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Descents to the Underworld from Gilgamesh to Christian Late Antiquity

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Abstract

In my contribution I trace the transformations of the descent into the underworld from ancient Assyria via Greece and Rome to the world of Christian Late Antiquity. My aim is to analyse the evolution of a pagan and Jewish hellscape into a Christian one. First, I will briefly discuss the earliest known literary descent, that by Enkidu, which almost certainly influenced the poet of the *Odyssey* (§ 1), who, in turn, paved the way for the famous descent of Orpheus (§ 2). Subsequently, we will return to Assyria, and from there move to Israel and Rome during the early Imperial period (§ 3), before concluding with Christian Late Antiquity (§ 4). In my argument I will concentrate on the interplay of pagan and Christian traditions, as well as to the nature of the sinners in the various hellscapes.

Keywords: descent into the underworld, tours of hell, hellscapes, apocalypses, Gilgamesh, *Odyssey*, Orpheus, *1 Enoch*, *Aeneid*, *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Vision of Ezra*, *Apocalypse of Paul*
Słowa kluczowe: zejście do podziemia, podróże do piekła, apokalipsy, Gilgamesz, *Odyseja*, Orfeusz, *1 Księga Enocha*, *Eneida*, *Apokalipsa Piotra*, *Wizja Ezdrasza*, *Apokalipsa Pawła*

Humankind has long been interested in knowing the Beyond, which has often been conceptualised as an area below the earth or as a land at the edge of the known world.[1] The border between this world and the Beyond constituted a challenge that in myth and legend has proven to be irresistible to many a hero. The earliest example of such a brave descent into the underworld is to be found in the epic of Gilgamesh,

[1] This is my keynote lecture from the 5th International Kraków Study of Religions Symposium, 7 November 2016. I have kept the oral text, but added notes to the most recent literature, without trying to be exhaustive. I am most grateful to Suzanne Lye for her thoughtful comments and corrections.

OF = A. Bernabé, *Poetae Epici Graeci. Testimonia et Fragmenta. Pars II: Orphicorum et Orphicis similium testimonia et fragmenta*, vols. 1–2, Munich–Leipzig 2004–2005.

whereas, for most modern readers, the most famous descent is in Dante's *Inferno*. In my contribution I would like to trace the transformations of this descent from ancient Assyria via Greece and Rome to the world of Christian Late Antiquity. My aim, however, is not to focus primarily on the brave heroes of these descents, but to analyse the evolution of a pagan and Jewish hellscape into a Christian one. As I hope to show, the subject is a unique case where we can trace the mutual relationships between different cultures and religions over a long period of time. First, I will briefly discuss the earliest known literary descent, that by Enkidu, which almost certainly influenced the poet of the *Odyssey* (§ 1), who, in turn, paved the way for the famous descent of Orpheus (§ 2). Subsequently, we will return to Assyria, and from there move to Israel and Rome during the early Imperial period (§ 3), before concluding with Christian Late Antiquity (§ 4). In my argument I will concentrate on the interplay of pagan and Christian traditions, as well as to the nature of the sinners in the various hellscapes.

1. From Gilgamesh to Theseus and Dionysos

In world literature, the Beyond is first thematised in the Sumerian poem *Bilgames and the Netherworld*, one of a series of Sumerian narrative poems about Gilgamesh.[2] The Sumerian poem was probably handed down independently in Babylon for many centuries before its latter part became appended to the Gilgamesh epic as Tablet XII in an Akkadian prose translation.[3] This happened at the end of the eighth century BC, shortly after the death of Sargon II during a battle against the Cimmerians in Iran in 705 BC. The reason for its addition to the Gilgamesh epic is not certain. But the moment of its appendage might suggest that the death of Sargon and many of his soldiers further inspired Nabû-zuqup-kenu to look for a suitable text to end the epic, as death in battle is mentioned as one of the forms of death enumerated by the Sumerian poem (268o1).[4] Unfortunately, the text ends rather abruptly, in a way that offends our literary sensibilities, but the ancient Greeks did not share our modern sense of closure. Neither Homer nor Thucydides, nor even the Acts of the Apostles end in ways a modern author would ever have imagined.[5]

The last Tablet of the poem relates that Gilgamesh had been playing a kind of croquet in the streets of Uruk. When his ball and mallet fell down through a hole deep into the

[2] A. Gadotti, *"Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld" and the Sumerian Gilgamesh Cycle*, Berlin–Boston 2014. For the name, see G. Rubio, *Reading Sumerian Names, II: Gilgameš*, "Journal of Cuneiform Studies" 2012, no. 64, pp. 3–16; J. Keetman, *Der altsumerische Name /pa-^{g}bilga-mes/ = Gilgameš*, "Bibliotheca Orientalis" 2014, vol. 71, pp. 30–40.

[3] For the circumstances of composition, see the splendid edition of the Gilgamesh epic by A.R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 2 vols., Oxford 2003, pp. 1.12–1.14 (summary of the text), 2.743–2.777 (text and translation of 172–end). All quotations are from this edition.

[4] E. Frahm, *Nabû-zuqup-kenu, das Gilgamesch-Epos und der Tod Sargons II*, "Journal of Cuneiform Studies" 1999, no. 51, pp. 73–90; A.R. George, *op. cit.*, pp. 1.49–1.54.

[5] See the interesting discussion by S.R. West, *Terminal Problems* [in:] *Hesperos. Studies in Ancient Greek Poetry. Presented to M. L. West on his Seventieth Birthday*, P.J. Finglass *et al.* (eds.), Oxford 2007, pp. 3–21.

Underworld, his servant Enkidu offered to fetch them. Gilgamesh instructed him not to draw attention from the shades, but "Enkidu paid no attention to (the word) of his master" (206), and the Underworld seized him (221). Fortunately, the Sun God Utu brought Enkidu back. Gilgamesh hugged and kissed him, and asked him what he had seen: "Did you see the man with one son?", to which Enkidu answered with "I saw him." Gilgamesh then asked: "How does he fare?" (255), and Enkidu answered: "For the peg set in his wall bitterly he laments" (256). Gilgamesh then posed a series of similar questions until we reached the man with seven sons, and from the answers it is clear that the more sons a man has, the less thirsty he will be in the underworld. Moreover, the repeated "I saw him" (102, 104, 106, 108, etc.) shows that Enkidu reports his findings in the first person singular. Thus the information about the underworld is clearly authenticated as deriving from an eyewitness report, which the Germans call an *Icherzählung* (§ 2).

