

## Chapter Five

# “How is Jesus Greater than Solomon?” Solomon and Jesus as Magicians (Healers and Exorcists)

*“A sound magician is a demi-god”*

Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (1704), 1, 1:59

*“Will you believe in antiquity?*

*I’ll show you a book where Moses and his sister*

*And Solomon have written of the art”*

Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist* (1612)

## Magic and Occultism

Did the image of Solomon as a magician appear as an inseparable part of Jewish occultism that developed during the Second Temple period (the Hellenist and Roman), or was it a reaction to Jesus’ reputation as an exorcist and healer in an effort to prove that Solomon was greater than Jesus?<sup>492</sup> Or, perhaps, it was the other way around. Namely, when the people refer to Jesus, known for his ability to exorcise demons, as the “son of David”, they do so because during the Second Temple period Solomon was famous as a healer and exorcist, and the authors of the Gospels wished to cite evidence that Jesus was, in this regard, greater than Solomon. Or, perhaps, both traditions emerged separately as an outcome of the extensive presence of magic in all the cultures of the ancient world. However, Solomon does not resemble Jesus and he is not described as having engaged in the practice of magic, namely in exorcising demons, and not as having written magic oaths and texts, or having possessed them. Jesus, on the other hand, is described as having engaged in the practice of magic, namely, in healing people and in exorcising demons, and not as the author of any text whatsoever. At the most, the two “meet” in the few magic texts in which they both appear.

Since the terms “magic” and “occultism” appear frequently in the research literature—and will appear in this chapter and in Chapter Seven as well—I will begin by relating the nature of the occult (or esoteric) sciences. The word first

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<sup>492</sup> On this claim, see Sasson (2003, pp. 140 – 141).

appeared in German (*Esoterik*) in 1792.<sup>493</sup> Magic is part of these sciences and generally refers to human activity in the supernatural sphere, namely to various practices such as astral magic, mathematical magic, natural magic, mechanical magic, and others.<sup>494</sup> By human means, an attempt is made to influence supernatural forces to come to one's aide, both for evil purposes (*magia diabolica*; necromancy) and for worthy purposes, i.e., "white magic" (*magia bona*). The former, known as "black magic" (*goetia*), has been denounced as "mendacious, loathsome vain acts" (*magicas vanitas*) because it employs false trickery (*miracula circumlatoris*) that deceives men and is used by itinerant witches who lead people astray. The latter, theurgy, instructs people how to harness supernatural forces for human benefit.<sup>495</sup> However, practical magic is not separate from the sciences of occultism because it is anchored in an all-embracing view (occult philosophy) about the structure and order of the world and about the forces and concealed mechanisms that act within it and operate it.<sup>496</sup> The polymath, legal scholar, and physician Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's (1486–1535) definition of this kind of magic is: "Magic is a faculty of wonderful virtue, full of most high mysteries, containing the most profound contemplation of most secret things, together with the nature, power, quality, substance, and virtues thereof, as also the knowledge of whole nature, and it doth instruct us concerning the differing and agreement of things among themselves, whence it produceth its wonderful effects, by uniting the virtues of things through the application of them to one another[...]"<sup>497</sup> When Faust says he has despaired of theology, philosophy, and the sciences, and decides to turn to magic in order to explore the wondrous and to understand "*was die Welt / Im Innersten zusammenhält / Schau' alle Wirkenskraft und Samen / Und tu' nicht mehr in Worten kramen*"<sup>498</sup> he is not referring

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**493** Lynn Thorndike uses "magic" as a generic term to include all superstitious arts and occult sciences (Thorndike 1964, pp. 973–974).

**494** Birkhan (2010, pp. 33–114).

**495** Philo of Alexandria, for example, draws a distinction between "true magic", which is the "science of vision" or *theosis*, namely the study and interpretation of the actions of nature, on the one hand, and magic on the other. See Garin (1983, p. 91).

**496** On the terminology, see Copenhaver (2003, pp. 280–281). See also Hanegraaff (2013); Katz (2007).

**497** *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, Book I. The book was translated into English in 1651. On it, see Lehrich (2005); And see Giordano Bruno, in the Third Dialogue, *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante* (The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast). Agrippa, incidentally, does not count Solomon among the ancient authors of occult literature.

**498** "That I might see what secret force / Hides in the word and rules its course / Envisage the creative blazes / Instead of rummaging in phrases" (I:82–85), Goethe (1963, p. 95). It is no coincidence that I cite Faust. Agrippa's doctrine in *Aus Meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit*,

to practical magic, namely to magic techniques, but rather to texts that suggest a religious or cosmological method,<sup>499</sup> such as neo-Platonic or Hermetic writings, which tell how the world was formed (*gnosis*) and what forces (*primae causae*) operate within it and how they influence humans. The two magi, Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) and Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) believed that magic is “the practical part of nature” (*magia est practica scientiae naturalis*). The idea that (occult) magic is no more than a collection of superstitions and speculations, or that it is an “irrational” belief, has not been the accepted view for a long time. I should like to quote the words of the scholar of ancient Egyptian magic, John Baines that “Magic and rationality do not conflict; magic is rational, its argumentation is often rationalistic”.<sup>500</sup>

## Magic and Healing

The belief in demons, magic, and magic practices does not acknowledge any boundaries between religions and cultures,<sup>501</sup> which were—and still are—trans-cultural, in many cases diffuse, dynamic, and syncretic in their nature.<sup>502</sup> It is more than a folk culture<sup>503</sup>; in fact, it is a deeply rooted phenomenon, existing continuously from the ancient era until the present day and it cannot be eradicated,<sup>504</sup> certainly not in a world in which magic is perceived as part of the created order, in which no distinction was drawn between it and “religion,” in

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VI, resonates in Faust’s above-mentioned words. Goethe stated that Agrippa’s book was one of his favorites and “so set my young brains in a considerable whirl for a time” (Basel, 1949, 140). Agrippa is also one of the two magicians who come, in Marlowe’s play, to persuade Faust to embrace esoterism: “The miracles that magic will perform \ Will make thee vow to study nothing else” (1.1: 130–131).

**499** See Wasserstrom (2000). The article contains a lengthy bibliography and the issue contains other important articles on the subject.

**500** Baines (1991, p. 165).

**501** See Greenbaum (2016).

**502** Bohak (2004, 2007, 2015); Hull (1974, pp. 27–37).

**503** The number of books written on the subject of magic in general, and magic in the ancient world in particular, is so vast that I saw no need to cite more than a handful of them: Butler (1998); Wygant (2006); Kieckhefer (1990); Klutz (2004); Schäfer and Kippenberg (1997); Classen (2017); Fanger (1998); Dickie (2001); Paola Zambelli (2012). On magic and exorcism in the period of the Second Temple in general, see Bohak (2008, pp. 71–142); and in Josephus in particular, see Bohak (2008; pp. 83–85, 99–105). On its representation in art, see Battistini (2004, pp. 131–249); Page (2004). For a short bibliography on Egyptian magic, see notes 43 and 44 in my Shavit (2013).

