

Article

Whose Soul Is It?—Destinative Magic in East-Central Europe (14th–18th Centuries)

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Abstract: This study explores destinative elements in late medieval and early modern learned magic in East-Central Europe, focusing on names, images, characters, invocations, and addresses facilitating communication with transcendental entities. It contends that a thematic shift occurred in the early modern era, witnessing a decline in destinative talisman texts, replaced by a surge in treasure-hunting manuals. Drawing from legal cases and treasure-hunting manuals, the research aims to categorize the “souls” frequently invoked in these practices. The term “souls” is interpreted as either spirits or the souls of the deceased, reflecting the significant role of the dead in treasure hunting, often conducted in cemeteries. This shift is linked to changes in the sociocultural background of practitioners, marking a transformation in magical practices from destinative talismans to treasure hunting, revealing a nuanced evolution in East-Central European magical traditions.

Keywords: treasure hunting; learned magic; necromancy; rituals; East-Central Europe

1. Introduction

The initial section of this paper introduces a widely utilized typology of late medieval learned magic, emphasizing the nuanced nature of the categories presented. It highlights that destinative elements, encompassing names, images, characters, invocations, and addresses facilitating communication with transcendental entities (spanning spirits, demons, angels, souls, or the deceased), are pervasive across these categories. The subsequent section contends that a thematic shift occurred in the early modern era, witnessing a decline in destinative talismans and the emergence of a new genre in Central and East-Central Europe: treasure-hunting manuals. Drawing on legal cases and manuals, including those curated and published by the author from Hungarian archives, this paper explores this transformative period. The final segment seeks to categorize the frequently addressed “souls” in treasure-hunting practices. The term “soul” is interpreted variably, translating the ambiguous term “spiritus” in some instances and signifying the souls of the dead in others.

This connection is possibly influenced by the integral involvement of the deceased in treasure hunting. Such activities were commonly conducted in cemeteries, involving the search for coins and other valuables either within or beneath tombs. This practice stirred considerable controversy within local communities. Furthermore, treasure hunters sought to safeguard themselves from potential reprisals by actively engaging in genuine necromancy. This shift in practices is intertwined with broader alterations in the sociocultural context of the practitioners, as detailed in the conclusions.

2. Destinativity: A Crosscutting Element in Late Medieval Magic Classifications

In the examination of late medieval magic, scholars often find utility in categorizing magical texts into distinct classifications, namely natural magic, image (astral) magic, divination, and ritual magic. These categories serve as analytical tools, offering insights into the varied methodologies employed during this period (Fanger 1998; Kieckhefer 1997; Klaassen 2015; Page 2015; Boudet 2006).

Natural magic, encompassing works such as the *Experimenta* attributed to Albertus Magnus and *Kyranides*, involves experiments grounded in the hidden powers and secret



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correspondences of herbs, stones, and animals. These experiments, theoretically devoid of demonic intervention, derive their adjective “natural” from their intrinsic connection to the natural (i.e., non-demonic) world.

Image magic, exemplified in texts like *De imaginibus* and the *Opus imaginum* attributed to Thebit ibn Qurra and Ptolemy respectively, revolves around talismans and magical images. These artifacts incorporate magical characters, small statues, seals, numerical combinations, as well as circular and quadrangular figures engraved on various materials. A perennial debate surrounds the question of demonic intervention in image magic, with differing perspectives on the extent of such involvement (Klaassen 2015).

Ritual magic methodologies, on the other hand, explicitly hinge on spiritual, demonic, or angelic assistance. Practitioners of ritual magic often engage with spiritual powers through prayers and conjurations. Notably, a nuanced distinction arises within ritual magic, demarcating explicitly demonic magic, as evident in the handbook edited by Richard Kieckhefer, from angelic magic. In the latter, spirits are perceived as seemingly innocent, as observed in the *Ars notoria* and its derivatives (Fanger 2012; Véronèse 2007). Divination, an integral aspect of magical practices, entails the art of foreseeing future events or uncovering hidden knowledge through the interpretation of signs. It serves as a crucial component across various magical categories.

However, the demarcation between these categories is not always clear-cut, and overlaps frequently occur. Not only ritual magic texts but also natural and image magic texts may incorporate charms, invocations, and spiritual interventions, adding complexity to the delineation of magical practices during the late medieval period.

