

Chapter Six

Miracles and Wonders: Magic, Satan, and Demons

*Er erzählte mir aufs Neue,
Was mir schon Arabiens Dichter
Längst erzählt, wie Salomo
Einst bezwang den Todesengel
Und am Leben blieb—Unsterblich
Lebt er jetzt in Dschinnistan,
Herrschend über die Dämonen,
Als ein unbeschränkter König.
Heinrich Heine, “Atta Troll”*

*No intelligent person doubts the
existence of sorcery.
Ibn Khaldūn, The Muqaddima*

The correspondence between Solomon and Jesus also took place in the spheres of the esoteric and supernatural world of miracles and wondrous acts, even though, at this point, the two parted ways. Solomon did not work miracles or deal in magic, though he is a hero in many tales of wonders, while Jesus did work miracles and the mere mention of his name sufficed to overcome demons⁶²¹; as a magician, he appears in both pagan and Jewish anti-Christian polemics.

In Mendele Mocher Sforim's⁶²² novel *Susati* (My Mare), a classic of Yiddish and Hebrew literature, the narrator encounters witches, demons, and the demon king Ashmedai in a forest. A demon, formerly one of King Solomon's servants, relates his account of ‘What King Solomon Did’: a mix of legends of the Sages and the author's imagination. Upon finishing his story, the demon informs his listener that “I have many more tales from Solomon's life; however, since I see in you signs of a non-believer—begging your forgiveness, one who casts doubt on everything, and you do not believe the words of an old demon—I would do well to hold my tongue. And nevertheless, I am not angry at you. For, after all, you are a descendant of the sons of the sons of Solomon...”⁶²³

621 Thus, for example, people arriving at the synagogue in Nazareth wonder “Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?” (Matthew 13:54) Both Jews and pagans, however, regarded the claimed miracles as deception or witchcraft.

622 The pen name of S.Y. Abramovitsh (1835–1917).

623 *Susati* (My Mare) in Mendele Mocher Sforim (1962, pp. 341–342).

No one other than Solomon has so inspired the creative imagination to invent and create a plenitude of legends and fantasies and has become the hero of as extensive a variety of folktales and folklore.⁶²⁴ He is famous for his ability to converse with animals and fowl. The source for the attribution of this skill is in 1 Kings 4:33: “And he spoke of trees...he spoke also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes”. That verse gave rise to the *Midrashic* understanding that Solomon knew “what an ass brays and what a bird twitters”.⁶²⁵ He has the marvelous ability to communicate with fowl, including wild turkeys and the hoopoe, and even ants, and make them his messengers. One story tells how an ant taught Solomon a lesson about humility: an ant warns her fellows to hurry into their nest to avoid being trampled by Solomon’s army. The king calls the ant, places it on his palm, and asks its name. “Repentance” [*teshuva*], she replies, and when he asks whether there exists anyone greater than him, she replies that she herself is the greater: “If I were not greater than you, the Almighty would not have sent me to be held by you in your palm”. Furious at the ant, Solomon throws it to the ground and declares: “I am Solomon, son of King David”. The ant replies: “Know that you came from a putrid drop and that you should not be proud”. Solomon falls on his face in shame and commands the wind to carry him away from there.⁶²⁶ The ant parts from him with these words: “Go, but do not forget the blessed Almighty and do not take great pride in yourself”.

Solomon was not alone in his ability to converse with beings of all kinds. Apollonius of Tyana is said to have learned the language of birds in his travels in “the East”.⁶²⁷ R. Johanan ben Zakkai was known to be fluent in the “speech of spirits” and the “speech of palm trees”,⁶²⁸ and it was said of Hillel the Elder “that he had not omitted to study any of the words of the Sages, even all languages, even the speech of mountains, hills and valleys, the speech of trees and herbs, the speech of wild beasts and cattle, the speech of demons and parables. Why [did he study] all these? Because it is stated the “*Lord is well pleased, for his righteousness’ to make the teaching [of the Torah] great and glorious*”.⁶²⁹ Nothing, however, is said about the use R. Hillel or R. Yohanan made of this ability. The New Testament, for its part, does not attribute to Jesus the knowledge of the languages of animals. It was Christian hagiography that began to ascribe such

⁶²⁴ Vol. 5, pp. 96–100, in Ginzberg (2003).

⁶²⁵ *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:19, in Neusner (1989).

⁶²⁶ *Bet haMidrash* 5:11–13. On the Quran’s version of this story, see Q. 7 (“The Ant”).

⁶²⁷ Philostratus (1912, p. 329).

⁶²⁸ *Sukkah* 28a.

