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A TRANSPARENT ILLUSION

*The Dangerous Vision of Water in Hekhalot Mysticism.
A Source-Critical and Tradition-Historical Inquiry*

BY

C.R.A. MORRAY-JONES



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For Ellen,
האדר חייה

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>AdRN(A)</i>	<i>'Abot de-Rabbi Nathan</i> , version A
<i>AdRN(B)</i>	<i>'Abot de-Rabbi Nathan</i> , version B
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AJS	Association for Jewish Studies
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
AOS	American Oriental Series
<i>APOT</i>	<i>The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament</i> , ed. R. H. CHARLES
ArBib	The Aramaic Bible
<i>ARW</i>	<i>Archiv für Religionswissenschaft</i>
AV	Bible, Authorized Version
BAG	BAUER, ARNDT and GINGRICH, eds., <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
BDB	BROWN, DRIVER and BRIGGS, eds., <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums
<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BSJS	Brill's Series in Jewish Studies
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZNW	Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CFTL	Clark's Foreign Theological Library
CGL	The Coptic Gnostic Library
CSHJ	Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism
D	ms. Dropsie 436 (in SCHÄFER, <i>Synopse</i>)
DAWBIO	Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin Institut für Orientforschung
<i>EJ</i>	<i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i>
<i>FJB</i>	<i>Frankfurter judaistische Beiträge</i>
FJS	Frankfurter judaistische Studien
HBS	Herders biblische Studien
<i>HR</i>	<i>Hekhalot Rabbati</i>
<i>HS</i>	SCHÄFER, <i>Hekhalot-Studien</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>

<i>HZ</i>	<i>Hekhalot Zutarti</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IOS</i>	<i>Israel Oriental Studies</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JJTP</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period</i>
<i>JSJT</i>	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought</i>
JSJTSup	Supplements to <i>Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought</i>
JSNTSup	Supplements to <i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Supplements to <i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSQ</i>	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LLJC	Littman Library of Jewish Civilization
LSJ	LIDELL, SCOTT and JONES, eds., <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i>
M22	ms. Munich 22 (in SCHÄFER, <i>Synopse</i>)
M40	ms. Munich 40 (in SCHÄFER, <i>Synopse</i>)
<i>MGWJ</i>	<i>Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums</i>
<i>MM</i>	<i>Ma'aseh Merkabah</i>
<i>MR</i>	<i>Merkabah Rabbah</i>
MT	Massoretic Text
N	ms. New York 8128 (in SCHÄFER, <i>Synopse</i>)
NAB	New American Bible
NCB	New Century Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NHC	Nag Hammadi Codex
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
NovTSup	Supplements to <i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
O	ms. Oxford 1531 (in SCHÄFER, <i>Synopse</i>)
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTM	Old Testament Message
<i>OTP</i>	<i>The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> , ed. JAMES H. CHARLESWORTH
<i>PdRE</i>	<i>Pirquei de Rabbi Eliezer</i>
PSS	Publicazioni del Seminario di semistica
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
PVTG	Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>REJ</i>	<i>Revue des études juives</i>
RGVV	Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten
<i>RHR</i>	<i>Revue de l'histoire des religions</i>

<i>RQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
RSV	Bible, Revised Standard Version
SB	La Sainte Bible traduite en Français
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SFSHR	South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism
<i>SH</i>	<i>Scripta Hierosolymitana</i>
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions (Supplements to <i>Numen</i>)
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SJLC	Schiff Library of Jewish Classics
SPB	Studia post-Biblica
<i>SRdB</i>	<i>Seder Rabbah diBere'shit</i>
SSJHMC	State University of New York Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism and Culture
SSJHMR	State University of New York Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism and Religion
STJD	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
StJud	Studia Judaica
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti pseudepigrapha
T&S	Texts and Studies
T&T	Texts and Translations
<i>ThWAT</i>	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i>
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TTS	Trier theologische Studien
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
<i>UT</i>	<i>The Untitled Text</i> in the Bruce Codex
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae christianae</i>
VCSup	Supplements to <i>Vigiliae christianae</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
W	Text of <i>HR</i> in <i>בתי מדרשות</i> , ed. WERTHEIMER.
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
YJS	Yale Judaica Series
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

CHAPTER ONE

THE DANGEROUS UTTERANCE IN “FOUR ENTERED PARADISE”

1. “Four Entered Paradise” in the Talmudic Sources and Canticles Rabbah

This investigation takes as its starting point a passage which is found in the Babylonian version of the well-known story of four men who entered the garden of Paradise (פֶּרֶדֶס), three of whom came to grief while only the illustrious R. Aqiba survived unscathed. In *tosefta*, *yerushalmi* and *babli*, the story is included in an anthology of materials associated with the esoteric subjects *מעשה בראשית* and *מעשה מרכבה*. This anthology, which DAVID J. HALPERIN has called the “mystical collection,”¹ is appended to *m.Hag.* 2.1, where it is stated that only a חכם or (in this context) rabbinic sage may study or teach about the divine chariot-throne (המרכבה), as described in Ezekiel 1. A fourth version of “Four Entered Paradise” is preserved in *Midrash Canticles Rabbah*, where it is associated with Cant. 1:4, which verse is applied to Aqiba in these four versions of the story. A fifth recension is included in two hekhlot compositions, *Hekhalot Zutarti* and *Merkabah Rabbah*. A different, shorter version is preserved in a genizah fragment of *Hekhalot Zutarti*.

I have previously published a detailed analysis of this material,² in which I show that the interpretation put forward by GERSHOM G. SCHOLEM,³ drawing on the earlier work of WILHELM BOUSSET,⁴ HANS

¹ DAVID J. HALPERIN, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (AOS 62; New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1980), especially 65-105.

² C. R. A. MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1-12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul’s Apostolate. Part 1: The Jewish Sources,” *HTR* 86 (1993) 177-217.

³ GERSHOM G. SCHOLEM, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (3d edn., 1954; reprinted New York: Schocken, 1961) 52-53; *idem*, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (2d edn.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965) 14-19.

⁴ WILHELM BOUSSET, “Die Himmelsreise der Seele,” *ARW* 4 (1901) 145-154.

WINDISCH,⁵ and HANS BIETENHARD,⁶ is basically correct. In that study, I pointed out that the essential point of the versions in the talmudic sources and *Canticles Rabbah* is provided by the names of the four, only one of whom, Aqiba, was according to tradition a חכם or authorized teacher, accorded the title “Rabbi.”⁷ The three who came to grief were, according to numerous rabbinic sources, not sages but “students of the sages” (תלמידי חכמים). In this form, therefore, the story is an illustration of *m.Hag.* 2.1.

In my previous study, I did not inquire into the meaning of the enigmatic warning attributed to Aqiba in *babli’s* version of the story, which is found at *Hag.* 14b:

כשאתם מגיעין אצל אבני שיש טהור אל תאמרו מים מים משום שנאמר דובר שקרים לא
 כן לנגד עיני

When you approach the pure marble stones, do not say: “Water! Water!” – according to that which is written: *The speaker of lies shall not endure before my sight* (Ps. 101:7).

The versions found in *tosefta*, *yerushalmi* and *Canticles Rabbah* make no mention of this warning, which is also lacking in all but one of the extant manuscripts of the hekhalot recension.⁸ As will be seen below, the warning refers to a narrative unit which is preserved elsewhere in the hekhalot literature but which, in and of itself, is not immediately connected to the פֶּרֶס story. The following inquiry will explore the origins and development of the mystical and literary tradition by which these materials were produced and within which they were combined. Before embarking on this undertaking, however, it is necessary to recapitulate the principal points of my analysis of the recensions of “Four Entered Paradise” itself.⁹

⁵ HANS WINDISCH, *Der zweite Korintherbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1924) 375-6.

⁶ HANS BIETENHARD, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum* (WUNT 2; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1951) 91-95 and 161-68.

⁷ MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited. Part 1,” 195.

⁸ See ms. New York of *Merkabah Rabbah* (B1b) on p. 13 below.

⁹ The following material is substantially reproduced, with a few mostly minor revisions, from MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited. Part 1,” 195-217. The permission of the editor of *HTR* is gratefully acknowledged.

The presentation on pages 4-11 below is based on the version found in *t.Hag.* 2.3-5 (according to ms. Vienna),¹⁰ which combines three units of material: the story itself (A); and two parables appended by way of commentary, of a king's פֶּרֶט (B), and of a "highway" which passes between two roads (C).¹¹ Unit A also occurs, with variations, at *y.Hag.* 77b, *b.Hag.* 14b-15b and *Cant. R.* 1.28¹² *Yerushalmi* and *babli* incorporate additional material (indicated in square brackets) about the archheretic Elisha b. Abuyah, otherwise known as Aḥer ("the other one"), but only a very small proportion of this material is common to both sources.¹³ *Cant. R.* 1:28 includes a fragment about Elisha, very approximate parallels of which are found at *y.Hag.* 77b and *b.Hag.* 15a-b. *Babli* also includes additional material about Ben Zoma and Aqiba. Neither *babli* nor *Canticles Rabbah* includes B or C, which occur within the Mystical Collection in *yerushalmi*, but in different contexts.¹⁴ Unit C is also found, in an altogether different context, in chapter 28 of *'Abot de Rabbi Nathan*, version A.¹⁵

¹⁰ SAUL LIEBERMAN, ed., *The Tosefta according to Codex Vienna* (4 vols.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962) 2.381; cf. M. S. ZUCKERMANDEL, ed., *Tosefta: Based on the Erfurt and Vienna Codices* (2d ed., 1937; reprinted Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1963) 234.

¹¹ I do not include the story of Joshua b. Hananiah and Simeon b. Zoma, which occurs after C in *tosefta*, mss. Vienna and London, but before B in *tosefta*, ms. Erfurt; and at *b.Hag.* 14b, after A and additional material on Aqiba. In *y.Hag.* 77a-b, this unit occurs before the פֶּרֶט story and is attached to an incident which concerns Joshua, but not Ben Zoma. The unit also occurs on its own at *Gen. R.* 2.4. See CHRISTOPHER ROWLAND, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982) 323-331 and the sources cited there.

¹² In SAMSON DUNSKY, ed., *מדרש רבה: שיר השירים, מדרש חזית* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1980) 27; corresponding to pp. 7b²-8a¹ of the Vilna edition of *Midrash Rabbah* (מדרש רבה) [1878; reprinted in 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Sefer, 1970] vol. 2); and to 1.4, §1 in the translation by M. SIMON (in H. FREEDMAN and M. SIMON, eds., *Midrash Rabbah: Translated into English with Notes, Glossary and Indices* [10 vols.; London: Soncino Press, 1961] 9.2,46-7). Except where indicated otherwise, references to *Canticles Rabbah* are given below according to ed. DUNSKY; corresponding references to trans. SIMON are given in parentheses in the footnotes.

¹³ *y.Hag.* 77b-c (cf. *Ruth R.* 6.4, *Ecd. R.* 7.8, §1); *b.Hag.* 15a-b.

¹⁴ *y.Hag.* 77c (B) and 77a (C). See further pp. 123-126 below.

¹⁵ SOLOMON SCHECHTER, ed., *Abot De Rabbi Nathan* (1887; reprinted Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms, 1979) 43b; JUDAH GOLDIN, trans., *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955) 118. See p. 11, n. 51 below.

*tosefta**yerushalmi*

A1		
A2	Four men went into פָּרְדָּס:	Four men went into פָּרְדָּס:
A3		
A4	Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma,	
A5	Aḥer and R. Aqiba. ¹⁶	
A6	One looked and died;	One looked and died;
A7	one looked and was smitten;	one looked and was smitten;
A8	one looked and cut the shoots;	one looked and cut the shoots;
A9	one went up in peace	one went in in peace
A10	and came down in peace. ¹⁷	and came out in peace.
A11		
A12		
A13		
A14		
A15		
A16		
A17		
A18		
A19		
A20	Ben Azzai ¹⁸ looked and died.	Ben Azzai looked and was smitten.
A21	Of him, scripture says:	Of him, scripture says:
A22	<i>Precious in the eyes of the LORD</i>	<i>Have you found honey?</i>
A23	<i>is the death of his saints.</i> ¹⁹	<i>Eat what is enough for you</i> ²⁰
A24	Ben Zoma ²¹ looked and was smitten.	Ben Zoma looked and died.
A25	Of him, scripture says:	Of him, scripture says:
A26	<i>Have you found honey?</i>	<i>Precious in the eyes of the LORD</i>
A27	<i>Eat what is enough for you</i> ^{20, 22}	<i>is the death of his saints.</i> ¹⁹
A28		
A29		

¹⁶ *tosefta*, ms. London omits A4-5.

¹⁷ *tosefta*, ms. Erfurt omits A6-10.

¹⁸ *tosefta*, ms. London: "Ben Zoma."

¹⁹ Ps. 116:15.

²⁰ Prov. 25:16.

²¹ *tosefta*, ms. London: "Ben Azzai."

²² *tosefta*, ms. London completes the verse, as in *babli*.

<i>babli</i>	<i>Canticles R.</i>	
Our Rabbis taught:	We read in a mishnah:	A1
Four men went into פָּרְדָּס	Four men went into פָּרְדָּס:	A2
and these are they: ²³		A3
Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma,	Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma	A4
Aḥer and R. Aqiba.	Aḥer and R. Aqiba	A5
		A6
		A7
		A8
		A9
		A10
R. Aqiba said to them: ²⁴		A11
When you approach		A12
the pure marble stones,		A13
do not say:		A14
“Water! Water!” ²⁵		A15
According to that which is written:		A16
<i>The speaker of lies</i>		A17
<i>shall not endure</i>		A18
<i>before my sight.</i> ²⁶		A19
Ben Azzai looked and died. ²⁷	Ben Azzai looked and was smitten,	A20
Of him, scripture says:	and of him it is said:	A21
<i>Precious in the eyes of the LORD</i>	<i>Have you found honey?</i>	A22
<i>is the death of his saints.</i> ¹⁹	<i>Eat what is enough for you</i> ²⁰	A23
Ben Zoma looked and was smitten,	Ben Zoma looked and died,	A24
and of him scripture says:	and of him it is said:	A25
<i>Have you found honey?</i>	<i>Precious in the eyes of the LORD</i>	A26
<i>Eat what is enough for you,</i>	<i>is the death of his saints.</i> ¹⁹	A27
<i>lest you be filled with it</i>		A28
<i>and vomit it.</i> ²⁰		A29

²³ *babli*, A2-3, *ed. princ.*: וארבעה נכנסו בפרדס ואלו הן; all mss., Rashi, *tosafot*: לפרדס; *tosefta*, *yerushalmi*, *Canticles Rabbah* and the hekhalot recensions all support לפרדס.

²⁴ *babli*, ms. Vatican 134 adds: “to the Sages”; ms. Oxford adds: “to his disciples.”

²⁵ *babli*, A12-15: כשאתם מגיעים אצל אבני שיש טהור אל תאמרו מים מים; ms. Vatican 134 omits טהור; mss. Vatican 171 and London: חזרו כשאתם מגיעים.

²⁶ Ps. 101:7.

²⁷ *babli*, ms. Vatican 171: “... and was cut off.”

*tosefta**yerushalmi*

A30

A31

A32 Elisha²⁸ looked and cut the shoots.

A33

A34

A35

Aher cut the shoots.

Who is Aher?

Elisha ben Abuyah, who

used to kill the masters of Torah.

[Additional material on Elisha]

A36 Of him, scripture says:

A37 *Do not let your mouth*A38 *lead your flesh into sin*²⁹

A39

A40

Of him, scripture says:

*Do not let your mouth**lead your flesh into sin etc.*²⁹

– that he ruined the work

of his own hands.³⁰

[Additional material on Elisha]

A41 R. Aqiba went up in peace

A42 and came down in peace.³¹

R. Aqiba went in in peace

and came out in peace.

A43

A44

A45

A46

A47

A48

A49

²⁸ *tosefta*, ms. Erfurt: “Aher.”²⁹ Eccl. 5:5. The verse continues: *and say not before the angel* (MT: הַמַּלְאָךְ, but LXX: τοῦ θεοῦ) *that it is an error. Why should God become angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?*³⁰ Allusion to Eccl. 5:5 (see the previous note).³¹ *tosefta*, ms. Erfurt: “.... went in and came out”

<i>babli</i>	<i>Canticles R.</i>	
Aḥer cut the shoots		A30
Rabbi Aqiba came out in peace		A31
[Additional material on B. Zoma]		
Aḥer cut the shoots.	Elisha b. Abuyah cut the shoots.	A32
		A33
		A34
		A35
[Additional material on Elisha]		
Of him, scripture says:	And of him it is said:	A36
<i>Do not let your mouth</i>	<i>Do not let your mouth</i>	A37
<i>lead your flesh into sin</i> ²⁹	<i>lead your flesh into sin</i> ²⁹	A38
		A39
		A40
[Additional material on Elisha]		
R. Aqiba went up in peace	R. Aqiba went in in peace	A41
and came down in peace. ³²	and came out in peace, ³³	A42
	and he said,	A43
	Not because I am greater	A44
	than my fellows,	A45
	but thus taught the Sages	A46
	in a mishnah: ³⁴	A47
	<i>Your deeds will bring you near</i>	A48
	<i>and your deeds will keep you far.</i> ³⁵	A49

³² *babli*, ms. Göttingen: “... went in and came out”

³³ HALPERIN (*The Merkabah*, 78, n. 41) reports that a text of *Canticles Rabbah* cited by R. MARTINI, *Pugio Fidei* (Leipzig: n.p., 1687) 320, reads: “... went up and came down”

³⁴ *Cant. R.* (edition): כִּךְ שֵׁנו חֲכָמִים בְּמִשְׁנָה בְּמִשְׁנָה. MARTINI’s citation (see the previous note) omits *בְּמִשְׁנָה*. Ms. Vatican 76,3 supports the edition. Ms. Munich 50,2 reads: כִּךְ אִמְרוּ בְּעֵלֵי הַמִּשְׁנָה. Parallels in *Hekbalot Zutarti* tend to support the inclusion of *בְּמִשְׁנָה* (see A2b on p. 12 below). See further HALPERIN, *The Merkabah*, 78, n. 42.

³⁵ *m. ‘Ed.* 5.7.

*tosefta**yerushalmi*

A50 Of him, scripture says:
 A51 *Draw me after you!*
 A52 *Let us run ...*, etc.³⁶

Of him, scripture says:
Draw me after you!
*Let us run!*³⁶

A53
 A54
 A55
 A56
 A57
 A58
 A59
 A60

[Additional material on Elisha]

[Material on בראשית]

B1 They employed a parable:³⁷
 B2 To what may this be compared?
 B3 To the garden (פרדס) of a king
 B4 with an upper chamber³⁸
 B5 built above it.
 B6 What should a man do?
 B7 Look,³⁹
 B8 only let him not feast his eyes on it.⁴⁰

... to the garden of a king
 with an upper chamber³⁸
 built above it.
 One may look,
 but not approach.⁴¹

³⁶ Cant. 1:4a, ignoring the massoretic accents which attach אַחֲרָיִךְ (“after you”) to נָרוּצָה (“let us run”), rather than to קוֹשְׁכֵנִי (“draw me”). See further n. 42 below.

³⁷ מושלך; *tosefta*, ms. Vienna omits: מושלך.

³⁸ HALPERIN (*The Merkabah*, 67, 73, 93, etc.) translates עלייה (“upper chamber”) by “balcony,” but there is no evidence to support this conjectural rendering.

³⁹ *tosefta*, ms. Vienna: להציץ; ms. Erfurt: אלא להציץ (“only look”); see further the next two notes.

⁴⁰ *tosefta*, ms. Vienna: רבלבד שלא יזין את עיניו ממנו; ms. London: יזון את עיניו; ms. Erfurt: יזין עיניו. ZUCKERMANDEL prints יזין עיניו, “remove his eyes” (and, in his apparatus, יזון for ms. Vienna and the printed edition), but this is an error. See SAUL LIEBERMAN, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta* (8 vols.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1955-73) 5.1291.

⁴¹ *yerushalmi*: עליו להציץ אבל לא לגרע. See pp. 22-23 below.

<i>babli</i>	<i>Canticles R.</i>	
Of him, scripture says:	And of him it is said:	A50
<i>Draw me after you!</i>	<i>Let the king bring me</i>	A51
<i>Let us run!</i> ⁴⁶	<i>into his chambers!</i> ⁴²	A52
Even R. Aqiba		A53
– the ministering angels		A54
wanted to drive him away.		A55
The Holy One, blessed be He,		A56
said to them:		A57
Leave this elder alone,		A58
for he is worthy		A59
to make use of my Glory. ⁴³		A60

[Additional material on Aqiba]

B1
B2
B3
B4
B5
B6
B7
B8

⁴² Cant. 1:4b, following *NAB, NEB* and others in emending MT **הָבִיאֲנִי** to **הָבִיאֲנִי**, a reading supported by Peshitta and Symmachus. See JOHN F. BRUG, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1995) 24; *contra* ROLAND EDMUND MURPHY, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 125-126.

⁴³ שראוי להשתמש בכבודי. Parallels in *Hekhalot Zutarti* and *Merkabah Rabbah* read להסתכל (“to behold”) for להשתמש.

<i>tosefta</i>	<i>yerushalmi</i>
C1 They employed another parable: ⁴⁴	
C2 To what may this be compared?	This teaching ⁴⁵ is like
C3 To a highway ⁴⁶	
C4 which passes between	
C5 two roads, ⁴⁷	two paths, ⁴⁷
C6 one of fire and one of snow.	one of fire and one of snow.
C7 He who turns aside this way	He who turns to this side
C8 is scorched by the fire. ⁴⁸	dies in the fire.
C9 He who turns aside that way	He who turns to that side
C10 is scorched by the snow. ⁴⁹	dies in the snow.
C11 What should a man do?	What should one do?
C12 Let him walk in the middle	One should walk in the middle.
C13 – only let him not turn aside,	
C14 neither this way nor that way. ⁵⁰	
C15	
C16	
C17	

⁴⁴ *tosefta*, ms. Erfurt: “Another saying – they employed a parable:”

⁴⁵ התורה הזו.

⁴⁶ *tosefta*, ms. Vienna: איסטרטא; ms. London: איסרטא; ms. Erfurt: איסטרטא; *AdRN(A)*: איסטרטיא, which could mean either (as translated above) “a courtyard” or “a military troop” (these are two different words with the same spelling). JACOB NEUSNER (trans., *The Tosefta* [6 vols.; New York: Ktav, 1977-86] 2.313) evidently adopts the *AdRN(A)* reading and renders: “platoon.”

⁴⁷ *tosefta* (all mss) and *AdRN(A)*: שבילים; *yerushalmi*: ורכים.

⁴⁸ *tosefta*, ms. Vienna reads: גבוה באור, “is exalted (or perhaps: “exceeds”) in the fire.” However, LIEBERMAN follows the other mss. and the printed edition, which give נכיה, as does *AdRN(A)*.

⁴⁹ *tosefta*: as previous note, save that ms. London omits the word completely here. *AdRN(A)*: לוקה בציניה.

⁵⁰ *tosefta*, ms. Erfurt: “... and let him not turn aside, this way or that way.”

*’Abot deRabbi Natan (A)*⁵¹

They employed a parable:	C1
To what may this be compared?	C2
To a courtyard ⁴⁶	C3
which passes between	C4
two roads, ⁴⁷	C5
one of fire and one of snow.	C6
If one walks on the side of the fire,	C7
lo, one is scorched by the fire; ⁴⁸	C8
but if one walks on the side of the snow,	C9
lo, one is smitten by the cold. ⁴⁹	C10
What should one do?	C11
Let him walk between the two of them	C12
	C13
	C14
and take care of himself,	C15
lest he be scorched by the fire	C16
or smitten by the cold.	C17

⁵¹ In *AdRN(A)*, the parable is contextualized by the following apparently irrelevant preamble, attributed to R. Judah ben Ilai: “Everyone who makes words of Torah primary and worldly affairs secondary will be made primary in the world to come (but he who makes) worldly affairs primary and words of Torah secondary will be made secondary in the world to come.”

2. “Four Entered Paradise” in the Hekhalot Recensions

The hekhalot version of the story of the four occurs in *Hekhalot Zutarti* (HZ), mss. Munich 22 and New York 8128, and in *Merkabah Rabbah* (MR), mss. New York 8128 and Oxford 1531.⁵² All four sources contain the same basic text but this has been expanded, in different ways, in ms. New York of *Hekhalot Zutarti* [HZ(N)] and in ms. New York of *Merkabah Rabbah* [MR(N)]. Mss. Munich of *Hekhalot Zutarti* [HZ(M)] and Oxford of *Merkabah Rabbah* [MR(O)] both include the basic text only. The basic text is shown below in ordinary print. Material unique to MR(N) is shown in italics and within braces {....}. Material unique to HZ(N) is shown in italics, within angled brackets and underlined <....>. Quotations from scripture and *mishnah* are italicized or, where necessary, indicated by “reverse italics.”

A1a R. Aqiba said:

A1b We were four who went into פרדס.⁵³ One looked and died, one looked and was smitten, one looked and cut the shoots, and I went in in peace and came out in peace.

A2a Why did I go in in peace and come out in peace?⁵⁴

A2b Not because I am greater than my fellows, but my deeds⁵⁵ have caused me to fulfil the teaching that the sages taught in their mishnah: *Your deeds will bring you near and your deeds will keep you afar* (m. 'Ed. 5.7).

⁵² See PETER SCHÄFER, ed., *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (TSAJ 2; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1981) §§338-339 and §§344-346 (HZ), and §§671-673 (MR); and cf. RACHEL ELIOR, ed., (828) 8218 כ"י ניריורק היכלות זוטרת, (JSJTSup 1; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982) 23, lines 43-58. HALPERIN (“A New Edition of the Hekhalot Literature,” *JAOS* 104 [1984] 543-552; and *idem*, *The Faces of the Chariot* [TSAJ 16; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1988] 201-204) is misled by SCHÄFER’s rather confusing presentation of this material in HZ into treating the manuscripts as separate recensions. See MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited. Part 1,” 195-196.

⁵³ HZ(M), HZ(N), and MR(N): ארבעה היינו שנכנסו לפרדס; MR(O), word within braces stricken: ארבעה {נכנסו} היינו שנכנסו לפרדס.

⁵⁴ HZ(N) and MR(N) omit A2a.

⁵⁵ MR(O) and HZ(M) omit “my deeds” (מעשי).

- B1a And these are they that went into פֶּרְדָּס:⁵⁶ Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma and אֶהָר and R. Aqiba.
- B1b {*R. Aqiba said to them: Beware! When you approach the pure marble stones, do not say, “Water! Water!”⁵⁷ – according to that which is written: The speaker of lies shall not endure before my sight (Ps. 101:7).*}
- B2a Ben Azzai⁵⁸ looked <into the sixth palace and saw the brilliance of the air of the marble stones with which the palace was paved,⁵⁹ and his body could not bear it, and he opened his mouth and asked them: “These waters – what is the nature of them?”⁶⁰> and died. Of him, scripture says: *Precious in the eyes of the LORD is the death of his saints* (Ps. 116:15).
- B2b Ben Zoma⁶¹ looked <at the brilliance in the marble stones⁶² and thought that they were water, and his body could bear that he did not ask them, but his mind could not bear it> and was smitten <– he went out of his mind>. Of him, scripture says: *Have you found honey? Eat what is enough for you ...*, etc. (Prov. 25:16).
- B2c Elisha b. Abuyah looked⁶³ and cut the shoots. <In what way did he cut the shoots? They say that whenever he went into the synagogues and study-houses and saw children succeeding in Torah-study, he used to speak over them and they would be silenced, and> of him, scripture says: *Do not let your mouth lead your flesh into sin!* (Eccl. 5:5).
- B2d {*They say that when Elisha went down to the מִרְכַּבְרָה he saw Metatron to whom permission had been given to sit for one hour in the day to write down the merits of Israel. He said, “The sages have taught: On high there is neither standing nor sitting, no rivalry, no contention, no neck and no affliction.”⁶⁴ He entertained the thought that there*

⁵⁶ HZ(N): וְאֵלֶּה הֵם שֶׁנִּכְנְסוּ לְפֶרְדָּס; HZ(M): אֵילוּ הֵם שֶׁנִּכְנְסוּ לְפֶרְדָּס; MR(N) and MR(O): וְאֵילוּ הֵן שֶׁנִּכְנְסוּ לְפֶרְדָּס; cf. p. 5, n. 23 above and p. 14, n. 68 below.

⁵⁷ חֲזוֹהֵרוּ כִשְׂאֵתָם מְגִיעִים אֶצֶל אַבְנֵי שֵׁשׁ טָהוֹר אֶל תֹּאמְרוּ מִים מִים אֲבוֹהֵם; cf. p. 5, n. 25 above.

⁵⁸ MR(O): “Ben Zoma.”

⁵⁹ זִיו אוֹיֵר אַבְנֵי שֵׁשׁ שִׁהִיו סְלוּלוֹת בְּהִיכֵל. See pp. 92-96 below.

⁶⁰ מִים הִלְלוּ מֵה טִיבֵן

⁶¹ MR(O): “Ben Azzai.”

⁶² בְּזִיו בְּאַבְנֵי הַשֵּׁשׁ

⁶³ HZ(N): “went down.”

⁶⁴ לְמַעַלָּה אֵין עֲמִידָה וְאֵין יִשְׁבָּה (ה) לֹא קִנְאָה וְלֹא תַחְרוּת וְלֹא עוֹרֵף וְלֹא עֵינָיו. The source and meaning of this quotation are unknown. On parallels to this unit in *3 Enoch* and *babli*, see: P. S. ALEXANDER, “3 Enoch and the Talmud,” *JSJ* 18 (1987) 54-66; MORRAY-JONES, “Hekhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition: Alexander’s Three Test Cases,” *JSJ* 22 (1991) 17-36; and NATHANIEL DEUTSCH, *Guardians of the Gate: Angelic Vice-*

might perhaps be two Powers in heaven. At once, they led Metatron outside the פרגוד and punished him with sixty lashes of fire, and permission was given to Metatron to burn the merits of Aher. A heavenly voice came forth and they (sic) said: "Return, backsliding children (Jer. 3:22) – except for Aher!"

- B2e R. Aqiba went in in peace and came out in peace.⁶⁵ Of him, scripture says: *Draw me after you! Let us run!* (Cant. 1:4a)
- C1a R. Aqiba said:
- C1b At that time, when I went up to the heavenly height, I made more signs in the entrances of רקיע than in the entrances of my house,
- C1c and when I arrived at the פרגוד, angels of destruction came out to destroy me. The Holy One, blessed be he, said to them: "Leave this elder alone, for he is worthy to behold my Glory."⁶⁶

Taken together, sections A and C contain a statement about the ascent to פורדס which is expressed in the first person and attributed to Aqiba. Section B, however, is a third-person narrative, as are the talmudic versions. It is therefore probable that the unit originally comprised A and C only, and that B (basic text) has been inserted by a redactor who was familiar with one or more talmudic versions of the story. This is confirmed by a genizah fragment of *HZ*, where the material in sections A and B occurs in a different order.⁶⁷

- A/B1 R. Aqiba said:
- A/B2 We four were going into פורדס. These are they:⁶⁸ Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma, Aher and I, Aqiba.
- A/B3 Ben Azzai looked and died. Ben Zoma looked and was smitten. Aher looked and cut the shoots. I went up in peace and came down in peace.

Regency in Late Antiquity (BSJS 22; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1999) 48-77.

⁶⁵ *HZ(N)* and *MR(N)*: ".... went up and came down"

⁶⁶ Following *HZ(M)*: הניחו לזקן הזה שהוא ראוי להסתכל בכבודי; *HZ(N)* omits section C entirely; *MR(O)*: הניחו לו לזקן שהוא ראוי להסתכל בכבודי; *MR(N)*: הניחו לזקן; זה ראוי להסתכל בי.

⁶⁷ Genizah Fragment T-S.K21.95.B, in SCHÄFER, ed. *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (TSAJ 6; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1984) 88, lines 6-15.

⁶⁸ ארבעה היינו נכנסין לפרדס אילו הן.

- A/B4 Why did I go up in peace and come down in peace?
- A/B5 Not because I am greater than my fellows, but my deeds caused me to fulfil that which was taught by the sages in the Mishnah: *Your deeds will bring you near and your deeds will keep you afar* (m. ‘Ed. 5.7).
- C1a R. Aqiba said:
- C1b When I went up to the heavenly height, I set down a sign in the entrances of רִקִיעַ, more than in the entrances of my house,
- C1c and when I arrived behind the פִּרְגִיד, angels of destruction came and wanted to drive me away, until the Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: “My sons, leave this elder alone, for he is worthy to behold my Glory.”⁶⁹
- C2 Of him, scripture says: *Draw me after you! Let us run!* (Cant. 1:4a)

The awkward transition from first to third person in A/B2 indicates that the names of the four have been added by a redactor who has obtained them from one of the talmudic recensions. A/B3 will, therefore, originally have read: “one one one and I ...” as in *HZ/MR:A1b*. The underlying text of the fragment is thus virtually identical with *HZ/MR:A-C*, save that C1b, “.... and wanted to drive me away” is closer to *babli*, A55. The only other significant difference is that the fragment includes the application to Aqiba of Cant. 1:4 (C2), which in the *HZ/MR* version occurs only in the section derived from talmudic tradition (B2e). Since C2 reverts to the third person, it is probable that the redactor of the fragment has also borrowed this item from a talmudic source.

3. *Source- and Redaction-Critical Observations on “Four Entered Paradise” and the Origins of the “Ascent to Paradise” Tradition*

Despite minor differences of detail, the three talmudic sources are clearly derived from a single recension of the פִּרְדָּס story, narrated exclusively in the third person. This is an extremely formal and formulaic composition, giving a terse, rather enigmatic account of what happened to the four men and applying to each in turn a verse chosen

⁶⁹ בניי הניחו לו לזקן זה שהוא ראוי להסתכל בכבודי cf. n. 66 above.

from the scriptures. As observed above, the key to the meaning of this version is provided by the names of the four *dramatis personae*, of whom only Aqiba qualifies as a חכם or ordained sage, while the others have the lesser status of תלמידי חכמים. In this form, therefore, the story is an explicit illustration of the restriction recorded at *m.Hag.* 2.1:

ולא במרכבה ביחיד אלא אם כן היה חכם ומבין⁷⁰ מדעתו

.... nor concerning the מרכבה by an individual, unless he were a sage and (had) understood from his own knowledge.⁷¹

Whereas *tosefta* gives only the “bare bones” of this recension, both *yerushalmi* and *babli* include additional materials about some, though not all of the four characters, as does *Canticles Rabbah* in the instance of Elisha.⁷² These materials are extraneous to the story and, for the most part, outside the scope of the present study. *Babli*, however, incorporates two passages about Aqiba into the “Four Entered Paradise” narrative itself. These are: Aqiba’s warning (A11-19) which, as we shall see, alludes to a story which is preserved in the hekhalot tradition, but outside the context of the פרדס story; and the angels’ attempt to “drive him away,” until overruled by God (A53-60). The latter unit corresponds to *HZ/MR* C1a-c (also in the genizah fragment) where, however, it is rendered in the first person. God’s statement that Aqiba is “worthy to behold my Glory (ראוי להסתכל בכבודי)” alludes to *m.Hag.* 2.1:

כל המסתכל בארבעה דברים ראוי⁷³ לא כאילו לא בא לעולם וכל שלא חס על כבוד קונו ראוי⁷³ לו שלא בא לעולם

He who gazes at four things, it were fitting⁷³ for him that he had not come into the world and he who is not heedful concerning the Glory of his Creator, it were fitting⁷³ for him that he had not come into the world.

⁷⁰ Var.: והבין. See HALPERIN, *The Merkabah*, 12, n. 5.

⁷¹ See MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited. Part 1,” 191-195, and the sources cited there; on the meaning of *m.Hag.* 2.1, see *ibid.*, 185-190.

⁷² See p. 3, n. 13 above.

⁷³ Var.: רחמי, (“a mercy”). See HALPERIN, *The Merkabah*, 12, n. 7.

The hekhalot version of this unit appears to have priority over that in *babli*, where להסתכל has been altered to להשתמש.⁷⁴

Canticles Rabbah preserves essentially the same recension as *tosefta* and *yerushalmi*, but introduces a new element. In this version, Aqiba explains that he succeeded where the others failed due to the merit of his deeds, and cites *m. Ed.* 5.7 in support of this claim (lines A43-49). This explanation, which is incompatible with the meaning of the three talmudic versions (that Aqiba alone of the four was a חכם), also occurs in *HZ/MR:A2a-b* (= *A/B4-5* of the Genizah fragment). The fact that *Canticles Rabbah* deviates from the talmudic pattern by employing the first person at this point, and this point only, indicates strongly that the hekhalot version has priority where this item is concerned.

The hekhalot sources have, moreover, preserved a version of the פרדס story – the first-person narrative in *HZ/MR:A-C* – which is different from and much simpler than that found in the talmudic sources and *Canticles Rabbah*. A subsequent redactor has expanded this first-person narrative by inserting third-person materials taken from the talmudic tradition in section B, but, when this additional material is discounted, it can be seen that the hekhalot version was originally a statement by or attributed to Aqiba that he and three unnamed individuals went into פרדס, that the other three met with disaster, and that he alone went in/up and came out/down safely, despite the opposition of the angels, through the merit of his deeds. This version includes the citation of *m. Ed.* 5.7 (*HZ:A2b* = *A/B5*, whence *Cant. R.*, A43-49) but not the scriptural verses quoted in the talmudic recension.⁷⁵ Since the other three *dramatis personae* are not identified, the meaning cannot be that they were not, like Aqiba, חכמים. Indeed, Aqiba refers to them as חברים (“fellows”), a term which implies equality of status and, possibly,

⁷⁴ SCHOLEM (*Major Trends*, 358, n. 17) and JOHANN MAIER (*Vom Kultus zur Gnosis: Studien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte der “Jüdischen Gnosis.” Bundeslade, Gottesthron und Märkäbāh* [= *Kairos* 1; Salzburg: Müller, 1964] 45-46) have shown that the curious expression להשתמש בכבודי (“to make use of my Glory”) refers to theurgic pronunciation of the divine Name, originally in the context of the temple cult. Nonetheless, להסתכל is likely to be the better reading, partly because the פרדס story is concerned throughout with “looking,” and partly by reference to *m. Hag.* 2.1.

⁷⁵ As observed on p. 15 above, the redactor of the genizah fragment (*A/B5*) appears to have copied the quotation of *Cant.* 1:4a from *babli* (as in *HZ/MR:B2e*).

co-membership of a formally constituted – perhaps esoteric – society or “fellowship” (חבורה).⁷⁶

Analysis of the textual interrelationships between the talmudic sources and the hekhalot writings thus reveals a fairly complex process of interaction and mutual influence. In *HZ/MR:B* (still confining our attention to the basic text only) a later redactor has inserted material taken from a talmudic source, which he doubtless regarded as authoritative. It should be observed that the source of this section is unlikely to be *babli*, since the basic text includes only material which is common to *tosefta* and *yerushalmi*. Allusions to material which is unique to *babli* (of the talmudic sources) are encountered only in the interpolated sections of *MR(N)* and *HZ(N)*, which must, of course, be later still.⁷⁷ The redactor of *HZ/MR:B* (basic text) has interpolated his talmudic material, which consists basically of the names and the scriptural citations, into a much simpler and more straightforward version of the story, which carries an altogether different meaning. I conclude, therefore, that the version preserved in *HZ/MR:A-C* represents the original form of the פֶּרֶדֶס story and that the redactor of the mystical collection adapted this source to suit his purpose by adding the names of the three תלמידי חכמים, thereby turning it into an illustration of *m.Hag.* 2.1.⁷⁸ Even prior to this adaptation, however, this source must already have been associated with the restriction preserved at *m.Hag.* 2.1, the language of which is employed in C1c (ראוי להסתכל בכבודי). According to this source, the פֶּרֶדֶס is located “behind the פֶּרְגוֹד” (C1c), which can only mean: in the holy of holies of the celestial temple.⁷⁹

Thus, once the priority of the hekhalot version (A and C) has been established, it is clear that the story is concerned with a visionary ascent

⁷⁶ The word חברים is used of those present at Nehunyah b. HaQanah’s trance-ascent to the מרכבה in *Hekhalot Rabbati (HR)* 14.3 (*Synopsis* §203). See further pp. 67-73 below.

⁷⁷ See further pp. 28 and 78-82 below.

⁷⁸ For a fuller discussion of the relationships between these sources, see MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited. Part 1,” 199-201. Note also ROWLAND’s observation that in *yerushalmi*, the names of the four are not given in the initial story (A1-10), but only in its subsequent expansion (A20-52), indicating that “originally there may have been a form of the story in which neither the names of those concerned nor the scriptural texts commenting upon their actions in the garden were included” (see ROWLAND, *The Open Heaven*, 314).

⁷⁹ On the celestial פֶּרְגוֹד, see pp. 164-172 below.

to the heavenly temple, in the face of fierce opposition on the part of the “angels of destruction” (C1c).⁸⁰ These angels seem to be the terrifying guardians of the gateways, who are described in other passages of the hekhalot literature and will be encountered again below. The pre-talmudic version preserved by the hekhalot redactors (C1c) makes it quite clear that the object at which Aqiba, alone of the four, was worthy to look was God’s “Glory” (כבוד) – which is to say, the object of Ezekiel’s vision, the כבוד-יהוה (Ezek. 1:28, etc.) or כבוד אלהי ישׁראל (Ezek. 8:4, etc.), these being the prophet’s terms for the divine manifestation in “a form like the appearance of a man” (דמות כמראה אדם) upon the heavenly throne (Ezek. 1:26).⁸¹

⁸⁰ On the expression מלאכי חבלה, see MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited. Part 1,” 201-203; and further, *idem*, “Paradise Revisited. Part 2” (see n. 83 below) 281-283.

⁸¹ On the כבוד and related “divine agency” traditions in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic literature, see for example: GILLES QUISPÉL, “Gnosticism and the New Testament,” *VC* 19 (1965) 65-85 (reprinted in J. P. HYATT, ed., *The Bible in Modern Scholarship* [Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1965] 252-271; and also in QUISPÉL, *Gnostic Studies* [2 vols.; Istanbul: Netherlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Institut in het Nubije Osten, 1974-5] 1.196-212); *idem*, “The Origins of the Gnostic Demiurge,” in P. CRANFIELD and J. A. JUNGSMANN, eds., *KYRLAKON: Festschrift Johannes Quaesten* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1970) 271-276 (reprinted in QUISPÉL, *Gnostic Studies*, 1.213-220); *idem*, “Ezekiel 1:26 in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosis,” *VC* 34 (1980) 1-13; *idem*, “Judaism, Judaic Christianity and Gnosis,” in A. H. B. LOGAN and A. J. M. WEDDERBURN, eds., *The New Testament and Gnosis* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1983) 46-68; ALEXANDER ALTMANN, “Saadya’s Theory of Revelation: Its Origin and Background,” in *idem*, *Studies in Religion, Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969) 140-160; ROWLAND, “The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature,” *JSJ* 10 (1979) 137-154; *idem*, *The Open Heaven*, 94-113 and 280-289; ALAN F. SEGAL, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (SJLA 25; Leiden: Brill, 1977); *idem*, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990) 34-71; JARL E. FOSSUM, “Jewish-Christian Christology and Jewish Mysticism,” *VC* 37 (1983) 260-287; *idem*, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (WUNT 36; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1985); *idem*, *The Image of the Invisible God: Essays on the Influence of Jewish Mysticism on Early Christology* (NTOA 30; Freiburg, Switzerland and Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995); LARRY W. HURTADO, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); MARGARET BARKER, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992); CAREY C. NEWMAN, *Paul’s Glory-Christology: Tradition and Rhetoric* (NovTSup 69; Leiden: Brill, 1992); MORRAY-JONES, “Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkabah Tradition,” *JJS* 43 (1992)

In this earliest version of the story, then, the term פֶּרֶדֶס is used without explanation as a technical term for the holy of holies of the heavenly temple. This usage is derived from ancient traditions which identified the Garden of Eden with the heavenly sanctuary and/or its earthly counterpart.⁸² In the second part of my previous study of this material, I demonstrate that Paul the Apostle uses the term “Paradise” (παράδεισος) in this same sense at 2 Cor. 12:4 in his account of a visionary ascent to the heavenly temple, during the course of which he claimed to have received from Christ his apostolic commission to the gentiles.⁸³

It should be observed in passing that, according to most versions, the story does not state that the four men “entered פֶּרֶדֶס” in company with each other. Rather than being an account of a single incident, the unit seeks to compare four instances or types of individuals and their fates. It is not said that they entered פֶּרֶדֶס on the same occasion or, in other words, that they somehow participated in a shared “out of body”

1-31; and APRIL D. DE CONICK, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas* (VCSup 33; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 99-125.

⁸² See MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited. Part 1,” 204-206, and the sources cited there; and see in addition: ANDRÉ NEHER, “Le voyage mystique des quatre,” *RHR* 140 (1951) 59-82; E. THEODORE MULLEN, JR., *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (HSM 24; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980) 147-169; JON D. LEVENSON, “The Temple and the World,” *JR* 64 (1984) 275-298, especially 297-298; *idem*, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985) 127-133; BARKER, *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1987) 233-245; *idem*, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991) 57-103; MARTHA HIMMELFARB, “The Temple and the Garden of Eden in Ezekiel, the Book of the Watchers, and the Wisdom of ben Sira,” in JAMES SCOTT and PAUL SIMPSON-HOUSLEY, eds., *Sacred Places and Profane Spaces: Essays in the Geographics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Contributions to the Study of Religion 30; New York, Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1991) 63-78; GARY ANDERSON, “The Garden of Eden and Sexuality in Early Judaism,” in HOWARD EILBERG-SCHWARTZ, ed., *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992) 47-68, especially 54-55; JACQUES VAN RUITEN, “The Garden of Eden and Jubilees 3:1-31,” *Bijdragen* 57 (1996) 305-317, especially 310-312; and C. T. R. HAYWARD, *The Jewish Temple: A Non-Biblical Sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 44-46, 89-91 and 111-112.

⁸³ MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited (2 Cor. 12:1-12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul’s Apostolate. Part 2: Paul’s Heavenly Ascent and its Significance,” *HTR* 86 (1993) 265-292.

visionary experience. In section C of *HZ/MR*, Aqiba seems clearly to be describing a solitary ascent, for – apart from the angels and the Holy One – there is no mention of companions. The language of the genizah fragment (A/B2): “We four were going” (ארבעה היינו נכנסין) may perhaps indicate that this redactor believed that the four men undertook the practice of the heavenly ascent together, on the same occasion or occasions. Even this, however, may simply mean that they performed certain ritual practices and/or devotional exercises together, in preparation for the visionary ascent. Other passages of the hekhalot literature seem to reflect an historical situation in which the practice of heavenly ascent was associated with cultic group activity.⁸⁴ Descriptions of the ascent-experience itself, however, involve only one visionary traveller at a time and nowhere, to my knowledge, do we find an account of a heavenly group excursion. It is not, therefore, necessary to infer that any individual’s experience of the celestial journey was believed to be other than internal or subjective. It is, admittedly, true that the redactor of *babli* (A11) [= *MR(N):B1b*] seems to have believed that Aqiba instructed the three disciples prior to the heavenly journey and warned them of its danger, but this does not necessarily imply a communal experience. In any case, both “Four Entered Paradise” itself and this interpolated section are, as we shall see, the products of a complex exegetical and mystical tradition, not accounts of actual historical events.

The parable of the king’s garden (B1-8 above), which is directly appended to the story of the four in *tosefta* (though not in *yerushalmi*), confirms our identification of the פֶּרֶדֶס with the innermost chamber or chambers of the temple. As indicated in my previous study,⁸⁵ this parable refers to the actual structure of the Jerusalem sanctuary building (ההיכל). The “garden” (פֶּרֶדֶס) represents the ground floor, which contained the outer sanctuary and the holy of holies, while the “upper chamber” (עלייה) is the empty, unused space which occupied the upper portion of the building. Tractate *m.Middot*, which refers to this chamber as the עֲלֵיית בֵּית קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים, states that, whenever it became necessary to make repairs to the internal walls of the holy of holies, the workmen were let down from here in closed boxes “... lest they should feast

⁸⁴ See the account of Nehunyah b. Ha-Qanah’s mystical ascent/descent in *HR* 13-23 (SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§198-250, discussed in more detail on pp. 67-73 below. The extensive liturgical contents of the hekhalot corpus are also indicative of cultic activity.

⁸⁵ MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited. Part 1,” 207.

their eyes on the holy of holies (שלא יזונו עיניהן מבית קדשי הקדשים)⁸⁶. The same formula occurs in *tosefta*'s version of the parable (B8), indicating clearly that the object at which the three unworthy travellers all "looked" was the celestial holy of holies.

In my previous study, I argued that this interpretation of the parable does not apply to the version found in *yerushalmi*, "which occurs in a different context and has a completely different meaning."⁸⁷ I now consider this judgement to be mistaken. It was based on the observation that the parable in *y.Hag. 77c* occurs outside the immediate context of the פירדס story (though within the mystical collection) and is appended to another parable which concerns a king's palace (פלטין). The parable of the palace will furnish a significant clue at a later stage of this investigation,⁸⁸ but it does not carry the same meaning as the parable of the king's garden in the context of the story of the four as we find it in *tosefta*. There is no apparent connection of meaning between the two parables and it is probable that an editor of *yerushalmi* has combined them for no other reason than their similarity of form.⁸⁹ It is therefore unlikely that *y.Hag. 77c* is the original context of the parable of the garden.

Philological considerations indicate, moreover, that in *yerushalmi*, as in *tosefta*, the parable of the garden is inherently connected to the story of the four. Lines B7-8 of *yerushalmi* read: עליו להציץ אבל לא לגרוע. In my previous study, I understood the verb נגע to mean "strike" or "injure" and translated: "One may look, but not damage (it),"⁹⁰ but this was almost certainly an error. HALPERIN⁹¹ and NEUSNER⁹² both offer: "... look, but not touch," as is perhaps at first sight most natural. The translation on page 8 above, however, is based on the observation that the word לגרוע appears to be an echo of the saying attributed to Aqiba in *babli*, lines A12-13: כשאתם מגיעים אצל אבני שיש טהור

⁸⁶ *m.Mid.* 4.5 (= *b.Pes.* 26a). Presumably, the meaning is that the boxes were closed on all sides except that facing the wall to which the repairs were to be made.

⁸⁷ MORRAY-JONES, "Paradise Revisited. Part 1," 207, n. 113.

⁸⁸ See further pp. 123-125 below.

⁸⁹ See further p. 124, n. 70 below.

⁹⁰ MORRAY-JONES, "Paradise Revisited. Part 1," 214.

⁹¹ HALPERIN, *The Merkabah*, 93.

⁹² NEUSNER, trans., *Hagigah and Moed Qatan* (The Talmud of the Land of Israel 20; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986) 53.

Here, the verb נגע, admittedly in its *hif'il* form, means "to approach" or "to arrive at," a meaning which may also be carried by the *qal* form of this verb.⁹³ This linguistic connection, if valid, may just possibly indicate that Aqiba's saying in the form preserved by *babli*, A11-19 was also known to the redactor of *yerushalmi*. It is much more likely, however, that both occurrences of נגע (*yerushalmi*, B8 and *babli*, A12) are independently derived from the saying attributed to Aqiba in the earlier version of the פרדס story, as preserved in the hekhalot sources (C1c): ... וכשהגעתי אל הפרגוד.

On its own, this linguistic connection between the story of the four and the parable of the garden in *yerushalmi* may perhaps be considered rather weak and inconclusive. It is, however, strongly supported by another very clear link: namely, the *hif'il* verb, להציץ (also in *tosefta*, B7) which is used throughout the פרדס story, in all sources, of the three who "looked."⁹⁴ I conclude, therefore, that the parable of the king's garden has been displaced in *yerushalmi*, that *tosefta* locates it in its proper context, that it correctly identifies the פרדס with the (celestial) holy of holies, that it was originally composed as an interpretative comment on the story of the four, and that the author of the parable was very probably aware of the pre-talmudic version preserved in the hekhalot sources (as indicated by the verb נגע).

In the case of the parable of the two roads (C1-17), no such linguistic connections are discernible and the relevance of this parable to the פרדס story seems, therefore, to be very doubtful. MAIER associates the imagery of fire and snow with *1 Enoch* 14:13, where it is stated that the celestial temple was "hot like snow and cold like ice."⁹⁵ In *yerushalmi* and *'Abot deRabbi Natan*, however, the parable appears in contexts which do not support this interpretation and it is, therefore, unlikely that it originally had this meaning. Nonetheless, it may be that the redactor of *tosefta*'s version did make the association suggested by MAIER, which

⁹³ See MARCUS JASTROW, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (1886-90; reprinted Brooklyn, NY: Traditional, 1950) 875a, and the references cited there.

⁹⁴ In the talmudic sources and *Canticles R.*: lines A6-8, A20, A24 and A32; in the longer hekhalot recension: sections A1b and B2a-c; and in the genizah fragment of HZ: section A/B3.

⁹⁵ MAIER, "Das Gefährdungsmotiv bei der Himmelsreise in der jüdischen Apokalypik und 'Gnosis,'" *Kairos* 5 (1963) 26-27.

would explain why he chose to include it here. Alternatively, HALPERIN suggests that the parable may originally have referred to the Torah as a whole,⁹⁶ while ROWLAND interprets it in the context of the פרדס story as a warning about the dangers associated with mystical or theosophical speculation and as “an encouragement to moderation, an avoidance of infatuation and extremes.”⁹⁷

Returning to “Four Entered Paradise” itself, the above analysis has shown that the story of the four was in rabbinic tradition associated with *mHag.* 2.1 even before the redactor of the mystical collection made it into a specific illustration of the restriction concerning המרכבה by adding the names of the three תלמידי חכמים. We have also found that the earliest form of the story referred quite unambiguously to the visionary-mystical practice of ascent to the heavenly temple. This finding has significant implications regarding the meaning of the expression מעשה מרכבה as encountered in rabbinic sources. Contrary to the opinions of scholars who maintain that the traditions included under this heading were purely biblical-exegetical in scope and nature, having nothing to do with the supposedly later practice of the heavenly ascent as described in the hekhalot writings,⁹⁸ the פרדס story demonstrates that

⁹⁶ HALPERIN, *The Merkabah*, 94-97. HALPERIN cites a somewhat similar parable in *4 Ezra* 7:6-14, also found in *Mek., bahodesh*, 4: “... the Torah is of fire, was given from fire, and is compared to fire. As it is the way of fire, that if one draws near it he is burnt, if he goes far from it he is cold, so one is to warm oneself by its light” (trans. HALPERIN, *ibid.*, 96).

⁹⁷ ROWLAND, *The Open Heaven*, 316.

⁹⁸ See, for example: MAIER, *Kultus*, 128-146; EPHRAIM E. URBACH, “המסורות על-תורת הסוד בתקופת התנאים,” in *idem*, R. J. ZVI WERBLOWSKY and CH. WIRSZUBSKI, eds., *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem on his Seventieth Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967) 1-28; GERD A. WEWERS, *Geheimnis und Geheimhaltung im rabbinischen Judentum* (RGVV 35; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1975) 231-235; SCHÄFER, “New Testament and Hekhalot Literature: The Journey into Heaven in Paul and in Merkabah Mysticism,” *JJS* 35 (1984) 19-35, reprinted in *idem*, *Hekhalot-Studien (HS)* (TSAJ 19; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1988) 234-249; *idem*, “Tradition and Redaction in Hekhalot Literature,” *JSJ* 14 (1983) 172-181, reprinted in *HS*, 8-16; *idem*, “Merkavah Mysticism and Rabbinic Judaism,” *JAOS* 104 (1984) 537-554; *idem*, “Gershom Scholem Reconsidered: The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism” (12th Sacks Lecture; Oxford: Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 1986), reprinted as “The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism,” *HS*, 277-295; HALPERIN, *The Merkabah*, especially 179-185; *idem*, *Faces*, especially 1-37 and 451; JOSEPH DAN, *Three Types of Ancient Jewish Mysticism* (7th Rabbi Louis Feinberg

מעשה מרכבה was already associated with the visionary ascent in the earliest stages of the rabbinic literary tradition.

This is not, of course, to deny that biblical exegesis was a central element of מעשה מרכבה, as it was of the apocalyptic literary tradition. As numerous scholars have recognized, the supposed dichotomy between exegetical-literary activity on the one hand, and practical-experiential mysticism on the other is largely false, since each type of activity must support and inform the other.⁹⁹ The following study will confirm this observation and explore the interaction between these two elements of the מרכבה tradition.¹⁰⁰ On the one hand, the פרדס story indicates clearly that visionary practices and heavenly ascents were known to, and allegedly practiced by, some members of the early rabbinic community, although others seem to have strongly disapproved of such practices and – which is at least equally important – of the exegetical traditions with

Memorial Lecture in Judaic Studies; Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati, 1984) 3-4; *idem*, *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History* (New York: New York University Press 1988), 38-76, especially 58-59; *idem*, *The Revelation of the Secret of the World: The Beginning of Jewish Mysticism in Late Antiquity* (Brown University Program in Judaic Studies Occasional Paper No. 2; Providence, RI: Brown University, 1992), especially 1-13; and *idem*, *The Ancient Jewish Mysticism* (Tel-Aviv: MOD Books, 1993) 7-41.

⁹⁹ See, for example: ALEXANDER, “The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch,” *JJS* 28 (1977) 173-180; *idem*, “3 Enoch and the Talmud,” 41-43; ITHAMAR GRUENWALD, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (AGJU 14; Leiden: Brill, 1980) 82-97; MOSHE IDEL, “תפיסת התורה בספרות ההיכלות וגלגוליה בקבלה,” *JSJT* 1 (1981) 23-84; IRA CHERNUS, *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism: Studies in the History of Midrash* (StJud 11; Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1982) 11-16; ROWLAND, *The Open Heaven*, 271-281; *idem*, “The Parting of the Ways: the Evidence of Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic and Mystical Material,” in JAMES D. G. DUNN, ed., *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135. The Second Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism (Durham, September, 1989)* (WUNT 66; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck 1992) 213-237, especially 222-226; MICHAEL FISHBANE, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986) 536-543; ARNOLD GOLDBERG, “Quotation of Scripture in Hekhalot Literature,” in JOSEPH DAN, ed., *Proceedings of the First International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism: Early Jewish Mysticism* (= *JSJT* 6:1-2; Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1987) 37-69; SEGAL, *Paul the Convert*, 38-56; ELLIOT R. WOLFSON, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994) 108-124; and DEUTSCH, *The Gnostic Imagination: Gnosticism, Mandaeism and Merkabah Mysticism* (BSJS 13; Leiden: Brill, 1995) 63-67.

¹⁰⁰ For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see pp. 217-225 below.

which they were associated.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, we shall find that the hekhalot writers' descriptions of the practice of heavenly ascent are permeated with ideas and images derived from a rich and complex exegetical tradition with ancient roots and far-reaching branches, which extend into rabbinic literature and beyond.

The mystical collection is evidently older than any of the talmudic sources in which it is preserved. Assuming that the earliest talmudic source, *tosefta*, achieved its final form during the mid- to late fourth century CE, the mystical collection must have been compiled in the third or very early fourth century at latest.¹⁰² The underlying hekhalot recension of "Four Entered Paradise" has in turn been found to pre-date the mystical collection, which means that it cannot have been written much later than the middle of the third century. This *terminus ad quem* is separated by little more than a century from the *terminus a quo* of the story its present form, namely, the lifetime of its hero, Aqiba. It is therefore entirely possible that the story goes back to Aqiba himself or to the circle of his disciples. It may even be the case that a pre-existent unit of tradition was appropriated by or posthumously attributed to him. The evidence of Paul's account of his ascent to Paradise (2 Cor. 12:1-12), the content and language of which have been found to include more – and more precise – parallels with the story of the four than can be accounted for by coincidence,¹⁰³ indicates that the key components

¹⁰¹ See MORRAY-JONES, "Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition: A Study of the Traditions Concerning *hammerkabab* and *ma'aseh merkabab* in Tannaitic and Amoraic Sources" (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1988); *idem*, "Paradise Revisited. Part 1," 183-190; and the sources cited there.

¹⁰² See HALPERIN, *The Merkabah*, 105.

¹⁰³ These parallels include the following: both Paul and Aqiba hear "unutterable words" during the course of their heavenly journeys (2 Cor. 12:4, cf. HZ at SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§348-352, immediately following the פּרדס story); Paul's ἄγγελος Σατανᾶ (2 Cor. 12:7) corresponds to Aqiba's מלאכי חבלה (HZ/MR:C1c, cf. *babli*, A54); Paul's plea that the angel should leave him (ἵνα ἀποστή ἀπ' ἐμοῦ [2 Cor. 12:8]) corresponds to God's command that the angels should "leave this elder alone" (הניחן לזקן הזה [HZ/MR:C1c, cf. *babli*, A58]); Paul's expression ἵνα με κολαφίζη (2 Cor. 12:7) corresponds to the statement in the פּרדס story that one of the four was "smitten" (נפגע) [HZ/MR:A1b, B2b, cf. the talmudic recensions, A7 and A24]; and finally, in another account of what appears to be the same vision, the response of Paul's listeners: "it were not fitting for him to live" (οὐ γὰρ καθήκεν αὐτὸν ζῆν [Acts 22:22]), echoes the formula: ראוּי לוֹ כּאילוֹ לֹא בּא לעוֹלָם, preserved at *m.Hag.* 2.1. See

of the tradition of ascent to פָּרַדֵּס had already been assembled by the mid-first century CE.¹⁰⁴

4. *The Water Vision Episode in “Four Entered Paradise” according to ms. New York of Hekhalot Zutarti*

Aqiba’s enigmatic warning to refrain from saying “Water! Water!” in the vicinity of the “marble stones” is evidently a reference to a known location to or through which the visionary must travel in the course of his heavenly journey. Of the talmudic and midrashic versions, the warning is mentioned only in *babli*’s version of the פָּרַדֵּס story (A11-19). It is not found in *tosefta*, *yerushalmi* or *Canticles Rabbah*, nor does it occur in the first-person account preserved in *HZ/MR:A-C*, which we have identified as the earliest surviving version of the story.

We have seen that section B of the hekhalot recension is an editorial expansion of the original story. Here, the material common to all four manuscripts appears to be lifted directly from a talmudic version which did *not* include Aqiba’s warning. This interpolated text has in turn been expanded in different ways by the redactors of *MR(N)* and *HZ(N)*. The material unique to *MR(N)* includes Aqiba’s warning (B1b) in a form which agrees verbatim with mss. London 400 and Vatican 171 of *babli*,¹⁰⁵ but there is no way of telling which of these sources has priority and *MR(N)* provides no additional information to explain the

further MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited. Part 2,” 278-289.

¹⁰⁴ It should be remarked that my analysis of the redactional history of the פָּרַדֵּס story and my interpretation of its meaning have been challenged by ALON GOSHEN GOTTSTEIN (“Four Entered Paradise Revisited,” *HTR* 88 [1995] 69-133), who proposes an altogether different interpretation of the story and maintains that its original context was the mystical collection in *t.Hag.* 2.1-7. In my opinion, GOSHEN GOTTSTEIN’s theory of the story’s origin and meaning is produced by an invalid method and proceeds from false assumptions. It is not, however, possible to provide an adequate rebuttal of his position without a detailed analysis of his argument and the extensive body of textual material by which it is supported. Such an analysis requires more space than is available within the confines of this study and will therefore be published in another place (see ROWLAND and MORRAY-JONES, *The Mystery of God: Jewish Mystical Traditions in the New Testament* [CRINT 3; Assen/Minneapolis: Van Gorcum/Fortress, in preparation]).

¹⁰⁵ See p. 5, n. 25, and cf. p. 13, n. 57, above.

unit's meaning.¹⁰⁶ Turning to the material unique to *HZ(N)*, B2c agrees almost *verbatim* with *Cant. R.* 1.28.¹⁰⁷ *HZ(N)*:B2a-b, however, introduces material which is not found in any talmudic or midrashic source and which bears directly on the meaning of Aqiba's warning in *babli*, even though the warning itself does not occur in this version:

B2a Ben Azzai looked into the sixth palace and saw the brilliance of the air of the marble stones with which the palace was paved (זיר אויר אבני שיש שיהיו סלולות) (בדיכל)¹⁰⁸ and his body could not bear it, and he opened his mouth and asked them: "These waters – what is the nature of them (מיים הללו מה טיבן)?" and died. Of him, scripture says: *Precious in the eyes of the LORD is the death of his saints* (Ps. 116:15).

B2b Ben Zoma looked at the brilliance in the marble stones (בזיר באבני השיש) and thought that they were water, and his body could bear that he did not ask them, but his mind could not bear it and was smitten – he went out of his mind. Of him scripture says: *Have you found honey? Eat what is enough for you ...*, etc. (Prov. 25:16).

Here the cause of Ben Azzai's death and Ben Zoma's affliction (glossed as madness) are explained as the consequences of an hallucination: the marble stones look like, but are not really, water. When Ben Azzai sees this, he is unable to refrain from asking a question which brings about his death. Ben Zoma manages not to ask the question, but the mental strain of resisting the urge to do so drives him mad. Both characters seem to know that the question should not be asked, but this foreknowledge cannot easily be explained by reference to Aqiba's warning, which is not included in this manuscript's version of the פֶּרֶדֶס story. We are not told to whom the question is addressed, but the hallucination is evidently connected with "looking" into the sixth דיכל. While

¹⁰⁶ It is worth observing, however, that *MR(N)*'s rendering of the story of Aher's encounter with Meṭatron (B2d) appears to represent a stage of development between 3 *Enoch* 16:1-5, which is probably the original source of this unit, and the earliest manuscript version of *b.Hag.* 15a (see the discussion of this material by ALEXANDER, MORRAY-JONES, and DEUTSCH, cited on pp. 13-14, n. 64 above). The possibility that *babli* is dependent on *MR(N)*:B2d – perhaps also, B1b – must therefore be considered.

¹⁰⁷ See p. 3 above.

¹⁰⁸ Literally: "... the brilliance of the air of the marble stones, which were paved in the palace." See further pp. 92-96 below.

the “brilliance” associated with the stones is perhaps natural enough, the mention of “air” in B2a is puzzling.

This material is evidently related to an episode described elsewhere in the hekhalot writings and located, as in this passage, at the gate of the sixth *היכל*. In this episode, which makes no reference to the *פרדס* story, the mystic sees (or is shown) a vision of what appears to be water, although this appearance is an illusion. If he fails to recognize the illusion as such and asks about the water, he is deemed unworthy to enter the sixth *היכל* and assaulted by its angelic guardians, who accuse him of being descended from the worshippers of the golden calf. It is clear from the immediately preceding material that the redactors of the surviving editions regarded this episode as a test and most modern commentators have interpreted it in this light. Two significantly different recensions of this episode (henceforth: “the water vision episode”) are preserved in the hekhalot compilations. These are examined in detail in chapter three below. First, however, it is necessary to consider the significance of the location at the entrance to the sixth *היכל* and to review previous scholarly discussion of this enigmatic episode and its meaning.

5. *The Cosmic Temple*

As we have seen, the *פרדס* of “Four Entered Paradise” is identified with the interior of the heavenly sanctuary, and especially with the celestial holy of holies. This equation must be understood in relation to a basic structural motif of the Jewish literature of heavenly ascent, in which the journey into heaven is typically envisaged as a procession through the courts of a cosmic temple.¹⁰⁹ In the majority of accounts, the courts and chambers of this temple are not merely “in” heaven, but are themselves the discrete celestial levels or “heavens” of the cosmos. This

¹⁰⁹ See further: HIMMELFARB, “Apocalyptic Ascent and the Heavenly Temple,” *SBLSP* 26 (1987) 210-217; *idem*, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); and MORRAY-JONES, “The Temple Within: The Embodied Divine Image and its Worship in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish and Christian Sources,” *SBLSP* (1998) 400-431. On the central significance of temple imagery in the hekhalot corpus, see, above all, ELIOR, “From Earthly Temple to Heavenly Shrines: Prayer and Sacred Song in the Hekhalot Literature and Its Relation to Temple Traditions,” *JSQ* 4 (1997) 217-267.

cosmic model is already implicit in the earliest detailed account of the process of heavenly ascent, *1 Enoch* 14:8-25. Here, Enoch's ascent proceeds in three distinct stages, the first being marked by a wall, corresponding either to the balustrade (סורג) which, in the Jerusalem temple, marked the boundary between the Court of the Gentiles and the inner temple, or, which is functionally the same, to the wall around the inner courts and sanctuary building.¹¹⁰ This is followed by a "great house" (the sanctuary building), within which is a second "house" (the holy of holies), containing the divine throne. As I have argued elsewhere, the tripartite structure of this temple embodies a cosmology of three heavens,¹¹¹ which is also attested in other passages of the early Enoch literature.¹¹² According to most commentators, *Testament of Levi* originally incorporated a similar three-level cosmology, although the number of heavens was increased to seven in later versions.¹¹³ In this text, the

¹¹⁰ HIMMELFARB (*Ascent to Heaven*, 14) suggests that the first stage of the vision corresponds to the temple vestibule (אולם), but her statement that the Greek text of *1 Enoch* 14:9 reads "building" for "wall" is inaccurate and appears to be derived from J. T. MILIK's very speculative reconstruction of the text, which has been refuted by MATTHEW BLACK. See MILIK and BLACK, eds., *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments from Qumrân Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 195 and 146-147.

¹¹¹ See MORRAY-JONES, "Paradise Revisited. Part 1," 203-205 (*contra* HIMMELFARB, *Ascent to Heaven*, 9-31, who understands the passage to refer to a single heaven only).

¹¹² See MILIK and BLACK, *The Books of Enoch*, 33-41 and 231-236.

¹¹³ See, for example: R. H. CHARLES, *APOT* 2.304; *idem*, *The Greek Versions of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (1908; reprinted Oxford and Hildesheim: Oxford University Press and Georg Olms, 1960) xxviii; H. C. KEE, *OTP*, 1.775-780 and 788-789, nn. 2d, 3a; ROWLAND, *The Open Heaven*, 81; ADELA YARBRO COLLINS, "The Seven Heavens in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses," in JOHN J. COLLINS and MICHAEL FISHBANE, eds., *Death, Ecstasy and Other Worldly Journeys* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) 62-66. HIMMELFARB maintains that "no form of the text with three heavens ever existed" (*Ascent to Heaven*, 126-7, n. 7) but this assertion appears to be based on a misunderstanding of the analysis of MARINUS DE JONGE ("Notes on Testament of Levi II-VII," in *idem*, *Studies on the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* [SVTP 3; Leiden: Brill, 1975] 247-260). True, DE JONGE comments that the relevant fragment of the Aramaic Levi document from Qumran (4Q213, 1.ii.15-18) "does not necessarily presuppose more than one heaven" (*ibid.*, 253), but this observation does not apply to the developed recensions of *Testament of Levi*. The "non- α " Greek and Armenian recensions, which refer twice to an arrangement of three plus four heavens, are believed by DE JONGE to have priority over the " α " recensions, which have three heavens only. Nonetheless, he states that the extra four heavens in the "non- α " recensions are "clearly redactional" (*ibid.*, 259), implying that a three-heaven version

celestial levels are clearly portrayed as the courts and chambers of the cosmic temple, the highest heaven being called the holy of holies.¹¹⁴

Although Paul’s account of his ascent to Paradise in “the third heaven” reverts to the simpler threefold cosmology, it is largely displaced by the seven-tiered model in the later apocalyptic literature. The sevenfold model is also encountered in the thirteen *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* (שירות עולת השבת) from Qumran, where the seven sanctuaries (דבירים) of the celestial temple are evidently identical with the seven heavens. This is most clearly apparent in the description of the seventh sanctuary, the holy of holies:

Sin[g praise] to Go[d who is Dr]eadful in power, [all you spirits of knowledge and light] in order to [exa]lt together the splendidly shining firmament of [His] holy sanctuary.

[Give praise to Hi]m, O you god[like] spirits, in order to pr[aise for ever and e]ver the firmament of the uppermost heaven, all [its beams] and its walls, a[ll] its [for]m, the work of [its] struc[ture].¹¹⁵

Here, the parallel expressions “firmament of his holy sanctuary” and “firmament of the uppermost heaven” indicate clearly that the innermost sanctuary is the highest heaven. This is confirmed by the fact that the “uppermost heaven” is described as having “beams” and “walls.”

Turning to the hekhalot literature, we find in 3 *Enoch* 18:3-4¹¹⁶ and *Massekhet Hekhalot*, §4¹¹⁷ that all seven palaces are located in the uppermost of the seven heavens. From a formal point of view, however, these two texts are somewhat atypical of the hekhalot corpus, the former being an apocalypse and the latter a fairly conventional midrashic compilation. Neither text describes the practice of the heavenly ascent. In

of the text did, in fact, precede the seven-heaven version.

¹¹⁴ See HIMMELFARB, *Ascent to Heaven*, 33 and further, pp. 111-113 below.

¹¹⁵ 4Q403, 1.i.41-44 (= 4Q405, 6.i.3-5), ed. and trans. CAROL NEWSOM, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (HSS 27; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) 211-213.

¹¹⁶ HUGO ODEBERG, ed. and trans., *3 Enoch or The Hebrew Book of Enoch* (1928; reprinted New York: Ktav, 1973), Hebrew, 26 and English, 53-55; cf. SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §24; and trans. ALEXANDER, *OTP* 1.271. See further: ALEXANDER’s remarks in *OTP* 1.239-240; and SCHÄFER, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992) 124.

¹¹⁷ KLAUS HERRMANN, ed. and trans., *Massekhet Hekhalot: Traktat von den himmlischen Palästen* (TSAJ 39; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1994) 34*-38* and 153-155, §§10,1-5.

passages of the hekhalot literature which refer explicitly to this practice, it is nowhere described apart from the visionary journey through the seven היכלות, which are clearly identical with the seven heavens. There is, for example, no mention of a prior ascent through the heavens in the very detailed account in *Hekhalot Rabbati* of Nehunya b. Ha-Qanah's visionary journey through the seven היכלות to the מרכבה.¹¹⁸ Nonetheless, the practice of this journey is said to be "like having a ladder in one's house,"¹¹⁹ and the voyage of "descent" through the seven היכלות is clearly the same as that of ascent through the seven heavens. In the final chapter of *Ma'aseh Merkabah*, Aqiba states that he gazed "from the palace of the first firmament to the seventh palace" (or, according to ms. New York: "... to the palace of the seventh firmament").¹²⁰ Here again, the seven היכלות are the seven heavens.

The seven-heaven cosmology is most commonly found in Rabbinic sources,¹²¹ but alternative traditions which enumerate two or three heavens are also sometimes mentioned.¹²² The sevenfold model doubtless reflects the seven planetary spheres of Greek cosmology and/or the seven heavens which are encountered in some Sumerian and Babylonian magical texts.¹²³ A correspondence between the seven-level cosmos and the structure of the Jerusalem temple may be implied at *m.Kelim* 1.6-9, which lists ten areas of increasing holiness in Jerusalem, three outside the temple and seven within. Differing opinions are expressed about the precise divisions between these areas, but all agree that there were seven levels of holiness in the temple. According to R. Jose, these levels

¹¹⁸ HR 13.2-(?)23.4; *Synopse* §§198-(?)250 (it is not clear exactly where Nehunya's narrative ends). See further pp. 67-73 below.

¹¹⁹ HR 13.2 and 20.3; *Synopse* §§199 and 237.

¹²⁰ *MM*, §33 (ed. SCHOLEM, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 116; SCHÄFER, *Synopse* §595; cf. MICHAEL D. SWARTZ, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkabah* [TSAJ 28; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1992] 249; and NAOMI JANOWITZ, *The Poetics of Ascent: Theories of Language in a Rabbinic Ascent Text* [SSJHMC; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989] 64). Mss. Oxford, Munich 40, and Dropsie: ' וראיתי מהיכל לרקיע ראשון ועד היכל ד' (ms. Munich 40: 'עד היכל שביעי'; ms. Munich 20: 'ראיתי מהיכל לרקיע ראשון ועד היכל שביעי'; ms. New York: 'ראיתי מהיכל לרקיע ראשון עד היכל רקיע שביעי'). See further p. 171 below.

¹²¹ See, for example: *Lev. R.* 29.11, *AdRN(A)* 37, *Pes. R.* 20.11-12 (see pp. 32-32, n. 121 below), and *Midrash ha-Gadol* to Exod. 7:1.

¹²² For example: *b.Hag.* 12b, *Midr. Ps.* 114:2, and *Deut. R.* 2.32 (to Deut. 6:4).

¹²³ See YARBRO COLLINS, "The Seven Heavens," 81-87.

were as follows: (1) the area within the סורג, from which gentiles were excluded; (2) the court of women; (3) the court of Israel; (4) the court of the priests; (5) the area between the altar and the entrance to the sanctuary; (6) the interior of the sanctuary building; and (7) the holy of holies.¹²⁴ Comparison of this schema with the simpler tripartite model of *1 Enoch* 14 reveals three points of correspondence: Jose’s level 1 corresponds to *1 Enoch*’s wall, and Jose’s levels 6 and 7 to *1 Enoch*’s two houses. It thus appears that the more elaborate sevenfold division of the temple may have been developed on the basis of the threefold schema by dividing the area between the סורג (or wall) and the sanctuary building into four distinct zones of ascending sanctity (Jose’s areas 2-5). All this suggests that the seven- and three-level cosmologies correspond to the hierarchic structure of the Temple more or less as follows:¹²⁵

<i>Sevenfold Model</i>	<i>Threefold Model</i>
1. Within the סורג	1. Within the סורג (or the wall around the inner temple)
2. The court of women	
3. The court of Israel	
4. The court of priests	
5. Beyond the altar	
6. The sanctuary building	2. The sanctuary building,
7. The holy of holies	3. The holy of holies.

When the seven-tiered celestial schema of the hekhalot writings is related to the structure of the temple, it appears that the gate of the sixth דִּיכָל, where the water vision episode occurs, corresponds to the entrance of the sanctuary building. That an element of danger should be associated with the transition across this threshold is not, perhaps, surprising, but the nature of that danger in the water vision episode is, as yet, unclear.

¹²⁴ See further, NEHER, “Le voyage mystique,” 73-76.

¹²⁵ Cf. MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited. Part 1,” 205.

CHAPTER TWO

THE פֶּרֶס STORY AND THE WATER VISION EPISODE: THE *STATUS QUAESTIONIS*

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most commentators (a) assumed Aqiba's warning, as preserved in *babli*, to be an integral component of the פֶּרֶס story, (b) associated the motif of water with Gnostic cosmological and/or cosmogonical speculations, and (c) used this as a key to unlock the meaning of the פֶּרֶס story as a whole.¹ This approach was roundly rejected by SCHOLEM, who likewise believed Aqiba's warning to be an original element of the story, but sought to explain it by reference to the water vision episode of the hekhalot tradition. Correlating the text of *babli* with the hekhalot versions of "Four Entered Paradise," he wrote:

Modern interpretations of this famous passage, which clearly enough refers to a *real* danger in the process of ascending to 'Paradise,' are extremely far-fetched and not a little irrational in their determination at all costs to preserve the characteristic essentials of rationalism. We are told that the passages refers (*sic*) to cosmological speculations about the *materia prima*, an explanation which lacks all plausibility and finds no support in the context or in the subject matter itself. The fact is that the later Merkabah mystics showed a perfectly correct understanding of the meaning of this passage, and their interpretation offers striking proof that the tradition of Tannaitic mysticism and theosophy was really alive among them, although certain details may have originated in a later period.²

¹ HEINRICH HIRSCH GRÄTZ, *Gnosticismus und Judenthum* (Krotoschin: Monasch, 1846) 94-101; MANUEL JOËL, *Blicke in die Religionsgeschichte zu Anfang des zweiten christlichen Jahrhunderts* (2 vols., 1880-83; reprinted Amsterdam: Philo, 1971) 1.163-170; WILHELM BACHER, *Die Agada der Tannaiten* (2 vols.; Straßburg: Trübner, 1884) 1.339-346; MORIZ FRIEDLÄNDER, *Der vorchristliche jüdische Gnosticismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1898) 57-60; N. I. WEINSTEIN, *Zur Genesis der Agada* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1901) 198; DAVID NEUMARK, *Geschichte der jüdischen Philosophie* (2 vols.; Berlin: Reimer, 1907-28) 1.87-95.

² SCHOLEM, *Major Trends*, 52 (*italics his*); cf. *idem*, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 14-16.

It should be noted that SCHOLEM here assigns priority to *babli*, which, in his opinion, has been interpreted correctly by “the later Merkabah mystics,” who, presumably, are represented by the redactor of the פְּרָדָס story in *HZ(N)*, B2a-b. Referring to the water vision episode itself, according to the recension found elsewhere in *HZ*,³ he comments:

The authenticity of the story’s core, the ecstatic’s vision of water, hardly requires proof. Nothing could be more far-fetched than to treat it as a *post-festum* interpretation of the Talmudic passage: there is no reason whatsoever to doubt that the mystical experience of the dangers of the ascent is really the subject of the anecdote.⁴

SCHOLEM, then, presupposes that Aqiba’s warning in *babli*, A11-19 is the source of *HZ(N)*, B2a-b. Nonetheless, he believes that the redactor of *HZ(N)* has correctly understood the warning to be an allusion to a “real” – or, in some sense, objective – visionary experience which had also been encountered by other heavenly travellers in a continuous tradition which originated in, if not before, the tannaitic period. Confirmation of this is, in SCHOLEM’s opinion, provided by the water vision episode itself, which he takes to be an independent account of the same visionary experience. The following study will confirm SCHOLEM’s fundamental insight that the mystical traditions to which these texts refer are both authentic and early. The weakness of his source-critical analysis must, however, be acknowledged, since he ignores the fact that the passage which supposedly interprets Aqiba’s warning, as found in *babli*, and the water vision episode, which allegedly confirms the accuracy of that “interpretation,” are both found in the same source, *HZ*, and so cannot be assumed to be independent of each other.

