

Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism

Second, Revised Edition

ANCIENT JUDAISM AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY 90

Ithamar Gruenwald

BRILL

Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism

Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity

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Second, Revised Edition

By

Ithamar Gruenwald



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Preface

The revised edition of this book is a project, which has been planned for a long time. In fact, since the first edition went out of print and was no longer available, many readers who have expressed their wish to access the book have found it difficult if not impossible to purchase even a second hand copy.

The revised edition contains new introductory and concluding chapter, a Select Bibliography, and a new Index. Furthermore, substantial corrections and changes have been made in the original text. The changes concern matters of language and style, they nuance the line of argumentation, and they update the discussion of major issues. The new chapters fill several scholarly gaps that have opened since the initial publication of this book in 1980. The new “Chapter One” explores new venues and issues in the study and assessment of the Hekhalot literature and relevant passages in apocalyptic literature, and this in terms of epistemological and ontological considerations. The “Concluding Chapter” suggests a new approach to the study of mystical theurgy and magic in terms of ritual study and theory.

A major factor that contributed to the enormous change in the scholarly interest in the Hekhalot literature after the publication of the first edition of this book is the series of volumes of the *Hekhalot Literatur* (including a concordance) prepared by Peter Schäfer and his research teams.¹ They made printed editions of the relevant texts accessible to the scholarly world. Previously—and this was the case when I worked on the first edition—only manuscripts scattered through various libraries or their photographic reproductions were available. The few printed editions of the texts at hand were not as reliable as the manuscripts themselves.

Naturally, responsible discussions of all the studies that have been published in the field since the publication of the first edition are beyond the capacity of a revised text. Taking into consideration the updated and annotated electronic bibliography prepared by Don Karr (<http://www.digital-brilliance.com/contributed/Karr/Biblios/mmhie.pdf>), which consists of more than forty pages of items, one could justifiably draw the conclusion that an altogether new book should have been written. A revision of the original text cannot do full justice to the wealth of material published after the publication of the first edition. However, essential issues in that material have been carefully considered in revising the present edition. Naturally, not every reference could be

1 Published by J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen, 1981–1988. These volumes were followed by a series of translations into German by the same teams of scholars and publisher.

taken up and discussed at length. Only studies that bear direct relevance to my discussion have been included in this edition. I decided to bypass debates that would have given the book what I consider a wearisome twist.

Instead, I have put new agenda on the discussion table, which will alert the reader to the scholarly relevance of issues that previously did not receive the kind of attention they deserve. Furthermore, I reconsidered almost every issue in the first edition and made the necessary changes. As indicated, epistemological questions and matters of ritual theory, which relate to the essence of the Hekhalot writings, are now in the foreground. In this respect, attention is given to the ontology that sustains the visionary experiences and, particularly, the role of hymnic materials in the realization of that ontology. The ritual aspects of the mystical and theurgic practices receive a new mode of theoretical and practical consideration. As a result, the subject matter contained in the book now highlights the epistemological cogency of the mental experiences that sustain the Hekhalot writings and the ritual theory that underlies the theurgic and magical practices. So far, the absence of these discussions has constituted a gap that had to be filled with due scrutiny.

J. R. Davila's *Hekhalot Literature in Translation: Major Texts of Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2013) came out too late to be consulted for this edition. The English translations of passages from *Hekhalot Rabbati* were taken from the electronic edition prepared by Don Karr (<http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/karr/HekRab/HekRab.pdf>). Karr's extended "Preface to the January 2009 Edition" provides the story of that translation, which reflects the work of Morton Smith done over a long period. I took the liberty of making several changes to the English text, which, as the recently updated version of Karr's Preface makes clear, I have good reason to believe that Morton Smith would have accepted. Furthermore, Don Karr read the final draft of this edition and made numerous stylistic and other suggestions. They considerably improved my line of argumentation. I am indebted to his friendly help and the open line of communication that the work on this edition initiated.

Finally yet importantly, an old colleague at Brill, Ms. Loes (Louise) Schouten, was for many years the driving force behind this publication. More recently, Ms. Mattie Kuiper took upon herself the publishing responsibility and patiently stayed with the publication through all its unfortunate delays. They and my old publisher, Brill, on whose behalf they work, deserve thanks and the warm gratitude of the writer and his readers.

I also wish to thank Dr. Lieve Teugels, the diligent copy-editor on behalf of Brill.

Jerusalem, November 2013

List of Abbreviations and Transcriptions

Abbreviations

OGIS = *Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*

TB = *Talmud Babylonicum*

TP = *Talmud Palaestinense*

Transcriptions

א = ’

ע = ‘

ב = v

ו = w

ה = h

ט = t (sometimes: t)

כ = k

ח = kh

צ = z (sometimes: tz)

ק = q (sometimes: k)

ש = sh (sometimes: sch)

ת = t

PART 1



Introduction

Part 1

This book is a description of Jewish Merkavah (“Divine Chariot”) mysticism, its history, structure, and main thematic features. Merkavah mysticism developed from visions like those described in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1, 8 and 10, though, when Merkavah mysticism appeared on the literary scene, it did so in more complex ways than its prophetic fore-fathers. The earliest post-biblical traces of Merkavah mysticism are found in apocalyptic literature and in some of the texts discovered at Qumran. However, the literature that first gives a full-scale presentation of Merkavah mysticism is called the Hekhalot (“Divine Palaces”) literature, mainly composed in Eretz-Yisrael at the time of the Talmud and the beginning of the Ge’onic period (circa 200–700 C.E.). Other traces of such mysticism are found in the rabbinic writings.

As a creative literary stream the Merkavah tradition ended sometime in the Ge’onic period, but references to that tradition are also made in the writings of Jewish medieval mysticism, the Kabbalah. We know, too, that the German Ḥasidim (a movement of Jewish piety that flourished in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Germany) engaged in some forms of Merkavah mysticism and contributed in a significant way to the preservation of the Hekhalot literature in manuscripts.

The term Merkavah mysticism derives from the Hebrew term *Ma’aseh Merkavah* (“The Work of the Divine Chariot”), which usually means the mystical explication of the first chapter of the Book of Ezekiel. It appears that the mystical speculations about the Merkavah in rabbinic circles were first developed among Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Zakkai and his pupils (second half of the first century C.E.), though, as has been indicated, traces of Merkavah mysticism are already present in apocalyptic writings and in the Qumran literature. In rabbinic writings, *Ma’aseh Merkavah* is somehow related to *Ma’aseh Bereshit* (“The Work of the Creation of the World”), that is, Jewish cosmology. Together they form the two branches of the esoteric teachings of ancient Judaism. Interestingly, for Maimonides *Ma’aseh Merkavah* and *Ma’aseh Bereshit* signified, metaphorically, Aristotelian metaphysics and physics respectively.

