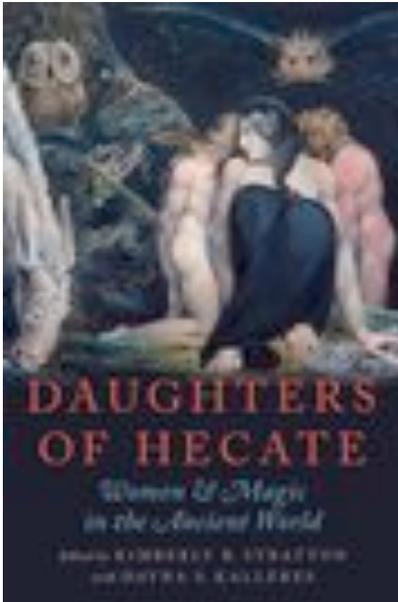


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Dayna S. Kalleres and Kimberly B. Stratton, eds.

Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World

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Over the last few decades, the study of ancient magic, however defined or problematized, has become a sophisticated academic investigation that seeks a more emic, nuanced, multifaceted, and balanced appreciation of the evidence. What once was an inquiry largely preoccupied with, and grounded in, theological polemics that sharply distinguished magic from religion has burgeoned into a fascinating, interdisciplinary field boasting numerous important publications. The edited collection under review here is an excellent example of this progress.

The editors have gathered a number of leading scholars to interrogate the “presumed association of women and magic by probing the foundation of, the process underlying, and the motivations behind the stereotype” (ix). They divide the fifteen essays that make up the volume into three major sections that organize the essays well and reflect their methodological preference for not taking literary portrayals at face value: (1) “Fiction and Fantasy: Gendering Magic in Ancient Literature”; (2) “Gender and Magic Discourses in Practice”; and (3) “Gender, Magic, and the Material Record.” Below I provide a cursory summary of each of the essays and their main contributions.

Kimberly B. Stratton's "Interrogating the Magic-Gender Connection" opens the volume by surveying scholarship on the topic from the Greco-Roman period to early modern Europe. Her survey includes an informative discussion of the various theoretical explanations for early modern witch hunts and the roles that the women-magic stereotype played in shaping demonological treatises, witch trials, and contemporary scholarship. Her wonderfully synthetic treatment shows that accusations of witchcraft are not as one-sided with regard to gender as often assumed and that there are some historical periods and places in which men make up the majority of the accused. As she observes: "The industry of scholarship on witchcraft has thus contributed to essentializing the gendered conception of witchcraft in the Early Modern Period, imposing our own knowledge construct onto Early Modern thinkers and actors, for whom it is not entirely representative" (20). This observation contextualizes and connects the other contributions in this volume, each of which Stratton summarizes at chapter's end.

Barbette Stanley Spaeth's "From Goddess to Hag: The Greek and Roman Witch in Classical Literature" is a comparative study of literary portraits of female witches in Greek and Roman literature. Her analysis demonstrates that, while Greek and Roman literary portrayals of witches share "a connection with nature and a focus on the human body" (43), there exist significant differences between the two corpora. Witches in Greek literature are often young and beautiful and more frequently appear in mythological contexts. They perform magic often out of sexual attraction to a hero, whom they then protect. They are depicted as "morally neutral or as mixed, good and evil together" (48). As such, Spaeth argues, they represent male anxieties and fantasies. However, Roman literary portraits of witches describe them as old, ugly, horrifying, and as practicing magic for nefarious purposes. They tend to situate witches in the real world but give them far more frightening powers than witches in Greek literature. For Spaeth, these depictions functioned as negative models against which to measure proper female behavior. They served "to reassert traditional social mores through reaffirming by contrast the traditional roles held by women in Roman society" (55).

In "The Most Worthy of Women is a Mistress of Magic': Women as Witches and Ritual Practitioners in *I Enoch* and Rabbinic Sources," Rebecca Lesses examines the varying ideological contexts in which one finds female magicians in the Hebrew Bible and postbiblical Jewish literature. She argues, *inter alia*, that "these sources must not be read as presenting one monolithic view on the relation of women to forbidden ritual practices" (72), since men appear to be just as often associated with witchcraft. Nevertheless, Lesses does find that "one strain of rabbinic thought seems to have shared the conviction that women were in some way inherently connected to witchcraft" (93). She interprets this view as "expressing the hidden (and threatening) side of women's activities toward men,

presenting women as the ‘internal other’” and reflecting “their fears about women’s supposed mysterious powers of fascination and control over men” (94).

