CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

A NOTE ON SOME JEWISH ASSIMILATIONISTS:
THE ANGELS (P. BERLIN 5025b, P. LOUVRE 2391)

[207] Professor Bickerman’s particular interest in relations between Jews and gentiles as a continuing theme in Jewish history makes it seem appropriate to dedicate to his memory this note on a minority group of Jewish immigrants who entered Europe from the Near East about the beginning of the present era, prospered mightily, after their (probably involuntary) conversion to Christianity, became an important part of the ruling class, and in many cases assimilated with, in others reportedly drove out, the earlier inhabitants of their own sort (this in spite of the fact that they also remained active in Jewish affairs). I refer to the angels.

That they were originally a Jewish family—or even a family at all—is disputed. Certainly they had close relatives in Palmyra and elsewhere along the Palestine-Syrian coast, where their name can be traced back to the bronze age. It was originally mal’ak, a functional name meaning ‘envoy’ or, by extension, ‘agent.’ In early times it seems to have been used for any men or deities, or even animals, who ran errands for their superiors. This was true also of its Greek (not quite) equivalent, angelos, ‘messenger,’ which in hellenistic times, if not before, became its common translation. By Roman imperial times, however, the trade union was well on towards becoming a family group. When writers of the Antonine period and later speak of “the angels” they usually mean a special class of beings, commonly conceived as a sort of racial group distinct from the other groups of the (usually) invisible population—the gods, ghosts, demons, etc.

To trace the stages—let alone the causes—of this transition would be a task far too complex for the present paper. Here we shall focus on one small stage of the process, a stage documented by two invocations in the magical papyri, one which I shall call L, in P. Louvre 2391,1 the other, B, in P. Berlin 5025b.2 In both papyri these have been run together with other metrical passages and therefore have not, so far as I know, been [208] considered separately, in spite of their differences from their contexts. L follows a hymn to the sun (who is addressed as ‘Titan’) and is followed—after two lines of uncertain content—by a

---

1 Lines 211-24, according to the numeration of K. Preisendanz, Papyri graecae magicae, ed. A. Henrichs (Stuttgart, 1973-74, 2 v.; henceforth P), in which P. Louvre 2391 is no. III, often called P. Mimaut; its fragments have been arranged and its lines numbered in various ways by various editors, see the table by G. Moeller in P, I.32f.
2 P no. I, lines 300-305.
conjuration of some single individual; the purpose of the conjuration is not stated. B follows a brief invocation of the Pythian Apollo, and is immediately followed by a conjuration related to that in L. Here, too, the conjuration has no stated purpose and no apparent connexion with the invocation of the angels. The similar arrangement in both papyri of two apparently unrelated pieces of material suggests that both papyri used some smaller collection, which apparently existed in widely different forms, evidence of rather long descent from its original, but this is a side road we cannot follow.

Both L and P have been reprinted as verse, along with their quasi metrical contexts, in the appendix to P. The versions given there are based on the observations and conjectures of many scholars who have tried to make sense and hexameters of the letters in the papyri. Let us suppose the results of their scholarship approximately correct. If so, those elements of the content which will concern us are mostly reliable. Serious uncertainty about them occurs only in the case of L, about the preserved initial of the lost name at the end of line 2, and about considerable elements in lines 4, 5, 7, and 13. We may put these problems aside till we come to them, and may here pass over the general questions of palaeography, wording, and grammar (which have hitherto had most attention) so as to come to those of composition and content (hitherto comparatively neglected). The two texts, as printed in the appendix to P, read as follows:

B: ἄγγελε πρῶτε θεοῦ, Ζηνός μεγάλαο, Ἰάω, καὶ σὲ τὸν οὐφάντον κόσμον κατέχοντα, Μιχαήλ, καὶ σὲ καλῷ, Γαβριήλ, πρωτάγγελε, δεῦρ’ ἀπ’ Ὀλυμποῦ, ἀντολῆς Ἀβραᾶξ κεχαρημένος, Ἰλαος ἐλθοις, 5 δὲ δύσιν ἀντολήθην ἐπικοπιάζη, Ἀδωναί.

πάσα φύσις προμεῖι τε, πάτερ κόσμου, Πακερβῆθ.

L: κλῆξθα πρῶτον τῷ Διὸς ἄγγελον, θε<ξ>ον Ἰάω, καὶ σὲ τὸν οὐφάντον κόσμον κατέχοντα, Ραφαήλ, ἀντολῆς χαίρων, θεὸς Ἰλαος ἐς<ο>ο, Ἀβραᾶξ, καὶ σὲ, μέγιστη <καὶ> αἰθέρει, κλῆξθα (αἰρώγον σου) <σε> Μιχαήλ,