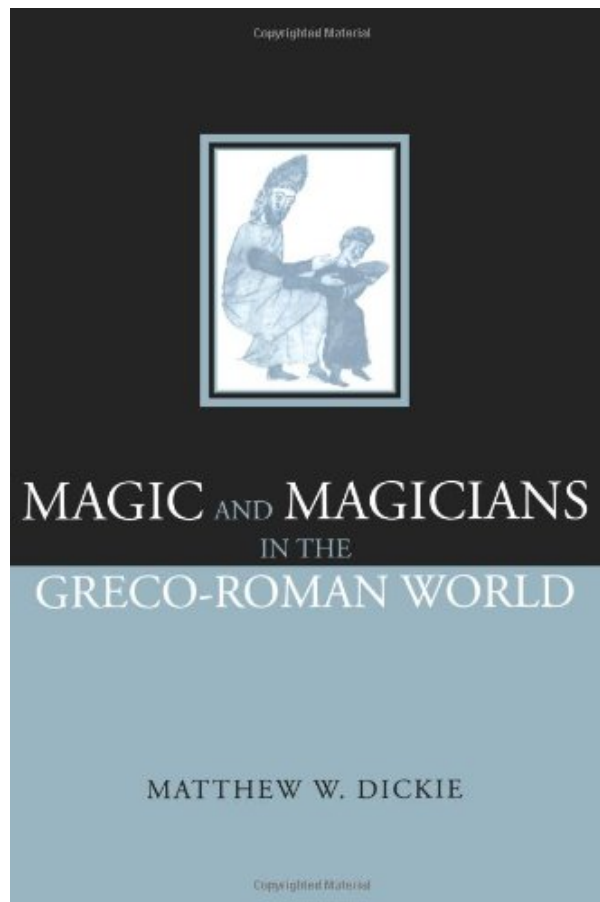


**MAGIC AND MAGICIANS IN THE GRECO-
ROMAN WORLD BY MATTHEW W DICKIE,
MATTHEW W. DICKIE**



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Review

'*Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* is the fruit of prodigious reading and profound scholarship, yet never bogs down to its own accumulation of facts.' - Los Angeles Times

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BY MATTHEW W DICKIE, MATTHEW W. DICKIE PDF

This study is the first to assemble the evidence for the existence of sorcerers in the ancient world; it also addresses the question of their identity and social origins. The resulting investigation takes us to the underside of Greek and Roman society, into a world of wandering holy men and women, conjurers and wonder-workers, and into the lives of prostitutes, procuresses, charioteers and theatrical performers.

This fascinating reconstruction of the careers of witches and sorcerers allows us to see into previously inaccessible areas of Greco-Roman life. Compelling for both its detail and clarity, and with an extraordinarily revealing breadth of evidence employed, it will be an essential resource for anyone studying ancient magic.

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About the Author

Matthew W. Dickie teaches at the University of Illinois in Chicago.

Most helpful customer reviews

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

It's an academic text alright

By Mischa

My goodness...this is a dense read. It is one of those text books that packs a lot of information into a small place, but not in a way where it's easy reading. I find myself reading 3 pages and having no idea what I just read as it is written in such a dull way.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent work on a difficult topic

By Christopher R. Travers

In this work, Matthew Dickie sets out to chronical the development of both the concept of magic and the

magician in the Greek and Roman worlds. He succeeds well enough that I would highly recommend this book. Note that generally, he doesn't always trace the origins of magical practices and this may provide different and perhaps complementary information on the sorts of influences affecting magic in this part of the ancient world.

The book starts off with a basic premise: that it is possible to trace the development of magic as a sociological phenomenon distinct from mainstream religion in the classical world. He seeks, so far as is possible, to address the concept of magic in the categories used by the cultures he studies and builds a picture both of the situation at different times in Athens and Rome. While the author notes that many cultures do not separate magic and religion, he notes that both Greece and Rome did, and that this distinction is one we inherited from them.

The book then proceeds to systematically ask the following questions about different periods and places within its scope:

- 1) What were the social concerns about magic-workers?
- 2) Who were believed to be magic-workers?
- 3) What legal actions were possible against magic workers?
- 4) What was the status of female magic workers relative to their male counterparts?
- 5) What sorts of professional magic workers do we see in each time and place?

The study is thus fairly broad in scope, is a very heavy read, and covers the period from Hellenic Greece through the early Middle Ages. In many ways, students interested in the context of the witchcraft trials in Europe should probably start with this book because the work shows a great deal of continuity between concepts of sorcery in Greece and Rome and those during the Middle Ages.

This book will challenge you and make you think. It is highly recommended.

22 of 22 people found the following review helpful.

An Indispensable Guide to Classical Magic

By Amazon Customer

Beginning with an overview of what constitutes magic and magical behavior in the Classical world, Dickie traces the evolution of the concept of magic through his chosen period (500 BCE - 700 CE). His precise field of inquiry is the "common" magic-worker, insofar as such a practitioner existed. He attempts to answer the questions "who was doing magic and why?" by examining a vast array of evidence, both primary and literary. Along the way he discards much of the dross that has accumulated on Classical scholarship in the last decade or so, deriding the postmodern and deconstructionist habits of hanging modern Freudian meanings on antique societies and social actions.

The scope of this work is breathtaking. A truly vast array of sources are brought forth, considered, and placed into the context of what is known about the societies in question. Primary material, drawn heavily from archaeological evidence such as curse tablets and amuletic inscriptions, is cited wherever appropriate. Extensive use is made of the magical papyri as well and the author makes a consistent effort to consider what role is played by the casters of such spells in their societies - the society of classical Athens, for example, is different from that of Athens in the time of Alexander, which in turn is different from Republican or Imperial Rome. Each discrete period of time is considered from its own sources, archaeological, primary or literary.

Nor are modern scholars ignored in this tour de force. Dickie makes wide-ranging use of the best that Classical scholarship has to offer - Graf, Faraone, Obbink, Johnston, all are cited where relevant. The only modern scholar that is missing from this lineup is Hans Dieter Betz; Betz' translation and collation of the PGM is abandoned in favor of the older and less complete Preisendanz editions, nor is Betz cited in the Bibliography except for two minor articles, both contained in collections with other articles which are

extensively cited. (The scholar in me smells some obscure feud in this.) Nevertheless, this puzzling absence in no way detracts from the stellar quality of the book itself.

This is a must-own for any serious student of Classical magic. Buy it today!

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