The prophet Ezekiel supplied the Merkavah tradition with some of its key notions and visual concepts, and his influence prevailed in the literary history of Jewish mysticism until *Sefer Yetzirah* (“The Book of Creation/Formation”) provided a new conceptual framework and language. Still, Ezekiel was for

a very long time the model for visionaries to follow and imitate. Various practices were adapted and introduced in order to bring about the realization of mystical experiences of the like Ezekiel had. Of course, as time passed the Merkavah tradition underwent substantial changes: new modes of mystical experiences were discovered, new ideas and concepts developed, and novel points of emphasis reshaped the material.

The present book has two parts. The first contains an analysis of the major features of the Merkavah tradition. In the second, a detailed description is given of all the known Hekhalot writings. Both parts of the book contain also several comments on the Merkavah material incorporated in the Gnostic writings found at Nag Hammadi.

Some readers will probably think that this book would have gained from the application of the method of Form Criticism. Now an accepted methodology, form criticism could have really helped scholars in orienting themselves to the problems raised by this subject. However, it appears that, in spite of the study already carried out in the field of Merkavah mysticism, yet, the way is not open for the application of any of the "higher" forms of criticism. The main reason for this is that we still lack critical editions and commentaries for almost all the texts under discussion. Before such editions and commentaries are at hand, final judgment based on serious textual criticism has to be postponed. Consequently, we have limited ourselves to presenting a comprehensive survey of the Merkavah tradition, and it is hoped that what the book does will outweigh what it cannot yet do.

Merkavah mysticism has stimulated most controversial attitudes and utterances. To begin with, Mishnah *Ḥagigah* ii, 1 forbids the study of the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* in public, to say nothing of the many dangers allegedly involved in the study and realization of Merkavah mysticism as described in the Rabbinic writings and the Hekhalot literature. In one of his letters to his kabbalistic colleagues in Europe, Shlomo Dresnitz, who came from Strassnitz in Moravia to Safed in the year 1602, wrote that Rabbi Yitzḥaq Luria Ashkenazi, The Holy 'Ari as he was called, regarded the Hekhalot literature as being full of errors. However, Shlomo Dresnitz reports, the founder of Lurianic Kabbalah believed these errors were purposely introduced to prevent misuse of the writings for magical purposes. Of course, as the writer of the letter says, the Holy 'Ari could have removed all these errors, but for obvious reasons he did not do so. The evidence contained in that letter, as later incorporated in the small book *Shivḥei Ha-'Ari* ("The Sacred Acts of the 'Ari"), is only one testimony to the fact that the kind of literature we are discussing

in this book persisted in being a controversial issue in Jewish history for a very long time.

In yet another context, we find Maimonides attacking certain books, which belong to the Hekhalot literature. In the introduction to his commentary to Mishnah *Sanhedrin*, Tractate *Heleg*, Maimonides writes in connection with Rabbi 'Akiva's view quoted in that Mishnah to the effect that "he who reads in the *Sefarim Hitzonim* (Apocrypha?) has no share in the world to come": "And *Sefarim Hitzonim*—it is said (cf. Bav. *Sanhedrin* 100/b) that they are books written by heretics; and also the book written by Ben Sira (actually Pseudo Ben Sira), who wrote books which contained *inter alia* the subject of physiognomy—all these are worthless books and their study is a waste of time". Now, as we shall see in the second part of our book, the subject of physiognomy is one of the oldest subjects in Jewish esoteric lore, and the attitude shown by Maimonides towards its study is reminiscent of his derogatory attitude towards the *Shi'ur Qomah*. In one of his Halakhic Responsa, Maimonides attacked the *Shi'ur Qomah* as a book composed by a non-Jew, and recommended its destruction.

These are only three out of many views expressed in connection with the Hekhalot literature. To these one can add the views expressed by modern scholars to the effect that Merkavah mysticism "constitutes an inner Jewish concomitant to Gnosis" (Scholem), or that in comparison to later developments of Merkavah mysticism, the mysticism of the early Tannaim, among them Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Zakkai and the four sages who entered the *Parades*, was "an ascetic type of mysticism" (Urbach). Under the circumstances, I have found it necessary to try to give as balanced a picture of the subject matter as possible. And if I have been successful in that undertaking, I owe a lot to many people.

First, a word is due to my wife, Rachel. She followed me in my studies with love and devotion. Fortunately, for her, she did not stray too far along the path where my studies were leading, but where she stayed, I always saw a beacon directing me to safety.

This book also owes a lot to Professor Gershom Scholem and to his writings. I had the honor of being invited by him to spend the academic year 1975/76 at the Institute for Advanced Studies of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The stimulating hours and days we spent together there have left their traces in this book.

It is at the Institute for Advanced Studies that I first met Professor Saul Lieberman. The interest he took in my studies is clearly seen in the two

appendices, which he offered to write for this book. In addition, his great erudition has helped me by clarifying a number of questions and prevented me from falling into pitfalls of ignorance.

In mentioning the Institute for Advanced Studies, it is with great satisfaction that I recall my colleagues there: Professors Daniel Sperber, Shama Friedman and David Winston, with whom I discussed several issues, particularly concerning the first part of the book.

A word of gratitude is also due to the staff of the Institute for Advanced Studies and its secretaries who typed most of the manuscript. Professor Arie Devotzki, the Head of the Institute, encouraged us all in our studies and did everything in his power to further its success.

Many other colleagues deserve more than mere words can express. First, Professor Morton Smith of Columbia University, who read great parts of the typewritten manuscript, corrected its style and made many useful suggestions. Professor John Strugnell of Harvard University read parts of the manuscript, and he, too, made several useful suggestions. Professor Bentley Layton of Yale University helped me greatly in matters relating to Gnosticism.

The editors of the Series "Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums", Professor Dr. Martin Hengel of Tübingen, and Professor Dr. Peter Schäfer of Cologne, read the manuscript chapter by chapter and encouraged my work as it was progressing.

Mrs. Shifrah Danai checked the references and compiled the Index.

All these people helped me in achieving what I have. If, however, the book contains any shortcomings, I alone am to blame.

Finally yet importantly, I would like to mention my parents and children. They were so eager to see this book in print. Here it is dedicated to them, and to my wife, in love and gratitude.