As the summary shows, here we have a proper descent into the underworld, which also displays an interest in the fate of the deceased. Interestingly, though, it is not the hero himself, Gilgamesh, who goes down, but Enkidu, "his servant" (177), whose inferior status is also stressed later: the Sumerian version explicitly states that he paid no attention to the words of "his master" (206). Moreover, Enkidu does not have to travel large distances to arrive at the underworld: the Beyond is, so to speak, just around the corner. In Mesopotamia, then, unlike in ancient Greece, it was not the great hero himself who braved the underworld.

Few scholars will now deny that the epic of Gilgamesh had some kind of influence on Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, even if the channels of transmission are still unclear.[6] It is not surprising, then, that we also find a descent in Homer in the famous eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, the *Nekyia*, and an obvious candidate for a plausible influence of the Gilgamesh epic on this episode of the *Odyssey* is the repeated use of "I saw" by Odysseus in his report of his own descent to the underworld (*Od*. 11.281, 298, 576, 582, 593), which precisely parallels the language of authentication by Enkidu. Yet the allusive character of some of the passages in Homer strongly suggests that such descents in fact pre-dated Homer. This is especially apparent from the end of the *Nekyia*.

The last person Odysseus meets is the shade of Heracles. Evidently, the encounter is the climax of Odysseus' own visit: even Heracles, the mightiest hero of the Greeks, had to die and remain in the underworld. Yet he also tells Odysseus about the Athenian king Eurystheus: "and once he sent me here to fetch the dog, since he could not think of any more difficult labour for me. I carried him off and led him out of Hades, and Hermes and owl-eyed Athena escorted me" (*Od*. 11.621–626; see also *Iliad* VIII.362–369). In other words, the descent into the underworld was the culmination of Heracles' labours, and the (clearly indispensable) help of the gods shows the difficulty of descending into the underworld.[7]

Another aspect of Odysseus' descent is that he not only sees his old comrades and his mother in the otherworld, but also sees several great sinners: Tantalus, Sisyphus and Tityus. Yet it is usually not observed that Homer does not mention any sins of

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[6] For the most recent view, see M.R. Bachvarova, *From Hittite to Homer. The Anatolian Background of Ancient Greek Epic*, Cambridge 2016.

[7] A. Karanika, *The End of the* Nekyia*: Odysseus, Heracles and the Gorgon in the Underworld*, "Arethusa" 2011, vol. 44, pp. 1–28.

these men. They are, seemingly, sufferers without a cause. This is different in the Gilgamesh epic. Here, several manuscripts mention faults committed by the living: "Did you see the man who did not respect the word of his mother and father?" He "drinks water measured in a scale, and he never gets enough." In a way, as Walter Burkert observed, this already seems to foreshadow Tantalus.[8] A second example can be found in the Akkadian translation. When Gilgamesh asks: "Did you see the one who was struck by a mooring-pole?", Enkidu answers: "I (saw him.) Alas for his mother (and father!). When pegs are pulled out (he) wanders about" (144–145). Although the text is not wholly clear, the inference is reasonable that "the unfortunate shade will find no rest, being spurred into constant motion every time a peg is pulled out." This penalty, which was probably the culmination of the penalties for those with violent or sudden deaths, is not unlike that of Sisyphus,[9] who also never found rest and had to continuously push a stone which would predictably come down again. In these and other cases, we can see the traces of a not yet fully elaborated hellscape, but certainly an incipient hell. In Gilgamesh, though, we only hear of anonymous sinners, whereas in Homer we only hear of famous mythological figures.

Given the popularity of Heracles' descent, which appears on vases as early as the sixth century, we need not be surprised that Odysseus also mentioned a descent of the Athenian hero Theseus in the company of Peirithoos, who in many ways was a kind of Athenian counterpart to Heracles (*Od*. 11.631). Homer's mention might be a somewhat later insertion used to boost the fame of Theseus, but the descent certainly goes back to the late Archaic Age, as we can see the duo with Heracles, all three identified by their names, in Hades on an Argive shield-band dating to about 575–550 BC, which was found in Olympia.[10]

Now the descents of Heracles and Theseus must also have been part of literary elaborations, presumably small epics, although here we run into highly contested and uncertain territory. In a famous commentary on the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, one that still impresses with its stupendous erudition and all-encompassing mastery of Greek and Latin literature, medieval Apocalypses included, the German classicist Eduard Norden (1868–1941) identified three poems with descents as important sources for Virgil – those by Odysseus in the Homeric *Nekyia*, by Heracles, and by Orpheus.[11] Norden,

[8] W. Burkert, *Pleading for Hell: Postulates, Fantasies and the Senselessness of Punishment*, "Numen" 2009, no. 56, pp. 141–160.

[9] D. Fabiano, *La fatica di Sisifo e le astuzie di Hades*, "I Quaderni del Ramo d'oro on line" 2008, no. 1, pp. 238–257.

[10] Cf. J.N. Bremmer, *Theseus' and Peirithoos' Descent into the Underworld*, "Les Études Classiques" 2015 [2016], no. 83, pp. 35–49; E. Cingano, *Epic Fragments on Theseus: Hesiod, Cercops, and the* Theseis, "Journal of Juristic Papyrology" 2017, Suppl. XXX, pp. 309–332; M.A. Santamaria, *Theseus and Pirithous' Catabasis in P. Ibscher Col. I (Hes. fr. 280 Merkelbach-West =* Minyas *fr. 7 Bernabé)*, "Journal of Juristic Papyrology" 2017, Suppl. XXVIII, vol. 1, pp. 37–51.

[11] E. Norden, *P. Vergilius Maro Aeneis VI*, Leipzig 1903[1], 1927[3], p. 5. For Norden, see most recently N. Horsfall, *Virgil, "Aeneid" 6. A Commentary*, 2 vols., Berlin–Boston 2013, pp. 2.645–2.654, with additional bibliography at 645 n. 3, but add K.A. Neuhausen, *Aus dem wissenschaftlichen Nachlass Franz Bücheler's (I): Eduard Nordens Briefe an Bücheler (1888–1908)* [in:] *Iubilet cum Bonna Rhenus. Festschrift zum 150jährigen Bestehen des Bonner Kreises*, J.P. Clausen (ed.), Berlin 2004, pp. 1–39 (important for the early history of Norden's commentary on *Aeneid* VI); J. Rüpke, *Dal Seminario all'esilio:*

whose first edition is from 1903, was still unable to date the poem about Heracles, but we now know that it has to be dated to the middle of the sixth century. Given the early date of this epic, we would still expect its main emphasis to be on the more heroic inhabitants of the underworld. And indeed, in none of our literary sources for Heracles' descent do we find any reference to nameless humans or initiates seen by him in the underworld, but we hear of his meeting with Meleager and his liberation of Theseus, who had tried to kidnap the queen of the underworld, Persephone.[12]

