

ITTAI GRADEL and NILS ARNE PEDERSEN

The Lost Novel of King Solomon and the Demons

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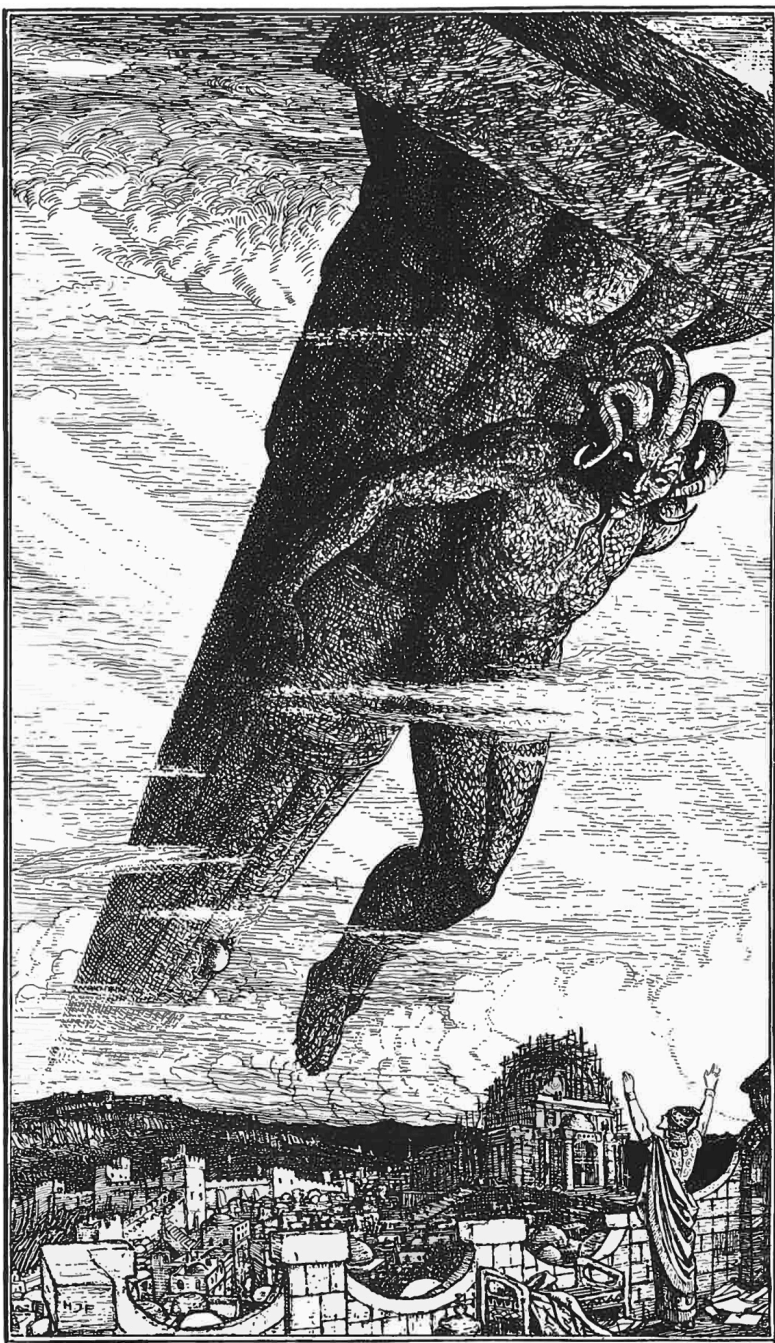
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EPHIPPAS & THE DEMON OF THE RED SEA BRING
THE GREAT PILLAR TO SOLOMON

Ittai Gradel and Nils Arne Pedersen

The Lost Novel of King Solomon and the Demons

New Evidence
on the Testament of Solomon
in Antiquity

Mohr Siebeck

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Frontispiece: Drawing by H. J. Ford for James (1913), *ad* 116: Solomon coercing the demon Ephippas (*Testament of Solomon* 24.2).

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Rings catalogue nos. (left to right) 2, 4, 3, 9. Photo Ittai Gradel.

Preface

This book began with a chance discovery. In 2019 one of its authors, Ittai Gradel, noticed a Roman ring in a provincial German auction and bought it because he was puzzled by the mysterious inscription engraved on its ring stone: something evidently about Solomon, but otherwise making little immediate sense (this was the Kaufmann ring, no. 2 in our ring catalogue). Gradel showed it to his friend Nils Arne Pedersen, the other author, and to him it rang a bell: somehow, somewhere he had seen and read something like those three words on that ring stone ...

So we set out on a journey which has taken us far and wide, tackling sources in seven mostly extinct languages: Koine Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Sahidic Coptic, Syriac, as well as Arabic and Ge'ez (where we are sadly both ignorami), zigzagging back and forth over the customary borders between many academic disciplines: theology, archaeology, history of religion, philology, literary criticism, folklore studies, dactyliology (the study of finger rings and gem engraving) – and more, and equally nerdy. One author, Gradel, is an ancient historian and classical archaeologist, among other things specialising in ancient rings and gems; Pedersen is a theologian, church historian, and knows Coptic and Syriac. But even in combination we could not cover all these fields, simultaneously vast and minute. We have indeed frequently felt like dilettanti and harbour no illusions that specialists in one field or another will not find that we have misunderstood much: we can only look stoically forward to standing corrected on many an issue. Yet at the same time our investigation has been a labour of love, exactly because it constantly and unpredictably led us outside our accustomed comfort zones into enchanted realms of ever new and delightful knowledge.

