The Demonic Effect: A comparison of demonic beliefs in the ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt.

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Abstract

This dissertation undertakes a comparative analysis of demonic beliefs in Ancient Greece, Egypt and Rome; examining how each civilisation conceptualised supernatural beings within their religious, social and cosmological systems. Drawing upon primary ancient texts (including Homeric epics, Egyptian Funerary literature, and Roman philosophical and ritual sources) alongside modern scholarship, the study challenges later Christian-influenced assumptions that demons were universally perceived as embodiments of evil. Instead, it demonstrates that such beings functioned as intermediaries, guardians, agents of punishment, and mechanisms of moral and cosmic regulation.

The research adopts a qualitative and comparative methodology, analysing demonic figures within their cultural contexts rather than imposing out-dated moral frameworks. Greek *daimons* are examined as morally ambiguous intermediaries mediating fate, madness and divine justice. Egyptian demons are explored as function-based agents operating within the cosmic principle of *Ma'at*, enforcing balance rather than *Isfet* (chaos). Roman demonology is analysed as a syncretic system that blended indigenous spirit beliefs with Greek philosophical concepts, increasingly associating demons with social anxiety and moral suspicion.

By comparing these traditions, this dissertation highlights both structural similarities, such as the use of demons to regulate fear, morality and liminality and additionally theological differences. The study concludes that ancient demonology was not a theology of evil but a culturally adaptive framework for negotiating uncertainty, responsibility, and divine order. Recognising this complexity contributes to a more nuanced understanding of ancient religion and underscores the historical contingency of demonological concepts.

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I am satisfied that this work is the result of the student's own efforts.

Signed: ……

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I would like to thank my supervisor for their guidance

and my daughter for her patience and encouragement.

Contents

Abstract

Declaration

Acknowledgments

1. Introduction

2. Research questions, aims and objectives

3. Literature Review

3.1 Defining “Demon” in Ancient Contexts

3.2 Greek Demonology in Modern Scholarship

3.3 Egyptian Demons and Cosmic Order

3.4 Roman Demonology and Religious Pragmatism

3.5 Methodology

4. Demonic Beliefs in Ancient Greece

4.1 Terminology and Conceptual Ambiguity of Daimon

4.2 Daimons in Epic and Tragedy

4.3 Philosophical Interpretations of Daimons

4.4 Chthonic Daimons and the Restless Dead

5. Demonic Beliefs in Ancient Egypt

5.1 Conceptual Foundations: Ma'at, Isfet and Cosmic Order

5.2 Terminology and Classification of Egyptian Demons

5.3 Scholars Theories

5.4 The Slaughterers

5.5 The Guardians – Table 1.

6. Demonic Beliefs in Ancient Rome

6.1 Indigenous Roman Spirit Beliefs and Domestic Religion

6.2 Hostile Spirits: Lemures, Larvae, and the Restless Dead

6.3 Magic, Curse Tablets and Demonic Mediation

6.4 Greek Philosophical Influence and Intermediary Demons

6.5 Literary Representations and Social Anxiety

6.6 Demons, Morality, and the Rise of Christian Interpretation

6.7 Scholarly Interpretations and Debates

7. Comparative Analysis

7.1 Moral Ambiguity versus Moral Function

7.2 Cosmology and Demonic Hierarchy

7.3 Ritual Engagement and Management of Demonic Forces

7.4 Demons, Death and Liminality

7.5 Social Control and Moral Regulation

7.6 The Impact of Syncretism and Cultural Exchange

7.7 From Functional to Moralised Demonology

7.8 Summary

8. Conclusion

Bibliography

Introduction

Demonic beings occupy complex and often misunderstood positions within ancient Mediterranean religious systems. Modern interpretations of demons are frequently shaped by later Judeo-Christian theology, which tends to frame demons as inherently evil entities opposed to divine authority. However, in Ancient Greece, Egypt and Rome, supernatural beings were not conceptualised in such absolute terms; instead, they functioned as intermediaries, guardians, enforcers of cosmic justice, and agents of misfortune and disorder.

This dissertation examines how demonic beings were understood within these three cultures and asks how such beliefs reflect broader cosmological frameworks. While similarities exist, each civilisation developed distinct demonological traditions shaped by their unique religious and political contexts. Greek *daimons* were morally ambiguous spirits mediating between gods and humans; Egyptian demons operated within a rigid cosmic hierarchy governed by Ma'at; and Roman demonology evolved as a syncretic system incorporating indigenous spirit beliefs and Greek philosophical thought.

This study adopts a functional and comparative approach, analysing demonic beings not as abstract theological constructs but as culturally embedded mechanisms through which ancient societies negotiated morality, misfortune, and cosmic order. By integrating textual, ritual, and social analysis, the dissertation contributes to ongoing scholarly debates concerning ancient religious belief systems.

Research Questions, Aims and Objectives

Research Question

How did ancient Greek, Egyptian and Roman cultures conceptualise demonic beings, and what functional roles did these entities play within their respective religious systems?

Aims

- To analyse representations of demonic beings in primarily ancient texts.
- To critically evaluate modern scholarly interpretations of ancient demonology.
- To conduct a comparative analysis highlighting cultural continuities and divergences.

Objectives

- To examine Greek daimones in literacy and philosophical contexts.
- To assess the role of demonic beings within Egyptians cosmology and afterlife beliefs.
- To analyse Roman demonological concepts within domestic, magical, and philosophical frameworks.
- To synthesise findings through a comparative, functional methodology.

Literature Review & Methodology

The study of demonic beliefs in the ancient world has undergone significant revision over the past century. Early scholarship often interpreted ancient demonological concepts through a Christian lens, however modern scholars increasingly emphasise that such interpretations are anachronistic and obscure within cultural specificity of ancient religious systems. This literature review examines key scholarly debates surrounding demonology in Ancient Greece, Egypt and Rome, identifying methodological trends, theoretical foundations, and gaps that this dissertation seek to address,

3.1 Defining "Demon" in Ancient Contexts

One of the central challenges in demonological scholarship is definitional. The modern English term "demon" derives from the Greek *daimon*, yet its contemporary connotations differ substantially from its ancient usage. As Dodds (1951) argues, *daimons* in Greek literature often refers to an impersonal divine force rather than an entity (Dodds, 1951, p. 30). This semantic

ambiguity has generated extensive debate regarding whether "demon" is an appropriate analytical category for ancient supernatural beings at all.

Burket (1985) cautions against imposing rigid ontological classifications, noting that Greek religious thought was fluid and situational, rather than systematic. Similarly, Johnstone (1999) emphasises that ancient demons should be understood functionally, defined by their roles in ritual, narrative, and social regulation rather than by moral alignment (Johnstone, 1999). These perspectives challenge earlier moralising interpretations and provide a foundation for a comparative analysis.

In Egyptology, scholars such as Hornung (1999) reject the concept of moral dualism entirely, arguing that Egyptian cosmology did not conceptualise evil as an autonomous force. Demonic beings functioned as agents of divine order, operating within the structure of Ma'at. Assman (2005) further argues that Egyptian religion prioritised balance and continuity over moral absolutism, complicating attempts to categorise demons as either benevolent or malevolent.

Roman scholarship faces similar definitional challenges. Beard, North and Price (1998) demonstrate that Roman religious practice was pragmatic and non-dogmatic, incorporating a wide range of supernatural beings without systematic theology. Ogden (2002) highlights the Roman Tendency to adopt Greek philosophical demonology while retaining indigenous beliefs about ancestral and domestic spirits. Together, these studies underscore the necessity of contextualising demonological concepts within their cultural foundations.

3.2 Greek Demonology in Modern Scholarship

Modern interpretations of Greek demonology have largely been shaped by the work of Dodds (1951), whose analysis of irrationality and divine compulsion reframed *daimons* as explanatory mechanisms for human behaviour rather than moral agents; her emphasis on psychological and social factors marked a departure from earlier theological interpretations. Burket (1985) expands this perspective by situating *daimons* within ritual practice, highlighting their role in sacrifice, purification, and communal identity. Additionally, Burket (1985) argues that Greek religion functioned as a system of negotiated relationships between humans and supernatural forces, with *daimons* meditating uncertainty and risk. Johnston (1999) further develops this functional approach by examining chthonic *daimons* restless dead, and curse rituals. Her work demonstrates how demons articulated social anxieties surrounding death, pollution, and justice. Importantly, Johnstone challenges the assumption that demonic beings were inherently feared, showing that they were often invoked deliberately through ritual.

Philosophical traditions also receive significant scholarly attention. Plato's depiction of *daimons* as intermediaries between gods and humans, particularly in the *Symposium* and *Apology*, had been interpreted by scholars such as Morgan (2010) as an attempt to systematise popular religious beliefs within philosophical framework. These interpretations illustrate the adaptability of demonological concepts across literacy genres. However, despite extensive scholarship on Greek demonology, critics note a tendency to treat *daimons* in isolation from broader Mediterranean contexts. This dissertation addressed that limitation through comparative analysis.

3.3 Egyptian Demons and Cosmic Order

Egyptian demonology has historically been marginalised in comparative studies due to its complexity and resistance to moral categorisation. Early Egyptologists often translated Egyptian terms as "demons" without fully accounting for their functional roles. **Hornung (1999)** criticises this approach, arguing that Egyptian supernatural beings cannot be understood outside the cosmological principle of *Ma'at*. Additionally, Assman (2005) situates demonic beings within Egyptian conceptions of death, judgement, and divine kingship, as demons functioned as gatekeepers, punishers and protectors; Particularly within funerary literature such as the *Book of the Dead* and the *Amduat.* Rather than threatening cosmic order, they enforced it.

Wilkinson (2003) examines the iconography of Egyptian demon, emphasizing their hybrid forms and liminal symbolism. These representations reinforce their roles as boundary enforcers between life and death, *Ma'at* and *Isfet*. Medical-magical texts further demonstrate the dual capacity of demons to cause and cure illness, depending on ritual context. Furthermore, recent scholarship has emphasized the everyday presence of demons in Egyptian life. Ritner (1993) demonstrates how domestic magic sought to control demonic forces through spells, amulets, and protective deities. This scholarship challenges earlier portrayals of Egyptian demonology as purely funerary and highlights its social relevance.