It should also be noted that SCHOLEM was by no means the first modern scholar to interpret Aqiba’s warning as a reference to a vision encountered in the course of a heavenly ascent. This had already been proposed by BOUSSET and, later, BIETENHARD, who both maintained some continuity with previous scholarship by suggesting that the warning is directed against Gnostic interpretations of the vision’s meaning.⁵ SCHOLEM, who, as we have seen, rejected this view, was apparently

³ See pp. 55-59 below; SCHOLEM (*Major Trends*, 52-53) quotes ms. Munich 22.

⁴ SCHOLEM, *Major Trends*, 53.

⁵ BOUSSET, “Himmelsreise,” 146; BIETENHARD, “himmlische Welt,” 92-95.

content simply to emphasize the vision's experiential basis and offered no further explanation of its meaning, its illusory nature, or its danger.

SCHOLEM's solution did not satisfy NEHER, who, rightly recognizing that the פֶּרֶס of the ascent tradition is the celestial temple, interpreted Aqiba's words in the light of Ezekiel's eschatological vision of water flowing from beneath the temple (Ezek. 47:1-12). He suggested that Aqiba was warning the יוֹרְדֵי מַרְכָּבָה who experienced such visions not to be misled into succumbing to the catastrophic delusion of imminent messianic expectation.⁶ MAIER, who likewise perceived that Aqiba's warning alludes to the vision of the heavenly prototype of the Jerusalem temple,⁷ explained the "pure marble stones" by reference to the brilliant white masonry of the actual temple, as described in several ancient sources.⁸ MAIER found an especially striking parallel in the following baraita:

Our rabbis taught

.... He who has not seen the sanctuary on completion of its construction has never seen a beautiful building in his life. Which one? Abaye or, some say, R. Hisda, said: This is the building of Herod. Of what did he build it? Rabbah said: Of yellow and white marble stones (בִּאֲבֵנֵי שֵׁשׁ וּמַרְמָרָא) – there are those who say: Of yellow, black and marble stones (בִּאֲבֵנֵי שֵׁשׁ וְכֹחֶלֶא וּמַרְמָרָא) – in alternately recessed and projecting rows, so that it could be plastered, for he intended to cover it with gold. Our rabbis said to him: Leave it be – it is more beautiful just as it is, for it resembles the waves of the sea.⁹

It certainly seems possible that this baraita is in some way related to Aqiba's warning. The difference of opinion about the varieties of the stones seems, however, to be an indication that the baraita is not based on historical memory. There is, moreover, no mention of the wavelike appearance of the stones in any contemporary description of Herod's temple. The possibility must therefore be considered that the baraita is

⁶ NEHER, "Le voyage mystique," especially 59-68 and 77-82. On Jewish, Christian, Gnostic and Mandaean traditions about the eschatological waters issuing from beneath the temple, see further ERIK PETERSON, "Die "Taufe" im Acherusischen See," in *idem*, *Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis: Studien und Untersuchungen* (1959; reprinted Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1982) 310-332.

⁷ MAIER, "Gefährdungsmotiv," 28-38; *idem*, *Vom Kultus*, 18-19 and 140-146.

⁸ For example, Josephus, *War* v.223, and *m.Sot.* 2.2 (also cited by NEHER, "Le voyage mystique," 77; see further p. 92, n. 41 below).

⁹ *b.Sukk.* 51b; cf. *B.B.* 4a; see MAIER, "Gefährdungsmotiv," 35-36.

in some way derivative of *b.Hag.* 14b and/or the hekhalot tradition. In the baraita, however, the appearance of water is here given a positive valuation, which is contrary to both “Four Entered Paradise” and the water vision episode itself. Thus, although the baraita seems to confirm the association between the marble stones which look like water and the temple, it does not help us to explain the extreme danger which attaches to them.

MAIER found a reference to the marble stones of the celestial temple in the description of Enoch’s visionary ascent in *1 Enoch* 14:

⁽⁹⁾... and I went in until I approached a wall, built of hailstones, with tongues of fire surrounding it, and it began to terrify me. ⁽¹⁰⁾And I went into the tongues of fire and approached a great house built of hailstones; and the walls of the house were like smooth ashlar (λιθόπλακες), and they were all of snow, and the floor was of snow; ⁽¹¹⁾and the ceiling (was) like shooting stars and lightning-flashes; and between them (were) fiery cherubim; and their heaven (was) water; ⁽¹²⁾and a flaming fire surrounded the walls; and the doors were ablaze with fire.¹⁰

MAIER argued, however, that although Aqiba’s warning in *babli* is indeed derived from the ascent tradition, as SCHOLEM maintained, the saying is a late addition to the story of the four, which originally referred to non-visionary exegetical speculation about the heavenly temple and was only later interpreted as an account of an actual heavenly ascent.¹¹

MAIER further associated the image of water with the primordial chaos waters of ancient Near Eastern and Hebrew mythology, but did not develop this point in detail.¹² GOLDBERG offered the important observation that, according to both hekhalot and midrashic tradition, the basic substance of the celestial realm is fire. He inferred that the meaning of the water vision episode is that one who misperceives the substance of the *היכלות* as water thereby betrays himself to the angels as a “liar” who, like the Israelites who kissed the golden calf, has worshipped a false image of the deity.¹³

¹⁰ *1 Enoch* 14:9-12. This passage is examined in detail on pp. 105-109 below.

¹¹ MAIER, “Gefährdungsmotiv,” 37-38; *idem*, *Vom Kultus*, 140-141. According to MAIER’s thesis, this reinterpretation of the earlier exegetical and speculative tradition marks the emergence of hekhalot mysticism as such.

¹² MAIER, “Gefährdungsmotiv,” 28, n. 29, and 33-35.

ROWLAND, like MAIER, believed that *babli's* interpolation of Aqiba's warning into "Four Entered Paradise" marks the reinterpretation of that story – which, he thought, originally referred to esoteric forms of biblical exegesis – as an account of a heavenly ascent.¹⁴ He associated the image of marble stones which look like, but are not, water with the "sea of glass" mentioned at Rev. 4:6 and 15:2.¹⁵ With regard to the derivation and meaning of this image, he conceded that "the influence of cultic ideas is not to be ruled out," but argued that the firmament of ice in Ezek. 1:22 is "the more likely origin."¹⁶ The influence of Ezek. 1:22 is already found, ROWLAND argued, at *1 Enoch* 14:10 (reading "crystal" in place of "snow"¹⁷), where it is combined with the imagery of Exod. 24:10.¹⁸ Observing that references to celestial bodies of water are also encountered in other apocalyptic writings,¹⁹ ROWLAND suggested that Ezekiel's firmament was exegetically associated with the firmament between the upper and lower waters in Gen. 1:7:

The reference to a firmament in Ezekiel and Genesis could easily have led a later reader to combine the two verses and as a result water would play a part in the cosmology, whose appearance would be like the crystal which characterized the firmament in Ezekiel 1.22²⁰

In Rev. 15:2, the sea of "glass ... mingled with fire" is symbolically identified with the waters of the Red Sea, by which the enemies of God are overwhelmed, but which the faithful are permitted to traverse in safety. ROWLAND suggested that Aqiba's warning in *babli* may be an oblique reference to the same tradition and, conversely, that

¹³ GOLDBERG, "Der Vortrag des Ma'asse Merkawa: eine Vermutung zur fruehen Merkawamystik," *Judaica* 29 (1973) 7-8; *idem*, "Der verkannte Gott: Prüfung und Scheitern der Adepten in der Merkawamystik," *ZRGG* 26 (1974) 17-29.

¹⁴ ROWLAND, *The Open Heaven*, 313-314.

¹⁵ ROWLAND, "The Visions of God," 147-149; *idem*, *The Open Heaven*, 219-221 and 225. See further pp. 129-134 below.

¹⁶ ROWLAND, "The Visions of God," 148; cf. *idem*, *The Open Heaven*, 225.

¹⁷ See further p. 106, n. 3 below.

¹⁸ See further pp. 98-100 below.

¹⁹ In addition to Rev. 4:6 and 15:2, ROWLAND refers to *Test. Lev.* 2.7, *2 Enoch* (J) 3:3, and *Test. Abr. (B)* 8:3. See further pp. 111-115 below.

²⁰ ROWLAND, *The Open Heaven*, 225.

the inclusion of the sea of glass with its threatening aspect in Rev. 15 may well be an earlier recollection of a danger facing visionaries as they seek to identify the different contents of the heavenly world.²¹

URBACH also believed Aqiba's warning to be a late addition to "Four Entered Paradise," but did not think that it originated independently of the story. He understood the expression "Water! Water!" to be an idiom for ecstatic experience associated with the vision of the pavement below the celestial throne, and attributed the pericope to the rabbinic redactors of *babli*, who, in his opinion, regarded the claim to have experienced such visionary revelations as a blasphemous lie.²² On this basis, URBACH argued that the hekhalot tradition of the water-like marble stones, far from being the source of the talmudic unit, was originally an attempt to explain the talmudic pericope itself. He failed, however, to provide adequate justification of his claim that water is a recognizable metaphor for ecstatic experience as such,²³ or to account for the form of Aqiba's warning in *babli*: "When you approach do not say," which appears to imply participation in a visionary ascent and thus directly to contradict the meaning that URBACH attributed to it.

WEWERS, like URBACH, believed the warning to be a late expansion of the story of the four.²⁴ He interpreted it by reference to the story of Ben Zoma's meeting with Joshua and his disciples "in the street," where Ben Zoma is portrayed as being deeply absorbed in misguided contemplation of the upper and lower waters of creation.²⁵ Although this story makes no mention of marble stones, WEWERS evidently felt justified in reading it in combination with Aqiba's warning in *babli*, so that each explained the other. On this basis, he attributed a very literal and concrete – if rather fantastic – meaning to Aqiba's words, arguing that they may originally have referred to an hallucination which might

²¹ ROWLAND, "The Visions of God," 149. ROWLAND (*ibid.*) observes, however, that in Revelation 15, the threat associated with the sea is not cosmological error, but persecution of the faithful.

²² URBACH, "המסורות," 14-17. On the pavement beneath the throne, he refers to the association of Ezek. 1:26 with Exod. 24:10, on which see pp. 98-99 below.

²³ On the motif of seeing, hearing and/or drinking water, URBACH cites Ezek. 1:24, 4 Ezra 14:38-42, and *Od. Sol.* 11:4-7.

²⁴ WEWERS, *Geheimnis*, 171-188.

²⁵ *t.Hag.* 2.6, *y.Hag.* 77a-b (see p. 3 n. 11 above); *b.Hag.* 15a locates this story in the temple, not the street; *Gen. R.* 2.4 is not specific on this point.

be experienced by a rabbinical student who became intensely absorbed in exegesis of the creation story while walking in the city:

The twice-repeated “Water” refers to the rivers of Paradise and R. Aqiba warns his students: If you are going along the street in a state of absorption and think that you see this water, you are in error, for in reality this is the dazzling stones of the buildings that surround you. This means, however, that R. Aqiba not only understood the practice of entry into פֶּרֶדֶס, but also rejected it for his students. Even if a later era made a heroic tale out of this, it must still be emphasized that in this rejection, and in the consequences described, a defensive stance corresponding to that of [*m.Hag.* 2.1] is established.²⁶

Thus, WEWERS agrees with URBACH that the warning was originally a polemic against involvement in visionary practice and experience, as opposed to exegetical activity. His speculation with regard to the nature and cause of the vision is, however, based on a very dubious intertextual reading of the sources and has not met with widespread support. Equally unconvincing is the suggestion of HENRY A. FISCHEL that Aqiba’s words are a satirical warning against the dangers of Epicurean philosophy.²⁷ Although FISCHEL is able to find references in Epicurean and other Greco-Roman sources to celestial journeys involving visions of shining walls, gates and buildings, the supposed parallels are weaker and less convincing than those found in Jewish sources. They are certainly much too general to justify his bold conclusion that

the resplendent stones of the Akiba warning must be reminiscent of the wall, gate, building or fortress which in poetry and ecstatic vision represents the celestial world in certain Greco-Roman traditions and which was appropriated in the Epicurean pseudoapocalypse.²⁸

²⁶ WEWERS, *Geheimnis*, 187-188 (my translation).

²⁷ HENRY A. FISCHEL, *Rabbinic Literature and Greco-Roman Philosophy: A Study of Epicurean and Rhetorical in Early Midrashic Writings* (SPB 21; Leiden: Brill, 1973) 24-31. FISCHEL believes that Aqiba’s warning is an independent unit of tradition, not part of the פֶּרֶדֶס story (*ibid.*, 24-25). Nevertheless, his theory of its meaning is a development of his interpretation of “Four Entered Paradise” as an anti-Epicurean polemic, the term פֶּרֶדֶס standing for the garden (κῆπος) in which Epicurus lived with his disciples (*ibid.*, 1-24). Similarly, he sees the story of Ben Zoma’s meeting with Joshua as an example of a χρεῖα or satirical anecdote poking fun at the stereotype of the absent-minded, otherworldly philosopher (*ibid.*, 78).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

Since FISCHEL's Greco-Roman sources furnish no explanation of the significance of water, he concludes that the motif has no intrinsic meaning. Arguing that the repetitive utterance "Water! Water!" is simply a parody of the enthusiastic but incoherent rhetorical style of the Epicureans, he proposes the following very forced and speculative paraphrase of Aqiba's warning:

When (in your discussions with Epicureans) you reach (the point at which they begin to speak of) 'the place of pure marble splendor' do not (be carried away by their enthusiasm and) say (like them ecstatically) 'water, water' (or whatever the dialogue may touch upon at this point).²⁹

In the same category of forced interpretation, SAMSON H. LEVEY has suggested that the warning is a cryptic allusion to the waters of baptism, this being an extension of his unconvincing argument that the word פֶּרֶדֶס represents the Greek term *παράδεισος* and that the four named characters were all involved in study of Christian belief and doctrine.³⁰

Most recent commentators, whatever their views concerning the original meaning of the story of the four, have concurred with MAIER's opinion that, while Aqiba's warning was not part of the original פֶּרֶדֶס story (*contra* SCHOLEM), it was derived from the Jewish ascent tradition (*contra* URBACH and WEWERS). SCHÄFER summarizes this position as follows:

The combination of the *pardes* narrative with the water episode is redactional and thereby secondary. This is valid for Hekhalot literature as well as for the one Talmudic attestation (bHag 14b). The original *Sitz im Leben* of the *pardes* narrative is the rabbinic school; the *Sitz im Leben* of the water episode is Merkavah mysticism.³¹

SCHÄFER's opinion regarding the origin of the פֶּרֶדֶס story is, as has been shown above, mistaken. His statement that the combination of the

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ SAMSON H. LEVEY, "The Best Kept Secret of the Rabbinic Tradition," *Judaism* 21 (1972) 454-469, especially 467-468; see also *idem*, "Akiba: Sage in Search of The Messiah: A Closer Look," *Judaism* 41 (1992) 334-345; but cf. the devastating review by SOLOMON ZEITLIN, "The Plague of Pseudo-Rabbinic Scholarship," *JQR* 63 (1972-73) 187-203.

³¹ SCHÄFER, "New Testament and Hekhalot Literature," *HS*, 246.

story with the water vision episode is a secondary development, seems, however, to be correct, since the earliest form of “Four Entered Paradise” in *HZ/MR*, A and C makes no mention of marble stones or the appearance of water.

SCHÄFER’s conclusion concerning the origin of the water vision episode is supported by JOSEPH DAN’s detailed study of the hekhalot traditions about the dangers encountered by the יורדי מרכבה at the gate of the sixth היכל, in which he demonstrates that several layers of editorial activity can be detected in the extant sources, reflecting the growth and modification of these traditions over time.³² At what he believes to be the earliest stages of textual development, DAN observes that the actions of the angelic gatekeepers, especially the “tests” to which they subject the mystic, are portrayed as cruel, arbitrary and irrational, although subsequent generations of editors have tried to modify this impression in various ways. In its original form, he argues, the water vision episode was also characterized by these qualities and was not, in fact, a test at all, since its outcome was predetermined.³³ He concludes that these traditions about the dangers of the heavenly ascent originated independently of the rabbinic פורס tradition and only penetrated the talmudic literature at the late stage of editorial activity represented by *babli* (A11-19). DAN’s careful and methodical structural analysis of the material yields many significant insights, but he does not offer an explanation of the meaning of the water vision episode and is content merely to emphasize its “arbitrary” nature.

HALPERIN is skeptical regarding SCHOLEM’s insistence that Aqiba’s warning refers to a “real” visionary experience, pointing out that this explanation seems to attribute a spurious objectivity to the supposed experience of the vision of water:

Scholem’s stress on the reality of the *merkabah* mystics’ ecstatic experiences can be misleading. He did not, of course, mean that they “really” ascended to heaven, but that they “really” believed that they had done so. But it is easy to slip from this into the illusion that we can explain the ascension materials in the apocalypses and the *Hekhalot* by pointing to the supposed reality of the experience underlying them; whereas, of course, this hallucinatory “experience” itself

³² DAN, “פתח היכל שישיר,” in *idem*, ed., *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Early Jewish Mysticism*, 197-220.

³³ *Ibid.*, 198-202. See further p. 70 below.

cries out for explanation. This fallacy seems to me to dog much of Scholem's presentation.³⁴

HALPERIN was at first inclined to agree with URBACH's position that the hekhalot versions of both "Four Entered Paradise" and the water vision episode are derivative of *babli*,³⁵ but he subsequently reconsidered this opinion. Following a detailed comparative analysis of the sources, he argued that *babli*'s version of the פֶּרֶס story (A11-19) combines the imagery of the celestial temple ("pure marble stones") with that of God's battle with the waters of chaos, and that Aqiba's warning refers to a traditional belief that a traveller to the heavenly temple might be (or appear to be) assaulted by these waters.³⁶ Allusions to this tradition are, HALPERIN believes, encountered in a variety of rabbinic, Gnostic and apocalyptic sources. He carefully documents and analyzes an extensive midrashic tradition in which the battle with the waters is associated especially with God's appearance on the מֵרֶכְבֶּה at the Red Sea crossing, and in which the origin of the sin of the golden calf is traced to the distorted image of the מֵרֶכְבֶּה, reflected in the water:

The *merkabah* that appears in the waters has become part of the waters. Far from protecting us against chaos, it becomes one with chaos. Like the Gnostic divinity, it has become degraded in some unspeakable and possibly irreversible way. It has taken on the character of the dark and demonic forces from below.³⁷

Although HALPERIN recognizes that the water vision episode of the hekhalot sources "shows no sign of the influence of BT Hag. 14b,"³⁸ he resists the conclusion that *babli* may be indebted to a hekhalot source and maintains that the water vision episode is, in its earliest form, "an independent witness" to the same traditions.³⁹ He concludes:

³⁴ HALPERIN, *Faces*, 7.

³⁵ HALPERIN, *The Merkabah*, 86-92.

³⁶ HALPERIN, *Faces*, 31-37, 194-249.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 235.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 206 (HALPERIN is here referring to the version in *HR*, which he believes to be older than that in *HZ*, whereas the latter has in his opinion has been modified on the basis of *b.Hag.* 14b). See further pp. 78-82 below.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 199.

.... that the marble stones in Akiba's warning are those that pave the heavenly Temple (thus far Maier); and that the Babylonian transmitters of the *pardes* story believed them to be the primordial waters, solidified and thus mastered. To claim that they are water is to claim that chaos is still potent. This admission is too dreadful to be tolerated. That is why he who says "water, water" *speaks lies*, and *shall not be established in God's sight*.⁴⁰

RONEN REICHMAN is highly critical of HALPERIN's method, which in his opinion relies too heavily on questionable parallels and fails to address the meanings of the hekhalot recensions in their own literary context.⁴¹ This criticism is overstated and does not justify REICHMAN's sweeping dismissal of the large body of evidence that HALPERIN puts forward.⁴² He is, however, right to insist on the need for a detailed account of the specific structure, contents and language of the hekhalot materials themselves, without which the appeal to supposed parallels in external sources lacks a secure foundation.⁴³ In particular, REICHMAN emphasizes that the vision of water, though an illusion, is not merely a figment of the imagination of the unworthy *יורד מרכבה*, since it is also seen by those accounted worthy. His interpretation focuses on the form of the fatal question, "These waters: what is the nature of them (מה טיבן)"⁴⁴ REICHMAN infers that the meaning of the episode was originally that the *יורד מרכבה* failed the test if he was unable to demonstrate an appropriate "mastery of his drive for knowledge" ("Überwindung des Wissenstriebes") in the face of the illusion:

With the question, the *יורד מרכבה* expresses his desire to understand the meaning of the illusion. He is not satisfied with the fact that he sees the water and cries

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 238. See further p. 78 below.

⁴¹ RONEN REICHMAN, 'Die "Wasser-Episode" in der *Hekhalot*-Literatur,' *FJB* 17 (1989) 67-100 (discussion of HALPERIN on pp. 78-79).

⁴² In my opinion, REICHMAN has chosen to apply the methodological principles formulated by SCHÄFER ("New Testament and Hekhalot Literature") in an unreasonably restrictive manner, which effectively prohibits the interpretation of any text in the light of another if this means crossing a boundary between (sometimes arbitrary) literary categories. It is, in any case, certain that the very diverse contents of the hekhalot compilations are drawn from several different source traditions and did not all originate in their present context.

⁴³ HALPERIN is, in fact, alert to these methodological concerns.

⁴⁴ See the water vision episode, section D2 (on p. 56 below); cf. "Four Entered Paradise" in *HZ(N)*, B2a (on p. 13 above).

out “Water! Water!” He gives expression to his desire for a more complete understanding and this, precisely, is his sin: not that he has made for himself a false picture, but that he wants to understand. The drive to knowledge has taken possession of his mind. He has not mastered it. This is why he is unworthy The difference between the two types of *יורדי מרכבה* is not that one understands and the other misunderstands. By his question, the unworthy *יורד מרכבה* imparts one thing only: so long as one yields to the desire for knowledge, one cannot attain to God. God’s beauty, then, cannot be grasped by knowledge It is essential that the one who is tested does not lay claim to knowledge. This seems to me to be the meaning of the test.⁴⁵

Originally, REICHMAN suggests, the *יורד מרכבה* was in fact permitted the simple and non-interrogative exclamation recorded in *babli*: “Water! Water!” Only in the later stages of textual transmission, as the original meaning of the test became confused, was this too understood to be a sign of failure. REICHMAN fails, however, to provide textual evidence to support this speculative reconstruction. His “anti-Gnostic” reading of the episode is, moreover, unsatisfactory, since it fails to elucidate the central image of water, which, unless we are to believe that it was chosen merely at random, can hardly be devoid of significance. The pursuit of rational scholarly inquiry thus excludes us from the pre-critical paradise of REICHMAN’s *יורדי מרכבה*, since it requires us to fail the alleged test by asking what this enigmatic but specific image means.

The theory that the dangerous illusion of water can be explained by reference to Gnostic traditions has been revisited from time to time. ISRAEL EFROS understood Aqiba’s warning in *babli* to be directed against Gnostic teachings about the role in creation of emanated, intermediate powers, the lowest being water.⁴⁶ GEDALIAHU G. STROUMSA, adopting a position similar to that of BOUSSET and BIETENHARD, stated that the motif of water is “central in Gnostic visions of ecstasy,” and suggested that Aqiba’s warning in *babli* (which he assumed to be an integral component of the *פרדס* story and wrongly attributed to *tosefta*) may be directed against “behavior similar to that of the Gnostics.”⁴⁷ It is, of course,

⁴⁵ REICHMAN, ‘Die “Wasser-Episode,”’ 85-86 (my translation).

⁴⁶ ISRAEL EFROS, *Ancient Jewish Philosophy: A Study in Metaphysics and Ethics* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1964) 56-59.

⁴⁷ GEDALIAHU G. STROUMSA, “Aḥer: A Gnostic,” in BENTLEY LAYTON, ed., *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28-31, 1978* (2 vols. paginated as 1; SHR 41; Leiden: Brill,

widely recognized that celestial water plays an important role in some Gnostic cosmologies. STROUMSA's statement that the Gnostics encountered this water in the course of ecstatic heavenly ascents is, however, supported only by three short and rather inconclusive texts.⁴⁸ If accepted at face value, moreover, his explanation would seem to imply that the Gnostics and the hekhalot mystics experienced the same or very similar visions and differed only in their interpretation of those visions. As HALPERIN has observed with regard to SCHOLEM's exposition of the hekhalot materials, this attributes to visionary experience a degree of objectivity which, from a rational point of view, is problematic.⁴⁹

More recently, NATHANIEL DEUTSCH has drawn attention to some striking parallels to the water vision episode in Mandaean sources, which clearly are related in some manner to the hekhalot traditions.⁵⁰ The relevant Mandaean traditions are associated especially with Abathur, a cosmic figure whose role and characteristics are in many respects parallel to those of the Jewish angel Metatron.⁵¹ Like Metatron, Abathur is enthroned as guardian and judge at the entrance to the "World of Light" or "House of Life," which is separated from the material universe by a body of water called the *hafiqia mia* or "water brooks." If the ascending soul is judged worthy to enter the House of Life, it is helped to cross over these waters, but if not, it is overwhelmed by them and imprisoned in one of seven or eight lower "watchhouses," inhabited by demons who torment the soul as it awaits the final judgement.⁵² Whereas some interpreters of Mandeism have looked for an Iranian background to these images and ideas, DEUTSCH demonstrates that they are of Jewish

1981) 2.817.

⁴⁸ The three texts are: *The Book of Baruch* by the Gnostic Justin, as quoted by Hippolytus, *Ref.*, 5.26,11-13 and 5.27,3; *Melchizedek*, NHC ix.8,1; and *Zostrianos*, NHC viii.18,3-9 (see STROUMSA, *ibid.*).

⁴⁹ See p. 42 above.

⁵⁰ DEUTSCH, "Dangerous Ascents: Rabbi Akiba's Water Warning and Late Antique Cosmological Traditions," *JJTP* 8 (1998) 1-12; and *idem*, *Guardians*, 111-123.

⁵¹ See further DEUTSCH, *Guardians*, 78-111 and the sources cited there.

⁵² Cf. E. S. DROWER, trans., *The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans* (Leiden: Brill, 1959) 62, n. 5, who comments: "The *mataraita*, officers of the watch-houses, or places travellers are detained at frontiers, are demons, spirits who torment and purge souls after death." It seems more than possible that these beings are related in some way to the gatekeepers of the hekhalot tradition.

origin.⁵³ The expression *hafiqia mia* is derived ultimately from 2 Sam. 22:16 (אֲפִיקֵי יָם) and its parallel, Ps. 18:16 (אֲפִיקֵי מַיִם).⁵⁴ The text in which these verses occur describes how God descends from his temple (מְדוּיָלֵלוֹ),⁵⁵ riding on a cherub and accompanied by thunder, lightning, fire, storm and earthquake, to save David from the waters of death and destruction. It may be observed in passing that this text is strongly associated with the מְרַכְבָּה tradition, in part because of its similarity to Ezekiel 1,⁵⁶ and in part because of midrashim which apply it to the Red Sea theophany.⁵⁷

DEUTSCH links the Mandaean motif of celestial waters with the three Gnostic texts cited by STROUMSA, and also with the Jewish and Christian apocalyptic sources discussed by ROWLAND.⁵⁸ He regards Aqiba's warning in *babli* as a veiled polemic against the teachings of one or more non-rabbinic groups, who are represented by texts such as these. Citing evidence of hostility between Mandaeans and Jews in Babylonia, he argues that this polemic included the Mandaeans among its targets and may well, in fact, have been directed specifically against them. He concludes:

The motif of heavenly water appears in Jewish apocalyptic sources but its adoption by Christian apocalyptic circles, Gnosticism, and Mandaeism may have encouraged the authors of the Merkabah texts to reject it. Were it known to the authors of the Talmud or the Hekhalot passages, the Mandaean formulation of the heavenly waters would have been particularly disturbing because of its many close parallels with the Merkabah tradition

⁵³ See DEUTSCH, "Dangerous Ascents," 7-8, and *idem*, *Guardians*, 107-108 and 112-113, and the sources cited there.

⁵⁴ See DEUTSCH, "Dangerous Ascents," 9, and *idem*, *Guardians*, 113-114.

⁵⁵ 2 Sam. 22:7; Ps. 18:7.

⁵⁶ Note especially the parallels between 2 Sam. 22:13/Ps. 18:13: נְחֹלֵי-אֵשׁ מִנְּגֵהָ and Ezek. 1:4, 28 and 13.

⁵⁷ See, for example: *Mek.*, *beshallah*, 3; *Cant. R.* 1:9; *Exod. R.* 23:14; *Tanh.*, *shofetim*, §14; *Midr. Ps.* 18:14. See further HALPERIN, *Faces*, 164, n. 8, 168, and 221-223. Consider also *Visions of Ezekiel*, ii.F2, as translated by HALPERIN, *ibid.*, 268 (cf. WERTHEIMER, *בְּתֵי מַדְרָשׁוֹת*, 2.133): "The *merkabah* of *Kerub*, which God rode when he descended to the Red Sea," although the words: "to the Red Sea" are uncertain (see HALPERIN, *ibid.*, 268, n. 17 and 498-503); compare with this 3 *Enoch* 24:1, on which see HALPERIN, *ibid.*, 411-412.

⁵⁸ DEUTSCH, "Dangerous Ascents," 4-5; *idem*, *Guardians*, 115-116 (see p. 46, n. 48 and p. 38, n. 19 above).

The “Water Warning” may thus be understood as a very sophisticated polemic against the heretical belief in heavenly water, perhaps specifically focusing on Mandaean beliefs.⁵⁹

This “sophisticated polemic” is explained as follows:

The Jewish sources acknowledge that during a heavenly ascent one may encounter what *appears* to be water. Yet they turn the widespread tradition of heavenly water on its head by declaring that the water is only an illusion. This truly esoteric knowledge not only separates the qualified Jewish mystic from the unqualified, but it also differentiates Jewish mysticism from its late antique competition.⁶⁰

DEUTSCH shows that the Mandaean writings contain at least one significant and specific parallel to the water vision episode, which will be examined at a later stage of this inquiry.⁶¹ For the present, we should note that, although the Mandaean materials are undoubtedly relevant, some significant problems are left unresolved by his theory that Aqiba’s warning in *babli* and the hekhalot sources to which it relates can all be explained in terms of sectarian polemic against the Mandaeans or any other group. In the first place, the sources contain little or no internal evidence to suggest that their primary concern is sectarian propaganda. Aqiba’s warning in *babli*, citing Ps. 101:7 with its reference to a “speaker of lies,” is perhaps susceptible of being interpreted in this way, but the saying, considered in isolation, is so cryptic that, without the support of external evidence, such a reading is no more than speculation.⁶² DEUTSCH argues that the polemical intent of the passage has been deliberately concealed, reflecting a standard literary technique of rabbinic writers:

In such cases, the rabbis adopted a terse, even enigmatic approach, at least to the eyes of the average reader. The method was, in fact, highly pragmatic since explicitly describing the doctrine or practice under attack might actually encourage

⁵⁹ DEUTSCH, *Guardians*, 122-123.

⁶⁰ *Idem*, “Dangerous Ascents,” 12.

⁶¹ The parallel concerns an expression in Mandaean literature which is closely equivalent to the words אִוִּיר זִיר/זִיר אִוִּיר in the פֶּרֶס story according to HZ(N), B2a and in the HZ recension of the water vision episode. See pp. 93-96 below.

⁶² This point, of course, applies to several of the theories discussed above, not only that of DEUTSCH.

people to engage in heresy, even unintentionally introducing some readers to heretical positions for the first time. Such polemics are therefore directed to those Jews who already know and in some sense appreciate the views considered heretical and can read between the lines of a more subtle attack. These individuals do not require explicit description to identify the target of the polemic and may even be more receptive to a less direct approach.⁶³

Although these remarks may have some validity, they do not justify the reading of sectarian propaganda into passages which contain no evidence of such intent. The citation of Ps. 101:7 is not included in the פֶּרֶס story in *HZ(N)* or in the water vision episode in either *HR* or *HZ*, nor do these sources make any other reference to the utterance of lies. DEUTSCH's hypothesis is thus based primarily on Aqiba's warning in *babli*, which he appears to assume has priority over the hekhalot materials. The direct linguistic connection that he finds with the Mandaean sources occurs, however, not in *babli*, but in *HZ*.⁶⁴ His theory therefore includes the questionable assumption that the hekhalot writers shared the same ideological and polemical agenda as the redactors of the talmudic literature, and even used the same (alleged) literary technique of disguised propaganda. As DEUTSCH himself recognizes, many elements of the Mandaean religion are derived from Hebrew biblical and later traditional Jewish sources.⁶⁵ The Mandaean parallels to the talmudic and hekhalot water vision materials may, therefore, indicate that they are derived from the same Jewish source tradition. The theory that Mandaean ideas influenced Jewish מֵרַכְבָּה mysticism, and that the

⁶³ DEUTSCH, "Dangerous Ascents," 1-2.

⁶⁴ See n. 61 above.

⁶⁵ On the probable Jewish origins of Mandaism, see further: KURT RUDOLPH, *Mandaism* (Iconography of Religions 21; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 4-5; and *idem*, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987) 363-364. For an opposing view, see EDWIN M. YAMAUCHI, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidence* (2d edn.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) 135-142, who believes that the Mandaean religion came about through the fusion of "an eastern proto-Mandaean component" with "a western proto-Mandaean component" (*ibid.*, 140) which he identifies as a group of Aramaic-speaking non-Jewish inhabitants of Transjordan who may have emigrated to Babylonia following Jewish attacks on neighboring Gentile communities in 66 CE. Thus, in his view, the Jewish elements in Mandaism "are the result not of consanguinity but merely of contiguity" (*ibid.*). Note, however, that even if YAMAUCHI's reconstruction is preferred, the direction of influence is still from Judaism to Mandaism, not *vice versa*.

talmudic and hekhalot redactors were concerned to counter such influence, is thus unproven.

A further deficiency of DEUTSCH's theory is that it leaves the rabbinic and hekhalot authors' objection to the motif of water unexplained. His argument seems to imply that they rejected the idea that one who ascended to heaven would find (real) water there for no other reason than that this was believed by the Mandaeans and/or other religious groups. This explanation is inadequate. The Jewish writers doubtless disagreed with many aspects of the teachings of groups such as the Mandaeans, and several of these differences will have been perceived to be of fundamental theological importance. Why, then, was the specific motif of celestial water considered to be so objectionable? What are the origin and meaning of the deceptive appearance of the marble stones? By drawing our attention to the Mandaean sources, DEUTSCH has made a valuable contribution to the scholarly discussion, but he does not address these all-important questions.

With regard to the relationship between the water vision episode and the פרדס narrative, a minority opinion has been defended by ITHAMAR GRUENWALD,⁶⁶ who maintained that Aqiba's words in *babli* are, in effect, "a muddled quotation" of words attributed to the same sage in *HZ*.⁶⁷ Perceiving the source-critical weakness of SCHOLEM's reconstruction, GRUENWALD argued:

It is not, as Professor Scholem argues, that the *Hekhalot* literature contains the correct interpretation of the saying of Rabbi 'Akiva, but that the words attributed to the sage are words virtually taken from what already was, or was soon to become, the established *Hekhalot* tradition.⁶⁸

In GRUENWALD's opinion, the talmudic sources preserve more or less abridged versions of the פרדס story, which had its original *sitzimleben* in the hekhalot (or proto-hekhalot) tradition and is likely to have included an allusion to the dangerous vision of water from the outset.

⁶⁶ ITHAMAR GRUENWALD, "פיוטי יניי וספרות יורדי מרכבה," 36 תרביץ (1966-7) 261-266; *idem*, *Apocalyptic*, 86-92.

⁶⁷ GRUENWALD, "פיוטי יניי," 264, referring to the פרדס story in *HZ(N)*, B2a-b (on p. 13 above) and to the water vision episode, also according to *HZ(N)*, F1a-F2 (see pp. 57-58 and 79-81 below).

⁶⁸ GRUENWALD, *Apocalyptic*, 88.

GRUENWALD expressed his view of the relationships between the sources as follows:

From examination of the baraita about the four who entered פֶּרֶדֶס, we learn that it is extremely difficult to explain the sages' words about esoteric subjects by reference to those words alone. On the contrary, comparison of the parallel versions of the baraita with its 'source' in *tosefta* shows just how abbreviated the *tosefta* is in its language. Understanding of *tosefta* depends on its later parallels, but these in turn already hint that their own interpretation can only come from the original source of the baraita in the circle of the יִרְדֵי מִרְכַּבָּה. This is not to say that the source of the baraita is *Hekhalot Zutarti*. We still do not have much information about the process of editing of the hekhalot literature, or about the time when this editing occurred. Because of this, it may be supposed from a formal point of view that the text of *Hekhalot Zutarti* was written down later than the text found in *babli*. On the other hand, however, there can be no doubt at all that the text in *Hekhalot Zutarti* is the one that transmits to us, in a clearer, more open form, the mystical tradition which is concealed in the baraita in *tosefta* and its parallels.⁶⁹

My analysis of the story of the four has confirmed that it did, in fact, originate in the ascent narrative preserved in *HZ*, as GRUENWALD maintains. In the tradition from which that narrative is derived, the divine throne and celestial temple stand in opposition to the evil and destructive waters of chaos, as recognized by both MAIER and HALPERIN.⁷⁰ Although the water vision episode is not mentioned in the earliest version of the פֶּרֶדֶס story in *HZ*, A and C, GRUENWALD's contention that the story may originally have included an allusion to the waters is, to some extent, supported by the work of JAMES R. DAVILA, who finds that the essential ingredients of the tradition of ascent to the celestial garden-temple, as found in "Four Entered Paradise," are already present in a thanksgiving hymn from Qumran, which DAVILA calls "The Hymn of the Garden."⁷¹ DAVILA draws attention to the fact that, before he is admitted to the holy garden, the narrator of this hymn withstands an

⁶⁹ GRUENWALD, "פֶּרֶדֶס יְנִי," 265.

⁷⁰ See also, for example: DAVID NEIMAN, "The Supercælian Sea," *JNES* 28 (1969) 243-249; JOHN DAY, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 18-21; and BARKER, *The Gate of Heaven*, 18-20, 62-67.

⁷¹ JAMES R. DAVILA, "The *Hodayot* Hymnist and the Four who Entered Paradise," *RQ* 17 (1996) 457-478. The text in question is 1QH^a, xvi (= viii).4-26.

assault by the demonic and destructive waters of chaos.⁷² There are thus grounds for believing that the ascent to the heavenly garden-temple and the encounter with the threatening waters of destruction were closely related traditional motifs. Combining the evidence produced by MAIER and HALPERIN with that presented by DAVILA, it is possible to reconstruct a pre-rabbinic tradition according to which one who would enter the garden-temple must first cross over the menacing chaos waters, and to infer that both the hekhalot and the talmudic versions of the פֶּרֶד story are derived from this tradition.

Satisfying as this reconstruction undoubtedly is, several anomalous features of the talmudic and hekhalot textual traditions remain to be explained. The “marble stones” and their resemblance to water are (as shown by MAIER) readily explained by reference to the structure of the celestial temple, but it is not clear why or how these stones are associated with the demonic chaos waters. The hekhalot writers’ insistence that the waters are illusory also requires explanation: granted that the stones look like water, why should mistaking them for such reveal the mystic to be unworthy or, as *babli* puts it (in terms reminiscent of the Qumran literature) a “speaker of lies?” It is also necessary to clarify the meaning and relevance, in this context, of the reference to the golden calf story. GOLDBERG’s answers to these questions appear to have some merit, but require further clarification. HALPERIN’s interpretation, on the other hand, contains the plausible suggestion that the illusory nature of the waters is a mutation of the early tradition of the menacing chaos waters and reflects a characteristically rabbinic concern to protect the divine throne and temple from any implication of contamination by proximity to the forces of evil.⁷³ HALPERIN’s reconstruction of the early tradition is supported by the work of DAVILA, and the process of redactional modification that his theory implies is at least broadly consistent with DAN’s analysis. The apocalyptic and Gnostic materials discussed by ROWLAND, DEUTSCH and others are clearly relevant to this discussion, although the exact nature of their relevance remains to be determined.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 474-477. See p. 135 below.

⁷³ HALPERIN, *Faces*, 194-247. For further evidence of the hekhalot redactors’ concern to dissociate the divine realm from the demonic, see MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited. Part 1,” 201-202. It is, however, surprising that HALPERIN should attribute this motive to the hekhalot writers, whom he believes to have been members of the עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ and, hence, hostile towards the rabbis (see HALPERIN, *Faces*, 437-455).

None of the theories described above succeeds, however, in accounting adequately for some significant peculiarities of expression at key points in the hekhalot renditions and REICHMAN is correct to insist that these demand our close attention.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WATER VISION EPISODE AND ITS CONTEXT IN *HEKHALOT RABBATI* AND *HEKHALOT ZUTARTI*

1. *The Sources*

Two versions of the narrative sequence that includes the water vision episode are preserved in the hekhalot writings: a shorter recension in *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*HR*) 25.5-6,¹ and a longer one in *HZ*.² Our first task will, therefore, be to investigate the relationships of the two recensions to each other and to the literary and traditional materials by which they are surrounded.

In the presentation on pages 55-59 below, variations occurring in the text of *HR* published by SOLOMON WERTHEIMER³ (W) are shown within square brackets. Other significant manuscript variations are given in the footnotes.

¹ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§258-259; also in ADOLPH JELLINEK, ed., *Bet ha-Midrash. Sammlung kleiner Midraschim und vermischter Abhandlungen aus der ältern jüdischen Literatur* (1853-57; reprinted, 6 vols. in 2, Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1967) 3.102. JELLINEK's text is that of ms. Oxford 1531, which is included in the *Synopse*. The chapter and section numbers of *HR* are cited in accordance with the majority of the manuscripts (but see n. 3 below). The following translation is eclectic.

² SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§407-408; ELIOR, *היכלות זוטרת*, 30-31, lines 289-304. The following translation is eclectic, but based primarily on ms. Munich 22.

³ SOLOMON WERTHEIMER, ed., *בתי מדרשות* (2d edn.; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: כתב וספר, 1968) 1.107-8. In this edition, which is based on a Jerusalem manuscript and employs an idiosyncratic set of chapter and section divisions, the following passage is referenced §§26.1-2.

HR

HZ

A. *And I saw what/one who looked like the חשמל* (Ezek. 1:27).⁴

A. *And I saw what/one who looked like the חשמל* (Ezek. 1:27).⁴

B. He would meet,⁵ and stand up and select among (היה נזקק ועומד ובורר ב-) הירדי מרכבה, between one who was worthy to go down to the מרכבה and one who was unworthy to go down to the מרכבה.

B. who is recognized,⁶ and stands up and selects from the יורדי מרכבה, between one who is worthy to see the king in his beauty and one who is unworthy to see the king in his beauty.

C1. If one was worthy to go down to the מרכבה, when (כיון ש-) they said to him: "Enter!" and he would not enter, they would again say to him: "Enter!" and then he would enter. They would praise him, saying: "Surely (בודאי), this is one of the יורדי מרכבה!"

C1. If one was worthy to see the king in his beauty, they would influence his mind. When (כיון ש-) they said to him, "Enter!" he would not enter. And again they would say to him, "Enter!" Then he would enter. They would praise him, saying, "Surely (בודאי), so-and-so is worthy to see the king in his beauty!"

C2. But if one was unworthy to go down to the מרכבה, when (כיון ש-) they said to him, "Do not enter!" [W: "Enter!"]⁷ and he entered, then they would throw iron cleavers at him (מיד מטיילין עליו מגזרי ברזל).

C2. But if one was unworthy to see the king in his beauty, they would influence his mind and when (כיון ש-) they said to him, "Enter!" he would enter. Then they would crush⁸ him and throw him (ורמשליכין אותו) into ריגיון of the fiery coals.

⁴ וארא כעין החשמל. Ed. WERTHEIMER of HR and ms. Oxford of HR and HZ: וארא כעין חשמל, agreeing with MT of Ezek. 1:27 (but cf. Ezek. 1:4); ms. Munich 22 of HR: וראה ("And he saw"); mss. Dropsie and Munich 40 of HR: ארקא כעין חשמל ("and the ground [?] looked like חשמל").

⁵ The meaning of נזקק is obscure. See JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 410b; and HALPERIN, *Faces*, 200, n. 7.

⁶ This word is extremely uncertain. The above translation is a guess based on mss. Oxford and Munich 40: מוחזק (see JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 445a); mss. Munich 22 and Dropsie 436: מוחזק; ms New York: מוחזק.

⁷ Ms. Budapest 238 gives "Enter!" as a variant reading. See pp. 60-65 below.

⁸ Mss. Munich 22 and Oxford: סוחטין; mss. Dropsie and Munich 40: דוחפין "push"; ms. New York: שוחטין, "slaughterer."

D1. Because (מפני ש-) the guardians of the gate of the sixth palace [W: were acting like ones who (היו עושים כמי ש-) throw and hurl upon him (מטיילין ומשל-) ⁹ a thousand thousand waves of water when there is not so much as a single drop there,

D2. and if he should say, “These waters: what is the nature of them (מים הללו מה) (טיבן?)” – then they run after him to stone him and say to him, “Worthless one! Perhaps you are of the calf-kissers’ seed¹⁵ and unworthy to see the king and his throne!”

D3. If he is such a one, a heavenly voice issues from ערבובת רקיע, saying: “You have spoken well! He is of the calf-kissers’ seed,¹⁵ and unworthy to see the king and his throne!”

D1. The sixth palace¹⁰ looked as if¹¹ a hundred thousand thousand myriads of myriads of waves of the sea were billowing in it (טורדין בו), yet there was not a single drop of water in it (בו) but only, of brilliant air (זיר מאיר¹²), the pure marble stones with which the palace was paved,¹³ the brilliance of the appearance of which was more terrible than water.¹⁴

D2. And lo, the ministers stand before him, and if one should say, “These waters: what is the nature of them (מים) (האלה מה טיבן?)” – then they run after him to stone him and say to him, “Worthless one! Do you not see with your eyes? Perhaps you are of the calf-kissers’ seed¹⁶ and unworthy to see the king in his beauty!”

D3. If so, a heavenly voice comes forth from the seventh palace, and the herald comes forth before him and trumpets and proclaims, saying to them, “You have spoken well! He is indeed (בוודאי) of the calf-kissers’ seed¹⁶ and unworthy to see the king in his beauty!”

⁹ Ed. WERTHEIMER and ms. New York omit ומשליכין.

¹⁰ Ms. Munich 22: “And the gate of the sixth palace” See pp. 74-78 below.

¹¹ Corrupt word. See pp. 74-78 below.

¹² Thus mss. Munich 22 and Oxford. Mss. Dropsie and Munich 40 omit זיר. Ms. New York reads: זיר מאור, which could be either זיר מאור (“of brilliant light”) or מאור-זיר (“the light of the brilliance”). See pp. 93-96 below.

¹³ אבני שיש טהור שהיו סלולות בהיכל, according to all mss.

¹⁴ שיהיה זיר מראהם נורא ממים. שיהיה זיר מראהם occurs only in ms. Munich 22, but appears to be required by the syntax. See further p. 100 below.

¹⁵ HR, ms. New York: מזרעם של מנשקי עגל; ms. Vatican: מזרען של מנשקי עגל; mss. Oxford, Munich 22, Munich 40 and Dropsie: מזרעו של מנשקי עגל; ms. Budapest agrees with mss. Oxford, etc. in D2, but with ms. Vatican in D3.

¹⁶ מזרעם של מנשקי עגל in both D2 and D3, according to all mss. of HZ except Dropsie, which reads מזרעו in D3, and Munich 40, which omits D3 entirely.

D4. He does not depart thence before they throw a thousand thousand iron cleavers at him (לא זו משם עד שמטילין (בו אלף אלפים מגזרי ברזל

D4. And he does not depart thence before they split his head with iron cleavers (ואינו זו משם עד שמפצעין את ראשו) (במגזרי ברזל

The following material occurs only in *HZ*:¹⁷

E1 This shall be for a sign to the generations, lest a man should err¹⁸ at the gate of the sixth palace (בפתח היכל הששי) and see the brilliance of the air (זיר איר¹⁹) of the stones and ask, or say that they are water, that he may not bring himself into danger,

E2 because even if one is unworthy to see the king in his beauty, and does not ask them about the brilliant air (זיר איר²⁰) of the pure marble stones with which the palace is paved, they will not destroy him but judge him according to the scale of merit, saying, "If he is unworthy to see the king in his beauty, how did he get into the (first) six (היכלות?"

F1a R. Aqiba said:

F1b A certain person²¹ was worthy, and stood at the gate of the sixth palace, and saw the brilliance of the air (זיר איר²²) of the stones, and he opened his mouth twice and said, "Water! Water!" In the blink of an eye, they cut off his head. And eleven thousand iron cleavers shall be upon him.²³

¹⁷ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§409-412; ELIOR, *היכלות זוטרתני*, 31-32, lines 305-348. Sections G-H have not been included in previous discussions of this material, but they are clearly intended to be the climax of this narrative sequence. See further pp. 100-104 below.

¹⁸ Following ms. Munich 40: יטעה; mss. New York, Oxford and Munich 22: תעה ("should be misled"); ms. Dropsie: יגלה ("should be exposed"). Compare n. 24 below.

¹⁹ זיר איר according to mss. Munich 22 and Oxford; mss. Dropsie and Munich 40 omit איר; ms. New York: זה איר ("this air").

²⁰ זיר איר according to mss. Munich 22, Oxford and New York. Mss. Dropsie and Munich 40: איר זיר.

²¹ פלוני אלמוני in all mss. except New York, which reads: "Ben Azzai." See pp. 79-81 below.

²² זיר איר in all mss.

²³ Meaning uncertain: מגזרי ברזל ונהיו עליו Ms. New York: והטילו עליו ("and they threw"). Mss. Dropsie and Munich 40: "twelve thousand." See pp. 81-82 below.

- F2 This shall be for a sign to the generations, lest a man should err²⁴ at the gate of the sixth palace.
- F3 “The LORD is king! The LORD was king! The LORD will be king for ever and ever (יהוה מלך יהוה מלך יהוה ימלוך לעולם ועד):”
- G1a R. Aqiba said:
- G1b Thus does the face of Jacob our father shine with light in the presence of אֲדִירִירוֹן, the LORD God of Israel, our Father who is in heaven, and thus shall his love be received with love in the presence of אֲדִירִירוֹן the LORD God of Israel, our Father who is in heaven, beneath the clouds and thunder-clouds that sprinkle blood.²⁵
- G2 And in the seventh הִיכָל, the wheels of light sprinkle perfume and pure balsam,²⁶ and a doubled wheel²⁷ sounds a plain note, a tremolo, and a plain note, saying: “Everyone who is worthy to see the king in his beauty, let him enter and let him see!”
- G3 And, if so, the wheels of power would embrace him, and the cherubim of glory would kiss him, and the living creatures would raise him up, and the brightness (הַנוֹרָה)²⁸ would go leaping before him, and the חֲשֻׁמַל²⁹ would go singing before him, and a living wind of brilliance³⁰ would raise him up, until they had lifted him and seated him before the throne of glory.

²⁴ Mss. Dropsie, Munich 40 and New York: יִטְעָה; mss. Oxford and Munich 22: יִתְעָה. Compare n. 18 above.

²⁵ תַּחַת עַנְנִים וְעֵבִים שְׂמֹלֶפֶת דָּם. The significance of this image is obscure. Possibly, it alludes to the reception in heaven of the sacrificial blood of the Jewish martyrs. A contrast with the “perfume and pure basalm” which are “sprinkled” in the seventh הִיכָל in G2 must be intended. A very similar blood-sprinkling cloud appears above the heads of the guardians of the seventh הִיכָל at HR 16:2 (SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §215; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.94, §18.2). See further p. 103 below.

²⁶ אפיליטון (apparently Heb. לִטְרוֹם, “gum-mastich,” with the Greek prefix ἐπι) and אפילסמון (= Gk. ἐπιβήλασμον).

²⁷ אוֹפֵן כַּפּוּל, possibly: “a pair of Wheels,” but more likely an allusion to Ezek. 1:16: “a wheel within a wheel.”

²⁸ SCHÄFER (*Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur*, [4 vols.; TSAJ 17, 23, 29, and 46; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1987-94] 3.151; cf. *idem*, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, 74) translates this word: “the morning star,” but in this context, it must surely be an allusion to Ezek. 1:4 and/or 1:28.

²⁹ Ms. Oxford: הַחֲשֻׁמַל; all other mss.: הַחֲשֻׁמַל.

by heavenly fire.³⁴ The most straightforward translation of *וַאֲרָא כְעֵין הַחַשְׁמַל* is “And I saw something like the appearance of *הַחַשְׁמַל*,” or “... what looked like the *הַחַשְׁמַל*,” but HALPERIN renders the verse in the hekhalot passage literally: “I saw something like the eye of *הַחַשְׁמַל*,” and associates this with his Freudian interpretation of the eyes of the *חיות* as described elsewhere in *HR*.³⁵ It seems, however, to be clear that in section B of this passage, the expression must refer to a personal being. HALPERIN has “was standing” in place of “would stand up,” but the word *עומד*, thus interpreted, is redundant. In this context, the “one who looks like the *הַחַשְׁמַל*” is almost certainly an exalted angel, who is responsible for determining whether or not the mystic is worthy to proceed,³⁶ and who, perhaps, is required – like Metatron at the gate of the *seventh היכל* in *3 Enoch* 16:1-5 – to stand up when approached.³⁷

3. *The Keepers of the Gate and the Saying: “(Do Not) Enter!”*

In section C, it seems, in both *HR* and *HZ*, that the gatekeepers already know whether the *יורד מרכבה* is worthy or unworthy, this having been determined in advance by the one who looks like *הַחַשְׁמַל*. Nonetheless, there are important differences between the two recensions. According to *HZ:C2*, one who is known to be unworthy is induced to enter and so led to his destruction. In most manuscripts of *HR:C2*, in contrast, he is forbidden to enter and only attacked when or if he ignores the prohibition: “Do not enter!” although a few witnesses agree with the *HZ*

³⁴ *b.Hag.* 13b. See further HALPERIN, *The Merkabah*, 156-157, and MORRAY-JONES, “Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition,” 128-135. For an interesting short discussion of traditions about the *הַחַשְׁמַל*, see GRUENWALD, *Apocalyptic*, 77, n. 13.

³⁵ HALPERIN, *Faces*, 200-201, 393-396. Compare *idem*, “A Sexual Image in Hekhalot Rabbati and its Implications,” in DAN, ed., *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Early Jewish Mysticism*, 117-132; and see also HALPERIN, *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993) 14.

³⁶ Thus SCHÄFER, *Übersetzung*, 2.238, n. 3 (*HR*) and 3.145, n. 3 (*HZ*); and thus also, by implication, DAN, “פתח היכל שישי,” 198-199. SCHÄFER (*Übersetzung*, 2, *ibid.*) reports that ms. Leiden 4730 of *HR* does in fact read: *וַאֲרָא עֵין הַחַשְׁמַל*, “I saw the eye of (the?) *הַחַשְׁמַל*,” but this does not justify HALPERIN’s speculations.

³⁷ See p. 13, n. 64 and p. 28, n. 106 above, and the sources cited there. Also relevant may be the traditions concerning the title: “Standing One” (ὁ ἑστῶς/קעעים) in Samaritanism and Simonian gnosticism, on which see FOSSUM, *The Name of God*, 55-58 and 120-124.

reading: “Enter!” Close examination reveals, moreover, that the manuscripts of *HR:C2* contain several less obvious variations, which, though small in themselves, significantly affect the meaning of the narrative unit as a whole. These variations produce four distinct versions of the unit, apparently reflecting the different ways in which it was understood by the redactors and copyists who were responsible for its transmission. These four versions are presented for comparison on pages 62-63 below,³⁸ together with a single representative of the *HZ* recension, which is different again.³⁹

The starkest contrast is between the *HZ* recension and the version represented by *HR(O)*. In *HZ*, the first invitation to enter is a deliberate deception. If the *יורד מרכבה* is known to be worthy, the angels will induce him to refrain from responding to the summons, but if he is known to be unworthy, they will induce him to fall into the trap that has been prepared for him. Since the angels already know his status and control both his actions and their outcomes, the situation described is not a test, but the execution of a prior decision (presumably, of the one who looks like *חשמל*).⁴⁰ These two elements of predetermination and deliberate deception are entirely absent in *HR(O)*, where, in *C2*, the unworthy *יורד מרכבה* receives a straightforward instruction to refrain from entering. Although he is known to be unworthy, there is no indication that his fate is predetermined and we are told only that *if* he ignores the warning, the angels will attack him. By implication, it follows that if he were to heed the warning, no harm would come to him. Similarly, *HR(O):C1* does not state that the invitation to enter is a test, or that the worthy *יורד מרכבה* is induced not to enter, but simply that *if* he holds back he will be invited a second time and commended by the angels for having been appropriately reticent. This version, then,

³⁸ O = ms. Oxford; W = ed. WERTHEIMER; M22 = ms. Munich 22; B = ms. Budapest. Mss. New York, Dropsie, Munich 40, and Vatican 228 agree in all important respects with ms. Oxford.

³⁹ Although variations are found in the manuscripts of *HZ*, they do not alter the structural meaning of the unit. Ms. Munich 22 is followed in the presentation below (words in parentheses from ms. New York).

⁴⁰ Roughly the same point is made by DAN, “פתח היכל שיש,” 198-199, but I cannot follow him in the inference that he draws from this, which appears to be based on an argument from silence. It is true that we are not told how the one like *חשמל* decides whether or not the *יורד מרכבה* is worthy, but this need not mean that the decision itself is therefore arbitrary. See further below.

HR(O)

אם היה ראוי לירד למרכבה
כיון שאומרין לו היכנס
ואינו נכנס וחוזרין ואומרין
לו היכנס ומיד נכנס היו
משבחין אותו לומר בוודאי
זה מיורדי מרכבה

HR(W)

אם ראוי לירד במרכבה כיון
שאומר' לו הכנס ואינו נכנס
חוזרין ואומרין לו הכנס
ומיד נכנס היו משבחין
אותו בודאי לומר זה מיור-
די מרכבה

HR(M22)

אם היה ראוי ליורד מרכבה
כיון שאומרים לו הכנס
ואינו נכנס חוזרין ואומרין
לו הכנס מיד נכנס היו
משבחין אותו לומר בבדאי
זה מיורדי מרכבה

אבל אם אינו ראוי לירד
למרכבה כיון שאומ' לו אל
תיכנס והוא נכנס מיד
מטילין עליו מגזרי ברזל

אבל אם אינו ראוי לירד
במרכבה כיון שאומרין לו
הכנס והוא נכנס מיד מטיל-
ין עליו אלפים מגזרי ברזל

אבל אם אינו ראוי ליורד
מרכבה כיון שאומרין לו אל
תכנס מיד נכנס מיד מטילין
עליו מגזרי ברזל

C1. If one was worthy to
go down to the מרכבה,
when they said to him,
"Enter," and he did not
enter, and they said to
him again, "Enter," and
then he entered, they
would praise him, saying,
"Surely, this is one of the
יורדי מרכבה."

C1. If one was worthy to
go down to the מרכבה,
when they said to him,
"Enter," and he did not
enter, they would say to
him again, "Enter," and
then he entered. They
would surely praise him,
saying, "This is one of
the יורדי מרכבה."

C1. If one was worthy to
go down to the מרכבה,
when they said to him,
"Enter," and he did not
enter, they would say to
him again, "Enter."
Then he entered. They
would praise him, saying,
"Surely, this is one of the
יורדי מרכבה."

C2. But if one was not
worthy to go down to
the מרכבה, when they
said to him, "Do not
enter," and he entered,
then they would throw
iron cleavers at him.

C2. But if one was not
worthy to go down to
the מרכבה, when they
said to him, "Enter," and
he entered, then they
would throw two thou-
sand iron cleavers at
him.

C2. But if one was not
worthy to go down to
the מרכבה, when they
said to him, "Do not
enter," then he entered.
Then they would throw
iron cleavers at him.

HR(B)

אם היה ראוי לירד למרכבה
כיון שהיו אומרים לו היכנס
ואינו נכנס חוזרין ואומרים
לו הכנס ומיד נכנס היו
משבחין אותו לומר בודאי
זה מיורדי מרכבה

אבל אם אינו ראוי לירד
למרכבה כיון שאומרים לו
הכנס ס'א אל תכנס מיד
נכנס ומיד מטילין עליו
מגזרי ברזל

C1. If one was worthy to go down to the מרכבה, when they said to him, "Enter," and he did not enter, they would say to him again, "Enter," and then he entered. They would praise him, saying, "Surely, this is one of the יורדי מרכבה."

C2. But if one was not worthy to go down to the מרכבה, when they said to him, "Enter" (variant reading: "Do not enter"), then he entered, and then they would throw iron cleavers at him.

HZ(M22)

את מי שהוא ראוי לראות
מלך ביופיו היו נותנים בלבו
כיון שאומר' לו הכנס לא
היה נכנס וחוזרין ואומרים
לו הכנס ומיד היה נכנס
והיו מקלסין (אותו לומר)
בודאי פלוני ראוי לראות
מלך ביופיו

ואת מי שאינו ראוי לראות
מלך ביופיו היו נותנים בלבו
וכיון שאומר' לו הכנס היה
נכנס מיד סוחטין אותו
ומשליכין אותו לתוך ריגיון
גחלים

C1. He who was worthy to see the king in his beauty, they would influence his mind: when they said to him, "Enter," he would not enter, and they would say to him again, "Enter," and then he would enter, and they would praise (him, saying), "Surely, so-and-so is worthy to see the king in his beauty."

C2. And he who was not worthy to see the king in his beauty, they would influence his mind and when they said to him, "Enter," he would enter. Then they would crush him and cast him into Rigyon of the fiery coals.

presents a straightforward contrast between two types of behavior and is best understood as a cautionary tale, the moral being that it is better to hold back, since one will then be invited again and commended for one's modesty, than to be heedless of warnings to desist, since such arrogance will incur disaster.

The other three versions of *HR* represent positions falling between the extremes represented by *HZ* and *HR(O)*. *HR(M22):C2* intensifies the contrast between the two types of *יורד מרכבה* by stating that if the mystic is unworthy he *will* ignore the command to desist, with the consequences described. The element of deception reappears in *HR(W)* and in the primary text of *HR(B)*, both of which read "Enter!" in *C2*. *HR(W)* is somewhat incoherent, but clearly intends us to understand that the unworthy *יורד מרכבה* will enter at the first invitation, whereas the worthy *יורד מרכבה* will not. The syntax of this version does not make it entirely clear whether this is a test of the *יורד מרכבה* or, as in *HZ*, the execution of a judgement previously made. Nor is it certain whether the doom of the unworthy *יורד מרכבה* is inevitable, although it seems that this is probably intended. *HR(B)* leaves no room for uncertainty on this point and is, moreover, the only one of these five versions to interpret the first invitation unambiguously as a test: 'if he was unworthy *when* they said to him "Enter," *then* he entered.' If, however, the variant reading noted by the copyist in *C2* is followed, *HR(B)* corresponds to *HR(M22)*.

All of the significant differences between the *HR* recensions occur in section *C2*, *HR:C1* being basically the same in all four cases. If the structural syntax of *HR:C1* is reduced to its essentials, it expresses the thought:

If one who was worthy did not enter they would praise him.

HR(O):C2 provides a logical counterpoint to this:

But if one who was not worthy did enter they would attack him.

Each of the other three versions of *HR:C2*, however, expresses the following thought, which is also found in *HZ:C2*:

But if one was unworthy one would enter and then they would attack him.

The syntactic logic of these versions thus requires that C1 be understood to mean:

If one was worthy one would not enter and then they would praise him.

This statement is not found in any version of *HR*:C1. It does, however, correspond to the syntactic logic of *HZ*:C1.

It is, therefore, apparent that *HR*(W), *HR*(M22) and *HR*(B) combine the narrative logic of *HR*(O) in C1 with that of *HZ* in C2. Since this destroys the coherence of the account as a whole, it is safe to conclude that *HR*(O):C1-2 represents the original form of this recension. The modifications that have occurred in the other versions are attributable to redactors whose understanding of the unit was influenced by that expressed in the *HZ* recension and/or the material in D-G. It is unlikely that *HR*:(O) is a modification of any other *HR* version, since all four begin with the same syntax in C1.

HR(O) and *HZ*, then, represent two alternative versions of C1-2, both coherent in themselves, but embodying two very interpretations of the meaning of this unit. The decision as to which of these two recensions has priority is finely balanced. HALPERIN objects to the reading "Do not Enter!" in *HR*(O):C2 on the grounds that

it is hard to imagine that any traveller to the merkabah, no matter how "unworthy," could be so stupid as to disregard an explicit command not to proceed.⁴¹

He concludes that *HZ* preserves the original tradition and that the alteration of "Enter!" to "Do not enter!" in *HR*(O):C2 (thus also most *HR* manuscripts⁴²) was made by a copyist who was uncomfortable with the idea that the angels would attempt to deceive the *מרכבה*. This objection is not very convincing, since the theme of danger is a central feature of the *מרכבה* tradition, in which stories such as this are clearly intended to warn about the consequences of disregarding the conditions and prohibitions with which the subject of the vision of the *מרכבה* was surrounded. HALPERIN assumes, moreover, that the narrative describes

⁴¹ HALPERIN, *Faces*, 209.

⁴² See p. 61, n. 38 above.

a test of worthiness,⁴³ which the above analysis has shown not be the case in either *HZ* or the “standard version” of *HR*, as represented above by ms. Oxford. The narrative in *HR(O)* is simply a warning about what will happen if the *יורד מרכבה* does disregard the instruction to desist. In other words, it is a cautionary tale with the straightforward moral that “pride goes before a fall.” In *HZ*, the words: “they would influence his mind (נותנים בלבו)” are slightly awkward owing to the absence of a prepositional link with what follows (“so that”), which might perhaps suggest that these words may have been added in order to explain a text in which the formula of C1: “Enter (הכנס)” has mistakenly been repeated in place of “Do not Enter (אל תכנס)” in C2. On the other hand, however, this change cannot be explained as a straightforward accidental omission, and there are grounds for suspecting that it may have been deliberate. The reading “enter” in C2 is, on the face of things, *lectio difficilior* and HALPERIN may be right to associate this version with the biblical and midrashic traditions that God “hardened the hearts” of the Egyptians at the Red Sea in order to lead them to destruction.⁴⁴ HALPERIN also finds a talmudic parallel which, if valid, strongly supports the priority of *HZ* and sheds light on its meaning: according to *b.Ber.* 34a, one who is asked to “pass before the Ark” (העובר לפני) and lead the prayers of the community in the synagogue should at the first invitation refuse this privilege and only afterwards accept. Referring to SCHOLEM’s suggestion that the puzzling expression *יורד למרכבה* may be based on the standard rabbinic expression *יורד לפני התבה*,⁴⁵ HALPERIN suggests that in *HZ:C* “... the etiquette of the synagogue ritual is transferred to the approach to the Divine Throne.”⁴⁶ The validity of this parallel is supported by the facts that the sixth *היכל* corresponds to the sanctuary of the temple and that the *יורד מרכבה* therefore assumes a quasi-priestly role.⁴⁷

⁴³ Although HALPERIN bases his translation of *HR:A1-C2* on ms. Oxford, his understanding of the meaning of the narrative corresponds to the version in ms. Munich 22. In *HZ*, he takes C1-C2 to be a test, rather than the execution of a prior decision. See HALPERIN, *Faces*, 200, n. 8.

⁴⁴ HALPERIN, *Faces*, 208-227. See further pp. 87-89 and 116-117 below.

⁴⁵ SCHOLEM, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 20, n. 1. The formula: *יורד לפני התבה* occurs in *b.Ber.* 34a and very frequently elsewhere (see JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 1643b).

⁴⁶ HALPERIN, *The Merkabah*, 88., n. 80.

⁴⁷ See pp. 33 above, 91-92 and 192-205 below.

It is, perhaps, not possible to achieve a final resolution of this problem at this stage of our inquiry. The clarity and simplicity of structure of *HR(O)* seems at first sight to support the suspicion that this version may have preserved the structural meaning, at least, of the original tradition. There are, however, very good grounds for the decision that *HZ* has priority and that *HR(O)* is, in reality, a false “correction” of this difficult text. Evidence to be considered below suggests, moreover, that the reading “do not enter” in C2 was known at an early stage of the *HR* textual tradition.⁴⁸

4. *The Keepers of the Gate in the Ascent of Rabbi Nehunya b. Ha-Qanah*

The penalty inflicted on the unworthy mystic (C2) is different in the two recensions. At this point, despite the one uncertain word in the *HZ* manuscripts,⁴⁹ there are compelling reasons for attributing priority to *HZ*. *HR*'s strange and unexplained statement that the angels “throw ברזל מגזרי ברזל at him” appears to be an awkward combination of two elements borrowed from the following material: מטילין in *HR*:D1 and D4; and מגזרי ברזל in *HR* and *HZ*:D4. The expression מגזרי ברזל itself has not, to my knowledge, been satisfactorily explained. The word ברזל simply means iron, while מגזר evidently refers to some kind of cutting implement.⁵⁰ The significance of this expression may, perhaps, be explained by reference to *b.B.Qam.* 81b, where “to split the joints with an iron implement (Aramaic: גזרא דפרזלא)” is a metaphor for excommunication. In the context of the heavenly temple, moreover, the reference to iron seems to carry a clear implication of ritual impurity.⁵¹

It is interesting to compare this with the account in *HR* of what happens when Nehunya b. Ha-Qanah, in the course of his visionary ascent, arrives at the gate of the sixth דיכל. Nehunya, who has entered into a self-induced state of trance, is using automatic speech to tell his

⁴⁸ See p. 73 below.

⁴⁹ See p. 55, n. 8 above.

⁵⁰ In biblical Hebrew, only the feminine form מגזרה/ות occurs, at 2 Sam. 12:31 (cf. 1 Chron. 20:3), where David makes his Ammonite captives “... labor with saws and iron picks and iron axes (במגזרה ובחרצני הכרזל ובמגזרת הכרזל).” JASTROW (*Dictionary*, 727b) lists only the Aramaic form מגזרא, meaning: “cutting tool, sickle, pruning knife.” In modern Hebrew, מגזרה means “a saw.”

⁵¹ See *m.Middot* 3.4 on 1 Kgs. 6:7.

colleagues, who are seated before him, what he sees during his heavenly journey (*HR* 17.6-18.4):⁵²

17.6 Because (מפני ש-) the guardians of the sixth palace⁵³ used to destroy those⁵⁴ who descended to the מרכבה, but not those who descended to the מרכבה without permission and about whom they had been commanded, (and⁵⁵) they were flogged and burned, and others were set in their place.⁵⁶ But the others who stand in their stead are of the same nature (כך היא מדתם). They neither fear, nor does it occur to them to say, “Why are we being burned, and what does it profit us that we are destroying those who descend to the מרכבה, but not those who descend to the מרכבה without permission?” And this is still the nature (ועדיין כך היא מדתן) of the guardians of the gate of the sixth palace.

18.1 R. Ishmael said:

All the members of the fellowship said to me, ‘Son of the noble ones, you have mastery over the light of the Torah, as does R. Nehunya b. Ha-Qanah. Attract his attention and bring him back from the vision that he has been beholding to sit with us, so that he may explain to us the meaning of “one who is of those who descend to the מרכבה, but not of those who descend to the מרכבה,” whom the guardians of the gate of the sixth palace attack, although they would not molest “those who descend to the מרכבה” in any way. What is the difference between these and those?’

18.2 R. Ishmael said:

At once I took a piece of fine white woollen cloth, and gave it to R. Aqiba, and R. Aqiba gave it to our servant, saying, ‘Go and place this cloth beside a woman who has immersed herself, but whose immersion is not valid, and make her immerse herself again, so that if that same woman should come and declare the state of her menstruation before the fellowship, surely one would declare her forbidden, but the majority would declare her permitted. Say to that woman, “Touch this cloth with the tip of the middle finger of your hand, but without pressing on it, as a person removing a hair that has fallen in his eye wipes it away, ever so gently.”’

⁵² SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§224-228; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.96-98, §§19.6-20.4.

⁵³ Mss. New York, Munich 22, Vatican and Budapest: “... of the gate of the sixth palace”

⁵⁴ Mss. Vatican and Munich 22: “... some of those” (ביורדי in place of מיורדי).

⁵⁵ The conjunction is present in all mss., but has to be disregarded given the present structure of the sentence. See further p. 69 below.

⁵⁶ Following ms. Budapest (the other mss. contain only very minor variations): מפני ששימרי פתח היכל הששי היו משחיתים ביורדי מרכבה ולא ביורדי מרכבה שלא ברשות והיו מצוין עליהם ומכין אותם ושורפין אותם ומעמידין אחרים במקומם.

18.3 They went and did so, and laid the cloth before R. Ishmael. He inserted it into a myrtle twig filled with nard oil, which had been soaked in pure basalm, and they laid it on the knees of R. Nehunya b. Ha-Qanah. At once, he was dismissed from before the throne of glory, where he had been sitting and beholding a wondrous pride and a strange dominion, an exalted pride and a sublime dominion, which wells up before the throne of glory, three times each day, on high, from the time that the world was created until now, for praise.

18.4a And we asked him:

Who is he who is “of those that descend to the מרכבה, but not of those who descend to the מרכבה?”

18.4b He said to us:

These are the men whom those who descend to the מרכבה take and place above them, and make them sit before them, and say to them, “Observe, see, listen and write down everything that I say and everything that we hear before the throne of glory.” And if those men are not worthy of this, the guardians of the gateway to the sixth palace attack them. Take care, then, that you choose for yourself suitable men who are tried and tested members of the fellowship.

This passage, which has been the subject of several studies,⁵⁷ contains several problems. The syntax of the first sentence of section 17.6, which appears to consist entirely of an extended relative clause, is clearly defective. In order to create a main clause, the conjunction “and” (in parentheses) before “they were flogged” has to be disregarded, although it is present in all the manuscripts. Alternatively, the conjunction ceases to be troublesome if the opening expression, מפני ש, is disregarded:

The guardians of the sixth palace used to destroy those who descended to the מרכבה, but not those who descended to the מרכבה without permission, and about whom they had been commanded, and they were flogged and burned, and others were set in their place.

⁵⁷ LAWRENCE H. SCHIFFMAN, “The Recall of Rabbi Nehuniah Ben Ha-Qanah from Ecstasy in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*,” *AJS Review* 1 (1976) 269-281; SAUL LIEBERMAN, “The Knowledge of *Halakha* by the Author (or Authors) of the *Heikhaloth*,” Appendix 2 of GRUENWALD, *Apocalyptic*, 241-244; SCHÄFER, “Engel und Menschen in der Hekhalot-Literatur,” *Kairos* 22 (1980) 207-208, revised and reprinted in *HS*, 256-257; MARGARETE SCHLÜTER, “Die Erzählung von der Rückholung des R. Nehunya ben Haqana aus der *Merkava*-Schau in ihrem redaktionellen Rahmen,” *FJB* 10 (1982) 65-109; DAN, “פתח,” *היכל שיש*, 206-208.

In 18.1, Nehunya's statement in 17.6 is taken to mean that the gatekeepers destroy "those who descend to the מרכבה but do not descend to the מרכבה," despite the fact that they (the gatekeepers) have no permission to destroy them. Nehunya is then recalled from his trance to explain what this puzzling expression means. As observed by DAN, however, his explanation is both inadequate and inconsistent with 17.6, where it is clear that "worthiness" provides no protection against the gatekeepers' attacks.⁵⁸ In fact, the whole sequence is based on a misunderstanding of 17.6 and quite clearly belongs to a subsequent stage of literary activity. The real meaning of 17.6 is that the gatekeepers, contrary to their proper function, destroy the properly authorized יורדי מרכבה but do not destroy the יורדי מרכבה who lack permission (for what and from whom are not stated at this point). Although there is nothing in the present context of the passage to explain this strange statement, DAN argues that it belongs to the earliest layer of tradition about gate of the sixth היכל. In his opinion, the sixth gateway represents the boundary of the divine world, where the heavenly traveller is exposed to the terrifying, chaotic powers of the demonic realm, which are beyond the control of justice and of reason.⁵⁹

In the narrative produced by this misunderstanding, the method used by Ishmael to recall Nehunya from his trance is significant to this study. He evidently intends Nehunya to be dismissed from the presence of the divine Glory in the heavenly temple, but does not want him to be expelled from the holy place so abruptly as to cause him injury. His solution is to bring Nehunya's body into contact with the faintest possible trace of impurity and, as will emerge in the course of this inquiry, the form of impurity chosen is by no means incidental. The degree of uncleanness contracted through indirect contact with the questionable נדה, which is so weak as to be negligible in an ordinary human situation, is further attenuated by layers of "insulating" material of the highest purity. This merest hint or suspicion of impurity is, however, enough to cause Nehunya to be immediately expelled from the heavenly world, albeit in a gentle, controlled manner which contrasts markedly with the violent rejection of one who mistakes the marble stones for water. The criterion of ritual purity thus seems to have been a signif-

⁵⁸ DAN, "פתח היכל שיש," 208.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 206-208, 215.

icant factor in determining the worthiness or unworthiness of the **יורד מרכבה** at the gate of the sixth **היכל**, which, as we have seen, corresponds to the sanctuary of the temple.

5. *The Strange Expression: "Because"*

Turning to the *HR* recension of the water vision episode itself, sections D1-4 state that the guardians of the palace pretend to throw water at the mystic but that this water is an illusion. If he is deceived into asking about the nature of the waters, he betrays himself as unworthy and is condemned. We are not, however, told why this should be so and the passage does not help us to understand either Aqiba's warning in *babli* (A11-19) or the corresponding material in the *HZ(N)* recension of the **פרדס** story (B2a-b). There does not seem to be any intrinsic or causal connection between the "Enter/Do not enter!" incident in C1-2 and the water vision episode in D1-4, and the two must therefore be regarded as originally independent units of tradition.⁶⁰ This being so, the expression **מפני ש** in D1 is again rather puzzling, as it is in *HR* 17.6. As translated on p. 56 above, the expression refers forwards ("Because the guardians throw and if he should say then they throw" etc.) but this is rather forced and the expression really seems redundant. According to both *HR:D* and *HZ:D*, in apparent contrast to *HR/HZ:C*, the guardians do not seem to know in advance whether the **יורד מרכבה** is worthy. In the *HR* recension, where the illusion of water is produced by the guardians, it clearly functions as a test.

As we have seen, *HR* includes two blocks of material concerning the sixth gate and its guardians: Nehunya's encounter with the destructive gatekeepers (17.6-18.4); and the sequence which includes the encounter with the "one like **חשמל**," the "Enter/Do not enter!" incident, and the water vision episode (25.5-6). These two passages occur at different points in a narrative sequence which constitutes the final portion of *HR* in its present form (excluding the **שר תורה** appendix). The main comp-

⁶⁰ Against HALPERIN, who suggests that the original text is preserved by ms. Dropsie, which runs C2 and D1 together: 'And if he was worthy to descend to the **מרכבה**, when they said to him: "Enter!" and he entered, they would throw and hurl a thousand thousand waves of water at him, and there is not a single drop there, and if he should say' This, however, is certainly an accidental (or deliberate) elision. See REICHMAN, 'Die "Wasser-Episode,"' 75, n. 10.

onents of this narrative sequence, which has evidently been compiled from a variety of sources, are as follows.⁶¹

- A. (*HR* 17.1-5⁶²) A sequence describing the journey of the *יורד מרכבה* through the gateways of the *היכלות*, at each of which he must show “seals” to the guardians who will thereupon escort him through the following *היכל* to the next gate. As observed by DAN,⁶³ the language of this passage is formulaic, rhythmic and repetitive, creating the impression of a serene and orderly ritual procession, in which the element of danger, though present, is under control.
- B. (*HR* 17.6-18.4⁶⁴) The above sequence is interrupted, between gates 5 and 6, by the strange statement that the guardians of the sixth gate “destroy the *יורדי מרכבה*, but not the *יורדי מרכבה* without permission,” and the appended story of R. Nehunya’s recall and “explanation,” as given on pages 68-69 above.
- C. (*HR* 18.5-20.3⁶⁵) The continuation of the “processional ascent,” through gates 6 and 7, including the examination of the *יורד מרכבה* by the angels *קצפיאל* and *דומיאל* at the sixth gate. The qualities required of the *יורד מרכבה* are Torah observance and talmudic learning. Again, the element of danger, though present, is muted.⁶⁶
- D. (*HR* 21.1-22.3⁶⁷) An account of how R. Nehunya was induced to reveal the names of the guardians of the sixth *היכל*, which are not included in the previous account. Two different lists of names are given, rationalized as one for the “ascent” and one for the “descent.” We are introduced to the chief guardian of the seventh gate, *ענפיאל*, “whose name is like the name of his master.”

⁶¹ On the form and content of *HR* as a whole, see: GOLDBERG, “Einige Bemerkungen zu den Quellen und den redaktionellen Einheiten der grossen Hekhalot,” *FJB* 1 (1973) 1-49; SCHÄFER, “Zum Problem der redaktionellen Identität von *Hekhalot Rabbati*,” *FJB* 13 (1985) 1-22, reprinted in *HS*, 63-74; and DAVILA, “Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of the Hekhalot Rabbati,” *JJS* 45 (1994) 208-226.

⁶² SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§219-223; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.95-96 §§19.1-5.

⁶³ DAN, “פתח היכל שיש,” 204-206.

⁶⁴ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§224-228; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.96-98 §§19.6-20.4.