We have even at times felt an eerie whiff of divine – or perhaps demonic – assistance, as ever more such inscribed Solomon rings kept appearing in the antiquities market: till now *five* ‘new’ ones, all to receive their first academic publication here, have come our way. Indeed, Tolkien fans will immediately recognise the One Ring of our story as the Kaufmann ring, the one that first set us going, and the only one with precise provenance, discovered by Bedouins at Abu Mena in Egypt’s Western Desert in the mid-nineteenth century. To these five rings should be added five similar, previously published ones, bringing the total thus far to ten (we cannot help but recall the *Nine Rings for Mortal Men* of the 19 rings controlled by that supreme One Ring in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* ...).

In the course of our work we have received generous assistance from many human quarters too. Above all we wish to express our gratitude to Annegret Wolf, née Kaufmann, for sharing her knowledge and memories of her father Carl Maria Kaufmann; to Damon Nestor Ploumis for translating *ms* E; to Hanne Lavér Hansen for assistance with translating *mss* G and D; to the Director of Istanbul Archaeological Museum Rahmi Asal and to Ebru Zeren for kind assistance in getting us photographs of the Istanbul ring stone (no. 1 in our ring catalogue); further to Felix Albrecht, Ryan Bailey, Christfried Böttrich, Torben Bramming, Sebastian Brock, Adam Bülow-Jacobsen, Alberto Camplani, Jan Doehorn, Michael Erdman, René Falkenberg, Dorotei Getov, Jannis Grossmann, Ian Henderson, Richard Kalmin, Wolfram Kinzig, Jacob Mortensen, John Møller Larsen,

Greg Rowe, Kai Scheuermann, Markus Scholz, Stephen Shoemaker, Jeffrey Spier, Lasse Løvlund Toft, and Carina Weiß. We are grateful for financial support from H. P. Hjerl Hansen Mindefondet for Dansk Palæstinaforskning and from The Department of Theology, Aarhus University; and also to Brepols, to California University Press, and to the Diözesanarchiv Limburg for gracious permission to publish or republish material.

The Septuagint is quoted in the Greek text of Rahlfs (1935) and the English translation of Pietersma & Wright (2007); for other biblical translations we use the New International Version (2011); in both cases we intermittently adapt the translations for precision. All other translations are our own unless otherwise stated.

A digressionary word of caution, or perhaps of warning, seems fitting here. As already suggested, we shall include hitherto unpublished, and only recently published, archaeological material in our study: the ten rings mentioned. Indeed, this book could not have been written, or at least brought to make sense as a scholarly project, in any other way.

However, many archaeologists today argue that any such archaeological objects whose provenance or ownership history before December 1970 (strictly the date of a UNESCO Convention on illegally traded antiquities, but essentially an arbitrary time limit) is not certainly known should be left entirely out of academic publications. American peer-reviewed archaeology journals in particular now tend to rigidly follow this principle, as do increasingly most of the British peer-reviewed ones. The argument, unquestionably sound, in support of this principle is that any archaeological publication of previously unpublished objects devoid of old (i.e. pre-1970) provenance will add to their commercial value, thereby encouraging illicit excavation of archaeological sites.

The problem with this principle, however ethical in theory, is that it is in practice incompatible with the very notion of academic scholarship. Our ten rings which we here publish or republish furnish a good case in point. Eight of them do not have old, pre-1970 provenance (though there is nothing to suggest that any of them stemmed from recent illicit excavations: the question is, we must stress, one of ethics, not of legality). All these rings are small and fairly uncommercial objects, which will always – at least until recognised as of interest in academic study, such as the present one – fly under the radar and be traded for very measly amounts by, typically, ancient coin dealers. In the very nature of things, meticulous provenance records will hardly ever have been kept and made to accompany objects of such small monetary worth; and to insist on the same one-size-fits-all rule for publishing them as is also employed in the case of, say, high quality, and highly commercial, ancient marble sculpture makes no sense in practice. Nonetheless, these same standards and rules are now increasingly getting adopted by academic journals for all and every ancient object coming out of the marketplace, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world. The consequences of this policy will be devastating. Not only can new evidence only in exceptional cases enter scholarly discourse, for most such objects will not have appeared from controlled and licit archaeological excavations; but, even worse, that very discourse will get ever more fictitious if having to ignore known evidence not allowed to be mentioned or discussed. The wilful ignoring of such material evidence – though legally traded and acquired – will ultimately result in the death of scholarship.

The *Testament of Solomon* appears to elicit interest well outside the narrow academic field (try, for instance, searching those words on YouTube). And there may, of course, be many other reasons for reading a book than those which compelled its authors to write it. Some readers will plough through it all. Others will focus their interest on our

overall interpretation of the *Testament of Solomon*, on its contexts, religious and social, in the ancient world, but have less patience with highly specialised arguments expounded along the way. Others yet again may pluck from our book according to each their own particular interests. Specialist academics will hopefully be able to make use of Chapter II with its overview of the last two centuries of scholarship on the *Testament of Solomon*; but most other readers may wish to skip this chapter altogether (and can do so without any problems for following the book's argument). Similarly, non-specialist readers can simply fast-forward past two technical digressions which we have marked in smaller typeface as a sort of extended footnotes (pp. 71–78 and 162–64).

