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The Testament Of Cyprian The Mage: 1 (Encyclopaedia Goetica)



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Customer Reviews

Love it! As usual JSK is the subject matter expert!

I have been following the work of Jake Stratton-Kent for many years, from his work with the English Qabalah in the 1970's to present. The current text is the third volume of the series, Encyclopedia Goetica. These two books comprising Volume Three are an analysis of Iberian Grimoire manuscripts attributed to Saint Cyprian. I assume that all these Cyprian Texts are readily available in Spanish only, to audiences in Spain, Mexico, and South America. They are late Grimoires showing multiple influences including Paracelsus (1493-1541) and Eliphas Levi (1810-1875) First to the physical books themselves. My copy is two hardback volumes with excellent, high quality, paper and binding. This is typical of the high standards of Scarlet Imprint and the construction will last for years. The dust jackets are midnight blue paper with gold stars, beautiful in its way, but not practical for on-going use. A summary of what Volume Three of The Encyclopedia Goetica is about I will quote from the work itself: "My approach, throughout this Encyclopedia, is essentially ecumenical or open-ended. It is not my role to tell people what theology or cultural background to prefer. Description of the evolution of Western magic from the synthesis period, involving Jewish, pagan, Christian expressions, involves commonalities that require appreciation. For the first time in thousands of years another synthesis period is emerging from the meeting of Western and African traditions " among others " in a newly globalized world. Commonalities provide options for synthesis, for mutual understanding, for adaption in various ways. Many of these options I leave

for the reader, or larger movements, to explore in their own way. The approach employed in these two particular volumes provides a profound non-denominational model, whereby ritual processes within Western magic can be compared. This regardless of whether a Supreme Deity concept is superimposed on the archaic practical agencies, or indeed which Supreme Deity is preferred if so. So too the names of the practical agencies, and their cultural origins, are in large part left open; once one understands that these names indicate positions and roles, one may proceed to structure or restructure rituals on that basis. All this places considerable responsibility with the reader, but also circumvents the limitations implicit had I approached the project differently; saying 'these are my gods, these are my spirit superiors and spirits, work my system by rote and you won't have to think very hard'. That approach has been employed extensively and has not provided much by way of insight; reinforcing differences rather than revealing underlying patterns and their syncretic basis. If anything misunderstandings and artificial elements have proliferated by this means. Invention without attention to the underlying principles has had many failings. The need for the kind of analysis I have undertaken is reinforced rather than lessened in consequence.

• Quoting the above paragraphs illustrates in short order both the strength and weakness of the work. The quote is a wonderful summary of the author's aim. However, they occur on pages 75 and 76 of book two, when they would better serve at the beginning of book one. I have found that both books are poorly edited. There are omissions of punctuation which would make the text more readable. While familiar with the basic arguments of the volume and of the literature cited, I still had difficulty following the text. This was especially true for the first 125 pages or so, because connecting paragraphs joining ideas were either excised or never written. The author introduces concepts which are unexplained for the lay reader, and unreferenced. In addition, academic authors were referenced without corresponding citation. Mr. Stratton-Kent should have included footnotes (which he was loath to do), or an expanded bibliography including all texts and journal articles used. This would have made the book much more useful, and I would encourage these changes in any future edition. At the current two books of 250 pages each I understand why the publisher would want to limit the length of the manuscript, however, this was at the cost of usefulness and readability. The title of the text is also somewhat misleading as the first parts of book one are more focused upon a study of the Testament of Solomon and the Hygromanteia, than on the Iberian Cyprian texts which the author indicates are the focus of study. The arguments espoused however are well worth consideration on many levels. It would behoove magical practitioners in many areas of esoterica to consider them. Mr. Stratton-Kent outlines the historical flow of ideas and magical practice rooted in Egyptian use of the decants, and Babylonian/Chaldean astrological concepts of organizing the world being passed

onto the ancient western empires of Greece and Rome then continuing into the Grimoire traditions and being with us today. He also discusses roles of deities rooted in the middle east, and how they have blended with the above to generate literature such as the Greek Magical Papyri, Testament of Solomon, and Hygromanteia. It would enrich us all to incorporate this understanding into our world view. How Mr. Stratton-Kent makes this argument, however, does not flow well. I would have preferred starting with a good historical grounding in Egyptian use of the decants and Babylonian development of an astrological framework of the universe with it's three part divisions of Heaven, Earth and Underworld and how these ideas/practices continue into Greek culture, then blended with Jewish ideas during late antiquity. He does get to this but in a more roundabout manner. I advocate Mr. Stratton-Kent's thesis as the arguments he makes hold direct relevance to current discussions regarding Modern Witchcraft, and Golden Dawn based magical practice. The cultural mixtures which occurred in late antiquity continue to be under appreciated. It is these structures that Mr. Stratton-Kent elucidates: the universe being divided in a tripartite manner and it's magical reflection in three Chiefs, while also having a four-fold division of the terrestrial sphere and the use of four kings for the directions. The strand which runs through the Encyclopedia Goetica series is Mr. Stratton-Kent's proposition of the central place that eschatology holds in esoteric frameworks and how this unexamined influence has effected practice in many ways. This proposition traces back to the Orphic mysteries, then forward to Pythagoras, Plato, the Neo-Platonists, the Chaldean Oracles, examining the "shamanic" roots of Goetia, and how these roots then influenced the Grimoire tradition. Mr. Stratton-Kent has been arguing for quite some time that there is an alternative to the thwarting angel commanding demon paradigm prevalent in other systems. He uses The True Grimoire (Volume One of the Encyclopedia Goetica) as the model example. This approach will appeal to those raised in a post-Christian era where the dualistic good/evil world view is not seen as helpful. Mr. Stratton-Kent's analysis of the Demon King Asmodus is excellent, and here he begins analyzing the four kings (and queens) of the Grimoire tradition. But the meat of book one is Mr. Stratton-Kent's treatment of the Decans, and related star lore which starts at page 160. He then proceeds to discuss the role of Angel or daimon as intermediary in multiple frameworks. This role is central to many systems and Mr. Stratton-Kent is fond of bringing in African based traditions such as Kimbando for comparison, as an illustration of continuity of practice between the European Grimoires, and modern practitioners. Aspects of many Demons and Angels are then put forward to examine the four kings motif in greater detail. Then follows shorter sections analyzing plants, animals and stones and their association with the decans and mansions of the Moon. After the long detour, Book Two resumes the study of the Cyprian text. Starting at page 24, Mr. Stratton-Kent

