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DO BULGAKOV'S HELLA (GELLA), AZAZELLO, BEHEMOTH, AND ABADONNA HAVE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN ORIGINS?

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Abstract: This paper[1] focuses on the issue of the possible Ancient Near Eastern origins of famous Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov's demonic characters, such as the vampire Hella (Gella), the cat-human Behemoth, and the demons Azazello and Abadonna from the novel *The Master and Margarita*. The nature of the members of Woland's court have been analysed in several works; however, their roots are usually considered to go back to biblical times and context. Our aim is to try to shed some light on their possibly more ancient origins, since it is a well-known fact that Bulgakov was deeply interested in the Ancient Near East and used several of its elements in his novel. Therefore, in order to establish any potential Ancient Near Eastern impact on the essence of those characters, we need to look into Akkadian and Sumerian mythology and Mesopotamian religious texts (e.g., incantations).

Keywords: Abadonna, Ancient Near East, Azazello, Behemoth, demons, Hella (Gella), Mikhail Bulgakov, The Master and Margarita

INTRODUCTION

Mikhail Bulgakov (1891–1940), one of the most prominent Russian writers of the twentieth century, began writing his probably most famous novel, *The Master and Margarita*, in 1928, and continued to work on it until his death

in 1940. It is believed that the author destroyed the first manuscript in 1930 (about the different redactions of the novel see M. Chudakova's article (1976)). For many years Bulgakov tried to find a suitable title and considered different versions, for example, *The Great Chancellor*, *The Black Theologian*, *The Hoof of the Advisor*, etc. He finally decided on the current title in 1937. In 1966 the first part of the novel, heavily censored, was published in the monthly magazine *Moskva*; the second part appeared at the beginning of the following year. It has been said that approximately 12% of the text was left out of these first publications. The first uncensored version in Russian was published in Paris in 1967 and in Frankfurt in 1969. In the Soviet Union the first uncensored version was published only in 1973. For a long time, the Estonian translation that was published in 1968 remained the only book version of the novel in the Soviet Union.[2]

Since the second half of the 1960s, this novel has been translated into many languages. There exist several English translations of it (e.g., Mirra Ginsburg 1967; Michael Glenny 1967 and 1992; Diana Burgin & Katherine Tiernan O'Connor 1993; Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky 1997; Michael Karpelson 2006; Hugh Aplin 2008; John Dougherty 2017), and critics have very different opinions about those versions (see May 1998). In our article examples from Michael Glenny's translation (1992) are used.

This article focuses on Ancient Near Eastern origin of some characters, but in fact, Bulgakov used many different oriental phenomena and motifs in his most famous novel. The importance of Near Eastern motifs in *The Master and Margarita* becomes immediately apparent right at the beginning of the novel, when the author mentions Ancient Near Eastern deities, such as the Mesopotamian god Marduk (Sommerfeld 1982; Johandi 2016, 2019), Osiris of Egypt, the Phoenician-Mesopotamian Tammuz, Sumerian Dumuzi, etc.

> *Berlioz's high tenor resounded along the empty avenue and as Mikhail Alexandrovich picked his way round the sort of historical pitfalls that can only be negotiated safely by a highly educated man, the poet learned more and more useful and instructive facts about the Egyptian god Osiris, son of Earth and Heaven, about the Phoenician god Thammuz, about Marduk and even about the fierce little-known god Vitzli-Putzli, who had once been held in great veneration by the Aztecs of Mexico.* (p. 4)

Not only deities but also other important Near Eastern phenomena are introduced on the first pages of the novel; for example, the religion of Zoroastrianism (Stausberg 2002–2004; Boyce 1979), the month of Nisannu, when the New Year celebration – Akitu-festival (Sommer 2000) – took place.

One can suggest at least two main reasons for Bulgakov's interest in the Ancient Near East. Firstly, he was well educated in theology since his father was an associate professor at the Theological Academy in Kiev and Bulgakov read his father's papers when he was working on *The Master and Margarita*. However, there is no reason to assume that Bulgakov knew any Ancient Near Eastern languages; he was a medical doctor. One can suggest that he probably read about the Ancient Near Eastern culture, history, deities, demons, etc., in popular scientific literature.[3]

Secondly, at the beginning of the twentieth century there was great interest in Ancient Near East history and culture in the Russian Empire, as well as in the rest of Europe. Bulgakov was also a good friend of Anna Akhmatova (for more see Pavlovskii 1988), who showed great interest in the Ancient Near East and whose second husband was Voldemar (Vladimir) K. Shileiko (1891–1930), who was born in the same year as Bulgakov (see Emelianov 2019: 60–88) and was a famous Russian professor and author of many scientific papers on Assyriological studies, as well as translator of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, prominent scholar and poet (for more see Emelianov 2019; Sallaberger 2008). Undoubtedly, Bulgakov had several possible sources for his Ancient Near East inspiration in the process of writing his famous novel.

