

James R. Davila

Descenders to the Chariot
*The People behind
the Hekhalot Literature*



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DESCENDERS TO THE CHARIOT

The People behind the Hekhalot Literature

BY

JAMES R. DAVILA



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To my mother

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St. Andrews
11 April 2001

ABBREVIATIONS AND SIGLA

Abbreviations

<i>FJB</i>	<i>Frankfurter judaistische Beiträge</i>
<i>SH-L</i>	Peter Schäfer et al., <i>Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur</i> (TSAJ 2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981). Hekhalot texts published in the <i>Synopse</i> are cited by the traditional name of the given "macroform" (<i>Hekhalot Rabbati</i> , <i>Hekhalot Zutarti</i> , etc.), followed by the relevant section number(s) in <i>SH-L</i> . Passages not found within the boundaries of the traditional named texts are cited as <i>SH-L</i> followed by the relevant section number(s).

Sigla Used in Translations of Primary Texts

[. . .]	Unreadably damaged or missing text
<i>text</i>	The translation of the italicized primary text is uncertain
text	Text marked for deletion by being crossed out or erased
<text>	Material written supralinearly in the manuscript
[text]	Restoration of text in a lacuna. For biblical quotations, the part of a verse not actually written in the manuscripts
text(!)	The translation corrects a mistake in the Hebrew or Aramaic text
(text)	Explanatory comment inserted in a quotation from a translated primary text
{text}	Text missing in the manuscripts but restored on the basis of context
<<text>>	Text to be ignored as an inadvertent dittography
???	A Hebrew or Aramaic word I do not know how to translate

Additional Sigla

//	Marks a parallel passage found in two different texts or manuscripts (e.g., §§258–59//§§407–408)
G	Refers to Geniza fragments of Hekhalot texts published by Peter Schäfer in <i>Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur</i> (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984). These are cited with the siglum "G" followed by the text number in Schäfer's edition and, when relevant, the column and line numbers. For example, "G11 2b 2–4" means lines 2–4 of column 2b, text 11 in this edition.

All other abbreviations and sigla may be found in *The SBL Handbook of Style for Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies*, ed. Patrick H. Alexander (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999). All translations of primary texts are my own unless otherwise indicated.

CHAPTER ONE

THE HEKHALOT LITERATURE

And what mortal man is it who is able
to ascend on high,
to ride on wheels,
to descend below,
to search out the inhabited world,
to walk on the dry land,
to gaze at His splendor,
to dwell with His crown,
to be transformed by His glory,
to recite praise,
to combine letters,
to recite their names,
to have a vision of what is above,
to have a vision of what is below,
to know the explanation of the living,
and to see the vision of the dead,
to walk in rivers of fire,
and to know the lightning?
And who is able to explain it,
and who is able to see it?
(*Hekhalot Zutarti* §§349–50)¹

Who indeed? Who is this profoundly mighty human being who rides a divine chariot on high and knows the place of the dead below, who gazes directly at God and is thereby transformed into a creature who wades in the celestial rivers of fire, and who exercises his powers on earth to understand the lives of those around him? This figure is the subject of the corpus of texts known as the Hekhalot literature and also the focus of this book. As a foretaste of many of the themes I will be exploring, I quote a passage written by a Soviet ethnographer about the experiences and characteristics of the spiritual intermediary generally, although not uncontroversially, called the “shaman”:

¹ For linguistic and textual comments, see the discussion of this passage in chapter 9.

Convinced of his connection with the spirits, the shaman expected of himself the behavioral characteristics that conformed to this connection. Having assumed the role, he would live it, no longer straying from the pattern. An important part of this role were [sic] the imaginary wanderings and encounters with the spirits during the seance. While conducting the ritual, the shaman was in the power of his visions. The spirits and scenes from other worlds would appear before him. He would experience all the details of his journey. For example, a Chukotka shaman in his hallucinations would fly through the air and shoot up to the stars, travel under the earth and beneath the water, change his form, encounter and converse with the spirits of his ancestors. It should be kept in mind that these hallucinations were not arbitrary, but connected with the purposes of the ritual.²

The similarities between the Chukotka shaman and the figure described in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* are obvious, and such similarities will be explored in detail in the following chapters. Some of the terms employed in the quotation, most of them loaded, are critical for the case I intend to make. The most important of these is, of course, "shaman." But before I discuss terminology, I must introduce the corpus of texts I shall be exploring and their accompanying phenomenological construct, Merkavah mysticism.³

The Hekhalot literature is a bizarre conglomeration of Jewish esoteric and revelatory texts produced sometime between late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. The name comes from a Hebrew word (הַיְכָלוֹת) meaning "palaces." The Hekhalot literature is the literature of the celestial palaces. These documents have strong connections with earlier apocalyptic and gnostic literature and claim to describe the self-induced spiritual experiences of the "descenders to the chariot" (a difficult phrase, used in some of the texts but not all, but the

² V. N. Basilov, "Chosen by the Spirits," in *Shamanism: Soviet Studies of Traditional Religion in Siberia and Central Asia*, ed. Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer (Armonk, N.Y., and London: Sharpe, 1990) 3–48; the quotation is on p. 10. This essay is highly schematic and permeated with the heavy-handed dialectical materialism obligatory for the era, but it is still quite useful.

³ The Hebrew word *merkavah* literally means "chariot," but it is used in rabbinic and related texts to refer to the vision of God's heavenly "throne-chariot" described by the prophet in the first chapter of Ezekiel—this despite the fact that the word itself never occurs in the book of Ezekiel. As will become clear in the next chapter, the terms "mysticism," "magic," and "theurgy" are highly problematical for etic discourse. In my summaries of the secondary literature in this chapter I will sometimes echo the imprecise usage of these words in the literature, since their use is one of the problems to be faced in the current state of the question.

only attested title for these magico-religious practitioners).⁴ The narrators and protagonists are almost always three prominent rabbis of the Tannaitic era: Akiva, Ishmael, and Nehuniah ben HaQanah. The texts are clearly pseudepigraphic, written long after the lifetimes of these men, although it is not impossible that some of the Hekhalot traditions go back to their teachings. But in any case, not only do the texts purport to tell us stories of their adventures; they also claim to reveal the very techniques that permitted the rabbis to view for themselves Ezekiel's Merkavah as well as those that gave them control of angels and a supernatural mastery of Torah. This material is of particular interest for the study of divine mediation and revelatory experiences, because the Hekhalot documents claim to detail actual practices used to reach trance states, gain revelations, and interact with divine beings. The basis for deducing the existence of Merkavah mysticism as a religious movement is largely exegesis of the Hekhalot literature. *I intend to show that this literature preserves the teachings of real religious functionaries, the descenders to the chariot, who flourished in late antiquity and who were quite like the functionaries anthropologists call shamans.*

One of the best-known stories in the Hekhalot corpus is that of the four who entered paradise, which is also found in the Babylonian Talmud and in various forms elsewhere in the rabbinic literature. The following version appears in a manuscript (New York, 8128) of the work that is the source of the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter.

And these are they who entered paradise (or "the garden"—פרדס): Ben Azzav, Ben Zoma, the Other,⁵ and R. Akiva.

⁴ The mysterious designation "descender to the chariot" (יורד ל/במרכבה) or יורדי (מ)מרכבה is found frequently in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (e.g., §§94, 163, 234, 236); the Geniza fragment G8 (e.g., G8 2b 3, 8); and in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §407. For some reason the Hekhalot texts often—though not always—speak of "descending" to God's throne-chariot in heaven and "ascending" on the return to earth (again, especially in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* and G8; but cf. also *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§335; *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §565; *Merkavah Rabba* §§672, 685). Numerous explanations of the paradoxical idiom have been offered, none compellingly persuasive. See Annelies Kuyt, *The "Descent" to the Chariot: Towards a Description of the Terminology, Place, Function and Nature of the Yeridah in Hekhalot Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995). In this book I will use the term "descenders to the chariot" when referring in general to the practitioners described in the Hekhalot literature, but not when referring to the contents of specific documents or "macroforms" (see below) that do not use the idiom "to descend to the chariot."

⁵ An unfriendly nickname for the infamous heretic Elisha ben Avuyah.

Ben Azzay peered into the sixth palace and saw the splendid atmosphere of the alabaster stones that are paved in the palace. And his body could not endure it, and he opened his mouth and asked them, "What is the nature of these waters?" and he died. Concerning him the Scripture says, "Worthy in the eyes of YHWH is the death of His saints" (Ps 116:15).

Ben Zoma peered at the splendor in the alabaster stones and supposed that it was water. And his body endured that he not ask them, but his mind could not endure it, and he was struck down. He lost his mind. Concerning him the Scripture says, "Have you found honey? Eat (only) your fill, lest you become sated and vomit it up" (Prov 25:16).

Elisha ben Avuyah descended and cut the plants. How did he cut the plants? They say that when he would come to the synagogues and to the schools and he saw youngsters there excelling in Torah, he would recite (a spell) against them and they were silenced. And concerning him the Scripture says, "Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin" (Qoh 5:5).

R. Akiva ascended safely and descended safely, and concerning him the Scripture says, "Draw me after you, let us run. The King has brought me into His chambers" (Cant 1:4). (*Hekhalot Zutarti* §345)

As it stands, the story is about four rabbis who made the perilous journey to the celestial paradise, a journey so dangerous that only one returned unscathed. Whether or not this was its original meaning has been stridently debated in recent years.⁶ This controversy is not new: a *responsum* survives from the eleventh century in which the head of a Babylonian rabbinic academy, Hai ben Sherira HaGaon, addressed a number of questions sent to him about the story.⁷ The questioners ask,

What is this garden? And at what did he "peer and was struck down"? And what is this stroke? And what is "he cut the plants"? And what are these plants? And R. Akiva who entered—into what place did he enter, and why did he enter safely and go forth safely? If you say, because of his righteousness, behold, Ben Azzay and his companions were righteous! May our master explain to us this tradition, for the opinions are many.

⁶ For a discussion and recent bibliography, see my article "The *Hodayot* Hymnist and the Four Who Entered Paradise," *RevQ* 17/65-68 (1996) 457-78.

⁷ B. M. Lewin, *Otzar ha-Geonim: Thesaurus of the Gaonic Responsa and Commentaries*, vol. 4: *Tractae Jom-Tov, Chagiga and Maschkin* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press Association, 1931) 13-15.

The text of the story available to the questioner is somewhat different from the one quoted above. For example, in their text R. Akiva "entered . . . and went forth" rather than ascending and descending. Nevertheless, their questions are essentially the same as those that might arise in the mind of a reader of our version.

Hai replies as follows:

Perhaps you know that many of the sages thought that one who is worthy of certain designated and elucidated traits, when he seeks to have a vision of the chariot and to peer into the palaces of the angels on high, has ways to do it. He sits in fasting a certain number of days and rests his head between his knees and whispers to the ground many songs and praises which are specified. And so he peers into its (or "his") inner rooms and chambers like one who sees seven palaces with his eyes, and he has a vision as if he were entering from palace to palace and seeing what is in each. And there are two compilations that the Tannaim taught on this matter—they are called *Hekhalot Rabbati* and *Hekhalot Zutarti*, and this matter is publicized and well known.

He then proceeds with a detailed exegesis of the story, the gist of which is that the garden, according to context, represents the celestial palaces, and the four passed through these palaces in order to see the Merkavah. He quotes a passage in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* (still extant in our manuscripts) which warns that the pavement of the sixth palace looks like overwhelming waves of water, but one must never mistake it for what it appears to be. Ben Azzay died because he made this mistake and referred to the waters; Ben Zoma was driven insane from the confounding visions; "the Other," Elisha ben Avuyah, became a heretic as a result of his experience; and only R. Akiva was able to bear what he saw and return unharmed.

As we shall see, Hai's interpretation of the story and its implications is not without difficulties, and it has been challenged. But let this be our starting point: by the eleventh century, a major Jewish authority in Babylonia believed that in the time of the Tannaim there had been established a group of ascetic practices which allowed one to experience a celestial ascent and view the Merkavah. The instructions for these practices were found in two works that pertained to the heavenly palaces (at least one, and perhaps both of which survive today). Later in the *responsum* Hai acknowledged that some denied that visions could be had or miracles performed except by the prophets. But he himself disputed this view, believing instead "that the Holy One, blessed be He, does miracles for the righteous

and great wonders, and -it is not far from Him to show in their inner rooms these visions of His palaces and the station of His angels." Moreover, this belief goes back to the ancients.—

Was Hai right or wrong? Were there Jewish sages who used ascetic rituals in order to have visions of heaven and to perform wonders on earth? In the rest of this chapter I survey the views of modern scholars on the authorship, date, and social location of the Hekhalot literature, and above all on its nature: is it literature arising merely from exegesis of scripture and rabbinic myth, or does it preserve a residue of genuine experience and praxis? But first some things need to be said about the texts and the manuscripts that contain them.

The Nature of the Texts

In order to study these documents, we must get clear in our minds just what we mean by the Hekhalot literature. This question is far more difficult than one might expect, even on the most basic level. Our main source for the texts is a group of about fifty medieval manuscripts in Hebrew and Aramaic which contain, *inter alia*, copies of the works generally assigned to the Hekhalot corpus.⁸ Until 1981, these were available only in descriptions and excerpts in secondary sources, on microfilm, or in uncritical editions drawn from a very limited manuscript base.⁹

All this changed with the publication of the *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, a synoptic edition of seven of the most important manuscripts containing the major works in the Hekhalot corpus.¹⁰ Why a synoptic edition and not a full-scale critical text? Because, as Peter Schäfer, the chief editor of this edition has been pointing out in articles published both before and after the appearance of the *Synopse*, a close analysis of the manuscripts makes the concept of a Hekhalot "work" or "text" difficult.¹¹ Certainly, scholars speak of individual

⁸ Peter Schäfer describes forty-seven manuscripts in "Handschriften zur Hekhalot-Literatur," in *Hekhalot-Studien* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988 [first published in 1983 in *FfB* 11, 113–93]) 154–233.

⁹ For details and bibliography, see David J. Halperin, "A New Edition of the Hekhalot Literature," *JAOS* 104 (1984) 543–52.

¹⁰ Peter Schäfer et al., *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981).

¹¹ These articles are collected in *Hekhalot-Studien*.

works and texts, and some of the titles assigned to these works have been used since the Middle Ages, as we saw from Hai's reference to the *Hekhalot Rabbati* and the *Hekhalot Zutarti* in the eleventh century, although these titles generally do not appear in the manuscripts. But the textual basis for most of the corpus turns out to be exceedingly fluid, varying widely from manuscript to manuscript. Indeed, there is often no clear indication where one document ends and another begins. Schäfer uses the term "macroform" for these larger, constantly shifting units. They are composed of smaller blocks of tradition ("microforms," in Schäfer's terminology) which can appear in more than one work or in different places in different manuscripts of the same work, often with significant textual variants, but which are, by and large, more stable than the macroforms. The extent and nature of the textual problems vary from macroform to macroform. The manuscripts of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, for example, have relatively little internal variation, and it seems likely that a traditional critical text could be produced for it.¹² But the manuscripts of the *Hekhalot Zutarti* vary so much, in so many ways, that it is difficult to speak of it as a document whose Urform might be reconstructed.¹³

Most of the manuscripts discussed in the previous two paragraphs come from the textual tradition that passed through the editorial hands of the *Haside Ashkenaz* in the Middle Ages. When we take into account the earlier Hekhalot material that does not come from this tradition, the textual picture becomes murkier and still more complex. The Cairo Geniza, a synagogue repository for discarded manuscripts in Hebrew script, preserved numerous fragments of Hekhalot texts which did not undergo European editing, and where these overlap with the European manuscripts there are often substantial differences. In addition, a number of fragments from the Cairo Geniza contain parts of texts that are entirely unknown in the European manuscripts.¹⁴

¹² I have argued the case in more detail in "Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*," *JJS* 45 (1994) 208–26.

¹³ See: Schäfer, "Aufbau und redaktionelle Identität der *Hekhalot Zutarti*," in *Hekhalot-Studien* 50–62 (first published in 1982 in *JJS* 33, 569–82). Rachel Elijor's edition does not obviate this conclusion, nor does it claim to do so (*Hekhalot Zutarti* [Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, Supplement 1; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982] in Hebrew). See also the remarks of Halperin, "A New Edition of the Hekhalot Literature," 546–49.

¹⁴ Some of the Hekhalot fragments from the Cairo Geniza were first published by Ithamar Gruenwald in "New Passages from Hekhalot Literature," *Tarbiz* 38

Our analysis of the Hekhalot literature must proceed, therefore, on multiple levels. It is helpful to structure the treatment broadly around the larger units, the macroforms, because in a rough and ready way these tell us how some tradents organized and transmitted the material. But this must be done with constant attention to variant arrangements in the manuscripts and, especially, alongside a detailed analysis of the shorter units of one or a few paragraphs—the microforms—in whatever macroform they occupy. The microforms are likely to give us older information than the macroforms. The starting point for the Geniza material should be the individual fragments that now survive. For all our evidence, textual criticism, redaction criticism, and form criticism must work together to help us isolate textual units of different length, and these must be studied on their own terms as well as in the context of the larger, blurry macroforms and of the individual Geniza manuscripts.

Since the broadest angle of attack will aim at the traditional macroforms and the Geniza manuscripts, it is worthwhile to survey these at this point, both to give a general idea of their content and to signal particular redactional problems associated with each one. The most important macroforms are the following.¹⁵

The *Hekhalot Rabbati* (“The Greater [Book of Celestial] Palaces”; roughly §§81–121, 152–73, 189–277). A fairly stable collection in Hebrew of miscellaneous hymns and traditions about the heavenly realm, incorporating a version of the story of the ten martyrs and a narrative about an ascent of R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah. Other episodes and mythic material are included in some of the manuscripts. The fragments from the Cairo Geniza suggest that earlier, somewhat different redactions once existed.¹⁶

The *Sar Torah* (“The Prince of Torah”; §§281–306). A set of instructions in Hebrew for invoking the angelic Prince of Torah in order to compel him to descend and give the adept supernatural knowl-

(1968–69) 354–72 (in Hebrew) and “Remarks on the Article ‘New Passages from Hekhalot Literature,’” *Tarbiz* 39 (1969–70) 216–17 (in Hebrew). Peter Schäfer has republished these, along with many others, in *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984).

¹⁵ All section numbers are those of Schäfer’s *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*.

¹⁶ See Schäfer, “Zum Problem der redaktionellen Identität von *Hekhalot Rabbati*,” in *Hekhalot-Studien* 63–74 (first published in 1985 in *FJB* 13, 1–22); “Ein neues *Hekhalot Rabbati*-Fragment,” in *Hekhalot-Studien* 96–103; Peter Schäfer et al., *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur*, vol. 2: §§81–334 (TSAJ 17; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987) xiv–xxxvi; and n. 12 above.

edge of Torah. This macroform usually follows the *Hekhalot Rabbati* in the manuscripts. The last third of the text contains substantial variations in the manuscripts.¹⁷

The *Hekhalot Zutarti* ("The Lesser [Book of Celestial] Palaces"; roughly §§335–68, 373–74, 407–26). A highly unstable Hebrew and Aramaic conglomeration of adjurations, stories about heavenly ascents, and instructions for undertaking heavenly journeys. One manuscript includes cosmographic myths found in other manuscripts in contexts outside the *Hekhalot Zutarti*.¹⁸

The *Ma'aseh Merkavah* ("The Working of the Chariot"; §§544–96). A fairly stable collection in Hebrew of Merkavah hymns, adjurations, and ascetic practices for controlling angels and ascending to the chariot. One manuscript adds an adjuration; another preserves an earlier recension that lacked §§579–90; and there are other minor variations.¹⁹

The *Sar Panim* ("The Prince of the Presence"; §§623–39). A highly stable, extended Hebrew adjuration for the purpose of forcing the angelic Prince of the Presence to descend from heaven and grant the wishes of the practitioner.²⁰

The *Merkavah Rabba* ("The Great [Book of] the Chariot"; §§655–708). A rather unstable Hebrew compendium of instructions for ascetic practices, adjurations, hymns, and Shi'ur Qomah speculation (see below).²¹

3 *Enoch* (chaps. 1–48; §§1–79). The macroform takes the form of a Hebrew apocalypse describing the ascent of R. Ishmael to heaven, where he meets the great angel Metatron, who was once the patriarch Enoch before he was assumed into heaven and transformed into a fiery angel. Metatron then takes R. Ishmael on an extended tour of the celestial realm. The macroform seems to be built around an

¹⁷ See n. 16.

¹⁸ See Peter Schäfer et al., *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur*, vol. 3: §§335–597 (TSAJ 22; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989) vii–xxvii and n. 13 above.

¹⁹ See Schäfer et al., *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur* 3:xxvii–xliii; Michael D. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkavah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992) esp. pp. 41–62.

²⁰ See Peter Schäfer, "Die Beschwörung des *sar ha-panim*. Edition und Übersetzung," in *Hekhalot-Studien* 118–53 (first published in 1978 in *FJB* 6, 107–45).

²¹ See Peter Schäfer, "Prolegomena zu einer kritischen Edition und Analyse der *Merkava Rabba*," in *Hekhalot-Studien* 17–49 (first published in 1977 in *FJB* 5, 65–99); Schäfer et al., *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur IV §§598–985* (TSAJ 29; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991) xvii–xxx.

earlier microform (chaps. 2–15; §§3–19) containing the story of the ascent and exaltation of Enoch. As it stands now, *3 Enoch* is notably lacking in ritual material and adjurations, although a fragment from the Cairo Geniza indicates that a substantially different recension of the material once existed which included such material.²²

I will have occasion to cite a number of other macroforms which must be mentioned here. First, the *Massekhet Hekhalot* (“The Treatise on the [Celestial] Palaces”) is a carefully constructed and detailed description in Hebrew of the seven heavens and their supernatural structures and denizens. It was probably composed later than the other documents, since its cosmography is given without an ascent account or ritual instructions, and thus it is of minimal interest for our purposes.²³ Second, the *Shi’ur Qomah* is a loose compilation in Hebrew of detailed descriptions of the various enormous body parts of the enthroned deity. Some *Shi’ur Qomah* passages are found in the *Synopse* (e.g., §§939–78), but the material is preserved more fully in other manuscripts.²⁴ It, too, is of limited use to us. Third, a Hebrew cosmological treatise covering the heavenly and infernal realms exists in a number of recensions, one of which is known as the *Seder Rabba di Bereshit* (“The Greater Order of Creation”; roughly §§428–67,

²² See P. S. Alexander, “The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch,” *JJS* 28 (1977) 156–80; Peter Schäfer, “Ein neues Fragment zur Metoposkopie und Chiromantik,” in *Hekhalot-Studien* 84–95 (first published in 1985 in *FJB* 13, 61–82); Peter Schäfer and Klaus Herrmann, *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur*, vol. 1: §§1–80 (TSAJ 46; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995) vii–lxiii; James R. Davila, “Of Methodology, Monotheism, and Metatron: Introductory Reflections on Divine Mediators and the Origins of the Worship of Jesus,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism. Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, ed. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 3–18. The *Synopse* has only two of the manuscripts of *3 Enoch*. The textual data from the rest may be found in the apparatus of the edition of Hugo Odeberg, *3 Enoch, or the Hebrew Book of Enoch* (1928; rpt. New York: Ktav, 1973). Note also the English translation by P. S. Alexander in *OTP* 1:223–315. I cite *3 Enoch* according to Odeberg’s edition by chapter and verse, followed in parentheses by the section numbers in the *Synopse* (except when the latter lacks the passage).

²³ The *Massekhet Hekhalot* has been edited by Klaus Herrmann in *Massekhet Hekhalot: Traktat von den himmlischen Palästen. Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentar* (TSAJ 39; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994).

²⁴ See Martin Samuel Cohen, *The Shi’ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983); idem, *The Shi’ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions* (TSAJ 9; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985); Schäfer, “*Shi’ur Qomah*: Rezensionen und Urtext,” in *Hekhalot Studien* 75–83; Schäfer et al., *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur IV §§598–985 xxxi–xlv*, 136–202.

518–40, 714–853).²⁵ It presents cosmographic and cosmological traditions almost entirely without reference to visionary experience or ritual praxis, but it will have some relevance for my analysis. In addition, I note that MS New York 8128 (whose text was published in Schäfer's *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*) contains numerous additions to the various macroforms, some of which are of considerable interest and will be discussed in later chapters.²⁶ Other works have a close relationship to the Hekhalot traditions, but they are usually considered magical rather than mystical texts and will be discussed below in chapters 2 and 8.

Schäfer has also published twenty-three fragmentary Hekhalot documents in Hebrew and Aramaic from the Cairo Geniza. Many of these are copies of already known documents, although often in a rather different form,²⁷ but some of them contain entirely new material. G8 has been called the Ozhayah fragment, after the name of the angel who figures in the ascent account. G11 begins with a passage about Metatron, the angel of Israel, then continues with previously unknown *Shi'ur Qomah* material. G12 bears the title "A Good Omen" (סימן טוב) and consists of passages found in 3 *Enoch* about the ascent of R. Ishmael and the heavenly tour that Metatron gives him, along with new physiognomic and astrological speculation. G13–G17 are copies of an adjurational text called *Sheva' Zutarti* or *Sheva' Eliyahu* ("The Lesser Seven" or "The Seven of Elijah"), another copy of which (in MS Michael 9/Oxford 1531) was published in transcription by Rebecca Macy Lesses.²⁸ One may question whether it belongs with the other Hekhalot texts, and I will consider it in

²⁵ Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer and Abraham Joseph Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashot: Twenty-Five Midrashim Published for the First Time from Manuscripts Discovered in the Genizoth of Jerusalem and Egypt with Introductions and Annotations* (2nd ed.; Jerusalem: Ktab Yad Wasepher, 1968) 1:3–48 (in Hebrew); Nicolas Séd, "Une cosmologie juive du haut moyen âge: la Béraytā dī Ma'aseh Berēšit," *REJ* 123 (1964) 259–305; *REJ* 124 (1965) 23–123.

²⁶ See Klaus Herrmann and Claudia Rohrbacher-Sticker, "Magische Traditionen der New Yorker *Hekhalot*-Handschrift JTS 8128 im Context ihrer Gesamtedaction," *FJB* 17 (1989) 101–49.

²⁷ G1–G6 (*Hekhalot Rabbati*); G7, G18 (*Hekhalot Zutarti*); G9–G10 (*Shi'ur Qomah*); G23 (*Pereq Shirah*, a poetic text with some relationship to the Hekhalot literature).

²⁸ Rebecca Macy Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power: Angels, Incantations, and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (HTS 44; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 1998) 381–94. A translation of these Cairo Geniza fragments with commentary has now been published by Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked in *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997) 2:27–95.

my discussion of magical texts in chapter 8. Other fragments are G19, a ritual and adjuration for invoking Metatron; G20, some leaves from a handbook of rituals; G21, an adjuration describing the revelatory ascent of Moses to heaven; and G22, adjurations and Merkavah hymns, some of which also appear in the major macroforms.

Literature or Experience?

What, then, are the Hekhalot texts? Who wrote them, and to what end? For the last generation the question of the purpose of the material has been debated. Broadly speaking, two positions have been defended. The first is that the Hekhalot literature describes certain otherworldly experiences (especially ascents to heaven but also the summoning of angels to earth) as well as the means to achieve them. The second is that the alleged experiences described in the texts (again, especially the heavenly ascents) are primarily literary constructions based on creative exegesis of scripture and rabbinic myth, and it is doubtful that any genuine experience lies behind them.

More than any other scholar in the twentieth century, Gershom G. Scholem is responsible for setting the study of Jewish mystical literature on a sound scientific basis. He built on and transcended the nineteenth-century study of the Hekhalot literature, substantially revising the understanding of the material. In a number of discussions he argued that the Hekhalot literature described the religious experiences of a school of practitioners which originated in Palestine in Talmudic or even Tannaitic times, but which is now known primarily from literature transmitted to Western Europe from Babylonia. These practitioners made use of ascetic practices to experience the "ascent" or "descent" to the chariot. Recitation of prayers and hymns, along with the invocation of divine names and other magical practices, served to generate a state of ecstasy which allowed them to make the perilous journey through the gates of the seven celestial palaces in order to stand before the throne of God, where they faced the danger of a fiery and potentially fatal transformation into an angel. Although magic and theurgy were integral to its practices from the beginning, this school of ecstatic mysticism gradually "degenerated" in different directions to produce, first, a more or less purely magical literature exemplified by tractates such as the *Sar Torah* and the *Harba di Moshe*; second, a moralizing reinterpretation that devel-

oped into later devotional literature such as the Midrash of the Ten Martyrs and the Alphabet of R. Akiva; and third, a group of Hekhalot texts (*Hekhalot Rabbati*, 3 *Enoch*, *Massekhet Hekhalot*) purged of magical elements. Aspects of Merkavah mysticism also informed cosmogonic and cosmological speculation that united with Hellenistic and Neoplatonic streams of thought to produce medieval Kabbalah.²⁹ Scholem took it to be the case that Merkavah mysticism developed out of apocalyptic movements in the Second Temple period and that these traditions were alluded to, albeit in cautionary contexts, in the classical rabbinic literature. Ithamar Gruenwald defended these views in more detail in a monograph and a collection of essays.³⁰

David J. Halperin mounted the first thoroughgoing challenge to the framework established by Scholem, arguing that the traditions about the Merkavah in Palestinian sources are based on scriptural exegesis and that ecstatic journeys to the otherworld appear first in Babylonian sources.³¹ He reconstructs a tradition of synagogue exegesis associated with Shavuot sermons which he believes generated the traditions found in the Hekhalot literature. These creative reinterpretations of scripture combined Ezekiel's vision of the Merkavah with the account of the revelation of the Torah at Sinai in the book of Exodus and in Psalm 68. While allowing for the possibility that the writers sometimes had visionary experiences or "hallucinations," Halperin sees the major developments as literary. In addition, he questions an important assumption of previous work on the Hekhalot literature, that at its core or center is the theme of the ascent (or descent) to the celestial chariot. He sees the ascent motif as at most

²⁹ Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (3rd ed.; New York: Schocken, 1954) 40–79; idem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (2nd ed.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965); idem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Meridian, 1974) 10–21, 317–19, 373–81.

³⁰ Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (AGJU 14; Leiden: Brill, 1980); idem, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism: Studies in Apocalypticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1988).

³¹ See esp. David J. Halperin, *The Merkavah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1980); idem, "A New Edition of the Hekhalot Literature," 549–51; idem, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988) esp. pp. 359–63. Halperin builds on the earlier challenge by Ephraim E. Urbach in "The Traditions about Merkavah Mysticism in the Tannaitic Period," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem on His Seventieth Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends*, ed. Ephraim E. Urbach et al. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967) 1–28, Hebrew section.

one major aspect of the material, and he points to another tradition that has as much or greater claim to centrality: the Sar Torah tradition. I have referred above to a particular *Sar Torah* text, but the theme of wresting knowledge of Torah from the angels through the use of powerful adjurations appears in a number of places in the Hekhalot literature. Halperin believes that both heavenly ascent and Sar Torah adjuration are inspired by an exegetical myth transmitted in the Shavuot sermons in which Moses ascended to heaven to seize the Torah over the objections of the angels, bringing it back to earth for Israel to follow. Certain individuals, Halperin argues, drew on this myth to imagine (or even hallucinate or fantasize) recapitulating Moses' journey. But more to the point, they sought through magical means to gain access to the Torah and the social benefits that expertise in it conferred and which were denied them in their own life situation. More on these individuals in the next section.³²

Peter Schäfer, who was the first to note that in some Hekhalot texts adjurations were considerably more prevalent than ascent accounts,³³ agrees with Halperin concerning the importance of separating the heavenly ascent from the Sar Torah adjurations, but he takes issue with him regarding the primacy of the latter over the former. Scholem's position "turned upside down" still suffers "from the desire to find *one* explanation for the *entire* Hekhalot literature"—a futile enterprise, since the literature is not a unity. He does concur with Halperin on the point that the texts do not give a clear indication that the heavenly journey "was carried out as a 'truly' ecstatic experience," arguing that evidence for a liturgical life situation for the ascent traditions "does not necessarily exclude ecstatic implications, but makes them relatively unlikely." Overall, he seems to see both the ascent tradition and the adjurations as "ritual-liturgical actions."³⁴

Martha Himmelfarb sharpens the wedge driven between the descent to the chariot and the Sar Torah adjurations, maintaining that ritual and ascetic exercises are far more characteristic of the latter than the former.³⁵ With Halperin and Schäfer, she argues "that the heav-

³² Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot* 366–87, 441.

³³ Peter Schäfer, "Engel und Menschen in der Hekhalot-Literatur," in *Hekhalot Studien* 250–76, esp. pp. 258, 264–65 (first published in *Kairos* 22 [1980], 201–25).

³⁴ Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992) 150–55.

³⁵ Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Oxford:

enly ascents of the hekhalot literature should be understood not as rites to be enacted but as stories to be repeated." The story has become the ritual.³⁶ Her conclusion is supported by Michael D. Swartz in his study of the Sar Torah traditions. He too holds that the ascetic preparations in the Hekhalot texts are associated with the Sar Torah adjurations, not the ascent traditions. He also argues on form-critical grounds that in most of the apparent exceptions, where Sar Torah and ascent passages seem to be linked, the connection is redactionally secondary.³⁷

This shift toward analyzing the Hekhalot literature as ritual instruction rather than only as literature, first touched on by Schäfer and Himmelfarb, is a significant step forward in understanding these texts and the people behind them. In 1994, I published an article that served as a preliminary summary of the present book, in which I argued that the Hekhalot literature makes sense as an organic whole when sifted through the explanatory grid of shamanism as found in the anthropological literature, especially the work of Åke Hulkrantz.³⁸ Shamans function as mediators who control guardian spirits and use them to achieve ecstasy in order to create a rapport between their human community and the supernatural realm. They use a set of ascetic practices which is fairly stable across cultures to control the spirits and to travel to the multilayered otherworld by means of a "world tree" or "world pole" that connects the otherworld to the earth. The descenders to the chariot use much the same set of techniques to compel angels to teach them Torah and to grant their wishes, as well as to ascend or descend through the seven celestial palaces (a journey likened to climbing a ladder) to gain information or power and to join the heavenly liturgy. The techniques used in Sar Torah adjurations and descents to the chariot are different to

Oxford University Press, 1993) 106–14; idem, "The Practice of Ascent in the Ancient Mediterranean World," in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, ed. John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1995) 123–37, esp. pp. 126–28.

³⁶ Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven* 109.

³⁷ Michael D. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996) 29, 153–57, 170–72, 210–12. Swartz reached similar conclusions about the redactional history of the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* in *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism*, esp. pp. 211–23.

³⁸ James R. Davila, "The Hekhalot Literature and Shamanism," *SBLSP* 33 (1994) 767–89.

some degree, but not so much so as Himmelfarb implies, and overall they fall within the range of shamanic techniques for similar practices.

Another recent study has also focused on the ritual elements embedded in the Hekhalot literature with a view toward elucidating the question of experience versus exegesis. Rebecca Lesses analyzes a corpus of Hekhalot adjurations from the perspective of the theory of performative language and concludes that these adjurations are performative (that is, meant to be used) in the sense that they use formulaic verbal utterances, ascetic restrictions, and manipulation of the space around the adept.³⁹ They are instructions for the acting out of rituals, not simply literary documents, and these rituals have the goal of providing the adept with various kinds of power. Examining adjurations for learning Torah, obtaining revelations from angels, generating dream revelations, ascending to the chariot, along with a text (*Sheva' Zutarti*) that combines prayers and adjurations for healing, exorcisms, and other acts of power, she concludes,

despite these different goals, all of these texts draw both on Hekhalot traditions about the celestial world and its angels, and on broader Jewish patterns of adjuration. These adjurations are, for the most part, embedded in narratives and explicit instructions that indicate how one is to use them. . . . They are not merely literary renditions of rituals; they instruct the adept on how to perform them.⁴⁰

Lesses's conclusions and mine, then, are mutually supportive. The adjurations and instructions for ritual praxes in the Hekhalot literature were meant to be used in actual rituals for controlling the spirits, whether the desired outcome was Torah learning, ascent to heaven, or other acts of power.

Authorship and Life Situation

In the preceding section I briefly outlined Scholem's views about the origins, authorship, and life situation of the Hekhalot literature. Much of his reconstruction remains widely accepted, but much also has been subjected to serious challenge.

³⁹ Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power*. Naomi Janowitz also draws on modern linguistic theories in *The Poetics of Ascent: Theories of Language in a Rabbinic Ascent Text* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989). Her analysis of the *Ma'aseh Merkah* in the light of Michael Silverstein's theories of language is only tangentially relevant for the issues discussed here.

⁴⁰ Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 273–74.

The first extended and detailed challenge again came from Halperin, who finds a key source of development and dissemination of lore about Ezekiel's Merkavah in the synagogue traditions, especially the sermons associated with the festival of Shavuot, of second- and third-century CE Palestine. But unlike Scholem, he sees the association of Merkavah traditions with ecstatic experiences and otherworldly journeys as a new development in Amoraic Bābylon, especially in the fourth century.⁴¹

In addition, Halperin attempts to reconstruct something of the social location of those who produced the Hekhalot literature. Here he finds the Sar Torah traditions in general and the *Sar Torah* text in particular especially useful. These traditions emphasize that the Sar Torah adjurations can make difficult Torah study easy even for the dullest of students, including "shepherds" and the *'am hā-'āreṣ*, the "people of the land," the uneducated people who were held in contempt by the rabbis. Halperin argues accordingly that the latter group, the people of the land, made theurgic use of the myth of the ascent of Moses to seize the Torah from heaven, and that the result was the Hekhalot literature. Their motivations were less a matter of piety than envy of and desire for the social status and power the rabbis held in their society.⁴²

Schäfer, too, calls into question the idea that the Hekhalot traditions arose in rabbinic circles. In a lecture at Oxford in 1986 he summarized his view as follows:

⁴¹ Scholem's view that the ecstatic element goes back to Tannaitic Palestine has not gone without defenders. In addition to the work of Gruenwald, mentioned in the previous section, see C. R. A. Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkabah Tradition," *JJS* 43 (1992) 1-31; idem, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1-12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate, Part 1: The Jewish Sources"; idem, "Part 2: Paul's Heavenly Ascent and Its Significance," *HTR* 86 (1993) 177-217, 265-92. I have drawn attention to parallels between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the traditions about the four who entered paradise in "The *Hodayot* Hymnist and the Four Who Entered Paradise"; and to physiognomic tractates related to the Hekhalot literature in "4QMess ar (4Q534) and Merkavah Mysticism," *DSD* 5 (1998) 367-81. I have also surveyed more parallels between the two corpora of texts in "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Merkavah Mysticism," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Their Historical Context*, ed. Timothy H. Lim et al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000) 249-64; and *Liturgical Works* (Eerdmans Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls 6; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000). But the question of the *origins* of the ecstatic or visionary element in the Hekhalot literature falls for the most part outside the scope of this monograph. My interest here is primarily in the people behind the texts we actually have and their life situation.

The Hekhalot literature is an expression of how an elite post-Rabbinic group of scholars understood the world and reality. They were people who, through the fantasy of the heavenly journey and through magical adjuration, wanted to proceed to God directly or to force God down to earth. The aim of this theurgic ritual was the confirmation of communion with God and of the love of God, as well as the complete knowledge of revelation. This was for the purpose of attaining the redemption of Israel here and now, on this earth and in this time.⁴³

Thus, unlike Halperin, he saw the people behind the Hekhalot literature as elite scholars rather than uneducated popularizers, and dated them to the postrabbinic rather than the Amoraic period.

In a publication that appeared a few years later, Schäfer presents a very similar position, although more nuanced, far more detailed, and to some degree less confident.⁴⁴ He now seems uncertain whether the Hekhalot literature was composed in rabbinic times or later and, if the former, whether the authors belonged to the rabbinic class or were outside it. But in any case, he rejects Halperin's proposal, first, on the grounds that the Hekhalot literature is both exoteric and esoteric, depending on the macroform in question, not primarily exoteric, as Halperin argues. Second, the magical reinterpretation of Merkavah midrash which informs the Hekhalot literature does not inherently imply a conflict between lower and upper social strata: magical notions affected all strata of Jewish society in late antiquity. Finally, he declares it unlikely that a repressed underclass would legitimate its rebellion by pseudepigraphic attribution of its literature to the heroes of the hated, oppressing elite.⁴⁵

In 1994, I made a proposal that is perhaps compatible, in different ways, with either Halperin's or Schäfer's reconstruction, but which approaches the problem from another angle and provides a somewhat more focused solution.⁴⁶ I suggested on the basis of parallels with Jewish magical literature of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages (manuscript contexts, content, and social background) that the Hekhalot literature could be understood as a subgenre of Jewish

⁴³ Peter Schäfer, "The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism," in *Hekhalot Studien* 277–95 (12th Sacks Lecture, Oxford, 1986); the quotation is on pp. 294–95.

⁴⁴ Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 157–61. This last point hardly seems persuasive to me. Subversive appeal to the traditions that uphold a despised elite is an obvious and powerful tactic of rebellion. The Qumran sectarians, for example, appealed for their own purposes to the scriptures and traditions also accepted by the Temple authorities in Jerusalem.

⁴⁶ Davila, "The Hekhalot Literature and Shamanism."

magical literature. I suggested that the users of the praxes in the Hekhalot literature probably used the other closely related magical texts and thus may have been healers and exorcists as well. It would seem to follow logically that the community behind the Hekhalot texts was at least closely related to, and probably overlapped with, the community that produced the Jewish magical texts. The magical texts from the Cairo Geniza were composed by professional scribes who did not have a rabbinic education. They had some imperfect knowledge of the Bible and rabbinic teachings and a wide acquaintance with Jewish folklore. This description also seems to fit well the composers of the Hekhalot literature. I proposed then that the authors of the Hekhalot literature were a group of professional scribes who lacked formal rabbinic training and whose socioeconomic position probably suffered as a result. They envied the superior station of the rabbis and defied them with another art commonly pursued by those in their own profession—magic. This strain of magical praxis, as noted in the previous section, is from an anthropological perspective closer to shamanism than anything else.

In 1996, Swartz published a study of the Sar Torah narratives in which he sets aside the issue of whatever inner experience may have lain behind their ritual praxes. Placing them in the context of scholasticism as a cross-cultural category, he sees them as a form of “scholastic magic,” a term that reflects the literature’s “appropriation of rabbinic scholasticism through magical means.”⁴⁷ After a detailed exegesis of the relevant narratives, he explores their use of the concepts “ritual,” “purity,” “tradition,” and “authority,” concluding that the rituals seek not so much to produce a “mystical state” as to purify the adept of earthly pollution in preparation for interacting with angels. He analyzes the use in the Hekhalot literature of chains of tradition (lists of authorities who have passed down traditions), arguing that this use confirms the values of the rabbinic elite while advancing a counterclaim that undermines the authority of the rabbis—the claim that the Hekhalot adjurations are potent for mastering Torah. These texts promoted the view that power over the Sar Torah transformed the magician into a wonder worker akin to the rabbis portrayed in the Babylonian Talmud.

⁴⁷ Swartz, *Scholastic Magic* 22.

Swartz accepts that the Hekhalot traditions probably have Palestinian roots, although he places much of their development in Amoraic and perhaps Geonic Babylon.⁴⁸ He sees the people who produced the Sar Torah texts, and indeed the Hekhalot literature as a whole, as proponents of a form of popular religion. They did have some degree of literacy and aspired to elite status (in the sense that members of secret societies generally seek to convince themselves of their own value), but they were not in reality a social elite. They stood outside learned rabbinic circles, but this does not mean they came from the poorest and most ignorant level of society. Rather, they were to be found somewhere in the circles of synagogue functionaries, liturgical poets, and scribes.

Finally, Lesses notes parallels between the Hekhalot adjurations and a wide range of praxes in ancient Greco-Egyptian and Jewish cultures.⁴⁹ She finds similarities in the ascetic restrictions and purification practices prescribed in both the Hekhalot texts and the literature of the Qumran sect: the purity requirements of both groups go beyond the Talmudic rules and are based on the fact that the practitioners expected to be in close contact with the angels, who might be offended by the least hint of impurity. Babylonian baptist groups, particularly the Elchasites and Manicheans, also followed praxes similar to those in the Hekhalot literature, including frequent ablutions or immersions and restrictions on food consumption and sex. The connection with angels is less direct, but not entirely absent. An important difference, however, is that the Hekhalot adjurations are for the use of individual practitioners, whereas the Qumran and baptist practices are prescribed for sectarian groups.

In general, the association of ascetic preparations with adjuration was common in late antiquity. Likewise, there are structural similarities between the Hekhalot adjurations and rituals of Greco-Egyptian background (the Greek magical papyri) and of Jewish origin (*Sepher HaRazim*). In addition, the ascent accounts in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* and *Hekhalot Zutarti* are illuminated by the instructions for ascent in the Mithras Liturgy.

Lesses concurs with other scholars regarding the likelihood that some of the Hekhalot traditions go back to third- and fourth-cen-

⁴⁸ Compare Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism* 211–23.

⁴⁹ Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power*.

ture Palestine, and she finds some confirmation for this view in the contents of the Palestinian Jewish Aramaic amulets from late antiquity. However, she adduces parallels between the Hekhalot literature and the Babylonian Aramaic incantation bowls which are even more striking and which offer powerful evidence that Babylonian traditions were centrally important in the development of Merkavah mysticism.

Conclusions

To summarize, the Hekhalot literature has undergone an exceedingly complex process of transmission and redaction, which makes it very difficult to speak of canonical works or texts in the corpus. Following Schäfer's lead, I have outlined a number of macroforms, larger, relatively stable units of material. My treatment is organized around these at the broadest level, but the central focus of the analysis is on the microforms—smaller units that may appear in different places in different manuscripts of a macroform or even in different macroforms.

In his discussions of the Hekhalot literature, Scholem's focus was on the traditions about the heavenly ascent, which he treated as the central concern of the material, although he did not neglect analysis of the Sar Torah texts and other adjurational passages. Indeed, he understood the rituals and adjurations to be preliminary preparations for the ascent. Halperin, Schäfer, Himmelfarb, and Swartz have challenged this synthesis on a number of grounds. They take the Sar Torah traditions to be more central than Scholem did, and they argue that the heavenly ascent and the adjurations of the Sar Torah are different facets or strata of the Hekhalot texts, and that the ascetic rituals are preparatory to the adjurations and not to the ascent. Halperin, Schäfer, and Himmelfarb also doubt that ecstatic experience lies behind the tales of ascent to heaven and they see these stories to be primarily literary constructs. (For the most part, Swartz sets aside the question of experience.)

Lesses and I have argued for a position somewhat closer to Scholem's in that, on the basis of cross-cultural anthropological and linguistic evidence, we find both the ascent texts and Sar Torah adjurations to include rituals that were meant to be used. The ascent traditions are therefore not merely pseudepigraphic stories about the

adventures of the ancient, heroically pious rabbis. They are handbooks to be used by those who wished to experience (in a sense we have so far left undefined) the same ascent.

There is a greater degree of consensus about the authorship and life situation of the Hekhalot literature. It is generally agreed that the movement has its roots in Amoraic (and perhaps even Tannaitic) Palestine, but that important and perhaps crucial developments also occurred in Amoraic and Geonic Babylon, and that (apart from the Geniza fragments) the surviving Hekhalot texts have also undergone a lengthy period of transmission and redaction in the hands of European Jewish communities.

The exact nature, however, of the group or groups that wrote and presumably used the Hekhalot literature, the people we take mainly to have lived in Babylonia in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, is still a subject of debate. Halperin identifies them with the "people of the land," the uneducated peasantry. But Schafer has called them "an elite post-Rabbinic group of scholars" (although later he expressed less certainty about both their chronological and social locations). Swartz and I take them to be a popular religious movement of people with some education who drew on rabbinic tradition in order to subvert it for their own purposes. Finally, Lesses places them in the context of the ascetic and magical traditions of late antiquity without speculating on the exact nature of their community, apart from noting that they acted as individual practitioners with a more or less orthodox Jewish identity rather than as organized sectarians.

In this book I aim to shed some light on these two areas of debate: whether and in what sense the Hekhalot literature represents experience and praxis rather than mere literary fantasy, and who it was who composed and transmitted these mysterious texts.⁵⁰ I propose here to expand on the argument I made in my 1994 article: that the background and meaning of the Hekhalot literature can be substantially illuminated by reading the religious complex it represents—

⁵⁰ Other questions and areas of debate, fascinating as they are, fall outside the scope of the summary of scholarship in this chapter and of the interests of this book. For example, I have said nothing about Halperin's stimulating suggestions in *The Faces of the Chariot* regarding murky aspects of the Merkavah vision of Ezekiel with disturbing and even demonic implications which may have troubled later exegetes, or his proposals to illuminate these implications based on psychoanalytic and analytic psychological theory.

traditionally known as Merkavah mysticism—in light of the anthropological construct called shamanism.

So far in this chapter I have used a number of etic and potentially cross-culturally significant terms without any attempt to define or explain them. These include “mysticism,” “magic,” and “shamanism.” The first two and related terms are used frequently in the secondary literature on the Hekhalot texts, often without elaboration.⁵¹ Chapter 2 of this book is devoted to a survey and synthesis of the literature on these three terms, an explanation of how I use them, and a discussion of the overall methodology that drives my analysis.

Chapters 3–7 present the case for understanding the magico-religious functionaries described in the Hekhalot literature as intermediaries similar to shamans, through correlating features of the texts with the basic elements of the shamanic complex. Chapter 3 deals with the various ways one can become a shaman and compares them with what the Hekhalot literature and related texts tell us about how one became a descender to the chariot. Chapter 4 surveys the ascetic techniques shamans use to gain power over the spiritual world and compares these with the ritual praxes described in the Hekhalot literature. Chapter 5 looks at a condition endured by some shamans, particularly in Arctic regions, which I call the “initiatory disintegration and reintegration,” a subjective experience of being torn apart or burned alive, then resurrected as a creature with vast spiritual powers. I argue that the Hekhalot literature describes a similar experience in its accounts of the heavenly journeys of the descenders to the chariot and their direct encounters with God. In chapter 6, I look at the shaman’s otherworldly journey and the cosmology it presupposes, again arguing that the same cosmology underlies the descent to the chariot in the Hekhalot texts. In chapter 7, I explore the central, unifying element of the shaman’s power—the ability to control helping spirits for various purposes. I argue that this element is also central to the Hekhalot literature.

Chapters 8 and 9 are of a more broadly synthetic character. Chapter 8 analyzes the relationship between the Hekhalot literature and the corpus of Jewish magical texts (or better, “texts of ritual power”) in order to clarify the details of the religious complex behind

⁵¹ The work of Swartz and Lesses provides refreshing exceptions to this generalization.

the Hekhalot texts and to come to a better understanding of their social background. Chapter 9 then collects the passages in the Hekhalot literature which give explicit information about the social location of the writers and integrates this information with the data isolated in earlier chapters, and then compares it with the ways shamans interact with the communities they serve. The conclusion summarizes what we can know about the descenders to the chariot as real magico-religious functionaries.

CHAPTER TWO

MYSTICISM, MAGIC, AND SHAMANISM

Mysticism, magic, shamanism: three controversial etic terms or concepts that have frequently been used, for better or worse, in cross-cultural research on religious studies. All three terms have also been applied in one way or another to the religious complex behind the Hekhalot literature. Each has been the subject of lengthy debate and has generated an enormous amount of scholarly literature. A full review of this literature is beyond the scope of this chapter—indeed, it would take up a book in itself. Nor do I aim to solve any of the major problems arising in the discussion. Instead, I wish to give an overview of the principal issues surrounding each term, especially as these issues relate to the study of Merkavah mysticism and the questions outlined in chapter 1, and to explain my provisional strategies for either using or sidestepping these concepts in the rest of the book. The fourth section in this chapter presents the main thesis I wish to defend, and the fifth reviews the central bodies of cross-cultural evidence I use in defending it.

Mysticism

The word “mysticism” is etymologically related to the word “mystery.” Both derive from the Greek verb *μύω*, “to close” or “to be shut.” As applied to the ancient mystery religions (the best known of which is the Eleusinian mysteries), the word had the double connotation of closing the mouth—that is, keeping the sacred teaching secret (and so, by extension, the verb comes to mean “to be initiated,” Latin *initiāre*)—and of bringing closed eyes to be opened and illuminated by the mysteries. In Neoplatonic thought the root eventually took on the sense of being silent in contemplation, and this meaning is the source of our modern usage of the words “mysticism” and “mystic.”¹

¹ Marvin W. Meyer (ed.), *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987) 4–5; Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard

During the last century scholars have debated at length whether "mysticism" is a useful term in the academic study of religion and, if so, how precisely it should be used. I begin with an old but still pertinent monograph whose detailed treatment of the concept can serve as an appropriate entry into the benefits and problems of its use.² Evelyn Underhill defines mysticism as "the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order; whatever be the theological formula under which that order is understood. This tendency, in great mystics, gradually captures the whole field of consciousness; it dominates their life and, in the experience called 'mystic union,' attains its end." The goal of mysticism, then, is union of the soul with the Absolute.³

Underhill also sets out a psychological process by which the mystic moves toward and gradually attains the goal of union with the divine. She presents a typical "composite portrait" of the experience of the mystic under five chronologically ordered headings. First, there is the "Awakening of the Self," a soul-wrenching conversion in which previously rejected or unexamined theological beliefs suddenly take on a direct and emotionally profound reality. Second, having realized his or her unworthiness in the face of the new divine reality, the mystic undertakes a painful and difficult "Purgation" in order to push aside everything that stands in the way of progress toward mystical union. Third comes the "Illumination of the Self," a joyous sense of the presence of God, often accompanied by a visionary perception of the inner reality behind the physical world. At the time, it feels as though this experience is the final illumination, but the greatest mystics realize that union with God is greater still. They proceed to the fourth stage, the "Dark Night of the Soul" or the "mystical death." This is the final purification of the self, in which the sense of the illuminating Absolute is withdrawn and the instincts and desires of the personality must be denied and ultimately slain until the will is utterly passive and fully in submission to the divine. Only then can the fifth and final stage, "Union" or the "Unitive Life" be attained. Although this union is an absorption of an indi-

University Press, 1987) 7-8; Louis Dupré, "Mysticism," in *ER* 10:245-61, esp. p. 245.

² Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (1911; rpt. New York and Ontario: Meridian, 1974).

³ *Ibid.*, xiv; see also pp. 428-32.

vidual into the divine, the Unitive Life of the highest mystics is generally intensely social: they seek to bring the benefits of their experience into their community. Underhill elaborates on the nature of this mystical union in light of Christian and Muslim traditions, distinguishing the Sufi description of the annihilation or reabsorption of the soul in the Absolute from the Christian view of the Unitive Life as either deification or spiritual marriage.⁴

The importance of Underhill's synthesis can hardly be denied. She has gathered accounts by numerous mystics, particularly in the Christian tradition, and distilled many common features of their experiences into a coherent framework and order. Nevertheless, there are serious problems with her treatment. First, it comes with a strong theological bias in favor of Christianity. Indeed, she claims that "we are bound to allow as a historical fact that mysticism, so far, has found its best map in Christianity." Arguing that the doctrine of the Trinity allowed Christian mystics to incorporate the complementary aspects of mystical experience as pilgrimage toward "a transcendent and unconditioned Absolute" and as "the discovery of that Absolute in the 'ground' or spiritual principle of the self," she asserts that "the Christian atmosphere is the one in which the individual mystic has most often been able to develop his genius in a sane and fruitful way."⁵ Needless to say, all of these claims are debatable and would be contested by those from other religious traditions.

The last point leads to the second major problem with Underhill's synthesis. Despite her appeal at times to "Oriental" (i.e., Muslim) traditions, she says very little about mysticism in the context of world religions, and her largely theistic and Eurocentric system is simply not workable for many religions, especially those of Asian origin. Buddhism, for example, is an essentially agnostic belief system, and its goal of attaining Nirvana, the extinction of all craving and therefore all suffering, cannot be fitted into the framework of mystical union without serious distortion. It is not clear that the various mystical traditions of Hinduism, Taoism, and local indigenous religions would fare much better, although perhaps Jewish Kabbalah and Merkavah mysticism could be argued to be more or less compatible with her ideas.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 167-75, 415, 418-43.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

Several decades after the appearance of Underhill's work, R. C. Zaehner published a monograph that attempted to address these problems.⁶ He proposes a cross-cultural typology of mysticism with three components. First, there is "nature mysticism," which he defines as "the experience of all as one and one as all." It is sometimes called "pantheism," but this is a misnomer, since the etymology of the word implies the meaning "all is God," whereas nature mysticism makes no assumption of the existence of God. Zaehner suggests it might better be called "pan-en-hen-ism," that is, "all-in-one-ism."⁷ Nature mysticism is exemplified by the religion of the *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* and Aldous Huxley's work about his experimentation with mescaline, and is not clearly distinguishable from some forms of insanity. Second, there is "monistic mysticism," exemplified by Buddhism and the Hindu Sāṃkhya darśana, which teaches "that when the individual soul realizes itself as the Absolute, this is a stage beyond which it cannot go."⁸ In essence, the individual soul and absolute reality are in the end one and the same. Third, there is "theistic mysticism," of which Christianity and the Vedānta darśana are examples. Theistic mysticism assumes there to be a God or absolute reality apart from the soul, with whom or with which the mystic seeks union. "[I]t is the cutting off of one's ties with the world, the settling in quietness in one's own immortal soul, and finally the offering of that soul up to its Maker. The first stage is that to which the monist aspires: the second lies beyond and appears only to be attainable with the active help of God Who is felt to be other than the immortal soul."⁹

Ninian Smart has criticized Zaehner's position on a number of grounds. First, Zaehner writes with a theological agenda. He assumes the truth of Catholic Christianity in his arguments and treats theistic mysticism as superior to the other two types. Second, for his typology to work, Zaehner construes some religious doctrines in a manner that would not be accepted by those within the tradition in question, by interpreting key terms in ways that do not fit their normal contexts. In Smart's terminology, he offers "hetero-interpretation"

⁶ R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane: An Inquiry into Some Varieties of Praeternatural Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

of other religions, with a high degree of "ramification." This problem is especially acute in Zaehner's understanding of Buddhism, which introduces the concept of a self by interpreting the word "atman" in Buddhist texts in a way unlikely to be the original or orthodox meaning in context. Smart accepts the distinction between nature mysticism and the other two as useful, but argues that the distinction between monistic and theistic mysticism, although present as "auto-interpretation" in nontheistic and theistic religious systems, is phenomenologically unnecessary.¹⁰ At the end of his article, Smart summarizes his own position on mysticism as follows:

- (1) Phenomenologically, mysticism is everywhere the same.
- (2) Different flavors, however, accrue to the experiences of mystics because of their ways of life and modes of auto-interpretation.
- (3) The truth of interpretation depends in large measure on factors extrinsic to the mystical experience itself. Thus, the question of whether mysticism is a valid means of knowledge concerning the Transcendent is only part of a much wider set of theological questions.¹¹

In my opinion, Smart's critique of Zaehner's reading of Buddhism leads to the opposite conclusion from the one he suggests: Zaehner's three categories are valid in themselves, but his typology needs more categories, not fewer. Monism does seem to fit some traditions, such as the Sāṃkhya darśana, but it does not work for Buddhism; presumably, another category would have to be created to accommodate it. Smart's objection to the distinction between monistic and theistic mysticism is fundamentally theological, not descriptive. He admits that the traditions themselves make this distinction, but he believes that there is a single, primary mysticism behind the various mysticisms which can be described in phenomenological terms. In other words, he asserts that his etic definition is more true than their emic ones.

Steven T. Katz has criticized Smart's approach along these lines, arguing for "the recognition that in order to understand mysticism it is *not* just a question of studying the reports of the mystic after the experiential event but of acknowledging that the experience itself

¹⁰ Ninian Smart, "Interpretation and Mystical Experience," in *Understanding Mysticism*, ed. Richard Woods (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980 [first published in 1975 in *Religious Studies* 1]) 78–91. See also Ninian Smart, *Reasons and Faiths: An Investigation of Religious Discourse, Christian and Non-Christian* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958) esp. chaps. 2 and 3.

¹¹ Smart, "Interpretation and Mystical Experience," 91.

as well as the form in which it is reported is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape, his experience." He concludes, "If mystical experience is always the same or similar in essence, as is so often claimed, then this has to be demonstrated by recourse to, and accurate handling of, the evidence, convincing logical argument, and coherent epistemological procedures." Thus he argues for the existence of "a wide variety of mystical experiences which are, at least in respect of some determinative aspects, culturally and ideologically grounded."¹²

The debate between Smart and Katz exemplifies the nature of the debate about the meaning of mysticism over the last generation. Some take mysticism to be a definable cross-cultural phenomenon described in different ways from culture to culture, but ultimately delimitable to a common experience or small group of experiences. Others argue that it cannot be demonstrated that a common core of experience lies behind the accounts of mysticism by the mystics. Indeed culture and beliefs influence experience as well as being influenced by it. Mysticism in different cultures consists of different experiences, which do not necessarily overlap or cannot be proved to overlap.

No consensus has been achieved, and it seems unlikely that one will be anytime soon.¹³ It seems to me that there is a deep metaphysical issue at stake here which needs to be faced squarely. In Kantian terms, this debate is about "noumena" rather than "phenomena." Phenomena are the things accessible to us as mediated by our senses and the structure of our brains. Noumena are the things themselves, reality in its raw form before being translated, and presumably to some degree distorted, by our sensory apparatus and

¹² Steven T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (London: Sheldon, 1978) 22-74; the quotations are on pp. 26, 65, 66 (author's emphasis).

¹³ The literature is vast and cannot detain us here. Some representative studies published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* in recent years include Huston Smith, "Is There a Perennial Philosophy?" *JAAR* 55 (1987) 553-66; Sallie B. King, "Two Epistemological Models for the Interpretation of Mysticism," *JAAR* 56 (1988) 257-79; "Responses and Rejoinders: On Mysticism" (a debate between Katz, Smith, and King), *JAAR* 56 (1988) 751-61; Jonathan Shear, "On Mystical Experiences as Support for the Perennial Philosophy," *JAAR* 62 (1994) 319-42; Larry Short, "Mysticism, Mediation, and the Non-Linguistic," *JAAR* 63 (1995) 659-75; F. Samuel Brainard, "Defining 'Mystical Experience,'" *JAAR* 64 (1996) 359-93.

neurology.¹⁴ We have access to the mystics' own descriptions of their experiences, and they themselves have access to the experiences as processed by their own brains, but none of us can get at the unmediated reality (assuming there is such a thing) which produces the experiences. Thus although cognitive psychology, neurophysiology, and cybernetics are likely to contribute more and more to the discussion, they will at most give us a better understanding of the neurological phenomena. The putative noumena will remain elusive.¹⁵

In any case, for our purposes the central debate about the nature of mysticism can be set aside, since all parties agree that even if it is a transcultural universal on an ultimate level, mysticism takes different forms in different cultures and thus must be broken down into categories.

"Mysticism" is the general term that has been applied most frequently to the religion of the Hekhalot literature. Scholem calls this religion "cosmocratorial mysticism" or "Basilmorphism," which focuses on God's unapproachable majesty, without any sense of divine immanence and with little sense of the love of God. There is ecstasy, but no mystical union, and "the chief peculiarity of this form of mysticism, its emphasis on God's might and magnificence, opens the door to the transformation of mysticism into theurgy."¹⁶ Gruenwald goes further, wishing to restrict the term "mystical" to the ascent traditions in the Hekhalot literature and to exclude the Sar Torah and adjuration material from this category.¹⁷ Although Schäfer sees more emphasis in the texts on a loving relationship with God, he

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965 [first published in German in 1781 and 1787]) 257–75 (B 294–315).

¹⁵ Some relevant studies of altered states of consciousness include Barbara W. Lex, "The Neurobiology of Ritual Trance," in *The Spectrum of Ritual: A Biogenetic Structural Analysis*, ed. Eugene G. d'Aquili et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979) 117–51; Eugene G. d'Aquili and Charles D. Laughlin, Jr., "The Neurobiology of Myth and Ritual," *ibid.*, 152–82; Roland Fischer, "A Cartography of the Ecstatic and Meditative States," in *Understanding Mysticism* 286–305 (first published in slightly longer form in *Science* 174 (1971) 897–904). Note also the work of Kevin Warwick, Professor of Cybernetics at Reading University in the United Kingdom, who is experimenting with human-machine telepathy by implanting computer chips into his own nervous system; see his essay "I Want to Be a Cyborg," *The Guardian*, 26 January 2000.

¹⁶ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* 54–57; the quotations are on pp. 54 and 56.

¹⁷ Ithamar Gruenwald, "Literary and Redactional Issues in the Study of the Hekhalot Literature," in *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism* 175–89, esp. pp. 184–85.

follows Scholem's lead in using the term "mysticism" for the Hekhalot traditions with some reluctance, and he avoids using it in practice.¹⁸ Elliot R. Wolfson accepts the use of the term but limits it very strictly to cases where the adept ascends to heaven and is deified by enthronement.¹⁹

Other examples could be given, but I think those in the previous paragraph make my point. There is no agreement on how the concept of mysticism should be applied to the religion of the Hekhalot literature, and there is discomfort with the use of the term at all. These facts are not surprising, given the lack of agreement about mysticism among scholars of religion. I am quite happy to speak of Merkavah mysticism, and would even define it further as a form of Zaehner's theistic mysticism or Underhill's mystical union by deification, but in general I think the concept is too vague and subjective to be much use for serious analysis. We need a more precise terminology and a better methodological framework.

Magic

The word "magic" is also notoriously difficult, and its meaning and legitimacy for scholarly discourse has also been widely debated. Before reviewing the discussion or attempting a definition, I wish to survey the corpus of texts that are usually pigeonholed as "Jewish magical literature."²⁰ With this material in mind, we can tackle the problem of magic as a cross-cultural phenomenon.

The earliest Jewish "magical" texts were recovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls. They date from around the turn of the era and consist of fragmentary copies of exorcism hymns (4Q444; 4Q510-4Q511 and 11Q11),²¹ a poorly preserved Aramaic apotropaic incan-

¹⁸ Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* 3-5, 37-48, 143, 148-49, 164-66.

¹⁹ Elliot R. Wolfson, "Mysticism and the Poetic-Liturgical Compositions from Qumran: A Response to Bilhah Nitzan," *JQR* 85 (1994) 185-202; idem, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994) esp. chap. 3, "Visionary Ascent and Enthronement in the Hekhalot Literature."

²⁰ General surveys include those by P. S. Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic," in *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, ed. Emil Schürer, Geza Vermes et al. (rev. ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986) 3.1:342-79; Peter Schäfer, "Jewish Magic Literature in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages," *JJS* 41 (1990) 75-91.

²¹ The manuscript 4Q444 has been published by Esther Chazon in *Qumran Cave*

tation (4Q560) that anticipates much found in the Babylonian incantation bowls;²² an Aramaic "brontologion" (4Q318), a genre of omen that predicts the future by interpreting thunder;²³ a Hebrew physiognomic and astrological text (4Q186) written in a cryptic script, whose content is strikingly similar to some medieval documents in Hebrew; a text with thematic similarities to physiognomic and Mer-kavah traditions (4Q534); and a badly damaged Aramaic work that may also be a physiognomic tractate (4Q561).²⁴

More than thirty metal amulets inscribed in Aramaic and dating from approximately the fourth to the seventh centuries CE have been recovered, mostly in Palestine and Syria. These contain adjurations for healing, protection while traveling, romantic success, exorcism

4 *XX Poetical and Liturgical Texts, Part 2*, ed. Esther Chazon et al. (DJD 29; Oxford: Clarendon, 1999) 367–78. 4Q510–511 were published by Maurice Baillet in *Qumrân Grotte 4 III (4Q482–4Q520)* (DJD 7; Oxford: Clarendon, 1982) 215–62, pls. lv–lxxi. See also Bilhah Nitzan, "Hymns from Qumran לַפְּסוּד וְלִבְרָה Evil Ghosts (4Q510–511)," *Tarbiz* 55 (1985–86) 19–46 (in Hebrew); idem, "Hymns from Qumran—4Q510–4Q511," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research*, ed. Devorah Dimant and Uriel Rappaport (Leiden: Brill, 1992) 53–63; Joseph M. Baumgarten, "The Qumran Songs against Demons," *Tarbiz* 55 (1985–86) 442–45 (in Hebrew). 11Q11 was first published by J. P. M. van der Ploeg, "Un petit rouleau de psaumes apocryphes (11QPsAp*)," in *Tradition und Glaube: Das frühe Christentum in seiner Umwelt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971) 128–39 and pls. 2–7. The official publication is found in *Qumran Cave 11 II 11Q2–18 and 11Q20–31*, ed. Florentino García Martínez et al. (DJD 23; Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 181–205. See also Emile Puech, "11QPsAp*: Un rituel d'exorcismes. Essai de reconstruction," *RevQ* 14/55 (1990) 377–408; idem, "Les deux derniers psaumes davidiques du rituel d'exorcisme, 11QPsAp* IV 4–V 14," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research* 64–89.

²² Douglas L. Penny and Michael O. Wise, "By the Power of Beelzebub: An Aramaic Incantation Formula from Qumran (4Q560)," *JBL* 113 (1994) 627–50.

²³ Michael Owen Wise, "Thunder in Gemini: An Aramaic Brontologion (4Q318) from Qumran," in *Thunder in Gemini and Other Essays on the History, Language and Literature of Second Temple Palestine* (JSPSS 15; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 13–50; J. C. Greenfield, M. Sokoloff, et al., "An Astrological Text from Qumran (4Q318) and Reflections on Some Zodiacal Names," *RevQ* 16/64 (1995) 507–25.

²⁴ 4Q186 was first published by J. M. Allegro in "An Astrological Cryptic Document from Qumran," *JSS* 9 (1964) 291–94 and pl. I; idem, *Qumrân Cave 4 I (4Q158–4Q186)* (DJD 5; Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) 88–91, pl. xxxi. 4Q534 was first published by Jean Starcky in "Un texte messianique araméen de la Grotte 4 de Qumrân," in *Mémorial du cinquantenaire de l'École des langues orientales anciennes de l'Institut Catholique de Paris* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1964) 51–66. A transliteration and translation of 4Q561 has been published by Robert Eisenman and Michael Wise in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered* (London and New York: Penguin, 1992) 263–65; see photographs PAM 41.944 and 43.598. For additional bibliography and discussion of the Qumran physiognomic texts see Davila, "4QMess ar (4Q534) and Mer-kavah Mysticism."

and protection from evil spirits, acquiring political power, and safe pregnancy.²⁵

Dating from roughly the same period, a large number of earthenware bowls inscribed in Aramaic have been recovered in Iraq. Many of these apparently functioned as a kind of "demon trap" or "demon repellent," buried upside down under the threshold of a house to catch or expel maurading demons. Other functions include spells for healing, for protection from demons and ghosts, sorcery, and the evil eye, and for silencing critics; curses on enemies; *historiolae* (stories whose telling is meant to generate power); and even a charm for the fermenting of wine.²⁶

Numerous "magical" texts have also been recovered from the Cairo Geniza, including many amulets and a number of booklets of recipes. These contain adjurations for a great many purposes, such as requests for favor from human beings and success in business; for protection of women during pregnancy and childbirth; for cursing or silencing enemies; for healing or protection from numerous afflictions; various sorts of love and hate charms; spells for divination and better memory (including memory of Torah); spells for power over

²⁵ Published by Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked in *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (2nd ed.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1987) 39–122; idem, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1993) 41–109; Roy Kotansky, "Two Inscribed Jewish Aramaic Amulets from Syria," *IEJ* 41 (1991) 267–81; R. Kotansky, J. Naveh, and S. Shaked, "A Greek Aramaic Silver Amulet from Egypt in the Ashmolean Museum," *Le Muséon* 105 (1992) 5–25.

²⁶ Major publications of the magic bowls include James A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1913); J. N. Epstein, "Gloses babylo-araméennes," *REJ* 73 (1921) 27–58; *REJ* 74 (1922) 40–72; Cyrus H. Gordon, "Aramaic Magic Bowls in the Istanbul and Baghdad Museums," *ArOr* 6 (1934) 319–34 + 6 pls.; idem, "An Aramaic Exorcism," *AfO* 12 (1937–39) 466–78; idem, "Aramaic and Mandaic Magical Bowls," *ArOr* 9 (1937) 84–106; idem, "Aramaic Incantation Bowls," *Or* 10 (1941) 116–41, 272–84, 339–60; idem, "Two Aramaic Incantations," in *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies: Essays in Honor of William Sandford Lazor*, ed. Gary A. Tuttle (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978) 231–44; W. S. McCullough, *Jewish and Mandaean Incantation Bowls in the Royal Ontario Museum* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967); Stephen A. Kaufman, "A Unique Magic Bowl from Nippur," *JNES* 32 (1973) 170–74; Charles D. Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls* (SBLDS 17; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975); idem, "Two New Aramaic Incantation Bowls," *BASOR* 223 (1976) 15–23; Edward M. Cook, "An Aramaic Incantation Bowl from Khafaje," *BASOR* 285 (1992) 79–81; Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* 123–214; idem, *Magic Spells and Formulae* 111–43; Christa Müller-Kessler, "Eine aramäische Zauberschale im Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte zu Berlin," *Or* 63 (1994) 5–9, pls. I–III; Shaul Shaked, "Peace Be upon You, Exalted Angels": On Hekhalot, Liturgy and Incantation Bowls," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2 (1995) 197–219.

spirits; and incantation prayers. There are also copies of various treatises, such as the *Shimush Tehillim* ("The Magical Use of the Psalms"), a systematic collection of incantations based on the Psalms; the *'Inyan Soṭah* (an adaptation of the ritual for testing a suspected adulteress); the *'Arba'ah Yesodot* (the "Four Foundations" of power inherent in the world); and the *Sheva' Ma'alot* (the "Seven Steps"). Fragments of liturgical-magical works also survive (such as *Sheva' Zutarti*).²⁷

In addition, handbooks that compile groups of adjurations and spells have been passed down in the medieval manuscript tradition and sometimes also survive in fragments from the Cairo Geniza. The best known of these is *Sepher HaRazim* ("The Book of the Mysteries"), which organizes its contents around hierarchies of angels in the seven heavens.²⁸ Others include *Harba di Moshe* ("The Sword of Moses")²⁹ and *Havdalah di R. Akiva* ("The Havdalah of R. Akiva," a work structured around the ceremony that marks the end of the Sabbath).³⁰ A short Aramaic document with a quite stable text is found in some of the Hekhalot manuscripts (*SH-L* §§489–95). Adjurations for the interpretation of dreams are also scattered among the medieval manuscripts.³¹

Finally, a number of tractates on physiognomy (the art of discerning personality from physical appearance) and astrology survive from the Talmudic period and the early Middle Ages. These include *Baraita di Mazzalot* ("The External Tractate on the Constellations"), a general treatise on astrology in Hebrew,³² and several physiognomic

²⁷ Major publications of the Cairo Geniza magical texts include Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* 215–40; idem, *Magic Spells and Formulae* 145–242; Lawrence H. Schiffman and Michael D. Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts from the Cairo Geniza* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked, *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza* (3 vols.; TSAJ 42, 64, 72; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994, 1997, 1999). A fourth volume, of divinatory and astrological texts, is promised.

²⁸ Mordecai Margalioth, *Sepher Ha-Razim: A Newly Recovered Book of Magic from the Talmudic Period* (Jerusalem: Yediot Achronot, 1966) (in Hebrew); English translation by Michael A. Morgan in *Sepher Ha-Razim: The Book of the Mysteries* (SBLTT 25/SBLPS 11; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983).

²⁹ Moses Gaster, *Studies and Texts in Folklore, Magic, Mediaeval Romance, Hebrew Apocrypha and Samaritan Archaeology* (3 vols.; 1928; rpt. New York: Ktav, 1971) 1:288–337; 3:68–103; *SH-L* §§598–622, 640–50; Peter Schäfer et al., *Übersetzung IV* vii–xvii, 1–17, 42–50.

³⁰ Gershom Scholem, "HAVDALA DE-RABBI 'AQIVA: A Source for the Tradition of Jewish Magic During the Geonic Period," *Tarbiz* 50 (1980–81) 243–81 (in Hebrew).

³¹ These are collected by Lesses in *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 395–411.

³² Wertheimer and Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashot* 2:7–37.

works, one of which (published by Scholem) is pseudepigraphically ascribed to R. Ishmael, a hero of the Hekhalot literature.³³

So much for our corpus. What then do we mean by calling the material in it “magic”? The word itself comes from the Greek word *μαγεία*, that which is done by a *μάγος* or magus, a priest of the Persian religion. But early on the word “magus” also takes on the meaning “enchanter” or even “sorcerer.” Philosophers in late antiquity distinguished lower magic or “howling” (*γοητεία*) from their own higher magic, which they called “theurgy” (*θειουργία*) or “divine work.”³⁴ From the beginning, the word “magic” has connoted something done by the other, by those outside normal society, and in both modern scholarly and ancient discourse the word has routinely been contrasted unfavorably with “religion,” “miracle,” and “science.” Such language often moves into the theological realm, setting up a logocentric opposition that obfuscates the descriptive scholarly enterprise. If “magic” merely means religious cult that is disapproved of by the speaker, the term serves little purpose outside a specific confessional context.

This is one reason for dropping the use of the word as an etic concept. Another is that scholars who try to use it in an objective and descriptive sense can never quite agree on what they mean by it. But there is a difficulty in dropping it entirely; those who reject the usefulness of the term usually find themselves forced to use it anyway.³⁵ It is open to debate whether this is because there is an inescapable cross-cultural phenomenon with which we have to come

³³ Gershom Scholem, “Physiognomy and Chiromancy,” in *Sepher Assaf* (Festschrift for Simha Assaf), ed. M. D. Cassuto et al. (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1953) 459–95 (in Hebrew); idem, “Ein Fragment zur Physiognomik und Chiromantik aus der Tradition der spätantiken jüdischen Esoterik,” in *Liber Amicorum: Studies in Honour of Professor Dr. C. J. Bleeker* (Leiden: Brill, 1969) 175–93; Ithamar Gruenwald, “Further Jewish Physiognomic and Chiromantic Fragments,” *Tarbiz* 40 (1970–71) 301–19 (in Hebrew); Peter Schäfer, “Ein neues Fragment zur Metoposkopie und Chiromantik” (on the Geniza fragment G12).

³⁴ For reviews of the evidence, see Hans Dieter Betz, “Magic in Greco-Roman Antiquity,” in *ER* 9:93–97; Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997). It is worth emphasizing that the word “theurgy” was coined to support a theological agenda and is no more useful as an etic term than “magic.”

³⁵ This point has been made by H. S. Versnel, “Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion,” *Numen* 38 (1991) 177–97, esp. p. 187; Peter Schäfer, “Magic and Religion in Ancient Judaism,” in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 19–43, esp. pp. 23–25.

to terms or because our own ethnocentric biases about what religion should be are so ingrained that we have not been able to escape them.

Underhill sets up a dichotomy between mysticism and magic which is useful for my discussion, at least as a foil. She says that magic "claims to be a practical, intellectual, highly individualistic science; working towards the declared end of enlarging the sphere on which the human will can work, and obtaining experimental knowledge of planes of being usually regarded as transcendental."³⁶ Magic, then, is esoteric practice by an individual seeking to gain knowledge of and power over the supernatural realm. It is based on three doctrines or axioms: the existence of the "Astral Light" (a medium or force that the magician seeks to access and use); the "Power of the Will," positing that there are no limits to the power of the disciplined human will; and the "Doctrine of Analogy," "an implicit correspondence between appearance and reality." Underhill considers magic inferior because it falls short of what she holds to be the real goal of esotericism—mystical union with the Absolute.³⁷ This view of magic, which is sometimes called the substantialist approach, is also exemplified by the comments of John Middleton.

Magic is usually defined subjectively rather than by any agreed-upon content. But there is a wide consensus as to what this content is. Most peoples in the world perform acts by which they intend to bring about certain events or conditions, whether in nature or among people, that they hold to be the consequences of these acts. If we use Western terms and assumptions, the cause and effect relationship between the act and the consequence is mystical, not scientifically validated. The acts typically comprise behavior such as manipulation of objects and recitation of verbal formulas or spells. In a given society magic may be performed by a specialist.³⁸

The definitions of Underhill and Middleton apply well enough to the ancient and medieval Jewish magical texts, as well as to the Hekhalot literature, but the usefulness of this approach is undermined by both the explicit and the implicit value judgments of the

³⁶ Underhill, *Mysticism* 152.

³⁷ Underhill discusses magic in relation to mysticism in *Mysticism* 149–64; the quotation is on p. 159.

³⁸ John Middleton, "Theories of Magic," in *ER* 9:82–89; the quotation is on p. 82. Middleton also gives a full survey of earlier scholarship on magic which will not delay us here.

definitions—magic is either inferior religion or failed science—and by their very flexibility. Both definitions fit not only magic but also many other religious practices not normally thought of as magical, including, for example, Indian Yoga, the Catholic Mass, and fundamentalist Protestants searching the Bible for guidance.

Another way of evaluating magic can be called the historical or evolutionary approach, represented by a recent book by Daniel Lawrence O’Keefe.³⁹ Drawing on anthropology, psychoanalysis, and history to try to explain the origins of magic in human societies, O’Keefe defines magic, “in the strict sense,” as sacred institutions related to religion but often of an illicit or peripheral nature and mostly based on the relationship between practitioner and client rather than on community ties. His thesis is that primitive human beings had (or have) a much weaker sense of self than modern Westerners, and that magic emerged out of religion, developing to protect this fragile self from potentially fatal social pressures such as “voodoo death,” “soul loss,” and even anxiety. Seizing the offensive, the weak self regained a sense of control which aided self-preservation. The resulting dialectic between magic and religion actually renews religion.

