

# FROM AZAZEL TO AZAZELLO: EVIL CHARACTERS IN THE SLAVONIC PSEUDEPIGRAPHA<sup>1</sup>

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The paper deals with the importance of the Old Testament Slavonic Pseudepigrapha as a source of cultural information that might have influenced contemporary thinking and culture. The evil character analysed in the article can be found in the two Old Testament Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: *The Apocalypse of Abraham* and *2 Enoch*. The character's name is Azazel, and it is widely known nowadays thanks to its echo in Bulgakov's novel *Master and Margarita*, as well as in Akunin's novel *Azazel*, which was translated into English under the title *The Winter Queen*. The paper explains how the character of Azazel is presented in the Old Testament Slavonic Pseudepigrapha, and it highlights the significant transformation of its role from one Old Slavonic text to the other. The paper also discusses the origin of the expression *scapegoat* in Russian.

KEYWORDS:

*Old Testament Slavonic Pseudepigrapha, evil characters, Azazel, 2 Enoch, The Apocalypse of Abraham, scapegoat*

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The Evil is present in all kinds of universal literature and national cultures. To highlight its specific features in the genre that we are analysing in this paper, it is necessary to briefly characterise the Slavonic pseudepigraphical literature itself.

## 1. THE SPECIFIC NATURE OF THE SLAVONIC PSEUDEPIGRAPHA

In Slavonic studies, the texts that have not been included in the Biblical Canon are traditionally called the “Slavonic Apocrypha”, disregarding the fact that they belong to the Old or New Testament. In the terminology of Biblical studies, the Old Testament Slavonic “Apocrypha” are nowadays called the “Old Testament Slavonic Pseudepigrapha”, and this is the term I use in this work.

The Old Testament Slavonic Pseudepigrapha played a very important role in the Old Slavonic literature and culture. As translated works, they provide us with very valuable material not only for the history of language but also for the history of culture, because

*the transfer of writing enriched the intellectual horizons of the Slavic peoples, who were relatively late to join the cultural circle of the Mediterranean peoples, with a multitude of abstract scientific and philosophical ideas and concepts that had not previously existed in the minds of our ancestors.*<sup>2</sup> (Mešerskiĵ 1978: 3)

Through translations the main samples of literary types and genres were obtained, forming the foundations for the development of original literature.

The study of the Old Slavonic translated works shows the continuity of older literary traditions (Ancient Greece, Rome, Byzantium, Palestine) and the writing of Slavic countries of the Middle Ages. The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha are of particular interest in this connection, since, over the long centuries of their existence, they have become the heritage of the cultures of different peoples and accumulate (when translated from one language into another) features dating back to different literary traditions.

Thus, the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha connected the literature and culture of *Slavia Orthodoxa* with their historical predecessors: the culture of ancient Greece and

<sup>2</sup> Translated from Russian: «переводная письменность обогатила умственный кругозор славянских народов, относительно поздно включившихся в культурный круг народов Средиземноморья, множеством отвлеченных научных и философских представлений и понятий, до этого не существовавших в сознании наших предков»

Rome, Christian Byzantium, as well as the countries of the Ancient East: Egypt, Palestine, Mesopotamia, linking the Slavic world with the Mediterranean cultural circle, with the Christian traditions of the East and West.

However, there is also a “reverse connection”: Slavonic translated texts represent a very important part of world heritage. And in this sense, the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha hold a special place, since there is a number of these texts that have “survived” only in Slavonic, or are preserved in different languages, but the Slavonic text represents a special version of the Pseudepigraphon. These include, among others, *The Testaments of the 12 Patriarchs*, *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, *The Ascension of Isaiah*, and *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch*.

It is important to note that *Slavistics has a long tradition of researching and publishing the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, they have remained quite unknown *outside Slavic studies* until relatively recently. They seem to become popular when the first volume of the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* was published at the beginning of the 1980s (Charlesworth 1983). Especially in the last two decades, we have seen a significant surge of interest in these texts worldwide, including the fields “beyond Slavistics”: the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha are translated into different languages, their originals are published; monographs and volumes on this topic are issued, among others, in respectful publishing houses, such as Brill, Oxford University Press, Mohr Siebeck (see, in particular, Di Tommaso et al. 2011, Orlov et al. 2012, Kulik and Minov 2016).

The main goal of the present paper is to demonstrate the importance of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha as a possible provenance of cultural information that can find their reflexion in modern literature and culture. The characters derived from the evil character of Azazel, such as Azazello in Bulgakov’s masterpiece, have been extensively studied. However, even in works dedicated to Wolland’s entourage and the infernal motifs in the novel, potential direct or indirect influences from the Pseudepigrapha have remained overlooked: researchers either do not mention pseudepigrapha as possible sources of the character of Azazello<sup>4</sup> (for example: Ivanickij 2012, Kaprusova

<sup>3</sup> The bibliography on the topic is extensive, tracing its origins to the works of Pypin and Tikhonravov in the mid-nineteenth century (Pypin 1862, Tikhonravov 1863). Among relatively recent and fundamental works, I would mention just a few: the research of Roždestvenskaâ 2004, Miltenova 2008, Kulik 2010, among others. A comprehensive bibliography of the Old Slavonic Pseudepigrapha, including works up to about 2010, was compiled by Andrei Orlov. It can be found on the Marquette University website.

