MATTHEW GRAVES

A DICTIONARY OF DEMONS

History, Powers, and Hierarchies of More Than 200 Demons, from the Grimoires to the 72 Spirits of the Goetia

intra



Mysteria Series



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Introduction

Demons do not have biographies. They have bibliographies.

The story is said to begin with a king and a jar. Solomon, the old books say, gathered seventy-two spirits with all their legions, shut them in a vessel of brass, sealed it, and drove it into a deep lake near Babylon. He never explained why. The Babylonians, seeing the thing go down, assumed it was full of gold, waded in, and broke it open. Out flew the spirits, each back to his old place, except one, who slipped into a statue and began giving answers to anyone who would bring him sacrifices. His name was Belial, and the people worshipped the statue as their god.

It is a good story, and like every story in this book it exists only on paper. Nobody has seen the vessel. What we have are the pages that describe it, copied by men who had read other pages, and that is where demons actually live.

Consider the man who did more than anyone to put Hell in order. In 1577 Johann Weyer, a Dutch physician at the court of the Duke of Cleves, printed a catalogue of sixty-nine infernal spirits, each with a rank, a shape, a set of talents, and a precise number of legions. Bael, king of the East, three-headed, hoarse-voiced, able to make a man invisible: sixty-six legions. Paimon, crowned, riding a dromedary, preceded by a band of trumpets and cymbals: two hundred. Weyer did not believe a word of it. He published the list to show how absurd the conjurers were, in the same book in which he argued, at real risk to himself, that the women being burned as witches were sick, deluded, or innocent, and that the guilty party was the devil's oldest trick, human credulity. Seven years later an English country gentleman, Reginald Scot, translated the catalogue into English for the same reason, to mock it. Within a century the magicians had copied it back out of both books and turned it into a working manual. The skeptics wrote the directory of Hell, and the believers used it.

Copying is how demons travel, and copying is how they change. Somewhere between a Latin printing of 1583 and an English manuscript of the seventeenth century, Asmodeus stops making men *invisible* and starts making them *invincible*: one misread word, and a gift for thieves becomes a gift for soldiers. The spirit Flauros commands twenty legions in a French manuscript of the fifteenth century, thirty-seven in Weyer's Latin, thirty-six in the grimoire that English occultists published in 1904. No number is more correct than the others. Each is a fact about a book.

Then the demons began to talk back. In the convents and courtrooms of seventeenth-century France, possessed women spoke in the voices of their tormentors, and the exorcists wrote everything down. At Aix-en-Provence in 1611 a demon named Balberith, speaking through a nun, dictated the whole hierarchy of Hell, with the sin each devil handled and the saint assigned to beat him. At Loudun in 1634, among the Ursuline sisters whose possession sent a parish priest to the stake, the demons were made to sign written promises stating where and when they would leave the body. One of those promises, signed with the name of Asmodeus, still survives. It was filed alongside the doctors' report, and the two documents do not agree on which side of the body the demon came out of.

By the nineteenth century Hell had become an administration. In 1863 Jacques Collin de Plancy, a Parisian man of letters who had started out as a freethinker and ended as a devout Catholic, gave it ministries, ambassadors, and an order of knighthood: Beelzebub at the top, Belial posted to Turkey, Asmodeus supervising the gambling houses. In 1891 the English occultist Arthur Edward Waite, retelling that court, moved Asmodeus to the theaters. De Plancy also hired an artist, Louis Le Breton, to draw the demons from their descriptions, and Le Breton's engravings are the reason most people today know what Bael looks like, or think they do.

And the demons are still on the move. A horror film of 2018 built its whole plot around King Paimon. A video game played by tens of millions named its gods after spirits from Solomon's list. An animated series turned the owl-prince Stolas into a fan favorite. Every one of those names came down the same chain of pages, and every link in the chain left a mark.

