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ZOMBIES AND DEMONS:
ON THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM
AND THE 'SUPERNATURAL' LANDSCAPE
OF THE LATE ANTIQUE CHRISTIAN
HISTORIOGRAPHICAL IMAGINATION

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Keywords

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MAGIC AND MIRACLES, ZOMBIES AND DEMONS: ON THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM AND THE 'SUPERNATURAL' LANDSCAPE OF THE LATE ANTIQUE CHRISTIAN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL IMAGINATION

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I. Introduction

What counts as “supernatural” — and indeed, what that term means, or if it can mean anything at all — is not consistent across time and culture.¹ Yet many modern worldviews have something in common with certain ancient Mediterranean ways of thinking: a distinction between the real, feasible, natural, and/or demonstrable on one hand, and the unreal, infeasible, supernatural, and/or non-demonstrable on the

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¹ The following shorthand acronyms are used throughout: *AJ* = *Antiquitates Judaicae* (Jewish Antiquities); *BJ* = *Bellum Judaicum* (Jewish War); *CA* = *Contra Apionem* (Against Apion); *DEH* = *De excidio Hierosolymitano* (*On the Destruction of Jerusalem*); *LAJ* + *LBJ* = the Latin translations of *AJ* and *BJ* respectively.

other. Historiography has proven to be one literary genre with a penchant for bringing such issues to the fore, inasmuch as historiography purports to describe things that actually happened, or at least could have. Thus, authors like Herodotus have at times been portrayed as credulous historians of the unrealistic,² whereas historians like Thucydides and Polybius have reputations for not buying into fabricated nonsense.³ Specialists recognize that things are not so simple: Herodotus was not necessarily a believer in tall tales,⁴ and Thucydides and Polybius did not always produce narratives that claim the credence of modern readers. All of these authors wrote within an ancient Mediterranean *koinê* in which all sorts of phenomena were commonplace—including magic, miracles, zombies, demons—that in today’s post-Enlightenment world are largely relegated to the realm of fiction. Yet there has long existed an apparent tension between credulity and

² Herodotus’ reputation and his *Histories* (or *Inquiries*) vis-à-vis questions of fact versus fiction, truth versus falsehood, natural versus supernatural have been debated since antiquity, and the literature is massive. Herodotus, for one thing, recorded stories and phenomena that he did not necessarily believe happened (7.152; cf. 2.123), as discussed in Lionel Pearson, “Credulity and Skepticism in Herodotus,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 72 (1941): 335-355 and elsewhere. In fact, Herodotus’ presentations of “wonders,” θαύματα, had a profound effect on subsequent Greek thought and literature vis-à-vis the fantastic: Jessica Lightfoot, “Wonder and the Marvellous from Homer to the Hellenistic World,” PhD Dissertation: University of Oxford, 2018, 67. However, Thomas Harrison, *Divinity and History: The Religion of Herodotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 30, following Donald Lateiner, *The Historical Method of Herodotus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 84-90, counts “no more than a handful of supernatural explanations” among Herodotus’ narratives for which he gives alternative explanations.

³ Ingela Nilsson, “To Render Unbelievable Tales Believable: The Storyworlds of Paradoxography,” in *Storyworlds in Short Narratives: Approaches to Late Antique and Early Byzantine Tales*, ed. Stavroula Constantinou and Andria Andreou (Leiden: Brill, 2024) 59-80, at 61, notes “Herodotus and his journalistically documented experiences of a world filled with incredible things and paradoxical behavior, later defamed by historians such as Thucydides focusing on political history and ‘truth’.” Cf. Edith Foster and Donald Lateiner, eds., *Thucydides & Herodotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2. A good example of what I consider an “old-fashioned” reading of Thucydides and Polybius vis-à-vis Herodotus (and Xenophon and Arrian) comes in Lord Macaulay, *Reviews, Essays, and Poems* (London: Ward, Lock, & Tyler, 1884), 331-332, who says of Xenophon that he “was as superstitious as Herodotus, but in a way far more offensive” (so Herodotus is superstitious) and that “[t]he nonsense of Xenophon is that of a dotard. His stories about dreams, omens, and prophecies, present a strange contrast to the passages in which the shrewd and incredulous Thucydides mentions the popular superstitions.” Similarly, Macaulay imputes to Polybius an “authentic account of the facts,” though not with a “comprehensive mind.”

⁴ An excellent place to begin when asking these questions about Herodotus is Anthony Ellis, “Fictional Truth and Factual Truth in Herodotus,” in *Truth and History in the Ancient World*, ed. Ian Ruffell and Lisa Hau (London: Routledge, 2016), 104-129, which begins by parsing Herodotus’ reputation between that of the “father of history” (so Cicero) and that of the “father of lies” (so Juan Luis Vives in the sixteenth century [and Plutarch long before]).

incredulity vis-à-vis the paranormal, supernatural, and extraordinary, and this tension was prolonged, arguably exacerbated, within Late Antiquity and the rise of the Christian worldview as a formidable cultural reality.

It would be reasonable to suppose—and some have—that the situation became more complicated in Christianized Late Antiquity,⁵ when competing conceptions of what was and was not “natural,” and what the supernatural was, came into collision within twin processes that can be referred to as Classicism and Christianization.⁶ It is by no means certain that some tenets central to Christian belief and practice—Jesus’ resurrection, glossolalia, manifestations of the Holy Spirit—would have seemed “normal” to ancient people. Yet the extant evidence does not necessarily support sharp temporal distinctions among understandings of what moderns would call the supernatural within Mediterranean antiquity; a much broader continuity of thought regarding such things through the Classical, Hellenistic, and late antique eras may indeed have existed. More than that, greater continuity exists between ancient conceptions of the “supernatural” and many worldviews that are common today than is generally assumed. Yet when it comes to history-writing, it must be acknowledged that many events described by ancient historians would never make it into modern history books. This chapter is about those kinds of events.

This chapter takes as a case study an ignored but important late fourth-century CE Latin history called *On the Destruction of Jerusalem* (*De excidio Hierosolymitano* – hereafter *DEH*), based on Flavius Josephus’ first-century CE (Greek) *Jewish War* (= *BJ*),⁷ and arguably the only classically-modeled Christian historiography to emerge

⁵ Thus has Gary B. Ferngren, *Medicine & Health Care in Early Christianity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 83 argued that “there is no question that a heightened supernaturalism came to characterize late antiquity in the fourth and fifth centuries.”

⁶ “Classicism” here refers to the Late Antique penchant to look back to the authors, texts, norms, and values of Classical antiquity for guiding principles and best practices. “Christianization” here refers to the processes by which those ideas and habits that were distinctively Christian came to have far-reaching effects on society.

⁷ *DEH* is a Late Antique Christian rewrite of Josephus’ history, which may be considered both Jewish and Roman. Josephus’ narrative centers on the Roman-Jewish War (66-70 CE), which led to Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 CE, within a larger first-century historical perspective. While a source for *DEH*, the perspective of Josephus is not directly relevant to the topics treated in this chapter inasmuch as *DEH* is not beholden to, or usually aware of, Josephus’ views on a given issue. Josephus’ perspective on the ‘supernatural’ has often been described as something like ‘rational,’; see George MacRae, “Miracles in the *Antiquities* of Josephus,” in *Miracles*, ed. C. F. D. Moule (London: Mowbray & Co., 1965), 128-147, who is credited as “one of the first explorers of Josephus’ attitude towards the supernatural and miraculous” by Philip Edward Jewell, “Magic in the Works of Flavius Josephus,” PhD Dissertation: University of Southampton, 2006, 22; see further Horst R. Moehring, “Rationalization of Miracles in the Writings of Flavius Josephus,” *Studia Evangelica* 6 (1973): 376-383; Morton Smith, “The Occult in Josephus,” in *Josephus, Judaism and Christianity*, eds. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 236-256.

in that century (in contradistinction to church history and the chronicle, both popularized by Eusebius of Caesarea).⁸ This history touches upon the topics of magic, miracles, zombies, and demons in its narrative. Yet, over the course of an 80,000+ word work, each of these phenomena is very rare. And, while these are presented as phenomena that did exist *or* were at least thought to exist by the narrative's historical actors, their presentation is somewhat ambiguous. Taken together, I argue that these supernatural phenomena, recounted in *DEH*, derived from a worldview that assumed that such things were 1) real, possible, or believable; 2) unusual or uncommon; and 3) fakeable, or privy to be credited where there was no substance. In this chapter, I treat each of these themes in turn, assessing the extent to which each figures in *DEH* and the worldview it seems to assume. For the conclusion, I put this outlook into conversation with several other ideas emerging from recent research that are important for understanding Christianity in/and Late Antiquity.

Before proceeding, a brief contextualization of magic and the supernatural in Late Antiquity. The world of Late Antiquity is not the world of today, and neither its language nor its concept of “an ambiguous or illegitimate sphere of ritual” —to which words like “magic” or conventionally ascribed—is the same as ours. Nor were such things inclined to go unchanged historically, geographically, or terminologically.⁹ Nevertheless, there do exist similarities between antiquity and today when it comes to supernatural or seemingly strange phenomena, reactions to them, and vocabulary used to describe them. Thus, we can identify in ancient sources terms and concepts—like magic, miracles, zombies, and demons—for which we find that we do not need immediate explanations and descriptions. At the same time, we must recognize that we may today differ markedly from late ancient peoples in terms of baseline assumptions about ourselves and the world and how things work. The continuities and congruities in thought that we share with our brethren of old can actually serve to confuse the issue, inviting us to assume solidarity and familiarity in ways that are only half-true. With these things in mind, this study assumes that both skepticism and credulity were possible for ancient

⁸ Thus the primary argument of Carson Bay, “Pseudo-Hegesippus and the Beginnings of Christian Historiography in Late Antiquity,” *Studia Patristica* 126 (2021): 255-266; cf. *inter alia* Albert A. Bell, Jr., “An Historiographical Analysis of the *De Excidio Hierosolymitano* of Pseudo-Hegesippus,” PhD Dissertation: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1977; Dominique Estève, “L'Oeuvre historique du Pseudo-Hégésippe: “De Bello iudaico”, livre I à IV,” PhD Dissertation: Université Paris Nanterre, 1987; Carson Bay, *Biblical Heroes and Classical Culture in Christian Late Antiquity: The Historiography, Exemplarity, and Anti-Judaism of Pseudo-Hegesippus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

⁹ David Frankfurter, “Ancient Magic in a New Key: Refining an Exotic Discipline in the History of Religions,” in *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World* 189 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 3-20, at 5.

thinkers, as they are for thinkers today, as it seeks to trace the contours of just one perspective on the supernatural from Late Antiquity.

