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STATE OF PLAY: MAGIC

RADCLIFFE EDMONDS



THIS IS A MARVELOUS TIME FOR MAGIC, as the scholarship on ancient magic moves from the margins to the mainstream. Twice in the past three years, the Society for Classical Studies has selected works on magic for its prestigious Goodwin Award: in 2023 *The Greco-Egyptian Magical Formularies: Libraries, Books, and Individual Recipes*, edited by Christopher A. Faraone and Sofía Torallas Tovar; and in 2025 *In Blood and Ashes: Curse Tablets and Binding Spells in Ancient Greece* by Jessica Lamont.¹ There has been an extraordinary boom in the scholarship in this subfield in recent years; 2019 saw the publication of no less than three works providing an overview of the field, Lindsay Watson's short *Magic in Ancient Greece and Rome* (MAGR), my own *Drawing Down the Moon: Magic in the Ancient Greco-Roman World* (DDM), and David Frankfurter's massive edited volume, *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic* (GSAM).² A plethora of publications has appeared as well, from edited volumes of broader scope to specialized studies of smells to detailed corpora of material evidence.

The development of these corpora took place in the midst of the debates over the origins of Christianity within the new disciplines of history of religions and anthropology but also within the debates over the history of science. Magic characteristically formed the “other” that helped define these categories of “religion” and “science.” The late 20th century

¹ Faraone and Torallas Tovar 2022c; Lamont 2023.

² Watson 2019, Edmonds 2019, Frankfurter 2019.

saw a re-examination of all these categories, leading to the deconstruction and reformulation of the classifications and prompting new attention to the materials that had been labeled magic. New anthropological models brought new methods of study to the practices labeled magic, while new approaches to literary criticism opened new avenues for understanding the literary depictions of magic.

The scholarship of the last ten years primarily involves the analysis of new material evidence for “active magic” practices, in contrast to reworking the study of the literary imaginations of magic that have come down through the tradition. With the aid of new technological advances, enormous progress is being made in updating, expanding, and systematizing the corpora of magical evidence first put together over a century ago, especially the defixiones (curses often inscribed on lead), gem amulets, and the magical formularies (collections on papyrus rolls and codices of instructions for ritual practice). The scholarship on magic is characterized by interdisciplinary approaches and international collaborations; one recent volume is charmingly characterized by its editor as “wantonly interdisciplinary.”³ Renewed attention to the physical evidence has spurred approaches using the “material turn,” as the defixiones, amulets, and formularies are studied not simply as bearers of texts but as objects demanding analysis in their materiality. Another feature of recent work has been attention to the complex cultural contexts in which the evidence is produced, especially the cross-cultural negotiations in the ancient Mediterranean world where many languages and ritual traditions mingle.⁴

Questions linger, however, about the meaning of the term itself: what is this “magic” that we study? How does this “magic” relate to the categories formed by the earlier scholars of magic, with all the baggage of their imperialist, colonialist, and Christianity-centered ideas? Do the materials we group together in our corpora relate to one another in the ways that their ancient producers saw their relations? Recent scholarship continues to grapple with these problems of definition even while making great progress in the analysis of materials with the aid of technological advances.

DEFIXIONES

That Jessica Lamont’s study of curse tablets and binding spells, *In Blood and Ashes*, recently won the Goodwin Award from the Society for Classical Studies shows how studies of magic have moved into the mainstream

³ Johnston and Gardiner 2023, 2.

⁴ E.g., Edmonds, Lopez-Ruiz, and Torallas Tovar 2024.

of Classical scholarship; even a decade earlier, her excellent book would not have received the recognition it deserves. Lamont's work builds upon some remarkable advances in the creation or revision of corpora of defixiones, as well as studies that focus on the materiality of this evidence and analyses of their different cultural contexts.

