The Problem of Magic and Monotheism in the Book of Leviticus

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Abstract

The article deals with some of the theses advanced in Mary Douglas's later works (In the Wilderness, Leviticus as Literature, and Jacob's Tears), and in particular with her claim that magic and divination were outlawed in the priestly conceptions of the reformed religion of Israel. Her position here relates to her basic thesis that the priestly writings promoted a renewed religion more abstract, more orderly, and more fully theorized than the religions in the Israelite ancient Near Eastern environment. I show that the transformation of Israelite religion in the exilic-post-exilic period was less radical and that the concept of monotheism had no effect on certain ritual practices that could be considered magic, because their concept was in essence theistic.
The book of Leviticus itself does not deal with magic explicitly, except for Lev 19:26, which belongs to the later H source, which reworks and often radicalizes priestly regulations. The condemnation of magic in other priestly and exilic/early postexilic writings is—of course—not as clear as scholarship in the last century thought it was. 17 Douglas, In the Wilderness, 33. The problem of magic and monotheism in Leviticus. God relationship while the ašipu from his year-long specialist education standing in a tradition centuries-old. What they are actually doing—praying, performing ritual acts, and the like—is basically the same: They anticipate a divine intervention. Monotheism: Monotheism, belief in the existence of one god, or in the oneness of God. As such, it is distinguished from polytheism, the belief in the existence of many gods, and from atheism, the belief that there is no god. Monotheism characterizes the traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and. The choice of either monotheism or polytheism, however, leads to problems, because neither can give a satisfactory answer to all questions that may reasonably be put.