While the above categorization proves beneficial for late medieval learned magic texts, the delineations between categories are not invariably clear, and elements characterized as “destinative” can manifest within each category, though their prevalence may differ. Nicolas Weill Parot, a historian of magic, terms this phenomenon “destinativity” in magic, which involves allusions to the names of, or communication with, spirits—frequently identified by theologians as demons (Weill-Parot 2002, p. 37).

Ritual magic, encompassing both angelic and demonic subcategories, inherently incorporates such elements, as these texts explicitly engage with transcendental beings. Nevertheless, destinative components also emerge, albeit to a lesser degree, within image (or talismanic) magic. In this domain, the characters engraved into specific materials like metals, stones, and crystals are frequently directly associated with spirit names. Moreover, these elements can even be discerned in the ostensibly innocent realm of natural magic, labeled as “natural” to preempt accusations of demonic influence.

An exemplar of natural magic literature is the *Kyranides*, which occasionally provides invocations and details the ritualistic sacrifice of an eagle to remedy certain afflictions. The prescribed procedure involves beheading the eagle with an iron sword previously immersed in honey, followed by whispering specific incantations into its ears.

Within a Prague manuscript (PNL XI. C. 2), a repository predominantly comprising natural magic texts, a compendium of recipes combating toothache is discernible. This manuscript integrates medical sections utilizing herbal materials with magical components, incorporating prayers and, notably, a compendium of summons to various spirits (Láng 2008). It is noteworthy that, in the medieval era, medical texts, encompassing disciplines such as surgery and incantations, share a thematic connection, as highlighted by Michael McVaugh (2003).

Within the realm of image or astral magic, intricacies abound. In the case of the *Picatrix*, for instance, the complexity extends beyond mere talismans to encompass a repertoire of charms (Pingree et al. 2019). Another illustrative talismanic text, the *Book of Runes (Liber Runarum)*, preserved in both Germany and Krakow, presents an intricate methodology. In this text, the names of planetary spirits are meticulously inscribed in Nordic runes, offering explicit guidance on how to engrave these spirit names onto metals and stones associated with each celestial body. The practitioner is instructed to inscribe the names of

the corresponding angels on the designated metals, subsequently invoking these angels and seeking their assistance to fulfill the intended purpose (Láng 2008).

Another image magic text, namely *De imaginibus septem planetarum* attributed to Belenus and preserved, among other locations, in a manuscript from Krakow, intricately details the temporal and material aspects involved in talismanic preparation (Láng 2008). This text delineates specific hours for the crafting of the talisman, along with the prescribed materials for its construction. The intended purposes are elucidated: to exude potency in battle through the Mars talisman; to maintain a woman's affection with the Venus talisman; and, conversely, to render an individual repugnant with the aid of Saturn, engendering a perception of unpleasantness, disgust, and odiousness in the eyes of others. Notably, the name of the person upon whom the benign or malevolent influence of the spirits is to be exerted is to be inscribed on the talismanic image.

Certainly, within the realm of ritual magic, destinative elements manifest in even greater abundance, often assuming a dominant role. This prevalence is notably evident in works such as the Munich handbook, edited and analyzed by Richard Kieckhefer (1997). Here, destinative components permeate the fabric of the text, underscoring their significance in the ritualistic practices outlined.

Additionally, texts affiliated with angelic magic, such as a derivative of John of Morigny's *Liber visionum*: the prayer book of King Wladislas of Poland also contain destinative elements. In this text, crystal magic and the invocation of angels serve as customary means to achieve specified ends. Thus, the utilization of angelic magic, while ostensibly distinct from explicitly demonic practices, occasionally aligns with similar methodologies in the pursuit of magical outcomes (Láng 2008).

3. The Rise of Treasure Hunting: A Shift in Destinative Magic

Until the conclusion of the 15th century, within the spectrum of learned magic, texts pertaining to image magic held a predominant position in East-Central Europe. Aside from the domain of natural magic, the majority of extant magical texts from this era predominantly revolve around talismans and images.

Nevertheless, a thematic shift occurred in the early modern era, marking a decline in the prevalence of manuscripts focused on destinative talismans. A discernible transformation unfolded as a new genre emerged in Central and East-Central Europe—that of treasure-hunting manuals.

