

The Incubus - Are the Myths True?

The incubus is a rather interesting character speculated throughout and beyond ancient history by various different cultures and religions. Of the diverse stories and variations on this creature, they all follow at least one general progression of coinciding agreements: The incubus is a “night demon” that assumes a male form in order to lie with women as they sleep and undergo sexual activity with them. However, as mentioned before, each regional variation tells of a slightly distinct story, and only after a detailed historical investigation and comparative study of these differences can we draw the conclusion that, ultimately, it is unlikely that any of these myths are truthfully legitimate.

One of the earliest mentions of the confrontingly twisted demon comes from ancient Mesopotamian culture. More specifically, the incubus is mentioned in the Sumerian King List, which lists the kings of Sumer all the way back to the Bronze Age, in the form of Lilu. Lilu is listed as “the hero Gilgamesh’s father, [who] disturbs and seduces women in their sleep,”¹ and though this is a translation from the Sumerian language into English, the mention of his existence (regardless of whether it was in reality or only in mythology) is nonetheless indisputable. Additionally, the Sumerian King List also speaks of Lilitu, the female counterpart of Gilgamesh’s father--much like the succubus--and, as historian Botha states, “corresponding demons, [Ardat lili and Irdu lili], appear as well.”² However, an interesting speculation was made by historian Holloway, who states that this artefact

¹ Vincente (2001). The Sumerian king list: translation. [online] Etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk. Available at: <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section2/tr211.htm> [Accessed 9 Jul. 2017].

² Botha, P. (2012). Demonology: Demons & Devils: Spiritual Warfare.

is known for its peculiar “blend of mythical pre-dynastic rulers with historical rulers who are known to have existed.”³ This argues the point that, although the Sumerian King List is a highly regarded piece of evidence in potentially proving the legitimacy of the incubus, the co-existence of real and mythical figures within the text ultimately compromise just how truthful the story could be. Perhaps, it even becomes less of a reliable source of truth and, as historian Marchesi argues, the artefact (or at least aspects of it) was simply fabricated to be “fundamentally political” and abide to the cultural beliefs at the time⁴. The Mesopotamian take on the incubus legend also includes the variation that the demons are able to reproduce through the humans that they engage in sexual activity with. As a result, a breed of deities called Annunaki is created. Though these creatures were widely regarded in ancient Mesopotamian times to be the only “truth,” historian Sánchez argues that those who try to prove the existence of Annunaki and, by extension, that of the incubus, are simply buying into “alternative archaeology.” That is, those that followed these theories of the Annunaki with no basis have only a “strong belief that made them argue with a discourse full of misconceptions.”⁵ As a result, we can conclude that existence of the incubi, at least in the way that the ancient Mesopotamians understood it, is ultimately not legitimate.

The legend of the incubi lived across land, time and religion, and of the arguably most well-known of the latter is the epic chronicle of the Bible. The incubus is not explicitly

³ Holloway, H. (2009). The Sumerian King List still puzzles historians. [online] Ancient Origins. Available at: <http://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends-asia/sumerian-king-list-still-puzzles-historians> [Accessed 9 Jul. 2017].

⁴ Marchesi, G. (2016). The Sumerian King List or the ‘History’ of Kingship in Early Mesopotamia. [online] The ASOR Blog. Available at: <http://asorblog.org/2016/11/01/sumerian-king-list-history-kingship-early-mesopotamia/> [Accessed 9 Jul. 2017].

⁵ Almansa Sánchez, J. (2012). No news is better than evil news. Clearing up the way to face Alternative Archaeologies. AP: Online Journal in Public Archaeology, [online] 2, p.122. Available at: <http://revistas.jasarqueologia.es/index.php/APJournal/article/view/17/18>.

referred to in the book specifically by that name, but many believe that it is rather embodied through various demonic spirits that are closely associated with a euphemised lust of the night. That is, the Book of Genesis particularly speaks of the “sons of God” and “daughters of men” (in laymen’s terms, demons and human women) whose offspring are called the Nephilim, a race of giants that may very well be the Christian equivalent of the ancient Mesopotamian Annunaki.⁶ The existence of the Bible’s variation of the incubi, as well as the legitimacy of the Bible’s events themselves, has been long argued from both ends of the spectrum. Prolific author Steve Ramsey claims that they do, in fact, exist, stating that “the encounters that people share about sex demons are actual experiences, as opposed to schizophrenic episodes which is how doctors try de-validating these experiences.”⁷ However, this source’s reliability and, consequently, its usefulness, becomes immediately questionable due to the fact that the composer follows the Christian faith themselves, and thus is ultimately biased in providing a purely historical insight into the legitimacy of the incubus legend. Similarly, this can also be said about historian Shepherd, who argues for the existence of the incubus and its manifestation in the Bible by stating that “medieval times and folklores should be forgotten, for these demons are real.”⁸ Though the issue of objectivity does not necessarily always result in a less valuable opinion, their religious affiliation to Christianity, especially due to its prominence in society even today, could potentially interfere with how trustworthy this source is. As a result, we can conclude that those