Before we come to Norden's third source, we have to note another descent, albeit lesser known than the others and not mentioned by Norden. From various iconographical sources we can deduce that in the last third of the sixth century – thus only shortly after the poem about Heracles – there also was a myth, perhaps even a poem (although we cannot be certain) related to Dionysos' descent into the underworld to fetch his mother Semele to bring her to the Olympus. The literary allusions to this myth are much later, but Aristophanes' *Frogs* (405 BC) presents Dionysos' stay in the underworld in great detail, albeit for a different purpose. Various later texts associate this quest for Semele with what is probably the most famous descent of antiquity, that of Orpheus, who fetched his late wife Eurydice.[13]

2. The Descent of Orpheus and Pythagoras

Orpheus' descent brings us to Orphism, an elusive current of Greek religious thought and practice, which has become much more visible in the last few decades through a steady stream of new discoveries, including new fragments and readings of the Derveni Papyrus,[14] new Orphic Gold Leaves,[15] new bone tablets,[16] and Apulian

Eduard Norden a Werner Jaeger (1934–1939), "Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia" (Siena) 2009, no. 30, pp. 225–250; O. Schlunke, *Der Geist der lateinischen Literatursprache. Eduard Nordens verloren geglaubter Genfer Vortrag von 1926*, "Antike & Abendland" 2013, no. 59, pp. 1–16 and *Eduard Norden. Altertumswissenschaftler von Weltruf und „halbsemitischer Friese"*, Berlin 2016.

[12] For the epic(s) about Heracles, see now J.N. Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World*, Berlin–Boston 2014, pp. 190–193; add D. Colomo, *Herakles and the Eleusinian Mysteries: P. Mil. Vogl. I 20, 18–32 Revisited*, "Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik" 2004, no. 148, pp. 87–98.

[13] The tale of Orpheus may well have been inspired by that of Semele, who had been burned to death after seeing Zeus in his full glory, cf. M.A. Santamaria, *El descenso de Dioniso al Hades en busca de su madre* [in:] *Apocalipsi, millenarisme i viatges a l'inframón: d'Odisseu a Bernat Metge*, J. Redondo, R. Torné Teixidó (eds.), Amsterdam 2014, pp. 217–240.

[14] See now V. Piano, *Il Papiro di Derveni tra religione e filosofia*, Florence 2016; M.E. Kotwick, *Der Papyrus von Derveni*, Berlin–Boston 2017.

[15] *OF* 474–496, updated in A. Bernabé and A.I. Jiménez San Cristóbal, *Instructions for the Netherworld*, Leiden 2008, pp. 241–271; Y. Tzifopoulos, *Paradise Earned: The Bacchic-Orphic Gold Lamellae of Crete*, Washington DC–Cambridge, MA 2010, pp. 255–284; *The "Orphic" Gold Tablets and Greek Religion*, R.G. Edmonds III (ed.), Cambridge 2011, pp. 15–50; F. Graf, S.I. Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, London–New York 2013², pp. 1–49, with a useful concordance (48–49); R. Janko, *Going Beyond Multitexts: The Archetype of the Orphic Gold Leaves*, "Classical Quarterly" 2016, no. 66, pp. 100–127; M.A. Santamaria, *Sobre el arquetipo de las laminillas áureas mnemosinias* [in:] *Ratna. Homenaje a la Profesora Julia Mendoza*, J.A. Álvarez-Pedrosa *et al.* (eds.), Madrid 2017, pp. 325–332.

[16] L. Dubois, *Inscriptions grecques dialectales d'Olbia du Pont*, Geneva 1996, pp. 154–155; *OF* 463–465; A.S. Rusjaeva, *Graffiti Ol'vii Pontijskoj*, Simferopol 2010, pp. 33–35: nos 29–31; F. Graf, S.I. Johnston, *op. cit.*, pp. 214–216.

vases with new representations of Orpheus and the afterlife.[17] These discoveries enable us to speak about Orphism with much more certainty than previous generations of scholars. It is now clear that in the early fifth century BC, this movement originated in southern Italy and Sicily, perhaps just after the death of Pythagoras around 495 BC.[18] One of its major interests was salvation. To that end, the Orphics adopted the just invented Pythagorean doctrine of reincarnation, but they also designed a new view of the afterlife. According to them, after death there is a strict separation between the good and the bad. The latter are penalised by lying in the mud, while the former enjoy a life of eternal sunlight, playing on green meadows and feasting on sumptuous banquets. This new picture of the afterlife completely modified the Homeric picture in *Odyssey* 11 of a sombre afterlife with a stay on the Elysian Fields for the elect Menelaus. So how did the Orphics propagate their new view of the afterlife?[19]

The most likely answer is through a poem about Orpheus' descent to the underworld to fetch his wife, who remained anonymous until the Hellenistic era. When she finally gets a name, the most popular one is Eurydice, a name common to many Macedonian princesses – in other words a name comparable to our Kate or Diana.[20] We may find the story very romantic, but for the early Greeks, Orpheus' wife was only of secondary importance, and the story was meant to demonstrate, amongst other purposes, the power of Orpheus' music and song, validating him as a *Meistersinger*.[21] In the tradition, Orpheus descended into the underworld to supplicate the rulers of the underworld, Hades and Persephone. During his journey through the underworld to their palace, he witnessed the good life of the blessed, who were the initiates of the Orphic Mysteries, as well as the mud-lying sinners. Through this, the reader or, perhaps originally, the audience would have been given a tour of the underworld in order to instruct them about this new beyond. Since later works – such as Vergil's

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[17] S.I. Johnston, T. McNiven, *Dionysos and the Underworld in Toledo*, "Museum Helveticum" 1996, no. 53, pp. 25–36; M. Schmidt, *Aufbruch oder Verharren in der Unterwelt? Nochmals zu den apulischen Vasenbildern mit Darstellungen des Hades*, "Antike Kunst" 2000, no. 43, pp. 86–101; C. Pouzadoux, *Hades*, "Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae" 2009, Suppl. 1, pp. 234–236, add. 10*; M.-X. Garezou, *Orpheus*, "Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae" 2009, no. 77, pp. 399–405.

[18] J.N. Bremmer, *Initiation*, *op. cit.*, pp. 70–79.

