Many alchemical texts espoused solemn secrecy that would lead readers to think this was a respected study, and to many it was. Yet Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* comically depict the Canon’s Yeoman (who helped with his master’s alchemical experiments) as looking sickly with a colourless face, spending much time (and more money) on failed experiments.⁷⁴ While this thesis does not wish to portray people’s beliefs and practices as “silly superstition,” it also does not wish to ignore the possibility that this was a contemporary attitude. Despite my openness to this possibility, however, the only game chiromancy was bound with in the medieval period was rithmomachia, which we shall explore further in chapter three.

Many compilers, and later owners, read in an interactive way, writing annotations and corrections to the original texts. Some drew *manicula* (small hands in the margins) which pointed to passages that they deemed particularly important. Alternatively, readers would expunge sections they deemed inappropriate. Annotations are roughly dateable by their script, allowing yet another layer of analysis.⁷⁵ The quality of manuscripts is also very telling as coarse

⁷⁴ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson et al. 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 271-272.

⁷⁵ Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), 135.

informal writing was likely intended for personal use and not for public eyes. These, arguably, offer a more personal window into individuals' thoughts, dreams, and fears. Texts intended for a wider audience, however, show more about larger cultural norms since they would have to conform in order to avoid censure.

I employ the methodological approach of context-function analysis to take advantage of the complex nature of how medieval books were produced and the “archaeological layers” that they possess, to discern how chiromancy was conceptualised and used by its scribes and compilers.⁷⁶ For example, a chiromantic text found in a book of remedies, natural philosophy, and diagnostic methods suggests that it was used as a means of diagnosis by a healer or physician. Using context-function analysis to determine how these texts were used and conceptualised frees researchers from relying on the perspectives of the few contemporaries who wrote about it. Though other contemporary writings about chiromancy are (of course) extremely valuable sources, they were often written by those who were outside of the tradition, such as moralising church authorities. This can be especially problematic in the case of historical magic due to the prejudice such texts drew from theologians. These writings show us how others saw chiromancy, as a forbidden magical art, but does not show us whether the scribes and compilers who transmitted chiromancy understood it in the same way. Therefore, assessing the larger manuscript context offers a more nuanced analysis than studies limited only to the chiromantic text.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Context-function analysis determines how a text in a manuscript was understood and used by assessing how that text relates to the larger manuscript.

⁷⁷ Throughout this paper I use the words “text” and “tract” interchangeably when referring to a specific manual or treatise on a subject (such as chiromancy or astrology) which a scribe wrote. When I refer to a “manuscript,” “codices,” or “medieval book” I am talking of a collection of texts that were bound together by a compiler. Occasionally scribes would compose entire manuscripts that included tracts on multiple subjects. However, as these tracts were copied from earlier ones that can often be traced, these tracts should still be discussed individually.

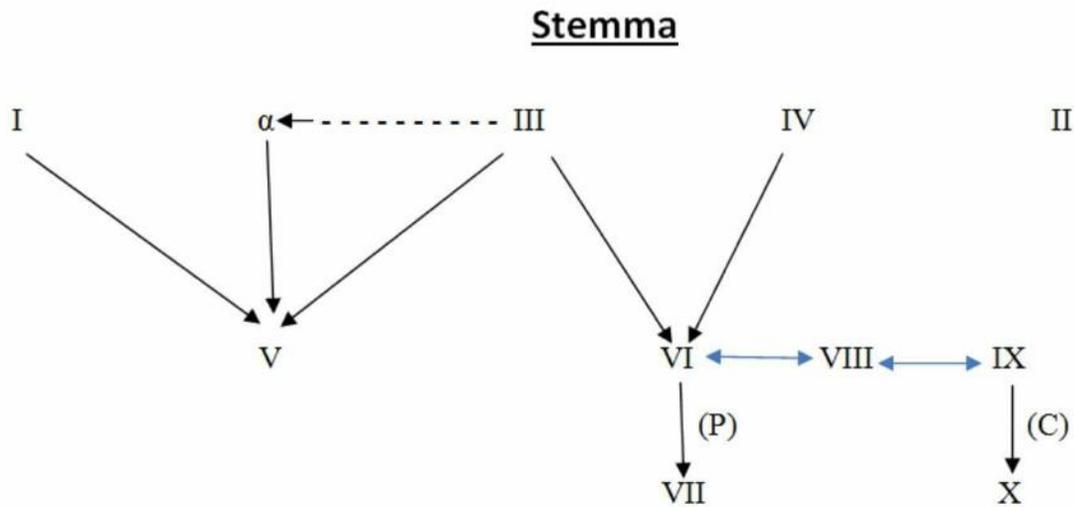
Chapter 1: Simple Origins, Growing Complexity

Over the course of the medieval period chiromancy developed from humble and rudimentary beginnings to a complicated system which included theoretical discussions and astrological associations with different parts of the hand. Astrological elements were not present in early chiromantic texts, as might be expected in a tradition transmitted from Greek or Arabic sources, but rather they were introduced as the result of a larger scholastic process by which simpler texts were compiled and expanded into more technical and theoretically complex treatises. Although this process intensified over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, early chiromantic texts offered the groundwork for this integration of scholastic natural philosophy and astrology into chiromantic theory. This chapter outlines the primary chiromantic texts covered in this study, how they relate to each other, and how they evolved over time. It then offers a very brief overview of how chiromancy was performed and the type of information it was intended to reveal. It goes on to demonstrate how scholasticism affected chiromantic theory within the texts themselves. It ends by outlining how medieval scholastics understood how the body (and by extension the hand) was connected to the stars. The addition of astrological elements to chiromantic texts was an incremental process which took place over the course of several centuries.

Primary Chiromantic Texts

The genre of chiromantic manuals is comprised of multiple interrelated texts, with later manuals often drawing from two or more previous ones. Although incipits are the common way to identify medieval texts, chiromancy's complex textual tradition renders this means of

identification imprecise.⁷⁸ Several classification systems have been developed over the past hundred years to more accurately distinguish various chiromantic texts. Where possible this study adopts the classification of chiromantic texts produced by Charles Burnett, who in turn has produced his list from those of Craig, Pack, and Schmitt and Knox in conjunction with his own research. The following diagram and legend (see page 23) are based on his classification of “The Principal Latin Texts on Chiromancy Extant in the Middle Ages” (Figure 1).⁷⁹ The titles and numbers of chiromantic texts in this thesis will follow those found in the legend below Figure 1.



Note Bene: Over time I and III were added to IV.

Figure 1: Diagram of principal chiromantic texts as outlined in Charles Burnett’s “Chiromancy: Supplement.” To see which texts appear in each manuscript see Appendix 1.

⁷⁸ For a full list of the incipits of chiromantic texts, see Thorndike, *History of Magic*, vol. 5, 673-678. Cf. Lynn Thorndike and Pearl Kibre, *A Catalogue of Incipits of Mediaeval Scientific Writings in Latin: A Revised and Augmented Edition* (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1963).

⁷⁹ Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.1-4.

Legend for Figure 1:

α : A hypothetical chiromancy proposed by Charles Burnett.

-- \rightarrow : Indicates that either III was influential in α , or the novel material he ascribes to V originated in III.

\rightarrow : Indicates that the text which the arrow points to drew upon the earlier text.

\leftrightarrow : Burnett observes a “great similarity” between the texts, but does not theorise on the nature of this relationship.

P: Rodger Pack established this link.

C: Hardin Craig established this link.

I: The Eadwine Chiromancy (Burnett Chiro. A)

II: The Sloane Chiromancy (Burnett Chiro. A2)

III: The Adelard Chiromancy or *Chiromantia parva* (Burnett Chiro. B1)

IV: The Hands

V: The *Ars chiromantiae* (Schmitt and Knox Chiro. II)

VI: The John of Seville Chiromancy (Schmitt and Knox Chiro. IV)

VII: *Tractatus cyromancie*

VIII: The Earliest Known Book of Palmistry in English

IX: *Summa chiromantia*

X: Incipit: *Secantur* (or *Distinguunt*) *scientiae inter se quemadmodum res de quibus, res aut ex quibus scientiae...*

The Latin chiromantic tradition is founded upon four chiromantic manuals (I-IV). Burnett describes these as “mutually independent sources” which contain unrelated interpretations for the

lines on the palm.⁸⁰ **II**, the Sloane Chiromancy, occurring in only one manuscript (the fourteenth-century Sloane 323, from the Netherlands), is conspicuous for its oddity in both vocabulary and content, although it appears to have had little impact on contemporary or later chiromantic texts.⁸¹ **IV**, called the Hands, is primarily a diagram with line interpretations written directly upon an image of the palm.⁸² Both the Eadwine Chiromancy (**I**) and the Adelard Chiromancy (**III**) were often bound next to the Hands in subsequent manuscripts, and scribes eventually added interpretations from these texts to the Hands.⁸³ Evidently compilers were not disturbed by contradictory chiromantic interpretations, as many manuscripts contained more than one of the above chiromantic manuals, which did not always agree.

The Eadwine Chiromancy and the Adelard Chiromancy were used as sources for the self-consciously compilatory *Ars chiromantiae* (**V**). There is some material included in the *Ars chiromantiae* that is not accounted for in any previous chiromancy. This led Burnett to conclude that this is either original material by the author of the *Ars chiromantiae*, or there was another source (now lost) which is represented by “ α ” in the diagram above. Likewise the Hands (**IV**) and the Adelard Chiromancy (**III**) were used as sources for **VI**, “an elaborate scholastic text” called the John of Seville Chiromancy.⁸⁴ This chiromancy has much in common with **VIII**, the “earliest known book of palmistry in English,” and **IX**, the *Summa chiromantia*.⁸⁵ Pack established that the John of Seville Chiromancy is the source that Rodericus Maioricis used to

⁸⁰ Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.1.

⁸¹ Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.1. I have drawn the date and place of origin for Sloane 323 from British Library, “Detailed Record for Sloane 323.”

⁸² Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.1.

⁸³ All three of these texts were used as sources for later chiromancies. Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.1. As a result it becomes difficult to determine when “The Hands” is functioning as an independent text or an illustrative diagram that functions as part of the textual chiromantic manuals bound adjacent to it, or whether this is even a useful distinction.

⁸⁴ Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.2-3.

⁸⁵ Pack, “Pseudo Aristotelian Chiromancy,” 200. Cited in Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.3.

write his *Tractatus cyromancie* (VII) in Oxford.⁸⁶ According to Hardin Craig, X is an expanded version of the *Summa chiromantia* which retains the original form and content of the *Summa chiromantia* while expanding on all aspects, particularly the astrological associations it introduced.⁸⁷

The Development of the Art

In its earliest extant manifestation in the Eadwine Psalter, chiromancy was performed by determining the three natural lines which, in principle, occur in every human hand and together form a triangle. It directs the reader, with no identifiable order and little explanation, to determine the qualities of these lines, the creases that may cross these three lines, and whether other signs (by which it means distinctively shaped small lines) occur in the palm. The manual ascribes various meanings to these lines, some of which echo modern palmistry. For instance, “the higher line of the triangle measures life according to its length.” These interpretations generally fall into four broad categories. Firstly, there are those concerned with the means and nature of the subject’s death. For instance, if one angle of the triangle was empty the person would have an honourable death; however, if a crease marred this area, he would die in battle. One line indicates that the subject “will die in foreign parts,” while yet others indicate death by hanging, lack of food, and the like. Secondly, many interpretations were concerned with the subject’s moral action, particularly sexual morality. Some lines indicate that the subject is a

⁸⁶ Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.3. Pack, “Pseudo Aristotelian Chiromancy,” 200. This is in spite of the fact that the earliest example of VI in this study is from the end of the fifteenth century (MS Arundell 88) and examples of VII date from the last quarter of the fourteenth century (MS Bodl. 177). Fifteenth-century examples of VII are found in MS Egerton 847, and Sloane 513. If Pack’s assessment is correct, then there were likely examples of VI (now lost) dating back to at least the mid-fourteenth century. This is supported by earlier extant continental copies of VI.

⁸⁷ Craig, *Works of John Metham*, xxvi-xxvii. Cited in Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.3

virgin, another indicates a prostitute, yet others whether he or she will be chaste or adulterous.⁸⁸ Many line interpretations were more specific, with one indicating that the subject would kill a relative, and “if two creases strongly cut these lines of the thumb indicating kin, he will violate his mother’s bed.”⁸⁹ Curiously, one sign (the shape of which was missing from the manuscript) indicated thirst for human blood. Thirdly, other signs indicated the subject’s health. Some indicated pain, and others wounds, in various parts of the body such as the head or neck. Several indicate whether he would lose his testicles, one eye, both eyes, or his feet. Several lines were specific to women’s health, though they generally pertained to sexual morality and childbirth. Furthermore a horizontal line intersecting three vertical lines indicated leprosy. Lastly, many lines indicated one’s vocation and quality of life. The severity and angle of “the last natural line” indicated whether the subject would lose or gain happiness and if that happiness would come gradually or as a sudden boon. Others indicate if he would become a bishop or a prebend. Burnett notes that in later copies of this chiromantic manual the ecclesiastical interpretations were universalised to apply to people who were not of the clerical class.⁹⁰

The basic operation of the art remains much the same in later chiromantic texts, although they gain many theoretical underpinnings and additional specifications. For example, the Adelard Chiromancy advised that the art should be performed only on certain days of the week, that the hand should be washed first, and that a man’s palm should be read during summer and his right hand should be used, whereas a woman’s left hand should be read in winter.⁹¹ Later and more complex treatises are concerned with uncovering similar information and, although they

⁸⁸ Burnett, “Earliest Chiromancy,” X.192-195.

⁸⁹ “*Si has lineas pollicis parentele indicas .ii^e rimule fortiter finderint, matris lectum violabit.*” This English translation and the Latin transcription are provided in Burnett, “Earliest Chiromancy,” X.193.

⁹⁰ Burnett, “Earliest Chiromancy,” X.191-195.

⁹¹ Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.14-17.

gain more theoretical underpinnings, they differ little in the fundamental operations of the art. For example, the triangle of three primary lines remains an important core in many texts, although a fourth is added.⁹² The most notable development in the practice of chiromancy was the addition and expansion of astrological aspects in the texts.

The *Summa chiromantia* (IX) was the first chiromantic text to include astrological material. The earliest British manuscript is Harley 3353 (written ca. 1300). The integration of astrology in the *Summa chiromantia* was not complex but simply entailed assigning a planet to the “mounts” (the raised fleshy areas on the palm) and fingers.⁹³ Yet the effect that this would have upon the chiromantic tradition was considerable. The *Summa chiromantia* became the archetypal chiromantic text that remained largely unchanged for centuries, and formed the basis for later chiromantic manuals which themselves expanded upon the astrological elements.⁹⁴ As we shall see, following the writing of the *Summa chiromantia*, chiromantic texts were bound next to or near astrological texts with great regularity. Although many chiromantic texts without astrological connections are extant, those with them were more numerous. Travelling as companions in multiple manuscripts no doubt helped to reinforce the link between chiromancy and astrology in the minds of readers who frequently saw this pairing. This connection became so strong that by the fifteenth century some manuscripts containing chiromancy included little other than astrological material. For example, Emmanuel 70 is almost entirely astrological, as is

⁹² The attempt to keep the conceit of there being three natural lines even when a fourth is included can be seen in the Adelard Chiromancy, “*Linee naturales tres sunt in planitie omnis cyros, que triangulum constituunt. Est et alia adiacens que mensalis vocatur eo quod per longitudinem mense ciros extendatur.*” Burnett translates this as: “There are three natural lines on the flat part of each hand; these make up a triangle. There is another next to this which is called the ‘table line’, because it extends across the length of the table of the hand.” See Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.10-11.

⁹³ Craig, *Works of John Metham*, xxvi. Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.3. Thorndike and Kibre, *Catalogue of Incipits*, 176.

⁹⁴ Craig, *Works of John Metham*, xxvi.

Society of Antiquaries 306 (other than some mathematical tracts). Egerton 847 was also almost entirely astrological, although in addition to the chiromancy it also contains a text on physiognomy and another on geometry. The growing strength of this connection in the manuscript context was mirrored within texts themselves.

The chiromantic text beginning *Secantur* (or *Distinguunt*) *scientiae inter se quemadmodum res de quibus, res aut ex quibus scientiae...* (X) is similar to the *Summa chiromantia*, but expanded the astrological elements.⁹⁵ This text first appears in the British Latin chiromantic tradition in the fifteenth century where it sometimes travelled with a copy of the *Summa chiromantia*. It quickly eclipsed even the *Summa chiromantia*, being extant in seven of the twelve fifteenth-century manuscripts whereas the *Summa chiromantia* occurs in four.⁹⁶ *Secantur scientiae...* not only contains far more astrological associations, but contains figures which have a marked similarity to planetary spirit sigils, suggesting a further integration with the astral magic tradition (itself understood by its proponents as a part of astrology).⁹⁷

The texts of chiromancy thus passed through a process in which texts were increasingly incorporated into larger texts (if not perfectly systematised). In addition, the astrological elements first introduced at the start of the fourteenth century became more sophisticated and

⁹⁵ Craig, *Works of John Metham*, xxvi. Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.3.

⁹⁶ The text beginning *Secantur scientiae* appears in the following fifteenth-century manuscripts: Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS Eng. 920, fol. 22-23; London, British Library, Egerton MS 847, fol. 75-96; London, British Library, MS Sloane 513, fol. 109-134; Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.1.57, fol. 110v-118; Cambridge, Emmanuel College, MS 70, fol. 120-129; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 45, fol. 67-95v; Oxford, New College MS 162, fol. 48-56. Copies of the *Summa chiromantia* are extant in the following fifteenth-century manuscripts: Bodleian Library, MS 607, fol. 1-2b; Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 190, fol. 55-62; London, British Library, MS Sloane 513, fol. 100-109; London, Society of Antiquaries of London, MS 306, fol. 28-29.

⁹⁷ For an example of the sigil-like figures see Eng. 920, fol. 20r. I thank Joseph H. Peterson for drawing my attention to this similarity during a conversation we had at the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo in 2016. Exploring whether there are any more explicit correlations between these chiromantic symbols and astrological spirit sigils would be an excellent area of further research in the history of chiromancy, as would a proper Latin and/or English edition of Chiromancy X.

their integration with chiromancy more complete. This was clearly driven by the demands and inclinations of scholastic natural philosophy.

Chiromancy and Scholasticism

Given the prominence of scholasticism it is unsurprising that chiromantic texts circulating in this intellectual environment were influenced by it and that a movement characterised by dialectical exegesis of texts to reconcile contradictions and refine theoretical vagaries would make it increasingly complex, well structured, and theoretically sophisticated. Chiromancy was not alone among magical texts to follow this trend. The *Ars notoria* was also rudimentary and poorly ordered in earlier manuscripts but became a cogent and well-glossed text over the course of the High Middle Ages.⁹⁸ The best illustration of this process in chiromantic texts is the increasingly complex discussion of *natural* versus *accidental* lines in the palm, which reflects the Aristotelian (and, through his influence, the scholastic) distinction between substance (or *essence*) and accidents.⁹⁹

The most important medieval implementation of the distinction between substance and accidents was to explain the transubstantiation of the Eucharist. This was first done explicitly in the early twelfth century by the scholastic theologian Peter Lombard.¹⁰⁰ Peter wrote that while all of the accidental qualities (appearance, taste, texture, etc.) of the Eucharist remained those of bread and wine, the essence or true substance had become the body and blood of Christ through

⁹⁸ Julien Véronèse, “Magic, Theurgy, and Spirituality in the Medieval Ritual of the *Ars Notoria*” in *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. & trans. Claire Fanger (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 38-39.

⁹⁹ David Bell, *Many Mansions: An Introduction to the Development and Diversity of Medieval Theology* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1996), 296.

¹⁰⁰ Bell, *Many Mansions*, 296.

transubstantiation.¹⁰¹ This application uses the terms to distinguish between essential substance versus incidental characteristics (for instance: wax is still wax whether it is hot, transparent, and liquid or cold, opaque, and hard). In Aquinas's *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* he explains that the necessary qualities of being two legged and an animal compose the substance that is a human.¹⁰² This human may have separable or inseparable accidental qualities. An example he gives of the former would be the state of sitting. A human may stand upon two legs, but if the person sits upon a chair she or he would still be a human. There are also inseparable accidental qualities (which I argue are what is meant in chiromantic texts by "accidental lines"). The example Aquinas gives of these is that a man may have a curved nose. This is an accident that is permanently a part of him. It is an accident, however, because a man with a perfectly straight nose is still a man.¹⁰³ Thus substantial forms refer to the integral and universal qualities that make a thing what it is, whereas accidental qualities give a thing its non-essential characteristics.¹⁰⁴

When this concept is applied to chiromantic instructions, which hold that there are four natural lines on the palm and that the remainder are accidental, then it means that these four lines are an integral and universal part of the hand, whereas other lines are incidental. Even the earliest known Latin chiromancy in the Eadwine Psalter employs scholastic language by referring to some lines as "natural," although it is otherwise devoid of theoretical elements.¹⁰⁵ Later chiromancies expanded on this, explaining that some lines are natural, some "natural and

¹⁰¹ Bell, *Many Mansions*, 296-297. In other words, it was in fact blood that happened to look and taste exactly like wine.