This fascinating historical approach may well give us insights into the origins of magic and religion, but I have two fundamental criticisms of it. First, to all intents and purposes, it is nonfalsifiable. Given our current knowledge of Neolithic and earlier human society, we simply do not have the evidence to test this sort of historical theory, and we may never have it. Second, theories about the origins of magic are not very useful for increasing our understanding of the magical texts and traditions we actually have, and these are my interest here.

The functionalist approach is another way of attempting to make sense of the concept of magic. For functionalists, the important thing is not what constitutes magic in reality, but rather what magic means in social discourse. In a given society there may be no actual magicians, but magic may still be part of the cultural script in the form of accusations and of hostile reinterpretations of one group’s beliefs by outsiders. A classic example of a functionalist analysis is E. E.

³⁹ Daniel Lawrence O’Keefe, *Stolen Lightning: The Social Theory of Magic* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1982).

Evans-Pritchard's study of the religious beliefs of the Central African Zande.⁴⁰ According to Evans-Pritchard, accusations of witchcraft formed an important part of the Zande culture of the early twentieth century. Someone who suffers misfortune carries out a special form of divination (poison administered to domestic fowls) to determine the identity of the witch who caused it. Receiving an answer from the poison oracle, the victim arranges for a representative to confront the alleged witch in a carefully orchestrated accusation ritual. The accused denies any awareness of being a witch, but nevertheless normally performs a ritual to counteract any witchcraft he or she may have unintentionally exuded. Evans-Pritchard found little evidence for the actual practice of witchcraft in Zande society, so it is possible that it existed only in the cultural script of accusation, denial, and ritual negation.

I. M. Lewis has done much to clarify how accusations of magic or sorcery can have important functions in a society, whether or not the accusations are true or magic is actually practiced.⁴¹ Lewis shows that possession cults are often used by those who are socially subordinate to challenge the authority of the society's central cult. Members of the peripheral cult experience possession by spirits, who demand favors or improved conditions from the central powers for their possessed victims and their followers. If not too outrageous, such favors are often granted, thus indirectly relieving some of the frustrations of the underclass. But if the peripheral intermediaries go too far in their demands, the central authorities can fight back by accusing the intermediate cult of witchcraft, an accusation often fatal for the accused. In this way excessive social tension is defused. In societies where possession cults are accepted as valid and viewed reasonably positively, the relationship between the central powers and peripheral possession cults takes on a dialectical character in which both sides press their claims only so far and an optimum balance of social tension and release is maintained.

⁴⁰ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1937).

⁴¹ I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1971). Lewis's insights have been applied usefully to prophecy in ancient Israel by Robert R. Wilson in *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); idem, *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) esp. pp. 67-80.

Finally, proposals have been made in recent years to replace entirely the concept of magic with clearer and more descriptive terminology. Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith have proposed that “ritual power” is a better category in which to place what has traditionally been called magical literature. They point out that “ritual” is “a more useful, less value-laden term than either ‘magic’ or ‘religion,’” and that so-called magical texts are unquestionably ritual texts. Moreover, although many or most rituals have something to do with power, magical texts “are overt in their manipulation of power and force.”⁴²

Jonathan Z. Smith also wishes to drop the term “magic” from scholarly discourse. He writes,

I see little merit in continuing the use of the substantive term “magic” in second-order, theoretical, academic discourse. We have better and more precise scholarly taxa for each of the phenomena commonly denoted by “magic” which, among other benefits, create more useful categories for comparison. For any culture I am familiar with, we can trade places between the corpus of materials conventionally labeled “magical” and corpora labeled by other generic terms (e.g., healing, divining, execrative) with no cognitive loss. Indeed, there would be a gain in that this sort of endeavor promises to yield a set of middle-range typologies—always the more useful kind—more adequate than the highly general, usually dichotomous, taxa commonly employed.⁴³

As with the term “mysticism,” scholars tend to use permutations of the words “magic” and “theurgy” to describe the practices found in the Hekhalot literature, but usually without a theoretical discussion of the meaning of the words.⁴⁴ Swartz is an exception. Acknowledging the problems in formulating a cross-cultural definition of magic, he opts for a heuristic definition that marks off a particular corpus of Jewish literature, more or less that which was surveyed earlier in this section. He identifies three traits of this material: “(1) the empha-

⁴² Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith (eds.), *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994) 4, 5. Meyer and Smith’s comments pertain specifically to the texts included in this volume, but the points they make are clearly meant to apply to magical literature in general.

⁴³ Jonathan Z. Smith, “Trading Places,” in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 1995) 13–27; the quotation is on pp. 16–17.

⁴⁴ For example, Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* 50–51, 56, 77–78; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* 109–110, 225; Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot* 377, 384, 429, 434–35, 450; Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* 4, 40, 49, 67–69, 109–12, 142–46, 158–59.

sis on the power of the name of God; (2) the intermediacy of the angels in negotiating between divine providence and human needs; and (3) the application of divine names and ritual practices for the needs of specific individuals."⁴⁵ Lesses is another exception. As indicated by the title of her monograph, she accepts the terminology proposed by Meyer and Richard Smith and takes the use of names, adjurations, and incantations in the Hekhalot literature to consist of "ritual practices to gain power."⁴⁶

Again, I make no claim to solve the problems associated with the word "magic." My approach, like Swartz's, will be primarily heuristic, although I think mine also has cross-cultural validity. With the functionalists, I see the most legitimate use of the term to apply to cultural scripts that use it mainly as an accusation or pejorative. Magic is someone else's objectionable religious cult, sometimes so objectionable that we call it "witchcraft" and set out to put an end to it and the practitioners.

I would propose, however, that this use of the word remains legitimate in certain cases that fall outside the functionalist parameters, namely when the accusation is true. To put it another way, it is in principle possible, and almost certainly true sometimes in practice, that there are people who actually consider themselves to be magicians, sorcerers, γόητες ("howling sorcerers"), or whatever term of accusation is appropriate in their cultural context. Such people would use their magic as ritual power in a conscious context of social deviance, and no doubt social deviance theory would help us understand them. Such analysis would be worth doing, but it cannot delay us here. I simply note that in places the texts we traditionally label as magical literature do seem to operate from a perspective of social deviance, and it would be well to keep this in mind in analyzing the Hekhalot literature.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Swartz, *Scholastic Magic* 18–22; the quotation is on p. 20.

⁴⁶ Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 55–61.

⁴⁷ See, in particular, Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (rev. ed.; New York: Free Press, 1973). The Greek magical papyri offer examples of behavior that would be considered deviant in Greco-Egyptian society, such as the robbing of graves and the use of human corpses and body parts in rituals (e.g., PGM IV.2125–39, 2140–44, 2577–78; XIII.275–85; XIXa.15, 49). These texts are translated in *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, vol. 1: *Texts*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz (2nd ed.; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992). One may legitimately doubt whether such rituals were actually carried out, but nevertheless, the attitude is consciously deviant. If we follow Becker's

These legitimate uses apart, however, from this point on I will avoid the term "magic" in favor of "ritual power." The texts surveyed at the beginning of this section all fit comfortably under this rubric, which is more neutral than "magic."⁴⁸ But more important, I will follow up this terminological shift with Jonathan Smith's trade of places: my primary focus will be on the form, genre, and social context of the individual texts, whatever they are called as an assemblage.

My main interest in the Jewish texts of ritual empowerment surveyed above is that they have parallels on many levels with the Hekhalot literature. Indeed, on the broadest level, Lesses has shown that a central element of the Hekhalot texts themselves is the quest for ritual power. In addition, the two corpora have a similar technical terminology and cosmology, share similar scribal conventions, and sometimes even have close literary parallels. These affinities require a comprehensive analysis, which I undertake in three places in the rest of this book. In chapter 3, I explore the connections between the Hekhalot literature and the Jewish astrological and physiognomic texts. In chapter 8, I look in detail at the parallels between the Hekhalot literature and other Jewish texts of ritual power in an effort to establish more clearly the social roles and social context of the descenders to the chariot. And in chapter 9, as part of a concluding survey of the evidence analyzed in this book, I ask whether the descenders to the chariot can be considered magicians, as a result of either accusations directed against them or their own deliberate identification with socially labeled deviant ideas or practices.

typology, magicians of this type would usually be engaging in "secret deviance," in which "an improper act is committed, yet no one notices it or reacts to it as a violation of the rules" (*Outsiders* 20).

⁴⁸ One must be cautious of too much attention to the definition of terms, lest one fall into an infinite regress, and it is worth noting that the following major works on ritual studies never propose a global definition of "ritual": Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); idem, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (rev. ed.; Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1995). For my purposes I accept Evan M. Zuesse's definition of "ritual," as "those conscious and voluntary, repetitious and stylized symbolic bodily actions that are centered on cosmic structures and/or sacred presences" ("Ritual," *ER* 12:405-22, the quotation is on p. 405), and Dennis H. Wrong's definition of "power" as "the capacity of some persons to produce intended and foreseen effects on others" (*Power: Its Forms, Bases and Uses* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1979] 5). Other works on social power include Raymond D. Fogelson and Richard N. Adams (eds.), *The Anthropology of Power: Ethnographic Studies from Asia, Oceania and the New World* (New York and London:

Shamanism

Unlike either "mysticism" or "magic," the concept "shamanism" is widely, although not universally, accepted by anthropologists as a usable etic, cross-cultural category.⁴⁹ The word "shaman" comes via Russian from the Tungus word *šaman*, which, whatever its etymology,⁵⁰ refers to a religious functionary in Siberian society who acts as an intermediary between a human community and the divine realm. But the Siberian functionary exemplifies a type of male or female intermediary found in many other cultures by many other names, a type whose characteristic traits can be isolated as the "shamanic complex." It is perhaps unfortunate that these intermediaries are conventionally assigned the title they bear in the culture where they were first noticed by ethnographers, but there is no help for it now, and words for other religious specialists (e.g., "priest," "prophet," "medicine man," "diviner") also carry cultural baggage that must be discarded before they can be used for cross-cultural comparison.

Academic Press, 1977); Steven Lukes (ed.), *Power* (Washington Square, New York: New York University Press, 1986); and Angela Cheater (ed.), *The Anthropology of Power: Empowerment and Disempowerment in Changing Structures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁴⁹ Clifford Geertz is an oft-quoted exception when he writes, "But even at its simplest folk and tribal levels—where the individuality of religious traditions has so often been dissolved into such desiccated types as 'animism,' 'animatism,' 'totemism,' 'shamanism,' 'ancestor worship,' and all the other insipid categories by means of which ethnographers of religion devitalize their data—the idiosyncratic character of how various groups of men behave because of what they believe they have experienced is clear" ("Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* [N.p.: HarperCollins, 1973] 87–125; the quotation is on p. 122.) I am largely in agreement with Geertz's comments, as I hope my critiques of the categories "mysticism" and "magic" above show. He is very concerned with perfecting the conceptual tools for a "thick description" of individual cultures, tools such as the ideas of "symbol" and "ritual" in the essay quoted above. This concern for accurate analysis of particular cultures is, of course, of central importance to anthropology, but it does not obviate the importance of cross-cultural comparison or its need for adequate tools. Naturally, the comparisons must be carried out with methodological rigor and careful attention to specifics of the cultural systems in question, all the more so when one is analyzing past cultures in the light of ethnographic data. Without taking a position on the other categories Geertz mentions, I maintain that the category "shamanism" is a useful tool for the comparative enterprise. For some comments on the proper methodology for the use of anthropology in the study of past cultures, see Wilson, *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament* esp. pp. 28–29.

⁵⁰ Pali and Turko-Mongolian etymologies have been suggested, but there are difficulties with both. In any case, linguistic usage is more important than linguistic

Åke Hulthkrantz has described the shaman as "a social functionary who, with the help of guardian spirits, attains ecstasy in order to create a rapport with the supernatural world on behalf of his group members."⁵¹ The shaman, then, is known especially for achieving "ecstasy," a trance state in which he or she "stands outside" the body. This ecstatic state usually involves the perception that the soul of the shaman is ascending or descending to levels outside of mundane reality. In recent years, the nature of this state and the overall psychology of shamanism have become subjects of particular interest. The "Shamanic State of Consciousness" (SSC) has been described as a type of "altered state of consciousness" (ASC) which has been the subject of psychological and neurological investigation.⁵² These approaches are quite important, and in the long run they may provide us with valuable data on the nature of shamanism (for example, brain states associated specifically with the SSC). Unfortunately, psychological and neurological approaches are not very useful for my purposes, since of course we cannot study the brain responses of the long-dead practitioners described in the Hekhalot literature—assuming they represent real people on some level at all.

origins for phenomenological analysis. See Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (rev. ed.; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964) 4, 495–98; Michel Perrin, *Le chamanisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995) 9–10.

⁵¹ Åke Hulthkrantz, "A Definition of Shamanism," *Temenos* 9 (1973) 25–37; the quotation is on p. 34. For comparison, I give two other recent definitions. I. M. Lewis defines the shaman as "an inspired prophet and healer, a charismatic religious figure, with the power to control the spirits, usually by incarnating them. If spirits speak through him, so he is also likely to have the capacity to engage in mystical flight and other 'out of body experiences'" ("What Is a Shaman?" *Folk* 23 [1981] 25–35; the quotation is on p. 32). The definition of shamanism proposed by Roger Walsh is "a family of traditions whose practitioners focus on voluntarily entering altered states of consciousness in which they experience themselves, or their spirit(s), traveling to other realms at will and interacting with other entities in order to serve their community." ("What Is a Shaman? Definition, Origin and Distribution," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 21 [1989] 1–11; the quotation is on p. 5.)

⁵² The most comprehensive recent discussion is by Michael James Winkelman in *Shamans, Priests and Witches: A Cross-Cultural Study of Magico-Religious Practitioners* (Arizona State University Anthropological Research Papers 44; Tempe: Arizona State University, 1992) 93–121. Jane Monning Atkinson gathers and discusses additional bibliography in "Shamanisms Today," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992) 307–30, esp. pp. 309–14. In 1982 an issue of the journal *Ethos* (10.4) was devoted to the subject "Shamans and Endorphins," and in 1989 an issue of the *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* (21.1) dealt with the subject "Shamanism and Altered States of Consciousness." See also Michael Ripinsky-Naxon, *The Nature of Shamanism: Substance and Function of a Religious Metaphor* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1993).

This being the case, I must proceed on the more traditional basis of a model constructed from information from a wide range of societies where shamanism is found. I base my analysis primarily on the publications of Hultkrantz, whose definition and overall treatment give a well-balanced presentation of the features generally accepted as belonging to shamanism. I nuance his model in a few places, but only in ways compatible with its spirit and supported by widespread ethnographic data. The notes cite representative (but far from comprehensive) discussions of the various elements by other authors.

After Hultkrantz, I adopt a model with the following main features.

– *Means of becoming a shaman.* In general, one is elected by the spirits to become a shaman rather than choosing to do so oneself. In some cases shamanic powers are inherited and confirmed in some way by the spirits (for example, by special physical features). In others the spirits make themselves known to the chosen individual in a dream or vision and will hound their victim until the prospective shaman submits. In some cases, particularly in North America, supernatural experiences may be actively sought out. In some Native American tribes, all males carry out such “vision quests” as a matter of course as a puberty rite or in times of crisis. Shamans in these tribes also seek out initiatory visions, although according to Hultkrantz, in such cases “the boundary line between the shaman and other visionaries is quantitative rather than qualitative.”⁵³ He prefers the term “medicine man” as a general term for Native American intermediaries, since not all American medicine men use ecstasy to control the spirits. Nevertheless, he classes both medicine men and shamans under the rubrics “shamanism” or the “shamanic complex.”⁵⁴

– *Ecstasy or trance and ascetic techniques.* Hultkrantz writes of shamanism:

[T]here is one central, outstanding feature that from the start served as its mark of distinction: the frenzy or ecstasy connected with the shamanistic performance and other events associated with the shaman. Most particularly, the shaman enters into ecstasy in connection with his professional work. The ecstasy is, in fact, the precondition for his

⁵³ Åke Hultkrantz, “Ecological and Phenomenological Aspects of Shamanism,” in *Shamanism in Siberia*, ed. V. Diószegi and M. Hoppál (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1978) 27–58; the quotation is on p. 34.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 34; Åke Hultkrantz, *The Religions of the American Indians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) 72–79, 85–86, 93–94. Compare Vilmos Diószegi,

functioning. . . . Ecstasy of course constitutes a problem of its own which we cannot look into here. Suffice it to say that it should be interpreted as a state of trance, a psychogenic, hysteroid mode of reaction that forms itself according to the dictates of the mind and that evinces various depths in various situations.⁵⁵

Although I agree with these comments, I take the concept of ecstasy or trance in a somewhat different direction. Because my native informants are no longer available, I cannot determine by scientific measurement or even by simple observation the nature of their ecstatic experiences. So I focus instead on the means they claim to have used to achieve these experiences and compare their methods to the ascetic techniques employed by shamans. Hultkrantz refers to a number of these techniques, including ingestion of drugs, fasting ordeals, the use of the drum and rattle, and secret shamanic spirit languages.⁵⁶ Other methods include various forms of isolation and self-denial, such as solitary confinement, celibacy, dietary and ritual purity restrictions, and protracted prayer and singing. The two central functions of ecstasy, the otherworldly journey and control of the spirits, are considered below.

— *Initiatory disintegration and reintegration.* Hultkrantz notes this phenomenon in passing: “During his *vocation* [as opposed to later *shamanistic activity*] the future shaman is harassed by spirits (often, but not always, beings who become his helping spirits) who make him seemingly insane and finally ‘kill’ him in order to resuscitate him as a

“Shamanism,” in *Shamanism: Selected Writings of Vilmos Diószegi*, ed. Mihály Hoppál (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1998) 1–9, esp. pp. 2, 4 (originally published in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., 1974, pp. 638–41); Nevill Drury, *The Elements of Shamanism* (1967; rpt. Shaftesbury, Dorset, England: Element, 1989) 6–7; Eliade, *Shamanism* 67–88, 99–109; Joan Halifax, *Shamanic Voices: A Survey of Visionary Narratives* (New York and London: Arkana/Penguin, 1979) 4–10 (et passim—relating numerous accounts of how specific individuals became shamans); Perrin, *Le chamanisme* 23–32; Winkelman, *Shamans, Priests and Witches* 50; Peter T. Furst, “An Overview of Shamanism,” in *Ancient Traditions: Shamanism in Central Asia and the Americas*, ed. Gary Seaman and Jane S. Day (Niwot, Colo.: University Press of Colorado, 1994) 1–28, esp. pp. 6–7.

⁵⁵ Hultkrantz, “A Definition of Shamanism,” 27–28. Compare idem, “Ecological and Phenomenological Aspects of Shamanism,” 41–51.

⁵⁶ Hultkrantz, “Ecological and Phenomenological Aspects of Shamanism,” 41; idem, “Spirit Lodge, a North American Shamanistic Séance,” in *Studies in Shamanism*, ed. Carl-Martin Edsman (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1967) 32–68, esp. p. 38; idem, *The Religions of the American Indians* 95, 101. The ethnographic literature is full of information on the techniques and rituals used by shamans to achieve ecstasy. For discussions, see Diószegi, “Shamanism,” 6–7; Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques*

new, power-filled being, a shaman."⁵⁷ Frequently a candidate will gain shamanic powers during a visionary experience in which he or she undergoes some form of death or personal destruction and disintegration at the hands of divine beings, followed by a corresponding resurrection or reintegration that purges and gives a qualitatively different life to the initiate. Actual sickness also often occurs. For reasons I will explore in chapter 5, this initiatory experience is especially characteristic of the Arctic region, and seems to overlap with "Arctic hysteria" or "kayak angst." Shamans from many other regions of the world do not undergo an initiatory disintegration and reintegration, or else have a more attenuated experience.

— *The otherworldly journey*. Following Eliade, Hultkrantz notes the centrality of "soul flight" or "extra-corporeal experiences" in the shamanic complex. This journey to the otherworld is one of the chief outcomes sought when shamans achieve an ecstatic state. Their reports about the otherworld fall consistently within the broad outlines of a coherent *shamanic cosmology*.⁵⁸ Hultkrantz writes,

Central in this cosmology is the idea of a world in three (or more) layers, sky, earth, and underworld, as depicted on some Lapp drums, and the world-tree or world-pole, the joiner of the three world levels and the means of communication to the spirits above and below. The shaman's pole-climbing is a ritual expression of this communication, a realistic rendering of the shaman's soul flight.⁵⁹

— *Control of the spirits*. According to Eliade, to be considered a shaman, a religious functionary must make use of ecstasy to accomplish

of Ecstasy 96–101, 168–80; idem, "Shamanism: An Overview," in *ER* 13:202–208, esp. pp. 204–205; Halifax, *Shamanic Voices* 6–10, 29–33; Perrin, *Le chamanisme* 43–52; Larry G. Peters and Douglass Price-Williams, "Towards an Experiential Analysis of Shamanism," *American Ethnologist* 7 (1980) 397–418, esp. p. 399; Drury, *The Elements of Shamanism* 32–42; Walsh, "What Is a Shaman?" 7–8; Winkelman, *Shamans, Priests and Witches* 51–53, 93–121.

⁵⁷ Hultkrantz, "Ecological and Phenomenological Aspects of Shamanism," 48 (author's emphasis), cf. p. 39. Compare Diószegi, "Shamanism," 2, 5; Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* 33–66; Halifax, *Shamanic Voices* 10–15; Anna-Leena Siikala, "Shamanism: Siberian and Inner Asian Shamanism," in *ER* 13:208–15, esp. pp. 210–11; Winkelman, *Shamans, Priests and Witches* 50.

⁵⁸ Hultkrantz, "A Definition of Shamanism," 28–31; idem, "Ecological and Phenomenological Aspects of Shamanism," 31–33; idem, *The Religions of the American Indians* 27–29; 109–13, 129–39; Diószegi, "Shamanism," 3, 6; Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* 259–87. Compare Halifax, *Shamanic Voices* 15–21; Lewis, "What Is a Shaman?" 33; Walsh, "What Is a Shaman?" 4; Drury, *The Elements of Shamanism* 23–31; Winkelman, *Shamans, Priests and Witches* 50.

⁵⁹ Hultkrantz, "A Definition of Shamanism," 30–31.

the otherworldly journey. But Hultkrantz offers a generally accepted qualification to this definition: a shaman may also use the ecstatic state to summon—and control the spirits. These auxiliary spirits may escort the shaman on the otherworldly journey, provide information, possess the shaman, or help the shaman heal or aid others. These spirits are often in animal form, although they may also be the spirits of ancestors or deceased predecessors.⁶⁰

— *Serving a community*. “The shaman is the intermediary between the human group and the supernaturals.”⁶¹ Hultkrantz finds the natural life situation of the shaman to be within hunting cultures, where shamans are common. They are correspondingly rarer as societies become more advanced. The services provided by the shaman include the following, although no single shaman is likely to provide them all: (1) healing, either by retrieving the victim’s escaped soul or by removing an intruding object or spirit from the victim’s body; (2) divination, either with the help of the spirits or by the shaman’s own power, to gain otherwise inaccessible knowledge; (3) psychopompy—leading the souls of the dead to the proper afterlife; (4) acting as “hunting magician” to help the community have a successful hunt; and (5) only exceptionally, acting as a sacrificial priest.⁶² I follow Amanda Porterfield in adding another service, one implicit in many discussions but rarely treated explicitly: (6) the shaman addresses social problems in the community and aims to control or remedy them.⁶³

⁶⁰ Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* 5; idem, “Shamanism: An Overview,” 202; Diószegi, “Shamanism,” 5–6; Hultkrantz, “A Definition of Shamanism,” 29, 33; idem, “Ecological and Phenomenological Aspects of Shamanism,” 38–40. Compare Lewis, “What Is a Shaman?” 28–33; Perrin, *Le chamanisme* 38–41; Walsh, “What Is a Shaman?” 4–5; Winkelman, *Shamans, Priests and Witches* 50.

⁶¹ Hultkrantz, “Ecological and Phenomenological Aspects of Shamanism,” 33.

⁶² Ibid., 35–38. Compare Diószegi, “Shamanism,” 5; Perrin, *Le chamanisme* 60–81; Winkelman, *Shamans, Priests and Witches* 30, 50.

⁶³ Amanda Porterfield, “Shamanism: A Psychosocial Definition,” *JAAR* 55 (1987) 721–39. Porterfield sees the shaman as a functionary who personifies the unconscious psychological tensions of the group in the form of spirits who command actions to reduce these tensions, such as scapegoating individual members of the community when misfortune arises. Thus the shaman can bring harm as well as good to the group and its members.

The Hekhalot Literature and Shamanism

In 1977, P. S. Alexander drew on anthropological works on shamanism to illuminate material in the Hekhalot literature, noting similarities in the account of R. Nehuniah's ascent in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* to elements of shamanism as described by Eliade.⁶⁴ My purpose in this volume is to follow up his observation in depth by analyzing the Hekhalot literature from the perspective of the anthropological study of shamanism. *My thesis is that the religious functionaries described in the Hekhalot literature correspond well to the model of shamanism as outlined above, and that reading the Hekhalot literature alongside the model greatly illuminates the material and clarifies many difficulties, showing in particular the great likelihood that such functionaries really existed and engaged in the practices attributed to them.*

It should be noted that even before Alexander published his comments, Ithamar Gruenwald had also noticed similarities between the Hekhalot literature and shamanism but dismissed them as coincidental, for the following reason:

Now, in discussing shamanism in general one must also be aware that although it may technically be defined as the "technique of ecstasy" [after Eliade], it has above all a clear social and cultural function. . . . Shamanism is at home in a culture lacking writing, in a culture without social organization. Shamanism is, first and foremost, characteristic of the fringe-cultures to the north where people subsist by primitive hunting and fishing.⁶⁵

Gruenwald raises an important point, one that is accepted by Hultkrantz and indeed can scarcely be contested: the shamanic complex originated in preliterate hunting societies and finds its natural life situation in them. The question then becomes, can it survive outside of hunting cultures, and if so, is it radically altered? There

⁶⁴ Alexander, "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," esp. pp. 169-73. Scholem also cites a Chinese ethnological parallel to ascetic praxes in the Hekhalot literature, although he does not use the word "shamanism" (*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* 49-50). Shaul Shaked has noted the "almost shamanistic" character of the Hekhalot literature in passing, in "Peace Be upon You, Exalted Angels," 205-206.

⁶⁵ Ithamar Gruenwald, "'Knowledge' and 'Vision': Towards a Clarification of Two 'Gnostic' Concepts in the Light of Their Alleged Origins," in *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism* 65-123, esp. pp. 105-108; the quotation is on pp. 107-108. (First published in *Israel Oriental Studies* 3 [1973].)

is good evidence that it can indeed survive, and in recognizable form. As we shall see in the next section, Carmen Blacker argues that it was an important part of Japanese culture (an agrarian and literate society) for many centuries. V. N. Basilov gives a schematic survey of the fate of shamanism in the Soviet Union, noting that it was adopted and adapted into local Muslim, Lamaist, and Orthodox Christian traditions.⁶⁶ Likewise, recent evidence from Siberia and Korea shows shamans adapting even to life in modern urban environments.⁶⁷

Drawing on a vast body of cross-cultural data, Michael James Winkelman has distilled a fourfold typology of shamanistic healers, correlated to social circumstances and degree of social organization.⁶⁸ The "shaman" is found in hunting and gathering societies and is described in terms nearly identical to the model outlined above.⁶⁹ The "shaman/healer," found in sedentary agricultural communities, has a greater degree of professional and group organization and greater specialization of roles, engages in trance but rarely in soul flight, uses impersonal sources of power along with the spirits, and has a lower social status than that of the shaman.⁷⁰ The "medium" is a member of an agricultural or pastoral society with "political integration beyond the level of the local community."⁷¹ Usually a woman, the medium has low social status. She is selected for training because of an initial spontaneous trance episode and during trances is possessed and controlled by the spirits.⁷² The "healer" is found in the same social circumstances as mediums and normally alongside mediums. The healer uses rituals and spells rather than trances for healing and divination, and tends to be economically better off than average and to have political and social power.⁷³

This typology is balanced against the roles of two other major magico-religious practitioners. The "priest" is found in social circumstances similar to those of the medium and healer, always along-

⁶⁶ Basilov, "Chosen by the Spirits," 30-45.

⁶⁷ Caroline Humphrey, "Shamans in the City," *Anthropology Today* 15 (1999) 3-10; Laurel Kendall, "Korean Shamans and the Spirits of Capitalism," *American Anthropologist* 98 (1996) 512-27.

⁶⁸ Winkelman, *Shamans, Priests and Witches*.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 25-36, 47-53.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 55-59.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 59-63.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 27-28, 63-67.

side some form of shamanistic healer. A priest is involved with sacrifice and purification, generally has a high social status and a large amount of political power, and is not associated with ASCs.⁷⁴ Finally, the “sorcerer/witch” is a status that seems to arise primarily or entirely by accusation and persecution in the same societies that produce shaman/healers, healers, mediums, and priests, and is associated with evil and harmful magico-religious practices. These may arise involuntarily from within the person of a “witch”; be sent against a victim deliberately by a “sorcerer”; or be generated unconsciously by someone looking enviously at other people or their possessions (the “evil eye”).⁷⁵ The sorcerer/witch corresponds roughly to my category “magician,” discussed above.⁷⁶

Winkelman suggests that as societies grow more complex, the office of shaman is broken down into various specializations. First, it can bifurcate into the roles of priest and shaman/healer, although priests seem also to arise in other circumstances. Then perhaps the shaman/healer can evolve into either a healer or a medium, although again other social developments, such as convergence and diffusion, may also create these offices. The role of sorcerer/witch is imposed by accusation, drawing on morally ambivalent or negative features associated with the now defunct role of shaman.

For the sort of cross-cultural comparison I undertake in this book, it makes sense to make primary use of the pure form of the model in question (here “shamanism”) and only then to nuance the outcome on the basis of evolutionary theories about the development of the model. So beginning in the next chapter, I compare the practitioners and practices described in the Hekhalot literature to the elements of the shamanic complex. In chapter 9, I pull together the results of the comparison and at that point return to Winkelman’s typology to see how it might illuminate these results.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 28, 69–76.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 28, 76–92.

⁷⁶ And thus I feel free to use Winkelman’s term “magico-religious practitioner,” defining the “magical” element of his typology as the accusation of being a sorcerer/witch.

Shamanisms in This Book

My approach in the rest of this volume is to examine the elements of the shamanism model, devoting one chapter to each, with the subject of the shaman's community divided between chapters 8 and 9. I begin with a discussion of the particular element, offering specific illustrations of it from various cultures, then compare it to relevant material in the Hekhalot literature. In choosing the illustrations, I have sought to strike a balance between a random scattering of examples, which would give no overall sense of the compared cultures, and detailed comparisons with just a few cultures, which would neglect the immense range of relevant data. My solution is to concentrate on a limited but geographically widely diverse selection of shamanisms and their cultures, supplementing these with other examples when it seems useful. My final task before beginning is to say a few words about the shamans and shamanisms that will serve as my main points of comparison.

Naturally, I draw on ethnographic data from Siberia, the culture by which the concept of shamanism was introduced to the West. I focus on a particular shaman, Sereptie Djaruoskin, of the Nganasans, a Samoyed group in northern Siberia whose shamans served small communities or villages rather than larger clans.⁷⁷ Arctic shamanism is also represented in Inuit (Eskimo) culture and was documented by the explorer Knud Rasmussen in the early twentieth century. I will make use of his accounts of two Inuit shamans: Christian Autdaruta of Greenland, a reformed murderer and convert to Christianity, and Igjugarjuk, a Caribou shaman from the western Canadian Arctic.⁷⁸

For sub-Arctic Native North American cultures, I mainly examine the shamanism of the Lakota Sioux, whose shamanic traditions

⁷⁷ A. A. Popov, "How Sereptie Djaruoskin of the Nganasans (Tagvi Samoyeds) Became a Shaman," in *Popular Beliefs and Folklore Tradition in Siberia*, ed. V. Diószegi (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1968) 137-45; Siikala, "Shamanism: Siberian and Inner Asian Shamanism," 209.

⁷⁸ Knud Rasmussen, *The People of the Polar North: A Record* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1908) 305-33; idem, *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-24*, vol. 7.2: *Observations on the Intellectual Culture of the Caribou Eskimos* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1930) 51-56. I should note that Merete Demant Jakobsen's book, *Shamanism: Traditional and Contemporary Approaches to the Mastery of Spirits and Healing* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 1999), which deals with Greenlandic shamanism and Western neoshamanism, came to my attention too late to be used in this book.

were documented by James R. Walker in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and among whom shamanism survives to the present day.⁷⁹ The best-known Lakota shaman is Nick Black Elk, of the Oglala Division of the Lakota Nation, whose career in the early twentieth century was made famous by John G. Neihardt.⁸⁰ South and Meso-American shamanisms depend more on the ingestion of psychotropic drugs than do most other shamanic traditions, and for this reason I have not used many data from this area, although I do draw on accounts of María Sabina, a shaman of the Mexican Mazatec people who died at an advanced age in 1985 and who used the sacred psilocybin mushroom to achieve her trances.⁸¹

In addition, I cite examples from Japanese shamanism, relying mainly on the paradigm established by Carmen Blacker, who sees the Japanese shamanic complex as a mutually dependent system composed of the female "medium," by whom the spirits speak, and the male "ascetic," who functions as a healer and exorcist. According to Blacker, this complex is a stew of ancient traditions going back to Siberian shamanism, in the case of the ancient Sibyl or *miko* (whose role seems to survive in the persons of founders of some new religious sects); to Polynesian or Melanesian shamanism, in the case of the blind medium or *itako*; and to Buddhist monasticism, in the case

⁷⁹ The bibliography on Lakota religion is enormous. Representative works include James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1980); Raymond J. DeMallie (ed.), *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); William K. Powers, *Oglala Religion* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1975, 1977); Clyde Holler (ed.), *The Black Elk Reader* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000). "Sioux" is a corruption of an Algonquian pejorative term meaning "small adder," so there is a tendency, especially among outsiders, to avoid the term and instead use the language name "Lakota" for the people. This, however, is not a perfect solution, since the tribal group in question speaks three mutually intelligible dialects: Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota. The term "Oglala" refers to a political subdivision among Lakota speakers (Powers, *Oglala Religion* 3-14).

⁸⁰ John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (1932; rpt. Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1988). This volume is a fairly free paraphrase of Black Elk's words, so preference should be given to the raw notes taken by Neihardt's daughter Enid and published by DeMallie in *The Sixth Grandfather*. In my quotations I do not distinguish between Enid Neihardt's shorthand notes and her typed transcript. The former sometimes contain information missing in the latter (DeMallie [ed.], *The Sixth Grandfather* xxiv-vi).

⁸¹ R. Gordon Wasson, George and Florence Cowan, and Willard Rhodes, *María Sabina and Her Mazatec Mushroom Velada* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974); Álvaro Estrada et al., *María Sabina: Her Life and Chants* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Ross-Erikson, 1981).

of the ascetic (known in antiquity as the *ubasoku*, *hijiri*, or *shamon*, and represented in modern times by certain Buddhist priests and by the *yamabushi*, members of the Shugendō monastic order, which descends from the *hijiri*).⁸²

These, then, will be my main sources of ethnographic data. I have chosen them as particularly fully documented and analyzed cases, but the shamanisms found in many other cultures might have served as well.⁸³ Shamanism is a concrete and isolable cross-cultural construct that, as we shall see, illuminates not only the present but also the distant past.

⁸² Carmen Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan* (2nd ed.; London and Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986) 21–31, 128–29, 164–66. I myself take no position on whether the various types of shamanism in the world spread through diffusion or arose independently.

⁸³ A few examples. Tamang shamanism in Nepal: Larry G. Peters, "Trance, Initiation, and Psychotherapy in Tamang Shamanism," *American Ethnologist* 9 (1982) 21–46; Amazonian Baniwa shamanism: Robin M. Wright, "Guardians of the Cosmos: Baniwa Shamans and Prophets," *HR* 32 (1992–93) 32–58, 126–45; shamans of the American Northeast woodlands: John A. Grim and Donald P. St. John, "The Northeast Woodlands," in *Native American Religions: North America*, ed. Lawrence E. Sullivan (New York: Macmillan, 1987, 1989) 117–31, esp. pp. 127–29; John A. Grim, *The Shaman: Patterns of Siberian and Ojibway Healing* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983). Many other accounts of individual shamans have been collected by Halifax in *Shamanic Voices*.

CHAPTER THREE

BECOMING A SHAMAN

Chosen by the Spirits

There is no single way that a person becomes convinced of his or her call to shamanhood. We can, however, make some generalizations about the range of experiences that lead to this conviction. Almost always the initiative lies with the spirits. The call may come from compelling dreams or revelations from the spirits, who may bring an illness upon an initiate until the initiate agrees to accept the vocation. Frequently the call is hereditary, and sometimes it is indicated early in life by special psychological or physical characteristics. In some cases the decision is voluntary, and if so, the prospective shaman actively seeks out contact with the spirits. In this section I survey the calls of a number of shamans from various parts of the world, most of whom figure prominently in the rest of this book.

Siberian Shamanism (a Gol'd Shaman and Sereptie Djaruoskin)

Two features that are often encountered in the choosing of Siberian shamans, the initiatory illness and the spirit marriage, are represented in an account of how an unnamed Gol'd (southern Tungus) man was chosen to be a shaman early in the twentieth century. According to the informant, he was a descendant of three great shamans "some generations back," although none were known in his family in recent generations. When he was twenty he was struck with severe headaches and ailments throughout his body. In his sleep, a spirit came to him in the form of a beautiful woman, who informed him that she had been the helping spirit of his dead ancestor shamans and that she would teach him to become a shaman. She also proposed to cohabit with him as his wife.

"I love you, I have no husband now, you will be my husband and I shall be a wife unto you. I shall give you assistant spirits. You are to heal with their aid, and I shall teach you and help you myself. Food will come to us from the people."

I felt dismayed and tried to resist. Then she said: "If you will not obey me, so much the worse for you. I shall kill you."

She has been coming to me ever since, and I sleep with her as with my own wife, but we have no children.

His spirit wife presented him with three other helping spirits and would take him on tours of other countries. She also taught him to heal. Despite his initial resistance, he accepted his fate and settled reasonably happily into shamanhood.¹

The election of the Siberian Nganasan shaman Sereptie Djaruoskin was heralded in a dream. He tells us,

When I was a young man I used to dream all sorts of insignificant things just like any other man. But once, I saw myself going down a road until I reached a tree. With an axe in my hand, I went round the tree and wanted to fell it. Then I heard a voice saying: "(Fell it) later!" and I woke up.

Next day the neighbours said to me: "Go and fell a tree for the *kuojka* sledge!" I set out, found a suitable tree and started to cut it down. When the tree fell, a man sprang out of its roots with a loud shout. I was petrified with fear (from this unexpected event).²

The tree was the tree in his dream, and the man was a spirit who would guide him through the underworld on a quest for shamanhood. The details of the vision that followed will be taken up in chapters 5 and 6.

Among the peoples of Siberia, physical characteristics are sometimes considered indicators of selection for shamanhood. Such shaman's marks can single a person out as a prospective shaman from childhood or even at birth. The Yurak-Samoyed believe that "infants born with their 'shirt' (i.e., caul) are destined to become shamans."³ Also among the Yurak-Samoyed (or-Nenets), a shaman is routinely identified at birth by the presence of "a pellicle at the crown of his head . . . or a birth-mark."⁴ According to Basilov,

Children were often prepared for shamanic activity from an early age. According to the Shor, the future shaman was supposed to be born with a "mark" from the god Ul'gen—an "extra bone." This might be

¹ Halifax, *Shamanic Visions* 120-23; the quotations are on p. 121.

² Popov, "How Sereptie Djaruoskin of the Nganasans (Tagvi Samoyeds) Became a Shaman," 138. Popov reports in a note that *kuojka* were "holy family relics such as stones, anthropomorphous and zoomorphous figures made of wood or metal. They were transported in special sledges."

³ Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* 16.

⁴ L. V. Khomič, "A Classification of Nenets Shamans," in *Shamanism in Siberia*, ed. Diószegi and Hoppál, 245-53; the quotation is on p. 245 n. 4.

a prominence on the finger or toe, or even a dimple on the ear lobe. Elders, noticing the "mark," pointed it out to the parents, who consulted a shaman. A seance was held in order to learn from the chief spirit of the locality—the owner of the mountain—whether the child would become a shaman [*kam*]. "The spirit generally 'confirms' this, and it is instilled in the child from tender years that he is a future *kam*." I. D. Khlopina reported a youngster who began to shamanize while playing at the age of three. His "mark" was a thickness of the bone on the left ankle. "Instead of a drum, he took . . . a frying pan, a tray, or the like, instead of words he pronounced inarticulate sounds, and everyone was convinced that he was a future *kam*."⁵

The mention of a special mark on the ankle illuminates a cryptic comment in the narrative of Sereptie's vision. At the end of his account of being reduced to a skeleton and "forged," we read, "When a shin-bone or something else is hit and the sparks fly, there will be a shaman in your generation."⁶ I take this to mean that certain irregularities in bone structure or the like are interpreted to be hammer marks left by the prenatal forging of the prospective shaman. Although Sereptie mentions no such marks on himself, perhaps we are to assume that he bore them.

Inuit Shamanism (Autdaruta)

Still in the realm of Arctic shamanism, the Greenland Inuit shaman Autdaruta told Rasmussen that after his father died he used to go for long walks in the hills, and one day he heard someone singing among the rocks. The next morning he returned to the hills and again heard someone singing. He reports,

Just then I saw two men coming towards me. They were inland-dwellers.

"We were sorry for you, because you were an orphan; so we have come to help you," they said, and so they became my first helping-spirits. Then I began to be a magician, but did not speak to anyone about it. The year afterwards we moved south; that was in the

⁵ Basilov, "Chosen by the Spirits," 8. The Shor are a Turkic people of Siberia. Basilov's data are confirmed by N. A. Alekseev, who notes that among the Shor, "*Ul'gen* himself indicates future shamans by placing a mark on them in the form of a supernumerary bone" ("Shamanism among the Turkic Peoples of Siberia," in *Shamanism: Soviet Studies*, ed. Balzer, 49-109; the quotation is on p. 99).

⁶ Popov, "How Sereptie Djaruoskin of the Nganasans (Tagvi Samoyeds) Became a Shaman," 138.

season when the small birds come, and we settled down in company with an old and much venerated magician.⁷

This aged master became his mentor and showed him how to gain shamanic powers through a horrific initiation ritual that will be discussed in chapter 5.

Native American Shamanism (Nick Black Elk and María Sabina)

In North America, the Lakota shaman Nick Black Elk was the son of a shaman or “medicine man” (*wicaša wakan*), and several of his uncles were also shamans.⁸ He was first contacted by the spirits in 1868, at the age of five, in a vision that took about twenty minutes. He says,

I was out in the woods trying to get a bird and just as I was going into the woods there was a thunderstorm coming and I heard a voice over there. This was not a dream—it actually happened. I saw two men coming out of a cloud with spears. As I was looking up to that, there was a kingbird sitting there and these two men were coming toward me singing the sacred song and that bird told me to listen to the two men. The kingbird said: “Look, the clouds all over are one-sided, a voice is calling you.” I looked up and the two men were coming down singing:

Behold him, a sacred voice is calling you.

All over the sky a sacred voice is calling you.

I stood gazing at them and they were coming from the north; then they started toward the west and were geese.⁹

He adds that when he was six years old, “It seemed that at times I would hear someone calling me, and then at other times I would forget entirely about the voice. After the vision I felt that someone was calling me always after that.”¹⁰ When he was nine, the same

⁷ Rasmussen, *The People of the Polar North* 306. None of the background information for the Caribou Inuit shaman Ijugarjuk indicates that he came from a line of shamans or that he was called by the spirits; his mentor was his father-in-law. He thus may be a fairly rare example of a shaman who takes the initiative to attract helping spirits to himself. Another example is Sanimuinak, an Angamagsalik Inuit, who decided to become a shaman as a boy and actively sought out the spirits (Halifax, *Shamanic Voices* 110–13).

⁸ DeMallie (ed.), *The Sixth Grandfather* 102.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 110. Shaman’s marks are known among North American shamans as well as those of the Arctic. Hultkrantz reports, “By their nervous psychic disposition, special bodily features, or other distinctive traits many youths are considered

spirits returned and struck him unconscious for twelve days, during which he received his Great Vision.

The Mexican Mazatec shaman María Sabina also came from a line of shamans, including her great-grandfather, grandfather, and father. In the late 1890s, shortly after her father's death, when she was four years old, she began to ingest the sacred mushrooms while pasturing animals with her sister. They ate the mushrooms purely from hunger. She relates,

But one day, I don't know how long a time had elapsed, I began to have visions. My hands had ripped from the earth the *teo-nanácatl* [the mushrooms], and the *teo-nanácatl* had entered my mouth and my soul. The goats were grazing on the mountain, and I was sitting on the grass as though drunk. My soul was coming out of my body and was going toward the world that I did not know but of which I had only heard talk. It was a world like this one, full of sierras, of forests, of rivers. But there were also other things—beautiful homes, temples, golden palaces. And there was my sister, who had come with me, and the mushrooms, who were waiting for me—mushrooms that were children and dwarfs dressed like clowns, children with trumpets, children that sang and danced, children tender like the flesh of the flowers. And the mushrooms talked, and I talked to the mushrooms, crying, "What are we going to do?" I said, "We are so poor. How are we going to live? What will happen to us?" And the *teo-nanácatl* answered with the words of hope and peace, saying that they would protect us, that when we needed something, we should go to them and they would give it.

María Sabina learned shamanic lore from her grandmother, who had learned it from her husband and son. When she was eight years old, María performed her first healing. When her uncle became ill, she ingested the mushrooms and at their direction located an herb that healed him.¹¹

Japanese Shamanism

Shamans in Japan find their vocation through a wide variety of experiences and means. In the twentieth century, founders of new religions experience an initiatory sickness much like that of Siberian

predisposed to becoming medicine men and therefore at an early age, sometimes as young as ten, they come to the attention of older medicine men and others who are interested" (*The Religions of the American Indians* 93).

¹¹ Halifax, *Shamanic Voices* 129–35; the quotation is on p. 131.

shamans.¹² The female mediums called *itako* are chosen by their having a specific physical characteristic: blindness.¹³ Japanese ascetics can be called by the spirits in a dream, abruptly possessed by a spirit (*kamigakari* possession), or taken by a spirit messenger on a visionary journey. Some also choose to become ascetics of their own free will and follow a course of rigorous austerities like those carried out by the *itako* as described in chapter 4.¹⁴

The specific cases and cultural conventions outlined here give some sense of the range and variety of calls to shamanhood. The closest parallels to the religious complex of the descenders to the chariot revolve around the concept of the shaman's mark.

The Descenders to the Chariot and Physiognomy

The Hekhalot literature itself does not explain how one is chosen to become a descender to the chariot. However, other texts that bear on the question offer evidence that the sort of practitioner described in the Hekhalot literature really existed. We saw in chapter 1 that Hai Gaon reported to his correspondents that according to the sages one who sought out visions of the chariot has to be "worthy of certain designated and elucidated traits." This phrase is ambiguous: it could refer to moral or to physical traits. But a passage in another *responsum*, written by Hai and his father Sherira, indicates that Hai had physical traits in mind. Commenting on passages in *b. Hagiga* 13a and 14a which interpret Isa 3:3 to describe the attributes of anyone suited to study the "work of the chariot," they write,

Therefore the sages transmitted to one another the "discernment of appearance" and the arrangement of lines, which are mentioned partly in the "book", "This is the generations of Adam" (cf. Gen 5:1), and partly in the arrangement of the following verse, "Male and female He created them" (Gen 5:2).¹⁵

The phrases "discernment of appearance" (הכרה פנים), based on Isa 3:9, and "arrangement of lines" (סדרי שרטוטין) are technical terms

¹² Blacker gives examples in *The Catalpa Bow* 127–39.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 140–63.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 168–74.

¹⁵ Lewin, *Otzar ha-Geonim* 4:12.

in medieval Hebrew referring to the discipline of physiognomy, the determination of character traits by looking at the face and the lines on the hand (chiromancy) and forehead (metoposcopy). We will see below how the passage cited from Genesis was used in this context. These disciplines are tied to R. Ishmael, a major character in the Hekhalot literature, by Yehuda HaLevi (d. 1141), who writes, "He is the R. Ishmael of the Hekhalot and the discernment of appearance and the work of the chariot." Likewise, Nahmanides (1194–1270), who knew the *responsum* cited in the previous paragraph, writes, "It is the wisdom of R. Ishmael of the Hekhalot and of the discernment of appearance."¹⁶

But we are not dependent on the medieval commentators alone for proof of the connection between the Hekhalot tradition and Jewish physiognomic speculation. A number of physiognomic and astrological tractates survive which demonstrate the relationship beyond doubt. One of these, 'שמעאל לר' הכרה פנים לר', *The Physiognomy of R. Ishmael*, is a Hebrew text published from several manuscripts by Scholem, who dates it to the Talmudic period.¹⁷ It opens,

(§§1–2a) R. Ishmael said:

Suriah, Prince of the Presence, told me a secret that I am revealing to you. Anyone who reveals it to whoever is unworthy is banished from this world and from the world to come, and his residence is in the lowest level of Gehenna.

"This is the book of the generations of Adam," for knowing the righteous from the wicked.¹⁸

Thus the work presents itself as a revelation to R. Ishmael by the angel Suriah, as in the Hekhalot literature, and it quotes Gen 5:1,

¹⁶ The Hebrew passages (from the *Kuzari* and the *Wars of the Lord*, respectively) are given by Lewin in *Otzar ha-Geonim* 4:12 n. 9. Other passages of interest are noted by Schäfer in "Ein neues Fragment zur Metoposkopie und Chiromantik," 84 n. 1.

¹⁷ Scholem, "Physiognomy and Chiromancy"; the text is discussed on pp. 469–74 and published in appendix B (pp. 480–87). Scholem also published another article on this text with an improved German translation that took into account a new manuscript ("Ein Fragment zur Physiognomik und Chiromantik"). Citations from the *Physiognomy of R. Ishmael* follow the paraphrasing of the latter article.

¹⁸ Manuscript A begins somewhat differently: "This is the book of the generations of Adam," which Suriah, Prince of the Presence, transmitted to R. Ishmael for knowing the righteous from the wicked."

the passage Hai and Sherira reported was used as a scriptural proof text justifying the discipline of physiognomy.¹⁹

The tractate describes the outward physical characteristics that signify to the initiated whether a person is righteous or wicked and what that person's fate shall be. A number of the descriptions of the righteous indicate that figures similar to the descenders to the chariot are numbered among them. The righteous are repeatedly portrayed as "meriting (from one to four) crowns" (§§5, 12, 18, 37), which brings to mind the various references to the Great Seal and Fearsome Crown mentioned in the *Hekhalot* literature (e.g., *SH-L* §§318–21//§§651–54). One description says that the subject is "a son of two worlds" (§4), which Scholem compares to the comment in *Merkavah Rabba* §705 regarding the reciter of the *Shi'ur Qomah*: "It is good for him in this world and restful for him in the world to come."²⁰ Of another we are told, "it is well known to you that he is of the inhabitants of the Garden of Eden" (§15). This may mean only that the subject can look to a blessed hereafter (like the "son of the world to come" in §13), but it also recalls the story of the four who entered paradise. Another figure receives high praise in that "he merits all crowns and both worlds" (§36).

Another section refers to the heavenly ascent. It reads, "And if he has one (line) that stands on his forehead, thus he ascends opposite bindings of crowns" (§32). Scholem points out that according to two passages in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, "bindings of crowns" (קשרי כתרִים) are features of apparel bound on by angels, so apparently the ascent takes the subject to the realm of the *Hekhalot*.²¹ Other passages describe the good man as meriting—"a crown of Torah" (§5, MS A) and being exceptionally wise (§20) and "a son of Torah" (§31), characteristics of those who participate in Sar Torah praxes.

¹⁹ Scholem has suggested that the word translated "generations" (תולדות) be interpreted in line with the Greco-Roman physiognomic tradition to mean "nature." Thus Gen 5:1 would refer to the book of human nature or human physical characteristics (see "Physiognomy and Chiromancy," 477–79). Schäfer, for his part, is unconvinced by this interpretation ("Ein neues Fragment zur Metoposkopie und Chiromantik," 91–92 n. 31).

²⁰ Scholem, "Physiognomy and Chiromancy," 481 n. 12. Compare *Merkavah Rabba* §675, in which R. Ishmael promises the Sar Torah practitioner that "he acquires this world and the world to come and worlds upon worlds."

²¹ Scholem, "Physiognomy and Chiromancy," 485 n. 42. "Bindings of crowns" appears in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§103, 253; cf. *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §574.

A Geniza fragment (T.-S. K 21.88) with similar physiognomic speculation, but which also includes astrological material, has been published by Gruenwald.²² It too has connections with the Hekhalot literature. It predicts the life courses of a number of characters on the basis of their physical appearance and astrological data surrounding their birth. We are told of one that, after various childhood mishaps,

(A1 7-9) When he is eight years old he shall enter into the house of his master and he shall learn Torah, Prophets, and Writings. And when he is seventeen years old he shall go forth from Bible school and he shall become one of the teachers and study Mishnah and *halakhot* more than his companion.

Of another we read, "And he who is born [on the fourth day] in the week in Jupiter or in the moon shall be a chief and a sage" (A1 17-18).²³ And of another, "Until eight ye[ars] are fulfilled for him, he shall learn no Torah. But after that, anything that his companions learn in two days, he shall learn in one day" (A2 15-17). And of still another,

(B1 11-14) And anyone who is born on the fourth (day of the week?) and who has(!) the constellation Cancer or Virgo—he shall live and his name is on his ring finger and he is "a ready scribe" (סופר מוזיר; Ezra 7:6). This man shall live, and the appearance of his face is lovely in the eyes of everyone, and his voice is low. . . . And he is wise and discerning and is a scribe.

The work closes with the following warning (a corrupt text whose translation here is provisional in places):

(B2 17-26) My son, open your eyes and see with your eyes and hear with your ears. If you reveal the work of discernment of bodies, (you shall be) in fire and d[oom]ed in both worlds, and his [*sic*] body is given to the cruel one. And if *he keeps it* [. . .] to any eye except to one for whom it is fitting, and he shall not repeat [. . .] fruit, and he shall not (perhaps delete "not") meditate in his heart with immersion in a place of conceal[ment] with which people are unfamiliar, and he conducts himself with humility of spirit, and he does not speak in vain.

²² Gruenwald, "New Fragments from the Physiognomic and Chiromantic Literature"; the text is introduced on pp. 301-304 and published on pp. 306-17.

²³ Following Gruenwald's restoration of the day of the week based on *b. Šab.* 156a, which says that one born on the fourth day is "a wise and bright man." According to *Baraita di Mazzalot* 15/107, the planet Jupiter is appointed over Torah. Compare the astrological notice in G12, translated below.

Happy is he in his life, -and happy is he in his death, for he is one [o]f the holy ones and he inherits a good name for himself and for his progeny forever. End.

I[f] you want to become wise in them and in the work of man and woman and cattle and animals and birds and creeping things of the ground, stand and perform a strict immersion against danger . . .

This document shows a persistent interest in those who excel in the study of Torah. One studies more than others, another learns twice as fast, another is "a chief and a sage," and another is given Ezra's epithet, "a ready scribe." All of this is reminiscent of the Sar Torah traditions, which give the adept the power to learn Torah effortlessly. The closing paragraph has additional parallels to the Hekhalot literature and other Jewish texts of ritual power, which, like the opening of the *Physiognomy of R. Ishmael* quoted above, sometimes warn against misusing their secrets or revealing them to outsiders, promising disaster for those who do and blessings for those who do not.²⁴ As we shall see in the next chapter, the practice of immersion in an isolated place alluded to here is typical of Hekhalot rituals, as is the practice of immersion to gain esoteric wisdom found in what appears to be the beginning of a separate work at the end of page B2.

The most important physiognomic document for our purposes is a Geniza fragment (T.-S. K 21.95.L [= G12]) that begins as a Hekhalot text but includes physiognomic and astrological material.²⁵ Entitled *סימן טוב*, A Good Omen, it begins with an account by R. Ishmael of his ascent to the chariot and describes how the angel

²⁴ A close parallel is found in the conclusion to the *Hekhalot Zutarti*, which reads, (§425) R. Ishmael said:

Suria, the Prince of the Presence, told me that "I reveal to you this secret, and anyone who reveals it to one who is unworthy is banished from this world and from his dwelling into the lowermost dwelling—Gehenna."

(§426) R. Ishmael said:

Suria, the Prince of the Presence, told me, "Anyone who takes precautions with this book and purifies himself, the angels, the 'er'ellim, the bands, the seraphim, the cherubim, the ophanim, and the throne of glory love him. And the righteous, the upright, and the fathers of old pray for his life and make him inherit the garden of Eden."

See also the Aramaic book of ritual power, in which one is instructed to carry out an ascetic ritual similar to those described at the end of Gruenwald's text, then warned in detail of the dire curses awaiting one who sells the book and the multitudinous blessings awaiting one "who does not reveal this great name" (§§489–90).

²⁵ Schäfer translates and discusses the text in "Ein neues Fragment zur Metoposkopie und Chiromantik."

Metatron showed him the souls of human beings yet to be born. Essentially the same material is found in *3 Enoch* 1 and 43–44 (§§1–2, 61–62), but in a form redactionally secondary to G12.²⁶ After a tour of the places of the souls of the future righteous, the intermediate, and the wicked, Metatron shows R. Ishmael the twelve constellations and their zodiacal signs and begins reciting a horoscope:

(2b 15–22) He who is born in the constellation of Libra, on the first day, in Jupiter or in the moon: when he, the child, is born in these two hours, he is only born *little and small* and sallow. And he shall have a sign on the fingers of his hands and the toes of his feet, or an extra finger (or “toe”) on his hands or on his feet. And this man shall be a ready {scribe}. And three lines in (the form of) crowns are on his forehead, and the middle one is broken into three, and they are wide lines. And he is one of the good. And at the age of seven months and ten days he shall become sick and shall be in hot waters. They shall ascend upon him, and anyone who sees him says that he shall not be saved from this. . . .²⁷

Much in this passage is obscure; however, a number of points should be noted. The text combines an ascent typical of the Hekhalot literature with physiognomic and astrological speculation. The righteous man described here, whose character is indicated by physical markings and determined by the time of his birth, is also (if we accept the emendation) a “ready {scribe},” that is, one skilled in Torah. Finally, his childhood illness is reminiscent of the illnesses that sometimes presage the onset of a shamanic call.²⁸

Scholem has compared two particular passages in the Hekhalot literature with some general features of the physiognomic texts. First, he has pointed out that a series of boastful hymns of self-praise at

²⁶ Schäfer, “Ein neues Fragment zur Metoposkopie und Chiromantik,” 86–87; Davila, “Of Methodology, Monotheism, and Metatron,” 15–17. Note also that this work quotes Gen 5:1 in connection with the preincarnate souls of the righteous (2b 2–3).

²⁷ “Little and small”: emending according to the suggestion of Jonas Greenfield (Schäfer, “Ein neues Fragment zur Metoposkopie und Chiromantik,” 95 n. 58). “A ready {scribe}”: emending to כּוּפֵר מְדוּר on the basis of the parallel expression in T.-S. K 21.88 B1 12 (cf. Schäfer, “Ein neues Fragment zur Metoposkopie und Chiromantik,” 95 n. 61).

²⁸ Compare T.-S. K 21.88 A1 5–7, which reports of the figure who shall “study Mishnah and *halakhot* more than his companion,” that in his childhood “he shall cut an amulet from his flesh and for some days he shall grieve, until he is healed. [And] when he is seven years old he shall fall from the roof and his head shall be broken, but he shall not die.”

the beginning of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§§81–86, 91–93) can be interpreted to draw on physiognomic traditions. According to these hymns, the descender to the chariot can surmise the intimate details of the lives of those around him just by looking at them. We are told that “he knows and discerns” (יודע ומכיר) the thief, the adulterer, the murderer, the impure, and so on. The same phrase occurs later in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §169, where we are told that no mortals can “know and discern” the divine countenance. Scholem suggests tentatively that the writer of the earlier section is claiming, without directly saying so, that the descender to the chariot can know the personal lives of his neighbors through his mastery of physiognomic indicators. This interpretation is possible, although the passage does not require it. It is appealing, however, in that it suggests a life situation for the surviving physiognomic material, material that deals with a wide range of lives and personality types, not just with identifying potential practitioners of the ascent or of Sar Torah rituals.

The second passage, the one from the *Merkavah Rabba* referred to briefly above, reads much like an entry in a physiognomic work.

(§705) R. Ishmael said:

He who repeats this great mystery—his face is sallow, his stature is fine, awe of him is imposed on (all) creatures, and his good name goes into all the places of Israel. His dreams are easy to him, his Torah is preserved in him, and he does not forget the words of Torah all his days. It is good for him in this world and restful for him in the world to come. Even the iniquities of his youth are remitted him for the coming future. The evil inclination has no authority over him, and he is saved from spirits and demons and robbers and from all injurious animals and from snake and scorpion and from all harmful demons.²⁹

This passage is a notable mixture of Sar Torah, adjuration, and physiognomic traditions. Like the Sar Torah adept, the reciter of the *Shi'ur Qomah* never forgets his studies, and as in a number of *Hekhalot* adjurations, he is protected from physical and spiritual injury and attack.³⁰ Like the descenders to the chariot, he is feared

²⁹ The next section, echoing closely the language of §705, urges the reader to pray for the blessings described in this passage.

³⁰ Compare, for example, *Hekhalot Zutarti* §424 (“that satan and stroke not accuse him all year long”); §490 in the Aramaic book of ritual power (“A satan shall not be a snare to him . . . he catches the lion by his ear and the snake by the skull of his head”); *Sar Panim* §639 (“With these fearsome and powerful names that darken

and revered in his society; and like those praised in the physiognomic texts, he has “sallow” (מצהיבות) coloring and he is “fine” (נאה) of stature (presumably meaning he is tall).³¹

Other Evidence

Thus we see that the physiognomic tractates provide evidence that practitioners who ascended to heaven and men who had special ability to learn Torah were identified on the basis of specific physical characteristics. The *Hekhalot* literature has little to say about the choosing and initiating of the descenders to the chariot, but a few hints are dropped which are worth reviewing here. As we shall see in chapter 4, the texts are full of ritual instructions that are meant to be used. The question is, for whose use were they intended?

The *Hekhalot Rabbati* includes an intriguing episode in which R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah, in response to the threat of persecution from Rome, reveals to his disciple R. Ishmael the character of one who can descend to the chariot: “Everyone who is innocent and void of idolatry, incest, bloodshed, slander, a false oath, blasphemy, an insolent demeanor, and an unfounded grudge. And he keeps every positive and negative commandment” (§199). R. Ishmael protests, “My master, if so, there is no end to the matter, for you have no one with breath in him who is innocent and void of these eight characteristics!” Granting this point, R. Nehuniah orders R. Ishmael to “stand and bring before me all the mighty men of the association and all the magnificent ones of the academy” (§201). R. Ishmael gathers the group and brings them to the Temple. He reports,

(§203) We came and sat before him and the associates were a whole crowd standing on their feet, because they were seeing to the *globes* of fire and the torches of light that they had set as a barrier between us

the sun and thrust aside the moonlight and overturn the day and split the stone and quench the fire, I adjure spirits and dews, demons and satans: you must go far and depart from so-and-so, son of so-and-so”.

³¹ Compare the *Physiognomy of R. Ishmael* §2 (“A man whose stature is tall . . . will be made head or president or king or judge or high priest”); §15 (“everyone whose face is fallow . . . is of the inhabitants of the Garden of Eden”); §31 (If . . . the whole form of his face is fine to the eye . . . he is a son of Torah”). In T.-S. K 21.88, the figure who shall “study Mishnah and *halakhot* more than his companion” appears to be “a man of stature” (A1 3). The “ready {scribe}” of G12 is born fallow.

and them. And R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah sat and set out in order all the matters of the chariot: descent and ascent, how one who descends descends and how one who ascends ascends.

The descenders to the chariot are thus portrayed as a conventicle consisting of a leader, a circle of inner followers, and a larger circle of followers, all of whom are instructed in the esoteric 'praxes of the group. They can achieve the descent to the chariot either by means of a morally perfect character or through ritual devices. But otherwise, no explanation is given as to how the members are chosen.

Later in the same episode, moral excellence is again presented as a prerequisite for experiencing the descent to the chariot. R. Nehuniah warns that when the adept arrives at the sixth palace he will be challenged by the angel Dumiel:

(§234) And he says twice:

Before you I testify and forewarn you that no descender descends to the chariot except he who has in himself these two characteristics: he is one who has read the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings, and he teaches traditions, midrash, laws, lore, and interpretation of laws—forbidden and permitted action; or³² he is one who has confirmed every negative commandment that is written in the Torah and has kept all the prohibitions of the statutes and of the customs and of the instructions which were said to Moses at Sinai.

This passage seems to make scholarly or moral excellence the central requirement for joining the group (more or less in contradiction to the Sar Torah tradition, which promises superlative scholarship to anyone who practices the proper techniques of ritual power). But this impression is lessened by the comment that when the adept attempts to pass the raging angels of the seventh palace, "Nevertheless, it is necessary to let them feast their eyes on a great seal and a fearsome crown" (§236)—that is, he must show the angels a seal of ritual power.

So far it appears that anyone with the proper personal qualifications may join the descenders to the chariot. But there are hints that the situation is more complicated. In a later account of the arrival of a successful practitioner at the seventh palace, the *Hekhalot Rabbati* has

³² Three manuscripts read "or" and four read "and" (with one of the first three glossed with "and"). Compare §235, where the visionary replies, "I have in me *one* of these two characteristics."

the angels say, "Do not fear, son of a beloved seed" (§248). The phrase "beloved seed" may mean no more than the seed of Israel, but still another account of the heavenly descent suggests a more specific sense. When he arrives at the Hashmal, the descender to the chariot must prove his fitness to proceed by waiting for a second invitation from the guardian angels to cross the threshold of the sixth palace. Those who enter on the first invitation are slain (§258). Once in the sixth palace, the adept is faced with the infamous water test: although the floor appears to be deluging him with countless waves of water, he must refrain from referring to or even thinking of it as water. If he fails, the angels pursue him, saying, "Fool! Perhaps you are of the seed of those who kissed the calf, and you are unfit to feast your eyes on the King and his throne!" If their suspicion of his ancestry is confirmed by a heavenly voice (בַּח קוֹל), they kill him as well (§259). Apparently the writers regarded family purity to be a factor in successfully negotiating the descent to the chariot. Anyone whose ancestors "kissed the calf"—that is, worshiped the golden calf of Exodus 32, might be destroyed during the descent.

The *Sar Torah* gives similarly ambiguous evidence. When the angels object to the teaching of the *Sar Torah* praxis to human beings, God assures them that "I am revealing concerning it to a beloved people. To a faithful seed I am teaching it" (§293). The most natural reading of the couplet is that it refers to the people of Israel, although a more restricted meaning along the lines of the "seed" in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* is not impossible. There are indicators that family background counts. We read in a passage found in some but not all manuscripts,

(§304) R. Ishmael said:

Thus said R. Akiva in the name of R. Eliezer the Great:

Blissful is the one whom the merit of his fathers assists and for whom the righteousness of his forebears remains. He will make use of this crownlet and this seal, and they shall be bound to him, and he shall be declared majestic with the majesty of Torah.

Nevertheless, the next section (§305) emphasizes that anyone, no matter how dull and no matter whether in Israel or Babylon, can use the praxis to become a master of Torah.³³ Another *Sar Torah* text

³³ Another version of this passage in §305 appears in G8 2b 21–22 in association with the descent to the chariot rather than the *Sar Torah* praxis.

(*Pereq di R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah*) encourages “every disciple who knows that his learning is not established in his hand” (§310) to make use of its rituals and adjurations.

Likewise, the *Hekhalot Zutarti* does not give a clear-cut answer to the question. It contains the passages about the threshold test (§407) and water test (§408) in a form very similar to the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, including the reference to “the seed of those who kissed the calf.” But other passages imply that anyone could use the adjurations and praxes the document presents. The *Hekhalot Zutarti* opens, “If you want to be unique in the world, to have the mysteries of the world and the secrets of wisdom revealed to you, repeat this teaching and be careful with it until the day of your separation” (§335). The next section has God telling Moses, “Any man whose heart errs—invoke over him these names” (§336; cf. §340).

The evidence of the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* points toward an openness to recruiting disciples despite their family background, but it also hints at a new twist. Early in the work, R. Ishmael reports that R. Akiva told him “that to all flesh and blood in whose heart is the praise of RWZYY YHWH, God of Israel, there is revealed this great mystery” (§547). This lesson is reinforced later.

(§583) R. Ishmael said:

ZBWDY'L, the angel of the Presence, said to me:

“Son of the proud, what merit did your father and your mother have that you merit taking your stand upon this mystery?” For the whole, entire world did not merit it, but I and R. Akiva merit making use of it.

(§584) R. Ishmael said:

ŠQDHWZYH, the angel of the Presence, said to me:

Son of the proud, do not declare yourself more majestic than all your associates, and do not say, “Indeed, I have more merit than anyone,” for it is not from your vigor and your might, but from the vigor of the might of your Father Who is in heaven. But blissful are you in this world, and it will be good for you in the world to come. And blissful are you, and it will be good for you forever and ever and ever and for all the mortals who take hold of it and recite it from dawn to dawn in prayer like you.

This strident egalitarianism may be mitigated by a slightly later passage, in which R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah asks R. Ishmael why he dared expound on all the angels in the heavenly palaces. R. Ishmael replies that he did so for God's glory, not his own, but R. Nehuniah warns him, “The Torah of truth that Aaron the priest acquired

remains to you, and there is no grief for you concerning this mystery. But if you seek to use this mystery, strengthen yourself with five prayers" (§586). The point seems to be that R. Ishmael's priestly ancestry has offered him some protection, but he should nevertheless safeguard his position by reciting appropriate Merkavah hymns.

The *Merkavah Rabba* also implies that all who seek the powers of the Sar Torah praxes may pursue them, and indeed it carries this claim further than any of the other macroforms. At one point R. Akiva descends to the chariot to learn about a ritual praxis described earlier in the work. There he sees God on his throne, who says to him,

(§686b) Akiva, my son, this throne of glory on which I am seated is a lovely furnishing that my hand, my right hand, founded. Even if one has been a proselyte for only an hour, and his body is innocent of idolatry and bloodshed and incest, I am bound to him. I bind to him Metatron my servant—to his steps and to much study of Torah.

God then orders R. Akiva to return to earth and teach the praxis to human beings, which he does. Thus, even a recently converted proselyte can seek ritual power from heavenly secrets.

Nevertheless, family background is not irrelevant to an adept's success or failure in the perilous work of adjuring angels. In an earlier passage R. Ishmael learns that he had been carrying out the rituals in a manner contrary to the *halakhah*. R. Nehuniah tells him, "But for the covenant that was made for Aaron and the shoot from which you (priests) came, they (the angels) already would have attacked you and destroyed you from the world" (§681). His priestly status protected him from angelic assault even when he erred in the requisite rituals.

Yet more explicit affirmations of the importance of R. Ishmael's priestly lineage appear in *3 Enoch*. At the opening of the work, he ascends to the door of the seventh palace, where he prays,

(*3 Enoch* 1:3 [§1]) Master of the world, I beg You that in this hour the merit of Aaron, son of Amram, lover of peace and pursuer of peace, who received a crown of priesthood from before Your glory on Mount Sinai, be extended to me so that Qaspiel the prince and the angels who are with him will not overcome me nor cast me from heaven.³⁴

³⁴ Another version of this speech appears in G12 2a 5-7.

God then sends Metatron to escort him the rest of the way. When they reach the throne of glory, the other angels object to the presence of a mere-human being in their midst and demand to know his background and character. Metatron replies,

(3 *Enoch* 2:1–3 [§3]) He is of the people of Israel, which the Holy One, blessed be He, chose to be his people out of the seventy tongues; of the tribe of Levi, who lifts up the offering to His name; of the seed of Aaron, he whom the Holy One, blessed be He, chose to be His own attendant, onto whom the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself bound a crown of priesthood on Sinai.

When they learn of his lineage, the angels conclude, “Certainly he is fit to gaze at the chariot!” (3 *Enoch* 2:4 [§3]).

To sum up: there is a general sense in the macroforms that any disciple of the sages can pursue either the descent to the chariot or Sar Torah revelations if he chooses to do so. But this welcoming attitude is qualified in various ways. According to the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, ideally one should be of a family without egregious sin in its background and oneself morally irreproachable or an outstanding scholar. The *Sar Torah* praxis should work for any Jew, no matter how dull or uneducated, but having righteous parents is still helpful. The *Hekhalot Zutarti* invites all comers but also acknowledges that a poor genealogy can bring disaster to an adept. Both the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* and the *Merkavah Rabba* emphasize the egalitarian nature of the praxes they promote, yet both acknowledge that being of a priestly family gives an advantage, and this last point is reinforced by 3 *Enoch*.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have illustrated with specific cases the general point that most shamans are chosen by the spirits. The election by the spirits can be communicated by various means, such as dreams or visions (drug-induced or otherwise, accompanied by an initiatory sickness or not) and special physical characteristics or markings. Often shamanism runs in a family. Unsolicited attempts by human beings to attract the attention of spirits in order to achieve shamanhood are rare but not unknown.

The physiognomic tractates indicate that practitioners similar to those found in the *Hekhalot* literature were chosen on the basis of physical markings that were not unlike those of shamans. Physical

appearance and astrological background were used for many purposes, including to identify students especially gifted in Torah study and those able to ascend to the angelic realm. Geonic writers refer to the use of the “discernment of appearance,” physiognomic canons for deducing someone’s personality, by the same R. Ishmael who appears in the Hekhalot literature.

When we come to the Hekhalot texts themselves, we find evidence at the beginning of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* that the writers may have used physiognomic canons to judge those around them. One passage in the *Merkāvah Rabba* also echoes the language of the physiognomic treatises. The Hekhalot literature never refers to specific physical criteria for acceptance into the group, and indeed the texts sometimes seem to issue an open invitation for any disciple of the sages to join. Nevertheless, heredity and character are viewed as important factors that bear strongly on the success or failure of an initiate. Such evidence as there is seems to indicate that one became a Hekhalot practitioner by attaching oneself to a more experienced practitioner—whether voluntarily or at the behest of the senior practitioner is not clear. There is no particular reason why we should expect a uniform viewpoint among the various macroforms, let alone among the numerous microforms within them, but overall the viewpoints expressed are reasonably consistent.

They are also reasonably consistent with shamanism. There is no evidence of a direct and explicit call by the spirits (as with the Gol’d shaman, Autdaruta, and Nick Black Elk) but possession of the requisite physical characteristics may have been considered a call in itself (as among the Shor and with the *itako*). A given culture might recognize a fairly wide range of experiences that could lead to a vocation as a shaman, but at the same time most shamans might come from particular families or be chosen on the basis of specific personal characteristics. To take Inuit culture as an example, Edward F. Foulks reports of it as follows:

People did not voluntarily seek to become shamans. In some cases, an old shaman would recognize certain personality qualities in a youth, which would indicate that he was a good candidate for tutelage. Not infrequently, a youth traveling alone on the tundra would hear his name being called by a *tunraq* [a spirit]. If he answered the call, the power of the *tunraq* would be his; however, he would be doomed from that moment on to the fears and turmoils of dealing with the supernatural. While virtually anyone could become a shaman from such experiences, in

practice this role was often passed from father to son, or from a man to another close relative. Shamanistic power seemed to run in certain families On the other hand, Rasmussen . . . observed among the Angmagssalik Eskimos that orphans were often the chosen subjects for shamanism.³⁵

In short, the evidence supports the view that the practitioners described in the Hekhalot literature received their vocation in ways consistent with what we know about how one becomes a shaman.

³⁵ Edward F. Foulks, *The Arctic Hysterias of the North Alaskan Eskimo* (Anthropological Studies 10; Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1972) 50.

CHAPTER FOUR

SHAMANIC ASCETIC TECHNIQUES

Shamans reach the state that gives them access to the otherworld and the spirits in a variety of ways. A very common method is by ingesting mind-altering drugs. Another is to listen to the protracted pounding of a drum. Less direct methods are also widely practiced. These include various forms of isolation and self-denial, such as fasting, solitary confinement, celibacy, and dietary and purity restrictions, as well as protracted prayer and singing. This chapter explores these methods in selected cross-cultural contexts in order to show that the ascetic techniques attributed to the religious functionaries in the Hekhalot literature correspond well to what shamans do to achieve their states of trance.

Ascetic Techniques of Shamans

The Use of Hallucinogenic Drugs

The use of hallucinogenic drugs is quite common among shamans in many cultures, although the centrality and origins of the use of psychoactive drugs in shamanism continue to be debated. Eliade acknowledges that such drugs are used frequently but asserts that their use is a sign of degeneration from a more original form of shamanism. He writes,

Narcotics are only a vulgar substitute for “pure” trance. We have already had occasion to note this fact among several Siberian peoples; the use of intoxicants (alcohol, tobacco, etc.) is a recent innovation and points to a decadence in shamanic technique. Narcotic intoxication is called on to provide an *imitation* of a state that the shaman is no longer capable of attaining otherwise.¹

R. Gordon Wasson takes strong exception to Eliade’s conclusions. Wasson, who focused much of his research on the use of hallucinogenic

¹ Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* 401 (author’s emphasis). See also pp. 24, 64, 84–85, 109, 130 n. 58, 220–23, 228, 278, 395–402, 416–17, 475, 477.

mushrooms, has argued that the intoxicant *soma*, mentioned frequently in the Rig Veda, was actually the fly agaric, a psychotropic mushroom that is also used by Siberian shamans and lay people as an inebriant. He maintains that the use of the fly agaric for shamanic trances goes back six to ten millennia in Siberia.² Wasson's views are accepted by Michael Ripinsky-Naxon, who argues that the use of psychoactive drugs is both ancient and integral to shamanism. He even suggests that human beings may have domesticated cereal grains for the pharmacological properties of fungal parasites associated with grain; the food value of cereal may have been a later discovery.³

Fortunately, this problem is irrelevant to this inquiry, and we may set it aside. But it is worthwhile to include one example of a shamanic tradition that uses mind-altering drugs to generate a Shamanic State of Consciousness.⁴ The shamans among the Native American Mazatecs of the Mexican state of Oaxaca use psychotropic mushrooms (*Psilocybe mexicana Heim*) in their work. The best known of these shamans is María Sabina, a Mazatec woman who was born in 1894 and died in 1985, whose initiation into shamanhood is related in chapter 3. Widowed twice, she acted as a shaman between and after her marriages and earned a wide reputation as a healer which came to the attention of Western scholars in the 1950s. Three of her shamanic séances were recorded (in 1956, 1958, and 1970) and their contents published and translated into English and Spanish. Álvaro Estrada, a native speaker of her language, also interviewed her and published the story of her life. Her songs are discussed below.⁵

² R. Gordon Wasson, *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968) esp. pp. 326–34.

³ Ripinsky-Naxon, *The Nature of Shamanism* 151–86. For additional discussions of the use of drugs in shamanism, see Michael J. Harner (ed.), *Hallucinogens and Shamanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁴ Perhaps the best-known Native American figure associated with the use of psychoactive drugs is Don Juan, who was made famous by Carlos Castaneda beginning with *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (New York: Ballantine, 1968) and then in many other volumes. Don Juan is presented as a Yaqui Indian from Sonora, Mexico, who was a “brujo,” a medicine man or sorcerer, who used peyote, as well as other hallucinogenic plants, in his work. Don Juan seems to be different than a shaman, however, and in any case, doubts have been raised concerning the veracity of Castaneda's work. See Richard de Mille, *Castaneda's Journey: The Power and the Allegory* (2nd ed.; Santa Barbara, Calif.: Capra, 1978); Richard de Mille (ed.), *The Don Juan Papers: Further Castaneda Controversies* (2nd ed.; Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1990).

⁵ Wasson et al., *María Sabina and Her Mazatec Mushroom Velada*; Estrada et al., *María Sabina: Her Life and Chants*. See also Halifax, *Shamanic Voices* 129–35, 195–213.

Beating a Drum

The use of protracted drumming to achieve a trance state is extremely common among shamans, especially in Siberia and among Native Americans. Speaking of Siberian shamanism in particular, Eliade writes:

The drum has a role of the first importance in shamanic ceremonies. Its symbolism is complex, its magical functions many and various. It is indispensable in conducting the shamanic séance, whether it carries the shaman to the "Center of the World," or enables him to fly through the air, or summons and "imprisons" the spirits, or, finally, if the drumming enables the shaman to concentrate and regain contact with the spiritual world through which he is preparing to travel.