In the current article we will focus on the origin of four creatures (members of Woland's court) from *The Master and Margarita*:

1) the female vampire Hella (Gella) (see Sazonov & Kupp-Sazonov 2020);
2) the demon Azazello;
3) Behemoth, the enormous cat who can transform into human shape (see Sazonov & Kupp-Sazonov 2021);
4) Abadonna, the demon of war.

HELLA (GELLA)[4]

Hella is depicted in Bulgakov's novel as one of the living dead, a demon, and a female vampire. She is described in the following ways:

> *The two robbers vanished and in their place appeared* ***a completely naked girl – a redhead with eyes that burned with a phosphorescent glitter.***[5] *… The girl came right up to him and put her hands on his shoulders. … 'Let me give you a kiss,' said the girl tenderly, her gleaming eyes close to his. Varenukha lost consciousness before he could feel her kiss.*[6] (p. 125)

> *The girl increased her efforts, pushed her auburn head through the little upper pane, stretched out her arm as far as she could and began to pluck at the lower catch with her fingernails and shake the frame. Her arm,* ***coloured deathly green****,* ***started to stretch as if it were made of rubber****. Finally her* ***green cadaverous fingers*** *caught the knob of the window-catch, turned it and the casement opened. …* ***The walking corpse*** *stepped on to the window-sill. Rimsky clearly saw* ***patches of decay on her breast****. At that moment the sudden, joyful sound of a cock crowing rang out in the garden …* ***Wild fury distorted the girl's face as she swore hoarsely*** *… The cock crowed again, the girl* ***gnashed her teeth*** *and* ***her auburn hair stood on end****. At the third crow she turned and* ***flew out****.* (p. 174)

> *The door had been opened by a girl, completely naked except for* ***an indecent little lace apron****, a* ***white cap*** *and a* ***pair of little gold slippers****. She* ***had a perfect figure*** *and the only flaw in her looks was a* ***livid scar on her neck****.* (p. 227)

> *The* ***naked witch****, Hella...* (p. 284)

> *The* ***beautiful Hella*** *turned her* ***green eyes*** *on Margarita and smiled.* (p. 288)

Woland describes her in the following way: "this is my maid, Hella. She's **prompt, clever, and there's no service she cannot perform for you**" (p. 288).

It has been noticed that although Hella seems to be quite an insignificant character, Bulgakov dedicates considerable time and space in his novel to describing her appearance and actions.

Above all, it is worth mentioning that Hella differs from the other members of Woland's suite since readers are given no information about her fate after the Satanic ball and the supper. She is not included in the final flight from Moscow. Bulgakov's widow Yelena Bulgakova was once asked about this curious fact, and she guessed that the author probably just forgot about this character. This does not seem impossible because we have to keep in mind that Bulgakov was already very ill when finishing his novel and the final editing was done by his wife. However, some research has also proposed that, since Hella is a so-called lower-class demon, it is quite natural that she should disappear after the ball when she has fulfilled all her tasks (Belobrovtseva & Kuljus 2004: 241).

It is no simple matter to establish the origin of the character and her name because there exist many different theories. In general, we can point out three possible versions[7] of Hella's origin:

1) she is a mixture of female demons Lamia, Empusa, and Mermolika from Ancient Greek mythology;
2) she is derived from Near East Lilith and Akkadian Lilitu;
3) she is inspired by Sumerian *Galla* and Akkadian *Gallû* demons.

Theory of Ancient Greek mythology

Numerous researchers speculate that Hella has Ancient Greek origin. For instance, Lesley Milne claims that the name Hella "was borrowed" by Bulgakov from the Brockhaus-Efron Encyclopaedic dictionary (see BE: Demonologia), where in the chapter about witchcraft it is said that young girls who have become vampires after their death were called by this name on the island of Lesbos (Milne 1977: 50).