¹⁰² Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, trans. Richard J. Blackwell, Richard J. Spath, and W. Edmund Thirlkel (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1999), 26-27.

¹⁰³ Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, 26-27.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of Summa Theologiae Ia 75-89* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 82-83.

¹⁰⁵ Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.11.

accidental” (*Naturales et accidentales tantum dices...*) while others are only “accidental.”¹⁰⁶ For example, the Adelard Chiromancy (**III**) employs this terminology, explaining that the four “natural” lines (the three that form the triangle plus the table line) occur in every hand, while “accidental” lines offer no insight into a person’s nature or future, but merely arise from an excess of heat or cold, or an imbalance in the blood.¹⁰⁷

The growing complexity of both content and theory evinces scholasticism’s influences on chiromantic texts. The Adelard Chiromancy expands and defines its discussion of natural vs. accidental lines, has a more cogent order than earlier chiromancies, and begins with a discussion of theory. The Adelard Chiromancy was not unique in this. Many chiromantic manuals grow in complexity and theory, with the *Ars chiromantia* (**V**) being a self-conscious compilation, and the John of Seville Chiromancy (**VI**) “an elaborate scholastic text.”¹⁰⁸ These are far cries from the rather modest original texts exemplified by Chiromancies **I**, **II**, **III**, and **IV**. The combination of the chiromantic and astrological traditions and the expansion of the astrological aspects in chiromancy **X** (beginning *Secantur scientiae*) are further evidence of this larger scholastic process by which scholars attempted to clarify texts and articulate their theoretical foundations.¹⁰⁹

The growing complexity of chiromantic texts also involved the integration of astrological elements. This was, in part, due to how contemporary scholastic thinkers understood the planets

¹⁰⁶ Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.11.

¹⁰⁷ Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.11. It is noteworthy that this text offers a more ambiguous class of “natural and accidental” lines which, to use Burnett’s translation, are “those lines which individually are in some subject by nature, and accidentally reveal his fate, whether in respect to past things, or present or future.” The writer explains that these can be used in addition to the purely natural lines to gain true insight. While this distinction may be unclear, it shows that the author, in keeping with the scholastics’ approach, attempted to precisely explain chiromantic theory and develop specific terminology.

¹⁰⁸ Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.2-3.

¹⁰⁹ Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.1, 3.

to connect to the body as a whole. Medieval scholars drew upon late classical cosmological theories of the macrocosm and the microcosm to understand the human body, thereby reinforcing the astrological principle of celestial influences.¹¹⁰ Drawing upon Late Antique cosmology, the eighth-century mystical text entitled the *Emerald Tablet* was foundational to the so-called “hermetic corpus” which was partially translated into the Latin West during the twelfth century.¹¹¹ Among other more veiled assertions, the text states that “What is below is like that which is above, and what is above is like that which is below, to accomplish the miracles of one thing.”¹¹² This concisely reflects an image of the universe in which the human microcosm mirrors the macrocosm, that is the cosmos. In the medieval period the macrocosm was understood in astrological terms, giving rise to the common diagram of the “zodiac man.” This diagram occurs in one manuscript in this study, on fol. 10v of MS Trinity O.1.57 (James catalogue 1081), the notebook owned by the Haldenby family which will be discussed further in chapter three. In this illuminated image each body part of the man is overlain with the signs of the zodiac to show what part of the body was influenced by which sign.¹¹³ Even more elaborate illustrations of the “microcosmic man” are also extant.¹¹⁴ This diagram depicts the figure of a man drawn in the centre of a series of concentric circles: four representing the elements, seven for the planets, and one sphere of the fixed stars (including the zodiac) all of which are

¹¹⁰ Sophie Page, *Astrology in Medieval Manuscripts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 52.

¹¹¹ The hermetic corpus is a multitude of texts attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, a Hellenistic composite god of magic who was later reimagined as an ancient human author. Arabic and Western scholars alike interpreted the *Emerald Tablet*, and it was widely influential especially upon alchemy and early modern Hermeticism. Florian Ebeling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus: Hermeticism from Ancient to Modern Times*, trans. David Lorton (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), 3, 6, 49-50.

¹¹² Ebeling, *Secret History*, 49.

¹¹³ Laura Theresa Mitchell, *Cultural Uses of Magic in Fifteenth-Century England* (PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2011), 260.

¹¹⁴ Page, *Astrology in Medieval Manuscripts*, 52-53.

encompassed by the sphere of the *primum mobile* (God).¹¹⁵ This image displays the medieval conception of the universe in which each planet and each zodiac sign is ascribed to a different part of the human body over which it has primary influence.¹¹⁶ These macro-microcosmic links not only set humans at the centre of the universe, but bodily connected them to the cosmos.

An example of a medieval scholar to explicitly describes this cosmological structure was Hildegard of Bingen. Although Hildegard rarely makes reference to planetary influences affecting occult properties in her medical work *Physica*, her other works make it clear that she understood astrological influences to permeate the world. In her *Liber divinorum operum* she describes a vision in which she sees the cosmos “in the structure of the wheel... at its centre, is man.”¹¹⁷ She describes how all the planets are linked to each other and to the winds by rays, each of which connect to a different part of the central human figure.¹¹⁸ Both ancient and medieval scholars believed that the entire universe was connected by sympathies which caused all movement and fate.¹¹⁹ At the time of a person’s birth the positions of the planets in the firmament were believed to influence and shape the formation of a new-born body to produce a lifelong baseline of astrological influence. This baseline would then be further affected by the astrological conditions at any given time in her or his life.¹²⁰

Long before medieval scholars reconciled the astrological cosmology to Christianity, ancient authors had reconciled it to the naturalistic Aristotelian worldview, explaining that the

¹¹⁵ Page, *Astrology in Medieval Manuscripts*, 52-53. This is further exemplified in the image of the zodiac man, which depicts a naked man with each body part covered by a different zodiac symbol to show which body parts are under the influence of which sign.

¹¹⁶ Page, *Astrology in Medieval Manuscripts*, 53.

¹¹⁷ Hildegard, “*Liber divinorum operum*,” in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis CCCM 92*, eds. A. Derolez and P. Dronke (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), XLIII.

¹¹⁸ Derolez and Dronke, XLIV-XLV. See the image from *Liber divinorum operum* in the appendix.

¹¹⁹ Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (London: Routledge, 1994), 103-104, 190.

¹²⁰ Page, *Astrology in Medieval Manuscripts*, 54.

influence of the planets was conveyed through the elemental spheres to the earth and thereby affected change in the elements in sublunary regions.¹²¹ This would make astrology more readily accepted by medieval scholastics whose natural philosophy was founded upon Aristotle. Medieval physicians already understood the human body, in Galenic terms, to be composed of four humours which corresponded to the four elements. When the humours were properly balanced the person would be healthy, but imbalance produced illness, and a person's temperament was explainable by which humour was dominant.¹²² The idea that planets influenced the human body and natural inclinations through causing an ebb and flow of bodily humours was readily understandable to contemporary natural philosophers. Planetary influences or sympathies were the bases of astrological medicine, occult properties in natural objects, and also astral magic.¹²³ Although these topics would reach their zenith in the West during the Renaissance with such writers as Ficino and Agrippa, knowledge of astrology was of central importance to medieval physicians in determining safe times to bleed and perform operations. The University of Bologna went so far as to teach young physicians how to determine celestial influence on human bodies.¹²⁴ The use of astrology in medicine was widely accepted in the later Middle Ages to the point that by the end of the fourteenth century physicians in many countries were legally required to calculate the moon's position before surgery.¹²⁵ The use of astrology in medicine was readily accepted because it implied that the stars affected only people's bodies, not their souls, thus avoiding determinism.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 104-105.

¹²² Page, *Astrology in Medieval Manuscripts*, 53-54.

¹²³ Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 130-131.

¹²⁴ Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 122, 144-150.

¹²⁵ Page, *Astrology in Medieval Manuscripts*, 52.

¹²⁶ Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 128.

The Adelard Chiromancy echoes this medical practice by adopting a simple form of astrological timing. It prescribes that a man's hand should be read only on a Sunday or a Thursday, whereas a woman's hand should be read on a Monday or Friday.¹²⁷ Although this may seem arbitrary to the modern reader, the genders of the Greco-Roman deities associated with these days correspond with that of the patients.¹²⁸ Here we see a gendered use of rudimentary astrological timing in chiromantic assessments that reflects the implicit connection of astrology, the human body, and chiromancy.

Chiromancy also shows the adoption of contemporary natural philosophy and medical knowledge in its use of humoral language. Some chiromantic texts, such as the Adelard Chiromancy, offer different interpretations for reddish and pale lines, perhaps taking them as indicative of excess or lack of certain humours, such as blood.¹²⁹ The same text also warns that some lines are caused purely by excess heat or cold and "from a malfunction of the blood" which creates "accidental" lines that hold no meaning.¹³⁰

Since medieval people increasingly understood the human body to reflect the universe and to be affected by stellar influences, then it was sensible to look for indications of this in the body. The widespread medieval belief that the planets shaped the human body (and by extension the hand) led chiromancy's scribal authors (who did not wish to characterise this art as demonically inspired) to conclude that planetary influences were the cause of chiromancy's efficacy. Interpreting the art in the context of contemporary cosmography, it appeared less

¹²⁷ Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.17.

¹²⁸ Sunday and Thursday corresponded to the Sun and Jupiter respectively while Monday and Friday corresponded to the Moon and Venus. It is noteworthy that they selected the positively valenced male gods opposed to violent Mars or melancholic Saturn. This may have been done in the hope that information gleaned on those days would be more auspicious.

¹²⁹ Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.11-17.

¹³⁰ Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.11.

potentially dangerous and arbitrary. Determining which parts of the hand were shaped by which planet would deepen one's interpretation when reading the palm. This astrological worldview was taken up by the chiromantic texts themselves, and is reinforced by the texts with which compilers associated them. Though the use of scholastic language the groundwork was already laid for the incorporation of astrological elements in early texts, as will be discussed in the following chapters. Some scholars and medieval chiromantic texts describe chiromancy as the physiognomy of the hand. This connection can be more broadly framed by saying that authors of chiromantic texts increasingly understood the hand to be the microcosm of the microcosmic man.

Chapter 2: Chiromancy as Framed by Authorities, Scribes, and Compilers

The previous chapter demonstrated the growing complexity of chiromantic texts. Some of this process involved rationalising and contextualising the various strands of the literature on chiromancy. Much of the growing complexity, however, stems from the influence of scholastic natural philosophy. We have seen how the increasing use of astrology was in part driven by the fact that it was a conventional way of thinking about the natural world. But the addition of these astrological elements to chiromancy was not merely a passive act of interpreting the art using accepted cosmological theories. Censorship of heretical or illicit knowledge was common practice, so scribes who wished their writings to survive had to be careful in how they framed their work.¹³¹ Chiromancy's association with divination by authoritative writers placed the art in a precarious position, for the "rather unanimous negative attitude" of theologians toward divination led to instances of censorship.¹³² Theologians saw all divination as demonically inspired because it attempted to uncover knowledge known only to God, and which he kept secret (such as many future things).¹³³ Scribes of chiromantic texts had to actively confront authoritative voices which wished to eradicate "superstitions" and non-Christian practices. Scribes did this by attempting to draw chiromancy into the fold of legitimate natural philosophy. They also did this by carefully assuring their readers that the art reveals "natural inclinations" as opposed to predicting the future.¹³⁴ This chapter is concerned with how medieval scribes, compilers, and authorities framed chiromantic texts in Britain between 1160 and 1500. The first section offers an overview of authoritative voices that shaped medieval attitudes toward

¹³¹ Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 5.

¹³² Lang, *Unlocked Books*, 125.

¹³³ Lang, *Unlocked Books*, 125.

¹³⁴ Pack, "Greek Chiromantic Fragment," 379-380.

divination in general and chiromancy in particular. There was a growing scholastic impulse to clearly demarcate the lines between what was natural and what was not. These boundaries were used to both justify and condemn chiromancy. The second section will assess the internal evidence within chiromantic texts, and the context of the material with which these manuals were bound. I argue that scribes and compilers framed chiromancy as a branch of *naturalia* in reaction to authoritative condemnations. To do so they argued that chiromancy was natural, yet not demonically inspired, and therefore a valid science. Chiromancy was shaped by the very authoritative voices which sought to condemn it, and so the art's development must be understood as the product of the dialogue between its proponents and critics.

Authorities on Divination and Chiromancy

The medieval attitude toward divination was based upon the writings of St. Augustine (354-430 CE) who argued that most divination is comprised of empty associations made arbitrarily by humans. He concedes that things foretold by diviners and astrologers often appeared to come true; however, any efficacy of such divination was rooted in the machinations of demons attempting to lead humans into the sin of idolatry.¹³⁵ In his *De divinatione daemonum* Augustine explained that demons could make inferences¹³⁶ about the future with far greater accuracy than any human due to their subtle senses, speed of movement, and their intricate understanding of how the natural world operates which was born from their long lives.¹³⁷ He

¹³⁵ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, Inc., 1958), 59-60.

¹³⁶ Here, and elsewhere in this paper, I use the verbs “infer,” “forecast,” and (occasionally) “conjecture” to specify that the future events are being predicted through reason and theologically acceptable means. I shy away from using “predict,” “divine,” and “foretell” in this context since they hold the implication that information about the future is being accessed through magic or divination. “Conjecture,” “infer,” and “forecast” lack this supernatural baggage and all imply using reason to (imperfectly) anticipate likely future events.

¹³⁷ Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 90. Cf. Augustine, *De Divinatione Daemonum* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2010), <http://clt.brepolis.net.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/llta/pages/Toc.aspx?ctx=686673> (Accessed

explicitly condemned all forms of divination, calling them “fornication of the spirit.”¹³⁸ This position is echoed by the sixth-century bishop Philoxenus of Mabbug who defined fornication of the body in the usual way, fornication of the soul as the mind thinking of fornication, and fornication of the spirit as “the communication of the soul with devils or its agreement with strange teachings.”¹³⁹ For Augustine divination was literally a set of demonic teachings and an art which involved implicit or explicit communications with demons. It was akin to fornicating with demons in thought by contemplating learning forbidden by Christianity. Divination was also incompatible with Christianity because it challenged the principle of free will. If all future things could be foretold this would imply that people do not have the freedom to make choices and determine their own fate in life and the afterlife, which is problematic since this freedom is a fundamental tenet of Christian theology. In his discussion of astrology Augustine condemns divination for robbing people of this freedom, stating that “a man is free when he... gives his money [to an astrologer] that he may leave him as a servant... of all the stars.”¹⁴⁰ Although Augustine makes reference to astrology and to omens such as lightning or strange animal births, his discussion of divinatory techniques remains vague and excludes specific examples of divinatory techniques.¹⁴¹ In the coming centuries, Christian condemnations would become more focussed on specific techniques.

October 27, 2017). For an English translation of this see Augustine, “The Divination of Demons,” trans. Ruth W. Brown in *The Writings of St. Augustine*, vol. 15, in *The Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 27, ed. Thomas P. Halton et al. (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 414-440.

¹³⁸ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 59-60.

¹³⁹ This is an issue that would certainly have been of great concern to Philoxenus, as he became bishop of a see where Christianity had only recently become the majority religion in the fifth century, and both paganism and heretical sects still flourished. Robert Ardelle Kitchen, “The Development of the Status of Perfection in Early Syriac Asceticism with Special Reference to the *Liber Graduum* and Philoxenus of Mabbug” (PhD Dissertation, University of Oxford, 1997), 194-195, 221.

¹⁴⁰ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 56.

¹⁴¹ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 60.

A few centuries after Augustine, Isidore of Seville (560-636 CE) wrote against specific types of magicians and diviners in his *Etymologies*.¹⁴² *Etymologies* was a compendium created to preserve ancient Greco-Roman and early Christian learning. Due to its accessibility and fanciful arguments it went on to become “arguably the most influential book, after the Bible, in the learned world of the Latin West for nearly a thousand years.”¹⁴³ In this work he goes into far more detail regarding the various types of divination, listing among them astrology, augury (divination by use of birds), haruspicy (divination from animal entrails), four forms of elemental divination he draws from Varro (116-27 BCE), and many others.¹⁴⁴ The four types of elemental divination are geomancy, hydromancy, aeromancy, and pyromancy. His lists became the basis for taxonomies of divination throughout the Middle Ages.¹⁴⁵

The structure of Isidore’s book reflects Augustine’s argument that demons taught divination to humanity. By positioning his discussion of divination directly before his section on paganism, he implicitly links divination to paganism and idolatry. Isidore also explicitly argues that gods or “evil angels” taught these arts to men and the cultures over which they held influence. Indeed, in a typically fanciful but rhetorically useful etymology he says that divination is so called because practitioners pretend to be filled with a divinity and thereby foretell the future. In this section Isidore also discusses necromancy, which in this early period was understood as divination by means of the dead. Necromancers and other diviners follow naturally

¹⁴² Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. and ed. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 181-183.

¹⁴³ Isidore, *Etymologies*, 3.

¹⁴⁴ Isidore, *Etymologies*, 183.

¹⁴⁵ These are in fact found in a fragment from Varro of unclear origin quoted by the fourth-century CE Roman grammarian Servius. See Federico Santangelo, *Divination, Prediction and the End of the Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 48. Augustine also cites Varro in *The City of God* where he describes hydromancy as conjuring visions of the gods/demons into basins to inquire about future things. He therefore directly equates the practice with necromancy and idolatry. See Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Hafner, 1948), 302.

in his writing from a description of evil magicians (evildoers, or *malefici*) who can kill by magic alone, thus linking the passive art of divination with more active forms of magic that effect change in the world. Isidore subsumes divination into his section *De magis* and, like Augustine, he makes little if any distinction between the arts of magic and those of divination, portraying the latter as a branch of the former. Isidore goes beyond vaguely listing types of divination to recount certain details about their operation. For example, he explains that demons who pretend to be the dead love blood and so such divination requires blood to be mixed with water to help draw the demons. By emphasising the grotesque he stresses that divination is a demonically inspired tool used to draw people away from the Christian faith.¹⁴⁶

Isidore not only attempted to preserve the knowledge of the ancient world, but was a forerunner of later Christian writers who dealt with new forms of divination that were both more compelling for Christian use, and more difficult to condemn. He recounts examples of attempts by diviners to produce legitimate Christianised forms of divination, such as using lots marked with different saints and passages of scripture. Although Isidore rejects these attempts of Christianised divination as “false religion,” such anecdotes indicate that contemporary Christians were already attempting to carve out a niche for licit Christianised divination.¹⁴⁷

Many condemnatory lists of divination and magic include the four types of elemental divination and necromancy outlined by Isidore.¹⁴⁸ Multiple authorities from the eighth to eleventh centuries also follow the Isidorian pattern, although (like him) they do not include chiromancy.¹⁴⁹ The earliest authority to include chiromancy in this list of condemned divination

¹⁴⁶ Isidore, *The Etymologies*, 182-183.

¹⁴⁷ Isidore, *Etymologies*, 183.

¹⁴⁸ Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 1, During the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923-1958), 628-632. Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 2, 14, 81, 158-159, 319-320, 701-702. Cited in Pack, “Pseudo-Aristoteles,” 290.

¹⁴⁹ Pack, “Pseudo-Aristoteles,” 290. Here Pack offers a useful survey of these authorities.

was the archbishop Dominicus Gundissalinus (1115-1190 CE).¹⁵⁰ Shortly after this, Gundissalinus' contemporary John of Salisbury criticised Thomas Becket, the then chancellor of Henry II, in his satire of courtly follies entitled *Policraticus*, which was addressed to Becket. John chides him for consulting a chiromancer and soothsayer before a battle against the Welsh.¹⁵¹ These two earliest references to chiromancy were contemporaneous with the writing of the Eadwine Psalter chiromancy.¹⁵² The fact that both of these figures were significant churchmen offers circumstantial support for the argument that chiromancy initially circulated in ecclesiastical circles.¹⁵³ It also shows that chiromancy was linked with divination and condemned by authorities, either as a dark art or impotent folly, since its earliest known practice in the Latin West.

The development of scholasticism in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries subtly shifted the focus of condemnation to demarcating the boundary between what was within nature and that which was beyond.¹⁵⁴ Drawing on Augustine, scholastics believed that God imbued the natural world with its order and virtues at the point of creation. While it was possible for humans to learn the causes of sublunary things (natural), some things were not caused by nature but were directly caused by God (supernatural).¹⁵⁵ High and Late Medieval authorities, such as Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, defined miracles (*miraculi*) as those things which arose not from

¹⁵⁰ Pack, "Pseudo-Aristoteles," 290. Ironically, Gundissalinus argued that at least some necromancy was part of natural science. See Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 26.