3.4 Roman Demonology and Religious Pragmatism

Roman demonological scholarship emphasises syncretism and adaptability. Beard et al (1998) argue that Roman religion prioritised ritual efficacy over theological coherence, resulting in a fluid supernatural landscape. Domestic spirits such as the *Lares* and *Penates* exemplify this pragmatism, functioning as protective forces rather than moral agents. Furthermore, Ogden (2002) explores Roman attitudes toward ghosts, magic, and hostile spirits, demonstrating how

fear of the restless dead influenced legal and ritual practices. Literary sources such as Ovid and Pliny the Younger reveal growing anxiety surrounding supernatural interference, particularly during periods of social instability.

Philosophical influences further complicate Roman demonology. Apuleius' *De Deo Socrats* introduces Platonic intermediary demons into Roman thought, framing them as morally neutral messengers. Scholars debate whether this represents philosophical abstraction or religious innovation, with some arguing that such ideas remained confined to elite circles. However Late Roman scholarship examines the moralisation of demons during the rise of Christianity. Brown (1978) argues that Christian demonology reinterpreted traditional spirits as evil forces, reshaping cultural memory. This transformation underscores the importance of distinguishing between pre-Christian and Christianised interpretations.

Despite substantial scholarship on individual cultures, comparative studies of ancient demonology remain limited. Many analyses focus on isolated traditions, reinforcing artificial boundaries between Greek, Egyptian and Roman belief systems. This division obscures shared Mediterranean concerns with liminality, misfortune, and cosmic order. Methodological challenges include translation bias, fragmentary sources, and the dominance of elite literary perspectives. Scholars increasingly advocate interdisciplinary approaches that integrate archaeology, anthropology, and ritual studies. This dissertation responds to these calls by adopting a functional, comparative methodology grounded in primary texts.

The conducted research builds upon existing scholarship while addressing its limitations. By comparing demonological concepts across cultures, it highlights both shared functions and culturally specific interpretations. Rather than seeking a universal definition of demons, the study examines how supernatural beings operated within distinct cultures. In doing so, the dissertation contributes to broader debates concerning the nature of ancient religion, the construction of moral categories, and the historical contingency of demonological concepts.

Employing a qualitative comparative methodology, grounds in close textual analysis of primary sources and critical engagement with secondary scholarship. Primary texts include Homeric epics, Hesiod, Plato, Egyptian funerary literature (Books of the Underworld etc), and Roman authors including Ovid and Apuleius. A functional analytical framework is adopted, focusing on what demonic beings *do* rather than imposing rigid ontological definitions. Methodological challenges include translation ambiguity and modern interpretive bias; these limitations are addressed through contextual analysis and cross-cultural comparison.

Demonology in Ancient Greece

Ancient Greek demonology occupies a foundational position within the study of religious thought. Not only due to the term *daimon* originating in Greek language and culture, but also because Greek conceptions of supernatural agency profoundly influenced later Roman and early Christian interpretations. However, Greek *daimons* were not understood as an embodiment of absolute evil, but instead they functioned as morally grey beings that were perceived to have many roles such as messengers between human and Gods, blamed for misfortunes and an enforcer of cosmic and moral order. The following chapter examines Greek demonological beliefs through literary, philosophical, and ritual evidence; demonstrating that *daimons* served as flexible explanatory figures rather than fixed conceptualised entities. This chapter argues that Greek demonology reflects broader Greek concerns with fate, responsibility, and the limits of human agency.

4.1 Terminology and Conceptual Ambiguity of Daimon

Morals of demons is one of the most significant aspects of this comparative study. Firstly, Greek *daimons* are characterized by moral division as demonstrated in epic, tragedy and philosophy. *Daimons* could act as protectors, punishers or sources of madness without fixating on a moral compass. Ancient Greek demonology occupies a foundational position within the study of religious thought. Not only due to the term *daimon* originating in Greek language and

culture, but also because Greek conceptions of supernatural agency profoundly influenced later Roman and early Christian interpretations. However, Greek *daimons* were not understood as an embodiment of absolute evil, but instead they functioned as morally grey beings that were perceived to have many roles as protectors, punishers and sometimes sources of madness; demonstrating that *daimons* served as flexible beings rather than fixed entities.

In early Greek literature, the dividing term *daimon (δαίμων)* is often used interchangeably with *theos,* indicating divine energy without specifying a particular being. This linguistic flexibility reflects a worldview in which supernatural principles were perceived as impersonal and situational rather than morally absolute (Dodds, 1951 p.153). The earliest work of Plutarch's *De Superstitione*, opens the interpretation of the term *daimon* and can also be seen in the works of Plato and Empedocles later on. Neither viewed the *daimon* as an independent being between men and gods, but as something other than the human soul passing to or from incarnation (Brenk, 1973). Moreover, the specific meaning of the term is widely vague and has been interpreted to many different phrases, *'character is destiny'* (Hillman,1996 p.15), or *'man's character is his daimon'* (Kirk, 1983, p.89).

4.2 Daimons in Epic and Tragedy

In the Homeric epic, *daimon (δαίμων)* frequently appears in moments of crisis or emotional extremity. Characters attribute sudden reversals of fortune, madness or irrational behaviour to a *δαίμων,* thereby externalising responsibility. A prime example of this is in the *Illiad,* Agamemnon attributes his disastrous decision to seize Briseis not to personal failure but to a δαίμων (Hom, *Il.* 19.86-90). This attribution does not absolve guilt entirely but situates human error within a larger cosmic framework. Burkert (1985), argues that this ambiguity reflects the practical function of *daimons* as explanatory tools rather than objects of systematic belief. Rather than representing a distinct class of beings, these beings articulated the presence of divine influence in unpredictable circumstances, which is present within the Greek Epics. In both the *Illiad* and the *Odyssey*, supernatural intervention is frequent, yet the boundary between gods and *daimons* remains fluid. However, the term *daimon* can be divided into six different versions. Firstly, the *daimon* being a divine being and usually referred to as *theoi* (gods), which is presented mostly in the Iliad. Secondly, is the *daimon* representing some form of a god or being that is aiding in a person's life but the god or being is unknown. Telemachus, is shocked to see Odysseus again;

οὐκ εἶ πατήρ μου, οὐκ εἶ Ὀδυσσεύς·

τις θεία δύναμις (δαίμων) ἐμὲ παίζει

δόλον, ἵνα πένθος μου πικρότερον γένηται.

οὐδεὶς θνητὸς ἀνὴρ τοιοῦτον ἂν πράξειεν

βουλῇ, εἰδὼς δὲ ὅτι θεὸς ὅστις ἐθέλοι

ῥᾳδίως ἂν ἄνδρα νέον ἢ γέροντα ποιήσειεν.

You are not my father, you are not Odysseus;

some divine power (daimon) is playing me a

trick to make my grief all the more bitter.

No mortal man could do such a thing by

design, though I know that any god who

wished could easily make a man young or old

(Hom. *Od.* 16.194-195)

Telemachus knows there is a divine power that has aided Odysseus, his reasoning of *"no mortal man"* therefore implying there is a divine power *(daimon)* but the specifics of what god or what power it is, is unknown to him, then applying the term *daimon.* Thirdly, the version of a *daimon* that fulfils the role of minor deities. *Erinyes (Ερινύες),* are a key example. The *Erinyes* have different origin stories, but most of these beginnings surround the creatures with darkness. In Hesiod's *Theogony* it was the castration of Ouranos that created them:

Κρόνος τὴν μὲν ἀριστερὰν χεῖρα ἐξέτεινε,

τὸ δὲ δρεπάνῃ ὀδοντωτῷ δεξιᾷ ἔλαβεν,

καὶ ταχὺ τὰ τοῦ φιλτάτου πατρὸς αἰδοῖα ἀπέτεμε,

καὶ ὄπισθεν ἔρριψεν. οὐ μὴν μάτην ἔπεσον·

πᾶσα γὰρ σταγὼν αἵματος ἐρυθρᾶς ὑπὸ τῆς Γαίας

ἐδέχθη, καὶ χρόνῳ Ἐρινύας μεγάλας ἔτεκεν.

Cronos reached out with his left hand,

took the jagged-toothed sickle in his right,

and quickly cut off his dear father's genitals and

threw them behind him. But they did not fall in

vain, for all the blood-red drops that fell were caught

by Gaia, and in time, she bore the mighty Erinyes.

(Hes. *Theog.* p10)

In the Aeschylus *the Oresteia*, where the Furies originated from the night itself being mistaken for Gorgons, then corrected due to their appearance:

Ἄπτεροι, μέλανες,

παντελῶς βδελύγματα, οἳ ἐξέπνεον

ἀναθυμίασιν δυσοσμίαν, ἀπρόσιτοι,

ἐκ δὲ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν ἐρρέει

ἡδὺ πύον

Lacking wings, and black,

abominations totally, that snored

out breath miasmic, unapproachable,

while from their eyes there oozed

lovely pus

(Aesch. *Or.* p. 4)

In *Agamemnon,* Cassandra describes the Erinyes as drinking the blood from the murdered as this is their food source (Eum. *Ag.* 264-266). The connection between the type of *daimons* mentioned so far is the external factor, implying that daimons were only a physical being that aided or haunted the individual. In the *Odyssey daimons* act as agents of both protection and destruction. Odysseus' suffering is repeatedly framed as the result of divine forces beyond his control, while moments of salvation are similarly attributed to supernatural favour:

Ἢ δαίμων τις ἀνίησιν ἐπ' ἐμὲ

ἓν τῶν πολλῶν τεράτων

ἃ μεγάλη Ἀμφιτρίτη τίκτει ἐν ταῖς

θαλάσσαις αὐτῆς, εὖ δ' οἶδα ὅτι

ὁ γῆς σειστὴρ ἐναντίος ἐμοί ἐστιν.

Or some daimon may let loose

against me one of the many monsters

that the great Amphitrite breeds in her

seas, and I am well aware the earth

shaker is at odds with me.