Estonian researchers Irina Belobrovtseva and Svetlana Kuljus have presumed that Hella is a character who is a compound of different creatures, more precisely of Empusa, Mermolika, and Lamia. According to Ancient Greek mythology, Empusa was a monstrous spectre which was believed to devour human beings. It could appear in different forms and was sent out by goddess Hecate to frighten travellers. Empusa was believed to usually appear with one leg of brass and the other of an ass. Whenever a traveller addressed the monster with insulting words, it would flee and emit a shrill sound. Mermolikas were demons who ate small children (TGM).

In Greek mythology, Lamia was a Queen of Libya who became a child-murdering monster feared for her malevolence. According to the legend, the goddess Hera slayed all of Lamia's children (except Scylla) in anger due to the fact that Lamia had slept with her husband Zeus. Lamia's subsequent grief at the death of her children caused her to turn into a monster who took revenge on all mothers by stealing their children and devouring them (RE 1924: 544–546). Lamia was a daughter of a mortal man; the goddess Hera killed all of her children, and because of her grief she turned into a monster – a woman with a long tail of a serpent, fingers tipped with wickedly sharp talons, and a mouthful of long, dagger-like teeth (RE 1924: 545). One could, of course, argue that Bulgakov's Hella does not possess any of these characteristics and there is nothing that might suggest she is aggressive towards small children.

Theory of Near East Lilith and Akkadian *Lilītu*

Additionally, Belobrovtseva and Kuljus (2004: 240) are convinced that Hella's origin should also be looked for in Hebraic and Sumerian mythology. In Hebraic culture Lamia is known as Lilith (Hutter 1999b [1995]: 521). Very similar to Lamia is also the Babylonian female demon Lamashtu (Farber 2014; Wiggermann 2011: 310, 316–319; 2000: 217–253).

Laura D. Weeks (1984: 238–239) claims that Hella is a direct reference to the Lilith legend in the Ancient Near East. Sumerian *líl* means 'a gale, emptiness'. In Sumerian mythology *líl*-demons are related to gales and their Akkadian equivalents are *lilû, lilītu* (MUNUS.LÍL.LÁ) and (*w*)*ardat lilî* 'storm demons' (Black & Green & Postgate 2000: 182; Hutter 1999b [1995]: 520–521).

J. Black and A. Green have pointed out:

> *The male* lilû *and the two females* lilītu *and* ardat-lilî *are a sort of family group of demons. They are not gods. The* lilû *haunts desert and open country and is especially dangerous to pregnant women and infants. The* lilītu *seems to be a female equivalent, while the* ardat-lilî *(whose name means 'maiden* lilû*') seems to have the character of a frustrated bride, incapable of normal sexual activity. As such, she compensates by aggressive behaviour especially towards young men. The* ardat-lilî*, who is often mentioned in magical texts, seems to have some affinities with the Jewish Lilith (e.g. Isaiah 34:14). 'She is not a wife, a mother; she has not known happiness, has not undressed in front of her husband, has no milk in her breasts.' She was believed to cause impotence in men and sterility in women.* (Black & Green 2004 [1992]: 118)

Hutter, on the other hand, emphasizes their sexuality. They are mostly female creatures without husbands, who look for men and enter through windows (as does Hella in the novel). They seduce men but cannot give birth. In this sense Lilith is very similar to Lamashtu and they are often considered to be the same creature. The motif of Lilith spread from Mesopotamia to Syria and from there to the West (Hutter 1999b [1995]: 520–521).

In fact, Lilith is already to be found in Ancient Sumer, such as in the poem *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld*. In the first tale Inanna (the Sumerian goddess of love and war) plants a tree in her garden in the hope of one day making a chair and a bed from it. The tree becomes infested, however, by a snake at its roots, a female demon (*lilītu*) in its centre, and an Anzu bird on its branches. No matter what she tries, Inanna cannot rid herself of the pests and so appeals to her brother, sun-god Utu, for help. Utu refuses but her plea is

heard by Gilgamesh who comes, heavily armed, and kills the snake. The demon and the Anzu bird then flee and Gilgamesh, after taking the roots for himself, presents the trunk to Inanna to build her bed and chair from. From those roots Gilgamesh makes the musical instruments *pukku* and *mikkû* (Afanasieva 1979: 85–86). The *lilû* demon who is related to Lilith appears already in the *Sumerian King List* (Espak 2009; Gabriel 2018), written in ca 2000 BC, where he appears as Gilgamesh's father. The Akkadian *Lilītu* belongs to a group of female vampires called succubi. *Lilītu* is described as possessing extraordinary beauty and a thirst for blood (Weeks 1984: 238–239).