**504** Barb (1963, p. 125).

which magic was regarded as an effective means of achieving security in this world, which is constantly threatened by concealed forces<sup>505</sup>; a world in which “magic,” “medicine”,<sup>506</sup> and “science” were not thought to contradict one another. In all the cultures, practices were—and are—followed to expel evil demons.<sup>507</sup> These included incantations (*epoide*), curse tablets (*defixiones*), charms, gems with magic powers, amulets, curse bowls, and seals. These techniques passed from culture to culture, and along with them went magic rituals (*goetian*), magic texts, and a system of magic symbols. An endless number of testimonies document the circulation of magic texts and the use of magic practices in Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome.<sup>508</sup>

It is not surprising, then, nor is there any need to cite evidence, that belief in the existence of evil spirits (the “spirit of Satan”, or “spirits of malice”) that harm humans was also prevalent in Jewish culture and that, at the same time, Jews believed there were ways and means of combating these spirits.<sup>509</sup> For example, the apocalyptic Book of Tobit [Tobias] (written and edited between the 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E.) describes the exorcism of a demon or evil spirit with the aid of incense from the liver, heart, or gall of a fish (I, 1–9). According to Josephus, the Essenes “display an extraordinary interest in the writing of the ancient, singling out those which make for welfare of the soul and body. With the help of these, and with a view to the treatment of diseases, they make investigations into medical root and properties of Stone”.<sup>510</sup> And the Roman historian and geographer Strabo (64 B.C.E.—23 C.E.) based his view on Posidonius’ when he wrote that the Jews were a “people of sorcerers who pretend to use incantations”.<sup>511</sup>

However, Solomon was not depicted as having healed the ill or exorcised demons from the bodies of humans. He is not like Elijah, nor like his father David, who cured Saul of the evil spirit that had possessed him by playing on his harp.<sup>512</sup> Nonetheless, the source of his fame as a magician is in the wisdom at-

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505 Assmann (2002, pp. 239–240).

506 See Jankrift (2005).

507 See Thräde (1962b).

508 Israelowich (2015); Meggitt (2006, pp. 109–114); and Tanman and Pitarakis (2018).

509 See Alexander (1986).

510 *The Jewish War*, II (6), 136.

511 Strabo, *Geography*, 16. 2.43 (Strabo 1930, p. 295). In the apocryphal book, *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, the narrator, Judah, is sad about the fact that his sons are being seduced by witches and spirits. And that is only one example that shows how widespread belief in magic was.

512 Plutarch writes about the playing of music to exorcise demons among Pythagoras’ pupils: p. 371.

tributed to him in the Bible: “And Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt”.<sup>513</sup> It included, among other things, the ability to speak “of trees, from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall; he would speak of animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish.”<sup>514</sup> “He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered a thousand and five”.<sup>515</sup> As for “the wisdom of Egypt”, the allusion is probably to the wisdom literature such as *Instructions of Amenemhat* from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.<sup>516</sup> Even if we read the verse in 1 Kings 4:33 as “**to** the trees, **to** the beasts, **to** the fowl,” instead of “of the trees,” etc., that would still not suffice to suggest that Solomon possessed the skills of a magician just as the words in the *Gemara* about R. Johanan ben Zakkai that he was well-versed in “the speech of the Ministering Angels, the speech of spirits, and the speech of palm-trees”<sup>517</sup> do not make him a magician.<sup>518</sup>

Putative evidence that Solomon engaged in magic is in “Song for the Stricken” from Qumran, which is attributed to David (11QPs Ap).<sup>519</sup> It states that Solomon received from his father a hymn [a version of a curse] to exorcise an evil spirit, but it does not say he used it. And Josephus writes that “God granted him knowledge of the art used against demons for the benefit and healing of men. He also composed incantations by which illnesses are relieved, and left behind forms of exorcism which those possessed by demons drive them out, never to return”.<sup>520</sup>

Moreover, Josephus finds it necessary to cite a concrete example of Solomon’s power as a healer and an exorcist of demons. Another source may have been the Vulgate. Solomon was known as a writer of curses in the first centuries C.E. from a number of sources: the 1<sup>st</sup> century fragment *Cithsrisimus Regis David contra daemonun Saulis*, in which David warns the demons: “A son will be born to me who will rule over you”; and the work *Hydromatiae of Solomon*, namely divination through water, or hydromancy, which describes healing techniques

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**513** 1 Kings 4:30.

**514** 1 Kings 4:33.

**515** 1 Kings 4:32. We have no way of knowing what the wisdom of the three ancient wise men was (whom Josephus calls “ancients”).

**516** Which has several parallels in Proverbs 22:17 and 22:25.

**517** *Sukkah* 28a.

**518** On the other hand, according to the legendary biography of Apolloni Tyaneus, written by the Athenian sophist Philostratus (c. 170–247), he knew all the languages in the world, understood the language of birds, healed sick people who were possessed by demons, or were struck blind (III 3.38), and he also owned books of magic. Philostratus (1995, p. 277).

**519** J. M. Baumgarten (1985). Nitzan (1985).

**520** Josephus, *Ant.* 8, 45–46.

in which the magician places the demons in a basin of water<sup>521</sup>; as well as at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E. by the alchemist Zosimus of Panopolis: “among the Egyptians there is a book called *The Book of Seven Heavens* but it is not true that it was written by Solomon, for these bottles were brought [from Jerusalem] many generations earlier by the [Egyptian] priests. But Solomon only wrote a single book about the seven bottles...”.<sup>522</sup>

The Sages did not mention Solomon in the context of exorcism, though Talmud Yerushalmi<sup>523</sup> refers to a “tablet of remedies” that King Hezekiah ordered removed in order to cleansing the Temple of idolatry (גנו טבלה של רפואות).<sup>524</sup> The late secondary addition to *Mishnah Pesahim* 4:9 reads: “King Hezekiah did six things... He hid the book of remedies”. In Maimonides’s view, the tablet was a list of magical remedies.

The tradition that this book was composed by Solomon appears in Christian literature.<sup>525</sup> In *Quaestiones et responsiones XLI*, Anastasius Sinaita, the 7<sup>th</sup>-century monk, repeated the question posed by the Church father Hippolytus in the early third century in his commentary on Song of Songs. There, Hippolytus wondered where had the proverbs and psalms written by Solomon<sup>526</sup> disappeared to. His reply was that King Hezekiah feared the people might apply the incantations that appeared in those books instead of praying to God for a cure, and, hence, only a portion of Solomon’s writings were copied during his reign and the rest were placed in archives. Among the latter, Hippolytus enumerates books on the physiology of plants, animals, flow and fish, as well as the healing of illness. According to the Byzantine writer George Syncellus (ca. 800), it was Solomon’s writings that were engraved in the gate of the Temple that contained the remedy for every disease. McCown concludes that in the fifth century there were still Christian writers who related with admiration to pseudo-Solomonic texts on magic.<sup>527</sup> Even if we accept this view, the fact is that none of these texts from the Second Temple period and thereafter mention Solomon’s magic practices,

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521 According to Varo, who is cited by Augustine (1984, 8:38) the source of these techniques was in Persia. And see Livy, XI, xxix, pp. 91–93, and the discussion in Torijano (2002, pp. 209–309). The book was preserved in Persian under the name *Key of Mercy and Secrets of Wisdom*.

