



and the book's argument is not always evident. J. argues in this chapter for the remarkable consistency of *soteria* from the archaic period to the fourth century CE, but appears at times to downplay the significant changes it undergoes, particularly with the addition of its eschatological meaning in Christian contexts. Secondly, the broad scope of the investigation – especially when departing from the lexical line of analysis – sometimes risks collapsing the diversity of cases examined. For instance, the differences between awarding Soter titles to Hellenistic kings, often as praise epithets, and the appeal to a god through a name that aims to identify or emphasise a divine sphere of action could have been explored more thoroughly. Yet these points do not detract from the value of the work, which is an impressive and insightful study that makes a significant contribution to our understanding not only of who the Greeks appealed to as saviours, but why they did so.

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## MAGIC AND SCENT

AGER (B. K.) *The Scent of Ancient Magic*. Pp. xii + 225. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022. Cased, US\$75. ISBN: 978-0-472-13302-4.

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The central thesis of this volume is that in 'Greek and Roman culture, scent was sometimes equated with magic' (p. 34). Notwithstanding the substantial body of evidence from Graeco-Roman antiquity attesting to the use of scented ingredients as a means of effecting change in the world, it is remarkable that scent and its relationship with ancient magic has yet to receive sustained scholarly attention. The primary reason for this, as A. points out in the introductory chapter, is that past studies of Graeco-Roman magic have been dominated by philological approaches (p. 31). Researchers in the field have traditionally looked to the textual sources such as the Greek magical papyri, the Orphic gold tablets and lead curse tablets in order to apply literary-focused theories. In this volume A. deviates from these traditional scholarly approaches to provide a fresh and innovative perspective on ancient magic. By taking a holistic sensory approach to the evidence in order to 'decenter the spoken and written word in the study of ritual' (p. 42), A. teases out of the ancient sources new and nuanced insights into the embodied sensory experience of ancient magical practices that are not immediately discernible through philological analysis alone. Given contemporary trends in Classics, adjacent fields and the social sciences that have seen sustained interest in sensory studies over the last decade, otherwise known as the 'sensory turn', A.'s olfactory analysis of ancient magic is not only relevant but also a timely and welcome contribution to this field of research.

The volume is presented in six chapters, including an epilogue. In the substantial and contextually detailed introductory chapter, 'The Breath of the Leopard: Scent and Magic', A. discusses the complex nature and sensory elusiveness of ancient magic. The opaque and intangible experience at the specific 'moment of the magic itself' (p. 3) is, as A. suggests, a period of uncertainty, albeit one framed by an arguably understandable and sensorially perceivable process of cause and effect; for example, the multi-sensory experience

generated during the creation and subsequent deposition of a *defixio* is both tangible and understandable to an ancient onlooker, the magic itself is not. It is in this interim period of perceptual uncertainty between cause and effect where A. situates her study of scent.

The remainder of Chapter 1 is predominantly taken up by a thorough anthropological and sociological literature review, which provides a firm foundation for the study. A.'s comprehensive discussion of the material demonstrates how renewed interest in the sensorium brought about by the so-called 'anthropology of the senses' of the 1980s facilitated the rejection of historic Eurocentric modes of sensory perception (e.g. the Western pentad sensory model, elevating sight over other sensory inputs), on account that these constructs were overly restrictive and failed to consider different sensory hierarchies across different societies and cultures. Indeed, where past anthropological studies have focused their attention on Western societies, A. deploys an impressive selection of cross-cultural examples throughout her contextual analysis to effectively highlight that sensory perception is an inherently cultural act. The final section of Chapter 1 discusses the aims of the volume and briefly touches upon the difficulties of providing a universal definition of ancient magic, as to do so would, in A.'s words, 'give a false impression of uniformity and coherence over the course of centuries of Greco-Roman history' (p. 34). This, however, does not seem to pose a problem for A., given that it facilitates an expansive rather than a restrictive approach to the ancient evidence that takes into account potential overlaps between ancient magic and activities such as 'cooking, medicine, and normative temple practices' (p. 41).

