

Gerasim Petrinski

The Image of the Demon in Byzantium

Philosophical and Mythological Origins

With a foreword by Prof. Georgi Kapriev

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Gerasim Petrinski

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BYZANTIUM**

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For my parents

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AASS: Acta Sanctorum, 68 vols (Paris: Palmé, 1870).
- BS: Bibliotheca Sanctorum, ed. Filippo Caraffa and Giuseppe Morelli, 12 vols (Vatican: Istituto Giovanni XXIII, 1961–1970).
- BHG: Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca, ed. François Halkin [Subsidia Hagiographica 8a], 3 vols (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1957).
- DOHD: Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database
(<https://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/resources/hagiography/database/dohp.asp?cmd=AList>)
- LSJ: Greek-English Lexicon. With a Revised Supplement, ed. Henry Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
- MPG: Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca, ed. Jacques Paul Migne, 161 vols (Paris: Migne, 1857–1866).
- MPL: Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina, ed. Jacques Paul Migne, 217 vols (Paris: Migne, 1841–1855).
- ODB: Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, ed. Alexander Kazhdan, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- PLRE: The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, ed. John Martindale et al., 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971–1992).
- PGM: Papyri Graecae Magicae, ed. and comm. Karl Preisendanz, 2 vols (Leipzig: Teubner, 1928–1931).
- TIB: Tabula Imperii Byzantini, ed. Johannes Koder, 15 vols (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1976–2022).

A NOTE ON THE CITATIONS OF BIBLICAL TEXTS

All references to the Old and New Testaments are based on the following editions:

Septuaginta, ed. Alfred Rahlfs, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Württemberg Bible Society, 1971).

The Greek New Testament, ed. Kurt Aland, Bruce Metzger, and Allen Wikgren (Stuttgart: Württemberg Bible Society, 1968).

The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

FOREWORD

The Eastern Roman Empire, misleadingly referred to as “Byzantium”, provides the modern researcher with innumerable accounts of the demon both as an abstract concept and as the concrete material image of the incarnation of Evil. During the past hundred years, the complexities of this image have attracted the interest of specialists in the fields of theology, literature, philosophy, and the history of culture. These studies, however comprehensive and thorough some may be, usually focus either on the period following the eleventh century, when a whole set of demonological traditions developed, or on particular texts and concepts, like the journey of the soul in the afterlife.

The main subject of Gerasim Petrinski’s book is the image of the demon in the hagiographic tradition between the reign of Emperor Justinian I and the epoch of Symeon Metaphrastes. The foundations and supporting framework of high Byzantine culture were laid during this long period, marked and defined by countless political, economic, religious, and philosophical conflicts, culminating in the Iconoclast Controversy in the eighth and the first half of the ninth century. These complex and ambiguous processes resulted in the golden era of tenth- and eleventh-century classicism when the heritage of antiquity, once the natural enemy of Christianity, was already “disarmed” and selectively assimilated, and when the works of the early Fathers of the Church were reconsidered, re-evaluated, and approached from a new perspective. The evolution of the image of the demon during this epoch is an essential and fascinating element in the processes of Byzantine cultural formation.

The hagiographic literature is a unique literary and cultural niche. The authors of the saints’ *Lives* were to some extent theologically educated, but they were not necessarily strictly constrained by formulated doctrinal positions. This particularity explains the relatively free blending of high dogmatic matters with concepts containing pagan remnants and elements of contemporary folklore with its corresponding local distinctive features. In addition, the hagiographic texts reveal educative or con-

textually assimilated cultural deposits displaying a sense and sensibility of Hellenic mythological and narrative culture and perspectives not typical of classical Greek culture and mentality. Taking this into account, Petrinski offers a brief overview of demonology, as it unfolds in Western cultural space from the medieval and post-medieval times up to the present, in order to establish and outline both the similarities and the differences between the cultural domains formed around the two “foci” of the “ellipse” of Christian culture, namely the Western Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox worlds, each of which laid the foundations of their own European cultures – distinct but interwoven.

In the first chapter, the author provides an analysis of the rhetorical aspects of the hagiographic genre and an overall survey of the texts and the “schools” to which they belong, in this way introducing the reader to the literary and historical context of the main subject of the book. He highlights the distinctive features of each period from a literary, political, cultural, and philosophical point of view, emphasizing the various patterns of ideological demands fulfilled by the texts during the age of Justinian, the epoch of the Arab conquest, the Iconoclast crisis, and, ultimately, the Golden era of Byzantine classicism and elitist encyclopedism of the second half of the ninth and the tenth centuries. The perspective chosen by Petrinski demonstrates the processes that structure and form the hagiographic tradition, its evolution and trends, proposing that “some of the most interesting demonic images and narratives come from texts written before the last Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787”. This is a natural conclusion for a period in which standards and clichés had not yet been established, or, at least, had not acquired and solidified a normative character that would allow for the emergence of a universally accepted “Orthodox tradition”. Petrinski's thorough analysis of the demonic images and narratives in the hagiographic texts under consideration demonstrates the complex dynamics behind the formation of Byzantine culture, and this undoubtedly is one of the many merits of the book.

