

SAMPLE PAGES

Ya`kûb ibn Ishâk ibn Sabbâh al-Kindi  
ALKINDI

# DE RADIIS STELLICIS

On The Stellar Rays  
C9<sup>th</sup> AD

Translated by

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# ALKINDI ON THE STELLAR RAYS

## Preface

This text has been long known to historians of science who find in it a clear expression of the Theory of Magic by a renowned Moslem philosopher who flourished during a time when this type of magic was prevalent.

While many contemporary historians dismiss magic as an ancient superstition they can not overlook the significance of such a historically important doctrine. Here, in Alkindi's work is found a clear exposition of that doctrine, written at a time when magic was both accepted and practised, and written by someone who believed in it. As such it provides a reliable reference point to examine a subject that is as difficult to define as it is to research.

It is widely accepted that the roots of science are to be found in the occult arts. Academic interest in magic has been further stimulated in the field of the history of mathematics, physics and medicine. It is realised on the one hand, that astrology played an important role in the development of geometry (especially spherical), trigonometry, logarithms, optics and astronomy. While on the other hand, both alchemy and magic played dominant roles in early pharmacology and medicine.

Likewise, for the history of thought, this text is important, as it exhibits the unified conception of reality with respect to objective and subjective phenomena prevalent prior to the scientific revolution and Enlightenment. It also contains ideas relating to an entirely different conception of causality to that which developed in the West after the seventeenth century.

The text's importance for astrologers is somewhat different to its importance to the devotees of the derivative modern sciences. Modern astrologers must have both a clear theoretical understanding of their art as well as an accurate understanding of its historical development. By the first they may adapt eternal principles to modern demands and by the second they learn the truly noble stature of their discipline as well as recover concrete, reliable techniques and doctrines otherwise in danger of being lost. For these reasons, while astrologers are active practitioners of an ancient art, they, no less than physicians, astronomers and mathematicians, need scholars dedicated to translating, preserving, studying and presenting to them the ancient texts on which their tradition rests.

The value of re-discovering and re-stating astrological tradition is to engender public respect facilitated by the recognition that hoary antiquity and astute philosophic inquiry both guided by rational principles and a sober, ethical and practical application characterise a legitimate field of endeavour. The alternative is arbitrary, whimsical and nonsensical jibber-jabber.

For too long the astrologer has laboured under the cloud of condemnation arising from a public misconception that his Art is merely a cover for foolish, if not criminal pursuits. Too often, the astrologer, though willing to defend their Art against the such slander has lacked the historical, scientific, philosophic and rhetorical resources needed to rout the enemy. Astrology and astrologers have thus lived under a blight born of an ignorance of their noble estate. It is hoped that works of this sort, produced by astrologers, for astrologers, may awaken astrologers to the fact that they pursue an ancient and honourable science. One far richer than many, at present, appreciate.

I would like to acknowledge the help of Robert Hand and Robert Schmidt in connection with this translation, which was originally produced as the first tract of Project Hindsight. Many suggestions were made and much philosophy was discussed. The result was a degree of edification for all of us as well as a deeper insight into Alkindi's intention. For the translation itself, any infelicities it may have I myself am responsible.

## Introduction

A few words are necessary by way of introduction to the reading of this book by the modern reader.

Alkindi (Ya`kûb ibn Ishâk ibn Sabbâh Alkindi), who died c. 870, is one of the greatest names in the history of Arabic learning. He is known as "The Philosopher of the Arabs" and was the teacher of the great Persian astrologer Abu Ma'shar. Alkindi worked in the famous House of Wisdom erected by the Caliph Al-Mansur in Baghdad (founded 762) for the purpose of promoting the Arab's assimilation of Indian, Greek and Persian science. He translated the works of Aristotle and other Greeks into Arabic and developed his own philosophy (heavily influenced by the Neoplatonism). Many books are attributed to him on such subjects as philosophy, politics, mathematics, medicine, music, astronomy and astrology. Unfortunately, few of his works survive.