Chapter 2, 'Fragrant Panacea: Scent and Power', considers the efficacy of scent derived from odoriferous plants. Scented plants were used in many ways in Graeco-Roman antiquity; they were potentially powerful and possibly dangerous and had both magical and medical applications, for example in fumigations (pp. 47–8). A. interrogates a range of ancient sources including the Byzantine *Geoponica*, the medical treatises of the Hippocratic corpus, Aelian's *On the Nature of Animals* and Pliny's *Natural History* to emphasise the perceived power of scent whilst maintaining that efficacy, be it scientific or supernatural, was judged and established intellectually according to the world view of the user. Chapter 3, 'Scent in the Magical Papyri', provides a rich sensory evaluation of the uses of scent as described in the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (PGM). A.'s detailed analysis of the evidence leads her to the conclusion that for elite magicians from Roman Egypt scent was a sensory manifestation of control (p. 101); for example, clouds of incense could be used to create sensory boundaries and delineate ritual space and time (p. 43), alternatively under the correct circumstances scented smoke could be used maliciously to compel an individual to obey a magician (p. 92). The fourth and fifth chapters, 'Perfumed Enchantments: the Smell of Witches' Magic' and 'Rot and Roses: the Smell of Witches', move away from examining the practices of magicians, to consider literary representations of witches in both Greek and Roman sources, exploring in turn the scent of witches' magic and the scent of their bodies. The sixth and last chapter, 'Scented Space, Scenting Space', addresses the relationship between odours, gods and space, and specifically considers how scent was used as a vehicle to imbue a place or object with scientific, religious or magical efficacy. In literature 'the gods themselves were believed to smell fragrant' (p. 174), as were their 'birthplaces, homes, or favoured cities and islands' (p. 179). Scent could also be used to create a ritual space (p. 184) in both public and private contexts, while the pervasive nature of scent could function as an indicator of sacred space over time (p. 186).

Overall, the volume is well presented and thoroughly researched. The anthropological and sociological approaches discussed in Chapter 1 provide a robust and consistent methodological framework for A.'s sensory analysis of the relationship between scent and ancient magic; indeed, this particular section of the volume is a highlight. However,

A.'s reluctance to commit to a more definitive definition of magic from the outset, which perhaps would have been possible had this study not spanned such a wide expanse of Graeco-Roman history, predisposes some of the arguments to being more far-reaching than the boundaries of magic proper would arguably allow. That being said, considering the chronological scope of the work, A. expertly deploys and critically analyses a variety of genres of ancient sources to navigate effectively the perceived ambiguity of both scent and ancient magic over time and to provide a unique and engaging sensory perspective on the topic. The epilogue provides a succinct but satisfying conclusion by drawing together the main threads of the argument to address the central thesis. The suggestions for further research focusing on the sensory elements of ancient magic are thought-provoking and sound, as they call for a better acknowledgement and critical understanding of sensory perception across diverse cultural contexts. Finally, the bibliography is extensive and well presented. In conclusion, A.'s volume achieves its stated objectives and will be of particular interest to researchers in the fields of ancient magic and sensory studies alike.

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## THE GODDESS ISIS

BRICAULT (L.) *Isis Pelagia: Images, Names and Cults of a Goddess of the Seas*. Translated by Gil H. Renberg. (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 190.) Pp. xviii + 384, b/w & colour ills, map. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020 (originally published as *Isis, dame des flots*, 2006). Cased, €149, US\$179. ISBN: 978-90-04-41389-4.  
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B., with his numerous and successive publications, has been stirring the waters of the study of Egyptian religions for two decades now, creating concentric waves that reach the shores of scholarship and making more people into isiacologists (*isiacologues*). In this sea of publications B. has pitched the volume under review. This is a completely reworked version in English of a book that initially appeared in French, *Isis, dame des flots* (2006). The translation of the enhanced version is due to Renberg, a seasoned scholar of ancient religions. When the original version was published in 2006, only a few of B.'s important documentary collections had come to light, notably *Atlas de la diffusion des cultes isiaques* (2001) and *Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques* (2005); his *Sylloge nummorum religionis isiacae et sarapiacae* would only come out in 2008. Apart from multiplying his publications in the last 20 years, B. has been involved directly or indirectly in major projects concerning Isiac studies: in some of the volumes of the *Roman Provincial Coinage* series, four volumes of the series *Bibliotheca Isiaca* and the *Supplements* thereto, a number of proceedings of international colloquia on Isiac studies and, finally, a *Thesaurus iconographicus cultuum isiacorum*. With this work B. has, if not created, certainly reshaped an entire field of study.

The book reviewed here, with 177 figures and 20 tables with typologies of coin types and a handy map, is an example of the renewal that B.'s work has brought about in the field. The