[19] For early Orphism and the Orphic afterlife, see R. Parker, *Early Orphism* [in:] *The Greek World*, A. Powell (ed.), London–New York 1995, pp. 483–510; W. Burkert, *Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis*, Cambridge, MA 2004, pp. 74–98 and *Kleine Schriften* III, Göttingen 2006; *Orfeo y la tradición órfica: un reencuentro*, A. Bernabé, F. Casadesús (eds.), 2 vols., Madrid 2008; M. Herrero de Jáuregui, *Orphism and Christianity in Late Antiquity*, Berlin–New York 2010; R.G. Edmonds III, *Redefining Ancient Orphism*, Cambridge 2013; J.N. Bremmer, *Initiation...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 55–80 and *The Construction of an Individual Eschatology: the Case of the Orphic Gold Leaves* [in:] *Burial Rituals, Ideas of Afterlife, and the Individual in the Hellenistic World and the Roman Empire*, K. Waldner *et al.* (eds.), Stuttgart 2016, pp. 31–52. Innovative regarding the transmission of Orphic literature: L. Trzcionkowski, *Collecting the Dismembered Poet: The Interplay between the Whole and Fragments in the Reconstruction of Orphism*, "Journal of Juristic Papyrology" 2017, Suppl. XXX, pp. 251–272.

[20] J.N. Bremmer, *Orpheus: From Guru to Gay* [in:] *Orphisme et Orphée*, P. Borgeaud (ed.), Geneva 1991, pp. 13–30. For a new, fairly early testimony of the name of Orpheus' wife (second half of the first century AD), see *P.Oxy*. 76.5093 (published by D. Colomo).

[21] F. Graf, *Orpheus: A Poet among Men* [in:] *Interpretations of Greek Mythology*, J.N. Bremmer (ed.), London 1988², pp. 80–106, somewhat abbreviated, and with less focus on possible shamanistic connections, in F. Graf, S.I. Johnston, *op. cit.*, pp. 167–176.

Aeneid, which partially go back to this epic of Orpheus' descent – contain catalogues of sinners and their punishments, we may accept these details as being a part of this early poem. Such catalogues must have been such a remarkable feature of the underworld description that they remained a standard feature of underworld descriptions for many centuries to come (§ 4).

But when and where did such a poem originate? Epigenes, a late fifth- or early fourth-century Athenian author, tells us that the Orphic *Descent to Hades* was actually written by a Pythagorean, which points to southern Italy, as does the mention of an Orpheus of Croton and a *Descent to Hades* ascribed to an Orpheus from Sicilian Camarina. These last two authors, whose names were also Orpheus, were probably fictitious persons,[22] but their poems surely acquired these author-names from the fact that they told of Orpheus' descent in the first person singular, just as Orpheus himself does at the beginning of the Orphic *Argonautica*: "I told you what I saw and perceived when I went down the dark road of Taenarum into Hades, trusting in our lyre, out of love for my wife" (40–42).[23] Norden had already noted the close correspondence with the line that opens the *katabasis* of Orpheus in Virgil's *Georgics*, *Taenarias etiam fauces, alta ostia Ditis, / ... ingressus* (4.467–4.469), and persuasively concluded that both lines go back to a *Descent to Hades* ascribed to Orpheus.[24] But to make things more complicated, the mention of Cape Taenarum suggests that this new epic about Orpheus also borrowed from the somewhat older epic about Heracles' descent, as he also descended at Taenarum.[25] Taking everything into account, it seems reasonable to guess that the Orphic *katabasis* with the story of Eurydice originated in southern Italy. Orphic eschatological material is used by Pindar in his *Second Olympic Ode* for Theron of Acragas, written in 476 BC. The Orphic poem, therefore, would most likely have been composed somewhat earlier.

3. From Assyria to Israel (?) and Rome

From the Greek world, we now return to the ancient Near East, and then proceed to Israel and Rome. During the reign of the last great Assyrian king Ashurbanipal in the late seventh century BC, a scribe wrote the oldest visionary journey to hell, now known as the *Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Crown Prince*. In this Assyrian vision, which is unique in cuneiform literature, we have an exposition of the underworld, a first-person-singular description of that exposition (as in the Orphic poem) and an explanation of the identity of some beings which the visionary sees in hell through the use of demonstrative particles by the god Nergal. Such a use of

[22] For these authors, see J.N. Bremmer, *Initiation...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 60f.

[23] For Orpheus' account in the first person singular, see E. Norden, *op. cit.*, pp. 5 and 508–509; U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Der Glaube der Hellenen*, 2 vols., Darmstadt 1959[3], pp. 2.194–2.195 also compares Plutarch, *Moralia* 566c (= *OF* 412). H. Diels, *Parmenides*, Berlin 1897, p. 14 had already observed the importance of the *Icherzählung* in connection with descents to the underworld.

[24] J.N. Bremmer, *Initiation...*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

[25] *Ibidem*, p. 192.

demonstratives – in our vision, for example: “This [corpse] which (lies) buried in the underworld, is that of the proud shepherd who fulfilled the wishes of my father Assur, the king of the gods” (r. 1, 22) – is typical of Mesopotamian dream interpretation and scholarly exegesis. It is this combination that identifies this vision as “the first tour of hell.”[26] These elements recur in the Jewish *Book of the Watchers*, a part of the book *1 Enoch*, to which we will turn now.

The expression “tour of hell” refers to Martha Himmelfarb’s ground-breaking book *Tours of Hell*, published in 1983. Himmelfarb argued that previous scholars had grossly neglected the Jewish sources of the depictions of hell and had also overestimated the Greek influence. She criticised in particular Albrecht Dieterich (1866–1908), who, in his pioneering book *Nekyia*, had argued the priority of Greek traditions in the constitution of the underworld against the then dominant idea of a priority of Persian and Babylonian ideas: we are speaking of a time that would soon see the famous Babel-Bibel debates. Himmelfarb’s book remains an important contribution about the tours of hell.[27] Yet the unbiased reader, somebody like me, can hardly escape the impression that she, in turn, overestimated the Jewish influence. I will therefore compare what we have seen so far with her argument and proceed from there to the early Christian world.

Let us first, though, take a closer look at the relevant part of the *Book of the Watchers*. In the last centuries BC, a series of apocalyptic texts were composed about Enoch, the man who walked with God in *Genesis*, probably in Palestine. They were collected into a single book, which is known today as *1 Enoch* and probably dates to the end of the third century. Its size is roughly comparable to that of the *Book of Isaiah*, and it contains religious, scientific, intellectual and social material. It is a strange world with flights to heaven, ghosts of dead giants roaming the world, and fallen angels called “the Watchers,” who mate with mortal women. The work was originally composed in Aramaic, but Scaliger, writing in the seventeenth century, detected Greek fragments in the works of the ninth-century Byzantine author George Syncellus. These were the only textual evidence for *1 Enoch* in the West before the publication of an early Ethiopic translation in 1773, which had canonical status. Here, at the edge of Christianity, books have been preserved that had been condemned as heretical in the centre of Christendom.[28]

As part of his grand cosmic tours, Enoch also travels to the Northwest (Chapters 17–19), where he arrives not in hell proper but in a kind of underworld, a land of great

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[26] A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, Helsinki 1989, pp. 68–76; S. Sanders, *The First Tour of* Hell, “Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions” 2009, no. 9, pp. 151–170.