<sup>4</sup> A fairly typical example is the description of Azazel as a “Jewish mythological character” without any specific references: *Azazello is a character in the novel The Master and Margarita, a member of Woland’s entourage. His name comes from Azazel, a fallen angel from Jewish mythology who*

2018, Login and Ivanickij 2012, Pimenova et al. 2025, Kornienko 2016, Malkova 2009, Šolc 2008, Ākuševič 2023, Galkina 2016, Niculcea 2023, Kazkenova 2015), or scholars often cite *The Book of Enoch* as a possible prototype of this evil character and obviously refer to *1Enoch* without addressing the issue of a complex relation between different Enochic pseudepigrapha (including 2 “*Slavonic*” *Enoch*). They hardly ever discuss another pseudepigraphon in which the evil character is prominently represented in Slavonic tradition — *The Apocalypse of Abraham* (for example: Češenko 2021, Abzalova and Balko 2018, Devickaâ 2011, Aleeva 2025, Gončarova 2007). Therefore, this paper, focused on *Azazel* in Slavonic texts, aims to make the detailed content of the Old Slavonic textual witnesses better known to scholars of later literary periods. There are some laconic comments on contemporary “echoes” of *Azazel* later in the paper, which are not intended as deep analysis of this character in modern literature; they merely offer a kind of “bridge” between Old Slavonic and contemporary works.

## 2. AZAZEL IN THE SLAVONIC PSEUDEPIGRAPHA AND THE BIBLE

### 2.1. THE APOCALYPSE OF ABRAHAM

**Azazel** as an evil character of complex nature appears in the Old Slavonic Pseudepigraphon “Откровение Авраама” (*The Apocalypse of Abraham*), which is preserved only in Slavonic in the *Толковая Палея* (*The Explanatory Paleja*, 14<sup>th</sup> century), a Medieval Slavonic compendium of the Old Testament texts with explanations and the Old Slavonic Pseudepigrapha. However, the origin of the Pseudepigraphon in question is generally dated to as early as 70-150 AD (McDonald 2017: 139). The text consists of three sections. The introductory section (chapters 1-8) tells the story about Abraham’s life before receiving the revelation from the Mighty One. In this part, he is gradually transforming from polytheism to monotheism. The section describes, among other things, how his father Terah made idols and how his house was burnt

*lived in the desert. M.A. Bulgakov simply used his name in the Italian manner. According to legend, he was the standard-bearer of the army of hell and was known for his ability to seduce and kill. It was no coincidence that when Margarita met him in the Alexander Garden, she mistook him for a cunning seducer* (translated from Russian: Азazelло – персонаж романа «Мастер и Маргарита», член свиты Воланда. Его имя восходит к падшему ангелу из иудейской мифологии Аззелу, который, обитал в пустыне. М.А. Булгаков лишь употребил его имя на итальянский манер. По преданию именно он был знаменосцем армии ада и отличался способностью к обольщению и убийству. Неспроста, встретив его в Александровском саду, Маргарита приняла его за коварного обольстителя) Login and Kazakova 2022: 83.

down along with all the idols after Abraham left it at the command of Heaven. Even before that, Abraham was already convinced of the impotence of the pagan idols made by his father: the idol Mar-Umath, striking another idol, loses its head; some of the idols offered for sale break when they fall; the idol Bar-Eshath, set to watch over the burning wood, partly burns itself up). The second section (chapters 9-14) starts the apocalyptic section based on Genesis 15.8-17 expanding and modifying the latter. As a result, the thought of God, the creator of everything, comes into Abraham's mind, then the patriarch hears an order of sacrificing to God coming from heaven. The angel Yahoel, who accompanies him, takes Abraham to Mount Horeb where he makes a sacrifice, and Azazel tries to attempt him, but the angel orders the latter to leave Abraham. The third section contains the story of Abraham's heavenly journey (chapters 15-32). At the sunset, Abraham and Yahoel ascend into heaven (a dove takes them on its wings) where they see undepictable light, the throne, the seven heavens and all their contents, the earth and the underworld; in the Garden of Eden they see Adam and Eve and **Azazel** with them. The patriarch wonders how God could allow the fall into sin, but instead of a direct answer, he is given visions about the future destinies of the world, indicating sins and offences on earth and the punishments for them in the future life.

Since the description and functions of Azazel presented in this pseudepigraphon differ from the Enochic texts (the latter will be discussed later), it seems essential to first present all the contexts in which his name appears in the text, and then to comment on possible interpretations of his role as an evil character.