¹⁵¹ Pack, "Pseudo-Aristoteles," 290-291.

¹⁵² The connection between these two early references to chiromancy and the contemporaneous emergence of the earliest Western chiromantic text in the same city was first made by Burnett, "Earliest Chiromancy," X.191-192.

¹⁵³ Chiromancy's early ecclesiastical context is further supported by the fact that Becket went on to become the Archbishop of Canterbury, as noted in Burnett, "Earliest Chiromancy," X.191-192.

¹⁵⁴ For a useful discussion of this shift see Robert Bartlett, *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 7.

¹⁵⁵ Bartlett, *Natural and the Supernatural*, 6.

nature, but from direct intervention by God.¹⁵⁶ Traditionally a miracle had been defined as that which inspired great awe, but scholastic theologians sought a more precise definition because they recognised that many wonders arose from natural causes (*mirabiliae*), which included magic and demons.¹⁵⁷ Drawing from Augustine, Albertus Magnus argued that the works of magicians seem miraculous because the demons that the magician employs have subtler senses than humans and the hidden knowledge gained from their long lives reveals how to effect marvellous natural wonders that seem like miracles.¹⁵⁸ For this reason, determining causation became paramount, because it sharpened the line between natural wonders and miracles.¹⁵⁹ The impulse to distinguish between *miraculi* and *mirabiliae* offered possible vindication for arts such as chiromancy because close examination of magic and divination suggested that some forms might be non-demonically natural, and therefore legitimate.

It is important to note that while scholastics viewed all magic and demonic power as natural (that is, they operated within the order of creation), they did not believe that all natural wonders were necessarily demonic.¹⁶⁰ This led to a second important distinction which would divide illegitimate/demonic magic practices from legitimate use of occult natural effects. Some, such as the thirteenth-century Bishop of Paris William of Auvergne, argued that natural magic was simply a branch of natural science concerned with the wonders woven into nature by God during creation.¹⁶¹ It is easy to understand why medieval people would become anxious that a

¹⁵⁶ Bartlett, *Natural and the Supernatural*, 9.

¹⁵⁷ Bartlett, *Natural and the Supernatural*, 9, 18-20.

¹⁵⁸ Bartlett, *Natural and the Supernatural*, 25. Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 19-20.

¹⁵⁹ Bartlett, *Natural and the Supernatural*, 9.

¹⁶⁰ Bartlett, *Natural and the Supernatural*, 20-21. It is amusing to note that the thirteenth-century bishop of Paris William of Auvergne approved of natural magic because it is not contrary to God unless used to an evil end, yet he refers to divination as an “unspeakable operation” that fell under the sin of *curiositas*.

¹⁶¹ Bartlett, *Natural and the Supernatural*, 21-22.

seemingly innocuous art might in fact be covertly demonic since the effects of miracles, innocent natural wonders, and demonically inspired natural wonders could be so similar.¹⁶² Association with licit branches of natural philosophy, however, could be used to validate potentially dubious practices, such as chiromancy.

One such text which sought to categorise these tracts according to whether they were actually natural astrology or magic was the *Speculum astronomiae*, at the time commonly attributed to Albertus Magnus (1206-1280 CE), which treated chiromancy as non-demonic natural philosophy. This was a highly influential medieval text that condemns most astrological magic texts as demonic (approving only two of about forty).¹⁶³ Despite its uncompromising attitude towards illicit magical practices, it tentatively offered justification of chiromancy as being a branch of *naturalia* rather than illicit divination. While discussing the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the four elemental divination methods, the author of the *Speculum* wrote that chiromancy was possibly part of physiognomy, which in turn “seems to be collected from the significations of the stars over the body and over the soul, while it makes conjectures about the character of the mind from the exterior figure of the body; not because the one might be the cause of the other, but because both are found to be caused by the same thing.”¹⁶⁴ It remains unclear whether chiromancy and physiognomy were frequently positioned near each other in manuscripts because compilers read the *Speculum* and adopted its explanation, or whether the

¹⁶² Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 14.

¹⁶³ Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 29.

¹⁶⁴ “...collecta videtur ex significationibus magisterii astrorum super corpus et super animam, dum mores animi conicit ex exteriori figura corporis; non quia sit unum causa alterius, sed quia ambo inveniuntur ab eodem causata.” The full quote is as follows, “De chiromantia vero nolo determinationem praecipitem ad praesens facere, quia forte pars est physiognomiae, quae collecta videtur ex significationibus magisterii astrorum super corpus et super animam, dum mores animi conicit ex exteriori figura corporis; non quia sit unum causa alterius, sed quia ambo inveniuntur ab eodem causata.” Both translation and transcription are drawn from Paola Zambelli, *The Speculum astronomiae* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), 272-273. Cf. Roger A. Pack, “Pseudo Aristotelian Chiromancy,” 293. Note how this line of justification conforms with the arguments of St. Thomas Aquinas, which are discussed below.

Speculum connects the subjects because they were so often bound together.¹⁶⁵ In either case, this small window of approval likely went far in validating chiromancy and contributed to its proliferation. The texts of which the *Speculum* approved were copied far more frequently than those it condemned. Evidently, it assured people who were interested in copying more wondrous varieties of *naturalia* that certain texts did not involve unknowingly consorting with demons. At the very least, it provided authoritative justification for collecting certain works of divination and magic.¹⁶⁶

Scholastic arguments against divination became even more focussed in the writings of Albertus Magnus' pupil Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE). Elaborating upon both Augustine and Isidore's writings, Aquinas distinguishes three various causes of future things. The first were necessary causes; for instance, if one drops a pen it will fall. The second were causes that allow one to conjecture likelihoods. Aquinas gives the examples of physicians determining the likely health of their patients, and astrologers discerning the likely coming weather with imperfect accuracy through observation of the planets. The third class were things which happen by pure chance or by human reason and will. While he approves of naturally making conjectures about the future through reason in the first two instances, he condemns the third as divination, stating that it "usurps what belongs to God."¹⁶⁷ From this we can see that Aquinas defined divination only as the attempt to gain knowledge of the future which could not be inferred through the use of human reason and is therefore known only to God.¹⁶⁸ While he expanded Augustine's argument that divination and some forms of astrology robbed people of free will, he also

¹⁶⁵ Thorndike, "Chiromancy in Mediaeval Latin Manuscripts," 679.

¹⁶⁶ Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 29. This anxiety over whether something miraculous was due to natural or demonic power was common within the medieval mind, and has been dubbed by Frank Klaassen "the apothecary's dilemma." Klaassen discusses this on page 14.

¹⁶⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 2.2.95.1

¹⁶⁸ Aquinas, *Sum.* 2.2.95.1

preserves Augustine's classification of divination in general as a form of superstition akin to idolatry since he argues that all divination is overtly or covertly demonically inspired.¹⁶⁹ His acceptance of astrological influence on the natural world is characteristic of the High and Late Middle Ages, and was an accepted part of Aristotelian natural philosophy.¹⁷⁰

While Aquinas reiterates the lists of divinatory methods mentioned by Isidore, such as necromancy and elemental divination, he also divides all divination into three main categories: divination that explicitly involves demons; divination from the "observation of the disposition or movement of some other being" (such as planets or birds); and active occult operations to determine the future (such as drawing lots or pouring molten lead into water).¹⁷¹ He dubs these "necromancy," "augury," and "sortilege" respectively.¹⁷² What is notable is that while the majority of these divinatory practices are drawn from Isidore, chiromancy is one of the few new forms of divination which, likely following Gundissalinus, Aquinas specifically adds to the discussion. Moreover, he places chiromancy in the general category of augury, a category which may contain valid science.¹⁷³

Aquinas argues that it is occasionally possible to naturally infer future things from the objects observed by auguries, such as the flight of birds. This is not because the birds foretell hidden future things, but because sometimes the actions of the birds and the future events arise from a common cause. He says that birds are not rational, but instinctual beings. Thus, due to their sensitivity to the surrounding air and the influence of the planets which cause changes in the

¹⁶⁹ Aquinas, *Sum.* 2.2.95.2, 5, and 3.

¹⁷⁰ Sachiko Kusakawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy: The Case of Philip Melanchthon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 171.

¹⁷¹ Aquinas, *Sum.* 2.2.95.3.

¹⁷² Aquinas, *Sum.* 2.2.95.3. Note that while "augury" is generally defined as "divination by the flight of birds," Aquinas here employs the term in an unusual and specialised manner.

¹⁷³ Aquinas, *Sum.* 2.2.95.3.

weather, birds act in particular ways before those changes take place.¹⁷⁴ According to Aquinas, therefore, legitimate auguries are restricted to the knowledge that can be licitly gained from the natural influences of the planets and human reason.¹⁷⁵ He limits the knowledge provided by the planets to that which arises from necessity, such as eclipses, and denies that they can foretell accidental things or things which arise from human will.¹⁷⁶ In other words, an action should be considered divination only when information gleaned from such things as birds is applied to future events that are not connected by a common cause to the thing observed (or which cannot be foretold by human reason).¹⁷⁷ By allowing that the observation of “auguries” might illuminate future things that arise from common causes, especially through the influence of the planets, he opened a line of argument for those who wished to validate chiromancy.¹⁷⁸ Taken together with the *Speculum astronomiae*, Aquinas’ arguments, in part, explain why chiromantic texts began to make explicit associations between the planets and parts of the hand. For if the body was shaped by the planets, and one’s inclinations and likely future behaviour (unless one overcome one’s own nature through reason) were influenced by the planets, then the signs on the palm and one’s nature/likely behaviour would arise from the same cause, namely astrological influences. While this provided the art’s proponents justification of chiromancy as a form of augury, Aquinas’ influential voice went far in fostering hostility toward chiromancy and all forms of divinatory texts.

¹⁷⁴ Aquinas, *Sum.* 2.2.95.7.

¹⁷⁵ Aquinas, *Sum.* 2.2.95.7.

¹⁷⁶ Aquinas, *Sum.* 2.2.95.5.

¹⁷⁷ Aquinas, *Sum.* 2.2.95.7.

¹⁷⁸ Note how the passage about chiromancy and physiognomy in the *Summa astronomiae*, outlined above, conform to this line of argument.

The list of divinatory methods was expanded yet again as late as the early fifteenth century when Nikolaus Magni, a theologian in Heidelberg, wrote that chiromancy was one of the seven forbidden arts which Satan used to entice humans.¹⁷⁹ This condemnatory list is particularly interesting, despite not necessarily reflecting common divinatory practice and betraying little practical knowledge of how these arts were meant to work. Instead it reflects Nikolaus' cosmological ordering of the universe. Nikolaus starts with necromancy, which represents the higher sphere of spirits, and proceeds to descend through all four elements before reaching chiromancy, which represents the human sphere, and ending with scapulimancy (divination using a sheep's shoulder blade) at the level of base animals.¹⁸⁰ The argument that chiromancy had a place among the "forbidden arts" was repeated again by the physician Johanas Hartlieb in his 1455 *Book of All Forbidden Arts*.¹⁸¹

These condemnations were not without effect and posed a threat to chiromancy in the form of censorship. As the historian Benedek Lang relates, MS BJ 551 from Krakow (which he describes as being 90% astrological) contains a short tract on chiromancy collected together with magical texts including explicit spirit evocations in the vein of the *Ars notoria*.¹⁸² While these later texts were left intact, the tract on chiromancy was defaced by a "pious... interactive reader."¹⁸³ Some people, evidently, viewed the art as *more* reprehensible than ritual magic. Clearly, the voices raising concerns about divination had an effect on Late Medieval readers.

¹⁷⁹ Johannes Fried, *The Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 460-461.

¹⁸⁰ Charles Burnett, "The Translating Activity in Medieval Spain" in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, S. K. Jayyusi ed. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 1042. Reprinted in Charles Burnett, *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages: Texts and Techniques in the Islamic and Christian Worlds* (Hampshire: Variorum, 1996), IV.1042.

¹⁸¹ Fried, *Middle Ages*, 460.

¹⁸² In his "Description of Selected Manuscripts" Lang specifies that the manuscript dates to "1388 and the fifteenth century." Lang, *Unlocked Books*, 125, 320.

¹⁸³ Lang, *Unlocked Books*, 125-126.

Despite chiromancy's condemnation, it continued to hold a liminal position between the licit and the illicit. This is exemplified by the fact that three years after writing his *Book of All Forbidden Arts*, in which he condemned the art, Hartlieb produced a vernacular woodblock chiromantic manual.¹⁸⁴ In their efforts to provide more focussed and precise discussions of specific techniques and processes, the early theologians and scholastics did two things. They opened up the possibility that some forms of prognostication could be legitimate natural science, while still condemning divination as demonic. This made it crucial to establish that one's preferred form of magic or divination lay on the "natural" side of the divide. As we shall see, chiromancy's scribes did precisely this.

Scribes and Compilers' Response to Authorities: A Two-Pronged Approach

Two continental examples of the Adelard Chiromancy, so called because two of its five¹⁸⁵ extant copies are attributed to Adelard of Bath (c. 1080-1150), include two seemingly contradictory myths which assured readers of the art's legitimacy. They claim that chiromancy was natural philosophy discovered through human reason by an Arabic scholar before being translated into Latin by Adelard. They also, however, offer a *historiola* describing how God revealed the art directly to an anchorite in Britain.¹⁸⁶ The manuscript held in Paris offers the more elaborate version which asserts that the British anchorite, named Hilaricus, prayed to God to know whether his mortally ill brother would recover from his malady. Upon rising from prayer, he saw a sculpture carved with a man and woman's hand which had all the chiromantic

¹⁸⁴ Martin Porter, *Windows of the Soul: Physiognomy in European Culture 1470-1780* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 88-89.

¹⁸⁵ Although Burnett asserts that there are only "four known manuscript copies" of this text, his list does not seem to include the partially extant copy in Ashmole 1472 fol. 82-82v. The copy in Ashmole 1472 cuts off abruptly in the middle of line 37 of Burnett's edition. See Charles Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.1, 8, 14.

¹⁸⁶ It is interesting to observe that these two origin myths parallel the two main origin theories for chiromancy.

signs inscribed upon it. The first myth locates the origin of the art in the historical intellectual tradition of natural philosophy, and indicates that it was discovered through human reason, whereas the second presents it as revealed truth.¹⁸⁷

Although this divine origin myth is unusual and may seem to contradict the Arabian-philosopher origin myth, they both acted to legitimise chiromancy and are in fact not mutually exclusive. The idea that God would bestow knowledge of natural philosophy on a pious person was not unprecedented. There are numerous passages in the Bible wherein people are given knowledge or insight by God, most notably when King Solomon's prayers are answered and God grants him *sapientia, scientia, et intellegentia*.¹⁸⁸ Pursuing scientific learning was completely harmonious with medieval Christianity (so long as it did not lead into heresy), and the belief that God might bestow this knowledge on the pious is attested in the fifty surviving copies of the *Ars notoria* (a ritual magic text intended to convey wisdom, but which was sometimes accused of being necromancy). The conceit of the *Ars notoria* was that God could, as he did for Solomon, infuse knowledge and wisdom directly into the pious.¹⁸⁹ This revelatory origin myth and the more widespread assertions of chiromancy's Arabic or Greek origins both countered authoritative concerns and self-consciously framed chiromancy as a licit subject.

These two seemingly contradictory myths must be interpreted together since they are not mutually exclusive. They are, rather, two prongs of a single argument which reveals the authors' awareness of condemnations and optimises their attempt to overcome them. Firstly, the texts emphasise their legitimacy by claiming that chiromancy was an art revealed by God. Since they

¹⁸⁷ All references to the Adelard Chiromancy texts in this paragraph are from the edition and translation provided in Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.16-17.

¹⁸⁸ 2 Chronicles 1:9-12 and 2 Kings 3:5-14. These, and several other illustrative biblical examples which provide justification for the belief that God could directly grant knowledge are outlined in Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 89.

¹⁸⁹ Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 92, 94.

believed that God created the natural world, and that natural philosophy is the study of God's creation, the art's revelation by God does not contradict the Arabic origin myth. Should God decide to reveal the secrets of his creation to one person it would not mean that another could not discover it through her or his reason. Therefore, the divine origin myth assures the reader that chiromancy was in fact natural and not demonically inspired. Secondly, the fact that in this myth chiromancy was also discovered by an Arabic philosopher shows that the writer understood chiromancy as a branch of natural philosophy discoverable through observation of nature and through human reason, and therefore not as knowledge appropriate only for God to possess.¹⁹⁰ But since God chose to reveal it, the art must be above the machinations of demons, who operate within the natural sublunary sphere.¹⁹¹ Finally, the fact that the art was offered by God for interpreting an illness establishes chiromancy as a prognostic for medical outcomes, a perception shared by many of chiromancy's compilers.¹⁹² By employing a complementary two-pronged approach the scribes of these texts defended chiromancy. This both reassured those who were interested in the art (but afraid that it would imperil their eternal souls) that it was safe, and it lowered the likelihood of censure.

Rationalising Chiromancy: Chiromancy Framed as *Naturalia*

As we have seen in the previous chapter, scholastic scribes were aware that multiple different chiromantic texts circulated, sometimes with contradictory or alternate interpretations,

¹⁹⁰ This was important since attempting to gain knowledge known only to God, as we have seen, would have been a heretical notion. See page 39, above.

¹⁹¹ An easy dismissal of this account by authoritative voices would be that the vision itself was an illusion made by demons. However, the assertion that the visionary was a "very religious anchorite" would tend to counter this line of argument. To my knowledge no authority ever specifically refutes or makes reference to these accounts.

¹⁹² The fact that chiromancy was often bound with medical texts fortifies the argument that chiromancy was a form of *naturalia* because medical texts were themselves under the umbrella of natural philosophy.

and they attempted to rationalise this art. They rationalised chiromancy in a variety of ways, such as distilling multiple chiromantic texts into compilations. Scribes actively attempted to reconcile disparate texts and integrated them into each other to produce more comprehensive, and comprehensible, manuals. They also rationalised chiromancy by expanding on the art's theoretical underpinnings, principally through integrating it with astrology which firmly anchored chiromancy in contemporary understandings of the natural order. Thus, they developed the art of chiromancy itself in ways that more deeply connected it with the literature of *naturalia*, that is, the literature on the natural world.

Scribes and compilers also framed the chiromantic texts they copied as *naturalia* in three primary ways despite, and perhaps in reaction to, chiromancy's dubious reputation among medieval authorities. Firstly, they attributed them to authoritative natural philosophers or translators. Secondly, some began to include explicit disclaimers assuring the reader that chiromancy was not illicit divination but a form of prognostic that revealed innate inclinations. Lastly, chiromantic texts were widely bound with natural philosophic texts, reinforcing this association. In these ways the authors, scribes, and compilers of chiromantic texts acted to protect the art from orthodox censure.

It was common for medieval scribes and authors to pseudonymously attribute their texts on natural philosophy to classical authorities, especially Aristotle.¹⁹³ In this way medieval authors honoured ancient writers and bolstered the credibility of their texts for medieval readers. This was often the case in chiromantic texts which were variously attributed to “Plato, Aristotle, Galen, Albertus, Ptolemy, Avicenna, Averroes,” and Rasis (among others).¹⁹⁴ As mentioned

¹⁹³ Porter, *Windows of the Soul*, 47.

¹⁹⁴ Craig, *Works of John Metham*, xxiv.

above, the survey by Schmitt and Knox found forty-one surviving European chiromantic texts attributed to Aristotle.¹⁹⁵ The authors and scribes of chiromancy also strengthened the art's connection to the massive influx of natural philosophic learning being translated into Latin during the twelfth century by constructing a fictional provenance from Greek through Arabic scholarship and into Latin. Many of these offer fictitious accounts of translation from Greek or Arabic into Latin by well-known translators such as John of Seville and Adelard of Bath.¹⁹⁶

Both of the aforementioned continental copies of the Adelard chiromancy contain fictitious provenance myths which place chiromancy under the umbrella of *naturalia*.¹⁹⁷ They explicitly state that chiromancy is a natural science or art which was translated into Latin from Arabic or Greek.¹⁹⁸ The text housed in Paris says that chiromancy was discovered by an Arabic philosopher named Eadmund (previously known as Manean), whereas the one housed in Schlagl simply calls the philosopher "Saracenus."¹⁹⁹ Both agree that Adelard translated the text into Latin. Adelard was a preeminent English natural philosopher, early translator of Arabic texts, and teacher of the liberal arts.²⁰⁰ He wrote many works on natural philosophy and education, such as *Quaestiones naturales* (Questions on Natural Science) which is structured around a series of questions about nature ordered in an ascending cosmological hierarchy from plant roots

¹⁹⁵ Burnett, "Earliest Chiromancy," X.189. Schmitt and Knox, *Pseudo-Aristoteles Latinus*, 21-24. A potential avenue of future study would be an assessment of how this differs from medieval vernacular texts, for two Latin copies of the Adelard chiromancy are bound in Trinity College Cambridge MS O.2.5 with a French palmistry attributed to King Solomon, indicating a connection with more dubious forms of magic.

