Faustus Byzantinus: The Legend of Faust in Byzantine Literature and Its Neo-Platonic Roots

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Abstract

Late in Queen Elizabeth I's long reign, around 1595, Cristopher Marlowe presented on stage his famous play *The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus.*[1] In this play, a great scholar, who penetrated the very depths of knowledge, summoned the Devil, rejected Christ and his Christian faith, and signed with his own blood a contract with the Evil One. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the notorious Witch Hunt was a reality and, hence, Marlowe's audience was well acquainted with the idea of a pact with the Devil. A different situation occurred in the 1820s, when Goethe elaborated and put on stage his own "Faustus." By then, the great stakes had ceased to burn for almost a century in Europe. Nevertheless, the fascinating story of the man who sold his soul to the Devil is known today mostly in this literary, romantic form. In reality, though, behind the myth of Faustus lies an enormous philosophical, theological, political, and ideological tradition; its roots are actually visible in the literary production of Late Antiquity and the Early Byzantine Empire. Here we present and study these ancient sources, the real phenomena behind them, and the philosophical tradition, related to them.

Keywords: Late Antiquity • Byzantium • Neo-Platonism • demons • Devil • ideology • hagiography • soul

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[1] The first edition of the play (the so-called 'A-text') was published for the first time in 1604 by Valentine Simmes. Cf. *Cristopher Marlowe. Doctor Faustus. A- and B- texts (1604, 1616)*, ed. and comm. by D. Bevington & E. Rasmussen, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993, p. 62.

1. Introduction

The sources giving information on the contract with the Devil were partially edited in 1927 by Ludwig Radermacher.[2] The texts incorporated in this collection are dated from the 4th to the 7th centuries. In the West, the Latin versions of the legend of Theophilus (Church *oeconomus* or "manager" of the city of Adana, who reportedly sold his soul to the Devil) was translated and rewritten several times between the 9th and 13th centuries. We also still have records of Byzantine variations of this narrative *topos*, where it took political and religious dimensions and probably was interwoven with some urban legends of the cosmopolite imperial capital during the period between the 8th and 10th centuries.

The theme of the contract with the Devil in Late Antiquity and in the Byzantine tradition is a complex phenomenon that combines elements from literature, folklore, politics, and philosophy. The core idea probably evolved as a Christian reaction against the widespread magical practices (a flourishing business in the eastern Roman cities) and as an attempt to demonize them. In addition, as we will see below, in the late 4th century Neo-Platonism had already developed an elaborate demonological system, including the so-called *demon-paredros*, i.e., a "patron demon" or "protector demon."[3] In our opinion, early Christian authors of hagiological texts borrowed this idea from the great Eastern philosophical schools of Athens, Antioch, and Alexandria, combined it with numerous urban legends, and created in this way the image of the evil spirit that accompanies and helps the devilish and cunning magician in his harmful deeds.

The theme of the Devil's contract was used in different anonymous hagiological texts. In the late 8th and in the early 9th century, Stephen, deacon of St. Sophia in Constantinople and founding father of the iconodule hagiology, used it to create the image of the Emperor Constantine V (741–775) — one of the most hated and demonized Byzantine rulers. Obviously, the legend of the Emperor, who signed a written

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[2] L. Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen zur Faustsage*, Wien & Leipzig: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky in Komm, 1927.

[3] The term is used in one of the Egyptian magical papyri edited by Karl Preisendanz in: *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, ed. and comm. by K. Preisendanz, t. 1, Leipzig: Teubner, 1928, p. 8.

contract with the Devil, gained huge popularity among the populace of the imperial capital and was employed in the late 9th and in the first half of the 10th centuries by the chronographer George Monachus, by the encyclopedists of Emperor Constantine VII's intellectual circle, and by the anonymous author of the *Suda* lexicon.

We can only speculate about the origin of the pact with the Devil before the 4th–6th centuries, when it appears for the first time in relatively elaborated form. It is vaguely reminiscent of the founding principle of the relationship between humans and gods in Ancient Rome — *do, ut des* ("I give so that you may give"). Before some important event, in cases of illness or some difficulty, a person would promise to a higher puissance certain reward for its help. Votive offerings (usually figurines representing the injured part of the body) are frequently found in ancient temples.[4] In ancient Greek *poleis* and in Rome, this tradition was related neither to mysticism nor theurgy. The pact with the deity was considered a real contract, similar to the contracts made by mortals. In the eclectic Hellenistic world and especially in Late Antiquity, where magical practices of Egyptian, Babylonian, and Syrian origin mixed with Graeco-Roman mythological traditions, the summoning of supernatural powers for the sake of a client became profitable business for professional "magicians" in huge metropolises. These practices constituted a significant obstacle for Christianity in its course to universal power and were therefore subjected to intense propagandistic "demonization."[5] They became criminalized as early as the mid-4th century, under Emperor Constantius II (337–361). Ammianus Marcellinus mentions accusations of magical

[4] Cf. A. Comella, *I rilievi votivi greci di periodo arcaico e classico: diffusione, ideologia, committenza*, Bari: Edipuglia, 2002.

[5] The term "démonization de la magie" is used by J.-B. Clerc (J.-B. Clerc, *Homines magici. Etude sur la sorcellerie et la magie dans la société romaine impériale*, Bern: Peter Lang, 1995, p. 248) in his thorough analysis on treatises of St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, and other early Christian theologists (ibid., pp. 246–278).

practices as a powerful weapon in political struggles.[6] Supernatural aid, unauthorized by the Church, was perceived as dangerous for society itself.[7]

The judicial measures against the widespread magical business were insufficient to deal with such practices, deeply rooted in the Graeco-Roman and Middle-Eastern social and religious traditions. The Christian Church needed propaganda to change the public opinion and attitudes towards pagan cultism. Under these circumstances, and along with the formation of the new religion's ethical and theological system, a new narrative emerged. The pivotal points in the plot and the main characters are clear from the very beginning and, at least until the 10th century, have become almost identical — the differences usually lying in the details and in the background. A wealthy and powerful man (a Faustian type, we would say), usually young, is driven by ambition, lustful passion, or thirst for revenge. But some obstacle holds him back. In his frustration he turns to a famous (or, from the Christian point of view, notorious) magician. This magician promises to fulfill his wish, but the supernatural powers summoned to this end require something in return. The price is costly: the client has to sign a written contract (usually with his own blood), whereby he barters his soul. At the end, the sinner usually confesses and is saved by a holy man.

This quite simple and basic *topos* is very convenient to convey a didactic message, which is the main goal of hagiology. In addition, to be successful, every propaganda tool needs certain "anchors" — values, beliefs, attitudes — already accepted by the persuadee.[8] The story line of

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[6] According to the same author, people were accused of magic and executed just on grounds of being caught passing in the vicinity of graveyards early in the afternoon or in the evening. Cf. *Ammiani Marcellini, Rerum gestarum libri qui supersunt*, ed. J. C. Rolfe, Harvard: Loeb Classical Library, 1963–1964, XVI, 8, 2; *Zosime. Histoire nouvelle*, ed. F. Paschoud, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1971–1979, IV, pp. 13–15; Α. Βακαλούδη, "Μαγεία, πολιτική, θρησκεία και φιλοσοφία στο πρώϊμο Βυζάντιο," pp. 116–118, *Βυζαντιακά*, vol. 19, pp. 99–136; Α. Βακαλούδη, *Η μαγεία ως κοινωνικό φαινόμενο στο Πρώϊμο Βυζάντιο (4ος–7ος μ. Χ. αι.)*, Αθήνα: Ενιάλιος, 2001, p. 192.

[7] Βακαλούδη, *Η Μαγεία...*, p. 193.

[8] G. Jowett, V. O'Donnel, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, Fifth Edition, Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2012, p. 35.

the pact with the Devil was probably inspired by urban legends of Antioch, Adana, and Constantinople, well known to the populace. These legends would have made the story more plausible.

