NATHANIEL DEUTSCH

GUARDIANS OF THE GATE

ANGELIC VICE REGENCY IN LATE ANTIQUITY

GUARDIANS OF THE GATE

BRILL'S SERIES IN JEWISH STUDIES

VOL. XXII

GUARDIANS OF THE GATE

ANGELIC VICE REGENCY IN LATE ANTIQUITY

BY

NATHANIEL DEUTSCH

BRILL
LEIDEN · BOSTON · KÖLN
1999

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is also available.

Die Deutsche Bibliothek – CIP-Einheitsaufnahme

Deutsch, Nathaniel:
Guardians of the gate : angelic vice regency in late antiquity / by Nathaniel Deutsch. – Leiden ; Boston ; Köln : Brill, 1999
(Brill's series in Jewish studies ; Vol. 22)
ISBN 90–04–10909–9

ISSN 0926-2261
ISBN 90 04 10909 9

PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

For Yael and David

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my mother and father for their devotion, sacrifice, and love. Without them, this book would not have been possible. I would also like to thank the rest of my family and friends for their support. Both Sarah and Miriam deserve props for helping me to complete this project. My students, teachers, and colleagues have all helped me along the way. In particular, I would like to thank my fellow professors in the Department of Religion at Swarthmore College: Yvonne Chireau, Jerry Frost, Steven Hopkins, Vera Moreen, Ellen Ross, Don Swearer, and Mark Wallace. A number of institutions have provided financial assistance during different stages of research and writing. Thank you to the Memorial Foundation of Jewish Culture and the National Foundation of Jewish Culture for providing grants which helped me to complete this work. SUNY Press allowed me to re-print material from an earlier piece: "Abathur: A New Etymology," in J. Collins and M. Fishbane, eds., *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, Albany, 1995. I have also benefitted from the expertise of a number of colleagues who commented on papers I delivered or who discussed my work in private conversations and correspondence, including April De Conick, David Halperin, Moshe Idel, and Christopher Morray-Jones. I would especially like to thank Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley for her encouragement and guidance in the area of Mandaean studies. Finally, my deep gratitude goes to the following scholars who read sections of the manuscript, providing helpful comments and criticism; of course, any errors which remain are entirely my own: Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley, John J. Collins, Arthur Droge, Michael Fishbane, and Elliot Wolfson.

PREFACE

This book reflects a long period of research into the religious movements of Late Antiquity. Out of this same research emerged my first book *The Gnostic Imagination: Gnosticism, Mandaeism, and Merkabah Mysticism*, which focused on the theoretical issues involved in a comparison of these traditions and touched on a number of theological issues, such as the link between the hypostatic body of God and transformative knowledge. The present study may be read as a companion volume to *The Gnostic Imagination* insofar as it examines the same religious movements. Whereas the first book explored methodologies and broadly examined Merkabah mysticism, Gnosticism, and Mandaeism, the present work takes a magnifying glass to a single topic within these traditions: the myth of the angelic vice regent.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> "Truth did not come into the world naked, but it came in types and images" *Gospel of Philip 67:10*

One of the most important types to mediate between the divine realm and the material world in late antique religions was the angelic vice regent. As the name implies, the angelic vice regent functioned as a theological counterpart to the political vice regent. Just as the human vice regent mediated between the emperor and his realm, so the angelic vice regent mediated between God and the world. Thus, the angelic vice regent frequently functioned as judge and governor of the world, guardian of the divine dwelling, priest of the heavenly tabernacle, and even as a divine hypostasis and demiurgic figure.

More than any other figure in late antique religions, the angelic vice regent embodies the logic of mediation. Certainly the angelic vice regent was not the sole mediator figure in late antique religions, but he was the mediator *par excellence*. The angelic vice regent mediated between the physical and pleromatic worlds, divine and human existence, transcendence and immanence. The mediating functions of the angelic vice regent reveal his quintessentially *mythical* character, as Lévi-Strauss has written: "myths seem to be entirely devoted to exhausting all the possible solutions to the problem of bridging the gap between the *two* and the *one*."[1]

This book will illuminate a highly important topic within the history of angels. Angels have fascinated human beings for thousands of years and continue to do so today, as the current host of books on angels attests. The important position of the angelic vice regent in the theologies and cosmologies of Late Antiquity teaches us much about what it meant to be divine or human in this period. Thus, the angelic vice regent holds at least one key to understanding the basic theological and anthropological structures of Late Antiquity.

---

[1] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. I, New York and London, 1963, p. 226.

I will examine a number of angelic vice regents including the Jewish figures Metatron and Akatriel, the Gnostic figure Sabaoth and the Mandaean figure Abathur.[2] The role of the angelic vice regent in early Christianity requires a monograph of its own. Because of this I have merely outlined the profile of Jesus as a vice regent, as well as certain Muslim and Hermetic traditions, in appendices. The comparative study of angelic vice regents in Merkabah mysticism, Gnosticism, and Mandaeism is important for several reasons. The development of highly similar angelic vice regent traditions within Merkabah mysticism, Gnosticism, and Mandaeism indicates that all three movements struggled with the same theological questions and sometimes attempted to solve these questions in parallel ways. By contrast, the differences between Jewish, Gnostic, and Mandaean angelic vice regents highlights the sometimes conflicting orientations of these religious traditions. My comparative examination will reveal that Jewish, Gnostic, and Mandaean sources drew on a common pool of biblical and intertestamental Jewish traditions in constructing the myths of their respective angelic vice regent figures.

A number of scholars, most notably Gershom Scholem, have examined the relationship between Merkabah mysticism and Gnosticism. In another study, I examined this topic in detail, placing particular focus on Scholem's work.[3] Although Merkabah mysticism is not a form of Gnosticism, as Scholem would sometimes have had it, there are a number of important elements shared by the two movements. These include common cosmological and angelogical motifs, a belief in transformative knowledge, and a valorization of the image of God.

Studies on the relationship between Mandaeism and Judaism have long focused on the areas of ethics and ritual.[4] While cosmological and theological issues have attracted some attention, many important topics remain unexplored. Of particular interest are the many parallels between Mandaeism and different forms of Jewish mysticism including the Kabbalah and the Hekhalot material.[5]

---

[2] Although not all of these figures are angels, per se, their character justifies this convenient appellation.

[3] Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Gnostic Imagination: Gnosticism, Mandaeism, and Merkabah Mysticism*, Leiden, 1995.

[4] See, especially Kurt Rudolph, *Die Mandäer I. Prolegomena: Das Mandäerproblem*, Göttingen, 1960; *Die Mandäer II. Der Kult, Göttingen*, 1961, and Edwin Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins*, Cambridge, 1970, for two different opinions on the issue of Jewish-Mandaean relations.

[5] One scholar who noted the importance of such parallels was Hugo Odeberg.

Despite the inherent difficulties in comparatively examining Jewish and Mandaean literature, there are several advantages to such a study. First of all, Jews and Mandaeans lived in close proximity in Babylonia. According to their own accounts, the Mandaeans were settled in the same area as the Jews, even living in the two major centers of Jewish learning: Sura and Pumbeditha.[6] In addition to their geographical closeness, there are other indications that Jews and Mandaeans had close contact. Throughout Mandaean literature, we find strong anti-Jewish polemics, a phenomenon which would imply some first hand knowledge of Judaism, at the very least, and, perhaps, an actual competition between Mandaeism and Judaism. The severity of anti-Jewish polemics in the Mandaean literature has even provoked Kurt Rudolph to theorize the existence of "periodic oppressions by Babylonian Jewry."[7]

Their geographical closeness, the anti-Jewish polemics, and the mutually comprehensible dialects of Aramaic spoken by the two groups makes it very likely that Mandaeans and Jews influenced one another, as Alexander has written, "the Mandaeans were, for several centuries, in close historical contact with the rabbinic communities of Babylonia in which Merkabah mysticism flourished."[8] On the linguistic closeness between Mandaic and the Aramaic spoken by the Jews of Babylonia, Theodor Nöldeke, one of the nineteenth century pioneers in Mandaean research, wrote:

> Mandaean is closely related to the ordinary dialect of the Babylonian Talmud. Both the dialects are neighbours, geographically speaking..... actually, we may asssume that the language of the Babylonian Talmud was that used in Upper, and Mandaean that used in Lower Babylonia.[9]

See H. Odeberg, *3 Enoch or The Hebrew Book of Enoch*, New York, 1973 (reprint), pp. 64-77. In his "Prolegomenon" to Odeberg's edition of *3 Enoch*, p. xxxix, Jonas Greenfield sharply criticized such parallels as "mostly verbal and are on the whole meaningless." While Greenfield correctly characterizes many of the parallels proposed by Odeberg, he is too broad in his criticism. In several instances, Odeberg illuminated valid comparative issues by juxtaposing parallel passages from Mandaean literature and *3 Enoch*. I will revisit some of these parallels in my section on the Mandaean vice regent figure Abathur.

[6] E. S. Drower, *The Haran Gawaita and the Baptism of Hibil-Ziwa*, Vaticano, 1953, p. 10.

[7] K. Rudolph, in Werner Foerster, ed., *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts*, Vol. II, 1974, p. 142.

[8] P. S. Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," in James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. I, New York, 1983, p. 253.

[9] Nöldeke, *Mandäische Grammatik*, Halle, 1895, pp. xvff., as cited by E. S. Drower in *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran: Their Cults, Customs, Magic, Legends, and Folklore*, Leiden, 1962 (reprint), p. 13.

There is also evidence, in the form of magic bowls, that Mandaeans and Jews shared common magical and angelogical beliefs. Besides these indications of contact, there is the complex question of whether Mandaeism developed out of Palestinian Jewish roots and the debate over the extent of Jewish elements in Mandaeism. Perhaps Scholem was correct in his intuition that Judaism and Mandaeism were more closely intertwined than generally thought:

> Christian Gnosticism in Babylonia, too, seems to have been preceded by a form of Jewish Gnosticism, one which in this case assimilated Jewish and Persian elements and intertwined the one with the other. Indeed, I think it can be shown by a closer study of the much discussed Mandaean texts (in which the Jewish elements are much stronger than generally supposed) that such a process may well have taken place.[10]

Throughout this volume I will point out parallels between Mandaean and Jewish material, primarily from Merkabah mysticism but in a few cases from the Kabbalah as well. In a few places I will suggest that certain Mandaean and Jewish sources may have a polemical relationship with one another. Although scholars have been intrigued by the question of the relationship between Mandaeism and Judaism since the nineteenth century, most studies have focused on the issue of origins and specifically on whether Mandaeism developed out of Judaism. In a few cases, parallels between Mandaean and Jewish traditions have been noted and analyzed but the field remains in its infancy. Particularly interesting are the tantalizing parallels between Mandaeism and Jewish mysticism.

In the past few years, Mandaean studies has become re-energized thanks to the prodigious efforts of Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley. I seek to make a small contribution to what will hopefully be a renaissance of interest in this often neglected area of study. My own suggestions are only that — suggestions. Many of the parallels and potential polemics which I will identify in the following pages remain on the level of speculation. Rather than stifle my own imagination and the imaginations of others, I have chosen to include such speculative discussion. Even if some of my suggestions prove to be incorrect, I hope that they will nevertheless help to inspire further research into the relationship of Mandaeism and Judaism. This question is not only intriguing to scholars. As a Mandaean goldsmith who worked with

---

[10] Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*, New York, 1965, p. 5.

Hasidim in New York's diamond district recently told J. J. Buckley: "We [Mandaeans and Hasidim] are so similar! The same clothes, the same habits, the same humor — everything! I was amazed! ..... Are they Mandaeans? Are we Jews?"[11]

Mediation in Late Antiquity

The role of mediating figures in early Judaism has provoked great debate. Many Christian scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries adopted the position that the need for intermediaries in early Jewish theology differentiated it from Christianity. Ferdinand Weber contrasted the immanent theology of Christian trinitarianism with the "transcendentism" of ancient Judaism.[12] Weber argued that Judaism must have postulated a transcendent God, since it clearly formulated a number of intermediaries between him and the world. In a scathing review, George Foot Moore criticized Weber for his ignorance of the "history or the content of Christian dogma,"[13] which, for centuries, had emphasized the parallels between the Supreme God of Christianity and that of Judaism, and also between the Christian Logos or Son and Jewish intermediary figures.

Like Weber, Wilhelm Bousset contrasted what he considered to be the immanent theology of Christianity and the transcendent theology of Judaism.[14] Bousset relied heavily on apocalyptic sources for his description of Jewish theology, for which he was roundly criticized by Jewish scholars, who lamented his lack of rabbinic evidence. Although Moore, too, cautioned against painting an accurate portrait of early Jewish theology from the apocalypses alone, his primary criticism of Bousset was more subtle: even the God of the apocalypses was not transcendent, rather, the apocalyptic image of a

---

[11] J. J. Buckley, "Mandaeans in the USA Today: The Tenacity of Traditions," *ARAM*, 7, 1995, p. 355.

[12] Ferdinand Weber, *System der altsynagogalen palästinischen Theologie*, Leipzig, 1880, esp. pp. 145ff.

[13] G.F. Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," *Harvard Theological Review* 14, 1921, p. 233; idem, "Intermediaries in Jewish Theology: Memra, Shekinah, Metatron," *Harvard Theological Review* 15, 1922. For a more recent review of the history of scholarship on early Jewish theology (one which draws heavily on the work of Moore and Büchler), cf. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Philadelphia, 1977.

[14] Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter*, Berlin, 1903.

God enthroned in the highest heaven, surrounded by ministers of different ranks, and nearly inaccessible to mere mortals, was "conditioned by the visionary form".[15]

Moore criticized both Christian dogmatists and scholars for writing with ulterior theological motives which inevitably skewed their conclusions. In his zeal to combat what he viewed as the pernicious anti-Jewish sentiment of Weber, Bousset, et. al., Moore downplayed the significance of intermediate figures in early Jewish theology.[16] In retrospect, Moore's greatest contribution to the question of intermediaries in early Jewish theology was his identification and rejection of the polemical orientation of the scholarship which preceded him.

Moore's approach to the role of intermediate figures in early Judaism was challenged by several scholars of his own generation. The greatest critics of Moore's views on mediation were W.O.E. Oesterley[17] and G.H. Box.[18] While Oesterley and Box supported the existence of intermediaries in early Judaism, they did not accept the particular polemical stance of Bousset and Weber. Instead, they came close to reiterating the earlier position of those Christian dogmatists who considered Jewish intermediaries to be an important parallel with Christian figures such as the Son or Logos. Box and Oesterley argued that while early Jewish theology was rich with intermediate figures, later Jewish theology became narrow and restricted:

> The importance of the doctrines and thought-tendencies which have been passed in review above [concerning mediation], as illustrating the rise and growth of the expression of Christian ideas is obvious; but it should be added that they largely belong to the wider and richer Judaism which has had to give place to the na rower and more restricted Judaism of subsequent times.[19]

---

[15] "Christian Writers on Judaism," p. 247.

[16] See, for example, "Intermediaries in Jewish Theology," p. 41.

[17] W.O.E. Oesterley, *The Jewish Doctrine of Mediation*, London, 1910. Oesterley writes, p. 85, "We have so far seen that both the principle of Mediation, as well as the idea of a Mediator, are expressly formulated in the Rabbinical literature; men and angels, chief among the later being the archangel Michael, fulfil this function."

[18] G.H. Box, "The Idea of Intermediation in Jewish Theology," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 23, 1932-33. Also, G.H. Box and W.O.E. Oesterley, *The Religion and Worship of the Synagogue: An Introduction to the Study of Judaism from the New Testament Period*, New York, 1907, pp. 169-195. A more recent examination of this literature appears in A. M. Goldberg, *Untersuchungen über die Vorstellung von der Schekinah in der rabbinischen Literature (Studia Judaica 5)*, Berlin, 1969.

[19] The Religion and Worship of the Synagogue, p. 195.

Oesterley and Box turned the view of Bousset and Weber on its head, replacing it with their own polemical model, which still viewed early Judaism through the lens of Christianity and found its theology wanting.

Within Jewish circles, the issue of mediation has also been widely debated. While Saadya, Ibn Ezra, and Maimonides each developed their own doctrines of mediation, other traditional voices rejected the existence of intermediate figures or, at least, attempted to limit their scope and significance.[20] Among Jewish scholars of Moore's era, Joshua Abelson stands out for his opus *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Judaism.*[21] Abelson responded to those scholars who contrasted a transcendent God of Judaism with an immanent God of Christianity by stressing that in early Judaism, God was both transcendent and immanent, or as he put it: "Immanence and Transcendence coalesce into one another, component parts of the same whole."[22] Abelson eliminated the theological necessity for intermediate figures in early Judaism by arguing that God was active in the world via manifestations such as the Shekinah or Ruah ha-Qodesh ("Holy Spirit").

Abelson's emphasis on the immanence of God in rabbinic literature was criticized by Ephraim Urbach as apologetic and exaggerated.[23] Nevertheless, like Abelson, Urbach stressed that the Shekinah was a "manifestation of the Lord" and not an hypostasis with a separate existence.[24] In support of this position, Urbach cited the work of Gershom Scholem.[25] A close examination of Scholem's writings, however, reveals a more complex position than that suggested by Urbach. Although Scholem wrote that in the "Talmud, midrash, and the Aramaic translations of the Bible," the Shekinah was not a distinct hypostasis, he nevertheless described it as "verging on hypostatization".[26]

---

[20] On this issue see Judah Goldin's article, "Not by Means of an Angel and Not by Means of a Messenger," in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, Leiden, 1968.

[21] Joshua Abelson, *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Judaism*, London, 1912 (reprint: New York, 1969).

[22] Ibid., p. 37.

[23] Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages*, Jerusalem, 1975, p. 41.

[24] Ibid., p. 43; pp. 63-64.

[25] Although Urbach argued that Scholem's identification of *Midrash Proverbs* (ninth century) as the first textual source for a hypostatic Shekinah was too early, favoring instead the later work *Bereshit Rabbati* (eleventh century).

[26] Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, New York, 1991, pp. 147-148.

Furthermore, while Scholem basically accepted Abelson's assertion of the immanence of God in rabbinic literature, he unequivocally rejected its relevance for Merkabah mysticism. Instead, Scholem adopted the position of Heinrich Graetz that Merkabah mysticism was a "Judaized form of cosmocratorial mysticism concerning the divine King (or Emperor)," or "Basileomorphism".[27] Far from a theology of immanence, Scholem argued that:

> in the Merkabah mysticism with which we are dealing here, the idea of God's immanence plays practically no part at all..... The fact is that the true and spontaneous feeling of the Merkabah mystic knows nothing of divine immanence; the infinite gulf between the soul and God the King on His throne is not even bridged at the climax of mystical ecstasy.[28]

At the symbolic center of the unbreachable gulf between humans and God in Merkabah mysticism, Scholem placed the figure of Metatron or the "lesser Jaho," who functioned as God's vice regent and angelic emissary.[29]

In the wake of Scholem's research, many scholars of early Jewish mysticism have focused on the issue of intermediate beings, generally concentrating on the figure of Metatron, but also examining other figures, such as the angelic Jacob, the primal Adam, and the divinized Moses. Important contributions in this area have been made by Gedaliahu Stroumsa,[30] Peter Schäfer,[31] Moshe Idel[32], Elliot Wolfson[33], Alan Segal[34], J. Z. Smith[35], David Halperin[36], and Jarl Fossum[37], among others.

---

[27] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York, 1961, pp. 54-55.

[28] Ibid., p. 55.

[29] See Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 43-55.

[30] G. Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ," *Harvard Theological Review* 76, 1983.

[31] Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism*, trans. A. Pomerance, Albany, 1992,

[32] Moshe Idel, "Enoch is Metatron," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6, 1987 (Hebrew). Here, Idel discusses Metatron in light of Adam traditions, both Jewish and Gnostic.

[33] E. Wolfson, "The Image of Jacob Engraved on the Throne: Further Reflection on the Esoteric Doctrine of the German Pietism," in Elliot Wolfson, *Along the Path: Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism and Hermeneutics*, Albany, 1995.

[34] Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism*, Leiden, 1977.

[35] J. Z. Smith, "The Prayer of Joseph," in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, Leiden, 1970.

[36] David Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, Tübingen, 1988.

[37] Jarl Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts*

Although the important role of the angelic vice regent and other intermediate figures cannot be ignored, it does not necessarily follow that the God of Merkabah mysticism was transcendent. It should also be emphasized that one should not expect to find identical theolgical positions in different forms of early Judaism, or because of the polyphonic nature of Jewish literature in general, even within a single genre or text. In regards to Merkabah mysticism, in particular, a growing number of scholars have begun to reject an either or approach, in favor of a model which posits God's transcendence and immanence. As Peter Schäfer has argued concerning Hekhalot literature (echoing the earlier view of Joshua Abelson regarding rabbinic literature): "God is transcendent *and* immanent, at the same time hidden *and* revealed."[38]

Within Merkabah mysticism, God is frequently depicted as an exalted and highly remote figure. Thus, Scholem was partly right when he described the gulf between humans and God in Merkabah mysticism. Yet, Scholem erred when he emphasized the impossiblity of closing this gulf — that is, when he defined the God of Merkabah mysticism as absolutely inaccessible or transcendent. How was the distance between human beings and God breached in Merkabah mysticism? The answer to this question requires an appreciation of the paradoxical nature of the angelic vice regent.

In one respect, the angelic vice regent symbolizes the gulf between God and humans; between the divine and physical worlds. Indeed, without such a gulf there would be no need for the mediating functions of the angelic vice regent. At the same time, it must also be stressed that the angelic vice regent symbolizes the ability of human beings to breach the distance with God. In this respect, the angelic vice regent serves as a potent symbol of a continuum between human, angelic, and divine existence.

Thus, according to the Hekhalot text known as 3 *Enoch*, the angelic vice regent Metatron begins his career as a human, only to be transformed into a supra-angelic being, even a "lesser YHWH".

---

of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism, Tübingen, 1985.

[38] *The Hidden and Manifest God*, p. 150. Eliade describes a similar theological model in Yoruba religion, where the Highest God is both transcendent and immanent, yet generally delegates worldly affairs to a lower deity. See, Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: the Nature of Religion*, New York, 1959, pp. 123-124. See also Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, "The Paradox of Transcendence and Immanence of God in African Religions," *Religion* 15, 1985.

Once transformed, Metatron serves as a guide for R. Ishmael on his own journey through the hekhalot or heavenly palaces. Although 3 *Enoch* portrays God as distant and exalted (after all, God lies at the end of a very long heavenly journey), God is not transcendent or inaccessible. Rather than keeping R. Ishmael and God apart, Metatron enables his human charge to achieve one of the most poignant and intimate visions of God preserved in any work of Jewish literature:

> R. Ishmael said: Metatron said to me:
> Come and I will show you the right hand of the Omnipresent One, which has been banished behind him because of the destruction of the Temple. From it all kinds of brilliant lights shine, and by it the 955 heavens were created. Even the seraphim and the ophanim are not allowed to look on it, till the day of salvation comes. I went with him, and, taking me by his hand, he bore me up on his wings and showed it to me..... Then the right hand of the Omnipresent One wept, and five rivers of tears flowed from its five fingers, and, falling into the Great Sea, made the whole world quake.[39]

By virtue of Metatron's mediation R. Ishmael is granted a vision of God prohibited to the seraphim and the ophanim. The underlying message of the episode is that while God's mercy in the world (symbolized by God's right hand) is temporarily restrained, God still loves Israel, and has even empowered an angelic intermediary (the vice regent, Metatron) to bring his worthiest children to him, as it were, even if he cannot or will not come to them.

Thus far I have concentrated on the issue of mediation in early Judaism and, in particular, in Merkabah mysticism. Mediating figures also occupy a significant place in Gnosticism and Mandaeism. Indeed, without such figures the essential drama of Gnostic and Mandaean mythology would be impossible. The antipodal processes which drive the motor of these systems are creation and salvation. Both require intermediate figures such as the demiurge and the saviour. Vice regent figures in Gnosticism and Mandaeism reign over the space and time between creation and salvation. These interstitial roles are reflected in ambivalent characters. Thus angelic vice regent figures in Gnosticism and Mandaeism possess demiurgical and salvific characteristics.

---

[39] *3 Enoch* 48A, as cited in P. S. Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," pp. 300-301. On the image of God's right hand being placed behind his back because of the destruction of the Temple, see *Lamentations Rabbah* 24 (drawing on Lamentations 2:3, "He placed his right hand behind him from before the enemy").

An analysis of angelic vice regent traditions sheds light on the complex development of radical dualism and its theological alternatives in Late Antiquity. According to Gilles Quispel,[40] Alan Segal,[41] Nils Dahl,[42] Jarl Fossum,[43] and Ioan Couliano,[44] the Gnostic demiurge emerged from the radicalization of Jewish binitarian or ditheistic traditions. Alan Segal, in particular, has created a cogent model to explain the development of radical Gnostic dualism from Jewish doctrines of an exalted angel or vice regent figure. In his book, Two *Powers in Heaven*, Segal theorizes that originally ditheistic or binitarian proto-Gnostics were radicalized as a result of *"the battle between the rabbis, the Christians and various other 'two powers' sectarians who inhabited the outskirts of Judaism* [emphasis in original]."[45]

Early or proto-Gnostics attacked the god of the Hebrew Bible by depicting him as a lower deity, a kind of reverse image of the angelic vice regent. Although he was depicted as the true god's enemy, the Gnostic demiurge resembled the angelic vice regent in many respects. He functioned as the creator and ruler of the physical world and as a de facto guardian of the divine realm, although in this case, he attempted to prevent all human beings from ascending to

---

[40] Quispel, "The Demiurge in the Apocryphon of John," in *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis*, ed. R. Mc.L. Wilson, Leiden, 1978, pp. 25-33; idem, "The Origins of the Gnostic Demiurge," *Gnostic Studies* I, Istanbul, 1974, p. 219, "If we are willing to admit the Jewish roots of Gnosticism, we see that that this terminology is misleading and that absolute dualism is a later development, based upon and originating from the relative dualism of Jewish Gnosticism."

[41] Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, p 262, "Whenever the second figure in heaven is seen as negative, we are dealing with a radically gnostic system. Not until then can we say definitively that a gnostic heresy is present. In all the earliest traditions, the second figure is always seen as a complementary figure, suggesting that the notion of a divine helper who carried God's name is the basic concept which developed into heresy, not a redeemed redeemer."

[42] Nils Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon and the Lewd Sophia: Jewish Traditions in Gnostic Revolt," in Bentley Layton, ed., *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, Vol. II, Leiden, 1981, p. 701, writes "diverse Jewish sources indicate that the contact between 'proto-gnostic' [whom Dahl identifies as "some fringe group of hellenized Judaism, not..... early Christianity] and more 'orthodox' Jewish exegetes extended over some period of time..... Under the attack of strict Jewish monotheism, some early form of gnosticism was radicalized".

[43] Fossum, *The Angel of the Lord*, p. 281, "It is far more probable that Jewish mysticism in this respect reflects the kind of dualism of subordination which was the *matrix of Gnostic dualism."*

[44] Couliano, "The Angels of the Nations and the Origins of Gnostic Dualism," in R. van den Broek and M.J. Vermaseren, eds., *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, Leiden, 1981, p 78.

[45] Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, p. 265.

the divine realm, rather than just unworthy individuals. Some Gnostics divided the biblical god into two figures — one, an evil or ignorant demiurge (Ialdabaoth) and two, a vice regent who opposed the demiurge and served the high god of the Pleroma (Sabaoth). As we will see, this is the relationship between the demiurge Ialdabaoth and his wayward son, Sabaoth, in a number of Gnostic texts from the Nag Hammadi Library.

The transformation of the God of the Hebrew Bible into one or more lower figures suggests that Gnosticism understood itself to be in competition with Judaism and Christianity or, phrased differently, that it saw itself as a corrective to these traditions. This observation raises another issue which will be central to the present work. On the one hand, Mandaean, Gnostic, and Jewish vice regent traditions have many parallels, reflecting (as I will argue in the next chapter) structural similarities as well as a common literary and exegetical heritage. On the other hand, there is evidence that these movements employed their respective vice regent myths for polemical purposes, either to undermine parallel figures in competing traditions or to undermine other cosmological and theological beliefs which were associated with these vice regent figures.

CHAPTER TWO

MYTH AND EXEGESIS

The angelic vice regent is a mythological figure. For a long time, scholars downplayed or even rejected the significance of myth in both rabbinic Judaism and Merkabah mysticism.[1] As recent studies have shown, however, the imaginative world of late antique Judaism provided fertile ground for mythological speculation.[2] By contrast, scholars have long appreciated myth as an important if not defining feature of Gnosticism and Mandaeism. In this chapter, I will situate the angelic vice regent within the broader study of myth. I will also examine the important role which exegesis plays in the construction of the different versions of the myth of the angelic vice regent. Two schools of thought in particular have influenced my observations on myth — the history of religions approach developed by Mircea Eliade and the structuralist model of myth formulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss. While both methodologies have their weaknesses, one of their common strengths is an ability to illuminate the significance of mediation in mythical thought.

One of the goals of this study is to further explore the relationship between Merkabah mysticism, Gnosticism, and Mandaeism on the basis of their shared mythologoumena. If the mythologies of Gnosticism, Mandaeism and Merkabah mysticism are like jigsaw puzzles, then one of the most important pieces in each puzzle is the angelic vice regent. The similar profiles of the angelic vice regents in these religious movements reflects two major factors: a shared logic and a common body of traditions.

Lévi-Strauss' goal in his far reaching studies has been "to define each myth by the set (*ensemble*) of all its versions."[3] The encyclope-

---

[1] I have examined the debate over this issue in *The Gnostic Imagination*, pp. 4-17.

[2] For example, Michael Fishbane, "The 'Measures' of God's Glory in the Ancient Midrash" in *Messiah and Christos: Studies in the Jewish Origins of Christianity*, Tübingen, 1992; Elliot Wolfson, "Visionary Ascent and Enthronement in the Hekhalot Literature" in *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton, 1994; G. Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ"; Moshe Idel, "Enoch is Metatron."

[3] *Anthropologie Structurale*, Paris, 1958, p. 240. For the use of this approach in the study of Gnosticism, G. Stroumsa's *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology*, Leiden, 1984, p. 2.

dic character of his oeuvre testifies to Lévi-Strauss' almost heroic attempt to map out the many versions of different myths. My own enterprise is less ambitious. Instead of exhaustively examining the *ensemble* of transformations of the myth of the angelic vice regent, I seek to define its basic structure or morphology and to comparatively examine three representative examples of this mythological type.

Myths are narratives about etiologies and origins. Their characters are divine or semi-divine figures whose actions become paradigmatic for human beings. The angelic vice regent functions as a mythological figure in a number of ways. He is frequently associated with the creation of the world, either as a demiurgic figure, himself, or as a close associate of the demiurge. As we will see, his story of transformation is a model for human beings to imitate. The message of his tale, like that of other myths, is the possibility of commerce between human and divine beings.

The morphology of the angelic vice regent is as follows: 1. Demiurgical function 2. Guardian of the gate (the abode of God) 3. Ruler (of human and/or angelic beings) 4. Judge 5. Priest 6. Hypostatic form of the divine anthropos 7. Composite or hybrid ontology (has characteristics of God, human, angel). The glue which binds these elements is the *logic of mediation.* Although not every angelic vice regent figure exhibits all of these characteristics, each figure exhibits many of them. In this respect, my approach draws on a body of scholarship concerning another mythological figure: the trickster. As William Hynes has written: "a number of shared characteristics appear to cluster together in a pattern that can serve as an index to the presence of the trickster..... Not every trickster necessarily has all of these characteristics. Still, more times than not, a specific trickster will exhibit many of these similarities." Hynes and others have suggested employing shared characteristics as a matrix by which to survey all known examples of tricksters and to judge their degree of "tricksterness."[4]

Mircea Eliade's form of religious phenomenology is sometimes contrasted with structuralism.[5] Yet there is much in common be-

---

[4] William Hynes, "Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide," in William J. Hynes and William Doty, eds., *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms*, Tuscaloosa and London, 1993.

[5] Two exceptions are J.Z. Smith and Ugo Bianchi who have both noted the morphological nature of Eliade's work. See, J. Z. Smith, "Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit," in *Map is Not Territory*, Chicago, 1993 (reprint) pp. 254ff. Smith includes phenomenology (which he uses "only in the loose sense currently employed by historians of religions"), and Eliade's work, in particular, in the category of "Left

between Lévi-Strauss' definition of myth as the mediation between opposites and Eliade's description of the paradox of the hierophany as the "coming-together of sacred and profane, of being and non-being, absolute and relative, the eternal and the becoming".[6] Like the androgene in Eliade's *The Two and the One*, the angelic vice regent symbolizes *the coincidentia oppositorum* that is at the core of religious thinking.[7]

Just as the angelic vice regent embodies the dialectic of religious thought, so he functions as a model for the religious transformation of the human being. As the guardian of the gate (i.e. the portal between the physical world and the divine realm) the angelic vice regent oversees what Eliade calls a:

> frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds — and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible..... The threshold, the door show the solution of continuity in space immediately and concretely; hence their great religious importance, for they are symbols and at the same time vehicles of *passage* from the one space to the other.[8]

J. Z. Smith adds that this "point of communication..... is repeatable by man."[9] It is therefore not surprising that the angelic vice regent oversees the passage of human beings from this world to the realm of God, where in Merkabah mysticism, Gnosticism, and Mandaeism the successful individual is spiritually and physically transformed through a process of angelification or divinization.[10] The model for this process is the vice regent himself, whose ontological ambiguity symbolizes the potential transition from one mode of existence to another, and who, in the case of Metatron has undergone a process of angelification, himself.

Wing" methodologies, along with structuralism and other morphological approaches. Ugo Bianchi, *The History of Religions*, Leiden, 1975, discusses Eliade and the "Morphology of the Holy."

[6] M. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, New York, 1958, p. 29.

[7] M. Eliade, *The Two and the One*, New York, 1965.

[8] M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 25.

[9] J.Z. Smith, "The Wobbling Pivot," in *Map is Not Territory*, pp. 94-95.

[10] On the divinization which follows entrance into the pleroma in Gnosticism, cf., G. Quispel, "Judaism, Judaic Christianity and Gnosis," in *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honour of Robert McL. Wilson*, ed. A.H.B. Logan and A.J.M. Wedderburn, Edinburgh, 1983, esp. pp. 53-58. On the phenomenon in Merkabah mysticism, see, Elliot Wolfson, "*Yeridah la-Merkavah*: Typology of Ecstasy and Enthronement in Ancient Jewish Mysticism," in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics, and Typologies*, ed. R. Herrera, New York, 1993.

Like a novice in a male puberty rite who is a "not-boy-not man," the angelic vice regent is a not-man-not-God.[11] Victor Turner refers to the novice as a liminal persona "betwixt and between" standard categories of structural classification — "neither one thing nor another; or may be both; or neither here nor there". And as Mary Douglas argues in *Purity and Danger*, a thing which confuses categories can be dangerous.[12] Awareness of the hybrid character of the angelic vice regent sheds new light on the most famous episode involving the angelic vice regent Metatron. Figures involved in "interstructural activities and liminal situations" are often exempt from standard taboos.[13] Metatron has been given permission to sit down by God, that is, the taboo of angels sitting in heaven has been suspended. When Elisha unwittingly witnesses the breaking of this taboo, he is quite naturally confused and this confusion leads him to heresy: indentifying Metatron as a "second power" or god in heaven. The angelic vice regent thus poses a challenge to what Louis Dumont has called *homo hierarchicus*.[14] He is betwixt and between a great number of hierarchical categories: world/pleroma; man/god; sacred/pro fane.

The Trickster: Shadow of the Vice Regent

My analysis of the angelic vice regent has been influenced by the rich body of scholarship concerning the trickster. Unlike Jung's work on the trickster, my goal is not to define the angelic vice regent as a universal archetype, representing a particular stage of human consciousness.[15] Instead, I share Robert Pelton's view that "the trickster is not an archetypal Idea, but a symbolic pattern that, like the High God or the Divine Mother, includes a wide range of individual figures."[16]

---

[11] Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Ithaca and London, 1967, p. 95. For a study of liminality in Gnosticism which draws on Turner's method, see Ingvild Gilhus, "Gnosticism — A Study in Liminal Symbolism," *Numen* 31, 1984.

[12] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London, 1966.

[13] J.Z. Smith, "Birth Upside Down or Right Side Up?" in *Map is Not Territory*, pp. 149-150.

[14] Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, Paris, 1967.

[15] Carl Jung, "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure," in Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*.

[16] Robert Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study in Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight*, Berkeley, 1980, p. 3. Claude Lévi-Strauss also rejects the theory of ideal archetypes,

The trickster and angelic vice regent share the same logic of mediation and many of the same personality traits. In his seminal essay "The Structural Study of Myth," Lévi-Strauss chose the trickster as the definitive model for the structuralist method of interpreting myth.[17] Taking Lévi-Strauss' observations to their logical conclusion, several scholars have argued that the trickster is not only a mediator *par excellence*, but actually symbolizes the very "myth-making processes of the human mind itself."[18] Without mediation, binary opposition remains static. The trickster and the angelic vice regent embody the dialectical nature of mythical thinking; the transformation of binary into trinary structure.

Among the mediating figures that Lévi-Strauss includes alongside the trickster are the messiah, sibling pair, and bisexual being.[19] In the wake of Lévi-Strauss' research, several scholars of Gnosticism have illustrated the parallels between the trickster and Gnostic figures such as the Demiurge,[20] the aeon Sophia,[21] and the Saviour.[22] In some cases, these beings have even been defined as trickster figures them

---

cf. "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. I, New York and London, 1963, p. 208, "Let us consider, for instance, Jung's idea that a given mythological pattern — the so-called archetype — possesses a certain meaning. This is comparable to the long-supported error that a sound may possess a certain affinity with a meaning."

[17] C. Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. I, p. 224. See, also, p. 226, where Lévi-Strauss writes, "Thus, like Ash-Boy and Cinderella, the trickster is a mediator."

[18] R. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 12, following Mac Linscott Ricketts, "The North American Indian Trickster," *History of Religions* 5, 1965. Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*, Oxford, 1988, p. 75, makes a similar argument for the Signifying Monkey, another trickster figure. Gates writes, "Whereas he [Roger Abrahams] writes that the Monkey is a master of this technique, it is even more accurate to write that he *is* technique."

[19] *Structural Anthropology*, p. 226. Lévi-Strauss' position has been sharply criticized by Klaus-Peter Koepping, "Absurdity and Hidden Truth: Cunning Intelligence and Grotesque Body Images as Manifestations of the Trickster," *History of Religions* 11, 1985, p. 197.

[20] On the relationship between the Gnostic Demiurge and the trickster, cf. Ugo Bianchi, "Der demiurgische Trickster und die Religionsethnologie," and "Trickster e demiurgi presso culture primitive di cacciaotori," in *Selected Essays on Gnosticism, Dualism and Mysteriosophy*, Leiden, 1978; idem, *The History of Religions*, pp. 156-157. Also see Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, "The Gnostic Demiurge — An Agnostic Trickster," *Religion* 14, 1984.

[21] Ioan Couliano, "Feminine Versus Masculine: The Sophia Myth and the Origins of Feminism," in ed., H. G. Kippenberg, *Struggles of Gods*, Berlin-New York, 1984; idem, *The Tree of Gnosis*, pp. 24; 86; 241. Couliano argues that Gnostic mythology has two trickster figures, the male Demiurge and the female aeon Sophia.

[22] Carl Jung, "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure," p. 203, describes the trickster as "a forerunner of the saviour".

selves, although this identification has not gone uncriticized.[23]

Both trickster and angelic vice regent are ambiguous and polymorphous figures. As Lévi-Strauss writes concerning the trickster: "Since his mediating function occupies a position halfway between polar terms, he must retain something of that duality — namely an ambiguous and equivocal character."[24] Metatron, an angelic vice regent, and Hermes, a trickster, are depicted as at once old men and youth.[25] Just as Metatron is portrayed as a human being transformed into a supra-angelic figure, so the trickster is "less than a god but more than a human — not god but 'a god who is not god'.[26] The key hermeneutical issue for studying both the angelic vice regent and the trickster therefore becomes what Mac Linscott Ricketts has described as the need to penetrate the "kind of logic [that] combines all these disparate elements into one mythical personality."[27]

The interstitial character of both angelic vice regent and trickster is reflected in the liminal spatial position they frequently occupy, namely, at the threshold or boundary of the divine and physical worlds. The West African trickster figure Ananse, who is characterized as a spider, aptly illustrates this position, for Ananse "lives on the ceiling but inside the house," that is, he is suspended between heaven and earth.[28] Likewise, the angelic vice regents Sabaoth, Metatron, and Abathur are each enthroned at the ceiling of the

---

[23] Cf. Stroumsa's criticism of Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, "The Gnostic Demiurge — An Agnostic Trickster," in his article "Myth into Metaphor: The Case of Prometheus" in S. Shaked, D. Shulman, G. Stroumsa, eds., *Gilgul: Essays on Transformation, Revolution and Permanence in the History of Religions Dedicated to R. J. Zwi Werblowsky*, 1987. On p. 319, Stroumsa writes, "A recent study devoted to the gnostic demiurge insists on his ability to cross boundaries and on his 'lack of determination' as basic features qualifying him as a particular instance of a trickster. Yet the gnostic demiurge, whether he is called Yaldabaoth (i.e. creator of chaos), Saklas (the fool) or Samael (the blind one), does in no way partake in the ambivalence inherent to the trickster. He does not have any redeeming features and can only be considered as an anti-god, either threatening and dangerous or foolish and ridiculous."

[24] *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. I, p. 226.

[25] William Doty, "A Lifetime of Trouble-Making: Hermes as Trickster," in *Mythical Trickster Figures*, p. 48.

[26] Describing the trickster Maui, in Laura Makarius, "The Myth of the Trickster: The Necessary Breaker of Taboos," p. 82, in *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms*. On the multivalent ontology of the trickster, see, also "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure," p. 203, where Jung writes that the trickster is "God, man, and animal and once. He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being".

[27] Mac Linscott Ricketts, "The North American Indian Trickster," *History of Religion* 5, 1965, p. 327.

[28] *The Trickster in West Africa*, pp. 59, 239.

physical world, at the entrance of the world of light or seventh hekhal. From this position, both trickster and angelic vice regent act as agents of mediation between the divine and physical worlds, or as Karl Kerényi has written concerning the trickster: "messenger and mediator..... [a] hoverer-between worlds who dwells in a world of his own".[29]

Because of the trickster's mediating nature, ambiguity, and multi valence, Victor Turner has depicted the trickster as a liminal figure.[30] Indeed, Robert Pelton has gone so far as to call the trickster a "personified limen, or a "symbol of the liminal state itself and of its permanent accessibility as a source of recreative power."[31] This creative power does not derive entirely from the trickster's ability to mediate or synthesize binary oppositions (à la Levi-Strauss). Instead, Karl Kerényi's important observation that the trickster is "the spirit of disorder, the enemy of boundaries," must be added to Lévi-Strauss' emphasis on the synthesis of distinctions.[32] Like carnival, whose symbolic inversion of hierarchy actually serves to reinforce or reconstitute the same hierarchy, the trickster breaks taboos in order to reify already existing boundaries or, even, to create new ones.[33]

Similarly, the angelic vice regent reinforces or establishes new boundaries by initially disrupting or challenging them. For example, the Mandaean vice regent Abathur ruptures the lower boundary of the world of light by gazing below into the "black waters". This rebellious act results in the establishment of the physical universe and the stratification of the boundary between this world and the world of light. In Jewish sources, Metatron challenges the boundary between divine and angelic natures by remaining seated when Aher encounters him. Metatron's behavior causes Aher to speculate on the possible existence of two divinities. Ultimately, however, Metatron's disruption of the heavenly order serves as an opportunity to reinforce the boundary between God and his chief angel. Finally, the Gnostic vice regent Sabaoth's rebellion against his evil father Ialdabaoth actually serves to clarify rather than blur the boundary between the forces of good and evil. In all three cases, the initial dis-

---

[29] Karl Kerényi, "The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology," p. 189, in Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, New York, 1956.

[30] Victor Turner, "Myth and Symbol," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 10, pp. 580-581.

[31] *The Trickster in West Africa*, pp. 35, 58.

[32] "The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology," p. 185.

[33] On the breaking of taboos in order to show the existence of boundaries, cf. Laura Makarius, "The Magic of Transgression," *Anthropos* 69, 1974.

ruption of boundaries or breaking of taboos ultimately results in the reinforcement of pre-existing boundaries or the creation of new ones.

The trickster "enters the human world to make things happen, to recreate boundaries..... Then he returns to that hidden threshold which he embodies and makes available as a passage".[34] Both trickster and angelic vice regent symbolize the ability of human beings to pass between sacred and profane modes of being. While reinforcing the existence of boundaries, the trickster and angelic vice regent also symbolize the elasticity, even permeability of the same boundaries. Like the trickster, the angelic vice regent is "at once an agent of disruption and an agent of reconciliation."[35] For example, the Mandaean figure Abathur sets into motion the creation of the physical world by rebelliously gazing below the Pleroma, but, afterwards, he actively functions to restore the unity of the Pleroma by weighing human souls and restoring those found worthy to their pleromatic home.

Like a bricoleur, the angelic vice regent destroys or transforms existing structures in order to create new ones. Trickster and angelic vice regent, alike, are frequently portrayed as demiurgic figures. Related to his demiurgical function, the angelic vice regent is sometimes depicted as the hypostatic divine phallus. This phallic quality is also a common feature of trickster figures like Hermes, who is often portrayed ithyphallicaly.[36]

As might be guessed, the relationship of the trickster and the high god is one of great ambivalence. The trickster is often portrayed as a rival of the high god.[37] Frequently, the trickster attempts to imitate or usurp the unique powers of the high god.[38] Yet, the trickster can also be the high god's accomplice or collaborator.[39] Indeed, the West African trickster Eshu is depicted as the "marshal" of the divine court.[40] Paul Radin suggests two mythological etiologies for the

---

[34] *Mythical Trickster Figures*, p. 60.
[35] *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 75.
[36] *Mythical Trickster Figures*, p. 48.
[37] Ibid., p. 27, "He [the trickster] is..... the High God's accomplice and his rival."
[38] On the trickster's tendency to imitate the High God, cf. William Hynes, "Mapping the Characteristics of the Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide," pp. 33; 41, and Christopher Vecsey, "The Exception Who Proves the Rules: Ananse the Akan Trickster," p. 113, in *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms.*
[39] On the characterization of the trickster as the High God's accomplice, cf. n. 29, *supra.* For a depiction of the trickster as "a collaborator of the Supreme Being," see Ugo Bianchi, *The History of Religions*, p. 45.
[40] *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 135.

ambivalent relationship between the trickster and the high god. Either the trickster represents a human hero who was transformed and elevated to the rank of a semi-deity, or, conversely, a deity who was displaced and demoted to the rank of semi-deity by the high god.[41] In both scenarios, the trickster competes and/or collaborates with the high god.

The angelic vice regent also has an ambivalent relationship with the high god. Like the trickster, the angelic vice regent frequently imitates the high god (e.g. Metatron's sitting; Abathur's procreative activity). This mimetic behaviour brings the angelic vice regent into conflict with the high god since it undermines his uniqueness. Nevertheless, the angelic vice regent also helps the high god by mediating between him and the physical world. Finally, like the trickster, the angelic vice regent is sometimes depicted as a transformed human hero (Metatron), a demoted deity (Abathur), or a combination of the two (Sabaoth).

The identification of the African trickster Eshu as marshal of the divine court raises another parallel between the trickster and the angelic vice regent. Indeed, in the case of Eshu, the boundary between trickster and angelic vice regent is blurred, since the role of marshal is extremely close to that of vice regent. Eshu's position, while not accorded to the majority of tricksters, highlights the important role of the trickster within the divine court or hierarchy. Unlike Eshu, however, most tricksters are shadow members of the divine hierarchy, rather than officially empowered figures.

During the medieval period and later, the trickster figure became a significant member of the court, both as a literary trope, and, in the guise of the jester, in the actual courts of European royalty. In both contexts, the human trickster evinced the same ambivalent relationship with the king that his mythological brother shared with the high god.[42] Officially, the purpose of the court fool or jester was to entertain. Unofficially, however, the jester cynically challenged the king's authority by way of farce and imitation, and also served the collaborative function of mediating beween the king and his audience by comically evaluating or judging the individuals who came to see the king. Thus, the court fool of the medieval period is another

---

[41] *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, pp. 125; 162-164.

[42] On the medieval fool and its relationship to earlier mythological trickster figures, see "Iconographical Notes Towards a Definition of the Medieval Fool,"in Ed. Paul Williams, *The Fool and the Trickster: Studies in Honour of Enid Welsford*, Cambridge, England, 1979.

version of the myth of the trickster, just as Lévi-Strauss has argued that Freud's writings on the Oedipus complex are "on a par with earlier or seemingly more 'authentic'" versions of the Oedipus myth, such as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*.[43]

Like the trickster, the vice regent is also a member of the royal court, whether divine or human (in Jewish sources the heavenly court is referred to as the "*familia* on high"). The same ambivalence which governs the relationship between the angelic vice regent and the high god also governs the relationship between the human vice regent and the king. Both human and angelic vice regents are frequently guilty of imitating the ruler or usurping his power and authority. Yet, both angelic and human vice regents perform a number of necessary collaborative and mediating functions. Thus, trickster and vice regent are both subversive and collaborative — at once undermining and helping the ruler.

Although angelic vice regents and tricksters have much in common, the categories should not be conflated. While both figures function ambivalently vis-à-vis the high god, the angelic vice regent operates from a position of official authority within the hierarchy, that is, he is divinely appointed to perform many of his mediating functions. By contrast, the trickster almost always operates from a position of unofficial authority within the hierarchy, even when he appears as the court fool, whose official function is to entertain, not mediate between the king and his subjects.

Because of his permanently unstable position within the official hierarchy, the trickster must consistently rely on cunning and trickery in mediating between the gods and humanity (à la Prometheus).[44] By contrast, the angelic vice regent, due to his official empowerment and position, is not definitively tricky, although he may rely on trickery when other means of achieving a goal fail.[45] In relation to one another, therefore, the angelic vice regent and trickster are like mirror images. Despite their differences, both trickster and angelic vice

---

[43] *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. I, p. 216.

[44] On the characterization of Prometheus as a trickster, cf. Ugo Bianchi,"Prometheus, der titanische Trickster," in *Selected Essays on Gnosticism, Dualism and Mysteriosophy*; and Gedaliahu Stroumsa, "The Case of Prometheus".