It will be remembered that several initiatory dreams of future shamans included a mystical journey to the "Center of the World," to the seat of the Cosmic Tree and the Universal Lord. It is from a branch of this Tree, which the Lord causes to fall for the purpose, that the shaman makes the shell of his drum. The meaning of this symbolism seems sufficiently apparent from the complex of which it is a part: communication between sky and earth by means of the World Tree, that is, by the Axis that passes through the "Center of the World." *By the fact that the shell of his drum is derived from the actual wood of the Cosmic Tree, the shaman, through his drumming, is magically projected into the vicinity of the Tree; he is projected to the "Center of the World," and can thus ascend to the sky.*⁶

Likewise, Hultkrantz writes with reference to Native American shamans:

An important aid for establishing contact with the other world is the drum (often of a tambourine shape), used primarily in North America, and the rattle, which occurs throughout the two continents. In South America the gourd rattle is a sacred instrument enclosing the stones in which the spirits hide; the sound of the rattle is accordingly interpreted as the voices of the spirits. The Indians are generally of the opinion that the drum and the rattle summon the helping

The work of other Mazatec shamans is discussed by Henry Munn in "The Mushrooms of Language," in *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, ed. Harner, 86-122.

⁶ Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* 168-69 (author's emphasis), see also pp. 170-76. For discussions of the construction and use of the drum in Siberian shamanism, see V. Diószegi, "The Problem of the Ethnic Homogeneity of Tofa (Karagas) Shamanism," in *Popular Beliefs and Folklore Tradition in Siberia*, ed. Diószegi, 239-329, esp. pp. 268-86, 294-98, 301-314, 319-323, 327; E. Manker, "Seite Cult and Drum Magic of the Lapps," in *ibid.*, 27-40; Siikala, "Shamanism: Siberian and Inner Asian Shamanism," in *ER* 13:212-14; S. M. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus* (London: Kegan Paul, 1935) 287-303.

spirits or frighten away evil spirits. We may add that both of them also serve as instruments of exaltation.⁷

Listening to drumming may, like ingesting psychoactive drugs, affect the human brain in a way that predisposes it toward altered states of consciousness.⁸ These two methods are the most direct ways used by shamans to induce trance states in themselves. However, the Hekhalot literature gives no indication that either practice was used by the practitioners it describes, so I will focus on more subtle ascetic praxes that are also frequently reported of shamans and that, as we shall see, correspond well to the exercises attributed to the functionaries in the Hekhalot texts.

Isolation and Self-Denial

Many shamans make use of a constellation of techniques that revolve around isolation and self-denial. This section examines in detail the techniques used by Inuit, Lakota, and Japanese shamans and then abstracts from these accounts a basic set of praxes that are found frequently among shamans who depend on this approach to achieve their trance states.

Inuit shamanism (Igugarjuk)

Igugarjuk, when he was an old man, described to Rasmussen his initiation into shamanhood.

When I was to be a shaman, I chose suffering through the two things that are most dangerous to us humans, suffering through hunger and suffering through cold. . . .

My instructor was my wife's father, Perqánâq. When I was to be exhibited to Pinga and Hila,⁹ he dragged me on a little sledge that

⁷ Hultkrantz, *The Religions of the American Indians* 101. For accounts of the use of the drum in Native American shamanic séances, see, for example, idem, "Spirit Lodge, a North American Shamanistic Séance," 39–44 (an Oglala Lakota shaman performing for an Arapaho community); Grim, *The Shaman: Patterns of Siberian and Ojibway Healing* 156–67. Lakota shamans use drums and rattles frequently in their rituals but not, as far as I can tell, in their vision quests (for which, see below). For the use of the drum and rattle in the Lakota *Hunka* (making of relatives) ceremony, see Walker et al., *Lakota Belief and Ritual* 216–39; and for their use in a healing ceremony, see DeMallie (ed.), *The Sixth Grandfather* 236–37.

⁸ Winkelman, *Shamans, Priests and Witches* 95.

⁹ On the mythology of the so-called Caribou Mother goddess, who goes by both these names, see Daniel Merkur, *Powers Which We Do Not Know: The Gods and Spirits of the Inuit* (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1991) 89–95.

was no bigger than I could just sit on it; he dragged me far over on the other side of Hikoligjuaq. It was a very long day's journey inland to a place we call Kíngârjuit: the high hills, which are at Tikerarjuaq (by the southeast shore of Hikoligjuaq). It was in winter time and took place at night with the new moon; one could just see the very first streak of the moon; it had just appeared in the sky. I was not fetched again until the next moon was of the same size. Perqánâq built a small snow hut at the place where I was to be, this snow hut being no bigger than that I could just get under cover and sit down. I was given no sleeping skin to protect me against the cold, only a little piece of caribou skin to sit upon. There I was shut in . . . The entrance was closed with a block, but no soft snow was thrown over the hut to make it warm. When I had sat there five days, Perqánâq came with water, tepid, wrapped in caribou skin, a watertight caribou-skin bag. Not until fifteen days afterwards did he come again and hand me the same, just giving himself time to hand it to me, and then he was gone again, for even the old shaman must not interrupt my solitude. The snow hut in which I sat was built far from the trails of men, and when Perqánâq had found the spot where he thought it ought to be built, he stopped the little sledge at a distance, and there I had to remain seated until the snow hut was ready. Not even I, who was after all the one to have to stay there, might set my footprints in the vicinity of the hut, and old Perqánâq had to carry me from the sledge over to the hut so that I could crawl in. As soon as I had become alone, Perqánâq enjoined me to think of one single thing all the time I was to be there, to want only one single thing, and that was to draw Pinga's attention to the fact that there I sat and wished to be a shaman. . . . Pinga should own me. My novitiate took place in the middle of the coldest winter, and I, who never got anything to warm me, and must not move, was very cold, and it was so tiring having to sit without daring to lie down, that sometimes it was as if I died a little.¹⁰

Igjugarjuk was successful: he was visited by a spirit near the end of his thirty-day ordeal.¹¹ But his training and testing were far from over. After he was brought home by Perqánâq in a severely emaciated condition, he was permitted to eat, although other restrictions were imposed:

¹⁰ Rasmussen, *Observations on the Intellectual Culture of the Caribou Eskimos* 52-53.

¹¹ Presumably we must grant Igjugarjuk some poetic license in his story. This is confirmed by the other two accounts of shamanic initiations given to Rasmussen by Igjugarjuk. According to one, he hanged a disciple from some tent poles for five days, then took her down and used a gun to shoot her in the heart with a stone. She recovered the next morning, just before he was going to bring her back to life. Igjugarjuk tied another disciple to a pole and, after a hole was cut through the ice, completely immersed him in a lake for five days, a treatment that made him into

For a long time I might eat only very little in order to again get my intestines extended, and later came the diet that was to help cleanse my body.

For a whole year I was not to lie with my wife, who, however, had to make my food. For a whole year I had to have my own little cooking pot and my own meat dish; no one else was allowed to eat of what had been cooked for me.¹²

Earlier in his account he describes his special diet as

... the sort of food on which there is never any taboo, preferably fleshy meat, and never intestines, head, heart or other entrails, nor meat that has been touched by wolf or wolverine while it lay in a cache. I was to keep to this diet for five moons, and then the next five moons might eat everything; but after that I was again forced to eat the meat diet that is prescribed for all those who must do penance in order to become clean. The old ones attached great importance to the food that the would-be shamans might eat...¹³

A number of elements worked together in Igjugarjuk's initiation to prepare him mentally and physically for a visitation from the spirits. Prolonged fasting was combined with isolation from other people, near-total sensory deprivation in the small ice hut, and acute discomfort from the bitter cold. In these circumstances he was instructed to concentrate entirely on his desire that the goddess Pinga accept him as a shaman. Igjugarjuk's father-in-law placed him in an ideal situation for generating the sort of visionary experience he sought in order to become a shaman.

Even after his initiatory vision, it was necessary for him to submit to a long ascetic regime to preserve and develop the spiritual power he had gained. For an entire year he had to remain celibate while adhering to purity regulations and, periodically, to a special diet.

a mighty shaman (Rasmussen, *Observations on the Intellectual Culture of the Caribou Eskimos* 57-58). Dan Merkur notes that in these two descriptions the initiation lasts for five days, and he gives other evidence that shamanic vision quests normally lasted five days among the western and central Inuit. Merkur suggests that Igjugarjuk's initiation probably ended on the fifth day, when his father-in-law returned to him (*Becoming Half Hidden: Shamanism and Initiation Among the Inuit* [rev. ed.; New York and London: Garland, 1992] 236-38).

¹² Rasmussen, *Observations on the Intellectual Culture of the Caribou Eskimos* 53.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 52.

Lakota shamanism

It should be noted that vision quests are not limited to shamans in Lakota society. Traditionally, any male Lakota may undertake a vision quest for any number of reasons, and many do so. Among the texts collected by Walker is a set of instructions for the vision quest by a man named Thunder Bear. Much of it describes the procedure to be followed by someone who wishes to become a medicine man. Since it gives an orderly description of the rituals involved, I quote this passage at length.

Among the Sioux Indians if a man wishes to become a medicine man he must *Hanbleceya* which means he must seek a vision in a peculiar manner. To *Hanbleceya* one must invite a number of medicine men to be with him and advise him in his preparation.

He then builds a sweat house by sticking slender poles into the ground in a circle about six feet across and then bending them and weaving them together so as to form a dome about four feet high and over this he places a covering of skins, robes, or other material, leaving a place just large enough to crawl in but which can be closed from the inside. When the invited men are assembled, they heat a number of stones and place them in the sweat house. Then they all strip and go into the sweat house. While in there, they pour water on the hot stones or they pour infusions of herbs on them. This fills the place with steam and causes those in it to sweat freely.

While in the sweat house, the medicine men exhort the one who wishes to seek a vision and advise him how to proceed and impress on him the importance of telling truly his experiences while seeking the vision. They tell him that if he is successful in his quest the Spirit of the Earth will come to him in some form and communicate with him and that this communication must be interpreted rightly and that he must govern his action according to this interpretation. They are expected to be present when he returns from his quest and to aid him in arriving at the true interpretation of the communication. After the exhortation and advice are ended, all come out of the sweat house, bathe, and clothe themselves and then the one who wishes to seek a vision gives a feast.

Soon after this, he prepares four small banners on four small wands, mixes kinnikinic,¹⁴ and fastens a small portion of this to each banner. He then strips himself naked and, throwing a robe about his body, takes a pipe, some kinnikinic, and the banners and goes to the top of a hill. There he clears a space of all vegetation, large enough to lie on, and, placing one banner each at the west, north, east, and south,

¹⁴ Tobacco mixed with dried willow or dogwood bark and smoked ceremonially. See Walker et al., *Lakota Belief and Ritual* 295 n. 13.

he then implores the Spirit of the West, the North, the East, and the South to aid him. He then fills the pipe with kinnikinic and lights it and while smoking it makes an offering of the smoke to the spirits, facing first to the west, then to the north, then to the east, and then to the south, addressing each spirit in turn.

He then sits and meditates as long as he deems proper and then he rises and calls on the Spirit of the Winds and of the Clouds and of the Thunder to help him and makes an offering of smoke to these, addressing each in turn. He then sits and meditates for a longer period than before, after which he covers himself entirely with the robe and then calls on the Spirit of the Earth to come and speak to him, chanting a song in praise of the spirit.

After this he must at no time go from the space he has prepared for himself but may lie, sit, or stand, but must try to keep his mind on his quest. He must neither eat nor drink after this until the quest is over. The Spirit of the Earth may come to him either while he is awake or as a dream while he sleeps. It may come to him in the form of a man, an animal, or a bird or it may come as a voice only or only in his thoughts. When it comes, it will tell him something which will be a knowledge of some medicine or what to do in the future or a warning against some evil or to make another quest or to cease from seeking a vision. The communication is apt to be ambiguous and require an interpretation.

The spirit may not come at all and after maintaining his quest as long as he can endure the fasting, he returns and reports his failure. Or the spirit may come only after he has fasted for four or five days, when the communication is very apt to be ambiguous and very important and to require much time and consultation to be properly interpreted.

Soon after he returns from his quest, he calls together the medicine men who advised him in his preparation and they prepare and enter the sweat house as before and he then tells them while in the sweat house all he experienced, and if he failed to see the spirit they question him closely as to all he did and advise him how to proceed anew, which he may or may not do, as he chooses. If he saw a vision, he tells it to them and they question him closely regarding all the particulars relating to it. If the meaning of the communication is plain, then he is declared the proper custodian of the knowledge and the proper person to exercise it.

If the meaning of the communication is ambiguous, they come out of the sweat house, bathe, and clothe themselves and enter into council which continues until an interpretation is agreed upon, after which he is declared the custodian of the knowledge and the proper person to exercise it. If this knowledge pertains to the sick or to anything that may be used as a medicine, this knowledge constitutes him a medicine man so far as that particular medicine is concerned. But it gives him no other knowledge or power.

If the vision pertains to a particular kind or class of medicine, as, for instance, Bear medicine, he must become the pupil of some Bear medicine man and learn what the medicines are, how to prepare them, how to administer them, and the songs and ceremonies that pertain to them.¹⁵

The ascetic techniques used in the Lakota vision quest are described with greater detail than the Inuit praxis, although the length of the ordeal seems to be roughly comparable (if we accept that Igjugarjuk fasted five rather than thirty days). The regime begins with the sweat lodge ceremony, which exposes the subject to an environmental extreme (heat from steam) and darkness, while focusing his mind on the spiritual matters behind the ceremony through the ongoing explanations, songs, and prayers. No doubt the fumigation and smoking of tobacco also have a psychological effect. After this preparation the quester seeks a vision in isolation, outdoors at the top of a hill, in an area he makes into a sacred space where he meditates, fasts, prays, and sings until he either receives a spirit visitation or gives up. If he has a vision, he brings together the medicine men of his community, who agree on an interpretation and also on the initiate's new status and, if necessary, on who should become his mentor.

Japanese shamanism (Suzuki Tsuyako and Deguchi Onisaburō)

Both the (mostly male) ascetic shamans (*yamabushi*) and the blind female mediums (*itako*) of Japan make use of ascetic techniques to gain and maintain their otherworldly powers. According to Blacker, who discusses these practices in detail in her monograph on Japanese shamanism, the austerities in question are especially prevalent among those who actively seek shamanhood rather than being called by a deity. Generally known as *gyō*, these practices include fasting and dietary restrictions of various kinds, rigorous regimes of immersion and bathing in ice-cold water, seclusion in a dark place, and walking pilgrimages between sacred places. These disciplines, especially the endurance of cold, eventually fill the shaman with heat and spiritual might.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid., 130–32. The account of Nick Black Elk's vision of the Thunder Beings conforms well to this outline (DeMallie (ed.), *The Sixth Grandfather* 227–32).

¹⁶ Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow* 85–93, 98–103.

Dietary restrictions come in a number of forms, including abstinence from meat (a Buddhist and Shinto practice) and abstinence from the Five Cereals (rice, wheat, millet, barley, and beans; a Taoist practice). Japanese shamans also engage in total fasting for a set period of time. The most extreme, not to say macabre, type of fasting was carried out by Japanese ascetics in the early modern period, some of whom very gradually starved themselves to death in order to mummify themselves.¹⁷

The shaman performs the cold water immersion (*mizugori*) by standing under a waterfall (preferably well before dawn and in the coldest part of the winter) or, if no waterfall is handy, by pouring buckets of ice-cold water in vast numbers over his or her own shoulders.

Seclusion (*komori*) is practiced by confining oneself, "preferably in the darkness of a cave, in a temple or shrine, or in a room of one's own house specially prepared and purified."¹⁸ In addition, from the early Middle Ages on, ascetics have gone on prolonged walking tours to a series of sacred places as part of their regime of austerities.¹⁹

Two examples of the use of ascetic techniques by Japanese shamans will be given here. The first describes the initiation of an *itako* in Yamagata prefecture in the 1930s.

Suzuki Tsuyako, born in 1923, recalled a severe daily *mizugori* at crack of dawn, twelve buckets of cold water from the river to be poured over each shoulder. In winter this austerity was excruciating; the cold was so intense that often she nearly lost consciousness and only kept herself from fainting by focusing all her power and concentration on reciting the *Hannya Shingyō*. She had nothing to eat until midday. All the morning was spent in repeating, phrase by phrase after her teacher, various kinds of sacred text, including *norito* and invocations to Inari, Kōjin and the deities of the nearby mountains Gassan and Yudonosan. Her memory was bad, and her teacher often scolded her until she cried.

Once the initiation ritual drew near, however, the austerities increased ferociously in intensity. For the week immediately preceding the rite,

¹⁷ For these "self-mummified Buddhas," see *ibid.*, 87–90; Ichiro Hori, "Self-Mummified Buddhas in Japan: An Aspect of the Shugen-Dō ('Mountain Asceticism') Sect," *HR* 1 (1961) 222–42.

¹⁸ Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow* 98.

¹⁹ For these shamanic walking tours, see *ibid.*, 99–102; Ichiro Hori, "On the Concept of *Hijiri* (Holy Man)," *Numen* 5 (1958) 128–60, 199–232.

the girl was subjected to appallingly severe *gyō*, calculated to reduce the body to a pitch of exhaustion verging on total breakdown.

Suzuki Tsuyako, for example, described the ordeals which she underwent in 1935 at the age of twelve. The intensification of her *gyō* started a hundred days before her initiation, when every morning at 2 a.m., the spiritually powerful hour of the ox, she had to get up, grope her way to the river bank and pour twelve buckets of cold water over each shoulder. She then had to walk to the local Inari shrine, light candles and chant the *Hannya Shingyō*. Blind as she was and unaffected by the darkness, she nevertheless found the precincts of the shrine at that hour of the morning terrifyingly uncanny. During this period neither she nor her family ate meat or strong-smelling vegetables.

For the week immediately before her initiation the austerities were further intensified to an almost incredible pitch of severity. She had first to observe the *sandachi* of Three Abstentions. No cereals must pass her lips, no salt, nor any cooked foods. Nor, if the austerities took place in winter, must she ever go near a stove or any other form of heating.

Every day she had to pour over her shoulders no less than a thousand buckets of cold water, each one counted on the beads of a rosary. At the same time she must recite a thousand *Hannya Shingyōs* and twenty-one Kannon Sutras. This appalling austerity lasted from crack of dawn until late at night, so that throughout the week she was allowed next to no sleep. The first two days of this fearful regime, she recalled, were almost unbearable. The intense cold, the sleeplessness and the semi-starvation brought her to the point of breakdown. Her joints ached so agonisingly that she could scarcely walk or lift the buckets over her head. But on the third day her pain suddenly vanished. She felt herself flooded with an extraordinary access of strength and enthusiasm such that she felt capable of enduring any ordeal in order to accomplish the final initiation.²⁰

In the exercises preliminary to her initiation, Suzuki Tsuyako was thus subjected to partial fasting, an environmental extreme (agonizingly excessive cold) at times inflicted in isolation, and sleep deprivation. Paradoxically, just when the austerities seemed about to bring about complete physiological breakdown, she suddenly found herself filled with a new and mysterious vigor. Referring to this and other accounts, Blacker sums up the purpose of asceticism in Japanese shamanism. Her conclusions seem valid as a general interpretation of shamanic asceticism cross-culturally:

²⁰ Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow* 143-44.

Here we are surely confronted with the underlying reason for *gyō*. Performed within a sacred context, with the prospect of a transformed life ahead, asceticism may open the mind to an influx of spiritual strength. By breaking down the ordinary human habits of living, by drastically altering the rhythms of sleep and eating, and above all by subjecting the body to extreme degrees of cold, the system is reduced to a point where mere collapse would usually ensue. Where the sacred world lies before one, however, these stresses become the means of opening a crack or vent in the hard carapace of human habit, enabling a new source of power to stream in.²¹

The second example of the use of austerities by a Japanese shaman focuses on a modern figure, Deguchi Onisaburō, a founder of the new religion Ōmoto. Blacker summarizes his experience as follows:

Deguchi appears to have been a sickly youth, haunted by visions of ghosts. He also affected the low company of gamblers and drunkards, who in the spring of 1898 beat him up so severely that he was nearly killed. After recovering from this ordeal he suddenly disappeared, and for a week nothing was heard of him. Then he reappeared, and . . . sank for several days into a comatose sleep. When eventually he recovered consciousness, he declared that he had gone to a cave on Mt Takakuma in order to undergo a period of ascetic fasting. There his soul had been separated from his body and carried off, under the guidance of a variety of divine figures, to all the quarters of heaven and hell. In the course of his journey he had been granted supernatural powers, including clairvoyance and clairaudience. . . .

His account begins with a description of his austerities in a cave on the holy mountain Takakuma. For several days neither food nor water passed his lips. Day and night he sat crosslegged on a painfully jagged rock, his body pierced by an icy wind, while blood-curdlingly uncanny sounds reverberated over the mountainside. Then there appeared a messenger who summoned his soul from his body and carried it off hundreds of leagues through the air, his body meanwhile remaining behind crosslegged in the cave.²²

Deguchi used variations on the standard techniques employed by Japanese shamans to enter a trance state: fasting (in this case total abstention from both food and drink), isolation in a cave, and environmental extremes (sitting on a jagged rock in an icy wind).

²¹ Ibid., 146.

²² Ibid., 202–203.

Songs and Words of Power

Besides the painful austerities described in the previous section, the ascetic discipline of *gyō* in Japanese shamanism also includes what Blacker calls in general terms "the recitation of words of power." She divides these words of power into three categories: (1) Some words are considered to confer power on the reciter because of their meaning, such as a passage in the Lotus Sutra describing the redemptive virtue of the Bodhisattva Kannon. (2) Other words have no meaning to the reciter, but their mere recitation gives power, theoretically because of the inherent structure of the words themselves. In Japan, corrupt Sanskrit texts whose meanings are lost to all but a few scholars often serve in this category. (3) The invocation and pronunciation of divine names are also understood inherently to endue the invoker with power. These three types of recitation are normally combined with ascetic practices.²³ Note, for example, the use of invocations of divinities and recitations of sacred texts in the initiation of Suzuki Tsuyako described in the previous section.

In fact, Blacker's categorization of the songs and recitations of Japanese shamans also works well cross-culturally. The power of song is normally used by shamans alongside their ascetic disciplines. As we saw above, song and prayer are integral elements of both the sweat lodge ceremony and the vision quest of the Lakota. Walker's informants confirm the importance of these practices for the Lakota shaman. A group of older shamans described to him the paraphernalia and methods of the holy man or shaman. They said, *inter alia*,

A shaman has his songs and his formulae. He has a song and formula for each God. Other shamans may have different songs and formulae for the same Gods. . . . These songs and formulae are in the speech of the shamans. . . . When a shaman prays, he first sings his song or he repeats his formula and then he tells the God what he wishes.²⁴

As this passage indicates, the shamans had their own esoteric language (*iyē wakan*) used in the rituals. They also spoke the language of the spirits (*hanbloglaka*). Neither of these languages was intelligible to those who were not shamans.²⁵ Classical Lakota shamanism thus

²³ *Ibid.*, 93–98; the quotation is on p. 93.

²⁴ Walker et al., *Lakota Belief and Ritual* 95 (author's ellipses).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 30, 31, 34–35, 37, 48, 79, 80, 84, 94, 114, 128. For more on such

tied the power of words to its ascetic practices through invocation of the gods and song that was meaningless to outsiders.

The songs of María Sabina conform especially well to Blacker's categories. The meaning of much of the material is clear, if extremely poetic and allusive. It pertained to the problem under consideration and the events occurring in the *séance*.²⁶ Still, the songs often contained meaningless words of power. Sometimes these were purely nonsense syllables or "glossolalia."²⁷ Sometimes María Sabina used archaic Mazatec terms that no longer occur in the contemporary language and whose meanings may have been unknown even to her. She called one of these phrases "mushroom language."²⁸ She also introduced uncomprehended and garbled Spanish phrases into her songs. For example, in her performance recorded in July 1970, she began "by reciting the Lord's Prayer in pidgin Spanish."²⁹ In addition, she often invoked divine names—usually Christian terms, but set in a context suffused with pre-Conquest religious notions. Immediately after her Spanish recitation of the Lord's Prayer she continued:

Father Jesus Christ
 God the Son and God the Holy Spirit
 Lord Saint Peter
 Lord Saint Paul
 Saint, saint, saint

Native American shamanic languages, see Hultkrantz, *Religions of the American Indians* 101. The nature of the sacred languages was probably oversimplified by Walker and his associates to some degree. William K. Powers, who has studied the shamanic languages of the Oglala Lakota of Pine Ridge, finds that these languages are constantly evolving (with words cycling back and forth between the secular and sacred languages), are to a large degree idiosyncratic to a given shaman, and are not consistently archaic. See *Sacred Language: The Nature of Supernatural Discourse in Lakota* (Norman, Ok.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986) 11–41.

²⁶ Much meaningful material is found, for example, in the *séance* recorded on the night of July 12–13, 1958 by R. Gordon Wasson. This *velada* ("night vigil") was performed to inquire of the spirits and intercede with them on behalf of a very ill young man named Perfecto José García. The conclusion reached in the *velada* was that his condition was incurable, and in fact he died six weeks later. The transcript of the performance is found in Wasson et al., *Mazatec Mushroom Velada*.

²⁷ Estrada et al., *María Sabina* 112, 218; Wasson et al., *Mazatec Mushroom Velada* 4–9.

²⁸ Estrada et al., *María Sabina* 211–12; Wasson et al., *Mazatec Mushroom Velada* xxix–xxx, 54, 57, 62–63, 269.

²⁹ Estrada et al., *María Sabina* 126. For comments and other examples of her use of Spanish words, see *ibid.*, 212; Wasson et al., *Mazatec Mushroom Velada* xxix–xxx, 277–78.

Holy saint Father, says³⁰
 Father Jesus Christ, says
 God and Son, says
 God the Holy Spirit, says
 Saint Peter
 Saint Paul
 Saint, saint
 You are the saint, says
 You are the saintess, says
 Holy Father, says
 Father Jesus Christ, says
 God and Son, says
 God the Holy Spirit, says
 Saint Peter, says
 Saint Paul, says
 Holy Father, says
 Father Jesus Christ, God and Son, says
 You are the saint, saint Christ
 You Father Jesus Christ, beneath your eyes, in your presence, you
 who are watching, Father
 Beneath your eyes and your lips, Old One
 From where you look, beneath your gaze, beneath your lips, saint
 Father
 You are the saint and you are the saintess
 Holy Father³¹

Space permits the complete citation of only one shamanic song, which comes from the Siberian Evenki (Tungus) and was recorded and published by G. M. Vasilevič. It has been chosen to illustrate the mixture of divine invocations, archaic and nonsense language, and immediately pertinent narrative description that normally appears in shamans' songs and prayers. The songs of the Evenki shamans often contain so much linguistically archaic material that they are unintelligible to a modern Evenki. Those that can be understood (either through the linguistic knowledge of the researcher or because they are sung in a more modern form by a literate speaker) clearly derive power from their content. This is a song sung during the Evenki ceremony of "searching for the souls of the sick." The reciters knew the song from memory but apparently understood only its general content. The gist of the ceremony and the song is as follows:

³⁰ The subject of "says" is understood to be the mushrooms that are producing the trance.

³¹ Estrada et al., *Maria Sabina* 126-27.

the shaman gathers his helping spirits and goes down the shaman's river but encounters difficulties and is forced to retreat temporarily, lest he go beyond the eighth shallow and die. After invoking help from his assistant spirits, he pauses and then resumes singing, facing the sun. He starts back down the river and does battle with spirits. He reaches the realm of the dead and sends his assistant spirits, who catch a *wala* spirit. After more ceremonial activity he concludes the performance.

Go another way! Go another way!
 Go another way! Go another way!
č̣nəkə Birds have sent [him off]
 Without circling
 He went well inside
 Down [along the river] he started
 Here he led my children [the Evenki]
 Children farther
 Why do you go forward?
 Come here my children!
 Now there is a soul
 On the sharp peak [of the mountain] of the earth
 There we meet
 On the wretched place of earth
 There where the sharp peak [stands]
 In the very middle of the earth.
 At the two waterfalls [of the river]
 On the third waterfall
 I am held up [they catch me]
 On the fourth waterfall
 I am held up,
 On the fifth waterfall
 I am held up
 On the sixth waterfall,
 I am held up
 On the seventh waterfall,
 I am held up
 On the eighth waterfall
 I am held up.
 Turn round! Turn round! Turn round!
 Upwards! Upwards! Upwards you go!
 My dogs, my fast ones
 Don't fall behind!
 In the direction of light
 You run, without dispersing . . .
 By the beginning of day
 Of the morning-mother.

They utter [all sorts of] sounds.
 The older uncles
 Uttering [all sorts of] sounds
 To the mother morning
 They carry [us]
 At the eight places of the descent
 Descend my arrows!
 Small creatures—my protection
 Burbots—my protection
kəštər fish—my protection
 Snake—my ancestress—
 At the light of burning birch bark
 Showed me.
 The place which I reach
 Lighted with the gleam of the birch bark.
 The snake—my ancestress—
 Father *Iwelčə*
 When I was inside
 Like that I shall sing
 With the spirit of disease
 We sang competing
 At the time when there were fields
 They shamanized near the camp-fire
 [unintelligible words]
 [unintelligible words]
 The ceremony—the knowledge of the future
 I am singing.
 Something to say
 I say it now
 Fox-cub—young game
 Now the souls are there!
 [unintelligible words]
 Stop! Stop!
 Oh, oh, my owl
 Look into the future!
hargi spirit, *məlkən* spirit
 Rise on the steep slope!
 Behold there!
 Are there no souls?
 Now we match our strength in battle
wala spirit! *wala* spirit!
 I am not less,
 Not less than you.
 However strong you are
 Your cunning [slyness],
 Spirit of the *tətlmə* disease,
 Spirit of the *ətulkə* disease

Now with you,
 With eight swords
 I will fight.
 On the sharpest peak of the mountain
 We clash in struggle.
 Are there no souls there?
 Down along the river, down!
 Down along the river, down!
 To little mother-night
 To the place of dive [to the outlet of the lower world]
 [unintelligible words]
 On the earth, where there is an outlet.
 There appeared
 a waterfall [in the river]
 There appeared
 The second waterfall,
 There appeared
 The third waterfall,
 The fourth waterfall,
 The fifth waterfall.
 Appeared there
 The sixth waterfall
 will be visible.
 The eighth waterfall
 Appeared there
 On a bright day
 I try to see
 Through the eighth waterfall
 Through the swift course
gaša birds—my fathers
 Carry me
 Until the break of the day
 I try to arrive.
 Little mother morning
 He began to lock up
 With a wooden log
 When morning arrives
 There we shall see
 Little mother morning.
 We shall utter sounds
 On the place where they fuse closely
 When the day breaks
 When the day breaks
 In eight days
 We shall arrive. . .³²

³² G. M. Vasilevič, "Shamanistic Songs of the Evenki (Tungus)," in *Popular Beliefs*

In sum, there is a well-defined and widespread set of techniques used by shamans to gain access to and power over the realm of the spirits. Both the use of hallucinogenic drugs and stimulation from the pounding of a drum are common. With or without these external stimuli, shamans also make use of forms of self-denial and seclusion. These include fasting or dietary restrictions, purification rituals, following of ceremonial taboos and restrictions (e.g., enforced celibacy for short or long periods), isolation and sensory deprivation, and subjection to environmental extremes (including both extreme cold and extreme heat). Song and prayer are also a central part of shamanic asceticism: whatever constellation of techniques is used by a given shaman or shamanic tradition, words and songs of power seem always to be a part of it.

Ascetic Techniques in the Hekhalot Literature

Isolation and Self-Denial

Nothing in the Hekhalot literature indicates that the practitioners it describes made use of psychoactive drugs to induce their visionary experiences. Nor is there any mention of their using drums. Instead, a relatively self-consistent cluster of techniques is frequently described, one that involves various forms of self-denial and ritual purification. To begin with a fairly typical example that appears in the *Sar Torah* text:

(§299) R. Ishmael said:

Thus said R. Akiva in the name of R. Eliezer the Great:

He who would bind himself to the Prince of Torah must wash his garments and his clothes and immerse (in) a strict immersion as a safeguard in case of pollution. And he must enter and dwell for twelve days in a room or in an upper chamber. He must not go out or come in, and he must neither eat nor drink. But from evening to evening see that he eats his bread, clean bread of his own hands, and he drinks pure water, and he does not taste any kind of vegetable.

and Folklore Tradition in Siberia, ed. Diószegi, 351–72. The introductory discussion is on pp. 351–52 and the song quoted here is on pp. 352–59. All ellipses are in the text of the article. The words in brackets appear to be variants from different recitations. Explanatory comments of the informants have been summarized here before the song and omitted from the text of the song itself. For some relevant comments on the cosmology of the Evenki, see Vilmos Diószegi, “The Origin of the Evenki Shamanistic Instruments (Stick, Knout) of Transbaikalia,” in *Shamanism: Selected Writings of Vilmos Diószegi* 134–78, esp. pp. 165–66.

(§300) And he must insert this midrash of the Prince of Torah into the prayer three times in every single day; it is after the prayer that he should pray it from its beginning to its end. And afterward, he must sit and recite during the twelve days, the days of his fasting, from morning until evening, and must not be silent. And in every hour that he finishes it he must stand on his feet and adjure the servants, as well as their King, every single prince twelve times. Afterward he must adjure every single one of them by the seal.

(§§301) These are their names. He should say: (A list of *nomina barbara* follows, each member of which is given the title יהשר, "the prince.")

(§302) He must adjure them for the twelve (days) in the name of YWPY'L, who is the adornment on high of his King;³³ and in the name of SRBY'L, who is one of the princes of the chariot; and in the name of ŠHRRY'L, who is a beloved prince; and in the name of HSDY'L, who is called to might six hours in each day. And he must go back and adjure them, the latter four princes, with the great seal and with a great oath in the name of 'ZBWG', which is a great seal, and in the name of SWRTQ, a holy name and a fearsome crown.

(§303) When he completes the twelve (days), he will go forth to all the principles of Torah that he seeks, whether to Bible, or to Mishnah,³⁴ or to the vision of the chariot, for he goes forth in a pure condition and (departs) from grief and from great pain. For the learning is in our hands, the remedy of the olden ones and the tradition of the ancients, which they wrote and set down for generations (to come), for the humble to make use of it. And whoever is fit shall be answered by them.³⁵

The point of this exercise is to gain control over the Prince of Torah and a number of his fellow angelic princes so as to get power from the ancient principles of Torah, the latter being defined here rather

³³ Several manuscripts read "on high by permission of his King." The gloss מרשהו was added to tone down the high status given to this angel in the original text.

³⁴ A few manuscripts add "or whether to Talmud." Since there are no grounds for haplography and no reason why a scribe might deliberately delete this phrase, I take it to be a secondary expansion. The word *talmud* also appears a few lines later, but I have translated it, according to context, as "learning."

³⁵ Two manuscripts read "by it" (the teaching), but the more difficult reading is certainly the plural form. Schäfer suggests that the plural pronoun refers to the angels (*Übersetzung* 2:297 n. 16). Halperin and Swartz translate the phrase as an indefinite passive construction, "is answered" (*The Faces of the Chariot* 433; *Scholastic Magic* 100).

The next two sections (§§304–305) appear in most but not all manuscripts and deal with the success of the praxis in Palestine and Babylon. Section 306 appears in all manuscripts. It begins "R. Ishmael said: How should a man open before he prays this Prince of Torah (adjuration)? As soon as he has stood up, he must say . . ."; a Merkavah hymn follows. Since §§304–305 are not part of the praxis, it is likely that §306 is also a secondary accretion.

freely as Bible, Mishnah (a few manuscripts add Talmud), and the visionary experience of the chariot. It is interesting that personal visions seem to be put on the same level of authority as the written Torah.

The techniques described here are strikingly similar to those explored in the first section of this chapter. After a ritual immersion to ensure purity, the subject isolates himself for twelve days, during which he eats only bread he has baked himself and drinks only pure water. The point of this limitation seems to be to protect him from the potential cultic defilement from a woman (who might be menstruating or otherwise ritually impure) preparing his food. During the period of isolation he recites the entire "midrash of the Prince of Torah" (presumably some or all of the *Sar Torah* text in §§281–306) with his daily prayers and continues to recite (the same thing?) throughout his waking hours, punctuating the repetitions with invocations of angels along with adjurations by means of the "great seal" and the "fearsome crown." These are prayers that are given elsewhere in a microform that appears in a number of *Hekhalot* manuscripts (§§318–21//651–54).³⁶

A passage near the end of the *Hekhalot Zutarti* also contains instructions about the use of ascetic techniques. It follows a detailed description, narrated by R. Akiva, of the angels who must be faced during the heavenly journey and the proper seals to present which will neutralize them (§§413–19). In §420, R. Ishmael recounts a terrifying experience of self-immolation before the throne of God. Then in §421 the great angel Anaphiel reveals an adjuration of *nomina barbara* and praises R. Akiva for his esoteric knowledge of God. The text continues,

³⁶ The first two sections of the Great Seal—Fearsome Crown text read: (§318//651) R. Ishmael said:

I asked R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah one question about the name of the great seal and about the name of the fearsome crown. I learned the following name of the great seal from him: ŠWRṬQ DR'GYNT 'RK NZYR ŠWRṬYN RDYDYH. This is the seal by which heaven and earth were sealed. The fearsome crown is 'ZBWGH 'BGDHW ZHWZYH ZWHSYH. This is the fearsome crown by which they adjure all the princes of wisdom.

(§319//652) R. Ishmael said:

Anyone who uses the great seal and does not pray a prayer—his end is to pass away.

The next two sections then give the text of the two prayers. The first celebrates God's creation of the universe and the second praises God and blesses his crown.

(§422) R. Akiva said:

When I explicated this praxis of the ascent and the descent of the chariot, they appointed a blessing for me every single day in the heavenly law court and in the earthly law court.

(§423) And in addition R. Akiva said:

A heavenly voice spoke from beneath the throne of glory and said to me:

(As for) my cherished one who troubles himself with the praxis of the ascent and the descent of the chariot before me, I have appointed for him a blessing three times every single day in the heavenly law court and in the earthly law court. And I love and redeem the house in which they recite it.

(§424) R. Akiva said:

Whoever seeks to learn this teaching and to explicate the name fully must sit in fasting for forty days; and he must place his head between his knees until the fasting overcomes him. He must recite an incantation to earth and not to heaven. And earth shall hear, but not heaven. And if he is a youth, he may recite it so long as he does not have an ejaculation. If he has a wife, he must "be ready by the third day," as it is written, "Be ready by the third day; [do not go near a woman]" (Exod 19:15).

If he is reciting it for his associate, he must recite for him one letter from the beginning and one letter from the end, but he must not connect one to the other for him, lest he err and lay waste to the world of the Holy One, blessed be He. [If he is chained in prison, the reciter must, for the sake of his life, lest it perish, recite it during the day, not during the night, lest he err and lay waste to the world of the Holy One, blessed be He.]³⁷ If he seeks to test it, he may test it one time, but he must not test it twice. He must be very careful with it, lest he err and lay waste to the world of the Holy One, blessed be He.

And he must make a habit of it from month to month and from year to year, thirty days before the New Year, from the beginning of the month of Elul to the Day of Atonement, lest satan and stroke accuse him all year long.

The adept must follow dietary restrictions for forty days, a number that presumably echoes Moses' forty-day fast on Mount Sinai (Exod 34:28) and Elijah's fast on his forty-day journey to Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8). Such forty-day fasts appear elsewhere in the Hekhalot

³⁷ The sentence in brackets is found only in MS Munich 22. It seems to be a secondary addition, since the text makes better sense without it: one can see why someone being taught the incantation might want to try it out once for practice; there is no reason why someone attempting to escape from prison should want to test the spell first.

corpus, but the assumption of a special posture, one that would make blood accumulate in the head, and the adjuration of earth spirits appear only in this text. Likewise, the ascetic regime is associated with a specific time of the year. One is to time it consistently each year so that the culminating trance takes place on the Day of Atonement. The implication might be that it may be done at other times during the year ("from month to month"), although this phrase may simply mean something like "without stopping" between the first of Elul and the Day of Atonement. As we shall see, rituals found in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* and the *Merkavah Rabba* are also linked with specific dates in the Jewish festival cycle.

The point of carrying out this regime is not terribly clear. The comments in §§422–23 associate it with the heavenly journey, but a general blessing is promised to those who "recite it." The antecedent is not explained; it could be Anaphiel's adjuration or the description of the ascent in §§413–19. In §424 it is simply "this teaching." Moreover, §424 gives the ascetic practice that goes with the recitation or incantation, leaving its use undefined except to indicate that improper use would unleash vast powers of destruction (and according to the gloss, that it may be of use in escaping from prison).

Halperin has pointed out quite correctly that this passage seems to be the inspiration for Hai Gaon's description of the experiences of the Hekhalot practitioners.³⁸ But he goes on to argue that Hai was mistaken when he concluded that this technique was to be used by someone who "seeks to see a vision of the chariot and to peer into the palaces of the angels on high." He explains,

Although the aim of the ritual is not entirely clear, there is no hint that it has anything to do with heavenly journeys. The conclusion speaks of it as something that one is to do regularly, particularly in the crucial time before the yearly judgement of New Year's Day, to make sure that one is slated for good luck in the coming year. This does not sound very much like a visit to the *merkabah*.

Indeed, the drift of the text has gradually carried us away from the idea that its reader is expected to undertake a journey to the *merkabah*. He will indeed benefit from the magic he has learned, but in a less strenuous way. He need only mention the sacred formulae, and 'Anafiel's power will be at his disposal. He need only repeat the blessing fixed for R. Akiba, and he will share vicariously in the benefits of Akiba's "suffering of descending and ascending to the *merkabah*." There

³⁸ Halperin, "A New Edition of the Hekhalot Literature," 543–44, 550–51.

is no reason to suppose that he himself needs to take on this suffering. Akiba's visiting the *merkabah* is important for him, not because he is necessarily going to imitate it, but because it has opened channels of power from which he can now profit.³⁹

I am not convinced by Halperin's arguments. First, it seems to me that he overemphasizes some elements of this passage, and second, he draws some sharp distinctions here that would have been much fuzzier to the writer, if he accepted them at all. To begin with, it is hardly the case that "there is no hint that [the ritual] has anything to do with heavenly journeys." Sections 422–23 explicitly tie the ritual to the ascent and descent of the chariot. This journey is not mentioned in §424, but it is not excluded. Must every sentence of every text contain every detail of the experience? Nor is the regime in §424 accomplished "in a less strenuous way." A forty-day fast and regime of celibacy are prerequisites, followed by the assumption of a posture that could easily lead to blackout. One would also presume that the danger of laying waste to the world would put the practitioner under no little stress to get the details of the incantation right!

The sharp distinction that Halperin draws between the otherworldly journey and acquisition of power is not supported by what we know of shamanism. On the contrary, the journey to the otherworld is one of the ways for the shaman to gain power over the spirits. After his Great Vision, Nick Black Elk was filled with power that was visible to the medicine man Whirlwind Chaser, who told Nick's father, "Your son there is sitting in a sacred manner. I can see that there is a special duty for him to do. Just as he came in I could see the power of lightning all through his body."⁴⁰ Likewise, as we shall see in the next two chapters, the Siberian shaman Sereptie Djaruoskin gained the power of exorcism as a result of his otherworldly journey.⁴¹ In addition, the fact that something is recited as part of the shamanic ceremony is not in itself an indication that no otherworldly experience is involved. As we have seen, it is in fact the norm that sacred songs, and sometimes even sacred texts, be recited along with the ascetic practices of the shaman.

³⁹ Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot* 374. Compare his comments in "A New Edition of the Hekhalot Literature," 550–51.

⁴⁰ DeMallie (ed.), *The Sixth Grandfather* 150; cf. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* 49.

⁴¹ Popov, "How Sereptie Djaruoskin of the Nnganasans (Tagvi Samoyeds) Became a Shaman," 145.

Thus, the techniques used in this passage from the *Hekhalot Zutarti* are somewhat different from those found elsewhere in the Hekhalot literature but are still well within the range of normal shamanic praxis. At a minimum, these techniques are presented as a way for the practitioner to obtain mighty ritual powers. However, I am not convinced that Halperin is correct in arguing that Hai Gaon misunderstood the passage. The exegesis required to separate the heavenly journey from the praxis seems to me excessively subtle and unnecessary in light of the anthropological evidence.

Early in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* we find a reference to a prayer ritual (a "great mystery") to be recited at daybreak:

(§547) And what does RWZYY YHWH do?

R. Ishmael said:⁴²

How can one see a vision of them?

He said to me:

I prayed a prayer of mercy, and by means of it I was saved. Forceful One, YHWH, God of Israel, blessed are You, YHWH, great God, mighty in might.

What does RWZYY YHWH, God of Israel, do? Therefore hear what R. Akiva said to me. And he revealed to me that this great mystery is revealed to all flesh and blood, the one who has in his heart the praise of RWZYY YHWH, God of Israel. He must complete it on each day at the break of dawn and cleanse himself from iniquity and falsehood and from all evil. And RWZYY YHWH, God of Israel, does rightly by him every day in this world and stands by him to his honor, and he is assured that he is a son of the world to come.

Here the vision of the heavenly realm is associated with praise of God carried out in purificatory ritual at daybreak, and with benefits accruing to the practitioner in both the present and the future life.

Later in the same work we find a praxis similar to the one in the *Sar Torah*:

(§560) R. Ishmael said:

I was thirteen years old and my heart was moved on each day that was permissible for fasting. As soon as R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah revealed to me this mystery of Torah, Suriah, Prince of the Presence, was revealed. He said to me:

(As for) the Prince of Torah, YWPY'L is his name. Anyone who seeks him must sit forty days in fasting. He must⁴³ eat his morsel with

⁴² The first sentence is missing in one manuscript and displaced in another. The text of the second and third sentences is corrupt, and it is unclear who is speaking to whom.

⁴³ One manuscript (Munich 22) adds "not."

salt, and he must not eat any kind of filth. He must immerse (with) twenty-four immersions. He must not gaze at various dyed things. His eyes must be pressed down to the earth, and he must pray with all his vigor. He must set his heart on his prayer and seal himself with his seals⁴⁴ and invoke twelve words.

Section 561 is an invocation of God, followed by a list of *nomina barbara* and the request, "May seventy angels descend beside me and may ŠQDHWZYY, the angel of the Presence, be with them." The adept is then given a list of letters to invoke, "lest he injure himself." Section 562 is a prayer to God, "Who gave leave to Your glorious bands to be joined to mortals." God is invoked so that the harmful demons may be drowned and the angels may bring secret wisdom. More angelic names are invoked, including ŠQDHWZYY (with variant spellings). The instructions continue:

He must lift up his eyes to heaven, lest he die. He must stand and invoke the name and ornament it, in order that wisdom be engraved in all his limbs and searching of understanding in his heart. He must advance and pray it in His name, and he must make a circle for himself and stand in it, lest the harmful demons come and seem like angels to him and kill him.

In §563, R. Ishmael learns from "RPDS, the angelic Prince of the Presence," that "anyone who wishes to make use of this great mystery must pray it with all his vigor, lest he forget one word of it. For if he forgets one word of it, all his limbs suffer destruction." The angel then reveals three names, the calling of which will make him (the angel) descend. In §564, R. Ishmael asks R. Nehuniah how to obtain the wisdom of the Prince of Torah. R. Nehuniah teaches him three names to invoke which are also invoked by the angels of glory, along with three letters to be appended to his prayer which are invoked by the living creatures when they look at God. Still another prayer is the song sung by the "wheels" of the chariot (*galgalim*, a class of angels) in front of God's throne. All these prayers consist of *nomina barbara*, all longer than three letters or three words. The section concludes with instructions for a ritual that Moses taught Joshua in which one writes "three words" (*nomina barbara*) in a cup and drinks the contents. This praxis is presented, apparently, as an alternative to the very difficult ascetic regime described in §§560–64.

⁴⁴ In §566, R. Ishmael seals seven parts of his own body with seven seals (*nomina barbara*) at the descent of the angel PDQDS.

We read, "If you cannot perform (the ritual), engrave them (the *nomina barbara*) with a mark, and do not trouble yourself with the words of the mighty." I take this last comment to mean that the text is presenting, almost as an afterthought, a much easier means for the adept who cannot perform the fearsome ascetic feats of the ancient rabbis.

Fortified by all this detailed—if at times less than coherent—instruction, R. Ishmael sets out to make use of it.

(§565) R. Ishmael said:

I sought this mystery and I sat for twelve days in fasting. As soon as I saw that I could not serve by means of fasting, I made use of the name of forty-two letters. And PDQRM, the angel of the Presence, descended in rage, so that I shrank back, falling backward.

He said to me:

Mortal, son of a putrid drop, son of a maggot and a worm! You made use of a great name! It has taken for you arrays of Torah! I am giving nothing to you until you sit for forty days.

At once I stood with all my vigor, and I carefully invoked three letters, and he ascended. (This: B'R^o BYH GDWLT 'TYT BYH.) And I sat forty days, and I prayed three prayers at dawn, three at noon, three at the afternoon offering, and three in the evening. And I invoked twelve words at every single one. And for the last day I prayed three (times) and invoked twelve words and PDQRM, the angel of the Presence, descended, and with him were angels of mercy.

And they placed wisdom in the heart of R. Ishmael.

Who is able to stand in his prayer? Who is able to see a vision of PDQRS, the angel of the Presence, from the hour that he established this mystery?

PNQRS YHWH, God of Israel, said to me:

Descend and see. A man like you—if he descended without the permission of PNKRM YHWH, God of Israel, He destroyed him.⁴⁵

The ascetic discipline described in this passage is much the same as that in the *Sar Torah*, although the one in the *Ma'aseh Merkawah* has more detail and includes more ritual praxes. The adept must follow dietary restrictions for forty days, and he undergoes numerous purificatory immersions and submits to sensory deprivation (looking downward and avoiding the sight of colored clothing). During this period he must pray fervently and in addition recite divine names

⁴⁵ The last sentence of this passage has two corrupt additions in MS Munich 22. The relationship of the two beings "PRQDS, the angel of the Presence," and "PDQRS/PNKRM YHWH, God of Israel," is obscure, but they are not identified with one another in any of the manuscripts.

and incantations. At some point, not made clear in the text, he is to raise his eyes and enclose himself in a circle of power as protection from demons who might appear to him as angels. The circle reminds one of the story of the Tannaitic sage Honi the circle-drawer, who drew a circle and stood praying in it until rain came.⁴⁶ The price of making a slip while performing the ritual is total destruction, a fate narrowly avoided by R. Ishmael when he tries to end the rite prematurely. An alternative and much easier rite is also advertised as accomplishing the same effect. Given the last few lines of §565, it is difficult to avoid drawing the inference that the praxes presented in §§560–65, although primarily concerned with the Sar Torah adjuration, were also considered by the editor to be effective for use in the descent to the chariot.

A rather different ritual in Hebrew and Aramaic is found later in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* in a single manuscript (New York 8128, §§571–78). Despite its limited attestation, it is worth looking at carefully since it has close parallels to a passage attested in all manuscripts of the *Merkavah Rabba* and some general similarities to the praxes I have already described.⁴⁷ The text is somewhat corrupt and my translation is provisional—it is at times quite unclear whether words are *nomina barbara* or not, and there are other difficulties.

After a section in which R. Ishmael extols the powers of the forty-two-letter name of God, the passage continues,

(§572) R. Ishmael said:

A disciple who seeks to use this great mystery should sit in fasting from the beginning of the month of Sivan until 'Ašeret. And he must eat nothing except from the first of what has been separated from all.⁴⁸ And he must whisper (to) the moon or bring wine. And he must bake a pot of bread with his (own) hands. He must go to the river and immerse. And also these nine days, morning and evening, he must immerse. And on the last day, when he seeks to bake he immerses, and after dark he immerses, and when he has passed the night he immerses. But after he has eaten he does not need to. And when he seeks to eat he must bring a jug(!) of his own wine,⁴⁹ and he must

⁴⁶ *m. Ta'an.* 3.8; cf. Schäfer, *Übersetzung* 3:277 n. 56.

⁴⁷ Swartz takes it to be an insertion of "late, Geonic provenance" (*Scholastic Magic* 114), but he does not take into account the similar text *Merkavah Rabba* §§659–70.

⁴⁸ The meaning of this sentence is unclear. Swartz translates it, "He must not eat anything except from the beginning of this period" (*Scholastic Magic* 110), whereas Schäfer translates, "und esse nichts außer vom Ersten, was man von allem absondert" (*Übersetzung* 3:294).

⁴⁹ I follow Schäfer's emendation and interpretation (*Übersetzung* 3:295 nn. 4–5).

count over it nine times and immerse and drink and use a new vessel. And he must not lie alone, for this is in order that he not be harmed.

(§573) R. Ishmael said to R. Akiva:

A fig leaf and olive leaves and a silver cup and wine and an egg. He said to me:

Concerning all you ask as to holiness and purity, uprightness and piety are in your heart, and you take your stand on their vigor.

(§574) Fig leaf: I adjure you, Sandalphon, the angel who binds on the crown of his Lord, that you ascend and say to Him:

Two angels, Metatron and 'GMTY', who are the wisdom in the heart of so-and-so, and he knows. And I will be wise and I will be intelligent, and I will complete and not forget, and I will learn and not forget that You are the first and the last over me. They shall not exchange (letters) in the name: PŠ MPŠ MPŠ Š'H ŠY'H ŠQ BQQ 'H YH W'ZMR KGWN HW' GMR KGWN 'KRKYNYH. In the name of 'H W'H B'H YHW YHW YHW Y'H H'Y from now and forever. Immerse in the evening, and on the next day you must fast, and write (this) on a fig leaf and eat (it) and drink wine afterward and sleep on your arm.

(§575) Olive leaves: MSWMSNN BMWSM' KMWQM' 'YN SMN G'H QM' ? 'GYPY'L MSPW YH W'Y Y'. These are the princes who rend the firmament, and they gave the Torah to Moses by the hands of YHW YHW WHH. I adjure you (plural) by His name: Great DDRYN, that You may preserve the Torah in my heart. Write (this) on three olive leaves, blot (it) out with wine, and drink. Write the amulet and hang it on your(!)⁵⁰ left arm.

(§576) The silver cup: Ink and 'BYRYN QNTYS and 'P??NYM H'HTYTN W'ṬWṬW(T). He must gather and order the orderings. These are the orderings of Michael, the great prince(!) of Israel, that you should preserve it for the study of Torah in my heart. Amen. Amen. Selah. Hallelujah. Write (this) on a silver cup, blot (it) out with wine, and drink it, and count twenty-four times, "Listen to our voice," and (at) the final one say, "Who hears prayer."⁵¹

(§577) Wine: NBT PT' that sits on the heart and SRWK ZYQZ' that sits on the mouth of the stomach. MLYLY MYNY. And throw on me Bible and Mishnah and Talmud, and enlighten my heart ~~with~~ <concerning> words of Torah. And may I not stumble with my tongue in all that I will learn. In the name of YHW'L and 'L and in the name of the great God YH YHW YH YH 'LY 'L and in the name of the great God YH YHW YH YH God of gods, the explicit and honored name. Amen. Amen. Selah. Say (this) forty-one times over

⁵⁰ The manuscript reads "my."

⁵¹ Phrases from the statutory *Amida*. See Schäfer, *Übersetzung* 3:298 n. 3; Swartz, *Scholastic Magic* 112 n. 17.

the wine from this mouth at the coming of the Sabbath when you sleep, and drink (it). And on the next day sit in fasting.

(§578) Egg: L'YGNSM BPSH PR 'NH. The great Prince of Torah who was with Moses on Mount Sinai and garlanded him with a wreath(!)—all that he learned and all that his ears heard—so may you garland and come to me, and you shall remove a stone from my heart with haste and you must not hesitate(!).⁵² Amen. Amen. Selah. Write (this) on a day-old egg of a black hen. Roast this egg for yourself, and after it is roasted, peel it, and write on it, this egg, this word, and afterward eat it, but do not drink afterward. And on that day he must sit in fasting and in(?)⁵³ a box.

The first section prescribes a six-day fast (the festival of 'Ašeret or Shavuot starts on the sixth of Sivan), which begins a nine-day ritual. The ritual requires pure food that the adept prepares himself, and numerous immersions. It is unique in forbidding self-isolation.⁵⁴ Its goal appears to be for the practitioner to use the forty-two-letter divine name so that he becomes “wise and fills himself with wisdom” (§571). The remainder of the passage describes a set of rituals built around a cluster of *materia. Nomina barbara, historiolae*, and adjurations are written on the various materials, then the practitioner eats the inscribed object or dissolves the ink and drinks it. Immersions, single-day fasts, and night incubations also figure in the rituals; the last one seems to prescribe self-isolation in a box. The goal of the praxes is to make the angels (including the Prince of Torah) endow the user with a prodigious memory for Torah.

The *Sar Panim* (§§623–39) is a collection of adjurations designed to summon the Prince of the Presence and compel him to reveal heavenly secrets, grant wishes to the summoner, and drive off demons. In the first section R. Eliezer the Great, in response to a query of R. Akiva, warns the latter of the dangers associated with summoning the Prince of the Presence: “My son, one time I made him descend and he sought to destroy the whole world!” Once R. Akiva declares his determination to proceed nonetheless, R. Eliezer prescribes ascetic praxes to be followed before beginning the adjurations:

⁵² For the emendations and the interpretation of this sentence, see Swartz, *Scholastic Magic* 112 n. 8; Schäfer, *Übersetzung* 3:299 n. 4.

⁵³ Literally “and between” (וּבֵינֵינוּ).

⁵⁴ Unless the end of §572 is corrupt, in which case we should emend to “And he must lie alone” (וְלֹא יִשְׁכַּב לְחֻדֵיֶיךָ). It is possible that the word “not” (לֹא) arose from a dittography of the beginning of the first word.

(§623) The one who binds himself to make use of him must sit in fasting one day in order to make him descend. And before that day he must sanctify himself from pollution for seven days. He must dip in a cubit⁵⁵ of water and must not make conversation with a woman.⁵⁶ Then at the end of the days of his purification, on the day of his fasting, he must descend and sit in water up to his neck, and he must recite before he adjures:

[The rest of the document consists of adjurations.]

Near the beginning of the *Merkavah Rabba* we find a ritual very similar to the one found in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§571-78.

(§659) R. Ishmael said:

I asked R. Akiva the word of 'Aseret, the word of Rosh HaShanah, the word of every single New Moon, and the word of the first of the month of Adar. He said to me concerning all that I asked:

As to holiness and purity, uprightness and piety are in your heart, and you can take your stand on their vigor.

(§660) The word of 'Aseret: HP YH HPY HP' HYZ' ZYH' YD' DS YHW. Write these on myrtle leaves on the eve of 'Aseret. At cockcrow he must put the myrtle inside his mouth and blot them (the letters) out.

(§661) The word of Rosh HaShanah: YH has seen YY' NBR' fearsome SB SBYB DS ZYH'. Write these on bay leaves on the eve of Rosh HaShanah. At cockcrow he must put the bay leaves inside his mouth and blot them out.

(§662) The word of every single New Moon: DD ṬB' ṬRTY NYṬ'. Write these on your fingernail and put your fingernail inside your mouth and blot them out.⁵⁷

(§663) The word of the first of the month of Adar: splendor of the way KYWY' BBBYH YTRP' DWM PYRY'Y YKNYS light 'HY 'HHHW HH YH YHW YHY YSDYR and wisdom. Write these in a dish of silver and pour wine inside it and blot out the letters with wine: Acts of knowledge of YHWH, a multitude of praisesongs and confessions, psalmodes, acts of holiness, fearsome acts, mighty acts, and acts of salvation belong to our King, to our Savior, to our Redeemer. Amen. Amen. Amen. Peace.

Inquiry: Purify yourself for seven days and bathe in a river three times a day, and purify yourself from bad food and from wine. And in the hour that you come to pray this name, put in your mouth a rolled leaf and chew it first and afterward pray: Blessed be Your name 'H 'H YH YH HW HW HY HY H' H'.

⁵⁵ Or "channel."

⁵⁶ The phrase "with a woman" is found in only one of the four manuscripts.

⁵⁷ Manuscript New York 8128 adds, "Do so three times. Eat salt as a shared meal, a fist(ful) three times, and he must drink water and make them silent."

(§664) Michael, the great angel who is the prince at the throne on which God is engraved, praises H' with these in the first firmament: 'H' 'H'-'H', 3 times; YHWH 'Y 'Y 'W 'W Y'W.

(§665) Gabriel, the righteous angel, praises with this in the second firmament: Šabaot 'W 'W Y'W " 'W Y'W Y'W H' 'H HW the explicit name BH.

(§666) Suriel praises in the third firmament: YY YHWĤ, merciful and gracious God. BN living and abiding. HW, 3 times; 'W, 3 times; PW, 3 times; PY, 3 times; 'HW 'HW BH.

(§667) 'KTRY'L praises in the fourth firmament: 'W 'W 'Y 'Y HWH HWH I Am Who I Am B'T. It is the explicit name BH. Metatron sits on his throne of glory, 'HY 'HY PLMKS KK visions 'WT 'W 'W HY HY HW HY HW 'Y Y'W HY' BH.

(§668) Raphael praises in the fifth firmament: Y'W 'W HWY' Y'W HW, 4 times; HW HW M'HW Y'HW 'HW Y(?)W 'Y " 'WW' W'W Y".

(§669) BWDY'L praises in the sixth firmament: Lord 'DWNYP'L gods Shaddai Šabaot 'H, 3 times; 'W, 3 times; BH BH HG HG effulgence HW HW WHW HHW HW H' BH.

(§670) YWM'L the angel praises in the seventh firmament.

And fumigate yourself and your clothes with myrrh, frankincense, and white blossom. And in any place that you wish, you may pray and it shall be heard, whether day or night, whether on the sea or on dry land, any time that you invoke in purity. And keep yourself from all evil, lest it harm you. For it is the explicit name.

Like the passage in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, this text ties its rituals to dates in the Jewish calendar, including 'Ašeret (Šavuot); it involves similar uses of *materia*, which are inscribed and the ink of the inscription ingested; and it requires a pure diet, ritual immersions, and prayers. Sections 573 and 659 have R. Akiva giving the same answer to a question of R. Ishmael. But there are differences as well. The text is to be used on a number of dates: Šavuot, New Year's Day, and the first day of each month (with the first of the month Adar singled out, for reasons unclear to me). It does not mention fasting but does require self-fumigation, and it lists *nomina barbara* recited by the chief angels in the first six firmaments, presumably also meant for recitation by the practitioner. He is promised that his prayers will be heard, wherever and whenever he prays. The word "inquiry" (תַּשְׁאֵלָה) in §663 may also indicate that the rite can be used for divination.

A little later there is a relatively long and connected passage describing various ascetic practices (*Merkavah Rabba* §§677–84). The first two sections of it also occur in two other contexts, indicating

that the longer passage in the *Merkavah Rabba* is not the earliest formation of the material. I have reconstructed the text of §§677–78 with the help of all three passages but deal with the other contexts of these two sections later in this chapter. In the first four sections of the passage in the *Merkavah Rabba*, R. Ishmael describes how once he came of age he had great difficulty remembering the Torah he studied, how R. Nehuniah cured him of his problem, and the salutary effect of the cure:

(§677//278//308) R. Ishmael said:

I was thirteen years old. R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah, my master, saw me in great privation, in great grief, and in great danger. When I would read Bible one day, in a few days I would forget it. When I would study Mishnah one day, I would forget it the next day. What did I do? As soon as I saw that Torah did not stay with me, I took hold of myself and withheld myself and my appetite from food and drink, from washing and anointing, and I deprived myself of the use of the bed. I did not chant, nor did any word of melody and song go forth from my mouth.

(§678//279//309) At once R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah, my master, stood and took me from the house of my father and brought me into the Chamber of Hewn Stone⁵⁸ and adjured me by the great seal that belongs to ZBWDY'L YHWH, God of Israel (this is Metatron YHWH, God of Israel, God of heaven and earth, God of the sea, and God of the dry land). And he revealed to me the praxis⁵⁹ of the secret counsel of Torah. At once he illuminated my heart at the gates of the east, and my eyeballs had a vision of the depths and of the paths of Torah. And not a word of all that my ears heard from the mouth of my master and from the mouths of the disciples was ever forgotten again. And I never again forgot any of the paths of Torah on which I acted according to their truth.

(§679) R. Ishmael said:

If I had not done any Torah, this praxis that I established in Israel would be equivalent for me to the whole entire Torah, so that people should multiply the Torah that comes without effort.

(§680) R. Ishmael said:

As soon as my ears heard this great mystery, the world was changed for me to purity, and my heart became as if I had come into a new world. And in every single day it seemed to me as if I stood before the throne of glory.

⁵⁸ A chamber in the Jerusalem Temple (see *m. Mid.* 5.4).

⁵⁹ Reading *מורה*, with most of the manuscripts. One manuscript reads *מיר*, "at once."

So up to this point R. Ishmael's efforts are successful. After he prepares himself through limited fasting and other forms of self-denial, R. Nehuniah reveals to him an undisclosed praxis that has the desired effect and that is worth more to him than any amount of normal study of Torah. From that point on he has no trouble remembering his lessons. Even more, this esoteric knowledge gives him such a sense of the divine presence that he continually feels as if he were in front of God's throne. This last section seems to allude to the visionary experience of the descent to the chariot, but the experience sounds more attenuated than in the other descriptions.

Still, not all is well. In §681, R. Akiva warns R. Ishmael of dangers associated with the praxis revealed by R. Nehuniah. R. Nehuniah confirms this warning and gives R. Ishmael more specific instructions. The last three sections are additional descriptions of ascetic techniques, given only in the name of R. Ishmael:

(§681) R. Ishmael said:

R. Akiva said to me:

Son of the proud, go, return to the presence of R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah and ask your master, that he may tell you and explain to you discernment regarding this praxis:⁶⁰ how one makes use of it and how people adjure with it, lest you err and use it in a way contrary to the *halakhah* and you act inappropriately, and they (the angels) attack you, as in the case of so-and-sos whom they (the angels) attacked and whose gall was dissolved inside them (the victims) to become like water. For they listened to what was contrary to the *halakhah* and they acted inappropriately.

And when I made this request before R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah, my master, he said to me:

My disciple, my mouth says whatever R. Akiva said to you. But for the covenant that was made for Aaron and the shoot from which you (priests) came, they already would have attacked you and destroyed you from the world. However, go back and give an answer to its owner and say to him:

People adjure attendants by their king, and people adjure the servant by his master.

When he returned and brought back the answer to its owner, what did he do? His mouth enunciated names, and the fingers of his hands were counting, until they counted one hundred and eleven times.

⁶⁰ For this strange phrase, see Peter Schäfer, *Übersetzung* 4:84 n. 4. Schäfer takes the phrase *דבריהם* to mean "the recitation of the secret." Note that the idea of "separation" or "discernment" (*פירוש*) is also associated with the heavenly descent in the opening section (§335) of the *Hekhalot Zutarti*.

And so, everyone who makes use of this praxis, his mouth must enunciate names while the fingers of his hands are counting, until he counts one hundred and eleven times. He must not subtract from the names, and he must not add to them. And if he subtracts from them or adds to them, his blood is on his own head.

(§682) Rabbi Ishmael said:

Every wise disciple who knows this great mystery must sleep on his bed in the evening and recite the *Shema*. And in the morning at the first watch and in the ninth hour, day and night, he must stand on his bed and wash his hands and his feet twice with water and anoint them with oil. And he must put on *tefillin* and stand and pray in front of his bed. And when he finishes his prayer, he must go back and sit on his bed and recite and explicate and adjure and invoke and bind and establish:

ŠQDĤWZYH ZHW BD YH YH MH, who is called names in addition to the name Metatron: MRGYWWY'L, who is Metatron; ṬNRY'L, who is Metatron; GP'Y'L, who is Metatron; GZHY'L, who is Metatron; 'WZYH, who is Metatron; GNWNYH, who is Metatron; SSNGRYH, who is Metatron; SWRY'YH, who is Metatron; ZRZRY'L, who is Metatron; PSQWN, who is Metatron; 'TMWN, who is Metatron; SGRWN, who is Metatron; SNGDYH, who is Metatron; Z'PNWDYH, who is Metatron; ZHWBDYH, who is Metatron; ZBWDY'L, who is Metatron. "And one calls to the other and says 'Holy, holy, holy'" (Isa 6:3). And he issues decrees over them.

(§683) R. Ishmael said:

In what condition may someone make use of this matter? With awe, with fear, with purity, with immersion, with uprightness, with explication, with humility, with fear of sin.

(§684) R. Ishmael said:

One must fast forty days at one time. He must eat bread that he makes with his (own) hands and drink water that he gets with his (own) hands. He must not eat meat or drink wine or taste any kind of vegetable. And if he suffers pollution, he must begin his praxis over again.

R. Akiva's warning involves the danger of angelic attack against a practitioner who makes a mistake in carrying out the praxis. When questioned, R. Nehuniah acknowledges this danger and even indicates that R. Ishmael's status as an Aaronid priest is the only thing that has kept the angels from destroying him so far. (One wonders why R. Nehuniah did not see fit to mention all this beforehand!) R. Nehuniah adds a message to R. Akiva, the point of which seems to be that God should be approached through adjuration of the angels, just as a king is approached through his courtiers and a master through his servants.

For reasons unclear to me, the narrative then shifts from first to third person. We are told that when R. Ishmael brings the answer back to R. Akiva, one of them (the antecedent of the pronoun is ambiguous) demonstrates a technique for counting the divine names as one recites them. The narrator tells us that any adjuration including the wrong number of names could bring the reciter into peril. The basis of this story could conceivably be a disagreement on praxis between esoteric schools that traced themselves back to R. Nehuniah and R. Akiva, respectively. In any case, we shall see this technique for proper recital of the divine names mentioned and explained in other Hekhalot texts.

The next three sections are all attributed to R. Ishmael. The first (§682) explains how an adept fits the adjurations into his normal ritual life. At a set hour in the morning he carries out ablutions and anointings, prays his usual morning prayer, then recites an adjuration to Metatron given in the text. The second section (§683) emphasizes the need for moral and cultic purity in this praxis. The third (§684) describes an ascetic regime that we have seen elsewhere, involving a forty-day limited fast in which the practitioner prepares his own food and water and avoids pollution (the word can mean a nocturnal emission).

As mentioned above, the first two sections of this passage (§§677–78) are also found in two other contexts: MSS Munich 22 and Budapest 238 include them in §§278–79 between the *Hekhalot Rabbati* and the *Sar Torah*; MS Vatican 228 inserts them into a larger redactional unit entitled the “*Pereq* (‘Chapter of’) R. Nehuniah Ben HaQanah, Which He Taught R. Ishmael” (§§307–14).⁶¹ This microform also contains a good bit of material on esoteric praxis, so it is worthwhile to examine it here as an alternate formation of some of the same material. Section 307, which I do not translate here, gives the title of the pericope and contains a hymn of praise to God. It is followed by §§308–309, which are a variant form of §§677–78 (and a

⁶¹ Cited hereafter as *Pereq R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah*. Two more sections (§§315–16//148–49) appear in MS Vatican 228 before the beginning of the Great Seal—Fearsome Crown piece. They deal with the superiority of repentant human beings to the angels, and it is not clear to me whether the scribe of this manuscript meant them as part of the *Pereq R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah*, since §315 has a new title (מדיכילוח; “From [the] Hekhalot”). However, §316 is marked as if it were v. 2 of chap. 3 of the *Pereq R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah*. In any case these two sections give no information on ascetic practices.

bit of §679) in the *Merkavah Rabba*. (My translation above of these two sections is an eclectic text using all three passages, but below I have translated only MS Vatican 228, which is often an inferior text.) Sections 308–14 read as follows:

(§308) R. Ishmael said:

For three years R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah saw me in great privation and in great grief. When I would read and study Bible one day, I would forget them [*sic*] the next day. And as soon as I saw that my learning (or “my Talmud”) was not established in my hand, I stood and took myself away from food and drink, from washing and anointing, and the use of the bed. And no word of melody and song went forth from my mouth.

(§309) R. Ishmael said:

At once R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah seized me and took me from the house of my father and brought me into the Chamber of Hewn Stone and adjured me by the great seal, by the great adjuration in the name of YD NQWP YD NQWY YD HRYŠ YD ŠWQŠ, by his great seal, by ZBWDY'L YH, by 'KTRY'L YH in heaven and on earth. And as soon as I heard this great mystery, they enlightened my eyes and whatever Bible, Mishnah, and anything else that I heard, I did not forget them again. And the world was renewed for me in purity, and it was as if I had come from a new world.

(§310) And now, let every disciple who knows that his learning (or “his Talmud”) is not established in his hand stand and bless, and arise and adjure in the name of MDGWBY'L GYWT'L ZYWT'L ṬNRY'L HWZHYYH SYN SGN SWBYR'WHW: all of them are Metatron. MRG is Metatron; GWW is Metatron, ṬNRY'L is Metatron; HWZHYYH is Metatron; SYN is Metatron; SGN is Metatron; SWBYR'YHW is Metatron. And out of the love with which they love him on high they say to him: ZYWT'L, servant of ZBWDY'L YH 'KTRY'L YWY, God of Israel, “YWY YWY, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exod 34:6). Blessed is the Wise One of mysteries and the Lord of secrets.

Chapter 2

R. Ishmael said:

How should one make use of this thing? His mouth must enunciate names and his fingers must count one hundred eleven times. He must not subtract or add. And if he adds to them and is injured, his blood is on his own head. And the adjurer must stand and confirm in the name of MRGWBY'L as in the first chapter until he reaches “slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” Blessed are You, Y', Who raise the dead.

(§311) 2. R. Ishmael said:

Every wise disciple who repeats this great mystery—his stature is fine, his speech is accepted, awe of him is cast upon the creatures, his dreams are easy on him, and he is saved from all kinds of troubles and sorceries, and from the judgment of Gehenna.

(§312) R. Ishmael said:

Every disciple of the sages who repeats this great mystery must repeat it twice and say:

Blessed are You, YHWH. Teach me your statutes. You are good and do good. Teach me your statutes.

(§313) R. Ishmael said:

When I was thirteen years old, my heart was moved by this matter and I returned to the presence of R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah, my master. I said to him(!):⁶²

What is the name of the Prince of Torah?

He said to me:

YWPY²L is his name.

At once I arose and denied myself for forty days. Then I recited the great name until I made him descend. And he descended in a flame of fire, and his face was like the appearance of a lightningbolt. As soon as I saw him, I was confounded and shrank back and fell backward. He said to me:

Mortal, who do you think you are, that you have shaken the great household?

I said to him:

It is manifest and well known before the One Who said and the world was, that I have not made you descend for my own(!) glory,⁶³ but rather to do the will of your Creator.

He said to me:

Mortal, putrid drop, maggot, and worm!

(§314) Whoever seeks to have (him?/it?) revealed to him must sit in fasting for forty days and must immerse twenty-four times every day. He must not taste anything filthy, nor gaze at a woman, and he must sit in a dark, peaceful house. In the name of (another list of *nomina barbara*).

This passage contains material closely related both to the *Merkawah Rabba* and to other texts we have studied in this chapter. Section 308 is an abbreviated and corrupt form of §677. The material in §309 is closely related, although not identical to §§678 and 680. The adjuration in §310 is a variant version of that in §682. The procedure for counting the 111 divine names is essentially the same as in §681. Section §311 parallels fairly closely a description of the benefits that accrue from reciting the *Shi'ur Qomah* (found in the *Merkawah Rabba* §705). Section 312 gives an invocation to be recited along with the aduration in §310. As far as I can tell, there are no par-

⁶² Reading ל for "to me" (לי) in the text.

⁶³ The text reads "for your glory" (לכבודך), which has been emended in this translation to "for my own glory" (לכבודי) following Swartz, *Scholastic Magic* 69.

allels to it. The material in §313 is a shorter formulation of similar material in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (§§560–65). The same characters appear, the same name of the Prince of Torah is given, very similar ascetic praxes are described and used, with a similar terrifying result. It is unclear whether §314 is meant to be a continuation of §313. Swartz takes the last section to be an instruction given by the angel,⁶⁴ whereas Schäfer suggests that the text breaks off at the end of §313.⁶⁵ In any case, §314 mandates an ascetic praxis that includes prolonged (limited?) fasting, a multitude of ritual ablutions, dietary ritual purity, radical celibacy (the practitioner may not even look at a woman), isolation, and sensory deprivation. It concludes with an adjuration making use of *nomina barbara*. The closest parallel to this passage is §§560–61 in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, although it has connections with other Hekhalot passages discussed thus far in this chapter.

A Geniza fragment (G19) contains an incantation invoking Metatron which includes ascetic instructions and seems to claim to have been revealed to Moses at the burning bush. The goal of the spell is given on the verso: it is a general purpose adjuration for help. The speaker is the practitioner and the addressee appears to be God:

(G19 lb 14–17) And hear the voice of my prayer in this hour, O magnificent and strong King, the gracious and merciful One Whose eyes are on His creatures. Turn to the prayer of your servant and answer me in a time of favor, O Lord of all the worlds, Creator of all, Unique One of the world. Let the gates of heaven be opened by my cry, for I [in]voke and seek grace before Your great and [in] holy and pure and blessed name.

The ascetic praxes are given earlier in the text, following an incantation based on the divine name “I Am Who I Am” (אֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי; Exod 3:14). They include fasting, sensory deprivation, immersion, and recitation of divine names according to the same counting ritual we have seen twice already.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism* 88–89.

⁶⁵ Schäfer, *Übersetzung* 2:307 n. 7.

⁶⁶ A variant of this ritual may have been given in a lost passage of G8. At one point in the text, R. Ishmael refers to a scroll of instructions for descending and ascending to the chariot and says, “And I wrote it about the palace and its princes, and I explained those hundred and nineteen. [Are they no]t written in the

(G19 1a 11–25) How does he (Moses and/or the practitioner?) make use of it? He goes and sits in a house by himself, and he must be in a state of fasting-all-day long. He eats no bread (made by) a woman, and he gazes at neither man nor woman. When he walks around in the marketplace, his eyes are raised above all creatures, and he does not gaze at anyone, even a baby one day old. He immerses from evening to evening and recites this word after the reading of the evening *Shema*⁶⁷ every single day. How does he adjure? He begins here:

I adjure you, Metatron, Prince of the Presence; I recite over you, Metatron, angel of the Presence; I decree over you, Metatron, Prince of the Presence; I establish over you, Metatron, angel of the Presence; and I seal upon you, Metatron, Prince of the Presence. In the name of ŠQDĤ<W>ZYY, what is called by the seven names: MRGYWY'L GYWT'P'L TŃ'R'Y'L HWZH YH ŠQDHWZY MTRWN GNWW YH SSNGY' SSBRY' R' S', God of Israel, God of hosts, God of heaven, God of the sea, God of the dry land. BZBWRY'L HWZH YH YH YHW holy YH QDWŠYH QDWŠYH.

Thus far, one hundred and eleven times. He must not decrease and he must not increase. If he decreases or increases, his blood is on his (own) head. How does he count? On every single finger ten times. And he repeats on his first finger <ten> and on his second finger one time, and they are sweet on his hand.

(A list of Metatron's names follows [cf. §§310 and 682b].)

Finally, the so-called Unicum Geniza fragment (G22), originally published by Gruenwald and republished by Schäfer, has some relevant material.⁶⁷ The fragment is a conglomeration of incantations and Merkavah hymns (some of them known from elsewhere) interspersed with what sound like instructions for ascetic activities, along with at least one account of a revelatory experience of R. Ishmael's. The material on the verso seems to bear on means of achieving supernatural knowledge of Torah. The writing on the lower half of the verso is almost completely illegible, but the lines just before are tantalizing:

(G22 1b 27–30) . . . he must put] on ne[w] clothes, and he must cover himself with new garments of wool [. . .] t[o]day, and he must eat in the evening [br]ead of his (own) hands, and he must not go out that day, and he must not enter [. . .] the seven great and small palaces to gaze [. . .] to R. Abraham bar

beginning of this book?" (G8 2b 20–21). It seems likely that the reference is to a praxis of repeating divine names 119 times.

⁶⁷ Gruenwald, "New Passages" 368–72; Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente* 183–89.

This passage seems to associate a typical version of the Sar Torah praxis with the experience of entering the seven celestial palaces to gaze on the wonders therein. We can only hope that future improvements in photographic technology will someday permit us to read the rest of the leaf. The reference to the donning of new clothes as part of the ritual is unique to this text.

These instructional passages from the Hekhalot literature and closely related texts share a remarkably consistent set of praxes. Most of them include dietary restrictions and (apparently limited) fasting for from one to forty days, various degrees of self-isolation and sensory deprivation, temporary celibacy, and a concern with ritual purity and, often, ritual immersions. It is possible that the sometimes severe regime of immersions served, besides its obvious cultic function, as an environmental extreme analogous to the *gyō* practiced by Japanese shamans, although the practice was less demanding. Other techniques are found occasionally, such as the drawing of a circle around the adept (*Ma'aseh Merkavah* §562), the adoption of special postures (*Hekhalot Zutarti* §424; cf. *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §560), self-fumigation (*Merkavah Rabba* §670), and a ritual for counting divine names a set number of times (*Merkavah Rabba* §681; *Pereq R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah* §310; G19 1a 11–25; G8 2b 20–21?). Some passage link rituals with special dates in the Jewish calendar (*Hekhalot Zutarti* §422–24; *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§572, 577; *Merkavah Rabba* §§659–70). And in all cases, the practitioner makes use of songs or words of power alongside his ascetic regime. It is to these that we turn next.⁶⁸

Songs and Words of Power

Words of power also play a crucial role in the esoteric practices described in the Hekhalot literature, as is obvious from the passages discussed thus far in this chapter. Songs, prayers, and adjurations permeate this literature and are closely tied to the ascetic practices delineated therein. Blacker's three categories of words of power accurately encompass this material as well, and I will use them in this

⁶⁸ Gruenwald finds a mention of another visionary praxis in the *Re'uyot Yehezgel* (the Visions of Ezekiel), a midrashic text that has connections with the Hekhalot literature. The text describes how Ezekiel looks down on the river Chebar as if into a mirror and sees a vision of the seven heavens. Gruenwald suggests that this technique was used by "some prophets and apocalypists" (*Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* 135).

section as organizing principles. These categories are (1) words that empower the reciter through their meaning; (2) meaningless words whose mere recitation gives power; and (3) the invocation of divine names.