522 James (1893, pp. 195–196).

523 *y.Mishnah Pesachim* 9:1, 36c–d, p. 332; also see *b. Berahot* 10b, *Pesachim* 56a, *Sanhedrin* 47a.

524 Halperin (1982); Silverman (1976). This tradition is part of the attempt to glorify Hezekiah’s image.

525 See Halperin (1982, pp. 117–126).

526 1 Kings 5:13.

527 McCown (1922a, p. 15).

and the *Testament of Solomon* is apparently the only work in which the king not only rules the world of demons but also recruits them to construct the Temple while he also exorcises a demon called Urinus from a boy's body and calls other demons by name in order to exorcise them.<sup>528</sup> Jesus appears in this text as possessing more power to rule over demons than Solomon.

Would it be correct to state that during the Second Temple period a tradition about Solomon as an exorcist was widespread in Jewish society in Palestine and in Egypt, and that that tradition was also accepted by non-Jews? We have not come across more than a few magic papyri that use the name of Solomon before the 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E. that can be attributed to Jews and can serve as evidence of a Jewish "popular tradition" about Solomon as an exorcist of demons and the use of Solomon's name for purposes of magic.<sup>529</sup> From the few examples of such use, we can mention the Paris magical papyrus from the fourth century, which states: "I adjure (*exorkizo*) thee [the demons] by the seal which Solomon laid upon the tongue of Jeremiah and he spoke".<sup>530</sup> The text of the papyrus is complex and in a later version, 'Jesus, the God the Hebrews', was added to it. And, written on another papyrus, Köln 338 (3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E.): "I adjure every spirit wicked and evil by the great God most high who created heaven and earth and seas and all things in them, to come out of Allous, whom Annis bore, the holder of the Seal (*sphragis*) of Solomon. Now! Now! Now! At once!"<sup>531</sup>

All this is not enough evidence of the existence of a widespread tradition about King Solomon, in contrast to Jesus, performing magic or healing.

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**528** *Testament of Solomon* had an influence on demonology in much later generations. For example, the Dutch physician and occultist, Johann Weyer (1515–1588) mentions 69 demons in his book *Pseudomonarchia Daemonum* (False Kingdom of Demons) and in the index to his book *De Praestigiis Daemonum et Incantationibus ac Venificiis* (On the Illusions of the Demons and on Spells and Poisons, 1563).

**529** Torijano writes that: "The figure of Solomon as exorcist enjoyed enough fame among the gentile readers of Josephus to allow the adaptation of pre-existent patterns without much trouble" (Torijano 2002, pp. 104–105). However, there is no evidence that Solomon was famous among non-Jewish readers in the time of Josephus. Duling also writes that "the fascinating legend of Solomon's magical wisdom was widespread in Late Antiquity [...]", Duling (1985).

**530** Bibliothèque Nationale, Supp., grec., no. 564, 11, 3039f. [PGM IV 3009–3009]. And see Bonner (1943); Kotansky (1995, pp. 261–266).

**531** David R. Jordan and Roy Kotansky (1997); Duling (1975).

## Jesus as a Healer and an Exorcist

The major achievement ascribed to magic is the exorcism of demons or devils from the body of an ill person using various techniques. All the cultures of the ancient world<sup>532</sup> believed that evil spirits (demons/devils) possessed the power to enter the body of a person, and in the power of a king, or a saint, to overcome the demon by the touch of his hand.<sup>533</sup> There are instances of healing without any magical practice in the Bible (the stories of Elijah and Elisha) and in *Genesis Apocryphon* (XX. 16–32), a work from the Judean desert scrolls (Qumran) that tells how Abraham cured Pharaoh after all of his sorcerers had failed and fled: Abraham: “prayed [for him]...and I laid my hands on his [head]; and the scourge departed from him and the evil [spirit] was expelled...”<sup>534</sup>

Similar testimonies are found in rabbinical literature. In the *Midrash Genesis Rabbah*, a tale is told about “Elijah of blessed memory who came to our master [Judah ha-Nasi], put his hand on his tooth and healed him”.<sup>535</sup> Certainly, the Sages opposed healing by whispering spells, viewing it as a practice of the *minim* (heretics),<sup>536</sup> but their negative opinion was not adopted by the public. The belief in healing through the laying of hands of saints and kings endured at least until the seventeenth century.<sup>537</sup> This widespread belief aroused quite a lot of criticism and derision.<sup>538</sup>

Many episodes in the Gospels tell of Jesus’ deeds as a healer and exorcist of demons, and they contain different versions of how Jesus explains the source of his power. I shall cite only a few.<sup>539</sup> Matthew relates that Jesus passed through all the cities and villages “teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good

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532 Jayne (1962); Bharyo and Rider (2017).

533 Flusser (1957).

534 Vermes (1987 edn.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 255. See also Fitzmyer (2004, p. 103).

535 *Genesis Rabbah* 33:3; ed. Theodor-Albeck (1936, pp. 306–307).

536 See Schäfer (2007, pp. 52–62).

537 Uzbek, the Persian traveler in Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* writes: “This king is a great magician [...] he even succeeded in making them [the French] believe that he can cure them of all sort of diseases by touching them.” The King of France is a master sorcerer, whose subjects believe not only in the paper money he prints, but also in the healing power of the touch of his hand. The disease, scrofula, is called “kings evil” in English. Letter 24 in Montesquieu (1973, p. 73). And see Thomas (1973, pp. 227–242).

538 Lucian of Samosata mocks those who “purify themselves with holy potions and others who are deceived by imposters who sell them spells” and tells about a fool who was seduced into buying incantations from a Jew (*Iudaïos eternon moron eksadei labon*). Lucian of Samosata (1973, p. 173).

539 See Duling (1978, pp. 392–410); Paffenroth (1999).



news of the kingdom” and that he also was “curing every disease and every sickness.”<sup>540</sup> And he also tells how Jesus cured a girl by holding her hand, and two blind men, whose eyes he touched, and said: “According to your faith let it be done to you”. And their eyes were opened.<sup>541</sup> Jesus also healed by exorcising demons: “Then they brought to him a demonic-possessed man who was blind and mute; and he cured him, so that the one who had been mute could speak and see. All the crowds were amazed and said, ‘Can this be the Son of David?’”<sup>542</sup> And when another presumed to cast out devils in his name, Jesus did not prevent him and said to his followers: “Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you”.<sup>543</sup>

The only direct correspondence between Jesus and Solomon as exorcists is in Matthew 12:22–24, when the crowd, amazed at seeing Jesus cure a blind man possessed of a demon, cries out: “Can this be the Son of David?” The Pharisees heard it, and said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, that this fellow casts out the demons”. And Jesus replied: “If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your own exorcists cast them out? Therefore, they will be your judges”.<sup>544</sup> There is also the story in Mark<sup>545</sup> about the beggar Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, who upon seeing Jesus began to call out: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”<sup>546</sup> In these stories, the “true” Jesus does not appear as a magician<sup>547</sup> or a shaman.<sup>548</sup> However, he does not use healing herbs, roots, incantations, or a seal.

In these acts, Jesus is akin to Elijah the Tishbite, who resurrected the son of the woman in whose home he lived: “After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill; his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. She then said to Elijah, ‘What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of

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**540** Matthew 9:35.

