Several editions of a manuscript entitled the *Liber visionum*, or The Book of Visions, have recently come to light. This text, written by John of Morigny, a fourteenth century French monk, provides instructions for a practice that, if followed correctly, results in divine visions and knowledge of the seven liberal arts. The study of this text is particularly alluring as it provides both a fascinating object of study in and of itself and a means by which to question commonly accepted categories within the study of religions. This text has numerous repercussions for the field of medieval studies, but in this paper I hope to use John’s text as a means of critiquing modern understandings of several key terms within the study of religions. As will be shown, the *Liber visionum* easily shakes the ground on which a number of respected taxonomies stand. The analysis of John’s text presented here is not meant to stand as a definitive explanation, but rather is meant to serve as an example of the ways such a text may be used to prod at the continually revised categories presented within religious studies.

The pursuit of identification and classification seems universal across the academic disciplines. In giving a subject a name, a type, or a place among other subjects of its kind, confusion and uncertainty are turned into a clearly understood reality. Of course these classifications often fail, but nonetheless they allow for material advances to be made. As J.Z. Smith writes in his chapter *A Matter of Class: Taxonomies of Religion*, attempts at classification are an academic imperative, despite the many problems that may emerge. This passage on the subject, like much of Smith’s writing, is worth quoting at length:

> I am aware of the new ethos that eschews classification, comparison, and explanation. In the satiric formulation of Kimberley Patton, ‘Though Shalt Compare Neither Religious Traditions, Nor Elements of Religious Traditions, Lest Thou Totalize, Essentialize, or Commit Hegemonic Discourse’ – to which I might add, ‘Nor shalt thou consider thyself a member of the academy.’ This is counsel to be rejected, as it was by William James, in what has become, perhaps, the most oft-quoted paragraph in *Varieties* [of Religious Experience]: ‘The first thing the intellect does with an object is to class it along with something else. But any object that is infinitely important to us and awakens our devotion feels to us as if it must be *sui generis* and unique. Probably a crab would be filled with a sense of personal outrage if it could hear us class it without ado or apology as a crustacean,
and thus dispose of it. “I am no such thing,” it would say; “I am MYSELF, MYSELF alone.” To fail to reject the crab’s sentence is to condemn the study of religion to an inconclusive study of individuals and individual phenomena. I avoid the anti-intellectual term ‘unique’ in favor of the word ‘individual,’ which, at least, implies the notion of class. So classify we must – though we can learn from the past to eschew dual classifications such as that between ‘universal’ and ‘ethnic’ or the host of related dualisms, all of which finally reduce to ‘ours’ and ‘theirs.’

As Smith (and James) illustrate, a constant tension is necessary in academic work between the need to make a subject understandable, thus relating it to author and audience, and the desire to avoid forcing the subject of study into categories which appeal to the scholar, but would baffle the subject.

In my discipline of religious studies, *binaries*, rather than complex categorizations, have been popular for some time. Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), who more or less created the study of comparative religion during his tenure at the University of Chicago had one binary which he particularly popularized – that of the sacred and the profane. This binary was enthusiastically adopted through much of the academy and imposed over many diverse subjects of study. This wholesale application is the genius of the binary – if the category is broad enough, it can be made to apply to anything. But, while the assignment of the label “sacred” or “profane” can be vitally important, it can become meaningless if applied too widely.

This emphasis on the sacred and the profane by no means sets the standard for inclusive binaries in the study of religion. An earlier binary, which like the sacred and the profane continues to hold importance today, is that of magic and religion. Nineteenth and twentieth-century scholarship is redolent with discussions of magic and religion – all couched in oppositional terms. In these texts magic is presented as the foil to religion. It is primitive, mechanistic and self-serving, while religion is philosophical, altruistic, and sophisticated. I believe that the *Liber visionum* may be used to decisively undermine efforts to essentialize the inherently nebulous and malleable creatures that are magic and religion.

