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Between Demonology and Cosmology: The Powers of Darkness in the *Apocalypse of Paul*

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After I had made my debut at the Coptic congress of 1984 in Warsaw with a paper on demons in the *Mysteries of John* (CANT 333), the late Jürgen Horn introduced me to a recently graduated student from Göttingen, who shared my perhaps somewhat morbid interest. The student appeared to be Heike Behlmer, who a few months afterwards sent me a copy of her article “Zu einigen koptischen Dämonen” (“On Some Coptic Demons”), a study frequently cited since. It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to return briefly to the subject that first brought me into contact with Heike, demons.

In the following pages, I will discuss the role of demons or demon-like beings in a famous apocryphon of Egyptian origin, the *Apocalypse of Paul* (CANT 325). As the discussion will show, the evidence collected by Heike back in 1984 is still today relevant for interpreting the representations found in the *Apocalypse of Paul*.

The *Apocalypse of Paul*

The *Apocalypse of Paul* is one of the most influential Christian apocrypha of all times, famous in particular for its colorful description of the punishment of the sinners in hell. Composed in Greek in Egypt, possibly in the region of Panopolis / Achmim, in the second half of the fourth century, it was translated, revised and re-edited in practically all the languages of ancient and medieval Christendom. Of all surviving versions, the Sahidic Coptic one, in spite of being incompletely preserved, is definitely closest to the fourth-century original. Below, wherever possible, this superior Sahidic version will be cited.¹ For chapters 1–15, which are lost in Sahidic due to a missing quaternion in the principal manuscript, the long Latin version is used, which likewise offers an ancient and largely reliable translation, but lacks the final chapters, due to an incident in the early transmission of the text.² The published Greek text represents a medieval abridgement.³

In the *Apocalypse of Paul*, Paul himself relates his guided tour through the various regions of the cosmos where, after death, the sinners are punished and the righteous rewarded. Their contrasted fate underlies the structure of the entire intricate composition, which can be read as a demonstration of the workings of God’s judicial system. God is righteous and endlessly patient; man may opt for evil, but the sinner will ultimately be punished, unless he or she

1 By the chapters and paragraphs of the edition in Roig Lanzillotta, van der Vliet, *Apocalypse of Paul*.

2 L¹/L³, cited after the edition in Silverstein, Hilhorst, *Apocalypse of Paul*, using their nomenclature of the manuscripts, but the paragraph numbers of Carozzi, *Eschatologie*.

3 Printed in Tischendorf, *Apocalypses apocryphae*, 34–69.

repents. The great themes of divine mercy and human sinfulness, of reward for the righteous and punishment for the sinner dominate the text from beginning to end. God's unfailing judicial system is carefully mapped onto the various parts of the world visited by Paul in the course of his long journey.⁴

Angels or Demons?

Given this emphasis, it may come as a surprise that the role of evil spirits in the *Apocalypse of Paul* is limited. Even the term δαίμων and its cognates are absent. The text rather focuses on different types of human behavior that are systematically addressed through the lively depiction of their widely different eschatological consequences.

This does not mean that terrifying beings or personifications of evil are lacking. They are actively present at various instances in the text, but their role is qualified in each case by the context in which they appear. Also the devil occurs, though infrequently. Only in chapter 49,3, devoted to the righteous Job, he acts as a person, trying to convince Job to rebel against God. Perhaps under the influence of the *Testament of Job* (CAVT 207), the *Apocalypse of Paul* attributes the words of Job's wife in Job 2:9 to the devil. In another passage, chapter 59, "the accuser (κατήγορος) who comes up from hell (ἀμνῆτε)," over whom Paul is predicted to prevail, may represent the devil, the great adversary, but strictly spoken the terminology is ambiguous.⁵ Otherwise, the devil is merely cited twice to characterize human behavior as vicious. In chapter 3, God blames the Christians for being children of God while at the same time perpetrating the works of the devil. In hell, loose women are punished for donning "perfumes of the devil" (39,4).