returns to his study of the Four Kings. Again, this material is useful for the range of magical practitioner from Wiccan to Golden Dawn. Page 43 sees the return of focus to the Cyprian texts (or is it a detour from the Four Kings? Anyway, you get the picture). In the context of analyzing the Iberian Cyprian texts is an excellent discussion on the nature and activities of Gnomes. Following this are some practical considerations regarding invocation, with suggestions for those interested in adapting Crowley's Pyramidos for use in their work. The sigils of Superiors and deputies are presented for use in the rites. Throughout this section the Cyprian text is compared and contrasted with the Grand Grimoire and the Grimorum Verum. Mr. Stratton-Kent discounts the sacrifice of animals and use of animal parts in the work preferring to see them as totems associated with the spirits and the Mansions of the moon. Next follows examples of spell work drawn from the Cyprian text, with Ætreasure Seeking viewed as a metaphor for spiritual initiation. A key section to the entire series is that on Magic and Eschatology starting on page 111. Philosophically this topic is central to Mr. Stratton-Kent's world view and it deserves to be expanded upon. For the novice, the entire section would have been usefully moved to the start of book one to provide a grounding for understanding magical relationships with the spirits presented later and differing approaches to evocation. The author links ideas regarding eschatology to the religion and practice of Spiritism and Spiritualism. He then flows naturally into discussing the role of the dead in magical work. The author would like them to be restored to their rightful place, and he makes a very strong case both culturally and historically. The next section focuses on another of the Cyperian manuscripts, this one titled the Heptameron. There is a delightful discussion on palmistry called, Chiromancia Astrologica elucidating its history and place in magic. Stellar associations for Beelzebuth and Baalberith are provided along with the Kings and Queens of quarters. The importance of the archaic Capricorn/Cancer-North/South Axis is discussed, contrasting with the Ænewer Æ deities associated with the East/West-Vernal/Autumnal equinoxes. Two unique magical scripts are presented. The author identifies the first as being connected to Sanskrit. The second appears related to Chinese or Japanese ideograms, but Mr. Stratton-Kent makes no comment upon it. This is curious given the connections between the Chinese study of the decants and the prevalence of stellar worship in Taoist magical practice and in Japanese Buddhism. This is followed by a discussion of the connections between the four kings and The Wild Hunt which will be of great interest to certain schools of Witchcraft. Book Two returns to the Chiromancia Astrologica which lists demons associated with the constellations and specific stars. The well done exploration of the folklore associated with each these Ædemons Æ will interest readers of a pagan bent, and illustrates the author's contention of the syncretic nature of the Grimoires. Following this

we return, yet again, to the four kings (and queens). The conclusion of the work includes a summary of the aim of all three volumes of the Encyclopedia Goetica. The summaries of Volumes One and Two would have better served at the start of book one. Then perplexingly, the appendix of book two consists of the Testament of Solomon. This is odd considering a few translations of this work are readily available. I would be remiss if I did not mention the wonderful artwork of Oliver Liebeskind. His original drawings added great depth to these volumes, and I wanted to see more of his renderings interspersed with the text. I look forward to seeing more of his work in future. In summary, the detours between topics are tedious. The work would benefit from reorganization into separate topic specific monographs consolidating information. Given the organization of the information as presented, a good index would help to make the volumes useful as a reference. The index at the end of each book is average at best. I stumbled upon one error without effort. If the author would like his work to be used without reorganization I recommend releasing a future edition in hypertext. Overall this is a useful work, but one which will be difficult going for those not already familiar with the literature involved. I would give it 3 and a half stars.

This whole series is wonderful. I feel a reader of this series has to understand that reading and studying these books is a life long process of understand and reach towards mastery of a certain current of western High Magic. Not just the texts; the context and examples of use of the texts.

i found this book to be a big disapointment. there is no good reason i can find for it to have the title it does. it is in no way the testament of saint cyprian. it is however a well learned dissertation on theurgic and goetic themes (largely the testament of Solomon)it does contain some extracts of the Sulfurino ciprianus but quickly leaves them in favor of historical and no doubt encyclopedic wanderings through theurgic and neo-platonic remains. the author is I believe well know for his mastery of goetic trivia and this book the only one in the encylopedia of goetica series i have ventured to own bears it out . therefore it is likely i am not fit to judge. if the title is meant to be understood as alluding to something other than the Testament of Cyprian. than my bad.as for the rest of the material, for me its old data mixed with speculative material of no interest to me. perhaps some others will find the material " A fundamental revisioning of magic" but i did not.

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