2. The Platonic Tradition and the Concept of the *Demon-Paredros*

The concept of the divine protector of a hero and/or a ruler can be traced back to Homer. The classical example of this concept is that of the goddess Athena, who took under her wing Ulysses and his son Telemachus.[9] In the *Odyssey*, even the secondary hero Autolicus had his own guardian, namely his father Hermes.[10] In some cases, as we learn from the tragical poet Euripides, the divine protector may abandon his/her *protégé*, such as Artemis, who abandoned Hippolytus. Nevertheless, these protectors are gods, not *daimones*. They are by no means identified with the hero himself, like the Roman *genius*. Their relationship with the hero is *ad hoc*; it is mostly aimed at the fulfillment of some specific task.

Personal demons that accompany somebody through his/her whole life are mentioned for the first time in the 6th century BC. According to Pindar, there are two kinds of demons: the good one and "the other demon, who brings a man to harm" (δαίμων δ'ἕτερος ἐς κακὸν τρέψαις).[11] In his *Elegies*, the poet Theognis mentions the "brave" (ἐσθλός) and the "cowardly" (δειλός) demon, both of whom could determine one's life.[12] Nevertheless, this concept of determination was not an entirely fatalistic one. Mortals could change their fate by willingly choosing to follow their "brave" guardian and to avoid the vicious deeds inspired by the "other" one. Judging from such examples, we could assume that the concept of guardian demon was quite common as early as the Archaic Period.

Plato and the Platonic tradition contributed significantly to the de-

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[9] *Homeri Odyssea*, ed. P. von der Mühll, Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1962, §13.300 sq. and §13.393–4.

[10] Ibid., §19.398.

[11] *Pindari carmina cum fragmentis*, ed. H. Maehler (post B. Snell), t. 1, Leipzig: Teubner, 1971, §3.108–109. Cf. W. Burkert, *Greek Religion, Archaic and Classical*, transl. by J. Raffan, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1985, p. 181.

[12] Theognis, *Elegiae*, §1.161–164. In: *Theognis*, ed. E. Diehl, Leipzig: Teubner, 1971, pp. 1–83.

velopment of the philosophical idea of the personal demon. In the *Phaedo*, Plato says that every human being receives by lot his or her own demon. This demon accompanies the person he took charge of through their whole life and after death leads him or her to the place in the kingdom of Hades where the dead are put to trial. According to the philosopher, one is not entirely dependent on his or her demon; he or she can always follow the path of virtue and is obliged to do so, even against the will of this personal genius.[13] Another well-known account on this subject is that of the "divine and demonic creature" (θεῖόν τι και δαιμόνιον), whose voice Socrates used to hear since childhood. This voice never incited the philosopher to do anything, but rather always prevented him from acting. Because of this, Socrates was charged with attempting to introduce "new deities" in Athens and eventually lost his life as a result of this.

During the next seven centuries, until the decline of the pagan Roman Empire, the distinction between good and evil demon was preserved, enriched, and, occasionally, rejected.[14] Intellectuals such as Plutarch (*c*. 45–120), who wrote a whole treatise *On the Demon of Socrates* (*Περὶ τοῦ Σωκράτους δαιμονίου*), were particularly interested in the *daimonion* of Socrates. In the 3rd century the idea of the personal *genius* was common in Neo-Platonism. In his *Life of Plotinus*, Porphyry tells the story of the encounter between the personal demons of Plotinus and those of an Egyptian priest. The meeting was to be held in the temple of Isis in Rome — the holiest place in the city. Surprisingly, when the genius of the philosopher was summoned, there came a god (θεός) instead

[13] Plato, *Phaedo*, 107d–e and 113d. In: *Platonis opera*, ed. J. Burnet, t. 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967, 57a–118a; Plato, *Respublica*, 617b–618a. In: Burnet, *Platonis opera*…, t. 4; Plato, *Leges*, 877a. In: J. Burnet, *Platonis opera*…, t. 5, 624a–969d.

[14] For example, the comical poet Menander tries to persuade his audience that everybody is accompanied by only one good guardian demon. According to him, the widespread belief in evil demons comes from people who lead vicious lives and who prefer to blame their misfortunes on supernatural powers instead of on themselves (Menander, *Fragmenta longiora apud alios auctores servata*, fr. 714. In: *Menandri reliquiae selectae*, ed. F. Sandbach, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, pp. 303–324).

of a "deity of a lesser nature."[15] Around 180 A.D., the sophist Maximus of Tyrus even "calculated" that exactly 30 000 demons were haunting the world.[16] Every demon was in fact the *eidos* of a certain human talent; he chooses his own *protégé* and endows him or her with this talent.

Surprisingly enough, the guardian demon has no specific place in the elaborated demonological system of the leading figure of Neo-Platonism in the late 3rd and in the early 4th centuries, namely Jamblichus. According to his treatise *On the Egyptian Mysteries*, the demons are creatures of an immortal nature. Their main function is to fulfill the orders of the gods and to reveal their will to the mortals through divination. In other words, they are mediators between the intelligible world of *ideas* and the material world. Jamblichus asks, rhetorically, "[w]ho is capable to perform any sacred ritual or to predict the future without the participation of both a god and a demon?"[17] The concept of the demon-mediator was a dangerous one for the Christian religion, as we will see in the story of St. Cyprian.

The guardian demon appears once again in the demonological system of Proclus, one of the last heads of the Academy (5th century). In his *Commentaries on Plato's Alcibiades*, he distinguishes between "demons by substance" (δαίμονες κατ'οὐσίαν) and "demons by analogy" (δαίμονες κατ'ἀναλογίαν). The demons of the former kind have a divine nature and origin, whereas "demons by analogy" are spirits who choose a human being and take care of him or her.[18] Proclus does not clarify why he calls this kind of demons "by analogy"; possibly, in his opinion they were celestial creatures of different nature, that just bore some resemblance to the "demons by substance."

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[15] Porphyrius, *Vita Plotini*, p. 10. In: *Plotini opera*, ed. P. Henry & H.-R. Schwyzer, t. 1, Leiden: Desclée de Brouwer, 1951, pp. 1–41.

[16] Maximus, *Dialexeis*, §8.8.f.1–2. In: *Maximi Tyrii philosophumena*, ed. H. Hobein, Leipzig: Teubner, 1910, pp. 1–484.

[17] Jamblique, *Les mystères d'Égypte*, ed. É. des Places, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1966, §3.30.37–39.

[18] Proclus Diadochus, *Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato*, ed. L. Westerink, Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1954, pp. 73–75.

3. St. Cyprian: The Mage-Philosopher Who Became a Christian

Neo-Platonism was undoubtedly one of the most dangerous rivals of Christianity in the 3rd and 4th centuries. According to this philosophical and mystical doctrine, the main path towards God is through initiation in various mysteries (e.g., in the Eleusinian mysteries).[19] The demonization of such pagan rituals, as well as the condemnation of theurgy in general, is evident in the legend of St. Cyprian of Antioch. The story is preserved in two versions. The first one contains the *Confession of St. Cyprianus* (*Μετάνοια τοῦ ἁγίου Κυπριανοῦ*)[20] and was written by an anonymous author between 350 and 370.[21] The second version is the *Life of St. Cyprian and Justina*, preserved in three sub-versions, edited and translated in German by Radermacher.[22] From the Christian perspective, the *Confession* represents the path to be followed by the heathen philosopher to achieve full control over the higher powers. At the age of six, the future saint was sent by his parents to be initiated in the mysteries of Mithra. At ten years old, he served as *dadouchos* (torch-bearer) in the Eleusinian mysteries. He then visited Mount Olympus, where he remained for forty days, dancing and fighting with deities and demons. At the age of fifteen, he studied arcane arts under the guidance of seven different *hierophants*, was initiated in the mysteries of Artemis of Argos and Artemis of Lacedaemon, and was taught all the divination techniques by the Phrygians.[23] Afterwards, Cyprian travelled to Memphis and observed there all kinds of demons and evil powers, as well as the incarnated images of deceptions of Greek philosophers[24] — perhaps a far echo of the Platonic *eidē*. The highest point of his education in the art of magic and

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[19] Cf. *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, ed. P. Athanasiadi, M. Frede, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.