⁶²⁹ *Tractate of the Scribes* 15:9, in Cohen (1965, pp. 291–292).

knowledge to the saints: Francis of Assisi is said to have spoken with birds, and Anthony of Padua with fish.⁶³⁰

And what of miracles?⁶³¹ Unlike Jesus, neither the biblical nor the legendary Solomon walked on water, or turned water into wine, or worked a miracle like that of the bread and fish.⁶³² Jesus' fame spread with his miraculous demonstrations: "Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. [The people] were amazed, saying, 'What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!'"⁶³³ Nor was fame the only result, but a confirmation of Jesus' holy status: "Truly you are the Son of God".⁶³⁴ *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, from the first or second century, relates another miracle worked by Jesus. As a boy, he was playing on the Sabbath and fashioned twelve sparrows from clay. A Jew who observed him at work hastened to tell his father Joseph that his son was desecrating the Sabbath. Joseph rebuked Jesus; the boy then clapped his hands and the birds flew away.⁶³⁵ The priest Nestor saw no reason to be overly impressed by Jesus' miracles or to call him Lord simply because he "turned water into wine"⁶³⁶... and fed a thousand people with eight loaves of bread and fish". He notes that "Christ's deeds are no more marvelous than the deeds of Moses". Nor did Jesus outdo Joshua ben Nun, who "made the sun and the moon stand still in the sky a whole day. The Jordan River dried up for him and a flowing river, gushing with water, stopped in its course for him". The miracles of walking on the water and the miracle of the bread and fish were not equal to the wonders worked by the prophet Elisha, who returned two people from the dead, walked atop the Jordan River, and made an ax head float. It is worth noting that Nestor did not count Solomon among the miracle workers.⁶³⁷

630 Regarding St. Francis, see St. Saint Bonaventure (2010). On Anthony, see Heywood (1924, pp. 101–103). The collection is from the fourteenth century. This skill was also ascribed to others. See, for example, Bohak (2016).

631 See van Dam (1993); Theissen (1983 [1974]); P. Brown (1970). According to Ibn Khaldūn, "a miracle is a divine power that arouses in the soul [the ability] to exercise influence. The worker of miracles is supported in his activity by the spirit of God...miracles are found (to be wrought by good persons for good purposes and by souls that are entirely devoted to good deeds". Ibn Khaldūn (1958, Vol. 3, p. 167).

632 Matthew 14:19–20.

633 Matthew 8:26–27.

634 Matthew 14:33.

635 Gribetz (2013).

636 Jupiter, when visiting Philemon and Baucis, also performs a miracle in which a wine bowl is constantly refilled (this is only one of his many miracles). See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 8:679–680.

637 Limor (1998a). According to Luther, the Jews called Jesus a sorcerer and tool of the devil "because they cannot deny his miracles" (Luther 2015, p. 148).

The Bible does relate miracles that happened to the Israelites, as does the Talmud. It is said of R. Simeon ben Yoḥai that he was “experienced in miracles”,⁶³⁸ and of the *Tanna* R. Ḥanina ben Dosa that, thanks to his blessing, a poor woman’s meager cubits of wood sufficed to cover her house,⁶³⁹ and that when he died, “miracle workers came to an end”.⁶⁴⁰ Miracles, however, do not occur to individuals, and the Talmud cautions against dependence on miracles: “A man should never stand in a place of danger and say that a miracle will be wrought for him, lest it is not. And if a miracle is wrought for him, it is deducted from his merits”.⁶⁴¹

Sorcerers and Magicians⁶⁴²

While the arts of sorcery were carefully kept shrouded, exhibitions of sorcery were often performed in public.⁶⁴³ The reason for this, Ibn Khaldūn writes, was that the laws of religion forbade all types of sorcery; the purpose of acts of sorcery was usually to cause harm or damage, for example, to turn humans into animals, or to raise the dead from their graves.

The Bible condemns acts of sorcery and biblical law declares an all-out war against them: “No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or augur, or sorcerer, or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead”⁶⁴⁴; it commands that “You shall not permit a female sorcerer to

⁶³⁸ *Me'ilah* 17b. R. Shimon lived during the second century C.E.

⁶³⁹ *Ta'anit* 25a.

⁶⁴⁰ *Mishnah Sotah* 9 [trans. Neusner].

⁶⁴¹ *Shabbat* 32a. See also Guttman (1947). The fantastic tales attributed to Solomon are numerous. One example, out of many: Solomon had a great robe “of green silk, woven of gold thread with all manner of pictures, sixty miles in length and sixty in breadth, and Solomon would sit wearing it and move with the wind throughout the world, eating breakfast in Damascus and supper in Medea...” (in *One Thousand and One Nights*, the robe turned into a carpet).

⁶⁴² For general survey see Harari (2017). On Solomon, see Sasson (2003, pp. 129–160).

⁶⁴³ *Sanhedrin* 67b. Ibn Khaldūn wrote that sorcery unlike magic was the science of imbuing human souls with the ability to influence the material world, without any outside help: “The sorcerer possesses a particular quality in potentiality, as is the case with all human powers. It is transformed [from potentiality] to actuality by exercise. All magical exercise consists of directing oneself to the spheres, the stars, the higher world, of the demons by means of various kinds of veneration and worship and submissiveness and humiliation”. However, “sorcery... is found (practiced) only by evil persons and as a rule is used for evil actions”: *The Muqaddima* (6:27), Ibn Khaldūn (1958, Vol 3, pp. 159, 167).