⁶⁵ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§229-237; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.98-100, §§20.5-22.3. See further pp. 204-205 below.

⁶⁶ DAN (“פתח היכל שיש,” 208-210) treats this as an independent unit, but his reasons for doing so are unclear to me. The passage is, admittedly, slightly muddled and some material has evidently been added to it. The core of the account is, however, clearly recognizable as the continuation of 17.1-5.

⁶⁷ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§238-243; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.100-102, §§22.4-23.4.

- E. (*HR* 22.4-23.4⁶⁸) A second, more detailed account of the admission of the יורד מרכבה into the seventh היכל and his presentation before the throne of glory.
- F. (*HR* 24.1-26.8⁶⁹) A long series of hymns, which are said to be recited daily by the throne of glory, and which the יורד מרכבה also recites, thereby symbolically identifying himself with the throne which bears the divine image or כבוד.⁷⁰ This sequence forms the “grand finale” of *HR* in its present form, but is interrupted by:
- G. (*HR* 25:5-6⁷¹) Appended to Ezek. 1:27, the encounter of the worthy and unworthy יורדי מרכבה with the “one like השמל” and the guardians of the sixth gate (“Enter/Do not enter!”), followed by the water vision episode, as given on pages 55-57 above.

The passage with which we are primarily concerned, G (25:5-6), is quite out of place in this narrative sequence and alien to the hymnic material with which it is surrounded.⁷² In its present location, it looks like a left-over item of tradition for which a redactor had found no place, but which he wanted to include. *HR* 17.6-18.4 occurs at the appropriate point in the narrative sequence but is alien to the stylized account of the ritual ascent (17.1-20.3) into which it has been inserted. Both, then, have been added to this narrative from another source. The fact that the awkward and unexplained expression מפני ש- occurs in both *HR* 25.6 (D1) and *HR* 17.6 suggests that the two units may be derived from a single context in which they were closely associated with each other. This hypothesis enables us to interpret the difficult formulation of *HR* 17.6 as a garbled reference to a version of the episode described in *HR* 25.5, in which C2 read “do not enter.” If this is correct, Nehunya seems to be saying that the gatekeepers were destroying the יורדי מרכבה who had been given permission to enter the sixth palace, but not those to whom such permission had been refused.⁷³

⁶⁸ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§244-250; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.102-105, §§23.5-24.5.

⁶⁹ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§251-277; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.105-112, §§25.1-28.2.

⁷⁰ See further MORRAY-JONES, “Transformational Mysticism,” 26-27.

⁷¹ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§258-9; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.107-8, §§26.1-2.

⁷² See the remarks of GOLDBERG, “Einige Bemerkungen,” 28.

⁷³ I resist the temptation to speculate that an early version of the story may have offered the readings: “Do not enter!” in C1, and “Enter!” in C2.

6. *The Beginning of the Water Vision Episode:
Textual Problems and Relationships*

In the *HZ* recension of the water vision episode, the text of the first clause of D1 is evidently corrupt and the translation given on page 56 above must, therefore, be justified. The manuscript readings published by SCHÄFER are as follows:⁷⁴

M22:	גלי מים	....	שטורדין בו	⁷⁵ היכל השישי היה נראה במי
D436:	גלי ים	....	שטורדין בו	היכל השישי היה נראה למי
M40:	גלי ים	....	שטורדין וכו'	היכל השישי היה נראה למי
O1531:	גלי ים	....	שטורדין בו	⁷⁶ היכל השישי היה נראה באמי
N8128:	גלי ים	....	שטורדין בו	היכל השישי היה נראה כיון

SCHOLEM translates:

And at the gate of the sixth palace, it seemed as though hundreds of thousands and millions of waves of water stormed against him⁷⁷

This translation, however, glosses over several problems. The primary cause of difficulty is the corrupt word following *נראה*. Ms. New York's *כיון ש* – meaning either “when” or, much less frequently, “since” in the sense: “because”⁷⁸ – makes no sense at all in this context. The expression occurs twice in *HR:C1-2* and *HZ:C1-2*, in all cases meaning “when.” If, however, it is taken in this instance to mean “since” or “because,” a potentially significant correspondence with the recension in *HR:D1* becomes apparent:

<i>HZ(N):</i>			כיון ש	היכל השישי היה נראה
<i>HR:</i>	שומרי פתח ההיכל הששי		מפני ש	
<i>HZ(N):</i>	גלי ים	....	בו	טורדין
<i>HR:</i>	גלי מים	....	עליו	מטילין ומשליכין

⁷⁴ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §408 (omitting the numbers of the waves, which vary slightly). M = Munich; D = Dropsie; O = Oxford; N = New York.

⁷⁵ Letter כ doubtful.

⁷⁶ Letter א deleted; letter מ doubtful.

⁷⁷ SCHOLEM, *Major Trends*, 53 (following M22).

⁷⁸ See JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 631a-b.

HZ(N): The sixth palace looked because (כיון ש-) they
HR: Because (מפני ש-) the guardians of the gate of

HZ(N): drive at him waves of the sea⁷⁹
HR: the sixth palace cast and throw upon him waves of water....

If this correspondence is not merely coincidental, several considerations support the view that *HZ(N)* has priority at this point. In addition to the awkwardness of *מפני ש-* in *HR*, it is unlikely that the redactor of *HZ(N)* has adopted the expression from *HR* and changed it to the more ambiguous *כיון ש-*, since either expression makes nonsense of his sentence. It is therefore probable that *כיון ש-* in *HZ(N):D1* is a scribal error arising from the occurrence of the same word in the previous paragraph (C1-2) and that the redactor of *HR*, faced with the meaningless sentence which resulted from this mistake, has attempted to make sense of it by (a) interpreting *כיון ש-* (in this instance) in the sense: “because”; (b) changing it to the unambiguous *מפני ש-* to make this meaning clear and to distinguish it from the previous occurrences of *כיון ש-*, meaning “when”; (c) dropping the opening words of the *HZ* version (היכל השישי) (היה נראה); and (d) explaining that the implicit “they” of *HZ(N)*: טורדין (changed in *HR* to מטילין ומשליכין) refers to the angelic guardians. If the expression *מפני ש-* at *HR* 17.6 indicates a link with *HR* 25.6 (= D1), as suggested above, then *HR* 25.6, which is derivative at this point of *HZ(N)*, must in turn have priority over *HR* 17.6.

The uncertain word in the remaining *HZ* mss. appears to mean “to someone who” (in D and M40) or “by/with someone who” (in M22 and O). The doubtful letter ב should certainly be read as the graphically similar כ, meaning “as” or “like.” On this basis, HALPERIN translates as follows:

The sixth palace looked like someone [!] at whom a hundred thousand thousands and myriad myriads of waves of the sea were being driven⁸⁰

This, of course, makes no sense at all. HALPERIN attempts to solve the problem by postulating an earlier version of the *HR* recension in which

⁷⁹ Accepting this construction for the purpose of the comparison, but see pp. 76-77 below.

⁸⁰ HALPERIN, *Faces*, 201.

the unworthy *יורד מרכבה* experienced the hallucination that he was being thrown into the illusory water, but there is no evidence to support this reconstruction. In fact, the emended text of *HZ(M22)*, reading *כמי* for *במי*, corresponds closely to WERTHEIMER's version of *HR*:

<i>HZ(M22)</i> :		And the gate of	the sixth palace
<i>HR(W)</i> :	Because the guardians of	the gate of	the sixth palace
<i>HZ(M22)</i> :	looked like someone who	(היה נראה כמי)	were driving at him
<i>HR(W)</i> :	were acting like ones who	(היו עושים כמי)	were throwing upon him
<i>HZ(M22)</i>:	.... waves of the sea	....
<i>HR(W)</i>:	.... waves of water	....

The most immediately obvious explanation of this similarity is that WERTHEIMER's text has priority. In this case, *HZ(M22)* has lost the words: "Because the guardians of ...," with the result that the subject has become "the gate" which is (a) singular and (b) incapable of acting, hence the alteration of *היו עושים* ("were acting") to *היה נראה* ("was seen" or "seemed"). As indicated by the remaining mss. of *HZ*, "... the gate of ..." was subsequently lost, so that the subject became "the sixth palace." This reconstruction, however, contradicts the conclusion reached above that *HZ* is, at this point, the earlier source. I therefore suggest that the redactor of *HR(W)* has added the words *היו עושים* in an attempt to make sense of the difficult word *כמי* ("like someone who"), which he found at this point in his source – namely, the version preserved in *HZ(M22)* and, less clearly, *HZ (O)*.

Two further considerations support this hypothesis. In the first place, it is unlikely that *HR*'s *עליו* (ומשליכים) ("throw [and hurl] upon him") has been changed to *HZ*'s *טורדין בו*, which is *lectio difficilior* for two reasons: firstly because *בו* ("in/with him/it") is, if the *HR* recension is presupposed, much less appropriate than *עליו* ("upon," "at," or "against him") and secondly because the verb *טורד*, where it occurs in connection with water, is elsewhere either intransitive or, where transitive, normally has water (or waves) as its subject, not its object.⁸¹ In

⁸¹ Admittedly, *טורד* is used of the effect of wind on water at *HR* 9:1 (SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §162; cf. WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.85, §10.4; full quotation on p. 211 below). Even here, however, the verb does not take the waves (*גלי תרשיש*) as its direct

other words, the verb usually refers to the movement of water in and of itself. Again, if the priority of *HR* is to be maintained, the verb must here be understood to be transitive, having “waves of the sea (or water)” as its object, as in HALPERIN’s translation. SCHOLEM’s translation avoids this difficulty, but is unsatisfactory in other respects. Both SCHOLEM and HALPERIN understand *בו* to refer to the *יורד מרכבה*. The word recurs, however, in the following clause, where it can only refer to the palace: *ואין בו אפילו טיפה אחת מים* (neither SCHOLEM nor HALPERIN account for the word at this point).⁸²

All these difficulties are resolved if the doubtful word in *HZ* is assumed to be *כמו* (“like”). The translation offered on page 56 above is based on this emendation, which has been accepted by most translators.⁸³ The outcome is a perfectly comprehensible sentence in which *טורדין* assumes its most natural, intransitive meaning and *בו* refers back to the palace, as it does in the following clause:

The sixth palace looked as if (*כמו ש-*) waves of the sea were billowing in it (*טורדין בו*)⁸⁴

It has become apparent that the *HR* recension is confused at the point of transition between C2 and D1, where a redactor has attempted to resolve the difficulties posed by a corrupt text of *HZ:D1*. It follows that the *HZ* recension must have priority in D. *HR*’s statement that the gatekeepers are responsible for throwing the illusory water at the *יורד מרכבה* is a product of the confused transition and distorts the significance of what follows. In *HZ:D1*, the illusion of water is not produced by the guardians, but is a feature of the palace itself, produced by the appearance of marble stones. The illusion is dangerous, since it provides an opportunity for error, whereby the *יורד מרכבה* may betray

object, being related to them by the preposition *ב-*.

⁸² *היכל* is a masculine noun, despite the misleading plural form. See BDB (1977), 228a-b and JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 345b.

⁸³ Thus, in addition to SCHOLEM, SCHÄFER, *Übersetzung*, 146, and REICHMAN, ‘Die “Wasser-Episode,”’ 70.

⁸⁴ Thus the translation on p. 56 above. An almost equally attractive alternative is to read the corrupt word as *כמים* (“like water”), yielding: “The sixth palace looked like water in which were billowing (*בו שטורדין*) waves of the sea” This does, however, impose a strain on the syntax, since *בו* must refer to the palace, not the water, which is, of course, a plural noun in Hebrew.

his unworthiness, but it is not certain that this is its primary purpose, or that the episode is formally a test. There is no indication that the question of the unworthy *יורד מרכבה* is predetermined, or prompted by the angels, and the episode does not seem to involve the execution of a prior decision, as in *HZ:C*. A careful reading of the text reveals, moreover, that in *HZ:D-F* the *יורד מרכבה* is no longer standing outside the sixth gate, as he is in *HR*. In *HZ:D3*, the *בת קול* comes forth from the *seventh היכל*, and in *E2* we are told that the *יורד מרכבה* has already been admitted to “the (first) *six היכלות*.” If we accept the narrative unity that the redactor of this recension has imposed on this sequence, the *יורד מרכבה*, having been found worthy and permitted to enter (C), is now standing *inside* the sixth *היכל*.⁸⁵ This point, although it may, perhaps, seem at first sight to be relatively minor, profoundly affects the significance of the episode, as will emerge below. It follows that the “ministers” who “stand before him” (*המשרתין עומדין כנגדו*) in *HZ:D2* must be either the inhabitants of the sixth *היכל* or the gatekeepers of the seventh.⁸⁶

7. Conclusion: The Water Vision Episode and the Paradise Tradition

The few commentators who have attempted a detailed investigation of the relationships between the *HR* and *HZ* versions of these materials have come to different conclusions. HALPERIN believes that *HZ* has priority in A-C, but that *HR*'s version of D, the water vision episode itself, is older than that in *HZ*.⁸⁷ REICHMAN treats *HR:D* and *HZ:D* as independent developments of a pre-literary source tradition (A-C are

⁸⁵ In E-F, unless this passage is hopelessly confused, *בפתח* must presumably mean “inside the gate.” See further below.

⁸⁶ Since the only clear reference to the keepers of the sixth gate in either recension of A-D occurs at the beginning of *HR:D1*, where the text of this recension is confused, it might be possible to conclude that they are alien to the whole sequence and to attribute their appearance to the contaminating influence of *HR* 17.6. I am unwilling to go this far, for two reasons: firstly, because it would undercut my strong suspicion that *HR* 17.6 is a garbled reference to 25.6 (= C); and secondly, and more importantly, because *מפני ש-* at *HR* 25.6 (= D1) has been found to have priority over *מפני ש-* at *HR:17.6*, and it is not possible to separate this expression from the keepers of the sixth gate.

⁸⁷ HALPERIN, *Faces*, 204-208.

outside the scope of his inquiry).⁸⁸ The above analysis has, however, confirmed DAN's judgement that the whole of *HR:A-D*, including the water vision episode, is a confused and abbreviated version of the older *HZ* recension.⁸⁹

HALPERIN, who wrongly attributes priority to *HR:D*, proposes the following reconstruction of the tradition history of the water vision episode: Aqiba's warning at *b.Hag.* 14b: 'Do not say, "Water, Water ...,"' is an allusion to the early tradition about this episode; *HR* 25.6 (= D) is an independent witness to the same tradition; the redactor of *babli* also included a reference to the "pure marble stones" of the heavenly temple, which are not mentioned in *HR:D* and are not part of the water vision episode in its earliest form; subsequently, the redactor of *HZ:D* interpreted *HR:D* in the light of *babli*, and *vice versa*, and inferred that the "marble stones" were those of the sixth *היכל*; finally, the references to these stones in the *HZ(N)* version of the *פרדס* story (B2a-b) represent a further stage in this process of 'mutual contamination of the *pardes* story and the "water" test.'⁹⁰ The finding that *HZ:D* has priority over *HR:D* undermines this unnecessarily complicated reconstruction and indicates a much simpler set of relationships between these texts. In *HZ:D*, the pavement of marble stones is clearly an integral component of the narrative, which makes no reference to the story of the four who entered *פרדס*. The image of the marble stones is derived from the tradition of the heavenly sanctuary, to which the sixth *היכל* corresponds, and can be traced at least as far back in time as *1 Enoch* 14. There is, therefore, no reason to assume that the redactor of *HZ:D* has borrowed this image from *babli*. It is both simpler and more reasonable to conclude that the marble stones and the saying, "water" in *babli* are both allusions to the water vision episode and that they were derived from a single source in the tradition represented by *HZ:D*.

HALPERIN discerns a reference to the talmudic *פרדס* story in *HZ:F*, where he prefers the variant reading of ms. New York (F1b): "Ben Azzai" for "a certain person."⁹¹ He justifies this preference on the grounds that the majority version

⁸⁸ REICHMAN, 'Die "Wasser-Episode,"' 69-97.

⁸⁹ DAN, "פתח היכל שיש," 210-11.

⁹⁰ HALPERIN, *Faces*, 204-208 (quotation, 206).

⁹¹ See p. 57, n. 21 above.

.... leaves the anecdote completely pointless and is best explained as an alteration by scribes who did not want to attribute to the saintly Ben Azzai a fate reserved for the descendants of calf-worshippers.⁹²

A circular logic underlies this argument: the variant reading is preferred on the assumption that *babli* has priority over *HZ*, and then cited as evidence in support of that assumption. The motive that HALPERIN attributes to the copyist is, moreover, unconvincing, since one affected by this scruple could easily have adopted the widely attested talmudic alternative: “Ben Zoma.”⁹³ It is much more probable that the copyist of *HZ(N):F* has identified the unnamed person with Ben Azzai on the basis of the talmudic version of the פרדס story. It should further be noted that this change occurs only in ms. New York, which is also the only source, other than *babli*, to connect the פרדס story with the water vision episode.⁹⁴

Most commentators, including HALPERIN, believe on the basis of perceived narrative inconsistencies that the material in *HZ:E-F* was added at a later stage of literary development than that represented by *HZ:D*. HALPERIN bases his case on the observation that *HZ:E*, where the unworthy יורד מרכבה can apparently fool the angels, is inconsistent with *HZ:C*, where they know his status in advance.⁹⁵ This, however, is irrelevant unless we grant HALPERIN’s assumption that *HZ:C-D* are a single unit of tradition. This is unlikely to be the case, since, as observed above, the two units are inconsistent: in *HZ:C*, the angels know in advance whether the יורד מרכבה is worthy or unworthy, but in *HZ:D*, they do not. DAN regards *HZ:E* and *HZ:F* as two separate units. In his opinion, *HZ:E* represents a redactor’s attempt to moderate the “arbitrariness and harshness” of *HZ:D*, whereas these qualities are, if anything, exacerbated in *HZ:F*. He considers it possible that *HZ:D* and *HZ:F* are a single unit, into which *HZ:E* has been interpolated.⁹⁶ REICHMAN maintains that the “forbidden utterance” motif in *HZ:E-F*

⁹² HALPERIN, *Faces*, 533, note g.

⁹³ See pages 4-5, lines A20-24, above.

⁹⁴ See “Four Entered Paradise,” B2a-b (above, p. 13); and further, p. 82 below.

⁹⁵ HALPERIN *Faces*, 206. It should be observed that HALPERIN here undermines his own argument, since the mention of Ben Azzai in *HZ:F1b*, if late, can have no bearing on the origin or meaning of *HZ:D*.

⁹⁶ DAN, “פתח היכל שיש,” 200-202.

is inconsistent with the meaning of the “test” in *HZ:D*, as he wrongly understands it.⁹⁷

We should certainly allow for the possibility that the text of *HZ:D-F* was expanded over time. The narrative structure of these units is not, however, disjointed or discontinuous, as these scholars have maintained. If the majority reading: פלוני אלמוני is followed in *HZ:F1b*, the narrative sequence in *HZ:E-F* is, in fact, an internally consistent development of *HZ:D2*,⁹⁸ where the unworthy יורד מרכבה betrays himself as such by asking the question: “These waters: what is the nature of them?” The unidentified unfortunate of *HZ:F* does not ask this question, but merely says the word “water” twice. This is consistent with *HZ:E1*, which warns that one should not “ask, or say that they are water.” The meaning appears to be that, even if one does not ask the question, merely to say the word the word “water” is enough to cause disaster. *HZ:E* makes the point that, even if one is unworthy, one may avoid discovery if one refrains from mentioning water, and *HZ:F* provides the counterpoint to this: even though the unnamed יורד מרכבה “was worthy,” he made the mistake of saying “water” and, for this reason, was assaulted by the angels.

The meaning of מגזרי ברזל ונהיו עליו (*HZ:F1b*) is obscure, and the variant in ms. New York: והטילין עליו is almost certainly an attempted clarification of this strange reading. The verb הטיל does not occur anywhere else in the *HZ* recension and it is possible that the copyist of *HZ(N)* has been influenced by *HR*, where מטילין occurs in C2, D1 and D4. We have observed, however, that each occurrence of this verb in *HR* is at a point of narrative and textual confusion.⁹⁹ It seems more likely, therefore, that the redactor of *HR* has taken the verb from the variant reading in *HZ(N):F1b* (compare מושליכין in *HR:D1*, which is a product of the same confusion and has almost certainly been taken from *HZ:C2*). If this is correct, *HZ:F* has priority over *HR:C-D*. These narrative and textual considerations indicate that the sequence *HZ:E-F*, though possibly later than *HZ:D*, nonetheless represents a relatively early stage in the development of the literary tradition. Whether this be so or not, the crucial point to be made in this connection is

⁹⁷ REICHMAN, “Die “Wasser-Episode,”” 91-97.

⁹⁸ *Contra* HALPERIN, DAN and REICHMAN (see the previous three notes).

⁹⁹ See pp. 67 and 74-77 above.

that in all of *HZ:A-F* there is no single element that requires to be explained by reference to *babli*. On the contrary, the saying “Water! Water!” in *babli* (A15) appears to be derived from the (perhaps secondary) stage of literary development represented by *HZ:F*.

Nor, except in ms. New York, is there any point of direct contact between the *HZ* recension of the water vision episode and the story of the four who entered פְּרֻדָּס. Returning to the hekhalot version of that story (pages 12-14 above), it has been observed that, although sections A and C reflect the pre-talmudic version, the material common to all four manuscripts in B is derived from a talmudic source which, since it mentions neither water nor marble stones, is unlikely to be *babli*. At B2a and B2b, however, ms. New York of *HZ* interpolates into this text material which can only be derived from the water vision episode according to the *HZ* recension, which we have found to be independent of and prior to *babli*. In other words, the redactor of the פְּרֻדָּס story in *HZ(N)* has interpreted it in the light of the water vision episode, which is described elsewhere in the *HZ* collection, and there is no reason to suppose that he has been influenced at this point by *babli*. It is very probable, therefore, that the context in which the story of the four first came to be associated with the water vision episode was the relatively late literary tradition represented by *HZ(N)*, and that this tradition was employed as a source by the redactor of the פְּרֻדָּס story in *babli*.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CELESTIAL PAVEMENT AND THE “ASCENT MIDRASH” IN *HEKHALOT ZUTARTI*

1. *The Hekhalot Zutarti Literary Tradition*

The conclusion reached at the end of the previous chapter has significant implications with regard to the origins and development of the hekhalot literary tradition, especially the collection known to us as *HZ*, and its relationship to the talmudic sources. In SCHOLEM's opinion, supported by GRUENWALD, *HZ* is “the oldest [hekhalot] text available to us.”¹ The contents of this loosely organized collection are extremely diverse, prompting SCHOLEM to remark that “the text of the Lesser Hekhalot as it is preserved is something of a hodgepodge.”² The title *Hekhalot Zutarti* is derived from Hai Gaon's well-known *responsum* on the story of the four, which cites the water vision episode according to the text of *HZ*:D1.³ JELLINEK identified an untitled portion of ms. Oxford 1531, following *HR*, as the text which Hai Gaon calls *HZ*.⁴ The collection is not called by this title in any extant manuscript, although SCHOLEM reported that he saw the title in an Italian manuscript which, unfortunately, was lost during World War II.⁵ ELIOR observes that the materials identified as *HZ* by JELLINEK do not constitute a coherent or clearly defined text:

¹ SCHOLEM, *Major Trends*, 45; and see further, *ibid.*, 358, n. 15; and *idem*, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 75-83; cf. GRUENWALD, *Apocalyptic*, 142-149.

² SCHOLEM, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 83.

³ Hai Gaon, *responsum* on *b.Hag.* 14b-15b, in BERNHARD M. LEWIN, ed., *Otzar ha-Geonim: Thesaurus of the Gaonic Responsa and Commentaries*, vol. 4: *Tractate Yom Tov, Chagiga and Maschkin* (Haifa and Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press Association, 1931) 3.13-15.

⁴ JELLINEK, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 6.xliv. SCHOLEM (*Jewish Gnosticism*, 127, addendum to *ibid.*, 6, n. 12) observes that LEOPOLD ZUNZ apparently also “knew of the correct identity of the Lesser Hekhalot.” See ZUNZ, *Die synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters* (2 vols.; Berlin: J. Springer, 1855-59) 1.148, note c (on the name אֲזַרְתֵּי הַקְּהָלוֹת, which ZUNZ finds in “the Lesser Hekhalot,” see SCHOLEM, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 66-67).

⁵ SCHOLEM, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 127, addendum to *ibid.*, 6, n. 13.

.... the passages containing Hekhalot Zutarti, according to Jellinek's suggestion, do not present a continuous composition or a textual unit but rather a conglomeration of somewhat related bits and pieces

This author [i.e., ELIOR] sees them as most probably representing various mystical traditions from different circles of Yordi Merkava, copied in a haphazard manner with no attempt to attain textual unity. Hekhalot Zutarti should not be considered as an unfolding narrative or book but rather different forms of literature which grew from a nucleus of idea, situation, or perhaps a true mystical experience and to which has been grafted, with the passing of time, other similar traditions and new material.

If these passages must be seen as a unit, then their nucleus must be the well known archetypical mystical experience of Rabbi Akiva – the four who entered the orchard – since their uniqueness is obviously founded on the visionary experience.

However, it is doubtful that at any time these parts were truly compiled together in a more coherent manner than we now possess.⁶

SCHÄFER's detailed analysis of the materials included in *HZ* results in an even more radical deconstruction of the text than that proposed by ELIOR.⁷ Owing to its lack of internal organization, the fluidity of the manuscripts, and a high degree of textual overlap with other hekhalot and midrashic collections, it is, in SCHÄFER's opinion, not possible to determine the specific content and precise boundaries of the collection:

On grounds of neither content nor formal criteria is it possible to define a "text" which can properly be so called, as possessing any kind of unified redactional structure. The designation of this textual complex as *HZ* is a convention which quite obviously originated in an attempt to give a name to the materials which follow *HR* in the manuscripts, and to distinguish those materials from *HR* itself. This phenomenon of the delimitation of textual units as *Rabbab* and *Zuta'* is sufficiently well known from the midrashic literature, where the text designated *Zuta'* should more often than not be regarded as redactionally the later. "*Hekhalot Zutarti*" thus turns out to be a classic example of a fictitious text, which apparently never existed as a redactional unity.⁸

Elsewhere, SCHÄFER observes, in partial agreement with ELIOR, that the first part of the *HZ* collection (*Synopse*, §§335-374) appears to have coal-

⁶ ELIOR, *היכלות זוטרתי* (English summary), ii-iii.

⁷ SCHÄFER, "Aufbau und redaktionelle Identität der *Hekhalot Zutarti*," *JJS* 33, (1982) 569-582, reprinted in *HS*, 50-62.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 582/62.

esced around the central theme of the ascensions into heaven of Moses and R. Aqiba. These figures are presented as archetypical parallels and

.... obviously function as prototypes of the Merkavah mystic and possibly as heroes of the past as well (Moses as the role model for 'Aqiva and 'Aqiva as role model for the *yored merkavah*).⁹

With regard to the dating of the materials included in *HZ*, SCHÄFER concludes:

Speculation about the antiquity of *HZ* in comparison to other texts of the hekhalot literature are completely out of place. Discussion is only possible, if at all, with regard to the age of the individual textual units, not the age of a redactional unity called *Hekhalot Zutarti*.¹⁰

This point is undoubtedly valid and, moreover, has much wider applications. While it may be true that, in SCHÄFER's words, "of all the analyzed macroforms of the Hekhalot literature, *Hekhalot Zutarti* is the least homogenous,"¹¹ this is only a matter of degree. As SCHÄFER is at pains to point out, the entire hekhalot corpus is made up of more or less loosely organized and frequently overlapping compilations ("macroforms") of quite variegated textual materials.¹² In this respect, the hekhalot compilations are not markedly different from the "mainstream" talmudic and midrashic collections. These too are composite documents, the contents of which are derived from a variety of sources and, in many cases, "migrate" freely from one collection to another. Although these sources may, in most cases, have been subjected to a more systematic process of organization and redaction than the majority of the hekhalot compilations, this again is a matter only of degree. Thus, the methodological principle enunciated by SCHÄFER – that issues of provenance and dating should primarily be addressed with regard to

⁹ SCHÄFER, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, 67.

¹⁰ SCHÄFER, "Aufbau und redaktionelle Identität," 62. A similar opinion is expressed by ELIOR, *היכלות זוטרתרי*, iii.

¹¹ SCHÄFER, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, 55.

¹² See, especially, SCHÄFER, "Prolegomena zu einer kritischen Edition und Analyse der Merkava Rabba," *FJB* 5 [1977] 76-77, reprinted in *HS*, 17-49; *idem*, "Tradition and Redaction in Hekhalot Literature"; *idem*, "Zum Problem der redaktionellen Identität von *Hekhalot Rabbati*"; and *idem*, *Synopse*, v-viii.

small units of textual tradition and that the date of redaction of a larger compilation of such units (or “macroform”), where known, provides only a *terminus ad quem* for its contents — applies not only to *HZ* but to the entire hekhalot corpus and, indeed to rabbinic literature as a whole.¹³

This does not mean, however, that there is no point in exploring the processes of accumulation and redaction of traditional materials by which the various hekhalot and rabbinic collections were produced, or in examining the relationships between these and other streams of literary tradition. On the contrary, a detailed source-critical and tradition-historical inquiry into the origins and development of these literary streams may yield important new insights about the original meanings and *Sitze im Leben* of the textual units, and about the redactional agendas which shaped the literary sequences and longer collections in which they are combined. Thus, while the notion of *HZ* as a single text should clearly be abandoned, this does not prevent us from inquiring into the sources and stages of formation of the *HZ* literary tradition.

As we have seen, SCHÄFER believes that the collection came to be known by the title *HZ* because it was appended in the manuscripts to *HR*. For this reason, he is inclined to think that *HZ* represents a later phase of editorial activity than *HR*.¹⁴ His suggestion about the origin of the title *HZ* is entirely plausible, but the fact that the *HZ* materials were appended to *HR* by the copyists of these relatively late manuscripts proves nothing about their dates of origin. Arguably, the collection’s looseness of structure and lack of redactional definition are grounds for supposing that it may, at least in part, represent an early stage in the literary development of the hekhalot tradition. This is supported by the results of our inquiry thus far. *HZ* preserves the earliest form of the סדר פּרדּיּם story, which appears, by all accounts, to be one of the nuclear components around which the collection as a whole accumulated and

¹³ This point is made by SCHÄFER; see *idem*, “Tradition and Redaction,” *HS*, 16.

¹⁴ See p. 84 above. Cf. SCHÄFER, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, 8, 61, 73-75 and 156, n. 35. HALPERIN (*Faces*, 206-207, n. 18) inclines towards the same position, but this is based on his faulty analysis of the relationships between the *HR* and *HZ* versions of “Four Entered Paradise” and the water vision episode (see pp. 78-79 above).

grew to assume such shape as it possesses.¹⁵ The water vision episode, to which *babli*'s version of the פֶּרֶדֶס story makes reference, is also best preserved in this collection. We have found, moreover, that the redactor of *babli* has been influenced by a source in which the פֶּרֶדֶס story and the water vision episode had already been brought into contact with one another, and that this source, preserved in *HZ(N)*, was part of the same complex of developing literary traditions. SCHÄFER has observed that the opening paragraph of *HZ* (*Synopse*, §335) contains several echoes of *m.Hag.* 2.1, the lemma of the mystical collection,¹⁶ and this paragraph is separated from “Four Entered Paradise” only by a short account of the revelation of God’s secret name to Moses and Aqiba during their ascents to heaven.¹⁷ It is therefore very possible, as I observed in my previous study of the פֶּרֶדֶס story, that the context in which that story first came to be associated with *m.Hag.* 2.1 (or its source) was an early version of *HZ*, or, to put the matter differently, that the layer of tradition in which that association first occurred has been preserved in this collection.¹⁸ In this qualified sense, these findings tend to support SCHOLEM’s and GRUENWALD’s estimation of the antiquity of *HZ*. At the very least, this stew of traditions contains substantial morsels of pre-talmudic מַעֲשֵׂה מֵרִכְבָּה material. The evidence considered above suggests strongly, moreover, that, even before the talmudic redactors dipped their spoons in it, it had already started cooking.

2. *The Chaos Waters Theme*

HALPERIN argues convincingly that the motif of a heavenly traveller being attacked by the waters of chaos is rooted in the well documented traditions about Israel’s passage through the waters of the Red Sea, interpreted as a symbol of deliverance from the forces of cosmic evil.¹⁹ The traditional theme of opposition between the temple and the waters of

¹⁵ SCHÄFER has demonstrated that the version of “Four Entered Paradise” in *MR* is secondary to that in *HZ* (see SCHÄFER, “Prolegomena zu einer kritischen Edition,” *HS*, 25; *idem*, “Aufbau und redaktionelle Identität,” *HS*, 57; and *idem*, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, 117-118).

¹⁶ SCHÄFER, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, 69-71.

¹⁷ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§336-337.

¹⁸ MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited. Part 1,” 207-208, n. 116.

¹⁹ See HALPERIN, *Faces*, 208-249.

chaos is equally well attested, the legend of the אֶבֶן שֹׁטֵיידָהּ being perhaps the most obvious example.²⁰ HALPERIN's interpretation accords well with DAN's understanding of the location of the sixth gate as the boundary between the celestial temple and the realm of chaos,²¹ while DAVILA has shown that the motif of assault by the demonic waters on one attempting to enter the garden-temple may, indeed, be quite early.²² Returning to the water vision episode, the relevance of all this material is confirmed by the liturgical formula in HZ:F3, the significance of which has not, to my knowledge, been explained before. The formula occurs in the standard daily liturgy as part of the morning service and is also included in the confession of faith to be made at the point of dying.²³ Its significance in the context of the water vision episode is surely derived from the biblical settings of two of its three components. The perfect-tense form יְהוָה קִלְקַץ occurs at the beginning of Psalms 93, 97 and 99, the first of which reads as follows:

⁽¹⁾The LORD reigns; he is clothed with majesty.

The LORD is robed; he is girded with power.

Yea, the world is established; it shall not be moved.

⁽²⁾Thy throne is established of old; thou art from everlasting.

⁽³⁾The floods have lifted up, O LORD; the floods have lifted up their voice;
the floods lift up their roaring;

⁽⁴⁾Mightier than the noise of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea,
the LORD on high is mighty;

⁽⁵⁾Thy decrees are very sure; holiness befits thy house,
O LORD, for evermore.

This correspondence might perhaps be dismissed as merely coincidental, were it not for the fact that the imperfect tense component of the formula: יְהוָה יִמְלֵךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד is derived from Exod. 15:18, the final verse of

²⁰ See LOUIS GINZBERG, *The Legends of the Jews* (7 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1911-38) 1.12-13 and 5.14-17, n. 39; RAPHAEL PATAI, *Man and Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual* (2d ed.; New York: Ktav, 1967) 84-85; FOSSUM, *The Name of God*, 250-253. See also p. 51, n. 70 above and pp. 199-201 below.

²¹ See p. 70 above.

²² See pp. 51-52 above.

²³ See JOSEPH H. HERTZ, ed. and trans., *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book* (revised edn.; New York: Bloch, 1961) 82-85 and 1064-1065; and ISMAR ELBOGEN, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (4th edn.; Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1962) 85.

the “Song of Moses,” which recounts and celebrates the events of the Red Sea crossing and the destruction of Pharaoh and his host.

Thus far, then, HALPERIN’s explanation of the general background of the water vision episode is well supported, and his ground-breaking research has significantly advanced our understanding of this material. His analysis of the textual tradition has, however, been found to be flawed, and our finding that the *HZ* version of the episode has priority over that in *HR* raises problems for his theory. The image of an assault on the heavenly traveller by the chaos waters (whether real or illusory) may, perhaps, have colored *HR*’s presentation of the episode, but it is nowhere to be detected in the earlier *HZ* recension. A more precisely nuanced interpretation of the imagery and specific terminology of this version is, therefore, now required.

3. *The Celestial Paving Stones*

The *אבני שיש* are, as is now widely recognized, a standard feature of the earthly and, by extension, the celestial temple.²⁴ At 1 Chr. 29:2, the expression occurs at the end of a list of materials bequeathed by David to Solomon, to be used in the building of the temple (interestingly enough, the list also includes *ברזל*, despite the later ban on iron in the temple).²⁵ Along with these materials, David also gives Solomon the plans according to which the temple is to be built (1 Chr. 28:11-19). It is very possible that this passage is the basis of the myth of the revelation of the *שר תורה* to the returning exiles, as described in *HR* 29:3-6.²⁶ Here God, who wishes to give a gift to Israel in compensation for their recent suffering, recites a similar list of precious materials which he possesses in heaven but, since all these things are already to be found in the world below, decides that what they really need are the secret names of the *שר תורה*. Although *שיש* is not included in this list of treasures, the connection with 1 Chr. 28:11-29:5 is confirmed by what follows. The *רוח הקודש* descends and appears on the throne of glory to the elders of the people “from the great gateway of the house of the

²⁴ See pp. 36-44 above.

²⁵ See p. 67 above.

²⁶ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§294-298; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.116-118, §§31.2-32.3. For an English translation of the *שר תורה* appendix to *HR*, see HALPERIN, *Faces* 430-434.

LORD (ממבוי הגדול אשר בבית יוי) between the vestibule and the altar (בין האולם ובין המזבח)²⁷ in the precinct of the temple, which has not yet been rebuilt, but the plan of which is marked out on the ground.²⁸ A further point of contact between the scriptural passage and the hekhlot tradition occurs at 1 Chr. 29:1, where David calls Solomon “youth” (נער), a title of the angelic vice-regent, usually identified as Metatron, according to 3 *Enoch* and several קומה שיעור sources.²⁹ The term שיש (= שיש; “alabaster” or “white marble”) occurs twice at Esther 1:6, with reference to the pillars and mosaic pavement of King Ahasuerus’ palace, and once at Cant. 5:15, where the legs of the Beloved are compared to marble columns (עמודי שיש). Of more direct relevance to this study is the following passage of *HR* 9.5:³⁰

כי במקום שמזכירין אותו מאיר ומזריח ומזהיב ומכסף וטורד פטרה ויהלום ספיר ונפך
ברקת ושייש טהור

For in the place where they praise him, there shine, glisten, glitter, gleam and sparkle (?) topaz, onyx, sapphire, carbuncle, emerald and pure marble.

The language of this passage clearly echoes the *HZ* recension of the water vision episode. In addition to the שייש טהור, the word מאיר may be a slightly distorted echo of the expression, מאויר זיו in *HZ:D1*.³¹ The verb טורד, meaning “stirred up” or “constantly in motion,” does

²⁷ *HR* 29.4; SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §297; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.117, §31.5. Mss. Budapest, Vatican and Munich 22 read “third” in place of “great.”

²⁸ For reasons which I do not understand, HALPERIN declines to translate the statement that the temple plan was drawn on the ground, on the ground that it consists of “a series of very difficult and possibly corrupt phrases ...,” which “... seem to be parenthetical, and do not advance the narrative” (see HALPERIN, *Faces*, 432, n. 77). Ms. Budapest, for example, reads as follows: שא'ע'פ' שעדיין עד אותה שעה לא בנו בניין וההיכל והמזבח וכל הבית אלא על מקום הצורות שהם צורות ועומדות לשכלל עליהם האולם וההיכל והמזבח וכל הבית כולו, “for although they had not, up to that time, built the building, but (the holy spirit stood) on the place of the forms that had been outlined and stood ready for the vestibule, the sanctuary, the altar, and the whole of the entire house to be completed upon them” (compare SCHÄFER, *Übersetzung*, 2.283-284).

²⁹ See, for example: SCHOLEM, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 49-52; and MARTIN SAMUEL COHEN, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, New York and London: University Press of America, 1983) 131-132.

³⁰ *HR* 9.5; SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §166; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.86, §11.4.

³¹ See pp. 93-96 below.

not really fit this context and is probably derived, directly or indirectly, from HZ's description of the sixth palace, where the pure marble stones resemble water in which waves of the sea are billowing (טורדין).³² All this material confirms what we already know, namely, that marble is an important feature of the heavenly and earthly temples, and that this precious substance appears to resemble water, but it does not seem at first sight, to convey much further information. We should not, however, overlook the significance of a detail found in HZ:D1, repeated in HR 9.5 and *babli* (A13). According to these sources, the substance of the stones is said to be טהור, that is, uncontaminated by levitical uncleanness. In this connection, it is interesting to observe that in HR, when Neḥunya b. Ha-Qanah makes his visionary journey through the seven דיכלות, he is said to be seated “at the (great) third gateway of the temple” (למבוי [הגדול] השלישי אשר בבית ה'), on “a bench of pure marble (ספסל של שיש טהור),” which is the inherited property of R. Ishmael, the priest.³³ The (great) third gateway of the temple is, according to some manuscripts, also the location of the appearance of the holy spirit in the שר תורה myth,³⁴ where it appears to be the entrance to the sanctuary building, to which the gate of the sixth דיכל corresponds. If Neḥunya is indeed seated at the entrance to the sanctuary, priestly status is clearly attributed to him. Another parallel is suggested by HR 19.3, where Neḥunya tells his listeners that “Prince Dumiel, the threshold-guardian at the right of the gate of the sixth דיכל, sits on a bench of pure stone [?] (יושב על ספסל של ליתוק טהור).”³⁵ At all events, the substance of “pure marble” appears in the context of Neḥunya's ascent to be associated with the conditions of extreme cultic and priestly, or

³² See pp. 74-77 above.

³³ HR 14.2; SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §202; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.91, §16.2. “Great” is lacking in mss. New York, Munich 22, Vatican, and Budapest; all mss. include “third.”

³⁴ HR 29.4 (see n. 27 and compare n. 33 above). The parallel is noted by HALPERIN, *Faces*, 432, n. 76.

³⁵ HR 19.3; SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §233; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.99, §21.3. The uncertain word ליתוק is given according to mss. Oxford, Budapest, Dropsie (mss. Vatican and Munich 40: ליתיק; ms. Munich 22: ליתוק; ms. New York: ייתוק; ed. WERTHEIMER: יתוק). WERTHEIMER (*ibid.*, n. 93) comments that the word and its meaning are unknown. I surmise that its origin is somehow traceable to the Greek λίθος. See further p. 205 below.

quasi-priestly, purity required of one seeking admission to the celestial temple, where the divine Glory is enthroned.

A key to the meaning of the water vision episode is provided by the expression סלולות כהיכל in *HZ:D1*, repeated in *HZ:E2* and also in the *HZ(N)* recension of the פֶּרֶס story (*B2a*). HALPERIN, who finds this expression puzzling, guesses that it means "... built into the palace."³⁶ SCHOLEM, presumably associating the expression with the description of the marble facing stones of the Jerusalem sanctuary in *b.Sukk.* 51b and *B.B.* 4a,³⁷ offers: "... with which the palace was tessellated."³⁸ In biblical Hebrew, the verb סלל means "to lift or cast up."³⁹ It is used at Isa. 57:14 and 62:10 of "raising up" (i.e. making or paving) a road. At Jer. 18:15, the expression לֹא קָלוּקָה לֵא דֶרֶךְ means "an unpaved road." Prov. 15:19 states that the path of the righteous is קָלוּקָה (RSV: "a level highway"). In rabbinic Hebrew, סלל can mean either "to tread, press, make a path, or pave," or "to be light (of weight)," in which case the passive participle means "high," "light" or "swinging."⁴⁰ It is probable that both of these meanings are intended here, but the primary reference must be to the pavement of the heavenly sanctuary.⁴¹ A further dimension of meaning is provided by *t.Miqwa'ot* 3.4, where סלול occurs as a dialect form of צלול, meaning "clear" or "transparent" (of water). This word is used by Rashi (on *Hag.* 14b), who explains that the stones were "shining like clear water" (מבֹהֵיק כַּמֵּיִם צְלוּלִין), and by Hai Gaon, who appears to misquote *HZ*: צלולות כהיכל ("transparent like the palace").⁴² HALPERIN finds this strange, because the word "is normally used of liquids."⁴³

Ḥananael b. Ḥushiel explains Aqiba's warning in *babli* by reference to the water vision episode. He cites only *HR* by name and quotes the opening words of *HR:D1*, but also includes a part of the text of *HZ:D1*, which he attributes to Aqiba, misquoting the word סלולות:

³⁶ See HALPERIN, *Faces*, 201, 204, and 533, note e.

³⁷ See p. 36 above.

³⁸ SCHOLEM, *Major Trends*, 53; *idem*, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 15.

³⁹ See BDB, 699b-700b.

⁴⁰ See JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 995a-b.

⁴¹ Compare *m.Sot.* 2.2, which states that the earthly sanctuary was paved with marble flagstones.

⁴² See p. 83, n. 3 above.

⁴³ HALPERIN, *Faces*, 533, note e.

And R. Aqiba commanded them: When you come to look, in the depth of your mind, towards the stones of pure marble, do not say, “Water! Water!” for there is no water there at all – but a worldly image (רמורת בעולם) is seen and he who says, “Water!” is thrust away, for he has been found to be a liar. It is explained in these terms in *Hekhalot Rabbati*: Because the guardians of the gate of the sixth palace cast and throw a thousand thousand waves of water when there is not so much as a drop there. R. Aqiba said: It seems as though there are waves of water in it (נראה כמי שיש בו גלי ים), but there is not so much as a single drop in it, but only the brilliant air (אוויר זיו) of the pure marble stones which are included within the palace (שדון כלולות בדיכלל), the brilliance of the appearance of which was like water. And he who says, “These waters: what is the nature of them (מה מנה)?” is thrust away etc.⁴⁴

Returning to HZ:D1 itself, HALPERIN also finds the expression מאויר זיו incomprehensible. He therefore argues that the reading of ms. New York: מאור זיו (“light of the brilliance”) should be preferred.⁴⁵ If this were correct, it would mean that HZ:E1, E2 and F1b, and HZ(N):B2a of the פרדס story, all of which read either זיו אויר (“brilliance of air”) or אויר זיו (“air of brilliance”), must be based on the supposedly corrupt text of HZ:D1. The reading of the majority of the witnesses is, however, *lectio difficilior*, and it is hard to account for an arbitrary alteration of “light,” which is naturally associated with “brilliance,” to “air,” which normally is not.

DEUTSCH finds a parallel to the expression אויר זיו/זיו אויר in the Mandaean sources, where a “divine being called Radiance or *ziwa* leads the soul over the *hafiqia mia* to the world of light.”⁴⁶ In other passages of the Mandaean literature, reference is made to a substance called the *ayar ziwa* (“air of radiance”) which forms a kind of subtle atmosphere surrounding the world, and which is also sometimes personified as a divine being. E. S. DROWER explains:

Ayar-Ziwa. ‘Ether-Brilliance’ or ‘radiant ether’ this rare and purer atmosphere is represented as interpenetrating the thick air round the earth, and giving it vital

⁴⁴ Hananael b. Hushiel, commentary on *b.Hag.* 14b (in the margin of the printed edition).

⁴⁵ HALPERIN, *Faces*, 206. See p. 56, n. 12 above.

⁴⁶ DEUTSCH, *Guardians*, 119. See pp. 46-50 above.

qualities This Ether is personified, and is sometimes mentioned as a source of life.⁴⁷

In the Mandaean sources, radiance and light are connected not only with air, but also with water. DROWER comments:

Water, which reflects the light, is considered a form of light A freshly baptized person is 'clothed in light'. The conception that the firmament is filled with a fluid light and that water is a grosser form of it appears in the doctrine of the planetary boats.⁴⁸

DEUTSCH believes the water vision episode to be a veiled or coded polemic against these Mandaean beliefs:

The Mandaean terms for air (*ayar*) and radiance (*ziwa*) parallel the expressions *awir ziw* and *ziw awir* which appear in the Hekhalot versions of the "Water Warning." Indeed, both Hekhalot and Mandaean sources agree that connected with the cosmic waters (or illusion of waters) is some kind of light or radiance and air. Once again, however, there is a crucial difference between the Jewish and Mandaean traditions. The Mandaeans personify the radiance and air, even transforming them into beings who help the soul over the waters. They also posit that the light actually becomes manifest in the form of water. By contrast, the Hekhalot authors connect the radiance and air to the stones which only appear like water. The Hekhalot texts therefore provide an alternate explanation for the appearance of the radiance and air (they are not divine beings) just as they suggest an alternate explanation for the appearance of the water. In both cases, the source of the illusion is actually the stones of the palace or hekhal. This etiology prioritizes the hekhalot over other cosmological structures which may appear in competing traditions such as Mandaeism. As in the case of the waters, rather than denying that radiance and air appear at the end of the heavenly journey, the Hekhalot authors offer their own definitive version of the tradition, thereby subtly undermining other cosmological traditions without explicitly rejecting them by name.⁴⁹

DEUTSCH must certainly be right to suggest that the Mandaean *ayar-ziwa* is related in some manner to the אַיִר זַיִר/אֵיִר of the water vision episode in *HZ*. As observed above, however, his theory that the water

⁴⁷ DROWER, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran: Their Cults, Customs, Magic, Legends, and Folklore* (Leiden: Brill, 1962) 58, n. 13 (also quoted by DEUTSCH, *Guardians*, 119).

⁴⁸ DROWER, *The Mandaeans*, 100 (also quoted by DEUTSCH, *Guardians*, 120).

⁴⁹ DEUTSCH, *Guardians*, 120.

vision episode is basically a piece of anti-Mandean propaganda is less than wholly convincing and leaves several questions unanswered.⁵⁰ Moreover, the association between "radiance" and water in Mandaeism is not really relevant to the context of the water vision episode, since it occurs primarily in connection with the life-giving waters of the celestial river *yardna* and with purificatory baptismal rites.⁵¹ It does not, to my knowledge, feature in accounts of the soul's transition across the *hafiqia mia* at the end of its heavenly journey after death. There, the *ziwa* is clearly opposed to the waters or *hafiqia mia*, which are associated more with darkness than with light.⁵² DEUTSCH seems here to have conflated two motifs in Mandean tradition which are really quite disparate. As has already been remarked, moreover, many elements of Mandean belief and practice are either of Jewish origin or derived from a cultural matrix which was common to both religions, whereas there is no clear evidence of Mandean influence on Jewish belief or practice.⁵³ DROWER sees a correspondence between the Mandean *ayar-ziwa* as the source of life and Josephus' report (*War* ii.154) that according to the doctrine of the Essenes, human souls "emanate from the most subtle ether" (ἐκ τοῦ λεπτοτάτου φοιτώσας αἰθέρος).⁵⁴ If this is correct, it implies

⁵⁰ See pp. 48-50 above.

⁵¹ See DROWER, *The Mandaeans*, 100-123; and RUDOLPH, *Gnosis*, 360-362.

⁵² See RUDOLPH, *Gnosis*, 357-360.

⁵³ An excellent example is, as it happens, provided by Mandean belief about water, only one part in nine of which is considered to be *mia hia* or "living water" (= Heb. מֵיִם חַיִּים), coming from and returning to the heavenly river *yardna* (from Heb. יַרְדֵּן), whereas the other nine parts are a lifeless substance called *tabma* (= Heb. תַּבְמָה [?]) which ends up in the bitter waters of the sea (see DROWER, *The Mandaeans*, 101-102). The origins of this belief are clearly related to Jewish teachings that only "living" water is effective for purification, and to the practice – described in rabbinic sources but shown by archeological evidence to be earlier – of causing a *מִקְוֶה* containing drawn water to be valid by mixing into it a much smaller amount of "living" water (see *m.Miqvaot* 6.8 and further, for example, E. P. SANDERS, *Judaism: Practice and Belief*, 63 BCE - 66 CE [2d impression; London and Philadelphia: SCM/Trinity Press International, 1994] 224-227). The early evidence for these Jewish practices means that they cannot be derived from Mandean sources. We must, therefore, conclude either that the Mandean beliefs about water are derived from Judaism, or that both religions drew their beliefs and practices from a common source.

⁵⁴ See DROWER, *The Mandaeans*, 58, n. 13. The Greek text of Josephus is taken from H. ST. J. THACKERAY, RALPH MARCUS, ALLEN WIRGREN, and LOUIS H. FELDMAN, eds. and trans., *Josephus*, (10 vols.; LCL; London, New York and Cambridge, MA:

either that the Mandaean belief has a sectarian Jewish origin, or that it is derived from a source tradition within the oriental and hellenistic background which was common to both groups. Whatever the truth of this matter, many technical terms in the Mandaean religious literature are quite clearly of Hebrew origin.⁵⁵ It is, therefore, much more probable that the Mandaean expression *ayar-ziwa* is derived from a Jewish source tradition than that the *אֵיר זֵיר/זֵיר אֵיר* of the water vision episode in *HZ* has been imported from Mandeism.

If, *contra* HALPERIN, *מֵאֵיר זֵיר* is accepted as the correct reading in *HZ:D1* (as in the translation on page 56 above), the meaning is apparently that the substance of the “pure marble stones,” although it looks like turbulent water, is in fact “brilliant air.” It thus seems that the visionary is looking down through the floor of the palace, which is evidently transparent, into the air of the world below. From the perspective of the ethereal realm in which he is standing, this air looks as dense and substantial as water. At the same time, the floor of the palace is the firmament dividing this celestial level from the one beneath it and, since the inhabitants of this realm are able to walk upon it, it is for them something solid, like stone. Thus, “the pure marble stones with which the palace was paved (סלולות)” could also be said to be “high” or “light” (סלולות) and “transparent” (צלולות), and are not water but solid air. The visionary traveller is literally “walking on air.”

4. *The Celestial Pavement in Midrashic and Biblical Tradition*

In rabbinic midrash, the image of walking on the firmament occurs in the context of Moses’ heavenly ascent at Sinai to obtain the Torah. The theme of angelic opposition to the admission into the heavenly realm of a human being is also encountered in these sources, although the ascending hero’s response to this challenge is noticeably different from that of the hekhalot visionary.⁵⁶

Heinemann, Putnam and Harvard University Press, 1926-65) 2.382.

⁵⁵ Of many possible examples: *hafiqia mia*, *yardna*, *mia bia*, and *tabma* (see pp. 46-47 and n. 53 above).

⁵⁶ *Pes. R.* 20.11-12 in RIVKA ULMER, ed., *Pesiqta Rabbati: A Synoptic Edition of Pesiqta Rabbati Based upon All Extant Manuscripts and the Editio Princeps*, vol. 1 (SFSHR 155; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997) 422-425; corresponding to *Pes. R.* 20.3 in EPHRAIM ZALMAN MARGALYOT, ed., *פסיקתא רבתי דרב כהנא* (1892; reprinted New York:

And Moses entered into the midst of the cloud (Exod. 24:18) *and the cloud covered him* (Exod. 24:16) and the cloud carried him up. And he was walking (מהלך) on the firmament (ברקיע) and the angel קמוראל, who is in charge of the twelve thousand angels of destruction who are seated at the gates of the firmament,⁵⁷ met him. He rebuked Moses:⁵⁸ "What are you doing (מה לך)⁵⁹ amidst the holy ones of the Most High?⁶⁰ You come from a place of womb-filthiness (ממקום טנופות)⁶¹ What are you doing (מה לך)⁶² in a place of purity (במקום טהרה)⁶³ You are born of a woman!⁶⁴ What are you doing (מה לך)⁶⁵ in the place of fire?"⁶⁶ He replied, "I am Moses ben Amram, and I have come to receive the Torah for Israel!"⁶⁷ When he would not let him pass, Moses struck him a single blow and made him perish out of the world.⁶⁸ And Moses was walking about (מהלך) on the firmament as a man walks about on the earth

Following this incident, Moses has to overcome a series of such challenges by angels before he reaches the throne of glory, where God opens the seven firmaments beneath him and reveals the celestial sanctuary as

Menorah, 1959) 169; and see also KARL-ERICH GRÖZINGER, *Ich bin der Herr, dein Gott! Eine rabbinische Homilie zum Ersten Gebot (PesR 20)* (EJS 2; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1976) 300-301 (= 6*-7*) and 295 (= 12*), who gives the text according to ms. Casanata 3324 and an excerpt from *Pes. R. 20* in a medieval source according to ms., Oxford 135 (in both cases, this passage is numbered 20.11,1-3); and WILLIAM G. BRAUDE, trans., *Pesikta Rabbati: Discourses for Feasts, Fasts and Special Sabbaths* (2 vols.; YJS 18:1-2; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968) 1.405-406 (where this passage is numbered 20.4). For a survey of the manuscripts and editions of this text, see ULMER, *Pesikta Rabbati*, xxviii-xxxix.

⁵⁷ Following mss. Parma 3122, Dropsie 26 and Casanata 3324; *ed. princ.* (Prague, 1656) and *ed. MARGALİYOT*: "... at the gate"; ms. Oxford (see the previous note): "... who stand at the gates of heaven (שהם עומדים על שערי שמים)."

⁵⁸ *Ed. princ.*, *ed. MARGALİYOT* and ms. Oxford add: "and said to him."

⁵⁹ Ms. Parma: מהלך.

⁶⁰ Ms. Oxford omits this sentence.

⁶¹ Thus mss. Parma and Dropsie; ms. Casanata: ממקום טנופת; *ed. princ.*, *ed. MARGALİYOT*: ממקום הטנופות; ms. Oxford: ממקום הטנופת. The root טנף means to be soiled with excrement or, especially, blood or mucus from the womb (see JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 541b).

⁶² *Ed. princ.*: מהלך; *ed. MARGALİYOT*: מהלך.

⁶³ Ms. Oxford: במקום טהור.

⁶⁴ According to BRAUDE: "... a woman in heat."

⁶⁵ *Ed. princ.*, *ed. MARGALİYOT*: מהלך.

⁶⁶ BRAUDE adds: "... that is pure!"

⁶⁷ לִישְׂרָאֵל, except in ms. Parma: מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל; and *ed. princ.*: לִישְׂרָאֵל.

⁶⁸ Ms. Oxford omits this sentence.

the template of its future earthly counterpart. Although the literary relationships between the various recensions of this material in the midrashic literature and the hekhalot writings are neither clear nor straightforward, there can be no doubt that both draw from a common matrix of ancient tradition.⁶⁹ As we have observed, the ascent of Moses is a central theme of the *HZ* collection. In the passage quoted above, the angel's accusation of Moses expresses a common theme of angelic opposition to the ascent of human beings into heaven, on the grounds that the process of conception and birth renders one born of woman substantially and inherently impure.

The biblical roots of the image of the transparent firmament as the floor of the celestial world can be traced to Ezek. 1:22 and 1:26, interpreted in the light of Exod. 24:10:

<i>Ezek. 1:22</i>	<i>Ezek. 1:26</i>	<i>Exod. 24:10</i>
<p>וְדַמּוּת עַל־רֵאשֵׁי הַחַיִּים רָקִיעַ קַעֲזֵן הַקָּרָח הַנּוֹרָא נְטוּי עַל־רֵאשֵׁיהֶם מִלְמַעְלָה:</p>	<p>וּמִמַּעַל לְרָקִיעַ אֲשֶׁר עַל־ רֵאשֵׁם כְּמַרְאֵה אֲבֹן־סַפִּיר דַּמּוּת כֶּסֶף וְעַל הַדַּמּוּת הַכֶּסֶף דַּמּוּת כְּמַרְאֵה אָדָם עָלָיו מִלְמַעְלָה:</p>	<p>וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַתַּחַת רַגְלָיו כְּמַעֲשֵׂה לְבֵנֹת הַסַּפִּיר וּכְעֵצָם הַשָּׁמַיִם לְטָהָר:</p>
<p>And over the heads of the living creatures was an image like the appearance of the terrible ice (or: crystal), stretched out over their heads, from above.</p>	<p>And from above the firmament which was over their heads, like the appearance of sapphire stone, was the image of a throne and, on the image of the throne, was an image like the appearance of a man, upon it from above.</p>	<p>And they saw the God of Israel and, under his feet, something like tilework of sapphire, and like the substance of heaven for purity.</p>

⁶⁹ See: GRÖZINGER, *Ich bin der Herr*, esp. 142-149 and 243-248; HALPERIN, *Faces*, 289-322. On the pre-rabbinic origins of these traditions, and extra-rabbinic parallels, see: WAYNE MEEKS, *The Prophet-King* (NovTSup 14; Leiden: Brill, 1967), esp. 122-125, 156-159, 190-195, 205-215, and 232-246; *idem*, "Moses as God and King," in JACOB NEUSNER, ed., *Religions in Antiquity. Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (SHR 14; Leiden: Brill, 1968) 354-371; JOSEPH P. SCHULTZ, "Angelic Opposition to the Ascension of Moses and the Revelation of the Law," *JQR* 61 (1971) 282-307; and FOSSUM, *The Name of God*, 112-155. See also MORRAY-JONES, "Transformational Mysticism," 13-14, and the references cited there.

As observed by ZIMMERLI, the term רָקִיעַ, “firmament,” is derived from a verb meaning “to stamp,” or “beat (out).”⁷⁰ According to traditional Hebrew cosmology, the רָקִיעַ was, of course, the solid barrier with which God divided the “upper” waters from the “lower” waters (Gen. 1:6-7).⁷¹ In Ezek. 1:26, however, the firmament is the floor of the divine throne room. It thus corresponds to the sapphire pavement of Exod. 24:10, which is said to be made of “the substance of heaven.” The word טָהַר, “purity,” applied to this substance, should be noted. The term קָרָח, applied to the appearance of the substance out of which this firmament is made (Ezek. 1:22), refers elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to ice or frost, but LXX translates: κρυστάλλου. Most translators and commentators have chosen to apply the words אֲבֵן-סַפִּיר in MT Ezek. 1:26 to the throne,⁷² but the clear parallel with קָרָח הַנּוֹרָא in Ezek. 1:22 seems to indicate that they really refer to the firmament. If this is correct, Ezek. 1:26 itself embodies an exegesis of Exod. 24:10.⁷³ This was probably understood by the translator of LXX, who rendered Ezek. 1:25-26 as follows:⁷⁴

καὶ ἰδοὺ φωνὴ ὑπὲρ ἄνωθεν τοῦ στερεώματος τοῦ ὄντος ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς αὐτῶν ὡς ὄρασις λίθου σαπφείρου, ὁμοίωμα θρόνου ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ

And behold, a voice from above the firmament that was above their head, as the appearance of sapphire stone; the likeness of a throne (was) upon it

⁷⁰ ZIMMERLI, *Ezekiel 1*, 122; cf. BDB, 955b-956a.

⁷¹ See M. GÖRG, “רָקִיעַ,” *ThWAT* 7.668-675; cf. ROWLAND, “The Visions of God,” 147-149; and *idem*, *The Open Heaven*, 225 (see p. 38 above).

⁷² Thus, for example, RSV, and see further: G. A. COOKE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (ICC 21; New York: Scribner, 1937) 21; DRIVER, “Ezekiel’s Inaugural Vision,” 61-62; ZIMMERLI, *Ezekiel 1*, 122; and GREENBERG, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 50.

⁷³ Thus, for example, WALTHER EICHRODT, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970) 58; and BROWNLEE, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 13. GREENBERG (see the previous note) argues that Ezek. 10:1 militates against this interpretation but this seems less than certain and, in any case, the verse may itself be exegetical of Ezek. 1:26 (see HALPERIN, *Faces*, 38-48). See further E. W. NICHOLSON, “The Interpretation of Exod. 24.9-11,” *VT* 24 (1974) 77-97.

⁷⁴ Text follows JOSEPH ZIEGLER, ed., *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Societatis Litterarum Göttingensis editum*, vol. 16.1, *Ezekiel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952) 95-96, except that ZIEGLER (wrongly, in my view) places the comma after αὐτῶν, in accordance with the usual understanding of this verse.

At Ezek. 1:22, the Greek recension does not represent הַנּוֹרָא and many authorities therefore believe this word to be an editorial gloss on the original Hebrew text.⁷⁵ GREENBERG, however, translates it by “dazzling,”⁷⁶ while BROWNLEE comments concerning the נִקְיָע:

This dome (or firmament) was thought of as sapphire in color, and as crystalline and transparent. This is the pavement on which the Lord himself rested his feet in the vision of Moses and the elders In Ezekiel’s vision, this dome is “glistening like an awesome sheet of ice.” It may be that the word הַנּוֹרָא here means not only “awesome,” as derived from the root ירא, but “transparent,” deriving from the root ראה “to see.”⁷⁷

Regardless of whether this perhaps rather speculative interpretation is considered acceptable, it is important to note that, in the *HZ* recension of the water vision episode, the term נּוֹרָא is applied to the appearance (מַרְאִיהֶם) of the marble paving stones of the sixth palace (*HZ*:D1).⁷⁸ There can, then, be no doubt that, according to this source, the floor of the sixth palace is Ezekiel’s firmament, seen by the visionary traveller from above. It appears that the hekhalot writer, perhaps taking his cue from the strangely redundant word מִלְּמַעְלָה (literally: “from above”) (Ezek. 1:22, 1:26), and perhaps also believing that וּמִמַּעַל לְרִקִּיעַ (“and from above the firmament”) (Ezek. 1:26) expresses the prophet-narrator’s point of view, has interpreted the scriptural description of Ezekiel’s vision as an account of a heavenly ascent.

5. *The Ascent Midrash*

Although most commentators believe that narrative descriptions of heavenly ascents represent an exclusively post-biblical development,⁷⁹ this

⁷⁵ Thus, for example, ZIMMERLI, *Ezekiel 1*, 87. The word is marked as an addition to the text in *BHS* (3rd. ed.; 1987) and omitted by RSV.

⁷⁶ GREENBERG, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 48.

⁷⁷ BROWNLEE, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 13 (see also *ibid.*, 9, n. 22a).

⁷⁸ See p. 56, n. 14 above.

⁷⁹ See, for example: MAIER, *Vom Kultus*, 14-15 and 106-128; GRUENWALD, ‘Knowledge and Vision: Towards a Clarification of two “Gnostic” Concepts in the Light of their Alleged Origins,’ *IOS 3* (1973), reprinted in *idem*, *From Apocalyptic to Gnosticism* (BEATAJ 14; Frankfurt am Main, etc.: Peter Lang, 1988) 69-70 and 98-115; *idem*, *Apocalyptic*, 32; *idem*, “Priests, Prophets, Apocalyptic Visionaries, and Mystics,” in *idem*,

interpretation of Ezekiel’s vision is, arguably, well supported by the text. Having fallen on his face (Ezek. 1:28), the prophet gets up and interacts with the figure on the throne, eating the scroll that he offers him, and so forth (Ezek. 2:9-3:3). All this makes excellent sense if we understand the prophet to be in the presence of the כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה, i.e., in his vision, above the firmament.⁸⁰ Whatever the meaning intended by the biblical author may have been, the interpretation that I have attributed to the hekhalot writer is thus a viable and reasonable reading of the scriptural account.⁸¹ If, as appears to be the case, he understands Ezek. 1:26 to mean that the prophet is standing upon the firmament and looking down, he has presumably inferred that, when the חַיִּוֹת and the אוֹפְנִיִּים “ascended from the earth” (Ezek. 1:21), the prophet ascended with them. This inference was doubtless confirmed by Ezek. 3:12-14, where a wind or spirit lifts the prophet up (וַתִּשְׂאֲנִי רוּחַ ... וְרוּחַ נְשָׂאתָנִי וַתִּקְחֵנִי) and, apparently, returns him to earth. This experience is accompanied by “the sound of the wings of the חַיִּוֹת touching one another, and the sound of the אוֹפְנִיִּים beside them, like the sound of a great earthquake” (Ezek. 3:13, compare 1:24). According to the hekhalot writer’s interpretation, the wind that returns the prophet to earth in Ezek. 3:1-12 must be the רוּחַ הַחַיָּה of Ezek. 1:20-21, conventionally translated: “spirit of the living creatures” but here, perhaps, interpreted as the wind generated by their wings, which had previously carried him up to the realm above the firmament.

This exegesis of Ezekiel’s vision is further developed in the passage that follows the water vision episode, where the visionary is raised from the sixth to the seventh הִיכָל by the living creatures and by “a wind of living brilliance” (רוּחַ זֵיז חַיָּה, HZ:G3). The alternative reading רִיחַ (“extended space”) for רוּחַ,⁸² which in no way obscures the reference to Ezek. 1:20-21, identifies the “wind” by which the יוֹרֵד מִרְכַּבָּה is raised

From Apocalyptic to Gnosticism, 125-144; GEORGE W. E. NICKELSBURG, “Enoch, Levi, and Peter: Recipients of Revelation in Upper Galilee,” *JBL* 100 (1981) 576-582; HALPERIN, *Faces*, 63-74; and HIMMELFARB, *Ascent to Heaven*, 9-28.

⁸⁰ See further GEO WIDENGREN, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book* (Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift 1950:7; Uppsala: Lundequistska, 1950) 30-32.

⁸¹ The suggestion that this interpretation may, in fact, accurately reflect the biblical author’s meaning will doubtless encounter a skeptical response, perhaps deservedly so, but I submit that this possibility cannot wholly be excluded.

⁸² See p. 59, n. 30 above.

with the pavement of air (Ezekiel's shining firmament), and this is confirmed by the qualifying noun זיו, which has previously been applied to the "air" of the "pure marble" paving stones (*HZ*:D1, E1, F1b; cf. the ספרדס story in *HZ*(N):B2a-b). The vocabulary of the passage is full of allusions to Ezekiel 1-3 and it is especially noteworthy that the statement that the cherubim "kiss" the adept (מנשקין אותו) contains a verbal echo of the "touching" (משקות) of the wings of the חירות in Ezek. 3:13.

It appears, then, that the literary sequence which provides the context of the water vision episode, as preserved in *HZ*, is, at least in part, an exegetical exposition of Ezekiel's vision, and specifically of Ezek. 1:19-28 (from the rising of the wheels and the living creatures, at the instigation of the רוח הַחַיִּים, to the vision of חֲשָׁמַל) and, secondarily, of Ezek. 3:12-14. This observation provides a key to the narrative structure of the sequence as a whole, which appears to have been constructed as a mystical midrash or chain of midrashim on the first words of Ezek. 1:27: וְאֵרָא כְּעֵן חֲשָׁמַל. In this midrashic composition, the biblical verse (section A, the lemma) is interpreted in the context of an ascent to, or entry into, the outer and innermost sanctuaries of the celestial temple, which are the sixth and seventh הַיְכָלוֹת of this system. Section B, the first of three separate midrashic expositions, explains that "the one who looks like חֲשָׁמַל" is the guardian of the entrance to the sixth הַיְכָל, whose function is to distinguish between those who are worthy and those who are unworthy. Section C is a secondary expansion of section B, developing the theme of selection amongst the יורדי מַרְכָּבָה. This episode is not directly connected to the scriptural lemma and does not appear to be derived by exegesis from Ezekiel 1. It has, therefore, almost certainly been imported from another source.⁸³ HALPERIN's suggestion that the episode is derived from a convention of reticence on the part of one called to officiate during synagogue worship may well have merit.⁸⁴

Section D, the water vision episode, is the second midrash and refers directly to the lemma without reference to B-C. Here, the appearance of חֲשָׁמַל is explained, not as the description of an angelic temple guardian, but rather as a reference to the substance of Ezekiel's shining firmament of solid and transparent air, which is identified with the

⁸³ See further DAN, "פתח היכל שישי," 197-199.

⁸⁴ See p. 66 above.

floor of the sixth *היכל*, “the brilliance of which was more terrible than water.”⁸⁵ Sections E and F are, of course, secondary expansions of this midrash, not directly connected to the lemma. While the composition of this material may, perhaps, be subsequent to that of section D, it develops the narrative in a coherent manner and so appears to be derived directly from the midrash. It is therefore unlikely to have been imported into this midrashic sequence from an outside source. Aqiba’s words in *babli*, A11-19 appear to be derived from this stage of development of the *HZ* literary tradition.⁸⁶

Section G describes the triumphant finale of the ascent, in which the *יורד מרכבה* is admitted to the divine throne room or seventh *היכל*. This section refers back to the lemma and introduces a third midrashic exposition, explaining that the appearance of *חשמל* seen by the prophet Ezekiel, and by the worthy *יורד מרכבה*, is the light of the countenance of Jacob.⁸⁷ This vision is, however, obscured by a covering of dark clouds,⁸⁸ which are said to “sprinkle blood” (*HZ*:G1b). This defiling substance is contrasted with the “perfume and pure basalm” sprinkled by the “wheels of light” in the innermost *היכל* (G2), a juxtaposition of pure and impure substances which calls to mind the recall of Nehunyah b. Ha-Qanah from the innermost *היכל* in *HR* 18.2-3.⁸⁹ The narrative concludes (section H) with a hymn of praise to the divine king on his

⁸⁵ An allusion to this exegesis may, just possibly, be preserved in the strange misquotation *וארקה כעין חשמל*, found in mss. Dropsie and Munich 40 at *HR*:A. See p. 55, n. 4 above.

⁸⁶ See pp. 79-82 above.

⁸⁷ It is worth noting that a variant reading added to ms. Montefiore of *Tg. Ezek.* 1:26 identifies the figure on the throne with “the form of Jacob our father, upon it from on high” (*צורת יעקב אבנא עלוה מילעיל*) (ALEXANDER SPERBER, ed., *The Bible in Aramaic* [4 vols. in 5; Leiden: Brill, 1959-68] 3.267). The tradition that the image of Jacob’s face was engraved on or, alternatively, attached to the throne of glory is very widespread, being found in Targums *Pseudo-Jonathan*, *Neofiti*, and the *Fragment Targum* to Gen 28:12 (E. G. CLARKE, ed., *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance* [Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1984] 53; ALEJANDRO DíEZ MACHO, ed., *Neophyti I* [6 vols.; Madrid and Barcelona, 1968-79] 1.179; MICHAEL L. KLEIN, ed. and trans., *The Fragment-Targums of the Pentateuch According to their Extant Sources* [AnBib 76; 2 vols.; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980], 1.57, 2.20) and also in *Gen. R.* 68:12, 82.2, *Numb. R.* 4.1, *Lam. R.* 2.1, *PdRE*, §35, and *HR* 9.2 (SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §163; cf. WERTHEIMER, *נות מדרשות*, בתי מדרשות, 1.86, §12.2). On this material, see further FOSSUM, *The Image*, 135-151.

⁸⁸ On the “veil” of dark cloud before the throne, see further pp. 164-165 below.

⁸⁹ See p. 58, n. 25 and pp. 68-70 above.

throne, possibly quoted from another source. It is probable that the three primary components of this midrashic compilation (B, D, and G) were originally independent units and that an early redactor of *HZ* has used them as building blocks with which to construct this account of the mystic's progress from the gate of the sixth **היכל**, or sanctuary threshold, to the holy of holies and the vision of the divine **כבוד**.

The structure of this midrashic sequence can be represented in schematic form, as shown below:

6. *Structural Analysis of the Ascent Midrash in Hekhalot Zutarti*
(ed. SCHÄFER, Synopse, §§407-412)

- A *Lemma*: **נֶאֱרָא קִעֵן חֲשָׁמֹל** (Ezek. 1:27).
- B *First midrash*: ... who is recognized ... and selects ... between one who is worthy to see the king ... and one who is unworthy to see the king ...
- C1-2 *Development of first midrash*: If one was worthy to see the king ... But if one was unworthy to see the king ...
- D1 *Second midrash*: ... looked as if ... waves of the sea were billowing ... but only, of brilliant air, the pure marble stones ... the brilliance of the appearance of which was more terrible than water ...
- D2-4 *Development of second midrash*: ... and if one should say, "These waters: what is the nature of them?" ... they split his head with iron cleavers.
- E1-2 *Further development of second midrash*: ... lest a man should err ... and see the brilliance of the air of the stones and ask, or say that they are water ... because even if one is unworthy ..., etc.
- F1a-3 *Further development of second midrash (counterpoint to E1-2)*: A certain person was worthy ... and saw ... and said: 'Water! Water!' ... They cut off his head ..., etc.
- G1a-3 *Third midrash*: Thus does the face of Jacob our father shine ... everyone who is worthy ... let him enter ... until they had lifted him up and seated him before the throne of glory.
- H1-3 *Development of third midrash*: And he would gaze and see ..., etc.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CELESTIAL PAVEMENT AND THE WATERS OF IMPURITY

1. *Some Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Sources*

The previous chapter has shown that the narrative sequence which includes the water vision episode in *HZ* is organized around a series of mystical midrashim attached to Ezek. 1:27a: נִאֲרָא כְּעֵן חֲשָׁמַל, in which the text of Ezekiel 1 is interpreted as an account of an ascent to the divine throne room in the sanctuary of the celestial temple. The glittering floor of this sanctuary, which resembles water, but which is really made of solidified transparent air, is Ezekiel's firmament (and also that of Exod. 24:10) viewed from above. This exegetical tradition is evidently quite closely related to the midrashic accounts of Moses' ascent to the pure realm of celestial fire above the firmament, to which *HZ* itself makes reference. These findings have advanced our understanding of this material, but the full significance of the error of mistaking the "brilliant air" of the firmament for water remains elusive. The traditional opposition between the temple and the chaos waters is surely relevant, but provides only a partial explanation of this episode. To gain a deeper understanding of its meaning, we must enquire into the origins and background of the belief that Ezekiel 1 should be understood as an account of a heavenly ascent, this being the central premise on which the "ascent midrash" in *HZ* is based.

The beginnings of this exegetical development can be clearly detected as early as the pre-Maccabean period. In *1 Enoch* 14, Enoch's ascent to the celestial sanctuary is described as follows:¹

¹ *1 Enoch* 14:8-17 (compare p. 37 above). Greek text in M. BLACK, ed., *Apocalypsis Henochi Graece* (PVTG 3:1; Leiden: Brill, 1970) 28-29. The Aramaic text preserved at Qumran, 4QEnoch^a, vi.20-25, is very fragmentary (see MILIK and BLACK, *The Books of Enoch*, 194-199). With regard to the Ethiopic versions, I have relied on the authorities cited below. On the date of *1 Enoch* 12-16, see NICKELSBURG, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 48-52; E. ISAAC, *OTP*, 1.6-7; and the many sources cited there.

⁽⁸⁾ ... and winds, in my vision, were bearing me aloft,² ⁽⁹⁾ and they lifted me upwards and carried me into heaven. And I went in until I approached a wall built of hailstones, with tongues of fire surrounding it, and it began to terrify me. ⁽¹⁰⁾ And I went into the tongues of fire and approached a great house built of hailstones; and the walls of the house were like smooth ashlar, and they were all of snow, and the floor was of snow;³ ⁽¹¹⁾ and the ceiling (was)⁴ like shooting stars and lightning-flashes;⁵ and between them (were) fiery cherubim; and their

² Gk.: καὶ ἄνεμοι ἐξεπέτασάν με. Thus MATTHEW BLACK, ed. and trans., *The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch: A New English Edition* (SVTP 7; Leiden: Brill, 1985) 33, and see *ibid.*, 147. Most other translations: "... were making me fly."

³ Gk.: καὶ ἤγγισα εἰς οἶκον μέγαν οἰκοδομημένον ἐν λίθοις χαλάζης, καὶ οἱ τοῖχοι τοῦ οἴκου ὡς λιθόπλακες, καὶ πᾶσαι ἦσαν ἐκ χιόνος, καὶ ἐδάφη χιονικά. One Ethiopic ms. reads "... of pearl-crystals," for Gk.: ἐν λίθοις χαλάζης ("of hailstones"), reflecting an alternative sense of (presumed) Aram. ܢܝܢܐ ܓܝܓ (see BLACK, *The Book of Enoch*, 146-147). Gk.: ἐκ χιόνος χιονικά ("of snow") renders Aram. ܠܗܢ (extant); the Ethiopic word used here can, apparently, mean either "hail" or "snow" (see MICHAEL A. KNIBB, with EDWARD ULLENDORF, eds. and trans., *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch: A New Edition in the Light of the Aramaic Dead Sea Fragments* [2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1978] 2.98). Gk.: λιθόπλακες ("smooth ashlar") is a *hapax legomenon* which appears to mean literally: "smooth stone slabs" (see MILIK and BLACK, *The Books of Enoch*, 198-199). Note, however, that the compound combines λίθος, "stone," with πλάξ, a word frequently applied in Jewish and Christian sources to the tablets of the Law (See BAG 666a and, further, pp. 201 and 205-210 below). Published translations of this verse include the following: "... and drew nigh to a large house which was built of crystals: and the walls of the house were like a tessellated floor (made) of crystals, and its groundwork was of crystal" (CHARLES, *APOT*, 2.197); "... and came near to a large house which was built of hailstones, and the wall of that house (was) like a mosaic (made) of hailstones, and its floor (was) snow" (KNIBB and ULLENDORF, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, 2.98); "... and came near to a large house which was built of hail stones, and the wall of that house *was* like a mosaic *made* of hail stones, and its floor *was* snow" (A. PENNINGTON in H. F. D. SPARKS, ed., *The Apocryphal Old Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1984] 201); "... and drew near to a large house built of hailstones; and the walls of the house were like tessellated paving stones, all of snow, and its floor was of snow" (BLACK, *The Book of Enoch*, 147); "... and drew near to a great house which was built of white marble, and the inner wall(s) were like mosaics of white marble, the floor of crystal" (ISAAC, *OTP*, 1.20). See also GRUENWALD, *Apocalyptic*, 33, n. 11.

