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## The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period

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*THE TESTAMENT OF SOLOMON*  
FROM LATE ANTIQUITY TO THE RENAISSANCE

Sarah Iles Johnston

*Introduction*

To work on the *Testament of Solomon* properly a scholar must acquire something like one of Solomon's legendary magical rings – not the ring that he used to imprison demons, which the *Testament* itself describes, but the one that enabled him to understand and speak the languages of all earth's creatures.<sup>1</sup> The *Testament* drew upon and in turn influenced so many cultures' folk beliefs, magical practices and literatures that unless a scholar is fluent in numerous languages, ancient and modern (Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic and Persian as well as in all the contemporary European languages, just to name a few) it is impossible to present the text and its significance completely. A scholar must also have infinite time at his or her disposal, for the territory that the *Testament* inhabits is not only geographically vast, but also temporally so: it stretches backwards into much older Jewish lore and the traditions represented in the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri, and then stretches forward into the *Arabian Nights*, medieval folklore, Renaissance *grimoires* and even modern novels and films.

Lacking both a magical ring and infinite time, I have chosen to provide a brief survey of our knowledge about the *Testament*, its background and its dissemination and, following that, to discuss the relevance of two of its most distinctive features for the study of the history of magic: the use of demons for the benefit of humanity and the imprisonment of demons in sealed containers. It is my hope that this small taste of what the *Testament* has to offer will stimulate other scholars to undertake further, more detailed work.

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<sup>1</sup> I thank the organisers of the conference for inviting me to deliver the paper on which this was based and many of the audience members for their comments. In addition, I am grateful to Gideon Bohak and Dick Davis for their help with some of the comparative materials I used, and particularly to Jan Bremmer for his many suggestions as I completed the essay.

## Description of the document

The Testament of Solomon is a document written in Koine Greek, purporting to be the testament (*diathêkē*) of King Solomon and narrated in the first person.<sup>2</sup> Like many ancient testaments, it has two components: (1) an extensive middle section that conveys information and (2) a **frame**, consisting of a brief opening statement that explains who the narrator is, how he acquired the information he is about to convey and why he wants to convey it, and a closing statement exhorting the reader to make good use of the **information** and explaining what happened to the narrator **after** he had acquired it. Later tradition picks up on Solomon's **final** words and explains that we must be prepared to cope with the demons whom Solomon once had captured because they subsequently were **freed** by the Babylonians (or 'Chaldeans' as the text variously calls them), who had been ordered by King **Nebuchadnezzar** to destroy the Temple, under which the demons' bottles had been buried. The Babylonians, thinking that the bottles contained gold, opened them.<sup>3</sup>

The information that Solomon passes along to his readers in the Testament comprises a demonology. Solomon tells us in the opening statement that, during the time when the Temple was being built, his favorite workman was attacked each night by a vampire-like creature who sucked out his energy through his thumb; the demon also stole half of the workman's provisions and wages (TSol, 1.4). Solomon asked God for help, and via the angel Michael, God delivered a magical ring to Solomon. This ring, upon which was engraved the famous 'Seal of Solomon', could be used to control and bind all the demons of the world (TSol, 1.5).<sup>4</sup> With a little help **from** the

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Work on the *Testament (TSol)* should begin with consultation of the following works: Duling, 'Testament' (1992); Jackson, 'Notes' (which corrects and amends Duling); McCown, *The Testament*; Preisendanz, 'Salomo', pp. 684-690.

<sup>3</sup> The story appears most fully in an eighteenth-century manuscript from a Greek monastery in Jerusalem, which McCown includes in his edition; Bonner, 'The Sibyl' (pp. 5-6), translates the text, discusses the relevant portions, and shows that it is likely to be much older. The tradition is already alluded to at *TSol*, 5.5 and 15.9-15 as well. See also *The Testament of Truth = Nag Hammadi Codex IX.3* 70.5-24 for an alternative and early attested (second or third century) version that blames the Romans for opening the bottles when they destroyed the Temple.