[45] Thus, in a Mandaean myth called "Abathurs Klage" by Lidzbarski, the High God orders Abathur to take up residence at the entrance of the World of Light. After protesting his demotion without success, Abathur tricks the divine being Hibil Ziwa to take his place. "Abathurs Klage" comprises pp. 232-234 (sec. 70-72) of Lidzbarski's *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer*, Giessen, 1915.

regent fulfill what Robert Pelton has called the "need for healthy commerce between what is above and what is below."[46]

Mythopoetic Exegesis

The vice regent is a central figure in the mythologies of Late Antiquity. Gnosticism and Mandaeism both possess highly complex mythological systems which drew on a number of earlier traditions for inspiration. Among the most important sources for Gnostic and Mandaean myths are the events and figures in the Hebrew Bible. Far from devaluing the Hebrew Bible as was previously thought, it has become clear that Gnostics employed biblical exegesis as one of the primary means for generating their own mythological systems.[47] Thus, exegetical transformations were often mythological transformations, as well.

Birger Pearson describes the "interpretations of key Old Testament text" as the "building blocks" of Gnostic thought.[48] Indeed, some texts are best described as Gnostic midrash, so closely do they resemble rabbinic exegetical traditions in their hermeneutical approach and their content.[49] In addition to the structural parallels between Gnostic and rabbinic exegesis, Gnostic authors sometimes borrowed

---

[46] Robert Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 2.

[47] Robert Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 2. Scholarly literature on the role of biblical exegesis in Gnosticism includes, but is certainly not limited to: Karl-Wolfgand Tröger, ed., *Altes Testament-Frühjudentum-Gnosis*, Berlin, 1980; R. McL. Wilson, "Old Testament Exegesis in the Gnostic Exegesis of the Soul" in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honour of Pahor Labib*, ed. M. Krause, Leiden, 1975; R. Kasser, "Citations des grand prophètes bibliques dans les texts gnostiques coptes," idem, O. Wintermute, "A Study of Gnostic Exegesis of the Old Testament" in *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays*, ed. J. M. Efird, Durham, 1972; M. Krause, "Aussagen über das alte Testament in z.T. bisher unveroeffentlichen gnostischen Texten aus Nag Hammadi," *Ex Orbe Religionum: Studia Geo Widengren*, Leiden, 1972; J. Fossum, "Gen. 1,26 and 2,7 in Judaism, Samaritanism, and Gnosticism," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 16, 1985; G. Quispel, "Ezekiel 1:26 in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosis," *Vigiliae Christianae* 34, 1980. Also important are the attempts made to distinguish between Gnostic and orthodox Christian exegesis by Elaine Pagels, "Pursuing the Spiritual Eve: Imagery and Hermeneutics in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and the *Gospel of Philip*" in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen King, Philadelphia, 1988, esp., p. 189.

[48] Pearson, "The Development of Gnostic Self-Definition" in *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, Minneapolis, 1990, p. 125. For the term "building blocks," see, also, Pearson, "The Problem of 'Jewish Gnostic' Literature," in C. Hedrick and R. Hodgson, eds., Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity, Peabody, MA, 1986, p. 34.

[49] See Pearson, "Jewish Haggadic Traditions in *The Testinomy of Truth* From Nag Hammadi (CG IX, 3)" in *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, pp. 42ff.

Jewish midrashic traditions and placed them within their own narratives.[50]

The role of biblical traditions in Mandaean mythology is no less significant. Although Edwin Yamauchi downplays the influence of Judaism on Mandaeism in general, he admits that "the Mandaeans' knowledge of the Old Testament was more extensive — if not more intensive — than that of many Gnostics whose knowledge seems not to have exceeded the prediluvian section of Genesis."[51] In fact, it is my contention that Mandaean and Gnostic authors — like their Jewish counterparts — transformed mythological material in biblical and apocalyptic texts into new myths of vice regent figures. These mythopoetic transformations indicate that Gnostics and Mandaeans shared a broader knowledge of Jewish literary sources then generally acknowledged.

Gershom Scholem frequently downplayed the importance of both myth and exegesis in Merkabah mysticism. According to Scholem, the most representative Merkabah texts "are precisely those which are almost entirely free from the exegetical element."[52] Scholem also wrote that Merkabah texts are "essentially descriptions of a genuine religious experience for which no sanction is sought in the Bible."[53] Nevertheless, Scholem acknowledged that Merkabah mysticism drew on biblical literature for its images and "basic categories of thought".[54] Scholem's equivocation on this issue reflects a profound ambivalence about how to characterize Merkabah mysticism, a topic I have examined in great detail elsewhere.[55]

Recent studies have emphasized the significant presence of myth and exegesis — and the link between them — in Merkabah mysticism. If, as a number of scholars have argued, apocalypticism represents a secondary explosion of myth, then Gnosticism, Mandaeism, and Merkabah mysticism may be described as branches of a tertiary explosion.[56] Not only did these movements refigure ancient Near

---

[50] See Fossum's statement of purpose in "Gen. 1,26 and 2,7 in Judaism, Samaritanism, and Gnosticism," p. 202, "The scope of this paper is to restore an ancient Jewish haggada on Gen. 1, 26 and trace its subsequent development."

[51] E. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, Grand Rapids, MI, 1973, p. 136.

[52] *Major Trends*, p. 45.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid. An example of what might be called "biblical inspiration" (as opposed to biblical exegesis) was the influence of Ezekiel 1:26, Song of Songs 5:10-16, and Psalm 147:5 on the formulation of the Shiur Komah.

[55] This is a major focus of my work *The Gnostic Imagination*.

[56] See Frank Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, Cambridge, MA, 1973; Paul Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, Philadelphia, 1975; John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, New York, 1989.

Eastern and biblical mythologoumena, they also adopted and transformed mythical motifs from apocalyptic sources. The critical role of exegesis in the development of angelic vice regent traditions reflects a general trend in late antique angelology. As Saul Olyan writes: "Exegesis is at least a major aspect, if not the most significant component, of the elusive framework sought by scholars in order better to understand the development of ideas about angels in late biblical and post-biblical texts."[57]

In most cases, the relationship between late antique vice regent myths and earlier Jewish literary sources is not indicated by the explicit citation of a biblical or apocalyptic text. Instead, the formulation of angelic vice regent traditions in Gnosticism, Mandaeism, and Merkabah mysticism often reflects what Michael Fishbane has called "implicit" or "virtual" exegesis, or what Carol Newsome has referred to as "traditional-historical" transformations.[58] According to Fishbane, where the explicit citation of a biblical lemma is absent, the identification of implicit exegesis depends on two basic criteria:
1. "multiple and sustained lexical linkages" between two texts.
2. The lexical reorganization and topical rethematization of an earlier text (the traditum) by a later text (the traditio). Drawing on Fishbane's work, Newsome has suggested that in some cases, the relationship is better described as traditional-historical, rather than exegetical. Newsom illustrates this distinction in her work on Merkabah exegesis in the Qumran Sabbath Shirot:

> I would, for instance, identify I Enoch 14 and Daniel 7 as tradition-historical developments of Ezekiel's merkabah visions but not exegetica transformations of Ezekiel. In these passages certain motifs from Ezekiel's description of the divine throne chariot are combined with other traditions about the heavenly seat, the divine council, etc. in order to create a picture of the heavenly court. In neither case, however, are there "multiple and sustained lexical linkages" with the text of Ezekiel.

The most striking exegetical transformation shared by Jewish, Gnostic, and Mandaean vice regent traditions is that the enthroned figure in Daniel 7:9-10 has now become a prototype for the angelic vice regent. This move — common to all three religions — is significant because in the biblical text, the enthroned Ancient of Days

---

[57] Saul Olyan, *A Thousand Thousands Served Him: Exegesis and the Naming of Angels in Ancient Judaism*, Tübingen, 1993, p. 11.
[58] Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, Oxford, 1985, pp. 285ff. Carol Newsom, "Merkabah Exegesis in the Qumran Sabbath Shirot," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38, 1987, p. 17.

(*atiq yomin*) is almost certainly God, whereas the late antique documents apply the same imagery to a lower figure. This transformation suggests a general tendency within late antique religions to characterize the angelic vice regent as the hypostatic form of God.

In at least two instances, Jewish texts explicitly cite the verse from Daniel when describing the angelic vice regent. Gnostic and Mandaean texts are better described as having an implicitly exegetical or even a traditional-historical relationship with Daniel 7, since they never actually cite the biblical lemma itself. On the other hand, they do possess "lexical linkages" with the biblical text. This is particularly the case with the Mandaean sources. The apparent appeal of the Book of Daniel to at least some Mandaeans reflects several factors. The book's story of exile from the land of Israel to Babylonia resembles the Mandaean's own myth of origin (see the Haran Gawaita); the Babylonian context of the work would have resonated with the Mandaeans. Finally, the critical verses in Daniel 7:9-10 are written in a dialect of Aramaic comprehensible to the Mandaic (another form of Aramaic) speaking Mandaeans.

CHAPTER THREE

IN PRAISE OF METATRON

The angel known as Metatron appears in a host of Jewish sources from the Talmud to the Kabbalah. The following chapters will focus on Metatron in rabbinic and Hekhalot texts, material which straddles the border between Late Antiquity and the early medieval period. Peter Schäfer has made great strides in both assembling the Hekhalot manuscripts and analyzing the stages in their composition and redaction. Schäfer has redefined the study of Hekhalot literature by focusing on the issue of literary development, proposing a stage by stage series of compositions and redactions instead of an early, defining period of composition and codification.[1] Schäfer has concluded that to speak of "texts" let alone "Urtexts" is an erroneous assumption in the Hekhalot literature. Instead, smaller literary units were composed and redacted along a time line of hundreds of years.[2]

Opinions concerning the historical mileu for the composition and redaction of the Hekhalot literature have ranged from Graetz, who posited a post-Islamic setting,[3] to Scholem, who argued for a Tannaitic or early Amoraic date of composition,[4] and set the authors of the Hekhalot literature "near the center of rabbinic Judaism, not on its fringes," due to the "Halakhic" character of the Hekhalot literature.[5]

---

[1] See especially Schäfer's essays "Tradition and Redaction in Hekhalot Literature," *Hekhalot-Studien*, Tübingen, 1988, pp. 8-16 and "The Problem of Compositional Identity of 'Hekhalot Rabbati'," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* Vol. 6, I, 1987, pp. 1-12. According to Schäfer, it is dubious to speak of Hekhalot texts, such as Hekhalot Rabbati or Ma'aseh Merkabah, per se (see, "Tradition and Redaction," p. 15). Instead, the manuscripts as we have them can be most accurately broken down into smaller literary units. Schafer also criticizes the search for "Urtexts" or "Urforms" which he thinks begs the question, since original texts may not have existed at all. Michael Swartz has applied this compositional theory to the text Ma'aseh Merkabah, in his book, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkabah*, Tübingen, 1991.

[2] Although Scholem accepted that the Hekhalot literature developed in stages, he was also convinced that at the basis of the Hekhalot tradition were original texts. See, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 77.

[3] Heinrich Graetz, "Die mystische Literatur in der gaonischen Epoche," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums* 8, 1859, pp. 72-73.

[4] G. Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, Berlin, 1962, pp. 15-20.

[5] *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 12.

Recently, a number of scholars have re-opened the question of who wrote the Hekhalot literature, a topic I will discuss below.[6] Although no definitive statement can be made concerning the site of composition, evidence suggests that even if many of the Hekhalot traditions originated in Palestine, they may have received their full development in Babylonia, a theory which makes the possibility of cross pollination between Merkabah mysticism and Mandaeism more intriguing.

I will not attempt to provide a comprehensive treatment of Metatron in these sources. Instead my goal is to show how the texts in which Metatron appears reflect two opposing tendencies within Merkabah mysticism. The first tendency seeks to destabalize, blur, or even eliminate the ontological and functional boundaries between human, angelic, and divine beings. The second tendency is to enforce or to polemically re-assert these boundaries, thereby producing passages which embody the unbreachable gulf between human beings and God mentioned by Gershom Scholem. The figure of the angelic vice regent is at the center of this crucial debate and may be said to mediate between the two positions. I will first examine those Merkabah traditions which depict the angelic vice regent as a figure who calls into question the impermeability of different categories of being(s).

Metatron as Divine Man

The importance of temples in the ancient Near East cannot be overestimated. They were at once cosmic and cultural centers. In societies from Babylonia to Greece, temples were understood to be no less than bridges between the heavens and the earth. Likewise, the cadres of priests devoted to the upkeep and function of these sacred spaces were empowered as living conduits between divine and human beings. For a temple to be destroyed was a cataclysmic event for the people who worshipped within its precincts. The trauma becomes more understandable to modern readers when we appreci-

---

[6] See P.S. Alexander, "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 28, 1977, p. 180, where Alexander argues that Hekhalot literature developed in "orthodox" circles although "There was probably a less "orthodox" form of the teaching." I will discuss various theories concerning the authorship of the Hekhalot writings below.

ate that many ancient peoples considered their temple to be the navel (Gk. *omphalos*) of the world. When this connection was violently severed, an entire culture felt a shock comparable to being torn from the womb, an image which captures the reaction of the ancient Israelites to the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem.

The impact of the destruction of the Second Temple on late antique Jewish culture has long been debated. Some scholars have argued that the destruction of the Temple was the primary catalyst for the development of rabbinic Judaism. Out of the ashes of 70 CE, a new religious and cultural edifice emerged. Instead of a building made of stones and mortar, the rabbis built a discursive structure consisting of text (the Tanakh) and exegesis (midrash). Within this new context, pilgrimage consisted of re-visiting the Bible and offering one's own interpretations upon the altar of the text. As Jacob Neusner has written, in place of the temple, works like the Mishnah allowed Israel "to experience anywhere and anytime that cosmic center of the world".[7]

Other scholars have argued, however, that even before 70 CE, a cultural shift occurred in the Mediterranean world away from locative religious structures, such as temples, and towards more anthropocentric models of religious expression which focused on charismatic religious figures.[8] The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem thus gave concrete expression to a cultural process already underway. The increased focus on messianic figures and "divine men" in Late Antiquity is evidence of such a transition, with Jesus serving as the best known example of this phenomenon.

Rather than arguing for a complete contrast between these forms of religiousity, I would like to suggest that both before and after 70 CE, groups within Judaism combined locative, exegetical, and anthropocentric elements in their practice and ideology. The Dead

---

[7] Jacob Neusner, "Map Without Territory; Mishnah's System of Sacrifice and Sanctuary," *History of Religions* 19, 1977, 186.

[8] J.Z. Smith, writes in "Earth and Gods," *Map is Not Territory*, 128, "if the Temple had not been destroyed, it would have had to be neglected. For it represented a locative type of religious activity no longer perceived as effective in a new, utopian religious situation with a concomitant shift from a cosmological to an anthropological view-point." In other writings, Smith has qualified this position by adding that not all locative religious structures were eliminated in Late Antiquity. See, for example, "The Temple and the Magician," in ibid., p. 186, "But I believe that a more complex model is called for — one that might better account for a large class of cultic phenomena that exhibit characteristics of mobility, what I would term religious entrepeneurship and which represent both a reinterpretation and a reaffirmation of native, locative, celbratory categories of religious practice and thought."

Sea Scrolls reflect this cluster of elements, with their focus on messianic figures, the presence of a charismatic leader (the Teacher of Righteousness), an intense but critical interest in the Temple in Jerusalem, and the beginnings of midrashic type exegesis.[9] Early Christianity also reflects this combination of *topoi*. Peter Brown has written that "In the popular imagination, the emergence of the holy man at the expense of the temple marks the end of the classical world."[10] Yet, the New Testament actually reinscribes the importance of the temple as a religious category in a number of ways, including Paul's description of the body as a temple (where the image of the divine man and the temple are organically integrated), the eschatological role of the heavenly temple, and even Jesus' condemnation of the contemporary Temple which nevertheless reflects his devotion to the sanctity of the institution. Finally, rabbinic literature and, in particular, the Mishnah, is notable for its discussion of laws and traditions concerning the Temple, despite the fact that this literature was produced years after the Temple's physical destruction. All of these examples highlight the degree to which the Temple functioned as a conceptual category as much as an actual physical place of worship. Thus, even if the Temple no longer existed as a site of pilgrimage and sacrifice, it continued to exert great influence on the religious imagination in Late Antiquity.

One of the chief ways the Temple was reconceptualized in late antique Judaism was the development of the heavenly temple. This phenomenon may be traced to the period before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and is intimately linked to the apocalyptic focus on the heavens, their angelic inhabitants, and contents.[11] The heavenly temple also became the locus of a new form of pilgrimage — the heavenly ascent — a theme which runs from apocalyptic works to the later Merkabah material.[12]

Within the heavenly temple the role of the high priest was filled by an angelic or semi-divine figure, whose identity differed depending on the particular community or text. Michael, Melchizedek, Akatriel, Jesus, and Metatron were each described as high priests in

---

[9] On these issues, see B. Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament*, Cambridge, 1965.

[10] Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, London, 1971, 102ff.

[11] On this development, see Johann Maier, *Vom Kultus zur Gnosis*, Salsburg, 1964.

[12] On the idea of the ascent to the Merkabah as a form of pilgrimage, see Ira Chernus, "The Pilgrimage to the Merkavah: An Interpretation of Early Jewish Mysticism," in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1-2), 1987, p. 9.

the heavenly tabernacle.[13] The characterization of Metatron as a high priest appears in a number of texts including *3 Enoch*, a Hekhalot text with marked affinities with earlier apocalyptic literature including the other works in what is commonly called the Enochian corpus.[14] *3 Enoch* 15 refers to "a great heavenly tabernacle of light" where Metatron serves as the high priest. In the Shiur Qomah literature, we find mention of the *mishkan ha-na'ar* or "the tabernacle of the Youth [i.e. Metatron]". One of the most striking references appears in the midrashic collection called *Numbers Rabbah*, where Metatron is described as follows:

> When the Holy One, blessed be He, told Israel to set up the tabernacle, he intimated to the ministering angels that they should also construct a tabernacle. And when one was erected below, the other was erected on high. The latter was the tabernacle of the Youth, whose name is Metatron, and there he offers up the souls of the righteous to atone for Israel in the days of their exile. [*Numbers Rabbah* 12:12]

The tradition of Metatron as the high priest reflects a conjunction of locative (temple oriented) and anthropocentric (divine man) modes of religiousity. J. Z. Smith has written that "Rather than celebration, purification and pilgrimage, the new rituals will be those of conversion, of initiation into the secret society or identification with the divine man."[15] Although some movements in Late Antiquity reflect the transition mentioned by Smith, others, including Merkabah mysticism, combine elements of both modes of religiousity (as well as an

---

[13] On the well attested tradition of Michael as the high priest, cf. BT Hagigah 12b, Menahoth 110a, and Zebahim 62a. The priestly nature of Jesus is discussed in *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 150, 183; Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, p. 466, n. 63. For Melchizedek as a high priest, see A.S. van der Woude, "Melchisedek als himmlische Erlösergestalt," *Oudtestamentishe Studiën* 14, 1965, pp. 354-373; *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 183, p. 185, where Fossum notes that in later Jewish sources, Melchizedek was identified with Michael. Akatriel's priestly activity appears in Berakhot 7a.

[14] See, Odeberg, 3 *Enoch*, p. 104; Alexander, "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," p. 161; Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 49, writes "Metatron is described at some length in the *Shiur Komah* as the celestial High Priest of the heavenly tabernacle," a function linked with the expression *mishkan ha-na'ar* or 'the Tabernacle of the Youth,' i.e. Metatron. It should be noted that Metatron's function as high priest in the heavenly tabernacle has been challenged by Martin Cohen in *The Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism*, Lanham, 1983, p. 134, who writes, "Metatron's function is more the heavenly choir-master than the celestial high priest."

[15] J.Z. Smith, "The Temple and the Magician," *Map is Not Territory*, p. 187.

exegetical element).[16] Thus, Merkabah mysticism is characterized by purification, pilgrimage (in the form of heavenly ascent), and identification with a divine man, in this case, Enoch-Metatron.

Although Metatron is an angelic being, he is also a species of divine man insofar as he represents a transformed or angelified human being: the biblical figure Enoch.[17] Esoteric speculation regarding Enoch was inspired by the Bible's laconic and mysterious account: "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, for God took him." [Gen. 5:24] Apocalyptic sources contain a number of references to Enoch's heavenly *apotheosis* or angelification. In *I Enoch* 71, Enoch is addressed as the Son of Man, thereby implying that he has undergone a process of spiritual and/or physical transformation, perhaps even angelification or semi-divinization.[18] As Alan Segal writes: "This is an extraordinarily important event, as it underlines the importance of mystic transformation between the adept and the angelic vice-regent of God."[19] *II Enoch* 22:8 explicitly describes the

---

[16] On the importance of exegesis in Merkabah mysticism, see *The Gnostic Imagination*, pp. 56-67.

[17] On the transformation of Enoch into Metatron cf., Moshe Idel, "Enoch is Metatron," pp. 156-157 and Charles Mopsik, *Le Livre hébreu d'Hénoch ou Livre des palais*, Paris, 1989, pp. 55, 210. Also, G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 60. Metatron was also linked with other human figures, most notably Adam and Moses. Cf. Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, "The Conceptions of Metatron in the Writings Associating Metatron Particularly with Moses," pp. 106ff; Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, Princeton, 1987, p. 120; Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah*, pp. 135-136, and Mopsik, *Le Livre hébreu d'Hénoch*, pp. 65-71. David Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, p. 426, writes, "These authors, I presume, saw the exalted Metatron as the primary figure, the ascending Moses as his junior replica. As historians of the tradition, however, we must reverse this relationship. First the Shabu'ot preachers had Moses invade heaven and lay hold of the throne. Then the authors of the *Hekhalot*, breaking the restraints of the older stories, let Metatron enjoy the fruits of conquest."

[18] Cf. P.S. Alexander's remark in "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," p. 160, "There may be an implication that in becoming the Son of Man the human Enoch went through some kind of physical transformation." Matthew Black, "The Throne-Theophany Prophetic Commission and the 'Son of Man': A Study in Tradition-History," in *Jews, Greeks and Christians: Religious Cultures in Late Antiquity*, eds. Robert Hamerton-Kelly and Robin Scroggs, Leiden, 1976, p. 72, stresses the connection between Enoch and the Son of Man in *I Enoch* and Enoch/Metatron *3 Enoch*. John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, p. 152, writes "There is no doubt that Enoch was eventually identified with the 'Son of Man,' and this tradition is later developed in the figure of Metatron in *3 Enoch*." On p. 153, Collins hypothesizes that the identification of Enoch with "that Son of Man," may have been made "in response to the Christian appropriation of 'Son of Man' as a title for Jesus. The identification would then deny the christological use of the title and affirm that Enoch, sage of the heavenly mysteries, was the model to be followed, rather than Christ."

[19] Alan Segal, "The Risen Christ and the Angelic Mediator Figures in Light

transformation of Enoch as one which blurs the boundaries between human and angelic existence: "And the Lord said to Michael: Take Enoch and strip him of his earthly garments and anoint him with the holy oil, and clothe him in garments of glory. And Michael stripped me of my garments and anointed me with the holy oil..... *And I looked at myself, and I was as one of the glorious ones, and there was no difference.* [emphasis added]"[20]

The specific connection between Enoch and Metatron is made in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis* 5:24, where it says of Enoch that "God called his name Metatron, the Great Scribe," and in several passages of *3 Enoch.*[21] For example, in *3 Enoch* 4 Metatron declares

---

of Qumran," in *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James Charlesworth, New York, 1992, p. 305. On p. 304, Segal discusses the role of angelic transformation at Qumran. On the phenomenon of Merkabah speculation at Qumran, cf. Lawrence Schiffmann, "Merkavah Speculation at Qumran: The 4Q Serekh Shirot 'Olat ha-Shabbat," in *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians: Essays in Jewish Intellectual History in Honor of Alexander Altmann*, eds. Jehuda Reinharz and Daniel Swetschinski, Durham, 1982.

[20] See also, the Ethiopic *Ascension of Isaiah* 9:9, where Isaiah sees "Enoch and all who were with him, stript of their garments of flesh and clothed in the garments of the upper world, and they were like angels, standing there in great glory."

[21] J.T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave* 4, p. 128, argues that the identification of Enoch and Metatron is a late addition to the Targum (for an earlier dating, cf. I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, Leiden, 1980, p. 197, n. 11). Milik's claim, however, must be viewed in the context of his overall argument that all three Books of Enoch are late compositions. Because of his late dating of *I Enoch* 37-71 (late, third century) and *II Enoch* (ninth or tenth century) and a number of other reasons (supposed dependency on Muslim Hermetic traditions, etc.), Milik goes so far as to date *3 Enoch* to the thirteenth century, a position he supports by citing Scholem's work on the Kabbalah. On p. 127, Milik writes "Moreover, recent research into the origins of the Cabbala in Western Europe, in particular the work of G. G. Scholem, definately excludes a date earlier than the twelfth century for the greater part of the theological and mystical theories contained in the Hebrew Enoch." Scholem's own position was that *3 Enoch* was a fifth to sixth century composition, cf. Jewish Gnosticism, p. 7, n. 19, a view he contrasted with Odeberg's dating (third century), because "The author of this text [*3 Enoch*] reinterprets, and wrongly, some older Merkabah traditions that a third century writer could not have mistunderstood." Nevertheless, Scholem adds, "But much of the material is old and important." Matthew Black, "The Throne-Theophany Prophetic Commission and the 'Son of Man'," p. 66 and J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, pp. 142-143 both explicitly reject Milik's late dating of the *Similitudes of Enoch* (=*I Enoch* 37-71), arguing instead that the text is either a first or second century composition. P. S. Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," pp. 227-228, outlines and then convincingly refutes Milik's arguments for a late dating of *3 Enoch*, positing, instead, a fifth or six century C.E. date of composition. The tradition of Enoch as a scribe goes back to *I Enoch* 15 and *Jubilees* 4:23, where Enoch is conducted "into the Garden of Eden in majesty and honor, and behold there he writes down the condemnation and judgement of the world, and all the wickedness of the children of men."

declares "I am Enoch, the son of Jared. When the generation of the Flood sinned and turned to evil deeds..... the Holy One, blessed be he, took me from their midst to be a witness against them in the heavenly height..... And the Holy One, blessed be he, appointed me in the height as a prince and a ruler among the ministering angels.'

As a type of divine man, Metatron functions as the archetypal initiate and pilgrim as well as the model for angelification. Likewise, as the heavenly high priest, Metatron serves as the mythological prototype of Merkabah mystics such as Rabbi Ishmael.[22] Metatron's role as a high priest highlights the functional parallel between the angelic vice regent and the human mystic (both are priests), whereas his transformation from a human being into an angel reflects an ontological process which may be repeated by mystics via their own enthronement and angelification.[23]

Metatron signifies the resistance of some sources within the Merkabah genre to a binary ontology. Instead of a hard and fast division between human and angelic existence, Enoch-Metatron points to a more fluid ontological and functional continuum. Of course, it may be argued that the true division within Merkabah

---

[22] For example, in *3 Enoch* 2, where Metatron describes Ishmael as "of the family of Aaron, who the Holy One, blessed be He, chose to minister in His presence and on whose head He himself placed the priestly crown on Sinai." Although there is a rabbinic tradition (BT Ket. 105b, BT Hull. 49a, etc.) that R. Ishmael was of priestly descent, he could not have been the "official" high priest in Jerusalem (as implied by BT Ber. 7a) since he was only a child when the Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E. Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkabah Tradition," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 43, 1992, pp. 20-21, writes, "When taking part in the celestial liturgy, the adept acts as the representative of the people before God, as well as being commissioned to declare what has been revealed to him. In other words, he performs a function analogous to that of the High Priest of the Temple. A passage [Synopse §§147-149] found in some versions of Hekhalot Rabbati indicates that the adept, here typified by Metatron-as-Enoch, has taken over the priestly function of atonement." The high priestly function of Enoch in the heavenly Temple is asserted in *Jubilees* 4:25. For the explicit identification between Metatron as the heavenly high priest and R. Ishmael as his earthly counterpart, cf. 2 *Legends of the Martyrs*, "I have a servant (*'ebed*) on earth as you are my servant on high. His splendour corresponds to your splendour and his appearance corresponds to your appearance." (BH. vi. 19-36). On this passage, see Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, p. 102, and Gruenwald, "The Impact of Priestly Traditions on the Creation of Merkabah Mysticism and the Shiur Komah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1-2) (Hebrew) p. 92.

[23] Elliot Wolfson has argued for a process of angelification in Merkabah mysticism. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, p. 12, "the enthronement of the mystic [in Hekhalot sources] should be understood as a form of quasi-deification or angelification, in line with the older tradition expressed in apocalyptic literature concerning the transformation of individuals into angelic beings."

mysticism existed between God and all of his creatures, including angels. Even this model must be qualified in light of Metatron, however, who not only blurs the boundaries between human and angelic beings but, as I will show in the next section, between angelic and divine existence.

Metatron as Divine Angel

Along with his roles as heavenly high priest and angelified human being, Metatron was sometimes portrayed as a kind of second — albeit junior — deity.[24] The textual traditions which combined to create the image of Metatron as a "lesser YHWH" include biblical, apocalyptic, and Merkabah material. In a number of passages, the Bible refers to an Angel of the Lord or *malakh* YHWH, who is sent by God into the world to act as his representative or emissary (cf. Judg. 13:3; Gen. 16:7). Perhaps the best known, and in terms of Metatron, the most important of these biblical references is Exodus 23:20-22:

> I am sending an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay head to him [lit. 'his face'] and obey him. Do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your offenses, since My Name is in him. But if you obey him and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes.

The tradition of an angelic being who embodies the name of God continued within apocalyptic sources such as the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, a document which only survives in Slavonic but probably stems from the first or the beginning of the second century. In chapter ten of the work, Abraham's heavenly guide declares: "I am called Yahoel by Him who moves that which exists with me on the sev-

---

[24] Peter Hyman has argued that the Bible reflects a "dualistic pattern in which two divine entities are presupposed: one the supreme creator God, the other his vizier or prime minister, or some other spiritual agency, who really 'runs the show', or at least provides the point of contact between God and humanity." Peter Hyman, "Monotheism — A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?" *Journal of Jewish Studies* XLII, 1991, p. 2. Hyman argues that "most varieties of Judaism" reflect this dualistic pattern, which itself is an outgrowth of old Canaanite patterns of Canaanite multiple divinities. In Hyman's opinion, the monotheistic theology of Deuteronomy reflects the views of a small party of priests and scribes, what Morton Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament*, London, 1987, called "The Yahweh Alone Party".

enth expanse on the firmament, a power in virtue of the ineffable name which is dwelling in me." This statement is followed by a description of Yahoel which draws on the anthropomorphic images of God in both Daniel 7:9 and Ezekiel 1:26-28: "the appearance of his [Yahoel's] body was like sapphire, and the look of his countenance like chrysolite, and the hair of his head like snow, and the turban upon his head like the appearance of a rainbow".[25]

There are a number of important parallels between Yahoel and Metatron.[26] Yahoel's relationship with Abraham in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is analogous to Metatron's relationship with R. Ishmael in the Hekhalot tract *3 Enoch*. Both figures serve as heavenly guides, protectors, and agents of revelation. Like Metatron, Yahoel is linked with the high priesthood, in this case, via the turban (cf. Ex. 28:4) which Yahoel wears.[27] Finally, as emphasized by Scholem, both Metatron and Yahoel were known by the epithet "The Lesser YHWH," a name which also found its way into Gnostic and Mandaean literature.[28]

The explicit identification of Metatron with the Angel of the Lord in Ex. 23 appears in *3 Enoch* 12, where Metatron declares that God "called me the Lesser YHWH in the presence of His heavenly household; as it is written (Ex. 23:21), 'For My name is in him.'" From the available evidence, it appears that Yahoel and Metatron developed separately but, at some point, Metatron "absorbed the originally idependent angel Yahoel."[29] Indeed, in *3 Enoch* 48D:1

---

[25] *Apocalypse of Abraham* ch. 11. Rowland and Fossum have both noted the exegetical relationship with Daniel 7:9 and Ezekiel 1:26-28, cf. *The Open Heaven*, p. 102; *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 318-321.

[26] On the resemblence between Metatron and Yahoel, cf. G.H. Box and J. I. Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, London, 1918, p. xxv; H. Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, pp. 99, 139, 144; G. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 68; idem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 51; idem, "Metatron," in Enc. Jud. 11, p. 1444; J. Fossom, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 318-321; P.S. Alexander, "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," p. 13.

[27] Cf., *The Open Heaven*, p. 102, and *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 320, where Fossum writes, "That Yahoel is said to have a turban may be a sign of his high priestly function".

[28] See Scholem's remarks in *Major Trends*, p. 68, "The same Yahoel is referred to in Jewish gnostical literature as the 'lesser Yaho,' a term which at the end of the second century had already made its way into non-Jewish gnostical literature, but which was also retained by the Merkabah mystics as the most exalted cognomen of Metatron."; *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 51, "Thus, for example, it is obvious that the predication of Metatron as the Lesser Jaho, which was taken over by the Christian Gnostics of the second century, was based on the original speculation about the angel Jahoel."

[29] As Alexander writes in "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," p. 161.

Metatron is actually called by the names Yahoel Yah and Yahoel.[30] While the depiction of Metatron in *3 Enoch* is well known, the Cairo Genizah preserves a manuscript fragment with an equally striking depiction of an angelic junior deity.[31] Although the angel in the fragment is never explicitly identified as Metatron, its overall depiction and the explicit identification of the figure with the Angel of the Lord in Ex. 23, indicate that the intended subject is Metatron, a conclusion also reached by Schäfer in his preliminary analysis of the fragment, as he writes "Hier kann nur Metatron gemeint sein."[32]

1a

1 And the earth is illuminated from his glory and from his light the sun, the moon
2 and the stars are brightened and illuminated. And God appointed him,
3 this angel, lord of all the creatures. And He set him to rule over the upper
4 and the lower [beings], to conduct them and to guide them at their head. And all
5 praise, sanctify, proclaim the power of, and declare 'Holy, Holy, Holy'[33] and 'Blessed is the Glory
6 of the Lord in His place.'[34] And this angel[35] praises among them. And this [angel] is whom
7 the Holy One blessed be He appointed over Israel, saying to Moses 'Lo, I am sending
8 an angel before you, etc.'[36] 'Obey him and heed his voice, do not disobey him, etc.'[37]

---

[30] The parallels are so acute that Jarl Fossum's claim that "It is obvious that Yahoel is the protoype of Metatron," is hardly an understatement. See *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 321.

[31] Photographic reproductions of the manuscripts, preliminary reconstructions of problematic sections, and skeletal notes are provided by Peter Schäfer in *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literature*, Tübingen, 1984, pp. 132-134, [G11 (=T.-S. K21. 95.J)].

[32] See, Schäfer, *Geniza*, "11.6 Kommentar," p. 134.

[33] Isaiah 6:3.

[34] Ezekiel 3:12.

[35] Schäfer, *Geniza*, "11.6 Kommentar," p. 134, notes that "Der über Israel gesetzte Engel is offenbar Metatron, nicht Michael."

[36] Exodus 23:20-22

[37] Exodus 23:21. Here, the referent is clearly Metatron. See the interpretation of this verse in BT Sanhedrin 38b.

9 'But if you indeed heed his voice and do all that I say, etc.'[38]
10 He called the name of this angel by the name of his Creator.[39] As it is written, 'For My name is in him'.[40]
11 And He made his authority like His own authority and his decree like [His own] decree [the rest of line eleven and line twelve are difficult to reconstruct]
12 [?]
13 ..... and he does not have a share in the world to come. And proof of our words
14 that He gave him authority to decree decrees and the Holy One blessed be He establishes [them is] that
15 the verse said, "But if you indeed heed his voice and do
16 all that I say, etc." and did not say "all that he said." From here
17 we learn that he makes a decree and his Creator establishes [it]. Said
18 R. Ishmael, "The Prince of the Countenance whose name is Metatron told me."

This text is followed by a *Shiur Qomah* passage which appears to treat the Holy One blessed be He as the name of a lower divine figure, one separate from the Creator: "R. Ishmael said: 'The Prince of the Presence, whose name is Metatron, said to me, 'What is the measure of the Holy One blessed be He who is called by the name of his Creator.'" [1a: 17-1b:1] Next comes a description of the divine anthropos which one finds in other *Shiur Qomah* texts, complete with measurements of various body parts. As it stands, the formulation implies that the Holy One blessed be He is a lower being who possesses the same name as its creator — presumably God. This is problematic, of course, since in other sources the Holy One blessed be He is invariably a name for God and the being who possesses the same name as its creator is Metatron.

How to make sense of this text? Perhaps the scribe intended to write the following: "R. Ishmael said: 'The Prince of the Presence, whose name is Metatron, who is called by the name of his Creator, said to me, 'What is the measure of the Holy One blessed be He.'"

---

[38] Exodus 23:22.
[39] Here, Schäfer, *Geniza*, "11.6 Kommentar," p. 134, writes, "Hier kann nur Metatron gemeint sein."
[40] Exodus 23:21

Instead, the scribe may have mistakenly switched two of the phrases to produce the version in the Genizah. It is also possible that the scribe actually viewed the Holy One blessed be He as a separate entity from the Creator of the world and the proper subject of the *Shiur Qomah*.[41]

The situation is made even more confusing by the passage which follows this *Shiur Qomah* description. This text depicts a cosmic judge and weigher of souls. The identity of this figure is unclear because the text describes him in imagery that could indicate God or a supra-angelic being such as Metatron:

2a

1 The goings and comings of the souls of people
2 is held in his hand and he completes the work of the great princes
3 who are appointed over the entrances of the watches of God.
4 And he lifts [or, 'takes'] them by his hand, the same souls, and
5 the same completed book and they go and give them
6 to the guardians [or, 'angels'] and the holy ones greater than them. And the guardians and holy ones[42]
7 go and transfer them to the seventy one great princes
8 appointed at the right entrance to God,
9 which is where the great court is located and these seventy one
10 great and glorified princes, the arrangers of the orders of the
11 great court are with them and the one who judges the world[43] sits in the heights
12 in a bright residence over the wheels of devouring fire
13 and over flaming cherubs and on great beasts and on wheels of brightness.[44]
14 And from the light over his throne of judgement his countenance is brightened.
15 Seventy two dwellings[45] surround him
16 like the appearance of great light, like the appearance of great brightness.

---

[41] My thanks to Elliot Wolfson, with whom I discussed these Genizah texts.

[42] In §44 (=*3 Enoch* 28) these terms are applied to the four great princes who stand before the throne of glory. Also see Daniel 4:10 for the biblical source of the terms.

[43] Cf. parallel in §45 (=3 Enoch 28).

[44] This description is based on Ezekiel 1.

[45] The term *me'onot*, (sing. *ma'on*) is often associated with the Temple, cf. Jastrow, p. 814; and is also a name of one of the heavens in BT Hag. 12b. As Schäfer

17 And the least among them is like the appearance of the sun's brightness.
18 And above and below and all the world in its entirety suspend[s][46] on his arm.[47]

2b

1 Like an amulet which hangs on an arm, as it is said, "And under
2 [his] arms the world, etc."[48] [ ] And all the deeds of human beings are engraved
3 on his *Pargod*,[49] whether the past or the future, whether the complete
4 or the not complete. And the prince about whom they say, 'he moves the sea'[50]
5 views their deeds in a single glance and examines
6 and determines their judgements and establishes them on the truth, as it is said, "Look at your
7 path in the valley, know what you have done."[51] And it says, "And the Lord [Adonai]
8 is truly God [Elohim]; he is a living God and king of the world, etc."[52]

---

notes, (*Geniza*, p. 134, n. 2a/15), the term *me'onot* appears in several Hekhalot passages, although the number seven, not seventy one, is associated with it. Cf. §743; §777; §842f; §966. See also, Deuteronomy 33:27, where the form *me'onah* is used in conjunction with the image of the supporting "arm" of the Lord, which we will see in lines 18 and 2b/1, where the verse is actually cited. Finally, the well attested (Jewish and Gnostic) tradition of the seventy two divine forms must be mentioned.

[46] Since the plural form is used, Schäfer, (*Geniza*, n. 2a/18f), has correctly noted that the true, singular subject, "the world," is not being modified, but, rather, the plural, "residences."

[47] This motif appears in §§784; 804; 967 and 743, where it (more specifically, God's "right arm") is explicitly linked to the image of the "dwellings".

[48] Deut. 33:27. The use of this verse may allude to the more complex issue of the measure of God's body or the *Shiur Qomah*, since in *Sifre Deuteronomy* 355 the verse Deut. 33:26, "O Jeshurun, there is none like God, riding through the heavens to help you, through skies in His majesty," is cited as a proof text in what appears to be a rabbinic exposition of the *Shiur Qomah* doctrine. Cf. Michael Fishbane, "The Measure of God's Glory."

[49] See parallel in §64f. = §930ff. (=3 Enoch 45).

[50] In §986, it is God who "moves the sea" although a Hiphil form is employed, rather than the Qal form as in the present context. See, Schäfer, Geniza, p. 134, n. 2b/4.

[51] Jeremiah 2:23.

[52] Jeremiah 10:10.

9 Adonai is the attribute [*Middah*] of mercy and Elohim is the attribute
10 of justice;[53] Truth is the place of the Shekinah who establishes
11 all creatures [Lit. "who enter the world"] in truth. And when he sits
12 on the throne of judgement righteousness stands at his right and mercy
13 stands at his left and truth stands before him,[54] as it is said,
14 "righteousness and justice are the base of your throne; grace and truth stand
15 before you."[55] And scales of <righteousness>[56] truth rest
16 before him and the book of the account of the world[57] are opened[58] before him and he
17 is a witness[59] and makes known the deeds of everyone. And all thoughts
18 of the heart are revealed to him[60], as it is said, "I the Lord probe the heart, examine
19 the kidneys and heart [fig. 'the mind'] to repay each person according to his ways, like a fruit of his deeds."[61]

---

[53] See BT Berakhot 7a and Schäfer §151, where these these attributes are identified with Akatriel. Cf. also, Schäfer, *Geniza*, p. 134, n. 2b/9-11.

[54] See parallel in §48 (= 3 Enoch 31).

[55] Psalm 89:15.

[56] This word has been specially marked by the scribe, see Schäfer, *Geniza*, p. 133, 2b. It is unclear why.

[57] The phrase *sefer ma'aseh 'olam* or "the book of the account of the world" is paralleled by the phrase *sefer she-kol ma'ase 'olam ketubin bo* or "the book in which are written all the deeds of the world" in §47 (=*3 Enoch* 30). In §47, this book is associated with a prooftext from Daniel 7:10, "The judgement was set and the books were opened." Either the plural *ma'ase* of Schäfer §47 or the plural *sifrin* of Daniel 7:10, may have influenced the plural modifier which follows in our text, i.e. "are opened" rather than the grammatically correct "is open."

[58] The text gives a plural form although the subject is singular, see n. 167, above.

[59] In §72 (=*3 Enoch* 48c) Metatron is called God's *'ayd* or "witness." See Schäfer, *Genizah*, p. 134, n. 2b/17f, where he writes, "Die Funktion des *'ayd* könnte auf Metatron verweisen".

[60] A close parallel to the phrase, "And all the thoughts of the heart are revealed to him" is found in §14 (= *3 Enoch* 11), where the phrase, "and all the thoughts of the hearts of living beings ..... are revealed to me as they are revealed before the Creator (*Yotser Bereshit*)." Concerning this parallel, Schäfer writes, "Vgl. §14 (3. Henoch), wo dies von Henoch = Metatron ausgesast ist. Hier wird nicht ganz klar, ob Gott oder Metatron gemeint ist." Cf. Schäfer, *Geniza*, p. 134, n. 2b/17f.

[61] Jeremiah 17:10.

Section 2a describes the ascent of the souls to the heavenly court. As the souls ascend, they are passed along to different sets of holy beings, until they arrive at the "great house" where they are judged by the "one who judges the world". The final line (18) describes how the entire world hangs on his (the judge of the world's) arm. This image forms a segue into the next section, 2b, which begins with an account of how the souls are actually judged. Much of the imagery and terminology in section 2b appears in other Hekhalot passages where the subject is clearly God. In this passage, however, these images and terms appear with other motifs generally associated with Metatron, making it extremely difficult to determine whether God or His angelic vice regent is the subject of the description.

Line 4 introduces the first ambiguity, for a "prince" who is described as "moving the sea" perceives the deeds of the souls "in a single glance and examines and determines their judgements and establishes them on the truth." If the subject were God, it seems extremely unlikely that the term "prince" or *sar* would be employed. Nevertheless, the epithet "who moves the sea" is applied to God in another Hekhalot passage. The description of how this prince is able to instantly apprehend human deeds, appropriately characterizes either God, or Metatron, who in *3 Enoch* 11, is granted the omniscient knowledge of human deeds described here.

Lines 7-15 depict an enthroned figure of judgement, with the hypostatic attributes of justice/righteousness at his right, mercy at his left, and truth before him. Although these attributes are generally associated with God, BT Berakhot 7a and *Synopse* §151, apply them to "Akatriel Yah Lord of Hosts," who may be an angelic vice regent figure in these passages. It is also significant that Elohim and Adonai are equated with the hypostatic figures of justice and mercy respectively, since these are names of God. The confusion over the subject of the description is heightened by three features which appear in lines 15-18. First, in line 15, we find the image of the scales, which is associated in *3 Enoch* with the angelic being Shoqed Hozii (who is identified with Metatron, in other passages). Second, in line 17, the enthroned figure is called a "witness" ('ayd) an epithet associated with Metatron in *3 Enoch* 48c. Finally, in the same line, the phrase "And all thoughts of the heart are revealed to him" is applied to the figure, a phrase which parallels the description of Metatron in *3 Enoch* 11: "and all the thoughts of the hearts of living beings..... are revealed to me."

These Genizah passages point to an extremely close link between God and the angelic vice regent, even to the degree that it may be

difficult to identify which one is the subject of a particular description. The situation becomes even more cloudy when we turn to the question of God's anthropomorphic form and its relationship to the chief angel. The possibility that the Angel of the Lord actually embodies God is already present in the Bible and, as several scholars have shown, emerges in apocalyptic writings as well.[62] The nature of God's hypostatic form or *Shiur Qomah* in Merkabah sources has been widely debated. In an earlier work, I discussed this debate, focusing in particular on the complex position of Gershom Scholem.[63] I concluded my discussion by affirming Gedaliahu Stroumsa's suggestion that an ancient, perhaps even the original, version of the *Shiur Qomah* tradition understood the subject of the descriptions to be a Name bearing angel, most likely Metatron.[64] In addition to the link between Metatron and the *Shiur Qomah*, it also appears that some sources understood Metatron to be the hypostatic embodiment of a particular part of the divine form, most notably the face of God. As I have argued elsewhere, it is likely that this tradition underlies the title *sar ha-panim*, which is associated with Metatron. Rather than "prince of the face [of God]", this title is better understood as "prince who is the face [of God]".[65] Indeed, at least one Merkabah passage explicitly identifies Metatron as the hypostatic face of God:

> Moses said to the Lord of all the worlds: "'If your face does not go [with us], do not bring me up from here.'" [Ex. 33:15] The Lord of all the worlds warned Moses that he should beware of that face of his. So it is written, "Beware of his face". [Ex. 23:21] This is he who is written with the one letter by which heaven and earth were created, and was sealed with the seal of "I am that I am" [Ex. 3:14] .... This is the prince who is called Yofiel Yah-dariel..... he is called Metatron. [§§396-397][66]

In addition to the connection between Metatron and God's face, this passage also expresses a link between Metatron and the "one letter

---

[62] Christopher Rowland, "The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 10, 1979, pp. 153-154. Cf., also, *The Open Heaven*, pp. 96ff; Jarl Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 333-334.

[63] See *The Gnostic Imagination*, pp. 80-99.

[64] G. Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God."

[65] See *The Gnostic Imagination*, pp. 99-105.

[66] Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, p. 258, writes "It seems to identify this being with the 'face' of God mentioned in Exodus 33:15, and with the angel of whom God says (in Exodus 23:21) that my name is in him; that is, it represents him as a manifestation of God."

by which heaven and earth were created". This phrase echoes a series of descriptions in *3 Enoch* which imply that Metatron may have been understood as a demiurgic figure by some Merkabah mystics. In *3 Enoch* 11, Metatron declares that "all mysteries of Torah and all secrets of wisdom, and all depths of purity, and all thoughts of the hearts of living creatures, and all secrets of the world, and all the secrets of Creation are revealed before me as they are revealed before the Creator [*yoser bereshit*]." In chapter 12, God clothes Metatron in a garment of glory, crowns him, and calls him "the Lesser YHWH" or *Yahweh Ha-Qatan.* In chapter 13, Metatron states that out of the "great love and mercy with which the Holy One, blessed be He, loved and adored me more than all the children of heavens, He wrote with his finger, with a flaming style, upon the crown on my head the letters by which the heavens and earth were created."

Despite the link between Metatron and the "secrets of creation," *3 Enoch* still maintains a distinction between Metatron and the *Yoser Bereshit* or Creator. The question of whether Jewish sources identify a figure other than God as the creator of the world has long been a thorny one, since the existence of a demiurge is one of the defining features of Gnosticism and is traditionally viewed as one of the chief ways in which Gnostic movements diverged from late antique Judaism and Christianity. A number of scholars have suggested that the portrayal of Metatron in *3 Enoch*, while not demiurgic, per se, reveals "the matrix of ideas out of which the Gnostic concept of the demiurge has risen."[67] Other scholars have gone one step further by attempting to reconstruct a no longer extant Jewish tradition which attributed demiurgic function to an angelic figure such as Metatron.[68] Thus, in Stroumsa's view: "It was Jewish speculation about the cos-

---

[67] Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 301. Fossum bases his observation on the more general argument of Gilles Quispel, "The Demiurge in the Apocryphon of John," in *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis: Papers Read at the First International Congress of Coptology (Cairo, December 1976)*, ed. R. McL. Wilson, Leiden, 1978, p. 33, "An immanent development within Judaism — awareness of God's transcendence, embarrassment about the crude anthropomorphism of the Old Testament — created a situation where it became feasible to identify the Angel of the Lord with this demiurge."