**Azazel** in *The Apocalypse of Abraham* appears in chapter 13 first in a form of an "impure bird"<sup>5</sup>:

*13:1 And I [Abraham] did everything according to the angel's command. And I gave to the angels who had come to us the divided parts of the animals. And the angel took the two birds. 13:2 And I waited for [the time of] the evening offering. 13:3 **And an impure bird flew down on the carcasses**, and I drove it away. 13:4 And the impure bird spoke to me and said, "What are you doing, Abraham, on the holy heights, where no one eats or drinks, nor is there upon them food of men. But these will all be consumed by fire and they will burn you up. 13:5 Leave the man who is with you and flee! Since if you ascend to the height, they will destroy you." 13:6 And it came to pass **when I saw the bird speaking I said to the angel, "What is this, my lord?" And he said, "This is***

<sup>5</sup> Cites according to Kulik 2010.

***iniquity, this is Azazel!*** 13:7 And he said to him, “Reproach is on you, Azazel! Since Abraham’s portion is in heaven, and yours is on earth, 13:8 Since you have chosen it and desired it to be the dwelling place of your impurity. Therefore, the Eternal Lord, the Mighty One, has made you a dweller on earth. 13:9 And because of you [there is] the wholly evil spirit of the lie, and because of you [there are] wrath and trials on the generations of impious men. 13:10 Since the Eternal Mighty God did not send the righteous, in their bodies, to be in your hand, in order to affirm through them the righteous life and the destruction of impiety. 13:11 Hear, adviser! Be shamed by me, since you have been appointed to tempt not to all the righteous! 13:12 Depart from this man! 13:13 You cannot deceive him, because he is the enemy of you and of those who follow you and who love what you desire. 13:14 For behold, the garment which in heaven was formerly yours has been set aside for him, and the corruption which was on him has gone over to you.”

Angel Yahoel also teaches Abraham to be bold and to tell Azazel the following:

14:5 Say to him, “May you be the fire brand of the furnace of the earth! Go, Azazel, into the untrodden parts of the earth. 14:6 Since your inheritance are those who are with you, with men born with the stars and clouds. And their portion is you, and they come into being through your being. 14:7 And justice is your enmity. Therefore, through your own destruction vanish from before me!” 14:8 And I said the words as the angel had taught me... 14:11 And he spoke to me a second time. 14:12 And the angel said, “Now, whatever he says to you, answer him not, lest his will affects you. 14:13 Since God gave him the gravity and the will against those who answer him. Answer him not.” 14:14 And I did what the angel had commanded me. And whatever he said to me about the descent, I answered him not.

Later in the Pseudepigraphon there are additional references to Azazel. For instance, the Eternal Mighty One mentions the name of Azazel in his story about the creation (20.5). Abraham asks him (20.7) “*why then, while he is now not before you, have you set yourself with him [Azazel]?*” Showing the multitude of tribes who existed before and who were destined to come after Abraham, God says (22:5) “*Those on the right side of the picture are the people set apart for me of the people [that are] with Azazel. These are the ones I have destined to be born of you and to be called my people.*”

Thus, Azazel is not just a leader of fallen angels (Watchers) in this text, but a much

more important character. Even his appearance is something ambiguous: he looks like a serpent, his hands and feet are human, he has six wings on each side (23.7), and in one of the contexts he appears in Eden: *And he who is between them [Adam and Eve] is the Impiety of their pursuits for destruction, Azazel himself* (23.11).

And, finally, in the last part of the Pseudepigraphon, where the punishment of heathens is narrated, Azazel is also mentioned, this time as a personification of the Evil:

(29.6-7) *And I saw that as they worshiped him, Azazel ran and worshiped, and having kissed his face he turned and stood behind him. And I said, "Eternal Mighty One! Who is this shamed and struck man, worshiped by the heathen with Azazel?"*

(31.5, 7-8) 31:5 *And those who followed the idols and their murders will rot in the womb of the Evil One—the belly of Azazel, and they will be burned by the fire of Azazel's tongue. ... 31:7 And they glorified an alien. 31:8 And they joined one to whom they had not been allotted, and they abandoned the prevailing Lord.*

Researchers have repeatedly emphasised the dualistic nature of the Slavonic apocalypse, demonstrating the parallelism of higher and lower powers in it (Collins 1998: 229, Stone 1984, Orlov 2016). This new step in the development of dualistic ideology has a major impact on the portrayal of the main negative character of the apocalypse, the fallen angel Azazel. Unlike the eschatological “opponents” of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Azazel becomes no longer just one character in a large gallery of “opponents”, but a unique, overriding enemy (Orlov 2016). In this regard, Lester Grabbe notes that in describing its negative protagonist, *The Apocalypse of Abraham* has in mind a complexly composed primordial Archdemon called Azazel; according to Grabbe, in the Slavonic apocalypse, Azazel is no longer depicted as just one of the leaders of the fallen angels, but the leader of all demons; the figures which have previously been thought of as distinct are now united in one character, and the different names have become simply alternative designations of the same devil (Grabbe 1987).

