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ASPECTS OF LATE SECOND TEMPLE JEWISH APOCALYPTIC: A
CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON

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To Cecília, Julia and Isabela,
with love

He [Anthony] said that the monk should be known, in his life and
deeds, as being a stranger to the world and a friend of the angels.

Primitive life of S. Anthony, 7



ABSTRACT

Among the many difficulties raised by Second Temple Jewish apocalyptic literature (which include dating and original language of composition among other issues), one that stands out is the interpretation of the many visionary episodes described. Do they report genuine, first-hand experiences on the part of the writers, are they just a literary convention, or do they stand in-between those two possibilities (i.e. do the written accounts reflect actual experiential practice even if what we have in the accounts themselves is mere literary artifice)?

The most important issue to be raised among all these difficulties is that almost all apocalyptic literature is pseudonymous - i.e. even if we are facing authentic revelatory experiences these cannot, by definition, be first-person accounts even when they ostensibly appear to be so. Pseudepigraphy poses a barrier here but at the same time it has been suggested by a number of scholars that this device might be related to the whole visionary process, implying that there may be some mystical identification between actual writer and portrayed hero. In short, the actual writer may believe himself to have been used as a channel for communication which would account for the pseudonymous authorship of the texts.

Such questions cannot be answered by the study of apocalyptic literature alone, since the texts give us no evidence regarding this identification, or regarding the possibilities of evaluation of the visionary experiences. A different method must be used to try to assess the literary corpus and the above stated questions in a different light.



To this end, cross-cultural comparison can provide a useful tool in dealing with cases such as ours, where evidence in the sources themselves is scarce but when phenomena apparently similar can be compared. Great care must be taken not to exaggerate the possibilities of cross-cultural comparison so as to find exactly what one wants to in arbitrary fashion. Cross-cultural comparison can however be very useful in noting similarities and differences in pseudonymous attribution of religious texts.

In the case discussed in this thesis, we are dealing in the Jewish literature authorship in which a later author viewed himself as in some way identified with a figure of the past as he wrote, leading to pseudepigraphy; I have therefore looked for a suitable, well-documented modern counterpart to religious pseudepigraphy in Antiquity. The example chosen is Kardecist automatic writing (also known as psychography), a religious practice at the core of Brazilian Kardecist Spiritism. This has proved insightful due to both the external similarity of religious pseudepigraphy and to the abundant examples of preparatory ecstatic practices found therein.

In Kardecism, authorship is not really pseudonymous since the name of the medium who mechanically wrote the text is usually given; still the contents of the texts are ascribed to people other than the actual writer, i.e. the medium. Among these, the figure of Francisco "Chico" Xavier stands out as one who, at the same time, had an enormous output of texts (more than 400 books).

The study of Kardecist material on automatic writing, and study of scholarship on its problems, shed light on a number of issues, some reinforcing the idea of actual identification on the part of apocalyptic writers, others pointing against it. Supportive of the hypothesis of



apocalyptic pseudepigraphy being akin to Kardecist automatic writing are the effects reported by the visionaries - tiredness, fear, exhaustion, trembling, visual hallucinations are all standard issues in Jewish apocalypses and in the reports of Kardecist mediums. They are very frequent in Chico Xavier, especially in his earlier production (as time passed he admittedly learnt how to discipline his feelings and development of psychic abilities). Differences in style are also a common feature: a text like, say, 4Ezra does not resemble its canonical counterpart (Ezra), nor do texts like *Há 2.000 anos atrás...* resemble a report on the life of Jesus such as could be written at the time of his death, or even centuries after. Anachronism is thus a common feature of apocalyptic pseudepigraphy and Kardecist automatic writing.

Manipulation of spirits and/or possession by them are practices that make Kardecist automatic writing something other than mere convention and testify to the sincerity of the mediums' descriptions. In utilising the Kardecist evidence consideration is given to evidence of similar ideas from Late Antiquity, specifically Second Temple Judaism. Far more common are negative references to belief in reincarnation in patristic authors like Augustine, Origen or Jerome, but they are Christian, not Jewish, authors discussing with pagans imbued with specifically Pythagorean ideas and in a period much later than that ascribed to most of the apocalyptic output. The mere fact that these authors discuss the issue is indicative that people held such beliefs and this was a risk amongst those to whom they wrote as well.

As a result of this comparison it would appear that there is some evidence to consider apocalyptic pseudepigraphy as potentially involving manipulation of



spirits (of dead past figures such as Baruch and Ezra, but also of mythical characters like Enoch, who did not die but was taken up to heaven), since Josephus' testimony - notwithstanding its inherent problems - clearly ascribes this belief to a major Jewish group, the Pharisees. It should be noted that the fact that reincarnation was a concept "in the air" for late Second Temple Jews makes pseudepigraphy (which may have involved the writer identifying in some way with a figure of the past) a viable proposition, but no more than that. Immediate preparatory practices, on the other hand, although plentiful in Jewish apocalyptic descriptions, do not form part of Kardecist training and can, as such, be dismissed as non-mandatory to perform automatic writing involving manipulating of spirits. Both short- and long-term preparations (i.e. immediate practices and life-long training and absorption of doctrine) play a very different role in the cases of Jewish apocalyptic pseudepigraphy and Kardecist automatic writing and this is an issue discussed in the appendix to the thesis.

It stands out in most apocalypses that the characters under whose name the revelations happened are described as undergoing preparatory processes before the visions occur. This evidence may be adduced in support of this thesis, therefore. These descriptions take a highly stereotypical character (e.g. the sequence of fasts in 2Br) but this stereotypical nature does not mean, however, that they could never have taken place. Such descriptions are very much absent from Kardecist usage, however. It must also be stressed that, since what changes is culture and not chemistry or physiology, the same preparatory practices can lead to very different results according to the mental tools that the visionary has at his/her disposal. Thus a



Kardecist medium such as Chico Xavier sees things that fit well in his Kardecist point of view, which includes the manipulating of spirits in order to produce coherent texts exhortative to charity etc., in Kardecist fashion. The same result cannot be expected from mystics in societies where reincarnation (at the core of Kardecism) or invoking of spirits are absent.

In the appendix I discuss preparatory practices of seers as described in apocalyptic texts.



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My wife Cecília shared a great part of the burden that the research took on both of us, and still we had the gifts of our daughters Julia and Isabela amidst all work - this was a blessing indeed, so this thesis is dedicated to the three of them.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- 1En - *Ethiopic Book of Enoch*
2Br - *Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch*
2En - *Slavonic Book of Enoch*
3Br - *Greek Apocalypse of Baruch*
3En - *Hebrew Book of Enoch*
4Br - *Fourth Book of Baruch*
4Ezra - *Fourth Book of Ezra*
AAASH - *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*
AI - *Acta Iranica*
AJ - *Josephus, Antiquitates Judaicarum*
AJCH - *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*
AJCHH - *Australian Journal of Clinical Hypnotherapy and Hypnosis*
AJT - *American Journal of Theology*
AMI - *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*
AMWNE - HELLHOLM, Daniel (ed.). *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979*. Tübingen: Mohr, 1983.
ANF - ROBERTS, Alexander and DONALDSON, James (eds.). *The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*. Edinburgh / Grand Rapids: T & T Clark / Eerdmans, 1989.
ApAbr - *Apocalypse of Abraham*
ApEl - *Coptic Apocalypse of Elijah*
ApMos - *Apocalypse of Moses*
ApSed - *Apocalypse of Sedrach*
ASC - "altered state of consciousness"
ATR - *Anglican Theological Review*
Bib. - *Biblica*



BJ - Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum*
BJP - *British Journal of Psychology*
BM - KARDEC, Allan. *O livro dos médiuns* (*The Book of Mediums*).
BN - *Biblische Notizen*
BSOAS - *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
CA - Josephus, *Contra Apionem*
CBQ - *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
DNS - *Diseases of the Nervous System*
EA - *Ex Auditu*
EI - *Encyclopedia of Islam*
EPS - *Encyclopaedia of Psychic Science*
ET - *Expository Times*
FE - *Folha Espírita*
FPP - "fantasy-prone personality"
GrEzra - *Greek Apocalypse of Ezra*
HTR - *Harvard Theological Review*
IJCEH - *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*
Int. - *Interpretation*
JAIH - *Journal of the American Institute of Hypnosis*
JAP - *Journal of Abnormal Psychiatry*
JASP - *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*
JASPR - *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*
JBL - *Journal of Biblical Literature*
JCEH - *Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*
JGP - *Journal of Genetic Psychology*
JHBS - *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*
JHS - *Journal of Hellenic Studies*
JMI - *Journal of Mental Imagery*
JNMD - *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*



- JSP - *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*
JSPR - *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*
JTD - *Journal of Trauma and Dissociation*
JTS - *Journal of Theological Studies*
MIFAN - *Memoires de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire*
Mnem. - *Mnemosyne*
NT- *Novum Testamentum*
NTP - SCHNEEMELCHER, Wilhelm (ed.). *New Testament Apocrypha*.
Vol.2. London: Lutterworth Press, 1965.
NTS - *New Testament Studies*
OTP - CHARLESWORTH, James (ed.). *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. New York: Doubleday, 2 volumes. 1983-1985;
PP - *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*
PQ - *Psychoanalytical Quarterly*
PQS - *Psychiatric Quarterly Supplement*
PR - *Psychological Review*
PSPR - *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*
Pseud.I - VON FRITZ, Kurt (ed.). *Pseudepigrapha I: huit exposés suivis de discussions*. Vandouvres-Genève: Fondation Hardt, 1972.
PsyR. - *Psychology Review*
PT - "possessional trance"
RS - *Religião e sociedade*
SBE - MÜLLER, Max (ed.). *The Sacred Books of the East*.
SJT - *Scottish Journal of Theology*
SR - *Spiritist Review*
T - "trance"
TB - *Tyndale Bulletin*
Test12 - *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*
TestAbr - *Testament of Abraham*
Th. - *Themelios*



TPAPA - *Transactions and Proceedings of the American
Philological Association*

V - Josephus, *Vita*

ZDMG - *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen
Gesellschaft*



CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

The aim and purpose of this thesis is to discuss apocalyptic pseudepigraphy as related to a mystic experience of possession; in short, to discuss the idea that the pseudonymous authorship of most apocalypses may be in some way related to the mystical experiences described in them.

This introduction focuses on three main subjects, namely a theoretical discussion of the need for the cross-cultural analysis such as the one proposed (as well as its limitations), some thoughts on the terminology to be used hereafter as related to the psychological processes involved in the mystical phenomena to be analyzed and an evaluation of scholarship related to the theme.

So it is my aim to deal with the study of pseudepigraphical practices as related to the literature above defined; only secondarily is it related to the texts in their original language. It is not my intention to engage in translation for its own sake: where necessary comment will be given by means of checking translations accepted and renown throughout the scholarly community.

My interest in the topic above rose not so much as a personal wish to study theoretical issues related to altered states of consciousness (ASC, from now onwards) but more as a long-term desire to come closer to the people who produced these texts. Although the literary corpus preserved is big enough, we know very little about the persons behind the texts and, by extension, of the mystical experiences that may lie behind the apocalypses - even when dating is relatively straightforward, as it occurs in the book of Daniel. This can be part of our general ignorance



about readers and books in Antiquity, but, if pursued as an independent theme could lead us to a better understanding of the world of Judaism in late Second Temple Period, and, by extension, of the world Jesus knew and where Christianity was born.



1. Nature and purpose of cross-cultural studies in Biblical scholarship

A first and major difficulty arises in defining whether the ecstatic practices described in our sources are genuine processes or just literary *topoi*. If this could be defined as true or false with any degree of certainty, a big part of the problem discussed in this thesis would be solved beforehand; unfortunately the evidence available will not provide any definite answer.

Thus, in the absence of contemporary and genealogically linked evidence to support any conclusion regarding the authenticity of the apocalypticists' practices, I propose instead to turn to a structural approach - i.e. the investigation of similar patterns of mystical behaviour in societies non-directly related to Judaism of the defined period, but on which we have enough clear information to draw on parallels or divergences. Or put in an even simpler way, we should try to attain some degree of generalization by means of comparing similar phenomena: this can be done regarding historically related societies (genealogical approach, when direct borrowing is demonstrable) or non-related ones (structural)¹.

In this respect, the attempt here proposed is not by any means new: already in the 19th century Franz Boas could theorize on it, although with a somewhat evolutionist bias (due to the underlying assumption that, human societies having developed everywhere with so many common traces, the same ethnic phenomena would be observed everywhere with

¹ William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt (eds.). *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*. Evanston: Row, Peterson, 1958. P.4.



minor differences in shape)². However, besides the dubious assumption that the above should be true, we are not dealing with the same ethnic phenomena here, but rather trying to observe if similar psychological processes are at work and could thus provide us with insights regarding Second Temple mystics. Obviously, since this is not a work on psychology, it should provide only some tools to help analysis in individual areas, namely those where specific differences must not be ascribed to different cultural backgrounds between individuals or groups. Besides, as Boas already knew, it would be really unwise to ascribe identical consequences to similar causes when dealing with cultural material³; there are many cases of non-related societies which display the same conditions for the rising of prophetic or apocalyptic movements, and nonetheless such movements would not take place in some of them⁴.

Important modern cross-cultural comparisons in the study of religions include those of John Ashton, who used it regarding Paul's "shamanistic" features⁵, and Thomas Overholt, who tried the same thing in order to understand prophetism in parallel to Native American religions⁶, to name but two famous examples. In the case of Paul it can still be argued that shamanism could be echoed to him via Greek first-hand knowledge (i.e. the "structural" approach could lead to a "genealogical" link); evidently the same

² Franz Boas. "The limitations of the comparative method of Anthropology" (1896) in: Franz Boas. *Race, Language and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

³ Idem pp.273-275.

⁴ Robert Wilson. "The problems of describing and defining apocalyptic discourse" in: *Semeia* 2, 1981.

⁵ *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*. New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 2000.

⁶ Thomas Overholt. *Prophecy in Cross-Cultural Perspective: A Sourcebook for Biblical Researchers*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986. This proved to be a very important work, especially regarding methodological considerations.



cannot be said of American native cults. Weston La Barre did the same thing using the Sioux' Ghost Dance religion as a model for understanding Christianity⁷.

Perhaps the most famous recent attempt to elucidate ancient mental processes by means of cross-cultural processes is that of Milman Parry comparing Serbian oral epic compositions in the beginning of the 20th century to Homeric poetry; although challenged in more recent times it was a noteworthy effort in a field where, like ours, internal evidence had long yielded whatever could be considered useful to elucidate psychological (in this case, mnemonical) processes⁸. A long list of similar works could be produced here but this would take us far away from our object of study⁹.

The main idea underlying all cross-cultural studies like the ones mentioned above (and also this thesis) is that similar social, historical or economical circumstances should produce similar but not identical results, as said above: this means that, while there are many gaps in our understanding of, say, peasant Judaea in the first-century, these could be at least partially filled by means of comparison with other better-known, more recent (or even

⁷ An effort which came to the somewhat curious conclusion that "Christianity is the still cognitively troubled and imperfectly melded Hellenistic 'ghost dances' of the Hellenic and Semitic peoples crushed by Rome". *The Ghost Dance: Origins of Religion*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1972. P.254.

⁸ Adam Parry (ed.) *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; Moses Finley. *The World of Odysseus*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1956.

⁹ Mircea Eliade. *Patterns in Comparative Religion*: London: Sheed & Ward, 1958; Adolf Deismann. *Light from the Ancient East: the New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927. Noteworthy are also Keith Thomas' use of anthropology to study English witchcraft in the time of Reformation and Tessa Rajak's comparison of political upheaval in first-century Judaea with the English Revolution. It should be noted that anthropologists often go the other way round, i.e. turning to Biblical studies in order to understand their own objects (cf. Robert Culley, "Anthropology and the Old Testament: an introductory comment" in: *Semeia* 21, 1981).



contemporary) societies. A good example would be the article by Shimon Applebaum where the author tries to develop his insights into the economic situation of first-century Judaea looking at Brazilian millenarian movements from the beginning of the 20th century¹⁰. By looking at what we know with more detail, and by means of establishing reasonable parallels, we may come to know more about a theme shrouded in doubt such as the purposes and nature of apocalyptic pseudepigraphy in late Second Temple Judaism¹¹. One must be on guard, however, against selective description chosen in the sources to be evaluated – unless one is to force the evidence into pre-arranged schemes and then find, surprisingly, that both ends do indeed meet¹². On the other hand, a great deal of recent scholarship on the subject, still indebted to form-critical studies (remarkable in more than one aspect, it must be said) comes to a dead-end in many themes (e.g. the relationship between ecstatic means and rational content in classical prophecy, or between prophets and society)¹³; cross-cultural studies should, in my view, only be used in the absence of more complete data to allow conclusions of the "genealogical" type.

The cross-cultural analysis proposed here regards the possibility that pseudonymous authorship be something else other than mere fraud or stylistic device and, as such, understandable in the light of the contemporary, apparently

¹⁰ "Josephus and the economic causes of the Jewish War" in: Louis Feldman and Gohei Hata (eds.). *Josephus, the Bible, and History*: Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989. P.257.

¹¹ Such is the explicit intention of Wilson in *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980, while studying another "enigmatic" subject, the relation between prophecy and society in Ancient Israel.

¹² Bruce Metzger. "Considerations of methodology in the study of the mystery religions and early Christianity", HTR 48, 1955. Pp.8-9.

¹³ Wilson, "Prophecy and ecstasy: a reexamination", p.322 ff.



similar phenomenon of Kardecist automatic writing
(psychography).



2. Terminology and definitions

Since most of the terms used in the discussion of the phenomena come originally from the field of psychological studies, a brief summary of definitions, terms and concepts should be given here.

2.1. Altered states of consciousness

"Altered state of consciousness" is a broad term which comprises all the states of mind discussed in this work and goes far beyond (i.e. ASCs are also to be found in non-religious environments, or in subjects not involved with religious experience). On the other hand, when the scholar comes to deal with specific terminology (such as "trance", "ecstasy", "possession" and so on) there is no agreement between the specialists as to their meaning; the list of possible definitions for these terms would be endless. I have tried to offer operative definitions that are, of course, based on the specific literature but at the same time avoiding controversies that are, for our purposes, unnecessary.

A useful starting point for a definition of ASC is proposed by Ludwig - an ASC (of which ecstasy is but a particular case) can be defined as any state that is induced by physiological, psychological or pharmacological agents; they are also states of mind that can be identified by the self or by an external observer representing a clear deviation in terms of the subjective experience of the psychological working as related to general norms, dictated by the subjective experience of this same individual while



awake¹⁴. This is a very broad definition; more strictly, the ecstatic phenomenon can be understood as an alteration of man's mental activity, with relevant consequences for his interpretation of self and reality¹⁵. In short, ASCs comprise all the phenomena described below and are not necessarily related to religious experience - activities as different as oil painting and radar operating have been linked to ASCs by its participants.

2.2. Ecstasy

A modern definition of "ecstasy" provided by a recent work is that it is, "strictly, a trancelike state of profound emotionality in which awareness is limited to the object of contemplation. Also loosely used to refer to any exalted state of emotion"¹⁶. In an extension of its meaning in Greek, "ecstasy" defines a frame of mind where the self is no longer confined to its physical limitations (this being a required condition for otherworldly journeys such as the one described on 3En)¹⁷. By comparison "trance", to which it is related, can be defined as "a state of profound absorption frequently accompanied by vocal and motor automatisms that in some contexts are interpreted as signs of spirit possession"¹⁸.

2.3. Possession

"Possession", in contrast to all other terms defined here, is not a psychological or clinical term in origin, but rather a cultural explanation given to an ASC, namely

¹⁴ Arnold Ludwig. "Altered states of consciousness" in: Charles Tart (ed.). *Altered States of Consciousness*. San Francisco: Harper, 1990.

¹⁵ Id. *ibid*.

¹⁶ David Wulff. *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views*. New York: Chichester / Wiley, 1991. G-8.

¹⁷ Holm, *op.cit.* p.7.

¹⁸ Wulff, *op.cit.* G-30.



to a kind of trance ("possessional trance" or simply PT)¹⁹. Much of contemporary discussion on the subject is owed to the exceptional work of Oesterreich, which however goes further in trying to provide explanations for the phenomenon²⁰. As a starting point it must be said that "possession" is a cultural explanation given to a dissociative state, which is explained by means of a human, animal or supernatural entity entering the body of the possessed and taking hold, in part or whole, of his / her mind.

2.4. Automatism

Finally, a last keyword for our investigation is "automatism" (of which the phenomena to be analyzed in chapter 1 are but a particular case), which constitutes, in a psychologist's view, "actions that are carried out without awareness or at least without the attention that is usually required for their successful performance"²¹. Not every automatism is as spectacular as automatic writing: a great deal of automatic activity is carried out by every person on a continuous basis, without any mystical implication²².

¹⁹ Erika Bourguignon (ed.) *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1973. P.13.

²⁰ *Possession, Demoniacal and Other: Among Primitive Races in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modern Times*. Seacaucus: University Books, 1966. P.65 ff. Oesterreich's groundbreaking book is remarkable, among other things, for not dismissing possessional phenomena as false but rather as having an objective explanation (although not spiritual causes).

²¹ Wulff, op.cit. G-3.

²² Oesterreich, op.cit. 45. A very common variation of this phenomenon would be the "internal voice" that keeps a dialogue with every person as if it were a distinct part of the self or even a different person.



Since automatic writing is also a dissociative phenomenon, it has accordingly been related to possession and to multiple personalities by scholars²³.

2.5. Hypnosis

Although there is no unanimous conclusion among scholars about the role played by hypnosis in possession, dissociation and automatic writing, the majority of scholars would link both issues. A brief definition of hypnosis can circumscribe it as an ASC characterized by certain physiological attributes (such as lower blood pressure, increase in suggestibility and enhanced access to unconscious feelings and ideas)²⁴. "Hypnotic phenomena can be described as natural behavioral and experiential manifestations of the trance state"²⁵.

The way hypnosis has been regarded as scientifically acceptable or dismissed as charlatanism has swung back and forth over the last centuries. It must be said, however, that its clinical applications (and by extension, its credibility in other sectors of investigation) have had an ever-growing use since the huge experimental and theoretical work of Erickson in the 1930's. But while psychologists offer fine working definitions of hypnosis, when we come to comparison between clinical uses and Kardecist automatic writing similarities cease.

²³ E.g. Anita Mühl. "Automatic writing as an indication of the fundamental factors underlying the personality", JAP 17, 1922; Philip L. Harriman. "The experimental production of some phenomena related to the multiple personality", JASP 37, 1942; Brian Earle and Frederick W. Theye, "Automatic writing as a psychiatric problem", PQS 42(2), 1968.

²⁴ John Edgette and Janet-Sasson Edgette. *The Handbook of Hypnotic Phenomena in Psychotherapy*. Philadelphia: Brunner/Mazel, Inc, 1995. Pp.3-4.

²⁵ Idem, p.12.



3. Automatic writing and ecstatic practices in recent scholarship

Automatic writing can thus be considered a particular ecstatic state (an ASC) whose main characteristic is the output of a written record of some kind, whether of mystical nature or not; only the former interests us here.

One must also bear in mind the extreme variety and geographical distribution of ASCs throughout the world; evidently, the function they fulfill inside each society (not to mention how they are dealt with by individuals) varies immensely²⁶. This assures us that we are dealing with comparable phenomena, but by no means enforces that they are identical in form or content.

In this respect the anthropological or sociological approach to the visionary experiences depicted is more mindful of the subjects involved than the psychological / psychiatric approaches, which are often plainly evolutionary or grossly schematic as we can see in the 20th century works such as those of Achelis²⁷, Beck²⁸ and Voipio²⁹. A remarkable work on the field of analysis of ecstatic practices, in terms of psychiatry, was completed by Thomas Andrae in 1926³⁰, the author taking care to state that we should not consider ecstasy as any more "primitive" than other mental functions such as reasoning or will.

²⁶ Bourguignon, op.cit. p.3. The author conducted a famous research in the beginning of the 70s that came to the staggering result that, from 488 different societies observed around the world, 437, or 90%, had some kind of ASC inducing practice as part of their cultural milieu.

²⁷ *Die Ekstase in ihrer kulturellen Bedeutung*, p.18. Cit. by Holm, op.cit. p.11.

²⁸ *Die Ekstase*, p.50. Cit. by Holm, op.cit. p.11.

²⁹ Aarni Voipio. *Sleeping Preachers, a Study in Ecstatic Religiosity*. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1951. The author relates sleeping trances to hysteria. Useful comparisons can be found in Carlo Ginzburg. *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*. London: Hutchinson Radius, 1990.

³⁰ *Mystikens psykologi*. Cit. by Holm, op.cit. pp.11-12.



It is noteworthy that the pictures presented by Second Temple seers as product of their experiences are highly detailed and could be rationally apprehended by any person who knows the languages of the visionary texts (esoteric and hidden significance would constitute a second layer of meaning that does not concern us here), as different from related phenomena like glossolalia where a shared knowledge of skill between the mystic and surrounding people is assumed³¹. Even more remarkable is the fact that a concept of history such as the one shared by diverse men like Josephus, the authors of Daniel and of 4Ezra, can be so similar despite the very different means of each man to reach the concept. This means that there is no limit to the interaction between erudite and popular material in the sources available to us, and that the borders between conscious, "erudite" knowledge and popular lore are quite fluid, as the means to acquire them can also be.

I would like to stress that, even if the experiences described by the seers were completely fraudulent, they could, in theory, be understood in terms of structural (i.e. socio-anthropological or psychiatric) analysis of ASCs, this being arguably a strong point in favour of their authenticity. Besides, being the ecstatic experiences potentially harmful³², they should occur inside institutionalized frameworks³³ - referring us again to the

³¹ Felicitas D. Goodman, *Speaking in Tongues. A Cross-Cultural Study of Glossolalia*. Chicago / London: University of Chicago Press, 1972. P.8.

³² Cf. the introduction to the text of 3En by Andersen, OTP 1, p.233 and Ithamar Gruenwald. *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*. Leiden: Brill, 1980.

³³ Thus Sarbin and Allen introduced a "scale" to measure the intensity of the ecstatic factor involved in each case-study, varying from 0 (no ecstatic involvement) to 7 (bewitchment), ecstasies being normally graded by them at 6; dogmatic as it may seem, it has the virtue of recognizing the potential harm of ecstatic practices and, by extension, their authenticity. Cf. Theodore Sarbin. "Role theory" in: Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson (eds.). *The Handbook of Social*



discussion of the experiences as literary *topoi*, fraudulent or not, but anyway the need for social performance and control of the visionary experiences is widespread³⁴.

Psychology. Reading, Mass / London: Addison-Wesley, 1968. Cit. by Holm, op.cit. p.18.

³⁴ Wilson, "Prophecy and ecstasy: a reexamination", p.326. A point must be made here regarding the relative loneliness of the apocalyptic seer as compared to his prophetic counterpart.



4. The meaning of pseudepigraphy

The idea of a text signed by someone other than its real (i.e. mechanical) writer is usually associated with fraud, both for modern cases as well as for ancient ones.

However, in this thesis we are dealing with phenomena that, although externally being akin to fraudulent pseudepigraphy, may be something different since it appears in texts strewn with references to visionary experiences, to which pseudepigraphy may or may not be related. In the case of ancient Second Temple texts the notion of pseudepigraphy is much more complicated than ours in the modern world, and usually involves the appropriation of the name of a great figure of the past: for example, wisdom traditions can be attributed to a past character (naturally one noted for his gifts on wisdom, namely Solomon), as is the case in Qohelet, Testament and Wisdom of Solomon.

In the modern-day texts chosen for cross-cultural comparison a similar phenomenon happens, with the major difference that the author in whose name the medium writes can sometimes be completely unknown to the public (e.g. Emmanuel, the guiding spirit of the medium Francisco Cândido "Chico" Xavier), or may be a famous person of the past disguised in another name, for various reasons (André Luiz, who may have been the famous doctor Carlos Chagas; "Irmão X", a nickname used by the intellectual Humberto de Campos to avoid further lawsuits from his family against the medium). The comparison is particularly useful when it comes to pseudepigraphical works where the style of the presumed authors is easily comparable.

In the modern-day cases fraud can be dismissed on the part of the medium analyzed, at least as far as investigation has taken us until now. Instead,



psychological devices, usually related to hypnosis, may be the clue to understanding the various automatisms that direct the medium activity and thus produce works ostensibly similar, but not identical in style to the putative authors.

That the same reasoning should be applied to ancient Second Temple pseudepigraphy is one of the objectives of this thesis. It should be noted, however, that most authors seem to be interested in the history of reception of pseudepigraphy, and not in the psychology of the "pseudepigrapher". The most recent attempt in the field is Duff's remarkable DPhil work, which makes a point in insisting on the relevance of accurate attribution of authorship for ancient readers³⁵. Literature on the subject is plentiful, but almost always either trying to prove whether a certain text is false, or attempting to elucidate how people dealt with attribution of authorship. As a very brief survey, the works of Syme³⁶, Brox (as editor)³⁷, Chambers³⁸, Sint³⁹ and, above all, Torm⁴⁰ are the most important for the theme of this thesis. They shall be discussed in more depth in further chapters.

In short, although the attitude towards ancient pseudepigraphical texts may have been quite similar to our modern way of doing so, the psychology of pseudonym authorship may have been quite different, at least for

³⁵ This contradicts the widely held notion that ancient readers did not care about accuracy in authorship, or lived in such a different frame of mind from ours that it "did not matter".

³⁶ "Fraud and imposture", Pseud.I.

³⁷ *Pseudepigraphie in der Heidnischen und Jüdisch-Christlichen Antike*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977.

³⁸ *The History and Motives of Literary Forgeries*. Oxford / London: Basil Blackwell / Simpkin / Marshall, 1891.

³⁹ *Pseudonymität im Altertum; ihre Formen und ihre Gründe*. Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 1960.

⁴⁰ "Die Psychologie der Pseudonimität im Hinblick auf die Literatur des Urchristentums" in: Torm, op.cit.



religious texts that we cannot suspect of having been deliberately falsified through ill will⁴¹. Modern automatically written Kardecist texts offer a live example of how to produce a text that is, at the same time, truthful to its presumed author and at the same time mechanically written by another person decades, centuries or millennia later than the portrayed author. As we shall see in the next chapter, since the mechanical author's subjectivity plays such an important part of the process, this would also account for anachronisms seen both in modern psychography and in ancient texts.

⁴¹ A famous example of this kind of pseudepigraphy is given by Tertulian regarding a priest of Asia Minor accused of having written himself the *Acts of Paul* "out of love for Paul" (*amore Pauli*); this was soon discovered with consequences for the priest. Cf. Torm, op.cit. p.126 ff. It would be unwise to put all pseudepigraphical texts in this category, as it would also be to consider all pseudepigraphy to hide a sincere and deep-rooted psychological process. The episode will be discussed in greater detail below.



5. Outline of scholarship about late Second Temple apocalyptic pseudepigraphy

According to the criteria discussed in the terminology above, the experiences related by the apocalyptic seers do in fact bring profound alterations both in their perception of reality and of themselves, bringing out vivid and colorful visionary pictures. It is also unclear as to what can be considered authentic first-hand experience and what is an expected part of a genre⁴². More on the theme is to be found in the Appendix to the thesis.

5.1. The concept of corporate identity as applied to apocalyptic pseudepigraphy

In the discussion about the sincerity of apocalyptic experiences one pioneering attempt was made by David S. Russell, affirming that there could be an essential affinity between individuals separated by a great distance in time, happening due to similarities in different events⁴³. This also supposes that diachronic events may be perceived by the individual as simultaneous in a given cultural context - without this implying mental confusion or foolishness on the part of the visionary, but constituting rather a fulfillment of the conditions

⁴² There is not a unanimously accepted definition of apocalypse, notwithstanding the efforts of so many scholars at the end of the 1970's; the often quoted volume 14 of *Semeia* and the proceedings of the 1979' Uppsala colloquium are the products of that discussion, to which I refer. These all point to a definition of apocalyptic in terms of literary genre. Cf. John J. Collins (ed.). *Apocalypse: the Morphology of a Genre*. (Semeia vol.14.) Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979 and Daniel Hellholm (ed.). *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979*. Tübingen: Mohr, 1983.

⁴³ David S. Russell. *Divine Disclosure: an Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic*. London: SCM, 1992. P.67. His efforts can be considered as pioneering because many of his ideas were first developed during the Sixties, in *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*.



available to him / her in terms of the range of ecstatic experiences available in a given society⁴⁴.

Russell chose to identify such a phenomenon in terms of what he calls "corporate unity", or the perception of events widely separated in time as being simultaneous⁴⁵. This unity is composed not only of the perception of diachronic events as simultaneous but also of the identity between the mechanical writer and the social group in which he is inserted, and as such accounts for the choosing of the name to which the text is being attributed⁴⁶. In later years Russell came to reject part of his explanation, although retaining its essentials, however. In the next pages we will discuss only the use made by Russell of the concept of corporate identity; finer points in the whole of his arguments are to be found in item 5.2 of this introduction, together with other authors' points of view.

The idea that the apocalyptic visionary may sincerely impersonate someone else can be explained by means other than possession and corresponding automatic writing. It has been proposed in the past that Hebrew thought could be informed by categories utterly different from our own (and, for that matter, also from Greek modes of thought⁴⁷). Regarding what interests us here, Hebrew notions of time and identity are the most important to be discussed.

⁴⁴ Id. *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Id. *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Again if readers (or listeners) were fooled by this device, no matter how good-intentioned it may have been, this would fall beyond the scope of this thesis, although comprising an important part of Russell's argumentation - which includes both reception and composition.

⁴⁷ By "Greek" Boman implies a continuity with our own forms of thinking - this is emphasized when he defines the differences between verbal forms in Indo-Germanic mentality (possessing a clear indication of the difference between past, present and future) and the Semitic one (only knowing complete or incomplete actions). Cf. Thorleif Boman. *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*. London / New York: SCM Press, 1960. P.146.



Boman proposed, in a widely read book⁴⁸, that Hebrew concepts of time developed very differently from the Greek ones and among these chief differences would be the fact that Hebrew thought (if ever there was any entity that can be named as such, unmovable from pre-Exilic to Tannaitic times) could not conceive time as something abstract, preferring instead to fill it with "quality" (i.e. to ascribe to different times different qualities - good, or bad and so on)⁴⁹. Boman also points out the notorious absence of mathematical thinking in Hebrew mentality and to the emphasis put by Hebrew modes of thinking on the whole instead of the individual⁵⁰.

These are the two main issues regarding Boman's very influential ideas. But before we discuss them in any length, we should take a look at another stance where the supposedly intrinsic difference between Hebrew thought and Greek was formalized - in Wheeler Robinson's work⁵¹.

Summarizing Robinson's ideas regarding the topic, we could say that he affirmed the precedence of the collectivity against the individual in Hebrew thought, taking as a standard for that the legal idea of collective responsibility (e.g. manifest in Js 7, in the episode of Achan). It would imply that for individual mistakes the whole family of the offender must be punished and all Israel must suffer, thus leaving no place for individuality as we know it. A fairly recent review of Robinson's ideas led to the conclusion that he was deeply (mis)informed by anthropological theories current in his own time (i.e. the beginning of the 20th century), which he would apply cross-

⁴⁸ Idem, p.140.

⁴⁹ Idem, p.154.

⁵⁰ Idem, p.168.

⁵¹ Referred to in Boman, op.cit. p.148.



cultural-like to understand Hebrew mentality by way of primitive people.

One such anthropological reference is the work of Maine, who affirmed that in such societies individuality was swallowed by the family - but this only implies, as in Israelite society, that *legally* men were understood in such collective terms, not that individuals were not conscious of being themselves and not someone else, or of being wholly absorbed by the group⁵². Later texts by Robinson, such as a conference in 1923, show great influence of Lévy-Bruhl's notion of "pre-logical" thinking among primitive peoples⁵³.

The idea comes to a possible and logical conclusion in that the ecstatic practices of the prophets lead them to mingle themselves with God, to become one with Him, i.e. to attain ecstasy by losing individuality and identifying oneself fully with the deity⁵⁴. This is impossible, in my view, both in prophetic and in later apocalyptic descriptions of ecstatic practices. The seer, whoever he is and regardless of the passage reading like a plain cliché (like VisEzra) or having the sincere feel and development of 2Br, remains a different entity from God, from the angels that may intermediate his experience and from other characters present in the texts⁵⁵.

⁵² John W. Rogerson. "Hebrew conception of corporate personality: a re-examination", JTS 21: 1-16, 1970. P.3.

⁵³ Idem, p.7.

⁵⁴ Id. *ibid*.

⁵⁵ Without going into further detail and theological issues, even He who is the Son of God himself for Christians, Jesus. If in that case no loss of identity is implied, what does one say about prophets and apocalypticists' much more modest claims? Gnosticism would present us with a quite different picture, but then the hermetic character of their doctrines and practices would make the comparison altogether more difficult, if not impossible. Exception to the question of identity is to be made in the episode of Enoch's identity as Metatron in 3En 4.



These are then the two main stances of the idea that Hebrew individuality may be something entirely different from our own conception, and that it would be misleading to treat Jewish mystics as individuals in the same way we understand the term. Criticism of Boman has been made by many, over a long period of time - Arnaldo Momigliano's arguments being the best to synthesize the many problems involved with Boman's reasoning⁵⁶. Although Momigliano is more concerned with historiographical practices, he seems quite right in arguing that differences in modes of expression (i.e. the fact that grammatically the passage of time is expressed in quite different ways in Semitic thought) do not imply that Jews lived in a state of mental confusion, knowing nothing but an eternal present where biblical characters and first-century man intermingled freely⁵⁷.

Wheeler Robinson's ideas left a deeper mark than Boman's in apocalyptic studies inasmuch as they provided the framework for an important and pioneering work on apocalyptic visionary experiences, such as Russell's *Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*. In his reassessment of the corporate identity theme and its influence, Rogerson rightly points out to the influence of the idea in Russell but bluntly states that pseudepigraphy is not necessarily explained by corporate identity⁵⁸.

In Russell, Robinson's ideas first take the form of the spread of apocalyptic consciousness through the whole body,

⁵⁶ Arnaldo Momigliano. "Time in ancient historiography" in: *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1987. Pp.180-181 ff.

⁵⁷ Although Jewish historians - not to say apocalyptic seers - were clearly unaware of the difference between mythical and historical past (i.e. between one informed by documents subject to criticism, or, more often, by personal testimonies of witnesses to events). This includes Josephus.

⁵⁸ Rogerson, op.cit. p.11.



so that some organs incorporate ethical and psychical properties. This leads to the precise and useful description of organ's functions in apocalyptic texts, which can be found in the Appendix⁵⁹. In later years Russell rejected the more radical assumptions of the corporate identity idea as applied to apocalyptic, but kept the essential of it - including the notion that events might be perceived as simultaneous by an individual, when indeed they had taken place in the mythical or distant past⁶⁰. Russell adds that in his opinion some - but not all - of the consumers of apocalyptic texts might have believed that the text had really been written at the time portrayed⁶¹. This does not add directly to the issue of whether the actual writer felt as if he were someone else but *may* suggest that, if the practice were common to the audience, it could be a mode of experience to the writer as well.

The notion that apocalypticists lived in a time shared by the portrayed heroes is to be rejected by the simple fact that stylistic devices show the dating of apocalypses themselves (i.e. even if able to posit the existence of a *Vorlage* in the apocalyptic texts (usually Greek), there are many details in the narrative that allow us to ascribe the texts to dates other than those depicted in the narrative - like the references to the destruction of the Temple in 2Br and 4Ezra, the vineyard of Agrippa in 4Br etc.). This "betrayal" of authorship, instead of proving the falsehood of the mystical experiences described and, by extension, of the texts' authority claims, shows us the cultural

⁵⁹ Russell, *Method and Message*, pp.141-148.

⁶⁰ Russell, *Divine Disclosure*, pp.66-67.

⁶¹ Id. *ibid.*



subtleties and deeply human character of the composer⁶². As much as some Kardecist texts pretend to be narratives of events which took place in First-century Palestine, what they show in fact is a vivid picture of Brazil in the first half of the 20th century; likewise with apocalyptic pseudonymity in this regard. But by the same token it is not to be inferred that the apocalyptic seer, any more than a Kardecist medium such as Chico Xavier, did not witness in mystical rapture the events he portrays. Research has shown that mediums at large are capable of doing that without any loss of other aspects of consciousness or social conformity⁶³.

What I propose is different than an application of the concept of corporate identity (which is flawed); I intend to look at the pseudepigraphical phenomenon as involving identity not with an indistinguishable whole but regarding a specific character, namely the portrayed hero. It is for this reason that cross-cultural analysis regarding other possessional phenomena related to producing religious texts seemed ideal.

5.2. Recent discussions on apocalyptic pseudepigraphy as identification with alleged authors

The main reason, however apparently feeble, to take apocalyptic experiences described in the apocalypses and Second Temple literature at large is the "aura of truth" attached to them. This is surely no proof of authenticity (frauds can be very well disguised, after all), but the reverse is also true: pseudonym disguise needs not be the

⁶² We can no longer say with Pusey in the Nineteenth century that either Daniel is divine or a plain imposture. Cf. John J. Collins. "Inspiration or illusion: biblical theology and the book of Daniel", EA 6, 1990. P.29.

⁶³ See below chapters 2 and 3.



mark of fraud⁶⁴. Other recent authors have tried, in different ways, and with varying focus, to take into consideration the possibility of apocalyptic pseudepigraphy being something other than fraud; particularly important among those are, in a loosely chronological sequence, Stone, Russell, Himmelfarb, Collins, Aune, Rowland, Merkur and Frankfurter. Reference should also be made to the work of John Barton⁶⁵.

Michael Stone's reasoning is perhaps the only attempt outside of this thesis to suggest a specific link between pseudepigraphical authorship and mystical experience, albeit not in terms of possession⁶⁶. For Stone, the experiences described in apocalyptic experiences are to be found commonly in the Hellenistic world; besides, Stone is eager to point out that authentic ecstatic practices can be transmitted in heavily traditional forms⁶⁷. The question of a link between the visionary and the acquired identity is not dealt with by Stone, who knows there can be no "hard proof" for it, but is nonetheless taken seriously as a possibility. Like every other author, including myself, Stone emphasizes that there will never be hard-proof for the issue, but he gives the positive hypothesis a chance and goes on to develop it⁶⁸.

⁶⁴ Collins, "Inspiration or illusion", p.33.

⁶⁵ *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel After the Exile*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1986. 211 ff. A final word must be said about Rebecca M. Lesses. *Ritual Practices to Gain Power: Angels, Incantations, and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998, a well-written book on the subject that, nonetheless, does not deal with our main concern in the thesis (i.e. authorship and mystical experience in apocalyptic texts) but concentrates on preparatory issues related to *hekhalot* texts.

⁶⁶ "Apocalyptic - vision or hallucination?" in: *Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha with Special Reference to the Armenian Tradition*. Leiden / New York / Kobenhavn / Köln: E.J. Brill, 1991. P.425.

⁶⁷ Idem, p.428.

⁶⁸ Idem, p.420.



Stone adds that opposition to Hellenization in political terms (as different from cultural issues, many of which were incorporated without trauma in the world view of Jews and other peoples subject to Greek rule) is also a feature common to ancient magic world view, frequent in the Hellenistic world, which can in theory enable an experimental dimension behind the apocalypticists' description⁶⁹. Pseudepigraphy, by its very nature, excludes the possibility of a face value registry of intimate experiences, immediate and autobiographical⁷⁰. Stone rejects the assumption that pseudepigraphy might be just a resource to gain authority, for this would imply a closed canon that was obviously not the case (at least for the two core apocalyptic texts, Dn and 1En, and arguably so for 4Ezra and 2Br, First- or Second-century texts as they most likely are).

Fear of censorship - another possible reason to be rejected also by Collins, as we shall see - is discarded by Stone who, basing himself on 4Ezra, argues that there could still be room for the enlargement of Sinaitic revelation at the time of its composition; he also points out that, as deception, pseudepigraphy works very poorly - when ancient authors wanted something to look like the Bible, they would produce something like the *Temple Scroll* and write in

⁶⁹ Id. *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Idem, p.421. This does not mean that an author in trance - such as Chico Xavier has done - can not mingle his/her own intimate fears, joys or other emotions in the ensuing narrative. In fact that is the main point Stone uses to argue in favour of the authenticity of the experience of the visionary in 4Ezra in a later article ("A reconsideration of apocalyptic visions", HTR 96 (2): 167-180, 2003), to be taken into consideration below. Stone has devoted a great deal of his efforts to the examination of 4Ezra which is indeed rich for our purposes but not representative of apocalyptic experiences - not only for the presence of chemical inducement but also for the lengths gone by the visionary to show his inner transformation in the course of the visions.



Hebrew⁷¹. Against Russell, Stone argues that in Antiquity the assumption that apocalypses were regarded as old as they intended to be was indeed widespread - even Tertulian wondered how Enoch's books survived the Flood⁷². The attribution of authorship might have begun - but this does not explain all cases - as the crystallizing of a tradition, and not as forgery⁷³. Lastly, Stone follows the trend of Eliade and Himmelfarb in underlining the fact that a heavily traditional description does not exclude sincere experience⁷⁴; I too find this reasoning correct.

In a recent article, Stone celebrates the fact that, 30 years from the original publishing date of "Apocalyptic - vision or hallucination?" (1974) a lot has changed and the experiences described in the apocalypses are no longer as easily dismissed as forgeries - and points out the ill-feeling that the ASC-prone Ezekiel generates among fundamentalist scholars is precisely for that reason⁷⁵. There is no experience comparable to that of 4Ezra (an assumption to which I also subscribe and shall develop), and Stone makes good use of the narrative of 4Ezra to trace the journey of the visionary's soul: in shifting from demanding of God an explanation of evil as in the beginning of the text to the position taken in front of the woman in

⁷¹ Idem, pp.423-425.

⁷² Idem, p.426; cf. also Russell, *Divine Disclosure*, p.67.

⁷³ Idem, pp.426-427.

⁷⁴ Idem, p.428. This also points out to the fact that the "truths" revealed in Biblical literature tend to be regarded as valid in the realm of myth, not as a repository of actual information (something to be emphasized by Collins). It is as true for apocalyptic as it is for Kardecist automatic writing: the medium is limited by traditional forms and dogma, and yet experiences do take place. It should be noted, however, that there are a number of layers that mediate the initial apocalyptic vision, supposing it to be true (copying, editing, and just putting the experience down in an intelligible manner). Cf. Amos Wilder. "The rhetoric of ancient and modern apocalyptic", Int. 25, 1971. P.437.

⁷⁵ Stone, "A reconsideration of apocalyptic visions", p.167.



the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem (4Ezra 9-10), the visionary has undergone a complete rebirth process⁷⁶.

The plain and simple identification of the visionary with Ezra - which is a tenable hypothesis but which was somewhat taken for granted by Stone in his earlier work - is rectified by the author, claiming that even if the visionary had not undergone the experiences described, they were common enough in his society for him to know them⁷⁷. The question of the traditionalism of the forms taken by the descriptions - which has also puzzled Russell much earlier - is dealt with by Stone via the idea that mystics can only describe their experiences in terms of the language available to them; or it could be argued that some degree of "imposition" is present and makes the apocalyptic seer conform to the expectations of the group in terms of what is to be seen⁷⁸.

Russell argues for the sincerity of the experience although underlining an overall impression of artificiality in the texts⁷⁹. Among indications that we are facing

⁷⁶ Idem, p.175. The process described by 4Ezra echoes shamanistic emphasis in death and resurrection, and is emphasized by Stone. But here we have a text that is intact and was composed as a whole, displaying the intimacies of visionary episodes and even some weird chemical induction practices. All of that is not to be found anywhere else. The parallel with Shamanism is resumed by Stone regarding the issue of traditional formulation of experiences, which the Shamans also do according to an established literary convention: "The use of conventional forms does not contradict the existence of the experience. However, it does make it difficult to demonstrate in any given case".

⁷⁷ Idem, p.178.

⁷⁸ An idea dear also to Himmelfarb and which is paralleled in psychology - Freudian patients having Freudian dreams, Jungian having Jungian ones. Freud had a similar problem long ago when, during hypnosis sessions, he "found out" that 10 out of 10 female patients reported effective or attempted assaults by their fathers during early childhood. 10 in 10 means 100 in 100, which is obviously nonsense and made Freud replace the actual sexual impulse and aggression for symbolism of both. See William W. Sargant. *The Mind Possessed: a Physiology of Possession, Mysticism and Faith Healing*. London: Heinemann, 1973. P.109 and 195.

⁷⁹ *Method and Message*, p.158.



references to genuine experiences Russell points out the many examples of nocturnal inspiration (e.g. visions before sleep in Dn 10:9, during sleep in 2Br 53:1 or even after it in 2En 1:6), suggesting genuine psychical activity rather than a mere literary theme⁸⁰. Joseph's appearance in TestBenj 10:1 looks like television and echoes Balaam in Nm 24:4⁸¹.

Eager to show the essential affinity between prophecy and apocalyptic, Russell argues that the inspiration of the latter is a mixture of the original prophetic inspiration and a more recent, literary one⁸². It should be noted that Russell also sets limits for what modern psychology might have to say about the apocalypticist's mental procedures⁸³.

In the above quoted *Divine Disclosure*, Russell would refine some points and argue further on the sincerity of the experiences described. Here he suggests that pseudepigraphy might imply a *unio mystica* of the actual writer with the putative author⁸⁴. The essential of Russell's way of putting the hypothesis owes much to Wheeler Robinson's concept of corporate identity, as seen above, but in *Divine Disclosure* some finer points are made.

First, pseudonymity is here discussed as part of a widespread phenomenon throughout the Mediterranean world; it would be naïve to assume that all the public would regard the pseudepigraphed author as being the real one⁸⁵. Quoting Collins, Russell also points out that the apocalyptic choosing of some names and not others for putative authors betrays some essential similarities,

⁸⁰ Idem, p.165. For quantitative appreciation of visions asleep see the appendix to the thesis.

⁸¹ Idem, p.166.

⁸² Idem, p.173.

⁸³ Idem, p.140.

⁸⁴ Idem, p.66.

⁸⁵ Idem, p.67.



following the sincere identification of the author in question with the past hero; both would share a common revelatory experience⁸⁶.

The key to Russell's argument - the intensity and frequency of dream-like visions in apocalyptic literature - appears again, this time with the aid of cross-cultural studies⁸⁷. The almost day-to-day nature of the language by which the apocalypticist describes his visions is so vivid that it reinforces the idea that we are dealing here with sincere experiences: the need of prayer as part of the process - as seen in e.g. Dn 2:18, 4Ezra 5:13 etc. is also favourable to the sincerity of the episodes, according to Russell⁸⁸. The fact that by means of prayer, fasting or chemical induction (4Ezra) the apocalypticists believed they were propitiating the visionary episodes only adds to the assumed identification between putative and real authors' trance⁸⁹.

The next author to be examined is Martha Himmelfarb. An initial point to be taken into consideration is that she asks how far the experience of the apocalyptic seer was accessible to others as well - this accessibility appears to be the case in *hekhalot* literature, and also in the *Ascension of Isaiah*; it should be available to all the righteous after death⁹⁰.

The traditional character of many of the apocalyptic visionary episodes is also pointed out by Himmelfarb - she emphasises that all otherworldly-journey apocalypses report

⁸⁶ John J. Collins. *The Apocalyptic Wisdom of the Book of Daniel*. Harvard Semitic Monographs 16, Scholars Press, 1977. P.72. Cit. by Russell, *Divine Disclosure*, pp.67-69.

⁸⁷ Thomas J. Sappington. *Revelation and Redemption at Colossae*. JSOT Press, 1991. P.78 ff. Cit. by Russell, *Divine Disclosure*, p.73.

⁸⁸ Russell, *Divine Disclosure*, p.74.

⁸⁹ Idem, p.75.

⁹⁰ Martha Himmelfarb. "The experience of the visionary and genre in the *Ascension of Isaiah* 6-11 and the *Apocalypse of Paul*" in: *Semeia* 36: 97-111, 1986. P.103.



themes already occurring in 1En⁹¹, and among these of chief importance is the "Book of Watchers" (1En 1-36), a true matrix of apocalyptic visions⁹². A point of interest to us here is that, like Elijah - possibly important in terms of automatic writing, as we saw in chapter 4 above -, Enoch, important as he is for the developing of apocalyptic tradition does not die, but rather walks with God (Gn 5:24). But even being foundational, 1En's visionary experiences find a close parallel in Ez 1 and Is 6, in a process culminating with *hekhalot* texts⁹³ - showing how traditional material can be refurbished to convey and propitiate sincere experiences.

However, even being kind to the possibility of sincere experience described in Enochic literature, Himmelfarb takes great caution in regarding the reports as true at face value: "Enoch's ascent cannot be taken simply as a testimony to the author's own experience. Whatever else it may be, it is an episode in a story about Enoch"⁹⁴. This is no decisive argument against the authenticity of the experience described, but pseudepigraphy may also suggest a certain distancing between actual and putative authors (i.e. apart from identification like the Kardecist writings we might have, here as in other apocalyptic examples, an even greater separation between visionary and hero; but this can also mean that there is no loss of self involved and that the visionary keeps his identity by not completely mingling his own self with the portrayed hero).

⁹¹ This might imply the anteriority of 1En over other apocalypses or just that the themes therein reported are earlier. Cf. Martha Himmelfarb. "From prophecy to apocalyptic: the *Book of the Watchers* and tours of Heaven" in: Arthur Green (ed.). *World Spirituality*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. P.146.

⁹² Idem, p.148.

⁹³ Idem, p.149.

⁹⁴ Idem, p.153.



The most important point to be made by Himmelfarb in our analysis is that the visionary, having had a sincere experience, nonetheless already knows at the start what to see and expect - "Christian mystics see Christ; Jewish mystics do not": the ascent to Heaven only confirmed what the visionary knew beforehand⁹⁵, much in the same fashion as Freudian patients under hypnosis conformed to Freud's own wishful theories and modern-day subjects undergoing psychoanalysis confirm their analysts' assumptions in their processes. This is a point of the utmost importance and to be resumed in the conclusion to this thesis.

Following the same trend, Himmelfarb points out that visions conveying too much information about heaven or hell are in principle more suspect than those having a more spontaneous and sober outlook⁹⁶.

One of the most important defenders of the sincerity of the visionary experiences in the apocalypses is John J. Collins. Regarding this issue, we shall have a look closer into one of his many texts, for it seems to be more directly related to our discussion.

In a 1990 text Collins argues rightly that pseudonymity was the norm rather than the exception among apocalyptic texts, something to be confirmed by the rediscovery of pseudepigrapha and the Dead Sea Scrolls⁹⁷. Taking into account the extension of pseudepigraphy in Antiquity, we cannot dismiss the possibility of dealing with a conscious literary mechanism here, but the apparent acceptance and

⁹⁵ Idem, pp.153-154.

⁹⁶ This seems a reasonable proposition in itself to me, but leaves the question that, if we are to consider as true experiences those where the visionary already knew what to expect, the amount of detail cannot be perfectly assessed as to make us consider any outlook of experience true or false with certainty. In short, if the existence of a *topos* is no proof of falsehood, than Himmelfarb's arguments translate into the question of intensity - how much are we going to allow as evidencing true or false experiences.

⁹⁷ "Inspiration or illusion", p.30.



moral seriousness of Jewish-Christian pseudepigrapha makes it difficult to believe we are dealing with plain fraud⁹⁸.

Collins goes on to discuss a number of ancient quotations regarding the legitimate use of pseudepigraphy, among them those of Salvian of Marseilles and Tertullian⁹⁹. An important point made by Collins is that forgery out of fear should be discarded as motivation for pseudepigraphy seeming as texts like Daniel glorify martyrdom or are outspoken about the dominant powers like OrSib 3¹⁰⁰; on the other hand, agreeing with Himmelfarb, Collins points out the fact that foundational texts like Daniel and 1En had no known *topos* to imitate, and thus might imply authentic experience¹⁰¹. To any definite attempt of proving definitely the sincerity of the visionaries' experiences related to the choosing of a putative author's name in the apocalypses Collins says that "Such an explanation is, of course, hypothetical, and I do not know of any way in which it could be verified. It is attractive, nonetheless, because it attempts to deal seriously with the ecstatic character of the experience that an apocalypse describes. Apocalyptic pseudepigraphy, then, need not be regarded as a calculated deception, but rather as a result of the intense and emotional experience of the visionary"¹⁰².

David Aune offers insights about the issue in two texts, and we notice a clear shift in position between them both. In his 1983 book he states that pseudonymity was an expedient to gain authority for a canon that was already closed (contra Stone, see above): parallels in prophetic

⁹⁸ Idem, p.31.

⁹⁹ These will be resumed below, together with a more complete discussion of pseudepigraphy in Antiquity.

¹⁰⁰ Collins, "Inspiration or illusion", p.32.

¹⁰¹ An assumption reasonable in itself but again in need of examination in the light of prophetic texts like Ezekiel and Isaiah. Cf. Collins, "Inspiration or illusion", p.33.

¹⁰² Id. *ibid*.



literature in the Jewish and Christian worlds show that it never circulated anonymously, but always had an author¹⁰³. Nor does Aune's earlier text consider pseudonymity essential to the understanding of apocalyptic¹⁰⁴.

However, a later text by him shows a shift in considering the autobiographical narrative in prose as central to the definition of the form of an apocalypse¹⁰⁵. Indirect evidence for the importance attached to the performance of reading (and thus, potentially for the assumed identity of the narrator, a point to be resumed by Frankfurter, see below) is furnished, according to Aune, via Dio Chrysostom (*Oratio* 18.18)¹⁰⁶, for whom the composer should dictate the text and not write it directly (the recitation possibly being regarded as closer to impersonation, at least for the audience). In Rev 1:3 we shall observe the same phenomenon, proof of the scarcity of silent readers in Antiquity¹⁰⁷.

Next in our bibliographical review come the views of Christopher Rowland, as expressed in *The Open Heaven*¹⁰⁸. Even being one defender of the sincerity of apocalyptic visionary experience against the notion that it could be a mere literary convention, Rowland advises caution in stating that a great part of apocalyptic material may be redactional (e.g. 4Ezra 11-12)¹⁰⁹. Preservation of authentic visions does not mean that the whole apocalyptic

¹⁰³ David Aune. *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983. P.109. This would hold true even for Malachi, who began circulation in anonymous fashion but then was ascribed to the prophet of the same name.