[20] R. Bailey, *The Confession of Cyprian of Antioch: Introduction, Text and Translation*, Master's thesis, Montreal: McGill University, 2009.

[21] This dating is accepted by R. Reitzenstein, L. Radermacher, and Th. Zahn (cf. Bailey, *The Confession of Cyprian of Antioch…*, pp. 3–5).

[22] "Cyprianus und Justina" (Ὁμολογία τῆς ἁγίας παρθένου Ἰουστίνης). In: Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen…*, pp. 76–113. Cf. F. Halkin, *Bibliotheca hagiographica Graeca*, Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1957, № 452–452c.

[23] Bailey, *The Confession of Cyprian of Antioch…*, pp. 34–38.

[24] Ibid. pp. 38–44.

theurgy was his encounter with the Devil himself. Cyprian is said to have met him in Chaldea at the age of thirty (Christ's age when He was crucified). Having learned from the Chaldean wise men all the secrets of the stars, plants, and fire, and having seen the so-called "mediator demons" (δαίμονες μεσῖται), he was ready to come face to face with their master. According to the text, Cyprian described the encounter as follows: "Believe me, I saw this devil and placated him with sacrifices. Be sure, I gladly accepted him, and I talked with him, and I was granted the highest power among his servants. He turned his face to me and called me 'wise youth, a new Jambres, apt to serve him, worthy to communicate with him.'"[25]

Cyprian was appointed chief of a "phalanx of demons" (φάλαγγα δαιμόνων) and with their support he was able to accomplish all his plans. He settled in Antioch and there gained huge influence with his magical skills,[26] much demanded by the local nobility. His life changed when a powerful and wealthy lawyer, Aglaides, asked the mage to grant him the love of a virtuous maiden called Justina. Cyprian tried everything, but his efforts were in vain. Even the most powerful demon summoned by the wizard was incapable of breaking her unwavering piety.[27] According to the *Life of St. Cyprian and Justina*, at this point Cyprian asked the Devil to reveal the reason of this constant failure. Before answering, the Evil One demanded from his loyal servant that he swear the oath that he will never renounce him. Cyprian accepted and said: "I swear to all your might, I will never renounce you."[28] The Devil informed Cyprian that the source of Justina's strength against all temptations was Christ and that nobody was more powerful than Him. The mage then abandoned his pagan ways and became a Christian. To achieve this task and to escape the power of the Devil, he was helped by a priest, who demanded from him a lengthy confession and repentance. In addition, Cyprian had to burn his devilish books and to become a monk.[29]

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[25] Ibid. p. 46.
[26] Ibid. p. 52: ὀνομαστὸς ἤμην μάγος φιλόσοφος.
[27] Ibid. pp. 54–60; Radermacher, *Grieschiche Quellen*…, pp. 84–100.
[28] Radermacher, *Grieschiche Quellen*…, pp. 100–101. The content of the oath is identical in all versions of the text.
[29] Bailey, *The Confession of Cyprian of Antioch*, pp. 62–104; Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen*..., pp. 104–113.

Cyprian, it must be stressed, did not actually break the deal. As we saw, he swore in the name of Satan's powers. Supposedly, if he renounced his master, all the might of the Evil One would eventually be against him. If Christ is more powerful than the Devil, then *a fortiori* Cyprianus would be fully protected, even if he did not fulfill his promise.

The image of the mage Cyprian, who obtained all conceivable knowledge, only to find that the ultimate power lays in the hands of the Christian God, mirrors the deep identity crisis in the Late Roman Empire. In addition, this story reveals the propagandistic uses of demonization as a weapon against the widespread mystery cults and practices in the second half of the 4th century. The plot of the written contract with Satan has not taken its final shape yet, but some of its basic elements are already present. Cyprian meets the Devil personally, makes sacrifices to him, speaks with him, obtains power over demons, and swears not to renounce the Devil. All these features will evolve in the next centuries.

4. The Professional Magician and His Clients

Between the late 4th and the third decade of the 7th century, the struggle between Christianity and the pagan cults continued, but the enemy of the Church was now different. As a consolidated intellectual movement mixed with mysticism and based on certain sacred texts ("textual community"), Neo-Platonism was gradually marginalized by the efforts of fanaticized Christian bishops. It waned and finally died out with the last pupils of Olympiodorus of Alexandria in the late 6th century. Nevertheless, the magical practices inherited by the cosmopolite Hellenistic and Roman worlds continued to flourish. According to many hagiological texts, the professional magicians became very important figures in the megapolises of the Empire. Among their clients were the noblest and wealthiest citizens. Reasonably enough, Church authorities felt threatened and inspired fierce polemic against these magicians, usually called "poisoners" (φαρμακοί). The "tragicall histories" of people who sold their souls to the Devil during this period ended happily — the misled victims were forgiven and accepted back into the bosom of the Church.

One of the versions of the *Life of St. Basil the Great* is the first

known text wherein a written contract with the Devil is mentioned.[30] This text was erroneously ascribed by its first editor, François Combefis, to St. Basil's close associate, bishop Amphilochius.[31] Its critical edition was prepared by Radermacher with the title *On the One Who Renounced Christ in Written Form*.[32] The author and the date are unknown, but on the basis of circumstantial data we could suppose that the *Life of St. Basil the Great* was probably compiled before the 7th century. The events took place during the reign of the heretic Emperor Valens (364–378), when a pious senator, Proterius, disgusted by the ruler's religious views and policies, decided to self-exile and settle with his daughter in the Holy Lands.[33] He wished her to become a nun, but this was not to the taste of the Evil One. By the Devil's inspiration, a certain youth fell in love with her. When she resisted his lust, the man resorted to the services of an "enchanter" (ἐπαοιδός)[34] or a "poisoner"/"magician" (φαρμακός).[35] To his great disappointment, the magician declared that he was powerless to deal with the girl's virtue and advised his client to renounce Christianity in written form and to seek his master's help.[36] The enchanter gave the youth a letter, addressed to the Devil, wherein he described briefly his client's passion and his firm decision to abandon his faith. The young man had to bring this letter at a certain nocturnal hour to an ancient graveyard, to sit upon some pagan grave, and to wait.[37] Everything was accurately carried out. As soon as the lover-to-be

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[30] F. Halkin, *Bibliotheca*…, № 246y–260.

[31] "Εἰς τὸν βίον καὶ τὰ θαύματα τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Βασιλείου ἀρχιεπισκόπου Καισαρείας Καππαδοκίας," ed. F. Combefis. In: *Amphilochii Opera Omnia*, Paris: Piget, 1644, pp. 155–225.

[32] "Die Erzählung des Helladius (Proterius)" (Περὶ τοῦ αρνησαμένου τὸν Χριστὸν ἐγγράφως). In: Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen*..., pp. 117–149. Cf. F. Halkin, *Bibliotheca*…, № 253a.

[33] Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen*..., p. 122; 123.

[34] Ibid., p. 122; 125.

[35] Ibid., p. 124. The Greek word could have both meanings.

[36] Ibid., p. 124.

