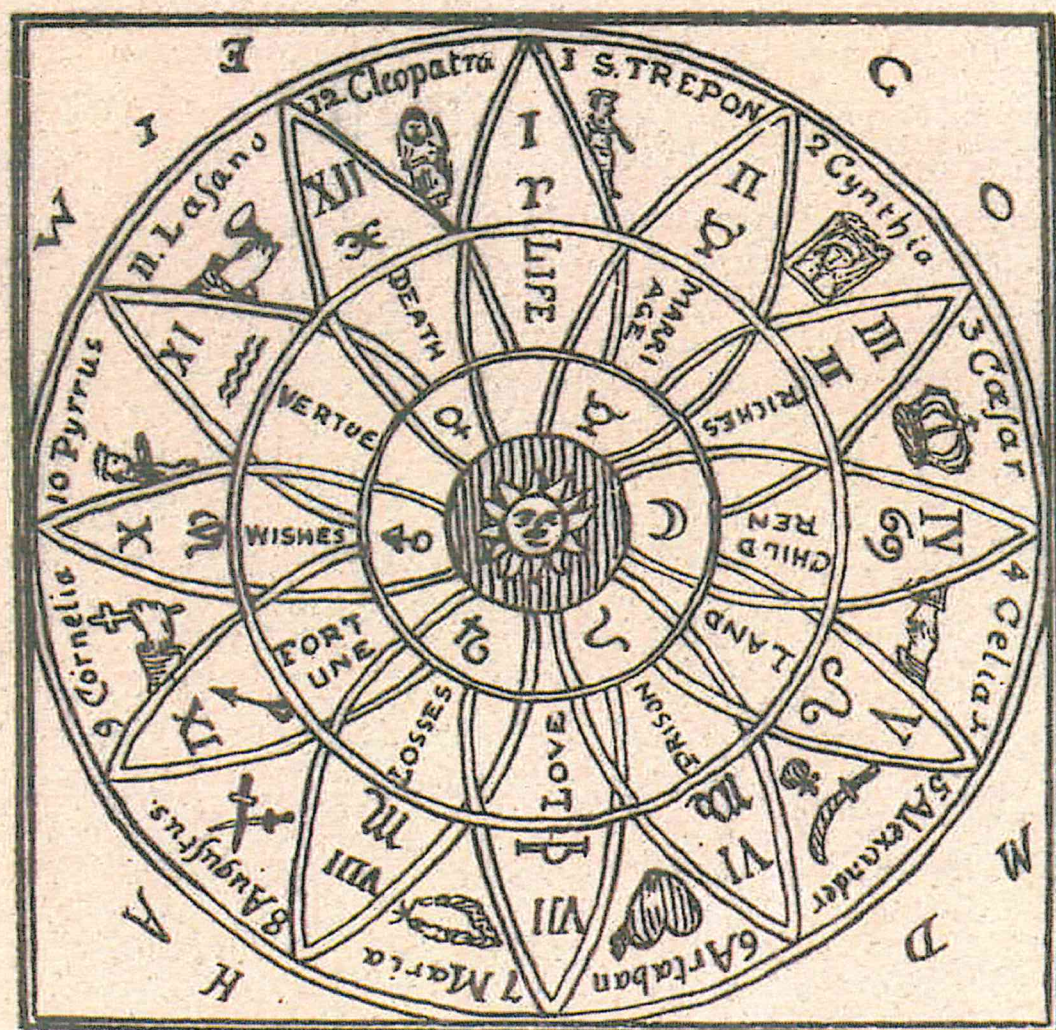
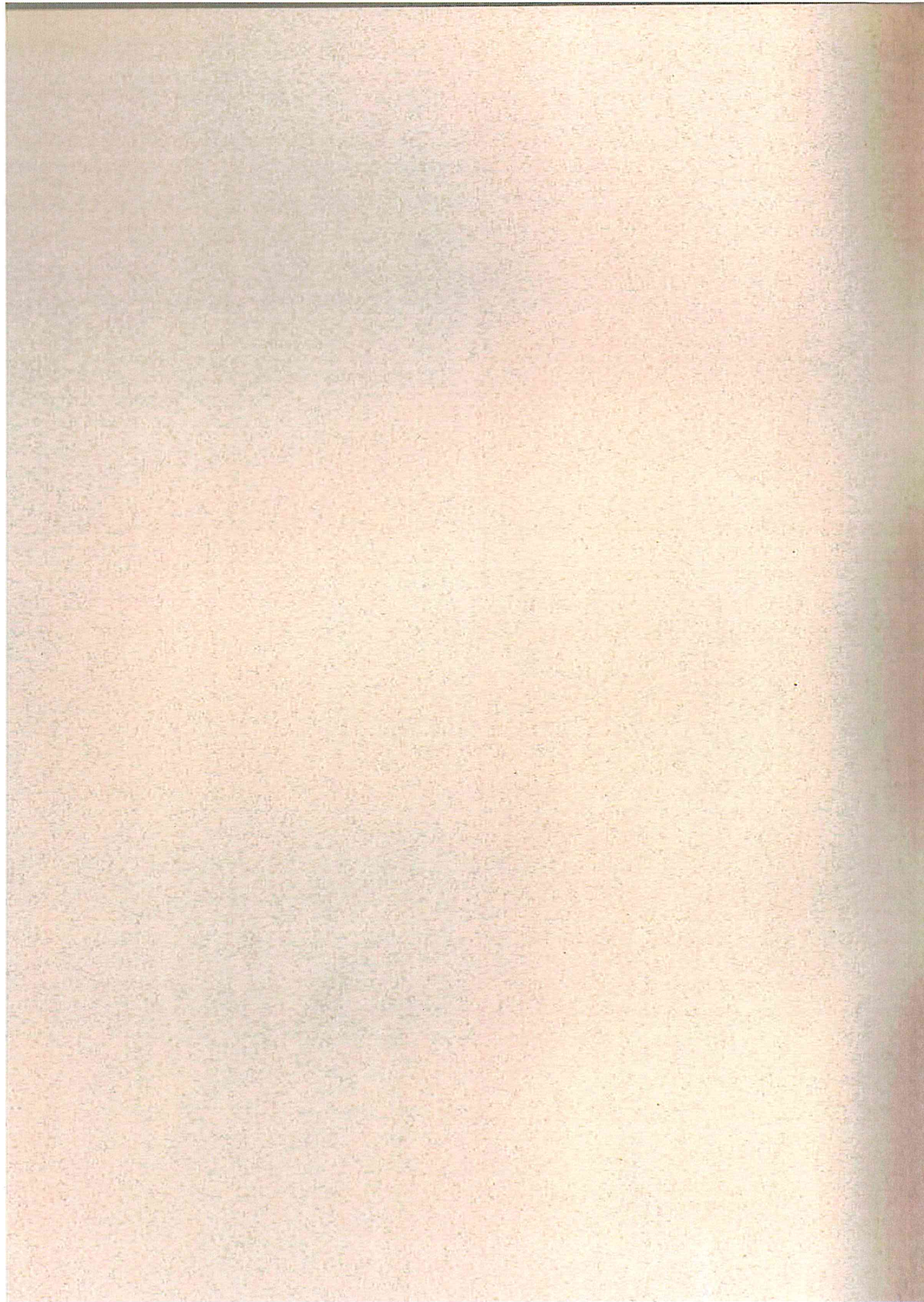