This parallelism between the highest and the lowest world can be seen in different features of Azazel. For instance, George Henry Box reflects on the details of the description of Azazel's dwelling, noting that Yahoel is opposed to Azazel, who is the head of the dark forces that operate on earth (chapter 13), while his real domain is hell, where he rules as Lord (chapter 31) (Box 1919: xxvi). The researcher has also noted the fiery character of the demonic imagery of the Slavonic Apocalypse, in which Azazel is depicted as hellfire, and this hellfire has its parallelism in the description of

God's dwelling that is also fiery. Reflecting on the fiery epiphany of Azazel, he observes that, according to the particular mode of representation in the apocalyptic text we are studying, Azazel himself is the fire of Hell (Box 1919: xxvi).

According to Andrei Orlov, this definition of Azazel's essence through the image of the subterranean flame is very interesting in view of the previously mentioned ideological attitude, in relation to which fire appears as the most characteristic feature of the theophany, expressing the very presence of the Divinity. Like the Deity, understood in *The Apocalypse of Abraham* as the Fire of Heaven, seated on a throne of flaming flames, the demon is also designated as the fire of the underworld (Orlov 2016).

One of the most striking fragments that puzzles the scholars is the appearance of Azazel with Adam and Eve, literally entwined with them, in Eden. This is a very peculiar characteristics that cannot be found in either Slavonic or other cultural traditions (Harlow 2011: 320, Orlov 2016). However, here Orlov sees possible parallelism with another theophanic tradition of the Divine presence where the Epiphany is conveyed by the image of the intertwined twin cherubim in the Holy of Holies (Orlov 2016). Such a parallel seems even more convincing, since Azazel is described in the Pseudepigraphon in question as resembling a pair of cherubs fused together: he has 12 wings (six on each shoulder).

Orlov emphasises, while concluding his analysis of dualistic motifs in *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, that both the nature and possible sources of these conceptual developments are shrouded in mystery (Orlov 2016). There have been attempts to explain the dualistic tendencies found in the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha such as *The Apocalypse of Abraham* and *2 Enoch* with their potential connection to the Bogomil movement, a dualistic sect that flourished in the Balkans in the late Middle Ages (Ivanov 1925). However, recent works have increasingly expressed scepticism about such radical claims, stating that there are almost no parallels between the pseudepigrapha we are studying and the texts of the Bogomil movement (see, for instance, Turdeanu 1981). Orlov insists on the conceptual complexity of the dualistic tendencies presented in the Slavonic apocalypse and on their connection with authentic Jewish traditions (Orlov 2016, 2011)<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Orlov considers that the important place of these dualistic motifs in the structure and content of both pseudepigrapha shows once again that here we are not dealing with secondary additions and insertions, but with conceptual expressions belonging to the original intent of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha. The development of these thoughts resembles in many respects the dualism of Palestinian origin that found its place both in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the dualistic tendencies of later Jewish mysticism (Orlov 2016).



## 2.2. КНИГА О ВСХИЩЕНИИ ЕНОХОВЪ ПРАВЕДНАГО (OR THE BOOK OF THE SECRETS OF ENOCH, OR 2 ENOCH)

This pseudepigraphon is a text with a long and extremely complex textual history. Before turning to the personification of evil in it, it is essential to present not only 2 *Enoch* but also other pseudepigrapha associated with the name of Enoch, so that their special character and importance could be better appreciated.

The Bible identifies Enoch as the seventh from Adam, the great-grandfather of Noah, who lived 365 years and “walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away” (Gen. 5.24). He “pleased God” and “did not experience death” (Heb. 11.5), “no one like Enoch has ever been born (Sirach 49.14) and “was taken up into heaven” (Sirach 44.16).

If we look at the history, we will find that the writings that depict patriarch Enoch have a very ancient origin: the oldest fragments of texts related to the name of Enoch in Aramaic were discovered at Qumran and date back to the period between the second and first centuries BC (Milik 1976)<sup>7</sup>. It must also be emphasised that certain written texts associated with Enoch were authoritative in the first century AD, which is evidenced by their mention in the Epistle of Jude (14):

*Enoch was the seventh person after Adam, and he was talking about these people when he said: Look! The Lord is coming with thousands and thousands of holy angels to judge everyone. He will punish all those ungodly people for all the evil things they have done. The Lord will surely punish those ungodly sinners for every evil thing they have ever said about him.*

Many centuries before the moment when the scholarly community started to differentiate three Enochic pseudepigrapha, a text known as the *Book of Enoch* was referred to by Irenaeus of Lyon, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Tertullian in their writings. Even though it was not included in the established canon of the Holy Scripture, its readers (and admirers) did not disappear, as evidenced, among other things, by the presence of excerpts preserved in the ninth-century author George Syncellus<sup>8</sup> (see, among others, Milik 1976, Black 1970). It is impossible to say with certainty whether there was a Latin translation of the *Book of Enoch* (nowadays called *1 Enoch*); nevertheless, even if the texts associated with the name of Enoch were not available, they

<sup>7</sup> The Aramaic fragments correspond to *1 Enoch*.

<sup>8</sup> These fragments also correspond to *1 Enoch*.

were indirectly well known in the Christian West. Their traces appear in iconography and literature in Roman and Byzantine times, as well as in the Middle Ages (Milik 1976).