The corpus of defixiones from Classical Attica, which provided one of the first collections of curses for study, has just recently been re-edited and updated by Jaime Curbera in *IG II/III*³ 8, 1, now in an electronic edition that includes translations into German and English, making these texts more accessible to scholars.⁵ While the Attic texts come from a context that is more richly documented in other regards, many of the new corpora of defixiones come from other contexts less detailed in our Athenocentric sources. Updating the 2008 work of Amina Kropp, both Daniela Urbanová's 2018 publication and the massive 2022 *Sylloge* of Celia Sánchez Natalías collect defixiones from the "Latin West." Urbanová provides a typology of cursing and develops Kropp's categories of content for curses, but she presents the evidence regionally.⁶ Sánchez Natalías likewise sorts by region and categories of content, but she provides a much larger corpus (520 rather than Urbanová's 309 or Kropp's 382) with line drawings from autopsy of most of the tablets, as well as information about the archaeological context of the find and the material condition of the tablet. Alexey Belousov in 2021 published a small corpus of 25 defixiones from the region of Olbia Pontica, with drawings and even some color photographs, but Roger Tomlin's superb publication in 2024 of 87 tablets from Uley in Britain provides the best treatments of the evidence, with detailed commentary accompanying text and translation, along with drawings and high-quality images. Tomlin set the standard for the publication of defixiones with his 1988 work on the tablets from Bath, a work that was decades ahead of its time in methodology, and his most recent publication takes advantage of new technological advances to provide an even better scholarly study.

All these corpora remain disjointed, however, with overlaps and omissions that still make it difficult for a scholar to survey all the potential evidence for a study of the defixiones. A database, *Thesaurus Defixionum*, attempts to fill the need for a comprehensive corpus, but it remains a

⁵ [https://telota.bbaw.de/ig/digitale-edition/inschrift/IG II_III%C2%B3 8, 1, 1](https://telota.bbaw.de/ig/digitale-edition/inschrift/IG_II_III%C2%B3_8_1_1). The corpus still awaits a more extensive commentary and discussion, but a project to provide that analysis is under way under the auspices of Werner Riess, T. H. M. Gellar-Goad, and Zinon Papakonstantinou.

⁶ i.e., non-specific, legal, athletic, amatory, other competitive contexts, and prayers for justice. See Urbanová 2018, 20.

work in progress. Werner Riess salvaged *TheDefix* from the remains of an earlier database, *TheDeMa* (*Thesaurus Defixionum Magdeburgensis*) after the funding was pulled from the project by the University of Magdeburg in 2019, but the database, which includes over 1700 defixiones, remains difficult to use. Scholars had started to cite defixiones by their *TheDeMa* numbers, and such a standard reference would greatly facilitate the scholarship in this area, so it is to be hoped that funding can be found to refurbish and expand the *TheDefix* database.⁷

Recent scholarship has built upon these advances in the body of evidence. All three of the recent overviews include substantial sections on defixiones; both DDM and MAGR include chapters on curses (with separate chapters on erotic curses), while GSAM has essays by Esther Eidinow on defixiones and the social contexts of cursing, in addition to a piece by Drew Wilburn on figurines and other material elements of curse practice. Lamont's work, *In Blood and Ashes*, is exemplary in its attention both to the material analyses and to the historical and cultural contexts of production. Lamont traces the development of the technology of defixiones from the earliest evidence of lead curse tablets in 6th-century Sicily and its spread across the Mediterranean and even to the Black Sea, with particular attention to the spread of the epigraphic habit in various realms of Greek culture (although she also notes the significance of the availability of lead from the silver mines near Athens in the concentration of evidence from Attica). Lamont also examines the roots of this textual tradition of cursing in an oral hexametric tradition, building on the fundamental work of Faraone and bringing in new evidence, including the hexametrical bit in some recently discovered defixiones that provides her study with its name.⁸

Other scholarship focuses on the technical and material aspects of the defixiones, including iconography, or on the different social and historical contexts in which they were produced.⁹ Faraone has edited four volumes of essays on "Curses in Context" that explore curses in different contexts, from Classical and Hellenistic Greece through the Roman Empire.¹⁰ Zinon Papakonstantinou provides a study of curses in what is

⁷ *TheDefix*: https://heurist.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/html/heurist/?db=The_dema&website&id=41774. The Corpus of Greek Ritual Norms (CGRN) would provide an excellent model for such a database of epigraphic materials (<http://cgrn.ulg.ac.be/>).

⁸ Cf. Faraone 2021a.

⁹ Bailliot 2024; Martín Hernández 2022a and 2022b. See also the collection edited by Gordon et al. 2020 that focuses on material aspects and includes an appendix with correspondences between the *Sylloge* of Sánchez Natalías and other corpora.