⁶⁴⁴ Deuteronomy 18:10–11.

live”.⁶⁴⁵ Daniel regarded the acts of magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers⁶⁴⁶ as dependent on unacceptable Chaldean wisdom, and when Simeon ben Shetaḥ was elected president of the Sanhedrin in the first century C.E., he sent eighty men wrapped in prayer shawls to capture witches and instructed them: “When you enter, each of you shall choose one and lift her from the ground, since the nature of this sorcery is that separated from the earth it cannot do anything... They lifted them, took them away, and crucified them”.⁶⁴⁷

The severe prohibitions against sorcery indicate that belief in the power of magic was widespread among the Jews from ancient times. Hence, they fought against it, not always with success.⁶⁴⁸ “R. Johanan said: Why are [sorcerers] called *Kashshafim*? Because they diminish the power of the Divine agencies”⁶⁴⁹; “While R. Abbaye bar Nagri cited R. Ḥiyya bar Abba to distinguish magic performed through the agency of demons from sorcery, which was accomplished without external aid”.⁶⁵⁰ Yet, at the same time, Jews exhibited an ambivalent attitude towards acts of magic. The Talmud also contains many tales of magic⁶⁵¹: some are humorous, and some tell of the power of those skilled in magic and of conflicts between them and witches.⁶⁵² The latter sort, for example, includes three stories about the power of R. Joshua ben Hananiah as a sorcerer. One presents a foreign magician as a trickster; in another, R. Joshua orders the ruler of the sea to swallow one *min* (heretic); in the third, he mocks R. Yannai, who became involved in acts of magic and was hurt.⁶⁵³ *Sanhedrin* 17a contains a remarkable statement: “R. Johanan said: None are to be appointed members of the Sanhedrin, but men of stature, wisdom, good appearance, mature age, with knowledge of sorcery”. The words may have been said in jest, or perhaps they gave rise to the tale (the source of which is otherwise unknown) about the Sanhedrin that wanted to replace a sage who had died with another. But since the new sage lacked any knowledge of sorcery, the Sanhedrin decided to send him to Egypt which was “known for its witches and magicians”. The owner of the inn where the sage stayed on his way to Egypt offered to teach him sorcery, and

⁶⁴⁵ Exodus 22:18.

⁶⁴⁶ Daniel 2:52.

⁶⁴⁷ *y.Hagigah* 2:2, 77d, trans. Guggenheimer (2015, p. 439).

⁶⁴⁸ Eshel (1999). The apocryphal *Testament of Judah*, probably from the early second century, tells of men who rebel against the (Hasmonean) monarchy using magic. See Charles (1908, pp. 92–93).

⁶⁴⁹ *Sanhedrin* 67b [trans. Neusner].

⁶⁵⁰ See Schäfer (1997).

⁶⁵¹ See Urbach (2006).

⁶⁵² Including *Baba Metzia* 59b, *Sanhedrin* 67b-68, and *y.Sanhedrin* 7:19, 25d.

⁶⁵³ See JLevinson (2006).

when the sage was doubtful, the innkeeper demonstrated his ability: a barrel of water turned into a river and the sage found himself in a boat sailing with men from Persia and Medea (countries also famous for their magicians) and arrived in their country where he was appointed a minister and judge. I will not relate all his adventures; suffice it to say that after spending three months with the innkeeper he returned to Jerusalem “more proficient in sorcery than his elderly brethren”.⁶⁵⁴

One of many works that attest to the Jews’ knowledge and practice of sorcery in the Middle Ages is *The Chronicle of Ahimaaz* (inspired by Apuleius’s *The Golden Ass*), in which local witches, against whom none can protect themselves and who are respected even by the dead, rob graves to use the bones to cause harm to their neighbors.⁶⁵⁵ It relates how Abu Aaron of Baghdad saved a boy who had been turned into an ass by a witch.⁶⁵⁶

Yet none of the tales of witches, sorcery, and magical acts that are found in Talmudic literature, where sages encounter witches in their daily lives and contend with them,⁶⁵⁷ depict Solomon displaying his power at magic, as Moses and Aaron did in the palace of Pharaoh (though Josephus makes it clear that Moses did not practice magic, but rather worked miracles “by the providence and power of God”.⁶⁵⁸ Only the Quran states explicitly that Solomon did not engage in sorcery: “Solomon disbelieved not; but the demons disbelieved, teaching mankind magic”⁶⁵⁹). In the Middle Ages, the magical powers attributed to Solomon were used in the polemic against Aristotelianism and its denial of the “supernatural” and the “spiritual”. For example, the Kabbalist and rabbi Nahmanides (1194–1240) of Catalonia believed that sorcery was ancient wisdom that could not be denied, and hence King Solomon’s wisdom included sorcery.⁶⁶⁰

654 The tale, called “The Knowledge of Sorcery”, is found in Berdyczewski (1913, pp. 166–165).

655 Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, trans. Robert Graves (1951, pp. 62–63).

656 Salzman (1966, p. 64).

657 On this subject see Sperber (1994).

658 Josephus, *Antiquities* (1963, Vol. 2, p. 286). According to Philo in *De Vita Mosis* (in his comments on the section on Bilaam), “the craft of the sorcerer and the inspiration of the Holiest might not live together”, *De Vita Mosis* I:278. Colson (1994, Vol. 6, p. 419).

659 In *The Tales of the Prophets*, it is the demons who document the secrets of magic and hide them under Solomon’s throne; after his death they remove them and claim that Solomon had written and used them. See Q. 2 (“The Cow”).