<sup>4</sup> On instructions for making rings to be used in exorcisms of demons, see *Cyranides* 1.13 and the discussion at Bonner, 'Technique'. Lucian, *Navigium* 42-45 mentions magical rings that are able to do all sorts of things; cf. also his *Philopseudeis* 45. The magical papyri include recipes for making magical rings, e.g., *PGM* V.213-303, VII.628-42, XII.201-350; cf. also *Sepher ha-Razim* 6,16-29. Solomon's ring is first mentioned at Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae*, 8.41-9; cf. *bGittin* 68a-b. Cf. also *PGM* IV.3039, which adjures a demon by Solomon's seal (but without mention of a

angel *Ouriel*, Solomon first brought under his control *Omiar*, the demon who was persecuting his workman; he then forced *Omiar* to bring *Beelzeboul*, a more powerful demon, into his presence (*TSol*, 1.10-3.5). *Beelzeboul* was compelled to call up all the other demons, one by one, so that Solomon might learn from each of them what his or her name was, how each of them persecuted mortals, and how each could be controlled (*TSol*, 3.6 ff.).<sup>5</sup> The bulk of the rest of the *Testament* describes how some of these demons were then sealed immediately into vessels with the help of the ring while others were first set to work building the Temple, carrying out tasks that ranged from plaiting hemp into ropes to lifting stones that were too heavy for humans to handle. At the end of the *Testament*, Solomon relates how, seduced by the beauty of a foreign woman, he agreed to sacrifice grasshoppers to the gods *Raphan* and *Moloch* and thus fell out of God's grace, losing his power over the demons (*TSol*, 26.1-6). He ends his *Testament* by exhorting other people to use the information that he has passed on to them to protect themselves against demons as best they can, and to resist temptations to leave their faith better than he had (*TSol*, 26.8).

*Date and place of composition; orientation of composer*

The most recent scholar to study the *Testament* extensively, *Denis Duling*, favors dating the text between the first and third centuries AD; previous scholars had suggested dates between the first and thirteenth centuries AD with proposals clustering in the first five centuries of the Common Era. Most scholars accept that some of the traditions underlying the *Testament*, most importantly the tradition that Solomon could exorcise demons, go back at least as far as the first century BC.<sup>6</sup> It is now also agreed that the

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ring), and similarly, amongst others, *Isbell*, *Corpus*, nos. 7.118, 18.18, etc. Further on Solomon's ring within a broader cultural context, *Preisendanz*, 'Salomo', pp. 670-676; *Duling*, 'The *Eleazar* Miracle', pp. 21-22, and, on the Islamic development of the legend of Solomon's ring(s), *Walker*, 'Sulaymān', p. 823. Further on magical rings, see also *Versnel*, 'Polycrates', pp. 35-36, with note 77 for bibliography.

<sup>5</sup> *Jackson*, 'Notes', rightly recognises and emphasises that one manuscript of the *Testament* (MS L, from the British Library) includes interpolations made by a medieval reader who used it as a practical *grimoire* for performing exorcisms; the interpolations are intended to improve and expand the *Testament's* usefulness in this field. *Jackson's* work not only clears up some supposed textual problems but underscores how important the *Testament* was to the development of later magical theory and practice. The article also provides ancient and medieval parallels for some of the *Testament's* magical and demonological features that are not found elsewhere.

<sup>6</sup> *Duling*, 'The *Testament*' (1983), pp. 940-943, reviews the arguments and previous scholars' opinions; his own opinion is given on pp. 941-942. See also *McCown*, *The Testament*, pp. 105-106.

original language of the document was the Koine Greek in which it has been transmitted to us, although Moses Gaster earlier had argued that the existing *Testament* was a translation from a lost Hebrew original.<sup>7</sup>

Fifteen manuscripts of the *Testament* and a fragment of a sixteenth are now known.<sup>8</sup> C. C. McCown's 1922 edition drew on ten manuscripts to create a composite on which Duling's translation of the *Testament* was based; McCown also commented on three other manuscripts that were recognised at the time of his publication.<sup>9</sup> A. Delatte subsequently published another, shorter version of the *Testament* and K. Preisendanz a papyrus fragment from the fifth or sixth century AD; Duling discusses a final, Arabic manuscript dating to the seventeenth century.<sup>10</sup>

Hypotheses regarding the place of composition vary and include Syria-Palestine, Babylonia, Asia Minor (especially Ephesus) and Egypt; Duling reaffirms McCown's judgment that we cannot assign a place with certainty, but adduces good reasons to favor Babylonia or Egypt. The religious orientation and cultural background of the composer have also been much debated: proposals include Christian, Palestinian Jew with awareness of Christian ideas of the time, Essene and Egyptian Gnostic, but current consensus is that the author was a Greek-speaking Christian." The backgrounds of the rituals and beliefs represented in the *Testament* are diverse. Some passages find their closest parallels in the Greek and Demotic magical papyri of approximately the same date, which in turn draw on Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Jewish ideas; others seem borrowed from haggadic (i.e., traditional Jewish) lore. There are also passages that bear close resemblances to passages in the Old and New biblical Testaments; most scholars suggest that the Testaments and the *Testament* drew on common older sources, however,

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<sup>7</sup> Duling, 'The Testament' (1983), p. 939, and Gaster, 'The Sword', pp. 294,309.