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The division between magic and religion was influentially codified in Bronislaw Malinowski’s (1884-1942) essay on *Magic, Science, and Religion*. Malinowski makes his disdain for magic transparent when he writes:

Magic – the very word seems to reveal a world of mysterious and unexpected possibilities! Even for those who do not share in that hankering after the occult, after the short cuts into ‘esoteric truth,’ this morbid interest, nowadays so freely ministered to by stale revivals of half-understood ancient creeds and cults, dished up under the names of ‘theosophy,’ ‘spiritism’ or ‘spiritualism,’ and various pseudo-‘sciences,’ -gies and -isims – even for the clear scientific mind the subject of magic has a special attraction.¹ Yet, despite this clear disdain for the subject, Malinowski authored a treatment of magic which remains in use, even if not directly, today. He views “magic as a practical art consisting of acts which are only means to a definite end expected to follow later on; religion as a body of self-contained acts being themselves the fulfillment of their purpose.”³ He further associates magic with spells, rites, performance, simplicity, and practicality.⁴ “Magic [is] the specific art for specific ends…”⁵ Religion is described as “complex,” with coherent systems of ritual and belief alongside an extensive pantheon.⁶ The problems with this system are obvious. The term magic, like heresy, is most commonly applied to a practice that is out of favor or viewed as lesser by whoever is in power, or whoever is completing scholarship. Conversely, the term religion is applied to all the practices and beliefs of the dominant group. Magic and religion, as Malinowski defines them, are not terms which essentially apply to any one practice or belief. In fact, using Malinowski’s definition, the terms would be best used to study the prejudices and beliefs of the scholar, rather than her subject.

Of course it is impossible to stop categorizing or to remove binaries altogether, and it would be a fool’s project to do so, but the failings of earlier scholarship seem to indicate that even approaches which seem sophisticated and solid have their flaws and exceptions. It is in these areas in which systems and

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³ Ibid., 88.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
binaries begin to falter that attention should be fixed, not to insure that nothing escapes a preexisting system of classification but to encourage the full exploration of whatever is most difficult to categorize. These points of stress problematize commonly held approaches to history and most often indicate areas of weakness in accepted approaches.

In many contemporary works, the fallibility of systems created within scholarship is recognized. Within the discipline of religious studies, this recognition has led to radical restructuring as it has highlighted the artificial nature of the historian of religion’s project. As J.Z. Smith defines it, religion is in no way an essential term, but instead, an artificial construction used to limit a particular field of study:

‘Religion’ is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define. It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as ‘language’ plays in linguistics or ‘culture’ plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon.7

Just as the very “thing” that a religious historian studies is selected by invented criteria, so are the parts of that “thing” artificially categorized. In recognizing the simulated quality of these categories, their fallibility (and more importantly, flexibility) becomes evident.

Within this rickety but tantalizingly alluring construction, areas of particular stress appear. Definitions of terms like “religion” as well as articulations of binaries such as magic/religion are examples of theoretically based stresses. However, specific examples provide a grounded approach to the redefinition of the terms of religious studies, which may prove more effective in criticizing and reconstructing the terms of scholarly discourse. It is at just such a point of stress in the convoluted intersections between magic and religion that John of Morigny may be found.

John of Morigny was a fairly obscure figure and, as a result, little information on him is extant, the most extensive source for such information being the prologue to his Liber visionum. From this prologue, it becomes clear that he studied at Chartres and for a short while at Orléans before becoming a

Benedictine monk at the monastery of Morigny. He became a monk in Morigny in 1308 and sometime thereafter attained the position of reeve, which placed him in secondary charge of a group of monks within the monastery. While studying, he gained access to at least two texts that served to instruct him in magical, or necromantic, practice. John was clearly an ambitious student, but because of financial difficulties he could not procure all that he needed to succeed. “Now I, John, while I was a student in school, suffered many poverties in books and exemplars, as well as in many other necessities, and above all I desired with my whole heart to come to the knowledge of all the sciences.” Because he lacked these resources, John decided to pursue another path towards the achievement of knowledge in the seven liberal arts.