**541** Matthew 9:25–31.

**542** Matthew 12:22–23.

**543** Luke 9:50.

**544** Matthew 12:24–27.

**545** Mark 10:46–52.

**546** Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:31. And the story about the “Queen of the south” (Queen Sheba) who when she came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, found that “something greater than Solomon is here!”

**547** Unlike Morton Smith’s claim in his book. See Smith (1978). See Birkett (2015); Twelftree (2007); Benko (1982); Kee (1986). In a thoroughly researched study, it is argued that healing and miracles contributed to the success of Christianity. See Ehrman (2019, pp. 131–159).

**548** Craffert (2008).

my son!’ But he said to her, ‘Give me your son’. He took him from her bosom, carried him up into the upper chamber where he was lodging, and laid him on his own bed. He cried out to the Lord, ‘O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?’ Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to the Lord, ‘O Lord my God, let this child’s life come into him again’. The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived”.<sup>549</sup>

Jesus exorcises demons through his authority and faith. When he exorcises a foul spirit from the body of a child and commands it: “You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!”<sup>550</sup> He said to them, “This kind can come out only through prayer”.<sup>551</sup> And when, at the synagogue in Capernaum, where he taught as one that had authority, and not as the scribes, a foul spirit entered into one of the worshippers and Jesus ordered it to come out, those observing were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him”.<sup>552</sup> In this way, Jesus’ power is greater and different from that of Philip from Samaria, who exorcised foul spirits and healed the lame, and from that of Simon (Magus), also from a city in Samaria, who used sorcery and bewitched the people of his city with his magic. But after they heard from Philip the tidings about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.<sup>553</sup> Hence, Matthew and Luke rejected magic practices and, in doing so, drew a distinction between Jesus as an exorcist of demons and other exorcists.<sup>554</sup> He is the antithesis of Simon Magus, who amazed the crowds with his sorceries *tais mageasis*<sup>555</sup> and in the Middle Ages became the archetype of a satanic magician.

Jesus works miracles without using incantations or other means. He is, therefore, a therapeutic Jesus, who exorcises demons that have possessed the body of a person, or heals the disabled, with the power that comes to him from God,<sup>556</sup> and works miracles the like of which have never been wrought be-

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549 1 Kings 17:17–22.

550 Mark 9:24–25.

551 Mark 9:29.

552 Mark 1:21–29.

553 Acts 8:4–19. See also Butler (1993, pp. 63–83).

554 Butler (1993, pp. 73–83). According to Matthew (12:28), Jesus says: “by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons”.

555 Acts 8:9–13.

556 Fisher (1968).

fore: “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you”.<sup>557</sup> Jesus passes this power on to his apostles, whom he sends to heal the sick, to revive the dead, to purify lepers, to cast out demons.<sup>558</sup> But the use of Jesus’ name to exorcise demons was already widespread during his lifetime, and “imposters” began to use his name. When his followers encountered such an imposter, they forbade him because “he does not follow with us”.<sup>559</sup> During his journey to Ephesus, Paul came across several vagabond Jews who claimed they were casting out demons by using Jesus’ name, but the possessed man fought them off and they fled, naked and wounded, and “the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified”. Following this incident, “A number of those who practiced magic collected their books and burned them publicly; when the value of these books was calculated, it was found to come to fifty thousand silver coins”.<sup>560</sup>

The power—and the authority—to exorcise demons lies only with the Apostles. In Lystra, Paul heals a cripple by calling out loudly: “Stand upright on your feet.” And the man leaped and walked.<sup>561</sup> This deed caused the people of the city to regard Paul and Barnabas as gods who had come down to earth in the likeness of men. In Malta, when the father of the chief man of the island lay sick with fever and bloody flux, Paul prayed, laid hands upon the man, and cured him.<sup>562</sup> Timothy reminds Aquila that Jesus healed the many illnesses of those who were sick (7, 6b).<sup>563</sup>

Eusebius attests to Jesus’ popularity as a healer when he writes that when Abgar, King of Edessa in southern Syria, fell ill, he heard reports about Jesus who healed the sick without using herbs and medicines, caused cripples to walk again and blind men to see, and cast out evil spirits and demons. The King understood that Jesus is a god who descended from heaven to work all these miracles, or that he is, perhaps, a son of God. Hence, he asked him to come to Edessa to cure him. The King also heard that the Jews were spreading malicious rumors about Jesus and trying to harm him. His city is small and pious, the King writes to Jesus, and there is room for the two of them. Jesus replies: “Those who have seen me will not believe in me” and “those who have not seen me will be saved”. He says he will not come to Edessa for he must complete

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<sup>557</sup> Matthew 12:28.

<sup>558</sup> Mark 6:13.

<sup>559</sup> Luke 9:49; Mark 9:38.

<sup>560</sup> Acts 19:19.

<sup>561</sup> Acts 14:8–10.

<sup>562</sup> Acts 28:7–9.

<sup>563</sup> *The Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, 155.

his mission, and then will be taken up to heaven, but he will send to Abgar one of his apostles who will bring him a cure. Eusebius hastens to add that there is evidence of the existence of this exchange of letters in an Edessa archive.<sup>564</sup> This is, of course, a legend, but the fact that Eusebius believed that Jesus' healing powers furthered the spread of Christianity in Eastern Syria indicates that he regarded Jesus' powers of healing and exorcising demons as a significant element both of his divinity and of the attraction of believers to the new religion.<sup>565</sup> He writes that it is well known that we are accustomed to using the name of Jesus and pure prayers to repulse the actions of demons<sup>566</sup> and Justin Martyr writes in a similar vein.<sup>567</sup>

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**564** Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.13.1–10, in Cartlidge and Dungan (1980, p. 91). The reference is to Abgar V, King of Osroene in Mesopotamia 4–50 C.E. Another version of the story comes from Ioannes Damascenus (676–749), an Arab Christian monk and theologian. According to him, Abgar wrote to Jesus asking that, in case he will refuse to come, he will charge his ambassador to employ an artist to make a portrait of him (*Epistola ad Theophilum*). The letter is mentioned in a description of the journey of Egeria, at the end of the fourth century. She relates that the bishop of the city showed her the king's letter and Jesus' reply. Wilkinson (1999, p. 133). In the medieval apocrypha "Letter of Lentulus", the writer, Publius Lentulus, a fictitious governor of Jerusalem, Jesus "raises the dead and heals all diseases". See Lutz (1975).

**565** On the vast literature on this subject, see Cartlidge and Dungan (1980, p. 9); as well as the bibliography in the article by Meggitt (2006, pp. 109–114).