[68] Saul Lieberman, "How Much Greek in Jewish Palestine?" in Alexander Altmann, ed., *Biblical and Other Studies*, Cambridge, 1963, p. 141, cites a rabbinic tradition in *Aboth de-R. Nathan* (ch. XXXIX, ed. Schechter, page 116), which links the creation of the world with the "likeness on high": "Because of his sin it is not granted to man to know *what likeness is on high*; and but for that, the keys would have been handed to him and he might have known *what heaven and earth were created with.*"

mic size of the demiurgic angel, the hypostatic form of God, that both Christians and Gnostics adopted and transformed".[69]

The following passage from the Merkabah text *Re'uyot Yehezkel* ("*The Visions of Ezekiel*") not only likens Metatron's name to the "name of the creator of the world," it also depicts him as the *atiq yomin* or Ancient of Days from Daniel 7:9-10.[70]

> What is in Zebul? R. Levi quoted R. Hama b. 'Uqba, quoting R. Johanan: The prince dwells only in Zebul, and it is he who constitutes the fullness of Zebul. Thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads are in his presence, serving him. Daniel says of them: "While I was watching, thrones, and so forth..... A river of fire flowed....." [Daniel 7:9-10] What is his name? Qimos is his name. R. Isaac says: Me'attah is his name. R. 'Anayni b. Sasson says: Bizebul is his name. R. Tanhum the elder says: 'ttyh is his name. Eleazar of Nadwad says: Metatron, like the name of the Power. Those who make use of the name say: slns is his name, qs bs bs qbs is his name, similar to the name of the creator of the world.[71]

The identification of Metatron with the Ancient of Days is provocative for two reasons. First, in Daniel 7:9-10, the Ancient of Days

---

[69] Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God," pp. 287-288. Joseph Dan, "Anafiel, Metatron, and the Creator," *Tarbiz* 52, 1983 (Hebrew), p. 457 has argued that a demiurgic role was ascribed to the angelic figure Anafiel and that Metatron and Anafiel may have originally been "a single entity, which was differentiated only at the moment when the aggadah of the apotheosis/ascension of Enoch was joined to the image of Metatron," since this link precluded his identification with a pre-existent demiurge. It is significant that Anafiel, like Metatron, is described as "a servant who is named after his master," *(Synopse* §§242, 244) and is stationed at the "gate of the seventh hekhal" (§245), where he guides the mystic to the vision of the "King in His beauty" (§250). Metatron is explicitly depicted as the demiurge in the medieval writings of Abraham Ibn Izra and Abraham ben David of Posquiéres (RABaD). See Elliot Wolfson, "God, the Demiurge, and the Intellect: On the Usage of the the Word *Kol* in Abraham ibn Ezra," *Revue des études juives* 149, 1990, esp. pp. 93-101.

[70] It should be noted that in at least one of the *Shiur Qomah* passages, God, rather than Metatron, is explicitly referred to as the Ancient of Days (*atiq yomin*), cf. Martin Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions*, Tübingen, 1985, p. 116, line 392. In *3 Enoch* 28, God (i.e. the "Holy One") is described as sitting in judgement and "the hair of his head is as pure wool," a clear allusion to the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7; while in ch. 35, Daniel 7:10 is cited in reference to the Holy One blessed be He.

[71] *The Visions of Ezekiel*, ed. I. Gruenwald, in *Temirin* I, Jerusalem, 1972, pp. 128ff., lines 71ff. Cf. Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, pp. 263ff for an English translation and examination of the manuscript traditions and dating. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, p. 140, writes, "one might rightly ask whether the author of *Re'uyot Yehezkel* did not think that the *'Atiq Yomin* described in the Book of Daniel was identical with the *Sar* of the Heaven *Zevul*. Admittedly, the identification is not explicitly made, but one may assume that it could have been implied." Peter Hayman, "Monotheism — A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?" p. 12, is more confident, "In the Visions of Ezekiel, one of the earliest of the Merkabah texts, Metatron is seated in the third heaven and is identified as the Ancient of Days of Daniel 7."

appears to be a title for God and not a subordinate being. Second, in addition to the Ancient of Days, Metatron bears a resemblance to the Son of Man of Daniel 7:13-14.[72] Ancient evidence for the conflation of the two figures in Daniel 7 comes from LXX Daniel 7:13, where instead of reading the Son of Man "came unto [*heos*] the Ancient of Days," the text reads "came as [*hos*] the Ancient of Days".[73] Commenting on this passage, Rowland writes: "This variant suggests that the Son of Man is in fact the embodiment of the person of the Ancient of Days. In other words the original scene in Daniel 7, where two figures exist alongside each other in heaven, is changed so that the vice-regent, the Son of Man, takes upon himself the form and character of God himself."[74]

The conflation of the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man into a single figure recalls the widespread rabbinic tradition that God appears as both an old man and a youth.[75] In BT Hag. 14a, R. Samuel ben Nahman depicts God as both the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9 and the youth in Song of Songs 5:11. Other rabbinic passages portray God as an old man full of mercy at Sinai (*zaqen male' rahamim*), and a young warrior at the Sea of Reeds.[76] Gedaliahu Stroumsa has shown that Metatron embodies a similar "two-fold polymorphy."[77] The most striking evidence for this parallel between God and Metatron appears in BT Yebamoth 16b, where in another tradition attributed to R. Samuel ben Nahman, the *Sar Ha-'Olam* or "Prince of the World" (another title for Metatron) declares: "I have been young, but now I am old." (Ps. 37:25)[78]

---

[72] Frank Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, Cambridge/London, 1973, pp. 16-17, argues that the Son of Man is "evidently young Ba'l reinterpreted and democratized by the apocalypticist as the Jewish nation," whereas the Ancient of Days echoes the figure of El.

[73] Cf. *Two Powers in Heaven*, p. 202; *The Open Heaven*, p. 98; *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 319.

[74] *The Open Heaven*, ibid. See also *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 312-313, n. 139, where Fossum notes the parallel between the LXX passage and BT Yeb. 16b, since both describe the second power in heaven as a youth and an old man.

[75] Gedaliahu Stroumsa, "Polymorphie divine et transformations d'un mythologème, *L'Apocryphon de Jean* et ses sources," in *Savoir et Salut: Gnosis de l'antiquité tardive*, Paris, 1992.

[76] For example, in *Mekhilta de R. Simeon bar Yohai*, Beshalah 15, in eds., J.N. Epstein and E.Z. Melamed, Jerusalem, 1955, p. 81.

[77] The term Stroumsa employs when he describes the phenomenon of Metatron as old man and youth in "Form(s) of God," p. 281.

[78] Stroumsa identifies Metatron with the "Prince of the World". Stroumsa notes that further evidence for the depiction of Metatron as a youth and an old man

The significance of these traditions lies in their shared ability to undermine boundaries between human, angelic, and divine beings. As both an angelified human being and a lesser Yahweh, Metatron stands midway between God and humanity. Rather than affirming an unbreachable gulf in these texts, the angelic vice regent functions as an embodied limin, whose janus like character symbolizes the ability to move from one state of existence to another. As David Halperin has written concerning the connection of Metatron and Moses: "As Metatron is a 'lesser' Yahweh, so he is a 'greater' Moses."[79]

---

comes from Abraham Abulafia's *Hayyei Ha-'Olam Ha-Ba* and from parallels with Jesus, cf. below.

[79] David Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, p. 426.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FALL OF METATRON

This chapter will focus on the evidence for an internal polemic within rabbinic and Hekhalot texts against the angelic vice regent. The polemic focuses on the figure of Metatron although one of the texts I will examine mentions the figure Akatriel rather than Metatron and is exceptional in other ways as well. These texts reflect an uneasiness with the ascent and angelification of human beings, on the one hand, and the depiction of the angelic vice regent as a second — albeit lesser — deity, on the other. They polemicize against these related traditions by creating a worst case scenario: a mystic ascends to heaven, where instead of seeing God and undergoing a process of angelification, he mistakenly sees the chief angel as a second deity and is transformed into an arch-heretic. In other Merkabah texts, vision is intimately linked to the mystic's angelification (as Elliot Wolfson has shown). In these passages, vision is the source of heresy. Thus, along with the angelification of the mystic and the God-like appearance of the angelic vice regent, these texts also problematize the visionary focus of much of Merkabah mysticism.

In the passages I have discussed thus far, Metatron serves as the chief symbol for the continuum between human beings, angels, and God. The following passages employ Metatron for a contrary purpose: to highlight the hierarchical relationship between different categories of being(s). The transformation of Elisha ben Abuya into Aher, a name which means "alien" or "other," may be read as an opposite process to the angelification or deification of successful Merkabah mystics in other texts. His failure results in a complete separation or alienation from God, as the heavenly voice calls out, "Return backsliding children — except for Aher!" The reification of boundaries, therefore, rather than their crossing, is the goal of these passages.

Having said this, it is important to note that not all of these passages are equally critical regarding the angelic vice regent or the Merkabah mystic. Indeed, at least one of the texts I will examine actually defends both the mystic and the angelic vice regent, in this case Akatriel, although in other ways the text seems to belong to what I will call the Aher/Metatron tradition. At the other end of

the spectrum stands the Babylonian Talmud's version of Aher's encounter with Metatron which in my opinion contains the strongest polemic. Determining the relationship between what appear to be different (sometimes very different) versions of the same textual tradition is one of my goals. In doing so, I hope to show that the line between rabbinic and Hekhalot literature is sometimes difficult to discern. Finally, I seek to understand the relationship between this polemical tradition and the more positive depictions of the angelic vice regent. Did the former function as a kind of warning label attached to Merkabah traditions in order to make sure that the line between God and his creatures was not completely erased? Did it represent another school within the mystical tradition or even the voice of certain opponents of Merkabah mysticism which were nevertheless preserved by the editors of the mystical texts, themselves?

The danger that some devotées might actually worship Metatron in place of God is clear from a *beraita* in BT Sanh. 38b:

> Once a min said to R. Idith, It is written: "And unto Moses He said, come up to YHWH" (Exodus 24:1). Surely it should have said: Come up to Me!
> This was Metatron, he replied, whose name is like that of his Master, for it is written: "For My Name is in him" (Exodus 23:21). But, if so, we should worship him!
> R. Idith replied, The same verse, however, says: "Do not rebel against him." (This means:) Do not exchange him for Me [reading *al temor* (do not exchange) for *al tammer* (do not rebel)].
> But, if so, why is it stated: "He will not pardon your transgressions" (loc. cit., above)?
> He answered, Indeed, we would not accept him even as a messenger, for it is written: "If Your Presence go not with us" (Exodus 23:15).[1]

A similar danger underlies a more famous rabbinic episode: Aher's heavenly encounter with Metatron. The talmudic context of this tradition is the story of the four rabbis who entered Pardes.[2] Although the episode occurs in only one talmudic passage — BTHagigah 15a

---

[1] For a detailed discussion of this passage, cf. Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, pp. 68-69.

[2] Studies on the Pardes account have included (although this is by no means an exhaustive list) those of Heinrich Graetz, *Gnosticismus und Judenthum*, Krotoschin, 1846, who read the Pardes account as a rabbinic expression of the Gnostic controversy; Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 52-53, and *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 14-19, who viewed rabbinic and Hekhalot Pardes accounts as related descriptions of heavenly ascent; Ephraim Urbach, "Ha-Mesorot 'al Torat ha-Sod be-Tequfat ha-Tannaim," in Eprhaim E. Urbach, R. J. Zvi Werblowsky and Chaim Wirsubski, eds., *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem*

— several versions are preserved in the Hekhalot literature. In addition, as P.S. Alexander has shown, different talmudic manuscripts indicate the existence of at least two recensions of the talmudic account.[3] By comparatively discussing all versions of the Aher/Metatron tradition for the first time, I hope to reconstruct their chronological and thematic relationship.

I begin my analysis of the humbling or dethronement of Metatron with an examination of the talmudic manuscripts translated and discussed by Alexander:[4]

1. The *editio princeps* of Bomberg, which save for minor variations, = Vilna folios, the standard edition.

A. 'Aher cut down the plants.
B. Of him Scripture says: 'Do not allow your mouth to bring your flesh into guilt' (Eccl. 5:5).
C. What does this mean?
D. He saw Mitatron to whom permission was given to sit and write down the merits of Israel.
E. He said: 'It is taught that on high there is no sitting, no rivalry, no neck..... and no weariness.....
F. Perhaps' — God forbid! — 'there are two powers.'
G. They led forth Mitatron and whipped him with sixty lashes of fire.
H. They said to him: 'Why did you not stand up when you saw him?'
I. Permission was given to him to erase the merits of Aher.
J. A Heavenly voice went forth and said: 'Return, backsliding children' (Jer. 3:22) — except Aher!'"

---

on His Seventieth Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends, Jerusalem, 1967, pp. 12-17, who read the Pardes tradition as an allegory constructed around a *mysterium tremendum*, namely a vision of the Merkabah; David Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature*, New Haven, 1980, pp. 94ff., who accepts Urbach's allegorical reading but denies an ecstatic vision of the Merkabah at the core of the tradition, asserting, instead, that only in the Babylonian Talmud was the Pardes account re-interpreted as an ascent; Peter Schäfer, "New Testament and Hekhalot Literature: The Journey into Heaven in Paul and in Merkavah Mysticism," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 35, 1984, pp. 19-35, where Schäfer sharply criticizes Scholem's position and interprets the Pardes accounts as the struggle of competing rabbinic schools; and Henry Fischel, *Rabbinic Literature and Greco-Roman Philosophy: A Study of Epicurea and Rhetorica in Early Midrashic Writings*, Leiden, 1973, who interprets the Pardes in terms of Greek philosophical traditions.

[3] P. S. Alexander, "3 Enoch and the Talmud," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 18, 1987.

[4] Ibid., pp. 54, 59, 61. Alexander's rendering of these passages is also included by

2. Vaticanus 134 [differences from Bomberg are indicated by italics].

A. 'Aher cut down the plants.
B. Of him Scripture says: 'Do not allow your mouth to bring your flesh into guilt, *nor say before the angel that it was a mistake* (Ecc. 5:5).'
C. *What did he see*?
D. He saw that permission was given to *Metatron* to sit *for one hour in the day* to write down the merits of Israel.
E. He said: 'It was taught that on high there is *no standing* and no sitting, *no jealousy* and no rivalry, no neck and no weariness.
F. Perhaps' — God forbid! — there are two powers *here*'.
G. They led forth Metatron and whipped him with sixty lashes of fire.
H. —
I. Permission was give to him, to *Metatron*, to *uproot* the merits of Aher.
J. A heavenly voice went forth *from behind the Curtain* and said: 'Return, backsliding children — except Aher!'"

3. Munich 95 [differences from Bomberg in italics].

A. 'Aher cut down the plants.
B. Of him Scripture says: 'Do not allow your mouth to bring your flesh into guilt, *nor say before the angel that it was a mistake* (Eccl. 5:5).'
C. *What did he see*?
D. [He saw] Metatron to whom permission was given to write down the merits of Israel.
E. He said: 'It was taught that on high there is *no standing* and no sitting, *no jealousy* and no rivalry, no neck and no weariness.
F. Perhaps' — God forbid! — 'there are two powers.'
G. They led forth Metatron and whipped him with sixty lashes of fire.
H .—
I. Permission was given to him, to Metatron, to uproot the merits of Aher.
J. A heavenly voice went forth from behind the Curtain and said: 'Return backsliding children — except Aher?'"

C.R.A. Morray-Jones, "Hekhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition: Alexander's Three Test Cases," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 22, 1991, p. 17.

According to Alexander, the crux of the differences between the accounts lies in their attitudes toward sitting. He notes that Munich 95 gives no indication that Metatron's sin was specifically *sitting* in the presence of Aher. Indeed, section E declares that "It was taught that on high there is no standing and no sitting," in other words, sitting is not identified as being more problematic than standing. Like Munich 95, Vaticanus 134, section E prohibits both sitting and standing in heaven. However, Vaticanus 134, section D adds that Aher saw that Metatron was given permission to "sit for one hour in the day," thereby implying that Metatron's sitting inspired Aher's heresy.[5] While Vaticanus 134 restricts Metatron's sitting to one hour a day, Bomberg, section D simply states that Metatron was given permission to sit. Furthermore, Bomberg adds a section absent from the other manuscripts, in which Metatron is condemned for not standing up when he saw Aher (section H). Finally, Bomberg, section E lacks the reference to standing which is present in the other manuscripts, and reads "It is taught that on high there is no sitting, no rivalry....."

Alexander accounts for the differences between the manuscripts by arguing that Munich 95 represents the earliest recension of the account, while Vaticanus 134 represents a later recension, and Bomberg the latest. This reconstruction is largely based on Alexander's evaluation of section E of the manuscripts. As mentioned above, Munich 95 and Vaticanus 134 both declare that there is no sitting and standing on high, while Bomberg lacks the reference to standing. According to Alexander, not only does the presence of the word standing create "a more balanced, rhythmic form" in the Hebrew original, but it indicates the lectio difficilior, since it creates a contradiction in Vaticanus 134, namely, if there is "no standing and no sitting" in heaven, how come Metatron is given permission to sit for one hour a day?[6] It seems unlikely that Vaticanus 134 would have introduced such a complication to the formulation preserved in Bomberg (i.e. without the reference to standing). Therefore, the original version of the quotation must have included both standing and sitting.

Thus, the emphasis on sitting in Vaticanus 134, and to a much greater degree in Bomberg, reflects an attempt to clarify the cause

---

[5] The emphasis on sitting may have been inspired by the tradition that angels do not have joints, cf. Ezekiel 1:7, "their legs were straight legs"; *Genesis Rabbah* 65:21; PT Berakhot 1:1; *Leviticus Rabbah* 6:3, etc.

[6] "3 Enoch and the Talmud," p. 60.

of Metatron's undoing, something which is unclear from Munich 95. Probably aware of the tradition that angels cannot sit because they lack joints, the authors of Vaticanus 134 and Bomberg focused on the motif of sitting in the quotation in section E. Bomberg represents the latest stage of the tradition since it cleans up the quotation in section E, by eliminating the apparent contradiction preserved in Vaticanus 134.[7]

Having reconstructed the sequence of the talmudic recensions, Alexander turns his attention to the relationship between the talmudic accounts and the version of Metatron's downfall in *3 Enoch* 16:

3 Enoch 16:1-5 (Synopse §20):

> Rabbi Ishmael said: "Metatron, the Prince of Countenance, the splendor of the highest heaven, said to me:
> At first I was sitting on a throne of glory at the entrance to the seventh hekhal and I judged all the denizens of the heights, the familia of God, on the authority of the Holy One blessed be he. I distributed greatness, royalty, rank, rule, splendor, praise, diadem, crown, and glory to all the Princes of Kingdoms, when I sat in the heavenly court. And the Princes of Kingdoms stood beside me, to my right and to my left, by authority of the Holy One blessed be he. But when Aher came to gaze on the vision of the Merkabah and set his eyes on me, he became frightened and trembled before me. And his soul was alarmed [to the point] of leaving him because of fear, dread and terror of me, when he saw me when I was sitting on a throne like a king, and ministering angels were standing beside me like servants and all the Princes of Kingdoms crowned with crowns surrounded me. And in the same moment, he opened his mouth and said: "Surely there are two powers in heaven." Immediately a heavenly voice went out from before the Shekinah saying: "Return, backsliding children, except Aher." In the same moment, 'Anafiel YHWH, the glorified, splendid, endeared, wonderful, terrible, and dreadful Prince came at the dispatch of the Holy One blessed be he and struck me sixty lashes of light and stood me on my feet."

Although there are considerable differences between *3 Enoch* 16 and the talmudic manuscripts, Alexander argues that "It is the central role of 'sitting' that allies 3 Enoch's version of the story with that of Bomberg, and sets it apart from Munich 95. Of course once again the option is, in principle, open that both 3 Enoch and Bomberg drew on a common, lost source, but there is no advantage in taking this line. It is much simpler to suppose that the author of 3 Enoch

---

[7] Ibid., p. 62.

16:1-5 knew and used the Bomberg version of the story."[8] Therefore, Alexander concludes that "3 Enoch is based on the Bomberg version of the humbling of Metatron, i.e. it derives from the latest stage in the evolution of the Talmudic tradition."[9]

C. R. A. Morray-Jones has critically examined Alexander's model. Although Morray-Jones accepts Alexander's reconstruction of the sequence of the talmudic manuscripts (as do I), he disagrees with Alexander's view of the relationship between the talmudic tradition and *3 Enoch* 16. In Morray-Jones' view, it seems likely that the talmudic accounts represent a "softening" of an earlier, more radical tradition which is preserved in *3 Enoch.* According to Morray-Jones, the cause of Aher's error in *3 Enoch* is not simply that Metatron was seated, as Alexander implies, but Metatron's "god-like and glorious appearance as the enthroned 'Grand Vizier' of Heaven."[10] Since the talmudic redactors were interested in discouraging the most extreme forms of Metatron speculation, they eliminated all references to Metatron's glorious and god-like appearance and, instead, characterized him as a less threatening celestial scribe. Morray-Jones concludes that "the talmudic story in its earliest recension [i.e. Munich 95], represents an abbreviated and heavily edited version of the original, which is more fully preserved at 3 Enoch 16."[11]

In order to shed further light on the tradition of Metatron's downfall, I would like to examine two additional sources. The first passage is *Synopse* §672, which explains the apostasy of Elisha ben Abuya in the following way:

> *Synopse* §672
>
> And these are the men who entered the Pardes.....
> "Elisha ben Abuya cut the shoots." Concerning him Scripture says: "Do not allow your mouth, and so forth. They said when Elisha ben Abuya descended to the Merkabah he saw Metatron to whom *permission was given to sit and write down the merits of Israel for an hour a day.*

---

[8] Ibid., p. 64.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Morray-Jones, "Hekhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition," p. 30.

[11] Ibid., p. 31, as Morray-Jones explains, "In the talmudic versions then, the story of Aher's disastrous encounter with Metatron is re-told in such a way as to minimize and guard against precisely the kind of extravagent speculation concerning the glorious and God-like appearance of the Lesser Lord; that is preserved in Sefer Hekhalot [i. e. *3 Enoch*]". Indeed, Alexander, himself, speculates that the original motivation behind the talmudic tradition "may not have been what Metatron was doing, but rather his glorious appearance." See "3 Enoch and the Talmud," p. 62.

> He said: "The sages have taught that on high there is *no standing* and *no sitting*, no jealousy and no rivalry, and no neck and no affliction." He contemplated [*hirher*] that perhaps there are two powers in heaven. Immediately they brought out Metatron to outside the Curtain (*Pargod*) and struck him with sixty fiery lashes. And they gave Metatron permission to burn Elisha's merits. A heavenly voice went out and said: "Return, backsliding children, except for Aher." [emphasis added]

There are important similarities and differences between this passage and the other versions of Metatron's humbling. Unlike all the talmudic manuscripts, *Synopse* §672 does not open its description with the line "Aher cut the shoots," but, instead reads "Elisha ben Abuyah cut the shoots". This reading jibes more closely with the version of the Pardes account in Tosefta Hag. 2:4: "Elisha looked and cut the shoots" and is identical with the version in Song of Songs Rabbah to 1:4.[12]

Synopse §672 states that Elisha "contemplated" (*hirher*) that perhaps there are two powers in heaven". By contrast *3 Enoch* 16 describes Aher as *saying* that "There are indeed two powers in heaven," while all of the talmudic recensions have Aher declare "Perhaps — God forbid! — there are two powers." *3 Enoch* 16 and §672, therefore, share the specific reference to the two powers in heaven, while the talmudic recensions and §672 temper the declaration of Aher/Elisha by adding the word "perhaps" (and in the case of the Talmud, "God forbid").

Unlike either the talmudic manuscripts or *3 Enoch* 16, §672 describes Aher/Elisha as only *contemplating* rather than declaring his heretical idea. This feature may have been included to ameliorate the severity of Elisha's sin or it may reflect the reluctance of the authors to even record such a heretical declaration. In any case, the implication of §672 is that even contemplating the existence of two powers in heaven is a sin, let alone actually declaring their existence.

Although the talmudic accounts do not explicitly declare where Metatron is located, the implication is that he is within the Pardes, since the opening line declares that "Four *entered* the Pardes....." By contrast, *3 Enoch* 16 describes Metatron as sitting at the entrance of the seventh hekhal ("palace"), the exact location where he is enthroned by God in *3 Enoch* 10. By contrast, §672 reinforces the idea that Metatron was in the Pardes when confronted by

---

[12] The Palestinian Talmud Hag. 2:1 77b has "Aher looked and cut the shoots."

Elisha/Aher, for it states that "they brought Metatron to outside the Curtain," in order to whip him, a detail absent from the other versions.

By introducing its account with the talmudic line, "Four who entered the Pardes," §672 clearly indicates that the Pardes was the site of the episode (in contrast to *3 Enoch* 16). Nevertheless, §672 essentially glosses the talmudic tradition by adding that "Elisha ben Abuya descended to the Merkabah". In doing so, §672 incorporates the Pardes account into the Merkabah tradition and preserves a parallel with *3 Enoch* 16, which states that "Aher came to gaze on the vision of the Merkabah." Besides this reference to Elisha's descent to the Merkabah, however, §672 lacks any obvious indications that it belongs to the Hekhalot genre, whereas *3 Enoch* 16 clearly indicates its Hekhalot provenance in a number of ways.[13]

Significantly, §672 reads like a Hebrew parallel to the Aramaic version in Vaticanus 134.[14] Both passages include the reference to "no standing and no sitting" and most strikingly, both declare that Metatron was given permission to "sit and write down the merits of Israel for one hour a day," a detail which is absent from all other versions.[15] If we regard the reference to Elisha's descent to the Merkabah as a gloss, whose function was to incorporate the passage into the Hekhalot genre, then we are faced with the conclusion that either §672 drew on Vaticanus 134 for its primary inspiration, that Vaticanus 134 drew on §672, or that both passages drew on a common source. It also seems likely that the version of the story preserved in Bomberg was either unknown to the author of §672 or had not yet been formulated.

As for the relationship between §672 and *3 Enoch* 16, it appears that besides their common references to the Merkabah, and the "two powers in heaven," there are no other lexical links between the two passages. There is, however, the intriguing reference in §672 to Metatron being cast "outside the Curtain" following Elisha's apostasy, while in *3 Enoch* 16, Metatron is portrayed as being enthtroned outside of the Curtain, at the entrance of the seventh hekhal, *before*

---

[13] With references to the seventh hekhal, the Merkabah, Anafiel, etc.

[14] Despite the differences between them. In addition to the ones I have already mentioned, it should be noted that §672 declares that "they gave Metatron permission to burn Elisha's merits." a line which is absent from all the other versions, and which sets up a parallel between the whipping of Metatron with fiery lashes and the burning of Elisha's merits.

[15] Although the quotations in their entirety have minor differences.

Aher encounters him. It is possible that each passage preserves a competing tradition (one negative; one positive) explaining how Metatron ended up at the entrance of God's abode, rather than inside it.

Do my observations concerning §672 shed light on the relationship between *3 Enoch* 16 and the talmudic recensions? At the very least, they indicate that §672 was probably not influenced by the final recension in MS Bomberg, which Alexander has argued underlies the version in 3 Enoch. On the other other hand, §672 also preserves a Hekhalot tradition which is either unaware of, or has chosen to suppress the glorious appearance of Metatron emphasized by *3 Enoch* 16.

Our ability to reconstruct the relationship of the different versions is further complicated by the final Hekhalot witness to the tradition, *Synopse* §597:

> *Synopse* §597
>
> Elisha ben Abuya said: When I ascended to the Pardes, I saw Akatriel Yah, God of Israel, Lord of hosts, sitting at the entrance of Pardes and one hundred and twenty myriads of minstering angels were surrounding him. As it is written: "Thousands upon thousands served him and myriads upon myriads stood before him," [Daniel 7:10]. When I saw them I was alarmed, I trembled, and I pushed myself and entered before the Holy One blessed be he. I said to him: "Master of the world, as you wrote in your Torah: "The heavens and the heavens of heavens belong to the Lord your God," [Deut. 10:14]. And it is written: "The firmament declares your handiwork," [Psalm 19:2]. [This implies] only one [God]. He said to me: "Elisha my son, did you come here only to find fault with my attributes [*le-harher 'al midotai*]? Haven't you heard the proverb which goes....."

In §597, instead of encountering Metatron, as he does in the other passages I have examined, Elisha ben Abuya sees Akatriel Yah, God of Israel, Lord of Hosts, sitting at the entrance of Pardes. Although it may therefore be argued that §597 does not belong to the traditions concerning Metatron's downfall, it is clear that this passage is related to the other accounts.

Like Metatron, Akatriel is a highly ambivalent figure. §597 calls Akatriel "God of Israel, Lord of Hosts," which seems to imply that Akatriel is God, except that later in the passage, Elisha actually enters Pardes and encounters the Holy One blessed be he, the most common rabbinic title for God.[16] A figure named Akatriel appears in

[16] In fact, Hekhalot sources often refer to exalted angels such as Akatriel and

a number of rabbinic and Hekhalot sources. In BT Berakhot 7a (Cf. parallel in Synopse §151), Akatriel is described as follows:

> R. Ishmael ben Elisha says: I once entered the innermost part [of the Sanctuary] to burn incense and saw Akatriel Yah, the Lord of Hosts, seated upon a high and exalted throne. He said to me: "Ishmael, my son, bless me." I replied: "May it be your will that your mercy will suppress your anger and your mercy will prevail over your other attributes [*middotekha*]. And that you will act with your children according to the measure of mercy and on their behalf, stop short of the limit of strict justice." And he nodded to me with his head.[17]

As Scholem noted, it cannot be determined from this passage whether "Akatriel, represents the name of an angel or the name of God Himself in one of the aspects of His glory as it is revealed upon the throne".[18] In *3 Enoch* 15B, Akatriel YHWH of Hosts functions as a manifestation of God and is described as ordering Metatron to fulfill the requests of Moses.[19] Akatriel appears in other Hekhalot passages, as well, where he is characterized as God, an angel, or the secret name engraved on the divine throne or crown.[20]

In order to fully appreciate the similarities and differences between §597 and the other accounts, I will analyze §597 in detail. Unlike §672 and the talmudic recensions, §597 does not begin with the line "Aher/Elisha ben Abuya cut the shoots." Instead it opens with the line "Elisha ben Abuya said," and portrays the episode as the first-person testimony of Elisha ben Abuya, just as *3 Enoch* 16 treats the episode as the first person testimony of Metatron (the other accounts are in the third person). These differences in narrative voice are important because they suggest a difference in perspective. By portraying him as a heavenly scribe rather than a glorious vice regent, the Talmud depicts Metatron as a more lowly figure than *3 Enoch.* The latter text's more sympathetic image of Metatron is reinforced by his first person account of his heavenly meeting with Aher.

Metatron with names reserved for God in more exoteric Jewish literature. Cf. Wolfgang Fauth, "Tatrosjah-Totrosjah und Metatron in der jüdischen Merkabah-Mystik," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 22, 1991.

[17] In Synopse §151 the same episode is described, except instead of burning incense, R. Ishmael is "offering a sacrifice on the altar" when he sees Akatriel.

[18] *Jewish Gnosticism,* p. 51. For a discussion of the mythical significance of this passage see, Yehuda Liebes, "Dei Natura Dei: On the Development of the Jewish Myth," in *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism,* Albany, 1993, pp. 10ff.

[19] The identification of Akatriel with God and not an angel in this passage is supported by Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism,* p. 52, Odeberg, *3 Enoch,* ch. 15B, p. 42,n. 4, and Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," p. 304.

[20] The name Akatriel appears in a number of Hekhalot passages, including §130, where it is probably a name for God; §138, where Akatriel is either God or an angel

In *3 Enoch*, we hear Metatron's side of the story, as it were. Likewise, §597 provides us with Elisha ben Abuya's perspective on what happened when he ascended to Pardes and not coincidently, I would argue, §597 presents a much more sympathetic portrayal of Elisha ben Abuya.

One way of explaining these differences is that both *3 Enoch* and §597 represent voices from within Merkabah circles, whereas the Talmud may reflect a dissenting view from without the mystical tradition or a more conservative voice from within the Merkabah movement.[21] The use of first person voices establishes an empathetic link between the reader (presumably a mystic, himself) and the figures of Metatron and Elisha ben Abuya, respectively. This is significant given the broader phenomenon of identification within Merkabah mysticism. Thus, Metatron was once Enoch, who serves as a model for Rabbi Ishmael, who in turn serves as a model for the readers of the Merkabah texts. It is also important to note the different contexts of the accounts. The talmudic account was intended for a general audience, whereas the Hekhalot passages were written for a limited audience of mystical adepts. The Talmud's version may therefore function as a warning to the general public against the possible dangers of Merkabah mysticism.

§597 continues with Elisha's declaration "When I ascended to the Pardes". The explicit reference to ascension contrasts §597 with the talmudic accounts, which open with the line "Four entered (*nekhnesu*) the Pardes" and with *3 Enoch*, which states that "Aher came to gaze on the Merkabah." Furthermore, the use of the term "ascended" differentiates §597 from §672 which states that Elisha ben Abuya "descended to the Merkabah." Like §672 and the talmudic versions, and unlike *3 Enoch* 16, which refers to the hekhalot, §597 depicts the Pardes as the location of the episode. Yet, in striking contrast to

---

who receives prayers; §310 where Metatron is called Akatriel's "servant" and Akatriel is implicity identified with God; Geniza fragment 19, which parallels §310; §501, where the name Akatriel is engraved on God's crown and throne; §667, where Akatriel is an angel in the fourth heaven, and §310 = §678, where Akatriel is the name of an angel. Scholem has argued, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 54, that "to define Akatriel in this way, as a secret name of the crown, seems to be both a plausible and a rational explanation of its etymology." William Roseanau, "Some Notes on Akatriel," *Oriental Studies Dedicated to Paul Haupt*, Baltimore, 1926, pp. 103-105, arrives at the same conclusion. Scholem, ibid., n. 35, writes that Rosenau "has 'guessed' the correct explanation without being aware of existence of the various passages in the Merkabah literature and without mentioning Rashi, from whose commentary he took it."

[21] As I have suggested above, §672 appears to belong to the same branch of the tradition as MS Vaticanus.

§672, §597 does not add a gloss to integrate its account into the Hekhalot genre. Indeed, there is no mention of the Merkabah in §597, unlike in both §672 and *3 Enoch.*

Strikingly, Elisha's vision of Akatriel does not occur within the Pardes, as implied in the talmudic versions and §672, but at its entrance, a detail which jibes structurally with the location of Metatron at the entrance of the seventh hekhal in *3 Enoch.* At this point, we might ask whether §597 has merely transformed the motif in *3 Enoch* 16, transferring the locus of the encounter from the entrance of the seventh hekhal to the entrance of Pardes or whether there is another source which may have influenced its formulation. In fact, there is a pre-talmudic tradition which parallels the location in §597.[22]

In the *Testament of Abraham*, Recension A, (c. 100 CE), Abraham ascends to heaven and encounters the proto-plast Adam (Gk. *ho protoplastos*) seated on a throne at the entrance of Paradise. Because of its many thematic connections to the Aher/Metatron tradition, I will cite chapter 11 at length and will italicize those phrases which are most significant for my comparison:

> Michael turned the chariot and brought Abraham toward the east, to the first gate of heaven. And Abraham saw..... *a man seated an a golden throne. And the appearance of that man was terrifying, like the Master's.* ..... And when the wondrous one who was seated on the throne of gold saw few entering through the strait gate, but many entering the broad gate, immediately that wondrous man tore the hair of his head and the beard of his cheeks, *and he threw himself on the ground from his throne* crying and wailing. And when he saw many souls entering through the strait gate, *then he arose from the earth* and sat on his throne, very cheerfully rejoicing and exulting. *Then Abraham asked* the Commander-in-chief, "My lord Commander-in-chief, *who is this most wondrous man, who is adorned in such glory.....* "This is the first-formed Adam who is in such glory, and he looks at the world, since everyone has come from him. And when he sees many souls entering through the strait gate, the he arises and sits on his throne rejoicing and exulting cheerfully, because this strait gate is (the gate) of the righteous, which leads to life, *and those who enter through it come into Paradise.....* And when he sees many souls entering the broad gate, then he pulls the hair of his head and casts himself on the ground crying and wailing bitterly; for the broad gate is (the gate) of the sinners, which leads to destruction and eternal punishment.[23]

---

[22] As Morray-Jones has noted: "This is analogous to the position of Metatron in 3 Enoch; a precise parallel is found in a surviving fragment of a lost Hekhalot work [i.e. §597]." Transformational Mysticism," p. 17.

[23] E.P. Sanders, "Testament of Abraham," Recension A, in James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha.*

Like Elisha ben Abuya in §597, Abraham encounters a glorious being enthroned at the entrance of a heavenly place called Paradise/Pardes. The appearance of this enthroned being is "terrifying, like the Master's." The terrifying character of the being in the *Testament of Abraham* parallels the depictions of Metatron and Akatriel in *3 Enoch* and §597, respectively. Even more significantly, this being is described as resembling the "Master" — that is, God — precisely the source for the confusion in all of the versions of the Aher/Metatron tradition.[24]

Unlike Aher, Abraham possesses a heavenly guide in the form of Michael. This detail also differentiates Aher from R. Ishmael who is led through heaven by Metatron in *3 Enoch*. Indeed, part of the polemical focus of the Aher/Metatron tradition may be directed against the practice of heavenly ascents without an angelic guide, perhaps indicating a desire to preserve an earlier, apocalyptic model for ascents. Certainly, the presence of an angelic guide in the *Testament of Abraham* leads to a very different result. Rather than speculating that the enthroned being is a second God as in the Aher/Metatron tradition, Abraham wisely asks Michael to identify the mysterious figure: "Then Abraham asked..... who is this most wondrous man, who is adorned in such glory?"

The text links the enthroned figure to the separation of human beings into righteous and unrighteous camps, a detail which recalls the role of Metatron in the Talmud and §672 as a heavenly scribe who records the merits of Israel. The *Testament of Abraham* also contains the elements of standing and sitting which feature so prominently in the Aher/Metatron tradition. A voluntary dethronement occurs in the *Testament of Abraham* when souls enter the broad gate signifying damnation. By contrast, the wondrous figure stands and re-enthrones himself when souls enter the narrow gate of righteousness. Although the reasons for enthronement and dethronement are different in the various versions of the Aher/Metatron tradition, the dynamic of standing and sitting is an intriguing parallel. Underlying all the sources is the sense that there are proper and improper times to sit and stand in heaven. Adam dethrones himself as a sign of mourning in the *Testament of Abraham*, which employs the same motifs as the Aher/Metatron tradition to produce a different story.

---

[24] That the "Master" in chapter 11 of the *Testament of Abraham* should be identified as God is clear from chapter 8.

Another link between the *Testament of Abraham* and the Aher/Metatron tradition involves the identification of the "wondrous" figure as the proto-plast Adam. Despite the fact that Cosmic Adam traditions originated in Jewish circles, extant Merkabah sources do not possess a Cosmic Adam tradition.[25] Nor do they explicitly identify Adam with Metatron, a link which is well documented in kabbalistic sources.[26] Nevertheless, several scholars have posited that an early tradition linking the two figures probably existed. According to Odeberg, this tradition was "obliterated" as a reaction against Mandaean speculation concerning the Primordial Man, although possible vestiges may still be found in Hekhalot literature.[27] By contrast, Idel prefers to view the suppression of the Cosmic Adam tradition in Hekhalot circles as a product of "internal tension between different tendencies in early Jewish mysticism," rather than as a reaction to Gnostic or Mandaean speculation.[28]

The existence of a no longer extant tradition linking Metatron and Adam is supported by a number of sources which portray Adam as God's vice regent.[29] For example, in *2 Enoch* 30:11 God declares concerning Adam: "And on the earth I assigned him to be a second angel, honored and great and glorious. And I assigned him to be king, to reign on the earth, and to have my wisdom. And there was nothing comparable to him on the earth, even among my creatures that exist." Indeed, there exists a rabbinic passage concerning Adam with striking parallels to the Aher/Metatron tradition:

---

[25] Moshe Idel, "Enoch is Metatron," p. 151.

[26] Ibid., pp. 156-157; Ch. Mopsik, *Le Livre hébreu d'Hénoch ou Livre des palais*, pp. 54-55, 210; Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, p. 121-123. Moshe Idel has more recently written on what he calls the myth of Metatron in "Metatron: Notes on the Development of a *Myth in Judaism*," in Havivah Pedayah, ed., *Myth in Judaism*, Jerusalem, 1996 (Hebrew). Unfortunately, Idel's essay came to my attention as this book was coming to press and I was unable to include it in my discussion.

[27] 3 Enoch, pp. 77-78 and p. 83: "Lastly mention must be made of a possible vestige of the conception of *Metatron as a primordial being* occuring in ch. 48C: 'I made him (Metatron) strong (or Mighty) in the time of the first Adam'. One might read in this statement an allusion to Metatron as connected with or being the Primordial man, the *'Adam Qadmon*."

[28] "Enoch is Metatron," p. 152. On the connection between Adam and Enoch, see pp. 155-156.

[29] As Jarl Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 271, writes "That Adam was made God's vice-king over the creation is an old and widespread tradition which is elaborated upon particularly in the so-called Adam literature." The Adam literature consists of a group of accounts concerning Adam preserved in Greek, Syriac, Mandaic, Ethiopic, Armenian, and Slavonic, as well as *The Apocalypse of Adam* from Codex V of the Nag Hammadi Library.

> R. Hoshaya said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, created Adam, the ministering angels mistook him for a divine being and wished to utter the *Sanctus* before him. What does this resemble? A king and a governor who sat in a chariot and his subjects wished to say to the king *'Domine!'* but they did not know which one it was. What did the king do? He pushed the governor out of the chariot, so they know who was the king. [*Genesis Rabbah* 8:9][30]

In this passage, Adam is compared to a governor whose similar appearance to the king confuses the latter's subjects. The parable notes that both king and governor were sitting in a chariot, a parallel to the image of Metatron sitting like God in heaven, particularly since God is said to sit on a throne-chariot (cf. Ezekiel 1). The angels who wish to say the *Sanctus* before Adam resemble Aher, who wondered whether Metatron was a "second power" in heaven. Just as Metatron is dethroned in the Aher/Metatron tradition, so Adam is tossed off the chariot in *Genesis Rabbah*, making it clear who is and isn't God. In terms of dating, the tradition preserved in *Genesis Rabbah* may stand somewhere inbetween the other sources. It may have functioned as a polemic against the earlier tradition of the enthroned, glorious Adam whose appearance was "like the Master's" and as a bridge between the positive image of the enthroned vice regent figure and the more ambivalent image in the talmudic version of the Aher/Metatron tradition.

Recension B of the *Testament of Abraham* preserves a different version of Abraham's heavenly adventure. Instead of getting off his throne as a sign of mourning, in this version Adam cries when he sees a damned soul being led to destruction and laughs when he sees a soul entering the gate of life (ch. 8). And yet, Recension B preserves other details which may have influenced the development of the Aher/Metatron tradition. In chapter 10, Michael takes Abraham to Paradise. There Abraham sees a judge (whom ch. 11 identifies as Abel) command another figure who "writes records" to present himself. The description of this figure suggests connections with both Metatron and Akatriel:

---

[30] For discussions of this passage and the Aher/Metatron tradition, see Saul Lieberman, "Metatron, the Meaning of His Name and His Functions," p. 239. On this tradition, see also, Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism," p.17; E. Wolfson, "Yeridah la-Mekavah," pp. 24-25; Idel, "Enoch is Metatron," p. 153, where he cites a parallel passage from the *Alphabet of Aqiba*, and p. 164, n. 18, where he discusses the *Genesis Rabbah* passage.

> The judge commanded the one who writes the records to come. And behold, (there came) cherubim bearing two books, and with them was a very enormous man. And he had on his head three crowns, and one crown was higher than the other two crowns. The crowns are called the crowns of witness. And the man had in his hand a golden pen.[31]

Like Metatron in the *Shiur Qomah* tradition, this figure is described as "a very enormous man." Like Metatron and Akatriel, he is associated with a crown or crowns (indeed the very name Akatriel contains the Hebrew word for crown, *keter*). These crowns are called the "crowns of witness," a title associated with Metatron (Heb. "witness"=*'ayd*). Finally, the figure holds a pen in his hand, which suggests that he is a scribe like Metatron in the Talmudic version of the Aher/Metatron tradition. Chapter 11 makes the connection with Metatron stronger, for it identifies the figure with the pen as Enoch:

> And the one who produces (the evidence) is the teacher of heaven and earth and the scribe of righteousness, Enoch. For the Lord sent them here in order that they might record the sins and the righteous deeds of each person. And Abraham said, "And how can Enoch bear the weight of the souls, since he has not seen death? Or how can he give the sentence of all the souls?" And Michael said, "If he were to give sentence concerning them, it would not be accepted. But it is not Enoch's business to give sentence; rather, the Lord is the one who gives sentence, and it is this one's (Enoch's) task only to write. For Enoch prayed to the Lord saying, 'Lord, I do not want to give the sentence of the souls, lest I become oppressive to someone.' And the Lord said to Enoch, 'I shall command you to write the sins of a soul that makes atonement, and it will enter into life. And if the soul has not made atonement and repented, you will find its sins (already) written, and it will be cast into punishment.'"[32]

This intriguing passage emphasizes that while Enoch has been granted the authority to function as a scribe, he cannot sentence the souls, since this responsibility is reserved for God. Moreover, Enoch is only allowed to record the sins of people who have already atoned and repented and not the sins which are still 'outstanding.' These motifs are remarkably similar to the description of Metatron in the Talmudic version of the Aher/Metatron tradition. In the Talmud, Metatron is described as "recording the merits of Israel," which

---

[31] E.P. Sanders, "Testament of Abraham," Recension B, in James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, p. 900.

[32] Ibid.

jibes with the notion of only recording sins which have already been atoned for. Like the *Testament of Abraham*, the Talmud does not depict this scribal figure as possessing the authority of a judge. Indeed, the Talmud's attack on Metatron's sitting may be an implicit rejection of this kind of authority. Whereas Metatron makes the mistake of appearing like he possesses the authority of a divine figure rather than a mere scribe, in this passage, Enoch makes it clear that he does "not want to give sentence." Thus, the tales employ similar motifs to different ends. In the Talmud, Metatron appears as a careless figure at best and a hubristic one at worst; in the *Testament of Abraham*, Enoch explicitly humbles himself and rejects the kind of authority which is the unique possession of God. While it is possible that these thematic parallels are coincidental, the different versions of the Aher/Metatron tradition may also have adopted and transformed elements from both recensions of the *Testament of Abraham*, a work which probably originated in the first century CE.

Returning to §597, we find that Akatriel is described as "sitting" and "one hundred and twenty myriads of ministering angels were surrounding him. As it is written: 'Thousands upon thousands served him and myriads upon myriads stood before him.'" [Daniel 7:10] In §597, Akatriel is not merely sitting, but is enthroned, just as Metatron is in *3 Enoch* 16. Indeed, both passages reflect the image of the divine judge or *atiq yomin* in Daniel 7:10, although *3 Enoch* 16 ("and ministering angels were standing beside me like servants and all the Princes of Kingdoms crowned with crowns surrounded me") only implicitly draws on this *Vorlage*, while §597 explicitly cites the biblical lemma.

What does this parallel imply about the relationship of *3 Enoch* 16 and §597? Of course, both sources may have independently decided to employ the image of the *atiq yomin* in Daniel 7:10 in order to characterize their respective supra-angelic figures. Yet, the other parallels (and we will see more below) between the accounts allude to a closer relationship. Either both passages drew on a common tradition which depicted the subject of Elisha/Aher's vision as the enthroned vice regent, or one passage was influenced by the other. We have already seen one case in which §597 appears to have preserved an earlier form of a motif shared by *3 Enoch* 16, namely the location of the angelic being at the entrance of Pardes or Paradise (as in the *Testament of Abraham*), rather than at the entrance of the seventh hekhal.

Determining which passage preserves the earlier depiction of

the enthroned vice regent figure is more difficult. On the one hand, §597 may represent an earlier version because it is more compact and because it explicitly quotes Daniel 7. As the tradition developed it may have expanded to include more details of the angelic vice regent's glorious appearance; and as the formulation became more elaborate, the originally explicit connection with the biblical lemma may have been ommitted in favor of a more creative reworking. Of course, it is also possible that the author of §597 opted for a more concise formulation and therefore eliminated what he considered to be the excessive detail of the earlier tradition.

A further parallel between §597 and *3 Enoch* 16 is the fear which the angelic vice regent figure inspires in the human observer. §597 states that after Elisha saw Akatriel and his angelic host, he announced: "I was alarmed, I trembled," while *3 Enoch* states that after Aher saw Metatron and his angelic host: "he became frightened and trembled..... his soul was alarmed". This element of fear is completely absent from §672 and from the talmudic recensions. Indeed, these accounts do not portray Metatron in a particularly awe inspiring manner.

Metatron's glorious, terrifying appearance provides the most reasonable explanation for Aher's confusion. Given this conclusion, we may reconstruct the relationship between *3 Enoch* 16 and the talmudic recensions as follows.[33] Initially, the tradition of Metatron's humbling was motivated by his glorious appearance, which quite reasonably caused Aher to consider him a second divinity. Indeed, in *3 Enoch* 16, Aher confidently declares "Surely there are two powers in heaven." As the earliest recension of the talmudic tradition, Munich 95 represents the most severe attempt to suppress any hint of Metatron's glorious appearance. In its general zeal to counteract the image of Metatron as an angelic vice regent, however, Munich 95 also eliminated any specific reason for Aher's confusion. Therefore the talmudic authors of Vaticanus 134 and Bomberg emphasized Metatron's sitting, a motif which echoed the enthronement of Metatron in the earlier tradition. The new focus on sitting had the advantage of implicitly attacking Metatron's enthronement without actually describing it in glorious terms. In contrast to the talmudic recensions, *3 Enoch* 16 does not reject

---

[33] Although I arrived at the basic elements of my reconstruction before reading Morray-Jones' article "Hekhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition," I am nevertheless indebted to his cogent model for certain details of my formulation.

Metatron's glorious appearance and enthronement. Instead it argues that *despite* Metatron's godlike qualities, we should not mistake him for another god. In other words, *3 Enoch* 16 accepts the image of Metatron as an enthroned vice regent but warns against confusing the angelic vice regent with another god. By contrast, the talmudic authors were entirely opposed to Metatron's glorious appearance, and therefore focused on another tradition (also linked with Enoch) that characterized Metatron as a scribe. The implicit goal of the talmudic versions is to combat Metatron's vice regency altogether. The assumptions and goals of *3 Enoch* 16 and the talmudic recensions are therefore quite different, even contradictory. By suggesting this reconstruction I am not arguing that the actual text of *3 Enoch* 16 is earlier than the Talmud but that its depiction preserves an earlier form of the tradition.

If the relationship between *3 Enoch* 16 and the talmudic tradition appears clearer, we are still faced with the equally vexing problem of the relationship between *3 Enoch* 16 and §597.[34] Although Elisha/Aher is described as alarmed and trembling with fear in both *3 Enoch* and §597, his subsequent reaction differs significantly in each account. In *3 Enoch* 16, like in the other versions, Aher's vision is followed by his heretical declaration. By contrast, §597 preserves a stunning detail: "I pushed myself and entered before the Holy One blessed be He." In other words, Elisha actually encounters God when he enters Pardes, a far more radical idea than encountering Metatron or Akatriel, no matter how glorious they are. Thus, §597 preserves the most extreme depiction of the mystical experience achieved by Elisha/Aher. Once again, we must ask whether this feature reflects a later addition, or an earlier element which was suppressed in later accounts.