(Hom. *Od.* 5.421)

The beginning line indicates that some form of daimon controlled the monsters that roamed amongst humans. However, the demonic influence with the monsters is their guidance of Odysseus' ship to the direction of Scylla in book 12. In Greek tragedy offers a particularly rich source for understanding demonic agency. Tragic narratives frequently attribute catastrophic outcomes to a destructive *daimon,* often associated with inherited guilt or familial curses. In Aeschylus' Agamemnon, the house of Atreus is haunted by a destructive *daimon* or *furies.*

Ἐκεῖναι αἱ Ἐρινύες, ἀκορέστως ἐργαζόμεναι

κατὰ τοῦδε τοῦ γένους, ἀναστάντες βοᾶν

ἐπ' εὐφροσύνῃ· ἔχουσι γὰρ ἄλλην θῦμα

λίθοις ἄξιον.

Τίνα μανίαν νῦν ἐπικαλεῖ

ὀλολύζειν διὰ τούτου τοῦ οἴκου;

Ἃ νῦν εἶπας

φόβον μοι παρέχει.

Let those Furies insatiably at work

against this clan rise up and scream

for joy - they have another victim fit

for stoning.

What fury do you now invoke

to shriek throughout this house?

What you've just said

makes me afraid.

(Aes. *Ag*, p. 1310-21)

The Furies/Erinyes, according to Liva, are Tisiphone (avenger of murder), Megaera (Jealous one) and Alecto (unceasing in anger), although portrayed as monsters, have the specific task of ensuring the demands of justice (Liva, 2016, p.17). Although prominent figures in literacy, these beings were additionally ingrained in the Greek cult. This tragic *daimon* does not function as an independent evil force but as a manifestation of moral imbalance and unresolved pollution *(miasma).* As Parker (1983) argues, tragedy uses demonic language to dramatize the consequences of moral transgression within a cosmic framework that exceeds human comprehension.

Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* similarly employs demonic causation to explore responsibility and fate. Odepius' downfall is framed as both inevitable and self-inflicted, mediated through divine signs and oracles. Like Aeschylus' the concept of the daimon within these tragedies all

reside under the conceptualisation of evil. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* the *'evil-minded daimon'* is accused of possession over Clyemnestra (Aesch. *Ag.* 1388). In Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus, after Oedipus is blind, the chorus asks him who brought his misfortune:

τίς σ', ὦ τλῆμον,

προσέβη μανία; τίς ὁ πηδήσας

μείζονα δαίμων τῶν μηκίστων

πρὸς σῇ δυσδαίμονι μοίρᾳ;

What fury came upon you?

What daimon with great leaps from a great

height came upon you bringing such

an unfortunate fate?

(Soph. *OT.* 1300)

As previously mentioned, the term Fury is another name for the Erinyes daimons. However, the daimon that brings an unfortunate fate to Oedipus, could be considered a god, without any specifics. The implicit presence of a destructive *daimon* reinforces the tension between human agency and cosmic order. However, Euripidean tragedy complicated this perspective and demonological interpretation further by portraying daimons in relation to death, rather than evil influence:

μηδὲ νεκρῶν ὡς φθιμένων χῶμα νομιζέσθω

τύμβος σᾶς ἀλόχου, θεοῖσι δ' ὁμοίως

τιμάσθω, σέβας ἐμπόρων.

καί τις δοχμίαν κέλευθον

ἐμβαίνων τόδ' ἐρεῖ:

Αὕτα ποτὲ προύθαν' ἀνδρός,

νῦν δ' ἔστι μάκαιρα δαίμων:

Χαῖρ' , ὦ πότνι', εὖ δὲ δοίης.

τοίᾳ νιν προσεροῦσι φήμᾳ.

And let not the tomb of your wife

be reckoned as the mound of

perishing dead, but let her

be honoured as the gods, an object

of worship to merchants. And someone

walking on the path across

[from her tomb] will say the following:

"This woman died at once in place

of her husband, and now she is

a blessed daimon; hail,

O mistress, and do well for us."

(Eur. *Alc.* 995)

4.3 Philosophical Interpretations of Daimons

Greek philosophy introduced a new structure for understanding demonic beings. Plato's dialogues, particularly the *Symposium* and *Apology,* conceptualise *daimons* as intermediaries

conveying messages between gods and humans. Socrates' personal *daimon* exemplifies this idea, functioning as a guiding inner voice rather than a malevolent force. Plato' s philosophical demon reflects an attempt to rationalise popular religious beliefs within a moral and metaphysical system. As Morgan (2010) argues, this reinterpretation does not reject traditional demonology but reframes it in ethical terms. Later philosophical schools, including stoics, further abstracted demonic agency, associating *daimons* with rational cosmic principles. These developments influenced Roman and early Christian thought, demonstrating the enduring impact of Greek demonological concepts.

This literary development suggests an involving influence in Greek philosophical thought regarding the soul had an impact on Greek literature. However, Hesiod's *Work and Days* introduces a more structured demonological concept. Hesiod describes the souls of the Golden Age as becoming *daimons* who watch over mortals, dispensing justice and wealth.

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δὴ τοῦτο γένος κατὰ γαῖ᾽ ἐκάλυψε,—
τοὶ μὲν δαίμονες ἁγνοὶ ἐπιχθόνιοι καλέονται
ἐσθλοί, ἀλεξίκακοι, φύλακες θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων,
οἵ ῥα φυλάσσουσίν τε δίκας καὶ σχέτλια ἔργα
ἠέρα ἑσσάμενοι πάντη φοιτῶντες ἐπ᾽ αἶαν,
πλουτοδόται…

But in fact when the earth concealed this generation,
— they are called good *daimons* that dwell beneath
the earth, warders off of evil, and guardians of dead
men, who watch over judgments and unhappy deeds,
themselves clothed in mist they go throughout the
entire world, and they give wealth.
(Hes. *Works and Days*. p121-126)

These guardian *daimons* are explicitly benevolent, reinforcing moral order rather than undermining it. Therefore, the coexistence of destructive and protective *daimons* within early Greek thought demonstrates the absence of moral dualism. Supernatural forces reflected the unpredictability of life rather than a cosmic struggle between good and evil. This duality

presents the non-moralised nature of Greek demonology; supernatural beings that were not constricted to benevolent or malevolent characteristics. As examples of *daimons* in an external context, it is important to understand there is another form of demonic beliefs, a concept underlined with the human soul and mind, embracing the concept of an internal *daimon*. This internalised aspect is based in Greek philosophical thought rather than Greek mythology. A key example of this type of *daimon* is found in the works of Plato regarding Socrates' sign. In the *Apology,* Socrates explains

πολλάκις καὶ ἐν πολλαῖς ἑορταῖς

ἀκηκόατέ μου λέγοντος τὴν αἰτίαν ταύτην,

ὅτι τι θεῖόν τε καὶ δαιμόνιον μοι φαίνεται,

ὃ καὶ Μέλητος ἐν τῇ γραφῇ αὐτοῦ λέγει,

καταγελῶν αὐτοῦ.

You have often and on many occasions

heard me explaining the reason for this,

namely that something divine and daimonic

appears to me, which Meletus also describes

in his indictment, ridiculing it.

(Pl. *Ap.* 31.C7-D2)

Socrates had spoken of the daimon amongst the people, therefore earning the suspicion of demonic beliefs that the opposing argument uses against him in his trial; claiming he is *'corrupting the youth and teaching them not to acknowledge the same gods the state does…'* (Pl. *Ap.* p8). The problem with attempting to understand this sign is the vagueness from both Plato and Socrates, assuming it is due to a lack of understanding. It is clear that this voice aided Socrates in living the philosophical life and avoiding a political career, however it is unclear how else this voice aided him. In the *Republic's* Myth of Er, the individual after death, reincarnates from the choice they themselves have chosen and is provided by Lachesis (Vinkesteijn, 2021, p. 217).

ἰδόντες εἶπαν ὅτι ταὐτὸ ἂν ἐποίησεν εἰ τὸ πρῶτον κλῆρον ἔλαβεν, καὶ αὐτὸ εὐχαρίστως ἐκλέξατο.

καὶ ὡσαύτως, τῶν ἄλλων θηρίων τινὲς εἰς ἀνθρώπους εἰσῆλθον καὶ εἰς ἀλλήλους, οἱ ἄδικοι εἰς ἄγρια, οἱ δίκαιοι μεταβαλόντες εἰς ἥμερα, καὶ πᾶσα μίξις καὶ σύνθεσις ἐγένετο.

ἐπεὶ δὲ, τέλος, πᾶσαι αἱ ψυχαὶ τὰς βιοτὰς ἐκ τῆς τάξεως τῶν κλήρων ἐκλέξαντο, ἐτάχθησαν καὶ ἔμπροσθεν τῆς Λαχεσίδος ἐπορεύθησαν.

καὶ ἡ δὲ ἑκάστῃ ἔπεμψεν φύλακα τοῦ βίου καὶ ἐκπληρωτὴν τῆς αἱρέσεως τὸν δαίμονα.

Upon seeing it said that it would have done

the same had it drawn the first lot, and chose it gladly.

and in like manner, of the other beasts some entered into

men and into one another, the unjust into wild creatures, the

just transformed to tame, and there was every kind of

mixture and combination. But when, to conclude,

all the souls had chosen their lives in the order of

this lots, they were marshalled and went before Lachesis.

And she sent with each as the guardian of his

life and the fulfiller of his choice the daimon.

(Pl. *R.* 620d)

This concept can bring understanding to Socrates' voice, however there is one major flaw that prevents this as an insight into his daimon. According to (Vinkesteijn, 2021, p212) if the individual chooses their reincarnation, how could Socrates' choose being a philosopher, if the role was not invented until him? He was the first with the philosophical title, therefore the role would not have existed for him to choose it for his reincarnation. Socrates also speaks of how the daimon inside him was the first ever, so in other words he is the archetype for the philosophy paradigm with a guardian *daimon* guiding it (Vinkesteijn, 2021, p.214). This is not to say that Socrates is the "father" of philosophy, as there were many before him, even though

scholars argue he is the one who shifted Western philosophy from cosmology to ethics. Nonetheless, his sign was the only *daimon* within someone's mind as a voice.