Annette Yoshiko Reed’s study, “Gendering Heavenly Secrets? Women, Angels, and the Problem of Misogyny and ‘Magic,’” traces the tradition of fallen angels (i.e., “the Watchers”) as found in 1 Enoch and its later interpreters. Her detailed analysis reveals that women were not originally blamed for the angels’ fall and that they are not said to have received the knowledge of magic from them until later Greek discourse on magic influenced the literary tradition. She concludes her study with an exploratory rethinking of the powerful female gaze in the Testament of Reuben: “When we re-read the passage in the light of ancient understandings of optics, for instance, the possibility arises that both its ‘magic’ and its misogyny might be understood, at least in part, as expressions of a broader concern in the first centuries of the Common Era with the power of seeing to shape the soul” (133). In this context, “seeing and being seen were conceived as tactile and physical experiences,” and “opened eyes were also orifices by which souls were made vulnerable to penetration by transformative powers” (138). This ancient perception leads her to opine that we might better understand the text as communicating the Watchers’ susceptibility to the power of sight: “their watchings as witnesses opens a conduit between earth and heaven, and intromission enables the inhabitants of the former to touch the inhabitants of the latter, through the eyes, with transformative effects” (138).

In “Magic, Abjection, and Gender in Roman Literature,” Kimberly B. Stratton reads Roman stories of witches “who transgress the boundaries of bodies, social mores, and even the threshold between life and death, against the corporal ideology that sought to protect the fragility and vulnerability of individual bodies, especially those of elite men like the authors of our texts” (153). Drawing upon Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theory of abjection (i.e., “anything that ‘disturbs identity, system, order,’” (54), Stratton examines how abjection operates “on a social level, where threats to boundaries, borders, and collective identities are hedged by laws, taboos, grammar rules, and rituals, all working to preserve social coherence through containment of the abject” (154–55). Thus, “Anything abject reveals the fragility of our well-bounded selves and rationally controlled autonomy” (155). She divides Roman literary depictions into two categories: those that violate the individual physical body, through corpse-magic, bestiality, and the use of blood and body parts; and those that violate the social body, such as stories involving infanticide, manipulating men’s libidos, adultery, and controlling the decisions of one’s social superior. Stratton further argues that notions of abjection explain the preponderance of women as magicians in the literary imagination: “exaggerated and hyperbolic depictions of *women* practicing magic suggest that these gendered portraits helped to communicate the abject quality of magic. Women’s Otherness concretized the Otherness of magic, and vice versa” (172).

Elizabeth Ann Pollard's "Magic Accusations against Women in Tacitus's *Annals*" directs our attention to nine charges of *artes magicae* leveled against female aristocrats during the reigns of Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero. Pollard divides her study into three sections. The first discusses the legal definition of magic in order to contextualize the accounts in Tacitus. The second compares the ways in which Tacitus configures his accusations against the figures Munatia Plancina and Aemilia Lepida, who were tried in the same year with different results, as opposed to other women in *Annals*. In the third section, Pollard examines "how these accusations fit within Tacitus's history telling and how his depictions also reflected genuine sociological developments in first-century CE imperial Rome" (184). She concludes that the accusations served to negotiate "competitive and unregulated relationships among powerful women and their families, including especially the would-be wives of emperors" (195).

"Drunken Hags with Amulets and Prostitutes with Erotic Spells: The Re-feminization of Magic in Late Antique Christian Homilies," by Dayna S. Kalleres, examines the effort of ecclesiastical authorities "to extend the church's paternal reach deep into the growing number of families now entering the church" (220) whose ritual practices were informed by their polytheistic past. Kalleres argues that church leaders revived two types of traditional Greek stereotypes concerning women and magic "to frighten the Christian household and family into existence: 1) 'old drunken hags' who introduced healing magic into the Christian home and 2) prostitutes whose erotic magic lured Christian husbands out of the home, thus disrupting or even destroying families" (220). Focusing on the works of Athanasius, Augustine, Basil of Caesarea, Caesarius of Arles, and especially John Chrysostom, she demonstrates how their rhetoric "marked and/or constructed social aberrance" (220) by identifying the use of nonsanctioned ritual practices, such as the use of amulets and charms as *remedia* or to achieve erotic desires, as demonic threats to salvation.