Though the necromantic arts technically concern conversations with and coercion of the dead, during the Middle Ages necromancy was primarily used to indicate a magical practice of which the church did not approve. I should note here that, contrary to popular opinion, the church accepted or at least turned a blind eye to any number of magical practices. In fact, as Richard Kieckhefer, one of the foremost scholars of medieval ritual magic, has conclusively argued, it was often priests or other religious who engaged in magical practices. Such individuals within the church, engaging in practices condemned by Christian authorities, Richard Kieckhefer refers to as part of a “Clerical underworld”. This underworld, it seems, was relatively easy to join:

[T]hey all would have had at least a little learning, and for them this learning was a dangerous thing. Basic knowledge of the rites of exorcism, and perhaps an acquaintance with astrological images and other kinds of magic, might well lead them to experiment with conjuration. If they had access to the infamous books of necromancy, and if they were curious enough to try them out, that was all they needed for membership into this clerical underworld.

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10 Ibid., 208, note 29.
11 Ibid., 178.
So, odd as it might seem, it was not unusual for a monk to pursue the study of magic.

As if in confirmation of Kieckhefer’s argument, the first book John obtained that taught the necromantic arts was “passed on to me by a certain cleric.”\textsuperscript{14} John copied this book, but appears to have been unsatisfied with the text or with its results as soon after he “began to think how I might be able to attain to the perfection of this nefarious science.”\textsuperscript{15} As a means of achieving this goal, he consults with “a certain Lombard medical expert named Jacob.”\textsuperscript{16} It was from this man that John of Morigny first received advice to consult the \textit{Ars Notoria} as a means of furthering his aspirations in the necromantic arts:

When I had consulted with him, he said to me: ‘Get permission to use the school [\textit{studia}], and when you have obtained it look for a certain book called the \textit{Ars Notoria}, and in that way you will discover the truth not only about this knowledge, which you seek information of, but about all of the sciences.’ And so I did this, and finally got the book after seeking it for some time, and having got it I immediately set to the task of performing this work and obtaining its effect to the best of my ability.\textsuperscript{17}

This passage makes clear both that the library at John’s school actually owned a necromantic text like the \textit{Ars Notoria} and that he was so badly supervised that he could not only search out this text but was also able to dedicate himself exclusively to the study of this text. “Setting aside all other studies I undertook to study in it more frequently; and I studied in it so much that I figured out what I had to do to make it work. Once I had grasped this, I set to acquiring my proposed desire, the work of this book according to its teaching, better than I had [previously] been able to do.”\textsuperscript{18} However, as John learned through a series of divine and demonic visions prompted by his work with this text “the \textit{Ars Notoria}, is without a doubt a fountain head of malice, origin of deviation, teacher of error, bag of tricks, river of iniquity, false advocate of grace; in it peace is bound to hatred, faith to falsehood, hope to fear, and madness is mixed with

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 174.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 178.
reason.”\textsuperscript{19} Despite this blistering condemnation, it took John some time to give up the \textit{Ars Notoria}. He repented of his dealings with it but again returned to it before finally and completely rejecting it. He was able to reject the workings taught by this text because he was shown, through visions of the Virgin Mary, a new set of prayers and operations which would achieve the same ends as those of the \textit{Ars Notoria}. The instructions received by John in his visions became his \textit{Liber visionum}.

Up until the point when John begins his involvement with the materials that would later become the \textit{Liber visionum}, his story is fairly easy to understand and place within the schema of medieval sanctity. He began life as a monk, firmly within the fold of normative religion, and than strayed into the prohibited domain of necromantic practice. However, this simple picture soon became complicated with his creation of a text which fit neither into illicit necromantic traditions (as did the \textit{Ars Notoria}) nor typical patterns of sanctity, but instead appears to maintain an intermediary position.

