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Frankfurter, David (ed.). *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic*. Religions in the Graeco-Roman world, volume 189. Leiden: Brill, 2019. xx, 797 p. €249,00. ISBN 9789004171572.

M J Geller, ([m.geller@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.geller@ucl.ac.uk))

This highly useful and informative collection of essays both illuminates and somewhat distorts the topic which it intends to guide us through, as it is aiming to define ancient magic while at the same time attempting to avoid the term 'magic'. The book is divided into four Parts consisting of 28 individual contributions. Part 1 provides a general introduction. The theme of Part 2, 'Cultural Constructions of Ambiguous, Unsanctioned, or Illegitimate Ritual', is contentious, since it hardly leaves room for a more balanced presentation of the positive psychological effects of healing or defensive magic. Part 3 on the 'Materials of Ancient Magic' is less controversial, since it deals more with text than with theory. Part 4 on the 'Dimensions of a Category Magic' predominantly concerns late antique Greek and Egyptian magic.

The volume editor, David Frankfurter, explains that the overall concept was inspired by the venerable Dutch scholar Henk Versnel, who argued that 'magic does not exist, nor does religion. What do exist are our definitions of these concepts.'<sup>[1]</sup> The resulting theoretical framework has produced introspective but relatively inconclusive discussions of the meaning of 'magic' within various linguistic, confessional, and geographical or social contexts, without much comparative analysis between systems of magic from Mesopotamia, Iran, Egypt, Greece and Rome. Christian and Jewish magic complicate matters since they span both the Occident and Orient, as well as incorporating a variety of languages (Greek, Coptic, Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, etc.), while other magic from the same region, such as that of the Mandaeans, is unaccounted for. The problem faced by all contributors in each area is how to grapple with the meaning 'magic' in their respective disciplines, given that each contributor has a somewhat different idea of what magic is and how it works.

One general problem with this volume (reflecting the bias of the present reviewer) is the lack of balance in guiding us through 'ancient magic', since the treatment of Mesopotamian magic on the whole is one-sided and inadequate. Daniel

Schwemer's chapter is the only contribution dedicated to Mesopotamian magic. While Schwemer is fully aware of the broader dimensions of magic, his graphic description of witchcraft and sorcery avoids the term 'magic' and successfully conforms to the editor's guidelines of presenting 'ambiguous, unsanctioned, or illegitimate ritual'.

Nevertheless, any reader would be forgiven for thinking that Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Hittites, and other ethnicities only indulged in illicit sorcery and witchcraft rituals, without any interest in therapeutic or healing magic. In fact, Mesopotamia boasts extensive corpora of licit magic in cuneiform and alphabetic scripts, rivalling all of the other regions covered by this volume.<sup>[2]</sup> It is worth noting that selected readings in all eight chapters of Part 4 lack a single reference to Mesopotamia, although Mesopotamian magic provides a potentially rich source of documentation for topics treated in this section, such as magic of the spoken word and of writing and materiality, or magic in relation to local authority and social tensions.

Another weakness of this book's conceptual framework is the lack of synergies between the various disciplines covered. For instance, Schwemer's essay refers to the key Akkadian term *āšipūtu*, which is the closest one gets to a general term for 'magic' in Mesopotamian contexts, in contrast to the specific word *kišpu* for 'sorcery'. Understanding these terms has ramifications for other systems of magic treated in this volume. The term *āšipūtu* has only one attested meaning, indicating all of the collected activities of the magic expert (usually a priest), the *āšipu*, often translated as 'exorcist', for want of a better term. The duties of the *āšipu* are clearly set out in a manual of *āšipūtu*, which includes cultic duties in the temple as well as exorcism and many types of rituals for healing illnesses and righting wrongs, but this important text is omitted in the present volume.<sup>[3]</sup> The same type of definition of 'magic' appears in other contexts as well, as in Greek. Fritz Graf's earlier work on magic simply and correctly states that 'magic' represents 'the art of the *magos, magus*',<sup>[4]</sup> which is a much sharper definition of the term than anything offered by Graf in his chapter on 'Greece' in the present volume. Furthermore, while Ab de Jong's chapter on 'Iran' leaves us with no clear image of Persian magic, a Sassanian Jewish text solves the problem, defining an Aramaic term '*mgušta*' 'Magianism' as either 'blasphemy' or 'sorcery' (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 75a). Thus, in actuality it serves as a term for 'magic'; in essence, this term '*mgušta*' indicates all of the activities of a Persian *magos* (Aramaic '*mguša*' Akk. *magušu* 'Persian priest'), parallel to *āšipūtu* and *mageia* mentioned above. In all of these cases, there was no need for an abstract definition of 'magic', since everyone knew what it was – the collective activities of the expert or magician who dealt in all relevant rituals and practices related to healing, counter-charms, cursing, astrology, annulling bad omens, and many other similar activities.

Yuval Harari's chapter on Ancient Israel and Early Judaism suggests a number of biblical terms for various forms of magical practices, chief among which is *kishūf* or 'sorcery', cognate to Akk. *kišpu*, discussed by Schwemer. This means that the Bible actually lacks any neutral term of 'magic', and the illicit nature of necromancy and similar terms mentioned in the Bible are all coloured by associations with sorcery, rather than with therapeutic magic. The lack of terminology for licit magic in the Bible (and subsequently later Jewish sources) reflects the fact that the Pentateuch did not record any specifically designated programme for healing or protection, although

Israelite priests took action against perceived impurities. In other words, there was no general term for 'magic' in the absence of a term for 'magician'.