Together with other philosophers, magi, alchemists and physicians such as Abu Ma'shar<sup>1</sup>, Al-Farghani<sup>2</sup>, Ishâk ibn Honein<sup>3</sup>, Honain ibn

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<sup>1</sup> Full name: Abu Ma'shar Ja'far ibn Muhammad ibn `Umar al-Balkhi (b. 787. d.886 AD) is an example of Hermetic influence on Arabic astrology. His works (written in Arabic) represent a curious fusion of Sabian Hermeticism, Persian chronology, Islam, Greek Science and Mesopotamian astrology. He was instrumental in fostering the identification of the Antediluvian Prophet Idris with Enoch and Hermes. He was an extremely successful practitioner of the Art who travelled throughout the Mid East in service to numerous Indian, Persian, Arab, and Egyptian chiefs of state. His reputation was established in the Christian West by Peter of Abano in the 13th century in his Conciliator Differentiarum Philosophorum et Precipue Medicorum (Diff. 156) where he quotes the AL-Mudsakaret or (Memorabilia) of Abu Sa'id Schadsan, a student of Abu Ma'shar's who recorded his teachers answers and astrological deeds. The Memorabilia - which have come to be known among scholars as "Albumasar in Sadan" due to traditional corruptions of both men's names, is analyzed by Lynne Thorndike in ISIS 1954 pp 22-32.

It will suffice to say here that it is, perhaps the only example of a medieval astrological hagiography. It portrays "the master" as a nearly omniscient wise man learned not only in the techniques of all branches of the Art but also in its traditional history and aware of the contributions of his predecessors. He is quoted, in Albumasar in Sadan (p.29 of Isis article), that he follows Messahala's method of projecting rays and in other locations admits to following other methods of Messahala (Masha'allah).

Ishâk, Geber<sup>4</sup> and others, he was instrumental in spreading the Hermetic Philosophy throughout all levels of ninth century Moslem society. Initially this was effected as an esoteric doctrine, but eventually became the underlying structure of the entire system of values of the Baghdad State and, for a time, the spiritual focus of the culture. Under the influence of this cabal astrology, alchemy and magic were to become the three highest sciences under the Koran and the Hermetic magician subordinate only to Allah and his prophet Muhammad.

This coup was accomplished by means as yet imperfectly understood. We do know that Abu Ma`shar worked as an astrologer for almost all the kings, caliphs and rajas of Western Asia and India. His teacher, Alkindi was put in charge of the Bait al- Hikma (House of Wisdom) in Baghdad - a city whose construction had been guided by two famous astrologers: the Persian al-Naubakht and the Egyptian Jew Mash`allah. Two Nestorian Christians (Hunain ibn Ishaq and his father, Ishaq ibn Hunain who had been sent to the Caliph al-Ma`mun upon the latter's request for Greek Scientific and Philosophical works began the translation of Ptolemy's *Almagest* and other alchemical, medical and astronomical texts. At the same time, Alkindi commenced translating the works of Aristotle, Plato and Proclus. He also wrote the Hermetic magical text *On the Stellar Rays* which played a significant role on the development and transmission of both Hermetic magic, and esoteric optics throughout the Arab world and later into the European Christian Middle Ages.

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<sup>2</sup> Alfraganus, 9th cent. Turkish Christian astronomer. Full name: abu-al`Abbas Ahmad al-Farghani. Summarized Ptolemy's Almagest.

<sup>3</sup> The Nestorian Christian Ishaq ibn Hunain translated the Almagest and the Tetrabiblos into from Greek into Arabic at Baghdad around 828 for the Caliph al-Mansur.

<sup>4</sup> Geber (Jabir ibn Hayyan As-Sufi) was an important figure for the history of Alchemy as well as of the Harranian Sabians He studied alchemy under the 6th Shiite Imam Ja`far As-Sadiq before the latter's death in 765 and served as court alchemist to calif Harun al-Rashid. Geber died 815 AD at Tus. He is said to have been a Harranian Sabian and is called al-Sufi. He cites Hermes and Agathodæmon frequently. Alchemy for Geber (and apparently for the entire Sabian community to which he belonged) was part of a complex inter-related system of Neo-pythagoreanism, Neo-platonism and Hermeticism. From the looks of Geber's The Books of the Balance, the Harranians had developed a highly precise and numerical theoretical alchemy and medicine. In Geber we see what the Syrian schools had been doing since Iamblichus.

## Ninth Century Islamic Magic

If we are to understand Alkindi's book, we must have some understanding of the Magical context it belongs to. Islamic teachings on magic were expounded by the fourteenth century historian Ibn Khaldun in his *Muqaddimah*<sup>6</sup>.

