



**A BRIEF INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR**

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*“Darmok and Jalad. At Tanagra.”  
Star Trek: TNG S05 E02.*

This volume brings together papers inspired by the conference *Demon Things: Ancient Egyptian Manifestations of Liminal Entities* that took place March 21–24, 2016, at Swansea University in Wales.<sup>1</sup> The goal of this international event was to explore the range and variation of liminal entities the ancient Egyptians believed capable of harm and help. The discussions focused on manifestations of demons through iconography, objects, or textual descriptions, moving on from previous demonological conferences that had focused on issues related to the thorny problems of categorization and definitions.<sup>2</sup> Scholars were encouraged to present their findings in the hopes that Wales, a land blanketed with mythology, legends, sacred spaces, megaliths, and castles, would serve as a creative venue for converg-

ing different areas of research, through which a fuller picture of these multifaceted entities could emerge. Professor Martin Stringer<sup>3</sup> launched the conference by reminding us to recognize and respect religious diversity (whether that of the past or the present) and the need to understand religious behavior through real-life situations. The beings we try to study so objectively were not just theoretical constructs, nor theological speculations, but were part of everyday experiences. Our demons energetically attacked, defended, and danced. They played drums, rushed like the wind, and bellowed like hippos. Capable of penetrating bodies and minds, bringing both disease and rapture, they evoked both extreme fear and hope. Whether or not these particular supernatural entities fit our own individual preferences and experiences is irrelevant—for the believer, these beings were tangible and real. They were part of the numinous landscape of ancient

Egypt—they were found in towns and villages, homes and temples, throughout the *duat*, in borderland outposts and even quarries. In the tradition of the late historian of religion Jonathan Z. Smith, we can say that these demons belong to the Here, the There, and the Anywhere.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the best-known liminal entities are those found on objects associated with the funerary and mortuary sphere, with beings who exist over “there.” The earliest to appear both in text and image are found in the Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts. In “The Anatomy of a Coffin Text Demon,” Zuzanna Bennett applies a systematic forensic technique, dissecting the morphology, attributes, behavior, and functions of over 400 different groups and individuals whose role was to maintain *maat* in the afterlife. Nika Lavrentyeva and Ekaterina Alexandrova approach the need to maintain cosmic balance by examining “Liminal Sources of Dangerous Powers: A Case of the Black Ram.” Their approach is to structure the image of the black ram as an icon and mytheme, looking at the concept of the black ram and related solar creatures, particularly in the Pyramid Texts Book of Two Ways. In “A Particular Depiction of Anubis from the Tomb of the Sculptor Nakhtamun (TT335): Is Anubis a Demon?” Arnaud Quertinmont closely examines the iconography of the armed guardian demons who manifest as canines. The distinctive attributes of the Anubis in TT335 are used as a case study to demonstrate the complexity of roles played by Egyptian *ntr.w*.

Moving forward in time to late Dynasty 26 to early Dynasty 27, Ladislav Bareš introduces us to “Underworld Demons in the Decoration of the Large Late Period Shaft Tombs at Abusir.” A number of these inhabitants of the netherworld are known from Book of the Dead 144, but others have rarely been attested. Their function and possible reasons for their selection and inclusion into the iconographical program of this burial chamber are discussed. Renata Landgráfová continues to explore the site by examining in more detail the “The Guardians of Menekhibnekau: Chapter 144 of the Book of the Dead in the Shaft Tomb of Menekhibnekau at Abusir.” Their specific configurations as presented in the iconography and accompanying texts are examined in the context of their arrangement within the architectural layout of the burial chamber itself.

In “Fear and Loathing at Amarna: A Case Study of the Development of Sacred Objects in Response to Communal Anxiety,” Kasia Szpakowska moves the focus away from the inhabitants of the *duat* to people

still living on earth (“here”). She approaches the introduction of clay cobra figurines at Amarna as an example of protective traditions created as a response to profound emotional upheaval, adding to recent studies in the archaeology of anxiety. Moving away from the Egyptian Nile Valley, Erin E. Bornemann and Stuart Tyson Smith present findings from their recent fieldwork at Tombos in “Liminal Deities in the Borderlands: Bes and Pataikos in Ancient Nubia.” Through iconographical analysis, materiality studies, and entanglement theory, they demonstrate how these two amuletic forms continued to be valued through time, for aiding the transition from life to death for individuals even beyond the borders of Egypt and into Nubia. In “The Maned Hippopotamus at Lahun: Identifying Homes and Names,” Stephen Quirke and Campbell Price interpret a late Middle Kingdom limestone figurine. By combining recent settlement archaeology with close reexamination of its production, morphology, provenance, and excavation history, they reveal the performative power that was part of the creative process itself.