Instead of immediately uttering a heretical "two powers" declaration, in §597 Elisha actually *speaks* with the Holy One blessed be He. This is an amazing event which recalls the relationship between God and Moses at Sinai, more than it does the relationship between God and the Merkabah mystic in the seventh hekhal. Although the tenor of Elisha's words indicates that the glorious appearance of Akatriel has troubled him, unlike in the other accounts, Elisha does not declare that there may be, or are, "two powers". Quite the contrary, he addresses God as the "Master of the

---

[34] As I mentioned above, §672 appears to be related to MS Vaticanus 134.

world," and cites two carefully chosen verses from "Your Torah" which support the uniqueness of God's authority.

The first of these verses, Deuteronomy 10:14, forms part of the divine instructions which Moses transmits to Israel following his second sojourn on Mount Sinai. If the depiction of Elisha's ascent and dialogue with God are at least partially inspired by the traditions of Moses' paradigmatic ascent and dialogue with God, then it is no accident that the author of §597 places Moses' words on Elisha's lips. Secondly, Deut. 10:14 was a common proof-text for the existence of three heavens, since it repeats the word "heavens" three times.[35] Why is the reference to three heavens significant? We can only answer this question if we assume that the author of §597 identified the Pardes as the third heaven.[36] Therefore, by reciting the verse, "The heavens and heavens of heavens belong to the Lord your God," Elisha is arguing that all three heavens belong solely to God, rather than to God and another divine being, i.e. Akatriel. The second verse cited by Elisha is also significant. Although Elisha only cites the second half of Psalms 19:2, as is often the case, the unquoted part of the verse is at least as important: "The heavens declare the Glory of God". Once again the emphasis of the verse is on the sole dominion of God over the heavens.

After reciting these verses, Elisha declares *'ehad bilvad* or "only one". In other words, rather than declaring the existence of "two powers," Elisha emphasizes the uniqueness of God. Thus, Elisha challenges God to explain the incongruency between the monotheism which he knows to be true and the godlike appearance of Akatriel. In this formulation, the onus falls on God's shoulders to explain the apparant discrepency, rather than on Elisha for having hypothesized the existence of two deities or Akatriel for having appeared like another deity. This interpretation is supported by God's response to Elisha's declaration. Instead of a heavenly voice declaring "Return, backsliding children, except Aher," God addresses Elisha. Although God criticizes Elisha for "coming only to find fault," he acts more like a father instructing a wayward child

---

[35] Cf., for example, R. Judah's use of Deut. 10:14 in BT Hag. 12b.

[36] In *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 14-19, Scholem argued, largely on the basis of parallels with Paul's account in II Corinthians, that the Pardes should be equated with the third heaven. Peter Schäfer, "New Testament and Hekhalot Literature: The Journey into Heaven in Paul and Merkabah Mysticism," challenges Scholem's position. The identification of Paradise as the third heaven is common in apocalyptic sources, cf. *Testament of Abraham* 11; *Life of Adam and Eve* 37:4-5 (Greek version); *2 Enoch* 8-9.

(God calls Elisha "my son" and recites a proverb in order to enlighten him), rather than a distant, angry deity rebuking a heretic, as in the other accounts.

The specific phrasing of God's criticism of Elisha is extremely significant: "did you come here only to find fault with my attributes [*le-harher 'al middotai*]?" As we saw above, in BT Ber. 7a, R. Ishmael prays that Akatriel's "mercy may prevail over your other attributes [*middotekha*]". Thus, the attributes or *middot* of mercy and justice were specifically associated with Akatriel in at least one tradition. It is possible that §597 depicts Akatriel as the hypostatic embodiment of the attributes of mercy and justice, an interpretation supported by the depiction of Akatriel as the enthroned judge from Daniel 7:10.[37] Yet, in other sources, the term *middot* refers not to God's attributes, but to His "measures," i.e. to His *Shiur Qomah*. Instead of representing God's attributes, therefore, Akatriel may function as the hypostatic embodiment of God's form in §597. Whichever interpretation is correct, the jist of God's gentle rebuke of Elisha is not to condemn Akatriel (and certainly not to whip him with fiery lashes), but to *defend* him. In other words, §597 does not attempt to undermine the existence of an angelic vice regent but to support such a conception.

It is also noteworthy that in §597 God asks Elisha whether he came "to find fault," which in the original Hebrew is expressed by the verb *le-harher*. Above we mentioned that §672 employs the word *hirher* to depict the heretical activity of Elisha, i.e. "He contemplated [*hirher*] that perhaps there are two powers in heaven." Thus, both §597 and §672 employ the same verb to describe Elisha's action in Pardes. In other sources, the term specifically refers to idolatrous or sexually impure thoughts.[38] The first connotation is relevant for both §597 and §672 even though the more precise sense of the verb in the former passage is "to find fault," whereas in the latter, it is "to contemplate".[39] Is it a coincidence that both passages employ the same verb in parallel contexts, did they draw on a common tradition, or did one formulation influence the other?

Indeed, how can one explain the provenance of a passage which barely criticizes Elisha, defends Akatriel, and yet is clearly related to

---

[37] N. Dahl and A. Segal, "Philo and the Rabbis on the Names of God," *Journal for Study of Judaism* 11, 1978, have extensively explored the traditions concerning God and His attributes.

[38] Cf. BT Ber. 12b; Nidd. 13b; Yoma 29a.

[39] Both meanings are attested to in rabbinic literature, cf. Jastrow, p. 366.

a well attested tradition which harshly punishes both Elisha and Akatriel's counterpart, Metatron? In my opinion, the most plausible explanations are also the most radical. That is, either §597 preserves the earliest form of a tradition which was later linked with Metatron, or it represents a late attempt to rehabilitate both Elisha and the angelic being he encounters.

I have already observed that §597 probably preserves at least one pre-Talmudic tradition, namely the enthronement of God's vice regent at the entrance of Paradise in the *Testament of Abraham.* At present, I will examine other indications that §597 may reflect a pre-Talmudic stage of the tradition. §597 lacks the stinging portrayal of Elisha as an arch-heretic and also omits another feature which all the other accounts preserve: the identification of Elisha ben Abuya as Aher. In the talmudic recensions and *3 Enoch* 16, Aher is cited throughout as the name of the individual who encounters Metatron; in §672, Elisha ben Abuya is described as seeing Metatron, and is only called Aher after his heretical "two powers" declaration. In §597, however, the only name mentioned is Elisha ben Abuya; Aher does not appear at all. Likewise, in all the accounts besides §597, the character who encounters Metatron is condemned by a heavenly voice with the phrase "Return, backsliding children, except Aher."[40]

The only possible explanations for the absence of the name Aher in §597 are that the author knew of the tradition identifying Elisha as Aher and chose to suppress it, or that he was unaware of this tradition. If the latter suggestion is correct, then the episode preserved in §597 must be older than, or somehow unaware of, all the other accounts we have examined. In addition, it must be older or unaware of the Palestinian Talmud's version of the Pardes account, since in PT Hag. 77b 11., the name Aher is already attributed to Elisha. Significantly, the Tosefta manuscripts all employ the name Elisha (except for MS Erfurt) and appear to be unaware of the name Aher. Yet, the Tosefta still condemns Elisha by declaring that: "Elisha looked and cut the shoots." Unlike the Tosefta or the other accounts, §597 does not mention that Elisha/Aher "cut the shoots". Once again, we must ask whether this means that §597 preserves an earlier tradition, or whether the author was unaware of, or chose to omit, this motif.

---

[40] The ultimate source for this quote is probably the Palestinian Talmud Hag. 77b. Significantly, the formulation in the PT does not include the name Aher, but reads "Return, backsliding children, except for Elisha ben Abuya, for he knew my power yet rebelled against me!"

Besides the elements which I have already discussed, there are several additional features which support an early origin for the tradition in §597. Unlike §672 or *3 Enoch* 16, §597 gives no evidence of having been integrated into the Hekhalot tradition of descent to the Merkabah. *3 Enoch* 16 explicitly mentions the "seventh hekhal," and relates that "Aher came to gaze on the vision of the Merkabah," whereas §672 states, "when Elisha ben Abuya descended to the Merkabah". §597 lacks any references to the Merkabah or to the Hekhalot and instead reads like a talmudic tradition in its emphasis on the Pardes, and its prolific citation of biblical proof-texts, none of which are cited in the other accounts.

Therefore, we are faced with considerable evidence that §597 preserves an early tradition. Nevertheless, as I mentioned above, there is another potential solution to the problems presented by §597. Instead of preserving the earliest form of the tradition, §597 may actually represent a late composition. If so, then the author of §597 chose to suppress or simply ignore otherwise universally attested motifs (such as the name Aher, the references to "backsliding children," and "two powers," etc.) in order to paint an extremely different portrait of the characters involved. This portrait did not involve Metatron, but another supra-angelic being, Akatriel, who may have replaced Metatron because the author considered him to be the rightful angelic vice regent or merely because he considered Akatriel to be another name for Metatron. If it is late the formulation may reflect the work of the German Pietists, who played a critical role in the redaction and transmission of the Hekhalot material.

Unlike the authors of the talmudic recensions and §672, and to an even greater degree than the author of *3 Enoch* 16, the author of §597 defended the angelic vice regent in his account. The rehabilitation of the vice regent figure may have been one of the motivations for the changes made in §597. Yet, in addition to defending the vice regent, the author only mildly condemned Elisha for pointing out an apparent tension between what Elisha saw (a godlike figure) and what he knew to be the truth as stated in the Torah (the uniqueness of God). Why would the author have wanted to rehabilitate the figure of Elisha?

Morray-Jones has written "that what the talmudic redactors sought..... to suppress was a certain form of speculation concerning the angel Metatron as 'Lesser LORD' and enthroned Vice-Regent in heaven — and not the practice of heavenly ascents or Hekhalot

mysticism as such."[41] Although I agree completely that the talmudic redactors wished to suppress the tradition of Metatron as enthroned vice regent, I would like to re-examine the question of whether they sought to suppress or at least undermine the practice of heavenly ascents. Clearly, the Talmud does not seek to completely suppress the practice of heavenly ascent, for it indicates that R. Akiba ascended and descended safely. Yet, by undermining the tradition of Metatron's heavenly enthronement the talmudic redactors were implicitly attacking the view that the Merkabah mystic could ascend to heaven and repeat the process of enthronement and angelification originally undergone by Enoch-Metatron. This message is reinforced by the transformation of Aher into the arch-heretic. One imagines that most people hearing or reading this account would become wary of heavenly ascent and visionary experience. If this reconstruction is correct, then the author of §597 may have rehabilitated the angelic vice regent and Elisha in order to rehabilitate a central goal of Merkabah mysticism, itself, i.e. the vision of God's Glory and the enthronement and angelification which accompanies it.

Although both solutions have their merits, my own preference is for the former, namely, that §597 preserves the earliest form of a tradition which originally concerned Akatriel and only later was transferred to Metatron. My primary reason for supporting this model is its greater simplicity; futhermore, it better explains certain archaic features, such as Akatriel's enthronement at the entrance of Pardes.[42] In either case, §597 raises many basic methodological questions for our understanding of Hekhalot literature. On what basis does §597 belong to the Hekhalot genre? It lacks any references to the Hekhalot or the Merkabah. It depicts an angelic figure, but so do many rabbinic passages. It describes Elisha as ascending to heaven, but the Talmud implies this as well. Indeed, as mentioned above, §597 reads more like a rabbinic passage than a Hekhalot one. My analysis has shown that it is possible to suggest a redactional sequence of the various rabbinic and Hekhalot versions of a particular tradition, yet, it is sometimes more difficult to identify the

---

[41] "Hekhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition," p. 36.

[42] Although one could argue that this feature derives from *3 Enoch* 16's description of Metatron at the entrance of the seventh hekhal. But why would the author of §597 have transferred the location from the entrance of the seventh hekhal to the entrance of the Pardes? Unless, of course, he was trying to create what appeared to be an early tradition. Once again, however, this is a more complicated explanation.

particular genre to which a passage belongs. Essentially, the distinction between rabbinic and Hekhalot literature may be much less concrete and far more heuristic than previously accepted. As I have argued, the talmudic account of Metatron's downfall impliclity undermines the tradition of the heavenly enthronement and glorious appearance of an angelic vice regent figure. By contrast, the versions of the episode preserved in *3 Enoch* 16 and §597 do not seek to negate the image of the enthroned vice regent, but rather, to warn against viewing this figure as a second God, *despite* his glorious appearance.

Ultimately, the *Vorlage* for Metatron's humbling may be the biblical, intertestamental, and rabbinic tradition-complex which depicts a human or angelic being as attempting (and failing) to attain divine status. Thus, in Isaiah 14:12-15, we read:

> How are you fallen from heaven, O Shining One, Son of Dawn [Vulgate = Lucifer]. How are you felled to earth, O vanquisher of nations! Once you thought in your heart, "I will climb to the sky; Higher than the stars of God I will set my throne. I will sit in the mount of assembly, On the Summit of Zaphon. I will mount the back of a cloud. I will match the Most High." Instead, you are brought down to Sheol, to the bottom of the Pit.[43]

And in Ezekiel 28:1-8:

> The word of the Lord came to me. O mortal, say to the prince of Tyre: Thus said the Lord God: "Because you have been so haughty and have said, 'I am a god; I sit enthroned like a god in the heart of the seas,' whereas you are not a god but a man, though you deemed your mind to a god's..... they shall strike down your splendor. They shall bring you down to the Pit."

Significantly, in a passage which recalls the dethronement of Metatron in Pardes, Ezekiel 28 links the King of Tyre with Adam:[44]

> You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and flawless in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God..... I created you as a cherub with outstretched shielding wings..... You grew haughty because of your beauty, you debased your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I have cast you to the ground.

---

[43] On the mythological background of Isaiah 14, cf. B. S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, London, 1960, pp. 61-71.

[44] On this identification see, H. G. May, "The King of the Garden of Eden," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honour of James Muilenburg*, eds. B. W. Anderson and W. Harrelson, London, 1962, pp. 166-176; Nils Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon," p. 703.

The tradition of Metatron's downfall clearly echoes these biblical passages.[45] Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 warn against another figure enthroning himself on high and challenging the unique authority of God. Indeed, the talmudic authors may have viewed Metatron as a contemporary version of the "Son of Dawn"/"King of Tyre".[46] Accordingly, they ensured that like his biblical predecessors, Metatron was dethroned by God and his divinity explicitly rejected.

Further inspiration for the demotion of Metatron may have come from the well attested intertestamental tradition of a Fallen Angel whose sin involved heavenly enthronement.[47] Thus, in *2 Enoch* 29, we read that: "one from the order of angels, having turned away with the order that was under him, conceived an impossible thought, to place his throne higher than the clouds above the earth, that he might become equal in rank to my power. And I threw him out from the height."[48] Besides the common motif of angelic enthronement and forcible dethronement, the link between Metatron and the fallen

---

[45] As several scholars have argued, the tradition of the fallen angel may ultimattely derive from the ancient Canaanite figure of Athtar, who attempted to fill the throne of Baal but failed and subsequently had to descend and rule the underworld. L.R. Clapham, *Sanchuniathon: The First Two Cycles*, Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1969, pp. 150-153; Francis Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth: Jewish Elements in Gnostic Creation Myths*, Leiden, 1978, p. 27.

[46] On the King of Tyre in later Jewish sources, cf. *Faces of the Chariot*, pp. 241ff.

[47] On fallen angels, cf. Leo Jung, *Fallen Angels in Jewish, Christian and Mohammedan Literature*, Philadelphia, 1926; Bernard Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, Philadelphia, 1952. On p. 124, Bamberger discusses Elisha's encounter with Metatron, but he does not attempt to interpret the account in light of fallen angel traditions. On the relationship of the fallen angel tradition, the tradition of a haughty ruler who claimed to be a god, and the Antichrist tradition, cf. A. Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Missoula, Montana, 1976, p. 81, with nn. 130-134; 162, with n. 27; 166-168; 178-183. Also, Nils Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon," pp. 703-705. David Halperin, "Ascension or Invasion: Implications of the Heavenly Journey in Ancient Judaism," *Religion* 18, 1988, interprets the ascension traditions concerning Moses and Metatron as positive structural variations of the negative tradition of Lucifer's ascent and subsequent downfall. On p. 56, Halperin writes "To sum up: the ascending hero, in all of his avatars — Enoch, Abraham, Moses and Enoch-Metatron — is Lucifer, viewed this time in a positive light and permitted to triumph. Lucifer is *thrown down to She'ol, to the depths of the pit.* Moses vanquishes the angels and grasps the throne of God. Metatron carries Moses' succes to a degree that matches Lucifer's fantasies." Halperin does not mention the tradition of Metatron's own demotion, which seems to echo the downfall of Lucifer. Consequently, he only portrays Metatron's enthronement in heaven as a positive motif, whereas it was clearly viewed negatively or at least ambivalently by some sources.

[48] See the parallel in *The Life of Adam* and Eve 15:2. For other sources, cf. F.I. Andersen, "2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. I, p. 149, nn. i, j.

angels may have been intensified by *1 Enoch* 12-13, where Enoch intercedes on behalf of the fallen angels.

As a segue into the next chapter, a final parallel to the downfall of Metatron may be found in Gnostic traditions concerning the Demiurge or what Nils Dahl has called "The Myth of the Arrogant Ruler".[49] As Dahl and other scholars have argued, the downfall of the Gnostic Demiurge, commonly known as Ialdabaoth, Samael, or Saklas, is also related to the forementioned biblical and intertestamental traditions concerning the haughty human or angelic being who falsely claims to be a god.

Like Metatron, the Demiurge is rebuked in a number of Gnostic texts by "a voice from above" which declares: "You are mistaken, Samael," or "Do not lie, Ialdabaoth."[50] Unlike the Aher/Metatron tradition which emphasizes the unique authority of the biblical God, the Gnostic sources actually seek to undermine the God of the Bible by identifying him with the Demiurge[51] The point of the Aher/Metatron tradition is to differentiate Metatron from the God of Judaism; the point of the Gnostic sources is to differentiate the God of Israel (i.e. the Demiurge) from the higher God of the Pleroma. Despite their divergent theologies, the Gnostic and Jewish sources resemble one another in a very important respect: both function as polemics against a lower figure who may be easily mistaken for the one, true God.

In the next chapter, I will examine two vice regent figures, Sabaoth and Abathur, who like Akatriel in §597 and Metatron in *3 Enoch* 16, are depicted as judges enthroned at the entrance of the divine dwelling. The existence of this cross cultural phenomenon may have influenced the authors of the Talmudic version of the Aher/Metatron tradition to polemicize against such a figure within Jewish circles. The closeness of the Hekhalot depictions of Metatron

---

[49] Cf. Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon," pp. 701ff. Cf., also, Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth*, pp. 26ff.; Bernard Barc, *L'Hypostase des Archontes: Traité Gnostique sur L'Origine de L'Homme du Monde et des Archontes (NH II, 4)*, Québec/Louvain, 1980, p. 34.

[50] Cf. *Hypostasis of the Archons* 86:32-87:4; 94:24-26; 95:5-7; *On the Origin of the World* 103:15-18; Irenaeus, Haer. 1.30.6. Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon," pp. 693-694, includes the rebuke of the Demiurge as part of the pattern of the myth of the arrogant ruler in Gnosticism.

[51] "The Arrogant Archon," pp. 706-707. As Dahl writes: "The mythopoetic polemic is not directed against an earthly ruler, against the symbolic or eschatological adversary of the people of God, or against the religious hero of a heretical group, but against the God of monotheistic opponents."

and Akatriel to the Gnostic and Mandaean traditions could easily have raised the suspicions of the Talmud's authors. Rather than explicitly declaring that belief in an enthroned vice regent was heretical, however, they may have formulated a far more subtle attack. Even in his avatar as a scribe allowed to sit in heaven to write down Israel's merits and not as a glorious, enthroned vice regent, Metatron was a dangerous figure, whose appearance could cause confusion and lead to heresy. Aher then becomes the symbol of those Jews whose ditheistic or binitarian belief in an angelic vice regent too closely resembles the beliefs of Gnostics and Mandaeans. Perhaps even the reference to "no standing and no sitting," appearing in the earliest Talmudic manuscripts reflects this polemical context for as Michael Williams has shown, standing was a positive sign of stability in many Gnostic sources.[52] As Zostrianos declares, "I became a root-seeing angel and stood upon the first aeon which is the fourth..... I stood upon the second aeon which is the third..... I stood upon the third aeon which is the second." (*Zostrianos* 6:20-7:10) Thus, in its most conservative formulation the Talmudic episode attacks both heavenly enthronement and the tradition of standing in heaven, actions which are linked to angelification or divinization in Gnostic and Hekhalot sources alike.

I conclude this discussion with a final tradition concerning Metatron. The passage appears in the midrashic collection called *Lamentations Rabbah* and follows a description of God lamenting the descruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the exile of his Shekinah:

> At that moment Metatron entered and fell on his face and said before Him, "Master of the Universe, I will cry so that you don't have to cry." He [God] replied, "If you don't let me cry now I will enter a place where you don't have the authority [*reshut*] to enter and I will cry, as it is said, "If you do not heed, My soul will weep in the secret places because of your arrogance [Jeremiah 13:17]. (*Lamentations Rabbah* 24)

In this poignant encounter, Metatron bows down to God as a sign of respect, a sharp contrast to his action in the Aher/Metatron tradition. At first glance, Metatron's suggestion that he weep in God's stead appears to reflect positively on Metatron: he is volunteering to perform an activity which is either painful or

---

[52] Michael Williams, *The Immovable Race: A Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability*, Leiden, 1985.

inappropriate for God. And yet God's response hints that Metatron may have overstepped his boundaries once again. Rather than accepting Metatron's offer, God tells Metatron that unless he leaves him in peace, God will retreat to a place where Metatron is unable (lit. does not have the "authority") to follow. The Hebrew term used is the same word employed by Aher in his infamous "two powers" statement. Whether or not we hear an echo of the Aher/Metatron tradition in God's response, it is clear that Metatron has been rebuked for assuming too much authority. This is also suggested by the biblical proof text which in the original context refers to Israel's "arrogance" as the source of God's sadness, while in the midrashic re-reading Metatron's arrogance has become the catalyst for God removing himself to a hidden place to cry. Once again, Metatron has literally been put in this place.

Indeed, this powerful passage argues that God, rather than Metatron — the angel typically in charge of Israel — will personally mourn for the destruction of his Temple and the exile of his Presence from his people. By affirming that God, and not Metatron, will mourn, the text rejects the importance of intermediaries and argues instead for the primacy of the direct relationship between God and Israel, even as it describes the catastrophe (the destruction of the Temple) which threatens this relationship. Thus, we have seen texts which treat Metatron as a positive symbol of the human ability to breach the distance with God, others which understand Metatron as a threat to what they consider the proper boundaries between God and his creatures, and still others which imply that Metatron functions as an obstacle in the way of a direct relationship between God and people, as in this final passage.

CHAPTER FIVE

ABATHUR'S LAMENT

Like Merkabah mysticism, Mandaeism and Gnosticism developed their own myths of vice regency, incorporating many of the same themes and transforming a common pool of biblical and apocalyptic traditions. As in the case of the Jewish sources, Gnostic and Mandaean texts depict the vice regent as a figure who both crosses and reinforces boundaries and categories. Examining these traditions, we encounter similar motifs of ascension and transformation, expulsion and rehabilitation. In the following chapters, I will focus on two vice regent figures, Abathur and Sabaoth. Because the Gnostic figure Sabaoth and the texts he appears in have already been examined in great detail, I will emphasize in particular his parallels with Metatron and Abathur. By contrast, I will provide an extensive portrait of the Mandaean figure Abathur, who has received relatively little scholarly attention until now.

Many early scholars of Mandaean literature, including Eric Lidzbarski, Richard Reitzenstein and Rudolph Bultman postulated a pre-Christian, Palestinian origin for Mandaeism.[1] This view gains support from the *The Haran Gawaita*, which contains the Mandaean's own account of their forced migration from Palestine to Mesopotamia. More recently, Kurt Rudolph has suggested a "Jewish, Palestine, Pre-Christian" theory of Mandaean origin,[2] and has written that "Even the oldest form of that which we today call Mandeism was a splintering off from official Judaism."[3] Edwin Yamauchi has offered the strongest challenge to this position, arguing instead that the origin of Mandaeism lies in a Transjordan or "western proto-Mandaean component" of "non-Jews" (possibly sharing an ideology similar to that of the Elchasai sect), who migrated to Mesopotamia and combined their form of Gnosticism

---

[1] For discussions of the various positions see Kurt Rudolph, "Problems of a History of the Development of the Mandaean Religion," *History of Religions* 8, 1969, pp. 210-234.

[2] Kurt Rudolph, *Die Mandäer I. Prolegomena: Das Mandäerproblem*; *Die Mandäer II. Der Kult.*

[3] "Problems of a History of the Development of the Mandaean Religion," p. 228.

with an indigenous group, as he writes: "It was this fruitful union of the vitality of Gnosticism and the tenacity of Mesopotamian cult and magic that resulted in the birth of a hardy new religion, perhaps by the end of the second century AD."[4]

Determining the date and provenance of the many works which comprise the Mandaean library is notoriously difficult.[5] The most extensive and, from a theological point of view, richest, Mandaean texts, such as the *Ginza Raba*, the *Book of John*, and the *Canonical Prayerbook*, are compilations of chronologically and theologically disparate elements.[6] The oldest stratum of these works are the liturgical hymns contained in the *Canonical Prayerbook*, which probably date from the third century CE. *The Ginza* and *Book of John* were first redacted in the early Islamic period. The earliest figure appearing in the colophons of Mandaean works is a scribe named Zazai d'Gawazta, son of Natar and Hawwa, who is said to have copied the hymns in the *Canonical Prayerbook* "from the scroll of the first life."[7] Many Mandaean scrolls written in the medieval period and later claim to trace their origin to this figure, who lived in the second half of the third century CE. The systematic analysis of the Mandaean colophons is currently being undertaken by Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley, whose work will undoubtedly shed much light on the development of Mandaean literature.

The highly redacted nature of Mandaean literature recalls the literary character of Hekhalot texts which, as Peter Schäfer has

---

[4] Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, pp.140-42.

[5] On the critical study of Mandaean literature, see Svend Aage Pallis, *Essay on Mandaean Bibliography 1560-1930*, London/Copenhagen, 1933; Rudolf Macuch, *Zur Sprach und Literatur der Mandäer: Mit Beiträgen von K. Rudolph und E. Segelberg*, Berlin, 1976 (=*Studia Mandaica*, Band I); Geo Widengren, *Der Mandäismus*, Darmstadt, 1982, esp. Sec. 5, "Literarische Fragen"; Kurt Rudolph, *Die Mandäer I. Prolegomena: Das Mandäerproblem*, Göttingen, 1960. Also worthwhile are the introductory comments of E. S. Drower in her editions of Mandaean texts.

[6] The standard edition of the *Ginza Raba* (also called *Sidra Raba*) is that of M. Lidzbarski, *Ginza. Der Schatz oder das große Buch der Mandäer*, Göttingen, 1925; H. Petermann also published an edition in lithographic form as *Thesaurus sive liber magnus*, Leipzig, 1867. *The Book of John* (Mand., *Drâshê d'Yahyâ*; also known as *Drâshe d'Malke* or "Book of the Kings") appears in Lidzbarski, *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer*, 2 Volumes, Gießen, 1905 and 1915 (Reprint, Berlin, 1965). The *Canonical Prayerbook* is the name given by Edith Drower to the *Qolastâ*, a collection of Mandaean liturgical passages, cf. E.S. Drower, *The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans*, Leiden, 1959; see, also, Lidzbarski's edition, *Mandäische Liturgien*, Berlin, 1920, (Reprint, Hildesheim, 1962).

[7] For a discussion of these issues, see R. Macuch, "Anfänge der Mandäer," in R. Altheim and R. Stiehl, eds., *Die Araber in der alten Welt*, Berlin, 1965 and "Preface," in J. J. Buckley, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship (Diwan Malkuta 'Laita)*, New Haven, 1993.

argued, are actually compilations of smaller literary units or traditions. In response to the complex nature of Mandaean sources, scholars have developed a number of criteria for determining the age and compositional mileu of specific literary units. These critical indicators include the mention of baptismal practices, Jewish doctrines and practices, polemical references, parallels with Gnostic and Christian literature, and linguistic usages.[8]

Generally, the correlation between Mandaean practices and beliefs with those of early baptismal groups such as the Elchasites is taken as an indication of an early, that is, pre-Islamic, or even pre-Christian origin. Likewise, parallels between Mandaean and Jewish, Christian and/or Gnostic sources are often interpreted as signs of an early date. The presence of polemics against Christianity and Judaism, but not against Islam, is considered an indication of a pre-Islamic provenance. By contrast, the use of Arabic names, rather than their traditional Mandaic counterparts, (e.g. *Allah*, for the highest God; *Yahyâ*, for John) may signify a post-Islamic date.

Unfortunately, the determination of a particular literary unit's date and provenance on the basis of these criteria often proves to be highly problematic. For example, the conspicuous absence of a polemic against Islam may have more to do with the fear of Moslem reprisal than a pre-Islamic origin, while the use of an Arabic name such as *Yahyâ* instead of the Mandaic *Yôhannâ*, may indicate a late redactional change made to a compositionally early passage. Because of this uncertainty, many scholars have focused on reconstructing the phenomenological character of Mandaean religion, rather than its precise literary development. As Kurt Rudolph has written:

> It is very difficult to get a clear picture of these religious ideas from Mandaean literature..... It has therefore not yet been possible to reconstruct the evolution of Mandaean ideas from their earliest beginnings with any certainty. Here, I can do no more than to give a short phenomenological outline of the main current of religious ideas in this literature.[9]

Elsewhere, however, Rudolph has argued that certain phenomenological criteria may help us ascertain the evolution of Mandaean theology. In his opinion, the chief phenomenological

---

[8] On the related issues of dating Mandaean literary sources and the Mandaeans, themselves, see the survey in Edwin Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins*, pp. 4-10.

[9] Kurt Rudolph, *Mandaeism*, Leiden, 1978, p. 12.

shift in Mandaean theology is from an earlier radical dualism to a more monistic view, a hypothesis which I will examine more closely below.[10] Despite the great variety of Mandaean traditions, Rudolph cautions that Mandaeism "cannot be characterized as a simple mosaic of individual sects or ideas. It is, as Macuch recently emphasized again, a 'unified phenomenon'".[11] In examining the Mandaean figure of Abathur, I will adopt both of Rudolph's methodological principles, namely, his focus on phenomenology and his acceptance of the underlying coherence of Mandaean sources.

One of the unifying themes of Mandaean theology is its emphasis on the divine and semi-divine beings who populate the various levels of the Mandaean universe. Although studies of Mandaean religion have never kept pace with the plethora of Mandaean theological figures, a number of works have been devoted to examining particular beings. The Mandaean Primal Adam or Anthropos has until now received the most scholarly attention, with relevant studies produced by Kraeling, Drower, Quispel, and Cohn-Sherbok.[12] Although Kraeling noted the parallels between the Mandaean Anthropos and Jewish and Gnostic traditions, he traced the origin of the phenomenon to Iranian religion. By contrast, more recent studies have emphasized the dependence of the Mandaean figure on Jewish conceptions.

Earlier in the century, when scholars were more intent on showing the influence of Mandaeism on early Christianity, the Mandaean figure of John the Baptist and the saviour figure Enosh were frequently compared with Christian portrayals of Jesus.[13] In roughly

---

[10] Cf. Rudolph, *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie in den mandäischen Schriften*, Göttingen, 1965, pp. 136-138; 341ff.

[11] Rudolph, "Problems of a History of the Development of the Mandaean Religion," pp. 234-235, quoting R. Macuch, "Anfänge der Mandäer," p. 170.

[12] Carl H. Kraeling, *Anthropos and Son of Man: A Study in the Religious Syncretism of the Hellenistic Orient*, New York, 1927 (Reprint, New York, 1966); E. S. Drower, *The Secret Adam: A Study of Nasoraean Gnosis*, Oxford, 1960; G. Quispel, "Jewish Gnosis and Mandaean Gnosticism," in J.-É. Menard, ed., *Les Textes de Nag Hammadi*, Leiden, 1975; Dan Cohn-Sherbok, "The Alphabet in Mandaean and Jewish Gnosticism," *Religion 11*, 1981; idem, "The Gnostic Mandaeans and Heterodox Judaism," in *Rabbinic Perspectives on the New Testament*, Lewiston, 1990.

[13] This hypothesis was especially advocated by R. Reitzenstein (and his *religionsgeschichtliche Schule disciples*), *Des mandäische Buch des Herrn Größe und die Evangelienüberlieferung*, Heidelberg, 1919; idem, *Die Vorgeschichte der christlichen Taufe*, Leipzig, 1929. See also, G.R.S. Mead, *The Gnostic John the Baptizer: Selections from the Mandaean John-Book*, London, 1924; Franck Gueutal, *The Mandaean Enosh and the Gospels' Tradition*, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1930 (Dissertation). When Portugese missionaries started sending reports back to Europe on the Mandaeans they

the same period, Kraeling devoted an article to the etymology and origin of the Mandaean demiurge Ptahil.[14] During this early phase of Mandaean research, general studies and editions of Mandaean texts often contained brief comments on the character and origin of Mandaean theological figures. More recently, Kurt Rudolph has devoted large portions of his now classic *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie in den mandäischen Schriften*, to examining the various actors in the Mandaean cosmogonic drama. Finally, mention must be made of the current work being done by Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley, who has devoted a number of highly interesting studies rehabilitating the often maligned figure of Ruha.[15]

It should be stressed that Abathur is not the only Mandaean figure who possesses characteristics of a vice regent. For example, Hibil Ziwa, Manda d'Hiyya, and Ptahil each have vice regent features, some of which have already been noted in earlier studies.[16] Nevertheless, Abathur not only possesses the greatest number of

---

encountered in the area around Basra during the 17th century, they referred to them as "Christiani S. Ioannis," or "Christians of St. John," cf. Eric Segelberg, "Old and New Testament Figures in Mandaean Version," in Sven Hartman, ed., *Syncretism*, Stockholm, 1969. On p. 239, Segelberg speculates that the reason "why Jesus Christ was never received and absorbed and 'Mandaeized'" was that the Mandaeans were "a strongly Jewish influenced Gnostic sect" who lived in close contact with Syrian Christianity. Thus, "The knowledge of Jesus Christ was too much alive in their surroundings to allow a Mandaean transformation."

[14] Carl Kraeling, "The Mandaic God Ptahil," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 53, 1933.

[15] See J. J. Buckley, "The Mandaean Sitil as an Example of The Image Above and Below," *Numen* 26, 1979; idem, "Two Female Gnostic Revealers," *History of Religions* 19, 1980; idem, "A Rehabilitation of Spirit Ruha in Mandaean Religion," *History of Religions* 21, 1982; idem, *Female Fault and Fulfilment in Gnosticism*, Chapel Hill and London, 1986. For a different view of Ruha in a recent study, cf. M. V. Cerutti, "Ptahil e Ruha: per una fenomenologia del dualismo mandeo," *Numen* 24, 1977.

[16] Cf. H. Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, pp. 64-79. Odeberg also notes some parallels between Abathur and Metatron, which I will examine below. For criticism of Odeberg's parallels, see Jonas Greenfield's "Prolegomenon" to the 1973 reprint of Odeberg's work. On p. xxxix, Greenfield writes, "The parallels which he [Odeberg] offered are mostly verbal and are on the whole meaningless." While Greenfield correctly characterizes many of Odeberg's suggestions, he is too broad in his criticism. In several instances, Odeberg illuminates valid comparative issues by juxtaposing parallel passages from Mandaean literature and *3 Enoch*. Unfortunately, Odeberg's own analysis of these passages is incomplete. See also Fossum's discussion of Ptahil in *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 261-263. Fossum stresses the Mandaean identification of Ptahil with the archangel Gabriel, and argues that the Mandaean concept of the demiurge Gabriel must derive from Jewish sources, contra Rudolph (following S. A. Pallis), who asserts that the figure of Gabriel in Mandaeism is derived from Islam, cf. *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie*, pp. 199ff.

these characteristics, but also most closely resembles the other vice regent figures I have already examined.[17]

Abathur as Creative Light Being

According to Mandaean mythology, Abathur is originally an emanation of the unknown High God, who is called "Life" (*haiye*), "Great Life" (*haiye rabbe*), and "Lord of Greatness" (*mara drabuta*) in the earliest texts, and the "King of Light" (*malka dnhura*) in later sources. The stages of divine emanation are commonly referred to as the "Second," "Third," and "Fourth Life," but are also known by the corresponding personal names Yoshamin, Abathur, and Ptahil. As the *Canonical Prayer Book of the Mandaeans* states, "The First Life is anterior to the Second Life by six thousand myriad years and the Second Life anterior to the Third Life by six thousand myriad years and the Third Life more ancient than any 'uthra by six thousand myriad years."[18] Together these divine beings make up the World of Light (*alme d'nhura*). Parallel to the World of Light is a World of Darkness (*alme d'hshuka*), inhabited by a pantheon of beings including the ambivalent female figure Ruha and her monstrous son 'Ur.

As the light is emanated, its quality decreases, so that the Second Life is inferior to the First Life, and so forth. In a number of sources, a process of devolution occurs as the Second Life (Yoshamin) turns towards the World of Darkness. The Third Life (Abathur), who is also called B'haq-Ziwa, accelerates the process of degeneration by gazing into the "black" or "turbid" waters which form the

---

[17] The most extensive and best examination of Abathur until now appears in Rudolph, *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthroponie*, esp., pp. 121-138. Until Rudolph's work, most speculation on Abathur concerned the etymology of his name, which I will examine below. Brief discussions of Abathur may be found in Wilhelm Brandt, *Die mandäische Religion, ihre Entwickelung und geschichtliche Bedeutung*, Leipzig, 1889, pp. 51ff.; idem, *Das Schicksal der Seele nach dem Tode nach mandäischen und parsischen Vorstellungen, Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie* 18, 1892 (reprint with epilogue by G. Widengren, Darmstadt, 1967), pp. 27-29; H. Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, Vol. 1, esp., pp. 277ff.; M. Lidzbarski, *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer*, pp. xxix-xxx; E. S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, p. 95, n. 4; idem, *The Secret Adam*, pp. 64-65; R. Macuch, *Handbook of Classical and Modern Mandaic*, Berlin, 1965, pp. 210-211. I have recently examined several aspects of Abathur in *The Gnostic Imagination*, pp. 199-127; "Abathur: A New Etymology," in J. Collins and M. Fishbane, eds., *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, Albany, 1995, pp. 169-179.

[18] E.S. Drower, *The Canonical PrayerBook of the Mandaeans*, p. 1.

lower boundary of the World of Light. By gazing below, Abathur commits an act of extreme hubris and even rebellion, for the proper focus of the emanated beings is on the Great Life, above. Like Sophia's rebellion in the western Gnostic mythos, Abathur's gazing results in the creation of the demiurge, Ptahil, who forms the physical world (*tibil*). As the *Ginza Raba* states:

> Abathur arose, opened the gate (of the World of Light) and gazed into the black waters; and immediately his counterpart was formed in the black waters. Ptahil was formed and ascended to the boundary..... Abathur instructed him and said: 'Arise, my son, condense a condensation in the black water.'[19]

In another version of the cosmogonic drama, the rebellious character of Abathur's action is emphasized:

> B'haq-Ziwa [i.e. Abathur] shone by himself, and he held himself to be a mighty one. He held himself to be a mighty one and abandoned the name that his father had called him by. And he spoke: "I am the father of the uthras. The father of the uthras am I, I made shkinas for the uthras." He contemplated the turbid water and said: "I shall call forth a world." He took no advice and did not perceive the turbid water.
> He called Ptahil-Uthra, embraced him, and kissed him like a mighty one. He bestowed names on him, which are hidden and protected in their place. He gave him the name "Gabriel, the Messenger," he called him, commanded, and spoke to him: "Arise, go, descend to the place where there are no shkinas or worlds. Call forth and create a world for yourself, just like the sons of perfection, whom you saw."[20]

As a result of his rebellious involvement in the creation, Abathur is condemned as the one "from whom imperfection originated, from him imperfection came into being and he sowed bad seed [i.e. Ptahil]. Bad seed did he sow and created creations not worthy of

---

[19] Mark Lidzbarski, *Ginza*, p. 174. Rudolph discusses this passage in *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie*, p. 126.

[20] *Ginza*, pp. 97 ff. This passage is also examined in *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie*, pp. 121-122. For another version of Abathur's role in the cosmogony, cf., E. S. Drower, *Diwan Abathur or Progress Through the Purgatories*, Vaticano, 1950, pp. 11ff. Besides Rudolph, Mari Cerutti has most thoroughly examined the Mandaean cosmogonic traditions, cf., *Dualismo e ambiguità: Creatori e creazione nella dottrina mandea sul cosmo*, (*Prometeo, Orfeo, Adamo*, vol. 3, 1981). E. S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, pp. 73ff., has also attempted to make sense of the confusing variety of Mandaean cosmogonic traditions.

him, who asked no advice".[21] Abathur's ultimate punishment is his dethronement and exile from the World of Light. Following this event, Abathur is installed at the entrance of the World of Light, where he receives a new throne and functions as the weigher and judge of human souls, as *The Canonical Prayerbook* declares, "he [Abathur] is fallen from his throne, why from his throne he is fallen and went and become Him-of-the-Scales".[22] Another text, recently published by Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley, called *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship* (*Diwan Malkuta 'Laita*), describes Abathur's fall from grace as follows: "So Abatur Rama, whose child is the world, is degraded from his throne, degraded, and he went to become 'He-of-the-Scales.'"[23]

Abathur's Dethronement

The most dramatic account of Abathur's installation as the weigher of souls is preserved in the Mandaean *Book of John*, in a section called "Abathurs Klage" (Abathur's Lament) by Lidzbarski.[24] After being ordered to leave his pleromatic home and take up the position of judge and weigher of souls, Abathur complains, "Why have you

---

[21] *The Canonical Prayerbook*, p. 198. E. S. Drower,The Great '*First World*', in *A Pair of Nasoraean Commentaries (Two Priestly Documents): The Great "First World" and The Lesser "First World"*, Leiden, 1963, p. 47, declares that "when Yushamin comes into existence deficiency and imperfection will originate with him."

[22] *The Canonical Prayerbook*, p. 199. The location of Abathur's new throne is described in *The Canonical Prayerbook*, p. 7, as follows: "[Abathur's] throne is placed at the gate of the House of Life". In E. S. Drower, *The Thousand and Twelve Questions (Alf Trisar Shuialia)*, Berlin, 1960, p. 163 (English); p. 45 (Mandaic), Abathur is located below the treacherous waters which separate the World of Light from the various "watchhouses" or *mattarta*, which function as waystations or purgatories for the ascending soul: "And the world of Abathur is below the world of the outflowing waters [*hafiqia mia*], and the world of outflowing waters below the world of the pure Yushamin."

[23] J. J. Buckley, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 38.

[24] "Abathurs Klage" comprises pp. 232-234 (sec. 70-72) of Lidzbarski's *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer*. For another, less critical account of Abathur's installation below the world of light, cf. E. S. Drower, *Diwan Abatur, Vaticano*, 1950, pp. 1-2, "Then Hibil Ziwa went and said to Abatur, 'Arise! set up thy throne in the House of Boundaries and take over sovereignty. And sublimate that which is sound (*good*) from that which is base when Man's measure is full and he cometh and is baptized in the jordan, is weighed in thy Scales, is sealed with thy Seal and riseth up and dwelleth in thy world'. Then Abatur spoke and saith to Hibil Ziwa, 'This ye have arranged for me, (*that I was obliged to leave*) my land that is lofty and my spouses who are worthy and suitable, and ye brought me and made me "He-of-the-Scales'."

made me the Scaleman out of all the uthras. I have been forced out from my shkina, so that my world is destroyed and desecrated and is deprived to me."[25] Hibil Ziwa, a divine emissary, then ascends to his father, the Life (a name for the highest god) and informs him that Abathur has refused to assume his position as weigher of souls or Scaleman. Upon hearing this, the King (i.e. Life or Great Life) becomes angry and calls out two times, only to have his call muffled by the shkinas. The third time the King calls out, a lesser being (Sâm) responds that he will assume the position of Scaleman. The King responds to Sâm's suggestion by calling him a fool and declaring that "Abathur is called, who is a gentle uthra."

Section 72 begins with a confrontation between Abathur and the Mâna.[26] Once again, Abathur asks why he has been chosen from among all the uthras. Mâna responds that "Among all the shkinas and uthras there is none like you. None in these light worlds, who would be so gentle as you. You are gentle and you are a qualified uthra. You are so courageous and you are a bullwark to the souls. You feel sympathy with the souls and you are an acceptable judge." To this Abathur responds that Hibil Ziwa should be judge and he will be Scaleman.

The account concludes with a confusing series of role reversals between Hibil Ziwa and Abathur. Upon discovering that Abathur has convinced Hibil Ziwa to become the weigher of souls while he, Abathur, has assumed Hibil Ziwa's role as king of the shkinas, the Great Life throws Abathur off his throne:

> After that Abathur said to Mana: "Tell Hibil-Ziwa, that he will be the judge and I will be the Scaleman. So then Hibil Ziwa-Yawar turned to Abathur and said: "If I become judge, who should maintain the shkinas? If I become judge who should become king in these worlds?" To that Abathur answered, "I will become king, and I will maintain the shkinas." When Abathur said this, Hibil-Yawar clenched and became the Scaleman. (When Hibil-Ziwa said this), the Great Life took him into the Good and against Abathur did the Great Life become full of anger. The Great Life came and threw him [Abathur] off his throne and placed him by the gate of the Sufat

---

[25] Ibid., p. 233. In Mandaean cosmology, the uthras or divine beings of the World of Light inhabit dwelling places called "shkinas".

[26] Here, the name Mâna may refer to the highest god, i.e. Life, Great Life, King, cf. Lidzbarski's comments in ibid., p. 233, n. 8. Otherwise, the term may designate an individual member of a class of heavenly beings, cf. Rudolph's comments in *Gnosis: A Selection of Texts*, p. 146.

[*lbaba d'sufat*]. "Go," he said to him, "be the judge, as long as the Great [Life] desires it from you."[27]

This version of Abathur's dethronement has much in common with the dethronement of Metatron in the Jewish sources I examined above. In both traditions, an enthroned figure who threatens the proper divisions within the cosmic hierarchy is punished by being forced off his throne. Synopse §672, in particular, parallels the Mandaean account since Metatron is exiled outside of Pardes and placed at its entrance, just as Abathur is placed at the gate of the Sufat: "Immediately they brought out Metatron to outside the Curtain (*Pargod*) and struck him with sixty fiery lashes." In both Mandaean and Merkabah accounts, enthronement functions as the most potent symbol of divine authority. Dethronement, therefore, serves an opposite function, signifying that a lower divine figure does not have the same power or authority as God. In their desire to go beyond their own status and imitate God, Abathur and Metatron are guilty of hubris. This emerges explicitly in the Mandaean account, where Abathur declares that he seeks to become "king of the shkinas," and implicitly in the Jewish sources where Metatron does not stand up when he sees Aher.

The relationship between Abathur and Hibil Ziwa in this text is confusing, probably reflecting the fact that although the two figures are often portrayed as separate beings in Mandaean literature (indeed, they interact with one another in a number of places), in some sources it appears that Hibil Ziwa and Abathur are actually the same being, a phenomenon already noted by Drower.[28] Thus, for example, the Diwan Abatur alternately depicts Ptahil as the son of Abathur and of Hibil Ziwa. "Abathur's Lament" appears to flirt with the idea that Abathur and Hibil Ziwa are identical beings and that they are separate.

A final point concerns the depiction of Hibil Ziwa as a judge and weigher of souls in "Abathur's Lament". Hibil is the Mandaean version of the biblical name Abel. In the *Testament of Abraham*, a text with many parallels with the Aher/Metatron tradition, Abel is depicted as an enthroned judge, surrounded by angels who record

---

[27] "Sufat" is the name of an underworld. See E. S. Drower and R. Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary*, Oxford, 1963, p. 323.

[28] E. S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, p. 95, n. 4, where she refers to "Abathur Rama, an epithet for Hibil Ziwa," and "Hibil Ziwa, sometimes identified with Abathur".

and weigh the souls: "And the wondrous man [Abel] who sat on the throne was the one who judged and sentenced the souls. . . And the one [Dokiel] who was in front of the table, who was holding the balance, weighed the souls."[29] This same cluster of themes appears in "Abathur's Lament," where the functions of judging and weighing souls pass back and forth between Abathur and Hibil-Ziwa. As in the case of the Aher/Metatron tradition, it is possible that such parallels are coincidental or that *The Testament of Abraham* influenced the formulation of the Mandaean tradition concerning a cosmic figure named Hiwil (=Abel), enthroned in heaven as a judge.

Abathur as Priest

Although "Abathurs Lament" preserves the tradition of Abathur's exile from the World of Light, it does not portray Abathur in an entirely negative light. Abathur is a rebellious divine figure, but, as Rudolph has noted in his analysis of the account, Abathur is also characterized in more positive priestly terminology and imagery. Thus, for example, the depiction of Abathur as a "king of the shkinas" echoes the common Mandaean tradition of referring to priests by the title of "king" (*malka*).[30]

In his study of heavenly baptism and enthronement in Mandaeism, Geo Widengren has argued that the Mandaean depiction of the priest as king ultimately derives from Jewish sources such as *Test. Levi* 8:1-12, where the enthroned priest is described in royal imagery. As Widengren writes: "We are reminded of the fact that the priest also is called *malka*, king [in Mandaean writings]."[31] Abathur's priestly

---

[29] "Testament of Abraham," Recension A, ch. 12, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, p. 889.

[30] Cf. *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie*, p. 136, n. 1. The characterization of human and heavenly priests as "kings" is most evident in the Mandaean text *The Coronation of the Great Sislam*, cf. E.S. Drower, *The Coronation of the Great Sislam. Being a Description of the Rite of the Coronation of a Mandaean Priest According to the Ancient Canon*, Leiden, 1962. Also see J. J. Buckley, "The Making of a Mandaean Priest: The Tarmida Initiation," *Numen* 32, 1985. Eric Segelberg, "Trasa d-Taga d-Sislam Rabba: Studies in the Rite Called the Coronation of Sislam Rabba," in *Zur Sprache und Literature der Mandäer*; E. S. Drower, *A Pair of Nasoraean Commentaries*, p. ix, writes, "The spirits ('uthras) who enact such rites are 'kings' (human priests are also 'kings')."

