ASTRAL MAGIC IN ANCIENT JEWISH DISCOURSE: ADOPTION, TRANSFORMATION, DIFFERENTIATION

Kocku von Stuckrad

Astrology and Magic in Ancient Culture

When scholars analyze the relationship between Judaism and Christianity on the one hand, and the practice of astrology and magic on the other, they are confronted with many biases and preconceived attitudes about the nature of these practices and their incompatibility with monotheistic theology. Therefore, an analysis of the complex history of astral magic in ancient Jewish discourses has to begin with a brief overview of previous research.

Many nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians, who made astrology the main focus of their studies, seemed to feel the need for justifying what they did. Auguste Bouché-Leclercq (1842–1924), for instance, opens his celebrated study on *L'astrologie grecque* (1899), with the witty remark that it is perhaps not a simple waste of time to study things with which other people have wasted their time. At the end of the nineteenth century, it was a widespread belief that European post-Enlightenment modernity had left astrological "superstition" behind for good, and that this discipline could now only be studied as a curiosity. This changed only with Aby Warburg (1866–1929), whose legendary lecture in 1912 on the cycle of frescos in the Palazzo Schifanoia and its astrological iconography suddenly moved astrology into the center of academic scrutiny. With his study *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeit* (1920, Engl. as *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*), Warburg—and subsequently many scholars of the Warburg School—paid attention to the important role of astrology in the Renaissance, which he read as a conscious revival of ancient paganism.

Research into ancient astrology witnessed similar progress. Franz Cumont (1868–1947) and Franz Boll (1867–1923) collected and edited an incredible amount of astrological manuscripts and fragments from the ancient Greek world in the *Corpus codicum astrologorum Graecorum*.

Wilhelm Gundel and his son Hans Georg published many studies about ancient astrology. Finally, Lynn Thorndike has to be mentioned, whose encyclopedic *History of Magic and Experimental Science* (1923–1958) covers no less than seventeen centuries. Thorndike and the other historians thus made accessible a cornucopia of primary sources that had previously been unknown or had not been taken seriously. At the same time, many historians of science (including Thorndike) had difficulties in interpreting astrological sources in a neutral way. Small wonder, then, that George Sarton dismissed these sources in 1951 as "superstitious flotsam of the Near East." Despite the famous reply by Otto Neugebauer (1889–1990), published under the title "The Study of Wretched Subjects" in the scholarly journal *Isis*, and Neugebauer's insistence on the importance of astrology for our understanding of the history of the natural sciences, this area of scholarly research has something sleazy about it still today.

The reluctance of modern historians to analyze astrology as an important element of European cultural history—as well as the at times bitter and polemical fights between natural scientists and astrologers about the legitimacy of astrology—reveal one thing: at stake here are not only historical facts but also identities. Pushing astrology to the margins of natural science, rationality or the Christian religion confirms modern identities that like to see "the West" as enlightened, rational and immune to the "pagan past."[1]

Standing on the shoulders of the academic giants mentioned above, recent scholarship has tried to free itself from biased assumptions about astrology being merely a discipline of "pseudo-science" or "superstition."[2] Today, only few scholars would doubt that in Late Antiquity astrology held a key position among the accepted and well-reputed sciences. As *ars mathematica* closely connected with astronomy, it made its way into the highest political and philosophical orders of the Roman Empire[3] and became the standard model for interpreting past, present and future events. Nevertheless, many scholars assume that the application of astrological theories is limited to the "pagan mind," whereas Jewish and Christian theology is characterized by a harsh refutation of astrology's implications. Unfortunately, this assumption is not the

[1] On this mechanism, see also Zika (2003).
[2] See, for instance, Barton (1995); Oestmann et al. (2005).
[3] See Cramer (1954).

result of careful examination of the documentary evidence but of a preconceived and misleading opinion about the basic ideas of astrology (as well as of "Judaism" and "Christianity" being homogenous entities), which led to an astonishing disregard of Jewish and Christian evidence for astrological concerns. This evidence has either been played down—if not neglected entirely—or labeled "heretic," thus prolonging the polemics of the "church fathers" right into modernity. One gains the impression that Jews and Christians simply did not take notice of what was going on around them. David Flusser plainly notes: "The Jewish people in Palestine and elsewhere had become completely immune to the attractions of the paganism against which the prophets [had spoken]."[4] And Gundel resumes regarding the Christians: "Right from the beginning Christianity refuted astrology's axioms and radically fought against them."[5] Considering the huge amount of Jewish and Christian astrological documents in Late Antiquity, these statements are, at least, questionable.[6]

These often undoubted academic axioms have had negative implications for the study of ancient astrology and magic. First of all, documents not fitting into the narrow perspective of modern scholarship have simply been ignored. The fact that it took 35 years from the preliminary publication of the Qumran horoscope 4Q186 by J. T. Milik in 1957 and its new presentation to a wider public by R. Eisenman and M. Wise in 1992 is a telling example. But in some cases the astrological connotations were too strong to be ignored entirely, e.g. the pavements of the Palestinian synagogues with their zodiacal depiction[7] or—on the Christian side—the elaborated astrological ingredients within gnostic writings. In these cases scholars tend to claim that those developments were only able to emerge outside "orthodox" or "normative" Judaism and Christianity. With regard to astrology the same process of centralization has taken place as in the case of Christian mythmaking, profoundly analyzed by Burton L. Mack.[8] Jonathan Z. Smith laid further emphasis on the methodological difficulties still determinable within theological historiography:

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[4] Quoted from Charlesworth (1987), p. 945 note 65.

[5] Gundel (1966), p. 332 (if not noted otherwise, all translations are mine).

[6] For a detailed description of ancient Jewish astrology, see von Stuckrad (2000b); for the present article, I have used material from that study, as well as passages published in von Stuckrad (2000a).

[7] On which see von Stuckrad (1996), pp. 161–175.

[8] Mack (1995), see especially pp. 7–11.