⁴ Gk.: καὶ αἱ στέγαι ..., "and the ceilings (were)"; BLACK (*The Book of Enoch*, 147): "its upper storeys were"

⁵ Gk.: ὡς διαδρομαὶ ἀστέρων (lit., "courses of stars") καὶ ἀστραπαί. Translation follows NICKELSBURG, "Enoch, Levi, and Peter," 579.

heaven (was) water;⁶ (12) and a flaming fire surrounded the walls; and the doors were ablaze with fire. (13) And I went into the house, hot as fire and cold as ice, and there was in it no sustenance for life,⁷ and fear overcame me and trembling seized me. (14) And, shaking and trembling, I fell on my face. And I saw in my vision (15) and beheld another house greater than this one, with its door wide open before me,⁸ all built of tongues of fire. (16) And in every respect it excelled, in glory and honor and greatness, so that I am unable to express its glory and its greatness. (17) And its floor was of fire, above which were⁹ lightning-flashes and shooting stars; and its ceiling was of blazing fire. (18) And I looked and saw a lofty throne; and its appearance was, as it were, crystalline,¹⁰ and its wheels (were) like the shining sun, and (there was) the sound of cherubim.¹¹

The extent to which this description of a visionary ascent is indebted to Ezekiel 1 has been noted by several commentators and does not require

⁶ Gk.: καὶ μεταξὺ αὐτῶν χερουβὶν πύρινα, καὶ οὐρανὸς αὐτῶν ὕδωρ. Thus also the Ethiopic mss., one of which reads *samayomu* instead of *samāyomu*, giving the reading “he named them water” (see ISAAC, *OTP*, 1.20, n. 14s). CHARLES (*APOT* 2.197): “and their heaven was (clear as) water.” BLACK (*The Book of Enoch*, 147) believes the text to be corrupt. He suggests that the Aramaic original read: ועירי שמיא, “celestial watchers,” and that ὕδωρ, “water,” is based on a misreading of שמיא as מיא, but there is no solid basis for this speculation.

⁷ Gk.: καὶ πᾶσα τροφή ζωῆς οὐκ ἦν ἐν αὐτῷ. The Ethiopic versions read either “no pleasure of life in it” or “nothing in it” (see: BLACK, *The Book of Enoch*, 147; and ISAAC, *APOT*, 1.20-21, n. 14u).

⁸ Following the Ethiopic text preferred by most translators. The Greek and some Ethiopic mss. reverse the order: καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄλλη θύρα ἀνεωγμένη κατέναντί μου, καὶ ὁ οἶκος μείζων τούτου, but see BLACK, *The Books of Enoch*, 148.

⁹ Gk.: τὸ δὲ ἀνώτερον αὐτοῦ (thus also the Ethiopic text). BLACK (*The Books of Enoch*, 33, cf. 148): “and its upper chambers were”

¹⁰ Gk.: καὶ τὸ εἶδος αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ κρυστάλλινον. BLACK, (*The Book of Enoch*, 33) translates: “and its appearance was like the crystals of ice,” and refers in a note to Ezek. 1:22, 1:26 (*ibid.*, 147). PENNINGTON (*The Apocryphal Old Testament*, 202) offers: “and its appearance *was* like ice.”

¹¹ Thus the Ethiopic versions. Gk.: καὶ τροχὸς ὡς ἡλίου λάμποντος καὶ ὄρος χερουβὶν, “and (there was) a wheel like the blazing sun and ?...? of cherubim.” CHARLES (*APOT*, 2.197) points out that the Ethiopic text assumes Gk. ὄρος in place of the corrupt ορος, but adopts the alternative emendation: ὄρασις, “vision.” BLACK (*The Book of Enoch*, 147; cf. n. 6 above) again suggests an Aramaic original: ועירי (= Gk. [ἔγρηγ]όρους), “watchers.” MILIK suggests that Gk. ὄρος (“mountain”) here means “boundary stone” and reflects an Aramaic original: וגדנפריה, “and its sides ...,” but admits that this retranslation is “very hypothetical” (see MILIK and BLACK, *The Books of Enoch*, 199-200).

a detailed demonstration here.¹² Nonetheless, several points of especial relevance to this study may be noted. In the first place, Ezekiel's vision is already interpreted as a journey into (εἰσιῆλθον) the consecutive precincts of the heavenly temple, which are later represented by the seven *היכלות*, but appear in this passage to be only three in number. As we have seen, the three stages of Enoch's journey correspond to the *סורג* (or the wall around the inner temple precinct), the outer sanctuary and the holy of holies, representing the three celestial levels of *The Book of the Watchers*.¹³ Like Ezekiel as interpreted by the hekhalot author, and like the *יורד מרכבה* in the ascent midrash (*HZ:G3*), Enoch is raised to heaven by the wind (*1 Enoch* 14:8-9).¹⁴ Most importantly, the floor of snow, ice or crystal at *1 Enoch* 14:10 is clearly the firmament of Ezek. 1:22-26, seen from above, and the "smooth ashlars" (λιθόπλακες) of *1 Enoch* 14:11 are surely the literary ancestors of the "marble stones" of the water vision episode.¹⁵ The crystalline substance of the throne resembles that of the firmament and reflects the interconnected imagery of Ezek. 1:22, 1:26 and Exod. 24:10, as discussed above.¹⁶ The references to fear in *1 Enoch* 14:9 and 13-14 may, perhaps, reflect the expression *נורא* in Ezek. 1:22.

The obscure reference to the cherubim and their "heaven of water" (*1 Enoch* 14:11) seems somehow relevant to this study, but it is difficult to determine exactly what this means. In the first place, it is not entirely clear whether the cherubim are located "between" the celestial phenomena on the ceiling (thus most translators) or, as seems more probable, "between" the walls, floor and ceiling. Similarly, it is not certain whether the preposition *αὐτῶν*, applied to *οὐρανὸς* ("their heaven"), refers to the cherubim, or to the celestial phenomena on the ceiling, or

¹² See further, for example: GRUENWALD, *Apocalyptic*, 32-37; NICKELSBURG, "Enoch, Levi, and Peter," 576-587; ROWLAND, *The Open Heaven*, 219-221; HALPERIN, *Faces*, 78-85; HIMMELFARB, *Ascent to Heaven*, 14-16.

¹³ See p. 30 above.

¹⁴ Compare *1 Enoch* 70:2, where Enoch ascends to heaven on "a chariot of wind," a motif which is also found in a citation of an Enoch apocalypse in the *Cologne Mani Codex*; see further JOHN C. REEVES, *Heralds of That Good Realm: Syro-Mesopotamian Gnosis and Jewish Traditions* (NHMS 41; Leiden, New York and Köln, 1996), 183-184 and 192-193.

¹⁵ See pp. 37 above and 210 below; and compare, especially, ISAAC's translation of *1 Enoch* 14:10 (p. 106, n. 3 above).

¹⁶ See further ROWLAND, *The Open Heaven*, 221.

to the walls, floor and ceiling previously mentioned. Whatever the precise meaning of the syntax, the οὐρανὸς should probably be identified with Ezekiel's firmament, upheld by the cherubim (= תְּחִילֹת). If so, however, it is no longer the floor of the outer house, seen from above as in verse 10, but its ceiling, seen from below. It is perhaps possible that the author of *1 Enoch* 14 has interpreted the repeated expression בְּלָכְתָּם ("when they went") at Ezek. 1:21 and 24 as indicating two distinct stages of the heavenly ascent, and Ezek. 1:22 and 26 as referring to two successive firmaments.

At *1 Enoch* 14:17, the expression ἀνώτερον αὐτοῦ ("above it"), which has puzzled translators,¹⁷ seems to reflect the מַלְמַעְלָה of Ezek. 1:22 and 26. The description of the floor of the inner house (*1 Enoch* 14:17) is so similar to that of the ceiling of the outer house (14:11) as to suggest that it is the same phenomenon, now seen from above. It thus appears that underlying this passage is the image of the starry firmament as the throne-platform upheld by the cherubim, which looks like water, ice or crystal, but which also, when seen from above, resembles fire. According to the author of the water vision episode in *HZ*, as we have seen, the substance of this celestial pavement, the חֶשְׁמַל, is "brilliant air" (אֵיר / זֵיר / אֵירִיר), the "terrible" or "transparent" (נֹרָא) brilliance of which looks like the shimmering of water.

Several sources describe the visionary as standing on the celestial firmament and looking down through it at the worlds below. An extrarabbinic witness to the currency of these ideas in the late first or early second century CE is the ascent narrative in *Apocalypse of Abraham* 15-29,¹⁸ where the ascent to the seventh heaven is described as follows:¹⁹

And we ascended as if (carried) by many winds to the heaven that is fixed on the vast expanses. And I saw on the air to whose height we had ascended a strong light which can not be described.

¹⁷ See p. 107, n. 9 above.

¹⁸ On the date and provenance of *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, see, for example: G. H. BOX, with J. I. LANDSMAN, eds. and trans., *The Apocalypse of Abraham* (London: SPCK, 1918) xv-xxxii; R. RUBINKIEWICZ, *OTP*, 1.682-683; NICKELSBURG, *Jewish Literature*, 298-299; D. S. RUSSELL, *Divine Disclosure: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 55. On the text and its relationship to the מְרִכְבָּה tradition, see: SCHOLEM, *Major Trends*, 61; GRUENWALD, *Apocalyptic*, 51-57; HALPERIN, *Faces*, 103-113; and HIMMELFARB, *Ascent to Heaven*, 61-66.

¹⁹ *Apoc. Abr.* 15:4-5, trans. RUBINKIEWICZ, *OTP*, 1.696.

H. G. LUNT states in a note appended to this passage that the Slavonic phrase *na aerě* “presents the air as a surface.”²⁰ The indescribably strong light of this surface is strikingly similar to the “brilliant air” of the water vision episode in *HZ* and may likewise be derived from Ezekiel’s *הַשָּׁמַיִם*. A little later, we are told that this firmament undulates up and down (17:3) in a manner which appears to resemble the motion of waves. This is followed by a *מַרְכָּבָה* vision, replete with allusions to Ezekiel 1, after which Abraham looks down through the firmament at the levels below – very much like Moses in *Pes. R.* 20 – and is shown the past and future history of creation, depicted on the firmament upon which he is standing (21:1-29:21).²¹

The Ascension of Isaiah, a Christian ascent-apocalypse of about the same period as *Apocalypse of Abraham* and deeply indebted to Jewish sources, also describes an ascent through seven heavens.²² As Isaiah ascends through the first five heavens, the transition from one heaven to the next is described with the simple formula: “and (again) he took me up into the *nth* heaven” (*Asc. Isa.* 7:13-37), but at the point of entry to the sixth heaven this formula becomes:

And again, he took me up into *the air* of the sixth heaven, and I saw a splendor such as I had not seen in the five heavens as I went up.²³

This formula, which again calls to mind the “brilliant air” of the water vision episode, is repeated at the point of transition from the sixth to the seventh heaven. Here, Isaiah’s worthiness to enter is challenged by “the one in charge of the praise of the sixth heaven” (*Asc. Isa.* 9:1-4), who occupies a role similar to that of the “one like *הַשָּׁמַיִם*” in the ascent midrash (*HZ/HR*: A-B). The dominant characteristic of the two highest heavens is their extraordinary brightness, which is so great that “I thought that light which I had seen in the lower five heavens darkness” (*Asc. Isa.* 8:21).²⁴ Brightness is, of course, the primary characteristic of Ezekiel’s *הַשָּׁמַיִם*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, n. 15d.

²¹ See further ROWLAND, “The Visions of God,” 150-152.

²² See further: KNIBB, *OTP*, 2.143-154; HALPERIN, *Faces*, 65-69; HIMMELFARB, *Ascent to Heaven*, 55-58; YARBRO COLLINS, “The Seven Heavens,” 74-77.

²³ *Asc. Isa.* 8:1, trans. KNIBB, *OTP*, 2.168 (italics added).

²⁴ Trans. KNIBB, *OTP*, 2.169.

A reference to water in heaven occurs in the vision described in the second and third chapters of *Testament of Levi*, the Aramaic source of which can be dated from fragments discovered at Qumran to the later part of the second century BCE.²⁵ It is therefore one of the earliest surviving Jewish ascent texts, but, since no portion of the description of Levi's heavenly ascent has survived in Aramaic, we cannot be certain that all of this material belongs to the earliest level of the text's development.²⁶ The specific terminology to be considered below may, therefore, have originated as late as the first or second century CE. In chapter 2, we read:

⁽⁶⁾And behold, the heavens were opened, and an angel of the Lord spoke to me: 'Levi, Levi, enter!' ⁽⁷⁾And I entered the first heaven, and saw there much water suspended (Καὶ εἰσῆλθον τὸν πρῶτον οὐρανὸν καὶ εἶδον ἐκεῖ ὕδωρ πολὺ κρεμάμενον).²⁷ ⁽⁸⁾ And again I saw a second²⁸ heaven much brighter and more lustrous, for there was a measureless height in it. ⁽⁹⁾And I said to the angel, 'Why are these things thus?' And the angel said to me, 'Do not be amazed concerning this, for you shall see another heaven more lustrous and beyond compare. ⁽¹⁰⁾And when you have mounted there, you shall stand near the Lord. You shall be his priest and tell forth his mysteries to men

and in the following chapter, Levi's angelic guide explains the vision as follows:

⁽¹⁾Listen, therefore, concerning the heavens which have been shown to you. The lowest is dark for this reason: It sees all the injustices of humankind ⁽²⁾and contains fire, snow, and ice, ready for the day determined by God's righteous judgement. In it are all the spirits of those dispatched to achieve the punishment of mankind. ⁽³⁾In the second are the armies arrayed for the day of judgement to

²⁵ See: MILIK, "Le Testament de Lévi en araméen. Fragment de la grotte 4 de Qumrân," *RB* 62 (1955) 398-406; FLORENTINO GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, (Leiden: Brill, 1994) 266-270. The precise relationship between the Aramaic text and the developed recensions preserved in Greek and, secondarily, Armenian and Slavonic is obscure. See the authorities cited on pp. 30-31, n. 113 above and, further, NICKELSBURG, "Enoch, Peter, Levi," 587-590.

²⁶ See the previous note.

²⁷ Recension β: "And I entered from the first heaven into the second, and there I saw water suspended between the one and the other (καὶ εἰσῆλθον ἐκ τοῦ πρῶτου οὐρανοῦ εἰς τὸν δεύτερον καὶ εἶδον ἐκεῖ ὕδωρ κρεμάμενον ἀνάμεσον τούτου κακείνου)."

²⁸ Recension β: "a third."

work vengeance on the spirits of error and Beliar. Above them are the holy ones.
⁽⁴⁾In the uppermost heaven of all dwells the Great Glory (ἡ Μεγάλη Δόξα)²⁹
 in the holy of holies superior to all holiness. ⁽⁵⁾There with him are the
 archangels, who serve and offer propitiatory sacrifices to the Lord³⁰

In this account, the three heavenly levels correspond to the courts of the temple.³¹ The uppermost heaven is the holy of holies (3:4), and the middle heaven is thus the outer sanctuary, corresponding to the sixth הַיְכָל of the hekhalot writers' sevenfold celestial structure.³² This level is above that of the waters, which are "suspended" (κρεμόμενον) in the first heaven (2:7). These hanging waters are clearly the "upper waters" above the earthly firmament of Gen. 1:7.³³ The celestial sanctuary is, therefore, above these waters and, presumably, separated from them by a second firmament. The statement that this level is "brighter and more lustrous" than the waters beneath it (2:8) calls to mind the אֲנִי שֵׁשׁ טָהוֹר of the water vision episode, "the brilliance of which was more terrible than water" (HZ:D1), while the expression κρεμόμενον resembles one meaning of the passive participle סְלוּלוֹת ("high," "light," or "swinging").³⁴ The darkness of the lowest heaven is said to be due to contamination by contact with the sins of human beings on earth (3:1), and also to the fact that it is inhabited by the instruments of divine wrath, including (possibly demonic) spirits who are sent to inflict punishment on human beings (3:2). If we discount the eschatological orientation which permeates this text but is largely absent from the hekhalot literature, the armies stationed in the middle heaven are not

²⁹ HIMMELFARB (*Ascent to Heaven*, 127, n. 8) inaccurately quotes the form: ἡ Δόξα ἡ Μεγάλη, as found at *1 Enoch* 14:10.

³⁰ *Test. Lev.* 2:6-10, 3:1-5, trans. KEE, *OTP*, 1.788-789; Greek text and variants from CHARLES, *Greek Versions*, 27-33); cf. M. DE JONGE, H. W. HOLLANDER, H. J. DE JONGE and TH. KORTEWEG, eds. *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Critical Edition of the Greek Text* (PVTG 1.2; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 26-27, based on the β recension.

³¹ On the three heavens in this text, see pp. 30-31, n. 113 above.

³² See pp. 29-33 above.

³³ See CHARLES, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs Translated From the Editor's Greek Text* (London: Black, 1908) 28, who comments: "This is a peculiar idea. Could κρεμόμενον = כְּרוּקִיעַ. If so, this would be corrupt for רִקִיעַ or בְּרִקִיעַ = "on the firmament." See further: H. W. HOLLANDER and M. DE JONGE, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary* (SVTP 8; Leiden: Brill, 1985) 137; YARBRO COLLINS, "The Seven Heavens," 64.

³⁴ See p. 92 above.

unlike the fearsome guardians of the sixth היכל. The invitation to Levi to “enter” the sanctuary (2:6) is reminiscent of the incident at the sixth gate in the ascent midrash (*HZ/HR:C1-2*) and, indeed, the פרדס story.

It must be stipulated that no single one of these points, considered individually, is strong enough to establish a direct connection between *Test. Lev.* 2:6-3:5 and the water vision episode in *HZ*. The linguistic echoes noted above are, however, sufficient in number to support the strong suspicion that both texts are derived from a common matrix of symbolic and literary tradition. Of great importance is the fact that *Testament of Levi* locates the celestial sanctuary above the “upper waters” and provides compelling evidence that this notion was current in the second century CE at latest, and perhaps much earlier. We should also observe that a parallel between the priesthood of Levi (2:10) and that of the archangels (3:5) is evidently intended.

An interesting juxtaposition of air with water in heaven is found in *2 Enoch*, recension J, 3:1-3:

And it came about, when I had spoken to my sons, those men called me. And they took me up onto their wings, and carried me up to the first heaven, and placed me on the clouds. And behold, they were moving. And there I perceived the air higher up, and higher still I saw the ether. And they placed me on the first heaven. And they showed me a vast ocean, much bigger than the earthly ocean.³⁵

Although this passage is not entirely clear, it seems to contain several elements which are reminiscent of the ascent midrash in *HZ*. Enoch ascends – first on the angels’ wings, then on the clouds – through the air, then the ether, until he is standing on the first heaven. Here, he encounters a “vast ocean,” which may perhaps be the surface of the air and/or ether through which he has just passed. Admittedly, the location of the ocean in the first, rather than sixth, heaven means that the parallel with the ascent midrash in *HZ* is far from exact,³⁶ but it is readily apparent that this passage shares a common background with the texts discussed above.³⁷ Although the date and provenance of *2 Enoch*

³⁵ Trans. F. I. ANDERSEN, *OTP*, 1.110.

³⁶ The longer (J) recension of *2 Enoch* has ten heavens, but the original text has almost certainly been expanded. The shorter (A) recension has seven heavens only. See ANDERSEN, *OTP*, 1.134-5. n. 20a; and ROWLAND, *The Open Heaven*, 82.

³⁷ See ROWLAND, “The Visions of God,” 148; and *idem*, *The Open Heaven*, 225.

are extremely uncertain, some parts of the text may perhaps be as old as the late first century CE.³⁸

Also from the late first or second century CE, *3 Bar. 2:1* should be noted in passing.³⁹ The Slavonic recension of this text reads simply:

And the Angel of hosts took me and carried me where the firmament of heaven is.⁴⁰

The Greek recension, however, reads as follows:⁴¹

καὶ λαβὼν με ἤγαγεν με ὅπου ἐστήρικται ὁ οὐρανός, καὶ ὅπου ἦν ποταμὸς ὃν οὐδεὶς δύναται περᾶσαι αὐτόν, οὐδὲ ξένη πνοὴ ἐκ πασῶν ὧ ἔθετο ὁ θεός.

And taking me, he led me to where the heaven was set fast and where there was a river which no one is able to cross, not even one of the foreign winds that God created.

It seems that, according to this text, the lower rim of the dome of the firmament is “set fast” on the far side of a great river which marks the boundary of the earth. This image strongly resembles the river Oceanus of Greek mythology and may, therefore, be of non-Jewish hellenistic derivation. On the other hand, the proximity of the river to the firmament is possibly relevant to the subject of this inquiry and it is interesting to observe that “winds” are mentioned in this connection. As observed by GAYLORD, moreover, the Greek term πνοή is found later in this text (*3 Bar. 8:7*) and elsewhere to mean “breath” or “living creature.”⁴² It is, therefore, conceivable that these four winds are associated with

³⁸ See SCHOLEM, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Philadelphia and Princeton: Jewish Publication Society and Princeton University Press, 1987) 73; JONAS GREENFIELD, “Prolegomenon” to ODEBERG, *3 Enoch*, xviii-xxi; ULRICH FISCHER, *Eschatologie und Jenseitserwartung im hellenistischen Diasporajudentum* (BZNW 44; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978) 37-41; and ANDERSEN, *OTP*, 1.94-97; but cf. NICKELSBURG (*Jewish Literature*, 188) who states that the date is uncertain.

³⁹ On the date of *3 Baruch*, see H. E. GAYLORD, JR., *OTP*, 1.655-656, and the sources cited there; and see also NICKELSBURG, *Jewish Literature*, 303.

⁴⁰ Trans. GAYLORD, *OTP*, 664.

⁴¹ Greek text in S. P. BROCK, ed., *Testamenti Iobi* and J.-C. PICARD, ed. *Apocalypsis Baruch Graece*, (PVTG 2; Leiden: Brill, 1967) 82; cf. GAYLORD, *OTP*, 1.665.

⁴² GAYLORD, *OTP*, 664, n. 2c; see also BAG 680a.

Ezekiel's four תִּיִן. These connections are rather speculative, however, and it must be conceded that the river does not seem to be in heaven. Thus, while this motif may possibly be derived in part from a Jewish apocalyptic background, it has, if so, been reinterpreted in accordance with Greek cosmological ideas.

Another, clearer reference to Oceanus, again possibly dating to the late first or early second century CE, occurs in *Test. Abr.*, B, 8:3-5:⁴³

Then Michael departed and took Abraham upwards on a cloud in the body and carried him up to the river Oceanus (ἐπὶ τὸν Ὠκεανὸν ποταμόν). And Abraham looked and saw two gates, one small and the other large. And between the two gates sat a man on a throne of great glory, and a multitude of angels surrounded him

A difference between this text and *3 Bar.* 2:1 is that here, the cosmic river is clearly located in heaven. In symbolic terms, however, the difference is perhaps not that great, since, in both instances, the river marks the boundary between the celestial and earthly worlds. DELCOR⁴⁴ perceives a connection between this passage and a doctrine of the Essenes, reported by Josephus:

Sharing the beliefs of the sons of Greece, they maintain that for virtuous souls there is reserved an abode beyond the ocean. (*War* ii.155)⁴⁵

SANDERS points out, however, that the common denominator between these two passages is really the Greek notion of the isles of the bless-

⁴³ See M. R. JAMES, ed., *The Testament of Abraham* (T&S ii.2; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1892), reprinted with an English translation in MICHAEL E. STONE, trans., *The Testament of Abraham: The Greek Recensions* (T&T 2; Pseudepigrapha Series 2; Missoula: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972) 72-75; cf. E. P. SANDERS, trans., *OTP*, 1.899. On the date of this text, see MATTHIAS DELCOR, *Le Testament d'Abraham: Introduction, traduction du texte grec et commentaire de la recension grecque longue, suivi de la traduction des Testaments d'Abraham, d'Isaac et de Jacob d'après les versions orientales* (SVTP 2; Leiden: Brill, 1973) 73-77; and SANDERS, *OTP*, 1.874-875; NICKELSBURG (*Jewish Literature*, 253) considers that the date "cannot be precisely determined."

⁴⁴ DELCOR, *Le Testament d'Abraham*, 70-71.

⁴⁵ Trans. THACKERAY in *idem et al.*, *Josephus*, 2.382-383; Gk.: καὶ ταῖς μὲν ἀγαθαῖς, ὁμοδοξοῦντες παισὶν Ἑλλήνων, ἀποφαίνονται τὴν ὑπὲρ ὠκεανοῦ δίαιταν ἀποκεῖσθαι.

ed.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, it is probable that, in both instances, Greek terminology is being used to convey an idea which, in and of itself, is derived from a Jewish apocalyptic background. Of relevance to this inquiry is the fact that the celestial river is the place where the souls of the righteous are separated from those of the wicked, the two gates being, of course, those leading to “life” (εἰς τὴν ζωὴν) and to “destruction” (εἰς τὴν ἀπώλειαν) (*Test. Abr.* 8:11). This bears a certain resemblance to the separation between the worthy and unworthy מֵרַבֵּי מֵרַבָּה at the gate of the sixth הַיְכָל and, perhaps more closely, to the Mandaean *hafiqia mia*. If these parallels are valid, the figure on the throne occupies the role of Metatron, the recorder of human deeds, corresponding to the Mandaean Abathur,⁴⁷ and to the “one like חַשְׁמֹל” in the ascent midrash (*HZ/HR:B*). Here, however, the enthroned figure is identified as Adam, who rejoices over righteous souls and weeps over wicked ones as they go to the afterlives determined by their deeds. This text was probably written in Egypt by a Greek-speaking Jew of the diaspora.⁴⁸ Thus, while it is possible that the imagery of this passage may have originated in the early מֵרַבֵּי tradition, it has, if so, been subjected to considerable adaptation, which has transformed both its meaning and, of equal importance, its affective tone.⁴⁹

An important extra-rabbinic witness to the early development and interpenetration of the symbolic and literary themes encountered in the water vision episode is *Vit. Ad.* 29:1-3:

After I had worshipped the LORD, Michael the Archangel of God immediately took hold of my hand and ejected me from the Paradise of visitation and of

⁴⁶ SANDERS, *OTP*, 1.876, n. 37.

⁴⁷ See p. 46 above.

⁴⁸ See DELCOR, *Le Testament d'Abraham*, 67-69; SANDERS, *OTP*, 1.874-876; NICKELSBURG, “Eschatology in the Testament of Abraham: A Study of the Judgement Scenes in the Two Recensions,” in *idem*, ed., *Studies on the Testament of Abraham* (SBLSCS 6; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976) 23-64; FRANCIS SCHMIDT, “The Two Recensions of the Testament of Abraham: In Which Direction did the Transformation take Place?” *ibid.*, 65-83; and ROBERT A. KRAFT, “Reassessing the ‘Recensional Problem’ in Testament of Abraham,” *ibid.*, 121-137.

⁴⁹ As observed by SANDERS (*OTP*, 1.876-878; *contra* DELCOR, *Le Testament d'Abraham*, 69-73, who suggests that the text is a product of the Therapeutae), *Testament of Abraham* is wholly devoid of sectarian polemic and expresses a universalist soteriology, making no cultic or moral distinction between Jew and Gentile.

God's command. And Michael held in his hand a rod and touched the waters that were around Paradise and they became solid. I crossed over and Michael with me, and he took me to the place from which he had seized me.⁵⁰

In this passage, the motif of entry into and exit from Paradise is combined with that of walking across a surface of solid water. This combination of motifs corresponds to a relatively advanced stage of development of the *HZ* literary tradition, as represented by the פֶּרְדָּס story in *HZ(N)*. In *Vita Adae*, however, the water is not said to be illusory and Michael's rod is an obvious allusion to the Red Sea crossing (cf. Exod. 14:16). The provenance and dating of this text is somewhat uncertain, but the original (Hebrew?) composition, which contains much מַרְכָּבָה material, is unlikely to be later than the second century CE.⁵¹

2. *The Origins of Hekhalot Zutarti*

As we saw in chapter one, the talmudic mystical collection, which includes the פֶּרְדָּס story, appears to have existed as a redactional unity prior to any of the three talmudic documents and therefore must have been compiled before the middle of the fourth century CE. It has become clear in the course of this enquiry that one of the sources used by the redactor of the mystical collection was an early form of the hekhalot compilation now known as *HZ*, which must therefore be older still. We have found that several of the key images and linguistic expressions encountered in the *HZ* recensions of the water vision episode and/or the פֶּרְדָּס story are already combined in a significant number of very diverse non-rabbinic Jewish sources, the majority of which appear to have been written or redacted during the first and second centuries CE, although some are considerably older. The origins of the *HZ* literary tradition or its immediate sources may, therefore, be located with fair confidence in the late second or the early third century, at latest. This

⁵⁰ *Vit. Ad.* 29:1-3, trans. M. D. JOHNSON, *OTP*, 2.268. See HALPERIN, *Faces*, 96-103. The "Paradise of visitation" is the heavenly, not the earthly Paradise.

⁵¹ Following JOHNSON, *OTP*, 2.252. See also: RUSSELL, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Patriarchs and Prophets in Early Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 15-17; and NICKELSBURG, "Some Related Traditions in the Apocalypse of Adam, the Books of Adam and Eve, and 1 Enoch," in BENTLEY LAYTON, ed., *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, vol. 2, *Sethian Gnosticism* (SHR 41; Leiden: Brill, 1980) 515-539.

estimate differs from that of SCHÄFER,⁵² but agrees with that proposed by SCHOLEM and GRUENWALD.⁵³ It has reportedly been confirmed by GREENFIELD, who analyzed the Hebrew and Aramaic language in which the collection is written and “inclines to locate it in Eretz-Yisrael, most probably in the second or third century C.E.”⁵⁴

3. *The Form of the Question*

Returning to the water vision episode, we have found that *HZ* records a tradition that the floor of the celestial sanctuary looks like turbulent water, but that it is really the “brilliant air” of the sixth firmament, which forms a solid but transparent barrier above the world below. The roots of this idea have been traced to a midrashic exposition of Ezek. 1:19-28, interpreted as a description of a heavenly ascent from below to above the firmament supported by the חַיִּוִּת. In this midrash, Ezek. 1:27a, וְאֵרָא כְעֵן חֲשָׁמַל, is understood to be an allusion to the brilliance of this celestial pavement (cf. Exod. 24:10, “like the substance of heaven”) when seen from above (מִמַּעַל לְרִקִּיעַ) Ezek. 1:26; כּוֹלֵמָעָלָה, Ezek. 1:22, 1:26), and the agency which causes the prophet to ascend is identified as the רִיחַ הַחַיָּה of Ezek. 1:20-21. The beginnings of this exegetical tradition can be traced as far back as the early second-century BCE *Book of the Watchers*, where, already, the heavenly ascent is interpreted as a journey through the successive courts of a temple, the “floors” and “ceilings” of which correspond to a plurality of firmaments resembling fire, ice, snow, or water. Detailed correspondences with the imagery and language of the water vision episode have been encountered in a cluster of sources from the late first and early second centuries CE. *Apoc. Abr.* 15:5 speaks of a firmament of solid air, while *Test. Lev.* 2:6-3:15 appears to locate the celestial temple and its inner sanctuary (heavens two and three) above the upper waters. In *Vit. Ad.* 29:1-3, the image of walking on solid water is associated with the heavenly פָּרֶדֶס. Some significant details of the water vision episode are, however, as yet unexplained and it is not yet clear why the mistake of believing the air of the firmament

⁵² See pp. 84-86 above.

⁵³ See p. 83 above.

⁵⁴ GRUENWALD, *Apocalyptic*, 142. To the best of my knowledge, GREENFIELD’s study has not been published.

to be water should be regarded as evidence that the *יורד מרכבה* is unworthy or a liar.

A key to this problem is contained in the form of the question asked by the unworthy *יורד מרכבה*: “These waters – what is the nature of them (מה טיבן)?”⁵⁵ Outside the context of the water vision episode, there are six occurrences in the hekhalot manuscripts published by SCHÄFER of the interrogative formula: *מה טיב* with suffix.⁵⁶ In *3 Enoch*, 5:11-12, the angels persuade God to withdraw his *שכינה* from the earth after the idolatry of the generation of Enosh, by urging him as follows:

“Why have you abandoned the heaven of heavens on high, the abode of your Glory, and the high and exalted throne which is in the height of *ערבות*, and come and lodged with the sons of men who worship idols, and who have placed you on the same level as the idols (והשוו אותך בעד)? Now you are in the earth, and the idols are in the earth. What business have you (מה טיבך) among the idolatrous generations of earth?”⁵⁷

Here, the formula is rhetorical and expresses the angels’ disapproval of association between the divine Presence and human beings. In the remaining five instances, the formula is applied to a human being, but the contrast between the natures of human and heavenly beings is essentially the same. The following three cases resemble the water vision episode in that they concern the ascent of a human being to heaven. In *3 Enoch* 2:2, the angels express their objection to R. Ishmael’s presence in heaven by asking Metatron:

“Youth, why have you permitted one born of woman to come and behold the *מרכבה* What is the nature of this person (מה טיבו של זה)?”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ REICHMAN (see p. 44 above) rightly recognizes the importance of this question but misinterprets its significance.

⁵⁶ See SCHÄFER, ed., *Konkordanz zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (2 vols.; TSAJ 12-13; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1986-88) 1.275c. As will be seen, three instances of the expression occur in *3 Enoch*. See further p. 122, n. 65 below.

⁵⁷ *3 Enoch* 5:11-12, following ms. Vatican (SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §8; cf. ODEBERG, *3 Enoch*, Hebrew, 10-11 and English, 17-18; ALEXANDER, *OTP*, 1.260).

⁵⁸ *3 Enoch* 2:2, following ms. Vatican (SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §3; cf. ODEBERG, *3 Enoch*, Hebrew, 5 and English, 6; ALEXANDER, *OTP*, 1.257). See further pp. 202-203 below.

Similarly, Metatron tells Ishmael how the angels objected to his own ascent, as Enoch, into heaven:

Then came three of the ministering angels, Uzzah, Azzah and Azazel, and they were making accusations against me (והיו מסטינין עלי) in the heavenly height and when they saw me, they said before him, "Lord of the world, what is the nature of this one (מה טיבו של זה), who ascends to the highest height? Is he not one of the descendants of those who perished in the waters of the flood? What business has he on the firmament (מה טיבו ברקיע):"

Again, the Holy One, blessed be he, replied and said to them, "What right have you to interrupt my words (מה טבכם שאתם נכנסים לדברי)? For I have chosen this one above you all to be a prince and to rule over you in the heavenly height."

At once, they all stood up and came forth to meet me, and prostrated themselves before me, and said, "Happy are you, and happy are your parents, for your Creator has favored you!"⁵⁹

Here again, the formula *מה טיב-*, applied by the angels to Enoch, and by God to the angels, quite clearly expresses a derogatory sentiment. A fourth instance of the formula occurs in a Genizah fragment from the Taylor-Schechter collection of the Cambridge University Library. The fragment includes a total of 112 more or less complete lines on four consecutive pages of an otherwise unknown text which describes the heavenly ascent of Moses and combines elements of the Sinai midrashim with hekhalot traditions. Approximately halfway down the second page, we read:

When Moses ascended, on the first day of his ascent, the ministering angels were contending against him and saying, "What right has one born of a woman to be here, in a place of purity, in a place of holiness (מה טיבו שלילוד אשה במקום קדושה במקום קדושה)? (טהרה במקום קדושה)?" And Moses was afraid of the fires outside (האישות), lest they should burn him. At that time, along came Prince חסמדיאל, who covered and protected Moses until they came to [...] When Moses arrived at the place of the sapphire stone (כיון שהגיע משה במקום אבן ספיר), a mighty fire came forth [...] at Moses⁶⁰

⁵⁹ 3 *Enoch* 4:6-9, ms. Vatican (*Synopse*, §§5-6; cf. ODEBERG, 3 *Enoch*, Hebrew, 7-8 and English, 10-13; ALEXANDER, *OTP*, 1.258-259).

⁶⁰ Frag. T.-S.K21.95.A, fol. 1b, lines 12-18, in SCHÄFER, *Geniza-Fragmente*, 175.

Here, the question *מה טיבו* expresses even more explicitly than in 3 *Enoch* the contrast between the purity and holiness of the heavenly world and the inherently impure status of one “born of woman.” The tone is very similar to that of *Pes. R.* 20.11-12,⁶¹ where the fiery nature of the heavenly world is also emphasized. The words: “When Moses arrived (*הגיע*) at the place of the sapphire stone” are formally reminiscent of Aqiba’s warning in *babli* and must allude to the crystal firmament of *Exod.* 24:10, on which Moses presumably is standing.

Two instances of the formula *מה טיב*- remain to be considered. These occur in connection with the descent of heavenly beings to earth, not the ascent of a human being to heaven. In the cosmological treatise *Seder Rabbah diBere’shit*, it is applied to one who presumes to exercise the priestly prerogative of pronouncing the divine name:

For whenever a man interprets the letters of the name of the Holy One, blessed be he, those letters of fire that stand in front of the crown of the Holy One, blessed be he, fly forth, hour by hour, moment by moment, instant by instant! And as soon as they hear the sound of the interpreter’s exposition, they come down to burn up the entire world, because they say to each other: “What is the nature of this one (*מה טיבו של זה*) who is making use of the secrets of the letters of the Explicit Name?”⁶²

Our final example occurs in a short *שר תורה* text entitled *Pereq R. Nehunya ben Ha-Qanah*, which in ms. Vatican appears immediately after *HR*, but which is not found in its entirety, to the best of my knowledge, in any other source.⁶³ Here, Nehunya’s pupil Ishmael describes the occasion when, at the age of 13, he invoked the *שר תורה* for the first time:

⁶¹ See p. 97 above.

⁶² *Seder Rabbah diBere’shit deRabbi Ishmael Cohen Gadol (SRdB)*, §8 (ed. WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.23-24; SCHÄFER, *Synopse* §§840-841). In the edition by NICOLAS SÉD, “Une cosmologie juive du haut moyen âge: la berayta di ma’aseh berešit,” *REJ* 124 (1965) 47, these words are not found.

⁶³ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§307-314 (ms. Vatican only). Three of these seven sections correspond approximately to material included in *Merkabah Rabbah* by other manuscripts (§§308-309 = §§677-678; §311 = §705). A translation of most of this text is offered by HALPERIN (*Faces*, 378-379).

He descended in a fiery flame, and his face was like the appearance of lightning. When I saw him, I was terrified, and I trembled and fell back.

He said to me, "Son of man, what is your nature (מה טיבך), that you have disturbed the great household?"

I said to him, "It is known and revealed to him who spoke, and the world came into being, that I have not made you descend for your glory (*sic*), but to do the will of your Creator."

He said to me, "Son of man! Putrid drop! Worm and maggot!"

He who asks for him to be revealed to him must fast for forty days, and immerse himself twenty-four times every day. He must not taste any filthy thing, and he must not look at a woman, and he must sit in a dark house.⁶⁴

It has become apparent that in the hekhalot manuscripts, the formula *מה טיבך* occurs primarily in the context of interaction between angels and humans, and is used as a rhetorical device which emphasizes the contrasting natures of the human and heavenly worlds.⁶⁵ In one case, this is linked to the sin of idolatry, and in another to descent from "those who perished in the flood,"⁶⁶ but the aspect of human nature that is most clearly and consistently contrasted with the pure nature of the heavenly world, in both the hekhalot sources and the Sinai midrashim, is the impurity which is inherent in the status: "born of woman." The "putrid" fluids and impure processes of conception, of which the

⁶⁴ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§313-314.

⁶⁵ Two instances of the formula in a different context, and with a different meaning, are listed in SCHÄFER's *Konkordanz* (see p. 119, n. 56 above), but neither occurs in any of the mss. included in *idem*, *Synopse*. The first is found at the beginning of the *מרכבה* midrash *Visions of Ezekiel* (i.A in trans. HALPERIN, *Faces*, 264; cf. ed. WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 2.127): 'And it came to pass in the thirtieth [year], and so forth [Ezekiel 1:1]. What was the nature of these [מה טיבך]. *Thirty* corresponds to thirty kings who reigned over Israel. For thus they said to Ezekiel: "Our fathers were punished in the desert forty years, a year for each day [that they spied out the land of Canaan; Numbers 14:34]. Similarly, we are punished for every king who arose over us.'" The second occurs in *Mass. Hek.*, §24,1 (ed. HERRMANN, 72* [Hebrew] and 176 [German]), where the author introduces his discussion of the heavenly voices that accompany the wheels of the *מרכבה* with the question: *מה טיבך של בנות קולות הללו*. Neither of these two cases occurs in the context of interaction between humans and angels. They do not, therefore, substantially affect my argument.

⁶⁶ This is rather strange, since those who died in the flood have for that reason no descendants. Possibly the parents of Noah's wife and those of his son's wives are intended. If so, the contamination of future generations is transmitted on the female side.

corruptible human body is the product, and which are attributed primarily to the female, are held to be wholly incompatible with the pure, fiery substance of the heavenly world and the angels' bodies. As GOLDBERG has pointed out,⁶⁷ the hekhalot sources and the Sinai midrashim repeatedly emphasize the point that the basic substance of the heavenly world is fire (or its celestial equivalent, חשמל), which is destructive to corruptible human bodies, unless those bodies are themselves transformed into fire during the course of the ascent.⁶⁸ Thus, again, *Pes. R.* 20.12:

“What are you doing (מה לך) amidst the holy ones of the Most High? You have come from the place of womb-filthiness – what are you doing (מה לך) in the place of purity? You are born of a woman – what are you doing (מה לך) in the place of fire?”⁶⁹

It is, I think, clear that the expression מזה טיבן in the context of the water vision episode is the equivalent of מה לך in *Pes. R.* 20, and that it expresses a similar contrast between the pure substance of heaven and impure earthly matter. The question מה טיבן האלה מזה טיבן implies, then, that the image of water is associated with the inherent impurity of human conception, birth and bodily existence. In this symbolic ledger, fire is on the side of purity and the angels, while water stands for the substantial basis of corruptible matter, which is alien to the pure, celestial dwelling place of God.

4. *The Palace Above the Waters*

A similar symbolic model is encountered at *y.Hag.* 77c:

- A. R. Judan Nesiya asked R. Samuel bar Nahman: What is the reason for the text, *Praise the Charioteer in עֲנֵבֹתָ by his name, Yah (בְּיְהוָה שְׁמוֹ) and rejoice before Him* (Ps. 68:4)?
- B. He said to him: There is no place anywhere that does not have a governor appointed over its highways. And who is the governor of the highways of them

⁶⁷ See pp. 37-38 above.

⁶⁸ See MORRAY-JONES, “Transformational Mysticism,” 11-14, 17-18, 22-26, and the references cited there.

⁶⁹ See p. 97 above.

all? The Holy One, blessed be he. “Highway” is his name (reading *גִּיהֵ* [= Latin *via*] instead of *גִּיהֵ*), for Yah is his name.

- C. He said to him: R. Leazar, your master, used not to expound it thus but (compared it) to a king who built a palace (*פּלַטִּיּוֹן*) in a place of sewers, in a place of midden heaps, in a refuse dump. Does not one insult him, who comes along and says, “This palace is in a place of sewers! It is in a place of midden heaps! It is in a refuse dump!”? Just so does one insult him who says, “In the beginning the world was water mixed with water (*מֵיִם בְּמֵיִם*).”⁷⁰

Judan Nesiya’s question (A) refers to the praise of God on his *מִרְכַּבָּה* in *עֲרֻבוֹת*, the highest heaven (in the hekhalot writings, very often called *עֲרֻבוֹת רִקִּיעַ*). Samuel’s answer (B) is an extremely far fetched pun, and serves only as a foil to Leazar’s exposition (C), which explains that to associate water with the realm of the *מִרְכַּבָּה* is a sacreligious insult, i.e., the opposite of praise. The king’s palace is the pre-existent celestial temple, whereas water appears to be associated with the material world of corruption and impurity.

Applying this symbolism to the water vision episode, the pavement of the celestial sanctuary is the solid but transparent firmament of “brilliant air,” which functions as a barrier between the two realms of existence and prevents them from coming into contact. One who, seeing this firmament from above, misperceives it as being water and asks: “*מִה טִיבָן*” thereby attributes impurity to the sanctuary and reveals his own state of impurity and unworthiness. This is why the angelic guardians, whose function is to safeguard the purity of the temple, react to the question with such violence and why, in *HZ:F*, the merest mention of water is enough to betray the unworthy *מִרְכַּבָּה* as “worthless” and a blasphemer. The angels’ words: “Do you not see with your eyes?” (*HZ:D2*) seem to indicate that the “brilliant air” of the firmament does

⁷⁰ The above text is immediately followed by *yerushalmi*’s version of the parable of the king’s garden, (B3-8 on p. 8 above): “... to the garden of a king with an upper chamber built above it. One may look, but not approach.” As we have seen, a variant form this parable is appended to the *פֶּרֶס* story in *tosefta* (B1-9). In *yerushalmi*, there is no continuity between the parable and section C of the text given above, and several translators (e.g., NEUSNER, *Hagigah and Moed Qatan*, 53) have found it necessary to make the connection by supplying additional words. As was argued on pp. 21-23 above, however, the parable seems to be inherently connected to the *פֶּרֶס* story and is therefore misplaced here.

not look like water to them, and that the misperception is something of which only a corruptible human body is susceptible. This may explain why one who is deceived by the illusion is “unworthy to see the king in his beauty.” It may also be why, in the פֶּרֶס story according to *HZ(N)*, B2a-b we are told that Ben Azzai “saw the brilliance of the air of the marble stones and his body could not bear it, and he opened his mouth ...,” whereas Ben Zoma was physically strong enough to resist the urge to ask the question, although his mind was still overwhelmed by the illusion.

Returning to Leazar’s parable of the king’s palace, it is interesting to discover an allusion to the cosmological doctrine which lies behind the symbolism of the water vision episode in *yerushalmi*, which nowhere alludes to the episode itself. The expression מִים בְּמִים refers to the division between the upper and lower waters (Gen. 1:6-8) and Leazar’s exegesis thus insists that the dwelling place of “the Charioter in עֲרֹבוֹת” is above and beyond them both.

The background of this tradition may be connected with an exegesis of Psalm 104:1-4, which, as HALPERIN points out, evidently influenced the author of *1 Enoch* 14, and which crops up more than once in apparently esoteric midrashim on Gen. 1:1.⁷¹

⁽¹⁾O LORD my God, you are very great.

You are clothed with glory and splendor.

⁽²⁾Who covers himself with light as with a garment,

Who spreads out the heavens like a tent,

⁽³⁾Who sets the beams of his upper chambers

in the waters

Who makes the clouds his chariot,

Who walks on the wings of the wind,

⁽⁴⁾Who makes his angels winds,

His ministers flaming fire.

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי גְדֻלָּתְךָ מָאֵד

הוֹד וְהָדָר לְבִשְׁתְּךָ:

עֹטָה אֹרֶךְ כְּשִׁלְמָה

נוֹטָה אֶרֶץ שָׁמַיִם כְּרִיעָה:

הַמְקַרְרָה בְּמִים עֲלִיּוֹתָיו

הַשָּׁם עֲרֹמִים רְכוּבוֹ

הַמְהַלֵּךְ עַל-כְּנָפֵי-רִיחַ:

עֹשֶׂה מְלָאָכָיו רִיחֹת

מִשְׁרָתָיו אֵשׁ לְהֵט:

HALPERIN not unreasonably renders the first line of verse 3 by: “roofs his upper chambers in the waters,”⁷² but if הַמְקַרְרָה is translated straightforwardly, as above, the line may reasonably be understood to mean that the beams beneath the floor of the “upper chambers” of God’s dwelling

⁷¹ See HALPERIN, *Faces*, 82-85.

⁷² HALPERIN, *Faces*, 83.

are laid upon the waters.⁷³ This is remarkably like the image found in *Test. Lev.* 2:6-3:5 and *y.Hag.* 77c (C) of the temple or palace whose upper chambers are above the watery realm of the impure material creation (i.e., above the “upper waters”). The first line of verse 4 is normally taken to mean “makes the winds his messengers” (thus RSV), but HALPERIN rightly suggests that later expositors may well have understood it in the manner suggested by the above translation.⁷⁴ Taken together with the previous line, this accords with the way in which Ezekiel’s רִיחַ הַיָּמִים was understood by authors of descriptions of heavenly ascents from *1 Enoch* 14 to the water vision episode in *HZ*.

5. *The Waters of Impurity in the Qumran Scrolls*

In the writings of the Dead Sea Sect, the image of turbulent or muddy water appears often to be symbolic of the inherent impurity of the material creation and, especially, the biological processes of the birth-giving female. The *Thanksgiving Hymns* contain several allusions to this theme:

.... I am a creature of clay, fashioned with water,
 foundation of shame, source of impurity⁷⁵

ואני יצר החמר ומגבל המים
 סוד הערורה ומקור הנדה

It is important to observe that clay and water are associated with the shameful condition of impurity, which originates in the female (נדה). Compare the following:

What is someone born of woman
 among all your awesome works?

ומה ילוד אשה בכול - - - - הנוראים

He is a structure of dust shaped with water,
 his base is the guilt of sin,
 vile unseemliness, source of impurity,
 over which a spirit of degeneracy rules.⁷⁶

והוא מבנה עפר ומגבל מים
] - [ה סודר
 ערות קלן] - [ה
 רוח נעוה משלה בו

⁷³ Thus RSV, and see BDB, 900a.

⁷⁴ HALPERIN (*Faces*, 83) translates: “Makes his angels spirits,” but notes “winds” as an alternative translation (*ibid.*, n. 19).

⁷⁵ 1QH^a, ix(= i).21-22, English text from GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, 327; Hebrew text from E. L. SUKENIK, ed., *The Dead Sea Scrolls of the Hebrew University* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1955) plate 35.

⁷⁶ 1QH^a, v.20-21 (= xiii.14-15), trans. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ, 320; ed. SUKENIK, plate 47.

As in the biblical tradition, the forces of evil and chaos are frequently symbolized by the raging waters of the ocean:

The assembly of the wicked is roused against me,	ועלי קהלת רשעים תתרגש
they roar like the turbulence of the seas	ויהמו כנחשולי ימים
when their waves beat	בהרגש גליהם
and spew out ash and mud ...	רפש וטיט יגרישו

Like the crash of turbulent water	וכהמון מים רבים
is the roar of their voices,	שאון קולם
like a hurricane storm	נפץ זרם
which destroys many.	להשחית רבים
Right up to the stars	למזורות
burst emptiness and nothing	יקבעו אפעה ושוא
when their waves heave upwards. ⁷⁷	בהתרומם גליהם

Yet another hymn depicts the soul of the righteous man as a ship beset by a raging ocean of seething evil forces as the eschatological battle begins. Closely associated with these destructive waters is the image of a woman, who seems to represent, at least in part, the material creation (cf. Rom. 8:18-23), and who is racked by agonizing birth pangs as she gives birth to a son (evidently, the soul of the hymnist), following which she is overwhelmed and destroyed by the forces of impurity and evil:

Now, my soul [...]	עתה נפש] -[
they have counted me, and have put the soul	יחשיבוני וישימו נפש
like a boat in the depths [of the sea],	באוניה (sic) ב[מ]צולות - -
like a besieged city positioned opposite [its enemies].	וכעיר מבצר מלפ[] [
I was in distress	אהיה בצוקה
like a woman giving birth the first time	כמו אשת לדה מבכריה
when her birth-pangs come on her	כיא נהפכו ציר- -
and a pain racks her womb	וחבל נמרץ על משבריה
to begin the birth in the "crucible" of the pregnant woman.	להחיל בכור הריה
Since sons reach the frontiers of death	כיא באו בנים עד משברי מות
and the woman expectant with a man	והרית גבר הצרה בחכליה
is racked by her pains,	
for from the shores of death	כיא במשברי מות
she gives birth to a male,	תמליט זכר
and there emerges from the pains of Sheol,	ובחבלי שאול יגיה

⁷⁷ 1QH^a, x(= ii).12-13, 27-28, trans. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ, 329-330; ed. SUKENIK, plate 36.

from the “crucible” of the pregnant woman
a splendid counsellor with his strength,
and the man is freed from the womb.

Into the woman expectant with him
rush all the spasms

and the wrenching pains of his birth;
terror (seizes) those giving birth,
and at his birth all the pains come suddenly,
on the “crucible” of the pregnant woman.

And she who is pregnant by the serpent
is with a wrenching pain;
And the edge of the pit
is with all the deeds of terror.

The foundations of the wall shake
like a ship on the surface of the sea,
and the clouds echo with the uproar.
And both he who lives in the dust
and he who sails upon the sea
are terrified by the din of the water.

For them their wise men are like sailors
on the deeps,
for all their wisdom is perplexed by the roar
of the sea,

by the welling up of the deeps
upon the springs of water;
[they churn] to form huge waves,
the gates of the water, with clamorous sound.
And when they are wild, [Sheol and Abaddon] open;
all the arrows of the pit
make their voice heard while going down
to the abyss;

the gates of [...] open
[...] the deeds of the serpent.
And the gates of the pit close
upon the woman expectant with wickedness,
and the everlasting bolts
upon all the spirits of the serpent.⁷⁹

מכור הריה
פלא יועץ עם גבורתו
ויפלט גבר ממשברים
בהריתו החישו כול משברים

חבלי מרץ במולדיהם
ופלצות להורותם
ובמולדיו יהפכו כול צירים
בכור הריה
והרית אפעה
להבל נמרץ
ומשברי שחת
לכול מעשי פלצות
וירועו אושי קיר
כאוניה על פני מים
ויהמו שחקים בקול המון
וירשבי עפר
כירודי ימים
נבעתים מהמון מים
חכמיה (כו) למו כמלחים במצולות⁷⁸

כי תתבלע כול חכמתם בהמות ימים

ברוח תהומות
על נבוכי מים
- - - - שו לרום גלים
ומשברי מים בהמון קולם
ובהתרגשם יפתחו שן [ל] [] -
[] חצי שחת
עם מצערים לתהום ישמיעו קולם

ויפתחו שערי []
מעשי אפעה
ויסגרו דלתי שחת
בעד הרית עול
ובריחי עולם
בעד כול רוחי אפעה

Here, the waters of destruction are closely associated with the impurity of the birth-giving female, from whose foul womb or “crucible” the

⁷⁸ The letters כו are written above the line.

⁷⁹ 1QH^a, xi(= iii).6-18, trans. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ, 331-332; ed. SUKENIK, plate 37.

“mighty counsellor” breaks free. The masculinity of the new-born counsellor separates him spiritually from his doomed and fundamentally evil mother, whom the writer regards with an intensity of disgust and loathing that, to a modern sensibility, appears pathological. The remainder of the hymn tells how the wicked are sucked down by the “torrents of Belial” into the infernal abyss. The soul of the righteous man is, however, rescued from this destructive orgy by being raised up to a heavenly expanse on which, like the heroes of the apocalypses, the Moses of the Sinai midrashim, and the יורדי מרכבה, he is able, in his rescued state, to walk:

I thank you, Lord,
because you saved my life from the pit,
and from Sheol and Abaddon you have lifted me up
to an everlasting height,
so that I can walk on a boundless plain.⁸⁰

אדכה אדוני
כי פדיתנה נפשי משחת
ומשאול אבדון העליחני
לרום עולם
ואתהלכה במישור לאין חקר

6. *The Book of Revelation*

In the Book of Revelation, as in the Qumran literature, imagery of turbulent water and, especially, the sea is symbolically associated with the demonic forces of opposition to God’s will. In chapter 12, we encounter a scarlet beast “with ten horns and seven heads and a blasphemous name upon its heads.” This beast spews out a river of blasphemy and lies against a female figure “clothed with the sun and with the moon under her feet” (12:1), who represents the messianic community or earthly Zion and will later be transformed into the Bride of God, the New Jerusalem (21:1-22:5).⁸¹ In the following chapter, the same beast arises from the sea (13:1), to blaspheme God’s name and dwelling, “that is, those who dwell in heaven” (13:6), to dominate the earth and to wage war against the saints or “holy ones” (ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων) (13:7). In chapter 17 we are introduced to “the great harlot who

⁸⁰ 1QH^a, xi(= iii).19-20, trans. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ, 332; ed. SUKENIK, plate 37. Compare the text of *Apocalypse of Enosh*, as quoted in the *Cologne Mani Codex*, where Enosh is raised by an angel to “a flat plain” (εἰς συχνας πεδιδάδας); text in REEVES, *Heralds of That Good Realm*, 141-142; and see further his comments, *ibid.*, 148 and 157, n. 36.

⁸¹ See CELIA DEUTSCH, “The Transformation of Symbols: The New Jerusalem in Rv 21:1-22:5,” *ZNW* 78 (1987) 106-126.

is seated upon many waters” (17:1), who is subsequently identified as “Babylon the Great” (17:18; 18:2), and who rides on the same beast (17:3).⁸² The closest point of contact with the traditions considered above occurs, however, at Rev. 4:6-8:

⁽⁶⁾And before the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal (καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου ὡς θάλασσα ὑαλίνῃ ὁμοία κρυστάλλῳ). And in the midst of the throne and around the throne (Καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου; cf. Ezek. 1:27: קַיִבִּיב וְיִתְלַבֵּב) are four living beings, full of eyes in front and behind. ⁽⁷⁾And the first living being is like a lion, and the second living being is like a calf, and the third living being has a face like that of a man, and the fourth living being is like a flying eagle. ⁽⁸⁾And the four living beings, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within (κυκλῶσθιν καὶ ἔσωθεν; cf. Ezek. 1:4: וְיִתְלַבֵּב וְיִתְלַבֵּב). And they do not rest, day and night, from saying: Holy! Holy! Holy is the Lord God, the Almighty One, who was, who is, and who is to come (“Ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος)!

The six wings of the living beings and the trishagion are both taken from Isa. 6:2-3, which is, of course, a key text of the מַרְכָּבָה tradition. The words: ὁ παντοκράτωρ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος seem to contain an echo of the liturgical formula attached to the water vision episode (HZ:F3): וְעַד לְעַלְמֵי יְהוּדָה מְלֶךְ יְהוּדָה מְלֶךְ יְהוּדָה. The crystal sea of Rev. 4:6 is undoubtedly the crystal firmament of Ezek. 1:22-26 (LXX).⁸³ BEASLEY-MURRAY makes the important observation that this writer’s treatment of the image of the crystal sea is unusual in one very significant respect:

He does not actually state that there is a sea in heaven. He says that there is something which looks like one (*as it were*), having the appearance of glass or crystal.⁸⁴

⁸² On this material, see especially: G. B. CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (HNTC; York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1966) 147-152; G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, ed., *The Book of Revelation* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1974) 191-221; J. MASSYNGBERDE FORD, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975) 187-230.

⁸³ See p. 99 above.

⁸⁴ BEASLEY-MURRAY, *The Book of Revelation*, 116. See further and compare: ROWLAND, “The Visions of God,” 147-150; *idem*, *The Open Heaven*, 218-227; and HALPERIN, *Faces*, 93-96.

This striking correspondence with the central motif of the water vision episode, which has not been found in any other non-rabbinic source, is almost certainly derived from the language patterns of Ezekiel 1 itself. The $\omega\varsigma$ $\delta\mu\sigma\iota\alpha$ of Rev. 4:6a echoes the $\text{כְּעֵין} \dots \text{וַדְמוּת}$ of Ezek. 1:22 and also, perhaps, the $\text{כְּעֵין} \text{חֶשְׁמֶל} \text{כְּמִרְאֵה־אֵשׁ}$ of Ezek. 1:27. An indication that the author of Revelation, like the composer of the water vision episode, has understood the latter expression to be a description of the firmament may be detected in Rev. 15:2a, where the sea of glass is described in a slightly different way:

And I saw what appeared to be a glass sea, mingled with fire ($\text{καὶ εἶδον ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην μεμιγμένην πυρὶ}$)

Around this crystal sea, which is remarkably similar in composition and appearance to the floors and ceilings of the temple in *1 Enoch* 14,⁸⁵ stand “those who have conquered the beast and its image” (15:2b), who are said to sing “the Song of Moses, the servant of God, and the Song of the Lamb” (15:3). Only the words of the latter are given (“Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God Almighty ...!”) and it is almost certainly safe to assume that by “the Song of Moses” is meant Exod. 15:1-18.

It appears, then, that the author of the Book of Revelation believes that God’s righteous ones, who have “conquered the beast” and “come out” from the harlot-city of the corrupt and impure world of the flesh in advance of the coming judgement (18:4), are now located in the heavenly world, above Ezekiel’s firmament. An uncompromising statement of the criteria by which these righteous persons have been selected is found at Rev. 14:1-5:

⁽¹⁾And I saw, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with him were one hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. ⁽²⁾And I heard a voice out of heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of great thunder. And the sound that I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. ⁽³⁾And they were singing, as it were ($\omega\varsigma$), a new song before the throne, and before the living beings and the elders. And no one was able to learn that song save the hundred and forty-four thousand who had been redeemed from the earth. ⁽⁴⁾These are they who have not been defiled with women, for they are virgins (οὗτοί εἰσιν

⁸⁵ See MILIK and BLACK, *The Books of Enoch*, 199.

οἱ μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν, παρθένοι γάρ εἰσιν). These are they who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from humankind as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. ⁽⁵⁾And in their mouth no lie has been found (καὶ ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν οὐχ εὐρέθη ψεῦδος). They are unblemished (ἄμωμοι).

In addition to the allusion to Ezek. 1:24 in Rev. 14:2, the song which can only be sung by those who have been found worthy is very reminiscent of the heavenly songs that are taught by the angels to the יוֹרְדֵי מְרִכְבָּה in the hekhalot tradition (and compare *Apoc. Abr.* 17:8-21). The first qualification that is required for membership of this elect band is celibacy, since contact with women is evidently understood to be, in and of itself, defiling.⁸⁶ The second is never to have lied, which may be an allusion to Ps. 101:7 (cf. *b.Hag.* 14a, A17-19). Thirdly, one must be “unblemished,” (ἄμωμοι = תְּמִיִּם), which is the condition required, above all, of priests (Lev. 21:16-24, etc.). The statement that they “have been redeemed as firstfruits” also echoes the status of the priestly clan (see Numb. 3:11-15, 9:14-22). Further indications of the priestly status of this group, in addition to their celibacy (1 Sam. 21:4; cf. Exod. 19:15), are: the location of this scene on “Mount Zion,” which must refer to the heavenly temple (cf. Heb. 12:22); their levitical instruments; and the seal of the divine name on their foreheads (Exod. 28:36-38). Possibly, the twenty-four πρεσβύτεροι of Rev. 4:4, etc. are full priests or כֹּהֲנִים, while the status of this larger group corresponds to that of the Levites, in their role as liturgical musicians.⁸⁷

In the seer’s final vision of the eschatological temple-city of the New Jerusalem, after the sea has given up its dead for the final judgement

⁸⁶ A number of commentators (e.g., CAIRD, *A Commentary*, 179) are unwilling to accept the plain sense of the text in this matter. MASSYNGBERDE FORD (*Revelation*, 241-243) rightly links celibacy with the office of priesthood but does not consider the implications of the idea that the conditions of purity obtaining in the temple apply to the heavenly realm and its inhabitants in perpetuity. See further pp. 192-205 below.

⁸⁷ The priestly status of the elders is clearly apparent in Rev. 5:8-9, where they worship the sacrificed Lamb, holding “a harp and golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (see further and compare: HENRY B. SWETE, *The Apocalypse of John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1906] 179; A. FEUILLET, “The Twenty-Four Elders of the Apocalypse,” in *idem*, *Johannine Studies* [New York: Alba House, 1965] 183-214; and MASSYNGBERDE FORD, *Revelation*, 72-73). Note that the ratio of elders to musicians is 1:6,000.

(20:13), we are told that “the sea was no more” (Rev. 21:1).⁸⁸ Since “nothing unclean” has survived the judgement, a separate area of holiness is no longer needed, and so there is no temple in the city (21:22-27). It is significant, however, that the city street retains the quality of the crystal firmament, being made of “pure gold, like transparent glass” (χρυσίον καθαρὸν ὡς ὕαλος διαυγῆς) (21:21).

This necessarily abbreviated study of the New Testament Apocalypse has advanced our enquiry by several small but significant steps. Not only does the author draw on the traditional imagery of the demonic chaos waters and their war against God and his servants, he also interposes a barrier between the holy divine realm and the lower world in which the “water-born” forces of evil are permitted to have temporary dominion. This barrier is Ezekiel’s crystal firmament. Rev. 4:6 is, moreover, the earliest known source to hint at the idea that the heavenly “sea” is not exactly what it seems. The idea that the firmament, when seen from above, looks like, but is not really, a sea of glass appears to be derived from the repeated “as if” language of Ezekiel 1 itself. It seems probable that the image of illusory water, which is the central signifier of the hekhalot episode, originated in this same process of exegetical reflection and “mystical” imagining on and around Ezekiel 1.

We have found that, for the author of Revelation, as for the hekhalot writer, the primary purpose of the sea-like crystal firmament is to serve as a barrier between the heavenly realm and the lower world, and above all between that which is pure and that which is unclean. Impurity, as in the other sources that we have examined, is strongly associated with sexuality, femininity and the bodily processes of existence in the flesh. Absolute purity, including sexual abstinence, is required of those who seek to penetrate beyond the barrier and to gain admission to the celestial world, since this transition necessitates the transformation of the body from fleshly to spiritual substance (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35-58).⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Recent helpful discussions of this verse include: RICHARD BAUCKHAM, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993) 56-70; and THOMAS E. SCHMIDT, “And the Sea was no More’: Water as People, not Place,” in *idem* and MOISES SILVA, eds., *To Tell the Mystery: Essays on the New Testament in Honor of Robert H. Gundry* [JSNTSup 100; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994] 233-249.

⁸⁹ On the theme of bodily transformation, see further: SEGAL, *Paul The Convert*, 34-71; MORRAY-JONES, “Transformational Mysticism”; and HIMMELFARB, “Ascent to Heaven,” 47-71.

Those who achieve this are presented as possessing the status of priests in the heavenly sanctuary,⁹⁰ having become, in the words of another Christian source, “like the angels in heaven,” who neither marry nor give in marriage.⁹¹

7. *Waters of Purity and Impurity*

As we have seen, the author of Revelation associates the sea and the “many waters” of Rev. 17:1 with impurity and with the forces of evil. At the end of the book, however, he introduces a contrasting image, derived from Ezek. 47:1-12:

And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal (ποταμὸν ὕδατος ζωῆς λαμπρὸν ὡς κρύσταλλον), going forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1).⁹²

The seer’s description of the New Jerusalem, where the source of this living water is located, embodies the imagery of the heavenly temple and the celestial Paradise. This living water is thus a heavenly substance, providing spiritual sustenance.⁹³ Unlike the demonic waters previously mentioned, which are evidently associated with carnality and pollution, this spiritual water is a purifying agent, immersion in which is required of those who seek to enter the holy city:

(14)Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates. (15)Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the fornicators, the murderers, the idolaters, and all those who love and practice falsehood (Rev. 22:14-15).

The motif of washing robes is rightly associated by most commentators with the seer’s earlier vision of the worshippers in the heavenly temple,

⁹⁰ On the theme of priestly investiture in apocalyptic literature, see HIMMELFARB, *Ascent to Heaven*, 29-46.

⁹¹ Mk. 12:25; cf. Matt. 22:23-33, Lk. 20:27-40.

⁹² See further: CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation*, 280; BEAZLEY-MURRAY, *The Book of Revelation*, 330-331.

⁹³ See further: DEUTSCH, “Transformation of Symbols,” 116-118; and RICHARD BAUCKHAM, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 132-136.

who have “washed their robes and whitened them in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14),⁹⁴ but this in no way severs the self-evident connection between Rev. 22:1 and 22:14. For this Christian author, Christ’s sacrificial blood has been transformed into the clear living water that is given to the saints, of which they drink (Rev. 21:6, 22:17), and in which those who would enter the gates of heaven must first be purified.

The image of life-giving and purifying water is frequently encountered in the Qumran *Hodayot*, where it symbolizes the heavenly wisdom which has been revealed to the inspired teacher and his followers, and which leads the way to righteousness:

You have opened a spring	[] אור פתחתה בפי עבדכה
in the mouth of your servant,	
on his tongue you have inscribed	רבשונו [] חקקתה
the cord [...]	
[to] announce your knowledge	על קן [] שמייע ליצר מבינתו
to your creature,	
to explain these matters	ולמליצ (sic) באלה [] לעפר כמוני
to dust such as me.	
You have opened a spring	ותפתח מקן [] להוכיח ליצר חמר דרכו
to correct the creature of clay,	
the guilt of the one born of woman	ראשמות ילוד אשה
according to his deeds. ⁹⁵	כמעשיו

In “The Hymn of the Garden,” this spiritual water is contrasted with the raging demonic waters by which the sage who seeks to enter the holy garden is assaulted:

.... I had become the mockery	ואני הייתי לזאי/ה}נרות שוטפים
of the raging torrents	
which throw their mire over me	כי גרשו עלי רפשמ
But you my God,	ואתה אלי
have placed in my mouth	שמתה בפי כירה גשמ לכול []
As it were early rain for all [...]	
spring of living water. ⁹⁶	ומבוע מים חיים

⁹⁴ CAIRD, *A Commentary on the Revelation*, 99-103, 285-286; BEAZLEY-MURRAY, *The Book of Revelation*, 144-149, 339-342.

⁹⁵ 1QH^a, xxiii (= xviii).10-13, trans. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, 359; ed. SUKENIK, plate 52 (a fragment placed by SUKENIK at the end of these lines is ignored, following GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ).

These sources, then, distinguish between two types of water, one of which is associated with carnality, impurity, idolatry and evil, and the other with the opposites of these qualities. A similar contrast occurs in rabbinic literature.⁹⁷

The uttering of the ten commandments corresponds to the ten sayings by which the world was created⁹⁸ *You shall have no [other gods]* (Exod. 20:3) corresponds to *And God said: Let there be a firmament [in the midst of the waters and let it separate the waters from the waters]*. The Holy One, blessed be he, said: Let there be a separation between me and the gods of idolatry,⁹⁹ which are called “gathered together” (שנקרא מכונסים), according to what is written: *They have forsaken me, the fountain [of living waters and dug cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that cannot hold water]* (Jer. 2:13).

This passage alludes to the distinction between drawn or gathered water and the “pure living water” (מים חיים וטהור) which is necessary for purification (Lev. 15:13), and which the “broken cisterns” of Jer. 2:13 are unable to contain. As in the water vision episode (HZ:D2), these impure waters are associated with idolatry, or the worship of demons, and the function of the firmament is to maintain a separation between these evil forces and the dwelling place of God. Although this midrash is clearly related to the traditional background of the water vision episode, however, an important difference must be observed. Here, as in the Book of Revelation and in the Qumran *Hodayot*, the upper waters are located above the celestial firmament and are spiritual in nature, having God or his throne as their source. The water vision episode in *HZ*, by contrast, does not distinguish between material and spiritual water, and appears rather to stand in the literary tradition represented by such sources as *Test. Lev.* 2:6-3:5 and *y.Hag.* 77c, in which the heavenly sanctuary is located above the upper waters and separated from them by a further firmament or firmaments. This tradition emphasizes the fiery substance of the celestial world (in *HZ*, the חשמל), which is opposed to

⁹⁶ 1QH^a, xvi(= viii).14-16, GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ, 346; ed. SUKENIK, plate 42. See further DAVILA, “The *Hodayot* Hymnist,” 475-476.

⁹⁷ *Pes. R.* 21.46, ed. ULMER 492-493 (= 21.19 in MARGALIYOT, פסיקתא רבתי, 185; cf. BRAUDE, trans., *Pesikta Rabbati*, 1.444). Words in brackets are added.

⁹⁸ That is, the ten occurrences of נִאֲמַר in Gen. 1:1-2:18.

⁹⁹ Mss. Parma, Dropsie, Casanata and Budapest all end here. The following words are included in *ed. princ.*, ed. MARGALIYOT, and ms. JTS 8195 only.

the corruptibility and repulsiveness of a bodily existence born from and nurtured by the demonic, feminine waters of impurity and chaos.

CHAPTER SIX

SOME Gnostic AND CHRISTIAN SOURCES

1. *The Waters of Materiality*

A similar association of water with materiality, impurity and femininity is found in two Gnostic treatises, *Hypostasis of the Archons* and *On the Origin of the World* (a.k.a. “the Untitled Treatise”).¹ The two documents are closely related by way of common source traditions, some of which are undoubtedly Jewish. Both were probably composed in Egypt during the third or very early fourth centuries CE, the former being in all likelihood slightly earlier than the latter. Originally written in Greek, they were translated into the Coptic versions found at Nag Hammadi before the end of the fourth century CE.² The Jewish sources to which both texts are indebted can therefore be dated with fair confidence to the late second or early third century CE, at latest. The origins of the *HZ* literary tradition have been located in the same period.

The author of *Orig. World* begins by stating the premise that, contrary to the prevailing opinion of both human beings and worldly deities, the chaos-darkness from which the material and psychic universe was formed was not a pre-existent reality, but a shadow cast by the “first product” of the spiritual world of the “immortal beings” or aeons, which has already come into being at the point where he begins his narrative. This “first product,” he tells us, was the light proceeding from Sophia, the likeness emanated by Pistis, who is one of the immortal aeons:

¹ This treatise should not, however, be confused with the *Untitled Text (UT)* in the Bruce Codex. See further below.

² See ROGER A. BULLARD, “Introduction” to *Hyp. Arch.*, and HANS-GEBHARD BETHGE, “Introduction” to *Orig. World*, in BENTLEY LAYTON, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7 together with XII, 2** *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1), and P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655* (2 vols.; CGL; NHS 20-21; Leiden, New York, etc.: Brill, 1989) 1.220-225 and 2.12-18. On the relationship between the two texts, see further: FRANCIS T. FALLON, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth: Jewish Elements in Gnostic Creation Myths* (NHS 10; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 10-24.

4. After the natural structure of the immortal beings had completely developed out of the infinite, a likeness then emanated from Pistis (Faith); it is called Sophia (Wisdom). It exercised volition and became a product resembling the primeval light. And immediately her will manifested itself as a likeness of heaven, having an unimaginable magnitude; it was between the immortal beings and those things that came into being after them, like [...]; she (Sophia) functioned as a veil dividing mankind from the things above.
5. Now the eternal realm (aeon) of truth has no shadow outside it, for the limitless light is everywhere within it. But its exterior is shadow, which has been called by the name darkness. From it, there appeared a force, presiding over the darkness. And the forces that came into being subsequent to them called the shadow "the limitless chaos." From it, every [kind] of divinity sprouted up [...] together with the entire place, [so that] also, [shadow] is posterior to the first product. It was <in> the abyss that [it] (shadow) appeared, deriving from the aforementioned Pistis.
6. Then shadow perceived that there was something mightier than it, and felt envy; and when it had become pregnant of its own accord, suddenly it engendered jealousy. Since that day, the principle of jealousy among all the eternal realms (aeons) and their worlds has been apparent. Now as for that jealousy, it was found to be an abortion without any spirit in it. Like a shadow it came into existence in a vast watery substance. Then the bile that had come into being out of the shadow was thrown into a part of chaos.
7. Since that day, a watery substance has been apparent. And what sank³ within it flowed away, being visible in chaos: as with a woman giving birth to her child – all her superfluities flow out; just so, matter came into being out of a shadow and was projected apart. And it (viz., matter) did not depart from chaos; rather, matter was in chaos, being in a part of it.
8. And when these things had come to pass, then Pistis came and appeared over the matter of chaos, which had been expelled like an aborted foetus – since there was no spirit in it. For all of it (viz., chaos) was limitless darkness and bottomless water.⁴

³ BETHGE, LAYTON *et al.* (see the following note) report that the meaning of this Coptic verb is uncertain.

⁴ *Orig. World*, §§4-8 (NHC ii.98,11-99,28), ed. LAYTON, trans. BETHGE, LAYTON and the SOCIETAS COPTICA HIEROSOLYMITANA, in LAYTON, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2-7*, 2.30-33. Lacunae within square brackets: each point represents a standard letter width; words within angled brackets: text added by editor, a conjecture (see *ibid.*, 9).

In this passage, the image of water represents the principle of materiality. Like Judan Nesiya and Leazar at *y.ag.* 77c,⁵ the Gnostic author is concerned to deny the belief that this *prima materia* existed prior to creation. It was produced, he tells us, as a by-product of “jealousy,” the spiritless abortion conceived in the womb of “shadow,” i.e., chaos, which is a product of Sophia, who is herself “a product [of Pistis] resembling the primeval light” (*Orig. World*, §4). Subsequently, Pistis Sophia (now regarded as a single entity in two aspects) causes this lifeless aborted fetus to become animated and to assume the form of the ignorant but powerful lion-like demiurge Yaldabaoth-Samael, who, seeing nothing other than himself but darkness and water, believes himself to be the supreme, pre-existent deity. This thought, taking verbal form, becomes the “spirit of God, moving to and fro upon the waters” (Gen. 1:2). The demiurge then causes solid matter, corresponding to the “dry land” of Gen. 1:9, to emerge from the watery *prima materia*.⁶ Thus, the creation of the demiurge does not extend beyond the material realm, which, according to this source, includes the heavens created by him for his offspring:

19. Now the prime parent (ἀρχιγενέτωρ) Yaldabaoth, since he possessed great authorities, created heavens for each of his offspring through verbal expression – created them beautiful, as dwelling places – and in each heaven he created great glories, seven times excellent. Thrones and mansions and temples, and also chariots and virgin spirits up to an invisible one and their glories, each one has these in his heaven; mighty armies of gods and lords and angels and archangels – countless myriads – so that they might serve.
20. The account of these matters you (sg.) will find in a precise manner in the first *Account* (λόγος) of *Oraia*.
21. And they were completed from this [first] heaven to as far up as the sixth heaven, namely that of Sophia.⁷

Hyp. Arch. begins with a summarized version of what seems to be basically the same myth, save that the events are given in a different order.

⁵ See pp. 123-124 above.

⁶ See *Orig. World*, §§9-14 (NHC ii.99,29-101,9), ed. LAYTON, trans. BETHGE, LAYTON *et al.*, 32-35.

⁷ *Orig. World*, §§19-21 (NHC ii.102,11-26), ed. LAYTON, trans. BETHGE, LAYTON, *et al.*, 38-39 (Greek script added).

Here, the scene opens with Samael's declaration that "It is I who am God; there is none [apart from me]," and this utterance descends "to chaos and the abyss, his mother," pursued by Samael himself, "at the instigation of Pistis Sophia."⁸ Samael's blasphemous utterance thus appears to perform the role of the "abortion" of "jealousy" in *Orig. World*, §6. Only after these events, do we find the following:

4. As incorruptibility looked down into the region of the waters, her image appeared in the waters; and the authorities of the darkness became enamored of her. But they could not lay hold of that image, which had appeared to them in the waters, because of their weakness – since beings that merely possess a soul cannot lay hold of those that possess a spirit – for they were from below, while it was from above.⁹

This passage seems to correspond to *Orig. World*, §8, "incorruptibility" being a term for Pistis Sophia. Here, however, it is Sophia herself who is identified as the Spirit of God moving upon the waters.¹⁰ It thus appears that this author has applied a different interpretation to the same traditional mythology, much of which is quite clearly of Jewish origin. Later, however, he refers to the same form of the myth as that found in *Orig. World*, §§4-14:

22. And the great angel Eleleth, understanding, spoke to me: "Within limitless realms dwells incorruptibility. Sophia, who is called Pistis, wanted to create something, alone without her consort; and her product was a celestial thing.
 "A veil exists between the world above and the realms that are below; and shadow came into being beneath the veil; and that shadow became matter; and that shadow was projected apart. And what she had created became a product in the matter, like an aborted fetus. And it assumed a plastic form molded out of shadow, and became an arrogant beast resembling a lion." It was androgynous, as I have already said, because it was from matter that it derived.
23. "Opening his eyes he saw a vast quantity of matter without limit; and he became arrogant, saying, 'It is I who am God, and there is none other apart from me.'

⁸ *Hyp. Arch.*, §§2-3 (NHC ii.86,27-87,11), ed. and trans. LAYTON in *idem*, *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2-7, 1.234-235.

⁹ *Hyp. Arch.*, §4 (NHC ii.87,11-20), ed., trans. LAYTON, 236-237.

¹⁰ See BULLARD, "Commentary," in *idem*, *The Hypostasis of the Archons: The Coptic Text with Translation and Commentary* (PTS 10; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1970) 55-58. Note that in this edition the pages are numbered 134-145, instead of 87-96 (see BULLARD, "Introduction," *ibid.*, 1, n. 1).

“When he said this, he sinned against the entirety. And a voice came forth from above the realm of absolute power, saying, ‘You are mistaken, Samael’ – which is ‘god of the blind.’”¹¹

In both these Gnostic texts, the material and spiritual worlds are radically distinguished from each other, being characterized by the opposing qualities of darkness/light and corruptibility/incorruptibility. Later, in terms reminiscent of the motif of purifying water found in Revelation and the Qumran *Hodayot*, the author of *Orig. World* informs us that

48. the water was purified through the likeness of Pistis Sophia, who had appeared to the prime parent in the waters. Justly, then, it has been said: “through the waters.” The holy water, since it vivifies the all, purifies it.¹²

In both sources, however, the symbol of water is primarily associated with materiality and corruptibility, and with the unclean by-products of bodily birth. This is congruent, in general terms at least, with the dominant symbolism of the passages from the *Hodayot*, Revelation, and *y.Hag. 77c* which were considered in the previous chapter, and also with the angels’ disgust at the substance and smell of those “born of women” in the hekhalot texts and the Moses midrashim. These similarities do not, of course, imply that the non-Gnostic Jewish and Christian sources embody the full-fledged Gnostic ideology of the two texts from Nag Hammadi. What defines these texts as Gnostic is the doctrine that the God of Genesis is himself an animal product of the material realm, that both he and his worshippers are deluded, and that the true knowledge (γνῶσις) confers liberation from his material kingdom. These ideas, which are in themselves quite foreign to the non-Gnostic sources, appear to represent a “mutation” of a strain of Jewish apocalyptic and mystical tradition which believed the material world and the processes of nature to be inherently impure, because corrupted by and subordinated to the demonic forces of unholiness and chaos. This strain of tradition, the influence of which has been encountered in a variety of sources, seems to have associated these qualities of the material universe with the feminine, maternal principle. This principle was in turn associated with

¹¹ *Hyp. Arch.*, §§22-23 (NHC ii.94,2-26), ed., trans. LAYTON, 252-253.