660 Schwartz (2004b, p. 135).

Sorcery and sorcerers have been present in the Christian world since the inception of Christianity,⁶⁶¹ and the name of Jesus was invoked as a means of combating them and their influence. Thus, for example, Father Euthymius of a *laura* in the Judean desert rescued his relative Romanus from the claws of a sorcerer who, acting in the service of a man who craved Romanus's property, infected him with a disease. When Euthymius opened Romanus's stomach, he removed from it a tin plate bearing magic letters; thereafter, he rubbed the sick man's stomach, erasing the incision in it, and Romanus was restored to good health. The tale is told by Cyril of Scythopolis, of the second half of the sixth century; he claimed that Eutumus worked the miracle through the power of God who is benevolent towards saints", and simultaneously maintained that the miracle was wrought with the help of magic, without noticing a contradiction between these claims.⁶⁶² Augustine, we will recall, regarded magic as deception and Tertullian considered it fraudulent trickery (*miracula circulatoris*).⁶⁶³

It was only in the tenth century that the Church began to persecute those accused of engaging in magic, particularly witches—launching an infamous chapter in western culture, which also produced writings that provided instructions on how to identify anyone dabbling in magic. The best-known of these are the tenth-century *Canon Episcopi* and the *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of the Witches), published by the Catholic clergyman Heinrich Kramer in 1486.⁶⁶⁴

The pagan polemic against Christianity, meanwhile, accused both Christians and Jews of engaging in sorcery. Emperor Julian described Paul as "surpassing all the charlatans and all the magicians of every place and every time",⁶⁶⁵ while according to Celsus, Jesus and his disciples were capable of working the miracles attributed to them only through sorcery, and that they learned magic from the Egyptians. Origen rejected that claim; he trusted in Jesus' superior power: Christians trusted Jesus' superior power as Savior, God, teacher, Son of

661 The sacrifices offered by the Gentiles are made to demons and not to God: "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils" (1 Corinthians 10:19–22).

662 Cyril of Scythopolis (1991, pp. 76–77). In her translation to Hebrew (Yad Ben Zvi, Jerusalem, 2005) Leah di Segni adds that such plates were discovered in the entire Mediterranean basin, including in Palestine (pp. 135–136, n. 297).

663 *Apologeticus* xxiii, I, p. 122.

664 L. Martin (2010, pp. 114–145), and see the brief bibliography, pp. 146–148. The early sixteenth-century compendium *The Pseudomonarchia Daemonum* (False Hierarchy of Demons) names sixty-nine demons.

665 *Against the Galileans*, p. 341.

God”.⁶⁶⁶ Of Solomon as a sorcerer, in any event, no mention is made in the pagan polemic.

In Jewish anti-Christian tradition, Jesus also appears as a sorcerer.⁶⁶⁷ The “biography” of R. Joshua ben Peraḥyah recounts how Simeon ben Shetaḥ, a leader of the Pharisees in the first century CE, called upon R. Joshua, who had been forced to escape to Egypt, to come back to Israel. On his return, he was accompanied by Jesus, who according to the tradition was his student. A story in *Sotah* 47a also describes Jesus as R. Joshua’s pupil and relates that the latter dismissed him: “A Master has said: The disciple practised magic and led Israel astray”. All of Jesus’ attempts to appease his teacher failed.⁶⁶⁸ Perhaps the similarity between the two names Joshua and Yeshua inspired the creative imagination to link the two, who were not contemporaries; and perhaps this affinity was created because R. Joshua ben Peraḥyah is invoked as a person possessing magical powers on incantation bowls in Aramaic, Syriac, and Mandaic.⁶⁶⁹ It seems, however, that the accusation that Jesus engaged in sorcery played only a minor role in the Jewish anti-Christian polemic, and was expressed mainly in the book *Tol-dot Yeshu*, which in its various versions contains several depictions of Jesus’ study of magic during his stay in Egypt, whence he returned to Palestine with knowledge with which he tried to save himself at his crucifixion. He spoke words of sorcery, flew into the air, hid in a cave, turned himself into a rooster; ultimately, he was apprehended and taken to R. ben Peraḥyah. When Judah the gardener was questioned by Pilate, in the presence of ben Peraḥyah, as to whether he knew Jesus, he replied that Jesus dealt in magic and trickery by employing the books of the Egyptian magicians. There was, after all, no better place to learn magic than Egypt. About that country, it was said: “Ten measures of witchcraft were given to the world, nine taken by Egypt and one [by] the rest of the world...”⁶⁷⁰ According to another version, John the Baptist was questioned by a group of sages led by Joshua ben Peraḥyah, who asked where he had obtained the magic writings in his possession, and John replied they had been writ-

⁶⁶⁶ (6:30), Origen (1965, p. 346). On Origen and Celsus, see Thorndike (1964, pp. 436–461).

⁶⁶⁷ Schäfer (2007, pp. 102–105).

⁶⁶⁸ Tropper (2011, pp. 89–110).

⁶⁶⁹ Geller (1974); Ilan (2013).