⁶ Biblia. (2017). Genesis 6:1–4. [online] Available at: <https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ge6.1-4> [Accessed 13 Jul. 2017].

⁷ Ramsey, Steve. "Incubus And Succubus – Daemons And Ghosts Of The Night, Paranormal Zone, The Haunting Dimensions- PZHD." Paranormal Zone, The Haunting Dimensions- PZHD. N.p., 2016. Web. 24 July 2017.

⁸ Shepherd, E. (2008). INCUBUS AND SUCCUBUS. [online] Spreadhisword.org. Available at: <http://www.spreadhisword.org/jil/incubus.htm> [Accessed 13 Jul. 2017].

who claim that the incubus, or at least in the way that the Bible interprets it, is real often come from a place of religious bias, instead of arguing it from a historical perspective. However, this is not always the case. Professor Richmond states that the legend of the incubus as it exists in the Bible is true, only to a smaller extent than most believe it to be. Allegedly, modern science's attribution of this possibly supernatural phenomenon to explanations such as sleep paralysis are legitimate, but do not "offer any insight into the symbolic meaning of such an experience."⁹ This questioning challenges the idea that the Christian take on the incubus is either completely legitimate or false. Instead, it suggests that the truth lies somewhere on a more vague spectrum--though there may very well be a scientific reason for people's "encounters" with such demonic figures, the Bible is still correct in offering a more figurative solution. On the more extreme side of those who argue against the existence of the incubi as told in the holy text, historian Lazarus-Yafeh mentions that ancient polymath Ibn Hazm "set out to prove [chronological inaccuracies from the Book of Genesis],"¹⁰ thus putting into question the events that occur within the text themselves. Altogether, such evidence coming from both narrow primary and broader secondary sources largely shows that, though the Christian interpretation of the story of the incubus may still be insightful for a person who has come into contact with the "demon" holistically, it is generally not legitimate and can be explained scientifically.

German folklore has, since the beginning of time, often been regarded as one of the most intricate aspects of human culture. After all, many of its epic "fairy-tales" have not

⁹ Richmond, R. (2011). Dream of feeling smothered and paralyzed : Incubus dream. [online] Chastitysf.com. Available at: http://www.chastitysf.com/q_smothered.htm [Accessed 15 Jul. 2017].

¹⁰ Lazarus-Yafeh, H. (1992). Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism.

only persisted through to even modern times, but some even go as far as arguing that, through these stories have been “distorted and embellished further over the centuries by regional re-tellings, they are occasionally grounded in forgotten and known historical figures, events, and places.”¹¹ Its wide variety of mythical creatures and legends have no doubt influenced our perceptions of the supernatural even today, thus its take on the legend of the incubus is another prominent variation that we must consider to more extensively comprehend the legitimacy of the demon. Ancient German folklore have attributed the apparent encounters with the incubus to the Alp, a vampire-like spirit that torment people’s dreams. More specifically, this variation of the legend is said to be bred from the tomb of a recently deceased person, as well as being able to take the form of several rabid, beast-like animals.¹² It is also said to drain blood from the breasts of women or the nipples of men and children, absorbing the life force of the individual.¹³ Surprisingly, of the many variations of the incubus that have been circulating the world since ancient times, the story of the alp appears to be regarded as the most legitimate. Many sources allude to the idea that the German take on the legend, though not all of its specific details, could very well be true. In an expedition to the Waldviertel region of Austria in search of the alp, Finnish archaeologist Mäkinen claims that, in a photograph taken by them, the night demon is clearly pictured as it takes the form of a winged creature.¹⁴ In addition to this source of information which argues the alp’s existence, it has been stated that “extensive research shows that the Alp is a distant relative to the

¹¹ Hammock. "Do All Famous Fairy Tales Contain An Element Of Truth? - Philosophy Now Forum." Forum.philosophynow.org. N.p., 2014. Web. 19 July 2017.