> As in the archaic locative ideology, the centre has been protected, the periphery seen as threatening, and relative difference perceived as absolute 'other.' The centre, the fabled Pauline seizure by the 'Christ-event' or some other construction of an originary moment, has been declared, *a priori*, to be unique, to be *sui generis*, and hence, by definition, incomparable. The periphery, whether understood temporally to precede or follow the Pauline moment, or, in spatial terms, to surround it, is to be subjected to procedures of therapeutic comparison. This is exorcism or purgation, not scholarship.[9]

The modulations of this criticism have been intensively discussed in the humanities during the last three decades,[10] but its implications have only rarely been put into practice. In other words: although that criticism is widely accepted theoretically, many scholars shrink from the consequences that lead to a new position regarding the possibility of telling a monolinear history. But one has to take them seriously. General definitions of "Judaism," "Christianity" or "astrology" should be avoided.[11] They are the result of a theological project of legitimization carried out in ancient and early modern times. Acknowledging the multiplicity of astro-magical perspectives in ancient culture means that we will no longer try to "detect" a linear development from refutation to adoption, from superstition to enlightenment, or vice versa. Those "developments" are mere inventions of scholarly *emplotment*.[12] What we will have to take seriously is the fact that the ancient authors were involved in a twofold discourse—first, in their religion's tradition, and, second, in their contemporary social, political, scientific and religious negotiations. Hence, the analysis has to keep in mind the possible overlapping of different discourses, regardless of religions' boundaries.

Addressing discourses instead of distinct religious traditions is a strategic response to the fact that the very terms "Jewish" and "Christian" are *contested categories*. As to Judaism, Shaye J. D. Cohen argued in a much discussed monograph that until the third and fourth centuries the category "Jewish" did not have the same importance and

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[9] Smith (1990), p. 143.

[10] Among the most illuminating contributions to this debate are Berger & Luckmann (1966); White (1973); White (1978); Koselleck (1995); Müller and Rüsen (1997). Cf. von Stuckrad (2000b), pp. 12–101; von Stuckrad (2003).

[11] See von Stuckrad (2002).

[12] Hayden White introduced this expression and distinguished it from *argument* and *ideological implication*. All three are standard means to give a pretence of explanation to an academic treatise; see White (1973).

connotation that modern interpreters found in terms as *Ioudaios*/*Iudaeus* or *ioudaizein*. Cohen argues:

> [M]y thesis is that Jewish identity in antiquity was elusive and uncertain for two simple reasons. First, there was no single or simple definition of *Jew* in antiquity. Indeed, the Greek word *Ioudaios*, usually translated as "Jew," often is better translated as "Judaean," and the concepts "Jew" and "Judaean," in turn, need clarification. Second, there were few mechanisms in antiquity that would have provided empirical or "objective" criteria by which to determine who was "really" a Jew and who was not. Jewishness was a subjective identity, constructed by the individual him/herself, other Jews, other gentiles, and the state.[13]

If we regard ancient religions as a dynamic plurality of identities with various subjective meanings and if we acknowledge the fact that people could be followers of theologically quite different religious traditions, we will perhaps gain a better understanding of the processes of group formation and theological competition in Late Antiquity. As Andreas Bendlin argues, for Republican Rome the "hybridity" of religious convictions was by no means an exception. "Religious hybrids […] resulted from the instrumentalisation of the public domain by private concerns; students of Roman religion shun them as marginal to their systematizations, yet hybrids such as these may in fact have been the rule in the polytheistic society of late republican Rome."[14]

But if the terms "religion" or "tradition"[15] in general, and "Judaism," "Christianity" or "paganism" in particular, are hybrid, fleeting and dynamic categories, we will have to find other categories for adequately describing religious processes in Late Antiquity. This is why I use the term of *fields of discourse*, a concept that takes the transgression of religious traditions as the normal case, subsequently identifying shared fields of interest as well as arenas of conflict. Talking of discourses also acknowledges the insight that European history of religion is characterized by a two-fold pluralism—i.e., a transfer between religious traditions on the one hand, and an interference between various cultural systems, such as religion, philosophy, politics, law, art, economy, etc.—on the other.[16]

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[13] Cohen (1999), p. 3.

[14] Bendlin (2000), p. 132. Methodologically, this is a problem of *singularization* that affected both theology and—subsequently—the study of religion. On the concept of "singularization," see Gladigow (2006) and Smith (2004).

[15] For a problematization of the concept of "tradition" that is ultimately a polemical term for constructions of conflicting identities, see von Stuckrad (2005).

[16] See Kippenberg, Rüpke and von Stuckrad (2009); von Stuckrad (2010, pp. 3–23).

This approach can easily be combined with Peter Schäfer's notion of *macroforms*, which he introduced to describe the textual structures that underlie the Hekhalot literature. According to Schäfer, macroforms are (ideal) literary units that materialize in a large number of concrete *microforms*—i.e., texts.[17] If we extend the concept of macroforms to the magical and astrological texts of Late Antiquity, we will encounter many structural elements that are shared by representatives of different religious convictions; macroforms are a way to identify fields of discourse. When it comes to the concrete manifestation of such shared fields of discourse—the microforms—the transformation, adaptation and polemical differentiation in a pluralistic religious environment become visible.

The methodological considerations concerning the status of astrology in ancient culture pertain to the field of magic, as well. However, this is not the place to analyze the controversial term "magic" in detail. The basic problem boils down to the question whether we apply the use of "magic" as it is attested widely—and controversially—in ancient documents, or an academic use of the term. The latter is fraught with difficulties and preconceived attitudes that have a history of their own.[18] My suggestion is that we as scholars should adopt a meta-position and analyze the various uses of the term in historical context (what I call a "magical field of discourse"). Despite these precautions, my use of the term in this article also reflects my understanding that it is analytically meaningful to call something "magic" that (a) involves a cosmological model that reckons with an intrinsic connection between various layers of reality, and (b) a ritual practice that intends to work with these relationships. Hence, the *doctrine of correspondences* is a

[17] "I employ the term *macroform* for a superimposed literary unit, instead of the terms *writing* or *work*, to accommodate the fluctuating character of the texts of the Hekhalot literature. The term *macroform* concretely denotes both the fictional or imaginary single text, which we initially and by way of delimitation always refer to in scholarly literature (e.g., *Hekhalot Rabbati* in contrast to *Maʿaseh Merkavah*, etc.), as well as the often different manifestations of this text in the various manuscripts. The border between micro- and macroforms is thereby fluent: certain definable textual units can be both part of a superimposed entirety (and thus a 'microform') as well as an independently transmitted redactional unit (thus a 'macroform')" (Schäfer 1992, p. 6 note 14).