⁶⁷⁰ *Qiddushin* 49b. That image is repeated, for example, by the third-century Church Father Clement of Alexandria, who wrote “it is said that mystery originated in Egypt” (*Stromata* 1960, p. 153), and by the tenth-century Muslim historian al-Nadīm, who stated that in Egypt many men and women were sorcerers and exorcists, who claimed they possessed seals, talismans, and the like. Rabbenu Gershon on *Menahot* 85a: “So to a land full of sorcery you bring sorcery”.

ten by Jesus and his disciples.⁶⁷¹ And in yet another account, Jesus wrought his miracles through the power of holy letters he had stolen from the Temple: “and wrote the [holy] name on paper, mentioned the Name so it would not harm him, and cut his flesh, hid in it the paper with the Name, again mentioned the Name, and put the flesh back in place. And using magic and the name of defilement, he entered the Temple...”⁶⁷²

Satan and Demons⁶⁷³

The power of Satan and the demons is said, in Jewish and Christian (and Muslim) traditions, to encompass more than the mere possession of mortals, and the imaginary biographies of Solomon and Jesus also correspond in this context, which stems from the extensive presence of Satan and the demons in those traditions. Satan and the demons differ from magicians and sorcerers in that the latter are humans; hence, demons and Satan (or in his other names: Asmodeus, Samael, and Lucifer) must be dealt with differently. Their existence explains why the forces of evil and sin exist in the human world and underscore the challenge they pose to the faithful. Their presence, and the struggle against their attempt to gain control of the human soul, intensifies the need to believe in God, or in Jesus.⁶⁷⁴ Satan and the demons are material creatures active in human society, even conducting a dialogue with it.⁶⁷⁵ It is no wonder then that they play an important role in theological discussions, in books of ethics, in legends, and in folklore.⁶⁷⁶ One cannot say about demons “Thou shalt not suffer a devil to live” (as was written of witches) because demons are not humans. Like evil spirits (*mezikin*) and demons, demons are perceived as dating back to the Creation⁶⁷⁷ and depicted as active in the environment and society of humans. They

⁶⁷¹ Yaacov Deutsch (1997, p. 8).

⁶⁷² Limor (1998b).

⁶⁷³ See Giversen (1972); Särkiö (2004); Bohak (2017). According to Origen, Satan is “an adversary to the Son of God who is righteousness, truth, and wisdom: (6:44), Origen (1965, p. 361).

⁶⁷⁴ See J. B. Russell (1984, 1991).

⁶⁷⁵ Of the literature on Satan I will only cite here: H. A. Kelly (2006); Boureau (2013).

⁶⁷⁶ A God-hating demon entered into the Jew Aquila who went around the synagogues preaching that “the one whom we Christians now worship is not the Messiah, but he was a man even as we are. He was condemned to be crucified as a blasphemer because he said that he was God” (1.2–1.5, in Varner (2004, p. 141).

⁶⁷⁷ According to *Mishnah Avot* 5:6, the destructive spirits were created on the eve of the (first) Sabbath at twilight, populated the imaginary reality of the ancient world, and took human form. The insides of clay incantation bowls found in Iraq and Palestine and dating from the fourth to

have been described as “the angels of service”; they “have wings, fly from one end of the world to the other, know the future, and like human beings they eat and drink, procreate like human beings, and die like human beings”.⁶⁷⁸ It has been said that there are three times as many demons in the world as humans; they live in deserts, forests, ruins, and the like, and “can change into many colours” and they employ various tricks in attempts to incite humans to engage in evil acts, but also have been recruited to assist them. Demons are mentioned in the Bible, and the Israelites are denounced for sacrificing to demons (false gods).⁶⁷⁹ Belief in their existence and activity spread throughout the Jewish culture apparently under Persian influence,⁶⁸⁰ and their attributes and actions are frequently mentioned in the literature of the Sages.⁶⁸¹ In medieval Jewish philosophy, demons were regarded as real creatures, but also as a personification of internal forces acting within a person.⁶⁸²

The struggle between the rule of God and the rule of Satan⁶⁸³ takes on various forms and in it, Satan appears in various guises. The Akkadian sage Saturnus asks Solomon: “How many shapes will the devil and the *Pater Noster* take when they contend together?” Solomon replies: “Thirty shapes” and describes them (the last is the “likeness of death”), and the *Pater Noster* does not win out over him.⁶⁸⁴ In the Bible, it is Satan who suggests to God that he ought to test Job⁶⁸⁵; in the New Testament, he appears to Jesus in the desert and challenges him to work a miracle (“If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread”, to throw himself from a high place, and to bow down to him, in return for which he will gain all the kingdoms of the world. Jesus rejects Satan and leaves him, whereupon “suddenly angels came and waited on him”.⁶⁸⁶). It is told that the Pharisees claimed Jesus was exorcising demons with the aid of Beelzebub, and Jesus replied to them: “And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come

seventh centuries were decorated with incantations and drawings of Asmodeus, Lilith, and other demons. See Viložny (2017).

678 *Hagigah* 16a.

679 Deuteronomy 32:15–18, and more.

680 For a detailed description see Eshel (1999).

681 Day (1988).

682 Schwartz (2004a, pp. 189–199).

683 Theissen (1983 [1974], pp. 90–91). On demons in medieval Hebrew literature, see Rotman (2016). On Solomon and the demons in art, see Shalev-Eyni (2006).

684 *The Dialogue of Salomon and Saturnus*, (Kemble, 1848, pp. 145–149).