<sup>8</sup> See list and description at Duling, 'The Testament' (1983), pp. 937-939, with particular attention to the notes; cf. McCown, *The Testament*, pp. 10-28, and Duling, 'Testament' (1992), p. 119.

<sup>9</sup> Preceding McCown, *The Testament*, the only edition available was that of Fleck, *Wissenschaftliche Reise* (repr. in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 122, 1315-1358).

<sup>10</sup> Delatte, *Anecdota*, pp. 211-227; Preisendanz, 'Ein Wiener Papyrusfragment', and see now Daniel, 'The Testament'; Duling, 'Testament' (1992), p. 119. See also McCown, *The Testament*, pp. 82-87, for a discussion of how the manuscripts differ from one another. The most recent translation into English is that of Duling, 'The Testament' (1983); see also Conybeare ('The Testament'), whose translation, however, draws upon Fleck's edition, which used only the Paris codex.

<sup>11</sup> Duling, 'The Testament' (1983), pp. 943-944, for a summary of earlier views and arguments in favor of Babylonia; Duling, 'Testament' (1992), for arguments that favor Egypt. Another thorough discussion (although outdated) is that of McCown, *The Testament*, pp. 88-90.

rather than that the Testament drew directly on the Testaments. In short, we are dealing with a document that is like so many other religious documents **from** the late antique Mediterranean: it is a well mixed bricolage to which we can hardly assign an ethnic or religious background in any useful sense.<sup>12</sup>

#### Solomonic traditions that preceded the Testament

The basis for Solomon's reputation as a controller of demons (and later, a worker of all sorts of magic) goes back to I Kings 4.29-34 (5.9-14 in Hebrew), which describes him as being extremely wise, as having composed 3000 proverbs and 1005 songs (translated as Gidai in the Septuagint), and as knowing a great deal about plants and animals. Over the centuries, these statements were interpreted to mean that he wrote incantations (*epôidai*)<sup>13</sup> and knew the magical uses of plants and animals. These claims were joined by others that credited him with the knowledge of astrology and 'forces of spirits' as well, by at least the second century BC.<sup>14</sup> A key text for our understanding of how Solomon's reputation developed is Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 8.2.5, which makes him, among other things, an expert exorcist whose name could be used by later exorcists to chase demons out of those whom they possessed (Josephus clearly alludes to I Kings 4.29-34 at several points, which supports the idea that it is here that the tradition of Solomon as an exorcist and magician finds its root). The Dead Sea Scrolls contain a **fragmentary** recension of Psalm 91, known to the Rabbis as an exorcistic text, which mentions Solomon's name just before the term 'demons',<sup>15</sup> and the *Targum Sheni* to Esther describes him as ruling over not only animals but also devils and spirits of the night. Thus, by the first century AD, Solomon's reputation as a controller of demons seems to have been well on its way towards becoming a central part of his legend, if it were not so already. Solomon's identity as the son of David, whom texts of

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<sup>12</sup> The most thorough survey of these topics is that of McCown, *The Testament*, pp. 51-90; although somewhat outdated now, it still is a starting point for further work. Preisendanz's thorough review of Solomon's reputation in Antiquity is also important ('Salomo'). See also Duling's various publications as listed in the bibliography. On Jewish magic more broadly, including traditions that influenced the *Testament*, see Alexander, 'Incantations', pp. 375-379.

<sup>13</sup> Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 8.2.5.

<sup>14</sup> *Wisdom of Solomon* 7.15-22.

<sup>15</sup> 11Q11, cf. Garcia Martínez and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden, 2000), vol. 2, pp. 1200-1205.

about this time credit with curing Saul of an evil spirit by playing upon his harp, probably contributed as well.<sup>16</sup>

*Solomonic traditions to which the Testament contributed*

Solomon's reputation as a controller of demons developed further into a generalised reputation as a magician during the late antique, Byzantine, medieval, Renaissance and early modern periods.<sup>17</sup> In particular, he was credited with the authorship of numerous books of magical and alchemical knowledge, some of which explicitly included demonological information of the sort that is found in the *Testament*. The best known, in addition to the *Testament*, is probably the *Key of Solomon*, a treatise that first appeared in the fourteenth century.

As late as the eighteenth century, in both Europe and the east, practicing magicians believed that the *Key* and other treatises they followed had been composed by Solomon. The existence of *any* book of magic written by Solomon could have been regarded as miraculous, for there was also a tradition that Hezekiah had burned or hidden all of Solomon's magical writings after his death, for fear of how the less pious might use them.<sup>18</sup>

Like several other Jewish figures from the Bible or Late Antiquity (e.g., Abraham, Moses and Maria the Jewess),<sup>19</sup> Solomon also was credited with the invention of alchemical processes and devices. Earlier sources explicitly

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<sup>16</sup> Further on the development of the tradition at Duling, 'The Testament' (1983), pp. 944-951; Duling, 'The Eleazar Miracle', and *idem*, 'Solomon'; Jordan and Kotansky, 'A Salomonic Exorcism': McCown, *The Testament*, pp. 90-93.