Theory of Sumerian *Galla* and Akkadian *Gallû* demons

The Greek version of the name *Lilītu* is *Gello* or *Gellos* (Γέλλως), a demon who harms newborns and their mothers, and the name *Gello* appears repeatedly in Greek texts. For example, Gello is mentioned by the Greek sophist Zenobius (Zenobii Proverbia 1839: 253).

However, the origins of this form are probably not originally from Ancient Greece but from Ancient Mesopotamia, where this name occurs in Sumerian as *galla* (gal_5-la) and in Akkadian as *gallû*, standing for a group of demons from the underworld. Assyriologists J. Black and A. Green state:

> *The* galla *(Akkadian* gallû*) is one of the numerous types of underworld demons especially responsible for hauling unfortunate humans off to the underworld. Often mentioned in incantations in enumerations of seven types of evil demons (see magic and sorcery), the* gallas *in one magical text are said themselves to number seven.* (2004 [1992]: 85–86)

Gallû were constables (Wiggermann 2011: 300) and very powerful demons, who could capture even gods and take them to the netherworld. For example, in the Akkadian myth "Innana's descent to netherworld", the goddess Inanna had to enter the underworld (Inanna decided that she would visit her sister, goddess Ereškigal, one of the rulers of the underworld), give up all her clothes, and could not return to the earth unless she left a replacement in the underworld. It was generally impossible to return from the underworld, even for gods. So, in order to return to the earth, Inanna had to give her husband, the god Dumuzi (Akkadian Tammuz), to the demons of Galla. The Galla demons took Dumuzi at the request of Inanna and led him to the underworld where Dumuzi was forced to spend six months each year. While he is gone it is winter on the earth

and when he returns to the earth, it is spring (Black & Green 2004 [1992]: 85; about Dumuzi see also Rubio 2001).

As Franz Wiggermann has correctly pointed out, sometimes evil people were also characterized as *gallû* (Wiggermann 2011: 300). In Mesopotamian incantations *gallû* were also often portrayed as evil demons of illness (Annus 2017: 191), for example, in the anti-witchcraft incantation series *Maqlû* and others (e.g., Annus 2017: 103, Tablet II line 5; 135, Tablet V, line 63).

The possible Near Eastern origin of Hella is also important from the point of view of translation. In Estonian and English translations, the original name *Гелла* has become *Hella*. This has happened most likely because it is common knowledge that many (especially German, but not only) foreign names and words originally beginning with the letter H are written in Russian with a G, for example, *Hitler – Гитлер, Hamburg – Гамбург, hertz – герц*, etc. So, it is possible that in both Estonian and English translations, the name *Гелла* was treated as a foreign name, and since in Russian it was written with the letter G, it turned into an H in translated texts. However, if we consider the fact that Bulgakov, who knew the Ancient Near East very well, named his character after *Gallû* or *Galla* demons, the vampire should be called Gella in other languages as well. We would like to add here that in some German translations (see, e.g., Bulgakow 1994) the name *Gella* is preserved.

AZAZELLO

Another demonic character in the novel is Azazello (for more see Mason 2010) and he is described as follows:

> *He was **short**, with fiery **red hair** and one **protruding fang,** wearing a starched shirt, a good striped suit, patent-leather shoes and a bowler hat. His tie was bright. One strange feature was his breast pocket: instead of the usual handkerchief or fountain pen, it contained a gnawed chicken bone.* (p. 251)

> *… a small, red-haired man … He had one yellow fang, a **wall eye** and was wearing a black sweater with a knife stuck into a leather belt.* (p. 223)

> *… rode Azazello, his face transformed by the moon. Gone was the idiotic wall eye, gone was his false squint. Both Azazello's **eyes were alike, empty and black, his face white and cold**. Azazello was now in his real guise, **the demon of the waterless desert, the murderer-demon.*** (p. 427)

Compared to some other members of Woland's court, Azazello does not appear in the novel very often, and when he does appear, he mostly just frightens humans into doing what Woland wants; he is strong, violent, and shoots very well. When he has to convince Margarita to attend the Satanic ball, he is forced to admit that dealing with women is difficult for him and that Behemoth would have managed much better.