¹² *Orig. World*, §48 (NHC ii.108,28-109,1), ed. LAYTON, trans. BETHGE, LAYTON *et al.*, 52-53.

water, which was believed to be the primordial basis of all matter. The fiery, adamantine substance of the heavenly world thus stands in radical opposition to the corruptible substance of earthly matter, which, according to this tradition, originated in the chaos waters. In the Jewish sources, as we have seen, the two realms are separated by a shining firmament, which is also the pavement of God's dwelling. In *Hyp. Arch.*, §22, this function is performed by a veil. According to *Orig. World*, §4, this veil is apparently identical with Sophia herself.¹³

A different version of the myth of Pistis Sophia occurs in Books 1-3 of the compendious and rambling compilation now known by the title *Pistis Sophia*, composed in Egypt during the late third century CE.¹⁴ Here, Sophia herself is imprisoned and persecuted by the archons of the material universe, from whose power she is finally rescued by the Savior, Jesus.¹⁵ Prior to her deliverance, Sophia recites a series of thirteen songs of repentance (μετάνοια), the first of which begins as follows:

O Light of Lights, in whom I believed from the beginning, hear my repentance now at this time, O Light; save me, O Light, for wicked thoughts have entered into me.

I looked, O Light, to the parts below. I saw a light in that place, and I thought: I will go to that place to receive that light. And I went, and I came to be in the darkness which is in the Chaos below. And I was not able to proceed out to go to my place, because I was oppressed among all the emanations of the Authades. And the lion-faced power took away my light.¹⁶

A little later, Maria the mother of Jesus interprets this lament in a way which is clearly related to the traditions that we have been considering:

Hear now that I may speak concerning the repentance (μετάνοια) which the Pistis Sophia said, as she spoke of her sin, and all the things which had happened

¹³ See pp. 139 and 141 above.

¹⁴ On the dates of the components of *Pistis Sophia* and the *Books of Jeu*, see CARL SCHMIDT, ed. and trans., *Gnostische Schriften in koptischer Sprache aus dem Codex Bruccianus* (TU 8; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1892) 579-598, but note the reservations of FALLON (*The Enthronement of Sabaoth*, 127, n. 107) with regard to some of SCHMIDT's conclusions.

¹⁵ See especially *Pistis Sophia* 1.29-31 (41,25-46,27), 1.58-2.67 (112,6-149,5) and 2.81-82 (178,1-184,6) in SCHMIDT, ed., and VIOLET MACDERMOT, trans., *Pistis Sophia* (CGL; NHS 9; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 82-105, 224-299, and 356-369.

¹⁶ *Pistis Sophia*, 1.32 (47,1-14), ed. SCHMIDT, trans. MACDERMOT, 94-95. "The Authades" corresponds to Yaldabaoth in *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World*.

to her. Thy light-power once prophesied about it through David, the prophet, in the 68th Psalm:

Save me, O God, for the waters have come in to my soul (ψυχῆ).

I have sunk or been immersed by the mire of the abyss, and there was no power. I came to the depths of the sea (θάλασσα); a storm wind overwhelmed me.¹⁷

2. *The Realm of Air and Light*

In the fourth book of *Pistis Sophia*, which seems to be somewhat earlier than Books 1-3,¹⁸ we find an account of what appears to be a heavenly ascent by the post-resurrection Jesus, along with his disciples. Following a vision in which the heavens and the earth, with its mountains and its seas, all “flee to the west,” we are told:

.... And Jesus with his disciples remained in the Midst in an airy place (τόπος ἀέρινος) in the way of the Midst which is below the sphere (σφαῖρα). And they came to the first rank of the way of the Midst. But Jesus stood in the air (ἀήρ) of its place with his disciples.

The disciples of Jesus said to him: “What is this place in which we are?” Jesus said: “These are the places of the way of the Midst. For it happened, when the archons of the Adamas rebelled, and they continued to be concerned with sexual intercourse, begetting archons and archangels and angels and ministers and decans, then Jeu, the Father of my Father, came from the right. He bound them in a Heimarmene-sphere. For there were twelve aeons; Sabaoth, the Adamas, ruled over six, and Jabraoth, his brother, ruled over the other six. Now then Jabraoth believed in the mysteries of the light with his archons. And he practised the mysteries of the light and he abandoned the mystery of sexual intercourse. But Sabaoth, the Adamas, with his archons, continued to practise sexual intercourse. And when Jeu, the father of my father, saw that Jabraoth believed, he carried him with all his archons which had believed with him, he received him to himself in the sphere, he took him to a purified air in the presence of the light of the sun, between the places of those of the Midst and between the places of the Invisible God. He placed him there with the archons which had believed in him. And he carried Sabaoth, the Adamas, with his archons which did not practise the mysteries of the light but continued to practise the mysteries of sexual intercourse. He bound them within the sphere.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Pistis Sophia*, 1.33 (52,22-53,3), ed. SCHMIDT, trans. MACDERMOT, 104-107 (Greek script added). The biblical quotation is, in fact, Ps. 69:1-2.

¹⁸ See p. 143, n. 14 above.

¹⁹ *Pistis Sophia* 4.136 (355,5-356,8), ed. SCHMIDT, trans. MACDERMOT, 710-713.

It is not necessary, for the purpose of this study, to explain every cosmological detail of this account. It is, however, worth observing that Jesus and his disciples are described as standing upon the “purified air” of the realm of Jabraoth, which is outside the sphere of fate (εἰμαρμένη) in which Sabaoth and his archons are confined, and that admission to this pure, exalted realm appears to be contingent on the renunciation of sexual intercourse. Following a long cosmological and astrological discourse on the ruling powers and mechanisms of the sphere of fate, Jesus assures his disciples that he is about to give them the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which will enable them to compel the lower powers to submit to them.

When Jesus had said these things, he sang praise to the great name. The places of the way of the Midst were concealed, and Jesus with his disciples remained upon an air of very strong light.²⁰

The motif of standing upon “air of light” recalls the airy firmament of *Apoc. Abr.* 15:4-5 and the sixth heaven of *Asc. Isa.* 8:1.²¹ It is probable, therefore, that it is ultimately derived from the same traditional background as the “brilliant air” of the celestial pavement in the water vision episode in *HZ*.

Several Gnostic sources refer to a “new earth” or heavenly kingdom, frequently identified with the heavenly Zion or new Jerusalem, which is said to be composed of light and, not infrequently, pure air.²² Thus, we find in *The First Book of Jeu*, a text of approximately the same age as Book 4 of *Pistis Sophia*:²³

Hear me as I sing praises to thee, O First Mystery, who hast shone in thy mystery, and has established all the archons with Jabraoth, who have believed in the Kingdom of the Light, in a place of pure air²⁴

²⁰ *Pistis Sophia* 4.141 (367,9-12), ed. SCHMIDT, trans. MACDERMOT, 734-735.

²¹ See pp. 109-110 above.

²² See further GEDALIAHU A. G. STROUMSA, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (NHS 24; Leiden: Brill, 1984) 119-121.

²³ See p. 143, n. 14 above.

²⁴ *I Jeu* (frag.) 82,18-21, in SCHMIDT, ed., and MACDERMOT, trans., *The Books of Jeu and the Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex* (CGL; NHS 13; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 90-91.

This kingdom of pure light-air is a true reflection of the divine pleroma and so contains the authentic pattern of which the material universe is but a distorted imitation. In the Gnostic apocalypse *Zostrianos*, the seer ascends through the heavens, leaving his body on earth, until he reaches this realm, which is described as follows:

The great ruler on high Authrounios said to me, "Are you asking about those (places) through which you have passed? Or (ἦ) about this ethereal (ἀήρ) earth, why it has a worldly (κοσμικό ν) model (τύπος)?"

The [great] ruler on high Authrounios said [to me], "The ethereal (ἀήρ) earth came into being by a word, yet (δέ) it is the begotten and perishable things that it reveals by its indestructibility. With regard to the coming of the great judges (κριτής), (they came) not to (ἴνα) taste perception (αἴσθησις) and to be enclosed in creation (κτίσις). But (δέ) when they came upon it and saw through it the works of the world (κόσμος), they condemned its ruler (ἄρχων) to death because he was a model (τύπος) for the world (κόσμος), a [] and an origin (ἀρχή) of matter (ὕλη) begotten of lost darkness.²⁵

The realm of light is sometimes said to be the dwelling place of the righteous archons and of the great Savior figures of the various Gnostic systems, who descend from there to earth. *The Gospel of the Egyptians* calls it:

.... the ethereal (ἀέροδιος) earth, the receiver of God, where the holy men of the great light receive shape (εἰκό ν).²⁶

Similarly, *Apocalypse of Adam* states:²⁷

²⁵ *Zostrianos*, NHC viii.8,8-9,15, ed. LAYTON, trans. JOHN H. SIEBER, in SIEBER, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII* (CGL; NHS 31; Leiden, New York, etc.: Brill, 1991) 44-49. This text was probably written in Alexandria during the late second or early third century CE. See SIEBER, "Introduction," *ibid.*, 25-28; and LAYTON, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987) 122.

²⁶ *Gos. Eg.*, NHC iii.50,10-13 = iv.62,9-11, in ALEXANDER BÖHLIG and FREDERICK WISSE, eds. and trans., *Nag Hammadi Codices III,2 and IV,2: The Gospel of the Egyptians* (CGL; NHS 4; Leiden: Brill, 1975) 96-97; and see further their comments, *ibid.*, 178. The dates of the components of this composite text are unknown; see *ibid.*, 36-38, and LAYTON, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 101.

²⁷ *Apoc. Adam*, NHC v.82,23-28, ed. DOUGLAS M. PARROTT, trans. GEORGE W. MACRAE, in PARROTT, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2-5 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4* (CGL; NHS 11; Leiden: Brill, 1979), 188-189. Words in braces have been added by me for the sake of clarity; words in square brackets and parentheses,

He {God} caused a knowledge (γνώσις) of the undefiled one of truth to come to be [in] him {the thirteenth aeon}. [He (or "it")] said: '[Out of] a foreign air (ἄήρ) [from a] great aeon [the great] illuminator (φωστήρ) came forth.

Elsewhere in the same text, we learn that souls who are enlightened by the saving *gnosis*, having become free of their material bodies, will at death ascend to this ethereal realm and dwell there with "angels of the great light."²⁸ Thus also the *Untitled Text*:

20. And those begotten of matter rejoiced because they were remembered. And they rejoiced that they had come forth from what is narrow and painful, and they begged the hidden mystery: "Give authority to us so that we make for ourselves aeons and worlds, according to thy word which thou O Lord hast established with thy servant Hear us and send to us incorporeal spirits that they may dwell with us and teach us those things which thou hast promised to us, and that they may dwell in us and that we may become bodies to them

And he heard them, he sent powers of discernment which know the ordinance of the hidden aeons. He sent them forth according to the ordinance of the hidden ones. And he established ranks according to the ranks of the height, and according to the hidden ordinance. They began from below upwards, in order that the building should join together. And he created the land of air (ἄήρ), the dwelling-place of those that had come forth, that they should remain upon it until the establishment of those below them.²⁹

It is worth observing that the penultimate sentence of this text contains an allusion to the second chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, where the new creation, the church as the body of Christ, is represented by the image of the temple:

⁽²⁰⁾Christ Jesus ⁽²¹⁾in whom the whole structure, fitly joined together, grows into a holy sanctuary in the Lord, ⁽²²⁾in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling-place of God in spirit. (Eph. 2:20-22)

The term "authority" (ἐξουσία) near the beginning of the passage in *UT* may be another, admittedly fainter, echo of Eph. 2:1-6:

including Greek, are given by MACRAE. Though the date of this text is uncertain, it may possibly be from the late first or early second century CE; see MACRAE, "Introduction," *ibid.*, 152-153.

²⁸ *Apoc. Adam*, NHC v.72,10-11, ed. PARROTT, trans. MACRAE, 168-169.

²⁹ *UT*, §20 (262,6,-263,18), ed. SCHMIDT, trans. MACDERMOT, 286-289 (see p. 145, n. 24 above).

⁽¹⁾And you were dead in your trespasses and the sins, ⁽²⁾in which you once walked according to the aeon of this world, according to the archon of the authority of the air (κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, κατὰ τὸν ἀρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος), the spirit now working in the sons of disobedience, ⁽³⁾among whom we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, following the desires of the flesh and the senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, as are the others. ⁽⁴⁾But God, being rich in mercy ⁽⁶⁾raised us up with [him] and seated us together with [him] in the heavenly places (ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις)³⁰ in Christ Jesus.

Here, “the archon of the authority of the air” is apparently the spirit who rules over the world of the flesh, the dwelling place of the “sons of disobedience.” The heavenly realm to which those “in Christ” have been “raised up” is, it seems, located above the sphere over which this archon rules. The context of this imagery in Ephesians is primarily one of “realized eschatology,” but in 1 Thessalonians we find the following future-eschatological prophetic statement:

⁽¹⁶⁾The Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with a trumpet of God, will descend from heaven. And the dead in Christ will rise first, ⁽¹⁷⁾then we, the living who remain, will be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air (ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες, οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἄερα).³¹

This passage, together with Eph. 2:2, is quoted by Origen, according to whom the airy realm is a kind of spiritual academy in which the souls of the dead are instructed about the principles that govern all worldly phenomena.³² Like the prisoners in Plato’s underground cave,³³ they have been able to perceive only the diverse forms of those phenomena while imprisoned in the body. This realm, then, corresponds fairly closely to the world of the platonic forms and, in that it represents the

³⁰ Or: “... among the heavenly beings”

³¹ 1 Thess. 4:16-17. It is worth observing that Paul, who is the author of this letter but, almost certainly, not Ephesians, uses the verb ἀρπάζω (in its passive form) in only two other instances, both in the account of his rapture into Paradise (2 Cor. 12:2 and 4).

³² Origen, *de Princip.*, ii.11,5-6.

³³ Plato, *Republic*, vii.514a-521b.

true archetype of the material creation, to the “airy earth” of the gnostic sources. Origen continues:

It is necessary, therefore, to speak in such a way of the abode in the air (*de aëria sede*). For I think that the saints who depart from this life will dwell in a place situated on the earth, which holy scripture calls Paradise, as if in a place of instruction or, so to speak, a classroom or school for souls, in which they may be taught about all the things that they had seen on earth, and also to receive some indications concerning things that are to follow in the future — just as in this life they had received some intimations of future events, albeit *in a mirror dimly* (1 Cor. 13:12), but nonetheless in part, which in their proper time and place will be revealed more clearly and more lucidly to the saints. If anyone be whole of heart, with a purer intelligence and a more highly trained perception, he will progress more swiftly and ascend to a place of air, and arrive in the heavenly realms (*uelocius proficiens cito et ad aeris locum ascendet et ad caelorum regna perueniet*) by way of those various places — habitations (*mansiones*), so to speak — which the Greeks have called “spheres” (σφαιρα, i.e., globes (*globos*), but which holy scripture has in truth named “heavens” (*caelos*). In each of these places, he will first see the things that are done there, and secondly, he will discover the reason why they are so done, and thus he will pass through each level in order, following him who has entered into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, who says: *I desire that where I am, these too may be* (Jn. 17:24). And he indicates this diversity of places when he says: *In my Father’s house there are many habitations* (Jn. 14:2).³⁴

The similarities between this text and *UT*, §20 are very striking. Both writers associate entry into the airy realm with the giving and receiving of instruction about the concealed principles by which the universe is governed. Both are at pains to emphasize the principles of hierarchy and order in connection with the soul’s ascent. Both allude to Ephesians 2. It is clear, then, that Origen and the authors of the Gnostic texts drew from a common reservoir of traditional imagery concerning an incorruptible realm of pure light-air located above the material, mutable world at the boundary of the divine sphere. While it should not be assumed that Origen’s platonizing interpretation of Eph. 2:2 and 1 Thess. 4:16-17 accurately reflects the original meaning of these New Testament passages, the image of a land of pure air and light beyond the firmament above the earth has been encountered in a variety of

³⁴ Origen, *De princip.*, ii.11.6,213-235, in HENRI CROUZEL and MANLIO SIMONETTI, eds. and trans., *Origène. Traité des principes. Tome I (Livres I et II)* (SC 252; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1978) 408-411.

non-Christian and non-Gnostic Jewish sources which betray little trace of the direct influence of hellenistic philosophy. It is also interesting to observe that Origen's formulation of this myth, in addition to its platonic elements, has points of contact with the Jewish tradition of ascent to the celestial temple, including his identification of the "abode in the air" with "Paradise," and of the celestial habitations (*mansiones*) with the heavens.

Independent testimony to the tradition of the ethereal realm is provided by a passage of the Hermetic tractate *Asclepius*. This text has survived in complete form only in Latin translation, but a Coptic version of the middle portion of the tractate, found at Nag Hammadi, is stylistically closer to the two surviving fragments of the Greek original.³⁵ The Coptic and Latin versions of the passage in question are very different:³⁶

Latin *Asclepius*

Hear, then, Asclepius. When the departure of the soul from the body has taken place, then a judgement and examination of its merit will follow under the power of the supreme daimon. When he has discerned that it is pious and just, he allows it to dwell in the regions under his authority. But if he observes that it is smeared with the stains of crimes and defiled with vices, then casting it down from the heights to the depths, he hands it over to the storms and whirlwinds that are frequently in discord in the air, fire, and water (*desuper ad ima deturbans procellis turbabinibusque aëris, ignis et aquae saepe discordantibus*

Coptic Version

Listen, O Asclepius. There is a great daimon (δαίμων). The Great God has appointed him to be an overseer (ἐπίσκοπος) or judge (δικαστής) over the souls (ψυχή) of men. And God has placed him in the middle of the air (ἀήρ) between the earth and heaven. Now when the soul comes forth from (the) body (σῶμα), it is necessary (ἀνάγκη) that it meet this daimon. Immediately he (the daimon) will surround this one (masc.) and he will examine him in regard to the character that he has developed in his life. And if he finds that he piously performed all of his actions for which he came into the

³⁵ See A. D. NOCK, "Introduction" to *Asclepius*, in *idem*, ed., and A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, trans., *Corpus Hermeticum* (4 vols.; Collection des universités de France; Paris: Société d'édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1945-54) 2.275-284; and PARROTT, "Introduction" to *Asclepius* 21-29, in *idem*, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2-5 and VI*, 396.

³⁶ Latin *Asclepius*, §28, ed. NOCK-FESTUGIÈRE, 2.334,3-351,2; Coptic *Asclepius*, NHC vi.76,21-77,24; both texts are taken from PIETER A. DIRKSE and DOUGLAS M. PARROTT, eds. and trans., *Asclepius* 21-29, in PARROTT, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codices V,2-5 and VI*, 440-445.

trahit), in order that it might be dragged away by the cosmic turbulence between heaven and earth, forever tossed about in all directions by eternal punishments (*ut inter caelum et terram mundanis fluctibus in diversa semper aeternis poenis agitata rapiatur*).

world (κόσμος) this (demon) will allow him [...] turn him. But [if he sees] [...] in this one [...] he brought his life into [evil] deeds, he grasps him, as he [flees] upwards and throws him down so that he is suspended between heaven and earth and is punished with a great punishment. And he will be deprived (ἀποστερεῖν) of his hope (ἐλπίς) and be in great pain (λύπη). And that soul has been put neither on the earth nor in heaven. But it has come to the open sea (πέλαγος) of the air (ἀήρ) of the world (κόσμος), the place where there is a great fire, and crystal (κρύσταλλον) water, and furrows of fire, and a great upheaval. The bodies are tormented (in) various ways. Sometimes they are cast upon raging waters; at other times they are cast down into the fire in order that it may destroy them.

No trace of Christian influence is apparent in either of these texts. The Latin version appears to be a fairly typical product of hellenistic theosophical speculation and is, in and of itself, of little relevance to this study. The Coptic version, however, betrays the influence of the Jewish heavenly ascent tradition. The combined imagery of “a great fire, and crystal water and a great upheaval” is, as we have seen, very typical of the apocalyptic sources and is ultimately derived from the language of Ezekiel 1 itself. Since this version is probably closer to the original, it is likely that the Latin recension has been rewritten by a hellenistic or late antique redactor for whom such Jewish apocalyptic details were no longer meaningful. If so, the two versions of this interesting text provide evidence of a developmental trajectory which originated in Jewish apocalypticism and culminated in a fully hellenized theosophy. This being the case, the expression “the open sea of the air of the world” in the Coptic text may well be derived from the same traditional background as the wave-like “brilliant air” of the celestial pavement as described in the water vision episode in *HZ*. The contexts of the two passages, although by no means identical, are broadly parallel: in *HZ*, the examination of the *יורד מרכבה* at the entrance to the celestial sanctuary; in *Asclepius*, the soul’s post-mortem examination between earth and

heaven, in the intermediate region of the air. The Gnostic texts and New Testament passages considered above, along with Origen's discussion of Eph. 2:2 and 1 Thess. 4:16-17, appear to be located at various points along the same or similar trajectories of religious and literary development.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TEMPLE VEILS AND CELESTIAL FIRMAMENTS

1. *The Enthronement of Sabaoth*

In both *Orig. World* and *Hyp. Arch.*, the spiritual and material worlds are separated by a veil (*Orig. World*, §4: παραπέτασμα; *Hyp. Arch.*, §22: καταπέτασμα). Matter itself is said to be the shadow of the realm of light, projected through that veil,¹ which, according to *Orig. World*, §4, is identical with Sophia herself. The supposition that the veil of Sophia corresponds to (one of) the firmament(s) of the Jewish apocalyptic and מרכבה tradition is confirmed by the following passage from the eschatological section at the end of the treatise:

144. Then the sun will become dark. And the moon will cause its light to cease. The stars of the sky will cancel their circuits. And a great clap of thunder will come out of a great force that is above all the forces of chaos, where the firmament of the woman is situated. Having created the first product, she will put away the wise fire of intelligence and clothe herself with irrational wrath.
145. Then she will pursue the gods of chaos, whom she created along with the prime parent. She will cast them down into the abyss. They will be obliterated because of their wickedness²

If we combine this information with that given in *Orig. World*, §21,³ it would appear that the veil – or firmament – of Sophia is located in the sixth heaven. This is not, however, consistent with the cosmological system of the treatise as a whole, according to which the seven heavens are assigned to the seven sons of Yaldabaoth with their retinues, and the separation between the realm of the aeons and the material universe is located *above* the seventh heaven.⁴ This model, which is encountered

¹ See BULLARD, "Commentary" in *idem*, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, 104-105.

² *Orig. World*, §§144-145 (NHC ii.126,10-24), ed. LAYTON, trans. BETHGE, 2.90-91.

³ See p. 140 above.

⁴ See *Orig. World*, §16 (NHC ii.101,25-102,2), ed. LAYTON, trans. BETHGE, 2.36-37; §19 (p. 140 above); and §23-34 (below).

in a variety of Gnostic and Hermetic sources, embodies a standard hellenistic cosmological belief.⁵ It also concurs with the account in *Hyp. Arch.*, §§26-29 of the elevation by Sophia of Sabaoth, the repentant son of Yaldabaoth-Samael, where “the veil (καταπέτασμα) between above and below” is located between the seventh heaven and the eighth (§28). A longer version of this narrative, which does not mention the veil but agrees with *Hyp. Arch.* in most other respects, occurs in *Orig. World*, §§23-35. As has been recognized by several commentators, these two texts are quite clearly indebted to Jewish מרכבה traditions.⁶

*Hyp. Arch.*⁷

26. “And he [Yaldabaoth] said to his offspring, ‘It is I who am the god of the entirety.’”

*Orig. World*⁸

23. Now when the heavens had consolidated themselves along with their forces and all their administration, the prime parent became insolent. And he was honored by all the army of angels. And all the gods and their angels gave blessing and honor to him. And for his part he was delighted and continually boasted, saying to them, “I have no need of anyone.” He said, “It is I who am God, and there is no other one that exists apart from me.”

⁵ See further, for example, HANS JONAS, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon, 1958) 43-44, 190-192, and 260-262; RUDOLPH, *Gnosis*, 67-113; and SCHOLEM, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 65-74.

⁶ See especially: FALLON, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth*, and further, for example: BULLARD, “Commentary,” in *idem*, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, 111; GRUENWALD, *Apocalyptic*, 110-118; *idem*, “Jewish Sources for the Gnostic Texts from Nag Hammadi?” in *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (3 vols.; Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1975-77) 3.45-56 (English Section), reprinted in *idem*, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, 207-220; *idem*, “Jewish Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism,” in JOSEPH DAN and FRANK TALMAGE, eds., *Studies in Jewish Mysticism: Proceedings of Regional Conferences Held at the University of California, Los Angeles and McGill University in April, 1978* (Cambridge, MA: Association of Jewish Studies, 1982) 41-55, reprinted in GRUENWALD, *From Apocalyptic to Gnosticism*, 191-205; ALEXANDER, “Introduction” to *3 Enoch* in *OTP*, 1.236-238; and HALPERIN, *Faces*, 511-517.

⁷ *Hyp. Arch.*, §§ 26-29 (NHC ii.95,13-35), ed. LAYTON, 1.254-257. The angel Eleleth is speaking.

⁸ *Orig. World*, §§23-35 (NHC ii.103,3-106,16), ed. LAYTON, trans. BETHGE, 2.40-47.

“And Zoe (Life), the daughter of Pistis Sophia, cried out and said to him, ‘You are mistaken, Sakla!’ – for which the alternate name is Yaltabaoth [*sic*]. She breathed into his face, and her breath became a fiery angel for her; and that angel bound Yaldabaoth and cast him down into Tartarus below the abyss.

27. “Now when his offspring Sabaoth saw the force of that angel, he repented and condemned his father and his mother matter.

28. “He loathed her, and he sang songs of praise up to Sophia and her daughter Zoe. And Sophia and Zoe caught him up and gave him charge of the seventh heaven, below the veil (καταπέτασμα) between above and below. And he is called ‘God of the forces, Sabaoth,’ since he is above the forces of chaos, for Sophia established him.

24. And when he said this, he sinned against all the immortal beings who give answer. And they laid it to his charge.

25. Then when Pistis saw the impiety of the chief ruler she was filled with anger. She was invisible. She said, “You are mistaken, Samael,” that is, “blind god.” “There is an immortal man of light who has been in existence before you and who will appear among your modelled forms (πλάσματα); he will trample you to scorn just as potter’s clay is pounded. And you will descend to your mother, the abyss, along with those that belong to you. For at the consummation of your (pl.) works the entire defect that has become visible out of the truth will be abolished, and it will cease to be and will be like what has never been.”

26. Saying this, Pistis revealed her likeness of her greatness in the waters. And so doing she withdrew up to her light.

27. Now when Sabaoth the son of Yaldabaoth heard the voice of Pistis, he sang praises to her, and [he] condemned the father [...] at the word of Pistis; and he praised her because she had instructed them about the immortal man and his light. Then Pistis Sophia stretched out her finger and poured upon him some light from her light, to be a condemnation of his father. Then when Sabaoth was illumined, he received great authority against all the forces of chaos. Since that day, he has been called “Lord of the Forces.”

28. He hated his father, the darkness, and his mother, the abyss, and loathed his sister, the thought of the prime parent, which moved to and fro upon the waters. And because of his light all

the authorities of chaos were jealous of him. And when they had become disturbed, they made a great war in the seven heavens.

29. Then when Pistis Sophia had seen the war, she dispatched seven archangels to Sabaoth from her light. They snatched him up to the seventh heaven. They stood before him as attendants. Furthermore she sent him three more archangels and established the kingdom for him over everyone so that he might dwell above the twelve gods of chaos.

30. Now when Sabaoth had taken up the place of repose in return for his repentance, Pistis also gave him her daughter Zoe (Life) together with great authority so that she might instruct him about all things that exist in the eighth heaven.

31. And as he had authority, he made himself first of all a mansion. It is huge, magnificent, seven times as great as all those that exist in the seven heavens.

29. "Now when these (events) had come to pass, he made himself a huge four-faced chariot of cherubim, and infinitely many angels to act as ministers, and also harps and lyres.

32. And before his mansion he created a throne, which was huge and was upon a four-faced chariot called "Cherubin." Now the Cherubin was eight shapes per each of the four corners, lion forms and calf forms and human forms and eagle forms, so that all the forms amount to sixty-four forms (!) – and (he created) seven archangels that stand before it; he is the eighth, and has authority. All the forms amount to seventy-two. Furthermore, from this chariot the seventy-two gods took shape; they took shape so that they might rule over the seventy-two languages of the peoples. And by that throne he created other, serpentlike

angels, called “Saraphin,” which praise him at all times.

33. Thereafter he created a congregation (ἐκκλησία) of angels, thousands and myriads, numberless, which resembled the congregation in the eighth heaven; and a firstborn called Israel – which is, “the man who sees God”; and another being, called Jesus Christ, who resembles the savior above in the eighth heaven and who sits at his right upon a revered throne. And at his left there sits the virgin of the holy spirit, upon a throne and glorifying him. And the seven virgins stand before her, possessing thirty harps, and psalteries and trumpets, glorifying him. And all the armies of the angels glorify him, and they bless him.

“And Sophia took her daughter Zoe and had her sit upon his right to teach him about the things that exist in the eighth (heaven); and the angel [of] wrath she placed upon his left. [cf. *Orig. World*, §30.]

34. Now where he sits is upon a throne of light within a great cloud that covers him. And there was no one with him in the cloud except Sophia the daughter of Pistis, instructing him about all the things that exist in the eighth heaven, so that the likenesses of those things might be created, in order that his reign might endure until the consummation of the heavens of chaos and their forces.

[Since] that day, [his right] has been called life; and the left has come to represent the unrighteousness of the realm of absolute power above.

36. Now Pistis Sophia set him apart from the darkness and summoned him to her right, and the prime parent she put at her left. Since that day, right has been called justice, and left has been called wickedness.

2. Jewish Traditions about the Tabernacle and its Curtains

The symbolism of heavenly veils in Gnostic, Jewish and early Christian sources has been analyzed by OTFRIED HOFIUS,⁹ who distinguishes between two types of veil in Gnostic literature. A few texts speak of a veil or veils within the pleroma itself, separating the spheres of the aeons from each other.¹⁰ Other sources, however, speak of a veil placed between the pleroma and the material-psychic universe,¹¹ as described in *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World*, and in *Pistis Sophia*, where it is called “the veil (καταπέτασμα) of the Treasury of Light.”¹² The latter veil is frequently associated with imagery of the temple and/or with the firmament of Gen. 1:6.¹³ This is consistent with the symbolic significance

⁹ OTFRIED HOFIUS, *Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Hebräer 6,19 f. und 10,19 f.* (WUNT 14; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1972).

¹⁰ *Pistis Sophia*, 1.14 (23,3), 1.29 (41,25-43,25), 2.84 (186,19-20), ed. SCHMIDT, trans. MACDERMOT, 46-47, 82-87, 372-373; *1 Jeu*, §§33-40 (83,4-92,17), ed. SCHMIDT, trans. MACDERMOT, 93-111. Compare *UT*, §7 (235,3-238,25, especially 237,3), ed. SCHMIDT, trans. MACDERMOT, 232-239, where the crowned form of the Only Begotten One (μονογενής) is said to be surrounded by a veil (καταπέτασμα) with twelve gates, each guarded by twelve myriads of archangels and angels; Ps. 68:17 (wrongly identified by MACDERMOT as Ps. 67:1) is cited at 236,13-16. See further HOFIUS, *Der Vorhang*, 43-46, and SCHOLEM, *Major Trends*, 72.

¹¹ E.g., *Sophia Jesu Christi*, NHC iii.114,18-25/BG 118,7-19, in PARROTT, ed. and trans., *Nag Hammadi Codices III,3-4 and V,1 with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502,3 and Oxyrynchus Papyrus 1081* (CGL; NHS 27; Leiden, New York, etc.: Brill, 1991) 169-170; the *Untitled Text*, §§12-13 (251,7-29) and §§18-19 (260,13-262,4), ed. SCHMIDT, trans. MACDERMOT, 264-265 and 282-287; *Gosp. Phil.*, NHC ii.84,14-85,21, ed. LAYTON, trans. WESLEY W. ISENBERG in LAYTON, ed. *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2-7*, 1.210-213. A third category of veil “between those of the right and those of the left” (i.e., between the forces of good and evil), to which HOFIUS makes no reference, is found in *Pistis Sophia* 4.139-140 (361,22-366,6), ed. SCHMIDT, trans. MACDERMOT, 722-733.

¹² *Pistis Sophia*, 1.29-31 (42,20; 43,19-20; 45,19-20), ed. SCHMIDT, trans. MACDERMOT, 82-46; cf. 2.86 (194,16-21), ed. SCHMIDT, trans. MACDERMOT, 388-389.

¹³ See further HOFIUS, *Der Vorhang*, 29-43. In this category, HOFIUS also makes a distinction between texts such as those listed in the previous note, which state that the veil was created by the First Father as a protective barrier between the realms of light and darkness, and those like *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World*, in which the veil “represents the first unlawful creation of Pistis Sophia, which in turn caused the genesis of the material world” (*ibid.*, 29). It is, however, questionable whether these sources consider the veil to be in and of itself “unlawful.” As observed above, moreover, *Orig. World*, §4 states that the veil is a function of Sophia herself, not her creation.

of the curtains of the tabernacle or temple, as encountered in a wide variety of Jewish sources. Philo, describing the tabernacle, states that the veil between the outer tent and the holy of holies represents the separation between the mutable and immutable worlds:

What is *the veil* (Exod. 26:31)?

By the veil the inside (= the holy of holies) is set off and separated from the things outside, for the inside is holy and truly divine, while the outside, though it is also holy, does not attain the same nature or a similar one. Moreover, it indicates the changeable parts of the world which are sublunary and undergo changes of direction, and the heavenly (region) which is without transient events and is unchanging. And (it shows) how they are set off and separated from one another, for the ethereal and airy substance is, as it were, a covering (ὕπὸ τῆς ἀίθερίας καὶ ἀερίας οὐσίας ὡς καλύμματος)

What is the meaning of the words, *Thou shalt set apart the veil between the holy of holies* (Exod. 26:33)?

I have said that the simple holy (parts of the tabernacle) are classified with the sense-perceptible heaven (τάττεται κατὰ τὸν αἰσθητὸν οὐρανόν), whereas the inner (parts), which are called the holy of holies, (are classified) with the intelligible world (κατὰ τὸν νοητὸν κόσμον). The incorporeal world is set off and separated from the visible one by the mediating Logos as by a veil so that there is between them something (at once) invisible and visible of substance.¹⁴

A very similar symbolic interpretation of the tabernacle is recorded by Josephus, who describes the interior of the tent as follows:

As for the inside, he (Moses) divided its length into three sections. At a measured distance of ten cubits from the innermost part, he placed four pillars the space within these pillars was the most holy place (ἄδυτον), but the rest of the tabernacle was open for the priests. The measurements of the division of the tent were, in fact, an imitation of the whole of nature: the third section, inside the four pillars, to which the priests were not admitted, was like a heaven peculiar to God; whereas the space of twenty cubits was like sea and land which are inhabited by men, and so this part was reserved for the priests Embroidered curtains of fine linen (ὑφέσει βύσσου), in which purple, and blue, and scarlet colors were mixed together, were spread over the tent. The first of these measured ten cubits in each direction, and was spread over the pillars that divid-

¹⁴ Philo, *Quaest. in Exod.* ii.91, 94; English and reconstructed Greek text according to RALPH MARCUS, trans., *Philo, Supplement 2, Questions and Answers on Exodus, Translated from the Ancient Armenian Version of the Original Greek* (LCL; Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press and Heinemann, 1953) 140-143.

ed the sanctuary (τὸν νεῶν), and screened off the innermost sanctum (τὸ ἄδυτον), making it invisible to the eyes of anyone This curtain (φάρακος) was very beautiful, being embroidered with every kind of flower that the earth produces, interwoven with other designs of all kinds to enhance its adornment, except for the images of living creatures (πλὴν ζώων μορφῆς). A second curtain, equivalent in size, texture and color to the first, covered the five pillars that stood at the entrance. It was supported by rings at the corner of each pillar and hung down from the top to the middle of the pillar, the rest being left as a passage for the priests to enter beneath it. Over this, there was a linen veil (φάρακος) of the same dimensions¹⁵

Following this, Josephus goes on to describe the curtains that covered the exterior of the tent, including an outer layer of skins (cf. Exod. 26:14) which, seen from a distance, “seemed not at all to differ from the color of the sky.”¹⁶ In these sources, as observed by HOFIUS:

“... the idea of a curtain between heaven and earth is so strongly anchored in the symbolic meaning of the tabernacle that it can only be understood in connection with this meaning.”¹⁷

This symbolic correspondence is also encountered in rabbinic traditions about the tabernacle:¹⁸

R. Jacob ben R. Assi said:

Why does it say, *O LORD, I have loved the habitation of your house and the place of the dwelling of your Glory* (Ps. 26:8)? In order to establish a correspondence with the creation of the world. How so?

On the first day, it is written, *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth* (Gen. 1:1), and it is also written, *who stretches out the heavens like a curtain* (כִּי־רִיָּעָה) (Ps. 104:2). And what is written about the tabernacle? *And you shall make curtains of goats' hair* (יָרִיעַת עֲזִים) [*for a tent over the tabernacle*] (Exod. 26:7).

On the second day, it is written, *Let there be a firmament* (Gen. 1:6a) and he decreed a separation (הַבְּרִלָה) between them, as it is written, *and let it divide* (מַבְרִיל) *between the waters and the waters* (Gen. 1:6b). And regarding the tabernacle

¹⁵ Josephus, *Ant.* iii.122-128 (ed. THACKERAY *et al.*, 4.372-376); compare Exod. 27:7-36, and see further below.

¹⁶ Josephus, *Ant.* iii.132 (ed. THACKERAY *et al.*, 4.378).

¹⁷ HOFIUS, *Der Vorhang*, 23.

¹⁸ *Tanh. pegudei*, §2, ed. ENOCH ZONDEL, *מדרש תנחומא* (2 vols. in 1; Jerusalem: Lewin-Epstein, 1964) 1.132a; cf. *Numb. R.* 12.16.

it is written, *and let the curtain divide* (וְהַבְדִּילָה הַפָּרֹכֶת) *for you [between the sanctuary and the holy of holies]* (Exod.26:33).

HOFIUS believes this symbolism to be of non-rabbinic, “hellenistic Jewish” origin and attributes the above passage to a rabbinic author who, he thinks, was seeking to construct a biblical-exegetical basis for “the hellenistic-Judaic Theologoumenon of the universal temple.”¹⁹ This theory is, of course, unnecessary, since it is now known that the cosmic temple, far from being an exclusively “hellenistic” Jewish concept, was a central motif of the apocalyptic and מרכבה traditions.²⁰

3. “Veil” as the Name of the First Heaven

According to a widespread rabbinic tradition, “Veil” (וילון, from Greek βῆλον or Latin *velum*²¹) is the name of the lowest of the seven heavens, that above it being called “firmament” (רקיע). The opening and closing of the וילון are said to mark the distinction between day and night:²²

Resh Laqish said:

There are seven (heavens), and these are they: מעון, זבול, שחקים, זבול, מעון, זבול, מעון. מכוון, ערברת וילון has no purpose, save that it comes in in the morning and goes out in the evening, and renews the work of creation every day, as it is said, *Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out as a tent to dwell in* (נְרוֹטָהּ) (Isa. 40:22). רקיע is that in which the sun, the moon, the stars and constellations are set, as it is said, *and God set them in the firmament of heaven* (Gen. 1:17).

A degree of uncertainty regarding the precise details of this mechanism is evident in the sources.²³ Rashi explains that the וילון is drawn aside

¹⁹ HOFIUS, *Der Vorhang*, 25.

²⁰ See pp. 29-33 above.

²¹ See JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 373a-b, and the sources cited there.

²² *b.Hag.* 12b (and see the following note). The same list of the names of the heavens occurs at 3 *Enoch* 17:1-3 (and see ALEXANDER’s note *f ad loc.* in *OTP*, 1.269). See further HOFIUS, *Der Vorhang*, 19-22.

²³ *Midrash Kohen* (ed. JELLINEK, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 2.36-37) and *Yalqut Shim‘oni*, §445 to Isa. 40:22 [לקוט שמעוני על תורה נביאים וכתובים] [2 vols., paginated as 1; Jerusalem: Lewin-Epstein, 1966] 2.792a) both agree with *b.Hag.* 12b, but *SRdB*, §34 (ed. WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.39) states that the veil “comes in” at night and “goes

to reveal the light of day and covers it at night. According to the *Tosafot*, however, the וילון is the opaque covering of the daytime sky, which is drawn aside to reveal the starry firmament at night. *Midrash Konen* agrees with the latter explanation:

Why is it called וילון? Because it is like a royal standard (סימן של מלכים) which is brought in through the gate of a royal palace. When the king goes into his palace, it is brought in, and when he goes out, it is carried forth. In the same way, at dawn, when the sun comes forth to minister to the world (לשמש בעולם), the וילון is spread out in the world and covers the surface of the firmament (פני ריקיע) from the sun's orb as it travels through the world. And when the sun goes in, it is rolled up and taken away, so that the moon may rise, with the stars and the planets, to shine upon the surface of the earth, which is five hundred years' journey from וילון.²⁴

The relationship described here between וילון and ריקיע is rather reminiscent of that between the curtain at the entrance to the tabernacle and its linen veil, as described by Josephus. The word וילון is, in fact, applied to this curtain (MT: קוקר) at *Tg. Ps.-J. Exod. 36:37*.²⁵ In terms of the cosmic tabernacle/temple structure, however, the lowest of the heavenly levels corresponds more naturally to the curtain around the outer court (Exod. 27:9-18), which Josephus describes as follows:

.... a cloth of fine linen, woven of many colors (σινδών δ' ἐκ βύσσου ποικιλωτάτη), went around all the pillars, and hung down in full, loose folds from their capitals to their bases, and enclosed the whole space in such a way that it seemed not unlike a wall around it.²⁶

It must be conceded that the loan-word וילון, used in the ordinary sense of “veil” or “curtain,” is not generally associated with the tabernacle or the temple in rabbinic sources, and that the heavenly וילון, though associated with the tent imagery of Isa. 40:22,²⁷ is nowhere explicitly

out” in the daytime.

²⁴ *Midrash Konen*, ed. JELINEK, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 2.37.

²⁵ Ed. CLARKE, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch*, 113. *Targum Onkelos* (ed. SPERBER, *The Bible in Aramaic*, 1.156) uses the term פרוסא.

²⁶ Josephus, *Ant.*, iii.110 (ed. THACKERAY *et al.*, 4.368).

²⁷ See *b.Hag.* 12b on p. 161 above.

connected to the symbolic structure of the cosmic temple.²⁸ It is also true that, given the variety of cosmological systems encountered in late second temple and rabbinic Jewish literature, with their differing numbers of heavens and diverse models of the cosmic temple, it would almost certainly be misguided to look for precise, systematic correspondences between these various sources. Nonetheless, it is possible to discern in them the broad outlines and essential features, at least, of a developing tradition of symbolism regarding the veils of the temple, and its principal variations.

4. *The Veils of the Temple*

In the biblical tabernacle, there are three points at which a screen or curtain (מָסָךְ) is said to have been located: at the entrance to the outer court;²⁹ at the entrance to the sanctuary tent;³⁰ and between the sanctuary and the holy of holies, the last being called the פָּרֹכֶת הַמָּסָךְ (“the veil of the screen”)³¹ or, more simply, the פָּרֹכֶת.³² LXX designates these three curtains by the terms κάλυμμα (“covering”), ἐπίσπαστρον (“screen”), and καταπέτασμα (“veil”) respectively. Philo likewise uses καταπέτασμα of the innermost curtain, but applies κάλυμμα to that at the entrance to the sanctuary and refers to the outermost curtain as ὕφασμα (“a woven cloth”).³³ Josephus uses the terms φάρσος, ὕφος, and σινδών, apparently without distinction, when describing the tabernacle,³⁴ but in the context of the temple, he applies καταπέτασμα to the curtain at the entrance to the outer sanctuary.³⁵ These three points

²⁸ On יָלִין in rabbinic literature, see JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 373a-b, and the references cited there, but note the exceptional case, cited above, of *Tg. Ps.-J.* Exod. 36:37. In the hekhalot writings, the word occurs only in lists of the seven heavens like those cited above; see SCHÄFER, ed., *Konkordanz*, 1.216b, and the sources cited there.

²⁹ Exod. 27:16, etc.; Numb. 3:26.

³⁰ Exod. 26:36, etc.; Numb. 3:25, 31.

³¹ Exod. 35:12, 39:34, 40:21, and Numb. 4:5.

³² Exod. 26:31-35 (four times), etc.; compare Lev. 4:6, פָּרֹכֶת הַקֹּדֶשׁ, and 24:3, פָּרֹכֶת הַעֲדָת.

³³ Philo, *Mos.*, ii.86, 87, 93; see F. H. COLSON's note in *idem* and G. H. WHITAKER, trans., *Philo, with an English Translation* (10 vols.; LCL; London and Cambridge, MA: Heinemann and Harvard University Press, 1929-62) 6.492-493.

³⁴ Josephus, *Ant.* iii.108-133 (ed. THACKERAY *et al.*, 4.366-378).

³⁵ Josephus, *War* v.212 (see p. 169 below).

of transition from lower to higher degrees of holiness correspond to the divisions of the threefold cosmic temple structure,³⁶ and if the rabbinic conception of the וילון as the lowest heaven may legitimately be correlated with this structure, it would correspond to the first of these divisions. In biblical descriptions of the Jerusalem temple, the second and third divisions (i.e., the entrances to the sanctuary and the holy of holies) are marked by double doors, which are *carved with cherubim, palm trees and flowers, and overlaid with gold*. These, however, appear to be additional to the curtains, rather than displacing them.³⁷ This is certainly true of the entrance to the holy of holies, according to the chronicler, who tells us that Solomon *made the veil (הַפְּרֹכֶת) of blue, purple, crimson and fine linen, and worked cherubim upon it* (2 Chron. 3:14).

5. *The Curtain Before the Throne*

In rabbinic sources, and occasionally in the hekhalot literature, we find a heavenly counterpart of the פְּרֹכֶת in the curtain that hangs at the entrance to the divine throne room (i.e., the holy of holies of the cosmic temple). This curtain is called by the non-biblical term פֶּרְגוּד.³⁸ In a few texts, the celestial פֶּרְגוּד is identified with the dark cloud in which, according to more than one text of scripture, God's Glory is concealed. The targum to Job 26:9, for example, interprets the verse in the light of

³⁶ See pp. 32-33 above and, further, MORRAY-JONES, "Paradise Revisited. Part 1," 202-205.

³⁷ 1 Kgs. 6:31-33; cf. 2 Chron. 4:22, Ezek. 41:23-25. Compare GRUENWALD, "Jewish Sources?" in *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, 211-212, who appears to interpret these texts incorrectly.

³⁸ The פֶּרְגוּד is explicitly stated to be identical with the biblical פְּרֹכֶת in *PaRE*, §4 (ABRAHAM AARON BEN SHALOM BRODA, ed., פֶּרְקֵי דְרַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר [Lemberg: Abraham Nisan Suss, 1874] 7b; cf. GERALD FRIEDLANDER, trans. *Pirké de Rabbi Eliezer [The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great] According to the Text of the Manuscript Belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna* [1916; reprinted New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1981] 23). This text is parallel to *Mass. Hek.*, §28 (= §18), ed. HERRMANN, 59*, 82* and 187; and to *HZ* at SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §372 = ELIOR, *הויכלות זוטרת*, ll. 270-278 (see pp. 173 and 176 below), both of which have פְּרֹכֶת but not פֶּרְגוּד. *Tg. Ps.-Jon.* Exod. 26:31-35, etc. renders פְּרֹכֶת by פֶּרְגוּד. See further: HOFIUS, *Der Vorhang*, 5-16; GRUENWALD, "Jewish Sources?" 212-214; HALPERIN, *The Merkabah*, 169, n. 99; ALEXANDER, *OTP* 1.296, n. 45a on 3 *Enoch* 45:1 (see below); and the numerous sources cited by these authorities.

this tradition. MT reads: *מֵאַחַז פְּנֵי-כִסֵּה פָרְשׁוּ עָלָיו עֲנָנֹו*, *He covers the face of the new moon; he spreads his cloud over it*, but the targumist, taking the word *כִּסֵּה* to mean “throne,” translates as follows:³⁹

מֵאַחַד בְּאַמִּיתוּתָא דְּמֵן כּוּרְסִיָּה מִן בְּגַלְל דְּלֵא יַחְמוּנִיָּה מְלֵאכִים פְּרִס דִּיךְ פְּרַגּוּדָא עָלָיו עֲנָנָא
דִּיקְרִיָּה

He wraps the thick darkness all around his throne, so that the angels may not see him; he spreads the clouds of his Glory upon it like a curtain.

More frequently, however, the *פְּרַגּוּד* is portrayed as an actual and visible curtain, possessing wondrous properties. According to several sources, the entire history of creation is embroidered or imprinted on the *פְּרַגּוּד*, the vision of which confers foreknowledge of the future. Thus *3 Enoch*, chapter 45:

R. Ishmael said: Metatron said to me:

Come and I will show you the curtain of the Omnipresent One (*פְּרַגּוּד שֶׁל* *מְקוּם*), which is spread before the Holy One, blessed be he, and on which are printed all the generations of the world and all their deeds, whether done or to be done, till the last generation. I went and he showed them to me with his fingers, like a father teaching his son the letters of the Torah⁴⁰

In the continuation of this passage, Ishmael is shown the deeds of all the generations of mankind, from Adam to the Messiah

.... All the rest of the leaders of every generation and every deed of every generation both of Israel and of the gentiles, whether done or to be done in the time to come, to all generations, till the end of time, were all printed on the curtain of the Omnipresent One (*חֻקְיָן עַל פְּרַגּוּד שֶׁל הַמְּקוּם*). I saw them all with my own eyes.⁴¹

³⁹ *Tg. Job* 26:9, in ed. PAULUS DE LAGARDE, *Hagiographa Chaldaice* (1873; reprinted Osnabrück: Zeller, 1967) 104. Compare *b.Hag.* 12b on Ps. 18:12, and see further HOFIUS, *Der Vorhang*, 5-7. On the date and composition of the Job targum, see further p. 266 below.

⁴⁰ See the following note.

⁴¹ *3 Enoch* 45:1-2 and 6, ed. ODEBERG, Hebrew, 58-61 and English, 141-148; cf. SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§64-65; translation follows ALEXANDER, *OTP*, 1.296-299.

A very similar statement about the פרגוד is found in the *Alphabet of Rabbi Aqiba*, version A, where Moses is shown the deeds and teachings of Aqiba and the rabbinic sages במקום של בפרגוד.⁴² The following geniza fragment of an otherwise unknown שיעור קומה text links this idea with that of the future judgement of the soul:⁴³

All the deeds of the sons of men are printed on his פרגוד – whether past or future, whether accomplished or not yet accomplished – and a prince of whom it is said: *He stirs up the sea [so that its waves roar – the LORD of Hosts is his name]* (Jer. 31:35 = Isa. 51:15) sees all one's deeds at single glance, examines them, determines their judgement, and establishes them according to the truth (ומעמידן על האמת), as it is said: *Behold your way in the valley! Know what you have done!* (Jer. 2:23). And it says: *But the LORD is the true God, he is the Living God and the Everlasting King* (וַיְהִי הָאֱלֹהִים אֱמֶת הוּא אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים וְקַיָּם עוֹלָם), etc. (Jer. 10:10).⁴⁴ *The LORD* (יהוה) – this is the attribute of compassion; *God* (אֱלֹהִים) – this is the attribute of judgement; *True* (אֱמֶת) – this is the Place of the Shekhinah, which establishes all who come into the world in truth.

Associated with this theme of judgement is the motif of a בת קול “from behind the פרגוד,” revealing God's irreversible and apparently pre-ordained decrees concerning the coming tribulations of the world,⁴⁵ or of a specific individual.⁴⁶ This motif, which, like the previous text, carries clear implications of divine foreknowledge, if not outright pre-determination of reward or punishment,⁴⁷ occurs in connection with the judgement pronounced upon Elisha b. Abuya at *b.Hag.* 15a. Elisha is riding his horse on a sabbath and, at the same time, discussing Torah with his pupil R. Meir, who is walking along beside him. Suddenly, Elisha interrupts the discussion and warns Meir to turn back, having

⁴² *Alph. R. Aqiba A*, (צ), ed. JELLINEK, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 3.44; cf. WERTHEIMER, בתי מדרשות, 2.388: בפרגוד של הקודש ברוך הוא.

⁴³ Fragment T-S. K21.95.J, fol. 2b, lines 2-11, in SCHÄFER, *Geniza-Fragmente*, 133. SCHÄFER (*ibid.*, 131) assesses the script of this fragment as “Northeast cursive from the region of Iraq; relatively late.”

⁴⁴ The verse continues: *at his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation.*

⁴⁵ *b.Ber.* 18b and parallels (see GRUENWALD, “Jewish Sources?” 212).

⁴⁶ Thus, for example, a passage in ms. Munich 40 at SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §877. SCHÄFER (*ibid.*, xv) states that this block of material (§§875-881) is “clearly a “late” piece, which does not belong to the hekhalot literature.”

⁴⁷ Cf. *m. Abot* 3.19.

discerned by counting his horse's hoofbeats that they have reached the sabbath limit:

He (Meir) said to him, "You too, turn back (חזור בך)!" He (Elisha) said to him, "I have heard from behind the Curtain (שמעתי מאחורי הפרגוד): *Return, backsliding children* (Jer. 3:14) – except *ואחר*!"

In a parallel passage at *y.Hag. 77b*, the declaration of judgement is transposed to the earthly sanctuary. Here, Elisha reports that he was once riding his horse before the temple (בית קודש קדשים) on a Day of Atonement that was also a sabbath, when

.... I heard a *בת קול* coming forth from the House of the holy of holies, saying: *Return children* – except for Elisha b. Abuya, who knew my power and rebelled against me!"

It is probable, however, that *yerushalmi*'s version of this narrative is a secondary composition, which is intended to provide an alternative context for the theologically troubling pronouncement that the possibility of repentance has been denied to Elisha. The act of riding a horse in front of the temple on a Day of Atonement on a sabbath is presumably to be understood as a cumulative sequence of acts of defiance, but the narrative remains somewhat unsatisfactory, since it fails to explain why this particular offence should be held to merit such dire and irrevocable condemnation. Moreover, the element of riding on a sabbath is itself derived from the context in which the dialogue is set. The Babylonian version, on the other hand, alludes to the story of Elisha's disastrous encounter with Metatron, where a *בת קול* makes the same pronouncement following his utterance of the "two powers" heresy, and this, almost certainly, is the original context of the saying.⁴⁸ The story of this encounter is given in *3 Enoch* 16:1-5, where the *בת קול* comes forth "from the presence of the Shekhinah,"⁴⁹ and the *פרגוד* is not mentioned. The printed edition and most manuscripts of *babli* state simply that

⁴⁸ *Contra* HALPERIN, *The Merkabah*, 167-172, and ALEXANDER, "3 Enoch and the Talmud," 54-66; see MORRAY-JONES, "Hekhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition," 17-36.

⁴⁹ Ed. ODEBERG, Hebrew, 22-23 and English, 43-45; trans. ALEXANDER, *OTP*, 1.268; SCHÄFER, *Synopsis*, §20. In MORRAY-JONES, "Hekhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition," 24, this detail is omitted in error.

“a בַּת קוֹל came forth and said ...,” etc., but two manuscripts add the words “from behind the פֶּרְגוֹד.”⁵⁰ The version included in *MR(N):B2d* of the פֶּרְדָּס story, in agreement with the majority of witnesses to *babli*, does not specify the origin of the בַּת קוֹל, but appends the words “outside the פֶּרְגוֹד” to “they led Metatron forth.”⁵¹ Thus, although certainty is perhaps impossible, there are grounds for believing that the פֶּרְגוֹד did figure in the original story of Elisha’s condemnation, which was said to have occurred in connection with a vision of Metatron at the entrance to the divine throne room in the heavenly temple. The fact that the concluding pronouncement of the story incorporates a quotation from Jeremiah suggests that it may be derived from the same store of traditions linking the פֶּרְגוֹד to the judgement scenario as the genizah fragment considered on page 166 above. As we have observed, a strong aroma of predeterminist theology seems to cling to these traditions about the פֶּרְגוֹד. Possibly, therefore, the excision of the detail in some sources reflects the redactors’ discomfort with regard to the implication that Elisha’s fate and the denial of even the possibility of repentance to him, being foreknown by God, may also have been predestined.

6. *The Locations of the Veils in Jewish and Gnostic Sources*

It may be the case, as both HOFIUS and GRUENWALD maintain, that the cultically-derived traditions about the פֶּרְגוֹד were originally quite distinct from those concerning the veil-as-firmament (וִילוֹן).⁵² It is, however, clear from the testimony of Philo and Josephus that by the first century CE the two traditions had already become closely interwoven with each other. In Jewish apocalyptic and מִרְכָּבָה mysticism, as we have seen, the pilgrimage through the precincts of the temple and the ascent into heaven are one and the same thing. The close interpenetration of “veil” and “firmament” symbolism in this context can be detected in *Apoc. Abr.* 21-29, where Abraham is shown the secrets of the creation, including the

⁵⁰ Thus *b.Hag.* 15a, mss. Vatican 134 and Munich 95 (see: ALEXANDER, “3 Enoch and the Talmud,” 54-62; and MORRAY-JONES, “Hekhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition,” 17-18).

⁵¹ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §672 (345); see pages 13-14 above. SCHÄFER indicates that the scribe wrote לַחֲוִץ סִפְרֵי הַפֶּרְגוֹד, but it is clear that לַחֲוִץ הַפֶּרְגוֹד must be meant.

⁵² HOFIUS, *Der Vorhang*, 25-27; GRUENWALD, “Jewish Sources?” 211-215.

whole past and future history of the world, depicted not on a curtain, as in the rabbinic sources, but on the surface of the seventh firmament itself, on which Abraham is standing. The fact that this powerful motif is able to “migrate” between the curtain and the firmament indicates a degree of correspondence between the two that approaches virtual identity. Reverse confirmation, so to speak, is provided by Josephus, who describes the curtain at the entrance to the outer sanctuary in terms that leave us in no doubt as to its symbolic significance:

Before these (the doors of the sanctuary) there hung a veil (καταπέτασμα), of the same length, of Babylonian tapestry, embroidered with blue, fine linen, scarlet and purple, a wondrous piece of artistry. This mixture of colors was not without a spiritual meaning (ἄθεώρητον); rather, it was a kind of image of the universe (ὡσπερ εἰκόνα τῶν ὄλων). For it seemed that the scarlet symbolized fire, linen the earth, blue the air, and purple the sea. In two cases, the comparison was based on color, but in those of the linen and the purple it was a matter of origin, since one is produced by the earth, the other by the sea. Embroidered upon it was a panorama of the whole heavens, except for the zodiacal signs (κατεγγράπτο δ' ὁ πέπλος ἅπασαν τὴν οὐράνιον θεωρίαν πλὴν τῶν ζωδίων).⁵³

Josephus' comment that “the signs of the zodiac” were excluded from the design is interesting in that it parallels his remark in *Ant.* iii.126 that “the forms of living creatures” were excluded,⁵⁴ in flat contradiction of the biblical instruction to embroider images of cherubim on the פְּרָכָה.⁵⁵ While it is probably true that Josephus' denial is intended to counter the accusation of animal-worship directed against the Jews,⁵⁶ there can be little doubt that in both texts he is referring specifically to the כְּרוּבִים, which he equates with both the zodiacal signs and Ezekiel's “living creatures.”

In the cosmic temple structure of the Jewish apocalyptic and מרכבה tradition, there were, as observed above, two principal lines of separation between the spheres of the holy and the unholy. These boundaries were demarcated by the curtain before the holy of holies (the פְּרִגְוֹד or פְּרָכָה) and that at the entrance to the outer sanctuary, corresponding to

⁵³ Josephus, *War*, v.212-214 (ed. THACKERAY *et al.*, 3.264).

⁵⁴ See p. 160 above.

⁵⁵ Exod. 26:31, etc.

⁵⁶ See THACKERAY's note in *idem et al.*, *Josephus*, 4.375.

the seventh and sixth firmaments respectively. Thus, when Aqiba states, in the hekhalot version of the פֶּרֶדֶס story, that he “arrived at the פֶּרְגוֹר” (*HZ/MR:C2*), this seems to place him inside the sixth הֵיכָל (i.e., the outer sanctuary), at the entrance to the seventh (i.e., the holy of holies). Alternatively, it is conceivable (though, on balance, unlikely) that the term פֶּרְגוֹר refers in this instance to the curtain at the entrance to the outer sanctuary. The latter location corresponds to that of the encounter with the gatekeepers and their invitation to “enter” the sixth הֵיכָל; the former (according to the analysis proposed above) to the water vision episode itself.⁵⁷ The Gnostic veil between the pleroma and the material universe is clearly a version of the פֶּרְגוֹר or פְּרֹכֶת, but it has been moved up a level in accordance with the new cosmology. In the traditional Jewish temple structure, the area of greatest holiness is the seventh heaven where God sits enthroned, and the פֶּרְגוֹר is spread before him, at the boundary between levels six and seven. In the Gnostic system as presented in *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World*, however, Sabaoth, who is no longer God, sits “below” the veil, outside the sphere of the pleroma. The veil or firmament, therefore, is located not between the sixth and seventh levels, but between the seventh and the eighth. So far as I am aware, however, there is no mention in any Gnostic source other than *Orig. World*, §21 of a boundary within the lower heavens that would correspond to the division between levels five and six in the hekhalot tradition. The anomalous location of Sophia’s heaven on the sixth level at *Orig. World*, §21 is, then, almost certainly attributable to a Jewish source reproduced by the Gnostic author, who appears to have overlooked the contradiction between that source and his own preferred system of cosmology. The fact that this location corresponds to that of the pavement of the sixth הֵיכָל in *HZ* indicates that the Jewish sources to which the Gnostic writers were indebted were closely related to those employed by the hekhalot author(s) of the water vision episode.

It should be noted that some passages of the hekhalot literature demonstrate an awareness of the distinction between the seventh heaven, where God appears in his כְּבוֹד on the מְרֻכְבָּה to receive the worship of his creatures, and the countless hidden realms above and beyond that

⁵⁷ See p. 78 above.

level in which he dwells invisible and alone.⁵⁸ This idea is introduced, following the discussion of the seven firmaments from וִילָוֶן to עֶרְבוֹת, in *b.Hag.* 13a:

R. Aḥa b. Jacob said:

There is yet another heaven above the heads of the חַיִּים, as it is written: *And above the heads of the living creatures was the likeness of a firmament, like the appearance of terrible ice, stretched out over their heads from above* (Ezek. 1:22). Up to here, you are permitted to speak, but from here on you are not permitted to speak, as it is written in the book of Ben Sira: *Do not interpret matters too wonderful for you, or investigate that which is concealed from you. Reflect upon that which is permitted to you, for you have no business with concealed things.* (Ecclus. 3:21-22).

What appears to be a reference to a vision of these dimensions of divinity beyond the seventh heaven is found in the final chapter of *Ma'aseh Merkabah*:⁵⁹

Rabbi Ishmael said:

I said to Rabbi Aqiba: How is one able to look upwards beyond the seraphim that stand above the head of רַזַּי, the LORD God of Israel?

He said to me:

When I had ascended to the first palace, I prayed a prayer, and I saw from the palace of the first firmament as far as the seventh palace.⁶⁰ And as soon as I had ascended to the seventh palace, I pronounced the names of two angels, and I gazed upwards beyond the seraphim. And these are they: סַרְיָד הַגָּלִיךְ. And as soon as I had pronounced their names, they came and took hold of me and said to me: Son of man, do not be afraid. He is the holy king who is sanctified upon the high and exalted throne, and he is excellent for ever and majestic upon the מַרְכָּבָה! In that hour, I saw upwards beyond the seraphim that stand above the head of רַזַּי, the LORD God of Israel.

This passage is, however, exceptional. Generally speaking, the hekhalot writers do not transgress the limits recommended by Ben Sira. The primary focus of their interest is the vision of the manifest Glory on the throne, and the hidden dimensions of the Deity beyond this vision

⁵⁸ See MORRAY-JONES, "Transformational Mysticism," 2-6 and 21, and the sources cited there.

⁵⁹ *MM*, §33, ed. SCHOLEM, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 116; SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §595; cf. SWARTZ, *Mystical Prayer*, 249; and JANOWITZ, *Poetics*, 64.

⁶⁰ See p. 32, n. 120 above.

remain obscure and unknowable, beyond the reach of human thought and imagination. As observed by GRUENWALD, this marks a significant difference between these writers and their gnostic counterparts.⁶¹ In this literature, moreover, there is no unbridgeable chasm or discontinuity of substance between the invisible Godhead and the manifest Glory in the seventh **היכל**. This being so, there is no barrier between the seventh **היכל**, the holy of holies where the visible manifestation of the divine image occurs, and the higher regions beyond that. The holy of holies is supremely holy precisely because of its openness and accessibility to the Divine Being in all its fullness. The protective barriers between the holy, the less holy, and the unholy are located below (or “outside”) this level, at the threshold of the holy of holies, at the entrance of the sanctuary (= the sixth gate), and so by degrees to the outer court and to the mundane world. Hence, the **פרגוד** is not located, as in the Gnostic sources, beyond the seventh heaven.

⁶¹ GRUENWALD, “Jewish Sources?” 215-217.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE FACES OF THE CHARIOT

1. *The Ascent Continues* (Massekhet Hekhalot, §28)

The above discussion has, to the best of my knowledge, accounted for every instance of the term פרגוד in the published texts of the hekhalot corpus.¹ The term פרוכת occurs only in two texts, which contain parallel recensions of the same material. The shorter of these two texts is found in *Mass. Hek.*, §28.²

And the throne of glory is high up in the air (גבוה למעלה באויר), and the appearance of his Glory is like the appearance of the חשמל (ומראה כבודו כעין החשמל חשמל) and the diadem of brightness (ועטרת נוגה) is upon his head, and the crown of the explicit name is upon his brow. One half of him is fire (אש) and the other half is hail (ברד). On his right is life, and on his left is death. And a scepter of fire is in his hand. And the veil is parted in two before him (ופרוכת פרוסה לפניו), and seven angels who were created in the beginning (שנבראו תחלה) minister before him inside the veil (לפני' מן הפרוכת).³

The language of this text contains several allusions to Ezekiel 1 and has numerous points of contact with the ascent midrash in *HZ*, §§407-412 where the terms חשמל (especially) and נוגה are accorded prominence. This text, however, goes further than the ascent midrash, which, though dependent on the lemma Ezek. 1:27 (וְאֵרָא כְּעֵין חֲשָׁמַל), stops short of describing the figure on the throne. There, the focus of interest is the visionary's passage through the firmaments (i.e., the gates of the sixth and seventh היכלות) as described, according to this exegetical tradition,

¹ See SCHÄFER, *Konkordanz*, 2.556c. I exclude the שיעור קומה texts in COHEN, ed. and trans., *The Shi'ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions* (TSAJ 9; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1985), for which no concordance is currently available.

² *Mass. Hek.*, §28, (= §18), ed. HERRMAN, *Massekhet Hekhalot*, 82* (cf. 59*) and 186-187. The following translation is based on ms. Vatican 1601. A parallel to this text is found in *PdRE*, §4 (see p. 164, n. 38 above; and cf. ed. HERRMANN, *ibid.*, 186-187 [Hebrew text in n. 3]).

³ *PdRE*, §4 (see the previous note): "inside the veil, which is called פרגוד."

in Ezek. 1:19-26, and the narrative concludes at the point indicated by Ezek.1:27 (*HZ:H*). *Mass. Hek.*, §28, which interprets and expands upon Ezek. 1:27-28, thus begins at precisely the point where the ascent midrash in *HZ* leaves off. The statement that the figure of the enthroned Glory is composed half of fire and half of hail is clearly a gloss on Ezek. 1:27, where the lower part of the figure is of fire, and the upper part of *השכול*. The combination of fire and ice is a standard feature of the ascent tradition, being found in *1 Enoch* 14, for example. A striking point of contact with the water vision episode in *HZ*, and with the hellenistic and gnostic traditions considered above, is the statement that the throne of glory “is high up in the air.” The expression *למעלה* echoes the *קלמיעלה* of Ezek. 1:22 and 1:27, which has been found to be a *crux interpretationis* of the ascent-exegetical tradition. These observations do not of necessity lead to the conclusion that *Mass. Hek.*, §28 and the ascent midrash in *HZ*, §§407-412 were once consecutive parts of a single document, but they are undoubtedly derived from the same literary and textual tradition.

2. *A Passage in ms. New York of Hekhalot Zutarti and the Sabaoth Enthronement Scene*

The parallel text to *Mass. Hek.*, §28 is, in fact, preserved as part of a much longer passage in *HZ*, ms. New York, at SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §372. SCHÄFER appraises this block of material (§§368-374) as “a compilation of various traditions and comments on them,”⁴ and as “clearly distinguishable from the other texts [in *HZ*] by a markedly descriptive style.”⁵ He asserts that, in his opinion, the passage is a late addition to *HZ*, probably attributable to the *hasidei ashkenazim*, but gives no reason for this evaluation. As will be seen below, there are, in fact, good grounds for assigning it to a much earlier stage of the *HZ* literary tradition. In the following presentation, it will be convenient to retain SCHÄFER’s section numbers, with additional subdivisions (a-b) in three cases.⁶

⁴ SCHÄFER, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, 64.

⁵ SCHÄFER, “Aufbau und redaktionellen Identität der *Hekhalot Zutarti*,” *HS*, 57.

⁶ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§368-374 (ms. New York); cf. ELIOR, ed., *היכלות זוטרת*, lines 239-284. Part of §368a and most of §§373-374 also occur in the other four mss. of *HZ* published by SCHÄFER (mss. Oxford, Munich 22, Munich 40, and Dropsie). An approximately parallel text to §§368-369 occurs in a *שיעור קומה* context at *Synopse*,

- §368a The legs of the throne of glory – surely, these are the חיות, standing beneath it. The first leg of the throne, which is a חייה, is called פער עגלא ענליי בבבליי פער עגלא ענליי. ⁷ The second leg of the throne, which is a חייה, is called מצמץ באמץ. מסמא כיכך ברביה כלני יפעי ככבב אגליי. The third leg, which is a חייה, is called צומץ. טייכלבוקם. The fourth leg, which is a living leg of the throne, is called יד. יד אצבעיה אצבייה כובץ בבת דצבעייה. And the likeness of their faces is the stamp of a lion, the seal of an eagle, [and the likeness of an ox,⁸] and the sealed face of a man.
- §368b Four faces each, and four faces to each corner, and four faces to each of these corners⁹ – sixty-four faces for each individual חיה. And four wings each, and four wings to each wing, and four wings to each of these wings – sixty-four wings for each individual חיה.
- §369 The prince with the face of a man is called אמן אמת במץ. The prince with the face of a lion is called הורד הורד אוריה אל אוריה הורד הורד. The prince with the face of an ox is called אמציה שוב אליה צמממממ. The prince with the face of an eagle is called עפפי להוויאל אליה. The prince with the face of a cherub is called ממציה להווידיאל. And when Israel sinned, the face of the ox was concealed and a cherub was put in its place. The prince with the face of a cherub is called פסיה עמנו והאליה עמנו מביאליה כרוביה כרוביה (sic) פצפציה [?] ציה פצפציה. הגנק נקיה.
- §370 The חיות, when they fly, fly with thirty-two (wings) and cover their bodies with thirty-two. And they fly on the wind, for they are entirely made of fire, and the fire is lighter than the wind, so that the wind supports the fire, as it is said: *Wherever the wind would go, they went ...*, etc. (Ezek. 1:12, 1:20). And the sound of the wings of the חיות is the earthquake of which Elijah spoke: *And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great strong wind ... here we have the wind ... and after the wind, an earthquake* (1 Kgs. 19:11). The earthquake was like the sound of mighty waters, as it is said, *and I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters* (Ezek. 1:24). *And after the earthquake, fire* (1 Kgs. 19:12). This is the

§§954-955 (ms. Munich 40 only) and in genizah fragment Heb. c.65.6 of the Bodleian Library, fol. 6b,7-11 (SCHÄFER, *Geniza-fragmente*, 117). Very approximate parallels to a few details in §368 and §371 also occur in *PdRE*, §4 (see pp. 164, n. 38; and cf. p. 173, n. 2 above). Compare the following translation with SCHÄFER, *Übersetzung*, 3.63-71 and HALPERIN, *Faces*, 390-391.

⁷ Different and shorter names are given in the other mss. of *HZ*, and in the שיעור קומה text.

⁸ “And the likeness of an ox” (ודמות השור) is omitted by *HZ(N)* and has been supplied from the שיעור קומה text in SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §954 (see n. 6 above).

⁹ Heb.: ארבע פנים לאחת וארבע פנים לכל פינה וארבע פנים לכל פינה ופינה. See further pp. 182-184 below.

fire of which Daniel spoke: *Its wheels were blazing fire* (Dan. 7:9), and he says: *A stream of fire issued and flowed forth from before Him. A thousand thousands served him and ten thousand times ten thousand*, etc. (Dan. 7:10).

§371a And the throne of glory stands upon the four *חיות*, and the likeness of the throne is the likeness of the firmament (*רקיע*); and the firmament is like the waters of the sea; and the waters of the sea are like the color blue; and the color blue is *sapphire* (Ezek. 1:26; Exod. 24:10).¹⁰ And around the throne are pure thunder clouds, which give forth lightning flashes like jewels of *תרשיש*. And the brilliance of the flashing of the throne, which is like sapphire with jewels of *תרשיש*, is *the brightness* (*הנוגה*) (Ezek. 1:4 and 28).¹¹ As the likeness of them both, sapphire and *תרשיש*, thus is the likeness of the *חשכול*. It is *like the appearance of fire* (Ezek. 1:27), but it is not fire. Rather, it is like fiery flames of all kinds of colors mixed together, and the eye cannot master their likenesses. And around the throne is *fire flashing forth continuously* (Ezek. 1:4) from the radiance and the many flashes of its appearance. And from the midst of these terrors, the likenesses of the *חיות*, which are the legs of the throne, appeared to Ezekiel.

§371b To each leg there were four faces; to all the pairs of faces [?] there were four wings. Thus you will find that for the four legs there were sixteen faces and sixty-four wings, [?] in each direction.¹²

§372 And upon the throne is the Great Fire, for from the veil (*הפרוכת*) of fire that is spread before him, no comparison may be made.¹³ And seven (chief) ministers, mighty ones of power, are before and inside the veil.¹⁴ And twelve are stationed outside the throne, three in each direction, and these are they: *שמעאל* and *זכריאל*, *עזריאל*; *מיכאל* and *פדיאל*, *כוכביאל* on the right;

¹⁰ ודמות הכסא הוא דמות רקיע והרקיע דומה למי הים ומי הים דומה לתכלת והתכלת הוא ספיר (see n. 13 below).

¹¹ Compare *HZ:G3* on p. 58 above.

¹² לכל רגל ארבע פנים לכול זוגי הפנים ארבעה כנפיים ותמצא לארבע רגלים ששה עשר אחת פנים ושש' ארבע כנפים מרוח אחת.

¹³ ולמעלה הכסא הוא האש הגדולה כי אין לדמות מן הפרוכת של אש פרוסה לפניו. SCHÄFER (*Übersetzung*, 3.68, n. 2) regards this text as corrupt. The meaning of the words: כי אין לדמות מן is, admittedly, obscure but there is clearly an intentional contrast with the string of comparisons at the beginning of §371a (see n. 10 above), and I take the point to be that the *פרוכת* marks the point at which such comparisons must be abandoned to avoid irreverence and/or because they are no longer possible. It seems to be clear from the context that *האש הגדולה* is a reference to the figure of the divine Glory seated upon the throne (*למעלה הכסא*, cf. Ezek. 1:27, *עליו מלמעלה*).

¹⁴ ושבעה ראשי שמישי גבורי כח לפני ולפנים מן הפרוכת (the word *ראשי* has been deleted).

Like *Mass. Hek.*, §28, this longer and more detailed description of the celestial throne, its surroundings, and its occupant can be seen as a continuation of the ascent midrash,²² beginning at the point where the sequence which contains the water vision episode leaves off. It is interesting to observe that the liturgical formula which occurs at the end of the water vision episode is also found at the conclusion of this passage (§374b).²³

Turning to §372, we find that this text has many components in common with *Mass. Hek.*, §28, although they are arranged in a different order. In addition to the connections noted above between this material and the ascent midrash in *HZ*, §§407-412, the text also has several points of contact with the "Enthronement of Sabaoth" accounts in *Hyp. Arch.* and *Orig. World*.²⁴ The seven exalted angels inside the veil correspond to the seven archangels of *Orig. World*, §29 and §32.²⁵ Moreover, "the twelve gods of chaos" in *Orig. World*, §29 correspond to the twelve angels outside the throne in *HZ(N)*, §372. As observed by HALPERIN, the material in *Orig. World*, §33 has parallels in several hekhalot sources.²⁶ The association of life and death, or good and evil, with the left and right sides of the figure on the throne is a widespread motif in both Jewish and Gnostic sources.²⁷ With regard to this point, however, the two Gnostic texts are significantly different from each other. In *Orig. World*, §36, the central position is occupied by Sophia, while Sabaoth and Yaldabaoth ("the prime parent"), as the representatives of good and evil, stand to her right and left respectively. This arrangement is entirely in accord with the form of Gnostic dualism that this author espouses. In *Hyp. Arch.*, §29, however, Sabaoth himself is in the center, with Zoe on his right and the angel of wrath on his left. This picture is much closer to the model encountered in *Mass. Hek.*, §28 and *HZ(N)*, §372. HALPERIN comments:

²² This is especially clear in §§370-371a, on which see further pp. 212-213 below.

²³ See *HZ:H3* on p. 59 and, further, pp. 88-89 above.

²⁴ See pp. 156-157 above and, further, HALPERIN, *Faces*, 511-517.

²⁵ FRIEDLANDER (*Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer*, 23, n. 5) sees an early parallel to this motif at *Jub.* 2:2, where seven categories of angel are said to have been created on the first day of creation.

²⁶ See HALPERIN, *Faces*, 516, and the sources cited there.

²⁷ See BULLARD, "Commentary," in *idem*, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, 111-112, and the sources cited there.

This detail is intelligible only in a monotheistic scheme which has the Lord Sabaoth at its center, the life he grants and the punishment he inflicts on either side of him Gruenwald seems to be right in inferring, not that the Jewish sources are in some way Gnostic, but that certain Gnostics were familiar with *merkabah* lore.²⁸

On the other hand, however, HALPERIN discerns a trace of influence in the opposite direction – from Gnosticism to Judaism – in the name הַבּוֹרֵא, which is assigned to one of the two angels of punishment to the left of the throne in *HZ(N)*, §372.²⁹ It is probable (though not quite certain) that this name should be vocalized הַבּוֹרֵא, “the creator,” as HALPERIN suggests, and he may be right to associate this name with the evil demiurge of the left in *Orig. World*, §36 and other Gnostic sources. In *HZ(N)*, §372, however, the two severe angels on the left are not said to be evil, but merely responsible for punishment, corresponding to the angel of wrath in *Hyp. Arch.*, §29. Alignment of the creative aspect of the Deity with the attribute of judgement – if that is what the name הַבּוֹרֵא indicates – is arguably, by rabbinic Jewish standards, rather unconventional, but it is not necessarily evidence of the influence on this text of full-blown Gnosticism.

In connection with this question, it is noteworthy that, in the same passage, one of the three outer angels on the left is called שְׁמַעֵאל. This name is undoubtedly based on the verbal root שָׁמַע and therefore means “divine hearing” or, perhaps more likely, “divine renown.” If, however, the initial letter were to be given a hard vocalization (שׁ), this name, although meaningless in Hebrew, would be the phonetic equivalent of Σαμαελ. This, as we have seen, is a name of Yaldabaoth in *Orig. World*, *Hyp. Arch.*, and other Gnostic texts. The Gnostic writers, however, explain this name on the basis of the Hebrew/Aramaic root סָמַא, “to be blind,” and it is therefore entirely possible that it has no connection with the name שְׁמַעֵאל in *HZ(N)*, §372.³⁰ It is also possible, however, that the similarity between the two names is not merely coincidental, in

²⁸ HALPERIN, *Faces*, 514-515.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 516-517.

³⁰ See pp. 142 and 155 above. The name סָמַא is, in fact, widely encountered in Jewish sources as a name of Satan or “the Prince of the Accusers,” who is the patron angel of Rome. See ALEXANDER, “Introduction” to *3 Enoch*, OTP, 1.236; and *idem*, n. 14b to *3 Enoch*, OTP, 1.266, and the sources cited there. See also p. 251 below.

which case the Gnostic authors have either accidentally or deliberately misinterpreted the meaning of the Hebrew name. In this case, it would follow that the Jewish tradition which placed the angel שמעאל on the left of the divine throne has priority over the Gnostic traditions about Samael. By no stretch of the imagination can the name שמעאל in *HZ(N)*, §372 be derived from Gnosticism.

In both *Mass. Hek.*, §28 and *HZ(N)*, §372, the פרוכת is, in accordance with the standard Jewish model of the cosmic temple, placed in front of the throne, not above the dwelling place of Sabaoth, as in *Hyp. Arch.*, §28. In *HZ(N)*, §372, the פרוכת is described as a curtain composed of fire, but the (mis-) quotation of Job 26:9 in §373 alludes to the traditional image of the פרגוד as a dark cloud that covers (קאחז) and conceals the enthroned Glory, as encountered in the targum.³¹ The statement in *Orig. World*, §34 that Sabaoth sits upon “a throne of great light within a great cloud that covers him” is clearly derived from this tradition.