[27] A. Dieterich, *Nekyia*, Leipzig–Berlin 1893, 1913^2; M. Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell. An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature*, Philadelphia 1983; note also M. Benz, *Gesicht und Schrift. Die Erzählung von Jenseitsreisen in Antike und Mittelalter*, Berlin–Boston 2013.

[28] J.J. Scaliger, *Thesaurus temporum*, Amsterdam 1658^2, pp. 404–405. G.W. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, Augsburg 2001, p. 13 dates Scaliger’s discovery to 1658, but it must have taken place between 1606, the year of the first edition of Scaliger’s *Thesaurus temporum* (Leiden 1606), and 1609, the year of his death, as the second edition was a posthumous one, cf. A. Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger*, 2 vols., Oxford 1983–1994, pp. 2.513–2.514, 2.685–2.686 (with thanks to Matthijs Holwerda); L.T. Stuckenbruck, *The Book of Enoch: Its Reception in Second Temple Jewish and in Christian Tradition*, “Early Christianity” 2013, no. 4, pp. 7–40.

darkness with a river of fire, most likely inspired by the Homeric underworld river, the Pyriphlegethon. There are also other underworld rivers, and the Homeric *Nekyia* is now generally accepted as being one of the author's sources.[29] Enoch sees all kinds of things – "no one among humans has seen as I saw" (*1 Enoch* 19.3) – but one example will be sufficient for us. In Chapter 18.13 we read: "There I saw seven stars like great burning mountains. To me, when I inquired about them, *the angel said*: '*This* place is the end of heaven and earth; *this* has become a prison for the stars and the hosts of heaven. The stars that are rolling in the fire, *these* are they that transgressed the command of the Lord in the beginning of their rising.'"

Three interrelated aspects of this passage are typical of such apocalyptic literature, as Himmelfarb showed. First, there is an important biblical figure who, in vision or in person, travels to the underworld, or often also to Paradise. Second, unlike in the Greek descents, there is a guide, the *angelus interpres* as he is normally called, who explains to the underworld traveller what he actually sees. And third, as Himmelfarb has noted, in order to explain what is seen, the angel habitually uses demonstrative pronouns to answer questions in the form: "*Who* are they? *These* are those who...", a motif that is also absent from Greek *Descents* into Hades. We can see that two of these elements also occur in the Assyrian vision, namely, the exposition of the underworld and the use of demonstrative pronouns, but it is not a proper tour, as the visionary starts his vision by saying: "I was a captive in the house [of ...] I beheld his terrifying splendor [...]." Similarly, in the Old Testament *Book of Zechariah*, the prophet has a vision and sees four horns, "I asked the angel who talked with me, 'What are *these*?' And he answered me, '*These* are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem'" (1.18). Thus we can conclude that the demonstrative pronouns and the person explaining have been derived from the Mesopotamian tradition, although along routes that are no longer clear to us. By paying close attention to these motifs and the nature of the punishments, Himmelfarb was able to construct a family tree of the various tours of hell.[30]

Yet the idea of a descent can hardly have been invented by a Jewish author, for the simple reason that the Jews did not have an underworld proper or an elaborated hellscape until the Hellenistic period. It is not surprising, therefore, that in *1 Enoch* we do not really see a descent proper. In *1 Enoch* 17, Enoch is lifted up to a mountain, and in *1 Enoch* 21.1, he relates: "And I came to an empty place. And I saw there neither a heaven above nor an earth below." So it is not really a proper descent but more being replaced into a different world. For a surviving literary representation of a descent in the period after *1 Enoch* we have to go to Vergil's *Aeneid*, the famous Roman epic.

There can be no doubt that we have a descent in Vergil's poem, as the Sibyl herself tells Aeneas: *facilis descensus Averni* (126). But can we go further? Elsewhere I have suggested that we can derive various motifs not only from the descents of Heracles

[29] P. Grelot, *La géographie mythique d'Hénoch et ses sources orientales*, "Revue Biblique" 1958, no. 65, pp. 33–69 (Greek and Oriental sources).

[30] For an update of Himmelfarb's stemma, see J.N. Bremmer, *Descents to Hell and Ascents to Heaven* [in:] *Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, J.J. Collins (ed.), Oxford 2014, pp. 340–357, reprinted in J.N. Bremmer, *Maidens, Magic and Martyrs in Early Christianity: Collected Essays I*, Tübingen 2017, pp. 329–345.

and Orpheus, but also from *1 Enoch*. This has recently been strongly contested by Maximilian Benz and Nicholas Horsfall,[31] so let us look again at the evidence. Benz argues that I should have shown that Vergil could have known Jewish writings. Now it is one of the sadder sides of German and English classical scholarship that tacit anti-Semitism has mostly ignored the question of the nature of Roman acquaintance with Jewish writings at the time of Vergil. However, as Horsfall has shown, there were plenty of what he calls "Levantines" in the milieu of Vergil who could have mentioned possible interesting Jewish books to him, such as that of the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament or *1 Enoch*. In fact, Ovid almost certainly knew *Genesis*, and even Horace has various motifs derived from Jewish culture. So can we reasonably assume that Vergil had knowledge of *1 Enoch*?

The suggestion was first made in a book on the Greek underworld in 1903 by the German philologist Ludwig Radermacher (1867–1952), who noted that the Sibyl's role in *Aeneid* 6 could be compared, "*in gewissem Sinne*," to the guide in Jewish Apocalyptic literature, that is, to the *angelus interpres*. In 1901, Radermacher had cooperated with a German edition and translation of the Ethiopic version. He was therefore well acquainted with *1 Enoch*, which was clearly his source of inspiration.[32] Now we should of course admit that the Sibyl does not continuously explain the underworld to Aeneas, but when Aeneas asks her: "Maid, tell me straightly, what the forms of wickedness are? And by what tortures are these sinners being scourged? Why does so terrible a lamentation rise into the air?" (560–562), the Sibyl launches into a long explanation of the Tartarus, just as she does in some other passages, albeit in less detail. Moreover, Himmelfarb herself pointed to the use of demonstrative pronouns in a number of verses of the sixth book, and calls this "the closest parallels to the interchanges of the Jewish and Christian texts" (49). We should also note that the Sibyl asks Musaeus to show them the valley where Anchises lives from a height (678: *desuper ostentat*). Benz thinks that this invalidates the role of the Sibyl, but Norden and Horsfall (*ad loc*. in their commentaries) have rightly noted that Vergil used a traditional motif from Greek descents, in which the inhabitants of the underworld are asked for information. In fact, Vergil also seems to borrow the motif of showing things from a height from Jewish Apocalypses. That is what we first find in *1 Enoch* (17–18), but then also in Philo (*SpecLeg* 3.2), the *Gospel of Matthew* (4.8), *Revelation* (21.10), the *Testament of Abraham* (10), the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (21), the *Apocalypse of Peter* (15–16), the *Apocalypse of Zephania* (2), and even the very late *Apocalypse of Paul* (13), which drew on earlier, Jewish-influenced Apocalypses and to which we will come shortly (§ 4).