**566** *Preparation for the Gospel* III: 6, 35, in Eusebius (2002).

**567** "...it is equally clear (as the word of prophecy) speaking in the name of His followers, metaphorically affirms, that We believers beseech Him to safeguard us from strange, that is, evil and deceitful spirits. We constantly ask God through Jesus Christ to keep us safe from those demons [...] We call him our Keeper and Redeemer [...] it is clear to all of us that His Father bestowed upon Him such a great power that even the demons are subject both to His name and to His ordained manner (the sign of the cross) of suffering" (Chap. 30), Justin Martyr (2003, pp. 191–192). Celsus also attests to the fact that Jesus was renowned as a healer and exorcist who learned certain magical powers in which the Egyptians excel, and when he returned to Palestine, he became arrogant and declared himself a god (1:28, Chadwick 1963, p. 28). He also mocked the Christians for materializing the demons, an act they had copied from various books of magic and compared the incantations and curses to an ode hummed by an old woman trying to put an infant to sleep. He adds that: "a certain Dionysus, an Egyptian musician [...] told him that magical arts were effective with uneducated people but not with people who had studied philosophy with whom they were not able to do any effect, because they were careful to lead a healthy way of life" (VI:41. Chadwick 1963, pp. 355–356) that is, only among the uneducated because of its vulgarity and the utterly illiterate" (I:26). The miracles ascribed to Jesus are the actions of sorcerers, who promise wondrous things, but the belief that they cast out demons, heal illness and call up spirits is but a figment of the imagination. To that claim, Origen replied: "But as a Christian, and having a more accurate knowledge of the matter than he [Celsus], I must aver that these are not doctrines of Christians, but of those who are wholly alien to salvation, and who in no way profess Jesus to be either Saviour, or God, or teacher, or Son of God (VI:30, Chad-

According to Emperor Julian, Jesus “accomplished nothing worth hearing of, unless anyone thinks that to heal crooked and blind men and to exorcise those who were possessed by evil... can be classed as a mighty achievement” (CG, 191 E).<sup>568</sup> In other words, this was a common phenomenon, not a great achievement to boast of. These mocking words towards Jesus and his disciples are far more harsh (and derisive) than Julian’s opinion of Solomon, who was, according to him, “proficient in the secret cult of God” (224c–d), namely in performing magic practices that created a link with the divine and also influenced him”.

However, demons do exist and hence, Jesus, with his greater power, protects people from them through *exousia* in the spirit like that of Julian and Celsus. Nestor the Priest writes that the Christians worship Jesus “because he resurrected one dead man, but resuscitated two people; one before his own death and the one after he has died”, Elisha “resuscitated two dead people: one before his own death, and one after he died. He walked in the Jordan River”, and “Ezekiel resuscitated many dead in the valley” (13\15). And that is far more marvelous than what Jesus did by resuscitating one dead person on the third day after his death.<sup>569</sup>

The name of Jesus as a healer was also known among Jews because of the incident related about R. Eleazar ben Damma, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E., who was bitten by a snake. Jacob of Kfar Sama came to cure him by using the name of Jesus ben Pantera. When R. Ishmael refused to permit this, ben Dama told him he would prove him wrong, but “he did not have time to bring the [promised] proof before he dropped dead”.<sup>570</sup> However, not all the Jewish healers used the name of Jesus, and the prohibition against magical healing was not only due to the fear that it might be associated with Jesus.<sup>571</sup> In any event, the prohibition did not keep Jews who were ill from seeking magical healing.<sup>572</sup> The Church unreservedly accepted the belief in the existence of demons that dwell in the soul and body of a man and control him.<sup>573</sup> It also adopted some

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wick, 346). Origen writes that Jesus overcomes the demons by his soul “and the divine power in him”. Their power would be destroyed, since they are unable to withstand the light of the divine power” (I.60), Chadwick 1963, p. 54. Schäfer writes: “Casting out demons through the power of Jesus’ name does not just mean through Jesus’ authority (*exousia*), but, literally, through using the power (*dynamis*) inherent in Jesus’ name.” In Schäfer (2007, p. 59).

**568** Julian (1980).

**569** *The Polemic of Nestor*, “The Account of the Disputation of the Priest”. See in Lasker and Stroumsa (1996, p. 54).

**570** *Tosefta Hullin* 2:22, trans. Neusner.

**571** Schäfer (2007, pp. 105–106).

**572** See in Bar-Ilan (1995) and Schäfer (1997, pp. 33–38).

**573** Jenkins (1953).

magic practices, but endowed them with a new character by means of a version of prayers and incantations (*coniuro, adiuro*), in the name of the “father, the son and the holy spirit”. Nuns also accepted the belief in the power of amulets.<sup>574</sup> For example, Anthony of the Desert (c251–356) was renowned for his ability to cast evil spirits from the bodies of the ill,<sup>575</sup> and the acts of healing and exorcism of the zealous Monophysite monk, Barsauma of the fifth century, were known to meet the standards of the established Church.<sup>576</sup> In *Summa Theologiae* (Book II, Question 96), Thomas Aquinas denounced the magic rituals intended to replace the grace of God as a way of achieving knowledge, and wrote that “magic art is to be absolutely repudiated and avoided by Christians”; nonetheless, he did not impugn the validity of some types of magic.<sup>577</sup> And it is a known fact that the use of the Scriptures for magic purposes was popular at least until the fifth century and John Chrysostom called them *theiai epôdai* (divine charms).<sup>578</sup>

## The Riddle of Solomon's Ring

Although Josephus may not be the source for Solomon's image as a magician, he did make a significant contribution to the dissemination of that image.

Why wasn't Josephus content merely to praise Solomon's knowledge of magic and its practice? Why did he decide to add a story about a miracle that proves the power of the incantations written by Solomon? According to his well-known story, Josephus claimed that he saw with his own eyes a man (perhaps an Essene) named Eleazar who, in the presence of Vespasianus, his sons, and a number of other soldiers, freed men possessed by demons by putting “[...] to the nose of the possessed man a ring which had under its seal one of the roots prescribed by Solomon,<sup>579</sup> and then, as the man smelled it, drew out the demon

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<sup>574</sup> In Underwood (1953, pp. 131–140) and Kieckhefer (1990, pp. 69–80).

<sup>575</sup> “Life of Antony by Athanasius 64 (36)”, in White (1991, pp. 48–49).

<sup>576</sup> Kiperwasser and Ruzer (2013).

<sup>577</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the French scholar Gabriel Naude (1600–1653) rejected the claim that Aquinas had engaged in magic in his book *Apologie pour tous les grands personages qui ont esté fausement soupçonnez de magie*, published in 1625 and printed in four editions. He also defended Pythagoras, Socrates, and others against a similar claim.

<sup>578</sup> See Gamble (1995, pp. 237–241).