[37] Ibid., p. 126.5–6; 127.5. In hagiological texts, such places are frequently inhabited by demonic powers and a standard "meeting place" for them. A good example in this instance is the *Life of St. Theodore of Sykeon* († 613). Cf., e.g., Théodore, *Vie de Théodore de Sykéôn*, ed. A.-J. Festugière, Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1970, pp. 38–38 (the inhabitants of the village of

raised his hand with the letter, he was surrounded by demons, which brought him triumphantly to their master's throne. The Devil accepted the document and demanded from the youth to sign a contract, in which he "renounced his baptism by his own will, passed to the side of the Evil One, and accepted to face, along with Satan, the eternal damnation, prepared for him in the Last Judgement."[38] With the help of the demons, the man successfully seduced the girl. Ashamed, she convinced her father to agree to her marriage with the seducer. The couple lived happily afterwards, but their neighbors noticed that the husband avoided church and did not take communion.[39] They told his wife that he was not Christian and the apostate confessed everything to her. Together they visited St. Basil.[40] In order to take back his contract, the man had to be locked up in a small room inside the church, where he bravely resisted a horde of demons, who restlessly threatened him with utter destruction. In the fortieth day, the evil spirits disappeared and the bishop showed the repentant to his fellow citizens, announcing his salvation.[41] At this point, Satan himself appeared with the contract, but St. Basil encouraged the throng to shout at the top of their lungs "*Kyrie, eleison*" ("Lord, have mercy"). A fierce wind then blew and wrested the document off the Devil's hands, laying it in the hands of the bishop instead. St. Basil teared it to pieces and the young husband was accepted back in the Church.[42]

The meeting with the Devil and the selling of the soul in *Life of St. Basil the Great* are related to significant literary and social phenomena. Cyprian is simply called a "mage" and a "philosopher." By contrast, in this text the man who urged the desperate youth to sign a contract with Satan is not just a "mage"; he is a "poisoner" or "magician," which de-

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Bousaion use raw materials from ancient graveyards), pp. 89–90 (Eutolmius of Sandos digs into rich ancient graves), pp. 94–95 (demons emerge from an ancient sarcophagus).

[38] Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen*…, pp. 128; 129.

[39] Ibid., pp. 132, 133.

[40] Ibid., pp. 136–138.

[41] Ibid., pp. 142–143.

[42] Ibid., pp. 146, 147. Cf. R. Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology*, Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1988, p. 255; Βακαλούδη, *Η Μαγεία*..., pp. 217–218.

notes a precise social function, well-mentioned in judicial texts. A φαρμακός (*pharmakos*) is a professional sorcerer who performs magical rituals and frequently provides different herbs and poisonous potions for his clients.[43] As we will see, the magician's role in the ritual of signing contracts with the Devil is constant.

The author and the exact datation of the next text, the *Life of St. Mary of Antioch*,[44] are unknown.[45] The plot and the main characters suggest that this hagiological work was written between the second half of the 6th century and the Arab conquest (in 637).[46] A poor and pious widow had a daughter named Maria, brought up in accordance with the Christian morals. The girl grew up and became so beautiful that even the most wealthy and powerful men in Antioch were attracted to her. Nevertheless, she did not succumb to any temptations and used to leave her house only to accompany her mother to Church. Unfortunately, there she was spotted by a certain Anthemius — one of the richest youths of the Syrian capital.[47] During the next two years he was constantly trying to seduce her, but all his efforts were fruitless. The man had almost abandoned all hope, when by chance he witnessed a strange scene. An impressive and supercilious person approached his company and his noble friends payed him enormous respect. He asked them who was this man and they answered that he was Megas — an experienced professional "poisoner"/"sorcerer" (φαρμακός, γόης), for whom nothing was impossible.[48] The social status

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[43] Cf. e.g., the laws against this occupation in *Iustiniani Novellae*, p. 537.16. In: *Corpus iuris civilis*, ed. R. Scholl, vol. 3, Berlin: Weidman, 1895 (repr. 1968), pp. 1–795, where the term φαρμακός is used.

[44] Radermacher, *Griechiche Quellen*…, pp. 258–271. Cf. Halkin, *Bibliotheca*…, [1045].

[45] *Acta Sanctorum*, ed. J. Bollandus & G. Henschenius, Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1966 (=Antuerpiae: apud Ioannem Meursium, 1643), Maii VII, p. 53D ("absque ulla nota temporis").

[46] At the time, when the story is laid out, the city of Antioch was already mostly Christian. The Christianization process of this megapolis was probably completed by the second half of the 6th century and, therefore, the text must have been written after that period. On the other hand, there is no mention of the Arab invasion of the city (637).

[47] Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen*…, p. 261.

[48] Ibid., pp. 262 (γόης); 262, 262, 263, 266, 267 (φαρμακός). As we have seen, the last word denotes a certain social role according to Justinian's *Novellae*.

of Megas was very high. The wealthy and noble youth called him "sir" (κύριέ μου) and bowed to him. Anthemius implored him for help. The magician took the assignment and promised that that same night the maiden would come to him, but the next day he disdainfully informed his client that he had forgotten about him.[49] Afterwards, the magician assigned the mission to two of his demons. One of them took the shape of the girl and accompanied her mother back to their home. The other evil spirit disguised himself as the mother and brought Maria to Anthemius' house. The young aristocrat offered her money and expensive jewelry if she agreed to become his wife. Weighted down by his insistence, she swore to fulfil this wish after fifteen days, having meanwhile persuaded her mother to bless the marriage.[50] Anthemius agreed and let her go. Impressed by the immense power of the demons, he proposed to Megas as much gold as he wished, if only he made him mage and gave him control over these spirits. Anthemius was even ready to give up his Christian faith.[51] The sorcerer wrote a note, gave it to the youth, and instructed him to go to a certain bridge in the evening (a widespread symbol of the transition between life and death)[52] and to wait there. At midnight he would hear a tumult and would see some magnificent lord, Satan himself, riding in a chariot and accompanied by a huge retinue of followers. He said that Anthemius would not be harmed if he held high the magician's letter. Afterwards, he would have to greet respectfully the kingly person, to say that Megas had sent him, and to give the note to the lord. In addition, if he wanted to achieve his goal, he was never to make the sign of the cross. The youth acted as he was told. The Devil read the letter and wrote an answer to Megas. Anthemius's wish would be fulfilled, it turned out, but under one condition, namely, that he renounced his Christian faith in writ-

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[49] Ibid., p. 263.

[50] Ibid., pp. 264–265.

[51] Ibid., p. 267. It is interesting that Anthemius does not want to be a professional *magician* (φαρμακός) like Megas himself, but only to acquire the skills of a mage and to control the demons.

[52] Cf., e.g., the struggle between St. George of Lesbos (8^{th}–9^{th} c.) and Imeros, commander-in-chief of the demonic army, took place on a bridge (Acta graeca ss. Davidis, Symeonis et Georgii Mitylenae in insula Lesbo, ed. J. van den Gheyn, pp. 222–223. *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. 18, 1899, pp. 209–259.). Cf. and Βακαλούδη, *Η Μαγεία*..., p. 218.

ten form. The client produced the following document: "I, Anthemius, deny Christ and my faith in Him; I renounce my baptism, and the name 'Christian,' and His cross, and I vow never to use or mention these symbols."[53] As soon as he pronounced these words, the apostate sweated from head to toe, which indicates that God's grace came out from him. Megas approved the text and warned Anthemius not to demand from the Devil more than one or two demons as servants — they would push him day and night to assign them tasks. The youth handed the document to Satan, who raised it to the sky, and shouted triumphantly to God "I took a soul from you!" This cry sobered the apostate up. He tried by all means to persuade the master of the demons to give him back the contract, but all his efforts were in vain. The Devil answered that he would use the document as evidence on the Day of Judgement.[54] The desperate youth turned for help to the local bishop, who declined his plea to be baptized again, but advised him to repent. Anthemius sold all his property, distributed the money among the poor — three pounds of gold (approximately one kilogram). In this way, his soul was saved.[55]

In 1903, Léon Clugnet and François Nau published in a short paper the first paragraphs and the abstracts of some inedited texts dedicated to the lives of early Christian saints and hermits. Among them we find an anonymous and incomplete story about the ritual that concerns us here.[56] This text is missing from Radermacher's collection. The scene of the narrative is completely different from that of the eastern cities, where St. Cyprian, Aglaides, and Anthemius sold their souls. In this case, the events are happening in the imperial capital, Constantinople. According to the text, during the reign of Emperor Mauricius there lived a certain Mesites, who surpassed in skills all the magicians who had lived before him. He hired as his *notarios* (secretary) a pious man who had just arrived in the capital. Deeply desiring to make him renounce the Christian faith, Mesites invited him to ride together. The two men arrived at a field where a group of demonic Ethiopians were gathered. A huge nigger was their leader — the Devil himself. But their encounter was

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[53] Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen*..., p. 268.
[54] Ibid., pp. 267–269. Cf. and Βακαλούδη, *Η Μαγεία*..., pp. 218–219.
[55] Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen*..., pp. 269–270.
[56] L. Clugnet & F. Nau, "Vies et récits d'anachorètes (IVe–VIIe siècles)," *Révue d'Orient Chrétien*, vol. 8, 1903, pp. 91–100, pp. 93–94.

spoiled by the piety of the secretary. As soon as he saw this godless throng, he fearfully crossed himself and everything disappeared.