Emphasizing the dual nature of all ancient Egyptian divine beings, Sabrina Ceruti turns to the darker side of the hybrid hippo by considering “The *B<sup>3</sup>w* of Taweret: Vindictiveness (and Forgiveness) of the Hippopotamus Goddess.” Close readings of texts reveal the ambiguous nature of this complex divine being, who, far from being simply a benevolent protectress, is capable of inciting fear alongside piety. Susanne Beck presents a comparative approach in her study of “Disease Demons in Mesopotamia and Egypt: *Sāmānu* as a Case Study.” She first provides an overview of how these demons were conceived of in Mesopotamia as compared with Egypt, before moving on to a study of a specific demon, *Sāmānu*/Akhu, who appeared in texts of both cultures. In “The Impact of the Manifestation of Demoniactal Winds on Terrestrial Life: The Role of Demon Gangs in Dispersing the *I<sup>3</sup>dt-rnpt*,” El Zahraa Megahed examines the role of pestilential winds as bearers of affliction on an annual basis. Sekhmet makes an appearance here, where the author notes the constant link between these demons and the goddess. Emphasizing again their dual nature, in “The Slaughtering: A Study of the *H<sup>3</sup>.tyw* as Liminal Beings in Ancient Egyptian Thought” Danielle Sass presents a detailed orthographical and etymological analysis of these hostile hordes known nearly exclusively through texts. Sekhmet again makes an appearance, but the focus is primarily on the role that the *h<sup>3</sup>.tyw* performed whether or not they were under the com-

mand of a greater deity. Also focusing on texts is Renata Schiavo, who uses letters to the dead to understand “Ghosts and Ancestors in a Gender Perspective.” Intriguingly, this approach highlights the importance of rituals to maintain a positive mutual relationship between female ancestors and the household.

The role of an individual liminal entity is discussed by Rita Lucarelli in “Baba and the Baboon Demons.” Tracing his development from the Pyramid Texts to Book of the Dead and on through Ptolemaic temple texts, Lucarelli shows how the ancient Egyptians used their native fauna, in this case the baboon, as models for the form and characteristics of the god Baba, as well as related guardian beings. Amr Gaber also investigates the history of another individual being, in this case the aggressive “*Mnh*, ‘The Butcher’ and Lord of the Butcher Demons.” A full presentation of every attestation of the demon is included, from the Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts to Roman Period papyri. That the Egyptians continued to rely on liminal entities for protection “anywhere” is demonstrated in “*Symbolae Sacrae: Symbolic Formulae for Protection and Adoration within the Quarries of Gebel el Silsila*,” presented by Maria Nilsson. Moving to the very peripheries of the Egyptian landscape, she introduces the reader to quarry marks and schematic renditions of sacred symbols inscribed into the very rock of the quarries by worried workers.

Ultimately, this conference and the contributions in this volume allow us to catch only tantalizing glimpses of a veritable swarm of beings whose very existence seems to surf waves of chaos and of order. We call them “liminal beings,” for they exist in that threshold, able to cross the boundary area between the world of the mundane and that of the divine. A range of lenses have been brought into play through the systematic collection of textual, representational, and figural examples found on a range of sources: from otherwise ordinary objects to compositions that were perhaps only ever meant for divine consumption. Throughout runs the recognition of the importance of understanding the past history and provenance not only of the objects, but also of the history of our own study of the meaning and interpretations of rituals and beings. We do not have the luxury of talking to ancient Egyptians—all we have is the complex iconography, compositions, and objects that were often symbolic and perhaps could

be understood as metaphors or allegories themselves. It is my sincere hope that this volume starts to bring to light some of the lesser-known liminal beings whose very survival in the archaeological record testifies to their importance, and encourages the understanding of both them and the individuals who used them.

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#### REFERENCES

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Summaries of the conference can be found starting at < <http://www.demonthings.com/conference22march/> >.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this volume, we can simply understand "demons" as a blanket term for those beings between human, animal, and major god, who were not worshipped in temples. To reflect the lack of consensus as to definition, scholars use a range of terms to refer to these beings, and we have not attempted to impose any artificial consistency during the conference, nor in this volume. Previous gatherings included the International Specialists' Symposium: Ancient Egyptian Theology and Demonology: Studies on the Boundaries between the Divine and Demonic in Egyptian Magic (Rhodes, Greece, June 27–29, 2003), Ancient Egyptian Demonology: A Comparative Perspective (Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn Institut für Kunstgeschichte und Archäologie, February 28–March

1, 2011), and *Evil Spirits, Monsters and Benevolent Protectors: Demonology in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia* (Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University, April 23, 2012). Papers from these conferences can be found in Kousoulis 2011 and volume 14(1) (2013) of *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Anthropologist and Pro Vice Chancellor of Swansea University.

<sup>4</sup> Smith (2003, 23) offers a means of understanding religious practices through spatial topography as

(1) the "here" of domestic religion, located primarily in the home and in burial sites; (2) the "there" of public, civic, and state religions, largely based in temple constructions; and (3) the "anywhere" of a rich diversity of religious formations that occupy an interstitial space between these other two loci, including a variety of religious entrepreneurs, and ranging from groups we term "associations" to activities we label "magic."

In the context of this volume, "there" can also refer to the *duat* itself—the abode of the dead, damned, demons, and divinities.