The evidence from Egypt (the land of father earth and mother sky) shows the opposite pattern. According to Jacco Dieleman's contribution on 'Egypt', the term *heka* (formerly translated as 'magic') should now be understood as a 'force with the ability to change the course of nature' (p. 96, not a bad definition of magic!). However, this same *heka* belonging to divinities could also be harnessed by humans through esoteric spells and rituals. The term *heka* was also the name of a deity, whose presence was essential for the Egyptian life-death-rebirth cycle, but the term also applied to '*heka-workers*' or ritualists who could use these powers for hostile purposes (p. 98). Hence, the pattern noted elsewhere (*mageia, magos*) does not apply to Egypt.

There is general agreement among contributors that magic tends to be misogynistic and often reflects alien origins, or 'the Other'. It appears to be a commonplace that witches are more popular than warlocks, and such attitudes are also reflected in folklore, as in the famous Midrash that Lilith was originally Adam's repudiated first wife; similarly, in Mesopotamia, the baby-strangling demon Lamaštu was the daughter of Anu (god of heaven), hence a girl from a good family who later turned bad. The second theme, of magic representing 'the Other', may not always apply as explained. Harari's remarks refer to magical practices called *darkey ha-amori* or 'Amorite practices' (p. 164), which also include abnormal behaviour (not mentioned by Harari), such as the wife urinating into the cooking pot or men and women exchanging names (perhaps reflecting cross-dressing).<sup>[5]</sup> The latter reference is particularly interesting in the light of an Akkadian proverb, which reads, 'The Amorite says to his wife, you will be the man, I will be the woman.'<sup>[6]</sup> The point is that so-called 'Amorite ways' not only caricature alien ('other') but also older traditional Near Eastern practices which were integral parts of the social and cultural fabric.

In Part 3, Gideon Bohak's instructive survey of 'Jewish Amulets, Magic Bowls, and Manuals' covers a range of magical texts under the rubric of Jewish magic, but amulets from Palestine were unknown to the Jews of Babylonia, nor do spells on Babylonian magic bowls ever appear in magical texts from Palestine or even in the Cairo Genizah. An example of the disconnect is the interesting fact that wonder-working or miracle-healing Rabbis mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud always lived in Palestine rather than in Mesopotamia, which reflects the broader picture that earlier cuneiform magical texts from Babylonia never refer to charismatic healers by name or reputation.

The fact that languages of the ancient Mediterranean and Near East often lacked words for 'magic' or 'religion' which conform to our modern terminology does not negate the existence of these fundamental social enterprises. The concept of magic (even without any associated terms) was easy enough to comprehend in antiquity as a system of ritual and recitations which had the power to alter the natural and social environment; medicines and pharmacy could be accommodated within this framework, as well as curses, oaths, and measures to counteract dangers posed by demons, ghosts, bad omens, or aggressive magic initiated by others.

One of the contrasting features of the modern discourse on magic between Classical and Near Eastern scholars is the treatment of divination, which tends to be treated as a

and Near Eastern scholars is the treatment of divination, which tends to be treated as a subset of magic in the Greco-Roman world but as a completely separate highly developed discipline (i.e. forecasting the future) in Mesopotamia. In Akkadian texts, the *technē* of magic could be resorted to when divination (forecasting) produced threatening results; similarly, prognosis and diagnosis of disease symptoms (forecasting) led to the employment of prescriptions and remedies (healing arts). The vast Akkadian textual corpora on various types of divination (chief among which are extispicy and astrology)[7] usually belonged to separate classes of professional experts, such as the *barû*-seer or scribes designated as astrologers.[8] Although some genres related to divination belonged to the bailiwick of the *āšipu*-exorcist (such as interpreting medical symptoms and dream interpretation), the distinctions between divination and magic are easily distinguishable in Akkadian sources, without much room for confusing the two distinctive genres. The coalescing of magic and divination partly arises from the reputation of *magoi* as astrologers (as in the New Testament), but it is instructive that Ab de Jong never refers to Persian priests in this way in his chapter on 'Iran'.[9] Nevertheless, there is a distinct advantage in factoring out divination when defining magic, since the process of forecasting events has little to do with the putative ability to influence events.

This volume contains numerous valuable insights, and the editor, David Frankfurter, deserves much credit for gathering so many informative essays on this provocative topic. Under the circumstances, this volume provides a basis for continuing the discussion and debate on the nature, aims, and functions of magic in the ancient world.

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[1] See p. 605, citing Versnel's comments in *Numen* 38, 1991, 177.

[2] The large corpora of *Utukkū Lemnūtu* and *Lamaštu* incantations are mentioned by Roy Kotansky (p. 516-518) but only in relation to amulets.

[3] The Exorcist's Manual is mentioned in passing by Schwemer, p. 40. For a recent treatment of this text, see E. Frahm, 'The Exorcist's Manual: Structure, language, *Sitz im Leben*', in *Sources of Evil*, ed. G. van Buylaere *et al.* (Leiden; Boston, 2018).

[4] F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge MA.; London), 20.

[5] *hw bšmh why' bšmw*, 'he with her name and she with his name', Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 67b.

[6] See W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford, 1967), 226, 230.

[7] There is a vast literature on this topic (not mentioned in the present volume under review); the most recent of which is S. M. Maul, *The Art of Divination in the Ancient Near East* (Waco, 2018). See also D. Furley and V. Gysenbergh, *Reading the Liver* (Tübingen 2015), for Babylonian extispicy in Greek.

[8] These are known as scribes of *Enūma Anu Enlil*, a large compendium astrological omens.

[9] Selected readings for Iran could have included the article on 'Magic' in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* by A. Panaino (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/magic-i-magical-elements-in-the-avesta-and-nerang-literature>).

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