[31] Geo Widengren, "Heavenly Enthronement and Baptism: Studies in Mandaean Baptism," in J. Neusner, ed., *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, Leiden, 1968, pp. 558-559. Widengren frequently emphasizes the influence of Syrian-Mesopotamian ritual traditions on Mandaean baptism and

functions are evident in other Mandaean texts where he is depicted as performing heavenly rituals analogous to the rituals of human priests. Thus, for example, in the text known as *The Great 'First World'*, the earthly priest is instructed: "And when thou sayest 'thou shalt go and reach the guard-house of four beings, sons of perfection' those are the four ritual handclasps (*kushtas*) which Abathur seeks to exchange with the soul."[32] And, even more strikingly, in *The Lesser 'First World'*, we read:

> And when thou takest the iron knife into thy hand, thou hast placed Ptahil's hand into Abatur's hand with (thy) right hand. And when thou takest the sheep or the dove, and turnest thy face towards the Gate of Prayer, Abatur-of-the-Scales gazes upon thee.[33]

Indeed, there is a direct correspondence between the rituals performed by the priests on earth, and the heavenly rituals performed by the priestly uthras. On the one hand, as E. S. Drower has argued, "the rites and sacraments which, performed in the ether-world by 'uthras, were to serve as archetypes for earthly baptisms, masses, and commemorations."[34] On the other hand, the relationship between the earthly and heavenly rituals appears to be theurgical, that is, the actions of the human priests actually influence parallel behavior in the divine realm. Thus, at one point in the priestly ritual known as the *Tabahata-masiqta* ("Parents' Death-Mass"), the earthly priests exchange the handshake or *kushta* and declare: "May *Kushta* strengthen you, my brother-'uthras! The living have been joined in communion, just as 'uthras in their *shkintas* are joined in communion. Pleasing is your fragrance, my brothers, in your innermost, that is all full of radiance."[35]

In another ritual, this time the initiation of the low level priest or *tarmida*, the relationship between the actions of human priests and the light beings (including Abathur) is spelled out as follows: "When

---

enthronement rites. Other studies of Mandaean baptism include, E. Segelberg, *Masbuta: Studies in the Ritual of the Mandaean Baptism*, Uppsala, 1958; J. J. Buckley, "Why Once is not Enough: Mandaean Baptism (*Masbuta*) as an Example of a Repeated Ritual," *History of Religions* 29, 1989; Majella Franzmann, "Living Water: Mediating Element in Mandaean Myth and Ritual," *Numen* 36, 1989.

[32] *A Pair of Nasoraean Commentaries*, p. 35.

[33] Ibid., p. 73.

[34] Ibid., p. ix. See also Drower's comments in her *Water into Wine*, London, 1956, p. 253.

[35] *A Pair of Nasoraean Commentaries*, p. 21. For a detailed study of the Mandaean rite of *kushta*, see, Waldemar Sundberg, *Kushta: A Monograph on a Principle Word in Mandaean Texts*, Lund, 1953.

you recite this *'niana* over the seal-ring of the novice, (then) earth, skies, sun, moon, stars, constellations and Ruha and the Seven and Ptahil, Abatur, and the four beings, sons of perfection, and all *'utras* of the world of light bow down and worship him, saying, 'Go, go, be watchful and be established until the earth comes to nought!"[36]

J. J. Buckley eloquently expresses this dialectic between earthly and heavenly actions in Mandaean myth and ritual:

> The presentation of the masiqta shows that spoken words accompanied by pertinent acts have a creative effect and that these words and acts affect the upper worlds. Modelled after the rituals of the primordial beings in the Light-world, the priests' actions 'recreate' these ceremonies. The Light-beings sent down prayers and rituals so that they might be carried out on earth. But the 'uthria themselves perform these rituals above, too. This reciprocity breaks the borderlines between Light-world and earth, and the earthly rituals 'work' because the priests are, essentially, 'uthria on earth.[37]

Along with Abathur, other divine figures who are frequently portrayed as priests in Mandaean mythology include Yoshamin and Ptahil, whom I will discuss below, the Secret Adam or Adam Kasia, who is portrayed as the First Priest, and Sislam Raba, who is depicted as the chief archetype of proper priesthood.[38] As Drower has noted, a major valence of the priesthood is its mediating function between the World of Light and the world of matter.[39] It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that Abathur is portrayed as a priest, since intermediation is the chief characterisitic of the angelic vice regent. Just as Metatron's priestly role in the heavenly tabernacle serves as a model for the earthly priesthood, so Abathur's priestly activity is a paradigm for that of his human counterparts.

It may be argued that, in contrast to Mandaeism, the earthly priesthood in Judaism no longer functioned during the period when even the earliest Metatron literature was produced. Nevertheless, there is evidence that the mystics who produced the Hekhalot literature identified themselves as spiritual or (in the case of R. Ishmael, in particular) physical representatives of the priesthood.[40]

---

[36] *The Scroll of Kingship*, p. 51

[37] J. J. Buckley, "*The Mandaean Tabahata Masiqta*," *Numen* 28, 1981, pp. 152-153.

[38] On Adam as the first priest, see E. S. Drower, *The Secret Adam*, pp. 26; 30-31. On Sislam Raba, see idem, *The Coronation of the Great Sislam.*

[39] *The Secret Adam*, p. 26, "the crown of priesthood, which is the crown of intermediation between the worlds of light and those of matter".

[40] See, for example, the description of R. Ishmael in BT Ber. 7, and the identificaton of Ishmael as a priest in *3 Enoch* 1-2.

Indeed, in at least one text (*The Legend of the Ten Martyrs*), God declares that R. Ishmael is His (priestly) servant on earth, as Metatron is His servant on high.

As I noted above, Kurt Rudolph has argued that Mandaean sources reflect a chronological (and phenomenological) shift from an earlier dualism to a later monism. One example of this shift, according to Rudolph, is that earlier sources which portray the cosmogony as the rebellious work of Abathur, Ptahil and the forces of chaos, give way to sources which depict the creation as the work of an angel commissioned by a representative of the Great Life.[41] An equally important, and related, element in this shift is what Rudolph refers to as a process of "clericalization" and "ritualization".[42] According to Rudolph, as time passed, Mandaean literature and rituals increasingly became the patrimony of an emerging priestly elite.[43]

An important element in the trends toward monism and the empowerment of the priesthood, was the rehabilitation of previously condemned heavenly priests, such as Yoshamin and Abathur. As Rudolph writes: "Out of celestial beings come types of celestial priests; the erring and then rehabilitated priest is an especially favorite theme of this kind."[44] There is a definate connection between the mythological theme of "erring and then rehabilitated" celestial priests such as Abathur and the Mandaean rituals for the rehabilitation of human priests. As Drower has noted, the purpose of these scrolls is precisely "to discover what must be done to atone for errors in recitation or ritual or to find out what will restore to office a priest who has incurred pollution or committed an involuntary crime against ritual law."[45] The rehabilitation of Abathur therefore functions as a model and even a justification for the rehabilitation of the human priesthood and vice versa.

---

[41] See *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie*, pp. 97ff.

[42] Rudolph, *Die Mandäer*, II: *Der Kult*, pp. 119ff., 136, 138, 196, 213, 341-342.

[43] See "Problems of a History of the Development of the Mandaean Religion," p. 234, "This clerical elite, if one may put it thus, reserved for itself special documents, that is, wrote works of this sort, as its property, a development which was utterly foreign to ancient Mandeism since there everyone was a Mandaean who attached himself to the community."

[44] Ibid., pp. 233-234. On the rehabiliation of Yoshamin, cf. *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie*, p. 120; of Abathur, pp. 132-133. On the relationship between the trends towards monism and clericalization and the rehabiliation of heavenly priests, see p. 342.

[45] *The Secret Adam*, p. 66.

The erring and rehabilitation of heavenly priests is expressed in a variety of ways. *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship* warns the initiate not to err as Yoshamin and Abathur did: "be warned and beware of the works (or: 'rites') that Yushamin performed! (For he did not put on his crown. Abatur divided it (i.e. the ritual?) into three kinds; it became useless. The great mystery of seed and the three mysteries of distress departed from his intelligence and they took their course (which is) from Abatur. He became small and unimportant and went to become 'He-of-the Scales.'"[46] In one hymn from *The Canonical Prayerbook*, the human being asks for forgiveness of his own sins and then declares that Yoshamin, Abathur, and Ptahil will be forgiven for their transgressions as well (once again emphasizing the correlation between heavenly and human beings):

> Forgive the sins, trespasses, follies, stumblings and mistakes of him who made (furnished) this bread, *masiqta* and *tabuta*. His sins, trespasses, follies, stumblings and mistakes you will remit for him, my lord Manda-d-Hiia and Great First Life, (those of) the donor of fee and oblation. For our forefathers there shall be forgiving of sins. For Yushamin son of Demut-Hiia there shall be forgiveness of sins. For Abatur son of Bihrat there shall be forgiveness of sins..... For Ptahil son of Zahriel there shall be forgiveness of sins.[47]

In her analysis of *The Scroll of Exalted Kinship*, Buckley argues for an internal debate within Mandaean literature over the rehabilitation of primordial priests. Early texts like *Canonical Prayerbook* 243 and the following passage from the *Ginza* emphasize that the rehabilitation of Yoshamin, Abathur, and Ptahil will only occur at the final judgement:

> The works of the Tibil [the earth] will fall into disorder, [on the Day of Judgement] and the whole firmament will be shaken. Then Yoshamin, Abathur, and Ptahil come and see this world. Groaning seizes their heart, and they beat themselves on the breast. They behold the container of souls which lies completely corrupted on the ground (?). On that great day of judgement sentence will be pronounced on Yoshamin, Abathur, and Ptahil. Then Hibil-Ziwa comes and lifts them from this world."[48]

---

[46] *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 53. On p. 96, Buckley notes concerning Abatur's wrongdoing in this passage, "Precisely what Abathur has done wrong in dividing the ritual (?) into three parts remains unclear."

[47] *The Canonical Prayerbook*, p. 151. Hymns 237 and 243 of the collection (cf. Drower's comments on p. 214) also deal with the rehabiliation of Yoshamin, Abathur, and despite his initial reluctance, Ptahil.

[48] *Ginza*, p. 311. See also *The Canonical Prayerbook* 243, p. 200.

By contrast, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship* (*Diwan Malkuta 'Laita*) a later document concerned with the human priesthood, takes a more lenient position, as Buckley writes:

> I think DM'L [*Diwan Malkuta 'Laita*] lingers over the hapless, salvation-needy 'utras because it suits the text's own interest. To wit: the activity of priest-creating inevitably conjures up the somber lessons of the primordial priests/*'utras* who went astray. When Hibil Ziwa pleads for forgiveness regarding Abatur, "place your right hands on him!," he advocates lenience toward sinning priest-colleagues, a lenience that the Great Life was not ready to extend to Abatur in CP [*Canonical Prayerbook*] 243. This is an example of Mandaean inter-textual criticism — the author of DM'L seems to feel that the Great Life in CP 243 was too stern, a attitude that should be softened with regard to faux pas committed by earthly priests.[49]

In a passage from the Mandaean *Book of John*, a messenger from the Great Life informs Yoshamin that he will be re-enthroned in the World of Light: "Your throne is firmly erected as it was, and you will be called a king in your shkina."[50] There is an analogy between the rehabilitation and enthronement of Yoshamin in this passage and the ascent and heavenly enthronement of the human soul in Mandaean sources.[51] As *The Canonical Prayerbook* declares: "For thee [the human soul] a throne of rest is set up in which there is no heat and wrath."[52] This process recalls the Jewish traditions I examined above, where the ascent, enthronement, and angelification of Enoch-Metatron serves as a paradigm for the similar transformation of the Merkabah mystic.

Abathur and Metatron

In a number of passages, Abathur expresses his desire for rehabilitation by pleading with a representative from the World of Light to deliver a favourable report concerning him to the Great Life. This theme is eloquently depicted in a passage from the *Ginza Raba*, which also reveals a number of remarkable parallels between Abathur and Metatron:

---

[49] *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 90.

[50] *Das Johannesbuch*, p. 40; Widengren, "Heavenly Enthronement and Baptism," p. 562, analyzes this passage.

[51] Ibid.

[52] *Canonical Prayerbook*, p. 96. See also Rudolph's observations in *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, San Francisco, 1983, p. 188.

> He [Manda d'Hiia] goes and arrives at the watchhouse of the high Abathur. Thousand upon thousand [stand there] with their eyes upon him, and ten thousand upon ten thousand stand before him [at his service]. They raise his throne which is high and upon which he sits. When Abathur saw Manda d'Hiia, he stood up from his throne. Then spoke Manda d'Hiia to Abathur: 'Stay, stay, Abathur. Sit on your throne, which is high, magnificent and fortified, which the Great Life on High has granted to you.' At that, Abathur spoke to Manda d'Hiia: 'When you go, make mention of me in the presence of the Life.' Then Manda d'Hiia spoke to Abathur: 'When I ascend and speak and deliver a favorable report, then two angels will come from on High. They will lift up the high curtain [*bargod*] between the end of your *shkina* and the Great Life. They will inform you and speak to you and they will inform and say to the Great Life that Manda d'Hiia has ascended on high and Abathur has administered *kushta*.[53]

In the Mandaean account, Abathur rises from his throne in order to show respect for Manda d-hiia, whereas in the Jewish sources Metatron neglects to rise from his throne when he sees Aher. A heavenly voice delivered by two angels breaches the curtain (*bargod*) and informs Abathur that he has correctly and respectfully performed his duties. By contrast, in the Jewish sources, a heavenly voice comes from beyond the curtain (*pargod*) to condemn Aher.[54] Like Metatron, Abathur is depicted as an enthroned judge surrounded by thousands and tens of thousands of angels, a striking parallel to the *atiq yomin* of Daniel 7:9-10.[55] I am not arguing for the influence of one tradition on the other but rather for a similar combination of tropes.

The connection between Abathur and the *atiq yomin* is confirmed by another text in which a hybrid being named Denanuxt (whom Lidzbarski describes as "ein Mittelding zwischen Mensch und Buch")[56] ascends through the seven heavenly watchhouses until he reaches the highest of them, that of Abathur:

> Winds, winds took away Denanuxt, storms, storms led him away, ladders, ladders carry him upwards and make him ascend on steps. They make him ascend and erected him in the Watchhouse of Abathur, the ancient, high, hidden and preserved one. I watched

---

[53] *Ginza*, p. 195.

[54] Furthermore, in §672, Metatron is punished by being taken beyond the *pargod* and whipped, "Immediately they brought out Metatron to outside the Curtain (*Pargod*) and struck him with sixty fiery lashes."

[55] Geo Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book* (=*Uppsala Universitets Arsskrift* 1950), pp. 68-69.

[56] Lidzbarski, *Ginza*, Right, p. 205.

> and saw thousands upon thousands who were standing, and myriads upon myriads who were sitting. All of them clad in splendour and covered in light. A crown of victories was put on their heads. They were sitting on thrones of rest..... [57]

A number of other passages describe Abathur as the "ancient, high, the hidden and guarded (*abathur hatiqa rama kasia untira*) or simply "Abathur the ancient".[58] These epithets echo the title "Ancient of Days" from Dan. 7, particularly since they appear in conjunction with the image of the thousands and myriads of ministering angels. Indeed, the Mandaean passage employs a number of parallels with terms from Daniel 7, including the Mandaic term for "ancient" or *atiqa* and the term for "throne" or *kursia.* The depiction of Abathur surrounded by angelic beings with crowns on their heads also recalls *3 Enoch* 16, where Aher sees Metatron "seated upon a throne like a king" surounded by ministering angels and "all the princes of kingdoms crowned with crowns."

Abathur is installed at the entrance of the World of Light beneath a heavenly curtain or *bargod.* This liminal location, as well as the specific motif of the heavenly curtain or veil, appear in both Jewish and Gnostic depictions of the angelic vice regent. Mandaean awareness of Jewish angelogical traditions in general and of Metatron in particular is supported by the evidence of the magic bowls.[59] Indeed, Steven Wasserstrom has written that "Metatron remained alive in Mandean magic for perhaps over a millenium."[60] The most powerful evidence for Mandaean knowledge of Metatron appears in a magic bowl written in Mandaic which depicts Metatron — like Abathur — as serving before the heavenly curtain (*bargod*): "in the name of Metatron HLDH who serves before the Curtain [*bargod*] and who has compassion upon the town and who has compassion upon the countryside."[61] This bowl was apparently written by a Jewish scribe for a Mandaean customer, which not only

---

[57] Ibid., p. 210.

[58] See, for example, *The Canonical Prayerbook*, pp. 7, 45, 46; *Ginza*, p. 196.

[59] Jonas Greenfield, "Notes on Some Aramaic and Mandaic Magic Bowls," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 5, 1973, pp. 149-156.

[60] Steven Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis Under Early Islam*, Princeton, 1995, p. 191, n. 98.

[61] The incantation bowl I refer to is Bowl D (931.4.2) in W. S. McCullough, *Jewish and Mandaean Incantation Bowls in the Royal Ontario Museum*, Toronto, 1967, pp. 28-47. Also see, Baruch Levine's analysis of the bowl in "The Language of the Magical Bowls," in an appendix to Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia* (V), Leiden, 1970, pp. 343-373; Jonas Greenfield's remarks in his Prolegomenon to Odeberg's edition of *3 Enoch*, p. XL; and Moshe Idel's comments in "The World

suggests Mandaean acceptance of at least some Jewish angelogical beliefs — despite the strident anti-Jewish polemics which appear throughout Mandaean writings — but also indicates that at least some Jews knew Mandaic and therefore were more open to the possible influence of Mandaean traditions.

Indeed, Metatron is not the only angelic being shared by Mandaeans and Jews. Gabriel was also adopted by Mandaeans and played an important role as a demiurgic figure in one version of the Mandaean cosmogony. In the *Diwan Abatur*, Abathur is described as follows: "And Abatur putteth on its robes, (he) whose name is Kanfiel, he whose name is Bhaq, he whose name is Hazazban, he whose name is Nsab, his name is Tauriel."[62] In a Genizah fragment, a figure named Kanfiel is one of the angels who greets Moses during his heavenly ascent and one of the princes created by the Holy One blessed be He, even before the creation of the world, when "I [God] stretched the fire outside of myself."[63]

The many parallels between Abathur and Metatron are particularly striking when Mandaean writings (I. & III.) are placed side by side with passages from *3 Enoch* (II. IV.):[64]

> **I.** Abathur, the ancient, high, hidden, and guarded, the one who is enthroned on high and hidden in the depth. The one who penetrates and understands the worlds and the generations, who sees what they do and is appointed over the souls to weigh what they have done. [65]
>
> **II.** Henceforth [after enthroning Metatron at the entrance of the seventh hekhal] the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed to me [Metatron] all mysteries of Torah and all secrets of wisdom and all depths of purity; and all thoughts of the hearts of living creatures and all the secrets of the world and all the secrets of Creation are revealed to me as they are revealed before the Creator. And I watched intently to behold the secrets of the depth and the wonderful mystery. Before a person thinks in secret, I see. And before a person makes a thing, I see. And there is nothing on high and in the depth of the world hidden from me.[66]

---

of Angels in the Image of Man," p. 26, n. 90. In "The Language of the Magical Bowls," p. 359, Baruch Levine comes closest to unpacking the problematic term "HLDH".

[62] *Diwan Abatur*, p. 7.

[63] Schäfer, *Genizah*, 21. T.-S K21.95.A, p. 179.

[64] These parallel passages are cited by Odeberg in his edition of *3 Enoch*, p. 66. Odeberg devoted an entire volume to the topic of Mandaeism, *Die mandäische Religionsanschauung*, Uppsala, 1930.

[65] *Ginza*, p. 285 and parallel in *The Canonical PrayerBook*, p. 8, "He seeth and discerneth that which the worlds and the generations do."

[66] Ibid., citing from *3 Enoch* 11.

> **III.** I extol, honour and glorify Abathur, the ancient, high, secret and guarded one..... at the door of the Chamber of Life a Throne is founded for him [*'al baba d-bayt hiia kursia ramilah*], and he is seated on it, the balance is erected before him; he weighs words and rewards; he sees and knows the worlds and the aeons, what they are doing.[67]
>
> **IV.** I set up his [Metatron's] throne at the door of my Hall, that he may sit and judge the heavenly household. And I placed every prince before him, to receive authority from him.[68]

Abathur and Metatron are both enthroned at the apex of the physical world, a location which is also at the entrance of the divine abode. From this liminal position, they possess complete vision and knowledge of the lower world's events and inhabitants, and, at the same time, they can receive instructions from on high. Both figures guard the gates of God's dwelling and decide who will be allowed to enter. In this respect they function like a *psychopompos* or "leader of souls" into the divine realm, as the following passages reveal:

> **I.** And Abathur, when he seeth thee, will take thy hand in holy troth, [kushta] Will clothe thee in his radiance and cover thee with his light. And he will set thee in his scales. Thou wilt be clothed in thy radiant-body and mighty wrappings of light. He will set wreaths of victories on thy head; Thou will become akin to 'uthras, An (inhabitant) of the world of light..... Thou wilt rise up to the place which is the House of Perfection.[69]
>
> **II.** At once the Holy One, blessed be He, summoned to my aid his servant, the angel Metatron, Prince of the Divine Presence. He flew out to meet me with great alacrity, to save me from their [the other angels'] power. He grasped me with his hand before their eyes and said to me, "Come in peace into the presence of the high and exalted King to behold the likeness of the chariot." Then I entered the seventh palace.[70]

Abathur and Metatron greet the ascending human being (or soul), take the individual's hand, and lead him to the divine dwelling

---

[67] Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, pp. 65-66, citing from Lidzbarski's *Mandäische Liturgien* (*Text und Übersetzung*), Berlin, 1920, pp. 16-17. The same passage is found in Drower's *The Canonical Prayerbook*, pp. 7-8, "I worship, laud and praise the Ancient, Supernal, Occult and Guarded Abathur, who is high, hidden and guarded, whose throne is placed at the gate of the House of Life. He sitteth with the scales set before him."

[68] Ibid., citing from *3 Enoch* 48C.

[69] *The Canonical Prayerbook*, p. 302.

[70] *3 Enoch* 1, as cited in Alexander, "3 (the Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," p. 256.

place — the House of Perfection and the seventh hekhal, respectively. This function of the angelic vice regent is inherited from Jewish apocalyptic traditions of the chief angel (frequently Michael), who leads the human visionary through a tour of heaven. The transformation which the human soul undergoes in the Mandaean passage resembles the transformation which Enoch undergoes in *3 Enoch* 12, where he is wrapped in a "glorious cloak in which brightness, brilliance, splendor, and luster of every kind were fixed," and crowned with a "kingly crown". Indeed, both elements (the glorious garments and crown) probably reflect the influence of Jewish apocalyptic sources, such as *The Ascension of Isaiah*, on Hekhalot and Mandaean literature, alike.[71]

---

[71] Abathur is also depicted as wearing garments of light, cf., for example, *A Pair of Nasoraean Commentaries*, p. 35, and *The Canonical PrayerBook*, p. 45, "(Like them) she (the soul) puts on garment on garment and robe over robe like the vestments of Abathur." Other Mandaean divine figures are also described as wearing garments of light, see, Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, p. 66. The transformation of Enoch also parallels the transformation which the Mandaean demiurge Ptahil undergoes at the hands of this father Abathur, cf. *Ginza*, 348ff., "When I, Ptahil, was created and came into being, I came into being from the source of the Great radiance. When my father considered and called me forth, he called me forth from the source of radiance. He clothed me in a garment of radiance and wrapped me in a covering of light. He gave me a great crown by whose radiance the worlds shine." It is more likely that Mandaean, as well as Hekhalot, depictions of the garments which wrap the ascending soul derive from Jewish apoclayptic rather than Iranian sources, as Geo Widengren has argued in *The Great Vohu Manah*, Uppsala, 1945. On the issue of the garment in Jewish, Mandaean, and Iranian sources, see also R. J. Z. Werblowsky's discussion in his review of Drower's *The Secret Adam* in *Journal of Semitic Studies* 8, 1963, p. 132. On the issue of the garments in Mandaean sources specifically, see E. Segelberg, *Masbuta: Studies in the Ritual of Mandaean Baptism*, pp. 115-130; and J. J. Buckley's critique of Segelberg's assertions in her article "Why Once is Not Enough: Mandaean Baptism (Masbuta) as an Example of a Repeated Ritual," p. 29. For a discussion of the glorious garments and crown in *The Ascension of Isaiah* and in Jewish apocalyptic texts, in general, see I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, pp. 60-61, with notes. On the relation of the divine garment and the Shiur Qomah doctrine, cf., Raphael Loewe, 'The Divine Garment and the Shi'ur Qomah," *Harvard Theological Review* 58, 1965; Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 58ff. Wayne Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *History of Religions* 13, 1974, p. 184, notes that from a phenomenological perspective, the change of garments during rites de passage (including the heavenly ascent): "may symbolize the death and rebirth of the initiate but also the assimilation of the power of the deity represented by the new garb." This is certainly the case in the Jewish and Mandaean passages we have mentioned. On p. 187, Meeks discusses the connection between the "glorious garments" found in baptism contexts, and the lost image of God which is construed as a "robe of light". Furthermore, in different Jewish and Samaritan contexts (including depictions of the revelation at Sinai) human beings (Moses, in particular) were re-clothed with the image of God which Adam lost in the Garden of Eden. A version of this tradition is also present in

Both Metatron and Abathur are associated with the care of human souls in other ways. Metatron is characterized as the teacher of "all the souls of the dead that have died in their mothers' wombs, and of the babies that have died at their mothers' breasts, and of the schoolchildren that have died while studying the five books of the Torah."[72] Abathur's watchouse is depicted as the storage place for the pre-existent souls that have not yet descended to earth.[73] Once again we observe the logic of the angelic vice regent: he is a guardian of the gate; a lord of mediation. Therefore, Metatron and Abathur are in charge of souls that are betwixt and between different modes of existence. In one case, the souls belong to those individuals who were never born or who died too young to receive a proper education; in the other case, the souls are waiting for their corresponding bodies to be born.

Hypostatic Traditions

A final parallel between Abathur and Metatron is that both figures function as hypostatic manifestations of the Divine Anthropos.[74] As we will see shortly, most of the relevant passages link Abathur with specific body parts, as Metatron is linked with the face in early Jewish sources and with the phallus in medieval kabbalistic sources. One Mandaean passage does link the body (*'stuna*) with the image of the scales, a symbol of Abathur: "For the body is (like) a (pair of) balances!"[75] At least one Mandaean text identifies Abathur with the hypostatic body itself, just as Metatron was linked with the *Shiur Qomah*. The passage appears in *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*. Its interpretation of the letters of the alphabet recalls similar descriptions in *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, another priestly

---

Mandaean sources, as Meeks notes, "Robing with 'garments of light' restores the heavenly self in the Mandaean masbuta and masiqta rituals." In other words, the wearing of the glorious garments signifies the restoration to the original, divine self.

[72] *3 Enoch* 48C.

[73] See *Ginza*, pp. 207-210.

[74] Another formulation of the hypostatic traditions associated with Abathur and their connections to the Kabbalah appears in *The Gnostic Imagination*, pp. 124-127. For other Mandaean passages which depict the hypostatic phallus which I did not discuss in *The Gnostic Imagination*, see J. J. Buckley, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, pp. 23, 36.

[75] E. S. Drower, *A Pair of Nasoraean Commentaries*, "The Great 'First World,'" p. 50.

Mandaean text. In this passage, the Wellspring, a female being, generates other beings who are each identified with a letter of the Mandaean alphabet. The sequence proceeds from "A" to "T," and comprises the first eight letters of the Mandaean alphabet (there is no distinction phonemically between an original "het" and a "heh," so the text does not include a "het" in the eighth position).[76] Following this, the text cites another tradition in which the spirit, body, and soul are each linked with a different letter. Although in the first tradition, Abathur is identified with the letter "U" (a "waw") in the second, he is identified with the "'ayn," which, as the text declares, "belongs to the body, it is Abatur."

> Yusamin the Pure, Yawar the Great, Abatur the Lofty, Sam Mana Smira, and Sam Ziwa proceeded from her [the Wellspring]. They are the brothers of the Lord of Greatness and they are the letters of the alphabet. A is the Lord of Greatness; B is Mana the Great, Mighty one; G is the Great Father of Glory D is Yusamin the Pure; H is Yawar the Great; U is Abatur the Lofty; Z is Sam Mana Smira; T is Singlan the Great..... In another scroll I shall teach you about those three kings who set themselves, who are H, 'AYN, and D. Those are three kings who stand in one garment (i.e. are identified with one another); they are spirit, body, and soul. Behold! The spirit built the body, she is the mistress of children, for H is the spirit. (And) 'AYN belongs to the body, it is Abatur..... Anyone who reveals a portion of these mysteries, the well Sumqaq shall be his dwelling and he shall not see his creator! And Life is victorious![77]

This esoteric tradition is extremely important for a number of reasons. First it is the only Mandaean text I know of which explicitly links Abathur with the body, itself, rather than a particular organ. Second this passage recalls the letter speculation of a number of Jewish mystical texts including the *Sefer Yetsira* and *Sefer Ha-Bahir.* Several scholars, including Drower and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, have already noted parallels between certain Mandaean doctrines and the *Sefer Yetsira.*[78] None of them have comparatively examined the Mandaean and Jewish texts in depth, however. Unfortunately, such a detailed comparison also lies beyond the scope of the present study, since it would involve a prolonged detour into the complicated

---

[76] On Mandaic orthography and this point in particular, see Edwin Yamauchi, *Mandaic Incantation Texts*, New Haven, 1967, p. 70.

[77] *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 59.

[78] See *The Secret Adam*, p. 17. Dan Cohn-Sherbok, "The Alphabet in Mandaean and Jewish Gnosticism"; idem, "The Gnostic Mandaean and Heterodox Judaism," in *Rabbinic Perspectives on the New Testament.* Also see Zwi Werblowsky's comments in his review of Drower's *The Secret Adam*, in *Journal of Semitic Studies.*

realm of the Kabbalah, for as Zwi Werblowsky noted in a review of Drower's *The Secret Adam*: "What is so remarkable about these similarities [between Mandaeism and Jewish mysticism] is the fact that they relate to medieval Kabbalah even more than to the earlier, 'gnostic' Hekhaloth-mysticism."[79]

There is a great need for a systematic comparison of Mandaean and kabbalistic literature. Given the present study's concentration on earlier Jewish sources, I will limit myself to a few observations concerning the relationship of the *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship* to what is generally considered to be the first Kabbalistic text, the *Bahir*, a Provençal work from the 12th century. Throughout his writings, Scholem depicted the *Sefer ha-Bahir* as a conduit for Gnostic influences in the Kabbalah.[80] Although Scholem consistently cited the *Bahir* as evidence for the historical impact of ancient Gnosticism on the Kabbalah, he also considered the possibility that the parallels between the *Bahir* and Gnostic sources were fundamentally phenomenological rather than historical:

> The fundamental problem in the study of the book [i.e. the Bahir] is: is the affinity based on an as yet unknown historical link between the gnosticism of the mishnaic and talmudic era and the sources from which the material in Sefer ha-Bahir is derived? Or should it possibly be seen as a purely psychological phenomenon, i.e., as a spontaneous upsurge from the depths of the soul's imagination, without any historical continuity?[81]

In *Origins of the Kabbalah*, Scholem seemed to waver between historical and phenomenological explanations for the parallels between Gnosticism and the Kabbalah. On the one hand, Scholem wrote "it is not too much to assume that the gnostic material of Oriental origin in the Book *Bahir*, once it was received and adopted by a circle of religiously agitated and productive men, amply suffices to explain the inner development of the Kabbalah up to and including, the *Zohar*."[82] On the other hand, Scholem suggested that "The process within the pleroma that brought forth the aeons or the sefiroth could have been developed anew, using purely Jewish forms

---

[79] Werblowsky, op. cit., 132.

[80] See, for example, *Major Trends*, 34, 75; "Kabbalah," *Enc. Jud.*, 506, 519; Kabbalah, Jerusalem, 1974, 315; *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 58, 68, 90, 99, 197; *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, New York, 1969, 99.

[81] *Kabbalah*, 315.

[82] *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 90.

and based on purely Jewish material, as soon as the preliminary historical and psychological conditions were present."[83]

Scholem's interest in the possible links between the *Bahir* and Gnosticism focused on Western Gnostic traditions, such as the school of Valentinus. In the next few paragraphs, I will focus on parallels between the *Bahir* and Mandaeism. Like Scholem, I am open to the possibility that the similarities between Mandaean sources and the Kabbalah are the result of historical contact or, conversely, that they reflect parallel, independent developments. If the esoteric traditions are linked historically, the contact must have occured in Babylonia, where Jews and Mandaeans appear to have shared angelogical and magical traditions. At some point, a Jewish doctrine which emerged from this syncretistic mileu may have made its way via Jewish travellers to Western Europe, a scenario akin to the one depicted in the *Chronicle of Ahimaz*, a medieval document which describes a figure named Aaron of Baghdad (Abu Aaron) as traveling from Babylonia to southern Italy, eventually transmitting his secrets to Moses b. Kalonymus, a founder of the German Pietists (*Hasidé Ashkenaz*). Whether or not such a historical link existed between Mandaean and Jewish traditions, and it seems extremely unlikely that it could ever be proved, the parallels between the sources are thought provoking.

Both the *Bahir* and *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship* depict emanatory systems in which the primordial source of creation is a tree and a wellspring. As the Mandaean text declares: "those twenty-four letters of the alphabet are the twenty-four crowns that clothe the twenty-four kings who are formed by the light. For the light, the Wellspring, and the Datepalm wear the radiance that glows in the light of *Tibil* ["earth"], and the twenty-four stars, the body, and the twenty four mysteries (that) do not sleep".[84] According to another Mandaean text, from the hieros gamos between the phallic datepalm and vaginal wellspring (*Aina u-sindirka*), "proceed all worlds and generations."[85] The *Diwan Abatur* contains a drawing of a tree known as *'lana d mrabia yanqia* ("the tree which nourishes nurslings"), which, as Drower notes, "is said to be identical with the Sindarka" mentioned above.[86]

---

[83] Ibid., 99.

[84] *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 41.

[85] *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, p. 110. See Drower's discussion in *The Secret Adam*, pp. 11.

[86] See *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, pp. 230-231.

The *Bahir* describes a similar cosmogonic process: "I [God] am the one who planted this tree [*eilan*] in order to delight in it, I and all the world. And in it I established All and I called it All..... For all depends on it, and all proceed from it, and all need it, and all gaze on it, and all wait for it, and from it fly all the souls..... To what is this similar? To a king who wanted to plant a tree in his garden..... He dug and opened a spring [*ma'ayan*], flowing with living waters [*mayim hayim*]. He then planted the tree, and it stood, giving forth fruit. It was successfully rooted, since it was always watered from the spring."[87] This passage has much in common with the Mandaean symbology of tree and wellspring, including the reference to the "living waters" (*mayim hayim*) a concept which appears throughout Mandaean sources where the waters are called by the analagous expression *mia hiia.*

The *Bahir* has a complex cosmological and mythological system of light, flowing water, letters of the alphabet, crowns, parts of the body, sexual symbols, and divine attributes. These same elements appear in *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, where they interact in ways recalling their relationship in the *Bahir.* Fully illuminating these parallels would require a detailed semiotic analysis, a worthwhile project, but one taking us too far afield from our original subject. To give some indication of the similarity between Mandaean and kabbalistic thought, however, I quote another passage from *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*:

> As to the novice[priest], you know that there is something female about him — the inner crown that comes to the outer one supports it. Behold, the crown of the bridegroom has something internal to it, (something) dwelling in the mystery of the female! (If) there is nothing external within it, its kingship is lost. Behold, the female without the male cannot be established![88]

Typically, the crown or *taga* is a male, priestly symbol in Mandaeism and yet this passage emphasizes its androgynous character, an androgyny in which the female supports and is literally comprised within the male. This model of androgyny and its use of crown and marital symbolism greatly resembles one of the most important symbolic structures of the Kabbalah, one which Elliot Wolfson has explicated as follows: "The image of the masculine king wearing the crown connotes perfect unity of male and female, which, as I have

---

[87] *Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 15-16.
[88] *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, p. 41.

noted above, involves a reconstitution of the male androgyne..... the image of the crown or the process of crowning is used to denote the union of the masculine and femine aspects of the pleroma."[89] Within the *Bahir*, the idea of androgyny is linked to the date palm which is described as "including both male and female. How is this? The *lulav* [the frond of the date palm] is male and the fruit is male on the outside and female on the inside."[90] Thus, the Bahir, like the Mandaean text, links the masculine with the external and the feminine with the internal.

I close my discussion of *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship* and its parallels with kabbalistic sources by returning to the passage which prompted this excursus. The section on the beings of light and their connection to the letters of the alphabet is introduced by the following line: "These are the seven kings who proceeded from one Wellspring [*aina*] and five others who proceeded from other Wellsprings..... A is the Lord of Greatness; B is Mana the Great....." This passage has a close parallel in the *Bahir*: "These are the explicit holy exalted names. There are twelve names, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel..... To what is this similar? A king had a beautiful wellspring [*ma'ayan*]. All his brothers had no water except from this wellspring and could not endure thirst. What did he do to this wellspring? He made twelve pipes for the fountain and gave them twelve names."[91] This parable is followed by a discussion of the letters of the alphabet. Both sources speak of twelve divine figures fed by primordial wellsprings; both link this theogonic model with the alphabet. Whether or not the kabbalistic and Mandaean authors drank from the same well of traditions, these parallels suggest the development of similar symbolic and mythological systems and shed new light on the possible relationship of the *Bahir* to Gnostic sources.

Despite their similarities, the *Bahir* and Mandaean sources also reflect the profound differences between Judaism and Mandaeism. The *Bahir* makes liberal use of biblical citations and emphasizes the importance of the commandments (*mitzvot*). Unlike Mandaeism, which valorizes the North as "the source of light, instruction, and healing," (the North Star, for example, is the seat of Abathur)[92], the

---

[89] Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, pp. 363-364.
[90] *Sefer ha-Bahir*, sec. 59.
[91] Ibid., sec. 47.
[92] On the significance of the North in Mandaeism, see *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, p. 18, n. 9; p. 199 on Abathur and the north star.

Bahir, drawing on an older Jewish tradition, considers the North to be the source of evil. The *Bahir* also valorizes circumcision, while Mandaeans abhor the practice and a circumcized man cannot serve as a priest.

Although they have greatly differing attitudes towards circumcision, both Mandaeism and the Kabbalah view the phallus as a locus of esoteric knowledge or gnosis. The following passage from the Mandaean work known as *The Lesser First World* indicates this clearly. It describes the phallus as "more venerated than all the mysteries" and identifies Abathur as the hypostatic phallus of the Cosmic Body:

> And when thou recitest 'Life dwelleth in Its own radiance', thou offerest praise to Maleness (the male organ?), the name of which is Abatur of the scales but which the worlds and generations call *duna* [Lit. "keg"; Fig. "penis"], for it is more venerated than all the mysteries, and worlds and generations are held (comprised) therein.[93]

The same text identifies Abathur as the hypostatic tongue, as well: "the lofty Abathur whose name is 'the Tongue.' [*lishana*]"[94] A parallel depiction is found in *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, "Abathur-Rama, whose name is 'the Great Jordan of White Water', that he is called 'the Tongue'."[95] Elsewhere, the Jordan is explicitly identified as semen: "she [the soul] received a sign from the Jordan — which is Semen — and entered the Scales."[96] Thus, Abathur is identified as thesemen as well as the phallus, itself.

At first, the identification of Abathur as the hypostatic tongue may seem both obscure and unrelated to his function as the divine phallus. The reason for this identification is illuminated, however, when we observe that in the Jewish mystical and cosmological text, *Sefer Yesira*, the "circumcision of the tongue and the mouth" is identified with the "circumcision of the foreskin."[97] Moreover, as Yehuda Liebes has observed, the *Zohar* considers the *sefirah* called Da'at to be a symbol of the tongue, "which is considered

---

[93] *A Pair of Nasoraean Commentaries*, p. 57. See Drower's comment in *The Secret Adam*, p. 29, that in this passage, "the organ of virility is assigned to 'Abathur of the Scales'". Also cf. Rudolph, *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie*, p. 136, n. 7.

[94] *A Pair of Nasoraean Commentaries*, p. 58. Drower has noted, *The Secret Adam*, p. 29, that "semen is attributed to Hibil-Ziwa 'because thou, Hibil-Ziwa, art the Living Seed: Thou rulest us and all worlds.'"

[95] *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, p. 174.

[96] *A Pair of Nasoraean Commentaries*, p. 34.

[97] *Sefer Yesira* 1:3, see, I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yezira*," *Israel Oriental Studies* 1, 1971, p. 141. Both Elliot Wolfson, "Circumcision,

analogous to the male organ".[98] Thus, as in the medieval Jewish sources, the Mandaean depictions of Abathur preserve the phenomenologicallink between the tongue and the phallus.

The identification of Abathur as both the hypostatic phallus and tongue reflects two aspects of his character. Abathur is the father of the demiurge, Ptahil, and may have been understood to be the "father of the uthras" (*aba d-'utria*).[99] The characterization of Abathur as the father of a host of angelic beings would have easily translated into, or reinforced, an identification of Abathur as the phallus, i. e. the organ of fatherhood, and as semen. Both Brandt and Nöldeke saw this title as a possible etymology for the name Abathur. Macuch has pointed out that despite the similarity between phrases such as *aba d-'utria hatiqa rama kasia ntira* ("the ancient, lofty, concealed, guarded father of the uthras") and *abatur hatiqa rama kasia untira* ("Abathur the ancient, lofty, concealed and guarded"), the title "father of the uthras" does not appear to have been applied to Abathur in Mandaean literature, although it is linked with the figure B'haq-Ziwa (as we saw above), who is identified with Abathur.[100]

Just as importantly, Abathur was identified with the balance or scale in his avatar as Abathur d-muzania or "Abathur of the Scales." Elliot Wolfson has demonstrated that Jewish mystics established linguistic and iconographic connections between the scale and the phallus.[101] For example, the medieval work *Sefer ha-'Iyyun* makes a pun on the Hebrew word *peles* or "scale," whose consonants can also signify the Latin word "phallus."[102] Wolfson observes that in a

---

Vision, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol," *History of Religions* 27, 1987, p 207 and Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, Albany, 1993, p. 171, n. 65, note this connection. It should be mentioned that the Mandaeans do not practice circumcision, nor do they spiritualize circumcision as, for example, in the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas* 90:18-23, cf. E. Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins*, p. 64; E.S. Drower, *Diwan Abatur*, p. 17.

[98] *Studies in the Zohar*, p. 171, n. 65, where Liebes refers to *Da'at* as "the inner essence of *Yesod*. Both *Da'at* and *Yesod* are on the 'middle line' ..... and both have to do with the matter of couplin." In "Erasing the Erasure: Gender and the Writing of God's Body in Kabbalistic Symbolism," in *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism*, Albany, 1995, p. 64, Elliot Wolfson writes, "just as the spark and the line are phallic symbols so too is the scale, or more specifically, the tongue of the scale."

[99] Cf. Mark Lidzbarski, *Ginza*, pp. 97ff.

[100] Rudolf Macuch, *Handbook of Classical and Modern Mandaic*, 210-211.

[101] "Erasing the Erasure," p. 63. Y. Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, pp. 68-70, also discusses these motifs. For the image of the scale or balance in the *Zohar*, in general, see Y. Liebes, *Sections of the Zohar Lexicon*, Jerusalem, 1976, pp. 327-35 (Hebrew).

[102] "Erasing the Erasure," p. 63. Heb. *peles* and Lat. *phallus* are written with the same consonants in Hebrew.

variety of kabbalistic sources, the scale is graphically represented as follows: "the weights of the scale are thought to correspond to the testicles and the tongue in the middle to the *membrum virile*."[103] A similar symbolic matrix underlies the connections between Abathur, the phallus, and the tongue in Mandaean literature.

Finally, according to yet another passage, Abathur is the liver: "Abatur-Rama, he is the liver [*abatur rama kabda hu*]".[104] Underlying the identification between Abathur and the liver may be a pun on the Mandaic word *kabda*, which generally means liver but, in this case, may also have the connotation of Glory, as in Hebrew.[105] Similar puns are quite common in Mandaean literture, as J. J. Buckley points out: "Mandaean texts abound in obviously enjoyed puns and word-plays".[106] A link between the Glory and the divine phallus also appears in the *Zohar*, as Liebes writes: "In the *Zohar* both the male organ and the *sefira* of *Yesod* are called the glory of the body, *hiddura de-gufa* (II, 186b)."[107]

Abathur of the Scales

As the lord or embodiment of the scales, Abathur mediates between opposing elements. It is not surprising that Abathur's realm is described as follows: "There is death, there is life. There is darkness, there is light. There is error, there is truth. There is destruction, there is construction. There is blow, there is healing."[108] Until now, scholars have emphasized the Iranian background of Abathur's function as weigher of souls, by linking Abathur with the Iranian figure of Rashnu razishta.[109] As Kurt Rudolph writes: "Das an den Seelenaufstieg anschließende Seelengericht durch den 'Waagemann' Abathur hat sein Vorbild in dem Rashnu razishta".[110] Although

---

[103] Ibid., p. 64, and p. 182, n. 128 for kabbalistic sources of this image.

[104] *A Pair of Nasoraean Commentaries*, p. 8.

[105] Drower has suggested this very pun in a different context, see, *A Pair of Nasoraean Commentaries*, p. 57, n. 3.

[106] Buckley, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 82.

[107] *Studies in the Zohar*, p. 27.

[108] *Ginza*, 206. This is the list communicated by Disai to Denanuxt. On 207, these elements are identified with Ruha.

[109] See, for example, the extreme position taken by Kraeling, "The Mandaic God Ptahil," p. 163, "Abatur, literally 'the man with the scales' [following Andreas] and none other than the Iranian Rashnu".

[110] K. Rudolph, *Die Mandäer*, Vol. I, p. 124. See also the similar view of Brandt, *Das Schicksal der Seele nach dem Tode*, pp. 27-28.

Abathur is explicitly identified with "Rashna uRast" in the *Ginza Raba*, this occurs in a passage of late provenance.[111]

While acknowledging the possibility of Iranian (or Egyptian) influence on Abathur's function as a weigher of souls, it also behooves us to examine Jewish literature for possible connections. The motif of weighing an individual or his deeds in a scale ("psychostasy") appears frequently in biblical and rabbinic sources.[112] In apocalyptic literature, the theme of weighing merits emerges in a number of texts, where it is sometimes associated with a secondary divine being instead of with God, as in the biblical and rabbinic sources.[113]

The specific motif of an angelic being who weighs souls, rather than deeds or merits, appears in the *Testament of Abraham*, Recension A, ch. 12, a text we examined above. In this text, the biblical figure Abel is depicted as the enthroned judge, while another "sunlike angel" (Dokiel) actually weighs the souls in a balance:

---

[111] *Ginza*, p. 284.

[112] The Bible contains several examples of weighing the individual in the scale, including Job 31:6, Prov. 16:11, Ps 62:10, and Daniel 5:27. Job 31:6 reads, "Let Him weigh me on the scale of righteousness"; Prov. 16:11, "Scales and balances of justice belong to the Lord"; Ps. 62:10, "Humans are breath; people are illusion; weighed on a scale together they are less than breath"; Daniel 5:27, "You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting." In rabbinic literature the emphasis is on weighing the merits of an individual, although the image of weighing the individual is also present. Two of the most striking rabbinic examples of this motif are *Pirkei Avot* 2:8, where Abba Saul declares: "If all the sages of Israel were in one scale of a balance, and even Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus were with them, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh in the other scale, he would outweigh them all." and *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* xxvi (ed. Buber, 167a), where R. Eliezer declares: "The scales are evenly balanced. The scales of iniquities on the one side and of merits on the other; the Holy One inclines (the balance) to the scale of merit." For a discussion of the theme of weighing merits in a balance in rabbinic literature, cf. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, London and Philadelphia, 1977, pp. 128-147.

[113] In apocalyptic writings, the motif of a divine being who weighs merits with a scale appears in several places including *IV Ezra* 3:34 and *I Enoch* 41:1; 61:8. In *IV Ezra* 3:34, we read, "Now, therefore, weigh thou our iniquities, and those of the inhabitants of the world, in the balance [*pendara in statera nostras iniquitates*] and so shall be found which way the turn of the scale inclines [*momentum puncti ubi declinet*]." In *I Enoch* 41:1, after Enoch sees the four Archangels, he "saw all the secrets of the heavens, and how the kingdom is divided, and how the actions of men are weighed in the balance." And in *I Enoch* 61:8, "the Lord of Spirits placed the Elect One on the throne of glory. And he shall judge all the works of the holy above in the heaven, and in the balance shall their deeds be weighed." The importance of the last passage is that the function of weighing merits has been transferred from God to a lower divine being, placed by God on a throne of glory and appointed weigher and judge.

> And between the two gates there stood a terrifying throne with the appearance of terrifying crystal, flashing like fire. And upon it sat a wondrous man, bright as the sun, like unto a son of God. Before him stood a table like crystal, all of gold and byssus..... In front of the table sat a light-bearing angel, holding a balance in his hand..... And the one who was in the front of the table, who was holding the balance, weighed the souls.[114]

The parallels between this passage and Mandaean depictions of Abathur are significant and, furthermore, are not limited to the motifs of the angelic beings who judge and weigh human souls, rather than deeds or merits. Another important parallel is the presence of a crystal structure at the heavenly location of the weighing. In the passage cited above, both a throne and a table of crystal are associated with the weighing and judging of souls. The Mandaean text *Diwan Abatur* also juxtaposes the motifs of a crystal structure and the psychostasy:

> This is Abatur who is in charge of the weighing and numbering [of souls]. This is the throne Sar ("It-stood-firm"). This is the vault; its name is "Covering-over"; its name is "Pure Crystal" [*bilura dakia*]; It is crystal cut into facets [*qisa*]. It abideth and my soul counteth thereon.[115]

Although the Mandaean passage depicts the heavenly vault, rather than a throne or table, as composed of crystal, the image of a heavenly crystal structure is almost certainly derived from the same Jewish apocalyptic milieu. Indeed, another Mandaean text actually depicts the construction of a sanctuary of crystal and a table (or tray) of crystal by primordial priests: "Thereupon they set to work and built a sanctuary (*bimanda*) all of pure crystal..... and set up a table (*tariana*) that was of pure crystal."[116]

In many apocalyptic texts, the earthly or heavenly Temple in Jerusalem is described as composed of crystal or "pure marble".[117]

---

[114] *Test. of Abr.* 12, as cited in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, p. 889; see also the comments in n. f.

[115] *Diwan Abatur*, p. 7.

[116] *A Pair of Nasoraean Commentaries*, pp. 10-11. Drower discusses this passage in *The Secret Adam*, pp. 70ff. For *tariana* as "table," also see *A Pair of Nasoraean Commentaries*, p. 49.