Meaningful words of power

The Hekhalot literature is filled with what Scholem calls “numinous hymns.”⁶⁹ These songs of power are mentioned repeatedly in the documents. The *Hekhalot Rabbati* begins with R. Ishmael’s question “What are these songs that one recites who seeks to gaze at the vision of the chariot so as to descend safely and to ascend safely?” (§81). Starting in §94, songs of the angels who attend the throne of God are given. This collection of songs concludes, “R. Ishmael said: R. Akiva heard all these songs when he descended to the chariot. He seized and learned them from before the throne of glory, for His attendants were singing before it” (§106). Near the end of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* is a set of songs recited daily by the throne of glory, which the descender to the chariot should also sing (§§251–57//260–66). The *Ma’aseh Merkavah* begins with R. Ishmael requesting “a prayer by which one prays the praise of RWZYY YWY, God of Israel” (§544). Prayer and song are prescribed repeatedly for the vision of the chariot in the same work.

(§550) R. Akiva said:

When I prayed this prayer, I saw six hundred and forty thousand myriad angels of glory who stood opposite the throne of glory. And I saw the knot of the *tefillin* of the bands of YHWH, God of Israel, and I gave praise with all my limbs.

(§570) And again I said to R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah:

In the hour that one invokes twelve words, how can one have a vision of the splendor of the Shekhinah?

He said to me:

He prays a prayer with all his vigor, and the Shekhinah is beloved to him, and He gives him leave to have a vision, and he is not harmed.⁷⁰

After a Merkavah hymn, §591 concludes,

⁶⁹ Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism* 21.

⁷⁰ The phrase “and He . . . not harmed” is found in only one manuscript, although three other manuscripts read “etc.” at this point, implying that the scribes knew there was more text. The subject of the word “gives” cannot be the Shekhinah, since the verb is masculine, so I assume it to be God.

R. Ishmael said:

R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah said to me:

Anyone who prays this prayer with all his vigor is able to have a vision of the splendor of the Shekhinah, and the Shekhinah is beloved to him.

(§592) R. Ishmael said:

R. Akiva said to me:

I myself prayed this prayer, and I had a vision of the Shekhinah, and I saw everything that they do before the throne of glory.

And what is the prayer?

The text of the prayer is given in the remainder of this section and in the next two (§§592–94). The exchange continues in the following section.

(§595) R. Ishmael said:

I said to R. Akiva:

How can one have a vision from above the seraphim who stand above the head of RWZYY YHWH, God of Israel?

He said to me:

When I ascended to the first palace, I prayed a prayer and I saw from the first palace up to the seventh palace. And when I ascended to the seventh palace, I invoked two angels and I had a vision from above the seraphim.

And these were they: SRYD HGLYN.

And when I invoked their names, they came and took me and said to me:

Mortal man, do not be fearful. It is the holy King Who sits on an exalted and lifted-up throne, and He is choice forever and magnificent over the chariot. In that hour I saw from above the seraphim who stand above the head of RWZYY YHWH, God of Israel.

The text of the prayer is given in the final section of the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (§596).

There are countless examples of Merkavah hymns in the Hekhalot literature. Space permits the citation of only a very limited number. I have chosen a group of hymns found as a unit in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (and elsewhere)⁷¹ as well as two other songs from the *Ma'aseh*

⁷¹ The text behind this translation has been reconstructed from §§251–57 and §§260–66. Manuscript New York 8128 places the entrance and water tests (§§258–59) before the hymns, apparently on the theory that the descender to the chariot should join the heavenly liturgy only after overcoming all the ordeals leading up to the chariot. For this explanation, see Herrmann and Rohrbacher-Sticker, "Magische Traditionen der New Yorker *Hekhalot*-Handschrift JTS 8128 im Context ihrer Gesamtedaction," 109–10. This complex of hymns also appears in another context in MS Munich 40 (§§974–77).

Merkavah. The passage from the *Hekhalot Rabbati* comes at the end of an account of the arrival of a descender to the chariot at the seventh palace (§§247–50) and describes his participation in the celestial liturgy:

(§251) As soon as he stands before the throne of glory, he begins to recite the song that the throne of glory sings every single day:

May psalm, song, melody, blessing, praise, psalmody, laud, thanksgiving, confession, illustriousness, music, recitation, rejoicing, shouting, happiness, gladness, chanting, euphony, humility, fineness, truth, righteousness, uprightness, a treasured possession, ornamentation, power, exaltation, glee, ascent, rest, restfulness, comfort, ease, quiet, peace, repose, trust, goodness, love, loveliness, grace, lovingkindness, beauty, shapeliness, magnificence, compassion, splendor, radiance, merit, shine, epiphany, garlanding, the morning star, light, branch, elevation, wonders, salvation, salted incense, luminary, magnificent acts, acts of help, exclamations, vigor, loftiness, worth, strength, rulership, valiance, lifting up, exaltation, raising up, power, might, valor, holiness, purity, cleanness, majesty, greatness, kingship, effulgence, adornment, glory, and ornament be to ZHRRY'L YWY, God of Israel.

(§252) Ornamented King, garlanded with ornament,
Adorned with embroideries of song,
Garlanded with effulgence of glory and adornment:
A garland of majestic acts and a crown of fearsome acts.
His (own) name is pleasant to Him;
Its invocation is sweet to Him;
His throne is ornamented for Him;
His palace is adorned for Him;
His glory is lovely to Him;
His effulgence is fine to Him;
His power is pleasing to Him.
His attendants chant euphoniouly to Him;
Israel recounts to Him His power and His wondrous acts.

(§253) King of kings of kings,
God of gods,
Lord of lords;
Who is surrounded by bindings of crowns,
Encircled by branches of brightness.
For with the branch of His effulgence "He covered the heavens";⁷²
With His adornment He shone from the heights.
By His beauties the deeps were burned;
By His form the heavenly clouds were splashed.
His form *rescues* majestic ones;
His crown shatters enduring ones;

⁷² Hab 3:3.

His garment confuses worthy ones.
 All the trees rejoice in His word;
 The grasses chant with His happiness.
 His words are spices that flow,⁷³
 Dripping and going forth in flames of fire.
 He gives liberty to those who search them out
 And ease to those who fulfill them.⁷⁴

(§254) Beloved, loved, pleasing, and innocent King,
 Who is made mighty over the kings.
 Majestic One Who is made majestic over the majestic ones,
 Adorned One Who is lifted up above the enduring ones
 And exalted over the fearsome ones.
 The Ornament of kings,
 The Psalm of the choice ones,
 The Treasured Possession of the holy ones,
 The Humble One of the humble ones.
 Pleasant in the mouth of those who call on Him,
 Sweet is His name to those who wait for Him.
 Righteous in all His ways,
 Upright in all His works,
 Fine in all His dimensions,
 Meritorious in counsel and in knowledge,
 Choice in understanding and in action,
 Witness to every matter,
 Verdict Giver for every soul,
 Judge of every being,
 Noble One in wisdom and in every mystery,
 Magnificent One in holiness and in purity.

(§255) King of truth and Unique One,
 King Who brings death and gives life,
 King Who lives and abides forever,
 King Who says and does and sustains,
 King Who forms every wound
 And Who creates all healing,
 King Who makes all evil
 And establishes all good,
 King Who nourishes all His works
 And sustains all He formed,
 Exalted One, yet tender to every lowly one;
 He is strong for every valiant one.

(§256) Exalted and lifted-up King,
 Elevated and wondrous,

⁷³ Cf. Cant 4:16.

⁷⁴ I discuss this reconstruction and translation of §253 in detail in my article "Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of the Hekhalot Rabbati," 210-13, 223-26.

Cherished and venerable,
 Upright and faithful,
 Worthy and glorified,
 Strong and valiant,
 Righteous and truthful,
 Holy and pure,
 Pious, great, mighty, powerful, enduring, worthy, fearsome, and
 confounding,
 Enthroned on an exalted and lifted-up, powerful, enduring, worthy,
 fearsome, and confounding throne.
 Extolled above decorations of majesty,
 Perfected above the garlands of the ornamentation in the chambers
 of the majestic, powerful, enduring, worthy, fearsome, and
 confounding palace.

He Who feasts His eyes on the depths,
 Who has a vision of the secrets,
 Who looks into the dark places;
 He is in every place,
 He is in every heart!
 There is no altering His will,
 No turning back His word,
 No delaying His desire.
 There is no place to flee from Him,
 And one cannot be made secret or hidden from Him.

(§257) You will reign forever;
 Your throne shall reign from generation to generation,
 O merciful and gracious King,
 Who pardons them and forgives them,
 Bears with (them) and overlooks.
 You are adorned with every song;
 You are ornamented with all euphony,
 You are exalted over the palace of majesty;
 You are lifted up over garlands of ornamentation,
 You are made lofty by all (Your) deeds;
 You are declared majestic over all formed beings,
 You are glorified above Your throne of glory;
 You are worthier than Your lovely vessels;
 You are blessed with all blessings;
 You are praised with all praisesongs;
 You are psalmed with all psalming;
 You are lauded with all chants;
 You are declared great forever;
 You are declared holy forever and ever;
 TWTRWSY³Y H,
 King of all worlds,
 Lord of works,
 Wise One in all mysteries,

Ruler over all generations,
 The One God Who is from eternity,
 Unique King Who is from everlasting to everlasting. Selah.

The two songs translated below have been chosen from the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* to show the correspondence of Merkavah hymns to the canons of shamanic hymns established above. The first is a prayer revealed by R. Nehuniah to R. Ishmael for protection from the angels who stand in the heavenly throne room.

(§569) R. Ishmael said:

R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah said to me:

The one who seeks to make use of this great mystery must invoke the angels who stand behind the holy living creatures: MQLS 'SGD NWSS. And he must pray a prayer lest they destroy him, for they are the most enraged of the whole host on high. And what is the prayer?

Blessed are You, YY', my God and my Former, great and fearsome, living forever, magnificent over the chariot. Who is like You, magnificent on high? Give me success in all my limbs, and I will meditate on the gates of wisdom; I will search in the ways of understanding; I will have a vision of the chambers of Torah; I will meditate on the treasures of blessing, and they shall be treasured up for me, for wisdom is before You. And save me from all the enraged ones who stand before You, and let them love me before You. And I know that Your holiness is forever, and I bless the holiness of Your name forever, and I sanctify Your great name. And let it be a great seal upon the limbs *of my body*, as it is written, "Holy, holy, holy, YWY of hosts; the whole earth is full of Your glory" (Isa 6:3). Blessed are you, YY', Who live forever.

The other is the second in a series of five hymns at the end of the work which are revealed to R. Ishmael by R. Nehuniah for making use of the mystery of Torah and for praying during the descent and ascent.

(§586) When R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah, my master, arranged these prayers before me, I was praying every single one every day with the names of it (the prayer) in descent and in ascent, and it was a relief to all my limbs. . . .

(§588) You are declared holy, God of heaven and earth,
 Lord of lords,
 Magnificent One of magnificent ones;
 God of the cherubim,
 Rider of the cherubim;
 God of hosts,
 And His rulership is over the hosts.
 God of the attendants,

And His name is declared holy over the attendants.

He is His name and His name is He.

He is in He. [*sic*] and His name is in His name.

A song is His name and His name is a song.

Z'WPH Z'P ZW'Y ZY' 'HSY HWHSYN RMY YHH HW' RGŠ
BRQ 'TG'H HW' HYL'H 'HY 'H HW' HW'B DRY 'YL RHY RS
'L DRW ZRYZ YŠ' WYŠ' ZRYZ. Eye to eye, vigor in vigor, might
in might, greatness in greatness, support in support, poor in poor,
shadow "in the shadow of ŠDY he will take refuge" (Ps 91:1). You
are declared holy, King of the world, since everything depends on
Your arm, and all declare praise to Your name, for You are the Lord
of the worlds, and there is none like You in all the worlds. Blessed
are You, YY', the Holy One in the chariot, rider of cherubim.

Much of the power of these songs clearly resides in their meaning. The collection of hymns in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* is sung both by the throne of God and by the entranced descender to the chariot. The hymns praise God and expound on his nature and glory. Much the same is true of §588, which appears at present in a complex of songs to be sung both to achieve ritual power and to experience the descent to the chariot. The incantation in §569 also praises God, but in addition it explicitly seeks knowledge of Torah as well as divine protection for the reciter from hostile angels whose cooperation is necessary for the adjuration to succeed.

Intelligible song and prayer play a large part in many of the passages from the *Hekhalot* literature discussed earlier in this chapter which prescribe ascetic praxes, as well as in other passages. The *Sar Torah* commands that the adept "must insert this midrash of the Prince of Torah into the prayer three times in every single day" (§300). The same pericope (§302) has the adept reciting the Great Seal—Fearsome Crown.⁷⁵ As in §300, the normal daily prayers of the pious Jew are frequently incorporated into the ascetic regime (*Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§565, 576; *Merkavah Rabba* §682; G19 1a 11–15). The *Merkavah Rabba* also emphasizes the beneficent effect of reciting the *Shi'ur Qomah* (§§688–707).

Meaningless words of power

Meaningless words of power are also an important element of the *Hekhalot* literature. *Nomina barbara* appear in many of the songs and adjurations. It is characteristic cross-culturally of incantations and

⁷⁵ Cf. n. 36 above.

adjurations to include long strings of nonsense syllables in incantations. Such nonsense words appear often in the Hekhalot literature, made even more cryptic by their uncertain vocalization. In addition, there are countless meaningless words of power in these texts presented as divine names or the names of angels. These words and names are to be recited or invoked in order to gain ritual power. Many of the texts discussed in this chapter include such words or names (e.g., *Sar Torah* §§301–302; *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§561–64, 571–78, 588; *Merkavah Rabba* §§659–70, 682; *Pereq R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah* §§309–11). It is not uncommon for whole paragraphs in the Hekhalot literature to be composed entirely or almost entirely of such nonsense words.

Invocation of divine names

The category invocation of divine names overlaps with the category of meaningless words of power and there is no sharp demarcation between them. Invocation both of *nomina barbara* and comprehensible divine names is extremely common, and often both sorts of names appear side by side in the same pericope (see many of the texts cited in the last section). One passage in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* which invokes divine names is especially relevant. Without any mention of *Sar Torah* praxes, it gives instructions for adjuring an angel who will aid the invoker to descend to the chariot. The technique presented involves only the repetition of divine names, using the same method of counting found in some of the other texts discussed thus far. (Note, however, that the names are to be recited 112 times, one more than in the other texts.) According to the story, R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah suggests to his disciple R. Ishmael that the descender to the chariot must be morally perfect, bringing R. Ishmael to despair. R. Nehuniah then has his protégé gather together the academy so that he can explain a ritual praxis for experiencing the descent to the chariot (§§198–203). R. Ishmael continues:

(§203) We came and sat before him, and the associates were a whole crowd standing on their feet, because they were seeing to the *globes* of fire and the torches of light that they had set as a barrier between us and them. And R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah sat and set out in order all the matters of the chariot: descent and ascent, how one who descends, descends, and how one who ascends, ascends.

(§204) When someone seeks to descend into the chariot, he calls on Suriah, Prince of the Presence, and adjures him one hundred and twelve times by $\text{TWTRWSY}^{\text{Y}} \text{Y} \text{WY}$, who is called $\text{TWTRWSY}^{\text{Y}}$

ŠWRṬQ ṬWṬRBȳ'L ṬWPGR ʾŠRWLYȳ'Y ZBWDȳ'L, and ZHRRȳ'L ṬNDȳ'L, and ŠQDHWZYȳ'Y DHYBYRWN, and ʾDYRYRWN YWY, God of Israel.

(§205) And he must be careful not to add to the one hundred and twelve times, nor to subtract from them. And if he adds or subtracts, his blood is on his own head. But his mouth must enunciate the names, and the fingers of his hands must count to one hundred and twelve. And at once he descends into and has authority over the chariot.

Following this section is a very detailed account of the descent to the chariot, to which we will return in chapter 6.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the use of ascetic techniques by the practitioners portrayed in the Hekhalot literature and compared this portrayal to the actual use of such techniques by shamans. On the negative side, there is no evidence that these practitioners used either drums or drugs. These are the best-known practices used by shamans but not necessarily the most pervasive. Many shamans use neither. On the positive side, the ascetic praxes attributed to the descenders to the chariot are commonly used by shamans: fasting and dietary restrictions; celibacy; purification rites (such as immersion); isolation; sensory deprivation; and, coupled with these, the recitation of shamanic songs and words of power: the singing of meaningful numinous hymns; the recitation of meaningless but mighty nonsense names and syllables; and the repetition of numerous divine names. Nearly all shamans use such techniques, whether or not they also use drums and drugs. The correspondence between the methods of shamans and the methods of the descenders to the chariot is so close that it becomes very difficult to maintain that the latter are only a literary fiction and that the techniques described in these texts were never used.

That having been said, it must be admitted that there is sometimes a certain distance between the writers and the practices they describe. The complex of tradition in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§560–65 seems to prescribe a shortcut for those who cannot perform the rigorous regime presented in the first part of the passage. In *Merkavah Rabba* §680 (cf. §309), R. Ishmael remarks that upon hearing “this great mystery” (an undefined “secret of Torah”) from R. Nehuniah, every day thereafter “it seemed to me as if I stood before the throne

of glory”—a rather mild claim compared to some of the other visionary descriptions. I do not, however, think Halperin is warranted in reading *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§422–24 as involving only a recitation.

Finally, we must ask the purpose of the esoteric praxes prescribed in these texts. The *Sar Torah* promises both knowledge of the principles of Torah and the ability to experience a vision of the chariot (cf. G22). *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§560–65 (cf. §§571–78) teaches one how to summon the Prince of Torah, gain heavenly wisdom, and descend to the chariot. The five Merkavah hymns at the end of the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (§§586–91), as well as some of the other hymns in this document, are associated with the descent and ascent of the chariot. *Merkavah Rabba* §§677–84 presents ritual means for helping a slow learner to remember his Torah lessons. *Pereq R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah* §§308–14 explains how to remember lessons and how to summon the Prince of Torah. The praxes in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§422–24 are associated with both the ascent and the descent of the chariot and with gaining vast powers. The *Sar Panim* teaches how to obtain knowledge of heavenly secrets, while *Merkavah Rabba* §§659–70 and G19 seek general powers and benefits, and G21 seems to give an ascetic praxis that is associated with the otherworldly journey. *Hekhalot Rabbati* §204 prescribes a method of reciting divine names to force the angel Suriah to guide the reciter on the descent to the chariot. Thus, all the passages analyzed here involve control of angelic beings for one purpose or another. Frequently the users seek raw ritual power of an ill-defined nature. Sometimes this power is associated specifically with learning Torah with supernatural facility; it is also sometimes linked to the otherworldly journey. We explore the applications of these techniques in chapters 6–9. But first, in chapter 5, we must address another element of the shamanic initiation which sometimes must be endured by adepts who have learned to achieve a trance state: the initiatory disintegration and reintegration.

CHAPTER FIVE-

INITIATORY DISINTEGRATION AND REINTEGRATION

Shamanic Initiatory Transformations

The shaman has a direct link with the supernatural world. As we saw in the last chapter, this link is not forged without difficulty or pain; the shamanic vocation often brings great suffering into the lives of those who pursue it. It is characteristic of the Arctic shaman, although not unknown in other traditions, that the initiation into the otherworld is experienced as a violent upheaval involving the destruction of the whole person by the spirits, followed by a kind of resurrection as a new being who is at home in both the mundane and the spiritual worlds. The initiate seems to endure being eaten alive or otherwise consumed—often the victim sees the process as though it were happening to someone else—until nothing is left but a skeleton. Consciousness is frequently lost at this point (understandably), but the initiate may watch his or her own skeleton being reforged and reclothed with flesh. In any case, the new shaman will discover that the terrifying personal disintegration has been followed by a reintegration that brings with it powers over the spiritual world.

Inuit Shamanism (Autdaruta)

The experience of the Inuit shaman Autdaruta, as told to Rasmussen, is fairly typical. After the death of his father, he received a call from the spirits and “began to be a magician, but did not speak to any one about it.” The following year, after moving south, he apprenticed himself to a very old master shaman. Autdaruta told Rasmussen,

One day he [Autdaruta’s teacher] came and said to me—

“Travel east with me, and I will teach you something; you may need help yet, you poor fatherless boy.”

So we travelled together, and he told me on the way that he was going to make a great magician of me. We went ashore up a fjord, close to a cave, and the old man took off his clothes and crept inside. And he told me to watch carefully what happened next. I lay hidden a little way off and waited. It was not long before I saw a great bear come swimming along, crawl ashore, and approach the magician. It

flung itself upon him, crunched him up, limb for limb, and ate him.

Then it vomited him out again and swam away.

When I went up to the cave, the old man lay groaning. He was very much exhausted, but was able to row home himself. On the way back he told me that every time he allowed himself to be devoured alive by the bear he acquired greater power over his helping spirits.

Some time afterwards, he took me on a journey again, and this time it was so that I myself might be eaten by the bear; this was necessary if I wished to attain to any good. We rowed off and came to the cave; the old man told me to take my clothes off, and I do not deny that I was somewhat uncomfortable at the thought of being devoured alive.

I had not been lying there long before I heard the bear coming. It attacked me and crunched me up, limb by limb, joint by joint, but strangely enough it did not hurt at all; it was only when it bit me in the heart that it did hurt frightfully.

From that day forth I felt that I ruled my helping-spirits. After that I acquired many fresh helping-spirits and no danger could any longer threaten me, as I was always protected.¹

Siberian Shamanism (Sereptie)

An account of a somewhat different disintegration and reintegration is given by the Siberian shaman Sereptie in his description of his long and arduous initiatory vision. He went through a series of tents in the underworld, where his shamanic intuition was tested repeatedly by his guiding spirit. On entering the sixth tent, he relates,

I think it was mine. To me, it seemed a strange one, not my own. People were sitting around the fire, men on one side and women on the other. I went in, not as a man but as a skeleton; I don't know who gnawed me off, I don't know how it happened. As I took a close look at them, they did not look like real human beings but like skeletons which had been dressed. At the bottom of the tent, there was a seven-bladed anvil. I saw a woman who looked as if she were made of fire. I saw a man holding (a pair of) pliers. The woman had seven apertures on her body. From these, the man pulled out iron pieces as from the fire, placed them on the anvil and struck them with the hammer. When the iron cooled down, the man replaced it in the aperture of the woman's body as if it were fire.

¹ Rasmussen, *The People of the Polar North* 306-307. For a cross-cultural overview of initiatory disintegrations and reintegrations, see Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* 33-66. For more examples from the Inuit tradition as well as a discussion of the testimony of Autdaruta, see Merkur, *Becoming Half Hidden* 231-64.

When questioned by his guiding spirit, Sereptie discerned that this couple were forging elements of the shaman's costume. He was informed that once he became a shaman he must come to them for permission to make his own costume and drum. Sereptie adds laconically, "When I entered as a skeleton and they forged, it meant that they forged me. The master of the earth, the spirit of the shamans, has become my origin."²

Arctic Hysteria

Although we should grant a certain degree of poetic license in the accounts of initiatory disintegration and reintegration, it is possible that the experience that lies behind them has a physiological basis. The well-attested syndrome known as Arctic hysteria has long been connected with shamans in the Arctic region.³ Merkur suggests that the initiatory experience is a form of anxiety attack generated by sensory deprivation (e.g., "kayak-angst" among the Inuit), and that perhaps the natural environments of the Arctic and Australia may be more conducive to sensory deprivation than that normally experienced by Native Americans.⁴ Diet may be an important factor as well, perhaps in part explaining the frequency of kayak angst among the Inuit. Anthony F. C. Wallace has argued that *pibloktoq*, the form of Arctic hysteria which afflicts the Inuit of northern Greenland, might be caused by hypocalcemia. An attack typically begins with the subject showing mild irritability or withdrawal for some hours or days, then abruptly going wild, tearing off his or her clothes, breaking things, and running amok until restrained by others. Seizures and collapse may ensue, followed by hours of coma, from which the victim awakes with no memory of the experience. "Tetany," caused by an insufficient concentration of blood calcium, has very similar symptoms, and Wallace points out that the Arctic environment is conducive to calcium deficiency, due to both a lack of calcium-rich sources in the diet and a lack of vitamin D₃ production in the body

² Popov, "How Sereptie Djaruoskin of the Nganasans (Tagvi Samoyeds) Became a Shaman," 142 (author's parentheses).

³ M. A. Czaplicka, *Aboriginal Siberia: A Study in Social Anthropology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1914) 169-70, 172, 319-20; Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* 24, 29-30.

⁴ Merkur, *Becoming Half Hidden* 250-56.

as a result of limited exposure to sunlight during much of the year.⁵

Wallace's theory has been developed by Alice B. Kehoe and Dody H. Giletti, who argue that the calcium-deficiency hypothesis explains not only Arctic hysteria but also initiatory experiences associated with spirit possession in many cultures, as well as the prevalence of women in possession cults. They correlate the poor and calcium-deficient diets of women in these cultures with the particular association of women with spirit possession.

Cultural patterns that result in nutritional inequivalence between men and women are frequently reported. Ferchiou (1968) presents a striking structural analysis of food customs among the Djerid people of the oases of Southern Tunisia. Djerid women are restricted from drinking milk and may drink only water; the men drink goats' milk. These women are not supposed to eat meat or vegetables, their staple food being a spiced fermented paste made from overripe dates fallen from the palms. Djerid men eat good-quality dates picked from the trees as well as meat, wheat, and vegetables when available. The women eat two meals daily, or one in poor seasons; the men eat three. Djerid women fall subject to spirit possession; it is absent among Djerid men.⁶

Thus the diet of these women falls short of "the optimal conditions for a sufficient intake of usable calcium," which Amy C. Zeller summarizes as "a diet containing milk and cheese and leafy vegetables which are the major calcium sources, sunlight, animal fat and fresh vegetables to produce vitamin D, and a healthy parathyroid gland."⁷ After surveying similar social situations, Kehoe and Giletti summarize their hypothesis as follows:

⁵ Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Mental Illness, Biology and Culture," in *Psychological Anthropology*, ed. Francis L. K. Hsu (rev. ed.; Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1972) 363-402, esp. pp. 370-83.

⁶ Alice B. Kehoe and Dody H. Giletti, "Women's Preponderance in Possession Cults: The Calcium-Deficiency Hypothesis Extended," *American Anthropologist* 83 (1981) 549-61; the quotation is on p. 553. On p. 551 the authors note that clinical tests were carried out by Edward F. Foulks on ten north Alaskan Inuit who were subject to Arctic hysteria, with inconclusive results (published in *The Arctic Hysterias of the North Alaskan Eskimo*). They write, "Because each occurrence was tested at least a full day subsequent to the hysterical attack—a period long enough for serum calcium levels to increase to normal range . . .—this inability to demonstrate hypocalcemia provides no evidence about the hysteria's onset." More recently, Amy C. Zeller has argued that the calcium-deficiency hypothesis may explain the strange early behavior of the girls accused of witchcraft in Salem in the late seventeenth century ("Arctic Hysteria in Salem?" *Anthropologica* 32 [1990] 239-64).

⁷ Zeller, "Arctic Hysteria in Salem?" 247.

We postulate that an initial experience of involuntary tremor or tetany, and/or dissociation, though transient, frightens the subject and those who know her. Attributing the episode to spirit possession may be consonant with the society's cosmology; it is certainly an easier explanation than one attributing the episode to delicate metabolic homeostasis requiring unseen minerals and chemicals present in marginally adequate amounts in traditional diets. That the involuntary behavior can be voluntarily replicated under induced trance ("hypnosis") assures the subject that her behavior is not, after all, altogether beyond human control. We suggest that anticipating control reduces the subject's anxiety and fortifies her to resume her normal behavior. Thus, induced possession trance can be the routinization of initially, and subsequently, involuntary tremors and dissociation, a culturally patterned means of heightening victims' confidence in their own or their leaders' control over threatening situations.⁸

With all due caution, I propose that the calcium-deficiency hypothesis may also help to explain experiences attributed to the practitioners portrayed in the Hekhalot literature, which resemble the disassembly and reconstitution endured by Arctic shamans. In chapter 4, I surveyed the ascetic techniques described in the Hekhalot literature. These include prolonged isolation indoors (the house is to be dark according to *Pereq R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah* §314) and long fasts or a diet of bread and water (explicitly excluding vegetables in *Sar Torah* §299 and meat, wine and vegetables in *Merkavah Rabba* §684). Given that in antiquity diet was rarely adequate to start with, these practices could well have led to hypocalcemia. If we grant the possibility that Autdaruta and Sereptie (or at least shamans in general in their cultures) owed their experiences in part to affliction by Arctic hysteria, we shall not be surprised to find evidence of similar experiences in the Hekhalot literature.

The Dark Night of the Soul and the Healed Healer

Nevertheless it is not necessary to suppose that every spiritual transformation a shaman undergoes must be attributed to Arctic hysteria. In chapter 2, we saw that Underhill's schema of the mystical path includes the "Dark Night of the Soul," a death of the self which is prerequisite to rising again to the Unitive Life. Kenneth Wapnick has compared Underhill's schema, as exemplified by the life of St.

⁸ Kehoe and Giletti, "Women's Preponderance in Possession Cults," 555.

Teresa of Avila, to an account of a recovered schizophrenic,⁹ "Lara Jefferson," arguing that they contain many similarities, including

their experience of a dichotomy between two levels of experience—the outer or social, as opposed to the inner or personal; the breakdown of their attachments to the social world; their experience of pain and terror as they "entered the inner world"; their feeling of peace following the end of the terror; and their "return" to the social world, deriving more satisfaction in their social functioning than before their experiences.¹⁰

The differences are also important:

the mystical process of St. Teresa was lifelong, whereas Lara Jefferson's experience of the "inner world" was compressed into a much shorter period of time. Teresa's mystic life culminated in the experience of Unity, while Lara had no such experience. Throughout the process, Teresa was able to maintain some degree of social contact, though living in a cloister. Moreover, her decisions to isolate herself were within her conscious control. Lara, on the other hand, experienced a loss of conscious control and breakdown in her social functioning, necessitating her hospitalization.¹¹

The point of the juxtaposition of Teresa and Lara is both to compare and contrast the mystic and the schizophrenic. Both break down the barrier between the inner and outer worlds, but the mystic does so with conscious intent, gradually building up the strength to face the inner world and "the overwhelming power of its fantasies and images."¹² For the schizophrenic, the barrier is broken down rapidly and without the necessary spiritual preparation. "The mystic provides the example of the method whereby the inner and outer

⁹ "Schizophrenia" is another difficult term. I follow Richard Noll's understanding here: "Schizophrenia is the generic term for a group of highly unstable states of a related nature which are generally considered to be pathological in that they are abnormal and maladaptive for the individual, deviating sharply and in an unsolicited manner from the baseline state of consciousness. Several different disorders are believed to constitute what we now call schizophrenia; thus a 'schizophrenic state' is more accurately considered as 'states' ("Shamanism and Schizophrenia: A State-Specific Approach to the 'Schizophrenia Metaphor' of Shamanic States," *American Ethnologist* 10 [1983] 443-59; the quotation is on p. 447).

¹⁰ Kenneth Wapnick, "Mysticism and Schizophrenia," in *Understanding Mysticism*, ed. Woods, 321-37; the quotation is on p. 334 (first published in *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 1 [1969] 49-66).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

may be joined; the schizophrenic, the tragic result when they are separated."¹³

The shamanic initiatory experience has also been compared to schizophrenia. Julian Silverman has laid out a group of structural parallels: both schizophrenia and the shamanic call often begin with feelings of fear, guilt, and impotence; the schizophrenic and the prospective shaman both become increasingly self-absorbed and isolated from their social reality; this self absorption leads both to constrict their fields of attention to the point that sensory perception and fantasy become difficult to distinguish; the inner forces of the psyche then overwhelm and disperse the psychological self; and this dispersal leads to a reorganization of the self and the perception of reality. In cultures in which the shamanic role is accepted a successful reorganization is likely, since conventions and social structures exist which encourage a full reintegration of the individual into the society as a highly valued member. No such conventions and social structures encourage the reintegration of the schizophrenic, so his or her reorganization is far more likely to fail.¹⁴

Silverman's comparisons have been criticized, but this paradigm of the shaman as the healed healer is not without value. It is important to avoid imposing a Western model of pathology on experiences that are viewed positively in their own cultural contexts. Insofar as they can be compared, the mental states associated with schizophrenia are not at all like the Shamanic State of Consciousness, although they bear some similarity to the shamanic initiatory crisis. The key difference between schizophrenia and shamanism is that the shaman voluntarily enters and leaves altered states of consciousness and does so in the service of a community.¹⁵

Lakota Shamanism (Nick Black Elk)

Initiatory transformations are also known among shamans outside the Arctic region, although these transformations are generally less intense than those attested in the Arctic. An example from North

¹³ *Ibid.*, 337.

¹⁴ Julian Silverman, "Shamans and Acute Schizophrenia," *American Anthropologist* 69 (1967) 21-31.

¹⁵ Peters and Price-Williams, "Towards an Experiential Analysis of Shamanism," 402-407; Noll, "Shamanism and Schizophrenia"; Merkur, *Becoming Half Hidden* 19-62; Roger Walsh, "The Psychological Health of Shamans: A Reevaluation," *JAAAR* 65 (1997) 101-24.

America is found in the narrative of the Great Vision of Nick Black Elk when he was a nine-year-old boy in the early 1870s. Toward its end he was given a magic herb by a black-horned man who underwent various transformations, including one into a skeleton. (Nick had been destined to use this herb to wreak great destruction on his enemies when he was thirty-seven years old, but out of compassion for the women and children who would suffer, he gave up his vocation instead and converted to Catholicism.) At the end of this episode he informs us:

During this whole time I did not notice how I was dressed. But now I noticed that I was painted red and all my joints were black. There was a white stripe between the joints all over my body. And whenever I would breath [*sic*], I would be breathing lightning. My bay horse had lightning stripes on it. The horse's mane was like clouds.¹⁶

This element of his vision is later linked with an internal transformation and acquiring a spiritual mission. After he awoke from his vision, he was visited by his relative Whirlwind Chaser, a medicine man, who told Nick's father, "Your son there is sitting in a sacred manner. I can see that there is a special duty for him to do. Just as he came in I could see the power of lightning all through his body."¹⁷

Lakota tradition also suggests a connection between the sweat lodge ceremony and an initiatory death and resurrection. During his first sweat lodge, in preparation for his first vision quest, Leonard Crow Dog, a Lakota shaman, was told, "This steam is the holy breath of the universe. Hokshila, boy, you are in your mother's womb again. You are going to be reborn."¹⁸ The myth of the Stone Boy, as told to James Walker by two native informants, contains a number of episodes in which the dead are raised by being subjected to the sweat lodge ceremony.¹⁹

¹⁶ DeMallie (ed.), *The Sixth Grandfather* 137; compare Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* 44. For the horse as a symbol of spiritual transformation and of death and renewal in Lakota tradition, see Julian Rice, "Akicita of the Thunder: Horses in Black Elk's Vision," in *The Black Elk Reader*, ed. Holler, 59-76.

¹⁷ DeMallie (ed.), *The Sixth Grandfather* 150; compare Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* 49. Note that Neihardt's rendition weakens the direct connection between Whirlwind Chaser's statement and Nick's vision, since it reads "a power like a light" instead of "the power of lightning."

¹⁸ Halifax, *Shamanic Voices* 81.

¹⁹ James R. Walker, *Lakota Myth*, ed. Elaine A. Jahner (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1983) 93, 97, 150.

Japanese Shamanism

Japanese shamanic traditions lack the sort of clear initiatory transformations found among Siberian peoples and the Inuit. But there are persistent echoes of the theme in Japanese shamanism, along with a few examples that fit the paradigm nicely.²⁰ Symbolic echoes of this death and rebirth appear to be preserved in the initiation ceremony of the blind female *itako*. Ichiro Hori describes the ceremony as follows:

When the novice has completed her training, she is initiated into the shamanic mysteries by her mistress. Before the initiation ceremony, as preliminary preparation, the novice puts on a white robe called the death dress and sits face to face with her mistress on three rice bags. Several shamaness elders assist in the ceremony. They chant and utter the names of deities, buddhas, and several magic formulas in unison with the mistress and the novice. In this mystical atmosphere, the novice's joined hands begin to tremble slightly. Observing carefully the novice's change of behavior, the mistress perceives the climax of inspiration and suddenly cries in a loud voice to the novice: "What is the name of the deity that possessed you?" Immediately the novice answers: "So-and-so deity (or sometimes buddha or bodhisattva) possessed me." When the mistress hears this answer, she throws a large rice cake at the novice, and the novice falls off the bags and faints. Sometimes the elders dash water on top of the novice's head 3,333 times at a well-side or at the seashore. The novice in a dead faint is warmed by the body heat of shamaness elders who share her bed, and finally regains consciousness. The novice is said to be newborn and is then initiated. She changes her white death dress to a colorful so-called wedding dress and performs the ceremony of the traditional wedding toast by exchanging nine cups of *sake* with her mistress.²¹

The purpose of the prolonged icy ablation, of course, is to generate a spiritual inner heat in the initiate. This inner heat is in some ways comparable to the burning or forging described in other accounts

²⁰ Blacker, following Hori, attributes the rareness of this initiatory experience in Japan to differences between Arctic hunting cultures and Japanese agricultural society: "The dismemberment and skeleton motifs suggest a hunting, pastoral people. The contrasting elements found in the Japanese tales of the cave, the passage through a hole down to a subterranean world, betoken a return to the womb of the earth mother goddess characteristic of an agricultural people" (*The Catalpa Bow* 346 n. 13). One difficulty with this explanation is that the experience is also rare among Native American hunting cultures.

²¹ Ichiro Hori, *Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 204–205.

of shamanic initiatory transformation. Referring to this ceremony, Blacker explains,

Here we have a rite of unmistakably initiatory character. A preliminary ordeal of an excruciating kind involving fasting, cold water, and repetitive chanting; a rite in which tension is raised to the point at which the candidate faints dead away. Dying to her old self, she is reborn in the dazzling garb of the bride of the deity implanted in her at the moment of death and with whom she will henceforth stand in a close tutelary relationship.²²

Some of the legends about ancient Japanese shamans and visionaries also seem to refer to something like the shamanic death and resurrection. Take, for example, the priest Chickō, whose story has parallels to the Platonic myth of Er. It is told in the *Nihon Ryōiko* (eleventh century). Chickō became irrationally jealous of another priest and shortly thereafter died of an illness, but came back to life nine days later. He described a near-death experience in which he was purged of his sin by being compelled to embrace two red-hot pillars whose heat reduced him to a skeleton. Both times he was brought back to life after three days. Then, for good measure, his angelic guides tossed him into a burning hell for three more days, after which he was judged to be purified of his besetting jealousy.²³ The parallels to the Arctic destruction and resurrection are clear, although technically this vision is an account of a near-death experience, not a shamanic initiation.

Likewise, the modern visionary Deguchi Onisaburō had not one but many initiatory deaths and resurrections. "Time and again he is killed, split in half with a sharp blade like a pear, dashed to pieces on rocks, frozen, burnt, engulfed in avalanches of snow. Once he was turned into a goddess. Time and again, by means of his spell [of protection], he was able to rescue tormented dead people."²⁴

²² Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow* 147. Blacker's comments here apply to a specific instance of an initiation ceremony for an *itako*, a Mrs. Nara Naka, whose experience is recounted on pp. 146-47.

²³ *Ibid.*, 188-89.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 205.

Dangerous Encounters with the Divine in the Judaic Tradition

In the Hebrew Bible, as well as in many ancient mythologies, there is a persistent tradition that it is deadly dangerous to have a direct encounter with the divine. A typical expression of this sentiment is found in the vision of the prophet Isaiah, which took place in Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem in the year 742 BCE (Isaiah 6). This fear for one's life in the presence of God is a well-established theme in biblical literature.²⁵

The fiery nature of the heavenly world is also a commonplace in the *Hekhalot* literature. The angels, like Isaiah's seraphim ("burning ones"), are by nature aflame. Consider, for example, this description in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* of the heavenly throne room just after God descends to the seventh firmament at the time of the daily prayers.

(§101) As soon as all those on high see that He is coming on the firmament that is over the heads of the cherubim and over the heads of the ophanim and over the heads of the holy living creatures, they shake and are confounded and overcome, and they fall backward. For no creature is able to approach within a hundred eighty-five thousand myriad parasangs of that place because of the tendrils of fire that flow and go forth from the mouths of the cherubim and from the mouths of the ophanim and from the mouths of the holy living creatures

²⁵ After his crippling encounter with a divine being, Jacob counts himself fortunate to have escaped with his life (Gen 32:24–32). The instinctive reaction of Samson's father, after he and his wife experienced a theophany of the angel of YHWH heralding the birth of their mighty son, is "We shall surely die, for we have seen God" (Judg 13:22). There is also the strange story about Moses to the effect that, when he comes down from Mount Sinai after receiving the second set of tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, something about the appearance of the skin of his face so terrifies the Israelites that he finds it necessary to wear a veil (Exod 34:29–35). The traditional interpretation of v. 29 is that Moses' face glowed with an echo of the divine glory. However, William H. Propp has shown that it is philologically and contextually more likely that the meaning of the verse is that Moses' face was scorched and thus horribly disfigured by the divine radiance ("The Skin of Moses' Face—Transfigured or Disfigured?" *CBQ* 49 [1987] 375–86). Note that the angels who serve before the throne of God suffer a similar fate (see below). There are other accounts in the Bible of dangerous encounters with God or divine beings (e.g., Exod 4:24–26; Num 22:21–35). For an example from extrabiblical myth, see the Greek story of Semele, the mortal mother of the god Dionysus. Zeus, disguised as a mortal man, becomes her lover, but Hera persuades her to demand of Zeus that he appear to her in his true form. She is instantly burned to death by his radiance, but the quick action of Hermes saves her unborn child, Dionysus. See Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (2 vols.; rev. ed.; London and New York: Penguin, 1960) 1:56.

who open their mouths, saying "Holy" before Him, in the hour that Israel says "Holy" before Him, as it is written, "Holy, holy, holy" (Isa 6:3).²⁶

Compare the description of the angel Ophanni'el YHWH, who is in charge of the group of angels known as the Ophannim:

(3 *Enoch* 25:1-3 [§39]) R. Ishmael said:

Metatron, the angelic Prince of the Presence, said to me:

Above them (the cherubim and their leader) is a great, fearsome, mighty, honored, learned, frightening, venerable, and strong prince: Ophanni'el YHWH is his name. He has sixteen faces, four on each one of his sides, and one hundred wings on one side and one hundred wings on the other side. He has eight thousand seven hundred and sixty-six eyes, corresponding to the hours of the days of the year, two thousand one hundred ninety-one on each side. And as for these pairs of eyes that are in his faces, lightning strikes in each one. From each one torches burn, and no creature is able to gaze at them, since anyone gazing at them is burned at once.

The heavenly realm itself is pictured as burning with fire throughout in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah*:

(§554) R. Akiva said:

Who is able to conceive of the seven palaces, and to have a vision of the innermost heavens, and to see the innermost chambers and to say, "I saw the chambers of YH"?

In the first palace stand four thousand myriad chariots of fire and two thousand myriad flames mixed among them. In the second palace stand one hundred thousand myriad chariots of fire and forty thousand myriad flames mixed among them. In the third palace stand two hundred thousand myriad chariots of fire and a hundred thousand myriad flames mixed among them. (And so on through the seventh palace.)

(§555) In the first palace chariots of fire say: "Holy, holy, holy" (Isa 6:3). And flames of fire are scattered and are gathered to the second palace, and they say: "Holy, holy, holy." In the second palace chariots of fire say: "Blessed is the glory of YHWH from His place" (Ezek 3:12). And flames of fire are scattered and are gathered to the third palace and they say: "Blessed is the glory of YHWH from His place." In the third palace chariots of fire say: "Blessed is the name of the glory of His kingdom forever and ever from the place of the house of His Shekhinah." And flames of fire are scattered and are gathered to

²⁶ For a discussion of this and other Hekhalot texts in relation to the Nag Hammadi Gnostic materials, see Ithamar Gruenwald, "Jewish Sources for the Gnostic Texts from Nag Hammadi?" in *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism* 207-20.

the fourth palace, and they say: "Blessed is the name of the glory of His kingdom forever and ever from the place of the house of His Shekhinah." (And so on through the seventh palace.)

Even given the flaming nature of the angels, they in turn cannot endure the direct sight of God. In Isaiah's vision the seraphim must cover their faces so as not to look God in the face. This theme is also picked up in the *Hekhalot* literature. Consider, for example, a passage that appears in a few manuscripts of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*:

(§183) At once, all of them stand in awe, in fear, with quivering, in a cold sweat, in holiness, in truth, and in humility. And they cover their faces with their wings so as not to perceive the likeness of God Who dwells on the throne. And there stand party after party of a thousand thousands of thousands and row upon row of a myriad myriads of myriads, camp after camp beyond reckoning, and host after host without number, like mountains upon mountains of fire and like hills upon hills of hail, before the throne of glory. And in that hour, the Holy One, blessed be He, sits enthroned upon the throne of glory, and His glory fills the world, as it is written, "the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa 6:3).

(§184) And also the holy living creatures prepare themselves and sanctify themselves and purify themselves more than the others. And every single one of them is bound with a thousand thousands of thousands crowns of various luminaries on their heads, and they clothe themselves with clothes of fire, and they wrap themselves with a covering of flame and cover their faces with a lightningbolt, and the Holy One, blessed be He, uncovers His face.

A text from the *Hekhalot Rabbati* describes a similar scene:

(§189) Every single day, when the afternoon prayer arrives, the adorned King sits enthroned and exalts the living creatures. The word does not finish coming from His mouth before the holy living creatures go forth from under the throne of glory. From their mouths chanting is fulfilled, with their wings rejoicing is fulfilled, their hands make music, and their feet dance. They go around and surround their King; one on His right, one on His left, one before Him, and one behind Him. They embrace and kiss Him and uncover their faces. They uncover and the King of glory covers His face, and the Arabot firmament is split like a sieve before the King.²⁷

²⁷ Cf. also 3 *Enoch* 22B:5-6 (Alexander, "3 [Hebrew Apocalypse of] Enoch," *OTP* 1:305). For a translation and a Freudian interpretation of this and a related passage (§§246-50, discussed below), see David J. Halperin, "A Sexual Image in *Hekhalot Rabbati* and Its Implications," *Proceedings of the First International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism: Early Jewish Mysticism*, ed. Joseph Dan (Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought VI 1-2; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1987) 117-32.

The attending angels, including the inconceivably mighty living creatures who form the legs of the throne of God, must cover their faces to protect themselves from the divine radiance. Only then is it safe for God to uncover his face in this cosmic game of peekaboo.

The Descenders to the Chariot and the Direct Vision of God

Sometimes angels can protect themselves from harm by taking precautions such as those discussed in the previous section. But it appears that sometimes no precaution can protect angels or human beings from harm that arises inevitably from proximity to the presence of God. The following section describes the divine glory and the effect it has on those beings whose fate it is to be exposed to it too directly or for too long.

(§159) The fine Presence, adorned Presence, Presence of beauty, Presence of flame, the Presence of YHWH, God of Israel, when He sits enthroned on His throne of glory and His dignity is perfected in the seat of His adornment. His beauty is finer than the beauty of the mighty acts of His adornment, made to ascend higher than the adornments of bridegrooms and brides in their bridal chamber. He who gazes on Him shall be torn apart at once; the one who peers at His beauty is poured out at once like a ladle. Those who attend on Him today do not attend on Him again tomorrow, and those who attend on Him tomorrow do not attend again, for their vigor has grown weak and their faces have turned black, their mind wanders and their eyes have darkened after (seeing) the adornment of the splendor of the beauty of their King. As it is written, "Holy, holy, holy" (Isa 6:3).²⁸

This text alludes to two distinct groups. The second, which "attends on" God, is clearly made up of the angelic beings who serve near the throne of glory. By the end of the first day of their existence, the scorching heat of the divine presence has afflicted them with something remarkably similar to radiation sickness; they wither, lose their faculties, and die.²⁹ But it is the first group that interests us here. They "gaze" and "peer" at God and as a result are "torn apart at once" and are "poured out at once like a ladle." Who are they? The description of their actions makes the answer clear. The verb "to gaze" (מסתכל) is frequently used in the Hekhalot literature

²⁸ Cf. *3 Enoch* 22B:7 (Alexander, "3 [Hebrew Apocalypse of] Enoch," *OTP* 1:305).

²⁹ This idea is based on a midrash of Lam 3:23 found in the rabbinic literature (see Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot* 267, 270).

to describe the visionary gazing of the descenders to the chariot at the throne of God.³⁰ Likewise, in the *Hekhalot* texts the verb “to peer” (רָמַז) is used mainly of the four who entered paradise. Each of them “peered” into the garden (presumed to be “paradise” or the heavenly realm in these texts) and went to his appropriate fate.³¹ This is our first indication that the descenders to the chariot, who literally rush in where angels fear to tread, are regarded as facing significant danger in obtaining their goal of a direct vision of God. This danger seems to be inherent in the act of looking at God rather than due to any failing on the part of the viewer.

Two rather difficult passages in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* seem to link the vision of God with the dangers of the descent. The opening section reads,

(§335) If you want to be unique in the world, to have the mysteries of the world and the secrets of wisdom revealed to you, repeat this teaching and be careful with it until the day of your separation. Do not seek understanding of what is behind you, and do not search out the words of your lips. You will understand what is in your heart when you merit the beauty of the chariot. Be careful with the glory of your Creator, and do not descend to it. And if you descend to it, do not enjoy it. And if you enjoy it, your end is to be banished from the world. “It is the glory of God to keep a matter secret” (Prov 25:2), lest you be banished from the world.

This passage promises the practitioner both special knowledge, presumably Sar Torah revelations, and “the beauty of the chariot,” meaning the experience of the otherworldly journey and the vision of God. However, the warnings in the last part of the section are obscure: they seem to say that it is preferable not to descend to the chariot, but the one who does so should certainly not “enjoy” the experience, on pain, apparently, of death. Perhaps “enjoying” the glory of God is a technical term for some sort of praxis that was

³⁰ E.g., 3 *Enoch* 1:1 (§1; Alexander, “3 [Hebrew Apocalypse of] Enoch,” *OTP* 1:255); *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§81, 200; *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§337//347, 349//361, 412; G8 2a 46.

³¹ *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§338//344, 339//345; *Merkavah Rabba* §§671–72. The verb is also used in other passages to describe the descenders to the chariot looking at the vision of the throne of God: *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§102 (discussed below), 225; G8 2a 25. Curiously, every other use of this verb in the *Hekhalot* literature has God or angels as its subject: *SH-L* §331; *Sar Panim* §636; *SH-L* §791.

disapproved of by the writer. Whatever the exact meaning, the association of the vision of God with deadly danger is clear.³²

The next section (§336) gives an incantation revealed to Moses when he ascended to God. Next come variant versions of the story of the four who entered paradise, along with accounts of ascents by Moses and R. Akiva (§§337-48). Then comes a passage that describes the powers of the Hekhalot practitioners (§349 and the first sentence of §350). Next we read,

(§350) First, this is written: "For a human being shall not see Me and live" (Exod 33:20). Second, it is written: "that God speaks with a human being and he lives" (Deut 5:24 [21]). Third, it is written: "And I saw YHWH seated on a throne" (cf. Isa 6:1b).

(§351) And what is His name? SSYT KSPN WDNYN DNYN NWN NYNYH, since all the holiness of His hosts is fire, even the fire of YH ŠWWH WHY Y ŠBY fire BNYN effulgence KYŠN NGWNY 'BYRW, seated on an exalted and lifted-up throne. "Holy, holy, holy, YHWH of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa 6:3). "Blessed be the glory of YHWH from His place" (Ezek 3:12). 'WṬYYS PWSWQSYW HYṬH ŠHQH QSPP PTQY ṬWQW 'PHH SPHQ SWPQ Y'YQ NYSHH QQH SQWS WHS W'QY' H' 'QṬM PHY Y, and there are those who say before Him: "A throne of glory on high from the beginning [is the place of our sanctuary]" (Jer 17:12).

(§352) The holy ones of the Most High say: "We see 'something like an appearance of a lightningbolt'" (cf. Ezek 1:14).

The prophets say: "In a dream' we see a vision like a man who sees 'a vision of the night'" (Job 33:15).

The kings who are on the earth³³ say: "LWQ' KTR GHYM."

But R. Akiva³⁴ says: "He is, as it were,³⁵ like us, and He is greater than all. And this is His glory, which is made secret from us."³⁶

Moses says to all of them: "Do not inquire³⁷ into your own words; rather, let Him be blessed in His place." Therefore it is written: "Blessed be the glory of YHWH from His place" (Ezek 3:12).

³² Peter Schäfer reads the whole section as a "purposeful revision" of the prohibition of esoteric practice in *m. Hag* 2.1, "taken up in a quite playful manner" (*The Hidden and Manifest God* 70-71; the quotation is on p. 70). His interpretation is surely correct as far as it goes, but it does not elucidate the warning against enjoying the glory of God.

³³ One manuscript (Munich 22) reads, "Those who walk on the earth."

³⁴ The name "Akiva" is missing in all but one manuscript.

³⁵ See Schäfer et al., *Übersetzung* 3:24 n. 13 for a discussion of this expression.

³⁶ Or, "And this is His glory, that He is made secret from us."

³⁷ Reading חבדקן. Other readings are "cleave to" (חבדקן) and "push forward" (חדפקן).

The issue seems to be the contradictory statements in the Bible about whether a human being can see God and survive. The first passage quoted, Exod 33:20, denies the possibility altogether; the second, Deut 5:24, asserts that the Israelites did just this when they experienced the revelation of God at Sinai. Finally, Isa 6:1 introduces Isaiah's vision of God. The implied question is, Who is right? If it is fatal to see God, how was it accomplished by Israel at Sinai and Isaiah in the Temple? Schäfer believes that the passage contains its own answer. The prophet Isaiah is taken to be one of the descenders to the chariot (since he too saw the vision of God's throne), and the fact that he returned unscathed establishes that there is indeed a way for human beings to survive the sight of God.³⁸ Schäfer may be right here, although it is not clear to me how the Israelites' vision of God on Mount Sinai is to be integrated with this interpretation. Be that as it may, the question is further addressed in the rest of this section.

The meaning of §351, especially in its context, is far from transparent. Pointing to the initial question, "And what is His name?" Schäfer suggests: "[t]his entails that the name of God is the crucial revelation for the *merkavah* mystic. . . . The 'vision' of God consists, so to speak, of the communication of his names."³⁹ Morray-Jones focuses on the use of the term "glory" (*kabod*): "[This section] establishes a link between the *kabod* in the preexistent celestial sanctuary and the earthly temple."⁴⁰ Both points seem to apply. The section seeks to present knowledge of God's name and presence (glory), which is relevant for making the descent to the chariot.

The final section addresses how various kinds of beings experience the sight of God. The holy ones (angels) describe an element from Ezekiel's Merkavah vision. The prophets see visions in dreams. The statement of the "kings who are on the earth" (or mortals in general?) is incomprehensible and probably corrupt. R. Akiva alludes to the vision of God in the Shi'ur Qomah tradition: God looks like us but is of enormous dimensions, and his true nature remains hidden from us. Moses gets the last word. He seems to command a shift from speaking about God to blessing (i.e., praising) him. Again, the general sense is clear, although the details are not. Angels have

³⁸ Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* 58.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1-12)," 281.

a direct view of the chariot. Prophets see obscurely in dreams. The descenders to the chariot see God in the vision of the Shi'ur Qomah, although their human limitations prevent a complete understanding of what they see. Schäfer takes the statement of Moses to be an anticlimax. Moses simply repeats the traditional belief that the job of both human beings and angels is "to praise God during the daily liturgy."⁴¹ This much is certainly true, but Moses may also be affirming Akiva's position by encouraging the "blessing" of God in the sense of the ecstatic praise described in the *Hekhalot* literature as one of the means used by the descenders to the chariot to induce their trances.⁴²

In any case, once again, the vision of God is treated as a potentially fatal enterprise. But some hope is offered as well: the Israelites at Sinai and the prophet Isaiah in his vision in Solomon's Temple looked at God and lived. R. Akiva (presumably representing the descenders to the chariot) refers to the vision of the Shi'ur Qomah, which is especially associated with his group. This successful perception of the beatific vision is linked with knowledge of the divine names and the proper praise of God, both elements that belong to the ascetic practices attributed to the descenders to the chariot.

A vivid description of the danger appears in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*. After §101, which describes the fiery nature of the angels around the chariot, we read:

(§102) A condition of holiness, a condition of might, a fearsome condition, a confounding condition, a condition of quivering, a condition of cold sweat, a condition of confoundedness, a condition of shuddering is the condition of the shirt of ZHRRY'L YHWH, God of Israel, Who is garlanded and Who comes onto His throne of glory. And it (the shirt) is engraved, and all of it is filled inside and out with "YHWH, YHWH." And no eyes of any creature are able to gaze at Him, neither eyes of flesh and blood nor the eyes of His attendants. And the one who gazes at Him and peers at and sees Him—*flashbacks* seize his eyeballs, and his eyeballs emit and bring forth torches of fire, and they scorch and burn him. The fire that goes forth from the man who gazes burns him and scorches him. For what reason? Because of the likeness of the eyes of the shirt of ZHRRY'L YHWH, God of Israel, Who is garlanded and comes onto the throne of glory. His beauty is pleasant and sweet, like the appearance of the beauty of the splendor

⁴¹ Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* 59.

⁴² Cf. Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1-12)," 281.

of the adornment of the eyes of the likeness of the holy living creatures, as it is written, "Holy, holy, holy" (Isa 6:3).

(§103) Who is like our King among all the majestic ones who hold kingship? Who is like our Creator? Who is like YHWH our God? Who is like Him among those who bind on crowns? For with six voices the *beings*⁴³ who carry His throne of glory sing, the cherubim and the ophannim and the holy living creatures, with voice after voice that is made to ascend over its companion and that is modulated before Him.

(§104) The voice of the first: whoever hears it immediately moans and prostrates himself. The voice of the second: whoever listens to it immediately gets lost and does not return again. The voice of the third: whoever hears it is seized by convulsions and dies immediately. The voice of the fourth: whoever listens to it—immediately the skull of his head, as well as his frame, is shattered, and most of the joints of his ribs are torn out. The voice of the fifth: whoever hears it is immediately poured out like a ladle and it dissolves all of him into blood. The voice of the sixth: whoever listens to it—immediately skipping seizes his heart and his heart shakes and overturns his bowels and it dissolves his gall inside him like water. As it is written, "Holy, holy, holy" (Isa 6:3).

Once again, the victim of this dissolution must be the descender to the chariot. No creature, earthly or angelic, who "gazes at" and "peers at" the divine vision can avoid being consumed by fire. And anyone who so much as hears the voices of the angels who bear the throne is torn apart and "poured out like a ladle." The phrases in quotation marks echo §159 and they include the same two technical terms for gazing at the divine vision.

Attacks by Angels versus the Ruinous Vision of God

But what is the cause and purpose of this horrifying ordeal? The most obvious answer is that this is the fate of unworthy human beings who somehow manage to pass the preliminary tests of the descent (such as the water test) and who then stand before the throne of God: they are consumed by the radiant glory of God's holiness. This seems to be the position of Ira Chernus, who argues that the best way to read this section "is to assume that in fact this text is

⁴³ The difficult word מדה (literally, a "measure") sometimes seems to have this meaning in the Hekhalot literature (cf. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot* 430 and 545 n. ii).

describing dangers—very dreadful dangers—facing the mystic who wants to see God. . . . I think, then, that the text is saying that no creature can see God under ordinary circumstances, but if an individual is willing to accept these terrifying dangers then he may in fact see God.”⁴⁴ Although Chernus does not make it explicit, his assumption seems to be that the person destroyed in this violent way must be an unworthy practitioner whose death illustrates the dangers of the descent to the chariot. Presumably a worthy candidate would escape harm. At first glance a number of passages in the *Hekhalot* literature appear to offer support for this interpretation. I will survey these in this section and show that they actually deal with something different from the ruinous vision of God.

In the *Merkavah Rabba* we read a warning given to R. Ishmael by R. Akiva.

(§681) R. Ishmael said:

R. Akiva said to me:

Son of the proud, go, return to the presence of R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah and ask your master, that he may tell you and explain to you discernment regarding this praxis: how one makes use of it and how people adjure with it, lest you err and use it in a way contrary to the *halakhah* and you act inappropriately and they (the angels) attack you as in the case of so-and-sos whom they (the angels) attacked and whose gall was dissolved inside them (the victims) to become like water. For they listened to what was contrary to the *halakhah* and they acted inappropriately.⁴⁵

R. Nehuniah tells Ishmael that he has been protected thus far only because of his priestly status, and then R. Nehuniah gives him instructions for adjuring angels which are nearly identical to those he gives his disciples in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§203b–205). This section uses the image of dissolution in a way similar to §§104 and 159, but it indicates an attack, presumably by angels, rather than a self-immolation caused by seeing God face to face. Thus it is a closer parallel to

⁴⁴ Ira Chernus, “Visions of God in Merkabah Mysticism,” *JST* 13 (1982) 123–46; the quotation is on pp. 129–30.

⁴⁵ A dim echo of the language of §§104 and 159 may perhaps also be found in the David Apocalypse. When the angel SNWNY'L, the Prince of the Presence, reveals to R. Ishmael the punishments to be meted out to Israel, Ishmael exclaims, “As soon as I heard this strong voice I was poured out and struck dumb, and I fell backward” (§124). Here the expression “to be poured out” is used metaphorically.

§204 than to §§102–104 and 159, although all three passages deal with the dangers of the celestial journey for mortals.

Instructions in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* on what the descender to the chariot should expect in the seventh palace also focus on dangers from angels during the descent.

(§246) Greatest of all, there are the five hundred and twelve eyes in the four living creatures opposite the gate of the seventh palace. All the forms of their faces are faces of sixteen by sixteen faces which belong to every single living creature, opposite the gate of the seventh palace.

(§247) When a man seeks to descend to the chariot, Anaphiel opens the doors of the gate of the seventh palace for him. This man enters and stands at the threshold of the gate of the seventh palace, and the holy living creatures lift up five hundred and twelve eyes on him. And every single eye of the holy living creatures is split open like a great winnowers⁴⁶ sieve. And the appearance of their eyes is as if “they dart like lightning” (Nah 2:5). Besides, there are the eyes of the mighty cherubim and the ophanim of the Shekhinah, which resemble torches of light and of flames of glowing juniper coals.

(§248) And this man is in a cold sweat, and he shrinks back and shakes. He is confounded, confused, and overcome, and he falls backward. But Anaphiel the prince supports him, he and the sixty-three guardians of the gates of the seven palaces. All of them help him and say to him, “Do not fear, son of the beloved seed! Enter and see ‘the King in his beauty’ (Isa 33:17). You shall not be destroyed, nor shall you be burned.”

(§249 is a Merkavah hymn.)

(§250) And they give him vigor. At once (God?) blows the horn “from above the firmament over their heads” (Ezek 1:26), and the holy living creatures cover their faces, and the cherubim and the ophanim turn their faces, and he enters and stands before the throne of glory.

Here the descender to the chariot is promised by the angels that he will be spared both destruction and burning—at least by them. Good as their word, they avert their faces in order to let him pass into the celestial throne room, where he proceeds to recite the hymns of the throne.

⁴⁶ This word is incomprehensible in the manuscripts. I translate according to Halperin’s emendation in “A Sexual Image in *Hekhalot Rabbati* and Its Implications,” 118, 126–27 n. 7.

Two other passages in the Hekhalot literature deal with how to avoid angelic immolation. The first is a prayer that appears at different points in the manuscripts:

(§§393//470//730) May You have goodwill, YHWH our God, Whose mercy presses down in the hour when we invoke Your great and fearsome name, so that we are not drowned in fire. For all Your attendants are flaming fire. May You have goodwill, O merciful and good Father, for in that hour we are saved from the harmful (spirits).

The second is one of a group of adjurations of the Prince of the Presence found in the *Sar Panim*. It is to be recited after carrying out a set of ascetic exercises that is typical of these texts.⁴⁷

(§626) By this (forty-two-letter) name, in this language, I call to you, 'WZHY', Prince of the Presence, Youth, attendant before the King of the world. And he is a prince and a master over the whole host on high.

(§627) I adjure you and I decree upon you that you should augment me so as to be bound to my will. And you shall accept the adjuration of my decree, and you shall do what I ask, and you shall fulfill my request. You shall not confound me, you shall not make me quake, you shall not perforate me, you shall not put my frame into a cold sweat, my ankles shall not slip, and you shall not make the speech of my lips err. But let me be strengthened and made valiant, and let the adjuration be made mighty, and let the name be in order in my throat. Let no cramp seize me, and do not let the foot of your attendants make me wander so as to confound me and to make me fear and so as to make my hands slack.⁴⁸ And let me not be drowned in the fire and in the flame, in the tempest and the storm that goes with you, wondrous and elevated one.

Chernus is correct in arguing that there are deadly dangers to be faced during the visionary journey and that some of them are fatal to the unworthy and ignorant but can be overcome by those properly initiated. Specifically, it is possible to neutralize the threat from guardian angels and angels adjured to serve the practitioner. This is done by reciting the proper hymns, presenting the proper seals, and passing tests along the way. *But this explanation does not suffice for*

⁴⁷ These ascetic exercises are described in *Sar Panim* §623.

⁴⁸ The text and meaning of this sentence are unclear (see Schäfer et al., *Übersetzung* 4:23).

§§102–104 and 159, which deal not with angelic encounters but with the experience of seeing God face to face.

A number of points speak against taking these passages as referring to the punishment of the unworthy. First, given the horrendous trials that must be overcome on the way to the chariot, it is hard to imagine that anyone unworthy of the vision could get as far as the throne of God in the innermost palace. But second, even if we grant the possibility, there is nothing in either §§102–104 or §159 which even hints that the descender to the chariot who suffers this violence is sinful or wanting in merit or instruction. Rather, the indication is that simply gazing or peering at God has this most unpleasant side effect for anyone, human or angel. Third, a text in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* recounts another such immolation, but this time the victim is named. He is R. Ishmael, the narrator and hero of much of the *Hekhalot* literature. Speaking of the obscure angel MGHŠH (with variants), he reports:

(§420) And he stands at the first gate and ministers at the great gate. When I saw him, my hands and feet were burned, and I was standing without hands and feet until PNYWYN, the prince from among the heavenly attendants, appeared to me before the throne of glory opposite the inner room of the seraphim, whose name is like His name, and it is one name. And he stands before the throne of glory and tends the throne, and he clothes (God) with the shirt and adorns the Ḥashmal and opens the gates of salvation to show grace and lovingkindness and mercies in the eyes of all who see him.⁴⁹

Here R. Ishmael begins to be consumed by the same fiery dissolution that overtook the nameless victims in §§102–104 and 159. But surely in this case the process is not one of punishment for sinfulness or unworthiness. Rather, the common factor is that R. Ishmael “saw” the inhabitants of the heavenly throne room, apparently while he was in front of the throne of glory (note the specific mention of God’s shirt).⁵⁰

One more example of the visionary disintegration and reintegration is found in the *Hekhalot* literature. It is perhaps the most illuminating case, but I have delayed introducing it because it appears in one of the latest strata of these texts. It is the description of the transformation of the mortal Enoch into the angel Metatron in 3

⁴⁹ A variant version of this episode is found in G8 2b 36–44.

⁵⁰ On this celestial garment, see Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism* 56–64.

Enoch 3–15 (§§4–19). Before we look at this passage, however, it is worthwhile to examine the biblical and postbiblical narratives about the antediluvian patriarch Enoch.

The Enoch Tradition

The earliest mention of Enoch is found in Gen 5:18–24. This intriguing fragment is the only reference to Enoch in the Hebrew Bible.⁵¹ It reads like a summary of a much longer story and raises more questions than it answers. Why did he have such a (comparatively!) short life of only 365 years? What does it mean to say that “Enoch walked with God”? And most intriguing of all, what should we make of the statement “and he was not, for God took him”?

These questions were not lost on ancient Jewish writers, and their interest in Enoch is shown by the compendium of literature known today as the book of *1 Enoch*. Written originally in Aramaic and perhaps Hebrew, it is fully preserved only in an Ethiopic translation based on a Greek translation. Fragments of the original Aramaic were discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls and published by J. T. Milik.⁵² The book of *1 Enoch* is actually a library of texts about Enoch. No less than five works, written over a period of centuries, are included in this collection. In *1 Enoch* the adventures of Enoch are recounted in much more detail than in the Bible. Whether these more detailed legends are postbiblical exegetical expansion of the biblical passage, survivals of a preexilic Enoch tradition that was purged from the Bible, or both does not concern us here.⁵³ Our interest is in how these ancient traditions can illuminate our understanding of the figure of Enoch in *3 Enoch*.

⁵¹ Another Enoch, a son of Cain, is listed in the Yahwistic genealogy in Gen 4:17–18. It is likely that this genealogy and the Priestly one share a common archetype in the form of a list of names. Such “genealogical stocks” are known elsewhere in the West Semitic world. But by the time of the final redaction of Genesis, the two genealogies had developed independently into very different forms. It is clear that the editor of Genesis considered the Enoch mentioned in chapter 4 to be a different person from the Enoch in chapter 5. As far as I can tell, no subsequent text in the later literature about Enoch identified the two figures. For Genesis 4–5, see my article “The Flood Hero as King and Priest,” *JNES* 54 (1995) 199–214, esp. pp. 207–10.

⁵² J. T. Milik and Matthew Black, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments from Qumrân Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976).

⁵³ Milik argues that the verses on Enoch in Genesis 5 are dependent on the

The Book of the Watchers tells the story of the lust of the angels for mortal women and the subsequent fall of these angels. The story also appears in very abbreviated form in Gen 6:1-4. In *1 Enoch* 14-16, Enoch intercedes for these angels (the "watchers") and as a result is caught up by God into heaven, where he sees a vision of the celestial throne room, with God himself seated on the throne. (This vision obviously has a great deal in common with the descriptions of the heavenly realm in the Hekhalot literature.) In this text, too, the danger of looking directly at God is emphasized. God then rejects Enoch's intercession for the watchers. The phrase "and he was not, for God took him" is interpreted to mean that Enoch is taken up to heaven bodily while still alive. In the remainder of the Book of the Watchers (chaps. 17-36) we are told how he is given a tour of the heavenly realm by the angel Uriel. Presumably he remains in heaven permanently.

Whether or not such a translation to heaven is envisioned in the biblical text, this interpretation of Gen 5:24 is widely accepted in the Enoch literature written after the Book of the Watchers. The second section of *1 Enoch* (chaps. 37-71), the Similitudes of Enoch, is a case in point. This document, which is missing from the Qumran fragments, is dated by Milik as late as the third century CE, although many other scholars are inclined to put it sometime in the first century CE.⁵⁴ It consists of three cycles of visions revealed to Enoch which deal with the coming apocalyptic judgment and the mysterious heavenly redeemer figure called the Son of Man. The last two

Astronomical Book (*The Books of Enoch* 8). He also believes that part of the Book of the Watchers (chaps. 6-19) served as a source for the story of the Nephilim in Gen 6:1-4 (*The Books of Enoch* 30-31). His position has not been widely accepted (see, for example, the review of this volume by James C. VanderKam in *Maarav* 3.1 [1982] 85-97). Margaret Barker is inclined to find, at minimum, a core of pre-exilic traditions from the Judean royal cult in the literature of *1 Enoch*. She also seems to allow for the possibility that some of the extant Enoch literature was composed during the monarchy. See Barker, *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1987) esp. chap. 1; idem, *The Lost Prophet: The Book of Enoch and Its Influence on Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1988).

⁵⁴ Milik, *The Books of Enoch* 89-98. For a summary of scholarship on the Similitudes, see John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 142-54. *Jub* 4:16-26 also tells a legend of Enoch which seems to be dependent on the Book of the Watchers. *Jubilees* is fully preserved only in an Ethiopic translation and is generally agreed to have been written in the second century BCE (see O. S. Wintermute, "Jubilees," *OTP* 2:35-50, 62-63; Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* 63-67).

chapters, which may be a secondary addition to the main work, describe how Enoch ascends to heaven where he is himself transformed into the Son of Man, in defiance of all narrative logic.

The book of *2 Enoch*, which seems originally to have been written in Greek, survives only in a translation into Old Church Slavonic. Much of the material in it probably goes back to the early centuries CE, although its final forms (two recensions are preserved) appear to be the result of a long process of transmission.⁵⁵ According to this work also, Enoch ascends to heaven and is given a tour of the celestial realm. He is likewise transformed into an angelic being when he comes before the throne of God.⁵⁶

Enoch, Metatron, and the Fiery Transformation

This, then, is the mythic background of the story in *3 Enoch* 3–15 (§§4–19). I have digressed concerning this tradition because it has been shown by David Winston Suter that there are numerous parallels between the Similitudes and *3 Enoch*.⁵⁷ The latter clearly flows out of the tradition that produced the former, whether the connection is oral tradition, literary transmission, or both. With this in mind, let us now turn to the account of Enoch's apotheosis in *3 Enoch*.

The story begins with the ascent of R. Ishmael to the seventh palace and his encounter with God and the angels. The angel Metatron reveals that he was once the man Enoch but was taken

⁵⁵ For discussions of date and provenance, see F. I. Andersen, "2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch," *OTP* 1:91–100; Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven* 83–87.

⁵⁶ The rabbinic literature also preserves traditions about an initiatory death and resurrection of the Israelites before Mount Sinai. Elements of this legend are probably related to the translation of Enoch in *3 Enoch* and the initiatory transformation elsewhere in the Hekhalot texts. For the rabbinic material, see Ira Chernus, *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism: Studies in the History of Midrash* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1982) 33–73.

⁵⁷ David Winston Suter, *Tradition and Composition in the Parables of Enoch* (SBLDS 47; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979) 14–23. These parallels include the use of similar terminology (such as רוחות, "spirits," for angels; בְּחִירִים, "elect ones," for the righteous; the phrase "the throne of His glory"; and the trisagion [Isa 6:3b]) as well as a cosmological oath that reveals the secrets of creation and the transformation of Enoch into an angelic being. See also Davila, "Of Methodology, Monotheism, and Metatron," 12.

up to heaven in a fiery chariot to be a witness to the generation of the Flood. Although he was challenged by the angels, who believed that a mortal had no place in heaven, God overruled them and revealed celestial secrets to Enoch, enlarged him to enormous size, and enthroned him in what sounds very like a royal investiture. After receiving the homage of the other angels, he underwent a fiery transformation into the highest angel in heaven.

(3 *Enoch* 15:1b–2 [§19]) As soon as the Holy One, blessed be He, took me to serve the throne of glory, the wheels of the chariot, and all the needs of the Shekhinah, at once my flesh was changed into flame, my tendons into a fire of glowing heat, my bones to glowing juniper coals, my eyelids to radiance of lightning, my eyeballs to torches of fire, the hair of my head to glowing heat and flame, all my limbs to wings of burning fire, and my bodily frame to scorching fire. On my right were hewers of fiery flames, on my left torches were burning. There blew around me wind, storm, and tempest, and the noise of earthquake upon earthquake was in front of me and behind me.

The apotheosis of Enoch in this passage is a literary event, not necessarily meant to describe the actual or potential experience of a Hekhalot practitioner. Nevertheless, it provides an important context for the very difficult texts in the earlier strata of the Hekhalot literature which we have been examining. Scholem rightly uses this passage to interpret §§102–104, commenting that the vision of the “cosmic raiment” (the shirt of God)

induces in some way the mystical experience which, according to 3 *Enoch* 15:1, transformed the human Enoch into the angel Metatron. In both cases it is said that the eyeballs are transformed into torches of fire. This is not, it is to be noted, a description of dangers confronting the mystic, but of a mystical transfiguration taking place within him. What is a permanent transfiguration in the case of Enoch, however, is only a temporary experience in the case of the Merkabah mystic . . .⁵⁸

Morrays-Jones, in response to Scholem’s remarks, writes:

Chernus disputes this interpretation, arguing that the passage refers to the danger of the vision of the Glory, but both are surely right in what they affirm and wrong in what they deny. The meaning must be that the vision of the garment of the Glory, which embodies the Name of God, involves a transformation of the mystic’s body into fire,

⁵⁸ Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism* 60.

a process which is terrifyingly dangerous, even fatal should he prove unworthy.⁵⁹

Murray-Jones also cites two other passages that support the thesis that this immolating transformation is experienced by worthy as well as unworthy descenders to the chariot. The first is *Hekhalot Zutarti* §349 (//§361) in which someone, evidently R. Akiva, asserts that the visionary is able “to walk in rivers of fire and to know the lightning,” implying that he operates in an angelic body. In fact, this passage (which is translated in full in chapters 1 and 9) describes the whole process of initiatory disintegration and reintegration. It speaks of a mortal who ascends and descends on a visionary journey and who is thus able “to gaze at His splendor,” that is, to have a direct vision of God, and as a result is “transformed by His glory,” surely a reference to the transformation we have been exploring in this chapter. The adept gains incantatory and visionary powers along with a new, fiery nature.

The second passage comes a little later in the *Hekhalot Zutarti*, where we read:

(§366) R. Akiva said:

I had a vision of and I observed the whole inhabited world, and I saw it as it is. I ascended in a wagon of fire and I gazed on the palaces of hail and I found GRWSQ' GRWSQ' that sits on the burning sea.⁶⁰

As Murray-Jones notes, both walking in fire and riding in a wagon of fire “would hardly be possible in an ordinary body.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ Murray-Jones, “Transformational Mysticism,” 25.

⁶⁰ A similar passage in an Aramaic book of ritual power reads:

(§496) R. Akiva said:

I saw (and) you (pl.) shall see those who tread on the inhabited land of the earth. And what is it? I ascended <<in the world>> in a wagon of fire. What did I see? I saw GRWSQ' that sits on the burning sea . . .

The word GRWSQ' (with variants) is incomprehensible and appears to be corrupt in both passages. In §496 the word בעלמא, “in the world,” is a corrupt ditto-graphy of בעגלא, “in a wagon.” The word רדונו, “you shall see,” may also be a ditto-graphy of the previous word, רדווי, “I saw.” In §366 I have emended the meaningless word מקלילכא (with variants) to the reading קל' קל', “the burning sea,” which is found in §496.

⁶¹ Murray-Jones, “Transformational Mysticism,” 24. In addition Murray-Jones mentions §420, in which R. Ishmael's hands and feet are burned away. One more text, this time in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, describes the transformation of a human being who ascends through the seven palaces. The speaker is R. Ishmael:

- *Conclusions*

We have seen in this chapter that some shamans, especially those in the Arctic, experience a personal disintegration and reintegration as part of their initiation into shamanhood. They are eaten alive and regurgitated, stripped down to their skeletons and rebuilt, or transformed into lightning. They return from these ordeals as new persons with great new powers. This experience may have its ultimate origin in physiological causes arising from the Arctic environment and the shamanic ascetic regime.

I have argued that the descenders to the chariot experience a similar dissolution and glorification. According to the Hekhalot literature, heaven is a very dangerous place, both for people who go there (the descenders to the chariot) and even for the lesser angels who live there. The descenders to the chariot face numerous trials and dangers during the descent. In order to reach the celestial throne room they must subdue hostile angels who would otherwise attack them and whose very gaze can set them on fire. But for those who reach the throne of God there is another danger that cannot be avoided. Whoever "gazes" or "peers" at the enthroned deity, and whoever hears the song of the angels who bear the throne, is torn apart and incinerated. This is not a punishment: even R. Ishmael, one of the chief role models in the Hekhalot literature, catches fire when he comes before God's throne. Rather, judging from the story of Enoch/Metatron and the words of R. Akiva in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §349//§361 and §366, the successful adept is transformed, at least temporarily, into a fiery angel.

As is generally the case with the Hekhalot literature, the picture is not entirely consistent. Some accounts of the ascent or descent to the chariot do not mention a destruction or resurrection of the adept.

(§558) When I ascended to the first palace, I became pious. In the second palace I became pure. In the third palace I became upright. In the fourth palace I became faultless. In the fifth palace I brought holiness before the King of kings of kings, blessed be He. In the sixth palace I recited the Qedusha before Him Who spoke and formed the world and commanded that all creatures be created, so that the attending angels would not destroy me. In the seventh palace I stood with all my vigor, but I shook and shrank back in all my limbs, and I said . . . (a Merkavah hymn follows).

The transformation here is spiritual rather than physical, but it does seem to produce a change in the adept which protects him from hostile angels.