II. Magic

Mageia (or *magicus*) is not identical to “magic.”¹⁰ Yet the later English term derives from the Latin, itself based on the Greek, and thus in practice there is often enough considerable overlap between these ancient versus modern terminologies. However, all of the things that might be imputed to or assumed of *magicus*/magic, in antiquity or today, vary on multiple levels. For that reason, this section hones in on a particular term as used in a particular text without assuming that such usage is identical to modern terms and concepts or those of near-contemporary, Latin-writing authors of Late Antiquity like Augustine, Orosius, Jerome, or Ambrose, who may naturally be quite close to *DEH* in use of language and “worldview.”¹¹

The Latin term *magicus* appears exactly twice in all of *DEH*. First, in Book 1, we read of how Herod the Great (c. 72–4 BCE) dragged his son Alexander (35–7 BCE) to Rome, accusing him before Caesar of trying to kill his father: “Thereafter, raging in spirit, he [Herod] sought Rome, dragging Alexander with him, whom he accused before Caesar of being party to a crime of *magicus* against himself.”¹² The Greek passage from Josephus’ *Jewish War* upon which this passage is based uses the term *φαρμακεία* to describe Alexander’s putative crime, which Thackeray reads as an

¹⁰ Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, trans. Franklin Philip (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 26, 30, 34, 39, 56, etc., as cited by Frankfurter, “Ancient Magic,” 5n7.

¹¹ A number of important points are made by Robert A. Markus, “Augustine on Magic: A Neglected Semiotic Theory,” *Revue des études augustinienes et patristiques* 40.2 (1994): 375–388, including the anthropologists’ warning that trying to understand the essence of magic is a hopeless task; the idea that magic may have “occupied a different place in antiquity on the map of human activities than it does in modern times” (375); the method of honing in on one ancient thinker (Augustine) to see how *he* tried to understand magic as current in his society; and the important point, however debatable, that Augustine’s was “the only sophisticated attempt at a theory” of magic (which was ubiquitous) in Antiquity of which Markus knows (376). Certainly, the text under study here, *DEH*, attempts no comprehensive take on magic or anything like it. Note also Markus’ working definition of magic, borrowed from Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3: “Magic may be said to be the exercise of preternatural control over nature by human beings, with the assistance of forces more powerful than they.” (Of course, this leaves open the question of what counts as “preternatural.”) Later, medieval sources will often “recognize magic as falling into two basic types, demonic and natural,” as discussed in Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Third Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 20.

¹² *DEH* 1.38.5: *Denique furens animi Romam petit attracto secum Alexandro, quem reum magici aduersum se criminis ante Caesarem statuit.* Text from Vincenzo Ussani, ed., *Hegesippi qui dicitur Historiae libri v – Pt. 1: Textum criticum continens*, CSEL 66.1 (Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1932), 79–80.

accusation of poisoning.¹³ Yet the author of *DEH*, quite familiar with the Latin term for “poison, drug” (*venenum*),¹⁴ does not use that term here, instead apparently understanding φαρμακεία in its more nebulous sense.¹⁵ One might read what Alexander is here accused of as the supernatural equivalent to the (more) “natural” crime of poisoning, though the line separating the realm of *magicus* from that of *venenum* could be fine indeed.¹⁶ That *DEH*’s use of *magicus* in this passage constitutes an intentional interpretive choice is suggested by a comparison with the Latin translation of the base passage in the *Jewish War* (likely produced around the same time as *DEH* was written), which uses *venenum*, as one might expect.¹⁷

The author of *DEH* had an at-hand solution had he wished to avoid mention of *magicus*; instead, it almost seems as though he went out of his way to include a

¹³ Josephus, *BJ* 1.452, ed. and trans. Henry St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 212-213, translation adapted: “One of them [Herod’s sons], at any rate, namely Alexander, was dragged by his father to Rome, who accused him before Caesar of attempting to poison him” (Τὸν γοῦν Ἀλέξανδρον σύρας μέχρι Ρώμης ὁ πατήρ τῆς ἐφ’ ἑαυτῷ φαρμακείας ἐκρίνεν ἐπὶ Καίσαρος).

¹⁴ The term appears at *DEH* 1.22.2; 1.25.1; 1.28.1; 1.29.8; 1.40.6; 1.43.1; 1.43.5-8; 1.44.3; 1.45.1-2; 5.27.1. The preponderance of the term in Book 1 has to do with the historical developments described there, namely intrigue within the Herodian household; the outlier occurrence in 5.27.1 comes within a speech scripted by the author and attributed to Titus.

¹⁵ The term φαρμακεία, while it could refer to all kinds of materials related to poison, witchcraft, etc., could also designate drugs, potions, or herbal remedies, generically or specifically (and/or metaphorically), and thus need not have carried any kind of *de facto* nefarious connotation (though the possibility was always there, I suppose). See Plato, *Laws* 10.932E-933A and the discussion in Fritz Graf, *Roman Festivals in the Greek East: From the Early Empire to the Middle Byzantine Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 287-288.

¹⁶ So witness Lucan, *Bellum Civile* 9.922-924, discussing the *Psylli* (the earliest known inhabitants of North Africa), a *gens* associated with the ability to deal with snakes and their venom, both for themselves and for others, in this case having protected the Roman army by a collection of apotropaic herbs and materials that were burned and smoked around the camp (9.890-938). Describing the means by which *Psylli* ‘combat’ the poison of snakes—a process that would certainly fit with any modern notion of ‘magic’—Lucan states how “the miracles of this magic race” (*magicae miracula gentis*) were exhibited in their battle with “the absorbed venom” (*rapti ueneni*). J. D. Duff, trans. and ed., *Lucan. The Civil War (Pharsalia)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928) problematically translates *magicae miracula gentis* as “the wondrous powers of the people,” placing *magicae* in apposition to *miracula*. It may be significant that the author of *DEH* knew Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*. A near-contemporary work to *DEH*, the history of Ammianus Marcellinus (the *Res Gestae*), collocates poison and something like magic in attributing to the Persians a “fear of poison and secret arts” (*venenorum et secretarum artium metu*; 23.6.78); J. C. Rolfe, trans and ed., *Ammianus Marcellinus. History, Volume II: Books 20-26* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), 392-393.

¹⁷ *LBJ* 1.452: *Quapropter Alexandrum quidem secum Romam pater abstractum ueneni sibi dati reum apud Caesarem postulauit*. Bernd Bader, ed., *Josephus Latinus: De Bello Judaico, Buch 1* (Göttingen: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2019), 134. Note how strictly the Latin grammar and word-order here follows the Greek.

magical element in this episode, though establishing what the author imagined by *magicus* here is not possible. However, in any case, I would suggest that what Alexander was accused of, according to DEH 1.38.5, was something that would fall into the *modern* category of “paranormal.” While DEH does not endorse the idea that anything was actually done via *magicus* in this passage, it does attribute it to an imperial audience who take it seriously as a possible crime.¹⁸ There is no reason to suppose that the author considered the use of *magicus* unlikely; inasmuch as the author presents *magicus* as the substance of a criminal charge that could be taken seriously in a first-century Roman world, the presence of *magicus* in DEH 1.38.5 presents an ostensibly real(istic) scenario.

The one other instance of *magicus* in DEH comes near the beginning of Book 2, where an unnamed Egyptian reminiscent of Max Weber’s “charismatic” authority appears briefly on the scene in Judea before being put down by the Romans. The character is introduced thus: “And a certain Egyptian pseudo-prophet arrived, trained in the magic arts, and he boasted of his ability to proclaim heavenly oracles by the prophetic spirit.”¹⁹ This Egyptian “pseudo-prophet” is, in the Greek text from Josephus’ *Jewish War*, which this passage renders, called an ἄνθρωπος γόης, a “sorcerer” or “wizard.”²⁰ Interestingly, DEH arguably makes the Egyptian’s magical

¹⁸ Charges, often described as false, for practicing something like “magic,” are well attested in Latin historiography contemporary with DEH. Ammianus Marcellinus 14.1.2 describes “false charges ... of practicing magic” (*artium nefandarum calumnias*) as occurring in the fourth century (Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 4-5); cf. 28.1.26, describing how a young man named Lollianus “was convicted of having written a book on destructive magic arts” (*conuictus codicem noxiarum artium ... descripsisse*; Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 102-103). Similarly, 29.1.44 notes that Alypsius and his son Hierocles, “a young man of good character,” were “accused as guilty of magic” (*ut ueneficus reus citatus est*; Rolfe *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 212-213). 29.2.2 names a certain Palladius and others who “stained themselves with the knowledge of the magic” (*ueneficiorum notitia pollutes*; Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 214-215). Finally, 29.3.5 marks how one Athanasius “used magic arts and was charged therewith” (*ueneficiis usus incessebatur*; Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 236-237). Note how often Rolfe uses “magic” to translate terms unrelated to the *magic-* root, including “poisoning” language (*venefic-* at 29.1.44; 29.2.2; 29.3.5). The language of *veneficium/veneficum* is often treated as denoting “magical practices” in Ammianus: see the commentaries of J. den Boeft, J. W. Drijvers, D. den Hengst, and H. C. Teitler, *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXVI* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 63; J. den Boeft, J. W. Drijvers, D. den Hengst, and H. C. Teitler, *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXVIII* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 21, 64; J. den Boeft, J. W. Drijvers, D. den Hengst, and H. C. Teitler, *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXIX* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 76. Thanks to Gavin Kelly for encouraging me to look up the treatments of *veneficium/venenum* in these volumes.