<sup>17</sup> Survey at Duling, 'The Testament' (1983), pp. 956-957; see also McCown, *The Testament*, pp. 93-104; Preisendanz, 'Salomo', pp. 684-703 (emphasising the pseudonymous books attributed to Solomon), and Alexander, 'Incantations', pp. 375-379. For the Jewish tradition, Ginzberg, *The Legends*, vol. 4, pp. 149-172. For the Byzantine materials, see Greenfield, *Traditions, passim*, esp. part II (consult the index of proper names s. ~'Solomon' and 'Solomon's Magic Treatise') and Greenfield, 'A Contribution'. The best introduction to the *Key* and other magical works attributed to Solomon in the medieval, Renaissance and early modern periods is Butler, *Ritual Magic, passim*, esp. pp. 47-153; see also Waite, *The Book of Ceremonial Magic*, pp. 58-76; McCown, *The Testament*, pp. 100-104, and Seligsohn, 'Solomon'. References to Solomon are also found throughout Kieckhefer's *Magic and Forbidden Rites*.

<sup>18</sup> McCown, *The Testament*, pp. 96-100; Preisendanz, 'Salomo', pp. 664-666, and Alexander, 'Incantations', p. 378, for ancient sources and development of the tradition; it is found in Recension C of the *Testament* as well as a number of other sources.

<sup>19</sup> Generally on Jewish alchemy and its legends, Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, chapt. 2. On Solomon in particular, pp. 26-30, and frequently throughout. See also Preisendanz, 'Salomo', pp. 699-701.

linked this ability to his existing reputation as a controller of demons but later sources simply built upon the ever-growing and ever-broadening association between Solomon and virtually all types of arcane knowledge. Zosimus, writing in the third or fourth century AD, and his anonymous Syriac commentator discuss miraculous flasks invented by Solomon, originally for the confinement of the demons trapped during the building of the Temple but subsequently adapted for use as alchemical vessels.<sup>20</sup> In the early tenth century, Arabic writers ascribed the invention of iron tools to Solomon; in 1620 in Frankfurt, the German alchemist Michael Maier published *The Philosophical Week*, a book purporting to record the secrets of Solomon, the Queen of Sheba and Hiram, Prince of Tyre (who may have been understood as the Hiram who helped in the construction of the Temple).<sup>21</sup> Johann Joachim Becher, writing in the mid-seventeenth century, and others claimed that Solomon had possessed the Philosopher's Stone, having obtained it from the Queen of Sheba who inherited it from her husband. Soloman's understanding of animal languages and his control over animals was also helpful in his pursuit of precious metals: the *Stone Book of Aristotle*, an Arabic treatise from the mid-ninth century, relates a Herodotean-sounding story about how Solomon commanded ants to dig up red sulphur (that is, gold), in the Valley of the Ants.<sup>23</sup>

Folklore, especially Arabic folklore, embroidered Solomon's reputation both as a controller of demons and as a general magician even further.<sup>24</sup> The proverbial 'genie in a bottle' of the *Arabian Nights* originates in the story of Solomon sealing the demons in bottles upon completion of the Temple;

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<sup>20</sup> Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>21</sup> Full title: *Septimana philosophica, qua aenigmata avreola de omni natvrae genere a Salomone Israelitarum sapientissimo rege, & Arabiae regina Saba, nec non Hyramo, Tyri principe, sibe inuicem in modum colloqui proponunter & enodantur: vbi passim nouae, at verae, cum ratione & experientia conuenientes, rerum naturalium causae exponuntur & demonstrantur, figuris cupro incisus singulis diebus adiectis.*

<sup>22</sup> Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, pp. 26-27. The Greek work, entitled *The Book of Imouth*, is lost and is known now only through the anonymous Syriac translation and commentary and through mention in Georgius Syncellus's *Chronographia* edited by Goar (Venice, 1652). For the Syriac manuscript, see Berthelot, *Histoire*, pp. xx, xxx, 214 (note 1), 238 and 264-666. The manuscript is in the Cambridge University Library (MS 6.29). Further also at Berthelot, *Les Origines*, p. 9; Scott and Ferguson, *Hermetica*, p. 140.

<sup>23</sup> Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, p. 26. On the Herodotean story, see Peissel, *The Ants' Gold*, pp. 144-149; Karttunen, *India*, pp. 171-180.