Ayşe Tuzlak's "The Bishop, the Pope, and the Prophetess: Rival Ritual Experts in Third-Century Cappadocia" examines a third-century letter from a bishop named Firmilian to Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, that describes a prophetess from the region of Cappadocia as a demonically possessed sexual predator who, nevertheless, had attracted many Christian disciples, baptized them, and celebrated the Eucharist with them. Tuzlak demonstrates how the letter is replete with ambiguities that represent anxieties with regard to agency and ritual authority: "Firmilian's evident reluctance to ascribe any power to the woman—even while he must admit that her ritual and prophetic behavior had a dramatic impact on her community—illuminates the uncertainties that Christian authorities had about gender and power in this period" (254). Lurking behind the letter, Tuzlak reasons, was the theological dispute over whether people baptized in a heretical church must be rebaptized when entering the true church, an opinion that both Firmilian

and Cyprian held in the affirmative, despite the ruling of Pope Stephen I of Rome to the contrary. Though Firmilian and Cyprian agreed on who should be rebaptized, the letter suggests they may have disagreed on “whether ecstatic and spirit-possessed women fall into that category” (262). Tuzlak concludes that “the prophetess in Firmilian’s letter is a rich source of Otherness over and against which the bishop could define good ritual” (167) and a testament to a historical period in which ecclesiastical authority and sacramental power were much debated.

Nicola Denzey Lewis’s “Living Images of the Divine: Female Theurgists in Late Antiquity” focuses on Eunapius of Sardis’s fourth-century biography of Sosipatra, a Neo-Platonic holy woman who is described as erudite, prophetic, and given to spontaneous moments of “remote viewing.” Denzey Lewis examines her biography within the context of Theodosius’s relatively recent ban on traditional magic practices, sacrifice, oracles, and philosophy, which forced Neo-Platonists to transmit their learning secretly. She argues that it is in this context that Eunapius crafted Sosipatra’s biography so as to avoid any charges by Christians or rival philosophers that her theurgic abilities were acts of sorcery. Thus, the biography represents an effort “to create an apologetic hagiography that presented Sosipatra as custodian to a set of esoteric traditions without divulging too much or making her a target of Christian (including imperial Christian) suspicions” (285). In this context of increasing hostility, Neo-Platonists began to move underground, and “women physically and functionally replaced functioning public oracular sites” (292). Thus Sosipatra became an embodiment of tradition, a role to which, as a woman, she was ideally suited, since she could pass on her teachings privately, “far from the bands of roving monks that despoiled the temples of the southern and eastern Mediterranean basin in the wake of the Theodosian decrees” (292).

In “Sorceresses and Sorcerers in Early Christian Tours of Hell,” Kirsti Barrett Copeland presents a comparative study of tours of hell in late antiquity, especially the various recensions of the Apocalypse of Peter, Sibylline Oracle (2.195–338), and Apocalypse of Paul, with those of the Middle Ages, such as Dante’s *Inferno* and the *Vision of Thurkill*. She demonstrates that those in the later period depart significantly from their antecedents by restricting the crime of sorcery exclusively to women. While some early Christian texts, such as the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, do cast women as particularly vulnerable to male sorcerers, “for the early Christian tours of hell, there was no specific understanding that women either were or were not the primary practitioners of magic” (309). Thus, for Copeland the change in the later tours signals the growing influence of stereotypes concerning women and witchcraft among Christians.

David Frankfurter’s “The Social Context of Women’s Erotic Magic in Antiquity” examines a number of extant erotic spells in late antiquity for what they tell us about the social

contexts in which women employed them. He observes that spell making was a highly involved and intricate process, and he underscores the role of agency in making spells efficacious: one must first locate, consult with, and commission magical practitioners, collect the requisite materials, perform the charm, secretly bury or deposit the magic text, sometimes with a newly buried corpse, and then perhaps even make it known that such a text was performed. “By emphasizing agency we see the subject or initiator of the spell as one who takes expressive action on her own behalf and who negotiates creatively between immediate circumstances, authentic sentiments, and various modes of authority (gods, names, myths, phrases), usually with the help of a ritual expert” (325).

Frankfurter’s focus on agency allows him to posit that women’s spells, both *philia* and *agōai*, be understood not merely as efforts to satisfy personal desires but more emphatically as reflecting “the social or economic straights that could result if the arrangement sought were *not* secured through sexual or marital bonds” (328). Such a backdrop, he asserts, applies not just to “married women, maintaining their husband’s affections, and young women’s efforts to gain husbands, but also prostitutes whose real livelihoods ... were actually quite precarious and temporary” (329).