Jerusalem, June 22, 1977

The Quest for the Mystical Reality: Reflections on the Ontological Provenance of the Hekhalot Hymns and Visions

A

One of the most conspicuous features of the Hekhalot writings is their hymns. The unique provenance of these hymns makes them a major factor in establishing the epistemology and ontology of the mystical experiences described in the Hekhalot literature. Of course, they are not the only feature in that literature worth a scholarly discussion. However, their unique qualities make them a major factor in determining epistemological stances in relation to the experiential materials in the major Hekhalot writings (particularly *Hekhalot Rabbati* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah*). The Hekhalot hymns and visions have increasingly drawn scholarly attention since the publication of G. Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941). The mystical nature and function of these hymns have been explored from a variety of angles, chief among them being their laudatory characteristics or numinous essence.¹ Numerous studies based on nuanced textual and historical observations have highlighted literary, thematic, or theological issues.² Furthermore, comparative and phenomenological studies focusing on the affinity of the Hekhalot hymns with magical materials have added interest in the scholarly perspectives on the subject.³ In short, an impressive array of scholarly endeavors has reaped a wide spectrum

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- 1 Thus, still relevant to our discussion is A. Altmann, "Qedushah Hymns in the Ancient Hekhalot Literature," *Melilah* II (1946), pp. 1–24 [in Hebrew], reprinted in A. Shapira (ed.), *Faces of Judaism: Selected Essays* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1983), pp. 44–67. At the beginning of his essay Altmann rightly observes that "There is no vision of the Merkavah without a song [in Hebrew: *shir*]"—this is a rule to which we hold fast." Altmann also stresses the fact that the hymns have a theurgic nature. See also the references given in the next footnotes.
 - 2 The latest and most comprehensive study in this respect is P. Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).
 - 3 In this respect, scholars have followed P. Schäfer, *Hekhalot Studien* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988), pp. 277–295: "The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism." Schäfer argues that the Hekhalot materials should be treated primarily in a magical context. In my view, this interpretation reduces the mystical impact of the Hekhalot literature. See my brief comments on

of interesting results in the study of the Hekhalot literature in general and the Hekhalot hymns in particular. Their contribution to our knowledge and understanding is of this literature is invaluable.

Naturally, the constraint of space prevents a detailed discussion of all of these studies. They make a long list of scholarly references.⁴ One area of references, which will be bypassed in this connection, concerns scholarly attempts to engage in psychological interpretations in which erotic and even phallogocentric aspects receive special attention.⁵ In my opinion, mystical experiences, in which candid quests for the realization of divine realms play a major role, cannot recede into the venue of erratic explanations that focus on psychological projections of sexual drives. Inevitably, such explanations have intellectually redundant results.⁶

Schäfer's view in I. Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988), p. 184 and the more detailed discussion in the "Concluding Chapter".

- 4 A few studies, however, need to be mentioned. N. Janowitz, *The Poetics of Ascent: Theories of Language in a Rabbinic Ascent Text* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 13. Janowitz offers a nuanced and helpful exposition of essential issues relevant to the present discussion. She deals mainly with issues of the ritual aspects of language, and this in connection with one Hekhalot text, *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. See further, N. Janowitz, *Icons of Power: Ritual Practices in Late Antiquity* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), particularly chapter 5: "Using Names, Letters, and Praise: The Language of Ascent". See, however, D. Frankfurter's balanced review of Janowitz's book in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2004/4 (Bryn Mawr College). In connection with Janowitz's study, see M. D. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkavah* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992). Also relevant to the discussion is R. M. Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power: Angels, Incantations and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998). See further the detailed discussion of P. Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992). The latest study of the subject of which I am aware is H. Pedaya, *Vision and Speech: Models of Revelatory Experience in Jewish Mysticism* [in Hebrew] (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2002). A recurrent issue in Pedaya's book is mystical hymns. Her discussion is most relevant to the present study. However, her insightful comments remain on the illustrative level and lack methodological analysis.
- 5 The first to give this notion fully-fledged attention was D. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988). See also, E. R. Wolfson, *Through the Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). See, however, next footnote.
- 6 Writing about apocalyptic worldviews, S. L. C. Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 1995), p. 49, observes, "A focus on positive factors that allow for a group's new apocalyptic worldview overcomes the deprivation

As mentioned, several scholars have highlighted the magical or adjuratory functions of the hymns.⁷ However, the question must be asked: To what extent are the adjuratory components alone operative in making present the mystical essence and, above all, the divine realities to which the Hekhalot writings refer. I am inclined to suggest that the answer redirects the question to a different realm. It shifts the attention to a new examination of how the hymns make things happen—and this apart from the role which adjurations allegedly play in the matter. Admittedly, the concluding chapter of the present edition takes up the subject of magic in general and examines its impact on the study of mystical lore. In doing so, it focuses on the nature of magical rituals and practices in the framework of ritual studies and theory. In my opinion, adjurations, important as they are to the assessment of the subject of the hymnic materials, require a study within their own terms of reference. Ultimately, such a study would present them as subservient to other issues that are also discussed in my concluding chapter.

Thus, the present chapter will focus on a discussion of epistemological issues and the related question of the ontology that sustains the visionary experiences described in the Hekhalot hymns. In other words, my purpose is to suggest a new context for the study of the Hekhalot materials, particularly their hymnic sections. Ultimately, this new context creates an axis that makes a connection between ontology and ritual practice. Assuming that many readers of this chapter are familiar with the subject of the Hekhalot hymns, their contents, and their contextual study, I believe that we can immediately proceed to methodological matters.

Briefly, by ontology I mean the assessment of entities whose being lacks any mode of causal existence, in other words, the existence of a non-causal being, which, in this case, is a divine being. The mystic wishes to enter a state of mind in which he expects to gain a cognitive awareness of this ontological being. This happens in ways that normal human cognition fails to perceive. Mysticism unfolds in unique situations that cognitively strive to overcome two gaps. The first gap concerns the normal limits of the human mind aspiring to encounter entities, which are allegedly realizable as superhuman or celestial.

model's tendency towards psychological explanation. The tendency is reductionist. . . ." In my view, Cook's observation makes sense in the context of the present discussion.

7 In this connection, one should take notice of N. Janowitz's discussion of the matter. The difference between Janowitz's discussion and mine is that Janowitz deals with issues that concern the relationship between texts, poetics, and rituals with an emphasis on linguistic issues. The focus of my discussion is the implications that epistemological and cognitive considerations have on assessing the mystical realities of the Hekhalot hymns.