Ibn Khaldun gives an account of the reports of prior authors on this subject. He tells us that the Koran condemns to death the practitioners of the magic arts. The Babylonians and Nabateans were renown for this study as were the Egyptians. The Chaldaeans composed books which had survived to Ibn Khaldun's day (circa 1377). He lists *The Books of the Seven Stars* and the book of Tumtum the Indian on *The Figures of the Degrees of the Signs of the Zodiac and the Stars* and works by other authors. He considers alchemy to be sorcery because he denies that the transmutation occurs by means other than demonic spiritual agency. Therefore Geber (Jabir ibn Hayyan), the renown alchemist, is called "the chief sorcerer of the East". Maslamah ben Ahman al-Majriti, a renown mathematician, is said to have been the leading Spanish scholar in mathematical and magical studies. He abridged all the available books on sorcery and corrected and collected them in his *Ghayah al-hakim* (known in the West from the eleventh century as the *Picatrix*). No one has written on the subject since him.

Human souls he tells us are one in species but differ in qualities. Therefore they are of different kinds. The souls of prophets are prepared to have divine knowledge and to be addressed by angels in the name of God and to exercise the influence upon created things which goes with all that.

The souls of certain sorcerers are able to exercise influence upon created beings and to attract the spirituality of the stars so that they can use it and can exercise an influence through either psychic or satanic powers.

The souls that have magical ability are of three degrees: The first kind exercises its influence through mental power alone; without any instrument of aid. This, the philosophers call sorcery. In Ibn Khaldun's

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<sup>6</sup> The *Muqaddimah*, by Ibn Khaldun, New York, 1958: Bollingen Foundation, Pantheon Books, 3 vols. Ibn Khaldun deals with magic in pp 156-246. Page 156 has his section 27 entitled, "The sciences of sorcery and talismans."

## Relevance for Today's Astrologer

It is not intended that all who read this work will immediately adopt Alkindi's Theory of Magic. It is, important, however, from an historical point of view to understand astrology's relation to the other occult arts, especially when we may thereby get a fuller understanding of how our predecessors explained astrological influence. It is particularly worth noting in this work that, while the stellar rays are the ultimate explanation for events in this world, Alkindi also posits the existence of mundane, elementary rays as well. In other words, terrene things have an effect on each other as well. He asserts the importance of the material cause. This is something we have lost in modern astrological theory and its loss manifests as arguments among astrologers about the role of genetics or class in determining one's personality, behaviour and fate.

Lacking an astrological theory which addresses the material cause, one is sought in theories which are non-astrological and even antithetical to astrology. We would do well to permit Alkindi to re-open the search for a way to re-incorporate the material cause into astrological theory. In the past this was accomplished through the *Climata* and, to some degree, through the *spiritus* theory. These solutions may not be cogent in this day and age and need not be slavishly adopted but they could still provide a discussion with a point of departure in a new investigation aimed at rediscovery of the material cause in astrology.

It is interesting to note that in Alkindi's physical causality context, psychological affirmation magic such as is asserted to be useful by New Age "magicians" is superfluous. While the will plays an important role in Alkindi's concept of magic, it is the light of the stars which, in the final analysis, is always bringing things forth and causing them to pass away.

Alkindi's theory of elemental rays is to be based on ancient optics and the multiplication of images. It is part of a tradition of esoteric optics which we see in Roger Bacon, in John Dee and in Johannes Kepler and Placidus. John Dee, in his *Propaedeumata Aphoristica* urges the use of a catoptric contraption to focus and intensify the light of the stars in making astrological images. Kepler, in *On the More Certain Foundations of Astrology*, argue for the light of the stars as the active agent in astrological influence. A similar argument is also to be found in Placidus' *Primum Mobile*. Modern advocates of electromagnetism as the explanation for astrological causality are in good company from the historical point of view.

Alkindi's argument also does away with the need of any theory of a universal spiritual medium (be it ether, akasha, mind or phlogiston) in the production of effects at a distance.

This book is of interest from the psychological point of view as it presents us with an approach to the issue of causality in general which was prevalent long before the 17th century West separated objective and subjective and relegated the latter to the Hades of non-relevance. Mesmer's condemnation by Ben Franklin and the French Academy and the difficulties which psychology (especially Jungian psychology) has faced in receiving recognition from the scientific establishment demonstrate how modern western science has denied vast areas of human experience once considered scientifically pertinent. It is time to free ourselves from such ideological straight jackets and address the question of the relation of mind to matter.

Perhaps the most important issue for modern astrologers which Alkindi directs is the issue of Fate vs Free Will. While *On the Stellar Rays* does not address this issue from a theological point of view, Alkindi's philosophical concept of astrological causality and his understanding of the celestial harmony's relation to matter, as well as his understanding of the problems of perception and judgment have collectively, profound moral or ethical ramifications for the Fate and Free Will issue.