Another significant contribution is the intertextual manner of approaching and developing the theme. The author rightly notes that an approach that regards the Byzantine evil spirit solely as a historical, or

cultural, or mythological, or theological phenomenon oversimplifies the problem, leading to misleading interpretations. Petrinski relies on various and valuable sources and uses different methodological approaches to produce a comprehensive and detailed analysis that encompasses the philosophical and mythological origins and aspects of the notion. Byzantine demonology emerges from the multifarious and syncretic cultural environment of the late Roman Empire. Though covered with a thin veil of Christian dogma, Byzantine demonology before the tenth century still echoes the roar of late antique cities and the sober conversations of the academicians in the schools of philosophy and rhetoric in Athens, Alexandria, and Antioch. The book's second part encompasses and analyzes these various cultural layers that lie behind the notion of "demon", skillfully leading the reader through the complexities of its formation and engaging them with new perspectives and interpretations of classical and post-classical texts. Petrinski traces the philosophical and mythological origin of the demon back to the so-called "Homeric" and "Hesiodic" traditions, pointing out the ambivalence of the notion. In the Homeric epics, *demons* appear as an irrational, chaotic, and unknown power bringing fateful and usually baneful turns in human life. About a century later, Hesiod conceptualizes and objectifies them as higher beings of human origin, namely the souls of the "pure" and "blessed" dead who lived during the Golden Age of humanity. In the sixth century B.C., the Pythagoreans transformed this concept, enriching it with elements of South Italian folklore and traditions, shaping their own idea of demons as the ghosts of the dead floating restlessly in the aerial spaces above the human world, influencing human life both as guardians of mortals and as harbingers of doom.

These threads can be traced in the literature and philosophy of the following epochs: in the poetry of Pindar, the mythological approach of Plato, the philosophical speculations of the Neoplatonists, and the viewpoints and reflections of early Christian authors. Remarkably, the authors of the saints' *Lives* rarely refer to the works of the Church Fathers and the theologians. Neither, often, do they bother to develop theoretical concepts about demons' origins, functions, and purposes. Ultimately, Byzan-

tine hagiography develops a non-systematic demonology that borrows elements from the standard concept of demons as fallen angels, Mediterranean mythologies, and contemporary folklore. This eclectic mental structure influenced the Medieval Orthodox world and still significantly impacts modern concepts of the supernatural.

The idea that demons are inherently evil is a product of the syncretic world of Late Antiquity. This concept is found both in the Neoplatonic tradition and, naturally, in early Christian beliefs. This book takes readers on a captivating journey through the urban legends of Late Antique cities, filled with stories of powerful supernatural guardians granting their masters' wishes. Additionally, it offers a comprehensive and rigorous analysis of the treatises by prominent Neoplatonic philosophers, who created intricate hierarchies of gods and demons while attempting, with varying degrees of success, to define the ontological notion of "Evil".

In the second chapter of this study, Christian "sacred history" and the role of the Devil (also known as Beelzebul, Satan, Beliar, etc.) are presented. The Gospels portray the fallen angels not as powerful allies of Satan but as weak and wretched creatures who fear the mere mention of Christ's name. These beings are commonly referred to as "demons", and the synonym "spirits" is frequently used, often accompanied by adjectives like "unclean" or "evil". Demons lack a stable material form, being naturally bodiless, and they constantly seek to possess a host. They can take various material forms and exert different harmful influences, but their power is always deceptive and imaginary. They lack really transformative or even magical powers, since for hagiographers, the only force capable of performing miracles and wonders is the power of God. The difference between angels and demons is evident in the type of light they emit. While the Devil's servants sometimes pretend to be saints or angels, their light is burning, non-illuminating, and repulsive, unlike the angelic light, unburning, pure, peaceful, and enlightening. However, discerning between the two types lies within the power of saints and holy persons alone, not the ordinary human sensibility. Another distinction between angelic and demonic natures is the permanence of the angelic presence and the transience, fleetingness, and brevity of demonic visions and influence.

Another essential feature of the images of demons and angels in many, mostly vernacular, hagiographical texts is the somewhat paradoxical blending of their elements to form a unified image of the supernatural that does not easily fit into the inherent Christian dualism. Not infrequently, the outer appearance of materialized Good (the angels) and Evil (the Devil and the demons) share similar characteristics, like a large stature, fearful eyes, and exceptional physical power, but, as always, “the Devil is in the details”. Holy men and women are presented as the only “specialists” able to tell the difference between the two sides of the supernatural world. However, as much as demons may vary in different descriptions, a few stereotypical identifying characteristics can be identified. Among the surest is their abnormal ugliness, which lacks a stable form and instead stems from human perception. It is evident in various forms of disproportion, deformity, excess, and social impropriety, observable in their physical form, clothing, accessories, tone of voice, manner of speaking, and body language. Usually assuming a male form, the demons are almost always described as overdressed or clad in luxurious garments. Their gestures, facial expressions, and intonation reflect the excessiveness of the negative and sinful emotions they embody (such as anger, envy, and bitterness). Moreover, they often use stereotypical strange and incomprehensible words and phrases, sometimes even speaking in an unknown language. These and similar attributes explicitly emphasize the “otherness” of the demons, culminating in the image of the “black Ethiopian”: strong and sexually potent, yet evil, beast-like, and uncivilized. He personifies a great variety of sins and represents death and the underworld. This image is set in stark contrast with the white, gentle, ethereal, fragrant, and harmonious angel, creating the philosophical and religious basis for the inherent “racism” of pre-modern European societies. Additionally, evil spirits occasionally take various zoomorphic forms, such as snakes, dragons, birds, insects, pigs, and other “unclean” animals.