¹⁹ DEH 2.7.1 (Ussani, *Hegesippi*, 143): *Aegyptius quoque pseudopropheta adueniens et magicis inbutus artibus, iactabat se prophetico spiritu caelestia adnuntiare oracular.*

²⁰ Josephus, *BJ* 2.261: “Yet, it was with a worse blow than this that the Egyptian pseudoprophet damaged the Judeans. This enchanter fellow appeared in the countryside and, having attracted to himself a prophet’s trust, ...” (μείζονι δὲ τούτου πληγῇ Ἰουδαίους ἐκάκωσεν ὁ Αἰγύπτιος

abilities more realistic by attributing them to training rather than using a label (γόης) that usually connoted trickery and fakeness.²¹ Moreover, here again, the author of *DEH* proves willing to insert “magic” into his narrative where the Latin translation of the *Jewish War* is more literal and therefore less clear concerning the reality of *artes magicae*; there, the Egyptian pseudo-prophet is simply called a *magus*.²² However, we might note that Rufinus of Aquileia (340–410), a contemporary of *DEH*’s author, translated the exact same story from identical Greek preserved in the *Church History* of Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339) and likewise opted to use *magic-* language, describing the Egyptian as a *magus* and attributing his reputation as a *propheta* to the use of *ars magica*.²³ Thus, *DEH* is not alone in understanding Josephus’ Egyptian pseudo-prophet as a kind of magician, but rather shows itself to be a text of its time by doing so.²⁴

ψευδοπροφήτης. παραγενόμενος γὰρ εἰς τὴν χώραν ἄνθρωπος γόης καὶ προφήτου πίστιν ἐπιθεὶς ἑαυτῷ, ...). Text: Benedict Niese, ed., *Flavii Iosephi Opera*, Vol. VI: *De Bello Iudaico Libros VII*, editio secunda lucis ope expressa (Berlin: Weidmanns, 1955 [1885]), 204; translation: Steve Mason, *Flavius Josephus, Translation and Commentary: Volume 1b—Judean War 2* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 211-212.

²¹ Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus, Volume I: A — K* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 390, who defines γόης: “rogue, cheat, swindler, fraud, magician, wizard, fraudulent miracle-worker.” Josephus uses the term 4x in *BJ* (2.261, 264; 4.85; 5.317), 4x in *AJ* (20.97, 160, 167, 188), and 2x in *CA* (2.145, 161); cf. the related γοητεία (“magic, wizardry, deceit”) in *AJ* (2.286, 320) and *Vita* (40) and the verb γοητεύω (“to deceive”) at *BJ* 2.565. Further on the term γόης in Josephus, see René Bloch, “Mose und die Scharlatane: Zum Vorwurf γόης καὶ ἀπατεῶν in Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.145-161,” in *Internationales Josephus-Kolloquium Bruxelles 1998*, ed. Folker Siegert and Jürgen U. Kalms, *Münsteraner Judaistische Studien* 4 (Münster: LIT, 1999), 142-157, now as René Bloch, “Moses and the Charlatans: On the Charge of γόης καὶ ἀπατεῶν in *Contra Apionem* 2.145, 161,” in *Ancient Jewish Diaspora: Essays on Hellenism*, *JSJSup* 206 (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 39-54.

²² *LBJ* 2.261: *Maiore autem plaga Iudeos afflixit Aegyptius quidam pseudoprophetes. Adveniens quippe in provinciam, magus cum esset, prophetae sibi opinionem arrogans, ...* Text from Bern Burgerbibliothek Lat. 50, fol. 160v (no critical edition exists).

²³ Rufinus *LHE* 2.21.1: “But worse than all of this devastation was the damage caused to the Jews by an Egyptian false prophet; when he came to Judea, this man, a magician, persuaded others with his magical arts that he was a prophet,” (*Grauius uero omni hac uastatione adflixit Iudaeos Aegyptius quidam falsus propheta, qui cum uenisset ad Iudaeam, homo magus fidem sibi prophetae magica arte consciuit*). Text: Eduard Schwartz and Theodor Mommsen, eds., *Eusebius Werke, Zweiter Band, Erster Teil: Die Kirchengeschichte* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999 [1903-1909]), 161; translation: Philip R. Amidon, S.J., trans., *Rufinus of Aquileia: History of the Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 87.

²⁴ There are many issues related to *DEH*’s treatment of this figure and this passage, all of which are discussed at length in Carson Bay, “On the Multivocality of the Latin Josephus Tradition: A Comparison Between the Latin *War*, Latin *Antiquities*, Pseudo-Hegesippus, and Rufinus Based on the Egyptian Pseudo-Prophet Episode (*War* 2.261-263, *Antiquities* 20.169-172a),” *Medaevalia et Humanistica* 46 (2021): 1-36, including the grammatical aesthetics that appear to dictate how *DEH* introduces the pseudo-prophet’s magic (12). Note that the episode is also present in Josephus’

In terms of magic, the author of *DEH* seems a realist but not an enthusiast. This historian treats *magica* or that which is *magicus* as real-world entities in history, yet does so occasionally enough to dispel any suspicion that he is peddling fantasy. In line with this, below we will see that *DEH* 3.2.1 references the *artes* of Simon Magus (once referred to as simply *magus*), which include putative abilities to raise the dead and to fly—though he describes them as *uanitates*, which may or may not speak to their reality.²⁵ One gets the impression that, for this author, magic was relatively banal, a phenomenon to be neither avoided nor exaggerated.²⁶ Granted that *DEH* adhered to a considerable degree to the contents of the *Jewish War*, yet the way it treats magic vis-à-vis Alexander and the Egyptian pseudo-prophet still suggests an implicit level of realism. And indeed, inasmuch as this magic was something that political pretenders could be charged with, *DEH*'s presentation comports with a number of similar episodes related by a contemporary Latin Roman historian, Ammianus Marcellinus.²⁷

III. Miracles

Even if *magica/magicus* are not widespread in *DEH*, one might expect to find miracle language (*miraculum*, *mirabilis*) therein, given Late Antique Christianity's general interest in miracles.²⁸ But, once again, what we find is the occasional presence,

AJ 20.169 and its Latin translation, but no kind of magic language appears in either text. See Bay, "On the Multivocality," 15-19, 34-35 on *magica* language in *LBJ* and *LAJ* (and *LHE*) vis-à-vis *DEH* and in the broader Classical/Roman, Christian, and biblical traditions.

²⁵ Below we see that Simon's resuscitation efforts were not effective. However, his flying, which Simon performs before a crowd in order to prove his power in the face of Peter, is described straightforwardly: "On the stated day he ascended the Capitoline Hill and, throwing himself from the rock face, began to fly" (*Conscendit statuto die montem Capitolinum ac se de rupe deiciens uolare coepit*). *DEH* 3.2.1; Ussani, *Hegesippi*, 185. However, just after this, we learn that this flight was facilitated by some winged contraption (*remigii alarum*), which Peter's prayer entangles and disables.

²⁶ The caveat should be stated here that we are using only one lexical datum (*magic-*) to gauge magic discourse in *DEH*, a method with limited capacity. Consider, e.g., Ammianus Marcellinus, who never uses the terms *magica* or *magicus* but who provides an extensive ethnographic description of the *Magi* and their *magia* (23.6.32-36), which Rolfe (*Ammianus Marcellinus*, 367) translates "magic." Cf. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 370-371 (translating *uenenatur* as "gets magic power" at 23.6.38).

²⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus 14.1.2; 28.1.26; 29.1.44; 29.2.2; 29.3.5. As noted above, Ammianus never uses *magic-* language; most of these passages report charges of *veneficium* usage, perhaps 'poisoning' but perhaps best understood as a nebulous iteration thereof, comporting more with modern notions of "magic" than "poison" per se.

²⁸ A good place to start here is with the questions laid out in the preface of Tobias Nicklas and Janet E. Spittler, eds., *Credible, Incredible: The Miraculous in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), VII: "What was considered "miraculous" or "amazing" in the first centuries

relatively understated, of the miraculous in *DEH*. While the Latin term *miraculum* appears a total of ten times in the work,²⁹ and *mirabilis* seven times,³⁰ these terms most often mean something like “surprising” or “wondrous,”³¹ or (sometimes) refer to some broader “miraculous” reality—such as the “miracle of the divine plan [of history]” (*sanctae constitutionis miraculo*) mentioned in *DEH* Prol 2—that differs in kind from miracles *qua* concrete instances of supernatural activity (e.g. what Jesus is described as doing in the Gospels when he heals people, raises the dead, etc.).³²

As it happens, the one place where *DEH* mentions what we might qualify as miracles does not describe them *per se* but rather attributes them to none other than Jesus. In one of the relatively few passages that mention Jesus within *DEH*—in fact, within *DEH*’s version of Josephus’ famous “Testimonium Flavianum,”³³ i.e. the brief mention of Jesus in the *Jewish Antiquities*—we read:

CE? Which authors reported miraculous occurrences, and in what genres of texts? Which reports were considered credible, and by what criteria were their credibility judged? Which were, in the true sense of the word, incredible? How, if at all, did ancient authors indicate believability or unbelievability? This volume, like the conference for which most of the essays were originally written, is an effort to answer these and related questions, an effort to fill in the broader landscape of “miraculous” so as to better understand early Christianity’s place (or, perhaps better, the various early Christianities’ places) within it.”