The hell of the *Apocalypse of Paul*, Amente, is not the subterranean domain of the devil, but a dark and desolate region to the west of the inhabited world, entirely assigned to the eternal punishment of the sinners. The two powers who are in control of this process, Tartarouchos and Temelouchos (in the Sahidic version, Aftemelouchos), are no demons or devils, but angels.⁶ In spite of their at times furious behavior against the sinner, they are nothing but the faithful executors of the sentences pronounced by a righteous judge, God himself. Also the tormentors in hell are called "merciless angels" or "angels of wrath" (chapter 35), for whom only once a term denoting demons, δεκανος (δεκανός), is used (31,3).⁷

Between Heaven and Earth

The demons of the *Apocalypse of Paul* are not found in hell, but predominantly in the human sphere, intimately connected with human sin. Chapters 11 to 16 present a coherent picture of their activity, topographically focused on the region between earth and heaven and

4 The structure and intentions of the *Apocalypse of Paul* are more fully discussed in Roig Lanzillotta, van der Vliet, *Apocalypse of Paul*, 51–96.

5 The passage in question is a near-literal quote from the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, see Himmelfarb, *Tours*, 149; both there and in Rev. 12:10, the context is juridical, as the term κατήγορος suggests; cf. van der Vliet, *Thoth or Lady Justice*?

6 These figures are thoroughly studied in Rosenstiehl, *Tartarouchos-Temelouchos*.

7 The term δεκανος and its backgrounds are discussed in Behlmer, *Dämonen*, 15–18.

chronologically on the period between a person's death and his or her arrival in heaven to be judged. The remainder of my paper will be based on these important chapters.⁸

In chapter 11 Paul's voyage begins. He is taken up to heaven by the angel who acts as his guide and, in chapter 13, looks down upon the earth, where – as the angel points out – “the sons of men” are “perpetrating evil from dawn till dusk.” He then sees “a great cloud of fire spread over the whole world” and asks what it is. The angel answers: “This is injustice mixed up with the prayer of the sinners.”⁹ Human sin rises from the earth to materialize as a fiery cloud covering the earth. This very same zone, just above the earth and below the heaven, is the habitat of the powers of evil that act upon humanity from above.

From his celestial vantage point, Paul observes several classes of spirits. In chapter 11,2, he says:

“I looked back upon the firmament and I saw the powers (*potestates*) there, and there was there oblivion (*obliuio*) that deceives and turns the hearts of men away towards itself, as well as the spirit of slander (*detraccio*) and the spirit of fornication (*fornicacio*) and the spirit of wrath (*furor*) and the spirit of insolence (*audacia*) and there where the princes of vices (*principes maliciarum*) there.”

The text then situates these explicitly below the firmament, *sub firmamento caeli*.

In addition to these “powers,” “spirits” and “princes of vices” who mislead humanity, Paul observes, still below the firmament, a category of “angels without mercy,” who are described in gruesome detail. Their faces were “full of wrath and their teeth were sticking forth from their mouth; their eyes were flashing like the morning star of the east, and from the hairs of their head as from their mouth sparks of fire went out” (chapter 11,3). As earlier scholars have observed, the description of these angels echoes a passage from the Coptic *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* (CAVT 216), one of the direct sources of inspiration of the *Apocalypse of Paul*, which in turn drew upon the biblical Book of Revelation.¹⁰ Asked who they are, Paul's angel explains:

“Those are destined to the souls of the impious in the hour of agony.”

When, in the next chapter, Paul looks up on high he observes there a different class of angels, with faces shining like the sun, “full of meekness and pity” (12,1). These are the angels of justice, sent to receive the souls of the just when they are dying. As the angel states emphatically, there is only one way by which all pass over to God (*una est uia per quam omnes transeunt ad deum*), but whereas the righteous have a “holy helper” to guide and protect them on the way and are taken up by “holy angels,” the sinners lack such a support and fall victim to the “impious angels” that roam below the firmament.

These opposite fates are elaborated in chapters 14 and 15–16, which offer symmetrically laid-out descriptions of the death and judgment of, respectively, a pious person (14) and a

8 They are summarily discussed in Recheis, *Engel*, 171–173, but otherwise hardly studied, presumably on the unwarranted assumption that chapter 16 is largely a secondary interpolation of the Coptic.