¹⁰ Faraone and Gordon 2019; Faraone 2021b; Faraone and Polinskaya 2021; Faraone and Torallas Tovar 2022a.

perhaps the most richly documented context, the legal and extra-legal disputes in Classical Athens, but Sara Chiarini shifts away from specific historical or geographical contexts to re-examine curses as a particular form of prayer, focusing her attention on the rhetorical devices by which the curser negotiates the relations with the divine power that is to be enacting the curse.¹¹

Chiarini's work raises again the question of whether *defixiones*—or curses more broadly—should always be considered under the label of magic, whether the malevolent intent to harm another makes such curses by definition magical. Many of the recent studies avoid the issue by eschewing the vexed term “magic,” but it remains a valid question whether the prayers for justice against thieves deposited or displayed openly at Bath or Uley or elsewhere are more meaningfully analyzed alongside the *defixiones* secretly deposited in graves or wells that call for the sexual subjugation of a desired woman or the wrecking of a chariot in the upcoming race, rather than alongside votive dedications to divinities in other shrines or temples. The expansion and improvement of the corpus of evidence for *defixiones* has certainly improved our understanding of the particular technologies and practices, but it does not make such questions easier to answer.

AMULETS

The scholarship on amulets has benefited enormously in recent years from the technological advances in digital photography; recent publications of gem amulets sparkle in iridescent arrays of color and sharply defined images of the iconography, in contrast to the line-drawings or pale and smudgy black and white photos in the pioneering work of Campbell Bonner in 1950. Museums across the world have begun to make digital images of their collections available for researchers, facilitating comparative studies of materials that hitherto were available only to scholars who traveled to the museums and won permissions to examine objects that were often not on display. Several publications in the early 2000's, such as Simone Michel's collection of gems from the British Museum and Attilio Mastrocinque's two collections of “gnostic” gems, helped to create a corpus of gem amulets as an object of study, enabling comparative studies of iconography and materials.¹² Nearly all these amulets, however, lack any kind of reliable archaeological context, as such bright, shiny, precious

¹¹ Papakonstantinou 2021; Chiarini 2021.

¹² Michel 2001, Michel 2004, Mastrocinque 2004, Mastrocinque 2008.

objects were collected and hoarded centuries before they ever made it into modern museum collections. As a result, it remains challenging to engage in analysis of chronological and geographical variations as scholars have done for the defixiones.

The creation and expansion of the Campbell Bonner database (<http://cbd.mfab.hu/>) under the guidance of Árpád M. Nagy (Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest) and Véronique Dasen (University Fribourg), along with an international team of scholars, has, since its creation in 2010 to its essential completion in 2020, built up a solid corpus of approximately 5,600 objects. Each item has several digital images (mostly in color and high-resolution) as well as commentary that includes description of the iconography, transcription of any text, and bibliographic and museum collection information. The database is searchable by many features, including museum collection, material of the amulet, iconographic features, and various textual elements, so it provides a foundation for scholarship on these materials that was simply not available previously.

Some of the recent scholarship examines the amulets in the mix of cultural traditions throughout the ancient Mediterranean, exploring the ways that Greek and Roman elements blend with Egyptian, Jewish, and other traditions. Such studies do not, like earlier accounts, see this mixing as a sign of decadence, the rotting of the soul of the Classical world, but rather as a dynamic interplay of traditions and technologies, as older images are re-imagined and re-used with new meanings for new purposes.¹³ While better images permit new studies of the iconography, one of the most important advances these new corpora allow is consideration of the significance of the color and the material (type of stone, metal, etc.) that the amulets present. Attention to the affordances of the specific materials provides insights not just into the symbolic resonances of the materials but also into the conditions and traditions of manufacture, which can help to provide some historical context for these items so often without provenance. The establishment of a corpus that includes the information about the materials should also prompt new attention to textual sources like the ancient manuals on the properties of stones, or the *Kyranides*.¹⁴

GSAM includes a lengthy essay by Dasen and Nagy, outlining many of the issues and possibilities for the study of gem amulets, as well as an essay by Roy Kotansky on textual amulets. DDM includes some discussion of both textual and gem amulets in the chapter on healing and protective

¹³ See, e.g., Endreffy et al. 2019. Bohak's essay in GSAM examines Jewish amuletic traditions.