²⁹ *DEH* Prol 2; 1.37.2 (x2); 1.38.1; 2.12.1; 4.7.1; 4.18.1 (x2); 5.13.1; 5.46.1.

³⁰ *DEH* 1.12.1; 1.35.1; 2.12.1; 3.26.2; 4.17.1; 5.16.1; 5.53.1.

³¹ I read *miraculum* as “surprise(s), surprising,” or “marvel(s)” in the sense of marveling at something unusual or unexpected, in *DEH* 1.37.2 (x2); 1.38.1; 5.13.1; 5.46.1. At *DEH* 4.7.1, the high priests speak to the Idumaeans from Jerusalem’s walls, saying “that it was very surprising to them” (*maximo sibi esse miraculo*) that the Idumaeans were so quickly resorting to violence, having believed lies about the state of affairs. This construction is equivalent to the Greek θαυμάζω (“I marvel, I am amazed”), testified in the New Testament (Galatians 1:6) and, e.g., in Greek inscriptions, where it can conjure amazement, admiration, or anger (following non-response to a mandate, e.g.). Interestingly, in places *DEH* associates *miraculum* with the wondrous manifestations of the *natural* world: in *DEH* 4.18.1 the author, introducing a descriptive aside on the Dead Sea, states that “it is better to occupy the pen with descriptions of ancient places or the miraculous in other elements than with the seditions of the Jews” (*Melius est enim in locorum ueterum descriptionibus uel ceterorum elementorum miraculo quam Iudaeorum seditionibus stilum occupare*); later on, the author will say that the sun’s reflection off the water does not require the proposition of any new [explanation] “as if [this occurred] by miracle” (*nihil nouum et quasi pro miraculo promendum*).

³² As for *mirabilis*, in *DEH* 1.12.1 the phrase *pro mirabili* simply means “unexpected” or “miraculous,” describing the unforeseen success of Alexander Jannaeus (around 83-80 BCE). At *DEH* 1.35.1 the Jerusalem Temple’s adornment by Herod the Great is described as *mirabilis pulchritudinis* (“of wondrous beauty”). Like *miraculum*, so also *mirabilis* is applied to nature in *DEH*: at 3.26.2 Lake Gennesar is described in terms of *mirabili naturae gratia et specie pulchritudinis* (“the wondrous grace of its nature and the aspect of its beauty”). *DEH* links *mirabilis* and *gratia* again in 4.17.1 to describe the verdant trees surrounding Jericho.

³³ The *TF* appears in Josephus, *AJ* 18.63-64 and constitutes one of the only early references to Jesus outside of the New Testament. On the *TF* in Josephus and its reception, the traditional study has

De quo ipsi Iudaei quoque testantur dicente Iosepho historiarum scriptore, quod fuerat illo in tempore uir sapiens, si tamen oportet, inquit, uirum dici mirabilium creatorem operum, qui apparuerit discipulis suis post triduum mortis suae uiuens secundum prophetarum scripta, qui et haec et alia innumerabilia de eo plena miraculi prophetauerunt.

Of him the Jews themselves also testify, through the saying of Josephus the writer of histories, that “there had been at that time a wise man—if indeed it is proper,” he says, “for a doer of wonderful works to be called a man—who appeared alive to his disciples three days after his death in accordance with the writings of the prophets, who prophesied both this and innumerable other things, full of the miraculous, about him.”

DEH 2.12.1³⁴

This also happens to constitute the one place in *DEH* where *miraculum* and *mirabilis* occur in the same sentence. More importantly, in the part of the passage just preceding this, the author essentially identifies for us what qualifies as *mirabilia opera*: we are told that, during his lifetime, many Jews and even more Gentiles believed in Jesus “when they were drawn to [his] moral precepts and *the production of works beyond human capacity*.”³⁵ Jesus’ deeds, his miracles, were literally “superhuman” (*ultra humanam possibilitatem*). For all this, we do not find miracles discussed here; rather, the miraculous, supernatural deeds attributed by tradition to Jesus—reported here second-hand—are described as *mirabilia opera*. This passage tells us little beyond the fact that the author believes that Jesus was *thought* to have performed miracles. A Christian author, effectively by definition, must allow that miracles constitute historical realities at least in Jesus’ public ministry; thus, *DEH* does not treat *mirabilia opera* as unbelievable, but this is only by default. Miracles in *DEH* are only discussed by means of a hand-wave to Jesus’ long-past days on earth.

been Alice Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus: The Testimonium Flavianum Controversy from Late Antiquity to Modern Times* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), but T. C. Schmidt, *Josephus and Jesus: New Evidence for the One Called Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025) has now completely destabilized scholarly consensus. Scholars have long assumed that the *TF* was a Christian interpolation put into the Greek text of *AJ* in late antiquity, whereas Schmidt shows this to be highly questionable (see 35-37 for *DEH*).

³⁴ Ussani, *Hegesippi*, 163. Some important manuscripts (*BZaV*) read *miraculis* instead of *miraculi*, and add *iterum* after *uiuens* (thus, “alive again”). *B* alone has *triduo* instead of *triduum*.

³⁵ *DEH* 2.12.1: *cum praeceptis moralibus, operibus ultra humanam possibilitatem profluentibus inuitarentur*.

There are other cases where *miraculum/mirabilis* language in *DEH* could convey supernatural activity, but where this seems unlikely. For example, in *DEH* 5.53.1, the rebel leader Eleazar ben Yair asks a rhetorical question about the city of Jerusalem, which has by this point in the narrative been destroyed (this destruction being the entire focus of the work). He asks:

Ubi est magna ciuitas Hierusalem, ubi decora Sion, ubi templum mirabile, ubi secundum illud tabernaculum, sanctitatis sacrarium, quo solus semel in anno princeps sacerdotum solebat intrare non sine sanguine, quem pro se offerret et pro populi delicto?

Where is that great city Jerusalem, where beautiful Zion, where the wonderful temple, where that second tabernacle, the holy of holies, into which only the high priest, once per year, was permitted to enter, not without blood, which he would offer for himself and for the sin of the people.

DEH 5.53.1³⁶

Describing the Jerusalem Temple as *mirabilis* might connote some of the miraculous events associated with that site,³⁷ but in this context, the adjective seems ambiguous. Similarly, in a speech attributed to Josephus in *DEH* 5.16.1, he says: *Contremesco tanta patrum recensere mirabilia* (“I shudder to enumerate such great miraculous-deeds among [our] fathers”), which in such a context amounts to calling the feats of the Jews’ ancestors “very impressive.”³⁸ It is not that Josephus, or the author of *DEH*, did not impute miraculous events to the ancient Hebrew-Israelite record—they did. But it is difficult to argue that this usage of *mirabilia* refers to what we would call “miracles,” for what follows is a list of ancient *exempla*, some scenes within which would qualify as miraculous, but which are in the aggregate a collection of exemplary instances of bravery, fortitude, faith, etc. Overall, miracles in *DEH* are mundane occurrences. Nothing identified as a *miraculum* or as *mirabilis* is recounted in the narrative, and in fact, these terms almost never appear in this work to refer to any kind of supernatural miracle. The reference to Jesus as a *creator mirabilium operum* in *DEH* 2.12.1 suggests that the author, and the implied reader, take *mirabilia* for granted as real, if infrequent, facts of history.

³⁶ Ussani, *Hegesippi*, 413. Here *DEH* draws upon Hebrews 9:6-7 and —perhaps— Ambrose, *Exposito Secundum Lucum* 1.22.

³⁷ One example, known to the author of *DEH* (see *DEH* 5.9.4), is when God caused the shadow cast upon the steps of the Jerusalem Temple to move backward ten steps as a “sign” (*signum*/σημεῖον/תֹּאֵן) to King Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:1-11; Isaiah 38:1-8).

³⁸ On this speech, see Bay, *Biblical Heroes and Classical Culture*, 283-314, esp. 285 and 294.

One potential objection might target the lexical lens by which this argument has been made: even if *DEH*'s author seems to treat miracles as real-yet-banal in his use of *miracul*- and *mirabil*- language, does such language exhaust the possibilities for identifying miraculous content in *DEH*? One aporia introduced by this line of questioning is: to what extent can one enroll within the modern category of miraculous events or ideas whose descriptive vocabulary is not descended from the semantic root verb *miror* ("I wonder, marvel, am astonished, am amazed"),³⁹ whence the further "wonder" lexicon? But, to trace a few more borders of the issue, let us consider two possible candidates for so extending—or problematizing—this discussion.

1) Following Josephus (*BJ* 6.289–299), who was himself following common practice and widespread traditions, *DEH* 5.44.1 reports a number of "signs" (*signa*) that were said to have preceded and accompanied Jerusalem's downfall.⁴⁰ These included a comet that resembled fire and a sword burning above the Jerusalem temple for a year, a cow giving birth to a calf in the middle of the Temple courts, and the unexplained unbarring of a massive gate whose unlocking and opening required significant effort. While these might be considered miracles, it makes sense to distinguish these *natural* miracles from the kinds of miracles discussed above because they do not involve human agency and, indeed, were generally treated as their own class of phenomena within the ancient Mediterranean imagination, perhaps most commonly associated with the portents (*prodigia*) so representative of Livy's history, which notoriously reported such things as strange births among animals (e.g. 1.45.4, and esp. 23.31.15) as well as celestial phenomena like meteors and fire in the heavens (e.g. 3.10.5–7; 29.14.3; 30.2.9–13; 31.12.5–10; 39.22.3–5; 43.13.3–8; 45.16.5). Yet, for all that, *DEH* treats these kinds of portents just as *miracula/mirabilia*: such things are reported, often as rumored occurrences, but only once or twice across the entire narrative; they are not a stock feature of *DEH*'s historical outlook, as they are in Livy.

