

## BOOK REVIEW

*Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World*. Edited by KIMBERLEY B. STRATTON WITH DAYNA S. KALLERES. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. xv + 533. Paper, \$39.95. ISBN 978-0-19-534271-0.

This collection is overall of very high quality and has a cohesion that few such collected volumes achieved. *Daughters of Hecate* is aimed at a general humanities audience and, with a few notable exceptions, the contributors are scholars from related fields rather than traditional classicists. However, the collection does offer many insights into the topic of ancient witchcraft, both practical and mythological, that are of interest to classicists.

The collection is divided into three sections, entitled "Fiction and Fantasy: Gendering Magic in Ancient Literature", "Gender and Magic Discourse in Practice", and "Gender, Magic, and the Material Record." The choice of the first title controversially places the mythologies of Greece, Rome, Christianity, and Judaism into the context of fantasy. This choice seems unnecessarily contentious since titles mask a tradition division between literary, historical, and archaeological topics.

Of particular interest in the first section are Barette Stanley Spaeth's "From Goddess to Hag: The Greek and Roman Witch in Classical Literature," and Kimberly B. Stratton's "Magic, Abjection, and Gender in Roman Literature." Spaeth's chapter offers a synthesis of literary portrayals of witches across Greek and Roman Literature. While her conclusion, that witches reflect the fears and fantasies of the society that created them, is not revolutionary, her presentation of the literary tradition of magical women is an excellent introduction to the topic as a whole.

Stratton builds on Spaeth's work. She examines the Roman literary witch in the light of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection to explain the discrepancy between Rome's overwhelmingly female literary witches and the even gender split of actual practitioners. Stratton's arguments are solid, but she struggles to tie her ideas to the more Freudian aspects of Kristeva's theory. For example, there is an excursus on pages 154-155 on the psychoanalytic trauma of breastfeeding that could easily have been cut without affecting the integrity of the argument. Later chap-

ters offer a much subtler analyses of the topic grounded in physical evidence. Even so, the two chapters work well together and make excellent bookends to the first section.

With the exception of Elizabeth Ann Pollard's "Magic accusations against Women in Tacitus's *Annals*," all the chapters in the second section deal with witches in an early Christian context. Rather than being the odd man out, Pollard's offering fits well with the unspoken theme of the section, namely, the use of witches and witchcraft to undermine feminine agency. Instead it is the last two papers that are out of place. Kirsti Barrett Copeland's "Sorceresses and Sorcerers in Early Christian Tours of Hell," which would have been much better suited to the first section of the volume, and Nicola Denzey Lewis's "Living Images of the Divine: Feminine Theurgists in Late Antiquity" which, although excellent, would have been a better fit in a collection on philosophy or religion.

The third and last section is the strongest of all in terms of its content. It also does the best work to undermine the ancient literary bias toward evil female witches described in the collections' introductory chapter. David Frankfurter's "The Social Context of Women's Erotic Magic in Antiquity" opens with a discussion of the importance of magic in conveying agency to disenfranchised Roman women and as a result offers the best reason for the demonization of the female witch in the Empire and Late Antique periods. Pauline Ripat continues and augments this theme in her entry, "Cheating Women: Curse Tablets and Roman Wives." Fritz Graf does a beautiful job of tying all of themes of the volume together neatly with his entry "Victimology or: How to Deal with Untimely Death," disproving the stereotype of the evil female witch in Greco-Roman practice while still acknowledging its existence and AnneMarie Luijendijk turns the Early Modern stereotype on its head with her example of women practicing Christian magic in Late Antique Egypt.

The volume takes an interdisciplinary approach that might equally be called multidisciplinary in that it draws on many areas of study (Near East, Jewish, Christian, and Classical) and juxtaposes them without asking them to interact. Some manage it easily; the Late Antique chapters have no trouble drawing connections with the Old Testament and Imperial Rome, but others are not so well integrated. Rebecca Lesses's "'The Most Worthy of Women is a Mistress of Magic': Women as Witches and Ritual Practitioners in *I Enoch* and Rabbinic Sources" and Yaakov Elman's "Saffron, Spices, and Sorceresses: Magic Bowls and the Bavli" float in gentle isolation within their own sociocultural contexts.

If the volume has a flaw, it rests in its the conceptual frame. The purpose of the collection, as stated in the preface, is to discover the ancient sources for the Early Modern stereotype of the sexually deviant, demonically possessed witch. The preface to the volume states that its examination of the topic of women and magic assumes a ubiquitous negative stereotype starting from the *Odyssey's* Circe extending to today. This interpretation would be severely limiting if all contributors followed it, but most contributors offer a more nuanced view of the topic. The lead editor herself turns the table on her own stated unifying concept at the end of her helpful review of the scholarship on early modern conceptions of witchcraft.

While there are faults in this volume, they are for the most part superficial. This volume is a collection of strong, cohesive articles that offer a comprehensive look at the relationship between witchcraft, gender, and social hierarchies in the ancient, particularly the Roman, world.

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