[31] N. Horsfall, *Virgil and the Jews*, "Vergilius" 2012, no. 58, pp. 67–80; M. Benz, *Aeneas und Henoch im Jenseits. Zu einer vermeintlichen jüdischen Quelle von Verg. Aen. VI* [in:] *Jenseitsvorstellungen im Orient*, P. Bukovec, B. Kolkmann-Klamt (eds.), Hamburg 2013, pp. 217–243.

[32] L. Radermacher, *Das Jenseits im Mythos der Hellenen*, Bonn 1903, pp. 14–15, overlooked by M. Himmelfarb, *op. cit.*, pp. 49–50 and wrongly disputed by H. Lloyd-Jones, *Greek Epic, Lyric and Tragedy*, Oxford 1990, p. 183, cf. J. Flemming, L. Radermacher, *Das Buch Henoch*, Leipzig 1901. For Radermacher (1867–1952), see A. Lesky, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Munich–Berne 1966, pp. 672–688; A. Wessels, *Ursprungszauber. Zur Rezeption von Hermann Useners Lehre von der religiösen Begriffsbildung*, New York–London 2003, pp. 129–154.

Now matters become complicated when we look at Homer, as we find the combination of viewing from a height and the use of demonstrative pronouns in a famous scene from Book III of the *Iliad*. Here, standing on the wall of Troy, Priam asks Helen to identify certain conspicuous figures among the Greek warriors in the following manner:

> So you could tell me the name of this man who is so tremendous;
> *Who is this* Achaian man of power and stature?
> Helen answers Priam's question with:
> *That man there* is Atreus' son, wide-ruling Agamemnon (166–167).

Not only do we find a similar structure of "*Who* is that?" "*That* is..." in the cases of Odysseus (III.192–193 and 200) and Aias (III.226–227 and 229), but Homer was also imitated by Euripides in his very popular *Phoenissae*, where, standing on the roof of the Theban palace, Antigone asks a servant about the Seven against Thebes:

> *Who is he* of the white plume
> who stands in front of the army to lead it,
> bearing lightly upon his arm a shield all of bronze.
> And the servant answers:
> *That* man is said to be a Mycenaean by birth (125).

What seems to be the case, or at least what can be imagined, is that the author of *1 Enoch* was struck by the familiar use of the demonstrative pronouns, and combined this with the view from a height, the so-called *Mauerschau*,[33] which was not known to him from the Jewish tradition.[34] Previous scholars have agreed that the author of *1 Enoch* used material from Homer's description, such as the already mentioned river of fire. It is therefore not unlikely that he used other motifs too. Benz even admits that the spring of water in a second underworld description in *1 Enoch* (22) derives from Orphic descriptions of the underworld which mention a spring Mnemosyne. Yet he does not draw the obvious conclusion from his analysis that the author of *1 Enoch* was apparently a learned Hellenised Jew, who drew on Mesopotamian, Greek and Jewish traditions, but keeps insisting on the purely Jewish nature of *1 Enoch*'s underworld.

Naturally, Vergil was not a slavish imitator. As Norden and Horsfall have done, we can note motifs derived from the descents of Heracles and Orpheus, but also point to unexpected and unusual motifs in his work. I have singled out three of these: the Sibyl as a kind of *angelus interpres*, the use of demonstrative pronouns, and the showing from a height. From such evidence, Virgil seems to have used a Hellenistic-Jewish apocalyptic tradition to make his own narrative more interesting.[35] Horsfall,

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[33] Cf. T. Führer, *Teichoskopie: Der (weibliche) Blick auf den Krieg*, "Hyperboreus" 2017, no. 20, pp. 23–41.

[34] See J.N. Bremmer, *Orphic, Roman, Jewish and Christian Tours of Hell: Observations on the* Apocalypse of Peter [in:] *Other Worlds and their Relation to this World*, T. Nicklas *et al.* (eds.), Leiden 2010, pp. 305–321, updated in: J.N. Bremmer, *Maidens, Magic and Martyrs...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 281–293.

[35] Note also J. Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles*, Oxford 2007, p. 71: "the (Greek) translation may well go back to the first century BC or earlier still."

when discussing my earlier attempts at demonstrating Vergil's indebtedness to *1 Enoch*, comments that the points I have adduced are: "attractive details advanced to adorn an enticing hypothesis, but they hardly survive patient and sceptical analysis, or at least not as compelling proofs." And indeed, proof is impossible, but an enticing hypothesis is perhaps not the worst one can produce in our field.[36]

4. The early Christian period

Let us now turn to the early Christian period, in which we find the *Apocalypse of Peter*, which dates from the later first half of the second century AD and was probably written in Egypt, but survived as a whole only in Ethiopia, like *1 Enoch*. As it is the first major Christian account of post-mortem punishment outside the New Testament, it is an important writing which had a great influence on other Apocalypses that helped to develop the image of the Christian hell. As the *Apocalypse of Peter* is written in the form of a prophecy, it is not really a descent proper, even though Peter prophesies that at the end of time, sinners "will come to the place prepared for them" [7E], which a later Greek version has turned into a place: "very gloomy; and this was the place of punishment, and those who were punished there and the angels who punished had dark raiment, clothed accordingly to the air of the place" [21G]. Subsequently we get a catalogue of sinners and their punishments.

This is not the place to discuss these in great detail, but to give an idea of the nature of this catalogue and its interest for our subject, I will enumerate a few sinners:

> [22G] And some there were there hanging by their tongues: *these were those* who had blasphemed the way of righteousness; and under them was laid fire, blazing and tormenting them. [23G] And there was a great lake full of burning mire (*borboros*) in which were fixed certain men who had turned away from righteousness, and tormenting angels were placed over them. Other men and women who cast themselves down from a high slope came to the bottom and were driven by their torturers to go up the precipice and were thrown down again, and had no rest from this torture. *These were those* who defiled their bodies, behaving like women.

We can point here to several aspects that were also observed by Himmelfarb. First, she noted that the passage depends on the Jewish tradition of the demonstrative pronouns, which we saw in *1 Enoch*. Unlike that book, we do not have questions and answers, but the explanations are clearly answers to implicit questions with an implicit *angelus interpres*. Second, the punishment of blasphemy by the tongue is evidently a case of a measure-for-measure punishment, and Himmelfarb was able to show that such punishments – think of the biblical "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" – were typical, although not exclusively so, of the Ancient Near East. This will be another element from the Jewish tradition, and it can be found, as she shows, as an important component in most tours of hell. As the *Apocalypse of Peter* is early Christian, such connections with the Jewish tradition are hardly surprising.