But neither consistency nor linear and comprehensive presentation are characteristic of the material. At least some strands of the Hekhalot literature present the practitioners as experiencing a disintegration and reintegration that is notably similar to that experienced by shamans and which may be due in part to similar physiological causes.⁶²

⁶² These conclusions raise the fascinating question of how Enoch's transformation into an angel was regarded in the Second Temple period. Space forbids a lengthy digression on this problem, but a couple of possibilities are worth noting. First, the Second Temple descriptions of Enoch's apotheosis could be purely fictional literature whose later reflexes served as a foundation myth of sorts in the Hekhalot literature. That is, the visionary experiences attributed to the descenders to the chariot were interpreted in terms of the Enoch legend, even though historically there is no connection between the groups that produced the two bodies of literature. Alternatively, it is not impossible that quasi-shamanic groups in the Second Temple era drew on their own religious experiences in describing Enoch's ascent, and that the Hekhalot literature was written in circles that developed more or less directly from these apocalyptic groups. Much work remains to be done on this problem. See also chapter 1 n. 41 above.

CHAPTER SIX

THE OTHERWORLDLY JOURNEY

Perhaps the best-known element of shamanic experience is the ability, either as a free soul or in bodily form, to journey to other realms of existence not materially connected to our world. Eliade summarizes the cosmology of shamanism in terms that are nearly universally valid: “the universe in general is conceived as having three levels—sky, earth, underworld—connected by a central axis.”¹ This axis is usually pictured as a tree growing through the three layers (the “world-tree”) or as a mountain (the “cosmic mountain”). The shaman, who originates in the middle realm, our earth, travels to either or both of the other levels. Often the upper and lower realms are subdivided into (frequently seven or nine) layers. In the first section of this chapter I survey the otherworldly journey in the shamanic traditions we have been examining, with examples from Siberian, Native American, and Japanese shamanism. In the second section I collect references to and descriptions of the otherworldly journey in the Hekhalot literature, arguing that they fit well into the framework of the shamanic experience.

The Shamanic Otherworldly Journey

Siberian Shamanism (Sereptie)

In the example from the Arctic chosen here the initiate was repeatedly tested by the guiding spirits during the course of his adventure. This and other features of the narrative are very similar to the experiences ascribed to the descenders to the chariot, making the initiatory vision of Sereptie of special interest to us. He describes how, as he was felling a tree to make a sledge, a “man” (i.e., a guiding spirit) “sprang out of its roots with a loud shout.” The man engaged the terrified Sereptie in conversation and ordered him to descend

¹ Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* 259. All of chap. 8 of this book deals with shamanic cosmology.

through the root of the tree. When Sereptie asked him what sort of tree it was, the man replied, "From times of old, it is of this tree that the *kuojka* sledges have been made and the shamans have been growing from. Rocked in the cradle, they become shamans—well that's what this tree is for." Evidently satisfied with this explanation, Sereptie agreed to descend with the man.

The guiding spirit first encouraged Sereptie to deduce the spirit's nature from his costume. Then Sereptie noticed a hole in the ground, and the man informed him that, if he wished to become a shaman, he must explain the hole's nature. Sereptie answered correctly, "It is through this hole that the shaman receives the spirit of his voice." The hole expanded and they descended through it, finding themselves "at a river with two streams flowing in opposite directions." Once again, the spirit demanded an explanation and Sereptie answered, "The northern stream originates from the water for bathing the dead, and the southern from that for the infants." His guide accepted this as the right answer.

They proceeded along the shore of the northern stream, hand in hand. Presently they saw nine tents ahead of them. Coming to the first one, Sereptie was made to explain the nature of the trees, bars, and rope associated with it. From the street they entered the tent, which his companion explained was the tent of the spirits of madness, and which had seven nude men and women raving inside it.

The second tent, his companion told him, was the tent of the spirits of the Tungus. Sereptie himself was from a different tribe, but he would need the help of the Tungus spirits to heal stomach ailments, headaches, and epidemics. Later he tells us that half his helping spirits are of the Tungus. They entered the second tent but discovered it to be empty. Coming out through another door, they entered the third tent, "which seemed to be covered with fishing nets." Inside was a disfigured and half-naked old woman warming herself over a flickering fire. Sereptie was ordered to say who she was, and he correctly guessed her to be the spirit of the afterbirth. He answered other questions about the fire and paraphernalia in the tent, then he and his guide departed for the fourth tent.

This tent stood in the water and, Sereptie realized, belonged to the spirit of the water. At the urging of the guiding spirit, Sereptie deduced that the old woman inside represented the earth, who would help him find game and fish in hard times. Again, he explained various other paraphernalia present in the tent.

The fifth tent had an iron trunk on either side of it. The significance of the animals tied to the trunks was explained to Sereptie in terms of the shamanic costume and drum he would use, and he recognized still other elements of the tent's structure that had ritual significance. When they entered the fifth tent, the guiding spirit presented Sereptie with seven copper moon figures like those worn by shamans, showed him seven suns, and gave him twenty-one figures of the sun, symbolizing elements of his healing powers as a shaman.

He said of the sixth tent, "I think it was mine." He was reduced to a skeleton as he entered, and he found that the men and women sitting inside around the fire also looked like skeletons wearing clothes. A woman who appeared to be made of fire stood in the tent while a blacksmith removed pieces of iron from seven apertures in her body with pliers, hammered on them with a seven-bladed anvil, then replaced them. Sereptie surmised that this was where "the pendants of the shaman's clothes are forged and it is probably those people I have to ask (for pendants) for my clothes." With much additional detail his guide confirmed this conjecture, and Sereptie concluded, "When I entered as a skeleton and they forged, it meant that they forged me. The master of the earth, the spirit of the shamans, has become my origin. When a shin-bone or something else is hit and the sparks fly, there will be a shaman in your generation." The sixth tent seems to involve the initiatory disintegration and reintegration of the shaman.

Coming out of the sixth tent, they found a river and a hill on which there were two tents, one white and one checkered. It developed that the checkered tent was on Sereptie's side of the river and the white one was on the other side. After discussion of the details of the scene, his guide announced that he had led Sereptie "to all the origins and ways of diseases" and told him that he must find his way with his own shamanic powers henceforth. At the checkered tent they met a red woman who was called both the mother of measles and "the mistress of the earth who has created all life." His guide told him that he had brought him here to show him "the way of the big disease." The woman cleared the checkered tent of her clothes, and it now appeared red. She advised him to seek her counsel if he needed advice from the inhabitant of the eighth tent across the river or the ninth tent, a red one on a nearby reef, and admonished him further about shamanic praxes. Then they discussed the scenery of the area, connecting the seven stone peaks, the two

additional stone peaks, the seven willows, the nests of birds, and other features to Sereptie's shamanic vocation.

Departing, he walked along what seemed to be a river. The voice of another woman instructed him concerning the materials from which his metallic shamanic pendants must be made. Finally someone said, "Take a stone from here!" He seized a red stone, heard one last admonition, then awoke near the root of the tree he had been felling, where he finished making the sledge. He went on to have a successful career as a shaman which had lasted twenty years at the time he told his story.²

Lakota Shamanism (Nick Black Elk)

Nick Black Elk's story of his great vision (as told to John G. Neihardt) has rightly become a classical account of a shamanic otherworldly journey.³ This experience occurred when Black Elk was a nine-year-old boy, in the early 1870s. One evening he heard a voice saying, "It is time, now they are calling you." His thighs began to hurt, and the next day he collapsed and became very ill. While he lay in his tipi in the camp he saw descending from the clouds the two men who had come to him in his first vision. He got up to follow them when they began to ascend again, and a small cloud bore him into the sky.

Black Elk was met by a bay horse who stood in the clouds. This horse acted as his guide during the entire vision. He saw twelve black horses in the west wearing necklaces of buffalo hooves, twelve white horses in the north wearing necklaces of elks' teeth, twelve sorrel horses in the east with horns, and twelve buckskin horses in the south, also with horns. Apparently birds flew over each set of horses, although this detail is not made explicit for the buckskins. The bay horse informed Black Elk that his grandfathers were holding a council, to which these horses would escort him. The four

² Popov, "How Sereptie Djaruoskin of the Nganasans (Tagvi Samoyeds) Became a Shaman," 138-45.

³ DeMallie (ed.), *The Sixth Grandfather* 111-42; Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* 20-47. For my purposes it does not matter whether the message of the Great Vision is universal or aimed at the Lakota people in particular and whether or not Christianity has influenced the ideas and symbolism of the vision. For a recent survey of the debates on these questions, see R. Todd Wise, "The Great Vision of Black Elk as Literary Ritual" in *The Black Elk Reader*, ed. Holler, 241-61.

groups of horses formed ranks, then millions of horses were summoned by the bay from the four quarters of the earth. As the formation of forty-eight horses proceeded, with the bay horse and Black Elk in front, the countless horses that accompanied the group changed into other animals and birds and dispersed back to the four compass points.

Black Elk was taken to a cloud and found his six grandfathers seated behind a rainbow gate, in a place later identified as the house of the first grandfather. The two men of the first vision stood on either side of him, and the horses moved to their assigned places according to the cardinal directions. The first grandfather was the spirit of the west. He promised to give Black Elk willpower and also gave him a wooden cup of water for curing sickness and a bow and arrow with which to defeat his enemies. The first grandfather then turned into a black horse that became emaciated.

The second grandfather, representing the north, gave Black Elk an herb with which he restored the black horse to health. After admonishing the boy, he ran northward and became a goose (the bird of the north), as did all the white horses of the northern quadrant, symbolizing the geese who fly north again when spring comes. The first two grandfathers then sang songs.

The third grandfather, the eastern spirit, warned Black Elk that he would be taken across the earth but promised him power from two men he saw flying below the morning star. The grandfather showed him a peace pipe bearing a living spotted eagle on its handle, which he was to use for healing sickness. Then he showed Black Elk a red man who lay down and turned into a buffalo, then got up and ran to the east, where the horses of the east also became buffalo.

The fourth grandfather, the southern spirit, promised Black Elk the power of the four quarters of the earth and showed him a chief sitting in each quarter. This grandfather showed him a stick—evidently a form of the world tree—that sprouted and had singing birds at its top. This stick was to be placed in the center of the earth as a cane on which the nation could brace itself. Crossing this world tree were two roads: the sacred red road, running from north to south, which brings good for the nation, and the black road of the Thunder-beings, running from east to west, which gives power to destroy enemies. Black Elk was destined to walk the earth “with four ascents,” meaning for four generations. The fourth grandfather then

went to the south, transforming himself into a horse and then an elk on the way. When he joined the buckskins they became elks as well.

The fifth grandfather, who represented the Great Spirit, showed Black Elk his power by changing himself into a spotted eagle and promised him the support of creatures in the sky.

The sixth grandfather, who had the appearance of a white-haired old man, promised Black Elk his power when he returned to the earth. The grandfather went out the rainbow gate, and Black Elk followed him, riding the bay horse. The grandfather, who held a spear, began to grow younger until he was a nine-year-old boy—and Black Elk realized that he was looking at himself.

After the council the bay horse turned west, and all the accompanying horses stood in formation behind Black Elk and the bay. They turned north, east, and south, each time conversing with the grandfathers about some aspect of the vision, then faced east and proceeded down the road of destruction, starting from Pike's Peak, "the highest peak in the west." During the ride Black Elk was given the name Eagle That Stretches Its Wing (or Eagle Wing Stretches). Hail fell from twelve riders who accompanied him, and all in the world quaked with fear. At the forks of the Missouri River they encountered the enemy—a man standing in fire. They sang a sacred song and attacked the man. The twelve riders from each of the four quarters attacked him and were repulsed in turn. Then Black Elk charged on him and killed him with his lightning-flashing spear. The man turned into a turtle, and those who had been killed in the battle rose from the dead, cheering the victory.

Next, Black Elk and his entourage proceeded along the Missouri River on the sacred red road, going south to north. He found a camp set up in a circle and was informed that it was his own nation, and he saw that people were dying in the camp. He was given the stick again and told that he was to become a holy man or shaman (*wakan wicasa*) when he returned home. The southern grandfather ordered him to give the pipe and stick to the people in the camp, and the northern grandfather directed him to do the same with the sacred herb and sacred wind. They then broke camp and the people followed, while four riders representing the four quarters of the world each carried the sacred relic in their charge. Four other riders presented him with a hoop with which he was to raise up the nation. The western spirit gave him the hoop and described to him

again the properties of the bow and arrow and the wooden cup of water.

There follows a difficult account of the sacred days, apparently revealed by the spirits of the four quarters. Neihardt's transcription seems to be garbled, and the contents of the paragraph are unclear. After this, the procession and the prayers of the southern spirit are described, and then the four ascents—the four generations of Black Elk's life—are explained in greater detail. The first ascent was to be a time of fecundity, prosperity, and joy. At the beginning of the second ascent the southern grandfather told Black Elk that he would "prevent the making of the clouds," perhaps a reference to the future oppression of the Lakota by the white people (the clouds). During the second ascent the people walked in a sacred way on the good road in the form of animals—meaning that they would have the virtues and strength of the animals. Just before the end of this ascent the animals became restless and called for their chiefs. The southern grandfather then warned Black Elk that the rest of the way would be difficult and that he should go to the center of the nation's hoop to receive power. The third ascent would be "a fearful thing," a time of anarchy when "every man has his own vision and his own rules." Black Elk thought that the third ascent might be in the present (when he was relating the vision to Neihardt in 1931). Poised to embark on the fourth and terrible ascent, he was assured of his power to undertake all necessary tasks and was given the sacred relics of the four grandfathers. The animals turned back into human beings who were poor, sick, and dying.

Then a man painted red and carrying a lance came to the center of the hoop from the north and rolled on the ground, transforming himself into a buffalo. The buffalo transformed himself into an herb in the same way and this herb grew into a plant that revived the people and their horses. A breeze from the north raised from the dead all who had died. A spirit explained that this episode represented the powers of the north: man, buffalo, the herb, and the north wind. Then the morning star and the peace pipe bearing the spotted eagle flew from the east to the center of the hoop.⁴ The

⁴ According to Neihardt's version in *Black Elk Speaks* 37–39, Black Elk himself was transformed into this eagle and flew over the people. This may be implied by Black Elk's comments in Enid Neihardt's transcript, "I am now ready to return to the earth after being in the air with the fowls," just before the fourth ascent and "I was on the bay horse again," after the sacred stick had been placed in the nation's hoop (DeMallie [ed.], *The Sixth Grandfather* 128, 130).

sacred flowering stick was placed again in the center of the sacred hoop—the symbol of the power and fecundity of the people and their unity with the rest of the world, causing the people, animals, and birds to rejoice and to affirm that they would raise their children under the sacred stick (the cottonwood tree). The people camped and made preparations for an approaching storm. Black Elk and his friend One Side rode on the storm cloud and “christened” the people. The people broke camp and started on the good road again, and Black Elk was compelled to give them all his sacred relics except his bow and arrow (which represented lightning).

At the behest of the western grandfather, Black Elk and his entourage proceeded west until a flame rose out of the earth. His companions were unable to harm the flaming enemy, but he shot it with his arrows of lightning and killed it. It became a strange-looking dog, half black and half white. Then the western grandfather showed Black Elk an emaciated black horse and gave him an herb with which he transformed the animal into a mighty stallion that snorted lightning. The stallion faced west and neighed, summoning millions of horses from the four directions of the compass. Black Elk saw four beautiful virgins who were wearing red, one of whom held the peace pipe. The western spirit sang the horse-dance song, and Black Elk was given power to bestow happiness on all beings in the universe. This was the end of the fourth ascent, and all living creatures rejoiced and then dispersed to their homes.

The western grandfather told him that he was to be taken to the center of the earth. Then the spirits took him to the peak of a high mountain, accompanied by One Side as well as the riders of the four quarters, who now numbered sixteen. From there he could see the entire earth. He and his companions faced east and saw two winged men approaching with stars on their breasts and accompanied by the daybreak star and another little star. They gave Black Elk an herb that would give him power to accomplish anything. It grew to heaven and gave light to every being in the universe when he dropped it on the ground. From his panoramic viewpoint Black Elk saw a white cloud—probably representing the white people—moving over the country bringing sickness. He knew that in the future it would be up to him to heal his people. The western grandfather sang another song.

Next Black Elk was directed by the western grandfather to return to the place of the six grandfathers, but first he was shown a flame coming from the earth which took the form of a man in black whose

movements generated lightning. This man represented war. The man became a gopher (a symbol of war to the Lakota), then an herb that Black Elk named "soldier weed." This was the most potent herb he was given; it could destroy a nation in war. Four riders approached. The bay rider wore a living buffalo bonnet, with all sorts of animals standing on its long, curved horns. The gray rider wore a war-bonnet that had eagles on its horns. The white rider wore a spotted eagle as a bonnet and carried a lance. The sorrel rider wore an eagle bonnet and carried a serpent lance. They sang a song and then charged. The buffalo, eagle, and horse represented endurance, while the snake represented the poison of war. Smoke obscured the scene of carnage and the herb until the warriors reached the fourth ascent. Then the smoke cleared, the herb had become a skeleton, and the warriors became black-tailed deer—a symbol of invulnerability. The man in black reappeared and transformed himself from man to gopher to herb to skeleton. Black Elk noticed that his own body had also been transformed: he was painted red with black and white stripes on his joints, and he breathed lightning. His horse bore lightning stripes and its mane "was like clouds." Black Elk's interpretation of this episode was that he had been destined to use the soldier weed against his enemies when he was thirty-seven years old. But when he saw that its use would bring death to many innocents, he gave up the power of the herb and became a devout Catholic.

Finally, he was brought back to the flaming rainbow and the six grandfathers, who had somehow preceded his return. Once again he saw the two men of his first vision, who had turned into flocks of geese and were flying in formation over the four directions of the compass. He was given "the power of the goose voice." They returned to the house of the first grandfather in the sky, where Black Elk was cheered by the grandfathers and all living creatures as he entered. The six grandfathers had wooden cups of water before them into which Black Elk looked and from which he drank, in turn. The cup of the first grandfather had a buffalo in the water, symbolizing the power Black Elk would possess to sustain the nation. The second grandfather put butterfly cocoons on Black Elk's arms, symbolizing sacredness and the power of lightning, and gave him the cup, which contained a man painted blue. The man was also a fish, and represented the power of water. The cup of the third grandfather had the morning star in it, which would give Black Elk wisdom. The red road—"the road of the generations" which Black Elk must walk—

ran over the cup of the fourth grandfather, who also gave him a song for curing illness. The cup of the fifth grandfather had in it a dancing spotted eagle with wings outstretched, who was to watch over Black Elk and his nation. The cup of the sixth grandfather—himself—contained many tiny people, representing the six bands that composed his nation. Black Elk looked down over the four quarters of the earth in bliss: “this was the happiest moment of the vision.” They left the rainbow tipi, and Black Elk found himself in the place of the sixth grandfather. The other five grandfathers took their places in the four quarters and on the earth, then vanished along with the cloud house. Only Pike’s Peak was left in its place.

A spotted eagle led him home, and he came into his own tipi and reentered his dying body, which was healed by the vision brought back by his wandering spirit.

Japanese Shamanism (Deguchi Onisaburō and Others)

In recent history the otherworldly journey has not been characteristic of the shamanic complex in Japan. Blacker, however, believes that it may have been more common in the Middle Ages and earlier, from which times come accounts of Buddhist priests who made journeys to heaven and hell. In chapter 5 we reviewed one of these, the story of the priest Chickō, who visited hell in a near-death experience. Blacker summarizes others, such as the heavenly ascent and descent into hell by Nichizō.⁵ The *yamabushi* of the Shugendō monastic movement carry out a symbolic ascent to the otherworld in their ritual climbing of mountains while performing ascetic austerities, a practice they have followed since the Middle Ages.⁶

But the most significant evidence for the otherworldly journey in Japan comes from the unique account of the call of Deguchi Onisaburō who, as we saw in chapter 5, fasted in 1898 in an icy cave on a sacred mountain until a spirit came and bore him off on a visionary adventure. His dictated account of this vision takes up twelve volumes, the first of which is summarized in part by Blacker.⁷ I note some highlights here.

⁵ Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow* 191.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 208–34; Carmen Blacker, “Initiation in the Shugendō: The Passage Through the Ten States of Existence,” in *Initiation*, ed. C. J. Bleeker (Studies in the History of Religion 10; Leiden: Brill, 1965) 96–111.

⁷ Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow* 203–207.

After crossing the river to the underworld, Deguchi and his guide came to the courthouse of the king of the underworld, who told Deguchi that “he was to become the messiah between the two worlds.” He was commanded to tour the otherworld and was given a magic spell to use for protection during the tour.

We see him first walking along a narrow road choked with dead weeds as sharp as icicles. On either side lay a deep ditch filled with loathsome worms and insects. Above loomed a black cloud from which a terrible face glared down at him. Behind, a demon in a red jacket was trying to prod him with a sharp spear. Ahead of him he soon came to a deep river full of blood and pus, with no bridge, in which countless people, their bodies covered with leeches, were writhing and screaming. In this desperate position he murmured the words of the spell he had been given, and at once found himself on the other side of the river.⁸

After passing through more horrors from which he was repeatedly saved by the spell, he arrived at a massive building with “two fierce guards, looking in all directions with eyes like mirrors.”⁹ Soldiers drove a horde of tormented dead souls, whom he rescued by means of his spell. He suffered initiatory death and resurrection many times and was taken from the infernal realms back to his cave, then, after a brief rest, to a double crossroads. From there he attempted again and again to go down the road to paradise, but he was thwarted by hellish visions.

At length he found himself at the centre of the world, at the summit of the huge axial mountain Sumeru. Here he was vouchsafed a sight of the creation of the world. . . .

This vision ended, he found himself again walking along a road. At last he came to a great river, beyond which was paradise. Over it hung a great arched bridge made of gold. Many travellers were gath-ered at its foot, amazed at its steepness and dazzling beauty. There was no railing and the golden surface was very slippery, so that he had to take off his shoes and cast away everything he was carrying before venturing to step upon it. Many travellers slipped and fell into the river, but Deguchi, though dizzy and faint, reached the other side safely. There he saw before him, standing on a vast lotus, a marvellous palace made of gold and agate and the seven jewels.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., 204.

⁹ Ibid., 205.

¹⁰ Ibid., 206–207.

The Shamanic Cosmology

The shamanic cosmology is well represented cross-culturally by these and many other accounts of shamanic visions. The first element is the division of the universe into three levels: the sky, the earth, and the underworld. The shaman is able to reach and act in all three. Sereptie was guided by a spirit through the underworld.¹¹ Two spirits conducted Nick Black Elk to heaven, where he was guided by another spirit during his revelatory journey.¹² The Lakota believe in an afterlife. The spirit of a good person goes to the spirit world, conceived as vaguely "beyond the pines that grow on the edge of the earth," while the spirit of a bad person cannot find the path to the spirit world.¹³ I am unaware of any accounts of Lakota shamans traveling to the realm of the afterlife. Deguchi Onisaburō and earlier Japanese shamans experienced both ascents to heaven and descents to the underworld.

The second element is the axis and connection between the three realms, the world tree or cosmic mountain, by which the shaman travels between the worlds. Sereptie entered the underworld via the hole made by the root of the world tree. Both Siberian and Native American shamans frequently carry out a ritual pole-climbing that symbolizes travel between the worlds.¹⁴ The world tree also figures in Black Elk's vision, although symbolic of the future courses he might take rather than of the journey between worlds. This tree is placed in a sacred circle that represents a sacred center or axis mundi. Of this vision DeMallie writes,

¹¹ Ascents to heaven are also known among Siberian shamans. For additional accounts of shamanic ascents and descents in central and north Asia, see Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* 180–258. An otherworldly journey by María Sabina has been noted in chapter 3. Accounts of otherworldly journeys by Inuit shamans are quite rare; see Merkur, *Becoming Half Hidden* 142–54.

¹² Visions of the otherworld are common among Lakota men, whether shamans or not. See, for example, the vision of White Bull in 1858, summarized by DeMallie in *The Sixth Grandfather* 84–85. Native American cosmologies frequently conceive of a three-tiered universe. See Hultkrantz, *The Religions of the American Indians* 27–29.

¹³ Walker et al., *Lakota Belief and Ritual* 115 (cf. 71, 99, 100, 102, 116–17, 125–26, 140, 141–42, 164 and Powers, *Oglala Religion* 53). Shamanic journeys to the realm of the afterlife are found elsewhere in Native American cultures; see Hultkrantz, *The Religions of the American Indians* 129–39.

¹⁴ Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* 115–27, 194–97 (cf. 260–74); Hultkrantz, *The Religions of the American Indians* 109–15.

Perhaps its most striking feature is the representation of the circle of life as enclosing a central tree, symbolizing regeneration, with crossed roads from south to north and west to east, the former symbolizing life and harmony and colored red, the latter symbolizing warfare and destruction and colored black. Although these are conventional symbols—the central tree was the sun dance pole itself—they are given greater prominence and more precise definition in Black Elk's vision than in the recorded teachings of other holy men. That the circle and the central tree, as axis mundi, are pancultural archetypes leads directly to many parallels with other religious traditions. But there is nothing in Black Elk's great vision that is foreign to Lakota culture.¹⁵

According to Blacker, the three-tiered model is not the normal Japanese cosmology. Rather, the otherworld is represented mainly as a cosmic mountain, from which the shaman can summon the *kami* (nature spirits) and the spirits of the benevolent dead. Superimposed on this system, one also finds the more recently adopted Buddhist cosmology that includes other worlds, hells, and heavens.¹⁶ We see this mixture in the account of Deguchi Onisaburō's vision. He stands on the cosmic mountain at one point but also travels vertically to hells and paradises. The bridge to the celestial castle (which leads to island paradises) also functions much like the world tree.

The third element is the multiple layering of the celestial and infernal realms, often with seven or nine levels. The vision of Sereptie divides the underworld into a series of nine tents. Similarly, the Evenki song for the ceremony of "searching for the souls of the sick," given in chapter 4, divides the underworld into eight waterfalls down which the shaman must go. Black Elk's vision has a vertical axis with himself (as sixth grandfather) and the Lakota nation on the earth and the Great Spirit, as the first grandfather, in the sky. The horizontal axis is a plane divided into quadrants, the four cardinal directions, each with a corresponding grandfather. These particular

¹⁵ DeMallie (ed.), *The Sixth Grandfather* 86. The sacred hoop is an important Lakota symbol of national solidarity and prosperity (Powers, *Oglala Religion* 183–87). The Sun Dance is a summer ritual and ordeal in which the sacred pole figures prominently and which is celebrated by many North American Indians of the Plains and Prairie (Powers, *Oglala Religion*, 95–100; Joseph Epes Brown, "Sun Dance," in *Native American Religions: North America*, ed. Sullivan, 193–99). For the function of the sacred hoop, the sacred pipe, the Sun Dance tree, and the Black Hills as reflexes of the axis mundi in Lakota tradition, including Black Elk's Great Vision, see Alexandra Witkin-New Holy, "Black Elk and the Spiritual Significance of *Paha Sapa* (the Black Hills)," in *The Black Elk Reader*, ed. Holler, 188–205.

¹⁶ Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow* 69–84.

examples partition the spirit realms more on a vertical than a horizontal axis and include from six to nine subdivisions, but they confirm the general cosmological structure advanced by Eliade.

The Otherworldly Journey in the Hekhalot Literature

Otherworldly journeys are also described frequently in the Hekhalot literature. This section surveys the Hekhalot texts and summarizes the material on otherworldly journeys found in individual documents. The focus is on passages that lay bare the cosmology of the visionary journey.

The longest and most detailed description of the descent to the chariot is in R. Nehuniah's instructions to the academy in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*. After explaining how to summon the angel Suriah (§§203b–205), he describes the cosmography of the celestial realm that must be navigated by the descender to the chariot.

(§206) R. Ishmael said:

Thus said R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah:

In seven palaces $\text{ṬWṬRWSY}^{\text{Y}} \text{YHWH}$, God of Israel, sits enthroned, chamber within chamber. And at the gate of every single palace are eight guardians of the threshold, four to the right of the lintel and four to the left of the lintel.

(§207) These are the names of the guardians of the gate of the first palace: DHB^{L} , QŠR^{L} , GHWRY^{L} , BZTY^{L} , ṬWPHY^{L} , DHR^{L} , MTQ^{L} , and ŠWW^{L} , and there are some who say ŠB^{L} .

(§208) These are the names of the guardians of the gate of the second palace: ṬGRY^{L} , MPTY^{L} , SRHY^{L} , RPY^{L} , ŠHRRY^{L} , SṬR^{L} , and $\text{DG}^{\text{Y}}^{\text{L}}$.

(§209) These are the names of the guardians of the gate of the third palace: ŠBWR^{L} , RŠWSY^{L} , ŠLMY^{L} , SBL^{L} , ZHZH^{L} , HDR^{L} , and BZDY^{L} .

(§210) These are the names of the guardians of the gate of the fourth palace: PHD^{L} , GBWRTY^{L} , KZZY^{L} , ŠKYN^{L} , ŠTQ^{L} , RB^{L} , KPY^{L} , and Anaphiel.

(§211) These are the names of the guardians of the gate of the fifth palace: TḤYL^{L} , YZY^{L} , GYWY^{L} , GṬHW^{L} , S'PRW^{L} , NPRY^{L} , GRY^{L} , DRY^{L} , and PLṬRY^{L} .

(§212) These are the names of the guardians of the gate of the sixth palace: Dumiel, Qašpiel, GHGHY^{L} , $\text{'DSBSRSBY}^{\text{L}}$, 'GRWMY^{L} , PRS^{L} , MHQ^{L} , and TWRPR^{L} .

(§213) And at the gate of the seventh palace all the mighty ones stand raging; (they are) frightening, powerful, hard, fearsome, and confounding, higher than mountains and sharper than hills. Their bows

are drawn, and in their hands are sharp swords. In their faces lightning drips and goes forth from their eyeballs, *globes* of fire from their nostrils, and torches of glowing coals from their mouths. They are wreathed (with) helmets and coats of mail and lances, and spears are hung on their arms for them.

(§214) Their horses are horses of darkness, horses of deep darkness, horses of gloom, horses of fire, horses of blood, horses of hail, horses of iron, horses of the misty cloud. The horses on which they ride stand over mangers of fire filled with glowing juniper coals, and they eat glowing coals out of their mangers, a measure of about forty seahs in one mouthful. The measure of the mouth of every horse is three times as much as that of the gate of Caesarea, and the measure of the mouth of every single horse is three times more than the manger of Caesarea.

(§215) There are rivers of fire beside their mangers, and all their horses drink about the measure of the full canal of water that is in the brook Kidron, which brings out and joins all the rainwater of Jerusalem. A cloud is there above their heads, dripping blood above their heads and the heads of their horses. So this is the nature and character of the guardians of the gate of the seventh palace, and such is the gate of every single palace.

(§216) All who descend to the chariot ascend and they are not hurt; rather, they see all this violence and descend safely. And they come and stand and testify to the fearsome and confounding sight, the like of which is not in all the palaces of kings of flesh and blood.

The descenders to the chariot sing God's praises, and God in turn is delighted when they come before his throne to join in the thrice-daily celestial praise. The instructions for the descent continue:

(§219) R. Ishmael said:

When you come and stand at the gate of the first palace, take two seals in your two hands, one of $\text{TW}\overline{\text{T}}\text{RWSY}^{\text{Y}}\text{YHWH}$ and one of Suriah, Prince of the Presence. Show the one of $\text{TW}\overline{\text{T}}\text{RWSY}^{\text{Y}}\text{YHWH}$ to those standing on the right, and show the one of Suriah to those standing on the left. At once RHBY^{L} , the prince who is head of the gate of the first palace and who is appointed over the first palace and who stands on the right of the lintel, and $\text{TW}\overline{\text{P}}\text{HY}^{\text{L}}$, the prince who stands on the left of the lintel with him, will seize you, one on your right and one on your left, until they bring you and deliver you over and introduce you and admonish TGRY^{L} concerning you, the prince who is the head of the gate of the second palace and who stands on the right of the lintel, and MTPY^{L} , the prince who stands on the left of the lintel with him.

(§220) Show them two seals: one of 'DRYHRWN YHWH , one of 'WZHYY^{L} , Prince of the Presence. Show the one of 'DRYHRWN YHWH to those standing on the right, and show the one of 'WZHYY^{L} , Prince of the Presence, to those standing on the left. At once they will

seize you, one on your right and one on your left, until they bring you and deliver you over and introduce you and admonish ŠBWRY'L concerning you, the prince who is head of the gate of the third palace and who stands on the right of the lintel, and RŠWŠY'L, the prince who stands on the left of the lintel with him.

The key to the proper descent seems to be these seals (*nomina barbara*), which must be "shown" (recited?) to the guardian angels of each portal. The same procedure is followed during the rest of the descent. The proper seals are shown to the princes of the third palace, who convey the adept through their realm and pass him on to the guardians of the fourth palace, and so on to the fifth and sixth palaces. But when the narrative brings the descender to the sixth palace (§223) there is a sudden break in the text, and the following passage (§§224–28) is an interpolation that interrupts the flow of the original instruction. Up to this point, R. Nehuniah has been describing a generic descent to the chariot in order to instruct his gathered disciples. But suddenly in this passage the understanding is that he himself has been experiencing a descent and describing it as he goes along through the celestial palaces.

This interpolation is obscure in many ways and difficult to translate. The general drift is that some of the angels guarding the gates of the sixth palace have developed the unpleasant habit of attacking and killing some of the descenders to the chariot—the nature of the victims seems to be specified, but there is no agreement on the meaning of the descriptive phrase. When these angels are beaten and burned and replaced by others, the replacements behave no better. The baffled disciples ask R. Ishmael to bring R. Nehuniah out of his trance so he can clarify. R. Ishmael complies, making use of a strip of wool touched by a woman bearing the slightest possible suspicion of ritual impurity, as well as what seem to be ritually powerful *materia*, to have R. Nehuniah dismissed from the celestial throne room. Having returned to earth, R. Nehuniah explains his comments, although his explanation remains obscure to modern commentators.¹⁷

¹⁷ For discussions of this strange interlude in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, see Arnold Goldberg, "Einige Bemerkungen zu den Quellen und den redaktionellen Einheiten der Grossen Hekhalot," *FJB* 1 (1973) 1–49, esp. pp. 20–21; Lawrence H. Schiffman, "The Recall of Rabbi Nehuniah Ben Ha-Qanah from Ecstasy in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 1 (1976) 269–81; Shaul Lieberman, "The Knowledge of *Halakha* by the Author (or Authors) of the *Heikhaloth*," appendix 2 in Gruenwald,

The instruction resumes where it left off at the sixth palace. The descender is directed to show the proper seals to the terrifying prince Qaspiel (§229) and the prince of silence, Dumiel (§230). Qaspiel then seats the adept in a wagon of brightness while trumpets blare and Dumiel precedes the wagon and bears the gift of merit that allows the man to descend through the seven palaces unharmed (§§231–32). Dumiel seats him on a bench of pure marble and confirms that the adept is either an expert in Torah or has kept all the commandments perfectly (or both—the manuscripts are not consistent), then has his merits written down by Gabriel and displayed from a pole on the wagon (§§233–35). Finally, the guardian angels of the seventh palace come to the wagon to view a great seal and fearsome crown as their due (§236). Then they escort the man into the heavenly throne room and seat him in the celestial choir. The passage ends with an *inclusio* echoing §201, which describes the awesome power of the descender to the chariot to enter the heavenly realm:

(§237) R. Ishmael said:

All the associates are comparable to this character; to a man who has a ladder inside his house on which he ascends and descends; there is no creature that can prevent him. Blessed are You, O YHWH, the One Who is wise in mysteries and the Lord of secrets.

This instructional passage is followed by an episode (§§238–45) in which Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel rebukes R. Ishmael for revealing the secrets of the descent without giving the crucial names of the guardians of the seventh palace. R. Ishmael protests that these names are especially dangerous, since they include the Tetragrammaton, but he dutifully gathers the association and reveals the names to be used to invoke these angels for the “ascent,” along with a different set of names to be used of the same angels on the “descent.” (Uncharacteristically for the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, the term “ascent” seems to be used for the outward journey and “descent” for the return journey in this passage.) The last two sections discuss the name of Anaphiel YHWH, the highest guardian of the seventh palace.

Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism 241–44; 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; Kuyt, *The “Descent” to the Chariot* 88–94. The earliest preserved fragment of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* omits §§224–28 and seems to preserve a redactionally more primitive text. See Schäfer, “Ein neues *Hekhalot Rabbati*-Fragment.”

The terrors of the Merkavah vision are then described in chilling detail in §§246–51a. The visionary is confronted with horrifying multivisaged angels, but he is strengthened by the angel Anaphiel and the guardians of the gates and is allowed to enter the celestial throne room unharmed. The songs of the throne are given in §§251–57. The last passage in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* which gives instructions for visionaries warns the adept of two perilous tests that await him at the final stages of the journey.

(*Hekhalot Rabbati* §258) “And I saw something like¹⁸ Ḥashmal” (Ezek 1:27) *encountering* and standing and distinguishing among the descenders to the chariot—between him who is fit to descend to the chariot and him who is unfit to descend to the chariot. If he was fit to descend to the chariot, when they would say to him, “Enter!” he would not enter. They would say again to him, “Enter!” At once he would enter. They would praise him, saying, “Certainly, this is one of the descenders to the chariot!” But if he was unfit to descend to the chariot, when they would say to him, “Enter!” then he would enter. At once they would cast iron axes upon him.

(§259) Because the guardians of the gate of the sixth palace cast and throw upon him a thousand thousand waves of water, but there isn’t really even one drop there, if he says, “What is the nature of these waters?” at once they run after him stoning (him), saying to him, “Fool! Perhaps you are of the seed of those who kissed the calf, and you are unfit to feast your eyes on the King and His throne!” If he is such, a heavenly voice goes forth from the Arabot firmament, saying, “You have spoken well; he is of the seed of those who kissed the calf. He is unfit to feast his eyes on the King and His throne.” He does not depart from there until they cast upon him a thousand thousand axes of iron.

The *Hekhalot Rabbati* then closes with some hymns to God (§§268–72), a detailed description of the four living creatures, whose faces are engraved on God’s throne (§273), more hymns (§§274–76), and a meditation on the names of Metatron (§277).

There is one other description of a vision in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, this one claiming to tell of an actual experience of R. Ishmael’s rather than giving general instructions on the visionary descent. At the beginning of the story of the ten martyrs, R. Ishmael relates that Rome ordered the arrest of some of the sages and that R. Nehuniah “stood and made me descend to the chariot.” There the angel Suriah

¹⁸ Or “something like the eye of.”

explains the negotiations between Sammael, the angelic prince of Rome, and the heavenly law court, and assures R. Ishmael that the situation is well in hand. R. Ishmael then returns and relates the news to his companions, who promptly throw a party to celebrate (§§107–11).

A scattering of passages in the first, redactionally less stable part of the *Hekhalot Zutarti* (approximately §§335–374) mentions visionary experiences. Some of these shed light on the aims of the otherworldly journey and are considered in the last section of this chapter. Those that describe the cosmology of the celestial realm are examined in this section.

First, I note in passing that although §§338–47 are jumbled and confused in the manuscript tradition, all manuscripts agree that some version of the story of the four who entered paradise belongs here. The content and order of the material differ greatly from manuscript to manuscript, not to speak of the parallel and widely variant traditions elsewhere in rabbinic literature. These traditions have been subjected to much scrutiny, and there is no consensus regarding their earliest form or the original meaning of the story. It suffices to say that the context makes clear that the redactor(s) of the *Hekhalot Zutarti* regarded the adventure of the four as an otherworldly journey and take the word “garden” or “paradise” (גַּן־עֵדֶן) in the narrative to refer to the paradise of the celestial Temple.

One section in this group of traditions, found only in MS Munich 22, also appears in the *Merkavah Rabba* and in the Geniza fragment G7. It describes a single firmament with an entrance guarded by angels of destruction which, given the context of the passage in both works, seems to be identified with the celestial paradise.

(§346//§673//G7 2a 11b–15a) R. Akiva said:

In the hour that I ascended on high, I put more markings on the entrances of the firmament than on the entrances of my house. And when I arrived at¹⁹ the curtain, angels of violence went forth to do me violence.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them:

Leave this elder alone, for he is fit to gaze at Me.

¹⁹ G7 reads “behind.”

The section appears to describe the use of *mezuzot* on the otherworldly journey to the celestial holy of holies (concealed by the curtain) as a means of protection from the angels of violence.²⁰ The next section, which seems to relate an esoteric cosmological revelation, follows immediately in all manuscripts.²¹

(§348//§674//G7 2a 15b-19a) R. Akiva said:

In the hour that I ascended to the chariot a heavenly voice went forth from beneath the throne of glory, speaking in the Aramaic language. What did it speak in this language?

Before YHWH made heaven and earth He established a *vestibule* to the firmament by which to enter and go out. A *vestibule* is nothing but an entrance. He established a firm name by which to design the whole world.²²

Somewhat later we find a passage that describes in detail the cosmography of the heavenly throne room, evidently in the context of one of R. Akiva's visions.

(§353) R. Akiva said:

From its right side and from its left side²³ I heard them saying:

Whoever seeks to know this name, let him seek this wisdom. And whoever seeks to learn this wisdom, let him learn this mystery. And whoever seeks to learn this mystery, let him learn knowledge from the living creatures who are before Him—their walking, the appearance of their faces, their wings. Their walking is like the appearance of a lightningbolt; a vision of them is like a vision of the rainbow; their faces are like the vision of a bride; their wings are like the radiance of the clouds of glory.

(§§354-55) (A textually difficult and convoluted exposition of the faces, wings, and voices of the living creatures.)

(§356) Before the hooves of their feet lie hailstones; before the hailstones lie stones of glowing coal; before the stones of glowing coal lie beryl stones; before the beryl stones lie clouds of comfort; {before the

²⁰ See Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited: (2 Cor 12:1-12)," 195-208; Kuyt, *The "Descent" to the Chariot* 225-26.

²¹ §347 is an abbreviated reduplication of §337 and is found only in MS Munich 40, which does not contain §346. G7 has God quote Cant 1:4 at the end of §346.

²² The meaning of this section is very unclear. The word translated "vestibule" (following Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism* 77) is corrupt in all manuscripts and this translation is a guess based on the gloss that explains it.

²³ That is, on either side of the throne. The phrase could also be translated "From His right side and from His left side."

clouds of comfort)²⁴ are gathered winds²⁵ and glowing coals; before the winds and glowing coals stand holy walls; before the holy walls are gathered spirits and *lillin*; before the spirits and *lillin* rivers of fire go in a circle; before the rivers of fire is "he seizes the face of the throne" (Job 26:9a); before "he seizes the face of the throne" is "spreading his cloud upon it" (Job 26:9b); before "spreading his cloud upon it" is "a thousand thousands and a myriad myriads before Him" (Dan 7:10), and it is said, "A river of fire issued and came forth before Him, etc." (Dan 7:10). And above them are stationed thunderclaps and lightning and the letters of His name like the splendor of the rainbow and drops. He says He is covering over all of them and high over them, and He sees all of them. He Himself—His exaltation dwells in the world, and His fullness dwells in His palace. He stays in mystery, BMSNW T̄GWS crouching in clouds of GPRWS, covered with bodies of fire, MSMR SMRY NKW BY GBR. His feet rest on clouds of fire, on torches of fire and on puffy clouds and on TRGLS and on TRGLY of hail and on lightning of effulgence and on the scepter of Y'Y'L and on the hooves of the feet of the living creatures like the sun, like the moon, like the stars, on the face of a man, on wings of an eagle, on the roar of a lion, on the horns of an ox. And the countenance of the visage of His face is like the image of the wind and like the formation of the breath,²⁶ so that no creature can recognize Him. "And His body is like Tarshish" (Dan 10:6), filling the whole world, so that none—near or far—can gaze at him. Blessed and blest is His name for ever and ever and ever.²⁷

Another passage (§366//496) in the first part of the *Hekhalot Zūtarti* also mentions an ascent by R. Akiva in a wagon of fire.

A long passage of loosely connected instructions for the otherworldly journey is found in the second part of the *Hekhalot Zūtarti* (§§407–20). This passage begins with another account of the trials faced by the practitioner near the climax of the visionary journey.

(§407) "And I saw something like²⁸ Ḥashmal" (Ezek 1:27) which was made strong and was standing and distinguishing among the descenders to the chariot—between him who is fit to see the King in His beauty and him who is unfit to see the King in His beauty. Who is

²⁴ The phrase in brackets has been lost by haplography in all the manuscripts but is required by the context.

²⁵ Or "spirits." Cf. the phrase "spirits and *lillin*" two clauses later.

²⁶ Or "like the image of the spirit and like the formation of the soul."

²⁷ Compare 3 *Enoch* 34 (§51). Another rather more coherent and better-preserved account of the living creatures is found in MS New York 8128, §§368b–72 (cf. §§954–55 MS Munich 40 and the Geniza fragment G9). Schäfer suggests that the passage is an addition by the *Haside Ashkenaz* (*Übersetzung* III, xiii).

²⁸ Or "something like the eye of."

it who is fit to see the King in His beauty? They would put it in his heart: When they would say to him, "Enter!" he would not enter. And they would say again, "Enter!" At once he would enter. They would praise him, saying, "So-and-so indeed is fit to see the King in His beauty!" And who is it who is unfit to see the King in His beauty? They would put it in his heart: when they would say to him, "Enter!" he would enter. At once they would wring him out and throw him into the (river) Rigion of glowing coals.

(§408) The sixth palace appears as though someone splashes a hundred thousand thousands and myriads of myriads of waves of the sea onto him. But there is not really even one drop of water on him; rather it is the splendid atmosphere of the pure alabaster stones that are paved in the palace, which is a splendor more fearsome than water. And do not the attending (angels) stand opposite him? And if he says, "What is the nature of these waters?" at once they run after him and say to him, "Fool! From now on you shall not have a vision with your eyes! Perhaps you are of the seed of those who kissed the calf, and you are unfit to see the King in His beauty!" If so, a heavenly voice goes forth from the seventh palace, and the herald goes before him and blows a sustained, a quavering, and a sustained blast on the horn, saying to them, "You have spoken well. Indeed he is of the seed of those who kissed the calf, and he is unfit to see the King in His beauty." He does not depart from there until they have wounded his head with iron axes.

Thus far the text is quite similar to the corresponding passage in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, although the trickster angels appear more culpable, inasmuch as they seem to put the right or wrong thoughts into the minds of the approaching human beings. But the next two sections (§§409–10) offer an extended meditation on the water test in the sixth palace and tie it to the story of the four who entered paradise. Two sections (§§411–12) follow which describe the entrance of the successful visionary into the seventh palace, his enthusiastic reception by the divine beings therein, and his rapture at the beatific vision, a description reminiscent of the reception of the practitioner in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§230–36.

(§409) Let it be according to this sign for (all) generations, so that no one err at the gate of the sixth palace and see the splendid atmosphere of the stones and ask and say, "Are they water?" lest he bring himself into danger. For even if he is unfit to see the King in His beauty, if he does not ask them about the splendid atmosphere of the pure alabaster stones that are paved in the palace, they will not annihilate him. Rather, they judge him inclining to his having merit, saying, "If he is unfit to see the King in His beauty, how did he enter the six palaces?"

(§410) R. Akiva said:

So-and-so merited standing at the gate of the sixth palace and he saw the splendid atmosphere of the stones. He opened his mouth twice and said, "Water, water!" In the wink of an eye they severed his head and cast on him eleven thousand iron axes. Let it be according to this sign for (all) generations, so that no one err at the gate of the sixth palace. YHWH is King, YHWH is King, YHWH will be King forever and ever.

(§411) R. Akiva said:

Thus the light of the face of Jacob our father gives light before HDYRYRWN YHWH, God of Israel, our Father Who is in heaven. And thus the love of the beloved people brings itself near before 'DYRYRWN YHWH, God of Israel, our Father Who is in heaven, under thick clouds that drip blood. In the seventh palace the ophanim of light drip foliage and even pure balsam, and a double ophanim blows a sustained, a quavering, and a sustained blast on the horn, saying, "Let whoever is fit to see the King in His beauty enter and see." And if so, the ophanim of might embrace him and the cherubim of effulgence kiss him, and the living creatures lift him up, and the morning star dances before him, and the Hashmal sings before him, and a living wind of splendor²⁹ lifts him up until they make him ascend and seat him before the throne of glory.

(§412) And he gazes and sees the gleeful King (a string of divine epithets follows), the King united with him and with all His attendants. And this is his glory.

Starting with §413 the text takes a new turn. R. Akiva begins another set of instructions, this one starting at the first palace.

(§413) R. Akiva said:

Again, take for yourself the names of the seven princes, guardians of the seven gates of the palaces—the majestic gate, the gate of exaltation, the gate of wonders, the gate of purity, the gate of princeliness, the gate of ornamentation, the gate of holiness—and the names of their seals, the name of every single one. You show him his seal and he lets you enter his palace.

The names of the seven princes and the seal of each are listed in §§414–15. Detailed instructions are then given for the ascent, again reminiscent of those in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§206–37.

(§416) RGZ'L YY the prince . . .³⁰ has been appointed over the first palace: You show him the seal and seal-ring on which is engraved

²⁹ Or "the scent of the splendor of a living creature."

³⁰ Most of the text of this section has been lost by haplography in all manuscripts except Munich 22. The ellipsis in the translation represents the words ירוח

'TBH YY, God of Israel . . .,³¹ our Father Who is in heaven. WHB-YRWN YY the prince has been appointed over the second palace. You show him the seal and seal-ring on which is engraved 'ZBWGH YY, God of Israel, our Father Who is in heaven. ŠQDHWZY Y the prince has been appointed over the third³² palace. {You}³³ show him the seal and seal-ring on which is engraved ZHPNWRYY YY, God of Israel, our Father Who is in heaven. SGNSG'L YY the prince has been appointed over the fourth palace, and he is sealed. You show him the seal and seal-ring on which is engraved ZBWRY'L YY, God of Israel, our Father Who is in heaven. 'ŠYRWWZLY Y the prince has been appointed over the fifth palace. You show him the seal and seal-ring on which is engraved 'RDGHWDRYHN YY, God of Israel, our Father Who is in heaven. TTRWSY Y, the prince, the majestic prince—the King of the world is declared majestic along with him(!)³⁴—has been appointed over the sixth palace. Therefore he has been appointed to the gate of the sixth palace, and he is sealed. You show him the seal and seal-ring on which is engraved NHPRDY'L YHWH, God of Israel, our Father Who is in heaven.

(§417) ŠHRY'L YHWH, the prince, the majestic prince—the King of the world is declared majestic along with him, like him—has been appointed over the seventh palace. Therefore he has been appointed to the gate of the seventh palace, the majestic palace, exalted palace, palace of princeliness, palace of wonders, and he is sealed. You show him the seal and seal-ring on which is engraved ŠTQYYR YHWH, God of Israel, our Father Who is in heaven, Whose name is called 'H ŠTQYYR YHWH, God of Israel, our Father Who is in heaven. At once the first takes it into his hand and surrenders it to the second, and the second to the third, and the third to the fourth, and the fourth to the fifth, and the fifth to the sixth, and the sixth to the seventh, and the seventh makes you ascend and seats you on the lap of 'BTH YHWH, God of Israel, on the lap of 'ZBWGH YHWH, God of Israel, on the lap of ZHṣPNWDY'Y YHWH, God of Israel, on the lap of ZBYRY'L YHWH, God of Israel, on the lap of NTPDD'YLN YHWH, God of Israel, on the lap of 'BRNRGHWDRYHW YHWH, God of Israel, on the lap of ŠTQYYR YHWH, God of Israel, Whose name is called 'H ŠTQYYR YHWH, God of Israel. YHWH is King,

ואר ("and mist and winds"), which follow the name of the first prince in Munich 22. The meaning of this phrase in this context is obscure, and it may be a corruption.

³¹ The ellipsis in the translation represents the words אהוה, which Schäfer suggests are a corruption of אהוה, "and it/he is sealed," with a muddled word order (*Übersetzung* 3:160 and n. 2). Compare the instructions for the fourth seal in this section.

³² The scribe originally wrote "fourth," then corrected it to "third."

³³ The word אה, "you," is missing in the manuscript and restored in the translation.

³⁴ Reading אהוה for אהוה, as in the first sentence of §417.

YHWH is King, YHWH will be King forever and ever!

(§418) Make your request (as follows): May there be favor from before You, YHWH, God of Israel, our God and the God of our fathers.

(§419) (*Nomina barbara*), may You give me grace and lovingkindness before Your throne of glory and in the sight of all Your attendants. And may You bind to me all Your attendants so as to do such and such, O great, mighty, fearsome, strong, valiant, magnificent, and eminent God! (The text of Cant 5:10–16 and a few *nomina barbara* follow.) Recite this teaching each day after the prayer.

Following this passage comes the description of R. Ishmael's self-immolation (§420), the adjuration of the angel Anaphiel (§421), and R. Akiva's instructions for the forty-day fast and ritual culminating in the Day of Atonement (§§422–24). The *Hekhalot Zutarti* ends with an admonition of the angel Suriah to R. Ishmael regarding the curses or blessings accruing to those who use the book improperly or properly.

The *Ma'aseh Merkavah* mentions journeys to the otherworld frequently. Many of these passages have already been noted in chapter 4. The following texts give information on the celestial cosmography. The work begins,

(§544) R. Ishmael said:

I asked R. Akiva for a prayer by which a man prays the praise of RWZYY YHWH, God of Israel. Who knows what it is?

He said to me:

Holiness and purity are in his heart and he prays a prayer:
(the text of a Merkavah hymn follows.)

The next two sections give a teaching of R. Akiva about his visionary journey and the celestial geography revealed to him.

(§545) R. Akiva said:

In the hour that I ascended and had a vision of the Might, I saw all the creatures that are in the midst of the roads of heaven: their height above and their breadth below, their breadth above and their height below.

(§546) R. Ishmael said:

And how do the attending angels stand on them?

He said to me:

Like a bridge that is placed over the river and the whole world crosses it, so a bridge is placed at the head of the entrance and up to its end, and the attending angels go around on it and recite a song before TRQLYY YHWH, God of Israel, and forceful ones of awe, captains of fear stand on it, a thousand thousands of thousands and

More details are given: R. Akiva mentions millions of bridges spanning thousands of rivers of fire and rivers of hail, as well as thousands of storehouses of snow, millions of wheels of fire, and numerous angels. Unfortunately, the exact details of how these marvelous structures fit together remain far from clear.

In §554, R. Akiva asks, "Who is able to conceive of the seven palaces, and to have a vision of the innermost heavens, and to see the innermost chambers and to say, 'I saw the chambers of YH?'" The question is answered with a long and hypnotically repetitive account of the innumerable fires and praise-giving, flaming chariots in the seven palaces (§§554–55).

Finally, in §§558–59, R. Ishmael asks R. Akiva "How much space is there between one (celestial) bridge and another?" R. Akiva answers,

(§559) Between one bridge and another is twelve myriad parasangs. In their ascent is twelve myriad parasangs and in their descent twelve myriad parasangs. Between the rivers of awe and the rivers of fear is twenty-two myriad parasangs. Between the rivers of hail and the rivers of darkness³⁵ is thirty-six myriad parasangs. Between the rows of³⁶ lightning and the clouds of comfort is forty-two myriad parasangs. Between the clouds of comfort and the chariot is eighty-four myriad parasangs. Between the chariot and the cherubim is a hundred and sixty-eight myriad parasangs. Between the cherubim and the ophannim is twenty-four myriad parasangs. Between the ophannim and the innermost chambers is twenty-four myriad parasangs. Between the innermost chambers and the holy living creatures is forty thousand myriad parasangs. Between one wing and another is twelve myriad parasangs, and their width is the same. From the holy living creatures to the throne of glory is thirty thousand myriad parasangs. And from the foot of the throne of glory up to the place where He sits—the holy God, the exalted and lifted-up King, 'NPR' YHWH of Israel—is forty thousand myriad parasangs. And His great name is declared holy there.³⁷

An amusing anecdote about an ascent of the heretic Elisha ben Aruyah, one of the four who entered paradise, appears in two manuscripts

³⁵ Manuscript Munich 22 reads "snow."

³⁶ Manuscript New York 8128 reads "chambers of."

³⁷ The *Merkavah Rabba* focuses much more on Sar Torah invocations, rituals of power, and recitation of the *Shi'ur Qomah* than on the otherworldly journey. The places that describe such journeys give few details of the heavenly realm except to note that it contains seven firmaments and that God dwells there on his throne. Relevant passages from the *Merkavah Rabba* are discussed in the last section of this chapter.

immediately after the *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. It adds little to our picture of the visionary journey, but I include it here for the sake of completeness.³⁸

(§597) Elisha ben Aruyah said:

When I ascended to paradise, I saw 'KTRY'L YH, God of Israel, YHWH of Hosts, Who sits at the entrance of paradise, and one hundred twenty myriad attending angels encircling Him, as it is said, "A thousand thousands served Him, and a myriad myriad stood before Him" (Dan 7:10). When I saw them I was confounded and shaken, but I made myself enter before the Holy One, blessed be He. I said before Him:

Lord of the world, it is written in Your Torah, "[Behold, to YHWH your God belong] heaven and the heaven of heavens" (Deut 10:14). But it is written, "the firmament proclaims His handiwork" (Ps 19:2)—one (heaven) alone.

He said to me:

Elisha, my son, have you come for nothing but to discuss My consistency? Have you not heard the proverb that mortals tell?

Unfortunately, the proverb is missing in both manuscripts. Its absence is noted ruefully by the scribe of MS New York 8128 ("I did not find the proverb").

The book of *3 Enoch*, whose redactional development is quite complicated, is built around a visionary ascent to the seventh palace in which R. Ishmael encounters Metatron and is given a tour of the celestial realm. The work is a compendium of detailed and not entirely consistent cosmological traditions, but the celestial realm is divided up into the familiar seven palaces (1:1–2, 6 [§1]; 10:2 [§13]; 16:1 [§20]) or into seven firmaments (17–18 [§§21–29]; 22:3 [§33]), with countless categories of angels including the familiar cherubim, ophanim, seraphim, and holy living creatures (e.g., 1:8 [§1]; 20–26 [§§31–42]). The celestial Temple and curtain are at the top level (e.g., 16:1 [§20]; 45 [§§64–65]).

One point worth noting is that *3 Enoch* (along with its parallel in G12) is the only Hekhalot text to include a visit to the realm of the dead by a practitioner. According to *3 Enoch* 43–44 (§§61–63),

³⁸ For further discussion, see my article "The Hodayot Hymnist and the Four Who Entered Paradise," 471–72; Nathaniel Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate: Angelic Vice Regency in Late Antiquity* (Brill's Series in Jewish Studies 22; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 57–73.

Metatron takes R. Ishmael to see the souls of the deceased righteous in the vicinity of the throne of glory and the unborn righteous in the "storehouse of beings." Then they visit the souls of the wicked dead, who suffer the fires of Gehinnom in Sheol, and the souls of the patriarchs in heaven. The corresponding passage in G12 is probably redactionally earlier, as noted in chapter 1. R. Ishmael reports that after Metatron met him in the sixth palace,

(G12 2a 15-2b 13) After an hour, the Holy One, blessed be He, opened for me gates of wisdom, gates of understanding. He enlightened my eyes and made me enter beside the place of the Shekhinah and revealed to me and showed me those souls that were not yet created for a body, which fly above the throne of glory before the Holy One, blessed be He. And afterward, I opened(!)³⁹ my mouth and expounded this verse: "For the spirit shall clothe itself before Me and the souls I made" (Isa 57:16). "For the spirit shall clothe itself before Me"—these are those souls that were created in the body of the beings o[f the rig]hteous, and they have returned before the Holy One, blessed be He. "And the souls I made"—these are the souls of the righteous that have not yet been created for a body, whose explanation is in the book: "This is the book of the generations of Adam. On the day that God created Adam, in the likeness of God" (Gen 5:1-2).

R. Ishmael said:

Again, Metatron, the Prince of the Presence, said to {me}:⁴⁰

Come, and I will show you the souls of the intermediate and the souls of the wicked—where they stand and how they make them descend to Sheol by the hands of the two angels Z'PY'L and SMKY'L. SMKY'L is the one who is appointed over the souls of the intermediate, in order to support them and purify them from sin, according to the abundant mercies of the Omnipresent. And Z'PY'L is appointed over the souls of the wicked, in order to make them descend from before the Shekhinah, from the law court on high, to Sheol, and to place them in the fire of Gehinnom with staves of glowing coals. And I went up to him, and he took me by the hand and raised me with his wings and showed me all of them with the fingers of his hand, like a father who teaches his son the letters of Torah.

The remainder of the text involves an astrological and physiognomic revelation.

The last text in our survey is the fragment G8, which appears to refer to itself at least in part by the title "The Seal of the Descent

³⁹ Reading פרחי for פרחי.

⁴⁰ The word "me" is missing but is restored on the basis of the context.

to the Chariot.” This tattered manuscript from the Cairo Geniza seems to contain a number of compositions with strong connections to the corpus of Hekhalot texts preserved in the medieval manuscript tradition (especially the *Hekhalot Rabbati*). The first preserved column is a version of the *Shi'ur Qomah* corresponding to §§381–83, 376–77 (//944–46, 939–40, 947). Another column, probably not directly contiguous with the first, contains an otherwise unknown Hekhalot text that begins *in media res* with fragmentary cosmological speculations somehow involving Noah's flood, then continues with the introduction of the speaker, the angel Ozhayah, who narrates most of the rest of the document. The discussion turns to the divine name ṬNR^{L} and its obscure relationship to a mysterious future sage who will appear in Babylon. (I attempt to translate this passage in chapter 9.) Ozhayah then begins to instruct the reader on the descent to the chariot.⁴¹

(G8 2a 23b–49) And turn yourself, beloved, to the learning of the descent to the chariot which I will set out before you and teach you: thus they descend and thus they ascend; thus is the praxis of the first palace; and thus they bind; and thus is their adjuration. And I have interrupted you, so you must write and set down the Seal of the Descent to the Chariot for those who enter the world, for you and for whoever seeks to descend to peer at the King and at His beauty. And if he takes this path, he may descend and see, and he will not be struck down, for I have put it on the scroll for you and you saw it, and afterward you descended and saw [it] and tried it and were not struck down. For I set out for you the paths of the chariot like a light and the highways of the firmament like the sun.

And (you are) not like those before you, whom that great disgrace found, for they were like a man who got lost in a great wilderness, and a path took him along and he went, and they cast him into a fecund jungle. And he went and found there lair upon lair of lions and young lions and den upon den of leopards and den upon den of wolves. He came and stood among them and did not know what he should do. And so one smites him and tears him and another smites him and drags him away—indeed, your associates who descended before you.

I swear to you, beloved, by this Majesty, they dragged him—Ben Zoma—a hundred times over the first palace. I am a witness, for I

⁴¹ The text was first published by Gruenwald in “New Passages from the Hekhalot Literature,” 354–72. It was republished by Schäfer in *Geniza-Fragmente* 97–111. English translations of much of the text have been published by Halperin (*The Faces of the Chariot* 368–69) and Kuyt (*The “Descent” to the Chariot* 34–52).

counted the times he and his associates were dragged—whether they saved him or not, whether they were saved or struck down: two hundred times over the second palace, four hundred times over the third palace, eight hundred times over the fourth palace, one thousand six hundred times over the fifth palace, three thousand two hundred times over the sixth palace, six thousand four hundred times over the seventh palace.

But you do not get even one scratch from the princes of the guardians of the palaces or from any of the angels of violence. And you come and arrive at the sixth palace, (to) regiment upon regiment of princes and of prince upon prince and of band upon band, since the gate of the sixth(!)⁴² palace thrusts and ejects and brings forth myriad upon myriad and camp upon camp and household upon household in a single hour. But there is no hindrance and you are not harmed, for you hold a great seal and all the angels on high tremble at it. Then turn yourself, beloved, to the signs of prohibition of the sixth palace, which is to be seized for you just like its associates, and do not let yourself be destroyed. See the fires that are stirred up, and go forth from the seventh palace to the sixth palace—fire of glowing coals and trickling fire and blazing fire and sweet fire—they go forth and enter like arrows. Therefore I say to you, do not stand in the middle at the gate of the sixth palace, but rather to the side. When they go forth from the seventh palace to go into the sixth palace, it⁴³ will be known to you as a sign of disgrace. And do not be confounded, for (they stream) eight thousand myriad parasangs distant from the gate of the seventh palace, all the way up to the place where you stand.

But when they are gone—a sound on either side. If you were standing, be seated(!);⁴⁴ and if you were seated, turn over; and if you were turned over on your back, turn over onto your face; and if you were turned over on your face, wedge your fingernails and your toenails into the ground of the firmament. (Place) wool in your ears and wool in your nose and wool in your anus, so that your soul may be obstructed and not go out before I reach you and I come to you and stand over you and fan you so that your spirit returns and your soul is revived.

For so have I commanded you when you seek to descend to the chariot to gaze at the King and His beauty—you and anyone who seeks to descend to the chariot, whether in your generation or in other generations: at every single palace he must invoke my name and call me in a deep voice. At once there shall be no creature that harms him or leads him astray. And he sees wonderful majesty and preeminent beauty. But let this be a sign to you: even though you are thrown

⁴² The text reads "second."

⁴³ Standing in the middle?

⁴⁴ The command "be seated" (שׁוּב) is emended from "turn over" (הִיטב) on the basis of context, following Gruenwald.

on your face before the earthquake of fires of destruction that enter this place where you are thrown down, your ears . . .

At this point in the text the first part of the verso page is badly damaged and extremely difficult to translate. Referring to the fires in the sixth palace, it seems to explain how they may be negotiated by the descenders to the chariot. Evidently the adept is taught how to pass into the seventh palace without harm, since there is a reference to "the praxis of the seventh palace" in line 8, and we are told that the mighty angels of this palace sheathe their weapons, cover their faces, and welcome the visionary with loud music (cf. *Hekhalot Rabbati* §236). The instructions continue.

(G8 2b 12–22). Whoever knows in himself that he is pure of transgression of bloodshed and that he has Torah in himself may enter and sit before me. And thus the herald announces, three times every day.

And see the Youth, who goes forth to meet you from behind the throne of glory. Do not worship him, for his crown is like the crown of his King, the sandals on his feet are like the sandals of his King, his shirt is like the shirt of his King, and a garment of stone is girded on his loins. The sun is poured from the belt in front of him and the moon from the knots behind him. His eyes kindle like torches, and his eyeballs kindle like lamps. His splendor is like the splendor of his King, and his adornment is like the adornment of his Creator. ZHWB-DYH is his name. And behold he takes [you] by your hand and seats you on his lap. It is not just that you entered with his permission; but he has seated others on the seat that is prepared before [e] the throne of] glory. This is the praxis of the sign of the seventh palace.

R. Ishmael said:

I did so in the first palace and on to the seventh palace, [and I had a vision] and saw the King in His beauty.

R. Ishmael said:

I did not depart from that place until I completed and extolled it⁴⁵ for descent and ascent [. . . sc]roll for generations of sage[s] to descend and ascend. And I wrote it about the palace and its princes and I explained(!)⁴⁶ those hundred and nineteen. [Are they no]t written at the beginning of this book?

R. Ishm[a]el said:

The thing was done by me, but I did not believe it until the thing was done by a certain [di]sciple who was the most inferior of us all in the association. And he descended [and ascended?] and said to me—

⁴⁵ A feminine noun; evidently the scroll (מגילת) referred to in the same sentence.

⁴⁶ Reading ופירושו ופירשו, with Halperin (*The Faces of the Chariot* 369, 542 n. f).

What the disciple says is far from clear; the speech is damaged and the grammar and syntax of the undamaged text are very difficult.⁴⁷ Apparently R. Ishmael is told to get up and testify to the association about something that is to happen four times and that pertains to "the seal of the chariot." A visionary descent is mentioned, which is linked to the redemption of the world. Evidently the four times have to do with the experiences of four individuals who are alluded to as follows: "These are they: the beloved (elsewhere in this text, R. Ishmael) and his disciple are two; and two at the end of years in the days of the great house, and at once salvation comes to Israel." The narrative comes to an end with the phrase "Thus far the Seal of the Chariot."

This document is of considerable interest, since it purports to relate instructions for the descent to the chariot given by the angel Ozhayah. The dire perils of the descent are described in excruciating detail, but R. Ishmael is given careful instructions on how to avoid disaster as he negotiates the dangerous journey, until he reaches the lap of the mysterious Youth in the celestial throne room.⁴⁸ R. Ishmael confirms that he carried out the journey successfully and apparently wrote down what he learned before he even left the seventh palace. The contents of his book are tantalizing: he speaks of "the palace and its princes," which indeed have been discussed earlier in the document, but he also refers to "those hundred and nineteen" which are to be found at the beginning of the book. Alas, the first leaf or leaves of the work are lost, so the reference is obscure; we do not even know what it is that there were 119 of. Gruenwald suggests that they are the names that must be recited before the descent to the chariot, whereas Halperin thinks they are magic words or formulae, and Schäfer and Kuyt take them to be the names of angels.⁴⁹ The proposals are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It seems likely

⁴⁷ I have attempted to translate the speech of the disciple in chapter 9.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Hekhalot Zutarti* §419. In this passage of the *Hekhalot Zutarti* the adept reaches a divine being, perhaps God himself, sits on the lap of this being, and demands angelic help with whatever he wishes. It seems likely that the encounter with the Youth in the Seal of the Descent to the Chariot is also meant to lead to a similar request, although this is not stated in the text.

⁴⁹ Gruenwald, "New Passages" 363 n. 20; Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot* 369; Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente* 111; Kuyt, *The "Descent" to the Chariot* 49 and n. 77. As Schäfer notes, this number is unique. The other passages that refer to a set number of divine names to be recited indicate either 111 (*Pereq R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah* §308; *Merḳavah Rabba* §681; G19 1a 22) or 112 (*Hekhalot Rabbati* §205).

that the earlier part of the document presented a ritual that involved the recitation of precisely 119 divine names. In other words, an ascetic practice is tied to this visionary tradition as well.

The end of the document echoes the Sar Torah tradition. R. Ishmael tells us that even after his own successful use of the praxis, he did not believe in its efficacy until it was done by his dullest student.⁵⁰ This student's report back to his master remains more or less obscure. The connection with Sar Torah material is made explicit in the sentence that immediately follows the closing phrase, "Thus far the Seal of the Chariot." The next phrase reads, "The Prince of Torah that belongs to it." In other words, in the view of a redactor, the Seal of the Chariot was closely associated with a Sar Torah incantation. The appropriate names to be invoked are given, and R. Ishmael reports that they were written down for use (G8 2b 24–34a). He continues:

(G8 2b 34b–37) R. Ishmael said:

I bear this testimony for (all) generations, that when I invoked the name of this beloved prince and lovely servant and by means of him adjured the three princes, his companions who write according to the word of the princes written in the Book of the Princes, at once I sat and had a vision and feasted my eyes on the midrash and the palaces and the message and the interpretation of the palaces, and I expounded and extolled the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings for a year and a half by the command of the master of interpretations and the lord of wonders, Ozhayah MYŠGH, the prince who has leave.

One could scarcely ask for a more thorough intermixing of the visionary journey and the Sar Torah traditions: after using a Sar Torah praxis, R. Ishmael experiences a vision of the celestial palaces coupled with a revelation of Torah that takes him a year and a half to expound.

The text then proceeds with an account of R. Ishmael's curious self-immolation at the entrance to the first palace. Following this is a speech of the angel Anaphiel in which he warns the reader of the dangers one faces in invoking him. The leaf of the manuscript ends in midsentence with "R. Ishmael said to me: I adjure you, QBRQLY'L the prince."

To summarize, the cosmology of the Hekhalot literature is, not surprisingly, inconsistent in detail, but in its broad outlines it conforms

⁵⁰ See *Sar Torah* §§304–305.

well to the parameters of shamanic cosmology. Seven firmaments or heavens are mentioned in *3 Enoch* and the *Merkavah Rabba*, but normally the otherworld is conceived of as consisting of seven concentric palaces, with God's throne room in the innermost palace. This arrangement appears in all the other major macroforms, in many of the Geniza texts, and elsewhere in *3 Enoch*. The *Hekhalot Zutarti*, *3 Enoch*, and the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* describe this throne room with (mutually inconsistent) additional concentric vertical divisions. The *Massekhet Hekhalot* has no visionary journey but describes the cosmology of the seven firmaments in great detail. Mention of the underworld or the place of the dead is rare, and it is visited by a Hekhalot practitioner in only one episode in *3 Enoch*, which is paralleled in G12. However, lurid descriptions of the various levels of the underworld form part of the traditions of *Ma'aseh Bereshit*, the "Working of Creation." These are compiled in the cosmological tractate *Seder Rabba de Bereshit*, which survives in multiple recensions, including in some of the manuscripts of the Hekhalot literature.

A description of the world tree forms an *inclusio* for R. Nehuniah's instructions to the academy in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*. R. Nehuniah prefaces his instructions with these comments:

(§199) What does this character (of the descender to the chariot) resemble? A man who has a ladder inside his house on which he ascends and descends; there is no living creature who can prevent him. . . .
 (§201) I will recite before (the academy) the mysteries, the concealed things, the gradations, wonders, and the weaving of the web that is the completion of the world and on which its plaiting stands, the axle of heaven and earth, to which all the wings of the earth and inhabited world and the wings of the firmaments on high are tied, sewn, fastened, hanged, and stand. And the way of the ladder on high is that its one head is on earth and its other head is on the right foot of the throne of glory.⁵¹

The Aims of the Otherworldly Journey in the Hekhalot Literature

The otherworldly journey, like the ascetic rituals, can have more than one function. In the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, R. Nehuniah sends R. Ishmael to the otherworld for practical information on the heavenly

⁵¹ Cf. also §237. In addition, in *SH-L* §182, angels ascend a "ladder of fire" (סולם של אש) to the heavenly throne room after returning from earth and bathing in rivers of fire to purify themselves.

implications of the actions of Rome (§§107–11). In the instruction of R. Nehuniah to the academy (§§198–237), the descender to the chariot is already assumed to have knowledge of Torah (he must affirm this before the angels when he arrives; see §§234–35). The purpose of the journey is to permit the descender to experience the liturgy of the angels before God's throne (§236).

The culmination of the long ascent instruction of the *Hekhalot Zutarti* (§§417–19) has the adept seated on the lap of a divine being and asking for authority to command the angels "to do such and such," that is, whatever the asker wants. An earlier passage in the same work concerns an ascent of Moses.

(§336) In the hour that Moses ascended to God, He taught him:

Any man whose heart errs—invoke over him these names:

In the name of B'RY 'BH'Y H'Y MR MR'WT SMW SLM 'BRY W'NKYBWN, so that all that I hear and learn may be gathered into my heart—Bible and Mishnah,⁵² laws and lore—and I may not forget, either in this world or the world to come. Blessed are You, YHWH, Who teaches me Your laws.⁵³

This text has a Sar Torah praxis revealed in a visionary ascent. A teaching of R. Akiva comes next.

(§337) This is the name that was revealed to R. Akiva, who was gazing at the working of the chariot. R. Akiva descended and taught it to his disciples. He said to them:

My sons, be careful with this name; it is a great name, it is a holy name, it is a pure name. For everyone who uses it [with awe, with fear, in purity, in holiness, in humility]⁵⁴ will have abundant offspring and will succeed in all his ways and will have a long life.

Once again, the otherworldly journey—in this case, R. Akiva's ascent and vision of the "working of the chariot"—is the vehicle for the

⁵² Or "teaching."

⁵³ This section is missing in the Geniza fragment G7. A variant version of it appears just after this in MS New York 8128 only and reads as follows:

(§340) When Moses ascended to God, the Holy One, blessed be He, taught him about every man whose heart errs concerning Him:

Invoke over him these names:

'YWM YHWH of Hosts 'H BHH YH BYH YHW'L YHW'L. You, these holy names, open, open my heart. Let everything that I hear—from words of Torah to all the words of the world—be kept in my heart, and let them never be forgotten by me.

⁵⁴ This phrase is missing in G7 and may be secondary.

revelation of a praxis of ritual power, here the use of the divine name to bring personal prosperity.

In the *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, R. Akiva uses song to see a vision of the chariot, a vision that also brings divine grace to the world.

(§557) R. Akiva said:

Happy is the man who stands with all his vigor and obtains a song before BRWKYY YHWH, God of Israel, and he has a vision of the chariot and sees everything that they do before the throne of glory upon which sits BRWKYY YHWH, God of Israel. And he sees to the commandment and to the might and to the statutes and to good decrees, so that harsh decrees may be abolished from the world and one may not banish his companion.

The *Merkavah Rabba* begins with a rather murky account of a vision of R. Ishmael.

(§655) R. Ishmael said:

I saw the King of the world sitting on an exalted and lifted-up throne. And one band⁵⁵ stood from the earth up to the firmament. Sandalphon is his name. And in the hour that He—RWZYY YHWH, God of Israel—seeks to swear by the *tefillin* and to hurl an adjuration with His hand, he takes the *tefillin* from His head and abolishes decrees from the earth.

Who is able to regard the face of RWZYY YHWH, God of Israel? His face is His name and His name is His face. And the sayings of His lips are His name. His words are fire. The “breath of His lips” (Isa 11:4) is fire. With His breath He ordained the whole entire world. Therefore happy is the man who uses this secret; he sanctifies it by His holiness, and he knows the secrets of creation.

(§656) R. Ishmael said:

I asked R. Akiva about the mystery of Sandalphon. He said to me: Sandalphon—his name is SP' NGWDY'L 'LH' 'L YWS SKWDDY'L NGDY'Y 'NGYY 'PPP' 'LP' 'NG', adding to it ZRZ Z'N YHWH, God of Israel. Three dear names: GRWYYY THWYY HBYBY'L.

When he revealed the names of the angel I stood and engraved them, with permission. And there was light in my heart like the light of lightning that goes from one end of the world to the other.

The text of the next section (§657) is corrupt, but apparently the gist is that R. Ishmael offers additional instructions about the use of “this secret” involving the invocation and writing of the divine names.

⁵⁵ The word נָדוּד normally means “band” or “group” and is often used of groups of angels in the Hekhalot literature. Here it seems to be used as the name of a

As usual, the consequences of failing to follow directions are dire: "And he must invoke the name of RWZYY YHWH, God of Israel, before he writes them. If he writes them without-invocation, he will go mad."

This episode introducing the *Merkavah Rabba* is typical of the role of the otherworldly journey in this document. R. Ishmael has a vision of the angel Sandalphon, who has important, if obscure, duties in the celestial throne room. A Merkavah hymn intervenes, then the focus shifts to the "mystery of Sandalphon," some sort of ritual of power further illuminated, or at least discussed, in §§656–57. The revelation of the angelic names by R. Akiva fills R. Ishmael's heart with light, but this flash of insight scarcely counts as a visionary journey. In fact, the vision that began the section seems to be little more than window dressing, and it no longer figures after the first few lines.

The next pericope (§§658–70) involves a ritual invocation of angels is associated with the festivals. Following this is another account of the four who entered paradise (§§671–74), corresponding more or less to §§344–46 (§348) of the *Hekhalot Zutarti*.⁵⁶ The passage ties the adventure of the four to an ascent of R. Akiva, so presumably the editor believed that the entrance into the garden corresponded to an otherworldly journey. But once again, the interest in the journey is tangential.

Later, in the middle of an episode analyzed in detail in chapter 4 (§§677–84), regarding the Sar Torah praxis he has just learned,

(§680) R. Ishmael said:

As soon as my ears heard this great mystery, the world was changed for me to purity, and my heart became as if I had come into a new world. And in every single day it seemed to me as if I stood before the throne of glory.

The language here is very attenuated. By saying it was "as if" he stood before the throne, he seems to acknowledge that in fact he did not. Further on (§685) we read, "R. Ishmael said: Concerning this matter R. Akiva descended to inquire of the chariot." "This matter" appears to be the "secret of Torah" and its attendant rituals revealed in §§677–84. The rest of the section contains a gram-

⁵⁶ Manuscripts New York 8128 and Oxford 1531 give the full text, except that they abbreviate §348; MS Munich 40 abbreviates the story to two lines, while MS Munich 22 ends the *Merkavah Rabba* with §670.

matically obscure pronouncement by R. Akiva on some of the divine names associated with Metatron. Then we read:

(§686) R. Akiva said:

When I went and made this inquiry before the throne of glory, I saw YHWH, God of Israel, Who was exceedingly happy. And He stretched out His hand—His right hand—and slapped the throne of glory, and He said:

Akiva, my son, this throne of glory on which I am seated is a lovely furnishing that My hand, My right hand, founded. Even if one has been a proselyte for only an hour, and his body is innocent of idolatry and bloodshed and incest, I am bound to him. I bind to him Metatron, My servant—to his steps and to much study of Torah.

And when I was dismissed from before the throne of glory to descend to be with mortals, He said to me:

Akiva, My son, descend and bear testimony of this praxis to beings. And R. Akiva descended and taught beings this praxis.

At this point (§687) R. Ishmael intervenes with a Merkavah hymn to be recited by “every wise disciple⁵⁷ who learns this great mystery.” Then he gives us another account of a vision in which he solicits and receives an account of the Shi‘ur Qomah from the Prince of Torah.

(§688) R. Ishmael said:

I saw the King of the world seated on an exalted and lifted-up throne. And all His armies stood, and the whole host on high in heaven prostrated themselves, stationed before Him to His right and to His left.

I said to him, to the Prince of Torah:

My master, teach me the stature of our Creator. And he recited the stature of our Creator, he recited the Stature of the Body (*Shi‘ur Qomah*), may it be adorned, may it be blessed.

Most of the rest of the *Merkavah Rabba* (§§689–706) is taken up with adjurations and *Shi‘ur Qomah* material that seem to function as an answer to R. Ishmael’s questions. We have already learned in chapter 3 of the benefits promised the practitioner who recites this material (§§705–706).