Cunning Folk

An introductory bibliography



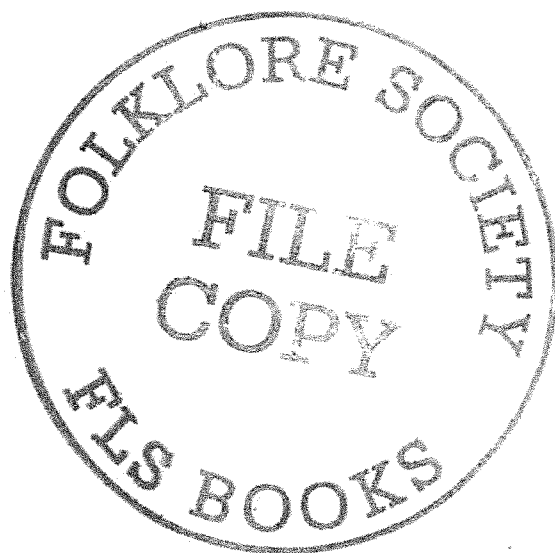
by Owen Davies and Lisa Tallis



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Introduction



This publication does not provide a list of every published source in which the authors have found mention of cunning folk. Such a bibliography would include hundreds of brief notes and articles, which are in any case traceable in the endnotes and footnotes of the publications listed below. Our aim is to provide a bibliography representative of the diversity of sources relevant to the study of English and Welsh cunning folk from the medieval period to the twentieth century, as well as references to relevant contextual material regarding the broader history of magic, prophecy, astrology, and medicine.