685 Job 1:6–12.

686 Matthew 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13.

unto you". Luke relates that when the seventy-two messengers sent by Jesus to "every town and place where he himself intended to go" returned, they reported: "Lord, in your name even the demons submitted to us". And Jesus said: "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning".⁶⁸⁷ Satan is mentioned in Revelation: "When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison...and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth".⁶⁸⁸

Satan figured frequently in the Christian world of the imagination.⁶⁸⁹ St. Anthony, for example, struggled against Satan's various efforts to forcefully divest him of his belief in Christ's suffering,⁶⁹⁰ and Cyril describes the hermit Father Cyricus, who in a vision saw Satan gaining control over two monks and saved them, since Satan and the "tricks of the devils" are merely a personification of sorrow. And there is also the crowd of demons who hid on a hill near the Castellion monastery and were driven out by the monk St. Sabbas, who anointed the place with "the oil of the most revered cross".⁶⁹¹

It is difficult to reconstruct the development of, and the various forms taken by, the demonological tradition. In any event, at a certain stage, stories about Solomon and the demons were in broad circulation. For example, in *Citharismus Regis David contra daemonum Saulis*, King David warns the demons that a son was born to him who will rule over them.⁶⁹² This tradition appears at great length in the syncretic and enigmatic *Testament of Solomon*, which was perhaps written in Roman Egypt in the first or second centuries C.E., and expanded and edited over several centuries thereafter. The book is an "encyclopedia of demonology", containing numerous tales and at least three thematic elements: belief in the existence of the world of spirits and demons as part of human existence, the exploits of King Solomon in the wondrous supernatural world, and the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Solomon's control over demons is also mentioned in the Gnostic literature found at Nag Hammadi, in the *Epistle to Rehobam*, and *The Apocalypse of Adam*, which enumerates thirteen false explanations for the birth of the redeemer, *Photor*. According to the fourth explanation: "Solomon himself sent his army of demons to seek out the virgin. And they did not find the one whom they sought, but the virgin who was given to them. It was she whom they fetched. Solomon took her, the Virgin became pregnant and gave

⁶⁸⁷ Luke 10:1.

⁶⁸⁸ Revelation 20:7–8.

⁶⁸⁹ J. B. Russell (1981).

⁶⁹⁰ Gibson (1995).

⁶⁹¹ Cyril of Scythopolis (1991, pp. 25–27, 119–121).

⁶⁹² Charlesworth (1983, Vol. 1, p. 546).

birth to the child there”.⁶⁹³ In *The Testament of Solomon*, Jesus displays greater power over the demons than does Solomon. When the devil is asked who drove him away, he replies: “He who was born of a virgin and was crucified by the Jews”. The king also states in his “testament” that he commanded each of the thirty-six demons and interrogated them. “Tell me, O demon, to what zodiacal sign thou art subject?” Later, he commanded thirty-six other celestial bodies and questioned them, revealing his knowledge of astrology. They said: “We are the thirty-six elements, the world-rulers of this darkness. But, O King Solomon, thou wilt not wrong us nor imprison us, nor lay command on us; but since the Lord God has given thee authority over every spirit, in the air, and on the earth, and under the earth, therefore do we also present ourselves before thee like the other spirits”.⁶⁹⁴ Later, Solomon imprisons the demons with the aid of a ring and recruits them for various tasks, including building the foundations of the Temple. Solomon supposedly composed the *Testament* before his death so that the Israelites “might know the powers of the demons and their shapes, and the names of their angels, by which these angels are frustrated,”⁶⁹⁵ and that Jesus was Solomon’s successor and would rule over the demons.⁶⁹⁶ In the *Dialogue Between Timothy and Aquila*, Jesus is depicted as greater than Solomon: Solomon submits to the demons while Jesus subdues them and will rule them forever.⁶⁹⁷

In the Talmud, Solomon rules over Satan and the demons, but is also ruled over by them; he is at once stronger and weaker than they are. Perhaps this is meant to express the view that even a ruler like Solomon, who reigned over both the lower and the upper realms, has human weaknesses that overpower him, weaknesses that Jesus does not possess. Thus, the Talmud (as well as the Quran)⁶⁹⁸ relates that Satan ousts Solomon from his throne and replaces him and that Satan is sent to punish Solomon, to humiliate him and succeed him.⁶⁹⁹

An encounter between Satan and Solomon appears in a medieval Christian folk tale about a trial at which Satan is the prosecutor; Mary or Moses are wit-

⁶⁹³ Trans. G. W. MacRae and D. M. Parrott in J. M. Robinson (1988, p. 282).

⁶⁹⁴ *The Testament of Solomon*, 18:1–3.

⁶⁹⁵ *The Testament of Solomon*, 18:14–15.

⁶⁹⁶ This text was widely circulated in the first centuries C.E.; whether it was the source for the tales about Solomon and the demons in the literature of the Sages (and later in the Quran), Conybear (1898); Duling (1983, p. 987); McCown (1922b); Schwarz (2007); and Klutz (2005).

⁶⁹⁷ *Ancient Jewish-Christian Dialogues: Timothy and Aquila*, Varner (2004, pp. 14–15.)

⁶⁹⁸ In the *Tales of the Prophets*, Satan hears a divine voice telling him of the birth of Solomon, David’s son, “at whose hands will be your destruction and your seeds”, al-Kisā’ī (1997, p. 289).

⁶⁹⁹ On the scores of versions of this story that appeared in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, see Kushelevsky (2011, pp. 272–288). For further detail, see Sasson (2003, pp. 129–160).

nesses for the defense, and Solomon is the judge. Though Satan quotes from the Holy Scriptures, he is sentenced to Hell.