The assertion I put forth posits that, from the 16th to the 19th century, the ascendancy of treasure-hunting manuals became conspicuous, ultimately establishing itself as the most prevalent and sought-after form of magical literature in East-Central Europe.

Treasure hunting emerges as a distinct phenomenon, its practices meticulously documented through a diverse array of sources. External references, such as court cases and accusations related to witchcraft, provide insights into the manifestation of treasure hunting. Simultaneously, internal sources, exemplified by treasure-hunting handbooks, contribute to our understanding of these practices. These handbooks are occasionally seized during legal proceedings, underscoring their significance in legal contexts, while at other times they endure independently, offering a unique perspective on the intricacies of treasure hunting.

Certainly, the practice of treasure hunting did not wane with the conclusion of the early modern period; its persistence extended even into the tumultuous era of the Second World War in rural Germany, a phenomenon underscored by Johannes Dillinger in his work "Magical Treasure Hunting" (Dillinger 2012, p. 26). This endurance highlights the persistent appeal and cultural significance of treasure-hunting practices, transcending historical epochs and socio-political contexts.

Likewise, it is important to acknowledge that treasure hunting was not an entirely novel phenomenon in the early modern period. While the practice gained prominence during this era, it is noteworthy that elements of treasure hunting can be traced back to various medieval necromantic manuals. Notable examples include the Munich handbook

edited by Richard Kieckhefer (1997) and the examination of British manuscripts by Frank Klaassen (2015).

Regarding the East-Central European region, a notable case is that of Henry the Bohemian in Krakow. Preserved legal documents shed light on a compelling legal case from 1429, where a group of associates, under Henry's leadership, endeavored to unearth treasures with the aid of demonic assistance. These individuals possessed prohibited books that contained divinatory procedures, invocations of demons, and conjurations specifically crafted for the purpose of uncovering hidden treasures and objects. One of these volumes, attributed to a necromancer named Matthias, was a real book of knowledge. Unfortunately, both the mystical texts and the elusive Matthias await identification. Henry the Bohemian collaborated with other individuals affiliated with the university, whose identities are discernible. Moreover, it is plausible to suggest that this same Henry was involved in copying the prayer book of King Wladislas, mentioned earlier, which encapsulated prayers from the *Ars notoria* and *Liber visionum*. Notably, this prayer book featured inserted formulae specifically designed for crystal magic, thereby intertwining the realms of treasure hunting and angelic invocation in the magical practices of the time (Láng 2008).

Indeed, the prevalence of such cases appears to have been sporadic before the year 1500. However, a discernible trend emerges, particularly after 1600, wherein instances of treasure hunting proliferate across various European regions. Owen Davies, in his work "Grimoires: A History of Magic Books", provides documentation of this phenomenon. In Sicily and Venice, around 1630, the *Clavicule of Salomon* and Peter d'Abano's *Lucidarius* were employed as grimoires for treasure hunting (Davies, 54). Similarly, in France, *The Grimoire du pape Honorius* and the *Petit Albert* were utilized for analogous purposes (Davies 2010, pp. 100–17). In Spain, *The Book of Saint Cyprian* played a comparable role in the pursuit of magical practices associated with treasure hunting.

While the phenomenon of treasure-hunting manuals had a European footprint, the dominance of such manuscripts within handwritten magical sources appears particularly pronounced in Central Europe. There are notable examples from Germany that underscore this trend. In 1773, in the town of Günzburg, a group of treasure hunters faced arrest, and their leader received punishment in the form of kneeling in the marketplace with his magical manuscripts (Davies 2010, p. 120). Johannes Dillinger and Petra Feld, in a comprehensive list of publications, presented numerous instances of treasure-hunting cases from the Protestant Duchy of Württemberg during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Dillinger 2003; 2012; Dillinger and Feld 2002; Tschakner 2006). Intriguingly, even the dukes themselves occasionally participated in these treasure hunts, despite the official stance deeming treasure hunting as a prohibited magical action and an abuse of religious practice. In this milieu, amulets, magic circles, and prayers to God, Christ, and the saints were believed to offer protection against malevolent spirits. Practitioners had access to a variety of handbooks that provided practical details on treasure hunting (Graesse 1843, pp. 37–38, 64, 87; quoted also in Dillinger and Feld 2002, p. 165).