The second concerns the ontological being of God, often conceived of in terms of what, in modern forms of conceptualization, is tantamount to his transcendence and, paradoxically the various modes of his assumed exposure to modes of a perceptible presence. The full realization of these gaps and the ways in which they may be overcome entail mental stances that relate to the manner in which people can find ways of conceiving the feasibility of such situations and the degree of compatibility they can create between verbal expression and the relevant experiential situations. Mysticism is the venue in which these situations are given a chance to unfold. Maintaining a transition from ontology to cognitive awareness and experience, on the one hand, and from cognitive awareness and experience to verbal expression on the other, constitutes the essence of the mystical matter. However, this mostly happens in altered states of consciousness, which generally defy a rational discourse. An outsider wishing to comprehend these states of consciousness usually adopts an interpretive stance. For him, words and being are expected to obey the requirements of communicative compatibility in a manner, which, in the case of mysticism, they often do not obey. A more sophisticated approach, though, can venture into new areas of investigation. In our case, they involve epistemological and cognitive considerations.

B

An ancient Jewish prayer originally recited after the Haggadic or homiletic explication of the Torah has become known as “Qaddish”. In its various versions, it addresses the sanctification and exalted glorification of God.⁸ Essential parts of it are spoken in Aramaic. Nowadays, not only does the person who leads the prayers in the synagogue say it but also people in different states of mourning for deceased relatives alternately recite it several times during the daily prayer sessions in the synagogue. Its recitation requires a congregation

8 The classic study of the history of this particular prayer and its liturgical applications still is D. De Sola Pool, *The Kaddish* (New York: The Union of Sephardic Congregations, 1964). It should be noted that in rabbinic literature, the singular term *shirah* refers to a liturgical litany in which the liturgical leader of the congregation begins the recitation of the first part of a biblical verse and the whole congregation repeats the recitation and adds the second half of the verse. See Tosefta *Sotah* 6, 2. The classic model is Psalms 113–118, the *Hallel*-prayer, recited on religious festivals. See *Mechilta de-Rabbi Ismael*, ed. Horovitz-Rabin, pp. 118–119, which mentions the liturgical custom, in which the leader of the congregation says the opening phrase and the rest of the congregation repeats it and then says second half of it, too.

consisting of at least ten people. One part of this prayer refers to God in these words: "Blessed is He above all *shirata we-tushbehata* (Aramaic for hymns and praises)..." De Sola Pool, whose study of this prayer is still relevant, rightly observed that the equivalent Hebrew terms "*shirot*" and "*tishbaḥot*" are usually used in reference to the Psalms.⁹ Since the "Qaddish" gives a liturgical expression to the sublime and elevated status of God,¹⁰ one is likely to read into the quoted words notions of divine transcendence. This is the *opposite* of what is maintained in the *Hekhalot* writings, and particularly the hymns-section therein, concerning the mystics and the range of their psychic capabilities, provided they perform the right rituals of mental and physical preparation. Reciting hymns or "prayers" is a major component of this process. The words of the "Qaddish" give faithful expression to the religious notions voiced in Scripture in general, and in Book of Psalms in particular. We shall return to this point soon.

Taking the following quote from *Hekhalot Rabbati* as our comparative point of departure, it follows that the recitation of the hymns is not exhausted within an adjutory context. Referring to the origin of the hymns, the text says, "All these hymns Rabbi Aqiva heard when he descended to the Merkavah. He grasped them and learned them before the Throne of God's Glory, for His servants were singing them before Him."¹¹ In other words, the hymns are part of the angelic ritual configured in heavenly realms and not necessarily a technical vehicle to gain the vision thereof. The question may be asked, if these hymns reflect a heavenly liturgy, what does their inclusion in the visionary oeuvre presuppose from an epistemological point of view? An answer to this question requires a few terminological comments. They will clarify the position I take on this matter. The major Hebrew terms designating the notion of hymn(s) are *shir/shirah* (song) and *tefilah* (prayer).¹² In Modern Hebrew, the term *shir* signifies either "poem" or a melodic incantation of words. In biblical Hebrew, though, the musical aspect is not necessarily included in connection with Songs, such as the "Song of Moses" and the "Song of David", and many psalms.¹³

9 See *ibid.* p. 61.

10 In this respect, its recitation by people in states of mourning may be viewed as a somewhat forced expression of theodicy.

11 See P. Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1981, [henceforth abbreviated: *Synopse*], § 106).

12 See the numerous attestations to these terms in G. Reeg and P. Schäfer. *Konkordanz zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988), pp. 648/9, 703/4.

13 It should be noted that in the Book of Psalms the Greek word "psalm" translates the Hebrew term *mizmor*. It derives from ψάλλω, 'to pluck [a string of (a harp or guitar)].' Liddell & Scott, s.v. ψάλλω, remark that the LXX frequently uses the root *z'm'r* to denote "sing to a harp" (Psalms 7, 18, etc.). See further Exodus 15, 20–21, which follows the "Song

The English term ‘hymn’ derives from the Greek ὕμνος/ὕμνεϊν, ‘song’/‘to sing’. In this respect, it is interesting to note what Plato said on the matter. He comments, “Our music was then divided into several kinds and patterns. One kind of song which went by name of a *hymn* (ὄνομα δὲ ὕμνοι) consisted of prayers to the gods.”¹⁴ Evidently, there was music in the Greek hymns but no incantatory features. The interesting term *Shiroth Hekhal* mentioned in Amos 8, 3, is the closest biblical antecedent of the modern term *Shirat ha-Hekhalot* used in connection with the Hekhalot hymns. Another significant occurrence of a similar term is attested in Mishnah *Sukkah* v, 4, “Ḥasidim and charismatic people used to dance before them (the people gathered in the temple) with burning torches in their hands, reciting before them words of songs (*divrei shirot*) and praises, the Levites playing ‘violins’(?),¹⁵ and harps, and cymbals and trumpets, and countless musical instruments . . .”.¹⁶ It is noteworthy that the Mishnah refers to musical instruments, which accompany the *divrei shirot*. The account in this Mishnah is based on 2 Chronicles 5, 13, and may also be a ritual extension of Psalms 149, 1–3, which refers to the congregation of pious ones [*Ḥasidim*] “... Let them praise His Name in dancing, singing to Him with *tof* [timbrel?] and *kinor* [lyre or violin]”.¹⁷

Musical instruments are mentioned right from the days of creation of the world.¹⁸ They were variously used in the temple service and on other occasions.¹⁹ 1 Samuel 10, 5–6 refers to a unique prophetic experience in which Samuel tells

of Moses” and briefly mentions the “Song of Miriam”. Miriam and “all the women” played the timbrels and danced. In contrast to the “Song of Moses”, the “Song of Miriam” was accompanied by a musical instrument.