¹² Ford, Michael W. Book Of The Witch Moon. London: Succubus Pub., 2006. Print.

¹³ Guiley, Rosemary. The Encyclopedia Of Demons And Demonology. New York: Facts On File, 2009. Print.

¹⁴ Mäkinen, T. (2011). The Alp. [online] Thefinnishhunter.blogspot.com.au. Available at: <http://thefinnishhunter.blogspot.com.au/2011/08/alp.html?m=1> [Accessed 21 Jul. 2017].

flying fox.”¹⁵ In this statement, it can be concluded that not only do many people believe that the alp lives in our world beyond ancient myths, but that its existence can be linked to a very real animal. It also expands on the variations within the variations of the legend of the incubus, as different sources will inevitably lead to different perspectives on the matter. On the other hand, it has also been argued that the specifics of this ancient myth, specifically in which they are “blood-sucking vampires, [...] has never been proved.”¹⁶ On surface level, the large amount of evidence that exists under these claims may persuade many into believing that the incubus and, more precisely, the ancient German folklore’s take on it is legitimate. However, a more detailed investigation into this will expose the fact that cultural influences and bias have led these opinions to become less factually or historically accurate and more fabricated on the basis of popular belief and hype. Some sources argue that the alp was nothing more than a strange manifestation of the mythical dwarf king Alberich from the Teutonic epic poem *Nibelungenlied*.¹⁷ As the rumour of such a creature’s existence began garnering more attention, people at the time would “join the bandwagon,” so to speak, and fuel their popular culture by adding more variations to the original story. In addition, at the height of this legend’s popularity, women in High Middle German society were oppressed and any sign of their sexuality outside of their marriage and maternal role was not only stigmatised, but punishable by the law.¹⁸ It was indeed a dire situation for many females, and the social repercussions they experienced was, in many cases, just

¹⁵ Lecouteux, Claude. *Encyclopedia Of Norse And Germanic Folklore, Mythology, And Magic*. Paris: N.p., 2002. Print.

¹⁶ Strickler, L. (2013). In Search of the Alp. [online] *Phantomsandmonsters.com*. Available at: <http://www.phantomsandmonsters.com/2011/08/search-for-alp.html?m=1> [Accessed 21 Jul. 2017].

¹⁷ Lurker, M. (1987). *The Routledge Dictionary of Gods, Goddesses, Devils and Demons*. New York: Routledge & Kegan.

¹⁸ Haeberle, E. (1977). *Historical Roots of Sexual Oppression*. New York: Association Press.

as horrific, if not more. Many women who breached this strict code of sexual righteousness would find themselves disowned in fear of bringing shame to the name of the family.¹⁹ Calling on the cultural obsession of the alp in High Middle Germany would, in turn, free women from having to suffer harsh legal and social consequences should they fall pregnant out of wedlock--blaming an invisible and purely mythical creature for sexually assaulting a woman would inevitably take blame off of her shoulders. Consequently, by understanding the pressures that women specifically had to face in the context of the emergence of the story of the alp shows us that, despite claims from sources even from today, it is nothing more than that: a story.

Through a detailed historical investigation that includes the important consideration of the reliability of the sources that exist, it can be concluded that the variations of the incubus studied are ultimately not legitimate. Specifically, the ancient Mesopotamian, biblical and German takes on the legend can, in one way or another, be disproved logically through a combination of examining scholarly evidence and comprehensively understanding how context and culture can play a role in our perspective of what is “real” or not. More generally, claims of encounters with the incubus can be most easily and scientifically summarised as the result of experiencing “a state dissociation in which part of the mental apparatus comes to conscious awareness even as the rest of the brain is in the REM stage of sleep.”²⁰ Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that these stories, regardless of the fact that they are most likely not legitimate, have altered the

¹⁹ Tankard, K. (2010). The Role of Women in the High Middle Ages. [online] Worldhistory.knowledge4africa.com. Available at: <http://www.worldhistory.knowledge4africa.com/medieval/women.jsp> [Accessed 26 Jul. 2017].

²⁰ Cline, J. (2008). Incubus Attack. [online] Psychology Today. Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/sleepless-in-america/200809/incubus-attack> [Accessed 26 Jul. 2017].

way we perceive the supernatural in the modern world. They provide a more intangible, holistic explanation for our experiences and have undoubtedly helped people throughout history come to terms with their often inexplicable unconscious mind. Perhaps, the incubus exists because we believe it so--just because it does not reside in the temporal world does not mean that it is not worthy of being considered "real," if only as a cultural phenomenon.