Much work remains to be done on the influence and activities of cunning folk in English and Welsh society. Their role in witchcraft accusations in the early modern period has certainly been neglected. Further research may reveal, for example, some interesting links between the influence of cunning folk and the paucity of witch trials in Wales in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Future archival work on eighteenth-century sources will, it is to be hoped, expand our rather limited knowledge concerning numbers of cunning folk and their social characteristics, at a time when schoolmasters, clerks, and the clergy seem to have dissociated themselves from the business of providing 'magical' services, particularly in relation to astrological medicine.

The coverage for the nineteenth century is fairly good, but the story of the demise of cunning folk during the early twentieth century is still under-researched. This bibliography is, therefore, intended to provide a resource for researchers seeking to further our understanding of one of the most fascinating professions in English and Welsh society.

SECTION Source material



The history of cunning folk has to be pieced together from a wide variety of sources. The most important are court records, trial pamphlets, newspapers, and folklore, but tracts, chapbooks, and diaries also prove useful. As regards the trial material, under the Witchcraft and Conjuratation Acts of 1542, 1563, and 1604, the crimes of detecting stolen goods, conjuring up treasure, and procuring love were felonies to be dealt with at the assizes. However, as published assize records show, cunning folk were rarely tried before judge and jury (e.g. nos. 1, 2). They were more likely to find themselves before the lesser court of quarter sessions (e.g. no. 5). They also make frequent but fleeting appearances in witchcraft depositions (no. 3) and witch trial pamphlets (nos. 4, 11). Although many church court records have yet to be investigated, it is clear that the ecclesiastical authorities were far more concerned with the activities of cunning folk and those who consulted them than were the secular judiciary, at least up until the early seventeenth century (e.g. nos. 4, 8, 9).

Under the Witchcraft Act of 1736 the magical activities of cunning folk remained illegal, but now they were prosecuted for *pretending* to have such powers. The Vagrancy Act was also invoked. As a result, courts, primarily the quarter sessions, continued to deal with the occasional cunning man or woman. Unfortunately, few eighteenth-century quarter sessions records have been printed or indexed, so the researcher has to conduct long and often fruitless trawls through the archives. Newspapers also provide a useful source of information regarding the prosecution of cunning folk, but, once again, few newspapers of the period have been fully indexed. Turning to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the valuable information provided by newspaper court reports – particularly those concerning prosecutions brought before the petty sessions – is supplemented by the folklore record. The journal of the Folklore Society contains many references to the activities and practices of cunning folk, much of it in the ‘notices’ section, while county folklore surveys and county antiquarian journals such as the *Montgomeryshire Collections* also contain valuable information.

It is important not to rely solely on literary sources. The archaeological evidence for the activities of cunning folk also needs to be considered. The pioneering work by Merrifield (no. 7), and more recent research by Hoggard (no. 6), Semmens (no. 12), and Davies (no. 44), show the importance of studying the witch bottles and charms that cunning folk employed over the centuries.

- 1 Cockburn, J. S., *Calendar of Assize Records. Home Circuit Indictments: Elizabeth I and James I*, 10 vols (London: HMSO, 1975–85).
- 2 Ewen, C. L'Estrange, *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials* (London: Kegan Paul, 1929).
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- 4 Gibson, Marion, *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 25–33.
This provides an annotated transcription of the examination of the cunning man John Walsh.
- 5 Hardy, W. J., ed., *Hertford County Records: Notes and Extracts from the Sessions Rolls 1581–1698* (Hertford: Hertfordshire County Council, 1905).
- 6 Hoggard, Brian, 'The Archaeology of Counter-Witchcraft and Popular Magic', in *Beyond the witch trials: Witchcraft and magic in Enlightenment Europe*, ed. by Owen Davies and Willem de Blécourt (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 167–86.
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- 9 Raine, James, ed., *Depositions and Other Ecclesiastical Proceedings from the Courts of Durham* (Durham: Surtees Society, 1845).
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- 11 Rosen, Barbara, ed., *Witchcraft in England 1558–1618* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969).
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SECTION **England: medieval and early modern period** (to 1750)