Briefly put, Alkindi posits a kind of modified determinism in which nature is thoroughly ruled by the concourse of astrological forces (called by him "the celestial harmony"), but man, and even beasts to a lesser degree have the power to alter matter through their actions. The behaviour of beasts, being dominated by their appetites, is largely in

conformity with the dictates of the stars. Man's status is somewhat different. Having, beyond Desire, Will, Speech, and above all Reason, he is capable of making an effect upon matter which nature and its irrational beasts cannot. But beyond this, some men (whom he refers to as the wise), "on account of the temperance of human nature more perfectly thriving in them than in other men," "by ... rectitude of character, and the regular {philosophical} exercise," these men "learned to aspire higher things for their own perfection, and motivated by this aspiration... did not cease their whole lives from" the task. These few men, assisted by inspiration, ultimately attain self mastery and the knowledge of the secrets of heaven and of matter by which they are enabled to exercise a creative magical influence upon the world around them. In effect, they become demi-gods, co-operating with the will of heaven in the generation of effects.

Are these men above the rule of the stars? Alkindi never says so, though by attributing god-like powers to them he at least claims for them a unique status in nature. They are above the elements and the irrational beasts and capable of co-operation with the stars who otherwise exert a ruling sway over all of nature. As mentioned above, Alkindi articulates a philosophy which is homocentric.

Notice that he does not assert this semi-divine status as available to all men equally and automatically. There are two kinds of people for Alkindi: the wise and the vulgar. It is only the wise who are heirs to the higher possibilities and they rise to such heights mostly through their own efforts, total life long commitment and the use of Reason with some mysterious assistance from "inspiration". The vulgar never rise to such heights.

It is not Islam which is the source of such ideas. Rather, it is to Neoplatonism and to its philosophical fellow traveller Hermeticism (which Alkindi knew of through the Harranian Sabians) that we must look for the sources of Alkindi's homocentric magical conception of human perfectibility.

# Alkindi On the Stellar Rays

*Here begins the Theory of the Magic Arts*

## Chapter One: On the Origin of Opinion.<sup>13</sup>

All men who perceive sensible things by means of the senses apprehend them in some form<sup>14</sup>. By this apprehension they discover, through the operation<sup>15</sup> of reason, that individual things perceived by sense agree with some forms and differ from others. With this exercise of sense<sup>16</sup>, through the ruling unity<sup>17</sup> of each man, the office of reason concurs that that very unity<sup>18</sup> comprehends a thing in a common form by subtraction<sup>19</sup> of the things which are not common. And this is the

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<sup>13</sup> Some of the content of this chapter is also discussed more fully in Alkindi's Metaphysics. See edition cited in Introduction.

<sup>14</sup> The faculty of recognition in us is contingent upon a geometrical congruence. Presented with sense input from sight, for instance, the mind observes the form of that impression and judges its form according to Same or Other. What is true of visual input is also true of input from the other senses by analogy.

<sup>15</sup> *Motus*. This word can mean, in an objective sense, motion or operation. In a subjective sense, impulse, emotion, affection, agitation, or operation in the sense of a faculty (in this case, a mental faculty).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Aristotle, On the Soul (*De Anima*), sec. 414b, 1-5: Aristotle connects living beings (including man) with the sensory, appetite, passion and imagination. All these will play important roles in what follows. In particular, he asserts that imagination is never found without sense and that the judgement is often influenced by appetite (desire) and imagination. Importantly, Aristotle asserts that appetite, mind and imagination are all capable of initiating movement. For a thorough discussion of the relation of Astrology to the Aristotelian Tradition see, R.Lemay, Abu Ma'shar and Latin Aristotelianism in the Twelfth Century, American University of Beirut, Publications of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Oriental Series, no.38.

<sup>17</sup> i.e. the soul, in which is the observing consciousness or Observer in man.

<sup>18</sup> the observer in man

<sup>19</sup> *cum subtractione non communium*. Literally, "*cum subtractione*", means " with

## Chapter Two: On the Rays of the Stars

Every star has its own nature and condition in which the projection of its rays with others is comprehended. Just as each star has its own nature (which is found in no other) in which the emission of rays is comprehended, so those rays in diverse stars are of a diverse nature, just as the stars are diverse in nature.

Every star has its own place in the mundane machine, different from all others. Whence it necessarily comes about that each star is allotted a different relationship<sup>32</sup> than other stars<sup>33</sup> both to all things and {to all} places contained in the world.

Varied relationship, however, varies the effect of the rays just as all the other properties of them are varied. Whence it happens that each star causes one thing or another in diverse places and things as much in small things as in things differing only slightly since the whole operation of the stars proceeds through the rays which are themselves varied in every varying aspect.