¹⁰⁴ Idem, p.110.

¹⁰⁵ "The Apocalypse of John and the problem of genre" in: *Semeia* 36, 1986. P.65.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. the edition organized by Ludwig A. Dindorf. *Dionis Chrysostomi Orationes*. Leipzig: Teubner, 1857.

¹⁰⁷ "The Apocalypse of John and the problem of genre", p.77.

¹⁰⁸ London: SPCK, 1982.

¹⁰⁹ *The Open Heaven*, p.234.



text in question describes sincere experiences, or even that apocalyptic had begun in this fashion, so argues Rowland ¹¹⁰.

This being said, Rowland agrees that revelatory techniques are exposed and preserved in earnest in apocalyptic visions (e.g. the cup in 4Ezra 14:18 looking like Ez 3:2) ¹¹¹. An important point made by him is that in an episode like 4Ezra re-reading of Dn 7:13 the awkwardness of the picture (in Dn the beasts come from the sea, whereas in 4Ezra it is the man) suggests that we are dealing with more than plain literary convention - in which case there would be less room for contradictions like that ¹¹².

Lastly, Rowland, in a trend to be followed by Himmelfarb and Frankfurter, argues for the importance of reflection on Biblical passages as an important aspect of ecstatic techniques - a well-known example being Dn 9:1 related to Jr 25:11 ¹¹³, but others might be given, many going back to Ezekiel.

One of the most enthusiastic defences of the sincerity of the visionary experience in apocalyptic literature comes from Daniel Merkur ¹¹⁴. He follows Russell and Rowland in agreeing on the staggering amount of detail given by experiences in the texts, and argues both about the authenticity of the experience and also about the means by which visions were produced ¹¹⁵. It should be noted,

¹¹⁰ Idem, pp.246-247 and 214-215.

¹¹¹ Idem, p.229. Rowland does not say which are the techniques thus preserved, but arguably no one can answer that question satisfactorily. Like every other author including myself he is arguing also in favour of the importance of Ez 1 as a matrix for apocalyptic visionary experience (cf. p.228).

¹¹² Idem, pp.217-218.

¹¹³ Idem, p.215.

¹¹⁴ "The visionary practices of Jewish apocalypticists" in: L. Bryce Boyer and Simon Grolnik (eds.). *The Psychoanalytic Study of Society*. Hillsdale: Analytic Press, 1989.

¹¹⁵ Idem, pp.120-121.



however, that the author's theory is limited to psychoanalysis (severely hampering his efforts, in my opinion, and also arguably forcing ancient modes of thought into a modern pattern and one quite authoritarian in this case)¹¹⁶.

Having said that, Merkur's analysis offers a number of insightful propositions. One of them is that, while accepting the now common idea that dreams might follow induction by Freudian, Jungian or any other theoretical suggestion, Merkur takes further the attempt to separate conventional themes and sincere experience (e.g. a standard theme would be the angels explaining dreams in 2Br 35-47 and 48-76)¹¹⁷.

An important issue raised by Merkur is that the apocalyptic seer frequently gets answers to questions he did not look for: "This circumstance indicates a phenomenology of inspiration rather than auto-suggestion [...]"¹¹⁸. On the other hand, together with Gruenwald and Rowland, he suggests that AsIs 6:10-12, 14-16a might reveal self-hypnotic induction of trance¹¹⁹. Excessive mourning is also underlined by Merkur as an ASC inducer in the apocalypses (or, for that matter, even in Biblical literature - e.g. 1Kgs 18:26-29, Js 7:2-5). In apocalyptic literature this recourse appears, among other stances, in 1En 14:7, Dn 9:3-4 and 3Br 1:1-3¹²⁰. In the *Shepherd of Hermas* third vision, 10:6 there is explicit reference to that¹²¹.

Another important point to make is that even this inducing device might have an unsuccessful outcome (e.g.

¹¹⁶ Idem, p.121. See also Russell, *Method and Message*, p.140.

¹¹⁷ Idem, p.123.

¹¹⁸ Idem, p.124.

¹¹⁹ Id. *ibid.*

¹²⁰ Idem, p.125.

¹²¹ Idem, p.127.



the third vision in 4Ezra); the sudden change of humour by the visionary in 1En 26:6b, 17:1, 4Ezra 13:11, ApSof 10:8 and 3Br 17:3 would show traces of manic-depressive psychosis¹²². Lastly, and related to the idea of mourning, Merkur emphasizes the feeling of guilt that accompany many religious creeds, with the manifest intention of giving the individual a feeling of release when opposite sentiments are developed - i.e. to the idea that mourning and guilt will follow a state of repentance and well-being. This is made explicit in ApAbr 18:12-14¹²³. Merkur also argues against self-hypnosis theories that stress the monotony of repetitions, for meditation techniques of the apocalyptic seers are rational and discursive: rehearsing well-known themes and building imaginative mental pictures, they could incubate inspirations that would, finally, gain visual form¹²⁴.

The last important author left for us to take a look at is David Frankfurter. Against what we have been pursuing in this thesis (and it should be remembered that most of the previous authors followed the same path), namely investigation of ecstatic techniques present in passages that talk openly about what the seer did before the visionary experience (texts prone to that being the major apocalypses like 1-3En, Dn, 2Br and 4Ezra, as well as some less popular works such as ApSof or ApAbr), Frankfurter gets his analysis from the Coptic *Apocalypse of Elijah*, an apparently very crude text for the purpose, besides being late and of Christian origin and usage¹²⁵.

¹²² Idem, p.133.

¹²³ Idem, p.140.

¹²⁴ Idem, p.141.

¹²⁵ Notwithstanding the many peculiarities of ApEl, Frankfurter's work is remarkable and we shall discuss the two texts where Frankfurter exposes his views, namely *Elijah in Upper Egypt: the Apocalypse of Elijah and Early Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press,



First of all it should be noted that, unlike 1En, Dn, 2Br or 4Ezra we are dealing here with a Christian text, emanating from the illiterate background of the Egyptian *chora*, space of fanatic millenarianism¹²⁶. ApEl reveals a world where traditional Biblical heroes are as important to Egyptian Christians as they were to Palestinian Jews¹²⁷. The text itself places great stress in fasting (e.g. ApEl 1:23-27), but this can be understood as a cleansing device rather than induction technique explicitly formulated for visionary purposes¹²⁸. As I said above, in ApEl we have no hints of pseudepigraphy other than the title of the work – unlike 4Ezra or 2Br, we have no introduction in ApEl stating how “Elijah” got his vision: it does show, however, some connection between “this” Elijah and the Biblical one¹²⁹.

Frankfurter also points to the importance of aural consumption of this kind of literature and the effects this might have had on an audience immersed in Biblical tradition, while at the same time illiterate:

*The narrative context of the Apocalypse of Elijah and its pseudepigraphic attribution may thus be outlined: the text would have been heard and understood in light of the legend of Elijah’s revelations on a mountaintop. In a predominantly illiterate culture, such legends would have carried authority equal to that of biblical stories*¹³⁰.

1993) and “The legacy of Jewish apocalypses in early Christianity: regional trajectories” (in: James C. VanderKam and William Adler (eds.). *The Jewish apocalyptic heritage in early Christianity*. Assen: Van Gorcum / Fortress Press, 1996).

¹²⁶ *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, p.1.

¹²⁷ Idem, pp.2-3.

¹²⁸ See e.g. ApEl 1:13-22. Fasting could avoid demons entering the body. On the other hand fasts were a known means of propitiating revelations from Elijah in Jewish literature: cf. Ithamar Gruenwald. *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*. Leiden: Brill, 1980. P.101.

¹²⁹ Idem, p.40, 59-60.

¹³⁰ Idem, p.65.



This "soaking" could be related to the actual identification of common people to Biblical characters, an idea to be resumed below. Anyway the use of first-person narrative in such an atmosphere should have caused the deepest impact on the audience, and Frankfurter suggests that this might have been a deliberate use of the device¹³¹.

Frankfurter's ideas, as further developed in a later text, take us to the notion that, for some Christian groups represented in the *Martyrdom of Perpetua* (+-202 CE), the gift of prophecy is clearly not restricted to ancient times¹³². In "The legacy of Jewish apocalypses" Frankfurter refines the ideas underlying his previous work and stresses the apparent identity between Elijah and other Biblical figures and the audience of ApEl; great care must be taken, however, since this does not imply a face-value identity between the actual author of the text and Elijah, although makes this more than a remote possibility¹³³.

I understand all these examples to be stances that show the importance of self-suggestion or immersion of the individual in certain given cultural references. This holds true even for forgeries - although logically not for the sincerity of the experiences -, and does not imply self-hypnosis but does not exclude it either. As we shall see in the Appendix, this can take the form of exhaustive repetition of formulae but does not necessarily imply such devices. Neither is this kind of induction present in

¹³¹ Idem, p.88.

¹³² "The legacy of Jewish apocalypses", p.137.

¹³³ A very important text regarding the review of motivations for the production of apocalyptic pseudepigrapha is furnished by Bruce Metzger ("Literary forgeries and canonical pseudepigrapha", JBL 91: 3-24, 1972), but I shall deal with it only in the next chapter - when discussing specific studies on pseudepigraphy and pseudonymity.



apocalyptic literature nor in Kardecist visionary induction techniques.



6. Why a cross-cultural approach is needed

Cross-cultural studies such as the one proposed here could hardly be justified if there were enough primary sources for us to establish a complete theory of apocalyptic pseudepigraphy in the defined texts accessing only the sources themselves. This is not possible for a wealth of reasons - what we now have is just a part of a larger output of texts; the original compositions in which the sources were written (in languages which we cannot be sure of in most cases) have been, to an immense extent, lost; the sources, never obliged to tell what the historian wants to know, are particularly dismal regarding our question; and lastly, pseudonymity may play its role in making things more difficult for the scholar (while at the same time being a possible clue to the processes analyzed).

The group chosen provides both a manageable and untried universe for cross-cultural comparison with the visionary processes of late Second Temple mystics.

The sources used hitherto have not been able to yield a conclusive, clear-cut picture revealing the sincerity of pseudepigraphy, much less if the choosing of pseudepigraphical writing involves true possession by the real (i.e. mechanical) author. Since this is in effect the case in Kardecism (where spiritual authorship is indeed a variety of possession) it comprises a particularly useful cross-cultural source to be evaluated against ancient pseudepigraphy.



7. Considerations of method

The parallel offered in this thesis as an elucidating clue to the apocalyptic seers' practices relates to a mainstream Brazilian contemporary religious movement (Kardecism) where ecstatic practices play a major role, while these produce a literary corpus whose authorship is, like Jewish apocalyptic, pseudonym. This is Kardecist Spiritism, an important religious stream in Brazil. This choice is justified by many reasons - the major one being the fact that, both in apocalyptic pseudepigraphic writing and in Kardecist automatic writing there is the apparent external similarity of ecstatic processes involving alternate identities for the production of texts¹³⁴.

The fact that shamanism has already been tried in other stances besides Ashton's attempt, with inconclusive results¹³⁵, also suggests that new, fresh approaches to tackle the problem of understanding old ecstatic practices lacking in primary sources by means of comparison with more recent, better documented ones should be tried. Comparisons of this kind are not self-evident, and the chosen path is not the only one possible, for the limits between comparable objects is virtually inexistent¹³⁶. And in comparing this group with the mystics of late Second Temple

¹³⁴ It must be taken into account, however, that the texts produced in apocalyptic contexts were, at varying degrees, regarded as sacred or even as part of canonical Scripture when this came into being; the same cannot be said of psychographical writings in the context chosen for comparison, although they are often held in high esteem and are used as a guidance for the faithful.

¹³⁵ One good example would be the article by Arvid S. Kapelrud. "Shamanistic features in the Old Testament" in: Carl M. Edsman. *Studies in Shamanism*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1967. Eliade's remarks on Ezekiel as displaying shamanic features also drew much attention, although very weakly substantiated in my view (cf. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. London: Arkana, 1989. Pp.162-163).

¹³⁶ Overholt, *Prophecy in Cross Cultural Comparison*, p.1; 4.



Judaism, I do not intend to analyze one whole group against the other, but merely to compare certain characteristics apparently shared between them; the apocalyptic pseudepigraphic experience could be better understood by these means, although not the specific content or doctrine of the groups involved¹³⁷. By definition, comparison is never a synonym for identity - nor can parallels prove definitely the ways of thinking of the ancient visionaries. There is much insight for the historical imagination to be gained by this approach, however¹³⁸.

The idea of taking a cross-cultural approach picking the Brazilian Kardecist movement cannot suppose or prove a direct link between late Second Temple Judaism and contemporary South American ecstatic practices; there can be no direct quoting, use or clear borrowing between, say, the much-read writings of Allan Kardec and the Syriac apocalypse of Baruch. This work is not intended to demonstrate direct links and influences between religious groups and texts, but rather it is intended that, by means of analyzing contemporary automatic writing practices, some light may be shed upon pseudepigraphy as it appears in Jewish apocalyptic literature¹³⁹.

Of course the whole idea that psychographical processes (i.e. automatic writing) and apocalyptic pseudepigraphy are comparable rests on the assumption that apocalyptic was, from the start, written literature and not a collection of

¹³⁷ Christopher R. Hallpike. "Some problems in cross-cultural comparison" in: Thomas O. Beidelman (ed.). *The Translation of Culture*. London: Tavistock, 1971; Overholt, "Prophecy: the problem of cross-cultural comparison", p.73.

¹³⁸ Overholt, *Prophecy in Cross Cultural Comparison*, p.335.

¹³⁹ Of course Kardec and 2Baruch can be related in a way, since both stem from a common source - namely pre-Exilic Judaism, which in turn could be related to earlier religions and beliefs etc... However, this is not the kind of link searched for in this work and any attempt to elucidate it would take us much beyond the scope of the thesis, if indeed it should prove possible.



orally preserved traditions to be put into written form long after their composition. I have never seen any serious challenge to this idea.

Pseudonymity and pseudepigraphy, remarkable features as they are in Second Temple literature, can well have nothing to do with the visionary episodes described: no matter how vivid and realistic the apocalyptic pseudepigraphic picture may be, it can always be a fraud, pious or done with malice. However, if this were the case we would still be left with many side questions - why is this character chosen for putative authorship in a given text, and not any other one? How does the concept of fraud apply to the ancient readership of these texts? Did the composers of such texts form part of any definite groups which could be defined by having in common the device of pseudonymity, or was this so overspread as to constitute a feature indistinguishable from others?

These questions are not answerable at present, and they shall only be dealt with in this thesis insofar as they may help us understand the apocalyptic seers in a more complete way. But I think that, were we able to posit that pseudepigraphy is clearly fraud (regardless of its intention), the case for investigation would be much weaker and the relevant questions in much smaller numbers. But even in that case, we would be left with the problem of the nature of the mystical experience that may lie behind it. Of course, the experiences may be real with the identity also being true, or with an assumed identity; or they can be false and still offer the same two possibilities regarding identity.

Summarizing those possibilities, a false experience under a false name would leave us with a parody, in itself worthy of investigation but far away from the study of



visionary experiences themselves - it would take us to an entirely different type of proposal, that of the study of a literary *topos* in the chosen period (it could happen that this thesis ends with the conclusion that the experiences described are in fact *topoi*, but then such a conclusion will have been reached by a wholly different approach). A true experience under a true name is, for reasons well known to anyone reasonably acquainted with apocalyptic, impossible (i.e. the "Ezra" of 4Ezra cannot be the post-Exilic leader of the canonical book that bears his name, nor could this be said of Baruch, and so on). A false experience under a true identity is also ruled out (we cannot be sure about the authenticity of the experience yet, but, as stated above, we can be sure that whoever composed 4Ezra is definitely not the hero of the canonical book).

A true experience under a false name is the thing to be dealt with here, for reasons to be developed in a more complete fashion in the next chapters. If this underlying assumption is given some initial credit as a tentative hypothesis, however modest, we can dwell on the accessory theme of the chosen identity with greater assurance and better perspectives. This will be done throughout this work, and even if the results come to the conclusion that apocalyptic pseudepigraphy has nothing to do with one possible modern counterpart, psychography, it would have been worth trying, for allowing a different insight into the process of producing religious texts under the guise (or guidance) of an entity other than the mechanical writer's personality. This would still hold true if modern-day automatic writing can be understood in terms of self-suggestion or hypnotic processes.



It is not expected that, by allowing the identity of the presumed author to be akin to that of the spirit that communicates to the Kardecist medium, we will automatically have first-hand proof that apocalyptic texts describe authentic visionary processes; as said above, it may well be the opposite. Pseudonymity as possession in any degree is just a hypothesis to be tested in the absence of complete information on the writing/composing process of apocalyptic writers, and the many limitations that this method imposes on the scholar shall be dealt with in the next chapters. I hope to have explained satisfactorily that this is not an arbitrary choice but that apparent similarities and the immediate availability of much material regarding automatic writing makes this association a logical step, and hopefully a fruitful one.

The idea that the experiences described by the apocalyptic visionaries may be mere expressions of literary *topoi* does not render invalid the episodes described, which may hide authentic experiences. I would suggest that the fact that the seers may be describing their experiences in a preconceived and highly artificial manner - as has been pointed out by more than one scholar - is no proof that the experiences never took place. This just reflects the fact that the audience of those texts expected the seers described to have undergone certain kinds of experiences, much in the same way that modern man expects certain groups and individuals to behave in determined fashions; this expectation may in turn contribute to the role-playing of participants from the chosen group. Of course the issue of pseudepigraphy raises a lot of subsequent questions, for when we talk about collective expectations in the behaviour of certain individuals and groups we assume that the latter can be clearly identified - and being the apocalypses for



the most part pseudepigraphic writings we would then have to understand simultaneously the *topoi* of the visions and the writing under a pseudonym¹⁴⁰.

Summing up, the fact that the action of the subjects involved can be stereotypical does not mean that they are necessarily false¹⁴¹; it may well be that the stereotypical performances of the ecstasies investigated communicate recognizable meanings to people who participate and watch rituals, and since the visionary episodes are highly valued by the groups concerned, this should normally lead to stereotypy¹⁴². It should be remembered that there will always be room for varieties of experiences between the practitioners of any sect or group, no matter how similar or stereotyped the descriptions may come.

In other societies with religious ecstatic practices such as shamanism we will also find *topoi* guiding the conduct of the shaman: they are expected to behave in a certain fashion and in so doing they gain social acceptance¹⁴³. The issue whether their first-hand experiences are fake or not is altogether different and takes us back to a point already discussed, namely that even being apocalyptic visions, false experiences in themselves, the "lies" told are understandable only in terms of certain social codes, which cannot be, as such,

¹⁴⁰ An example of reversing roles can be found in the very interesting autobiography of Jacob Fromer quoted by Oesterreich, op.cit. p.x; 207-208, where a young and skeptical Jew sees, in the ghetto, a rabbi perform the exorcism of the spirit of a deceased Jew converted to Christianity. The unfortunate soul had, moreover, been a suicide and subsequently reincarnated as a pig - all very fitting to a non-Christian interpretation which nonetheless left unexplained aspects both for Fromer the eyewitness as well as for Oesterreich.

¹⁴¹ Bourguignon, op.cit. p.14.

¹⁴² Overholt, *Prophecy in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, p.13. The author gives as an example the fact that among the *huichol* from Northern Mexico visions inducted by ingestion of the *peyote* also have a strong stereotypical character, without this meaning that they are fakes.

¹⁴³ Eliade, *Shamanism*, especially chapter 1, "General considerations. Recruiting methods. Shamanism and mystical vocation".



true or false. To give an example, the setting of Daniel's visions in Dn 7 can be fake, or the visionary episode itself may be, but nonetheless the whole picture tells us much about fears and hopes of Jews during the Hellenistic period, as well as what could be reasonably expected as signs of success for a royal servant like Daniel in Oriental courts of the period: both sets of data are independent of the authenticity of the visionary process itself.

So this is a summary of the possibilities of understanding the phenomenon of apocalyptic visionary experiences as possession - of the seer by God, but more likely of the seer by the one whose name he takes. This explanation seems to be worth trying, for it would account both for the stereotyped character of pseudepigraphic visions and also for the eventually "true" nature of the experiences described in the texts. Since PTs are such an important part of this discussion, these are just introductory observations to be fully developed in the appropriate parts of the thesis.

Comparison to Kardecism is by no means the only cross-cultural path to follow, but the staggering number of texts, their willingness to talk about ASC-inducing procedures and the variety of genres they represent make Kardecist texts, and especially those by Chico Xavier, a very good choice for cross-cultural comparison even if automatic writing is present in a number of other cultures.

Finally a word of caution is due to the variety of material chosen regarding ancient sources: although apocalyptic texts constitute the core of the source materials, a look at other kinds of texts was unavoidable and sometimes constitutes a micro-cross-cultural universe in itself. Thus pseudepigrapha from the OT as well as the



NT were used when feasible, even when they are not apocalypses (e.g. the case of 4Br, or apocryphal works attributed to Paul in late Antiquity, or even more importantly, the Christian apocalypse known as ApEl). Not every text will furnish evidence, nor are conclusions related to Christian circles applied to earlier Jewish ones without risk.



8. Presentation of the thesis

In the thesis, chapters are presented following the exposition of the argument as below: first of all the introduction deals with the theoretical issues at the core of the thesis, essentially the possibilities and limits of cross-cultural comparison, and also why such an approach is needed for the proposed theme (ch.1).

The thesis proper is structured beginning with an overview of general issues related to Brazilian Kardecism and of the relevance and output of its foremost psychic, Chico Xavier (ch. 2). Xavier is exemplary among an output that this immense for several reasons - his reputation, his willingness to talk about preparatory practices in a very straightforward manner (including admission of self-hypnotic practices); this is then analyzed in terms of the scholarship associated with automatic writing and possession trance as these are integral to Kardecist psychography (ch. 3). This scholarship, relevant as it is to the purposes of the thesis, has not, so far as I have investigated, explained the phenomenon of Kardecist automatic writing in purely scientific terms, but it sheds light on ASC-inductive practices that are - at least superficially - akin to many of the preparatory passages found in apocalyptic literature.

Part 2 is an application of the insights from the study of the Kardecist material to the study of apocalyptic pseudepigraphy. The discussion begins with consideration of the evidence from Second Temple Jewish and other contemporary texts for the notion of an individual being seen as embodying or in some way being inspired by a figure from the past. This discussion also explores the examination of apocalyptic passages where the actual writer



speaks of himself in first person under the guise of another character, for such passages are the first place to search for this alleged identity because they ostensibly refer to first-hand experiences. Ancient religious texts (not necessarily apocalyptic) where automatic writing or some similar authorial device may be implied are then analyzed since they provide evidence on how pseudepigraphical devices might have worked regarding their audience; this is not a "perfect fit" but rather an analogy towards apocalyptic pseudepigraphy (ch. 5). This part of the dissertation concludes with a discussion of religious pseudepigraphy in Antiquity as a whole, emphasizing recent theoretical discussion on pseudepigraphy in the Greco-Roman world, though the support these discussions offer to the present thesis is marginal, at best (ch. 6).

The thesis concludes with an assessment of the viability of the idea that pseudepigraphy may be the result of a form of automatic writing (i.e. as involving manipulating of spirits or possession by them) and is therefore a possible way of understanding both apocalyptic pseudepigraphy and the visionary episodes described therein. In short, it is hoped that in part 3 of the dissertation the many insights collected along modern studies regarding automatic writing - with special emphasis in the output of Chico Xavier, for the reasons already stated - are tentatively fit into what is known of apocalyptic descriptive preparatory passages. The study of modern-day practices that lead to ASCs that, in turn, take to automatic writing, may help us investigate the authenticity of such apocalyptic descriptions and, in case we are dealing with literary *topoi*, to discern, as far as is possible, what can be reports on first-hand experiences



and what is just what is expected from a genre, without any link to sincere reports.

Lastly the appendix discusses evidence which might suggest the reality of the visionary experiences contained in some apocalyptic texts, including aspects of preparatory practices in apocalyptic with special regard to 4Ezra and the possibility of chemically-induced visionary experiences.

Part One

Cross-cultural parallels to visionary
processes involving the assumption of
another person's authorial identity



CHAPTER 2 - AUTOMATIC WRITING IN MODERN-DAY KARDECISM

1. Introductory remarks to the chapter

In this section of the thesis we will have a brief introduction to Brazilian Kardecism, with special focus on its renowned output of spiritually-oriented literature named "psychography". An outline of the institutional and dogmatic development of the doctrine in Brazil is given, followed by biographical data on its most relevant and prolific medium, Francisco Cândido "Chico" Xavier. The many genres represented in Kardecist output are also discussed, with emphasis on the editorial aspects of the practice of Kardecist automatic writing (i.e. how Chico Xavier handled the process of everyday writing, how references to deceased authors led to legal action and how this subsequently changed declared identities of presumed authors). The chapter concludes with the apocalyptic nature of two of the most famous Kardecist texts by Chico Xavier, and how their declared authors act as guides in the otherworld.



2. Brief introduction to the development of Brazilian Kardecism

The religious group chosen for comparison is composed of Brazilian Kardecist mystics. A very brief summary of the doctrine and a history of the group in Brazil will be given; we shall concentrate on the visionary processes themselves with occasional reference to the content of texts or visions only when they could convey useful information about preparations themselves. Among the sources consulted, great importance is attributed to the writings of Francisco "Chico" Xavier, the most important Brazilian psychic ever, whose life, teachings and practice are all representative of Kardecist practice while at the same time set up as a standard to be imitated by followers. Chico Xavier is relevant for his exemplary life as well as for his enormous output - about 400 different titles written, many translated into foreign languages and amounting to many millions of copies sold. This productivity, as we shall see, is the result of a life entirely dedicated to automatic writing. All the above justify his choice as the standard against which Kardecist preparatory practices can be measured.

It must be borne in mind that, since ASC phenomena in Kardecist Spiritism were extremely varied (i.e. ASCs can be related to the healing of diseases, to performing operations without anaesthetics, to divining the future and so on), we shall concentrate on visionary processes related to automatic writing since these will lead to a final result similar to the sources of the main theme of this thesis -both in apocalyptic pseudepigraphy and Kardecist automatic writing we have real or assumed mystical



experiences that are crystallized as texts written in the name of someone other than the actual (i.e. mechanical) writer. Of course cross-cultural comparison other than automatic writing could be used to assess data on mystical experiences of types between the groups chosen, but this is not the aim of this thesis and shall be omitted due to the availability and apparent similarity between the two types of phenomenon chosen.



2.1. A survey of Kardecist doctrine ¹

The sources on which our analysis will be based are essentially the "codification" (*codificação*, the Portuguese name given to the founding texts of Kardecist Spiritualism) as it is related to automatic writing and some representative texts of the most important Brazilian Kardecist psychic ever, Francisco Cândido Xavier (1910-2002), widely known as "Chico" Xavier. Occasional reference shall be made to lesser-known *mediums* (this is the term by which Kardecist psychics are known in Brazil) such as Divaldo Pereira Franco, as well as to the smaller amount of material on preparation for automatic writing published by Kardecists themselves. But Chico Xavier is hailed as a national saint and in the hierarchy of holiness among Kardecist mediums he is by far the most prestigious².

In essence, Kardecism developed in the nineteenth century as a mystical doctrine that on one hand derived from the belief in reincarnation and spirits, and relied heavily on Darwinism on the other. This meant that, in the Kardecist conception of the world, continuous evolution of individual spirits, of civilizations, religions and of the whole Earth is a cornerstone. This leads both to a complacent view of every other religious practice (each being good in its own time, and suited to a certain kind of evolutionary stage both of man and of society) while at the same time purporting a highly elitized view of Kardecists themselves - naturally seen as the top of this evolutionary

¹ To avoid confusions, "authors" in psychographed works are always the mediums; the name of the spirit they claim to be representing is always given whenever stated in the original works.

² Maria L. Cavalcanti. *O mundo invisível: cosmologia, sistema ritual e noção de pessoa no espiritismo*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1983. Cit. by Sandra J. Stoll. *Entre dois mundos: o espiritismo da França e no Brasil*. DPhil. Departamento de Antropologia. Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 1999.



chain, something understandably disliked by practitioners of other cults.

Brazilian Spiritism is generally known as Kardecism³, and takes its name from Allan Kardec, *nom de plume* of the French Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail (1804-1869). He was deeply involved with Pestalozzi as an educator and, in May 1855, he witnessed the then common phenomenon of turning tables (apparently moved by the mediumistic force of mediums around it). From then on he devoted more and more effort to the forging of a doctrine which would try to understand, in typical Positivistic fashion, religious phenomena in terms of rational and accessible explanation. He left a reasonably large amount of work behind him, among which we should underline *Genesis*, the *Book of the Spirits*, the *Book of the Mediums* and the *The Gospel according to Spiritism*, plus voluminous posthumous works. The four books above constitute staple reading for Brazilian Kardecists, with the *Book of Mediums* being usually considered more difficult reading than the rest.

Synthetically speaking, Kardecism tried to explain the destiny of man (individual and collectively) in terms of evolution. Applied to the human soul, this means that Heaven and Hell are denied as permanent abodes for the soul of the dead; Jesus is also rejected as a divine figure but

³ Some confusion arises here, since other non-Kardecist groups in Brazil identify themselves as "Spiritist" while being in fact Afro-Brazilian cults. This happens to enhance their own prestige, much to the dislike of "true" Kardecists who despise this use of the term. Another issue to take into account is that some Afro-Brazilian circles are deeply interested in Kardecism and adopt many of their concepts suited to their own uses and practices. For the purposes of this thesis, however, Kardecism means only what their practitioners intend it to - the religious practice based on the writings of its founder, Allan Kardec. The idea that Afro cults and Kardecism do indeed form a "continuum" is found in the pioneering work of the Brazilian sociologist Cândido Procópio Camargo its champion - cf. *Kardecismo e umbanda; uma interpretação sociológica*. São Paulo: Livraria Pioneira Editora, 1961.



highly praised as a great medium. In terms of ethics, Kardecism draws a lot on Christianity, although rejecting Catholicism as much as possible (a very peculiar situation in Brazil, where among general syncretism it is very common to see people practicing both cults)⁴. In Kardecist terms, the soul goes through a process of continuous evolution, aided or hampered by the "discarnate spirits", the souls of the dead. These are not to be manipulated in magical terms, but can offer useful or harmful advice. Kardec himself "interviewed" spirits in order to know whether it would be profitable for man to know the future beforehand, getting the answer that it would not be⁵.

In chapter XIII of the *Book of the Mediums*, Kardec devotes a lot of space to the theme of psychography (Spiritist automatic writing), which he divides in two types: indirect (with the help of instruments) or direct (which comes straight from the medium).

The advantage of psychography, according to Kardec, is that it allows us to keep track of, and record communication with the other world as much as we do with our ordinary letters⁶. Indirect writing comprises the use of some intermediary device (such as a wooden basket with a pen attached) touched by the medium in order to get the writing done; according to Kardec this can lead to lengthy writings which can go on for many pages⁷. It must be pointed however that Kardec never attributed the writing to the "incarnation" of the object used as a helper by a spirit; the same holds for direct writing, where the medium

⁴ A picturesque note on the theme is added when it is known that among the most stubborn spirits that may inadvertently appear and spoil a Kardecist séance are those of deceased Catholic priests (echoing the exorcism of the apostate Jew cited by Fromer, cf. Oesterreich, op.cit. p.x). Cf. Camargo, op.cit. p.22.

⁵ BM 26.289; 303.

⁶ BM 13.152.

⁷ BM 13.154.



is considered to be just a machine lending his/her hand for the intelligent force (the spirit) to write⁸.

*The spirit that communicates acts over the medium who, under this influence, moves mechanically the arm and hand to write without having the slightest awareness of what he writes (at least that is the most common case)*⁹.

Kardec emphasizes that, if a basket is used, it is not the object that becomes intelligent, but

*Should we suppress this intermediary and put the pen straight in the hand of the medium and the result should be the same and with an even simpler procedure, since the medium would then write as one does in ordinary fashion*¹⁰.

Anyone who has mediumistic power to write using devices (tables, baskets and so on) can write directly. This is also the means to be preferred in terms of mediumistic writing, since according to Kardec it does not need any preparation whatsoever¹¹ - a very disputable assumption to any student of religious phenomenon, and indeed to be rejected in close examination of preparatory practices of famous Brazilian Kardecist mediums such as Chico Xavier. These are the most important issues to be taken into account regarding psychography and its preparation according to the *codificação*, or Kardec's own writings.

A related matter is psychography as understood by other Spiritists from the nineteenth century like William S.

⁸ This highly distant and quasi-scientific concept of mediumship would be greatly altered in Brazil, where religious aspects of Kardecism took greater precedence over the original scientific ones. Chico Xavier's relation to the world of spirits is proof of that, as we shall see shortly.

⁹ BM 13.157.

¹⁰ Id. *ibid*.

¹¹ Id. *ibid*.



Moses, who took it to mean writing without human interference of any kind (i.e. just to leave paper and pen under a table, with the presence of mediums around it and then collect messages written by spirits)¹². This takes us far away from the proposed cross-cultural comparison; it is a highly disputed issue and is illustrated here just to show that the term "psychography" may have meanings other than the Kardecist one¹³. This kind of spiritual communication with the dead by the living is notoriously absent from the Brazilian Kardecist scene, both in edited texts and personal reports, and by its very nature it would have little to do with cultural preparatory processes of any sort. Indeed some Brazilian mediums would rather use the term "pneumatography" to refer to the direct writing of messages without the intervention of the medium; however as one Spiritist is eager to distinguish, psychography has always the mediation of the medium's psychological life¹⁴.

A modern taxonomy of the automatic writing phenomenon would look like this: on one hand we have two extreme types of mediumship involving automatic writing,

1. Mechanical: the mechanical psychographer is identified by the involuntary movements of his hand and the lack of consciousness about the content of the delivered message.

¹² It must be remembered that Moses himself would also write automatically in the more usual meaning of the term - initially with a very dim, irregular and slow hand, so much that he had to watch carefully that the final text would not be illegible. Since he was a "mechanical" medium (see taxonomy below), these limitations soon improved. See William S. Moses, *Ensinos espiritualistas*. Rio de Janeiro: Federação Espírita Brasileira, 1981.

¹³ William S. Moses. *Psychography: by M.A., Oxon*. London: Lond. & Co., 1882.

¹⁴ Jader Sampaio. "Um estudo comparativo sobre a psicografia". Electronic source, <http://www.geae.inf.br>, 2003. Part 1.



2. Intuitive: the reverse of the above. Here a spirit transmits his/her ideas to the medium who registers them voluntarily.

On the other, the most common type according to Kardec (and as far as I know every Brazilian Kardecist would agree with this) is the semi-mechanical, where the medium feels bodily movements of the hand and records the thoughts occurred during the session. Kardec would also offer a different classification, related not to the level of consciousness of the medium but to the final output as related to the starting conditions (thus, mediums could be "polygraphs" - when calligraphy changes; "polyglots" when they write in languages unknown to them; or "illiterate" when they write during the ASC although ignorant of writing when conscious). Kardec insisted, moreover, that the psychographer always has a great role in the process, be the medium intuitive or mechanical. Mediums can alter the messages of the spirits and assimilate them to their own ideas and preferences¹⁵.

¹⁵ BM, 266 and 261. The same idea is to be found in Edgard Armond's famous treatise, *Mediunidade*, p.85, where the much-revered spirit of Ramatis insists on the active role (non-robot-like) of the medium (São Paulo: Aliança, 1956).



2.2. Kardecism in Brazil

Kardecism, although almost dead in Europe became very popular in Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century. The *Federação Espírita Brasileira* (Brazilian Spiritist Federation) dates from that time (1884) and it is quite possible that Kardecism became "adopted" in Brazil in much the same fashion that all things French were, at that time (one must only consider that even the motto on the national flag, *Ordem e progresso* - "order and progress") is also a main slogan of Positivism, another French doctrine which became widespread in Brazilian circles)¹⁶.

After having been high fashion in nineteenth-century Europe (famous people like Conan Doyle were deeply interested in what seemed, at the time, the definitive understanding of religious phenomena), Kardecism almost disappeared from view in Europe but developed very quickly in Brazil. To this day it is a well-known, organized and diffused cult, so much so that the small number of practitioners seems disproportional to what is ostensibly seen of Kardecism in the mass media and printing industry. Messianic overtones have been given to that, namely that Brazil had a mission regarding the practice and perfectioning of Kardecism¹⁷.

Brazilian Kardecism is essentially a middle-class phenomenon, often the option of people eager to establish contact with the other world while at the same time keeping other religious affiliations - with the exception of Protestantism, intransigent on this matter, syncretism and

¹⁶ A very fine overview on Brazilian Kardecism for the English-speaking reader can be found in David J. Hess. *Spirits and Scientists: Ideology, Spiritism, and Brazilian Culture*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991.

¹⁷ Chico Xavier was one of the major propagandists of this theme, avoiding doctrinal discussions whenever possible and emphasizing Brazil's role as spiritual leader of the world.



even the simultaneous practice of more than one cult at a time is a common characteristic of Brazilian religiosity.

In terms of initiation, Kardecism does not offer spectacular happenings such as Afro-Brazilian cults: it is expected that the *médium* leads a decent private and public life, as free from vices as possible (these are seen as sign of a "backward" obsessing spirit and are consequently to be avoided as preparatory means). It is also supposed by Kardecists that mediumship can take many different forms (or *dons*, "gifts"), which are not the same in every medium. Some have the gift of healing, some that of persuasive speaking, some that of psychography, some of foreseeing the future. Of course most people coming to the *centros espíritas* (Kardecist Spiritist meeting centres) are looking for immediate-purpose services (contacting the dead, healing diseases and so on), but for the medium himself Kardecism is rather a burden to be carried in order that the individual may go on in the evolution of his/her soul, while helping others. Psychography is understood as part of this process and, from the mediums' point of view, arises as a "calling" from the other world insisting that they must take the burden and go on with their mission. From an outsider's point of view, however, it seems clear that those who display any tendency towards mediumship and receive "calls" (usually from teenagehood onwards, but sometimes earlier too) are already well disposed towards it (by relatives, parents, friends, written material). This previous internal disposition, although denied by most mediums as being a trigger for mediumistic behavior, seems the most important aspect to be considered in the initial stages of mediumship.

Since not everyone has the same gifts, it is debatable whether there is any difference in the ASCs experienced by



the different subjects (i.e. from the mediums who experience possession trance to those who heal - to give passes in Kardecist jargon - and to those who undertake automatic writing). Very little research has been done on the theme but we shall come back to it later (in a sense Kardecists themselves, regarding their religion akin to science, will offer explanations for the phenomena, which must surely be taken into account but by no means can be listed as scholarly approaches).

In terms of the relation between the Kardecist mediums and the possessing spirits, a few things must be pointed out. First, since Kardecism is essentially a middle-class phenomenon, a great deal of the participants will have college education or at least a full high school diploma; the spirits they purport to represent are accordingly serious and respectable people (as opposed to the lower strata of society represented in Afro cults)¹⁸. The "possessing" spirits do not necessarily take hold of the medium (the author has heard from more than one person involved that this a kind of "base" procedure, that is both the spirit and the medium are *evoluídos*, "developed", possession becomes unnecessary); but they are always respectable and sometimes even famous people of the past, usually speaking in Portuguese and writing in the same language¹⁹. Spirits of less sophisticated origins may appear at the sessions but are to be persuaded to leave

¹⁸ Camargo, op.cit. p.85 ff.

¹⁹ Although Chico Xavier has a few texts written automatically in other languages, among which one of the most famous is the message delivered by the spirit of the Italian Ilda Mascaro Saullo, deceased in Rome on December 20th 1977. Interestingly, here changes of calligraphy also occur and expert evaluation did identify the "new" style as indeed belonging to Ilda. Cf. Carlos A. Perandréa. *A psicografia à luz da grafoscopia*. São Paulo: Editora Jornalística Fé, 1991. P.56. It should be noted that other Kardecist theoreticians hold that changes in calligraphic style are only possible in mechanical writers, and Chico Xavier defined himself as semi mechanical.



under the efforts of the more experienced mediums, should this be required. The time during which the medium is subject to the influence or possession of a spirit varies a great deal, as in Chico Xavier's own accounts.

Psychography in Brazilian Kardecist circles is, among other things, a way of reading, writing and understanding the past - sometimes equated to history as a discipline. The title of one of the best-known works by Chico Xavier testifies to that - *Há 2000 anos...* (2000 years ago...). In this case we have a lengthy work dealing with nothing less than the birth of Christianity itself, complete with background intrigue and *feuilleton*-like adventures regarding the spirit of Emmanuel (the main spiritual guide of Chico Xavier), who was, in one of his incarnations, a Roman senator. This makes what many would consider bad taste literature but which is nevertheless eagerly consumed (it was already in its 29th edition by the time of the redaction of this thesis; total output of books psychographed by Chico Xavier alone is said to be above 12 million), and fulfills the role of explaining human history to a public unused to, and unwilling to approach, more academic works.



3. Kardecist preparatory processes for automatic writing

3.1. Automatic writing and mediumship training

As seen above, Kardecist mediums themselves ascribe their ability to write automatically, in any of the sub-varieties of psychography, to a spiritual gift. Besides, in accordance with Kardec's own vocation as a pedagogue and his didactical view of the spiritual world²⁰, this gift should be educated and perfected. As a well-documented example, any person having a mediumistic disposition and willing to join a Spiritist group in São Paulo during the 1950's would undergo the following steps as "formal mediumistic education": first he/she would contact the *Federação Espírita* (Spiritist, i.e. Kardecist Federation of São Paulo); then he/she would undergo spiritual and medical exams (the latter sometimes not being observed); afterwards the person would attend evangelization courses, according to his/her level of understanding; as a fourth step the candidate would help in assistential work (philanthropy being a cornerstone of Brazilian Kardecism) and finally he/she will be taken to one specific course such as the "Medium school", which may have had more than 5,000 students in 1960 alone. The whole process would have taken 4 years for an adult (with classes once or twice a week), thus equating in number of years anyway the normal duration of a university degree in Brazil²¹. This amount of time may be greater or shorter depending on other factors - if the subject had been introduced to Kardecism since childhood (a practice contrary to Kardec's teachings but which is now

²⁰ Spirits are to be equated with teachers; see the *Book of the spirits* 24.

²¹ Camargo, op.cit. pp.29-30; 6; 31.



standard practice in organized Brazilian Kardecism), if he/she showed any mediumistic propensity before, if he/she had already been involved in voluntary work.

From an outsider's point of view this looks too rational, but it must be remembered that from the Kardecists' viewpoint the initial individual drive is never to be explained in terms of deliberate induction or conscious training. Kardecist mediums are either unsure about their own preparatory processes, or unwilling to tell anyone about them, or both; however, Leandro Santarosa has given a lengthy and very substantial contribution to the theme, that shall be discussed below.

As a starting point, this Kardecist theoretician can argue that

As we all know, mediumship is a faculty that depends on an organic predisposition, independent of morals. This means that it is to be found in any person, whatever the temper, health, intellectual and moral development; the same cannot be said of its use, which can be good or less good, according to the medium's qualities²².

That said, practice of automatic writing does require special conditions (although, in typical Kardecist fashion, Santarosa claims that nothing else besides pencil and paper are necessary):

In terms of material disposition, one should avoid all that may hinder the movements of the hand; it is better that it does not rest on the paper. These precautions are useless, because after the person is writing correctly, no obstacle can deter the hand. It does not matter whether pen or pencil are used²³.

²² Leandro Santarosa. "Formação dos médiuns". Electronic source, <http://www.espirito.com.br>, 2002.

²³ Id. *ibid*.



Again in terms that seem contradictory to the highly organized scheme of the *Federação Espírita de São Paulo* (FESP), it is stated that, for the medium to develop him/herself properly it is necessary to go through a series of preparatory stages: "years of study, maturity, constant moral change, temperate life and abstinence from the grosser vices, such as smoking and drinking"²⁴. To these I think that an ever-growing know-how on automatic writing could be added.

Chico Xavier himself would fulfill all the conditions above, which could, in hindsight, be seen rather as his own example set up as a model than a strict preparation, which he never admitted knowing in such precise terms. Santarosa goes on in his list of preparatory issues, however, and adds that in the apprentice medium faith is not the most important condition: it helps efforts, no doubt, but goodwill, intense desire and right intentions should be enough²⁵.

The first sign of ability to write automatically as understood by Santarosa is a kind of trembling in the arm and hand; sometimes this gives only insignificant traces *but soon, with training, the signs will become clearer and the script ends up looking like ordinary writing* (italics mine; the passage shows how even unwillingly, the theoretician allows part of the preparation process to relate to training, i.e. to intensive concentration on the goal).

In some cases, which are rare, the medium writes with ease from the beginning. In others, he must learn how to let his/her hand loose. There are mediums that cannot produce but the most meager results; if this

²⁴ Id. *ibid.*

²⁵ Id. *ibid.*



*condition goes on for some time it is better to stop. Because it is unprofitable to insist*²⁶.

The beginner should avoid establishing relationships with lesser spirits who are likely to make him/her write faster, but at a cost: "The first condition is the medium to put himself under the protection of God and higher spirits". A common doubt arises in every medium (at least in the semi mechanical and intuitive types) - it is the message delivered really from a spirit? To this Santarosa gives the typical answer that it does not really matter (a common trace to all Kardecist literature and to practitioners with whom I had the chance to talk on the matter): if it is good and in conformity with the doctrine, it can be in good faith regarded as the medium's own ("thank your guardian angel, who will not stop suggesting other good ideas")²⁷. The very same idea is to be found in one of the texts of the *codificação* (Kardec, *Book of the spirits*, 33).

3.2. Preparation and meaning of automatic writing in Brazilian Kardecism

While dealing with the main theme of this work, namely preparatory processes for visionary experiences, one should not confuse different approaches and issues to be taken into account: while at a psychological level explanations can be found in the scientific literature dealing with ASCs (while automatic writing is a theme which has not been widely researched, compared to others). At the neurological level this can be done too, namely in the works of Osmard Faria (*Manual de hipnose médica e odontológica*) and Jayme Cerviño (this in the more traditional Kardecist fashion,

²⁶ Id. *ibid.*

²⁷ Id. *ibid.*



Além do inconsciente). As a general feature, it must be underlined that very little empirical work is done by Brazilian Kardecists themselves (who prefer to draw on other sources and, whenever there is something resembling "empirical" research it merely has the effect of confirming pre-existing beliefs through circular arguments).

However, this being an analysis centered in cultural aspects of the preparatory processes, it is more important to understand what meanings the practices related to psychography mean to the Kardecists themselves than to tackle the issue via psychological / psychiatric or a medical approach, which shall come in the next chapter.

By visionary processes one should understand here not only the immediate practices (which can, to some extent, be learnt and taught to individuals) but the whole of the cultural environment which surrounds the individual in question - this means also the often anonym themes, characters and literature to which people are exposed since childhood (a good example would be the *Reader's Digest* issues left behind by Chico Xavier himself when moving to another home)²⁸.

This takes us to 2 non-excluding but rather complementary levels of understanding Kardecist preparatory processes: the first comprises "techniques" which are still rather obscurely investigated in Kardecism, but which include hypnosis, self-suggestion and ascetism; a second and more accessible level (although much more difficult to analyze in full detail, which would take down to the individual medium) comprises the whole of cultural themes known by a given person since childhood, and likely to be present in his / her role performance as a medium (this

²⁸ Marcel S. Maior. *As vidas de Chico Xavier*. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1994. P.129.



includes the Christian hagiographical models present in a backlands Catholic upbringing such as the one received by Xavier in the beginning of the 20th century).

The ecstasy techniques listed above, which could be generally grouped under the triple label of intellectual discipline, ascesis and hypnotic self-suggestion explain part of the phenomena: *what* is happening to the medium? But they do not answer what is of interest to us here, *why* did the ASC take this form? In my opinion this can only be understood in terms of cultural references that should, as such, be taken as an integral part of the preparatory process. The reading of case studies and personal observation by the author has shown that a vision always conforms more to the cultural milieu of the subject than to the technique itself²⁹. Even in mundane drug experiences with hallucinogens the kind of ASC reported can easily be matched to known tales, myths or even common media themes – and none of this means that the experience was false in itself, but only that culture fashions a performative discourse that is made possible by a technique³⁰. The latter, devoid of cultural content, would never take place; if we are to ascribe similar ASC-inducing techniques like, say, the use of henbane ointment in subjects far apart in time like sixteenth-century witches and twentieth-century scholars the result is surprisingly similar³¹. This is less due to the properties of henbane and more because modern subjects were well informed of what experiences past

²⁹ Not everybody has the same experiences with the same drugs (people who took LSD in controlled experiments in the Fifties claimed to have had no experience at all, in contrast to the then fashionable accounts by Aldous Huxley; cf. Ernst Arbman, *Ecstasy, or Religious Trance, in the Experience of the Ecstatics and from the Psychological Point of View*. Stockholm: Bokförlaget, 1963-1970. P.196).

³⁰ See chapter 1.

³¹ Cf. the Appendix to the thesis, 2.4 for a deeper discussion on expectations related to visionary processes (with special emphasis in chemical inducement).



henbane-using witches had had (i.e. what stereotypes would fit in). In other words, the learned technique comprises also what is deemed as acceptable as a performance to be socially displayed as mystical experience.

This means that, while reportedly being other-worldly and non-related to earthly taught subjects, the revelations contained in Kardecist literature easily show their own signs of the times where they were written. This is not by any means to say that they are false, but rather to recognize the profoundly human (thus, cultural) character of the writings of men like Chico Xavier, Bezerra de Menezes or Divaldo Franco. A hint of the idea above can be found at the preface to Chico Xavier's first book, *Parnaso de além-túmulo* (a lengthy collection of poems from very famous Brazilian dead artists): the medium claims that, of some of the poets "I did not know a single verse"³² - which raises the immediate question of how much Xavier did know about others³³. That his personal level of instruction was very low is a well-known fact - and has the effect of enhancing the results of his psychographed poetry.

In fact it is a *topos* among Kardecist texts that ideas and concepts beyond the knowledge of the medium are proof of the truth of the process and message of Kardecism and, by extension, of the existence of the spiritual world and the survival of the soul after death. Chico Xavier is no

³² Francisco C. Xavier, *Parnaso de além-túmulo*. Rio de Janeiro: Federação Espírita Brasileira, 1932. P.26.

³³ In a commonplace to this kind of literature, Chico Xavier would say that he began to receive these poems while tending a garlic garden (image of humility and lack of resources); all the while the first poet, the Symbolist Augusto dos Anjos would tell him orally the poems using words that he, Chico could not possibly know (this "proving" the authenticity of the experience via the *topos* of poor formal education versus complexity of vocabulary). The same development would be found later in texts dictated by the spirit of André Luiz who, as a former medical doctor, would strive to use words as complicated as possible (see specially *Nosso lar*, but also *Nos domínios da mediunidade*). Cf. Stoll, op.cit. pp.138-139.



exception, and claims that he had to resort to a dictionary very often, as he was being commanded to use words he had never heard of. One could almost say that anachronism is greatly prized in Kardecist literature as proof of authenticity, thus inverting an outsider's critical approach to the causes for some concepts to be found in the texts.

On the other hand, Xavier is sincere enough to admit, a few pages after, that he has always had an inclination toward literature: "At home I always studied as much as I could"³⁴. It is not because of his lack of formal education that we cannot posit that he had a fine degree of knowledge of what was being psychographed and thus, of what would be considered appropriate: even when dealing with the most erudite authors it is not easy to know what they read as part of their education (direct quotation of others helps solve only half of the question: we know that author A read B, but this does not exclude knowledge of C, D or E via indirect means, lore, trivia or even misquotations).

So we know with little detail what composed Chico Xavier's long preparatory course - what constituted his cultural package unleashed when he began to write psychography at the age of 21. It can be reasonably inferred, from his own words, that some of the poets quoted he already knew. As for the Bible (which he would also comment on psychographically, this was staple reading for anyone going through primary education at that time in Brazil, even more so in the backlands: he even admits that (precarious) teaching of the four operations and sections of the Bible constituted the working knowledge of a schoolmaster at his time³⁵.

³⁴ *Parnaso de além-túmulo*, p.31.

³⁵ *Idem*, p.31 ff.



While being unable to know precisely what constituted his formative references, we can be sure that these had a huge importance in the roles that Xavier chose for himself and, it can be argued, for the kind of spirits he chose (or was chosen by) to psychograph. It should be pointed out, however, that Chico Xavier himself admits that, while he began to deal with psychography only at 21, since the age of 5 he "confused" inhabitants of this world and the other - this being sign not only of a powerful imagination mystically inclined, but also that it was somehow accepted and welcome, in his social milieu, to have this kind of behavior³⁶. The whole episode of his sister's disease and cure shows that, following the shamanistic pattern of development: the girl, becoming hopelessly ill in 1927 (she could not be cured by normal medicine, nor by the religious intervention of Catholic priests) was finally taken into the house of a Spiritist couple to whom Chico Xavier would always feel greatly indebted, José Hermínio Perácio and Cármen Pena Perácio and, of course, be healed.

The above episode fits in the pattern so fully studied by Mircea Eliade regarding shamanistic "calling" - the shaman usually being, in the societies studied, someone who underwent symptoms of apparent sickness and found relief in developing his / her shamanic (thence, mediumistic) possibilities. According to Eliade, the shaman is first of all someone who, having cured himself, acquired the gift of healing others³⁷. This is precisely the kind of experience undergone by Chico's sister: soon after being taken in by the generous couple, she went back home cured and at the

³⁶ Idem, p.33.

³⁷ Eliade, *Shamanism*, p.27.



same time began to dictate messages from their mother, who had died in 1915³⁸.

The death of his mother had the greatest impact compared to any single event in the biography of Chico Xavier. While she lay on her deathbed, she summoned her son and told him that "If anyone tells you that I died, it is false. Do not believe it. I will remain quiet, sleeping. And I shall come back"³⁹. This forecast would probably have been the first testimony to Chico Xavier about life beyond death - at a time when it would have left the most profound impression, to be deepened by the subsequent maltreatment by his stepmother and many visions of his biological mother coming back to comfort him.

Chico himself, however, minimizes the episode of his mother's deathbed talk. But what happened with his sister is more openly admitted as contributing to his formation as medium: he says that it was only after her return that he began to attend meetings where his abilities as a "semi mechanical writing medium" began to develop, with special emphasis on hearing and visual mediumships. The first pieces of communication were prose fragments on the Gospels, as well as small pieces of poetry⁴⁰, both fitting well with what Chico claims to have been his readings up to that time. A biographic work states that Chico Xavier began his "public mediumship" precisely on July 8th 1927, having then produced the first "official" pages under automatic

³⁸ Id. 32. Chico Xavier's mother would remain a very great influence throughout his life: he even produced a book entirely devoted to her psychographed messages from the other world (*Cartas de uma morta*, 1935).

³⁹ Souto Maior, op.cit. p.13.

⁴⁰ Id. *ibid*.



writing⁴¹, and the whole episode is recalled by Chico Xavier himself⁴²:

It was a freezing night and the friends who were together round the table would follow the movements of my arm, moved and curious. The room was not very big but, in the beginning of my first transmission from the other world, I felt out of my physical body, although besides it. It must be noted that, while the messenger wrote the seventeen pages, my usual vision [i.e. biological faculty of seeing] underwent significant alterations. The walls that limited the space disappeared. The roof dissolved itself, as it were, and looking high above, I could see the stars in the middle of the night. At the same time, looking around I could see a whole array of friendly [spiritual] entities [...] pushing me forward not to fear anything about the road to travel⁴³.

In this thick description of the ASC as it happened to Chico Xavier for the first time, some features look outstanding: the perception of space is greatly altered, the writing flows automatically but the medium is in a kind of "in-between", not fully in rapture but retaining at times the remembrance of the world around him (attested by the presence and warmth of his friends, the roof and the walls).

The medium cannot, under any circumstances, guarantee that the poems are really from the personalities who sign

⁴¹ Chico Xavier himself admits that, as part of his training as a semi mechanical automatic writer he had produced hundreds of draft pages before that: however, on command by the spirit of Emmanuel, these have all been destroyed. This suggests the willingness of Chico Xavier to present a public persona with an official record both for private virtue and active automatic writing, disregarding experiences that do not fit in the chosen pattern - described as being in fact chosen by spirits such as Emmanuel just as training material.

⁴² Federação Espírita Brasileira. "Chico Xavier - traços biográficos". Electronic source, <http://www.espirito.org.br/portal/download/pdf/index.html>, 2002.

⁴³ Id. *ibid*.



them: what he does emphatically deny is that the poems can, for any reason, be considered his own:

*What I can definitely say is that they are not mine, because I did not make the slightest effort to put them into written form*⁴⁴.

The sensation felt was that some other hand guided his; sometimes

*[I felt as if] I had a written volume in front of me, which I copied; other times, that someone was dictating to me (while doing those, I could feel electric impulses through my arms and brain)*⁴⁵.

The climax of those experiences makes Chico feel that he

*had lost my [his] body, not feeling, for some moments, the slightest physical sensation. That is what I physically feel throughout this phenomenon, very common in me*⁴⁶.

As he concluded *Paulo e Estêvão* (1941), after 8 months of work, Chico Xavier saw a spirit dismounting a kind of panel that turned his room into a cabin isolated from the outside world⁴⁷. Although this is the end rather than the preparation for the ecstatic process, it is reasonable to infer that Chico was in such a deep trance as to describe the end of the task in such terms.

There is no spirit invocation in the practices hitherto described, and it should be noted that the process is by no means uniform: Chico could remain 10 days without receiving

⁴⁴ *Parnaso de além-túmulo*, p.33.

⁴⁵ Id. *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Id. *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Souto Maior, *op.cit.* p.67. This makes an obvious contrast to the walls coming down in his first official experience.



any message, while then having up to three whole poems dictated in the same day. According to Chico, the smaller the number of mediums attending, the better the result obtained (contradicting somehow Kardec's considerations on psychography), although no explanation is given for this reasoning. In the preparatory processes described in the preface to the *Parnaso*, two conclusions are to be drawn at this stage: Chico Xavier himself had no revelatory-initiatory experience that guided him to the road of spirit manipulation, but his sister did and hers was declaredly a very meaningful experience; plus, the kind of messages received, no matter how anachronistic the medium tries to make them look, fits very well in his cultural possibilities at the time.