14 See Plato, *Laws* III (700 a), quoted from E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (eds.), *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, Bollingen Series LXXI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 1294.

15 In the Hekhalot literature, the *kinor* is mentioned several times as being used for various purposes. See P. Schäfer and G. Reeg, *Konkordanz zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, Vol. I, p. 351, s.v. כִּנּוֹר. The word *kinor*, often translated “violin”, is variously described in antiquity as a string instrument, which is plucked. No bow is used in playing it. The *Hebrew Encyclopedia Biblica*, vol. V, coll. 755–782 contains a long article, which contains relevant materials to the present study. For a comprehensive survey and discussion of the problems involved in the use of music in the time of Mishnah and Talmud, see E. Friedheim, “Jewish Society in the Land of Israel and the Challenge of Music in the Roman Period”, *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism* XV/1 (2012), pp. 61–88.

16 See Psalms 149–150.

17 See also Psalms 98, 4–8.

18 Genesis 4, 21.

19 See, for instance, 1 Chronicles 15, 19–21 and Daniel 3, 5, 15. For a recent attempt to identify these instruments, see J. J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 183–184. See also Nehemiah 12, 27–29.

the newly appointed King Saul to join a band of prophets playing various musical instruments. When Saul joins them, he undergoes a prophetic transformation. Notably, he becomes a “different person” (*’ish ’aḥer*). 2 Kings 3, 15 records the fact that a musician playing an [unidentified] instrument was able to induce the spirit of prophecy. As we have just seen, musical hymnology is mentioned in the Book of Psalms. However, in Psalms 137, 1, the notion of hanging, or suspending, the “violins”, when asked to sing (*divrei shir*), is a gesture expressing desperate mourning. Still, it is noteworthy (a) that musical instruments are mentioned in connection with the celestial hymnology of the Hekhalot literature, and (b) that the hymns recited by the Hekhalot visionaries lack musical references. There are no indications as to what kind of music accompanies the celestial hymns. The connection between poetics and music is a subject that requires a separate discussion. Briefly, ethno-sociological studies have shown that the specifics of prayers and their musical setting function as a cohesive factor in establishing congregational identity and unity. Furthermore, they are an integral part of various ritual practices that have magic-like goals. However, as indicated, the Merkavah mystics do not use any musical instruments.

What we propose to assess is the cognitive stance of the poetry, or poetic diction, in the Hekhalot writings. The verbal setting of the hymnic diction widens and enhances the communicative possibilities of language. In this respect, it opens new channels of cognitive perception. N. Frye opens the first chapter of his book *The Great Code* with a resonant statement: “A sacred book is normally written with at least the concentration of poetry so that, like poetry it is closely involved with the condition of its language.”²⁰ In my opinion, which is not detached from the manner in which Frye gives expression to his thoughts, “the condition of its poetic language” sets the visionary ambience evolving in the Hekhalot hymns. In fact, major sections of the Hekhalot writings can be set in a poetical format.²¹ An inherent feature in the description of the celestial domains is the high tone of the linguistic diction used to capture their unusual holiness, splendor, and glory.

One unique and early example of this kind of poetic diction is the *Serekh Shirot ’Olat Ha-Shabbat* from Qumran. It shows striking linguistic similarities

20 N. Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1982), p. 3. Frye deals with the nature of religious language and discusses essential points that concern our present discussion, though with no reference on the kind of poetry and hymns discussed here.

21 The English Translation of *Hekhalot Rabbati* prepared by Morton Smith and published by Don Karr (PDF, 2009) records a noteworthy attempt to set major parts of the English text in poetic form.

to the Hekhalot literature.²² The poetic diction of these texts enhances their unique contents, namely, the cultic provenance of the celestial sacrifices offered by the angelic beings officiating as idealized priests. If we discuss these texts in the context of the Hekhalot literature, they open a view to an interesting landscape in which picturesque reports about sacrificial rituals done in celestial realms play a major role. In contrast, though, the Hekhalot writings, including, for that matter, *Re'uyot Yehezkel*,²³ present a completely different cultic climate, whether literary or performative, from which these rituals were excised.

As noted, the term “*shiroṭ*” is used in the Hekhalot writings and, most significantly, in the opening section of *Hekhalot Rabbati*: “What are the hymns (*shiroṭ*) uttered by one who wishes to have a vision of the Merkavah?”²⁴ Above, I have mentioned the fact that scholars suggested viewing the *shiroṭ* in the context of adjuratory rituals or as incantations assisting the Merkavah visionary in his various experiences in the divine realms, as well as in his expected survival from the awe-inspiring aspects of his visions. However, I have expressed hesitation with regard to the attempt to stretch this facet of the hymns to fit the requirements for an overall characterization of the “aim and purpose” of the Hekhalot literature. The vantage point chosen for our purposes here takes us in another direction. It focuses on the fact that the hymns make God, the Throne of Glory, and the hosts of heavenly beings experientially *present*. In the context of cognitive perception, this experience evolves in linguistic realms,

22 See C. Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice from Qumran: A Critical Edition*, Harvard Semitic Series 27 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985). For a scholarly assessment of these texts in the framework ancient Jewish apocalyptic and mysticism, see P. Alexander, *The Mystical Texts: Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and Related Manuscripts* (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2006). Alexander highlights these texts and other materials from Qumran. I strongly support Alexander's cautious reading of the Qumran texts. In contrast to some positive views expressed on this matter, I prefer to remain on the skeptical side regarding the question whether the Qumran community practiced mysticism or just used poetic modes of expression that resonate of similar modes later on used in the Hekhalot writings. The Qumran writings do not contain any references to mystical practices and real experiences of heavenly ascents. P. Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 130–146, offers a close analysis of the contents and the scholarly positions taken in regard to these texts. Unfortunately, in the first edition of this book (p. 41), I could only refer to the two published fragments of the 13 extant ones. The late Professor John Strugnell showed me all of them, but asked me to refer only to those that had been published.

23 See the discussion of this text below, Part Two, of the present book.

24 *Synopse*, § 81. The same question is repeated, though the term slightly changes in § 94: *hefresh shiroṭ* (= the recitation, utterance or pronouncement of the hymns). See also *Synopse*, § 105, which will be discussed below.

parts of which have an adjutory layout, though their major essence is poetically potent. They induce an intense sense of the unique presence of the divine entities mentioned. Thus, in my view, highlighting the epistemological issues that relate to the validation of this presence has to receive priority. These issues are of particular relevance, since the visions evolve in special states of mind or in mental conditions that can be easily dismissed as hallucinations.²⁵ To avoid this pitfall, a strong case must be made to show the epistemological validity of the linguistic venues in which the Hekhalot visions evolved.