It is indeed our hope that some of the enjoyment we have felt in writing this book on an extraordinary and fascinating text will come across and be shared by more readers than would perhaps typically engage with an academic monograph.

Ittai Gradel and Nils Arne Pedersen
Rudkøbing and Aarhus, September 2025

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I. Introduction

[T]he [Testament of Solomon] is without any doubt very foolish, and superstitious, and corrupt, and bad; but ..., at the same time, it is extremely interesting and amusing, and sometimes picturesque.

M. R. James (1899)

‘After we are all released from our work on the Temple of God, after sunset when I rest myself one of the evil demons comes and takes away from me half of my pay and half my food. Then he also grasps my right hand and sucks my thumb, and look, my soul is depressed and so my body becomes thinner with every passing day.’

Testament of Solomon 1.4

The earliest appearance of a vampire in literature, this attack on King Solomon’s young favourite turned out to be demoniacal overreach. The youth’s complaint to Solomon set in motion a sequence of events where the sage king managed to entrap and enslave not only Ornias the nasty thumb-sucking ogre, but the very King of the Demons Beelzebul the fallen angel and all his underlings, indeed the entire demon population of the world.

The *Testament of Solomon* (henceforth *TSol*), purportedly narrated by Solomon himself, is one of the strangest offshoots ever sprouted from the fertile growth of writings continuing and elaborating on biblical narratives. The biblical theme of King Solomon and his God-given wisdom was indeed continuously exploited and ever expanded in folktales and in literature: Solomon understood the speech of birds and animals; he knew how to foretell the future; he acquired the power to coerce all demons to do his bidding; his earthly and spiritual powers knew no bounds – at least until he finally, led astray by carnal desire overcoming all his proverbial sagacity, transgressed against God’s commands and was deprived of his superpowers (thus the ending of *TSol*, quaintly mirroring its beginning of Ornias’ downfall caused by his insatiable lust for blood and plunder).

The storyline of *TSol* may be briefly summarised.¹ Having discovered that his favourite boy, engaged on the construction of his grand Temple in Jerusalem, every night falls victim to the parasitic attacks of the demon Ornias, Solomon fervently prays for guidance. God hears him and sends the archangel Michael with a remedy: a ring with such powers as to overcome even the strongest of demons. Predator becomes prey when the boy employs the ring to capture Ornias and bring him before Solomon. Ornias is next forced to betray his master Beelzebul, the King of the Demons, who similarly succumbs to the power of the ring and is dragged howling and fire-spouting before Solomon. With Beelzebul’s capture all his subject demons likewise come into Solomon’s power. One by one they pass muster before Solomon and are made to tell about themselves, including what remedies and angel names are effective in combating and thwarting them.

The demons present a motley and eccentric bunch: one has no head, another is all head and no body; one has the body of a snail, another is half horse, half fish (a hippo-camp), yet another a three-headed dragon, one impersonates the dead and loiters among

¹ The summary is of the text as given in *ms P*, which we argue is the best and earliest of the complete textual versions of *TSol* known (cf. p. 55 below); Conybeare’s 1898 translation of *ms P* is reprinted Ch. IX.1 below.

tombs to lure the living to their destruction; seven evil demon sisters seem to represent the starry constellation of the Pleiades; some are shape-shifters, appearing now as a comely maiden, next as a lion, then sprouting wings to travel with lightning speed; some are the offspring of angels, and can be made subject to them; all specialise in various forms of evil and torture, each concentrating on a particular type of human victims; a few can be truly coerced only by Jesus; one, Enepsigos by name, has three heads and can scarcely be contained by the strongest bonds. She is one of the demons to prophesy to Solomon about the future, including the coming of Christ Jesus, but also about the demons' future liberation from Solomon's power. Solomon did not, he here comments in hindsight, believe these prophecies till they came true and the demons escaped to once again roam and work their evil in the world; but now, about to die, he is writing this Testament, so that the children of Israel may know the powers and shapes of the demons, and the remedies and names to combat them, indeed all the information he had wrung from the ogres themselves when they were in his power.

This whole assemblage of monsters, though each contributing their own weird little tale of evildoing, is still clearly part of a common and overarching story. One long passage (ch. 18), however, notably interrupts the narrative flow with a monotonous catalogue listing of thirty-six so-called decans, a particular type of zodiacal demons (this section, we shall indeed argue, was a secondary interpolation).

Having now brought Beelzebul and his underlings in his power, Solomon sensibly employs them as a hyper-effective source of manual labour for the construction of his grand Temple, till it is finally and gloriously completed. Solomon is admired, visited, and praised by all the kings of the earth, as also by the Queen of the South (the biblical Queen of Sheba), who is a witch (a piece of information left oddly unexplained). A rather delightful digression now reintroduces Ornias: an inheritance dispute between a father and his son is brought before Solomon as judge, but proceedings are interrupted when Ornias suddenly bursts out in loud and inappropriate laughter. For the demon already knows of the son's imminent death, destined to render the entire court case futile. Forced by Solomon to reveal how he acquires such knowledge of the future, Ornias then expounds how he and his fellow demons flutter about in the heavens and eavesdrop on God's counsels, before finally in exhaustion falling back to earth as shooting stars.