As Kardec himself states, "anyone who feels, to any degree, the influence of spirits is a medium"⁴⁸. Chico Xavier could boast that he felt them at a high degree from childhood onwards, always emphasizing the involuntary character of his mediumship. The most striking example of Chico Xavier's attempt to obliterate any stylistic characteristics that could be ascribed to himself rather than to the spirits he is psychographing would be found in *Mecanismos da mediunidade* ("Mediumship mechanics", 1960), written together with another Brazilian medium, Waldo Vieira. The latter was then only 25 years old, already a dentist and medical doctor (thus adding prestige to the whole Kardecist experience via the reverse strategy to that of Chico emphasizing his own ignorance); Waldo was discovered to be receiving from a spirit also well-acquainted to Chico (the already quoted dr. André Luiz) and both set about writing a book together - Waldo doing the even chapters and Chico the odd ones. The result is that in

⁴⁸ BM, 14.



the end it is impossible to tell any stylistic differences between them⁴⁹.

Indeed, although Chico Xavier would officially consider his mediumship work to have begun between 1927 and 1931 and comprising the poetry of the *Parnaso*, we can be sure that, according to his own accounts, he had begun much earlier, although reluctant to consider any previous experiences as relevant. So, when Chico Xavier was still in the fourth year of primary school he was on the verge of writing a composition with a theme defined by the government of Minas Gerais, his province. It would be a competition won by the young Chico, an episode to which however he attributes little importance (possibly to stress humility and the lack of preparation of his later experiences).

As soon as time began, I saw a man beside me. I was scared and asked my companion on my side [...] if he had seen anyone. He said he saw no one [...] But the man told me the first part of what I was supposed to write. Having heard clearly, I asked the teacher if I could leave my place and I went to talk to her [...] She asked me calmly [what the man was telling me to write] I repeated what I had heard⁵⁰.

The teacher was skeptical about the episode, which would nonetheless earn Chico honours in the competition. The rest of the class, while knowing this, mocked him and asked him to write again, with the help of the "man", about any given theme; apparently Chico did the job. However, his own report does not go much further than that to inform the nature of the challenge (which again fits in Chico's future description of his own preparatory processes, or lack of).

This passage being forgotten in Chico Xavier's "official" accounts of preparation for psychography, the

⁴⁹ Stoll, op.cit. p.102.

⁵⁰ Id. pp.127-128.



medium is willing to tell about his first psychographed message he willingly recognizes as such - a letter by his mother, dated from 23/07/1927. This was done with the assistance of the already quoted dona Cármen, and Chico tells us that he was really trembling at the end⁵¹.

Chico Xavier would psychograph a message from the spirit of André Luiz giving more detail on the preparatory process from an otherworldly point of view:

Based on noble magnetism, the discarnate instructors influence the brain's mechanisms to the formation of certain phenomena, just like musicians when they touch the cords of the piano and produce a melody. And just like the sound waves associate themselves in music, mental waves conjugate themselves in [written] expression [...] Thus we can identify psychography, from the strictly mechanical to the intuitive, incorporation in different degrees of awareness, inspirations and premonitions⁵².

Another famous Brazilian medium, Divaldo Pereira Franco, could theorize on the problem of the relations between pathology and mediumship (apparent in the case of Xavier's sister and, to some extent, in his own frail constitution):

[Mediumship] is a gift that puts man between two extremes and can lead to certain states, confused with diseases. If it manifests itself in the intellectual area, it can present the individual with certain apparent states of auditive or visual hallucinations, anxiety, fear, claustrophobia, unreasonable fears of the night and of getting along with people [...] Not being prepared for these manifestations, it is only

⁵¹ Id. 130.

⁵² Francisco C. Xavier and Waldo Vieira [dictated by the spirit of André Luiz]. *Mecanismos da mediunidade*. Rio de Janeiro: Federação Espírita Brasileira, 1964. Pp.133-134.



*natural that [the medium] experiences intranquility or ill-feeling*⁵³.

Reflecting the first psychographed letter from his mother, Chico Xavier would give a vivid account of the problems he would face in the beginning of his writing (all adding to the idea that psychography requires training and, as such, can be understood in terms of disciplinary exercise both by Kardecist or by external observers): in the beginning it was very tiresome, as if Chico had an iron belt compressing his head⁵⁴:

*His arm seemed to be mineralizing, turning into an iron rod, heavy but driven by an awesome force [...] and his [Chico's] psychological state would vary considerably, between extremes of good and bad temper. But as time went by these sensations changed. Step by step the medium acquired greater ability, and, in the end, an incredible speed in the practice of psychography: [...] 'I just needed to take paper and pencil that the message would flow'*⁵⁵.

Both passages are a clear admission of mediumship as therapy (this not implying that the mediums themselves are sick, but only that they experience symptoms of sickness, or akin to it, that disappear after developing mediumistic faculties)⁵⁶; Kardecists would say that, if the medium gets sick in apparent relation to his/her visionary activities, this is due to debts of past lives, not to the activity

⁵³ Divaldo P. Franco. "Características da mediunidade". Electronic source, <http://www.conciesp.org.br>, 2002 (excerpts from Miguel de Jesus Sardano. *Divaldo, mais que uma voz, uma canção de amor à vida!* Santo André: Centro Espírita Dr. Bezerra de Menezes, /s.d./). Part 1.

⁵⁴ Surprisingly similar to the experience described by Ludwig Staudenmaier. *Die Magie als experimentelle Naturwissenschaft*. Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1922. Pp.22-23 ff.

⁵⁵ Stoll, op.cit. pp.136-137.

⁵⁶ On the link between ASCs and disease much has been said, unfortunately of little use due to the preconceived nature of the studies. As Eliade put it, the natives in the groups observed do not confuse sickness and shamanistic vocation - or alternatively, the sick man is a failed shaman. Cf. Eliade, *Shamanism*, p.27.



itself⁵⁷. Divaldo goes on to distinguish the kinds of mediumship, which comprise the ability to write automatically – here again prizing anachronism as proof of authenticity: “[...] if he can write a page in finer fashion than his momentary capacities, or do so about a subject hitherto unheard of to him, here we have psychographical mediumship”⁵⁸.

What should be considered as the primordial preparatory means to this process? In the words of Chico Xavier himself, recalling a dialogue with Emmanuel, his main “sponsoring” spirit, the answer is easy: discipline. Emmanuel once asked Chico if he was ready for mediumistic duty: to this Chico answered positively but wanted to know what was necessary – and to this question Emmanuel repeatedly answered that discipline was the key (in fact the spirit did not mention anything else as necessary besides this). This goes very well with what is known about the recently deceased Chico Xavier, who seemed by all accounts to have lived a very disciplined, ascetic and blameless life⁵⁹. These aspects are told to us by Xavier himself, who described his daily life in the familiar to the reader terms of mission, ascetics and suffering:

I can only rest when I am sleeping. As soon as I wake up, I am attracted to the book affair [...] It is a kind of compulsion [sic]. I cannot think about anything else [contrast this to the idea, by Ludwig, that psychography is akin to the ability of doing two things at the same time – but maybe Chico Xavier is referring not to the process of writing, but to his own self-perceived obsession] [...] I am not complaining, but to

⁵⁷ Franco, op.cit. part 1.

⁵⁸ Id. ibid. Chico Xavier would agree that, after 3 or 4 days without psychographical work, the medium’s sensibility is somewhat lessened; cf. Stoll, op.cit. 173.

⁵⁹ “Chico Xavier – traços biográficos”. Chico Xavier, by reason of this way of life and the huge assistencial work he led, would compete for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1982.



*fulfill my duty I could not even care about the clothes I am wearing [...] I cannot think about anything else but the Spiritist book. These books come to life among incredible struggles [...] but so it is. I wake up [...] the day just starting, and I am already looking for paper and pencil; the ideas stumble as if in a waterfall inside my head and I must write. I feel obliged, I cannot resist [...]*⁶⁰

One last aspect in Chico Xavier's personal conduct must be considered here for its apparent relation with his incredible output and incessant dedication to spiritual work, and this is celibacy. Chico never considered it as an imposition on all mediums, but rather as a personal burden that had to be undertaken in order that he could fulfill his mission:

*In order that the books could spring out of my poor faculties, it was necessary, so Emmanuel tells us, that I accepted the life I presently live, where marrying [...] would not be possible. This does not mean that mediumship creates antagonisms between the medium and earthly marriage, but rather that some mediumistic tasks require special conditions to be fulfilled*⁶¹.

⁶⁰ Revista Espírita Allan Kardec 19, 1993, 30. Again the medium would agree that each time the symptoms described would be less and less severe as time passed; in his later life Chico Xavier would say that "I do not get so tired anymore and, after getting the messages, I remain in the same physical and psychological state as before". The discipline motif appears again in the strange episode of the piano - Chico Xavier has always received an incredible amount of gifts and donations of every kind throughout his life, and he always disposed of them to charity. On one occasion, however, he was given a brand new piano, which he intended to keep and learn how to play. His guiding spirit, Emmanuel, reprehended him severely pointing out that he could not spare the time for such mundane pleasures, and so the piano was done away with. It is a most striking example of the Prussian discipline self-imposed by Chico Xavier - or, in his own terms, imposed on him by the spirits. In fact, since 1931 Emmanuel drew a daily routine for Chico Xavier, which includes the study of grammar, typing, the New Testament and Kardec's writings (cf. Elias Barbosa. *No mundo de Chico Xavier*. São Paulo: IDE, 1992. Cit. by Stoll, op.cit. p.49). All this points to a preparatory process that goes far beyond personal concentration for each *séance* or writing session.

⁶¹ Folha Espírita, November 1976, cit. by Stoll, op.cit. p.151.



Indeed, the medium would say publicly that he could not be considered a man in proper terms, in the episode where a woman had tried to seduce him; already in his youth he had been taken to a brothel for sexual initiation, evidently without having had intercourse with any of the women: legend has it that they recognized him and went all together to pray⁶². This all lends itself admirably to build Xavier's personal legend of holiness, but can also be understood in terms of integral dedication to a cause, that of automatic writing: sexual intercourse (not to mention the obligations of a family life) would have made his task much more difficult if not impossible, given the intensity of his daily dialogues with his guiding spirits (usually Emmanuel and André Luiz).

⁶² Id. *ibid.*



3.3. Genre and personal identity of the spiritual author

Can modern automatic writing be considered a genre in itself, or does psychography comprise several genres? This is important regarding preparatory processes, for if the texts are to be dealt with as a whole, it is reasonable to treat the preparations as essentially similar; the same would not be true if they are just "otherworldly" expressions of more respectable literary genres. It would appear that while they all display many similarities, the psychographed texts ostensibly belong to different genres - romance, poetry, biography, short advice. The pattern of preparatory processes is, correspondingly, overly stereotyped regardless of the genre and obeys the following characteristics:

1. The mediums are ascetics, following the example of the great Kardecist mystics (Chico Xavier, Bezerra de Menezes, Divaldo Pereira Franco and Kardec himself);

2. Discipline is the key to preparation (understood as focusing on the ethical aspects of a "proper" medium life);

3. Chemical induction is not only absent, but ASC-inducing substances are despised by Kardecists even in ordinary life (they are after all the identifying signs of a "backward" spirit, still attached to earthly vices - this being the reason for the use of incense and elaborate rituals in other "less developed" religions such as Umbanda - an Afro-Brazilian cult - and even Catholicism⁶³);

⁶³ It must be noted that Chico Xavier claimed to have had an experience with LSD, not taking the drug as any other person, but "spiritually", i.e. given to him by his life-long advisor Emmanuel: in October 1958 the spirit offered to introduce the drug to Xavier, who felt out of his own body in the night. Emmanuel came and put a white drink inside a glass, explaining that it was an alkaloid that would produce the same effect as LSD. In this first experience, however, Xavier felt awful sensations and saw monstrous visions. Emmanuel explained to him that this was due to his spiritual state at the moment: with



4. Imagination, helped by self-hypnosis, seems to form the mainstream of the process – the visionary taking hold of many themes that comprise his/her ordinary life happenings and transforming them into visionary experiences, meaningful to the Kardecist community of believers involved. Ancient or modern languages, when they appear, would constitute a separate issue whose investigation, to see whether the case constitutes fraud or not, would take us too far away from our subject (although this phenomenon has echoes in a few apocalyptic passages, as we shall see in other chapters).

However the issue of the genre of the text is far from superfluous in our case, since the final output is very different in each of the genres tried by Chico Xavier.

A first and more important one is that of poetry: it is perhaps here that the issue of personal style as imitation, truthful communication with the other world or plain fraud poses itself in the clearest way. The question of the authenticity of poems (i.e. of their relation to output of the poets when alive) is far from closed.

On other genres, such as self-help or romance, this is far from clear. After all, although the very modern and *feuilleton*-like adventures of Emmanuel in the first-century look unlikely, there is no hard proof that they never took place (although, in the opinion of the author of this thesis, they constitute very bad literature indeed, but the "historical" series was not written with an eye on style).

repentance, praying and charity the results might be different. Xavier did as was told and, six days after, had a very fine visionary experience (in the same lines, with Emmanuel guiding him etc.). The effects in both cases match what would be expected of a LSD-user so much (i.e. constitute visionary *topoi*) that it is hard not to think of second-hand knowledge on the part of Chico Xavier. Cf. Souto Maior, *op.cit.* pp.125-126.



The huge output of messages from the dead would take this further, given the universal acclaim of Xavier's ability to catch communication from the other world.

To the genres loosely correspond definite characters: Emmanuel to the historic books; André Luiz to the "medical" or "technical" works dealing with theories of reincarnation; Humberto de Campos, Frederico Figner and even Marilyn Monroe and the bohemian composer Noel Rosa to lighter texts, in the form of essays or chronicles. Of course the poets as a group are of paramount relevance when it comes to the attribution of poetry to spiritual authors. The identity of these is so important, both to Kardecists and to greater sections of Brazilian society as a whole, as to motivate lawsuits on the issue as will be observed in the next section.



4. Editorial mediation of psychography

It must be taken into account that although Chico Xavier does not tell us much about it, editing plays its role in the final product: at least for 1936 Chico describes his daily Kardecist writing as going from 19:00 to 1:00 am, when he would rewrite the drafts (i.e. the psychographed texts themselves) and type them on a borrowed typewriter⁶⁴. How many changes the text would undergo in this process is impossible to know (even more so because at least in the beginning of his mediumship the spirits would order him to destroy any drafts⁶⁵).

It could be argued whether the phenomenon experienced by Chico Xavier is plain fraud, actual psychic communication or a kind of psychological process that makes the medium incorporate the mechanics of the portrayed subjects without any formal knowledge of them (i.e. to be able to produce poetry in the metre of a deceased artist without formal and deliberate training of any kind).

If the psychographical phenomena of the mediums discussed here were fraudulent, there would be no need to understand the preparatory processes in terms of psychological analysis; and it would be very unwise to explain them in terms of the Kardecist explanation itself (since it constitutes a hypothesis whose basis cannot be checked). It must be taken into account, however, that a great deal of controversy arose in Brazil regarding Chico Xavier's mediumship, and this is indeed related to his preparatory processes: in 1944 the widow of a very famous and by then deceased Brazilian intellectual, Humberto de Campos, decided to sue Chico Xavier who had been publishing

⁶⁴ Souto Maior, op.cit. p.66.

⁶⁵ Stoll, op.cit. p.136.



books under the name of her husband as the communicating spirit. This put Kardecist Spiritism under the scrutiny of the law, because it could be seen either as a fraud (and as such condemned by stringent Brazilian laws on witchcraft and related practices) or it could be seen as a practice generating true authorial texts - in which case Humberto de Campos' family would be due a huge sum in copyrights. At the end of the trial, Chico Xavier was declared innocent⁶⁶ but his works and practices were put under a much brighter light by all segments of Brazilian cultured readers. It should be noted that, even before the lawsuit and while still alive, Humberto de Campos manifested himself in terms that would dismiss Chico Xavier's poetry as plain fraud⁶⁷. The same would be said of many renowned authors in articles published some years after, when Kardecism remained an important issue in the debate⁶⁸.

On these issues the controversies that evolved in the Brazilian press during the 1930's and 40's are very telling - for even skeptical intellectuals could not relate Chico Xavier's experiences to fraudulent practice. On the contrary, one eminent thinker, Raymundo Magalhães Jr., wrote that it would take 60 days reading one author at a time, day and night, to be able to emulate his style.

⁶⁶ The judges considered the case without grounds, and while unable to explain psychography, reasoned that royalties should only be ascribed to "incarnate" authors.

⁶⁷ Chronicle published in the *Diário Carioca*, 10/07/1932. Cit. by Stoll, op.cit. p.60.

⁶⁸ The author of this thesis managed to observe a few times mediums writing automatically, and could not ascribe any external preparation to them (substances etc.). The content of the messages was always very different from the huge diversity of genres dealt with by Chico Xavier, but this needs not concern us here. It should be noted however that the mediums observed had less striking features in their writings than Chico Xavier, this making the messages more easily identifiable to them outside the mediumistic milieu but at the same time less compelling than Xavier's historical novels or poems.



*But imitation no doubt takes qualities of intelligence and a great deal of culture, logic in the choosing of themes and in exposing the ideas, in short, some degree of conscience of literary values [...] For these very reasons I declare that, if Chico Xavier is an imposter, he is a very talented one.*⁶⁹

Emmanuel himself would have a role in censoring writings from Chico Xavier: on one of those the medium, a great lover of animals, had a vision strongly condemning the ingestion of meat. The spirit who signed the "article" about the issue was none other than Humberto de Campos, who was censored by Emmanuel - who argued that the evils coming from a wholesale condemnation of meat-eating would surpass the benefits of a cause that was, in itself, just. So the text was ripped to shreds on the orders of Emmanuel⁷⁰.

A strange case of spiritual censorship again arising from Emmanuel dealt with a psychographed biography. Frederico Figner, a wealthy businessman from Rio de Janeiro, Kardecist and friends with Chico Xavier, died in 1947 after an intense relationship with the medium (which included huge donations for assistential work). A few months after, Xavier received his visit, willing to put down his own experiences in the other world as a kind of autobiography (even with a complete title - *Voltei*, "I am back"). Emmanuel would not allow it: the spirit said that Figner was still immature for such an enterprise, which nonetheless took place 2 years afterwards, and with Figner appropriately disguised as *Irmão Jacob* ("Brother Jacob"),

⁶⁹ Article in *A Noite*, Rio de Janeiro, 4/8/1944. Cit. by Stoll, op.cit. p.65.

⁷⁰ According to the medium, one of Emmanuel's arguments was that many men earned their living dealing in meat - including Chico Xavier himself, a public servant on a state farm. Cf. Souto Maior, op.cit. pp.116-117.



so as to avoid another lawsuit in the lines of Humberto de Campos,⁷¹.

Emmanuel's criticism, continuous interference in Chico Xavier's life and endless demands would add to the censorship of texts as described above, but would take us far from the main theme which are psychographed texts rather than Xavier's biography.

Nor would the poems of the first edition be always the same - editorial activity meant that some would be excluded from subsequent editions, as well as the prefaces undergoing minor changes. The second edition of the *Parnaso* - from 1935 - would for instance moderate the attacks on the preface to the Catholic Church by Manuel Quintão. It is the final example of how earthly and spiritual revision are to be understood in the world of Kardecist automatic writing (although the originals from each book have not undergone any other alterations than Xavier's own transposing them to typewritten text).

⁷¹ Souto Maior, op.cit. p.91.



5. Two modern-day Kardecist apocalypses, and how their alleged authors are portrayed

A very important part of PTs (as experienced by Chico Xavier) can also be deduced from experiences described in apocalypses, like the "daily life" aspects of the afterworld described in them both. It appears so important that it composes a major part of revelations described.

If this is to be taken into account, then hardcore Kardecist texts like *Nosso lar* and *Missionários da luz* should be considered modern-day apocalypses: but at the same time Kardecism proposed a wholesale demystification of the beyond and their visions have a correspondingly more "daily-life" character.

In the case of Kardecist material the parallels from this world to the other go much further, and books such as *Missionários da luz* are sold as newspaper articles on what the world beyond is like⁷². Here too there are classes, teachers, pupils and workers, all engaged in team work which, in the end, has strong Christian overtones: all spirits, living or dead, should aspire to put the Gospel into practice, i.e. to love one another⁷³. A striking example would be the organization of *Nosso lar* which, as already said, resembles very closely that of Getúlio Vargas' corporative state: at some point the assistance given by the more developed spirits to the backward ones

⁷² So the back flap reads: "André Luiz, going on with the series of reports on life 'on the other side', gives us details about the work involving preparation for reincarnation of spirits ready for a new existence in the physical world". And the whole text follows this scheme, which in the end makes reading flow quite easily.

⁷³ *Missionários*, p.110, 121, 137 and many more. It is in this spirit that Xavier's aversion to politics is to be understood - it is rendered useless or, at the best, as a secondary tool to the practicing of the "golden rule".



has to be stopped - temporarily - because of the indiscipline and consequent risks involved.

Again it must be stressed that all those daily experiences and related lore are integral to visionary processes in Kardecism.

Part of this output deals with reports on what the world beyond is like - they are in fact guided tours for the curious about what there can be after death. Two of Chico Xavier books in particular are shaped in apocalyptic fashion - *Nosso lar* and *Missionários da luz*. Both are part of the "André Luiz series", having been dictated by the spirit of the same name. Both are also incredibly detailed and didactical regarding information on the other world, and yet both have an unmistakable flavour that betrays the cultural milieu in which they were written.

Nosso lar was written in 1944, in the last days of Vargas' dictatorship in Brazil and the structure it displays resembles very much the assistential state that existed at that time. One of the sections of the book (which begins, appropriately, with a close look at the lower regions of the beyond) deals with the ministerial structure of the supernatural colony, medical language and clinical exams permeate it throughout. The whole of the work is devoted to show how divine justice works continuously and to the usual commonplaces of sapiential lore.

The book is not rich in accurate descriptions of what Chico Xavier underwent to be able to receive the message of André Luiz, but the whole work is full of sensations, descriptions and reasonings that are all too familiar in sensory detail. The visionary undergoes all the range of human emotions and experiences all the commonest bodily sensations, like hunger, fear, thirst and so on - only to



find out that the spiritual colony that gives name to the book is almost a carbon-copy of things the visionary knew very well beforehand. Even the picturesque closing of assistential works in the higher levels due to the rest of the lower is pretty much a description of class relations in Brazil of that time⁷⁴. It can hardly be doubted that again all the range of the experiences known to the medium are an essential part of his visionary travel, even more than specific preparations for the purpose.

The other text, *Missionários da luz*, follows the same *topoi* to some extent. It is also a portrait of the world beyond with minute detail regarding the eternal job of teaching souls into the ways of God, involving analysis of past misdeed and retribution etc. but is much less spectacular than *Nosso lar* in terms of the places and experiences described. It could also be that after the huge impact caused by *Nosso lar* there would be much less to impress the public; in any case, the way that the spirit of André Luiz moves in relation to his own guiding spirit Alexandre and other ethereal beings does not involve any specific practices, or at least these are not minutely described - as is the norm in all of Xavier's writings that we have examined. The whole "André Luiz series" has this apocalyptic flavour and it is in vain that one should search for immediate visionary induction techniques in them.

⁷⁴ *Nosso lar*, op.cit. p.57.



6. Summary

The essential issues arising from this chapter as related to the whole of the thesis are:

1. Kardecism, regardless of the transformations it underwent in its adoption in Brazil, has authorship attributed to the spirits of the deceased as a main issue;

2. The way these writings are produced is via automatic writing, which has 3 main forms: intuitive, mechanical or semi-mechanical. Most mediums, including Chico Xavier, fall in the latter category;

3. The huge output of Chico Xavier, together with his exemplary life and comparatively goodwill to tell about preparatory processes render him as invaluable for the cross-cultural study intended;

4. Authorship as spiritual phenomenon, such as it presents itself in Brazilian Kardecism, may be an important parallel to Second Temple pseudepigraphy, due to the essential attribution of writings to someone other than the actual, mechanical writer;

5. As preparatory means, chemical induction is to be excluded (and, by extension, any kind of pharmacological induction); the Kardecist medium relies instead on psychological processes;

6. As preparatory processes one should understand not only the immediate concentration of the medium for the task at hand in the next *séance*, but rather his/her whole personal history, which may comprise impressing episodes (like Chico Xavier's mother's talk on her deathbed, or the seeing of spirits in school);



6. Attribution of authorship is very important in the Kardecist-book world and is indelibly related to the genre of texts⁷⁵.

7. Among the many styles and forms that Kardecist texts can take, that of the apocalyptic revelation is one of the most important in terms of its impact among the reading public: however, the revelations described resemble more the cultural environment where they were produced than anything else (i.e. that while exhibiting an ethnography of the world beyond they look very much like the social *milieu* of Brazil in the first half of the 20th century).

⁷⁵ Although we saw above that for Kardecists a good psychographed text is the one that conveys a message in conformity with the doctrine, regardless of the signature - which is nonetheless very important for the purposes of this work.



CHAPTER 3 – KARDECIST AUTOMATIC WRITING IN THE LIGHT OF SCHOLARSHIP

1. Introductory remarks to the chapter

In this section an analysis of Kardecist automatic writing will be made according to scholarly discussion on the theme. It should be pointed out that research on Kardecism is comparatively scarce.

A first major division in this area relates to the division between religious and profane automatic writing, of which only the first concerns us (although data on the latter can prove useful, as will be seen). Many features found by researchers not concerned with Kardecism at all will apply to Kardecist automatic writing, strongly suggesting that a special type of personality is more prone to that kind of religious output.



2. Automatic writing as hypnotic phenomenon

By comparison to other religious texts, Kardecist reports are quite open in describing the visionary processes themselves, and taking into account the fact that we have some kind of identification between two authors (the "real" and the "supposed" or spiritual one), we should assess the mediumnistic experiences hitherto described in terms of possession phenomena as defined by scholars. A good starting point would be Zaretsky and Shambaugh's study¹. According to these authors, there are 5 essential traits to define mediumnistic/spiritual possession:

1. The individual becomes sick or enters a dissociative state by means of several inductive techniques (Chico Xavier did not become sick himself but had the powerful example of his sister's experience - although of a different nature - as well as witnessing his mother's deathbed talk);

2. His behaviour can be recognized as different from the habitual one;

3. This behaviour is attributed to a kind of control exercised by some external agent (this being an explicit claim of all Brazilian Kardecist psychographic literature, although in different degrees according to each case);

4. This agent inspired the individual to act in a certain fashion, having "entered" him (another claim of Chico Xavier and all mediums);

5. This agent communicates an understandable message.

¹ Irving Zaretsky and Cynthia Shambaugh (eds.). *Spirit Possession and Spirit Mediumship in Africa and Afro-America: an Annotated Bibliography*. Garland Reference Library of Social Science. New York / London: Garland Publishing, 1978. P.xii.



The above can be held as true for the experiences hitherto described without us having to deal with the authenticity of the phenomenon: the mediums accept spontaneously (or, in a few personal observations, when asked) the items above. We could speak with a good degree of certainty, then, of Kardecist automatic writing as constituting a PT type experience (although in Brazilian religious jargon this would be accepted only reluctantly by many Kardecists, for the term "possession" has strong Afro-religious overtones, to be avoided as a matter of principle by Kardecists). Possession will be discussed below; for the moment suffice it to say that, following the above distinctions, Chico Xavier had both PT and plain T (some kinds of communicating with spirits involve trance, others do not; trance does not automatically imply in possession by spirits)².

Zaretsky and Shambaugh go further in defining the stages of the PT itself, again five in total:

1. The previous preparation (baths, libations and so on; no mention of immediate use of them is made in the texts consulted or in the sessions observed, although peace of mind, sexual abstinence or avoidance of certain foods and alcohol on the day of the *séance* are sometimes to be kept; "external" inducement techniques are condemned as belonging to "lesser" spirits and, as such, are to be avoided by the medium);
2. The ecstasy-induction techniques;
3. Possession itself;

² Erika Bourguignon. "The self, the behavioral environment, and the theory of spirit possession" in: Melford E. Spiro (ed.). *Context and Meaning in Cultural Anthropology*. New York: Free Press, 1965. Pp.40 and 42.



4. The end of trance;

5. The after-effects of trance (tiredness, ill-being and so on)³.

It should be noted that the concept of possession does not include the faculty of transmitting any highly coherent or even sophisticated message (although this is a main issue in Kardecist automatic writing). In fact we can observe, in Kardecist *séances*, the odd appearance of unwanted, base spirits who have to be dealt with, kindly but firmly, by a more experienced medium available. In no case observed or heard of did these possessional non-writing entities lead to any written testimony of what they were doing at the wrong time and place. PT leading to automatic writing seems to involve the capacities of the medium to a high degree, when control of a coherent message is of high importance while at the same time usually obtained (i.e. the medium almost always gets a message related to his/her inner motivations to start the process itself).

It should also be pointed that, following a pattern already observed for PTs outside the Brazilian Kardecist milieu, the automatic writer's PT is almost always a public happening (i.e. there are more witnesses to it)⁴. It is also remarkable that close examination of the spirits portrayed reveals a symbolic conception of the society

³ Zaretsky and Shambaugh, op.cit. p.xiv.

⁴ Bourguignon, *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change*, p. 15. This would not hold true to some personal reports of very few people who claimed to have very private and solitary automatic writing experiences (and who were Kardecists). It would be reasonable to infer, however, that the preparatory process to be discussed below was the same in famous, dated *séances* such as the ones from the *Parnaso de além-túmulo* and to the anonymous, recluse-type ones, since the ideals of lifestyle are fairly similar among practitioners interviewed and no chemical ASC-inducing technique was ever found among any of them.



where the phenomenon takes place and as such is independent of the visionary processes involved⁵. The above working as starting definitions regarding ASCs related to automatic writing, let us take a look at modern operative definitions of the issue. It can be defined as scripts produced without the control of the conscious self⁶ or as writing that is done without the writer being conscious of what he is writing, or even occasionally of the act of writing itself⁷. Others venture that automatic writing is to be understood as a phenomenon of dissociated consciousness in which the writer feels his hand guided by some mysterious force, in some cases being aware of what is being written, in some having amnesia⁸. A more precise contemporary definition claims that automatic writing is the script that the writer produces involuntarily and in some instances without being aware of the process, although he may be in an alert waking state, and generally is so⁹.

The state in which the automatic writer is is also very important. Besides therapeutic (i.e. psychologists') use of the practice, it almost always implies an ASC (at least one author affirming that the dissociation produced by automatic writing is an ASC in itself)¹⁰. This does not pose any problem since in anthropological literature

⁵ This is quite obvious when one thinks about *Nosso lar*. Bourguignon's conclusion regarding this issue means that people less apt to change their lives in the material world tend to do so in dissociative states; see Bourguignon's *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change*, p.24.

⁶ Nandor Fodor. "Automatic writing" in: *Encyclopaedia of Psychic Science*. London: Arthur Press, 1933. P.19.

⁷ Ian Stevenson. "Some comments on automatic writing", *JASPR* 72 (4), 1978. P.316.

⁸ Brian Earle and Frederick W. Theye. "Automatic writing as a psychiatric problem", *PQS* 42(2), 1968. P.218.

⁹ Anita Mühl. *Automatic Writing. An Approach to the Unconscious*. New York: Garrett / Helix, 1964. P.4.

¹⁰ Id. *ibid*.



trance and spirit possession are also considered dissociative states¹¹.

In another sense it also implies how the automatic writer sees himself regarding the writing process, as we saw in the last chapter. From the point of view of the final product - the psychographed book - greater importance seems to be attached to the actual writer than to the spiritual one¹². As a rule, the Kardecist psychographer is willing to emphasize that

1. He is ignorant of the content of the messages conveyed (the more sophisticated or supposedly sophisticated the message and the greater the ignorance of the medium, the more valued it is)

2. Factual confirmation should be readily available whenever possible (this is especially desirable when it comes to political statements or to the locating of former places, although Chico Xavier was particularly unhappy about the first)

3. Doctrinal confirmation is always more important than items 2 and 3 in Kardecist automatic writing; if the identity of the spiritual author is the main interest for the author of this thesis, more than one Kardecist interviewed would stress the irrelevance of the issue and that if a message is sound in terms of Kardecist doctrine, the identity of the communicating spirit is of secondary importance.

We have also seen that for Kardecists the writing medium can be classified in 3 categories, according to the degree of self-consciousness involved in the writing

¹¹ Bourguignon, "Self", p.39.

¹² Luiz E. Soares. "O autor e seu duplo", RS 4, 1979. P.132.



process - mechanical, semi mechanical or intuitive. Recent data on the theme by a group of clinical researchers indicates that, in a group of 110 Kardecists from São Paulo, Brazil, 77,2% claimed to be conscious during the whole process of psychography, psychophony or possession; 18,9% declared themselves to be semiconscious and only 3,7% would say they were unconscious of what was happening¹³. Translated to the Kardecist categories this means that 2/3 of the interviewed consider themselves as automatic writers of the intuitive type (as such with no scientific interest, due to the impossibility of separating clearly what is internal to the writer and what may be ascribed to outside, spiritual sources). 18,8% would fit in the same category of Chico Xavier, i.e. semi mechanical (keep partial consciousness of what they are going through)¹⁴. To this stratification follows another, which is coherent to it: when asked if they could control their mediumship, 63% said that they always did, 31,1% that they usually did and 5,5% rarely or ever controlled

¹³ The rest answered that they had never undergone any experience of the three listed. Cf. Paulo J. Negro et alii. "Do religious mediumship dissociative experiences conform to the sociocognitive theory of dissociation?", JTD 3(1), 2002. Pp.57-61. Another questionnaire involved a more gender-focused approach (cf. Keith M.T. Hearne. "A questionnaire and personality study of self-styled psychics and mediums", JSPR 55(816), 1989, which reminds us of the fact that psychic powers may be a means of expression to people otherwise short of them, such as women, in several societies (following Lewis' suggestion).

¹⁴ One important observation to be made is that it looks very risky to consider the output of Chico Xavier as one single block of texts written through the same formula and having equal value to the researcher; it seems to me that, as time went by and Xavier became more and more important (and as a consequence devoting more time to charity work) his text loses the originality and freshness of the first decade and have as content more and more commonsensical lore and everyday wisdom. Although this relates to their content and not to the preparatory process itself, it also means that the supposedly striking features of the spirits of the deceased and much less perceptible in those last 300 books and this in turn may mean that their content owes more to Xavier's own personality than to mediumnistic communication attained via preparations.



it (taking us roughly to the same proportions about awareness of the writing process itself)¹⁵.

The research above tackles a very important issue from the point of view of Kardecists,- but regardless of how they feel about their own experiences, from the scientific point of view there has always been an important question as to the motor and/or psychological background of automatic writing¹⁶ (this pointing to the difficult question about how much, if at all, a symbolic activity as writing can be done without the awareness of the subject). And as early as the 1920's discussions regarding the role of recollection of memories in the final product of automatic writers was taking place¹⁷, as well as to how much non-verbal associations are important for the automatic writers¹⁸. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, automatic writing could be seen as strictly motor

¹⁵ Negro et alii, idem. Concerning child abuse and health as important to the formation of the psychic, no distinctive feature could be found - for the first, 89,9% of those interviewed did not mention any abuse during childhood, and 91,4% no abuse after becoming adults. All the people examined considered their own health as good, very good or excellent (Negro et alii, op.cit. p.61). On the other hand, the fact that the texts produced by Kardecists via automatic writing are so varied, the case for Chico Xavier being very special can be pushed forward and related to both his failing health and his childhood unhappiness as well. It is also astonishing that Negro's team of researchers did not find any relation whatsoever between training and mediumship (Negro claims no current religious affiliation but was raised as a Kardecist, and so should have known better). For me this is in the very core of the problem, and any clinical observation should take into account the lengthy and sophisticated training needed to become a successful Kardecist automatic writer, itself part of the preparatory processes.

¹⁶ Wilma Koutstaal. "Skirting the abyss: a history of experimental explorations of automatic writing in psychology", JHBS 28(1), 1992. P.5.

¹⁷ Cf. Morton Prince. "An experimental study of the mechanism of hallucinations", BJP 2, 1922. P.165 ff.

¹⁸ Even a relatively sceptical scholar as Morton Prince knows only two kinds of automatic writer, from the point of view of the production - those who remain unconscious during the process and those who get ideas related to the issues being written, but not in verbalized forms. Apparently it did not occur to him that the writers might be putting down impressions (internal or spiritual) intuitively, not following a dictation. Cf. Koutstaal, op.cit. p.6.



and having nothing to do with the subconscious¹⁹ (but then this may be due to the then small amount of conceptual apparatus referring to other aspects of the human mind other than the conscious level). A more promising path (we shall return to it on item 4 of this chapter) is the link between memory and automatic writing, especially as related to "criptomnesia" (the ability to recall things recorded at a subconscious level)²⁰.

But if we are dealing with semi mechanical or purely mechanical automatic writers it is reasonable to assume they are all in some kind of ASC, or dissociative state, and that many of those quoted report similar sensations to that felt by Chico Xavier - a heavy arm and electrical impulses flowing through it²¹. One patient of Anita Mühl reported a similar sensation, electric vibrations throughout the whole body: soon after she began with automatic writing, claiming to receive letters from her dead husband²².

So far we have been dealing with automatic writing in mystical contexts, since we are trying to elucidate aspects of apocalyptic literature; but it is also very important in the therapeutic universe, stripped of mystical content by the analyst, by the patient or both. This may be clarifying since it accounts both for a great deal of scholarship on automatic writing to day and may shed light on the underlying processes themselves.

¹⁹ William R. Newbold. "Experimental induction of automatic processes", *PsyR.* 2(4), 1895. P.358.

²⁰ Stevenson, *op.cit.* p.319.

²¹ See above, p.96; Stevenson reports the same sensations with the impression that someone else is guiding the arm (*op.cit.* p.317). Newbold reports the strange case of A.B. who, reunited with other mediums, felt a violent movement in his left arm but the motor disturbance transferred itself to the right side (*op.cit.* pp.358-362).

²² Mühl, *Automatic Writing*, p.42.



2.1. Non-mystical automatic writing

Under this heading we shall be referring essentially to the use of automatic writing in a clinical context, either for curing mental disturbances, for evaluating supposedly mystical processes or even to investigate crimes.

The main idea underlying all work in this area is that automatic writing may be a window for the subconscious, unleashing information about issues too difficult to handle on a conscious level, or too superficial to be recalled by it. As such, it had among its greatest theoreticians Anita Mühl and Milton Erickson (the latter famous for work on hypnosis). In the lay sense that automatic writing gets done in this context, every person is capable of it - the simplest form of the phenomenon being the random drawings most of us are used to doing while on the phone and with pen and paper at hand²³.

Examples abound where automatic writing was used to uncover hidden psychological processes. A famous case in some aspects evocative of Chico Xavier is described by Erickson and Kubie: an undergraduate 20 years old developed a phobia of leaving doors open, with a side symptom of hatred for cats. Via the use of automatic writing (in which she was interested and came to understand in scholarly terms) it was found out that when she was three she would leave doors open in defiance of her father, and her grandfather told her a scary story about a mouse being hunted by a cat²⁴. Part of her symptoms would be the development of a secondary personality, that

²³ Idem, p.5.

²⁴ Milton H. Erickson and Lawrence S. Kubie. "The permanent relief of an obsessional phobia by means of communicating with an unsuspected dual personality", PQ 8, 1939. Pp.471-509.



of "Mrs. Brown", a guiding and protecting spirit in some ways similar to the Emmanuel of Chico Xavier²⁵.

Other examples could be given, but it would take us too long and far away from the main issues. Suffice it to say that, under more or less controlled circumstances in a therapeutical environment automatic writing can be produced even by people with no mystical inclinations, and can be used as a means of scrutinizing the subconscious.

2.2. Writings in other languages

Among Kardecist texts the occurrence of messages in languages other than that of the actual writer is relatively rare; on the other hand writings in archaic style, supposedly from spirits of the deceased that have allegedly lived in a time matching the written style are fairly common. These occur in Xavier's first poem book, and in other contexts many examples could be given.

One of the most famous is that of "Patience Worth", the spirit of a seventeenth-century Englishwoman that would appear to a humble St.Louis housewife called Pearl Curran in the first decades of the 20th century²⁶. She would put down her communications in archaic English, which some would attribute to the knowledge of dialects, others to the guiding spirit itself. Today, most researchers would consider her case as a very special one of secondary personality²⁷. An associated phenomenon would be that of

²⁵ One must keep guard, however, regarding cases like Erickson's student - stereotypy occurs not only in religious circles but also in therapeutic ones; it is quite possible that she said, consciously or not, what Erickson would like to hear. The explanation fits definitely in a psychoanalytical frame.

²⁶ For a full report on the case (that once generated very heated arguments) see Irving Litvag. *Singer in the Shadows: the Strange Story of Patience Worth*. New York: MacMillan, 1972.

²⁷ Stevenson, "Some comments", op.cit. p.319. Another case is reported by Newbold, op.cit. p.361 where one spirit in a *séance* claimed to have lived between 1629 and 1685: immediately B.



composing in the name of deceased musicians, like the case of Rosemary Brown in the early Seventies of the last century; but the latter involves a degree of training in musical notation and theory²⁸.

Anita Mühl, possibly the researcher who did most on the subject of automatic writing, claims that

Many more things are recorded by us than we have any idea of ever being aware of - things read but not understood (for instance, seeing a foreign language flashed on a screen, or Hebrew, Chinese or Egyptian symbols which are utterly unfamiliar); things heard but rejected (especially the hearing of obscenities and vulgar phrases) or things sensed in any way but apparently not noticed²⁹.

This is true even for the dullest of existences, leading Mühl to assert that "it is no wonder that almost anything might come out of anybody"³⁰. Another clinical case refers to a patient speaking in the ancient Italian dialect, Oscan. One example of this Fifth-century language has been preserved in a plumb roll named "The curse of Vibia", whose text matched perfectly the language that the patient spoke. Under hypnosis, he revealed that a long time before he was in a library and someone near was reading Oscan, precisely from the "Curse" page³¹. This kind of cryptomnetic rescuing of remembrances is akin to past lives' experiences, as we shall see below.

(another patient) began to write in archaic English, which he knew. Cases such as this pose many simultaneous problems - how mediumship can be "contagious" and how it is often difficult to separate between previous, conscious knowledge and subconscious memories.

²⁸ Although it is also an escape from a dull existence, in this case fleeing to the world of classical composers. Cf. Rosalind Heywood. "Notes on Rosemary Brown", JSPR 46, 1971. P.215.

²⁹ Mühl, *Automatic Writing*, op.cit. pp.8-10 ff.

³⁰ Id. *ibid*.

³¹ Judith Marriott. "Hypnotic regression and past lives therapy: fantasy or reality?", AJCHH 5 (2): 65-72, 1984. P.67



Another example of such ability is apparent in a case from the beginning of the twentieth century. Oliver Lodge, a famous classicist and friend of a well-known scholar in the field, Frederick Myers, was willing to prove that he could establish communication with the spirit of the latter after he died³². Lodge went so far as to engage Myers' spirit in a long discussion on the meaning of the word *lethe*, in which the "spirit" gave long and sophisticated answers. The psychic, Mrs. Willett, knew a bit of Virgil (the main issue in discussion between Lodge and the spirit), but did not have enough scholarship as to give the answers Lodge transcribes³³. But the case is not as well substantiated as Lodge would have it, and one wonders if it is not wishful thinking.

This would be especially important for the case of Chico Xavier, who, as we saw, always stressed his willingness to read whatever he could on any subject, and has been seen reading dynamically at a blinding pace. The other link established by Mühl, that the mechanism by which apparently such incomprehensible information as foreign and ancient languages are stored in an subconscious memory is similar to that by which many traces contrary to the nature of the medium can be developed (obscenities, strange sexual behaviour etc.). This is a feature in many of Xavier's episodes, as we shall see below.

³² Myers himself wrote quite a lot on psychic phenomena, including one article called "Automatic writing: the daemon of Socrates" (PSPR 5: 522-547, 1889), where the persistence of psychic phenomena in history is discussed.

³³ Oliver Lodge. "Evidence of classical scholarship and of cross-correspondence in some new automatic writings", PSPR 25, 1911. Pp.123-124; 145.



3. Multiple-personality phenomena and automatic writing

There can be an essential similarity between automatic writing and the phenomenon of multiple personalities, both in religious-oriented practice and in lay, therapeutic contexts³⁴. Both have the common trait that the actual role-player presents him/herself as someone else, this involving possession or not, accordingly³⁵. The way to handle the occurrences is quite varied and plays a great part in the visionary process itself, in my opinion.

A very elementary effort in producing multiple personalities under controlled conditions was tried as early as 1942, with a complete "recipe" being given³⁶. These experiments were repeated and the results the same, on more than 50 different occasions. Most researchers point to the idea that multiple personalities phenomena are a distinctive trace of mental disease, or of serious psychological trouble³⁷; we shall not go into that but, for the cultural analyst this does only make sense if the

³⁴ The theme has been thoroughly investigated in the quoted works of Anita Mühl, in Earle and Theye's article and also in Ernest Hilgard. *Hypnotic Susceptibility*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965.

³⁵ Theodore Sarbin and Vernon Allen. "Role theory" in: Gardner Lindzey and Elliott Aronson (eds.). *The Handbook of Social Psychology*. Vol.1. Reading, Mass. / London: Addison-Wesley, 1968. Pp.489 ff.

³⁶ Philip L. Harriman. "The experimental production of some phenomena related to multiple personality", *JASP* 37, 1942. Pp.245-246. It is important to note that on the one hand the "recipe" involves a good hypnotic subject and on the other produces dismal results - not at all resembling Xavier's kind of texts or, for that matter, even those of Patience Worth or of other case-studies described by Mühl. Harriman states that he never found writings devoid of meaning, a redundant affirmative being writing a cultural (i.e. meaningful) activity by definition.

³⁷ So Mühl, *Automatic Writing*, p.132 (with the observation that involuntary expression, of which automatic writing is a peculiar case, can be associative when it leads to satisfactory adjustment and dissociative when not); by the same author, "Automatic writing as an indication of the fundamental factors underlying the personality", *JAP* 17, 1922. P.16 ff.; Ernest Hilgard. "The hidden observer and multiple personality", *IJCEH* 32(2), 1984. P.250.



final output leads to maladjustment³⁸. Thus, in psychoanalytical terms a secondary personality (or multiple ones) may be the final result of deep dissociations, which in turn express compulsions and obsessions³⁹, and alternating of personalities may make the individual unreliable for himself and society⁴⁰.

It also turns out that the personalities that emerge can be utterly opposed to the ordinary, conscious one (this will prove to be the case of Chico Xavier, as we shall see). So contrary to them these tendencies crystallizing in secondary personalities may be that the individual quite logically attributes them to an external agent, most commonly a spirit⁴¹. The process may also imply in the formation of criminal or perverted secondary personalities, showing polymorphic sexual instincts⁴². This becomes astonishingly clear in a report of a holiday trip taken by Chico Xavier with some friends: it constitutes important testimony about his personal devotion to the Kardecist cause and provides fresh insight into the issue of the links between multiple personality identities and automatic writing.

[After a busy day] *The three friends dined and went to a room. They chatted [...] They were ready for a reasonably tranquil sleep when Chico suggested some prayer. Emmanuel would manifest himself [...] Chico's voice changed. [...] Soon after, he became quiet and gave way to a series of ghosts. All used and abused Chico's body*⁴³.

³⁸ I.e. following Eliade's idea that the shaman is, above all, someone who acquired the gift of healing others by first healing himself; this could truthfully be said of Chico Xavier.

³⁹ Mühl, *Automatic Writing*, pp.18-19.

⁴⁰ Idem, p.25.

⁴¹ Idem, p.10.

⁴² Mühl, "Automatic writing as an indication", p.168

⁴³ For the whole sequence, cf. Souto Maior, op.cit. pp.107-109.



The first visitor was the spirit of a ship captain sunk by a French buccaneer off the Brazilian coast, in 1810. He was mad giving orders to the gunmen, mourned his crew, wife and children killed in the event and complained about Napoleon:

How can this be gentlemen? I loved general Napoleon so dearly. How could he become such a vulture? He who fought for the ideals of equality, fraternity and liberty...

Very commonsensical and yet very much to the taste of Enlightenment inspired visionaries like Kardecists. But more was to come.

Chico's voice would become wailing, more acute or sibilant, stronger and gentler. He would crawl, jump, contort and have the face marked by sudden strokes. Alone, he gave birth to unbelievable characters. Through his mouth a 'judge' negotiated unfair sentences against political prestige. Franciscan monks remembered the good times when they engaged in orgies and killed the guests in their cloister to rob them [...]

The ugly stories came one after the other: newborns were kidnapped in the senzalas [slaves' house in Brazil], tortured and sacrificed in satanic rituals. Female slaves were raped by their owners. Chico incarnated all those creatures in a maddening monologue.

His friends tried to calm him down, but to no avail: one of the most desperate visitors was

a slave killed by flaying [...] His crime: to supplicate to the head of the Franciscans that his daughter Aninha would not be taken to their orgies [...] For three nights, the room became the stage of otherworldly tragedies. There [...] Chico offered a taste of what he used to do in the weekly and private desobsession séances [...] Those were his holidays.



In this exceptionally dense description, many features described before in the chapter arise. First of all, the alternation of voice, tone and facial expression that accompanied every new spirit. Secondly, the perverted character of the stories told - some with very sordid detail⁴⁴. Thirdly, the sexual polymorphism (present already in the story told that Xavier had been, in another incarnation, Flavia, wife of Emmanuel in the drama of *Há 2000 anos atrás...*)⁴⁵. This should include traditional Kardecist attacks on the Church of course (the monks being criminals in at least two such stories). Apart from having spiritual existence or not, the characters present in Xavier's holiday nights fit very well indeed with whatever work has been assessed on multiple personalities and possessional phenomena, and also fit the picture of his dysfunctional family background. This does not imply that the episodes were false or made up, but merely that the medium is, by the above listed factors, predisposed to see them; one could even speak of a preparatory process so complete as to entail a kind of "re-education" when dealing with possession⁴⁶. Lastly, although there is no hint that Chico Xavier's parade of secondary personalities was instigated by prayer, the whole episode began after praying - not enough to conclude that it acted as an inducer, but something which cannot be dismissed.

Even researchers sympathetic to the reality of paranormal phenomena are willing to concede that the

⁴⁴ Cf. above, p.96.

⁴⁵ Souto Maior, op.cit. p.65.

⁴⁶ This is the point of view expressed by Pierre Verger regarding possession in Afro-Brazilian cults. Cf. "Notes sur le culte des Orisa et Vodun a Bahia, la Baie de tous les Saints au Bresil et a l'ancienne Cote d'Esclaves en Afrique", MIFAN, Dakar, 1957.



secondary personalities emerging may be false (although conveying paranormal knowledge)⁴⁷.

It is agreed by all researchers consulted on the matter that there is some relation between dissociative states (of which multiple personalities are a particular case, and automatic writing a by-product of it if it is not attributed to the subject himself) and internal conflicts, especially if they go back to early childhood⁴⁸. In one extreme clinical case, that of Miss X, 7 secondary personalities developed, one being that of the prostitute Anne McGuinnis - and another, Violet 2, quite capable of writing perverse detective stories, something impossible for the patient herself⁴⁹.

Regarding the active use of senses in automatic writing, it appears that all possibilities present themselves - Chico Xavier having at the same time visual and/or auditory hallucinations and others being conscious during only part of the process⁵⁰.

People who have the ability to write automatically may, in short, also have an ability to develop secondary personalities to each of whose different attributes, styles and even handscript are attributed. This does not mean that every automatic writer has several personalities, but this is the case that most interests us here both regarding Kardecists like Chico Xavier and ancient apocalypticists writing in the name of someone else than themselves. The type of personality prone to

⁴⁷ Stevenson, "Some comments", p.321.

⁴⁸ Hilgard, "The hidden observer", op.cit. p.250. It should be pointed out that at least one scholar (Mühl) attributes the development of automatism as producing the dissociative state, and not the other way round (cf. Mühl, "Automatic writing as an indication", p.166).

⁴⁹ Mühl, "Automatic writing as an indication", pp.170-178.

⁵⁰ So the case described by Morton Prince, where a patient could describe in loud voice the hallucination she was having (because it was on a conscious level) but the writing regarding it was automatic. Cf. Prince, op.cit. p.170.



dissociation to the level that a whole different character pops up has been termed "FPP", or "fantasy-prone personality"⁵¹. This deserves closer examination.

The experiment that originated the term FPP was conducted in a group of 27 women, excellent hypnotic subjects, with a control group of 25 that were not. Interviews concentrated on memories of adults and children, fantasies and psychic (mystical) experiences. All but one of the good hypnotic subjects had an intense fantasy life that, in turn, fed their hypnotic performance⁵². All the subjects had higher education (with 2 exceptions) and their age varied from 19-63.

From the original 27, the report could be summarized thus: all but one had an intense make-believe life since childhood, talking to dolls and toy animals (the control group did the same just when playing, not all the time). In the main group most also believed in angels, leprechauns etc., since childhood, and the ones who came from highly dysfunctional homes (like that of Chico Xavier) would have Jesus or God as their companion⁵³. And like Chico Xavier they developed mechanisms to cope with the potential dangers of such situations, like asking neighbours if they were also seeing the same things⁵⁴.

From the original group it was found out that 70% had been encouraged to fantasize by an important adult figure,

⁵¹ The term was first used, as far as I know, in Sheryl C. Wilson and Theodore X. Barber's now classical article of 1983 ("The fantasy-prone personality: for understanding imagery, hypnosis, and parapsychological phenomena" in: Anees A. Sheikh (ed.). *Imagery: Current Theory, Research and Application*. New York: Wiley, 1983).

⁵² Idem, p.340.

⁵³ Idem, pp.345-347.

⁵⁴ This becomes clear in the advice given to Chico Xavier to another famous medium, Luiz Gasparetto (specialized in painting in the name of famous deceased artists like Van Gogh etc.). In an interview between them both in 1976, Xavier exhorted Gasparetto to educate the spirits and give them a daily allowance of time, and stick to it. Cf. Souto Maior, op.cit. pp.195-196.



by 3 main channels: reading stories, praising the child's make-believe or treating the child's toys as if they were real⁵⁵ (the question remains if most adults do not do this with children; I would say that more factors are involved and were not taken into account on the experiment - like who was the adult in each case? Did this person play make-believe out of "normal" playing times? Did he / she incarnate the characters of stories? An affirmative question to this must be put in the case of Chico Xavier, if we go back to his mother's death-bed talk - very impressive and realistic, and by the most significant figure a child can have during early childhood).

Among the 27 of the main group, 16 had a lonely childhood (against just 1 in the control); of those 9 had imaginary friends. Again 9 in the main group against nil in the control allegedly had disturbances in early childhood, which included serious physical abuse, a mother that had had serious emotional troubles or had left home, domestic instability or various combinations of the factors above⁵⁶. As many as 9 among the main group started artistic activities between 2-4 years old, and would fantasize while practising them for at least the following 12 years. 65% of the main group claim to see as well with eyes open or shut⁵⁷.

However, the main characteristic of the FPP group regarding role-playing (i.e. related to multiple personalities and/or automatic writing) is that 64% of

⁵⁵ Wilson and Barber, op.cit. p.349. People having fantasies with this intensity have tolerance for the distortion of reality, and all kinds of hallucinations have been found in these cases - including talking animals etc.. This is what is implied in the term "trance logic" quoted by Hilgard, *Hypnotic Susceptibility*, op.cit. p.9.

⁵⁶ Id. ibid. Contrast this picture with the one generated by Paulo Negro's team, above.

⁵⁷ Idem, p.352. This may be an important factor considering the accounts we have about apocalypticists' visions being at night, or dream-like. The boundary may be more blurred than it seems.



them occasionally pretend to be someone else just as they did when children; while pretending, they would be so absorbed in the role-playing as to lose awareness of their real identity⁵⁸. This may also account for the surprisingly high percentage of FPPs claiming to have had psychological pregnancy (60%)⁵⁹.

Role-playing and losing identity with someone else may, as automatic writing, have to do with memory recall according to Wilson and Barber's study. 96% of the FPPs against 4% in the control group define their own memories as abnormally sharp; this means that when recalling they typically bring the past experience into present time and space. Very few of them forgot things which had happened in early childhood, and 24 in the main group remember things before their third year (against 3 in the control group); in the FPPs 8 remember things which happened before their first year⁶⁰. This is of the utmost importance, since it is memory that warrants the integrity of personality, and loss of it (common in hypnosis) can lead to enactment of roles usually non-accessible to the subject⁶¹. It is an apparent contradiction then that excellent hypnotic subjects are, in this investigation, also FPPs and have good recall at the same time. It could be that the capacity to recall is one and the same regardless of the veracity of the fact remembered - i.e. the hypnotist can suggest the reality of memories for events that did not happen; the hypnotized subject can

⁵⁸ Idem, p.354.

⁵⁹ Idem, p.358.

⁶⁰ Idem, p.356.

⁶¹ Hilgard, *Hypnotic Susceptibility*, p.208.



also acquire other roles and fulfil them according to what is expected from him/her in each case⁶².

To conclude the statistics, 50% in the main group have felt the sensation that someone was using them to write a poem, song or message; 6 in the main group (against nil in the control) have had important religious experiences in the form of visions. 2/3 of the main FPP group believes that has the power of healing, and claim to have established contact with spirits or ghosts (against 16% in the control group)⁶³. The FPPs have had, throughout their lives, many experiences similar to hypnosis, and seem to live in a world very similar to that suggested to them by the hypnotizer⁶⁴; but the main issue here is that out of the 27 FPPs only 4 can be classified as having adjustment problems⁶⁵. This means that FPPs way of dealing with reality may be much more reasonable and functional than one might think at first sight.

⁶² Idem, pp.8-10. Cf. also Thomas Sarbin. "Contributions to role-taking theory: I. Hypnotic behavior", PR 57, 1950. Cit. by Hilgard, *Hypnotic Susceptibility*, p.10.

⁶³ Wilson and Barber, op.cit. pp.362-363.

