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# THE DISPUTE OF SPIRITUAL BEINGS FOR MOSES BODY IN THE BIBLICAL TEXT AND PAINTINGS

Ilie Melniciuc Puică\*

*University 'Al. I. Cuza', Faculty of Orthodox Theology, 9 Closca, 700065 Iasi,  
Romania*

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## Abstract

Canonical text of Jude verse 9, with background in Jewish pseudepigraphical writings, shows the dispute for Moses body between the Archangel Michael and devil. Painters pointed in their moralizations artefacts the fate of deathly Christians, under the dispute between good and evil. The implicit Archangel' recognition of God sovereign judgment calls to respect the memory of ancestors and their burial place. Michael's wise attitude, attested by this canonical epistle, became a paradigm from pious leaders, on relation with peoples and Church. Under Church observance Bible and religious painting could educate their believers in moral and aesthetic fields.

*Keywords:* pseudepigraphical writing, Moses body, archangel, tomb, Sucevita monastery

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## 1. Introduction

In the Jewish and Christian traditions, we find, next to a canonical Bible text, a 'deutero-canonical' literature (or 'apocryphal') and pseudepigrapha, who 'rewrite' biblical traditions. The phenomenon of rewriting could reflect the very high fluidity of traditions 'scriptural' collected by the communities at that time. Jude's epistle, ascribed in New Testament canon, raise many questions about the Jewish non-canonical background. Even Church recognizes his moral value from Orthodox perspective and doctrine. In 25 verses, ideas and texts from presudepigraphical 1 Enoch and Assumption of Moses are mixed with moral exhortations.

## 2. Canonical text of Jude reflected in picture

The last epistle of New Testament, included in the universal epistles, is Jude. Written in the latter years of the first century, with many suspicions about its apostolic and Christian authority, was included in Eusebius list (Ecclesiastical History 3.25.3) as a 'disputed' (antilegomena) letter, until the Council of

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\*E-mail: bradeail@gmail.com

Laodicea (360), when was included in canonical books and aloud to be read in churches (Canon 59-60).

Being a short epistle (only 25 verses), with similarities background with 2 Peter, Jude epistle is treated by scholars as a re-write message. The message is to advertise the Christians believers from ideological danger of the intruders who 'pervert the grace of God into licentiousness and deny our only master and Lord, Jesus Christ' (v. 4). The intruders show disrespect for the 'holy' by the way they talk about (heavenly) authority and angels.

If 2 Peter expose four events which attest the punishment of God against disobedient infidels (punishing angels, rescuing Noah's flood, Sodom and Gomorrah burning and salvation of Lot), the Epistle Jude in verses 5-7 lists only three events: the punishment of the Jews in the wilderness, the fall of the angels and the collapse of the Dead Sea valley cities as admonition against intruders. Jude illustrates this by showing that Jesus destroyed the unbelievers in the wilderness (Numbers 14.29-37), the angels who did not keep their charge (Genesis 6.1-4 as expanded in 1 Enoch), and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19.4-25).

In this spiritual state, confusing heretics are the appropriate offenders: defile body, practicing sin of Sodomites, deny authority, i.e. the person of Jesus Christ - absolute master of Christians (v. 4), because this authority imposes crucifixion of body and pleasures. Heavenly powers – the good angels - help people toward salvation from sin and shun them of bad defend them [1].

Michael (which is translated from Hebrew: 'who is like God', i.e. in the sense that nobody is equal to Him) the archangel (called with this function only here) is one of the captains of angelic powers and patron of the Israel nation. The New Testament remembers his name again, in Revelation 12.7, where it appeared that fight, helped by angels, against the dragon.

According Jude v. 9 the dispute between Michael and devil consists in an interchange of speech in order to convince. When devil in a malicious way tries to accuse and judge, using blasphemy, the angel of the Lord replies to the charges of Satan: 'LORD rebukes you' (Jude v. 9). The words appear only in Zechariah 3.1-2, when the slander is charged by the angel for the body of Joshua: "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, 'The LORD rebukes you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebukes you!'"