This dictionary follows the names. For each demon it asks who wrote the name down first, what that writer said, who copied him and what the copyist changed, and what the name has become since. Where the books disagree, the entry says so and leaves the disagreement standing, because the disagreements are the point. Hell was built one name at a time, over six centuries, by people who had often not read the people before them.

How to Read an Entry

Each entry opens with a one-line portrait in italics. A short block of fixed headings follows, filled in only when the sources have something to say: **Also called** (other names and spellings, with the book that uses each), **Rank**, **Appearance**, **Powers**, **Commands** (legions and subordinates), **Direction** (the compass point the conjurer must face), and **First recorded**. Then comes **The story**, the history of the name from its first appearance onward, and **Sources**, a list of the books where the demon actually appears. The major figures also have an **Afterlife**: what literature, film, television, and games have made of them. **See also** points to related entries. Short cross-references (*Apollyon see Abaddon*) send variant names to the main entry. The Appendix at the back of the book sets the great catalogues side by side.

Matthew Graves

Dictionary

Abaddon

The angel of the bottomless pit in Revelation, king of the locusts; a place, before it was a name.

Also called: Apollyon, the Greek name given in the same verse; Exterminans, the Exterminator, in the Vulgate; Abadon in the *Lanterne of Light*.

Rank: king: so Revelation calls him, making him sovereign of the locusts and "the angel of the bottomless pit."

Appearance: the text does not describe him; it describes his army: locusts like horses prepared for battle, with crowns like gold, faces of men, hair of women, teeth of lions, breastplates of iron, and tails like scorpions.

Commands: the locusts that rise from the bottomless pit and for five months torment the men who do not bear the seal of God, without being allowed to kill them.

First recorded: as the name of a place, in the wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible; as a figure, at the end of the first century, in the Revelation of John.

The story. Before Abaddon was anyone, Abaddon was somewhere. The Hebrew word means "ruin" or "perdition," and in the wisdom books it names the realm of the dead. Job pairs it with Sheol, both lying open before God; the Psalmist asks whether the Lord's faithfulness will be told in Abaddon; Proverbs warns that Sheol and Abaddon are never full. Readers of the King James Version will not find the word in any of these passages, because the translators rendered it rather than transliterating it: "Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering" (Job 26:6). A single verse turns the place into a person. At the sound of the fifth trumpet a star fallen from heaven receives the key of the bottomless pit; out of the smoke come the locusts, and over them reigns a king, "the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon" (Revelation 9:11). The Vulgate adds a third name of its own, in Latin: Exterminans, the Exterminator. The verse does not say that this angel is a rebel. In the same book it is an angel of God who comes down with the key of the bottomless pit to chain the dragon (Revelation