Thus, the patriarch Enoch was widely known and honoured from the first centuries AD across different cultures. The existence of a *Book of Enoch* was assumed, but the writings themselves were unavailable in the West in the Middle Ages. The first publications of the texts related to the name of Enoch date back to the beginning of the seventeenth century: the first to be published in 1606 was a Greek fragment included in the Chronicle of George Syncellus, and in 1703 an edition containing quotations from the *Book of Enoch (1 Enoch)*, along with allusions and references to it in Greek and Latin authors from the first to fourth centuries came out (see Milik 1976). But the year that initiated scholarly interest in the Enochic pseudepigrapha was 1773 when the three manuscripts containing the complete text of it in Ethiopic translation were brought to Europe from Abyssinia by the English scholar Bruce (Milik 1976). This discovery was the starting point for the emergence of an entire branch of biblical studies, the Enochic literature. With the discovery of additional sources, the researchers' interest in the Enoch pseudepigrapha steadily increased, and the most valuable of all the sources were undoubtedly the oldest fragments connected with the name of Enoch, discovered at Qumran in 1952, which aroused even more attention to the Enochic studies. The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha related to the name of the patriarch are of particular interest to scholars, because, especially the most studied of them, *1 Enoch*, is considered a forerunner of all early Christian literature, one of the first works of the apocalyptic genre: Martin Hengel calls the *Book of Enoch (1 Enoch)* and the *Book of Daniel* the high point of Hebrew apocalypticism of the intertestamental period (Hengel 1974:180); Matthew Black places the *Book of Enoch (1 Enoch)* among the texts of *praeparatio evangelica* (Black 1985:1)<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> During the two and a half centuries that followed the discovery of the first copies of the Pseudepigraphon in Ethiopic, texts of different "Books of Enoch" were discovered, preserved in whole or in part in other languages (Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew, Slavonic, Coptic), the comparison of which allowed scholars to speak of the existence of three different "versions". Nowadays in the scientific tradition it is customary to distinguish them as three different Pseudepigrapha associated with the name of the patriarch Enoch—that is, 3 Books of Enoch. They are called *1 Enoch*, *2 Enoch*, and *3 Enoch* (to my knowledge, they were first named so in the Hugo Odeberg's edition of the *Hebrew (3) Enoch* in 1928—Odeberg 1928). All of them are united by the figure of Enoch; however, the Pseudepigrapha themselves are completely different, both in content, volume, composition, and the character of the narrative. *1 Enoch* is the text preserved entirely in Ethiopic, partly in Greek, and in fragments in Aramaic (Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2004; Olson 2004; Black 1985; Knibb 1978; Milik 1976; VanderKam 1995). *2 Enoch* is a version which, until very recently, was known only in Slavonic copies

It is worth underlining that, in the Slavonic milieu, the pseudepigraphon connected with the patriarch Enoch (namely *2 Enoch*), which is of our particular interest, enjoyed considerable popularity. What is more, in the West the *Book of Enoch* (*1 Enoch*) was known in the Middle Ages only through fragments and echoes of it, whereas in Slavonic there existed a translation of the entire *Book of the Secrets of Enoch* (*2 Enoch*). There is considerable evidence for the popularity of the Slavonic writing. One of the most important indications is the fact that fragments of the *Book of the Ascension of Enoch the Righteous* appear in the Chronicles and other Old Russian Compilations. For instance, there is a fragment from the pseudepigraphon in the juridical compiled text *The Scale of Justice* (*Мерило Праведное*); Archbishop of Novgorod Gennady (15th century) makes references to the *Book of Enoch* (Sokolov 1910). The patriarch's name is honoured in Church Slavonic hymnography (Navtanovich 2022b). We can find Enoch among other Patriarchs (Adam, Abel, Seth, Noah, Melchizedek) and John the Baptist in the dome drum of the Church of the Transfiguration on Ilyina Street in Novgorod (Lifšic 1987: 500). Most of the Slavonic copies of the pseudepigraphon are from the seventeenth century, and during this period Bibles edited as *ouvrages* appeared with Slavonic verses, and there, among other dedications, we can read lines devoted to the patriarch (Belobrova 1993). All these demonstrate immense interest in the figure of Enoch in the Old and Medieval Slavic world, which possibly explains the influence of the scriptures attributed to him in forthcoming Slavic literature and culture. As for the provenance of the Slavic text, it is also considered to be of very ancient origin, possibly dating back to the first century AD (see, for instance, Orlov 2000, Böttrich 1992, 1995, Charles 1913). The Slavonic Pseudepigraphon narrates about what Enoch saw and was told in heaven. The story in the Slavonic manuscripts begins at Enoch's home, two men (later it is said that they were angels) appear to Enoch in his dream and ascend him to heaven. This is followed by a description of the seven (in some copies ten) heavens which Enoch visits: in one of them he sees the condemned angels; in another he sees the movement of the heavenly lights; in the seventh heaven Enoch sees the Lord, and the Lord tells him about the creation of the world. Then, the archangel Verevel (in other copies Vreveil, Vrevoil), at the command of the Lord, recounts to Enoch the Book of the Mysteries of Heaven, Enoch is ordered to write down the story and give his writing to his children. After that, the angels lower Enoch to the earth for 30 days

