

The Demons of Magic

by Morton Smith

I was first asked to talk about demons of magic and the notion was that I would show slides representing various demonic beings, demons we find on the magical gems. It occurred to me that you were probably familiar with them. You certainly would be if you looked at the works placed on the admirable bibliography that was circulated, especially Bonner's *Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* is to be highly recommended. If you do look at those you will find that the imagination of the Greco-Near Easterners of the second century A.D. produced a fantastic population of beings who are quite unlike ancient near Eastern gods, on the one hand, and even less like the standard Greek or Roman gods, on the other. As far as iconography goes there was a flourishing or a remarkable growth of new and fantastic forms. This did not by any means take care of all the gods that were used in magic. I will come back to that point presently.

I decided not to deal with this question because I thought, as I have said, that if you were reading the recommended bibliography or if you were interested in the purely iconographic side of magical invention, you could easily do that for yourselves. A friend of mine who gave up church history for history of art told me, "I used to have to read the texts but now I just have to look at the pictures." For iconographic studies you could do that; one picture is worth a thousand words. Besides that, I was having trouble as I started preparing for that since the magical gems commonly show the gods that are invoked, how do you know when something that appears on a magical gem is a god, and when is it a daimon. Take the rooster-headed angleped, for instance. He is a rooster from the neck up, and from the neck to the knees he is a Roman soldier in regular Roman soldier's armor. He grasps a good round Roman shield, and wields the whip. And from the knees down he is a pair of serpents. An odd creature. Very widely represented, very often with the name Abrasax, which led to a belief that he was a representation of Abrasax. But Iao also appears very often in connection with him. So it was thought too that he was a representation of Iao. You had your choice, and you could solve the problem by saying that this was a representation of Abrasax-Iao or Iao-Abrasax, product of syncretism. Then go on to the remarks of the heresiologists about Abrasax as the demon of the year whose number is 365, and the god of the highest heaven which has all the lower heavens below him, and so on. But is he a god or is he a demon?

So I decided that I was facing a new problem, or a problem that I had not seen adequately studied. And that is what exactly is the usage of the term daimon, and related terms? What usage does that family of terms have in magical texts in the Greco-Roman world? That is what I have been looking at for preparation of this paper. You know of course that the Septuagint has a very simple and brief answer to that, *apantes hoi theoi ton ethnon daimonia*, "all the gods of the gentiles are daimonia" (Septuagint Ps. 95.5). The Hebrew Psalm 96 calls them *elilim*. To Homer this statement would have been unobjectionable. Homer knows that gods are daimones and Nock argued this in *Classical Philology* 45 (1950):49, with references to many previous discussions. Daimonia is just the derived adjective from the daimones so that's no problem. But what is wrong is that the Septuagint didn't intend to make a statement of fact, that statement is polemic. The reader is intended to understand that, contrary

to Homer, daimones are not gods. Daimones are inferior beings. And the Septuagint, by saying that all the gods of the gentiles are daimonia, is degrading them to a class of beings subordinate or inferior to the one true God.

When the Septuagint does this it was not doing something that was radically new or peculiarly Jewish. The subordination of daimones to theoi has classical precedents. One thinks immediately of Plato's *Apology*, of course. But Plato is by no means the only one nor is he the first. So you are faced with this fact that in the classical tradition is double. On the one hand, there is a tradition from Homer on down equating daimon with theos. On the other hand, there is tradition dating back to the pre-Socratic philosophers subordinating daimon to theos. The question is, how did the magicians deal with this problem of second-class supernatural citizens? In the papyri, first of all you must remember that the bulk of papyri comes from the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., were written at that time, and certainly contain in some instances considerably older materials and in some instances contains materials invented by the writer. The safest thing to conclude is that you have materials from the fourth to the fifth century, in general. Sometimes one can see what looks like significant changes but it's hard to be sure. For instance, in the Great Magical Papyrus of Paris, daimon is used pretty consistently all the way through until the last couple of hundred lines. Then daimonia comes in and daimon disappears. It looks as if you had an appendix or at least as if the last sections of that papyrus were written by someone who was subordinating these beings to daimon-like beings. Daimonion is a step down--it isn't actually a pejorative term or anything of this sort, but it is a step down from daimon. And if this step should occur, then all usage of daimonion in the Great Magical Papyrus of Paris, at least all those which the index chose to record, come after the line 3000 and run a few hundred lines. This is a small appendix and that the adjectival form is absent in the first 3000 lines is significant or seems significant.