¹⁴ Martín Hernández 2015 provides one of the few treatments of the *Lithica* after Halleux and Schamp 1985.

amulets, as well as a number of images of the amulets (some of which come directly from the Campbell Bonner database). MAGR, by contrast, does little with these materials. The most important book to come out of the recent surge in studies on amulets is *The Transformation of Greek Amulets in Roman Imperial Times* (2018) by Christopher Faraone, as he makes use of the new data to examine the broader tradition of amulets in the ancient Mediterranean world. Faraone argues that the sudden increase of evidence dated to the Roman Imperial period should not be understood as indicating that the practice arose in this time, but rather as an increase in the visibility and identifiability of the evidence, as the epigraphic habit and certain styles of iconography make the amulets often called magical easier to differentiate from less obviously marked materials that nevertheless served the same functions. Building upon his earlier work on the amulets, both in publications and in the Campbell Bonner database, Faraone contextualizes the use of amulets both historically and cross-culturally, and the volume is lavishly illustrated with high quality images of the amulets.¹⁵

In his discussions of the amulets, Faraone uses the term “magic” in scare quotes and refers to “the wider prejudice that amulets are by definition ‘magic,’ when in fact they perfectly straddle the outdated divide between ‘magic’ and ‘religion.’”¹⁶ Indeed, many of the recent studies of the corpora, like earlier scholarship on the topic, uncritically assume that any object inscribed with incomprehensible words and exotic images must fall into the category of magic. Dasen and Nagy more analytically set out the “etic category” of magical gem as identifiable by its unusual texts, images, and signs, but such a category depends on what a modern scholar thinks significant rather than reflecting the distinctions the ancient users made between ordinary and extraordinary gems. They also refer to the “magical powers” and “amuletic function” of such gems, without ever explaining what distinguishes such powers and functions from other similar objects.¹⁷ The new scholarship on amulets thus still needs to revisit the issue of what counts as magic and for whom.

FORMULARIES

Perhaps the most exciting developments in the scholarship on ancient magic involve the enigmatic recipe books, often referred to as the Greek

¹⁵ See, e.g., Faraone 2012 or the essays in Entwistle et al. 2011.

¹⁶ Faraone 2018, 5.

¹⁷ Dasen and Nagy 2019, 416, 422, etc.

Magical Papyri (*Papyri Magicae Gracae—PGM*) but now more accurately dubbed the Greco-Egyptian Magical Formularies (*GEMF*). These collections of ritual instructions on papyri from Egypt were first gathered by Preisendanz in the early 20th century, but it was the translation and commentary put together by a team of scholars working under the direction of Hans Dieter Betz at the University of Chicago that really sparked the new wave of scholarship on magic at the end of the century. Betz and his team added to Preisendanz's collection not only many newly discovered Greek papyri but also formularies in Demotic Egyptian that had been excluded from Preisendanz's corpus, despite the fact that some were in the same scribal hand as some of the Greek formularies.¹⁸ Starting in 2015, a new research group, *Transmission of Magical Knowledge: The Papyrus Magical Handbooks in Context*, headed by Christopher Faraone and Sofía Torallas Tovar, began work on a new edition of these materials, incorporating texts in Greek, Demotic, and Coptic, with a deliberate focus on consideration of the material aspects of the papyri. The first volume of the Greco-Egyptian Magical Formularies, containing the earliest material, was published in 2022, and the next two volumes, containing the most extensive and elaborate formularies from the 3rd to 5th centuries CE, are in process.¹⁹ This new edition, unlike Preisendanz's, indicates physical features such as the layout of the text on the papyrus, the scribal abbreviations, and the lectional signs used by the scribes to indicate breaks between recipes or the special magical words (*voces magicae*), providing a much clearer picture of the scribal practices involved in the creation of these formularies in late antique Egypt. The careful examination of the materiality of the papyri and the improved edition of texts will furnish the basis for the next generation of scholarship on ancient magic, since these formularies provide the perspective of the practitioners of these rituals in ways that the evidence from the amulets or the defixiones cannot—and without the kinds of distortions involved in the literary representations of magical practices.

The *GEMF* project has indeed already begun to produce such scholarship, including the volume on *Libraries, Books, and Individual*

¹⁸ Betz 1986. Preisendanz also excluded material he considered too Christian or alchemical. Much of the Christian formulary material has been published (and translated) in earlier decades, but the alchemical material remains separated from the other formularies—even in the new *GEMF* collection, despite the fact that the scribal hand for some of the alchemical recipe books is the same as for some of the formularies with “magic” recipes. See further Edmonds 2019, 273.

¹⁹ Faraone and Torallas Tovar 2022b.