The hagiographic literature displays a natural interest in the fate of the human soul after physical death. The corresponding descriptions demonstrate this genre’s connection with apocryphal Christian texts, para-religious piety, and the superstitious imagery prevalent in the period

under study, especially in the late ninth and tenth centuries. It is worth noting that the Eastern Orthodox tradition views such ecstatic experiences with suspicion, whether they occur in dreams or not. Excluding the long-discussed “didactic visions”, such dreams and journeys to other worlds are typically attributed to demonic influence. However, hagiography abounds in extensive descriptions of the Underworld. While earlier hagiographies linked the latter less to the torments and sufferings inflicted by demons but instead to the horrors of darkness, with occasional and brief mentions of a “river of fire”, the later hagiographies more frequently feature various evil spirits punishing sinners dramatically and spectacularly.

Characteristically, hagiography in the period under study interprets the invisible world through a four-part framework, which deviates from orthodox theological teachings and instead incorporates ideas borrowed from Neoplatonism and other non-Christian doctrines. God’s heavenly kingdom is accessible only to righteous souls; there, they can unite with God and bask in perfect bliss and harmony. Just below lies the “air”, where demons examine the dead for various mortal sins and stop the impure from ascending the “heavenly ladder”. Beneath this heavenly realm is the visible world of the living, situated above the Earth’s depths, where Satan’s kingdom thrives. John Climacus (c. 650 A.D.) presented the metaphor of the “heavenly ladder” in its most elaborate form, which intriguingly intertwines with the metaphor of the “river of fire”. This fiery river is crossed by a narrow bridge, allowing only select righteous souls passage to the opposite shore from where they can proceed to God’s Kingdom, while all others are condemned to burn in darkness and horror.

Christian beliefs about the torments of sinners in Hell, inflicted by dreadful demons, appeared as early as the birth of Christianity – for instance, in various apocryphal gospels and the Book of Revelation, only one of which found a place in the New Testament. Nevertheless, as Petrinski demonstrates, in Byzantine hagiography, descriptions of Hell are relatively rare and, at least before the tenth century, are usually not associated with the presence of demons but instead with darkness and

fire. Petrinski's analysis of sources convincingly points to the increasing prevalence of these descriptions and themes, rooted in ancient culture and the Western Christian tradition of the early and High Middle Ages. During the ninth and tenth centuries, the interest of the Byzantine intellectual elite in ancient literature was very great. The ninth century was also a period of intensive but not necessarily friendly contact between the clergy of Constantinople and the Franks (especially around the baptism of the Bulgarians).

Given the peculiarities of the genre, hagiographical texts focus not only on demons in the fearsome aerial regions and the Underworld but also on their presence and harmful influence in the world of the living. The visible world is the battleground on which the forces of Evil try to regain and impose their power, defeated by Christ's incarnation. After Christ's victory, the Devil cannot win the war, and his power is nothing but an apparition, a nightmarish illusion, unable to harm physically those who genuinely believe in God. Still, through their deceptions and temptations, the Fallen Angel and his demons can lead people to sin and destruction. No place in the world is secure from their presence; but, most commonly, the saints' *Lives* describe them haunting the wilderness, the uncivilized and uninhabited space where only holy men and women dare to set foot. Yet even inhabited spaces are not immune to being haunted by malevolent forces. With astonishing mastery of language and imagery, the hagiographers vividly describe the demonic presence in monasteries, monks' cells, deserted churches, wells, bathhouses (associated with magical practices and sin), pagan shrines, tombs, cemeteries, and inhabited and uninhabited houses. In their skillful narratives, astute readers can discern echoes of Greco-Roman and Near Eastern mythological traditions, ancient literature, and contemporary folklore. Ultimately, there is no place in the visible world that is indisputably safe from the invasion of evil spirits. Restraining their malevolence and controlling them requires the presence and actions of holy persons or saints blessed with divine grace emanating from their relics and tombs. Occasionally, the hagiographers refer to demons confined in a particular space or an inanimate object, subjected them to excruciating pain, rendering them harmless.

Even this limited overview of the themes in *The Image of the Demon in Byzantium: Philosophical and Mythological Origins* demonstrates the significance and innovation of Gerasim Petrinski's research. Deliberately narrowing the subject of study to Byzantine hagiography between the sixth and the tenth centuries allows him to present these themes in their historical dynamics, taking into account the local specifics of different schools and enriching the analysis with details, some of which are unique to a school or even a single text. This hagiography demonstrates a pronounced character, one displaying a powerful syncretism, drawing from a "toolbox" of late antique concepts and mythological narrative, the living folklore of the time, as well as high and low theological discourses, and canonical and apocryphal texts. The period under study witnessed the consolidation and systematization of divergent demonological concepts, which would continue to be developed by subsequent authors in the following centuries. Despite the tendency towards stereotyping, Petrinski's interpreted texts provide a well-structured image of syncretic Byzantine culture, revealing its unique characteristics, but also its commonalities with Western cultural tropes. The development of an everyday religiosity, along with the integration of elements of apocryphal and superstitious beliefs, are particularly evident, and their continuation can be traced to the present day. The popularity of the Byzantine hagiographical texts has preserved them and established them as a part of Orthodox culture into our own time. They must now be recognized as an essential element of the European cultural heritage as well.

