



## EGYPTIAN DEMONOLOGY WITHIN THE PHYLOGENETIC AND POLYMORPHIC ENVIRONMENT OF THE LATE PERIOD AND PTOLEMAIC EGYPT: SEARCHING FOR MODES OF DEMONIC CONCEPTION, PROGRESSION AND PRAXIS

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Ancient Egyptian demonology is a very perplex subject, mainly due to the fact that there exists no specific generic denotation to clearly describe its subject, i.e. demons. In the Egyptian context, what we term demon drawing on our own cultural heritage, is not seen as a negative aspect of cultural praxis and conceptualization, but rather as a centralized concept of the Egyptian understanding of the workings of the world from the very continuation of the cosmos itself down to the vicissitudes of existence faced by individuals. The articulation of the involvement of demonic agency forms one of the crucial links in ancient Egypt between individual existence on the human level and the level of nature or the cosmos, the realm of the gods. Unlike, though, the explicit recognition of the term demon in the ancient Greek language and religion, as the intermediary between god and mortals the majority of the demonic personae in the Egyptian literature do not possess an apparent ontological essence, or a clearly defined denotation. Although ancient Egyptian demonology of the Late and Ptolemaic periods is strongly attached to the aforementioned axioms and it is related to earlier religious beliefs, as attested in the magico-religious repertoire of the Pharaonic period, it also expresses a novel variety of conceptual modes in both the demonic iconography and role. The former is mostly concerned with the ideas of polymorphism through the creation and mobilization of a variety of demonic names and personae, and the latter with the specific liturgical environment or ritual discourse. This research strand is my contribution to the on-going Ancient Egyptian Demonology Project (<http://www.demonthings.com>), which is co-ordinated by Kasia Szpakowska (University of Swansea) and Rita Lucarelli (University of Bonn), and attempts to investigate the underlined principle behind the formation, progression and ritual manipulation of demonic entities and roles within a specific performative environment, as well as to define certain conceptual models of determining and classifying the demonic personae in the first millennium BC. The strand of the Project comprises two major research themes:

1. “*Anti-god entities and their demonic associates*”, in which the demonic phylogenesis and polyformism in the magico-religious discourse of the Late Period are explored. One important aspect of the Egyptian demonology that has not been properly investigated in the past is the interrelation between the major anti-god figures of the Egyptian theology, such as Apophis or Seth, and the multiple demonic names and hypostases associated with them. This research strand forms part of my on-going research on Apophis and the riddle of primeval evil in the Egyptian belief-system. The multiplicity of Apophian names and manifestations consists of a central chapter in the development of the Egyptian demonic motif, because it touches the quite problematic relation between the name and the named. These manifestations could range from positive to negative and vice versa. Certain issues related to the identity of these demonic entities and the interrelation between name and function should be carefully examined, especially when the negative and hostile polarity of the latter is not easily detectable in all cases. Similarly, although certain criteria that distinguish divine from demonic entities occasionally exist in the Egyptian belief system, diversity and multiplicity of names and forms are not idiomatic privileges of the demonic but they have been taken after the exemplar within the society of the divine. The most striking prototype is that of Seth, whose malevolent nature as the rival of Horus, is appeased by protective attributes towards Re and against Apophis, or that of Bes/Beset who seems to operate in the luminal areas of transformation between the human/animal on the one hand and the divine/demonic on the other. The main objectives of the current research strand are: (a) the definition of the anti-god category in the theological and ritual discourse of the ancient Egyptians; (b) the exploration of the inner mechanisms that govern the formation of the multiplicity of its names, visual expressions and personae; (c) the construction of a detailed demonic cartography (names, properties, roles, variations in iconography and role, ritual mechanisms of the demonic formation) which will map together and fully exemplify the polygenetic and polymorphic characteristics of the demonic idiosyncrasy within the multi-

cultural and syncretistic environment of the Late Period and Ptolemaic Egypt.

2. *“Demonization of otherness and the issue of acculturation in the Late Period Egypt”*, in which the issue of ethnicity as a criterion for distinguishing good from evil in both the divine and social sphere is examined. The position of the demonic agent, regarded as marginal and outcast to the Egyptian social ethics, shares common characteristics with the position of the foreigner in the Pharaonic ideology and society: as a member of an ethnic group, the foreigner was portrayed as an enemy of mAat, like a demon or animal, with strange habits and appearance. This rigid opposition between Egyptian and *foreigner topos*, which reflects the pharaonic ideology towards the chaotic and potentially threatening world beyond its boundaries, acquires new modes of conception and visualization during the Late Period alongside the diverse notions of acculturation and demonization of the foreigner, divine or human being. The idea of acculturation, which

describes the adaptation processes of various intensities that follow the inclusion of foreign ethnic individuals and groups in the Egyptian society, could be employed *mutatis mutantis* to explain diverse attitudes towards demonic entities of a syncretistic nature associated with foreign gods in the religious discourse of the first millennium Egypt. The existence of foreign divine and demonic personae could easily be accepted into the framework and worldview of Egyptian religion, because of its polytheistic nature. Thus, this strand will examine certain aspects of cultural adaptation in the formation and role of certain demonic motifs and their divine associates in the Egyptian ingenious pantheon. Moreover, the analysis of the rich apotropaic ritual repertoire of the Ptolemaic Period will exemplify issues concerning the relationship between demons and gods, as well as the way theologians, by subordinating demons to the gods' control, could insert the former into the ordered world created by the latter.