<sup>579</sup> Ring (*daktulios*) and seal (*sphragis*). They are sometimes one object (see Esther 3:12) a seal is attached to the ring, and they were attributed with magical powers. In the *Testament of Solomon*, the seal ring is given to him by the Archangel Michael so that he can control demons. Also see Barb (1963, pp. 112–113).

through his nostrils, and when the man at once fell down, adjured the demon never to come back into him, speaking Solomon's name and reciting his incantations (*epôdai*) that he composed. The exorcism of the demon revealed to the onlookers the greatness of his [Solomon's] nature and how God favoured him, and that no one under the sun may be ignorant of the king's surpassing virtue of every kind".<sup>580</sup>

The addition of this episode to the description of Solomon's wisdom is a riddle of sorts that has aroused much interest among scholars, among other reasons, because it "revealed" the significant role of magic, magic practices, and astrology in Jewish culture and society. Josephus also wrote that there were books in circulation giving "recipes", and that he himself knew of a work under such a title ascribed to Solomon.<sup>581</sup>

It seems that the importance that Josephus ascribes to Solomon as the author of magic incantations is not sufficiently explained by the fact that exorcism was a widespread practice in Jewish society,<sup>582</sup> or that Nahor's father supposedly taught him the traditions of the Chaldeans so he could practice divination and astrology according to the signs as reported in the *Book of Jubilees* (9:8), or that it is written that "Noah wrote everything in a book just as we taught him according to every kind of healing, that the evil spirits were restrained from following the sons of Noah, and he gave everything which he wrote to Shem, his oldest son[...]"<sup>583</sup>

However, neither that nor the fact that exorcism was a wide-spread practice in Jewish culture, can explain why Josephus saw fit to ascribe to Solomon "magical wisdom",<sup>584</sup> which is not attributed to him in the Bible. One might also wonder why Josephus believed that the story of Eleazar's act of exorcism, in which he was helped by incantations and recipes written by Solomon, would impress the educated Roman reader, and why he did not cite a different concrete example of the depth and breadth of Solomon's wisdom. Bohak writes that Josephus "assumed his non-Jewish readers would share his own excitement about such a glorious manifestation of the supreme wisdom of an ancient Jewish king".<sup>585</sup> Jose-

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**580** Ant 7VII.45–9, Trans. Thackery with Bohak's modification, in Bohak (2008, p. 101). Also see Förster (2001).

**581** McCown (1922a, pp. 1–24).

**582** Eshel (1999).

**583** *Jubilees* 9:10–14, trans. Wintermute, in Charlesworth (1983, pp. 35–142).

**584** Contrary to Duling's view. See Duling (1985, p. 7).

**585** Bohak (2008, pp. 100–101). Joshua Amir goes even further when he writes that Josephus sees in Solomon's ring "the greatness of Solomon", and also adds that if so, "it is no wonder, then, that in the eyes of the simple Jew of the time Solomon's magical power seemed to be

phus must have been cognizant of the harsh, even derisive criticism of faith in magic practices (*magikê technê*), which were thought to belong to *dedita superstitiosa gens*, to be *miracula circumlatoris* and *magicae vanitates*. Josephus lived and wrote in Rome at the time when the Roman authorities failed to suppress traditional Egyptian magical techniques and the circulation of magical texts.<sup>586</sup> The expulsion from Rome of astrologers and sorcerers in 33 B.C.E. was not effective, and the burning of thousands of magic books by order of Emperor Augustus in 13 C.E. was also to no avail (the church father John Chrysostom [c. 347–407] states that in the city of his birth, Antioch, soldiers searched for books of magic and set fire to them).<sup>587</sup> At the same time, in Egypt under Roman rule, “much of what had constituted public religion was driven underground, becoming a secretive and ‘private’ practice”.<sup>588</sup> In any event, the persecution or even the execution of those using magic or possessing amulets or books of magic did not succeed in dissuading those who wished to avail themselves of such practices.<sup>589</sup>

If so, did Josephus have any reason to believe that the Emperor Vespasianus would be impressed by Eleazar’s ability to cure a blind man, using a ring and incantations? Tacitus (56–120 C.E.) states that while the emperor was staying in Alexandria, a blind man and a man who had lost the use of his hand approached him and begged to be cured. Vespasianus at first ridiculed these appeals and treated them with scorn. However, when the men persisted, he “took precaution” and consulted his physicians “whether such blindness and infirmity could be overcome by human aid”. Their reply treated the two cases differently: they said that in the first the power of sight had not been completely eaten away and it would return if the obstacles were removed; in the other, the joint had slipped and become displaced, but they could be restored if a healing pressure were applied to them. Such perhaps was the wish of the gods, and it might be that the emperor has been chosen for this divine service; in any case, ridicule would fall only on the poor supplicant. So, Vespasianus, believing that his good fortune was capable of anything and that nothing was any longer incredible, with a smiling face, and amid intense excitement on the part of the by-

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one of the strong cards of Judaism in its great proselytizing campaign”. Amir (1968, p. 17). Feldman’s claim that Josephus added the episode because “exorcising demons was regarded as the sign of special power in a wise man”, is odd. Feldman (1998, p. 584).

586 Ritner (1993, p. 89).

587 MacMullen (1975, pp. 46–127); Kippenberg (1997).

588 Ritner (1995a, pp. 43–60). At the same time, Pliny the Elder writes, “magic rose to such a height that even today it has sway over a great part of mankind, and in the East commands the King of Kings”, Pliny the Elder XXX.1–1–2 (trans. Jones).

589 See Barb (1963, pp. 100–125).



standers, did as he was asked to do. The hand was instantly restored to use, and the day again shone for the blind man”.<sup>590</sup> In order to confirm the veracity of the story, Tacitus stresses that “both facts are told by eye-witnesses even now when falsehood brings no reward”. It is impossible to know what the truth is in this story, but it seems more reliable to me than Josephus’ story, although the latter states that he himself was present at the act of exorcising the demon.

Why, then, would Josephus provide support, for example, for Posidonius’ assertion that the Jews are a people of sorcerers who pretend to use incantations? Duling suggests that Josephus believed such a story would enhance Solomon’s prestige within a public that believed in supernatural forces and was familiar with the traditions about Solomon’s greatness and wisdom.<sup>591</sup> This explanation seems to me contrived.<sup>592</sup> The only reasonable explanation is that Josephus did not find in the historical tradition any concrete example demonstrating that Solomon was well-versed in all branches of “scientific” knowledge. Therefore, he decided to add the episode about Eleazar—and even to affirm it, declaring that he himself saw it with his own eyes. And perhaps the simple explanation is that Josephus, like many authors, wanted to introduce anecdotes into his story, a fruit of his creative imagination.<sup>593</sup> Whatever the reason, this episode certainly influenced the shaping of Solomon’s legendary image as a ruler of demons, which dominated the imagination of the coming generations.<sup>594</sup>

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**590** Books IV-V, LXXXI, pp. 158–163 in Tacitus (1969). Tacitus also writes that the Egyptians “are the most superstitious of nations”.

**591** Duling (1985, p. 25); Förster (2001).

**592** There is no evidence that “Solomon’s ring” (or “seal”) was known in Jewish history before the writing of *Jewish Antiquities*. Possibly, the motif appears under the influence of the book, which was quite popular. Tertullian writes: “The Jew Josephus, native champion of Jewish antiquities, must be consulted” (Tertullian 1984, xix, pp. 5–6). The motif was known, for example, to several Byzantine chronographers, such as Georgios Hamartolos (ca. 850), who mentions the exorcism carried out by Eleazar, and Cederez (c. 1000) who mentions the act of exorcism and the incantations composed by Solomon. See Torijano (2002, p. 87). However, it is impossible to prove that Josephus was the progenitor of this motif.

**593** On the claim that Jews engaged in demonology was widespread in Byzantium see the Byzantine poet Johannes Tzetzes of the 12<sup>th</sup> century who wrote: “To the Jews, I say in a proper manner in Hebrew: Your blind house devoted to magic, your mouth, a charm engulfing flies [...]” in Herrin (2008, p. 242).

**594** Solomon’s ring appears on a glass paste oval amulet from the Byzantine period. In Maguire (1995, p. 39). Papyrus PGM XII, 261–69 states: “A little ring useful for every [magical] operation and for success. Kings and governors [try to get it]. Very effective”. In Betz (1992, p. 161).