9 The reading of the Arnhem manuscript, *commixta deprecacioni peccatorum*, Silverstein, Hilhorst, *Apocalypse of Paul*, 85, lines 32–33, is confirmed by the Syriac and the Slavonic versions; pace Carozzi, *Eschatologie*, 52–53.

10 Himmelfarb, *Tours*, 148; on the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* and the New Testament, see van der Vliet, Thoth or Lady Justice?

sinner (15–16). In the liminal period between the soul’s departure from the body and its appearance before God, the angels and demons seen by Paul are activated. Both the holy and the impious angels attend to the dying person, both hoping to find something “of theirs” in the soul. In the case of the pious person, his soul is taken up by holy angels (14,3) and encouraged and comforted by its personal angel and its spirit (14,4–5). The impious angels try to stop it, but they cannot lay hold on the soul and are rebuked by the pious angels (14,6, St Gall manuscript). After judgment, the soul is handed over to Michael, “the angel of the covenant,” and brought to “the Paradise of joy” (14,7–8).

By contrast, when the sinner dies, the holy angels find no place in his or her soul and it is the malign angels who literally scare the soul out of the body (15,3). Its angel and its spirit disavow the sinner’s soul (16,1) and when it starts its ascent, it finds “the powers of darkness” (ⲛⲉⲗⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ ⲛⲓⲕⲁⲕⲉ) on its way (16,2–3). Yet the voice of God asks it to be brought up, in spite of the soul’s repellent stench (16,4). Its angel and its spirit present it to the divine judge (16,5), who rebukes it (16,6) and orders it to be handed over to Aftemelouchos (thus the Coptic; the Greek retained the presumably original Temelouchos), “the angel in charge of the punishments” (16,7).

It is therefore in the sinner’s agony and in the passage of his or her soul through the sub-celestial region, on its way to the divine tribunal, that the “malign angels” and the “powers” (*potestates*) observed earlier by Paul below the firmament (in chapter 11) become active. Their sway over the sinner and his soul is only limited by God’s order to bring up the soul for judgment. Were it not for divine intervention, they would have blocked the soul’s way up and utterly destroyed the soul.

The climax of this demonic activity is reached in chapter 16,2–3, where the sinner’s soul in its ill-fated ascent finds the powers of darkness on its way. The description of these powers in the Coptic version of chapter 16 fills the earlier sketchy list of chapter 11 in with more, and more frightening, details.¹¹ The following translation of the entire passage bears this out:

(16,2) “As soon as it (sc. the sinner’s soul) reached the powers that should bring it up to heaven, one torment followed another. Oblivion came forward to meet it and slander and the spirit of wrath and the powers of darkness.

Some with faces of lions, dressed in iron armor blazing with fire, with slaughtering swords in their hands.

Some had faces of bulls and hands like men’s, with great horns of fire upon their heads, carrying lances with which they massacred the souls of the sinners.

Some had faces of bears, their eyes spitting fire in all four directions, with wrath upon their faces, holding huge iron razors, ready to lacerate the body of the impious before they come forth from the body, harassing them in the agony of death.

11 This passage is usually considered a secondary insertion of the Coptic. This view is entirely unwarranted; for a detailed argument, see Roig Lanzillotta, van der Vliet, *Apocalypse of Paul*, in their commentary on this chapter, in particular at 230–232.

Some had faces of dragons, with smoke coming forth from their mouths along with steam and fire, carrying saw-edged hooks in their hands with which they torture these souls.

Some were serpent-faced and had tails like scorpions, ready to sting the souls, torturing them in a ruthless manner.

Some were donkey-faced, dressed in tenebrous armor, with fiery spears in their hands, hooking the souls with wrath.

Some were crocodile-faced, carrying great daggers and cutting up the limbs of the soul secretly.

Some had faces of beasts and tongues of fire, protruding from their mouth, and iron teeth. These latter seized the souls and chewed them in their mouth and devoured them for about an hour. Then they would spit them out of their mouth and others would chew them in turn and swallow them, while some passed them on to still others, who knew no mercy for the souls of the sinners.

(16,3) Then the powers of darkness went up to the soul and told it: ‘Where are you going, O wretched soul? Are you on your way to heaven? Wait, so that we may see whether we own something inside of you, for no holy helper accompanies you.’”