[18] See Styers (2004); e.g. the polemical distinction between "magic" and "religion" or between "compulsion" and "prayer."

common feature both of astrology[19] and of magic; we can even argue that many forms of magic or ritual power are based on techniques of "applied correspondences."

During Greco-Roman times magic was a common religious activity and worldview. Recent studies in ancient magic reveal the fact that this kind of "ritual power" flourished among Jews and Christians as well.[20] Just as with astrology, there is no reason to sever magic from pious Jewish or Christian faith, as theological historiography used to do.[21] Nor is it appropriate to consider magic as being the religion for daily life purposes of less educated people. The complex rituals performed in the so-called *Mithras Liturgy*, the *Sepher ha-Razīm*, or some gnostic documents demanded a high standard of education, not to mention the philosophical skills of an Apuleius.[22] The differences between sophisticated magical theory and practice, on the one hand, and the more pragmatic application for medical and daily life reasons, on the other, still await thorough scholarly research.[23]

Astral Magic in Ancient Jewish Discourse

In what follows, my objective is to identify three major fields of ancient magical discourse that make use of astrological semantics. All of them—the control of cosmic powers, the veneration of planets,

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[19] In Late Antiquity there was a broad consensus that the heavenly realms mirror—in a secret or obvious way—mundane events. This notion was so common that it is difficult to find a document which does *not* make use of it. It is visible in the stoic concept of *sympathy* and *heimarmenē*, as well as in the Platonists' description of the world as a living creature with every part connected to other parts or to its transcendent idea. In Roman Egypt, Platonism was molded with older priestly traditions and brought forth the esoteric doctrines of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Despite the various roots of Hermetic doctrines and practices, the Egyptian matrix of Hermeticism that originated in Ptolemaic times cannot be doubted. On this point I agree with Cumont (1937) and Lindsay (1971). See also Mahé (1978–1982); Fowden (1986); Burns (2004).

[20] The literature is abundant. The change of paradigm concerning our understanding of magic can be studied in Naveh and Shaked (1987); Faraone and Obbink (1991); Gager (1992); Meyer and Mirecki (1995); Graf (1996); Schäfer and Kippenberg (1997); Bremmer and Veenstra (2002); Mirecki and Meyer (2002); Shaked (2005).

[21] In fact, magic and demonology formed an integral part of early Christian theology, which perpetuated magic in a mode of condemnation; see Flint (1999).

[22] See Sandy (1997).

[23] It seems that the former is represented by theurgic groups, philosophers and others, the latter by the authors of PGM, magic bowls and similar documents. But this distinction is far from being accurate. For the theurgic groups cf., for instance, Johnston (1997). On Neoplatonic theurgy, see Shaw (1995).

and the heavenly journeys of religious specialists—reveal strategies of adopting, transforming and polemically differentiating magical theory and practice in the first centuries CE.

Controlling the Cosmic Powers

Starting with the discursive field of control of heavenly powers, the first macroform to be identified is the textual tradition that was shaped around the figure of Solomon, with the *Testament of Solomon* being its most important representative.[24] The text's title makes sufficiently clear what the reader can expect:

> Testament of Solomon, son of David, who reigned in Jerusalem, and subdued all the spirits of the air, of the earth, and under the earth; through (them) he also accomplished all the magnificent works of the Temple;[25] (this tells) what their authorities are against men, and by what angels these demons are thwarted.[26]

To unfold his magic power, Solomon, after having prayed to God, receives his famous seal ring[27] from the archangel Michael. With the help of his magic ring Solomon is able to find out the names of the demonic powers and, subsequently, to thwart them.[28] Of astrological interest is the fact that Solomon forces the entities to tell him the zodiacal place they inhabit. For example:

> (2:1) When I heard these things, I, Solomon, got up from my throne and saw the demon shuddering and trembling with fear. I said to him, "Who are you? What is your name?" The demon replied, "I am called Ornias." (2) I said to him, "Tell me, in which sign of the zodiac do you reside?" The demon replied, "In Aquarius; I strangle those who reside in Aquarius because of their passion for women whose zodiacal sign is Virgo […]."

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[24] On Solomon as an esoteric authority in Antiquity, see Torijano (2002). On textual criticism and the astrological doctrines involved in the *Testament of Solomon*, see von Stuckrad (2000b), pp. 394–420. Johnston (2002) gives a brief overview of the *Testament*'s status and reception.

[25] Sarah I. Johnston notes: "This, so far as I have been able to discover, is the first example of demons being so used from any Mediterranean culture" (2002, p. 42).

[26] I follow D. C. Duling's translation in Charlesworth (1983–1985), vol. 2, pp. 935–987, who in most cases relies on McCowns' translation of 1922.

[27] Cf. PGM V.213–303; VII.628–42; XII.201–305; *Sepher ha-Razīm* 6:16–29. There is much more evidence in antiquity for making rings in order to exorcise or control demons; see references in Preisendanz (1956); Johnston (2002), p. 36 note 4; on ring spells see also Dieleman (2005), pp. 182–183.

[28] Very often, the magical act rests on the knowledge of the 'secret names.'

The zodiacal astrology, combined here with demonological perspectives, is further attested by the seven constellations that appear through the power of Solomon's evocation:

> (8:1) There came seven spirits bound up together hand and foot, fair of form and graceful. When I, Solomon, saw them, I was amazed and asked them, "Who are you?" (2) They replied, "We are heavenly bodies [*esmen stoicheia*], rulers of this world of darkness [*kosmokratores tou skotous*]." (3) The first said, "I am Deception." The second said, "I am Strife." The third said, "I am Fate." The fourth said, "I am Distress." The fifth said, "I am Error." The sixth said, "I am Power." (4) The seventh said, "I am The Worst. Our stars in heaven look small, but we are named like gods. We change our position together and we live together, sometimes in Lydia, sometimes in Olympus, sometimes on the great mountain."