## Solomon's After-Life as a Magician

In *Commentary upon Matthew*, Origen wrote that “the Jews are regarded as adept at the adjuration of demons and they employ adjurations in the Hebrew language drawn from the books of Solomon”. By “books”, Origen was not referring to Song of Songs, Proverbs or Ecclesiastes, but rather to books of incantations. *Sepher ha-Razim*, apparently written in Palestine in the third century C.E., relates that ancient books of magic were passed down each generation to Solomon. Secrets of magic were passed down from Noah through the Patriarchs to Moses, and from him to the Prophets and Sages, until they came to Solomon: “And the *Books of the Mysteries* were disclosed to him and he became very learned in books of understanding, and (so) ruled over every-thing he desired, over all the spirits and the demons that wander in the world, and from the wisdom of this book he imprisoned and released, and sent out and brought in, and built and prospered. For many books were more precious and more honorable and more difficult than any of them”.<sup>595</sup> In other words, these “books of secrets”, which contained incantations and curses to exorcise demons and spirits, were not written by Solomon but were passed down to him in a chain of transmission, of which he was the last recipient. In contrast, according to the Sufi encyclopedia, *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*, compiled in Basra in the second half of the tenth century, the source of the magic texts is human—the Persians received the wisdom of astronomy from the Indians, and Solomon gained the knowledge of trickery and sorcery and curses and the uses of idols and talismans from the kings of other nations. In other words, not from the mythological Noah, the Patriarchs, and the Prophets. On the many incantation bowls against demons and evil spirits found in Babylonia, Solomon's name<sup>596</sup> is mentioned on some, for example: “Solomon the Son of David who worked spells on male demons and female lilitis”.

The longevity of this tradition is attested to by, among others, Don Isaac Abrabanel, the learned Jewish statesman from Portugal (1437–1508). In his commentary on 1 Kings based on Josephus' *Antiquities* (which he read in a Latin or Castilian translation published in 1492), he wrote that Solomon's magic power “in the matter of demons and their deeds and the spells to be employed against them” is an expression of his unique wisdom. And the German bishop, theologian, and scholar Albertus Magnus (1200–1280) cites the work *Speculum astronomiae*, which refers to “satanic books attributed to Solomon”. The *Ars Notoria*

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<sup>595</sup> Morgan (1983); Margalioth (1966, p. 16).

<sup>596</sup> See Shaked et al. (2013); Shaked (1999).

*quam Creator Altissimus Salomoni reuelavit* from the 12<sup>th</sup> century (which was preserved in more than 50 manuscripts and attributed also to Apollonius) states: “*Ista, inquit Salomon*” (Thus said Solomon): magic is described as a “holy art” and a sacrament revealed by God to Solomon”.<sup>597</sup> Many books from this genre known as “Solomonic Grimoire” were disseminated in the West.<sup>598</sup> The most popular of these is *Clavicula Salomonis* (*Solomon’s Key*), a collection of talismanic formulae for summoning demons.<sup>599</sup> Its source is unknown and it appeared in the West in the sixteenth century in Latin, Italian and French manuscripts.<sup>600</sup> When Faust says: “Für solche halbe Höllenbrut / Ist Salomon’s Schlüssel gut” (I.1257–8), he is not referring to the ability to overcome a ghost with a real key, but with the help of a book that contains ritual diagrams. That also appears in the chapter *Ars Goetia* in the book *Lesser Key of Solomon* evoked by King Solomon.<sup>601</sup> In the two works, Solomon bequeaths the knowledge of magic he possesses, “the most precious of all”, which shows how to introduce the celestial movement to his son Rehoboam. The four brass jugs in which Solomon imprisoned and sealed the demons are part of this sacred geometry. A key is mentioned in *The Second Targum to Esther*<sup>602</sup>: “Solomon was a wise man who knew the secrets of the heavens... To him was given a large key whereby to open the gates of wisdom und understanding the heart”.<sup>603</sup> Here a key is not an object, but rather a metaphor (“the keys of heaven”). On the other hand, as someone engaging in *magia naturalis*, Solomon appears very rarely. For example, as such he appears in a 14<sup>th</sup> century work, *Jocalia Salomonis* (*Diamonds of Solomon*), where he is de-

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**597** Page (2004, p. 39). The 15<sup>th</sup> century *Liber Visionum* (Book of Visions) was, for example, “an attempt to reconcile the goals of a condemned medieval, ritual magic text, the *Ars Notoria* after which it was loosely modelled”. See “Plundering the Egyptian treasure: John the Monk’s Book of Visions and its relation to the *Ars notoria* of Solomon”, in Fanger (1998, pp. 216–249).

**598** Among them: *Liber Salomonis libri de Tribus Figuris*, *Le Livre de Salomon*, *Herbarium Salomonis*, *Hygromantia Salomonis*, *Schemhamphoras Salomonis Regis*. On the “Solomonic Cycle”, see Butler (1998, p. 48).

**599** Yates (1984, pp. 42–43); Thorndike (1964, Vol. 2, pp. 279–290). According to a medieval Neapolitan story, the body of the poet Virgil was found in a grave perfectly preserved, and under his head, among others, was the *Ars Notoria*. Virgil also “possessed” the seal of Solomon. See Comparetti (1895; pp. 274, 318).

**600** See Macgregor Mathers (2006 [1888]). His translation is based on a French translation from the eighteenth century. The Chivalric Romans *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (14<sup>th</sup> century) refers to the Pentangle, is a symbol that Solomon-formerly (conceived) as a “token of (holy) truth”. Trans. Brian Stone (1974, p. 45) and Trans. S.W.A. Neilson (1999, p. 14).

**601** This book was written under the inspiration of Johann Weyer’s book, mentioned in note 34.

**602** *The Second Targum to Esther*, II. Cassel (1888, p. 270).

**603** Thus, also “key of David” in Revelation 3:7.

scribed as dabbling in alchemy.<sup>604</sup> In any event, as I noted, Solomon is famous not for the practice of magic, but rather as the author of magic literature, or as the possessor of such literature.

The use of a ring<sup>605</sup> was apparently not an “invention” by Josephus, but he may have inspired the appearance of Solomon’s signet ring (*sigillum*)<sup>606</sup> as a major item in the magic toolbox. In *Testament of Solomon*, it is related that after having prayed to the Lord Sabaoth, Solomon received from the angel Gabriel a signet ring from a precious stone on which a *pentalpha* was engraved to help him build the Temple. He brought to Solomon “a little ring, having a seal consisting of an engraved stone, and said to him: Take, O Solomon, king, son of David, the gift which the Lord had sent thee. With it thou shalt lock up all the demons of the earth, male and female; and with their help thou shalt build up Jerusalem”. And Solomon called a boy, gave him the ring, and when the king ordered him to, he threw the ring at the chest of the demon.<sup>607</sup> On one side of a medallion from Smyrna, for example, the spell appears: “Flee, hated one: Solomon pursues you [...] Seal of Solomon. Expel every evil from the bearer”. When Timothy tells Aquila the Jew that a demon has entered his body making him belittle Christianity, he says, “make the seal of Christ that is the sign of the cross on his forehead and his heart” (II.2).<sup>608</sup> A ring also appears in esoteric texts attributed to Solomon, including *Sigillum Solomonis* (Solomon’s ring). The “seal of Solomon” (i.e., signet ring) and “the ring of Solomon” became popular symbols and were widely disseminated. Egeria writes that during Easter week a crowd of worshippers came to the Church of the Nativity and, after kissing the cross, passed before a Deacon that held Solomon’s ring and kissed it.<sup>609</sup> Priests in Catholic England used a “Solomon’s ring” as well as “Solomon’s staff” and the ring of the prophet Elisha.<sup>610</sup> From this very long tradition, the signet ring arrived at the roots of the plant whose botanical name is *Polygonatum odorum*, which was given the name “Solomon’s ring” because it was used for healing wounds and fractures, and as a love potion. As for Jewish tradition, “Solomon’s ring” did not become a talisman, a

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**604** “Ergotzliche Experimente Salomons”, Birkhahn (2010, pp. 52–53).