The narrative is once more set in motion by a letter to Solomon from a royal colleague, a King of Arabia, who implores Solomon to rid him of a powerful wind demon ravaging his lands. Solomon complies and sends off his favourite – the original victim of Ornias' blood-sucking – with the power ring and a wineskin or sack, which is then used to capture and contain the demon, Ephippas by name. Ephippas is the physically strongest of all demons: only he can lift and put in place a huge building block for the Temple, its cornerstone. But one final demon hunt remains: entrapped under a huge column at the bottom of the Red Sea, ever since Moses and his people crossed over there, lies the mighty demon Abetzethibod, who in days of yore hardened Pharaoh's heart against the Israelites. Ephippas is made to fetch and bring Abetzethibod too, plus the column, and both these super-demons are now commanded by Solomon to uphold the enormous column (the Milky Way?) in the sky, which they swear to do 'until the world's end'. Thus Solomon's demon coercions end and culminate: all the world's demons and all their immense powers are now under his control.

And then he loses it. This finale is told with breath-taking speed and brevity, as if the narrator had suddenly tired of his own story and now only wanted to wrap it up and be

done with it. Totally besotted with a gentile *femme fatale* and promised sex with her in return, Solomon is enticed into worshipping pagan gods with a strange sacrifice of grasshoppers. Immediately the Spirit of God abandons him, he becomes an utter fool and even builds temples to the girl's idols; his superhuman powers are lost, the demons all escape, he is the laughingstock of demons and idols, even while remaining king. All his demonic coercions are annulled – bar one: his command to Abiezethibod and Ephippas to uphold the column in the sky till the end of the world remains in force.

This strange *TSol* tale, 'a combination of folk-tales and a magician's vade-mecum', in the phrase of one modern editor,² is but one strand in a wide web of stories about Solomon and his demons, told and re-told from ancient Israel to the Roman Empire to Southeast Asia, in modern Western esotericism and literary fiction, popular among Jews and Christians, Muslims and magicians, sorcerers and Satanists, alchemists and amulet-makers. The Talmud and the Quran, the *Arabian Nights*, the grimoires of European occultism: all make reference to Solomon and his demons, whether based directly on *TSol*, or on oral versions of this and related tales.³ Indeed, in all three Abrahamic traditions, whether as Solomon, Shlomo, or Suleiman, he came to be seen and narrated as the ultimate sage and demon-tamer, the greatest wizard the world has ever known.

Versions of these stories of Solomon and his hordes of demons likely circulated orally as folktales well before achieving any literary form. By common consent, however, the earliest written version known to us is indeed this weird and wonderful *TSol*, written in the Koine Greek that was standard as a lingua franca during the Roman Empire. Preserved in its entirety only in late medieval or even more recent manuscripts, the text is usually taken as much older. Here, however, scholarly agreement ends: where, when, and why it was written; whether it was originally Jewish or Christian; whether it belongs in the early Christian period, or even earlier, but then underwent Christian editing; or perhaps received final form only well into Byzantine times; whether it is, in terms of its literary genre, even a real testament – an admonitory farewell speech – or is better viewed as a manual for demon handlers, or perhaps rather as a proto-zoological catalogue of demons: all and sundry such fairly basic questions have long been, and still remain, subject to debate.

Further questions have more rarely, or not at all, been asked: why do most *TSol* versions contain passages told in the third person, when the literary genre of 'testament' indeed required such to be held in first person narration? Why is its character so uneven, changing from racy narrative at beginning and end to the trite and formulaic demon listing in chapter 18? And switching from expansive storytelling to the final hurried wrapping-up of the tale? Which of the several versions or recensions of *TSol* is the older and more original one? What exactly is the meaning of the ten inscribed rings which we present in this volume, and which appear to quote from some version or other of *TSol*? When was *TSol*, in its earliest version, first written? Where? In what contexts and environment? Who, exactly, would have been its earliest readers?

We believe that we can contribute new and specific evidence to elucidate and perhaps even conclusively answer many of these questions. This new evidence comes from archaeology: ten inscribed rings or ring stones, some clearly originating from a Christian context, and all datable to the third century. We shall argue that these ring inscriptions

² McCown (1922), 1.

³ Talmud: see Ch. VI.2 below; see further pp. 191f below.

are in fact quotations from *TSol*, or strictly from an early version of it, for convenience to be here designated *Proto-TSol*: a novel narrated of Solomon in the third person rather than by Solomon himself, as is more commonly the case in the *TSol* manuscripts known to us.

The writer who produced this *Proto-TSol* we shall term ‘the author’. In contrast, the redactor or epitomiser who first changed the Solomon third person novel *Proto-TSol* into the first person testamentary *TSol* we shall refer to as ‘the editor’.

Let us set out, however, with some of the more recent editors and scholars to have devoted their energies to *TSol*, beginning in 1837 when a full and complete version of the text was first published, thus finally making *TSol* generally available for study.