These points of contact between the Gnostic accounts of the enthronement of Sabaoth and *HZ(N)*, §§368-374 provide clear evidence that they are derived from a common literary tradition. Considered individually, they do not necessarily establish a direct or close textual relationship between the Gnostic and Jewish sources. The sheer quantity of such connections does, however, justify consideration of the possibility that such a relationship exists.

3. *Multiplying the Faces*

Hyp. Arch., §29 refers to the throne of Sabaoth as a “chariot of cherubim” (ἄρμα χερουβιν). As observed by HALPERIN,³² this expression is probably derived from LXX 1 Chr. 28:18: τοῦ ἄρματος τῶν χερουβιν, and/or the Greek recension of Ecclus. 49:8:³³

ἰέζεκιηλ δς εἶδεν ὄρασιν δόξης, ἦν ὑπέδειξεν αὐτῷ ἐπὶ ἄρματος χερουβιν.

³¹ See p. 164 above.

³² HALPERIN, *Faces*, 514, n. 5.

³³ In ZIEGLER, ed., *Septuaginta*, vol. 12.2, *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965) 355; and see further p. 185, n. 51 below.

It was Ezekiel who saw the vision of the Glory, which was shown to him upon a chariot of cherubim.

Orig. World, §32, however, understands “Cherubin” to be the name of the throne-chariot itself. This is probably due to a misunderstanding of Ecclus. 49:8 (reading: “a chariot, Cherubin”),³⁴ either directly or by way of *Hyp. Arch.*, §29 or another intermediate source. This idiosyncratic expression may also, however, be related to the equally unusual statement in *HZ(N)*, §§368-371 that the four חיות do not merely carry the throne but are actually its legs.³⁵ As has frequently been observed, the author of *Orig. World*, §32 appears to have miscalculated the number of the “forms” (μορφῆ) of the cherubim, since eight multiplied by four equals only thirty-two forms, not sixty-four as stated. BÖHLIG offers the explanation that each of the thirty-two forms are considered to be both male and female,³⁶ but this is nowhere supported by the text itself, and GRUENWALD is certainly correct to associate this detail with Jewish sources like the above, in which the numbers of the wings and/or faces of the חיות are multiplied.³⁷ The fact is, however, that these sources themselves offer a confusing variety of calculations. In the targum to Ezekiel, the wings and faces of the חיות are enumerated as follows:

And four faces for each one (וארבעה אפין לחדא): each one had four faces, and each single one of the four faces had four faces – sixteen faces for each creature; the number of the faces of the four creatures was thus sixty-four faces.

And four wings for each one (וארבעה כנפין לחדא): four wings for each single one – sixteen wings for each of the faces, sixty-four wings for each creature; the number of the wings of the four creatures was (thus) two hundred and fifty-six wings.³⁸

³⁴ The Greek form: χερουβιν does not, of course, decline.

³⁵ A few texts, admittedly, state that the חיות are “fixed” (קבוע) to the throne. See, e.g., *PaRE*, §4; *HR* 26.5 (SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §273 = *HR* 27.2-5 in WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.109-110).

³⁶ See BÖHLIG’s commentary in *idem* and PAHOR LABIB, eds., *Die koptisch-gnostische Schrift ohne Titel aus Codex II von Nag Hammadi in koptischen Museum zu Alt-Kairo* (DAWBIO 58; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962) 52. BÖHLIG is followed by FALON, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth*, 102-103.

³⁷ See GRUENWALD, “Jewish Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism,” in *idem*, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, 198-199.

³⁸ *Tg. Ezek.* 1:6, ed. SPERBER, *The Bible in Aramaic*, 3.264-265.

An allusion to this calculation occurs on an Aramaic incantation bowl:

שלם לכן מלאכי [ה]שרית המשרתין קדמוהי דיתיב על ארבע כרובים וילהין שיתין
וארבע פרצופי

Peace be upon you, ministering angels (?), who officiate in front of him who sits upon four cherubim; and they have sixty-four faces.³⁹

Shortly after the פֶּרֶדֶס story in *HZ*, however, we find an Aramaic text which calculates the numbers of the faces and the wings independently of each other, arriving in both cases at a grand total of two hundred and fifty-six, as follows:⁴⁰

§354 *Four faces for each one*: four faces for each face; four faces for each of these faces – sixteen faces for every face; sixty-four faces for each creature; the number of the faces of the four creatures was (thus) two hundred and fifty-six faces. *Four wings for each one*: four wings for each wing; four wings for each of these wings – sixteen wings for every wing; sixty-four wings for each creature; the number of the wings of the four creatures was (thus) two hundred and fifty-six wings.

An allusion to this calculation is found in *HR* 22:4-5, which refers to “... the two hundred and fifty-six faces of all the חיות הקודש opposite the gate of the seventh palace,” and states that these four חיות possess five hundred and twelve eyes, which belong to “... the (four) faces of the sixteen faces of each חיה.”⁴¹

The Hebrew text of *HZ(N)*, §368b, as given above, offers: “... four faces (פנים) to each corner (פינה), and four faces to each of these corners.”⁴² HALPERIN, however, argues convincingly that the word פִּינָה was originally פִּנָּה, the “non-existent singular form” of פנים, “face,” this being the author’s attempt to render the singular Aramaic noun אפא in

³⁹ Moussaieff Bowl 1:8-11, in SAUL SHAKED, “Peace be Upon You, Exalted Angels”: on Hekhalot, Liturgy and Incantation Bowls, *JSQ* 2 (1995) 207 (Aramaic text) and 210 (English translation).

⁴⁰ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §354; ELIOR, *היכלות אטרתי*, 105-112; translation based on ms. Munich 22. On both passages of *HZ* and the targum, see HALPERIN, *Faces*, 125-127 and 387-393.

⁴¹ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§245-246; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.103, §24.1. For HALPERIN’s Freudian interpretation of this text and the passage that follows it, see p. 60, n. 35 above.

⁴² See p. 175, n. 9 above.

HZ, §354.⁴³ This is confirmed by the parallel שיעור קומה text, which does, in fact, read פנה.⁴⁴ The emended text of *HZ(N)*, §368b thus reads as follows:

Four faces each, and four faces to each face, and four faces to each of these faces – sixty-four faces for each individual חיה. And four wings each, and four wings to each wing, and four wings to each of these wings – sixty-four wings for each individual חיה.

If HALPERIN is right, as he almost certainly is, then the Aramaic text in *HZ*, §354 must have priority over the Hebrew text in *HZ(N)*, §368b. It is, in any case, evident that these two texts agree with each other against the targum. The first sentence of *HZ(N)*, §370 confirms this calculation and relates it to the statement in Ezek. 1:11 that “each of the creatures had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies” (cf. Isa. 6:2). The natural continuation of *HZ(N)*, §368a, however, appears to be §369, which knows nothing of a multiplicity of faces. This suggests strongly that §368b was not originally part of this sequence, and that it has been inserted by the redactor of the compilation at this point, probably on the basis of *HZ*, §354. If §368b is omitted, *HZ(N)*, §§368a-369 seems, in fact, to agree with Rev. 4:7, against any known non-Christian Jewish source in assigning one face only to each of the four חיות. Though contradicted by Ezek. 1:6, this is, arguably, a legitimate interpretation of the Hebrew text of Ezek. 1:10, if the verse is considered in isolation:

וְרַמּוֹת פְּנֵיהֶם כְּפְנֵי אָדָם וּפְנֵי אַרְיֵה אֶל־הַיְמִין לְאַרְבַּעָתָם וּפְנֵי־שׁוֹר מִהַשְּׂמֹאל לְאַרְבַּעָתָם
וּפְנֵי־נֶשֶׁר לְאַרְבַּעָתָם:

And the likeness of their faces was: the face of a man [in front of the four of them], and the face of a lion on the right of the four of them, and the face of an ox on the left of the four of them, and the face of an eagle [behind] the four of them.

It seems, however, that the tendency over time of the Jewish tradition was to magnify, rather than diminish, the number of the faces. Though perhaps not fully conclusive, these observations provide grounds for the

⁴³ HALPERIN, *Faces*, 391-392.

⁴⁴ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §954 (see p. 174, n. 6 above).

supposition that *HZ(N)*, §§368a-369, excluding §368b, may be a very early text indeed, and that it preserves a tradition which, being prior to the Book of Revelation, is at least as old as the mid-first century CE.

The Hebrew text of the calculation of the numbers of faces and wings in *HZ(N)*, §371b is, as it stands, very problematic. According to SCHÄFER's edition, it reads:

לכל רגל ארבע פנים לכול זוגי הפנים. ארבעה כנפיים ותמצא לארבע רגלים ששה עשר
פנים וששי' ארבע כנפים מרוח אחת

The punctuation point after the word הפנים represents a mark of either one or two dots which has been added by a copyist (of this manuscript or its source) to indicate the point at which, in his opinion, a sentence break occurs.⁴⁵ The mark is not part of the original text and (as quite frequently in these manuscripts) indicates an attempt by the copyist to resolve a textual difficulty.⁴⁶ We are not obliged to accept his opinion, which in this instance appears to be wrong. The crux of the problem is the word זוגי, meaning "pairs of," which makes nonsense of the calculation. As SCHÄFER rightly indicates, this word is certainly corrupt.⁴⁷ HALPERIN, who appears to accept the sentence break indicated by the copyist, offers the following rather loose translation:

Each leg has four faces of different types, and four wings. The four legs thus have sixteen faces and sixty-four wings in each direction.⁴⁸

If this rendering were accepted, this calculation would agree with that in the targum. HALPERIN's translation is, however, unsatisfactory for two reasons. First, as observed by SCHÄFER,⁴⁹ it involves a silent emendation of the text. SCHÄFER suggests that סוגי, which according to a fairly late usage would mean "species of," has been read in place of זוגי,⁵⁰ and this may be what HALPERIN has in mind. Second, HALPERIN's translation requires the reader to infer a great deal of informa-

⁴⁵ See SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, xix.

⁴⁶ ELIOR (היכלות זוטרתני) line 269) does not represent this mark.

⁴⁷ SCHÄFER, *Übersetzung*, 3.67, n. 6.

⁴⁸ HALPERIN, *Faces*, 391.

⁴⁹ See n. 47 above.

⁵⁰ See JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 961a.

tion which is not given in this text regarding the mathematical relationship between the faces and the wings. Only by reading this text in the light of the targum can we arrive at this understanding of its meaning.

The original form of this text can, I suggest, be recovered on the basis of a clue found in a better known but equally puzzling text of the second century BCE. As was observed above, the Greek translation by Ben Sira's grandson of Ecclus. 49:8 reads as follows:

Ἰεζεκιηλ δς εἶδεν ὄρασις δόξης, ἣν ὑπέδειξεν αὐτῷ ἐπὶ ἄρματος
χερουβιν.

It was Ezekiel who saw the vision of the Glory, which was shown to him upon a chariot of cherubim.

The Hebrew text of this verse is, however, quite different:

יחזקאל ראה מראה ויגד זני מרכבה:

Ezekiel saw a vision and declared varieties [?] of chariot.⁵¹

As can be seen, the word זני ("kinds" or "varieties") is graphically very similar to the problematic word זוגי of *HZ(N)*, §371b. I therefore propose that the latter text should be emended in the light of Ecclus. 49:8 as follows (with appropriate punctuation of my own):

לכל רגל ארבע פנים. לכל זני הפנים ארבעה כנפיים. ותמצא לארבע רגלים ששה עשר
פנים ושש' ארבע כנפים מרוח אחת.

To each leg, four faces; to all the kinds of faces, four wings; thus you will find that for the four legs there were sixteen faces and sixty four wings, in each direction.

Thus reconstructed, the text is entirely coherent, except for one problem: the computation produces a grand total of sixteen faces and sixty-

⁵¹ Texts in FRANCESCO VATTIONI, ed., *Ecclesiastico: Testo ebraico con apparato critica e versioni greca, latina e siriana* (PSS 1; Napoli: Istituto orientale di Napoli, 1968) 266-267. The Syriac text is close to the Hebrew, but changes the order of the words (see MILWARD DOUGLAS NELSON, *The Syriac Version of the Wisdom of Ben Sira Compared to the Greek Materials* [SBL Dissertation Series 107; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981] 6-7 and 17-33); the Latin version follows the Greek. See further pp. 188-191 below.

four wings *altogether*. This is contradicted by the words *מרוח אחת* at the end of the text, which, if understood to mean “in each direction,” produce a grand total of sixty-four faces and two hundred and fifty-six wings, in agreement with the targum. These words, thus understood, are themselves, however, inconsistent with the opening words of the sentence: ותמצא לארבעה רגלים (“and you will find that for the four legs ...,” etc.). These observations may, perhaps, indicate that the redactor who was responsible for adding §368b to this compilation also added the words *מרוח אחת* to §371b in an only partially successful attempt to harmonize his sources. An alternative explanation of the apparent anomaly is that the words *מרוח אחת* do not, in this text, mean “in each direction,” but “from a single spirit,” referring to the singular *רוח הַחַיָּה* of Ezek. 1:20-21 and meaning, presumably, that all the faces and wings are animated by a single breath or spirit. In either case, our final reconstruction of the calculation in *HZ(N)*, §371b is as follows:

לכל רגל ארבע פנים. לכול זני הפנים ארבעה כנפיים. ותמצא לארבע רגלים ששה עשר פנים ושש' ארבע כנפיים.

To each leg, four faces; to all the kinds of faces, four wings; thus you will find that for the four legs there were sixteen faces and sixty-four wings.

It should be observed that *PdRE*, §4, although it does not mention the wings, likewise sets the number of the faces at sixteen.⁵² If this reconstruction of *HZ(N)*, 371b is accepted, we must conclude that three different calculations of the numbers of the faces and wings of the *חיות* are encountered in the sources at our disposal. When these three calculations are presented side by side, as on the following page, their increasing complexity is readily apparent:

⁵² See p. 164, n. 38; p. 173, n. 2; and pp. 174-175, n. 6; above; and cf. FRIEDLANDER's notes in *idem*, trans., *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer*, 23-25.

HZ(N), §371b;
PaRE, §4

Each creature has 4 faces.
Total number of faces: $4 \times 4 = 16$.

Each face has 4 wings.
Each creature has $4 \times 4 = 16$ wings.
Total number of wings: $4 \times 16 = 64$.

Tg. Ezek. 1:6;
Moussaieff Bowl 1:8-11

Each creature has $4 \times 4 = 16$ faces.
Total number of faces: $4 \times 16 = 64$.

Each face has 4 wings.
Each creature has $4 \times 16 = 64$ wings.
Total number of wings: $4 \times 64 = 256$.

HZ, §354; *HZ(N)*, §368b;
HR 22:4-5 (§§245-246)

Each creature has $4 \times 4 \times 4 = 64$ faces.
Total number of faces: $4 \times 64 = 256$.
(Total number of eyes: $2 \times 256 = 512$.)

Each creature has $4 \times 4 \times 4 = 64$ wings.
Total number of wings: $4 \times 64 = 256$.

Since *HZ(N)*, §371b, as reconstructed, contains the simplest and most straightforward calculation, there is at least a *prima facie* case for supposing that this text has preserved the original form of the tradition, and that the arithmetic was expanded over time. In support of this supposition, it may be observed that the reconstructed text of *HZ(N)*, §371b embodies an intelligible exegesis of Ezek. 1:6, where it is said of the four חִיּוֹת:

וְאַרְבַּעָה פָּנִים לְאַחַת הָאַרְבַּע כַּנְּפִים לְאַחַת לָהֶם

And four faces to each, and four wings to each one of them.

The calculation that the four חִיּוֹת had a total of sixteen faces and sixty-four wings between them must almost certainly have originated with an expositor who understood the words לְאַחַת לָהֶם at the end of this verse to refer back to the faces, of which the חִיּוֹת had four each, rather than to the חִיּוֹת themselves. Thus, what he read was, slightly paraphrased, as follows:

Four faces to each one (of the חִיּוֹת), and four wings to each one of those (faces).

This, then, accounts for the origin of *HZ(N)*, §371b. In contrast, it is not possible (so far as I can tell) to explain either of the two more complex calculations as having been deduced directly from the text of scripture. It is, therefore, safe to conclude that the larger calculations are expanded versions of the smallest one in *HZ(N)*, §371b, which has preserved the earliest form of the tradition about the numbers of the faces and wings of the *חיות*, albeit in a corrupt form. If, as suggested above, the words *מרוח אהת* were added to *HZ(N)*, 371b by the redactor who also inserted *HZ(N)*, §368b into the unit: §368a-369, the fact that he felt compelled to expand the totals given in §371b would imply that §371b was already present, in conjunction with §371a and/or §372, in the source at his disposal. According to our alternative hypothesis, the words *מרוח אהת* originally meant “from a single spirit” and referred to Ezekiel’s *רוח נְחִיָּה*. In this case, it is perhaps possible that the further expansion of the numbers in subsequent texts was based on a misunderstanding of this expression, which was wrongly taken to mean: “in each direction.”

4. *Ben Sira, the Enthronement of Sabaoth, and Hekhalot Zutarti*

In the light of these considerations, it would appear that *HZ(N)*, §371b, together with some, at least, of the surrounding material, is derived from an early stage in the development of the *מרכבה* tradition. Rather striking confirmation of this conclusion is obtained when the corruption that has occurred in this text (*זני* changed to *זוגי*) is considered in relation to the evidence of two other sources, the approximate dates of which are known.

In the first place, the strange miscalculation of *Orig. World*, §32 can very easily be explained if we suppose that the author of this Gnostic work was attempting to make sense of a Hebrew text, or the Greek translation of a Hebrew text, which, like *HZ(N)*, §371b, read *זוגי* (“pairs”) instead of *זני* (“kinds”). This will have led him to double the numbers of the “forms,” making eight at each corner. He has, admittedly, omitted the wings, but retained the number sixty-four, which is achieved by the process of doubling again. It seems then, that he has understood his source to say something like the following:

For each of the four forms, a pair of forms, and for each one of each of these pairs of forms, four pairs of forms (i.e., $4 \times 2 \times 4 \times 2 = 64$).

The Hebrew text of *HZ(N)*, §371b and the surviving Coptic translation of *Orig. World*, §32 are, admittedly, so far distant from each other that it is not possible to reconstruct every step of this process. Nonetheless, it seems probable almost to the point of certainty that the puzzling text in *Orig. World*, §32 is the direct or indirect outcome of an attempt to resolve the confusion caused by a Hebrew textual mutation of the words זוגי (ה)פנים (“kinds of faces”) into זוגי (ה)פנים (“pairs of faces”). This being so, the textual corruption observed in *HZ(N)*, §371b must already have occurred before the time of writing of *Orig. World*. If the latest possible date is assigned to the Gnostic treatise,⁵³ and if a minimum of time is allowed for the circulation and translation into Greek of the corrupted Hebrew text on which the calculation in *Orig. World*, §32 is based, then the corrupted Hebrew text preserved in *HZ(N)*, §371b cannot plausibly be dated any later than the mid-third century CE. A more reasonable estimate would place it somewhere in the second century. The original, uncorrupted text must, of course, be older still.

A further indication of the priority of this passage in *HZ(N)* over *Orig. World*, §32 is the statement in the latter text that “the Cherubin was eight shapes per each of the four corners.” As we have seen, the word “corner” (פינה) in *HZ(N)*, §368b was originally פנה, corresponding to the Aramaic, אפא, “face” of *HZ*, §354.⁵⁴ Once again, therefore, the influence of a textual corruption in the passage preserved by *HZ(N)* can be detected in *Orig. World*, §32. Furthermore, we have found that §371b and §368b were originally independent units which were combined by the redactor of the passage preserved in *HZ(N)*. Since *Orig. World*, §32 betrays the influence of both units, it is beyond reasonable doubt that the source used by the Gnostic author was this Hebrew passage or a Greek translation thereof.

These observations lend further support to our finding that the origins of the *HZ* literary tradition are at least as old as the second century CE. We have not yet, however, exhausted the potential significance of the textual corruption: זוגי to זוגי in *HZ(N)*, §371b. A further implication of this remarkable happenstance, pointing to a much earlier period of origin, remains to be examined. The clue that led to the unravelling of the mystery of the “pairs of faces” was discovered in the Hebrew text

⁵³ See p. 138 above.

⁵⁴ See p. 182 above.

of Ecclus. 49:8. This text itself is evidently corrupt or deficient, since *זני מרכבה* (“varieties of chariot”) makes no apparent sense.⁵⁵ The text must have become corrupt at a very early stage in its circulation, since Ben Sira’s grandson, writing in Egypt soon after 132 BCE, evidently found it incomprehensible and therefore substituted a Greek paraphrase of his own. As we have seen, both *Hyp. Arch.*, §29 and *Orig. World*, §32 appear to have been influenced by this paraphrase or the tradition that it represents. Moreover, the fact that the mutation of *זני* into *זוגי* has been found to be the source of the confused calculation in *Orig. World*, §32 indicates that the Hebrew textual tradition in which that mutation occurred was, almost certainly, closely related to that of Ecclus. 49:8. This being so, the light shed by Ecclus. 49:8 on *HZ(N)*, §371b may, perhaps, be reflected back in equal measure. If so, the mistake of the scribe who miscopied an early Hebrew text of Ecclus. 49:8 will be found to have been a straightforward error of elision. What Ben Sira originally wrote, I suggest, may well have been as follows:

יחזקאל ראה מראה ויגד זני פני מרכבה:

Ezekiel saw a vision and declared the various faces of the chariot.

⁵⁵ Several authorities have attempted to make sense of this expression, for example: F. VIGOUROUX, *La Sainte Bible Polyglotte* (8 vols.; Paris: Roger et Chernovicz, 1900-09) 5.963: “le genre du char”; G. H. BOX and W. O. E. OESTERLEY, trans., in *APOT*, 1.505, cf. OESTERLEY, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus)* (1916; reprinted London: SPCK, 1931) 139: “the different beings of the chariot”; HILAIRE DUESBERG, “Le Livre de L’Ecclesiastique” (SB; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1958) 217: “les aspects du char”; JOHANNES MARBÖCK, “Henoch – Adam – der Thronwagen. Zu frühjüdischen pseud-epigraphen Traditionen bei *Ben Sira*,” *BZ* 25 (1981) 103-111, reprinted in *idem*, *Gottes Weisheit unter uns: zur Theologie des Buches Sirach* (HBS 6; Freiburg, etc.: Herder, 1995) 14: “die Ansichten des Thronwagen”; GEORG SAUER, “Jesus Sirach (Ben Sira)” in WERNER GEORG KUMMEL, ed., *Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*, vol. 3, *Unterweisung in lehrhafter Form* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1981) 629: “von den Gestalten des Wagens”; ANTONINO MINISSALE, *La versione greca del Siracide. Confronto con il testo ebraico alla luce dell’attività midrascica e del metodo targumico* (AnBib 133; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Biblico, 1995) 219: “le (varie) forme del carro”; RALPH HILDESHEIM, *Bis daß ein Prophet aufstand wie Feuer: Untersuchungen zum Prophetenverständnis des Ben Sira in Sir. 48,1-49,16* (TTS 58; Trier: Paulinus, 1996) 206: “die Gestalten am Cherubwagen.” None of these suggestions, however, agrees with the usual meaning of the Hebrew word זני; see BDB, 275a and JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 405b.

These two proposed textual corruptions – זני פני מרכבה to זני מרכבה in Ecclus. 49:8; and זוגי הפנים to זני הפנים in *HZ(N)*, §371b – are quite different and independent of each other. The suggestion that these two mistakes can explain not only each other, but also a third confused source, written in a different language before being translated into yet another, would undoubtedly strain the bounds of credibility, were it not for the fact that connections between these three texts can be demonstrated on other grounds.⁵⁶ There is, of course, no evidence to suggest that the corruption in *HZ(N)*, §371b, or the text which existed prior to that corruption, is of the same antiquity as Ecclus. 49:8. Since the wings of the חירות are not mentioned by Ben Sira, we do not know the date at which an anonymous exegete first interpreted Ezek. 1:6 as meaning that each of the four faces had four wings. It is, however, clear that the origins of the tradition about the “varieties of the faces of the chariot,” grounded in exegesis of Ezek. 1:6 and 1:10, are at least as ancient as the early second century BCE,⁵⁷ and that *HZ(N)*, §371b has preserved a very early form of that tradition. By no stretch of the imagination can this text, in its uncorrupted form, be later than the second century CE. It is likely to be considerably older. As we have seen, moreover, *HZ(N)*, §371b appears to be intrinsically connected to some, at least, of the material in which it is embedded, or at least to have been combined with this material at an early stage of redaction of the *HZ* compilation. This material, therefore, while not necessarily of equal antiquity, is also likely to be derived from the earlier stages of the *HZ* literary tradition.

⁵⁶ See pp. 178-181 above.

⁵⁷ MARBÖCK (“Henoch – Adam – der Thronwagen,” 141-143) points out that Ecclus. 49:8 is a clear indication that the מרכבה vision was already regarded as the most significant episode in the book of Ezekiel by the early second century CE.

CHAPTER NINE

THE STUFF OF HEAVEN

1. *The Calf, the Levites, and the Waters*

The theme of priestly purity has surfaced several times in the course of this inquiry. Since the gate of the sixth היכל corresponds to the entrance to the sanctuary building, the יורד מרכבה who passes through this gate is entering territory which is reserved for priests in a state of purity. When he enters the seventh היכל or divine throne room, corresponding to the holy of holies, he is assuming the supremely privileged role of the high priest. In the water vision episode, the difference between “worthiness” and “unworthiness” will, therefore, very probably have to do with the issue of eligibility and fitness to perform the priestly office. Considered in the light of this theme, the angels’ accusation of the unworthy יורד מרכבה in *HZ:D2*, “Perhaps you of the calf-kissers’ seed and unworthy to see the king in his beauty,” is an important key to the meaning of the episode.

DAN regards this accusation as further evidence of the “capriciousness and cruelty” of the angels’ behavior, since the יורד מרכבה can neither know nor be held responsible for the actions of his ancestors at Sinai.¹ DAN observes that the accusation seems, in fact, to apply equally to all יורדי מרכבה, without exception, since the entire community of Israel was, according to scripture, guilty of this sin.² In REICHMAN’s opinion, the expression מזרעם של מנשקי עגל is not meant to be taken literally, since the יורד מרכבה who betrays his unworthiness by asking the question is responsible for his own fate, and

.... is himself, so to speak, a מנשק עגל. The author does not wish to tell us anything about his genealogical descent. His membership of the family of the desert idolaters seems rather to be of a typological nature.³

¹ DAN, “פתח היכל שיש,” 199-200.

² DAN, *ibid.*, 199.

³ REICHMAN, “Die “Wasser-Episode,”” 80-81.

DEUTSCH interprets the reference to the kissers of the calf as a polemic against heretics and suggests that it may have been specifically directed against the Mandeans, who, like other Gnostic groups, attributed the Sinai revelation to an inferior power and denigrated Moses as the false prophet of the earthly rulers Ruha and Adonai.⁴ Observing that the Mandeans of the twentieth century linked their own ancestors to the Egyptians and, according to DROWER, held an annual commemorative meal for the Egyptians who drowned in the Red Sea,⁵ DEUTSCH relates these Mandaean traditions to numerous rabbinic sources which attribute the creation of the golden calf to the “mixed multitude” of Exod. 12:38 (עָרֵב רַב) and Numb. 11:4 (הָאֶסְפָּסָרָה), and/or to the Egyptians.⁶

The Jewish tradition portraying the Egyptians or mixed multitude as the makers of the golden calf combined with the Mandaean identification with the Egyptians, denigration of the revelation at Sinai, and general hostility to Judaism may have inspired a Jewish polemic which identified the Mandeans as the mixed multitude who left Egypt with the Israelites and therefore as the makers of the golden calf.⁷

This proposed connection between rabbinic traditions and the beliefs and practices of the twentieth century Mandeans is, as DEUTSCH himself concedes, highly conjectural.⁸ Moreover, this interpretation of the angels’ words of condemnation of the unworthy יוֹרֵד מֵרֵכֶבֶה is based on the premise that the water vision episode is itself a polemical composition directed against Mandaean or other Gnostic cosmological doctrines. That premise is not supported by the results of this inquiry.

None of these interpretations, I submit, succeeds in recognizing the real significance of the angels’ accusation. Associated with the stories of Moses’ ascent into heaven from Mount Sinai and the bodily metamorphosis that this entailed, is a very widespread midrashic tradition that all the Israelites, when they beheld the appearance of God’s manifest Glory on the mountain, experienced a similar transformation of

⁴ DEUTSCH, *Guardians*, 121-122.

⁵ See DROWER, *The Mandeans*, 10.

⁶ See further LEVY SMOLAR and MOSHE ABERBACH, “The Golden Calf Episode in Postbiblical Literature,” *HUCA* 39 (1968) 91-116, especially 113, n. 27, and the sources cited there.

⁷ DEUTSCH, *Guardians*, 122.

⁸ DEUTSCH, *ibid.*

their bodies and were translated to angelic status. We find, for example, that God adorned the Children of Israel “from the splendor of his Glory,” vested them in royal robes, and gave them crowns and weapons engraved with the divine name, all of which which liberated them from the power of death.⁹ According to *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer*,

R. Judah says: “Whenever a man puts on his fine clothes (בגדי תפארתו), he becomes beautiful in his appearance, glory and splendor. Thus were Israel while they were wearing that name – they were as good as angels in the presence the Holy One, blessed be he.”¹⁰

According to a related cycle of traditions, attributed mainly to rabbis of the third century CE, the Israelites were unable to withstand the vision of the divine Glory or the sound of God’s voice and so died, but were revived by the angels at God’s command. This process involved the transformation of their bodies into fiery angelic forms clothed with the name of God, which conferred immortality upon them until, as a result of the sin of the golden calf, they reverted to ordinary human status.¹¹ Several sources, however, record a tradition that the tribe of Levi did not participate in the sin of the calf and received the gift of priesthood as a reward for its faithfulness.¹² The innocence of the Levites is, presumably, inferred from Exod. 32:25-29, where the Levites are said to have “consecrated themselves” by slaughtering three thousand of their fellow Israelites, at Moses’ command, in retribution for the sin of the calf. Although the scriptural account does not explicitly state that the Levites had refused to participate in the idolatrous crime itself, the tradition of

⁹ *Exod. R.* 51.8, 45.2; *Cant. R.* 1.25 (= 1.4, §2), 4.25 (= 4.12, §2) and 8.2 (= 8.5, §1). See further MORRAY-JONES, “Transformational Mysticism,” 13-15 and 22-23, and the sources cited there.

¹⁰ *PdRE*, §47, ed. BRODA 61b-62a; cf. trans. FRIEDLANDER, 367-368.

¹¹ *b. Shabb.* 88b; *Exod. R.* 29.4; *Cant. R.* 6.3-4 (= 5.16, §3); *Midr. Ps.* 68.5; and *Pes. R.* 20.21-22 (ed. ULMER, 434-435); Compare *t. Arak.* 1.10 and *Mek., bahodesh*, 9.53-61 (ed. and trans. JACOB Z. LAUTERBACH, *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael: A Critical Edition on the Basis of the Manuscripts and Early Editions* [2 vols; SLJC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933-1935] 2.270), which include similar material but do not state that the Israelites died. On the theme of “initiatory death” and mystical rebirth in these sources, see further CHERNUS, *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism*, 33-73.

¹² In addition to the sources discussed below, see: *b. Yoma* 66b; *b. Hag.* 6b; *Midr. Ps.* 1.14; and *PdRE*, §45.

their innocence is old enough to be recorded by Philo.¹³ One version of this tradition is found in *Pes. R.* 21.17:¹⁴

The chariots of God are two myriad, two thousand, the Lord with them, on Sinai in holiness (Ps. 68:18).¹⁵

R. Abdimi of Haifa said: "I have learned in my mishnah that twenty-two thousand ministering angels descended with the Holy One, blessed be he, on Mount Sinai, and in the hand of each one was a crown with which to crown each single member of the tribe of Levi."¹⁶

R. Levi said: "It was revealed and known to the One who spoke, and the world came into being, that none of the tribes [?] would stand in their oath, in their integrity [?], but that the tribe of Levi [?] would stand in its integrity [?]. Therefore, they descended with the Holy One, blessed be he, on Mount Sinai, [?] and in the hand of each one each single member of the tribe of Levi [?]."

R. Yannai, the son of R. Simeon ben Yoḥai, said to him: "If so, you diminish it.¹⁷ Rather, at the time when the Holy One, blessed be he, descended on Mount Sinai, twenty-two thousand chariots (מרכבות) descended with him, each one like the chariot that Ezekiel saw."

According to BRAUDE, this midrash is an attempt to resolve an apparent contradiction between the Torah's account of the Sinai event, in which God appears and acts alone, and the large number of angels mentioned in Ps. 68:18.¹⁸ The latter verse, which, as HALPERIN has shown, became

¹³ Philo, *Mos.* ii.167-173.

¹⁴ *Pes. R.* 21.17, ed. ULMER, 456-457; cf. 21.7 in ed. MARGALIYOT, 177-178; and trans. BRAUDE, *Pesikta Rabbati*, 1.425-426. The text of Levi's opinion is problematic. The following translation is based on *editio princeps*, but the phrases marked: [?] [?] are very questionable and will be examined in detail below.

¹⁵ MT: רָכַב אֱלֹהִים רַבְתִּים אֶלְפֵי שָׁנָן אֲדָנִי בָּם סִינַי בְּקֶדֶשׁ; ed. *princ.* and ms. Parma of *Pes. R.* read: בסִינַי, "on Sinai."

¹⁶ Mss. Casanata and Dropsie: וְיָרַד עִטְרָה לְעֵטֶר בֵּה כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד מֵהֶם עִטְרָה לְעֵטֶר בֵּה כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד מֵהֶם; ms. JTS and ed. *princ.* omit מהם and מבני שבטו של לוי; ms. Parma omits the words: מהם עטרה לעטר בה כל אחד ואחד

¹⁷ Ed. *princ.*, ms. JTS and ed. MARGALIYOT: מֵעֵטְתָּה; ms. Dropsie: מֵעֵטְתָּה; ms. Parma: מֵעֵטְתָּה; ms. ms. Casanata: מֵעֵטְנָה (deleted: מֵעֵטְנָה). The exact meaning is unclear and the text, as it stands, seems unsatisfactory. BRAUDE offers: "If it is meant that only twenty-two thousand angels accompanied God, then you make out His retinue to be a small thing." The original text is, however, probably that found in *Tanh.*, *zaw.*, §12: אִם כֵּן מֵעַתָּה שֶׁבִּשְׂבַט לְוֵי כְּתִיב לֵוִי כְּתִיב, which seems to mean: "if so, then in consequence (מֵעַתָּה), the text (i.e., Ps. 68:18) is about the tribe of Levi" (see p. 197 below).

¹⁸ BRAUDE, *Pesikta Rabbati*, 1.425, n. 36.

a major focus of the מרכבה tradition,¹⁹ is here explained by an implicit reference to Numb. 3:39, which states that at the time of the Sinai revelation “all that were counted of the Levites were twenty-two thousand (קָל-פְּקוּדֵי הַלְוִיִּם שְׁנַיִם וְעֶשְׂרִים אֶלֶף).” The text of Levi’s opinion is, as noted above, extremely problematic. The manuscripts and *editio princeps* published by ULMER read as follows:²⁰

E:	גלוי וידוע שכל השבטים אינם עומדין	בשבועתם בתומיהם	ושבטו של לוי
J:	גלוי וידוע שכל השבטים אינם עומדים	בשבועתם בתומם	ושבטו של לוי
D:	גלוי וידוע שכל השבטים אינן עומדין	במימהם	ושבטו של לוי
C:	גלוי וידוע שכל השבטים אינן עומדין	במימהם	ושבטו של לוי
P:	גלוי וידוע שכל השבטים אינם עומדים	במימהם	ושבטו של לוי

E:	עומד בתומי	לפיכך ירדו על הר סיני וביד	כל אחד
J:	עומד בתומיא	לפיכך ירדו על הר סיני וביד	כל אחד
D:			כל אחד ואחד
C:			כל אחד ואחד
P:	עומד במימיו	לפיכך ירדו על הר סיני וביד	כל אחד ואחד מהם עטרה

E:	מבני שבטו של לוי
J:	מבני שבטו של לוי
D:	מבני שבטו של לוי
C:	מבני שבטו של לוי
P:	לעטר בה כל אחד ואחד מבני שבטו של לוי

Mss. Dropsie, Casanata and Parma all differ from ms. JTS and *editio princeps* by reading עומדים במימהם (“would stand in their waters”) in place of עומדים בשבועתם בתומם (“would stand in their oath, in their integrity”). In the second clause, ms. Parma again reads: עומד במימיו in place of עומד בתומיא, whereas mss. Dropsie and Casanata omit these words altogether. The obscure readings: במימהם and במימיו might be due to a copyist’s mistake, but there are grounds for preferring them as *lectiones difficiliores*. Taking the text as a whole, it is clear from the syntax that mss. Dropsie and Casanata are defective, and this is also true of the second part of the text in ms. JTS and the edition. It is thus evident that ms. Parma has preserved the only complete and satisfactory

¹⁹ HALPERIN, *Faces*, especially 18, 58-60, 141-149, 171-176, 288-289, 301-317, 335-345, and 501-504.

²⁰ See n. 14 above. E = *editio princeps*; J = ms. JTS 8195; D = ms. Dropsie 26; C = ms. Casanata 3324; P = ms. Parma 3122; ed. MARGALYOT agrees verbatim with J.

version of the text as a whole.²¹ While not decisive in itself, this observation strengthens the case for preferring the difficult readings: **במלימיהם** and **במלימיו** in this manuscript, the first of which is supported by mss. Dropsie and Casanata. The text of Levi's opinion in ms. Parma reads in full:

R. Levi said: "It was revealed and known to the One who spoke, and the world came into being, that none of the tribes would stand in their waters, but that the tribe of Levi would stand in its waters. Therefore they descended with the Holy One, blessed be he, upon Mount Sinai, each one with a crown in his hand, with which to crown each single member of the tribe of Levi."

Before considering what this might mean, we should note that the same pattern occurs in a slightly shorter version of the same unit, which is found in four different sources.²² The standard edition of *Tanh.*, *zaw*, §12 reads as follows:²³

R. Abdimi of Haifa said, "I have learned in my mishnah that twenty-two thousand and ministering angels descended with the Holy One, blessed be he, upon Mount Sinai."

R. Berakiah the priest (**כהן**) said, "The Holy One, blessed be he, saw that they would not stand in their faithfulness (**עמידים באמונתו**), except for the tribe of Levi. On account of this, twenty-two thousand (angels) descended, corresponding to the camp of Levi."

R. Yannai said to him: "If this were so, then, in consequence (**מעתה**), the text: *the chariots of God are two myriad, two thousand* would be about the tribe of Levi.²⁴ What does *the chariots of God are two myriad* (really) mean? Twenty-two

²¹ In the previous paragraph, however, ms. Parma is defective (see p. 195, n. 16 above).

²² *Tanh.*, *zaw*, §12, ed. ZONDEL, *מדרש תנחומא*, 2.9a; *tanh. B, zaw*, §16, ed. SOLOMON BUBER, *מדרש תנחומא* (1885; reprinted 6 vols. in 2; Jerusalem, Ortsel, 1963) 4.10b; *Tanh. B, yitro*, §14, ed. BUBER, 3.38b-39a; and *Pesiqta deRab Kahana* 12.22, ed. BERNARD MANDELBAUM, *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana According to an Oxford Manuscript* (2 vols. paginated as one; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962) 219-220. For further analysis of these texts, see HALPERIN, *Faces*, 141-149.

²³ Ed. ZONDEL (see the previous note).

²⁴ Heb.: **אם כן מעתה בשבט לוי כתיב**. See p. 195, n. 17 above. The three parallels omit Yannai's rebuttal of Levi's opinion: *Tanh. B, zaw*, §16 retains "R. Yannai said ...," whereas *Tanh. B, yitro*, §14 and *Pes. deR. Kahana* 12:22 introduce what follows as an unattributed tradition.

thousand chariots descended with the Holy One, blessed be he, and each single chariot was like the chariot that Ezekiel saw.²⁵

The three parallel sources, however, all read **במימיהם** (or its equivalent) in place of **באמונהן**.²⁶ Thus, the more difficult reading is found in witnesses to both the longer and the shorter recensions of this text, whereas the alternative readings are different in the two recensions. This indicates very strongly that the text did originally read **במימיהם**, and that this word was altered to **בשבועתם בתומיהם** by an early copyist of one recension, and to **באמונהן** by a copyist of the other. It is, therefore, necessary to ask what the obscure expression: "... would stand in their water" (**עומדים במימיהם**) might mean in this context.²⁷

A clue to this riddle may be found in a passage about the golden calf event, which also alludes to the Levites' innocence:²⁸

He took the calf which they had made and burnt it with fire etc. (Exod. 32:20). Then he judged the corrupt ones and he established a court from among the sons of Levi, for they had not taken part in the affair of the calf. Each person who appeared but lacked a witness was tested with the water as it is written: and he scattered it upon the water and made the children of Israel drink it (ibid.).

²⁵ Ed. ZONDEL: ועם כל מרכבה ומרכבה וקב"ה ועם כל מרכבה ומרכבה ירדו עם הקב"ה ועם כל מרכבה ומרכבה. כמרכבה שראה יחזקאל, which is unique to this source. The parallels in *Tanhuma B* both read: וכל מרכבה, while *Pes. deR. Kabana* reads: ועל כל מרכבה, ועל כל מרכבה, which may be an attempted correction of the error: ועם כל מרכבה in *Tanhuma*.

²⁶ *Tanh. B, zavo*, §16: במימיהם; *Tanh. B, yitro*, §14: במימיהם; *Pes. deR. Kabana* 12.22: במימיהן (MANDELBAUM notes the variant: באמונתן in one ms.).

²⁷ WILLIAM G. BRAUDE and ISRAEL J. KAPSTEIN, trans., *Pesikta dē-Rab Kahāna: R. Kahana's Compilation of Discourses for Sabbaths and Festal Days* (LLJC; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975) 245, offer: "only the Tribe of Levi would retain its water-clear integrity." This eclectic rendering strikes me as very speculative and not at all convincing. Elsewhere, BRAUDE suggests that in this exegesis of Ps. 68:18, שָׁנֵן is read by metathesis: שָׁנֵן, which he renders: "calm, unruffled," and that Ps. 68:18 was thus understood to mean: "God's [coronal] mountings for the 22,000 who would remain calm." Applying this notion to the image of "standing in water," he translates the midrash as follows: "It was known and revealed to Him that [during the frenzy aroused by the golden calf] most of the tribes would not keep control of themselves. Only the Tribe of Levi would remain unmoved" (see BRAUDE, *Pesikta Rabbati*, 425-6, n. 37; on שָׁנֵן, see BDB 983a-b; and JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 1508b). No evidence is cited in support of this elaborate interpretation, which appears to be a guess.

²⁸ *Tanh., tišša*, §26, ed. ZONDEL, 1.124a.

This *Tanhuma*' text is, of course, referring to the narrative of Moses' response to the sin of the calf in Exod. 32:19-22. The enforced drinking of the water on which the ashes of the calf have been scattered is interpreted in terms of the bitter water ordeal inflicted on a woman suspected of adultery (Numb. 5:11-31), with the calf-worshipping community cast in its familiar role as God's unfaithful wife.²⁹ It may be that the puzzling expressions: עומדין במימיהם, and עומד במימיו in the midrash on Ps. 68:18 originally referred to this test, in which case עמד ב- must in, this context, mean "to withstand" or "to endure." If so, the statement attributed to Levi in the longer recension, and to Berakiah in the shorter, reads as follows:

It was revealed and known to the Holy One, blessed be he, that none of the tribes would withstand their water, but that the tribe of Levi would withstand its water.

2. *The Waters and the Heavenly Tablets*

If this hypothesis is correct, the point of the midrash is that the tribe of Levi, unlike the other eleven tribes, was able to pass the bitter water test, thereby demonstrating its collective innocence of the sin of the calf. At first sight, this obscures, rather than clarifies, the relationship between these midrashim and the water vision episode, since, although the image of water is central to both traditions, the motif of drinking water is very different from that of walking on a pavement which looks like water but is really "brilliant air." Nonetheless, the common concern with priestly "worthiness" and the theme of guilt/innocence of the sin of the calf both seem to indicate that the two traditions are somehow related. A possible resolution of this difficulty is suggested by the following passage of *Sefer ha-Zohar*:³⁰

At the time when Moses broke the tablets, as it is written: *And he shattered them beneath the mountain* (Exod. 32:19), the ocean arose from its place and welled up

²⁹ Compare *b.A.Z.* 43b-44a, and *Numb. R.* 9.48.

³⁰ *Zohar*, 3.113b, in REUBEN BEN MOSHEH MARGALYOT, ed., *ספר הזוהר על חמשה חומשי תורה מהתנא האלהי רבי שמעון בן יוחאי* (3 vols.; Jerusalem: Kook, 1984-5) 2.113b; cf. HARRY SPERLING, MAURICE SIMON, and PAUL P. LEVERTOFF, trans., *The Zohar* (2d ed.; 5 vols.; London and New York: Soncino, 1984) 3.338-339, who seem to follow a slightly different text.

to flood the world. When Moses saw that the ocean was rising and seeking to flood the world, *he took the calf which they had made and burnt it in the fire [and ground it to powder]* (Exod. 32:20a). Then he stood up before the waters, against the waters of the ocean, and said: “Waters, waters, what do you want?”

They answered: “Is it not true that the world was only established upon the Law on the tablets, and upon the Law that Israel has betrayed by worshipping the golden calf? (Therefore) we want to flood the world!”

Then Moses said to them: “Behold, all that they have done regarding the sin of the calf is delivered unto you. Are not all these thousands of them who have died enough?” At once, *he scattered it upon the surface of the water* (Exod. 32:20b).

The waters were not appeased until he had taken water from them and given it to them (i.e., the Israelites) to drink. Then the ocean sank back into its place.

In relation to the subject-matter of this inquiry, the *Zohar* is, admittedly, a very late source. It is, however, clear that, although the text itself is undoubtedly a medieval composition, its author or authors drew from a reservoir of traditional ideas and imagery, both written and oral, which he or they have reshaped and systematized in accordance with the metaphysical doctrine of the ten *ספירות*.³¹ Like the earlier midrashic and hekhalot compilations, therefore, the collection includes materials of varying antiquity, although these materials may have been considerably modified. This particular passage is attached to a discussion of the unquestionably ancient traditional list of ten things which were said to have been created on the eve of the first sabbath of creation.³² HALPERIN has shown, moreover, that the golden calf was closely associated with the chaos waters and their assault on creation in the early *מרכבה* tradition.³³ It is, therefore, reasonable to suppose that this text from the *Zohar* – or, at least, the imagery and ideas that it contains – may be derived from that tradition. Here, the waters on which the ashes of

³¹ On the authorship and sources of the *Zohar*, see SCHOLEM, *Major Trends*, 172-176; *idem*, *Kabbalah* (1974; reprinted New York: Dorset, 1987) 223-225; and, especially, *idem*, “Zohar,” *EJ*, 16.1201-1203; also ISAIAH TISHBY, *The Wisdom of the Zohar* (3 vols.; LLJC; Oxford, London, New York, etc.: Oxford University Press, 1989) 1.51-96, especially 74-83. SCHOLEM and TISHBY both maintain that the book is essentially the work of a single author, Moses de Leon. For a theory of group authorship, see YEHUDA LIEBES, “How the Zohar Was Written,” in *idem*, *Studies in the Zohar* (SSJHMR; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) 85-138. All agree that the author or authors made use of a wide variety of traditional sources, of different dates.

³² See *m. Abot* 5:6, *b. Hag.* 12a, *Sifre Deut.*, §355, *PaRE*, §18, etc.

³³ HALPERIN, *Faces*, especially 176-193.

the calf were scattered, and which the Israelites were made to drink, are equated with the waters of chaos, while the function of the אֲבָן שַׁטִּייהַ, which subdues those waters,³⁴ is symbolically attributed to the tablets of the Law. These, of course, are the first pair of tablets, which were of heavenly origin (Exod. 31:18, 32:15-16) and were broken by Moses as a consequence of the making of the calf. Several sources state that the substance of which these tablets were made was the sapphire of the celestial pavement, the earliest of these sources being *Sifre Numb.*, §101:³⁵

We find that the sapphire of the (second) tablets belonged to Moses, for it is said: *At that time, the LORD said to me, "Cut two tablets of stone for yourself, like the first pair"* (Deut. 10:1). And elsewhere it says: *And the tablets were the work of God* (Exod. 32:15), *And they saw the God of Israel and, under his feet, something like tilework of sapphire, and like the substance of heaven for purity* (Exod. 24:10). Thus, there is an analogy between the making of the one and the making of the other. Just as in the former case it was sapphire work, so in the latter case it was also sapphire work.

Combining the evidence of these sources, we find that the tablets of the Law protect the world by subduing the waters of the ocean (i.e., the "lower" chaos waters) and that they are derived from the sapphire pavement or firmament, which, as we have seen, forms a parallel barrier between the "upper" waters and the celestial throne room. The sin of the calf, which caused the tablets to be broken, released the lower chaos waters from their bounds. Only the Levites, who had not worshipped the calf, were able to withstand these waters when, after they had been mixed with the ashes of the calf, they were given to the Israelites to drink. The sapphire pavement thus provides a connection between the midrashic traditions about the "bitter water" ordeal of Exod. 32:19-22 and the water vision episode in *HZ*.

³⁴ See p. 88, n. 20 above.

³⁵ *Sifre Numb.*, §101 (H. S. HOROVITZ, ed., *Siphre d'Be Rab*, vol. 1, *Siphre ad Numeros adjecto Siphre zutta*. (1917; reprinted Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1966) 99-100; cf. JACOB NEUSNER, trans., *Sifre to Numbers: An American Translation and Explanation* (2 vols.; BJS 118-119; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986) 2.106. Compare: *PdRE*, §46; *Cant. R.* 5.12 (= 5.14, §3); and *Zohar*, 2.84a-b.

3. *The Angelic Priesthood*

The tradition that the Levites were wholly innocent of the sin of the calf explains the angels' response to the unworthy *יורד מרכבה* at *HZ:D2*, which is much more than a mere insult. It is, in fact, a specific and pointed accusation, since one who is descended from "the calf-kissers' seed" cannot be a valid priest. One who mistakes the upper surface of the firmament for water and imputes bodily impurity to the substance of the celestial realm reveals himself as unqualified for the priestly office and, therefore, unfit to enter the temple. Furthermore, since the seed of Levi is uncontaminated by this heinous sin, the Levites are exempt from the penalty that was incurred by the other tribes, namely, loss of angelic status. The accusation: "You are of the calf-kissers' seed!" thus also means, by implication: "You are not, like us, an angel!" As we have observed, the question which precedes the accusation – "Do you not see with your eyes?" – seems to imply that the substance of the pavement does not look like water to the angels.³⁶ If so, the *יורד מרכבה* who mistakes it for water betrays himself as one who does not possess the pure transformed angelic body of a valid priest, and who is therefore incapable of correctly perceiving the celestial realm.

In *3 Enoch* 2:1-4, when Rabbi Ishmael seeks admission to the heavenly sanctuary, he is challenged by the angels as follows:³⁷

Rabbi Ishmael said:

Then the eagles of the *מרכבה*, the flaming wheels, and the seraphim of devouring fire asked Metatron, saying to him. "Youth, why have you permitted one born of woman to come and behold the *מרכבה*? From what nation is he? From what tribe is he? What is the nature of this person (מה טיבו של זה)?"

Metatron replied, saying to them: "He is from the nation of Israel, which the Holy One, blessed be he, has chosen from the seventy to be his nation. He is of the tribe of Levi, which presents the offering to his name.³⁸ He is of the seed of Aaron, whom the Holy One, blessed be he, has chosen to be a minister

³⁶ See pp. 124-125 above.

³⁷ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §3 (ms. Vatican); cf. ODEBERG, *3 Enoch*, Hebrew, 5 and English, 5-6; and ALEXANDER, *OTP* 1.257.

³⁸ Reading *שמרים תרומה לשמו*, with ODEBERG, who indicates that the word *שמרים* is conjectural, not found in the mss. In fact, ms. Munich 40 reads: *מרים לשמו*, but omits *תרומה*, whereas mss. Vatican 228 and Oxford 1656/2 omit *מרים* (see SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §3 and ALEXANDER, *OTP* 1.257, n. 2e). The expression *תרימו תרומה ליהודה* is found in Numb. 15:19 and Ezek. 45:1.

to him, and upon whom the Holy One, blessed be he, himself bound the crown of priesthood on Sinai.”

Then they opened and said, “Surely, this one is worthy to behold the מרכבה (בוראי ראוי זה להסתכל במרכבה),³⁹ as it is written: *Happy the people of whom this is true* etc. (Ps. 144:15).”

In general terms, this is, of course, reminiscent of the angels’ opposition to the ascent of Moses in the Sinai midrashim. It should, moreover, be observed that the formulaic response: בוראי ראוי זה להסתכל במרכבה closely parallels that of the gatekeepers of the sixth דיכל in the ascent midrash (C1, D3), and that the criterion of “worthiness” is explicitly stated to be priestly status and descent.

A question to be considered is whether, in the context of the water vision episode, the notion of priestly status is to be interpreted in literal terms, in which case we are to understand that only a *bona fide* descendant of Levi can undertake the visionary journey through the דיכלות. It is probable to the point of certainty that the מרכבה tradition, with its overwhelmingly cultic imagery, did originate, at least in part, in priestly circles – as, of course, did the Book of Ezekiel itself.⁴⁰ Long before the catastrophe of 70 CE, however, the ideal of a “nation of priests” had been gathering strength, and groups who had become alienated from the Jerusalem temple and its cult had begun to develop the doctrine of a spiritual priesthood based on criteria of purity which were independent of physical descent. In the context of Christianity, these ideas are most clearly expressed in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which draws on the Melchizedek tradition to articulate a claim to a priesthood which, being conferred by one who is not “born of woman” (Heb. 7:3), is untainted by the questionable process of bodily descent. In Revelation, Levitical status in heaven is attributed to the martyrs,⁴¹ a category which, in a Jewish context, would include Aqiba. In the Qumran writings, we find that the traditional structure of priestly hierarchy and privilege is allegorized in accordance with the sect’s perception of its own situation and self-significance:

³⁹ Ms. Oxford omits זָה.

⁴⁰ See further, for example, MAIER, *vom Kultus*; and ELIOR, “From Earthly Temple to Heavenly Shrines.”

⁴¹ See pp. 131-132 above.

But with the remnant which held fast to the commandments of God he made his covenant with Israel for ever, revealing to them the hidden things in which all Israel had gone astray. He unfolded before them his holy sabbaths and his glorious feasts and he built them a sure house in Israel whose like has never existed from former times until now. Those who hold fast to it are destined to live for ever, and all the glory of Adam shall be theirs⁴² – as God ordained by the hand of the Prophet Ezekiel, saying, *The Priests, the Levites, and the sons of Zadok who kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel strayed from me, they shall offer me fat and blood* (Ezek. 44:15).

The *Priests* are the converts of Israel (שבוי ישראל) who departed from the land of Judah, and (the *Levites* are) those who joined them (והגלויים עמהם). The *sons of Zadok* are the elect of Israel, the men called by name (קריאי השם) who shall stand at the end of days.⁴³

The hekhalot traditions associated with R. Ishmael frequently emphasize his priestly lineage, and it is reasonable to suppose that these traditions originated in circles which attributed considerable value to the hereditary priesthood. It is also noteworthy that, in the midrashic sources presented on pages 195 and 197-198 above, the tradition of priestly innocence of the sin of the calf is handed down, in one instance, by a Levi and, in the other, by a Cohen. These considerations do not, however, apply to materials transmitted in the name of Aqiba, who, according to tradition, came from humble origins.⁴⁴ It is, moreover, unlikely that, within the broadly rabbinic context of the hekhalot tradition, an insistence on literal, hereditary priesthood would or could have been sustained. The material in *HZ*:E-F, where the fate of the *מרובה* is determined by his actions, regardless of his actual worth, appears to be incompatible with such a scenario, as, indeed, does Aqiba's warning in *babli*. In the rabbinic *מעשה מרובה* tradition, the required qualification is not priestly descent, but the status of a *חכם*, i.e., a talmudic "sage" or rabbi (*m.Hag.* 2.1, etc.). According to the author of *HR* 19.3-20.1, it is

⁴² ויבן להם בית נאמן בישראל אשר לא עמד כמהו למלפנים ועד הנה המחזיקין בו לחיי להם וכל כבוד אדם להם.

⁴³ CD, iii.12-iv.4, trans. GEZA VERMES, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (3rd. edn.; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998) 129-130; Hebrew text in JAMES H. CHARLESWORTH *et al.*, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*, vol. 2: *Damascus Document, War Scroll, and Related Documents* (Tübingen and Louisville: Mohr-Siebeck and Westminster John Knox Press, 1995) 16-18.

⁴⁴ See *AdRN(A)* 6 and *AdRN(B)* 12 (ed. SCHECHTER, 14b-15b); *b.Ber.* 27b, etc.

in these terms that the *יורד מרכבה* who seeks admission to the heavenly sanctuary must demonstrate his worthiness:⁴⁵

And at the gate of the sixth *היכל* sits *דומיאל* the prince, the threshold-guardian on the right of the gate of the sixth palace, on a bench of pure stone (*על ספסל*) (*של ליתוק טהור*) upon which is the splendor of the lights of the firmament (*רקיע*) as at the creation of the world⁴⁶ – *ארסטאן ואירא ארסטאר וכנפינן צמנש ערנה* – the LORD God of Israel.⁴⁷

And *דומיאל* the prince would receive him [i.e., the *יורד מרכבה*] cordially and seat him on the bench of pure stone and sit beside him on his right. And he would say to him: “Two things do I declare and warn you about. He who would descend to the *מרכבה* may not descend unless he possesses these two qualities: he is one who has read the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings, and who studies *mishnayot*, *midrash*, *halakhot* and *aggadot*, and the interpretation of the *halakhot* concerning what is forbidden and what is permitted, and⁴⁸ who has fulfilled every negative commandment that is written in the Torah and observed all the prohibitions of the statutes, judgements and ordinances that were spoken to Moses on Mount Sinai.”

Here, then, the conditions for entry into the celestial sanctuary, and the “priestly” status that this implies, are the rabbinic virtues of Torah observance and talmudic expertise. It is possible that the expression *אלא אלא שיש בו שני מידות הללו* alludes to and expands upon the formula: *אלא אם כן היה חכם ומבין מדעתו* (*m.Hag.* 2.1). This text, then, upholds the ideal of a “functional” rather than hereditary priesthood, for which the required qualification is not physical descent, but rabbinic scholarship and piety.

4. *The Heavenly Tablets and the Sea of Torah*

The following midrash on Cant. 5:14, in *Cant. R.* 5.12, includes a discussion of the tablets of the Law which is, at first sight, unsatisfactory and problematic. Beneath the confusion, however, we may be able to

⁴⁵ *HR* 19.3-20.1, following ms. Oxford; SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§233-234; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.99-100, §§21.3-4.

⁴⁶ See p. 91 above.

⁴⁷ The *nomina barbara* vary slightly between the mss.

⁴⁸ Mss. Budapest, Vatican and Munich 22: “or.”

detect an allusion to a tradition which casts a significant light on the water vision episode in *HZ*.⁴⁹

- A1 *His hands are rounded gold, [covered with jewels. His body is ivory work, encrusted with sapphires]* (נָדְרוּ גְלִילֵי זָהָב כְּמִזְלָאִים בְּתַרְשִׁישׁ מְעִירו עֲשֶׂת שֵׁן קִמְעָלָפֶת סַפִּירִים) (Cant. 5:14).
- A2 These are the tablets of the covenant, as it is said: *And the tablets were the work of God* (Exod. 32:16).
- A3 *Rounded gold* (גְּלִילֵי זָהָב) – these are the words of the Torah, as it is said: *More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold* (Ps. 19:11).
- A4 R. Joshua b. R. Nehemiah⁵⁰ said: “They were of miraculous construction (מעשה) היו (נסיים היו), for they were “rolled up” (נגללין היו). They were of sapphire, and they were “rolled up” (של סנפירינן והיו נגללין).⁵¹
- A5 R. Menahema said in the name of R. Abun: “They were hewn out from the orb of the sun (וחצובין מגלגל חמה היו).”
- B1 How were they written?
- B2 Five on one tablet and five on the other, as it is said: *His arms are rounded gold*, in accordance with the words of R. Hanina b. Gamaliel: *And he wrote them on two tablets of stone* (Deut. 4:13).
- B3 [Various opinions about the number and arrangement of the commandments: ten on each tablet; twenty on each tablet, i.e., ten on each side; and forty, written in a square around the edges of each tablet.]
- C1 Hananiah, the nephew of R. Joshua, said: “Between each word and the next were written the sections and minutiae of the Torah.”
- C2 Whenever R. Yohanan was explaining scripture and he came to the verse: *covered with jewels* (מִמְזִלָּאִים בְּתַרְשִׁישׁ), he would say: “Well did R. Joshua’s nephew teach

⁴⁹ *Cant. R.*, 5.12 (= 5.14, §§1-2) ed. DUNSKY, *מדרש רבה שיר השירים*, 134-135; cf. FREEDMAN and SIMON, trans. *Midrash Rabbah*, 9:2.245-246; and NEUSNER, trans., *Song of Songs Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (2 vols.; BJS 197-198; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989) 2.120-121, §74.

⁵⁰ Following trans. FREEDMAN and SIMON, and trans. NEUSNER; ed. DUNSKY prints: “R. Joshua bar Nehemiah.”

⁵¹ The word גְּלִילֵי (“rounded,” Cant. 5:14) is here understood to mean נגללין (“rolled up”), presumably like a Torah scroll. See further below.

me! As, in the case of these waves, there are small waves between one big wave and the next big wave (מה גלים הללו בין גל גדול לגל גדול גלים קטנים), so between each word and the next were written the sections and minutiae of the Torah.”

- C3 *Covered with jewels* – this is the Talmud, which is like the Great Sea, as it says elsewhere: *as far as Tarshish* (תַּרְשִׁישָׁה), Jonah 1:3), and so it is said, *All rivers run into the sea [but the sea is not full]* (Eccl. 1:7).

The midrash begins by making a connection between the hands of the Beloved and the heavenly tablets (A1-5), but the basis for this connection is far from clear. Although the biblical account states that the tablets were made by God (Exod. 32:16, quoted in A2) and that he wrote on them with his own finger (Exod. 31:18), the statement that the tablets *were* his hands makes no apparent sense.⁵² The appeal to the word “gold” in Ps. 19:11 (A3) provides a link of sorts between the hands of the Beloved and words of Torah in general, but this looks like an attempt to justify the association of Cant. 5:14 with the tablets, which has already been made on other grounds. Similarly, the idea that the tablets were hewn from the sun’s golden orb (גלגל) is introduced to explain why Cant. 5:14 applies to them (A5), but it is clearly a consequence of that application, not its cause. Joshua b. Nehemiah’s statement that the tablets were “rolled up” (A4), which has no basis in scripture, likewise assumes the connection between Cant. 5:14 and the tablets as a given. No satisfactory explanation of the real reason for that connection is provided. A clue to this mystery may, however, be discerned in Joshua’s remark that the tablets were “of sapphire.” This is inconsistent with the rest of A1-5, where the tablets are of “rounded gold,” as is also implied by Joshua’s own prior statement that they were נגללין. Since all these attempts to relate the expression גלילי זָהָב to the tablets are clearly secondary, Joshua’s passing remark suggests strongly that the original reason for associating them with Cant. 5:14 was, in fact, the word סַפִּירִים at the end of the verse. If so, the basis for the connection, which the redactor of this passage evidently failed to recognize, was the tradition that the first tablets were carved from the sapphire pavement of the celestial firmament beneath the divine throne.

⁵² The image of the Torah as the body of God described in the Song of Songs, though both interesting and important in its own right, falls outside the scope of this analysis and, in any case, does not explain the specific connection between the hands of the Beloved and the tablets delivered to – and broken by – Moses.

This understanding of the midrash in *Cant. R.* 5.12 is supported by a passage in *Tanhuma*:⁵³

- X Another interpretation of *Cut for yourself* [*two tablets like the first*] (Exod. 30:1; cf. Deut. 10:1):
- Y R. Levi and R. Yohanan ask: “Whence did he cut them?” One says: “from underneath the throne of glory.” And the other says: “He made himself a quarry inside his tent and hewed out two stones. And when he lifted up the stones he had cut, he became rich, for they were made of sapphire.”
- Z1 This is what Solomon says: *His hands are rounded gold, covered with jewels. His body is ivory work, encrusted with sapphires* (Cant. 5:14). *His hands are rounded gold* – these are the tablets.
- Z2 And how much on each tablet? Five words on each tablet, and they were made like kinds of folding panels, (which folded) between one (word) and the next,⁵⁴
- Z3 as it is said: *His hands are rounded gold wrapped with sapphires*, for they were made of sapphire.

The statement in Z2 that the tablets were like “folding panels” (גלילים) is an implicit reference to 1 Kgs. 6:34, where the two doors of the sanctuary building are said to have been constructed each of two leaves, folding (גלילים) against each other. Thus, the word גלילים in 1 Kgs. 6:34 is cited to explain how it is that the expression וְנָבַגְלִילֵי in Cant. 5:14 applies to the tablets. There is, however, no reason to associate the tablets with the folding doors of the temple except the word גלילים, which is only relevant because of the previous association between the tablets and Cant. 5:14. The statement in *Tanhuma*, Z2 is, therefore, a secondary explanation of that association, which has already been made on other grounds. As is clearly evident in sections Y and Z3, the real reason for that association is the tradition that the second tablets, like the first, were made of sapphire.

Returning to *Cant. R.* 5.12: in B2, the reason for the proposed connection between Cant. 5:14 and Deut. 4:13 is, as in A1-5, completely obscure if this passage is read in isolation. In C1-3, however, the image

⁵³ *Tanh.*, *‘eqeb*, §9 (ed. ZONDEL, 2.105a-b).

⁵⁴ וְהָיָה עֲשׂוּיָן כַּמִּין גַּלְיִלִים בֵּין זֶה לְזֶה. See further below.

of Torah-talmud as a great sea is applied to the appearance of the writing on the tablets. Since the invisible basis of this passage is the tradition that the tablets were taken from the heavenly sapphire pavement, the graphic image in C2 may originally have applied, not only to the tablets, but also – and, perhaps, primarily – to the celestial pavement as a whole. If so, the tradition attributed by Yoḥanan to Joshua’s nephew will have stated first, that the entire corpus of Torah and talmud was engraved on the sapphire pavement in patterns of large and small writing, and second, that the appearance of this writing resembled that of waves and ripples on the surface of the sea.

The tradition reported by Yoḥanan may thus, perhaps, provide an important key to the symbolic significance of the water vision episode in *HZ*. If the episode were to be read in the light of this tradition, it would appear that, when the יורד מרכבה looks down at the shining pavement of the heavenly temple, what he sees is not water, but the words of the Torah engraved on the transparent firmament in patterns of large and small writing which look like the waves and ripples of the sea’s surface. If this interpretation is valid, the meaning must be that it is Torah, together with Israel’s observance thereof, that subdues the chaos waters. Just as, in the *Zohar*, the writing on the tablets protects the world by keeping the lower waters at bay, so the writing on the firmament preserves the holiness and purity of the heavenly temple by preventing the encroachment of the upper waters. The unworthy יורד מרכבה fails to recognize the true nature of this barrier and imputes to it the very qualities of materiality, impurity and uncontrolled fluidity against which it serves as a protection. By so doing, he demonstrates his own moral and spiritual blindness, as well as his non-possession of angelic status (“Do you not see with your eyes?”). The symbolic meaning of the episode may, therefore, be that the unworthy יורד מרכבה has betrayed himself as one who does not meet the criteria of “worthiness” according to the rabbinic value system, namely, observance of Torah and mastery of talmud.⁵⁵ Applying the standard specified in *m.Hag.* 2.1, he is not a חכם and is, therefore, unable to understand the vision “from his knowledge.” Like the sin of the calf, this fatal misperception threatens to shatter the sacred boundary and to unleash the forces of

⁵⁵ Compare *HR* 20.2-3 on p. 205 above.

chaos and destruction. Protection of the holy place requires expiation of the sacrilege and destruction of the blasphemer.

It must be conceded that, given the evident confusion of the traditions recorded in *Cant. R.* 5:12 and the uncertainty of their dates of origin, this reconstruction of the conceptual basis of the water vision episode, as formulated in *HZ*, remains somewhat speculative. Moreover, the idea that the waters of chaos are subdued by the words of Torah seems characteristically rabbinic, while the traditions about the heavenly temple, the crystal firmament and the chaos waters are undoubtedly much older. The tradition of exegesis of Ezekiel 1 as an account of the prophet's heavenly ascent has been traced to *1 Enoch* 14 and thus to pre-rabbinic times.⁵⁶ On the other hand, however, the idea that the tablets of the Law were of the same substance as the celestial pavement may, perhaps, already be implicit in the unique expression: $\omega\varsigma$ λιθόπλακες in *1 Enoch* 14:10.⁵⁷ If the above reconstruction is accepted, the idea that the Torah itself is engraved on the firmament, in a pattern which looks like waves and ripples on the surface of water, must be the product of a relatively late reworking of the traditional materials out of which the water vision episode was composed.

It is possible, therefore, that the discussion in *Cant. R.* 5:12 represents a development in the treatment of these materials which is later than the water vision episode itself. Against this, however, the fact that the real reason for the connection between the tablets and *Cant. R.* 5:14 was apparently unknown to the editors of the midrash points to the possibility that the teaching of Joshua's nephew is a relatively ancient unit of tradition, which may be earlier than, or contemporaneous with, the oldest strata of *HZ*. An indication that the origin of this tradition may be at least as old as the early second century CE can be found in the vision described in *Apoc. Abr.* 21:1-29:21, where the biblical account of creation and history is depicted on the firmament.⁵⁸ It may also be observed that the teaching of Joshua's nephew might help to account for the fundamental premise of the water vision episode – namely, the author's belief that the appearance of Ezekiel's heavenly firmament resembled that of the waves of the sea.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ See pp. 105-109 above.

⁵⁷ See p. 106, n. 3 above.

⁵⁸ On the date of *Apocalypse of Abraham*, see p. 109, n. 18 above.

⁵⁹ However, see p. 212 below.

5. *The Celestial Substance*

In *Cant. R.* 5:12, the connection between *Cant.* 5:14 and the image of the sea is provided by a play on the word תרשיש (C2-3). In scripture, this term occurs both as the name of a precious stone, possibly yellow jasper,⁶⁰ and also as the name of a distant sea-port which can only be reached by large, ocean-going vessels.⁶¹ A passage in *HR* alludes to the latter:⁶²

Like the sound of ocean waters,⁶³ like raging rivers, like the billows of תרשיש when the south wind stirs them up (כגלי תרשיש שרוח דרומית טורדת בהן),⁶⁴ like the sound⁶⁵ of the singing of the throne of glory when it extols and praises the wondrous king

In the former sense, the term occurs in *Dan.* 10:6, where it is used as a simile to describe the appearance of an angel:

His body was like תרשיש (ויגויחתי כתרשיש), his face like the appearance of lightning (כמראה ברק), his eyes like flaming torches (כלפידים אש), his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze (כעין נחשת קלל), and the sound of his voice like the noise of a multitude (וקול הדברי כקול המון).

This passage echoes the language of Ezekiel 1 and provides an important exegetical bridge between Ezekiel's vision and the description of the body of the Beloved at *Cant.* 5:14. Ezekiel, in fact, uses the word תרשיש to describe the appearance of the heavenly wheels:

מראה האופנים ומעשיהם כעין תרשיש

The appearance of the wheels and their construction were like the appearance of תרשיש.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ In addition to *Cant.* 5:14, see *Exod.* 28:20, 39:13, and *Ezek.* 28:13.

⁶¹ 1 *Kgs.* 22:49, *Isa.* 2:16, 23:1, 23:14, 60:9, *Ezek.* 27:25, *Jonah* 1:3, etc.

⁶² *HR* 9:1; SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §162; WERTHEIMER, *בתי מדרשות*, 1.85, §10.4.

⁶³ Following mss. Vatican Oxford: כקול ימים; all other mss.: בקול; ms. Munich 22: בקול מים.

⁶⁴ On the expression טורדת בהן, see pp. 76-77, n. 81 above.

⁶⁵ Following mss. Vatican and Munich 22: כקול; all other mss.: בקול.

⁶⁶ *Ezek.* 1:16a, and compare 10:9b: ומראה האופנים כעין אבן תרשיש.

It is, perhaps, possible that the dual meaning of the word תרשיש, transferred from “the appearance of the wheels” to that of the firmament and the celestial temple as a whole, is actually the basis of the central image of the water vision episode: “The sixth palace looked as if waves of the sea were billowing in it.” If so, the teaching attributed to Joshua’s nephew – that the wavelike appearance of the sapphire pavement was produced by the words of the Torah engraved upon it – may, after all, be a later development of this idea.

The dual meaning of תרשיש undoubtedly explains the association between the body of the Beloved and the sea in *Cant. R.* 5.12, C2-3. As in sections A and B, however, Yoḥanan’s reason for applying the term to the tablets of the Law is concealed beneath the surface of the text. The explanation is provided by the tradition that the tablets were made of the same substance (תְּרַשִּׁישׁ – סַפִּיר – חֲשָׁמֶל) as other phenomena of the celestial world.

This substance is also described in the midrash on 1 Kgs. 19:11-12 in *HZ*, §370,⁶⁷ which correlates the vision of Elijah with those of Ezekiel and Daniel, beginning as follows:

The חיות fly on the wind, for they are entirely made of fire, and the fire is lighter than the wind, so that the wind supports the fire (ועופפות ברוח כי הן מאש) (כוליה והאש קלה מן הרוח לכך הרוח מסייע לאש (רוח) *would go, they went* etc.

This statement, which is obviously derived from the tradition about the רוּחַ הַחַיִּים of Ezek. 1:20-21, as we have encountered it in the ascent midrash in *HZ*, in *1 Enoch* 14, and elsewhere, provides rather striking confirmation of our interpretation of the significance of air and wind in the ascent-exegetical tradition, and especially of the “brilliant air” of the celestial pavement in the water vision episode itself. The scriptural quotation appended to this statement is, strictly speaking, Ezek. 1:12: עַל אֲשֶׁר יְהִי־שָׁם הָרוּחַ לְלֶכֶת יִלְכוּ, but the context indicates that Ezek. 1:20, with its strange initial preposition: רוּחַ לְלֶכֶת, is probably intended. If translated literally, the verse reads:

Upon that which the wind was to go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

⁶⁷ See pp. 175-176 above.

The anomalous preposition על is noteworthy in itself, since it provides further support for the exegesis of Ezek. 1:19-28 as a description of a heavenly ascent. If taken literally and interpreted in the light of the previous verse (וּבְהִנָּשָׂא הַחַיִּית מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ יִנָּשְׂאוּ הָאֹפְנִיִּים), then MT of Ezek. 1:20 may easily be understood to mean that the creatures and the wheels were driven by the wind so that they rose to a point “upon” a surface higher than the ground.

Immediately after the midrash on Elijah’s vision, the following passage in *HZ(N)*, §371a, draws together several strands of the ascent-midrashic tradition:⁶⁸

.... and the likeness of the throne is the likeness of the firmament; and the firmament is like the waters of the sea; and the waters of the sea are like the color blue; and the color blue is *sapphire*.⁶⁹ And around the throne are pure thunder clouds, which give forth lightning flashes like jewels of תרשיש. And the brilliance of the flashing of the throne, which is like sapphire with jewels of תרשיש, is *the brightness*. As the likeness of them both, sapphire and תרשיש, thus is the likeness of the חשכול. It is *like the appearance of fire*, but it is not fire. Rather, it is like fiery flames of all kinds of colors mixed together, and the eye cannot master their likenesses.

This is a highly summarized, but at the same time very comprehensive, midrash on the כְּעֵיִן חֲשָׁמַל of Ezek. 1:27, which, it is explained, is the celestial substance of which both the throne and the firmament are made. This substance is also indicated by a variety of scriptural terms and expressions, including: אֶבֶן־סַפִּיר, בְּרִקֵּת, נֶגֶה, כַּמְרֹאֵה־אֵשׁ, and תְּרֻשִׁישׁ.

The image of colors mixed together, applied in this passage to the throne and to the firmament, is distinctly reminiscent of the interwoven colors of the temple veils, as described by the chronicler and by Philo and Josephus.⁷⁰ The same celestial substance is described, in remarkably similar terms, in the twelfth of the thirteen *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* from Qumran, which occurs at the climax of the liturgical cycle and concerns the manifestation of the divine Glory on the מִרְכָּבָה in the holy of holies of the heavenly temple:

⁶⁸ Cf. p. 176 above.

⁶⁹ On parallels to the sequence about the color blue in *b.Sot.* 17a and elsewhere, see HALPERIN, *Faces*, 217-220.

⁷⁰ See pp. 158-164 above.

The cherubim fall before him and bless. When they rise, the sound of divine silence (קול דממת אלוהים) [is heard], then a tumult of jubilation as their wings are raised. In the sound of divine silence, they bless the image of the chariot-throne (תבנית כסא מרכבה) above the firmament of the cherubim, [and] they sing of [the splendor] of the radiant firmament beneath the seat of his Glory (מושב כבוד). And when the wheels (אופנים) go, the holy angels return. From between the [w]heels of his Glory (גלגלי כבוד), like the appearance of fire, go forth the holy spirits. Round about is the appearance of streams of fire. Like חשמל, a radiant substance of glorious colors, wondrously hued and purely blended, are the spirits of the living אלוהים that move continuously with the glory of the wondrous chariots (כבוד מרכבות פלא).⁷¹

This “radiant substance of glorious colors” is, then, כְּעֵיִן חֲשָׁמַל, which, in the water vision episode of the ascent midrash in *HZ*, reappears as the mysterious substance of the “pure marble stones” of the pavement of the heavenly temple or, in other words, the transparent firmament of “brilliant air” beneath the throne. It is this radiant substance which the unworthy יורד מרכבה, who is not a חכם, and who is neither priest nor angel, mistakenly perceives as being water – which is to say, the chaotic substance of the impure world of womb-born bodily existence.

⁷¹ 4Q405, 20-21-22.ii.7-11, my translation; cf. NEWSOM, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, 306-307. See MORRAY-JONES, “The Temple Within,” 417-419.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

1. *The Date of Origin of Hekhalot Zutarti*

This inquiry has confirmed that Aqiba's words of warning in *b.Hag.* 14b are, like the story of "Four Entered Paradise" itself, derived from the hekhalot tradition. More specifically, the saying is based on a passage which is appended to the water vision episode in the literary collection that came to be known as *Hekhalot Zutarti*. This passage (*HZ*:F1-2¹) is likewise attributed to Aqiba. It may, perhaps, represent a secondary stage of literary and editorial development of the water vision episode, but it is a logical continuation of the narrative in *HZ*.² We have seen that the earliest version of "Four Entered Paradise" is also preserved in *HZ* and, secondarily, *MR*,³ although material from a talmudic source has been interpolated by a later redactor.⁴ Although the motif of danger associated with the chaos waters appears to have been a part of the tradition of ascent to the celestial garden or temple from an early period,⁵ the פּרדס story and the water vision episode are found in disconnected passages of *HZ* and seem originally to have been entirely separate literary units. The recensions of "Four Entered Paradise" in *tosefta*, *yerushalmi* and *Canticles Rabbah*, which do not include Aqiba's warning, are adaptations of the original פּרדס story, as preserved in *HZ* and *MR*, sections A and C.⁶ The redactor who included Aqiba's words of warning in *babli* was very probably influenced by the stream of literary tradition and editorial activity represented by ms. New York of *HZ*, in which a reference to the water vision episode has been interjected into "Four Entered Paradise,"⁷ and in which a character from the adapted version

¹ On pp. 57-58 above.

² See pp. 80-82 above.

³ See p. 87, n. 15 above.

⁴ See pp. 12-18 above.

⁵ See pp. 50-52 above.

⁶ On pp. 12-14 above.

⁷ *HZ(N)*:B2a-b on p. 13 above.

of that story, Ben Azzai, has been introduced into the continuation of the water vision narrative.⁸ Thus, the connection between the פרדס story and the water vision episode seems first to have occurred within the HZ(N) literary tradition.⁹

We have found that the passage in HZ which includes the water vision episode is composed of a series of “mystical” midrashim on Ezek. 1:27 (וַאֲרָאָה בְּעֵין חִשְׁמִיל) in which the first chapter of Ezekiel is understood to be an account of the prophet’s ascent to the divine throne.¹⁰ The passage is concerned with the transition from below to above Ezekiel’s firmament and has, therefore, been designated “the ascent midrash.” In the water vision episode, the firmament is the floor of the sixth הֵיכָל, which is the outer sanctuary of the celestial temple. The ascent midrash ends with the admission of the visionary to the seventh הֵיכָל, i.e., the holy of holies, where he is said to see the enthroned king “in his beauty” but, in this passage, neither the throne nor the king are actually described. Related materials are encountered in another passage of HZ(N),¹¹ parts of which are reproduced in *Mass. Hek.*, §28 and elsewhere. Although this passage is found at an earlier point in the HZ collection, it appears to be a continuation of the ascent midrash and includes detailed descriptions of the celestial throne, its attendant angels, and the figure who sits upon it.¹² In the following discussion, this passage will be referred to as “the throne midrash.”