The \textit{Liber visionum}, the only known work by John, was composed between 1304 and 1317.\textsuperscript{20} In this text John presents two systems. The first “consists of a series of prayers to God, the angels, the whole court of heaven, and especially the Virgin Mary.”\textsuperscript{21} These prayers when recited in conjunction with the correct rituals allow the attainment of the “knowledge of the seven liberal arts, philosophy, theology, and any other branch of formal learning he or she may desire.”\textsuperscript{22} The second system “which is directed more towards finding our specific items of information than formal knowledge … mainly turns on generating and interpreting visionary dreams and contemplating certain figures, with and without the aid of a consecrated ring.”\textsuperscript{23} The prologue to this work (the only portion of the text currently available in translation from the original Latin) was composed around 1313. Claire Fanger and Nicholas Watson, the translators and compilers of the \textit{Liber visionum} write “John seems to have obtained Mary’s permission for writing such an account as early as 1308, and may even have started recording his visions on an

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 174-175.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 109.
individual basis at that time.”\textsuperscript{24} This prologue “was written to defend this book from the charge of magic.”\textsuperscript{25} John’s attempt was clearly unsuccessful as, in 1323, the text was condemned. The \textit{Grandes Chroniques de France} recounts John’s case:

> a monk of Mornigny … who through his curiosity and pride wanted to inspire and renew a condemned heresy and sorcery called in Latin Ars Notoria, although he hoped to give it another name and title…. [T]he said book was justly condemned in Paris as false and evil, against the Christian faith, and condemned to be burned and put in the fire.\textsuperscript{26}

Although his book was condemned and burned, it does not appear that John himself suffered a similar fate.

As the initial popularity of the \textit{Liber visionum}, in conjunction with its subsequent condemnation would indicate, John’s work does not fall into neat categories. Both Claire Fanger and Nicholas Watson, the authors of the only significant studies on John’s text, are well aware of the complicated position of the \textit{Liber visionum}. Fanger writes “So John the Monk was simultaneously an insider and an outsider, a Christian occultist with a visionary bent, or a Christian visionary with an occultist bent. He is the writer of a text which … was viewed simultaneously (though perhaps not by the same people at the same time) as most sacred, and most unlawful.”\textsuperscript{27} Here Fanger clearly acknowledges John’s position between modes of religiosity, but (perhaps wisely) goes no farther. She neither attempts a stronger alignment with one or another characteristic, nor tries to create a third space for John.

Watson, in an avowedly provocative treatment of the \textit{Liber visionum}, paints a more definite picture of the text. He sees the text as a whole (and not just the prologue with which I am dealing) as related to mystical ascent. However, he writes that, “It will be clear that this is not a mystical work by any current definition of this vexed term, but it can at least be said that John is anxious to exploit the

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid.}, 111.
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}
structural analogies between his project and certain kinds of mystical thought.”

Unlike Fanger, Watson puts John more strongly into the camp of mysticism, though he still acknowledges the shaky ground on which such a classification must stand. Neither author seems willing to assign a label to John and his text, though both are willing to discuss terms that come close to categorizing the Liber visionum. They do not put emphasis behind any one argument but alternately give preference to magic or mysticism in their discussions of the text. Both Fanger and Watson seem comfortable leaving John in this typological no-man’s land. It seems possible, however, to begin a cartography of the space in which John put himself. It is the beginning of this cartography in which I am interested.

At the start of this paper, I began to tell the complicated story of the magic/religion binary. One contemporary revisiting of the issues surrounding this division bears recounting. By and large, contemporary scholars have offered increasingly complex taxonomies to answer the problem of the definition of magic. J.Z. Smith offers another alternative. In his Trading Places he argues for the removal of the term magic from scholarly analysis though not in those instances in which a particular individual or group uses the term. He believes practitioners of magic may be best understood if we remove the general descriptor “magic” from our analysis:

I see little merit in continuing the use of the substantive term ‘magic’ in second-order, theoretical, academic discourse. We have better and more precise scholarly taxa for each of the phenomenon commonly denoted by ‘magic’ which, among other benefits, create more useful categories for comparison.