Michael would not take the law into his own hands as the apostate false teachers were doing in Jude v. 9 [2]. This vision, recorded in prophetic manner by Zechariah, reminds us about the angel of the LORD and Satan, standing at his right side. The high priest Joshua, as religious leader after the return from the Babylonian captivity, must be confirmed in his sacerdotal dignity. LORD's word and the change of fine garments that replaced filthy clothes present His choice in cleansing the religious leader. It seems to have a re-write tradition in Jude epistle, Joshua been replaced with Moses, the living man with the death man, the message of LORD with Michael's warning.

Jude directly quotes 1 Enoch 1.9 in verse 14 to stress the certainty of judgment: “And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of His holy ones / To execute judgement upon all, / And to destroy all the ungodly: / And to convict all flesh / Of all the works of their ungodliness which they have ungodly committed, / And of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” [3]

### **2.1. The background of canonical New Testament text of Jude verse 9**

This reference to Michael word was said by Origen (*De Principiis* III.2.1) and Gelasius of Cyzicus (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.21.17) to be founded on a Jewish work called ‘The Assumption of Moses’ (As. Mos.), the first part of which was lately found in an old Latin translation at Milan [4]. “Since Jude v. 9 contains a passage which corresponds almost word for word to Gelasius’ quotation concerning the quarrel between Michael and the devil, it can safely be assumed that Jude v. 9, too, goes back to the lost ending of As. Mos.” [5]

The Christian comments about Jude v. 9 or Deuteronomy 34.6 often treat the dispute between good and evils spirits concerning better the soul and less body of Moses, even the Greek term *soma* is cited in Jude v. 9. This conception is based on Judaeo-Christian belief that on death the soul ascends in Heaven and the body must buried [6].

Because Moses mediates the divine mercy for Israelites’ sin of disobedience at the waters of Meribah Kadesh (Numbers 20.12, Deuteronomy 32.51) God doesn’t allowed him to enter in the Promised Land. Scholars have suggested that God buried Moses secretly and without a grave marker to prevent the grave from becoming a shrine or a place of worship [7].

Deuteronomy records Moses’ death and explains that God was in charge of the funeral arrangements and burial, but makes no mention of Michael’s dispute with Satan. The burial customs specified in Jude v. 9 make confusion with Joshua cleansing affirmed in Zechariah 3.1, but there is nothing there about Moses’ body, or Michael, or a dispute about the body. Others scholars, are confused by a rabbinical comment on Deuteronomy 34.6, where Michael is said to have been made guardian of Moses’ grave.

According to Deuteronomy 32.49-50 God announced Moses that he was to die at Mount Nebo. Even Deuteronomy 34.5-6 reminds us: “So Moses the servant of the LORD died there, in the land of Moab, at the command of the LORD. He was buried in the valley in the land of Moab, near Beth-peor; but no one knows his burial place till this day yet his burial took place in the valley of Beth-peor.” It is not surprising that God was involved directly in view of the secrecy surrounding of his burial location, for if humans had buried him, surely someone must have known where.

*Targum (Pseudo-) Jonathan* translates Deuteronomy 34.6 in this manner: “Moses, the servant of the Lord, was gathered in the land of Moab by the kiss of the Word of the Lord”, covering the historicity of sacred text with mystical and celestial overtones. His deathbed has been prepared by the angels (Michael and Gabriel) and a golden deathbed it is, adorned with precious stones.

*Targum Onkelos* from Deuteronomy 34.7 expresses the presence of Samael (the angel of death) who fight with the prophet to yield his soul. Because Moses refuses the messenger, God himself negotiate the place of his soul: in glory near the Throne, as recompense from his faithful leadership.

In Philo or Josephus [8] the angels do not participate at this stage, although there may be a hint in the *As. Mos.*, according to which the ending is famously lost, that the archangel Michael was sent to take care of his corpse (11.7).