His name is considered to be undoubtedly derived from the demon Azazel (see, e.g., Dietrich & Loretz 1993). Azazel or Azazil (*'azā'zēl*) appears repeatedly in the Bible (e.g., in the Old Testament, Book of Leviticus 16:10), but its meaning is not completely clear. According to Bernd Janowski's analysis, *'zz'l* may consist of the following components: *'zz* (to be strong) and *'l* (meaning god in Hebrew; *ilu* is the equivalent of this in Akkadian) (Janowski 1999: 128–131).

There are several possible etymologies of the name of Azazel; here we present just a few examples. Azazel could be the geographic name meaning a 'steep place' or a 'rough rock' (Driver 1956: 97–98), as well as a demon's name or demon's epithet. In addition, Azazel has the concept of *'ēz* ('goat') and *'oz ēl* ('to go away, disappear', cf. to Arabic *zl*), meaning 'a goat who goes away' (Janowski 1999: 128). Janowski has rightly pointed out:

> *In order to define a word as the name or epithet of a demon one could refer primarily to the textual evidence: according to Lev 16: 8–10 a he-goat is chosen by lot 'for Azazel' in order to send it into desert (v 10.21) or into a remote region 'for Azazel'. Since* la'ăzāz'zēl *corresponds to lěYHWH (v 8), 'Azazel' could be also understood as a personal name, behind which could be posited something such as a 'supernatural creature' or 'demonic personality'.* (ibid.)

The question is whether a similar name can be found in the Ugarit cuneiform texts in North Syria. The Ugaritologist Oswald Loretz (1985) has argued that there is a noticeable similarity between the Hebrew *'zz'l* and Ugarit *'zb'l*.

In any case, in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, Azazel is called an evil genius, a fallen angel who started a war against God in heaven. According to the legend, he was the one who introduced the art of making weapons and jewellery to people (Belobrovtseva & Kuljus 2004: 192). Bulgakov's Azazello is also aggressive and militant; he fights and kills. In Talmudic literature his name is synonymous with Satan. The desert is considered to be the place for demons, so Bulgakov calls him 'the demon of the waterless desert' and that is correct, as has been pointed out by several investigators. H. Duhm and some other researchers have called Azazel 'Kakodämon der Wüste', who was involved in the sacrifice of goats (Duhm 1904: 56; Janowski 1999: 128).

Possible connections with Egypt have also been suggested:

> *According to this theory an original ritual of elimination has been enriched through the addition of the concept of 'scapegoat'-receiver in the form of a demon, who bears traits of the Egyptian god Seth, the classic 'God of Confusion'.* (Janowski 1999: 129)

Based on the Mesopotamian material, researchers have discovered that Azazel may have origins in Anatolia and northern Syria. In addition to the comparison of Canaan, the Palestinian material, it is also relevant here to study the Hurrian material from Kizzuwatna in northern Syria and southern Anatolia. Here it is important to look at the rituals of the "scapegoat", which "may be the missing link between South Anatolia, North Syria and the traditions of Palestinian rituals" (Janowski 1999: 129).

> *In the case of Azazello, the ties with the Hebraic tradition are of a more substantial nature. A demon of the desert whose origins go back to ancient Near Eastern lore, Azazel appears briefly in the Old Testament (Leviticus 16) and again in the First Book of Enoch, a large part of which is devoted to retelling the story of Noah. It gives the following account of the misdeeds of men and angels that brought on the great flood: God's creation having been successfully established, certain of the Heavenly Watchers, among them the angel Azazel, began to lust after the beautiful daughters of mortal men. Binding themselves with an oath to their proposed venture, they came to earth together with their leader Semjazel, and each of them took to himself a mate. Once on earth, they also began to disseminate their heavenly knowledge in various fields (astrology, metallurgy), knowledge that had previously been forbidden to men. … We have here more than enough, it seems, to identify Azazello with the fallen angel Azazel. Not only is Azazello associated with weapons through his gun with which he kills the Baron and later wins the shooting match, but it is he who gives Margarita the cream with the power to beautify women and bewitch men.* (Weeks 1984: 237–238)

BEHEMOTH

In the novel Behemoth is described as three forms: a cat, a human, and a demon:

> … *a cat the* ***size of a pig***, ***black as soot*** *and with luxuriant cavalry officers' whiskers … the cat trotting along on its hind legs.* (p. 52)

> … ***black cat of revolting proportions*** *… a glass of vodka in one paw and a fork, on which he had just speared a pickled mushroom, in the other.* (p. 90)

> … *a shortish, fat creature with what seemed like* ***the face of a cat.*** (p. 124)

> *The creature who had been the pet of the prince of darkness was revealed as a slim youth, a* ***page-demon***, ***the greatest jester that there has ever been.*** (p. 427)

On the one hand, in North America and Europe cats have been associated with forces of darkness for a very long time and in different cultures cats are considered to be witches' assistants. Cats, especially the black ones, are believed to bring bad luck.

On the other hand, there also exist cultures where cats have been worshipped as positive creatures, such as in Egypt, where the sun-god Ra had a cat who defended him. Ra's daughter Bastet was also a cat goddess.

Thirdly, there are very common beliefs about people who are able to transform into animals and vice versa, such as werewolves and others.

The relationship with the forces of darkness as well as the ability to transform into human form are also characteristics of M. Bulgakov's Behemoth. But what is the possible Oriental origin of this character?

Most likely, Bulgakov was particularly inspired by Mikhail Orlov's *Istoriia snoshenii cheloveka s d'iavolom* (The History of the Relation of Man with the Devil, 1904), where the demon Behemoth (also one of the fallen angels) is mentioned and described as a monster with an elephant head, tusks and trunk, enormous belly, short tail, big hind legs and human hands (Orlov 1991: 158; see also BE). Bulgakov was probably also inspired by the books of Genesis, Job, and Enoch.

Laura D. Weeks associates Behemoth in particular with Judaism (Old Testament), according to which Behemoth was created together with Leviathan on the 5th day and was the greatest land creature of all times (the largest sea monster was Leviathan). Behemoth appears both in Genesis and in the Book

of Enoch (Weeks 1984: 237), and is also mentioned in the Book of Job (40: 15–24). There is no consensus among researchers about this appearance; some are convinced that it refers to the hippopotamus, and others that it could have been an elephant.

Bernard Batto suggests that *Běhēmôt* is an intense (female) plural form of the word *Běhēmâ* (Batto 1999 [1995]: 165), meaning 'beast', 'ox',[8] or 'cattle'. Behemoth's Ancient Near Eastern origins have also been discussed, but there is no solid evidence of that, so we cannot state 100% that it was "borrowed" from the Ancient Near East.

There is also the theory that *Běhēmôt* could be derived from the ancient Egyptian word **p'-iḥ-hw* 'the ox of the water'. Batto (1999 [1995]: 166) has stated that although it is now known that such a term was not found in Egyptian or Coptic, Behemoth is still firmly related to the hippopotamus.[9]

ABADONNA (ABADDON)[10]

Abadonna is one of the most mysterious characters in the novel and he is described in only a few words:

> *He is **utterly impartial and is equally sympathetic** to the people fighting on either side.* (p. 291)

> *… from the wall appeared the figure of **a man wearing dark glasses**.* (p. 292)

Altogether Abadonna appears only three times: once at Woland's apartment when Woland shows Margarita a globe; and twice during the ball scene when he appears, accompanied by a group of unnamed youths, and later helps to kill Baron Maigel.

His name refers to another ancient demon, Abaddon, the demon of abyss and destruction, who appears repeatedly in the Old Testament (Job 26: 6; Job 28:22; Job 31:12; Psalms 88:11; Proverbs 15:11; Proverbs 27:20). In Hebrew his name means "destruction" or "the place of destruction". In Revelation 9:11, however, the word "Abaddon" is used as the name of "the angel of the abyss" (Watchtower Online Library).

Although Abaddon appears in the Bible, there is no evidence that he could have even more ancient origins. Manfred Hutter explains it as follows: "Though the religions of the ancient Near East know a considerable number of deities

and demons relating to the netherworld, there occurs no divine name of such a being which can be derived from the root *'BD*" (Hutter 1999a [1995]: 1).

Nevertheless, it has been established that Abaddon is the Hebrew name for the Greek Apollyon, the angel of the bottomless pit, the "destroyer".