¹⁹⁶ Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.1-3.

¹⁹⁷ The two copies of the Adelard chiromancy extant in England, both bound in Trinity College Cambridge MS O.2.5, do not include this attribution. Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.1.

¹⁹⁸ Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.17.

¹⁹⁹ The Paris text seems to indicate that Manean was initially a Muslim scholar who converted to Christianity and took the name Eadmund. This is recounted in the first half of line 53 in Burnett's edition, "*Sciendum est tamen quod quedam ars reperta est naturalis a quodam philosopho Eadmundo qui ante fuerat Saracenus et vocabatur Maneanus...*" Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.16-17.

²⁰⁰ Charles Burnett, "Adelard of Bath," *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy: Philosophy Between 500 and 1500*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 24. https://link.springer-com.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-1-4020-9729-4_12.pdf

to the stars and firmament. He translated works on many subjects such as mathematics, astronomy, astrology, and even manuals to produce magical talismans.²⁰¹ Although magical talismans might seem distant from natural science to the modern reader, this was not the case. Adelard was an important early voice to argue that talismanic (or image) magic was not demonically inspired, but a branch of natural science which was empowered by planetary influences on the world.²⁰²

Likely due to chiromancy's tenuous position, which was the result of authoritative anti-divinatory polemic, chiromantic texts became more defensive and they began to include prefaces containing counterarguments against censure. This is evident even in the incipits. As though in anticipation of orthodox concerns, the *Summa chiromantia* opens with the pious words "Blessed God almighty who made the plan of the universe and creatures without precedent..."²⁰³ This begins the text with a pious orthodox conceit, but also keeps the association with the natural world by reaffirming that God created humankind and the natural world, of which (it implies) chiromancy is a part. The earliest extant British copy of the *Summa chiromantia* is found in MS Harley 3353, written c. 1300.²⁰⁴ Perhaps this preface is in part what has led to its popularity and survival, for of the twenty-seven manuscripts that this study covers, at least eight contain copies of the *Summa chiromantia*, and many more contain similarly apologetic lines and defensive

²⁰¹ Burnett, "Adelard of Bath," 25-26.

²⁰² Although, ironically, Gundissilinus argued that at least some necromancy was part of natural science. See Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 26, 29. See also Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.1-15 and Charles Burnett, "Adelard, Ergaphalau and the Science of the Stars" in *Adelard of Bath: An English Scientist and Arabist in the Early Twelfth Century*, Charles Burnett, ed. (London: Warburg Institute, 1987), II.133-145. Reprinted in Charles Burnett, *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages: Texts and Techniques in the Islamic and Christian Worlds* (Hampshire: Variorum, 1996), X.1-15, II.133-145.

²⁰³ The translation is my own. The original Latin is "*Benedictus deus omnipotens qui machinam mundi et creaturas absque exemplo condidit.*" See Thorndike and Kibre, *Catalogue of Incipits*, 176.

²⁰⁴ Thorndike and Kibre, *Catalogue of Incipits*, 176.

prefaces.²⁰⁵ Another text meets authoritative concerns about divination head on. The John of Seville Chiromancy (found in MS Arundel 88) opens with the reassurance that, far from attempting to divine knowledge of a future inaccessible by reason, “Chiromancy is the art revealing character and inclinations...”²⁰⁶ This clearly frames the art as belonging to the second class of Aquinas’ causes, those that allow us to forecast likelihoods with imperfect accuracy from physical forms or conditions which result from a common antecedent. In other words, the marks on the palm are not necessary causes, but rather arise from the same cause as people’s inclinations, to wit, the formation of their bodies. Many other chiromantic manuals include similar disclaimers either near the beginning of the tract or in its prefatory material.²⁰⁷

An Apology for Chiromancy, printed in 1490, presents the strongest evidence that chiromancy’s scribes and authors were aware of official condemnations and actively attempted to offer counter arguments.²⁰⁸ The text echoes the John of Seville Chiromancy’s responses to accusations of being deterministic by explicitly stating that chiromancy only indicates people’s natural inclinations and does not predict things which will necessarily happen since that would be against proper doctrine.²⁰⁹ The author also draws on the authority of Aristotle and Albertus Magnus (via the *Speculum astronomiae*) to argue that chiromancy is “a branch of ‘natural

²⁰⁵ These are Harley 3353, Trinity College Dublin MS 115, Ashmole 1471, Harley 866, Bodleian 607, Trinity College Cambridge O.1.57, Corpus Christi College 190, Society of Antiquaries of London 306.

²⁰⁶ The translation is my own. The original Latin is “*Cyromancia est ars demonstrans mores et inclinationes.*” See Pack, “Pseudo Aristotelian Chiromancy,” 205. For other texts beginning with this disclaimer see Bodleian 177, Sloane 513, Rawlinson D 247, Arundel 88. For more on the John of Seville Chiromancy see Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.3.

²⁰⁷ The widespread use of this argument at the beginning of surviving chiromantic texts indicates that a substantial percentage of scribes began their chiromantic texts with this material. It is possible, however, that selection bias has made the ratio of extant texts to include this material greater because tracts that did not begin with such justifications may have been more likely to have been censored.

²⁰⁸ Since this was printed in Ulm, not Britain, it shows that the apologetic tendency of chiromantic texts was not limited to the insular context. Pack, “Pseudo-Aristoteles,” 289-290.

²⁰⁹ Pack, “Pseudo-Aristoteles,” 289, 309.

science and physiognomy.”²¹⁰ By opening this narrow niche in which scribes could validate the art, the *Speculum* gave chiromancy the authoritative support of Albertus Magnus with which to counter contemporary anxieties.

Likely due to its guarded approval in the *Speculum astronomiae* chiromancy was collected in manuscripts with astrological material more frequently than any other subject (this combination occurring in nineteen of the twenty-seven manuscripts covered in this survey). Chiromantic manuals were located close to astrological material within most of these nineteen codices, and directly adjacent to astrological texts in many of them. This is the strongest correlation between chiromancy and any other topic, including physiognomy. The proximity of these subjects in manuscripts at least indicates the scribes’ assumption that chiromancy belonged under the larger umbrella of natural philosophy and medicine of which astrology was a part, even if not a direct relationship between chiromancy and astrology themselves.²¹¹

Chiromancy Collected with *Naturalia* by Compilers

The way that authors frame their material does not necessarily reflect how it was received, how a scribe understood it, or why it was copied.²¹² Examining which texts medieval manuscript compilers chose to collect together within a single codex offers additional insight into what the learned viewed as cognate subjects. This is particularly the case when compilers

²¹⁰ Pack, “Pseudo-Aristoteles,” 289.

²¹¹ Contemporary compilers may have seen chiromancy and astrology as related fields due to their understanding of the macrocosm and microcosm. Astrology was used to bring materials incompatible with scholastic thinking into the orbit of scholastic thought, such as image magic. The addition of astrological elements into chiromantic texts indicates that scribes and authors of chiromancy ultimately saw, and in fact created, direct linkages between the fields, even if they were not initially present.

²¹² For example, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* by Reginald Scot took material from magic texts out of their intended context to display the “ridiculous superstitions” that people believed in. Amusingly, this material was later taken out of the context he intended and was bound into magic manuals. Thus authorial intent, while important, is often less significant than manuscript context when attempting to discern how compilers and future readers received the material. For more on this see Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 159.

repeatedly treat a subject in a similar fashion, as it reveals conventional patterns of thought. In the case of chiromantic texts, compilers associated chiromancy with natural philosophic texts with such frequency that there can be little doubt that they viewed chiromancy as a branch of *naturalia*.

The earliest extant manuscript to contain chiromancy, the Eadwine Psalter, is primarily a book of psalms and prayers. The chiromantic tract seems to be written in a new hand directly following an exposition of the Paternoster and then a commentary on the Apostles' Creed. The chiromantic text is in turn followed by a less formal onomantic text, which may be in yet another hand. The chiromantic text appears to have been incorporated into the original design of the book, unlike the onomantic tract.²¹³ Although clearly composed in an ecclesiastical context, this manuscript unabashedly includes prognostic texts with devotional material, indicating either an ignorance of theology (which is very unlikely), or that the scribe did not see the subject as contrary to Christian theology. This is the only extant twelfth-century chiromantic text and so it is impossible to establish a pattern for that century. However, its association with divinatory techniques, such as onomancy and geomancy, is a pattern repeated in later centuries. The monastic setting of the Eadwine Psalter's production is clear enough, but by the time other surviving chiromantic texts appear in thirteenth-century manuscripts the context has shifted markedly from devotional or ecclesiastical texts to *naturalia* and medicine.

The next earliest British Latin chiromantic text is bound in MS. Sloane 2030, a mid- to late thirteenth-century miscellany filled with *naturalia* and medical material.²¹⁴ The chiromantic texts (a copy of the Eadwine Chiromancy **(I)** surrounding a copy of The Hands **(IV)**) are

²¹³ I thank Dr. Yin Liu for her observations about this manuscript, in particular for her assessments of the various hands which wrote these tracts.

²¹⁴ Note that the catalogue record for "Sloane 2030 or 2422" identifies this manuscript. I refer to it throughout this thesis simply as "Sloane 2030."

preceded by cosmological materials such as the Venerable Bede's *On the Nature of Things*.²¹⁵ The chiromancy is positioned near the end of the codex, between Solini's *De mirabilibus mundi* and preceding several medical texts. This association with medicine is especially common in earlier manuscripts and indicates that chiromancy may have been employed as a medical diagnostic tool. Although later manuscripts frequently position chiromancy directly adjacent to physiognomy, this compiler does not do so despite a physiognomic text occurring earlier in the manuscript. Interestingly, MS Harley 3353 contains a miscellany of *naturalia*, compiled in the second half of the thirteenth to mid-fourteenth century, part of which follows same order as Sloane 2030, with the chiromantic text (written c. 1300) preceded by *De mirabilibus mundi* and followed by *De quatuor temporibus anni*.²¹⁶ The thirteenth- to fourteenth-century compiler of Harley 3353 did not choose the Eadwine Chiromancy accompanied by the Hands which appears in Sloane 2030, however, but the earliest known British example of the *Summa chiromantia*.

Another early chiromantic text occurs in MS Ashmole 399, a medical miscellany from the last quarter of the thirteenth century that contains multiple gynaecological texts interspersed throughout.²¹⁷ This manuscript contains two chiromantic texts; the first (a combined copy of the Eadwine Chiromancy and The Hands) is currently situated directly after a tract on the development of foetuses in the womb and follows it with an ornate treatise outlining the different

²¹⁵ In keeping with the other cosmographical tracts which precede the chiromantic text, an insertion of late twelfth-century material that contains several astrological tracts has also been bound into this part of the codex.

²¹⁶ This manuscript contains many other tracts on *naturalia* including several on medicine, alchemy, and mathematics. *A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts in the British Museum: With Indexes of Persons, Places, and Matters, Vol. III* (Great Britain: Printed by Command of His Majesty King George III, 1808), 19.

²¹⁷ Laurinda S. Dixon, *Perilous Chastity: Women and Illness in Pre-Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 25-26. I am indebted to an anonymous annotator of the British Library's catalogue who pointed out that we are able to date this chiromantic text quite accurately, for a calendar (likely from the East Midlands) on the verso of the chiromancy has been dated by this anonymous annotator to between Easter 1291 and Easter 1292.

systems of the human body (skeletal, circulatory, and so forth).²¹⁸ Ashmole 399 is not anomalous in connecting these subjects, since chiromancy is in close proximity to gynaecological texts MS Trinity O.2.5 (James catalogue 1109). This connection with gynaecology may be stronger than merely both being medical material. As early as the Eadwine Chiromancy and The Hands, chiromancies included different meanings for signs that occur in a man's hand versus a woman's.²¹⁹ The woman-specific signs, unsurprisingly, illuminate sexual morality, marriage, and childbirth.²²⁰ The Hands also gives information on the health and gender of the woman's children, as well as potential complications in childbirth.²²¹ It is therefore understandable that a medieval compiler interested in gynaecological material might find chiromancy useful as a tool to gain insight into women's bodies and health. Certainly, the volume confirms the association of chiromancy with medicine.

The second set of chiromantic texts in this manuscript are another copy of the Eadwine Chiromancy and The Hands, although of far inferior quality and apparently incomplete.²²² They are preceded by many medical tracts (including such subjects as anatomy, pharmacology, and uroscopy) and followed directly by a medical text on anatomy and the pulse.²²³ It is interesting

²¹⁸ There has been debate among scholars about the original order of this manuscript since it "may have been bound and rebound many times over the course of seven centuries." Dixon, *Perilous Chastity*, 25-26. This said, the theme of the manuscript at large is certainly medical with a gynecological focus. Furthermore, a small late thirteenth-century hand makes notes throughout the manuscript. This annotator appears to have an interest in medical and gynaecological works. The note he makes on 13v, on a gynaecological text which appears to have always been connected to the chiromantic text, and on other texts throughout the manuscript further connects the chiromantic text with medical and gynaecological works, at least in the mind of this late thirteenth-century annotator.

²¹⁹ Burnett, "Earliest Chiromancy," X.194. Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.25-27.

²²⁰ Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.25, 27.

²²¹ Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.25-27.

²²² I say "apparently" because the first letter was never illuminated and the hands are coarsely drawn and do not include the usual writing, but simply seem to be diagrams used to explain the Eadwine Chiromancy.

²²³ William Henry Black, *A Descriptive, Analytical, and Critical Catalogue of the Manuscripts Bequeathed Unto the University of Oxford by Elias Ashmole, Esq., M.D., F.R.S., Windsor Herald. Also of Some Additional MSS. Contributed by Kingsley, Lhuyd, Borlase, and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1845), 315-316.

that an onomancy occurs on the recto directly preceding the chiromancy, a coupling reminiscent of the onomancy directly following the chiromancy in the Eadwine Psalter. In this context, it appears that chiromancy was understood as a medical prognostic to aid in diagnoses by medieval medical practitioners.

This association between chiromancy and medicine ought not be surprising, as chiromancy is fundamentally connected to individuals' bodies. The idea that peoples' hands may indicate more about the rest of their bodies is no less logical than the common medieval practice of assessing urine or the modern one of assessing the tongue. In addition, many interpretations of the palm's lines are medically oriented in the Eadwine Chiromancy and *The Hands*, not only determining the length of life, but the nature of peoples' illnesses such as pain in the head, neck, or belly, the presence of leprosy, and even if the person "will escape from an illness."²²⁴ It also addresses the condition of a person's *moral physicality*²²⁵ with signs indicating chastity and virginity.²²⁶ Although the chiromantic texts include indications of things which cannot be justified as medical prognostics (such as whether a man will slay his parent or if a prayer will be granted), the fact that some compilers framed chiromancy as medical shows that they believed chiromancy could reveal information about the body, thus making it a tool with which to better

²²⁴ Burnett, "Earliest Chiromancy," X.193.

²²⁵ I use the phrase "moral physicality" to refer to the medieval mentality that one's body, especially a woman's body, is intimately connected to one's moral predispositions. This is not the idea that there are physical manifestations of one's moral condition, for instance the fallacious notion that a broken hymen shows the loss of virginity. Such things would be the effects of one's morality upon one's physicality. I use the term "moral physicality" to refer to physiological traits that medieval people viewed to be inextricably intertwined with one's moral inclinations. This understanding of morality and the body is well attested in physiognomic literature as well as in some chiromantic texts which state that, as noted in footnote 19 (above), "If the fingers are broad, he is faithful and writes well (*bene scribens*). If a woman, she has a deep womb and much seeks a man (*et multum appetit virum*)" and "If man or woman has a small table in the hand and large fingers, he or she will die of an apostume, and she will have a wide womb near the matrix but narrow at the mouth of the womb. And such women are disposed to prostitution because of the width near the matrix." See Thorndike, "Chiromancy in Mediaeval Latin Manuscripts," 677. Not only does this mean that they used indications in the hand to divine the shape of other areas of the female body, but it implies that a woman's behaviour and moral impulses are reflected by the shape of her body.

²²⁶ Burnett, "Earliest Chiromancy," X.192, 195.

understand God's creation and improve human life, as opposed to foreseeing someone's inevitable destiny.

Chiromancy was included in a number of specifically medical manuscripts in the thirteenth century, yet this also indicates a broader association with *naturalia* of which medicine was a part. The increasing association with this subject matter in the thirteenth century is attested in many manuscripts. The late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century manuscript British Library Additional 15236 contains materials that collectively might be considered more wondrous forms of *naturalia*, or natural magic, texts later associated with early modern cunning folk, such as tracts on the occult properties of herbs and stones, medical charms and recipes, part of the *Secreta secretorum*, instructions on astrology, divination by lot (henceforth referred to as *sortes*), and charms to recover stolen goods.²²⁷ Although the chiromantic text was written in Latin, some of the texts it was collected with are written in the Anglo-Norman vernacular, indicating a courtly context or courtly aspirations. The chiromancy is directly preceded by an astrological text attributed to Alchandiandi, likely a corruption of the influential Arabic astrologer and philosopher al-Kindi.²²⁸ This manuscript contains several physiognomic tracts in both Latin and the vernacular. Yet, it is not the vernacular but the Latin physiognomy attributed to Aristotle which directly follows the chiromancy. While scribes framed chiromancy as *naturalia* through pseudonymous attributions and origin myths, compilers did so by collecting it into a codex with tracts attributed to noted natural philosophers and more widely accepted natural philosophical texts, and evidently assumed that it belonged with that material.

²²⁷ Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic* (Brighton, England: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 31-32, 37. P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Witchcraft in Europe and The New World, 1400-1800* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), 11.

²²⁸ Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 24-25. British Museum, *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum in the Years MDCCCXLI-MDCCCXLV* (London: George Woodfall and Son, 1850), 117.

The proximity of physiognomy to chiromancy, both in manuscripts and in subject material, has been remarked upon by many scholars. Burnett went so far as to say that “chiromancy is the physiognomy of the hand.”²²⁹ Physiognomy appears in fifteen of the twenty-seven manuscripts in this study, often found adjacent to the chiromantic texts in manuscripts. This forged an ongoing association between these cognate subjects. The association between them in the *Speculum astronomiae* reinforced this and served to legitimise chiromancy, but it is important to note that the subjects were not universally positioned together in manuscripts by compilers.

Like astrology, physiognomy held a tenuous position between assessing predispositions and foretelling the future, but it does not seem to have provoked the same anxiety as chiromancy nor condemnation from authorities such as Aquinas. Indeed, Aquinas shows physiognomic logic in his discussion of Christ’s complexion, suggesting he may have been sympathetic to the art.²³⁰ Perhaps physiognomy’s attribution to Aristotle was more convincing than was chiromancy’s because physiognomy drew heavily from Aristotle’s *History of Animals* and was justified by his *Prior Analytics*.²³¹ In this latter work Aristotle writes that “it is possible to infer character from features, if it is granted that the body and the soul are changed together by the natural affections.”²³² He specifies that by “natural emotions” he means “passions and desires” and then explains that, through syllogistic logic, one can find physical features in humans that parallel those of animals which in turn reveal similarities in personalities.²³³

²²⁹ Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.3.

²³⁰ Irven M. Resnick, *Marks of Distinctions: Christian Perceptions of Jews in the High Middle Ages* (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 2012), 31.

²³¹ T. Corey Brennan, review of *Aristoteles: "Physiognomonica"* by Sabine Vogt, *The Classical World* 99, no. 2 (2006): 202-203.

²³² Aristotle, *Prior analytics*, II. 27.

²³³ Aristotle, *Prior analytics*, II. 27.

Chiromancy and Divination

We have seen that, unlike medieval authoritative voices which condemned chiromancy as divination of hidden future things, contemporary manuscript context often supports the internal arguments of chiromantic texts which state that the art is a form of *naturalia* indicating one's predispositions. This said, the category of divination was real and cannot completely be merged with *naturalia* or natural philosophy. Several manuscripts evince an association between chiromancy and other practices also frequently accused of being divination. A perfect example of this is MS Pepys 911, a thirteenth-century manuscript filled almost exclusively with divinatory materials such as astrology, a geomancy translated from Arabic into Latin verse, prognostication using birds, and the like.²³⁴ Despite containing material condemned since Late Antiquity, such as geomancy and a form of *sortes* using birds that echoes augury, there is no evidence that its scribe saw these materials as illicit. It would have been an unusually costly manuscript to produce, being written in an elegant gothic textura with beautiful illumination and gilding throughout.²³⁵ The original manuscript did not include a chiromancy, however. A cramped anglicana hand (ca. 1300) added the chiromancy in the margins around what appears to be an onomancy.²³⁶ The informality of this addition is also reflected in its use of the French vernacular in addition to Latin, although it strongly suggests this manuscript was produced and preserved in a courtly context.