At this point, the voice of God intervenes and the soul is allowed to pass.

Oblivion and Other Sins

The text’s depiction of the powers of darkness perfectly fits the category of demons studied in Heike Behlmer’s 1984 article, even though no terms such as ΔΑΙΜΩΝ, ΔΕΚΑΝΟΣ or ΘΑΒΕΞΟ are used. Yet they have the monstrous appearance of the ΘΑΒΕΞΟ, “changing-faces,” characterized each by a different animal snout, and, more importantly, they share the same functional domain, menacing to block the ascent of the soul after death.¹² The extensively described context in which they appear in the *Apocalypse of Paul* allows a series of further precisions, however.

First of all, within the cosmology of the *Apocalypse of Paul*, they occupy a precise place. While essentially associated with “darkness” (ἡσυχία), the habitat of these powers is the zone below the firmament and heaven proper. This is explicitly stated also by the Greek of chapter 11 (ὕπὸ τοῦ στερεώματος; Latin: *sub firmamento caeli*) and confirmed by the state of affairs depicted in the Coptic of chapter 16,2–3. Even though the term is not used, they apparently inhabit the αἴρ, “the air,” a zone in ancient cosmology traditionally inhabited by demons, the *spiritus aeris* and the *aerae potestates* of a famous passage in Origen, quoted below. The saints, such as Paul, can see them, as a passage in Shenoute emphasizes:

“Is not the air (αἴρ) bright during the day? And do we not often look up towards the heaven, either by night or by day? And we see nothing (. . .). The saints, however,

¹² The term ΘΑΒΕΞΟ is discussed in Behlmer, *Dämonen*, 13; alternatively, a translation “terror-faces” may be envisaged.

recognized him (sc. Satan) even in the air and made us aware that he is below the heavens in order that we might fight him.”¹³

Here Shenoute may be referring to, for instance, Eph. 2:2 or the *Life of Saint Anthony*.¹⁴ In spite of the customary terminology, therefore, the powers of darkness in the *Apocalypse of Paul* are no “Amente demons” or “demons of the underworld.”

Not only their habitat, but also their activity is described quite explicitly. It covers the period from “the agony of death” (ΤΑΝΑΓΚΗ ΨΗΜΟΥ) up to the moment of the soul’s appearance before the divine judge.¹⁵ In the description, two strands of representation appear to be intertwined. On the one hand, the idea of the angels as psychopomps, as found in Clement of Alexandria and Origen;¹⁶ on the other, the concept of obstructive powers that block the ascent of the soul.

The “impious angels” are destined to “harass them (sc. the sinners) in the agony of death” (ΕΥΤΙ ΣΙΣΕ ΝΑΥ ΨΗ ΤΑΝΑΓΚΗ ΨΗΜΟΥ; cf. 11,3: *destinantur ad animas impiorum in ora necessitatis*, Paris manuscript), until they drive forth their souls from their body, a process described in 15,2–3. Then they seize the sinful souls and take them up, since they are also said to be ΝΕΞΟΥΣΙΑ ΕΥΝΑΧΙΤΕ ΕΞΡΑΙ ΕΤΠΕ, “the powers that should bring it (sc. the soul) up to heaven.” At the same time, they seek to block the soul’s ascent (16,3: ΕΡΒΗΚ ΕΤΩΝ, Ω ΤΤΑΛΛΙΠΩΡΟΣ ΜΥΓΧΗ, “Where are you going, O wretched soul?”). The righteous and the sinners go the same way to God’s tribunal (12,2), but the latter are claimed by the powers on their way.

The demons that waylay the soul are entitled to do so when they find that they “own” something of theirs inside of the dying person, as their address of the sinner’s soul in 16, 3, shows: ΩΩ ΨΤΨΝΑΥ ΧΕ ΟΥΝΤΑΝ ΨΗΜΤΕ, “Wait, so that we may see whether we own something inside of you.”¹⁷ What the powers of darkness “own” in the soul is the evil that is proper to them. In both chapters 11,3 and 16,2, before they are even described, the powers (*potestates* / ΝΕΞΟΥΣΙΑ) are characterized as the embodiment of sin. They are “the princes of vices.” It is their very nature that gives them a rightful claim on the sinner’s soul. Like knows like. In the righteous soul, however, they find nothing of their own. Hence, it is granted free passage in order to worship before the throne of God, as is related in chapter 14. This state of affairs has an exact parallel in a passage from Origen’s *Homilies on Psalm 36*, 5.7 (in the Latin translation by Rufinus, CPG 1428 [1]).¹⁸ In Origen’s account, too, at the moment of death the *adversae potestates* and the *spiritus aeris* come to meet the soul in order to block its