Anastasia Vakaloudi points out that this story very much resembles the ceremonies through which a contract with the Devil was being made.[57] According to the text, Mesites took his secretary to the devilish gathering in order to coerce him to renounce Christ. The very name of the magician is somehow allegorical — *Mesites* (Μεσίτης) means "mediator" (between humans and the Devil). Even though at the beginning of the text a different etymology is ironically given by the anonymous author (Μεσίτις – Μεσίας/Messiah), it is possible that there really was an urban legend behind this narrative, which has preserved the memory of the Neo-Platonic idea of the *mediator* between the earthly and the heavenly world — a concept so threatening for Christians.

Undoubtedly, in Medieval Western Europe the most popular legend related to the contract with the Devil was the story of Theophilus, Church manager (*oekonomus*) in the Cilician city of Adana. This story is narrated in the anonymous *Confession of St. Theophilus*. Four Greek versions of the text have been preserved.[58] Only one of them is onymous[59] — the name of the author is Eutychianos, who was reportedly a close friend of St. Theophilus.[60] The first Latin translation, made in the 9th century by Paul, deacon of Neapolis, was probably based on this version.[61] In the next centuries, Paul Deacon's translation passed through different redactions and elaborations.[62]

The question of the datation of the described events has largely been

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[57] Βακαλούδη, *Η Μαγεία...*, p. 223.

[58] Cf. F. Halkin, *Bibliotheca*…, № 1319–1322.

[59] "Theophilus nach der Bearbeitung des Eutychianus mit daraus abgeleiteten Fassungen" ("Μετάνοια καὶ ἀνάκλησις πρὸς τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν γενομένη παρά τινος οἰκονόμου ὀνόματος Θεοφίλου ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἀνατολικῆς χώρας τοὔνομ' Ἀδανῶν διὰ τῆς μεσιτείας τῆς ἁγίας καὶ ὑπερενδόξου θεοτόκου καὶ ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας," ed. Radermacher. In: Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen*..., pp. 182–218. Cf. Halkin, *Bibliotheca*…, № 1321].

[60] Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen*..., p. 218.

[61] AASS Februarii t. I: 482; edition of the Latin version on pp. 483–487.

[62] About them cf. *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina antiquae et mediae aetatis*, Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1898–1901, [8121]–[8126].

solved. All the versions mention a "Persian invasion" (ἐπιδρομὴν Περσῶν, *incursio Persarum gentis*). The oldest of them,[63] according to Radermacher,[64] makes reference to the Emperor Heraclius (610–641).[65] If we accept this datation, the described events must have happened between 612/613 (when the Persian invasion against the Empire became almost unstoppable) and 628 (when the contract with Shah Kavad II Shiroe was signed and the Persian threat was eliminated forever).[66]

According to the texts, Theophilus was an extraordinarily pious person who held the position of *oekonomus* (i.e., manager) of the Church in Adana, Cilicia. Humble as he was, he refused to be ordained bishop after the death of the previous hierarch and the archbishop chose another priest for this post. A few days later, he was slandered and unjustly threatened to be removed from his office.[67] The Devil "entered his heart" and inspired in him the idea to turn to the "magicians" (φαρμακοί)[68] for help. Theophilus decided to visit a certain Jew who was a notorious servant of Satan. The sorcerer was afraid when he saw a high-ranking Christian priest knocking on his door — an indication of the steady marginalization of Jews in the Later Roman Empire and of their constant fear of repression, the main instigator of which was the

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[63] "Theophilus. Älteste Fassung" ("Περὶ τῆς πτώσεως καὶ τῆς μετανοίας τοῦ οἰκονόμου τῆς πόλεως Ἀδανῶν. Κύρι, εὐλόγησον"), ed. Radermacher. In: Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen…*, pp. 164–177. Cf. Halkin, F. *Bibliotheca*…, [1322].

[64] Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen…*, pp. 164–167 (Cod. Marcianus gr. cl. II 101).

[65] Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen…*, p. 164: "Ἐν τοῖς χρόνοις Ἡρακλείου πρὸ τοῦ τοὺς Πέρσας κατὰ Ῥωμανίας ἐξελθεῖν"; cf. and Βακαλούδη, *Η Μαγεία...*, p. 216.

[66] The pact between Shah Kavad and the Emperor Heraclius was signed in the last months of 628 (Χριστοφιλοπούλου, Αικ. *Ιστορία του Βυζαντινού κράτους*, t. B1, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1998, p. 28). Despite the existence of the version that mentions Emperor Heraclius, the editors of *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* date the story of Theophilus in the 6th century, after *Acta Sancorum*, Februarii t. I, p. 481 (where the events are dated *c*. 538, before the great invasion of Shah Chusrau I Anushirvan in 540 (Χριστοφιλοπούλου, *Ιστορία*…, t. A, p. 276).

[67] Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen…*, pp. 164; 182–186.

[68] Ibid., pp. 186; 164.

Church. Nevertheless, the magician accepted to hear the troubles of Theophilus and invited him the next night to an audience with his *patron* (πάτρων).[69] The priest agreed and at midnight was taken to the city's hippodrome. This location is closely related in Byzantine sources with the so-called *nekyodaimones* (νεκυοδαίμονες), i.e., souls of people who had suffered a violent death and who afterwards haunted the place of their demise or the graveyard where they were buried.[70] In addition, the hippodrome is *le monde à l'envers* (after Gilbert Dagron), similar to the Roman *Saturnalia*, where every ceremony has the opposite meaning to the usual. Before the meeting, the Jew advised his client in the same way as did Mesites for Anthemius in the *Life of St. Mary of Antioch*: no matter what he saw or heard, he had to avoid by all means the sign of the cross. Immediately after that, he showed him a long procession of ghostly humanlike figures, clad in white chamids and carrying lighted candelabras. Amidst them was seated their master. These creatures were the Devil and his servants. The Jew took Theophilus by the hand to his mentor and explained the case. Satan promised to help the priest and to give him power over the bishop, if only he renounced his faith and became his servant. Theophilus agreed and the Devil kissed him several times in the mouth — this way, says the author, the Evil One entered him. The priest quickly drew up the agreement and gave it to his new master.[71] The effect was immediate. The bishop apologized to him and Theophilus suddenly became the most powerful cleric in the city. Despite his great success, though, the priest feared Hell and quickly changed his mind. He decided to save his immortal soul and begged the Virgin Mary to help him. After forty days and forty nights spent in prayer in one of her churches, she finally appeared and, following her advice, he recited the Creed aloud. Three days later, St. Mary appeared to him anew in a dream, giving him back the contract.[72] In the morning, the document was lying on his chest. Repentant and thankful to his heavenly patron, Theophilus gave the contract to the bishop and asked him to read it publicly and burn it before the crowd. Another three days

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[69] Ibid., pp. 164–166; 188.
[70] Βακαλούδη, *Η Μαγεία...*, pp. 117–122; 217.
[71] Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen…*, pp. 166–168; 188–190.
[72] Ibid., pp. 170; 172–174; 198; 204–206. The confession of Theophilus is actually a paraphrase of the Nicene Creed.

later, the priest's body gradually weakened and he finally died.[73]

According to the texts dating from the 4th to the 7th centuries, the absolution of the sinners who made a contract with the Devil, was a compromise. The didactic message of such stories is clear: everyone could be accepted in the bosom of the Church, even the worst sinner. Nevertheless, the case of Theophilus of Adana was the last story wherein the one who sold his soul was saved. In the age of Emperor Heraclius and the Arab invasion, another type of person emerged, completely different from the cosmopolite citizen in the Eastern Roman Empire. The ethical and religious values and the code of behavior of this new man are completely determined by the Church and her ministers. Bishop Leo is representative of this almighty institution who is in position not to compromise with stray sheep of his flock. The conclusion of the Faustian narrative is being shaped — the sinner loses his soul forever.