For many early modern theologians and intellectuals, cunning folk were considered as bad as or even worse than witches. They were seen by some as the Devil's most pernicious disciples, in that they led good Christians to turn away from God by placing their faith in magic (nos. 15, 22, 27, 28, 30–34, 36, 38). They were also denounced as peddlers of Catholic 'superstition' and defrauders of the common people (nos. 15, 16, 24, 37). However, since by and large the common people saw cunning folk as important allies in the struggle against witches and misfortune, they rarely sought to prosecute them for what they practised. A couple of exceptions are recorded in popular pamphlets (nos. 19, 39), while equally rare cases of cunning women being prosecuted for bewitching people are also represented in the pamphlet literature (nos. 18, 40, 41). The story of Richard Walton is rather an unusual one: he was prosecuted and hanged for aiding and abetting two horse thieves who had consulted him in relation to their crime (no. 29).

The most detailed academic surveys of cunning folk in this period are to be found in the work of Thomas (no. 55), Macfarlane (no. 49), and Davies (no. 44), while the brief overviews by Sharpe (nos. 53, 54) are also useful. Work on the surviving notebooks of two early seventeenth-century astrologer-physicians, Richard Napier (nos. 47, 52) and Simon Forman (nos. 45, 51, 56), demonstrates the thin line between highly educated healers and diviners, and the usually more lowly cunning folk. Popular perceptions probably failed to recognize the differences that existed between the two groups – most notably demonstrated by the reluctance of Napier and Forman to diagnose witchcraft, even if they did believe in its power. One of their disreputable contemporaries, John Lambe, was less discerning and was keen to play up his magical powers (no. 20), while Blagrave's detailed description of his practice further highlights the porous boundary between cunning folk and those who thought of themselves as physicians (no. 17).

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Printed

- 15 Ady, Thomas, *A Candle in the Dark* (London: Tho. Newberry, 1656); second edition published as *A Perfect Discovery of Witches* (London: H. Brome, 1661).

- 16 *The Black Art Detected and Expos'd; or, A Demonstration of the Hellish Impiety of Being or Desiring to Be a Wizzard, Conjuror, or Witch* (London: William Carter, 1707).
- 17 Blaggrave, Joseph, *Blaggrave's Astrological Practice of Physick* (London: S.G. and B.G., 1671).
- 18 Bower, Edmund, *Doctor Lamb Revived; or, Witchcraft Condemn'd in Anne Bodenham* (London: T.W., 1653).
- 19 *The Brideling, Saddling and Ryding, of a Rich Churle in Hampshire, by the Subtill Practise of one Iudeth Philips, a Professed Cunning Woman* (London, 1595).
- 20 *A Briefe Description of the Notorious Life of John Lambe* (Amsterdam, 1628).
- 21 Brinley, John, *A Discovery of the Impostures of Witches and Astrologers* (London: John Wright, 1680).
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This pamphlet is reprinted in nos. 4 and 11.
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- 38 *Select Cases of Conscience Touching Witches and Witchcrafts* (London: Richard Clutterbuck, 1646).
- 39 *The Severall Notorious and Lewd Cousnages of John West, and Alice West, Falsely Called the King and Queen of Fayries* (London, 1613).
- 40 *The Tryall and Examination of Mrs Joan Peterson* (London, 1652).
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- 55 Thomas, Keith, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971).
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SECTION **England: modern period (1750–1950)**

 The continued popularity of cunning folk in the modern period is exemplified by several tracts and pamphlets denouncing their trade which were printed during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. John Collier (no. 58) used satire to mock them, while Thomas Hawkins (no. 61) and the author of *Ecce Homo!* (no. 59) resorted to angry denunciations and exhortations in order to undermine the reputations of several prosperous and widely consulted cunning men. The life of the notorious Leeds wise woman, Mary Bateman, hanged for poisoning, was printed for public entertainment and as a warning of the dangers of consulting such people (no. 60). The anonymous account of Richard Morris (no. 62), however, presented a more positive aspect of the 'cunning trade' in the same period. The various publications of John Parkins (nos. 63, 64), and the survival of his commonplace book (no. 57), provide a unique insight into the professional life and magical activities of a learned cunning man.