Prof. Georgi Kapriev, Ph.D., Dr. Sc.

INTRODUCTION

On June 13, 2014, the worldwide media published a “revolutionary” report. Pope Francis officially recognized the International Association of Exorcists¹ and thus legalized the necessity of appointing “professionals” to exorcise evil spirits. The stately tone of this proclamation is simply a continuation of a tendency in the development of the Church’s attitude to demons and the Devil during the second half of the twentieth century. As Robert Moushembled points out, fifteen years before this announcement, Pope John Paul II introduced a reformed ritual for exorcism and increased the number of priest exorcists from fifteen to 120 in France alone.²

To properly understand this gradual recognition of the material existence of demons over the last decades, we must distinguish between the demon as a real, material subject and the evil spirit as a metaphor. In Ancient Greek, this distinction is apparent on a terminological level. The Bad/Evil (*τὸ κακόν*) is a substantive adjective without an image of its own, an abstract category whose *eidōs* Plotinus found so difficult to define. The Evil or the Deceitful One (*ὁ Πονηρός*), on the other hand, is a prominent epithet for the Devil; this is the substantialized, materialized, external power that intentionally leads humans into temptation and destroys their souls. For the medieval as for the modern intellectual, innate human sinfulness, the imperfection of the human being, vigorously opposes such substantiation. The “Evil” is a spirit, the plague of materiality that necessarily infects the soul in its mortal shell during our brief earthly life. Everyone should fight against their imperfection and irrationality, objectified as the Devil, the invisible Enemy within, through knowledge and reason, with no external circumstances and supernatural creatures

¹ Carol Glatz, “Vatican formally recognizes international association of exorcists”, National Catholic Reporter, July 3, 2014. <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/vatican-formally-recognizes-international-association-exorcists> (accessed June 14, 2023).

² Robert Muchembled, *Une Histoire du Diable. XIIe-Xxe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), 9.

allowed as excuses. In Western Europe, this concept paved the way for the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the great development of the sciences and philosophy, and the gradual emancipation of intellectual life from the Church. Ideologically, it was fruitful as well. It provided the means for the psychological subjectivization of social issues, thus strengthening modern power structures. As an example of this discursive strategy, we could mention so-called “anger issues”. According to some clinical psychologists, whose theories are useful as propaganda, social exclusion is not the result of objective factors, e.g., low income or the lack of a social welfare system, but of internal, medically explainable psychosis. The discourse of madness, so brilliantly defined and studied by Michel Foucault in the context of the paradigm of reason, replaces the old discourse of the “Evil within”. The ideology of (neo)liberalism puts Agent in the place of Scene — in the terms of Kenneth Burke’s dramatic Pentad — and, in this way, again puts personal will above circumstances in European history. Such an arrogant attribution of all responsibility to the human being is elitist and intellectual. Yet it is simultaneously condemned to unpopularity by depriving us of the ability to blame someone/something else for our misfortunes.

On the other hand, the concept of actual, material incarnations of Evil differs markedly from the metaphorical Devil. Deformed or too beautiful, dangerous or tempting, demons’ bodies are a convenient “depository” for every human weakness and for everything in the world we do not understand. The name of the materialized evil spirit is Legion. It constantly changes shape, and its wicked deeds reflect everyone’s deepest fears. However, it is the necessary manifestation of Chaos and absolute irrationality that the enlightened intellectual tried so feverishly to escape after the Great Witch-hunt (from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries).

Both images of the Devil, the metaphorical and the material, blend peculiarly in the context of Western civilization. During the Middle Ages, the demon discriminates. It possesses persons belonging to marginalized groups: heretics, lepers, Muslims, destitute old women. In France, the British Empire, Spain, Germany, and the Americas, the upper classes

joined forces with the Church to produce a robust and extensive power structure, possessing well-developed theoretical means to detect and recognize the incarnated demon. This oppressive system fulfilled two social and political functions. The first was to restore the Church's authority, which had been seriously shaken by Savonarola and the Reformation in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The second was to strengthen the emerging power of the central government by providing it with an external enemy to fight. The demon Chaos, proud and magnificent, rose up as an antagonist of state Order.