**605** Ring (*daktulios*) and seal (*sphragis*) are often one object and a seal is attached to the ring. Milstein (1995, pp. 33–62). Another example is a glass paste oval amulet from the Byzantine period on which Solomon’s ring appears. See J. Russell (1995).

**606** I will mention here the play *Der Siegelring des Salomo* (Berlin, 1820) by the rabbi, poet, and playwright from Strasbourg, Lippmann Moses Büschenthal (1784–1818).

**607** Trans. Conybeare (1898, pp. 16–17).

**608** Varner (2004, p. 43).

**609** Wilkinson (1999, p. 155–156).

**610** Thomas (1973, p. 323).

role that was filled by a Shield of David usually hung on the neck. But there are “Kabbalists” who call themselves “world renown experts”, among other things, in writing amulets, “using the seals of King Solomon and the script of angels”.<sup>611</sup>

While in the esoteric literature Solomon and Jesus compete as to which of them controls the demons, in the corpus of magic papyri, they do not compete, but at times act jointly. Most of these magical texts written in Greek come from the Roman period and those that originate in Mesopotamia are from a far later period. From about 600 C.E., we do not possess any magic papyri from the first century C.E., or from previous centuries, that can be attributed to Jews, and in which Solomon is mentioned. Among other sources, we know from *Sefer Hasidim* written by R. Judah he-Hasid, the rabbi of the Ashkenazi Chasidim in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, that curses and spells were widespread in the Ashkenazi society. It states that “he who deals in curses of angels or demons or in magical incantations will not come to a good end, and distressing things will occur to his body and his sons”.<sup>612</sup>

Then, what Solomon did not write, or what was forbidden, is written (but not in Solomon’s name) in Ashkenazi Jewish culture in *Guide to Exorcism of a Spirit*,<sup>613</sup> similar to guidebooks written in Christian society.<sup>614</sup> Hundreds of texts about possession by a demon and its exorcism, or about a *dybbuk* (a term that appears in Hebrew only in 1715) have been documented, and I will relate to only one of these, taken from the *Chronicle of Ahimaaz*. It tells the tale of R. Shefatia who cast out a demon that refused to come out of the body of the daughter of the Emperor of Byzantium. R. Shefatia told the stubborn demon he would cast him out with the help of the Almighty and said: “come forth, in the name of God, that he may know there is a God in Israel. It came forth at once and tried to escape; but he seized it and put it into a leaden chest; he then covered the chest on

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**611** The (contemporary) “kabbalist” Yitzhak Mizrahi, whose name “precedes him and whose actions are well-known throughout the land and the whole world”, offered his goods in a colorful newspaper ad in which a miniature photograph of the seal appeared: “the strongest amulet today for couple hood, livelihood, physical and mental health.” The “Beit haRuchot” site, [www.israghost.co.il](http://www.israghost.co.il) (last visited on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2019). See Bohak (2019).

**612** Rabbi Judah ben Samuel (1998, p. 105). It is also written there: “If you see a man prophesying about the Messiah, know that he is engaging in an act of magic or of demons or using the explicit name”, pp. 206, 175 (my translation).

**613** Tzfatman (2016, pp. 187–202).

**614** See in Kieckhefer (1990, p. 156). And in Tzfatman (2016, p. 189), n. 5 in the first “Guide to the Exorcist”. *Thesaurus Exorcismorum* appeared in print in 1608. See, for example, Etkes (1995). And see a survey on this literature in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in Feiner (2017, pp. 295–310).

all sides and sealed it in the name of his Maker, dropped it into the sea, and let it sink into the depth of the mighty waters.”<sup>615</sup>

Exorcism rituals are practiced to the present day in both Jewish and Christian societies.<sup>616</sup> In any event, Solomon's name was not used in these rituals, but rather the name of Jesus, the cross, and holy water.

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Supposedly, faithful Christians have no need for magic since Jesus protects them from evil spirits. God endowed him with such power that even the demonic forces are controlled by him. Jesus rules over the supernatural world. From the force of the name, Jesus Christ, Justin Martyr tells Trypho, the demonic forces shudder and are cast out. Christians have no need for the name of Jesus in formulae of oaths, or on amulets; they are replaced by the cross or by holy *reliquia*, which one only needs to show to the demon, and he vanishes.<sup>617</sup> Augustine writes that at the St. Ambrose Cathedral in Milan, where two martyrs are buried, not only people possessed by a foul spirit were cured but also a blind man, immediately after he touched his eyes with a kerchief that lay on the bier of the saints, which greatly enhanced the fame of the dead bishop (*Confessions* IX:16).<sup>618</sup> It was reported that St. Anthony, in trying to prove the power of faith to a group of philosophers who came to visit him, said: “There are some here suffering from the torments of demons [...]. Now come on, use your syllogism and any wicked spell you wish, to drive out those whom you think of as your gods. But if you are unable to do so, hold out your conquered hands in supplication and take refuge in the signs of Christ's victory”. The philosophers were amazed by the miracle that had been wrought in the name of Jesus.<sup>619</sup> St. Anthony overwhelmed the philosophers through his power of healing which he owed to Jesus. St. Francis healed the ill and cast out demons by prayer and touching, by the Cross and by virtue of holy obedience,<sup>620</sup> without curses or incantations. Thus, a charismatic, holy man can do these deeds in the medieval legend *Vin-*

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**615** Salzman (1966, pp. 71–72).

**616** In 1972, Pope Paul VI forbade the use of exorcism. However, in November 2010, a committee of bishops in the United States that convened in Baltimore decided, considering the wide demand, to train priests to hold exorcism rituals. *Ha'aretz*, 14 November 2012 (trans. from the *New York Times*, 12 November 2012).

**617** See Jensen (2017).

**618** Augustine (1961, p. 191).

**619** White, *Early Christian Lives* (1991, pp. 58–59).

**620** Saint Bonaventure (2010, pp. 97–105).

*dicta Salvatoris* (Revenge of the Saviour). Titus was healed thank to his decision to avenge the Jews for having crucified Jesus, and in the *Kaiserchronik* (1150–1160) Emperor Tiberius is healed by an image of Veronica wiping the sweat from Jesus' face on the sixth station on the Via Dolorosa.