The histories of other nineteenth-century practitioners have been pieced together from newspapers, parish records, and folklore. Eric Maple (nos. 77, 78) has focused on James Murrell (1780–1860); Davies (no. 72) on William Brewer (1818–90); Semmens (no. 79) on Thomasine Blight (1793–1856); and Atkinson and Smith (nos. 65, 80) on John Wrightson of Stokesley. More general surveys of cunning folk can be found in nos. 44, 68, 69, 72, 73. The decline of cunning folk in the early twentieth century is considered by Davies (nos. 44, 71). Claims that one of the last practitioners passed on a secret pagan inheritance have been put forward by Lugh (no. 76) and Liddell and Howard (no. 75). Such claims have been expertly dissected by Hutton (no. 73).

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- 57 London, Wellcome Library, WMS 3770.
Commonplace book of John Parkins. Entries in the book range from 1797 to 1829. It contains extracts from works on astrological medicine, horoscopes, and instructions on magic rites and ceremonies.

Printed

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- 59 *Ecce Homo! Critical Remarks on the Infamous Publications of John Parkins, of Little Gonerby, Near Grantham; Better Known as Doctor Parkins* (Grantham: printed for the author, 1819).
- 60 *Extraordinary Life and Character of Mary Bateman, the Yorkshire Witch* (Leeds: John Davies, 1809).
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- 63 Parkins, John, *The Cabinet of Wealth; or, The Temple of Wisdom Including Our Celestial Touchstone* (Grantham: printed for the author, 1812).
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- 73 Hutton, Ronald, *The Triumph of the Moon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), chapter 6.
- 74 King, Francis X., *The Flying Sorcerer* (Oxford: Mandrake, 1992).
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- 76 Lugh, *Old George Pickingill and the Roots of Modern Witchcraft* (London: Wiccan Publications, 1982).
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- 81 Wheater, William, 'Yorkshire Superstitions', *Old Yorkshire*, 4 (1883), 265–71.

SECTION **D** Wales: medieval and early modern period (to 1750)

The multifarious activities of cunning folk are reflected in the diverse nature of the works listed here. It was common for the *dyn hysbys* (wise/cunning man) or *dewin* (magician) to *darllen tesni* (read fortunes or prophesy), discover lost or stolen property, compose protective charms, exorcize troublesome spirits, detect thieves and witches, and cure illnesses and bewitchments. Thus their skills spanned both the medical and magical worlds, blurring their boundaries. There are no detailed studies of Welsh cunning folk during this period, largely due to Wales's general exclusion from witchcraft historiography, but a good overview is provided by Sally Parkin (no. 110)

The tradition of the physicians of Myddfai (nos. 85, 112) offers evidence for a medical history of medieval Wales which filtered into popular beliefs about the magical origins

of the knowledge of the physicians and the practices of the *dyn hysbys*. Hicks's treatise of urines (no. 95) and Price's herbal text (no. 111) indicate how cunning folk adopted elements of learned medicine.

Prophecy was a significant activity associated with Welsh cunning folk. Arise Evans experienced dreams and visions prior to his major prophecies relating to the Civil War period (nos. 86, 87, 118). Although his prophecies were not always accurate, Evans was tolerated, mainly in consequence of the traditional image of the Welsh prophet (no. 96). Precognition was also a crucial aspect of the omniscience accredited to early Celtic poets (no. 117). The *Book of Taliesin* (no. 84) contains prophetic poems attributed to Taliesin himself. The folktale 'Hanes Taliesin' incorporates mythological motifs, such as the supernatural origin of poetic inspiration and the magical power of Taliesin's poetry. There is also a significant literary connection between Taliesin and the figure of Myrddin (Merlin). An early dialogue poem in the *Black Book of Carmarthen* (no. 83) presents Myrddin and Taliesin as together prophesying the future battle of Arfderydd. The mythical aspects of these poets are more suggestive of the *dewin* (magician) than the *dyn hysbys*, highlighting the nexus between high and low magic. John Dee has been included here not only because of his Welsh lineage, but also because of his experiments with astrology, alchemy, and skrying (conjuring spirits). These aspects of learned magic and occultism were also practised by intellectual cunning folk (see nos. 90, 127), which again emphasizes the permeable boundary between learned magic and folk magic.

The early modern period is also characterized by a growing concern over the popular recourse to cunning folk (nos. 89, 91). Holland's dialogue on witchcraft was based on his personal experiences of the popular reliance on magical practitioners in Welsh rural parishes (nos. 82, 91, 92, 105). *Cas gan Gythraul* (no. 90) is another rare Welsh-language tract against conjuration and magic. Not only does the text echo contemporary English demonologists such as William Perkins (no. 34), but its author, T. P., describes in great detail the many magical practices of *dewiniaid a chonsurwyr* (magicians and conjurers), such as prophesying, exorcizing devils, dispensing charms, curing diseases, conjuring spirits, and astrology. As well as highlighting the continued intellectual concern over the popularity of magical practitioners, this work again shows how the spheres of high magic, popular magic, and medicine blended together in the activities of cunning folk.