This argument makes much sense as the use of the term “magic” is often used as a negatively counterpoising term to religion. Such a subjective binary, when imposed by the scholar, will serve only to obscure the material.

However, J.Z. Smith appears to overlook the tensions that did in fact exist between religion and magic (or necromancy). In his area of specialization, late antique religions (specifically Judaism), the use


of the magic/religion binary is often highly artificial. But, in the Middle Ages, an era when the church condemned certain magical practices\(^{30}\) and set those practices in opposition to its own, the use of the term magic – with all its associations of negative dualism – is not only accurate, but necessary.

Smith clearly worries over the use of the term “magic” as a negative descriptor: “in academic discourse ‘magic’ has almost always been treated as a contrast term, a shadow reality known only by looking at the reflection of its opposite (‘religion,’ ‘science’) in a distorting fun-house mirror.”\(^{31}\) This worry is well founded, as the term is often misused in just such a manner. Practices clumped under the heading “magic” have been seen as normative and fully participating aspects of dominant religious cultures throughout much of western history. But, as John’s text makes clear, the dynamics between the regulators of an orthodox religion and an alternately repudiated and embraced necromantic practice make the maintenance of some sort of continuum of magic and religion essential. Malinowski’s strict separation between magic and religion would, of course, be utterly useless here, but nevertheless, some sort of plane on which both orthodox Christian practices, licit, and illicit magical practices can be placed is essential. The reconstruction of such a plane may only work if the terms arranged on it are “theirs” and “theirs” instead of the “‘ours’ and ‘theirs.’”\(^{32}\)

Just as it is necessary to provisionally limit the term religion in order to function as an historian of religions,\(^{33}\) it is sometimes necessary to erect some sort of a horizon of magic, nebulous as the term itself must remain. As Smith clearly argues, this horizon should not be opposed to religion. I do not believe it necessary to remove all limiting criteria within the larger category of religion, as Smith argues, and discuss “magic” only through its component parts. Rather, a second line should be drawn alongside the

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\(^{30}\) Though it should be kept in mind that, as Richard Kieckefer has demonstrated, the involvement of magic with Christian authorities was quite extensive throughout the Middle Ages, this interrelation of magical practices with the church should not be taken to indicate that all magical practices, all the time were viewed as legitimate, nor that those practices which did occur were officially approved. After all, John’s own text was eventually condemned as “heretical and sorcerous” despite the fact that this condemnation was at least a decade in the coming. Nicholas Watson, “John the Monk’s Book of Visions of the Blessed and Undeﬁned Virgin Mary, Mother of God: Two Versions of a Newly Discovered Ritual Magic Text.” Claire Fanger, ed. Conjur ing Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic. (Thropp, UK: Sutton Publishing, 1998), 164.


\(^{32}\) Ibid., 174.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 193-194.
line of religion, perhaps sometimes slipping beyond the horizon of orthodox religion, but by and large keeping a steady course, one beside the other. In the historical moment these horizons would most often blend into one, yet from the outsider’s vantage point, the traces of the “separate” horizons may be identified by watching for those points at which they separate or return together. As individuals like John of Morigny make clear, one person may exist, simultaneously along both lines. Problematic though it may be, John’s position is best studied by the use of magic “in second-order, theoretical, academic discourse.” Because John’s text and the events it recounts inhabit licit, illicit, and even a middle range of sanctity, the dynamics of these various articulations of religiosity must be teased out, as much as this is possible. Were the Liber visionum to maintain a stable position such a separation of strands would be unnecessary – but it is this complex position of the text which so utterly complicates the methodological and definitional work which must precede the contextualization of the Liber visionum. The construction of John’s position along these intersecting lines, however, is best attempted through a lens of medieval culture rather than of modern academic debate.