For a ray which descends from the centre of a star to the centre of the earth descends most powerfully is proved to be most powerful in its species of its operation. One which is turned away<sup>34</sup> is weakened in its effect<sup>35</sup> according to the proportion of its obliquity unless to the extent that they are strengthened by the rays of the other stars falling on the same places.

For into every place every star pours rays, on account of which<sup>36</sup>,

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<sup>32</sup> *respectum* It is possible that the Arabic word the Latin word *respectum* was intended to translate meant "astrological aspect" though the word *aspectum* is used at the end of the paragraph. I have translated *respectum* as "relationship" because a relationship, even if an aspect, is not limited to the Ptolemaic aspects of 0, 60, 90, 120 & 180 degrees.

<sup>33</sup> text has: *quam alia ad omnes et res omnes et loca in mundo contenta.*

<sup>34</sup> *obliquantur*

<sup>35</sup> This is why the influences of rising, culminating or setting stars or planets are held to be most powerful.

<sup>36</sup> *propter quod*

### Chapter Three: On the Rays of the Elements

Now therefore, since the world of the elements is the exemplum of the sidereal world so that each thing contained in it contains the figure<sup>60</sup> of the same {sidereal world}, it is manifest that every thing of this world, whether it be substance or accident, makes rays in its own way like a star otherwise it would not have the figure of the sidereal world to the fullest.

But this is sensibly manifest in other things. Fire, indeed, transmits the rays of heat to an adjoining place, and earth the rays of cold<sup>61</sup>. Curative medicine taken internally or applied externally seems to pour the rays of its virtue through the body of the one using it. Also the collision of bodies makes the sound pour itself forth from all sides through rays of its own kind and every coloured thing emits its own rays by which it is seen. This is also more subtly known in many other things. Whence, indeed, in all things the same {principle} is seen to be true by reason.

Assuming that this is true, therefore, we say that every thing that is actual and has existence in this world of the elements emits rays in every direction and that the whole world of the elements is filled by

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<sup>60</sup> *species*

<sup>61</sup> According to Medieval Science, hot, cold, wet, and dry were different things not merely relative qualities such as we conceive them. Hence Geber, whose alchemical and philosophical works Alkindi would have undoubtedly known, asserted that it was possible, through spagyric separations to isolate the so called *elementata*, or Primitive Qualities, Hot, Cold, Wet and Dry from any subject and, through recombination according to different proportions, to create artificial substances not produced in nature. With such a concept of hot and cold it is not unreasonable to suppose that cold is as capable of being radiated as is heat; especially as one can feel cold in the presence of a cold body. For instance, if you stand about a foot in front of the opened door of your refrigerator on a hot day (without touching it) you will feel cooler than you would in another room. The sensible impression is rather indistinguishable from that *mutatis mutandis* of standing before a radiator on a cold day. Our physics tells us that the two experiences are not identical, though they may feel so. In the latter case radiation of heat does occur. In the former case there is no radiation from the refrigerator but rather it is we who radiate heat and, in front of the open refrigerator, we lose it more than elsewhere due to the cooling system in the refrigerator which is constantly sucking heat from the inside of the unit. When we open the door, we become one of the knockwursts in the meat bin.

these rays according to their mode of being. Whence it is that every place of this world contains the rays of all things existing "*in actu*" ("*in actu*" {lit. in act} is a technical term in Aristotelian philosophy indicating actuality, being as fact. It is used to indicate some principle, thing or state of being which is manifested as opposed to existing potentially). And just as one thing differs from another, so the rays of each thing differ from all other things in their effects and nature, from which it is that the operation of the rays in all diverse things is diverse.

In particular, the distance of one thing from another makes a difference in the effect of its rays on the things of this world.

Likewise, a place more or less distant from the centre of the earth makes a difference in the effect of the rays on neighbouring bodies.

Likewise, the greater or lesser obliquity of the aspect produces a difference in the effect of the rays.

There are, perhaps, other accidents that induce diversity in the effects of the rays of the elements.

But this ought to be known: because the rays proceeding from some thing accompany a diverse nature and a diverse effect, from the aforesaid causes different rays of different things falling on the same subject modify each other, by increasing the species of the effect where they agree and by diminishing its effect where they disagree, or in other ways by aiding or impeding each other just as happens in the parts of the celestial harmony. Also, the diversity of matter receiving the rays of all elemental things causes the diversity in the effects of their rays, for instance, in fire we see that the same rays by which lead is softened, harden brick, which happens from their different matters.