(Vaillant 1952, Navtanovič 2022a), and now we have some Coptic fragments (Hagen 2012). *3 Enoch* is the Hebrew version of the Pseudepigraphon from the medieval period (Odeberg 1928, Alexander 1983). For each Enoch Pseudepigrapha there is currently a vast bibliography; I have limited myself only to few references, primarily those containing editions or translations of the texts).

to pass on the commandments to his sons and his people. The second half of the Slavonic text contains Enoch's instructions, his revelation about the coming Great Judgement: the awful fate of sinners and the eternal life awaiting the righteous. The last part of the Pseudepigraphon is devoted to the birth of Melchizedek by Nir (Enoch's great-grandson), Noah's brother.

Although *1 Enoch* and *2 Enoch* are separate texts, certain parallels can be traced between them, both in terms of specific themes and motifs, and in terms of individual fragments and readings. Among these common motifs is one of the most famous plots, which was later reflected in universal literature (it seems sufficient to only mention *Paradise Lost* by John Milton), apart from the Bible (Gen. 6:2, 4), which was first described in great detail in the Enochic Pseudepigrapha (*1 Enoch* and *2 Enoch*): this is the story of the rebellion of angels, the fallen angels. In Enochic texts they are called Watchers (the word has its origin in Greek ἑγρήγοροι that means *those who do not sleep, who vigil, watch*). Another part of the parallels between *1* and *2 Enoch* is the information on astronomy: the Slavonic text contains traces of the same 364-day solar calendar that is found in *1 Enoch*, including in Qumran texts—this fact was first noticed by Annie Maunder (1918). In both Enochic pseudepigrapha heavenly journeys are represented, the patriarch is ascended to Heaven to receive divine knowledge. Both texts contain the narration of the Creation, and the secrets of it are revealed to the patriarch. A very important theme for *1* and *2 Enoch* is eschatological: both have prophecies about the Last Judgment. At the same time, we can also find a lot of parallels between both texts on the level of short passages and even separate readings: the latest monograph by Grant Macaskill, for instance, shows significant common information and even textual closeness between *2 Enoch* and *The Parables of Enoch* in *1 Enoch* (Macaskill 2024); I dedicated several works to the detailed analysis of such parallelism (Navtanovich 1993, 2021, 2022).

In the Slavonic manuscripts of *2 Enoch*, we find the description of the *Watchers* in the second and in the fifth heaven. Here is the description of what was seen by Enoch according to the short recension<sup>10</sup>:

*And those men took me to the second heaven, and set me in **the second heaven**, and showed me the prisoners who were being punished immeasurably. And*

<sup>10</sup> The translation into English is mine, the Slavonic text is taken directly from the manuscript: from the Copy A (Library of the Academy of Sciences (Saint-Petersburg) 45.13.4, 16th century, fols. 357-366v.). Here I intentionally set aside the everlasting debate concerning the relation and provenance of the two main recensions—the short and the long (for more details see, for instance, Navtanovič 2022a).

there I saw the angels condemned and weeping, and I asked the men who were with me, “Why are they being tormented?” And the men answered me, “They are apostates from the Lord, who have disobeyed the Lord’s command and have made their own decisions.” And I grieved for them. The angels bowed to me and said, “Man of God, may you pray to the Lord for us.” And I answered them, saying, “Who am I, a mortal man, to pray for angels; who knows where I am going, or who will meet me, or who will pray for me.”

[...] And the men took me from there and carried me up into **the fifth heaven**. And I saw there a great army of Watchers; I saw two hundred. They looked like men, but they were bigger than great wonders; their faces were sorrowful, their mouths were silent, and there was no service [in that heaven]. And I asked the men who were with me, “Why are their faces so sorrowful and sad, and their mouths are silent, and there is no service in this heaven?” The men answered me, “They are Watchers, who have forsaken the Lord with their leader, and two hundred followed him. They came down to earth and broke their vow on the ridge of Mount Hermon to defile themselves by women, and they defiled themselves. And the Lord condemned them, and behold they are weeping for their brethren, and were punished.” (Then) I said to the Watchers, “I have seen your brethren and known what they have done, and I have heard their plea and prayed for them. Their Lord has condemned them to remain under the earth until the end of the heavens and the earth. Why are you waiting (for the fate) of your brethren, instead of serving the Lord? Set up the former service, serve in the name of the Lord! For if you anger the Lord your God, he will cast you down from this place.”

And while I was there, four trumpets sounded simultaneously and the Watchers began the service, and their voice went up to the Lord with one voice.

Although the leader of the Watchers is not explicitly mentioned in the *preserved* Slavonic manuscripts of the short recension of Pseudepigraphon<sup>11</sup>, it is obvious that it refers to the fuller account of the fallen angels’ rebellion found in *I Enoch* which contains a long story devoted to the Watchers (*The Book of Watchers*). The leader of the fallen angels in *I Enoch* is called **Azazel**, and it was him who taught men the art of war and the art of making everything necessary for battle; he also taught women the art of deception and seduction, and in particular the art of face and hair colouring;

<sup>11</sup> We have six “full” copies of the short recension left and a number of its fragments (Navtanovič 2000, Macaskill 2013).

he also taught men how to conjure.

