

Mind, Body, Magic: Sensory And Emotional Approaches To Magic In The Roman World - Milton Keynes - Friday 27th March 2020

*A one-day conference to be held at The Open University campus in Milton Keynes on **Friday 27th March 2020**.*

<https://www.openmaterialreligion.org/events-1/2020/magic>

Call for Papers

Please submit abstracts to Stuart McKie (stuart.n.mckie@durham.ac.uk) and Adam Parker (adam.parker@open.ac.uk) by **30th November 2019**.

We invite paper proposals for a one-day conference at the Open University, Milton Keynes, on the theme of sensory and emotional approaches to magic in the Roman World.

The four centuries of the Roman imperial period saw massive shifts in all aspects of life for people across the Mediterranean and northern Europe, including in the ways in which they communicated with the supernatural, as it fostered unprecedented movements of people, objects and ideas. Much work has been done on how these changes affected the beliefs and practices conventionally called religion, but there is plenty of scope for exploring those that both modern scholars and the ancients themselves recognised as magical.

Materials and materiality mattered, but sensory experiences and emotional responses were also important components of Roman magical practice and were integral to the successful and efficacious completion of ritual action. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling were key elements of the 'doing' and, in reality, there can be little separation between these concepts if we are to have a holistic understanding and engagement with this part of life in the ancient world.

It is the objective of this conference to develop these ideas and to take them further, into the theoretical fields of sensory and emotional archaeologies in order to help modern scholars to understand the relationships between people, objects, and magical rituals. The physical, emotional, and intellectual sensorium of the ancient world is difficult to access, but recent research has begun to provide toolkits and approaches which may be applied to the study of Roman magic.

The burgeoning field of sensory studies in antiquity has provided fertile ground for discussion and has greatly advanced our understanding of life in the Roman world (Hamilakis 2014; Toner 2014; Betts 2017), and emotional archaeologies (Tarlow 2000 and 2012) may help to advance our understanding of emotional effects of ritual practices. Approaching magical practices in these contexts and/or theoretically focussed ways can reveal more of the lived experience of the individuals who performed them in their daily lives but can also illuminate broader questions on the nature of a particular society as it changed over space and time.

The study of 'magic' in the ancient world has long suffered from scholarly disagreements regarding semantics and, subsequently, definitions of this term. Following on from the framework set out in McKie and Parker (2018, 2) we opt not to provide a single, rigid

definition of magic for our contributors and participants to use; we wish to encourage a multi-disciplinary conversation informed, perhaps, by multi-disciplinary understandings of magic.

We will, however, expect contributors to be broadly aware of these issues and have reflected on this debate.

We would like this conference to reflect as diverse a range of backgrounds and experiences as possible: in professional terms, we welcome contributions from archaeologists, academics and ECRs, post-graduates, museum professionals, classicists and historians.

We would welcome papers on the following topics:

- Sensory components of magical rituals (not necessarily limited to the classic five senses).
- The emotional effects of practicing magic.
- The interactions between human bodies and physical objects in magical rituals.
- Issues of ephemerality, temporality, and/or seasonality in sensory or emotional approaches.
- Experimental and reconstructive approaches to ancient magic.

Organisers: Stuart McKie (Durham University) and Adam Parker (Open University).

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