Recipes that won the Goodwin Prize in 2023. This volume delves into the construction of these formularies in their form as papyrus rolls or codices, their paleography, and their collecting of recipes, examining the ways in which many of the formularies we have seem to be put together from earlier collections of spells. In addition to studies on particular formularies, this volume also provides the latest research into the collections from which these formularies may have come, looking at both the shared scribal hands that produced them and the scanty information about their discoveries and sales (a sensational tale in itself!). The research into these elaborate formularies and their construction has produced another recent volume, on the most complex of the spellbooks (*PGM IV = GEMF 57*).²⁰

So rapid has the progress been on this material that the overviews that appeared in 2019 are already somewhat out of date. Both DDM and MAGR provide brief accounts of the formularies that introduce the evidence, but neither explores these remarkable texts at great length in themselves. The excellent essay by Jacco Dieleman in GSAM on the formularies and their collection has been superseded by the chapters in the *GEMF Libraries* volume. Other recent work draws on the *GEMF* project, but the full impact of this new scholarship has yet to be felt.²¹

RE-DEFINITIONS OF MAGIC

The editors of the *GEMF* volumes carefully note that the term “magical” in the title should be understood as an etic term, useful primarily for signaling to other modern scholars “private speech-acts and rituals designed for protection, cursing, erotic conquest and divination.”²² Such hesitation over the use of the term “magic” is characteristic of the current state of play in the scholarship on magic; all three of the recent overviews—and most of the other volumes mentioned here—include some discussion of the problem of how to understand the term “magic.” As Joseph Sanzo points out, in his 2020 essay on “Deconstructing the Deconstructionists,” this hesitation stems from the dismantling of older ideas of magic during the surge of studies on magic in the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st. The polemical usage of the term to disparage the beliefs and practices of “primitive” peoples,

²⁰ Faraone and Torallas Tovar 2022c.

²¹ Martín Hernández 2022a; Coulon and Dosoo 2022.

²² Faraone and Torallas Tovar 2022b, xx. The choice of the term “formulary” correlates to the avoidance of terms such as spellbook or spell in the translations.

elaborated so influentially in colonialist anthropologies such as those of Frazer, with its roots in theological controversies within Christianity, has freighted the term with so much baggage that many scholars argued that it should be removed entirely from scholarly discourse. Some advocated for the use of alternative terms, such as “ritual power,” or the replacement of the term “magic” with specific indigenous terms from within the ancient languages, such as *mageia/magia/khesheph/heka*, and Jonathan Z. Smith influentially called for the focus upon specific terms for types of practice in place of the general class of “magic.”²³ Sanzo identifies an alternative solution to the problem that retains the general term against such an “atomising approach,” which he identifies as a “deviance approach,” treating “magic” as a heuristic category that marks practices that deviate from standardly acceptable ones. Rather than entirely abandoning the term “magic” or replacing it with “religion,” like Bernd-Christian Otto (2013) or the scholarship from the 1990s, Sanzo ultimately advocates for a flexible taxonomy that allows for different classifications depending on the comparative enterprise of the scholar.²⁴

All of the recent overviews of “magic” retain it to some degree as an etic term that has some meaningful heuristic value. In my own study (DDM), I follow Sanzo’s “deviance approach,” using magic as a way of labeling things that are marked as extra-ordinary within the ancient sources.

Magic is a discourse pertaining to non-normative ritualized activity, in which the deviation from the norm is most often marked in terms of the perceived *efficacy* of the act, the familiarity of the *performance* within the cultural tradition, the *ends* for which the act is performed, or the *social location* of the performer.²⁵

I note that the sources tend to use a set of cues that indicate such deviance from the ordinary: efficacy, performance, ends, and social location, whereas the criteria more commonly used to mark “magic” in earlier scholarship are more relevant to the history of colonialist denigration of the primitive or the intra-Christian theological debates than to the distinctions drawn in the ancient sources between normative and non-normative acts.

By contrast, Frankfurter, in his volume (GSAM), tries to avoid the use of the term “magic,” although he admits that not all of his contributors

²³ Smith 1995, 16–17.

²⁴ Otto 2013; Sanzo 2020, 40–1.

²⁵ Edmonds 2019, 5. These cues resemble the Weberian markers of authoritative action within a community, as developed by Gordon 1999.

are successful in this endeavor. The essays in his volume attempt to treat different practices (binding spells, amulets, theurgy, etc.) separately, and he also includes essays that address different cultural traditions (Mesopotamia, Iran, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Israel, etc.) separately as well. However, he also admits the usefulness of “magic” as a heuristic tool.