Similar instances are documented in the legal proceedings of early modern East-Central Europe, particularly in Hungary. A vivid example is found in the case of Michael Szvetics, a former priest originally from Fiume, who faced accusations in 1752 for attempting to perform magic in Pécs, southern Hungary. During his endeavor to uncover treasure on the cemetery hill of the town, authorities confiscated from him a collection of items, including the finger of a deceased individual, a holy image, and a small leaflet containing a prayer to Saint Christopher (Láng and Tóth 2009, pp. 32–35).

Another account involves a discharged soldier who, on the verge of seeking out a local Jewish individual to decipher an inscrutable text, found himself arrested. In his possession, authorities discovered a Chaldean–German handbook, alongside a collection of other magical artifacts designed for treasure hunting. Remarkably, this book endured and became an integral part of the legal documentation surrounding the case, offering tangible evidence of the soldier's engagement with magical practices (Láng and Tóth 2009).

A third and particularly novelistic account hails from Győr in western Hungary in 1761. This narrative unfolds as the tale of a group of friends, including a nobleman, a merchant, a tapster, and other individuals of varying significance within the town. United by a common purpose, they devised a plan for a joint expedition to seek treasure. In a ritualistic act, they sealed their pact with their own blood, deciding to form an alliance with Satan himself. The legal documents pertaining to this case specify that they possessed a book containing prayers to Saint Christopher.

However, the camaraderie within this peculiar company was short-lived, as internal strife and mutual deception arose among its members. The situation took a more serious turn when one of them contemplated using the magical tools, purportedly to be received from the devil, against the Habsburg monarch ruling the country. This treacherous intent led to their ultimate arrest. As part of their sentence, in addition to a substantial fee, they were mandated to finance the construction of a statue depicting Saint Michael the Archangel triumphing over Satan. This statue, serving as a visual reminder of their transgressions, remains a prominent fixture in the town of Győr to this day (MNL OL (Hungarian National Archive), C 28, Acta captivorum et malefactorum; Lad. A. Fasc. 1. No. 3. Lig. 8., published in [Láng and Tóth 2009](#), pp. 136–72).

The connection between treasure hunting and the deceased is evident in various ways, often involving activities in cemeteries and the inappropriate disinterment of the dead. The utilization of human bones for magical practices has caused considerable scandal within local communities. An intriguing example is the above-quoted case from Győr involving Matyas Singer, a member of the brotherhood, who claimed to possess a black mirror crafted in Vienna. This mirror, intended for protection during treasure hunting, had a specific usage defined by Singer: it should be placed on a dead man's eyes, left there for nine days, and then removed on the ninth day at the exact hour when the entire procedure commenced ([Láng and Tóth 2009](#), p. 44).

In another account, Michael Szvetics, as previously mentioned, conducted his treasure-hunting practices on a cemetery hill, relying on the cooperation of a deceased boy during his endeavors.

It is not surprising that authorities consistently prohibited such practices. However, regulations did not seem to have a significant deterrent effect. Even as late as 1776, an individual was discovered in Nógrád county engaging in treasure digging and practicing 'ars nigromantica' by desecrating a tomb. Ignac Hokszend, a Moravian man, initiated the process by digging the grave of a deceased person near the church fence in Kalonda. His method involved using a black cat and a mirror to invoke the services of Satan, intending to protect himself from devilish temptations by compelling the cat to gaze at the mirror previously placed inside the coffin. The assumption was that the Devil would take the cat, granting Hokszend the freedom to excavate the treasure believed to be hidden under the coffin. However, the cat leaped out of the grave without looking into the mirror, resulting in the failure of the treasure-digging endeavor.

These external, in other words descriptive and legal, documents underscore the close and often unsettling relationship between treasure hunting and the realm of the dead, with practices involving the deceased being integral components of certain magical methodologies.

4. Souls, Dead, and Saints in Treasure Hunting

Internal documents that survived from early modern Hungary, namely the treasure-hunting manuals and prayers, also display a great amount of destinativity. They even enable the construction of a typology of invoked beings, often referred to as "souls" in the documents. In many instances, these souls can be easily identified as saints, archangels, or demons. However, in other cases, the term "soul" directly translates to the intentionally ambiguous term, "spiritus". Moreover, souls often seem to refer to spirits differently, instead signifying the souls of the deceased.