But this ought to be attended to, namely that certain rays are stronger in some effect and weaker in others. Likewise, certain are much aided in their effect by other rays of another species but some are aided little by others. Likewise, some have almost the same effect in diverse places and materials while others appear diverse. Likewise, some rays operate very much in one time which operate very little at another time. Likewise, some want to operate with many additional circumstances and not otherwise, but others are content with fewer and in these things there is such diversity of modes that words do not suffice to define it. On this issue men have partially investigated the matter, some through experiments and some through reason first.

## Chapter Four: On the Possible

As evidence of this business<sup>66</sup> it is fitting to know that man, through his nature and the use of reason receives science or faith regarding<sup>67</sup> the conjunction of things and conceives will and desire about things good for him and in some cases they produce free will about getting them which we say happens to men from their lack of understanding of things. Since every human cognition arises from sense, the properties of things are things which sense very often does not comprehend<sup>68</sup>. Regarding these things and their conditions there may be no knowledge in the reason. Whence concerning the totality of things, there are certain things which are known and others which are thoroughly unknown.

If however all things should be known by someone, he would in turn have knowledge of the causality things. He would know, therefore, that all things that act and happen<sup>69</sup> in the world of the elements have been caused by the celestial harmony and then he would know that the things of this world related to that {celestial harmony} come forth by necessity. This, indeed, has been clearly ascertained by the wise in many instances and for this reason and in all others things, is judged to be the same by human reason.<sup>70</sup>

Now, therefore, because this causality is not impressed in the minds of men, with the exception of a few who followed this in a few particulars, the opinion of the contingency of things in the thought of most people was advanced who, seeing that some occurrence of things comes forth {one way} in one time and otherwise in similar circumstances in another time, they judged such an event contingent, so that before it happened they thought it possible that it might

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<sup>66</sup> *rei*

<sup>67</sup> *super*

<sup>68</sup> Sense perceives things. Mind conceives properties.

<sup>69</sup> *omnia que fiunt et contingunt*

<sup>70</sup> If all things occur by necessity, fate exists and can be known by knowing its cause.

## Chapter Five: On Things Accomplishing the Effect of Motions <sup>82</sup>

Therefore, discussing the effect of the rays proceeding from individual elementary things existing *in actu* to things distant, we add that all things which are in any existence *in actu* perform<sup>83</sup> some motion<sup>84</sup>, either always or in one time and not in another.

Which things, however, always move some things and do it in the same way, is not, under the rules of {the} doctrine, fitting to recount<sup>85</sup> whence we judge that it is unprofitable labour to point out that one thing is be connected to every other thing existing *in actu* by relation of similarity or dissimilarity: that this indeed the case is publicly manifest.

On account of<sup>86</sup> good or evil, however, it is profitable to know which things make some species of motion<sup>87</sup> in one time and not in another or govern<sup>88</sup> in one mode and not in another. But in such diversity there is no perceivable science for man, except in a few things, and regarding those few things which are possible to be carefully examined by human foresight<sup>89</sup>, only those which proceed from the human will ought to be investigated at present those motions<sup>90</sup> having been left behind which produce other elementary things in other remote things by means of their rays without the work of man.

Man, therefore, by reason of his proportioned existence arises similar to the world itself. Whence he is called a little world and he receives the

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<sup>82</sup> *motus*

<sup>83</sup> *operantur*

<sup>84</sup> This is explained by realizing that in Aristotle's Philosophy both objective and subjective experiences/ phenomena are produced by some kind of motion.

<sup>85</sup> *comprehendere*

<sup>86</sup> *propter*

<sup>87</sup> or operation

<sup>88</sup> taking *ministrant* for *ministata*

<sup>89</sup> *humana providentia*

<sup>90</sup> *motus*

power of inducing motion<sup>91</sup> in appropriate matter<sup>92</sup> by his own work just as the world has, however by imagination and intention and faith previously conceived<sup>93</sup> in the human soul. Man, desiring to make something, first imagines the form of the thing which he desires to impress upon some matter through his work. After having conceived the image of the thing, he judges whether the same thing is useful or not and desires it or rejects it in his mind. Subsequently, if the thing were considered worthy of desire, he desires accidents through which the thing may come forth into actuality<sup>94</sup> according to the opinion he has taken up.

