This is a pioneering attempt to write a broad history of ancient Jewish magic, from the Second Temple to the rabbinic period. It is based both on the ancient magicians’ own compositions (and products) in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek, and on the descriptions and prescriptions of non-magicians, in an effort to reconstruct a historical picture that is as balanced and nuanced as possible. The book’s main focus is on the cultural make-up of ancient Jewish magic, with special attention paid to processes of cross-cultural contacts and borrowings between Jews and non-Jews and to inner-Jewish creativity. Other major issues are the place of magic within ancient Jewish society, contemporary Jewish attitudes to magic and the identity of its practitioners. Throughout, it seeks to explain the methodological underpinnings of all sound research in this demanding field, and to point out areas where further research is likely to prove fruitful.

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Scholarship is an eminently social thing, and the present study is no exception. Its ultimate origins lie in my Princeton days, when John Gager initiated me into the study of ancient magic. Its initial growth took place in Ann Arbor, when I was allowed to teach several courses on ancient magic and to curate an exhibition of ancient magical artifacts from the University of Michigan's rich archeological and papyrological collections (see Bohak 1996). But the book itself began to take shape here, at Tel-Aviv University, while teaching at the Department of Jewish Philosophy and the Program in Religious Studies and enjoying constant feedback from colleagues and students alike.

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This history of ancient Jewish magic, from the Second Temple to the rabbinic period, is based both on the ancient magicians’ own compositions and on the descriptions and prescriptions of non-magicians. It studies developments arising within the Jewish tradition as well as cross-cultural borrowings from Greco-Egyptian sources.
The diversity existing within ancient Jewish magic and the essential contradiction between witchcraft and monotheism are in themselves evidences of foreign influence on the system. The scholars of the first centuries of the present era refer frequently and unanimously to Egypt as the original home of magic arts (Blau, I.c. pp. 37-49). In the Bible the real homes of all varieties of witchcraft are given as Egypt (Ex. vii. et passim) and Babylon (Isa. xlvi). Ancient Jewish Magic, by Gideon Bohak. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 483 pp. Â£70.00 / $135.00.Â Magical techniques were apparently considered to "work" even where it is very difficult for us to see what effect they could have had; one might note that many of the practices of ancient medicine seem to have survived a similar shortcoming.

2: "Jewish magic in the Second Temple period" and 3: "Jewish magic in late antiquity - the 'insider' evidence."