

Call for Papers

(56th International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, May 2021):

Medieval Magic in Theory:

Prologues to Learned Texts of Magic



The prologues to medieval texts of learned magic could serve a variety of functions. They were a space for their authors to announce the theme of the work, to situate the work within a specific literary, philosophical, or theological landscape, and to lay special claim to the reader's attention. Consequently, these prologues have much to tell us about the traditions and beliefs underlying certain magical texts. Moreover, because many magical texts are substantially anonymous compilations, their prologues often provide unique access to the lives and contexts of the men and women behind the parchment.

The aim of this session is to explore these still largely understudied prologues which testify to the variety of medieval approaches to "magic". We are especially interested in how magic is theorized in these prologues. What insights do these prologues offer into contemporary debates about the epistemological status of magic? Moreover, what can they tell us about the social, religious, and institutional contexts of their authors and readers?