Accidents assisting for the purpose of inducing motion are the passions of the soul, examining which we said that imagination and human reason take on the likeness of the world when the figures<sup>95</sup> of mundane things in them are actually imprinted through the exercise of sense because the imaginary spirit<sup>96</sup> has rays conforming to the rays of

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<sup>91</sup> or affection, operation, agitation, emotion, etc

<sup>92</sup> "in appropriate matter" (*in competenti materia*). Magical tradition holds that the magician must join or "wed," as Pico della Mirandola would have it in his "Magical Conclusions," things which are appropriate for the production of the desired effects. Such things must also be competent, that is capable of yielding the desired results. Finally, there is often a given attraction between such appropriate items, so they can be said to seek each other intensely (*con + peto*).

<sup>93</sup> *preconceptis: prae-conceptis* instead of *conceptis* to indicate that the thoughts must be in the mind before one can act on them?

<sup>94</sup> *in actum*

<sup>95</sup> *species*

<sup>96</sup> Alkindi is aware of the Greek Physiological theory, put forth by Epistratus of Chios (c 304BC- c 250BC) that explained the presence of vitality in the human body as well as psychological phenomena by reference to *spiritus*. Costa ben Luca (d. 912 AD), in his *De Differentiae spiritus et animae discrimine*, a major text by which the spiritus doctrine was transmitted to the West in the Middle Ages defines *spiritus* as, "a certain subtle body which arises in the heart and is distributed throughout the body by the veins in order to nourish it. It causes life, breath and pulse. Likewise it arises in the cerebrum and nerves and causes sense and motion." The original source of this *spiritus* was thought to be the sun and it was taken into the human body by inspiration whence, according to Medieval Physiology, it found its way into the heart. By means of this theory, mental processes such as sleep, dreams, memory and imagination were accounted for by reference to changes in the quality of the spiritus in the brain.

## Chapter Six: On the Power of Words

Therefore because words<sup>129</sup> are believed by men to contain an effect of operation<sup>130</sup>, taking up this {opinion} again, we said that sounds<sup>131</sup> produced in actuality<sup>132</sup> make rays just like other actual things, and by their rays they work<sup>133</sup> in the world of the elements just as other individual things do. And since there are innumerable differences of sounds<sup>134</sup>, each one actually uttered has its own effect on elemental things which is different from the effect of others and sounds<sup>135</sup> have been allotted their effects by the celestial harmony just as herbs and other things, and likewise, the quality of the effect is extremely diverse in diverse {things}.

Indeed some incantations<sup>136</sup> strengthen the operation of Saturn, others, Jupiter', others Mars', others the Sun's, others Venus', others Mercury's, others the Moon's.<sup>137</sup> Likewise, certain agree in {their}

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<sup>129</sup> *verba*

<sup>130</sup> *motus*

<sup>131</sup> *voces*: voices, sounds, words, or incantations.

<sup>132</sup> *in actum producte*

<sup>133</sup> *operantur*

<sup>134</sup> *vocum*

<sup>135</sup> *voces*

<sup>136</sup> *vocum*. I switch over here in translating *vox* as utterance, word or sound to invocation as the author now connects the word with the planets. It is enough to note that the latin word *vox* means: that which is uttered by the voice, voice, sound tone, word, saying, speech, sentence, maxim, proverb, incantation, command.

<sup>137</sup> Note the reversal of relationship from what is normally thought to be the case. Instead of the Planet strengthening the invocation, or being its magical source, the invocation strengthens the planets operation. This seems to place man in an equal to or more important than the planetary gods or angels which were thought to be the ruling geniuses in each planet who were actually the causes of the planet's astrological effects. In Alkindi's concept, the angels are replaced by the light of the stars and man's will, expressed through his voice, can assist the action of the stars on sublunary things. Cf. Scott's *Hermetica, Libellus I*, 13a were Man, created by God as brother to (and therefore equal to) the

## Chapter Seven: On Figures

Manual operation harmonises elemental things to the effect of motion.<sup>248</sup> Wise men proved by frequent experience that figures and characters written by the work of men in different materials with intention and due ceremonies of place, time and other circumstances had an effect of motion on external things.<sup>249</sup> That this is so is because every actual figure, certainly every form impressed in elemental matter, produces rays which cause some motions in all other things, as has been said above. Also each figure has its own nature and virtue different from others, just as their forms are different.