As in pre-Socrates the concept of the daimon was prominent in Greek thought but viewed in a highly different way. In Empedocles *Purification* (B115), he observes daimons to be gods that were exiled from Olympus for corruption of oaths:

ἔστιν Ἀνάγκης χρῆμα, θεῶν ψήφισμα παλαιόν,
ἀίδιον, πλατέεσσι κατεσφρηγισμένον ὅρκοις·
εὖτέ τις ἀμπλακίῃσι φόνωι φίλα γυῖα μιήνῃ,
<νείκεΐ θ'> ὅς κ(ε) ἐπίορκον ἁμαρτήσας ἐπομόσσῃ,
δαίμονες οἵτε μακραίωνος λελάχασι βίοιο,
τρίς μιν μυρίας ὧρας ἀπὸ μακάρων ἀλάλησθαι,
φυομένους παντοῖα διὰ χρόνου εἴδεα θνητῶν
ἀργαλέας βιότοιο μεταλλάσσοντα κελεύθους.
αἰθέριον μὲν γάρ σφε μένος πόντονδε διώκει,
πόντος δ' ἐς χθονὸς οὖδας ἀπέπτυσε, γαῖα δ' ἐς αὐγὰς
ἠελίου φαέθοντος, ὁ δ' αἰθέρος ἔμβαλε δίναις·
ἄλλος δ' ἐξ ἄλλου δέχεται, στυγέουσι δὲ πάντες.
τῶν καὶ ἐγὼ νῦν εἰμι, φυγὰς θεόθεν καὶ ἀλήτης,
νείκεϊ μαινομένωι πίσυνος.

There is a matter of Necessity, an old decree of the
gods, eternal, made with full oaths; when some [god]
might stain their own limbs in error, and swear a false
oath having done wrong, these *daimones* who have
been assigned long-lasting life, they shall wander away
from the blessed ones for thirty thousand years, being
born as all sorts of mortal forms over time searching out
painful paths of life.
For the might of air forces them seaward, and the sea
spits them out to the surface of the earth, and the earth
[forces them] to the light of the shining sun, and it

throws [them] to the whirls of the air; and each receives
[them] from the other, and they all hate [them]. And I
now am one of them, an exile and wanderer from the
gods, reliant on mad strife.
(Emp. *Pur.* B115)

The elemental aspect of the passage combines Empedocles *On Nature* with *Purification* concepts that the elements are an important aspect to the incarnation processes, which unfortunately the beginning of the cycle is unclear (O'Brien, 1967, p182). Furthermore, the necessity and decree are in reference to the mandate against bloodshed and perjury, which triggers the transmigration. In *On Nature* the four elements are the compound for everything, and it is moved by only two forces; love and strife:

Ἄκουε πρῶτον πάντων τὰς τέσσαρας ῥίζας πάντων· Ζεύς
ὁ λαμπρός, Ἥρα ἡ ζωὴν διδούσα, Ἀϊδωνεύς,
καὶ Νηστις, ἣ τῷ δακρύῳ τήκει
θνητὴν βάσιν

Hear first of all the four roots of all things; Zeus
The gleaming, Hera who gives life, Aidoneus,
And Nestis, who moistens with her tears the
(Emp. On Nature. B6-D57)

The fact that the roots have divinities' names indicates that each has an active nature and is not just inert matter (Brenk, 1973, p.56). When the force of love moves the roots together, it does so through harmony, whereas strife will use a state of repulsion. In the context of daimons, the oath they break is in accordance with their alliance with strife (bloodshed, eating flesh and perjury), enveloping them in the incarnation cycle (O'Brien, 1967, p185). The line *'being born as all sorts of martial forms over time searching out painful paths of life'* indicates the process of incarnation starting from plants to animals, eventually to humans and then back to the gods.

The concept of good or evil *daimons,* as demonstrated, was not in existence, as the context of the situation controlled the daimons behaviour. However, Plutarch changed this concept in his later work with, according to Brenk, resisting the idea of evil *daimons* (Brenk, 1973 p.54). In his work *De Superstitione,* the concept that evil *daimons* existed (as in the Neoplatonic type) is evident, where Plutarch argues that it is better to acknowledge none of the gods and *daimons* than to sacrifice children to Cronos, as the Carthaginians did. The concept of evil *daimons* is emphasized by the story of the young Dionysis being dismembered by the Titans in the Orphic legend. Additionally, in Plutarch's *Lives* he indicates his belief in evil daimons, who *'attempt to frighten good men from the path of virtue'* (Pl. Liv. 171C). Furthermore, his later views in *De Sera Numinis Vindicta* express an underlining Christianity ideology:

4.4 Chthonic Daimons and the Restless Dead

Beyond literacy representation, Greek demonology encompassed chthonic *daimons* associated with the underworld, death and pollution. Johnston (1999) emphasises the role of restless dead *(biaiothanatoi),* those who died violently or without proper burial. These spirits were believed to linger among the living, causing harm unless appeased through ritual. Curse tablets *(katadesmoi)* frequently invoke chthonic daimons to bind opponents, demonstrating that such beings were actively engaged through ritual rather than passively feared. These practices reveal a pragmatic relationship with demonic forces. Rather than representing moral corruption, chthonic *daimons* functioned as extensions of social and legal concerns, particularly surrounding justice, reciprocity and ritual property.

Greek religious practices emphasised the management rather than eradication of demonic forces. Ritual purification, sacrifice, and appeasement were central to maintaining harmony between humans and supernatural powers. Pollution resulting from birth, death or crime attracted hostile *daimons,* necessitating ritual cleansing. Burkert (1985) notes apotropaic rituals aimed to deflect harmful influences rather than eliminate them. The existence of such rituals suggests that demonic forces were considered inevitable components of the cosmos, requiring negotiation rather than moral condemnation.

Domestic religion also played a role in the managing demonic presence. Household rituals honoured ancestral spirits and local daimons, reinforcing communal identity and continuity. These practices blur the boundary between demons, heroes, and gods, further illustrating the fluidity of Greek supernatural categories.

Modern scholarship emphasises the functional and symbolic roles of Greek *daimons.* Dodds (1951) highlights their psychological dimension, while Johnstone (1999) situates them within ritual practice and social anxiety. Parker (1983) underlines the moral implications of demonic pollution and purification. Critics, however, caution against over-systematising Greek demonology, noting that ancient sources resist rigid classification. This chapter aligns with functionalist interpretations, arguing that daimons articulated experiences of uncertainty, responsibility, and divine presence.

Greek demonology reveals a complex and nuanced understanding of supernatural agency. Daimons were neither angels nor devils but flexible intermediaries reflecting the unpredictability of human existence. Greek culture used demonic concepts to negotiate fate, morality and cosmic order. This foundational structure profoundly influenced later Mediterranean demonological traditions, providing essential context for the Egyptian and Roman case studies examined in subsequent chapters.

Ancient Egyptian Demonology

Ancient Egyptians' demonology differs fundamentally from later moralised conceptions of demons as autonomous embodiments of evil. Egyptian religious thought was structured around the concept of a cosmic order encompassing truth, balance and justice (Ma'at). Within this structure, demonic beings functioned not as adversaries of the divine but as subordinate agents tasked with enforcing cosmic stability. Using funerary texts, magical papyri, ritual practice and iconography to understand the roles, representations and functions of the demons, this chapter will demonstrate demons were an integral component of Egyptian cosmology and served as a mechanism for articulating boundaries between order and chaos. Rather than embodying moral

evil, Egyptian demons were function-defined beings whose actions were contingent upon context and divine authority.

5.1 Conceptual Foundations: Ma'at, Isfet and Cosmic Order

At the core of Egyptian religious thought lies the opposition between *Ma'at* and *Isfet.* Ma'at has a wide variety of meanings, truth, justice, righteousness, order, Isfet meaning the opposite. As Assman (2005) explains, *Isfet* represented disruption that had to be continually contained through ritual, kingship, and divine action. Between Ma'at and *Isfet* demonic beings operated all three worlds and were used as instruments, rather than a manifestation of either. Unlike later traditions, Egyptian demons were not against the gods, or fallen gods or enemies of mortals, but aided the deities in maintaining the cosmic balance between order and chaos. This is an important aspect of understanding these demonic beings and analytically approaching the topic without other religious bias. The *Amduat* further portrays demons as defenders of Ra and the fight of balance during his nightly journey through the underworld, combating the serpent Apophis. These demons protect the cosmic renewal, reinforcing the idea that demonic beings were essential to maintaining order.

5.2 Terminology and Classification of Egyptian Demons

The terminology for these beings is a controversial topic due to the lack of modern words that translate the Egyptian term for them. As the usage of the term 'demon' popularises, there is a level of bias. Demon in the modern world, is representative of an evil, horrifying being that is nothing but malicious and condemns humans to death or punishment for sins; which is the opposite of these beings' active role. The closest term suitable is the Greek term *daimon;* as the term, even in Greek thought, is a vague concept that can be pinned to the concept of a divine being of some kind, indicative of the dualistic personality of demons in most ancient thought. The term daimon is a useful tool when speaking on Egyptian daimons as a whole, however the attempted approach in categorising these beings into sub-identification is somewhat limited.

Unlike Greek demonology, Egyptian texts do not employ a single overarching term equivalent to daimon. Instead, scholars apply the label "demon" to a range of supernatural beings described in texts as messengers, guardians, or punishers. This diversity has complicated scholarly attempts at classification. Hornung (1999) categorises Egyptian demons into three broad groups: guardian demons, wandering demons, and executioner demons. Guardian demons protected sacred spaces and thresholds, wandering demons caused illness and misfortune, and executioner demons enforced divine judgement. Importantly, these categories

were not rigid; a single demon could fulfil multiple functions depending on context. Wilkinson (2003) notes that many Egyptian demons are unnamed or identified only by epithets describing their function or appearance. This functional naming presented the pragmatic nature of Egyptian demonology, were roles superseded identity. Other sub-category of demons in Egyptian religion include the messengers (wpw.tyw), the butchers (mn*ḥ.wy),* the watchmen (rs.w), the emissaries (hb.yw), the carvers (*ḥnṭ.tyw*), the watchers (s*ꜣw.tyw),* the ones who drive away (s*ḫ*r.w), the wanderers (*šmꜣ.yw), the reapers (ḳdf.tyw) and the cutters (ds.w)* (Coffin Text I, 290h, 366a, 368a and 77a, de Buck and Gardiner, 1935, 1947 and 1956) (Sass, 2020). Until, in 2020, the University of Chicago launched the Egyptian Demonology project, combining experts in the field and creating the Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections (March, 2020) and in addition, created an online database of demonic beings, their location, role and function and if possible, depictions.