⁶⁴ Idem, p.375.

⁶⁵ Idem, p.366.



4. Automatic writing as possession

In Kardecist terms, ambiguity arises as to the correctness of calling the automatic writing phenomenon "possession" : Kardec himself refused to accept it in the beginning of his career but adopted it later⁶⁶. Chico Xavier himself claims explicitly never to have invoked spirits, but at the same time we saw above that he did not ascribe the writings to himself (but rather he felt out of his body, feeling electricity flowing and so on).

In this sense, we must remember that "possession" cannot be understood as a synonym for "ecstasy", and constitutes a cultural explanation for a dissociative phenomenon that may have causes other than possession by a spirit⁶⁷. The spirit, be it Humberto de Campos, Emmanuel or André Luiz, remains someone different from Chico Xavier (there is no permanent confusion of identities between them, no matter how often the medium may refer to a given spirit as a helper, assistant or the kind).

As part of the considerations regarding possession in this chapter I would firstly like to stress that, while putting so much emphasis on the Kardecist preparatory processes as long-term cultural apprenticeship, I do not intend to deny the value of learnt patterns of acceptable behaviour and performance. It is rather as a didactical resource that one should separate the two issues, which are never considered as such by the actors themselves.

A good example of the above is the surprising admission of a scholar such as Felicitas Goodman of the feeling that overcame her while doing field work in a Pentecostal

⁶⁶ Contrast his position in the *Book of the spirits* 473 (1857) to that of the article published in SR, December 1863.

⁶⁷ Wilson, *Prophecy*, pp.32-34; Bourguignon, *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change*, p.12.



community in Mexico: although a very different milieu from Kardecist centres, she also "learnt" the behaviour expected and did not go on with it only because her previous training in another discipline. Milieu and *topoi* (those of the scholar) would give no room to it⁶⁸. The same happened to Diana Brown while undergoing research on Afro-Brazilian cults during the 1980's⁶⁹.

This means that on one hand the training of the medium itself conforms to certain *topoi*; on the other, the cultural heritage of the medium makes him/her adhere to a certain choice of characters, messages, styles (put in their own terms, "gifts").

In comparison to the amount of description of ecstasies, description of possessions is more rare⁷⁰. It is commonplace in Kardecism, albeit sometimes in a pejorative way, to happen *séances* of "disobssession" of people that are possessed by evil spirits being quite normal. Some of the phenomena described by Chico Xavier, however, are unmistakably posicional (e.g. the one with the First World War German nurse, Sheilla, who progressively possessed one of Chico's followers)⁷¹. This may be due to progressive secularization of the societies analyzed, or (more likely) to the fact that possession generally involves amnesia (also an explanation as to how to avoid the embarrassment caused by "subversive" or transsexual spirits). It should be noted that while ancient and medieval cases involve the devil himself with great

⁶⁸ Goodman, *Speaking in Tongues*, pp.71-73.

⁶⁹ *Umbanda: Religion and Politics in Urban Brazil*. Cit. by Hess, *Spirits and Scientists*, p.174.

⁷⁰ Oesterreich, op.cit. p.12. In this respect a great deal of the analysis provided herein owes to Oesterreich's classical work. Deeply interested in the phenomenon of possession, he changed from an initial Positivist point of view to a Neo-Platonic one, convinced as he became of the sincerity of the possession accounts (although he rejected a spiritual explanation until the end) .

⁷¹ Souto Maior, op.cit. p.141.



frequency, in modern case studies it is generally the spirit of the deceased that take hold of the victim - this being probably related to a diluting of the beliefs in the reality of the devil⁷².

In the Western world accounts of possession can be found fairly easily in the New Testament (e.g. Mk 12:24; 43; 3:22; 5:2-10; Lk 11:14-26; 8:26-39; Mt 7:28-33; more at At 19:13-16; Mk 1:23-27; 9:17-27; Mt 17:14-21; Lk 9:35-45; Mt 12:22; Lk 13:10-13. In the Old Testament Saul's case is possibly the best known (1Sm 18:10 ff.); Josephus gives a detailed account of an exorcism in AJ 8.2. Possessors are called **pneumata** and the fact that the descriptions given match what can be assessed today via psychology of religion, means we are dealing with authentic traditions⁷³ (although the explanations given then and now are obviously quite different).

A medium willing to talk about his ASC experiences such as Chico Xavier would fit very well in the three main characteristics of possestional phenomena as devised by Oesterreich: he acquires a new physiognomic appearance, (even more so when Emmanuel speaks through him, and this in turn is related to multiple-personality), a new voice, and the latter corresponds to the first (i.e. new physiognomy = new voice) . This is even truer when we think about the embarrassment caused by an Argentinean woman on Xavier, when she wanted to marry him (indeed, she was enraptured by Emmanuel)⁷⁴.

[After the séance] One of the women present, daughter of the Argentinean ambassador, lost her mind. She had found the man of her life [...] She clung to the

⁷² Oesterreich, op.cit. p.26.

⁷³ Idem, pp. 3-4.

⁷⁴ Idem, pp.17-21.



*medium's arm and did not loosen it. When Chico entered in the hall of passes [a kind of Kardecist blessing], she went after him and, to assure privacy, took the key in her pocket [...] Chico tried to escape [...] saying, 'My dear I have no marriage plans. I am not worthy of this and would only bring you unhappiness. You fell in love with Emmanuel, not with me [...]'*⁷⁵

Being filled with the idea that he was being possessed, Xavier could well have behaved in a manner consistent with his belief and developed a full-scale macho appearance when possessed by Emmanuel, while affecting no interest in sex in his daily life.

Following another thread in the discussion, it could also be that cultivating automatic writing develops even further the dissociative tendencies expressed fully in spirit possession. Staudenmaier did this more or less consciously; the boy Fritz, also studied by Oesterreich, would be another case. It is remarkable that while Staudenmaier cultivated personalities of grandiose characters, Fritz did not with have such in regard to his backing spirit "Algar" - but nonetheless he had daydreaming where he, the shy nerd, was a great character⁷⁶.

This is ostensibly absent in Chico Xavier writings, but is a main feature of Kardecism (many, if not most believers claiming to have been something very special in the past - preferably a Christian martyr or a slave owner). To these assumptions Xavier always gave mocking answers - regarding the supposed martyrs, he would say that he was just a flea on the lions in the Roman arena⁷⁷. Nonetheless, it was common talk that in his next

⁷⁵ Souto Maior, op.cit. p.97.

⁷⁶ Idem, p.57 ff.; pp.72-75.

⁷⁷ Souto Maior, op.cit. p.65.



incarnation he would swap places with Emmanuel and Xavier himself even joked at this wondering if his present master would be able to take the same punishment when they had swapped chairs⁷⁸.

Although it is always difficult to talk in general terms about possession in Kardecism (since it is usually the mark of backward spirits and mediums), it is reasonable to infer that this is present whenever there is a change in identities (such as happens with the poets' book, *Parnaso de além-túmulo*). Researchers more sympathetic to the spiritual explanation will say that the collaboration of different minds to the final product does not imply possession (it has been explained as due to telepathy, for example). The analogy between an orchestra and its conductor has been proposed, with hidden observers, subselves and spirits all playing a part in the final mediumnistic communication⁷⁹.

A more sceptical approach will say that possession is a phenomenon quite similar to self-talk, which every one of us knows well⁸⁰: the big difference being that here it goes to such lengths as to promote a complete dissociation and generate separate entities inside the self, which the medium chooses to call "spirits" in accordance with his/her beliefs. It can also generate very sophisticated interaction with knowledge stored unconsciously and able to be recalled under hypnosis or self-hypnosis (this being particularly true when it comes to communicating in languages or alphabets consciously unknown to the subject).

⁷⁸ Idem, p.235.

⁷⁹ Joseph H. M. Whiteman. "Dream and dreamlike states seen as kinds of possession: implications for mediumship, ESP and survival", JSPR 62 (852), 1998. Pp.408-412 .

⁸⁰ Oesterreich, op.cit. p.65.



Possession does not imply violent trance, although it does always imply an ASC. On that, it can also be said that it is also a technique that can be learned - Chico Xavier had great trouble in the beginning of his mediumship regarding this issue, but as time went by he developed ways to discipline both himself and the spirits as to how much daily time he would devote to psychography, as we saw. This does not include techniques for learning the content of what is being written - which would have more to do with memory recall via self-hypnosis⁸¹. What matters here is that Xavier would give rein to these memories of data on almost every subject via posseional phenomena (a way of protecting himself of critics, but also dangerous if copyright inheritors were still alive as in the Humberto de Campos' family episode)⁸².

It must also be pointed out that one thing is a Kardecist believer trying to explain possession in the lightest and blandest of ways and another is the scholar's look: be it violent or not, the ASC under which a medium like Chico Xavier writes down communications from the beyond is well described as a kind of possession, if not all the time, at least at the moment of putting it down in paper.

⁸¹ A fact well attested by the spirit of Emmanuel himself; cf. Souto Maior, *op.cit.* p.54.

⁸² *Idem*, p.111.



5. Past-lives therapy, hypnosis and identity with past characters

Spiritual, possessional identity with past characters, relevant as this may be both in pseudepigraphy and psychography, it is by no means limited to automatic writing as a means by which people can truly and completely identify themselves with men and women who have lived in the past. Past-lives therapy, regardless of the shaky grounds on which it is formulated, has grown in importance since the 1960's and, due to its widespread use, its apparent similarity to multiple personalities and its relation to hypnosis deserves to be examined.

This is not the place to draw a complete picture of the history of the doctrine of reincarnation (to which the belief in past lives is always attached), but rather to explore some aspects of it that might be useful. It is a cornerstone of Kardecism, as we saw above, and was widely known in the Ancient World as well (Plato and Origen, to name but two famous authors, were well acquainted with it).

Like so many things common to automatic writing and psychotherapy, past lives theory can be used as therapeutic means or understood in spiritual terms (in the latter the effect will also be therapeutical, if properly understood by the subject). The whole assumption underlying it is that personality traits, diseases, wealth or even skin marks are attributable to whatever the subject has done in the past. As such, the soul operates pretty much like a bank account, contriving debts, acquiring and repaying loans. Trouble is likely to arise when unpaid debts from one incarnation surface in another;



this is used both by Kardecist psychics and by alternative psychotherapists as a way of making people cope with their own fears and anxieties and, if possible, get rid of them.

The most common way to get to a subject's supposed past life is via hypnosis. To critics that claim that the idea of reincarnation has no scientific value, therapists adept to it will answer that all that matters is the patients' treatment, and in this sense it is irrelevant to know if there has ever been another life such as the patient describes as the cause of his/her woes⁸³. The method as such has nothing special - it just takes further what Freud and Jung began to do, i.e. to search for the origins of symptoms in the earliest possible recollections.

What makes past lives therapy so peculiar is that it takes the search beyond the subjects' present life⁸⁴. Other therapists suggest that one should only resource to past lives regression when environmental or genetic factors are not enough⁸⁵. The results are surprisingly similar to what Chico Xavier achieved in his own *séances* - to explain that one is afraid of fire because he/she died by it in a previous life, the other has headaches because he/she was beheaded etc.. The list is endless and the results, very coherent.

This indeed poses a problem. Some authors claim to have followed as many as 1,600 cases suggestive of reincarnation, with the consequence that this may provide a right answer for many phobias reported by the subjects⁸⁶.

⁸³ Morris Netherton and Nancy Shiffrin. *Past Lives Therapy*. Oxford: William Morrow, 1978. P.16.

⁸⁴ Idem, p. 18.

⁸⁵ Ian Stevenson. "The explanatory value of the idea of reincarnation", *JNMD* 164. 1977. P.305.

⁸⁶ Idem, p.309. Stevenson is quite rigorous in his treatment of evidence, and yet sympathetic to the whole concept. One suggestion he gives is that one subject may have memories that do not match memory images - and still be true. Another author thinks that the medium's



It may well be, however, that past lives are generated via mental processes quite similar to automatic writing and related phenomena (self-talk, possession, other automatisms). The subjects' idea of having been someone else and the matching remembrances may be induced.

A recent experiment on the issue consisted in taking 60 undergraduates and dividing them in 3 groups of 20, hypnotizing them and making them go back to "past lives"⁸⁷. Group A would listen to tapes supportive of the idea; group B would have neutral information on tapes; and group C had information contrary to it, or even ridiculing the whole concept. The results obtained show clearly the role of induction, with a greater proportion of past lives' believers according to the kind of induction received⁸⁸. More important, under hypnosis the subjects could go very far in regression (or in progression to the future), without this being hard proof of the validity of the idea of reincarnation.

In other experiments a woman was made to advance to the age of 65, at a time when she was much younger than that⁸⁹; and another researcher took the test even further inducing behaviour previous to the present stage in human biological evolution: a subject was hypnotized to go back

unconscious is capable of selecting, from the vast population in front of it, the information required via telepathy and then "dramatizes" it as coming from the dead. Cf. F.H. Cleobury. "The theory of selective telepathy", JSPR 44(737), 1968. Pp.326-327.

⁸⁷ Robert A. Baker. "The effect of suggestion on past-lives regression", AJCH 25 (1): 71-76, 1982. P.71 ff.

⁸⁸ Id.ibid. So, group A had 17 cases of past lives (15 relating more than 1 incarnation), with 3 relating nil; group B had 12 (9 with more than 1 incarnation), with 8 nil; and group C had only 2 reporting past lives (1 of these with more than one), against 18 reporting nil. This does not prove that the 18 could not have had the experience, but rather that, after suggestion, were embarrassed to report - which, in the end, matches to researchers initial assumption that inducement favors or inhibits "past lives" experiences.

⁸⁹ Idem, p.72.



to his behaviour when he was 6 years old, and from then on to older stages. When asked by the hypnotizer who she was, the subject pointed in letters that she was a chimp (for apes do not speak). Since it was then known that chimps would panic at the sight of an ape or human head deprived of the body, this was shown to the subject and a panic reaction followed - thus concluding the experiment with a reaction typical of what an ape would display⁹⁰.

Anyway, the experiments above show that the inducement of "role-playing" can indeed provide time travels and experiences not accessible to an ordinary imagination (although they could be possibly available to FPPs). It is also true that it is easier for subjects to produce material related to things past than to the future (for obvious reasons, since the past is well-documented even for the dumbest subject, whereas insights into the future have less guidance)⁹¹.

⁹⁰ Milton V. Kline. "A note on primate-like behavior induced through hypnosis", JGP 81, 1952. Pp.126-127. The whole experiment has one flaw, however: chimps cannot speak nor read - so the pointing of letters in answering the hypnotizer's questions is more complex and should not be taken at face value (lest the hypnotizer is to be credited with belief in speaking animals etc. - they are, as we saw, a distinctive mark of the FPPs). See also from the same author "Hypnotic retrogression: a neuro-psychological theory of age regression and progression", JCEH 1: 21-28, 1953. The most important researcher on hypnosis in the twentieth century, however, argues based on evidence that suggestibility is an important factor in hypnotizability and should always be present (cf. Milton H. Erickson "Hypnosis: a general review", DNS 2: 13-18, 1941); more recent approaches deny this link in non-clinical populations (cf. Joseph Green. "Hypnotizability, the dissociative experiences scale, HGSHS:A amnesia, and automatic writing: is there an association?", IJCEH 45 (1), 1997. P.69).

⁹¹ In this respect it should be noted that religious themes that now form part of traditional lore are favourite themes. Pearl Curran wrote, in the same fashion of Chico Xavier, a novel based on the passion of Christ (*A Sorry Tale*, where Tiberius has, feuilleton-like just as in Xavier's romance, an illegitimate son to a Greek dancer. This boy lives a life parallel to Jesus and ends up as one of the thieves crucified together with him); Netherton and Shiffrin report five cases of patients being eyewitnesses to the crucifixion but, amazingly, none had an important role on the plot (contrary to Xavier's guide, Emmanuel). See *Past Lives Therapy*, op.cit. p.160. It should also be pointed out that, since childhood, we are accustomed to



The theme of past lives as a report from patients under therapy is also related to the above-discussed concept of self-talk. Being an important feature to keep mental stability, self-talk can be used as a first induction to past lives regression and, if a patient sees his/her personal history as a disaster (as many will do), self-talk will be damaging to him/her. This looks like a nightmare, in which the subconscious creates a hideous metaphor to speak about itself, according to a scholar⁹². Being induced to an ASC where there is full awareness of the content of the metaphor, the psychotherapist may go on with the treatment⁹³. And although past lives therapy is an exaggeration in terms of retrogression, techniques for regression to attested, current life past times are also well known - and involve similar devices, such as heightening emotions of past moments, alternating clocks and watches etc.. Calligraphic analysis may be employed to see if the patient has really regressed to earlier times (e.g. infancy)⁹⁴.

To conclude, one important remark on the issue is that, although past lives and reincarnation cannot be proved, neither can psychoanalytical concepts be - both just provide narrative frameworks that apparently have therapeutic value for the patient. It is also to be

stories being told in the past tense and the fact that all these cases are in some way parallel to Jesus' story but do not interfere with the outcome suggest that this may be a device to make the whole episode more authentic, to the authors and to the public in general.

⁹² Frederick Landers. "Past lives therapy: a metaphor from the subconscious", AJCHH 7 (1), 1986. P.19.

⁹³ Idem, p.21. Landers is also sympathetic to the past lives concept (not as having ontological value but as a therapeutical tool), and argues that past lives are never 100% induced by hypnosis, but rather a voluntary function of the patient's personality. Supportive of this idea is the fact that, outside a clinical environment, even FPPs do not show signs of mental malfunctioning; cf. Robert E. Bartholomew et al. "UFO abductees and contactees: psychopathology or fantasy proneness?", PP 22 (3), 1991.

⁹⁴ William Bryan. "The techniques of age regression, progression, and time distortion", JAIH 15 (1), 1974. Pp.26-30.



questioned whether dismissive explanations are not abusive in respect to the thousands that undergo past lives therapy successfully - to assume that all have mental dysfunctions may be too far-fetched. The concept of FPP looks fairer regarding the understanding of the mental complexes underlying this particular phenomenon of identity with someone else in the past⁹⁵.

One main issue is also to be taken into consideration: all the experiments under controlled circumstances like those of Kline or Mühl yielded very meagre results compared to the quality, range and volume of Kardecist writings such as those of Chico Xavier or even to those of Pearl Curran. Although important observations might have been made regarding the relations between hypnosis, automatic writing, multiple personality and past lives, there is still a very big gap between scholar's observations in laboratories and what the faithful experience in *séances*. The hypnotized, be it a believer in past lives experiences or not (and the same criteria applying to the therapist), will acquire roles and perform what is expected from him/her accordingly⁹⁶ (thus the importance of Baker-like induction experiments).

⁹⁵ Mariott, *op.cit.* p.68. Just like Jewish mystics see Moses and Christian mystics see Jesus (following Martha Himmelfarb's suggestion), Freudian patients have Freudian dreams and Jungian patients, Jungian ones.

⁹⁶ Hilgard, *Hypnotic Susceptibility*, *op.cit.* p.10.



6. Summary

Summarizing the most relevant issues discussed in this chapter, we can say that:

1. Automatic writing is related to hypnosis, both in what follows from scholarship and also in mystical accounts (like the link established by Chico Xavier's protector, Emmanuel);

2. When interpreted in mystical context, automatic writing can be understood as a PT where partial or full identification with someone else is implied (the "other" being a spirit or, more rarely, a person still alive at the time of writing);

3. There is some degree of control of the ASC involving automatic writing in Kardecism, and this is substantiated both by statistics and by reports of Xavier himself;

4. Reports of physical sensations (specially regarding electrical impulses in the arms) are remarkably similar in automatic writing subjects, Kardecist or not;

5. Automatic writing can be used in non-mystical contexts and is an ability available to most if not to all people;

6. Dissociation involved in automatic writing processes can lead to fully detached secondary personalities, which many times display criminal or transsexual traits;

7. The recalling of memories helps the development of such personalities, and via hypnosis those subconscious memories can be unleashed (this is a possible explanation for Chico Xavier being able to write on so many different



themes, and for mediums in general to express themselves in languages that they do not know consciously);

8. In a controlled environment, secondary personalities can be produced;

9. Multiple personalities phenomena are akin to possession, in that both may be a heightened form of self-talk, and also related to childhood trauma (definitely the case of Chico Xavier) , -

10. There is a kind of person more prone to multiple personalities, automatic writing, belief in UFOs and the like - the FPP. They are not remarkable in other respects, but have developed a full-scale fantasy life. This capacity may also go back to early childhood, again resembling Xavier's process; all the phenomena discussed in this chapter relate to role-playing - people able to write automatically, FPPs and abductees are all, in the end, performing roles expected of them. FPPs, which may be the kind of personality displayed by automatic writers, only take their role-play more seriously than others.

Part Two

Apocalyptic pseudepigraphy in the light of
the Kardecist material



CHAPTER 4: RELEVANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF REINCARNATION, ITS VIABILITY IN LATE SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM AND EVIDENCE FROM CHRISTIAN AUTHORS

1. Introductory remarks to the chapter

This chapter comprises three main issues: first, a discussion in the relevance of the idea of reincarnation for the whole thesis (i.e. why this concept is linked to the authorial issues regarding pseudepigraphy and automatic writing at large); secondly an appreciation of the presence of the concept in late Second Temple authors, specially Josephus.

Regarding the evidence chosen among Second Temple authors, that of Josephus is of paramount importance, not least because of its confusing tones: as we will see below, his reflexions on reincarnation imply a precise knowledge of the original uses of the idea in Platonic or Pythagorean contexts, but also imply adaptation to a specifically Jewish mode of thought that cannot be considered identical, not even similar, to the Greek. But in terms of reflexions akin to the conceptual world of our sources, Josephus' remarks are the closest we can get and in this lies their importance.

In a cross-cultural comparison work like this one, the possibility of genealogical links between Josephus and some of the apocalypses examined (e.g. 4Ezra) cannot be dismissed. Whatever a late Second Temple author like him has to tell us regarding contemporary beliefs in reincarnation may not be the last word on the theme but must surely be taken into account.



2. Why reincarnation and manipulating of spirits are an important part of the argument

Writing spiritual texts under the guise of someone else, mythical or historical, alive or dead, is not necessarily linked to the belief in reincarnation. However, the latter implies a degree of independence and autonomy on the part of the spirits: by the same token, a system with fixed abodes for spiritual beings (such as Christianity) provides much less latitude for them to wander and, in turn, for the living to evoke and manipulate them.

This does not mean that stances of manipulation (such as the many exorcist practices present in the NT - e.g. Mt 10:1-8; Lk 9:40; 11:20 among others) are absent in late Second Temple texts. But as a rule Jews and Christians of the period studied are not especially fond of manipulating spirits, while at the same time one must bear in mind the interdictions against necromancy in the OT¹. It would indeed be difficult to understand the idea of an actual, mechanical Jewish author evoking the spirit of a Jewish hero of the past if such practice was forbidden (unless we are dealing with heterodox groups or individuals, which are also absent from our sources).

The same reasoning applies to Christianity: the dead are not to be manipulated or summoned in any sense (this constitutes one of many attrition points between Catholics and Kardecists - the latter insisting, not without reason, that evidence for the appearance of spirits in

¹ Specially 1Sm 28:7. These are much older references, however; but they can be read in a sense that implies interdictions against a practice that was widespread, thus the need for prohibition. 2Chr 21 with its reference to an Elijah writing that *may* have come to light via automatic writing presents a specific set of problems dealt with in the following chapter.



ecclesiastical context, i.e. in cloisters and churches, is unduly discarded by Church authorities). On the other hand, communication between dead and living - and specially written communication - is the hallmark of Kardecism. It ranges from trivial notes from the otherworld written by deceased people to their relatives to highly sophisticated descriptions such as those of André Luiz.

In all those cases, communication between dead and living, besides being something desired and longed for, is rendered possible by the transient nature of the states following death: no fixed categories of blessing or damnation being known, spirits are free to some extent to roam and interfere, for good or bad, in the matters of the living. Psychography is, in this sense, just a specific mode of such interference, although by no means the only one².

By the same token, the dead can interfere with the living by means other than written records: Josephus himself gives a remarkable account of such an occurrence in the tale of Glaphyra (AJ 17.349-354; incidentally this passage also contains some remarks on the immortality of the soul). But for the purposes of this investigation - which deals only with spiritual authorship and not with manipulating of spirits at large - the main link to be searched is that of disincarnate souls and enquiring or curious living individuals: and a high degree of

² Chico Xavier himself had long declined taking part in "materialization" *séances* (i.e. sessions where the most important spiritual happening is the materialization of a dead person so that anyone can see its form), because of Emmanuel's strict observations - Xavier's ability should be entirely devoted to the Spiritist book, that reaches far more people than any materialization *séance*. The examples of Chico Xavier relinquishing other areas of spiritual activity could be multiplied - he even declined a request to expel snakes from a field arguing that his powers were useless for the purpose, and that the parties interested should get a medium "specialized" in these problems.



independence from fixed categories is needed for the accomplishment of spiritual authorship. Spirits definitively anchored in Heaven or Hell are less available for the purpose³.

³ Obviously this does not apply to the content of many of the visions themselves - i.e. the voyages through the otherworld in 1, 2 and 3En are not incompatible with the notion of fixed abodes for the spirits. But the proposition that the spirit of Enoch came to a mechanical author on Earth to give a written account of such spiritual ethnography is.



3. Evidence for belief in reincarnation in Second Temple Judaism

One of the main conclusions that we have come to regards the essential and missing point between Kardecism and apocalyptic pseudepigraphy regarding mystical authorship of texts.

Summing up the discussion so far, the hypothesis that pseudepigraphy may be more than a literary device and should entail a degree of actual, sincere identification between the mechanical writer and his portrayed hero is what we have been discussing. In Kardecist texts this is more than a mere assumption: this identification is very real, differences in explanation remaining nonetheless. But the idea that a spirit effectively takes hold of Chico Xavier's faculties and composes texts - indeed, whole books - is the main core of Kardecist revelatory experience⁴.

This holds true not just for big, seminal texts like *Há 2000 anos...* or *Nosso lar*: the staggering number of people coming after Chico Xavier on a daily basis, looking for news from deceased relatives is perhaps of greater importance in his final textual output should anyone try to edit all his writings one day. It is thus at the very core of Kardecism that:

1. Spirits do exist;
2. Living people can contact them;
3. Contacting them is allowed (although not always meritory, depending on the nature of both medium and spirit and of their intentions)

⁴ But not of Kardecist practice, essentially referred to assistential work - development of mediumship is usually considered secondary to the practice of the Gospel's golden rule. Cf. Hess, *op.cit.* pp.2-3.



4. The existence of spirits and their communicating messages to the living is proof of the immortality of the soul;

5. Reports from the spirits regarding item 4 reveal not Heaven or Hell but a permanent search for perfection, summed up in the concept of reincarnation.

Of these five assumptions the last four are problematic (but not anathema) regarding Jews of the Second Temple period and, in doctrinal terms of the main world churches, they remain difficult issues for Christians as well. In the next chapters we will see a number of stances in ancient writings where some direct attribution of authorship to spirits is involved, and there is even the possibility that a message from Elijah was delivered via automatic writing⁵; we must note that such examples are comparatively rare in the corpus that reached us. They are not enough to show that manipulation of the spirits of the dead was a viable proposition to apocalyptic writers. One apocalyptic hero who goes to the world beyond and comes back is Enoch (e.g. 1En 94; 2En 43), but this is very different from assuming that it was the actual writer of 1En who witnessed the journey - or even that he had first-hand contact and intercourse with the spirit of Enoch himself.

3.1. Absence of the idea in the OT and Rabbinic sources

Although apparently incompatible with the unique action of God in history, reincarnation became part of mainstream Jewish thought by the end of the seventeenth century⁶. Modern scholars are almost unanimous in rejecting the

⁵ Cf. below, pp.225 ff.

⁶ On this subject see the recent thesis by Dina R. Eylon. *Reincarnation in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosticism*. Lewiston / Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003.



presence of the concept in Rabbinic sources before medieval times, in the *Sefer ha-Bahir*⁷. And yet Talmudic sources might mention it (not as part of acceptable doctrine, and in quite confused ways, but reincarnation seems present nonetheless)⁸.

Rabbinic passages from late Antiquity displaying knowledge of the concept of metempsychosis are *Sabbath* 152b and *Eccles* R.3.21 (where the resurrected are shaken up and down, what might suggest transmigration)⁹. *San.* 109a tells that the men from Babel were transformed into apes, spirits and demons.

*Origen frequently mentions the subject, and it is difficult to believe that it escaped the Rabbis' notice. That Simai and the others were consciously thinking of transmigration, I do not suggest. But the views which they expressed may well have come to them, through various channels, from those who believed in transmigration*¹⁰.

These very meagre references become even more irrelevant when compared to the nature of passages clearly against the belief in reincarnation. One of the most important of those happens to be an apocalyptic passage, namely 2Br 21:9-11:

For you only can sustain those who exist, those who have gone and those who will come [...] For you are the

⁷ Eylon, op.cit. p.45.

⁸ Possibly the first scholar to notice this was Herbert Loewe, back in the 1930's. Cf. Claude G. Montefiore and Herbert Loewe (eds.). *A Rabbinic Anthology*. London: Macmillan, 1938 with special reference to the notes between pp.660-666. Loewe tracks the misuse of the Hebrew term *mitgalgulin* (to roll) related to *gilgul* (transmigration, i.e. metempsychosis). This is a lengthy discussion not to be pursued here, but Loewe and Montefiore agree that the proper use of the concept of metempsychosis in Jewish thought begins only with Saadiah.

⁹ Montefiore and Loewe, op.cit. p.663.

¹⁰ Id. *ibid.* The relation of Church Fathers to transmigration shall be discussed below.



only Living One, the Immortal One and the Inscrutable One, and you know the number of men [...]

The reference to the "number of men" suggests a fixed existence, and those who have gone and who will come are clearly mentioned as different entities. Is 57:16 and BT Yevamot 62a speak of the fixed number of souls created by God:

[...] I will not continually accuse, nor will I always be angry; for then the spirits would grow faint before me, even the souls that I have made.

[...] R. Huna said: He fulfilled' [the obligation to propagate the race having had children before becoming a proselyte] because [he follows the tradition] of R. Assi. For R. Assi stated: The Son of David will not come before all the souls in Guf¹¹ will have been disposed of [...]

These quotations show that, although exotic, reasoning about reincarnation was a possibility for late Second Temple authors, such as Josephus¹². A topic related to this discussion is whether the notion of resurrection owes anything to the Greek concept of reincarnation: Josephus presents a separate set of problems on the theme, to be discussed below.

Regarding other sources, it is clear that no Biblical passage deals with the doctrine of reincarnation in convincing fashion - i.e. references are scarce and, at best, oblique. Often Sl 90:3-6, Pr 8:22-31; Jr 1:4-5; Ecl 1:9-11 and Js 24:3 are quoted as Biblical "evidence" for

¹¹ The region inhabited by the souls of the unborn.

¹² Cf. Eylon, op.cit. p.53 ff.; E.C. Porter. "The pre-existence of the soul in the *Book of Wisdom* and in Rabbinic writings", AJT 12, 1908. Pp.58-113 and George W. Nickelsburg. *Resurrection, Immortality and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism*. Cambridge (Mass.) / London: Harvard University Press / Oxford University Press, 1972.



reincarnation; none of them is convincing for that purpose¹³.

An altogether different matter is that of the possible Greek origin of the apocalyptic theme of the resurrection of the dead. That this idea, as well as that of rewards and punishments in the afterlife, is very late in Judaism is not disputed. But the analysis of Isidore Lévy goes very much in another direction, proposing that not only the idea of resurrection (a variation on the theme of reincarnation) but even Dn 12:2 itself are late, Herodian interpolations¹⁴ - therefore closer to the time when many apocalypses were being written.

3.2. Uses of the concept in Josephus

A very different picture emerges from the testimony of Josephus, at least at first sight. Stances of the knowledge and use of the concept are to be found in several passages, to be discussed below.

Josephus shows acquaintance with the theme of reincarnation¹⁵ in BJ 2.162, in a doctrinal connection to Pharisaism:

¹³ Joseph Head and Sylvia L. Cranston (eds.). *Reincarnation in World Thought*. New York: Julian Press, 1967. Pp.83-84. But see Leon Nemoy. "Biblical quasi-evidence for the transmigration of souls", JBL 59: 159-168, 1940 for the appearance of the theme in the so-called *Code of al-Qirqisānī*, a karaite source. The presence of the concept of reincarnation in such late Jewish sources has been attributed to the influence of Arabic thinking (cf. Carra de Vaux. "Tanāsukh", EI IV, 648-649).

¹⁴ *La légende de Pythagore de Grèce en Palestine*. Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1927. P.247.

¹⁵ It should be pointed out that even ancient authors could make a distinction between metempsychosis and palingenesia: Seneca, for instance (*Letters* 108.19) exhibits a point of view similar to that of Pythagoras, alternating the movement between each body (*metemyukwsij*) with interludes in the underground (*pal iggenesia*). The usage by Josephus is clearly in favour of the latter terminology, although we cannot be sure whether he was fully aware of the subtleties related to that specific vocabulary.



Every soul, they [the Pharisees] maintain, is imperishable, but the soul of the good alone passes into another body.

The same acquaintance is to be found in BJ 3.374:

Know you not that they who depart this life in accordance with the law of nature and repay the loan which they received from God, when He who lent is pleased to reclaim it, win eternal renown; that their houses and families are secure; that their souls, remaining spotless and obedient, are allotted the most holy place in heaven, whence, in the revolution of the ages, they return to find in chaste bodies a new habitation?

The reference to "chaste" bodies presents a specific problem of translation, for **agnoj** would better be translated as "holy"¹⁶.

And in CA 2.218:

No; each individual, relying on the witness of his own conscience and the lawgiver's prophecy, confirmed by the sure testimony of God, is firmly persuaded that those who observe the laws and, if they must needs die for them, willingly meet death, God has granted a renewed existence and in the revolution of the ages the gift of a better life.

The idea appears also in BJ 7.185, although less explicitly:

[...] the so-called demons - in other words, the spirits of wicked men which enter the living and kill them unless aid is forthcoming - are promptly expelled by this root [...].

¹⁶ Steve Mason. *Flavius Josephus on the Pharisees: a Composition-Critical Study*. Leiden / New York / Kobenhavn / Köln: Brill, 1991. P.166.



Surprisingly, little has been done about those passages in Josephus. The best analysis found was that of Steve Mason, who did much to clarify the misuses and misunderstandings of the idea of reincarnation in Josephus¹⁷.

In terms of vocabulary, Josephus appears remarkably close to Plato in his knowledge and use of terms related to reincarnation: the latter does not use **pal iggenesia** but **pal in gignesqai** occurs in the *Meno* 81b and *Phaedon* 70c¹⁸. In AJ 18.14 we have

They [i.e. the Pharisees] believe that souls have power to survive death and that there are rewards and punishments under the earth¹⁹ for those who have led lives of virtue or vice: eternal imprisonment is the lot of evil souls, while the good souls receive an easy passage to a new life.

In fact the idea of paradise is not incompatible with that of reincarnation: in Josephus reference is made of a new life in a new body only for the just (this could be understood as a mode of paradise): this looks remarkably similar to Dn 12 and its promise of perpetual reward and punishment, in the flesh, for good and wicked.

In addition, there was no unified Greek doctrine of reincarnation that Josephus could have known: but when he speaks of reincarnation in *one* body, and only for the just, he may be understanding resurrection as the Jewish mode of thinking about reincarnation²⁰. It must be remembered that Josephus might be trying to impress a Greek audience in the passages, by means of arguing that sectarian differences

¹⁷ Op.cit. Cf. specially chapter 6.

¹⁸ Idem, p.163.

¹⁹ An idea possibly inserted for the sake of Greek audience.

²⁰ Idem, pp.169-170. The idea that reincarnation is a sort of exile for the souls of the just finds a parallel in Philo, *De gigantibus* 2 ff.



among the Jews echo philosophical schools among the Greeks. This is explicitly admitted in the *Life* 12²¹:

Being now in my nineteenth year I began to govern my life by the rules of the Pharisees, a sect having points of resemblance to that which the Greeks call the Stoic school.

In short, evidence from Josephus' considerations about belief in reincarnation among the Pharisees is important and cannot be dismissed. The wording is very similar to Greek passages on the same theme (in fact, **pal iggenesia** and **ahabiwsij** seem interchangeable in Josephus - cf. AJ 18.14 and CA 2.218)²². Given all that, it is reasonable to conclude that Josephus knew what he was talking about, and what implications the concept of reincarnation had. At the same time, however, the way he discusses the issue is in line with apocalyptic thought in the fashion of Dn 12: by arguing in favour of reincarnating in one body only Josephus echoes the theme of resurrection. Less clear in the light of the Daniel text is the absence of references to the resurrection of the wicked, so that they may be tormented forever.

We cannot be aware if the use of Greek vocabulary related to reincarnation betrays the hand of a Greek secretary or reviser: this may well be the case given the fact that the essence of Josephus' ideas on the theme seem closer to Jewish resurrection than to Greek reincarnation. In any case, while vocabulary usage shows that metempsychosis, palingenesia and similar concepts were, in principle, available to Second Temple Jews - in any case, to Josephus they were - Josephus' usage of such terms does

²¹ AJ 15.371 makes a similar point when arguing that the Essenes followed Pythagorean teaching.

²² Mason, op.cit. p.164.



not imply similarities to Greek thought. So while the passages show knowledge and even familiarity with reincarnation they do nothing to prove that for apocalyptic seers this was a common theme (although, by reversion, resurrection *may* be understood as a Jewish derivation of the Greek concept, as discussed above).



4. Summary

The main ideas discussed in this chapter can be thus summarized:

1. The idea of reincarnation is an essential part of modern Kardecist automatic writing, due to the implications of freedom for manipulating the souls of the dead. Absolute categories such as Heaven or Hell, together with the rigidity of the places for the souls of the dead, render psychography impossible or considered as ethically wrong since they implicate the manipulating of spirits.

2. The notion of reincarnation, or approval of manipulation of discarnate spirits at large is altogether absent from the OT and appears in a very confusing, sometimes unfavourable light in Rabbinic sources.

3. Resurrection is a distinctly apocalyptic idea as it appears in late texts such as Dn 12. and it is usually considered as an Iranian borrowing; but it may be the result of Pythagorean influence, and as such it could be understood as a variation on the theme of reincarnation, or as a misunderstanding of the whole concept. This, however, cannot be proved and seems unlikely.

4. Josephus presents a specific problem, inasmuch as he explicitly ascribes belief in reincarnation to a Jewish sect (the Pharisees) and displays another as having points of contact with the Pythagoreans (the Essenes).

5. The vocabulary used by Josephus is what can be expected from Greek thought on the subject as was available to him; at the same time, he may be talking about resurrection and not reincarnation, given that he considers the blessing of rebirth in the body as a unique happening, and restricted to the good. That the vocabulary is similar



to that of Plato and Seneca may be due to the revision of a secretary, and the resulting effect of making some Jewish groups similar to Greek reincarnationists may not be due to Josephus' explicit redaction.



CHAPTER 5: AUTHORSHIP AND SPIRITUAL WRITING IN SECOND TEMPLE JEWISH APOCALYPTIC AND RELATED TEXTS

1. Introductory remarks to the chapter

This chapter discusses possible evidence for automatic writing or purely spiritual attribution of authorship in ancient texts.

In this sense apocalyptic passages written in first-person form are of paramount importance because, literary *topos* or not, they provide the first place in which to search for clues for authorship identity. Even if the whole authorial assumption is false and the experiences described pure invention, the first place to search for indications of authorship would be in these passages, written as if the mechanical writer was the portrayed hero. Not all of them provide full-scale identification between writer and Biblical character, but the differences in range and information between them will be discussed in detail below.

A related aspect of the authorial problem mentioned above is that of possible evidence for automatic writing in an OT passage, namely 2Chr 21 with a reference to a text from Elijah that may have been produced after his death via automatic writing, although this is by no means sure: for the sake of comparison with first-person experiences and to the Elijah passage, authorship directly attributed to a divine being is discussed in the case of the *Book of Elchasai*. Lastly, an example of how plain fraud regarding divine attribution of texts is given in the case of Lucian's report on Alexander of Abnoteichos. This obviously does not include any real mystical experience involving



authorship but is a remarkable example of how an audience (although Pagan) would react positively to allegations of divine authorship. It should be remembered that Christians and Jews were deeply disapproving of Alexander's practices.



2. Survey of chosen passages

It is my aim to discuss, by examination of apocalyptic passages implying the narrator's identity, looking at the issues involved in apocalyptic pseudepigraphy, possible attitudes towards direct revelation by means of inhuman authorship of texts, as they could be understood in late Antiquity or, in the case of 2Chr, in the late Hellenistic period.

The idea of possession, closely related as it is to the idea of pseudepigraphy as full identity between mechanical and portrayed hero, was by no means unfamiliar to Jews of the Second Temple Period. Instances of possessional reports are to be found very frequently in the New Testament and even in Josephus.

Philo, commenting on the sacred character of the Greek rendering of the Hebrew Bible, has an appreciation similar to the hypothesis proposed in this thesis, when he says that the Jewish sages responsible for translating the Hebrew Pentateuch into Greek, after being locked away separately, would each produce an identical translation of the biblical text.

Sitting here in seclusion [...] they became as it were possessed, and, under inspiration, wrote, not each scribe something different, but the same word for word, as though dictated to each by an invisible prompter¹.

The proposal of identity of the apocalyptic visionary with the putative author does not depend on this passage, quoted here only to show that possession as related to authorial matters was not an unknown phenomenon; judging by

¹ *On Moses*. II.37. The term used to refer to the invisible prompting (εκαστοις ἀπρωτῶν) will appear again in an apocalyptic passage.



the frequency with which it occurs, it seems to have been quite usual, notwithstanding biblical interdictions to the manipulating of spirits (which would include summoning them to get written records)². It is time to examine the apocalyptic passages and related literature that deal with authorship and attribution - i.e. which show more hints on the identity of the putative author, or that display some kind of dialogue switching roles between the visionary in his role of biblical character and an angel. I shall call these passages "narrative", since they expose the narrator's perspectives on the story that is going to be told or, when in third person, introduce the story directly.

I have divided the passages according to five categories, namely:

1. Those that are clearly written in 1st person;
2. Those that are clearly written in 3rd person;
3. Those that display any change of narrators (i.e. if there is any swapping of places, it goes from 1st to 3rd person or the other way round);
4. Those which contain definite commands given (usually from an angelic being to the visionary, but eventually from the latter to the former);
5. Those which contain any impressive feats involved (e.g. long fasts, visions, voyages to Heaven or Hell).

These categories are important because they deal with the descriptions of experiences from the subjects' point of view - either sincerely (if we have real experiences) or conventionally (should we have literary *topoi*). Since our

² Dt 18:10. These interdictions might be understood, as prophetic cries against polytheism, as proof of the spread of the practice denounced.



proposal deals with the relation between actual and putative authors, declarations of identity are most important and as a consequence, most of the passages dealt with here (but not all) come at the beginning of the texts.

2.1. Full description of the narrator's identity

The most interesting passages are those which fulfill all the above five categories (including 1st and 3rd person narratives in the same text, something which occurs with some frequency); their interest lies in the fact that they provide a lot of information on the preparatory processes themselves. These are, namely, 2Br 55:1-4, VisEzra 1-3, ApSed 2:1-5, TestAbr in B recension 10:1-3, Life of Adam and Eve 25, LdJb 1:1-9 and 2:1-4, Rev 21:9-11. In terms of the widely accepted notion of apocalypse as a literary genre, not to be discussed here, only 2Br, VisEzra, ApSed and Rev would qualify, but the intensity of the description of the mystical experiences in the other texts should make us take them into account too, here and in subsequent analysis.

In the first of these, 2Br 55:1-4, the visionary speaks in the first person in this way:

And it happened that when I had finished the words of this prayer [2Br 54], I sat down under a tree to rest in the shadow of its branches. And I was surprised and astonished, and I pondered in my thoughts about the multitude of the goodness which the sinners who are on earth have rejected from them, and about the great punishment which they have despised, when they knew that they should be punished because of the sins they have committed. And while I was pondering these and similar things, behold, Ramael, the angel who is set over true visions, was sent and said to me: 'Why does your heart trouble you, Baruch, and why are you disturbed by your thought?'



This passage shows a number of interesting features regarding side effects of ASCs. The visionary reports the need for resting (which may imply tiredness, a likely feature in actual continuous prayer); at the same time he talks about being astonished due to reflecting on the final judgment, and this makes his "heart" troubled, according to the comforting angel sent. According to Russell, in apocalyptic texts the heart may have four different functions - it houses character and personality, the more emotional side of human consciousness, intellectual and volitive functions. Examples of the first kind could also be found in TestJud 13:2; it is also the home of desire in TestRub 3:6 and ApAbr 23:30. Intellectually the reference is important in Jub 12:20, and for volition in 1En 91:4 and Jb 1:15³. In 4Ezra 4:36 a similar picture emerges, only there Jeremiel is the angel⁴: Ramael reappears soon after in 2Br 63:7.

VisEzra (*Vision of Ezra*) is a Christian pseudepigraphic text that nonetheless deserves to be examined together with Jewish texts for its attribution to a Jewish hero (Ezra), because of its similarities with 4Ezra and, strangely and interesting for our purposes, with ApSed⁵. It is also a quite late text in its final form (its date ranging from the fourth to the seventh centuries CE). The passage that concerns us here, VisEzra 1-3, reads after a short introduction in third person:

³ Russell, *Method and Message*, pp.142-143.

⁴ The translator in OTP, A. Klijn, points out that in the Syriac translation the angel is called Ramael too. In OrSib 2.215-217 and in 1En 20:8 (in a few mss. only) he is one of the archangels. Cf. Charlesworth, OTP p.640.

⁵ ApSed in its extant form constitutes a quite late product, possibly Christian and Byzantine, full as it is of terms of late Greek usage: but most scholars admit that its contents go a long way back, possibly into the beginning of the CE. See the introduction by S. Agourides, OTP 1, p.606 ff.



Ezra prayed to the Lord, saying: 'Grant me courage, O Lord, that I might not fear when I see the judgments of the sinners'. And there were granted to him seven angels of hell who carried him beyond the seventieth grade in the infernal regions [...]

The passage begins in a quite impromptu way, without any preparatory interlude being devised⁶. The apocalypse itself is rather short and consists basically of the description of Ezra's tour of hell telling, with sordid detail, the fate of the wicked.

The whole voyage has a quite stereotyped character, where Ezra does no more than ask God to have mercy on the sinners. This rectilinear and uninspired description, together with the lack of a proper introduction make one think of the episode as being, possibly, a literary fiction fashioned to match other well-known experiences in the name of Ezra (among which the visions and conversion of 4Ezra were undoubtedly the most famous⁷). Being a Christian text (the unequivocal reference to the damnation of the Jewish doctors of the Law and to a Herod guilty of massacring the innocent - VisEzra 46-47 and 37-39 respectively), everything points to the artificiality of the individual, voyage-like Jewish apocalypse when transplanted to Christian ground. But this certainty of artificiality cannot be seriously maintained when we think of other

⁶ As the translators of the text in the OTP (J.R. Mueller and G.A. Robbins) note, there is a variation in one manuscript, L (11th century) which introduces the formula "When the blessed Ezra prayed to the Lord [...]" before "Ezra" in others, but this is not enough to dismiss the artificial character out of the whole visionary episode. Cf. OTP 1 p.587.

⁷ 4Ezra constitutes, from the point of view of the sincerity of the experiences described, the most important individual text for our analysis. Cf. the discussion of the visionary experiences in Michael Stone. "Coherence and inconsistency in the apocalypses: the case of 'The End' in 4 Ezra", JBL 102: 229-243, 1983. and also "A reconsideration of apocalyptic visions", HTR 96 (2): 167-180, 2003. This will be resumed in the conclusion to this thesis.



Christian reports on otherworldly journeys, or in the dating and authorial problems posed by texts such as 2En⁸.

Next let us examine ApSed 2:1-5, a text which may have been written at any time from the Second to the Fifth centuries CE and is possibly of Jewish origin although of Christian redaction in what came to us⁹.

And he [Sedrach] heard a hidden voice in his ears: 'Here, Sedrach, you who wish and desire to talk with God and to ask him to reveal to you the things that you wish to ask'. And Sedrach said, 'What (is it), my Lord?' And the voice said to him, 'I was sent to you that I may carry you up into heaven'. And he said, 'I want to speak to God face to face, but I am not able, Lord, to ascend into the heavens'. But the angel, having stretched out his wings, took him as far as the third heaven, and the flame of the divinity stood there.

A number of features related to translation might be of interest here, beginning with the "hidden" voice (in the literal translation, *aoratos*, i.e. the visionary received a voice invisibly - this referring obviously to the voice and not to the seer)¹⁰. The form of the dialogue and Sedrach's compassion regarding the fate of the sinners echo standard issues of Jewish theology of the apocalypses (e.g. 4Ezra and 2Br), although chapter 1 constitutes a lengthy exhortation on the virtues of love (following the trends of 1Jn in the New Testament), and is not an authorial passage

⁸ VisEzra could constitute a typical case of the distinction established by Russell between "sincere" and "literary" inspiration. Cf. Russell, *Method and Message*, p.159.

⁹ The evidence for this process of composition is, among other reasons, the role of Sedrach resembling that of Mary in Christian tradition, and the lack of distinctively Christian elements such as the Cross and the incarnation, as well as to the typically Jewish theme (present in so many Jewish apocalypses) of the dialogue between man and God. Cf. the notes of S. Agourides to the translation of ApSed, OTP 1, p.606.

¹⁰ Cf. OTP 1 p.609 note 21. See also note 3 above for the same term as used by Philo in describing the inspiration for the sages to translate the *Torah* to Greek.



in the sense that it does not contribute to our knowledge of the visionary processes as related to the production of the text itself due to a mystical experience.

It is noteworthy that Sedrach has his interview with God granted not as a result of preparation (fasting for example) but rather suddenly after the sermon of chapter 1. Interestingly, the angel states that it was Sedrach who requested the talk (ApSed 2:1) and this is again emphasized in 3:1-2 by God Himself (pointing to a possible earlier tradition, now lost, that included Sedrach's wishes), while only appearing in the mouth of the seer in 1:4 after the angel presents himself clearly¹¹.

Another passage would be TestAbr in B recension 10:1-3:

And Abraham said, 'My lord, may I beseech you that you should conduct me to the place of judgment so that I too may see how they are judged'. Then Michael took Abraham onto a cloud, and he brought him to Paradise [...]

The text of this Testament owes its form to an apocryphal book that was probably written in Greek by an Egyptian Jew; from this matrix also sprang the Testaments of Isaac and Jacob, which need not concern us here¹². It should be noted here that Abraham looks forward to getting the vision, in contrast to what happens in VisEzra: and his request is quite specific, namely he wants to see the fate of the sinners. The request may be understood as a propitiatory prayer¹³.

¹¹ Cf. James H. Charlesworth. "The Jewish roots of christology: the discovery of the hypostatic voice", SJT 39 (1): 19-41, 1986.

¹² For a full discussion of redactional and literary problems related to this issue, cf. Mathias Delcor. *Testament of Abraham*. Leiden: Brill, 1973. P.78 ff.

¹³ It should be noted that here the most prominent characteristic of Abraham in canonical scripture is omitted by the author of the TestAbr, namely his unquestionable faith - the plot of the text



Next in our analysis comes Life of Adam and Eve 25¹⁴, when God speaks to Eve, who replies in the first person - a passage not particularly interesting but nonetheless fitting our picture of first person commandments given.

*Turning to me, the Lord said to me, 'Since you have listened to the serpent and ignored my commandment, you shall suffer birth pangs and unspeakable pains [...]'*¹⁵

The passage does not display any ASC-inducing practice, but as a direct discourse to Eve it may portray something of a first person mystical impersonation of the seer as Eve; but again, given the many theatrical stances in these texts where first person narratives are involved, together with didactical dialogues (explaining what was the cause of Fall, why beasts attack men etc.) we have no means of ascribing sincerity to the experiences described herein (by contrast to the highly elaborated visionary experiences of the bigger apocalypses such as 4Ezra and 2Br)¹⁶.

LdJb 1:1-9 and 2:1-4 gives us the following picture:

Jacob then went to Laban, his uncle. He found a place and, laying his head on a stone, he slept there, for

consists to a great extent of Abraham's refusal do face death and attempt flight from it. George W. Nickelsburg (ed.). *Studies in the Testament of Abraham*. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976. P.87.

¹⁴ The apocalypse itself and not the *vita* (i.e. the Greek text called Apocalypse of Moses, with several variant in the versions; see the notes and introduction by the translator, M.D. Johnson, OTP 2 p.249 ff.

¹⁵ In the Gn text we have an almost identical passage, but God turns to the woman and not to a narrator in first person, the only subtlety in the narrative's point of view.

¹⁶ Cf. John M. Martin. *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968. The popularity of the *Vita* among Christians in a much later time neither argues in favour nor against the first-person experiences described: it is reasonable to suppose, however, that this popularity was related to the effect of the narrated events to the audience. Obviously this does not necessarily imply sincere adhesion, by the reciting person, to the idea that he / she was effectively impersonating someone else.



the sun had gone down. He had a dream. And behold, a ladder was fixed on the earth [...]

And after a terrifying vision of the angels of God coming up and down the ladder, the story suddenly changes narrators and goes on as a speech of Jacob himself:

And God was standing above its highest face, and he called to me from there, saying, 'Jacob, Jacob!' And I said, 'Here I am, Lord!' [...] And when I heard (this) from on high, awe and trembling fell upon me. And I rose up from my dream and, the voice still being in my ears, I said, 'How fearful is this place! This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of Heaven'. And I set up the stone which had been my pillow as a pillar, and I poured olive oil on top of it, and called the name of that place the House of God.

The whole episode is full of interest - the visionary gives a lot of detail regarding the experience, which begins with the character asleep (and may very well be a dream within a dream) but apparently moves on to an awakened experience. The theme of the pillow that becomes a pillar is reminiscent of analysis of hypnagogic states between sleep and awakeness¹⁷. It is noteworthy that, while the voice resembles the experience in the Apocalypse of Sedrach, it reappears in LdJb 3:1 addressing not Jacob but Sariel, in charge of dreams, so that he may explain to Jacob what he went through.

Indeed, the whole passage is a case of refurbishing traditional biblical material - the narrative in Genesis 28:10-18:

Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in

¹⁷ Cf. chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis.



that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; [...] Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place - and I did not know it!' So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it.

The episode would be a mere reenacting, almost Targumic-like recounting of a well-known foundational myth, were it not for the different and original path taken after the pouring of oil over the pillow: while it ends with a short thanksgiving in the Biblical text, in LdJb the visionary goes on to a lengthy prayer that asks for intercession of the angels (in a sense resembling the role of angels in 2 and 3En) to give the interpretation of his dream: what follows is a very vivid description of a visionary experience¹⁸. Although the biblical text is almost an insertion in chapter 1, there is no reference in Gn 28 to any aftereffect of the experience - such as Jacob trembling and feeling awe, although he was clearly fascinated by what he saw. It is a pity that dating of LdJb should be almost impossible, as well as ascribing its provenance¹⁹.

Lastly, Rev 21:9-11 pictures the following:

Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.' And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city

¹⁸ Of course the considerations made about the visionary practice in LdJb should extend to its biblical matrix, but this would take the investigation too far back - and we are interested only in how Second Temple visionaries refurbished such narratives to dress their own visionary claims.

¹⁹ Epiphanius quotes a "Ladder of Jacob" that must have been an entirely different text, focusing on the Temple service (*Adv. Haer.* 30.16.7), cit. by Charlesworth, *OTP* 2, p.404. Cf. also James L. Kugel. "The Ladder of Jacob", *HTR* 88: 209-227, 1995.



Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

In this last "complete" vision (in terms of our questions) reference to earlier biblical material is abundant - particularly on Ezekiel 1, as happens so often with Rev. The picture fits well in the final visionary episodes of John of Patmos, including the new Earth and Heaven, as well as New Jerusalem and should thus be understood in the same context of the vision of the descending angel in Rev 20:1-3, the throne in 20:4 and the voice in 21:3. It would be difficult to envisage specific instances of preliminary practices in Rev, other than the presence of the angel in 1:9-17, 4:1-2, 18:1 and 19:1, but again the whole experience described by John - no matter how much it depended on the visions of Ezekiel - presents a very vivid picture on the whole²⁰.

2.2. Other descriptions of the narrator's identity

A second group of pseudepigraphic passages with information on authorship as related to mystical experience is comprised of texts conveying only four of the five items of information which are found in the passages discussed above: although less complete than the previous one, they still provide much information. So, in 2En 1:2-6 there are no commands given; 4Ezra 9:23-25, 26-29 12:51 and 14:38-48 do not switch narrators (being all in 1st person), the same following for ApAbr 15-19 and for TestNaph 5-7. On the contrary, TestAbr recension A 10:1 and 4Br 7:1 lack the

²⁰ It is striking that the vision in chapter 4 seems to take place in Heaven, while that of chapter 1 on earth; this relates very clearly to the content of each visionary episode (cf. Adela Y. Collins. *The Apocalypse*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1979. P.34 ff.). How this relates to the mystical experience itself of Revelation is unclear to me.



reference to a first person²¹. Rev 1:9-17, 4:1-2 and 10:8-11 all lack third person information, and in 19:1 there are no commands given. Dn 1:8-21 does not involve impressive displays regarding the visionary process, 7:1-2 lacks commands and 9:21 and 10:1-17 miss a third person main narrative. It would be tiresome and unnecessary to go over all these passages, and the most illustrative for our purposes are the following.

2En 1:2-6 gives, in the longer recension called J²², a vivid account of the experience undergone by the seer. The whole passage should be taken with great care, given all the problems surrounding 2En regarding dating and original language (everything has been proposed in both areas, with dates of composition ranging from II BCE to XIV CE - Charles proposing its author as a Hellenized Jew from Alexandria, Milik suggesting a Christian Byzantine monk in the ninth century CE):

[...] in the first month, on the assigned day of the month, I was in my house alone, and I lay on my bed, sleeping. And, while I slept, a great distress entered my heart, and I was weeping²³ with my eyes in a dream²⁴. And I could not figure out what this distress might be, [nor] what might be happening to me. Then two huge men appeared to me, the like of which I had never seen on earth.