The seven *stoicheia*—heavenly bodies, planets, or just evil entities—belong to the most prominent actors of Jewish and Christian theology in Late Antiquity. They were known to Paul who reminded his audience that "we have not to fight against humans of flesh and blood but against the rulers and powers, the sovereigns of this dark world (*pros tous kosmokratores tou skotous toutou*), against the evil beings of the heavenly realm."[29] At this point, Paul adopts the same attitude as his gnostic fellow-Christians at Nag Hammadi:

> Then since Death was androgynous, he mixed with his nature and begot seven androgynous sons. These are the names of the males: Jealousy, Wrath, Weeping, Sighing, Mourning, Lamenting, Tearful Groaning. And these are the names of the females: Wrath, Grief, Lust, Sighing, Cursing, Bitterness, Quarrelsomeness. They had intercourse with one another, and each one begot seven so that they total forty-nine androgynous demons. Their names and their functions you will find in "the Book of Solomon."[30]

This is the only passage in the Nag Hammadi corpus that explicitly refers to a "Book of Solomon."[31] We cannot be sure whether this reference is to our *Testament of Solomon*; Doresse argued for the *Letter to Rehobeam*, which is also known as the *Hygromancy of Solomon* or the *Key to Hygromancy*, and which probably originates in first-century BC

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[29] Eph. 6:12; cf. also Col. 2:4.20; Gal. 4:3.9.

[30] *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II.5 and XIII.2), trans. Bethge and Wintermute, in: Robinson (1988), p. 167.

[31] Solomon's name, however, is mentioned in three other texts; see Duling in Charlesworth (1983–1985), p. 942.

Egypt.[32] In that book, there are lists of the seven planets, angels, and demons, rendering their influence on the 24 hours of the day during one week, accompanied by prayers to the planets and angels, magical symbols of planets, and the correspondences between planets, zodiacal signs and plants. Despite this clear similarity, Doresse argues that the reference of the Nag Hammadi treatise is "to something in that vast collection entitled the *Testament of Solomon*, which enumerates a crowd of genies and mentions, for example, as rulers of this terrestrial world, Deception, Discord, Quarrelsomeness, Violent Agitation, Error, Violence and Perversity."[33] In any case, the mention of Solomon's astro-magical powers and a remarkable similarity in texts originating from Hellenistic Egyptian,[34] Jewish and Christian contexts, indicate the existence of a *macroform* of these texts that was extremely popular in those days.

The *stoicheia* topic is widespread among ancient theologies. And equally acknowledged was the ontological subordination and subjugation of the celestial powers, forced under Solomon's will who himself received his power from the almighty God. The intention is clear: The stars are under God's control and human beings are capable of invoking them in order to do pious work. Each adept, knowing the demons' secret names and performing Solomon's instructions, can accurately take part in the power—the magician actually becomes Solomon. The transformation of older Egyptian theological doctrines in monotheistic contexts is apparent in the *Testament of Solomon*. Already in 1936,

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[32] Edited by J. Heeg in CCAG VIII, 2 (1911), pp. 139–165. Cf. Reitzenstein (1904), pp. 186–187, who lists parallels in Josephus, *Kore Kosmou*, and the *Testament of Solomon*; Festugière (1950–1954), I, pp. 339–340; Goodenough (1953–1968), II, p. 233; Preisendanz (1956), pp. 690ff. (with further texts on hygromancy—i.e., the attempt to thwart demons in liquids to gain revelation from them). The *Letter to Rehobeam* with its prayers to the stars serves Ness as an explanation of the zodiacs in ancient synagogue pavements, because the planetary angels are representatives of God himself, "maintaining the world He created" (Ness 1990, p. 217).

[33] Doresse (1986), p. 170.

[34] The strong Egyptian influences are studied in detail by Dieleman (2005). With reference to PGM IV.850–929, which deals with a communication with Osiris by means of an ecstatic seizure of an adult or boy medium, he states that, "given the purely Egyptian character of these ritual techniques and mythological references, the attribution to the Jewish king Solomon is rather remarkable. However, the occurrence of Solomon's name in a magical text of the Roman period is not unusual, since, among Hellenised Jewish circles in Alexandria of the second century BCE onwards, the Biblical figure Solomon had been transformed from a wise king to a powerful astrologer and magician who exerted control over a wide range of demons" (p. 279, with reference to Torijano 2002, pp. 225–230).

W. Gundel had argued for a strong influence of Egyptian *decan tradition* on the Jewish *Testament*.[35] In the wake of a monotheistic adaptation, the ontological status of the planetary powers changed, an impression that is further attested if we look at the *decan melothesy*—i.e., the correspondence between decan rulers and parts of the human body. Emerging from an Egyptian background, the decans were positively described as healing powers;[36] the "astrologer of the year 379" referred to the Hermetic text *Iatromathematica* that introduced the planets of the decans as rulers of human diseases;[37] Teukros of Babylon likewise seemed to follow this tradition;[38] but the major interceder of Egyptian iatromathematics was Ptolemy: "The Egyptians completely united medicine and astrological prognosis."[39] The same can be said of magic—often functioning as "applied astrology." Thus, Jan Assmann remarks that "the most typical functional context of magic, in Egypt, is medicine, and the physician is the normal magician."[40] That the Jewish *Testament of Solomon* has to be linked to these Egyptian doctrines, is further attested in an anonymous *Greek-Jewish Decan Book*[41] that

[35] Gundel (1936), pp. 49–62; 286–7. For further literature on the decan tradition see von Stuckrad (2000b), p. 399 note 261; cf. also Mastrocinque (2005), pp. 173–183.

[36] In a very old magical papyrus the 36 parts of the body are already mentioned, perhaps in concordance with the decan system; see Koch (1993), p. 533; on the age of this text see also Quack (1995), p. 102.

[37] Likewise, in the *Apocryphon of John* the decans are not so much healing powers but demons ruling over the different parts of the body, probably more likely to cause illness than healing.

