

GODS AS SAVIOURS

JIM (T. S. F.) *Saviour Gods and Soteria in Ancient Greece*. Pp. xiv + 319, ills, maps. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Cased, £75, US \$100. ISBN: 978-0-19-289411-3.

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Within the field of ancient religion, the study of divine names, epithets and naming practices has flourished in the last ten years, and this monograph adds to this growing subfield by offering an exploration of saviour gods and the related concept of *soteria* in ancient Greece. The remit of the book is wider than its title suggests: it intends to analyse not only gods called saviour and not only the language of *soteria* and related terms such as the epithets Soter and Soteira. Instead, it aims to offer a full examination of the concept of ‘saving’ or ‘deliverance’ in ancient Greece, and thus goes beyond a semantic study of *soteria* vocabulary to investigate various expressions by which the Greeks articulated hopes for deliverance and safety. J. aims to uncover what it means to call a deity or a human being ‘saviour’. And in a world where multiple gods reigned, which gods did the Greeks invoke for *soteria*, and why?

The argument is presented in six chapters. The first chapter traces the development of *soteria* language and the concept of ‘deliverance’ from Homeric epic to the classical period. J. argues that a heightened awareness of ‘salvation’ emerged among the Greeks after the unprecedented threat of the Persian invasions of the 490s–470s BCE. By the fourth century, *soteria* had acquired multiple meanings: not only deliverance from physical destruction, often tied to seafaring and warfare, but sometimes also political autonomy, linking it to *eleutheria* (‘freedom’).

Chapters 2 and 3 provide surveys of the evidence for why and when worshippers invoked their gods as protectors, focusing on communal and individual worship, respectively. J. emphasises the individuality and variety present in appellations of saviour gods, showcasing intriguing examples such as Hellenistic graffiti invoking Pan Soter from the El-Kanais shrine in Egypt. These examples illustrate the repeating and ephemeral nature of *soteria*, which requires constant renewal. The capacity of dedications to encompass both gratitude for specific moments of ‘saving’ and hopes for ongoing deliverance is highlighted, illustrating the merging of the ‘blessing’ and the ‘saving’ aspects of *soteria*.

Chapter 4 explores the same evidence as the preceding chapters, resulting in occasional repetition. However, given the intricate nature of the subject matter tackled – divine names – repetition is perhaps unavoidable. It necessitates managing vast quantities of disjointed and often concise data, from short dedications offering only names to fragmentary archaeological evidence for cults, to literary references with dubious aetiologies for cults. To make sense of all this, detailed textual and contextual analysis (through attention to the local context) is required, but also positioning within a larger picture detailing spread, change over time and geographical variety. J. navigates between these narrow and broad perspectives, which, despite some repetition, enables her to construct a comprehensive overview of the topic. In Chapter 4 the origins and proliferation of *soter* cults are analysed, beautifully visualised through a considerable number of maps (eighteen in this chapter). These maps assist in identifying trends out of the mass of references to *soter* gods, such as the expected popularity of Zeus Soter and Artemis Soteira, or the unexpected rarity of Poseidon Soter.

The standard scholarly models for understanding epithet choices, J. asserts, fail to explain effectively trans-divine epithets such as *soter*. According to such models, epithets serve to

locate a god in a particular place or to identify a specific aspect of a deity. Following from this latter function, multifunctional gods require epithets more frequently than ‘specialist gods’. J. argues that this model falls short in explaining the epithet *soter*. Unusually, the choice for *soter* is often not based on a deity’s standard sphere of influence: gods who predominate in a sphere, such as Poseidon at sea, are rarely given the epithet. Instead, it is the *nature* of a divinity and the *modality* of their saving power that matters, J. contends. Poseidon, for example, is seen as too destructive to receive the title Soter, while Artemis is not worshipped as Soteira in childbirth because her negative power here outweighs the positive. Aphrodite is seldom called Soteira in maritime contexts since her saving power lies in calming the seas rather than active rescue. In contrast, the Dioscuri, who frequently travel on horseback to the aid of seafarers, are often called Soter. J. tentatively suggests the epithet Soter tends to be linked to gods ‘who could act in a more human-like way’.

Chapter 5 delves into the complexities of ruler worship during the Hellenistic kingdoms and the practice of bestowing the cult title Soter upon human beings. While ruler cult has been extensively studied, J.’s exploration of royal nomenclature and one specific title offers fresh insights. She emphasises the dynamic interplay between different agents involved in assigning the title to kings, ranging from local communities and individuals to the royal courts. The concept of ‘saviour’ carries inherent ambiguity, allowing people to interpret the representation of kings differently based on their beliefs regarding their divinity. J. argues that kings receive the cult title Soter due to specific saving deeds, but the list of exceptions is long (Ptolemy IX, the Ptolemaic queens, and possibly Ptolemy I in Ptolemais Hermiou and Antiochus I in Aegae received the title due to family connections or as a routine honour). There are also differences between saviour cults for deities and kings, which could have received more attention: royal *soteres* mostly lack individual invocations, for instance (though a fascinating exception is discussed on pp. 185–7).