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In his book, Dreaming in the Middle Ages, Steven F. Kruger argues for the profound middleness or betweeness of dreams. It is this middleness with which I believe John is best aligned. His entangled position betwixt and between the categories of magic and religion is analogous to the position of dreams in antiquity and the Middle Ages. As such, the previously articulated middle ground of the dream may be used to more firmly position John within his own taxonomic space.

Typologies of dreams remained relatively constant from late antiquity through the medieval period. Macrobius’ Commentary on the Dream of Scipio and Calcidius’ Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus, both written in the fifth century AD, set out detailed categorizations of dreams. These schemas

34 Ibid., 218.
35 And in so doing necessitates the articulation of provisional boundaries between magic and religion.
range in an ascending scale from corporeal dreams, which are those dreams prompted by the body, as, for example, a dream prompted by hunger, to oracular dreams which derive from divine or supernatural figures. In these early articulations, Kruger sees dreams as inhabiting a middle ground. He writes: “Neither wholly of this earth nor of the heavens, dreams, like soul, are able to navigate that middle realm where connections between corporeal and incorporeal are forged, where the relationship between the ideal and the physical is defined. Dreams can thus explore a wide range of human and universal experience, from the most exalted to the most debased. The purely mundane dream is locked into the realm of earth, while the dream of divine revelation soars to the heavens” The theories which granted this intermediary position to the dream were not lost in the Middle Ages. In fact both The Commentary on the Dream of Scipio, and The Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus were used as textbooks throughout the Middle Ages. The late antique, neoplatonic theories of Macrobius and Calcidius were revised by the fathers of the church, most notably Augustine (354-430) and Gregory the Great (540-604). These authors injected their concern with demons and angels, along with a belief in the inherently sinful nature of man, into their texts while retaining the concept of a multi-leveled classification of dreaming.

With the advent of Christianity and its tension between God and the devil, heaven and hell, or the sinners and the saved, it might be expected that dreams would lose some of their range and surrender the middle ground. But this did not happen: “for Christian writers, the dream could play a role in either divine revelation or demonic seduction. Late-antique authorities described dreams in terms of dualities; yet, they did not reduce the dream to a set of black and white oppositions. Certain types of dream … combine opposed qualities: the dream can be simultaneously fictional and true, or can arise from both internal and external causes. Indeed, in practice, dreaming most often expresses itself as an experience of

37 Ibid., 34.
38 Ibid., 58-59.
39 Ibid., 44.
middleness.” As Kruger points out, this middleness makes the study of dreams the perfect place from which to analyze the binaries which lie to either side of the dream.

Like Macrobius and Calcidius, the writings of Augustine and Gregory would be passed on to the educated of the Middle Ages to provide the primary sources for a number of lesser medieval compilers and amenders of dream theory. And so it would seem that John, despite his protestations that he “suffered many poverties in books and exemplars” had a grounding in the theory of dreams. This is crucially important as most of the visions contained within the Liber visionum – those visions alternately named by Fanger and Watson as mystic or magical – take place in dreams. His first vision, which he believed to be of primary importance in providing a context for his subsequent visions, clearly took place in a dream. At its end he writes “I was placed in such tranquility I immediately woke up.” This is not unusual, as most of John’s visions end with the phrase, “and I woke up.” In several other dreams he makes it still clearer that the visions did indeed occur in a dream state by mentioning that he got into bed before the vision began, as in the fourth vision in which he writes: “…In the night after twilight, after uttering a certain prayer from this book which is called the Signum Gracie I immediately extinguished my candle and got into my bed, and when I was lying down I fell into an ecstasy.” This clarity in identifying his visions as occurring during sleep is surprising as, while the possible divinity of dreams was maintained in the Middle Ages, such dreams were expected to occur infrequently and, according to some, only in the case of saints. Additionally, certain authors, such as Hildegard of Bingen, began to stress the