In 2000, Robert Muchembled published *A History of the Devil*. About seven years earlier, *The X-Files* was first broadcast and continued on the air until 2011. Since the late twentieth century, “demons” have been all around us in such series as *Supernatural* (2005–20, fifteen seasons), *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003, seven seasons), *The Collector* (2004–6, three seasons), *Sleepy Hollow* (2013–17, four seasons), and many others. Of course, horror movies enjoyed great popularity from the first years of motion pictures, but TV series create an atmosphere of presence. In the latter, the supernatural is always next to us, and its “reality” overflows the screen into our world. The average viewer lives with the demons of Dana Scully and Fox Mulder, the Winchester brothers, and Morgan Pimm. Moreover, the belief in the materialized demon, so different from the intellectuals’ metaphorical evil spirit, has probably been a part of folklore for tens of thousands of years; however, specific conditions are necessary for it to come to public light. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States lost its eternal enemy, the “Evil Empire”. Numerous discursive strategies were used from the early 1990s to the present to resolve this problem. The struggle against supernatural evil spirits and demons in movies and novels is only one part of these strategies, but by no means the least important one. The significance of *The X-Files* does not lie simply in its marking a turning point in Western popular culture. Its propaganda message is even more crucial. In however fantastic, simplistic, and infantilizing ways, through figures of FBI agents Mulder and Scully, the State declares its ability to cope with all sorts of enemies — including supernatural ones. Since 9/11, the dominance of the

discourse on terrorism has contributed to developing a “fear syndrome”, that feeling of constant threat and menace that enhances interest in the materialized demon.

We are paying so much attention to the Western European demon because of the enormous popularity and propaganda use of the images produced by Gothic novels and Hollywood cinema in modern popular culture. The concept of the demon as both a powerful and constantly hidden creature reflects the West’s culture of guilt and the constant fear of Evil lurking with the human being and society. However, this image misleads us where the Orthodox world is concerned. The purpose of this book is to present another demon, one whose information is drawn from the Byzantine hagiographical literature from the time of Emperor Justinian I (mid-sixth century) to the epoch of Symeon Metaphrastes (mid-tenth century). Unlike its Western European “counterpart”, in Gothic novels and Hollywood movies, the Byzantine demon can only conceal itself with difficulty and never very successfully. Its outer appearance is distinctive and recognizable. It is difficult to defeat, but the instruments for the struggle are clear to every Christian. The origin of its image is heterogeneous, but its type is obvious. The evil spirit is either too tall or too short; it is physically deformed; its color is almost always black; and it can take the form of a certain number of animal and human images. These are the elements that we will find in almost every hagiographical text. In addition, the demonization of sin-possessed emperors, dignitaries, and political figures is a powerful strategy for promoting the Iconodule dogma in the eighth and ninth centuries.

* * *

The image of the demon in Byzantine hagiographical literature has not yet been subjected to a comprehensive independent study. There has been research on the term “demon” before the Renaissance, but mainly in Antiquity from Homer to the dawn of the Hellenistic era. In the middle of the twentieth century, two voluminous studies were devoted to this problem: Marcel Detienne’s *La notion de DAÏMÔN dans le pythagorisme*

*ancienne*³ and Gilbert François's *Le Polythéisme et l'emploi au singulier des mots θεός, δαίμων dans la littérature grecque d'Homère à Plato*.⁴ These provide essential methodological guidelines for studying the demon in the narrow chronological period from Homer to Plato. We will use these books and articles as a basis for the presentation of the historical development of the Byzantine *δαίμων*, to which the second part of the present study is devoted. Such a short survey is necessary for several reasons. The Christian evil spirit (*πονηρὸν πνεῦμα*) is simply the final stage in the development of an idea of the supernatural, which probably preceded Homer. Many of the meanings expressed in the word *δαίμων* remain intact not only in medieval but also in modern thinking. We will pay special attention to the opposition between the Homeric demon as an unknown and incomprehensible force, an impersonal influence on human life, and the tendency to objectify this concept in literature. We will present the Hesiodic, the Pythagorean/Neo-Pythagorean, the Platonic/Neoplatonic, and the (Orthodox) Christian definitions of this complex notion.

Medieval demonology aroused the interest of scholars of high Christian theology. In 1896–97, Frederick Conybeare published his extensive study “Christian Demonology”. Its first part focuses on the demon in the New Testament, and the second deals with the views of early apologists (especially Origen).⁵ Relying on a comprehensive survey of source material, Conybeare's study is still a valuable guide to the Christian concept of the world of Evil, despite the availability of much more recent research on the subject. As regards the doctrine of the Devil and demons officially accepted by the Church today, works on general theo-

³ Marcel Detienne, *La notion de DAÏMŌN dans le pythagorisme ancienne* [Bibliothèque de la Fac. de Philos. et Lettres de l'Univ. de Liège, Fasc. clxv.] (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1963).

⁴ Gilbert François, *Le Polythéisme et l'emploi au singulier des mots θεός, δαίμων dans la littérature grecque d'Homère à Platon* [Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège, fasc. CXLVII] (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1957).

⁵ Frederick Conybeare, “Christian Demonology I”, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 8, no. 4 (July 1896): 576–608; and Conybeare, “Christian Demonology II”, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 9, no. 1 (October 1896): 59–114.

logy, such as Christos Androutsos's *Δογματική τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἀνατολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας* can also be helpful.⁶ Scholars like Thomas Provatakis, Richard Greenfield, and Charles Stewart, also pay much attention to this topic; their studies will be discussed below.