II. *TSol* in Scholarship 1837–2023

In its present form *TSol* claims to be a testament authored by the biblical King Solomon who, if a historical person, would have lived in the tenth century BC.¹ Fictitious pre-datings were typical of the genre of such parabiblical or apocryphal texts which continued and elaborated on the biblical narratives. No modern scholar has ever taken the text's own claim of its date seriously: everything suggests that it was an original Greek composition (for one thing, it is written in the Hellenistic and Roman standard Koine Greek). There, however, agreement ends, and suggestions for the date of the text have ranged from the first century BC far into the Byzantine or early medieval era. Similarly, no consensus has been reached on the original or essential character of the text: whether it was from the outset a Christian composition, or originally a Jewish tale only later, and superficially, undergoing Christian redaction.²

The following overview of two centuries of scholarship on *TSol* is decidedly for specialists; other readers may prefer to skip it and can indeed move directly to Chapter III without resultant problems in following this book's argument.

1. 1837–1950

Fleck and Bornemann. The *editio princeps* of *TSol*, an edition of *ms P* (Paris, BN, gr. 38), was published by Ferdinand Florens Fleck in 1837; his only laconic suggestion as to the origin of the work was to characterise it as a '*monumentum Byzantinum*'.³ Seven years later followed a translation to German by Friedrich August Bornemann, who suggested that *TSol* stemmed from a time when paganism had not yet been conquered by Christianity: *TSol* was composed by a Jewish Christian who endeavoured, through this mythical narrative, to demonstrate the superiority of monotheism over polytheism. More specifically, Bornemann pointed to similarities with the demonology in early Christian writers, Lactantius in particular. In two other articles Bornemann further published a useful series of notes of textual criticism on Fleck's text.⁴

Conybeare. It was, however, Frederick Cornwallis Conybeare's introduction to his English translation of Fleck's edition of *TSol* (1898) which basically set the agenda for all

¹ See the contributions in Handy (1997) for the possible historicity of Solomon.

² The following summary of *TSol* research makes no claim to being comprehensive: various other aspects of the research literature will feature in the more detailed discussions on points of interest throughout the present volume. For this overview we have chosen to concentrate on monographs (including doctoral theses) focusing on *TSol*, as well as some other contributions we deem to have played a particularly important role in *TSol* scholarship. For older – partial – publications of *TSol* before Fleck's 1837 *editio princeps*, going back to 1615, see Bailey (2017), 170f n. 1; for more recent research post-Fleck, see the summary in Duling (1983), 940–43.

³ Fleck (1837), 111–40; quote p. x.

⁴ Bornemann (1844), 9–17; translation 18–56: textual criticism: Bornemann (1843); (1846).

later discussions of the origin and dating of *TSol*. Conybeare thought that *TSol* ‘can be most properly described as Jewish and Gnostic’;⁵ in sum, he assumed that the original *TSol* was a Jewish text of the first century, which could well have been a collection of incantations mentioned by Josephus who ascribed them to Solomon as author (*Ant.* 8.2.5.45–49, see Ch. VI.1 below); it had then, however, undergone a very early Christian recension, perhaps around 100. This Christian recension may have stemmed from a gnostic sect like the so-called Ophites.⁶

This assessment was based on a list of phrases in *TSol* ‘which have a New Testament colour’; these, he argued, do not show *TSol*’s dependence on New Testament texts, but rather⁷

that the writer of the document was a Hellenistic Jew, who naturally employed the same phraseology and idioms as the writers of the New Testament. He has not the air of imitating another document; and if he were writing with the Gospels before him as a model, he would surely imitate them in a more unmistakable manner.

There is a fundamental problem with Conybeare’s approach: he failed to consider that more direct allusions to the gospels would have compromised *TSol*’s own claim to be an ancient text from King Solomon’s times.

Conybeare further assumed that *TSol* could provide a religious and historical background for Paul’s idea of demonic rulers:⁸

Even the phrase κοσμοκράτορες τοῦ κόσμου (§ 72 [18.2]), in spite of its recurrence in Paul (Eph. vi. 12), cannot be regarded as imported from Paul into the *Testament*. For Paul merely glances at a system of belief which the *Testament* sets before us in lengthy detail.

These words in Paul, *Ephesians* 6.12: κοσμοκράτορες τοῦ κόσμου, ‘world rulers of the darkness’, are indeed used in *TSol* 18.2 in connection with the doctrine or system of the thirty-six decans (also found in Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.58 and Firmicus Maternus’ *Mathesis*, of c. 334–337, 4.21.2f).⁹ Conybeare furthermore recognised such a system of belief in a set of demonological-astrological ideas in Origen’s *Contra Celsum*, quoted there from Celsus’ anti-Christian treatise of c. 177–180.¹⁰ Celsus presented these ideas as mainstream Christian, but this was rejected by Origen, who instead ascribed them to ‘the very insignificant heresy of the Ophites’.¹¹ The ideas could, according to Conybeare, not only supply a basis for understanding Paul’s letters (though more than a century older), but also explain why such a gnostic-Christian group as the Ophites would have taken an interest in a Jewish text, as Conybeare thought the original *TSol*. Conybeare thus saw the demonic prophecies of Christ in *TSol*, and the wording it shared with Paul, *Ephesians* 6.12, as independent of the New Testament scriptures, instead stemming from a heterodox group of Christians such as, indeed, the Ophites. In Conybeare’s view

⁵ Conybeare (1898a), 5.

