THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN DEMONOLOGY PROJECT

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This is an overview of The Ancient Egyptian Demonology Project, its aims, current research developments and upcoming conference.

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The "Ancient Egyptian Demonology Project" was initially created at the International Congress of Egyptologists in Rhodes, May 2008, by Rita Lucarelli (University of California, Berkeley), Panagiotis Kousoulis (University of the Aegean, Rhodes) and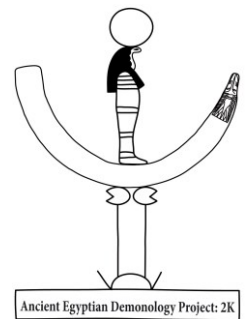 Kasia Szpakowska (Swansea University, Wales). Other scholars from around the world have since joined the project, and we welcome further contributions and collaborations. At the heart of this ambitious project is the systematic study of those demonic entities that seem to have the capability of being both malevolent and benevolent, from the Predynastic to the Byzantine. An undercurrent of transdisciplinary collection, analysis and interpretation of material, textual, and iconographical materials within the context of the ancient Mediterranean world and the Near East underpins the project.

THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN DEMONOLOGY PROJECT: SECOND MILLENNIUM BC

This three-year Project (2013–2016) is a discrete sub strand that aims to explore the world of demons in 2nd millennium BC Ancient Egypt (2000–1000 BCE or Middle–New Kingdoms). The term "demon" is our blanket term for those ghosts, guardians, monsters, and other supernatural entities (both hostile and beneficial) that hovered between the categories of god, man, and king. In both the modern and ancient world, demonic entities embody and are blamed for a host of physical and psychological afflictions, while helpful entities are called upon to aid the sufferer. But while much is known about temple religions and gods of ancient Egypt, this darker and more private side of Egyptian religion remains opaque. At the heart of the project is a database that initially focuses on the second millennium BCE that can later be augmented and expanded by other Egyptologists, as well as an interactive portal for the public to learn about these entities. By making the material public, the goal is to encourage cross-cultural research, allowing inter-connections and disjunctions to be more visible.

Our approach combines philological, iconographic, and archaeological analysis of the evidence. The Coffin Texts (religious compositions inscribed on coffins) and early Book of the Dead manuscripts constitute a subset that includes text, imagery, and material. Another priority of this project is the inclusion of material remains of objects that were used to attract or repel demonic entities. This pilot project includes ivory "wands," headrests, and figurines, as well as components referred to in spells. The relational database is focused on the structural, functional, and essential characteristics of each entity, as well as links to contextual information. This should allow data-driven analyses (a process increasingly used in the sciences) to encourage the development of hypotheses that might otherwise never be considered.

The aims of this specific project are to:

- Create a data-driven classification of ancient Egyptian demons and related paraphernalia from the second millennium BCE;
- Establish an interactive database, accessible through a website, allowing data to be shared and augmented by other scholars and researchers;
- Apply new methods of data visualization to convey the results effectively and engagingly to scholars and the public alike.

The project is funded by The Leverhulme Trust. The Demonology 2K team includes Kasia Szpakowska (director) and PhD students Zuzanna Bennett and Felicitas Weber.

CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT

March 24-26, 2016 – Swansea University and The Egypt Centre in Wales will host a conference *Demon Things: Ancient Egyptian manifestations of liminal entities.*

For more information please visit our website.

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