13 Chassinat, *Quatrième livre*, 15, lines 15–31; cf. Koschorke, Timm, Wisse, *De certamine*, 70. The text is “A Beloved Asked Me Years Ago,” from the fourth volume of *Discourses*, see Emmel, *Shenoute’s Literary Corpus*, 620–621; on the manuscript cf. Emmel, *Shenoute’s Literary Corpus*, 244–249.

14 Cf. Recheis, *Engel*, 165–167 (on Anthony); for Anthony’s famous vision of the giant in the air and its relation to late-antique esoterism, see Bull, *Great Demon*.

15 For the term ΤΑΝΑΓΚΗ: Behlmer, *Schenute*, 200 n. 39; the Latin has *necessitas*, but the translation “throes of death, agony” is confirmed by the Coptic of chapter 46, 3.

16 See e.g. Recheis, *Engel*, 56–64; 77–80.

17 For the phrasing, compare John 14:30, about the ruler of this world: ἐν ἐμοὶ οὐκ ἔχει οὐδέν / ἡὶτῷ λααγ ἔραϊ ἡρητ, “he owns nothing within me” (that is, within Jesus), a verse that is actually quoted in the Origen passage, cited below.

18 In the past, this passage has even been cited as an early witness to the text of the *Apocalypse of Paul*, which is impossible, however. Rather, the *Apocalypse of Paul* is dependent on an Alexandrian tradition.

ascent and claim it for themselves (*detinere et revocare ad se*). They intercept the soul to see whether they recognize within it something of their own evil: *si inveniant in ea aliquid suum*, which would give them power over it.¹⁹

The same representation can be found in a well-known prayer attributed to the Virgin Mary in the late-antique Egyptian Dormition literature. Thus, for instance, in a Coptic source that is already quoted by Heike Behlmer, Ps.-Cyril of Jerusalem's *Twenty-First Exegesis on the Virgin Mary* (CANT 132).²⁰ There the Virgin, who is about to die, asks her son Jesus:

“Remove from before me all stumbling stones as well as those (demons with) changing faces (ⲛⲉⲱⲟⲩⲱⲉⲣⲟ). May they who are at the left of me fall and may they who are at the right rise with me full of joy. May the powers of darkness be ashamed because they have not found anything of theirs within me (ⲙⲁⲣⲉ ⲛⲉⲗⲟⲩⲱⲥⲓⲁ ⲛⲡⲓⲕⲁⲕⲉ ⲗⲓ ⲱⲛⲡⲉ ⲗⲉ ⲛⲡⲟⲩⲭⲉ ⲗⲁⲗⲱ ⲛⲧⲁⲭ ⲛⲉⲛⲧ). Open for me the gates of righteousness that I enter through them and proclaim your holy name, my God (cf. Ps. 117:19). May the dragon flee before me so that I may boldly appear in front of you (Sahidic, chapter 49).”²¹

In the spirits “at the left” and “at the right” of the Virgin, we may recognize the two classes of angels of the *Apocalypse of Paul*.²²

Different than the prayer of Mary, the *Apocalypse of Paul* specifies at least part of the vices that characterize the powers, in chapters 11,3 and 16,2. Twice this takes the form of a brief catalogue of sins, nearly identical in the Latin and the Coptic versions, summarized in Table 1 below (with the spelling of the Latin terms normalized).