The final chapter explores the Christian concept of *soteria*, going beyond the classical and Hellenistic Greek and Roman contexts. J. highlights the notable distinctions and the similarities between *soteria* in Greek religion and in Christianity. In the Christian sense ‘salvation’ extends beyond physical protection from earthly dangers in the present life. It encompasses redemption from sin, liberation from its consequences in the afterlife and the attainment of eternal life following death.

The book is an impressive study that displays J.’s excellent and comprehensive command of the subject. The evidence brought together ranges far and wide in space and time, and J. manages to bring coherence to this broad picture with a perceptive analysis that pays attention to the intricate and technical details, especially of the epigraphic material, but also places these in a broader picture. She demonstrates the subject matter’s contribution to significant debates in the study of Greek religion, including the complexities of polytheism and the nuances of deification practices. The book enhances our understanding of specific cults and festivals, while also shedding light on larger topics, such as how worshippers in ancient Greece selected which deities to invoke. Despite the flexibility of Greek religious language and the multitude of available options within this polytheistic system, J. shows it is possible to uncover discernible patterns that provide insights into the meaning of the epithet *soter*.

There are two minor points of critique I would like to raise. Firstly, the repeated emphasis on the need to read *soteria* in ancient Greece without a Christian lens seems slightly unnecessary, given the obvious differences between the Greek and the Christian concepts and the well-established efforts of scholarship in the last decades to break free from Christian-tinted glasses. The decision to trace the uptake and usage of *soteria* in a different Greek-speaking religious tradition beyond the Hellenistic period is innovative, but the contribution of the final chapter to the overall investigation of *soteria* in Greece

and the book's argument is not always evident. J. argues in this chapter for the remarkable consistency of *soteria* from the archaic period to the fourth century CE, but appears at times to downplay the significant changes it undergoes, particularly with the addition of its eschatological meaning in Christian contexts. Secondly, the broad scope of the investigation – especially when departing from the lexical line of analysis – sometimes risks collapsing the diversity of cases examined. For instance, the differences between awarding Soter titles to Hellenistic kings, often as praise epithets, and the appeal to a god through a name that aims to identify or emphasise a divine sphere of action could have been explored more thoroughly. Yet these points do not detract from the value of the work, which is an impressive and insightful study that makes a significant contribution to our understanding not only of who the Greeks appealed to as saviours, but why they did so.

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MAGIC AND SCENT

AGER (B. K.) *The Scent of Ancient Magic*. Pp. xii + 225. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022. Cased, US\$75. ISBN: 978-0-472-13302-4.

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The central thesis of this volume is that in 'Greek and Roman culture, scent was sometimes equated with magic' (p. 34). Notwithstanding the substantial body of evidence from Graeco-Roman antiquity attesting to the use of scented ingredients as a means of effecting change in the world, it is remarkable that scent and its relationship with ancient magic has yet to receive sustained scholarly attention. The primary reason for this, as A. points out in the introductory chapter, is that past studies of Graeco-Roman magic have been dominated by philological approaches (p. 31). Researchers in the field have traditionally looked to the textual sources such as the Greek magical papyri, the Orphic gold tablets and lead curse tablets in order to apply literary-focused theories. In this volume A. deviates from these traditional scholarly approaches to provide a fresh and innovative perspective on ancient magic. By taking a holistic sensory approach to the evidence in order to 'decenter the spoken and written word in the study of ritual' (p. 42), A. teases out of the ancient sources new and nuanced insights into the embodied sensory experience of ancient magical practices that are not immediately discernible through philological analysis alone. Given contemporary trends in Classics, adjacent fields and the social sciences that have seen sustained interest in sensory studies over the last decade, otherwise known as the 'sensory turn', A.'s olfactory analysis of ancient magic is not only relevant but also a timely and welcome contribution to this field of research.

The volume is presented in six chapters, including an epilogue. In the substantial and contextually detailed introductory chapter, 'The Breath of the Leopard: Scent and Magic', A. discusses the complex nature and sensory elusiveness of ancient magic. The opaque and intangible experience at the specific 'moment of the magic itself' (p. 3) is, as A. suggests, a period of uncertainty, albeit one framed by an arguably understandable and sensorially perceivable process of cause and effect; for example, the multi-sensory experience