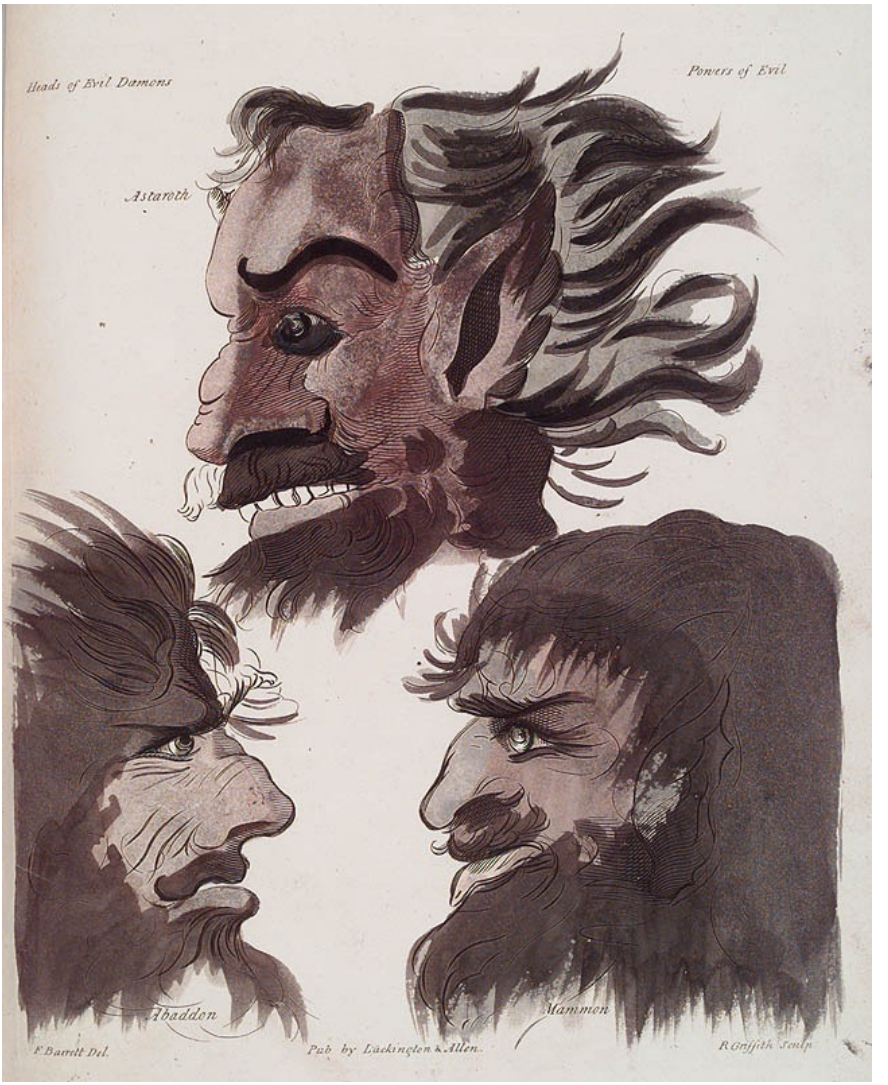
20:1–3), and some commentators have read Abaddon too as the agent of a divine punishment rather than an enemy; others, already in the Middle Ages, identified him with Satan or with one of his princes. Demonology took the second road, but never gave him a place in the catalogues: Abaddon appears neither in the *Livre des esperitz* nor in Weyer nor in the *Goetia*. He enters the ranks by side doors. The *Lanterne of Light*, an English Lollard treatise of the early fifteenth century, puts him in charge of sloth in its table of the seven deadly sins, the post that Binsfeld would give to Belphegor two centuries later; Francis Barrett, in *The Magus* of 1801, draws his head among those of the evil demons; Collin de Plancy lists him as "le destructeur," the destroyer, chief of the demons of the seventh hierarchy, and notes that the name is sometimes given to the exterminating angel of the Apocalypse. He is a fine example of how a modern demon is born: a common noun, a prophetic verse, and centuries of readers asking for a face.

Sources. In the Hebrew Bible as the name of the realm of the dead: Job 26:6; 28:22; 31:12; Psalm 88:11; Proverbs 15:11 and 27:20 (rendered "destruction" in the King James Version) · in the Revelation of John 9:1–11, as king of the locusts and angel of the bottomless pit, with the Greek name Apollyon and, in the Vulgate, the Latin Exterminans · in the *Lanterne of Light*, English treatise of c. 1409–1410, ed. Swinburn, London 1917, in the table of the deadly sins, for sloth · in Francis Barrett, *The Magus*, London 1801, in the plate of demons' heads · in Jacques Collin de Plancy, *Dictionnaire infernal*, sixth edition, Paris 1863, entry Abaddon.