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[36] Horsfall on Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.320.

More surprising is the fact that men are lying in mire (*borboros*), which was basically a technical term for the mud in the Orphic underworld.[37] Thus the term points to an influence from Orphic traditions. By combining Vergil and an Orphic papyrus from Bologna, published in the 1940s, we can add the tradition of two other characteristics which Himmelfarb missed. First, the punishments also mention punishing agents, to wit, the tormenting angels, who are probably identical to the torturers mentioned later in connection with the Lesbian women. These torturing agents, who whip those who persecuted the righteous, also occur in Vergil's description of the sinners, where we have the Fury Tisiphone whipping the sinners,[38] and in the same Bologna papyrus, Erinyes who whip also occur. This strongly suggests that torturers who whip already had a place in Orphic literature, from where they were taken over by Jewish authors.[39]

Secondly, the *Apocalypse of Peter* contains a list from about 20 kinds of sinners, which we can group in various categories: the largest one concerns the interrelated righteousness, blasphemy, idolatry and persecution. Next comes sexuality and the relationships between the sexes, and then concern for parents and slaves, such as sins against God, against the family and so on. Such catalogues also occur in Vergil and the Orphic papyrus. Consequently, their Orphic source will probably also have contained separate catalogues of sinners and their punishments, since such catalogues were most popular in Orphic and Orphic-influenced literature, as Dieterich and Norden have extensively demonstrated.[40]

Did the Orphic source also contain the names of the sinners already famous from Homer: Tantalus, Sisyphus and Tityus? The continuing throwing down of Lesbians from a great precipice, who then have to climb up in order to be thrown down again, reminds us of Sisyphus, and the carnivorous birds that torture those that did not honour their parents and the elderly (11.4–11.5 E) recall Tityus' vultures. As they are not named in the admittedly fragmentary Bologna papyrus, we cannot be sure. It is of course perfectly possible that a Hellenised Jew added these names from Homer, but it seems to me that their presence in the original Orphic descent is not impossible either.

In any case, we must be careful not to overstress a dependence on Orphic literature. When we look carefully at the punishments in our Apocalypse, we can see that the sins and their combinations are influenced by the Jewish tradition. Blasphemy, for example, is not a sin found in traditional pagan catalogues of sins, and lesbian love will hardly have been a bother for Orphic poetry, but may well have become a bone of contention for Jews because of its occurrence in Egyptian literary texts and magical spells. Also remarkable in our text is the element of fire. The sinners wallow in

[37] As I showed in *The* Apocalypse of Peter*: Greek or Jewish?* [in:] *The Apocalypse of Peter*, J.N. Bremmer, I. Czachesz (eds.), Leuven 2003, pp. 1–14, updated in J.N. Bremmer, *Maidens, Magic and Martyrs...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 269–280.

[38] Cf. M. Himmelfarb, *op. cit.*, pp. 120–121.

[39] For a more detailed discussion, see J.N. Bremmer, *The Long Latin Version of the Vision of Ezra: Date, Place and Tour of Hell* [in:] *Figures of Ezra*, J.N. Bremmer, V. Hirschberger, T. Nicklas (eds.), Leuven 2018, pp. 162–184.

[40] A. Dieterich, *op. cit.*, pp. 163–213; E. Norden, *Kleine Schriften zum klassischen Altertum*, Berlin 1966, pp. 229–231 (first published in 1893) and *idem*, *P. Vergilius Maro Aeneis VI*, *op. cit.*, pp. 287f.

fiery mud and are tortured by flames, fiery rods, fiery stones and wheels of fire; in fact, fire is everywhere. Yet although the fiery river, the Pyriphlegeton, is a standard part of the Greek underworld,[41] we do not find a similar stress on punishing fire in pagan hellscapes. On the other hand, in an already quoted verse from *1 Enoch*, we heard about "[t]he stars that are rolling in the fire, *these* are they that transgressed the command of the Lord in the beginning of their rising," and Gehenna, the late Jewish hell, is characterised by fire. Burning in hell, then, seems a clear Jewish invention, but taken over and further propagated by the early Christians.

Now were there other, similar Apocalypses circulating in the time of the *Apocalypse of Peter*? We are very lucky that, only one year after Himmelfarb's *Tours of Hell*, in 1984, a long and more original text of the *Vision of Ezra*, another early tour of hell, was published.[42] This Latin *Vision of Ezra* is clearly related to a long-known Greek *Apocalypse of Ezra*, of which the original must go back to the same, presumably Greek, text as the Latin *Vision of Ezra*; the latter, however, seems to have translated the Greek original much more carefully. This original Greek version presupposes another famous apocryphal work in which the prophet Ezra was the protagonist, the so-called *4 Ezra*, which is commonly dated around AD 100. Consequently, the Ur-text of the *Vision of Ezra* must be somewhat later, probably more or less contemporaneous with the *Apocalypse of Peter*, which clearly suggests that there were more Apocalypses circulating at that time.[43] In short, the author of the *Apocalypse of Peter* was not alone in imagining terrifying hellscapes, but had competitors who also tried to impress a new vision of the afterlife on the faithful.

In the *Vision of Ezra*, the prophet Ezra is lifted down deep into hell. In other words, here we have a proper descent. In hell, he sees similar sinners to those in the *Apocalypse of Peter*, with the demonstrative pronouns, the uses of fire for various punishments, and, sometimes, the tit-for-tat punishments. Yet the striking fact of this *Vision of Ezra* is that it contains only a reference to martyrdom in passing, and only one typically Christian sin. In fact, one striking aspect of the hellscape of the *Apocalypse of Peter* is that many of its sins would have been familiar to pagans, including features such as not obeying parents or slaves disobeying their masters, and several, such as not being charitable to widows and orphans, typical of the Jewish tradition. Even the references to martyrdom could easily derive from a Jewish predecessor. This is also the case in the *Vision of Ezra*, except for the beginning, where, at the entry to hell, when Ezra sees sinners burning in fire and being struck by dragons and dogs, he asks his guiding angel: "Lord, *who are these* who have been placed in such

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[41] Considering its occurrence both in Vergil (*Aeneid* 6.550) and the Bologna papyrus, it will also have been a part of the Orphic underworld, from where it was taken over by Plato in his *Phaedo*.

[42] P.-M. Bogaert, *Une vision longue inédite de la "Visio Beati Esdrae" dans le légendier de Teano (Barberini lat. 2318)*, "Revue Bénédictine" 1984, no. 94, pp. 50–70; *The Latin Vision of Ezra*, trans. R. Bauckham [in:] *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. More Noncanonical Scriptures*, R. Bauckham, J. Davila, A. Panayotov (eds.), vol. 1, Grand Rapids 2013, pp. 498–528.