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Logbook

Week 1 (28/6 - 2/7)

Because this was such a short week, in addition to the fact that it was the end of the term, I really wanted to keep the focus on my investigation rather low-key and subtle. However, I still managed to achieve my goal for the week, which was to settle on a specific topic to research for my essay. This was done ultimately as a result of a rather long process of letting my imagination take me to where it wanted to.

Firstly, after receiving the assessment notification, I considered the checklist given to us, which turned out to be immensely useful. I figured that, though I am interested in all kinds of histories and cultures, I have always found myself drawn specifically to the weird, the supernatural and the unsolved. This ultimately led to a few lessons in which I simply let myself brainstorm any and all ideas I had about mysteries and folklore in the ancient world--which, most likely because of the lack of reliance on science during that time, showed to be rather abundant.

Of course, I did use the internet as a great starting point to trigger this imagination. I started a general search on “folklore in the ancient world,” going to as many articles and websites that I could so that I would at least have a broader perspective on what to do. I let myself stay aware of the fact that conspiracy theories and manufactured “facts” are extremely present throughout the online world (especially in relation to the topic of mythology and mysteries), and they are more often than not rather concealed or not obvious at all. As a result, many of the sources that I came across were generally unreliable, but nonetheless were useful in leading me towards my final decision, the twisted story of the incubus.

What truly intrigued me about this demon is its extremely confronting nature, which fits precisely with my own style and interests. Many would, perhaps, be put off or, at the very least, shocked at the overt and violent sexuality associated with the legend. However, this only made it easier for me to formulate a question surrounding the topic. Why would something so opposed to the traditions of the time exist? Was it to scare people? If yes, then does that mean it is simply a story with no truth to it? I pondered these queries, while also taking into consideration of the variations of the incubus myth I had come across as I searched the internet, and ended up with my final topic of “The Incubus - Are the Myths True?”

There were still many things to consider, such as the reliability and, therefore, usefulness of the sources I would inevitably encounter due to the mysterious nature of the topic, as well as how precisely I would approach the making of the thesis response.

All in all, however, I was faced with barely any problems in achieving my week's goal for this assessment and am extremely happy with my progress thus far. Hopefully, the rest of my project will turn out as smoothly as this week did.

Week 2 (3/7 - 9/7)

This week, I focused mainly on researching the topic, as opposed to simply attempting to answer the question that I had formulated. I chose to do this because I realised that, without fully understanding the different parts of the topic there are to consider, it was impossible for me to create a valuable judgement on the truthfulness behind the myth of the Incubus. By gathering all of the information, however, I would be evaluating all of the knowledge that I had gained and, thus, taking the role of a historian and constructing a well-argued response.

I decided to initiate my research by, firstly, doing a general overview of what different cultures or religions actually mentioned a variation of the Incubus in their myths, so that I could eventually compile a list to follow as I write my response. This would make it much more simple for me to streamline my thesis, as I will be able to constantly refer to which specific myths about the incubus I would be doing a comparative study of. More importantly, it will aid in forming my opinion as to whether or not these variations are legitimate.

However, I did encounter perhaps the beginning of a potentially major problem this week. As I was researching the different legends of the incubus, I quickly came to realise that there were barely any historian articles or perspectives on such a taboo myth, despite its prominence in cultures all across the world. There were, of course, many non-scholarly webpages dedicated to this topic, but these sites made rather general observations about the incubus, rather than providing any valuable insight into anything that would be relevant to me. The sources were, thus, unreliable and, though still needed to some extent in the early stages of conducting my investigation, may prove to be ultimately useless when I am in need of scholarly voices in validating my argument.

Nevertheless, at this point, I am still quite satisfied with the amount of work that I have put in motion this week. I did actually end up completing an introduction for my thesis which, though not extremely strenuous work, will undoubtedly help me focus on the argument at hand, instead of going off on pointless tangents. My tendency to do so is, also, something that I should be aware of as I write my essay, as it could lead to me not forming a strong enough response to the question.

Hopefully, that can be overcome through persistence and determination. I know that this is a topic that I am extremely intrigued by, and as long as I focus on that above all else, I can answer the question efficiently. Ultimately, I am excited for what lies ahead and, perhaps, next week I will work on the actual essay.

Week 3 (10/7 - 16/7)

This week, I did progress rather well through my essay. It was predominantly a result of persistence over ease, but I ended up finishing approximately half of the investigation. As with any major projects like this one, I did encounter some difficulties, but they were not impossible to overcome.