[38] See Cumont in CCAG V, 1, 209, 9ff.; VIII, 4, 196, 1; Gundel 1936, 282ff.; Gundel and Gundel (1966), pp. 16ff. On the Egyptian element in Teukros cf. Boll (1903), pp. 158ff. Quack (1995, p. 121) assumes that Teukros is a link between Egyptian astrologoumena, the so-called *Salmeshiniaka*, the *Book of Zoroaster*, and the *Apocryphon of John* from Nag Hammadi.

[39] *Tetrabiblos* 1:3. Barton certainly has a point in asking why we should doubt the judgment of such a scholar. Rather, this is further evidence for the fact "that the origins of the networks of correspondences between astrological entities, stones and plants may have been in Egyptian medicine, famed already in the age of Homer, and that they were probably elaborated in Hermetic writings" (Barton 1995, p. 186). Cramer (1954, p. 194) links Ptolemy's iatromathematics to his discussion of fatalism and volition.

[40] Assmann (1997), p. 4.

[41] Kroll provided a first edition in CCAG VI, pp. 73–78; see Gundel (1936), pp. 385ff. For Gundel, the Egyptian origin of these doctrines is beyond any doubt, as a comparison of the twelfth decan in the present text with the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* chapter 162 suggests; regarding the magical power of the decans, Gundel states that the *Greek-Jewish Decan Book* comprises "the most extensive table of this kind known from antiquity, which especially refers to the magical power of the decan amulets" (Gundel 1936, 292).

described the magical incantation of decans for all zodiacal signs as appropriate means to cure illnesses, as in the following example: "The third decan [of Aries] is called Delphaa. You write it [i.e. its name] with Zaphora and rose extract, made of honey, in green jasper and drink it. It heals teeth pain and pains in the throat. [On the margin Venus]."

Certainly, the demonization of the decans is a new step of astral magic taken in the macroform of Solomonic magic between 200 BCE and 200 CE. The transformation is directly attested in the *Testament of Solomon*. In chapter 18, probably originating in second-century BCE Egypt, the demons are introduced as the "world rulers of this dark age," but here their number is 36 (mirroring the 36 decans). The stars appear in various forms, some human, others with a dog's head, as bulls, dragons, birds or sphinxes. Self-assured they say to Solomon: "But you, King, are not able to harm us or to lock us up; but since God gave you authority over all the spirits of the air, the earth, and (the regions) beneath the earth, we have also taken our place before you like the other spirits" (18:3). After having investigated all the names and activities of the 36 demons, Solomon declares: "When I, Solomon, heard these things, I glorified the God of heaven and earth and I ordered them to bear water; Then I prayed to God that the thirty-six demons who continually plague humanity go to the Temple of God" (18:41–42).

Let us take a brief look now at the astrological doctrines that underlie the *Testament of Solomon*. The lines of correspondences show no determinable common traditions. By way of example, the connection between Aquarius and Virgo (2:2, see above)—standing in the minor quincunx aspect—is not attested as significant in astrological literature. Manilius talks of Sagittarius who "is in love with Virgo only," and Ptolemy assures his readers that a quincunx is irrelevant for interpretation.[42] However, this is not due to the Jewish author's lacking acquaintance with astrological tradition but to the simple fact that, up to Ptolemy's outstanding work, there was no such common tradition available. All texts, however, shared the doctrine of correspondences that is the backbone of astrological hermeneutics. This perspective found its way into the *Testament of Solomon*, as well:

[42] Manilius *Astron.* 2:504–506; Ptolemy *Tetrabib.* 1:17.

> (20:14) I asked him, "Tell me, then, how you, being demons, are able to ascend into heaven." (15) He replied, "Whatever things are accomplished in heaven (are accomplished) in the same way also on earth; for the principalities and authorities and powers above fly around and are considered worthy of entering heaven."

It is important to note that the astrological techniques are not blamed in the text. Instead, the document's contribution to ancient discourses is the following: the doctrine of correspondences is not to be disputed. Knowledge of those correspondences—astrology—leads to a deep understanding of future events (see also *Testament of Solomon* 2:3; 20:12). To obtain that knowledge one has to control the demonic powers which inhabit the zodiacal sphere. Astrology, it appears, is a sacred gift from God, embraced thankfully by man.

Veneration of Planets

In addition to, and often in combination with, the discursive structure of "controlling the angelic powers," ancient magic shows an astonishing interest in devotion to planetary entities.[43] This is remarkable insofar as according to a normative view of monotheistic theology, the veneration of stars—idolatry—was regarded as forbidden. This presumption has led some scholars to the conclusion that evidence of star cult can by definition not be evidence of Jewish authors. This, of course, is far too simple. Hans Dieter Betz correctly notes with regard to magical spells that we cannot determine the religious background of their authors in a general way. Instead, "the examples of Jewish magic present a complicated but illuminating picture, and that the question of the Jewishness of each particular spell may have to be answered from case to case, depending on the types of texts involved."[44] Having analyzed three spells of the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (PGM), he concludes: "What makes them Jewish are the quotations from Scripture"[45]—nothing more. In a similar vein, Mastrocinque aptly notes that "it must not be forgotten that magic texts were not part of a religion that can be labelled as 'magic', because there was no such thing. Those who practised magic worshipped Isis, Sarapis and Horus, or Hecate and

[43] For a more detailed discussion of this topic see von Stuckrad (2000b), pp. 512–533.
[44] Betz (1997), p. 47.
[45] Ibid., 59.

Apollo, or the Hebrew god, or the saviour-Messiah, and frequently worshipped all these gods together."[46]

With regard to planetary veneration, there is also no reason to exclude this religious practice from ancient "Judaism." Instead, we will have to reckon with the possibility that Jews took part in an ongoing discourse of ritual involvement with planetary divinities. Perhaps the best evidence for this religious matrix or pattern is the "Book of Mysteries," the *Sepher ha-Razīm* (SHR), originating in the first centuries CE but compiled later.[47] According to the preface, this book explains how

> to master the investigation of the strata of the heavens, to go about in all that is in their seven abodes, to observe all the astrological signs, to examine the course of the sun, to explain the observations of the moon, and to know the paths of the Great Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades, to declare the names of the overseers of each and every firmament and the realms of their authority, and by what means they (can be made to) cause success in each thing (asked of them), and what are the names of their attendants and what (oblations) are to be poured out to them, and what is the proper time (at which they will hear prayer, so as) to perform every wish of anyone (who comes) near them in purity.[48]

The genealogy of "sages," known from Mishna *Pirque Abot* 1:1 to lead to the rabbinic sages, is now revealed to all adepts of ritual magic. Interestingly enough, in SHR the chain of revelation does not end with the *chachamim* but adds King Solomon to the list.[49]

Repeatedly, the adept is requested to pour libation or sacrifice incense, or even animals, to the celestial bodies, thus revealing a totally different attitude toward cultic purity than more 'orthodox' theology would prescribe. For example:

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[46] Mastrocinque (2005), p. 45. Mastrocinque's study is an important contribution to the development of gnostic and Jewish magic and astrology in late antiquity, even if—or because—some of his conclusions are controversial.