5. The Story of Bishop Leo of Catania and the Mage Heliodorus: A Comical Discourse

According to Alexander Kazhdan, three texts from the 8th–9th centuries belong to the comical genre, namely the *Life of Leo of Catania*, the *Life of Pancratius of Taormina*, and the so-called *Πάτρια Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* (*Patria of Constantinople*).[74] The same scholar pays close attention to the medieval sense of humor. On the one hand, laughter is perceived as something evil ("Christ never laughed," says a proverb). But, on the other hand, it could serve as a way to better understand something sacred. It is difficult for the modern reader to grasp the real meaning of the Byzantine sense of humor, which in hagiological texts is based mainly on the parody of serious theological matters and helps in clarifying them. In the legend of the mage Heliodorus and of his punishment, incorporated in the *Life of Leo of Catania*, we will see the literary *topos* of the Devil's pact as an example of this exact stylistic method (δριμύτης). This story influenced the Faustian tradition, since we have at least one Latin translation[75] and, in addition, the events take

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[73] Ibid., pp. 176; 210; 214–218.

[74] A. Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, t. 1, Athens: Institute for Byzantine Research, 1999, pp. 295–296.

[75] *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina*…, № 4838–4839.

place in the far Byzantine West (in the Sicilian town of Catania).

There are three known Greek versions of the *Life of Leo of Catania*[76] — two prosaic ones (a shorter one[77] and a longer one[78]) and one composed in verses.[79] The latter, preserved in a 1307 manuscript, is probably the latest. The author of the text is anonymous; about him we could only say that he was obviously knowledgeable about the architecture both of Constantinople and of Catania.

The dating of the events described is dubious as well. In Latišev's version, the Emperor Constantine IV (who reigned between 667 and 685) is mentioned along with his son Justinian II, crowned as his father's co-emperor probably in 681/682.[80] In the shorter version, edited by Augusta Acconcia-Longo, the rulers are different — one Leo and one Constantine. This fact suggests a much later date, namely the early 9th century.[81]

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[76] Kazhdan, *A History*…, t. 1, pp. 296–302.

[77] A. Acconcia-Longo, "La vita di s. Leone vescovo di Catania e gli incantesimi del mago Eliodoro," *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici*, vol. 26, 1989, pp. 3–98. Cf. Halkin, *Bibliotheca*…, № 981.

[78] Βίος καῖ πολιτεία τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Λέοντος ἐπισκόπου Κατάνης. In: V. Latišev, *Neidannye grečeskie agiografičeskie texti* (В. Латишев, *Неизданные греческие агиографические тексти*), St. Petersburg, 1914, pp. 12–28. Cf. Halkin, *Bibliotheca*…, № 981b.

[79] D. Raffin, "La vita metrica anonima su Leone di Catania," *Bolletino della Badia Greca di Gtottaferata*, vol. 16, 1962, pp. 37–48. Cf. Halkin, *Bibliotheca*…, № 981c.

[80] Kazhdan, *A History*…, p. 296; *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. A. Kazhdan, A. M. Talbot, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 1084.

[81] Kazhdan, *A History*…, p. 296. Marie-France Ausépy dates the text between 730 and 843 (M.-F. Auzépy, "L'Analyse litéraire et l'historien: l'example des vies de saints iconoclastes," *Byzantinoslavica*, vol. 53, 1992, pp. 62–67; Auzépy, "A propos des vies de saints iconoclastes," *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici*, vol. 30, 1993, pp. 3–5. According to A. Acconcia-Longo, it was written during the rule of Leo V, whose son and co-emperor was called Sabbatius-Constantine (813–820), or of Michael II (820–829) (Acconcia Longo, "A proposito di un articolo sull'agiografia iconoclasta," *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici*, vol. 29, 1992–1993, pp. 10–17; Acconcia-Longo, "Di nuovo sull'agiografia iconoclasta," *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici*, vol. 30, 1993, pp. 7–15.

Even though the existing data are insufficient to date the *Life of Leo of Catania* accurately, in my opinion the historical context supports the dating of the events, which stood in the core of the legend, in the early 680s. For instance, the *strator* (officer),[82] who was sent by the Emperor to Catania, bears a name typical for the period of the dynasty of Heraclius — "Heraclides." In addition, there is no mention of danger from a foreign enemy to trouble the tranquility of the provincial Byzantine town or its maritime relations with the capital. This is circumstantial evidence that the island of Sicily and the routes in the Aegean and Ionic seas were not seriously disturbed by Arab raids. Such raids became very frequent as early as the first half of the 8th century and especially after the secession of the North African emirates from the Abbasid khalifate at the end of the 9th century.[83]

After the beginning of the 8th century, the provincial city ceases to be the most popular scene of hagiological texts — the events are set mostly in Constantinople, in a monastery, or in the countryside. In the *Life of Leo of Catania*, the scene is different. Heliodorus made his contract with the Devil and was active as a professional sorcerer in Catania. The priest who saved the town from the wicked man was not a humble monk (as were usually the saints in the period of the iconoclast crisis), but the bishop himself. According to Kazhdan,[84] this is another evidence that the text was probably written before the 8th century.

According to the legend, the young Heliodorus belonged to the high society of Catania. Despite his position, he had incited the local populace against himself because of his arrogant temperament and behavior. His craving for power and glory inspired him to strive for the position of *ep-*

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[82] In the 7th century, the στράτωρ (*strator*, i.e., officer of the imperial guard) to a great extent had lost his previous military functions and had become a mere court dignitary.

[83] The threat on Sicily until 756 and after the beginning of the 8th century was almost unceasing (A. Vasiljev, *Vizantija i arabyi. Političeskie otnošenija Vizantii i arabov za vremja Amorijskoj dinastii* (А. Васильев, *Византія и арабы. Политическія отношенія Византіи и арабовъ за время Аморійской династии*, St. Petersburg: Tipografija I. N. Skorohodova, 1900, p. 55).

[84] Kazhdan, *A History*…, p. 300.

arch (governor) of Catania using his innate slyness.[85] Unable to fulfill this goal, he turned for help — like Theophilus of Adana — to a Jew. Unlike the texts that describe events that occurred during the period from the 4th to the 7th centuries, in the *Life of Leo of Catania* the mediator between the young and ambitious Christian and the Devil was not called φαρμακός and did not practice publicly.[86] Heliodorus invited this man to his home and took lessons from him. At the end of the training, the Jew gave him a written note, looking like a letter, and ordered him to bring it at midnight to some place, where were buried ancient heroes (ἥρωες). Heliodorus was told to sit upon a gravestone and wait. Supposedly, he would see a "person, dreadful in appearance and stunning, flying in the air."[87] The youth had to stay calm. The creature would come to him and promise to fulfill his every wish. Heliodorus followed the instructions with accuracy. The very moment when he stood with the note in hand on the gravestone, he saw flying on a huge deer "the devil-master of the air." The Devil promised to Heliodorus one of his servants if he accepted to renounce Christ. The wicked youth gladly obeyed, fell in prostration before the Devil, kissed[88] his hand and was awarded with the demon Gaspar as his servant. The master of the air ordered this evil spirit to help Heliodorus in everything and vanished in the darkness.[89]

The detailed account of the mischiefs of the mage and of his friends with the help of Gaspar is interesting and its style is highly humorous. For example, the youths would walk the streets and inspire to passing women the delusion that they waded in deep water. By this cunning strategy they made them lift their chitons up to the thighs. Such scenes were not only delightful to the lustful eyes of the young men, but provoked laughter to the other viewers. But not all of their actions were that harmless. The young

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[85] The eparch (Lat. *praefectus*) was governor of a city with huge power in the Late Roman Empire and Early Byzantium. The title is well documented both in Constantinople and in provincial cities.