One more Geniza text, G21, contains material that bears on the otherworldly journey. The first of the four preserved leaves begins with an incantation involving twenty-seven mysterious letters. Midway through an incantatory prayer the writer says,

⁵⁷ Or “disciple of a sage.”

(G21 1a 11–13a) Seat me in the chariot in the midst of the twenty-seven letters, for among them [. . . g]reat forever and ever and ever. Hear me! I am Pinhas Your servant where to [. . .] on account of You, for the sake of Your great name, which remains forever. Amen. Selah.

A string of *nomina barbara* follows, then we read: “All your letters—by them You answer me and You save me. Kings and gods of [. . .] my Rock and my Fortress, and You will save me from all *jealousy*. So do carry out what I ask and my request—everything pleasing, etc.” (1a 17b–19a). Later Pinhas asks for protection from evil spirits (1a 25–26), and at the end of the page he repeats his request for a granted wish: “Answer me at this time, and carry out what I ask and my request” (1a 28).

There are parallels between this document and the ascent passage in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* (§§413–19), which ends with the adept sitting on the lap of God or another divine being and asking for whatever he wants. In G21 the practitioner seeks to be seated on the divine throne chariot (and thus presumably on God’s lap), whence he repeatedly demands that anything he asks be given him. It is particularly significant that, unlike in the vast majority of Hekhalot texts and other texts of ritual power, the name of the practitioner is given: a real person named Pinhas actually used this ritual.

The reverse of the page concludes the incantation in the first two lines, and a blank space is left in the second half of line 2. Line 3 launches a new narrative, this one describing the well-known myth of the ascent of Moses to heaven to seize the Torah in the face of angelic opposition. This document is not of great importance to us, except perhaps to confirm that the writers of the Hekhalot literature used the myth for their own inspiration. It is also worth noting that, according to this text, adjurations of healing are among the powers Moses seizes in heaven. References to healing are quite rare in the Hekhalot traditions. We read:

(G21 2a 9b–13a) The prince of the head came to [him] (Moses). He (the prince) said to him (Moses), “This is my adjuration.” The prince of the eye came to him. He said to him, “This is my adjuration.” The prince of the ear came to him. He said to him, “This is my adjuration.” The prince of the mouth came to him. He sa[id] to him, “This is my adjuration.” The prince of the whole body came to him. He said to him, “This is my adjuration, and such is my healing.”

Conclusions

In this chapter we have looked at specific examples of the shamanic cosmology described by Hultkrantz and Eliade, and have found this framework to fit very accurately the cosmology presented in the *Hekhalot* literature. The seven-tiered heavenly realm appears in all macroforms and many Geniza texts, usually in the form of seven concentric celestial temples, with the divine throne room centermost, but sometimes also as seven firmaments. The *Hekhalot Rabbati* describes the descent to the chariot in terms of a kind of world ladder that is consistent with the idea of the shamanic world tree. Some of the accounts of shamanic otherworldly journeys share other themes with the *Hekhalot* literature, such as the terrible dangers of the journey, the testing of the adept along the way, and the use by the shaman of spells for protection, although these themes are not discussed explicitly by Hultkrantz or Eliade as part of the model.

We have also explored the complex aims of the otherworldly journey. In the *Hekhalot Rabbati* the journey is used to obtain divine revelations—the heavenly view of the political situation on earth—and to allow the adept to join in the celestial liturgy with the angels. In the *Hekhalot Zutarti* its culmination is the lap of God, where the divine wish granter may be asked to do the will of the practitioner (as in G21, another part of which also refers to the acquisition of healing powers). The *Hekhalot Zutarti* also connects the visionary ascent with revelations of Sar Torah praxes and generally beneficent adjurations. The *Ma'aseh Merkavah* hints of great worldly benefits to be had from the vision of the otherworld, but does not explain these in detail. In the *Merkavah Rabba*, the visionary ascent is used primarily to obtain knowledge of divine mysteries and secrets of ritual power: the “secrets of creation,” Sar Torah praxes, and the Shi‘ur Qomah. Fragment G8 seems to say of the descent to the chariot that “by it the world is redeemed” and also to associate it with revelations concerning scripture. The encounter of the practitioner with the Youth may also involve the granting of wishes, as in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §418 and in G21.

In the next chapter we take another look at the powers attributed to the descenders to the chariot, but from a somewhat different angle. We shall see that their abilities, like those of the shaman, are channeled primarily through their power to control the spirits.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONTROL OF THE SPIRITS

One of the central functions of the shaman is to control spirits. Almost every other shamanic activity depends on this control, which serves many purposes: the spirits may aid the shaman with visionary journeys, exorcisms, healings, or other acts of power; they may endow the shaman with clairvoyance, or they may help guide the dead to their proper place of rest. Control of the spirits is the *sine qua non* of shamanic competence: not all shamans engage in otherworldly journeys or heal, but all must have some power over the spiritual world. Likewise, in some cultures in which shamans play a part, anyone can have visionary or ecstatic experiences, so the mark of a shaman is not contact with otherworldly reality alone but control over elements of it. As noted in chapter 4, any Lakota man can engage in a vision quest for any number of reasons. Likewise, Merkur says regarding the Inuit:

The Inuit denotation of a shaman as the possessor of a helping spirit differs significantly from Western scholarly approaches, which tend to emphasize that shamans are professional ecstasies who conduct seances. This difference in the perception of what is distinctive about shamans reflects a difference in what Inuit and Western cultures regard as normal and presuppose when speaking of shamans. For Western scholars, ecstasy is worthy of remark, whereas for the Inuit it is not. . . . Because the Inuit are no strangers to ecstatic religious experiences, only the particular morphology of shaman's ecstasies, the possession of helping spirits, strikes them as distinctly shamanic.¹

This chapter begins with an overview of shamanic powers over the spirits, illustrated by examples from traditions we have drawn on in previous chapters. We then turn to the Hekhalot literature to look at the significance of control of the spirits for the descenders to the chariot. Some of the cross-cultural material and most of the relevant Hekhalot texts have been covered already in earlier chapters, so a good bit of this short chapter will summarize previously treated

¹ Merkur, *Becoming Half Hidden* 63–64.

evidence. But in this case brevity is not an indication of insignificance. Rather, it shows that control of the spirits is a centrally important element that permeates both shamanism and the Hekhalot literature.

Shamanic Control of the Spirits

Siberian Shamanism (Sereptie)

The initiatory vision of Sereptie introduces numerous spirits and explains the relationships the shaman must cultivate with them. He was guided through the nine tents of the underworld by a spirit who elicited answers from him about the spirits in the tents. Dwelling in the first tent was the spirit of madness, by which Sereptie was to initiate new shamans. The second tent belonged to spirits of the Tungus, who would help him use the proper materials for healing stomach diseases, insanity, and epidemics.² In the fourth tent he met a spirit in the form of an old woman who was to help him locate places to hunt and fish. The fifth tent held reindeer spirits, whose permission he needed to make his shaman's costume (of reindeer hide), and who would help him find the tree out of which to make his shaman's drum. He also needed the permission of the forging spirits in the sixth tent. The spirit of the seventh tent was called the mother of measles and "the mistress of the earth who has created all life." He was to ask her help to heal measles and also to intercede with the dangerous inhabitants of the eighth and ninth tents, who could help him recover the souls of the dying and cure the sick. Beyond the tents and the seven stone peaks, two other peaks represented the mistress of water who provides fish and the spirit who heals children of diseases.

After the description of the vision, Sereptie relates how he practiced shamanism for the next twenty years. First he explains how he tracked the souls of the sick and dying:

When I am shamanizing, I see a road to the north. When I am looking for a sick man, the road is narrow like a thread. I do not know who is leading me, in front I see the sun and the moon. On (the lower) part of the narrow road there are conical ramshackle tents; on this (road) you go for the breath of the man. The other part of the

² The third tent contained an aged and disfigured woman called the spirit of the afterbirth, but her relationship to the shaman is not explained.

road (leading upwards) is quite entangled—I do not understand why. The man who is to recover has a breath like a white thread, while he who dies has one like a black thread. Going along the road, you look sideways and you proceed. Then you find the man's *nil'ti* [life force or soul] and take it.³

He discusses the procedure for finding the proper tree from which to make his shaman's drum, then concludes by explaining his method of placating evil spirits.

When, for a man's illness, I make ceremonies to the evil spirits, the latter would say: "Here, I have surrendered to you, what is he going to give me?" I ask: "What you require for him I shall settle." "The ill man has to kill a certain wild reindeer," says the disease. The man indeed kills such a wild reindeer, gives me its hide and I make a new dress of it for myself. It may happen that the spirit does not speak sincerely and says: "He should kill a wolf, a fox or some other game." But in reality, the ill man kills a reindeer.⁴

Inuit Shamanism (Igjugarjuk and Autdaruta)

At the end of his dreadful ordeal in the snow hut, Igjugarjuk was visited by a spirit in the form of a beautiful woman who came as a sign that he was to become a shaman. He tells the story as follows:

Only towards the end of the thirty days did a helping spirit come to me, a lovely and beautiful helping spirit, whom I had never thought of; it was a white woman; she came to me whilst I had collapsed, exhausted, and was sleeping. But still I saw her lifelike, hovering over me, and from that day I could not close my eyes or dream without seeing her. There is this remarkable thing about my helping spirit, that I have never seen her while awake, but only in dreams. She came to me from Pinga and was a sign that Pinga had now noticed me and would give me powers that would make me a shaman.⁵

He was rescued shortly thereafter by his mentor and father-in-law but had to undergo more than a year of additional purificatory disciplines. He continues,

Later, when I had quite become myself again, I understood that I had become the shaman of my village, and it did happen that my neigh-

³ Popov, "How Sereptie Djaruoskin of the Nganasans (Tagvi Samoyeds) Became a Shaman," 145 (author's parentheses and brackets).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Rasmussen, *Observations on the Intellectual Culture of the Caribou Eskimos* 53.

bors or people from a long distance away called me to heal a sick person, or to "inspect a course" if they were going to travel. When this happened, the people of my village were called together and I told them what I had been asked to do. Then I left tent or snow house and went into solitude. . . . If anything difficult had to be found out, my solitude had to extend over three days and two nights, or three nights and two days. In all that time I had to wander about without rest, and only sit down once in a while on a stone or a snow drift. When I had been out long and had become tired, I could almost doze and dream what I had come out to find and about which I had been thinking all the time.⁶

Thus Igjugarjuk was granted his shamanic powers by a visit from a spirit who represented Pinga.⁷ After his final course of training and purification he became a shaman who served his local area. By means of "spirit wandering in solitude," he was able to draw on the power of the spirits to aid his community. He once even healed a sick man from another village by wandering in isolation for five days while concentrating on the man's recovery.⁸

Autdaruta also owed his shamanic powers to his helping spirits. After allowing himself to be eaten by the bear spirit, he concluded, "From that day forth I felt that I ruled my helping-spirits. After that I acquired many fresh helping-spirits and no danger could any longer threaten me, as I was always protected."⁹

To illustrate this claim, he then tells how once when towing home a seal attached to his kayak after a successful hunt, he was accosted by spirits who tried to abduct both him and his catch. He was rescued by a group of the "fire people," one of whom then became one of his helping-spirits. All of these helping-spirits abandoned him when he converted to Christianity.¹⁰

Lakota Shamanism (Nick Black Elk and Others)

Walker's informant George Sword describes three types of intermediaries among the Lakota. The "medicine man" (*pejuta wicasa*) treats disease by means of medicines and song. There are different kinds and orders of medicine men, and a given one may specialize in a

⁶ Ibid., 53-54.

⁷ On whom see chapter 4 n. 9.

⁸ Rasmussen, *Observations on the Intellectual Culture of the Caribou Eskimos* 54-55.

⁹ Rasmussen, *The People of the Polar North* 307.

¹⁰ Ibid., 307-308.

single medicine. They use drums and rattles in their healing rituals and keep their medicine in a "medicine bag." The "magician" (*wapiya wicasa* if a healer, *wakan skan wicasa* if one who brings illness) is a kind of sorcerer who can heal or harm, bring victory at games, harm enemies, and produce love charms. The "holy man" (*wicasa wakan*) has a "ceremonial bag," tied to a specific spirit, to which he sings and prays. The holy man heals the sick through the ritual invocation of the spirit or familiar (*sicun*) connected with his ceremonial bag. It is possible for a single person to hold two of these offices at once. It is the holy man who fits the model of the shaman and who is used for comparative purposes here.¹¹

Another informant, Little Wound, describes the powers of the shaman as follows:

A *wakan* man is one who is wise. It is one who knows the spirits. It is one who has power with the spirits. It is one who communicates with the spirits. It is one who can do strange things. A *wakan* man knows things that the people do not know. He knows the ceremonies and the songs. He can tell the people what their visions mean. He can tell the people what the spirits wish them to do. He can tell what is to be in the future. He can talk with animals and with trees and with stones. He can talk with everything on earth.¹²

Still another informant, Ringing Shield, adds,

If a man is good and wise, he may become a shaman and be the friend of the spirits. He must learn the songs and the ceremony. Shamans will teach him these. If he is a wise shaman, the spirits will teach him how to do mysterious things. They will give him mysterious powers over other men. The spirits love a generous man. They love an industrious woman and will help her in all her work. The shaman should know the word[s] of a shaman. He talks in the spirit language.¹³

Once again, Nick Black Elk serves as a good example of a specific shaman. We have already seen how two spirits took him into the sky for his great vision and then returned him to his body. During the vision he encountered numerous spirits of many kinds. After it, he was bound by the Thunder-beings to carry out a number of cer-

¹¹ Walker et al., *Lakota Belief and Ritual* 91–93 (cf. pp. 80, 95–96). Powers notes that medicine men and holy men can be either male or female (*Oglala Religion* 56).

¹² Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual* 69.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 114 (author's brackets). Compare p. 117 (which mentions the danger of communicating with spirits) and p. 119.

emonies in order to enact elements of the vision on earth. At age seventeen he revealed the contents of the vision to a medicine man, who advised him to engage in a horse dance ceremony. He did so, then the next year he carried out a vision quest in which the Thunder-beings appeared to him again, then he performed a *heyoka* ceremony.¹⁴ After this, he carried out his first act of healing, during which he invoked the Great Spirit to cure a very sick four-year-old boy. After this success he healed many other people.¹⁵

Japanese Shamanism (Mediums, Ascetics, and Deguchi Onisaburō)

Blacker describes four types of spirit with which Japanese shamans have to do: sacred powers in the physical and human world (*kami*), souls of dead people (*tama*), neglected and malevolent human ghosts, and "witch animals" who parasitically possess human beings.¹⁶ As outlined in chapter 2, female mediums (*itako*) and mostly male ascetics (often but not always *yamabushi*) exercise their powers over the spirits in somewhat different and often complementary ways.

The medium functions as an intermediary between the community and the spirits (both *kami* and the ghosts of the dead), and these spirits speak through her mouth while she is in, or pretends to be in, a trance. The *kami* are summoned at key points during the annual calendar to give supernatural guidance. A Japanese scholar, Sakurai Tokutarō, who has carried out extensive studies of contemporary *itako* in Japan, described rituals and séances in the Rikuzen district for calling up both the recently deceased (new ghosts) and those who have been dead for some time (old ghosts). Blacker paraphrases one of his accounts of a séance led by a local medium (*ogamisan*).

Sakurai described an old ghost-calling which he witnessed at the spring equinox of 1966 at the village of Kisenuma in Miyagi prefecture. Ten women of all ages were crowded into a six-mat room, one of whom acted as *toiguchi* or interrogator to the medium. This assignment

¹⁴ DeMallie (ed.), *The Sixth Grandfather* 3-7, 214-35. The *heyoka* cult was composed of people who had had a vision of the Thunder-beings and who were accordingly obliged at times to behave in a clownish or aberrant manner (Powers, *Oglala Religion* 57).

¹⁵ DeMallie (ed.), *The Sixth Grandfather* 235-40. As noted in chapter 3, María Sabina used the mushroom spirits as visionary guides and to reveal knowledge to be used in healing.

¹⁶ Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow* chaps. 2-3.

was held to be an important one, since on the skill of the questioner largely depended the success of the medium's utterance.

As in the case of new ghosts, it was necessary to summon myriads of *kami* first, who were present in a tutelary capacity throughout the rite. Then, one by one, in due order of seniority, all the family's ancestral ghosts were summoned. First the corporate Ancestor was called, then the grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins.

The interrogator called upon the Ancestor, "*Hai, senzosama, o-tanomi mōshimasu . . .*" Whereupon the Ancestor launched into a long admonitory speech. Always remember to be courteous to friends and relations, he advised. Don't neglect the mortuary tablets. Be extra careful on May 6th . . . If a member of the company sought his counsel on any particular subject—on building a house, for example, or arranging a marriage—she could put the question to the Ancestor through the interrogator.

When the Ancestor's speech was concluded, the interrogator called, "Next, father-in-law!" The *ogamisan* then transmitted father-in-law's message: work hard, don't forget to pay attention to us, and be careful not to catch cold next month.

The interrogator then called, "Next ghost, mother-in-law!" Through the medium, mother-in-law described her grief in leaving all her family and friends so suddenly, told her daughter-in-law to take care to bring up the children properly, and warned the company against colds and accidents on certain dates.

Thereafter ghost after ghost was called; the husband's sister, his younger brother, his nephew, the wife's parents, brothers and sisters, the daughter's husband, the small nephew drowned at the age of five, and lastly the *muenbotoke*, any "unrelated ghost" who might wish to speak.

Some of the ghosts were extremely talkative, their utterance continuing for some forty or fifty minutes. Others were briefer. But irrespective of the length of the speech, the medium received 30 yen for each one. The audience eagerly took notes of what each ghost had said. Most utterances, however, Sakurai recognised as falling into fixed types or *kata*, with which the audience was familiar.¹⁷

The ascetic exercises mostly practical powers for the benefit of the community or the ascetic's own personal benefit. These include the ability to perform exorcisms (of ghosts or witch animals), to sanctify a temple or mountain ("to 'open' a holy place"), and to control and communicate with animals. The *yamabushi* also sometimes exercise more showy powers such as walking on fire, dousing themselves with

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 152-56; the quotation is on pp. 155-56.

boiling water, and ascending a ladder of sharp swords. The exorcisms can be done alone or with the help of a medium.

As an example of an ascetic, I have chosen Mrs Hiroshima Ryūun, who wandered through Japan as a peripatetic healer in the years before and during the Second World War. One of her disciples recorded some of her adventures in a handwritten book, which Mrs Hiroshima's daughter made available to Blacker in 1972. Mrs Hiroshima was called to shamanhood by the legendary ascetic Enno Gyōja in a vision. After three years of intensive *gyō* she gained mighty powers of healing and vision, along with a patron deity who aided her work. Blacker relates the exorcism of a wandering ghost which is described in the book:

Mrs Hiroshima, respectfully referred to throughout the book as "sensei," master, was summoned to the house of a Mr Morimoto near Nara, whose baby was suffering from an obstinate swelling on the shoulder which the doctors were powerless to cure.

Sensei at once began to recite the Heart Sutra in front of the sick child. Soon there appeared to her clairvoyant eyes three spirits flashing like stars.

"Who are you?" she enquired.

"We are spirits belonging to this house," they replied. "We all died young and poor, with no descendants to care for us. We therefore make the Morimoto child sick in order to draw attention to our plight. Please tell the people here to recite requiem masses for us, and then we will let the child get well and act as guardians to it into the bargain. We are buried in the ground to the south of this house."

When Mr Morimoto was told the tale, he remembered that some years before an uncle of his had been buried near the house, together with his two wives, who one after the other had died without children. Thus the family had died out, and no one had performed any of the necessary requiems for the dead spirits. It was quite natural, he realised, that they should call attention to themselves by making his baby ill. But as soon as the correct masses were said and offerings made, needless to say the child recovered at once.¹⁸

Finally, we note again that Deguchi Onisaburō was guided through many other worlds by a divine messenger and was told by the king of the underworld that "he was to become the messiah between the two worlds." This spirit gave him a spell that protected him in the

¹⁸ Ibid., 172-73, 235-43; the quotation is on p. 243. For more exorcisms and miracles by Japanese ascetics see *ibid.*, chaps. 12 and 15.

underworld and allowed him to redeem the souls of the dead. His vision led him to become cofounder of the new religion Ōmoto.¹⁹

These examples illustrate Hultkrantz's point that the visionary otherworldly journey is not a requirement for shamanism. Shamans frequently have such experiences: Sereptie, Nick Black Elk, and Deguchi Onisaburō were taken on otherworldly journeys in which they were guided by helping spirits. But the two Inuit shamans as well as Japanese mediums and modern Japanese ascetics experience no such journeys. Indeed, shamans invoke spirits for many other purposes. In the examples given above, spirits were called to aid in a wide array of activities, including divination, healing, psychopompy, prognostication, protection of the shaman, interpretation of visions, necromancy, and exorcism of ghosts. A central feature of shamanism is control of the spirits, not visionary journeys.

Control of the Spirits in the Hekhalot Literature

The control of spirits (almost always angels) is also central to the practices attributed to the functionaries of the Hekhalot literature. Indeed, it is not too much to say that this power is the linchpin that holds together the disparate praxes and concepts in the Hekhalot texts. The power of spirits is bent to the will of the practitioner for a number of purposes. I have divided the relevant texts into three categories below (although it will become obvious that there is considerable overlap). First, the Prince of Torah and other angels are summoned or invoked so that they will give the human adept, immediately and without effort, the knowledge of Torah which is normally acquired only after years of arduous study. Second, angels may be called on to guide the initiate on the otherworldly journey, or contrariwise, angels guarding the entrances to the various levels of the otherworld may be placated or neutralized by the recitation and presentation of names and seals. Third, a scattering of passages involve several other uses of spirits. They can be adjured to grant wishes or give generic power, to pass on knowledge, or to protect the practitioner from other (hostile or demonic) spirits.

¹⁹ Ibid., 133, 138, 202–207.

Invoking the Prince of Torah

Many of the texts translated and analyzed in chapter 4 have to do with compelling angels to grant instant knowledge of Torah. Material in the *Sar Torah* text (§§299–303) involves ascetic practices, the invocation of the Prince of Torah, and the adjuration of numerous angels. Although the passage promises that the practitioner will be granted knowledge of Bible, Mishnah, and the vision of the chariot, no actual interactions with angels are described.²⁰

Such is not the case with many other texts in this category. The *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (§§560–65) prescribes a rigorous ascetic regime that includes forty days of fasting, the drawing of a circle of power, incantations, and invocation of the Prince of Torah and other angels. R. Ishmael follows these instructions, but when he tries to give up his fast on the twelfth day, the angel of the Presence descends and wrathfully orders him to finish the full forty days. R. Ishmael dismisses the angel with a spell but is cowed into completing his fast. Afterward, the angel of the Presence, accompanied by angels of mercy, descends once again, this time benevolently, and grants the adept esoteric wisdom.

A similar story appears in *Perekh R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah* (§§307–14). R. Ishmael tries unsuccessfully to learn scripture for three years. Then his master, R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah, takes him into the Temple treasury and teaches him a technique that includes the adjuration of Metatron with many names and the recitation of a set number of divine names. After learning the name of the Prince of Torah from his teacher, R. Ishmael fasts for forty days and invokes this prince. Unfortunately, the angel takes the summons with exceptional ill grace, demanding to know who Ishmael thinks he is to disturb the heavenly realm and addressing him as “Mortal, putrid drop, maggot, and worm!” The last section of the unit consists of further instructions for invoking the Prince of Torah, and these may or may not have been construed by the editor as the concluding comments of the inconvenienced angel.

²⁰ In *Hekhalot Zutarti* §336, R. Akiva ascends to God, who teaches him divine names to invoke in order to obtain a perfect memory of Torah. Although the praxis is revealed by God and not the spirits, the recitation of divine names is a sort of adjuration and it is unclear here, as often, whether these names are of God or of angels. A very similar story about Moses is found in §340 (MS New York 8128 only).

The *Merkavah Rabba* contains a narrative (§§677–84) that overlaps a great deal with this one. The passage describes R. Ishmael's frustration with learning and R. Nehuniah's revelation that ended the problem. No encounter with an angel occurs, but the praxis in §682, like its parallel in §310, includes an adjuration of Metatron under numerous other names. In addition, R. Nehuniah warns his protégé that he is in danger of being assaulted and killed by angels unless he carefully carries out the ascetic practices and adjurations prescribed in the text (§681).

Another passage in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (§§573–78) combines the manipulation of *materia* with ascetic praxes and the adjuration of angels to give the practitioner perfect memory of Torah. Finally, a passage in G8 describes how R. Ishmael invokes the Prince of Torah and through him adjures three other princes so as to fall into a visionary trance that gives him the power to expound the scriptures for the next year and a half.

*Negotiating the Otherworldly Journey*²¹

Control of angelic beings is also crucial for the otherworldly journey. The most detailed account of the journey is found in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§§198–237). In an assembly of the academy, R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah describes the ritual praxes to be used in the descent to the chariot. First, Suriah, Prince of the Presence, must be adjured by reciting the proper divine names exactly 112 times. This act starts the practitioner on his way. He must then pass through the gateways of the seven concentric heavenly palaces until he reaches the enthroned Deity in the central throne room. Each gateway is guarded by increasingly horrific hostile angels who must be placated by the presentation of "seals" (*nomina barbara*) as the adept approaches them. At the sixth palace, in addition to presenting the proper seals, the descender to the chariot must assure the angel Dumiel of either his knowledge of Torah or his pious conduct on earth. Then the adept rides in a luminous wagon to the seventh palace, where he must show the angels there "a great seal and a fearsome crown." Only after successfully negotiating all these obstacles is he permitted to listen to the heavenly choir around the throne of God.

²¹ Most of the passages cited in this section have been translated or discussed in chapter 6.

Two other well-known tests by spirits appear in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*: the threshold test (§258), in which the descender to the chariot must wait until the second invitation from the angels before crossing the threshold of the sixth palace, and the water test (§259), in which he must avoid being taken in by the illusion of being engulfed by waves of water. Failure in either test can result in instant death at the hands of the angels.

The overcoming of hostile spirits during the otherworldly journey is also a theme in the *Hekhalot Zutarti*. In §346 (*//Merkavah Rabba* §673), R. Akiva reports that he made marks on the entrances to the firmament, which gave him protection from angels of violence. Accounts of the threshold test and water test are repeated in §§407–408, followed by additional instructions on how to negotiate the water test and the angels in the sixth palace (§§409–10). The successful adept is seated before God's throne and is allowed to gaze at him (§§411–12). Another set of instructions for the journey to the throne of God appears in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§413–19 in the name of R. Akiva. According to this passage, one must learn the names of the angelic gatekeepers of the seven palaces as well as the seal that controls each. The names and seals are given, and the practitioner is told to show each the proper seal until in the seventh palace he is placed in the bosom of 'ZBWGH YHWH, God of Israel, a name of either an angel or of God himself, and this divine being will grant whatever the practitioner requests.

In *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §595, R. Ishmael asks R. Akiva how to direct one's visionary gaze above the seraphim who are above God's head. R. Akiva then tells his disciple how he himself ascended to the seventh palace and, once, there invoked two angels, whom he names. These angels, it appears, enabled him to see above the seraphim.²²

In *3 Enoch*, R. Ishmael is protected from the hostility of the angels by the mighty angel Metatron and then is led on a tour of the otherworld by the same angel.

²² Two other passages in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* may bear on the control of angels during the visionary journey. R. Ishmael is told in §565, "A man like you—if he descended without the permission of PNKRM YHWH, God of Israel, He destroyed him." It is not entirely clear whether the divine being whose permission is needed is God or an angel. And in §570, R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah tells R. Ishmael that one who wishes to have a vision of the Shekhinah by means of recitation of divine names "prays a prayer with all his vigor and the Shekhinah is beloved to him, and He gives him leave to have a vision, and he is not harmed." The nature of the potential harm is not specified, but normally harm on the visionary journey comes from hostile spirits.

In the Seal of the Descent to the Chariot (G8), the angel Ozhayah gives R. Ishmael instructions on how to negotiate the descent to the chariot safely, without suffering attack from other angels. The adept must invoke the name of this angel and call on him at each palace to receive his protection. Ozhayah also promises to come to his aid to keep him from expiring on the floor of the sixth palace. In the seventh palace the adept is welcomed by the angelic Youth, who must not receive worship but who will seat any human being who has come this far on his lap. The purpose of the seating is not mentioned, but it may involve the granting of wishes as in §419 and G21 1a 11–13a. A vision also seems to be involved in the adjuration passage in G8 titled the Prince of Torah That Belongs to It, a vision that seems to deal with both the heavenly palaces and Sar Torah knowledge.

*Other Uses of the Spirits*²³

The Hekhalot practitioners often call on the angels for other services. In the story of the ten martyrs in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§§107–21), R. Ishmael is made to descend to the chariot by his mentor, R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah. There Suriah, Prince of the Presence, explains the reasons in the celestial sphere which led to the current persecution of Israel by the Romans (§108). Later in the story (§§117–19) R. Ishmael receives three more revelations from Suriah about the persecution, which are narrated without any indication that he descended to the chariot first.²⁴

I have already noted the climax of the ascent in §§418–19 of the *Hekhalot Zutarti*, wherein the ascender is told to request whatever he

²³ Most of the texts discussed in this section have been translated or analyzed in chapter 4 or 6.

²⁴ A number of texts are included in one or a few manuscripts of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* but are separate compositions whose connection with the Hekhalot literature is debatable to a greater or lesser degree. I note relevant material from these for the sake of completeness. The David Apocalypse (§§122–26) appears only in MSS New York 8128, Budapest 238, and Leiden Or. 4730. In this narrative R. Ishmael is seated on the lap of the Prince of the Presence and given revelations about the fate of Israel and a vision of David enthroned in messianic glory. In the *Aggada* of R. Ishmael (§§130–38, MS New York 8128 only), he receives angelic revelations about future history. In the Messiah Raises the Dead (§§140–46, MS New York 8128 only), Metatron and another angel reveal to R. Ishmael the career of the coming suffering and victorious messiah, and still another angel shows R. Ishmael cosmological secrets.

wants. Another passage a few sections later, just preceding instructions for a forty-day ritual, tells how to gain control of the angel Anaphiel.

(§421) Anaphiel said:

Anyone who seeks to pray this prayer and to obtain understanding of the work of his Creator must invoke for himself one of these letters. Again, I will not turn to my right or to my left until I turn and do his will for him. And anyone who tells gossip about him—at once I smite him and destroy him, apart from the angel who is sent by the King of Glory, HY YWD 'LP HY YWD G'YYH SSYH 'LPP THŠ MŠYYM H' 'YHH RWQ WYW HY WHY HY 'BDR HYM M'HWBYM YS' NYS H' MLYYS YHW YHW 'Y HYY HH, the great, mighty, fearsome, grand, and strong God Who is hidden from the eyes of all creatures and kept secret from the attending angels, but is revealed to R. Akiva by the working of the chariot to do his desire.

As it is written, "each who calls on My name, and for My glory I created him" (Isa 43:7), so let him do my will and my desire and my request and all that I ask. Amen. Amen. Selah. YHWH is King, YHWH is King, YHWH will be King forever and ever.

Although it is not entirely clear from which letters the practitioner is to choose or where the incantation starts, this passage certainly maintains that one can compel Anaphiel both to grant wishes and to give protection.²⁵ The ritual in §§422–24 is linked not only with ascent and descent to the chariot, but also to the promise of general blessing and protection against the accusation of "satan and stroke" during the year. A gloss in the last section indicates that the ritual may be used to escape from prison.²⁶

The *Sar Panim* promises similar benefits to those who follow the procedures it gives for controlling the Prince of the Presence. In the introductory section, R. Akiva asks R. Eliezer the Great, "How do they adjure the Prince of the Presence to descend to earth in order to reveal to a man mysteries above and below, and some of the

²⁵ Another version of this section is found in G8 2b 44–49, in which the same angel asserts that, far from granting aid, he will attack and destroy anyone who invokes him!

²⁶ In MS New York 8128 §§511–16 (§§512 has parallels in MS Oxford 1531 and in §543 of MS Munich 22) we find a group of adjurations of divine names and angels, mixed with Merkavah hymns and ascetic rituals, which are intended for various purposes including protection from harm and demons, healing of the sick, general success, extinguishing of fire, and even raising of the dead. It is unclear to what degree we should consider this material to be part of the Hekhalot literature. For the dream interpretation adjurations in §§501–507, 17, see chapter 8.

searchings of the foundations of above and below, and the dark things of wisdom, and the shrewdness of abiding success?" (§623). Although he is warned by his master of the extraordinary dangers involved in invoking this angel, R. Akiva insists on learning the ritual and adjurations for doing so. One of the adjurations commands the Prince of the Presence, "I adjure you and I decree concerning you that you must again be bound to my will and accept the adjuration of my decree and do what I ask and fulfill my request," and then orders the angel not to do the adjurer any harm (§627). Amid a flurry of adjurations and fragments of cosmological speculation we also read the following:

(§634) By them (inscrutable divine names enumerated before this section) I adjure you, I decree and establish concerning you that you must make haste to descend beside me—I am so-and-so, son of so-and-so—you, and not your emissary. And in your descent you must not prey on my mind. You shall reveal to me all of the searchings of the mysteries of above and below and the secrets of the stored-up things above and below and the mysteries of understanding and the shrewdness of abiding success, like a man who talks with his associate.

The text concludes with an Aramaic adjuration against evil spirits:

(§639b) With these fearsome and powerful names that darken the sun and thrust aside the moonlight and overturn the day and split the stone and quench the fire, I adjure spirits and dēws, demons and satans: you must go far and depart from so-and-so, son of so-and-so.

The *Ma'aseh Merkavah* provides seals, invocations, and rituals for protection from hostile angels and harmful demons in §§560–66, and incantations in §§568–69 designed to protect against "angels and harmful demons" and "the angels who stand behind the holy living creatures." In *Merkavah Rabba* §§659–70 we find a passage that is closely related to the Sar Torah material in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§573–78, but which includes the recitation of the prayers of the angels in the various firmaments for the purpose of having one's prayers heard. The *Merkavah Rabba* also describes in detail the earthly and spiritual benefits of reciting *Shi'ur Qomah* traditions (§§705–706), including protection from spirits and demons. In G19 there is an adjuration of Metatron which seeks a favorable answer to prayer. G21 seeks the granting of wishes and protection from evil spirits, and the myth of the ascent of Moses on the same fragment implies that the readers had an interest in spirits of healing.

The Spirits in the Hekhalot Literature

According to the model of the shamanic complex presented in chapter 2, the spirits normally associated with shamans can be either those of animals, or of human ancestors, or of deceased former shamans. The cross-cultural evidence surveyed in this chapter compels us to nuance this generalization. The Siberian, Inuit, Lakota, and Japanese shamans we have looked at indeed have to do with theriomorphic spirits, and the Japanese shamans with ancestor spirits or ghosts as well, but they also encounter other types. Perhaps it would be most accurate to say that these other spirits represent or embody natural forces (madness, illness, thunder, fire, *kami*, etc.). I might add that the exact nature of some of the spirits who act as guides on visionary journeys remains elusive.

When we turn to the Hekhalot literature, the picture is somewhat different. Almost all of the spirits encountered by the practitioners are angels, and most of these appear to be in human form. A few of the most exalted and least controllable angels—the living creatures and perhaps the cherubim—come in roughly theriomorphic form, but they do not represent specific earthly animals. Two other classes of angels, the *galgalim* and *ophannim*, apparently take the form of wheels (of the chariot), since this is what the words mean. The subduing of demons is also mentioned. Ancestor spirits are alluded to briefly in 3 *Enoch* 43–44 and G12 but these play no active role in either narrative. The only deceased (or more accurately, deified) former practitioner who appears is Metatron, the translated patriarch Enoch, but he plays an important role in the Hekhalot literature as guide and model for the practitioners. Animal spirits and forces of nature do not figure in the corpus at all.

A number of reasons for the differences from the model can be advanced. Angels are the most important spirits in the Jewish tradition, so it would be natural that Jewish shamans should encounter them, just as Japanese shamans encounter the *kami* of the Shinto tradition. Spirits in the form of animals are not found in the biblical and Jewish traditions, perhaps because of the hostility in the Bible to the indigenous Palestinian nature worship (Deut 7:1–5; 12:1–4) and to iconographic representation of divine or earthly creatures (Deut 4:15–18; 5:8–9), and also due to caution toward theriomorphic representations arising from the story of the golden calf (Ps 106:19–20). Likewise, necromancy is strictly prohibited in the Priestly

and Deuteronomistic traditions (Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut 18:9–12; 1 Samuel 28), which presumably would have deterred practitioners from consulting dead intermediaries. Nevertheless, it is duly noted that the preponderance in the Hekhalot literature of humanoid but nonhuman spirits with no connection to specific natural forces is a departure from the model.

Conclusions

Control of the spirits is central both to shamans and to the practitioners portrayed in the Hekhalot literature. Shamans wield power over and communicate with animal spirits, the human spirits of ancestors or shamans of the past, and spirits of the forces of nature. The spirits are used for a wide variety of purposes, such as to guide the adept on the otherworldly journey, to help in healing and exorcism, and to grant knowledge of earthly and unearthly matters. The descenders to the chariot usually deal with anthropomorphic angels, although one of these is also a divinized human being. The angel is made to grant immediate knowledge of Torah or other revelations, to act as guides on the otherworldly journey, to refrain from harming the practitioner or even to protect him from misfortune and demons, and to grant wishes. One passage hints at the use of spirits for healing, but this idea is not developed. There is undoubtedly a significant overlap with the shamanic model, but there are also deviations. Angels are rather different creatures from the spirits usually associated with shamans, and the use to which they are put is mostly directed to the benefit or protection of the practitioner rather than to the service of a community. But it is precisely at this nexus between the last two elements of the model that the problems our analysis faces become more complicated.

The ideas of control of the spirits and service to a community confront us with a difficulty that for the most part has been avoided in previous chapters: how exactly are we to define the parameters of the Hekhalot literature? Up to this point I have focused on the traditional macroforms and microforms in the medieval manuscripts or on the closely related Geniza fragments published by Gruenwald and Schäfer. But even so, we have noted certain ambiguities, such as whether the David Apocalypse, the adjurations in §§511–17, or the *Sheva' Zutarti* belong to our corpus. It is to some degree a cir-

cular question, since the contents of the corpus depend on how we define it in the first place. For the purposes of this analysis, however, the most useful definition is as follows: we are interested in any and all texts that present themselves as instruction for the constellation of Jewish intermediaries whom this literature sometimes calls the “descenders to the chariot.”

We have already encountered one genre of texts outside the Hekhalot canon which gives us additional information—the physiognomic tractates. Does this exhaust the relevant literature? There are good reasons for thinking not. The texts surveyed in chapter 2 under the elusive rubric “magical literature” have many close connections with the Hekhalot literature. We turn to these in the next chapter in order to learn what portion of this material can be assigned with confidence to the people who produced the Hekhalot literature, and what else the relevant texts tell us about rituals these people transmitted for making use of the spirits as well as the life situation and social context of the writers and of the people who used these rituals. Thus the eighth chapter is a transitional one that addresses the last two elements of the model. Chapter 9 will conclude the exploration of the communities behind the Hekhalot literature.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE HEKHALOT LITERATURE AND OTHER JEWISH TEXTS OF RITUAL POWER

Aims and Methodology

In the next two chapters I move to considering broadly the people who produced the Hekhalot literature and the social situation they inhabited. The question to which I return at the end of chapter 9 is, To what degree did the life situation and vocation of these practitioners, as described in the texts and deduced from whatever other resources we can recover, correspond to shamanic-service to a community. But the path to the answer to this question is a meandering one. This chapter explores the connections between the Hekhalot literature and the texts of ritual power generally known as the Jewish "magical" literature. This is a very large topic, more than one element of which deserves a full-scale study in its own right. In the limited space available I can hope only to hit the high points that are directly relevant to the problems explored in this book.

It has often been noted that the Hekhalot literature and the Jewish "magical" literature have numerous similarities, most of which are not characteristic of other Jewish literature. They assume similar cosmologies, employ rhetorically similar adjurations for practical (and impractical) purposes, invoke *nomina barbara*, and fairly frequently write out the Tetragrammaton instead of using an abbreviation. Medieval manuscripts often have both types of text together.¹ The problem that I will address in this chapter is that of explaining these similarities. What is the relationship between the two types of texts of ritual power, and what connections are there between the two groups of writers which produced them? It is reasonable to guess that there is some overlap, but its nature cries out for elucidation. I begin the comparison and analysis on a strictly literary level, but

¹ Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic," 361-64; Schiffman and Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts* 24-26; Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae* 17-20; Davila, "The Hekhalot Literature and Shamanism," 783-84; Shaked, "Peace Be upon You, Exalted Angels."

in due course I explore the implications of the literary parallels for the life situations and social contexts of the people who produced the documents.

The method for evaluating the literary parallels requires some discussion. The first aim of the comparison is to locate texts of ritual power outside the Hekhalot corpus which share significant concerns with the Hekhalot literature, so some types of parallel are more important than others. The criteria, in ascending order of significance, add up to something like the following. Less significant parallels are the more general ones attested widely not only in texts of ritual power but also in Jewish literature overall, such as the celestial cosmography involving seven heavens, multitudes of angels, and speculation about the scene in the divine throne room. Somewhat more significant are ideas and practices central to the Hekhalot literature, but so widely attested in the other texts of ritual power that they offer little focus to our analysis and put us in danger of circular reasoning if overemphasized. These include adjurations and seals of power to control angels and demons for various purposes, the use of ascetic practices to gain power, and invocation of angel names and *nomina barbara*. Both sorts of parallel become more significant as they deal with figures of particular importance in the Hekhalot literature, such as the angels Metatron, Anaphiel, Suriah, the Prince of the Presence, and Rabbis Ishmael, Akiva, and Nehuniah ben HaQanah. A sustained complex of such parallels in a given text is of considerable interest but ultimately must count as only circumstantial evidence.

Very significant evidence includes, first of all, texts of ritual power which have embedded in them passages found also in the Hekhalot literature. In such cases one could always argue that another type of practitioner was quoting a Hekhalot passage for a purpose outside its original intent, but the burden of proof would be on the one who made such a claim. The Babylonian incantation bowls and many of the ritual power texts from the Cairo Geniza provide evidence dating from some centuries earlier than the medieval manuscripts containing the major Hekhalot macroforms, and Hekhalot passages found in them are our earliest evidence for how the material was used and thus must be taken very seriously.

Another very significant type of parallel would be texts that use terminology or concepts central to the concerns of the Hekhalot literature, peripheral to the interests of other Jewish texts of ritual

power, and unattested or exceedingly rare elsewhere in Jewish literature. These would include mention of the Prince of Torah, the use of ascetic practices and adjurations to compel him to grant a perfect memory of Torah, claims that a practitioner ascends to heaven to gain divine power or to participate in the celestial liturgy, and references to the “descent to the chariot” or “descenders to the chariot.” The more circumstantial parallels accompanying the significant ones, the more compelling becomes the case for a direct connection with the authors of the Hekhalot literature.

Comparison of the Hekhalot Literature to Other Texts of Ritual Power

The Metal Amulets

These amulets, of roughly the Talmudic era, have numerous superficial similarities to the Hekhalot literature, such as the adjurations of angels and demons, the invocation of angels, the use of *nomina barbara*, and references to the throne of God.² The most significant one for our purposes is A21, inscribed on silver and of unknown provenance.³ The right column, of which twelve lines are fairly well preserved, consists mostly of *nomina barbara* with a list of names of angels in approximately alphabetical order. A similar list appears in the work *Sheva' Zutarti*, a work whose relationship to the Hekhalot literature is discussed below.⁴ The middle column consists simply of the word מְכוּנָה, “their abode,” above a crude drawing. The word “Abode” is traditionally a name of one of the seven firmaments and is used of the divine celestial abode in the Hekhalot literature. The drawing can be interpreted to be a ladder, in which case the implication is that it portrays a ladder leading up to the heavenly abode of the angels. We saw in chapter 6 that the *Hekhalot Rabbati* compares the descender to the chariot to someone with a ladder that leads to the throne of God. Thus this amulet may hint at a heavenly ascent along the lines of that found in the Hekhalot literature. This being the

² See, for example, Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* A7, pp. 69–77; idem, *Magic Spells and Formulae* A28, pp. 95–98; Kotansky, “Two Inscribed Jewish Aramaic Amulets from Syria,” Amulet B, pp. 274–80.

³ Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae* 68–72.

⁴ G13 2a 4–7. For lists in this work arranged along the same principle, cf. G13 2b 9–11; G14 1a 9–11; G16 1a 1–3; 1b 9–13; G17 1a 21–26.

case, the purpose of the amulet is noteworthy. The six surviving lines in the lefthand column reads as follows:

[. . .] the great God Who will
 give healing to MLK
 son of GWZW from a spirit
 and from a demon and from [. . .]
 and from [. . .]
 Amen. Amen(!). Amen.

The purpose of the amulet is to heal the client of affliction by hostile spirits, and one might speculate that the practitioner associated his own heavenly ascent with the process.

Inscribed Bowls from Babylonia

The contents of these inscribed bowls indicate that they were produced in various subcultures: a given bowl may be of Jewish, Christian, Mandaean, or indigenous polytheistic origin, although there is frequently much overlap in the traditions. I have limited my consideration here to those bowls transmitting clearly Jewish traditions. Most of these are written in the square Aramaic script, although two bowls important for our purposes are written in the Syriac script. The Babylonian bowls have many superficial similarities to the Hekhalot literature, overall rather more than those found in the Syro-Palestinian metal amulets. These will become apparent in my analysis of more significant parallels below.

At least one inscribed bowl includes adjuration text found also in the Hekhalot literature. I translate Montgomery's bowl 25 in full, taking into account corrections and restorations suggested by Epstein and Lesses.⁵

¹[He]aling from heaven for GWRYW, son of T'ṬY, and for 'HT, daughter of DWD', his wife. May there depart from them all dē[ws and may] they [be healed] by the mercies of heaven from children who die to them, so that they may have children and they l[ive. ²May those who] have died find themselves in the presence of the gods and

⁵ Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantations Texts* 207–208; Epstein, "Gloses babylo-araméennes," *REJ* 74 (1922) 53–54; Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 354–59. See also Alexander, "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," 165–67; Shaked, "Peace Be upon You, Exalted Angels," 201–203. Unless otherwise noted, I follow Epstein's readings where they differ from Montgomery's and Lesses's readings where she differs from either of them.

goddesses,⁶ and the gods and goddesses ???.⁷ You are a pr[ince over pr]inces, and your chariot is over all the ophannim. Send to them⁸ LHRDRBDWBR [. . .] ³L, the lord of all, Whose [Tor]ah⁹ of mercy is placed in my mouth and all of [his]¹⁰ w[ays] are law. Blessed are You, YHWH, on account of the words of the name. In the name of ⁴YWPY'L—your name is YHW'L, they call you ŠSNGY'L YH YH—and all the re[st of] their names. [R]MSH Metatron YH. In the name of TGYN ⁵TRYGYS BLBYS ŠNGS ŠDRPS. These are the angels who bring healing [to all] the sons of men. May they ⁶come and ascend with the healing of the people of [his] household and of his cattle and of his wife and of [his] so[n] and of his daughter and all the people in his household, ⁷for this GWRYW, son of T'TY, from this day and for eternal ages. Amen. Amen. Selah. Hallelujah.

⁶ For line 2a I follow the interpretation of Shaul Shaked, given in a private communication.

⁷ I do not know how to translate this damaged word. One could read [ב]שֵׁם, “[in] the name of,” with Montgomery, but this reading is difficult to make sense of in context; or one could read [ה]שֵׁים, “May (the gods and the goddesses) hurry” or “attend to (the ghosts)” with Epstein, but mimmation of the plural participle is Hebrew, not Aramaic.

⁸ Reading לְהוֹם, with Montgomery, rather than לְהִיָּה, which Epstein takes as a mistake for לֵה or לִיָּה, “to him.” The copy could support either reading, but Montgomery’s makes better sense in context (the antecedent is the husband and wife in line 1) and requires no emendation.

⁹ Reconstructing [א]וֹרֵי־חַוָּה, with Lesses. The reconstruction is based on the parallels in the *Ši'ur Qomah* (see n. 11, below). Shaked reads the parallel in the Hermitage bowl as מַרְדּוֹן מְשִׁרְיָהוּה, “the lord of his camp,” and suggests that a similar reading ([מְשִׁרְיָהוּה] רַבְיָהוּן דְּכָל [מְשִׁרְיָהוּה]), “the lord of the whole [camp]” be restored here, although, curiously, he translates the phrase in Montgomery 25 as “the master of all the [deities?]” (see “Peace Be upon You, Exalted Angels,” 201, 203 and n. 44; the Hermitage bowl is published by A. Ja. Borisov in “Epigraficeskie zametki,” *Epigrafika Vostoka* 19 [1969] 3–13, esp. pp. 9, 11). Shaked’s suggestion is possible, but as Lesses notes, the parallels to Montgomery 25 cease immediately after this break in the Hermitage bowl, so there is no certainty that the two bowls are parallel in the lacuna (*Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 357 n. 386). A number of considerations favor the reading “Torah” in Montgomery 25. There is the unanimous testimony of the *Ši'ur Qomah* manuscripts and the Cairo Geniza text for the reading; moreover, the angel adjured here is Metatron, the Prince of Torah, so it is entirely reasonable that the practitioner should call on the power of the Torah. The mention of “law” (דִּין) later in the same line also coheres with the reading. The phrase “lord of all” is attested in the Hekhalot and related literature in both Hebrew (אֲדוֹן הַכֹּל; e.g., *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §551; *Sar Panim* §636) and Aramaic (מַרְדּוֹן דְּכָל; *SH-L* §493), whereas the phrase “lord of (all) the camps” is not attested elsewhere in the inscribed bowls or in the Hekhalot literature. Finally, although the phrase “the Torah of mercy” is not found in these texts, the Hekhalot literature frequently associates the idea of Torah with that of mercy (*3 Enoch* 8:2 [§11]; *SH-L* §§149, 326; *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§549, 565; *Merkavah Rabba* §706; cf. Ps 119:77).

¹⁰ Perhaps reconstruct “[my].”

Alexander, Shaked, and Lesses have pointed to numerous connections between this bowl and the Hekhalot literature. Lesses notes that lines 2–3 are closely related to a passage found in various recensions of the *Shi'ur Qomah* and in a Geniza fragment of Sar Torah material. These texts aid the reconstruction and interpretation of the damaged and difficult text of the bowl.¹¹ An important aspect of the adjuration is the request of the practitioner to have Torah placed in his mouth, an element shared with the Sar Torah adjurations. Alexander points out that the angel Metatron, who is mentioned frequently in the bowls, is also known by the names YWPY'L and YHW'L (*3 Enoch* 48D:1 [§76]) and variants of SSNYGY'L (*3 Enoch* 18:11–12 [§25]), and that he seems to be identified with YHWH (both are addressed in the second person in the same blessing).¹² Shaked draws attention to a close parallel to the names and phrasing of line 4a in *SH-L* §397, more general parallels to the same line in *SH-L* §387 (cf. *Hekhalot Rabbati* §277), and many *nomina barbara* in the Hekhalot literature which resemble the name LHRDRBDWBR in line 3. He also points out that a bowl in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg contains the same text as lines 2b–3a (see n. 9).

This bowl is thus filled with both highly significant and circumstantial parallels with the Hekhalot literature. It was composed by someone who knew a version of a surviving Hekhalot adjuration that, at least in its later form, was used for gaining knowledge of

¹¹ The *Shi'ur Qomah* passages are in *Sepher Razi'el* 13–22 and *Sepher HaQomah* 6–9 (Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions* 78, 126). The Sar Torah text is G4 1a 9–14. The word אַרְיִיחָא is almost obliterated in the last text, but an *aleph* survives at the beginning of the word, precluding the reading of the Hermitage bowl.

¹² Other mentions of Metatron in the Babylonian bowls include the following. Gordon D, lines 10–11, refers to God “Who sent ‘Z’ and ‘Z’L and Metatron, the great prince of His throne” (cf. *3 Enoch* 4:6 [§6]; 5:9 [§8]) (Gordon, “Aramaic Magic Bowls in the Istanbul and Baghdad Museums,” 328–30). Gordon L, lines 12–13, invokes him in an exorcism: “and in the name of Metatron, the great prince of the whole world” (Gordon, “Aramaic and Mandaic Magic Bowls,” 94–95). Ashmolean 1932.620 invokes ‘Z’ and ‘Z’L in quadrant 1, lines 14–15, and in quadrant 2, line 10, reads, “In the name of Metat[ron], the great prince who is *king* over all . . .” (the word “king,” מֶלֶכָא, is damaged and uncertain) (Gordon, “Aramaic Incantation Bowls,” 279–280). In Gordon Teheran 1, line 5, the demons are subdued and sealed away from the client’s household “by the talisman of Metatron, the great prince, who is called the great healer of mercies . . .” The meaning of the damaged last two words, מְבַרְכֵי אֲשֵׁרָא, is uncertain.; Gordon translates tentatively, “that bless the season” (“Two Magic Bowls in Teheran,” 307). McCullough D, line 6, invokes for protection of a client “Metatron HLDH, who serves before the curtain” (McCullough, *Jewish and Mandaean Incantation Bowls* 30, 32, 35). The phrase “Metatron, Prince of the Presence” appears in Shaked Moussaieff 1, line 13 (see the discussion of this bowl later in this section).

Torah. The composer drew on names and beliefs about Metatron characteristic of the Hekhalot texts. In addition to confirming the early existence of such material in Babylonia, it also gives us valuable information about how the practitioners used this material. The bowl was composed for the “healing” (אָרְוִיחֵן) of a named couple and their household who seem to be suffering affliction from the restless spirits of deceased children. If the restoration in line 3a is correct, the practitioner is filled with the power of Torah, then invokes Metatron and his cohorts and calls on them to descend and heal (i.e., exorcise ghosts from) the household and then return to heaven. In chapter 6 we saw a hint of interest in healing in the story of Moses’ ascent (G21 2a 9b–13a), in which a series of princes of various human body parts come to him in heaven and reveal the adjurations to heal the member in question. In 3 *Enoch* 48D:6–10 (§§78–80) we are also told that Metatron (called, *inter alia*, the Prince of Torah) revealed a secret to Moses which could be used for the healing of diseases. This bowl provides concrete evidence for the actual use of such revelations for healing by a tradent of Hekhalot traditions.

Three bowls with nearly identical texts make explicit mention of the Prince of Torah. I translate the parallel texts of the two published by Gordon in 1934. The passage is repeated twice in both bowls.¹³

Sealed and resealed is the house¹⁴ of DZYDYN ŠBWR, son of ʿYLYŠBʿ, with seventy knots, with seventy fetters, with seventy seals, with ropes, with ???,¹⁵ with the signet-ring of YWKBRYWʿ, son of RBY, and with the signet-ring of mighty KSDYʿL, the angel prince of the Chaldeans, and with the seal-ring of mighty Michael, the Prince of Torah, and with the seal-ring of mighty Gabriel, the angel prince of fire, and with the seal-ring of ʿSPNDS DYWʿ, the jinnee of King Solomon, son of David, and with the great seal of the Lord of the world, Whose knot is not loosened and Whose seal is not broken. Blessed are You, YHWH, God of Israel. Amen. Amen. Selah.

¹³ Gordon, “Aramaic Magical Bowls in the Istanbul and Baghdad Museums,” 331–34 (bowls E and F). I have ignored obvious errors in both bowls (see Gordon’s commentary for these). The third text was published by H. Hyvernat in “Sur un vase judéo-babylonien du musée Lycklama de Cannes (Provence),” *Zeitschrift für Keilschriftforschung* 2 (1885) 113–48. This bowl is written for different clients and is somewhat longer, twice including an adjuration against a long list of specific demons, but it adds nothing else notable for our purposes.

¹⁴ Bowl F adds “and orchard.”

¹⁵ Gordon conjectures that the word זְוִמְרִי is a synonym for שְׁשִׁירָא, which I

We see in this text, first of all, the same preoccupation with seals and rings for controlling angels that we find in the Hekhalot literature.¹⁶ But the most notable point is the invoking of “the signet-ring of mighty Michael the Prince of Torah (אִיסְרָא דְאֹרִיחָא).” As far as I can determine, this is the earliest attestation of the angelic title Prince of Torah, which is elsewhere found only in the Hekhalot literature and a few other texts discussed below. Gordon takes it to mean merely that Michael is the prince of Israel (cf. Dan 10:13, 21) and therefore also prince of Israel’s Torah, but the evidence of the Hekhalot literature suggests a different interpretation. As has been noted often, Michael and Metatron have many similarities. For example, Alexander writes,

A proper estimate of Metatron must begin with the fact that he bears a striking resemblance to the archangel Michael. Both these angels stand in a peculiar relationship to Israel as Israel’s special heavenly advocate; both are High Priest of the heavenly tabernacle; both are chief of the angels; what is said in one text about Metatron is said in another about Michael, and *Metatron* appears as a manuscript variant for *Michael*.¹⁷

There is probably some sort of genetic connection between Michael and Metatron, although they are almost always distinguished in surviving literature. In the Hekhalot literature, according to *3 Enoch* 17:1, 3 (§21); *SH-L* §148; and *Merkavah Rabba* §664 (cf. §667), Michael is a separate angel; but a list of angels in *SH-L* §363 (MS New York 8128 only) identifies Metatron with Michael (and Gabriel, Raphael, and many others). In *Ma’aseh Merkavah* §576 (MS New York 8128 only), although Michael is not addressed as the Prince of Torah, he is invoked in a ritual for gaining supernatural aid in Torah study. Given the comparatively early date of this bowl incantation,¹⁸ it seems likely that in it Michael is thought of as another name for Metatron, who is often called the Prince of Torah.

translate as “ropes.” In place of these words, Hyvernat’s bowl reads כְּשִׁשִׁין אֲבָנֵי זִמְרָא, “with sixty stones of melody,” which may be closer to the original text.

¹⁶ Compare, for example, *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§219–36 and *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§413–17.

¹⁷ Alexander, “The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch,” 162.

¹⁸ Perhaps late in the seventh century CE. The archaeological context of the bowls excavated in Nippur places them in the sixth or early seventh centuries (Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts* 102–105), but the presence of the word “jinnee” (גִּינְנִי or גִּינְנִי) in these bowls indicates that the text was composed long enough after the Islamic conquest for an Arabic word and Islamic concept to have been absorbed into the speech and folklore of the natives (cf. Gordon, “Aramaic Magical Bowls in the Istanbul and Baghdad Museums,” 320).

In Gordon's two bowls the angels and spirits are invoked to protect the named household, but the threat is not made explicit. In the third bowl, published by Hyvernāt, the sealing is against a long list of demons and spirits who are adjured to leave clients alone. Thus the practitioner includes the Prince of Torah among his divine allies against the forces of evil.

Heavenly ascents by practitioners are mentioned twice in the inscribed bowls. Two copies of a text in Syriac script (Montgomery 32 and 33) preserve a Jewish Aramaic adjuration containing a significant *historiola*. I translate the full text.¹⁹

¹This bowl is appointed for the sealing of the house ²and of the wife and of the son of DDYNWY, son of 'YSPNDRMYD, that there may depart from him the tormentress ³and bad dreams. I raise and I lift up a vessel;²⁰ it is a work that has been made ⁴like that which Rav Joshua bar Peraḥya sat and wrote against them: a dismissal²¹ against all the demons, dēws, ⁵satans, liliths, and no-gooders that are in the house of DDYNWY, son of 'YSPNDRMYD. Again, he wrote against them an eternal dismissal ⁶in the name of letter from within letters, letters from within letters, letters of the name, blank space from within blank space, by which were subdued²² ⁷heaven and earth and the mountains, and by which the heights were uprooted and by them were delivered up²³ sorcerers, demons, dēws, satans, liliths, and no-gooders,

¹⁹ Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts* 225–30. I give the lineation of Montgomery 32 and draw on the texts of both 32 and 33 to fill in damaged passages. Unless otherwise indicated I follow the corrections of Epstein in "Gloses babylo-araméennes," *REJ* 74 (1922) 46–49.

²⁰ For the meaning and etymology of פִּירָא, see Stephen A. Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) 84. My translation of the two preceding verbs presumes that before burying the bowl, the practitioner lifted it up while reciting the adjuration inscribed on it. But the meaning is not clear. Following Epstein, Shaul Shaked translates the phrase "I cast a lot and draw (?)" in "The Poetics of Spells: Language and Structure in Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity 1: The Divorce Formula and its Ramifications," in *Mesopotamian Magic: Textual, Historical, and Interpretive Perspectives*, edited by Tzvi Abusch and Karel van der Toorn (Groningen: Styx, 1999) 173–95; the quotation is on p. 176.

²¹ For this word (רִסְחָבְרִיאַ), see Shaul Shaked, "Bagdāna, King of the Demons, and Other Iranian Terms in Babylonian Aramaic Magic," in *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce*, ed. Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin and Pierre Lecoq (Acta Iranica 24–25, 2nd series; Leiden: Brill, 1985) 511–25, esp. pp. 512–13.

²² I translate line 6 as it appears in Montgomery 32, although it is probably somewhat corrupt. For possible emendations, see Epstein, "Gloses babylo-araméennes," *REJ* 74 (1922) 47; note the parallels in Montgomery 33 (the other copy) and 9 (translated below).

²³ I take אִיחַמְסַר to be from the root $\sqrt{\text{MSR}}$, "to transmit, deliver," which makes sense in this context.

⁸and by which he crossed over from the world and ascended above you on high and brought against you spells²⁴ of destruction for destruction and brought (them) out to bring you out ⁹of the house of DDYNWY, son of 'YSPNDRMYD, and from all that belongs to him. You are divorced by the dismissal, and it is bound and sealed and resealed, just as the demons of old did not break their word ¹⁰and the men of old were not diverted. Again, bound, sealed, and resealed is this dismissal in the name of YH YH YH YH YH YH YH YH¹¹. Amen. Amen. Selah.

¹¹Sealed and guarded are the house and residence of DDYNWY, son of 'YSPN[DRMYD], from the tormentress and bad dreams and curse. And may his wife and son be sealed and guarded ¹²from the tormentress and bad dreams and curse and vow and sor[cerers . . .] Amen.

The *historiola* in this bowl is of great importance for our analysis. In it we are told that Rav Joshua bar Peraḥya (a figure known from the rabbinic literature and other incantation bowls, on whom more below) produced adjurations like this one which involved manipulation of the letters of the divine name (cf. line 10) and which gave the user great powers over nature, spirits, and sorcerers. Moreover, he used these same adjurations to ascend to heaven and to return with spells of destruction to use against hostile spirits. The general similarities with the Hekhalot literature are obvious, but it is worth noting a close correspondence with a specific passage, *Hekhalot Zutarti* §349, which was quoted at the beginning of chapter 1 and which is analyzed along with its parallel (§361) in the next chapter. Like Rav Joshua, the figure in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* “is able to ascend on high . . . to descend below,” and “to search out the inhabited world.” He is also able “to recite praise, to combine letters, to recite their names”—in other words, to manipulate letters and divine names to create words of power. This person also has great powers over the natural and spiritual worlds, for he is able “to see a vision on high, to see a vision below, to know the explanation of the living, and to see the vision of the dead, to walk in rivers of fire, and to know the lightning.” In this text Rav Joshua conforms well to the description of the practitioners in the Hekhalot literature.

The purpose of this bowl is to protect a particular man and his family (the names differ in the two bowls) from malign influences, including various types of hostile spirits, sorcerers, and bad dreams.

²⁴ For the word שִׁבְלֵי (שִׁבְלֵי), see Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:65.

As with the previous bowls, these applications are somewhat atypical compared to the adjurations in the Hekhalot literature. True, in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §566-R: Ishmael seals his body with seven seals against the angel of the Presence who figures in §§560-65; in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §83 it is said that the descender to the chariot "recognizes all sorcerers"; and easy dreams are promised to the reciter of the *Shi'ur Qomah* in *Merkavah Rabba* §705. But such benefits are mentioned only rarely and apply to the practitioner or his disciple rather than to a client.

The third bowl that mentions an ascent, Montgomery 9,²⁵ is written in the Aramaic language and script. Its contents are closely related to those of the two bowls in Syriac script, so much so that we must conclude that they are based on the same template, but this bowl is in some ways even more striking.

¹I raise and I [lift-up]-a vessel, and a work.²I have made, and it was at the court se[ssion] of Rabbi Joshua ³bar Peraḥya. I write for them bills of divorce, for all liliths who appear to them in this (house) ⁴of BBNWŠ son of QYWMT[¹T], and of P(!)DR<D>WST, daughter of ŠRYN, his wife, in a dream of the night and in sleep ⁵of the day, that is, a bill of divorce of dis[charge] and of release. In the name of letter from within letter and letters from within letters ⁶and name from within the names and blank space from within [the blank spaces] by which heaven and earth were subdued, the mountains were uprooted, and by them the heights were abased.²⁶ ⁷O demons, sorcerers, dēws, no-gooders, and liliths, by them perish from the world! Therefore I have ascended above you(!)²⁷ on high and I brought against you ⁸a destroyer to destroy you(!)²⁸ and to bring y[ou out] of their house and out of their residence and out of their threshold and from every [. . .] place of the bed of BBNWŠ, son of QYWMT, and of PDRDWST, daughter of ŠRYN, his wife. And again, [may they] not [appear to

²⁵ Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts* 161-64. Unless otherwise indicated I follow the corrections of Epstein in "Gloses babylo-araméennes," *REJ* 73 (1921) 37-40. I have also taken into account Shaked's translation, commentary, and transcription in "The Poetics of Spells," 176-80, 188. In the same article, pp. 188-89, Shaked publishes a transcription of Bowl 11 in the Moussaieff collection, which is written for different clients but overlaps most of the text of Montgomery 9.

²⁶Or "were delivered up," as in Montgomery 32.7. But Epstein's derivation from $\sqrt{\text{סרע, סרע, סרה}}$ makes better sense here. On the basis of Montgomery's copy, Shaked prefers Montgomery's reading $\sqrt{\text{איחמסיאה}}$ and translates "melt away." The latter reading is supported by the text of Bowl Moussaieff 11.7.

²⁷Emended to $\sqrt{\text{עליכון}}$, with Montgomery 32.8. The text reads "above them" ($\sqrt{\text{עליון}}$).

²⁸Emended to $\sqrt{\text{עליכון}}$ on the basis of context. The text reads "against them" ($\sqrt{\text{עליון}}$).

them,] either in a dream of the night or in slee[p of the da]y. I discharge and dismiss y[ou] with a bill of divorce of disch[arge and] a dismissal document ¹⁰and a letter of release according to the law of the daughter of Israel.

(On the exterior of the bowl.) ¹¹I have made (it) for Your (sg.) name, YHWH, God of hosts, Gabriel and Michael and Raphael. Your (sg.) seal is on this sealing and on this threshold.²⁹ Amen. Amen. S[elah.]

In this bowl too we have manipulation of letters and divine names to generate ritual power. Although it appears in a quite different context here, the sealing of thresholds is reminiscent of the descenders to the chariot crossing the thresholds of the various celestial palaces by means of seals that subdue their guardians (e.g., *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§219–36). We should remark also on the apparent identification of YHWH with the three angels. The Hekhalot literature also sometimes fails to distinguish clearly between God and the angels (e.g., *Hekhalot Zutarti* §419; §597; but see also n. 29 above).

But the most notable parallel to the Hekhalot literature is the use of powerful adjurations, not by R. Joshua, but by the practitioner himself to ascend on high. This ascent is especially significant in that it is tied directly to the purpose of the bowl, to drive away demons who have been troubling the sleep of the clients. The practitioner serves these demons with divorce papers, a common strategy in the inscribed bowls, and then ascends to heaven to bring down a destroying angel who expels them from the household. The last element is somewhat reminiscent of the summoning of the Prince of the Presence in *Sar Panim* §§623–39. For good measure, the threshold is also sealed with the divine name to prevent any repossession. Once again, ritual practices found in the Hekhalot literature are used for the benefit of clients rather than just for the practitioner.

Lesses has drawn attention to another bowl that contains traditions related to the Hekhalot literature, although in this case there are no verbal correspondences.³⁰ Bowl Moriah 1, published by Gordon in 1984, is a complex of adjurations for the protection of MH'NWS,

²⁹ For Montgomery's חזמוך ("Your [sg.] seal") Shaked reads חזימו ("they have sealed") and, putting a full stop after "God of hosts," he translates the rest of the line "Gabriel, Michael and Raphael signed this seal and this threshold. Amen. Amen, Amen, Selah." Shaked's reading is a possible emendation but the final *kap* is clear on Montgomery's copy.

³⁰ Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 359–62.

son of 'ZRMWDWK, his wife, Eve, and their children from the attacks of demons and "hated dreams."³¹ Their house, residence, and threshold are sealed and resealed against them with seven charms, seven fetters, seven seals, and seven other things, perhaps primordial names. Numerous kinds of demons are exorcised. The bowl goes on to mention a great seal (line 14), the sealing of the throne (line 15), and the wheels and living creatures (lines 15–16). After another adjuration against demons, we read, "For sealed and resealed in the name of Anaphiel, the angel who is different from after them, whose name is called MRGWG" (lines 17b–18a).³² More invocations of names to drive away the demons follow. Then we read,

^{21b}In the name of the epiphany of YHWH of hosts, enthroned over the cherubim (cf. Ps 80:2, 5, 20), blessed be His name. Selah.

And in the name of Anaphiel, His angel, by this mystery and by this name, sealed and resealed and closed is this house and residence ²²and threshold and bed, wife; sons and daughters, and all the household of this MHP'NWS', son of 'ZRMWDWK, and of this Eve, his wife, from demons and from dēws and from satans and from lilitis and from hated dreams and from all evil spirits from this day and forever.

In the name of 'ZYZYH BWRY SWRY, ²³the Good W'ZGD, by this mystery and by this great name and with this seal of authority by which Anaphiel, His angel, is sealed. And with the seal-ring of 'DWNWNY'L which cursers³³ fasten.

The text concludes (through line 26) with more adjurations and invocations of names against the demons.

Aside from numerous less significant references to ideas found in the Hekhalot literature (the great seal, seven seals, *nomina barbara*, the throne, wheels, living creatures, and cherubim), this bowl contains a fairly important complex of traditions about the angel Anaphiel. Lesses notes three parallels to ideas about Anaphiel in the Hekhalot literature. First, the *nomen barbarum* MRGWG applied to him in line 18 is similar to names applied to Metatron in *Pereq di R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah* §310 (MDGWBY'L, MRG, MRGWBY'L) and in *Merkawah Rabba* §682 (MRGYWWY'L and variants). Second, the mention of Anaphiel being sealed by a "seal of rulership" brings to mind the tradition in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §241 that "the seal ring of the seal of

³¹ Gordon, "Magic Bowls in the Moriah Collection," 220–25.

³² The exact meaning of the phrase and what precisely is being sealed is not entirely clear. I interpret the participle מְסֻלָּם as an Itpael form.

³³ The word is not clear, but I follow Gordon's reading (מְסֻלָּם).

heaven and earth is delivered over to” this angel. There is a hint here of the special status ascribed to Anaphiel in the Hekhalot literature as God’s second in command. Third, we are told in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §421 that if he is properly invoked, Anaphiel can be adjured to do the will of a practitioner and to avenge any slander against the practitioner. This bowl is a concrete example of such an invocation, with the purpose of protecting and purging specified clients from demonic harassment. I would add that the reference to Anaphiel as “the angel who is different from after them” may imply a special status for him with reference to the other spirit beings. And in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §242 he is granted a very special status, for he receives adoration and perhaps even worship from most of the other angels:

And as soon as all who are on high see him, they bow down and fall and prostrate themselves before him. This is unheard-of on high. If you say they do not fall before the Prince of the Presence, rather apart from those who stand before the throne of glory—for they do not prostrate themselves before the Prince of the Presence—they prostrate themselves before Anaphiel the prince with permission and willingly.

Bowl Moriah 1 does not touch as directly on the central ideas and practices of the Hekhalot literature as the other bowls analyzed above, but it does parallel Hekhalot traditions about the exalted angel Anaphiel who may be adjured to do the will of a properly instructed human being.

Finally, Shaked has published an inscribed bowl, Moussaieff 1, whose text has numerous general connections to the Hekhalot literature, although it does not reproduce any specific passages or mention any crucially significant doctrines or practices.³⁴ The bowl invokes the name of God to heal a named woman from spirits who are afflicting her with numerous health problems. It also includes an invocation of the angels which reads as follows:

^{8b}Peace to you, angels on high! ⁹Peace to you, bands of the host! Peace to you, seraphim of flame! Peace to you, wheels of the chariot! Peace to you, ophanim and cherubim! Peace to you, living creatures of glory(!) Peace to you, spirit of fire that comes from the north! (Cf. Ezek 1:4.) Peace to you, ¹⁰spirit of fire that comes from the south and kindling flame “and brightness to Him all around” (Ezek 1:27), “the

³⁴ Shaked, “Peace Be upon You, Exalted Angels,” esp. pp. 198–200, 207–11.

likeness of four living creatures and this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man" (Ezek 1:5)! Peace to you, attending angels who attend before Him Who sits enthroned over the four ¹¹cherubim, who have sixty-four faces!

May she have life—MHDWK, daughter of NYWNDWK, who has fixed to her a spirit in her temple and in her ear, and it is making use of the seven orifices of her head. It closes her mouth, impales her face, and confuses her tongue ¹²in her mouth and is fixed to her in the inside of her navel and in her bowels and rules over the two hundred fifty-two members in her.

The text in the rest of line 12 and line 13 is damaged and its meaning not entirely clear, but the practitioner makes a request and refers to "Him Who is enthroned about the four cherubim who have sixty-four faces." Seraphim named ZNPY'L and ZBPY'L stand before God, as does "Metatron, Prince of the Presence," and two other angels named ḤWPNY'L and QṬNY'L. In addition, Isa 6:3 (the trisagion) is quoted in line 14.

As Shaked demonstrates, nearly every phrase in the first paragraph has a parallel in the Hekhalot literature. The writer is familiar with the liturgical traditions associated with these texts and connects them to the idea that angels may be called upon to heal victims of demonic oppression.

Many other Babylonian Aramaic bowls have a scattering of parallels to the Hekhalot texts, but the ones surveyed in this section have the most significant ones and demonstrate adequately the close relationship between the two corpora.

Amulets and Handbooks from the Cairo Geniza

An initial word is in order concerning the physical characteristics and literary forms of the texts of ritual power which have been recovered from the Cairo Geniza. Such texts may come in the form of individual "amulets," that is, single spells copied onto one or more pages for the use of a client, who is often named. Texts of ritual power may also appear in a codex. Such codices usually come down to us in very fragmentary form; often only one or a few pages from a given codex survive. A codex may consist simply of a group of (often unrelated) rituals or spells collected within the same binding, presumably for the convenience of a particular practitioner. I refer to such collections as "handbooks." But a codex may also consist of what I term a "treatise," that is, a text that has collected spells and

traditions of ritual power and redacted them in such a way that they now form a single work with defined boundaries. Handbooks and treatises may appear together in a single codex.³⁵

In this section I first analyze individual spells that appear in either amulets or handbooks, with careful attention to their form and genre. In the next section, I then survey the treatises that are preserved only or completely in their earliest forms in codices from the Cairo Geniza. Finally, I look at a treatise of ritual power which survives mainly in later medieval manuscripts preserved outside the Cairo Geniza. As with the metal amulets and the inscribed bowls, the aim is to collect significant parallels to the Hekhalot literature.

We find a passage from the *Hekhalot Zutarti* in a single leaf of a codex written in Hebrew and Aramaic in an oriental semicursive script of the eleventh century.³⁶ The text on the leaf reads as follows:³⁷

(1a) ¹[. . . exp]licating from ²[. . .] His name. Blessed be ³[. . .] blessed and blest be His name ⁴[. . .] blessed and blest be His name ⁵[. . . King of] kings of kings, blessed be He, ⁶for He is from of old³⁸ from all creatures and kept secret ⁷from the attending angels. “This is my name forever.” ⁸“This is my name forever.” “This is my name forever” (Exod 3:15). ⁹And what is His name? HMGPG HBR ZGL HQKR ¹⁰GGLP ‘Z ‘N ‘T SY BYH ṬY ‘GLG ¹¹LPY WW’ WWY BYWHWN, which is the explicit name.

¹²In the name of HY YWD ‘LP HY YWD G‘YH SSYH ¹³ŠLPN THŠ MMYŠY YS H’ Y‘Y ‘H DYQ ¹⁴[. . .] WTYH ‘BR RHYM M‘H WBYM YŠ’ ¹⁵MLMM YHY Y‘Y ‘Y HYY HH, the God ¹⁶[great] and mighty, the glorified and strong, W[h]o i[s] ¹⁷[hidde]n from the eyes of the creatures and kept secret from [the attendi]ng ¹⁸ang[els] but is revealed to R. Akiva for the working of the cha[riot], ¹⁹[to d]o his desire. This is “each who calls on [My] name, ²⁰[and for] my [glo]ry I crea[t]ed him” (Isa 43:7); so may he do my wish and my desire ²¹[and what] I [ask] and my every request. Amen. Selah. YY’ is King, YY’ is King, ²²[YY’ will be Kin]g forever. Amen. Selah.

(1b) ¹This is the name that [. . .] ²and to make understand and to teach [. . .] ³in all that he [. . .] ⁴the names on each day after your prayer and [. . .] ⁵evil, may these words be abolished from you. ⁶HY

³⁵ See Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic* 7–8; Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:5–10.

³⁶ T.-S. NS 91.53, in Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 3:185–90.

³⁷ The transcriptions of the *nomina barbara* are not always certain.

³⁸ As noted by Schäfer and Shaked (*Magische Texte* 3:189), the word “of old” (בְּעוֹלָם) is a corruption of “is hidden” (בְּעֵלָם); cf. *Hekhalot Zutarti* §421).

HW HW YH Y' WHW HW 'Y HW HW YK HWW 'WYHYK ⁷at Sinai BYH is His name 'HY WH HĻĻKH glory Š[M] ⁸ML L'.

Koinologia —

⁹You holy letters and these holy names, ¹⁰guard me—I am DRKWT, son of YPT, and all m[y household](?) from every ¹¹satan and from every evil stroke and from every human being who [...] ¹²[and g]live me grace and kindness and mercies in the eyes of all [...] ¹³[...] WGTYH T'WN YHWN YH [...] ¹⁴This is the name of the twenty-two l[ette]rs [...] ¹⁵YH YHWH YH' YHWH H [...] ¹⁶upon the holy diadem and [...] magnificent [...]

This leaf seems to come from a handbook of spells. The second paragraph (1a 12–22) appears in much the same form in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §421 as part of an incantation prayer revealed by the angel Anaphiel. In the present context it is part of a larger incantation prayer (or series of such prayers) that extends from 1a 1–1b 8. The rest of the page (1b 8–16) preserves the first part of a “koinologia.” The Greek word, meaning something like “common speech,” is written in Hebrew letters; it is a technical term that appears elsewhere in the ritual power texts from the Cairo Geniza.³⁹ The first three paragraphs invoke various divine names in order to gain the granting of the user’s wishes and protection for the user. There is also mention of the teaching of something, presumably to the practitioner (1b 3), and a reference to daily recitation of the names after prayer (1b 4). The koinologia invokes sacred letters and names for the protection of a specific practitioner and for the granting of favor to him.

There is nothing to indicate that the passage paralleled in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* has been lifted out of that work and placed in this incantation prayer. It fits perfectly well in its current context, which is the earliest one attested in terms of the dates of the manuscripts, although it fits just as well in §421. But it makes no difference which, if either, context is original. The important point is that Anaphiel indicates that it is to be used, and the Geniza fragment preserves it in the context of a handbook of rituals meant for use.

The invocation of the Prince of Torah is also attested in the Cairo Geniza texts. Two contiguous leaves survive from a handbook of recipes, which bear four pages of Aramaic written in an oriental semicursive script of the twelfth century.⁴⁰ The last page concludes with the following passage:

³⁹ Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 3:190.

⁴⁰ T.-S. K. 1.19: Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae*, 158–64 and pls. 37–38.

(4) ⁷For the opening of the heart and for forgetfulness.

⁸Write on 7 leaves of myrtle and blot them out ⁹with wine and let him drink and imbibe: NYSTWKWS ¹⁰B' B' B' TRMYWS LLSMS 'RY GSP. ¹¹Wisdom is given to the sage and Torah ¹²to the insightful, and by it shines [*sic*] the eyes of the unfortunate and there is opened ¹³the heart of the dullard. So may my own heart shine and be opened—I am ¹⁴so-and-so, son of so-and-so—that I may learn Torah and I may become occupied with wisdom, ¹⁵that I may learn Torah and not forget. In your name I call on ¹⁶Metatron, the Prince of the Presence, who is the Prince of Torah. ¹⁷'MY'L is your name; KNYNY' is your name; MYQWN 'YṬMWN ¹⁸PYSQWN STGRWN is your name, you whose name is like your master's.

Although it does not appear in the Hekhalot literature, this recipe was written by someone very familiar with Hekhalot traditions. In *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§573–75, leaves are inscribed with *nomina barbara* and blotted out in spells involving Metatron and Torah proficiency. Myrtle leaves are put to the same use in a recipe for answered prayer in *Merkava Rabba* §660. Metatron is called both Prince of the Presence and Prince of Torah in the Hekhalot literature;⁴¹ the names MYQWN, 'YṬMWN, and PYSQWN are applied to him (see *3 Enoch* 48D:1 [§76] and G12 2a 10–11); and he is addressed in an adjuration with the phrase “you whose name is like your master's” in *Merkavah Rabba* §706.

