


Hector M. Patmore – Josef Lössl (eds.), *Demons in Early Judaism and Christianity. Characters and Characteristics* (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 113; Leiden – Boston, MA: Brill 2022). Pp. 339. € 146.28. ISBN 978-90-04-51714-1

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Jewish and Christian demonology is a particularly interesting issue that is at the same time multithreaded and interdisciplinary. Although in the past this area of research remained largely ignored or neglected in critical studies, it has recently gained more interest due to the availability of a wealth of new primary sources, such as, for instance, the Dead Sea Scrolls. Critical studies on demonology in the Bible, Judaism, and early Christianity confirm that the belief in demons was not a primitive superstition nor an alien element in the Jewish world. On the contrary, that belief had become part of Judaism by at least the end of the Hellenistic period and manifested itself in various ways. It is to this area of research that the inspiring collective work edited by Hector M. Patmore and Josef Lössl entitled *Demons in Early Judaism and Christianity. Characters and Characteristics* is dedicated.

This work is the fruit of the research project, *Demonic Exegesis: The Role of Biblical Interpretation and Exegetical Encounter in the Shaping of Jewish and Christian Demonologies*, hosted at Cardiff University's School of History, Archaeology and Religion. Some papers collected in this volume were presented at the SBL Annual Meeting, the EABS Annual Conference and the International Conference on Patristic Studies. A total of 14 articles written by 15 contributors from various scientific centres around the world have been accepted for this publication. It is preceded by an editorial introduction and supplied with two indexes: of ancient sources and of modern authors.

An excellent introduction outlines the main themes covered in the book. It discusses first the context of research on Jewish and Christian demonology, showing the importance of diachronic and synchronic approaches in understanding how the beliefs and ideas were transferred from Judaism into early Christianity. Next, the editors indicate the main purpose of the work, which is to draw on the insights of the experts on a diverse range of corpora in order to shed new light on the understanding of demonic ontologies in Jewish and Christian sources from roughly 300 BCE until 500 CE. Subsequently, the content of the volume is presented paper by paper. Of note, the opening paper by Hector M. Patmore serves to set the scene for the entire volume, while the rest of the papers

are arranged in roughly chronological order according to the period of time they discuss. The editors then present the final achievements of the book and draw some general conclusions. It should be noted that the bibliography following the introduction is of great value since it lists the most important works covering the themes discussed in the volume, in addition to the bibliography provided by each contributor.

The first paper, “Demonic Exegesis” by Hector M. Patmore, Associate Professor at the KU Leuven (Belgium), focuses on the cases in which Bible texts that did not originally refer to demons came to be interpreted over time as if they did. He uses Psalm 91 and two oracles from the Book of Isaiah as examples to describe some of the ways in which this phenomenon finds expression, first, in the Dead Sea Scrolls and rabbinic sources, and then, in the Christian tradition, for instance, in the works of Jerome.

The examination of the semantic domains of the Greek lexeme δαιμόνιον in Jewish literature is the focal point of Anna Angelini’s “Δαίμονες and Demons in Hellenistic Judaism: Continuities and Transformations.” This researcher at the University of Zurich (Switzerland) analyses the ontology of demons, their location within a monotheistic spiritual hierarchy, and how they were conceptualised by Greek-speaking Jewish circles. She identifies three tendencies found in the Septuagint which made some aspects of Jewish culture more digestible for a non-Jewish audience.

Beate Ego’s paper, “The Demon Asmodeus in the Tobit Tradition: His Nature and Character,” casts new light on the interpretation of the Book of Tobit. This Full Professor at the Ruhr University Bochum (Germany) explains the association in the narrative between Asmodeus and disease, and the exorcism as a form of healing, against the background of magico-medical traditions in ancient Mesopotamia and Persia.

Another interesting issue is discussed by John K. Goodrich, Professor at Moody Bible Institute (Chicago, USA). In the paper, “Paul’s Suprahumanizing Exegesis: Rewriting the Defeat of God’s Enemies in 1 Corinthians, Romans, and Ephesians,” he demonstrates an example of “demonic exegesis” in Paul’s Letters, namely, that Paul quotes or alludes to passages from the Jewish Scriptures in order to include both human and superhuman anti-God powers which will be defeated in the eschatological reign of the Messiah.

Matthew T. Sharp from the University of St Andrews (Scotland, UK) analyses Paul’s demonic vocabulary in his contribution about “Courting Daimons in Corinth: Daimonic Partnership, Cosmic Hierarchies and Divine Jealousy in 1 Corinthians 8–10.” He concentrates first on the ancient philosophical understanding of “daimons” as intermediaries between gods and humans, and then demonstrates that “daimons” as recipients of pagan sacrifice in Paul’s critique of such a practice cannot be perceived as divine. Sharp concludes that the source of Paul’s theology is, of course, Jewish, yet it is strongly embedded in Graeco-Roman culture.