Wherefore there are some characters having power and virtue over fire, some over air, some over water, and some over earth; some indeed in the east, some in the west, others in the south, some in the north, some above, some below, some on the human species, others on other species of animals, some on herbs and on trees of one species, others on herbs and trees of another species. Some characters, set down with proper ceremonies strengthen the operations of Saturn, others of the other planets, and others, of the fixed stars. In the same manner, some agree in effect with Aries, others with the other signs, and this whole diversity of figures in virtue and effect is produced<sup>250</sup> by the celestial harmony attributing to each its virtue of causing<sup>251</sup> motion in bodies placed outside through the rays which it emits {producing} diverse effects as the figures are diverse in their forms, as

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<sup>248</sup> The idea that man exerts a transformative effect upon matter by working it manually, while simultaneously directing his attention fully to the work is fundamental to Alchemical theory. Here this idea is extended to the representation of magical characters the very act of drawing which are believed to alter matter.

<sup>249</sup> The editors of the Latin Text point out that this passage refers to the various designs commonly used in Islamic talismanic and amuletic magic. We are referred to R. Kriss, H. Kriss-Heinrich, *Volksglaube und Bereich des Islam, II, Amulette, Zauberformeln und Beschwörungen*, 1962, p. 74-79, and p. 81 (characters on lunettes).

<sup>250</sup> *operatur*

<sup>251</sup> *virtutem suam faciendi motus*

## Chapter Nine: On Sacrifices

Among the manual works of man, sacrifices are found to be more efficient in inducing a motion<sup>260</sup> of power in the elements, by which some elemental things are found to have sacrifices by which some individual things are {intentionally} broken down from actual existence to non-existence<sup>261</sup>. And, regarding those things which are sacrificed<sup>262</sup>, the more alike they are in physical constitution, the greater the effect the operation is found to have, generally. Whence the killing of animals with the intention of killing them accompanied by other ceremonies<sup>263</sup> work more effectively than other sacrifices that which is intended, and this is seen to have a physical explanation.<sup>264</sup>

For every animal has a centre and ruling unity and a physical constitution proportionate to its parts through which it is constituted similar to the universal elemental world itself<sup>265</sup>, which {also} has a centre and a ruling unity and a physical constitution proportionate in its parts which is allotted by the celestial harmony which produces the world in such a way and likewise that same harmony produces every animal in every one of its conditions. Hence it is that while an animal lives, it informs the parts of the elemental world with its rays and acts on them in its own way as much as on matter. When it dies naturally, however, the world is not changed by its death except in so far as all nature shows in its own course. But

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<sup>260</sup> *motus*

<sup>261</sup> *non esse*

<sup>262</sup> *quanto ea que opere hominis corumpuntur in non esse....* Lit. the degree to which those things which are {intentionally} corrupted by human agency into non-existence....

<sup>263</sup> The editors of the Latin text point out that the *Picatrix* contains specific instructions as to the species of animal to be sacrificed for specific purposes, the proper incenses to use as well as detailed instructions of other aspects of the ceremonies mentioned.

<sup>264</sup> *quod rationem naturalem habere videtur.*

<sup>265</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, trs MacKenna, London: Faber & Faber, 1969, 4:12-13 where the harmony of the soul of the world and the soul of an individual regulates the descent of the individual soul into an appropriate individual body of the appropriate species (of which it is an image) at the appropriate time and place.

## Chapter Ten: On the Beginnings of the Operations

Moreover it is good to know that the stars and signs having dominion in the celestial harmony in the beginning of any work of will<sup>273</sup> rule that operation all the way to its end. Whence, if they are fortunes, they defend that operation from impediment. But if they were infortunes, they involve the operation with impediment.

And since each star and sign has its own proper names and their own characters conforming to them in virtue and effect, as has been said, their expression in the beginning of any work of will is necessary. If they were naturally concordant with the stars or signs they direct the work; but if discordant, they pervert the work.

And likewise, the formation of figures in the beginning of any work of will is useful for expediting or impeding according as the same figures agree or disagree with the stars then ruling in the signs. Moreover that these names and characters are harmonious or disharmonious is known by some of the aforesaid modes of this sort of thing.

Hence it is manifest that discourses and obsecrations and adjurations for the purpose of charming men by significative sounds done with will and desire at the beginning of any work of will further the direction of the work or, if an imprecation is made, the impediment of the work. Such words mutate the matter of the work either all the time or frequently, when they agree or disagree with the constellation of the time when they are expressed.

Likewise a sacrifice at the beginning of any work of will, properly performed, have a great effect in some work rectifying or distorting provided that it is performed in the {proper} place and time and {along with} other circumstances.

The ancient physicians, knowing the said virtue of words and figures, took all the herbs which they gathered for making medicines, with incantations having been previously spoken or with the formation of images or both together, thinking that their power and virtue in expelling disease was thereby strengthened.

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<sup>273</sup> *operis voluntarii*