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40 Ibid., 65.
41 Ibid., 60-61.
43 Ibid., 171.
44 Ibid., 172.
46 While the role of visionary dreams was lessened in the later middle ages, the location of bed and sleeping chamber were frequently used in monastic writings. However, this use was constrained to creative vision and the process Mary Carruthers refers to as “invention.” Lying down “was among the postures that were commonly thought to induce the mental concentration necessary for ‘memory work,’ recollective, memorative composition” (173-174). This type of meditation and the visions which it produced were, however, clearly not associated with sleeping, but with meditation and composition (173-174). Nevertheless, some ambivalence was possible, as in the case of the Vision of Wetti, composed in 824 which notes that the visionary in question was “resting on his bed not asleep but with his eyes closed…” (180). This firm affirmation of the waking
correspondence between the morality of the dreamer and the level of divine involvement likely in a dream.47

John himself in writing of his immorality and his dealings with the Ars Notoria illustrates his willingness to step outside the boundaries of proper Christian behavior. But for John to write of his sinful nature does not necessarily mean that he was seen as an unholy individual, or even that he saw himself in this light. As Aviad Kleinberg recounts in his history of medieval sainthood, even for those recognized as saintly during life, a strong invective towards humbleness existed. “The saints themselves were often torn between a desire to preserve their deeds (or at least the manifestations of God’s work in them), and an uneasiness with the praise implied in the process of recording, and the damage it could do to their souls and to their reputations.”48 Given the secular aims of John’s text (the attainment of the seven liberal arts), it does not seem that he was moving towards sainthood. But this same dynamic between the desire to record and spread a set of teachings and experiences, and a worry over the possibility that others would see this desire as prideful is clearly evident within the Liber visionum. And so, the reader should not see John’s avowals of his own sinfulness as meant to place him outside of the boundaries of orthodox religion but, in fact, as aligning him strongly with traditional methods of textually verifying sanctity. Despite this moment of conformity, with its implication that John was not quite as sinful as he claimed,49 late-medieval dream theories make both the frequency and purpose (i.e. the attainment of the liberal arts) of his dreams anomalous.

47 Steven F. Kruger, Dreaming in the Middle Ages. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 76.
49 And so was able to experience divine dreams, under Hildegard of Bingen’s criteria.
The incorporation of Aristotelian dream theory into late-antique neoplatonic and patristic texts had decisively changed earlier traditions of dreams, in which divine revelation was rare, but not unheard of, into a system almost entirely bereft of the likelihood of divine connection in dreams. Aristotle’s theory of dreams emphasized physical or mental causes and almost entirely excluded the possibility of divine intervention. This theory, while it would lessen the involvement of the divine in the medieval dream, could in no way wipe it out altogether. With Augustine and Gregory the Great on the side of divine intervention, the most Aristotelian dream theory could do was rarify the occurrence of divine visions. This, indeed it did. But, despite arguments in the fourteenth century for a lessening role of the divine in dreams, John adamantly asserts that his true and divinely inspired visions did occur in dreams. He deliberately places himself, once again, into that realm of betweeness.

Given this location of John’s visions within the dream world and the hyphenating function of the dream, it seems possible that John’s visions were neither magic nor mysticism, nor even a hybrid of the two. They may have been firmly between the two, without surrendering any of the identity of the middle space. As my title suggested, I see John as a man who does not fit into the “typical” categories of medieval sanctity. He is not a visionary, a mystic, or even a magician. Instead he, like his visions, inhabits the area of betweeness most commonly seen in dreams. It is the possibility of this betweeness that leads me to argue for the retention of the term magic. In locating himself on a middle ground between necromantic practice and mystical ascent, John demonstrates that magic does not have to be a negative reaction to religion and that religion does not have to be bereft of magic. In the Liber visionum, a variety of elements, once classified in opposition to each other, may be unified into a complex interrelation of forces that is simultaneously true to an historical moment and provocative to existing taxonomies within the history of religions. Here there is a necessary instability in the approach; just as John teetered on the brink of heresy and condemnation, so too must the terms of categorization fluctuate.

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51 Ibid., 87.
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