Richard L. Gordon – Francisco Marco Simón (edd.), *Magical Practice in the Latin West. Papers from the International Conference held at the University of Zaragoza, 30 Sept. – 1 Oct. 2005*. (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 168.), Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2010, pp. xxvi + 676, ISBN 978-90-04-17904-2.

As well pointed out by the editors, Richard L. Gordon and Francisco Marco Sim**ó**n (1-49) in their introduction to this coherent and well-produced volumecontaining the proceedings of a conference held in 2005, the original feature of the collection is its focus on the practice, rather than the texts, of magic, as well as on the specific characters of magic in the Latin West, an area which has come to new prominence in this perspectivein recent years,with a spate of new discoveries in Great Britain, Spain, Germany, and Italy, especially from 1979 onwards.[1] Particularly, the archaeological finds at the Anna Perenna fountain site, after 1999 (see *infra*), have spectacularly transformed the traditional image of this deity, a benevolent and quaint characterhitherto virtually known only from the tale told in Ovid *Fasti* 3.523-696, into a goddess of black magic and revenge, thus opening up a whole new avenue of inquiry, with important implications for the coexistence of pagan and Christian religious practices in IV-V century Rome (cf. *Introduction* 21-2). Indeed, the Anna Perenna site, dated on archaeological evidence, colours our views of the by then predominantly Christian populationof Rome, showing the persistence of pagan popular rituals of black magic at a time when public worship of pagan deities was no longer allowed. Evidently Christian worship had no place for such direct requests for revenge and justice (although Versnel 326 briefly mentions Coptic Christian curse-prayers), and the old religious rituals filled the gap.The introduction is an original essay in its own right, problematizing the topics of the book, and assessing not only the state of the art of aresearch trend which has now come into its own after being styled by Wilamowitz as *Botokudenphilologie* ('troglodytes' philology'?), but also touching on points not discussed in other chapters in the book, such as that of historical conditions for the resorting to magic at specific times in antiquity (44 'what social changes and anxieties might lie behind the depositions at Mainz over a half-century?'). The study of modern analogues may help to contextualize ancient practice, and the editors indicate the main pre-

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1 Much of the textual evidence is included in the excellent database of Western curse inscriptions (Latin, but sometimes in Greek script) created by A. Kropp, *Magische Sprachverwendung in vulgärlateinischen Fluchtafeln (defixiones)*, Tübingen2008. The 2008 version, however, does not yet include the Anna Perenna texts.

occupation with property and theftin these texts as an interesting avenue for further research from a historical viewpoint.

The book is structured in five parts,[2] respectively dealing with: 1. the "discourse of magic" (53-141), that is, primarily, the representations and understanding of magic in Latin literary texts; 2. the corpus and its new accretions (141-357); 3. the linguistics of writing binding curses (357-99). The book is brought to a close by a fourth more miscellaneous section called 'Protective, eudaemonic and divinatory magic' (427-629), which deals also with the archaeology of magic, and with charms and protective amulets of different kinds. Helpful indices of subjects and words, Greek and Latin, will make this book an invaluable reference tool for students of the subject and beyond.

The book as a whole is also a salutary reminder of how much the field has moved on since the days ofAudollent's*Defixionum tabellae* (1908), not so much because of new textual discoveries, but on account of a greater understanding of, and sometimes even sympathy for, the religious and social convictions underlying the phenomenon of inscribed spells and curse-prayers. In particular, a long and engaging chapter by H. Versnel, doyen of religious studies of the ancient world, is devoted to methodological and classificatory issues: Versnel elaborates on his own distinction between *defixiones,* binding curses, and general prayers for justice, to redress or exact justice for a wrong suffered. Versnel tests the distinction's fit on a sample of recent finds from several Western Europe locations (1991-2005), some of them discussed by other contributors but, in Versnel's contribution, with a greater emphasis on the comparative element, for examplea number of comparisons with Greek and Eastern texts in which similar expressions are found.

