



Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg (eds.), *Defining Magic: A Reader*. Sheffield: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2013.

Reviewed by Claire Chandler

Defining Magic: A Reader by Otto and Stausberg is a compilation of key contributions to the scholarly treatment of magic. Extracts begin with the work of Plato, Pliny and Plotinus at one end of the time scale and end with specially commissioned contributions from five contemporary scholars at the other. Each extract has accompanying notes providing context and highlighting significant points. The book is divided into four, each section with an further introduction summarising the scholarly work in this field and locating the presented material within the scholarly frame.¹ A General Introduction to the volume introduces the concept of magic and summarises the academic debate. The first section covers historic contributions, so showing the reader how 'the academic debate inherited ideas and valuation patterns from former pre-academic discourses.'² Section two covers contributions from the theorists who laid the ground for the scholarly treatment of magic and explores that early work. Section three moves to the later twentieth century

¹ A list of the contents can be found here: <http://www.acumenpublishing.co.uk/display.asp?K=e2012121911335322>

² Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg, eds., *Defining Magic: A Reader*, Critical Studies in the Study of Religion (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2013), p. 16. [Hereafter *Defining Magic*]

and the subsequent work which built on the initial material showcased in the second section. Section four brings us those specially commissioned articles mentioned above.

This volume brings key texts within easy reach, provides excellent accompanying notes and reduces the size of the pile of reference books necessary to get to grips with the subject. This is an excellent book to begin an investigation of what might be meant by magic. The real gold here is that Otto and Stausberg do not attempt to define magic for you. They outline the scholarship of the field, draw your attention to the salient points and then leave you to think things through and draw your own conclusions. The selection of texts is well balanced and representative of the contributions to the subject.

Selection for the final list was based on which texts 'significantly shaped the subsequent discussion.'³ The section introductions mention other works and highlight their position in the on-going scholarly treatment. This provides indications of further reading and sets out an overview of the significant milestones in the debate. This is not a book which spoon-feeds the reader but it certainly lays out the pieces of the jigsaw ready for you to assemble. However there is no picture on the front of the box, no guaranteed number of pieces and nothing to say that all pieces are

present but this is the nature of the debate. What this book allows you to do is build a firm foundation to participate in the next round of that debate.

Claire Chandler has completed the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology at the University of Wales, Trinity Saint-David, focusing on magic in Greco-Roman Egypt and is awaiting her results. Her website is www.clairechandler.com.

inbox

Dear Editor

It may interest your readers to know that for thirteen years, there was another *Spica* in Great Britain! In March of 1961, Brigadier Roy C. Firebrace (1889-1974) founded an astrological journal called *Spica: A Review of Sidereal Astrology*. He started the journal after resigning his post as the first president of the Astrological Association of Great Britain, which he co-founded with John Addey in 1958. Over the course of his astrological career, Firebrace worked very closely with Irish astrologer Cyril Fagan, who pioneered the modern Western Sidereal movement. *Spica* became a leading force in the promotion of Western Sidereal astrology. Firebrace served as the editor until his death in October 1974, after which the journal was discontinued. Shortly thereafter, the siderealist movement also went into decline.

--Jenn Zahrt, PhD

send responses, reviews and emails
to editor@astronomy-and-culture.org

³ Otto and Stausberg, *Defining Magic*, p. 13.