*Sifre Deut.* §357 reminds us about the Angel of Death who fails to fetch the soul of Moses because he can't find any trace of Moses, soul or body [9]. In *Pseudo-Philo* God says to Moses: "I will take you from here and lay you down to sleep with your fathers, and I will give you rest in your resting place and bury you in peace. All the angels will mourn over you, and the heavenly hosts will grieve. But nor angel nor man will know your sepulchre in which you will buried." [10]

In Moses' case Jewish pseudoepigraphica emphases, according to a reminder-testament [11], the assumption of the prophet, as of Enoch or Abraham, with soul and body, as a new being or life form.

## 2.2. *Spiritual beings around Moses body*

A synthesis of a defunct respect in Christian world, are linked to the Scripture through a picture, in illuminated manuscripts or in painting artefacts. The canonisation process of Bible text, which ended in 4<sup>th</sup> century AD have adopted apocryphal writings from the Second Temple Judaism. Searching a guide for canonical picture, as will be 'Hermeneia' of Dionisie from Furna, the painters have oscillated between biblical scene and original representations. Three samples of pictorial art are discussed below.

### 2.2.1. *Bibles moralisées*

The first part of *Bibles moralisées* (cca. 1233), kept in Oxford Bodleian Library (Bodley 270b), preserve on fol. 93v the cycle of stories about Moses acts described in Deuteronomy. In the illuminated manuscript folio, on top right medallion is depicted the dormition of Moses. Three angels deposed his body in tomb, under the vigilant God's survey and blessing [[http://warburg.sas.ac.uk/vpc/VPC\\_search/mirror\\_subcats.php?cat\\_1=14&cat\\_2=53&cat\\_3=112&cat\\_4=3405&cat\\_5=3117&p=1](http://warburg.sas.ac.uk/vpc/VPC_search/mirror_subcats.php?cat_1=14&cat_2=53&cat_3=112&cat_4=3405&cat_5=3117&p=1)].

### 2.2.2. *Russian icon Michael the Archangel and biblical scenes*

In the Russian icon *Michael the Archangel and biblical scenes* (c. 1410), [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archangel\\_Michael\\_in\\_Christian\\_art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archangel_Michael_in_Christian_art)] on top right is represented the scene of dispute for Moses body. This biblical cycle dedicated to Michael surprises by one moment of dispute with the devil: the admonition

from Jude v. 9 who represents the spiritual forces in front, with Moses body in the middle of the scene. Michael has coloured garments; the devil spirit is represented in black colour.

### *2.2.3. Michael dispute for Moses body on Sucevita monastery*

The dispute of Archangel Michael with the devil for Moses' body is depicted in Humor and Sucevita burial chamber (Figure1). The painting from the tomb chamber of Sucevita monastery traces the biblical account described in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy books, although the painter doesn't show literally the scenes of Pentateuch. The existence of a collection of biographical texts for the major biblical figures (Abraham, Moses, Elijah) may be the answer to the freedom of painter's details or the avoidance of certain scenes from the canonical sequence of events.



**Figure 1.** Michael dispute for Moses body: (a) on the chamber tomb of Sucevita monastery, (b) on the exonarthex of Sucevita monastery

Among the 41 scenes from the life cycle of Moses, we find some that are strung from other sources than the Bible. Thus, there is the scene of 'Joshua son of Nun finding Moses dead', reflecting the Numbers 34.5 interpolated text; at 'The Israelites complained to Moses' whose incipit is for Deuteronomy 34.8, we found a deviation from the canonical text. The scene of 'the fight with the devil on Moses' body' has a damaged inscription, with damaged text, hard to decipher it [12].

In the Romanian edition of Dyonisius' *Hermeneia*, at the image 62 of the Old Testament is written: "The prophet Moses dead lying face up on a hill; and the devil (is) bent over his feet, and the archangel Michael (standing) almost next to his head, with his hands out to the devil, who fight with the sword" [13].

In the dispute between Satan and the archangel Michael regarding the burial of the body of Moses, the latter did not personally reject the devil's malicious slander. Whatever is the reason for the dispute, Satan lost the battle. The dispute expressed in Jude v. 9 word 'the Lord rebuke thee' are verbal aspects, symbolized in Sucevita painting by Michael spear used with the right hand against the devil situated on Moses foot (Figure 1a). The sword is stuck in the top left side of the devil, as it would have pierced the heart.