Let us delve into a few examples, where the fusion of religious invocations and magical practices is prevalent in treasure-hunting handbooks during this period.

One of the earliest handbooks, titled the “Book of Knowledge” (*Tudás könyve*), is a notable instance. Dating back to the 17th century, this extensive handwritten treasure-hunting text was discovered in Debrecen, written in the Hungarian language. Spanning numerous pages, the practitioner earnestly entreats God, Jesus Christ, and Saint Michael the Archangel, seeking divine intervention to expel the malevolent spirits guarding the hidden treasures (Herner and Szörényi 1990).

A century later, around 1770, in a rich source preserved in Kassa (Kosice, present-day Slovakia), Saint Christopher assumes a more central role in a treasure-hunting handbook (Esztergom, Főszékesegyházi Könyvtár—Archiepiscopal Library, MS II 102a-102e). This substantial book is not a singular text but rather a compilation of five closely themed booklets bound together. Within these booklets, German, Latin, and to a lesser extent Hungarian texts provide prayers and magic circles intended to assist the user in locating treasure. Saint Christopher emerges as a dominant recipient of the prayers within this collection, with sixty pages dedicated to prayers in German and more than fifty pages addressing him in both Latin and Hungarian. This compilation exemplifies the multilingual and syncretic nature of treasure-hunting manuals during this period, incorporating diverse linguistic elements to appeal to a broader audience.

I conjure you, all the spirits and owners of all those treasures that Saint Christopher will provide to me, with the help of the Sun and the Moon, and the five wounds and the precious blood of our most sacred Lord Jesus Christ, with the assistance of the first man, Adam, who was created by God, in the name of the Father + the Son + and the Holy Spirit + Amen (Esztergom, Főszékesegyházi Könyvtár (Archiepiscopal Library), MS II 102d, f. 7).¹

We, NN, conjure you, Saint Christopher! Great and holy martyr, patron of the poor, consoler of the afflicted and the abandoned, in the name of God the Father + and the Son, Redeemer + and the sanctifying Holy Spirit +. We conjure and call upon you with all His words and works that He achieved in this world (Esztergom, Főszékesegyházi Könyvtár (Archiepiscopal Library), MS II 102d, f. 50).²

These colligated booklets encompass psalms and excerpts from the gospel interspersed between prayers, along with an extensive array of magic circles and astrological tablets delineating propitious days and hours for treasure hunting. Within the Latin section, detailed instructions are provided on crafting the circle of Saint Christopher. This involves meticulous steps such as cleaning the designated area on the ground, conducting suffumigations with various burning substances, drawing the circle itself adorned with a cross and the image of the saint, and concluding the ritual with the sprinkling of holy water. By employing a wax candle and reciting designated psalms, practitioners are assured protection from malevolent spirits. It is evident that this comprehensive handbook of treasure-hunting methods was intended for practical application.

In a manuscript dating slightly later, numerous Hungarian prayers are directed towards an enigmatic, seemingly feminine entity known as the “Virgin Saint Crown” (distinct from the more logically phrased “Saint Crown of the Virgin”). Following this peculiar invocation, Saint Christopher reemerges as the preferred recipient of prayers. The crown and the saint are implored to aid in compelling the demon guarding the treasure, with extensive quotations from the gospels of John and Mark incorporated into the supplications (Országos Széchényi Könyvtár (National Széchényi Library) MS anekta 11.012, published in Láng and Tóth 2009, pp. 95–104).

Another extensively circulated text from the 19th century was ascribed to the author “Eberhardus, the Jesuit, who was the ordinary professor of Mathesis in the University of Ingolstadt”. The central figure in this work is Terosius, identified as the chief devil responsible for safeguarding treasures (among others: Szeged, Somogyi-könyvtár (Somogyi Library), Hg. 387, published in Láng and Tóth 2009, pp. 71–94).

The standard iteration of this text does not invoke Saint Christopher. However, in a significantly modified version, Virgin Mary, Christ, and primarily Saint Christopher replace

the role of devils. In this altered rendition, the prayers adopt a more “orthodox” tone, diverging from the magical elements present in the conventional version of Eberhardus’ book. (Szeged, Somogyi-könyvtár (Somogyi Library), AD 1925).