In “Cheating Women: Curse Tablets and Roman Wives,” Pauline Ripat studies a number of curse tablets intended to harm female slaves and freedwomen. She observes that sexual relations between a man and his slave were not prohibited by Roman law or custom and that, consequently, the use and abuse of slaves was common, “yet a wife suffering the ill effects of her husband’s relationship with a slave enjoyed no legal avenues of redress, nor validation of her problems” (344). Thus she hypothesizes that Roman wives commissioned the curses against influential slaves within their households who threatened to collapse the distinction of wife and slave: “wives might well find themselves bereft of the markers of their identity, cheated of the respect and protection their position was supposed to afford” (350).

Yaakov Elman’s “Saffron, Spices, and Sorceresses: Magic Bowls and the Bavli” opens by asking whether we might see the talmudic word *qeme’a*, usually understood as something made of leather or medicinal roots, as referring to the magic bowls found in Syria and Mesopotamia. After examining a number of talmudic passages, he concludes that, though the term could have been used for the magic bowls, there is not enough evidence to suggest the existence of the bowls in talmudic times. Elman next turns his attention to the onomastic evidence and notes that at least six women are named on bowl incantations, making their role as producers of the bowls likely. He adds that a number of the maladies for which the bowls were made appear to be gynecological in nature, thus making it probable that women commissioned them. He concludes that women played a larger role in the production of magic bowls than usually recognized and that they likely functioned

as colleagues to the rabbis in the Sasanian period, in a way similar to the relationship reported in the Babylonian Talmud (Pesahim 110a) between the rabbi Amemar and a sorceress who provided him with an efficacious incantation.

Fritz Graf's "Victimology or: How to Deal with Untimely Death" focuses on a number of tomb inscriptions from the Greek East and Latin West that curse sorcerers for bringing an untimely death upon someone: "to look for the action of an evil human perpetrator and her supernatural ritual power was an accepted way of dealing with the high emotional stress generated by the loss of a young family member, a child, or a wife" (404). Yet as Graf shows, accusations of sorcery (here *pharmakeia*) are inscribed ambiguously so as not to point the finger squarely on any one individual. This, he suggests, might relate to the need to maintain cohesion in small communities. In cases where specific individuals are accused, they typically are outsiders, such as immigrants and former slaves. Two conclusions emerge from the study. First, the number of curses is very small relative to burial inscriptions for young people generally, thus making it likely that, "Ancient societies, both in Greece and Rome, did not easily yield to such accusations, and even if they did, the accusations remained mostly on the level of suspicions, rumor, and gossip, and did not make it into the courtroom" (406). Second, the reality of curses on burial inscriptions does not conform to gender-stereotyped portraits of sorcerers in Greek and Roman literature, for men and women appear in roughly equal numbers as the accused.

The final contribution, Annemarie Luijendijk's "A Gospel Amulet for Joannia (Oxy. VIII 1151)," reconstructs the social and historical context of a fifth-century amulet from Egypt that contains a number of quotations from scripture and Christian liturgy. She argues that it was used to heal a sickness, likely malaria, to which pregnant women and children are more vulnerable. Based on the amulet's rather sophisticated integration of Christian texts (to serve as *historiola*) as well as compelling evidence for monks making amulets elsewhere, Luijendijk argues that Joannia's amulet was produced by a local member of the clergy. As she espies, the amulet "allows us to witness the paradoxical reality of women visiting shrines for amulets, on the one hand, and preachers railing against women's magical piety, on the other. Thus, in exposing the constructed nature of the rhetoric of the church leaders, we obtain a better, if more complex, understanding of practiced religion" (430).

A representative bibliography, as well as citation and subject indices conclude the volume.

The brief outline above cannot do justice to the richly articulated arguments and contributions of the aforementioned scholars. The volume's essays provide many healthy correctives to previous approaches that have accepted too readily the stereotyped literary

and rhetorical portraits of women as manipulative witches or governed by erotic desire.¹ They also reveal that the stereotype does not apply uniformly to all historical periods. Those engaged in the study of ancient magic will need to consult this volume. It offers many useful insights and directions for future research.

1. See similarly the useful study by Zvi Abusch and Daniel Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-witchcraft Rituals*, *Studies in Ancient Magic and Divination* 8/1 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), especially 1–7.