Demons are not always depicted as negative characters. In the medieval *Musare Haphilosophim* (The Teachings of the Philosophers), Solomon learns of an island where wise demons live. The king, who wishes to hear what they have to say, commands the wind to carry him there. On his arrival a hundred and twenty demons gather around him, each speaking a profound thought. And “when they were through, Solomon son of David wrote down their words of wisdom and returned to his home”.⁷⁰⁰

Asmodeus and the Demons Build the Temple

Demons brought water from India to the King’s gardens and orchards: “Solomon made use of the spirits and sent them to India from where they brought him water with which to water [the pepper-plant] here [in the land of Israel] and it produced fruit”,⁷⁰¹ and others were part of Solomon’s army, who helped assist in constructing the Temple that Solomon built for the Almighty—a temple whose construction was perceived as the completion of the six days of the Creation. Solomon was said to have been aided by demons, while one of the sins of the Israelites was that they sacrificed to them (“They sacrificed to devils, not God”⁷⁰²). In addition to the 30,000 demons who worked in three shifts of ten thousand a month cutting down trees in Lebanon, others worked on the construction of the Temple (“besides Solomon three thousand and three hundred, a supervisor who were over the work”).⁷⁰³ Josephus adds, based on the account in Chronicles according to which the reference is to all those who remained in the land who were not Israelites, “Then Solomon took a census of all aliens who were residing in the land of Israel (2 Chronicles 2:16) that the workers who quarried the huge stones and carried them and the ‘other materials’ to the city were “strangers who were left by David”.⁷⁰⁴

Legends of how the Temple built itself, quarried stones lowering themselves into position, or of how birds, spirits, and thousands of angels participated in the construction, were intended to imbue the undertaking with a wondrous aspect, rather than to simply say that the Temple was really built on the labor of a great

700 *Musare Haphilosophim*, Part 2, Chapter 21. And see Chapter Eight.

701 *Midrash Rabbah: Ecclesiastes*, II.2, § 4–5, § I, 55. Cohen (1939).

702 Deuteronomy 32:16.

703 1 Kings 5:16.

704 *Antiquities* 8:59. Josephus (1963).

many workers, often at the cost of their lives. One account claims that over the course of the seven years of construction, not a single builder died; after the work was completed, however, all the rest died so they would not be tempted to build palaces for the practice of idolatry, and they received their wages from the Almighty in the next world.⁷⁰⁵ This story about the workers perishing may have come into being to explain how the Temple was built without making use of iron: “The house was built with stones finished at the quarry, so that neither hammer nor ax nor any tool of iron was heard in the temple while it was being built”.⁷⁰⁶ It seems more likely the intent was to claim that the Temple was not built by forced laborers, but rather by demons. *Midrash Rabbah on Song of Songs* describes how spirits and angels helped Solomon construct the Temple: “all assist the king [...]; even spirits, even demons, even ministering angels”. R. Berekiah said: “the stones carried themselves and placed themselves on the row”.⁷⁰⁷

According to the fourth-century Gnostic work *The Gospel of Truth*,⁷⁰⁸ Solomon built Jerusalem with the help of demons; after they completed their work, he held them captive in seven jugs, from which they escaped after the Romans conquered the city. *The Testament of Solomon* expanded its account of the construction by integrating various elements from the Bible and from Egyptian and Hellenist astrology with magic formulae. According to that work, Solomon received from Lord Sabaoth, via the archangel Michael, a signet ring made of a precious stone, on which a pentagram was engraved. With the aid of that ring, Solomon defeats the demon Orniās, who offers, in exchange for his release, to bring to the king all manner of demons, male and female. The king recruits the demons for various jobs—digging the foundations for the Temple, quarrying the stones, carrying them, creating gold and silver, and more. Some of the demons are sealed in jugs. One, Ehippas, the wind demon, is caught in the Arabian Peninsula to set up a huge cornerstone, too heavy for the other demons to lift; he carries out the task with the help of the demon of the Red Sea.⁷⁰⁹ These versions of this text were circulated in the first centuries C.E. is evident from its citation in *The Dialogue between Timothy and Aquila*. A popular Jerusalem tradition from the early Byzantine period further shows how prevalent the motif of Solomon’s rule over the demons and their participation in the construction of the Temple was at the time. An anonymous pilgrim from Bordeaux, for example, recounts

705 Josephus (1963).

706 1 Kings 6:7.

707 *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:1,5. Neusner (1989).

708 Trans. H.W. Attridge and G. W. MacRae, in J. M. Robinson (1988).

709 Duling (1988, pp. 81–91).

his journey in *Itinerarium burdigalense*: he arrived in Jerusalem in the year 333, where, in the area of the Temple ruins, he saw the vault “where Solomon used to torture 590 demons”.⁷¹⁰ We have no way of knowing whether he knew the stories of Solomon’s rule over the demons before he arrived in Jerusalem, or first heard them in that city. In any event, the brevity of the description may suggest that the author assumed his readers would be familiar with the tradition that Solomon sealed demons in a cave and tormented them. Another description of a journey in the early sixth century contains the information that “a dozen silver jugs in which Solomon sealed the demons” were found in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (related in *Gospel of Truth*, and that the ring “with which Solomon sealed the demons” was found at Golgotha.⁷¹¹