³⁹ A related question might be: could we extend the scope of our search for miracle content in *DEH* by tracking down uses of this verb? This route, at any rate, turns out to be a bit of a dead-end, because *miror* has a semantic range as wide as the English cognates "I am surprised," "I wonder," "I am astonished," etc. So, for example, in *DEH*'s only use of the verb's lexical form (at 1.40.9), Archelaus says to his father (Herod the Great): *te miror, Herodes ...*, which simply means in context, "I am surprised at you, Herod ..."

⁴⁰ In Josephus, *BJ* 6.288, *DEH*'s source and inspiration for this passage, the language is that of τέρατα, which sometimes appear in Josephus alongside σημεία, "signs" (*BJ* 1.28, 377; *AJ* 20.168). Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus, Volume 2: Λ — Ω* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 179 defines τέρας in Josephus as "uncanny event, marvel, omen." It should not be missed that Josephus has a broad vocabulary related to the τερ- root, including (once) τερατουργία (*AJ* 2.284), which Rengstorff defines as "working of miracles (wonders), jugglery."

2) In *DEH* 3.2, which features more prominently in the next section, the apostles Peter and Paul are credited with impressive “works” (*opera*), for which they were famous and which apparently included such things as—*mirabile dictu*—raising the dead.⁴¹ Here we come across a class of *human*, as opposed to *natural*, activity that apparently includes the defiance of natural laws and the performance of wondrous feats. And indeed, this class of activities does include what we would call “miracles,” with perhaps a tendency toward notions of health and healing. Yet here again we find a phenomenon that, as with *mirac-/mirab-* language, *DEH* taps very seldom, though it isn’t presented as meriting any historical credulity.⁴² This example thus further supports our primary conclusions in this section about *DEH*’s treatment of the miraculous.

Thus, while the argument made here need not necessarily be restricted to the *miracula/mirabilia* lexical family, broadening the scope of the question tends only to confirm the thesis put forward. Beyond the examples given above, *DEH* does not contain other obvious examples of miracle material that I know of. Such stories are, once again, apparently relatable and unremarkable to *DEH*’s author, neither to be avoided within the historical narrative nor put forward on every other page.

IV. Zombies

DEH never mentions a word for “zombie”—nor did such a concept, much akin to our modern notion of “zombie”, necessarily exist—but we do find within its narrative a scene in which the undead appear to stir. In the middle of *DEH*, at 3.2.1, one finds the only pericope in the entire work in which Christian characters emerge. Referred to as the *Passio Petri et Pauli*, this is a pericope relating the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul (mostly Peter) that aligns in large part with a narrative tradition also represented in the apocryphal Acts of Peter, the *Passion of Peter* (Pseudo-Abdias), the

⁴¹ *DEH* 3.2.1 introduces Peter and Paul as *doctores Christianorum, sublimes operibus*, explains that they made themselves enemies of Nero *uirtute suorum operum* (“due to the strength of their works”), and says later on that “Peter was held to be most famous in such works” (*celeberrimus in his operibus Petrus habebatur*), i.e. the “works” of raising people from the dead. Ussani, *Hegesippi*, 184.

⁴² In addition to *DEH* 3.2, we find at 5.2.1 in a speech leveled at Jerusalem the following rhetorical question and its answer: “Where now are those services, where now those workings of the saints? It is no wonder if they [the Jews] were deprived of the prophets’ wonders, because they rejected the witness of the prophets” (*Ubi nunc ista merita, ubi nunc istae operationes sanctorum? Nec mirum si amiserunt prophetarum opera, quia negauerunt prophetarum arbitrum*). Ussani, *Hegesippi*, 296. This statement purports to explain the lack of miraculous activity associated with saints and prophets among the Jews with reference to the Jewish rejection of Jesus, the *arbiter prophetarum*. On *DEH* 5.2 generally, consult Carson Bay, “The Bible, the Classics, and the Jews in Pseudo-Hegesippus: A Literary Analysis of the Fourth-Century *De Excidio Hierosolymitano* 5.2,” PhD Dissertation: Florida State University, 2018, and for this passage 66, 209, 289-290.

Passion of the Holy Peter and Paul (Pseudo-Marcellus), the *Martyrdom of Blessed Peter the Apostle* (Pseudo-Linus), and Ambrose of Milan's *Sermon Against Auxentius* 13.⁴³ In short, the narrative relates a story in which a favorite young man in the Emperor Nero's court dies, and both the apostle Peter and his traditional arch-nemesis, Simon Magus, are put forward as those likely able to help. Predictably, this turns into a contest of religious legitimacy.⁴⁴ On the ground, however, it is a contest of ritual efficacy.

After some back-and-forth, Peter agrees to Simon's terms of a death-match: if Simon is able to raise the young man from the dead, Peter is to be killed. But if Simon cannot raise him and Peter can, then Peter can have whatever he likes done to Simon. The scene unfolds:

Simon approached the bed of the deceased and began to recite incantations and mutter ominous sounds. The head of the man who had died appeared to move. There was a great clamor among the Gentiles about him now being alive, because he was speaking with Simon. Wrath and indignation arose within Peter because Simon had dared to confer such power upon himself. Then the holy apostle demanded silence, and said, "If the deceased is alive, let him speak; if he has been revived, let him arise, let him walk, let him say something." It became clear that this had been an apparition, because the head had not really moved. Thereafter, Peter said, "Let Simon be moved away from the bed," and then there would not be any pretense. Simon was led away from the bed, and he who had died remained without any motion whatsoever. At length, Peter stood up and, having been briefly directed by a voice within him, said in a loud voice: "Young man, arise! The Lord Jesus heals you." And immediately the youth arose and spoke and walked and ate food, and Peter restored him to his mother.

DEH 3.2.1⁴⁵

⁴³ See translation, discussion, and bibliography in Carson Bay, "The Passion of Peter and Paul: A New Translation and Introduction," in *New Testament Apocrypha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, Volume 3, ed. Tony Burke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023), 465-478.

⁴⁴ In fact, there is a short back-story given wherein we are told that Peter had already exposed Simon's purported "necrological arts" (*ferales artes*) as "vanities and disgraceful things" (*uanitates et flagitia*), making his challenge of Peter in this contest appear all the more bold.

⁴⁵ Ussani, *Hegesippi*, 184: *Accessit ad lectum defuncti, incantare atque immurmurare dira carmina coepit. Visus est agitare caput qui mortuus erat. Clamor ingens gentilium quod iam uiueret, quod loqueretur cum Simone. Ira et indignatio in Petrum quod ausus esset conferre sese tantae potestati. Tunc sanctus apostolus poposcit silentium et ait: 'Si vivit defunctus, loquatur; si resuscitatus est, surgat, ambulet, fabuletur'. Phantasma illud esse, non ueritatem quod uideatur caput mouisse. Denique 'separetur', inquit, 'a lectulo Simon', et tunc ne id quidem ostentui futurum. Abducitur Simon a lectulo, manet sine specie motus alicuius qui mortuus erat. Adstitit Petrus longius et intra se orationi paulisper intentus cum*

The crux of this scene has to do with the efficacy of the *dira carmina* that Simon murmured (*immurmurare*) and the incantations he recited (*incantare*). The operative narrative clue as to how one is to understand the moving head of the dead man comes in the phrase *visus est*: the young man “was seen” to move his head—but did he? A competent storyteller, the author of *DEH* does not answer that question explicitly, but allows the narrative to imply. The reader is invited to infer that Simon’s hocus pocus was some kind of trick, whereas Peter’s solution is nothing short of remarkable. Accordingly, this scene is less about a zombie than about a resurrectee, a far more shocking kind of entity on the face of it.

Contemporary culture’s longstanding familiarity with Christianity can render the resurrection of the dead seem dull. That oft-repeated story is by now very old. On the contrary, the *quasi*-resurrection of someone thereby rendered *undead*, but not really alive, may be compelling for its novelty. Yet we should keep in mind here both how unusual actual resurrection from the dead was thought to be in the ancient Mediterranean world and the extent to which Christianity’s influence has shaped modern adjectives and categories that we might use to think about a zombie and its creation versus a resurrected person and his/her resurrection. We should also keep in mind that, even if *DEH* in the above scene represents the movement of the undead as of questionable veracity, the narrative certainly presents it as something to which a common crowd was very ready to lend credence. Were zombies, resurrected corpses, thought to exist in Late Antiquity?

As it happens, there exists a text that is a near-contemporary to *DEH*, which provides both insight and ambiguity when asking this question.⁴⁶ The *Ethiopian Story* (*Aethiopica*), attributed to Heliodorus, is a (probably) fourth-century Greek text that stands as one of the preeminent examples of the ancient novel. Novels, of course, deal in fiction, not fact, and thus this may seem an odd place to look when asking questions about the real and the unreal as dealt with by the “genre of the real,” as it were, i.e. historiography. Nevertheless, the *Aethiopica* and other ancient novels routinely tell stories that appear in many ways eminently realistic; in any case, it does not follow from fictionality that everything therein narrated is impossible, unrealistic, or beyond the pale. This story from the *Aethiopica* helps us imagine the kind of phenomenon that the author of the *DEH* might have imagined

magna voce ait: ‘Adulescens, surge: sanat te dominus Iesus’. Et statim surrexit adulescens et locutus est et ambulavit et cibum sumpsit et dedit eum Petrus matri suae.

⁴⁶ Indeed, the *Aethiopica* and *DEH* have both at times been dated to the 370s. For the former, see Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World from the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 118, but see the more nuanced and up-to-date discussion on dating recorded by Alan J. Ross, “Syene as Face of Battle: Heliodorus and Late Antique Historiography,” *Ancient Narrative* 12 (2015), 1-26, at 4 n. 21-22; for the latter, see Richard Matthew Pollard, “The *De Excidio* of ‘Hegesippus’ and the Reception of Josephus in the Early Middle Ages,” *VIATOR* 46.2 (2015): 65-100, at 68.

the crowd described in 3.2.1 to have expected when they saw the dead man's head move.