“Magic” or “magical” can serve as a *quality* of certain practices and materials that highlights for our scholarly scrutiny features of materiality, potency, or verbal or ritual performance we might not otherwise appreciate as part of a culture’s religious world, or aspects of the social location of ritual practices we might not otherwise appreciate. “Magic”—the category—becomes thus a heuristic tool rather than a second-order (etic) classification.²⁶

In his reflections on magic within his volume, he identifies a couple of elements that seem particularly significant, the features of materiality and what he refers to as “the indigenization or localization of a Great Tradition.”²⁷

Both of our approaches treat “magic” not as a thing, but as a way of talking about things, as a label or a discourse. By contrast, Watson (MAGR) maintains the usefulness of magic as a concrete term whose meaning is more or less self-evident, both to the ancients and to modern scholars. Adopting what might be called the “pornography approach,” after Supreme Court Justice Potter, who would not define pornography but maintained that he—and anyone—would know it when they saw it, Watson derides the “thicket of theory” that needlessly complicates a classification that “will simply not have troubled the head of, say, a wise woman who came to purify with eggs and sulphur the house of a sick mistress.”²⁸ As many scholars have pointed out, however, such a refusal to define one’s terms simply leads to the importation of implicit and unexamined definitions, whether of pornography or of magic.

By treating “magic” as a label by which the scholar can distinguish forms of religious practice that the ancients considered normative or non-normative (or “ambiguous or illegitimate” as Frankfurter puts it), scholars can gain a better understanding of the ancient cultures we study. Such distinctions are beyond the reach of some of the other approaches that have recently appeared in the scholarship, the sensory or cognitive

²⁶ Frankfurter 2019, 13–14.

²⁷ Frankfurter 2019, 14, borrowing the term from the anthropologist Robert Redfield’s distinction of Little and Great Traditions.

²⁸ Watson 2019, 2–3.

turns. Britta Ager's study of *The Scent of Ancient Magic* provides some interesting meditations on ancient associations between certain smells and magical powers, but her understanding of magic as something for which no tangible cause can be found or rational explanation be given hearkens back to Frazerian and earlier anthropological models, furnishing little help in a scholarly analysis of different forms of ritual contexts. Such a folding of "magic" into the broader (and equally ill-defined) category of "religion" appears also in what might be called the cognitive turn, which attempts to explain religious behavior in terms of physiological processes of mental activity, a phenomenon (presumed universal) that transcends emic and etic classifications.²⁹

Esther Eidinow takes a different approach in a collection of essays she edited with Richard Gordon in several special issues of *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*.³⁰ Here, the emphasis is more historical, focusing on the "lived religious experience" of ancient figures in various contexts and paying attention to the social dynamics that produce the narratives of malign magic in different cultural contexts and historical periods. In her essay in GSAM, Eidinow focuses on magic as a heuristic device that helps scholars describe "the relationship between certain belief systems/ritual practices with networks of social and political power,"³¹ and this focus on the social embeddedness of magic brings together some of the aims of the "lived religious experience" approach with the deviance approach, which should produce more insights into the ways that the peoples of the ancient Mediterranean world understood the ideas and practices that we as modern scholars label "magic."

In her earlier work, Eidinow brought together oracles and curses as strategies by which ancient Greeks sought to manage risk, and it is notable that oracles and other forms of divination remain a particularly problematic set of practices with regard to the label of magic.³² Many recent studies of magic leave divination to the side. DDM includes a chapter on divination generally, as well as one on astrology, but GSAM has no specific study of divination included, although divination is mentioned in a number of the chapters; MAGR omits divination entirely, except for references to necromancy. However, ancient lists of the various practices that are treated as non-normative, illegitimate, or subversive often include

²⁹ E.g., Eidinow and Salvo 2024.

³⁰ Eidinow and Gordon 2019; cf. Eidinow 2016.

³¹ Eidinow 2019, 771.

³² Eidinow 2007.

divination in one form or another, and attention to these collocations can help us understand when and how a practice, be it divination or cursing or protective amulets, may be labeled magic.

THE FUTURE OF MAGIC?

Esther Eidinow presented her ideas on magic in Oberlin College's prestigious Martin Lecture series in 2022, and it is to be hoped that her lectures on *Magical Thinking and Magical Beliefs in the Ancient World* may soon be published in some form. The 2025 Martin Lectures were given by Christopher Faraone on *The (Lost) Magical Handbooks of the Roman Empire*, showing again that magic is increasingly reaching more mainstream audiences within the field of Classics. The fascination with magic is fed by the publication of new evidence—defixiones, gems, and even papyrus formularies, and the attention in scholarship to the materiality and cultural embeddedness of this evidence continues to bring new insights, even as we continue to struggle with the mysteriously ambiguous and polymorphous nature of the discourse for which we use the term “magic.”

BRYN MAWR COLLEGE
e-mail: redmonds@brynmawr.edu

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