The examples quoted above aptly illustrate the diversity of invoked beings. Depending on the nature of the treasure-hunting text, the subjects of destinative behavior range from saints and biblical figures to archangels and demonic entities (Tripa 2023, pp. 21–25).

Within this classification, saints and biblical figures encompass a broad spectrum, featuring not only Saint Christopher, the patron of treasure hunters, but also Saint Isaac, Luke, Matthew, Michael, Abraham, John, David, Mark, Paul, Peter, Tekla, Barnabas, and two non-saints Cornelius and Ciprian. Of utmost importance are the divine entities such as God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and Virgin Mary (Tripa 2023, p. 22).

The category of archangels involves the biblical Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, alongside the apocryphal Uriel. In contrast, the realm of demonic beings and devils introduces Terosius, the chief devil guarding treasures and symbolizing damnation, as well as Belzebub, Asmodeus, Baal, and Lucifer (Tripa 2023, pp. 21–25). This diversity reflects the varied spiritual entities invoked in the context of destinative behavior within treasure-hunting texts.

Nevertheless, there is another category of invoked entities, a subject seldom explored in the secondary literature of treasure hunting: a further kind of the “spirits”. In the Hungarian texts, the term “lélek” is employed, signifying precisely “spirit”, albeit often interpreted more in the sense of “soul” rather than denoting spiritual beings.

What, then, are these souls in reality? In the Book of Knowledge from Debrecen, for instance, the explicit declaration that there is no mention of demonic activity during the invocation does not align with the nature of the addressed “souls”, which do not manifest a distinctly angelic quality:

You souls, whoever you may be, of whatever order, gender, and specific designation, who guard this hidden treasure, whether by command of God, the angels, or with the permission of humans, or even by your own actions, or by being permitted by those who preceded you! I, N. N., who seek and claim this treasure, am chosen by the immortal God for this task, He who created both us and you. In fear and obedience to Him, who has power over us, you must be obedient, speaking and declaring according to His command. [...]

I separate you, disperse you from the guardianship and possession of this treasure + In the name of the Father + the Son + and the Holy Spirit, Lord God. And I curse you, souls, who were the keepers and protectors of this treasure, by the power of the Almighty and invincible God, who created all things through His strength and might, submit yourselves to Him. [...]

I curse you, souls, with an immortal, eternal curse, excommunicate you, and bind you to the eternal torment of hell, where your torment will reign day after day, endlessly. If you do not become obedient and refrain from this treasure, you shall never return to it, neither you nor others, for all eternity (Herner and Szörényi 1990, p. 23).

What type of souls could these be, facing the prospect of such an excommunicatory warning?

The Terosius text can provide further insight:

I compel you once again, Terosius, by the immaculate virginity, purity, and renowned virgin fame of the Blessed Virgin Mary, where the Divinity and humanity lay for 9 months, by the holy spirit and death of Christ, by the true reality of the holy gospel, by the words of the holy angels and the sound of their trumpets, who will trumpet at the coming of the righteous judge, saying, “*Arise, ye dead believers, and come to eternal life*”, to bring me, a needy human, 99,999 gold coins in the manner mentioned above, and place them in the outer circle, without any trickery, superstition, or other such things. I compel you to do so, and heed my words, that

it may be accomplished, that it may be accomplished (Somogyi-library, Szeged, Hg 387, [Láng and Tóth 2009](#), p. 84, emphasis mine).

Somewhat later, the same book writes

But most importantly, I desire to use this treasure to liberate *the souls suffering in Purgatory*, through the offering and service of the holy Mass, along with almsgiving and charitable acts (Somogyi-library, Szeged, Hg 387, [Láng and Tóth 2009](#), p. 89, emphasis mine).

And one page later, again

You, benevolent souls, who arrived quietly and manifested without any grumbling, rattling, clattering, superstition, or emitting foul odors, I command you in the grace of God the Father to depart back to the place from where you came, and never gather here again. I shall not summon you anew. I command you through the holy power of Christ *Jesus, who was the conqueror of the devil and even death*, to return to your respective places (Somogyi-library, Szeged, Hg 387, [Láng and Tóth 2009](#), p. 90, emphasis mine).