<sup>24</sup> On Solomon's appearances in the Koran and Islamic tales, see Walker, 'Sulaymân'; McCown, *The Testament*, pp. 78-82. On Jewish folklore, Ginzberg, *The Legends*, vol. 4, pp. 149-172.

some passages in the *Arabian Nights* explicitly call the *genii*'s bottles 'Solomonic' and describe his seal upon their tops. Early haggadic stories credited Solomon with a magical carpet on which he could fly through the sky; whether this gave rise to the carpet stories in the *Arabian Nights* or both drew from a common folkloric source is impossible to say.<sup>25</sup> More generally, the *Arabian Nights* often refer to Solomon's magical powers in passing.

*Demons working for the glory of God and good of humanity*

One of the most striking aspects of the story told in the *Testament* is the fact that Solomon compels demons to work for the glorification of God and the good of humanity when he uses them to help build the Temple. This, so far as I have been able to discover, is the first example of demons being so used from any Mediterranean culture. The closest ancient analogy, on which the tradition represented in the *Testament* may draw, is the use of supernatural assistants to do things that benefit the individual magician who controls them, such as making a woman fall in love with the magician or fetching articles that the magician needs. We find instructions for gaining control of such assistants throughout the Greek and Demotic magical papyri of the first few centuries AD.<sup>26</sup> The rituals that the papyri record are several centuries older than the papyrus texts themselves, and have probably evolved from far earlier ritual techniques for manipulating the souls of the dead. The most famous and most commonly used of these older techniques were those employing 'curse tablets' or *defixiones*, in which the souls of the dead, especially the unhappy dead, were adjured to do things such as curse women with insomnia until they gave in to the desires of the magician, or cause a charioteer to crash on the race-course. We have examples of these tablets from Greece and its colonies as early as the late sixth century BC. They increase in popularity and are found throughout the Mediterranean as late as the fifth and sixth centuries AD. Notably, just as Solomon receives the ring that empowers him to command demons from God, so do the magicians who used curse tablets rely on Hecate, *Hermes* and other gods to compel the dead souls to do their bidding.<sup>27</sup> From at least the start of the first millennium BC, Mesopotamian magicians also used ghosts to accomplish various goals.<sup>28</sup> In short, it seems that many Mediterranean magicians con-

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\*\* On the carpet story, Ginzberg, *The Legends*, vol. 4, pp. 162-163.

<sup>26</sup> E.g., PGMI.1-195, VII.505-28, XIa.1-40, XII.14-95, LVII.1-37, and the contribution of Anna Scibilia in this volume.

<sup>27</sup> Gager, *Curse Tablets*, pp. 12-14; Graf, *Magic*, pp. 118-174; Johnston, *Restless Dead*, pp. 71-81.

<sup>28</sup> Overview in Johnston, *Restless Dead*, pp. 87-90, with citations to more detailed discussions by specialists in the notes.

sidered the control of ghostly or demonic entities to be essential to the completion of their work: the better one was at controlling demons, the greater a magician one was. The *Testament*, then, in presenting Solomon as controlling *all* of the demons, presents him as a *spectacularly successful* magician even as it simultaneously presents him as a completely pious one by combining his lordship over demons with his well-known construction of the Temple and attributing that success to the ring that God conveyed to him.

The *Testament* also stands at the beginning of a long tradition of presenting Solomon as an exorcist. The *Testament* begins with Solomon's desire to cure his favorite workman of demonic problems and it is only in the course of pursuing this end that he meets the other demons at all. This, of course, further substantiates the picture of Solomon that the *Testament* wants to project: he is a beneficent magician, *working* only for the good of other people. The message is underscored within the *Testament* by an implicit admonition against using demons for privately-oriented goals: when Solomon conjures up Beelzeboul he asks the demon to reveal 'heavenly things' to him. Apparently misunderstanding the request, Beelzeboul offers to teach him how to use a magical mixture of plants and oils to see the 'heavenly dragons who pull the chariot of the Sun' (*TSol*, 6.10-11). According to the magical papyri and theurgic documents contemporary with the *Testament*, viewing such cosmic sights not only was entertaining, but also taught the viewer more about how the cosmos functioned and thus how to put its powers to work.<sup>29</sup> Solomon refuses the offer and rebukes Beelzeboul for making it, again underscoring that his interest in magic is completely altruistic and within the confines of properly pious Judaism.