²¹ Although in the latter the eagle talking to Baruch is a visionary event worthy of note in itself.

²² Cf. the translator's notes, OTP 1, p.91 ff.

²³ The translator of 2En in OTP, F.I. Andersen, argues that weeping is a traditional motif in apocalyptic texts, related to the upsetting of apocalypticists by the evil of the world or by their inability to understand the plan of God (cf. Dn 7:15, Rev 5:4, 4Ezra 3, 1En 83:3. But he rightly points out that this needs not lie behind Enoch's unexplained grief in the passage. It is my idea that, although the weeping may derive from traditional motives it could imply grief as ecstatic practice (even if only a reminiscence of authentic mourning in the passage); see next chapter for Daniel Merkur's reasoning on grief as ASC-inducing practice.

²⁴ Text confused in many mss. and lacking in the other big text of 2En displayed in OTP 1, A.



*Their faces were like the shining sun;
their eyes were like burning lamps;
from their mouths fire was coming forth;
their clothing was various singing²⁵;
their wings were more glistering than gold;
their hands were whiter than snow.
And they stood at the head of my bed and called me by
my name. Then I awoke from my sleep, and saw those men,
standing in front of me, in actuality²⁶.*

The whole passage in 2En, regardless of the many compositional problems, is quite dense in the description of ecstatic episodes - the picture presented is quite vivid and implies a vision beginning during sleep and continuing afterwards. The amazing picture of Enoch's visitors may also be compared to the "ancient of days" in Dn 7:13, or to the angels in 4Ezra 4:1, 5:31 and 2Br 8.

TestNaph 5-7 displays a series of recollections in the first person narrative of the patriarch Naphtali, not showing impressive ASC-inducing means but allowing for incredible, dream-like feats - the grasping of the sun and the moon by Levi and Judah and the ship without captain which Jacob and his sons board.

The passages in 4Ezra (9:23-25, 26-29 12:51 and 14:38-48) are arguably very important for any discussion of apocalyptic ecstatic practices, but by their very nature cannot be discussed here: they allegedly involve chemical induction, for the only time in apocalyptic writing - MartIs 2:7-11 which refers to the eating of herbs may be understood in terms of the accepting of *kashrut*, not cause-effect relation²⁷.

²⁵ Text corrupt, but the translator proposes "singing" on orthographic grounds (similarities between the mistakes found in the mss consulted), adding that singing is a common theme for angels in 2En.

²⁶ The translator argues, correctly from my point of view, that this word implies objectivity and makes the dream vision coincide with what the seer was watching in an awakened frame of mind.

²⁷ Cf. the appendix, 2.4.



2.3. Passages with smaller number of indications

Finally, passages displaying three or less of the categories defined in the beginning of this chapter constitute another group, composed by 1En 1:2, 13:6-10, 39:9-14, 52, 70, 83:2, 91:1; 2En 3:1; 72:1, 10; 3En 1:1; 15B:2 (for its importance and peculiarities, 3En will be discussed separately in the next chapter). Many passages in 2Br display a few of the themes discussed, like 5:5-7; 6:2; 9; 12:5; 21:1-3; 26; 32:7; 35-36; 37; 38; 47-48:1; 48:25; 52:7-53; 53:12; 54. 3Br has both the Greek and the Slavonic introductions showing clearly third person narrations, and 4Ezra 3:1-15; 5:14-15; 5:19-10; 5:21; 5:31; 6:35; 10:29; 59; 11:1; 12:3; 13:1; 14; 14:1-3; 36. GrEzra 1, ApAbr 8; 12:1-2; 32:6, ApAdam 2:1, ApEl 1:1; 23-27, ApZeph recA:1; Dn 2:17-20; 7:15, 28; 8:1, 16; 9:1-13 are less important for our purposes.

2.4. Alleged 1st person passages in non-apocalyptic pseudepigrapha

Although the pseudepigrapha below do not qualify as apocalypses (at least not as whole integral apocalypses), they all present stances of ASC-inducing practices or other informative hints on Second Temple visionary practices. These are namely TestLv 2; TestJob 2-3; TestSol 26:6; Jub intro and 1:2-6, MartIs 1:5-6 (2:7-11 eventually offering the problems discussed above regarding induction of visions in 4Ezra); Life of Adam and Eve 26 and 27; VitProph 4; LdJb 2:1-4; 2:6-22; 4Br 4:11; 5; 6:7-16; 6:15; SibOr 2:1; 2:340; 3:1-7; 5:51; 11:315-324; 13:1-5 and fragment 8.

Although all the Sibylline Oracles passages display only two of the three characteristics that interest us here - namely, all are first person passages involving the



giving of commands -, at least some of them deserve a closer look. The extreme diversity of attribution of these texts, regarding their date and provenance should be borne in mind. They are also striking in that pseudepigraphy here refers not to Jews making use of mythical characters but to the appropriation of a Pagan prophetess fitted to well-known oracles. But they all have some characteristics of the portrayed visionary in common, the Sybil, who has the added interest of being the only Pagan seer in all the texts examined²⁸; the SibOr also present the additional difficulty of being constituted by extant oracles put in the mouth of a Pagan prophetic figure by a Jewish or Christian hand - taking all these observations into account, great care must be taken in examining their contribution to our present purpose. SibOr 2:1-5 reads²⁹:

*When indeed God stopped my most perfectly wise song
as I prayed many things, he also again placed in my
breast
a delightful utterance of wondrous words.
I will speak the following with my whole person in
ecstasy
For I do not know what to say, but God bids me utter
each thing.*

The passage emphasizes the forceful character of the sibyl's inspiration, as well as confessing the "delightful" character of the experience - in direct contrast with other sibylline passages such as 2:340:

²⁸ It is noteworthy that the Sibyl is also the only female figure in the texts examined, although women might play smaller roles in other texts, such as Eve in Life of Adam and Eve and the woman of 4Ezra 9-10, transmuted in heavenly Jerusalem.

²⁹ Following Collins' discussion, the earlier date for books 1 and 2 of the OrSib should be 70 CE. The Jewish core of those two books should be ascribed a Phrygian origin but not necessarily so the Christian parts of the text. We are dealing here with a Jewish passage (books 1 and 2 must have formed a unit and in this case the Christian interpolation runs from 1.324-400). Cf. OTP 1, p.330 ff.



*Alas for me, wretched one. What will become of me on that day
in return for what I sinned, ill-minded one,
busy myself about everything but caring neither for marriage nor for reasons?
But also in my dwelling, which was that of a very wealthy man, I shut out those in need³⁰; and formerly I committed lawless deeds knowingly [...]*

The reference here is rather to guilt and shame on the part of the sibyl - not as ASC-inducing mourning, such as found in 4Ezra 5:20, but rather as an after effect of a badly-spent life.

SibOr 3:1-7 gives a picture of vivid tiredness³¹:

*Blessed, heavenly one, who thunders on high, who have the cherubim as your throne, I entreat you to give a little rest
to me who have prophesied unfailing truth, for my heart is tired within.
But why does my heart shake again? and why does a whip, compelled from within to proclaim, lash my spirit
an oracle to all? But I will utter everything again, as much as God bids me say to men.*

The tiredness declared by the seer is followed by the compelling to prophesy and to the troubling of the spirit (also a commonplace among sibylline ecstatic passages).

SibOr 11:315-324 offers the following description³²:

³⁰ The inference may point either to illegitimate dwelling with a man to which the Sybil was not married, or just a comparison to the richness of a wealthy man's home. The theme of absence of solidarity is echoed in Old and New Testaments alike - cf. Job 34:19, 28, Lk 16:20 and TestJob 9. Here it adds to the guilt of the seer, apparently in traditional fashion. John J. Collins ascribes the first two books of the sybilline oracles to a period ranging from 30 BCE to 250 CE (cf. OTP 1, p.331).

³¹ OrSib 3 is usually attributed an Egyptian origin (cf. Macedon followed by the kingdom of Egypt in 155-161), and internal references point to a dating of the oracles contained in that book between 163-145 BCE.

³² This is one of the most difficult *Sybilline Oracles* to date - an overview of the many complexities involving the dating of OrSib 11 is



*[...] though someone will call me
a messenger with frenzied spirit. But when he
approaches the books
let him not shrink from them. He will know both all
that is to be and
that was before
from our words. Then no longer will anyone call
the divinely possessed seer an oracle-monger of
necessity.
But, prince³³, now stop my very lovely speech,
thrust away the frenzy and the true inspired voice
and the terrible madness, but grant a pleasant refrain.*

The passage repeats a number of themes, the tiredness and also the pleasant character of the experience itself. It also ascribes to whole utterance to an outside power, configuring it as a case of possession.

SibOr 13:1 shows a reluctant seer³⁴:

*The holy imperishable God bids me again
sing a great wondrous word. He who gave power
to kings, and took it away again, and delimited for
them
a time of both things, of life and of wretched death.
The heavenly God also presses me hard, though I am
reluctant, to proclaim these things to kings about
royal dominion.*

And finally fragment 8 is very short but full of indications of the seer's vision of the ecstatic process³⁵:

given by Collins, OTP 1, pp.431-432. However, the arguments there presented should lead to an authorship in the beginning of the CE and Egypt should be considered its origin (history begins and ends there).

³³ The same treatment to be found above, in 11:311, referring to God Himself (cf. also OrSib 5:298 for the repetition of the idea that He is imperishable, although without the epithet this time).

³⁴ Referring to Odenath of Palmyra, during the reign of Gallienus (260-268 CE) but failing to mention the death of either, it should be dated from about 265 CE; continuity with other sybilline books indicates a possible Alexandrian origin (cf. Collins, OTP 1 p.453).

³⁵ A fragment about which we know very little, to be found in Constantine's *Speech to the Saints*. Given the outspokenness of the small passage, it is a pity we only have this fragment - which could be somehow related to 3:1-5 and 296.



The Erythrean [the Sybil], then, to God: 'Why, she says, O master, do you inflict the compulsion of prophecy on me and not rather guard me, lifted high above the earth, until the day of your most blessed coming?'

In common, all the sibylline passages display the attribution of the gift of prophecy to a power outside the seer (God) and point to this gift as a compulsion or obligation (compare that to the feelings expressed by Jeremiah regarding his prophetic gifts, for example; see Jr 4:19 ff.).



3. Authorship of apocalyptic texts and divine manifestations

3.1. Brief discussion

The actual authorship of the apocalyptic passages interesting us was already discussed in the beginning of each quotation. It should be noted that the passages involved are basically Jewish in origin.

The experiences they describe are both vocal and visual, and the ones that look more decidedly stereotypical (VisEzra, for example) are remarkably abrupt on the ASC-inducing process and go straight to the content. In this way they resemble the highly artificial ending to the Syriac text of 4Ezra, who adds a verse stating that Ezra had also undergone a trip to heaven - something entirely strange for this character (but very Enoch-like) but which could, maybe, be expected by the audience and one text makes Ezra look more like other visionaries³⁶.

We can see that explicit manifestations of divine interference - or, for that matter, even possession - in matters that are usually understood in purely human terms (or may have an explanation other than God's manipulation) are relatively sparse in apocalyptic and pseudepigrapha in general³⁷. Besides the episodes discussed in the previous section, passages displaying direct interference over man-written texts will be examined in next section.

³⁶ The ending, after the Christian interpolation, states that Ezra had been "caught up, and taken to the place of those who are like him, after he had written all these things [...]". Cf. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, p.439.

³⁷ One need only to think of the numerous stances involving possession and exorcism in the New Testament, some examples of which have already been given above: it is by comparison to these that pseudepigrapha look poor sources for the theme. A full and up to date discussion on the subject can be found in Eric Sorensen. *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002.



3.2. Divine interference manifest in the texts

Separation between body and spirit often appears in pseudepigrapha in connection to the resurrection of the flesh - a late fixture in Jewish thought, by comparison to the more ancient core of the Old Testament³⁸. Stances illustrative of that separation appear, in our texts, in ApAdam 2:5; TestAbr 18:1-11; Jb 1:20-23; Ps-Phoc 104-115; ApSed 9:1-10:4; 4Ezra 7:75-101.

So 4Ezra 7:75-101:

If I have found favor in your sight, my lord, show this also to your servant: whether after death, as soon as every one of us yields up his soul, we shall be kept in rest until those times come when you will renew the creation, or will we be tormented at once?

And ApSed 9:1-10:4:

And God said to his only begotten Son, 'Go, take the soul of my beloved Sedrach, and put it in Paradise' [...] And Sedrach said to God, 'From where will you take my soul, from which member?' And God said to him, 'Do you not know that it is placed in the middle of your lungs and your heart and that it is spread out to all the members? It is removed through the pharynx and larynx and through the mouth; and whenever it is due (to go out of the body) it is drawn with difficulty at the beginning and as it comes together from the fingernails and from all the members there is, of necessity, a great strain in being separated from the body and detached from the heart'.

Demons act directly over a man and a child respectively in 1En 69:12 and 3Br 16:2. Both Eve and the serpent are taken by the devil in Vita 17:4; 16:5; 17:4; in 3Br 9:7 it is only the snake that is possessed by the devil. The Qumran texts provide other examples, among which 1QS 11:11-

³⁸ Russell, *Method and Message*, p.153 ff.



12 might suffice (Belial in the heart of a man who worships idols).

Regardless of what can be interpreted as visionary processes from the seer's point of view, in Dn 4:8-9, 18; 5:11-12, 14 the gift of prophecy is given by God Himself, or by other gods in Nebuchadnezzar's view see Dn 4:8-9:

At last Daniel came in before me - he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and who is endowed with a spirit of the holy gods - and I told him the dream: 'O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that you are endowed with a spirit of the holy gods and that no mystery is too difficult for you. Hear the dream that I saw; tell me its interpretation [...]'

The idea is not new and in the Old Testament other examples can be found in Ex 31:1-6; 35:30; 36:2 (God pours His spirit over the artisans in charge of the Tabernacle); the Judges act according to God's influence in Jdg 3:10; 11:29; 6:34; 14:6, 19; 15:14.

The idea of the working of a spirit of some sort (not only of God, as in most of the examples above - it can be simply a spirit with a characteristic, like the lying spirit in 1Kgs 22:19-24 - 2Chr 18:18-23) was a well-known feature in apocalyptic texts and pseudepigrapha. This does not point to a direct link to the idea of possession by a deceased author - if it did the cross-cultural approach tried in this thesis would be redundant -, much less to the notion of reincarnation. But it opens way to the idea of writing a sacred text in the context of Jewish (or Christian) authors by means of direct (and not general) spiritual influence of a definite agent a very real possibility - and this adds to the notion that experiences described may be, in some cases, authentic and revealing a static trance-like experience - an ASC - related to the



very writing down of the text. But before coming to that test we shall see, in the next part, some possibilities of spiritual composition present in works known to apocalyptic seers, or sharing with them a common ambience and background.



4. Possible evidence for automatic writing in three specific ancient cases

Under this topic we shall deal with texts, or even whole books, that came to be regarded as having been written spiritually or even literally composed and written by otherworldly beings. We shall concentrate on three cases - a passage from the Old Testament, a book well-known to the Manicheans and a confirmed case of imposture by a Greek First-century mystic. Given the scarcity of passages dealing with those issues, it is worth taking a closer look at the passages selected.

4.1. Writings from a deceased prophet via human hands: the case of 2Chr 21

We are dealing here with something entirely different from pseudepigraphy because the text does not imply that it may be a faking device (to write in the name of a deceased) but rather that something written came from a person that should probably be dead (or at least no longer among the living; cf. 2Kgs 2:11) at that time. This is of the utmost importance and shows that writings in the name of the dead were, at least in this stance, possible in the Old Testament.

The text reads:

*A letter came to him from the prophet Elijah, saying: 'Thus says the Lord, the God of your father David: Because you have not walked in the ways of your father Jehoshaphat or in the ways of King Asa of Judah [...]'*³⁹

³⁹ There are no controversial issues regarding the Hebrew or LXX Greek texts, which I quote here due to the importance of the whole passage for the theme discussed: the MT reads *וַיָּבֹא אֵלָיו מִכְתָּב מֵאֵלֵיהֶוָה הַנְּבִיא לְאַחַד* and the Greek *καὶ ἦλθεν αὐτῷ ἐγγραφή παρὰ Ἡλίου τοῦ προφήτου λέγων [...]*, both conveying



The passage can be understood in terms of automatic writing - the means by which the text came to be are not stated, how Elijah made it appear to the recipient - or as a stylistic / theological device such as the narrative in 2Kgs 23:24:

Moreover Josiah put away the mediums, wizards, teraphim, idols, and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, so that he established the words of the law that were written in the book that the priest Hilkiyah had found in the house of the Lord.

Although we are tempted to treat both cases equally, it appears at first sight that in 2Chronicles one states something unique in the Old Testament - namely that the deceased could, under certain circumstances, convey written messages to the living. It also states that it came in the form of a written text. It can always be argued that, even if the idea of receiving a letter from the dead is what the passage implies, this could have been the product of pious fraud or plain deception. Be that as it may, 2Chr 21:12 constitutes potential evidence in the Old Testament that a form of communicating with the beyond via written texts was known to Second Temple Jews via the (much more ancient) texts of the Hebrew Bible (a usual dating for Chronicles being the beginning of the Hellenistic period, i.e. sometime after 300 BCE). It should be noted that the discreet tone of the narrative and the absence of comments worthy of the importance of the feat, should we be dealing with true automatic writing, all argue in favour of the

the same meaning - a writing, or letter, came to Jehoram, king of Judah.



passage being nothing more than a device similar to the 2Kgs text.

A modern commentary on the passage tells us that arguably Elijah could have still been alive at the time of the accession of Jehoram of Judah to the throne⁴⁰, but it is worth noting that nowhere else does the Chronicler mention prophecies either by Elijah or Elisha⁴¹. Myers proposes that the whole story could be apocryphal.

The same author proposes that there are similar stories of

[...] prophets predicting disaster for kings before the event, for example Shemaiah for Rehoboam (12:5 ff.), Hanani for Asa (16:7 ff.), Jehu for Jehosaphat (19:2 ff.), Zechariah for Joash (24:20 ff.) and Azariah the priest for Uzziah (26:17 ff.) The letter could possibly have some basis in fact [...] in that stories and words are often shifted from a less well-known to a better known name⁴².

In Rabbinic tradition, the passage is commented in *Seder Olam Zuta* 58.7 without any problems arising due to the letter being ascribed to Elijah⁴³. It should be noted that there are no passages in the Old Testament referring

⁴⁰ Although a straightforward reading of 2Kgs 2-3 suggests that he was dead by that time; cf. Raymond B. Dillard. *2 Chronicles*. Word Biblical Commentary. Waco: Word Books, 1987. P.167. The letter might have had "the force of a voice coming from the dead", whatever this means, according to another commentary (Frank E. Gaebelin (ed.). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988. P.507).

⁴¹ Jacob M. Myers. *II Chronicles*. New York: Doubleday, 1965. Pp.121-122. Cf. also Wilhelm Rudolph. "Problems of the Books of Chronicles", VT 4, 1954.

⁴² Idem, p.122. Correspondence by this means was also usual at the time, if we allow for the chronological difficulties in proving that Elijah was alive; cf. Simon J. Vries. *1 and 2 Chronicles*. The Forms of the Old Testament Literature. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989. P.333.

⁴³ Aaron Hyman. *Sefer Torah ha-ketuvah vеха-mesurah 'al Torah, Nevi'im u-Khetuvim: mar'e mekomot 'al kol pesuke ha-Tanakh ha-muva'im be-rov sifre Torah shebe-'al peh, ve-'od harbeh sifre Hazal ve-Rishonim*. Tel Aviv: Devir, 1979 (in Hebrew). The absence of scandal or even questioning points to the passage being considered as normal, though, and does nothing to reinforce the automatic writing theory for its background.



to the action of spirits entirely independent of human action (the episode of the witch at Endor - 1Sm 28:6 ff, the restrictions on manipulating the dead in Dt 18:11, all depend on another person to work)⁴⁴.

It should also be noted that, apocryphal, psychographed or written in usual fashion with Elijah still alive, the genre to which it can be ascribed - that of the oracular letter - is attested in other places (in the OT, Jr LXX 36:4-23; 26-28 or 29:4-23; 24-28; 30-32, and in the Ancient Near East we also find evidence for it in Mari, in the letters sent to Zimrilim)⁴⁵.

The figure of Elijah himself would suit well such an episode, related as he is to all sorts of folklore in Judaism⁴⁶. The historical setting of the bad kingship of Jehoram lends itself to the use of Elijah for the purpose, but his folkloric character also seems to have played a part in the whole episode⁴⁷; it must be remembered that, since Elijah was the champion of Yahwism against the cult of Baal he would suit the Chronicler's idea of forging a document in his name especially well⁴⁸.

⁴⁴ Edwyn Bevan. *Sibyls and Seers, a Survey of Some Ancient Theories of Revelation and Inspiration*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1928. P.40.

⁴⁵ David Aune. *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983. Pp.72-73.

⁴⁶ It would be inappropriate to discuss all that tradition here, but for our purposes a note in a Byzantine encomium attributed to John Chrysostom says that "Whosoever shall take the pains to have a book made and written in thy [Elijah's] name, and shall dedicate it to thy shrine, I will write his name in the book of life, and will make him to inherit the good things of the kingdom of heaven". Cf. David Frankfurter. *Elijah in Upper Egypt: the Apocalypse of Elijah and Early Egyptian Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993. P.75.

⁴⁷ Of Elijah much is hidden in legend - of his death for example we read in 2 Kings 2:11 that he was taken up to Heaven (like Enoch); Malachi makes him alive with God to entrust him with an important mission in the end of time (Mal 4:5-6). In any case, we are not told by the Chronicler that Elijah was dead when the writing came to Jehoram, but that was his apparent intention; cf. Bevan, *Sibyls and Seers*, pp.112-113.

⁴⁸ Hugh G. M. Williamson. *1 and 2 Chronicles*. New Century Bible Commentary. London / Grand Rapids: Marshall, Morgan & Scott /



The received writing of 2Chr is also remarkable among ancient revelations in that, if it was an authentic experience, it would give us an example of a spirit of a deceased coming back to deliver a message when the usual practice in Antiquity is for living characters to go to the beyond and, on their return, reveal what they had seen⁴⁹. The format of the story puts it closer to modern revelatory journeys of the deceased back to the living world⁵⁰.

4.2. Texts handed down directly from above: the *Book of Elchasai*

This text, of which we have little more than hearsay information, is important in this discussion because it is a remarkable example of ascribing of authorship to a supernatural being.

In the *Book of Elchasai* we are dealing with a somewhat different tradition in the production of sacred texts inasmuch as we should be witnessing not human intermediation in the making of the final text, but rather the supernatural production of the whole artifact. The story of this book can be summed up in the account given to us by Hippolytus (c. 170-236 CE)⁵¹. A Greek-Syrian called Alcibiades brought to Rome an Elchasaite book that he received from the Chinese (apōl Shrwā), but initially he

Eerdmans, 1982. Pp.306-307. Williamson rightly points out that the absence of a written ministry by Elijah in Kings also argues against the authenticity of the letter; however, he admits that the passage is unclear in this respect and that the Chronicler could, in theory, have thought of a letter sent directly from Elijah, even if this has no OT parallels.

⁴⁹ There are many examples, but one needs only to think about Er, the Armenian in Plato's *Republic*, about Odysseus in the *Iliad* or in all the "otherworldly journey" apocalypses discussed in this thesis.

⁵⁰ Bevan, op.cit. pp.94-95.

⁵¹ Although the book itself is earlier, being held in high repute by Ebionites dwelling in lower Jordan and the Dead Sea.



claimed that it had been written by an angel, who was 96 miles high.

*A certain Alcibiades, who lived in Apamea in Syria [...] came to Rome and brought with him a book. Of it he said that Elchasai, a righteous man, had received it from the Seres in Parthia and had transmitted it to a certain Sobiai. It had been communicated by an angel, whose height was 24 schoinoi [...]*⁵²

The book announced a new kind of baptism and provides for purification through water, among other details that need not concern us here. It is remarkable for the fantastic tale involving its conception, but it does not allow for automatic writing or possessional mediumnistic phenomenon - being more of an example of how texts could be supernaturally conceived in Antiquity (although it appears from the story that Alcibiades quickly had to change his otherworldly authorial claims a bit to the more modest assumption that the book was just handed over to him in a normal fashion in Parthia - i.e. the supernatural section of the story could thus be safely remitted to someone else, a third-party unknown to anyone but to Alcibiades himself, that is Elchasai)⁵³.

⁵² Hyppolitus. *Elenchos* 9.13 in: Paul Wendland (ed.). *Hyppolitus Werke - Refutatio omnium haeresium*. Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1985. Translation by Johannes Irmscher, in Wilhelm Schneemelcher (ed.). *New Testament Apocrypha*. Vol.2. London: Lutterworth Press, 1965. Pp.745-746. The height of the angel echoes that of Metatron in 3En; cf. Rebecca M. Lesses. *Ritual Practices to Gain Power: Angels, Incantations, and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998.

⁵³ Cf. also Samuel Lieu. *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985. Pp.27-28. Epiphanius is the other witness to this amazing book, of which we only have meager fragments.



The idea that knowledge could be directly given from angels to a man finds a parallel in Eupolemus⁵⁴, who claims the same achievement for Enoch - whom he saw as a real character, in flesh and blood⁵⁵. The notion of pseudepigraphy as applied to texts directly written by otherworldly beings might have its oldest example in the Hammurabi Codex, handed over by Shamash, judge of Heaven and Earth⁵⁶.

4.3. Fraud and satire: written instructions for the Greek credulous

A brief mention of another case of supernaturally conceived writings in the religious sphere is due regarding a false prophet from Asia Minor, who produced texts with the manifest intention of deceiving an audience. It is not related to Jewish apocalyptic (although to Sibylline Oracles), but show how contemporary people - although Pagan - would react to supernatural authorship of texts.

A remarkable account of those reactions is given by Lucian of Samosata (Second century CE), in his *Alexander*. The whole work tells us about the wrongdoings of an impostor in Asia Minor called Alexander, whose tricks are expounded by Lucian in detail (he was even threatened with murder on account of this - cf. *Alexander*. 56). One of the specialties of the charlatan was to give answers to the consultant's questions put in a little scroll sealed specially for the purpose:

⁵⁴ Probably to be identified with Eupolemus son of John son of Accos, (1Mc 8:17; 2Mc 4:11); he was sent on an embassy to Rome in 161 BCE to negotiate a treaty between the Hasmoneans and Rome.

⁵⁵ Eusebius, *Prep. Ev.* 9.17.

⁵⁶ Martin Rist. "Pseudepigraphy and the early Christians" in: David Aune (ed.). *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature: Essays in Honor of Allen P. Wikgren*. Leiden: Brill, 1972. P.75



[...] Alexander announced to all comers that the God would make prophecies, and named a date for it in advance. He directed everyone to write down in a scroll whatever he wanted and what he especially wished to learn, to tie it up, and to seal it with wax or clay or something else of that sort. Then he himself, after taking the scrolls and entering the inner sanctuary [...] proposed to summon in order, with herald and priest, those who had submitted them, and after the god told him about each case, to give back the scroll with the seal upon it, just as it was, and the reply to it endorsed upon it; for the god would reply explicitly to any question that anyone should put⁵⁷

Lucian goes on to tell us how the deception worked, how Alexander would undo the waxed seals etc., minor detail that needs not concern us here. The important thing to be noted is that, although it appears as extremely rare to the Greeks that same message could come from the beyond in such fashion - and this explains part of Lucian's own bewilderment -, nonetheless it was an acceptable enough idea to ensure Alexander's success, not locally but throughout the whole Mediterranean - and he ended his career marrying the daughter of the Roman governor of Asia Minor (Alexander. 34-37). In short, the use of a supernatural, false writing by Alexander (although not implying actual possession) shows how easy it could be to start an oracular tradition from scratch, and that the idea of written sacred utterances from beyond would find ready listeners⁵⁸.

⁵⁷ Alexander the False Prophet. LCL, 19.

⁵⁸ Eric R. Dodds. *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine*. New York / London: Norton, 1970. P.56. It must be pointed out that opposition to his practices came only from Stoics and Christians.



5. Summary

The main issues discussed in this chapter can be summarized below:

1. The presence of divine participation in the composition of sacred texts is a common feature in Jewish literature.

2. Lack of detail can give a stereotyped appearance to the description of experiences – but even here great care must be taken, as this appears so in VisEzra but not in ApEl, an equally laconic text regarding actual authorial information (see next chapter).

3. The idea of a hidden voice dictating or commanding the actual writer is not unusual in Second Temple texts (e.g. Philo, ApSed⁵⁹)

4. Supernatural experiences may take the form of a big development of Scriptural text (LdJb on Gn, Ap on Ez, Dn on Jr, 4Ezra on Dn).

5. *Sibylline oracles*, exotic as they are – for provenance, identity and for presenting the only true visionary female figures in the literature analyzed – convey the biggest individual grouping of first person experiences, often implying complaint on compulsion, including unpleasant after effects.

6. Writing from the deceased to the living may well be the case in 2Chr 21:12 but is by no means certain: the story of Elijah may be apocryphal or he might have been alive at the time of delivery (although this seems improbable).

⁵⁹ This one, as discussed above, displaying a clear Second Temple content and outlook although having been composed, in its final form, at a much later date. Cf. OTP 1, p.605 ff.



7. Writings such as Lucian's and the *Book of Elchasai* show what reception supernatural authorship might have had in late Antiquity, but not being related to Jewish apocalyptic (or even to Christian reception of that phenomenon) their relevance is limited.

8. Corporate identity does not appear to be a valid concept to understand eventual identity between actual and putative authors of apocalypses and pseudepigrapha in general. It rests on dubious theoretical assumptions and in the generalization of legal aspects of Hebrew tradition to other spheres. Besides, other examples in apocalyptic texts themselves imply that communication with the divine could be open without this meaning to live in a permanent present tense. Communion with biblical figures shall be examined in the next chapter.

9. ASC-inducing devices by Second Temple mystics imply the fact that the mystic already knows what to expect of the experience, which can nonetheless be rich and varied since there is some amount of space for variation (this makes the application of the theory of the visionary descriptions as literary *topoi* more difficult, or at least dismisses simplistic explanations).



CHAPTER 6: CONSIDERATIONS ON RELIGIOUS PSEUDEPIGRAPHY IN ANTIQUITY

1. Introductory remarks to the chapter

In this chapter we will take a closer look at sources that display first-hand knowledge of religious pseudepigraphy at work in Antiquity, in several different stances: as a listing of names chosen to christen apocalyptic texts, as examination of some cases where direct spiritual attribution is involved and as arguing, in late Antiquity's own terms, about pseudepigraphy in the making (i.e. pseudepigraphers caught in the very act of writing and signing up as someone else).

First of all we will examine a survey of the names under whose guise apocalyptic literature and related material were written: how many texts are ascribed to a given character and how many to another, and how these choices are related - how the names fit or do not fit the content they sign.

Next the possibility of religious pseudepigraphy as literary fraud - as opposed to the hypothesis tested in the thesis, that of pseudepigraphy as mystical phenomenon - is sketched. This section concentrates on two well-documented cases of late Antiquity epistolary pseudepigraphy, those of Tertulian (reporting someone else abusing Paul's name as an author) and that of Salvian of Marseille, caught in the act of writing under the guise of a respectable patron, Timothy. The chapter concludes with the important discussion on authorial ascribing versus orthodoxy of contents - a main issue in Kardecism. It appears that



rightly ascribed authorship was more important to the ancient readerships we are dealing with than to modern ones, where Kardecist sources and practitioners are unanimous in considering doctrinal correctness more important than precise attribution of a given text to this or that spiritual being.

The cases examined provide an interesting background against which to position the cross-cultural perspective of the whole thesis, since they are insightful regarding how religious pseudepigraphy was perceived in Antiquity, at least in some circles. This comparison is not enough to preclude the use of broader cross-cultural methods for the purposes of the thesis but helps to show differences and similarities between the ways ancient and modern pseudonymous religious writings were perceived.



2. A survey of chosen names for apocalyptic pseudepigraphy

A first attempt on a systematic appreciation of the names chosen as putative authors in ancient (including apocalyptic) pseudepigraphy was tried by Brockington fifty years ago¹. In his article we come to the conclusion that, with the exception of the twelve patriarchs, apocalyptic pseudepigraphy refers to 8 names - Daniel, Enoch, Ezra, Baruch, Moses, Isaiah, Abraham and Noah. Brockington does not include Elijah, one of the most important ones for the question, presumably because it belongs to a Christian text, ApEl².

I have nothing to add to that list (excepting Elijah) and would like to go into further classification. Of the 9 names, 2 are antediluvian characters (Enoch and Noah), 1 is a founding figure related to the patriarchs (Abraham), 3 are prophets (Moses, Isaiah and Elijah), 2 are lawgivers (Moses again and Ezra), 1 is a folktale character to whom prophetic deeds are attributed but in a different fashion from classical prophecy (Daniel) and 1 is a secretary to a prophet (Baruch - cf. Jr 45:1).

From this we can see that prophets are the most common figures (although this does not lead to any strengthened links between prophecy and apocalyptic). But the variation

¹ Leonard H. Brockington. "Problem of pseudonymity", JTS 4: 15-22, 1953. P.17.

² An important issue to remember is that, while in Antiquity the name taken is usually from a great figure of the past, in the modern world the rule is to invent pseudonyms. Cf. David G. Meade. *Pseudonymity and Canon: an Investigation into the Relationship of Authorship and Authority in Jewish and Earliest Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987. Pp.1-2. In Kardecism, however, the taking of past names seem to be the rule as well, as it attests to the truthfulness of the message displayed - and this device can even lead to great similarity of detail and style, as we can observe in Chico Xavier's first poetry book, discussed above.



is very small - antediluvian characters are outnumbered by so little so that no conclusions might be drawn from that survey, other than apocalyptic putative authorship had a staggering amount of diversity regarding the choosing of names.

To that matter Brockington raised the hypothesis that, while the Law was Mosaic by nature, Wisdom was Solomonic - thus, legal works would be normally attributed to Moses, and sapiential ones to Salomon³. The reason for the diversity in apocalyptic would be, according to Brockington, the ever-changing situation faced by their authors⁴. But this would also hold true for the other genres - legal texts' authors and wise men would all have suffered the consequences of political or social instability, which seems to be what Brockington means. Another matter would be to put this in a positive way, i.e. to imagine that the situation of this or that past character is similar to that of the actual writer who would, in turn, be justified in choosing his name⁵. But this will always remain a supposition since we cannot know the particular situations of every apocalyptic writer and it would be risky to infer them in reverse, i.e. from the chosen portrayed name to a given situation⁶.

Another possibility would be that the chosen authors were "new" in the sense that Moses and the prophets already

³ Id. *ibid.*

⁴ Idem, p.22.

⁵ Jeremy Duff. *A Reconsideration of Pseudepigraphy in Early Christianity*. DPhil. Theology Faculty. Oxford, Oxford, 1997. P.176.

⁶ The same reasoning holds true for Kardecist texts - there the diversity of name picking is, as we saw, staggering and ranges from First-century Roman senators to Marilyn Monroe. What does that fact alone tell us about Kardecists' situation in the present time? Not much, I would say.



had their books and so a renewed message should be accordingly delivered in the name of "new" authors⁷.

But this does not entirely explain why people who already had books ascribed to them would also provide suitable names to be chosen. It is noteworthy that the most prolific pseudepigraphed apocalyptic author (a true "patron saint" of apocalyptic visionaries⁸), Enoch, had no book of his own in what would become the Old Testament. On the other hand, Ezra is a common figure in apocalyptic although he already had his own book previously: Isaiah and Moses had also had their own books for a long time before apocalyptic came to light.

This previous availability as an author (such is the case of Ezra) cannot be the only criterion for assigning respectability to a portrayed figure in the apocalypses. Abraham and Elijah, for instance, did not have books of their own in the centuries before the birth of apocalyptic. But the idea that names previously unassigned to books were more eligible for pseudepigraphy than more common ones, does not seem to solve the problem since we find both names common as authors and others that are not.

It should also be noted that while in Antiquity it appears that religious writing in the name of someone else was quite normal, the norm would be to write (anonymously) in the first person⁹. Attribution to another person - which

⁷ Cf. Morton Smith. "Pseudepigraphy on the Israelite literary tradition", *Pseud.*I, p.214. "What they had to say was known; new revelations should be put in the mouths of new, but prestigious, speakers".

⁸ Aland, *op.cit.* p.21.

⁹ Frederik Torm. "Die Psychologie der Pseudonimität im Hinblick auf die Literatur des Urchristentums" in: Norbert Brox (ed.). *Pseudepigraphie in der Heidnischen und Jüdisch-Christlichen Antike*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977. P.112. In Ecclesiastes the exhortative tone of the discourse is also derivative from the first-person speech, and creates an identity for the fictive character under which the text is put. Cf. Samuel Cheon. "Anonymity in the Wisdom of Solomon", *JSP* 18: 111-119, 1998. Pp.111-115; Bruce Metzger takes this



occurs in a great deal of the New Testament - cannot be strictly considered pseudepigraphy, but rather mistaken attribution which is something that does not concern us here.

possibility further in his famous article, "Literary forgeries and canonical pseudepigrapha", JBL 91: 3-24, 1972. P.20.



3. Pseudepigraphy and forgery

3.1. Central elements to the notion of literary forgery

To assume that pseudepigraphic apocalypses are an imitation of something else assumes, evidently, that there are originals to be imitated¹⁰. Besides, it also supposes that the Jews living between II BCE and I CE had a clear notion of literary property, which cannot be proved¹¹. And if a forgery is to be successful it depends upon the skillful imitation of the original¹².

But this takes us to further questions. To be imitations, the apocalypses must either be emulating other, "true" apocalypses - and with the passing of time the newer ones become mere literary imitations of a phenomenon that was once alive. It assumes that some apocalyptic texts are a sort of matrix for others, or that the older ones (1En and Dn) show sincere revelatory experiences clumsily imitated later in, e.g. the stereotyped and makeshift character of the visions in GrEzra. To make a forgery one must, of course, have the genuine thing in previous knowledge, which might in turn imply knowledge of mystical experiences¹³.

It could well be that apocalypses emulate not themselves, but try to imitate what we consider different

¹⁰ With all the consequences that this entails, e.g. a social development that allows for a reading public knowledgeable enough to discern between true and false, and possibly willing to spend time and resources on related quests. Cf. Ronald Syme. "Fraud and imposture", Pseud.I, P.15. Cf. also Archer Taylor and Frederick J. Moshel. *The Bibliographical History of Anonyma and Pseudonyma*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951 for a general introduction to the problems related to the study of literary forgeries.

¹¹ It could well be that this notion was only acquired from the Greeks. Cf. Wolfgang Speyer. *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum: ein Versuch ihrer Deutung*. München: Beck, 1971. P.150.

¹² Alfred Gudeman. "Literary frauds among the Romans", TPAPA 25: 140-164, 1894. P.141.

¹³ Syme, op.cit. p.15.



genres - i.e. prophecy and wisdom literature. This relates to the problems of the links between apocalyptic and those genres and reinforces our perception that apocalyptic was never conceived of as a separate genre in our period.

3.2. Intention of fraud

If apocalypses are imitations of something else, then the actual authors must clearly have had either the intention to deceive, or else they were sure that could not fool anyone and that their imitation would immediately be taken for what it was¹⁴. But this question can never be answered definitively, whether it is understood as pious fraud or as plain deception¹⁵.

Speyer has divided pseudepigraphy into three categories, according to the intention of the author: it can either be "serious" (*echte religiöse Pseudepigraphie*), the kind found in a few Jewish apocalypses; false (Christian literature is here) and fictional (i.e. pseudepigrapha written as artistic exercise)¹⁶.

But again this takes us to the question of reception, linked as it is to the intentions of the pseudepigrapher - were those "serious" attempts of borrowing other's names taken seriously? Or were they just literary convention that fooled no one, much in the same fashion that we watch films

¹⁴ The recent thesis of Terry L. Wilder seems to give a lot of attention to the theme, although devoting itself to New Testament pseudonymity. Cf. Terry L. Wilder. "New Testament pseudonymity and deception", TB 50 (1): 156-158, 1999.

¹⁵ Armin D. Baum. *Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung im frühen Christentum: mit ausgewählten Quellentexten samt deutscher Übersetzung*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001. P.84. Others have attributed to the Jews the prejudice of not loving the truth enough to make authorial matters clear in apocrypha: cf. Edmund K. Chambers. *The History and Motives of Literary Forgeries*. Oxford / London: Basil Blackwell / Simpkin / Marshall, 1891. P.13.

¹⁶ Speyer, "Fälschung, pseudepigraphische freie Erfindung", p.340.



or plays knowing that they are fiction?¹⁷ It should be pointed out that, while modern audiences sometimes have difficulty in understanding the difference between fact and fiction, the frontier between them might have been even more blurred in Antiquity¹⁸.

Whatever the intention of the real author was, the term "forgery" carries with it a strong connotation - namely, that the perpetrator is somehow profiting from its deception¹⁹.

A common mistake here is to confuse the attribution of authorship to a famous person for the sake of profit and the ascribing of a text to a mythical character²⁰. In the first case the intention of profit seems clear, at least if we are talking about lay texts; in the second, a wide array of motives can be argued and shall be developed below.

Besides plain profit interest, a very commonly argued motive for pseudepigraphy is that students would be entitled to write in their master's names out of respect. Applied to apocalyptic texts, this idea somehow implies the notion of apocalyptic circles, with masters and disciples that follow their practices, something which cannot be proved to have ever existed. It has often been argued, on

¹⁷ Conrad Gempf. "Pseudonimity and the New Testament", Th. 17: 8-10, 1992. P.8 and Duff, op.cit. p.197. Duff suggests that the little evidence we have shows us that the pseudepigrapha were understood literally, in terms of their attribution.

¹⁸ It is not uncommon to see people familiar with Kardecist texts take them as first-hand reports of thing past or even as historiography, in Brazil - Chico Xavier's book is often understood as the history of what happened to Jesus Christ.

¹⁹ John C. Fenton. "Pseudonimity in the New Testament" in: *Theology* 58: 51-56, 1955. P.55.

²⁰ Felix Jacoby. "Die Überlieferung von Ps Plutarchs Parallela minora und die Schwindelautoren", Mnem. 3 (8): 73-144, 1940. P.73. Another contributing factor would be that the more distant the actual character is in the past, the easier it would seem to attribute writings to him, or even to produce them in his name. The one hundred years after Plato's death and the amount of false epistles attributed to him in the meantime would be proof of that statement. Cf. Reginald Hackforth. *The Authorship of the Platonic Epistles*. Hildesheim: Olms, 1985. P.2.



the basis of a passage from Tertullian (*Adv. Marcion* 4.5), that pseudonymity was even praised in Antiquity, although I cannot infer this from the passage²¹.

Returning to the theme of whether wrong attribution of texts would be naively or critically understood in Antiquity, an important parallel has been raised in the form of the character discourses in historiography²². But here there are two conflicting criteria to ascribe words to the characters - truth on one hand, and adequacy on the other²³. In the most extreme case we have Josephus' narrative of the discourse by Eleazar ben Yair to the defenders of Masada, the last fortress to fall to the Romans. As is well known the *topos* of the defenders who would rather commit suicide than surrender is applied by Josephus in his work - but we should not assume that there is any kind of mystical experience underlying Josephus' narration of their last moments, or that his audience would suppose that there was any such thing at work. Although we cannot apply this reasoning plain and simply to apocalyptic pseudepigraphy, it shows that at least a learned audience would not take at face value literary "false" attribution of discourses to characters. These seem to be a particular case of what appears to have been the usual ancient

²¹ Leslie Mitton. "The authorship of the Epistle to the Ephesians", ET 67: 341-342, 1956 and the reply in the same issue, Donald Guthrie. "Tertullian and pseudonymity", ET 67: 341-342, 1956.. It appears that Tertullian is just linking Mark's and Luke's Evangelists to Peter and Paul, respectively, rather than praising pseudonymity or considering it to be the norm. As we shall see, Tertullian is one key author for our understanding of pseudepigraphy in Antiquity, although removed in terms of time from the world of Jewish apocalyptic.

²² Gudeman, op.cit. p.144-145. It should be pointed out that Latin historians are less outspoken about their intentions regarding the use of such devices possibly because in their time it was so common a device that no one had to be warned about them in the same fashion that Thucydides does in the *History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.22. It is also listed by Metzger as one of the possible reasons for pseudepigraphy, op.cit. pp.5012.

²³ Frank W. Walbank. *Speeches in Greek Historians (The Third J.L. Myres Lecture)*. Oxford: Blackwell, s.d. P.4.



reaction to authorship in the period that concerns us: people were very much interested in attribution and could not consider pseudepigraphy as a normal device²⁴. It appears that a discovered pseudepigraphon, back then as now, would be regarded as a forgery if uncovered²⁵ - which of course does not turn their authors into skilful forgers, but merely successful applicants of the device, when there was no intention of deceiving²⁶.

²⁴ For full discussion on the subject see Duff's thesis and also Gempf, op.cit. p.10.

²⁵ Metzger, op.cit. p.4. The same would hold true, albeit in a very different context, for alterations in text of tragedies - we cannot be sure why people - presumably actors - interpolated them, but to say that these changes intended to deceive the public does not explain anything and shows how complex relations between text and public could be. Cf. Denys L. Page. *Actors' Interpolations in Greek Tragedy: Studied with Special Reference to Euripides' Iphigeneia in Aulis*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934 and Meade, op.cit. p.4.

²⁶ This is a thesis espoused by many and for a long time, the main proponent being Rowley. A last remark on the superficial similarity between apocalyptic and historiography would be that the apocalypticists' interest in history is marked by the use of pseudepigraphy as a privileged viewpoint from which announce ex-eventu prophecies. Cf. John J. Collins. "Pseudonimity, historical reviews, and the genre of the Revelation of John", CBQ 39, 1977. Pp.332-333. This position goes against Von Rad's idea that apocalypticists share non-historical thinking.



4. Ancient testimonies regarding individual cases of religious pseudepigraphy

We have no clear case in Antiquity of someone who was caught in the act of writing an apocalypse in the same of a past, respectable character²⁷.

But we have two late testimonies of reactions, in Christian circles, to people writing in the name of past heroes or saints. For all the time span and different cultural issues they involve, these must be taken with great care, but the scarcity of ancient comment on the matter makes them worthy of our attention. This is not Jewish material, it is later than the period of composition of most Jewish apocalypses, but these two testimonies show with detail how two pseudepigrapha were composed in Christian circles and thus constitute a sort of cross-cultural approach on a smaller scale than the one that permeates this thesis.

It should also be noted that we are dealing with epistolary pseudepigraphy in both cases, and we cannot be sure if the reasoning applied to them is also valid for other types of pseudepigraphy. But they are the closest we can get to first-hand accounts of religious pseudepigraphy in the making, and for this reason they deserve a closer look.

²⁷ Although there is ancient criticism discussing authorship, in a way sometimes similar to our own: see e.g. Pophyry's dating of Daniel or Dionysius' (bishop of Alexandria) remarks about Revelation, that could not be possibly from the same John, author of the Gospel that bears his name. Cf. Eusebius. *Historia ecclesiastica*. 7.25.



4.1. Tertullian

The first one regards Tertullian, who mentions a priest in Asia Minor who was caught as the author of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*²⁸.

And if those women [i.e. who claim the right to baptize] invoke the Acts that mistakenly take the name of Paul, and claim their right to baptize following the example of Thecla, may they learn here: it was a priest of Asia that forged this work, covering so to speak his own authority under that of Paul. Guilty of fraud, he confessed acting this way out of love for Paul and was dismissed.

It is noteworthy that the same Tertullian is often quoted as a naive believer in pseudepigraphy, discussing as he does how Enoch's texts could have survived the Flood (*De cultu feminarum* 1.3.1-3):

*I know very well that some refuse the book of Enoch [...] because the Jews have not admitted it in their collection. They do not believe, I think, that this book composed before the Flood may have been preserved after the disaster that destroyed everything over the Earth. If this is their reasoning, they should remember that Enoch's grandson, Noah, survived the Flood [...] And it is not unlikely that Noah could assume, by his turn, the transmission of the prophecy [...]*²⁹

It must be noted that Tertullian remarks that the forger, no matter how great his love for Paul might have been, was also condemned for issuing heterodox opinions - making a woman baptize, for instance³⁰. Here we have a

²⁸ *De baptismo* 17. Cf. Raymond F. Refoulé (ed.). *Tertulien. Traité du baptême*. Sources chrétiennes. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1952.

²⁹ Marie Turcan (ed.). *Tertulien. La toilette des femmes: (de cultu feminarum)*. Sources chrétiennes. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1971. Pp.57-59.

³⁰ Metzger, *op.cit.* p.14.



clear case where unrest regarding the content of a text goes together with discredit on pseudonimity³¹.

4.2. Salvian of Marseille

The other document is in many ways more fascinating, as it provides a unique insight into something not very common even in our times - a first-person report by a forger caught in the very act of producing a pseudepigraphon, complete with his own defence and, so it appears, an admission of guilt.

All that refers to Salvian of Marseille, a prolific author of late Antiquity who was discovered by Salonius, his ecclesiastical superior, as the author of a spurious letter in the name of Timothy³².

The letter itself is an exhortation to the Church that it abandons riches and goes back to apostolic poverty etc. and begins with Timothy speaking in first person: but Salonius had no difficulty in finding the hand of Salvian on it. Salonius sent a letter to Salvian protesting against the fact that the letter would be taken as coming from Timothy himself, and it is the reply of Salvian that interests us here³³.

Salvian defends himself in a variety of ways and it is impossible to be sure of the sincerity of his arguments, but the ascetic discipline he was renowned for would rule out malice as a first motive. The way he puts his points

³¹ Torm, op.cit. p.119. In contrast, a book with a much more uniform stylistic look as Isaiah was never regarded, in Antiquity, as the work of more than one author. Cf. Bernstein, "Pseudepigraphy in the Qumran Scrolls" cit. by Baum, op.cit. p.63.

³² For Salvian's text, notes and general information of his life cf. Georges Lagarrigue (ed.). *Salvien de Marseille. Oeuvres*. Paris: CERF, 1971. The text we are referring to here was called *Timothei ad Ecclesiam Libri IV*, and is dated around 440 CE.

³³ For general questions on that document, cf. Alfred E. Haefner. "A unique source for the study of ancient pseudonimity", ATR 16: 8-15, 1934.



forward is, nonetheless, surprising. One of the reasons for writing in the name of Timothy is that then

*[...] the document will not be suspected as apocryphal when it is recognized that it is not by the Apostle Timothy [...]*³⁴

Salvian also complains that many people value not the content of a given text, but the prestige attached to the name of its author:

*For in the case of every book we ought to be more concerned about the intrinsic value of its contents than about the name of its author. And therefore, if the book is profitable reading and offers something to edify the reader, what does it matter whether or not it happens to satisfy someone's curiosity about the name of the author?*³⁵

The worry that readers might be more interested in ascribed authorship than in the content itself was present in authors other than Salvian: an interesting remark on it appears in Aulus Gellius *Attic Nights* 11.4, where Euripides - *Hecuba* - and Ennius are quoted on the issue (Ennius having successfully drawn poetic emulation on the former but, not being nearly as renowned, left to obscurity)³⁶. Salvian goes on candidly to say that

For this reason the present writer chose to conceal his identity in every respect for fear that his true name would perhaps detract from the influence of his book, which contains much that is exceedingly valuable. That

³⁴ Idem, p.12.

³⁵ Id. *ibid.* Here, as in Tertullian's testimony we find a characteristic shared by readers of ancient texts suspect of pseudepigraphy and modern Kardecist texts: conformity to the doctrine may be more important than precision regarding authorial issues (cf. above, chapters 2 and 3).

³⁶ John C. Rolfe (ed.). *The Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius*. London / Cambridge, Mass.: Heinemann / Harvard University Press, 1978.



*is the reason - whoever wants to know it - why the pamphlet was published pseudonymously.*³⁷

Among the things that really interested Salonius were both why Salvian used a pseudonym and why Timothy was the one chosen. To the first question we have seen that, by irony or not Salvian claims to be acting out of modesty and at the same time is proud that his text should be read by people that otherwise would not pay attention to it, worried as they were only about authors' names. And Timothy was the name chosen out of reverence for him³⁸. Salvian ends his reasoning by arguing that, having written for the honour of God, the person who led the book to be written in the first place - i.e. Timothy - is its real author³⁹.

A number of striking features should be underlined in the case. First of all, no *unio mystica* is implied: the reasons given by Salvian, no matter how sentimental they may sound, have nothing to do with full spiritual identity, possession-like (indeed it appears that he is more concerned about the final effect of his own pseudepigraphy, namely that people will read a worthy message because it is signed by a worthy name, Timothy). "Timothy" is the author in a very forced sense, that he inspired Salvian in his exhortation on poverty.

The source is non-apocalyptic, non-Jewish and very late but gives us a glimpse of how much authorial attribution had changed since the Old Testament texts - the great majority of which are anonym or pseudonym⁴⁰. With Salvian

³⁷ Idem, p.14.

³⁸ Tertullian's priest was more sanguine in his declarations, but the feeling of attraction towards both Paul and here Timothy seems to be very real in both cases.

³⁹ Haefner, op.cit. p.15.

⁴⁰ For specific questions regarding false documents in late Second Temple Jewish texts, with special emphasis on Josephus and the books of the Maccabees, cf. Hugo Willrich. *Urkundenfälschung in der*



we have a use of pseudonymity quite similar to our own and it illustrates how clarity regarding the authorship of religious texts - to some extent introduced by Christianity - puts pseudonymity and its by-product, pseudepigraphy, far away from the idea of possession by a deceased author, of rapture and automatic writing⁴¹.

hellenistisch-jüdischen Literatur. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1924.

⁴¹ Metzger, op.cit. pp.25-26 and Haefner, op.cit. p.11.



5. Psychological phenomena related to pseudepigraphy

As a first consideration to this topic, it must be taken into consideration that pseudepigraphy does not necessarily involve psychic phenomena - that it *may* do so in some specific varieties is the subject of this thesis but there is never any obligation that it should. Plain fraud, ill- or well-intended, or just satire, are important motives as well.

It has been stated that investigation into psychological aspects take the researcher unnecessarily away from literary questions, easier to observe and more concrete⁴². But if literary questioning is a better means of dealing with ASC-inducing issues, we would by now have come to definite conclusions, given the enormous amount of translations and commentary on most apocalypses. That they have not led to useful insights into the question underlines the purposefulness of the psychological approach.

German theories have had a penchant for the psychological approach - we must only remember those of Sint, Torm and Speyer. Besides these authors one must not forget Russell's use of the "corporate personality" apparatus. The quoted authors all link oracular or ecstatic identification to pseudonymity, in religious texts⁴³. But here again there is no internal evidence that the actual authors were in fact possessed by the declared names they use⁴⁴.

⁴² Lewis Donelson. *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles*. Tübingen: Mohr, 1986. Pp.8-9. Cf. also Karl M. Fischer. "Anmerkungen zur Pseudepigraphie im Neuen Testament", NTS 23: 76-81, 1977. P.78.

⁴³ Meade, op.cit. p.7.

⁴⁴ Smith, "Pseudepigraphy on the Israelite literary tradition", p.371 in response to Speyer's proposition.



However, the dismissal of the link between first-hand mystical rapture and pseudonymity on the grounds that, if the actual authors had wished to they would have written under their own names⁴⁵ I find it impossible to sustain on logical grounds - for it constitutes a mere turning around of the question, with no further reasoning implied. Why they used others' names is precisely that what we want to know: to repeat the question as Morton Smith does adds nothing. There are, besides, several options as to why they did not write in their own names.

It has already been pointed out that the authority of the apocalypticists' message was more important than their own claims to authority: it is for that content that the actual authors seek authority, not for themselves⁴⁶. It may even be argued that the sanity of the actual authors is to be doubted, at least in modern terms; it could also be that the actual writers would expect revelations to come from the privileged relation with the figure in whose name they write⁴⁷.

The idea that not only deities' utterances but also their written form are both divine is indeed quite old. We find it already in Plato (*Timaeus* 72) and Plutarch (*On the Pythian Oracle* 397c)⁴⁸. Even if apocalyptic texts are the product of "schools" of visionaries, one instigating another and revising the text to some extent, we would only have a variation of the same idea, namely that it was precisely the mystical experience that led the actual writer to sign in someone else's name. But our lack of knowledge about ancient man's psychology impairs us of

⁴⁵ Meade, op.cit. p.9.

⁴⁶ Collins, "Inspiration or illusion", p.31.

⁴⁷ Aland, op.cit. pp.20-21. If so, this is remarkably close to the Kardecist parallel.

⁴⁸ Duff, op.cit. p.152.



ascertaining if this is an artificial authority device or genuine experience, our main point of debate⁴⁹.

But here again parallels can enlighten us to the answer. Although a recent idea, even poetic inspiration was regarded in ancient Pagan circles as involving some sort of ASC⁵⁰. Here too inspiration and its written output depend, to a great extent, on very hard work - in other words, of training⁵¹. Even if pseudepigraphy were treated as just another formal literary element⁵², the experiences described and their outcome are clearly truthful (in itself not proof that the experiences were first-hand, but they cannot be dismissed as forgeries any easier because of that).

To come to the idea that this experience, authentic but covered by the cloak of pseudonymity, is sincere two different paths have been offered: on the first, the writer is a vehicle for the spirit of God, the Holy Spirit or an apostle (an explanation more suited to New Testament pseudepigrapha than to the ones we are dealing with)⁵³; but parallels to the prophets are also possible, and to a writer working under these mystical conditions the image of a dictate of divine voice being heard can be very real⁵⁴.

⁴⁹ Even an observer sympathetic to this idea as Duff is ready to point out that difficulty on ancient man's psychology.

⁵⁰ The idea does not seem to be older than the Fifth century BCE - thus it can be ascribed either as a post fact fabrication of Plato and others to explain and give shape to a theory of artistic inspiration, or it could be the result of the development of abstract thought used to explain a phenomenon much more ancient. Cf. Penelope Murray. "Poetic inspiration in Early Greece", JHS 101: 87-100, 1981. P.87.