[86] Ἑβραῖὸν τινα επὶ μαγείᾳ καὶ γοητείᾳ ἐπίσημον ("Some Jew, known for his profound knowledge of magic and sorcery") (Latišev, *Neidannye grečeskie agiografičeskie texti*, p. 16).

[87] "κἀκεῖσε κατιδεῖν" μέλλεις ἐρχόμενον διὰ τοῦ ἀέρος φοβερὸν τῇ θέᾳ καὶ πάνυ κατάπληκτον" (ibid.).

[88] The verb ἀσπάζω in Medieval Greek is liturgical and means *to kiss*.

[89] Latišev, *Neidannye grečeskie agiografičeskie texti*, pp. 16–17.

rascals inspired irresistible passion and "furious lust" in the hearts of the daughters of noble citizens. This madness "burned" the poor maidens and pushed them out of their homes right in the hands of Heliodorus' gang. The activities of the mage troubled the economic life of the town as well. He made the traders see common stones as gold and useless objects as absolutely necessary. Everyone in Catania was in such utter despair that all trade ceased and that the inhabitants were condemned to starve.[90] Under these circumstances, the governor Lucius was urged to ask the central government for help. The emperor sent his *strator* (military officer) Heraclides, but even his intervention did not save the world from the gang. Heliodorus managed to escape the executioners with the assistance of Gaspar. Only the bishop Leo was able to put an end to his outrages. After many attempts to save Heliodorus from his delusions, he dragged the mage out to the Achilion — the place where executions were usually carried out. There the priest ordered a furnace to be flamed up and entered it with the mage. The latter burned and Leo remained intact.[91]

The legend of the Sicilian mage Heliodorus is very different from the previous stories. The *Confession of St. Cyprian* and the *Lives* of St. Basil the Great, of St. Mary of Antioch, and of St. Theophilus of Adana have certain didactic functions: to demonstrate the omnipotence of the Christian God and to diminish the popularity of other mystical practices and cults. The *Life of Leo* describes events that take place in a completely Christianized social and religious environment, where there is no rival to the dominating religion. The Jewish sorcerer in this narrative has almost nothing in common with powerful figures like Megas from the legend of Anthemius of Antioch, who allowed himself to speak in a rough and scornful manner to a respectful member of the local society. The marginalization of the professional magicians, who once earned their wealth from the populace's credulity, is evident in the *Life of Theophilus of Adana*. Here the Jew was terrified as soon as he saw the priest knocking on his door. We can only imagine what repressions he was afraid of. In the *Life of Leo*, we observe the ultimate stage of this marginalization. The magician was scared not only to practice his "profession" publicly, but he was also unable to do so even in the comfort of

[90] Ibid., pp. 16–18.
[91] Ibid., p. 25.

his own house and was forced to settle in the home of the noble and ambitious youth. The struggle is no longer between mystery cults and Christianity, nor between Neo-Platonism and the new popular religion, but rather between the Church authorities and the local populace. The image of Heliodorus is not as tragic as the one of Theophilus of Adana with his long monologues of public repentance. Before the audience stands a dissolute and ambitious young man who, along with his friends, makes fun of the bishop's authority, of the serious businessmen in his town, even of the Emperor himself. The anonymous author parodically uses the standard hagiological thematic pattern and terms to describe the events. For the gravestone, where Heliodorus must wait for the arrival of Satan, is used the word στήλη that ironically refers to the στῦλος (the high pillar of the stylites). The Devil himself flies riding a huge deer — a symbol of Christ, e.g., in the martyrologue of Eustathios Placidas, where the animal materialized before the Roman commander and converted him to the true religion.[92] The only event narrated in a serious manner was actually Heliodorus's death in the furnace.

6. The Emperor Constantine V: Politicization of the Contract with the Devil

All of the above-mentioned hagiological texts are related to semi-legendary personages and were written by anonymous authors. The contract with the Devil was never accepted as a theological doctrine and never became a widespread phenomenon in literature until the late 8th century. It was used by iconodule authors as early as the first decade of the 9th century. During this crucial period of the iconoclast crisis, hagiology became a powerful weapon of Orthodoxy against its rivals. It is widely accepted by modern scholars that the model work of polemical iconodule hagiology was the *Life of St. Stephen the Younger* (August 11, 715 – November 28, 767), written between 807 and 810 by Stephen the Deacon.[93] This well-known author de-

[92] Kazhdan, *A History*…, p. 300 sq.

[93] "Vita Sancti Stephani Junioris, monachi et martyris" ("Στεφάνου διακόνου τῆς Ἐκκλησίας Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, εἰς τὸν Βίον καὶ μαρτύριον τοῦ παμμακαρίου καὶ ὁσίου μάρτυρος Στεφάνου τοῦ Νέου, μαρτυρήσαντος ἐπὶ τοῦ ἀσεβοῦς Εἰκονοκλάστου βασιλέως Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ καῖ Κοπρωνύμου"). In: *Patrologiae cursus completes. Series Graeca*, ed. J.-P.

cided to use the contract to create the propagandistic image of the iconoclast Emperor Constantine V (741–775).

According to the *Life of St. Stephen the Younger*, Constantine made his contracts (συνθήκας) with the demons in the debris of the church of "St. Mavra," located in the suburbs of the capital and which he had himself demolished. Reportedly, he sacrificed to them young boys. One of these boys, says Stephen, was the son of a certain Sulphamios.[94] The same story can be found in the chronographic work of George Monachus:

> This wicked god-hater and new Julian renounced the Holy Virgin and all the saints, and worshipped, like the Greeks, Aphrodite and Dionysus. He used to make human sacrifices to them outside the city, where he had established a special place for murders in the debris of the church of the saint martyr Mavra that he demolished by himself. There he sacrificed every night one boy during his mysteries, dedicated to the demons. A witness to that was the slaughtered son of Sulphamios, whom the demonic emperor secretly had sacrificed — this event was made widely known.[95]

This story is mentioned by many authors during the whole of the 10th century. Constantine VII and his associates included it in their encyclopedic work *On Virtues and Vices* and in the compilation known today as *Excerpta*.[96] An account of the son of Sulphamios can be found in the *Suda* lexicon as well.[97]

7. Accounts of the Byzantine Legal Documentation

All of the above-mentioned accounts of the contract with the Devil are produced by literary texts and have a concrete political, social, or ethical

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Migne, t. 100, Paris: Imprimerie catholique, pp. 1069–1186. Cf. Halkin, *Bibliotheca*…, [1666]; Kazhdan, *A History*…, pp. 183–198.

[94] "Vita Sancti Stephani Junioris," p. 1169.

[95] *Georgii monachi chronicon*, ed. C. de Boor (corr. P. Wirth), vol. 2, Stuttgart: Teubner, 1978, p. 752.

[96] "De virtutibus et vitiis," p. 155. In: *Excerpta historica iussu imp. Constantini Porphyrogeniti confecta*, vol. II, t. 1, Berlin: Weidmann, 1906.