So you can trace or see in some instances things that look like development but they are not very extensive and they don't enable me at least to see any consistent development in the body of papyrus material. What struck me first and hardest on reviewing that material is that daimones play a comparatively minor part in ancient magic. I expected them to be all over the place. In fact, when I started to write I said that they would be coextensive: magic, ancient Greco-Roman magic and daimones. But they are not. The great bulk of ancient magic, of magic recorded by the papyri, and I should say a good half of the magic recorded by deifixiones, and all of the magic that appears on the magical gems is done by gods as far as the writers go. They think and speak of the beings they are writing about, for the great majority of cases as theoi. Daimon and daimonion as far as I know never appear on the magical gems at all. There is one instance, in a gem in Braunschweig (number 186 of the Braunschweig gems in the big German collection *Antike Gemmen*) does have something that is restored or read as daimonion on it. But unfortunately that gem, because of stylistic grounds, is probably 16th to 17th century A.D. The chance that it is ancient is quite small. And there are a lot of points against it besides that use of daimonion.

I haven't examined all of the ancient gems, of course. But this judgment is based on a concordance of them that was prepared by Mrs. Francis Schwartz who examined about twenty of the major and minor published collections and a half dozen standard works on ancient gems. So we can leave the gems out of the question. The people who made them may have thought that they were representing daimonia but they never happened

to say so, and we can't go confidently beyond their silence. In the deifixiones you run into another question, but I'll come back to deifixiones in just a moment.

The papyri give you the fullest description of the daimones and their place in the world. They refer to them fairly often, as a class of beings who are intermediate, apparently, between gods and men. They are supernatural beings, in the sense that they haven't got human physical location and limitations, but they are subordinate to the gods. They are found in the air, on the earth, in the waters, and on the sea, and also in the underworld. An especially important class of them are the demons of the underworld, particularly the demons of the dead who become daimones after death--apparently all the dead do, and whenever you have a dead man you have a decidaimon who can be called up if you have some remains of the body, the proper spells, and so on. The decidaimon will be particularly effective if the dead man was killed violently, especially if was executed for a crime, but also if he died young, particularly if he died before marriage. Those who did not reach their time of flourishing, and those who died as infants, especially, provide lots of demonic service for the magicians. All of these daimones for the most part are what you might call the help, the labor, of the magical world. They are called in to provide various services for the magician. For example, "Go to a such and such house and stand next to somebody and take the appearance of the god or demon that he or she particularly reveres and tell the target person as follows." Then you give the message you want conveyed. Or "take control of them," usually used in attempts to get women. "Make her jump out of bed and come to me right away and pound on the door." "Inflame her with passion. Make her burn." And so forth and so on. You can also change the gender, but women, on the whole, are easier. The magical world is predominantly straight, so charms of this sort are usually for men trying to get women. You can also send out demons to commit murder, or for all sorts of other purposes, such as to get information. I suppose that if magic were still going there would be spells like, "Go to my competitor's computer and read what he has on the following keys." So these, what I might call lower class help, the helper class of demons, frequently appear in lists, especially when you are talking about the Great Name. "I have the Great Name at which the gods prostrate themselves, the demons are terrified, the wild animals take flight, rivers flow backwards..." and so forth and so on. You can go right on down. You normally start with the gods, then the demons, then the men or wild animals, and then other physical phenomenon, such as the seas will calm, and so forth.

This makes up the great majority of references to daimones in the Magical Papyri. They vary, but I don't think its worthwhile giving the figures because they don't tell you much since the papyri are such greatly different lengths. So the fact that you have four or five papyri in which there are no references to demons at all is not so impressive as it sounds when you look at those papyri and find that four of them are of one page only. All of the longer papyri contain some references to daimones and I imagine that they average on the whole two or three per hundred lines. This isn't enough to make them by any means a major concern. They are very apt to be used when you have a spell for a purpose. You may, in many cases, use demons to carry out the purpose, but you may not. I think the majority of cases, probably the bulk, well I'd say a small but substantial majority of cases demons don't function, the magic is done directly by the power of the name or by knowledge of secret names or in most cases by the action of the god you call on. And even when there are demons, in a great majority of cases they function merely as obedient to the name of the god which you have, or to

the commands which are authorizations that the god has given to you. So the first thing to do is line up the god (go directly to the provost). Then after that is settled you go, with authorization from the deity, to the subordinate official, the daimon. And then the daimon will do as you tell him and he must do as he is told because you have the authorization of the great god So-and-so whose name you pronounce, and you may also display his seal and the like.

That makes up the bulk of the magic and demons are not really very important. Well, at this point I am being challenged by the communist thinkers about demonology, who'll say it is true that demons provided the working force of the ancient world but who is to say that the work force of ancient magic and who is to say that the work force is unimportant. Now they were the people who did the work, and so on. I leave that argument without further discussion. This wasn't the way the ancient magicians saw it. They are strictly social snobs. Their notion is that the gods are important and the demons are simply there to do what you order them to do once the god has given you the authorization. It's a world in which the rights of the servant class are not considered. Those were the good old days.