5.3 Scholars Theories

Modern scholarship consistently emphasises the non-dualistic nature of Egyptian demonology. Hornung (1999) and Assman (2005) caution against translating Egyptian demons as "evil spirits', arguing that such terms obscure their functional roles. Ritner (1993) highlights the practical engagement with demons through magic, while Wilkinson (2003) focuses on iconographic evidence. However, critics note that Egyptian demonology resists systematic classification, reflecting the broader flexibility of Egyptian religious thought. This chapter adopts a functional approach, aligning with contemporary scholarship while integrating comparative insights.

One liminal group of daimons are those who act as messengers of Sekhmet, the ḫꜣ.tyw. This group of daimons, translating to slaughterers, knife-bearers or disease bringers, are attested from the Old Kingdom to the Greco roman period. However the ḫꜣ.tyw were prominent within the New Kingdom (potentially due to changes in the religious etiquette that limited iconography and oral representations) are an example of fluid boundaries between Ma'at and Isfet by having a dualistic nature that could affect the living, dead, gods and humans (Sass, 2020). Additionally, due to Sekhmet's control over the ḫꜣ.tyw, we can attest to their subordination in some manner, however in order to provide a vital analysis of their role in society and how they were initially conceptualised a view into the etymology is needed.

Edward argues that ḫꜣ.tyw derives from the term ḫꜣy.t meaning *disease* (Edwards, 1960. p6). However, association of these beings in invocations with iꜣd.t rnp.t (Papyrus Edwin Smith);

alongside the role of them as disease bringers it is unlikely (Sass, 2020, p.182). Additionally, in the early 2000's Hanning progresses Eschweiler's concept (1994), where they proposed a connection between ḫꜣ.tyw and ḫꜣwy (night, evening) (Hanning, 2006). The concept relates to the daimon groups connection with the Decan stars located in Pyramid texts (1915b), which was also made a point of by Quack (who claimed the ḫꜣ.tyw are the seven deathly decans of the netherworld, bringing illness and death (Schnipper, 2007, p4). However, many scholars have dismissed this concept due to the emphasis on the stars and lack of texts.

Sass theorises that as the ḫꜣ.tyw are disease bringers, it is likely to have resulted from the phonetic similarities, exhibited between the term ḫꜣ.yt (slaughter, massacre) and ḫꜣ.tyw (Sass, 2020, p182). Sass's argument is an extension of Faulkner's argument that the connection between both terms is demonstrated with the daimons depiction of weaponry and armed figures in conjunction with Papyrus Bremmer Rhind, in which their role is to "viciously" slay Apophis (Faulkner, 1938, p.122).

5.4 The Slaughterers

The weaponry the ḫꜣ.tyw uses defines their physical appearance. Classed as an *instrument of butchery, ds-knives* and *nm-knives* are directly targeted against the enemies, adversaries, rebels and the disaffected of the heart, posing a serious threat to the Pharaoh (Lucarelli, 2020, p.118). In the Shroud of Thutmosis III is a prayer to Sekhmet regarding the knives:

[O Sekhmet] do not course his flesh to be cut up the by ḫꜣ.tyw

(Horung, 1975)

The knives used for *the flesh to be cut* represent an indication of the ḫꜣ.tyw physical appearance that may manifest as different to the deities. Known for their anthropomorphic appearance, the deities represented various animals amongst Egypt and their personalities linked to the animal. From anthropoid to anthropomorphic, the ḫꜣ.tyw could be presented with the head of a lion or in complete animal form similar to that of the baboon guardian daimons of the underworld (Sass, 2020, p.198). In alignment with their physical attributes, the ḫꜣ.tyw were believed to be *kn* (strong), *nḫt* (victorious), *ḥꜣḫ* (fast, speed), and keen eyesight that that allowed them to see enemies in the distance (gm*ḥ wꜣ*.w), similar to that of the conceptual idea that the designated lord/chief *Meneh* (the butcher) of the ḫꜣ.tyw in a number of texts including the Papyrus Anastasi 3, 1, (C-G CXII, 2) (Fischer-Elfert 1986, Sass, 2020).

Beyond funerary contexts, Egyptian demons played a significant role in explaining illness and misfortune. Medical-magical papyri frequently attribute disease to the actions of wandering demons who entered the body through breaches in ritual purity. Ritner (1993) demonstrates that such explanations did not contradict medical treatment but complemented it, integrating supernatural causation with practical remedies. Furthermore, it was believed protective spells and amulets sought to repel or coerce demons rather than destroy them. Images of threatening demons were often used apotropaically, reflecting the belief that fearsome power could not be harnessed for protection.

The Butcher

Meneh (the butcher) was first attested for in Spell 580 within the Coffin texts:

Deceased proclaims when the temple of Meneh is sealed this N will not eat faeces and will not drink urine for you.

(Carrier, 2004)

However, his iconography first appeared in the 8th hour of the Book of Amduat from the New Kingdom, in the 9th cavern with three deities; first Darkness, second Meneh, third who keeps off the Akh spirits and finally Hacker of Earth (Hornung, 2007, p.78). Additionally, Meneh was presented in the Temple of Horus at Edfu as a mummified human and as a member of the nine dead deities of Edfu (PM VI, 149, 252-255) during the Ptolemaic period (Gaber, 2020). Furthermore, a complete human iconographic form of Meneh can be seen located at Hathor in Dendera. Alongside iconography, Meneh's epithets were also located at Dendera; first epithet nb ḫ³.tyw 'lord of the ḫ³.tyw demons'. However, the debate amongst scholars forms according to the second epithet, which showcases Meneh as ḥry ḫ³.tyw, which is associated with Tutu, suggesting Meneh is not 'Chief of the ḫ³.tyw' but perhaps another demonic group. Delving into the association demons have with Osiris can potentially dispel the idea that Meneh is related to the ḫ³.tyw specifically. In the Papyrus of Yuya (CG 51189), there is a reference to the phrase imnh n wsir translating to Butcher of Osiris, linking the deity to the butcher demons mnh and *mnḥw* (Davis, 1908, p25). There is a correlation between Osiris, demons and his sons, whereas in Dendera an epithet refers to Meneh as ḥry nmt rʿ 'Chief of the Slaughterhouse of Re' and the second epithet in Edfu, describing the demons themselves as the same; furthermore, an epithet located in Kom Ombo referring to Anubis translates 'Anubis, the chief of the butcher demons' *mnḥw* (Gaber, 2020, p.9). As previously mentioned, the ḫ³.tyw demons were under the epithet that represented Tutu or

Meneh (ḥry ḫ³.tyw). This analysis can potentially lead to the conclusion that perhaps the butcher Meneh is the Chief of the ḥry nmt rʿ, Anubis is the Chief of *mnḥw* and Tutu the Chief of ḫ³.tyw.

5.5 The Guardians

Funerary texts provide the richest evidence for Egyptian demonological beliefs. Texts such as the *Coffin Texts*, the *Book of Two Ways*, the *Book of the Dead* and the *Amduat* – all depict the afterlife as a perilous journey through a landscape populated by numerous demonic beings. These demons guarded gates, tested the deceased, and punished moral failure. In the *Book of the Dead,* the deceased must know the names of specific demons to pass safely through the Duat. Knowledge functioned as power, allowing the deceased to deter demonic threats through speech. As Assmann (2002) argues, this emphasis on knowledge reflects the broader Egyptian belief in the performance power of words (magic) *(heka).*

Dualistic behaviour is paramount to understanding the Egyptian demons with an emphasis on the Guardians. The guardian demons were depicted on entrance ways and doorways to tombs, guarding the underworld and depicted in temples. In the Book of Two Ways the dual characteristics of these demons is predominantly represented in the journey to the afterlife. During the Middle Kingdom in the Book of Two Ways, the textual and visual depiction of the Netherworld and the creature residing there was presented. With bending roads (non-overlapping), a lake of flames, a land road, marshes next to the water road were the homeland of particular demons, whose role involved guarding the gates. Similar to the ḫ³.tyw demons, where knives represented them and their role, the demons near the fire lake adjoined by the water path had fiery descriptions such as ³šbw (flaming,), rsy-ḥr (wakeful) and nhd-ns (fluctuating flame) (CT 1044, 1039, 1041, 1045, 1053) (Lavrentyeva and Alexandrova, 2020, p.110). The lack of visual representation of the demons indicates the idea that any depiction of these beings could potentially manifest them into the living world. Additionally, in CT 1070 to 1071, they are described to lack any well-defined form and described as 'formless otherworld beings' except for holding long sharp knives that threaten the deceased (Landgrafova, 2020, p.96)

These other worldly beings are described in funerary texts to be seen in a crippled manner, which potentially represents their attachment to their location of dwelling (Lavrentyeva and Alexandrova, 2020, p.106). However, in CT 1071, the other detailed iconography of demons in the underworld are in the House of Judges who are presented as scarabs with thin legs

(Bennett, 2020, p38). This is not to say all guardian demons in the living or dead worlds had none or limited iconography. The guardians etched into entrances and doorways were always well depicted. For example, in Abusir, amongst the large shaft tombs are decorated with these beings.

The burial chamber of general Menekhibnekau and the structure of the priest Iufaa, the collection of demon iconography is divided into two groups; approximately seventy demons are located on the sides of sarcophagus or coffins and secondly, the demons guarding the gates of the underworld in the vignettes of the Book of the Dead chapters 144 to 147 are depicted in the chamber of Menekhibnekau (Bareš, 2020, p.16). The divide represents guardian demons with different roles. Those located on the sarcophagus or coffins were there to protect the deceased physically and in their journey to the afterlife, whereas those located on the walls are there to protect space and strengthen the power of protection. Attested on the Southern entrance of Menekhibnekau's burial chamber the wall is split into two; the upper section depicted gates 1 to 3 and the lower section depicted gates 4 to 7. Upon each gate a representation of three demons (along with their name and roles) is present facing West in a therianthropic form, with a human body, animal head with either empty hands or holding an artefact or animal (Bareš, 2020, p18).