Following the foregoing discussion of terminological issues, it is important to assess several contextual issues in connection with the poetical characteristics of the Hekhalot writings. Our major point of reference will be the Book of Psalms and cognate forms of poetic diction in Scripture.²⁶ In sharp contrast, matters are substantially different in apocalyptic literature, including some of the Qumran writings and in the laudatory sections of the Hekhalot hymns. As mentioned earlier, the basic concept in the Psalms and traditional forms of prayer in Judaism is that God and the celestial world are aloof, distant, and essentially “other” or “different”, though worthy of endless praise. No human being can think of coming close to God or dwelling in his sanctuary (*Psalms* 15, 1; 24, 3). The Book of Psalms contains diversified pronouncements on all levels of expression, though the perception that “The heavens are God’s heavens and the earth He has given to the sons of men” (*Psalms* 115, 16) prevails throughout, as it does in other parts of Scripture. As discussed in later parts of this book, this

25 In this connection, see M. E. Stone, *Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha with Special Reference to the Armenian Tradition* (Leiden & New York: E. J. Brill, 1991), pp. 419–428: “Apocalyptic—Vision or Hallucination?” I fully agree with Stone’s concluding remark, “Jewish mysticism is a child of the apocalypses . . .” (428). Stone rightly maintains, “This enhances the possibility that the claim of visionary inspiration was not merely literary artifice or a means of avoiding the censorious view of an establishment, or the like” See also, M. Himmelfarb, “From Prophecy to Apocalypse: The Book of Watchers and Tours of Heaven”, in A. Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality From the Bible Through the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 145–165.

26 In this respect, I follow my discussion of the biblical roots of Merkavah mysticism. See I. Gruenwald, “Reflections on the Nature and Origins of Jewish Mysticism,” in P. Schäfer and J. Dan (eds.), *Gershom Scholem’s MAJOR TRENDS IN JEWISH MYSTICISM 50 Years After* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1993), pp. 25–48. See also, P. Schäfer, “Hekhalot Literature and the Origins of Jewish Mysticism,” in M. Goodman & P. Alexander (eds.), *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine*, Proceedings of the British Academy, 165 (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 265–280. Surprisingly, Schäfer bypasses the subject of the biblical origins of the Hekhalot materials. Likewise, J. Dan ignores the subject in his, *History of Jewish Mysticism: Ancient Times* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2008), Vol. III, pp. 945–997.

fact, which marks a major difference between Scripture and Apocalypticism and later phases of Jewish mysticism, deserves special attention. The Psalms do not strive, as the Hekhalot hymns do, to make God and the celestial world experientially present. At best, the psalmist gives expression to the experience of a divine theophany (24, 7–10; 29, 1–11). However, the experience unfolds in a literary mode in which the psalmist is not physically or mentally involved. Yet, the Psalms give ample expression to the existential urge of human beings to conceive of God as fully attentive to personal and communal needs.

It is important to keep in mind that in the poetic sections of Scripture a variety of modes of relating to God are used. In the “Song of the Sea” (Exodus 15), Moses and the People of Israel address God as an omnipotent protector and warrior, while in the second part of the “Covenantal Song [of Moses]”, which concludes the Book of Deuteronomy, the poet lets God Himself proclaim His omnipotent presence and acts. In contrast to the “Song of David” (2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18), no theophany is mentioned at all. Indeed, the “Song of David” is particularly relevant to our discussion. It mentions the fact that God in His heavenly Palace (*Hekhal*) hears the voice of the supplicant poet and then emerges in an act of grand theophany (verses 7–16, respectively) to save him from the abyss of his plight. As mentioned, scriptural poetry refers to various events of theophany, albeit without giving any details about any kind of human involvement in those events.²⁷

The mystical phase of the Hekhalot writings unfolds in narrowing, if not eliminating, the gap between human beings, God, and the celestial world. However, the poetic oeuvres of these writings do not reach the point of reflecting notions of mystical union. The decision whether the relevant experiences entail physical representations or engage in cognitive modes of conceptualization depends on how one assesses the reality of the relevant materials. In my opinion, what matters is the fact that the mystic conceives of the hymnic prayers as a factor that enhances the cognitive realization of his visions and thus establishes an ontological stance. This happens in alternate states of consciousness and therefore calls for a new assessment of the ways in which scholars approach the prevailing ontology. The reality we have in mind transcends the one unfolding in normal visions occurring in nocturnal dreams and in non-experiential descriptions of heavenly scenarios. As mentioned, it also transcends the realm of hallucinations.

In conclusion, Scripture follows poetic models known from the ancient Near East. An interesting and generally unnoticed example is the poetics of the Mesopotamian Hinkel Kudurru. Among other things, it says,

27 See, for instance, Deuteronomy 33, 2; Psalms 50, 2; 94, 1.

Enlil, the exalted master, the lord of heaven and earth the prince who is the master of the universe;
 The king of the great gods, who in heaven and earth has no god who equals him;
 Who, at the giving of orders, the Igigi gods salute and fearfully wait;
 and who, at his counsel, the Anunnaki remain humbly in silence and stand up in awe;
 The master of masters, whose utterance no god who-so-ever annuls;²⁸

These lines must sound familiar to those acquainted with the Psalms and other hymnic compositions in Scripture. However, when we turn to the Hekhalot hymns, they introduce completely different tones and dimensions of expression. Rather than proclaiming something *about* God, they give *experiential utterance* to various modes of direct encounter and involvement with the divine world—the celestial palaces, the hosts of angelic beings, God's throne of glory, and God Himself. In other words, the Hekhalot hymns entail different orientations characterized by their special cognitive dimensions and epistemological presuppositions.

C

The main question, then, is how to approach in a scholarly manner issues relating to the ontological essence of matters conceived in such unusual states of mind. One can easily argue that, since these states of mind crystallize in special psychic conditions, the scholarly domains of psychology—and not considerations pertaining to ontology—are an adequate venue. However, the capacity of the human mind to conceive of realities that transcend ordinary and empirical life-experiences and still have intensive experienceable validity calls for a special scholarly approach.²⁹ Of course, one may approach the subject from the vantage point of neurophysiology and recent brain research. However, I am

28 See V. A. Hurowitz, *Divine Service and its Rewards: Ideology and Poetics in the Hinku Kudurru* (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev Press, 1997), p. 32. See also the following hymns quoted in Hurowitz's book. Particularly relevant to the present discussion is M. Weinfeld, *Early Jewish Liturgy: From Psalms to the Prayers in Qumran and Rabbinic Literature* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2004).