Besides this, however, there is a very interesting class of exceptional passages which occur much more rarely but deserve, I think, much more attention. These are the ones that carry on the old tradition of identifying the gods as daimones, so that you get a list of names for example: lord god of gods, king daimon, followed by magical voces. Further on down in 460 in PGM 4, Helios Horus is addressed as "ruler of the world" or "lord of the world," "daimon of sleepless fire." Not only that but you have references to high gods who alike subordinate the gods and the daimons. Octiothus, for instance in 26.2, is "the only tyrant and swift fate of gods and daimones alike." And Selene is pretty much the same thing in 26.65. What really shows the seriousness of the problem you are getting into is (I'm still in the Great Paris Papyrus) in 29.74 are the directions for collecting herbs. An Egyptian when collecting herbs takes hold of the plant and calls on the daimon to whom the plant is sacred. This is obviously to the god to whom the plant is sacred, and they've just been called daimones, and this is shown by what follows. He tells the plant that it is the heart of Hermes, the eye of the sun, the light of the moon and so on. So Helios, Selene, Hermes are clearly the gods to whom the plant is sacred and they've just been called daimones. Not only that, but he tells the plant that it is the soul of the daimon of Osiris, which (not who [masculine], but which), was carried everywhere (I think the text is correct, but I don't know. It certainly is an extremely puzzling passage.) There are more of them in the next papyrus, papyrus 5. "I invoke you who created earth and bones and all flesh and every spirit (whose clearly the high god) conducting all things according to law, eternal eye, daimon of daimones, god of gods, lord of the spirits, inerrant aeon, eaoueaouae. I call you because I can, I call you because I am . . ." and so forth, the magician goes on to declare his magical powers. And then the god, daimon of daimons, god of gods, lord of the spirits and inerrant aeon is expected, on the account of who the magician is, to show him proper respect and do as he is told. This spell, by the way, belongs to anti-social magic. It will break bonds, it will break fetters, it will make thieves invisible, send dreams, win favors with ladies and gentlemen and so forth and so on.

You get into PGM 7 and 8 and you find an interesting spell which occurs several times: "Spell for demanding a dream from Bes." "I call on you the headless god who has sight in his feet. You who lightning and thunder . . ." etcetera. Besides being

headless, he is cosmic. "Arise, daimon. You are not a daimon but the blood of the two hawks on the coffin of Osiris . . ." etcetera. You go on to what the two hawks are up to and come back. "I conjure you daimon by your two names: Anouth-anouth. You are the headless god." and so forth, "Answer me." It's quite clear that the terms "daimon" and "god" are fluctuating back and forth here as practically equivalent terms. And that the creature we have in mind, a headless being with eyes on his feet is much like, or like what would ordinarily be considered a good daimon, then what would ordinarily be considered a high god. But he is the high god and I think he is the high god because he is the earth which hasn't got a head, which has a great stretch of flat land. The shoulders with the neck cut off which wears around itself the seed as a great serpent out of which the gods and men and other things grow. As gods, plants and men and the like are shown growing from this headless being wearing the great serpent around his middle as a loincloth. I'm describing a lapis lazuli gem in the British museum that shows this very clearly; it is reasonably well inscribed so you can see these details. There are a number of other gems showing this headless demon and we also find him in statues. There are a couple of lead statues from Syracuse showing him with his eyes (in this case) not on the feet but in the tummy. You have a headless torso with a face on the navel and there is another to prove that this was not just a Syracusan peculiarity. You have another statue of the same sort from the neighborhood of Constantinople. So this earth god is Bes and he also agathos daimon. Bes and agathos daimon and the headless god are very closely intertwined. That was easier to do because as you all know agathos daimon is serpentine. Agathos daimon is a well recognized god, who has well recognized cults in Egypt also elsewhere in southern Italy and the like.

But you find other gods also being called daimon, and quite explicitly in Papyrus 7.961. "Come to me invisible pantocrator, creator of the gods... Come to me invincible daimon Seth... Come to me fire-bright spirit, the god not to be despised. Daimon and daimon, subdue enslave Miss So-and-So." The connection of agathos daimon in this sort of passage which is particularly marked appears again in PGM 12.130f. "And I say also to you because I have . . ." (the magician is telling the deity he is speaking to him) ". . . and I say also to you daimon of great power go to the household of Miss So-and-So and you obey me agathos daimon whose power is greatest of the gods. Obey me, go!" There is another one of these in 13.762, an invocation of agathos daimon: "Whose hidden name the daimones are terrified, of whom the sun and the moon are the eyes shining in the eyes of men. He has his good affluences in the stars, daimones and fortunes and moira..." and so on. I think these suffice to show the problem that you have here, and I suspect it may be to a considerable extent a literary problem, in other words, that the early Homeric tradition of daimones as gods, given the importance of Homer in classical education is living on, side by side, with the developing and increasingly powerful classification of daimones as subordinate spirits. And since magic is a matter of ad hoc spells rather than a systematic thinking, it's not surprising that you get survivals and mixed forms of these various different lines and stages of earlier thought.