⁶ Conybeare (1898a), 13f; Conybeare, following Origen, termed them ‘Ophiani’.

⁷ Conybeare (1898a), 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Conybeare (1898a), 6–10.

¹⁰ Chadwick (1953), xxvi–xxviii for Celsus’ *True Discourse* (Λόγος Ἀληθείας); Grant (1988), 136.

¹¹ Orig. *Contra Celsum* 6.24–38; 6.24: ἀκηροτάτης αἰρέσεως Ὀφειανῶν, Marcovich (2001), 401.

the seven demons in *TSol* 8.2 and the seven ruling demons of the Ophites in *Contra Celsum* 6.30 show a point of contact between these ideas.

Subsequently, however, scholars have not only rejected that the two texts refer to the same demons, but have further pointed out that *TSol* lacks the specific mythology and ideas characteristic of the Ophites and similar gnostic groupings.¹²

There are obvious chronological problems with Conybeare's approach: he used much later texts to explain much earlier texts. Against Conybeare's claim that Paul's references to demonic rulers presuppose an advanced demonological system like the one in *TSol*, it is just as feasible to assume that Paul's vague phraseology contributed to the subsequent development of the more fully expanded demonological universe in *TSol*. More fundamentally, it seems inherently improbable that Christian sects of the mid-second century would not have been influenced by the earlier New Testament texts.¹³

Most interesting was perhaps Conybeare's attempt to find datable reference points in *TSol*'s intertextual references to ancient Jewish parabiblical texts:¹⁴

The reference to the lost apocryph of Iannes and Jambres might well belong to the first century, when that book was in the hands of Christian writers. So also might the mention of the fallen angels and their offspring, of the three and more heavens, of the sons of the giants, of the eleven aeons. Many of these ideas are derived from the Enoch literature, which was so popular in the earliest age of the Church.

The use of these texts in *TSol* is very doubtfully relevant for a precise or early dating of it. The two Egyptian magicians Jannes and Jambres who fought Moses are indeed mentioned in *TSol* 25.4, as they are also in *2 Tim* 3.8f, and a specific book about them, the *Apocryphon of Jannes and Jambres*, was indeed authored in the first century. But what is mentioned in *TSol* is not any specific work of that title. As pointed out by Pietersma, the two magicians were well known in a tradition separate from their biblical appearance and going back to the second century BC. Indeed, the *Apocryphon* sprang from that tradition. This book, of which fragments are preserved, was known to Origen and other ancient and medieval authors, and may well have been in use for a long time on a popular level.¹⁵ Hence the argument is doubly unconvincing: the *TSol* reference may be to the tradition rather than to the actual book; and even if we, charitably, here see a reference to the book, it provides no clear dating assistance anyway.

However, Conybeare is right that the use in *TSol* 5.2 and 17.1 of the idea from *1 Enoch* that demons are the offspring of fallen angels¹⁶ best fits the earliest generations

¹² McCown (1922), 70f, arguing that the seven demons in *Contra Celsum* 6.30 are the seven planets, but agreeing with Conybeare (1898a, 24 n. 2) that those in *TSol* 8 are the Pleiades; also Alexander (1986), 375; Busch (2006), 145–48 for the widespread idea of seven demons as astral entities.

¹³ Thus Conybeare assumed that patristic sources evidence a gnosticism which existed prior to the formation of the New Testament scriptures, and which may therefore provide a background for understanding these scriptures. This assumption runs parallel with similar ideas in then contemporary German scholarship, especially Wilhelm Bousset and the so-called History of Religions School in Göttingen: this may well have been a case of mutual inspiration. This approach is generally abandoned in modern scholarship.

¹⁴ Conybeare (1898a), 10.

¹⁵ Pietersma (1994); Erho (2025) for the recent discovery of a complete Ethiopic (Ge'ez) translation.

¹⁶ Further Alexander (2003), 628–30, stressing that *TSol* also provides explanations of some demons' origins not corresponding with those given in *1 Enoch* (which are not wholly consistent either); note also Duling (1983), 952f, 955. *1 Enoch* 1–36 (these first chapters constitute the oldest part of what

of Christianity, when *1 Enoch* was popular, was mentioned by several church fathers, and was even quoted in one of the texts that eventually entered the New Testament (*Jude* 14f), whereas it later, from the third century onwards, fell into disrepute.¹⁷ But even this does not provide the third century as a chronological limit for *TSol*: though *1 Enoch* was eventually rejected by normative theologians – the church elites responsible for almost all our written sources for the history of early Christianity – it remained in use at a popular level among Christians, at least in Egypt, well into the fifth century.¹⁸ *TSol* was in any case clearly not a normative theological text produced and furthered by these church elites: indeed, it is exactly its popular character, as evidencing another and lesser known form of Christianity, which makes *TSol* such a fascinating text.