The context of this passage is illuminating. It is preceded by a series of recipes to call up ritual power for numerous situations. The first page begins with the end of an incantation prayer concerning the enthroned God, a prayer to be inscribed on an earthenware bowl, which is then broken (1.1–6a). It is followed by an amulet for curing a sterile woman (1.6b–16);⁴² an invocation of angels for help in opening locks (1.17–18); another invocation of numerous angels, including ones who are appointed over the thresholds of the third through sixth firmaments, for the same purpose (2.1–18); a recipe for curing a scorpion sting (2.19–3.5a); another recipe for the cure of a sterile woman (3.5b–12); a recipe to prevent miscarriage (3.13–16a); a recipe for aiding a woman during difficult childbirth (3.16b–4.2); and a recipe for helping someone who has chronic fear and

⁴¹ For example, *3 Enoch* 1:4 (§1) and passim; *SH-L* §389//§959; §397; §947; G11 1a 18 (Prince of the Presence); *3 Enoch* 48D:6 (§77); *SH-L* §389 (MS New York 8128) (Prince of Torah).

⁴² Note that the amulet cites Cant 1:4, which is quoted for a very different purpose in the story of the four who entered paradise in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §345.

trembling (4.3–6). In other words, the Sar Torah praxis is one of a series of recipes intended for practical use. Presumably the practitioner carried it out along with the others.⁴³

More spells for Torah learning are preserved in two badly damaged but contiguous leaves from a handbook written in Hebrew in an oriental semicursive hand of the fourteenth or fifteenth century.⁴⁴ The first page includes three recipes (numbers 1–3 in the text): for protection in a dangerous place (1a 1–4); for protection while one is traveling (1a 5–8); and for deliverance from robbers (1a 9–17). Then on the verso we read,

(1b) ¹Whoever studies but does not <remember> and recites in his heart, let him explicate and he shall remember.

²I, so-and-so, son of so-and-so, adjure Šāqād Hōzay, Prince of the Presence, who is called ³by the 5 names that I invoke: []mi⁴el, Gözt⁵el, ⁶Özi Z(Y)rta⁷, Dakēr⁸el YY⁹ ??, [God of I]sraēl. Immediately ¹⁰his eyes are illuminated and as for water his heart thirsts for the learning of Torah. ¹¹And when he occupies himself with Torah, he shall forget nothing. The End.

There follow fragmentary praxes for protection from an evil man (1b 7–10) and from robbers (1b 11–17). The next leaf commences with an amulet for safety in the water (2a 1–5?), followed by what appears to be a recipe for helping a woman during difficult labor (2a 5–8). The verso begins with a spell for teleportation from place to place (קפיצת הדרך; 2b 1–6). The last lines that survive on the leaf read:

(2b) ⁷15. Whoever wishes to learn much Torah must do (what) Rabban Gamaliel (did) ⁸for Rabbi Nehuniah ben HaQanah. He must make a cake w[ith]thou[t . . .] ⁹and he must bake it with [. . .] ¹⁰[. . .]

⁴³ The handwriting, layout, and physical characteristics of T.-S. K 1.19 appear to be identical to T.-S. AS 142.13 + T.-S. NS 317.18, two noncontiguous leaves of recipes of ritual power written in Hebrew and Aramaic with some Arabic words. Certainty is impossible without a direct examination of the manuscripts, but it is very probable that all four leaves come from the same codex and perhaps from the same handbook, although the leaves of T.-S. K 1.19 are not contiguous with either of the others. T.-S. AS 142.13 was published by Schäfer as G20 in *Geniza-Fragmente* 169–70, then again with T.-S. NS 317.18 by Schäfer and Shaked as no. 69 in *Magische Texte* 3:143–52.

⁴⁴ T.-S. AS 143.171: Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 3:134–42.

The first passage adjures the angel Šāqād Hōzay (the vowels are given in the manuscript), who is also called the Prince of the Presence. The name, which appears with many variations in the Hekhalot literature, is applied to the “angel of the Presence” in *Ma‘aseh Merkawah* §§561, 584, and 585; to Metatron in *Merkawah Rabba* §682 and G19 1a 26; to “Metatron, Prince of the Presence,” and “Metatron, angel of the Presence,” in G19 1a 16–19; and it is given as the name of one of “the Princes of Torah” in G22 1a 37. It appears in a list of angels to be adjured in *Sar Torah* §301. Likewise, the Prince of the Presence is identified with Metatron frequently,⁴⁵ and with the Prince of Torah in *3 Enoch* 48D:6 (§77) and *Ma‘aseh Merkawah* §560. The second passage ties the learning of Torah to a ritual associated with R. Gamaliel and R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah, which involves the baking of a cake. R. Gamaliel never figures in the Hekhalot literature, but R. Nehuniah is one of the three major human characters in the texts. Special rules regarding the preparation of food are characteristic of *Sar Torah* praxes (e.g., *Sar Torah* §299). Thus this handbook too is well acquainted with Hekhalot traditions. And like T.-S. K 1.19, it indicates that at least some practitioners who used *Sar Torah* praxes also used many other rituals of power, some for themselves and some for clients.

One more Geniza text has a direct reference to *Sar Torah* traditions. It is a single leaf, which Naveh and Shaked describe as “a dedicatory text written on a codex of the Pentateuch.”⁴⁶ Anyone who sells, steals, or removes it is cursed with a series of curses:

^{6b}And may he be excommunicated in the name of 'KTRY'L YH YH YHWH of hosts. ⁷And may he be excommunicated by the mouth of Him Who is enthroned above the cherubim. And may he be excommunicated by the throne of glory. ⁸And may he be excommunicated by the living creatures and the ophanim. And may he be excommunicated by the mouth of Metatron. ⁹And may he be excommunicated by the mouth of YPYPHYH, the Prince of Torah.

The writer is well aware of Hekhalot traditions, including the name YPYPHYH applied to the Prince of Torah (cf. *3 Enoch* 48D:6 [§77]). I am not aware of the Prince of Torah being invoked in a curse

⁴⁵ See n. 41.

⁴⁶ T.-S. 12.41: Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae* 212–14; the quotation is on p. 214.

elsewhere, but this dedication demonstrates once again that he was drawn on for ritual power.⁴⁷

Shaked has drawn attention to two consecutive leaves from a Geniza codex (T.-S. K 1.35 + T.-S. K 1.48) which have parallels to the visionary ascent tradition and to the adjuration of angels in the Hekhalot literature.⁴⁸ This Hebrew text, written in an oriental semi-cursive hand of the eleventh to twelfth century, contains a prayer text of uncertain purpose (1a 1–15a) followed by a carefully structured set of recipes for ritual power. It is these recipes that is our focus. Each begins with the formula “If you seek . . .” (אם ביקשת),⁴⁹ followed by the aim sought, a list of *nomina barbara* to be recited to accomplish the aim, and a concluding formula from one of the eighteen benedictions of the *Amida*, each in its correct consecutive order. The work concludes with an unofficial but traditional-sounding benedictory prayer at the bottom of the recto of the second leaf. The verso contains the beginning of another work, the treatise *Sheva‘ Ma‘alot*. Shaked aptly sums up the implications of the structure of the composition: “It seems that this arrangement was chosen so as to introduce the various magic recipes into the prayer book, or (what amounts to nearly the same thing) to use the prayer book as a magical handbook.”⁵⁰

The relevant sections read as follows:

If you seek to see the angels so that they show you all your desires and everything you seek from them . . . (1a 26b–27)

⁴⁷ Other Cairo Geniza texts include spells for aid in remembering Torah. See T.-S. K 1.28 3a 10–13 (Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:133–50); T.-S. K 1.162 1b 37–39, 40–45 (*ibid.*, 3:65–88); T.-S. NS 322.59 + T.-S. AS 143.169 2a 2, 12–13, 18–20; 2b 1 (*ibid.*, 335–56). Still others provide rituals to aid memory in general; see T.S. K 1.132 1.1–8 (Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae* 181–88); JTSL ENA 1177.20 20b 2–4 (Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 3:55–59); T.-S. Misc. 11.12 1a 1–8 (*ibid.*, 107–10); Westminster College Misc. 117 1a 8–9 (*ibid.*, 167–73); T.-S. NS 324.92 1b 9–19 (*ibid.*, 357–65).

⁴⁸ Shaked, “Peace Be upon You, Exalted Angels,” 204–205. The text is published by Schäfer and Shaked in *Magische Texte* 2:100–117. Peter Schäfer has also analyzed it in “Jewish Liturgy and Magic,” in *Geschichte—Tradition—Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*, vol. 1: *Judentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996) 541–56, esp. pp. 544–49.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of this formula, see Schäfer, “Jewish Magic Literature in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages,” 85–88.

⁵⁰ Shaked, “Peace Be upon You, Exalted Angels,” 204.

If you seek to speak wi[th] the four-faced [living crea]tures, to have made known to you your d[esi]re . . . (2a 2–3a)

If you seek for the prince of the hosts of YY' to speak with you, that he may make known to you your request . . . (2a 5b–6)

If you seek to see “the wonders of the One perfect in knowledge” (cf. Job 37:16) and the throne of glory and the attending angels . . . (2a 8b–10a)

The first three passages describe how to make divinatory use of angels, the living creatures before God's throne, and “the prince of the host of YY’,” respectively. The title of the last angel is from Josh 5:14–15, but Schäfer and Shaked note that it is also applied to Metatron in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §341 (MS New York 8128). The last passage gives a praxis to obtain a vision of the throne of glory, with no particular additional aim attached to it. The ritual praxis prescribed is simpler than those found in the Hekhalot texts. It seems to amount merely to reciting a few *nomina barbara*—perhaps, by implication, during one's daily prayers. The recitation of divine names appears in many of the Hekhalot rituals, but they are nearly always accompanied by ascetic praxes. The instructions for the descent to the chariot given by R. Nehuniah in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§203–205 include only the recital of divine names, but structured in a context of hypnotic repetition. The same sort of repetition may perhaps be assumed here, but it is never mentioned. Perhaps the closest parallel to the practice in this text is the aside in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §564 which encourages readers who find it too difficult to carry out the prescribed ascetic practice to inscribe three *nomina barbara* on a cup instead, and tells them “do not trouble yourselves with the words of the mighty.”

In any case, in this document the command of angels and visionary experience are connected once again with numerous other goals, including to revive the dead (1a 21); to have a request granted by a sultan (1b 8); to save someone from death (1b 11); to speak with wisdom (1b 23); to speak with the moon and the sun (1b 26b–27a, 29b); to make demons perform services (2a 12b–13a); and to make animals perform services (2a 15b–16a).

I have found only one reference to ascending or descending to the chariot in the ritual power texts outside the Hekhalot literature. It occurs in an execration written in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Judeo-Arabic on one side of a single leaf, inscribed in an oriental semicursive script

of the thirteenth century.⁵¹ The practitioner, Mashiah son of Şemah, invokes a curse on a thief. The other side of the leaf is a private letter. The relevant passage of the execration reads:

(1a) ^{20b}And excommunication ²¹from the mouth of Judah bar Ezekiel and Joshua ben Levi and Jonathan ben Uzziel and Joshua ben Perahya; ²²and from the mouth of Nehuniah ben HaQanah and Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva, they who ascended and descended ²³to the chariot.

All of the figures listed in this passage have some connection with Hekhalot traditions. In the rabbinic literature, the first three transmit material about the Merkavah. According to the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, Joshua ben Uzziel was a member of R. Nehuniah's inner circle (§203). We have encountered Joshua ben Perahya in the texts of the inscribed bowls, and I will say more about him below. The last three are grouped together as those who ascended and descended to the chariot, and indeed they are the major protagonists in the Hekhalot literature. The curses of these men are apparently especially effective, presumably because of their closeness to the divine. The text shows that the composer was aware of Hekhalot traditions but adds little to our knowledge of their social background.

These are the most significant parallels to the Hekhalot literature in the texts of ritual power from the Cairo Geniza. In addition, there are countless minor connections. A good example of a text containing many such details is T.-S. K 1.68, a long amulet in Hebrew and Aramaic commissioned by a husband to restore his wife's love and to protect her from enemies and sorcery.⁵² In passing, this incantation prayer refers to the 390 firmaments; the four living creatures that bear God's throne; a heavenly high priest who has seventy names and who is also the great prince (the name is destroyed, but it was probably Metatron); God enthroned above the cherubim; and the angel Akhatriel.

Some Geniza texts also prescribe ascetic regimes similar to those found in the Hekhalot literature. The most significant of these is T.-S. K 1.28, two leaves from a Hebrew handbook written in an oriental semicursive script of the eleventh century.⁵³ A third page of

⁵¹ T.-S. K 1.148: Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 2:305–11.

⁵² Schiffman and Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts* 143–59.

⁵³ Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:133–50. Others include JTSL ENA 2643 6b 1b–7a 25 (ibid., 67–78), which has a parallel in Westminster College Misc. 16

the codex survives which contains material from the *Shimush Tehillim*, a treatise on the use of the Psalms to gain ritual power. The relevant passage of the handbook gives a set of praxes for dream inquiries:

(1a) ¹¹Request for a dream, tested ¹²and tried:

Purify yourself for 3 days and ¹³fast all day long for 3 days ¹⁴and wear pure, clean, washed clothes ¹⁵and write on the left hand:

On behalf of so-and-so, son of so-and-so. ¹⁶Holy, holy, holy, holy, holy. "This is My name forever and this is" (Exod 3:15) ŠDY ŠDY. ¹⁷"I am Who I am" (Exod 3:14). "Puissant" (Ps 89:9).

(1b) ¹"YH is One" (cf. Deut 6:4). Whose name is YY' of hosts, YY' of hosts, ²YY' God, YY' God, Who is enthroned above the wheels of ³the chariot. I myself call to you, Michael, the great prince, ⁴that you may come beside me and show me everything that I seek ⁵from you on this night in truth and fasting.

And you may not eat and you may not ⁶drink for ²⁵⁴ days and one night. And you must be sleeping in a pure ⁷place, and he shall make known to you all that you desire.

⁸Another good and fine and tested and truthful one:

⁹Fast for 3 days, and on the third night ¹⁰go to sleep without eating and wear pure clothes ¹¹and go far away from the house that has a woman in it, and say ¹²⁷ times, "YY' is my Shepherd, I shall lack nothing" (Ps 23:1)—the whole psalm. ¹³Then you must say:

I adjure you (pl.) that you show me whatever ¹⁴I seek and you make known to me what I ask and my request.

2a 1b–2b 13 (Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 3:21–29); T.-S. K 1.1 (Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:79–82); T.-S. K 1.74 2b 6–11 (Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 2:118–25); JTSL ENA 2871 7b 1–16 (*ibid.*, 126–31); Westminster College Misc. 117 1b 1–7 (Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 3:167–73).

In addition, the text of a book of ritual power appears in several of the Hekhalot manuscripts (*SH-L* §§489–97). It opens with a claim the book was revealed by God to the angels, who in turn revealed it to human beings, then continues with detailed instructions in Aramaic for an ascetic regime to be followed by whoever finds this book, instructions generally quite similar to those for such regimes in the Hekhalot literature (a long partial fast, self-isolation, avoidance of impurity, a special diet, and numerous immersions). The practitioner must then study the book until he receives a revelation from it. The document continues with a description of the dire torments awaiting the one who sells the secret, followed by an equally enthusiastic account of the material and spiritual blessings that attend the one who keeps the secret (§490). Most of the rest of the text consists of adjurations and divine names to be used by the practitioner (§§491–94). The next section repeats the order to read the book in an isolated place near a river, gives another incantation, and promises safety and prosperity to any household that owns the book. The document closes with a corrupt account of R. Akiva's ascent in a wagon of fire (cf. *Hekhalot Zūtarti* §366) in §496 and an adjuration for binding the earth in §497. The ascetic rituals and the ascent of R. Akiva are points of contact with the Hekhalot literature.

⁵⁴ Emending "42" (דב) to "2" (ב), with Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:147–48.

¹⁵And go to sleep and you shall see a wonder, for they shall come to you and say ¹⁶to you your wish and what you asked.

Other surviving recipes from the same handbook include a love charm (1a 2–11a); ways to identify a thief (1b 16–2a 19); a treatment for insomnia (2b 2–7); a spell to cure a wife's hatred of her husband (2b 8–13a); and an adjuration ritual to compel a man to become pious (2b 13b–21). The similarities of the translated passage to the Hekhalot literature are fairly general, but also pervasive. As we have seen, especially in chapter 4, Hekhalot praxes include fasting, the wearing of clean clothes, isolation from women, recitations, and adjurations of angels, including Michael. The Merkavah scene is mentioned briefly in this passage as well. The most that can be said is that such a text might easily have been composed by a tradent of the Hekhalot literature and that someone who performed Hekhalot rituals might well have performed this one, but we cannot be sure that either was the case.⁵⁵

Two Treatises from the Cairo Geniza

The *'Inyan Sotah*, a treatise on “the matter of the straying wife,” survives in a single manuscript, JTSL ENA 3635.17, on a leaf with two columns on each side, written in Hebrew in an oriental semicursive hand of the twelfth century.⁵⁶ The first column contains some material of minor significance, but which is worth noting.

(17a) ¹The *'Inyan Sotah*. Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingdom forever and ever, ²He Who created the world with the attribute of mercies ³and created the angels in heaven, group upon ⁴group and hosts upon hosts. And He created ⁵the spirits and the demons and the harmful demons ⁶a thousand years before He created Adam, ⁷and all the names He nicknamed the angels ⁸who attend before Him with praise and with song—⁹they wrote all of them down from the mouth of R. Ishmael, the high ¹⁰priest. And R. Ishmael (did so) from the mouth of Metatron, the Prince of ¹¹the Presence, and from those who

⁵⁵ One of the major Hekhalot manuscripts (New York 8128) includes some dream inquiry rituals in §§501–507, 517. These give praxes for summoning the Dream Prince (שר דלום) and having him reveal information during one's sleep. The praxes include three-day fasts, recitation of scriptural verses and adjurations, procedures for preparation for sleep, and rules of etiquette for one's encounter with the Dream Prince. Lesses has translated the passage and collected other dream inquiries (*Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 395–411; she discusses them in detail, including the one translated above, on pp. 230–54).

⁵⁶ Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:17–28.

revealed them to Moses at Sinai ¹²and at the bush, and from those who revealed it to Elijah at Mount Carmel ¹³and from those who revealed it to every single prophet from the mouth of ¹⁴MSMRYH, who stands before the curtain, until ¹⁵the time of the Sanhedrin of Israel, who knew the 70 ¹⁶names and the name in purity and the name in impurity ¹⁷and each root of usage; they knew everything. ¹⁸So know and understand these names that have been kept secret, ¹⁹which as the explicit name they made the ²⁰straying wife drink. And from the power of the names her stomach would swell ²¹and her thigh would collapse.⁵⁷

The remainder of the work gives an updated praxis for the ritual in Numbers 5, one that takes into account the present unavailability of a high priest to perform the ritual. The main point of comparison with the Hekhalot literature is the assertion that R. Ishmael received revelations from Metatron, Prince of the Presence.

The contents of the *Sheva' Zutarti* or *Sheva' Eliyahu* are more important for our purposes. This work consists of seven adjurational passages that seek power from God.⁵⁸ The writer is well aware of Merkavah traditions, to which the text alludes frequently. Schäfer has shown that it also alludes to the seven *Amida* benedictions for the Sabbath or holidays.⁵⁹ The first section begins with a blessing on God, then adjures numerous angels and *nomina barbara*, including "YWPY'L, Metatron, Metatron" and the spirit PYSQWNYT (3a 16–17), and refers to the cherubim, Metatron, and chariotry (רכב) of fire (3a 18–19). The second section refers to a palace of light and hail (3b 9), to Metatron and the throne on which he is seated (3b 10), and to the Hashmal (3b 14). The sixth section opens, "And again I adjure you, SYRWYH, angel of the Presence, that he do my will and all my request from before the throne of glory" (5a 15–16).⁶⁰ And in the seventh section we read:

⁵⁷ This passage also appears in almost exactly this form in T.-S. K 1.56 1b 3b–23 (Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:29–45). This manuscript comprises two contiguous leaves written in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Judeo-Arabic in an oriental script of the eleventh century. The leaves contain various instructions regarding rituals of power. In a few places I have followed its reading rather than that of JTSL ENA 3635.17.

⁵⁸ Unless otherwise noted, I quote from T.-S. K 1.144 + T.-S. K 21.95.T + T.-S. K 21.95.TP (Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 2:27–78 = G13–15), a manuscript written in Hebrew and Aramaic in an oriental script of the eleventh century.

⁵⁹ Schäfer, "Jewish Liturgy and Magic," 549–50.

⁶⁰ The corresponding text of Oxford 1531 (Michael 9) reads, "And again I cast

(6a) ⁶By the word of fire and by the speech of fire, and by the chari-
 otry of ⁷fire and by horses of fire and by the thousands of thousands
⁸and by the myriads of myriads of His bands and of ⁹the seraphim
 and of the holy living creatures ¹⁰that stand in awe and in fear ¹¹and
 run before the wheels of the chariot, ¹²may he accomplish redemption
 and save ¹³from harm the one who carries a load; may he heal ¹⁴and
 pursue every spirit from my body and every ¹⁵demon from me. Amen,
 3 times. ¹⁶Selah, 3 times. Hallelujah, 3 times.

The refrain in lines 12–16 appears in each section, with variants. Thus the *Sheva' Zutarti* adjures Metatron and Suriah and refers to details of the scene of the chariot in heaven. But it does not mention Sar Torah powers or the heavenly ascent. Instead it asks generally that the spirits do the will of the practitioner and that they protect him from spirits and demons. Lesses has noted that the copy in MS Oxford 1531 gives the name of the practitioner, demonstrating that these adjurations may still have been in use as late as the fourteenth century.⁶¹ There is considerable overlap in this work with the ideas and practices found in the Hekhalot literature, but it is not certain that it comes from the same circles.

Another Treatise: Sepher HaRazim

When we come to works of ritual power preserved mainly in manuscripts from the later Middle Ages, we move into a very difficult area. As with the Hekhalot texts, the tradents have sometimes exercised a freer hand than we would like, so it is often difficult to determine how old or how heavily reworked a given composition is. My focus is on the social background of the Hekhalot texts in their earliest life situation, which a mass of evidence places securely well before the editorial work of the *Haside Ashkenaz*, so I expend relatively little effort on texts that have likely gone through the hands of these redactors. But in order not to neglect the subject entirely, let us look at one such work, *Sepher HaRazim*, “The Book of Mysteries.” Some manuscripts of this work survive from the Cairo Geniza, but the complete document is known only from later copies and redactions. Nevertheless, there is good evidence for a strong degree of redactional integrity to the work, and its many parallels to the Greek

it before you, Suria', Prince of the Presence, that you do my will and all my request from before your throne of glory.”

⁶¹ Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 261.

magical papyri of the third to fifth centuries CE tend to indicate that its original composition fell sometime in late antiquity.⁶² It also has some material relevant to our inquiry.

The context of the later manuscripts links the work as a whole with the Hekhalot tradition. The six copies with relatively uncontaminated texts are bound after the *Massekhet Hekhalot* and before the *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and the *Shi'ur Qomah*.⁶³ In addition, a Geniza fragment of *Sepher HaRazim* written in the early thirteenth century was originally bound together with a copy of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (G6).⁶⁴ The basic structure of the work as reconstructed by Margalioth is as follows. It describes seven firmaments, each with its own angelic retinue. The first firmament has seven camps of angels with angelic overseers; the second, twelve steps on which angels stand; the third, three princes of fire; the fourth firmament contains the bridal chamber of the sun, which is led by angels of fire by day and by angels of water at night. In the fifth firmament are the twelve angelic princes who preside over the twelve months of the year. The sixth firmament has the place prepared for the deceased righteous spirits as well as two camps of angels, one on the west and one on the east, each ruled by a holy angel. Finally, the seventh firmament is the site of the throne of glory. After the descriptions of each of the first six firmaments, the text gives detailed recipes for calling on its particular spirits for aid. These recipes prescribe adjurations and rites for healing, cursing, divination, necromancy and the calling up of spirits, influencing people, and many other goals.

A note of caution about the text is in order, since Margalioth's reconstruction has been criticized as excessively heavy-handed.⁶⁵ Based on evidence from the Geniza fragments, however, it appears that *Sepher HaRazim* circulated in pre-Ashkenazic copies in something reasonably similar to the form preserved in the later manuscripts and the text reconstructed by Margalioth. The carefully crafted structure of the work allows us to test the redactional integrity of fragmentary copies. For example, MS Oxford Heb. C. 18.30 contains the

⁶² For a detailed comparison of adjurations from *Sepher HaRazim*, the Greek magical papyri, and the Hekhalot literature, see Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 278–325.

⁶³ Margalioth, *Sepher Ha-Razim* 48–49.

⁶⁴ Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente* 82–85.

⁶⁵ E.g., Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* 225–34; Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic," 347–50.

preface of the work and goes up to line 6 of the section describing the first firmament. It thus attests to a recension that included the preface, the first firmament, and an account of its seven overseers. And a first firmament, of course, implies others. MS Cambridge T.-S. K 1.145 contains II 100 to IV 47, thus witnessing to a version that included the twelve steps of the second firmament, the three princes of the third, and the bridal chamber of the sun in the fourth, besides the implication of a first firmament and perhaps others as well.⁶⁶

A number of elements of *Sepher HaRazim* show parallels to the Hekhalot literature. The cosmology is similar, although not identical. It has seven firmaments with attending angels for each and with God enthroned in a Merkavah scene in the seventh firmament. Much of the work consists of instructions for gaining control of the angels of each firmament through ritual power. But there is no mention of celestial palaces or gatekeepers. The introduction makes extravagant claims on behalf of any practitioner who uses the work. We are told that Noah received it from the angel Raziel, inscribed it on a stone of sapphire, and passed it on to his descendants.

⁴And from it he learned working of wonders, and mysteries of knowledge, and arrays of understanding, and thoughts of humility, ⁵and devices of counsel; to take a stand on the searching out of the steps of the heights, and to rove about everywhere ⁶in the seven habitations, and to gaze at all the constellations, and to gain understanding of the custom of the sun, ⁷and to make clear the searchings out of the moon, and to know the highways of the Great Bear and Orion and Draco (Job 9:9); and to tell what are ⁸the names of the overseers of every single firmament, and their kingdom, and how they can bring success in every matter, ⁹and what are the names of their attendants, and what is libated to them, and which is the proper time when you will be heard, ¹⁰for them to do the whole desire of anyone who approaches them in purity; to know from it the working of ¹¹death and the working of life, to understand the evil and the good, to search out seasons and moments, to know ¹²the time to be born and the time to die, the time for smiting and the time for healing (cf. Qoh 3:2-3), to interpret dreams ¹³and visions, to stir up battle and to quell wars, and to rule over spirits and smiters, ¹⁴to send them away so that they go like servants, to look at the four winds of the earth, to be made wise ¹⁵in the

⁶⁶ Margalioth, *Sepher Ha-Razim* 47-48. One Hebrew manuscript includes additions from an expanded Latin translation. Two fragments of the Arabic translation omit the fourth firmament, but this is a secondary bowdlerization of a passage with blatant pagan content, including a Greek prayer to Helios (*ibid.*, 50, 54).

sound of thunderclaps, to recount what is the working of lightning, to tell what will be in every single ¹⁶New Moon, to stand upon the business of every single year, whether for plenty or for famine, whether ¹⁷for provision or for dearth, whether for peace or for war, to become like one of ¹⁸the fearsome ones, and to have insight into the songs on high.

To some degree these claims have analogies in the Hekhalot literature. In *Hekhalot Zutarti* §349//361, for example, we are told that the practitioner is able “to ascend on high” and return. Perhaps something similar is described in *Sepher HaRazim* lines 5–6, where he learns “to take a stand on the searching out of the steps of the heights, and to rove about everywhere in the seven habitations.” Certainly, as in §349//361, he is able to “search out the inhabited world” (cf. lines 6–7, 14–17); “to combine letters” and “to recite their names” to gain power over angels (cf. lines 7–10); “to know the explanation of the living” and “to see a vision of the dead” (cf. lines 10–11); and if not “to walk in rivers of fire,” at least “to know the lightning” (cf. lines 14–15). Likewise, just as in the boastful hymns opening the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§§81–93), the practitioner of *Sepher HaRazim* knows heavenly songs (§81; cf. line 18); knows whether his neighbors are good or evil (§§82–83, 86; cf. lines 10–12); and becomes “like one of the fearsome ones” (lines 17–18).

Most of these parallels might be made by any claimant to great skill in matters of supernatural ritual power. The most significant connection is the apparent claim in lines 5–6 “to take a stand on the searching out of the steps of the heights, and to rove about everywhere in the seven habitations.” I take the phrase “the steps of the heights” to refer to the twelve steps of the second firmament and “the seven habitations” to mean all seven firmaments. If so, it is most natural to read the lines as a claim to experience ascents to heaven. However, no recipes or instructions are given for such ascents in the body of the work, so the claim may come down to the practitioner’s ability to learn about the heavenly realms merely by reading and meditating on the work.

Another parallel is the frequent demand for and instructions regarding ritual purity when carrying out the prescribed praxes. The following is a typical admonition from the section on the second firmament:

(II) ^{6b}And if you seek to ask ⁷something from any who stand on the steps of the second firmament, cleanse yourself for three weeks of ⁸days

from all fruit of the palm tree(!),⁶⁷ and from all small and large intestines,⁶⁸ and from wine, and from the intestines of fish,⁶⁹ and from all things⁹ that bring forth blood. And do not approach a woman during her impurity, and do not come up to any dead bodies,¹⁰ and do not approach a leper or one with a flux, and guard against chance pollution and a seminal emission. And guard¹¹ your mouth from every evil word and from every sin, and sanctify yourself from all' sin.

We have seen numerous Sar Torah praxes that have many similarities to this ritual. These include a long period of fasting, the prohibition of specific foods, and the avoidance of sources of ritual pollution.

The descriptions of the angels in the various firmaments are also often similar to descriptions in the Hekhalot literature. For example, compare the following enthusiastic account of the angels standing on the ninth step of the second firmament in *Sepher HaRazim* to the account of the angels at the gate of the seventh palace in §§213–14 of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*.

(II) ¹³⁰These are the ones who stand on the ninth step: ¹³¹forceful ones in valor flying swiftly in the air, their might is dominion and the likeness of swords is in their hand; ¹³²ready for battle, they grasp a bow; they hold a javelin; they leap higher than fire, and they have ¹³³horses of fire and juniper. Their chariots are fire, and there is fear of them wherever they turn.

(§213) And at the gate of the seventh palace all the mighty ones stand raging; (they are) frightening, powerful, hard, fearsome, and confounding, higher than mountains and sharper than hills. Their bows are drawn, and in their hands are sharp swords. In their faces lightning drips and goes forth from their eyeballs, *globes* of fire from their nostrils, and torches of glowing coals from their mouths. They are wreathed (with) helmets and coats of mail and lances, and spears are hung on their arms for them.

(§214) Their horses are horses of darkness, horses of deep darkness, horses of gloom, horses of fire, horses of blood, horses of hail, horses of iron, horses of the misty cloud. The horses on which they ride stand over mangers of fire filled with glowing juniper coals, and they eat glowing coals out of their mangers, a measure of about forty seahs in

⁶⁷ Emending פרי דקה "small fruit," to פרי דקל, "fruit of the palm tree," with Margalioth.

⁶⁸ Emending ומכל מיני דקה ונסה, "and from all kinds of small and large (?)," to ומכל מעי דקה ונסה, "and from all small and large intestines," with Margalioth.

⁶⁹ Emending וממעי דנים, "and from (different) kinds of fish," to וממעי דנים, "and from intestines of fish," with Margalioth.

one mouthful. The measure of the mouth of every horse is three times as much as that of the gate of Caesarea, and the measure of the mouth of every single horse is three times more than the manger of Caesarea.

Although we have found some parallels between *Sepher HaRazim* and the Hekhalot literature, when all is said and done they are not very significant. It is fair to say that *Sepher HaRazim* and the Hekhalot literature share a generally similar thought world, but they have numerous differences in cosmology and praxis and no parallels that suggest common authorship. There may be a hint of the idea of a visionary journey at the beginning of *Sepher HaRazim* but it is not mentioned again, let alone followed up with concrete rituals for embarking on such a journey. There are no passages shared with the Hekhalot literature, no recipes for compelling angels to grant knowledge of Torah, and no mention of any of the rabbis or angels centrally associated with the Hekhalot traditions. The ideas in *Sepher HaRazim* seem to me to be closer to those of the Syro-Palestinian metal amulets and to the Greek magical papyri than to the Hekhalot literature.

The Social Background of the Tradents of the Hekhalot Literature

In the previous section we saw that there is a close relationship between the Hekhalot literature on the one hand and the Babylonian inscribed bowls and the texts of ritual power from the Cairo Geniza on the other. Hekhalot passages and central Hekhalot teachings and rituals are found in both groups of texts, and thus these texts provide our earliest surviving contexts for the Hekhalot traditions. There is some evidence for similar traditions in the metal amulets and in *Sepher HaRazim*, pointing perhaps to a Palestinian tradition of ascent and adjuration of angels in the Talmudic era, but the connections with the Hekhalot literature are more extensive and compelling in the inscribed bowls and the Cairo Geniza documents. In this section I survey what we know about the social background of these documents in particular, with a view to elucidating the life situation of the creators and tradents of the Hekhalot literature.

Information from the Babylonian Inscribed Bowls

Relatively little work has been done on the specific social locus of these texts and a full-scale study remains a desideratum. But a pre-

liminary look at the evidence suggests some useful generalizations. Babylonian society in late antiquity was based on agriculture and highly structured and stratified. The Jewish people in the region were a minority living under Sasanian rule. They tended to try to live quietly among their neighbors but did not escape periodic official persecution and were not immune to bouts of revolutionary messianism. The Sasanian empire, which had been weakened by wars and palace intrigues, emerged with new vigor in the sixth century, repelling both internal and external foes. Little is known about the vicissitudes of the Jewish people in this century, although legend says that in the first part of it they rebelled and founded their own state for a short time. The seventh century was a period of great political turmoil which saw vast military exploits by Khusro II but which ended in his defeat and the collapse of the empire after his death. The Muslim conquest was complete by about the middle of the century and was a welcome change for Babylonian Jews, since it resulted in the restoration of Jewish public institutions such as the office of exilarch.⁷⁰

According to Montgomery, the bowls from Nippur were recovered in an area identified by the chief excavator as a Jewish settlement dating to at latest the seventh century. Almost every private house excavated had one or more such bowl, and some were also recovered from a cemetery among the buried coffins. Many bowls were fakes—inscribed with arbitrary sequences of letters or even meaningless scrawls, perhaps produced to fool illiterate clients. As for the bowls containing genuine incantations, the skill of the scribes varied widely. Some are well written, but Montgomery judges that many were inscribed by illiterate laymen.⁷¹

Some of the formal characteristics of the inscriptions provide us with more information. Most of them are composed by an unnamed practitioner who speaks in the first person and who writes on behalf of named clients referred to in the third person. The spirits (angels, demons, gods, or God) can be addressed in the second person or mentioned in the third person. By implication, then, the practitioner is normally distinguished from clients and is assumed to be a different

⁷⁰ For a detailed discussion of Babylonian society and the place of Jews within it during this period, see Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, vol. 5: *Later Sasanian Times* (SPB 15; Leiden: Brill, 1970).

⁷¹ Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts* 13–15, 27–28.

person. In a number of cases, however, the practitioner has produced the bowl on his or her own behalf, speaking in the first person and giving his or her name. In Montgomery 2, two named practitioners have together inscribed for one another spells of protection against demons.⁷² A different man and his wife used the same template in Montgomery 27 for their own protection.⁷³ In Montgomery 13 the client, a childless woman seeking fertility and the love of her husband, is referred to in the third person, but once (line 5) she and the practitioner speak together as “we.”⁷⁴ In Montgomery 17, a named woman speaking in both first and third person divorces demons from herself.⁷⁵ In bowls 6, 17, and 23, published by Naveh and Shaked, the practitioners repel enemies, the evil eye, and sorcerous and demonic attacks.⁷⁶ The named speaker of Gordon L repels evil attacks from himself, as does the speaker in Gordon N, who is referred to in the first and third person.⁷⁷

The contents of the texts themselves suggest that the composers had some education but were not rabbinic scholars. The texts consistently show a good, accurate knowledge of the Hebrew Bible.⁷⁸ They draw on a creative and detailed mythology involving angels, demons, and the celestial realm.⁷⁹ They use cryptograms, some of which are known from elsewhere in Jewish tradition.⁸⁰ There are hints of interest in legal issues, such as the ban and divorce decrees against demons, but this quasi-legal material does not correspond to the canonical rabbinic traditions.⁸¹ Aggadic knowledge is present too, but again, it is nonrabbinic. Examples include the traditions about Joshua ben Peraḥya, to which I return below, and the appearance

⁷² Ibid., 121–26.

⁷³ Ibid., 212.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 178–82.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 190–92.

⁷⁶ Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* 164–68; idem, *Magic Spells and Formulae* 120–22, 132–33.

⁷⁷ Gordon, “Aramaic and Mandaic Magic Bowls,” 93–95, 100–102.

⁷⁸ Charles D. Isbell, “The Story of the Aramaic Magical Incantation Bowls,” *BA* 41 (1978) 5–16, esp. pp. 13–14.

⁷⁹ Baruch A. Levine, “The Language of the Magical Bowls,” in Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia* 5:343–75, esp. pp. 371–73.

⁸⁰ Charles D. Isbell, “Some Cryptograms in the Aramaic Incantation Bowls,” *JNES* 33 (1974) 405–407.

⁸¹ Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia* 5:236–39; Shaked, “The Poetics of Spells.”

of a forty-two-letter divine name in a form different from that given in the Geonic *responsa*.⁸²

Indeed, the bowls show evidence of a competent and longstanding scribal tradition. Many of the documents exist in multiple copies prepared for different clients, indicating that the practitioners drew on a corpus of set texts. The *Vorlagen* generally show a fairly high literary standard, even if many of the surviving copies are carelessly executed and corrupt. The Torah incantation in Gordon Moriah 1 was transmitted in a stable form for many centuries, since it resurfaces in medieval European manuscripts. Likewise, the *historiola* about Sideros the child killer (which is known also from medieval Christian traditions in many forms and languages) appears in five Babylonian bowls and a (probably) Palestinian amulet. The texts of the bowls and amulet are nearly identical throughout.⁸³ In other words, the Babylonian bowls emerged from a scribal tradition that encompassed a wide geographical area and a vast span of time.

The evidence for the social situation that produced the incantation bowls is complex, but it adds up to something like the following. The composers of the texts were skilled scribes who were members of an influential guild. They were well educated in Bible and in their own mythological traditions and legends, and they had a smattering of knowledge about the sorts of traditions that appear in the classical rabbinic texts. The practitioners who copied and used the texts came from a much wider cross-section of society. Presumably they included the scribal composers, who produced bowls for clients and perhaps sometimes for themselves. But they also included semiliterate nonspecialists who copied set texts to make their own bowls or bowls for their friends, and even semiliterate or illiterate nonspecialists who produced imitation bowls with faux writing, either as outright frauds to dupe illiterate clients or perhaps as bargain-basement facsimiles for clients who were not overly particular.⁸⁴

⁸² Lawrence H. Schiffman, "A Forty-two Letter Divine Name in the Aramaic Magic Bowls," *Bulletin of the Institute of Jewish Studies* 1 (1973) 97–102. The name is found in bowl Gordon 5, published by Gordon in "Aramaic Incantation Bowls," 123–24.

⁸³ Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* 104–22 (A15) and 188–97 (B12a–b); Gordon, "Aramaic Incantation Bowls," 346–47 (Hilprecht g); Müller-Kessler, "Eine aramäische Zauberschale."

⁸⁴ I assume that the incantation was recited when the bowl was installed. As long as the practitioner knew the incantation by heart and gave a satisfying performance, the illiterate client may neither have known nor cared whether the writing on the bowl was genuine.

Another oblique line of inquiry gives us more information about the composers of the bowl texts. Six or seven of the bowls refer to a practitioner who functions as an ideal figure whom the writer seeks to exemplify. R. Joshua ben Peraḥya was an early Tanna' who is cited twice in the Mishnah: in *Hag.* 2.2, which says that he served as president of the Sanhedrin (נשיא בית דין), he expresses a view on the propriety of the laying of hands on an animal to be slaughtered on a festival day; and in *'Abot* 1.6 he advises the reader to obtain a teacher and a fellow disciple and to be careful in judgment of others. In *t. Makš.* 3.4 he gives a purity ruling with which the sages disagreed, and there is a *baraita* in *b. Menah.* 109b which transmits a saying by him concerning the dangers of accepting a high office. The most important rabbinic tradition about him is *b. Sanh.* 107b//*b. Soṭa* 47a, which describes the stormy relationship between R. Joshua and his disciple Jesus. They traveled together to Egypt but fell out during the return trip, with the result (to some degree laid to R. Joshua's discredit) that Jesus became an idolator. This passage is the only hint in the rabbinic references to a connection between R. Joshua and practitioners of supernatural power.

The picture we build up from the references in the inscribed bowls gives us some sense of the ideal practitioner in the minds of the composers of the incantations. R. Joshua is portrayed as a mighty exorcist who brought bans,⁸⁵ bills of divorce,⁸⁶ and a "dismissal"⁸⁷ against demons. The last involves the manipulation of letters to subdue the forces of nature and the forces of evil. He also sealed the demons with his seal-ring.⁸⁸ He is called a "healer" (רופא) in Montgomery 17.12 and perhaps in 34.2.⁸⁹ He is labeled as a producer and user of incantation bowls.⁹⁰ He ascended on high and brought back spells of destruction against demons.⁹¹ He is given the title Rav (רב) or Rabbi (רבי),⁹² titles which are associated in the

⁸⁵ Montgomery 8.6, 8; 17.8, 9–11 (*Aramaic Incantation Texts* 154–55, 190–91).

⁸⁶ Montgomery 8.7, 8–9; 17.10.

⁸⁷ Montgomery 32.4–7//33.3–9 (*ibid.*, 225–30 and translated above).

⁸⁸ Montgomery 8.11; 17.12.

⁸⁹ Montgomery, *ibid.*, 231. Bowl 34 is written in Syriac and invokes "the valor of Joshua the healer" (דויל דיישע אסיא). The reference could be either to R. Joshua or to Jesus.

⁹⁰ Montgomery 9.1–3; 32.3–4//33.1–4 (*ibid.*, 161, 225–30, translated above); Moussaieff 11.2–4 (Shaked, "The Poetics of Spells," 177–78).

⁹¹ Montgomery 32.8//33.9–10.

⁹² Montgomery 32.4//33.3 (רב); 8.6, 8; 9.2; Moussaieff 11.3; Naveh and Shaked B5.5–6 (*Amulets and Magic Bowls* 158–60) (רבי).

Babylonian Talmud not only with halakhic expertise but also with miraculous powers arising from knowledge of Torah.⁹³ Finally, there is a brief *historiola* about him which tells how he sent a ban against a lilit who used to strangle people, but the ban was ineffective because he did not know her name. Only after he wrote the name in a bill of divorce was a decree promulgated against her in heaven.⁹⁴ In short, the ideal practitioner of the ritual power of the bowls is a figure who appears peripherally in the canonical rabbinic tradition but is assigned both religious and political authority. He used powerful spells of various types to heal people of demonic affliction and even ascended to heaven to bring back more antidemonic charms.

Information from the Cairo Geniza Texts

Considerably more work has been done on the social background of the Cairo Geniza texts. S. D. Goiten has published a massive social history of the corpus,⁹⁵ and Schiffman and Swartz have drawn on Goiten's work, alongside a close reading of the amulets they have published, to reach some important conclusions about the background of the works of ritual power.⁹⁶ The writers of these amulets were well versed in the Bible and quoted from it frequently, if sometimes inaccurately. Biblical figures associated with ritual power, such as Joseph and Solomon, are also mentioned, sometimes with allusions to midrashic material that resembles but is not identical to canonical rabbinical literature. Clients are sometimes named in the amulets, but little else can be deduced about them. It was not uncommon for a practitioner to write an amulet for himself. Many of the texts were written with the skill of a professional scribe, but others were composed with much less care and sophistication. Swartz and Schiffman note the existence of a letter from the Geniza which has a profes-

⁹³ Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, vol. 2: *The Early Sasanid Period* (SPB 11; Leiden: Brill, 1966) 126-59, 187, 195, 201; vol. 3: *From Shapur I to Shapur II* (SPB 12; Leiden: Brill, 1968) 102-22; vol. 4: *The Age of Shapur II* (SPB 14; Leiden: Brill, 1969) 279-86, 324-62, 392-99.

⁹⁴ Naveh and Shaked B5.5-7 (*Amulets and Magic Bowls* 158-60); Moussaieff 2.5-7? (Shaked, "The Poetics of Spells, 192).

⁹⁵ S. D. Goiten, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* (6 vols.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967-93).

⁹⁶ Schiffman and Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts* 32-62.

sional scribe write a "charm" of protection for a new mother and her baby son.⁹⁷ They add,

It should also be recognized that professional scribes were often not members of the most educated class. They were trained to copy books and documents and compose letters, but were not necessarily legal scholars or philosophers. They certainly would have received an adequate education, but were more likely to be petty bureaucrats than members of the elite.⁹⁸

They characterize the practitioners of ritual power and their clients in these terms:

They represent a Judaism in which traditional Jewish practice was overlaid with rich folklore customs, itself often rooted in earlier literary sources. These people did not adhere to the philosophical approach to Judaism which would have led them, as it did the elite (Moses Maimonides is but the most extreme example), to eschew magic and "superstition."⁹⁹

It is worth pausing to look a little more closely at the social group described by Schiffman and Swartz as the probable context of the texts of ritual power from the Cairo Geniza. Concerning levels of Jewish education in the world that produced the Geniza texts, Goiten writes,

A Jewish scholar from Iraq, writing in Egypt around the middle of the twelfth century, described the various stages of study approximately as follows: If we disregard uneducated persons, people can be classified in three categories: the broad masses, scholars, and doctors. The masses have learned the written and the oral law, namely the Five Books of Moses and Saadya's prayerbook (which comprised also the religious injunctions connected with prayer and the keeping of the Sabbath and the holidays); the scholars have studied, in addition to the Pentateuch, the other sections of the Bible, as well as the "ordinances," that is, codified law (the work the writer recommends for the purpose is of enormous length); the doctor is at the highest level, a man who has also made himself familiar with the Mishnah, the Talmud, and their commentaries.¹⁰⁰

Thus we have four levels of education: the uneducated or illiterate; the masses, who are generally familiar with the Pentateuch and the

⁹⁷ Ibid., 49.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 50.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 50-51.

¹⁰⁰ Goiten, *A Mediterranean Society* 2:205-206.

prayer book; scholars, who have studied the Bible and a digest of the legal traditions; and doctors, who are also versed in the rabbinic scriptures. This overview is admittedly schematic, but it is a reasonable starting point for thinking about the social location of the writers of the ritual power texts. These people fall somewhere between the second and the third categories. They know biblical stories and texts and have some familiarity with law and lore, but their competence in both is limited.

An important point to keep in mind is that learning to write was a specialist's skill in this society. Goiten writes that, "[f]our types of students were trained in calligraphy: future government officials, physicians, religious scholars, and merchants. Thus the art of writing—not of reading, which was far more widespread—was the distinctive mark of a person belonging to the professional or higher classes."¹⁰¹

He adds later:

"A scholar should learn how to write" [*b. Hul.* 9a]. This amazing item in the list of accomplishments required of a scholar in the Talmud is to be understood in the light of medieval conditions and ideas about the subject. While the knowledge of reading was fairly common, writing was an art acquired just by persons who had a special reason to do so, mostly, as we have seen . . . those who prepared themselves for the profession of clerk, copyist, scholar, teacher, physician, and merchant.¹⁰²

It is indeed quite likely that many of the texts of ritual power from the Cairo Geniza come from the circle of professional scribes. But other circles are also possible sources. Teachers at the level of elementary education needed to be able to write well, and thus they sometimes also served as scribes.¹⁰³ And among synagogue functionaries, cantors in particular required linguistic and writing skills.¹⁰⁴ The ritual power texts from the Cairo Geniza often show familiarity with the Jewish liturgy (T.-S. K 1.35 + T.-S. K 1.48, discussed above, is a good example), as does the *Hekhalot* literature. Indeed, the Jewish liturgy is another corpus of texts of ritual power, although a type of power more communally focused and less immediately con-

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 223–24.

crete that the power of the documents we have covered in this chapter. More exploration of the relationship between the Hekhalot literature and the Jewish liturgy would no doubt be quite illuminating.¹⁰⁵

Conclusions

The central conclusion I wish to draw from the material covered in this chapter is that the Hekhalot literature is a body of real ritual instructions drawn up for real practitioners. Although the attribution of these instructions to specific Tannaitic rabbis is to a greater or lesser degree pseudepigraphic and the events described in the Hekhalot literature are presumably largely or entirely fictional, the instructions were meant to be used (as shown on other grounds in chapter 4) and in fact were used.

We have recovered two concrete life situations for this material. The first is the Jewish community in fifth- to seventh-century Babylonia. The practitioners who produced the ubiquitous incantation bowls drew on a version of at least one Hekhalot text of Torah adjuration known from the much later European manuscript tradition; they called on the Prince of Torah for help; and they practiced heavenly ascents to bring down spells and angels to help their clients. The composers of the bowl texts belonged to a cosmopolitan scribal tradition, although the texts were adopted, imitated, and forged by less educated or perhaps even illiterate contemporaries.

The second context consists of Jewish circles in the Middle East who transmitted and used texts of ritual power in the eleventh to twelfth centuries, fragments of which texts survived in the Cairo

¹⁰⁵ Such a study is outside the scope of this volume. I note, however, that the Hekhalot literature frequently connects and coordinates the angelic worship in heaven with the earthly liturgy (*Hekhalot Rabbati* §§161–97; *Sar Torah* §300; *SH-L* §385; *Hekhalot Zutarti* §423; *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§565, 576; *Merkavah Rabba* §682; G19 1a 14–15). I have more to say on this relationship in chapter 9. Ithamar Gruenwald has drawn attention to numerous points of contact between the Hekhalot literature and the work of the sixth-century Palestinian liturgical poet Yannay. These consist mainly of cosmological terminology rather than central concepts such as *Sar Torah* praxes or descent to the chariot (“The Piyyutim of Yannay and the Literature of the Descenders to the Chariot,” *Tarbiz* 36 [1967] 257–77 [Hebrew]). Michael D. Swartz has analyzed the use of the prayer *‘Alay le-shabbeah* in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §551 (“*‘Alay le-shabbeah*: A Liturgical Prayer in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*,” *JQR* 77 [1986–87] 179–90; cf. idem, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism* 118–25). He has also drawn attention to the potential importance of synagogue and liturgy for our understanding of the life situation of the Hekhalot literature (*Scholastic Magic* 218–21).

Geniza.¹⁰⁶ These practitioners included in their handbooks, *inter alia*, an adjuration known from the *Hekhalot Zutarti*, a Sar Torah praxis, and instructions for having visions of angels and the heavenly chariot scene. The texts of ritual power stored in the Cairo Geniza were produced by people who were educated in a scribal or synagogue tradition but did not have a formal rabbinic education. Again, it is likely that people with less education made frequent use of the texts once they were composed and circulated.

The key point is not so much that we find evidence for the transmission of Hekhalot traditions from the seventh to twelfth centuries (as well as later and quite possibly earlier), although this in itself is significant. It is the contexts in which these traditions are embedded. The incantation bowls are not theoretical or fictional literature. We have them because real clients commissioned them and real practitioners produced them and buried them in the clients' houses to exorcise demons from the household. Likewise, the Cairo Geniza handbooks that contain the passage from the *Hekhalot Zutarti*, the Sar Torah praxis, and the praxis for seeing visions are practical works that purport to tell the practitioner how to protect clients from demons, cure sterility, open locks, aid women in pregnancy and childbirth, divine useful information, and control demons and animals. Whether or not we think of these incantations, adjurations, exorcisms, and spells as practical devices, the people who used them did, and they made no distinction between the Hekhalot traditions and other texts of ritual power.

Up to this point I have been building the case for a particular reading of the Hekhalot literature, one that takes seriously its claims to describe the rituals used by a particular constellation of intermediary figures and ritual practitioners. The cumulative force of the anthropological and historical data now leads me to this conclusion. *The religious functionaries portrayed in the Hekhalot texts, the "descenders to*

¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately, the "oriental" scripts of this period are not easy to assign to specific geographical locations. Malachi Beit Arié says of this script type that "[i]t encompasses the variety of handwritings used in the Middle East, covering eastern Asia Minor, Iraq, Persia and its surroundings, Syria, Palestine and Egypt (including Libya), all of which were included, at the time of the earliest surviving codices produced in these areas, in one political unit, the Abbasid Caliphate. . . . Although some differences have already been noted in morphological research between north-eastern regions and south-western ones, they are not yet clear enough to be applied systematically" (*The Makings of the Medieval Hebrew Book: Studies in Palaeography and Codicology* [Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1993] 27).

the chariot" as they are sometimes called, were real people, practitioners of the rituals described in the Hekhalot literature and the writers of that literature. The texts were composed by people who knew the intimate details of the practices and their outcomes, both of which we have discerned in this chapter in real-life situations. The central microforms must have been written by those who used the traditions. I do not doubt that the microforms were adapted and reworked in a complex editorial process as they were redacted and assembled into the jumbled macroforms of the late manuscripts. But the descenders to the chariot were by and large also the composers.

Another implication arises from the material explored in this chapter. The descenders to the chariot made use of other forms of ritual power as well, forms only hinted at in the Hekhalot texts themselves. At the end of chapter 7, I concluded that the Hekhalot literature teaches its practitioners how to compel angels to grant supernatural knowledge of Torah, to act as guides on the otherworldly journey, to offer protection, and to grant wishes whose content is not specified. The focus of these services is on the practitioner, whereas a shaman would be expected to use such powers to help members of the shaman's community. The evidence of the other texts of ritual power fills out this picture and shows that the tradents of the Hekhalot literature used their powers to heal, protect, and exorcise demons from clients. This minimalist conclusion is inescapable, since it is based only on bowl incantations and Geniza handbooks that contain indubitable Hekhalot traditions inextricably joined to these other rituals of power. It is entirely likely that the practitioners used a wide range of other rituals of power. The texts of some of the amulets found in the Cairo Geniza would have generated no particular surprise if they had been found in a Hekhalot manuscript,¹⁰⁷ and one could easily imagine the descenders to the chariot using dream inquiry rituals such as those in T.-S. K 1.28 1a 11-1b 16 or a handbook like the *Sheva' Zutarti*.

I am content, however, with the minimalist conclusion, and on its basis I propose a preliminary interpretation of the Hekhalot literature as a whole. The Hekhalot literature is a body of instructional texts created with the purpose of teaching chosen disciples how to become a type of magico-religious practitioner—a type who so far

¹⁰⁷ E.g., T.-S. K 1.71 and T.-S. K 1.128 (Schiffman and Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts* 93-98, 128-30).

has many similarities to the shaman. This practitioner engages in otherworldly journeys, and in the summoning of angels to grant him knowledge of Torah. The Hekhalot literature is essentially esoteric, at least insofar as very few disciples would have been likely to have carried out fully the rigorous ascetic regimes it demands. But it has an implicit exoteric side in that the practitioner was expected to use his powers for the practical benefit of his community. The emphasis on the individual practitioner gaining a supernatural knowledge of Torah must not deceive us into thinking that the goals of the Hekhalot literature revolve only around the individual practitioner. As Jacob Neusner has shown, in rabbinic thought Torah is a source of vast supernatural power, power upon which the sage can draw.¹⁰⁸ We see this power being used, for example, in the inscribed bowls Gordon E/F/Hyvernat, where the practitioners invoke the Prince of Torah to protect the households of their clients and (in the Hyvernat bowl) to drive evil spirits away from them.

To put my point another way: we have seen that many Hekhalot texts call on God or the angels to grant the prayer of the practitioner or to do whatever he asks, to sign a blank check so to speak.¹⁰⁹ The texts of ritual power covered in this chapter give us some idea of how the blank was filled in. The power of the heavenly ascent or the adjuration of angels was, at least in some cases, cashed in for the benefit of clients or members of the community. It may be that the emphasis in some texts—such as *Hekhalot Rabbati* §236, on the adept joining in the angelic liturgy—had a similar outcome in view. Some texts of ritual power drew on liturgical material, and one might speculate that the clients of a practitioner who was believed to sing with the angels would regard him as especially mighty. But in any case, the Hekhalot literature gives instructions on how to obtain the power over the spirits that allows one to serve the community.

¹⁰⁸ See n. 93.

¹⁰⁹ *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§419, 421; *Sar Panim* §§627, 634; *Merkawah Rabba* §670; G19 1b 14–17; G21 1a 17b–19a.

CHAPTER NINE

LOCATING THE DESCENDERS TO THE CHARIOT

The Hekhalot Literature and the Community

In the first section of this chapter I return to the Hekhalot literature to ask what it says about the relationship between the descenders to the chariot and their communities. I will seek information about the nature of these communities and the social roles and powers the descenders to the chariot possessed within them. There are many questions to be asked, such as whether the descenders to the chariot are portrayed as central or peripheral intermediaries; whether and to what degree they are shown holding political or judicial power; what socio-economic and moral status is assumed about them; whether they appear to operate in groups or as individuals, on their own behalf or on the behalf of clients or congregations, as part- or full-time practitioners, as specialists or general practitioners, and under gender restrictions; and how they seem to be trained.¹ Naturally, we can hardly expect that the texts will answer all these questions.

Likewise, this analysis operates under two obvious limitations that must be kept firmly in mind. The first is the frankly propagandistic nature of the documents. Whatever the intended audience (and I think it likely that it was disciples and trainees), the texts tell us what the composers wished the audience to believe about the descenders to the chariot, which may (or may not) be quite different from what others may have accepted or what twenty-first century scholars might accept. Second, there is the fluid text and highly redacted nature of the major macroforms in the surviving manuscripts. Although the composers of the bulk of the microforms were clearly the descenders to the chariot themselves, as I argued in the last chapter, their work has been edited and adapted by later tradents. The agendas of some of them may have been quite different from the composers

¹ This list is inspired in part by the lists of socio-political powers, social characteristics, and professional characteristics included by Winkelman in his analysis of mediating practitioners (*Shamans, Priests and Witches* 19–20).

(§83) Greatest of all is that he has a vision of every deed that mortals do, even in inner rooms, whether fine deeds or corrupting deeds. He knows and recognizes the thief; he knows and recognizes the adulterer; he knows and recognizes the murderer; he knows and recognizes the one who is suspected (of contact with) the menstruant; he knows and recognizes the one who tells gossip. Greatest of all is that he recognizes all sorcerers.⁴

(§84) Greatest of all is that anyone who raises his hand against him and strikes him—they clothe him with plagues and cover him with leprosy and wreath him with skin blemishes. Greatest of all is that anyone who tells gossip about him—they attack and cast on him all strokes of skin eruptions and sores and wounds from which raw boils emerge.

(§85) Greatest of all is that he is set apart from all mortals and he is confounding among all his peers and he is honored over heavenly beings and earthly beings. And anyone who stumbles over him—great, evil, and harsh stumbling blocks fall on that person from heaven. And anyone who stretches out his hand against him—with a bill of divorce of the heavenly law court they stretch out a hand against him.

(§86) Greatest of all is that all beings shall be before him like silver before a refiner, whether it be refined silver, whether it be unfit silver, or whether it be pure silver. And also he will have visionary insight into a family, (knowing) how many bastards there are in a family, how many sons of a menstruant, how many wounded by crushing, how many whose male member is cut off, how many sons of slaves, how many sons of the uncircumcised.

(§91) Greatest of all is that anyone who insolently defies him—they make dim the light of his eyeballs. Greatest of all is that anyone who despises him does not leave behind root or branch, nor does he leave an inheritance. Greatest of all is that anyone who tells of his shortcomings—they bring the decreed annihilation upon him and have no compassion on him.

(§92) Greatest of all is that they blow a sustained, a quavering, and a sustained blast on the horn, and afterward they excommunicate and take captive and excommunicate and ban (him) three times every single day from the heavenly law court, from the day that permission was given to Israel, to the upright, to the ritually fit, to the meek, to the humble, to the sensible, to the chosen, and to the ones set apart, to descend and to ascend to the chariot. They say, "Let him be banished from T'SŠ YHWH, God of Israel, from him and from His throne of glory, from the crown of His head, from the heavenly law court, from the earthly law court, from the whole host on high, from all his attendants who stand before him considering the chariot but leaving it alone."

⁴ Another reading is "all who know sorceries."

(§93) R. Ishmael said: -

Such are they who study the vision of the chariot. The one who considers the chariot is not permitted to stand except before three figures alone: before a king, before a high priest, and before the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin only at a time when it has in it a president. If it lacks a president, he may not stand even before the Sanhedrin, and if he does stand, behold whoever he stands before is culpable for his own life, because he lessens his days and shortens his years.⁵

Three points stand out immediately from this remarkable passage. First of all, the glorified figure is unambiguously the descender to the chariot, and his access to the heavenly liturgy is tied directly to his powers. He sees what happens before God's throne and at the same time is granted knowledge of the future of the world.

Second, he knows the most intimate secrets of the people around him: their future fates, their private actions and sins, and the physical defects of their bodies and their family lines. This is a claim to extraordinary power indeed. The practitioner can detect clandestine violations of the Decalogue or the purity laws (§83; cf. Deut 5:17-19; Lev 18:19-20) or hidden blemishes that would render someone unfit for full participation in the community (§86; cf. Deut 23:1-3). Like Elijah, the forerunner of the messiah, he tests and refines the people like silver and gold (§§83, 86; cf. Mal 3:2-5, 23-24).⁶ The implication is that he is the primary policer of the social and moral boundaries of the community.

Third, he is a man who has enemies but enjoys divine protection from them. People gossip about him, despise and defy him, find him a stumbling block, and even attack him physically. If he really did try to expose their private failings as the text seems to imply, such enmity is hardly surprising. But the attacks of his enemies fail, for "they" (the angels) strike the enemies with defiling skin diseases, stumbling blocks, and the "decreed annihilation" (Isa 28:22; Dan 9:27). They also serve them with a heavenly bill of divorce, uproot their line, and excommunicate them.

⁵ Arnold Goldberg suggests that the first sentence of §81 is an editorial addition echoing the beginning of §94 and added when the hymns of boasting were incorporated into the *Hekhalot Rabbati* ("Einige Bemerkungen zu den Quellen und den redaktionellen Einheiten der Grossen Hekhalot," *FJB* 1 (1973) 1-49, esp. pp. 3-5. Gerd A. Wewers appears also to exclude §93 from the original unit, but this is far less certain ("Die Überlegenheit des Mystikers," *JST* 17 [1986] 3-22, esp. p. 8).

⁶ Wewers, "Die Überlegenheit des Mystikers," 15-18; Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* 41-43.

The means by which the practitioner acquires his dangerous knowledge and angelic support are not made explicit, although it is not unreasonable to tie them to his vision of God's throne in §81. We have seen that the physiognomic tradition discussed in chapter 3 uses somewhat similar terminology and promises to give somewhat similar sorts of knowledge. For example, the *Physiognomy of R. Ishmael* §14 describes the appearance of a man who covets his neighbors goods and swears falsely. It is notable that the enemies of the descender to the chariot are treated here in much the same way as demons in the Babylonian incantation bowls. Both are divorced and excommunicated by the heavenly council. And there are other parallels to these bowls and to the Cairo Geniza texts. For example, Naveh's and Shaked's Bowl 6 gives an incantation for defeating the enemies of the practitioner.⁷ Lurid curses are brought down on the heads of enemies in the amulets T.-S. K 1.42, 24; T.-S. K 1.169; and T.-S. K 1.148.⁸ Spells for identifying a thief appear in T.-S. K 1.28 1b 16–2a 19.⁹ It seems likely enough that this passage celebrating the powers of the descender to the chariot assumes the use of rituals of power like these.

How literally should we take the exalted claims in this passage? Or to put it another way, to what degree were these claims recognized by outsiders and to what degree were they merely asserted within the group of practitioners? This is a very difficult question and I am not sure how to answer it. I note simply that the similar assertions in the texts of ritual power mentioned in the previous paragraph (along with many others) imply the existence of a clientele who took such things quite seriously—to the point of commissioning the practitioners who made the claims to act on their behalf.

The second grouping of material in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* is §§94–106 and §§152–73, 189–197, two collections of traditions about the celestial liturgy which may have been a single unit before the third section, the story of the ten martyrs, was added. I will consider §§94–106, 152–73, 189–197 together here, since the material is thematically similar throughout. Most of it consists either of songs sung by the

⁷ Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* 164–68.

⁸ Schiffman and Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts* 83–92, 160–64; Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 2:305–311.

⁹ Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:133–50.

angels or descriptions of angelic worship, but a few passages mention or address the descenders to the chariot. The first collection opens,

(§94) R. Ishmael said:

What distinguishes songs that a man sings and descends to the chariot? He opens and says: The head of songs is the beginning of praise and the start of a song is the beginning of rejoicing and the start of a chant. The attendants sing the songs each day to YHWH God of Israel, to the throne of His glory.

The stage is set: the descenders to the chariot must learn the songs the angels sing in their daily liturgy. The only other passage in the first collection that refers unambiguously to human beings is §§101–104, which describes the initiatory death and resurrection of the adept when he comes before God's throne, as I argued in chapter 5.¹⁰

In the second collection we find our first passage of interest in the midst of a series of songs in praise of the angels, the *qedushah*, and God.

(§163) Blessed to heaven and to earth are the descenders to the chariot, if you recite and tell my sons what I do at the morning prayer and at the afternoon and evening prayer, every single day and every single hour that Israel says before Me, "Holy." Teach them, say to them, "Lift up your eyes to the firmament corresponding to your house of prayer in the hour that you say before Me, 'holy.'" There is nothing as fine to me in all my world that I created as that hour when your eyes are lifted up to my eyes and my eyes look into your eyes in the hour that you say before me, "Holy." For the voice that goes forth from your mouth in that hour drips and ascends before Me as a soothing odor.

(§164) And testify to them whatever testimony you have. You see Me—what I do to the visage of the face of Jacob your father which is engraved for Me on My throne of glory. For in the hour that you say before Me, "Holy," I kneel on it and embrace it and kiss it and hug it and My hands are on its arms three times, corresponding to the three times that you say before Me, "Holy." As it is written, "Holy, holy, holy" (Isa 6:3).

On the face of it, the descenders to the chariot are ordered to describe to the earthly community, God's "sons," perhaps to be taken as "Israel," what they see happening in the celestial liturgy during

¹⁰ I take the mysterious dialogue in §§96–97 to be between God and an angelic being, perhaps Metatron (following Schäfer, *Übersetzung* 2:14 n. 2).

their visionary journeys. The celestial liturgy corresponds to the earthly liturgy: heaven corresponds to the house of prayer; the *qedushah*, the recitation of Isa 6:3, occurs in both at the same times each day; God looks down into Israel's eyes as they look up into his; their prayers act as soothing offerings; and God embraces the image of Jacob carved on his throne. Schäfer takes this passage to say that the descender to the chariot acts as an emissary and representative of the nation Israel.¹¹ Chernus, however, on the basis of his interpretation of material in the *Sar Torah* text, interprets "Israel" here to mean "the mystical community as the 'true Israel.'"¹² I will address his arguments when we come to the *Sar Torah*. Either interpretation of this passage is defensible.

The same theme is picked up again several sections later:

(§169) The decree of heaven is against you, descenders to the chariot, unless you say what you have heard and unless you testify to what you have seen concerning the Presence, the Presence of exaltation and might, majesty and grandeur, which is lifted up, borne, stirred up, and magnified. The Presence is declared lofty and declared mighty three times a day on high, and there are no mortals who know and recognize it.

Here the descenders to the chariot are threatened unless they testify (to whom is not indicated) concerning their vision of God, which again is tied to the schedule of the earthly liturgy. The last passage that mentions them in this section is the following, addressed to the four living creatures:

(§172) Please, you beings who carry the throne of glory wholeheartedly and with a willing soul, magnify rejoicing and chanting, song and melody before the throne of glory of ʿTWʾRWSYʿY NBWBMRTSʿN (and some say NDYB MRTSʿN) YWY: God of Israel, that His heart may rejoice in the hour of the prayer of His sons, and He may seek and find them, the descenders to the chariot, in the hour that they stand before His throne of glory.

This passage hints at a topos in this section which Schäfer has noted. The angelic beings who bear God's throne on their back are given high praise throughout the section (§§152, 154, 156–58, 160, 167, 168, 171, 173, 184–85, 187–90), but "[t]he texts leave no doubt that Israel's liturgy, in the end, is more important than that of the *hayyot*'

¹¹ Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* 45–46.

¹² Chernus, "Individual and Community," 261.

(the angels in question).¹³ Here the praise of the throne-bearing angels serves merely as background music to the main event: the participation of the descenders to the chariot in the celestial liturgy. I note in passing that the use of the phrase "His sons" here is most naturally applied to the descenders to the chariot rather than Israel as a whole, a point in favor of Chernus' view that the revelations required of the adepts are to their own esoteric group rather than to exoteric Israel.

The third section of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* is §§107–21, the story of the ten martyrs. The narrative is put in the mouth of R. Ishmael, who reports that a proclamation came from Rome ordering the execution of four eminent Jewish sages. When R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah heard it he had R. Ishmael descend to the chariot. There he learned that the heavenly law court had decreed that the evil angel of Rome, Sammael, had been granted the lives of ten sages (the discrepancy in number is never explained) in exchange for his own destruction. After the agreement with Sammael was sealed, God rained plagues of skin diseases down on Rome for a year. Meanwhile, R. Ishmael returned from heaven and reported to the associates (חבררים), who threw a party along with R. Nehuniah and the president when they got the news. Then the heavenly law court ordered the angels of destruction to bring the "decreed annihilation" down upon "Lupinus Caesar." They killed his entire family and court, then when anyone attempted to gather the corpses for burial, the Deep would swallow them and disgorge them as soon as the attempt was given up. Thus the bodies were left to lie rotting in the palace.

The angel Suriah reported to R. Ishmael that these horrors were visited upon Lupinus Caesar because he had ordered the execution of R. Hananiah ben Tardion and even now he refused to relent. But, Suriah reported, he himself descended at God's command and gave R. Hananiah the appearance of Lupinus, then switched their places. R. Hananiah ruled Rome for six months, during which time he had six thousand Roman generals executed. Meanwhile, Lupinus was given the appearance, one at a time, of each of the ten condemned rabbis, and was burned to death as each of them. After each execution he was restored to life and made to suffer the death of the next victim.

¹³ Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* 46.

The narrative is very uneven and not entirely consistent and I have tried to avoid imposing harmony on the disparate elements in my summary. Evidently various versions of the story, and perhaps other stories as well were drawn on in the composition of this one.¹⁴ But in any case, it has points of interest. The descent to the chariot is made on behalf of the Jewish community at large, to discover the origins and outcome of a persecution by the colonial authorities. The results are reported to the "associates," presumably the conventicle of descenders to the chariot, but also to the president of the Sanhedrin, who rejoiced with them. However, according to later passages in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§§ 203; 238–40), Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel was president in the time of Ishmael and Akiva (this much appears to be historically accurate) and he was also privy to the esoteric secrets of the descenders to the chariot, so the mention of the president here does not necessarily imply that the contents of R. Ishmael's vision were shared with those who were not associates. Aside from several references to revelations to R. Ishmael by the angel Suriah, the rest of the story is composed of miracle stories unrelated to the Hekhalot traditions.

The fourth and final component of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* is the account of the instruction of matters pertaining to the descent to the chariot by R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah, and some related material (§§198–277). In the surviving redaction this instruction has been transformed into an account of an actual descent to the chariot by R. Nehuniah, but the secondary nature of this redaction is obvious. This section is composed of a number of subunits that probably circulated independently before being incorporated into the *Hekhalot Rabbati*. The account of the instruction is narrated by R. Ishmael in §§198–237. Another instruction, concerning the names of the guardians of the seventh palace, is found in §§238–46. This passage segues into a second description of the entry into the heavenly throne room which leads to the adept reciting the songs that the throne of glory sings each day (§§247–51). These songs are given (§§251–57//260–67) followed by versions of the threshold test and the water test (§§258–59).

¹⁴ For other recensions of the story of the ten martyrs, see Gottfried Reeg, *Die Geschichte von den Zehn Märtyrern: Synoptische Edition mit Übersetzung und Einleitung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985).

The work concludes with more songs and a list of the names of Metatron (§§268–77).

The relevant material is all found in the first two episodes, §§198–237 and §§238–46. In §201 R. Ishmael is ordered to bring “all the mighty men of the association (חבורה) and all the magnificent ones of the academy (שיבה).” Accordingly he “assembled the whole Sanhedrin, great and small at the third entrance that is in the House of YHWH.” In §203 a group of ten named inner disciples sit at R. Nehuniah’s feet while a “whole crowd” of “associates” stand around them, separated from the inner circle by a row of torches.¹⁵ The greater Sanhedrin had seventy-one members and the lesser had twenty-three (*m. Sanh.* 1.6), so although some of the ten disciples were Sanhedrin members (such as Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel), the crowd of standing associates must be taken to be the bulk of the Sanhedrin. Yet in §237 “all the associates” are attributed the ability to descend and ascend the world ladder. It seems that this passage means to describe a special revelation of esoteric lore to the leaders of Israel because of the imminent danger of persecution from Rome. Here we have an unambiguous statement that such revelations could be passed on to outsiders, and this supports the possibility that the traditions discussed above about the descenders to the chariot and the celestial liturgy teach that the visionaries should testify about their visions to exoteric Israel and not just to other insiders.

In R. Nehuniah’s instruction, three passages provide relevant information about the descenders to the chariot. After the terrifying description of the guardians of the gate of the seventh palace and their horses (§§213–15), we read,

(§216) And all the descenders to the chariot ascend and are not harmed; rather they see all this violence and descend safely and they come and stand and testify to the fearsome and confounding sight, the like of which is not in all the palaces of kings of flesh and blood. And they bless and praise and laud and exalt and adorn and give glory and ornamentation and greatness to TWTRWSY²Y YWY, God of Israel, Who is happy with the descenders to the chariot and Who sits and waits for every single one from Israel when he descends and feasts his eyes on the wonderful majesty and the strange rulership, on the majesty

¹⁵ The names of the ten members of the inner circle in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §203 are almost the same as the names of the ten martyrs given in two manuscripts of *Hekhalot Rabbati* §109.

of exaltation and the rulership of grandeur that throngs before the throne of glory three times every single day on high since the world was created and up to now for praise.

Once again we are told that the descenders to the chariot return to earth to testify concerning their visions (again, to whom is not specified). This passage adds that God eagerly watches the progress of the descenders to the chariot, "every one from Israel," as they come and see the vision of the celestial liturgy.

After a Merkavah hymn (§217) we read,

(§218) $\text{TW}^{\text{R}}\text{RSY}^{\text{Y}}$ YHWH God of Israel covets and waits in the same way that He waits for the redemption and for the time of salvation for Israel after the destruction of the former Temple. When will the descender descend to the chariot? When will he feast his eyes on the majesties on high? When will he hear the end of salvation? When will he see "what eye has not seen" (Isa 64:4) and ascend and report to the seed of Abraham His beloved?

The same points as in §216 are repeated and reinforced here. The arrival of the descender to the chariot is greeted by God with the same enthusiasm as the arrival of the eschaton. Indeed, the experience of the visionary is the same as "the end of salvation." And he returns and reports his experience "to the seed of Abraham," the "beloved" of God. It is difficult to take the recipient of the report to be other than exoteric Israel.

Finally, near the end of the instruction, we are told that the angel Dumiel gives the adept a solemn warning in the sixth palace to the effect that one who descends to the chariot must already be a master of Torah, either in theory or in practice, before he is permitted to proceed and join the celestial liturgy (§234). Obviously, this section stands in tension with the Sar Torah traditions, which have the purpose of teaching Torah instantly to anyone. Later, of course, we are told that he must also present a "great seal and a fearsome crown" to the angels in order to pass them (§236), which is more reminiscent of the sorts of ritual power tied to the descent to the chariot and the adjuration of the Prince of Torah elsewhere in the *Hekhalot* literature.

The account of the recall of R. Nehuniah during his descent to the chariot (§§224–228) is a secondary addition that is marked by redactional seams and is missing in the earliest manuscript of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, so we should consider its evidence separately. It fea-

tures a request from the “whole association” (כל חבורה) for R. Ishmael to bring back R. Nehuniah so that he can explain some difficulties in his instructions about the angels of the sixth palace, who sometimes attack some of the descenders to the chariot (§225). In passing, it also mentions the “association” as a body that makes legal pronouncements, with no particular esoteric connections (§226). R. Ishmael brings his master back, using a strange technique that involves ritual elements similar to those found in the texts of ritual power surveyed in chapter 8, but in a context that assumes standards of ritual purity that greatly exceed the rabbinic standards (§227). Once recalled, R. Nehuniah explains who the victims of the attack were.

(228b) He said to us:

These are mortal men whom the descenders to the chariot take and they station them above them and seat them before them and say to them, “Watch¹⁶ and see and give ear and write everything that we say and everything that we hear from before the throne of glory.” But these mortal men are not fit for such, therefore the guardians of the gate of the sixth palace attack them. Be careful that you select for yourselves ritually fit mortals and that they are of the well-tested associates.

His answer seems to say that the descenders to the chariot make use of amanuenses to take down by dictation the accounts of the descents to the chariot as they happened, but that the scribes are sometimes found ritually unfit and are attacked by the angels of the sixth palace. It is difficult to know what to make of this interpolation in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*. The application of extreme standards of ritual purity is characteristic of the *Hekhalot* literature,¹⁷ and the references to the “association” are compatible with the story into which the interpolation has been inserted, but the description of the people who risk their lives to act as secretaries to the enraptured visionaries is unique and rather implausible. It is not impossible that early details of the ritual practices of the visionaries are preserved here, but it is at least as likely, if not more so, that this passage is a late composition that does not accurately reflect praxes that were actually used.

¹⁶ Or “Have a vision.” The verb $\sqrt{\text{צפד}}$ usually has the latter technical sense in the *Hekhalot* literature, but that sense does not seem to fit this passage.

¹⁷ See Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 117–34.

Finally, there is the episode in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§238–46 in which R. Nehuniah reveals the names of the guardians of the gates of the seventh palace. After R. Ishmael is rebuked by Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel for not revealing them to another rabbi, R. Ishmael goes to R. Nehuniah complaining, “The president is angry with me! Why do I live?” R. Nehuniah replies,

(§239b) “Son of the proud, if not, what honor do I have among you? I have placed in your mouths Torah, Prophets, and Writings, Mishnah¹⁸ and midrash, laws and lore, and the interpretation of laws—forbidden and permitted action. Did any of you come and appear before me except for the secrets of Torah that I have entered?”

I take R. Nehuniah to be chiding his disciple gently, reminding him that he has prepared all his disciples for the visionary journey, teaching them both sets of requirements laid down by the angel in §234. Nevertheless, he does reveal the names after having R. Ishmael gather and instruct the group on how to receive them:

(§240b) “Now, since you say to me, specify (the names), come in and stand on your feet, and every single one of you, when His name issues from my mouth, bend down and fall on your faces.”

At once all the mighty ones of the association and all the magnificent ones of the academy came in and stood on their feet before R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah. He would recite (a name) and they would fall on their faces and the scribes would write (it).

This passage echoes §201, when R. Ishmael calls together the inner disciples and the whole Sanhedrin to hear the first instruction. Evidently they are all privy to the second one as well.

The Sar Torah

The *Sar Torah* text (§§281–306) begins with a legend about the revelation of the *Sar Torah* praxis. It is placed by R. Ishmael in the mouth of R. Akiva, who speaks in the name of R. Eliezer, and asserts that although the Torah was given long before, its true power was not revealed until the time of the building of the second Temple, when the returned exiles complained to God that they were too busy toiling at rebuilding the Temple to study Torah. God accepted their complaint and promised to give them their desire (§§281–86). I translate the rest of the legend, which contains the relevant material.

¹⁸ Or “tradition.”

(§287) "I know what you seek and My heart recognizes what you desire: you seek an abundance of Torah and a tumult of Talmud,¹⁹ you hope for a multitude of legal discussions and to ask about the law. You long for a tumult of My mysteries in order to multiply testimony—mountains and mountains of it; to set down sound wisdom—hills and hills of it; to enlarge Talmud¹⁹ in the streets and dialectics in the squares; to multiply law like the sand of the sea and masters like the dust of the inhabited world; (§288) to found academies in the gates of tents (cf. Gen 25:27), to explain what is forbidden and permitted, to declare impure the impure, to declare pure the pure, to declare ritually fit the ritually fit, and to disqualify the disqualified; to recognize bloods among them; to teach menstruants what things should be done; to bind crowns onto your heads and garlands of kingship onto the heads of your sons; to compel kings to abase themselves before you and to oblige potentates to prostrate themselves before you; to crack your name into every rock and your remembrance in the sea towns; to enlighten your faces like the brightness of the day and your forehead like the morning star.

"If you merit this seal so as to make use of this crown, the people of the land (*'am hā-'āres*) shall not be found in the world and there shall be no fool or dullard among you.