⁵¹ This takes us back to the old theme of the literary *topoi* and the stereotyped character of apocalyptic visions - the amount of immersion in study and exegesis would account for that without rendering it false. Cf. Murray, op.cit. p.88.

⁵² Just like the taste for symbolic numbers and animals. Cf. Josef A. Sint. *Pseudonymität im Altertum; ihre Formen und ihre Gründe*. Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 1960. P.77.

⁵³ Aland, op.cit. pp.30-31.

⁵⁴ Wolfgang Speyer. "Fälschung, pseudepigraphische freie Erfindung und 'echte religiöse Pseudepigraphie'", Pseud.I, pp.337; 339-340. In these



As Torm put it, this is the semi-darkness of the subconscious at work⁵⁵.

This semi-darkness can well come to the surface via automatic writing - for which we have a fair amount of research completed and actual observation of the process is possible. There is no way of getting hard-proof on these assumptions, although I must stress that something can be said about the matter by means of cross-cultural comparison.

In the end, there is no parallel in the Old Testament to the idea of mystical union of an actual writer with the declared author⁵⁶; if this did indeed happen the texts themselves are all that was left of the process. The amount of information they convey to mystical processes does not mean that all the surviving apocalypses are the result of ecstatic experiences⁵⁷: in the most obvious cases - like GrEzra or the addendum in the Syriac text of 4Ezra - it is possible to devise a cruder emulation of first-experience report, but the same cannot be said about the most

cases, as seen above, Speyer talks about "serious religious pseudepigraphy". An idea raised by Speyer to be developed fully in the conclusion to this thesis is how much this involves autosuggestion. Cf. also Baum, *op.cit.* pp.14-15.

⁵⁵ Torm, *op.cit.* p.125. The suggestion of Torm regards sibylline and hermetic texts but could be extended to apocalyptic as well. There is one important difference however - visionaries drawing on orphic, hermetic or sibylline material had a source to draw from, whereas the author of Daniel had nothing of the kind to hand, so says Torm (*op.cit.* p.120). This does not seem altogether correct, since that author did draw on Jeremiah and Ezekiel; the actual writer would also be identifying himself with a known past character like Daniel, if psychological experience plays a role here.

⁵⁶ Baum, *op.cit.* p.71. The idea that experiences occurred in the "life and times" span of, say, 1En make first-person accounts of mystical experiences impossible, according to Baum (*op.cit.* p.88), but this does not seem to be true in the light of automatic writing - a practice that places claims regarding experiences shared with past or mythical characters at its very core. The passage of 2Chr 12:21 remains problematic, as we saw above.

⁵⁷ Duff, *op.cit.* p.196.



significant apocalypses for our purpose (1En, Dn, 2Br and 4Ezra)⁵⁸.

⁵⁸ A last case worthy of examination in Antiquity, but that deserves at least a mention in passing, is that of the Syracusan doctor Menecrates (+-390 BCE), who allegedly identified himself with Zeus while being "the only cause of life to men". Cf. Speyer, "Fälschung, pseudepigraphische freie Erfindung", p.346. Cf. also Plutarch, *Life of Agesilaus*. 21.5 and Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks*. 4.48. Plutarch condemns Menecrates' use of the epithet "Zeus" - in a letter to Agesilaus - on the grounds of bad taste, but does not enter into details about how much Menecrates himself believed in that identification.



6. Authorial ascribing, orthodoxy and wisdom

A last important aspect regarding the ancient reader's regard for pseudepigraphy in religious context deals with the orthodoxy of writings. At least to primitive Christians it appears that it was more important to know whether a text was inspired than about its actual authorship⁵⁹, that an author's individuality is less important than the authority of his message⁶⁰. This emphasis on doctrinal correction provides an interesting parallel to Kardecism.

This reasoning leads to the idea that in Antiquity literary correction of a religious book was defined not by its authorship, but rather by its content - i.e. a text would be considered false when its content could not be somehow ascribed to the alleged author⁶¹.

However, this raises a number of issues. First of all, it assumes that pseudonymous authorship has to be measured against an original. This would hold true for most apocalypses, but not for the most important one, Daniel⁶². It also makes one think whether 1En can be considered an

⁵⁹ Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung*, p.151.

⁶⁰ Echoing again Collins' reasoning about apocalyptic pseudonymity not being a security device for authors, since it does not add to their authority - which they did not appear to be seeking anyway - but rather to their message, as stated above. Cf. Jean Gribomont. "De la notion de 'Faux' en littérature populaire", Bib. 54: 434-436, 1973. P.435, Eduard Verhoef. "Pseudepigraphy and canon", BN 106: 90-98, 2001. P.91, Metzger, op.cit. p.19 and Meade, op.cit. p.91, who claims that the attribution of Daniel is primarily a claim to authoritative tradition, not to literary origins.

⁶¹ Baum, op.cit. pp.3-4.

⁶² The remains at Qumran point to the direction that there once existed a much bigger Daniel cycle that included texts in his name other than the extant apocalypse - the same being possible for the medieval texts bearing his name. But the fragmentary state of the evidence and the fact that these had a much smaller circulation, plus the dating problems involved, make us think that it would be impossible to posit an "original" Daniel from which pseudonymous texts rise. Examples of texts found in Qumran pointing to Daniel are 4Q243-245, while 4Q242, 4Q552-553 and 4Q246, although not mentioning Daniel's name, all draw on themes related to him. Another example is the Ninth-century Byzantine *Apocalypse of Daniel* (cf. OTP 1, pp.755 ff.).



"original" in any sense⁶³; neither would an immensely popular character like Elijah have an "original" to be measured against. The reasoning also takes us to the problem of the closing of the canon of the Old Testament - it seems that ascribing "originals" makes sense only if they could be regarded as canonical as compared to other texts.

There is no hard proof for any of these matters in Jewish apocalypses, but again looking at Salvian we have a (much later) parallel showing us that even when theological orthodoxy could be ascertained (as is the case in his 3Tm) texts could be rejected on authorial grounds. After all Salonius went straight after him and, from the testimony left, orthodoxy did not play a role in making him any more lenient towards his former master Salvian - although it constituted part of the latter's own defence⁶⁴.

This does not mean that the same reasoning would hold true for Jewish texts - among the many differences an important one is that apocalypses were quantitatively more common in Jewish circles than in Christian ones⁶⁵.

Finally, an alternative to the idea of direct contact with the portrayed hero as a means to explaining pseudepigraphy is Meade's thesis linking authorship to tradition. His hypothesis deals not with apocalyptic as a

⁶³ That 1En, together with Dn, constitutes a "matrix" for description of mystical experiences is something quite different and takes us again to the idea that stereotypy does not necessarily imply deception, and that the matrix would shape the form of the visionary's experience but cannot be regarded as the experience itself.

⁶⁴ Baum, op.cit. p.112. It was a different case with Tertullian, where both the discovery of the fraud and heterodoxy played a role in disqualifying the *Acts of Paul*.

⁶⁵ To be more precise, it means that although most of the extant OT apocalypses were preserved by Christians they were mostly written by Jews, interpolations excluded. The popularity of the letter genre in Christian circles is also to be noted here. Cf. Smith, op.cit. p.213.



whole but rather deals with the most important apocalypses, Dn and 1En⁶⁶.

His argument runs by saying that the predicative nature of a great deal of apocalyptic writing lends itself to immediate comparison to prophecy, and it could well be that, not being regarded as a separate genre in Antiquity, apocalyptic texts were taken to be prophetic books. But Meade calls attention to the fact that the portrayed heroes are never called to prophesize, but they are called scribes or sages (e.g. Dn 1:4; 1:17-20; 2:23 etc.; 1En 12:4; 92:1; 4Ezra 14:50 Syriac version; 14:40; 4:22; 5:22; 2Br 38:4; 50:1). The elect are often referred to as sages (Dn 12:3; 1En 104:12; 4Ezra 14:47; 8:51-52; 2Br 28:1; 14:5 etc.). Their message itself is called "wisdom" (Dn 2:20; 9:22; 1En 37:1; 82:2-3; 92:1; 4Ezra 14:47; 8:4; 2Br 14:9; 51:3, 7)⁶⁷, and it is directed to the group of the wise⁶⁸.

All this points to the idea that in Jewish circles pseudonymity was used not in prophetic, but rather in sapiential contexts⁶⁹. This idea is further reinforced by the question of a wisdom text such as Proverbs - "Who climbed up to Heaven?" (Pr 30:4). To this question the apocalypticists would answer, "me" (e.g. 1En 14:8)⁷⁰. Meade calls this recourse - not to be taken as a mere authority-gaining device - "higher wisdom" and it would work as a kind of updating of wisdom lore⁷¹. In broader terms, Meade's thesis is about linking pseudepigraphy to Jewish

⁶⁶ Meade, op.cit. p.73.

⁶⁷ Idem, p.75.

⁶⁸ Idem, p.83.

⁶⁹ Idem, p.76. Again this does not mean that readers would consider the texts as sapiential rather than prophetic: Josephus is the classical example, in his treatment of Daniel in the *Jewish Antiquities*. Cf. also Amos Wilder. "The rhetoric of ancient and modern apocalyptic", *Interp.* 25 (1971). P.446.

⁷⁰ Meade, op.cit. p.77 and the critic by Baum, op.cit. p.73.

⁷¹ Id. *ibid.*



authorial tradition on one hand, and to "higher wisdom" on the other.

But this raises a number of issues as well. The fact that Jewish tradition was familiar with the concept of pseudonymity does not explain its use except in tautological terms: ancient apocalypticists wrote pseudepigraphically because that is the way they knew, a very poor argument. It also does not account for the choosing of the names - and this question is, maybe, the most difficult one to answer regarding apocalyptic pseudepigraphy. Lastly, the recourse to "higher wisdom" only covers the experimental dimension issues of our discussion: regarding themselves as wise or as new prophets, did the apocalypticists really experience something like an ASC and, if so, was this experience translated into pseudepigraphy which would then be a case of automatic writing?

To say that a form of wisdom, or of updated wisdom plays any part here is not an answer, but rather another aspect of the apocalypticists' guise to be taken into consideration. What is beyond doubt is that pseudepigraphy would have brought verisimilitude before the eyes of many ancient readers, whether this was intended or not. Verisimilitude on their described experiences cannot demonstrate truth, in any case⁷².

⁷² Duff, *op.cit.* pp.187-190.



7. Summary

The main issues discussed in this chapter can be summarized below:

1. The survey of pseudepigraphed names in Jewish apocalyptic literature shows no predominance of one category over any other. Variety is great and we find prophets, patriarchs and other types being chosen, with no preponderance of one type against the others.

2. Certain genres are especially ascribed to certain characters - the Law to Moses, wisdom to Solomon. The same cannot be said about apocalyptic (possibly because it was not regarded as a separate genre in Antiquity). It should be noted that Enoch and Ezra are leading figures among the portrayed heroes.

3. To think that apocalypses are imitations presupposes originals to be imitated. This cannot be proved in the cases of Daniel or Enoch, and even to Baruch and Ezra their "originals" look quite different to the pseudepigrapha bearing their names. A variant of this idea is that, while it is hard to show the existence of "originals", some texts may constitute a matrix for later ones - this could be the case with Dn and 1En.

4. Imitating originals or following a reestablished matrix, the actual authors must have had either the intention to deceive or else took for granted that their device would not fool anyone.

5. Apocalyptic writers might have chosen pseudepigraphy out of respect for ancient masters (a variant of the idea that apocalyptic was the product of "circles" especially devoted to it). But this proposition, together with the supposed "circles", cannot be proved.



6. An important parallel to the boundaries between fictive authorship and truthfulness is provided by analysis of characters' speeches in ancient historiography.

7. The best testimonies we have for difficulties arising from pseudepigraphy are those of Tertullian and Salvian. But both are late and refer to Christian matters, at a time when the idea of proper literary attribution was much more developed than in late Second Temple Judaism.

8. In Christian circles, authorial attribution - although important - appears to be strongly linked to orthodoxy, as the testimony of Tertullian shows us. But it is not the only way of dealing with the phenomenon, as Salvian's argument shows. In Jewish circles, this link with orthodoxy may be related to the non-sectarian character of the text of Dn as opposed to 1En.

9. Linking apocalyptic pseudepigraphy to "higher wisdom" rather than prophecy does not answer the fundamental question of the link between pseudepigraphy and mystical experience. It only shows that apocalyptic writers regarded themselves and their audience as closer to sapiential than to prophetic lore, but this does not account for the truthful mystical experiences described - unless we assume that recourse to wisdom meant ecstatic practices as they appear in the apocalypses, something highly unlikely and devoid of parallels in sapiential literature itself.



CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

1. Summary and assessment of the thesis

It has been my intent throughout the thesis to look for evidence of sincere mystical experiences in apocalyptic texts, and to do so exploring one of many possible paths - that of the possibility of the actual, mechanical writer identifying himself with the portrayed hero. Since evidence on this possibility is virtually non-existent in the sources themselves, I have come to cross-cultural comparison in order to measure this possibility against the background of a modern-day experience - that of Kardecism - , where actual identification with another character, famous or obscure, is not just possible but desired and advertised. It is time to look at the conclusions yielded by this attempt.

In part 2 of this chapter we will examine arguments supportive of the sincerity of the experiences described by the apocalyptic seers, in part 3 we will see arguments against it.



2. Arguments supportive of actual identification between mechanical writer and apocalyptic visionary

2.1. Effects described

One way to assess the truthfulness of the visionary experiences described in apocalyptic passages is by means of comparing them to descriptions of ASCs related to the symptoms described, another to compare the latter descriptions to what is known about Kardecists' aftereffects.

Beginning with the latter, it must be stated that the specific effects described by Chico Xavier are nowhere to be found in apocalyptic passages (e.g. the electricity flowing through the arms)¹. On the other hand, the compulsion to write (automatically) has many parallels. Chico Xavier very often stated that he felt the need to write whenever he was awake, and that he had to discipline this: the last passages of 4Ezra related to the writing of the 94 books day and night offer a parallel that can be considered as a compulsion to act. The remaining effects, to be discussed below, are too vague (although this does not mean that they are false) to provide a precise equivalent (i.e. the aftereffects exhibited in apocalyptic passages in most cases follow the same pattern of awe because of the presence of a spiritual being), but should not be dismissed on the side of the arguments against the authenticity of the experiences. They can be considered as vague because other ASC-inducing practices not related to automatic writing can produce them (other practices such as

¹ Cf. above, p.96.



dancing can generate ASCs without any written text coming out as a result of this experience).

The passages where apocalyptic authors describe the pleasing or negative effects of the experiences they have undergone are very widespread. Indeed, some symptoms - deep sleep (Dn 10:9), fear (4Ezra 12:3 etc.) and the fantastic imagery described (Dn 2, 7, 4Ezra 4:48 etc.) are in themselves to be found in Kardecist visionary processes, not to mention in clinically observed individuals². A note of truthfulness is attached to them, although this may surely be part of a deception plan from the part of the mechanical author.

But all this does not mean that the experiences described are first-hand, much less that they did indeed take place. The mechanical writers of the apocalypses were obviously acquainted with reports on them, but these reports constitute a blind alley for our purposes - we cannot be sure if what is described took place with anyone or not³. But it must be assumed that the effects described are possible on the basis of independent evidence, and no compelling counter-evidence is present (i.e. there is no report on apocalyptic experiences such as those of Lucian about Alexander's tricks with the snake, for example), and all this should be put on the side of pros and not cons regarding the sincerity of the experiences described. Apocalyptic writers knew what effects they were writing about, although these constitute in themselves *topoi* - i.e. everyone involved knew what to expect from a given vision, but this is a common feature of mystics of all times and does not imply deception. In fact conformation to

² Cf. Hearne, op.cit and Green, "Hypnotizability", p.69.

³ I mean that the experiences might have been lived by a person, rather than implying that what the visionaries describe is true or false in an empirical sense.



certain commonplaces is a guarantee of the cultural validity of the experience in question.

From the point of view of Kardecist experience, the effects described in apocalyptic visionary episodes in many cases match what has been surveyed in modern mediums. Also, the presence of a guiding entity such as the angel in 4Ezra, leading the dumb human who cannot understand God's ways, would find a parallel in Emmanuel's and André Luiz' guidance of Chico Xavier. In the case of the apocalyptic visionary, much as in that of the Kardecist medium, the enlightenment process equals the theological issues of the mechanical writer's own times: e.g. in 4Ezra the puzzling nonsense of the destruction of the Temple is the main conducting line, in Xavier's case the most pressing theme being the need for conciliation between Christian ethics and scientific development.

The presence of fantastic imagery in apocalyptic visions, when compared to data from modern-day mystics, would show the same apparent tendency described in chapter 3 as FPP⁴. Both see things uncommon to others, both live in a world populated by fantastic beings, and both appear dissatisfied with a purely ethical religious conception. And yet we cannot affirm that apocalyptic visionaries were FPPs, given the fact that the very concept of FPP is deeply rooted in the cultural meanings and conceptions of our own time - like any other concept. Even FPPs act according to cultural *topoi* - we do not find FPP candidates in Antiquity claiming to have been abducted by flying saucers, for example.

This means that what would be considered as a typical FPP case in our own time might not have been so two thousand years ago. The limits between what was considered

⁴ Bartholomew, op.cit. p.216; Wilson and Barber, op.cit. p.346 ff.



fanciful or fantastic have changed and although apocalyptic imagery fits FPP's description looking back in hindsight, we cannot be sure that they would have been considered abnormal or fantasy-prone people in their own time. But in any case the effects and visions described do fit our own conception of what contemporary fantasy-prone personalities do.

Religious experience may be regarded as non-reducible to psychological observations, but this is better understood in relation to their cultural meaning: if we are dealing with, say, the same alkaloid, it is reasonable to infer that the same chemical inducement will produce the same chemical effects. However, it is not reasonable to assume that descriptions of experiences should be the same, or that the cultural meaning should be identical. As will be seen in the appendix, it is culture that changes, not chemistry. The same reasoning can be applied to means other than chemical to induce ASCs, like fasting, praying, mourning etc. What remains different is what the visionaries are able to see, not the fact that these means grant visions. The effects of their experiences can thus be described in psychological terms without any risk of diminishing the sincerity of the experience in question.

2.2. Choosing of names

The names chosen in Jewish apocalyptic texts as putative authors would be further proof of the link between mystic experience and pseudepigraphy: one cannot imagine 2Br ascribed to Moses, or 1En to Ezra. Sometimes insertions are made as to make one tradition resemble another: this happens in the very end of the Syriac mss of 4Ezra, which



affirms that the visionary had an otherworldly experience in the manner of Enoch⁵.

As we discussed above⁶, wisdom was ascribed to Salomon, legislation to Moses. Texts equating First or Second-Centuries socio-political turmoil to the Exile are also appropriately ascribed to Ezra and Baruch: the special features of Enoch described in Gn 5:18-24 give rise to a complete cycle of stories regarding the otherworldly experiences of this character. Were we to deal with actual possession, the spirits taking hold of the mechanical writers could hardly be more fitting. This argues against pseudepigraphy being a mere literary *topos* of the kind found in the quoted last versions of 4Ezra in the Syriac version - where the experience described could easily be interchanged with any other past or mythical character.

The same feature occurs in Kardecist texts - the works by Emmanuel have a distinctly humanistic overtone, those of André Luiz are closer to medical or biological expositions. Obviously these two overlap from work to work, but here too the choosing of names is far from gratuitous - "historical" pieces fitting to one spirit, "medical" ones to another. This argues for the logic of the arrangement of themes in mystical authors (with the important difference that in the case of Kardecism, specially of Chico Xavier, we are dealing with a highly homogenous literary corpus (in fact composed, or automatically written, by one person alone) while apocalyptic literature comprises an astonishing variety of themes, settings etc.).

⁵ Cf. the verses inserted after 4Ezra 14 in the Syriac version, "caught up, and taken to the place of those who are like him, after he had written all these things [...]". The passage looks very artificial in the light of all the episodes related to the visionary in 4Ezra, and does not appear to describe a sincere experience at all given that no heavenly journey is implied in any other passage of the book.

⁶ Cf. above, chapter 6.



In the case of Kardecism, it must be stressed that there is almost always equivalence between the degree of evolution of the spirit and that of the receiving medium: although personally the medium may be ignorant of a variety of themes on which the spirit discourses, a minimum of adequacy is always assumed. So it is that although Xavier can be rightly considered as less learned than the spirits he claims to receive, he cannot be considered as "base" on those grounds alone⁷.

With a different approach, we have seen in Anita Mühl's analysis that, given the way she supposes memory to work, it is no surprise that almost anything may come out of anybody⁸. If these assumptions regarding memory recall are correct, differences in the degree of formal education between spirit and medium are rendered even more irrelevant⁹.

It remains to be investigated if, as appears in other religions (in Afro-Brazilian cults for example) there is any difference in the ASC as related to the entity in question: from what could be investigated in Kardecist experience, this is not the case (there is no evidence or report that the ASC related to the presence of Emmanuel was

⁷ Although Chico Xavier, like any other medium, could on occasion be possessed by very base spirits, such as the lustful friars or the corrupt judges seen on the report on his vacations. Cf. above, chapter 2.

⁸ Mühl, *Automatic Writing*, p.10.

⁹ It is interesting to note that the spirits received by Chico Xavier, regardless of the sophistication of their degree of knowledge, are always fitting to the purposes of his own life and preaching. They fall into definite categories: 1- Spirits that confirm and approve the Kardecist message, e.g. Emmanuel; 2- Spirits that look disoriented in the light of what they have found in the world beyond (deceased priests, the Portuguese writer Eça de Queiroz, Humberto de Campos); 3- Spirits that, in their revolt and lack of understanding, confirm the Kardecist assumption regarding the need of brotherly love to promote evolution (e.g. the killed slave in Xavier's vacation, the French ex-bonapartist). Taken together, all of them act in unison in confirming the basic tenets of Kardecism, even when outwardly some of them seem to oppose it.



in any sense different to that related to André Luiz)¹⁰. By the same token, there is no major difference in ASCs or their effects as described in apocalyptic texts ascribed to one putative author or another.

2.3. Parallels in other identification-type mystical experiences

Here we should take into consideration 2 different aspects of the problem: first, the role of auto-suggestion in the experiences described; secondly, the marginal role that ASCs, such as the ones we are dealing with, play inside the social group to which the visionaries belong.

1. Identity by means of auto-suggestion, in turn made possible by the complete and permanent absorption into a given mental framework (in our case, that of Biblical studies) is more than a guess: Biblical texts and pseudepigrapha alike are full of exhortations to it. This full-scale absorption could easily lead to an ASC that is not necessarily mystical: everyone has at times felt different when in a state of heightened awareness or concentration. But at the same time this ASC, apparently non-religious at first sight, can lead to visionary experiences or to ASCs that resemble these experiences¹¹. It is then the cultural setting and expectations that make an ASC-like experience be regarded as mystical or not.

¹⁰ This is an interesting feature in classical prophecy - the ecstasies of each prophet sometimes varying considerably. One needs only to think about the differences between the comparative calm of First Isaiah, the fears of Jeremiah and the almost surreal descriptions of Ezekiel's experiences. But here we are dealing with authorial, first-hand experiences, and in the very different context of pre-Exilic or Exilic setting. Cf. André, op.cit. p.190 ff.

¹¹ Ludwig, op.cit. p.18 ff. Cf. also Jason Gardner. "From a Christian perspective can the use of drugs for recreation and worship ever be justified?" Electronic source. 2003. P.10 ff. for analysis on ASCs related to dance culture in the Eighties in reports that use religious imagery and terminology.



It seems definite that, inasmuch as auto-suggestion is linked to self-hypnosis (and the latter is known to play such an important role in Kardecist ASCs - cf. all the analysis in chapter 3 and the outspokenness of Emmanuel regarding the way self-hypnosis is important for psychography, at least in the case of Chico Xavier), it is crucial for understanding how PT comes into being in a given group, or how individual mystics consider themselves to be other people, or pretend to incarnate them sincerely. Again it must be stressed that, for this channel of self-suggestion to be a viable proposition, PTs must be a viable option in the society we are examining¹². And this is very much debatable in the case of Second Temple Judaism, as we saw in chapter 4.

2. To dismiss pseudepigraphy as having nothing to do with actual possession by considering it an altogether marginal experience in a given group does nothing to effectively deny the possibility of mystical authorial attribution of texts. To-day possessional experiences like those of Kardecism discussed throughout this thesis are non-mainstream in Brazilian society and it could well be that in Antiquity their position would be similar (i.e. those experiences could, in theory, be as marginal to Jewish apocalyptic writers as they are to us). That this may effectively have been so is an altogether different matter which shall be discussed in the section against sincerity of pseudepigraphic experience, below. Epistolary religious pseudepigraphy may have followed the same pattern but, as said before, this will not be dealt with here for it would lead us too far away from the main issue. In short, marginality is not, in itself, an argument against

¹² Bourguignon, *Religion*, p.10.



the sincerity of the experience (although it may contribute to prejudice against it in mainstream religious circles).

2.4. Parallels in other identification-type non-mystical experiences

Experiences related to past-lives therapy have much in common to Kardecist trance (indeed the very idea of reincarnation is the cornerstone of this kind of treatment) and yet it can be argued that even if the premises are false and that there is no such thing as another life, still the mere act of engaging inside one self and talking about past-lives experiences has a therapeutical value¹³.

In this sense it can be argued that, *for modern experiences*, one needs not buy the whole theology of reincarnation in any of its guises - Kardecism is only one possibility here - to understand a past-life experience. In this fashion, experiences such as those of Xavier's holidays need not be linked to the real existence of real past characters - what the mystic was putting forward can be understood as sombre aspects of his own psychological functioning, which include, as we have seen, criminal stories and sexually polymorphic identities¹⁴.

Should this be possible to Jewish apocalyptic writers - i.e. to have an experience so profound as to make them feel like the hero under whose name the text is being written - it would overcome one of the major difficulties in ascribing authenticity to pseudepigraphy in the light of modern experiences, namely the immense theological gap regarding past lives, manipulating of the dead and reincarnation. But on the other hand there is no hint, either in our sources, or in the passages by Josephus and

¹³ Landers, op.cit. pp.17-20.

¹⁴ Mühl, "Automatic writing", p.168.



Talmudic sources, that the immense and complete absorption into Biblical lore has effectively led anyone into a trance-like state¹⁵.

In any case the freedom from absolute categories like Heaven and Hell associated to the belief in reincarnation fits much better with such a high degree of spirit manipulation: as Chico Xavier himself once put it, "the telephone only rings from the beyond to us, not the other way round"¹⁶. By this comparison he was really meaning, in his own terms, that communicating with spirits is independent of propitiatory practices (although we have seen in other stances that he, like other mediums, adopted them even if in mild forms).

2.5. Unmatching styles

Both in the case of Jewish apocalypses and in that of many Kardecist texts the end-result (i.e. the final text) does not match what would stylistically be expected from the "original" author. It is true that some messages from the beyond have the flavour of their originals (notably the poetry in *Parnaso de além-túmulo* and that related to the Humberto de Campos' legal suit), but the bulk of Xavier's output (books from Emmanuel and André Luiz) does not match supposed originals, does not have the intention of

¹⁵ For the record, it would possibly lead to what psychologists call "flow-state", a mode of partial detachment from reality because of the subject's involvement in a pleasant and meaningful activity, which can be anything from reading books to painting or practicing sports. This is obviously an ASC where the notion of time becomes different and the relations to the world acquire at least momentarily another meaning. It has also been experienced by almost anyone regardless of mystic inclinations and lies behind writers of all times, apocalyptic or not. But it does not follow that the "flow-state" entails possession or the identification of the self with another person (although flow-state and PT share, to some extent, the same symptoms of detachment from immediate reality). Cf. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. *Finding Flow: the Psychology of Engagement in Everyday Life*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.

¹⁶ Souto Maior, op.cit. p.152.



imitating anyone or is composed in a way that makes it pointless trying to find parallels in "originals". This is specially true of *Há 2.000 anos...*, which never had the intention of imitating the Gospels; by the same token, although many of the books from the André Luiz series can be portrayed as modern-day apocalypses they do not manifest any intention of imitating Revelation or Daniel (texts with which Chico Xavier was acquainted).

And yet in a sense these texts share a common heritage of knowledge, that is very frequently read by their public in terms of their matrixes: although there is no claim to holiness in *Há 2.000 anos...*, a great deal of people read the book as if it was a historiographical work on the life and times of Jesus. How naive readers of past times regarding apocalypses were remains an open question.

By the same reasoning, when ancient Jewish authors wanted something to look old they would produce something like, say, the *Temple Scroll* from Qumran, and not write in modern languages pretending to emulate "lost" Hebrew originals¹⁷. The anachronism involved in this process, arguing against a theory of mere deliberate deception, would prove indeed that apocalyptic authors knew from the start that no-one would consider their revelation to be contemporary to the portrayed heroes, much as the modern day reader, regardless of the faith he devotes to Kardecism, accepts *Há 2.000 anos atrás...* as a product of Chico Xavier's capacity as medium rather than a kind of non-canonical Gospel. That the contents should be considered as referring to past times (and as such constitute excellent examples of *ex-eventu* prophecies) is a different matter: we are discussing possible ways of dealing with the putative authorship issue.

¹⁷ Stone, "Apocalyptic - vision or hallucination?", p.425.



3. Arguments against actual identification between mechanical writer and apocalyptic visionary

3.1. Vagueness of the essential link, reincarnation and manipulating of the dead

The first and major objection against pseudepigraphy as constituting part of the mystical experiences described in Jewish apocalypses is that the most essential link to make manipulation of spirits and deliberate possession by them possible (what Kardecist automatic writing is all about) is rather vague. In fact, manipulation of spirits and all the issues related to reincarnation were all marginal in Jewish thought until very late for our purposes¹⁸.

It could be argued that in a cross-cultural study such as this one, these differences should not matter. But they do for the reason that, regardless of the fact that the final outcome may be similar - a text written more or less convincingly under the name of a mythical or past author - the paths taken to reach this will be incompatible given structural differences of this sort. I would even argue that cross-cultural analysis takes us to the conclusion above by means of examining these impossibilities.

It has been seen above that it could be that reincarnationists are behind Origen's discussions in Antiquity, and even that St. Paul's experiences may be read under the light of reincarnationist assumptions¹⁹. But then two things should be taken into consideration:

¹⁸ Cf. above and Eylon, *op.cit. passim*. It can always be argued that interdictions only make sense if practices are current - i.e. if manipulating of spirits was not standard practice in pre-Exilic times there would be no need for forbidding it. That the same practices persisted in late Second Temple period is more doubtful.

¹⁹ Cf. above, pp.191 ff.



1. Even if Paul thought himself to be the reincarnation of Christ, and if Origen was discussing with non-heathen circles - two highly debatable affirmations, to say the least -, they are definitely not dealing with Jewish groups who composed apocalypses. Origen is particular is arguing with Pagan thought founded on Pythagorean and Platonist doctrines.

2. That Jewish authors in the late Second Temple period were acquainted with the idea of reincarnation has been shown above²⁰. This familiarity includes not only Talmudic sources (where the evidence is faint and confused) but also Josephus (where the ascribing of the belief in reincarnation to the Pharisees looks bizarre but the vocabulary looks correct in comparison to its Greek sources). However, it is not to be found directly in any apocalyptic text where more traditional beliefs regarding resurrection and afterlife are current²¹.

For these two reasons it appears to me that to stretch evidence beyond this point and assume that Jewish apocalypticists effectively knew well the doctrine of reincarnation, that this entailed the deliberate evoking and manipulating of the spirits of the dead under whose names the apocalypses were written and that all that propitiated sincere mystical experiences is excessive. That literary authorial activity may involve ASCs like the flow-state does not equate it to PT, much less would it imply channeling messages from spiritual sources.

On the matter, Josephus' testimony is not to be discarded: his wording echoes unequivocally themes and concepts of mainstream Greek thought on reincarnation (i.e.

²⁰ Cf. above, pp.176 ff.

²¹ This argument would take us again to the point emphasized in chapter 5, namely that resurrection might be the Jewish mode of thinking about reincarnation.



Pythagoreanism and Platonism), but that this precise vocabulary equals precise knowledge of the subject remains doubtful. When Josephus insists on reincarnation in one body alone, he is closer in content to doctrines such as that of Dn 12 than to Greek metempsychosis. To this should be added the uniqueness of Josephus' ascribing the belief in reincarnation to the Pharisees: this is the word he uses, but again he is most likely thinking about belief in resurrection, i.e. one "reincarnation" in one body only.

From the idea of reincarnation as understood in Greek terms follows a comparative freedom of acting and manipulating of spirits, as seen in Seneca's passage discussed in chapter 4. Fixed categories of Heaven or Hell, together with theological interdictions, limit or forbid the coming and going of spiritual beings and messages so essential to any kind of spiritually-oriented automatic writing. In short, communicating with the dead, not being easy nor recommended, is an essential part of Kardecist psychographical practice virtually in late Second Temple evidence: only Josephus provides a glimpse of it (which cannot be dismissed) but again, he may be talking about something different to reincarnation in the Greek sense, and whose vocabulary he copies to some extent.

3.2. Weight of stereotypical descriptions

If on the one hand stereotypical descriptions are unavoidable and make every person - from the psychoanalyzed subject to the shaman - behave in very definite patterns and according to definite expectations, the stereotyped description of mystic experiences in apocalyptic poses a few problems when read in cross-cultural perspective.

The whole thesis is built on the notion that, regardless of the effective existence of a world beyond,



the experiences reported by Kardecists - Chico Xavier as the archetypical and most prolific medium - are not fabricated. A vast array of first and third-person testimonies has been examined for the purpose, to the conclusion that, even if the whole process is but a delusion, Xavier is being sincere both in dogmatic adherence to belief and in reporting experiences. And in this corpus of evidence the weight of stereotypy is indeed small regarding the description of the experiences themselves.

This means that, although Chico Xavier was very willing to talk about what goes into his mind while psychographing, or how it all started, or what his guiding spirit thinks about it all, we are left with no ostensibly ASC-inducing pattern on his reports. True, the use of light sacred music is a feature of Kardecist *séances* in Brazil, some mediums "energize" water to obtain cures and so on, but this is nothing compared to the massive presence of ostensible ASC-inducing practices in apocalyptic literature.

Fasts, praying and mourning are everywhere, in a few stances in 4Ezra there is even an apparent link between ingestion of substances and mystical vision²²: these are all practices that can lead to ASCs. And yet in Kardecist trance none of those is to be found (except very mild advice to avoid alcohol, drugs and cigarettes - not as preparatory measures but as cleansing practice) and we know the trances described to be sincere; the opposite happens in apocalyptic, where the weight of stereotypy gives the impression that the writer is trying to get the reader into believing that the visionary experience was linked to those practices, even when there may have been no first-hand experience behind the report. In the end, everyone lives

²² Cf. the appendix, item 2.4.



according to certain *topoi* and it seems useless to search for pure sincerity unlinked to any previous cultural expectations.

That the practices described in apocalyptic texts can effectively lead to ASC is beyond doubt - they do describe ASCs. That these are first-person true experiences is to be doubted, and in contrast to the austere picture of Kardecist descriptions the flamboyant reports in apocalyptic look exaggerated as sincere first-person experiences. Here as in anything else related to the theme, there can be no hard-proof of any sort, but since there is such proof regarding Kardecist mediumnistic practices, apocalyptic visionary episodes, if related to automatic writing, look much more exaggerated and artificial by comparison. It must be said that these last aspects may be due to matters of style or even of interference due to copyists' interpolations, but these are only speculations.

3.3. Weak evidence provided by similar hypnotic-like descriptions

Modern-day hypnotic states induced in laboratory conditions or studied under their auspices provide data that does not help much in terms of understanding ASC in ancient mystics: the effects look very similar but the stereotypical expectations that preside both are very different²³. On the other hand, the brute data on those effects must not be ignored without taking into consideration that the cause-effect described is indeed similar to those found in ancient religious texts including apocalypses. Again, the *topoi* imbued by a laboratory

²³ A similar point was already stressed by MacDermot, op.cit. p.xi, regarding the differences in religious and other types of ASC-induced experiences.



subject (no matter how "objectively" the research is conducted) are just others to be taken into account.

By the same token, the concept of FPP is of very limited use regarding ancient mystics: it is a cultural pattern that allows to decide whether this or that people are FPPs. The same concept applied to Antiquity would result in anachronism and to the inclusion of almost every author in the category. An altogether different possibility would be to adapt the concept so as to fit ancient values and attitudes, but the result is likely to be so arbitrary that it is to be doubted whether such an effort makes sense.

3.4. Uncertainty of OT passages

The passage of 2Chr examined above provides only apparent clues to the practice of automatic writing in the OT, for a number of reasons.

First of all, *Elijah could* be alive at the time of the writing, although this is not an obvious possibility. Secondly, there are precedents to the case presented in the text - namely that books or scriptures in general were "found" in miraculous circumstances. The most famous case among those is that of Deuteronomy.

Finally, the complete silence regarding the passage in later and unquestionably orthodox sources makes us wonder why it is that something so innovative and heterodox was overlooked by rabbis, Church Fathers and Josephus. The most likely answer is that the passage was never regarded as having been written "spiritually" by Elijah through the hands of a human medium, but rather that it was inserted in a tradition of texts "found" so as to enhance their authority. All this seems to invalidate any claim to the



existence of automatic writing among Second Temple Jews using 2Chr as hard proof.

3.5. Psychography is never intended as deception or confusing evidence

Another element to be considered as evidence against sincerity of apocalyptic visionary experiences as related to pseudepigraphy as compared to those of Kardecist automatic writing, is the issue of the identity of the mechanical writer.

In Kardecism, no matter how humble or ignorant the medium alleges to be in comparison to the supposed spiritual writer, it is always the case that the identity of the mechanical writer (i.e. the medium) is exhibited (even when Kardecist texts are presented as having an anonymous medium as the mechanical writer - a comparatively rare fixture - it is always clear to the reader that the final product, the text, is the result of a partnership between spirit and mechanical writer).

None of this is to be found in apocalyptic pseudepigraphy: much to the contrary, the identity of the mechanical writer is absorbed into that of the portrayed hero. Not to an extent that one cannot date a text (at least date it "negatively", i.e. eliminating some dating possibilities) from whatever evidence the mechanical writer has left (examples would be the reference to the eagle or the reinterpretation of Dn in 4Ezra, or the themes related to the angels and voices in the Temple shared by 2Br, Josephus and Tacitus).

From this point of view one can say not only that psychography and pseudepigraphy fulfil different needs regarding their respective publics, but also that they fulfil different intentions from the part of the authors:



while Kardecist psychography pretends to bring data on the otherworld and sometimes on the historical past to an audience hungry for them, apocalyptic pseudepigraphy seems to be more focused in authorship issues themselves, in the sense that from what little we know about readership and authorship in Antiquity, it was very important for readers correct (or supposedly correct) authorial attribution of texts²⁴. This needs not include deliberate intention of deceiving, of course, but constitutes a major difference between the two categories. In Kardecist psychography, by comparison, doctrinal correctness looks much more important than authorial issues.

It should also be noted that, although epistolary pseudepigraphy might (in theory) have presented the same set of visionary characteristics as the apocalyptic one, in the cases examined (those of Salvian and Tertulian) where the identity of the mechanical writer is known, this very knowledge ended up in disgrace with the pseudepigraphers. This can only mean that, at least in those two late Antiquity cases, pseudepigraphy was something intended *not* to reveal the identity of the mechanical writer, but rather that every effort was made to conceal it and that successful pseudepigraphy would take this hiding to an extent that identification of the mechanical writer would be impossible. In this sense, texts such as 2En should be regarded as highly successful, since after all the effort that has been put into investigating its geographical origins and dating, no one could come to any definite conclusion. In this particular case guesses on dating and authorship range from Christians to Jews, from the Byzantine Empire to Alexandria and from III BCE to XIV CE.

²⁴ Cf. Duff, *op.cit.*



In short, Kardecist psychography is never intentionally deceptive: one can doubt whether there is any spiritual reality beyond the veil of mediumship, but not about the concrete activity of the mechanical writer. In addition, despite all the ostensibly humble feelings of mediums such as Chico Xavier, they are the ones that become famous, and only secondarily the entities they purport to represent acquire fame. Nothing of the kind can be said about apocalyptic pseudepigraphy, not even about the epistolary frauds of Salvian and that denounced by Tertulian. In both cases authorial precision was very important, much more than in Kardecist circles where, as has been said, doctrinal correctness has precedence over authorship issues. That the opposite happened in the epistolary pseudepigraphy of Salvian has been demonstrated; that apocalyptic pseudepigraphy would have relied on the same assumptions looks likely but cannot be ascertained.

Emphasizing these last reflections, one point hitherto avoided must be stressed – namely that Kardecist authorship is never hidden. In that sense, it would be a mistake to call it pseudonymous: no matter how much the medium him/herself rejects merits, authorship and income resulting from the writings²⁵, one is never in doubt about who the mechanical author of a given text was.

Even in the prodigious case of Waldo Vieira and Chico Xavier alternating chapters in *Mecanismos da mediunidade*, we still know that it was they and no one else who wrote the final text.

²⁵ Emblematic of his own relation towards his output, Chico Xavier, during a TV program that became famous (the “Pinga-fogo” broadcast on July 28th 1971) kept on repeating, when questioned about this or that theme – “Emmanuel tell us this”, “Emmanuel thinks that” etc. Cf. Souto Maior, op.cit. p.171.



4. Final remarks

On the basis of Kardecist comparison, the experiences described in the apocalypses should not be considered as sincere as those of first-hand accounts. This does not mean that by other means they may be one day proved to be authentic, although the very nature of the sources involved makes the task exceedingly difficult - thus the necessary recourse to cross-cultural comparison. It is important to note that the possibility of identification between actual (mechanical) apocalyptic writers and their pseudonyms does not preclude the very truthful second-hand reports on mystical experiences described, which may possibly reflect authentic experience by people who were probably unknown to the actual writer. On the other hand, no matter how effective the practices described may look, Kardecist mediums avoid them altogether in order to enter into an ASC. The latter appears to be more related to self-hypnosis and immersion in a thematic world than to specific practices like fasting or mourning. Besides, experiments of several sorts have shown them to share several common characteristics that allow them to be grouped on what is currently called FPP.

There is always the possibility that the apocalyptic writer would also feel so immersed in his Biblical cultural references as to feel himself part of the picture he describes. But in this case the ASC-inducing techniques and eventual possession do not match the proposed comparative model, Kardecism.

As the Arab proverb goes, men resemble more their time than their parents. In this fashion, the whole range of experiences available to mystics - be it the case of Jewish



apocalypticists or modern-day Kardecist mediums - is an integral part of their preparatory processes.

Indeed, it could even be argued if the immediate preparations - fasts, prayers etc. - is not just a particular case within the broader framework of their world-view. And again the experiences available to each mystic are only those made possible by his cultural milieu, in a sense by his training as a mystic. The idea of possession (in itself a kind of manipulating) by a spirit and the consequent redaction of a text looks unlikely to Second Temple Jewish visionaries, although the preparatory proceedings described are accurate and efficient enough. In short, both sets of visionaries - apocalypticists and Kardecists - use preparatory devices, but this does not mean that any apocalyptic writer ever felt himself as being possessed.

On the other hand, Kardecist training put very little emphasis on those immediate practices: rather one gets the impression that the whole self-hypnotic scheme that lies in the background of Kardecist experiences is such an involving and complete cultural experience that it renders such immediate devices (fasting etc.) futile, even undesirable. In this case mystical authorship is not only allowed, but manipulation of spirits is an essential part of Kardecism, it is something highly prized. This very different approach to a phenomenon that looks the same in both cases - i.e. identification with someone else due to self-hypnosis - makes the idea of mystical experiences in Jewish apocalypses as related to the identification between seer and portrayed hero very unlikely, given the two main essential differences in ASC-inducing practices (that lead to self-hypnosis and, as a consequence, to Kardecist automatic writing) and the cultural difficulties in



accepting or even desiring spirit manipulation for any purposes.

Appendix

Visionary practices in Old Testament and
pseudepigraphical apocalypses and related
texts



1. Survey of chosen passages

In this appendix I will discuss the passages in apocalyptic literature and related pseudepigraphic material where preparatory visionary processes are described.

In this section we will only look at proposed ways to deal with the relation between apocalyptic pseudepigraphy and mystic experience. Examples of the above would be the vision of the weeping woman transfigured into heavenly Jerusalem in 4Ezra 10:25-28 or the book eaten by the seer in Rev 10:8. Of course one must bear in mind that in each culture the phenomenon investigated - inducted by fasting, mind-altering substances or prayer - will acquire a distinct and specific cultural meaning for the group involved.

We should consider the means of inspiration for the apocalypticists as being rather psychical than physical¹, i.e. the spectacular examples of chemically induced visions being comparatively rarer than visions obtained by more normal means. The references to trances, visions and dreams are much more frequent in the apocalypses than in other revelatory literature in the Old Testament, especially among the prophets. They are all the more remarkable in the most important apocalypses, namely Dn, 2Br, 4Ezra and 1En (which is not, as a whole, an apocalypse but has large sections which can be considered as such); the same issues can be raised regarding texts with strong points in common with the apocalypses, such as the Testaments.

The use of vapors as a means of getting inspiration in the oracle of Apollo, at Delphi, is a particularly famous

¹ Russell, *Method and Message*, p.161.



example of preparation for a visionary process². The Bible gives us some examples of pagan visionary practices: the prophets of Baal at 1Kgs 18:20 ff are an especially eloquent example.

As a first remark, it should be noted that with the exception of the Sibyl all of the visionaries portrayed are men (which does not prove the gender identity of the author, but is to be taken into account); and even the Sibyl is quite exceptional not only for being a woman but for all the other peculiarities of the oracles themselves³.

In terms of chronology I shall deal with texts ranging from roughly 300 BCE until 200 CE; this is the period when parts of Dn, 1En, 2Br, 4Ezra among other texts were composed⁴. Of course the question arises whether many other texts have not survived, and thus we have no clue about the representativeness of the period selected. However, in terms of what came down to us, the most important texts are situated between the limits set above. I shall also deal with pseudepigraphic texts that, while clearly not being themselves apocalypses, (e.g. the Testaments, 4Br) can shed light on the processes of preparing for visions in the apocalypses "proper", either by sharing common themes, or by showing inspirational practices similar enough to justify their inclusion here.

Trying to find general parallels for phenomena similar to the visions of the apocalypticists⁵ we should look with

² But see Oesterreich, op.cit. p.316 ff. for arguments against this idea.

³ Taking us back to the idea of the role of marginalized groups in a given society where the ecstatic phenomenon takes place; cf. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, op.cit. p.77.

⁴ Even if, as I said above, this does not at all mean that they have been preserved "purely" and without interpolations since their dates of composition. I will come to the matter of dating again below.

⁵ I use the term here meaning the authors, pseudepigraphic as the texts may be, rather than assuming that the apocalypses were consumed



particular attention to two specific cultures related to Judaism, namely the Greco-roman world and Near Eastern antecedents⁶.

In terms of "internal" Jewish references, prophets and apocalypticists alike share the idea of a divine compulsion to reveal things to men⁷; the means by which inspiration to say those things was also varied and can be roughly distinguished between the earlier prophets and the classical ones. Instances of the effect of music to prophesize can be found at 1Sm 19:20-24 and 10:5; Elijah "drank the water of the river" in 1Kgs 17:2-6; the spirit that animated the *neviim* is said to be the same as that of Moses (Nm 11:24-30). Parallels to the activity of the prophets can be found throughout the ancient Near East -the remembrance of a *baru*, a Mesopotamian kind of seer, is preserved in Nm 24, concerning Balaam; but the two things that need concern us here regarding apocalypticism are its relations to their ways of gaining inspiration as compared to the prophets.

Regarding the ways of getting inspired, the earlier prophets are conspicuously more violent in their ecstasies than the classical ones - this, however, must be taken with great care as it may be the deliberate result of the compilers trying to depict classical prophecy as "calmer" and thus as distinct from similar pagan practices as possible (i.e. the practices of, say, Isaiah resemble those of pagan diviners less than those of Elijah, in an earlier

by any definite group or groups of sectarians inside Jewish or Christian groups.

⁶ These phenomena may be rooted outside Judaism, although this does not exclude Jewish parallels, among which those related to prophecy seem to be among the most important. Cf. Russell, *Divine Disclosure*, p.21.

⁷ Russell, *Method and Message*, p.158.



period)⁸; but as examples we should cite that it was the *ruah* from God that seized the "ecstatic" or earlier prophets (cf. Jdg 14:6; 1Sm 16:14). This being the case, it should be noted that the prophetic books themselves seem to be less interested in the process of prophesizing than in the message they convey⁹.

There are few hints about the way the prophets got their inspiration, Ezekiel is apparently the most astonishing example - he claims, in Ez 1-3 that Heaven opened and he had a vision of God¹⁰. If this happened in the Temple or not is to be debated¹¹. Next, God gives Ezekiel a scroll, which he eats in order to acquire the gift of prophecy, also something to be doubted that occurred literally. The vision of Jeremiah in Jr 1:11-12 is again difficult to understand, but surely implies a pun in Hebrew between *shequed*, a tree, and *sequed*, "to make clear"; we do not know whether Jeremiah had an actual tree in front of him, but that is how the word of God was sent to him¹². Isaiah is likely to have had his vision inside the Temple (Is 6:1,2), but aside from those visual *stimuli* little else can be said - even if we can be sure that the coal did not physically touch his lips, otherwise he could not go on to prophesy. However, all this relates essentially to the messages conveyed and not really to preparation for visions, this being the reason for not discussing the matter further.

⁸ For a good discussion on the issue, see Gunnel André. "Ecstatic Prophecy in the Old Testament" in: Holm, op.cit.

⁹ Russell, *Method and Message*, p.159.

¹⁰ In later apocalypses of the "heavenly voyage" type this would be a major influencing image - although it was then implicit that God distanced Himself from men so much that now the heroes of the apocalypses are the ones that should seek and see Him. Cf. Himmelfarb, "From prophecy to apocalypticism" p.150.

¹¹ André, op.cit. p.189.

¹² Id.ibid.



We should consider the means of inspiration for the apocalypticists as being rather psychical than physical¹³, i.e. the spectacular examples of chemically-induced visions, as we shall see, being comparatively rarer than visions obtained by more conventional means. The references to trances, visions and dreams are much more frequent in the apocalypses than in other revelatory literature in the Old Testament, especially among the prophets.

Outside those Jewish prophetic references, the theme of voyages to Heaven or Hell is also well attested in the Greek cultural world: this can be found from Homer to Plato and, as satire, even in Lucian of Samosata. These are rather special kinds of visions, but it should be noted that throughout the Hellenistic world visions were regarded as a quite sophisticated means of acquiring knowledge about matters¹⁴ (many could be quoted here, but Josephus and Suetonius will suffice as exponents of the above statements¹⁵); on the other hand no essential change can be seen in Greek oracles from VIII BCE to III CE (here to be understood as a variety of the visionary phenomenon)¹⁶. The use of vapours as a means of getting inspiration in the oracle of Apollo, at Delphi, was a particularly famous example of preparation for a visionary process, although discredited in recent research¹⁷. The Bible gives us some examples of pagan preparatory practices, the prophets of Baal at 1Kgs 18:20 ff being an especially eloquent one.

The visions that are discussed have been obtained in various trance states, which the apocalyptic visionaries

¹³ Russell, *Method and Message*, p.161.

¹⁴ John J. Collins. *The Apocalyptic Imagination*. Grand Rapids: William B.Eerdmans, 1998. P.117.

¹⁵ See e.g. Josephus, *Jewish War* 3.399 ff. and Suetonius, *Life of Vespasian* 5.

¹⁶ David Aune. *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*. Grand Rapids: William B.Eerdmans, 1983. P.49.

¹⁷ Oesterreich, op.cit. p.316.



are very keen to describe, as compared to their canonical counterparts - prophets, seers and the like¹⁸. For the purposes of this appendix I shall treat "ecstasy" and "trance" as synonyms, while being aware that some authors may trace distinctions between them¹⁹. I will treat visions, then, as a particular case of trance, since not all trances purport visions although the reverse is not true - i.e. all the visions dealt with in this appendix were clearly obtained in ASCs, or claimed to have been so. Not every mystical experience should be regarded as ecstatic - in visions an individual receives personal and intense new knowledge about the Universe; in the ecstasies the emphasis is placed on the mental changes the seer goes through, rather than in the revelation itself²⁰.

Ecstatic practices, both Jewish and non-Jewish, are sometimes strongly related to divination, and this may be specially important to understand the revelations given to apocalyptic visionaries - these being in themselves practitioners of a kind of divination, where the seer intends to get knowledge about future events, about their meaning or about the secrets of Creation²¹. The Hebrew

¹⁸ This may imply deliberate censorship of the more spectacular or pagan-like aspects of the "canonical trances", although this is by no means certain and may in fact be a false assumption, if we only regard the nature of the visions of Ezekiel.

¹⁹ For a fairly complete state of the discussion until the beginning of the Eighties, see the introduction by Nils Holm. "Ecstasy Research in the 20th Century. An Introduction" in: Holm, op.cit. The term "ecstasy" seems to have been more common among religion historians, "trance" more favoured by anthropologists.

²⁰ Idem, p.8. Of course it could be altogether different from the point of view of the final consumers of the apocalypses - although we cannot say anything definitive on the matter.

²¹ Here too one can see marked differences between Old Testament prophecy and apocalyptic - both the promises and the geographical scope of apocalyptic literature being much broader than those of the prophets.



Bible preserved several instances of ecstasies from seers and prophets, as seen above²².

Besides divination, ecstasies are most obviously related to possession - a taboo theme in the Hebrew Bible and also in the New Testament, but worthwhile looking at if we are to have a broader picture of the kind of sensation the apocalyptic seers might have gone through in order to get their visions²³. A phenomenon that may well be possession takes place within the prophets and also in some apocalyptic writings, e.g. 4Ezra 14:40: "[...] and my mouth was opened, and was no longer closed". Note the passive positioning of the subject in regard to the mechanism of inspiration.

Since in this passage the seer apparently lost control over his capacity to silence and began to speak without pause, we can assume there is some degree of possessional behaviour here. But it is a very light hint and does not support the case for possessional phenomena being commonplace in apocalyptic writings, and it remains, like so much more in 4Ezra, a puzzling exception.

But it should be noted that the apocalypticist never loses his identity to become one with God, much less with the intermediary angel if this may be the case. This is all the more important if we are to differentiate between physical and psychic means of inspiration in the apocalyptic seers²⁴ - it seems that the former tends sometimes to be underlined due to its spectacular aspects, not taking into account that the majority of the

²² Nm 24:17; it is interesting that the passage attributed to a pagan diviner, Balaam, would have so important messianic connotations much later.

²³ Russell, *Method and Message*, pp.159; 160; 175.

²⁴ For a good and already classic discussion on the dichotomy see John Skinner. *Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926. P.11 ff.



experiences described by the visionaries do not involve artificial (i.e. pharmacological or chemically-induced) means of inspiration²⁵. It should be noted that even in one of the most spectacular sequences of visions of an Old Testament prophet, Ezekiel, he never loses his identity so as to be confused or mingled with the deity²⁶. I should now add that "apocalyptic literature" has never been looked at as a genre in Antiquity; in fact this treatment is quite recent and does not reflect the way the apocalypses themselves have been regarded by their public in Antiquity²⁷. So, while the texts only compose a definite genre in our eyes, at the same time one will not find a "theory of inspiration" for the apocalypses themselves²⁸ - simply because explanation for visionary processes found therein could easily be related, by the ancient reader, to other sources and practices. I will use two basic categories, which I think are more useful for the theme of this appendix, namely whether the visions were obtained in an awakened or sleeping state.

The spread of the theme of revelatory dreams ranging from Mesopotamia to Homer and Virgil should also be noted²⁹. Dreams are sometimes to be confounded with visions in the texts we are dealing with here, but I take the "nocturnal visions" sometimes described as a special kind of dream - forced by ecstatic practices, by chemical

²⁵ Russell, *Method and Message*, p.161. But see 2.4 in this appendix for discussion on chemical inducement.

²⁶ André, op.cit. p.190. The same author makes the interesting observation that all the cases dealt with - i.e. "classical prophets" in the Old Testament - the seers were alone; in terms of ecstatic practices, for the sake of comparison, it should be pointed out that the pagan prophets of Baal in 1Kgs 18:20-40 are depicted as a group and their self-mutilation in order to get an ecstasy are collectively described.

²⁷ John J. Collins. *Daniel, with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984. P.1.

²⁸ Russell, *Method and Message*, p.158.

²⁹ Collins, *Daniel*, p.15.



induction or whatever, but being meaningful to the seer in terms of what he purports to be his mission³⁰.

In short, were apocalyptic literature a definite genre, with well-established clichés and practices, we would have an altogether different picture, if there was not the additional problem of the fragmentary nature of the texts that have reached us (i.e. we have only a fraction of the "original" apocalyptic output)³¹; besides, their often striking parallels to pagan practices argues also in favour of the experiences described being more than mere clichés³², but in this, as in other aspects of the discussion between Persian influence on Jewish practices and thoughts, the difficulties remain due to the late compilation of Persian texts³³ (of course no one should confuse the date of a manuscript with the date of its composition, but still the issue cannot be overlooked).

Summing up what I have discussed so far, I have stressed the need for parallels and the "artificial" element present in the description of the preparation for visions in apocalyptic texts; while having to avoid the "spectacular" element present in many analyses of apocalyptic passages dealing with artificially induced visions. One still has to take note, however, of the myriad of possibilities preparing oneself for apocalyptic visions: they can be obtained by several means, physical, chemical, induced by prayer, by chastity or by combinations of the items above.

In terms of the final presentation from the seer's point of view, they can be divided into visions during

³⁰ Idem, p.8.

³¹ Anders Hultgard. "Ecstasy and vision" in: Holm, op.cit. p.218.

³² Russell, *Method and Message*, p.158.

³³ Idem, p.223.



sleep or occurring in an awakened state of mind, as proposed.