The *Testament* clearly indicates that other people may use beneficial magic, as well. The beginning of the *Testament* explicitly claims that Solomon passes along his knowledge of how to avert and exorcise demons so that readers may use it to protect themselves. The fact that Solomon lends his magical ring to his possessed worlanan both so that he may capture the demon who is persecuting him and so that he may use it to capture a wind-demon who is persecuting the Arabians, further *confirms* that it is proper for others to make use of Solomon's exorcistic powers (*TSol*, 22). The stories that Hezekiah had burned or hidden all of Solomon's magical books lest others be tempted into abusing his knowledge, in contrast (above, note 18), suggest that later Jewish tradition was uncomfortable with magic of any type and *from* all sources, however reputable. The plethora of magical books attributed to Solomon in later ages belie these stories, but an *admoni-*

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Jackson, 'Notes', pp. 43-44.

tion sprang up to take their place: manuscripts of the *Key of Solomon* include Solomon's statement to his son Roboam:

If thou dost not intend to use for a good purpose the secrets which I teach thee here, I command thee rather to cast this testament into the fire than to abuse the power thou wilt have of constraining the Spirits, for I warn thee that the beneficent Angels, wearied and fatigued by thine illicit demands, would to thy sorrow execute the commands of God, as well as to that of all such who, with evil intent, would abuse those secrets which He hath given and revealed unto me.

As E. M. Butler noted, 'this good advice would, if adopted, render a large part of the [*Key of Solomon*] of very doubtful value'.<sup>30</sup>

A story that similarly manages to present Solomon as a powerful magician and yet warn against the dangers of using demons for the wrong reasons and without God's blessing is found in the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Adam*, which dates to the first or second century AD and perhaps emerged from a Syrio-Palestinian baptismal sect.<sup>31</sup> Before explaining the real origin of a Redeemer-figure called the *Photor*, the author of the *Apocalypse* rejects several false explanations that currently were circulating. According to one of them, Solomon sought to sire the *Photor* upon a particular virgin and sent his army of demons out to find her. Unable to find the correct virgin, the demons instead returned with another virgin on whom Solomon subsequently sired a false *Photor* (*ApocAd.* 7.13-16). Here, even more clearly than in the *Testament*, we glimpse a tradition whereby Solomon used demons for much the same purpose as any other Mediterranean magician would have used them: to obtain the object of his personal desires, specifically a sexual partner, as is so often the case in the curse tablets and magical papyri. On the one hand, the story excuses Solomon by overlaying his actions with the implication that he performed them with the hope of redeeming humanity. On the other hand, the fact that the demons returned with a false virgin and then duped Solomon into accepting her, drives home the message that Solomon was wrong to use demons without God's explicit instructions, even if he sought to do so for the benefit of humanity. Indeed, it comes close to dismissing completely any possibility for the proper use of demons: we see here the Judaeo-Christian distrust and rejection of magic at an early stage of its development; such distrust and rejection thrives under monotheism, which requires that God and his angels be presented as so

<sup>30</sup> Butler, *Ritual Magic*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>31</sup> McCrae, 'The Apocalypse', and cf. the remarks of Duling, 'The Testament' (1983), p. 946.

powerful that humans cannot control them and demons so defective that humans cannot trust them to provide anything of benefit.

In spite of the implicit warnings included in these stories of Solomon's interaction with demons, they helped to pass down to later ages – even to revitalise – the old concept of the magician's demonic or ghostly assistant. In folklore, it was expressed in the Arabian tales of genies or *Ifrits* who, once released from the bottles in which Solomon had trapped them, were compelled to fulfill their liberators' desires. The stories also led to a medieval European tradition of tales in which the Devil or his agent was tricked by clever villagers or saints into building bridges, churches or other structures – participants in the conference that gave rise to this volume told me the Swiss tale of the 'Teufelsbrücke' in Goschenen and the German story of St. Wulfstan compelling the Devil to build a church; many other examples are recorded in the Brothers Grimm's *Deutsche Sagen*. These stories all have happy endings because the benefit of the Devil's work, as in the *Testament of Solomon*, is directed towards society at large or God himself, but the darker tale of Faust was among those that continued to make it clear how dangerous it was to seek personal gain from demons.

### *Imprisonment of demons*

As noted above, the method that Solomon used to imprison the demons whom he brought under his control – sealing them into containers – stands at the beginning of a long tradition of both folk tales and practice.<sup>32</sup> Although earlier examples of this method cannot be found, it is analogous to a few other practices that were earlier or approximately contemporary with the *Testament*. One of the closest is the Aramaic custom of trapping demons under inverted bowls that have been magically empowered; the earliest extant examples date from the sixth century AD but the practice is assumed by scholars to be older.<sup>33</sup> The bowls have exorcistic and apotropaic incantations written circularly around their interiors; sometimes a demon or an avertive power is drawn in the middle of the incantations. Some bowls include Solomon's name or a drawing of his Seal, which suggests they may

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<sup>32</sup> For further mentions of Solomon performing the trick, see *The Testimony of Truth = Nag Hammadi Codex IX* 3, 70.5-24; *Acta S. Marinae et S. Christophori*, p. 36, ed. H. Usener; Leontius of Byzantium, *Patrologia Graeca* 86, col. 1980; cf. Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, p. 295. For the prehistory of the trick, see also Tigchelaar, *Prophets of Old*, pp. 59-63 ('A Goddess in a Jar').