The application of daimon to greater gods is relevantly limited. Apollo is called a daimon. Agathos daimon of course is one. Selene, especially when she is being called on to do unpleasant things, and Octinofus, with whom she is identified, are daimones. The use is occasional. Seth is a shady deity despite being described as a brilliant god. Here's one more that has a surprise at the end and shows how this carries on. I don't

know whether it is into Christianity or is taking up things from Christianity. Once again this is a loosing spell. "... who loose all bonds. Go and loose the iron around so and so because the great and unspeakable and holy and just and fearful and powerful and authoritative and terrifying and unneglectable daimon, the great god Zora and Merabach commands you." And that is the type of thing you've come to expect. But then "When the bonds are broken, say I thank you lord that the Holy Spirit the only begotten living one released me. And again say the spell, "God who set the stars in their places, a string of magical voces, "daimon, deceitful one." And also the whole name of Helios with a long string of magical voces, which are the whole name of Helios. So apparently I take it that the mix up of the Holy Spirit the only begotten would date this prior to the Council of Constantinople, when the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was put pretty much in final form and separation from the only begotten was settled. The Spirit was not begotten but preceded. The Son was begotten and did not precede. How far these doctrinal, even though they did have imperial power behind them, decisions won acceptance in magical circles is what we would like to know. If you are mainly interested in breaking your bonds, having your fetters broken and being able to leave prison without anyone noticing you, you might not be too sensitive to theological decisions. But I do think that sufficiently indicates the mix-up of the situation that confronts us.

I guess I came across one thing that I'll like to call your attention to. A passage I found was a spell for an oracle in PGM 4.964 which is addressed to be said before a lamp. It is addressed to the living god, the invisible begetter of light, and it beseeches him by his strength "to arouse your daimon and come into this flame and fill it with the divine spirit and show me your power and let the house be open, the house of the god, be open for me. The house which is in this light and become a light, breadth, depth, length, height, brilliance and let that which is inside shine forth, Lord Bouel (Bouel is good, old Egyptian god who plays a large role in the Demotic papyrus.)" You can see the auto-suggestion of the magician, "Let the flame be open, ... let me see the depth, the breadth and the depth ..." and so on. But you notice that if you start doing this with gestures you find yourself in four dimensions. It is possible that the magicians with their extraordinary powers anticipated Einstein. But I am inclined to believe that four dimensional thought is a modern phenomenon and what you have here is simple, old fashioned rhetoric. In spite of the fact that it does not make sense when you try and do it, and you find yourself getting tangled up. What is remarkable is that this appears also in Ephesians 3:18 with the same four dimensions, not three. "Therefore, I bend my knees to the father, from whom every paternity is named in heaven and on earth and whom every fatherland is named in the heavens and on earth in order that the prayer that he may give to you according to the wealth of His glory and power to be strengthened through His spirit in the inner man. To make Christ dwell with faith in your hearts, being rooted in love that is founded in order that you may have the strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and the length and the height and the depth." That I noticed before and I think I might have put it in *Jesus the Magician*, or somewhere in a previous publication. But what I noticed this time is that this whole passage in Ephesians is full of parallels to this whole passage in PGM 4.964f. In Ephesians it starts with a prayer to the Living God, the Begetter of light. a prayer to the Father, that "...He may give you according to the power of His glory to be strengthened." In the magical text goes on to say, ". . . Give your strength and arouse your daimon to be strengthened by his spirit and show me your power." Ephesians has, "And let the house of the all ruling God be opened to cause Christ to

dwell by means of faith in your hearts in order that you may understand with all the saints what is the length and depth ..." and so on. Ephesians says ". . . in order that you may be filled with all of the fullness of God." And the magical text says, "And may the lord Bouel who is within shine forth." It's clearly not a word for word derivation. These are two representatives of a single tradition which has the same essential thoughts in it but has been cast independently in two different sets of words. Nevertheless, they preserve the same body of topics in roughly the same order. Since this is done by arousing the god who is entreated to arouse his daimon in order to do this, I think that makes a fair ending for this talk about daimones.