CONCLUSION

In the article we have tried to show the possible Ancient Near Eastern origins for the characters of Mikhail Bulgakov's most famous novel, *The Master and Margarita*. Although there is no concrete evidence proving that Bulgakov read solid scientific literature about Ancient Near Eastern deities and demons published in Russia or abroad, he was most probably familiar with popular scientific papers on these topics as this idea has been suggested by several different scholars. Here we emphasize two important clues. Firstly, his father was an associate professor of theological studies in Kiev and was most probably very familiar with the Bible, Hebrew, the Old Greek and Aramaic languages, and demonology. This could easily have had an impact on the future writer's understandings and interests. Secondly, Bulgakov's very close friend Anna Akhmatova was married to Voldemar (Vladimir) Shileiko, a famous Russian Assyriologist and poet. Although there is no evidence that Bulgakov and Shileiko ever corresponded or met in person, Bulgakov could have been familiar with Shileiko's works directly or through Akhmatova.

While there is no doubt about Azazello and Behemoth's Ancient Near Eastern origins (the only question being whether they are originally biblical demons or have some other Ancient Near Eastern background, e.g., Syrian, Aramaic, Phoenician, Ugaritic, etc.), in Hella's case there are many different theories about her possible prototypes in Roman, Greek, and Ancient Near Eastern mythologies and religions. We have presented some of the strongest hypotheses and tried to trace back to the most ancient sources where Hella or similar demons were mentioned – in Sumerian and Akkadian texts. We cannot be sure that, when writing his novel, Bulgakov had Hella's possible Sumero-Akkadian origin in mind, but as we have shown in our study, it does seem that Bulgakov's novel character is very similar to Mesopotamian *lilītu* and *galla/gallu* demons who were often depicted as succubi or another type of female (but not always) demon connected to the netherworld and the undead (vampires).

All in all, Bulgakov's great interest in and love of the Orient (especially the Ancient Near East) can clearly be seen in his novel, offering the reader a great deal of joy of discovery, as well as the opportunity to do a little detective work to discover the origins of these supernatural characters.

NOTES

[1] We would like to express our gratitude to professor Dr Vladimir V. Emelianov since he first drew our attention to the fact that there could be a connection between M. Bulgakov's Hella (Gella) and Akkadian *Gallu* demons. We were inspired to write this article because of Vladimir Emelianov's Facebook post (ОТКУДА ВЗЯЛАСЬ БУЛГАКОВСКАЯ ГЕЛЛА?) from 6.10.2018, https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=%D0%B3%D0%B5%D0% BB%D0%BB%D0%B0%20&epa=SEARCH_BOX (last visited 11 March 2020). V. V. Emelianov is a professor (Assyriologist) at St. Petersburg State University. He has also researched the reception of Ancient Near Eastern legacy in Russian literature. In addition, we are very thankful to Professor Gebhard J. Selz, Dr Sebastian Fink, Dr Mait Kõiv and anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and remarks about our article that helped us improve it significantly.

[2] About the history of the Estonian translations of this novel see Kupp-Sazonov 2017: 224–225.

[3] This point of view was also presented by Professor V. V. Emelianov in private scientific online discussion with V. Sazonov on 30 April 2020.

[4] In the earlier versions of *The Master and Margarita* she was called Marta (Aramaic name). For more on her possible prototype see *The Master and Margarita*.

[5] Hereinafter our emphases.

[6] Later the reader finds out that because of this kiss Varenukha turned into a vampire. In the miniseries *The Master and Margarita* (2005) Hella is very clearly depicted as a vampire and her "kiss" on Varenukha's neck emphasizes it even more.

[7] For some other suggested theories about Hella's origin see Razumovskaia 2012: 225.

[8] It could be that *Běhēmâ* means a water buffalo.

[9] The Russian word *бегемот* also means 'hippopotamus'. In Russian and Estonian versions Anna Richardovna, Prokhor Petrovich's secretary, described Behemoth as a tomcat, black, a colossus like a hippopotamus. In M. Glenny's translation she says: "A great black animal as big as Behemoth" (p. 211).

[10] Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita* is not the first occasion when Abadonna is mentioned in Russian literature. Vasily Zhukovsky wrote a poem "Abbadona" in 1814. In his interpretation Abaddon was once a seraph but he lost his divine position (Zhukovsky 1814). Furthermore, in 1840 Nikolay Polevoy wrote the novel *Abadonna*.

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