[117] Rev. 21:11 portrays the new Jerusalem which descends from heaven as "having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone; clear as crystal." BT Sukk. 51b and Baba Batra 4a relate that Herod built the Temple in Jerusalem of "stones of marble" (*'abne shaysha umarmara*). André Neher, "Le voyage mystique des quatre," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, CXL, 1951;

The earliest witness for this motif is *1 Enoch* 14, where Enoch ascends to heaven and experiences the following:

> And I came into the tongues of the fire and drew near to a great house which was built of white marble, and the inner wall(s) were like mosaics of white marble, the floor of crystal..... And behold there was an opening before me (and) a second house which is greater than the former..... And I observed and saw inside it a lofty throne — its appearance was like crystal. . . And the Great Glory was sitting upon it.....[118]

In this early passage, we find traces of the later Mandaean motif of a heavenly crystal vault (in this case the "floor" of the heavenly house) and the later apocalyptic motif of the throne of crystal (as in *Test. of Abr.*) associated with the image of an enthroned judge. Ultimately, the image of a heavenly structure composed of crystal probably derives from biblical verses like Ex. 24:10, where "under His [God's] feet there was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire, like the very sky for purity" and Ezek. 1:22, "Above the heads of the creatures was a form: an expanse, with an awe-inspiring gleam as of crystal, was spread out above their heads."[119]

By illuminating the many parallels between Mandaean and Jewish depictions of an enthroned being who weighs and/or judges human souls, I am not arguing that the older Jewish sources necessarily influenced the development of the later Mandaean tradition. I am suggesting, however, that the previous emphasis on an Iranian *Vorbild* for the figure of Abathur must be re-evaluated in light of the well attested and earlier Jewish traditions discussed above. Before leaving the issue of the angelic weigher of souls or merits, it is important to note that this motif also appears in *3 Enoch* 18,

---

Johann Maier, "Das Gefährdungsmotiv bei der Himmelsreise in der jüdischen Apokalyptik und 'Gnosis'," *Kairos* 5, 1963, discuss the parallel between the appearance of the earthly and heavenly Temples. Both also link the tradition of the celestial Temple composed of "pure marble" with R. Akiba's warning in BT Hag. 14b (and Hekhalot parallels, §§259, 345, 408-410, 672), "When you arrive at the stones of pure marble, do not say 'Water, Water'," On this connection also cf. David Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, pp. 210ff. I. Gruenwald discusses the motif of heavenly structures composed of crystal or sapphire in *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, p. 35, n. 21. Finally, mention should be made of the "Temple of the Grail" built by King Titurel, which was composed of crystal plated tiles, cf. Henri Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation*, London, 1986, p. 360.

[118] As cited in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 1, pp. 20-21.

[119] Also see Ezek. 1:26, "Above the expanse over their heads was the semblance of a throne, in appearance like sapphire". Although the color of sapphire is blue, in a text noted by Gruenwald, see n. 119 above, the sapphire of Ex. 24:10 is described as white (*Lekah Tov*, ad Exodus 24:10).

where among the angelic inhabitants of the seventh hekhal whom Metatron describes to R. Ishmael, we find a Shoqed Hozii:

> And why is his name Shoqed Hozii? Because he weighs men's merits in the scales of a balance before the Holy One blessed be He.[120]

In this passage, Metatron and Shoqed Hozii are separate figures, yet in one of the Hekhalot fragments found in the Genizah, Metatron is explicitly identified by the name Shoqed Hozii: "Metatron the Prince of Countenance by the name of Shoqed Hozii, who is called by seven names".[121]

Abathur and the Heavenly Waters

According to Mandaean cosmology, the World of Light is separated from the physical cosmos by a body of water called *hafiqia mia* or "water brooks" (Ger. *Wasserbäche*).[122] Abathur's throne is located at "the gate of the House of Life" immediately below these waters:[123]

> And the world of Abathur is below the world of the outflowing waters [*hafiqia mia*], and the world of outflowing waters below the world of the pure Yushamin. [*ualma d abatur mn atutia alma d hafiqia mia ualma d hafiqia mia mn atutia alma d yushamin dakia*][124]

Beneath *hafiqia mia* lie seven or eight "watchhouses" or *mattarta*, which function as dwelling places for a variety of demons and purgatories for the ascending soul.[125] Once the soul has ascended through the *mattarta* to the "gate of the House of Life," Abathur tests the soul to determine whether it is worthy to enter the pleromatic realm. If the soul is worthy, then it is helped over the waters into

---

[120] Odeberg, 3 Enoch, p. 61, writes, "The explantation given in the present verse rather presupposes a form 'Sheqal Zaki' ('weighing merits') or similar. (Cf. Mandaitic: *Abathur*, Introd. sect. 13 Ce.)."

[121] G19, in Peter Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, p. 165. The text also reads "this is Metatron Shoqed Hozii". In general, Metatron is described as possessing seventy names rather than seven. Abathur however has seven secret names. In *Ma'aseh Merkabah* (ed. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 108), we find "shoqedhozii malakh ha-panim".

[122] E. S. Drower, *The Canonical PrayerBook*, p. 45, n. 6, writes, "*Hafiqia mia*, the name of the river of departure, of death, which is the frontier of the worlds of light. In the *Diwan Abatur* a ship ferries souls across this river."

[123] E. S. Drower, *The Canonical PrayerBook*, p. 7.

[124] E. S. Drower, *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, p. 163; Mandaic, p. 45.

[125] In *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie*, p. 130, Rudolph charts the position of the *hafiqia mia* in the various cosmological schemes found in the Mandaean sources. Also see, Svend Pallis, *Mandaean Studies*, Amsterdam, 1974 (Reprint), p. 78.

the House of Life, if it is unworthy, then the soul is overcome by *hafiqia mia* and remains in one of the purgatories, receiving punishment until the final judgement.

The origin of *hafiqia mia* has long been traced to Persian sources.[126] Wilhelm Brandt hypothesized that the Mandaean waters were modeled on the Persian "stream of tears" which the soul must cross over after death.[127] In a Pahlavi text called *Sad Dar*, we find the stream of tears described as follows:

> The ninety-sixth subject is this, when any one departs to that other world it is not proper for others that they should utter an outcry, maintain grief, and make lamentation and weeping. Because every tear that issues from the eyes becomes one drop of that river before the Kinvad bridge, and then the soul of that dead person remains at that place; it is difficullt for it to make a passage there, and it is not able to pass over the Kinvad bridge.[128]

As support for the parallel between *hafiqia mia* and the "stream of tears," Brandt expanded his comparison to include the "Kinvad bridge" which linked the physical world with the after life in Persian religion. Based on several passages in the *Ginza Raba* and *Mandaean Book of John*,[129] Brandt argued for the existence of an analagous fixed bridge in the Mandaean sources, which traversed *hafiqia mia.*[130]

However, as Svend Pallis has pointed out, instead of referring to a fixed bridge such as the Kinvad, Mandaean sources valorize the ritual of baptism[131] as a symbolic bridge to the Pleroma, an observation which leads Pallis to argue "against the existence of a fixed bridge like the Kinvad, which everybody must cross."[132] Pallis continues his critique of Brandt's position by rejecting the parallel

---

[126] Wilhelm Brandt, *Das Schicksal der Seele nach dem Tode nach mandäischen und parsichen Vorstellungen, Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie*, XVIII, Braunschweig, 1892, pp. 405-38, 575-603.

[127] Ibid., pp. 427-429.

[128] *Sad Dar*, Sec. 96:1-2, as cited in Pallis, *Mandaean Studies*, p. 75. Also see, *Das Schicksal der Seele*, pp. 427-428.

[129] For a list of the passages and their important features, see Pallis, *Mandaean Studies*, p. 85.

[130] See Wilhelm Brandt, *Die mandäische Religion*, p. 76.

[131] In Mandaean sources, the name "Jordan" is given to any body of water which is used for baptism. In addition to the earthly rivers which are called Jordan, the soul is baptised in like-named celestial counterparts during its ascent.

[132] Pallis, *Mandaean Studies*, p. 85. The Zoroastrian motif of a bridge to the after life was, however, adopted by Manichaean sources, such as the following Manichaean prayer cited by Hans-Joachim Klimkeit in *Gnosis on the Silk Road: Gnostic Texts from Central Asia*, San Francisco, 1993, p. 18, "May the bridge be wide, I would cross it without hesitation (lit., doubt)."

between *hafiqia mia* and the stream of tears because it is strongly linked to the erroneous parallel between the Kinvad bridge and a non-existent Mandaean analog: "Neither am I able to agree with him [Brandt] when he declares that the idea of 'the waters of Life' [Pallis' translation of *hafiqia mia*] originated in the Pers. stream of tears, as this opinion is based on the assumption that *h'ApikiA mi'A* is the water under the Kinvad bridge."[133] Unfortunately, Pallis does not offer a convincing alternative to Brandt's clearly flawed theory for the origin of the *hafiqia mia.*[134]

Instead of a Persian theory of origin, a biblical source for the Mandaean *hafiqia mia* offers many advantages. Foremost among them is the linguistic analogy between the Mandaic *hafiqia mia* and the Hebrew expressions *afiqe mayim* and *afiqe yam*, whose relevant biblical appearances occur in Psalms 18 and II Samuel 22, respectively. In these parallel passages, the terms *afiqe yam* and *afiqe mayim* signify the cosmic waters which must be re-defeated by God in order to save the righteous individual, who is "drawn up out of the mighty waters" by God.

In order to uncover the overall relevance of the biblical tradition to the Mandaean sources, I cite the biblical passages at length:

I. II Samuel 22:5-29

5 For the breakers of Death encompassed me,
The torrents of Belial terrified me;
6 The snares of Sheol encircled me,
The toils of Death engulfed me.
7 In my anguish I called on the Lord,
Cried out to my God;
In His Abode [*hekhalo*] He heard my voice,
My cry entered His ears.....
14 The LORD thundered forth from heaven.....
16 The bed of the sea [*afiqe yam*] was exposed,
The foundations of the world were laid bare.....
17 He reached down from on high, He took me,
Drew me out of the mighty waters [*mayim rabim*][135]

---

[133] Ibid.

[134] Pallis' hypothesis concerning the origin of the *hafiqia mia*, namely that *hafiqia mia* was the ancient name for the waters of baptism, which later became identified with the Jordan, and his subsequent translation of *hafiqia mia* as "the waters of Life," are problematic, though interesting. See Pallis, *Mandaean Studies*, p. 24.

[135] As translated in *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, New York, 1985.

II. Psalms 18: 4-29

5 Ropes of Death encompassed me;
torrents of Belial terrifed me;
ropes of Sheol encircled me;
snares of Death confronted me;
7 In my distress I called on the LORD,
cried out to my God;
in His temple [*hekhalo*) He heard my voice;
my cry to Him reached His ears.....
14 Then the LORD thundered from heaven.....
16 The ocean bed [*afiqe mayim*] was exposed;
the foundations of the world were laid bare.....
17 He reached down from on high, He took me;
He drew me out of the mighty waters [*mayim rabim*][136]

The biblical passages employ a number of terms to signify the destructive waters which threaten to overwhelm David, including the parallel expressions *afiqe yam* (II Sam. 22) and *afiqe mayim* (Ps. 18). In order to save David from these waters, God descends on a cherub from his *hekhal*, shooting lightening, roaring, and blasting his breath. After exposing the *afiqe mayim/yam*, God reaches down and draws David out of the "mighty waters".

Similar depictions of a divine being reaching down and saving individuals from destructive cosmic waters are found throughout Mandaean literature, where these waters are called by the parallel Mandaic name *hafiqia mia*. *The Canonical PrayerBook*, describes the soul's rescue from the waters as follows:

> I. She [the soul] proceeded in the vesture of Yuzataq-Manda-d-Hiia and went onwards and reached the Waters of Death [*hafiqia mia*]. The waters covered her, (*but*) Radiance [*ziwa*] crossed over — his name abode in his *skinta*: honoured and chosen, he created himself — and said "Life, I am Thine, and for Thy name's sake came I forth from the world of Ptahil, from amongst evil plots and from beneath the throne of Abathur the Ancient, so that we may bring out this soul of N. of this *masiqta* (so that) she cometh before him".
>
> He is a ray of the great radiance of Life, a being who resteth upon the *skintas*, and upon the *skintas* doth his name rest.
>
> He graspeth her [the soul] with the palm of his right hand and handeth her over to two 'uthras, sons of light, to Adatan and Yadatan, of one *gnosis* and one mind.[137]

---

[136] Ibid.
[137] *Canonical PrayerBook*, pp. 45-46.

> II. The soul flieth and travelleth on until she reacheth spirits of Purgatory [*mataraiia*]. The sprits of Purgatory abased their heads and the soul passed the purgatory-spirits by. The soul flieth and goeth until she came to the waters of death [*hafiqia mia*] there came forth towards her a great beam of radiance (and) of life, (who) grasped her by the palm of her right hand and brought her over the waters of death [*hafiqia mia*]. The soul flieth and goeth until she reacheth the House of Life.[138]

The Mandaean motif of the cosmic waters must be seen within the broader context of late antique cosmological traditions. Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic sources all depict heavenly water. Some of these sources also emphasize that the ascending soul or individual will encounter this water during the heavenly journey. The image of heavenly water appears in Justin's *Book of Baruch* (Hippolytus, *Haer.* 5.26 and 5:27.3) and the Nag Hammadi treatise *Melchizedek* (CG IX 8:1).[139] The most detailed Gnostic description of heavenly water is in the treatise *Zostrianos* (CG VIII 18-5-9), which mentions the presence of water at the end of the ecstatic ascent: "The great male invisible perfect Mind, the perfect Protophanes has his own water, as you [will see] when you arrive at his place." This text is also significant insofar as it links this water with a specific being, just as Mandaean sources link the cosmic waters with Abathur.

The view that one encounters water in heaven was common in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature. For example, the *Testament of Levi* 2:7 declares: "And I entered from the first heaven and saw a huge sea hanging there"; the *Testament of Abraham* 8 states: "And Michael went out and took Abraham in the body on a cloud and lifted him up to the river Ocean"; while *2 Enoch* 3:3 states: "They placed me on the first heaven and showed me a very great sea, greater than the earthly sea."[140]

While these passages merely mention the existence of heavenly water, Rev. 22:1 likens the heavenly water to crystal: "he showed me a river of living water as clear as crystal proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb," and Rev. 4:6 describes "a sea of

---

[138] Ibid., pp. 62-63.

[139] G. Stroumsa discusses these traditions in "Aher: A Gnostic," in The *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, Vol. II, ed. Bentley Layton, Leiden, 1981, p. 817.

[140] See Christopher Rowland's discussion of these traditions and their possible relationship with R. Akiba's warning in "The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 10, 1979, pp. 147-149 and *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity*, New York, 1982, pp. 225ff.

glass like unto crystal".[141] Christopher Rowland has traced the apocalyptic identification of heavenly water with crystal to the combination of biblical verses such as Ez. 1:22, where the firmament between God and the *hayyot* is likened to crystal and Gen. 1:7, where the upper and lower waters in heaven are separated by a firmament. As Rowland writes: "Indeed the link between the water and the firmament here [in Gen. 1:7] could explain the resemblance of the sea in Rev. 4 to crystal, for the juxtaposition of water and the firmament in Gen. could easily have led to the comparison of the firmament to crystal found in Ez. 1, 22."[142]

The link between heavenly water and some kind of solid substance (crystal or glass) recalls a famous passage from the Babylonian Talmud known as Rabbi Akiba's "Water Warning". In the same section of the Talmud where Aher's disastrous encounter with Metatron appears we find the following warning:

> "When you arrive at the stones of pure marble, do not say 'Water, Water' for it is said, 'The speaker of lies shall not be established before my eyes.'" (Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 14b)

In addition to the Babylonian Talmud, the water episode appears in several places in the Hekhalot literature, including Synopse §§259, 345, 408-410, and 672.[143] Unlike the talmudic account, all but

---

[141] Actually, the "sea of glass like unto crystal" in Rev. 4:6 is not really water at all, but a "crystal like" substance. Rev. 15:2 also refers to a "sea of glass" but omits the reference to crystal.

[142] "The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature," p. 148.

[143] The relationship between the talmudic and Hekhalot versions of the episode has been discussed by numerous scholars, including Gershom Scholem, who writes in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 53, that "Nothing could be more farfetched than to treat it [one of the Hekhalot versions] as a *post festum* interpretation of the Talmudic passage."; Ephraim Urbach, "Ha-Mesorot 'al Torat-ha-Sod be-Tequfat ha-Tannaim," p. 16, who counters that the Hekhalot passages are "nothing but an adaptation" of the Talmudic account; Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, p. 88, who argues that the Hekhalot sources preserve the tradition more extensively and originally than the Talmud; Peter Schäfer, *Hekhalot-Studien*, pp. 244-245, who postulates that the Hekhalot versions of the water episode represent an independent tradition vis-à-vis the Babylonian Talmud and, furthermore, argues that the water episode originally existed outside of the *pardes* tradition and was only combined with it after the *pardes* story had been recast as an ascent; and David Halperin, who, in *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature*, p. 88, follows Urbach in declaring the Hekhalot accounts "later efforts to interpret BT's cryptic narrative." Halperin changes his view in The *Faces of the Chariot*, however, where he concludes that the earliest form of the tradition is *Synopse* §259, which does not link the illusion of the water with the marble stones or the *pardes*. Furthermore, on p. 210, Halperin declares that "Precisely because text I [i.e. *Synopse* §259] gives no hint that it is directly linked to BT Hag. 14b, we can use it with some confidence as an independent witness to the ideas underlying that source. It is surely, as Scholem says,

one[144] of the Hekhalot passages locate the water at the sixth palace (*hekhal*) and several threaten decapitation or mutilation by "iron axes" to those foolish enough to mistake the "stones of pure marble" for water.[145] What follows are two examples from the Hekhalot literature:

I. Synopse §259

> The guardians of the gate of the sixth palace [*hekhal*] throw and hurl upon him thousands and thousands of waves of water. Yet there is not a single drop there. If he should say, "What is the nature of these waters?" they run after him and stone him. They say to him, "Empty one, perhaps you are from the seed of those who kissed the calf, and you are not worthy to see the king and his throne?" If this is true, a heavenly voice goes forth from Arabot Raqia: "Well you have spoken! He is from the seed of those who kissed the calf, and is not worthy to see the king and his throne."[146] He does not move from there before they throw upon him thousands and thousands of iron axes.[147]

II. Synopse §409

> This is to be a sign for generations, that one must not err at the gate of the sixth palace and see the splendor of the air [*ziw awir*] of the stones and ask, and say, "They are water." Thus he will bring himself into danger. For even if he is not worthy to see the king in his beauty, one should not ask concerning the air of the splendor of the stones of pure marble which were built into the palace, [for then] they do not destroy him, but judge him to the scale of merit [*kaf zehut*], saying, "He is not worthy to see the king in his beauty, [but] how did he enter into the six palaces?"[148]

These Hekhalot passages recall certain important features of the Mandaean traditions concerning heavenly water. First of all, this

---

no '*post festum* interpretation of the Talmudic passage.'" See also, Joseph Dan, "The Entrance to the Sixth Gate," in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6, 1-2, Jerusalem, 1987, pp. 197-220 (Hebrew). The most extensive and best review of scholarship on the water episode is R. Reichman, "Die 'Wasser-Episode' in der *Hekhalot*-Literature," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 16, 1989, pp. 67-100.

[144] Like the talmudic account, *Synopse* §672 does not mention the sixth hekhal. As Peter Schäfer, *Hekhalot-Studien*, p. 244, has already noted, however, *Synopse* §672, "obviously cites the version from the Babylonian Talmud."

[145] *Synopse* §§408 and 410 mention mutilation of the head and decapitation by iron axes, respectively. *Synopse* §259 declares that "they throw upon him thousands and thousands of iron axes." *Synopse* §§409 and 345 are more vague.

[146] MS New York 8128 adds, "in his beauty."

[147] Schäfer §259. Translation based primarily on MS Oxford 1531. This passage also appears in Wertheimer's edition of Hekhalot Rabbati as Chapter 26:2.

[148] Translation based primarily on MS Oxford.

water is located toward the end of a heavenly journey, after the ascending individual has already passed through a series of *mattarta* ("watchhouses") or *hekhalot* ("palaces"), respectively. The encounter with the cosmic water is fraught with danger in both Mandaean and Hekhalot sources. The water functions as a final obstacle before the individual can enter the divine abode (the House of Life or seventh hekhal). The literary proximity of the water warning to the Aher/Metatron encounter suggests that the two passages may be read together and that the illusion of water is located near Metatron, just as the water is located above the throne of Abathur in Mandaean sources. Finally, the version in §409 links the heavenly water with a scene of weighing and judgement ("judge him to the scale of merit"), precisely the cluster of motifs in the Mandaean texts, where Abathur weighs the soul to determine whether it is worthy to cross the waters and enter the world of light.

There is, however, an extremely significant difference between the Merkabah and Mandaean traditions. According to the latter, the water at the end of the heavenly journey is real, whereas the former emphasize that the water is not real but an illusion. Indeed, the ability to recognize the illusory waters for what they really are, e. g. the "stones of pure marble," is the only way to avoid being ignominiously dispatched by the angelic guardians. The water episode may be read as a warning against those who expect to see water at the end of a heavenly journey. Since the motif of heavenly water appears in Mandaean, Gnostic, and Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature, the Talmudic and Hekhalot traditions may even have a polemical orientation. Unlike the adherents of these other traditions, who believe in the existence of heavenly water before the divine abode, the truly enlightened Merkabah mystic knows that what others think is water is actually stone (or the "air of the splendor of the stones of pure marble"). In their minds, this special knowledge elevates the adherents of Merkabah mysticism above those of other late antique ascent traditions.

The possibility that the "Water Warning" may have functioned as a polemic against Mandaean cosmological beliefs gains support from two other details in the Hekhalot versions of the episode. None of the Hekhalot sources, except for §672, which parallels the Talmudic account, limit their description to the stones of pure marble. Instead, they describe the explicit cause of the illusion produced by the stones as either the "air of splendor" (*awir ziw*) or "splendor of air" (*ziw awir*) of the stones. David Halperin has argued that these expressions

"are best explained as based on a mistaken reading of *me'or ziw*" which appears in MS New York's version of §408 instead of *awir ziw*.[149]

I would like to suggest that the significance of the phrases *ziw awir* and *awir ziw* may be illuminated by yet another Mandaean cosmological tradition. In a number of Mandaean accounts, a divine being called Radiance or *ziwa* leads the soul over the *hafiqia mia* to the World of Light:

> **I.** The soul flieth and goeth until she came to the waters of death [*hafiqia mia*] there came forth towards her a great beam of radiance [*ziwa*] (and) of life, (*who*) grasped her by the palm of her right hand and brought her over the waters of death [*hafiqia mia*].[150]
>
> **II.** The waters covered her, (but) Radiance [*ziwa*] crossed over - his name abode in his *shkinta*: honoured and chosen, he created himself ..... He is a ray [*surik*] of the great radiance [*ziwa*] of Life, a being who resteth upon the *shkintas*, and upon the *shkintas* doth his name rest. He graspeth her [the soul] with the palm of his right hand and handeth her over to two 'uthras, sons of light, to Adatan and Yadatan, of one *gnosis* and one mind.[151]

Other Mandaean passages describe a substance called the *ayar ziwa* or "air of splendor" which surrounds the world and is personified as a divine being. As Drower writes:

> Ayar-Ziwa. "Ether-Brilliance" or "radiant ether"..... With the Mandaeans this rare and purer atmosphere is represented as interpenetrating the thick air round the earth, and giving it vital qualities..... This Ether is personified, and is sometimes mentioned as a source of life.[152]

The personification of the air or ether appears in numerous Mandaean texts including *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, which describes part of the initiation ritual for the *tarmida* or low ranking Mandaean priest and refers frequently to the hymns or

---

[149] *Faces of the Chariot*, p. 206.
[150] *Canonical PrayerBook*, p. 63.
[151] Ibid., pp. 45-46.
[152] E. S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, p. 58. Also see J. J. Buckley, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 12 and elsewhere

liturgical poems found in *The Canonical Prayerbook.* One passage from this priestly text combines radiance, ether/air, and water in a way reminiscient of the Merkabah accounts: "There is radiance, and there is radiance and light and there is Ether in them; it dwelt and was divided into flows of water and streams without end."[153] This passage supports the general Mandaean view that water and light are intimately connected, as Drower writes: "Water, which reflects the light, is considered a form of light. . . The conception that the firmament is filled with a fluid light and that water is a grosser form of it appears in the doctrine of the planetary boats."[154]

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

The chief problem for the Jewish texts is that water, radiance, and air might be combined at the end of the heavenly ascent. This is precisely the combination which appears in Mandaean traditions. The Jewish sources argue that only an illusion of water exists and

---

[153] *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 49.

[154] *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, p. 100. Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley, "Libertines or Not: Fruit, Bread, Semen and Other Body Fluids in Gnosticism," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2, 1994, p. 25, writes, "riverwater is the way in which the Lightworld manifests itself on earth."

that this illusion and the "air radiance" are both linked to the stones of the hekhal, i. e., the chief cosmological structure of their own tradition. The polemical focus of the episode may even include the warning not to say "water, water" or "they are water" for in a number of Mandaean rituals, the individual makes statements concerning water, including the following from the priestly initiation: "And when he says, 'Bound is the sea,' (CP 15), seven walls of iron surround him, those that enclose Haiasum, the First Kusta..... For Haiasum Kusta is the soul that comes and settles on his head and surrounds herself with seven walls of the white waters."[155] Here we find an explicit declaration concerning the waters which causes seven walls of iron to surround the individual in a protective fashion (in another text, Abathur is called "hard iron that is strong").[156] In the Hekhalot text, by contrast, the declaration concerning water causes axes of iron to kill the individual.

A final element of the Hekhalot versions of the "Water Warning" which may suggest a polemical context is the condemnation: "He is from the seed of those who kissed the calf," applied to the individual who mistakes the stones for water. According to a number of rabbinic sources, the golden calf was either created by the "mixed multitude" which left Egypt with the Israelites, as cited in Ex. 12:38 and Numbers 11:4,[157] or by Egyptian magicians.[158] Thus in Song Raba 1:9, Rabbi Judan quotes in the name of Rabbi Aha: "The Egyptian magicians performed sorceries, and it [the calf] appeared to leap before them [the Israelites]."

Although the condemnation may refer to heretics in general, the formulation may also hint at a more specific focus. In a number of legends, the Mandaeans link their ancestors with the Egyptians (though they also claim ties to Judaism) and mention that "Musa was against the Mandai and had quarelled with them in Egypt."[159] The

---

[155] *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, pp. 4-5. The phrase "Bound is the sea," comes from *The Canonical Prayerbook* 15, p. 11.

[156] E. S. Drower, *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, p. 171.

[157] See Louis Ginzburg, *Legends of the Jews*, Vol. 6, 1942-47, p. 52, n. 267, for a list of the rabbinic passages concerning these verses.

[158] For information on the golden calf in post biblical literature, see Levy Smolar and Moshe Aberbach, "The Golden Calf Episode in Postbiblical Literature, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 39, 1968, pp. 91-116. On p. 113, n. 27, the authors provide a list of the rabbinic passages which describe the Egyptian magicians or "mixed multitude" as creating the golden calf, including BT Shabbat 89a, Exod. Rabbah XLI:7, etc.

[159] *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, pp. 259-265, esp. 261. Also see, E.S. Drower, *The Secret Adam*, p. xv.

same tradition declares that the Mandaeans "went out of Egypt and came to the sea which became shut off, leaving a road with mountains of sea on either side." Indeed, Drower has written that "Yearly, a ritual meal is eaten in memory of the Egyptian hosts who perished in the waters when following the wicked Jews."[160] The Mandaeans describe the events at Sinai as a deplorable event, involving the creation of a wretched people, whose prophet, Moses, served the earthly rulers Ruha and Adonai, not the true God.[161] It should be pointed out that these traditions appear in oral form and in Mandaean folk ritual and were recorded by Drower during the twentieth century. Whether or not they existed in the pre or early Islamic period is open to conjecture.

The Jewish tradition portraying the Egyptians or mixed multitude as the makers of the golden calf combined with the Mandaean identification with the Egyptians, denigration of the revelation at Sinai, and general hostility to Judaism may have inspired a Jewish polemic which identified the Mandaeans as the mixed multitude who left Egypt with the Israelites and therefore as the makers of the golden calf. Unfortunately, we do not know enough about the forms of Jewish polemics in Late Antiquity nor do we know to which groups the various "minim" (the most common rabbinic term for heretics) belonged. It is possible that among the heretics condemned in rabbinic literature were the Mandaeans and that the "Water Warning," is directed against those Jews who were attracted to Mandaean cosmological beliefs.

The motif of heavenly water appears in Jewish apocalyptic sources but its adoption by Christian apocalyptic circles, Gnosticism, and Mandaeism may have encouraged the authors of the Merkabah texts to reject it. Were it known to the authors of the Talmud or the Hekhalot passages, the Mandaean formulation of the heavenly waters would have been particularly disturbing because of its many close parallels with the Merkabah tradition. As the "proximate Other" in terms of cosmological motifs, language (Mandaic and the Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud are very similar), and geographical location (Mandaeans and Jews lived in close proximity in Babylonia) the Mandaeans would have posed a particular challenge to any Babylonian Jews involved in Merkabah mysticism.

---

[160] *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, p. 10.
[161] *Gnosis: A Selection of Texts*, p. 296, n. 1.

Mandaeans themselves were hardly shy in their attacks on Judaism. For example, the Mandaean term for Jews, *iahutaiia*, was understood as a pun which connected Jews with "abortion" or "miscarriage" and "sin."[162] Yet the Mandaeans also understood their religion as originally linked to Judaism. Thus, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship* depicts Judaism as the stage prior to Mandaeism, which must be cast off by the individual: "The first, outer casting off (is) when he leaves from the isolation (or: 'ban') of the Jews to be clothed with mandaeism [here understood as Mandaean lay status and therefore Buckley puts it in lower case]. The second casting off is the casting off of mandaeism [lay status] to be clothed in priestly status (*tarmiduta*)."[163] Mandaean polemics thus depict Judaism as a stage prior to Mandaeism; a kind of unformed or undeveloped tradition, i.e. an "abortion".

The "Water Warning," may thus be understood as a very sophisticated polemic against a heretical belief in heavenly water, perhaps specifically focusing on Mandaean beliefs. Instead of denying the existence of such water outright, the Jewish sources acknowledge that something which looks like water does exist at the end of the heavenly journey but only those "from the seed of those who kissed the calf" (i.e. heretics) mistakenly take the illusion to be reality. Those who are in the know, however, realize that the appearance of water is actually produced by the stones of the heavenly palace.

---

[162] *A Mandaic Dictionary*, p. 184b; *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 42, n. 298.
[163] Ibid., p. 42.

CHAPTER SIX

SABAOTH'S REHABILITATION

A figure named Sabaoth appears in a number of Gnostic works from the Nag Hammadi library and in the writings of the early Christian heresiologists. In this chapter, I will focus on his role in the Gnostic documents known as the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (HypArch)[1] and *On the Origin of the World* (OnOrgWld).[2] It seems probable that HypArch, like its neighbors in the Nag Hammadi library, was originally written in Greek and then translated into Coptic.[3] Although widely discussed, the provenance and date of the document are still debated. Nevertheless, the date of the traditions must be prior to the fourth century date of the codex. A great deal of scholarship has been produced on HypArch, in the form of critical editions, general studies, and highly specialized articles.

Like HypArch, OnOrgWld was probably composed in Greek and translated into Coptic. Its date and provenance are similarly unfixed,

---

[1] CG II,4. Also called *The Nature of the Archons*. The Coptic title of the work is given at the end of the codex as *t-thupostasis n n-arkhon*, which clearly reflects its Greek origin.

[2] CG II, 5. Formerly known as the *Untitled Text*.

[3] On this issue, cf. P. Nagel, *Das Wesen der Archonten (Wissenschaftliche Beiträge der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, Halle*, 1970, pp. 16ff. On the possibility of Egypt as the provenance for the text, cf. H.-C. Puech, "Les nouveaux écrits gnostiques découvertes en Haute-Égypte," in *Coptic Studies in Honor of Walter Ewing Crum*, Boston, 1950, p. 122. Roger Bullard, "Introduction," to *Nag Hammadi Codex* II, 2-7, Vol. One, ed. Bentley Latyon, in *Nag Hammadi Studies*, XX, eds. Martin Krause, James Robinson, Frederik Wisse, Leiden, 1989, p. 221, notes that an Egyptian provenance "is no more than tentative because of the sparsity of supporting evidence." Hans-Martin Schenke has included HypArch in his hypothetical corpus of 'Sethian' documents, cf. "Das sethianische System nach Nag-Hammadi-Handscriften," in *Studia Coptica (Berliner byzantische Arbeiten* 45), ed. P. Nagel, Berlin, 1974 and "The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, II; a Sethian provenance has also been suggested by Layton, "The Hypostasis of the Archons or 'The Reality of the Rulers'," *Harvard Theological Review* 67, 1974, pp. 371-372. R.A. Bullard, *The Hypostasis of the Archons (Patristische Texte und Studien* 10), Berlin, 1970, p. 115, argues for an Ophite origin for the first part of the text, and a heavy Valentinian influence on the second part; in his "Introduction," to *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2-7, Vol. I, p. 224, however, Bullard suggests that any identification of the text with a specific Gnostic sect "must be accompanied by a healthy skepticism about the usefulness of these sectarian names as employed by the orthodox heresiologists." This view is shared by Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth*, p. 5.

though not for lack of speculation.[4] While not as extensively studied as its literary cousin, OnOrgWld has nevertheless inspired a variety of scholary works. Two of the most pressing questions concerning these documents is their relationship to one another, and their relationship to Christianity and Judaism, respectively. It is now generally accepted that a direct literary relationship between HypArch and OnOrgWld should be rejected. Instead, the two documents appear to have reworked a common set of earlier traditions. By contrast, the relationship of the two texts to Christianity and Judaism remains highly contested.

According to Bentley Layton, HypArch is an "apocalyptic Christian *vaticinium ex eventu*, a Christian gnostic rewriting of Genesis and the Prophets."[5] Elaine Pagels emphasizes the influence of Paul's writings on HypArch, suggesting that the text "mythically elaborates Paul's own exegesis".[6] Bullard argues that the audience was a Christian Gnostic community which accepted the authority of Paul and had a wide ranging knowledge of both Old and New Testament material.[7] The view that the Christian elements are an integral part of HypArch is not universally accepted. Most recently, Bernard Barc has suggested that the text's explicitly Christian features reflect the attempt of a hypothetical redactor to Christianize originally non-

---

[4] A. Böhlig and P. Labib, *Die koptisch-gnostische Schrift ohne Titel aus Codex II von Nag Hammadi*, Berlin, 1962, pp. 31ff., suggests Egypt as the sight of composition. H.-M. Schenke, "Vom Ursprung de Welt: Eine titellose gnostische Abhandlung aus dem Funde von Nag Hammadi," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 84, 1959, p. 246 and Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spaetantiker Geist*, I, pp. 380, n. 1 and 383, have argued that OnOrgWld is a Barbelognostic document. Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth*, p. 6 has refrained from assigning the text to a particular Gnostic sect until the sects, themselves, are better defined, although Fallon does argue for Valentianian influence on the text, pp. 104-116, noting, however, on p. 116, that the author "has not been bound by Valentinianism but developed further beyond it."

[5] "The Hypostasis of the Archons," p. 364. Layton also writes, "the story might be considered to be non-Christian. But of course such a view would be wrong."

[6] E. Pagels, "Genesis Creation Acccounts from Nag Hammadi," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*, p. 266. On 276-277, Pagels stresses the use of specifically Pauline terminology and technical vocabulary.

[7] Bullard, "Introduction," *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2-7, Vol. One, p. 222. In *Hypostasis of the Archons*, pp. 114-115, Bullard seems to imply that the Chrisian influence is primarily redactional, when he writes that "The editor of the document was Christian Gnostic, and is responsible for what Christian influence can be seen in the writing." Another view on the relationship of HypArch with Christian traditions is provided by J. Magne in "L'exaltation de Sabaoth dans l'Hypostase des Archontes 143, 1-31 et l'exaltation de Jésus dans *Philippiens* 2,6-11 ou la naissance de Jésus-Christ," Cahiers du Cercle Ernest Renan 83, 1973 and Bernard Barc, *L'Hypostase des Archontes: Traité gnostique sur l'origine de l'homme du monde et des archontes (Bibliotèque Copte de Nag Hammadi* 5), ed. J.-E. Ménard, Québec/Louvain, 1980, p. 41.

Christian material.[8]

Although they stress the importance of Christian influences on HypArch, both Layton and Pagels acknowledge that the text exhibits a "deep dependence" on Jewish sources and exegetical traditions. In the case of OnOrgWld, Francis Fallon proposes that apparently Christian features (such as the role of Jesus Christ) reflect Valentinian rather than orthodox Christian influence.[9] Hans Bethge notes that Jewish, rather than Christian, influence is a "dominant and especially characteristic element in *OnOrgWld*".[10] Birger Pearson has eloquently articulated the view that HypArch and OnOrgWld represent a Gnostic midrash on the early chapters of Genesis. Finally, a growing body of scholarly literature emphasizes the influence of Jewish apocalyptic traditions on HypArch and OnOrgWld and the many parallels between the Gnostic documents and Merkabah mysticism.[11]

Like Metatron, Sabaoth is a complex figure who, as Francis Fallon has noted: "arises from the conflation of three figures: those of the God of the OT, the leading angels, and the apocalyptic visionary."[12] Both HypArch and OnOrgWld depict Sabaoth as the repentant son of Ialdabaoth, the Demiurge. Although Sabaoth and Ialdabaoth are juxtaposed in these documents, other sources blur the boundaries between the two figures. Structurally, the rehabilitated Demiurge of Valentinianism and the repentant figure of Sabaoth in HypArch and OnOrgWld greatly resemble one another. In both cases, the biblical God is transformed from a negative figure into a vice regent for the higher God, once he acknowledges the latter's authority.

The ability of a figure called Sabaoth and/or Ialdabaoth to function as a vice regent of the higher God and an opponent of the Devil is attested in a number of places.[13] According to Epiphanius,

---

[8] Barc, *L'Hypostase des Archontes*, pp. 1-48. Pagels, "Genesis Creation Accounts," p. 266, discusses this approach.

[9] *The Enthronement of Sabaoth*, pp. 107ff.

[10] "Introduction," *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2-7, Vol. Two, p. 14.

[11] I. Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, Frankfurt am Main, 1988, pp. 198ff; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven, 1988, p. 124; Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, p. 516; Michael Fishbane, "The 'Measures' of God's Glory in the Ancient Midrash," pp. 66-68; N. Séd, "Les Douze Hebdomades, Le Char de Sabaoth et Les Soixante-Douze Langues," *Novum Testamentum* 21, 1979, esp. 182ff.

[12] Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth*, p. 34.

[13] Ibid., pp. 83-87. For example, in Valentinian sources, the Demiurge, himself, rules the psychic class (those who have free choice and can either be saved or damned), which is composed of both Jews and orthodox Christians. Furthermore, the Demiurge is not evil, as in HypArch and OnOrgWld, but ignorant, and appears willing to genuininely repent. Like Sabaoth, he is portrayed as an intermediary being, between the truly good pleromatic entities and his son, the Cosmocrator or

the Archontics considered the Demiurge — whom they called Sabaoth rather than Ialdabaoth — to be the God of the Jews, while they depicted the Devil as his son and opponent:

> And Sabaoth, they say, is the God of the Jews, and the Devil is an evil son of his; and, being from earth, he opposes his own father. And his father is not like him, nor again is he the Incomprehensible God whom they call the Father[14]

The actual identification of Sabaoth and Ialdabaoth is reflected in the doctrine of Severus, who portrays a figure known as both Sabaoth and Ialdabaoth as an intermediary ruler between the true God and the Devil:

> There is, in an unnamed highest heaven and aeon, a good God. The Devil, he says, is the son of the great ruler over the host of the powers, whom he now names, Jaldabaoth, now Sabaoth. This one who was born from him is a serpent. He was cast down by the power above to the earth[15]

As Fossum notes: "According to both the Archontics and Severus, it is the devil, and not Sabaoth, who is responsible for the evils in the world..... Sabaoth, the chief of the demiurgic powers and the ruler in the seventh heaven, has retained his basic position as God's viceregent".[16]

Following his repentence, Sabaoth is "caught up" by Sophia and Zoe in HypArch 95:19ff. The ascension of Sabaoth reflects the apocalyptic tradition of the ascent of the seer. As we have seen, this theme also appears in *3 Enoch*. Although Enoch is not described as repentant, he is chosen for his apotheosis because he is the only righteous individual among a generation of sinners, just as Sabaoth is the only righteous archon. After he ascends, Sabaoth is installed as the ruler of the seventh heaven, which is described as "below the veil between above and below." (HypArch 95:20-21). The existence of a heavenly veil which separates the abode of God from the world is linked to the biblical tradition of the veil in the desert shrine (Ex. 26:33) and the Holy of Holies in the Temple (2 Chr. 3:14). In later Judaism, this veil was transferred to heaven, where it was called the *viylon*, the *pargod*, or the *paroket*. The influence of these Jewish

---

Devil, who rules the hylic/choic class (those destined for destruction).

[14] *Pan.* XL.v.1f. This and the following citation are from Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 303.

[15] *Pan.* XLV.1.3ff. It should be noted that the figure identified as a "serpent" is "cast down" like Ialdabaoth in HypArch and OnOrgWld.

[16] *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 303.

traditions on the veil in HypArch (*katapetasma*) and OnOrgWld (*parapestasma*), has been carefully examined by a number of scholars.[17]

Like Sabaoth, Metatron is installed below the cosmic veil in *3 Enoch* 10. Both the Gnostic and Jewish sources inherited the earlier Jewish apocalyptic tradition of a figure enthroned at the entrance of God's dwelling place. Upon his enthronement in the seventh heaven, Sabaoth receives the divine name "God of the forces," which parallels the ascension, enthronement (at the entrace of the seventh hekhal), and re-naming of Metatron as the "lesser YHWH" in *3 Enoch.*

In many respects, the tale of Sabaoth in OnOrgWld resembles the version in HypArch. Nevertheless, there are significant differences between the two accounts. The first feature I will examine follows the repentance of Sabaoth: "Then Pistis Sophia stretched forth her finger, and she poured forth upon him [Sabaoth] light from her light".[18] A close parallel to this tradition appears in *3 Enoch* 13, where Metatron declares: "Out of the abundant love and great compassion wherewith the Holy One, blessed be He, loved and cherished me more than all the denizens of the heights, he wrote with his finger, as with a pen of flame, upon the crown which was on my head."[19] Although the description in OnOrgWld is more terse, the basic scenario is the same — a divine being stretches forth a finger and pours light on a vice regent figure in what appears to be a kind of annointing.

---

[17] Although problematic in places, the most thorough discussion of the cosmic veil in Gnostic and Jewish sources is in O. Hofius, "Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes," *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 14, Tübingen, 1972. The relationship between the veil in HypArch and OnOrgWld and the veil in Jewish literature is also discussed by Fallon, *Enthronement of Sabaoth*, p. 55; Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, pp. 211-217; Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," p. 236. In *Kabbalah*, p. 18, Scholem notes that "In another form, this concept of the *pargod* (i.e. to separate the ministering angels from God) was taken over by second century non-Jewish Gnostics." Fishbane, "The 'Measures' of God's Glory in the Ancient Midrash," p. 61, discusses the signficance of the *viylon* in a Jewish text (*Sifre* 355) which exhibits other parallels with Gnostic sources.

[18] OnOrgWld 104:3-5. Fallon, op. cit., pp. 94-95, notes that the motif of the outstretched finger occurs in two passages from interestamental literature, Jub. 25:11 and 1QS 11:2, and writes that "Again we have a small motif drawn from intertestamental Judaism, apocalyptic Judaism, rather than the OT or NT. On the other hand, while the finger of God is also referred to in both the OT and the NT, there is never an emission coming from it."

[19] Metatron is basically transformed into a Light-Man, such as Michael in *TestAbr* 7 (Rec. A). Fallon, *Enthronement of Sabaoth*, pp. 91-94, notes the parallel between the intertestamental Jewish tradition of the Light-Man and the "Man and his light" (a separate figure from Sabaoth) in OnOrgWld 104:2-3.

The next set of features involves the ascension and enthronement of Sabaoth. After Sabaoth is snatched up to the seventh heaven, Pistis Sophia establishes a kingdom for him above the twelve gods of Chaos (OnOrgWld 104:23-26). Sabaoth fashions a dwelling place and a throne-chariot called Cherubin, whose "forms (*morphai*) amount to sixty four forms and seven archangels who stand before him. It is he who is the eighth, since he has authority. All the forms amount to seventy two for from this chariot the seventy two gods received a pattern. They received a pattern to rule the seventy two languages of the nations." (OnOrgWld104:31-105-16) This section has many parallels with Merkabah material and specifically with the depiction of Metatron in *3 Enoch*. Thus, in chapter 3, Metatron declares: "I have seventy names, corresponding to the seventy nations [or "tongues"] of the world," while chapter 17 mentions "seventy two princes of the kingdoms in the height, corresponding to the seventy two nations of the world." Both Sabaoth and Metatron are clearly being invested with the authority of God's vice regent.

The creation of angels in OnOrgWld (105:16-106:3) differs from the account in HypArch in a number of ways, but one is particularly relevant. OnOrgWld depicts Sabaoth as creating "a congregation [*ekklesia*] of angels, thousands and myriads". This detail almost certainly reflects the influence of Daniel 7, where the Ancient of Days is depicted in like language.[20] As we have seen, Merkabah sources also employed imagery from Daniel 7 to characterize the vice regent figures Metatron and Akatriel. Like these Jewish angelic vice regents, Sabaoth is therefore depicted as the Ancient of Days from Daniel 7:9-10 — an enthroned judge surrounded by thousands and myriads of angels.

I have thus far concentrated on the parallels between Sabaoth and Metatron, but there are also significant parallels between Abathur and Sabaoth. Both Abathur and Sabaoth are depicted as judges enthroned at the entrance of the World of Light. Each figure is intimately related to the actual demiurge of the world, either as his father or his son. Furthermore, both Abathur and Sabaoth are depicted as creators in their own right: Abathur creates Ptahil and Sabaoth creates a host of angelic beings. Indeed, if we accept the

---

[20] As noted by Fallon, *Enthronement of Sabaoth*, p. 106. Cf. *1 Enoch* 14:22; 60:1; 71:8; Rev. 5:11.

link between the name Abathur and the title "father [*aba*] of the uthras," there is a precise analogy with Sabaoth since the original form of the name Sabaoth was *yahwe seba'ot* or *du yahwe seba'ot*, meaning "he who creates the [heavenly] hosts".[21] The parallel I would like to focus on, however, is that both Abathur and Sabaoth are portrayed as rehabilitated figures.

In a number of ways, the Mandaean figures Yoshamin, Abathur, and Ptahil resemble the fallen angels of *I Enoch* 6-11.[22] The connection between the Mandaean uthras and the fallen angels is primarily, but not solely, based on their common fall from grace following an act of rebellion. Another important but less obvious parallel between the two sets of figures is that both are related to the image of a polluted priesthood. We have already seen that Yoshamin, Abathur, and Ptahil were characterized as heavenly priests who corrupted themselves by rebelling against the Great Life. A number of scholars have argued that the fall of the angels in *I Enoch* 6-16 should be interpreted as a mythically formulated attack on the polluted or fallen priests in Jerusalem.[23] On a mythical level, therefore, the fallen angels symbolize the fallen priests.

David Suter has suggested further that the chief sin of the fallen angels was their improper sexual union with human women.[24] The emphasis on the sexual nature of the angels' sin mirrors the extreme concern for the sexual purity (and contemporary pollution) of the human priesthood. It is unclear to what degree the fall of light beings such as Yoshamin, Abathur, and Ptahil is linked to the issues of sexual purity and pollution. In general, however, these issues are extremely important in Mandaean mythology and ritual.[25] For

---

[21] See Frank Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, pp. 69-70.

[22] Carl Kraeling, "The Mandaic God Ptahil," p. 156, has written that Ptahil, "approximates, at his worst, only the fallen angels or the revolting Lucifer, and not the demiurgic archons of Manicheism."

[23] See George Nickelsburg, "Enoch, Levi, and Peter: Recipients of Revelation in Upper Galilee," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100, 1981, pp. 586-587; David Suter, "Fallen Angel, Fallen Priest: The Problem of Family Purity in 1 Enoch 6-16," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 50, 1979. On the mythical character of *I Enoch* 6-16 and its affinities with Greek and ancient Near Eastern traditions, cf. Paul Hanson, "Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6-11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96, 1977.

[24] P. S. Alexander, "The Targumim and Early Exegesis of 'Sons of God' in Genesis 6," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 23, 1972, p. 60, writes "I Enoch 6-11 is an elaborate midrash of Gen 6:1-4 [where the "sons of god" intermarry with the "daughters of men"]."

[25] The "rehabilitated" Abathur, however, is portrayed as encouraging John the Baptist to "take a wife" and start a family.

example, in the *Ginza* the light being Hibil Ziwa (who is sometimes identified with Abathur), descends to the World of Darkness.[26] Pretending to be one of the demons, Hibil so impresses Ruha's mother Qin, that she gives him her other daughter, Zahariel, in marriage. Hibil Ziwa, however, is extremely careful not to consummate the marriage with Zahariel, presumably because he wants to avoid sexual pollution.[27] The importance of sexual purity for heavenly priests is also emphasized in the depictions of Sislam Raba as the archetype of the proper bridegroom and priest.[28]

The requirement of sexual purity for angelic priests is mirrored by the strict sexual regulation of human priests in Mandaeism. Thus, a priest must come from a priestly family, he cannot be the son of a woman guilty of adultery, nor the son by a second marriage of a widow. Furthermore, he cannot be physically blemished, circumcised, impotent or a eunuch. He must marry and his wife must come from a priestly family, be a virgin at the time of marriage, and neither she nor the instructor's wife can be menstruating during the period of priestly ordination.[29]

The key difference between the fallen uthra priests in Mandaeism and the fallen angelic priests in *1 Enoch* 6-16 is that the fallen uthras

---

[26] *Ginza*, pp. 150-173. This account is discussed by J. J. Buckley, "The Rehabil - itation of Spirit Ruha," pp. 61ff.

[27] Elsewhere, however, Ptahil is described as the "son of Hibil Ziwa and Zahariel, is a son of both Darkness of Light." Cf., Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, p. 95, n. 5 and p. 271, where Zahariel "bore him [Hibil Ziwa] a son, Ptahil." Furthermore, the Hibil Ziwa's rejection of Zahariel in this passage should not be taken as an encourgament of sexual asceticism, since in *The Canonical Prayerbook*, pp. 182ff., Hibil Ziwa is credited with the origin of sexual desire (which is portrayed as a positive act): "I [Hibil Ziwa] opened living waters and gave them to the bridal pair of this world to drink. I sowed in them pregnancy and birth and with sexual desire I enflamed them and caused love to dwell in both of them..... They will live and be happy and I, the Messenger Hibil, have performed and arranged that which my Father commanded me. And Life is victorious, and victorious the man who went hence."