The origins of this exegetical tradition were evidently ancient, since its influence can be detected as early as *1 Enoch* 14.¹³ Several Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings of the first and second centuries CE attest to its widespread currency at that time, the most notable of these sources being *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *Ascension of Isaiah*, *Testament of Levi*, *Vita Adae*, and the Book of Revelation.¹⁴ Ideas and images which originated in this tradition are also encountered in Christian, Hermetic, and, especially, Gnostic writings from the second and third centuries CE.¹⁵

⁸ See HZ:F1b on p. 57 (especially, n. 21) and, further, pp. 79-80 above.

⁹ See p. 82 above.

¹⁰ See pp. 100-104 above.

¹¹ SCHÄFER, *Synopse*, §§368-374.

¹² See pp. 173-178 above.

¹³ See pp. 105-109 above.

¹⁴ See pp. 109-117 and 129-134 above.

¹⁵ See pp. 138-152 above.

A passage in one Gnostic treatise, *Orig. World*, §32, reproduces two anomalies in the Hebrew text of the throne midrash as preserved in *HZ(N)*. The Gnostic author must, therefore, have had access to this text, perhaps in Greek translation.¹⁶

One outcome of this inquiry, then, concerns the date of origin of the stream of literary activity which produced the *HZ* collection. We have found abundant evidence that some, at least, of the textual units which are preserved in this collection must be at least as old as the second and third centuries CE and, moreover, that the compilation and redaction of those materials must already have been in progress at that time. The earliest strata of *HZ* are, therefore, older than the “mystical collection” which is appended to *m.Hag. 2.1* in *tosefta, yerushalmi* and *babli*. The beginnings of the *HZ* literary tradition must, in fact, have been contemporaneous with, or only very slightly later than, the redaction of the Mishnah itself.

2. *Hekhalot Mysticism and מעשה מרכבה*

The findings of this study also have important implications with regard to the meaning of the talmudic expression *מעשה מרכבה* and its relationship to the hekhalot tradition. As is well known, SCHOLEM and his supporters have interpreted the hekhalot writings as the literary products of a living stream of authentic mysticism which was concerned above all with the visionary practice of ascent to heaven.¹⁷ According to this view, the enigmatic allusions in talmudic and midrashic literature to an apparently esoteric tradition associated with Ezekiel 1, *מעשה מרכבה*, are to be understood as references to this tradition of visionary mysticism, the origins of which can be traced to pre-rabbinic times. From this perspective, the heavenly ascents of apocalyptic literature, the *מעשה מרכבה* of the talmudic sources, and the visionary mysticism of the hekhalot writings are three successive stages of what was, in essence, the same historical phenomenon. Thus, SCHOLEM postulated

.... the essential continuity of thought concerning the Merkabah in all its three stages: the anonymous conventicles of the old apocalypics; the Merkabah specu-

¹⁶ See pp. 188-191 above.

¹⁷ See further MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited. Part 1,” 182-185, and the sources cited there.

lation of the Mishnaic teachers who are known to us by name; and the Merkabah mysticism of late and post-Talmudic times, as reflected in the [hekhalot] literature which has come down to us.¹⁸

SCHOLEM's position has been challenged by numerous commentators, beginning with MAIER and URBACH.¹⁹ These scholars argue that the talmudic expression *מעשה מרכבה* originally referred simply to study and exegesis of Ezekiel 1, not to the actual practice or experience of visionary ascents to heaven. According to these commentators, the descriptions of such practices and experiences in the hekhalot writings were written during a later stage of literary development and may have little, if any, basis in historical reality. The hekhalot texts are thus held to be later than and – in a literary sense only – derivative of the talmudic discussions of *מעשה מרכבה*. At the same time, they are distanced from the religious ideology, values, and world view of the “classical” rabbinic sources. SCHÄFER, commenting on the hekhalot writings, has asserted that

.... we are concerned here with a type of *pseudepigraphal literature* which is related to Rabbinic literature in a way similar to that by which the the biblical pseudepigrapha are related to the Bible it seems quite improbable to me that the goals and ideas propagated in this literature were developed at the same time as those of Rabbinic Judaism in the form of Mishnah, Talmud and Midrash.²⁰

HALPERIN likewise believed the rabbinic concept of *מעשה מרכבה*, in sources prior to *babli*, to be exegetical rather than mystical. He proposed the following theory of the historical development of this idea:

The *merkabah* expositions of Tannaitic times did not, as far as we can tell, accompany an ecstatic mystical practice, nor did they consist of a secret doctrine. They were the public exegeses of Ezekiel's vision which, I presume, accompanied the recitation of Ezekiel 1 in the synagogue on Shabu'ot The people enthusiastically heard these expositions, and told stories of still more wondrous *merkabah* expo-

¹⁸ SCHOLEM, *Major Trends*, 43 [word in brackets added]. Note that, at this stage of his research, SCHOLEM still assigned a relatively late date (fifth and sixth centuries) to the redaction of the principal hekhalot writings (*ibid.*, 44). He later reconsidered this opinion and concluded that “in many respects, I was not radical enough” (*Jewish Gnosticism*, 8).

¹⁹ See pp. 24-25, n. 98 above.

²⁰ SCHÄFER, “Aim and Purpose,” *HS*, 293 (italics his).

sitions, which they ascribed to the disciples of R. Johanan b. Zakkai The popular enthusiasm, however, was opposed by certain rabbis, who feared potential sinister inferences which might be drawn from Ezekiel's fantastic symbolism, and attempted – with limited success – to suppress the public reading and exposition of the *merkabab*.

When rabbinic restrictions on the *merkabab* were combined with stories recounting its wonders the impression was created that *ma'aseh merkabab* was an esoteric doctrine associated with Ezekiel 1, whose numinous dangers demanded that it be kept secret

If this model is correct, it would follow that the esoteric exegesis of Ezekiel 1, termed *ma'aseh merkabab* ..., was a fiction, however sincerely evolved and believed, of the rabbis.²¹

Even this fictional picture of *מעשה מרכבה* – which, HALPERIN believes, was developed in amoraic Palestine – referred only to a supposed tradition of secret exegesis of Ezekiel 1. Although the performance of such exegesis was held to be capable of producing supernatural phenomena, and so to be highly dangerous, it was not, in HALPERIN's opinion, at first associated with visionary-mystical practices like those described in the *hekhlot* texts:

Only in Babylonia, it would seem, did certain rabbis understand *ma'aseh merkabab* to involve an ecstatic praxis as well as (or instead of?) a secret doctrine.²²

In his subsequent work, HALPERIN suggested that the *hekhlot* authors belonged to the *עמי הארץ*, a social group about which we know little except that its members were alienated from – and despised by – the rabbinic elite. HALPERIN argues that these writers were envious of the rabbis' power and prestige, which they attempted to appropriate by means of the heavenly ascent and, especially, the magical practice of invocation of the *שר תורה*.²³ Although this suggestion has not met with widespread acceptance, HALPERIN's analysis of the talmudic sources has been widely influential. DAN has, for example, stated:

It seems to me that we have to accept, from a historical-philological point of view, the conclusions of Urbach and Halperin, and follow a strict categorical distinction between homiletical, midrashic study of Ezekiel's chariot, known as

²¹ HALPERIN, *The Merkabab*, 182-183.

²² *Ibid.*, 183.

²³ *Idem*, *Faces*, 439-446.

ma'aseh merkavah, and the appearance of groups engaged in mystical activity whose ideas are present before us in Hekhalot and Merkavah literature. While *ma'aseh merkavah* speculation may be an old Jewish tradition, the mystical schools of the Hekhalot are new²⁴

Defenders of SCHOLEM's position have, in general, conceded the point that the talmudic *מעשה מרכבה* appears to have been primarily exegetical in nature, but have argued that this by no means precludes the possibility of visionary-mystical practices and experience.²⁵ GRUENWALD, for example, acknowledges that the verbs *דרש* and *שנה*, which are used by the talmudic writers in connection with *מעשה מרכבה*, do not normally refer to visionary experience,²⁶ but qualifies this concession with the following observations:

It is really very difficult to guess what the Merkavah speculations of the circle of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai were like. What is reported concerning these speculations in the rabbinic sources is actually so restrained in matters of content and literary expression that almost anything can be said with equal justification. One can say, with Urbach, that what is said is, materially speaking, everything that was known; but one can also maintain that a great deal more than what was said was in fact known. Admittedly, it is quite reasonable to say that the Tannaitic speculations about the Merkavah did not depend on the *Hekhalot* literature which was composed at a later age. But it seems equally reasonable to say that the *Tannaim* did not have to wait for the *Hekhalot* literature to discover the ecstatic potentials for the Merkavah mysticism.²⁷

SEGAL makes much the same point, but in a different way and with a greater force of conviction:

Because merkavah mysticism is esoteric and the rabbis comment on it only within works that are fundamentally exegetical in nature, some scholars have maintained that there is no mystical content to the stories at all. This is a hasty conclusion, however, based only on the exegetical hints one finds in talmudic literature. There is no firm evidence of ecstasy or mystical rites among the rabbinic writers because they are exegetes interested in the legal consequences of those experiences, not the experiences themselves. The first century, like all preceding and succeeding centuries, took experience gained in visions and dreams seriously.

²⁴ DAN, *Three Types*, 4, and see further *idem*, *The Ancient Jewish Mysticism*, 25-29.

²⁵ See p. 25, n. 99 above.

²⁶ GRUENWALD, *Apocalyptic*, 82.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

It also valued ecstasy or trance as a medium for revelation and developed techniques for achieving the ecstasy or trance in which these visions occurred. These beliefs pervaded Jewish culture as well and enriched Jewish spirituality. In the Hellenistic period, these terms become associated with the language of ascension or theurgy, the magic use of shamanic techniques to stimulate out-of-body experiences.²⁸

SEGAL further argues that the New Testament writings by and about Paul the Apostle provide definite evidence of the currency of such experiences and practices in first-century Judaism,²⁹ a claim confirmed by my own comparison of Paul's heavenly rapture (2 Cor. 12:1-12) with the "Four Entered Paradise" materials.³⁰ Approaching the problem from a phenomenological, as well as historical, perspective, WOLFSON adopts a position diametrically opposed to that advocated by DAN,³¹ and repudiates the proposed dichotomy between exegetical and mystical activity:

The dichotomy posited by many scholars between exegesis and experience, interpretation and revelation, seems to me to be problematic. On the contrary, the connection between the process of textual interpretation (*midrash*) and prophetic states of consciousness or visionary experience — what one might call "inspired exegesis" or "pneumatic interpretation" — is found already in Ps. 119:18 and becomes pronounced in apocalyptic texts, the Qumran scrolls, and early Jewish mysticism. Specifically in the case of the Merkabah vision, the seeing of the throne-world and the glory is to be understood as an interpretative process conditioned by religious traditions and the study of Scripture. The experience does not come to the Jewish mystic *ab ovo*; it is shaped and cultivated by a series of cultural-religious factors. There is thus an essential convergence of tradition, revelation, and interpretation that is characteristic of the visionary experience in apocalyptic and Hekhalot literature; these are not distinct categories in religious phenomenology.

To be sure, some of the ancient rabbis ostensibly distinguished between those "who expound the chariot," referring to Ezekiel's chariot vision, and those "who see the chariot," thus implying that exposition does not amount to experience. It is nonetheless clear that these domains were not, and cannot be, held in absolute distinction.³²

²⁸ SEGAL, *Paul the Convert*, 53-54.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 54 and 58-71.

³⁰ See pp. 20 and 26-27 above.

³¹ See pp. 219-220 above.

³² WOLFSON, *Through a Speculum*, 121.

As we saw at the outset of this inquiry, the evidence of “Four Entered Paradise” indicates clearly that the talmudic expression *מעשה מרכבה* was, in fact, associated with the visionary practice of heavenly ascent.³³ In that discussion, we concurred with the opinion, which WOLFSON has expressed most clearly, that exegesis and mysticism, far from being separate and incompatible activities, must inevitably have supported and informed each other. This undoubtedly valid observation does not, however, provide a complete or wholly satisfactory explanation of the relationship between the language of exegesis encountered in the talmudic sources (*לדרוש במרכבה/במעשה מרכבה*, etc.), and the explicit descriptions of mystical practices and visions which are found in the ascent passages of the hekhalot collections. The results of this inquiry enable us to find a resolution of this problem.

In the first place, it has been almost universally assumed that the hekhalot writings – even if they are believed to contain early source materials – were redacted at a later date than the talmudic documents. This study has called that assumption into question, at least with regard to some significant portions of *HZ*. These passages, which are descriptive of the process of the heavenly ascent, are also based on an elaborate exegesis of Ezekiel 1.

SCHOLEM’s supporters have, for the most part, maintained that, while the talmudic *מעשה מרכבה* may appear to have been primarily exegetical in nature, this is not true of the hekhalot writings, which were based on visionary practices and/or experiences. SCHOLEM himself was adamant on this point:

These texts are not Midrashim, i.e. expositions of Biblical passages, but a literature *sui generis* with a purpose of its own. They are essentially descriptions of a genuine religious experience for which no sanction is sought in the Bible. In short, they belong in one class with the apocrypha and the apocalyptic writings rather than with the traditional Midrash.³⁴

In the light of the results of this inquiry, this statement of SCHOLEM’s is undoubtedly mistaken. Some, at least, of the earliest components of *HZ* are, in fact, based on a detailed midrashic interpretation of Ezekiel’s

³³ See pp. 24-26 above and, further, MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited. Part 1,” 182-185.

³⁴ Scholem, *Major Trends*, 46.

vision. These elaborate literary compositions certainly cannot be explained as immediate descriptions or “raw” products of visionary experience. At the same time, however, our findings have greatly diminished the phenomenological – as well as chronological – distance between hekhalot mysticism and the exegetical *מעשה מרכבה* of the talmudic sources. The ascent-midrashic tradition preserved in passages of *HZ* is of pre-rabbinic origin, and these passages of *HZ* have themselves been dated to the early rabbinic period. It is thus more than probable that the talmudic expression *מעשה מרכבה*, with its connotations of awesome mystery and extreme danger, referred to the same ancient tradition of interpretation of Ezekiel 1 as an account of the prophet’s ascent to the divine throne room in the celestial temple above the firmament.

This does not necessarily mean, however, that the tradition to which the talmudic expression *מעשה מרכבה* alludes was “merely” exegetical or that it contained no element of authentic mysticism. Such a conclusion would, in fact, be incompatible with the evidence which has been examined in the course of this inquiry. That the ascent midrash in *HZ* may legitimately be so called is due to its underlying structure and its relationship to the text of Ezekiel 1. The interpretation of that text as a description of the prophet’s heavenly ascent, although perhaps initially surprising, falls well within the normal parameters of the midrashic method. The tradition of Moses’ ascent to heaven from Mount Sinai, to which *HZ* itself makes reference,³⁵ provides an obvious parallel. The ascent midrash, however, differs from more conventional midrashim in one very significant respect. Rather than simply describing the heavenly ascent of Ezekiel himself, this text extrapolates from the biblical author’s account of his experience the details of a celestial journey which, despite its considerable danger, can also be undertaken by others.

The ascent midrash – together with its continuation, the throne midrash – thus goes well beyond ordinary exegesis of its biblical subject. It is an instructional text, concerned with actual performance of the heavenly ascent. The reader is told what he can expect to occur during the heavenly journey, and how he should conduct himself in order to avoid the various dangers that he will encounter. In other words, the ascent midrashic tradition preserved in *HZ* appears to contain exegetic-

³⁵ See pp. 84-87 above.

ally derived instructions for performance of the celestial ascent by a process of “active visualization” or “guided imagination.” As we have seen, these instructions include hymns and liturgical formulae, which are evidently intended to be recited at the appropriate moments during the visionary ascent.³⁶

These very early passages of *HZ* are, therefore, both exegetical and, at the same time, concerned with mystical performance. We have found that these passages are older than the discussion of *מעשה מרכבה* in the talmudic mystical collection, and that the tradition of mystical exegesis which they represent is even older. There is, therefore, no reason to doubt that the talmudic expression *מעשה מרכבה* refers to this ancient tradition of “performative exegesis.” According to this tradition, exposition of Ezekiel 1 by one who understands its inner meaning reveals the secret method of the heavenly ascent and, conversely, only a person who knows the details of this visionary practice can disclose the hidden meaning of the biblical text.³⁷ Exegesis and performance thus cannot be separated, since they are two interrelated aspects of the same mystical and esoteric discipline, which the talmudic writers called *מעשה מרכבה*.

The earliest hekhalot literature appears to have emerged by a process of compilation and redaction of these inherited esoteric traditions. It seems that this process was both parallel and contemporary with that which produced the exoteric talmudic and midrashic collections. This does not necessarily mean that the hekhalot editors belonged to the same social circles as those of the “classical” rabbinic texts, or that their religious and ideological outlook was in all respects the same. There is, in fact, evidence of tension between the two traditions and some rabbis seem to have regarded *מעשה מרכבה* with hostility and suspicion.³⁸ We have also found, however, that the two literary traditions impinged upon and influenced each other from an early period, which indicates that the circles which produced them cannot, in fact, have been very far apart. The complex and reciprocal interaction that we have observed between the two streams of literary activity implies that the social contexts

³⁶ See *HZ*:F3 and H2 on pp. 58-59; and *HZ*(N), §374b on p. 177 above.

³⁷ This was, in my opinion, the original (pre-rabbinic) meaning of the expression: *אלהים אלהים כן היה חכם ומבין מדעתו* in *m.Hag.* 2.1. See MORRAY-JONES, “Paradise Revisited. Part 1,” 185-188, and the sources cited there.

³⁸ See p. 26, n. 101 above.

in which they occurred must have overlapped or, at least, been quite closely related to each other.

3. *Dualism and Priestly Purity*

Our investigation of the water vision episode in *HZ* has shown that this literary unit originated in the ascent-exegetical tradition. In this text, which contains multiple allusions to the imagery and language of Ezekiel 1, the prophet's statement: **וְאָרָא כְּעֵן חֲשָׁמַל** (Ezek. 1:27) is interpreted as a reference to the vision of the "pure marble stones" of the paved floor of the sixth **הַיִּכָּל**, "the brilliance (נוֹגַהּ) of the appearance of which (מֵרֵאִיהֶם) was more terrible (נֹרָא) than water" (*HZ*:D1). This pavement, although it looks like water, is, in fact, the "brilliant air" or "airy brilliance" (**אֲוִיר זֵיר/זֵיר אֲוִיר**) of Ezekiel's firmament, on which the visionary is standing, and which he therefore perceives from above (**מִלְּמַעְלָה**).³⁹ The sixth **הַיִּכָּל**, where this vision occurs, is the outer sanctuary of the celestial temple. Access to this sanctuary is controlled by fierce angelic guardians, whose function is to ensure that only one who satisfies certain criteria of "worthiness" shall be permitted to enter. These criteria are those of priestly – or quasi-priestly – purity, which in this context means possession of a purified angelic body. According to a related midrashic tradition, such a body was conferred on all the Israelites who received the Torah at Sinai. It would, therefore, be the birthright of each one of their descendants, save for the fact that this glorious gift was forfeited by all those who took part in the worship of the golden calf. Only the tribe of Levi, who refused to participate in this sin, retained their priestly and angelic status. Within the (broadly) rabbinic context of the *hekhalot* tradition, however, it appears that such status could be regained by one who has achieved exceptional mastery and/or perfect observance of Torah. Such a one will be considered "worthy" by the angels. One who mistakes the shining surface of the firmament for water will, however, be recognized as a descendant of the kissers of the calf.⁴⁰

The reason why the illusion of water is so dangerous is that, according to the tradition in which this material originated, the substance of

³⁹ See p. 100 above.

⁴⁰ See pp. 192-205 above.

both the heavenly world and the bodies of its inhabitants is the fiery, luminous material to which scripture refers using several expressions, but especially *כְּעֵין חֲשָׁמַל*.⁴¹ This substance is incompatible with that of the material creation, which was formed out of the primeval waters of chaos. These waters are considered to be intrinsically impure.⁴² The ordinary physical body therefore carries the taint of this impurity, which is especially associated with the female and with the processes of conception and birth – hence, of course, the recurring objection of the angels to the ascent into heaven of one who is “born of woman.”⁴³

The water vision episode thus embodies a dualistic cosmology and a correspondingly dualistic set of moral and social values. Materiality and female status are as essentially opposed to the spiritual and angelic nature as water is opposed to fire. The exegetical and visionary tradition which produced this literary unit must, therefore, have originated in a religious milieu in which such values were espoused. Several striking parallels to the ideas and dualistic values on which the water vision episode is based have been encountered in Gnostic sources, but we have found no evidence of Gnostic influence on the hekhalot writers, who make no allusion to the notion of the evil demiurge or to the Gnostic doctrine of salvation. On the contrary, we have found that the Gnostic writers were indebted to the Jewish sources and traditions which are preserved in *HZ* and the other hekhalot collections.⁴⁴

The dualistic perspective of the tradition which produced the water vision episode did not, therefore, originate in Gnosticism but in a much older stream of Jewish tradition, the influence of which can be detected in both Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings. The dualistic perspective of this tradition appears to be based on the laws of priestly purity, which are applied on a cosmic scale. The crystal firmament, which is the floor of the celestial sanctuary, functions as a barrier, protecting

⁴¹ See pp. 211-214 above.

⁴² To this extent, the results of this inquiry confirm and combine the explanations of both GOLDBERG and HALPERIN (see pp. 37 and 42-44 above).

⁴³ See pp. 96-98 and 119-126 above.

⁴⁴ See pp. 138-152 and 188-188 above. This is not to deny the possibility that the later hekhalot literature and Gnosticism may either have influenced each other or been subject to the same or similar influences within the general matrix of hellenistic culture. See ALEXANDER, “Comparing Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism: An Essay in Method,” *JJS* 35 (1984) 1-18.

the celestial realm of fire and light from contamination by the watery, impure world of womb-born bodily existence. One who aspires to cross this boundary must, therefore, possess the purified body of a true angelic priest. The influence of these ideas can be clearly seen in the Book of Revelation,⁴⁵ and in passages of the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁴⁶ According to the ideology embodied in these sources, the requirement of sexual abstinence which applies to priests in the temple must also be observed by those who are destined to participate in the celestial world and thereby to escape the coming destruction of the impure, feminine creation, which is to be delivered back to the waters of chaos out of which it was originally formed.

It appears, then, that the tradition which produced the water vision episode must have originated in a form of pre-rabbinic apocalyptic Judaism which espoused a radically dualistic vision of the world. This vision was a cosmic projection of the structure of the temple and the laws of priestly purity. The adherents of this apocalyptic form of Judaism regarded the material creation and the womb-born body as intrinsically impure, because contaminated by the substance of the demonic waters out of which they were formed. Consequently, they sought access to the pure celestial world of fire and light, and aspired to membership of the angelic priesthood of that world. In short, this tradition must have originated in a Jewish context very much like that of the Qumran community, whose writings include the earliest known *מרכבה* liturgy, the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*,⁴⁷ and perhaps also the earliest reference to the tradition of ascent to the garden-temple of Paradise above the chaos waters.⁴⁸ These observations do not, of course, necessarily justify the conclusion that the origins of the water vision episode can be traced to this particular community of apocalyptic Jews. The ascent tradition associated with Ezekiel 1 has been found in sources other – and, in at least one instance, earlier – than the writings of this group. The extreme dualism of the sect's teachings is undoubtedly but one instance of a more widespread phenomenon. We can, however, say with certain-

⁴⁵ See pp. 129-134 above.

⁴⁶ See pp. 126-129 above.

⁴⁷ See pp. 31 and 213-214 above; and see further MORRAY-JONES, "The Temple Within," 409-421.

⁴⁸ See pp. 51-52 above.

ty that the doctrines and practices of this group were deeply influenced by the tradition from which the water vision episode is derived.

Characteristic of this dualistic world view is rejection of sexuality and the female body as impure and unholy. This attitude – which is central to the ideology of the Qumran sect – is, as we have seen, based on the concept of priestly purity. To inquire into the primeval origins of these ideas and values would lead us from the sphere of history into that of anthropology or, perhaps, psychology. As HALPERIN has observed, sexual ambivalence and hostility towards the female are dominant themes of the Book of Ezekiel itself.⁴⁹ It may, therefore, be that these issues played a role in the tradition of ascent to the celestial temple, and the vision of the מרכבה, from the time of its inception.

Further research may be required to determine the extent to which the dualistic world view of the tradition behind the water vision episode is characteristic of the hekhalot literature as a whole. The radical dualism which is encountered in the writings from Qumran is inseparable from the sect's eschatological beliefs and messianic expectations. Such beliefs were also characteristic of the apocalyptic ascent tradition from which the water vision episode is derived. In this context, dualism and eschatology were two aspects of a single belief system. In the hekhalot literature, however, eschatological teachings are only infrequently encountered. In the centuries following the two catastrophic rebellions against Rome, it is clear that immediate messianic hopes and expectations were repudiated by the leaders of the rabbinic movement. This may, perhaps, be one reason for the hostility of some rabbis towards the exegetical and mystical tradition of the heavenly ascent, which they called מעשה מרכבה. These observations may also explain why the compilers and redactors of the hekhalot literature likewise chose to ignore or to excise this dangerous aspect of the ascent tradition. This being the case, we should not necessarily assume that they espoused – or even fully recognized – the dualistic ideology which was embodied in some, at least, of their sources. On the one hand, it is true that later phases of Jewish mysticism, including the medieval and Lurianic Kabbalah, were strongly dualistic. On the other hand, however, the “imminent” eschat-

⁴⁹ HALPERIN, *Seeking Ezekiel*. For an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of this psychoanalytic interpretation of the biblical text, see the review by MORRAY-JONES, *JIS* 47 (1996) 182-188.

ology of the apocalyptic ascent tradition is in hekhalot mysticism — as in Christianity, but not in Gnosticism — transformed into a “realized” eschatology which, as SCHÄFER has observed, does not reject the human world but, rather, posits its redemption:

The Merkavah mystic is the chosen one of God to whom messianic qualities are ascribed. The redemption does not occur in the world to come, but here and now.⁵⁰

The priestly role assumed by the *יורד מרכבה* who is accounted worthy of admission to the celestial temple can thus be seen to operate within a system of values in which the tendency to dualism may well have been considerably weakened. In this context, the extraordinary purity required of the *יורד מרכבה* is related to his function as a mediator between the celestial and human worlds, which are united in his person. As we have seen, however, the water vision episode is derived from an earlier stage of the ascent tradition in which the material creation and the ordinary human body were considered to be intrinsically impure and, in their essential nature, as opposed to the substance of the heavenly realm as water is to fire.

⁵⁰ SCHÄFER, “Aim and Purpose,” *HS*, 293.

APPENDIX

SOLOMON AND THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

1. *The Legend Cycle of Solomon and the Queen*

The above inquiry has shown that the symbolism of the water vision episode in *HZ* is derived from a stream of tradition in which the water of chaos is believed to be the basic substance of carnal existence and materiality. Being the expression of cosmic disorder and uncontrolled fluidity, such water is demonic and impure. It is opposed to the hierarchical order and purity of the divine realm and is strongly associated with the female. The following study will investigate the origin, tradition-history and meaning of a widely documented story about Solomon's encounter with the Queen of Sheba, which appears to be derived from the same traditional background and to be related in some manner to the water vision episode itself.

This story, which is found in both Jewish and Muslim sources, is one of a cycle of tales in which Solomon summons the queen to attend his court and pay homage to him.¹ Although the different versions of the cycle vary as to detail, almost all involve a contest in which Solomon demonstrates his superhuman wisdom by solving a series of riddles and/or tests posed by the queen, these being, of course, the *hard questions* of the biblical account.² Several, though not all, of these riddles and

¹ In addition to the editions and translations cited below, most of the relevant texts are conveniently compiled, in English translation, in JACOB LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (CSHJ; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 161-214. HALPERIN (*Faces*, 487-490) translates and discusses some Muslim versions of the story discussed below. On the Jewish sources, see also: GINZBERG, *Legends*, 4.142-149 and 6.288-291; and ANGELO S. RAPPOPORT, *Myth and Legend of Ancient Israel* (3 vols.; New York: Ktav, 1966) 3.122-130.

² 1 Kgs. 10:3-10 (= 2 Chron. 9:1-9). There are several versions of the riddles and tests, which also occur independently of the rest of the tales cycle in *Midr. Prov.*, §1 (ed. BURTON L. VISOTSKY, *Midrash Mishle: A Critical Edition based on Vatican MS. Ebr. 44, with variant readings from all known Manuscripts and Early Editions, and with an Intro-*

tests are concerned with “feminine” subjects, such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and cosmetics. One of the tests, which is found in both Jewish and Muslim sources, concerns differences of gender. The Queen presents Solomon with a number – varying between six and six thousand – of child slaves, who are all dressed alike and of similar appearance. She then challenges him to distinguish the males from the females without conducting a physical examination. Solomon solves the problem by offering the children food to eat and observing the differences in their behavior.

2. *The Glass Palace Tale in Targum Sheni to Esther*

The story which is of primary interest to us is included in some, but not all, versions of the cycle. One recension occurs in the so-called “Second Targum” to the Book of Esther (*Targum Sheni*), an expanded and embellished retelling of the biblical story in which it is claimed, amongst other things, that the great throne on which King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) sat (Esth. 1:2) was none other than the marvelous throne of Solomon,³ which had been taken as plunder from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. The text, which is written in Western (Palestinian) Aramaic,⁴ was probably composed or redacted in the seventh century CE, although estimates of its date have varied between the fourth and the fourteenth centuries.⁵

According to *Targum Sheni*, Solomon learned of the existence of the Queen of Sheba through a report brought to him by the wild cockerel (תרנגול ברא), who describes a land in which “the very dust is precious,

duction, References and a short Commentary [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1990] 3-7; trans. *idem*, *The Midrash on Proverbs* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992] 18-19) and the fifteenth-century Yemenite *Midrash ha-Hefez*, ed. and trans. SCHECHTER, “The Riddles of Solomon in Rabbinic Literature,” *Folklore* 1 (1890) 349-358.

³ See 1 Kgs. 11:18-20; 2 Chron. 9:17-19.

⁴ See BERNARD GROSSFELD, trans., *The Two Targums of Esther, Translated, with Apparatus and Notes* (ArBib 18; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991) 7-8; BEATE EGO, *Targum Sheni zu Ester: Übersetzung, Kommentar und theologische Deutung* (TSAJ 54; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1996) 9; and LOU H. SILBERMAN, “The Queen of Sheba in Judaic Tradition,” in JAMES B. PRITCHARD, ed., *Solomon and Sheba* (London: Phaidon, 1974) 66.

⁵ See further: GROSSFELD, *The Two Targums*, 19-24; and EGO, *Targum Sheni*, 21-25.

and gold and silver lie like dung in the streets.”⁶ The trees of this land, which are as old as creation, are nourished by water from the Garden of Eden. The inhabitants are ignorant of warfare and, most astonishing of all, they are ruled by a woman. On learning all this, Solomon sends the cockerel as his emissary to the queen, bearing a letter in which he commands her to attend his court and pay tribute to him. Should she refuse, he will send his armies of beasts, birds and demons to destroy her kingdom and devour her flesh. The cockerel, escorted by a flock of birds so large that it obscures the sun, arrives in the early morning, just as the queen is going out “to worship the day.”⁷ Torn between her reluctance to acquiesce to Solomon’s demands and her fear of the consequences if she does not, the queen sends him a fleet laden with tribute and, three years later, comes herself to Jerusalem. In an incident which is slightly reminiscent of Elisha ben Abuya’s encounter with Metatron, the queen, as she approaches King Solomon’s court, is met by one of his nobles, Benaiah ben Jehoida,⁸ and, deceived by his beautiful appearance, mistakes him for King Solomon himself. Her arrival at Solomon’s court is then described as follows:⁹

⁶ The story is found in *Targum Sheni*, §4, ed., PAULUS CASSEL, *Zweites Targum zum Buche Esther. Im vocalisirten Urtext mit sachlichen und sprachlichen Erläuterungen* (Leipzig and Berlin: Willhelm Friedrich, 1885) 13-23 (quotation, 13-14); cf. ed. DE LAGARDE, *Hagiographa Chaldaice*, 230-233; trans. GROSSFELD, *The Two Targums*, 114-117; trans. EGO, *Targum Scheni*, 73-77; and see further n. 9 below.

⁷ Reading, with the majority of manuscripts: למסגיד ליומא. Ms. Nürnberg (dated 1291) and the early editions read: למסגיד לימא, “to worship the sea” (thus also ed. DE LAGARDE, *Hagiographa Chaldaice*, 231; ed. CASSEL, *Zweites Targum*, 15; and trans. GROSSFELD, *The Two Targums*, 115, but see *ibid.*, n. nnn). It is tempting to pursue this possibility but, since we have just been told that the queen is performing her act of worship “in the early morning” (לעירן צפרא), the reading: “day” is much more likely to be correct. When the arrival of the birds blocks out the sun, the queen is dismayed and tears her clothes, which makes excellent sense if her worship is addressed to the sunrise. In the Muslim sources (see pp. 233 and 240 below), she is specifically said to be a worshipper of the sun.

⁸ See 2 Sam. 8:18, 20:23, and 23:20-23; 1 Kgs. 1:8-2:46, and 4:4; 1 Chron. 11:22-24, 18:17 and 27:5-6.

⁹ *Targum Sheni*, §4, ed. CASSEL, *Zweites Targum*, 21; and see the edition by L. MUNK (1876), quoted in ELI YASSIF, *The Tales of Ben Sira in the Middle-Ages: A Critical Text and Literary Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984) 52. The text in MORITZ DAVID, ed., *Das Targum scheni zum Buche Esther, nach Handschriften herausgegeben und mit einer Einleitung versehen* (diss., Friedrich-Alexanders Universität; Krakow: J. Fischer, 1898) 10 is

When the king heard that she was coming to him, he arose and went and sat in a glass house (בְּבַיִת זֹהָרִיתָא).¹⁰ And when the Queen of Sheba saw that the king was sitting in a glass house, she considered in her heart and said to herself (בְּחַשְׁבָּהָ קָלָהָ וְאָמְרָה)¹¹ that the king was sitting in water, so she lifted up her robe to wade across and he saw that she had hairy legs. King Solomon responded by saying to her: “You are exceedingly beautiful as a woman, but your hair is the hair of a man! Hair is attractive on a man, but on a woman it is disgusting (וְיִסְעָר לְגַבְרָה שְׂפִיר וְלֵאחַתָּה גְּנָאִי)! ”

Following this incident, the queen puts Solomon’s wisdom to the test by posing him three riddles. When he answers them correctly, she is persuaded of his greatness and pays homage to him.

3. *The Glass Palace Tale in the Qur’ān*

The story of the bird – here called a hoopoe – who informs Solomon of the queen’s existence and delivers his summons to her is also found in the *Qur’ān*.¹² The queen, we are told, is a worshipper of the sun. In this version, the primary focus of interest is the queen’s glorious throne, which, as observed by HALPERIN,¹³ is designated by the same expression as that used in the same passage to indicate the throne of God, “the Lord of the Glorious Throne.” On learning of this throne, Solomon expresses his wish to possess it, and one of his courtiers, who is said to be “learned in the Book,” instantaneously delivers it to him by supernatural means.¹⁴ Solomon gives thanks to God for having

clearly deficient. Compare the following translations: CASSEL, “The Second Targum,” Appendix 1 to *idem, An Explanatory Commentary on Esther, With Four Appendices* (CFTL, n.s., 34; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1888) 282-283; A. SULZBACH, *Targum Scheni zum Buch Esther, übersetzt und mit Anmerkungen versehen* (Frankfurt am Main: Kauffmann, 1920) 30; EGO, *Targum Scheni*, 75-76; and GROSSFELD, *The Two Targums*, 116.

¹⁰ GROSSFELD (*The Two Targums*, 116) translates: “a bathhouse,” but I can find no justification for this rendering. The other translations cited in nn. 1, 4, and 9 above all give the straightforward meaning: “a house of glass.”

¹¹ Ed. MUNK: וְאָמְרָה; ed. DAVID omits this word; see p. 235 below.

¹² *Qur’ān, Sūrah 27*, “The Ant,” 15-44; in N. J. DAWOOD, trans., *The Koran* (5th edn.; revised and reprinted London: Penguin, 1995) 265-267, the bird’s name is rather idiosyncratically translated: “lapwing”; cf. LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 185-186.

¹³ HALPERIN, *Faces*, 487.

¹⁴ The commentators (see pp. 238-248 below) differ as to whether the one “learned in the book” was a human being, a jinn, or the angel Gabriel.

granted him this “favor” and then, just before the arrival of the queen, orders the throne to be disguised:

Then he said: ‘Let her throne be altered, so that we may see whether or not she will recognize it.’

And when she came to Solomon, she was asked: ‘Is your throne like this?’ And she replied, ‘It looks as though it were the same.’

He said: ‘Before her, we were endowed with knowledge, and before her we surrendered to the Lord. Her false gods have led her astray, for she comes from an unbelieving nation.’

She was bidden to enter the palace; and when she saw it she thought it was a pool of water, and bared her legs. But Solomon said: ‘It is a palace paved with glass.’

‘Lord,’ she said, ‘I have sinned against my own soul. Now I submit with Solomon to God, Lord of the Universe.’¹⁵

Here, the queen’s failure to recognize the true nature of the glass pavement and her uncertain recognition of her own throne are clearly to be understood as parallel events. Although the precise meaning of the parallel is obscure, it seems that her inaccurate perception is somehow due to her erroneous beliefs. What finally convinces her of her error and persuades her to “submit” (i.e., to become a Muslim) is, it appears, her realization that she has been deceived by the illusion of water. As others have observed, this is highly reminiscent of the water vision episode, where the same misperception is understood to be a demonstration of unworthiness to enter the presence of the divine king.¹⁶ Moreover, the queen encounters the illusion of water produced by the glass pavement only after she has been told to “enter the palace” – exactly the same sequence of events as in the ascent midrash of the hekhalot tradition. We should also note the way in which the queen’s reaction to the king’s glass house is described in *Targum Sheni*: “... she considered in her heart and said” (בְּמַחְשָׁבָהּ בְּלִבָּהּ וְאָמְרָה),¹⁷ which may contain an

¹⁵ *Qur’ān, ibid.*, 41-44, trans. DAWOOD, *The Koran*, 267; cf. LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 186; and HALPERIN, *Faces*, 487-488.

¹⁶ See especially HALPERIN, *Faces*, 488; cf. ROWLAND, “The Visions of God,” 149, n. 26, who refers to the *Qur’ān*; and DAN, “פְּתוּחַ הַיְכָל שִׁישִׁי,” 199, who alludes in passing to the Jewish sources.

¹⁷ CASSEL (“The Second Targum,” 282-283) renders these words: “... she thought in her heart, and in fact said” The other translators cited in nn. 1, 4, and 9 above take them to mean simply that the queen “... said (or: thought) to herself” etc.

echo of the motif of “saying” in the water vision episode in *HZ*, *HR*, and *b.Hag.* 14b.

Although the *Qurʾān* does not state that the queen’s legs were hairy, the significance of her action of baring her legs is not otherwise explained. It may, therefore, be that the passage is alluding to a story much like that preserved in *Targum Sheni*. This is not, however, certain, since, as HALPERIN rightly observes, *Targum Sheni* itself fails to explain why the king chooses to sit in a glass house, or the relevance and meaning of the queen’s hairy legs.¹⁸ These considerations indicate that *Targum Sheni* and the *Qurʾān* are both alluding to a traditional story which is assumed to be familiar to the reader. Since both these sources were probably written during the seventh century,¹⁹ the story itself must be older still.

4. *The Queen’s Hairy Legs in Recent Jewish Folklore*

Two versions of the legend of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in the oral folk tradition, both obtained from Moroccan informants, are preserved in the Israel Folklore Archives. In both, the queen’s hairy legs are the subject of one the questions by which she tests the king. The first of these two accounts includes a version of the glass palace tale:

King Solomon invited the Queen of Sheba to his palace. The floor of the salon was built of mirrors After a reception party, the queen wanted to test Solomon’s wisdom. She said, “Everywhere, you have a reputation as a wise man who knows everything. It’s my wish for you to tell me what distinguishes my body.” King Solomon smiled and replied, “You have very hairy legs.” She said, “How do you know; you’ve never seen my legs?” Solomon answered her, “That’s why I set the mirrors on the floor.”²⁰

This version of the story makes it clear that the mirrored floor was constructed for the specific purpose of enabling Solomon to see the queen’s legs. It appears to be implied that Solomon anticipated the question and already suspected the queen of having hairy legs, but we are not told how he obtained this information. This version does not mention

¹⁸ HALPERIN, *Faces*, 488.

¹⁹ See p. 231 above. On the date of the *Qurʾān*, see DAWOOD, “Introduction” to *The Koran*, 1-3.

²⁰ Israel Folklore Archives 1340, trans. LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 179.

the illusion of water and, since the queen's legs are revealed by reflection, there is no need for her to raise her skirts.

In the second version, there is no mention of the glass floor and we are not told how Solomon obtained the answer to the queen's question. The issue of gender is brought to the fore:

She said to him, "First, what am I like?" He answered, "Those legs of yours are like a young man's but your face is that of a girl." Her jaw dropped as she expressed astonishment. She said to him, "You won as regards the first question."²¹

5. *The Queen's Hairy legs in the Tales of Ben Sira*

An allusion to the story of the queen's visit to Solomon is found in the *Tales of Ben Sira*, a bizarre collection of satirical tales and epigrams, also known as *Pseudo Ben-Sira* or, by the title of one of its parts, as the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*. Several versions of the work are extant, the earliest being dated by ELI YASSIF to the late ninth or early tenth century CE.²² DAN, who attributes the whole text to a single author, states that "it is impossible to fix even the approximate date of the work," but that it "seems to have been written in the East after the rise of Islam."²³

This strange but influential text, which does not refer to the queen's questions, the glass palace or the illusion of water, does, however, provide an interesting — albeit anachronistic — perspective on the tale. The mother of King Nebuchadnezzar was, we are given to understand, none other than the Queen of Sheba and, while it is not explicitly stated that Solomon was his father, this is almost certainly implied. The story, which occurs in the context of an equally anachronistic conversation between Nebuchadnezzar and Ben Sira, has been published in three different versions: one in the text edited by M. STEINSCHNEIDER,²⁴ and two in the more recent edition by YASSIF.²⁵ These three versions are presented for comparison on the following page. Ben Sira is speaking to Nebuchadnezzar:

²¹ Israel Folklore Archives 8152, trans. LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 181.

²² See YASSIF, *Tales*, 19-29 (and cf. SCHOLEM, *Major Trends*, 174).

²³ DAN, "Ben Sira, Alphabet of," *EJ* 4.548-550 (both quotations, 549).

²⁴ M. STEINSCHNEIDER, *Alphabetum Siracidis utrumque, cum expositione antiquâ (narrationes et fabulas continente). In integrum restitutum et emendatum e Cod. MS. Biblioth. Leydensis* (Berlin: Friedlaender, 1858) 21b.

²⁵ YASSIF, *Tales*, 217-218 (recensions A and B).

Ed. STEINSCHNEIDER

When your mother, the Queen of Sheba, came to Solomon, bringing him a gift (דורון), to behold (לראות) his wisdom, she was pleasing (ישרה) in his eyes and he sought to lie with her (בקש לשכב), but he found her hairy all over (כולה שער), so he brought lime and arsenic (סיד וזרניך) and sifted (וברר) the lime with the sole of his foot, ground up the arsenic, and mixed them in water – and thus there was made “miracle-with lime” hair-remover (נס בסיד) (תגלחת). And he anointed her and bathed her (וימשחה ורחצה), and all her hair fell off, and he came in to her at that time (ובא עליה באותה שעה).

Ed. YASSIF (A)

When the Queen of Sheba, your mother, came with tribute (במנחה) to hear (לשמוע) Solomon’s wisdom, he saw that she was beautiful (יפה) and he wanted to come in to her (ורצה לבא עליה), but he found her to be covered with hair (מלאה שער) – and at that time, not one of the daughters of Israel had a single hair beneath her clothes. Solomon opened his mouth and said to his servants: “Bring me lime and arsenic.”²⁶ They took the lime and sifted (וברר) it in a sieve, ground up the arsenic and mixed them into one (וערבו יחד). They did this so that your mother could anoint herself with it (שסכה בו),²⁷ and all her flesh was purified, and the hair fell off, and he did with her as he pleased (ועשה בה כרוצונו).²⁸

Ed. YASSIF (B)

When the Queen of Sheba, your mother, came to King Solomon to behold (לראות) his wisdom, and when Solomon wanted to come in to her (ורצה לבא עליה), he found her to be covered all over with hair (כולה מליאה שער) – and at that time, there was no one in Israel who was covered with hair, as it is written: *I am a smooth man* (Gen. 27:11). Then Solomon, in his wisdom, said to his servants: “Go, and bring me lime and arsenic (סיד וזרניך).” At once, they brought them to him, and sifted (וכברר) the lime in a sieve. And he ground up the arsenic on a tile (ברעה), and mixed it in, and made from them “miracle-with-lime” (נס בסיד). And he applied it to your mother (ועשה לאמך), the Queen of Sheba, and she beautified herself by bathing (ורחצה עצמה יפה), and all her hair fell from her.

²⁶ Accepting YASSIF’s emendation of סיד וזרניך to סיד וזריר, in agreement with ed. YASSIF (B) and ed. STEINSCHNEIDER.

²⁷ LASSNER (*Demonizing the Queen*, 168) mistranslates: “so that when Solomon saw your mother,” evidently understanding the verb to be סכי, “look,” rather than סוך, “anoint” (see JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 963b, cf. 989b).

²⁸ Cf. 1 Kgs. 10:13 = 2 Chron. 9:12: *And King Solomon gave the Queen of Sheba all that she desired* (אֵת־כָּל־הַדְּפוּסָה).

According to all three versions of this mildly obscene story, the hair to which Solomon objects is not confined to the queen's legs, but covers other parts of her body as well. At least one recension, ed. YASSIF (A), leaves the reader in no doubt that the primary cause of the king's revulsion is her pubic hair. A very similar statement that, during the time of the early monarchy, "the daughters of Israel had neither under-arm nor pubic hair" is attributed to Rabba in *b.Sanh.* 21a.²⁹

Although the narrative is in all three versions basically the same, there are numerous minor variations of detail and it is very noticeable that, in several instances, the three versions use different vocabulary to say the same thing. This suggests strongly that we are dealing with a popular comic tale which was orally transmitted and widely circulated in the pre-literary tradition.³⁰

Although the motif of unwanted body hair is the most obvious and direct connection between the story in the *Tales of Ben Sira* and that in *Targum Shevi*, a further link is provided by the role of Nebuchadnezzar, who, according to the targum, captured Solomon's throne and removed it from Jerusalem. The tradition that Nebuchadnezzar was descended from – though not the direct offspring of – Solomon's union with the Queen of Sheba is, in fact, encountered in several Jewish medieval sources,³¹ and the significance of this will be discussed below.³²

6. *The Muslim Commentators*

As we have seen, the *Qur'ān* tells us that the queen, when she saw the glass floor and mistook it for water, "bared her legs," but does not state that her legs were hairy. In most early Muslim commentaries on the passage, however, this detail is an integral element of the tale. According to the historian and commentator al-Ṭabari (d. 923), the queen – in these sources, called Bilqis – was the daughter of a female jinn, her father being a human king. Growing up to be beautiful, intelligent and

²⁹ Rashi comments: "before they sinned."

³⁰ I am sorely tempted to entertain the speculation that this risqué narrative may have originated in the sales patter of a travelling pedlar of a dubious and dangerous-sounding depilatory concoction known as "Miracle-with-Lime."

³¹ See: SILBERMAN, "The Queen of Sheba in Judaic Tradition," 78; YASSIF, *Tales*, 56-57; LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 22-23; and the sources cited there.

³² See pp. 277-279 below.

courageous, Bilqīs inherits her father's kingdom, which she rules in her own right until Solomon learns of her existence.³³ A similar account of Bilqīs' origin and early life is preserved by al-Tha'labī, an early eleventh-century compiler of traditions from a variety of sources.³⁴ In this version, Bilqīs' assumption of her father's throne is at first opposed by an evil male rival, who seizes and rapes his subjects' virgin daughters. Bilqīs agrees to marry him but, on their wedding night, gets him drunk and cuts off his head. The king's former subjects gratefully acknowledge the justice of this act and acclaim her as their queen and ruler.

A slightly different and more detailed version of the story is provided by al-Kisā'i (fl. ca 1200 CE), according to whom Bilqīs' father was not himself a king, but the minister of an evil king who, like Bilqīs' rival in the account of al-Tha'labī, abuses the daughters of his subjects. As in the versions of al-Ṭabari and al-Tha'labī, Bilqīs' mother was a jinn. When Bilqīs reaches maturity, she asks her father to let her live in the human world, rather than the realm of the jinn. Her father responds by telling her about the villainous king, who, he fears, will try to ravage her. Bilqīs, however, tells him not to be afraid and constructs a magic palace in which to trap the king.³⁵

The palace had seven gates, each attended by a daughter of the jinn as radiant as the rising sun. They held trays of gold containing silver and gold coins. Bilqīs instructed them to shower the king with them when they caught sight of him. Thus, when the king entered, he was showered by coins, causing him to say to each one of them, "Are you my beloved?" At that point, they answered, "No! I am [only] her servant. You have yet to see her." This went on until he finally reached the last of the gates.

When Bilqīs emerged and he saw her striking beauty, he just about lost his senses. She set for him a gold table filled with all varieties of food. "I have no need of these," he said. So she had drinks brought and poured them for him; he partook of them and began to moan. Then she offered him wine and he fell into a drunken stupor, laying absolutely motionless on the ground. At that, Bilqīs arose and cut off his head. She then turned to her servant girls and ordered

³³ For al-Ṭabari's account of Bilqīs' early life, see HERMANN ZOTENBERG, trans., *Chronique de Abou Djafar-Mohammed-ben Djarir-ben-Yesid Tabari, traduite sur la version persane d'Abou Ali Mo'hammed Bel'ami d'après les manuscrits de Paris, Gotha, Londres et Canterbury* (4 vols.; 1867; reprinted Paris: Éditions d'art les heures claires, 1977) 1.443-448.

³⁴ For an English translation of the relevant passage in al-Tha'labī's *'Arā'is al-majālis*, see LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 189-191.

³⁵ Al-Kisā'i, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā*, trans. LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 209.

them, "Take this ungrateful cur and hide his body in the sea. Tie him to a rock lest he surface above the water." The servants carried out her commands.

Following this event, Bilqīs assumes the former king's throne and, as in the other versions, rules the kingdom unchallenged until compelled by Solomon to submit to the overlordship of Allāh and himself.

The seven-gated magic palace of al-Kisā'i's account is at least slightly reminiscent of the Jewish hekhalot tradition. The motif of mistakenly identifying the guardians of the gates for the one whom they serve may, perhaps, call to mind the figure of Metatron. The king's death by decapitation is the same fate as befalls the unworthy *יורד מרכבה* in *HZ*. Considered individually, these parallels are, admittedly, too weak to bear much weight. If, however, they are taken together with the manner in which Bilqīs orders her servants to dispose of the body, it is not unreasonable to suspect that the story may contain a distant memory of the water vision episode itself.

All three of these commentators include the tale of the bird – as in the *Qur'ān*, a hoopoe – who tells Solomon of the queen's existence and delivers the king's summons. Bilqīs, who, as stated in the *Qur'ān*, has hitherto been a worshipper of the sun, challenges Solomon's authority – as in *Targum Sheni* – by subjecting him to a series of riddles and other tests, all but one of which he is able to solve,³⁶ thereby demonstrating the superiority of his wisdom. This is also demonstrated by the disguised throne and the illusory glass palace, although both seem to be significant in other ways as well. Al-Tha'labī reports that most authorities believed that Solomon ordered the throne to be brought to him in advance of Bilqīs' visit because he wanted it for himself and needed to obtain it while she was still an infidel, since after her submission to Islam, her property would become inviolate.³⁷

Al-Tha'labī's account of Bilqīs' arrival at Solomon's court and the ensuing confrontation is the longest and most detailed of the three. The recension in al-Ṭabari's *History* closely parallels the content of al-Tha'labī's version,³⁸ but it is somewhat shorter and the sequence of

³⁶ See further p. 245 below.

³⁷ See al-Tha'labī, trans. LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 197.

³⁸ Al-Ṭabari, *History*, 3.581-585, in WILLIAM M. BRINNER, trans., *The History of al-Ṭabari* (Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l mulūk), vol. 3, *The Children of Israel* (Bibliotheca Persica; Albany: SUNY Press, 1991) 161-164; cf. ZOTENBERG, *Chronique de Tabari*, 1.441-442.

events in the narrative is differently arranged. Al-Kisā'i, who provides the fullest account of Bilqīs' early life, gives only a summary of this part of the story.³⁹ It will, therefore, be convenient to begin by considering al-Tha'labī's version. Significant variations in the versions of al-Ṭabari and al-Kisā'i will be discussed below.

Al-Tha'labī states that Solomon disguised the queen's throne and built the glass court in order to test the truth of a malicious rumor about Bilqīs which had been started by the satans — a demonic class of jinn — who had their own nefarious reasons for so doing. His account of the ensuing confrontation is as follows:⁴⁰

- A Solomon then said: *Disguise her throne for her.* That is, add to it and take away from it by substituting the upper and lower parts for one another. *We shall see if she is truly guided* to her throne and recognizes it or is among the ignorant, [meaning] *those not truly guided* to it (Qur'ān xxvii:41). Solomon did this in order to test her intelligence. According to Wahb b. Munabbih, Muḥammad b. Ka'b, and other authorities: Solomon was led to this [test of her intelligence] because the satans feared he would marry her and make her desirous of having his offspring. She would then disclose to him the secrets of the jinn, and they would never rid themselves of their subservience to Solomon and his offspring to follow. Wishing to incite him against her, they distorted what was praiseworthy [about her], saying, "There is something [wrong] with her intelligence and her feet are like the hooves of a mule." Thus, Solomon wanted to test her intelligence by disguising her throne and wished to examine her feet by building the palace. When Bilqīs arrived, [she] was asked: *Is this the likes of your throne?* She said: *It is as if it were* (Qur'ān xxvii:42). Then she compared the [altered] throne to the one she had left behind in a chamber of seven locked gates — she retained the keys. She did not confess that [it was hers] nor did she deny it, whereupon Solomon knew the extent of her intelligence
- B When she arrived in Solomon's presence, *she was told: Enter the court* (Qur'ān xxvii:44)! The reason for this was as follows: When Bilqīs drew near in search of him, Solomon ordered the satans to build him a court (*ṣarḥ*). That was a palace (*qasr*) of glass resembling white waters in which they placed [real] water stocked with fish beneath the [floor]. Following that, he had his throne placed along

³⁹ See the translation by LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 212.

⁴⁰ The following passage from al-Tha'labī, *'Arā'is al-majālis* is quoted according to the translation in LASSNER, *ibid.*, 198-200 (paragraph identifiers have been added by me). Where indicated, a small amount of material which is not relevant to this inquiry has been omitted.

the central axis (*fi šadrihi*). Then he sat, the birds, jinn, and humans arrayed about him.

- C He ordered the construction of the court because the satans said to one another, "Whomsoever God has made subservient to Solomon, He has made subservient [according to His wish]. Bilqīs is the Queen of Sheba. If Solomon marries her, she will give him a son, and [our] servitude [to the prophet] will forever be unbreakable." Hence, they wished to incite him against her. And so they said, "Her feet are like the hooves of a mule and she has hairy ankles,⁴¹ all because her mother was a jinni." Solomon wished to learn the truth concerning that and to look at her feet and ankles. So he ordered the building of the court.
- D Wahb b. Munabbih related: Solomon built the court only to test her intelligence and understanding When Bilqīs arrived, she was told: *Enter the court! When she saw it, she reckoned it to be a pool* most of which was filled with water. *And so, she uncovered her ankles* (Qur'ān xxvii:44) to wade through the water on her way to Solomon. Solomon gazed at her. Behold! She had the most beautiful ankles and feet that any human could have, but her ankles were most certainly hairy. When Solomon saw that, he turned his eyes from Bilqīs and called out to her that *it is a court made smooth with slabs of glass* (Qur'ān xxvii.44) and there [actually] is no water [on the surface].
- E When she was seated, she said to him, "O Solomon, I wish to ask you something." "Ask," he responded. She continued, "I wish to ask you about [drinking] water which is neither in the ground nor in the skies." Now, when something came up that Solomon did not know, he asked the humans. If they had knowledge of that, good and well, if not, he would ask the jinn. If they knew, fine, and if not, he would ask the satans. So he asked the satans about her question, and they said, "Simple! Order horses to race and then fill the vessels with their sweat." Solomon replied, "The sweat of horses." "Correct," she said.
- F She continued [to probe], "Tell me about your Lord's [very] being." At that, Solomon leapt from his throne, prostrated himself, and lost consciousness. She stood aside as his contingents broke ranks [in panic], whereupon Gabriel came to him and said, "O Solomon, your Lord is speaking to you. Whatever you want is yours." The prophet answered, "O Gabriel, my Lord knows better of what she said." The angel then proclaimed, "God orders you to return to your throne. Then you will send for her and those of your contingents and hers that were present [when she asked her question]. Solomon returned to his throne and when they [that is, all who had been present] settled down about him, he inquired of Bilqīs, "What was it that you asked me about?" "About water that is neither in

⁴¹ The word translated "ankles" by LASSNER is rendered "calves" by HALPERIN (*Faces*, 488). HALPERIN's translation may, perhaps, be preferable.

the earth nor in the sky,” she responded. He continued, “What else did you ask?” “I asked nothing else,” she said. Following that he asked [the same of] the contingents and they responded as she did, for God, may He be exalted, caused them to forget her query. Thus, God protected Solomon from having to answer.

- G Now, Solomon called upon her to become a Muslim. Having witnessed what had happened concerning the hoopoe, the gifts, the messengers, the throne and the court [of glass], she responded affirmatively, saying: *My Lord! I have wronged myself through unbelief. I submit through Solomon to Allāh, the Lord of the Universe* (Qurʾān xxvii:44).
- H The authorities disagree as to what happened to Bilqīs after her conversion to Islam. Most report: When Bilqīs became a Muslim, Solomon wished to marry her. But, when he mulled over the idea, he became disenchanted; that was because of her thick ankle hair. “How disgusting this is,” he said. Then he asked the humans, “How is [ankle] hair removed?” “With a razor,” they answered. The woman protested, “No blade has ever touched me.” So Solomon was against [using] a razor. He said, “She’ll cut her ankle.” He turned to the jinn, but they responded, “We don’t know [how to remove hair without a razor].” Finally, he asked the satans, who feigned ignorance and said the same. When pressed by Solomon, however, they said, “We’ll employ a technique for you that will make her ankles appear like highly polished silver.” And so, they prepared her depilatory and bath. Ibn ‘Abbās related: That was the first time a depilatory was used. Solomon then married her
- J The authorities [that is, those who believed that the prophet and the queen had wed] reported: Solomon was very much in love with Bilqīs when he married her and established her [as ruler] over her dominion. At his command, the jinn built three fortresses in the land of Yemen, the likes of which were never seen as regards height and grandeur Following that, he would travel back and forth from Syria to the Yemen, visiting her once a month and remaining for three days – that was after he returned her to her domain.
- K Muḥammad b. Ishāq reported the following on the authority of some scholars quoting Wahb b. Munabbih: Solomon said to Bilqīs when she submitted to Islam – his business was done with her – “Choose a man from your own people so that I might marry you off to him.” She answered, “O prophet of God, should the likes of me marry among [mere] men when I have already possessed such authority as I have in my domain and among my people?” “Yes,” he said, “submission to Islam requires that you do not prohibit what God has declared as lawful.” “If there is no other way,” she replied, “marry me off to Tubba’ the Elder, King of Hamdān.” And so, he married them. He returned her to the Yemen and established Dhū Tubba’ as ruler there.

In paragraph A, we learn that the satans are concerned to forestall the possibility of a marriage between Solomon and Bilqīs, since they fear that the offspring of their union will have even greater power over them than Solomon himself. The same statement is made by al-Ṭabari,⁴² but neither of these two commentators tells us whether Solomon and Bilqīs did, in fact, produce children. Al-Kisā'i, on the other hand, says nothing about the satans' fear of such a union, but concludes his version as follows:

After that, Solomon married her and she bore him a son, whose name was Rehoboam. The latter's arms reached to his knees, which is a sign of leadership. Wahb continued: Bilqīs remained with Solomon for seven years and seven months. Then she died and Solomon buried her beneath the walls of Palmyra, which is in the Land of Syria.⁴³

The statement that Solomon married Bilqīs, which is found in all three of these sources, goes beyond the account in *Tales of Ben Sira*, where he is merely her lover. Moreover, according to al-Kisā'i, she becomes the mother, not of Nebuchadnezzar or his forebear, but of Solomon's legitimate son and heir.⁴⁴ Al-Kisā'i does not refer to Rehoboam's reprehensible character, or to the Hebrew biblical statement that he incurred the penalty for Solomon's having followed after strange gods, at the instigation of his foreign wives.⁴⁵ LASSNER states that these facts were well-known to Muslim scholars and infers that Al-Kisā'i may have intended his readers to understand that Solomon's marriage to Bilqīs was "ultimately a mistake,"⁴⁶ but this is not supported by any evidence in the text. The conflicting opinions recorded by al-Ṭabari and al-Tha'labī do, however, seem to indicate that the tradition that Solomon and Bilqīs were married was at one time controversial. Al-Ṭabari, although he includes Ibn 'Abbās' statement (H), reduces it to a passing reference and

⁴² Al-Ṭabari, *History*, 3.582-583 (trans. BRINNER, *The Children of Israel*, 162).

⁴³ Al-Kisā'i, trans. LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 212.

⁴⁴ See 1 Kgs. 11:41-14:31 (= 2 Chron. 9:31-12:15), but note that, according to 1 Kgs. 14:21 (= 2 Chron. 12:13), Rehoboam's mother was Na'amah the Ammonitess. I can find no antecedent for the statement that Rehoboam had long arms.

⁴⁵ 1 Kgs. 11:1-13, 31-36.

⁴⁶ LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 96.

reports that Solomon ordered the three fortresses built for Dhū Tubba', Bilqīs' new husband (J-K), not for Bilqīs herself.⁴⁷

The material in E-F is also found in the *History* of al-Ṭabari, who places it between A and B.⁴⁸ As in the Jewish traditions about the queen's *hard questions*, the meeting is here presented as a contest of wits. According to the rules of the game, Solomon must defend his title – in Islam, Prophet – by answering a series of questions posed by his challenger. Only if he answers them all correctly will the queen acknowledge his superiority and submit to him. The first of the two questions in this passage presents him with no problem, since he is able to obtain the answers to such riddles from the satans. The second question is, however, a different matter. Although the exact meaning of the question is unclear,⁴⁹ it seems probable that, if the story has a Jewish origin, it originally concerned the mysteries of the divine name.⁵⁰ It is, at all events, clear that Solomon is unable to answer the question without committing blasphemy. If he fails to answer, however, the queen will have won the contest – hence, the divinely sanctioned intervention of the angel Gabriel, who rescues him from this predicament by miraculously erasing all memory of the question.

In B-C, al-Tha'labī tells us that Solomon ordered the construction of the glass palace for the express purpose of testing the truth of the satans' allegations about Bilqīs' lower legs. As it turns out, these allegations are only partly true. There is nothing wrong with Bilqīs' intelligence (A) and her feet, far from being like the hooves of a mule, are “the most beautiful that any human could have” (D). Her only undesirable feature is the hair on her otherwise lovely lower legs. Close examination of the passage reveals that-Tha'labī has recorded two versions of the satans' malicious rumor (A and C). Both versions include the allegation that her feet are like those of a mule – an allegation which is unique to al-Tha'labī – but only the second accuses her of having hairy legs. The first version of the rumor is, therefore, completely false.

⁴⁷ Al-Ṭabari, *History*, 3.585 (trans. BRINNER, *The Children of Israel*, 3-164).

⁴⁸ Al-Ṭabari, *History*, 3.581-583, trans. BRINNER, *The Children of Israel*, 1-162. Al-Kisā'i omits this material.

⁴⁹ In al-Ṭabari, *History*, 3.581 (trans. BRINNER, *The Children of Israel*, 161), the queen asks: “Tell me about the color of the Lord.”

⁵⁰ Compare the version in al-Ṭabari's commentary on the *Qur'ān* (see pp. 246-247 below), where the question is transformed into a heretical “utterance” by the queen.

It is interesting to observe that al-Tha'labī attributes this first version to Wahb b. Munabbih, who was a Hebrew scholar, and to Muḥammad b. Ka'b, who was the son of a Jewish convert.⁵¹ In paragraph D, Wahb maintains that "Solomon built the court *only* to test her intelligence and understanding," which may, perhaps, indicate that the hairy legs motif was not universally accepted as an authentic component of the story. The motif, admittedly, reappears further down in the same paragraph, but this may simply be due to the way in which al-Tha'labī has combined his sources. Paragraph H includes material similar to that found in *Tales of Ben Sira*. In G, however, the glass palace incident is included in a list of events which are all understood to be demonstrations of the superiority of Solomon's God-given wisdom over that of Bilqīs, which comes merely from the jinn. The purpose of these events is simply to convince her of the error of her beliefs, thereby leading her into "submission" to the will of Allāh.

The recension of this material in al-Ṭabari's *History* closely resembles that of al-Tha'labī, with the significant difference that the idea of constructing the glass palace comes not from Solomon, but from the satans, who know that Bilqīs has hairy legs and want to trick her into exposing them to Solomon, in the hope that he will find her repulsive.⁵² The allegation that her feet are like those of a mule is not mentioned. In this version, therefore, Bilqīs' hairy legs are an essential component of the tale. In his *Commentary on the Qur'ān*, however, al-Ṭabari records a different version of the story, which does not include the hairy legs motif.⁵³

At Solomon's command, the demons built the hall out of glass, as white [that is, clear] as if it were water. He ran water beneath it, placed his throne [*sarir*] in it, and sat down upon it. The birds, jinn and humans stood in attendance upon him.

Then he said [to the queen], "Enter the hall"; for he intended to show her a kingdom stronger than her kingdom, a dominion mightier than her dominion. *And when she saw it she deemed it a pool and bared her legs*, not doubting that it was water through which she must wade. *It was said unto her: Enter. It is a hall, made smooth, of glass.*

⁵¹ See LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 86.

⁵² Al-Ṭabari, *History*, 3.583 (trans. BRINNER, *The Children of Israel*, 162).

⁵³ Al-Ṭabari, *Commentary on the Qur'ān*, 19.68, trans. HALPERIN, *Faces*, 489-490.

When she stood before Solomon, he called her to the worship of God, and condemned her for worshipping the sun instead of God. She then uttered a heresy [*qawel al-zanadiqah*]; at which Solomon fell prostrating himself and magnifying [God], on account of what she had said. Everyone prostrated themselves with him. She was at her wits' end when she saw Solomon doing what he did.

When Solomon raised his head, he said: "What was it you said, damn you?" "I've been made to forget it," she said.

Then she said: "*My Lord! I have wronged myself, and I surrender with Solomon unto Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.*" She became a good Muslim.

In this version of the story, as in the *Qur'ān*, the queen's action of barring her legs is given no significance beyond that required by the narrative – namely, that it reveals her erroneous perception of the glass floor as being water. The purpose of the glass palace is not to make her reveal her hairy legs, which are nowhere mentioned, but – as in section G of al-Tha'labī's version⁵⁴ – "to show her a kingdom stronger than her kingdom, a dominion mightier than her dominion." According to this understanding of the narrative purpose and meaning of the glass palace incident, the hairy legs motif would appear to be redundant.

In the *History*, al-Ṭabari describes the palace itself as follows:⁵⁵

They [the satans] built him a castle of green glass, making floor tiles⁵⁶ of glass that resembled water. They placed within those tiles every kind of sea creature, fish, and the like, then they covered it up.

These glass floor tiles are very reminiscent of the transparent (סלולות) paving stones of the sixth palace in the water vision episode in *HZ*.

Al-Kisā'i's version of the glass palace story is relatively short and expands the text of the *Qur'ān* as follows:⁵⁷

An 'ifrīt⁵⁸ called out: "O prophet of God! I shall make for you a court of glass. Whoever sees it will think that it contains water stocked with fish." Solomon gave permission to have the court built. It had been mentioned to him

⁵⁴ See the previous page.

⁵⁵ Al-Ṭabari, *History*, 3.583 (trans. BRINNER, *The Children of Israel*, 162).

⁵⁶ The Arabic word used here, *ṭawābiq*, is apparently unusual; see BRINNER, *ibid.*, n. 831.

⁵⁷ Al-Kisā'i, trans. LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 212.

⁵⁸ A type of jinn.

that Bilqīs had hairy ankles.⁵⁹ When the 'ifrīt had finished, Bilqīs arrived and drew near the court. She saw her throne and was bewildered. [*She*] *was asked: Is this the likes of your throne? She said: It is as if it were* [etc.] (Qur'ān xxvii:42). Following this, she ascertained that it was indeed her throne.

When she drew near the court, *she reckoned it to be a pool* [of water]. *And so, she uncovered her ankles* (Qur'ān xxvii:44). Solomon then informed her that *it is a court made smooth (with slabs of glass)*. *She said: My Lord, I have wronged myself [with unbelief]. I submit through Solomon to Allāh, the Lord of the Universe* (Qur'ān xxvii:42).

Here, as in al-Ṭabari's *History*, the building of the glass palace is proposed by a jinn – though not, in this case, a satan. As the text stands, it states that Solomon approved this proposal because – as in the version of al-Tha'labī – he had been told that Bilqīs had hairy legs and, as LASSNER explains, wanted to know if this was true.⁶⁰ This information is, however, contained in one short sentence which looks very much as if it may have been inserted into a recension of the story which – like that in al-Ṭabari's *Commentary* and, indeed, the *Qur'ān* itself – did not include the hairy legs motif. In the second part of the text, confirmation of the report about Bilqīs' legs is conspicuously lacking.

7. *The Subjugation of the Hairy Queen*

There are, then, grounds for the suspicion that the strange motif of the queen's hairy legs was not included in the earliest form of the glass palace story or, at least, in the earliest Muslim version thereof. If so, the queen's mistaken perception of the glass floor was simply a demonstration of her status as one who, owing to her erroneous beliefs, is incapable of seeing truly. Thus understood, the story seems to be closely parallel to the water vision episode in *HZ* and *HR*. It is, however, certain that the hairy legs motif was included in the story at an early stage of its literary development, since in *Targum Sheni* it has already come to define the meaning of the tale. It may be that Solomon has constructed the glass palace for the specific purpose of causing the queen to expose her legs, but, in *Targum Sheni*, this does not necessarily have to be inferred. It is, perhaps, conceivable that the bizarre motif of the queen's

⁵⁹ LASSNER adds the explanatory gloss: [and he wanted to see if it was true]. On the word "ankles," see p. 242, n. 41 above.

⁶⁰ See the previous note.

hairy legs was simply invented in an attempt to explain the meaning of the glass palace story, which, divorced from its proper context, was no longer understood. We shall, however, find evidence which indicates strongly that the motif has its own significance, and that it represents an authentic early tradition about the queen.

As we have seen, the Muslim writers who mention the queen's hairy legs all attribute this characteristic to the fact that her mother was a jinn. This does not necessarily carry any implication of demonic or evil status, for, in Muslim tradition, there are many varieties of jinn, both good and evil. In the tales of Bilqīs' origins, the jinn realm with which she is associated is described in a way which is devoid of sinister or demonic overtones. Though magical and, therefore, potentially dangerous, it is also – not unlike the fairy realm of Celtic folklore – a place of beauty and contentment. Despite her initial resistance of Solomon's summons to "submit" (become a Muslim), Bilqīs herself is by no means an unsympathetic character. The tales of her defeat of the evil king cast her in a heroic role. On the other hand, her rulership of her kingdom is understood by the commentators to be something which is contrary to the hierarchical order of society as ordained by Allāh. According to al-Tha'labī,

Ibn Maymūnah related through his chain of authorities going back to al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī and then Abū Bakr, who said: "I mentioned Bilqīs in the presence of God's Messenger [i.e., Muḥammad himself] and he remarked, 'No society (*qawm*) prospers that allows a woman to rule over them.'⁶¹

Thus, in these stories, the reason for the moral ambivalence that attaches to Bilqīs is that she is an "unnatural woman." She is courageous, intelligent, and skilled in the exercise of power, both political and magical. She is, therefore, highly dangerous and, clearly, very sexy. Her "manly" qualities are by no means entirely negative attributes, since they serve to accentuate the great prowess of the king who succeeds in taming her. At first, her independent spirit causes her to challenge Solomon's prophetic authority and to refuse to recognize the truth of his religion. She does not, however, seem to be motivated by wickedness. Rather, she is engaged in a spirited defence of her own autonomy. In

⁶¹ Al-Tha'labī, trans. LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 190-191 [words in brackets added].

the end, of course, she has to be defeated. Having shown herself to be the king's worthy opponent, the "wild woman" is compelled to submit to the mastery of Solomon and the rule of Allāh, which, once conquered, she does with a good grace. Following her submission, she must give up her authority to Solomon – who may allow her to continue to rule in his name – or, as in the alternative tradition recorded by al-Tha'labī (H), to the husband whom he appoints over her.

In this context, the meaning of the queen's hairy legs is not difficult to understand. They are symbolic of her wild and untamed "masculine" nature, and of her arrogation of the male prerogatives of rulership and power. In a woman, according to these writers, such qualities are repugnant, no matter how desirable she otherwise may be. Thus, the removal of the queen's hair denotes her submission to the king. This must not be achieved by the use of a razor, which is considered appropriate only for a man. Hence, the king who masters her is credited with having commissioned the satans to invent the first depilatory. The queen's use of a bath and cosmetics to beautify herself serves further to emphasize her acceptance of the properly feminine, alluring and submissive role.⁶²

8. *Lilith*

Many of these observations also apply to *Targum Sheni* and the *Tales of Ben Sira*. Although neither source explicitly attributes non-human status to the queen, this has been inferred by most modern commentators,⁶³ partly on the basis of the Muslim sources, and also because she is very frequently identified, in other Jewish sources, with the demonic figure of Lilith.

The traditions about Lilith are complex and many-faceted. At the earliest stage of development represented by the one reference to Lilith in the Hebrew Bible (Isa. 34:14),⁶⁴ the name appears to be that of "a female night-demon haunting desolate Edom."⁶⁵ Lilith is mentioned

⁶² For a similar analysis, see LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 73-87; but see also p. 280 below.

⁶³ See further pp. 256-257 below.

⁶⁴ This passage is discussed on pp. 257-261 below.

⁶⁵ BDB, 539a. Note that the name לִילִית is of Babylonian origin, and that, according to the editors, its connection with Heb. לַיְלָה, "night," is "perhaps only apparent, a popular etymology," although SCHOLEM (*Kabbalah*, 356) disagrees with this assess-

in several places in *babli*, where she is portrayed as a malevolent winged female demon whose characteristic feature is her Medusa-like long and tangled hair.⁶⁶ She is liable to attack a man who sleeps alone,⁶⁷ and is the mother of demonic children.⁶⁸ By the end of the amoraic period, she has assumed the role of a baleful “night hag” who preys on women in childbirth and throttles newborn infants – a role which may originally have been attributed to demons with other names,⁶⁹ but which becomes a central element of her identity. This aspect of her personality is the subject of many Aramaic and, later, Hebrew protective incantations and amulets, dating from amoraic to recent times.⁷⁰

In addition to her grim role as the strangler of children, Lilith also appears as a succuba who seduces men during sleep and, by their nocturnal emissions, becomes the mother of a horde of impure demons. In the literature of the medieval Kabbalah, she is sometimes portrayed as the wife and queen of Samael, the lord of the forces of evil. In this capacity, she is the mother of the impure “mixed multitude” that went forth from Egypt (Exod. 12:38)⁷¹ – which is to say, a demonic counterpart of the divine Shekhinah, who is the mother of Israel.⁷²

Premedieval sources often speak of “liliths,” in the plural, who are an entire species of demon.⁷³ *Targum Sheni*, for example, states twice that God gave Solomon authority over “... the demons (שִׂידִין), the spirits (רוּחִין) and the liliths (לִילִין).”⁷⁴ In the Aramaic incantation bowls

ment. Compare JAMES A. MONTGOMERY, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Publications of the Babylonian Section, 3; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1913) 76; and see further: OTTO KAISER, *Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974) 358-359; JOSEPH JENSEN, *Isaiah 1-39* (OTM 8; Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1984) 265-267; J. D. W. WATTS, *Isaiah 1-33* (WBC 24; Waco: Word Books, 1985) 13-14; and JOSEPH BLENKINSOPP, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 19; New York, etc.: Doubleday, 1964) 434-435.

⁶⁶ *b. Er.* 100b; *Nid.* 24b.

⁶⁷ *b. Shabb.* 151b.

⁶⁸ *b.B.B.* 73b.

⁶⁹ See, for example, *Test. Sol.* 13:1-7; cf. *b.Pes.* 112b; and see also, for example, MONTGOMERY, *Aramaic Incantation Texts*, 238, text 36, lines 4-6.

⁷⁰ See SCHOLEM, *Kabbalah*, 357 and 359-360; and see also p. 255, n. 96 below.

⁷¹ See p. 193 above.

⁷² See SCHOLEM, *Kabbalah*, 358, and the sources cited there.

⁷³ See further pp. 258-259 below.

⁷⁴ *Targum Sheni*, §4, ed. CASSEL, *Zweites Targum*, 15 and 16.

from Nippur, dating from about 600 CE or earlier,⁷⁵ this category of demon includes both males and females (לילין and לילית).⁷⁶ Several bowls contain protective spells or exorcisms directed against the liliths, in whom the two roles of succubus and child-murderer are completely intertwined. Appearing as males to women and as females to men,⁷⁷ in both “dream of night” and “sleep of day,”⁷⁸ they beget demonic children by unholy intercourse.⁷⁹ Corollary to this is their murderous hatred for human children conceived in holy wedlock. Protection of both born and unborn children from these evil beings is an element in several of the spells.⁸⁰ A common form of spell is the magical divorce-writ (גיטא), separating the lilith from his or her adult victim,⁸¹ and sometimes also stipulating that the victim’s children are not to be harmed.⁸² One text contains the following colorful narrative:⁸³

Elija the prophet was walking in the road and he met the wicked Lilith and all her band. He said to her, Where art thou going, Foul one and Spirit of foulness, with all thy foul band walking along? And she answered and said to him: My lord Elija, I am going to the house of the woman in childbirth who is in pangs (?),⁸⁴ of So-and-so daughter of Such-a-one, to give her the sleep of death and to take the child she is bearing, to suck his blood and to suck the marrow of his bones and to devour his flesh.

Following this interchange, Elijah pronounces a ban, thereby compelling Lilith to reveal her secret names, by which her evil power may be avert-

⁷⁵ See MONTGOMERY, *Aramaic Incantation Texts*, 102-105.

⁷⁶ See the texts cited below and, further, MONTGOMERY, *ibid.*, 75-78.

⁷⁷ MONTGOMERY, *ibid.*, 118 (text 1, lines 12-13), 141 (text 6, lines 2-3), and 154-156 (text 8, lines 10-11).

⁷⁸ MONTGOMERY, *ibid.*, 162 (text 9, line 9); cf. 155 (text 8, line 11).

⁷⁹ MONTGOMERY, *ibid.*, 118 (text 1, lines 8-9).

⁸⁰ MONTGOMERY, *ibid.*, 141-142 (text 6, line 10), 168-170 (text 11, lines 2-4 and 8-9), 190-191 (text 17, lines 7-8) and 248-249 (text 39).

⁸¹ MONTGOMERY, *ibid.*, 154-156 (text 8), 161-62 (text 9), and 209 (text 26).

⁸² MONTGOMERY, *ibid.*, 169-170 (text 11), and 190-191 (text 17).

⁸³ Trans. MONTGOMERY, *ibid.*, 258-260 (text 42). It should be noted that the provenance of this text is uncertain and not necessarily the same as that of the others (see MONTGOMERY, *ibid.*, 258), but this is not important for the purpose of our inquiry.

⁸⁴ מִי רִקְאָדָּהּ, apparently meaning “who dances.” MONTGOMERY (*ibid.*, 260) conjectures: “The root is probably used in Syriac sense of mourning, hence supplicating; or cf. Heb. חיל, “writhe,” as well as “dance.””

ed. The Lilith of this text is clearly the specific personality encountered in other Jewish sources, while the members of her “band” are, presumably, the lesser liliths encountered in the bowls and elsewhere. This text also exemplifies the assimilation that seems to have occurred between the Lilith figure and the witch.⁸⁵

The Lilith of the medieval and later Kabbalah is a product of the convergence of these traditions with a later myth, which is fully expressed for the first time in the *Tales of Ben Sira*.⁸⁶ Here, Lilith is portrayed as Adam’s first wife, who was created before Eve, at the same time as her husband,⁸⁷ and who refused to accept her divinely ordained status of subordination to Adam, even going so far as to claim the superior position in sexual intercourse. As if this were not bad enough, she then defiantly pronounces the forbidden name of God and flies off into the air. Three angels are sent in pursuit of her and eventually find her hiding in the Red Sea – a body of water which, as shown by HALPERIN, is often symbolic of the chaos waters.⁸⁸ When confronted by the angels, Lilith furiously declares her rejection of the subordinate, nurturing role appropriate to her gender and states that she was created for no other purpose than to kill or injure newborn infants. The three angels, however, decree that their names, whether written or spoken, will have the power to confer protection.

9. *Lilith and the Queen of Sheba*

It is evident that the same issues of gender and power as are contained in the Muslim stories about Bilqīs are also encountered in the Jewish traditions about Lilith, where, however they are raised to a much higher level of moral and emotional intensity. In the figure of Lilith, fear and horror of the “masculine” and “unnatural” female is increased by several orders of magnitude. Unlike Bilqīs, Lilith refuses to submit and is by nature wholly malevolent and evil.