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Manuscript copy of *Tudor and Gronow*, a dialogue against witchcraft, magic, and conjuration by the Rev. Robert Holland (1557–c.1622). No copies of the original edition have survived.
- 83 Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 1.
Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin (*Black Book of Carmarthen*), c.1250. Seemingly the oldest Welsh manuscript. Mostly poetry, with a significant amount of verse and prophecy relating to the tale of Myrddin/Merlin.
- 84 Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 2.
Llyfr Taliesin, early 14th century. Poetical anthology, containing many works attributed to the figure and poetical tradition of Taliesin. Taliesin is also described as a prophet and is subsequently connected to Myrddin. In *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* both Myrddin and Taliesin predict a forthcoming battle.
- 85 Oxford, Jesus College, MS 111.
'*Llyfr Coch Hergest*' ('Red Book of Hergest'), c.1400. Contains medical texts which were the basis of Ab Ithel's *Physicians of Myddvai*, as well as various texts relating to the *Mabinogion*, and traditional writings on Welsh history.

Printed

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A millenarian dialogue. Contains a passage regarding the 'mysteries' performed by magical practitioners.
- 90 P., T., *Cas gan Gythraul* (Shrewsbury: J. Rogers, 1711).
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- 106 Lloyd, Nesta, and Morfydd E. Owen, *Drych yr Oesoedd Canol* (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1985).

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SECTION

Wales: modern period (1750–1950)

The popular antiquities and folklore of Wales provide a wealth of information on cunning folk and popular magic during this period.

This is further enhanced by the prominence of certain magical practitioners and the preservation of their works (nos. 123–127, 129). An exceptional Welsh-language text, possibly belonging to one Ellis Edwart (nos. 122, 141), includes conjuration techniques and detailed astrological calculations similar to the occult practices of magicians like John Dee, while also adhering to the typical endeavours of the *dyn hysbys*, such as curing afflictions, detecting thieves, and procuring love.

Two quite different sources, the writings of Thomas de Quincey (no. 145) and a rare chapbook (no. 133), provide a fascinating window onto the practices of the Ruabon *dyn hysbys*, John Roberts, who operated during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The *dyn hysbys* about whom we have most information, however, is the famed John Harries of Cwrt-y-Cadno (nos. 69, 134, 151). His bill book (no. 124) and recipe book (no. 123) attest to his professional career as a doctor, while his conjuring book (no. 127), horoscopes (no. 129), and the folklore material relating his magical endeavours (nos. 139, 169, 172) also reflect the extent of his fame as a *dyn hysbys*. Examinations in the late nineteenth century of his library (nos. 137, 138, 140, 173) identified some of Harries's collection of occult and medical literature. This information again draws attention to the relationship between professional medicine, high magic, and the healing and magical practices of cunning folk.

More general surveys of practitioners in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are provided by nos. 69, 139, 144, 151, 160, 176. Isaac's *Coelion Cymru* [*Welsh Beliefs*] (no. 160) is of particular interest because it provides transcriptions and illustrations of the written charms sold by several cunning folk. The oral history archive at St Fagans (no. 132) provides further testimony to the enduring reputation of cunning folk in the twentieth century, particularly in the area around Llangurig, which was famed for its magical practitioners (nos. 156, 157).

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Relates information about the *dyn hysbys* dispensing charms and letters.
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Discusses Moses Penmynydd, the 'conjar', who could cure bewitchments.
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- Tape no. 3177: informant Robert Evans.
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SECTION Cunning folk in fiction

F The significance of cunning folk in society is well evidenced by their appearance in fiction over the last five hundred years. Seventeenth-century plays by Heywood and Ravenscroft both concern London cunning women and the intrigues and affairs of their clients. They are portrayed as smart, manipulative rogues rather than satanically inspired evil-doers. Cunning folk were also a target of eighteenth-century satire, as exemplified by *The Life and Character of Harvey* (no. 193), which may have been the creation of Jonathan Swift. In a similar vein was Defoe's depiction of the Kentish cunning man 'Dr Boreman', who was almost certainly a fictional character (no. 24). During the nineteenth century the lives of real cunning folk were the inspiration for novelists such as Forfar (no. 186) and Morrison (no. 195), and the Devon dialect poet Henry Baird wrote a long humorous poem based around James Tuckett of Exeter (no. 183 and no. 71). While such works used cunning folk for simple dramatic effect, other authors, such as Yonge (no. 198), Harrison (no. 190), and Warren (no. 197), were inspired by moral and religious indignation to use fiction as a means of focusing attention on the evil influence of cunning folk.