<sup>33</sup> These bowls have been compared to Solomon's bottles by a number of scholars, the earliest to my knowledge being McCown, *The Testament*, p. 65. See also Alexander, 'Incantations', pp. 352-355 (with extensive bibliography), and most importantly among recent publications, Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets*.

have been attempts to accomplish what Solomon did with his bottles through simpler and more easily obtainable means. The practice was to place the bowls, face down, in the four comers or the doorways of the dwelling that needed to be protected. It seems clear, particularly on the analogy of the Solomonic bottles, that the demon was meant to be caught under the inverted bowl like a trapped insect.

Other *comparanda* include the Greek practice of luring dangerous ghosts into statues that are meant to represent them and then binding those statues in chains or disposing of them in outlying areas such as forests. Instructions for such rituals date back as early as the fourth century BC. Later spells teach how to call gods or demonic assistants into physical objects such as statuettes or bowls of liquid not so much to entrap them and thus prevent their doing harm but so as to compel them to serve those who had called them.<sup>34</sup> These techniques share with Solomon's bottle trick and the Aramaic incantation bowls the assumption that, although demons, ghosts and gods do not normally obey the same rules of physical existence as do human bodies – that is, they can fly, they can become invisible, they are exceedingly strong, *etcetera* – nonetheless, physical objects, when properly consecrated by spoken spells, amulets or sacred devices such as Solomon's seal, can retain them. Raymund de Tarrega, a fourteenth-century alchemist who was executed during the Inquisition for, among other things, having written a book variously entitled *De invocatione demonum* or *The Book of Solomon*, also wrote a book called *De secretis naturae sive quinta essentia*, in which he makes a point very much like this: 'God's ability to subject the demons to sensate things', Raymund says, 'is made clear by Solomon's acts of necromancy, with which the demons were forced to perform good works; or with the evil virtues of words, stones, and plants. It is therefore clear how the demons are subject to the action of sensate things'.<sup>35</sup>

As was mentioned above, the story of Solomon's imprisonment of demons in bottles leaves its mark on Arabic folklore. From there it eventually moves into the popular fiction of many cultures and even into American films and television. The 1942 film 'I Married a Witch' imprisons witches in bottles;<sup>36</sup> during the 1960s, a popular American TV comedy entitled 'I Dream of Jeannie' revolved around an astronaut who released a

<sup>34</sup> Johnston, *Restless Dead*, pp. 58-60 with notes; Faraone, *Talismans*, pp. 54-93; Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles*, pp. 495-496, on theurgic invocation of gods into statues; Johnston, 'Charming Children', on calling gods and demons into bowls of liquid in order to obtain prophecies.

<sup>35</sup> On Raymund de Tarrega, see Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, chapt. 13. The passage to which I refer is given by Patai on pp. 201-202.

<sup>36</sup> Based on Thorne Smith's novel *The Passionate Witch*, completed by Norman Matson and published after Smith's death in 1941 (Garden City, NJ).

beautiful genie from a bottle and, like Solomon and others, quickly learned that this was a mixed blessing. Robert Louis Stevenson's 'The Bottle Imp' sets the motif in nineteenth-century Hawaii. Translated into Samoan during Stevenson's 'extended stay in the Samoan Islands, the story led natives to believe that the author actually possessed a marvelous bottle containing such a spirit – a relatively rare case of literature influencing belief, instead of the other way around.<sup>37</sup> The possibility of containing a mighty entity within a tiny vessel never loses its power to fascinate.<sup>38</sup>

The story also leaves its mark on real magical and alchemical practices of later ages. Solomon is credited with the invention of special flasks or bottles that were used in alchemy, as we learn from Zosimus and the Syriac author who copied and commented on Zosimus's texts; they describe these as being the same as the flasks in which Solomon contained the demons. The flasks were seven in number, like the planets, and manufactured from a composite of gold, silver, copper and other materials – nine in all – at the order of an angel and according to the dictates of the Philosopher's Stone. 'Through [these bottles]', the Syrian commentator tells us, 'all other works can be accomplished', a phrase that apparently refers to all alchemical works. Notably, the Syrian also refers to these bottles as 'talismans', which emphasises that it was the Seal imprinted upon them as much as any materials that went into bottles that was important in guaranteeing their excellence.<sup>39</sup>