*Azazel taught men to make swords, knives, shields, breastplates, the fabrication of mirrors, and the workmanship of bracelets and ornaments, the use of paint, the beautifying of the eyebrows, the use of stones of every valuable and select kind, and all sorts of dyes, so that the world became altered (1Enoch 8:1).*

In the end, at the command of God, Azazel was bound by the Archangel Raphael and chained to a rock by which he was to remain until the Day of Judgment.

In the Slavonic copies, as could be seen from the fragments cited above, only “the end” of the story is mainly preserved. Still, the name of **Azazel**, the leader of the Watchers, might have been known in the Slavonic copies that have not “survived” to this day and, thanks to them, in the Slavic Medieval literacy in general. Taking into account the extraordinarily complex textual history of *2 Enoch*—including the 14-15 century gap between the possible origin of the text in the first century AD and the earliest Slavonic witness—as well as the parallelism between texts repeatedly noted by researchers, such an assumption should be considered<sup>12</sup>.

Thus, in the two Slavonic Pseudepigrapha we can see the transformation of the role of the evil character in question: while in the *Book of the Secrets of Enoch* “unnamed” Azazel is the chief of the Watchers (and he is condemned by God and is expecting his punishment), in *The Apocalypse of Abraham* he is already a kind of archdemon opposed to the Lord himself.

### 2.3. AZAZEL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The name Azazel appears in the Bible (in the Hebrew text עֲזַזְאֵל), in the 16th chapter of the Book of Leviticus, dedicated to the description of the Jewish fest Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). According to the Bible, that was a day of an elaborate sacrificial service, including the following tradition described in Lev. 16.20–26:

<sup>12</sup> In one of my works, in a very meticulous manner, I compare the description of the fifth heaven in the Slavonic text (*2 Enoch*) with corresponding Greek and Aramaic fragments preserved (*1 Enoch*). And the comparison demonstrates clearly enough that the Slavonic pseudepigraphon retains the main content of *1 Enoch* in this fragment: the number of angels (two hundred) is the same, the place where they made an oath (Mount Hermon) coincides, in both pseudepigrapha the angels were “desecrated” by women (and this word in Slavonic **literally** corresponds to the same in Greek). This fact seems to support the hypothesis of an original closeness of the two texts and the possible existence of the name of the leader of the Watchers in the Slavonic one initially (Navtanovic 2022b).

<sup>20</sup> And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. <sup>21</sup> And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. <sup>22</sup> The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness... <sup>26</sup> And he who lets the goat go to Azazel shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.

Thus, on that day, one goat, upon which all the sins of the people were laid, was sent into the desert, and in Hebrew this goat is called לעזאזל, which literally means [*the goat*] for Azazel. In the Biblical text criticism, there is no agreement on how to understand this word combination. Wilhelm Gesenius explained the word Azazel as similar to “the averter”, which he suggested first referred to an idol and later was attributed to a demon in the Enochian texts (Gesenius 1857). Among other interpretations, there is one from *Baraita* that explains the word Azazel as formed from the words “rugged” and “God”, referring to the rough (rugged) mountain cliff: according to some sources, the goat had to be cast down from such a cliff.

The Septuagint must have interpreted the Hebrew word as “the sent away” reading it as עזאזל “goat that leaves”, linking this explanation to the Leviticus 16:8-10: *And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the scapegoat* (Greek τῷ ἀποπομπαίῳ). Since the Slavonic translation was made from Greek, the “goat for Azazel” was translated according to the Greek text as козел отпущения (in Modern Russian it is a phraseological expression that means a person who is blamed for the mistakes, misdemeanours or failures of others, often in order to conceal the real culprits or causes). Thus, the goat on which the High Priest laid the sins of the people, which was symbolically to be sent into the wilderness, this “scapegoat”, was named in Russian козел отпущения, originally supposed to mean “a goat for Azazel”.

### 3. “ECHOES” OF AZAZEL IN MODERN LITERATURE

Regarding the characters associated with the name of **Azazel** in contemporary culture, it should be said that the name has become familiar to the general reader since the first publication of the Mikhail Bulgakov’s novel *Master and Margarita* in 1966-

1967, where it has an Italianised form **Azazello**, one of Woland's entourage<sup>13</sup>. It is quite obvious that the name was not casually chosen by Bulgakov<sup>14</sup>: on the one hand, Azazello uses weapons and violence (it is him that thrusts Poplavsky out of the apartment, his force moves Stepan Likhodeyev from Moscow to Yalta, and, finally, he shoots Count Meigel to death); on the other hand, Azazello provides Margarita with a special magic cream, the *Azazello Cream* thanks to which Margarita transforms into a witch, but first and foremost, into a gorgeous beauty. The mirror was one of the things Azazel gave the human beings, and, in the novel, he enters the sinister apartment through the mirror<sup>15</sup>.