Reflection on other passages, although less appealing in terms of cross-cultural comparisons, may also be very important³⁴ and as we shall see nearer the end of the thesis, may take us to more contemporary parallels. In fact the re-evaluation of earlier passages in apocalyptic texts is one of its most distinguishing features, the most well known of those being possibly the theme of the "seventy years" of Jeremiah read by Daniel³⁵. The commonly stated allegation of prayer by the visionaries, although not synonymous to scriptural exegesis, seems to be related to it, since it supposes a detailed and firsthand knowledge of things divine, while hallucinations generated by external induction do not. Of course it should be regarded as the intimate link between the induction, where it appears, and the vision itself - in other words, the *form* the chemically-induced visions take is dependent on the whole of the cultural references of the seer's worldview.

In the brief survey that follows one must bear in mind that the passages examined do not tell us all that we want to know about preparation for visions - e.g. one passage may tell about the fasting involved, and that the vision obtained was during an awake state, but not whether it was obtained at home or outside. This means that evidence gathered and analyzed here is by no means complete and exhaustive, although the passages collected try to catch every reference to preparation for visions in the Old Testament pseudepigrapha, Revelation, Daniel, with occasional references to New Testament apocrypha (6Esd)

³⁴ Russell, *Method and Message*, p.181; Cf. also Rowland, *Open Heaven*, p.21 ff.

³⁵ Dn 9:24 ff.



and to one Qumran Cave Four fragment (4Q246). The Sibylline Oracles passages have also been taken into account.

The total number of passages found which tell something about preparation for visions is 114. I found three basic forms of dealing with this amount of evidence: firstly taking into account their form (i.e. visions where the seer was in an awakened state, or a sleeping one, the presence of angels etc.), in terms of their dating and finally by evaluating the seer's state of mind (awake/asleep) against data provided by the alleged preparatory process. The three kinds of analyses shall be cross-compared along the text, however any conclusions regarding transformations along the timeline must be dealt with with great care when controversial dates of composition are at stake.

Of the total number of passages examined, 61 clearly involved preparation for visions with an awakened seer - 1En 1:2; 91:1; 2En 1:2-6; 3:1; 72:1, 10; 2Br 5:5-7; 6:2; 9; 12:5; 21:1-3; 26; 32:7; 37; 53:12; 55:1-4; 3Br Slavonic introduction; Greek introduction; 1:3 in both recensions; 4Ezra 1:33; 5:14-15, 19-20, 21; 6:35; 9:23-25, 26-29; 12:3; 12:51; 13:14; 14:1-3, 36; ApAbr 8; 15-19; ApSed 2:1-5; Rev 1:9-17; 4:1-2; Dn 1:8-21; 2:17-20; 7:15, 28; 9:1-3, 21; 10:1-17; Jub introduction; 1:2-6; Martls 1:5-6; 2:7-11; Vita 25; 27; LdJb 2:1-3, 6-22; 4Br 4:11; 6:7-16, 15; 7:1; OrSib 2:1, 340; 3:1-7; 5:51; 11:315-320; 13:1, 5 and fr.8 (with other 2 probable, 3Br 9:1-2 in the Greek recension and Dn 8:1; 16) ; by comparison only 19 included preparations for visions where the visionary was asleep, 1En 13:6-10; 2En 1:2-6; 72:1, 10; 2Br 35-36; 52:7-53; 55:1-4; 4Ezra 3:1-5; 10:29, 59; 11:1; 13:1; GrEzra 1; ApAdam 2:1; Test 12, Lv 2; Naph 5-7; Dn 7:1-2; LdJb 1:1



and 4Br 5 (also with 2 doubtful passages, 4Ezra 5:31 and again Dn 8:1; 16).

Some of the above may be repeated (e.g. 2En 72:1, 10) because in the same verse the seer may be first awake and then asleep. The remaining 30 leave no clue about the issue.

Preparations involving a domestic setting (i.e. the seer is at home) total 6 confirmed (2En 1:2-6; GrEzra 1; ApAbr 8; Dn 2:17-20; 7:1-2, 15 and 28) and 1 probable (2En 3:1); specific geographical locations related to the preparations come to 10 confirmed (1En 13:6-10; 2Br 5:5-7; 47-48:1; 3Br Greek introduction; 4Ezra 1:33; 3:1-5; 9:26-29; Rev 1:9-17; Dn 10:1-17 and Jub 1:2-6), and natural locations such as mountains, unnamed rivers and the like, another 5 (2Br 6:2; 55:1-4; 3Br Slavonic introduction; 4Ezra 14:1-3 and MartIs 2:7-11).

In 7 passages special locations are needed as a full part of the seer's preparation for the visionary experience (such as the River Dan in 1En 13:6-10; the cave at the valley of Kidron in 2Br 21:1-3; under a tree in 55:1-4; the river Tigris in Dn 10:1-17; Mt Sinai in Jub introduction; a mountain in MartIs 2:7-11 and a tomb in 4Br 4:11).

Tombs are mentioned only twice (both in 4Br, 4:11 and 7:1), and the presence of angels or otherworldly beings as part of the preparation occurs 31 times in the passages examined (1En 1:2; 2En 3:1; 72:1, 10; 2Br 6:2; 55:1-4; 3Br Slavonic introduction; 1:3 in both recensions; 4Ezra 5:31; VisEzra 1; ApAbr 12:12; ApZeph A:1; TestLv 2; TestJob 2-3; Test3 TestAbr recA 10:1; recB 10:3; TestSol 26:6; Rev 1:9-17; 4:1-2; 18:1; 21:9-11; Dn 8:1, 16; 9:21; 10:1-17; 4Q246 I; Vita 25; 26; 4Br 4:11; 6:7-16, 15; OrSib 11:315-320 and 13:1).



2. Preparatory processes from the seer's point of view

For the purposes of the analyses of preparation for visions in Jewish apocalypses, one must take into account the nature of the visions themselves: in that sense, I have divided them into two basic types, namely visions where the seer is awake and asleep, respectively. Visions occurring during sleep sometimes cannot be distinguished from dreams, although this is not important at this stage of the text.

The texts examined are, in their greatest part, of Jewish authorship (although this does not by any means imply that they were consumed only or mainly by Jews), and can be situated, in terms of authorship, roughly between the second century BCE - second century CE. Many of them have their dating so controversial as to vary much more than that - the extreme case involving dates between 200 BCE to XIV century CE (Slavonic Enoch, or 2En).



2.1. Induction techniques

In terms of the induction to get the visions, I have arranged the evidence under 4 main categories: fasting³⁶, chemical induction, induction by prayer and by sexual activity (or lack of), as mentioned above. By "chemical induction" I understand the explicit alleged ingestion, by the seer, of some mind-altering substance, identified or not - such as the case with the fire-colored water drunk by Ezra - not the abstinence from items that may, biologically or from the seer's point of view, interfere with the process of the revelation of hidden things (such as Daniel's avoidance of meat and wine at Dn 1:8-21).

But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's rich food, or with the wine which he drank; therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself [...] Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's rich food be observed by you, and according to what you see deal with your servants [...] So the steward took away their rich food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all letters and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams [...] And in every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them [the youths] ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. And Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.

It must be pointed out that here the borderline between enlightenment given by bodily effects of the items ingested and rewarding effects of following *kashrut* laws is somewhat blurred.

³⁶ For an informed discussion on the major psychological aspects of fasting as related to religious phenomena, see Wulff, op.cit. p.61 ff.



Among preparatory practices, sexual abstinence is by far the least important in the passages evaluated, with 2 confirmed references (1En 83:2 - "I saw two visions before I got married", i.e. before Enoch took a wife; *Vitae Prophetarum* 4:2 states about Daniel that he "was a chaste man, so that the Judeans thought that he was a eunuch") and one possibly in OrSib 2:340:

*Alas for me, wretched one. What will become of me on that day in return for what I sinned, ill-minded one, busying myself about everything but caring neither for marriage nor for reasons?*³⁷

On the other hand, induction by prayer as part of the process of getting a vision seems the most popular practice in the passages examined - references to this amount to 19 confirmed - 1En 13:6-10; 39:9-14; 2Br 21:1-3 is a particularly interesting combination of fasting and prayer:

I went from there and sat in the valley of Kidron in a cave of the earth and sanctified myself there and ate no bread, but I was not hungry; I drank no water, but I was not thirsty. And I stayed there until the seventh day as he had commanded me [...]

See also 2Br 26; 38; 47-48:1 - also beginning with fasting; 48:25; 54; 4Ezra 3:1-5; 9:23-25; GrEzra 1; VisEzra 1; Dn 2:17-20; 9:1-3; 21; Vita 25; VitaProph 4 ; LdJb 2:6-22 and 4Br 6:7-16) and 2 possible quotations (3Br 9:1-2 in the Greek recension; Fragment 8 of the Sibylline Oracles). Among the above are especially worthy of closer examination 1En 39:9-14:

³⁷ Strangely, in the next verses the sibyl compares her house to that of a wealthy man, not a woman - a hint that may point to the actual author being a man stylistically disguised as the female sibyl.



In those days, I praised and prayed to the name of the Lord of the Spirits with blessings and praises, for he had strengthened me by blessings and praises in accordance with the will of the Lord of the Spirits [...]

Also 4Ezra 3:1-5:

[...] My spirit was greatly agitated, and I began to speak anxious words to the Most High, and said, 'O sovereign Lord, did you not speak at the beginning when you formed the earth [...]'

Praying may come as an immediate consultation, to which follows counselling, as in GrEzra 1:

[...] I was in my house and I cried out, saying to the Most High, "Lord, grant [me] glory so that I may see your mysteries". When night fell the angel Michael, the archangel, came and said to me, 'Prophet Ezra, lay aside bread for seventy weeks' [...]

This last passage points to an experience that may be, in its core, authentic fasting but that has been coloured with the clichés of the genre - it would not be physically possible for the seer to fast for seventy weeks on end, and the number, with its special connotations in apocalyptic thought, makes it wholly improbable that we have here effective description of preparatory fasting. Be that as it may, fasting comes second in popularity among preparatory techniques, with 14 confirmed references (3En 15B:2; 2Br 5:5-7; 9; 12:5; 21:1-3; 47-48:1; 4Ezra 5:19-20; 21; 6:35; GrEzra 1; ApAbr 12:12; Dn 9:1-3; 10:1-17 and Martls 2:7-11). The most interesting fasting passages are 4Ezra 5:19-20:



Then I said to him [to Phaltiel, a chief of the people], 'Depart from me and do not come near me for seven days, and then you may come to me'. He heard what I said and left me. So I fasted seven days, mourning and weeping, as Uriel the angel had commanded me.

In the *Apocalypse of Abraham* 12 there is a surprising reference to image and sound nourishing the seer:

And we went, the two of us alone together, forty days and nights. And I ate no bread and drank no water, because [my] food was to see the angel who was with me, and his discourse with me was my drink.

And finally, the Daniel passages, which may be the best known of all:

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by birth a Mede, who became king over the realm of the Chaldeans in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years which, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and supplications with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, 'O Lord, the great and terrible God, who keepest covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments [...]'

Chemically induced visions, spectacular as they may appear, occurred only 5 confirmed times in the sources (4Ezra 9:23-25; 26-29; 12:51; 14:38-48 and Martls 2:7-11), with unconfirmed references in one instance (4Br 5, when Abimelech still feels sleepy after a 66 year nap and complains, on waking up, that he may have got lost because he followed an unusual road to Jerusalem; the figs he was carrying are not only intact but even drip milk - all this pointing to a dream strange enough to make us suspicious of



chemical inducement, although this is stated nowhere). These references will be dealt with below, see 2.4.

2.2. Sensory details in preparatory techniques

Although this part of the thesis shall deal only with preparation for visions and not with the visions themselves, I felt it necessary to take into account passages where the effects of the vision on the visionary are described, for this also entails knowledge about the processes of preparation themselves as they are related to the use of the senses. In fact I have divided the sensory data about the preparation for visions into 3 main groups, namely specific sensory details (in 15 passages this was observed, 2Br 21:1-3; 48:25; 3Br 1:3 in both recensions; 4Ezra 3:1-5; 5:14-15 10:29; Rev 1:9-17; 10:8-11; Dn 7:15; 28; 10:1-17; Vita 26; 27; LdJb 2:1-3; OrSib 3:1-7 and 5:51), and the essentially vocal or visual character of the experience described by the visionary.

Regarding this last issue, basically visual experiences total 32 passages (1En 13:6-10; 52; 70; 3En 1:1; 2Br 6:2; 21:1-3; 35-36; 52:7-53; 55:1-4; 4Ezra 10:29; 11:1; 13:1; VisEzra 1; ApAbr 15-19; ApAdam 2:1; TestJob 2-3; TestAbr recA 10:1; recB 10:3; 6Esd 28-34; Rev 1:9-17; 4:1-2; 10:8-11; 18:1; 21:9-11; Dn 2:17-20; 7:1-2; Jub 1:2-6; MartIs 1:5-6; Vita 26; 27; LdJb 1:1 and 4Br 4:11) while essentially vocal ones amount to 30 (1En 1:2; 83:2; 91:1; 2En 3:1; 72:1; 10; 4Ezra 1:4; 33; 5:21; 9:26-29; 14:38-48; GrEzra 1; ApAbr 8; 32:6; ApEl 1:1; ApSed 2:1-5; Rev 1:9-17; 14:1-2; 18:1; 19:1; Dn 10:1-17; 4Br 6:15; 7:1; OrSib 2:1; 340; 3:1-7; 5:51; 11:315-320; 13:1; 13:5 and fr.8), thus presenting an evenly distributed picture if we remember that another 52 provide no data available on them regarding



that issue. Two passages were at the same time vocal and visual, both occurring in Rev (1:9-17; 18:1).

When we first compare the data available about the timeline development as related to the type of vision (i.e. with the seer awake rather than asleep), no clear picture emerges: of the confirmed passages where the visionary is described as being awake, it can be safely dated from the second century BCE: 1En 1:2; 39:9-14; 83:2; 91:1 (1En being a late Second Temple text, whose emphasis on dualism and the theme of the righteous against the wicked attest its late date, being possibly due to Persian influence; the reference to the Son of Man in 1En 62:6 also points to that direction, as well as the references to the Maccabean revolt and martyrs in chapters 89-90, disguised as sheep); Dn 1:8-21; 2:17-20; 7:15, 28; 9:1-3; 9:21; 10:1-17 (Daniel may have a primitive core regarding the short stories of its protagonist, but in the form that it comes to us should be considered as contemporary to the Maccabean Revolt or a bit later; this can be seen in the references to the four world empires, the last part being the Hellenistic kingdoms; the reference to the resurrection of the dead, likely to be related to the martyrs of the Revolt; and the presence of Antiochus Epiphanes); Jub intro and 1:2-6 (the *Book of Jubilees* is probably earlier than the earliest fragments from Qumran, and CD 26:2-4 depends on it; on the other hand, assuming that Qumran reflects a definite rupture with the priestly establishment in Jerusalem, Jub should be earlier since no clear-cut distinction of the kind is to be found there).

Four passages with the visionary awake can be dated with precision from I CE - Rev 1:9-17; 4:1-2 (the kind of tribulation referred to the Church should ascribe it to the persecutions of Nero or Domitian); Martls 1:5-6; 2:7-11



(the tradition that ascribed death by sawing to Isaiah is already present in Heb 11:37; the notion of martyrdom on similar lines can be seen in 2Mc 6:18-7:42; 4Br, if dated from the beginning of I CE, depends from Martls 1-5).

Another 5 texts with the seer awake can be dated from the period between I-II CE, namely ApAbr 8:15-19 (the Apocalypse of Abraham is probably later than 70 CE, for it describes the fall of the Temple) and 4Br 4:11; 6:7-16; 6:15; 7:1. 4Br tells us about the vineyard of Agrippa I, king from 41 CE - cf. 4Br 3:14; 21; 5:22; talking about the destruction of the Temple, it must be later than 70 but earlier than the Second Revolt in 132 CE, for the destruction of the Temple and the end of the sacrifices are quite important throughout chapters 1-4 -not giving the impression of a recent, traumatic event as would be the case if it had been written just after 70. Its world history view, in which God destroys the chosen people for their own sins, is remarkably similar to that of Josephus and 2Br.

4Ezra, which contains passages with the visionary awake can be ascribed to the beginning of II CE, in any case before the Bar-Kochba revolt: 4Ezra 1:33 (this introductory passage, dealing with "the Son of God, whom they confessed in the world", 2:47, being clearly Christian); 5:14-15; 5:19-20; 5:21; 6:35; 9:23-25; 9:26-29; 12:3; 12:51; 13:14; 14:1-3 and 14:36 (these chapters from 4Ezra can be dated from the end of I CE, in any case before the Bar-Kochba revolt; the author refers to "thirty years after the fall of Jerusalem"; the book of Daniel is explicitly reinterpreted, and this also entails references to Rome and to the Julio-Claudian and Flavian emperors; the theme of the four world empires must also be later than Daniel, since in 4Ezra the last world monarchy should



be Rome). The same dates can be ascribed to the preparatory passages in 2Br where the seer is awake (2Br 5:5-7; 6:2; 9; 12:5; 21:1-3; 26; 32:7; 37; 53:12 and 55:1-4; 2Br can be dated from the end of I CE, surely after the fall of the Temple, since it deals with the theme of the celestial beings leaving the Temple -also found in Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.300 and Tacitus, *Histories* 5.13 -; the idea that the fall of the Temple is the mere consequence of the Jews' own faults is also remarkably similar to the point of view of Josephus).

3Br can be ascribed to a period ranging anywhere between II-III CE (3Br Slavonic introduction; Greek introduction; 1:3 in both recensions and possibly 9:1-2 in the Greek text; 3Br seems to depend on the Apocalypse of Paul, from II CE, or from a common source; the reference to a "Temple in Heaven" also points to a date later than 70, when Jerusalem was already destroyed.).

The rest of the passages with the visionary depicted as awake are either clearly later or cannot be dated with enough precision to take part in the proposed evaluation of pattern according to a timeline. These are 2En 1:2-6; 3:1 and the unclear reference at 72:1, 10 (Slavonic Enoch having manuscripts not earlier than XIV CE, with no hints of earlier strata, and no earlier text quotes it), - Vita 25 and 27 (the *Life of Adam and Eve* should be later than 400 or 500 CE, reflecting older traditions; it should be noted that the theme of the fall of Satan was already known to Mohammed but the theme is not to be found in the Greek text) and LdJb 2:1-3; 2:6-22 - the *Ladder of Jacob* being possibly the most difficult of the passages assessed to date, since no hint of dating can be found in the text itself. All the Sibylline Oracles passages assessed



describe the seer as awake, and their problems of dating and of interpreting are many.

Passages of preparation for visions where the seer is asleep are distributed more unevenly: 3 in II BCE (Test12 Lv 2; Test12 Naph 5-7; the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs should be later than 250 BCE, since its authors use the Septuagint; Syria appears as the last world empire, and thus it should be considered as earlier than the Maccabean Revolt; and Dn 7:1-2), 4 to I CE (2Br 35-36); 52:7-53; 55:1-4), 8 to the period I-II CE (ApAdam 2:1 this is a likely date for the Apocalypse of Adam, since it refers to the eruption of Vesuvius in 79; 4Ezra 3:1-5 and possibly 5:31; 10:29; 10:59; 11:1; 13:1 and 4Br 5).

Other passages with the seer asleep are of a later date or cannot be dated precisely, namely GrEzra 1 (the Greek Apocalypse of Ezra is dated by scholars from 150 to 850 CE, the first date necessary because of its dependence on 4Ezra and the last due to a reference to it in the Council of Nicephorus) ; 2En 1:2-6; 72:1, 10 and LdJb 1:1.

When comparing the types of induction with the type of vision - i.e. awake / asleep - the following picture emerges (the total is much smaller than the complete sum of all the passages analyzed, for the reason already stated - there is not always a clear reference): fasting is referred to 7 times in relation to preparation for visions where the seer is awake (2Br 5:5-7; 9; 12:5; 21:1-3; 4Ezra 5:19-20; 21 and 6:35), while only once in their sleeping counterparts (GrEzra 1) , - chemically induced preparations appear 5 times (4Ezra 9:23-25; 26-29; 12:51; 14:38-48 and maybe Dn 1:8-21) in visions with the visionary awake, but only one dubious reference where he is asleep (4Br 5); prayer appears as an important part of preparation 9 times (2Br 21:1-3; 26; 4Ezra 9:23-25; Dn 2:17-20; 9:1-3; 21; Vita



25; LdJb 2:6-22 and 4Br 6:7-16) plus 2 possible references in awakened visions (3Br 9:1-2 in the Greek recension and OrSib fr.8), but only 3 in sleeping experiences (1En 13:6-10; 4Ezra 3:1-5 and GrEzra 1); finally, sexual abstinence has only one doubtful quotation (OrSib 2:340) on awakened visionary experiences, and none in visions occurring during sleep.

2.3. Strange behaviour and after-effects

Peculiar behaviour of the seer (such as trembling, prostration, deep troubling of the mind) and specific use of senses, including the basically vocal or visual character of the experience versus the kind of vision give us the following picture: in visions with the seer awake, peculiar behaviour appears 11 times (2Br 21:1-3; 3Br 1:3 in both recensions; 4Ezra 5:14-15; Rev 1:9-17; Dn 7:15; 28; 10:1-17; Vita 27; LdJb 2:1-3; OrSib 3:1-7 and 5:51). Worthy of note are 3Br 1:3, where the seer is especially troubled about what the heathen will think of the Jews after the destruction of the Temple:

Woe, now I Baruch (was) weeping in my mind and considering the people and how King Nebuchadnezzar was permitted by God to plunder his city, saying: 'Lord, why have you set fire to your vineyard and laid it waste? Why have you done this? And why, Lord, did you not requite us with another punishment, but rather handed us over to such heathen so that they reproach us saying, 'Where is your God?' And behold, while I was weeping and saying such things, I saw an angel of the Lord coming and saying to me, 'Know, O man, greatly beloved man, and do not concern yourself so much over the salvation of Jerusalem [...]'

And LdJb 2:1-3



And when I heard (this) from on high, awe and trembling fell upon me. And I rose up from my dream and, the voice still being in my ears, I said, 'How fearful is this place! This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven'. And I set up the stone which had been my pillow as a pillar, and I poured olive oil on the top of it, and I called the name of that place the House of God [...]

What renders this passage so important (although the text cannot be classified as an apocalypse) is the vivid detail portrayed by the author where you can see the actual metamorphosis of common everyday items (the pillow and the olive oil) into altogether different and sacred objects. It also makes one think how these would be perceived by other people attending the scene.

All this compares to only one for asleep experiences (4Ezra 3:1-5); basically vocal revelations occur 20 times in awakened experiences (1En 1:2; 91:1; 2En 3:1; 72:1; 10; 4Ezra 1:33; 5:31; 9:26-29; ApAbr 8; ApSed 2:1-5; Rev 1:9-17; Dn 10:1-17; 4Br 6:15; 7:1 and of those, 8 only in the Sibylline Oracles, namely OrSib 2:1; 340; 3:1-7; 5:51; 11:315-320; 13:1; 5; fr.8) against 2 in sleeping visions

(GrEzra 1 and possibly 2En 72:1; 10, which is also cited as of the "awake" kind). Remarkable is the description of God's voice in ApAbr 8:

And it came to pass as I was thinking things like these with regard to my father Terah in the court of my house, the voice of the Mighty One came down from the heavens in a stream of fire, saying and calling, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And I said, 'Here I am' [...]

Finally, essentially visual experiences are evenly distributed in the assessed evidence, 11 in visions with the seer in an awakened state (2Br 6:2; 21:1-3; 55:1-4; ApAbr 15-19; Rev 1:9-17; 4:1-2; Dn 2:17-20; Jub 1:2-6;



Martls 1:5-6; Vita 27 and 4Br 4:11) and 9 in sleeping visions (1En 13:6-10; 2Br 35-36 and again 55:1-4; 4Ezra 10:29; 11:1; 13:1; ApAdam 2:1; Dn 7:1-2 and LdJb 1:1). Regarding the explicit need for a special place to experience a vision (as something different from the precise citing of places - like the seer sitting under a tree to rest, in 2Br 55:1), awakened visions outnumber sleeping ones 6-2 (2Br 21:1-3; 55:1-4; Dn 10:1-17; Jub intro; Martls 2:7-11 and 4Br 4:11 vs. 1En 13:6-10 and again 2Br 55:1-4).

But the most astonishing picture emerges when we consider the presence of angels or supernatural beings in the preparation for visions (this is difficult to separate from the visions themselves; however, since many of those appearances occur at the beginning of the process of getting a vision - when not its very explanation - I think it reasonable to link them to the process of preparation). Here, the sources show 17 times the presence of otherworldly entities as part of the preparation for awakened visions (1En 1:2; 2En 3:1; 72:1; 10; 2Br 6:2; 55:1-4; 3Br Slavonic introduction; 1:3 in both recensions; Rev 1:9-17; 4:1-2; Dn 9:21; 10:1-17; Vita 25; 4Br 4:11; 6:7-16; 15; OrSib 11:315-320 and 13:1), while only 3 sleeping visions show their presence (Test12 Lv 2; 2Br 55:1-4 again and 4Ezra 5:31). Once the reference is sure, but coincides with their being present at a vision that is unclear (2En 72:1; 10;), and once it is doubtful in unclear visions (Dn 8:1; 16).

So far I have dealt with the quantitative aspects of the passages involved; of course, their levels of explicitness, relevance and enlightening to the theme vary accordingly. It would make no sense to discuss visions



awakened or sleeping as a whole, but rather in the way they have been compared above.

In terms of visions during sleep, the most important passages are 4Ezra 3:1-5; 10:29; 10:59; 13:1; TestLv 2 and TestNaph 5-7. Dn 7:1-2 should also be considered here.

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream, and told the sum of the matter. Daniel said, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea [...]"

Concerning visions with the seer in an awakened state of mind, some of the best-known passages are 1En 13:4; 2Br 55:3; Jub 14:1; ApMos 2:2 and 4Ezra 5:37.

For basically visual passages, which are, explicitly or implicitly, to be understood as dreams, see Dn 10:9 and specially 2Br 53:1, the "apocalypse of the clouds":

And I saw a vision. And behold, a cloud was coining from the great sea. And I was looking at it, and behold, it was entirely filled with black water [...] And because of my fear I awoke.

Equally worth looking at is 2En 1:6 in mss A, the shorter recension:

I got up from my sleep, and the men were standing by me in actuality. Then I hurried and stood up and bowed down to them [...]

The theme of "enlarged vision", i.e. the notion that the seer has a privileged vision regarding things of the otherworld, has a parallel idea already in Nm 24:2 ff.: "Balaam looked up and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. Then the spirit of God came upon him, and he uttered his



oracle, saying: "The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is clear, the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down, but with eyes uncovered: how fair are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel! [...]".

Allusions to physical or pharmacological induction of trances are much more straightforward: those kinds of stimuli as divided in the above categories give us the following examples:

Fasting emerges in passages like Dn 10:2-3; 2Br 5:7; 9:2; 12:5; 21:1. The effect obtained by fasting seems equal to any other of the inductions here described: however, 2Br is particularly remarkable for the number and frequency of the fasts Baruch goes through. In that apocalypse fasting has an unparalleled importance. The sequence of fasts begins in 5:7 and follows a "believable" pattern of a number of days where the seer could really fast: "And we sat there and fasted until the evening [...]" Then 9:2, "[...] and we rent our garments, and wept and mourned, and fasted for seven days"; finally 12:5 "And having said these things I fasted for seven days". 21:1 follows the same pattern but has already been quoted.

Chemical induction related to the visionary present the most "paganizing" reference to the means for inspiration found among the apocalypticists (i.e. the passages that most resemble pagan practices of artificial ecstatic practices)³⁸, - this may be so for the same reason that "classical prophets" have a "calmer" ecstasy than their pagan counterparts, i.e. for editorial reasons.

³⁸ See the article of Hultgard, "Ecstasy and vision", p.218 ff



A bit less appealing, but equally if not more important, are references to special diets as equivalent to chemical induction - e.g. Dn 1:12-17:

Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. You can then compare our appearance with the appearance of the young men who eat the royal rations, and deal with your servants according to what you observe." So he agreed to this proposal and tested them for ten days. At the end of ten days it was observed that they appeared better and fatter than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations. So the guard continued to withdraw their royal rations and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. To these four young men God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams.

Special places appear throughout apocalyptic literature (Daniel has his visions in Babylon, Ezra lies in the field) but more significantly in 2Br 6:1; 55:1 reads

And it happened that when I had finished the words of this prayer, I sat down there under a tree to rest in the shadow of its branches. And I was astonished, and I pondered in my thoughts about the multitude of the goodness which the sinners who are on earth have rejected from them [...]

Cf. also 2Br 77:18-19; TestAbr 2. A baru as early as Balaam could also have his insights related to a certain spot: "Now Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, so he did not go, as at other times, to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness" (Nm 24:1).

A last mention must be made to a most common element in preparation for visions, which is prayer. This is a difficult issue to handle, because prayer is so important



in every aspect of daily life among Jews³⁹ (and Christians). It may be just a commonplace theme pervading every mystical revelation of the times, thus not indicating any kind of special preparation - as opposed to the much more radical practices of long fasting, ingestion of certain foods or going to specific places, named or not, in order to receive a revelation. Prayer may be common in apocalyptic preparation for visions because of its diffusion, and thus should not be taken into account as a special means of preparation from the seer.

On the other hand, the frequency of allusions to prayer forbids their dismissal as a commonplace resource, stylistic or otherwise.

Some conclusions should be drawn from what has been examined above, for all the problems regarding consumption, copying and dating of the apocalypses themselves. However, after taking these precautions, some interesting issues arise, which can be taken as provisional conclusions of the investigation.

Even if the authors were not real ecstatic who, in fact, went through the experiences described and the visions were just a stylistic commonplace, a very different picture would emerge from divination and ecstasies as described in the Old Testament, as seen⁴⁰. The apparent absence of "symbolic acts"⁴¹ in the apocalypticists, while so often found among the prophets, is striking: the apocalyptic visionaries, whether their experiences are

³⁹ Edward P. Sanders. *Judaism. Practice and Belief 63 BCE - 66 CE*. London / Philadelphia: SCM Press / Trinity Press, 1992. P.202 ff.

⁴⁰ This does not exclude parallels, which seem especially important in the case of the Sinaitic revelation to Moses.

⁴¹ E.g. the 50 km run of Elijah that showed something "superhuman" to be with him, a spirit or *ruah*. Hosea married a whore, symbolic of Israel. With the "symbolic acts" the prophet aimed at a better, fuller understanding of his message; the symbolic act seems to have the same properties as the prophetic word.



authentic or not, seem to live in a much more lonely world, in which publicly performed acts which may have a social or political impact are apparently irrelevant⁴². It is arguable that, were the device of pseudonymity a mere stylistic *topos*, the imitation of Old Testament prophetic or scribal figures would be much more mimetic.

In terms of patterns observed, we should note that:

1. It is striking that the proportion of awakened visions, as opposed to those which occur during sleep or in dreams, is overwhelming;

2. The presence of chemically induced ecstasies, interesting and appealing in cross-cultural comparison as it may be, is comparatively small, as opposed to more "traditional" resources such as fasting and prayer;

3. The presence of angels or otherworldly beings as part of the preparation is also virtually non-existent in visions which occur during sleep; the prevalence of the awakened visions together with this indication points to the visionaries being conscious of the process they have triggered (if the experiences described are in fact authentic), this awareness being a common feature with Old Testament prophecy. The apocalyptic visionary, like his prophetic counterpart, does not lose his identity by "becoming one with the deity", but much to the contrary, the differences between the processes themselves show a striking diversity among the apocalyptic visionaries themselves, whether the experiences are authentic or not.

4. The conclusions arrived at do not relate to Collins' well-known taxonomy between historical and

⁴² On the theme, an important observation is made by John Ashton, drawing on the parallels between Jewish visionary experiences at the time of Paul and Shamanism: cf. *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*, p.33.



voyage apocalypses⁴³. No significant distinction can be made between the two in terms of preparation for visions - this meaning that resources for comparison and cross-cultural studies have to be sought elsewhere. While the classification proposed by Collins offers a useful taxonomy in terms of the content of the visions, the basic distinction between a "history-meaningful" apocalypse and an "otherworldly" one seems quite useless in terms of preparation for the visions. On the other hand, a study which should include closely related phenomena in the period (e.g. the "prophets" described by Josephus, New Testament literature) would be most useful, but impossible in the current limits of this appendix.

Sometimes in the same apocalypse feasible and apparently real experiences mix up with obviously impossible feats, without this implying plural authorship or truthfulness / falsehood of the whole work (e.g. the drinking of a kind of hallucinogen by the seer in 4Ezra as opposed to fasting forty days in 4Ezra 14. This may also be a reason to believe in the actual experience described by the seer in 1En 14 but to doubt the following detailed descriptions of heavenly lights and of hell (both could be just rewritings of earlier works and not imply any degree of actual visionary experience)⁴⁴.

As a last conclusion, I would like to stress that, from the pieces of evidence that have come to us, the relevance of visions, where the visionary is in an awakened state of mind, is overwhelming compared to visions during sleep; chemical induction is much less common than other types of preparation and sexual prescriptions. The latter constitutes an important part of legal prescriptions in the

⁴³ Collins, *Daniel*, p.2.

⁴⁴ Himmelfarb, "From prophecy to apocalyptic", op.cit. p.154.



Pentateuch, but are virtually excluded from the preparation for visions in the evidence assessed.

2.4. Chemical induction of visionary experiences

2.4.1. The nature of stories about chemical inducement in 4Ezra

The term "chemical inducement" should be first defined while dealing with the proposed theme, since ambiguity might arise. By "chemical inducement" I understand that the vision, as described by the seer, is a consequence of the ingestion of some substance that has a mind-altering character in the story subsequently told. Unorthodox dietary practices such as vegetarianism might also have a mind-altering effect (this is in fact described in Dn 1:8-15 and, surprisingly, in some modern case-studies as we shall see), but since in Jewish texts they are more likely be related to plain *kashrut* laws, they shall not be discussed here; fasting can have much the same preparatory effect in the stories told about visions, but likewise shall not be dealt with here⁴⁵.

This leaves us with four passages in the corpus of Second Temple Jewish literature, where the ingestion of some substance appears to be related to mystical experience: *Fourth Book of Ezra* 9:23-29; 12:51; 14:38-48 and *Martyrdom of Isaiah* 2:7-11. Of those, the last one cannot be properly understood as portraying a cause and effect relationship in terms of chemical inducement and the seer's vision, and shall be left out of this analysis.

⁴⁵ The text of 4Ezra used is Metzger's translation in OTP 1. "ASC" stands, from now on, for "altered state of consciousness". The transliteration of Persian sources has been left as they stand in the original editions, this accounting for differences in spelling of the same word.



The three passages of 4Ezra, on the other hand, provide clear links between the ingestion of substances and experiences undergone thereafter. It should be noted that no significant variations in the passages examined were found in the different readings of the manuscripts, according to the textual discussion by Stone⁴⁶.

The *Fourth Book of Ezra* is an apocalyptic text of Jewish origin (with the exception of what came to be known in the Vulgate as chapters 1-2 and 15-16 of II Esdras, which are Christian interpolations), that was probably written after 70 CE (because of the importance that the author attached to the fall of the Temple) and the end of the Second Century CE (where the first clear mention of it is to be found in Clement of Alexandria)⁴⁷. The text of 4Ezra is structured around seven different visions, of which the fourth (explanation for the weeping woman) and the seventh (the command to write the 94 books) are the most important for us here. 4Ezra 12:51 is also of importance and is attached to the context of the fifth vision (the eagle), although it, in fact, introduces the sixth - for after 12:51 the seer sleeps seven days and then receives a vision.

In the first passage, 4Ezra 9:23-29, we have a dialogue between God and Ezra where the seer is still perplexed about the fate of the wicked in relation to the righteous. For God to explain in further detail to Ezra why so many will perish while He is only concerned about the fate of the just, He orders Ezra to go to a field without any human

⁴⁶ The mss. of 4Ezra can be divided in two main groups, the first comprising the Latin and Syriac versions, the second the Georgian, Ethiopic and Coptic. Some differences in detail are sometimes found, and shall be noted. Cf. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, pp.1-3.

⁴⁷ Idem, p.9.



construction and not to fast⁴⁸, but instead eat only the flowers of the field and abstain from meat or wine (4Ezra 9:23-25).

But if you will let seven days more pass - do not fast during them, however; but go into a field of flowers where no house has been built, and eat only of the flowers of the field, and taste no meat and drink no wine, but eat only flowers, and pray to the Most High continually - then I will come and talk with you.

Here again the theme of vegetarianism is present (maybe as a reminder of the pre-diluvian diet that man once enjoyed, thus closer to Edenic times), but the reference to the eating of the flowers alone is striking and even absent from some versions of the text⁴⁹; since the Latin and Syriac texts are the best mss of 4Ezra, it looks more plausible that the reference to the flowers was already in the Greek or Hebrew original and eliminated in the less important versions than the other way round - it would make little sense to think of them as later insertions. It should be noted that Nabucodonosor also abstains from wine and meat in his madness (in the account of the *Vitae Prophetarum* 79:3-5)⁵⁰.

After this, Ezra goes to a field called Ardat (4Ezra 9:26). This poses a few problems, since there are so many variant readings for the name of the field as to dishearten the search for an actual place; but anyway it is clearly stated that the seer is commanded to go out of his house in

⁴⁸ Idem, p.302. Variant readings in the Ethiopic text and in the first Arabic version give a positive command, "do fast"; however, a witness as ancient as Tertullian already dismissed Ezra's practice in the episode as full fasting (*De ieiunio*. 9.1), and called it a "partial" one as in Daniel. Cf. also Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, p.36.

⁴⁹ The reference to the flowers appears only in the Latin, Syriac and Armenian versions. Cf. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, p.302.

⁵⁰ David Satran. "Daniel: seer, philosopher, holy man" in: George W.E. Nickelsburg and John J. Collins (eds.). *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism: Profiles and Paradigms*. Chico: Scholars Press, 1980. P.39.



Babylon (as we can see from the very beginning of the Jewish section of the text, 4Ezra 3:1 ff.), and the writer pays great attention to location details in the text, such as the name given to the field⁵¹. However, Ezra apparently does not obey the command strictly, for he admits having eaten flowers and the plants of the field (the well-being described by Ezra after eating those echoes Daniel). It would look from this passage that Ezra is keeping to a vegetarian diet, rather than ingesting the flowers alone. However, the reference to vegetables other than the flowers may be casual and Ezra's visions are apparently attached to the eating of the flowers indeed, because the command and the story themselves are strange (i.e. a command to avoid meat or to observe *kashrut* would not seem strange in the context). After seven days Ezra lies on the grass and finally begins to question God about His justice, and then receives the vision of the weeping woman who, in time, turns out to be the heavenly Jerusalem (4Ezra 9:38 ff.).

In the whole complex of preparation for the vision described in the last passages, it must be noted that the seer possibly did not perceive vegetarianism and the eventual inducement by the flowers as separate processes. In this respect too, we may have another parallel between Daniel and 4Ezra; both are men whose action takes place in Babylon, one Danielic vision finds its way explicitly in 4Ezra and both would appear to have a diet of vegetables.

⁵¹ The name has so many variants in the versions as to make actual identification almost impossible; "Arpad" in the Syriac version, "Araab" in the Ethiopic, some Latin texts with "Ardad", "Ardas", "Ardaf" or "Ardaph". Cf. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, p.304. The location of the field shows that the author is willing to give detail about the experience, and it is another element to be taken into consideration in order to consider it authentic (compare the huge amount of detail offered by Paul on his mystical experience, which gives a more real outlook to it).



The field without any human construction ("in campum florum ubi domus non est aedificata") echoes the stone cut out "not by human hands" of Dn 2:34.

Besides the flowers, God commands Ezra to pray "continually", also a means of ecstatic inducement present in many other texts (1En 13:6-10; 39:9-14; Dn 9:3; 3Br 1:1-3; Test12Lv 2:3-6 etc.). However, Ezra himself does not mention praying after God's command - but just states that he went to the field, ate the flowers and the plants and "the nourishment they afforded satisfied me" (4Ezra 9:26); then he speaks to God (this can be understood as a prayer, in the terms it is formulated, but it comes as a result of having sat in the field and eaten the flowers; this is what makes Ezra's heart troubled and is the cause of his mouth being opened)⁵².

Regarding the theme that interests us here, it should be noted that the eating of the flowers, far from being casual, is a strict command from God to the seer; while it is not stated that the vision arises as a consequence of eating them (rather, the seer tells us that he was nourished after eating - it could be a metaphor for spiritual fulfillment), it is reasonable to link them both because of the first command. Summing up the story told in 4Ezra:

1. The command comes together with other features (like the need of the flowers to be in a field with no human constructions);

⁵² The Ethiopic and the first Arabic versions have it in an active meaning, i.e. Ezra opens his mouth by himself. Cf. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, p.304.



2. God commands Ezra to pray as preparation (which he does, not earlier as he was ordered, but rather as a result of "being nourished");

3. Complete fasting is altogether absent;

4. Vegetarianism is commanded both in the form of abstinence from meat and in the eating of the flowers, but may be related to purity worries and not to health issues (i.e. not to be related to gaining more concentration or mental accuracy);

5. Wine is also forbidden to Ezra, and this is somewhat strange when the reader already knows that he may take it in the seventh vision;

6. Having eaten other unspecified plants together with the flowers, the case for holding the latter responsible for the whole process of preparation in chapter 9 is somewhat weakened, although the reference may well have been casual (i.e. flowers = plants);

7. Nevertheless, whether it is the effect of a proper diet or of chemical inducement, from the seer's point of view it arrives as a consequence of God's command.

The key preparatory themes of chapter 9 are resumed in 4Ezra 12:51: here Ezra consoles the people for his prolonged absence due to the fifth vision (the eagle, explicitly related to Dn 7).

So the people went into the city, as I told them to do. But I sat in the field for seven days, as the angel had commanded me; and I ate only of the flowers of the field, and my food was of plants during those days.

The opposition between city and field location for the visions of the text is present again in Ezra's statement that he would wait seven days more (as the angel commanded



him in 12:39) in the field, only eating the flowers (here the text of 4Ezra has "flowers" and "plants" as equivalent terms). Contrary to the visions of chapter 9, which are likely to be describing experiences with an awakened seer, the sixth vision in chapter 13 is described by Ezra as a dream. Besides, it should be noted that the relation between the flowers and the vision is far less clear in ch. 12: the angel simply pleads Ezra to wait seven more days to see whatever more God would tell him besides the interpretation of the eagle vision (4Ezra 12:38-39). The cause-effect relationship is less clear here than in ch. 9, if at all present.

Finally, the last passage of 4Ezra describing possible inducement for visions by means of mind-altering substances comes in chapter 14. There, in 14:38-48 Ezra is again in the field (the "again" making it clear that it is referring to Ardat or to the field named in a similar way in the versions). Ezra shall not be disturbed for forty days (echoing Moses' experience⁵³ and possibly also that of Abraham, although in ApAbr 9:7 the command is not exactly to fast but "to abstain from every kind of food cooked by fire, and from drinking of wine and from anointing [yourself] with oil"⁵⁴); and contrary to most visionary experiences described in apocalyptic texts, Ezra is not alone but has taken five scribes with him⁵⁵.

What happens next is not a vision but an auditive experience: Ezra hears a voice that commands him to drink from a cup. This marks the beginning of the visual part of the experience proper (4Ezra 14:38).

⁵³ Idem, p.303.

⁵⁴ Cf. also Ithamar Gruenwald. *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*. Leiden: Brill, 1980. P.52.

⁵⁵ André, "Ecstatic prophesy in the Old Testament", p.190 for the idea of the relative "loneliness" of the classical prophet as related to the pagan prophets, going together in groups.



So I took five men, as he commanded me, and we proceeded to the field, and remained there. And on the next day, behold, a voice called me, saying, 'Ezra, open your mouth and drink what I give you to drink'. Then I opened my mouth, and behold, a cup was offered to me; it was full of something like water, but its color was like fire. And I took it and drank; and when I had drunk it, my heart poured forth understanding, and wisdom increased in my breast, for my spirit retained its memory; and my mouth was opened, and was no longer closed. And the Most High gave understanding to the five men, and by turns they wrote what was dictated, in characters which they did not know. They sat forty days, and wrote during the daytime, and ate their bread at night. As for me, I spoke in the daytime and was not silent at night. So during the forty days ninety-four books were written [...]

After having taken the drink Ezra undergoes a transformation, and three things happen to what we would call Ezra's "mind": his heart pours forth understanding, his wisdom increases in his breast and his spirit retains his memory⁵⁶. His mouth was opened and did not close; Ezra's companions were also given the gift of understanding by God (the means of which are not stated), so that they might write down what Ezra was saying in "characters that they did not know" (rather than describing some ecstatic phenomenon like glossolalia, speaking in unknown tongues, this reference probably implies the use of square Aramaic script by the scribes⁵⁷). We are not told that Ezra ate anything after he drank from the cup (contrary to the scribes who, we are told, ate at night); he does this for forty days, with the final output of 94 books, of which 24

⁵⁶ In Jewish apocalyptic writings "heart" can, among other things, represent the intellectual function; "breast" is possibly related to it. Cf. Russell, *Method and Message*, pp.142-144.

⁵⁷ Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, p.439. Aramaic being also important in Daniel and in the Persian world at large reinforces this idea on the part of the author of 4Ezra.



would be made public and the remaining 70 not). This marks the end not only of the visions of chapter 14 but also of the chapter itself and thus, of the Jewish core of the book except the last two chapters, of Christian origin. The Syriac text adds two more verses, that say that Ezra was "caught up, and taken to the place of those who are like him, after he had written all these things...", but this reference alone does little to consider the revelatory experiences described by the author as being essentially concerned with heavenly journeys as e.g. 1En or 3En.

In the passage from ch. 14 there is the most clear cause and effect relationship in the chemical practices discussed: the seer states clearly that, *when* he drank the liquid his heart poured understanding etc... The command, the action and the vision are very clearly linked.

As a final balance of the ecstatic experiences described in 4Ezra 14:38-48 we could say that:

1. The experience described involves people other than the apocalyptic seer (the scribes);
2. The ingested substance resembles another one hitherto forbidden (wine);
3. The subsequent experience is not exactly a vision, but a prodigious deed (the writing of the books);
4. The scribes, although playing a secondary role and although we do not have the same amount of information about them, end up inspired in a very similar way to Ezra, albeit with less impressive means and less intensity (for they must stop to eat at night, while Ezra needs not)⁵⁸.

⁵⁸ All the considerations above are subject to one major difficulty permeating the whole issue, namely the pseudepigraphic nature of authorship: thus we cannot discuss properly who had the experience (if there is any indeed), but nevertheless we can analyze the practices described in the passages. For possibilities regarding the



The chemically induced experiences described by the apocalyptic seer disguised under the name of Ezra can be roughly divided into two groups: 4Ezra 9:23-29 and 12:51 on one side and 4Ezra 14:38-48 on the other. The first group involves certain foods and abstinence from alcohol, together with prayer which, however, may be playing only a conventional role in the visions described (i.e. while being a major ASC-inducer in other texts, it is clearly less important than the ingestion of substances in 4Ezra, and not only from the modern scholar's point of view; it looks so stereotyped in 4Ezra that it appears *after* the eating of the flowers, thus not being a cause of inducement).

On the other hand the second group, 4Ezra 14:38-48, involves a more fantastic and elaborate experience. Before trying to find out what the drink was, we should bear in mind that the theme of something "like fire" that gives inspiration is and can be connected to the Holy Spirit⁵⁹. Besides, the mere idea that Ezra was "dictating" sacred books (not yet canonical) implies that the Sinaitic revelation still had room to be enlarged⁶⁰, an idea that may reinforce the presence of the Holy Spirit in Ezra as he drank from the cup. The episode has parallels in the scroll eaten by Ezekiel (Ez 2:8-3:3) and thus to the author of the Book of Revelation (Rev 10:9-10), who also claims to have had sensory experiences related to ingestion.

The cup may also have a negative connotation as the means for God to madden peoples or nations (Jr 25:15-16);

relationship between the presumed and actual authors, see Stone, "Apocalyptic - vision or hallucination?" and Torm, "Die Psychologie der Pseudonimität".

⁵⁹ An association made by many, and well developed by Russell. See *Method*, op.cit. pp.171-172.

⁶⁰ Stone, "Apocalyptic", p.424.



it may also be a symbol of vocation (MartIs 5:14; Mk 10:38; 14:36). There are also many parallels for describing mystical experience in terms of drunkenness, the best known perhaps being Philo's *De ebrietate* 146-148:

[...] *to many of the unenlightened it may seem to be drunken, crazy and beside itself [...] indeed, it is true that these sober ones are drunk in a sense [...] and they receive the loving cup from perfect virtue*⁶¹.

Even if there is no multiple authorship involved, the spirit of both groups of visions analyzed is somewhat diverse from each other. The theme will be resumed in the "Conclusion" to this part of the thesis.

2.4.2. Persian parallels regarding chemically induced altered states of consciousness

The material used in this section is mainly composed of Persian texts. For reasons to be discussed in the "Conclusion", Persian influence in the theme of preparation for visions in 4Ezra is a reasonable supposition; however, it should be noted that the dating of all the Persian texts listed below is much later than those possible for 4Ezra. This is the greatest single reason that renders impossible any definite conclusion about the influencing of Persian sources on the apocalypse we are examining; it may indeed present an untransposable barrier⁶². A different matter is posed by the dating of the mythical themes contained in them, which will be addressed in the end of this section⁶³.

⁶¹ Translation by F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, in the Loeb Classical Library Edition, vol.III of Philo's works (Cambridge, Mass. / London: Harvard University Press, 1968).

⁶² John J. Collins. *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*. Semeia 14, 1979. P.207 ff.

⁶³ Examination of Mesopotamian relations to Jewish apocalyptic ecstatic practices showed no similar means of preparation, but rather similar contents of the visions, not to be dealt with here. Cf. Wifred G.



The sources quoted here derive basically from eight Persian texts, the *Jāmāsp Namag*, the *Wizirkard i Denig*, the *Zardush Nameh*, the "Conversion of Vishtapa", the apocalypse called *Zand-i Vohuman Yasn*, the experience of Vishtapa referred to in the *Dinkard*, a reference in the *Book of Artay Viraz*, and passages of the *Vidēvdāt*⁶⁴.

In the *Jāmāsp Namag* (also a pseudepigraphic text, written in the name of an old wise man), Jāmāsp receives from Zoroaster the gift of knowledge by means of a flower. This is also the theme of the Pahlavi text *Wizirkard i Denig* 19 (this text could be from the twelfth century - there is a dated manuscript dated from 1123, referring to another from 609, whose existence is far from sure -, written in Persian "disguised" as Pahlavi or Middle Persian)⁶⁵; indeed, the tradition that described the acquisition of mystical knowledge by Jāmāsp resembles very much that of Ezra regarding the flowers, as the drinking of the blessed wine looks similar to the experience of 4Ezra 14 - the main difference in the passage being the fact that here we have two different seers:

(19) *And behold: One day King Vištâsp, king of kings, (willing) to challenge his [Zoroaster's] prophetic achievements, asked Zoroaster that he gives him what he would ask: 'That I may be immortal and exempt from old age, that swords and spears be incapable of hurting my body, that I may know all the secrets of heaven, present, past and future and that I may see, in this life, the better existence of the just!' Zoroaster*

Lambert. *The Background of Jewish Apocalyptic*. London: The Athlone Press / University of London, 1978 and Helmer Ringgren. "Akkadian apocalypses", AMWNE, pp.379-386.

⁶⁴ For a brief overview of the place of these books in relation to the output of Zoroastrian texts, cf. Geo Widengren. *Die Religionen Irans*. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1965 and also Sven Hartman. "Datierung der Jungavestischen Apokalyptik", AMWNE, pp.61-76.

⁶⁵ Tord Olsson. "The apocalyptic activity. The case of Jāmāsp Nāmāg", AMWNE, p.32. For the dating, cf. Marijan Molé. *La légende de Zoroastre: selon les textes Pehlevis*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1967. P.9.



said: 'Ask any of these four things for yourself, and the other three for three other people; the Creator will grant them more easily'. So King Vištâsp wanted to see in this life the better existence of the just. With the help of Lord Ohrmazd, just Zoroaster [performed a sacrifice rite] and laid down milk, a flower, wine and a grenade. After having exalted and invoked the Well-doing Creator, he gave the blessed wine to Vištâsp so that he would fall asleep and see the better existence; he gave the flower to Jamâsp, the best of men and he was taught, by means of visions, about all events present, past and future; he gave the grenade to Spanddât whose body became sacred and invulnerable to pointed swords; he gave the blessed milk to Pêšôtan son of King Vištâsp who obtained immortality in the field and eternal youth.⁶⁶

In the *Zardush Nameh* (after the ninth century, for it quotes the earlier *Dinkard*, and written in Pahlavi⁶⁷) it is said that Jāmāsp acquired his gift by smelling the flower consecrated by Zoroaster in a ceremony:

*He gave to Jāmāsp some of the consecrated perfume, and all sciences became understandable to him. He knew about all things to happen and that would happen until the day of resurrection*⁶⁸.

The form of the text also resembles 4Ezra because of the question-answer form as introduced by Vishtapa ("This pure religion, how long will it last?" etc.). In terms of the visionary process itself, it is remarkable that Jāmāsp interprets for king Vishtapa a dream in much the same fashion that Daniel explained another one to

⁶⁶ Molé, op.cit. p.133.

⁶⁷ Edwin Yamauchi. *Persia and the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990. P.410. It was probably written in the Thirteenth century.

⁶⁸ Olsson, op.cit. p.32. In Mary Boyce's translation ("On the antiquity of Zoroastrian apocalyptic", BSOAS 47, 1984. P.60) the flower is rendered as "incense": the mixture of the latter with wine has a maddening effect not on visionaries, but on the elephants of 3Mc 5:45: "Now when the animals had been brought virtually to a state of madness, so to speak, by the very fragrant draughts of wine mixed with frankincense [...]".



Nabucodonosor⁶⁹. Drinking is alluded to also in the Pahlavi *Rivayat* 47 ("Conversion of Vishtaspa", the *rivayats* were composed between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, in Pahlavi⁷⁰), when Vishtaspa receives the perception on the ways of religion after a visit by a divine messenger who makes him drink a cup full of wine or haoma⁷¹ mixed again with a narcotic, *mang* (whose significance will be discussed shortly):

(27) Ormazd sent Nêrôsang: 'Go to Artvahišt and tell him: Put mang in the wine and give it for Vištâsp to drink'. (28) Artvahišt did so. (29) Having drunk it, he evaporated into the field. (30) His soul was taken to Garôtmân [Paradise] to show him what he could gain if he accepted the Religion. (31) When he woke up from the sleep, he cried to Hutôs: 'Where is Zoroaster so that I may accept the Religion?' (32) Zoroaster heard his voice, came and Vištâsp accepted the Religion.⁷²

In the *Zand-i Vohuman Yasn* (the text is in Pahlavi and a *zand* purports to be an interpretation of a lost book of the Avesta, the *Bahman Yasht*⁷³; it is quite similar in themes to the *Oracle of Hystaspes*, something which may suggest its antiquity) 3:7-8. Zoroaster drinks the water that Ahura Mazda gives to him and acquires his wisdom, in a similar fashion to the cup episode in 4Ezra 14:

⁶⁹ Anders Hultgård. "Forms and origins of Iranian apocalypticism", AMWNE, p.401.

⁷⁰ Mary Boyce. *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984. P.5.

⁷¹ An intoxicating mythical drink whose exact nature has yet to be explained; it is generally identified with soma, or even with other hallucinogenic plants, as we will see below.

⁷² Molé, op.cit. p.121.

⁷³ However, efforts to reconstruct an Avestic *Bahman Yasht* from the late commentaries we have are inconclusive: for a full discussion of the many problems involved, cf. Carlo G. Cereti (ed.). *The Zand i Wahman Yasn: a Zoroastrian Apocalypse*. Roma: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1995. Pp.14 ff.



4. Zarduxšt, in thought, was displeased. 5. Ohrmazd, through the wisdom of omniscience, knew that he, Spitāmān Zarduxšt of the righteous frawahr, thought. 6. He took the hand of Zarduxšt, he Ohrmazd, the bountiful spirit, the Creator of the world of material beings, holy [...] put his wisdom of omniscience, in the form of water, on the hand of Zarduxšt and said "Drink". 7. And Zarduxšt drank of it. He blended the wisdom of omniscience in Zarduxšt. 8. Seven days and nights was Zarduxšt in the wisdom of Ohrmazd⁷⁴.

In the *Dinkard* 7.4.84-86 Vishtapa drinks a mixture of wine or haoma with some narcotic, possibly henbane. The same episode in the *Zand-i Vohuman Yasn*, a later redaction, has this potation replaced by water as we saw above, possible evidence of the practice being rejected in later times⁷⁵.

[...] Ohrmazd the creator sent [...] to the residence of Wishtāsp the divinity Nērōsang [...] to cause Wishtāsp to consume the illuminating nourishment which would give his soul eye vision over the spiritual existence, by reason of which Wishtāsp saw great mystery and glory. As it says in the Avesta, 'Ohrmazd the creator said to the divinity Nērōsang: 'Go, fly on [...] to the residence of Wishtāsp [...] and say this to Ashawahisht: 'Powerful Ashawahisht, take the excellent bowl, more excellent than the other bowls which are well made [...] for conveying for our own sake hōm and mang [maybe henbane, see "Conclusion"] to Wishtāsp and cause the lofty ruler Kay Wishtāsp to drink it'⁷⁶.

⁷⁴ Cereti, op.cit. pp.150-151. The author suggests the passage implies a reference to psychotropic drugs and refers to the parallel in Arda Viraz Nāmag 3.15 (cf. the commentary on the *Bahman Yasht* by Cereti, op.cit. p.179). Ezra also sits in the field for seven days in 4Ezra 12:51, as seen above.

⁷⁵ Hultgård, "Ecstasy and vision" in: Holm, op.cit. p.222. The *Dinkard* is probably not earlier than the 9th century.

⁷⁶ David S. Flattery and Martin Schwartz. *Haoma and Hermaline: the Botanical Identity of the Indo-Iranian Sacred Hallucinogen "Soma" and Its Legacy in Religion, Language, and Middle Eastern Folklore*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989. P.18. An older and slightly different translation can be found at Molé, op.cit. p.59.



