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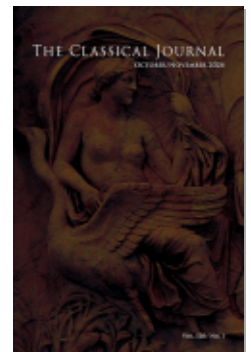
Drawing Down the Moon: Magic in the Ancient Greco-Roman World: Challenges, Dynamism, and Reinterpretation, 300-550 CE by Radcliffe G. Edmonds III (review)

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BOOK REVIEW

Drawing Down the Moon: Magic in the Ancient Greco-Roman World: Challenges, Dynamism, and Reinterpretation, 300-550 CE.
By RADCLIFFE G. EDMONDS III. Martin Classical Lectures.
Princeton, NJ and Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press, 2019.
Pp. xv + 474. Hardback, \$45.00. ISBN: 978-0-691-15693-4.

In recent decades there has been a well-documented, tidal wave of scholarship on magic in the ancient Mediterranean world, including a number of introductory works seeking to offer a wide-angle view of the field, each somewhat varied in their approach and range of content (e.g. Luck 1985; Faraone and Obbink 1991; Graf 1994; Ogden 2002; Collins 2008; Watson 2019; Frankfurter, 2019, etc.). Radcliffe Edmonds' latest offering, *Drawing Down the Moon: Magic in the Ancient Greco-Roman World*, is in the tradition of such works. Its wide-ranging, yet pedagogically-appropriate synthesis of inherently difficult material offers new insights and approaches for the seasoned scholar, yet still provides a very approachable text for students making their first entry into these waters.

In Chapter 1 Edmonds addresses the foundational yet always challenging question of how to define magic in the Greco-Roman world, which he, like many others, sees as an etic task. In so doing he playfully invokes the previously used metaphor of "bicycle maintenance" as he attempts to move our understanding of magic forward. Edmonds, channelling Max Weber via Richard Gordon, defines magic as non-normative ritualized action that can be evaluated by a series of emic cues (including the perceived efficacy of the ritual, familiarity of performance, intended ends and social location of the performer). In the chapters that follow he considers how each of these cues can be applied to a variety of topics within the magical corpora while asking an array of standard, analytic questions. Edmonds again follows others in noting that magic is a discourse and as such is "a dynamic social construct" (answering the question "magic for whom?"). In order to help his readers better understand his

methodology, however, Edmonds begins by offering a preliminary case study of a single ritual, the act of drawing down the moon. His approach is very effective pedagogically, since it tangibly demonstrates how such emic cues can be applied. It also allows Edmonds to lay the groundwork for the remainder of his study.

In Chapter 2 Edmonds shifts his focus from magic in order to define “the ancient Greco-Roman world” in terms of time, space and language. He also offers important and nuanced discussions of periodization, technology and space, giving particular attention to the ideas of J. Z. Smith (involving locative vs. utopian cosmological models for locating humans and gods as well as classifications of religious activities by space – the religion of *here*, *there* and *anywhere*) and those of Richard Gordon (on shifting patterns of “objective” and “intentional” profanation). In locating ritual activity Edmonds seeks an approach that “remains attentive to the multiple cues that are operative in the sources throughout the whole Greco-Roman world” rather than one that attempts to trace “an arc of development over time” (41). In doing so he highlights the challenges of working with various kinds of source material, ranging from the imaginary realm of literary sources (where scenes involving magic are often shaped by the constraints of genre and only limited by the author’s imagination) to epigraphic and papyrological traditions (including curse tablets and the Greek Magical Papyri). Edmonds’ concluding discussion explores the nature of ritual, incorporating ideas of S. J. Tambiah on ritual as symbolic communication and performance, Bronislaw Malinowski on the “coefficient of weirdness” in speech acts and Fritz Graf on the vertical and horizontal axes of communication in ritual.

In Chapters 3 to 11, while exploring evidence for ritual action, Edmonds does a close analysis of “not only what kind of evidence” is being examined, “but also what sort of action is being depicted in the evidence” (52). Some of the analytic questions are substantive (*What* is the ritual? *Where* and *when* does it take place?), while others are functional (*Why* is it done? *How* is it imagined to work?). In each chapter to follow he considers how ritual actions end up being labelled as “magic,” paying close attention to the earlier mentioned emic cues. The ground Edmonds covers is impressive and cannot be surveyed in this limited space, but chapters include focused and detailed discussion of commonly treated topics (including curses and binding magic, love charms and erotic curses, healing and

protective magic, prayer and divination) and a handful of important, but often ignored subjects (astrology, alchemy and theurgy). It is in these chapters that one begins to see how Weber's ideas about magic as non-normative ritualized action can be applied to various kinds of rituals. The work concludes with an insightful discussion of how the label of magic is used in other contexts, such as the law and the Greek Magical Papyri themselves.

Edmonds' new survey of magic in the Greco-Roman world, nicely illustrated with 21 figures and 8 pages of plates, is a wonderful addition to the existing scholarship of the field. His thorough exploration of magic as non-normative ritualized action gives his readers much to think about. It perhaps would have been helpful had he given more guidance on accessing Weber's writings, which represent core material for this work. Though limiting his investigations to Greco-Roman evidence, Edmonds (unlike Frankfurter 2019) only tangentially explores magic in Christian sources. Nonetheless, the substantial ground that he does cover sheds new light on a broad range of texts and topics. Thus, for anyone seeking an introduction to magic in the Greco-Roman world, this text will certainly be required reading for the foreseeable future.

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