The later scribe evidently felt that chiromancy belonged in this prognostic codex, thus echoing the associations forged by authoritative lists of condemned divination between

²³⁴ Robert Latham, *Catalogue of the Pepys Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), 5-7.

²³⁵ Latham, *Catalogue of the Pepys Library*, 7.

²³⁶ Latham, *Catalogue of the Pepys Library*, 6-7.

chiromancy and other divinatory arts like geomancy and scapulimancy. The chiromancy is positioned behind a tract on *sortes* which appears to connect different types of birds with each sign of the zodiac. This text is illuminated with gilded roundels containing birds on one side and the signs of the zodiac on the other.²³⁷ Although the placement of the chiromancy in this part of the manuscript was likely incidental (as it is where the annotator had more room to write), the fact that it was inserted in this codex at all indicates that he was familiar with condemnatory lists which associated geomancy, scapulimancy, and augury with chiromancy. This manuscript shows, perhaps more clearly than any other, that authoritative condemnation of this material was not terribly effective. Although authorities condemned the divinatory material this codex contains, the original scribe unabashedly produced a deluxe manuscript, likely for an elite patron. Yet even in Pepys 911 a connection to *natualia* via medicine is still present, for the scribe who inserted the chiromantic text also added a medical charm to the text.²³⁸ All of this serves to demonstrate that some medieval scribes and compilers cared less about authoritative condemnations and theological concerns, and more about whether certain texts could be of use.

Pepys 911 illustrates that the distinction between licit *naturalia* on one hand and illicit divination on the other was not as clear or important a divide for some compilers as it was for contemporary authorities and that chiromancy was regarded as belonging to both categories. This is also evinced by the compiler of BL Additional 15236 who followed the physiognomy with several tracts on dream divination and general divination. Dream divination also held a liminal position, as demonstrated when Albertus Magnus cited the *Liber somniorum Danielis* (the first dream divination to follow the physiognomy in Add. 15236) as the proper way to interpret

²³⁷ Latham, *Catalogue of the Pepys Library*, 6.

²³⁸ Latham, *Catalogue of the Pepys Library*, 6.

dreams.²³⁹ The connection between chiromancy and onomancy has existed at least since the Eadwine Psalter, and appears in several manuscripts, such as Pepys 911 and Ashmole 399 (in which the second chiromantic text is directly preceded by an onomancy). The connection to divination is also present in the early fourteenth-century MS Royal 12 C XII. This miscellany was written in Latin, French, and English in a variety of hands and included tracts as disparate as an Office for the Earl of Lancaster (beheaded in 1322), rhyming verses on the corruption of the law courts, and cooking recipes in French.²⁴⁰ It contains several romances and a great number of prophetic texts (7 of the 36 articles listed in the manuscript catalogue).²⁴¹ The chiromantic material is positioned close to the physiognomic material, but is separated from it by a tract on divination involving birds like that in Pepys 911, a tract of *sortes* associated with the zodiac, and a medical text. This manuscript connects chiromancy with potentially dubious forms of divination, yet the association to more conventional forms of *naturalia* is still present in this codex since it is positioned directly next to a medical tract.²⁴²

Whether included in primarily medical manuscripts or not, chiromancy was most often accompanied by *naturalia* texts that sought to illuminate the secrets and workings of the cosmos. This reflects the prefatory material in many chiromantic texts which explicitly states that chiromancy is natural and attributes the texts to natural philosophers or illustrious translators. This in part shows the attempt of authors and compilers to make sense of chiromancy using familiar cosmography, but also an attempt to counter censorship in the face of authoritative

²³⁹ Although Albertus was not the only medieval authority to support dream divination, all who did were explicit about the fact that all illumination of future matters by this means were acquired from God. For more see Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 15.

²⁴⁰ This manuscript dates from circa 1320-1340. George F. Warner and Julius P. Gilson, *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Old Royal and King's Collections*, vol. 2, *Royal MSS. 12 A. 1 to 20 E. X and App. 1-89* (London: British Museum, 1921), 26-29.

²⁴¹ Warner and Gilson, *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts*, vol. 2, 26-29.

²⁴² MS Royal 12 C XII will be contextualised and explained in more depth in the following chapter.

condemnations of divination. In this way the very authoritative voices that sought to condemn chiromancy took part in shaping the art as it developed over the course of the medieval period. Although the association of chiromancy and *naturalia* is clear, “*naturalia*” is itself an umbrella term that refers to a vast body of knowledge and was employed for various purposes. To gain a subtler understanding of how chiromancy was conceptualised, and who was using it, the following chapter will trace the different learned contexts in which chiromancy travelled.

Chapter 3: Chiromancy's Companions

The previous chapter demonstrated that medieval scribes and compilers generally treated chiromancy as belonging to the genre of *naturalia*. Although much effort has been expended on tracking the origins of chiromancy, little substantive work has been done on its later transmission in Latin manuscripts and there has yet to be a systematic examination of the manuscript contexts of chiromantic texts throughout the medieval period. This chapter will refine the generalised observation of previous scholars that chiromancy often travelled with *naturalia* to determine the specific social/intellectual environments in which chiromantic manuals were transmitted. It will be found that chiromancy followed a trajectory of transmission similar to other branches of natural philosophy in the High and Late Middle Ages, moving from its initial ecclesiastical context into the universities, before finally spreading to the popular and vernacular contexts in the early fifteenth century.²⁴³ More importantly, it was transmitted in very particular intellectual environments which further associate it with *naturalia*. When chiromancy entered the university context it was associated with texts common in a quadrivial education. Its learned transmitters then brought Latin chiromantic texts into lay environments as the art circulated with literature of natural secrets, fostering popular interest in the art which drove the production of vernacular translations.

The medieval university curriculum was in principle based on the seven liberal arts (of which the seven forbidden arts discussed in the previous chapter were an inversion). The liberal arts were divided into the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) which focused upon language and argumentation, and the quadrivium (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy) which

²⁴³ Due to the plethora of manuscripts included in this study, I have selected exemplary texts to represent each of the major trends I found when assessing the corpus as a whole.

focused upon mathematics.²⁴⁴ Logic dominated the curriculum, both due to its central role in the trivium, which itself was the core of the university curriculum, and because “logic was considered as a propaedeutic” for all the other liberal arts.²⁴⁵ Both the trivium and quadrivium were intended to develop the students’ reason and ethics and prepared students both for the clergy and secular positions.²⁴⁶ The texts favoured for teaching the quadrivium varied depending on the period. Some quadrivial textbooks passed in and out of favour, while others (like Boethius’ *Arithmetica*) remained standard texts throughout the Middle Ages.²⁴⁷ I use the term “quadrivial” adjectively to refer to prominent textbooks which evidence a university education in the quadrivium. This is to distinguish the quadrivial manuscript context from the more general collections of *naturalia*. Throughout this chapter I also distinguish between the secular and clerical elite. By “clerical” I refer not only to regular and secular clergy, but also to anyone with a university education, who would have the same legal rights as a priest and would know Latin, even if he never became a clergyman. The secular elite were the aristocracy, who did not necessarily know Latin or have a university education.

Early Devotional Context

Burnett has established that the earliest extant Western Latin chiromancy originated in an ecclesiastical context during the twelfth century and included prognostications specific to the

²⁴⁴ Alexander Broadie, *Introduction to Medieval Logic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 1-3.

²⁴⁵ Broadie, *Introduction to Medieval Logic*, 1.

²⁴⁶ Although some texts were widespread among students of the quadrivium, they would not necessarily be widespread among the general university population since the quadrivium never enjoyed the same importance as the trivium in the medieval university curriculum. Charles Abbott Conway, “Boethius, the Liberal Arts, and Early Medieval Political Theory,” in *Literature and Ethics: Essays Presented to A.E. Malloch*, ed. Gary Wihl and David Williams (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988), 96.

²⁴⁷ Gillian R. Evans, “The Influence of Quadrivium Studies in the Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Schools,” *Journal of Medieval History* 1, no. 2 (1975): 154.

clerical world. Burnett notes that the Eadwine Psalter chiromancy makes specifically clerical prognostications. For example, the chiromancy in the Eadwine Psalter states that “if... (a mark) like a ‘c’ should occur... he will be a bishop” while later texts intentionally universalise the interpretations, instead saying that “if, in the hand of a peasant the sign of a bishopric is found, one should not say that he will become a bishop or a prelate, but that he will have honour according to his estate.”²⁴⁸ This suggests that while the educated were learning this art, they may have begun performing it for the lower classes, thus necessitating a broadening of chiromantic interpretations. At the very least, the scribe imagined that the art could be used for the lower classes. Some priests may have used prognostic techniques (such as chiromancy and onomancy) to determine whether a patient would die before shriving him.²⁴⁹ The ecclesiastical associations in this chiromantic text are unsurprising given its context. The Eadwine Psalter’s production was overseen by the monk Eadwine at Christ Church, Canterbury.²⁵⁰ It is a deluxe manuscript with more illuminations than any other twelfth-century manuscript and contains three versions of the Latin psalter (including the Hebraicum which was considered more of an academic than a devotional text).²⁵¹

Chiromancy appears to have, in large part, followed the flow of learning from the cloister into universities with their development in the High Middle Ages. The ecclesiastical nature of this twelfth-century manuscript is unsurprising since monasteries and cathedral schools were the centres of learning and literacy before the rise of universities in the West. Monasteries remained the primary centres of medieval learning from Charlemagne’s capitulary of 789 CE, which

²⁴⁸ Burnett, “Earliest Chiromancy,” X.191.

²⁴⁹ Burnett, “Prognostications of the Eadwine Psalter,” 167.

²⁵⁰ Margaret T. Gibson, introduction to *The Eadwine Psalter: Text, Image, and Monastic Culture in Twelfth-Century Canterbury*, eds. Margaret T. Gibson, T. A. Heslop, and Richard W. Pfaff (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1992), 1.

²⁵¹ Gibson, “Introduction,” 1, 13.

mandated that all monasteries provide some educational services, until cathedral schools began to eclipse monastic schools in the early twelfth century.²⁵² Universities grew out of the urban cathedral schools to become the centres of medieval learning by the early thirteenth century, and scholars began to rise to positions as scribes and courtly advisors which had traditionally been filled by monks and nuns.²⁵³ The increasingly complex ecclesiastical and secular law codes required more educated clerics to maintain them. As Western European society urbanised and became more dependent upon laws instead of arms, scholars became increasingly necessary to fill various administrative roles. Those whose families could afford to support them were better able to secure positions of secular (as well as ecclesiastical) power through university education.²⁵⁴ Echoing the increasing complexity of Western European legal structure, the systematic approach to learning which characterises scholasticism grew in prominence. Chiromancy, like many other texts on natural philosophy, travelled with scholars from the monasteries into the rapidly growing world of universities.

Mathematics, Rithmomachia, and the Quadrivial University Context

Chiromancy had already spread beyond the cloister a century after the production of the Eadwine Psalter, when the next extant chiromantic texts, such as MS Sloane 2030, were written. By this time the centre of learning had shifted from monasteries and cathedral schools to universities, bringing chiromantic texts with it. In this new context chiromancy frequently travelled with medieval quadrivial textbooks.

²⁵² Judith M. Bennett, *Medieval Europe: A Short History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011), 178-179, 200, G6.

²⁵³ Bennett, *Medieval Europe*, 179, 200.

²⁵⁴ Bennett, *Medieval Europe*, 178.

Chiromantic manuals were increasingly included in manuscripts of natural philosophic texts which were commonly used as quadrivial textbooks in medieval universities. Evidence of this transition to the university context is visible as early as the compilation of Sloane 2030 in the second half of the thirteenth century.²⁵⁵ The manuscript is composed almost entirely of *naturalia*, astrological, and bloodletting manuals. The Venerable Bede's *On the Nature of Things* opens the manuscript and is followed by a commentary attributed to Boethius. The manuscript includes other texts of natural philosophy such as a copy of *De mirabilibus mundi* and a text attributed to Ptolemy.²⁵⁶ These were all recognised authoritative texts on the natural world and mathematics. In the thirteenth century the arithmetical writings of Boethius followed the same path as chiromancy, spreading out of monasteries and into universities.²⁵⁷ *De mirabilibus mundi* and the pseudo-Boethian commentary appear to function as sources of natural history and science here, which would inform a quadrivial education. The remaining texts of *naturalia* or natural philosophy are also consistent with quadrivial topics.

The rise of scholasticism led to a decline in the importance of the quadrivium as medieval scholars focused upon the trivium.²⁵⁸ Contemporaries justified the continued study of the quadrivium with its ability to foster moral virtue (a theme that is emphasised in *De vetula*) and prepare the student for higher degrees, such as theology.²⁵⁹ By the late thirteenth century, however, quadrivial education itself had changed, dropping more practical aspects in favour of technical subjects such as astronomy. Most quadrivial material became lumped in with

²⁵⁵ Note that I cannot confirm that the insertion of twelfth-century material from fol. 31-94v was included in the thirteenth-century compilation, or whether this was added at a later point before its current sixteenth-century binding. As such, I do not include its contents in this discussion of its thirteenth-century contents.

²⁵⁶ Note that a second text attributed to Ptolemy is in the insertion of twelfth-century material.

²⁵⁷ Ann F. Moyer, *The Philosopher's Game* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 34, 37.

²⁵⁸ Moyer, *Philosopher's Game*, 32-33.

²⁵⁹ Moyer, *Philosopher's Game*, 31-32, 44, 54.

mathematics and fell under the umbrella of Aristotelian inspired natural philosophy, which was more qualitative than the traditional quadrivium.²⁶⁰ By the early fourteenth century new quadrivial textbooks arose that better fit this new intellectual context, such as algorism manuals (which taught how to compute with Arabic numerals), as well as *De sphere*, *Computus*, and other works by Sacrobosco.²⁶¹ It is in this period, the late thirteenth century into the early fourteenth century, that three rithmomachia texts were bound in manuscripts containing chiromancy. Eleven of the twenty-seven manuscripts in this study contain mathematical material such as algorism and computus, and many also contain works by Sacrobosco. There are also at least three manuscripts that contain the work of Sacrobosco with no other explicit mathematical texts. Clearly chiromancy developed a strong and lasting place among quadrivial textbooks.

After astrology and physiognomy, mathematics is the subject that was most frequently transmitted with chiromancy, with eleven of the twenty-seven manuscripts containing mathematical material. About 40% of the thirteenth-, fourteenth-, and fifteenth-century manuscripts contain mathematics.²⁶² This indicates that the correlation between chiromancy and mathematics remained consistently strong through the high and late medieval period, neither dramatically growing or dwindling. Although the second earliest chiromantic text in this survey (in Sloane 2030, from the late thirteenth century) does not travel with arithmetic, the codex does contain “On the Division of the Sciences,” (fol. 9v-10) attributed to Boethius (d. 524). Boethius’ writings became early core texts to the trivium and quadrivium.²⁶³ His prolific writings

²⁶⁰ Moyer, *Philosopher’s Game*, 42-43, 56.

²⁶¹ Moyer, *Philosopher’s Game*, 43.

²⁶² I have not included rithmomachia manuals as mathematical texts for the purpose of determining this percentage. This is because while rithmomachia texts presuppose and reinforce mathematical knowledge they do not teach it beyond what is necessarily conveyed to understand the rules of the game. Other than in the case of MS Add. 15236, however, all rithmomachia texts were accompanied by mathematical texts.

²⁶³ Moyer, *Philosopher’s Game*, 3-4.

emphasised the connection of diverse subjects such as music, “theology, natural philosophy, and arithmetic” which medieval scholars understood to be intricately interwoven as aspects of the unifying structure that God wove into creation.²⁶⁴ Medieval authorities such as Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas continued to espouse the worth of mathematics in fostering morality and understanding of the divine.²⁶⁵ Medieval scholars believed that the mathematical relationships in Boethian arithmetic reflected the numeric principles by which God built creation, some supporting this by referring to the biblical passage which states that God made the world with “number, weight, and measure.”²⁶⁶

Three of the manuscripts assessed in this study, written between the late thirteenth and the late fourteenth century, contain both chiromancy and rithmomachia, emphasising chiromancy’s connection to mathematics.²⁶⁷ Rithmomachia (later called *Ludus philosophorum* or “The Philosopher’s Game” in the fifteenth century) was a highly complex board game evocative of chess but built upon the principles of Boethian mathematics.²⁶⁸ Its connection to math was so strong that it was often used as a symbol for arithmetic or the quadrivium in general in visual representations of the liberal arts.²⁶⁹ This game was used as an honourable leisure activity for the learned elite that would help reinforce mathematical operations.²⁷⁰ Since the game necessitates being well versed in Boethian mathematics, its players were limited to those with at least a general quadrivial education, and it was a particular favourite of mathematical specialists such as

²⁶⁴ Moyer, *Philosopher’s Game*, 9, 30.

²⁶⁵ Moyer, *Philosopher’s Game*, 45.

²⁶⁶ Moyer, *Philosopher’s Game*, 30. Cf. Wisdom 11:20

²⁶⁷ Additional 15236, Harley 3353, and Ashmole 1471.

²⁶⁸ Moyer, *Philosopher’s Game*, 2-3, 54.

²⁶⁹ Moyer, *Philosopher’s Game*, 35.

²⁷⁰ Moyer, *Philosopher’s Game*, 28, 29.

calculatores.²⁷¹ Although other games like chess were common among the noble classes, the Latin education required to play rithmomachia restricted its play to the clerical, opposed to secular, elite.²⁷² Pre-fifteenth-century literary references to rithmomachia are restricted to the clerical and university contexts and do not appear in vernacular poetry and prose.²⁷³ Since chiromancy is transmitted with rithmomachia in several fourteenth-century manuscripts, chiromancy too had clearly entered the university context. This is best exemplified by Harley 3353, which contains a rithmomachia manual attributed to Odo of Tournai.

Although chiromancy was sometimes transmitted with a game, contemporaries did not necessarily ascribe a ludic quality to chiromancy. Early rithmomachia manuals were not generally bound with games or leisure activities but rather with mathematical and musical texts, indicating that chiromancy was classed amongst these more sober pursuits.²⁷⁴ Rithmomachia was rarely bound with other games in part because of the exclusivity of the game, but also due to virtues attributed to it by contemporaries. It not only served as serious mathematical practice outside of the classroom, but was also seen as a remedy for the melancholy to which it was believed scholars were vulnerable.²⁷⁵ Most significantly, clerics believed that playing rithmomachia would illuminate deep mysteries and truths about the universe due to the Boethian principles that underlay both the game and creation.²⁷⁶ The connection between rithmomachia and deeper wisdom is emphasised in *De vetula*, which precedes the rithmomachia in Harley

²⁷¹ Moyer, *Philosopher's Game*, 15. *Calculatores* refers to members of an intellectual movement beginning in Merton College, Oxford University during the mid-fourteenth century. These scholars made great contributions to mathematical physics and other “calculatory fields.” For more see Edith D. Sylla, “Oxford Calculators,” in *Encyclopaedia of Western Philosophy: Philosophy Between 500 and 1500*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), https://link-springer-com.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-1-4020-9729-4_366

²⁷² Moyer, *Philosopher's Game*, 30.

²⁷³ Moyer, *Philosopher's Game*, 35.

²⁷⁴ Moyer, *Philosopher's Game*, 22.

²⁷⁵ Moyer, *Philosopher's Game*, 18, 27-28.

²⁷⁶ Moyer, *Philosopher's Game*, 15, 27-28, 30.

3353. So too did chiromancy reveal deeper secrets of nature woven into creation by God by revealing the inner workings or natures of individual people.²⁷⁷

The mid-thirteenth-century pseudo-Ovidian *De vetula* is a moralising poem directed at a scholarly and courtly audience. This poem reveals contemporary attitudes toward rithmomachia in its substantial discussion of the game.²⁷⁸ It is a scandalous and grotesque cautionary tale regarding the dangers of uncontrolled lust.²⁷⁹ This was likely attributed to Ovid as it illuminated the need of his poem *Remedia amoris*, which medieval physicians drew upon to cure lovesickness.²⁸⁰ Ovid was “mythologised... into a lovesick poet-physician” and his work had secular and monastic value in schools due to its style, its literal medical applications, and its stimulation of moral discourse.²⁸¹ Of *De vetula*’s twenty-four hundred lines, fifty are a discussion of rithmomachia which describes it as the “flower and fruit of Arithmetic.”²⁸² In this section of the poem the author uses mathematics, rithmomachia, music, and astronomy as examples of how one might study “things divine as seen in the created world.”²⁸³ The author links the game and mathematics to the pursuit of wisdom and understanding of cosmological structures such as the macrocosm and microcosm. The segment discussing rithmomachia circulated independently from the larger poem in manuscripts, often accompanying

²⁷⁷ Rithmomachia became increasingly interesting to those who studied astronomy and astrology in the later Middle Ages and Renaissance. As a result, it became increasingly bound with texts of natural magic, which share with rithmomachia “the theories of cosmic harmony that underlay” both natural magic and Boethian mathematics. Moyer, *Philosopher’s Game*, 15.