Old Testament demonology and the Judaic demonological tradition are the focus of numerous studies that shed light on the origins of many images in Byzantine hagiography. The so-called Testament of Solomon and the tradition related to it are also crucial to this book. This mysterious text was first published in the *Patrologia Graeca* series under Michael Psellus. The actual origins of the text and late antique demonological concepts are studied by Charles McCown in his critical edition of 1922.⁷ Various studies are devoted to certain evil spirits in the Old Testament tradition, like Beelzebub.⁸ The classic study of Alfons Barb, "Antaura, the Mermaid and the Devil's Grandmother"⁹ and Raphael Patai's voluminous *The Hebrew Goddess*¹⁰ are dedicated to the roots of the female demonic images in Jewish and early Christian literature. The Greek scholar Dimitrios Oikonomides presents the development of the wicked evil spirit Gello in great detail.¹¹ Numerous studies address the elements of the demonic images in Byzantium. To take one example, Gay Byron's *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature*¹² deals with the black demon.

⁶ Christos Androutsos, *Dogmatics of the Eastern Orthodox Church* [Greek: Χρήστος Ανδρούτσος, *Δογματική τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἀνατολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*] (Athens, 1907).

⁷ *The Testament of Solomon* [*Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 9], ed. Chester McCown (Leipzig, 1922).

⁸ W. E. M. Aitken, "Beelzebub", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 31, no. 1 (1912): 34–54; E-van MacLaurin, "Beelzebub", *Novum Testamentum* 20, no. 2 (April 1978): 156–60.

⁹ Alfons Barb, "Antaura, the Mermaid and the Devil's Grandmother", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29, no. 1 (1966): 1–23.

¹⁰ Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1990).

¹¹ Dimitrios Oikonomides, "Gello in Greek and Romanian Literature" [Greek: Δημήτριος Οικονομίδης, "Ἡ Γελλῶ εἰς τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν καὶ Ρουμανικὴν λαογραφίαν"], *Journal of the Greek Folklore Society* 30 (1975): 246–78.

¹² Gay Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002).

The Byzantine image of the demon is a vast field of study that initially attracted the interest of French scholars in the second quarter of the twentieth century. One of the first attempts to shed light on this problem is “Contribution à l'étude de la démonologie Byzantine”,¹³ an article by Armand Delatte and Charles Josserand, based primarily on the above-mentioned Testament of Solomon, the Church Fathers (among them Basil the Great and Theodoret of Cyrillus), and the works of Michael Psellus. The two scholars make some references to the philosophy of Iamblichus and to Greco-Roman mythology.¹⁴

Périclès-Pierre Joannou's *La démonologie populaire à Byzance au XIe siècle* is dedicated specifically to the image of the demon in hagiography.¹⁵ In this text, Joannou attempts to draw a clear distinction between folklore and the so-called “critical demonology” developed by Michael Psellus in the mid-eleventh century. Joannou's method has many advantages. The *Lives*, compiled between 565 and 1000, hardly constitute a careful theoretical system of evil creatures, in contrast to the great eleventh-century humanist who laid the foundations for late Byzantine demonology. In Joannou's view, the evil spirit is not a systematic idea but principally a collection of elements (external manifestations, acts, methods of exorcism) scattered through the vast hagiographic corpus. We must consider, however, that Joannou fails to include a large number of important hagiographic texts in his study — the *Lives* of St. Peter of Atroa, St. Elias Speleotes, St. Phantinos the Younger, among others.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, several important books on the Byzantine demon were published. These relied on different types of sources and therefore applied different methodologies. The approach of the Greek scholar Thomas Provatakis, who in 1980 published his voluminous work *The Devil in Byzantine Art* (*Ο Διάβολος εις την βυζαντινήν τέχνην*),

¹³ Armand Delatte and Charles Josserand, “Contribution à l'étude de la démonologie byzantine”, in *Mélanges Bidez*, ed. Georges Mathieu [Annuaire de l'institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales, vol. II] (Brussels, 1934), 207–32.

¹⁴ Delatte and Josserand, “Contribution”, 219ff.

¹⁵ Périclès-Pierre Joannou, *La démonologie populaire à Byzance au XIe siècle. La vie inédite de S. Auxence par M. Psellos* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1972).

draws on archeology and art theory.¹⁶ He studies the Devil's servants as part of an iconographic type that remained relatively stable in Byzantium; for him, the demon is a phenomenon outside of time and space. The images of the ugly Ethiopian, the temptress, the snake, or the dragon, remain almost unchanged. The elements of deformation that we will meet so often in hagiographic texts, i.e., disproportions, squinting eyes, sinister grimaces, and the scars left by disease on the material bodies of demons, are also stable.