⁸⁵ See MONTGOMERY, *ibid.*, 78.

⁸⁶ Ed. YASSIF 231-234 and 289-290; cf. ed. STEINSCHNEIDER, 23a-b. See further: SCHOLEM, *Kabbalah*, 357; and LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 21.

⁸⁷ The idea that Adam had a wife before Eve is, of course, an attempt to resolve the tension between Gen. 1:26-27, where male and female are created together, and the “spare rib” story in Gen. 2:18-24

⁸⁸ See p. 43 above.

The identification of Lilith with the Queen of Sheba is encountered in kabbalistic sources of the medieval and later periods, and becomes a widespread motif in Jewish folklore.⁸⁹ LASSNER cites a Polish tale in which a group of young Jewish boys, playing on the bank of a river, are drawn into the water and drowned by the Queen of Sheba, who appears to them in gender-bending disguise as a male *goy*, sitting in the water and smoking a long – indubitably phallic – pipe. LASSNER comments:

Some modern readers may wish to see a paradox in this rendering of an ancient tale: Here is the Queen of Sheba usurping phallic power while at the same time she uses water, a symbol of creative female fluid, as a destructive force.⁹⁰

10. *The Queen of Sheba in the Zohar*

The queen is mentioned in two passages of the *Zohar*.⁹¹ In the first, she appears, not as a demon, but as an evil witch who asks Solomon to tell her how to get hold of a powerful magic serpent which, according to a secret book given to him by the arch-demon Asmodeus, was born from the bones of Baalam.⁹² The second passage, found in the *tosafot* or *hashmatot* (“omissions”) to *Zohar*, volume 3,⁹³ is a midrash on Deut. 25:9-10, where it is decreed that, if a man refuses to honor the obligation of the levirate marriage, his brother’s widow is to remove his sandal and spit in his face, in the presence of the elders. The midrash links this text with 1 Kgs. 10:1 (= 2 Chron. 9:1): ... *she came to test him with hard questions*. In this version of the battle of wits, the queen challenges Solomon to make her a pair of shoes. The king, however, knows that she is a demon and that her feet are, for this reason, not like those of

⁸⁹ See further: SCHOLEM, “פרקים חדשים צענייני אשמדאי ולילית,” *תרביץ*, 19 (1948) 166-172; *idem*, *Kabbalah*, 325 and 358-359; and *idem*, “Lilith,” *EJ*, 11.248; HAIM Z’EW HIRSCHBERG, “Queen of Sheba,” *EJ*, 13.1424; SILBERMAN, “The Queen of Sheba in Judaic Tradition,” 78-84; YASSIF, *Tales*, 57-59; LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 21-35; and the sources cited there.

⁹⁰ LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 23-24 (ref. to Israel Folklore Archives, 7248).

⁹¹ See SCHOLEM, “פרקים חדשים,” 168.

⁹² *Zohar*, 3.194b. The text in trans. SPERLING *et al.*, 5.276-277, is abbreviated.

⁹³ *Tosefat la-Zohar*, 3.308b, in the *Soncino Classics Collection* (CD-Rom; Judaic Classics Library; Chicago: Davka, 1996), Aramaic text only.

human beings. He therefore “told her what was in her heart”⁹⁴ or, in other words, that the secret of her demonic identity was known to him. Although the name Lilith is not mentioned in the midrash, the queen’s association with the ritual shaming of a man who refuses to perform the levirate marriage may suggest an implicit link with Lilith, who, having rejected the first divine commandment (Gen. 1:28), is implacably opposed to human procreation. Whether this be so or not, the meaning of the midrash is that a man who refuses to continue his brother’s line is to be regarded as the equivalent of a demon.

Of potential relevance to this inquiry is the fact that, according to the midrash in the *Zohar*, the queen’s non-human feet are a symptom of her demonic identity. The nature of the deformity is, however, different from that described in any extant version of the glass palace tale, being derived from *b.Ber.* 6a (cited by the *Zohar*), where it is stated that the tracks left by demons on the ground are like those of a rooster. Lilith herself is sometimes portrayed on protective amulets as having bird-like claws,⁹⁵ which may, perhaps, be indicative of her association with the screech-owl.⁹⁶ These facts, which place her in a different zoological category than al-Tha‘labi’s allegedly mule-footed Bilqis, do not seem to shed much, if any, light on the queen’s hairy legs in the glass palace tale.

In both these passages of the *Zohar*, the queen is, undoubtedly, an evil character. In one instance, she is a witch and in the other, she is a demon, but in neither instance is she explicitly identified with Lilith. SCHOLEM, however, observed that, elsewhere in the *Zohar*, Lilith is identified with the spirit of אסכרה, croup or diphtheria⁹⁷ – both respiratory diseases of children and probably indistinguishable at the time of writing of the *Zohar* – and that it is also said that, when God brings about the destruction of “wicked Rome,” he will allow Lilith to settle among

⁹⁴ ויגדר לה המלך את כל לבבה, misquoting MT 1 Kgs. 10:2b-3a (= 2 Chron. 9:1-2), which, reads: וַתִּבְרַךְ אֱלֹהֵי אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר הָיָה עִם-לִבְבָהּ: וַיִּגְדֵר לָהּ שְׁלֹמֹה אֶת-כָּל-דִּבְרֵיהֶּ.

⁹⁵ See, for example, SILBERMAN, “The Queen of Sheba in Judaic Tradition,” plate 29 (facing p. 72).

⁹⁶ Compare SILBERMAN, *ibid.*, plate 32 (facing p. 73), where Lilith is shown with feathers and wings (in this amulet, her feet are not visible).

⁹⁷ See ZOHAR, 2.267b; and compare *ibid.* 1.19b, which does not mention the name Lilith but gives an account of the origin of אסכרה which is closely parallel to the legend of Lilith’s origin in *ibid.*, 3.19a (and see the following note).

the ruins.⁹⁸ SCHOLEM connected these passages with a text quoted by the sixteenth-century kabbalist Moses Cordovero, which, in SCHOLEM's opinion, is "undoubtedly" attributable to Moses de Leon, the principal author of the *Zohar*. This text states that *gold of Sheba* (Ps. 73:15) is a "concealed secret of judgement" given to the Messiah, namely, אַסְכְּרָה, by which he will destroy the inhabitants of Rome.⁹⁹ On these grounds, SCHOLEM concluded that Moses de Leon was probably the first to identify the Queen of Sheba with Lilith and that he made this identification on the basis of a much older Jewish tradition that the queen was a demon.¹⁰⁰

11. *The Problem of the Origin of the Demonic Queen*

Although no explicit reference to this tradition is found in *Targum Sheni* or the *Tales of Ben Sira*, it has often been inferred. GINZBERG interpreted the queen's hairy legs as a sign that she is a demon, partly by reference to the Muslim sources, and partly because of an allegedly widespread Jewish belief that the bodies of demons in general are covered with hair.¹⁰¹ The textual evidence for this belief amongst Jews seems, however, to be rather thin and, in any case, much later than the two sources under consideration.¹⁰² GINZBERG's interpretation was, nonetheless, accepted by SCHOLEM, who stated that the glass palace story in *Targum Sheni* is "based on the supposition that this queen was a demon or, at all events, descended from the demons."¹⁰³ Most subsequent com-

⁹⁸ *Zohar*, 3.19a (referring to Isa. 34:14, on which see pp. 257-261 below).

⁹⁹ Cordovero, *Orchard of Pomegranites, Gate of Colors*, §3.

¹⁰⁰ SCHOLEM, "פּרָקִים חֲדָשִׁים," 166-168.

¹⁰¹ See GINZBERG, *Legends*, 6.289, n. 41.

¹⁰² As evidence of the belief that demons as a class have hairy bodies, GINZBERG (*ibid.*, 192, n. 58) cites two seventeenth-century sources, *Emeq ha-Melekh* and *Yalqut Hadash* (the late twelfth century *Sefer Hasidim*, also cited by GINZBERG, contains the entirely different statement that male demons have hair on their heads, while female demons are bald). GINZBERG is followed by SILBERMAN ("The Queen of Sheba in Judaic Tradition," 79), who cites no sources but states that the belief that all demons have hair on their bodies "is everywhere present, emerging into explicitness in the cabbalistic schools of the early Middle Ages and in folklore, particularly of the German Jewish communities, in the late Middle Ages and on into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."

¹⁰³ SCHOLEM, "פּרָקִים חֲדָשִׁים," 165.

mentators have assumed that this is the correct explanation of the hairy legs motif in both *Targum Sheni* and the *Tales of Ben Sira*.¹⁰⁴

This interpretation has, however, been challenged by YASSIF.¹⁰⁵ He concedes that the beliefs that witches are hairy and that demons have feet which resemble those of ducks or other birds are “universal folklore motifs,”¹⁰⁶ but points out that, in both *Targum Sheni* and the *Tales of Ben Sira*, the significance of the queen’s body hair is otherwise explained. In both texts, it is simply said to be repulsive on the grounds of her gender. In YASSIF’s opinion, moreover, the Jewish sources which identify the Queen of Sheba as a demon are all later than these two texts. He concludes that this interpretation of the hairy legs motif originated in the “Arabic branch” of the literary tradition.¹⁰⁷

12. *Lilith and the Hairy Demons in Isa. 34:14*

YASSIF’s objection to GINZBERG’s weak explanation of the hairy legs motif is clearly justified. The interpretation of the queen’s hairy legs as a sign that she is a demon may, however, have an earlier and more specific basis in Judaic tradition than YASSIF is prepared to allow. There are several references in the Hebrew Bible to a class of demons called שְׂעִירִים, “hairy ones” or “satyrs.” These demons are said to haunt desolate and ruined places,¹⁰⁸ and are mentioned as the recipients of pagan sacrifices.¹⁰⁹ The word שְׂעִיר is, of course, also used of an ordinary male goat,¹¹⁰ which these demons were believed to resemble.¹¹¹ The

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, SILBERMAN, “The Queen of Sheba in Judaic Tradition,” 78-79; and LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 21-23.

¹⁰⁵ YASSIF, *Tales*, 57-59.

¹⁰⁶ YASSIF, *ibid.*, 57. See further STITH THOMPSON, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends* (rev. and enlarged ed.; 5 vols.; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966) 3.82 (motif F232.5), 3.40 (motif F231.2.1) and 3.41 (motif F401.3.5) (cited by YASSIF).

¹⁰⁷ YASSIF, *ibid.*, 59.

¹⁰⁸ Isa. 13:21.

¹⁰⁹ Lev. 17:7; 2 Chron. 11:15.

¹¹⁰ See BDB, 972b.

¹¹¹ See, for example, *b.Ber.* 62a, where it is stated that to use the privy alone is to invite attack by the demons. In the course of a discussion of how this danger may be avoided, we find the following exchange: ‘Abaye’s mother trained a lamb to go to

closely related term שַׁעִיר is an alternative name for Edom (אֶדוֹם), the region south of the Dead Sea,¹¹² which was said to be the territory of the descendants of Esau,¹¹³ who, of course, was born *red all over, like a hairy mantle* (אֶדְמוֹנִי כְּלוֹ כְּאֶדְרַת שַׁעַר),¹¹⁴ and whom Jacob impersonated by wearing goatskins on his hands and neck.¹¹⁵ In the medieval Kabbalah, the “kings of Edom” descended from Esau¹¹⁶ symbolize the evil forces of the קְלִיפוֹת.¹¹⁷ Relating the biblical term to the glass palace story, ANDRÉ CHASTEL made the very plausible suggestion that the queen’s hairy legs reveal her to be a שַׁעִיר.¹¹⁸ Moreover, the one and only reference to Lilith in the Hebrew Bible associates her with the land of Edom and the שַׁעִירִים. In Isa. 34:14, the prophet, foretelling the desolation that will follow God’s judgement on Edom, says:¹¹⁹

וּפְגָשׁוּ צִיִּים אֶת־אֵיִים וְשַׁעִיר עַל־רַעְהוּ יִקְרָא אֶדְ-שָׁם הַרְגִיעָה לִילִית וּמִצְאָה לָהּ מְנוּחַ

And wild beasts will meet with desert animals; and the satyr will call to his fellow; and Lilith¹²⁰ too will settle¹²¹ there and find for herself a resting place.

In this passage, Lilith, though not herself a שַׁעִיר, is closely associated with these “hairy demons.” Early evidence of the belief in a plurality of liliths is provided by the Isaiah scroll from Qumran, which gives the name as לִילִיּוֹת, and by the targum to Isaiah, which, in both cases, reads:

the privy with him.’ ‘She would have done better to train him a goat.’ ‘A satyr could transform itself into a goat.’

¹¹² E.g., Gen. 32:4; see further BDB 973a.

¹¹³ See Gen. 36:1-43.

¹¹⁴ Gen. 25:25.

¹¹⁵ Gen. 27:1-29.

¹¹⁶ See Gen. 36:1-43.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, *Zohar*, 1.177a-178a.

¹¹⁸ See ANDRÉ CHASTEL, “La légende de la Reine de Saba,” part 2, *RHR* 120 (1940) 31-32.

¹¹⁹ On this verse, see, in addition to the authorities cited on p. 251, n. 65 above: WALTER BRUEGGEMAN, *Isaiah 1-39* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998) 272; and PETER D. MISCALL, *Isaiah 34-35: A Nightmare/A Dream* (JSOTSup 281; Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

¹²⁰ RSV: “the night-hag”; AV: “the screech owl”; NEB: “the nightjar”; but see the remarks of A. S. HERBERT, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters 1-39* (CBC; Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1973) 194; and BLENKINSOPP, *Isaiah 1-39*, 449.

¹²¹ RSV: “alight.”

ליליין, with the verbs and reflexive pronoun in the plural.¹²² In the targum, the word שְׁעִיר is translated: שִׁידִין, “demons,” again with the verb in the plural.¹²³

The Greek versions of this verse will also repay our attention. LXX reads as follows:¹²⁴

καὶ συναντήσουσιν δαιμόνια ὄνοκενταύροις καὶ βοήσονται ἕτερος πρὸς τὸν ἕτερον, ἐκεῖ ἀναπαύσονται ὄνοκενταυροὶ εὐρδόντες αὐτοῖς ἀνάπαυσιν.

And spirits will meet together with ass-centaurs, and they will cry out to each other; there ass-centaurs will rest, finding rest for themselves.

The repetitive substitution of ἐκεῖ ἀναπαύσονται ὄνοκενταυροὶ in place of the Hebrew לִילִית הַרְגִיעָה שָׁם is clearly awkward and indicates that the translator has chosen to suppress the reference to Lilith. No such scruple is evident in Aquila which translates straightforwardly: ἐκεῖ ἀνέψυξεν Λιλίθ (“there Lilith found rest”). Especially significant is Symmachus, which translates לִילִית by Λάμια (Lamia),¹²⁵ this being the name of one of Hecate’s daughters, the Ἐμψυσαε (Empusae), who

.... were horrible demons, with the haunches of asses and wearing brazen slippers. They could disguise themselves as bitches, cows, or maidens, and in the latter shape they would lie with men asleep and suck their strength till they died. The idea of Empusae was probably brought from Palestine, where the Lilim, or daughters of Lilith, had similar characteristics.¹²⁶

¹²² 1QIsa^a, xxviii.14-15, in DONALD W. PARRY and ELISHA QIMRON, eds., *The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a): A New Edition* (STDJ 32; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1999) 56-57; מנחה להמה מנחה ואך שמה ירגיעו ליליות ומצאור להמה מנחה; *Tg. Isa.* 34:14, in ed. SPERBER, *The Bible in Aramaic*, 3.69: ברם תמן ישריין לילין וישכחן להון ניה.

¹²³ Ed. SPERBER, *ibid.*: ושידין חד עם חברייה יחייכון.

¹²⁴ The Greek text and variant readings discussed below are found in JOSEPH ZIEGLER, ed., *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, Auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Göttingensis editum*, vol. 14, *Isaias* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967) 245-246.

¹²⁵ ἐκεῖ ἠρέμησαν Λάμια (“there Lamia rested”).

¹²⁶ SHEILA SAVILL and ELIZABETH LOCKE, *Pears Encyclopaedia of Myths and Legends: Ancient Near and Middle East, Ancient Greece and Rome* (London: Pelham, 1976) 204; cf. C. KERÉNYI, *The Gods of the Greeks* (1951; reprinted London: Thames and Hudson, 1974) 38-40; and ROBERT GRAVES, *The Greek Myths* (2 vols.; New York: George Braziller, 1959) 1.189-190 and 205-206.

Lamia herself is elsewhere said originally to have been a queen of Libya, of great beauty, who was loved by Zeus and bore him children. These, however, were slaughtered by Zeus' jealous wife, Hera. Lamia, transformed by grief into a hideous and vengeful hag, has since that time gone about the world, like the Jewish Lilith, stealing other mothers' children and carrying them off into the underworld. The name Λάμια is related to λαμυρός, meaning "gluttonous," or (of a woman) "want-on,"¹²⁷ and also – which is interesting in the light of Lilith's role as a strangler of children and her association with תסכרה – to λαιμός, meaning "throat," or "gullet." Under her promiscuous aspect, Lamia is a "patron-demon" of prostitutes. The plural form λάμιαι is synonymous with Ἐμπυσαι, and thus more or less equivalent to the Hebrew לילית or לילית. Conversely, the singular form Ἐμπυσα occurs as the name of a female figure very much like Lamia or, in other contexts, as a name for Hecate herself. In Aristophanes' *Frogs* (285-295), Empusa appears at the entrance to the underworld in the shifting forms of a cow, a bitch, a beautiful woman, and a mule. In this dramatic epiphany, one of her feet is made of bronze and the other of dung.¹²⁸

Although the name Λάμια is found only in Symmachus, an implicit allusion to these traditions can perhaps be detected in the remarkably specific compound noun ὄνοκένταυρος ("ass-centaur"), which is used in all versions of the text to translate ערש. The word is unique to the Greek text of Isaiah and may well, therefore, have been coined for this purpose.¹²⁹ The origin of the mule's feet attributed to Bilqīs in the account of al-Tha'labī can almost certainly be traced to these same traditions. Finally, Lamia's dual role as queen and vengeful hag may perhaps be an early precursor of the Jewish tradition which identified the Queen of Sheba with Lilith.

¹²⁷ See LSJ, 1027a and 1028a.

¹²⁸ ALAN H. SOMMERSTEIN, ed. and trans., *The Comedies of Aristophanes*, vol. 9, *Frogs* (Warminster, U.K.: Aris & Phillips, 1996) 62-63. See further, KERÉNYI, *The Gods*, 40.

¹²⁹ See LSJ 1232a. In addition to this passage, the word is used in LXX Isa. 13:22, again to translate Heb. ערש. In Isa. 34:11, MT: וְנָקְטָה עָלֶיהָ קוֹרְתוֹהָ וְאֶבְגֵי-בְדוּהָ ("and he will draw across it the measuring cord of chaos, and the plumb-line of emptiness") is strangely rendered by LXX: καὶ ἐπιβληθήσεται ἐπ' αὐτὴν σπαρτίον γεωμετρίας ἐρήμου, καὶ ὄνοκένταυροι οἰκήσουσιν ἐν αὐτῇ ("and he will stretch across it the measuring cord of desolation, and ass-centaurs will dwell in it") but Aquila and Symmachus both agree with MT, as do 1QIsa^a and the targum.

These observations have significant implications for the history of the traditions about the Queen of Sheba. Symmachus, a translator of the second century CE, apparently familiar with rabbinic exegetical traditions,¹³⁰ identifies the Hebrew Lilith with the Greek Lamia, who has mules' feet. Al-Tha'labī, an Arabic writer of the early eleventh century, cites earlier sources with links to Judaism in which mules' feet are attributed to the Queen of Sheba.¹³¹ The missing link in the chain is, of course, the association of the Queen of Sheba with Lilith, which must, therefore, have arisen between the second and, at latest, tenth centuries. This finding undermines SCHOLEM's hypothesis that Moses de Leon was the first to make this association. It also calls into question YASSIF's theory that the belief that the queen was a demon had its origin in the Arabic literary tradition.

13. *A Problem of Difference*

It is evident that, if the glass palace story is understood in the light of the Jewish traditions about Lilith, it assumes a more sinister significance than is apparent on the surface of the text in either *Targum Sheni* or the *Tales of Ben Sira*. By baring her hairy and, perhaps, deformed legs and feet, the queen reveals the hideous demonic identity that lurks beneath her seductive outer appearance. Satisfying as this interpretation of the story may be, however, it turns the queen into an irredeemably evil character, very different from the feisty and independent but ultimately submissive Bilqīs of the Muslim sources. Before we can safely conclude that the traditions about Lilith and her demons do, in fact, lie behind the Jewish versions of the glass palace story, this difference with the Muslim recensions will have to be explained.

14. *The Queen of Sheba in Christianity*

It is also necessary to take account of the Christian traditions about the Queen of Sheba, in which she appears as a character even more unlike the Jewish demon queen. On the basis of biblical passages such as Isa. 60:6 – *All those from Sheba will come; they will bring gold and incense; they*

¹³⁰ See SUZANNE DANIEL, "Greek: The Septuagint," *EJ*, 4.856, and the sources cited there.

¹³¹ See p. 246 above.

will proclaim the praise of the LORD – the queen is allegorically identified with the gentile Church, who, like the three magi (Matt. 2:1-12), *came from the ends of the earth* (Matt. 12:42 = Lk. 11:31) to receive the wisdom of Christ, the true Son of David.¹³² In medieval iconography, she is sometimes depicted with African features and dark skin,¹³³ reflecting an ancient equation of Sheba with Ethiopia,¹³⁴ and also, perhaps, her identification – both literal and allegorical – with the biblical *black ... but beautiful* maiden who offers songs of praise and adoration to her Lord and lover (Cant. 1:5).¹³⁵

What seems to be a transformed version of the glass palace tale is encountered in the legend-cycle of the True Cross, which originated in Byzantium and was brought to Europe during the period of the crusades.¹³⁶ According to this legend, Seth, the son of Adam, procured a sapling from the Garden of Paradise, which grew over Adam's grave to become a mighty tree until Solomon ordered it cut down to be used in the building of the temple. His workmen, however, found that the beam which was cut from this tree was, at different times, too long or too short to be useful. Finally, they threw it across a brook (in some versions, a pond) to be used as a bridge. When the Queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon, she foresaw that this beam would one day be the cross that would bear the savior of the world and, refusing to set foot upon it, chose instead to wade across the brook. In some versions of this story, the queen has a deformed foot, like that of a goose, which is miraculously healed as she passes through the water. This detail may, perhaps, be a vestige of Lilith's bird-like claws – in which case it is

¹³² See further: CHASTEL, "La légende," part 3, *RHR* 120 (1940) 163-164; and PAUL F. WATSON, "The Queen of Sheba in Christian Tradition," in *Pritchard*, ed., *Solomon and Sheba*, 115-117, and the sources cited there. On Matt. 12:42 (= Lk. 11:31), see p. 264 below.

¹³³ See WATSON, *ibid.*, 118-119, and plates 43 and 45 (between pages 120 and 121).

¹³⁴ As we shall see (p. 264 below), this tradition goes back at least to Josephus. The consensus amongs scholars is, however, that the location of the land of Sheba at the south-western tip of the Arabian peninsula (the Yemen) – which is where the Muslim writers place it – is more likely to be correct. See further: CHASTEL, "La légende," part 1, *RHR* 119 (1939) 206-225; GUS W. VAN BEEK, "The Land of Sheba," in PRITCHARD, ed. *Solomon and Sheba*, 40-63; and the sources cited there.

¹³⁵ See CHASTEL, "La légende," part 3, 162-163.

¹³⁶ See further: CHASTEL, *ibid.*, 165-168; WATSON, "The Queen of Sheba in Christian Tradition," 121-125; and the sources cited there.

another indication that the queen's association with Lilith must be relatively early – but, in the context of this legend, no evil significance is attached to it.

The high importance of the Queen of Sheba in Ethiopian Christianity can hardly be overstated, since it is from her union with Solomon that the royal line of the kings of Ethiopia was descended – a claim which was maintained until the demise of the monarchy in 1974.¹³⁷ In a remarkable reversal of the Jewish traditions discussed above, it is Solomon who occupies the role of villain and seducer, while the queen, whose name is Makeda, is a pure and noble virgin. After being tricked and then raped by Solomon, Makeda returns to Ethiopia, where she gives birth to a son, Menelik. On reaching adulthood, Menelik visits his father in Jerusalem and is anointed King of Ethiopia by Zadok, the high priest. Menelik and his companions return home, bringing with them the ark of the covenant, which, at God's command, they have abducted from the temple. In this way, it is claimed, the divine presence departed from Jerusalem and took up residence in Ethiopia, where the line of David was continued down to very recent times.¹³⁸

15. *The Queen of Sheba in the First to Third Centuries CE*

When the traditions about the Queen of Sheba in the three great monotheistic religions are compared, we find that the wholly negative perception of the queen in later Jewish tradition is opposed by the highly positive evaluation of her in Christianity, while the Muslim sources, which present her in a morally ambiguous light, fall somewhere between these two extremes. In the light of these very pronounced differences, it is necessary to investigate the origins of her Jewish identity as Lilith or, in other words, to ask when and why she began to be perceived by Jews as evil and a demon. The answers to these questions may make it possible for us to determine whether or not the belief in her demonic identity – which, thus far, we have found only in medieval or later sources – is the real explanation of her role in the glass palace tale and, especially, her hairy legs.

¹³⁷ See EDWARD ULLENDORFF, "The Queen of Sheba in Ethiopian Tradition," in PRITCHARD, *Solomon and Sheba*, 104-106.

¹³⁸ For a more detailed summary of the legend in the *Kebra Nagast* ("Glory of the Kings"), see ULLENDORFF, *ibid.*, 108-112.

As we have seen, neither *Targum Sheni* nor the *Tales of Ben Sira* allude to this belief. Moreover, although the *Tales of Ben Sira* contains what is probably the earliest surviving account of the myth of Lilith as the evil proto-Eve, the Queen of Sheba is not identified with that figure in this source. On the other hand, the queen's role as the mother of the evil Nebuchadnezzar seems to indicate that her character may not be altogether sweetness and light. This element is not, however, found in *Targum Sheni*, or in any Muslim or Christian source, and therefore cannot be assumed to be an early or original component of the tale.¹³⁹

Two first-century CE sources which allude to the Queen of Sheba make no mention of her non-human ancestry and appear to regard her in a positive light. In Matt. 12:42 (= Lk. 11:31), Jesus says:

The Queen of the South (βασίλισσα νότου) will be raised up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth (ἐκ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς) to listen to the wisdom of Solomon – and, behold, a greater thing than Solomon is here!

Even less ambiguously approving is Josephus, whose account of the queen's interaction with Solomon contains no hint of impropriety,¹⁴⁰ and who introduces her as follows:

The woman who at that time ruled over Egypt and Ethiopia was thoroughly trained in philosophy and remarkable in other ways (σοφίᾳ διαπεπονημένην καὶ τὰλλα θαυμαστῆν).¹⁴¹

These two sources from the later part of the first century CE indicate strongly that the belief that the queen was a demon was not current at that time. Further evidence in support of this conclusion is provided by the *Testament of Solomon*, a Christian text of, at latest, the third century, which is believed by most commentators to contain materials of first-century Palestinian Jewish origin.¹⁴² The work is a collection of tales about Solomon's mastery over the demons, whom he compelled to assist him in the building of the temple. In chapter 19, the king boasts

¹³⁹ See pp. 277-279 below.

¹⁴⁰ Josephus, *Ant.*, viii.165-175 (ed. and trans. THACKERAY *et al.*, 7.660-665).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 165 (ed. and trans. THACKERAY *et al.*, 7.660-661).

¹⁴² See D. C. DULING, "Introduction" to *Testament of Solomon*, OTP, 1.939-944, and the authorities cited there.

that, while he was building the temple, he was honored by visiting kings. Queen Sheba – here considered to be her proper name – is then introduced by the same title as in the New Testament:

ἐν οἷς καὶ ἡ Σάβα βασίλισσα Νότου γόης ὑπάρχουσα πολλῇ τῇ φρονήσει ἦλθε καὶ προσεκύνησεν ἐνώπιον μου.¹⁴³

And among them, Sheba, the Queen of the South, who was an enchantress with great wisdom,¹⁴⁴ came and made obeisance before me.¹⁴⁵

This description of the queen as a γόης may, perhaps, seem somewhat closer to her role as an evil witch in the later Jewish sources. In this context, however, the word does not seem to imply a negative evaluation of her character.¹⁴⁶ On the contrary, her magical skills and her great wisdom serve to emphasize the even greater magical prowess and wisdom of Solomon, whose superiority is acknowledged even by her. Apart from the emphasis on magic, this presentation of the queen is no different from that offered by Josephus. Despite the fact that this work is primarily concerned with Solomon's dealings with demons, there is no indication that the queen is considered to be such. Elsewhere in the

¹⁴³ *Test. Sol.* 19:3, in CHESTER CHARLTON MCCOWN, ed., *The Testament of Solomon, Edited from Manuscripts at Mount Athos, Bologna, Holkham Hall, Jerusalem, London, Milan, Paris and Vienna* (University of Chicago Ph.D. dissertation; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1922) 60*; cf. trans. DULING, *OTP*, 1.982.

¹⁴⁴ DULING (see the previous note): "... who was a witch, came with great pride ...," etc. – a translation of the word φρονήσει which, if acceptable, would change the meaning of the whole passage. Admittedly, LSJ (1956b) cites two instances of the word with this meaning, both in Euripides. In the overwhelming majority of cases, however, the word means "thought," "intention," "intelligence," "judgement," etc. In post-classical Greek, the meaning of the term seems always to be either "thought" or "understanding," "prudence," "wisdom," etc., and I can find no single instance of the word meaning "pride." DULING's translation is, therefore, most unlikely to be correct. See further: E. A. SOPHOCLES, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods (From B.C. 146 to A.D. 1100)* (2 vols.; New York: Frederick Ungar, 1887) 2.1152a; G. W. H. LAMPE, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (5 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1961-68) 5.1490b-1491b; and BAG, 866b.

¹⁴⁵ One sixteenth-century manuscript adds: "... to the earth and, having heard of my wisdom, she glorified the God of Israel. In these things also she made an examination of all my wisdom, so much did I teach her according to the wisdom given to me. And all the sons of Israel glorified God." See also *Test. Sol.* 21:1-4.

¹⁴⁶ *Contra* DULING (see n. 144 above).

text, we encounter a female demon called Obyzouth (Ὀβυζούθη), who has dishevelled hair, attacks women in childbirth, and strangles newborn infants.¹⁴⁷ Although this figure is clearly an ancestor of the medieval Lilith, the queen is neither identified nor in any way associated with her. It is, therefore, safe to assume that the tradition that the queen was a demon was not known to the author of this work.

16. *The Demon Queen in the Job Targum*

The earliest explicit reference to the queen's identity as Lilith is, almost certainly, found in the targum to Job 1:15 – although, unfortunately, the precise date of this text is very hard to determine. The Job targum, which frequently offers multiple alternative translations of a single verse, sometimes written in the margins of the manuscripts, is evidently the product of a rather fluid oral and/or literary tradition, and seems to have been accumulated from a variety of sources over a considerable period of time.¹⁴⁸ Although this process of accumulation may, perhaps, have continued as late as the ninth century CE, several commentators have noted linguistic and conceptual connections with the Pseudepigrapha, New Testament and other early literature, which seem to indicate that the collection may have “a very early core.”¹⁴⁹ Within these parameters, the dates of the individual targumim are difficult to ascertain. SCHOLEM, defending his theory that Moses de Leon was responsible for the identification of the queen with Lilith,¹⁵⁰ baldly states that the targum to Job 1:15 is “very late,”¹⁵¹ but, by all reasonable estimates, it is clearly much earlier than the twelfth century.¹⁵² The fact that no alternative translation of Job 1:15 is offered may, in fact, indicate that the targum to this verse was established at a relatively early stage in the development of the tradition.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ See *Test. Sol.* 13:1-7, and cf. p. 251 above.

¹⁴⁸ See DAVID M. STEC, *The Text of the Targum of Job: An Introduction and Critical Edition* (AGJU 20; Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1994) 85-94.

¹⁴⁹ See CELINE MANGAN, *The Targum of Job, Translated, With a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* (ArBib 15.1; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1987) 5-21 (words quoted, 6) and the sources cited there.

¹⁵⁰ See pp. 255-256 above.

¹⁵¹ SCHOLEM “פרקים חדשים,” 166.

¹⁵² See MANGAN, *The Targum of Job*, 5-6 and 8.

In Job 1:15, a messenger brings Job news of a disaster which has befallen his livestock. The biblical text reads as follows:

ותפל שבא ותקחם ואת-הנערים הכו לפי-חרב ואמלטה בק-אני לכדי להגיד לך:

And Sheba fell (upon them) and took them, and slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.

In this context, the word שבא is obviously a collective noun, normally translated “the Sabe’ans.”¹⁵⁴ The targum, however, takes it to be a personal name or title and understands the following feminine singular verb accordingly.¹⁵⁵

ונפלת בתכיף¹⁵⁶ לילית מלכת זמרגד¹⁵⁷ ודברתגון וית עולימיא קטל¹⁵⁸ אוכלוסהא¹⁵⁹ לפתגם דחרב¹⁶⁰ ואשתיזיבית לחרד אנה לבלחרדאי לחואה לך

And Lilith, Queen of Smargad,¹⁵⁷ fell (upon them) suddenly¹⁵⁶ and carried them off, and they killed¹⁵⁸ the young men – a multitude¹⁵⁹ – by martial decree,¹⁶⁰ and I alone was spared to tell you.

¹⁵³ As observed by SILBERMAN (“The Queen of Sheba in Judaic Tradition,” 67), it is unfortunate that this verse is not included in the fragments of the Job Targum found at Qumran.

¹⁵⁴ Thus AV and RSV. LXX, however, evidently reads: שבה, “took captive,” and translates: οἱ ἀρχιμαλωτεύοντες.

¹⁵⁵ *Tg. Job*, ed. STEC, *The Text*, 8*; cf. MANGAN, trans., *The Targum of Job*, 25-26.

¹⁵⁶ The reading בתכיף follows MANGAN and is found in the majority of the mss., including representatives of three of STEC’s four groups (see STEC, *ibid.*, 67-84). Variants include בתקוף (thus STEC’s main text), בתקיף, and דתקיף, all of which would give the meaning: “fell in power,” or “attacked,” which is clearly a viable alternative.

¹⁵⁷ STEC (*The Text*, 8*), following his base text (ms. Vatican), prints: מלכת זמרגד, but this is clearly a corrupt reading of either מלכת זמרגד (thus the Venice edition) or מלכתא דזמרגד (thus the Antwerp Polyglot), which are strongly supported by the manuscripts, being represented in three of STEC’s four manuscript groups (see the previous note). Ms. Cambridge has been “corrected” by addition of the word שבא.

¹⁵⁸ Ms. Vatican only: קטל.

¹⁵⁹ The spelling of this Greek loan word (ὄχλος) varies in the mss.: אוכלוסהא is found in both printed editions and mss. in groups 1 and 2; ms. Vatican (followed by STEC): אוכלוסכא.

¹⁶⁰ Trans. MANGAN: “at the edge of the sword,” but on the expression: לפתגם דחרב, which appears to reflect a literal reading of MT: לפי-חרב, see JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 1250a-b (פתגם), and the sources cited there.

Here, Lilith is clearly understood to be the queen's proper name. The word זְמִרְגָד (from Gk. σμάρραδος) usually refers to an emerald or other precious stone. In this context, it presumably indicates a region which produces such stones, and BACHER associates this with a demonic realm called "the jewel country" in Persian mythology.¹⁶¹ BACHER also offers the very plausible suggestion that the word is, in fact, a translation of the Hebrew word שְׂבָא, which the targumist considered to be the equivalent of שְׁבַר, a term which, in Exod. 28:19, designates one of the stones in the breastplate of the high priest.¹⁶²

17. Rabbi Jonathan and the Queen of Sheba

An enigmatic remark about the identity of the Queen of Sheba is found in *b.B.B.* 15b, in the context of an exegetical discussion of the opening verses of Job, which raises the question: When did Job live? One of several answers to this question is proposed by R. Nathan:

Job was in the days of the kingdom of Sheba (מלכות שבא), as it is said: and Sheba fell (upon them) and took them (Job 1:15).

At the end of this discussion, further down the same page, we read:

א"ר שמואל בר נחמני א"ר יונתן כל האומר מלכת שבא אשה היתה אינו אלא טועה מאי מלכת שבא מלכותא דשבא

R. Samuel bar Nahmani said (that) R. Jonathan said: Whoever says that the Queen of Sheba was a woman is nothing if not mistaken. What does *the Queen of Sheba* mean? The Kingdom of Sheba.

R. Jonathan, to whom this saying is attributed, was a Palestinian teacher of the mid-second century CE. Samuel bar Nahmani, by whom Jonathan's sayings are very frequently transmitted, lived a century or so later, also in Palestine.¹⁶³ If the attribution to Jonathan is reliable, this statement is later than Josephus and the New Testament, but earlier than the *Testament of Solomon*. We should note that the first part of the saying

¹⁶¹ BACHER, "Lilith, Königin von Smargad," *MGWJ* 19 (1870) 187-189.

¹⁶² BACHER, *ibid.*, 188; followed by SILBERMAN, "The Queen of Sheba in Judaic Tradition, 67." See also JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 405b (זְמִרְגָד); BAG, 758b (σμάρραδος); and BDB, 986a (שְׁבַר).

— as far as the word טועה (“mistaken”) — is in Hebrew, whereas the second part is, except for words quoted from scripture, in Aramaic. It is, therefore, possible that Jonathan was responsible for only the first part of the saying, and that the words in Aramaic were added by Samuel or a subsequent redactor.

In the context of the discussion about Job, Jonathan’s statement is rather puzzling, since the words מלכת־שְׁבָא do not occur in Job 1:15, which, of course, reads simply: שְׁבָא. Most commentators have, therefore, concluded that Jonathan’s statement applies to the account of the Queen’s visit to Solomon in 1 Kgs. 10:1-13 (= 2 Chron. 9:1-12). If so, he appears — as the text stands — to be trying to expunge the character of the queen from the biblical record. This exegesis, of course, imposes a considerable strain on the grammar and syntax of the biblical account, in which the pronouns and verbs that refer to the queen are all feminine singular, and in which she herself speaks in the first person singular. SILBERMAN,¹⁶⁴ following GINZBERG,¹⁶⁵ argues that Jonathan’s statement applies not to the text of 1 Kings, but to *Tg. Job* 1:15, where the translator has inferred that שְׁבָא means מלכת־שְׁבָא, whereas Jonathan maintains that it means מלכות־שְׁבָא (or perhaps מלוכת־שְׁבָא). If this theory were correct, it would confirm the early date of *Tg. Job* 1:15. Unfortunately, however, it is not at all convincing, since Jonathan is clearly trying to explain a text which includes the expression מלכת־שְׁבָא, which is not found in the targum.¹⁶⁶ It is, therefore, much more probable that he is referring to the story in 1 Kings 10. Confirmation of this can be found in *b. Shabb.* 56b, which includes the following two sayings:

R. Samuel bar Nahmani said (that) R. Jonathan said: Whoever says that Solomon sinned is nothing if not mistaken (אינו אלא טועה), as it is said: *and his heart was not wholly with the LORD his God, like the heart of David, his father* (1 Kgs. 11:4) — it was *not like the heart of his father, David*, but, even so, he did not commit a sin (כלבב דוד אביו הוא דלא הוה מוחטא נמי לא חטא).

¹⁶³ See GERSHOM BADER, *The Encyclopedia of Talmudic Sages* (Northvale, NJ and London: Aronson, 1988) 519-523 and 546-553. We have encountered Samuel in the discussion of Ps. 68:4 in *y. Hag.* 77c (there called bar Nahman; see p. 123 above).

¹⁶⁴ SILBERMAN, “The Queen of Sheba in Judaic Tradition,” 69-70.

¹⁶⁵ GINZBERG, *Legends*, 6.288-289, n. 37.

¹⁶⁶ Except for the “corrected” text of ms. Cambridge, which is most unlikely to be the original reading (see p. 267, n. 157 above).

And further down:

R. Samuel bar Nahmani said (that) R. Jonathan said: Whoever says that Josiah sinned is nothing if not mistaken (אִינוֹ אֱלֹא טָרְעָה), as it is said: *and he did right in the eyes of the LORD and walked wholly in the way of David, his father* (2 Kgs. 22:2). But how can I reconcile this with: *and there was no king like him before him, who returned (בָּשָׁ) to the LORD with his whole heart ...*, etc. (2 Kgs. 23:25)? This means that he revoked every judgement that he had made between the ages of eight and eighteen.¹⁶⁸

These two sayings are attributed to the same two authorities as the saying in *b.B.B.* 15b, use exactly the same form of words, and also concern passages in Kings. This indicates strongly that all three of these closely parallel sayings are derived from a single tradition of commentary on that text.

If the text of *b.B.B.* 15b is accepted, in its present form, as a comment on 1 Kings 10, it seems that Jonathan's aim is to deny the existence of the Queen of Sheba as a person, and that he is prepared to do considerable violence to the plain meaning of the scriptural text in order to achieve this goal. SCHECHTER explained this radical agenda as

.... a protest against some legends, current at the time, which the Rabbis considered unworthy of the Solomon idealised by a later generation. The legend which scandalised the Rabbis was probably that which is to be found first in the *Pseudo-Sirach*, according to which the relationship between Solomon and the Queen ended in a love affair of which Nebuchadnezzar was the result The best way to make an end to all such stories was, therefore, to explain the word *Malkath* as if it were *Melucath*, meaning "kingdom."¹⁶⁹

An obvious weakness of this theory is its reliance on a source which is very much later than the saying under consideration. While it is true that the scurrilous legend in the *Tales of Ben Sira* is probably older than that text itself, no source of comparable antiquity to the saying in *b.B.B.* 15b betrays the slightest awareness of such a legend. Given the absence of any hint of improper behavior between Solomon and the queen in Josephus, the New Testament, the *Testament of Solomon*, or even *Targum*

¹⁶⁷ Understanding this word to mean that Josiah repented, which implies that he had sinned.

¹⁶⁸ See 2 Kgs. 22:1-3.

¹⁶⁹ SCHECHTER, "Riddles," 350-351.

Sheni, the argument that Jonathan was attempting to refute such rumors is very difficult to sustain.

SAMUEL KRAUSS suggested that Jonathan's statement was a response to the claim of the Christian church to be the true Israel and, especially, the assertion that the royal line of Ethiopia was descended from Solomon's union with the Queen of Sheba.¹⁷⁰ By denying the very existence of the queen, Jonathan was attempting to undermine the basis of such claims. A serious obstacle to this argument, as KRAUSS himself conceded, is the fact that, in Jonathan's lifetime, Ethiopia was not yet Christianized. KRAUSS, however, believed that the legend found in the *Kebra Nagast* may already have been in circulation at that time.¹⁷¹ This is even more speculative than SCHECHTER's theory about the story in the *Tales of Ben Sira*. Even granted the remote possibility that the Ethiopian legend, if it existed at this time, was known to Jonathan, it is hard to imagine that he would have perceived it as a threat of such magnitude as to provoke the drastic response of denying the queen's existence. On the other hand, we have seen that the non-Ethiopian gentile Church used typological exegesis of the story of the Queen of Sheba to support its claim to be the true Israel and, on this point, KRAUSS' theory may, perhaps, have merit.

A version of Jonathan's saying about the Queen of Sheba, in this instance attributed to the late third-century amora Yohanan b. Nappaha, is found in *Midrash ha-Gadol*, a text which, although written by the Yemenite author David b. Amram Adani in the thirteenth century, is known to contain material of much greater antiquity.¹⁷² The saying is included in a longer midrash on Gen. 25:6, which is attributed to Samuel bar Nahmani:¹⁷³

And he sent them away from his son Isaac. (Gen. 25:6). R. Samuel bar Nahmani said: When our father Abraham saw all these multitudes (אכליסין) and knew that Isaac had no need of them, for they were like weeds,¹⁷⁴ he stood up and sent them to the eastern part of the world. He said to them, "My son Isaac is young,

¹⁷⁰ SAMUEL KRAUSS, "Die Namen der Königin von Saba," in *Festschrift Dr. Jakob Freimann zum 70. Geburtstag* (Berlin: Rabbinic Seminary of Berlin, 1937) 120-121.

¹⁷¹ KRAUSS, *ibid.*

¹⁷² See SOLOMON FISCH, "Midrash ha-Gadol," *EJ*, 11.1515-1516.

¹⁷³ *MbG*, Gen. 25:6, in MORDECAI MARGULIES, ed., *Midrash haGadol on the Pentateuch: Genesis* (1947; reprinted Jerusalem: Kook, 1975) 418-419.

¹⁷⁴ Lit. "like thorns" (כקוצין); see JASTROW, *Dictionary*, 1339b-1340a.

and every nation and tongue which oppresses him or his descendants will be banished to Gehenna. But go, and abide in the east. Whenever the descendants of Isaac are oppressed by the nations, return to your place, but when you hear that they are dwelling in safety and tranquillity, come and do them service, so that you may be worthy of the table of the Messiah.” And it is said about them: *The caravans of Tema look; the travelers of Sheba hope* (Job 6:19). And *Sheba* means nothing other than the children of Keturah, as it is written: *And Jokshan was the father of Sheba* (Gen. 25:3). And they remained in their place until Solomon arose and Israel dwelt in safety, as it is written: *And Judah and Israel dwelt in safety, each man under his vine and his fig tree* (1 Kgs. 5:5/4:25) and they were not afraid. They thought he was the King Messiah, and so they all came to do him service, as it is written: *And the Queen of Sheba heard the fame of Solomon* (1 Kgs. 10:1).¹⁷⁵ R. Yoḥanan said: Whoever says that the Queen of Sheba was a woman is nothing if not mistaken. Do not read *Queen of Sheba* (מלכות שבא), but *Kingdom of Sheba* (מלכות שבא),¹⁷⁶ for in the days of Solomon the whole kingdom of Sheba came to serve Israel, as it is written: *for the sake of the LORD* (*ibid.*). What does *for the sake of the LORD* mean? R. Samuel says: *for the sake of* the word which Abraham handed down to them, that the Holy One, blessed be he, would in future reveal his kingdom to Israel and make them dwell in safety. When they saw that the king was not the Messiah, then at once *she returned to her own land* (1 Kgs. 10:12), for they returned to their own place. And they are destined to come back in the time of the King Messiah, may it come quickly and in our lifetime, as it is said: *A multitude of camels will cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba will come* (Isa. 60:6).

This elegant midrash needs but little explanation. On the basis of Gen. 25:3, the word *Sheba* is understood to be a collective term for Isaac’s subordinate relations, the descendants of Jokshan, who was Abraham’s son by his second wife, Keturah. This meaning is then applied to other passages of scripture in which the word occurs, including 1 Kings 10.

It will be observed that the whole midrash is attributed to Samuel, with the sole exception of the saying which is here ascribed to Yoḥanan. Since the connection between Samuel and Jonathan is well established, the name Yoḥanan should perhaps be emended on the basis of *b.B.B.* 15b. It might, perhaps, be suggested that this midrash is the source of the saying in *b.B.B.* 15b. It is certainly consistent with the meaning of the saying as *babli* understands it. We have, however, found that the

¹⁷⁵ Ms. Ḥabesus (Tel Aviv) adds here: “They say that from the realm of Sheba (מדינת שבא) to Jerusalem is a journey of seven years, yet they came to hear Solomon.”

¹⁷⁶ Ms. Mahlman (Jerusalem) gives only the first words of 1 Kgs. 10:1 (ומלכות שבא) and omits Yoḥanan’s statement up to this point. See further below.

saying is almost certainly derived from a tradition of commentary on the Books of Kings. This midrash on Gen. 25:6 is, therefore, unlikely to be its original home. It might perhaps be argued that the midrash is nonetheless representative of the kind of exegesis that produced the saying, but this explanation does not resolve the problem of Jonathan's motive for trying – as it seems – to expunge the person of the Queen of Sheba from the biblical text. There is nothing in the midrash which would explain why the queen should be regarded in a negative light, and the proposition that all the descendants of Jokshan came to visit Solomon does not, of itself, require that her existence as an individual be denied, since it is clearly stated in 1 Kgs. 10:2 that she was accompanied by *a very great retinue*. When the text of the midrash is examined closely, moreover, the saying is found to be somewhat redundant, since we have already been told that “*Sheba* means the children of Keturah,” and this collective meaning has been fully developed in the preceding narrative. The saying is, in fact, omitted by one sixteenth-century manuscript,¹⁷⁷ which is described by MARGULIES as, in general, “very accurate.”¹⁷⁸ This manuscript, which also abbreviates the preceding quotation of 1 Kgs. 10:1, thus reads as follows:¹⁷⁹

דמו שהוא המלך המשיח ובאו כולן להשתעבד לו, שנאמר ומלכת שבא שבאת כל מלכות
שבא בימי שלמה לשמש את ישראל שנאמר לשם ה'

They thought he was the King Messiah, and so they all came to do him service, as it is written: *And the Queen of Sheba* – that in the days of Solomon the whole kingdom of Sheba came to serve Israel, as it is written: *for the sake of the LORD*.

This text makes it clear that, in 1 Kings 10, *מלכת* implies *כל מלכות* and further elaboration of this point is, therefore, unnecessary. The saying attributed to Yohanan thus looks very much like a (mis-) quotation of *b.B.B.* 15b or its source, which has been interpolated into the midrash by Adani or a previous redactor. It should, however, be noted that, in addition to the change of attribution, the midrash gives the whole saying in Hebrew, unlike *babli*, where the second half is in Aramaic.

¹⁷⁷ See the previous note.

¹⁷⁸ MARGULIES, *Midrash hagGadol*, 12.

¹⁷⁹ As reconstructed from the apparatus of MARGULIES, *ibid.*, 419.

In short, it is easy to understand why the saying may have been added to the midrash, but the midrash does not provide a sufficient explanation of the saying. An alternative explanation remains to be considered. If the Aramaic explanation in *b.B.B.* 15b is disregarded, the saying is reduced to:

Whoever says that the Queen of Sheba was a woman is nothing if not mistaken.

It is thus possible to construe Jonathan's saying not as a denial of the queen's existence, but as a statement that she was not a woman, but a demon.¹⁸⁰ If this were correct, the saying would be our earliest witness to that belief. Owing to the absence of corroborating evidence, this interpretation of Jonathan's saying is, admittedly, conjectural. It does, however, have the advantage of simplicity and, for this reason, it offers the most economical resolution of the problems that surround the saying.

18. *The Queen, the Glass Palace, and her Hairy Legs:
A Survey and Assessment of the Evidence*

The evidence that has been examined up to this point in our inquiry has raised puzzling questions about the relationships between the various Jewish, Muslim and Christian traditions about the Queen of Sheba and her encounter with Solomon. The questions of primary importance to us concern the origins and development of (a) the Jewish belief that the queen was a demon, including her identification with Lilith; and (b) the legend that her legs and/or sexual body parts were repulsively and "unnaturally" hairy. Our aim has been to investigate the relationships of these two traditional motifs to each other and, above all, their bearing on the meaning of the glass palace tale, which is the principal subject of this inquiry.

In our exploration of the Muslim sources, we found some evidence which indicates that the glass palace story may not originally have included the hairy legs motif. This motif is not found in the *Qur'an*,¹⁸¹ or in al-Ṭabari's commentary on that text, where the purpose of the glass palace is "to show her a kingdom stronger than her kingdom, a

¹⁸⁰ And see further p. 279 below.

¹⁸¹ See pp. 233-235 above.

dominion mightier than her dominion.”¹⁸² Al-Tha‘labī’s recension of the tale makes use of sources which either did not include the hairy legs motif or disputed its authenticity.¹⁸³ In al-Kisā’i’s version, the one sentence which alludes to the motif may well have been interpolated into an earlier source in which it was not found.¹⁸⁴ The tradition that the queen was the daughter of a jinn is found in all the Muslim sources except the *Qur’ān* and al-Ṭabari’s *Commentary*, and this is said to be the reason for her hairy legs.

The queen’s repulsive leg or body hair occupies a central role in the glass palace tale according to *Targum Shenī*, and in the ribald “miracle with lime” episode in the *Tales of Ben Sira*. In both of these sources, the significance of the motif is related to issues of gender and erotic aesthetics. The tradition that the queen was a demon is not mentioned in either text, and YASSIF maintains that it is only encountered in Jewish sources of a later date.¹⁸⁵

We have, however, found evidence which indicates that the origins of this tradition are considerably older. The explicit identification of the Queen of Sheba with Lilith in the Job targum is unlikely to be later than the ninth century and may well be much earlier.¹⁸⁶ The significance of the hairy legs motif as an indicator of demonic identity is based on the biblical traditions about the שְׁעִירִים, who, in Isa. 34:14, are closely associated with Lilith. The mule’s foot motif in al-Tha‘labī’s version of the glass palace tale can very probably be traced to the Greek translations of this same verse and this implies that the queen’s association with Lilith and the שְׁעִירִים was known to his sources.¹⁸⁷ In the *Zohar*, the queen is a demon and has bird-like claws.¹⁸⁸ This passage and the goose-footed queen of medieval Christian legend appear to be derived from a shared source-tradition, which may be as early as the Byzantine period.¹⁸⁹ Taken together, these observations establish a *terminus ante quem* of about the ninth century for the origin of the queen’s

¹⁸² See pp. 246-247 above.

¹⁸³ See pp. 241-242 and 245-246 above.

¹⁸⁴ See pp. 247-248 above.

¹⁸⁵ See p. 257 above.

¹⁸⁶ See p. 266 above.

¹⁸⁷ See pp. 257-261 above.

¹⁸⁸ See pp. 254-255 above.

¹⁸⁹ See p. 262 above.

identification with Lilith, with a strong possibility that the tradition that she was a demon is at least two or three centuries older.

The evidence of the New Testament writers and Josephus, who portray the queen in a wholly positive light, indicates strongly that the belief that she was a demon was not yet current in the first century CE. This *terminus post quem* is supported by the *Testament of Solomon*, which, although it may be somewhat later, appears to be based on first-century Jewish sources.¹⁹⁰

It is possible, though very far from certain, that the origin of the tradition that the Queen of Sheba was a demon can be traced to Jonathan's saying that she was not a woman. This saying can be dated, if the attribution is authentic, to the mid-second century CE.¹⁹¹ If this possibility is set aside, we are left with the rather inexact conclusion that this tradition must have originated within Judaism at some time between the second and, say, the seventh centuries. We must, therefore, ask what happened during this period which might have caused such a radical change in the evaluation of the queen's character to occur. The obvious and most plausible answer to this question is: the rise of the Christian exegetical tradition which claimed the Queen of Sheba as a symbol of the gentile Church.¹⁹² As KRAUSS observed, this Christian typology may well have been an adaptation of the exegetical tradition represented by Samuel's midrash in *MhG*, Gen. 25:6.¹⁹³ Thus, the demonization of the queen and her transformation into the lecherous and impure Lilith, the bloodthirsty murderer of Jewish women and children, may well have been, at least in part, a Jewish response to the growing power of Christianity and a symptom of the increasing bitterness between the two religions. There may even, perhaps, be a veiled analogy between Nebuchadnezzar, in his role as the queen's bastard offspring by Solomon, and the Christian emperors.

Another factor in the process may well have been the proliferation of traditions about Solomon's mastery of the demons, as encountered in the *Testament of Solomon*, for example.¹⁹⁴ As we have observed, the

¹⁹⁰ See pp. 264-266 above.

¹⁹¹ See p. 274 above.

¹⁹² See pp. 261-263 above.

¹⁹³ KRAUSS, "Die Namen," 120.

¹⁹⁴ See further DULING, "Introduction" to *Testament of Solomon*, *OTP*, 1.944-951 and the sources cited there.

queen is referred to in that source as a γόης – “enchantress,” “sorceress,” or “witch” – and, although the term does not seem to carry negative value in this context,¹⁹⁵ it expresses an idea which may very easily be developed in that direction. Against the background of these traditions the riddling match between Solomon and the queen becomes a contest of magical power, and the king’s subjugation of her is an extension – or merely a particular example – of his dominion over the demons. The influence of this trajectory can be seen quite clearly in the Muslim traditions about Solomon and Bilqīs. Here, however, she is presented in a much less negative light than in the Jewish sources. The reason for this may, perhaps, be that the trend towards demonization of the queen was more strongly developed in the context of the Jewish-Christian controversy. It must also be recognized that the Muslim tradition that the queen was descended from the jinn expresses a very different concept than the Jewish belief that she was a demon. As we have seen, the various kinds of jinn differ as to their moral status,¹⁹⁶ whereas, according to Jewish belief, all demons are by definition evil.

In all probability, the demonization of the queen within Judaism, which culminated in her identification with Lilith, was, as SCHOLEM suggested,¹⁹⁷ a gradual process, beginning with the transition from wise woman (as in *Test. Sol.* 19:3) to wicked witch (as in *Zohar*, 3.194b), and thence to the status of demon or lesser lilith (as in *Tosefat la-Zohar*, 3.308b). As we saw in our discussion of the Aramaic incantation bowls, the figures of the witch and the lilith were closely assimilated with each other.¹⁹⁸

The queen as we encounter her in the *Tales of Ben Sira* appears to be located at an intermediate point along this trajectory. She is certainly not the primeval Lilith, who appears elsewhere in the text. Although we are not specifically told that she is a witch or a demon, this is strongly indicated by the statement that her union with Solomon produced Israel’s evil nemesis, Nebuchadnezzar. This statement, which embodies a well-documented tradition,¹⁹⁹ can almost certainly be detected beneath the text of *Targum Sheni*, where the story of Solomon and the queen is

¹⁹⁵ See pp. 264-266 above.

¹⁹⁶ See p. 249 above.

¹⁹⁷ See p. 256 above.

¹⁹⁸ See p. 253 above.

¹⁹⁹ See p. 238, n. 31 above.

preceded by an elaborate description of Solomon's marvelous throne and followed by an account of Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Jerusalem. The history of the throne is the real subject of the narrative, which tells how it passed from Nebuchadnezzar to his successors until, at last, it came into the hands of King Ahasuerus.²⁰⁰ The introduction of the Queen of Sheba into this narrative serves absolutely no purpose unless she is in some way connected to the history of the throne. The missing connection is provided by the tradition that Nebuchadnezzar was descended from her union with Solomon, which is found in the *Tales of Ben Sira* and elsewhere. It is, therefore, probable almost to the point of certainty that this tradition was originally present in the narrative but has been expunged by the redactor of the targum.²⁰¹

There can also be little doubt that the puzzling story of the queen's throne in the *Qur'ān* and other Muslim sources is somehow connected to this tradition, although here it is Solomon who purloins the throne, by magic, from the queen. In the Hebrew Bible, the description of Solomon's throne comes immediately after the account of the visit of the queen, and the queen's throne in the Muslim sources is clearly somehow parallel to the throne of Solomon in the Jewish texts.²⁰² If the Muslim and Jewish sources were to be conflated, it would appear that, when Nebuchadnezzar obtains the throne, he is, in fact, repossessing the stolen property of his maternal ancestor. Although the legitimacy of such a conflation will, no doubt, at first seem very doubtful, it may be justified if we allow for the possibility that the Muslim legend about the throne was derived from the Christian exegetical tradition which claimed the queen as a symbol of the gentile Church or "true Israel." The assertion that Solomon's throne was obtained from her makes excellent sense if it is understood to be a polemical extension of this claim. The story that Solomon altered the structure and appearance of the throne may originally have been an attempt to reconcile this assertion with the

²⁰⁰ Esth. 1:2 (see p. 231 above).

²⁰¹ Another significant omission by *Targum Sheni* can be clearly documented. The text includes the well-known story (see p. 231 above) that the queen sent Solomon "six thousand boys and girls, all born at exactly the same time, all of the same height, all of the same breadth, and all dressed in purple" (ed. CASSEL, 16; cf. trans. GROSSFELD, 116) but omits her challenge of Solomon to determine their genders.

²⁰² And also, as observed by HALPERIN, to the throne of God himself (see p. 233 above).

biblical account of its construction.²⁰³ The details of this hypothesis are, admittedly, within the realm of speculation, but it is quite clear that the Jewish and Muslim traditions about the throne are related to each other in some way. The Ethiopian legend that the ark of the covenant, which is the earthly counterpart of the celestial מִרְכָּבָה,²⁰⁴ was taken from Jerusalem by Menelik – who, like Nebuchadnezzar, is the queen’s son by Solomon – must also be somehow connected to these traditions.

The earliest form of the glass palace tale is probably best understood as an episode in the magical contest between Solomon and the queen. Since none of the sources considered thus far seems at all indebted to the talmudic version of “Four Entered Paradise,” there can be little, if any, doubt that the author based his story on the water vision episode of the hekhalot tradition. The glass palace story is not, however, set in the context of a heavenly ascent. It makes no allusion to the traditions about the celestial firmament, nor does it touch on any of the deeper issues and concerns of the ascent-midrashic tradition. It seems, therefore, that the author simply appropriated the story from the hekhalot tradition and adapted it to his own purpose, perhaps without much understanding of the deeper meaning of the story he was borrowing. He may, however, have appreciated the significance of the transparent floor as a barrier against the chaos waters and the association of those waters with all that is feminine and evil. If so, he will have intended the glass palace to be a demonstration of Solomon’s mastery over the fluid and chaotic forces from which the queen derives her power, and which comprise the extent of her knowledge – hence her inability to see through the illusion which the king has created.

The fluidity and chaos of the demonic realm, which exists in opposition to the divine order, has the dangerous effect of dissolving gender boundaries. This is, of course, the meaning of the queen’s hairy legs, which, although they may not be an original component of the story, represent a coherent development and expression of its narrative intent. A similar fluidity with regard to gender has been encountered among the liliths of the incantation bowls,²⁰⁵ and we have also seen that the Queen of Sheba herself can appear in the guise of a man.²⁰⁶ Although

²⁰³ See 1 Kgs. 10:18-20 (= 2 Chron. 9:17-19).

²⁰⁴ See SCHOLEM, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 20-30.

²⁰⁵ See p. 252 above.

²⁰⁶ See p. 254 above.

we cannot be sure how old this aspect of her character may be, it is perhaps worth observing that Jonathan's saying that the queen was not a woman might also be taken to mean that she was either a transvestite or an hermaphrodite – in either case, an “unnatural” being and, for that reason, strongly associated with witchcraft and the realm of the demonic. Like the witches' beards in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*,²⁰⁷ the queen's hairy legs are an insult to the order of creation and an expression of her evil nature.

The invention of the depilatory, which was probably added to the story at a relatively late stage of its development, is, at best, an ambiguous motif. In the Muslim versions, as we have seen, it enables the king to consummate his mastery of the “wild woman” – in other words, to achieve the restoration of the natural order. Likewise, in the *Tales of Ben Sira*, the function of the depilatory is to remove the aesthetic barrier which would otherwise have prevented Solomon from uniting with the queen. In this version, however, the product of that union is the evil monster who will destroy his kingdom and, being a true son of Lilith, will slaughter his legitimate descendants. The reader may, therefore, be intended to infer that the depilatory, which, although it may have seemed an excellent idea at the time, was, in fact, a diabolical invention. It will be remembered that, in al-Tha'labi's version of the tale, the invention of the depilatory is attributed to the satans.²⁰⁸

19. *An Early Eighteenth-Century Yemenite Jewish Version of the Tale*

One final version of the story of Solomon and the queen remains to be considered. *The Tale of the Queen of Sheba* was written by Saadia ben Joseph, a Yemenite Jew, in the year 1702. The text was published in 1953 by YEHUDA AVIDA, who discovered it in a manuscript in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (ms. JTS Enelow

²⁰⁷ Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act 1, scene 3. See further, for example: T. F. THISTLETON DYER, *Folklore of Shakespeare* (1881; reprinted New York: Dover, 1966) 28; CUMBERLAND CLARK, *Shakespeare and the Supernatural* (1931; reprinted New York: Haskell House, 1971) 84-85; and PETER STALLYBRASS, “Macbeth and Witchcraft,” in JOHN RUSSELL BROWN, ed., *Focus on Macbeth* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982) 196-197.

²⁰⁸ See pp. 243 and 250 above. This detail is also found in al-Tabari's *History*, 3.583-584 (trans. BRINNER, *The Children of Israel*, 163).

874).²⁰⁹ An English translation is provided by LASSNER,²¹⁰ who also discusses the text in some detail.²¹¹ Despite its late date, this text is of interest to us for several reasons. It is a pastiche of materials which are clearly derived from both Muslim and Jewish traditions. Most of these materials are also found in other sources, but they are sometimes combined in new ways. As we shall see, Saadiah's treatment of the glass palace tale introduces material which is not encountered in any other extant version of the story, but which will be easily recognized by readers of this inquiry.

The text is divided into three chapters of roughly equal length, the first being separated from the second and third by several pages of the manuscript.²¹² The content of this first chapter, which tells the story of the queen's birth and her life prior to the time of her encounter with Solomon, appears to be wholly of Muslim origin. As in al-Kisā'i's version, she is the daughter of a king's minister who, following an adventure which befalls him while he is on a journey in the king's service, is married to a female Ψ . Although this word – the Hebrew generic term for “demon” – is used throughout the text, it does not always carry the same meaning. In this chapter, it is devoid of evil significance and stands for a concept equivalent to that of the Arabic “jinn.”²¹³ Only in the later part of the text, where Jewish influence is more strongly evident, does it come to mean “demon” in the usual sense of that term.

The queen herself is presented in a highly favorable light. The King of Sheba, whom her father serves, has the disagreeable habit of posing riddles to his subjects, who, if they fail to answer correctly, must forfeit their property or their lives. The minister's new wife, however, puts a stop to this mischief by using her superhuman intelligence to discover the answers, which she then discloses to the king's intended victims. This ability to decipher riddles is inherited by her daughter, who grows up to be even wiser and more beautiful than her mother, marries the king and, when he dies, inherits his kingdom. It will be observed that, in this chapter, Saadiah is setting the scene for the encounter with Solo-

²⁰⁹ YEHUDA AVIDA, “מעשה מלכת שבא” in M. D. CASSUTO *et al.*, קובץ, ספר אסף. קובץ, in M. D. CASSUTO *et al.*, *מאמרי מחבר מוגש לכבוד הרב פרופ' שמחה אסף* (Jerusalem: Kook, 1953) 1-17.

²¹⁰ LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 168-175.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 137-153

²¹² See AVIDA, “מעשה מלכת שבא,” 1.

²¹³ The English term which comes closest to this meaning is, perhaps, “fairy.”

mon later in the story. By the end of the chapter, we have learned who the Queen of Sheba was, why she was good at riddles, and how she came to rule a kingdom in her own right. Although these questions arise from the biblical account, Saadiah's answers to them are derived exclusively from his Muslim sources.

The second chapter of the text tells of a war between Solomon and an island king, who has a beautiful daughter, and who worships an idol which is inhabited by a *שד* – and in this instance the word evidently means “demon.” Solomon sends the king a letter, demanding that he abandon his idolatrous religion and embrace the worship of the one true God, and also that he give his daughter to Solomon as one of his wives. At the instigation of the demon, however, the king has the temerity to refuse. Solomon's army of invasion, which consists of humans, animals and birds, is transported to the island by the four winds. After defeating the king, Solomon sends the demons (*שרים*) in his service to capture the demon of the idol and hangs him from a beam on which is inscribed the explicit name of God.²¹⁴ He also hangs the king of the island and makes off with his daughter. This chapter of the text, which contains both Muslim and Jewish elements, thus serves to introduce Solomon into the story and to indicate the extraordinary extent of his power.

The third and final chapter tells of Solomon's encounter with the Queen of Sheba. As in the Muslim sources, he learns of her existence from the hoopoes (*הדוכיפת*),²¹⁵ who describe her as follows:²¹⁶

There is a certain woman whose name is Queen of Sheba, who has ruled over them (the Shebans) since the death of her husband. She is wise, gracious, kind, intelligent, and beautiful in appearance. She judges us with justice and rectitude, and has worked much goodness and righteousness in that land. She has raised us *from our youth until now* (Gen. 46:34). She has been like a mother to us, and we are under obedience to her, not in fear of a king, but because she is kind to us and we are to her as sons.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ It is perhaps possible that this magic beam is distantly related to the beam of wood from the garden of Paradise which, according to the Christian legend, was destined to become the True Cross (see p. 262 above).

²¹⁵ Although the noun is singular in form, Saadiah treats it as a collective, using plural verbs throughout.

²¹⁶ Ed. AVIDA, “מעשה מלכת שבא,” 10; cf. LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 173.

²¹⁷ ואנחנו סרים למשמעתה ולא באימת מלך אלא שיש לה חסד עלינו ואנו לה כבנים

As LASSNER observes, this merciful maternal paragon is no Lilith,²¹⁸ Indeed, Saadiah seems at this point to be trying very hard to portray her as a figure who, despite her position of sovereignty, presents no challenge to Solomon's masculine authority. The birds then return to the land of Sheba, where they tell the queen all about Solomon. Their report emphasizes, on the one hand, Solomon's mercy and compassion but, on the other, his martial exploits and his terrible treatment of those who refuse to render obedience to him. Hearing this, the queen and her subjects are filled with wonder and dismay.

Following this, the queen decides to visit Solomon, so that she can experience his wisdom, power and greatness at first hand. On arrival, she presents him with a series of riddles. From this point on, Jewish elements are predominant in the narrative. All of the riddles are found in Jewish sources. All but one, which concerns the incestuous union of Lot and his daughters, have to do with "feminine" subjects, including menstruation, pregnancy, lactation, and cosmetics. Saadiah also includes the widely documented gender-recognition test involving male and female slave children.²¹⁹ Solomon responds to all these questions with contempt:²²⁰

He said to her: "With women's matters, about which women gossip to each other in the moonlight, you would come to test me!"²²¹

LASSNER tentatively suggests that the reference to the moon (לבנה) in this context contains an implicit allusion to a woman's monthly period of impurity, in particular the seven days of wearing white (לבן), and that Solomon may, therefore, have slept with the Queen in the knowledge that she was impure.²²² As LASSNER himself admits, however, this interpretation is extremely speculative and has no real basis in the text. There may, perhaps, be a hint of witchcraft in these words, but it is simpler and probably more reasonable to understand them as a straightforward expression of contempt for women's knowledge and concerns,

²¹⁸ LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 139-140.

²¹⁹ See p. 231 above.

²²⁰ Ed. AVIDA, "מעשה מלכת שבא," 10; cf. LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 174.

²²¹ אמר לה, וכי דברי נשים שמספרות אשה עם חברתה בלבנה את באה לנסות אותי בהם

²²² LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 148 and 152.

which are confined to the shadowy and feeble realm of moonlight, in contrast to the sunny and expansive sphere of men.

When Solomon has successfully answered all of her questions, the queen acknowledges his superiority. Saadiah then concludes his narrative as follows:²²³

- A. *And Solomon explained all her sayings to her. There was nothing concealed from the king which he did not explain to her and she said to the king: "The report that I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom was true, but I did not believe these things until I came and my own eyes had seen it, and indeed, the half was not told to me!"* (1 Kgs. 10:3-7a). You have added wisdom to your manifold wisdom and fame to your manifold fame!²²⁴
- B. Then the king saw that she was extremely beautiful and that she had no husband, and he decided to lie with her, but when he heard that she was the daughter of a demoness (בת שדה), nevertheless, he saw that her legs were hairy.²²⁵ He said: "What should I do?" At once, he made a place which was paved with marble stones (מיד עשה מקום שהוא רצוף אבני שיש), a hundred cubits square, and he made an orchard (פרדס) on one side,²²⁶ and poured water on the marble, so that it seemed as if it were water (והיה נראה כאילו הוא מים). Then he told her to cross over to that side so as to enter the orchard (להכנס בפרדס) and, believing that it was all water, she at once lifted up her robe, and he saw her legs, and they were hairy. He sent her the things with which women beautify themselves, including the stuff which removes hair, and she beautified herself with them.²²⁷ He came to her and lay with her, and from her came forth Nebuchadnezzar – and it is he of whom it is written: *Those who destroy you and lay you waste will come forth from you* (Isa. 49:17).²²⁸
- C. After this, he sent her on her way, and she returned to her own place, *and King Solomon gave her all that she desired, whatever she asked besides what was given her by*

²²³ Ed. AVIDA, "מעשה מלכת שבא," 11; cf. LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 174-175.

²²⁴ הוספת חכמה על חכמתך ושמועה על שמועתך, paraphrasing MT 1 Kgs. 10:7b: הוספת חכמה וטוב אל השמועה אשר שמעתי (You have added wisdom and goodness to the report that I had heard).

²²⁵ Following Saadiah's text as actually written: אבל כשמע שהיא בת שדה אעפ"כ. ראה שהיו רגליה שעירות. On the problems in this clause and AVIDA's proposed correction, see pp. 285-286 below.

²²⁶ Following ed. AVIDA: בצד אחד. YASSIF erroneously prints: עמד אחד.

²²⁷ שלח לה דברים שמתקשטין בהן הנשים ודבר שמשיר את השער ונתקשטה בהן

²²⁸ MT: בקהרסיך ומחרסיך במך יצאו. In its biblical context, this carries a different and more optimistic meaning: *Those who destroy you and lay you waste will depart from you* (i.e., Israel). See SILBERMAN, "The Queen of Sheba in Judaic Tradition," 77.

the band of King Solomon, so she turned and went back to her own land, she and her servants (1 Kgs. 10:13).

It will be observed that Saadiah's version of the glass palace tale (B) appears to have been interpolated into an extensive, slightly paraphrased scriptural quotation (A-C). This scriptural passage is the natural and appropriate conclusion to the preceding account of Solomon's encounter with the queen and the contest of riddles. In other words, the glass palace tale is not intrinsically related to the text in which it is embedded and appears to be derived from a different source or sources.

Saadiah states explicitly that Nebuchadnezzar was descended from Solomon's union with the Queen of Sheba. Although this widespread tradition very probably lies beneath the surface of the text in *Targum Sheni*,²²⁹ it is not openly stated in any other version of the glass palace tale. To the best of my knowledge, the only other source to combine the tradition about Nebuchadnezzar's ancestry with that of the queen's hairy legs is the *Tales of Ben Sira*. AVIDA regards the begetting of Nebuchadnezzar as the climax of Saadiah's tale and remarks that the entire composition would perhaps more accurately be entitled: "The Genealogy of Nebuchadnezzar."²³⁰ This is clearly an overstatement. Moreover, the queen's role as Nebuchadnezzar's maternal ancestor is hardly consistent with her character in the main body of the tale, where she is portrayed as a paragon of virtue. Rather than trying to impose a spurious unity on the text as a whole, it is more reasonable to infer that Saadiah, who clearly used a variety of sources, both Jewish and Muslim, has included every tradition known to him about the Queen of Sheba, and that he either did not notice or was not unduly troubled by the inconsistencies between them.

It is also necessary to account for a problem posed by the second part of the opening sentence of unit B, where AVIDA prints:

אבל כששמע שהיא בת שדה (אעפ"כ ראה שהיו) [ועל כן] רגליה שעירות אמר איך אעשה

This appears to indicate that, in AVIDA's opinion, the words in parentheses should be deleted and those in square brackets added.²³¹ AVIDA

²²⁹ See pp. 277-278 above.

²³⁰ AVIDA, "מעשה מלכת שבא," 2-3.

²³¹ Cf. n. 225 above.

gives no reason for this editorial correction, but it is true that Saadiah's syntax is at this point rather strained, since the conjunction **אבל** is, in effect, duplicated by the abbreviated expression **אפ על פי כן**. More important, perhaps, is the problem of narrative inconsistency raised by the statement that Solomon had already seen the queen's hairy legs, since this vitiates the purpose of the illusion of water. AVIDA's "correction" is adopted without comment by both YASSIF and LASSNER.²³² SILBERMAN, however, appears to ignore it and, explains the inconsistency of Saadiah's actual text as follows:

Why it is necessary for the queen to reveal her hairy feet, the matter already being known to Solomon, is not explained. Indeed, what seems to have happened is that the author wove together the two strands, the disclosure and Solomon's prior knowledge, without much fear of contradiction. He wanted both in his story, so he put both in.²³³

This explanation, which concurs with the observations made above, is undoubtedly preferable to AVIDA's unsupported alteration of the text. Saadiah's fractured syntax may well, in fact, indicate that he composed this sentence by combining two different written sources. Very possibly, he took a clause from one source and inserted it into the middle of a sentence borrowed from the other, as follows:

אבל כששמע שהיא בת שדה <אעפ"כ ראה שהיו רגליה שעירות> אמר איך אעשה

but when he heard that she was the daughter of a demoness <nevertheless, he saw that her legs were hairy> he said: "What should I do?"

One of Saadiah's sources was, almost certainly, a version of the *Tales of Ben Sira*, which is the only known previous Jewish source to combine the hairy legs motif, the depilatory, and the tradition of Nebuchadnezzar's descent from Solomon's union with the Queen.²³⁴ The *Tales of Ben Sira* does not, however, include the glass palace tale itself, for which Saadiah must have used a different source or sources.

²³² YASSIF, *Tales*, 53; LASSNER, *Demonizing the Queen*, 175.

²³³ SILBERMAN, "The Queen of Sheba in Judaic Tradition," 71.

²³⁴ Saadiah may also, of course, have been aware of the Arabic sources which mention the depilatory but, as we have seen, the tradition about Nebuchadnezzar is found only in Jewish texts.

It is abundantly clear that Saadiah's version of the glass palace tale is considerably indebted to the story of the four who entered פרדס. In addition to the term פרדס itself and the verb להכנס, his text includes the pavement of marble stones (אבני שיש), which, as in the water vision episode in *HZ:D1*, "looked as if" (היה נראה) it were water.²³⁵ In this version, the marble pavement replaces the glass floor. It is difficult to determine whether Saadiah has taken this unique version of the tale from an earlier source or whether he was himself responsible for its composition. All we can say for certain is that the author has made a connection between the glass palace tale and the פרדס story, and that he evidently regarded the water vision episode as an integral component of the latter. He must, therefore, have relied on a source in which the פרדס story and the water vision episode had already been combined. The most obvious candidate, perhaps, is *babli*, in which the term פרדס, the verb להכנס, and the expression שיש אבני are all found. The expression היה נראה is not, however, found in *babli* and, unless the parallel is merely coincidental, must ultimately be derived from *HZ*. Since the relevant passage of *HZ*, including the word נראה, is quoted by Ḥananael b. Ḥushiel,²³⁶ it is not necessary to infer that Saadiah or his source was personally familiar with that text. It is, however, clear that this author understood both the פרדס story and the water vision episode in terms which were derived either directly or indirectly from the hekhalot tradition.

Given the late date of Saadiah's composition, we should probably assume that he or his source was responsible for combining these specific details from the פרדס story with the glass palace tale. If so, however, his perception of a connection between the two stories was at least partly valid. Although the earliest known versions of the glass palace tale do not contain any recognizable allusions to the פרדס story itself, they are clearly indebted to the water vision episode of the hekhalot tradition. We have observed, moreover, that *Targum Sheni* and the *Qur'ān*, our earliest sources, both seem to be alluding to a traditional story which must have been in circulation by, at latest, the early seventh

²³⁵ Compare pp. 74-77 above. Note that Saadiah renders the corrupt word כמו in *HZ* by כאילו.

²³⁶ See p. 93 above.

century.²³⁷ It is known that the Jews of the Yemen had access to sources of considerable antiquity,²³⁸ and the possibility that Saadiah's version of the glass palace tale is in part based on a source much closer to the tale's origin cannot wholly be discounted. It is more probable, however, that the glass palace tale was originally composed under the direct influence of the hekhalot tradition about the water vision episode, and that it was only linked to the story of the four by a subsequent process of literary association on the part of either Saadiah or his source.

20. *Concluding Observations*

This investigation of the widespread tale in which the Queen of Sheba is deceived by the illusion of water produced by the glistening floor of Solomon's palace has shown that the original composition must have been adapted from the water vision episode of the hekhalot tradition. In Saadiah's version, as in the water vision episode and later recensions of "Four Entered Paradise," this marvellous floor was made of white marble paving stones (אבני שיש). According to most other versions, however, it was made of glass, perhaps reflecting the meaning of the word סלולות (HZ:D1, E2) as understood by Hai Gaon and Rashi, who both believed it to be the equivalent of צלולות ("transparent").²³⁹ The Queen's failure to recognize the nature of the illusion serves, much like the error of the unworthy יורד מרכבה, to demonstrate her inferior status in relation to Solomon. This status is attributable, in the first instance, to the fact that she is a woman. She has, moreover, rejected the subservient role appropriate to her sex and presumes to challenge Solomon's kingly, masculine authority. In the Jewish tradition, she is therefore regarded as a witch and/or a demon. While it is not certain that her hairy legs are an original component of the tale, they are undoubtedly symbolic of her "unnatural" usurpation of the masculine role and there are good grounds for believing that they may also be indicative of her hidden identity as (a or the) Lilith.²⁴⁰ As such, the queen is identified with the forces of evil, which are perpetually in a state of rebellion

²³⁷ See p. 235 above.

²³⁸ See p. 271, n. 172 above; and SCHECHTER, "Riddles," 349.

²³⁹ See p. 92 above.

²⁴⁰ See pp. 257-261 above.

against the divinely appointed hierarchical order of creation. According to the tradition which produced the water vision episode, these demonic forces originate in the fluid and filthy chaos waters, by whose female taint the very substance of the material creation is rendered impure. The influence of these ideas is clearly present in the glass palace tale, where the Queen's misperception of the floor of the palace reveals her evil nature. The results of this study have thus confirmed some, at least, of our findings about the underlying ideas on which the water vision episode is based and, above all, our understanding of the moral and symbolic significance of its central motif, the illusion of water.

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