The use of vessels to imprison and thereby control demons, however popular in folklore and however mimicked in the construction of alchemical vessels, almost died out in the practice of demonological magic itself. In European *grimoires* of the medieval, Renaissance and early modern periods, Solomon's Seal and other ritual techniques attributed to Solomon are repeatedly used to invoke and control demons, but very seldom, as far as I have been able to discover, do magicians attempt to contain demons physically.<sup>40</sup> Instead, it becomes the magician himself who must be contained: according to the *grimoires*, he must stand inside of a magical circle when he invokes demons, in order to protect himself from their attacks. The Seal of Solomon and other magical signs attributed to Solomon are used to streng-

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<sup>37</sup> See Levin, 'Introduction'.

<sup>38</sup> See also Horálek, 'Geist' for a review of the motif in folklore and literature throughout the world, and Haas, 'Ein Hurritischer Blutritus', pp. 77-83, although I find his connection of the motif to the story of Pandora somewhat unlikely. Also Bonner, 'The Sibyl', although again the connection seems distant to me.

<sup>39</sup> See Duling, 'The Testament' (1983), p. 950 note 94, and Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>40</sup> A partial exception is found in the *Lemegeton*, where an angel is called into a crystal; Waite, *The Book of Ceremonial Magic*, pp. 71-72.

then the circle or, in the form of amulets, are **worn** on the magician's body, to protect him more directly.<sup>41</sup> There are many distant analogies for this sort of behavior in Mediterranean and European cultures – to name just one, the hanging of apotropaic plants or smearing of apotropaic materials on house doors and windows to prevent demons and ghosts from entering: as long as one stayed home within the protected space, one was safe.<sup>42</sup> But even better analogies for what the magicians were aiming at can be found in modern science: like an ichthyologist descending in a metal cage to study sharks, or a biologist studying the effects of radiation from inside the safety of a special suit, the magician protects himself through his *own* confinement so that he can allow the dangerous elements he is using to run free and do their work. To put it another way, there was no desire to replicate Solomon's bottles because they were too good at doing exactly what Solomon had hoped they would: stopping humans and demons from interacting. I should add that it was not just a matter of the legend having died out – in fact, the *Lemegeton* begins by narrating a version of the story mentioned earlier in this essay, according to which Solomon trapped all the demons in a brazen vessel that he threw into the sea. The Babylonians **dregged** up and opened the vessel in the belief that it contained treasure, with predictably dire results. The manuscript of the *Lemegeton* provides an illustration of this vessel but, notably, no instructions for reproducing it. Unlike other illustrations in *grimoires*, this one seems to be there purely to entertain the reader, or perhaps to lend an air of authority.<sup>43</sup>

### Conclusion

The *Testament of Solomon* had a significant and extremely long-lived effect on both the ways in which magic actually was practiced in the centuries after its composition and on the way in which magic was *imagined* to be performed. To some extent, this must have been due to the prestige of his name; like Moses,<sup>44</sup> another Jewish patriarch credited with both wisdom

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<sup>41</sup> Butler, *Ritual Magic*, frequently throughout, for instance, pp. 73-76 and 52; Waite, *The Book of Ceremonial Magic*, pp. 220-235.

<sup>42</sup> E.g., the pitch smeared on doors during the Anthesteria in Athens to avert ghosts: Photius s.v. *miara htmera* and Nicander, *Theriaka*, 861-862, and the hanging of buckthorn on doors of houses where women were giving birth in order to prevent demons from entering (also at Photius s.v. *miara htmera*). The middle-European custom of hanging garlic at entrances to avert vampires is a well-known variation.

<sup>43</sup> The illustration is reproduced in Butler, *Ritual Magic*, opposite p. 66.

<sup>44</sup> Gager, 'Moses'.

and magical knowledge, Solomon's imprimatur bespoke both power and, if one chose to read it this way, piety.

But another reason that Solomon's *Testament* and more generally, his reputation as an exorcist and all-round magician survived so long may have been the prominent role that *demons* played in his story. Mediterranean and European forms of magic (indeed, Mediterranean and European forms of religion) have, **from** the start, been built upon the premise that the cosmos is full of entities who both thwart and, when properly controlled, benefit humanity. Temporally situated as it was at the crossroads between a very old, multi-cultural 'pagan' tradition of such demons and the emergent Christian tradition of Satan and his minions (which in turn influenced Islamic, Arabic traditions), the *Testament* could scarcely fail to win the fame that it did.