[28] See Drower, *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, p. 265, "Sislam-Rba is the archetype of bridegroom and priest. In both capacities he brings *gada* (good fortune, prosperity, divinity). As bridegroom he represents the Divine Creator in its male manifestation at the moment of its union with its female manifestation. . . Hence Sislam's union with his bride 'zlat re-enacts that of the *Aba u'ma* (Father and Mother) and brings prosperity to the community and fecundity to the soil." See also Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandeaan Origins*, pp. 49-50, for a discussion of this issue.

[29] For a list and discussion of these elements, see Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins*, p. 43. *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, p. 197, states that "a eunuch resembleth vessels of earthenware which when broken cannot be made whole." As Liebes, "The Messiah of the *Zohar*," p. 28, notes, the Zohar also deprecates the eunuch as one who lacks a beard and therefore lacks *hadrat panim*, "the glory of the face," as well as the power and voice of a man.

are rehabilitated and the fallen angels are not. Like Abathur and his kin, Sabaoth is rehabilitated in HypArch and OnOrgWld. The rehabilitation of Abathur and Sabaoth is extremely significant, for it allows them to represent God's interests in the sub-pleromatic realm and to function as God's vice regent. It also provides a model or paradigm for human beings to emulate. All human beings are, in effect, fallen figures according to Gnostic and Mandaean doctrine. The rehabilitation of Abathur and Sabaoth therefore signifies the potential for profound transformation, even rehabilitation, of human beings.

The rehabilitation of these fallen figures also represents a step away from a radical dualism between earthly and pleromatic powers, toward a more ambivalent theological position.[30] In her work on the Mandaean figures Ruha and Sitil, J. J. Buckley has repeatedly emphasized that the common scholarly interpretation of Mandaeism as an essentially dualistic phenomenon must be re-evaluated in light of the great importance of intermediate theological figures and categories. Instead of a dualistic view of Mandaeism, Buckley supports a tripartite model. Within this structure, opposing elements are separated *and* mediated by figures and categories that are betwixt and between.

According to Buckley, the focus on dualism has prevented scholars from apprehending the basic ambivalence of figures like Ruha. Although Ruha is frequently portrayed as a negative being of the World of Darkness, she is also described as having a positive, heavenly dimension in Mandaean sources. Furthermore, there is a correspondence between the divine figure Ruha and the anthropological category *ruha*, which signifies the human spirit, an entity which exists between the body and soul, and is a necessary component in the salvation of the individual.[31]

---

[30] See the comments of Jonas in *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, I, p. 341, "what the middle beings were to 'mediate,' was exactly the realization of otherwise merely abstract dualism." and p. 337, n. 2, "The basic thought of atonement for the demiurgic entity — precisely because of his bent towards creation — is of extraordinary (Gnostic) significance." As cited in J. J. Buckley, *Female Fault and Fulfilment*, p. 29; cf., ibid., pp. 14-15, where Buckley describes the figure of Elohim in the Gnostic *Book Baruch* as follows: "A middle and, seemingly, a mediating being, Elohim makes the dualism explicit and tangibly real. He is the cause of the separations, and he is the first to realize the implications of these; his own trapped spirit perfectly parallels his imprisoned life in the upper world."

[31] Concerning the *ruha*, Buckley, *Female Fault and Fulfilment*, p. 21 writes "Situated between body and soul, the spirit, always regarded as female, wavers between good

The key to understanding the ambivalance of Ruha and other Mandaean figures is the concept of the *dmuta* or "ideal (heavenly) counterpart".[32] As Buckley writes:

> The *dmuta* expresses, moreover, the paradoxical fact that entities may show themselves as both good and evil, may possess both higher and lower characteristics. Not only human beings, but also defective Light World beings — Ruha among them — have their upper images in *Msunia Kusta* [a region of the upper or ideal world]. The *dmuta* furnishes a solution to the static, dualistic model: it lends a dynamic feature to Mandaean mythological thought as well as to the anthropological speculation.[33]

Like Ruha, Abathur has a lower incarnation, known as Abathur Muzania (Abathur of the Scales) and an ideal heavenly counterpart or *dmuta*, known as Abathur Rama (Abathur the Lofty). Abathur's split personality mirrors his ambivalent functions within Mandaean mythology. On the one hand, by gazing below the World of Light, Abathur initiates the creation of the physical world, an act which compromises his and the Pleroma's unity. On the other hand, Abathur becomes a vehicle for the re-unification of the World of Light by identifying the perfected souls which may return to their pleromatic homeland. Thus, as both initiator of creation and judge of ascending souls, Abathur is the catalyst for change in both directions. Abathur's liminal, transformative functions are paralleled by his spatial position at the entrance of the World of Light — a location which is equally at the end of the physical world and at the beginning of the Pleroma.

I conclude my discussion with an exploration of the etymology of the name Abathur. The origin of the name Abathur has long puzzled scholars of Mandaean religion. According to Wilhelm Brandt, the name Abathur may be read as a contraction of the words *aba* (Mandaic = father) and *uthra* (Man. = divine being, similar to angel).[34] Thus, *aba d-'utria* ("father of the utras") > Abathur.

Against this explanation some scholars have supported an Iranian etymology.[35] According to this position, the name Abathur is based

---

and evil, between higher and lower instincts..... Ruha and *ruha*, then, both 'betwixt and between,' are situated in the middle, and may tilt either to good or to evil."

[32] *A Mandaic Dictionary*, p. 111.

[33] Ibid., p. 29. Buckley also discusses the *dmuta* in "Two Female Gnostic Revealers," pp. 266-267; "A Rehabilitation of Spirit Ruha," pp. 81-82.

[34] Wilhelm Brandt, *Die Mandäische Religion*, Leipzig, 1889, p. 51.

[35] For discussions of the etymology of the name Abathur, see Mark Lidzbarski,

on the reconstruction Abathur = *aβa (g) tur[a]*, combining the two "Iranian" words *aβa*, "he that has" + *tura*, "balance, scale," meaning "the one with the scale". However, as Svend Pallis has pointed out, the word *tura* does not exist in Iranian, and was only reconstructed by Andreas on the basis of a Sanskrit noun *tula*, "lever, beam," and a verb *tulayati*, "to weigh."[36] In addition, the word *aβa* only appears in Neo-Persian, indicating that the name Abathur would date from 800 C.E., which is extremely unlikely.[37]

In place of the unsatisfying Mandaean and Iranian reconstructions, I would like to propose a new etymology for the name Abathur. Rather than the "father of the uthras" or the "one with the scale," the name Abathur may reflect a combination of the Mandaic words *aba* = "father", and *thur(a)* or *thor(a)* = "bull". Thus, the name Abathur should be read "Father Bull". Although one would expect a final aleph in the Mandaic (and generally Aramaic) word for "bull", the name Abathur may preserve an older Aramaic or North-West Semitic form, *thôr*, which lacks the definate article ending, aleph.[38] In any case, personal names often do not conform to standard morphological patterns. Indeed, even if the form were originally Mandaic, it is possible that the final vowel dropped out, just as it does in the other hypothetical reconstructions we have cited: *Aba dUtrê* > Abathur and *aβa (g) tur[a]*, > Abathur. In addition to this linguistic argument, there is an intriguing matrix of associations between Abathur and another divine figure known by an epithet remarkably close to "Father Bull", namely the Canaanite god El.

In a number of passages, El is referred to as *tôru 'il abuhu* or "Bull El his father".[39] In these passages, the "son" in question is the storm god Baal. The name Abathur looks remarkably like a metathesis of

---

Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer, p. XXIX and Kurt Rudolph, *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie*, pp. 122-123. Both scholars base their views on Andreas' artificial Iranian etymology.

[36] Svend Pallis, *Mandaean Studies*, Amsterdam, 1974, p. 111.

[37] Ibid. Pallis' position is supported by Rudolph Macuch, who writes in his *Handbook of Classical and Modern Mandaic*, Berlin 1965, p. 211, n. 156, that "Andreas' artificial etymology (cf. Brandt, *Jüdische Baptismen*, p. 147; Lidzbarski, Jb, p. XXIX) doubted by Nöldeke (ZA 1916, p. 157) and refuted by Pallis (MSt, pp. 111x114) is made still more improbable by the pronunciation of the name."

[38] In fact, the Ugaritic word for "bull" is *thôr*, which lacks a final vowel except as a case ending. This is not to imply that the name Abathur preserves an archaic Ugaratic form, but it does indicate a potential transition from an older form which lacked a final aleph (= definate article), to one which incorporated it.

[39] Cf. A. Herdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques*, Paris, 1963, 3.5.43.

the epithet *tôru 'il abuhu*. Other evidence for a correlation between Abathur and El as bull gods, is found in a Mandaean text called the *Diwan Abathur*. In a list of the seven secret names of Abathur, we find the name "Tauriel" or "Taurel", which literally means "Bull-El": "And Abatur putteth on its robes, (he) whose name is Kanfiel, he whose name is Bhaq, he whose name is Hazazban, he whose name is Nsab, his name is Tauriel.[40] (These are) the seven secret names of Abatur."[41]

The same Mandaean text contains a story which explicity links Abathur with a cosmic bull: "Then Abatur speaketh to Ptahil, saying, 'Install thy son Adam (there), and go, build a large building for him and settle him in it. And then, bring the bull, Qadiael: tame him and fasten a yoke upon him and he shall plough furrows in the hills and we will sow seed so that the worlds and ages may eat thereof.'"[42]

In addition to their common epithets, both Abathur and El are depicted as fathers of the lesser gods (including the demiurge) and as enthroned judges. Above we examined the Mandaean traditions which portrayed Abathur has the father of the demiurge. Turning to El, we find a similar profile. In a number of passages, El is explicitly called *'abu bani 'ili* or "father of the gods".[43] Just as Abathur creates Ptahil, who in turn creates the physical world, El fathers Baal who is the demiurge proper in Canaanite mythology. The distinction between El as a god of theogony and Baal as a god of cosmogony is articulated clearly by Frank Cross in his book *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*: "'El is creator, the ancient one whose extraordinary procreative powers have populated heaven and earth, and there is little evidence that his vigor has flagged. Myths of 'El perceive creation as theogony. Myths of Ba'l view creation as cosmogony."[44] As we have seen above, the same distinction between creation as theogony and creation as cosmogony may be applied to Abathur and Ptahil, respectively.

---

[40] Geo Widengren has already noted the parallel between Tauriel and El. Cf. Geo Widengren, "Die Mandäer," in Geo Widengren, ed., *Der Mandäismus*, Darmstadt, 1982, p. 59.

[41] E. S. Drower, *Diwan Abatur*, p. 7. In J. J. Buckley, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship*, p. 18, a being is called "Yawaar Taur'il, whose name is Jordan." Elsewhere, Abathur is identified with the Jordan. Taur'il is also mentioned in ibid., p. 25.

[42] *Diwan Abatur*, p. 15.

[43] *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques*, 32.1.25,33, etc.

[44] Frank Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, p. 43.

Besides their common function as father of the gods, Abathur and El are both enthroned as judges. In numerous passages, Abathur is characterized as a judge:

> Then Hibil Ziwa went and said to Abatur, "Arise! set up thy throne in the House of Boundaries and take over sovereignty. And sublimate that which is sound (good) from that which is base when Man's measure is full and he cometh and is baptized in the jordan, is weighed in thy Scales, is sealed with thy Seal and riseth up and dwelleth in thy world."[45]

Likewise, El is described as an enthroned judge:

> 'El is enthroned with 'Attart <of the field>;
> 'El sits as judge with Haddu his shepherd,
> Who sings and plays on the lyre..... [46]

As Cross has noted: "The exercise of authority by 'El over his council suggests that his role is more that of a patriarch, or that of the judge in the council of a league of tribes than the role of a divine king." Similarly, Abathur is primarily characterized as a judge, rather than a king, although Abathur may aspire to a royal function.[47]

Besides these linguistic and functional parallels, there is another association between Abathur and El which must be noted. Perhaps the most striking connection between the two figures is not a direct parallel, but a common one. More explicitly, a triangle may exist between the figures of El, the "Ancient of Days" in Daniel 7, and Abathur. Cross has already noted the parallel between El and the Ancient of Days or *atiq yomin*[48]. Both figures sit in judgement, and both are called by epithets which stress their ancient age. In Ugaritic sources, El is called both *mélek 'ôlam*, "eternal king" and *malku 'abu shanima*, "king father of years".[49] The similarity between these epithets and the name *atiq yomin*, combined with the themes of enthronement and judgement, have led Cross to theorize that the author of Daniel 7 revalorized ancient Canaanite motifs in order to create the figure of the Ancient of Days: "The text of Daniel 7 is of

---

[45] *Diwan Abatur*, pp. 1-2.

[46] *Canaanite Myth*, p. 21, as quoted from the "Rephaim" cycle, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques*, 20-22.

[47] In fact, in "Abathur's Lament" or "Abathurs Klage," Abathur is sometimes called "King of the Shkintas", although Abathur is described as unfairly usurping this position.

[48] *Canaanite Myth*, p. 16.

[49] Ibid., Cf. notes 23 and 24 for Ugaritic texts.

particular interest. The apocalyptist utilized for his eschatological vision an old mythological theme: 'El sitting in judgment in his court. The identity of the Ancient One is transparent."[50]

While the figure of El clearly influenced the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7, the exact relationship between the apocalyptic figure and Abathur is less obvious, although, as we have already seen, a number of striking parallels exist between the two figures. The important parallels between the Ancient of Days and Abathur are: 1. Abathur's enthronement as judge. 2. The epithet *atiqa* or "ancient" which is commonly attributed to Abathur. 3. The description of the thousands and myriads of angels who serve before Abathur.

The parallels between Abathur and the *atiq yomin* may be explained by the direct influence of Daniel 7 on Mandaean theology or by positing that both Daniel 7 and Mandaeism drew on common sources. In any case, we have seen other features linking Abathur and El which are independent of the common connection with the Ancient of Days from Daniel 7. As a number of scholars have noted, the revitalization of ancient mythological elements is a characteristic feature of apocalyptic writings in general, with the parallels between El and the Ancient of Days being only one example.[51] The possibility that Mandaeism also produced a re-emergence of Canaanite mythological motifs, including those related to Abathur, is a topic which must be examined more closely, as must the links between Mandaeism and Jewish Apocalypticism. Thus, while it is possible that Abathur and the Ancient of Days are both influenced by the Canaanite deity El, it is unclear whether Abathur is also directly influenced by the figure of the Ancient of Days, or whether both figures incorporate common apocalyptic or pre-apocalyptic imagery.

Obviously, the view that Abathur's profile as enthroned judge depends, at least partially, on Canaanite and Jewish sources, runs contrary to the standard opinion of a Persian origin for Abathur. According to Kurt Rudolph, the figure of Abathur reflects two profiles: 1. Weigher and judge of souls. 2. Creative light creature. These dimensions are combined in what Rudolph calls "ein typisch "synkretistiches" Produkt der mandäischen Mythologie."[52] Rudolph adds that Abathur's identity as weigher and judge of souls belongs

---

[50] Ibid., p. 17.

[51] This is the view of Frank Cross, Paul Hanson, and John Collins, among others.

[52] Kurt Rudolph, *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie*, p. 138.

to the oldest Iranian stratum of Mandaeism, while Abathur's function as Demiurge stems from the Jewish or "semi-Jewish (gnostic) World."[53]

In light of the striking parallels between the descriptions of Abathur, El, and the *atiq yomin* in Daniel 7:9-10, Rudolph's (et. al.) conclusion concerning the Iranian origin of Abathur's identity as weigher and judge of souls may have to be ammended. Either the Mandaeans had already created an Abathur like figure before arriving in Babylonia and western Iran, basing it in part on Daniel 7:9-10 and/or other sources, or, the figure of Abathur was originally based on a combination of Jewish and Iranian elements. In this scenario, the Mandaeans or a group of proto-Mandaeans may have employed Canaanite and Jewish imagery as an original element in the creation of Abathur or in order to fill in the portrait of a pre-existing figure, which the Mandaeans derived from Persian religion. The possibility that the Mandaeans employed Daniel 7:9-10 in either creating or, if he already existed in some form, portraying Abathur is strengthened by the fact that Daniel 7:9-10 is written in Aramaic, probably in an eastern dialect, which, in any case, would have been comprehensible to Mandaic speakers.

Besides these historical questions, there is a compelling phenomenological issue which must be addressed. Namely, what is the underlying significance of the adoption of El as a prototype or *Vorbild* for the figure of Abathur? The solution to this problem lies in the distinction between Abathur and the Great Life. As we have already noted, the Great Life is the highest god in the Mandaean pantheon. A perfect being of light, the Great Life does not create (for this would compromise its perfection) but emanates. The first and second emanations of the Great Life are Yoshamin and Abathur, respectively. Abathur compromises the unity of the Pleroma by gazing into the turbid waters of chaos, an act which produces the demiurge. For his impudence, Abathur is exiled from the Pleroma and enthroned at its entrance, a vantage point which allows him complete knowledge of the world and its inhabitants. In addition, Abathur takes on the capacity of weigher and judge of souls, as well as leader of myriads of uthras or divine beings. In Abathur's fallen incarnation, he is known as Abathur-Muzania or Abathur of the Scales. Yet, even after his exile, Abathur retains an

---

[53] Ibid.

incarnation or *dmuta* in the World of Light, who is called Abathur-Rama or Abathur the Exalted. Only in the eschaton, will the two incarnations of Abathur be united, along with the rest of the Pleroma.

The figure of Abathur is a hybrid, composed, quite literally, of two distinct *ontoi*. On the one hand, Abathur is a creature of light, who dwells in the Pleroma, and on the other, he is a judge, enthroned outside (albeit, at the entrance) of the World of Light. As a being of light, Abathur is a dimmer reflection of the Great Life, since as the light is emanated, its quality decreases. It is well known that in Gnosticism, and as we have seen, in Mandaeism, a distinction is made between the highest god and the demiurge. Because in both Gnosticism and Mandaeism the highest god is a perfect being of light, and therefore perfectly transcendent, the act of creating the demiurge must fall to an intermediary divine being, who bridges the gap between the Pleroma and the physical cosmos. In Gnosticism, this divine being is a mother, Sophia. In Mandaeism, the creator of the demiurge is a father, Abathur, who is also enthroned as the judge of the world. Likewise, in Canaanite mythology, El is both the father of the demiurge and an enthroned judge. Thus, in El, the Mandaeans found a ready-made prototype for a wisened god of judgement and father of the demiurge.

The revolution of Mandaeism was the creation of a perfect god, whose transcendence precluded any contact with the physical world. Yet, at this phenomenological stage Mandaeism encountered two dilemmas: how was the world created and how is it judged? In order to solve these problems, Mandaeism revitalized the ancient mythological dynamic between a god of theogony/judge (El > Abathur) and a god of cosmogony/divine warrior[54] (Baal > Ptahil).

---

[54] Like Baal, who struggles with Mot and Yam before he creates the world, Ptahil must combat the forces of chaos. If El was, in fact, a *Vorbild* for the figure of Abathur, then depictions of Baal may have influenced the development of Abathur's son, Ptahil. Indeed, a long suggested etymology for the name Ptahil, combines the verb *patah*, which means to "open" or "create" in Mandaic, and the word el or "god". Thus, the name Ptahil would mean "God creates," a reasonable derivation given Ptahil's role as the demiurge. If Ptahil's father were associated with a god whose proper name was El, however, then his name might have the significance "El creates," or "El created," with Ptahil, himself, functioning as the "object" of his own name, i. e. "El creates or created [Ptahil]". For a discussion of the various etymologies offered for the name Ptahil, cf. Kraeling, "The Mandaic God Ptahil". Kraeling notes, pp. 153-154, possible biblical parallels of the name Ptahil: I Chronicles 24:16, the name "Pethahiah" (=*pethah yah*) and Joshua 19:14, the valley of "Iphtah-el".

As noted by Cross, the Hebrew god Yahweh represents the integration of the defining features of El (the father of the gods and judge) and Baal (the divine warrior and demiurge of the cosmos). In Abathur and Ptahil, we discover a Yahweh deconstructed, on a symbolic, if not a literal level.

While Yahweh is a synthesis of the dialectic between El and Baal, Abathur represents an incomplete synthesis of a new dialectic between El (or an El "like" god) and the Great Life. Incomplete, because Abathur has a split-personality: Abathur Muzania and Abathur Rama. Abathur manifests ontological and functional features of both a transcendent being of light and an immanent creator and judge. In doing so, he bridges the physical and philosophical chasm between the Pleroma and the physical cosmos. It is quite likely that even if a figure such as El had not already existed to serve as a prototype, his characteristic features would have been invented in the figure of Abathur.[55]

---

[55] Other possible trajectories of the figure, or, at least, the name Abathur have been noted by Steve Wasserstrom, "The Moving Finger Writes; Mughirab Sa'id's Islamic Gnosis and the Myths of Its Rejection". On p. 9, Wasserstrom notes that the *laqab* ("nickname") of either the Muslim rebel Mughira, or one of his followers, was "al-Abtar" ("the one with tail docked, the one cut off, the childless"). Wasserstrom writes that "None of the conflicting etymologies of the nickname, however, is convincing. None of these Arabic etymologies, naturally, refers to the most likely source of the name, which was in fact a widespread, variously employed religious appellative." Among the "various forms of the name abtr" discussed by Wasserstrom is the Mandaic name Abathur. Wasserstrom notes further, pp. 24-26, that the "anti-Messiah" or the Dajjal, was also linked with the name "Abtar". It is interesting to note that one of the Arabic etymologies for al-Abtar, "the one cut off," is a highly appropriate depiction of the Mandaean Abathur, whereas another etymology, "the childless," directly conflicts with Abathur's image as the father of Ptahil.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Despite their differences, the figures I have examined clearly reflect the same theological type: the angelic vice regent. The angelic vice regent is an ally or, more precisely, a servant of God. As such, he performs functions for a deity who is transcendent (Gnosticism/ Mandaeism) or sometimes remote (Merkabah mysticism). Although the angelic vice regent serves God, his exalted nature is a potential source of tension between him and God. In the sources I have examined, this tension is expressed and, at least symbolically resolved in a number of ways. Either the angelic vice regent is portrayed as a formerly rebellious figure (Sabaoth; Abathur) who has repented and been rehabilitated, or, as in the case of Metatron, the possibility that the angelic vice regent may be mistaken for a second god is expressly undermined.

Because he is God's servant, the angelic vice regent's relationship with God is not dualistic, despite the latent tension between them. Indeed, the angelic vice regent may even function as a remedy to radical dualism. This is clearly the case in Merkabah mysticism where the positive characterization of Metatron as God's vice regent preempted or possibly served as an orthodox Jewish solution to nascent Gnostic views of an inferior and evil second deity. In Gnosticism and Mandaeism, the valorization of Sabaoth and Abathur as angelic vice regents may reflect an internal, theological reaction against an earlier stage of radical dualism.

As Gilles Quispel, Alan Segal, and others have argued, originally Jewish conceptions of an exalted angel appear to be the theological "genotype" which later mutated into Gnostic depictions of the evil Demiurge. Yet these same angelogical conceptions also provided the raw material for the primary theological alternative to the evil second god, namely, the angelic vice regent. Thus Ialdabaoth, Metatron, Abathur, and Sabaoth are all children of the same father. Indeed, the angelic vice regent and the evil, inferior deity are essentially mirror images of one another. The mutability of the two types is illustrated in Valentinian sources, where the Gnostic Demiurge, himself, is rehabilitated and thereafter functions as God's vice regent to a certain degree.

The angelic vice regent only achieves his exalted rank after he undergoes a process of angelification (Metatron) or rehabiliation (Sabaoth; Abathur). In other words, none of the figures we have examined is born an angelic vice regent. Instead, each figure is chosen to undergo a profoundly transformative experience. Therefore, the tale of the angelic vice regent is an optimistic one. It informs its readers that a fallen angel, like Abathur and Sabaoth, or a human being who belongs to a generation of sinners, like Enoch, can change for the better. This lesson must have profoundly affected the world-view of those individuals who learned it. Human existence was not hopeless. If he accepted the unique authority of God, it was possible for even the lowliest being to ascend the heights.

What kind of individual would have identified most strongly with the angelic vice regent? In order to answer this question, we must first address the more general issue of what kind of communities produced the figures we have been studying. Drawing on the methodological model of Mary Douglas in *Natural Symbols*, Alan Segal has reconstructed the social character of the Johannine community. According to Douglas, there is a dynamic interplay between a group's social structure and its symbol system.[1] In Segal's words: "they are mutually dependent. Sometimes social structure affects theology; sometimes the opposite. All we have to note is the frequent parallel relationship between a given social structure and a society's ideas of divinity."[2]

Douglas argues further that dualistic theologies, in particular, are produced by "Small competitive communities [who] tend to believe themselves in a dangerous universe, threatened by sinister powers operated by fellow human beings."[3] As Segal notes, the imagined or real persecution of such groups may be "projected into hostility on the part of cosmic powers."[4] Segal employs this model to explain the theological dualism of the Johannine community, which stressed belief in Jesus while condemning traditional Jewish mediator figures and, in particular, the Prince of the World. In Segal's view, the antagonism toward these cosmic powers both reflected and reinforced the antipathy felt by the Johannine community towards Judaism. Thus, in the minds of Johannine Christians there was a

---

[1] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, New York, 1973, pp. 91, 122, 144-5, 153, 199.
[2] "Ruler of This World," p. 251.
[3] *Natural Symbols*, p. 137.
[4] "Ruler of This World," p. 251.

symbolic connection between the oppressive Prince of the World and the oppressive Jewish community.

A number of other scholars have employed similar models to explain the relationship between social structure and theological symbols in other late antique religions. As we saw above, David Suter and George Nickelsburg have argued that the negative depiction of the fallen angels in *1 Enoch* 6-11 represents an attack on the Jerusalem priesthood. The authors of *1 Enoch* 6-11 may have considered themselves to be the rightful human priests. By attacking the fallen angels (=Jerusalem priests), these pretenders created space for their own priestly aspirations. Once translated onto a cosmic plane the polemic against the Jerusalem priesthood gained added theological support.

The interplay between human and angelic priests also plays an important role in the Mandaean rehabilitation of fallen uthras such as Yoshamin, Abathur, and Ptahil. According to Kurt Rudolph, at a certain point in the history of the Mandaean religion, the priestly class empowered itself and transformed what was originally a radically dualistic theology into a more monistic, ritualistic system in which human priests played a greater role. An important part of this social and theological transformation was the rehabilitation of fallen, cosmic priests such as Abathur, who were re-created in the image of the newly empowered human priests. Interestingly, a number of Mandaean legends depict violent conflict between the Mandaeans and the Jewish priesthood in Jerusalem. Indeed, in a story commonly called "Nebuchadnezzar's Daughter," a group of Jewish rabbis and priests demand that the Mandaean priests reveal their secrets or they will kill them. This suggests that conflict over proper priesthood was an important element of inter-religious polemics as well part of the struggle over internal Jewish definition.

The issue of clerical authority was also an important element in the development of Gnostic theology. According to Elaine Pagels, the theological debate between Gnostics and orthodox Christions was essentially a struggle over what Pagels calls "spiritual authority".[5] Both sides of this debate accepted "the correlation between the structure of divine authority and the human authority in the church."[6] When Gnostics deprecated the demiurgic ruler of the

---

[5] Elaine Pagels, "'The Demiurge and His Archons' — A Gnostic View of the Bishop and Presbyters?" *Harvard Theological Review* 69, 1976, p. 303.

[6] Ibid., p. 320.

world, therefore, they were implicitly undermining the authority of the orthodox Christian authorities. As Pagels writes: "The Valentinian gnostic admits that the bishop, like the demiurge himself, exercises legitimate authority over the *psychic* church. But the bishop's demands, warnings, and threats, like those of the Demiurge himself, can no longer touch the one who has been 'redeemed.'"[7]

It is important to note, however, that Pagels distinguishes between those Gnostics who depicted the Demiurge in unremittingly negative terms and those who basically rehabilitated him:

> We might expect that those [Gnostics] who characterize the demiurge as implacably hostile, arrogant, and envious of the higher powers place themselves in a position of unremitting opposition to the authorities that bear 'the demiurge's' name and claim to exercise his power. On the other hand, such groups as the Valentinians who characterize the demiurge as the instrument of the higher 'psychic church,' thereby indicate that they are willing to accept the structure of the orthodox church as a provisional one (for psychics, if not for themselves).[8]

Pagel's distinction will play a signficant role in my own speculation on the community which characterized Sabaoth as an angelic vice regent.

David Halperin has attempted to reconstruct the *Sitz im Leben* of the Hekhalot texts. Although developed independently, Halperin's interpretation is remarkably similar to Pagel's model (as he himself, notes). According to Halperin, the authors of the Hekhalot literature were the *'am ha'ares* ("people of the land"). These common folk "had every reason to detest the rabbis" in Halperin's view.[9] Yet, because the *'am ha'ares* do not appear to have established their own religious institutions, their attitutude towards the rabbis was highly ambivalent. On the one hand, they thought of them as "arrogant tyrants," and on the other hand, they acknowledged them as "expert administrators" of the religious inheritance.[10]

The result of this ambivalence was that the authors of the Hekhalot literature attacked the rabbis while pseudepigraphically invoking the authority of important rabbis and employing rabbinic traditions. The antipathy for the rabbis was projected onto the cosmic plane, where the tension between the rabbis and the *'am*

---

[7] Ibid., p. 314.
[8] Ibid., p. 324.
[9] *The Faces of the Chariot*, p. 442.
[10] Ibid.

ha'ares was reflected in the enmity between angels (rabbis) and humans (*'am ha'ares*). Accordingly, human ascent to heaven encoded a rebellion against an oppressive, rabbinic social structure as well as a threat to angelic authority. In another work, Halperin has extended his model to include the transformation of Enoch. According to Halperin: "we might imagine that the figure of Enoch bears the hopes of certain disaffected Jews who themselves hankered for the status of Temple priesthood. In their fantasy, the high and mighty sinners (the angels) are cast down from God's presence, while saintly humble folk (the human Enoch) are elevated to it."[11]

Several scholars have criticized Halperin's model, including Elliot Wolfson.[12] According to Wolfson the link between apocalyptic and Hekhalot ascents makes an attribution of the latter material to the *am ha'ares* problematic, particularly since we know so little about this group. Secondly, as Scholem and Lieberman have already noted, the authors of the Hekhalot material were well versed in the intricacies of rabbinic law, as well as rabbinic aggadah. It seems unlikely that the *am ha'ares* would have possessed such knowledge. Finally, Wolfson points out that the medieval, Ashkenazi transmitters of the Hekhalot literature would probably have avoided transmitting works which originated "in a fringe group, or worse, in a group that was the fierce opponent of the rabbis.

Despite its potential problems, Halperin's work provides a helpful segue into my own discussion of the type of community which characterized Metatron as an angelic vice regent. Instead of the uneducated *'am ha'ares*, however, I propose that the authors of the Hekhalot literature may have been an educated group of individuals who identified themselves with the priestly class. Unfortunately, it is difficult to determine the precise trajectory of the priestly circles within Judaism following the destruction of the Temple. What is certain, however, is that the authors of the Hekhalot material identified themselves with the priesthood, even if they were not actual physical descendents of priests.

Indeed, it is also possible, perhaps even likely, that any priestly authors of the Hekhalot literature were also rabbis. That is to say, they were involved in the creation and promulgation of aggadic and

---

[11] "Ascension or Invasion," p. 56.

[12] See, for example, Peter Schäfer's critical comments in *The Hidden and Manifest God*, pp. 158-161. Elliot Wolfson, "Halperin's *The Faces of the Chariot*," *Jewish Quarterly Review* LXXXI, 1991, pp. 498-499.

halakhic traditions. This would explain the aggadic and halakhic expertise which the Hekhalot authors evince in their writings. In addition to the exoteric activities which they shared with their fellow rabbis, however, these priestly rabbis either inherited or revived an important part of the priestly (e.g. in apocalyptic and Qumran circles) patrimony: an interest in heavenly ascents and visionary experience.[13]

The priestly authors of the Qumran literature attacked the legitimacy of the Jerusalem priesthood, instead emphasizing their own connection with the angelic priests. This paradigm was inherited by the Merkabah mystics who patterned their own priestly role and functions on those of their angelic counterpart Metatron.[14] The interest of these priestly rabbis in mystical activities may have been opposed by more exoterically minded rabbis. Indeed, the Babylonian Talmud's version of Aher's encounter with Metatron may be evidence of this opposition.

Thus, Halperin's view that depictions of angelic opposition to heavenly ascents in Hekhalot literature symbolize rabbinic opposition to the activities of the Hekhalot authors may be correct. Instead of reflecting a conflict between the rabbis and the *'am ha'ares*, however, the social tension may have existed between two classes of rabbis: 1. Esoterically minded rabbis who identified themselves as priests and wanted to continue the priestly traditions of heavenly ascent and visionary experience. 2. Exoterically minded rabbis who were opposed to this mystical activity.

---

[13] I. Gruenwald, "The Impact of Priestly Traditions," pp. 75ff.

[14] For example, in *3 Enoch* 2, where Metatron describes Ishmael as "of the family of Aaron, who the Holy One, blessed be He, chose to minister in His presence and on whose head He himself placed the priestly crown on Sinai." Although there is a rabbinic tradition (BT Ket. 105b, BT Hull. 49a, etc.) that R. Ishmael was of priestly descent, he could not have been the "official" high priest in Jerusalem (as implied by BT Ber. 7a) since he was only a child when the Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E. Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism," pp. 20-21, writes, "When taking part in the celestial liturgy, the adept acts as the representative of the people before God, as well as being commissioned to declare what has been revealed to him. In other words, he performs a function analogous to that of the High Priest of the Temple. A passage [*Synopse* §§147-149] found in some versions of Hekhalot Rabbati indicates that the adept, here typified by Metatron-as-Enoch, has taken over the priestly function of atonement." The high priestly function of Enoch in the heavenly Temple is asserted in *Jubilees* 4:25. For the explicit identification between Metatron as the heavenly High Priest and R. Ishmael as his earthly counterpart, cf. *2 Legends of the Martyrs*, "I have a servant (*'ebed*) on earth as you are my servant on high. His splendour corresponds to your splendour and his appearance corresponds to your appearance." (*BH.* vi. 19-36). On this passage, see Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, p. 102, and Gruenwald, "The Impact of Priestly Traditions on the Creation of Merkabah Mysticism," p. 92.

The importance of Metatron to the authors of the Hekhalot material cannot be overestimated. With the earthly Temple in ruins, the focus of the Hekhalot authors was on the heavenly Temple. The ideal figure in the heavenly realm was Metatron, who functioned as the high priest in God's tabernacle. As such, Metatron was the angelic counterpart to the ideal Merkabah mystic, R. Ishmael, who was also depicted as a priest.

The characterization of Metatron as God's vice regent may reflect the desire of the priestly-rabbinic authors of the Hekhalot material for authority within the rabbinic establishment. At the very least, it indicates that the Hekhalot authors identified with the angelic vice regent and thought that they possessed a supra-angelic link or conduit to God, something which their opponents lacked. The typological association and identification between Metatron and the Merkabah mystics contrasts sharply with the antagonism between the demiurgic ruler of the world and the Gnostics, thereby illustrating the theological chasm between Merkabah mysticism and radical forms of Gnosticism.

Identifying the authors of the Hekhalot material as a circle of priestly rabbis rather than uneducated folk has many advantages. First of all, the authors appear to have considered themselves or, at least, their heroes to be priests. As such, they probably perceived themselves as continuing earlier priestly traditions of heavenly ascents and visionary experiences, which may help explain the connections between apocalyptic, Qumran, and Hekhalot material. The attribution of the Hekhalot material to a group of highly educated priestly rabbis also explains why the literature's authors were so well acquainted with halakhic procedures and why they identified so closely with Metatron, the heavenly high priest and his earthly counterpart, R. Ishmael. My interpretation suggests an alternative to Halperin's view but it is just that — an interpretation. Like Michael Swartz, who has most recently speculated on the possible authors of the Hekhalot corpus — and rejected the *'am ha'ares* hypothesis — I would argue that even if we cannot identify any single group with absolute certainty, we can at least "point to..... possible social locations of the phenomenon".[15]

The attribution of the Hekhalot traditions concerning Metatron to priestly circles jibes with Rudolph's reconstruction of the social class

---

[15] Michael Swartz, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton, 1996, pp. 217-221. Swartz suggests other possible sources for the Hekhalot literature including groups active within the synagogue and scribes.

which created the literature on the Mandaean vice regent Abathur. In both cases, priestly authors created angelic vice regents to function as ideal prototypes for their own priestly aspirations. The transformation of Enoch into Metatron taught the Merkabah mystics that a righteous individual in a generation of sinners could be transformed into an angelic being, even an angelic high priest in the heavenly tabernacle. Likewise, the rehabilitation of Abathur from a fallen uthra into a responsible, celestial priest served as a model for the human priest who was ritually polluted and required purification (i.e. rehabilitation), a scenario which was quite common due to the stringency of Mandaean purity laws.

Although I have proposed plausible social contexts for the creation of Metatron and Abathur as angelic vice regents, the question of what kind of community characterized Sabaoth as an angelic vice regent still remains to be answered. Earlier I noted Pagels' distinction between those Gnostics who portrayed the demiurgic ruler of the world as entirely evil and those who characterized the demiurge as a repentant figure, who functions as "the instrument of the higher 'psychic church'". In Pagels' view, such Gnostics "thereby indicate that they are willing to accept the structure of the orthodox church as a provisional one (for psychics, if not for themselves)." Pagels' observation is one of the keys to understanding the type of community which produced the speculation on Sabaoth. Like the Demiurge in Valentinian sources, Sabaoth is a repentant figure who is put in charge of the psychic church. However, while Sabaoth is rehabilitated, his father, Ialdabaoth, remains unrepentant. As I noted, this disjunction reflects a division of the biblical God into positive and negative dimensions. A division which Nils Dahl interprets sociologically: "One might guess that this differentation corresponds to a distinction between the zealous opponents of the gnostics [symbolized by Ialdabaoth] and other Jews or, at a later stage, Christians for whom there was a hope of repentance [symbolized by Sabaoth]."[16]

By combining the observations of Pagels and Dahl, we may arrive at a picture of the group which produced the Sabaoth speculation. These Gnostics viewed Sabaoth as the ruler of the psychic church, that is, Christians and Jews who were not saved or damned by nature, but could choose to accept the true God. As Pagels' notes, such Gnostics may have even accepted the provisional authority of

---

[16] Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon," p. 705, n. 36.

a repentant figure like Sabaoth, themselves. In either case, the authors of HypArch and OnOrgWld were less estranged from traditional Judaism and Christianity than their more radical cousins. Indeed, by creating the repentant and rehabilitated figure of Sabaoth, they may have hoped to inspire Jews and Christians to repent and accept the true God, themselves. If so, then Sabaoth, like Metatron and Abathur, would have functioned as an ideal prototype for individuals who wanted to improve their lot in life or, even, to reach for the stars.

APPENDIX A

JESUS

This study has examined vice regent figures in late antique Judaism, Gnosticism, and Mandaeism. Absent from the body of this study, however, is an extremely important vice regent figure who appears in a number of related religious traditions. I am referring to the figure of Jesus, who functions as a vice regent in Christian, Gnostic, and Jewish Christian sources. The methodological reasons for omitting Jesus from my general discussion of vice regency are two-fold. First of all, the introduction of Jesus expands the comparative framework of this study tremendously. The web of relations between Christianity, Judaism, Gnosticism, Mandaeism, and Jewish Christianity are extremely complex — not to mention the internal dynamics (i.e. in Johannine and Pauline writings, the Church Fathers, etc.) within Christianity, itself. Providing a proper context for Jesus' role as an angelic vice regent would require an extensive examination of the links between Christianity, Judaism, et. al. Secondly, the number of relevant sources for the depiction of Jesus as a vice regent is enormous in itself, as is the secondary literature on specific features of Jesus' vice regency, such as his hypostatic character, his ascension and enthronement and so on. Therefore, a thorough treatment of this topic would require hundreds of pages or, in other words, a volume of its own.

Although I cannot provide a definitive examination of Jesus as a vice regent figure, it is nevertheless important to point out and briefly discuss the ways in which Jesus fills this role. It is important because depictions of Jesus inherit many of the same Jewish traditions which influenced other late antique vice regents and because the portrait of Jesus which emerges from Christian, Gnostic, and Jewish Christian sources is remarkably similar to that of other angelic vice regents and, in particular, to that of Metatron. In the following pages, therefore, I will briefly survey the ways in which Jesus functions as a vice regent in these sources.

Early Christian texts avoid employing the term angel when depicting Jesus, in order to emphasize his superiority and lordship over the angelic beings (e. g. Heb. 1:2b-2:18).[1] In later Christian writings,

---

[1] As noted by Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, p. 219 and "The Risen Christ

however, the identification of Jesus as an angel is made explicit. For example, Justin Martyr depicts Jesus as God's messenger and chief angel, even identifying Jesus with the Angel of the Lord in Exodus 23:20.[2] Jewish angelogical traditions also played an important role in Jewish Christian depictions of Jesus as *Christos Angelos*.[3]

In addition to his identification with the Angel of the Lord, Jesus was linked with the "one like a son of man" of Daniel. In Matthew 25, Jesus is depicted as the enthroned Son of Man who will preside over the final judgement.[4] The image of Jesus' enthronement at the right hand of God represents an exegetical transformation of Daniel 7:9-10; 13, and Psalm 110: "The Lord said to my lord, sit at my right hand".[5] There is also evidence that Jesus, like the other angelic vice regents we have examined, was depicted in the image of the Ancient of Days of Daniel 7:9. As Christopher Rowland writes:

> in Rev. 1, 13 ff. the description of the glorified Christ derives in part from the description of the angel who appears to Daniel in Dan. 10,6, but he is also given attributes of God himself derived from Dan. 7, 9. Thus it would appear that the interest in God's form on the throne of glory which plays a small, but significant, role in Ez. 1 and 1 Enoch 14 is now fulfilled, to some extent at least, by the reference to a glorious angelic being endowed with divine attributes.[6]

Gedaliahu Stroumsa has shown that Jesus — like Metatron — was

---

and the Angelic Mediator Figures in Light of Qumran," in *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James Charlesworth, New York, 1992, p. 302.

[2] *Dialogue with Trypho* ch. 75. See *Two Powers in Heaven*, pp. 221-225; Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 148, 314.

[3] See, for example, Daniélou, "Trinité et angélologie dans la théolgue judó-chrétienne," *Recherches science religieuse* 45, 1957; Fossum, "Jewish Christian Christology and Jewish Mysticism," *Vigiliae Christianae* 37, 1983. Also see Henry Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation*, London, 1986, p. 330, "primitive Judaeo-Christian Christology represents something like a middle way: the Christology of *Christos Angelos and of the Verus Propheta*."

[4] See also Mark 13:26; 14:62, where Jesus, as the Son of Man, passes judgment on Jerusalem. On the depiction of Jesus as the Son of Man, see J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, pp. 209-210; Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, pp. 95, 205-209; Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 292-293; F. Borsch, *The Son of Man in Myth and History*, Philadelphia, 1967 and *The Christian and Gnostic Son of Man*, London, 1970; M. Black, "The Son of Man Problem in Recent Research and Debate," *Bulletin of John Ryland's Library* 45, 1963.

[5] On the role of Ps. 110 in early Christology, see David Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Ps. 110 in Early Christianity*, SBL monograph 18, New York, 1973.

[6] Christopher Rowland, "The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 10, 1979, p. 154, and "The Vision of the Risen Christ in Rev. 1:13ff: The Dept of Early Christology to an Aspect of Jewish Angelology," *Journal of Theological Studies* 31, 1980.

depicted as both a youth (*puer*) and an old man (*senex*), reflecting originally Jewish traditions which characterized God as a young warrior (Ex. 15:3) or lover (Song 5) and as an enthroned, elderly judge (Dan. 7).[7] According to Stroumsa, Jesus' polymorphous nature is also reflected in the primitive Christology of Phil. 2:6-11, where Jesus is described "in the form [*morphé*] of God" and then in "a servant's form, having become in a likeness of a man".[8] A number of scholars have also linked Jesus' role as a High Priest with his image as the "servant" of God.[9]

The image of Jesus as priest is implied in a number of New Testament writings, but only the Epistle to the Hebrews explicitly refers to Jesus as priest or high priest. The Epistle to the Hebrews teaches that Jesus is an enthroned high priest, who serves in a heavenly sanctuary: "[Jesus] sat at the right of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, cult-minister of the sanctuary and of the true tent." (Heb. 8:1-2]) The writings of the Church Fathers also describe Jesus as a High Priest. For example, Tertullian writes that during baptism, Jesus clothed the human being in his own priestly garment: "Jesus, the great High Priest of the Father, clothing us with His own garment — 'for those who are baptized in Christ have put on Christ' (Gal 3:27) — has made us priests to God His Father (Apoc 1:6), as John declares" (*Monogamy* 7).[10] Origen states that "the Son of God is the High Priest of our offerings and our advocate (*parakletos*) with the

---

[7] G. Stroumsa, "Polymorphie divine et transformations d'un mythologème: l'*Apocryphon de Jean* et ses sources," *Vigiliae Christianae* 35, 1981 (also appears in Stroumsa, *Savoir et salut: traditions juives et tentations dualistes dans le christianisme ancien*, Paris, 1992) and "Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ," p. 281. In *Savoir et Salut*, p. 62, Stroumsa writes, "les spéculations chrétiennes et gnostiques sur la bimorphie (jeune homme-vieillard) du Christ prennent leur source dans des traditions ésotériques juives sur la figure de l'Amant dan Cantique 5 et de 'Ancien des Jours dans Daniel 7."

[8] "Form(s) of God," pp. 282-283 and "Polymorphie divine et transformations," in Savoir et Salut, p. 62; Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 293.

[9] See O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, Philadelphia, 1963, p. 83, "Applied to Jesus the concept High Priest is closely related to that of the Suffering Servant of God. In a certain sense once could actually understand it as a variant of the Suffering Servant concept." Although Leopold Sabourin, "Jesus the High Priest," in *Priesthood: A Comparative Study*, Leiden, 1973, p. 208, criticizes Cullman's formulation, he adds that "it shows that there exist grounds for comparing the title of High Priest with that of Servant." See also, James Schaefer, "The Relationship between Priestly and Servant Messianism in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30, 1968.

[10] As cited in "Jesus the High Priest," p. 221. Compare this description with the Mandaean descriptions of Abathur clothing the soul in his seven garments, I discussed above.

Father, praying for those who pray and pleading with those who plead". (*Prayer* 10.1)[11]

Christian depictions of Jesus as the enthroned Son of Man and the heavenly high priest are important elements in the tradition of Jesus' ascension and enthronement. As I noted above, the chief biblical proof-text for Jesus' ascension and translation was Ps. 110:1 ("The Lord said to my lord, sit at my right hand") where Jesus was identified with the second "lord" (*adonai*) of the verse.[12] Ephesians 1:19-21 represents one example of this exegetical tradition, in which God raises Jesus from the dead and installs him in heaven as his vice regent:

> They are measured by his strength and the might which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead, when he enthroned him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all government and authority, all power and dominion, and any title of sovereignty that can be named, not only in this age, but in the age to come.[13]

Jarl Fossum has compared Christian traditions of Jesus' ascent and enthronement with *I Enoch* 71, where Enoch is taken up to heaven and identified as the Son of Man and with *3 Enoch*, where Enoch is translated to heaven and enthroned as Metatron. According to Fossum: "In the New Testament, it is Jesus who is the one being translated to heaven, and both traditions used to describe Enoch's heavenly status recur in the picture of Jesus."[14]

Another important element in the traditions concerning Jesus' ascent and enthronement was his investiture with the Divine Name. Thus, Philippians 2:6-11 declares: "Therefore, God highly exalted him [Jesus] and gave him the Name above every name, in order

---

[11] Ibid., p. 222. I cannot agree, however, with Sabourin's interpretation of this passage. This passage is reminiscient of the description of Akatriel in BT Berakhot 7.

[12] For a discussion of Jesus' ascent and translation, see Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, p. 207ff. Cf. also the studies of J. Davies, *He Ascended into Heaven: A Study in the History of Doctrine*, New York, 1958, pp. 25, 185 and Gerhardt Lohfink, *Die Himmelfahrt Jesu: Untersuchungen zu den himmeslfahrts — und Erhöhungstexten bei Lukas*, München, 1971, pp. 64, 191 for the influence of Daniel 7:9ff. and the Sinai theophany on Jesus' transfiguration, particularly in Luke.

[13] See Segal's analysis of this passage in *Two Powers in Heaven*, p. 212.

[14] *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 292. See also the more reserved observation of Peter Hayman, "Monotheism — A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?," pp. 14-15, "Whether or not the Enoch pattern of assumption to heaven and metamorphosis into Metatron was also at work here is difficult to say, because of the still unresolved problem of the date of the Similitudes of Enoch."

that, at the Name of Jesus, every knee should bend, in heaven and upon earth and under the earth".[15] The identification of Jesus with the Divine Name is developed more fully in Gnostic sources such as the *Gospel of Philip* 54, where the father gives his Name to the son: "For the son would not become father unless he wore the name of the father." And the *Gospel of Truth* 38, where Jesus is actually identified as the hypostasized Divine Name: "Now the name of the Father is the Son." Scholars have debated the origin of these Gnostic traditions, alternately emphasizing Jewish,[16] Samaritan,[17] or Jewish Christian backgrounds.[18]

In addition to providing evidence that Jesus was linked with the Divine Name, Phil. 2:6-11 indicates that Jesus was identified as the hypostatic form of God in early Christology. As Stroumsa writes, "We may assume that according to this original conception, when Christ was 'in the form [*morphé*] of God,' [Phil. 2:6] his cosmic body filled the whole world".[19] The conception of Jesus as God's hypostatic body also appears in the writings of the Church Fathers and in the writings of their competitors, the Gnostics. In *Dialogue with Trypho* 128:2, Justin Martyr refers to Christ as "Glory" (*doxa*), "Man" (*anér*) and *Anthropos*, a series of associations which Gilles Quispel has linked with the hypostatic form in Ezekiel 1:26.[20] Quispel has also identified a passage from the Gnostic *Tripartite Tractate* 66.10-16, which explicitly describes Christ as the form of the invisible God: "[Christ is] the man of the Father, that is the one whom I call the form of the formless, the body of the bodiless, the face of the invisible, the word of [the] unutterable".[21]

This passage not only depicts Christ as the hypostatic form or body, but as the hypostatic face of God, as well. A number of other Gnostic and Christian sources preserve the tradition of Jesus as the hypostatic face, including *Exc. ex Theodoto* 10. 6-11, "God is above every thing; subordinated to Him is the Son, who is the face of

---

[15] See "Form(s) of God," p. 283; *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 293.