[47] An edition of SHR still is a scholarly desideratum, cf. von Stuckrad (2000b), pp. 523–532. In his first collection, Mordechai Margalioth (1966) put together the SHR as a *macroform* on the basis of quite distinct fragments, particularly from the Cairo Genizah, medieval codices, and collections such as *Sefer Raziel, Sefer Kamayōt, Sefer hamalbūsh*, or *Mafteach Shlomo*; see Morgan (1983), pp. 2–6; Leicht (2005), pp. 241–242. Gruenwald notes that "Margalioth tampered with the text, in some cases even where the manuscripts supply good and interesting readings" (1980, p. 226).

[48] "Preface" to SHR, 5–10 (Morgan 1983, pp. 17–18).

[49] "Preface" to SHR, 23–26 (Morgan 1983, p. 19).

> If you wish to speak with the moon or with the stars about any matter, take a white cock and fine flour, then slaughter the cock (so that its blood is caught) in "living water" [מיים חיים].[50] Knead the flour with the water and blood and make three cakes and place them in the sun, and write on them with the blood the name(s) of (the angels of) the fifth encampment and the name of its overseer and put the three of them on a table of myrtle wood, stand facing the moon or facing the stars and say: *I adjure you to bring the planet of N and his star*[51] *near to the star and planet of N, so his love will be tied with the heart of N son of N.*[52]

Another example shows the close relation between astral magic, mystical discourse, and the Hekhalot literature. It has the objective to observe the sun (Helios) at night on its way "in the North."[53] After several purification ceremonies and dietetic measurements, the magician utters 21 times the names of the sun and the angels that accompany it. Then follows the adjuration:

> In the name of the Holy King who walks upon the wings of the wind,[54] by the letters of the complete name that was revealed to Adam in the Garden of Eden, (by)[55] the Ruler of the planets, and the sun, and the moon, who bow down before Him as slaves before their masters, by the name of the wondrous God, I adjure you, that you will make known to me this great miracle that I desire, and that I may see the sun in his power in the (celestial) circle (traversed by) his chariot, and let no hidden thing be too difficult for me.[56]

While this adjuration is still in accordance with the pious Jewish subordination of angels under the rule of God, the next passage reveals a theologically more tolerant position. Here, Helios is addressed directly:

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[50] This "living water" is important not only in ritual practice but also in Baptist milieus, for instance for Mandaeans. Do we come across a shared theology here? On the function of water in Hekhalot texts cf. also Morray-Jones (2002).

[51] Here, SHR applies the same language that the rabbis used to depict the planetary influences—one's star or *mazzal*; on the מזל see von Stuckrad (2000b), pp. 472–473; 480–483.

[52] SHR 1:161–167 (Morgan 1983, pp. 36–37). Probably this ritual is compiled from two different texts, because the adjuration does not really fit the ritual's objectives. The aspect of veneration melts here with the aspect of adjuration. And cf. the detailed analysis of this passage in Ithamar Gruenwald's paper in the present volume.

[53] See 1 Enoch 72:5.

[54] See Ps. 104:3.

[55] Morgan reads במושל instead of המושל. However, such an emendation is superfluous, because המושל relates to the "Holy King" as ruler of the planets and not necessarily to Adam.

[56] SHR 4:51–57 (Morgan 1983, pp. 70–71).

> Holy Helios who rises in the east, good mariner, trustworthy leader of the sun's rays, reliable (witness), who of old didst establish the mighty wheel (of the heavens), holy orderer, ruler of the axis (of the heaven), Lord, Brilliant Leader, King, Soldier. I, N son of N, present my supplication before you, that you will appear to me without (causing me) fear, and you will be revealed to me without causing me terror, and you will conceal nothing from me and will tell me truthfully all that I desire.[57]

This passage equips the Sun God with the same epithets reserved for YHWH in orthodox Jewish theology. Not only is Helios revealer of superior knowledge; the author even praises him as the creator of the cosmic order. That is why Margalioth called the *Sepher ha-Razīm* a "heretical work."[58] Ithamar Gruenwald adopts a more nuanced position, asking "whether a book like *Sefer Ha-Razim*, and similar material contained in manuscripts, does not betray, in a more reliable manner than do the rabbinic writings, the nature and scope of these occult practices among the common people."[59] However, as noted above, the lay status of SHR and related documents is by no means certain.[60] Mastering correspondences and ritual practice afforded experience and knowledge; hence, for SHR we must note the same as for the PGM: "We have to assume that for the prescribed performance of the magical ritual the magician had to know the astrological systematics, and also had to have access to respective charts or astrological handbooks."[61]

If we are looking for macroforms and shared patterns of magical discourse, a comparison of SHR with PGM is an obvious choice. Repeatedly, the planetary divinities are praised and adjured, which I want to exemplify with PGM IV here.[62] PGM IV.2241–2358, is an extensive adjuration of the moon that several times underscores the divinity of the earth's satellite:

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[57] SHR 4:60–66 (Morgan 1983, p. 71).
[58] Margalioth (1966), pp. 14ff.
[59] Gruenwald (1980), p. 230.
[60] In SHR 1:94–96, for instance, the author suggests to consult a hieratic papyrus to predict the future and to write the message down in hieratic script. This is certainly not aiming at "common people."
[61] Gundel (1968), referring to PGM V.
[62] For a good overview of astrological connotations within the PGM see Gundel (1968), pp. 3–17 (Sun), pp. 17–25 (decans), pp. 25–41 (Moon), pp. 41–52 (planets). Gundel correctly stresses the significant doctrine of correspondences (see p. 39). Further examples from PGM are provided in von Stuckrad (2000b), pp. 516–518; on the *Mithras Liturgy* see ibid., pp. 514–516.