It is difficult to trace the path by which the legend of Solomon’s rule over the demons found its way into the *midrashim* and *aggadot*. At any rate, since demons and spirits were part not only of the popular culture but of the Sages’ general understanding of the world, accepting the help of demons was not regarded as a wrongful act if done for the sake of Heaven: “Huna in the name of Rabbi Yosef said: Everyone helps the king, so even more so everyone helps for the honor of the King of Kings, the Holy One blessed be He. Even the spirits and even the demons and even the angels”.⁷¹² Solomon himself, in a letter he was said to have sent to the Queen of Sheba via a hoopoe bird, boasts about the fact that the Almighty appointed him to reign over the demons and spirits.⁷¹³ In the long Talmudic tale about Solomon and Asmodeus,⁷¹⁴ Solomon learns from a male and female demon that only Asmodeus knows the secret of the *shamir*,⁷¹⁵ namely how it may be used to split building stones without the aid of iron tools. He sends Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, to obtain it by trickery and bring it to him. Thus, Asmodeus was (after a variety of digressions and sub-plots) cunningly trapped and brought before Solomon, upon which he disclosed the whereabouts of the *shamir*—a hoopoe bird that possessed the power to split and chisel stones, without which it would have been impossible to build the Temple”.⁷¹⁶

710 Wilkinson (1999, p. 29).

711 Wilkinson (1999, p. 199).

712 *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:1,5. Neusner (1989).

713 *Targum Sheni Esther*, 1:2.

714 *Gittin* 68a-b.

715 The reference is probably to a diamond. *Mishnah Avot* 5:6 has it that the *shamir* was created on the eve of the Sabbath.

716 In *Tales of the Prophets*, the story is extended by elements from Gnostic literature, the *Testament of Solomon*, and Talmudic literature. According to al-Kisā’ī, the angel Gabriel convened for Solomon four hundred and twenty groups of all types of demons and devils, males and females, that he instructed to engage in various work “in iron, copper, wood, and stones, as well as in

The Talmudic legend regarding the iron-less construction of the Temple found its way, probably from Byzantium, into the *Paleia*, a collection of tales based on the holy scriptures and apocrypha from the fourteenth century. In this version of the tale, Asmodeus transformed into a *kitovar* (a centaur). Solomon sent someone to trap the *kitovar* and get him drunk. He was then brought before Solomon to inform the king how to build the Temple from stones not chiseled with iron tools. He claimed there was a *kokot* (a rooster) who, with the divine help of the *shamir*, knew how to split rocks and plant trees on desolate mountain tops, and was hence known as the “artist of the mountains”; this rooster knew where to find the *shamir*. The King’s messengers arrived at the rooster’s nest and smeared it with white glass; when the rooster wanted to return to his chicks he found the nest sealed, and flew off to bring the *shamir* in order to cut the glass. The King’s men yelled to frighten it, and when the wondrous worm fell from its mouth, they took it and brought it to Solomon.⁷¹⁷

It is tempting to read many of these legends about Solomon as an expression of his greatness, as seen in his control over demons and Satan; they may also be interpreted as an explanation for the destruction of the Temple. Yet, in their own discussion of the destruction, the Sages do not mention the use of demons to build it,⁷¹⁸ nor is their assistance why the Sages reject the idea that God requires a physical home in one specific place (a view that inspired Christianity’s attitude towards the Temple, as well as the idea of the *Ecclesia* as a temple). Nor is the

building villages, cities and fortresses”. Finally, he set them to work building the Temple. In this version, the residents of the city complained about the noise made by the cutting of rocks, so Solomon sent for Sakar, a demon who had rebelled, who told him of an eagle who knew where to find a mountain of diamonds. From there the demons brought the necessary quantity of diamonds with which the rocks could be cut without making any sound. In this version, the construction took forty days, since each day Solomon employed “a thousand demons, a thousand devils and a thousand human builders”. al-Kisā’i (1997, pp. 516–517). On the Islamic traditions on this subject see Soucek (1976, pp. 73–123).

717 Raba (2014, pp. 152–155). The late Dr. Joel Raba generously provided me with the texts. The monstrous bird appears in part of the Old English poem “Solomon and Saturn II”. A Babylonian sage, Saturn, asks Solomon to tell him about a mourning spirit (*gemorende gast*) which had aroused his curiosity for fifty years. Solomon responds with an obscure reference to a monstrous bird called *vasa mortis* held in chains in the heart of Philistine until the sound of Judgment Day is heard. Several suggestions have been offered in the research literature regarding the source of this text’s inspiration and its meaning (see Chapter Eight).

718 It would be only a conjecture to infer that these tales were inspired by Augustine and his successors, who described the *Synagoga* as “the bastion of Satan” and the “domicile of demons and idolatry”. See “The Synagogue as Foe in Early Christian Literature”, in Rutgers, *Making Myth* (2009, pp. 79–115).

aid of Asmodeus and the demons described in the Gospels or Christian literature as a flaw that marred Solomon's Temple from its inception.

Why it was Solomon specifically who became the protagonist of numerous *midrashim* and tales of occult adventure is a mystery. Be the reason as it may, such tales belonged primarily to Judaism's inward-facing literature, rather than to its correspondence with Christianity. However, between the figure of Solomon as the author of the Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, and the figure of Solomon who consorted with demons and Satan, there lies an abyss; no less an abyss divides Solomon from Jesus. The latter rejects Satan's temptations, and the mere mention of his name suffices to overcome the devil.