As a tangential complement to the larger narrative, in the *Aethiopica's* sixth book (of ten), the two main characters (Charikleia and Kalasiris) witness an old Egyptian woman outside of a village whose son has died. She claims to be preparing to perform the last rites of the dead, and she does not know that Charikleia and Kalasiris have stopped and are watching her. Thus,

Supposing herself now secure against any intrusion or observation, the old woman began by digging a pit, to one side of which she lit a fire. After positioning her son's body between the two, she took an earthenware bowl from a tripod that stood beside her and poured a libation (ἐπέσπενδεν) of honey into a pit, likewise of milk from a second bowl, and lastly of wine from a third. Then she took a cake made out of fine wheat flour and shaped it into the effigy of a man, crowned it with bay and fennel, and flung it into the pit. Finally, she picked up a sword and, in an excess of feverish ecstasy (ἐνθουσιῶδες σοβηθεῖσα), invoked the moon by a series of grotesque and outlandish names (πρὸς τὴν σεληναίαν βαρβάροις τε καὶ ξενίζουσι τὴν ἀκοὴν ὀνόμασι κατευξαμένη), then drew the blade across her arm. She wiped the blood onto a sprig of bay and flicked it into the fire. There followed a number of other bizarre actions (ἄλλα τε ἅττα τερατευσαμένη), after which she knelt over the dead body of her son and whispered certain incantations (ἐπάδουσα) into his ear, until she woke the dead man and compelled him by her magic arts (μαγγανείᾳ) to stand upright...The old woman had now begun to question the corpse in a somewhat louder voice. What she wanted to know was whether the corpse's brother, her one surviving son, would live to return home. The dead man made no reply, merely nodding his head (ἐπινεύσας) in a way that left some doubt as to whether his mother could expect her wishes to be fulfilled or not. Then he suddenly collapsed and fell flat on his face. The old woman rolled the body over onto its back and persisted with her questions. Employing apparently more powerful spells of compulsion (βιαιοτέροις) this time, she repeated her string of incantations (τοῖς κατανάγκης πολλὰ ... ἐπάδουσα) into his ears, and, leaping, sword in hand, from fire to pit, from pit to fire, she succeeded in waking the dead man a second time and, once he was on his feet, began to put the same questions to him as before, forcing him to use speech as well as nods of the head (νεύμασι) to make his prophecy unambiguous... the corpse spoke, and its voice

a hoarse whisper, sinister and cavernous, as if rising from some infernal abyss...With these words, the corpse fell limp to the ground.

Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 6.14.3–6.15.35⁴⁷

The narrative has been slightly shortened here, and we have not done justice to the larger context. But the point I would like to make with this story is that it shows that the Late Antique mind could imagine in graphic detail what it could look like to conjure the dead into a zombie state of lifelike limbo. Nor was this scene of what Niall Slater has called “posthumous parleys” unique to antiquity;⁴⁸ Slater also notes that many of the details offered by Heliodorus harken back to the well-known *nekya* of Homer’s *Odyssey* (11.23ff), “where Odysseus calls the shades of the dead to a similar trench filled with honey, milk, wine, and water.”⁴⁹ Rather, we might read this scene as indicative of a typology for particular ways of interacting with the dead, which, if not an everyday occurrence, were not pure fantasy. Indeed, Daniel Ogden wrote of a “Greco-Roman necromantic tradition” of “corpse reanimation” as something that, if well-represented in ancient fictional literature, was also taken seriously as a real-world technology, attested in the Greek Magical Papyri and elsewhere.⁵⁰

I suggest that *DEH*’s presentation of the dead man (seeming to) move in 3.2.1 reflects a somewhat generic Late Antique worldview, according to which “zombie” scenes like that in Heliodorus’ *Aethiopica* provided a backdrop for comprehending the movement of dead bodies, real or apparent, especially when worked upon by “specialists” of some sort. We may also note the presence of speech/movement in worked-upon corpses as an apparent mark of a particular magic’s efficacy (Heliodorus, where the old woman only succeeds on the second try) or of legitimate resurrection (Peter’s successful “body” work in *DEH*).⁵¹ Such phenomena were, in

⁴⁷ Text from Robert M. Rattenbury and Thomas W. Lumb, ed., *Héliodore: Les Éthiopiennes (Théagène et Chariclée)*, Tome II (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1960), 107-110. Translation from J. R. Morgan, trans., “Heliodorus: An Ethiopian Story,” in *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, ed. B. P. Reardon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 349-588, at 485-487.

⁴⁸ Cf. Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* 2.28-29.

⁴⁹ Niall Slater, “Posthumous Parleys: Chatting up the Dead in the Ancient Novels,” in *The Greek and the Roman Novel: Parallel Readings*, eds. Michael Paschalis, Stavros Frangoulidis, Stephen Harrison, and Maaike Zimmerman (Groningen: Barkhuis & Groningen University Library, 2007), 57-69, at 58-65, quote at 59.

⁵⁰ Daniel Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 203, citing *inter alia* Lucan, *Pharsalia* 6.654-826; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2.28-29; Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 6.14-15; Statius, 3.140-146; Claudian, *In Rufinum* 1.154-156; Lactantius on Statius, *Thebaid* 3.141; Virgil, *Ecloques* 8.95-99; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* 8.9.11. Thanks to Ryan Denson for pointing me to Ogden here, whose chapter touches precisely on the issues under consideration in this section.

⁵¹ Thanks to Ryan Denson for suggesting this point.

such a view, not necessarily seen as absolutely impossible, but they were certainly the exception rather than the rule, and possibly even subject to skepticism.

V. Demons

Across his corpus, Flavius Josephus discusses demons (or, rather, *daimons*) quite a bit.⁵² Within the *Jewish War* alone, “demons” are mentioned eleven times.⁵³ Josephus’ references to δαιμόνια and δαίμονες draw upon both Jewish (and Ancient Near Eastern) and Greek (or Greco-Roman) influences, and thus only resemble to a limited extent the “demons” that were shaped and became important within later Christian understandings.⁵⁴ What is important for our purposes is that *DEH* does follow its major source (again, Josephus’ *BJ*) in mentioning demons, but it is also notable that it does so only once. (Given the prevalence of the demonic in the Christian literature of *DEH*’s time, this may strike us as surprising, but again, the *type* of literature that *DEH* is, as compared to sermons or treatises, does not necessarily lend itself to discussion of the demonic *per se*.)⁵⁵ To begin with, then, we will survey briefly the passages in which Josephus mentions *daimons* and *DEH*’s later paraphrase does not.⁵⁶

Often, Josephus’ references to a *daimon* describe some perceived special ability possessed by some individual that *DEH*’s author interprets in non-*daimonic* terms. At *BJ* 1.69, Josephus describes the gift of prophecy that he imputes to John Hyrcanus (164–104 BCE, r. 135–105) by saying that “the *daimon* consorted with him” (ὡμίλει γὰρ αὐτῷ τὸ δαιμόνιον);⁵⁷ *DEH* simply describes John here as “possessed a certain

⁵² See Carson Bay, “Demons in Flavius Josephus,” *Henoch* 41 (2019): 204–225 for a comprehensive study.

⁵³ Rengstorf, *Complete Concordance, Volume I*, 405. Josephus’ *BJ* mentions δαιμόνια four times and δαίμονες seven times.

⁵⁴ As a starting point, see the essays and bibliography in Hector M. Patmore and Josef Lössl, eds., *Demons in Early Judaism and Christianity: Characters and Characteristics*, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 113 (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

⁵⁵ What *DEH* does share with the general Christian mood of his day is an approach to the daimonic that does not *ab initio* and *de facto* apprehend *daimons* as bad; see Peter Brown, “Sorcery, Demons, and the Rise of Christianity from Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages,” in *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, ed. Mary Douglas (New York: Routledge, 1970), 17–46; Dayna S. Kalleres, *City of Demons: Violence, Ritual, and Christian Power in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

⁵⁶ It is important here to know that *DEH* for the most part follows *BJ* closely as the basis of its narrative. In most passages, *DEH*’s narrative corresponds sentence-by-sentence to Josephus’, sometimes word-by-word. Instances where and when *DEH* does not follow *BJ* are therefore of *de facto* significance in understanding *DEH*.

⁵⁷ This language reflects how Socrates understood human-*daimonic* discourse according to Plato, as when he discusses “all exchange and communication between gods and men” (ἡ ὁμιλία καὶ ἡ διάλεκτος θεοῖς πρὸς ἀνθρώπους) in *Symposium* 202d–203a in terms of τὸ δαιμόνιον and

prescience of mind/soul" (*praescientia quadam animi tenens*). At BJ 1.521, a discussion of Alexander (35–7 BCE), son of Herod the Great (72–4/1 BCE, r. 37/36–4/1), avenging the *daimons* of his mother (Mariamne I) and her father (the high priest Hyrcanus II)— τιμωρήσειν ... δαίμοσιν—in DEH 1.41.3 becomes a statement about his avenging the *inferi* of his grandfather and mother,⁵⁸ this term referring to “shades of the dead” and constituting an apt translations of δαίμονες.⁵⁹ At BJ 1.556 Herod claims in a speech that “some gloomy *daimon* bereaved” (σκυθρωπὸς ἀφείλετο δαίμων) him of his sons (sons whom he had executed), whereas at DEH 1.42.3 Herod says that “some calamity took them away from me” (*illos mihi quaedam eripuit aerumna*). At BJ 1.599 the *daimons* of Alexander and Aristobulus (οἱ Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ Ἀριστοβούλου δαίμονες), murdered sons of Herod the Great, are said to have been patrolling Herod’s palace in search of blood—vengeance; DEH 1.43.7 describes the same scene without any real equivalent of this statement. At BJ 1.607, the δαίμονες of the same two brothers are suggested as the possible cause that prevented anyone from speaking to Antipater (46–4 BCE), another son of Herod the Great, to tell him that his return to Judea would be dangerous (because he was now suspected as a conspirator); DEH 1.44.2 relates the same narrative without the *daimons*.⁶⁰ At BJ 1.613, Antipater is said to have been convinced to return to Judea “for the *daimon* moved him” (ἐνῆγεν γὰρ τὸ δαιμόνιον);⁶¹ DEH 1.44.3 instead says that Antipater “believed those who were persuading him more out of desire than of necessity” (*credidit itaque uolentia magis quam necessaria suadentibus*). At BJ 1.628 King Herod

δαίμονες. Here he also discusses the “*daimonic* man” (δαιμόνιος ἀνὴρ) in terms of divination (μαντεία) and incantation (γοητεία), whereas Josephus in BJ 1.69 refers to “prophecy” (προφητεία). Cf. Plato, *Euthyphro* 3b; *Gorgias* 456a; *Theages* 129c, e; 131a. On the *daimonic* as “not human” (οὐκ ἀνθρώπειον), see Plato *Alcibiades I* 103a. Josephus was aware of Socrates’ reputed discourse with the his *daimon* (CA 2.263).