> Hail, Holy Light, Ruler of Tartaros,
> Who strike with rays; hail, Holy Beam, who whirl
> Up out of darkness and subvert all things
> With aimless plans. / I'll call and may you hear
> My holy words since awesome Destiny
> Is ever subject to you.[63]

Similarly, in a prayer to Selene it says:

> Come to me, O beloved mistress, Three-faced
> Selene; kindly hear my sacred chants;
> Night's ornament, young, bringing light to mortals, /
> O child of morn who ride upon fierce bulls,
> O queen who drive your car on equal course
> With Helios, who with the triple forms
> Of triple Graces dance in revel with /
> The stars.[64]

Praise and adoration of planetary divinities does not exclude their subjugation:

> I truly know that you [the waning moon] are full of guile
> And are deliverer from fear; as Hermes,
> The Elder, chief of all magicians, I
> Am Isis' father. Hear: EŌ PHORBA
> BRIMŌ SCHMI NEBOUTO / SOUALĒTH.
> For I have hidden this magic symbol
> Of yours, your sandal, and possess your key.
> I opened the bars of Kerberos, the guard
> Of Tartaros, / and premature night I
> Plunged in darkness. […]
> What you must do, / this you must not escape.
> You'll, willy-nilly, do this task for me.[65]

Thus, the planetary gods play a significant role in ritual practice. The magician developed a personal relation with these divinities that ranged from reverent praise to instrumentalization. This is true not only for Selene/moon and Helios/sun, but also for Hermes/Mercurius, Aphrodite/Venus, or simply "the gods" to whom long hymns and prayers are documented in PGM.

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[63] PGM IV.2241–2247, trans. Betz (1986), p. 78.
[64] PGM IV.2785–2795, trans. Betz (1986), p. 90.
[65] PGM IV.2289–2300, trans. Betz (1986), p. 79.

For a comparison with SHR an adjuration of Venus, combined with an incense offering to the planets, is particularly interesting (PGM IV.2891–2942).

> A white dove's blood and fat, untreated myrrh and parched wormwood. Make this up together as pills and offer them to the star on pieces of vine / wood or on coals. And also have the brains of a vulture for the compulsion, so that you may make the offering. And also have as a protective charm a tooth from the upper right jawbone of a female ass or of a tawny sacrificial heifer, tied to your left arm with / Anubian thread.[66]

Subsequently, the magician secures the success of the compulsion hymn with praise of the Goddess. The compulsion itself has the goal to "attract […] NN […] to bed of love" (2937–2938). The final sentence demonstrates the clear connection between astral-magical ritual and astrological divination: "If you see the star shining steadily, it is a sign that she has been smitten, and if it is lengthened like the flame of a lamp, she has already come."[67]

The magical papyri are not the only sources that reveal the liturgical and magical function of planetary divinities. I have argued elsewhere that for Manichaeism, Hermeticism and gnostic discourse this feature of religious practice and worldview was indeed ubiquitous—despite the diversity of theological positions that we find in the documents.[68]

Heavenly Journeys

According to ancient understanding, the secrets of divine astronomy were revealed to a few religious specialists who made their way into the heavens or received their knowledge by God's own intervention:

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[66] PGM IV.2893–2900, trans. Betz (1986), p. 92. Gundel notes: "In the ingredients of the sacrifice we can easily discern the sympathetic relationship with goddess and celestial body: Blood and fat of a white dove, myrrh, and Artemisia belong to Venus. The 'vulture's brain,' the 'right mandible of a female donkey,' or a 'red sacrificed calf' and the 'cord of Anubis' connect the vision of the star with the simultaneous vision of the divinities Horus, Anubis, Seth, and the cow-headed Isis or Hathor" (Gundel 1968, pp. 48–49).

[67] PGM IV.2940–2941, trans. Betz (1986), p. 94.

[68] See von Stuckrad (2000b); on Gnosis and Hermeticism see pp. 624–699; on Manichaeism see pp. 700–766 (particularly 728–742). On Zoroastrian sources see Panaino (2005); on the interlacing of Mesopotamian magic and the later Aramaic magic bowls from the same regions see Geller (2005) (who builds on Naveh and Shaked 1985 and 1993). On an often neglected, yet enormously important genre—magical gems—see Michel (2004). These studies testify to the wide range of mutual dependence and transfers of tradition.

Enoch, Moses, Solomon or other heroes of Jewish tradition guaranteed the revelatory status of astrological information. But secret knowledge was attributed not only to those extraordinary persons. Many people in Late Antiquity were engaged in heavenly journeys in order to gain insight into the mysteries of God's cosmic order. Connected with that mystical orientation was an application of astrological skills in a way one would call magical. In Late Antiquity, this topic is so common that Ithamar Gruenwald notes:

> These heavenly ascents of the soul became almost a cultural fashion in many religious systems in the first centuries of the Christian Era, the spiritual climate of which was full of a constant exchange of religious ideas and practices. In this respect there was no substantial difference between religion, philosophy and science.[69]

Heavenly journeys are a key motif within gnostic and Hermetic theologies, but—contrasting the Hekhalot mysticism where the mystic serves as a mediator between God and Israel—here the intentions are individual ones. One may only recall the famous passage of *Poimandres* that was so influential—and controversial—in subsequent esotericism, as it inaugurates the divinization of the adept.