The accompanying texts with the demon's images are located above or in front of them in a column. However, the translation of the guardian's name varies slightly from scholar to scholar, which is a common practice in the complex study of Egyptology. An example of this obstacle is the second gate; the names of the doorkeeper, guard and the one who reports it are as follows; "One with inverted faces, Numerous forms", "Hearer" and finally "Roaring of voice", according to Landgrafava (2020). Moreover, in the works of Bareš, the same second gate demons are referenced as "Fore-stretched", "Angle-faced" and "Blazing" (Bareš, 2020, p.10). The attempt to directly translate ancient Egyptian to a modern-day language is a repeated obstacle and rightly so; however, for this study, Bareš translation will be used to present the demons below:

Gate Number	Doorkeeper *iryʿ ꜣ.s*	Guard *s[ꜣw].s*	Reporter *Smi imy.s*

Gate 1	"Inverted faces, many-formed" *Sḫd-ḥrw-ʿšꜣw-irw* Standing, ram head, empty hands.	"Overhearer" *[S]mt* Kneeling and holding a small gazelle, human headed.	"Loud-voiced" *Hw-ḫrw* standing , long stick ended with ear or corn, baboon headed.
Gate 2	"Fore-stretched" *Dwn-ḥꜣt* Sitting posture, with one hand raised, ram head.	"Angle-faced" *[S]ḳd-ḥr* Standing, mixed hippo, lion head, crocodile tail, holding long knife in one hand	"Blazing" *ꜣsb* Standing with long stick end ear of corn, baboon headed
Gate 3	"Eater of detritus" *Wnm-ḥwꜣt* Seated, left hand on chest, right hand semi-raised and holding long knife, turtle head	"Alert-hearted" *Rs-ib* Standing, left hand raised, lion head	"He who curses" *ʿ ꜣ* standing, long stick with ear of corn, baboon headed.
Gate 4	"Repellent-faced, many voiced" *ḥsf-ḥr-ʿšꜣ* empty hands, Rams head	"Alert-faced" *Rs-ḥr* Standing, empty hands, human head	"Repeller of crocodiles" *Ḫsf-idw* Standing, long stick with ear of corn, baboon headed.
Gate 5	"One who lives on worms"	"Fiery" *ꜣšb(w)*	"Face-afire, violent timed" *Smi imy.s*

	ʿnḫ-m-fntt semi-seated, holding bovine forelegs in folded hands, Bes-like head facing front	Standing empty handed, bulls head.	Standing, long stick with ear of corn, baboon headed.
Gate 6	"Bread-scooper, violent voiced" *ꜣk[n]-t(ꜣw)-khb-ḫrw* Standing empty handed, ram's head.	"Face-bringer" *ʿIn-ḥr* Standing with empty hands, lion-headed	"Sharpened-faced, warden of the sky" *Mds-ḥr-iry-pt* Standing with long stick ended with ear of corn, baboon-headed
Gate 7	"Thier sharpener" *Md(s).sn* Standing empty handed, rams-headed	"Loud-voiced" *ʿꜣ-ḫrw* Standing empty handed, Rams-headed	"Repeller of attackers" *Ḫsf-ḫmiw* Standing, long stick with ear of corn, baboon headed.

Table 1: Guardian demons located in the burial chamber of Menekhibnekaus (Bares, 2020, p19)

Regarding the anatomy of the guardians represented in the living and those inhabited the Netherworld; there are many distinctions made between the guardians the Egyptians wanted to depict and those they did not. For example, the reporting role of the guardian demons are all depicted to have baboon heads. Delving into the anatomy aspect of these beings, the baboon is also depicted in Netherworld demons. As previously presented, the physical characteristics and weaponry of demons directly correlate to their function and nature. Baboons in the wild are highly intelligent and inherently non-aggressive towards humans; nonetheless, when they feel

threatened their primal urge to protect their troops takes over and causes them to become highly aggressive. Furthermore, the way baboons first show signs of their protective side is through their voice, exploding with a vicious growl like noise and bearing their teeth to the threat. Therefore, depicting demons such as “Loud-voiced”, “face-afire, violent timed” and “Repellent of attackers” to be baboon headed fits their personalities. Moreover, the demonic was known for their keen sight which is additionally, reflected with the representation of a baboon head. Baboons have trichromatic vision and are capable of viewing if fruit is ripe on the inside; which in the map of the Book of Two ways, demons hidden in the curves of the path are sometimes also depicted with baboon traits.

On the rest of the wall, the vignettes for Book of the Dead 144 are inscribed in the burial chamber, which was a common practice in the New Kingdom. Nevertheless, there is an unusual aspect within the burial chamber of Menekhibnekaus regarding the gates to the underworld which seem to be non-existent within the iconography of the guardian demons themselves. However, there is a solution to this that once again proves the vast intelligence of the Ancient Egyptians, is viewing the wall as a whole, instead of searching for each gate individually. Amongst closer inspection it is evident the entrance to the burial chamber on the Southern wall was considered to be the gate the demons guarded alongside their individual underworld gate. Landgrafova (2020) notes that the burial chamber of Menekhibnekaus should be considered as a three-dimensional representation of a gate that needs to be read seven times. Although it is an unusual set up for a burial chamber, as aspect is the commonly found words of a prayer for the deceased to pass through with afterlife successfully, on the rest of the wall:

O, this Osiris Menekhibnekau encircles the Eye
of horus,
an assistant of Thoth at night! May
he cross the sky in triumph! Cause that this
Osiris Menekhibnekau may pass in peace as he
sails in the barge of re!
The protection of this Osiris Menekhibnekau is
that which has been given by the great and

made by the Mighty because of ma'at. Annihi-
lation is bwt to this Osiris Menekhibnekau.
The protection of this Osiris Menekhibnekau is
the protection of hor-the-eldest-re,
which his
heart has made for him. (Landgrafova, 2020, p100)

The middle kingdom through to the Ptolemaic and Roman periods many magical and ritual texts attested to another demonic group like the slaughters. The messengers (wpwtjw) were known to cause misfortune amongst Egyptian society and spread isfet (chaos) without divine orders. These beings were not a separate category per say to the ḫ³.tyw, but fall under the same "umbrella", which additionally includes the 'Wanderers' (*šmꜣ jw)* gang. According to Leitz, these particular demons were considered to have the most strength during the epagomenal day (end of the year) as attested in the Calendar of Good and Bad (Leitz, 1994). The wpwtjw demons have been connected to the goddesses of Sekhmet and Bastet, however they could also be sent on missions by other deities, mainly in the form of bringing plagues and death to the living.

The Wanderers were equally seen as negatively interfering with the living. Although magic could hold them to specific borders and limit their movement the *šmꜣ jw* gans were still capable of creating Isfet without orders from the deities, therefore unlike other demonic groups they were not truly subordinate (Lucarelli, 2010, p.5). Similar to the messenger many magico-medical texts from the Middle Kingdom onwards were the *šmꜣ jw* were blamed for internal ailments and mental diseases; for example, the demon Sehaqeq (Shꜣḳḳ) is condemned for a headache (Leitz, 2020). Moreover, an example with the nsj demon and his female counterpart nsjt has been acknowledged to affect individual body parts and can even bring death upon their victims (Westerndorf, 1999, p.98).

The *šmꜣ jw* did not just terrify the living Egyptians, but portrayed a negative influence on their homes, which they were known to enter and haunt according to the Papyrus of Chester Beaty VIII (1-2.4), this being the only form of demons entering homes and causing chaos; there has been no other testaments to other demons capable of this action. Nonetheless, deities, as explained previously, were capable of using magic to limit their access to particular areas, therefore potentially praying prevented this from occurring.

The epithets for these beings is an unusual demonstration of gender having a minor influence on the demon's relationship with deities, not so much their roles and functions. In the Book of the Dead, spell 37 and Coffin texts two figures Ammut and the Two Meret Snake are attested to be the demonic forms of two goddesses; furthermore in the Oracular Amuletic Decree of the 21st century, the epithet wrt may refer to female demons (Edward, 1960, p.23). Although the etymology and precise meaning of wrt is still unknown and unclear, it does appear in other beings' epithets. The same wrt has been located in the combination with the phrase t*ꜣ*-wrt translating to “The Great One”, which is the name for the hippopotamus goddess Taweret; and in later texts for Sekhmet and Isis (Leitz, 2002, p153). This perhaps suggests the demons with the epithet wrt are of a female nature.

Egyptian demonology reveals a sophisticated system in which supernatural beings enforced cosmic order, guarded thresholds, and mediated between life and death. Demons were neither marginal nor morally corrupt but essential agents within a balanced cosmos governed by *ma’at*. Their roles in funerary literature, medical magic, domestic religion, and kingship demonstrate their pervasive influence across Egyptian society. This functional understanding provides a critical contrast to Greek and Roman demonologies and lays the groundwork for the comparative analysis that follows.

Ancient Roman Demonology

Roman demonological beliefs developed within a religious system characterised by pragmatism, ritual efficacy, and syncretism. Unlike Greek religion, Romans prioritised correct practice (orthopraxy) over theological speculation. As a result, Roman demonology did not emerge as a coherent or systematised doctrine but as a flexible constellation of beliefs concerning spirits, divine intermediaries, and hostile supernatural forces. This chapter examines Roman demonic beliefs through domestic religion, funerary practices, literary sources, philosophical texts, and magical traditions: demonstrating how Roman demonology reflects social order, ancestral anxiety and cultural adaptation. It is safe to say that Roman demonology was profoundly influenced by Greek thought, particularly during the Republican and Imperial periods, yet it retained distinctively Roman concerns with household stability,

civic duty, and ancestral continuity. By analysing both indigenous and imported concepts, this chapter argues that Roman demonology functioned as a culturally adaptive system that mediated between tradition and change, order and threat.

6.1 Indigenous Roman Spirit Beliefs and Domestic Religion

Early Roman religious thought centred on a wide range of spirits *(numina)* associated with places, actions, and social roles. Rather than sharply distinguishing between gods, spirits and demons, the Romans conceptualised supernatural presence as diffuse and embedded in daily life. Beard, North and Price (1998) emphasise that Roman religion lacked dogma, allowing supernatural beings to be integrated pragmatically according to ritual needs.

