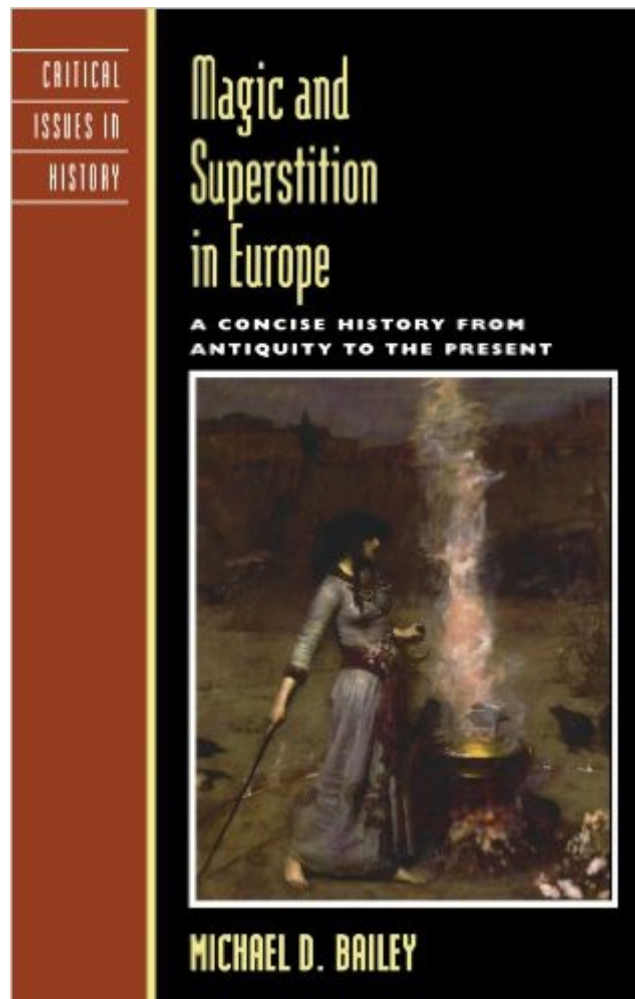


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Magic And Superstition In Europe: A Concise History From Antiquity To The Present (Critical Issues In World And International History)



Synopsis

The only comprehensive, single-volume survey of magic available, this compelling book traces the history of magic, witchcraft, and superstitious practices such as popular spells or charms from antiquity to the present day. Focusing especially on Europe in the medieval and early modern eras, Michael Bailey also explores the ancient Near East, classical Greece and Rome, and the spread of magical systems—particularly modern witchcraft or Wicca—from Europe to the United States. He examines how magic and superstition have been defined in various historical eras and how these constructions have changed over time. He considers the ways in which specific categories of magic have been condemned, and how those identified as magicians or witches have been persecuted and prosecuted in various societies. Although conceptions of magic have changed over time, the author shows how magic has almost always served as a boundary marker separating socially acceptable actions from illicit ones, and more generally the known and understood from the unknown and occult.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Bailey successfully tackles a daunting project here, providing a sweeping yet nuanced overview of a vast topic within only a few hundred pages. He displays a masterful command of the material (few historians are able to write expertly across time frames spanning the ancient and modern), and writes in a very engaging and readable manner. I particularly appreciated his attention to key shifts and developments over time, and how so many different cultural, political, scientific, and religious

developments in European history shaped ideas of magic and superstition. For readers (such as the other reviewer here) who want detailed studies of particular magical practices in certain times and places, there is a vast literature already in place -- such encyclopedic miscellany certainly would not belong in a concise survey. Having dragged myself through a number of such volumes and come away more confused than edified, I am grateful to Bailey for providing such a lucid framework within which now to place and make sense of other magic/witchcraft studies. Highly recommended.

This author's writing style made reading such a large portion of history fast and easy. While this book does not get into great detail it does cover a large span of magical history.

Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present is a well written and informative book about the 'reaction' to Magic and Superstition in Europe but is 'not about' Magic and Superstition in Europe. The somewhat misleading title is what interested me in purchasing the book. The opportunity to delve into some details about the nature of the 'Magic' was missed at every turn. A sentence or two, in spite of being concise, would have been much appreciated.

good and efficient

In his introduction, the author writes 'My approach is not philosophical (that is, theoretical) or scientific; still less is it legal or theological. Rather, it is historical, seeking to trace the development of magic and superstition in Europe from antiquity to the present'. The author is true to his word, in the sense that readers must not expect anything in the way of theory or philosophy, and very little in the way of description (full details of what magic entailed during every period under consideration). The book is more an example of what a history can be in its narrowest and least rewarding sense: a list of names and dates. Even within these self-imposed limits there are perplexing holes in the account. The author does not include words like 'grimoire', and 'Zohar', but manages to include mention of Newton, Diderot and Hobbes. The low point of the book for me is the central section describing the witch trials. The author's attention is devoted entirely to a history of the beliefs and practices of the authorities of the inquisitions, and shirks the effort of attempting a fuller description of the accused and their beliefs and practices, i.e. a history of magic and superstition in Europe.

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