For nearly everyone reading in Russian, the name **Azazel** in its original form has been familiar since the late 1990s when «Азazelъ» by Boris Akunin (in the English translation *The Winter Queen*) was published. That was his first novel and the first book on the Erast Fandorin series of historical detective novels (subtitled as *конспирологический детектив*). The title of the novel refers to a secret organisation called "Azazel"; according to its founder Lady Astair, the name is derived from a character who "taught man a sense of self-worth"<sup>16</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that the name Azazel in contemporary culture seems to become increasingly popular. What is more, over the past twenty years, more than thirty literary, film, and TV characters, as well as computer games characters have been given this name<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> The name Azazel appeared much earlier in different contexts (for instance, there is an entry in the Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopaedic Dictionary (1890-1907)). Here and later on, when speaking about "readers", I am referring to a wide range of people, not only to a limited circle of those interested in religious literature and mysticism. However, it is obvious that the use of the name Azazel in the Russian sources from the eighteenth, nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth century can and possibly should be a subject for a special study.

<sup>14</sup> In fact, in Bulgakov's personal archive there are notes from the book: I. Porfir'ev, *Apokrifičeskie skazaniâ o vethozavetnyh lichah i sobytiâh* (Kazan, 1872), which deals with both *The Book of Enoch* (*IEnoch*) and *The Apocalypse of Abraham* (Češenko 2021).

<sup>15</sup> Seven screen versions of the novel have been produced so far, three of them in Russia: Yuri Kara (1994), Vladimir Bortko (2005), and Mikhail Lokshin (2024).

<sup>16</sup> Lady Astair who has founded a number of schools (Astair Houses) tells Fandorin, the main character, that her graduates are working for progress around the world in all walks of life, and the "dirty work" of receiving the money for all this is done by a secret organisation named "Azazel". Fandorin finds out that Lady Astair is the leader of the Azazel group. She confesses that the Astair Houses are supposed to educate brilliant young minds (orphans) so that they could work for her and for "Azazel", and the final objective of the plot is taking over the world one day. There is a screen version of this novel as well: *Azazel* (2002). It is a pity that the supposed adaptation by Paul Verhoeven (2009) has never seen light (it was supposed to star Dan Steven and Milla Jovovich).

<sup>17</sup> There is even a special article in Wikipedia called: *Azazel in Popular Culture*.



#### 4. INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION: FURTHER RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

As can be seen, Azazel has left traces on the language and literature that follows. The paper has attempted to bring together all the contexts mentioning Azazel or his possible reference in the Slavonic pseudepigrapha in order to facilitate further in-depth analysis, and—although perhaps at this stage rather “in a dashed style”—to show the transformation of the image of the “evil genius” in question from one text to another. The urgent need to draw on primary sources in studying the demonic characters in Bulgakov’s novel is evident from the fact that even in the works *directly devoted to the origins of the character of Azazello*, no references are made to the Slavonic and other pseudepigrapha, but almost exclusively to the dictionaries on mythology as well as other encyclopaedic dictionaries (see, in particular, Urûpin 2008).

Returning to the question of evil characters in Slavonic pseudepigrapha, it should be said that, surprisingly, in the long recension of 2 *Enoch* the leader of the fallen angels (Watchers) is not called Azazel, but **Sataniel**. And this name can be found in another Slavonic Pseudepigraphon: Апокриф о Тивериадском море—*The Sea of Tiberias* (Badalanova 2011, Kuznecova 1998). The representation of this evil character has already been investigated (see, for instance, Orlov 2016, Kuznecova 1998); however, it deserves to be the subject of a separate study. I have mentioned this fact at the end of the paper to emphasise that the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha are treasures that are far from being definitively explored, with many interesting discoveries still awaiting us, particularly regarding their representations of evil.

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## OD AZAZELA DO AZAZELLA: ZLI LIKOVI U SLAVENSKIM PSEUDEPIGRAFIMA

LIUDMILA NAVTANOVICH

### SAŽETAK

U članku se razmatra važnost slavenskih pseudepigrafa Staroga zavjeta kao izvora opsežnih kulturnih informacija koje su mogle utjecati na suvremeno razmišljanje i kulturu. Zli lik analiziran u članku pojavljuje se u dvama slavenskim pseudepigrafima Staroga zavjeta: *Abrahamovoj apokalipsi* i *Henoku II*. Ime lika je Azazel, a danas je nadaleko poznato po svojim odjecima u Bulgakovljevu romanu *Majstor i Margarita* i Akuninovu romanu *Azazel*, koji je preveden na engleski pod naslovom *Zimska kraljica*. U članku se objašnjava kako je lik Azazela predstavljen u staroslavenskim pseudepigrafima i kako se bitno mijenja njegova uloga u različitim staroslavenskim tekstovima. U članku se objašnjava podrijetlo izraza *žrtveni jarac* na ruskome jeziku.

### KLJUČNE RIJEČI:

*Abrahamova apokalipsa, Azazel, Henok II, slavenski pseudografi Staroga zavjeta, zli likovi, žrtveni jarac*