In 1898 when Conybeare produced his translation of *TSol* he also published the first edition of the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, a debate between a Christian and a Jew (hereafter *TA*; see further p. 13–15 below).¹⁹ In *TA* 9.11–14 the debaters discuss a ‘testament’ (διαθήκη) in which King Solomon relates his fall because he sacrificed or crushed grasshoppers in his hand, just as is the case in *TSol* 26.5. *TA* is thus the only certain instance of another ancient text which knew of and referred to *TSol*. It is furthermore of interest that *TA*, as stressed by Conybeare, unquestioningly accepts *TSol* as an authentic work authored by Solomon himself, and therefore of greater authority than the biblical books merely telling the stories of Solomon in the third person (*Samuel* 1–2 and *Kings* 1–2 = Septuagint, *Reigns* 1–4): ‘it was not by the hand of a historian ... but ... from the mouth of Solomon himself’.²⁰

Istrin. Also in 1898, the Russian scholar V. M. Istrin published three more *TSol* mss, later termed D, I, and Q by McCown (see below). In fact, D does not contain a first person ‘testament’, but a third person biography of Solomon, and Istrin argued that this story was primary, while the testament versions were secondary adaptations of it. Istrin dated *TSol*, the testament adaption of the original Solomon story, very late, to c. 1200.²¹

McCown. In 1922 Chester Charlton McCown published a series of *TSol* mss, representing three different recensions (A, B, and C). He compiled a critical edition of *TSol*, an eclectic text mainly, though far from exclusively, based on ms H of the A recension, whereas alternative readings were mostly relegated to the critical apparatus. Ever since

is essentially a compilation of several texts), named *Book of the Watchers* in modern research, aim at interpreting *Gen* 6.1–4, where the בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, the sons of God, saw the beauty of the daughters of man and took them as wives, giving birth to the giant sons. In *Book of the Watchers*, these sons of God were watchers, that is angels; the fallen watchers filled the world with evil, but God sent four other angels who captured them and killed the giants or made them kill each other. The evil demons are, according to *Book of Watchers* / *1 Enoch* 15.11–16.1, the souls of the slain giants who now fill the earth, though invisible.

¹⁷ Julius Africanus, c. 200, rejected that ‘the sons of God’ in *Gen* 6.1–4 were angels; his interpretation is preserved in a quotation in George Syncellus’ *Ecloga chronographica* 34–35 (= Mosshammer (1984), 19 l. 23–20 l. 4). Note further Dexinger (1966), 61–67; 88–108; Wickham (1974); Klijn (1977), 61–67.

¹⁸ Thus, for instance, Bull (2017), 82–84.

¹⁹ Conybeare (1898b), 66–104, based on a single ms (V).

²⁰ Text and translation from Varner (2004), 156–59: οὐκ ἐν χειρὶ ἱστοριογράφου ... ἀλλ’ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ τοῦ Σολομῶντος. Conybeare (1898b), lvi.

²¹ Istrin (1898), republished by him (1899). We have not had access to Istrin’s publications, and the above summary is based on McCown (1922), 10; 12; 15; 18; 29; 35; 105.

McCown's edition, his text has been the scholarly standard one of *TSol* (we shall later argue why this has in many respects been unfortunate, and why Fleck's text, for all its flaws, rather ought to have remained the standard one).

McCown assumed that the original *TSol* was a Greek text from the early third century, partly because of the similarity between the demonology described by Celsus and Origen and that found in *TSol*.²² As the superscription of *TA* states the debate to have taken place in the days of Cyril, bishop of Alexandria 412–444, McCown took this as establishing a latest possible date of 444 for *TSol*.²³ In McCown's view recension A, as the shortest of the three recensions A, B, and C, is closest to the original *TSol*, whereas recension B represents a more extensive revision of this original *TSol*, with many interpolations and belonging 'to the time when Christianity was conquering [*sic*] the world', the fourth or fifth century. Recension C in McCown's view represents a much later, twelfth–thirteenth century, revision of recension B.²⁴

McCown's *TSol* text was accompanied by a thorough and wide-ranging introduction where he characterised *TSol* as

a collection of astrological, demonological, and magical lore, brought together without any attempt at consistency. The writer attempts no science or philosophy of demonology; indeed he is a compiler rather than an author.

McCown further assessed the 'prime interest of the writer' as 'medical. For him demons were what bacilli are to the modern physician, and his magical recipes and angel names are his pharmacopoeia.'²⁵

McCown followed Istrin's view that *ms* D, with its biography of Solomon, was a version of an original third person source underlying *TSol*, since he considered it inconceivable that anyone would have taken the longer *TSol* and reduced it to such a 'simple tale' 'by eliminating all the magico-medical element and the "testament" motif'. Thus D should not, in this view, be considered a version of *TSol*. Nevertheless, McCown noticed several secondary traits in D, as compared with the *TSol* recensions, and therefore assumed that D contained a later Byzantine revision of an original ancestor text, which he termed *d*. This lost original *d* underlying *TSol* was, according to McCown, not a Christian text, but a first century collection of Jewish-Palestinian extended commentaries (*midrashim*) about Solomon, whereas *TSol* was from the outset a Christian text. McCown thus rejected Conybeare's view that *TSol* as such was originally a Jewish text, but he still maintained that *TSol* was ultimately based on an original Jewish text.²⁶ Since the doctrine of thirty-six decans was of Egyptian origin, it followed that chapter 18 came from Egyptian sources, but presumably already revised by a Jew, as the names of the decans were probably 'for the most part ... Hebrew or, perhaps, mock Hebrew'.²⁷

²² McCown (1922), 107f, with reference to Conybeare (1898a).