²⁷⁸ Moyer, *Philosopher’s Game*, 38-39.

²⁷⁹ Ryan D. Giles, “A Galen for Lovers: Medical Readings of Ovid in Medieval and Early Renaissance Spain,” in *Ovid in the Age of Cervantes*, ed. Frederick A. De Armas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 8.

²⁸⁰ Giles, “Galen for Lovers,” 6. A message important for a scholarly cleric to retain.

²⁸¹ James G. Clark, “Introduction,” *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, eds. James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson, Kathryn L. McKinley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 14.

²⁸² Moyer, *Philosopher’s Game*, 38-39, 41.

²⁸³ Moyer, *Philosopher’s Game*, 40.

rithmomachia manuals as the description in *De vetula* alone is not detailed enough to teach the game.²⁸⁴

Like chiromancy, rithmomachia originated in the clerical contexts of the monasteries and cathedral schools, although rithmomachia appears as early as the eleventh century.²⁸⁵ By the twelfth century it was widespread in Northern Europe and was often bound with mathematical works such as *Computus* (a tract explaining how to calculate Easter) and chronicles of the world.²⁸⁶ The popularity of the game was in part due to the platonic implications of Boethian mathematics, which flourished as other Neoplatonic *naturalia* texts entered Europe in the twelfth century.²⁸⁷ Like chiromantic texts, rithmomachia followed the centre of learning into universities and scribes changed the attribution of the game manuals to men who reflected the new scholastic learned context, such as Peter Abelard.²⁸⁸

Case Study of Chiromancy in the University Context: MS Harley 3353

As we have seen, Harley 3353 contains the earliest example of the *Summa chiromantia* assessed in this study. It also makes a fascinating case study of the convergence of intellectual traditions in which medieval chiromancy was moulded. The British Library's catalogue characterises this manuscript as a "composite miscellany relating to medicine, alchemy and mathematics."²⁸⁹ In fact, little of this pertains to alchemy. Instead it betrays many of the features associated with quadrivial education discussed above, as well as more marvellous aspects of

²⁸⁴ Moyer, *Philosopher's Game*, 40-41.

²⁸⁵ Moyer, *Philosopher's Game*, 20

²⁸⁶ Moyer, *Philosopher's Game*, 29.

²⁸⁷ Moyer, *Philosopher's Game*, 30.

²⁸⁸ Moyer, *Philosopher's Game*, 34.

²⁸⁹ British Library, "Harley MS 3353," *Digitised Manuscripts*, accessed October 12, 2016, http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_3353

natural philosophy. The texts in this manuscript strongly indicate that it was compiled in a university context, perhaps for a member of a mendicant order.

This manuscript is composed of three physical sections (fols. 1r-38v, 39r-159v, 160r-176v), the chiromancy (58r-66v) is in the second section which comprises most of the manuscript. The first section is the lengthy tract *De viribus herbarum* (2r-38v) on the medical powers of herbs which is attributed to Macer Floridus. The final section of the manuscript (160r-177v) is a chronicle recording events during the year 1291. The collation reveals that the chronicle is a completely separate unit that may have been added at a later date.²⁹⁰

The middle section, which contains the chiromancy attributed to Johannes Philosophus (58r-66v), opens with the tract *Liber lapidum seu de gemmis* (39r-54v) by Marbod of Rennes (1035-1123). This poetic work on stones, written in hexameter verse near the end of the eleventh century, would rise to “extraordinary popularity” with at least 125 surviving texts and has been described as “perhaps the most famous lapidary of the Middle Ages.”²⁹¹ It discussed the appearance, location, as well as the medical and occult properties of stones.²⁹² To do so Marbod drew from several classical works such as Isidore’s *Etymologies*, Solinus’s *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, Pliny’s *Natural History*, and the Late Antique lapidary of Damigeron.²⁹³

Following the lapidary in the second section is the pseudo-Ovid *De mirabilibus mundi* (54v-57v) which, like the *De viribus herbarum* and *Liber lapidum seu de gemmis*, is also in hexameter verse. Historians have described this text as a proto-bestiary which primarily draws

²⁹⁰ British Library, “Harley MS 3353.”

²⁹¹ Katelyn Mesler, “The Medieval Lapidary of Techel Azareus on Engraved Stones and its Jewish Appropriations,” *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science and Judaism* 14, no. 2 (2014): 75. Herbert Bloch, review of *Marbode of Rennes' (1035-1123) De lapidibus* by Marbod of Rennes, John M. Riddle, and C. W. King, *Speculum* 57, no. 4 (October 1982): 915.

²⁹² Mesler, “Medieval Lapidary,” 75. Bloch, “Marbode of Rennes,” 915.

²⁹³ Bloch, “Marbode of Rennes,” 914-916.

upon the writings of Solinus.²⁹⁴ Solinus's third-century *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* (referred to elsewhere as *De mirabilibus mundi*) drew largely upon Pliny's *Natural History*, although focused on the marvellous and the monstrous, and influenced medieval *naturalia*.²⁹⁵ The attribution to Ovid is due to his reputation as a naturalist based upon such works as *Halieutica* and *Metamorphoses* and his authority in medieval schools, literature, and sermons.²⁹⁶ It is noteworthy that another pseudo-Ovidian tract, *De vetula* (147r-147v), is the second to last tract in the manuscript's middle section, followed only by the *rithmomachia* manual (148r-159v). All of these texts betray the compiler's interest in *naturalia* and, especially in the case of the *rithmomachia* manual, a university setting.

De mirabilibus mundi precedes the *Summa chiromantia*, which is in turn followed by the two medical tracts *De quatuor temporibus anni* (67r-69r) on health throughout the year, and a tract on humours beginning *Quatuor elementa quatuor quantitibus temporum* (69v-70v).²⁹⁷ The fact that the medical texts are followed by an excerpt from St. Francis' *Office of the Passions* may indicate that the manuscript was compiled for a Franciscan friar. Franciscan friars often became university masters after they joined their Dominican brothers as teachers in the thirteenth and fourteenth-centuries when some rose to be remarkable scholars of science and nature, such as Roger Bacon.²⁹⁸ If friars were using chiromancy then their unique position as

²⁹⁴ Siegfried Wenzel, "Ovid from the Pulpit," *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, eds. James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson, Kathryn L. McKinley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 161. Ralph J. Hexter, "Shades of Ovid: Pseudo- (and para-) Ovidiana in the Middle Ages," in *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, eds. James G. Clark, 299.

²⁹⁵ "Solinus, Gaius Julius," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ed. Hugh Chisholm (New York: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1911), 361. Richard Conniff, "Healthy Terror: In Our Concern for the Fate of the Natural World, One Essential Element Seems to be Missing," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 273, no. 3 (March, 1994): 18.

²⁹⁶ It is important to note that *Halieutica* was itself pseudo-Ovidian, having been incorrectly attributed to Ovid by Pliny the Elder. Hexter, "Shades of Ovid," 294, 300. Wenzel, "Ovid from the Pulpit," 161.

²⁹⁷ British Library, "Harley MS 3353."

²⁹⁸ It is worthy of note that St. Francis eschewed scholarly pursuits and espoused the ideal of celebrating nature as the beauty of God's creation. This ideal was adopted by later Franciscans, although many became learned scholars. Bennett, *Medieval Europe*, 208-209.

conduit between the learned elite and the popular classes might help explain why chiromantic texts came to include variant prognostications for women's and peasants' hands.²⁹⁹ This is because the texts in this study were exclusively written in Latin and therefore generally exclude women or peasants from their readership. Friars, however, were learned holy men of the world who considered preaching to the people to be one of their primary roles, and therefore would have more opportunity and reason to read the palm of peasants or women than other, more cloistered, holy men. The fact that chiromancy had such strong associations with medicine, particularly in early manuscripts, could also explain the appearance of interpretations for women. Learned medical practitioners were male but frequently had female clientele, perhaps explaining why chiromancy is transmitted with gynaecological material in MS Ashmole 399 and Cambridge MS Trinity O.2.5.

The *Office of the Passions* and texts which follow it indicate that this manuscript comes from a university quadrivial context and was likely compiled by someone with devotional interests. Two texts attributed to Johannes de Sacrobosco, *Algorismus* (76r-86v) and *Computus* (114v-144r), follow the *Office of the Passions*. The *Computus* is introduced by a tract on arithmetic and followed by notes on arithmetic (87r-114r and 144v-146r respectively). The arithmetical notes are followed by a drawing of the Virgin, emphasising the unity of learning and faith.³⁰⁰ Sacrobosco's writings were "elementary" mathematical and astronomical textbooks that were so widespread that Lynn Thorndike called his *Tractatus de sphere* the "most used textbook in astronomy and cosmography from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century."³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.10-11, 14-17, 20-25. Thorndike, "Chiromancy in Mediaeval Latin Manuscripts," 677, 681.

³⁰⁰ British Library, "Harley MS 3353."

³⁰¹ Lynn Thorndike, *The Sphere of Sacrobosco and its Commentators* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 1, 3.

There is strong evidence that the first two units were intentionally assembled. The contents of Harley 3353 are thematically grouped into three sections: fols. 2r-57v which pertain to natural properties and wonders,³⁰² fols. 58r-70v which opens with the chiromantic manual followed by a series of tracts relating to the human body and medicine,³⁰³ and fols. 76r-159v which includes arithmetic texts that conclude with two excerpts from *De vetula* preceding the rithmomachia manual.³⁰⁴ This manuscript's elegant progression up the cosmological hierarchy from the stones and herbs of the earth, to humans and their health, to the universal principles of mathematics and their divine implications may be coincidental. However, this organisation method was not novel. As we saw in the previous chapter, in his *Quaestiones naturales* Adelard of Bath organised his series of questions in an ascending cosmological hierarchy from the plant roots to the stars and firmament.³⁰⁵ The inclusion of texts indicative of a fourteenth-century quadrivial, and specifically mathematical, education (such as the *algorismimus* and *computus* attributed to Sacrobosco, the tracts on arithmetic, *De mirabilibus mundi*, *De vetula*, and the rithmomachia manual) lead me to conclude that this manuscript functioned as a quadrivial textbook in a university context.

By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries mathematical education had primarily moved out of the monasteries and into universities or clerical institutions with a university connection.³⁰⁶ Although Boethian mathematics survived all of these shifts in university curricula, it appears that by the late fourteenth-century interest in mathematics became more limited in

³⁰² *De viribus herbarum*, *Liber lapidum seu de gemmis*, and *De mirabilibus mundi*. See British Library, "Harley MS 3353."

³⁰³ *Summa chiromantia* attributed to Johannes Philosophus, *De quatuor temporibus anni* ("on regimen of health through the year"), and *Doctrina Henrici libello de imagine mundi* (on humours). See British Library, "Harley MS 3353."

³⁰⁴ Various texts on arithmetic and *computus*. For more details see British Library, "Harley MS 3353."

³⁰⁵ Burnett, "Adelard of Bath," 25.

³⁰⁶ Moyer, *Philosopher's Game*, 50.

general university education and fell to specialists called *calculatores* and Mertonians (scholastic physicists).³⁰⁷ The growth of mathematical specialisation is evident in manuscripts which contain chiromancy. Chiromantic manuals travelled with fewer non-mathematical *naturalia* texts after the mid-fourteenth century, with some fifteenth-century manuscripts such as Society of Antiquities 306 being almost entirely mathematical and astronomical.

Chiromancy in the Courtly Context: MS Royal 12 C. XII

While some manuscripts may reflect a university context, it does not mean that they spent their entire existences in such an institution, just as their owners did not. University men often attained high positions in courtly contexts and brought their manuscripts with them. In this way mathematical texts began to be translated into the vernacular.³⁰⁸

Burnett has used the tale in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* (in which Thomas Becket consulted a chiromancer before an expedition against North Wales) as evidence of the early ecclesiastical context of chiromancy, particularly around Canterbury.³⁰⁹ His anecdote strongly supports other contextual evidence of this argument (see above, "Early Devotional Context"). Yet this does not take into account that, if this anecdote is true, it took place before Becket became Archbishop of Canterbury.³¹⁰ Indeed, it would indicate that *courtiers* sought out those who performed chiromancy for advice. Sadly, the account is not sufficiently detailed to determine whether Becket's chiromancer was a member of the clerical elite or an illiterate lower-

³⁰⁷ Moyer, *Philosopher's Game*, 47.

³⁰⁸ Moyer, *Philosopher's Game*, 51.

³⁰⁹ Burnett, "Earliest Chiromancy," X.189-190.

³¹⁰ Since the *Policraticus* was written as though directly to Becket, it seems likely that the criticisms of his dealing with soothsayers were accurate. John's description of magical practices, such as spirit skrying in reflective surfaces, reflects what we know of real practice. This lends credibility to his description of chiromancy. See *Policraticus*, Book 1, Chapter 12 in Clemens C. I. Webb, *Ioannis Saresberiensis Episcopi Carnotensis Policratici*, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), 52.

class soothsayer. In any case, this account shows chiromancy was present in courtly contexts since its earliest recorded appearance in the Latin West. Once chiromancy's association with university texts was established it also began to travel in manuscripts which reflect the courtly context. This is unsurprising since the art was already circulating with quadrivial material and many university-trained clerics worked as administrators in courtly contexts where lay nobles likely desired this service. By bringing chiromancy from the university into the lay environment, these transmitters fostered a popular interest in the subject which precipitated chiromancy's widespread vernacular translation. The growth of non-clerical elite clientele for the new learned stream of chiromancy helps explain why chiromantic texts expanded to include varying interpretations for men and women's palms and why interpretations were broadened from their initial clerical frame.³¹¹ Nowhere is the growth of courtly chiromancy better exemplified than in the Latin, French, and English miscellany Royal 12 C. XII where chiromancy appears to have been employed to give advice to noble patrons.

Much attention has been rightfully given to this manuscript because it contains the only surviving copy of the romance *Fouke Le Fitz Waryn*. In the comprehensive introduction of their 1975 edition of the romance, E.J. Hathaway, P.T. Ricketts, C.A. Robson, and A.D. Wilshire go into great detail about the manuscript's compilation.³¹² They provide an excellent biography of the compiler (who was also the main scribe), in which they use other manuscripts he compiled and copied to outline how he fits into the courtly context.³¹³ He appears to have been born in

³¹¹ Burnett, "Earliest Chiromancy," X.191, 194. Burnett, "Chiromancy: Supplement," X.25-27. Thorndike, "Chiromancy in Mediaeval Latin Manuscripts," 677.

³¹² E.J. Hathaway, P.T. Ricketts, C.A. Robson, and A.D. Wilshire, eds., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* (Oxford: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1975), xxxvii-liii.

³¹³ This manuscript's compiler also compiled Harley 2253 and wrote notes in Harley 273 (neither of which are included in the present study due to their lack of a chiromancy). See Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, xxxviii-xxxix.

Ludlow, likely to a family in the service of Geoffrey de Geneville or his descendants.³¹⁴ In his youth he appears to have been “a tutor in a great baronial household,” although by the 1320s he had left his patrons and was either a member or in the employ of the chapter of Hereford and its bishop.³¹⁵ He eventually entered a higher ecclesiastical position, possibly becoming a canon of Hereford. Hathaway et al. describe Royal 12 C. XII as “a young man’s book” and there is strong evidence indicating that Royal 12 C. XII was compiled earlier in his career while he was acting as tutor for his noble patrons.³¹⁶ Indeed, while containing a great deal of informative and practical information, there is a ludic tendency to some of its varied contents. This miscellany is full of *naturalia*, “schoolroom history,” romances, devotional writings, prognostication, prophecies, satirical political material, quaint charms (such as one for expelling mice on fol. 6), mathematical games, and popular science, which was compiled from eight independent sections varying in length from one to four quires.³¹⁷ Knowing about this compiler’s life offers a rare opportunity to see the intellectual context into which chiromancy had been transmitted.

The manuscript contains multiple texts critical of contemporary Plantagenet kings, which may reflect the dissatisfaction of the compiler’s baronial patrons. For instance, the manuscript begins with liturgical writings in honour of Thomas of Lancaster, which may have been authored by the compiler.³¹⁸ Thomas of Lancaster led two rebellions of the barons against Edward II before being executed for his involvement, after which he was generally treated as a martyr and saint.³¹⁹ He would clearly have been regarded as a symbol of baronial independence, and

³¹⁴ Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, xli.

³¹⁵ Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, xlii, xlv.

³¹⁶ Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, xxxvii-xlv.

³¹⁷ Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, xlv.

³¹⁸ Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, xlvii.

³¹⁹ Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, xlvii. "Thomas, 2nd earl of Lancaster," *Britannica Academic*, accessed April 1, 2017, <http://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Thomas-2nd-earl-of-Lancaster/47003>.

certainly would interest the compiler's patron family. Yet it may be that these were collected to act as a mirror so that kings might be able to learn from the follies of their forebears.³²⁰ If so, perhaps the compiler had aspirations of emulating the advisory position of Becket (who is the topic of several texts in this manuscript). At the very least the compiler certainly had an interest in famous advisors of kings, since he also includes prophecies attributed to Merlin and Michael Scott (the court astrologer of Frederick II who later gained a reputation as a magician).³²¹ Although it is unclear whether the compiler ever achieved this position himself, his book certainly did. At some point between the fourteenth and eighteenth century Royal 12 C. XII made its way into the possession of the royal family who donated it, along with about 2000 manuscripts and 9000 printed books, to the British Museum in 1757.³²²

The chiromantic text is directly preceded by medical notes in the seventh discrete section of the manuscript which was evidently produced as a unit. This section primarily contains texts on prognostication and divination by various means as well as an extract from the *Secretum secretorum* concerning physiognomy. The compiler collected and copied these texts himself from other sources and evidently regarded the material in the seventh section to be closely related to the following section (which he likely inherited from an earlier scribe who wrote in a

³²⁰ In fact, it gives its possessor perfect material with which to advise (and entertain) a noble patron household, whether through the satirical histories regarding politics, colourful exemplars or cautionary tales from literary romances, or various forms of prognostication.

³²¹ This manuscript also contains prophecies attributed to "*Hermerus deus sapientum*" (Hermes, God of Wisdom). See Warner and Gilson, *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts*, vol. 2, 28. This is likely a reference to Hermes Trismegistus. This figure was a syncretic Hellenistic composite god of Hermes and Thoth, considered patron of alchemy and magicians. Ebeling, *Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus*, 3, 9. Medieval writers imagined Hermes Trismegistus to be a pagan philosopher connected to platonic thought, or as a "semi-mythical author" such as Solomon. See David Porreca, "Hermes Trismegistus in Thomas of York: A 13th-Century Witness to the Prominence of an Ancient Sage," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 72, no. 1 (2005), 153-154. The incipit of the prophecy on fol. 16 of Royal 12. C. XII appears to indicate a medieval survival of the original Late Antique conceptualisation of Hermes Trismegistus as a deity.

³²² British Library, "Royal Manuscripts," *Collection Guides*, accessed September 25, 2017, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/royal-manuscripts>.

textura hand) comprised of the *Liber experimentarius* (a series of astrological divinatory techniques translated from Arabic).³²³ Given the placement of the chiromancy with other prognosticatory material it seems likely that it was being used, or was understood, as a source of counsel (as it was for Thomas Becket in the *Policraticus*).³²⁴ The use of chiromancy as a means of advising noble patrons is unsurprising given its close and enduring connection with astrological texts, which were often used for the same purpose.³²⁵

Taken alone, segments seven and eight are largely dedicated to prognostic texts, much like the dedicated prognostic manuscript Pepys 911. The thirteenth-century manuscript Pepys 911 opens with the *Liber experimentarius* just as the Royal manuscript closes with it. Both manuscripts also contain a divinatory text outlining an odd system of *sortes* wherein thirty-six questions are each given twelve answers, and each grouping is assigned a bird.³²⁶ In Royal 12 C. XII this material closely precedes the chiromancy whereas in Pepys 911 the chiromancy is inserted directly before it.³²⁷ This similarity in content shows that this constellation of texts was linked in the minds of more than one person who lived circa 1300-1350. The Latin and French chiromancy in Pepys 911 is an extended marginal note which a scribe inserted on pages which had sufficient space circa 1300. As such, it does not reveal how the compiler of this manuscript understood the art to relate to adjacent material, but it does show that the later scribe thought chiromancy belonged in this manuscript of prognostication and divination. The fact that it was added to the manuscript closer to the period when Royal 12 C. XII was compiled (though likely

³²³ Hathaway et al., *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, xlv-xlv, li-iii.

³²⁴ Burnett, "Earliest Chiromancy," X.189-190.

³²⁵ Page, *Astrology in Medieval Manuscripts*, 11, 28.