The next paper offers a study on “Demons and Vices in Early Christianity” by Tom de Bruin. This scholar and university lecturer in the UK discusses how Christian writings of the second and third centuries CE tended to hypostasize vices as demons. He observes that in the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint, vices were already addressed metaphorically

as demons. He argues, however, that the “ontological turn,” meaning their hypostatization as external forces, occurred only in early Christianity and had far-reaching consequences, namely, it led to a view of the human self as potentially becoming demonic itself.

The seventh paper in the volume is dedicated to Tatian’s apology *Oration to the Greeks* dating from 170 BCE. This paper by Josef Lössl, “The ‘Demonogony’ of Tatian’s *Oratio ad Graecos*: Jewish and Greek Influences,” traces the exegetical history of the biblical concept of “first-born” in relation to the origin of the first demon as analogous to God’s Logos. Interestingly, this Professor at Cardiff University (Wales, UK) sees a certain affinity between Tatian’s parallel and the concept of the “Anti-Christ.”

In the paper “St. Jerome, Demons, and Jewish Tradition,” C.T.R. Hayward, a retired Professor at the University of Durham (England, UK), uses Psalms 3 and 31 as examples to demonstrate how words and translations can influence the perception of demons in these texts. He argues that Jerome translated these Psalms from the Greek Septuagint, making explicit references to demons, but sometimes imitating the source text and thus making more or less intentional allusions to demonic realities.

“Demonic ‘Tollhouses’ and Visions of the Afterlife in Pseudo-Cyril of Alexandria’s Homily *De exitu animi*” by Emmanouela Grypeou elaborates on some trends discussed in De Bruin’s and Lössl’s papers. In this early Christian homily, she finds an army of demons in God’s service in the afterlife. This Associate Professor at Stockholm University (Sweden) evokes the *Apocalypse of Paul* and the *Apocalypse of James* from the Nag Hammadi library and identifies there some common motifs, present in «*De exitu animi*», such as a toll-house where angels and demons struggle to possess the souls, or a heavenly ascent through an area dominated by hostile powers, or an intermediate judgement after death but before moving on to the final one. Grypeou thus argues that the homily of Pseudo-Cyril of Alexandria aptly shows the development of the understanding of demons as an array of forces interacting with humans right after death.

Hagit Amirav (University of Oxford, England, UK) and Peter-Ben Smit (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Utrecht University, the Netherlands) incorporate non-textual data into the discussion. In “The Naked Demon: Alternative Interpretations of the Alexamenos Graffito” they propose a different approach to the so-called “Alexamenos Graffito” and interpret it as representing a demonic figure. Drawing on a number of magical papyri, they suggest that it is a crucified and impaled demon, depicted naked from behind. Consequently, the graffito would be attributed to a Christian mocking a pagan demon worshipper, and not a pagan mocking a Christian, as it is traditionally interpreted.

The next paper, “Negotiating Danger: Demonic Manipulations in Jewish Babylonia,” by Alexander W. Marcus, brings to light the beliefs about demons in the Jewish communities of Sassanian Mesopotamia. This associate at Yale University (USA) discusses the depiction of demons in the Babylonian Talmud and their images on incantation bowls used in medical praxis and observes that demons were regarded as double-edged figures, essentially harmful but if harnessed they could have beneficial effects and become a source of healing and protection.

In “Demons and Scatology: Cursed Toilets and Haunted Baths in Late Antique Judaism” Ilaria Briata, a Research Associate at the University of Hamburg (Germany) sheds new light on demons who rule over toilets (a Babylonian phenomenon) and bathhouses (a Palestinian phenomenon) as threatening and dangerous spirits, provoking, for instance, diseases such as epilepsy. She argues that in the light of the Sassanian cultural milieu under Zoroastrian notions they represent a form of hypostatization of a fear arising from the potential insanitary nature of the place.

The penultimate paper of the volume, “The King of Demons in the Universe of the Rabbinis,” by Reuven Kiperwasser, puts together the figure of Ashmedai in the Babylonian Talmud and the Jewish magic bowls. This lecturer at Ariel University and a research associate at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem explains that the depiction of Ashmedai in the bowls originates in the Babylonian treatise *Gittin* sometimes representing him as exorcised, but sometimes as an exorcist.

Naama Vilozy’s paper, “The Gender and Sexuality of Demons in the Art of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls,” closes the collection. The author analyses the images of demons appearing on magic bowls dating from circa 400. This independent Israeli researcher and art historian focuses on the role of demons’ gender and demonstrates that demons take a variety of zoomorphic and humanoid forms, and their sex may be ambiguous or not fixed, which, in any case, reflects the local context.

The studies collected in this volume reflect a range of responses to the issue of cross-cultural influences of demonic phenomena as described in Jewish and Christian corpora. They provide insight into how Jews and Christians understood demons and how they integrated and naturalised various concepts of demons within their respective traditions. Undoubtedly, the collection of these papers offers fresh perspectives on a wide range of primary sources. Their detailed analyses and observations will surely be valuable for scholars working with these sources and the contexts they pertain to.