Moses tomb, situated between two mountains, is visited by five devil spirits, without garments. Only phylacteries on forehead reveal the death men religion. Moses has a quiet full face, a golden halo across his head and folded hands over a red garment. Moses name is inscribed in Heaven, on stars place. The devils, in their five stages of age (kneeling boy, standing up boy with wings, in middle age without wings, as mature with wings at Moses head and as old men with wings and elongate beard) touch the materiality of illustrious dead.

The second picture from Sucevita monastery, with Michael's fight for Moses body (Figure 1b), is located in the exonarthex or interior porch. The painter presents two great spiritual beings, each carrying as a symbol a stick (or rod) on their hand and with the other hand expressing what they think. Michael turns contrite warning index finger, while the devil asks with the whole open hand what he thinks he deserves. Archangel is dressed in red-blue transparent garments, and the devil is stripped. Moses body is wrapped in a white shroud (compared to the image of the burial chamber where is wearing a royal red Byzantine garb). The confusion of Deuteronomy 32-34 biblical text is reconciled by the appearance of the mountains in the background, and trees that grow rather on valley around the three characters. The colour scenes alternate: yellow-orange around the Archangel and green as a corpse in devil side. Archangel's face is clearly delineated by the yellow aura. Moses' face cannot be described, though it is surrounded by a luminous aura. The face of the devil's head, compared with the second face from the thoracic area, has also beard and two white horns like a goat.

Modern representations concerning Moses' death body may also be found [<http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2015/09/the-holy-prophet-and-lawgiver-moses-god.html>]. The dispute between the spiritual beings is located outside the Earth. Michael is the messenger of the light, against the darkness of devil. The

celestial warrior put his left hand on devil's heart, expressing the arguing message through the *forehead*. Michael and Moses have yellow aura around their head, but the devil has a red halo. In the luminous sphere can live only the righteous, so the devil rests in the dark dimension.

“Under eastern Orthodox or Catholic influence, the princes and boyars of Moldavia and their families would benefit from the right to be buried in the church as a consequence of patronage. This highlights Michael's role in funerary iconography, while the issue of salvation, intercession and responsibility is also represented.” [14] Any slander brought against the faithful dead, such as the challenge posed by Satan against Israel's great leader, is seen by Jude as a challenge to God's honour. Jeremia Movila, the founder of Sucevita Monastery, on tomb stone from the burial chamber has the text of this message in Slavonic: “This tombstone was made embellished by the lord Gabriel, former stolnic for the deceased, just and pious, loving Christ, our Io Jeremia Movila Voevode prince, by the grace of God, lord of the land of Moldova. May his memory be eternal and have a happy rest. In the year 7114 (1606) on June 30.”

The Supreme Judge is present as the one who protects the good name of the faithful, in life and in death. The righteous at least continue to exist post-mortem by means of their good name [15]. Jude's readers are thus assured that God protects the integrity of the faithful dead.

The conclusion of Moses life cycle, as perfection through virtue, can be also the conclusion from Sucevita cycle: “made us afraid of one thing: the fall from the friendship with God” [16].

### **3. Conclusion**

The admonition from Jude v. 9, in Church moral interpretation, became a source to keep the god name and pious remember of deceased. Michael's message against devil, recorded in As. Mos. and canonized in Jude v. 9, is advertising on careful evaluation of moral and social acts, because only God can't mistake in His judgment. Valorising Moses life cycle, the text of Deuteronomy 34 was re-written and re-signified, in a rabbinic tradition and ecclesiastical manner. The biblical message about Michael's dispute for Moses body is expressed in few Christian pictures. On Sucevita monastery two representations of this dispute reveal the dignity of the founder prince of the monastery in the first stage, and secondly the obedient worship of Michael to realize God's plan. In these five special scenes it was showed that the believer man lives after death in spiritual sense, only in relation with God. Also it is necessary to keep care of the dead human body, as recipient of collective memory and representative of the person.

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