[16] Gilles Quispel, "The Jung Codex and Its Significance," in H.-Ch. Puech, G. Quispel & W. C. van Unnik, *The Jung Codex*, trans. by F. Cross, London, 1955, p. 72; "Gnosticism and the New Testament," in *Gnostic Studies* I, Istanbul, 1974, p. 210; "The Demiurge in the Apocryphon of John," in *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis*, ed., R. McL. Wilson, p. 25.

[17] Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 106-112.

[18] J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, London, 1964, p. 157.

[19] "Form(s) of God," p. 283.

[20] "Ezekiel 1:26 in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosis," p. 2.

[21] "Gnosticism and the New Testament," p. 210.

God," and the *Odes of Solomon* 13:1-2, "Behold, the Lord is our mirror. Open (your) eyes and see them in Him. And learn the manner of your face." 2 Corinthians 4:6 identifies the divine Glory with the face of Christ: "[God] has let this light shine out of darkness into our hearts to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ".[22]

In at least one passage, the tradition of Christ as the hypostatic form of God was linked to his function as the creator of the world. Colossians 1:15-16 refers to Christ as the "image (*eikon*) of the invisible God," and adds that "it is in him that all things have been created..... all has been created through him and for him".[23] Christ's demiurgic function is also mentioned in John 1:3, 10 "All things were made through him, and without him nothing that has been made was made..... and the world was made by him"; Hebrews 1:10 "And you, Lord, laid the foundation of the world in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands," and a number of other New Testament passages.[24] Jewish Christian sources such as Hom. 18:4 also depict Jesus as the creator of the world: "[God] gave to His Son, who is also called 'Lord', and who brought into being heaven and earth, the Hebrews as his portion, and appointed him to be god of gods, that is, of the gods who received the rest of the nations as their portions".[25]

Jesus comes very close to matching the ideal profile of the angelic vice regent. He is variously portrayed as the chief angel, the heavenly high priest, the hypostatic form of God, the demiurge, and the enthroned judge of humankind. Scholars have noted the striking

---

[22] A. Segal, "The Risen Christ and the Angelic Mediator Figures," p. 315, has written, "Although Paul may be using language taken from his opponents, he characterizes his apostolate as proclaiming that the face of *Christ* is the glory of God."

[23] See "Form(s) of God," p. 284.

[24] See *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, pp. 195ff.; Nils Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon and the Lewd Sophia," p. 699, n. 21 for a list of New Testament verses which refer to Jesus' demiurgic function; idem, "Christ, Creation, and the Church," in *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church*, Minneapolis, 1976.

[25] As cited in *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, p. 218. Concerning this passage Fossum writes, "Thus, the Jewish Christians could in fact deny that the highest ws the creator and accept the view that he created through the principal angel, the guardian angel of the Jews. This is no doubt a teaching of Jewish origin. The Jewish Christians identified the angel as Christ, the Son of God, while the Gnostics exploited the idea in another way and developed a dualism of opposition." On Jewish Christian traditions concerning Jesus' demiurgic role and his hypostatic function (and the relationship of these tradtions with the *Sefer ha-Bahir*), see E. Wolfson, "The Tree That Is All: Jewish-Christian Roots of a Kabbalistic Symbol in *Sefer ha-Bahir*," in *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3, 1993.

parallels between Jesus and other vice regent figures, including Moses,[26] Metatron,[27] and Sabaoth.[28] The scholarly consensus concerning these parallels is that depictions of Jesus absorbed and transformed earlier Jewish traditions.

Although Christianity suppressed or even attacked the belief in traditional Jewish mediator figures, it would have been impossible for early Christians to accept Jesus as a "second God," were it not for the precedent set by earlier Jewish angelic vice regent traditions.[29] In Christianity, therefore, Jesus successfully supplanted his supra-angelic predecessors but only by absorbing their features. At the same time that Christians were transferring features of Jewish angelic figures to Jesus, however, they were also suppressing the belief in these same figures within their own nascent communities. As Alan Segal has noted concerning the Johannine community: "The Johannine community seems to be limiting the class of mediators to a unique figure — Jesus".[30]

---

[26] See Wayne Meeks, "The Divine Agent and His Counterfeit in Philo and the Fourth Gospel," in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, Notre Dame and London, pp. 57ff.

[27] See L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jewish*, vol. 5, p. 305, n. 248; D. Neumark, *Toledot ha-Pilosfiyah be-Yisra'el*, vol. 1, New York, 1921, p. 74; A. Murtonen, "The Figure of Metatron," *Vetus Testamentum* 3, 1953, pp. 409-411; P. Hayman, "Monotheism: A Misused Word in Jewish Studies," pp. 14-15; G. Quispel, "The Demiurge in the Apocryphon of John," p. 25; Y. Liebes, "The Angels of the Shofar and Yeshua Sar ha-Panim," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6, 1-2, 1987 (Hebrew); E. Wolfson, "The Tree That is All,"; G. Stroumsa, "Polymorphie Divine," and "Form(s) of God"; J. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*. See also, W. Lueken, *Michael*, Göttingen, 1898 and J. Barbel, *Christos Angelos: Die Anschauung von Christus als Bote und Engel in der gelebten und volkstümlichen Literatur der christlichen Altertums*, Bonn, 1941, on the influence of Michael speculation on depictions of Jesus.

[28] See J. Magne, *La naissance de Jésus-Christ: L'exaltation de Sabaoth dans Hypostase des Archontes 143, 1-31 et l'exaltation de Jésus dans Philippiens 2, 6-11 (Cahiers du cercle Ernest-Renan*, No. 83), Paris, 1973, who proposes that Phil. 2:6-11 and other New Testament passages which depict the enthronement of Christ have been influenced by the Sabaoth account in NatArch. Cf., however, Fallon's criticism of Magne's position in *The Enthronement of Sabaoth*, p. 8. Markham Geller, "Jesus' Theurgic Powers: Parallels in the Talmud and Incantation Bowls," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 28, 1977, p. 151, has also noted a possible link between Jesus and Sabaoth in the Greek magical papryi, "which invoke both 'Jesus, the God the Hebrews' and *Iao Sabaoth* without clearly distinguishing the two deities."

[29] This is the conclusion reached by Peter Hayman, as well. See "Monotheism — A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?," p. 15, "Until Christianity tried, always unsuccessfully I think, to fit the Holy Spirit into the picture, it did not deviate as far as one might otherwise think from a well established pattern in Judaism. Is there any better explanation for why thousands of Jews in the first century so easily saw Christianity as the fulfillment of Judaism and so easily accepted that believing in the divinity of Jesus was perfectly compatible with their ancestral religion?"

[30] "Ruler of This World: Attitudes about Mediator Figures," p. 255.

APPENDIX B

AL-JÍLÍ'S "PERFECT MAN"

The cultivation of Jewish, Christian, and Mandaean angelic vice regent traditions continued well into the Middle Ages. Another related branch of the phenomenon developed within Islam, particularly in those sources classified as Islamic Gnosis and in Muslim magical texts and amulets. The internal structures of Islamic Gnosis and magic are extremely complex, as are their relationship with earlier Gnostic, Jewish, Christian, and Jewish-Christian traditions.[1]

Within Islamic sources the subject of Allah's angelic or divine vice regent (*khalífa*) took on many forms. This appendix will not even attempt to exhaust the many angelic vice regent traditions in Islamic sources, which would require at least an entire volume of their own. Instead, it will briefly examine the depiction of the angelic vice regent in a single Islamic work, namely, *al-Insánu 'l-kámil fi ma'rifati 'l-awákhir wa 'l-awá'il* ("The Man Perfect in Knowledge of the Last and First Things"), written by 'Abdu 'l-Karím ibn Ibráhim al-Jílí.[2]

---

[1] In the given context, we cannot even begin to provide a comprehensive bibliography of primary and secondary works on Islamic Gnosis. Of course, the two giants in the academic study of Islamic Gnosis are Louis Massignon and Henry Corbin, whose works are too numerous to cite here, but include: Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, Princeton, 1972 and "The Origins of the Transformation of Persian Iconography by Islamic Theology: The Shi'a School of Kufa and Its Manichean Connexions," in *A Survey of Persian Art*, ed. A. U. Pope and P. Ackerman, London, 1938; Corbin, "De la gnose antique à la gnose ismaélienne," in *Convegno di Scienze, Morali, Storiche e Filologiche*, Rome 1957 and *Temple and Contemplation*. Other important work on the subject include, but are certainly not limited to, G. Widengren, *Muhammed the Apostle of God and His Ascension*, Uppsala, 1955; H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis, Zurich*, 1982 (see bibliography); and more recently, the work of S. Wasserstrom, "The Moving Finger Writes: Mughira B. Sa'id's Islamic Gnosis and the Myths of Its Rejection," and D. Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, "Appendix II: Islamic Reflections of Merkabah Traditions".

[2] Jílí was born in 1365-6 and probably died some time between 1406 and 1417. The passages from "The Perfect Man" (i.e. *Insánu 'l-kámil*) appearing in this appendix are taken from R. A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge, 1921 (Reprint, 1985), pp. 77-142. Nicholson's translations are from the edition of the *Insánu 'l-kámil* published at Cairo in A.H. 1300. See also, Nicholson, "The Súfi Doctrine of the Perfect Man," *Quest*, 1917, pp. 545ff.; idem, "A Moslem Philosophy of Religion," *Muséon*, Cambridge, 1915, pp. 83ff.; Muhammad Iqbál, *Development of Metaphysics In Persia*, London, 1908, pp. 150ff.; I. Goldziher, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. I, pp. 46ff.

In his analysis of Jílí's doctrine of the "Perfect Man," Reynold Nicholson acknowledged the presence of Jewish and Gnostic elements, but he emphasized the influence of Christian ideas, such as the Trinity and the Holy Spirit on Jílí's formulation.[3] If Nicholson had been more aware of Jewish Merkabah traditions, however, he could have noted a number of striking parallels between Jílí's Perfect Man and the Jewish figure of Metatron. Indeed, the Perfect Man of Jílí's *al-Insánu 'l-kámil* appears, in many ways, to be a transformation of earlier Jewish conceptions of the angelic vice regent.

According to Jílí, the Perfect Man is "our Lord Mohammed" and "stands over against the Creator (*al-Haqq*) and the creatures (*al-khalq*)." That is, he is an intermediary between God and His creation.[4] In the sixtieth chapter of *al-Insánu 'l-kámil*, Jílí describes the Perfect Man (i.e. Mohammed) as follows:

> The Perfect man is the *Qutb* (axis) on which the spheres of existence revolve from first to last, and since things came into being he is one (*wáhid*) for ever and ever. He hath various guises and appears in diverse bodily tabernacles (*kaná'is*): in respect of some of these his name is given to him, while in respect of others it is not given to him. His own original name is Mohammed, his name of honour Abu 'l-Qásim, his description 'Abdullah..... You must know that the Perfect Man is a copy (*nushka*) of God, according to the saying of the Prophet, 'God created Adam in the image of the Merciful," and in another *hadith*, "God created Adam in His own image."..... Further, you must know that the Essential names and the Divine attributes belong to the Perfect Man by fundamental and sovereign right in virtue of a necessity inherent in his essence.[5]

The parallels between Jílí's depiction of the Perfect Man and Jewish conceptions of Metatron are both numerous and striking. Like Metatron in Kabbalistic sources, the Perfect Man is portrayed as the pole or axis (*Qutb*) of the universe. He appears in different guises and "bodily tabernacles," much like Metatron sometimes resembles an old man, and sometimes a youth. The Perfect Man is described as "'Abdullah" or "the servant of God," just as Metatron is called God's *'ebed* ("servant"). While Metatron is identified with the *Shiur Qomah* or hypostatic divine form, Jílí calls the Perfect Man a "copy" (*nushka*) of Allah, and elsewhere, he refers to the hypostatic "Form of Mohammed" (*al-súratu 'l-Muhammadiyya*).[6] The Perfect Man also pos-

---

[3] See *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 138ff.
[4] Ibid., p. 104.
[5] Ibid., pp. 105-106.
[6] Ibid., p. 119.

sesses "the Essential Names," just as Metatron is called by the name of God, and possesses seventy other exalted names. Finally, the Perfect Man is identified with Islam's chief prophet Mohammed, while Metatron is intimately linked (although not explicitly identified) with Moses.

Besides the Perfect Man, himself, there is another intermediary being described by Jílí in *al-Insánu 'l-kámil* who exhibits parallels with Metatron and the other angelic vice regent figures we have examined. According to Jílí, the *Rúh* or "Spirit" is a supra-angelic being, who, though not identical with the Perfect Man, is identified as "The Spirit of Mohammed":

> God created the angel named *Rúh* from His own light, and from him He created the world and made him His organ of vision in the world. One of his names is the Word of Allah (*Amr Allah*). He is the noblest and most exalted of existent beings: there is no angel above him, and he is the chief of the Cherubim. God caused the mill-stone of existent beings to turn on him, and made him the axis (*qutb*) of the sphere of created things. Towards every thing that God created he has a special aspect (*wajh*), in virtue of which he regards it and preserves in its appointed place in the order of existence. He has eight forms, which are the bearers of the Divine Throne (*al-'Arsh*). From him were created all the angels, both the sublime and the elemental..... The *Rúh* excercises a Divine guardianship, created in him by God, over the whole universe..... He is the first to receive the Divine command, which he then delivers to the angels; and whenever a command is to be executed in the universe, God creates from him an angel suitable to that command, and the *Rúh* sends him to carry it out. All the Cherubim are created from him, e.g., Seraphiel, Gabriel, Michael, and Azrael..... The *Rúh* has many names according to the number of his aspects. He is named "The Most Exalted Pen" and "The Spirit of Mohammed" and "The First Intelligence" and "The Divine Spirit," on the principle of naming the original by the derivative, but in the presence of God he has only one name, which is "The Spirit" (*al-Rúh*).[7]

The *Rúh* or "Spirit" is depicted as the means by which the world was created, much as Metatron is portrayed in kabbalistic sources. Like Metatron, who is identified with the "Special Cherub," (*kerub ha-meyuhad*) and is the leader "over the majestic cherubim," the *Rúh* is depicted as the chief of the Cherubim, who, according to Jílí, possess Jewish angelic names, such as Seraphiel, Gabriel, and Michael.[8] Furthermore, the *Rúh* has eight forms which support the Divine

---

[7] Ibid., pp. 110-112.
[8] *3 Enoch* 48c.

Throne, a motif which echoes the Merkabah and Gnostic traditions of the eight archangelic or cherubic forms.[9] In the Gnostic text OnOrgWld 104-105, Sabaoth creates a throne-chariot called "Cherubin" which has eight "shapes" per corner, and seven archangelic beings to minister before it, while Sabaoth, himself, is counted as the eighth:

> And before his mansion he created a throne, which was huge and was upon a four-faced chariot called 'Cherubin.' Now the Cherubin was eight shapes per each of the four corners, lion forms and calf forms and human forms and eagle forms, so that all the forms amount to sixty-four forms and [he created] seven archangels that stand before it; he is the eighth, and has authority. All the forms amount to seventy-two. Furthermore, from this chariot the seventy two gods took shape; they took shape so that they might rule over the seventy-two languages of the peoples.

Just as Metatron is commonly called the sar *ha-panim* or "Prince of the Countenance," and is identified with the hypostatic face of God, so the *Rúh* is depicted as possessing "a special aspect [lit. "face"]," directed "towards every thing that God created".[10] Finally, the *Rúh* "excercises a Divine guardianship, created in him by God, over the whole universe..... He is the first to receive the Divine command, which he then delivers to the angels; and whenever a command is to be executed in the universe, God creates from him an angel suitable to that command, and the *Rúh* sends him to carry it out." Likewise, in *3 Enoch* 48c, Metatron is described as follows:

> I made every prince stand before him to receive authority from him and to do his will. I took seventy of my names and called him them them, so as to increase his honor. I gave seventy princes into his hand, to issue to them my commandments in every language..... as it is written, "So the world that goes fom my mouth does not return empty: he carries out my will." [Isa. 55:11] It does not say here, "I carry out," but "he carries out," which teaches us that Metatron

---

[9] For Jewish and Gnostic traditions of the eight forms, cf. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 122-128 and "The World of Angels in Human Form," pp. 25-26, n. 90. On the specific motif of the eight throne-bearers in Muslim sources, see Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, pp. 469-473. The Koran, itself, lists the number of angelic throne-bearers as eight: "And the angels will be on the sides thereof, and eight will uphold the Throne of thy Lord [*yahmilu 'arsh rabbika*] that day, above them" (Surah 69:17).

[10] The Arabic term *wajh* can signify "aspect" or "face," as in the Kuran 2:109, "Wherever you turn, there is the face [*wajh*] of Allah". On Islamic traditions of the hypostatic face, see Henry Corbin, *Face de Dieu, face de l'homme: herméneutique et soufisme*, Paris, 1983, pp. 237-310. These traditions echo earlier Jewish sources.

> stands and carries out every word and utterance that issues from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be he, and executes the decree of the Holy One.[11]

Although I have only touched the surface of *al-Insánu 'l-kámil*, the many parallels between the intermediate divine beings described by Jílí and the angelic vice regent Metatron hint at a thematic matrix shared by Jewish and Muslim sources. My comparative study confirms the work of Steven Wasserstrom, who refers to a "Jewish-Muslim symbiosis..... Between Muslim and Jew, angels and origins were traded in the marketplace."[12] Indeed, Wasserstrom has illuminated a kind of parallel life for Metatron in Muslim sources, even discussing a Shi'i amulet published in Pakistan in 1973 which invokes the aid of Metatron.[13]

Many Muslim magical traditions closely resemble the Jewish traditions I have examined above, including the classical depiction of Metatron as the guardian of the curtain before God. Some appear to add new elements to the Metatron myth, although even here Jewish sources may reveal parallels. A talisman entitled *Kitab 'azim fi' ilm al-hikma wa-ma yatarataba 'alaih* ("The Great Book Concerning the Knowledge of Wisdom and What Derives Therefrom") describes Metatron as holding a whip of seventy-three lashes.[14] While I do not know of any Jewish sources which depict Metatron as holding a whip, this tradition may have some connection to the Hekhalot passages §672 and *3 Enoch* 16, two versions of the Aher/Metatron tradition. In §672, Metatron is punished as follows: "Immediately they brought out Metatron to outside the Curtain (*Pargod*) and struck him with sixty fiery lashes." Although Metatron does not possess a whip, himself, he is linked to the act of whipping. Even more suggestive is the version in *3 Enoch*: "In the same moment, 'Anafiel YHWH, the glorified, splendid, endeared, wonderful, terrible, and dreadful Prince came at the dispatch of the Holy One blessed be he and struck me [Metatron] sixty lashes of light and stood me on my feet."

---

[11] *3 Enoch* 48c, as cited in Alexander, "3 (the Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," p. 312.

[12] Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, p. 205.

[13] Ibid., p. 199.

[14] Edgar Blochet, "Études sur le gnosticisme musulmane," *Rivista degli studi orientali* 3, 1909-10, p. 295. Concerning this tradition Wasserstrom, op. cit., p. 198, n. 130, writes, "Although I have not found this particular motif in Jewish texts, it is sufficient to read '3 Enoch' (*Sefer Hekhalot*) to feel the terrifying aspect of Metatron in his Merkabah depiction, which may perahps [sic] have some bearing on this whip-wielding Metatron."

Here Metatron testifies that a supra-angelic being named 'Anafiel YHWH whipped him with sixty lashes. It is easy to imagine how this tradition could have been transformed to produce the Muslim depiction of Metatron, rather than 'Anafiel, holding a whip.

APPENDIX C

HERMES

In an earlier chapter I compared the angelic vice regent and the trickster as phenomenologically distinct but, in many ways, similar mythological types. Among the tricksters I discussed was Hermes, whose career begins in Greek mythology and passes through a remarkable number of literary incarnations in a variety of languages.[1] In this appendix, I will argue that depictions of Hermes have so much in common with those of angelic vice regents like Metatron, Sabaoth, and Abathur, that Hermes appears to straddle the boundary between the two types of mythological figures.

In his study on Hermes as trickster, William Doty characterizes Hermes as an example of "the Greek sense of a divine-human continuum," which he contrasts with the "sharp differentiation between the divine and human that was developed in Judaism and Christianity".[2] As we have seen, Doty's model is explicitly refuted by angelic vice regent figures in both Jewish and Christian sources, who blur the boundary between human and divine modes of being.

Perhaps the most important parallel between Hermes and the angelic vice regent figure is that both embody the logic of mediation. Indeed, St. Augustine even derived the name Mercurius (the Roman version of Hermes) from his role as mediator or "medius currens," walking in the middle of two opposing individuals or "quod sermo currat inter homines medius".[3] Another striking parallel between the figures is their ambiguous and polymorphous character. Hermes, like Metatron and Jesus, was depicted as an old man (*sphênôpôgôn*) and a youth (*achnous*).[4] The Book of Krates, one of the Arabic Hermetic writings, actually draws on the image of the Ancient of Days of Daniel 7:9 in its depiction of Hermes.[5] Upon ascending to heaven, Krates sees the following:

---

[1] Including Greek, Latin, and Arabic.

[2] William Doty, "A Lifetime of Trouble-Making: Hermes as Trickster," in *Mythical Trickster Figures*, p. 50.

[3] *Civ. Dei* VII 14. See Gerard Mussies, 'The Interpretatio Judaica of Thot-Hermes, " in M. Heerma van Voss, E. J. Sharpe, and R. J. Z. Werblowsky, eds., *Studies in the History of Religions* XLIII, Leiden, 1982, p. 113.

[4] "A Lifetime of Trouble Making," p. 48.

[5] A survey of the Hermetic writings in Arabic is given by L. Massignon in A. J.

> And behold, an old man, the most beautiful of men, sitting on a throne-stool and wearing white garments, in his hand a shining tablet, containing a writing..... And I inquired about the old man, and it was said to me: this is Hermes Trismegistos.[6]

This passage is extremely significant, for it reveals that Hermes, like Metatron, Abathur, and Sabaoth, belonged to a trans-cultural but originally Jewish exegetical tradition which transferred the depiction of the *atiq yomin* to a lower divine or angelic being.

Like Abathur, Hermes was identified with the phallus, and his chief symbol was a phallus erected on a *herma* or phallic pillar.[7] Hermes was also intimately linked with the care of human souls. Among the different functions Hermes possessed were caretaker of souls during sleep, weigher of souls of the dead on a scale (*psychostasy*), leader of souls (*psychopompos*) on their way to Hades, and soul raiser (*psychagogos*) who led souls into this world, either for a brief visit or a new bodily incarnation.[8] In addition to these responsibilities, Hermes also played an important maieutic role (the term is derived from *maia*, "midwife" or "nurse," personified by Hermes' mother Maia) and was even called a male midwife.

As we saw above, both Metatron and Abathur were associated with the passage of souls into the divine world, during life and after death, respectively; while Abathur, and perhaps, Metatron, were linked with the weighing of the souls. Although neither Abathur nor Metatron was depicted as a midwife or nurse, per se, Metatron was characterized as the teacher of "all the souls of the dead that have died in their mothers' wombs, and of the babies that have died at their mothers' breasts, and of the schoolchildren that have died while studying the five books of of the Torah."[9] While Abathur's watchhouse was described as the storage place for the pre-existent souls that have not yet descended to earth.[10]

Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* (l'Hermétisme et 'lastrologie), Paris, 1959, pp. 384-400.

[6] Translation from Geo Widengren, "Hermetic-Gnostic Literature in the Arabic Language," in *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book*, p. 81. On the appearance of Hermes, Widengren writes, "For the old man, dressed in white and sitting on the throne, we may compare the description of the God in Dan. 7:9."

[7] "A Lifetime of Trouble Making," p. 48 and Couliano, *Out of This World: Otherworldly Journeys from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein*, Boston & London, 1991, p. 122.

[8] *Out of This World*, p. 122. On these functions, see also P. Raingeard, *Hermès Psychagogue: Essai sur les origines du culte d'Hermès*, Paris, 1935.

[9] *3 Enoch* 48C.

[10] See *Ginza*, pp. 207-210.

According to Cyril, bishop of Alexandria (412-444), Hermes Trismegistus ("Thrice Great") was a priest.[11] Other important functions attributed to Hermes included those of divine scribe and messenger. In fact, the identification of Hermes as heavenly scribe is preserved in the Babylonian Talmud (Shabbat 156a): "He who is born under Mercury will be of a retentive memory, because he [Mercury] is the scribe of the sun". As we have seen, the role of priest was attributed to Metatron, Abathur, and Jesus, while Metatron was characterized as God's messenger and scribe.[12]

Because of his multivalent character, Hermes was easily equated with important figures from a variety of religious traditions. This process of identification, commonly known as *interpretatio* (following Tacitus, *On the Origin and Situation of the Germans* ch. 48), was extremely popular in Late Antiquity. As Gerard Mussies has emphasized, however, the basis for equating two figures in late antique sources was never absolute similarity, but "partial analogies".[13] This is precisely the situation in regard to Hermes and his counterparts. In Egypt, Hermes was equated with the god Thoth, who functioned as the divine scribe and messenger in Egyptian religion. Within the Christian tradition, Hermes was identified with a number of figures. For example, Justin Martyr compared Hermes with the Logos-Christ (*1 Apol.* XXII2), while Conrad Celtes equated Hermes with John the Baptist in a wood-cut made for Petrus Tritonius' *Melopoiae* (an early sixteenth century songbook).[14] Although Mandaean sources, themselves, do not identify Hermes with any Mandaean mythological figures, E. S. Drower noted the similarity between the Primal Adam and Hermetic depictions of Hermes and even argued that "The Hermetic writings have so much which corresponds closely to religious conceptions familiar to them in Nasoraean gnosis that they [Mandaeans] would readily have identified the Hermes of the *Poimandres* as their own Manda-d-Hiia or Mara-d-Rabutha."[15]

Hermes was also identified with several figures from the Jewish tradition. Of course, the best known case is Artapanus' *interpretatio* of

---

[11] In Cyril's *Against the Writings of Julian the Atheist*, cf. Gerard Mussies, 'The Interpretatio Judaica of Thot-Hermes, " p. 94.

[12] On Metatron as messenger, see J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave* 4, pp. 131ff.

[13] Mussies, "The Interpretatio Judaica of Thot Hermes," p. 103.

[14] Ibid., pp. 118-120.

[15] *The Secret Adam*, p. 22, n. 1. p. 112. Although *The Haran Gawaitha* may identify Mercury and Jesus.

Hermes as Moses.[16] In Arabic Hermetic sources, Hermes was also equated with the figure of Enoch (e. g. 'Idrîs).[17] Finally, in the Aramaic incantation bowls, Hermes was actually equated with the angelic vice regent Metatron:

> Blessed art thou, Yahweh, on account of thy Name; in thy name, thou whose name is Yôfî'el, and Yehî'el they call thee, whose names are Sangî'el, Yawheh, Yavê (?), Yh[. .], and Hermes Metatron Yah.[18]

The connection between Hermes and Metatron survived in Muslim sources. Indeed, in his survey of Muslim charms and amulets, Baron Carra de Vaux noted that "Metatron is assigned sometimes to Jupiter and sometimes to Mercury."[19]

---

[16] Arthur Droge, *Homer or Moses? Early Christian Interpretations of the History of Culture*, Tübingen, 1989, pp. 25-35, discusses Artapanus' writing on Hermes and Moses.

[17] See Tamara Green, *The City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran*, Leiden, 1992.

[18] A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur*, Philadelphia, 1913, pp. 207-208, no. 25 (CBS 16009) and pl. XXIV. Translation is from Milik, *The Books of Enoch*, p. 128. Unfortunately, on the basis of the Arabic Hermetic identification of Enoch-Hermes and the incantation bowl identification of Metatron-Hermes, Milik arrives at the unfounded conclusion that the author or redactor of *3 Enoch* must have combined both of these traditions, thereby equating Enoch with Metatron. This position, which forms part of Milik's late dating of *3 Enoch*, is refuted by P. S. Alexander, "3 (the Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," pp. 227-229.

[19] Baron Carra de Vaux, "Charms and Amulets (Muhammaden)," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* 3, pp. 257-261.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abelson, J., *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature* (London 1912).
Aberbach M., & Smolar, L., "The Golden Calf Episode in Postbiblical Literature", *Hebrew Union College Annual* 39 (1968).
Alexander, P., "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 28 (1977).
——, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," in James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. I (New York 1983).
——, "3 Enoch and the Talmud," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 18 (1987).
——, "The Targumim and Early Exegesis of 'Sons of God' in Genesis 6," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 23 (1972).
Anz, W., *Zur Frage nach dem Ursprung des Gnostizismus* (Leipzig 1897).

Barc, B., *L'Hypostase des Archontes: Traité Gnostique sur L'Origine de L'Homme du Monde et des Archontes* (NH II, 4) (Québec/Louvain 1980).
Bianchi, U., *Selected Essays on Gnosticism, Dualism and Mysteriosophy* (Leiden 1978).
——, *The History of Religions* (Leiden 1975).
Black, M., "An Aramaic Etymology of Ialdabaoth?" in A.H.B. Logan and A.J.M. Wedderbrun, eds., *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honor of R. McL. Wilson*, (Edinburgh 1983).
——, "The Throne-Theosophy Prophetic Commission and the 'Son of Man': A Study in Tradition-History," *Jews, Greeks, and Christians — Religious Cultures in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honor of W.D. Davies*, Robert Hamerton-Kelly (Leiden 1976).
Blochet, E., "Études sur le gnosticisme musulmane," *Rivista degli studi orientali* 3 (1909-10).
Bousset, W., "Die Himmelsreise der Seele," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 4 (1901).
——, *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (Berlin 1903).
——, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (FRLANT 10) (Göttingen 1907).
Box, G., "The Idea of Intermediation in Jewish Theology," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 23 (1932-33).
Buckley, J. J., "A Rehabilitation of Spirit Ruha in Mandaean Religion," *History of Religions* 21 (1982).
——, *Female Fault and Fulfillment in Gnosticism* (Chapel Hill and London 1986).
——, "Mandaeans in the USA Today: The Tenacity of Traditions," *ARAM* 7 (1995).
——, "The Making of a Mandaean Priest: The Tarmida Initiation," *Numen* 32 (1985).
——, "The Mandaean Sitil as an Example of 'The Image Above and Below," *Numen* 26 (1979).
——, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship (Diwan Malkuta 'Laita)* (New Haven 1993).
——, "Two Female Gnostic Revealers," *History of Religions* 19 (1980).
Bullard, R., *The Hypostasis of the Archons (Patristische Texte und Studien 10)* (Berlin 1970).

Cerutti, M. V., "Ptahil e Ruha: per una fenomenologia del dualismo mandeo," *Numen* 24 (1977).
Charlesworth, J., ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. I (New York 1983).
Chernus, I., *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism* (Berlin and New York 1982).
——, "The Pilgrimage to the Merkavah: An Interpretation of Early Jewish Mysticism," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6:1-2 (1987).

Cohen, M., *The Sh'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham 1983).
——, *The Sh'ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions* (Tübingen 1985).
Cohn-Sherbok, D., "The Alphabet in Mandaean and Jewish Gnosticism," *Religion* 11 (1981).
——, "The Gnostic Mandaeans and Heterodox Judaism," *Rabbinic Perspectives on the New Testament* (Lewiston 1990).
Collins, J., "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979).
——, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York 1989).
Colpe, C., *Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule: Darstellung und Kritik ihres Bildes vom gnostischen Erlösermythus* (Göttingen 1961).
Corbin, H., *Face de Dieu, face de l'homme: herméneutique et soufisme* (Paris 1983).
Couliano, I., *Psychanodia I: A Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and Its Relevance* (Leiden 1983).
——, *Expériences de l'extase, de l'Hellénisme au Moyen Age* (Paris 1984).
——, *Out of This World: Otherworldly Journeys from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein* (Boston & London 1991).
——, "The Angels of the Nations and the Origins of Gnostic Dualism," in R. van den Broek. R., and Vermaseren, M. J., eds., *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, (Leiden 1981).
——, *The Tree of Gnosis* (San Francisco 1992).
Cross, F., *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge 1973).

Dahl, N., "The Arrogant Archon and the Lewd Sophia: Jewish Traditions in Gnostic Revolt," in Bentley Layton, ed., *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, Vol. II (Leiden 1981).
Dan, J., "Anafiel, Metatron, and the Creator," *Tarbiz* 52 (1983) (Hebrew).
——, "The Entrance to the Sixth Gate," in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6, 1-2, Jerusalem (1987) (Hebrew).
Daniélou, J., *Théologie du Judéo-Christianisme* (Tournai 1958).
Deutsch, N., "Abathur: A New Etymology," in J. Collins and M. Fishbane, eds., *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys* (Albany 1995).
——, *The Gnostic Imagination: Gnosticism, Mandaeism, and Merkabah Mysticism* (Leiden 1995).
Douglas, M., *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York 1973).
——, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London 1966).
Doty, W., "A Lifetime of Trouble-Making: Hermes as Trickster," in William J. Hynes and William Doty, eds., *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms* (Tuscaloosa and London 1993).
Droge, A., *Homer or Moses? Early Christian Interpretations of the History of Culture* (Tübingen 1989).
Drower, E.S., *A Pair of Nasoraean Commentaries* (Leiden 1963).
——, *Diwan Abatur* (Vaticano 1950).
——, *The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans* (Leiden 1959).
——, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (Oxford 1937).
——, *The Secret Adam: A Study of Nasoraean Gnosis* (Oxford 1960).
——, *The Thousand and Twelve Questions* (Berlin 1960).

Eliade, M., *The Sacred and the Profane: the Nature of Religion* (New York 1959).
——, *The Two and the One* (Chicago 1965).

Fallon, F., *The Enthronement of Sabaoth: Jewish Elements in Gnostic Creation Myths* (Leiden 1978).
Festugière, J., *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* (Paris 1959).

Filoramo, G., *A History of Gnosticism* (Oxford 1990).
Fishbane, M., *A Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford 1985).
——, "The 'Measures' of God's Glory in the Ancient Midrash," *Messiah and Christos: Studies in the Jewish Origins of Christianity Presented to David Flusser*, Ithamar Gruenwald, Shaul Shaken, and Gedaliahu Stroumsa, eds. (Tübingen 1992).
——, "Some Forms of Divine Appearance in Ancient Jewish Thought," *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism — Intellect in Quest of Understanding: Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, Vol. II, Jacob Neusner, Ernst Frerichs, and Nahum Sarna, eds. (Atlanta 1989).
Foerster, W., *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts, Vol. I: Patristic Evidence*; Vol. II: Coptic and Mandaean Sources (Oxford 1972-1974).
Fossum., J., *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tübingen 1985).
——, "Gen. 1,26 and 2,7 in Judaism, Samaritanism, and Gnosticism," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 16 (1985).
Friedlander, M., *Der vorchristlich-juedische Gnosticismus* (Göttingen 1898).

Gates, H. L., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford 1988).
Gershonzon, R. and Slomovic E., "A Second Century Jewish-Gnostic Debate: Rabbi Jose ben Halafta and the Matrona," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 16 (1985).
Gilhus, I., "Gnosticism — A Study in Liminal Symbolism," *Numen* 31 (1984).
Goldberg, A., *"Rabban Yohanans Traum: Der Sinai in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur* (Berlin 1969).
——, *Untersuchungen über die Vorstellung von der Schekinah in der rabbinischen Literature (Studia Judaica 5)* (Berlin 1969).
Goldin, J., "Not by Means of an Angel and Not by Means of a Messenger," in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (Leiden 1968).
Graetz, H., *Gnostizismus und Judentum* (Krotoschin 1846).
Grant, R., *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York and London 1959).
——, "The Mystery of Marriage in the Gospel of Philip," *Vigiliae Christianae* 15 (1961).
Green, T., *The City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran* (Leiden 1992).
Greenfield, J., "Notes on Some Aramaic and Mandaic Magic Bowls," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 5 (1973).
Gruenwald, I., "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yezira*," *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971).
——, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden 1980).
——, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism* (Frankfurt am Main 1988).
——, "The Impact of Priestly Traditions on the Creation of Merkabah Mysticism and the Shiur Komah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6:1-2 (1987) (Hebrew).
——, *The Visions of Ezekiel*, ed. I. Gruenwald, in *Temirin* I (Jerusalem 1972).

Halperin, D., "Ascension or Invasion: Implications of the Heavenly Journey in Ancient Judaism," *Religion* 18 (1988).
——, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen 1988).
——, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven 1980).
Hedrick, C. and Hodgson R., eds., *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA 1986).
Himmelfarb M., *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York and Oxford 1993).
——, "Heavenly Ascent and the Relationship of the Apocalypses and the Hekhalot Literature," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 59 (1988) 73-100.

Idel, M., "The Concept of Torah in Hekhalot Literature and Its Metamorphosis in Kabbalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981) (Hebrew).
——, "Enoch is Metatron," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6:1-2 (1987) (Hebrew).
——, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven 1988).
——, "Metatron: Notes on the Development of a Myth in Judaism," in Havivah Pedayah, ed., *Myth in Judaism* (Jerusalem 1996) (Hebrew).
——, "The Problem of the Sources of the *Bahir*," *Jersusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6:3-4 (1987) (Hebrew).
——, "The World of Angels in Human Form," *Studies in Philosophy, Mysticism, and Ethical Literature Presented to Isaiah Tishby on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, Joseph Dan and Joseph Hacker, eds. (Jerusalem 1986).

Janowitz, N., *The Poetics of Ascent: Theories of Language in a Rabbinic Ascent Text* (Albany 1989).
Jervell, J., *Imago Dei: Gen. 1.26f. im Spatjudentum, in der Gnosis und in den paulinischen Briefen* (Göttingen 1960).
Jonas, H., *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist, Vol I: Die mythologische Gnosis*; Vol. II, pt. 1: *Vond der Mythologie zur mystischen Philosophie* (Göttingen 1934-54).
——, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston 1963).

Kraeling, Carl, *Anthropos and the Son of Man: A Study in the Religious Syncretism of the Hellenistic Orient* (New York 1927) (Reprint, New York 1966).
——, "The Mandaic God Ptahil," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 53 (1933).

Lévi-Strauss, Claude, *Anthropologie structurale* (Paris 1958).
Lidzbarski, M., *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer* (Giessen 1915).
——, *Ginza: Der Schatz oder das große Buch der Mandäer* (Göttingen 1925).
——, *Mandäische Liturgien (Text und Übersetzung)* (Berlin 1920) (Reprint: Hildesheim 1962).
Lieberman, S., "How Much Greek in Jewish Palestine?" *Biblical and Other Studies*, Alexander Altmann, ed. (Cambridge, MA 1963).
Liebes, Y., "The Messiah of the Zohar," *The Messianic Idea in Jewish Thought: A Study Conference in Honour of the Eightieth Birthday of Gershom Scholem* (Jerusalem 1982) (Hebrew). English version in *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, and Penina Peli (Albany 1993).
——, *Sections of the Zohar Lexicon* (Jerusalem 1976) (Hebrew).
——, *The Sin of Elisha: The Four Who Entered Paradise and the Nature of Talmudic Mysticism* (Jerusalem 1990) (Hebrew).
Logan, A.H.B. and Wedderburn, A.J.M., eds., *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honor of R. McL. Wilson* (Edinburgh 1983).

MacRae, G., "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth," *Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970).
Macuch, R., "Anfänge der Mandäer," in R. Altheim and R. Stiehl, eds., *Die Araber in der alten Welt* (Berlin, 1965).
——, *Handbook of Classical and Modern Mandaic* (Berlin 1965).
Maier, J., "Das Gefährdungsmotiv bei der Himmelsreise in der jüdischen Apocalyptik und Gnosis," *Kairos* 5 (1963).
——, *Vom Kultus zur Gnosis* (Salzburg 1964).
Massignon, L., *The Passion of al-Hallaj* (Princeton 1972).
McCullough, W. S., *Jewish and Mandaean Incantation Bowls in the Royal Ontario Museum* (Toronto 1967).
Moore, G.F., "Christian Writers on Judaism," *Harvard Theological Review* 14 (1921).
——, "Intermediaries in Jewish Theology: Memra, Shekinah, Metatron," *Harvard Theological Review* 15 (1922).

Montgomery, A., *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia 1913).
Mopsik, C., *Le Livre hébreu d'Hénoch ou Livre des palais* (Paris 1989).
Morray-Jones, C.R.A., "Hekhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition: Alexander's Three Test Cases," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 22 (1991).
——, "Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkabah Tradition," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 43 (1992).
Mussies, G., "The Interpretatio Judaica of Thot-Hermes," in M. Heerma van Voss, E. J. Sharpe, and R. J. Z. Werblowsky, eds., *Studies in the History of Religions* XLIII (Leiden 1982).

Neher, André. "Le voyage mystique des quatre," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 140 (1951).
Nemoy, L., "Al-Qirqisani's Account of the Jewish Sects and Christianity," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 7 (1930).
Neusner, J., *A History of the Jews in Bablyonia*, Vol. 5 (Leiden 1970).
——, "The Development of the Merkavah Tradition," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 2 (1971).
Nicholson, R. A., *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge 1921) (Reprint: 1985).
Nöldeke, T., *Mandäische Grammatik* (Halle 1895).

Odeberg, H., *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch* (Reprint: New York 1973).
——, *Die mandäische Religionsanschauung* (Uppsala 1930).
Oesterley, W., *The Jewish Doctrine of Mediation* (London 1910).
Olyan, S., *A Thousand Thousands Served Him: Exegesis and the Naming of Angels in Ancient Judaism* (Tübingen 1993).

Pagels, E., *The Gnostic Gospels*, (New York 1979).
——, "Pursuing the Spiritual Eve: Imagery and Hermeneutics in the *Hypostasis of the Archons and the Gospel of Philip*," *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, Karen King, ed. (Philadelphia 1988).
Pearson, B., *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis 1990).
——, "The Problem of 'Jewish Gnostic' Literature," *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*, C. Hedrick and R. Hodgson, eds., (Peabody, MA 1986).
Pelton, R., *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study in Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight* (Berkeley 1980).
Pines, S., "God, the Divine Glory, and the Angels According to a Second-Century Theology," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6:1-2 (1987) (Hebrew).

Quispel, G., "The Demiurge in the Apocryphon of John," *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis*, R. McL. Wilson, ed. (Leiden 1978).
——, "Ezekiel 1:26 in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosis," *Vigiliae Christianae* 34 (1980).
——, *Gnosis als Weltreligion* (Zurich 1951).
——, *Gnostic Studies I-II* (Istanbul 1974-75).
——, "Gnosticism and the New Testament," *The Bible and Modern Scholarship*, J.P. Hyatt, ed. (Nashville 1965).
——, "Jewish Gnosis and Mandaean Gnosticism," *Les Textes de Nag Hammadi*, Jacques-É Menard, ed. (Leiden 1975).
——, "Judaism, Judaic Christianity, and Gnosis," *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honour of Robert McL. Wilson*, A.H.B. Logan and A.J.M. Wedderburn (Edinburgh 1983).

Robinson, J., gen. ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco 1988).
Roseanau, W., "Some Notes on Akatriel," *Oriental Studies Dedicated to Paul Haupt* (Baltimore 1926).
Rowland, C., *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York 1982).

Rudolph, K., *Die Mandäer I: Prolegomena. Das Mandäerproblem* (Göttingen 1960).
——, *Die Mandäer II: Der Kult* (Göttingen 1961).
——, "Problems of a History of the Development of the Mandaean Religion," *History of Religions* 8 (1969).
——, *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie in den mandäischen Schriften* (Göttingen 1965).

Schäfer, P., *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen 1984).
——, *Hekhalot-Studien* (Tübingen 1988).
——, "New Testament and Hekhalot Literature: The Journey into Heaven in Paul and in Merkavah Mysticism," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 35 (1984).
——, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literature* (Tübingen 1981).
——, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany 1992).
——, "The Problem of Compositional Identity of 'Hekhalot Rabbati'," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6:1-2 (1987).
Schenke, H.M., *Der Gott "Mensch" in der Gnosis: Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Beitrag zur Diskussion über die paulinische Anschauung von der Kirche als Leib Christi* (Göttingen 1962).
Scholem, G., *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York 1965).
——, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem 1974).
——, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York 1961).
——, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York 1969).
——, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York 1991).
——, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. Allan Arkush (Princeton 1987).
——, *Sabbatai Sevi* (Princeton 1973).
Séd, N., "Les Douze Hebdomades, Le Char de Sabaoth et Les Soixante-Douze Langues," *Novum Testamentum* (21 1979).
——, "Les traditions secrètes et les disciples de Rabbanan Yohanan ben Zakkai," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 184 (1973).
Segal, A., "Heavenly Ascent in Hellenstic Judaism, Early Christianity, and Their Environment," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.23.2 (1980) 1333-1394.
——, "Ruler of This World: Attitudes About Mediator Figures and the Importance of Sociology for Self-Definition," *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, Vol. II: *Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman World* (Philadelphia 1981).
——, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden 1977).
Smith, J.Z., *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden 1978).
Smith, M., "Observations on *Hekhalot Rabbati*," *Biblical and Other Studies*, Alexander Altmann, ed. (Cambridge, MA 1963).
——, "The History of the Term Gnostikos," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the Interanational Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Conn., March 1978*, Vol. II: *Sethian Gnosticism* (Leiden 1981).
Stroumsa, G., *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Leiden 1984).
——, "Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ," *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983).
——, "Polymorphie divine et transformations d'un mythologème: L'apocryphon de Jean et ses sources," *Vigiliae Christianae* 35 (1981).
——, *Savoir et Salut* (Paris 1992).
Swartz, M., *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkabah* (Tübingen 1991).
——, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton 1996).

Tröger, K.W., ed., *Altes Testament-Frühjudentum-Gnosis* (Berlin 1980).

Urbach, E., *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem 1969) (Hebrew).
——, "The Traditions about Merkabah Mysticism in the Tannaitic Period," *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem* (Jerusalem 1967) (Hebrew).

Wasserstrom, S., *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis Under Early Islam* (Princeton 1995).
——, "The Moving Finger Writes: Mughira b. Sa'id's Islamic Gnosis and the Myths of Its Rejection," *History of Religions* 25 (1985).
Weber, F., *System der altsynagogalen palästinischen Theologie* (Leipzig 1880).
Widengren, G., *Der Mandäismus* (Darmstadt 1982).
——, "Heavenly Enthronement and Baptism: Studies in Mandaean Baptism," in J. Neusner, ed., *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (Leiden 1968).
Williams, M., *The Immovable Race: A Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity* (Leiden 1985).
Wolfson, E., "Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashich Trope to Mystical Symbol," *History of Religions* 27 (1987).
——, "Erasing the Erasure/Gender and the Writing of God's Body in Kabbalistic Symbolism," *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* (Albany 1995).
——, "The Image of Jacob Engraved upon the Throne: Further Speculation on the Esoteric Doctrine of the German Pietists," *Massu'ot: Studies in Kabbalistic Literature and Jewish Philosophy in Memory of Prof. Ephraim Gottlieb*, Michal Oron and Amos Goldreich, eds. (Jerusalem 1994) (Hebrew). Revised, expanded English version in *Along the Path: Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism and Hermeneutics* (Albany 1995).
——, "The Tree That is All: Jewish-Christian Roots of a Kabbalistic Symbok in *Sefer ha-Bahir*," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1993).
——, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton 1974).
——, "*Yeridah la-Merkavah:* Typology of Ecstasy and Enthronement in Ancient Jewish Mysticism," *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics, and Typologies*, Robert Herrera, ed. (New York 1993).

Yamauchi, E., *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins* (Cambridge 1970).
——, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidence* (Grand Rapids, MI 1983).
——, *Mandaic Incantation Texts* (New Haven 1967).

INDEX

BRILL'S SERIES IN JEWISH STUDIES

1. COHEN, R. *Jews in Another Environment.* Surinam in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century. 1991. ISBN 90 04 09373 7
2. PRAWER, S.S. *Israel at Vanity Fair.* Jews and Judaism in the Writings of W.M. Thackeray. 1992. ISBN 90 04 09403 2
3. PRICE, J.J. *Jerusalem under Siege.* The Collapse of the Jewish State 66-70 C.E. 1992. ISBN 90 04 09471 7
4. ZINGUER, I. *L'hébreu au temps de la Renaissance.* 1992. ISBN 90 04 09557 8
5. GUTWEIN, D. *The Divided Elite.* Economics, Politics and Anglo-Jewry, 1882-1917. 1992. ISBN 90 04 09447 4
6. ERAQI KLORMAN, B.-Z. *The Jews of Yemen in the Nineteenth Century.* A Portrait of a Messianic Community. 1993. ISBN 90 04 09684 1
7. BEN-DOV, N. *Agnon's Art of Indirection.* Uncovering Latent Content in the Fiction of S.Y. Agnon. 1993. ISBN 90 04 09863 1
8. GERA, D. *Judaea and Mediterranean Politics,* 219-161 B.C.E. 1998. ISBN 90 04 09441 5
9. COUDERT, A.P. *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century.* The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614-1698). 1999. ISBN 90 04 09844 5
10. GROSS, A. *Iberian Jewry from Twilight to Dawn.* The World of Rabbi Abraham Saba. 1995. ISBN 90 04 10053 9
12. AHRONI, R. *The Jews of the British Crown Colony of Aden.* History, Culture, and Ethnic Relations. 1994. ISBN 90 04 10110 1
13. DEUTSCH, N. *The Gnostic Imagination.* Gnosticism, Mandaeism and Merkabah Mysticism. 1995. ISBN 90 04 10264 7
14. ARBEL, B. *Trading Nations.* Jews and Venetians in the Early Modern Eastern Mediterranean. 1995. ISBN 90 04 10057 1
15. LEVENSON, D. *Julian and Jerusalem.* The Sources and Tradition. 1996. ISBN 90 04 105441
16. MENACHE, S. (ed.). *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora.* The Pre-Modern World. 1996. ISBN 90 04 10189 6
17. PARFITT, T. *The Road to Redemption.* The Jews of the Yemen 1900-1950. 1996. ISBN 90 04 10544 1
18. ASSIS, Y.T. *Jewish Economy in the Medieval Crown of Aragon, 1213-1327.* Money and Power. 1997. ISBN 90 04 10615 4
19. STILLMAN, Y.K. & STILLMAN, N.A. (eds.). *From Iberia to Diaspora.* Studies in Sephardic History and Culture. 1999. ISBN 90 04 10720 7
20. BARKAI, R. *A History of Jewish Gynaecological Texts in the Middle Ages.* 1998. ISBN 90 04 10995 1
21. HELLER, M.J. *Printing the Talmud.* A History of the Individual Treatises Printed from 1700 to 1750. 1999. ISBN 90 04 11293 6
22. DEUTSCH, N. *Guardians of the Gate.* Angelic Vice Regency in Late Antiquity. 1999. ISBN 90 04 10909 9