Afterlife. *Literature.* The Greek name has had the greater fortune. In John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), for two centuries one of the most widely read books in the Protestant world, the pilgrim Christian must cross the Valley of Humiliation and meets Apollyon there: clothed in fish scales, with wings like a dragon, feet like a bear, and a lion's mouth, fire and smoke pouring from his belly, the monster claims him as a runaway subject of his kingdom and fights him in a duel lasting more than half a day, until Christian wounds him and puts him to flight; the scene became the most illustrated in the book. In Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's *Der Messias* (*The Messiah*, 1748–1773) the name softens into Abbadona, the fallen angel torn between remorse and rebellion, whom Romantic sensibility loved as the most human of infernal figures. *Film, TV, and Games.* In the television series *Supernatural* (USA, The CW, 2005–2020) Abaddon is one of the Knights of Hell, the antagonist who contests the infernal throne across the eighth and ninth seasons, played by Alaina Huffman; in the universe

of the tabletop wargame *Warhammer 40,000* (Games Workshop) Abaddon the Despoiler is the warmaster of the armies of Chaos. Of the king of the locusts, what remains is the name and the command of an army; everything else is invention.

See also. Belphegor, who took his place in the table of sins; Satan; Astaroth and Mammon, whom Barrett draws beside him; the deadly sins.



Abaddon, lower left, with Astaroth and Mammon among the heads of evil demons. Drawing by Francis Barrett, engraving by R. Griffith, in Francis Barrett, The Magus*, London 1801.*

Abezethibou

The one-winged demon of the Red Sea; it was he, says the Testament of Solomon, who hardened Pharaoh's heart.

Also called: Abezithibod (Conybeare 1898); Abezethibu (ed. McCown 1922).

Appearance: a proud winged spirit, but with only one wing.

First recorded: in the Testament of Solomon, the Greek pseudepigraphon of the first Christian centuries.

The story. Of all the demons that the Testament of Solomon parades before the king, Abezethibou has the most biblical résumé. He introduces himself as the offspring of an archangel called Ameleouth, who once sat in the first heaven, and he claims a part in Exodus: it was he who hardened Pharaoh's heart, he whom Jannes and Jambres invoked against Moses, he who fought Moses with wonders and pursued Israel into the Red Sea, where he remained under the waters, pinned down by a pillar. He is fished out by Ephippas, the demonic wind of Arabia that Solomon has caught in a wineskin: together the two raise the pillar and hold it suspended in the air, and swear to bear it up until the end of the world, for the day that stone falls will be the end of the world. Unlike the other demons of the Testament, he is not told which angel defeats him: he stays bound to the pillar, and that is all.

Sources. In the Testament of Solomon, trans. F. C. Conybeare, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 1898, as Abezithibod.

See also. Ephippas; the demons of the Testament.

Abigor *see* Eligos.

Abraxas

Divine name of a Gnostic sect, turned into a demon by the demonographers. Not a demon of the grimoires: which is exactly why readers come looking for him here.

Also called: Abracax (Collin de Plancy).

Appearance: on amulets, with a rooster's head, dragon's feet, and a whip in his hand; the demonographers, Collin de Plancy reports, give him instead a king's head and serpents in place of feet.

First recorded: according to Collin de Plancy, in the second century, among the Gnostic followers of Basilides.

The story. Abraxas does not belong to the tradition of the grimoires and appears in none of the catalogues collected in this dictionary: he comes here by way of Collin de Plancy, who gives him an entry and a plate. For the *Dictionnaire infernal* he is one of the gods of certain Asian theogonies, and his name is said to have produced the magic word "abracadabra," a derivation de Plancy proposes and which here remains a hypothesis. The Basilidians, heretics of the second century, made him their supreme god: the seven Greek letters of the name, read as numbers, add up to 365, the days of the year, and beneath him they placed as many spirits presiding over the three hundred sixty-five heavens, one virtue for each day. It was the demonographers, de Plancy concludes, who made a demon of him; and Le Breton draws this second version, a crowned king walking on two serpents.

Sources. In Jacques Collin de Plancy, *Dictionnaire infernal*, sixth edition, Paris 1863, entry Abracax, with the engraving by Louis Le Breton.

See also. Pazuzu and Baphomet, the other borderline entries.



Abracax crowned, whip in hand, with serpents for legs. Drawing by Louis Le Breton, engraving signed A. J., in Jacques Collin de Plancy, Dictionnaire infernal*, Paris 1863.*

Aciel *see* Aziel.