29 For a general discussion of this subject, see F. D. Goodman, *Ecstasy, Rituals, and Alternate Reality: Religion in a Pluralistic World* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988). Goodman supplies a large array of comparative materials.

not familiar with the scientific details of this subject. The day may come when this kind of research will contribute to the creation of a commonly shared and fruitful venue for assessing unique states of mind that unfold in psychic conditions of the kind that, one has to assume, make possible mystical experiences that presuppose ontological validity.³⁰

In order to make our point clear, we have to address another question. It concerns the issue of *visionary* dreams, or dream visions, that allegedly contain cognitive elements, the reality of which is utterly different from that evolving in the subjective conditions of regular dreams. One is prompted to ask this question for two reasons. The first derives from the fact that numerous accounts exist in different religious cultures of dream-events procured by dreamers who wish to receive in their nocturnal dreams solutions to problems they face in their daily lives. Technically speaking, these dreams are known as incubation dreams; they contain “dream requests” (*she’elot ḥalom*).³¹ A few of them found their way into one of the manuscripts of the Hekhalot writings.³² Frequently, supernatural beings appear in these dreams and offer, in one way or another, help and solutions to specific wishes and problems. It should be noted that, in trying to induce these kinds of nocturnal events, the dreamer uses special prayers and other ritual acts that, among other things, contain magical elements, like spells and incantations. The fulfillment of these “dream requests” means that, for the dreamer, they have enabled access to the venue of practical reality. The major difference, though, between incubation dreams and mystical visions is that incubation and other dreams address the private concerns of the dreamer. Ultimately, they are realized in empirical life. However, mystical visions of the kind we meet in the Hekhalot writings concentrate on and evolve in divine realms. They make a spiritual reality mentally experienceable.

30 The temptation can hardly be resisted to apply research modes that refer to trance events induced by drugs. See, for instance, D. Merkur, *The Psychedelic Sacrament: Manna, Meditation, and Mystical Experience* (Rochester, Vermont: Park Street Press, 2001). I refer to this particular book since the author is familiar with Jewish sources and offers relevant comments.

31 See the recently published study of H. Weiss, *All Dreams Follow the Mouth: A Reading in the Talmudic Dream Tractate* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv and Beer Sheva: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir Publishing House and Heksherim Institute, 2011), pp. 39–46. Weiss refers to various source materials and studies of this subject. See also R. Margolin, *Inner Religion: The Phenomenology of Inner Religious Life and Its Manifestation in Jewish Sources (from the Bible to Hasidic Texts)* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University Press and Shalom Hartman Institute, 2011), pp. 151–179. Margolin offers a comparative survey of prophecy, dreams, and other paranormal experiences.

32 *Synopsis*, §§ 502–506.

Furthermore, as we shall see, they concern a select “public domain.” At times, they are shared within a group of initiated people.

The second reason is that Scripture presents a polarized attitude towards dreams in general, and prophetic dreams in particular. On the one hand, we find prognostic dreams as told of in the stories about Joseph. Furthermore, God says that, in addressing Moses, the dream mode is used (Numbers 12, 6). On the other hand, Zechariah says that dreams are the specialty of false prophets (“sorcerers”). Evidently, Zechariah declares them to carry vain and false messages (10:2). Mystical dreams, which evolve in alternate states of consciousness, pertain to making possible a reality that transcends the dreamer’s daily requirements and needs. Their zenith is the realization of the presence of celestial beings. This is a religious goal, which the mystic strives to gain, and he does so with full awareness of the great risks he takes to his physical and mental well-being. The subject of the dangers that visionaries face in the course of their visions has been discussed in various studies, including the first edition of this book. However, to the best of my knowledge, it has not been assessed in terms of drawing epistemological conclusions with regard to the validity of the visionary experience. Simple dream visions entail no recorded risks to the dreamer, though moments of awe are sometimes reported. In this connection, one may refer to the vision, which Abraham experienced, and in the course of which “a dread and great darkness fell upon him” (Genesis 15, 12).³³ The Book of Daniel reports of similar sensations.³⁴ As has been variously recognized, the case of *Daniel* may indicate a noteworthy transition from prophetic to apocalyptic experiences. Mystical dream visions, though, contain a significant upgrade of this kind of experience. An inventory of ritual acts is prescribed to protect the visionary from all kinds of inherent dangers. From biblical settings, we know of dangers that people face when approaching the realm of the holy.³⁵ However, these are physical realms—holy places or temples—not spiritual locations as in Apocalypticism and Merkavah mysticism, which are experientially entered in visionary states of mind.

Speaking of dreams and visions, one should note that, in scriptural usage, dreams and visions are sometimes treated as coterminous experiences. A paradigmatic case is Joel 3, 1–2 (RSV: 2, 28–29), which predicts the future profusion

33 See also the reaction of the prophet when he sees God on His elevated throne: Isaiah 6, 5; Ezekiel 1, 28; 3, 23.

34 See Daniel 8, 17; 10, 11 and 17. J. J. Collins, *Daniel* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 1984), p. 333, rightly remarks that this is “the standard, appropriate response to an epiphany.” Collins adds references to similar reports.

35 See, for instance, Exodus 19, 12–19; Leviticus 10, 1–2; Numbers 4, 20.

of prophetic dreams and visions among the People of Israel. He says, “Your old men shall dream dreams; your young men shall see visions; I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy. Even on menservants and maidservants, in those days, I shall pour out my spirit.” Clearly, these words reflect a situation in the context of which prophetic dreams and visions are considered complementary experiences. Differences in age and social status do not count as essential factors in this case.³⁶

The crucial point in this respect is that visionary inspiration as presented in scriptural prophecy is divinely initiated and inspired. It is voluntarily granted by God. The prophetic style is poetic and often includes hymnic sections. However, the hymnic diction in scriptural prophecy is not functional in initiating the prophetic experience. In any event, the point made by E. R. Dodds concerning old Greek poetry holds special relevance in this connection. Dodds perceptively argues that “... like all achievements that are not wholly dependent on human will, poetic creation contains an element which is not ‘chosen’, but ‘given’; and ... ‘given’ signifies ‘divinely given’.”³⁷ In a wider sense, the view that the prophetic vision is “given” is the ultimate guarantee of the truth contained in it. Matters may therefore be different in the case of procured visionary experiences known from apocalyptic and particularly the Hekhalot literature. When visionaries engage in a ritual that initiates them into their respective experiences, they move, in the terms used by Dodds, from the “given” to the “chosen”. This fact is likely to raise questions with regard to the objective status of the contents of the respective visions. Thus, the issue of ontology, which this chapter addresses, becomes all the more relevant. It is no longer an academic question.