³²⁶ This text is also found in Bodleian, Ashmole 304. See Robert Latham, *Catalogue of the Pepys Library*, 5-6. Warner and Gilson, *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts*, vol. 2, 29.

³²⁷ Note that in Pepys 911 this text is in Latin, whereas the version in Royal 12 C. XII is in French. Robert Latham, *Catalogue of the Pepys Library*, 5-6. Warner and Gilson, *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts*, vol. 2, 29.

before that point), and the fact that it is partially in the vernacular, may be further evidence that chiromantic texts entered the courtly context by at least the fourteenth century. In any event, Royal 12 C. XII and the chiromancy it contains are suggestive of the scribe's desire to supplement his role as advisor to nobility.

Ad Hoc Books of Secrets: Ashmole 1471 and Trinity O.1.57

The powers of stones and herbs were subjects of great interest in both courtly and learned contexts due to the widespread belief that all sublunary things were connected to the planets via interconnected sympathies.³²⁸ These qualities, along with other hidden natural marvels, were described in the genre of medieval manuscript known as “books of secrets.”³²⁹ Books of secrets have been defined by the historian of science William Eamon as “assemblages of traditional lore concerning the occult properties of plants, stones, and animals, along with miscellaneous craft and medicinal recipes, alchemical formulas, and ‘experiments’ to produce marvellous effects through magic.”³³⁰ The most popular text in this genre (and indeed in the Middle Ages) was the *Secretum secretorum*, which was translated into Latin from the Arabic *Kitāb Sirr al-Asrār* (*Book of the secret of secrets*) in the mid-twelfth century. Over six hundred Latin and vernacular copies of this pseudo-Aristotelian text survive, although some only in fragments, making it one of the most popular books of the later Middle Ages. The *Secretum secretorum* is an encyclopaedic text containing moral and political advice, medicine, “health regimen, astrology, physiognomy,

³²⁸ William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 49.

³²⁹ Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 16.

³³⁰ He gives examples of the content which include “recipes, formulas, and ‘experiments’ of various kinds... from medical prescriptions and technical formulas to magical procedures, cooking recipes, parlour tricks, and practical jokes” which are unified in their promise to reveal “the secrets of nature and art.” Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 16.

alchemy, numerology, and magic.”³³¹ Although no book of secrets contains chiromancy, many miscellanies in this study combine it with material characteristic of that genre, indicating that those with an interest in books of secrets were also attracted to chiromancy. In fact, some chiromantic texts attribute their translation to John of Seville, who translated one version of the *Secretum secretorum* into Latin. His connection to the *Secretum* is likely why later scribes attributed the translation of chiromantic texts to him.³³² Some chiromantic texts went so far as to say that they had been “‘elaborated’ from Aristotle’s *Secretum secretorum*,” thereby making this link to books of secrets explicit.³³³ This marks another distinctive intellectual environment in which chiromancy increasingly travelled from the beginning of the fourteenth century onward. Books of secrets emphasised wonder and marvel in the natural world. Although they were built upon the conceit that they contained esoteric knowledge known only by the wise, they tended to be popular texts, far more accessible to a wider audience than the quadrivial texts of medieval universities, and far more entertaining than medical or mathematical treatises.

The term “book of secrets” has traditionally been applied narrowly to texts, like the *Secretum secretorum*, which gather a set of secrets under a single title or author. Laura Mitchell has argued that the definition should be applied more broadly to include not just collections of individual secrets of nature that constitute a single text, but collections of *texts* regarding secrets of nature. She proposes that collections of charms, magic tricks, and natural magic function as *ad hoc* books of secrets.³³⁴ Her discussion focuses on magic, not secrets, and as a result she does not include tracts on the occult properties of stones, herbs, or physiognomy in her discussion. But

³³¹ Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 45.

³³² Schmit and Knox, *Pseudo-Aristoteles Latinus*, 22. Craig, *Works of John Metham*, xxii.

³³³ “...elaboratum ex libro Aristotilis... id est, liber De secretis secretorum...” Pack, “Pseudo-Aristotelian Chiromancy,” 190, 235-236.

³³⁴ Mitchell, *Cultural Uses of Magic*, 117.

she is quite right that the genre should be expanded, and I propose that it should also include manuscripts that contain this constellation of subjects. Compilers certainly selected texts of this kind when assembling manuscripts, producing *ad hoc* books of secrets tailored to their specific interests.

The entanglement of the tradition of physiognomy with the *Secretum* further illustrates the anachronistic nature of the line between traditionally defined books of secrets and manuscripts containing texts which collectively function as *an ad hoc* book of secrets. Western physiognomy originated in the *Secretum secretorum* but, as this manuscript survey has demonstrated, it began to travel independently in miscellany manuscripts that contained similar material. This pattern of Western physiognomic texts' transmission indicates that compilers produced manuscripts which drew from and echoed the form and content of static books of secrets, but served as *ad hoc* books of secrets. Some of these manuscripts (as we saw in Harley 3353) include the occult properties of stones and herbs, some (such as Additional 15236) contain a variety of charms, and the frequent inclusion of physiognomy in these manuscripts has already been discussed.³³⁵ The frequency with which chiromancy was transmitted with physiognomy, and texts on similar material to that discussed in the *Secretum secretorum*, indicates that the art circulated in *ad hoc* books of secrets. Therefore, while no traditional book of secrets contains chiromancy, it was treated as belonging to the same constellation of subjects which books of secrets include.

³³⁵ Some also include alchemy such as Ashmole 1471, Bodl. 177, Bodl. 607, and Sloane 513 (which contains multiple alchemical treatises). The association of alchemy and chiromancy can also be seen on the continent. Sloane 323 is a continental manuscript from the Netherlands which is almost completely comprised of alchemical works, though it also contains a chiromantic text. MS Royal 12C XII includes a wide variety of material that might be bound in a book of secrets. Its contents range from the prophecies of Merlin to cookery recipes.

A late fourteenth-century example of an *ad hoc* book of secrets is Ashmole 1471, a manuscript that eventually came into the possession of Elizabeth I's court magician John Dee. Ashmole 1471 opens with a tract on the properties of stones, but then launches into a rithmomachia manual directly followed by the excerpt on the virtues of rithmomachia from *De vetula*. Clearly this manuscript was compiled by someone learned in at least the basics of a quadrivial education, yet this manuscript went beyond mere textbook material. While it contains more standard subjects such as astrological/astronomical texts, tracts on the properties of stones and herbs, arithmetic, algorism, and medical texts attributed to Galen, Hippocrates, and Constantinus Africanus, it also contains texts on more wondrous *naturalia* such as alchemy and astrological image magic.³³⁶ Finally, it also includes recipes indicative of the patriarchal attitude that characterises traditional books of secrets, such as experiments to determine if woman is a virgin.

This collection of secrets contains two chiromancies (fols. 82-82v and 121-124v) that appear in what is by now a very familiar pattern. The first follows a medical tract attributed to Galen and two physiognomic tracts and precedes several mathematical tracts followed by astrological material.³³⁷ The second chiromantic text directly follows an extended fifteenth-century insertion (and is itself in a later hand than the earlier part of the manuscript) which contains tracts on topics such as astrology, medicine, and wonderful forms of *naturalia*.³³⁸ This chiromantic text is directly preceded by a tract on the properties of herbs, stones, and metals respectively, and in turn is followed by an Aristotelian physiognomy and a tract on medical

³³⁶ Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 40, 225. Like Royal 12 C. XII, Ashmole 1471 also includes a tract attributed to Hermes, described as “Hermes Aydimon pater philosophorum,” which also appears to be a reference to Hermes Trismegistus. See footnote 321, above.

³³⁷ Note that three tracts on eight leaves have been lost following the first chiromancy. See Black, *Descriptive, Analytical, and Critical Catalogue*, 1282.

³³⁸ Black, *Descriptive, Analytical, and Critical Catalogue*, 1283-1284.

herbs. The circumstantial evidence not only betrays that the collector had a quadrivial university education, but that he either had a special interest in medicine or was a medical practitioner. The texts which immediately precede and follow the chiromancy suggest that it was used or understood as a medical prognostic. This manuscript context also shows a shift in chiromancy's intellectual environment from the restrictive traditional medieval university context to one of greater openness which forefronted intellectual curiosity about the natural world and its wonders.

Another example of the growing inclusion of chiromancy in *ad hoc* books of secrets is the fifteenth-century manuscript Trinity O.1.57. Mitchell writes that this early fifteenth-century manuscript had several scribes who were members of the Haldenby family, a gentry household in Isham, Northamptonshire.³³⁹ Taken as a whole this book contains information of interest to a family with learned members, including tracts ranging from *computus*, algorisms, and the division of the seven sciences, to charms for growing hair and magic tricks which ostensibly made one's home appear flooded.³⁴⁰ Written in both English and Latin, this text shows an awareness of, and interest in, the "secrets" of the learned, including several texts which would be typical in a university student's codex. Despite this, it contains much material that is more frequently associated with early modern cunning folk than medieval scholars. It includes medical charms such as the "Three Brothers" charm, another intended to catch a thief, and prognostication by means of thunder. It contains a variety of medical recipes from traditional assessments of urine to recipes against worms in the teeth, to aid conception, and for a baby that has died in the womb.³⁴¹ Certainly all of this material would aid in the running of a household

³³⁹ Mitchell, *Cultural Uses of Magic*, 17, 257, 267.

³⁴⁰ It is noteworthy that magic tricks often accompanied natural magic in recipe miscellanies. Mitchell, *Cultural Uses of Magic*, 55, 261-267.

³⁴¹ Mitchell, *Cultural Uses of Magic*, 264-266.

and the amusement of a family, but it may foreshadow the later Latin and vernacular medico-magical miscellanies owned by early modern cunning folk.³⁴² By bringing this Latin chiromantic text out of a strictly learned environment and into a household notebook this member of the Haldenby family encouraged interest in this material outside of the learned sphere, stimulating the popular interest which drove the production of vernacular translations.

The hand that wrote the chiromantic text also copied the *Somniale Danielis* and two treatises on physiognomy, one of which is from the *Secretum secretorum*.³⁴³ The *Somniale Danielis* is a manual on dream divination. This tract travelled with chiromantic texts irregularly but frequently throughout the High and Late Middle Ages. It also reflects a larger pattern of association. Nearly a third of the manuscripts in this study (seven of twenty-seven) compiled between the beginning of the thirteenth century and the end of the fifteenth century contain these dream divination manuals. The frequent inclusion of dream divination manuals suggests an enduring link between these and chiromantic texts which may provide an interesting line of research for future scholars to explore.

Although the present survey is limited to Latin chiromantic texts, which required at least grammar school education to access, there was an explosion of vernacular chiromantic texts with the rise in literacy in the fifteenth century. Paul Acker and Eriko Amino began to explore this in their study of Middle English chiromantic texts (which started to appear in the fifteenth century). They argue that these texts, along with the general proliferation of chiromantic works during the fifteenth century, indicate a growing interest in chiromancy as a popular science.³⁴⁴ It is likely

³⁴² Another example of such a manuscript is Bodleian Library, Bodley Additional B. 1, an edition of which will be included in Frank Klaassen, *Making Magic in Elizabethan England* (Pennsylvania State University Press, forthcoming).

³⁴³ Mitchell, *Cultural Uses of Magic*, 259.

³⁴⁴ Acker and Amino, "Book of Palmistry," 145.

that Trinity O.1.57 is reflective of chiromancy's spread beyond the intellectual elite and into the hands of the lay elite and lower classes. This shows that chiromancy followed the general spread of learning that is indicative of this period, and reveals that it was compelling not only to the learned elite but to a wider lay and non-Latinate audience. These *ad hoc* books of secrets were less concerned with censure than other manuscripts, containing far more contentious or illicit material. This also may be connected to the development of a more tolerant intellectual environment in the fifteenth century.³⁴⁵ This more accepting attitude that encouraged curiosity about natural wonders was firmly in place by the fifteenth century, when chiromantic texts proliferated in vernacular translations. Certainly, the evidence suggests that chiromancy was part of the growing interest in secrets of nature that was already developing in the fourteenth century, and perhaps earlier, which primed a wider interest in natural wonders in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³⁴⁶

A Liminal Manuscript: Sloane 513

MS Sloane 513 is a unique manuscript, the notebook of a Cistercian monk named Richard Dove who attended Oxford university in the early to mid-fifteenth century.³⁴⁷ As such it evinces both monastic and university connections. The British Library's online catalogue

³⁴⁵ Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 5, 36.

³⁴⁶ There are, in fact, many manuscripts which I would like to include in this "ad hoc" book of secrets section. Multiple manuscripts in this survey, such as Royal 12 C. XII, seem rather like a book of secrets. However, space and time constraints forced me to limit this survey to focus on exemplars of these broader trends. While the different intellectual contexts of chiromantic transmission which I have outlined in this section are useful, they are not always so clear-cut. At times they may overlap, for instance when a manuscript was compiled by a courtly scholar with a university education (as we saw in the case of Royal 12 C. XII), or a monk who attended a university (as was the case with Sloane 513, which we will explore in more detail in the following section).

³⁴⁷ David Bell, "A Cistercian at Oxford, Richard Dove of Buckfast and London BL Sloane 513," *Studia Monastica*, 31 (1989): 72.

describes Sloane 513 as a fifteenth-century “mainly scientific and grammatic miscellany.”³⁴⁸ The religious historian David Bell revises this picture, describing and analysing the manuscript in much greater detail. He observes that despite Dove’s monastic background and university context, very few tracts in the manuscript were those commonly used as university textbooks, and fewer still were theological or monastic tracts. The common university texts he includes were of a decidedly quadrivial bent, such as Sacrobosco’s *De sphaera*, an *algorismus*, a Galenic medical text, and material on geometry and the working of an astrolabe.³⁴⁹ Furthermore, the theological material amounts to a few “prayers, extracts from liturgy, statutes, formulae for the reception of novices” and the like, which appear in the opening and closing folios of the manuscript.³⁵⁰ He notes that Dove seems to have been “intrigued by prognostication for its own sake,” dedicating more space to chiromantic texts than to any other single subject in the manuscript, with the next most common subject being alchemy.³⁵¹ Bell observes that the threefold grouping of astrology/astronomy, physiognomy, and chiromancy make up between a third and a half of Sloane 513.³⁵² This interest in popular science, magic, and divination is reminiscent of books of secrets. Sloane 513 is a liminal manuscript which stands as a point of convergence between many of the intellectual contexts in which we have seen chiromancy travel. As such, it offers unique insight into how a person who lived in various learned contexts thought about chiromancy, how the art related to other subjects, and how these intellectual interests

³⁴⁸ British Library, “Detailed Record for Sloane 513,” *Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts*, accessed November 5, 2014, <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=797>.

³⁴⁹ Bell, “Cistercian at Oxford,” 75-77, 79.

³⁵⁰ Bell, “Cistercian at Oxford,” 79.

³⁵¹ Bell, “Cistercian at Oxford,” 77.

³⁵² It is important to remember, as Bell notes, that astrology and astronomy were synonymous during this period. Bell, “Cistercian at Oxford,” 77.

transcended specific environments. It also offers an excellent case study which elegantly demonstrates how its compiler understood chiromancy to relate to astrology.

Despite being compiled by a monk in a university context, Dove's manuscript reveals that his interests were not limited to core university curricula.³⁵³ In his discussion of a shortened *Ars notoria*, called the *Ars brevis*, located near the end of the manuscript, Klaassen posits that the text indicates either that Dove had a particular interest in divination or that the short tract on magically acquiring knowledge was included as a novelty.³⁵⁴ Bell offers strong evidence that, given the lack of focus on the sciences at Oxford and the fact that a monk need not have this specialty, Dove had a personal interest in these subjects, particularly fringe areas such as prognostication and alchemy.³⁵⁵ Although Bell cites the inclusion of a tract on divination by dice rolls as a part of this interest in prognostication, the text is even more revealing than this. This dice divination method is part of a section that includes various (obviously divinatory) techniques which are specifically intended to reveal the future and have no naturalistic justification.³⁵⁶ This, as well as his aforementioned inclusion of the *Ars brevis* (a shortened version of the *Ars notoria*, which was specifically condemned by authorities such as Thomas Aquinas), shows a general lack of concern as to whether a topic was licit or illicit.³⁵⁷ Amusingly, the only portions of this manuscript to eventually meet censure were not those containing magic

³⁵³ British Library, "Detailed Record for Sloane 513." Bell, "Cistercian at Oxford," 77.

³⁵⁴ Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 95.

³⁵⁵ Bell, "Cistercian at Oxford," 78.

³⁵⁶ Bell notes that the dice divination could not be justified as a useful form of medical diagnosis, indicating that Dove was "intrigued by prognostication for its own sake." Bell, "Cistercian at Oxford," 78.

³⁵⁷ Klaassen notes that the inclusion of the *Ars brevis* may have resulted from Dove's wider interest in divination. Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 95. Aquinas, *Sum. 2.2.96.1*

or divination. Instead, a selection of prayers at the end of the manuscript were crossed out after the Reformation with the word “papist” inserted in the margin.³⁵⁸

Although the whole manuscript does not fall into well-ordered sections like Harley 3353, in part of Sloane 513 there is a clear cosmological progression. From folio 58r to 96r the texts are in descending order from the macrocosm to the microcosm. An explanation of the figures and use of Arabic numbers on fol. 58r starts this series of texts with abstract and perfect mathematics. This is followed by a copy of Sacrobosco’s *De sphaera*, beginning on fol. 59r, which reflects a descent from the mathematical material into the celestial realm. *De sphaera* is directly followed by an interesting tract on how astrology affects human dispositions starting on fol. 75. This explicitly links the influence of the stars to human behaviour, addressing how the celestial spheres affect the sublunary humans. A physiognomic text follows this on fol. 77v, taking the focus of the reader more firmly out of the macrocosm and into the microcosm that is the human body. What is particularly interesting is that this cosmological descent does not stop there, but continues to narrow down to the hand with an introductory note on chiromancy starting on fol. 83r and a copy of *Tractatus cyromancie* (attributed to the Oxford Master Rodericus de Majoricis) beginning on fol. 84r.³⁵⁹

The descending cosmographical order of the tracts on folios 58r to 96r of Sloane 513 suggests that Dove saw the palm as a microcosm of man, just as man was a microcosm of the universe. This implies that chiromancy was not conceived of as a set of interpretations created *ex nihilo*, but that the lines on the palm and a person’s disposition were both influenced by a common cause, the planetary movements. Aquinas argued (as discussed in chapter two) that

³⁵⁸ This is on fol. 193r of Sloane 513. Bell, “Cistercian at Oxford,” 87.

³⁵⁹ British Library, “Detailed Record for Sloane 513.” Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” X.3.

attempting to predict the future using things based on chance is illicit divination. Yet he found it acceptable to infer future events if what one uses to anticipate the future arises from the same cause as that which one attempts to infer. With Aquinas's arguments in mind, the pattern of textual order evident in Sloane 513 and Harley 3353 suggests a logic behind chiromancy's efficacy that its authors thought too obvious to be explicitly stated. Namely, that if the lines of the palm and a person's disposition (and therefore her or his likely actions) are both influenced by the planets, then inferring these things using chiromancy could be conceived of as legitimate. Since Dove did not seem concerned with the permissibility of the texts he collected, this textual ordering was likely not an intentional implicit argument intended to shield chiromancy from authoritative anti-divinatory polemics by emphasising its connection to accepted natural science. Rather, this text order appears to reflect Dove's internalised cosmographical map.

As we have seen, chiromancy moved from its initial ecclesiastical context into the universities where it was treated as *naturalia* and often circulated with quadrivial textbooks. It entered courtly contexts and appeared in books of popular natural wonders and magic which might be dubbed *ad hoc* books of secrets. This latter trend indicates a cultural shift characterised by interest by both learned and lay readers in texts outlining the wondrous secrets of the wise. This "culture of secrets" was more expansive and inclusive of material which had previously been dubbed illicit, and has since been labeled pseudo-science or superstition. This is supported by the fifteenth-century explosion of vernacular chiromantic texts, as the art became a widespread popular science. Like much medieval learning, chiromancy spread from the libraries of the learned elite to the handbooks of lower class compilers by the beginning of the early modern period. The fifteenth century also saw increasing tolerance of magical texts. Unlike

many other Late Medieval/early modern popular sciences, however, chiromancy has endured as a popular practice to the present.

