

Zitierhinweis

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Fritz GRAF (tr. Franklin Philip), *Magic in the Ancient World*. Revealing Antiquity 10. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1997. ISBN 0674541510. Pp. vi + 314. \$35.00.

Good general works on magic in the Ancient Mediterranean are rare. The best accounts are in the introductions to collections of texts, such as Betz's translation of the Greek Magic Papyri. Graf's survey is useful and interesting but falls short of being a real introduction. It began as a series of lectures at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, became a German book, was translated and revised in French, and now into English, but still resembles a lecture series. While individual chapters are elaborately organized with subsections marked by italics or small capitals, there is little cross-referential, sequential or over-all organization.

The text has seven chapters, as well as endnotes, a medium-sized bibliography and six page index. Chapter One, "Introduction" surveys research on Greek and Roman magic by classicists and anthropologists. Graf describes the sources, primarily excavated græco-roman curse tablets and magical papyri from græco-roman Egypt. He also gives a useful survey of anthropological interpretations of magic, up to authors as recent as Tambiah. Graf concludes by telling us he will use the approach of Marcel Mauss, calling "magic" whatever Greeks and Romans called "magic". He rejects Frazer's approach of imposed modern categories, particularly sharp distinctions between magic, science and religion.

His vague definition of magic led Graf to seek a Greek and Roman definition of "magic," in Chapter Two, "Naming the Magician". This chapter is rather elaborately organized, with separate sections on Greek terminology (pp. 20-36) and Roman (pp. 36-60), each with several subsections. He concentrates on the words *μαγος/magus*, *μαγεια/magia* which came into each Greek and Latin at definite times, and compares the semantic overlaps. In Greece, "magic" became a category of religion in the late Archaic period, at about the same time that science and philosophy became separate categories. "Magic" as word and category first appears in late Republic didactic poetry, adopted from Greek Alexandria. In each society it was marginal, performed by somewhat marginal people. Frazer had precursors in antiquity, such as Plato and Hippocrates.

This leads to the subject matter of Chapter Three, "Portrait of the Magician Seen from Outside". What did Greeks or Romans picture when they thought of a magician? Graf concentrates on the two accounts

of trials for magic which come down to us, both from Roman sources. In the first, from Pliny's *Natural History*, set in the second century BC, C. Furius Cresimus, a freedman was accused of stealing his neighbours' crops magically. He brought his farm tools to court, said they were his magic, and was acquitted. Far more attention is given to the remarkable *Apology* of the second century AD writer, Apuleius, accused by rivals of using love magic to persuade a rich widow to marry him. *Apology* is his defence speech to the court. In describing accusations against him and then explaining suspicious actions as scientific research into, e.g., fish anatomy, he shows the ambiguous beliefs of relatively well-educated Romans. In each case, the accused was a prosperous outsider, resented by local elites. The defence given was a mundane explanation of actions, e.g., hard work, scientific research, technical knowledge.

Chapter Four, "How to Become a Magician: the Rites of Initiation" tells us that magicians were believed to come from Egypt and were also associated with Greek mystery cults. One became a magician by seeking and finding a special relationship with the gods, ending with the acquisition of a divine assistant, like Aladdin's genie or Socrates' δαίμονιον. Distinction between legitimate private religion and magic was unclear. There are genuine similarities in language and in assumptions between the magic papyri and texts from mystery cults, but magicians were more likely to be solitary while μύσται were usually members of groups.

Chapter Five, "Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls" mostly concerns practices from curse tablets. A chief purpose was to "bind" someone, e.g., to prevent court testimony or to force someone to have sex. Typically tablets on lead survive, although other media such as papyrus and wood were probably common. Lead sheets were rolled, nail pierced, and deposited underground, as part of associated rituals. He then describes "Voodoo dolls" with pins stuck in various body parts. Graf believes that many aspects of the theory and practice came from Mesopotamia. People suspected they had been "bound" magically because of mental or physical illness or sudden death. If a man forgot his speech for defence or a woman developed a passion for an inappropriate man, magic was a plausible explanation. A usual recourse was to find and destroy tablets, although there were alternatives in archaic and classical times.

Chapter Six, "Literary Representations of Magic" deals with descriptions of magical practice and of magicians in *belles lettres*, particularly the love poets. Theocritus' second idyll features a jilted woman

who turns to magic to regain her lover. A passage in Lucan's epic *Pharsalia* presents Sextus Pompeius consulting the witch Erichtho about the outcome of an approaching battle. Graf also compares these literary portrayals with what we know of actual magical practice. He shows that neither poem is terribly close to reality. Thus, most real love spells are not addressed to women who want their boyfriends back but to men who want wives. Erichtho is an almost super-divine personage, not the average exorcist and slight-of-hand artist seen at country fairs. Both Theocritus and Lucan wrote fantasy for artistic effect. The same was true for most other artists who include magic in their fiction.

In Chapter Seven, "Words and Acts", we return to theoretical considerations, "what is the nature of magic ritual, and, more generally, what makes magic seem something quite specific?" (p. 204). Graf rejects Frazer's concept of sympathy and points to Tambiah's theory of "performativity", a term that Tambiah borrows from linguistics. The goal of magical ritual is ritual performance, rather as the goal of an oath is swearing an oath. The goal of Greek or Roman magicians was to perform rituals which brought them into close divine contact to gain the divinity's help. Magic was thus a religious quest, not just a technical activity, like turning on a computer. There was also divine coercion, which was why Plato condemned magic. In general, coercion was most common in the classical period, when social hierarchy was weak and individual competition was common. A spiritual quest became important in Late Antiquity when society was more hierarchical and people wanted spiritual well-being rather than a competitive political edge.

For what it is, Graf's *Magic in the Ancient World* is not bad. It is not a survey for beginners, nor a specialized monograph. It describes Greek and Roman magic for people already familiar with literary sources and curious about magical practices mentioned therein. It clearly serves a need, since it now exists in three languages, but translations have failed to improve its weak points. For example, Graf fails to explain why he limits himself to only certain practices, "bindings" of curse tablets and magical papyri. He excludes any discussion of astrology although he says that magic and astrology were closely associated (pp. 40-41). He also omits any discussion of Hellenistic Jewish magic.

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