⁵⁸ DEH 1.41.1: A certain Eurycludes said that Alexander “was going to avenge himself of the shades of his grandfather and mother and [thereby] signal their brutal murder” (*repetiturum se ab inferis auum matrisque acerbissimam necem demonstraturum*).

⁵⁹ Note that Josephus’ overt definition of δαιμόνια at BJ 7.185, discussed below, equates them to something like the shades of the dead, i.e. the underworld correlates of deceased human beings. Such a definitional idea is very old, harking back through the Greek tragedians to Hesiod: see Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 450. It is worth noting that John Chrysostom (*Homily* 28.3 on Matthew 8:23-24; PG: 57:353) attests that the idea “the souls of the departed become *daimons*” (αἱ ψυχὰι τῶν ἀπελθόντων δαίμονες γίνονται) is not wholly absent in Late Antiquity (writing in the late-fourth century and associated with Antioch, whence DEH’s author might have come, Chrysostom is a particularly important comparandum). Thanks to Ryan Denson for bringing up this reference here.

⁶⁰ DEH 1.44.2 relates that “no indications became known to Antipater about the things which had occurred” (*nulla innotuere Antipatro indicia rerum gestarum*).

⁶¹ Note that here, as elsewhere, modern translators often remove the agency attributed to them in their translation: e.g., Henry St. J. Thackeray, ed. and trans., *Josephus, Volume I: The Jewish War, Books I-II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 291 (“...under the impulse of his evil genius...”).

blames “some *daimon*” (δαίμων τις) for desolating his house and raising up domestic conspirators against him;⁶² in DEH 1.44.7, Herod makes effectively the same complaint, but there blaming *malum*, “an/the evil.”⁶³

All of the above-mentioned *daimons* in Josephus’ *BJ* appear in Book 1; only a few appear in other books. The mention of δαίμων at *BJ* 4.41 is left out of the paraphrase of DEH 4.2.1 (which draws upon *BJ* 4.39–48).⁶⁴ The statement attributed to the Roman general (eventually emperor) Titus (39–81 CE, r. 79–81) in *BJ* 6.47—to the effect that souls slain by the sword on the battlefield become “good *daimons* and beneficent heroes” (δαίμονες δ’ ἀγαθοὶ καὶ ἥρωες εὐμένεις) and thus appear to their posterity—is omitted from the highly reworked version of this speech in DEH 5.27.1.⁶⁵ Finally, Josephus’ definition of a *daimon* at *BJ* 7.185 is omitted in DEH inasmuch as the latter’s Latin narrative does not include that portion of the narrative of Josephus’ *BJ*.⁶⁶ We can see that Josephus mentions *daimons* a good number of times; yet, in DEH, almost never is this language rendered in the same terms, i.e. *daemon(ium)*. There is only one exception.

The one place where DEH does mention demons is in a passage where Aristobulus I (r. 104–103 BCE) is lamenting his decision to have his brother Antigonos murdered (he had been led to suspect him of treason). He invokes a *daimon* in his desire to die, stating:

Let the victim of parricide be sacrificed, and let him be burned for his violated relative, let me vomit up all his blood at once for his offended intimate. May the *daimon* not be satisfied by the torture of my innards nor by tenacious decay, which pushes me into such nefarious hazards of savage crime. With these announcements, he put an end to his rule

⁶² Herod was famously suspicious of his kin, many of whom he killed. Thus, Caesar Augustus is said to have said: “It is better to be Herod’s pig than his son” (*melius est Herodis porcum esse quam filium*; Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 2.4.11).

⁶³ DEH 1.44.7: “But what unhappiness I have, that evil would make those whom I love the more rise up against me! (*Sed quae, malum, infelicitas mea, ut aduersum me eos faciat insurgere quos plus dilexerim!*).

⁶⁴ See Ussani, *Hegesippi*, 233–234. Compare *LBJ* 4.41, where δαίμων is translated *fortuna* (τοσαύτας μέντοι μυριάδας Ἰουδαίων ἀνελόντας αὐτοὺς ὀλίγην τῷ δαίμονι δεδοκέναι συμβολήν becomes *multis tunc iudaeorum milibus interfectis exiguum se stipem inimicae pependisse fortunae*). The text for *LBJ* here, in the absence of a critical edition, is taken from an early (ninth-century) manuscript, namely St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 627, p. 138.

⁶⁵ Ussani, *Hegesippi*, 365–366.

⁶⁶ At *BJ* 7.185 Josephus defines *daimons*—“the things called *daimons*—i.e. the spirits of wicked men which enter into the living and kill them unless aid is forthcoming” (τὰ γὰρ καλούμενα δαιμόνια, ταῦτα δὲ πονηρῶν ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπων πνεύματα τοῖς ζῶσιν εισδύμενα καὶ κτείνοντα τοὺς βοηθείας μὴ τυγχάνοντας). This entire section of *BJ* is missing from DEH—DEH 5.51.3 to 5.52.1 basically skips from *BJ* 7.111 to 7.252 (Bay, *Biblical Heroes and Classical Culture*, 373–374).

and his life, having administered for barely a year the royal power on account of which he had not fled from parricide.

DEH 1.8.1 (Ussani 1932, 12)⁶⁷

DEH follows *BJ* closely, even matching the Greek's diminutive form δαιμόνιον with the Latin *daemonium*, though in *DEH* Aristobulus never mentions God. In both accounts, the "demon" is credited with causing physical, internal illness as some sort of punishment or vengeance for immoral action. Thus, *DEH* at least follows Josephus in imputing historical reality to the serious belief in *daimons*, if not their actual existence.

By way of comparison, the above shows that the Latin translation of Josephus' *Jewish War* (= *LBJ*) uses a number of terms to translate δαιμόνιον/δαιμόνια (*deus*, *fortuna*)⁶⁸ and δαίμων/δαίμονες (*manes*)⁶⁹ that also suggest some avoidance of the words *daemon* or *daemonium*.⁷⁰ One could read this as an overt attempt to cleanse the

⁶⁷ *Mactetur hostia parricidalis atque imoletur violatae necessitudini, totum simul caro noxia sanguinem evomat. Non viscerum meorum cruciatibus et lenta tabe daemonium exsaturetur, quod me in tam nefarios ausus saevi facinoris impegit.* His dictis finem imperio vitaeque dedit vix anno functus potestate regia, propter quam parricidium non refugerat. Cf. the final words of Aristobulus in Josephus, *BJ* 1.84: "My lawless deeds, then, were not destined to escape God's mighty eye; swift retribution pursues me for my kinsman's blood. How long, most shameless body, wilt thou detain the soul that is sentenced to a brother's and a mother's vengeance? How long shall I make them these drop-by-drop libations of my blood? Let them take it all at once, and let the *daimon* cease to mock them with these dribbling offerings from my entrails" (οὐκ ἄρα θεοῦ μέγαν ὀφθαλμόν ἐπ' ἔργοις ἀθεμίτοις λήσειν ἔμελλον, ἀλλὰ με ταχεῖα μέτεισι δίκη φόνου συγγενούς. μέχρι τοῦ μοι, σῶμα ἀναιδέστατον, τὴν ἀδελφῶ καὶ μητρὶ κατάκριτον ψυχὴν καθέξεις; μέχρι τοῦ δ' αὐτοῖς ἐπισπείσω κατὰ μέρος τοῦμόν αἷμα; λαβέτωσαν ἀθρόον τοῦτο, καὶ μηκέτι ταῖς ἐκ τῶν ἐμῶν σπλάγχνων χοαῖς ἐπειρωνεύεσθω τὸ δαιμόνιον). Cf. Bay, "Demons in Flavius Josephus," 206 and Bay, *Biblical Heroes and Classical Culture*, 50-53.

⁶⁸ Naturally, *DEH* also uses the term *deus* (29 times in nominative singular alone), but never as a translation of Greek language. Conversely, *DEH* never uses the term *fortuna* (or *fatum*), preferring *euentus* to convey the idea of "fate" or "luck."

⁶⁹ *DEH* never uses the term *manes*.