Section 2, more generally, seems to me to be the core of the book and contains what are in my view the most substantial contributions, namely those by Jürgen Blänsdorf ('The *defixiones* from the sanctuary of Isis and Mater Magna in Mainz', 141-89; 'the texts from the *Fons Annae Perennae*', 215-44), Marina Piranomonte ('Religion and Magic at Rome: the fountain of Anna Perenna', 191-213), Roger Tomlin ('Cursing a Thief in Iberia and Britain', 245-73), and said HenkVersnel ('Prayers for Justice, East and West', 275-354). These are the chapters which will be of most immediate relevance for an audience of Latin and Greek scholars, providing fulsome and comprehensive commentaries of a great many 'new' tablets.

Blänsdorf 's two papers illustrate the finds in the *Isis / Magna Mater* shrine in Mainz, all written between the first and the second century CE, and at the*Nymphaeum* (sacred fountain) of Anna Perenna, with informa-

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2 For a detailed Table of contents and for a google books preview see
http://ebooks.brillonline.nl/view_pdf?id=nij9789004179042_nij9789004179042_i-676-2.
http://books.google.it/books?id=p_Udwog7VIC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

tion on the historical context, and, most interestingly, a detailed linguistic interpretation of a selection of texts; Piranomonte's paper also deals with the latter site, though concentrating more on the archaeological aspects. The Mainz and Rome new tablets have only started to be published after 2003; much remains to be done, because of the great difficulty of deciphering the sometimes barely legible tablets:the inscribed marks on the lead surface don't stand out clearly, and the letters are virtually impossible to read from even high definition digitalized images. As often done when discussing texts of this nature, the authors support their presentation of the evidence with the use of drawings rather than photos of the originals (though some are included at the end of the volume). Inevitably, such drawings, valuable as they are, are alsointrinsically deceptive, as they tend to reflect an act of interpretation (a point tellingly illustrated in R. Tomlin's article, 265, 269).

Various other factors add to the difficulties, such as, sometimes, a striving for obscurity before third parties, the adoption of a partly coded communication, on the grounds that the deity will know what is being said, and – though less frequently than expected a priori—a less than perfect literacy on the part of some writers. In fact, Blänsdorfshows convincingly that the two sets of tablets at Mainz and Rome represent a wide variety of compositional patterns, and that some of them, far from using fixed and repetitive patterns taken from phrase-books, are rhetorically very elaborate. Most texts must have been written directlyby the principals—in pointed contrast to many Greek spells which we know were composed by professional sorcerers (163-65; 229-30). Surprising as that may be, incorrect, 'vulgar' forms are not prominent in the tablets, though some are more substandard than others. Be this as it may, the tablets, written in sometimes primitive, sometimes sophisticated cursive hands, have already added to the Latin vocabulary, increased the evidence for rare and little-known words, and clarified the meaning of obscure ones, such as *megaron* (153-4), *aginare* (172-3), and the divine epithet *Megaru s*(discussions in Blänsdorf 175, Tomlin 262, Versnel 297).

Inevitably in the face of so much that is uncertain, many transcriptions of the new tablets must be regarded as provisional, even if the failure to make perfect syntactical sense in texts such as these may sometimes be regarded as a feature of the 'authentic' version, not only because of the writers' faulty linguistic competence, but also because the medium allowed neither for comfortable writing nor for ease of correction, once a mistake had been committed, or when the writer had a change of mind on how to phrase a sentence. One of the most striking texts from the Anna Perenna fountain (shown on 222, inv. 475567) is the beautiful *defixio* with snakes surrounding an image of a 'cello-shaped' body, perhaps the envisaged victim of the curse or a supportive deity. That too starts with a non sequitur phrase, *sacrassantas FV supteris et angilis quod | rogo et petomagnamuirtutemuestram*: I have no solution except the *cruces desperationis* for the initial unconstrued

sacrassantas (*sic*, though the traces are compatible with an initial *sacra-minta*= *sacramenta,* 'secrets? oaths?'; cf. *angilis* for *angelis* on the same line), but *supteris* cannot stand, and it's almost certainly a hypercorrect *su-paeris* for *superis.*

Rolando Ferri
Università di Pisa
r.ferri@flcl.unipi.it