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SECTION A European perspective: select publications



The activities of English and Welsh cunning folk need to be studied within the wider context of their European counterparts. De Blécourt (no. 205) and Davies (no. 44) have highlighted the main areas for comparative consideration. The most extensive body of analysis is the work of de Blécourt on Dutch cunning folk (nos. 202, 203, 204, 207) which covers the period from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. The role of cunning folk in the European witch trials is considered by Briggs (no. 200), Davies (no. 44), Dömötör (no. 211), and Kristóf (no. 218). These studies all contradict Horsley's thesis (no. 217) that many of those executed for witchcraft were in fact wise women, a view that has also been effectively debunked by de Blécourt (no. 205).

The role of practitioners of magic has also been discussed within the wider perspective of cultures of healing, by Gentilcore (no. 214) and Miller (no. 221) for the early modern period, and Ramsey (nos. 226, 227), Perdiguero (no. 225), de Waardt (no. 208), and de Blécourt (no. 204) for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. De Waardt's view that in the province of Holland cunning folk had effectively become obsolete by the nineteenth century is at odds with the evidence from the rest of Europe, such as Rørbye's Danish study (no. 228), de Blécourt's work on the Dutch province of Drenthe (no. 202), and Devlin's work on France (no. 210).

The continued popularity of cunning folk in the twentieth century is amply demonstrated by the work of the German folklorist Schöck (no. 231) and the French ethnographer Camus (no. 201), as well as by the activities of the German anti-cunning folk campaigner Johann Kruse (nos. 219, 235).

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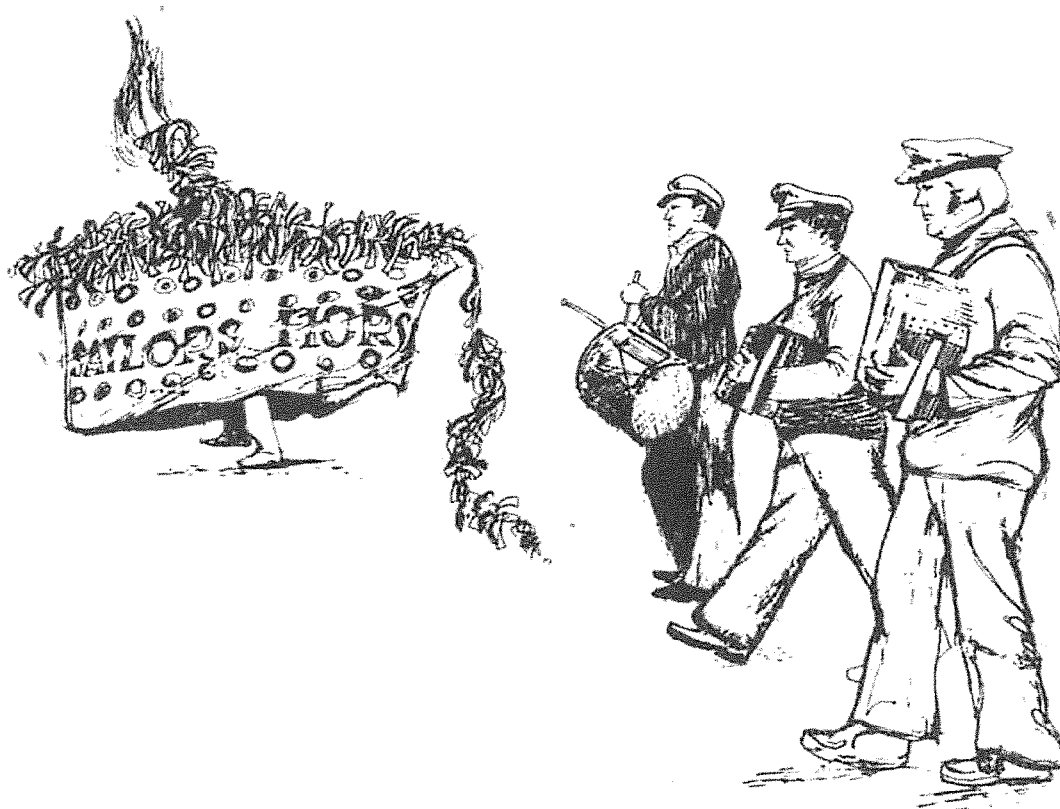