⁷⁰ In *LBJ* 1.69, τὸ δαιμόνιον is translated *deus* (ὠμίλει γὰρ αὐτῷ τὸ δαιμόνιον becomes *cum quo deus ita colloquebatur*); in *LBJ* 1.521, δαίμονες is translated *manes* (τιμωρήσειν γε μὴν αὐτὸς τοῖς Ὑρκανοῦ καὶ τοῖς Μαριάμης δαίμοσιν becomes *Proinde semet Hyrcani manes et Mariammes ultuire*); in *LBJ* 1.556, δαίμων is translated *fortuna*, a term *DEH* never uses (ἐμὲ τοὺς μὲν τούτων πατέρας σκυθρωπὸς ἀφείλετο δαίμων becomes *Horum quidem mihi patres fortuna quaedam tristis eripuit*); in *LBJ* 1.599, δαίμονες is translated (again) as *manes* (περιόντες δὲ οἱ Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ Ἀριστοβούλου δαίμονες becomes *circumeuntes Alexandri et Aristobuli manes*), as again at *LBJ* 1.607 (τάχα καὶ τοὺς ἀπαγγέλλειν προσηρημένους οἱ τῶν ἀνηρημένων δαίμονες ἀδελφῶν ἐφίμουν becomes *Fortasse autem etiam quibus indicandi uoluntas fuit, per interfectorum fratrum manes obmutescabant*); at *LBJ* 1.613, τὸ δαιμόνιον is translated *fortuna* (πείθεται τούτοις, ἐνήγεν γὰρ τὸ δαιμόνιον becomes *Paruit his Antipater impellente fortuna*); at *BJ* 1.628, δαίμων τις is translated *fortuna quaedam* (ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ δαίμων τις ἐξερημοῖ τὸν ἐμὸν οἶκον καὶ μοι τοὺς

narrative of *daimonic* presence, as it were. But one could also read it as a simple series of translational choices by authors who understood in the Greek language of δαίμων/δαίμόνιον something that was better conveyed with a series of terms related to divinity, fortuna, and spirits as opposed to a strict Latin equivalent. In any case, it is worth noting that both *DEH* and *LBJ* avoid transmitting the rather robust ‘demonology’ present in the narrative of *BJ*.

Overall, the author of the *DEH* was far less apt to include *daimons* than had Josephus. Perhaps this was due to some perceived incongruity between the *daimons* of the Josephan narrative and the fourth century’s emergent Christian demonology. Or perhaps *DEH*’s author was apprehensive about allowing so supernatural an entity to roam freely within his narrative remit—were *daimons* just too exotic to make *DEH*’s historiographical cut most of the time?

VI. Conclusion

If we take *DEH* as an example of one way of viewing the world in Late Antiquity—an example ostensibly accounting for what is real or realistic, given *DEH*’s genre, historiography—we find that a number of entities which are often today treated as purely fictional are presented in a way that renders them either actual realities or at least not-totally-impossible ones. At the same time, *DEH* presents magic, miracles, zombies, and demons such that they appear exceptions to the everyday. Thus, the worldview represented by *DEH* stands somewhere in the middle between an ancient credulity that bought into all manner of hocus-pocus and the austere rationalism, sometimes associated with figures like Thucydides, that adhered only to “the facts.” This is actually less unlike modern historiographical sensibilities vis-à-vis realism than we might expect, and not a stark departure from historians antedating *DEH* from Herodotus to Tacitus to Justin. In conclusion, let us ask how such a perspective on what we might call the “supernatural” fits with contemporary scholarly understandings of late ancient thought.

Mark Letteney’s book, *The Christianization of Knowledge in Late Antiquity*, argues that “what counts as a fact” shifted within the recently-Christian world of Roman Late Antiquity, i.e. the fourth and fifth centuries CE, under a sprawling Christian intellectual influence that extended “far beyond the realm of theology” and affected both Christians and non-Christians.⁷¹ *DEH* was written right in the middle of this milieu. One way to read *DEH*’s treatment of magic, miracles, zombies, and demons vis-à-vis Letteney is to see *DEH* as walking a tightrope between an ancient and august cultural weight that credited, for example, the relative ubiquity of *daimonic*

φιλάτους ἐπ’ανίστησιν αἰεὶ becomes *Verumtamen quia fortuna quaedam excitat contra me domum meam mihiq[ue] amicissimi semper infensi sunt*). Bader, *Josephus Latinus*, 62, 146, 152, 160-162, 165.

⁷¹ Mark Letteney, *The Christianization of Knowledge in Late Antiquity: Intellectual and Material Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 3.

activity and an emergent, “Christianized” domain of knowledge that was, if not more restrained, at least more self-consciously privy to testing and criticism. But could things be the other way around? Harold Drake’s *A Century of Miracles*, which tackles the same central period as targeted by Letteney, argues that miracles were a central part of how Roman Christians came to understand history in the fourth century.⁷² Is it possible that *DEH*’s author was a rather anti-supernatural thinker, a proto-Enlightenment rationalist, who only left small remnants of magic, miracles, zombies, and demons in his work because he knew that readers of history appreciated them (and might expect them given their erstwhile presence in the well-known narrative of Josephus’ *BJ*)? Of course, we cannot say.

What we can say, I think, is that the perspective derived from *DEH* vis-à-vis the examples of “supernaturalia” that we have examined points to a rather tempered view of history, the real(istic), and the world. *DEH* avoids extremes. A final aspect of *DEH*’s assumptions that must be accounted for, however, has to do with the time period of *DEH*’s narrative. *DEH* relates the history of a period that witnessed the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the lives (and often the deaths) of his earliest followers, to which *DEH* occasionally alludes (2.12.1; 3.2.1).⁷³ With several centuries between the author and events, it is not impossible that *DEH*’s author described these first-century events in a way that he would not have for fourth-century events. Recall, after all, that most or all of the magic, miracles, zombies, and demons described in *DEH* are presented through the lens of the perception or belief of others, the historian allowing their reality to hang unacknowledged but also uncontradicted. Yet, the point which we made above, that the author as a Christian would have to allow *de facto* for the reality of miracles vis-à-vis the life and ministry of Jesus, also applies to demons (which Jesus frequently cast out) at least, and perhaps also to magic (Acts 8:9, 11; 19:19 present magic as something that was actually practiced). Rather than a characteristic Christian credulity that led *DEH*’s author to *include* magic and miracles, zombies and demons in his narrative, might *DEH*’s author have been a relative skeptic whose foundational Christian belief forbade him from excluding some of these supernatural realities altogether? (Though this would not necessarily prompt their inclusion in a history.) Here, we might recall that Augustine was apparently recalled from his effective skepticism of

⁷² See Harold A. Drake, *A Century of Miracles: Christians, Pagans, Jews, and the Supernatural* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), with the important qualifications in the review by Michael Stuart Williams, “Review of H. A. Drake, *A Century of Miracles*,” *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (May 11, 2018) (<https://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2018/2018.05.11/>), such as the necessity of grappling with the fact that miracle stories make a precise historical claim: “that this inexplicable thing really happened. It must be more than merely unusual; it cannot be explained away.” Thus, naturalizing explanations of miracles rob them of their meaning and historical value.

⁷³ As with Josephus’ *BJ*, the historical narrative of *DEH* spans from around 167 BCE to 74 CE.

miracles voiced in *On True Religion* by the practical utility of miracles for saving souls, as discussed by Peter Brown.⁷⁴

Augustine, as noted above, has some utility as a comparandum to *DEH*. Both wrote in Latin within decades of the turn of the fourth century, yet Augustine wrote introspective and theological literature vis-à-vis the straightforward military prose of *DEH*, and while Augustine is a widely-known author, *DEH* is familiar to few (this is a modern development; *DEH* was very popular before Late Modernity). The defining difference between Augustine's oeuvre and *DEH* is that Augustine is explicit and prescriptive in his treatment of the kinds of things addressed in this essay. He identified pagan deities with demons and pagan rituals with superstition, differentiated between Christian and non-Christian miracles, and linked "magic and sorcery" to demons.⁷⁵ *DEH* does hardly any of this (though 3.2 does suggest a distinction between Christian miracles and the "pagan" magic of Simon the Magician). This distinction is largely dictated by *DEH*'s genre, which does not allow for the kinds of extensive and pointed treatments proffered by the Bishop of Hippo. Thus, in opposition to Augustine, what *DEH* may provide is a possibly less interested and certainly less rhetorically invested presentation of magic, miracles, demons, and so on from a Late Antique Christian perspective. At the same time, we may note that, where agreement may be gauged, *DEH* tends to align with Augustine, for example, in condemning magic like necromancy (*DEH* 3.2.1) and associating legitimate miracles with Christianity and its founder (*DEH* 2.12.1). *DEH* also bears Augustine out in witnessing a late ancient world that was understood to be full of demonic activity, sorcery, and miraculous occurrences. Yet *DEH* has very little space to give to such issues. Might its author represent a form of Christianity that was less concerned with such things, and perhaps more taken with the traditional subjects contained within conventional historiography (warfare, fate, causality, identity, historical progression, geography, etymology, rhetoric, etc.)? In any case, that *DEH* is not identical to Augustine in emphasis or perspective should lead us at least not to take the latter as representative of all of Late Antique Christianity—this is done quite frequently—nor to assume that the polemical, apologetic, religious, theological interests of an Augustine are a given for any Latin Christian writer of the "Patristic Golden Age."⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000 [1967]), 418-419; cf. Augustine *De vera religione* 25.47, which posits that *visibilia miracula* (*non enim aliter poterant*), had once been possible (in the apostolic age) but that this does not mean that they need be thereafter.

⁷⁵ Michael D. Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 53; cf. 9-10, 55-57, 106; Christoph Daxelmüller, *Zauberpraktiken: Eine Ideengeschichte der Magie* (Zurich: Artemis & Winkler, 1993), 41.

⁷⁶ Statements like that of Daxelmüller, *Zauberpraktiken*, 41 to the effect that "Augustinus schuf die Grundlagen sowohl für die Dämonologie wie für die Magietheorie der christlichen

To sum up: our guesses as to the motivations of *DEH*'s author are just that: guesswork. But it is a fact that *DEH*, a history, deals with what I have called magic and miracles, zombies and demons, yet only very occasionally, which implies the perspective that such supernatural phenomena were real, or at least were seen to be real, yet were to be sought everywhere. Perhaps, in fact, they were to be mostly (or only) associated with a bygone age, and not carried into the world of Late Antiquity.

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Hemisphere” are common, and Augustine is often effectively equated with “Christianity on X subject” in various domains.

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