Latin chapter 11,3	Latin chapter 16,2	Sahidic chapter 16,2	translation
oblivio	oblivio	ⲧⲉⲱⲣⲉ	oblivion
detractio	susurratio	ⲧⲕⲁⲧⲁⲗⲗⲓⲁ	slander
fornicatio	fornicatio	—	fornication
furor	—	ⲧⲟⲣⲉ	wrath
audacia	—	—	insolence

Table 1: Sins Represented by the Powers below the Firmament

Quite remarkably, as the table shows, each version highlights oblivion as the first and principal sin, the one “that deceives and turns the hearts of men away towards itself” (Latin,

19 Cf. Recheis, *Engel*, 152–158.

20 Behlmer, *Dämonen*, 10, no. 4, with note 33.

21 Campagnano, *Ps. Cirillo di Gerusalemme*, 188, 12–18, with minor adaptations. For context and transmission, see Łajtar, van der Vliet, *Empowering the Dead*, 208–219; cf. Saweros, van der Vliet, *Naqlun* N. 76/93.

22 For the angels of “the right” and “the left” in the Alexandrian tradition, see Recheis, *Engel*, 56–64; cf. Łajtar, van der Vliet, *Empowering the Dead*, 217.

chapter 11,3). Ever since Plato, oblivion (λήθη) was considered a major impediment to the knowledge of the divine realities and, in particular in late-antique dualisms, oblivion was widely current as a metaphor for the condition of human estrangement from God. In the *Gospel of Mary* (BG 8502,1), in a context that recalls the present one, the soul finally succeeds in obtaining freedom from “the bond of oblivion” (τιμῆρε ντῆσσε; 17,3), after having overcome the “seven powers of wrath” (τσαωρε ἡνε[ζ]ογσια ντε τορη; 16,12–13), a series of personified vices that try to block its ascent.²³

The Many Faces of the Powers of Darkness

Even if no exhaustive catalogue of sins is given, the *Apocalypse of Paul* appears to adhere to a tradition that visualized the obstacles preventing the ascent of the soul as a diversified group of powers, personifying a diversified group of sins or vices. This is the situation in the cited passage from the *Gospel of Mary*, where the ascending soul is confronted by the powers that try to stop it with the very same question as in the *Apocalypse of Paul*, “Where are you going?” (ερεβνηκ ετων: 15,14; 16,15).²⁴ It may even be speculated that the Sahidic chapter 16, with its parade of animal snouts, retains the echo of a tradition that associated each particular sin with punishment imposed by a particular animal-faced power. Such a tradition would be represented for instance by the Gnostic *Pistis Sophia*, in chapters 102, a long catalogue of sins and punishments,²⁵ and 126, about the twelve “punishment chambers,” τανιον ἡκολασις, of outer darkness, with their animal-faced archons.²⁶ A similar tradition seems to underlie the depiction of the powers of darkness found in the *Apocalypse of Paul*.

Chapter 16, 2, enumerates monsters with variegated animal faces. Discounting the generic beasts (θηριον) at the end of the series, which primarily seem to introduce the nice chewing scene, the remaining animal faces are seven in number. Septiform death was a common trope in late-antique Egyptian sources, thus for instance in the Gnostic text *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II,5), chapters 36–37, where androgynous Death, “mixing with his own nature,” begets seven androgynous offspring that realize as two sets of seven personified sins.²⁷ In one of the literary models of the *Apocalypse of Paul*, the *Testament of Abraham* 17:12–17, personified Death appears with “seven fiery heads of dragons and fourteen faces,” including a lion face and different kinds of snakes and dragons.²⁸

Apart from the vague “beasts” that conclude the enumeration, the *Apocalypse of Paul* is quite specific about the nature of the frightening faces of the powers, identifying them as those of lions, bulls, bears, dragons, serpents, donkeys and crocodiles, respectively. Also beyond representations of Death, the theriomorphism of powers of darkness was widespread in late-antique Egypt, thus for instance in the chapters from the *Pistis Sophia*, cited above. Most strikingly, however, the present series of seven animal faces recalls the series of seven theriomorphic planetary rulers as represented in the famous “Ophite diagram,” transmitted by Origen (*Contra Celsum* 6.30–31; 7.40.19–27) and related Gnostic sources such as the

23 Pasquier, *L'Évangile selon Marie*, 40–42, with her reading of 16, 13.

24 Pasquier, *L'Évangile selon Marie*, 38–40.

25 Schmidt, *Pistis Sophia*, 256–260.

26 Schmidt, *Pistis Sophia*, 317–319; cf. Frankfurter, *Amentes Demons*, 86–87.

27 Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 48.

