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Brill has given us many fine works collecting the scholarship on magic in the ancient world, and their latest offering is a strong addition to the series. This collection of conference papers focuses upon magic in Rome and its western colonies, with a slant toward discoveries made on the Iberian peninsula. Though some papers deal with the position of magic within documents of the period, most of the contents treat with archaeological finds—defixiones, prayers for justice, amulets, nails, and other artefacts—and the interpretation thereof.

Following the editor’s introduction, the book turns first to an exploration of the terminology of magic in the literary sources of the time. James Rives comments on the uses of the terms magus and magia in the Classical literature, from its first appearance in Apuleius and through its shifts in meaning in both prose and poetry. Matthew Dickie examines the discussions of magic in the Roman historians, which are much scantier than one might imagine. Dickie explores the significance, not only of what was written, but also of what was left unwritten. The code in the Codex Theodosianus condemning the heretical Eunomians is the topic of María Escrivano Paño’s essay, in which he finds it derived from the regulations from the Pauline Sentences regarding practitioners of malefic magic and their books.

Next we turn to the archaeological record, with an examination of defixiones, prayers for justice, and associated artefacts of a magical nature. Jürgen Blänsdorf presents a series of texts found near shrines to Isis and Cybele in Mainz dating to the first century, displaying the versatility of the corpus and outlining the characteristics of a particular local variant. Following this are two pieces by Marina Piranomonte and Blänsdorf on the Fountain of Anna Perenna and her associated nymphae in Rome, paying especial attention to the defixiones and other finds from the site. Tomlin compares six Iberian tablets to the British corpus, and Henk Versnel ties together the other offerings with a long piece on prayers for justice, updating the corpus and providing his reflections on the utility of differentiating such texts from curse tablets. Although his definitions seem to broaden the “prayers for justice” category
until it threatens to swamp that of defixiones, his arguments for his assignments are well-thought-out and keep the utility of the categories, rather than their reification, in the ore. This section of papers strongly shows an ongoing dialogue between the authors on the positioning of their particular finds within Versnel’s categories.

The book then turns to more detailed analyses of the language in such tablets, with Amina Kropp’s work on the performative characteristics of magical language. Kropp’s work proposes a new category of “transformative” language to speech act theory to cover the actions brought about in magical utterance. She and Faraone turn their attention to the tablets found near Mainz, outlining the uses of the verb vertere to bring about the reversal in status of the objects’ targets. A first-century set of defixiones found near the town of Ampurias is the topic of Francisco Marco Simón’s contribution. These curses are particularly interesting as they constitute one of the few known curses directed against Roman authorities.