[43] See also J.N. Bremmer, *The Long Latin Version of the Vision of Ezra...*, *op. cit*. For the date of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, see J.N. Bremmer *The* Apocalypse of Peter *as the First Christian Martyr Text: its Date, Provenance and Relationship with* 2 Peter [in:] *Second Peter in New Perspective: Radboud Prestige Lectures by Jörg Frey*, M. den Dulk, J. Frey, J. van der Watt (eds.), Leiden 2018 (forthcoming).

a great punishment? And he said to me: *These are the ones who* have denied the Lord and have spent the night with women on the Lord's day, and for this reason they are in torments" (9–10). As this sin is the first to be mentioned, it could easily have been added later. Similarly, at the very end, when Ezra is dying, he says: "Mourn for me, good angels and archangels, prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors and virgins, and afterwards bury me" (117). Here too, one could imagine that the martyrs and confessors were added at a later stage, even though the time of composition of these Apocalypses has not yet been fully elucidated.

Around AD 400, all these Apocalypses with their ethical transgressions and punishments were suddenly swept away from the religious market, so to speak, by the appearance of a new, innovative product, the Egyptian *Apocalypse of Paul* or *Visio Pauli*, the usual title of the Latin translation from around 600 AD. It is as if the victory of Christianity through Constantine and the prohibition of pagan cults by Theodosius around 398 AD had suddenly given a whole new perspective on the world and its sinners. Previous Apocalypses had focused on ethical transgressions, but this new one teems with religious or ecclesiastical sins.[44]

As regards the description of hell, we note that Paul does not descend into hell at all, but goes to the ends of the world, similar to Odysseus, to a place of darkness, sorrow and distress:

> And I saw there a river boiling with fire, and in it a multitude of men and women immersed up to their knees, and other men up to the navel, others even up to the lips, others moreover up to the hair. *And I asked the angel* and said: Sir, who are those in the fiery river? And the angel answered and said to me: They are neither hot nor cold, because they were found neither in the number of the just nor in the number of the impious. For those spent the time of their life on earth passing some days in prayer, but others in sins and fornications, until their death. And I asked him and said: *Who are these, Sir,* immersed up to their knees in fire? He answered and said to me: *These are they who* when they have gone out of church throw themselves into strange conversations to dispute [31].

In this passage, we still have the demonstrative pronouns; we also have some measure-for-measure punishments, as when adulterous women are hung by their hair and eyebrows, and finally, we have the punishments with fire. Moreover, we have a punishment very much like the one for Tantalus:

> And I observed and saw others hanging over a channel of water, and their tongues were very dry, and many fruits were placed in their sight, and they were not permitted to take of them, and I asked: *Sir, who are these?* And he said to me: *These are they* who break their fast before the appointed hour [39].

[44] The authoritative edition is by T. Silverstein, A. Hilhorst, *Apocalypse of Paul. A New Critical Edition of Three Long Latin Versions*, Geneva 1997; add M.-F. Damongeot-Bourdat, *Un nouveau manuscrit de l'Apocalypse de Paul, (Paris, BnF, nouv. acq. lat. 2676)*, "Bulletin du Cange" 2009, no. 67, pp. 29–64. The translations are adapted from H. Duensing, A. de Santos Otero, *Apocalypse of Paul* [in:] *New Testament Apocrypha*, trans. and ed. R. McL. Wilson, W. Schneemelcher (ed.), 2 vols., Cambridge 1992[2], pp. 2.712–2.748.

As this and other examples show, the nature of the sins has changed. No longer is the main focus on ethical sins, the punishments of which could often have been approved by Jews, Christians and many pagans as well. First and foremost, the focus is now on religious and ecclesiastical transgressions. It is only after these that we still hear of people who did not show compassion for widows and orphans or asked too high an interest for their loans and trusted in their riches. Now, the worst penalties are reserved for those who denied that Christ came in the flesh, born to the Virgin Mary, and who say that the bread of the Eucharist and the cup of blessing are not the body and blood of Christ. These will not be mentioned before God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. In other words, for these heretics no respite is possible, whereas for the others there will be freedom from torture on Sundays. It is important to remember that here, as in other Apocalypses, there is a plea for mercy. Although these Apocalypses appealed to a human thirst for revenge, there is also another side to them which should not be forgotten.

With this Apocalypse we have come to the end of our survey. In the East, the *Apocalypse of Paul* was replaced by other Apocalypses and the original Greek text is now lost, but in the West, it survived in Latin translations. Through the medieval period, these preserved only the very popular parts about hell, which were often translated into the vernacular.[45]

Conclusion

Looking back, we can see that the epic of Gilgamesh introduced a human attempt to invade the superhuman Beyond. This inspired Homer and other early Greek poets. With Orphism, the originally heroic underworld gradually became an underworld not only for great sinners like Tantalus, but also for anonymous sinners. This underworld was appropriated by Hellenised Jews, who also made use of their own Jewish tradition in the measure-for-measure punishments, the demonstrative pronouns and the prominence of fire. Somewhere between *1 Enoch* and the middle of the second century AD, a Jew invented the genre of the Apocalypse, which contained features of classical Descent literature but also a number of ethical transgressions, with fire being the instrument of punishment for anonymous sinners. After the victory of Christianity, the main sins became religious, ecclesiastical and dogmatic, but the fire remained. These sins have largely disappeared from the modern world, but burning in hell remains a fixed part of the popular imagination. It is not one of Christianity's best legacies.

[45] See, most recently, L. Jiroušková, *Die Visio Pauli. Wege und Wandlungen einer orientalischen Apokryphe im lateinischen Mittelalter unter Einschluß der alttsechischen und deutschsprachigen Textzeugen*, Leiden 2006; P. Dinzelbacher, *Von der Welt durch die Hölle zum Paradies – das mittelalterliche Jenseits*, Paderborn 2007, pp. 165–180 (the *Visio Pauli* in the Middle Ages); J. Zimmermann, *Die* Tiroler Predigtsammlung *und ihre* Visio Pauli *(mit Edition des. Predigttextes)* [in:] *Mertens lesen. Exemplarische Lektüren für Volker Mertens zum 75. Geburtstag*, M. Costard *et al.* (eds.), Göttingen 2012, pp. 9–30; N.H. Trunte, *Reiseführer durch das Jenseits: die Apokalypse des Paulus in der Slavia Orthodoxa*, Munich 2013; R.E. Guglielmetti, *Deux témoins inédits de la* Visio Pauli, "Apocrypha" 2015, no. 26, pp. 57–78.

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