(§289) "You are happy but My attendants are sad, since this mystery is one of the mysteries that comes from My storehouse. All your academies are like calves of the stall; you no longer learn with labor nor with toil, but rather by means of the name of this seal and by the invocation of the crown. The astounded one is astounded by you and the miserable one is miserable over you. Many die from grief over you and their soul departs upon hearing of your glory. (§290) Riches and wealth grow mighty upon you; the great ones of the world cling to you; pedigree surrounds on all sides the family you marry into. The one blessed by you is blessed and the one praised by you is praised. You are called those who make many righteous (cf. Dan 12:3; Isa 53:11); they call you those who make beings meritorious. The proclamation of new moons goes forth from you and intercalated years from the prudence of your wisdom. (§291) By your hands the presidents are anointed and when you speak the fathers of the law court stand. You give standing to the chiefs of the exiles; the judges of the cities act on your authority. The reform of the world issues from you and there is none who opposes it.

"The attendants of the celestial prosecutor, the greatest of the attending angels, battle against Me greatly." This is His answer.

(§292) "Let this mystery not go forth from Your storehouse, and the secret of prudence from Your treasuries. Do not make flesh and blood like us, do not think of mortals as our substitute. Let them labor at Torah to the same degree they have labored over generations to the

¹⁹ Or "learning."

present. Let them establish it with toil and with great anguish. This is Your glory, this is Your ornamentation, when they praise²⁰ and turn in order before You, calling with a whole heart, supplicating with a willing soul:

“May what we read remain in our hands. May what we have taught be established in our hearts. May our kidneys grasp whatever our ears heard. May our heart hold onto the paths of learning which we heard from the mouth of the master and may one honor the other.’

“But if You reveal this mystery to Your sons, the lesser will become like the greater and the fool like the wise.” This is the answer of His servants.

(§293) “Do not, My attendants, do not My servants, do not pester Me about this matter. This mystery shall go forth from My storehouse, and the secret of prudence from My treasuries. I am revealing concerning it to a beloved people and I am teaching it to a faithful seed. It was hidden from days of old but from the days of creation it was perfected for them, yet it did not come upon My heart to tell it to all these generations from the days of Moses until now. It was kept for this generation, to make use of it until the end of all generations. For they have gone forth from evil to evil and they did not know Me, since their heart was squashed from the exilings, so words of Torah were as hard as bronze and iron to them. It is fitting to make use of it to bring Torah like water into their midst, and like oil on their limbs.

“This is how Israel was from the day My wrath burned against it and I struck it down: the mountains were perturbed and their corpses were like dirt in the midst of the streets.

(§294) “With what will I have favor on him? With what shall I comfort him or what good dispensation of compassion is there on high that I may bring it out and give it to him and make him happy with it? I looked and saw gold with Me—gold is in the world. Silver is with Me—silver is in the world. Precious stones and pearls are with Me—precious stones and pearls are in the world. I have already put wheat and barley, honey and oil into the world, but what does the world lack? It is this mystery and this secret that are not in the world. Therefore I will give them a dispensation of majesty with which My sons may make themselves majestic.”²¹

(§297) R. Ishmael said:

R. Akiva said this in the name of R. Eliezer:

Our fathers did not take it upon themselves “to set stone upon stone in the temple of YHWH” (Hag 2:15) until the King of the Universe determined it and all His attendants were bound to Him, and the

²⁰ Manuscript Vatican 228 reads “when they forget.”

²¹ Sections 295–96 are found only in MS Budapest 238 (//§§405–406 in MS New York 8128). They contain material about Metatron and the heavenly throne room and are unrelated to the Sar Torah myth.

Prince²² of Torah revealed to them how they should act and how they should make use of him.²³ At once the holy spirit appeared from the third entrance that is in the House of YHWH, since the Shekhinah had not descended nor been in attendance at the most holy House because of the decree. As soon as our fathers saw the throne of glory that *towered* and stood between the porch and the altar—although until that time they had not rebuilt the building, but (it was) on the place of the forms which were forms and stood; according to them the vestibule and the Temple, the altar and the whole house were to be completed.²⁴

(§298) And as soon as our fathers saw the throne of glory *towering* from its midst and standing between the vestibule and the altar and the King of the world on it, at once they fell on their faces. And about that moment He said, “Greater shall be the glory of this latter House than that of the former’ (Hag 2:9), since in the former sanctuary I was not bound to My sons except by a voice. This one is Mine and for My throne and for all My attendants. May it be established!”

“My sons, why do you fall down and are thrown down on your faces? Stand and sit before My throne in the same way that you sit in the academy. And take the crown and receive the seal and learn the order of this Prince²⁵ of Torah: how you do it, how you inquire about it, how you make use of it, how (you) raise up the paths of your heart, how your hearts may have a vision of Torah.”

At once Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel answered and stood on his feet before Him like an interpreter. He explicated the names of the Prince of Torah, one by one, by His name, the name of the crown and the name of the seal.

This text puts in God’s mouth what appears to be the agenda of the group promoting the Sar Torah praxis. Their agenda has parallels to the claims in the opening section of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*. They long for knowledge of Torah, but for them knowledge is power. An expert in Torah can control the lives of those around him by judging their ritual purity and fitness. He is revered by the rulers of his people and his fame reaches far and wide (§§287–88). The text promises all this to anyone, no matter how stupid to start with, who

²² Other readings include “secret counsel,” “mystery,” and “book.”

²³ Or “it.”

²⁴ The translation of this aside is conjectural and the text seems to be corrupt. I take it to mean that the fathers had a vision of the heavenly Temple superimposed on the spot where the earthly Temple was to be built.

²⁵ I take the reading “the order of this Prince” from MS Oxford 1531. Other readings include “the prince of this order,” “the crown,” “the order of the book,” “the secret,” and “the order of this secret counsel.”

“merits this seal” and knows how to make use of (i.e., ritually manipulate) “the crown.” This last sentence of §288 brings to mind the mention of the “great seal and fearsome crown” elsewhere in the *Hekhalot* literature (e.g., *Hekhalot Rabbati* §236 and *SH-L* §§318–21// §§651–54), as praxes used to control angels.

This “mystery” (מִסְתֵּר), the seal and crown, was hidden by God in his special storehouse, and it allows the academies to learn Torah astonishingly effortlessly (§289). The worldly benefits accruing to the practitioner are piled up: the family he marries into is revered, he has the reputation of a great and righteous man, and he gives authority to the Jewish rulers in Palestine and the diaspora (§§290–91). The power of the mystery is so great that the angels beg God in vain not to reveal it to mortals, since it will make all of God’s “sons” like the sages (§292). But God insists that he will indeed reveal it to “a beloved people” and a “faithful seed” (§293) who have suffered enough and now deserve a special gift (§294).

The actual revelation of the mystery is described in §§297–98. The holy spirit appears in the “third entrance that is in the House of YHWH” (the same place where R. Nehuniah’s instruction concerning the descent to the chariot is given according to the *Hekhalot Rabbati*). Although the text is corrupt, it appears that the “fathers” are granted a *Merkavah* vision: a view of the heavenly Temple containing the throne of glory, superimposed on the site of the soon to be built second Temple. The mystery is then revealed and its details explicated by the restoration leader Zerubbabel (cf. Hag. 2:23).

Gruenwald and Chernus consider this revelation to be aimed at an esoteric community as the “true Israel” rather than to exoteric Israel as a whole, but I do not find their arguments persuasive.²⁶ The word “Israel” appears four times in the legend, always with an exoteric sense (§§281, 282, 284, 293). God refers to his “sons” in §283 in a context that identifies them with Israel. It is true that the revelation is called a “mystery,” but this is because it was hidden up to the time it was revealed. But the revelation comes to the “beloved seed,” the “faithful people,” and the “fathers” in a very public place. It is also true that the practitioners are promised a special status in the world, but these promises appear alongside the assurance that anyone can achieve the status if they just carry out

²⁶ Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* 170–71; Chernus, “Individual and Community,” 259–262.

the proper praxes of the mystery. The express goal is that "the people of the land shall not be found in the world." Every Jew in the world will become a sage.

The mystery itself is not given in the text of the legend, but the next part of the work (§§299–303) gives a complex and detailed praxis for the adjuration of the Prince of Torah and his minions. It is not clear that this is the praxis the legend had in mind and there is some reason to believe the two sections were composed independently. For example, the praxis is never called a "mystery" in the second section and the second section refers to it as the "great seal" and "fearsome crown," not just the "seal" and "crown" as in the first section.²⁷ Moreover §§281–98 appear as a separate unit in one manuscript (Parma 1287/1) and §§299–306 in another (London Add. 15299).²⁸ But in any case, the praxis only refers once to its intended users and the reference is ambiguous: "For the learning is in our hands, the remedy of the olden ones and the tradition of the ancients, which they wrote and set down for generations (to come), for the humble to make use of it. And whoever is fit shall be answered by them" (§303b). The "humble" and "whoever is fit" could be taken to mean potentially any Jew in general or a member of an esoteric group.

This praxis is followed in thirteen of the seventeen complete manuscripts of the *Sar Torah* by the following brief episode:

(§304) R. Ishmael said:

Thus said R. Akiva in the name of R. Eliezer the Great:

Blissful is the one whom the merit of his fathers assists and for whom the righteousness of his forebears remains. He will make use of this crownlet and this seal, and they shall be bound to him, and he shall be declared majestic with the majesty of Torah.

(§305) R. Ishmael said:

This thing was done by R. Eliezer and he was answered, but he did not believe it. It was done again by me but I did not believe it until I brought in a certain dullard and he became equal to me. It was done again by the shepherds and they became equal to me. They brought R. Akiva out of the Land (of Israel) with the permission of the law court and he tarried until it was done by the multitude who did not read or study and they became equal to the others and were made like the disciples of the sages (כתלמידי הכהמים). He came and estab-

²⁷ In the first section MS New York 8128 does give the terms as "great seal" and "fearsome crown," but this is surely a harmonistic expansion.

²⁸ Schäfer, "Handschriften zur Hekhalot-Literatur," 208.

lished and agreed with their testimony in the law court of the president, saying, "This thing was done even outside the Land and it succeeded." But R. Eliezer the Great and the sages said that perhaps by the merit of the Land of Israel it sufficed for us, and they did not believe until they sent R. Akiva away to Babylon and it was done and it succeeded and he testified and after that we rejoiced.

This unit, which uses slightly different technical terminology from either of the other two,²⁹ coheres well with the ideas in §§281–98. The praxis is effective for the sages, for dullards, for shepherds, and for uneducated people in Israel or outside it—even in Babylon. The point about it working outside the holy land may be implied in §291, which refers to the activity of the practitioners in association with "presidents" and the "fathers of the law court," but also with the "chiefs of the exiles." In addition the word "academy" is used in §288 and §298 in the Babylonian sense of a session of Torah study.³⁰ But the explicit mention of Babylon in §305 is helpful in that it turns our mind to the most important external and physical evidence we have about the descenders to the chariot: the Babylonian inscribed bowls and their archaeological context in the Nippur excavations.

Halperin has proposed an overall interpretation of the *Sar Torah* text which he then uses to undergird his understanding of the Hekhalot literature as a whole. He argues that it was composed in the circles of the "people of the land" (*'am hā-'āreṣ*), mentioned in §288. On purely exegetical grounds I find this argument unpersuasive. The texts picture a wide range of social groups using the praxis and seem to say that any Jew may use it. Thus the references to dullards, shepherds, and the people of the land probably function as a kind of *gal vaḥomer* argument—an argument from the lesser to the greater. In other words, if the *Sar Torah* praxis can empower the stupid and uneducated with expertise in Torah, how much more can it empower others with more ability and education and make them like the sages. If it works for the least sagacious it will work for anyone.

In addition, the evidence for the social background of the composers of the Hekhalot literature built up in chapter 8 places them in scribal and perhaps synagogue circles of people who were fairly well educated but who lacked the specialized learning of the rabbinic sages in Torah and therefore also lacked the social status and

²⁹ The praxis is called the "crownlet" (קִרְיָן) and the "seal."

³⁰ See Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot* 435–36.

perquisites of the sages. One might object that the *Sar Torah* and probably the *Hekhalot Rabbati* teach that the powers coming from the vision of the chariot and the adjuration of the Prince of Torah were to be made available to all Israel, not just an even moderately elite conventicle. This is quite true and is an important piece of the puzzle, a piece that perhaps can be fitted into its proper place by another look at the Babylonian inscribed bowls.

The *Sar Torah* traditions indicate both implicitly and explicitly that Hekhalot traditions were used in Babylonia and the Babylonian bowls confirm this. We found in the bowls a version of a Torah incantation known also from the *Shi'ur Qomah* texts, an adjuration of the Prince of Torah, traditions of ascent to get power from heaven, and numerous other connections with the Hekhalot literature. The internal evidence of the bowl incantations also pointed toward the composers being literate scribes of the type described in the previous paragraph. But the physical evidence for the use of the incantations these scribes composed presented us with a very complicated picture. They could be used by the practitioner on his or her own behalf, but they could also be used on behalf of clients. And the practitioners who used the bowls were frequently not the composers of the incantations. All indicators are that bowls were produced by a socially very diverse range of practitioners for an equally diverse group of clients. Some practitioners were good scribes, others adequately if unimpressively literate, others semiliterate and careless, and still others evidently illiterate or at least serving illiterate clients. A good many bowls were excavated at Nippur bearing faux writing of nothing more than realistic squiggles.

I propose to read the *Sar Torah* material in the light of the Babylonian bowls along the following lines. The composers of the Hekhalot texts³¹ were scribes who envied the rabbinic sages and sought to compete with them using their own rituals of power. They

³¹ Given the Merkavah vision in §§297–98 and the reference to the vision to the chariot in §303, as well as the other evidence we have seen of overlap between *Sar Torah* traditions and ascent/descent traditions, it seems reasonable to me to take the composers of the *Sar Torah* to be members of the general constellation of practitioners which produced the Hekhalot literature. The *Sar Torah* does not use any form of the idiom “to descend to the chariot,” but the technical terminology of the Hekhalot literature varies widely from microform to microform, so one can still think of them as “descenders to the chariot” in the sense of ritual practitioners who sought visions of the Merkavah.

followed their own rigorous ritual praxes to wrest Torah power from heaven but they did not keep this power for themselves. It was part of their agenda to share it with all other Jews. In the Babylonian bowls we see how this was done. The composers made available incantations of Torah power to clients (presumably with rituals attached, although we know very little about these). We must recall that Torah power is a form of ritual power and the interest of these practitioners was in its practical applications: protection from demons and sorcerers, curses on enemies, personal charisma, and so on. Perhaps they charged their clients money, but perhaps they were paid instead or in addition by the status and respect they clearly craved, although probably not to the megalomaniac extent claimed by their propaganda. It may be that once the incantations were sold or given away, bootleg copies and unauthorized fakes were widely distributed. But given their explicit social goals it seems more likely to me that these practitioners gave out the incantations with the intent that they be used by anyone and everyone. The whole community could become the equals of the sages. Perhaps this is why nearly every house excavated in the Jewish settlement in Nippur had one or more incantation bowl buried in it.

The Hekhalot Zutarti

The *Hekhalot Zutarti* is a mass of Hekhalot traditions which appears to have congealed into its current shape (or better, shapes) with comparatively little in the way of deliberate redaction. No dialogues occur in it, but often a speaker (usually R. Akiva) opens a section. A number of passages give us some data on the social location of the practitioners described in the work. It opens with an admonition to be careful on the descent to the chariot, although just what one should be careful of is not very clear (§335). The next section gives a name and adjuration for remembering Torah which was revealed to Moses when he ascended to God and which is intended for "any man whose heart errs" (§336). The next section begins, "This is the name that was revealed to R. Akiva, who was gazing at the working of the chariot. R. Akiva descended and taught it to his disciples (תלמידים)." He addresses these disciples as "My sons" (§337; cf. §347). There follow some sections on the story of the four who entered paradise which appear in different forms from manuscript to manuscript. One manuscript also contains traditions about the ascent of Moses (§§338-45).

After this comes material on the ascent of R. Akiva to heaven (§346–48), followed by a passage of some interest. (It appears again in §361, still within the *Hekhalot Zutarti*. Significant variants are given in the notes.)³²

(§349) And what mortal man³³ is it who is able
 to ascend on high,
 to ride on wheels,
 to descend below,³⁴
 to search out the inhabited world,
 to walk on the dry land,³⁵
 to gaze at His splendor,
 to *dwell*³⁶ with His crown,
 to be transformed by His glory,
 to recite praise,
 to combine letters,
 to recite their names,³⁷
 to have a vision of what is above,
 to have a vision of what is below,
 to know the explanation of the living,
 and to see the vision of the dead,
 to walk in rivers of fire,³⁸
 and to know the lightning?³⁹
 (§350) And who is able to explain it and who is able to see?⁴⁰

This poetic rhapsody ties together many of the traits of the descender to the chariot we have seen thus far. He ascends on high and returns, he knows the secrets of this world and sees the splendorous

³² Sections §§349–50a have also been translated and discussed in chapter 1. The earliest copy of this passage is found in G7 (copied before the middle of the eleventh century). Its text appears to be quite corrupt, but I translate it here in full: “Who is able to ascend on high, to ride on wheels, to descend below, to uproot the inhabited world, to overturn the dry land, to *guard* His crown, to search out His glory, to have a vision of what is above, to have a vision of what is below, to gaze at the clouds of comfort, to know its [explanation], to recite His praises, to investigate in letters, in living letters, to know rivers of [fire, and to walk (?)] in the lightning and the rainbow. Who is capable of a vision and who is able . . . ?”

³³ §361 reads “And who is the mortal man.”

³⁴ §361 reverses the lines to read “to descend below, / to ride on wheels.”

³⁵ §361 adds “to praise the glory.”

³⁶ This word is corrupt in both §349 and §361 and the meaning is uncertain. Perhaps emend to “to make use of” (לְהַשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ / לְשִׁמְשׁ) with Schäfer, *Übersetzung* 3:19 n. 12.

³⁷ §361 reads “to recite the names of God” or “to recite the names.”

³⁸ §361 reads “to ascend on wheels of iron.”

³⁹ The corresponding line is corrupt and indecipherable in §361.

⁴⁰ This sentence is not found in §§361–62.

beatific vision that transforms him into a being of fire, he participates in the heavenly worship, he carries out rituals of power involving combinations of letters and recitation of divine names, he sees visions of the celestial realm and, evidently, (as R. Ishmael in 3 *Enoch* and G12) visions of the realm of the dead as well. As noted in chapter 8, Montgomery's bowls 9, 32, and 33 present a similar picture of practitioners who ascend to heaven and return, and who use the same sorts of rituals of power. This passage in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* gives us little information about the relationship of the practitioner to clients or a community, but "to know the explanation of the living, and to see the vision of the dead" at least implies an interest in the lives of people other than himself.

The only other notable passage comes near the end of the *Hekhalot Zutarti*, in §420, which describes the immolation of R. Ishmael's hands and feet when he comes to the throne of glory. He is rescued by the angel PNYWYN, who stands before the throne and dresses God.⁴¹ Of this angel we read,

(§420b) All who see him—whether young man or virgin girl, whether youth or elder, whether man or woman, whether gentile or Israelite, whether slave or maidservant—run to meet him and they love him for his welfare and they run to do him a favor and rejoice in provision for him, whether or not he returns the favor.

This sentence is all the more surprising in that it is an aside that lacks any hint of a polemical edge. It seems to say that the vision of this exalted angel is potentially available to anyone at all: a man or woman of any age, gentile or Jew, slave or free. This openness is problematic in that the ascetic rituals described in the *Hekhalot* literature frequently assume the practitioner keeps standards of ritual purity available only to a male Jew. In *Sar Torah* §299 he must "immerse (in) a strict immersion as a safeguard in case of pollution (יִקְרָא)," the pollution in question being principally cultic defilement from ejaculation. He must also eat only "clean bread of his own hands," again to avoid potential defilement from a menstruating or otherwise defiled woman touching his food. The praxis in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §424 explicitly requires that a youth refrain from ejaculation and that a married man refrain from contact with his wife for three

⁴¹ Most of the first part of the section is translated in chapter 5. Another version of §§420–21 is found in G8. See below.

days in advance. The praxis in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §572 requires that he “bake a pot of bread with his (own) hands.” The user of the *Sar Panim* praxis must avoid sexual pollution for seven days and (according to one manuscript) refrain from conversation with a woman (§623). Temporary male celibacy is also part of the praxis of *Merkavah Rabba* (§677//278//308) as is the avoidance of sexual pollution and the preparation of one’s own food (§684). The practitioner in G19 1a 12 “eats no bread (made by) a woman and he gazes at neither man nor woman” and the one in G22 1b 28 must “eat in the evening [br]ead of his (own) hands.”

Referring to this evidence, Lesses writes:

As religious acts, the Hekhalot adjurations mediate between pure men on earth, who are fit to perform the adjurations by virtue of the purifications they have undergone, and God and the angels in heaven. Both the mystical ascent and the adjurations of angels mention women only because of the impurity they may transmit to the mystic. They do not appear as potential participants in the ascent or angelic adjurations. This does not mean that men are immune from impurity; indeed the Hekhalot texts are very concerned with the possibility of a man having a seminal emission, but this possibility is a challenge, not a barrier, to the proper state of purity. The texts thus enforce the requirements for purity unequally on men and women. Although one could theoretically imagine that a woman could be pure enough to engage in the Hekhalot adjurations or ascents, the authors of this literature seem never to [have] entertained this possibility. Women are primarily obstacles to the purity men must attain in order to adjure angels or ascend to heaven.⁴²

Her evaluation is correct except for one point. In this passage in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* (with its parallel in G8) the Hekhalot literature does at least entertain the possibility of women—and gentiles—engaging in the ascent and having to do with angels. Perhaps the assumption is that the gentile in question is a proselyte, but if so we would expect this to be made explicit as it is in the *Merkavah Rabba* (see below). According to the Cairo Geniza documents and related evidence, women could be Bible teachers, scholars, and calligraphers, so they were not unknown in the sorts of scribal circles that produced the Hekhalot literature.⁴³ In addition, at least one woman

⁴² Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 372. On pp. 117–44 she discusses these texts in the light of Jewish and gentile traditions of ritual power in late antiquity.

⁴³ Goiten, *A Mediterranean Society* 2:183–85.

inscribed and installed an incantation bowl (Montgomery 17), so we must reckon with the possibility that there were female practitioners among the descenders to the chariot. At the very least, women made use of bowl incantations composed in the circles that included the descenders to the chariot. Gentiles did as well, of course, but we can only identify them in bowls that use explicitly polytheistic or Christian traditions. We have no way at present of knowing what kind of collegial relationship there might have been between Jewish and gentile composers and users of the bowl incantations.

The Ma'aseh Merkavah

Like the other Hekhalot texts, the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* consists of numerous originally separate microforms redacted together without very tight editing, and the work appears in different forms in the manuscripts. R. Ishmael, who is the main narrator, has dialogues in which he is instructed by two different masters. He speaks with R. Akiva in §§544–47, 554–55, 558–59, 573–78 (MS New York 8128 only), 592, 595 and with R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah in §§556, 560–66, 569–70, 579–81, 586, 591. R. Ishmael speaks by himself in §§552–53, 571–72 (units found only in some manuscripts) and with an angel in §§583–85 (where he associates himself with R. Akiva). R. Akiva speaks by himself in §§550, 557.

The focus of the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* is on the relationship of disciple to master and little is said about their social context.⁴⁴ A community is mentioned only once, when the angel ZBWDY'L asks R. Ishmael, "Son of the proud, what merit did your father and your mother have that you merit taking your stand upon this mystery?" and R. Ishmael mentions in an aside, "For the whole, entire world did not merit it, but I and R. Akiva merit making use of it" (§583). The angel warns him,

(§584b) Son of the proud, do not declare yourself more majestic than all your associates, and do not say, "Indeed, I have more merit than anyone," for it is not from your vigor and your might, but from the vigor of the might of your Father Who is in heaven. But blissful are you in this world and it will be good for you in the world to come. And blissful are you and it will be good for you forever and ever and ever and for all the mortals who take hold of it and recite it from dawn to dawn in prayer like you.

⁴⁴ With Chernus, "Individual and Community," 262–65.

The other practitioners are called R. Ishmael's "associates" (חבריים), a term used in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* for the descenders to the chariot. The angel emphasizes that all mortals who make use of the "mystery" or praxis in question are just as blessed as the two ancient rabbis, a natural claim in a document written by much later disciples who look back to them. Likewise, in §591 R. Nehuniah assures R. Ishmael that "Anyone who prays this prayer with all his vigor is able to have a vision of the splendor of the Shekhinah and the Shekhinah is beloved to him." But the ideology of the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* is not entirely egalitarian, in that R. Nehuniah indicates at one point that R. Ishmael's priestly ancestry offers him some protection as a practitioner (§586).

The Sar Panim

The focus in the *Sar Panim* is almost entirely on the individual practitioner. It opens with a dialogue between R. Akiva and R. Eliezer the Great in which the former asks the latter to teach him how to adjure the Prince of the Presence (§623). The bulk of the work is a series of adjurations for this purpose, including one place where the practitioner is to insert his own name into the spell (§634). The only hint of an interest in anyone but the practitioner comes at the very end of the work, which reads,

(§639b) With these fearsome and powerful names that darken the sun and thrust aside the moonlight and overturn the day and split the stone and quench the fire, I adjure spirits and dews, demons and satans: you must go far and depart from so-and-so son of so-and-so.

It appears that this adjuration of exorcism is to be made on behalf of a client, whose name is to be filled in at the end.

The Merkavah Rabba

Different forms of this work are attested in the manuscripts, three of which extend from §§655–708, although one stops at §670. Some shorter passages are found in some manuscripts and missing in others. As with other Hekhalot texts, the *Merkavah Rabba* is a loose collection of microforms, many or most of which existed before they were collected in this document. Once again, R. Ishmael is the narrator nearly throughout and there are dialogues between him as the disciple and his masters, R. Akivah (§§656–70) and R. Nehuniah ben

HaQanah (§§677–81). He speaks with both in one episode (§681) and mentions R. Akiva twice (§§685, 705). R. Akiva narrates in §686 and a R. Nathan, a “disciple” of R. Ishmael, is quoted in §700. In §687 (cf. *SH-L* §311), R. Ishmael refers generally to “every wise disciple (or “disciple of a sage”) who learns this great mystery.” Thus the relationship between master and disciple is quite central.

Nevertheless, their community also finds a place. In one passage R. Ishmael addresses his fellow practitioners, promising them blessings and giving a genealogy of the transmission of their mysteries and secrets.

(§675) R. Ishmael said:

Blissful is the man who completes this mystery from dawn to dawn. He acquires this world, and the world to come, and the worlds, and he merits greeting the future return of the Presence of the Shekhinah. Complete this with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might to do My will. Keep your mouth from all iniquity. Sanctify yourself from all sin and from all guilt and from all iniquity, and I am with you at every time and in every hour and in every moment and at every second.

You are declared holy, You are praised, You are lifted up forever, YHWH, God of Israel, King of kings of kings, blessed be He. For You dwell on an exalted and lifted-up throne in the chambers on high, the majestic palace. For You revealed mysteries and mysteries of mysteries, secrets and secrets of secrets.

(§676) You revealed (them) to Moses, and Moses to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the pious, and the pious to the fearers of the Name, and the fearers of the Name to the men of the great assembly, and the men of the great assembly revealed (them) to all Israel. And the sons of Israel were carrying out Torah by means of them and multiplying learning⁴⁵ by means of them and invoking before You every single, solitary secret, establishing and meditating and conducting themselves as sages and making themselves wise and making melody, Living One, mysteries of my power, mysteries my Rock, secrets. (*Nomina barbara* and hymnic material follow.)

The first section promises the practitioner general benefits in this world, the afterlife, and the eschaton. The second plays off the chain of tradition in m. *Abot* 1.1, replacing the Torah with the esoteric mysteries and carrying the revelation beyond the great assembly all the way to “all Israel.” Other reworkings of this Mishnaic chain of

⁴⁵ Or “Talmud.”

transmission in the Hekhalot literature include 3 *Enoch* 48D:10 (§80) and *SH-L* §397//474//734. Both also refer to esoteric revelations rather than Torah and both carry the list beyond the point the Mishnah does. In the latter it goes up to a R. Abbahu, and in 3 *Enoch* several links past him to the “possessors of faithfulness” (בעלי אמונות). Somewhat similar chains of tradition also appear in other books of ritual power, such as *Sepher HaRazim*. Swartz had collected and analyzed all these traditions and has concluded quite correctly that they serve as a counterclaim to the claims of the rabbis regarding their transmission of Torah. He says, “In these testimonies, charisma is vested not in a particular class and its intellectual process, but in a potent name, ritual, or text. This name or text is valid for anyone who holds it.”⁴⁶ In a word, the agenda of this passage in the *Merkavah Rabba* is the same as that of the *Sar Torah*: the special ritual of power was and should be revealed to all Israel so that they all may become sages.

Another episode in the *Merkavah Rabba* makes the same claim in even stronger terms. In §686, R. Akiva reports that during a visionary journey he saw God enthroned and God told him “Even if one has been a proselyte for only an hour, and his body is innocent of idolatry and bloodshed and incest, I am bound to him. I bind to him Metatron my servant—to his steps and to much study of Torah.” God also ordered him to “descend and bear testimony of the praxis to beings” (i.e., human beings). The section concludes, “And R. Akiva descended and taught beings this praxis.” Any Jew, even a brand new proselyte who is in a state of purity, can bind both God and Metatron to give him Torah power.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, as noted in chapter 3, the *Merkavah Rabba* does acknowledge in §681 that being of the priestly line, as R. Ishmael was, gives one special protection when carrying out the rites of power.

Finally, the practitioner is assumed to be a man of status in the community, for one benefit of using the *Shi'ur Qomah* is that “his good name goes into all the places of Israel” (§705; cf. §706).

⁴⁶ Swartz, *Scholastic Magic* 173–205; the quotation is on p. 205.

⁴⁷ Schäfer suggests that §686 “nicht in den text der MR (*Merkavah Rabba*) gehört,” on the grounds of its different emphases from the rest of the work (“Prolegomena,” 27). Compare Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* 117–21. He may be right, but this view involves a certain amount of circular reasoning, since the section is present in all three manuscripts and a similar if less strident egalitarian ideology informs §76, which he does not suggest is secondary.

3 Enoch

There is relatively little information on the social background of the practitioners in 3 *Enoch*, perhaps because it is a later work in the form of an apocalypse and in its current form it is nearly oblivious to the ascetic practices and adjurations of the Hekhalot tradition. As noted in chapter 3, it does affirm in the opening scene that R. Ishmael's priestly background gave him an edge when he had to deal with hostile angels on the heavenly journey (cf. G12 2a 5b-7). And the chain of transmission in 48D:10 (§80) has healing Torah power being dispensed to the "possessors of faithfulness," either an esoteric group or Israel as a whole.

Geniza Fragment 8

Geniza Fragment 8 is the only Hekhalot fragment from the Cairo Geniza which has decipherable content that tells us something about the communities associated with the descenders to the chariot.⁴⁸ Fragments of two works seem to be preserved in the part of this manuscript of interest to us. In the first, the "Seal of the Descent to the Chariot," the angel Ozhayah quotes the following cryptic speech of God, about a future sage in Babylonia.

(G8 2a 12b-23a)⁴⁹ And I heard Him Who said:

"ṬNR'L the angel⁵⁰—let this name be prepared and ??? not⁵¹ for the prince, and for all the princes, my attendants and also not for the angel of My Presence, but for a certain future sage, to be in the latter years in the future great house to be established before Me in Babylonia. And by that future house Babylonia shall bind on two crowns, one from the [s]ix days of creation and one for the latter years when I will bequeath this name to this future sage to be established before me in Babylonia [in] the great [hou]se. And I will call him, I and the whole creation, so-and-so ṬNR'L, for the number of the

⁴⁸ G22 ("Unicum") has a passage narrated by R. Ishmael (1b 7-31) which seems to refer to practitioners who are called "masters of Mishnah," "masters of lear[ning]" (or "of Talm[ud]"), and possibly "princes of prophecy to My throne of glory" (1b 11-12). But the text is badly damaged and obscure and I am unable to translate it at present. G22 was published by Gruenwald in "New Passages from Hekhalot Literature," 368-72 and by Schäfer in *Geniza-Fragmente* 183-89.

⁴⁹ Gruenwald, "New Passages from Hekhalot Literature," 357-58; Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente* 102-103, 110.

⁵⁰ Emending מלך, "king," to מלאך, "angel," with Schäfer.

⁵¹ Emending לו, "to him" to לו, "not" with Gruenwald.

letters of his name are the same as this name, for this has f[ive le]tters and the other name has five letters.

“And Ozhayah the angel of His Presence presses all generations from the six days of creation and [would ad]d to it an additional letter. And what is the letter? Such that one calls him ṬNRD’L. And I in my plan and he in the plan [. . . no]t saying (it) as if My name were six letters and the name of the future sage to be established before Me in Babylonia in the great house that I lead [. . .] letters.”

And I say, this name is my name because it is five letters and the name of this sage is five lette[rs]. And what is t[his] house [in] establishment? Indeed it is in establishment. And the number of the name is the letters of his name—five, and the number of my name is five. It shall be measure for measure, for I, Ozhayah am appointed over one of them whose name is Magog, like his name, And ṬNR’[L Y]HWH God of Israel is appointed over one of them to lift him up to the eyes of QHL QHLY QHYLWT.

This passage is corrupt and extremely difficult and I am not at all sure of the meaning of parts of it. The gist seems to be that an esoteric five-letter angelic name, ṬNR’L, has been prepared by God to correspond to the name of a future sage who will be active in an academy that is yet to be founded. The angel Ozhayah thinks to improve on the plan by adding a letter to the name, making it ṬNRD’L, an angelic name attested earlier in the work (2a 2). For reasons that are not very clear God objects to this plan and Ozhayah appears to accept the five-letter name. The discussion has to do with the number of the letters in each name and the relationship of this number to other names, apparently of God and Ozhayah.

This passage is exceedingly frustrating, for it seems to be saying something important about a school of descenders to the chariot, but what exactly remains opaque. The setting is Babylonia, but I cannot tell whether the future sage is a mythic figure still in the eschatological future for the writer or whether this is a prediction after the fact meant to validate the school of a particular Babylonian master in the writer’s present. The answer might be clearer if we could decode the cipher of the names. But in any case, the passage at least provides us with another connection between the descenders to the chariot and Babylonia.

Another reference to this “great house” comes in in the next column. R. Ishmael refers to a book of instructions he wrote for coming generations who wish to accomplish the descent to the chariot. Referring to the praxis in this scroll, he continues,

(G8 2b 21b–24a)⁵² R. Ishm[a]el said:

The thing was done by me but I did not believe it until the thing was done by a certain [di]sciple who was the most inferior of us all in the association. And he descended [and ascended?] and said to me:

“Ascend and testify in the association, for it is written four times concerning⁵³ the seal of the chariot. You feared⁵⁴ to descend by it⁵⁵ to see the King in [His] bea[uty], but at once the world was redeemed. These are the beloved and his disciple, behold (they are) two. And two are in the latter years in the days of the great house, and at once salvation comes to Israel.”

Thus far the Seal of the Chariot

As noted in chapter 6, the first section parallels the story of the Sar Torah praxis in *Sar Torah* §305, but applies instead to a praxis for descent to the chariot. The speech of the disciple seems to mention two practitioners, “the beloved” (evidently R. Ishmael) and his disciple, and two others in the eschatological future (the writer’s present?) associated with the school of the future sage. Whatever all this means, the passage attests to a group of descenders to the chariot who are called “disciples” and who are active in an “association,” a group connected on some level to a Babylonian school. These disciples are also called “associates” (G8 2a 30, 32) and to descend to the chariot it is required that each one “knows in himself that he is pure of transgression of bloodshed and he has Torah in himself” (G8 2b 12). Overall, the ideology and terminology of this work is quite similar to the ideology and terminology of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*.

The second work, “The Prince of Torah That Belongs to It,” commences immediately after the close of the “Seal of the Chariot.” The only passage of interest is a speech of Anaphiel (‘NP’L) that parallels *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§420–21:

(G8 2b 44b–49a)⁵⁶ ‘NP’L said:

I am ‘NP’L. Whoever invokes for me the name of one of His four attendants and adjures me by it—at once I do not turn either forward or backward, either right or left, until I strike him at once and

⁵² Gruenwald, “New Passages from Hekhalot Literature,” 363–64; Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente* 104–105, 111.

⁵³ Reading ע with Schäfer rather than ע, “testimony,” with Gruenwald.

⁵⁴ Reading אר.

⁵⁵ The scroll.

⁵⁶ Gruenwald, “New Passages from Hekhalot Literature,” 367; Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente* 104–105, 111.

widen him and knock him on his face, whether man or woman or youth or stripling or virgin girl or sage or dullard or poor or rich or warrior or weakling or chief or magistrate. At once I strike him and destroy him and I give him no hindrance, except for the king, for we do not set a hand against the kingdom, because of the distribution of the glory which He distributes to kings of flesh and blood. Thus far the might of 'NP'L.

In the *Hekhalot Zūtarti* §420 the angel is PNYWYN and he is either indifferent or grateful for the human attention. Anaphiel appears in §421, where he does the will of the practitioner and directs his hostility to the practitioner's enemies, "apart from the angel who is sent by the King of Glory." But in this pericope 'NP'L is universally hostile to anyone who calls on him, apart from the king. We seem to be dealing with free-floating traditions which have been incorporated into the documents in rather different ways.⁵⁷ In any case this passage allows for the possibility of female practitioners, although they, like everyone but the king, are destined to fail to control 'NP'L.

Summary

Consistently, the orientation of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* is toward the descenders to the chariot as an esoteric community as well as toward their relationship to the exoteric Jewish community. The first section describes the enormous, indeed terrifying powers the practitioner has over his fellow Jews, for which he is held in great respect and fear. The *Sar Torah* describes rather similar powers, but shows a stronger emphasis on sharing them with the exoteric community. The *Merkavah Rabba* also pictures the practitioner as blessed by God and a man of standing in the community, but it lacks the bombastic tone of the other two works.

The *Hekhalot Rabbati*, especially in the descent instructions of R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah, portrays the descender to the chariot as a master of Torah and ritual power who descends to the chariot in order to join in the celestial liturgy, presumably to add its power to his arsenal. The conventicle of practitioners is called the "associates" (חבריים) and the "association" (חבורה) and they belong to an "academy" or "session" (שיבה). These are similar usages to that of the

⁵⁷ As noted in chapter 8, one of the Geniza handbooks of ritual power (T.-S. NS 91.53 1a 12–22) also contains an adjuration with material parallel to §421.

rabbinic literature, but as applied to the descenders to the chariot rather than the sages. We have no way of deciding if the strange interpolation with the recall of R. Nehuniah contains early or late information. R. Ishmael also obtains revelations important to the whole Jewish community in the story of the ten martyrs, although it is not clear that these are revealed outside the conventicle. The first work in Geniza fragment 8, the "Seal of the Descent to the Chariot," has a similar emphasis, requiring that the practitioner be free of bloodshed and have Torah in himself before he attempts the descent. It too uses the term "associates" for the practitioners, and it refers tantalizingly to a Babylonian sage in a school set in R. Ishmael's future. But the second text in G8, the "Prince of Torah That Belongs to It," says that any Jew may attempt to adjure the angel Anaphiel, although the text asserts strangely that he or she is always destined to fail.

Regarding Torah power, the *Sar Torah* has a quite different perspective from that of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* and the "Seal of the Descent to the Chariot." The ritual practice it advocates, although given during a vision of God's throne and usable for the vision of the chariot, is designed to make Torah scholars out of all Jews everywhere, with the goal that the "people of the land," the unlearned and marginally pure, will cease to exist entirely. I have explained above how this agenda may have been carried out in sixth century Nippur by *Hekhalot* practitioners. To be fair to the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, its authors do require in the sternest terms that they bear witness to their visions when they return, although it is not clear whether the testimony is given to the conventicle alone or to all Israel. In at least one case, albeit in a time of emergency, this testimony included initiating the entire Sanhedrin into the praxis of the descent to the chariot.

The attitude of the other macroforms is less easy to delineate. The *Hekhalot Zutarti* offers its *Sar Torah* praxes to "any man whose heart errs," but it also speaks of R. Akiva's disciples (תלמידים). It quotes individual speakers, but never in dialogue. The most striking indication of its agenda is an aside (parallel to the strange passage in G8 but more coherent), implying that anyone, man or woman, Jew or gentile, slave or free, is welcome to practice the ascent to the chariot and the adjuration of angels.

The *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, the *Sar Panim*, and the *Merkavah Rabba* consist largely of dialogues between master and disciple and instructions of a master to his disciple, so their main focus is on this relationship.

Nevertheless, each also looks at times to a larger community. In one passage the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* says that "anyone who prays this prayer" can have a vision of the Shekhinah, but in another R. Ishmael is warned not to lord it over his fellow practitioners, who are called "associates." But otherwise it ignores the conventicle and the exoteric community. The conclusion of the *Sar Panim* is an exorcism with a space to fill in the name of a client. The *Merkavah Rabba*, which uses the term "disciple" for the practitioners, asserts in one place that its Sar Torah praxis was revealed to be used by all Israel, and in another claims that even a brand new proselyte, if he is unblemished, can readily adjure Metatron for Torah power. The *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, *Merkavah Rabba*, and *3 Enoch* agree that being of a priestly line gives one an advantage when attempting acts of ritual power, but none of them assert that such a lineage is a requirement.

Sometimes it is unclear if terms used in the corpus are meant to refer to a conventicle of practitioners or to the exoteric Jewish community. The words "sons," "his sons," and "my sons" may be used both ways. I am inclined to interpret all uses of "Israel," "the fathers," "the seed of Abraham," "a beloved people," and a "faithful seed" in an exoteric sense, but not everyone would agree with me. The reference in *3 Enoch* to the giving of healing Torah power to the "possessors of faithfulness" is ambiguous, but may be another name for an esoteric community.⁵⁸

Were the Descenders to the Chariot Magicians?

At last we have considered all the evidence I set out to examine and we may return to the cross-cultural questions raised in chapter 2. Before coming back to the main question, the relationship of the Hekhalot literature to the model of shamanism, I wish to digress briefly and consider the question of whether the descenders to the chariot should be counted as "magicians" in either of the legitimate senses discussed in chapter 2. That is, were they recipients of witch-

⁵⁸ Chernus also has some observations about community in the *Massekhet Hekhalot* and the *Re'uyot Yehezkel* ("Individual and Community," 270–74). But since the first work seem to be a late cosmology and the second is more a midrash than a Hekhalot text, and neither have clear connections with practitioners, I have ignored them in my analysis.

craft accusations or did they indulge privately in conscious, radical social deviance?

The answer to both questions is to some degree subjective, but my reading of the evidence is that the answer to both is no. The *Hekhalot* literature shows some hostility to the rabbinic authorities, but this hostility is offensive rather than defensive. Even the most polemical text in the corpus, the hymns of boasting at the beginning of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, boasts of how the practitioner's supernatural powers can bring harm to members of the community rather than trying to defend those powers against an accusation of sorcery. In fact, we are told in §83 that the practitioner "recognizes all sorcerers" or "recognizes all who know sorceries." Conceivably this could be an answer to a sorcery accusation—the descenders to the chariot are not sorcerers, rather their powers enable them to discern and oppose sorcerers. But it reads more naturally as a nonpolemical remark by a practitioner who unselfconsciously sees sorcerers as the excluded other. In addition I see no evidence that the writers of the *Hekhalot* literature were concerned about accusations of "witchcraft" or the "evil eye" (in the sense the terms are used in Winkelman's sorcerer/witch model). Although the descenders to the chariot wield terrible powers and are protected by angels, the damage they wreak on their enemies is either deliberate, through exposing their blemishes and sins, or divinely sanctioned and carried out by God's representatives.

In addition I see no evidence that the descenders to the chariot have a conscious attitude of radical social deviance. In a sense, of course, they do portray themselves as socially deviant. They claim to overturn the ruling power structures by means of their own divinely granted ritual powers. But in their own view—and it is only their own view that matters here—they are enforcing exacting divine standards on a lax society or, in the case of the Sar Torah tradition, passing the free gift of meeting those standards on to the rest of the community. They are socially hypercorrect rather than socially deviant. Their standards of ritual purity are often excessive by rabbinic standards. Their goal of making all Jews Torah scholars was shared by the rabbis, although their methods emphatically were not.

One wonders, of course, how the people who produced for their clients curses, love charms, and other spells of compulsion or harm viewed themselves and were viewed by their neighbors. I suspect that these practitioners usually considered themselves to be providing a

necessary social service. And I also suspect that their neighbors, perhaps grudgingly, agreed. A modern analogy would be the social role of lawyers. People complain about the litigiousness of Western society and bemoan stories in the news media about the awarding of excessive compensations in ridiculous cases or the release of clearly guilty defendants on legal technicalities. People tell lawyer jokes. Yet the same people, if their marriages break up or they feel they have been wronged, have no hesitation about retaining lawyers and paying them very well indeed. Lawyers provide a necessary social service, even if it is also a necessary evil. Practitioners of harmful ritual power were probably viewed in much the same way.

One also wonders, if some of the claims made about the descenders to the chariot were true, why they were *not* accused of sorcery. If they really did make accusations of hidden family blemishes or refused to stand for anyone but the king, the high priest, or the Sanhedrin, they must have made themselves very unpopular. I imagine such claims must be taken with a grain of salt. If they thought they knew the inner secrets of others, they need not have exposed these secrets and presumably did not unless the victim was powerless to retaliate. If they prosecuted with any diligence their plan to replace Torah study with ritual Torah power—and the physical evidence of the Babylonian incantation bowls indicates they may have—they cannot have been viewed with much favor with the rabbinic authorities. But we simply do not know what reaction the rabbis had to them, if they felt they needed to take any notice at all. In any case, the descenders to the chariot seem to fit Lewis's typology of the peripheral intermediary, but not mine of the magician or Winkelman's of the sorcerer/witch.

The Model: Shaman and Community

The last section was speculative and the questions it considered have no bearing on the main thesis of this book, although they are helpful as an imaginative exercise that contributes to the secondary goal of placing the descenders to the chariot in a broad social context. I return now to that thesis and to a consideration of the final element of the model: a shaman mediates between the divine world and a human group and in this way serves the people of this group. In chapter 2, I outlined five ways in which Hultkrantz found shamans

to serve their communities, along with a sixth proposed by Porterfield. Not all shamans performed all six services. We are now in a position to ask whether or to what degree the descenders to the chariot served their communities in these ways.

(1) *Shamans Act as Healers*

We have seen that the Hekhalot literature itself does not show much interest in healing. 3 *Enoch* refers once to the power of the Sar Torah praxis for healing illnesses, and in G21 Moses ascends to heaven and is given knowledge of the spirits who heal the human body. But otherwise the subject is ignored. However, when we turn to the texts that tell us how the descenders to the chariot used their powers, the picture is quite different. They frequently acted to protect their clients from evil spirits or to “heal,” that is, exorcise them of spirits that already afflicted them. We find such uses in amulet A21 and in many incantation bowls. In addition, the Cairo Geniza texts with strong connections to the Hekhalot literature include recipes for the healing of physical afflictions including female sterility, scorpion stings, and difficult childbirth. Usually the goal is accomplished by the adjuration of the angels or God and the angels to drive away the spirits or heal the victim, but sometimes an adjuration or ritual against the spirits or the affliction suffices. According to Hultkrantz, shamanic healing is accomplished either by retrieving the victim’s escaped soul or by removing an intruding object or spirit from the victim’s body. The descenders to the chariot seemed to have banished possessing spirits rather than recovering misplaced souls.

(2) *Shamans Act as Diviners*

“The divination,” writes Hultkrantz, “reveals unknown events in past times, things and persons lost, and future things to happen.”⁵⁹ By this definition the descenders to the chariot were certainly diviners. They seem mostly to have used spirits, although the hymns of boasting at the beginning of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* may imply that they drew on the power of the celestial liturgy. The composers of these hymns claim the power to know the private sins and family blemishes of their neighbors as well as their futures. Later in the *Hekhalot*

⁵⁹ Hultkrantz, “Ecological and Phenomenological Aspects of Shamanism,” 35.

Rabbati, in the story of the ten martyrs, the secret events behind the story are revealed to R. Ishmael by the angel Suriah. In the *Sar Panim*, the Princē of the Presence is adjured to give the practitioner knowledge of esoteric subjects and to do whatever else the practitioner wishes, which presumably could include giving answers to divinatory questions. In the “Seal of the Descent to the Chariot” in G8, we are told that R. Ishmael was given a cryptic (to us) revelation about a future sage in Babylonia who seems to be one of four especially revered sages, of which R. Ishmael was one. One Cairo Geniza text that has connections to the vision of the Merkavah gives instructions on how to interrogate angels on whatever subjects one likes. We have seen also that some dream interpretation texts from the Cairo Geniza and elsewhere have connections with the Hekhalot literature and may have been used by the same practitioners.

(3) *Shamans Act as Psychopomps*

The descenders to the chariot took some interest in the realm of the dead, and this seems even to have extended at times to the guiding of the dead to their proper place of rest. The *Hekhalot Zutarti* says that the practitioner is able “to see the vision of the dead,” and both G12 and *3 Enoch* 43–44 have Metatron guiding R. Ishmael through just such a vision. Moreover, in *3 Enoch* 48C:12 (in the short account of the elevation of Enoch) we are told that for three hours each day Metatron gathers the dead souls of children and the souls of the stillborn and teaches them Torah, obviously acting as psychopomp to prepare them for the world to come.

Granted, Metatron is a purely literary figure, even more so than R. Ishmael, but both were important role models for the descenders to the chariot. And one piece of external evidence survives that hints that these practitioners could act or at least pray on behalf of the deceased spirits of Jewish children. Montgomery’s bowl 25 is an adjuration of divinities and angels which seeks healing for a particular couple. The practitioner asks that the couple be granted children who do not die, but also intercedes on behalf of the children who have already died: “[may those who] have died find themselves in the presence of the gods and goddesses” (line 2a). It would be stretching a point to call this intercession psychopomy but it is notable that the chief angel adjured in the text bears the name Metatron; it is possible that the composer is aware of the tradition of Metatron as

psychopomp and alludes to this role when asking that the ghosts be welcomed into the realm of the divinities.

(4) *Shamans Act as "Hunting Magicians"*

The Hekhalot literature and related evidence do not use ritual power to aid the community in hunting. This not surprising, since the material has its life situation in a complex society with an agricultural and pastoral base. I will say more on the issue of shamanism and hunting cultures in the next section.

(5) *Shamans May Rarely Act as Sacrificial Priests*

We have one or two cases where the protagonists of the Hekhalot literature act as sacrificial priests, and we have seen that a fair bit is made of the priestly status of R. Ishmael. He is portrayed once as sacrificing a holocaust offering when he was shown a vision of the enthroned Deity (*SH-L* §151, MS New York 8128 only). In *3 Enoch* 15B:1 we are told that Metatron has "a great tabernacle of light on high," in which he acts as heavenly high priest, and there is a tradition about Metatron offering the souls of the righteous as sacrifices in heaven (e.g., *Num. Rab.* 12:12). But it is doubtful that much should be made of these references, inasmuch as by the time of the descenders to the chariot the Temple was long gone and we have no evidence that sacrifices were being offered in Jewish communities. Indeed, the historical R. Ishmael probably lived too late to have participated in the Temple cultus. It is possible that the Hekhalot literature preserves a dim memory of shamanic practitioners who were also sacrificial priests in the Second Temple period, but the descenders to the chariot themselves were not.

(6) *Shamans Address and Seek to Remedy Problems in the Community*

Porterfield sees the point of this service to be the reduction of unconscious psychological tensions within the community, and as a service it is double edged. On the one hand, by personifying these tensions in the form of spirits and reifying them in his or her body, the shaman can raise morale with symbolic performances that prompt specific changes in the group to lessen the tensions, or which at least offer a dramatic resolution. On the other hand, the means of resolving the tensions can sometimes cause considerable harm for individual

members of the groups (such a member scapegoated for a poor hunting season), and a shaman who seriously miscalculates the social forces involved can bring disaster on the group. Porterfield gives the example of the Ghost Dance movement, which promoted the invulnerability of Ghost Dance shirts to bullets and thus helped precipitate the slaughter at Wounded Knee.⁶⁰

There is ample evidence that the descenders to the chariot had a strong interest in the problems of the exoteric communities of which they were a part and that any actions they may have taken could easily have been similarly doubly edged. The actions of the sages during the Roman persecution in the stories of the ten martyrs and of R. Nehuniah's instructions for the descent the chariot provide a positive example. They use their powers on behalf of the community by gathering intelligence from heaven and by revealing praxes of ritual power to the exoteric leaders. But the hymns of boasting at the beginning of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* claim powers that are ideal for scapegoating. An authoritative practitioner could well have found ways to lessen group tension by accusing vulnerable members of secret and unprovable adultery, sorcery, or impure lineage, incidentally destroying the lives of the victims. The *Sar Torah* seeks to redress social inequalities within the Jewish world by making the learning, rank, and perquisites of the sage available to all. An attempt to carry out this agenda could have resulted in the release of some social tension but also in the creation of much more. The incantation bowls from Nippur provide physical evidence that hints at such an attempt, but unfortunately we have no idea what the social ramifications were. Similar agendas are implied in some passages of the *Hekhalot Zutarti* and the *Merkawah Rabba*.

The Results

When we compare the services shamans render to their communities to what we know or what is asserted about how the descenders to the chariot related to theirs, we find a close correlation. Of the five types of services frequently found among shamans, the descenders to the chariot provided three (healing and exorcism, divination, and addressing problems in the community) and perhaps to some degree a fourth (psychopompy). Only "hunting magic" is missing, under-

⁶⁰ Porterfield, "Shamanism: A Psychosocial Definition," 734-35.

standably in that we are not dealing with a hunting culture in this case. The sixth service, sacrificial priesthood, is not normally characteristic of either the descenders to the chariot or shamans. In a word, the descenders to the chariot correspond well to shamans in the services they provided for their exoteric Jewish communities.

Although this analysis has been quite illuminating, we should not forget that there are many things we still do not know about these practitioners even though we would very much like to. These include whether they called themselves rabbis; whether they practiced part time or full time; how and how much they were paid by their clients or, for that matter, if they were paid at all or if their reward came in more intangible forms of social status; what a course of training consisted of, and whether and how a disciple paid his master; and to what degree a practitioner specialized in some aspect of the lore. But nevertheless, we have enough information now to come back to the complete model of shamanism and evaluate its usefulness for understanding the descenders to the chariot.

“Shamans” and “Shaman/Healers”

What are we to make of the parallels between the descenders to the chariot and shamans? Overall, we have found a fairly close correspondence between the model of shamanism and what we can find out about the Hekhalot practitioners. They are chosen at least sometimes on the basis of physical characteristics or shaman's marks, although heredity and personal character seem to be factors as well. They use some of the same ascetic techniques used by shamans and report that the techniques produced the same results shamans report. One result is the experience of an initiatory death and resurrection which perhaps may be explained by the physiological toll of their particular ascetic regime. Another is the experience of a journey to an otherworld whose structure and relationship to our world fits the normal shamanic cosmology. Control of the spirits is central for the work of both shamans and the descenders to the chariot. And although the Hekhalot literature concentrates on how practitioners can gain power for themselves, the external evidence makes it clear that they use this power to serve their human communities in much the same way shamans serve theirs.

All this having been said, there are some elements of the model which do not fit the descenders to the chariot. They are not explicitly

called by the spirits, although such a call may be implicit in their use of physiognomic criteria. The spirits they control are normally angels, one of whom,—Metatron, is a deified human being.—They have nothing to do with animal spirits. They also do not engage in hunting magic. These anomalies are not overwhelming, but they point to a significant overall difference. Even though the descenders to the chariot are quite like shamans in many ways, they inhabit an advanced, highly stratified society based on agriculture and pastoralism. Yet Hultkrantz and others agree that shamans practice in simple hunting societies. Where does this leave us?

It is at this point that we would do well to return to the broad, indeed theoretically all-inclusive complex of magico-religious practitioners formulated by Winkelman. It will be recalled that Winkelman uses the four categories “shaman,” “shaman/healer,” “healer,” and “medium,” along with the tangentially related “priest” and “sorcerer/witch.” He posits an evolutionary relationship between the first and the second and perhaps the second and the other two. Despite my reservations about evolutionary theories of religious phenomena, these cautiously formulated suggestions seem reasonable. In any case, the typology also works on a purely descriptive level, especially if one keeps in mind that it is a continuum with several areas of significant clustering rather than four isolated and discrete categories. If we apply his typology to the cross-cultural array of shamanic practitioners I have used as examples in this book, the Siberian and Inuit practitioners as well as the Lakota *wicaśa wakan*, “holy man,” who all inhabit hunting cultures, fall under his category “shaman.” Blacker’s Japanese shamanic complex of “ascetic” and “medium” would consist in Winkelman’s typology of the synergistic efforts of a “shaman/healer” (and perhaps sometimes a “healer”) with those of a “medium.”

Although I accept the usefulness of this typology, I note that Winkelman’s term “shaman/healer” is less descriptive than it might be and indeed could be somewhat misleading. Many although not all shamans and shaman/healers engage in healing, so the term shaman/healer signals no clear distinction from shaman. A better way of formulating the distinction between the two types of practitioner is to say they represent two types of shamanism. The first appears only in hunting societies, which have a very low level of social organization. The second, which may well evolve out of the first, is found in agriculturally based societies, which usually have at least a somewhat higher level of organization than hunting societies

and often a much higher level. The second sort of shaman has a lower social status, due to the parallel rise of the priest. This type of shaman can differ from the first in other ways, but the specific differences vary widely depending on the particular practitioner in question. The spirit allies are usually animal spirits but are not always; the practitioners may use spells and exorcisms along with direct control of the spirits; they may have other sources of power (*mana*) besides the spirits; they rarely have visionary journeys; and they may specialize more than the first type of shaman does. Since the main dividing line between shamans and shaman/healers is their cultural matrix, one might aim for more descriptive and accurate terms such as "hunting shaman" and "agricultural shaman," respectively.⁶¹ Nevertheless, it may be more confusing to introduce new terminology at this point, so having noted my reservations, I will continue to use Winkelman's terms "shaman/healer," "healer,"⁶² "medium," "priest," and "sorcerer/witch."⁶³

If we apply Winkelman's typology to our data for the descenders to the chariot, they share the most characteristics with the shaman/healer. They are like the shaman in that they engage in healing and divination; they are predominantly or entirely male; they serve clients and perhaps the local community by means of control of the

⁶¹ The point being that the "hunting shaman" lives in and serves a community in a hunting society, while the "agricultural shaman" lives in and serves a community in an agricultural or pastoral society. After this chapter had been written, it came to my attention that Roberte N. Hamayon has proposed a similar typology for shamanic intermediaries: she uses the terms "hunting shamanism" and "pastoral shamanism." She uses as examples the Buryat tribes who live respectively to the west (the Exirit-Bulagat) and to the east (the Khori) of Lake Baikal in Siberia. The Exirit-Bulagat worship an animal figure called "Lord Bull" and preserve an all-male hunting shamanism whose practitioners participate in the central, "life-giving rites" that have to do with the natural order. The Khori, who have introduced worship of the skies and whose main fertility deity—the White Old Man—is primarily anthropomorphic rather than theriomorphic, are heavily influenced by Lamaist Buddhism, and have pastoral shamans who are usually women and who perform only divination, healing, exorcism, and generally rites pertaining to private matters. Like the latter, the descenders to the chariot, although they seem to be primarily or entirely male, interact with cosmic or anthropomorphic deities and engage in private divination, healing, and exorcism. See Hamayon, "Shamanism in Siberia: From Partnership in Supernature to Counter-power in Society," in *Shamanism, History, and the State*, ed. Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994) 76–89.

⁶² Although one might prefer "healer/diviner," since this practitioner does not necessarily engage in healing.

⁶³ The problem of shamans active in modern urban environments still awaits a thorough inductive study along the lines of Winkelman's.

spirits; they endure an initiatory death and rebirth; they experience ASCs and engage in the soul flight/journey; and they use shamanic ascetic techniques. However, unlike the shaman they do not live in a hunting and gathering or nomadic society without social classes; they perform no hunting magic; and they have nothing to do with animal spirits or transformation into animals.

Many of the features of the shaman are the same for the shaman/healer. But where the two typologies differ, the descenders to the chariot are more like the shaman/healer. They live in an agricultural and pastoral society with a high level of stratification and political organization. Despite some of their more outrageous claims, they have a lower socioeconomic status than the shaman. The rabbis hold the higher position. They work with spirits (but never animal spirits), although one function of these spirits seems to be to give the practitioners access to forms of impersonal power, including Torah power and the power of the divine liturgy. They also use spells, exorcisms, and rituals. They are more like shamans in that they experience visionary journeys.

Overall the descenders to the chariot are quite unlike the healer, in that they perform no life-cycle rituals; they lack formal judicial and economic power; ASCs are central to their work; they engage in visionary journeys; they make extensive use of ascetic techniques; and their work is more with spirits than with the superior God of their culture. They do not seem to have charged high fees to limit access to their profession or to have performed at major public ceremonies. Only in one respect are the descenders to the chariot more like the healer than the shaman/healer: they never use animal spirits, nor are they ever transformed into the forms of animals. Instead, they use angels and, for what it is worth, are also transformed at times into the forms of angels.

They are least of all like the medium, who is usually female; uses fewer ascetic techniques; lacks impersonal sources of power; is possessed by her helping spirits rather than controlling them; and her personality is generally replaced by the spirits during possession, resulting in amnesia.

Thus we see that the application of Winkelman's typology of practitioners simultaneously validates and obviates Gruenwald's objection to the comparison of the Hekhalot literature with shamanism. Shamanism indeed originated and flourished in nonliterate hunting cultures that lacked social organization. This is hunting shamanism.

But the shamanic complex survived in a very similar form in highly organized agrarian societies in the role of shaman/healer. And it is to the model of shaman/healer that the descenders to the chariot correspond best.

It would be desirable at this point as a heuristic exercise to consider how the Jewish society that included the descenders to the chariot might be fitted into the overall pattern of Winkelman's typology, but the limitations of our surviving information make this a difficult task. We would expect there to be a priestly functionary alongside the shaman/healer, and certainly priests have always existed in the Jewish world. But the Israelite priesthood had its life situation in the cultus of the Temple in Jerusalem, and after the final destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, priests have never had a central role in Jewish society. To a large degree, their role was taken over by the sages or rabbis, who tell us about themselves in the rabbinic literature. Unfortunately, we have few outside controls on what they say. Nevertheless, one could make a good case for considering them to be priests in Winkelman's sense. They have a high socio-economic status and a positive moral status. They are concerned with worship, purification, and agricultural, communal, propitiatory, and calendrical rites. They derive power from God but generally do not control spirits. They sometimes can affect the weather. They do not engage in ASCs, radical asceticism, or (perhaps with a very few exceptions) visionary journeys. Yet in some ways also they resemble healers in that they can use Torah power for divination, curses, and healing. But given that the boundaries between Winkelman's categories are somewhat porous, and a practitioner in a particular culture may straddle two of them, it seems best to regard the rabbis as priests. We have already encountered the witch/sorcerer above, who existed at least as a potential accusation in Jewish society.⁶⁴ Thus we may conclude provisionally that the intermediaries in the Jewish society (especially the Babylonian Jewish society) of late antiquity could be modeled as the priest (the rabbis), the witch/sorcerer (the "sorcerers" alluded to in the literature), and the shaman/healer (the descenders to the chariot).

The model, then, proves to be useful. I should clarify here that I am *not* concluding that the descenders to the chariot *were* shamans

⁶⁴ Regulations for dealing with the "sorcerer" (המכשף) are given in *b. Sanh.* 67b, commenting on *m. Sanh.* 7.11.

or shaman/healers. The model is a theoretical construct based mostly on modern—albeit widely varied—cross-cultural data. One could legitimately debate whether the model is concrete and specific enough to justify using it to identify a well-defined role that appears in vastly different cultures, and even whether it is possible in principle to identify such cross-cultural roles. I assert, rather, that the comparison of the Hekhalot literature with the model has great heuristic value and substantially advances our understanding of the texts. Both the ascetic rituals of the descenders to the chariot and the uses and effects of these rituals as portrayed in the Hekhalot literature have many cross-cultural parallels, and it is therefore very likely that they reflect genuine rituals that were used by real practitioners for the purposes they claimed. The comparison also sets the disorganized mass of material in the Hekhalot literature into a clearer order, helping us to see it better as an organic whole.

The Evolution or Popularization of the Hekhalot Traditions

I should also note in closing that there is some evidence for a development or a bifurcation of the intermediating roles found in the Hekhalot literature. The clearest example is in the Sar Torah and descent praxis given in *Ma'aseh Merkawah* §§560–65. In the midst of instructions for an arduous and complicated ritual, we find instructions for a much simpler one involving the writing of *nomina barbara* in a cup and the drinking of the contents. The writer explains, “If you cannot perform (the ritual), engrave them (the *nomina barbara*) with a mark, and do not trouble yourself with the words of the mighty” (§564).

Another example is found at the end of the ascent praxis in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§413–19. The last section brings the practitioner to the lap of God or a divine being, where he sits and asks for whatever he wants. A quotation of the Song of Songs follows (Cant 5:10–16), which seems to be included as a *Shi'ur Qomah* text. Then the section concludes, “Recite this tradition each day after the prayer.” On the basis of this sentence, Halperin argues that the recitation of the instructions for the ascent is meant to give the reciter the same power as the ascent itself.⁶⁵ Lesses has rightly challenged his interpretation,

⁶⁵ Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot* 373.

pointing out that the “tradition” is not a description of a visionary journey, but a very concrete set of ritual instructions which would be irrelevant if the only point of the passage were to repeat the tradition.⁶⁶ She adds, “It seems to me that the phrase ‘repetition [*sic*] of this mishnah’ could have been added at a later redactional stage in an attempt to reposition the ascent/adjunction text within the context of the daily prayers.”⁶⁷ I have argued in chapter 4 against Halperin’s interpretation of the last part of the *Hekhalot Zutarti* and provided additional cross-cultural evidence in chapter 6 that §§413–19 is a real ascent praxis.

Lesses may be correct in suggesting that the problematic sentence is a gloss, but Halperin’s understanding of the material is more or less correct from the perspective of the glossator. In other words, at least some of the transmitters of the European Hekhalot manuscripts (if not earlier tradents) wanted to draw on the power of the Hekhalot praxes without performing the praxes themselves, and adjusted the manuscripts accordingly.

Another example of such adjustment appears in an early (eleventh- to twelfth-century) ritual power text from the Cairo Geniza. I discussed T.-S. K 1.35 + T.-S. K 1.48 in chapter 8, where I pointed out that its praxis for questioning angels and having a vision of God’s throne was much simpler than the praxes of the Hekhalot texts. It involves merely reciting a list of *nomina barbara* and a concluding formula from one of the eighteen benedictions of the *Amida*.

I can think of two interpretations of this type of radical simplification of the ascetic praxes. The first is a diachronic and perhaps evolutionary one. As time passed, the Hekhalot traditions survived but the practice of them died out, perhaps at first locally, then eventually completely. But the manuscripts and handbooks were adapted so that the power of the rituals could be retained long after the rituals themselves fell out of use. If we had more information we might be able to fit these new practitioners into Winkelman’s typology as healers or mediums.

The second interpretation is synchronic and is not incompatible with the first. It is also more speculative. We have seen that the Hekhalot tradition has a persistent radically egalitarian aspect to it.

⁶⁶ Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 254–55.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 255.

At least some of the tradents wished to have the power of their secrets put in the hands of the masses so that everyone could be a sage and a master of Torah. I have raised the possibility that the distribution of bowl incantations at Nippur makes sense as the working out of this ideology. The composers may have willingly distributed their compositions so that even the illiterate could use their Torah power. Perhaps the hints in the other texts that the recitation of the rituals could give the same power as the performance of the rituals is the survival of something very old, something promoted by the practitioners themselves as part of their own ideology.

Some might say that I am undermining my entire argument with this suggestion, so I should reiterate that I have assembled a great mass of evidence in this book which proves that the Hekhalot literature preserves rituals and adjurations that were meant to be used; that they actually were used in specific social contexts for practical reasons and for named clients; and that the people who produced the rituals correspond well to the multifaceted cross-cultural typology of a recognizable intermediary or magico-religious practitioner—the shaman/healer. Although I know of no shamanic cross-cultural analogies for the democratization of ritual power I am postulating for the descenders to the chariot, their radical egalitarianism is an important component of the texts, and my speculations about how it may have been worked out in practical terms seek only to do justice to the totality of the evidence and to Halperin's important contributions to the debate.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have surveyed the Hekhalot literature as a whole to see what it tells us about the relationship between the descenders to the chariot and the people around them. Depending on the macroform and microforms in question, I found the material to have a strong interest in the relationship between master and disciple, but always with a recognition that they worked alongside other practitioners. The texts also show an interest in serving the exoteric Jewish community by locating blemished persons within it, by supporting it in times of crisis, and by sharing divine power with it through the Sar Torah praxis and perhaps through revelations about the practitioners' visions of the celestial liturgy.

When I turned to a continued examination of the shamanic model and related typologies, I found that the descenders to the chariot did not fit the category "magician," either as recipients of unwanted witchcraft accusations or as conscious social deviants. But they did perform three, and perhaps even four, of the five services normally performed by shamans for their communities. Although the descenders to the chariot lack the connections with hunting cultures central to shamanism as traditionally understood, they do resemble the shamanic equivalent in agrarian and pastoral cultures, the functionary called the "shaman/healer" by Winkelman. This is strong evidence that they were real magico-religious practitioners.

I sought to apply Winkelman's typology of practitioners to the broader culture of the descenders to the chariot and proposed tentatively that the practitioner complex makes sense when viewed in his terms as consisting of priests, witch/sorcerers, and shaman/healers. I also noted the evidence that some tradents used simplified versions of the Hekhalot rituals or even the mere recitation of the ritual instructions in place of the performance of the rituals. This evidence may indicate a later development of roles similar to Winkelman's healers or mediums in the Hekhalot tradition, or that the practitioners themselves recognized simpler praxes for the masses, or both.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSIONS

Main Conclusions

The most important contribution of this study is the demonstration that the descenders to the chariot as described in the Hekhalot literature closely resemble the model of shamanism generally accepted in the anthropological literature, with the exception mainly of elements associated only with hunting cultures. The six elements of the model are as follows.

(1) One usually becomes a shaman through election by the spirits, often due to a hereditary link with shamanhood. The election may be indicated through dreams, visions, or physical characteristics of the prospective shaman. Occasionally someone may also conceive a desire to become a shaman and take steps to cajole the spirits into accepting him or her. The Hekhalot literature shows some interest in the hereditary background of the descenders to the chariot (descendants of "those who kissed the calf" are less likely to succeed and members of the priestly line more likely), but it does not restrict entry into the group to particular families. Nevertheless, the physiognomic literature hints that special physical markings, much like shaman's marks, are associated with the practitioners and such marks may have been taken to indicate their election as intermediaries.

(2) Shamans achieve ecstasy or trance by means of a cross-culturally attested complex of ascetic techniques which seems to promote particular types of altered states of consciousness (the Shamanic State of Consciousness). Although the Hekhalot literature does not prescribe ingestion of psychotropic drugs or the playing of drums, it does give detailed instructions for rituals involving fasting and dietary restrictions, temporary celibacy, cultic purification, and isolation and sensory deprivation. The descenders to the chariot use the same ascetic techniques shamans use.

(3) Some shamans, particularly in Arctic regions, endure an initiatory experience of personal disintegration or dismemberment by the spirits, followed by a reintegration and resurrection that fills them

with power over the spiritual world. The Hekhalot literature reports a similar ordeal suffered by the descenders to the chariot: when faced with the view of the enthroned Deity they are burned and torn apart, but then they are resurrected as flaming angelic beings at home in heaven. Aspects of their ascetic regime which might lead to hypocalcemia offer a possible physiological explanation for this experience and its similarity to the Arctic accounts.

(4) Many shamans go on otherworldly journeys to a multi-tiered heaven or underworld via a world tree or world ladder. According to the Hekhalot literature, the descenders to the chariot travel through the sevenfold celestial palaces as though on a ladder until they come to the throne of God. They use the same techniques as shamans and see the sorts of visions shamans report.

(5) A central element of shamanism is the control of the shaman over helping spirits for various purposes. These are usually the spirits of either animals, ancestors, or departed shamans. The Hekhalot literature and other evidence portray the descenders to the chariot as practitioners who control spirits—almost always angels—for nearly everything they set out to accomplish.

(6) The shaman acts to serve a human community by various means, including healing and exorcism, divination, psychopompy, hunting magic, the remedying of social conflicts, and (rarely) acting as a sacrificial priest. The evidence of the Hekhalot literature and related practical texts of ritual power from late antiquity and the early Middle Ages indicates that the descenders to the chariot carried out three of these and perhaps, at least on an attenuated level, psychopompy as well. They did not engage in hunting magic or sacrificial priesthood.

Thus the descenders to the chariot correspond well to Winkelman's typology of the magico-religious practitioner he calls the "shaman/healer." They do not always embody the most common elements of the model, but they fit within the total range of possibilities. They resemble a type of shaman who survives in a complex agricultural and pastoral society and who has adapted accordingly.

This correspondence has a number of implications for our understanding of the Hekhalot literature. First, it gives the bizarre content of the texts a certain organic unity. Shamans use the same ascetic techniques both to summon and control the spirits and to go on otherworldly journeys, two elements of the Hekhalot literature which some exegetes have tried to separate in recent years. The

model reinforces the centrality of the control of spirits in the Hekhalot texts, whether they are made to act as guides on the otherworldly journey, to reveal esoteric secrets, or for some other purpose. And the hitherto mysterious fiery destruction of the adepts makes good sense when seen as an initiatory experience.

A second implication is that the Hekhalot literature does not consist of primarily fictional or literary compositions, as do the Second Temple apocalypses. The instructions for rituals and adjurations are practical; they were meant to be used and indeed were used. The results they claim to bring about are the results claimed for such rituals by shamans all over the world. The Hekhalot literature must be read on its own terms as the literary residue of a quasi-shamanic intermediary movement, not on the terms of the earlier and quite different apocalyptic literature.

Third, the natural inference is that the descenders to the chariot themselves wrote much of the material that survives in the Hekhalot literature. Although the texts have been redacted and shaped over many centuries, a good portion of the microforms preserve genuine instructions about ritual practices and visionary experience. This material is esoteric, in that it consists of instructions for disciples, but at least some of it also perpetuates an ideology of radical exotericism, on which more below.

Another main contribution of this book is that it establishes at least one geographical and chronological life situation for the descenders to the chariot—Babylonia (specifically the city of Nippur) in the fifth to seventh centuries CE. Here we can see these practitioners in action in their own community through the evidence they have left us in the buried incantation bowls. Hints about other life situations have surfaced as well. The metal amulets may indicate that similar practitioners were active in Syria or Palestine at the same time or a little earlier. And the texts of ritual power from the Cairo Geniza show that Hekhalot rituals, adjurations, and traditions continued to be used somewhere in the Middle East in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and even later.

Ancillary Proposals and Suggestions for Further Research

These are the major conclusions of this study, which seem to me to be very well grounded. But throughout this volume I have made a

number of other proposals that are supported by the current evidence, although they are not as certain as the points summarized above. I present these less as conclusions than as stimulants for further discussion.

First, I have suggested that the instructions, rituals, and visionary accounts found in the Hekhalot corpus as a whole can be explained synthetically along the following lines. The Hekhalot literature provides instructions for becoming a practitioner of three types of ritual power. The practitioner can call down the Prince of Torah to gain Torah power. Or the practitioner can bind spirits directly to grant wishes, either by adjuration or by ascending to the throne and sitting on the lap of a divine being. Or he can compel angels to lead him on a journey to the celestial throne room so that he can participate in the celestial liturgy, evidently in order to be filled with heavenly liturgy power. All three types of power—Torah power, the power to bind spirits to one's will, and liturgy power—were viewed in Jewish tradition as practical forms of ritual power, and I see the overarching goal of the Hekhalot literature to be the use of these powers for practical benefits to the exoteric community. We see the practitioners using Torah power to drive away the spiritual forces of evil in the incantation bowls Montgomery 25 and Gordon E/F/Hyvernat. They adjure angels for similar purposes in the *Sar Panim* and in bowl Moussaieff 1, and various Hekhalot texts make it clear that the adept seated on the lap of the divine figure can ask for whatever he wants. And although participation in the celestial liturgy is never explicitly tied in the Hekhalot literature to practical service to the community, the connection is supported by the evidence. Some of the texts from the Cairo Geniza draw on the Jewish liturgy as a source of ritual power as effective as spells and adjurations. If the goal of the ascent is to bring back such heavenly liturgy power, we can understand why the *Hekhalot Rabbati* finds it so important for the practitioner to bear witness on his return to what he saw in heaven, and where Joshua bar Peraḥya got the exorcism spells he brought down from heaven according to Montgomery's bowls 32 and 33.

In general, the relationship of the Hekhalot literature to the Jewish liturgy and of the descenders to the chariot to the social structures associated with the synagogue are areas where further study is desirable.

Second, I have come to doubt that the Sar Torah and descent/ascent materials should be separated as two distinct movements or traditions. I see these materials as too intertwined with one another and too internally inconsistent in themselves for such a bifurcation. Ascetic rituals are not limited to the Sar Torah praxis: we find them applied to the heavenly descent/ascent in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§203–205; *Sar Torah* §303; *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§422–24; *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§560–65; and perhaps G22 1b 27–30. A vision of God's throne is featured in *Sar Torah* §§297–98. *Sar Torah* §305 and G8 2b 21–22 use nearly identical language to narrate the success of an especially dull disciple at, respectively, the Sar Torah praxis and the descent to the chariot. Visionary journeys to gain Sar Torah powers are narrated in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §336 and G8 2b 36–37 (and one for a revelation of the *Shi'ur Qoma* in *Merkavah Rabba* §688). Some of these passages have been dismissed as glosses or contamination of traditions, but the overlaps between the Sar Torah and descent/ascent materials are pervasive enough that to explain them all in this way would be specious.

This is not to deny that there are differences between the two categories of material. It is true, for example, that ascetic praxes appear more often and consistently in texts pertaining to the adjuration of angels, particularly the Prince of Torah and the Prince of the Presence. It is also true that such texts almost never speak of the descent to the chariot. But the two categories themselves have many internal variations from microform to microform. I have isolated three sets of terms used for the Sar Torah praxis in the *Sar Torah* text, and it is well known that some texts concerning the visionary journey speak of an upward “descent” and a downward “ascent,” while others use the two terms in the opposite and normal way.

It may be helpful to change our thinking about the material, focusing less on a distinction between the Sar Torah praxis and the visionary journey and more on the variant practices and emphases of the individual microforms. These may well reflect different notions of individual groups and communities, notions that have been collected only secondarily into the macroforms. Some practitioners in some groups may have specialized in the Sar Torah praxis or the visionary journey, while others combined them. Synergistic combinations of specialist practitioners in a given community are possible—compare the Japanese shamanic complex of ascetic and medium. Or some may have specialized in a particular form of power (binding of spirits, Torah power, or divine liturgy power) but used more than

one means to gain it (e.g., both heavenly ascent and adjuration of angels to gain Torah power).

Third, I have found both esoteric and exoteric elements in the Hekhalot literature. The extraordinarily demanding rituals and the dangerous adjurations of angels and visions of the divine realm are esoteric—aimed at highly dedicated disciples. But even these practices and experiences ultimately have an exoteric agenda in that the power arising from them is to be used for serving the Jewish community as a whole. Some of the texts also promote a radically egalitarian agenda which demands that the secrets uncovered by the visionary journey and the revelations of the Prince of Torah be shared with all Jews and perhaps even all human beings. I have suggested tentatively that the acting out of this ideology may be reflected in the physical evidence of the Babylonian incantation bowls, which simultaneously manifest origins in an elite scribal guild and enthusiastic dissemination through all levels of Jewish society and even among gentiles. With this interpretation in mind, a thorough review of the evidence uncovered in the Nippur excavation, and indeed the archaeology of late antique Iraq in general, might prove illuminating.

The Hekhalot literature seems also to hint at a degeneration or popularization of the rigorous demands placed on the descenders to the chariot. Provision is occasionally made to replace a difficult ritual with an easy one advertised as equally effective. It is a question for future research whether these notes are glosses added at a time when the ascetic rituals had fallen out of use or concessions by the composers themselves for the sake of their own democratizing ideology. The evolution of the textual tradition from late antiquity into the Middle Ages as well as developments among the practitioners who used the texts are other areas for future research. A correlation of sophisticated text-critical study, using synoptic and hypertext approaches, with social-scientific analysis of the material which uses typologies like Winkelman's is likely to advance our understanding of the history of the descenders to the chariot.

In this book I have located the practitioners who produced the Hekhalot literature in a specific time and place and to some degree in a specific social context. We know when and where at least some of them lived and worked. We do not know any of their names for certain yet, but we have learned the names of some of their clients and neighbors, of whose personal lives we have caught glimpses. I have also set these practitioners in an illuminating cross-cultural

context by comparing them to a particular type of magico-religious functionary: the shaman and, more specifically, the shaman/healer. Although much about them remains obscure—and much always will—our lens for viewing them has gained a sharper focus and we have, so to speak, a few snapshots of them at work. We can now speak of the descenders to the chariot not only as literary constructs but as real people, the people behind the Hekhalot literature.

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