Firstly, something that I found that suited to my working style extremely well was the method of consistent effort. More specifically, I realised that, instead of relying on only a short amount of time (i.e. one day) to dedicate to working on my historical investigation, I worked much better doing only a little bit every day. This may be because I feel as though I am more able to reflect accurately on my work each time I finish a writing or research session. I am able to progress through the essay without being overwhelmed with the new information that I have to process at one time. Instead, I can map out and gauge my development more clearly. This is a method that, hopefully, I will carry with me throughout my investigation (and, perhaps, even beyond this assessment task into other subjects).

However, the problem that I encountered last week of not being able to find reliable, scholarly voices in my essay did show to be a barrier in my creating a strong argument.

For example, one of the variations of the incubus legend I discovered originates from the Bible. Because religion is such a personal, sensitive matter to most people--especially in the world today--many of the articles that I found were obviously excessive in the amount of bias present. There were barely any factual and reliable sources of information. Instead, I simply found many Christians who were absurdly defensive about their religion, or radicalists who completely shunned their holy text and all of its ideals. Thus, I had to make the careful decision to sift through all of the "information" that I found, understand that the composer's intent and personal lives can create a lot of bias in their opinions and gather the general consensus on whether or not the incubus really did exist.

Overall, though this was a rather difficult challenge for me to overcome, I do believe that I handled the situation well. In the end, I was able to produce a strong argument as to why I do not think the incubus exists, without it becoming a personal attack on any specific religion, either. I am satisfied with the amount of work that I put in this week. As a result, I can spend the rest of my in-class lessons working on the essay so that I am ready well before the final submission date.

Week 4 (17/7 - 23/7)

With the return to school, I knew I would not have the same amount of time on my hands to work on my investigation as I did during the holidays. However, I decided that I would use the allocated lessons wisely to finish off what I had already made good progress through and, as of right now, everything has been going rather smoothly.

I have written approximately 1500 words, focusing mainly on exploring the ancient German folklore take on the incubus. It has been easy for me to not only find information and evidence for my argument, but easy for me to enjoy the work that I was doing. This part of the essay in particular, possibly because many people are still looking to prove the existence of certain mythical creatures to this day, was so interesting that I often lost track of time while doing it. Thus, I had to make sure that I was not going on tangents or rambling by continually looking back on what I had written and streamlining my thoughts. That being said, however, I do believe that there is a certain benefit that comes from writing too much and then refining it, rather than not having enough to say about the topic and forcing meaningless words out. As a result, I am rather glad that I am so passionate about the investigation.

A problem that came up this week (or an extension of the main difficulty I uncovered in previous weeks) was that my essay would not have enough “historical” elements to it. While I do completely understand that these concerns are valid, I also hope that I have

been able to twist my research and knowledge in such a way that focuses on analysing the evidence and arguing my answer to the question, rather than just retelling the narrative (although that is inevitable at least to some extent).

Overall, I am, once again, happy with the progress I made this week. As the assignment date approaches, I do begin to feel the stress. At times, I fear that I may have made the investigation a lot more difficult for me to do when I chose such an ambiguous and vague topic. Hopefully, however, I am able to keep in mind that this is something that I am truly interested in and, even if my final results do not appear to reflect that, at least I am able to learn more about a topic that I would not have otherwise.

Week 5 (24/7 - 30/7)

After a gruelling week of chipping away at my historical investigation piece by piece, I have finally finished it! I feel such a sense of relief, but also apprehension towards the possibility that I may have gone about answering my question entirely wrong, or perhaps that my question itself was too broadly worded. Either way, I am proud of myself for working so hard and overcoming the challenges that I faced this week.

Reaching the final thousand words did come rather easily. However, which content that I chose to specifically include was difficult to decide, as I felt there was still so much left to say of the conversation within tight restrictions. After delving into the possible reasons as to why such a strangely confronting legend would have existed in German folklore, I found myself becoming invested into my assignment. In other words, I believe the difficulty this week laid not in being able to write enough words, but writing the right kind of words since I felt like I had so much to say. However, I do think I ended up editing the less important parts out, as the final product appears to be strong and well-argued.

Either way, I am rather proud of myself for what I achieved this week, and over the course of this assignment. I finished early so that I could spend the next few days going over the investigation to pick out certain details that may need reconsideration. However, I do not believe that there is too much to change, since a big part of my writing process involved constantly reflecting on the work I had just done to ensure that my essay was coherent and purely historical, instead of just telling a narrative.