Radically different is the approach of Richard Greenfield in his book *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology*.¹⁷ He recognizes the need to place the Byzantine conception of the demon in specific literary and folkloric contexts.¹⁸ According to him, biblical literature, both Jewish and Christian, as well as Greco-Roman literature and mythology are the essential factors in the formation of a system of "traditions". Greenfield distinguishes only two such traditions: the "Standard Orthodox tradition" and "Alternative traditions". The period he has chosen significantly facilitates building such abstract systematizations of the supernatural. The Paleologian era has created an extraordinarily detailed corpus of texts, both canonical works and demonological treatises, which construct consolidated belief systems, whether or not accepted by the Church.¹⁹ Concerning the Late Byzantine period, we can only agree with Greenfield's conclusions. By the thirteenth century, the troubled times of the great heresies, which ended with the Iconoclast crisis of 726–843, were long gone, and the disputes with Rome were about liturgical rather than dogmatic matters. Late Byzantine society had a well-defined corpus of theological works sanctioned by the Church, which allows us to speak of an "orthodox tradition" regarding demons and many other beliefs. Moreover, after the early eleventh century, the intelligentsia had access to

¹⁶ Thomas Provatakis, *The Devil in Byzantine Art* [Greek: Θωμάς Προβατάκης, *Ὁ Διάβολος εἰς τὴν βυζαντινὴν τέχνην*], (Thessalonica, 1980).

¹⁷ Richard Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1988).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xi – xii.

¹⁹ On this corpus of texts, see Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief*, 3–6.

such a corpus of texts and knew them well. Michael Psellus (1017/18–c. 1078) and Pseudo-Michael Psellus (mid-thirteenth century), the authors of the most popular demonological texts in Byzantium,²⁰ were highly educated people thoroughly familiar with both the biblical texts and their officially accepted reception by the Church. The situation was quite different in the second half of the first millennium AD, whose hagiographic production will be the primary source for the present study. During this period, despite the Arab invasions, Byzantium was still a world empire stretching from the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Euphrates. Within this area there coexisted various poorly homogenized ethnic groups and communities, loosely fused by the Christian religion and the official Greek language of the imperial administration. Countless heresies and teachings constantly shook the Church, which was still far from assembling a generally accepted and consolidated corpus of theological works that would eventually form an orthodox demonological tradition. During the Middle Byzantine era, the provinces created a rich literature in which the supernatural played an important role. Palaeologian Byzantium, the focus of Greenfield's study, was a small state, even for its time, wielding hardly any power west and south of Thessalonica, north of the Rhodopes, or east of Bithynia. Its literary tradition was mainly a creation of Constantinople and was, therefore, highly consolidated from a dogmatic, linguistic, and stylistic point of view. In this case, the "Orthodox tradition" was undoubtedly a real phenomenon.

The situation regarding the concept of the so-called "alternative traditions" in Greenfield's book is different. It is not simply that it is inapplicable to the epoch we will study — worse, it is unscientific. "Alternative" is simply a fine-sounding synonym for "other", and "other traditions" is a term that refers to almost nothing. "Other traditions" include ancient mythology and literature, Neoplatonic teachings, Jewish Apocrypha, various remnants of Eastern religions, various folklore elements of Slavic and Celtic origin, and probably many other beliefs. Could these

²⁰ See Paul Gautier, "De daemonibus de Pseudo-Psellos", *Revue des Études Byzantines* 38 (1980): 128–30.

“fossilized” remnants of the past be classified as “traditions”, even less as a single “alternative tradition”? For the hagiographic literature of the period 565–1000, our answer to this question must be entirely negative.

The Christianization of ancient mythological, literary, and folklore images and motifs has become almost a commonplace. Greenfield presents this highly complex process as a set of traditions. In Byzantine hagiography, the focus of the present study, the picture of the supernatural is neither orderly nor coherent. In many cases, the thin veneer of Christian dogmata covering various images and motifs, well known to the classical philologist, cannot conceal the millennial traditions underlying them. One of the principal subjects of research here is the specific “conservatism” that the hagiographers demonstrate in constructing the image of the Devil and his servants; for this purpose, they make use of different remnants from the Greco-Roman world in standard ways. At the outset, we could say that the hagiographers employed the same strategy that the ideological architect of the Byzantine Middle Ages, Emperor Justinian I, applied when constructing Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. Justinian ordered various architectural elements from ancient monuments be incorporated into his building. Following a similar model, the hagiographers carefully removed characters, plots, and motifs from their religious and philosophical context. In this manner, they create a superficially homogeneous Christian image of the demon, an image that can more easily be traced back to texts rather than to authentic folklore. The comparison to church architecture is neither accidental nor simply a metaphor. The Christian way of thinking, whether concerning the construction of a temple or a literary image, follows the same tactics. It takes the exquisite Corinthian capital from an ancient temple, incorporates it into the solid brick wall of a cross-domed Church, deprives it of its architectural function, and thus “seals” it as a beautiful ornament in a temple structure dedicated to Christ, the new Pantocrator. This system is simple; it can be applied anywhere throughout the ancient Eastern Roman Empire; and it works flawlessly. It is much more difficult to discern the authentic, living folklore of the Middle Byzantine period. Here, however, the very peculiarities of hagiography as a genre come to our aid. A saint’s

Life is a popular text whose function is mainly propagandistic and rhetorical. It must reach as many readers as possible to fulfill this function; therefore, its conceptual system must be comprehensible to a broad audience. As a result, we can assume that the ancient motifs, images, and stories used by hagiographers were not selected at random. The authors presumably chose only those that were present in some form in the beliefs prevalent among their readers. This method is highly rhetorical. The authors consider the opinions and the needs of their particular audience as in some way influential.