²³ McCown (1922), 106.

²⁴ McCown (1922), 31–34; 82f; 108.

²⁵ McCown (1922), 43; 47.

²⁶ McCown (1922), 30–33; 35; 38f; 85–90; 108f.

²⁷ McCown (1922), 57–59; however, his only example, (1922), 42, of a distorted Hebrew name was $\rho\upsilon\breve{\xi}$ or $\rho\acute{\iota}\xi$ in *TSol* 18 which he considered to be 'a transliteration of $\eta\eta\iota$ ', though he added that 'even such a transliteration does not prove that the whole *Test* was originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic. This particular section, which is plainly of Egyptian origin, has been partially revised by a Jew before

McCown further published a third person narrative of King Solomon from an early eighteenth century *ms* in Jerusalem, which he named E.²⁸ As the language of E is modern Greek throughout, McCown dated the text as roughly contemporary with E itself, or only slightly older. Its narrative is closely related to the story in *ms* D, but deviates at some points where the text of E is closer to *TSol*. McCown explained this as resulting from E being based on a hypothetical source which he named *e*, which then again was based on the hypothetical source *d*. In other words, *e* would then, in McCown's reconstruction, have been the source for both *TSol* and for the tale of *ms* E.²⁹

James. In his review of McCown's *TSol* edition Montague Rhodes James objected to McCown's idea that *ms* D represents an original third person source underlying *TSol*:³⁰

I do not quite agree with Dr McCown when he says (p. 32) that it is "inconceivable that any one should take the *Test.* as found in Recs. A, B, or C", and reduce it to the form found in MS D. As against this I would cite the treatment meted out to the *Ascension of Isaiah* by the author of the 'Greek Legend of Isaiah', who has cut about and rearranged the old text, with large omissions, and put in matter from the Epiphanian Lives [*Lives of the Prophets*], producing a result very much like D.

Most scholars have followed James in this view, taking D (and, by implication, E) as simply derived from *TSol*.³¹

Gundel. Wilhelm Gundel in 1936 published a comprehensive investigation of the doctrine of the thirty-six decans, tracing it back to ancient Egypt and following it through antiquity and beyond, into the medieval period and modern times.³² Gundel surmised that the names of the decans in *TSol* 18 were Egyptian and, based on this argument, dated chapter 18 earlier than any other scholar, assuming that the chapter was based on a Hebrew model of the second or first centuries BC (the idea of a Hebrew original text was taken from McCown).³³ However, Gundel's Egyptian etymologies were highly hypothetical, since he had to assume that the Egyptian forms in all instances had been quite

it was taken over into the *Test.*' McCown (1922), 42f also discussed and dismissed possible other evidence that *TSol* could have been translated from Hebrew. However, it is now clear that ρύξ or ρίξ are instead distortions of the Latin loanword *rex*, Greek ρήξ, see Ch. IV.4 below.

²⁸ McCown (1922), 123–26; text 102*–120*. Some of the texts in the *ms* are dated 1719. See translation of E here Ch. IX.4 below.

²⁹ McCown (1922), 123–26; cf. Ch. VII.7 below, with stemma p. 184.

³⁰ James (1923), 468.

³¹ Duling (1988), 90; 95f; 106 n. 32. Detailed discussion in Busch (2006), 12–17; Albrecht (2012), 161; Bailey (2017), 173; Nordheim (1980), 187–92, however, subscribes to McCown's view. See further Ch. IX.3 below; James' *The Epiphanian Lives* is the pseudepigraphal collection better known as *Lives of the Prophets*, which in some *ms* traditions is (wrongly) attributed to Epiphanius of Salamis; cf. Satran (1995) on these *Lives* and cf. p. 241 n. 3 below for material from the *Lives* appearing also in D, further illustrating the aptness of James' parallel.

³² Gundel (1936).

³³ Gundel's stemma (1936), 45, placing the archetype of *TSol* in the first century BC and deducing the names of the decans in *TSol* 18 from Egyptian names; however, elsewhere Gundel (1936), 92 presented another stemma and dated the original to the second century BC; Gundel (1936), 56 for the view that the original, Jewish text was in Hebrew; however, Gundel (1936), 49f does not appear to have known Hebrew, since he believed that 𐤁𐤏𐤃 meant 'lord' ('Herr'), perhaps confusing it with Hebrew שׂאֵר, Syriac ܫܝܪ, 'head, chief'?

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2. Greek Terms

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 Βεθήλ, see Bethel
 γόης, see witch
 γράμμα, see letter(s)
 δαίμων ἐνοδία, see demon(s) of crossroad
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 τριζ, see vampire
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 ψαλιστής, see cutter
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 ψευδοπροφήτης, see prophet(s)

3. Hebrew Terms

רוח, see Spirit of God

4. Syriac Terms

ܠܘܬܐ, *lêutâ*, see toil