[97] *Suidae lexicon*, ed. A. Adler, t. III, Leipzig: Teubner, 1933, pp. 176–177. Cf. I. Rochow, *Kaiser Konstantin V (741–775). Materialen zu seinem Leben und Nachleben*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994, p. 137.

function. We can only guess the real magical practices that stood behind such stories. Very few official documents and court judgements that mention the contract have been preserved. Nevertheless, secondary sources on such cases could allow us to take a look into the underground of the capital and the provincial cities of the Late Roman and Byzantine world. Some criminals were known to be associated with evil spirits and/or demons. A typical example is the lawsuit against two women charged with child murder under the influence of the demon Gilo. The official authorities obviously did not pay much attention to such accusations, because the father of the future patriarch Tarasius (784–806), the imperial judge George, quickly found them innocent.[98] The *Life of Patriarch Tarasius* mentions neither a contract with the demon nor a renouncement of Christ.

More information on this matter can be obtained from Late Byzantine court protocols and judgements. Two synodal decisions of the Church of Constantinople on cases of voluntary desecration of Christ's name and exploitation of the "assistance" (συνεργία) of Satan have been preserved. The first one dates from November 1338 and the name of the individual charged with these accusations is George Tzerentzes. This man wrote and then covered with ink the name of Christ. In addition, he ritually scrawled spells to summon the demons. For these blasphemous acts he was sentenced to stay outside the church during the psalmody and to beg everyone who entered or exited the building for absolution. His punishment included fast and penitence for a hundred days.[99] Written renouncements of Christ and satanic help as a reward were in fact nothing but a contract with the Devil.[100]

An analogous story is described in a decision of the court of Thessaloniki (15th century).[101] A sorcerer called Cappadocus was notorious for his magical skills and his books on such impure arts. His influence upon the souls of the citizens was especially destructive. Innumerable penances were imposed on him by the Church's authorities. A monk be-

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[98] *Ignatii Diaconi vita Tarasii Archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani*, ed. I. Heikel, *Acta societatis scientiarum fennicae*, 17, 1891, pp. 395–423, p. 396.

[99] *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*, ed. F. Miklošič, J. Müller, vol. 1, Athens: Spanos, 1996, p. 180.

[100] Greenfield, *Traditions*…, p. 255.

[101] *Acta et diplomata graeca*…, pp. 342–344; Greenfield, *Traditions*…, p. 255.

gan to visit him, pretending that he was trying to get him on the right path, but his true intention soon came to light, a scandal blew up, and, as a result, the image of the Church was seriously damaged. In fact, the monk was a very ambitious man who strived for a higher position and tried to make "an alliance" with the Devil. To achieve his goal, he had to write and to recite a certain prayer (probably *Our Lord*) aloud backwards along with the names of the persons responsible for his promotion. In addition, Cappadocus had to write some "impure and sinful letter" to be read by the monk all night under the starlight and then to be worn by him under his cassock as an amulet.

Obviously, this shameful episode coerced the Church to put the monk to trial and to produce the decision edited by Franz Miklošič and Joseph Müller. Unfortunately, the final paragraphs are lost, and we have neither a date nor information about the imposed punishments. Even though there is no mention of a written contract with the Devil, the similarities with the stories of the above hagiological texts are many. The monk "was asking for an alliance with the Devil."[102] The letter, written by Cappadocus, resembles the correspondence between the magician and his evil master in the *Lives* of St. Basil the Great and St. Mary of Antioch.

8. Conclusion

The Faustian legend is rooted in a long-lasting mythological and philosophical tradition in the Greco-Roman world. The concept of the supernatural guardian of a hero, already found in Homer, was elaborated firstly by early poets — Theognis and Pindar —, who used the term *daimon* to refer to the divine protector instead of the Homeric "god." This difference, though seemingly small, brought about a new idea — the demon is an anonymous, unintelligible, both beneficent and malevolent power. The belief in this unknown higher puissance was fatalistic and quite different from the socially acceptable piety and the devotion to the Olympic gods. Demons were conceived as the very manifestation of chaos and disorder; they were thought to be innumerable and unnamable; it was believed that they act by their own obscure will and that mortals do not have any power over them.

[102] Ibid.

Plato brought a significant change to the concept of the guardian *daimon*, providing a philosophical elaboration of this ancient idea. The *daimonion* of Socrates was not the chaotic and frequently destructive power of the early poets — the word *daimonion* was actually synonymous with "conscience" or even with "super ego" (in Karl Jung's terms). According to the *Phaedo*, everybody ought to choose the way of virtue, despite the influence of his or her demon.

Neo-Platonism entwined the philosophical concept of the protector demon with its usual mysticism. According to Porphyry, exceptionally pious and holy persons, like his teacher Plotinus, had gods for guardians instead of *daimones*. According to Maximus of Tyros, the Platonic *ideas* of human talents had their manifestations, i.e., demons, who choose their *protégé* and gave him or her this talent. Along with this function of protecting humans, demons in the theogonies of the Neo-Platonic philosophers were mediators between the human world and the heavenly powers. From the philosophical and theological point of view, these functions of protection and mediation were crucial for the religious systems of the pagan Late Roman world. Exactly for this reason, the Cristian Church had to eradicate the very notion of the good *daimon* from the collective mind and to demonize the professional mage in the very heart of the pagan Hellenistic culture. One of the propagandistic tools, used to this end, was the Faustian legend.

As a rhetorical and literary *topos*, the concept of the pact with Satan probably originated in the eastern Roman provinces (Syria, Asia Minor). It appears for the first time as a story in a small number of hagiological texts in the mid-4th century. Such stories were undoubtedly one of the many instruments used for demonizing the ancient pagan mysteries and practices of Neo-Platonism.

From the late 4th to the early 7th century, in hagiological texts the *topos* of the contract was relatively widespread. The narrative pattern (the protagonists and the plot) are rather standardized. The plot is laid in a huge eastern city or in Constantinople. Ambition of strong carnal passion drive a Christian of high standing to ask the local magician for help — a well-respected man, at least until the late 6th century. His assistance had a price — the client had to renounce Christianity, accept Satan, and sign a contract to sell his soul. The ceremony is held in places typically related to pagan cults or haunted by demons: a bridge, an ancient graveyard, the hippodrome. During this period, only the sorcerer was damned

to eternal tortures in Hell. The client repents and his immortal soul is saved. Even though the authors show condescension to their sinful heroes, the punishments grow gradually more severe. While St. Cyprian and Anthemius of Antioch were entirely purified of their sins, Theophilus of Adana had a different fate. He was accepted back in the bosom of the Church, but died immediately after his absolution. In addition, here the image of the magician, who played the role of mediator between the pious priest and the Devil, is different from those of his earlier colleagues. He is just a frightened and marginalized Jew, scared to death by the Church authorities.

After the Arab invasions and the decisive cultural, political, and religious changes in Byzantium, from approximately the mid-7th century, the narrative motive changed as well. Heliodorus and Constantine V did not die only bodily, but also lost their souls because of their agreements with the powers of the Evil One. The ceremony continued to be held in places traditionally haunted by demons: a grave of an ancient hero, a ruined church. In addition, in the *Life of St. Stephen the Younger* the usage of the *topos* is clearly propagandistic — the damnation of the heretic emperor.

It is extremely difficult to distinguish in these stories what was real from what was merely a literary phenomenon. The later judicial documents give only circumstantial evidence that practices similar to the ones described in hagiological texts from the 4th to the 7th centuries existed throughout the Empire — the written renouncement of Christ and the Devil's aid were well-established in the 14th century.

It is important to emphasize the numerous Latin translations of Byzantine texts that provide accounts of the contract with the Devil. The stories of Theophilus of Adana and bishop Leo of Catania were well-known to the Catholic world as early as the 9th century. *The Tragicall Story of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* was a literary, political, and cultural phenomenon with a long history and the works by Christopher Marlowe and Johann von Goethe were only stages of its development.