Domestic spirits such as the *Lares, Penates,* and *Geni* occupied a central place in Roman religious life. The *Lares* protected the household and family lineage, while the *Penates* ensured the household's sustenance. The *Genius* represented the vital force of an individual, particularly the male head of the household. These spirits were not demons in a later moral sense, yet their liminal nature (in between gods and human), places them within a broader demonological framework.Ritual offerings to domestic spirits aimed to maintain harmony and prevent misfortune. The neglect of these rituals risked attracting hostile forces, indicating the preventative function within Roman religious practice. This domestic focus distinguishes Roman demonology to Greek and Egyptian.

6.2 Hostile Spirits: Lemures, Larvae, and the Restless Dead

Roman demonology is particularly concerned with the restless dead. Spirits such as lemures and larvae represented the souls of the improperly buried or socially marginal dead, believed to return to haunt the living.

We fear larvae and the shapes that frighten

Children in the dark, though reason tells us they

Are nothing

(Seneca, Epistulae Morales. 24.18)

Ovid's Fasti describes the festival of Lemuria, during which households performed rituals to appease these spirits and drive them away (Ov. *Fasti,* 5.421-492). These rituals reveal Roman anxieties surrounding death, memory and social obligation. Failure to perform funerary rites threatened not only individual households but the moral fabric of society. Ogden (2002) argues that fear of the restless dead functioned as a mechanism of social regulation, reinforcing norms concerning burial, inheritance, and family duty. Unlike later demonologies, Roman hostile spirits were not enemies of the gods. They were symptoms of ritual failure and social breakdown. Their appeasement through ritual reflects the Roman Emphasis on management rather than moral confrontation. However, Ovid also describes lemures as ancestral spirits who return to to disturb the living;

These rites are performed to appease

the Lemures, the spirits of the silent dead;

they wander and demand their due.

(Ov. *Fasti.* 5.441-442)

6.3 Magic, Curse Tablets and Demonic Mediation

Magical practices provide further insight into Roman demonological thought. Curse tablets (defixiones) frequently invoke underworld spirits and unnamed demons to bind rivals, influence legal outcomes, or secure romantic success. These practices demonstrate that demonic forces were actively engaged rather than passively feared. Ogden (2003) presents the continuity between Greek and Roman magical traditions, noting that roman curse tablets often employ Greek language and deities. However, Roman adaptations emphasised legal and competitive contexts, reflecting civic concerns. Demons functioned as agents who could be compelled through ritual precision and correct invocation. Therefore, Roman legal responses to magic reveal ambivalence toward demonic engagement. While magical practices were widespread, elite discourse increasingly associated magic with social deviance and moral corruption. This tension reflects broader anxieties surrounding power, control, and religious authority in the late Republic and Empire.

6.4 Greek Philosophical Influence and Intermediary Demons

Greek philosophical traditions profoundly influenced Roman demonology, particularly through Platonic and Middle Platonic thought. Apuleius' *De Deo Socratis* offers one of the most explicit discussions of demons in Roman literature, presenting them as intermediary beings between gods and humans. According to Apupleius, demons convey prayers, dreams, and omens, allowing them to maintain cosmic communication. This demonological concept reframes traditional Roman spirit beliefs within an intellectual framework. As Beard et al (1998) observes, such ideas were primarily confined to educated elites and did not replace popular religious practices. Nonetheless, philosophical interpretations introduced moral and metaphysical dimensions that influenced later Christian thought. Stoic philosophy further abstracted demonic agency by identifying divine reason (logos) as immanent in the cosmos. In this context, demonic forces became expressions of rational order rather than autonomous beings. This reinterpretation illustrates the adaptability of Roman religious concepts. Augustine's *City of God* provides his views on Plato's work determining what a daimon is:

How much more sensible and proper would

it be to have Plato's writings read in a temple

dedicated to him than to have the mutilation

of the priests of Cybele, the consecration

of eunuchs, the slashing of insane men,

in the temples of the demons, the perpetration

of every cruel and foul, or foully cruel and cruelly

(Miller, 2009, p. 92)

6.5 Literary Representations and Social Anxiety

Roman literature reflects evolving attitudes toward demonic forces. Poets such as Virgil and Ovid portray supernatural intervention as ambiguous and often threatening, which can indicate a reflection of social anxieties, especially during political transition. Virgil's Aeneid depicts the underworld spirits and divine agents as shaping Rome's destiny, reinforcing the link between supernatural order and imperial ideology. However, *Plint the Elder's Natural History*

adopts a more sceptical tone, cataloguing supernatural beliefs while questioning their validity. This ambivalence reflects an intellectual climate in which traditional beliefs coexisted with rational inquiry. Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* portrays magic and demons as sources of both danger and transformation. The novel's fascination with witches, spirits, and divine intervention reflects popular beliefs while critiquing superstition. Scholar's debate whether Apuleius reinforces or undermines demonological belief, but his work undeniably illustrates the cultural prominence of demonic themes.

6.6 Demons, Morality, and the Rise of Christian Interpretation

Late Roman demonology increasingly intersected with emerging Christian thought. Christian authors reinterpreted traditional Roman spirits as demons aligned with evil, reframing pagan religion as demonic deception. Brown (1978) argues that this moralisation of demons played a crucial role in Christianising the Roman worldview. This transformation marks a significant departure from earlier Roman demonic beliefs. Spirits once viewed as morally neutral or protective became associated with sin and corruption. Understanding this shift is essential for distinguishing pre-Christian Roman beliefs from later theological reinterpretations. Furthermore, the literature and reveal a contemporary attitude towards supernatural beings, hostile spirits and the restless dead. Unlike later Christian demonic beliefs, these Roman sources do not present a unified belief of evil, instead they predict a spectrum of supernatural forces whose moral character is reliant on the situational context to judge the beings' morals.

6.7 Scholarly Interpretations and Debates

Modern scholarships emphasise the pragmatic and syncretic nature of Roman demonology. Beard (1998) cautioned against imposing systematic theology onto Roman religion, while Ogden (2002) highlights the continuity between Roman demonology and everyday ritual practice. Brown (1978) states Roman demonology within broader cultural transformations during Late Antiquity. This chapter aligns with interpretations that view Roman demonology as a reflection of social order, ritual obligation, and cultural adaptation rather than moral absolutism. Roman demonological beliefs reveal a flexible and adaptive religious system grounded in domestic ritual, ancestral concern, and social stability. Demonic forces were managed through ritual precision rather than moral opposition, reflecting Roman priorities of order and continuity. Greek philosophical influence introduced intermediary demons, whilst later Christian reinterpretation moralised traditional spirits. Therefore, Roman demonology

occupies within Mediterranean religious history, bridging ancient functional frameworks and altering theological moralisation.

Roman Demonology, Law, Fear, and Social Control

Roman demonological beliefs did not exist solely within mythological or philosophical discourse but were deeply embedded within legal, social, and moral frameworks. Roman anxieties concerning demons, spirits, and supernatural mediation often intersected with concerns about social stability, criminality, and the misuse of religious power. This section argues that Roman demonology functioned as a mechanism for regulating behaviour by associating supernatural threat with deviance, marginality, and disorder.

Roman legal sources reveal persistent concern regarding magic and supernatural manipulation. While Roman religion accepted ritual engagement with spirits, practices perceived as coercive or antisocial were increasingly criminalised. The *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis* (81 BCE) targeted poisoners and magicians, reflecting anxiety about invisible forms of harm. Although demons are not explicitly named in legal texts, their implied presence is evident in the fear of nocturnal rites, curse tablets, and harmful incantations. Pliny the Elder expresses unease about secret magical practices, associating them with fear and deception:

"Magic is the most fraudulent of all arts, yet it has held such power over mankind that there is scarcely anyone who does not fear it."

(Pliny, *Natural History* 30.2)

This fear reflects not theological concern but social anxiety. Magic threatened the Roman emphasis on transparency, hierarchy, and public ritual. Demonic mediation, when conducted outside state-sanctioned rites, undermined civic authority. Roman sources frequently associate demons and spirits with the night, reinforcing their liminal status. Nighttime was perceived as a period when social order weakened and supernatural threats intensified. Ovid situates the Lemuria rites at midnight, when the paterfamilias performs rituals barefoot and in silence, underscoring the vulnerability of the household. Virgil similarly associates the night with underworld powers. In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas' descent into the underworld occurs through shadowed landscapes populated by monstrous spirits:

"Shapes of many kinds wander here, monstrous forms, ghosts of the dead."

(Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.282–283)

These images reinforce cultural associations between darkness, disorder, and supernatural danger. Demons occupy temporal and spatial thresholds, marking moments when human control is most fragile. Roman demonology also intersected with gender and social marginality. Literary depictions frequently associate women, foreigners, and the poor with magical and demonic practices. In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, witches are portrayed as invoking underworld spirits and manipulating demons to exert illicit power:

"They drag down the moon, disturb the stars, and summon the spirits of the dead."

(Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 1.9)

Such portrayals reflect elite fears of subversive agency rather than theological doctrine. Scholars such as Ogden (2002) argue that demonological accusations functioned as tools for reinforcing social norms, projecting anxiety onto marginalised groups. This dynamic becomes particularly significant in Late Antiquity, when accusations of demonic worship were used polemically against religious minorities, including pagans and later Christians. Despite widespread popular belief, elite Roman authors often expressed scepticism toward demonological fear. Cicero dismisses excessive superstition while acknowledging its cultural prevalence:

"Superstition has spread widely among the nations and seized the weakness of men."

(Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2.72)

This tension between belief and scepticism highlights the pluralism of Roman religious thought. Demons were culturally real even when intellectually doubted. Their power lay not in ontological certainty but in social belief and ritual action. Seneca similarly frames fear of demons as a psychological weakness rather than a cosmic reality, yet his repeated references to such fears suggest their persistence:

"We are tortured by imaginary fears as much as real ones."

(Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 13.12)

Elite scepticism did not eliminate demonological belief; instead, it coexisted uneasily with popular practice.As Roman society transitioned into Late Antiquity, demonological language increasingly became a means of defining religious identity. Pagan rituals once understood as

traditional were recast as demonic deception by Christian authors. Lactantius argues explicitly that pagan gods were demons misleading humanity:

"Those whom men worship as gods are in truth unclean spirits."

(Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 2.14)

This reinterpretation represents a decisive break from earlier Roman demonology. Demons were no longer neutral or functional agents, but morally corrupt beings opposed to divine truth. This shift transformed demonology from a pragmatic system of ritual management into a moral battlefield. When compared with Greek and Egyptian traditions, Roman demonology reveals a heightened concern with social regulation and legal order. Greek *daimones* explained fate and moral ambiguity; Egyptian demons enforced cosmic balance; Roman demons increasingly policed social boundaries. This evolution reflects Rome's prioritisation of civic stability and its vulnerability to cultural transformation during periods of political and religious change.

Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis is essential for understanding ancient demonological beliefs, as it reveals both shared Mediterranean concerns and culturally specific religious logics. While all areas conceptualised demonic beings in markedly different ways, each tradition employed demons as mechanisms for negotiating uncertainty, enforcing order, and mediating the relationship between humans and the divine. This chapter synthesises the preceding analyses to identify structural continuities, theological divergences, and functional parallels across the three cultures. Rather than seeking a universal definition of demons, this chapter adopts a functional comparative framework. Demonic beings are analysed according to their roles in cosmology, morality, ritual practice, and social regulation. This approach underlines how similar existential concerns – such as death, misfortune, and moral responsibility- produced diverse demonological expressions shaped by cultural contexts.

7.1 Moral Ambiguity versus Moral Function

One of the most significant comparative concerns of the moral status of demons; Greek daimons are characterized by moral division. As demonstrated in the epic, tragedy and philosophy, daimons could act as protectors, punishers or sources of madness without occupying a fixed moral category. However, in contrast Egyptian demons were defined primarily by function, rather than moral alignment. Operating within the cosmological framework of ma'at, demons enforced order and punished transgression without embodying evil. Their actions were legitimate extensions of divine authority, particularly in funerary and judicial contexts. The absence of moral dualism in Egyptian religion prevented the development of demons as oppositional forces. In relation to Roman demonic beliefs, their concept occupied an intermediate position. Early Roman spirits were morally neutral and domestically orientated, yet later Roman literature increasingly associates demons with social deviance and moral anxiety.

7.2 Cosmology and Demonic Hierarchy

Cosmological structure plays a crucial role in shaping demonological beliefs. Egyptian demonology is the most hierarchically organised, reflecting the centrality of cosmic order and divine kingship. Demons operate within a clearly defined system, subordinate to major deities

and integrated into the afterlife journey. In comparison, Greek cosmology is fluid. While Olympian gods occupy hierarchy, daimones existed in liminal spaces between gods and humans. This lack of rigid structure allows for greater interpretive flexibility but also contributes to the ambiguity surrounding demonic agency. Additionally, comparing Roman beliefs, this system reflects pragmatism rather than systematic hierarchy. Spirits are embedded in specific places, actions, and social roles rather than arranged with a cosmic order. This decentralisation reinforces ritual rather than the theological nature of Roman demonology.

7.3 Ritual Engagement and Management of Demonic Forces

Across all three cultures, demons were managed through ritual rather than opposed through moral struggle. Greek rituals of purification, sacrifice, and appeasement aimed to restore balance when demonic forces disrupted social or cosmic order. Curse tablets and chthonic invocations demonstrate active engagement with demonic power. Egyptian ritual practice emphasised control through knowledge, speech and symbolic power. Knowing the names of demons and performing correct rituals neutralised threats and ensured safe passage through dangerous liminal spaces. Ritual competence, rather than moral purity alone, determined success. Roman ritual practice focused on prevention and appeasement. Domestic rituals, festivals such as Lemuria and legal restrictions on magic illustrate attempts to contain supernatural threat through communal practice.

7.4 Demons, Death and Liminality

Demonic beings consistently occupy liminal spaces associated with death and transition. Greek chthonic daimones and restless dead reflect anxieties surrounding burial and pollution. Egyptian demons guard thresholds in the afterlife, testing the deceased's knowledge and purity. Roman Lemures and larvae embody fears of improper burial and disrupted ancestry. These shared concerns with universal human anxiety surrounding death while illustrating culturally specific responses. Greek demonology emphasises inherited guilt and fate, Egyptian demonology focuses on cosmic judgement and renewal, and roman demonology prioritises ancestral continuity and social obligation.

7.5 Social Control and Moral Regulation

Demonological beliefs functioned as mechanisms of social control in all three cultures. In Greece, demons externalised responsibility for transgression while reinforcing moral boundaries through fear of pollution and divine retribution. In Egypt, demons legitimised social hierarchy and kingship by enforcing ma'at.In Rome, fear of restless spirits reinforced funerary obligations and domestic piety. These functions demonstrate that demonology was not peripheral superstition but an integral component of social regulation. Demons articulated consequences for ritual neglect, moral failure, and social disruption.

7.6 The Impact of Syncretism and Cultural Exchange

Cultural exchange profoundly shaped demonological development. Greek demonology influenced Roman thought through philosophy, literature, and magic, while Egyptian religious concepts entered the Mediterranean through Hellenistic syncretism. Despite this exchange, local traditions retained distinctive features. Roman adoption of Greek intermediary demons illustrates selective integration rather than wholesale assimilation. Egyptian demonology, while influencing magical traditions, remained resistant to moral dualism. These patterns highlight the adaptability of demonological concepts within shared cultural spaces.

7.7 From Functional to Moralised Demonology

The comparative analysis reveals a gradual shift from functional demonology toward moralised interpretations, particularly in Roman contexts. This transition becomes explicit with the rise of Christianity, which reclassified traditional demons as agent of evil. Understanding pre-Christian demonology is therefore essential for avoiding retrospective misinterpretation.

7.8 Summary

Comparative analysis demonstrates demonic beliefs in Ancient Greece, Egypt and Rome were culturally embedded responses to shared existential concerns rather than expression of universal evil. Demons functioned as mediators or order, agents of justice, and explanations for misfortune. Their forms and meanings were shaped by cosmology, ritual practice and social structure. This synthesis underlines the importance of contextual interpretation and provides a foundation for the dissertation's concluding reflections on the historical contingency of demonology concepts.

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to examine demonic beliefs in Ancient Greece, Egypt and Rome through a comparative analysis, challenging later moralised and theological assumptions that

frame demons as inherently evil beings. By analysing literary, philosophical, and magical sources within their respective cultural contexts, the study has demonstrated that demonological concepts in the ancient worlds were neither uniform nor morally absolute. Instead, demons acted as cultural systems through which they enforced order, and articulated the boundaries between the human and the divine.

The analysis of Greek demonology revealed a system characterised by moral division and conceptual flexibility. Greek daimones operated as intermediaries between gods and humans, as explanations for misfortune physically and mentally, and as enforcers of justice through underworld punishment. Rather than embodying evil, *daimons* reflected Greek concerns with fate (*moira)* and the limits of humans. Epic, tragedy, and philosophy each adapted demonological language to explore different aspects of these concerns, demonstrating the adaptability of *daimons* across literary and intellectual traditions. This ambiguity presents the inadequacy of later forced dualistic moral frameworks onto Greek religious thought.

Egyptian demonology, by contrast, was embedded within a highly structured cosmological system governed by the principles of order and chaos. Demonic beings functioned as agents of order or forces of chaos in contextual situations, enforcing divine justice in both the earthly and afterlife realms. Funerary literature, magical texts, and iconography demonstrate Egyptian demons were essential to maintaining cosmic balance, guarding sacred spaces, and punishing moral impurity. Their capacity to cause harm was based upon divine orders rather than moral corruption, highlighting the performative and functional nature of Egyptian religious belief. This chapter illustrated that Egyptian demonology resists moral categorisation and instead prioritises a dualistic function towards cosmic stability and continuity.

Roman demonological beliefs reflected a pragmatic and syncretic religious culture shaped by domestic concerns, ancestral obligation, and social order. Indigenous Roman spirits occupied liminal positions between gods and humans, while hostile spirits (*lemures and larvae*) articulated fear surrounding improper burials and social disorder. Greek philosophy introduced intermediary demonic concepts into Roman intellect, yet these ideas coexisted with popular ritual practice rather than replacing it. Over time, Roman demonology increasingly attuned to

moral ambiguity, particularly during Late Antiquity, paving the way for Christian concepts that reframe benevolent or malevolent entities as embodiments of evil. This transitional position presents Rome's role between ancient functional demons and later theological Christian systems.

The comparative analysis demonstrated that despite cultural differences, Greek, Egyptian, and Roman demonologies shared several structural features. Across all three cultures, demons occupied liminal spaces associated with transition, particularly death and illness. They functioned as mediators between realms, enforcing boundaries and articulating consequences for social behaviour deemed disrespectful by the Gods. Importantly, demons were not opposed through moral struggle but managed through knowledge, and correct practice. This shared emphasis on ritual engagement acknowledges the practicality of ancient religion that challenges modern assumptions that religious belief is primarily good or evil. One of the most significant findings of this study is the recognition that demonological beliefs served as instruments of social regulation. By externalising misfortune and attributing it to supernatural agents, ancient societies were able to preserve divine justice while acknowledging human limitation. Demons reinforced social norms by punishing offensive behaviour, progressing authority, and maintaining unity of the community. In Egypt, demonology supported kingship ideology; in Greece, it articulated inherited guilt and moral responsibility; and in Rome, it reinforced domestic and ancestral obligations. These functions reveal demonology as an integral component of social order rather than a negative influence.

This dissertation has also presented the dangers of outdated interpretation. Later Christian demonology fundamentally reshaped ancient concepts by casting demons as rebellious enemies of divine authority. When applied analytically, such concepts change the original meanings and functions of ancient demonology. By situating demons within their historical and cultural contexts, this study contributes to a more methodological approach to the study of ancient religion. Methodologically, the functional and comparative approach adopted in this dissertation has proven effective in addressing the complex and diverse beliefs. Rather than seeking a universal definition of demons, the study examined what demonic beings did within their respective systems. This approach allowed for meaningful comparison without removing specificity. However, limitations remain. The reliance on elite literary sources, particularly in Greek and Roman contexts, inevitably privileges certain perspectives. Concluding demonic

beliefs in Ancient Greece, Egypt, and Rome were not expressions of universal evil, but rather culturally contingent responses to shared human concerns, enhancing our understanding of ancient religion but also challenging modern assumptions about the nature of belief, morality, and the supernatural. By interpreting ancient demonology on its own terms, this dissertation affirms the importance of contextual analysis.

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