> Thence the human being rushes up through the cosmic framework, at the first zone surrendering the energy of increase and decrease; at the second evil machination, a device now inactive; at the third the illusion of longing, now inactive; at the fourth the ruler's arrogance, now freed of excess; at the fifth unholy presumption and daring recklessness; at the sixth the evil impulses that come from wealth, now inactive; and at the seventh zone the deceit that lies in ambush. And then, stripped of the effects of the cosmic framework, the human enters the region of the ogdoad; he has his own proper power, and along with the blessed he hymns the father. […] They rise up to the father in order and surrender themselves to the powers, and, having become powers, they enter into god. This is the final good for those who have received knowledge: to be made god.[70]

The gnostic searches for redemption either in the world to come or during her or his lifetime. Pursuing this goal, it is of crucial importance "to know one's enemies"—i.e., to understand the heavenly opponents who try to block the mystic's way into the realms of light. This

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[69] Gruenwald (1988), p. 202 with no. 30. See on this topic Dean-Otting (1984); Himmelfarb (1993).

[70] CH I:25–26, trans. Copenhaver (1992), p. 6. On the *Poimandres* see von Stuckrad (2000b), pp. 673–677.

Platonic notion is found in a variety of texts. In the *First Apocalypse of James* from Nag Hammadi it is Jesus himself who gave instructions: He admonishes his disciples to be confidential since, after his grievous way through death, he will return and "appear for a reproof to the archons. And I shall reveal to them that he cannot be seized. If they seize him, then he will overpower each of them."[71]

The recipient of the holy revelation is rescued from the powers of *heimarmenē* and can depart from this dark world heading through the planetary spheres toward the pleroma. In order to fulfill this desire it seemed appropriate to examine the planetary laws thoroughly. Thus, the fight against the *stoicheia* led the gnostic to a different reaction than Paul who refuted astrology. What at first glance seems inconsistent becomes the gnostics' primary motivation for studying astrology. Just *because* gnostic theology strives to overcome the demonic planetary chains, it made extensive use of astrological tradition.

The gnostic interest in astrology resulted in an extraordinary discourse of its own. Special treatises have come down to us elaborated by Markos and Theodotus, both Valentinians, by Bardaisan of Edessa and—last but not least—by Mani. Summarizing the feature of gnostic astrology one comes to the conclusion that, besides the topic of heavenly journeys and magical empowerment, it is the doctrine of correspondences that is of particular importance.[72] This doctrine was applied to different manifestations such as the twelve apostles, to zodiacal geography, or zodiacal medicine (*melothesia*). In most cases the doctrines of the astrological tradition were well-known, at times even to a very sophisticated degree. Of further interest is the fact that the influence of Egyptian doctrines, particularly the decan system with its implementation of the numbers 36 and 72, had an important impact on gnostic astrology's proceedings.

The subjugation of the planets and their subsequent instrumentalization are fully in line with texts originating from Jewish milieus.

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[71] NHC 5.3:30,2–6 (Robinson 1988, p. 264). See also the *2nd Book of Jeû* ch. 52; the *Left Ginza* 3:56; NHC 7.127:20f. Those documents witness the correctness of Origenes' bold remarks in *c. Cels.* 7.40 and 6.30f.

[72] See esp. the doctrines of Markos as described in Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 1.14,3–6; Epiphanius *Panarion* 34.5. Theodotus was the first to explore the correspondences between zodiacal signs and apostles, see *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 25.2. Bardaisan "has to be called the first significant astrologer within the wider perspective of Christianity" (Gundel and Gundel 1966, p. 326); that was witnessed by Eusebius *Praep. evang.* 6.9,32.

Furthermore, the visionary's search for a heavenly journey calls similar texts of the Hekhalot tradition to mind; even rabbinical parallels may be mentioned.[73] But there are also marked differences. One such difference is, as noted above, the aspect of individual salvation prominent in gnostic texts, while the *yored merqabah* is acting on behalf of his community. Linked to this functional difference is another one—namely, the temporary nature of the heavenly journeys of Hekhalot texts. The *yored merqabah* ascends the heavens and returns to report to his people about what he experienced. A third difference pertains to the evaluation of stars and serving angels;[74] for the Hekhalot mystic, the angels are usually friendly entities, assigned to keep the unworthy out of the highest heavens. The gnostics, however, usually identify the angels with the archons that are dependent on the Demiurge.[75]

I have argued elsewhere that these differences—and also the differences *within* the Hekhalot literature—have to be taken seriously.[76] And I agree with Ithamar Gruenwald that "it seems very likely that some of the Gnostic writers were indeed familiar with certain aspects of the Merkavah tradition, while the opposite—that is, the adaptation by the Merkavah mystics of specific Gnostic doctrines—cannot so easily be proved."[77] At the same time, it is apparent that the Hekhalot mystics, the authors of gnostic literature and others shared a common view of religious experts entering the heavenly spheres in order to explore divine secrets. That is the discursive macroform that materializes in a variety of microforms, the latter clearly displaying the different—and often competing—claims and worldviews of the respective groups and milieus.

From a methodological point of view, the three discursive fields that I have discussed—the control of cosmic powers, the veneration of planets and the heavenly journeys of religious specialists—challenge

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[73] The rabbinic tradition is focused on R. Aqiba; see tChag 2:3; jChag 77b; bChag 14b.

[74] Here we come across the same positive function of the angels as attested in the Qumran literature, particularly in the *Shirot Olat ha-Shabbat*. On the astrological connotation of the priestly cult in Qumran, see von Stuckrad (2000b), pp. 168–183. From this point of view, there is much to argue in favor of Rachel Elior's thesis of continuation of priestly traditions in Hekhalot literature; see Elior (1997). A nuanced discussion of astrology in Qumran is now provided by Popović (2007).

[75] On these differences see Gruenwald (1988), pp. 192–193; see also Maier (1963), pp. 39–40.

[76] See von Stuckrad (2000b), pp. 681–686, with references.

[77] Gruenwald (1988), p. 201.

simple demarcations that have dominated scholarly analyses of Judaism's relation to astrology and magic. It turns out that the very notion of a singular "Judaism"—as well as of "Christianity"—is difficult to retain. What we witness in the sources of Late Antiquity is a creative blend of various influences that added to Jewish identities. Jews were involved in and connected to ongoing debates in ancient society. While some milieus tried to protect their identity by blocking out what was seen as "pagan practices," there were many Jewish milieus that embraced these doctrines as an important element of their worldview and practice. The demarcation lines that divided ancient society were not so much related to "religions" as to philosophical, metaphysical and ritual considerations.

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