The third approach we need to consider is the ethnographic. Charles Stewart applies this method in his book *Demons and the Devil: Moral Imagination in Modern Greek Culture*,²¹ published shortly after Greenfield's study. He is interested in the demonic and supernatural creatures in contemporary Greek folklore, mainly on the island of Naxos. In the fifth chapter of his book, Stewart draws attention to the official Orthodox concept of Evil and its creations. However, he disregards the definition of "alternative traditions" proposed by Greenfield and limits his analysis to various aspects of the beliefs held by some closed twentieth-century Greek communities.

To the three great studies of the 1980s, we must add the doctoral thesis of Stelios Lambakis, published in 1982 under the title "Descent into the Underworld in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Literature" ("Οι καταβάσεις στον Κάτω κόσμο στη βυζαντινή και στη μεταβυζαντινή λογοτεχνία").²² The second part of this work is dedicated to early Christian and Byzantine apocryphal writings and has proved very useful to our study. It focuses on a specific literary motif, namely the descent into Hell in ancient, apocryphal, and satirical Byzantine and post-Byzantine literature. Such a motif is inescapably connected to the image and role of the demon in Byzantium.

²¹ Charles Stewart, *Demons and the Devil: Moral Imagination in Modern Greek Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

²² Stelios Lambakis, "The Descents into Hell in the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Literature" [Greek: Στέλιος Λαμπάκης, "Οι καταβάσεις στον Κάτω κόσμο στη βυζαντινή και στη μεταβυζαντινή λογοτεχνία", PhD diss (University of Ioannina, 1982).

Some light on the Byzantine demon is also shed by Cyril Mango. In the seventh chapter of his book *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome* — “The Invisible World of Good and Evil”²³ — he studies the earthly Empire and its hierarchy, headed by the Emperor, modeled on the kingdom of Heaven as a prototype. In this way, the world of Evil becomes a distorted, perverted simulacrum of God's creation, and demons become anti-angels with the Devil as their Antichrist-Emperor. This concept allows Mango to draw some essential general conclusions about the world of Evil and medieval ideas of the demon. Central to his theory is the idea of parody. The evil spirit is a pathetic and weak creature with no true power, easily defeated by merely pronouncing the name of God. This is the main difference between the Byzantine demon and the proud, mighty fallen angel that Western civilization inherited from the era of the so-called “wars of religion” between Protestants and Catholics (in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). The descriptions of the Devil and his servants in Byzantine literature very often approach parody and are able to make even the modern reader smile.²⁴ Another of Mango's objects of interest is the so-called “aerial tollhouses” (τελώνια), already studied as a literary phenomenon as early as Franz Cumont's 1922 book *After Life in Roman Paganism*.²⁵ The problem posed by the origin of this concept will constitute one of the main topics in the fourth part of this study. The primary source on which Mango bases his conclusions is a short hagiographical text, probably composed in the 930s, and titled “The Terrible and Useful Vision of the Monk Cosmas”. We should note that Mango uses only the short, Synaxarion version of this text and not the original form, published by Christine Angelidi in 1983. He does not reference other essential works that describe such visions, e.g., the “Short Chronicle” of George Hamartolos or the *Life* of St. Phantinos the

²³ Cyril Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome*, (London: Scribner's, 1980), 151–65.

²⁴ Alexander Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, vol. 1: 650–850 (Athens: Institute for Byzantine Research, 1999), 300ff.

²⁵ Franz Valery Marie Cumont, *After Life in Roman Paganism: The Funeral Rites, Gods and Afterlife of Ancient Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922).

Younger. Mango's 1992 article "Diabolus Byzantinus"²⁶ adds almost nothing new to his contributions on a theoretical level. However, he extends his research into some hagiographical sources, e.g., the *Lives* of St. Anthony the Younger and St. Nikon Metanoieite.

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Whatever their strengths, the books and articles enumerated above leave gaps in the Byzantine concepts of the supernatural, in the first place regarding the sources. Serious research on the hagiographic material has been made only by Joannou in a brief introductory study that is at most forty pages long, which can hardly be said to place the *Lives* of the period between the fourth and the eleventh centuries in any particular literary, cultural, or religious context. On the other hand, Greenfield deals with the Palaeologian period, which is both very distant and very different from the Middle Byzantine era. The main subject of Steward's research is primarily modern Greek folklore, even though he tries to discover its ancient and early Christian roots. These authors, despite making use of an impressive corpus of sources, rarely refer to a single hagiographical text. The *Lives* of the saints between the eighth and the tenth centuries are almost entirely omitted. Their methodologies prove unsuitable for a period when Byzantium was still a vast and thriving cosmopolitan empire. The images and stories that will form the subject of the following pages must be studied along with the peculiarities of the hagiographical genre. They have to be placed in the context of ancient mythological and philosophical systems. The pictures drawn by the hagiographers were a realistic reflection of the Byzantine beliefs of this troubled time of brutal wars and religious controversies, and a genuine and exciting representation of a distant and exotic era.

²⁶ Cyril Mango, "Diabolus Byzantinus", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992): 215–23.