28 Greek, long recension; Schmidt, *Testament*, 154–156; for the later ramifications of this mytheme, see Dosoo, *Powers of Death*.

Apocryphon of John. Thus, in the Berlin manuscript of the latter text (BG 8502, 2), the archons have faces of lion, donkey, hyena, seven-headed serpent, dragon, monkey and shining fiery flame.²⁹ In order to bring out the similarities, the table below juxtaposes the animal forms of the powers in chapter 16,2, and their attributes, in the first and second columns, with those of the archons from the “Ophite diagram” and the *Apocryphon of John* in a third and fourth column.

<i>Animal shapes</i> 16, 2	<i>Attributes</i> 16, 2	<i>Animal shapes “Ophite</i> <i>diagram”</i>	<i>Animal shapes Apocr.</i> John (BG 8502, 2)
Lion	Sword	Lion	Lion
Bull	Lance	Bull	Donkey
Bear	Razor	Dragon	Hyena
Dragon	Saw-edged hook	Eagle	Seven-headed serpent
Serpent	Scorpion tail	Bear	Dragon
Donkey	Spear	Dog	Monkey
Crocodile	Dagger	Donkey	Flame of fire

Table 2: Comparative Table of the Animal Shapes in *Apocalypse of Paul* 16,2

As Table 2 shows, in order to visualize the obstructive powers faced by the soul in its ascent, the author of the *Apocalypse of Paul* drew upon an existing repertoire. In particular the presence of the Typhonian donkey face is indicative of an Egyptian background for all three lists.³⁰

For such representations of hostile powers, the number seven provided a widely applied structuring grid, often, though not always, associated with the planetary spheres. According to an ancient and widespread view, on their way down to the world the souls pass the seven planetary spheres, acquiring from each planet the powers that would mark their earthly existence. Conversely, on their way up, the souls needed to divest themselves before being allowed to return to heaven. In late-antique dualisms, such as Gnostic Christianity, these planetary spheres became the domain of hostile powers. The ritual of the “Ophite diagram,” cited above, associates the seven theriomorphic archons with the seven planets that the soul needs to pass during its ascent to the divine realm. The same association underlies the representation of the seven monstrous archons of the *Apocryphon of John*. Also the powers of darkness of the *Apocalypse of Paul* are more than mere instruments of punishment. They

29 For a synoptic rendering of the different versions, see Waldstein, Wisse, *Apocryphon of John*, 68–73. Both series of seven animal shaped archons, in the *Apocryphon of John* and the “Ophite diagram,” with their variants, are extensively discussed in van der Vliet, *Image du mal*, 179–218; for the diagram, see now the brilliant analysis by DeConick, *The Road for the Souls*.

30 See Fauth, Seth-Typhon; cf. van der Vliet, *Image du mal*, 198–199. For a cautious discussion of presumed “pharaonic” backgrounds, see Frankfurter, *Amentes Demons*, especially 86–89.

no less typify the guardians of heaven, the authorities governing the planetary spheres, who consequently control the souls on their way down to earth or up to heaven. Their number seven, their specific series of animal faces, their association – although not quite systematic – with specified sins and their obstructive role all connect them with late-antique discourses about the ascent of the soul, passing through the planetary spheres. They represent sin in its cosmological dimension.

Conclusions

The powers of darkness in chapters 11–16 of the *Apocalypse of Paul* have their place in a single, well-defined context, namely the soul's upward journey after the individual's death. The text of the *Apocalypse of Paul* underlines their liminality. They operate in the twilight zone between life and death, between earth and heaven. Yet, in accordance with the general character of the *Apocalypse of Paul* as a late-antique work of synthesis and erudition, their representation is a receptacle of various, often ancient traditions. In their physical and moral make-up and their structural role within the text's narrative, different strands of interpretation come together. They impersonate psychopomps, punitive angels, agents of sin and obstructive cosmic powers at the same time. Their primary function in the broader plan of the *Apocalypse of Paul* is a moral one, however. They have as much power as the sinfulness of the individual human person allows them. Heike's early study still today invites us to follow the ramifications of their complex personality through later Coptic literature.

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