My interpretation of these and similar texts is that the “souls” addressed in treasure-hunting documents represent a distinct category of beings, distinguished from explicitly mentioned figures such as saints, archangels, and demonic beings. While a literal translation might designate them as spirits, a term encompassing both angels and demons in the earlier late medieval magical texts, these entities in the specified cases do not appear to align with either angels or mere treasure-protecting demons. Rather, as evidenced by the emphasized phrases, they exhibit characteristics more akin to human nature and could plausibly be associated with the spirits of the deceased. Considering the frequent backdrop of treasure-hunting endeavors occurring within cemeteries, the concept of exerting control over the souls of departed individuals emerges as a plausible hypothesis.

5. Conclusions: Soul-Typology and the Democratization of Magic

In the early modern era, treasure-hunting documents predominantly exhibited a destinative character, incorporating a range of prayers, invocations, charms, coercive measures, and excommunication threats directed towards transcendental beings. These beings, including saints, archangels, Christ, etc., often align with the realm of angelic magic. However, in numerous instances, the identity of these beings, such as devils, demons, and malign spirits, suggests associations with demonic magic.

In Hungarian sources, individuals involved in destinative practices are often denoted as “spirits”, with “lélek” in singular form and “lelkek” in plural. While these entities can indeed be perceived as generic spirits, a term deliberately broad enough to encompass both angels and demons, this paper posits that within this particular context a more precise translation would be “souls”. This designation suggests their human origin and specifically indicates the souls of those who have passed away. By emphasizing the term “souls”, the implication is that these entities have a connection to the deceased, lending a deeper layer of significance to the practice of destinative rites.

The emergence of these new subjects in invocations may be linked to a noteworthy transformation observed in early modern practices. A meticulous examination of legal documents spanning from 1520 to 1796, specifically focusing on cases where individuals were not solely accused of engaging in treasure hunts but also where a magic handbook was cited as the guide for the conducted practices, reveals a discernible shift in the sociological status of the practitioners.

During the fifteenth century, practitioners were largely associated with prominent courtly intellectuals and renowned university masters ([Láng 2008](#)). However, in the early modern era, those accused of or linked to magical treasure-hunting practices tended to be either marginalized individuals or learned men who preferred to maintain their anonymity. By the 18th century, university masters had entirely disappeared from the practitioner group, even though the mythical Eberhardus is labeled as such, and the number

of noblemen gradually decreased. Many accused individuals not only hailed from the lower strata of society but also were considered “foreigners”. This term encompasses both settlers from Bavaria, Thuringia, or Bohemia moving to abandoned territories and individuals without stable residence, such as dismissed soldiers, wandering gypsies, and refugees.

Certainly, Keith Thomas (1971) previously highlighted the “democratization of magic”, and numerous scholars have documented the spread of books of knowledge throughout various social strata. While this development has been acknowledged, it remains valuable to trace the narrative in which Latin magic handbooks give way to vernacular books of knowledge. The shift from members of the clergy (the clerical underworld, as per Kieckhefer’s classification) as magicians and noblemen as supporters to a scenario where wandering foreigners, vagabonds, itinerants, and soldiers take on the role of magicians, supported by peasants, adds a nuanced layer to the evolving landscape of magical practices.

This form of magic, dependent on handbooks and texts, initially practiced by university masters and court intellectuals, and undoubtedly considered “learned” in the 15th century, gradually became less intellectual over the centuries, becoming more accessible to marginalized individuals within society. This socio-cultural shift significantly impacted the main focus of this article: the identity of the summoned beings and the communication acts applied in their regard.

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Notes

- ¹ Esztergom, Főszékesegyházi Könyvtár (Archiepiscopal Library), MS II 102d, f. 7: Coniuro vos omnes spiritus, ac possessores thesauri illius quem mihi Sanctus Christophorus laturus est, per solem et lunam et per quinque vulnera Sanctissimi Domini Nostri Jesu Christi per pretiosissimum sanguinem, et primum hominem quem Deus creavit Adamum, in nomine Patris + Filii + et Spiritus Sancti + Amen.
- ² Esztergom, Főszékesegyházi Könyvtár (Archiepiscopal Library), MS II 102d, f. 50: Nos NN. conjuramus te Sancte Christophore! Magne et Sancte Martyr, et Patrone Pauperum, et afflictorum desolatorumque consolator, in nomine Deus Patris + et Filii Redemptoris + et Spiritus Sancti Sanctificatoris + coniuro, et voco te per omnia ejus verba et opera qua fecit in hoc mundo.

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