The *Book of Artay Viraz* (a late text, possibly late Sassanian, in Pahlavi⁷⁷) also talks about preparation of the seer by means of taking wine with narcotic, in 2.25-31:

*The priests of the religion filled three golden cups with wine and with henbane of Vištāsp and presented to Virāz one cup for the Good Thought, one second for the Good Word and a third for the Good Deed*⁷⁸.

It must be noted that in the passage above no ascetic practice similar to the ones of 4Ezra occurs (much on the contrary, Viraz prepares himself by eating - not fasting - and nothing of the ascetic practices of the seer in 4Ezra seems present).

Finally, in the *Vidēvdāt* 4.14 (the text may have been started during Vologeses III, 148-191, and completed under the Sassanian Khosraw I, 531-579, in Pahlavi)⁷⁹ old women bring henbane to cause abortion:

Thus this who [is] a girl [looks] for an old woman; these girl-injurers consulted together; this who [is] an old woman brings mang or šēt [one is called that of Vištāsp, one that of Zartušt]; (it is something) that kills [i.e. kills (the fetus) in the womb], or (it is a means to) throwing off [i.e. (the fetus) comes, afterwards dies], or whatever plant which is aborfacient [a sort of drug]; (and she says) thus 'with this (drug) the son is killed'.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Walter Belardi. *The Pahlavi Book of the Righteous Viraz*. Rome: University Department of Linguistics and Italo-Iranian Cultural Centre, 1979. P.10.

⁷⁸ Gignoux considers these three cups are merely symbolic of the fact that Virāz observes those three virtues better than anybody else: besides he translates *mang* for henbane (*jusquame* in the French translation). Cf. translation and notes in "Apocalypses et voyages extra-terrestres dans l'Iran mazdéen" in: Claude Kappler (ed.). *Apocalypses et voyages dans l'au-delà*. Paris: CERF, 1987. P.367. An older version and commentary can be found at Translation and notes in Belardi, op.cit. p.92; cf. also from Gignoux, "Notes sur la rédaction de l'Ardāy Virāz Nāmag", ZDMG, Supplementa 1, 1969.

⁷⁹ Yamauchi, op.cit. p.407.

⁸⁰ Belardi, op.cit. p.114.



In the passage above we apparently have two different drugs, which may be vision inducing or abortifacient⁸¹.

It should be noted that the passages above, important as they may be, do not suggest that chemical inducement was the only means by which Persian seers might prepare themselves for ecstatic experiences: here too such references are comparatively rare - although outnumbering by far the ones in Jewish apocalyptic - and do not replace more traditional forms of preparation such as prayer or fasting⁸². But the insistent mentioning both of wine and plants as means of receiving inspiration deserves closer attention.

Evidence from 4Ezra checked against Persian data gives us the following items as being possibly chemical stimulants for the visionaries - wine (in 4Ezra 14:38-48, *Zand-I Vohuman Yasn* 3:7-8, *Wizirkard i Denig* 19), wine or haoma with narcotics (*Dinkard* 7.4.84-86; *Book of Artay Viraz* 2.25-28; *Yasna* 10.17; "Conversion of Vishtaspa" 47), henbane (as abortive in *Vidēvdāt* 4.14), unspecified flowers that could be henbane (4Ezra 9:23-29; 12:51; again Jāmāsp in *Wizirkard i Denig* 19; *Zardush Nameh*) and a further reference to haoma/soma in utterly unfavourable terms, that shall be examined below. Since in these references we are generally not guessing what the substance is, but the

⁸¹ Idem, p.115.

⁸² Hultgård, "Ecstasy and vision", p.224. The voyages described here have a non-historical flavour - i.e. they were supposedly performed by mythical characters. This does not exclude allusions to historical practices, but these should be taken with care - while the visionary is taken to an otherworldly voyage in the *Arday Viraz* passage, by contrast to the historical and earthly explanations given in 4Ezra. Real mystical experiences similar to those described above can be found in ancient Iran and will be discussed below. Cf. Philippe Gignoux. "La signification du voyage extra-terrestre dans l'eschatologie mazdéenne" in: *Mélanges d'histoire des religions offerts à Henri-Charles Puech*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974. Pp.64-68 and Shaul Shaked. *Dualism in Transformation: Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran*. London: University of London, 1994. P.49.



sources tell us in a much clearer way than in 4Ezra), we should take a look at the possibilities of these mind altering substances being available to the visionary of 4Ezra in the conclusion to this article.

The fact that the Persian texts related to practices similar to 4Ezra are, without exception, later than the Jewish text does not mean that their mythical cores cannot be older.

First of all, the figure of Vishtaspa (or, in its Greek form, Hystaspes) is much older than the earliest Jewish apocalypses themselves, and came to be known in a variety of syncretistic guises throughout the Mediterranean⁸³. This is no proof of the anteriority of the Persian texts (after all we also have an "earlier" Ezra), but at least assures that the figure of Vishtasp cannot be later than that of Ezra. Secondly, there are a number of other mythical themes portrayed in late Persian texts (like the *Zand* of the *Bahman Yasht*) that are known through earlier sources (like the four ages associated to metals and monarchies, already quoted in Theopompus - fourth century BCE - or in the fragments collectively known as the *Oracle of Hystaspes*). This is indirect evidence that late Persian texts contain cores that can be of an earlier date even if not of Persian origin. The theme of the cup that gives wisdom, being already present in the *Yasna* 10.17 is much older: the *Yasna* preserves material from the *Gathas* (sacred texts traditionally attributed to Zoroaster himself), including *Yasna* 10.17 - which deals with the theme of the wisdom cup, in this case related to haoma:

⁸³ We have in fact two different characters that sometimes get mixed up in later tradition - one being the king that protects Zoroaster, the second the father of Darius I. In the texts here discussed we are referring to the first. Cf. Hans Windisch. *Die Orakel des Hystaspes*. Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam, 1929. P.10.



Thereupon spake Zarathushtra: Praise to Haoma, Mazda-made. Good is Haoma, Mazda-made. All the plants of Haoma praise I, on the heights of lofty mountains, in the gorges of the valleys, in the clefts (of sundered hill-sides) cut for the bundles bound by women. From the silver cup I pour Thee to the golden chalice over. Let me not thy (sacred) liquor spill to earth, of precious cost.

The dating of the *Yasna* depends on the dating attributed to Zoroaster, but even supposing the prophet to be a figure living as late as the sixth century BCE (unlikely, because of the many parallels of Gathic material to the *Rig Veda*), the *Yasna* is much earlier than 4Ezra⁸⁴.

For the relation between the flowers and disclosure, however, no earlier parallel than that of the *Jāmāsp Namag* was found (there is one reference to flowers in a similar context in *Yasna* 42.4, related to haoma, but not exactly the same as that of the later texts). It should be noted that, if the *mang* put in the wine is henbane, we would be deprived of long-duration links if it would be translated instead as hemp, the latter being present in Scythian rituals reported by Herodotus; this would give us an earlier dating for shared Indo-Iranian ecstatic practices.

2.4.3. Conclusion

As a conclusion to this discussion on 4Ezra I should begin by pointing out that the difficulties in establishing a definite conclusion are overwhelming and that, unless dramatic new evidence changes the current picture, we will be left forever with no certainties on the matter of the relation between 4Ezra and eventual Persian sources.

⁸⁴ Boyce, *Textual sources*, p.2.



This being said, I am inclined to accept a relation other than casual between them, for many reasons. First of all, the themes of the flower and the drink that beget knowledge are striking parallels: it is important to notice that, contrary to other quotations of "cups" playing an important part in stories both in the Old Testament and the New, in 4Ezra the cup is part of a revelatory process: the seer becomes enlightened after taking it (or rather performs an amazing feat which is in itself some kind of revelation, the writing of the 94 books).

These parallels leave us, as always, with three possibilities: they can be either genealogically related, structurally related or it may be simply a coincidence that these themes are shared by our sources.

To say with certainty that there is any kind of genealogical link is out of the question, for reasons already stated⁸⁵.

Structurally, it has already been said that different societies attain a similar level of organization by means of different institutions⁸⁶; this would imply that the role of Persian seers and the author of 4Ezra might be analogous and independently achieved. While we know very little about who wrote, read and/or consumed Jewish apocalyptic literature and even less about its Hellenistic counterpart (i.e. Persian, Egyptian and Babylonian apocalypses), it should be noted that both Persian and Jewish visionaries were subject to similar conditions as related to foreign rule and oppression. In this sense the dating of the

⁸⁵ A possible exception would be the shamanistic traces present in the *Testament of Abraham*, according to Gignoux - the whole episode resembling in fact the voyage of Arda Viraz. Cf. Philippe Gignoux. "Les voyages chamaniques dans le monde iranien", AI 21, 1981. Pp.263-265. By the same reasoning the use of hallucinogens in Zoroastrian mystical experiences is considered by Gignoux as having a key role to establish a link with Siberian shamanism (op.cit. p.244).

⁸⁶ Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, p.2.



Persian sources may be less important than in a straight genealogical approach, for even being late redactions, their updating shows anomic conditions similar to those experienced by the author of 4Ezra (e.g. the four kingdoms in the *Zand-i Vohuman Yasn*, taken to mean Greek, Byzantine, Muslim and Turkish rules)⁸⁷. It must be stated that we know almost nothing about the seers themselves, either Jewish or Persian apocalyptic - while we have much information about *magoi* and Zoroastrians at large, it is not possible to just identify those groups with the seers of the texts examined.

Finally, the Persian seers and the visionary of 4Ezra may have gone through similar experiences by pure chance: taking the same ASC-inducers they had similar frames of visions, although developed in fairly different ways due to the cultural differences between their two worlds; after all, it is culture that changes, not chemistry⁸⁸. I do not think that this is the case; similarities between hallucinogenic cults both in the Old and in the New World point to a common shared heritage that may go back to the Paleolithic⁸⁹.

In terms of the experience described in 4Ezra, we have the additional difficulty of pseudepigraphy. Thus, even while using O'Brien's categories to understand our object (i.e. if the object confronted by the mystic is definite, if the confrontation is direct and if the experience goes contrary to his/her own cultural frame of mind we should be facing evidence of an authentic experience)⁹⁰ we are still left with very little; however, if these criteria are

⁸⁷ Samuel K. Eddy. *The King is Dead. Studies in the Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism 334-31 B.C.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961. P.17 ff; Collins, *Apocalypse*, p.209 ff.

⁸⁸ Peter Furst. *Hallucinogens and Culture*. San Francisco: Chandler & Sharp, 1976. P.17.

⁸⁹ Idem, p.2.

⁹⁰ Elmer O'Brien. *Varieties of Mystic Experience: an Anthology and Interpretation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964. Pp.4-6.



applied to the text we have, we must bear in mind the unique character of the preparatory practices described, in terms of Second Temple Jewish literature.

The effects of one candidate plant described (henbane) and its spread would make it quite possible that we are referring to an actual preparatory process here⁹¹. Other possibilities, such as hallucinogenic mushrooms, have been discussed in the past with controversial methods and results⁹². However, the use of the term *mang* has been recently proved to refer not particularly to henbane or to hemp, at least in the time of the writing of the later sources, but it appears to be rather a generic term for "psychoactive drug"⁹³.

Discussing the substances quoted in the sources, I think that wine should be omitted from this analysis as a stand-alone ASC-inducer for the reason that its diffusion, availability and use were nearly universal to Eurasian peoples at the time of the writing of 4Ezra (wine with narcotics is an altogether different matter and shall be examined below); this universality renders it useless as proof. Even if we were dealing with plain wine in 4Ezra 14:38-48, scholars consider it a comparatively weak ASC-inducer⁹⁴.

⁹¹ As opposed to the effects of hemp.

⁹² It is a pity that this specific theme lacks more bibliography; the only major work devoted to the theme is John Allegro's highly and understandably controversial *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross; a Study of the Nature and Origins of Christianity within the Fertility Cults of the Ancient Near East* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970). In his book Allegro says nothing about 4Ezra, Persian visionary processes or even henbane at large.

⁹³ We cannot know what the earlier use of the term was, but it should be noted that the Arabic *banj* refers to henbane, to datura and to intoxicating plants in general (al-Bīrūnī uses the term in the 11th century to refer to datura. In the 13th century Persia *mang* means both henbane and hashish. Cf. Flattery and Schwartz, op.cit. pp.16-17, 127. Hultgård is also vague on the interchangeable use of hemp and henbane regarding Persian texts; cf. "Ecstasy and vision", p.223 ff.

⁹⁴ Furst, *Hallucinogens*, p.17.



Regarding the other agents cited, we should begin by a definition of what they are and do: hallucinogenic drugs have the power to induce visual or other kinds of hallucinations and of divorcing the subject from reality⁹⁵. Most of these substances derive from plants, hemp being one of the most common; its effects are disputed among modern scholars, but ancient testimony gives credit to it as a powerful ASC-inducer⁹⁶. It looks possible (but unlikely) at first sight that the experience described by the Persian seer in the passages listed above is real, and even that Zoroaster's ecstatic experiences have been aided by hemp⁹⁷. It should be noted, however, that the Persian terms *bang*, *banj* or *mang* only came to be used as a reference including hemp after the Arab conquest, possibly in the 12th century: according to Belardi, in the book of *Artay Viraz* this virtually excludes the possibility that the seer is mixing wine with hemp, but rather with henbane⁹⁸.

Wine mixed with hemp has its use well attested in ancient sources: Galen attests to its use mixed with wine after meals as a digestive aid (*De facultatibus alimentarum* 100.49). Pliny says a lot about hemp in the *Natural history* but mostly in therapeutic terms (20.97). However, the most

⁹⁵ Norman R. Farnsworth. "Hallucinogenic plants" in: *Science*, New Series, volume 162, issue 3858 (Dec 6 1968). P.1086.

⁹⁶ Idem, p.1087; cf. William A. Emboder, Jr. "Ritual use of the *Cannabis Sativa* L.: a historical-ethnographic survey" in: Peter Furst (ed.). *Flesh of the Gods: the Ritual Use of Hallucinogens*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1972. Pp.219-220.

⁹⁷ H. Leuner. "Die toxische Ekstase" in: Theodor Spörri (ed.). *Beiträge zur Ekstase*. Bibliotheca psychiatrica et neurologica. Basel / New York: Karger, 1968. Pp.87-88. For the textual reasons given below, I find this not to be clear as Leuner puts it; Eliade's explanation, which simply accepts *bangha* and its derivation *mang* to mean "hemp" already at Sassanian times I find even less convincing. Cf. "Ancient Scythia and Iran" in: George Andrews and Simon Vinkenoog (eds.). *The Book of Grass; an Anthology of Indian Hemp*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972.

⁹⁸ Cf. Belardi, op.cit. p.114. See also the newer translation by Fereyduh Vahman. *Arda Wiraz Nāmag: the Iranian "Divina Commedia"*. London / Atlantic Highlands: Curzon Press / Distributed in the U.S.A. by Humanities Press, 1986. P.9.



important reference on the issue for our purposes comes from Homer (*Odyssey* 4.220). Being received by Menelaus, Telemachus is having a banquet and there Helen mixes something in the wine which deserves our attention:

*Then Helen, daughter of Zeus, took other counsel. At once she cast into the wine of which they were drinking a drug [nhpenqe] to quiet all pain and strife, and bring forgetfulness of every ill.*⁹⁹

In the sequence of the text it is also stated that this drug, *nepenthes*, had been given to Helen by Polydamna, a woman from Egypt - a land prone to these drugs and where, according to Homer, every man is a doctor. The nature of *nepenthe* is far from clear, the reference to Egypt especially obscure if it is to be understood as hemp, thus matching the effects described by the poet¹⁰⁰.

But the most important hallucinogenic plant in our context is henbane. It was present in Palestine of the time of 4Ezra (*Datura*, the genus of henbane has been present since long millennia BCE all over the world, with the exception of South America)¹⁰¹, but is not quoted in the authoritative work on Biblical flora by Crowfoot and

⁹⁹ Translation by A.T. Murray, in the Loeb Classical Library Edition (Cambridge, Mass. / London: Harvard University Press, 1995). Shaked makes the point that in Zoroastrian myth *mang* was also given to *Gayomart*, the primordial ox, to soothe the pains of death; cf. Shaked, *Dualism*, p.45.

¹⁰⁰ I shall return to this issue of the effects described in the passage; however the interpretation given by Pascal Brotteaux to the whole text is worth mentioning, being so original. He claims that the drug used must be either henbane, *datura* or *belladonna* (all of which effectively cause a loss to the mnemonic faculties, according to the author), while it cannot be hemp - according to him incapable of causing the described effects. This is surprising when it is almost commonsensical lore the effects on memory caused by hemp. Cf. "The Ancient Greeks" in: Andrews and Vinkennoog, *The Book of Grass*, op.cit. pp.27-28.

¹⁰¹ Richard E. Schultes and Albert Hoffman. *Plants of the Gods: Origins of Hallucinogenic Use*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979. Pp.27-28.



Baldensperger¹⁰². In this work extensive reference is made to the mandrake, a plant surrounded by bigger folklore. Mandrake is also used as a narcotic¹⁰³, and ancient reference points to its use mixed with henbane and poppy capsules in Diodorus Siculus and with wine in Homer¹⁰⁴.

Henbane, besides being available throughout the Near East, is also related to the *Atropa belladonna* (Nightshade) and, more importantly, gives us many instances of its use and effects in first person experiences, old and recent. We should now take a closer look at these.

Hyosciamus niger is the scientific name of henbane and it belongs to the family of the *solanaceae*, which includes common plants like potato and tobacco, and that comprises the most important group of plants used to establish contact with the other world, in terms of diffusion¹⁰⁵. All plants similar to henbane contain toxic substances in great quantity. One such substance may be absorbed via the skin (atropine), leading to many reports of its use in medieval and modern times in witchcraft trials¹⁰⁶. The use of henbane and the practice of vegetarianism is even combined

¹⁰² Grace M.H. Crowfoot and Louise Baldensperger. *From Cedar to Hyssop: a Study in the Folklore of Plants in Palestine*. London / New York / Toronto: The Sheldon Press / The Macmillan Company, 1932.

¹⁰³ Idem, p.118.

¹⁰⁴ Emboden, Jr. op.cit. pp.218-219. In Diodorus, it appears in the *History* 1.97, and in Homer in the *Odyssey* passage, if we should understand *nepenthe* to be identical to it.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Harner. "The role of hallucinogenic plants in European witchcraft" in: Michael Harner (ed.). *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*. New York / London: Oxford University Press, 1970. P.128.

¹⁰⁶ Idem, 135-137. This explains the connection of witches with the broom, something that may have phallic connotations because of its use to apply the henbane ointment in the vagina. There are also accounts like the one by Nider (1692) and Laguna (1545), which tell of the use of henbane by suspects who claimed to travel to Sabbaths. Fray Diego Durán, an early witness of Spanish rule in Mexico, (*Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*) establishes a link in terms of their effects between henbane and the magical agaric of the Mexicans, *teotlacuali* ("flesh of the gods"). Cf. Furst, *Hallucinogens*, pp.13-14.



in some reports¹⁰⁷; this is remarkably similar to the pattern of the first group of visions in 4Ezra (9:23-29; 12:51) and may be a technical issue related to enhancing the effects of henbane.

Modern experiences with the use of henbane include those of Kieseewetter (1907) and of Prof. Will-Erich Peukert from Göttingen (1966). Both prepared ointments as Porta suggested in the seventeenth century, and claimed to have had ecstatic experiences similar to those described by witches; Schenk breathed the smoke of burning henbane and said he felt his body separated from his soul, and had visions of rivers of molten metal (remarkably similar to the Persian experience regarding the Final Judgment, e.g. in *Jāmāsp Namag* 17.14)¹⁰⁸. It should be noted that the experiences described are notably similar even taking into account that medieval reports have been informed via inquisitorial processes whilst contemporary have not; there is also a difference in pattern regarding witchcraft / shamanism, for while both practices purport encounters with the other world, witches, contrary to shamans, would not manipulate spirits while in trance¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁷ See the reports by Porta, colleague of Galilei. Harner, op.cit. p.138.

¹⁰⁸ Harner, op.cit. p.139. On this issue it should be noted that, while not everybody has the same experiences with the same drugs (people who took LSD in controlled experiments in the Fifties claimed to have had no experience at all, in contrast to the then fashionable accounts by Huxley; cf. Ernst Arbman. *Ecstasy or Religious Trance. In the Experience of the Ecstatics and from the Psychological Point of View*. 3 volumes. Stockholm: Bokförlaget, 1963-1970. Volume 1 - Vision and Ecstasy. P.196), the visions described are seldom - if ever - much different from the cultural environment of the seer. This means that, knowing exactly why they were taking henbane, modern scholars were consciously or unconsciously bound to have visions similar to the medieval witches. This accounts at the same time for the stereotyped visions of apocalyptic literature in general and specifically of 4Ezra and gives an explanation for the same stereotype - the ancient seer, like the modern, could only "see" what his cultural environment allowed him to.

¹⁰⁹ Harner, op.cit. p.146.



Apart from hemp and henbane, there is a third group of ASC-inducing plants that must be dealt with here, namely fly agaric (*Ammanita muscaria*). This must be done - even if briefly - for the reference in 4Ezra 9:23-25 to the flowers in the field could mean the agaric. We should remember that 4Ezra 12:51 takes "flowers" to be synonymous to "plants"¹¹⁰.

There is a number of references in Persian literature that also point to the mushroom, namely the parallel between the Indian passage in the *Rig Veda* 8.4-10 and the *Yasna* 48.10 - both point to the drinking of urine, a practice known from Chinese Manicheans¹¹¹. It consists basically in the ingestion of the urine of people who had taken the fly agaric previously, and is attested in Siberian shamans; the Persian passage in the *Yasna* condemns it while the *Rig Veda* says that Indra was urinating soma. It is known that Indians have for long used mushrooms for hallucinogenic purposes, and it is possible then that the Persian and Indian passages relate to this usage¹¹².

We have seen that cross-cultural parallels offer pictures where inductive processes similar to the ones reportedly undergone by the seer in 4Ezra are abundant. The question remains, however, if these help explain something of the nature of the story told about the quoted vision episodes in 4Ezra.

All these parallels in themselves do not prove direct borrowing by Jewish apocalypticists from external sources.

¹¹⁰ Cf. above, p.13.

¹¹¹ Robert G. Wasson. "What was the soma of the Aryans?" in: Furst, *Flesh*, pp.204-206. So in the *Yasna* passage, "When, O Mazda, will the nobles understand the message? When will thou smite the filthiness of this intoxicant, through which the Karapans evilly deceive, and the wicked lords of the lands with purpose fell?" (F. Max Müller (ed.). *The Sacred Books of the East*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1887. Vol.31, translation by L.H. Mills).

¹¹² Farnsworth, op.cit. p.1089. The article also points to the possible identification of soma with *Ammanita muscaria*.



When it comes to Persian issues some specific points of disagreement arise.

Possibly the most sharp criticism against the idea of a Persian origin for Judeo-Christian apocalyptic comes from the famous article by Philippe Gignoux¹¹³. In the text, Gignoux points out some of the major issues that forbid us to trace a direct - i.e. genealogical - line between Persian and other apocalyptic environments. The major issues raised in the article are that on the one hand the content of the so-called "Persian apocalypses" is composite, and on the other the dating offered, even by the defendants of the influence-theory, is problematic¹¹⁴. Besides, Gignoux raises the always relevant issue about apocalyptic as a genre, something unheard of in Antiquity. This gets worse when it comes to Persian apocalypses, due to their lateness - Gignoux suggesting even that the trajectory of the common *topoi* may have been quite the reverse, i.e. Jewish-Christian ideas influencing Persian texts¹¹⁵.

Taken seriously, Gignoux's objections apparently make no distinction between the text as manuscript and as meaningful, cultural artifact - no matter how late the manuscripts of a given tradition may be, the ideas therein may be much older. Homeric epic may be the most famous stance of oral tradition put down in writing centuries after its composition, although Gignoux has a point in claiming that a continuity between 1.400 BCE (an eventual

¹¹³ "L'apocalyptique iranienne est-elle vraiment la source d'autres apocalypses?", AAASH 31 (1-2): (1988).

¹¹⁴ Idem, p.71.

¹¹⁵ Id. *ibid.* This is also the theme of Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin's article, "Apocalypse juive et apocalypse iranienne" in: Ugo Bianchi and Maarten J. Vermaseren (eds.). *La soteriologia dei culti orientali nell'Impero romano: atti del Colloquio internazionale su la soteriologia dei culti orientali nell'Impero romano, Roma, 24-28 settembre 1979*. Leiden: Brill, 1982. Cf. sp. p.759.



early date given for Zoroaster) and 900 CE (when a great part of the Zoroastrian texts had already been put down in writing), as proposed by Mary Boyce, may be an exaggeration¹¹⁶. Even as we consider the latest evidence in the texts dealt with here, we would only end up with a second-century reference for the *Vendidad* - more likely to be from the fourth -, which is very little to speak with certainty about any Persian influence on the preparatory processes of 4Ezra, a First or at latest Second-Century text.

Another issue which we just hinted at above is that of the non-historical character of the experiences described, both for 4Ezra and for the Persian sources. A different and important source altogether is provided by four inscriptions, dated between 290-293 CE, which describe in detail the otherworldly journey taken by a priest called Kirdir. He asks for a visionary experience to reinforce his beliefs, and is granted a tour of Heaven and Hell; stereotyped as the theme is in ancient literature, here we have dated evidence for people who claim to have undergone experiences of the kind¹¹⁷. The inscription is in a sorry state so we cannot know exactly what the preparations undergone by Kirdir before his voyage were¹¹⁸, but we can at least hint that they should not be dismissed, as a whole, as late additions to Persian apocalyptic.

As it has been pointed out, the changing from fasting to the eating of flowers marks a decisive stage in Ezra's

¹¹⁶ Idem, p.76.

¹¹⁷ Gignoux, "La signification du voyage extra-terrestre", p.65.

¹¹⁸ Shaul Shaked. "Jewish and Iranian visions in the Talmudic period" in: Isaiah M. Gafni et al (eds.). *The Jews in the Hellenistic-Roman World: Studies in Memory of Menahem Stern*. Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History / The Historical Society of Israel, 1996 (in Hebrew). P.481; for the inscription itself cf. Prods Skjaervø. "Kirdir's vision: translation and analysis", AMI 16: pp.296-306.



acquisition of understanding¹¹⁹. This takes us to the process described in 4Ezra itself, which is surprisingly overlooked in Gignoux's article - we have a description of practices that lead to visions, something especially important when it comes to the use of the cup in 4Ezra 14:38-42.

The cup, in every significant stance where it appears in the Old Testament and also in the New has all kinds of meanings - but never the revelatory role ascribed to it in the passage above.

Vegetarianism as cleansing practice or as *kashrut* prescription also is not related to the ingestion of flowers, as in 4Ezra 9 and 12. And resuming the issue of the wine mixed with *nepenthe*, the author of 4Ezra is at pains to make it very clear that whatever the supposed experience he went through (or claims to have been through), *he retained the memory of it*. This can be understood as a negative conclusion regarding the use of hemp, whose physiological effects, regardless of other opinions seen above, include partial loss of memory¹²⁰. The passage may be a clue to the idea that the experience described is real and involves actual ASC-inducing substances, whose nature the author tries to disclose. In some of the medieval cases quoted, the "witch" claimed to have gone to Sabbaths while intoxicated with henbane ointment, but since there were sober witnesses around, they could ascertain to the "witch" that she did not go anywhere but in fact stayed all the time still and unconscious. The "witches" claimed to "remember" being away in the Sabbath and not staying in the actual place where they sat; this

¹¹⁹ Earle Breech. "These fragments I have shored against my ruins: the form and function of 4 Ezra", JBL 92 (1973). P.272.

¹²⁰ Cf. above and the discussion on the mixed wine taken by Helen in the *Odyssey*.



would be a very different use of memory. But bearing in mind that henbane - if it is the flower of chapters 4Ezra 9 and 12 and a mixer at 14 - is effectively hallucinogenic and not a mere memory eraser, the emphasis of the author to tell us about the persistence of memory could have a different meaning, showing that he regarded the visionary experience as so real that he could not forget it. In any case, in 4Ezra we have a very different experience and claim from that of Helen in Homer, which suggests that we are dealing with different mixtures (wine with hemp in Homer, wine with henbane in 4Ezra).

Taking seriously the hypothesis that there is no relation whatsoever between 4Ezra and Persian sources is rendered more difficult due to the fact that practices like the ones examined above seem out of place and rare in both Testaments - by comparison, much more common in the Persian texts. A derivation of the idea, namely that it could have been the practices described in 4Ezra that influenced Persian texts, looks even more remote and leaves us with the question of how such dim references to these preparatory practices would have made their way to the Zoroastrian world, and why the all-conquering Persians would be so interested in Jewish practices and not the other way round. In this sense, it is symptomatic that the pseudepigraphic author of the apocalypse that bears most resemblances to Persian practices should be someone so closely related to Persia as Ezra; and while every location has been suggested as birthplace of the text - including Rome itself -, due to the insistent reference to wisdom and its granting it could well be that 4Ezra was originally composed in the sapiential milieu of Palestine or



Babylon¹²¹. This would be another way of focusing on the issue of the relations between Persian religion and Jewish apocalyptic in 4Ezra, but may in fact be the same - the appropriation of the pseudepigraphic authorship, the echoes of actual ecstatic practices and the writing in an environment familiar with Persian thinking make sense when taken together, although this is far from constituting definitive proof of Persian influence on 4Ezra.

The whole theme of the possible relationship between the practices described in 4Ezra and similar ones in Persian sources depends, of course, on the nature of actual contact between Jews and Persians (if we are not to assume structural similarities, which by their own nature are independent of direct borrowing, or mere coincidence). Such contacts are more than guesses, and in fact pose many different possibilities. Jews lived beyond the Euphrates at least since the big deportations of Assyrians and Babylonians, and after the Persian conquest came in direct contact with Iranian culture. Jewish communities also knew Persian neighbours in Asia Minor during the greatest extent of the Persian Empire and even before¹²²; in later times, the community that lived in Parthia was big enough to deserve the attention of leading characters in the Jewish Revolt such as Titus and Josephus. Before that, for a short time (40-37) Judaea was even occupied by the Parthians¹²³.

¹²¹ Hultgård, "Figures messianiques", p.743.

¹²² This being another possible way of explaining the meeting and exchanging of ideas between Persians, Jews and Greeks early on. Cf. Eddy, op.cit. pp.13; 65 ff.

¹²³ For the issues above see, among others, Emil Schürer. *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C - A.D. 135)*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979. 3 volumes (Rev. by Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, Martin Goodman and Matthew Black). Vol.IIIa, p.5 ff. The diffusion of Jews throughout the Mediterranean world is well attested in many ancient sources, sufficing to quote Philo (*In Flaccum* 7) and Acts 2:9-11, which specifically speak about Jews in Media.



The idea that we may have here a reverse process, i.e. that the practices described in fact traveled from West to East (originally part of Jewish or Greek religion appropriated by Persians), I find rather improbable - we should have more instances of the practices described in 4Ezra to see them make way for another complex and old religious system such as Zoroastrianism (although this is by no means obligatory). Also we have seen that, even if the texts which have come down to us are quite recent, the mythical complexes contained herein are not. All this tends to support the idea that the two mythical themes examined that find way in 4Ezra (namely, that of the cup and that of the flower, both of which bestow wisdom) were, both by their antiquity and their frequency, primarily Persian ecstatic practices that found themselves echoed in a Jewish apocalypse.

As last considerations, I would like to summarize the arguments for and against Persian influence on the theme of chemical induction in 4Ezra. Supporting the idea, it must be pointed out that:

1. The preparation procedures in 4Ezra are quite odd in the general picture of Second Temple Jewish literature;
2. The choice of Ezra as pseudepigraphed, a character well-acquainted with Persian things, may point to intentional absorbing of Persian lore;
3. The parallels occur, in Persian sources, both for the flower and the drink;
4. Evidence for chemical induction, as we have in 4Ezra, is just what was left over in the course of time in terms of survival of texts (i.e. in theory there could have been many more apocalypses with the same practices, but only 4Ezra came down to us). However, we cannot deal with



"if's" here and the same criteria should apply (even more so) to Persian texts - where the references are far more common. It makes sense to think that, if this practice were more common in Second Temple Jewish literature, we could perhaps have more examples of it.

Against the influence between them, we must bear in mind that:

1. The dating of the Persian texts poses a formidable barrier; even when there are parallels in earlier myths, to posit the existence of e.g. a pre-CE *Bahman Yasht* does nothing to prove conclusively that Persian texts anteceded 4Ezra;

2. There is no direct mentioning of the relation between those sets of texts, either in 4Ezra or in commentators (like the citing of Daniel, which makes it clear that 4Ezra must be later);

3. Strange as the idea of Jewish influence may initially seem (a very odd Jewish preparation practice finding its way to become quite popular in Persian circles), the episode of the conversion of the royal house of Adiabene (a Parthian buffer-state) shows that West-East adoption of Judaism, in part or whole, was a very real possibility in a period roughly corresponding to that of the redaction of 4Ezra.

Even with the limitations stated above, I tend to favour the idea of Persian influencing 4Ezra and not the other way round - the theme appears with much greater frequency in Persian texts than in Second Temple Jewish literature (remembering that in both cases we have but a sample of a larger output), the mentioning of the cup in



the *Yasna* passages puts the myth of the enlightening drink way back from 4Ezra (and it is not present in the OT at all) and the name of the pseudepigraphic writer (even more if 4Ezra was indeed written in Babylon) suggest the link with Persia being a clear one. The dating of most texts, however, prevents any definite conclusion.



3. Visionary experience, self-hypnosis and purity in 3 Enoch and related literature

The memorizing of texts or formulae can, by means of total immersion (not necessarily to be identified as self-hypnosis), lead to prodigious feats of recitation - Eusebius tells us about a martyr that recited all the Biblical text by heart "as if he were a prophet"¹²⁴. Although possibly exaggerated, the tale underlines the importance of oral transmission and the use of memory in an atmosphere textually, chronologically and geographically akin to that of many apocalyptic texts (without implying by any means that we are dealing with the same phenomenon - information about production and consumption of apocalyptic literature always being scarce).

The larger context in which 3En is inserted, that is *hekhalot* literature, is very different from other apocalypses in terms of preparatory advice - it has none of the esoteric character of Jewish apocalyptic texts of the Second Temple period¹²⁵. Indeed *hekhalot* literature, while sharing a number of common features with apocalyptic (it is also revelatory and pseudepigraphic), can be seen as a series of manuals to attain ecstasy¹²⁶.

An examination of *hekhalot* literature and of its corresponding mystical form, *merkabah* mysticism, takes us

¹²⁴ *Martyrs of Palestine*. 13.7, cit. by Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, op.cit. p.32.

¹²⁵ Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, p.123.

¹²⁶ Idem, p.99. In his comment to *Hekhalot Zutreti* (arguably the oldest extant *hekhalot* text, with linguistic evidence pointing to Second or Third CE composition) Gruenwald reminds us that "In contrast to the apocalyptic writers who selected their fictitious heroes from the gallery of biblical heroes, preferably from antediluvian times, the *Merkavah* mystics were more selective in their choice and affiliated themselves to the two great heads of halakhic schools in the Tannaitic period". This explains the role of Rabbi Akiba in such texts and is considered by Gruenwald as a means of gaining authority. Cf. Gruenwald, op.cit. p.147.



to a world quite different from that of typical apocalyptic visionaries¹²⁷. But it should be noted that while 3En has some reason to be included in an analysis of late Second Temple apocalyptic literature, it is singularly void of interesting preparatory practices, this being the reason why this brief analysis points more to other *hekhalot* texts than to 3En itself.

It should be pointed out that there is no evidence whatsoever of direct contacts between apocalyptic circles and *hekhalot* mystics¹²⁸ and indeed the open character of technical instruction given in the latter makes this contact rather improbable (and makes one wonder why *hekhalot* mystics were so outspoken in the telling of their techniques, which could thus easily fall into wrong ears).

3En received its current name only after Odeberg's 1928 edition¹²⁹, but can be considered at least partially an apocalypse because of the nature of the experience described (the ascension of Rabi Yishmael to Heaven), well fitting with texts such as ApAbr and, above all, 1 and 2En. It could well be that the pseudepigraphical insertion of Rabi Yishmael is intended to put the text into a *hekhalot* proper setting¹³⁰, but it might also be the other way round - that Enoch, transfigured as Metatron, is the insertion to make it fit into Enochic tradition.

Be that as it may, in 3En there is no mention of special ascension techniques, nor of special formulae to

¹²⁷ As operating definition, *merkabah* is the name given to Jewish mysticism that has its origins in the vision of the throne by Ezekiel in Ez 1. The basis of this mysticism is *hekhalot* literature, in Hebrew or Aramaic, which takes its name from the name given to heavenly places (*hekhalot*). Cf. Annelies Kuyt. *The 'Descent' to the Chariot. Towards a Description of the Terminology, Place, Function and Nature of the Yeridah in Hekhalot Literature*. Tübingen: Mohr, 1995. P.1.

¹²⁸ Gruenwald, op.cit. p.127.

¹²⁹ Hugo Odeberg. *3 Enoch or The Hebrew Book of Enoch*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928. Cit. by Kuyt, op.cit. p.333.

¹³⁰ Gruenwald, op.cit. p.192.



protect the mystic (two distinctive features of *hekhalot* literature)¹³¹. The identical formulae of 3En 8, 14, 18, 41 do not help much the study of visionary process, looking rather stereotyped¹³² - contrast these formulae with the detailed comment on such techniques in *Hekhalot Rabbati* ("What are the incantations which should be recited by him who wants to behold the vision of the *Merkavah*, to descend safely and to ascend safely?")¹³³, or to the even more astonishing picture on line 23 of the *Hekhalot fragments* - where the angel comes back to discuss certain mystical proceedings with the visionary after he had taught them¹³⁴. *Maaseh Merkavah* offers a similar picture with the introductory dialogue between Rabi Yishmael and Rabi Akiba, "What prayer should be uttered to ascend to the *merkavah*?"¹³⁵

In terms of the preparatory practices, it seems as if the great importance attached to fasting or dieting relates not so much to enhancing effects (psychological or physical) that these practices might entail, but rather to purity restrictions. So the allusion to avoiding women or cooking one's own bread should be read in this context of avoiding contact with impurity, i.e. the visionary should abandon practices and desires that would be considered normal under circumstances other than mystical practice, and these should all be seen as practices that allow the gaining of power¹³⁶. In this sense *hekhalot* texts do not differ from others in Antiquity, from the ascetic practices

¹³¹ Idem, p.191.

¹³² Kuyt, op.cit. pp.335-336.

¹³³ Gruenwald, op.cit. pp.150-151.

¹³⁴ Idem, p.189. This is an exceptional picture, however, not to be found in any other of the *hekhalot* texts that we have.

¹³⁵ Idem, p.181.

¹³⁶ Lesses, op.cit, pp.117-118. Cf. also Anthony Meredith. "Asceticism - Christian and Greek", JTS 27 (1976). P.320. Cf. also Gruenwald, op.cit. pp.100-101, where the author contrasts these interdictions to commands such as the ones given to the visionary in 4Ezra.



of Anthony seen above, or from Pagan figures such as Apollonius of Tyana¹³⁷. It should be pointed out that motivation can be very different in each case.

An additional note of interest is that another *hekhalot* text, *Reuyot Yehezkel*¹³⁸, makes the seer use the contemplation of water as a means of attaining mystical ecstasy: "Ezekiel was standing on the River Chebar looking down at the water and the seven heavens were opened to him and he saw the Glory of the Holy One"¹³⁹. The parallel with the frequent reference to rivers in apocalyptic literature cannot be ignored (e.g. Dn 7:2-3, 8:2, 10:4-5; 4Ezra 9-11; 2Br 21:1; 3Br 2:1; 1En 13:7); this might imply that we are dealing here with self-hypnosis¹⁴⁰. The effects of long-standing contemplation of objects (including rivers or water at large) can lead to anxiety attacks, prostration and other symptoms¹⁴¹.

But the main difference from what we have seen in terms of self-hypnosis so far - be it in the context of Kardecism or in the emphasis of the Desert Fathers in the recitation of psalms - is that in *hekhalot* texts this process seems to be attached to the repetition of formulae: this is of the utmost importance in many passages, e.g. *Hekhalot Rabbati* 14:4-5¹⁴². ApAbr 16-17 also insists in the singing of hymns

¹³⁷ Lesses, op.cit. p.145.

¹³⁸ Not considered as *hekhalot* by some authors, since the term *hekhal* does not occur in it. The names of rabbis quoted in the text apparently ascribe it to the Fourth or Fifth Century CE; cf. Gruenwald, op.cit. pp.134-135.

¹³⁹ Idem, p.135.

¹⁴⁰ Id. ibid.

¹⁴¹ Joseph Reyher. "Spontaneous visual imagery: implications for psychoanalysis, psychopathology, and psychotherapy", JMI 1 (2): 253-274, 1977.

¹⁴² Gruenwald, op.cit. pp.102, 104. Cf. also Moshe Idel. *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988. P.14. Obviously the experiences related to Abulafia, a Sefardi mystic (1240-1291) can only have very secondary interest for the main discussion in this thesis.



(the angel bids Abraham to do so, rather as a calming than a propitiating device):

*And I said to the angel, "Why is it you brought me here? For now I can no longer see, because I am weakened and my spirit is departing from me" And he said to me, 'Remain with me, do not fear' [...] And he said, 'Only worship, Abraham, and recite the song which I taught you' [...] And he said, 'Recite without ceasing'. And I recited, and he himself recited the song [...]*¹⁴³

These hymns and formulae may have self-hypnotic character, but in 3En none of this is to be seen. And if there is indeed a sincere self-hypnotic experience to be devised beneath the instructional character of *hekhalot* texts, we would be left with the same problem that led to a cross-cultural approach in the first place - no link between apocalyptic and *hekhalot* literature can be established, with the conditional acceptance of 3En in the apocalyptic corpus for the reasons stated above¹⁴⁴. In short, self-hypnosis may be more varied than a mere state induced more or less automatically by the repetition of formulae (although this appears, in the Desert Fathers' and

¹⁴³ OTP 1, p.697.

¹⁴⁴ I cannot agree with Gruenwald, however, when he dismissed apocalyptic mysticism as somewhat less-authentic than *merkavah* practices - "[...] the richness of the style and the vividness of the description may give the impression that, after all, lying behind the text, were real visionary experiences of the sort known from apocalyptic writings. Compared to the parallel experiences in the *Hekhalot* literature, the relevant experiences found in apocalyptic literature are, so-to-speak, proto-mysticism, that is they contain all the necessary elements which could easily turn into mysticism. But we must remember that it was not the ultimate goal of the apocalypticists to experience the Deity. Some of them experienced ascensions in the course of which they also had a vision of the Deity [...] When a vision of the Deity occurred, this only added a mystical ingredient but did not turn the whole of the apocalyptic experience into mysticism" (op.cit. p.156). "Experiencing" the Deity first-hand is by no means the only possible form of sincere mystical experience; if this objection was to be taken seriously even the prophets' experiences could be easily diminished as lesser ones, something I find very difficult to support.



hekhalot mystics descriptions as a valid means of attaining ecstasy), as we shall see in the "Conclusion" to this thesis.

As a final remark I should like to stress that although 3En entails comparison with other *hekhalot* texts it is singularly poor in giving detail about preparatory practices, even being part of a religious tradition so generous in displaying them as is *hekhalot* literature. For this reason, and for the stereotyped character of the formulae involved, with the exception of the introductory remarks in 3En 1:1 and 15B:2 there is not much of interest to the theme of our investigation.



4. The study of Scripture

Two main trends to understand the immersion of the visionary in a mystical atmosphere propitiating visionary experience as identification with a traditional character emerge from what we have discussed so far.

One possibility is that the identification of the mystic with the character may be understood as an integral part of the cultural world in which the seer lives. This holds true e.g. for the experiences described in ApEl (with the support of all Egyptian data provided by Frankfurter) and possibly of Dn, 4Ezra and others where reflection on Scripture is implied.

On the other hand, the inductive technique might take the form of repetitive practices, essentially praying and repeating formulae. Both possibilities will be discussed below.

4.1. Visionary experience and martyrdom

An indirect means of assessing the possibility of authentic experiences being described in apocalyptic texts is provided by data related to willingness of ancient Jews and Christians to be martyred. This holds true not only for discarding pseudepigraphy as mere convention, but can be examined regarding conscious identification of martyrs with traditional characters. When this happens in an ambience so close to apocalypticism as that of the Egyptian *chora*, where ApEl was probably composed and most consumed, it deserves a closer look.

Eusebius tells us that many Christians, accused by some Firmilian (possibly during the persecutions by Diocletian), took prophets' names as their own to the accuser; they rejected their former names as pagan and instead declared



themselves to be Elijah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Samuel and Daniel¹⁴⁵. An even more explicit case is that of a monk who retired to the desert and about whom it was said that the spirit of Elijah lived with¹⁴⁶.

Finally, one of the most explicit claims of writing in the name of some past religious figure is given in a Byzantine encomium which says that

*Whosoever shall take the pains to have a book made and written in thy [Elijah's] name, and shall dedicate it to thy shrine, I will write his name in the book of life, and will make him to inherit the good things of the kingdom of heaven*¹⁴⁷.

It could well be that this remarkable passage - that not only admits but indeed praises writing in the name of Elijah - portrays automatic writing¹⁴⁸.

And again this blend of aural consumption / impersonation, together with millenarian expectation and the absolute immersing in the world of scriptural characters, history and landscapes could lead to the creation of a world of their own among Egyptian mystics. The mnemonic development arising from this¹⁴⁹ is both cause

¹⁴⁵ William H. Frend. *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: a Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus*. London: Basil Blackwell, 1965. P.466 and Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, p.66. This does not imply that actual identification took place, much less that this was to be understood as a usual phenomenon for the whole group.

¹⁴⁶ Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, p.68.

¹⁴⁷ Budge, "Fragments of a Coptic version of an encomium", 369; 394. Cit. by Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, p.75.

¹⁴⁸ This is indeed proposed by Frankfurter, who goes further: "The Coptic Apocalypse of Elijah is, for all intents and purposes, a prophecy of the end and may indeed have been delivered as the words of Elijah incarnate to an audience quite prepared for such a concert". Cf. *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, p.75. This may in turn have originated with the aural consumption of apocalyptic by the Jewish community in Egypt prior to the massacres of 117 (cf. Frankfurter, "Legacy", p.163.

¹⁴⁹ Frankfurter, "Legacy" p.183.



and consequence of the prodigious effort to live among Biblical characters.

Anyway, we can see from the examples above that to some extent identification with the Biblical Elijah was more than a possibility for Egyptian ascetes, who may even have impersonated the prophet in the way of identifying and opposing an eschatological adversary¹⁵⁰.

4.2. Visionary experience as self-control

An important, controversial and often neglected aspect of the mystical experiences here discussed relates to the visionary phenomenon described by Egyptian ascetics in the first centuries of the Common Era, in the sense that these do not imply hallucination but much on the contrary, absolute self-control as to the mystic states to be obtained. In those reports and in their interpretation by a modern scholar such as Violet MacDermot¹⁵¹, there is no room left for spectacular turns such as we find in 4Ezra, or to after-effects claims such as those of other apocalypses.

Summarizing MacDermot's ideas, it can be said that she argues, on the one hand, that corporate identity is a valid concept to understand ancient visionary experience (at least in the case of ascetes imbued with Biblical lore in Egypt)¹⁵², and on the other that their mystical visions do not arise as spectacular results of hallucinatory

¹⁵⁰ Idem, p.76, 78.

¹⁵¹ *The Cult of the Seer in the Ancient Middle East: a Contribution to Current Research on Hallucinations Drawn from Coptic and Other Texts*. London: Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, 1971. Given the scope of its scholarship, it is surprising that this is a book still so much overlooked. I disagree with the author on a number of points and the title is misleading - the book deals not with Near Eastern visionary experiences at large, but rather with very definite aspects inside primitive Christian desert monasticism, which is not what the title implies.

¹⁵² Idem, pp.16-17, 56.



induction, but rather as an obsessive search for self-control (in which case visions are to be recognized and, with proper training, rejected by the seer)¹⁵³. A third important point in MacDermot's ideas (to be properly discussed in the conclusion to this thesis) is that ancient visionary experiences are irreducible to modern conceptualization or laboratory conditions¹⁵⁴.

But MacDermot's analysis has much in common with what I can observe myself so far in the object proposed. While the notion of corporate identity looks flawed from many points of view, the idea that there can be a true identity experience between seer and biblical hero can be seriously maintained on other grounds, even by MacDermot herself.

First, identities run at large as common group property in her analysis:

Thus, as in Egypt, the name of a man was the possession, not only of the individual but of the family or group. A father gave his name to his son and continued to live in the son; the qualities attached to a famous name were received by whoever inherited the name. In this way, to adopt the name of a seer of the past, was to be identified with him, to re-experience his vision and to continue, in new circumstances, to proclaim his message¹⁵⁵.

This tradition is, in turn, developed by Neo-Platonism with its emphasis in experiences related to immaterial reality (how it could have influenced mystical practices in the illiterate and millenarian milieu of Egyptian backlands MacDermot fails to explain); it is also related to the idea that prophecy had ceased in post-Exilic times, and

¹⁵³ Although the ascetics were revered by the rest of the Egyptian rural community precisely for their ability to have visions; cf. MacDermot, op.cit. pp.94-95.

¹⁵⁴ Idem, p.xi, 48 and 236.

¹⁵⁵ Idem, pp.16-17.



experiences such as the apocalypticists' were a way of keeping it alive¹⁵⁶.

This is, in my opinion, highly debatable. The notion that "prophecy ceased" is no longer tenable, although it is obvious that the form mystical experiences took to late Second Temple mystics is, at least to our eyes, very different from prophetic ones. But it is also noteworthy that a writer such as Josephus is unaware of these distinctions – he considers Daniel a prophet and equals his own work and duty to that of Jeremiah. Even a traditional insult launched at his enemies (**pseudoprofhthj**) echoes such perception that prophecy has not ceased after all¹⁵⁷.

But whether we posit a continuum between pre-Exilic prophecy and Egyptian Christian experiences or not, the case for the ascetics identifying themselves with past biblical heroes is certainly strong. MacDermot argues that the Egyptian ascetic, free from the traditional obligations of communal life, created for himself a whole new world, populated by biblical characters with whom he could have full intercourse and identification, and that could be shared with other mystics as well.

This was the 'vision' of the ascetic; it was not 'seen' in a dream or trance, it could be shared with others, and it concerned this life as well as the next. It was a world, not only of thought, but of emotion¹⁵⁸.

This inner life would have, according to MacDermot, an effect equal to that of Homeric poetry among Greeks – it could be seen both as emotional experience and also as a form of self-knowledge: it would also place the mystic in

¹⁵⁶ Idem, pp.19-20.

¹⁵⁷ Jannes Reiling. "The use of ΠΣΕΥΔΑΟΠΡΟΦΗΤΗΣ in the Septuagint, Philo and Josephus", NT XIII (2), 1971.

¹⁵⁸ MacDermot, op.cit. p.52.



the situation of an actor performing according to biblical precedent¹⁵⁹. All that was seen not as consequence of self-discipline, but rather as a divine gift.

One important observation must be made here, however: MacDermot's examples are only indirectly related to apocalyptic tradition, in the sense that both stem from the common origin of biblical lore. We should take a closer look at some of the sources she uses as examples of the ideas defined above.

The first of them comes in Palladius, who refers to the immersion of the saints in study and recitation of Psalms, that would make them live in a world fashioned after their imagination.

[The fathers] applied all the Psalms to their own lives and works, and to their passions, and to their spiritual life and to the wars which the devils waged against them. Each man did thus according to his capacity, whether he was engaged in a rule of life for the training of the body, or of the soul, or of the spirit [...] he acquires daily the faculty of singing a song mingled with the meditation of God and with the gaze (which is fixed) upon Him [...] and which is like that of the angels¹⁶⁰.

The same holds for Cassian, Conference 10.11:

He will make the thoughts of the psalms his own. He will sing them no longer as verses composed by a prophet, but as born of his own prayers [...] fulfilled in his daily life¹⁶¹.

¹⁵⁹ Idem, p.53 and 56. This would in turn imply the idea of literary *topoi*, which do not imply necessarily falsehood, as I suggested above.

¹⁶⁰ Active in the fifth century, but with some uncertainty regarding precise dates; he developed missionary activity in Britain and Ireland. Cf. also from Palladius, *Sayings of the Fathers* 11.17; 7.20.

¹⁶¹ The relation between *abba* (an older, fully trained ascetic) and student, while being the key to understanding Egyptian monasticism, might be resumed in the proposed interaction between reader and text as Cassian puts it - and could lie behind Cassian's report on Gallic audiences as well. The idea of mingling the thoughts of the Psalmist



The same theme appears in Conference 14.10, with the exhortation that

Over time, the continual repetition of a text will enable its words and images to fill our mind day and night so that it increasingly resembles the text it contains.

Cassian emphasizes the importance of humility rather than instruction, and in his perspective the act of reading is indeed a way of getting closer to God: commending reading, Cassian is indeed praising a particular form of contemplative life¹⁶².

Philo himself gives a similar account regarding ecstasy induction among the *therapeutae*, in the *Vita* 2.11:

But it is well that the Therapeutae, a people always taught from the first to use their sight, should desire the vision of the Existent and soar above the sun of our senses and never leave their place in this company which carries them on to perfect happiness. And those who set themselves to this service [...] carried away by a heaven-sent passion of love, remain rapt and possessed like bacchanals or corybants until they see the object of their yearning.

This would be a common feature throughout cults spreading in the Mediterranean world, all emphasizing the diminishing of self-consciousness through consciousness states that lead to possession. And although MacDermot is

as if these were the reader's own is also to be found in Origen. Cf. Steven D. Driver. *John Cassian and the Reading of Egyptian Monastic Culture*. New York / London: Routledge, 2002. Pp.6-8. The *Conferences*, in a total of 24, expose Cassian's views on Egyptian monasticism as examples of virtue to a Western audience.

¹⁶² Driver, op.cit. p.118. For related reading on the ways memory and study can fashion a world of their own, with special regard to Antiquity, cf. Georgia Frank. *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity*. Berkeley / London: University of California Press, 2000.



eager to stress the differences between hallucinations and mystical experiences as described by Egyptian mystics, she has to concede that "States of possession and mystical states had in common the fact that full self-consciousness was not maintained"¹⁶³. In short, MacDermot's main idea is that not every hallucinatory induction is the same - the Egyptian ascetics being especially careful, as just mentioned, to avoid visions (in particular unwanted ones) and to concentrate on one main object of meditation. Among these, the Psalms seem to hold a more important position than prophetic literature in the examples gathered by her (but not so by the groups related to the ApEl: cf. the discussion of Frankfurter's ideas above).

However, it is not clear to me what essential distinction between exaggerated concentration and hallucination there might be here. First of all the amount of information we do have is not enough to allow for a full-scale discussion of such techniques, in the way that it could be done regarding shamanic studies or, for that matter, even Kardecism. In the second place, MacDermot's defence of the specificity of the Egyptian's seers experiences has the look of an effort driven by full sympathy with the object - i.e. making it so peculiar as to be irreducible and incomparable to anything else, instead of making an impartial assessment of the sources. In short, it is not clear why their experiences are not typologically related to other, better-known ones.

The idea that the ascetic lives in a world of his own does not need the dubious theoretical apparatus of "corporate identity" either. In the conclusion to her book MacDermot even stresses the strong individualism attached - indeed, born with - the Egyptian ascetics. How such a feat

¹⁶³ Idem, p.235.



related to a world where there is no room for individual identity but only to oneness with the community MacDermot fails to explain¹⁶⁴.

Much more interesting in our view is the underlining of the importance of Psalms recitation and memorization as related to mystical experiences. This might find a possible parallel in the relevance of psalm-reciting in Qumran.

A last and important issue to be taken into account are the parallel examples of assumed identity between actual mystics and martyrs: it is an aspect that looks altogether similar to the psalm-like identity discussed by MacDermot but which derives from a different aspect of religious psychology, that of martyrdom.

It could also be that martyrological worries led to the idea that "[...] an Egyptian Christian of the third century might assume the role of prophet and the task of exposing an eschatological Adversary in the person of a religious or civil authority - and thus consider himself (or suggest to others the persona of) *Elijah redivivus*"¹⁶⁵.

It is also to be found in a reference by Epiphanius (310-320?-404 CE) that the sect of the Borborite made rhetorical use of apocrypha in the name of Elijah - these are to be understood in the same context of the experience he had on top of Mount Carmel (1Kgs 18:14-20), as seen above¹⁶⁶.

Frankfurter is thus the only known author outside this thesis that allows room for the possibility of automatic writing as part of the usual activities of apocalypticists, i.e. the ones linked to the writing or consumption of ApEl. The detailed analysis of the conditions of writing and

¹⁶⁴ Idem, p.236.

¹⁶⁵ Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt*, p.76.

¹⁶⁶ Idem, p.65.



reading of texts such as ApEl, together with the evidence seen above regarding early desert ascetics shows indeed that plain identification with biblical characters was more than just a possibility at the time, leaving us with a plausible hypothesis that first-person narratives were, after all, suited to a true impersonating of the character described, both by the audiences and possibly by the authors¹⁶⁷. In all of the cases examined above the conclusion to be reached is that the people involved in such mystical ambience were actually living in a world of their own, constructed with biblical material and lending itself to a very special kind of retreat, in which the mystic sees himself as part of the communities of saints past (how much he would consider himself to be living among actual people of his own times is, strangely, more difficult to ascertain). Direct evidence for the same practices in late Second Temple texts such as 4Ezra or 2Br is non-existent (and even in the case of ApEl it is not very clear, coming from indirect sources), but being to a wide extent of biblical characters the common heritage of Jews and Christians, there is no *a priori* to forbid us to imagine similar devices being used on both sides. It should be noted that the use Jews and Christians make of this common heritage can be markedly different, as the millennialist use of Elijah in Egypt has shown.

¹⁶⁷ This should be assumed as a logical follow up of the idea already defended by Collins ("Inspiration or illusion"), namely that the ethical content of apocalyptic literature is so serious as not to allow itself to be a mere game of delusion or debauchery, where fake impersonating of characters would play a part.



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