Conclusion and Epilogue

This thesis has demonstrated how the development of chiromancy cannot be fully understood in separation from critical authoritative voices. Chiromancy moved from its initial ecclesiastical setting into the universities where, under the influence of its scholastic environment, it became more complex theoretically sophisticated, and gained astrological elements which grounded the art in an accepted scientific framework. Scribes and compilers strove to characterise chiromancy as part of natural philosophy, directly responding to scholastic and theological critiques of the art. In this way chiromancy was both protected from censure and directly shaped by this discourse. Compilers collected chiromancy with texts of natural philosophy, thus protecting the art from censure by framing it as *naturalia*. Scribes and authors set chiromancy in an accepted cosmological context by employing scholastic language, adding astrological associations to the interpretations of the palm, and including introductory material and disclaimers that emphasise its natural (but not demonic and divinatory) nature. The relative success of this strategy explains why so many medieval chiromantic texts have survived. Finally, this thesis documents a third stage in the development of Latin chiromantic texts in which its learned transmitters encouraged popular interest in the art as they brought it into the popular literature of secrets. This initiated chiromancy's return to popular culture, bringing with it the scholastic-astrological accretions which it gained in its learned setting. These astrological elements made it possible to integrate chiromancy with other branches of magic.

In the first chapter we saw how, under the influence of scholasticism, chiromantic texts became more numerous and theoretically complex. They began growing in length, employing scholastic language, and gaining elements of astrological theory. The second chapter demonstrated how medieval authorities considered chiromancy a demonically inspired forbidden

divinatory art, and that both scribes and compilers of chiromantic texts framed them as part of *naturalia* in response to this condemnation. This was accomplished through internal assurances that the art was natural and did not offer forbidden knowledge, and by transmitting chiromancy with other texts on natural philosophy. The third chapter traced the different settings in which chiromantic texts were compiled, beginning in an ecclesiastical context, moving into the universities in connection to the quadrivium, appearing in the courtly context as an aid for advising courtiers, and finally entering collections of natural wonders that might be deemed *ad hoc* books of secrets. Though it was not universal, we can see that chiromantic texts followed a clear trajectory from the books of learned clerics, into less formal settings. This latter context is evidenced by the translation of chiromantic manuals into vernacular languages during the fifteenth century when it enjoyed widespread interest as a popular science.

The Latin Western chiromantic tradition was first put into writing in an ecclesiastical context, yet the texts themselves were shaped by their circulation with natural philosophy in the university context. Under the influences of scholastic method and natural philosophy they became lengthier and more theoretically complex. In reaction to authoritative condemnation the texts adopted scholastic language and contemporary cosmological theory to justify themselves and avoid censure. Compilers accepted this naturalistic justification and transmitted chiromancy with texts of natural philosophy, most commonly with astrology. Chiromantic texts adopted astrological associations which further validated them and cemented their place amongst wondrous *naturalia* and quadrivial textbooks alike. Chiromancy occasionally appears in manuscripts that included tracts ordered to reflect the hierarchy of macrocosm and microcosm. This shows how chiromancy was understood to be efficacious because the hand was formed by the same forces which shaped each person and his or her predispositions. The appearance of

astrological material in nineteen of the twenty-seven manuscripts surveyed in this study provides further evidence that medieval people believed chiromancy's efficacy to be grounded in astrological influences. This reflects the larger cosmographical framework which provided a naturalistic explanation for chiromancy's efficacy to medieval compilers. Chiromancy's appearance in courtly contexts, and in *ad hoc* books of secrets, likely precipitated chiromancy's expansion into vernacular languages and its proliferation as a popular science when the learned brought the art out of the universities, driving popular interest in the subject.

Though this study concludes with the close of the fifteenth century, chiromancy remained in use and had an enduring legacy as a prevalent popular practice. By the end of the medieval period chiromancy had gained a reputation as being an activity of the low social orders. For example, the fifteenth-century Dominican friar Peter of Prussia wrote the *Legenda litteralis Alberti Magni*, which stated that Albertus dismissed chiromancy as magic "for little old women and Egyptians."³⁶⁰ Peter wrote this hagiography in an attempt to salvage Albertus's reputation, since he had become known as a magician.³⁶¹ This reputation was formed due to the many extant magical works ascribed to him, several of which were chiromantic texts.³⁶² Why Peter used this specific criticism of chiromancy is unclear. While male clerical elite might dismiss old women as foolish and unlearned, the Egyptians were associated with philosophical learning.³⁶³ This, however, does not provide a clear rhetorical thread that would unite these two groups into a single insult. They both share a common association with magic since, due to biblical precedent,

³⁶⁰ David J. Collins, "Albertus, Magnus or Magus? Magic, Natural Philosophy, and Religious Reform in the Late Middle Ages," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 63, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 12.

³⁶¹ Collins, "Albertus, Magnus or Magus," 4, 9.

³⁶² Lång, *Unlocked Books*, 128.

³⁶³ The association of Egypt with philosophical learning and idolatry led medieval authors to associate Hermes Trismegistus with Egypt. Porreca, "Hermes Trismegistus," 152-153. There may have in fact been truth to the association of chiromancy with women. Several later chiromantic treatises were written for female patrons. See Acker and Amino, "Book of Palmistry," 147.

the Egyptians had long been associated with sorcery, and marginalised old women were often the targets of witchcraft accusations. This is so general a condemnation, however, that it could refer to all the arts which Peter dismisses, why would a general condemnation of magic be levied against chiromancy alone and in such a circumlocutious manner? It seems more likely that these two demographics were employed to levy a more specific condemnation against chiromancy. Perhaps the prevalent belief in Egyptian (or “unlucky”) days led the author to classify both groups as superstitious.³⁶⁴ However, in his denouncement of multiple divinatory arts he levies the accusation of superstition at aereomancy, not chiromancy.³⁶⁵ If he was implying that only superstitious people were practicing chiromancy then he likely would have grouped the art with his criticism of aereomancy (as he did while calling both pyromancy and hydromancy idolatrous).³⁶⁶

It seems most likely that Peter is not referring to ancient Egyptians at all, but rather to the Roma who entered Western Europe in the late fourteenth and fifteenth-centuries.³⁶⁷ By the early fifteenth century the Roma claimed to be from “Little Egypt” and the word “gypsy” was derived from this.³⁶⁸ The Roma had a reputation for soothsaying since they entered Byzantium shortly before 1068 CE.³⁶⁹ The popularity of chiromancy among the Roma appears to have already been

³⁶⁴ John C. Hirsh, “Fate, Faith and Paradox: Medieval Unlucky Days as a Context for ‘Wytte Hath Wondyr,’” *Medium Aevum*, 66 (Jan. 1997): 288. If anything, Egyptian days were more associated with idolatry and paganism than superstition. See Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 20. Note that chiromancy directly precedes a list of unlucky days in MS Rawlinson D. 247.

³⁶⁵ Peter also deems geomancy to be unscientific, pyromancy and hydromancy as idolatrous, and garrimancy (divination by bird calls) as the most dangerous because it pretends to be supported by reason. Collins, “Albertus, Magnus or Magus,” 12.

³⁶⁶ Collins, “Albertus, Magnus or Magus,” 12.

³⁶⁷ Angus Fraser, *The Gypsies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 53-54.

³⁶⁸ Fraser, *Gypsies*, 54.

³⁶⁹ They are mentioned in the *Life of Saint George the Anchorite*, written on Mount Athos in 1068 CE. This hagiography talks of Roma presence in Constantinople nearly twenty years earlier. This is the first reference to the Roma as “Adsincani,” which is the Georgian form of the Greek word “Atsinganoi.” This is the root word that many names for the Roma are based upon and, while its origins are still disputed, is believed to come from the term “Athinganoi,” a heretical sect that was seen to share with the Roma an association with fortune telling and magical

well established by the early modern period when Paracelsus observed that the “gypsies” widely practiced the art.³⁷⁰ In classing chiromancy as an art for “little old women” and the Roma, however, Peter associates the art with the lowest social orders of the time, especially from his perspective as an elite male cleric. As such it was obviously an art that would not be employed by respectable clerics, and certainly not by his hero Albertus. This precipitated the early modern and modern perception of palmistry. The association between the Roma and palmistry has endured, and has been adopted into the modern stereotype of the “gypsy.”

The relationship between these popular traditions and the learned ones that developed in the later Middle Ages is unclear. This study has told only half of this story by outlining the transition from sets of practical and comparatively rudimentary instructions into a complex learned art. More work, like that started by Acker and Amino, on how this learned tradition changed as it was translated into the vernacular would be an interesting and valuable area of future study. However, the astrological elements which were added in the learned context certainly became a part of popular traditions in the early modern period.

The early modern period witnessed the diffusion and integration of elements from chiromantic theory into other magical arts. Just as elements of astrological theory bled into chiromancy during the medieval period, chiromantic elements were included without explanation in the learned ritual magic of *The Key of Solomon*. Another early modern example of chiromancy entering into active magical practices is in a collection of rituals for love in Sloane 3850, likely used by a cunning man or wise woman, in which the reader is directed to write magical symbols

powers. See Fraser, *Gypsies*, 1, 46. And: David Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe and Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 1.

³⁷⁰ Craig, *Works of John Metham*, xxiii.

“with the blood of the little finger.”³⁷¹ Although this may appear arbitrary, the historian Stefano Rapisarda has clearly demonstrated that chiromantic texts position lines related to one’s romantic life directly below the little finger, which led to this finger becoming widely associated with romance.³⁷² Sloane 3850 also contains a love potion which is created by filling the naturally occurring cavities of a nutmeg with semen and “some of your blood, beinge pryked out of the hill of Venus at eight o’clock on Friday morning,” then letting it dry while held beneath one’s armpit, before finally grinding it into a powder.³⁷³ Not only is the “hill of Venus” a term used in palmistry for a mound on the palm associated with the planet, but rudimentary astrological timing is employed by requiring the blood to be let on the day and in the hour of Venus.³⁷⁴ Neither the *Key of Solomon* nor this magic manual offer explanations of the chiromantic theory which provides the cosmographical context for why their spells were ostensibly efficacious. While the *Key of Solomon* was an early modern witness to the medieval ritual magic tradition and was more of a learned art, the cunning folk operated on a popular level and were often only partly literate. In short, chiromantic theory had become so ubiquitous across class boundaries by the early modern period that writers in both demographics assumed their readers already possessed this knowledge. Familiarity with chiromantic principles was not limited to magic specialists. As Acker and Amino suggest, the Renaissance witnessed increased popular literary references to “technical aspects of palmistry, indicating a popular assimilation of the art.”³⁷⁵

³⁷¹ London, British Library, MS Sloane 3850, fol. 149v. Wise women and cunning men were collectively referred to as “cunning folk.” They operated as popular healers and magic specialists.

³⁷² Stefano Rapisarda, “A Ring on the Little Finger: Andreas Capellanus and Medieval Chiromancy,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 69 (2006): 190.

³⁷³ Sloane 3850, fol. 148v. London, British Library, MS Sloane 3850, fol. 149v.

³⁷⁴ The use of this timing system to enhance planetary influence was widespread amongst medieval magic texts, and had already entered the chiromantic tradition, as mentioned above.

³⁷⁵ Acker and Amino, “Book of Palmistry,” 146. See also Carroll Camden, “Elizabethan Chiromancy,” *Modern Language Notes* 62, no. 1 (1947): 1-7.

Chiromancy is not merely some piece of arcane medieval intellectual history, interesting only to the punctilious antiquarian. It has survived as a popular tool for divination through the early modern period and into the present due to its popularity and its translation into the vernacular during the Late Middle Ages. The art remains widespread, evidenced by the fact that the outstretched hand filled with planetary symbols has become the standard sign for many occult stores and psychics. Moreover, the art remains evocative. When presented with pictures of “The Hands” at academic presentations on chiromancy, many members of the audience will commonly examine their own hands, comparing them with the medieval illustrations.³⁷⁶ Readers of this thesis may well have done the same. Even in this apparently rational and sceptical environment, chiromancy remains personally, viscerally compelling. It ascribes meaning and promises insight into one’s self and destiny by means of something that is literally and permanently inscribed into our bodies. Perhaps for this reason, although our understanding of the natural world has changed and the art is no longer supported by the theoretical underpinnings which offered its naturalistic justification during the medieval period, chiromancy is still practiced today.

³⁷⁶ This was observed, for example, at the Fifty-First International Congress on Medieval Studies, May 12–15, 2016 at Kalamazoo, MI.

Appendix 1

Manuscript	Approximate Date	Folio Number	Chiromantic Text
Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.17.1	c. 1160	282	I
London, British Library, MS Sloane 2030	c. 1250-1300	125-126	I with IV
Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 399	c. 1292	16-17	I with IV
		60-60v	I
London, British Library, MS Additional 15236	c. 1275-1325	154-160	Unique (See Schmit & Knox: <i>Chiromantia I</i>)
London, British Library, MS Harley 3353	c. 1250-1350	58-66v	IX
Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 911	c. 1200-1300. Chiromancy added: c. 1300.	45	IV (Partially in the French vernacular)
London, British Library, MS Royal 12 C. XII	c. 1300-1350	106-106v	IV
Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Ii.I.13*	c. 1300-1400	8v-9	IV
Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.2.5 **	c. 1300-1400	128-130	III
London, British Library, MS Rawlinson C. 677	c. 1300-1400	1-2	Unique
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby MS 95	c. 1300-1400	8	Unique***
Dublin, Trinity College, MS 115	c. 1370	43-49	IX
Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1471	c. Late 1300s	82-82v	III
		121-124v	IX
Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodl. 177	c. 1375-1400	41	Unique
		46-48v	VII
London, British Library, Harley MS 866	c. 1390-1410	48v	IX

Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS Eng. 920	c. 1400	22-23	X
Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodl. 607	c. 1400-1450	1-2v	IX
London, British Library, Egerton MS 847	c. 1400-1450	41v-51	VII
		75-96	X
Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 190	c. 1400-1450	55-62	IX
London, British Library, MS Sloane 513	c. 1407-1470	84-96	VII
		100-109	IX
		109-134	X
Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.1.57	c.1400-1500	110v-118	X
London, British Library, MS Rawlinson D. 247	c. 1400-1500	2-12	V
Cambridge, Emmanuel College, MS 70	c. 1400-1500	120-129	X
		129-132	Unique
Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 45	c. 1400-1500	67-95v	X
London, Society of Antiquaries of London, MS 306	c. 1450-1500	28-29	IX
Oxford, New College MS 162	c. 1473-1476	48-56	X
London, British Library, MS Arundel 88	c. 1484- Early 1500s	59-67	VI

Notes to Appendix 1:

* The catalogue for Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS 1705 (Shelf mark Ii. I. 13) lists this chiromantic text as “A Tract on Planetary Influences, and on Palmistry” which runs from folio 1-7. This is incorrect, since the copy of chiromancy IV (The Hands) runs from 8v-9. If the preceding tract is not simply on planetary influences (as it appears) but explicitly connects astrological influences to chiromancy, then it may be a hitherto unclassified chiromantic text worthy of future study. It appears to me, however, that the text is a tract on planetary influences which is adjacent to a copy of chiromancy IV and the cataloguer conflated the two.

** There are two additional chiromantic texts in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS 1109 which did not qualify for this study but bear mentioning. A vernacular French palmistry with the title *Palmistria Salamonis* occurs of folio 190v-191v. It is noteworthy that this vernacular text

connects chiromancy with the Solomonic tradition because other branches of magic, including Solomonic texts, eventually borrow chiromantic principles (for a discussion of this see the concluding chapter of this thesis). Also, a copy of the Adelard Chiromancy (III) was later inserted on folios 212-216 in a seventeenth-century hand.

*** This brief chiromantic text is interesting in that it uses *linea vitae* to refer to the life line (like the Eadwine Chiromancy (I), *Ars chiromantiae* (V), and the John of Seville Chiromancy (VI), and it refers to the table of the palm as *tabula* like the *Ars chiromantiae* (unlike the Eadwine and Adelard chiromancies which tend to use *mensa*). Despite this terminological similarity to the *Ars chiromantiae*, the phrasing and assertions bear far more resemblance to the Adelard Chiromancy, albeit in a highly abridged or rudimentary form. For more on the use of terminology in various chiromantic texts see Charles Burnett, “Chiromancy: Supplement,” *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages: Texts and Techniques in the Islamic and Christian Worlds*, (Hampshire: Variorum, 1996), 5.

Note Bene:

- I use the word “Unique” in this appendix to indicate chiromantic texts which do not fall into any of the categories employed throughout this paper. They are generally uncommon and brief. In rare cases, noted above, they fall into the categorization schemes of scholars other than Burnett.

Appendix 2

Although Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D. 1362 holds nearly all the qualities required for inclusion in this study (being composed of medieval texts and containing two Latin chiromantic texts) it had to be omitted since the texts which compose it were not bound together until 1862. It therefore does not represent a medieval, but a Victorian conception of how chiromancy related to other material. It is noteworthy that this manuscript is almost entirely composed of ecclesiastical tracts. For more on this manuscript see Gulielmus D. Macray, *Catalogi Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Bodleianae, Partis Quintae*, (Oxford: Typographeo Academico, 1862), 448-449. Likewise, many manuscripts, such as London, British Library, MS Sloane 323, would have qualified for this study were they not initially from a continental context. Sloane 323, which is used as a point of continental comparison in chapter three, originated in the Netherlands during the fourteenth century. See British Library, “Detailed Record for Sloane 323,” *Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts*, accessed July 30th 2017, <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=912>.

Despite the fact that my research for this thesis draws upon the work of past historians, the many excellent medieval manuscript catalogues, and my own research trip to England where

I personally worked with the majority of these manuscripts first-hand, I was unable to gain sufficient information on all qualifying manuscripts. Here follows an overview of these manuscripts:

1) Edinburgh, Royal Observatory Edinburgh, MS Crawford 1.2 Although I attempted to contact the Edinburgh Royal Academy for information on this manuscript's contents, I did not receive a response and was incapable of finding sufficient information elsewhere.

2) Sloane MS 3464 appears to only contain a chiromantic text, and therefore was not bound with any other texts to provide context. It has therefore been omitted. It is a fifteenth-century British text accompanied by diagrams of the hands. The incipit is lost because the beginning is not extant. Thorndike suggests that it may be followed by medical notes, despite this not being mentioned in the catalogue. See Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 5, 676-677.

3) Another fifteenth-century chiromantic text with the incipit *Cum quis voluerit amici alicuius predicere res...* appears to be in a private collection. Thorndike relates that the chiromantic text is on 9r-10r in: Arthur Spaeth, Sales Catalogue One, No. 203. For more on this see Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 5, 674.

4) Other manuscripts (such as Oxford, All Souls 81) either contain some sixteenth-century material or are uncertainly dated to either the fifteenth or sixteenth century. These manuscripts have generally been omitted to ensure that only fifteenth-century manuscripts are included in this survey.

5) Finally, there is the unusual case of four manuscripts recorded in the catalogue of the York, Austin Friars. These manuscripts are: York, Austin Friars A8 371; York, Austin Friars A8 380; York, Austin Friars A8 465; and York, Austin Friars A8 469 (note that the index of the *Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues: The Friars' Libraries*, edited by K. W. Humphrey, mistakenly lists A8 469 as A8 496). Sadly, none of these are extant. We know that A8 371 and A8 380 were written and compiled before 1372 because this is when they were donated to the friars by the "frater" John Erghome and recorded in their medieval library catalogue. A8 465 and A8 469 were not part of Erghome's donation and, as such, may have been added to the collection at a later date. Furthermore, there is no way to determine in which century any of these manuscripts were bound. Humphreys notes that several extant manuscripts from this catalogue reveal that its writer did not always precisely list the order texts occur in manuscripts, occasionally omitting texts altogether. Although the first two were pre-1372 there is no way to know how long before that they were bound. The latter two are even more difficult to date since they have no *terminus ante quem*. While the information provided by the catalogue entries is useful, it is also incomplete and imprecise. Therefore, I have not included them in my list of manuscripts for quantitative purposes. Note that A8 371 and A8 380 appear to have contained ritual magic in the vein of the *Ars notoria*. This suggests that monks with an interest in ritual magic also had an interest in chiromancy, indicating that the two arts appealed to similar audiences. *Corpus of Medieval Library Catalogues*, vol. 1, *The Friars' Libraries*, ed. K. W. Humphreys (London: British Library, 1990), 91-92, 96-97, 114-116, 256.

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Cambridge, Emmanuel College
70

Cambridge University, Trinity College
O.1.57 (James catalogue 1081)
O.2.5 (James catalogue 1109)
R.17.1 (James catalogue 987)

Cambridge, University Library
ii. I. 13 (James catalogue 1705)

Cambridge University, Magdalene College
Pepys 911

Dublin, Trinity College
115

Harvard University, Houghton Library
Eng. 920

London, British Library
Additional 15236
Arundel 88
Egerton MS 847
Harley 866
Harley 3353
Royal 12 C. XII
Sloane 513
Sloane 2030 or 2422

London, Society of Antiquaries of London
306

Oxford, Bodleian Library
Ashmole 399
Ashmole 1471
Bodl. 177
Bodl. 607

Digby 95
Douce 45
Rawlinson C. 677
Rawlinson D. 247

Oxford, Corpus Christi College
190

Oxford, New College
162

Supplementary Manuscripts Referred to in this Study

Edinburgh, Royal Observatory Edinburgh
Crawford 1.2

London, British Library
Lansdowne 1202
Sloane 323
Sloane 3850

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