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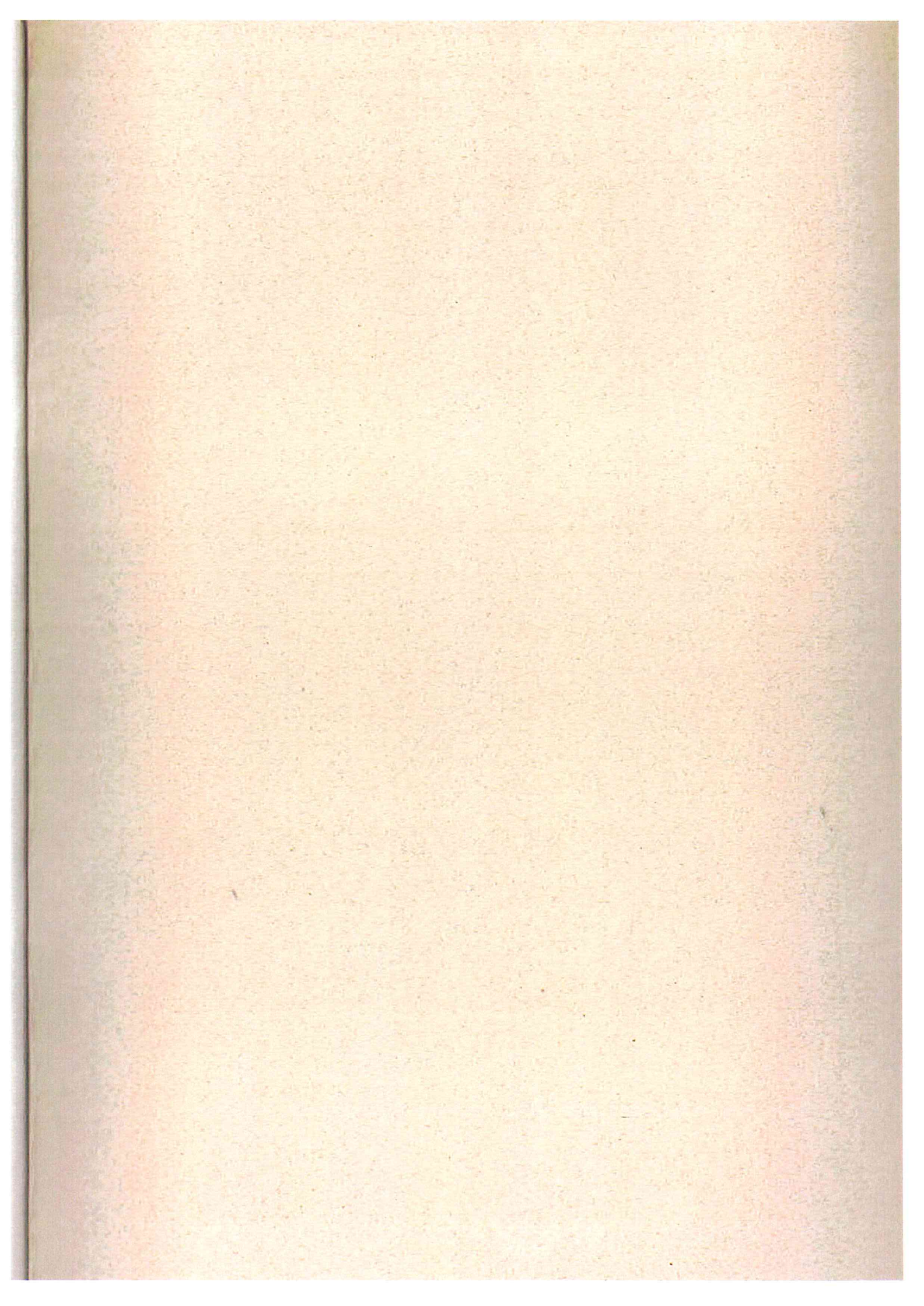
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