Regarding what the ancients believed to be the reality of dreams, G. W. Bowersock writes, “Dreams are inherently mysterious and elusive. Dreams, both real and imagined, can often strain credulity, and yet they are bound to tell us something about the world that generates them.”³⁸ The word “world”

36 Interestingly, late Jewish commentators influenced by philosophic thought distinguished between dreams and visions, noting that visions are more sophisticated mental experiences than dreams. Thus, Isaac Abrabanel (Lisbon 1437 – Venice 1508) in his commentary *ad locum* expresses his wonder why dreams, which are routinely experienced and demand less wisdom and life experience, are allotted to old men who have wisdom and life experience, while sophisticated visions are given to young men who are novices and are less experienced.

37 E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), p. 80.

38 G. W. Bowersock, *Fiction as History: Nero to Julian* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 77.

used in Bowersock's characterization requires qualification. In the first place, it signifies the physical environment and the ways of life routinely experienced by the dreamer. For those working in the field of psychodynamics or psychoanalysis, it is the emotional inventory of mostly suppressed experiences. For diviners and shamans, it is the venue of future times and remote locations. For the mystic it unfolds in heavenly or divinely configured realms. In any event, visionary dreams play a major role in pre-Merkavah literature, and these dreams require interpreters, whether angelic or human.³⁹ This is not the case in the Hekhalot literature.

Thus, it is not surprising that a recurring topos in the realms of prophecy and apocalypticism is the question "What are these?"⁴⁰ Unless the divine being who controls the vision gives the requested information, the substance of the visionary reality is likely to remain incomprehensible. The notion of the *angelus interpres*, the interpreting angel, is a recurrent theme often discussed in scholarly writings.⁴¹ The angel, in this case, fulfils two functions: he is instrumental in presenting the vision and, if asked to do so, he interprets its contents. In contrast to regular dreams, those depicting divine scenarios are likely to have divinely configured components.⁴² That is to say, they point to divine decrees and decisions with regard to personal and historical events. Obviously, these features substantially strengthen the impact of the dreams or the events seen in the dream visions as instrumental components in the transition from a phenomenological issue to a cognitive one.

39 See H. Weiss, *op. cit.*, who gives this matter detailed attention. Evidently, the title the book points to the Gordian knot binding together dreams and the various possibilities of interpretation.

40 Typical, in this respect, questions addressed by the prophet Zechariah 1, 9; 2, 4; 4, 4.

41 See M. Mach, *Die Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens in vorrabbinischer Zeit* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992), *passim*.

42 In this context, one has to keep in mind the prevalence of the interpretive component in mysticism, in general, and in Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah), in particular. See M. Idel, *Absorbing Perceptions: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002). In the context of Merkavah Mysticism, *Shir Ha-Shirim* ("The Song of Songs") used to play a major role. See S. Lieberman in Appendix D ("*Mishnat Shir Ha-Shirim*") in G. G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America [Second, Revised Edition, 1965]), pp. 118–126. See also the references to this issue in B. McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, Vol. I (New York: Crossroad, 1991), p. 21. I refer to this work, because it contains an impressive survey of methodological issues. However, McGinn does not raise the issues specifically highlighted in the present discussion.

In this respect, we have to raise a crucial question: Is there a connection between the preparatory rituals and the epistemological status of the ensuing experience, and, if there is, how do we assess its essence? The major corpus that contains relevant material on this question is the Hekhalot literature. However, there are apocalyptic writings with clear references to preparatory practices, which may be relevant to the discussion, too. The Book of Daniel, which is often regarded as marking a transition from prophecy to apocalyptic, includes two noteworthy samples of visions, which evolve after the completion of preparatory practices. In Daniel 10, without initially giving the necessary information about the purpose of what is done, the narrator describes a certain ritual practice, which ultimately turns out to be the preparation for a vision. Speaking in the first person, the narrator reports that Daniel entered a period of three weeks of “mourning,” that is, of ascetic rituals, during which he abstained from all kinds of food—pleasant bread, meat, and wine. Furthermore, he says that he did not anoint himself (10, 2–3).⁴³ At the end of that period, while he was “near the great river,”⁴⁴ he lifted his eyes and experienced a multi-layered angelic vision. His vision, then, can be viewed as self-induced; Daniel chose the special technique and location for its inception.

The same holds true of a previous vision described in Daniel chapter 9. The vision begins with a long prayer, which involuntarily ends with the appearance of the angel Gabriel (9, 20–27). Verses 4–5 set the tone for this prayer, which the visionary defines with the introductory words, “and I confessed” (*va-’etvadeh*), which indicate the predominantly confessional aspect of the prayer. However, it does not include an incantatory component. The prayer is introduced by what looks to be a summary of the ritual procedure mentioned in chapter 10. Daniel briefly says that he fasted and put on sackcloth and ashes (9, 3). Taken together, both visions mark a clear boundary between the Aramaic part of the book, which reports of spontaneous dream visions, and its Hebrew counterpart. More broadly viewed, they mark a dividing line between prophetic experience, which comes as divinely induced events, and apocalyptic vision.

43 For parallels in other apocalyptic writings, see J. J. Collins, *Daniel*, p. 372. It should be noted that Collins emphasizes the penitential aspect of these preparations. However, the view taken in the present book considers them as part of the visionary technique, which has interesting affiliations with magical practices. We shall discuss this issue in Chapter Five.

44 Later on, in the chapter discussing *Re’uyot Yehezkel*, the technical aspects of the “topos” of receiving visions on waters will receive attention. At this point, two biblical parallels will suffice: Ezekiel 1, 1; Daniel 8, 2, 10, 4.

Both visions contain prognostic references to imminent historical events. Several angelic beings appear in the course of the vision described in chapter 10,⁴⁵ including the heavenly Princes of Persia and Greece. The major angelic being in the vision is involved in a visionary battle, which the Prince of Greece wages against the Prince of Persia.⁴⁶ What particularly matters in this case is that, at the end of the vision (10, 21), an anonymous angel tells Daniel that everything revealed in the vision is written in the “book of truth” (*ktav ’emet*). Thus, its message receives confirmed authority.⁴⁷ Visions predicting war have an emphatic deterministic ring. Since both visions unfold on a uniquely experiential platform, they constitute for the scholar a stimulating epistemological problem. His task is to assess them in one of two ways: either as visions in which fantasy prevails, or as premonitions of real events. In the first case, he may quit at this point; in the second, however, he has to take into consideration the fact that the visions relate specific historical events which, being the core of an angelic revelation, receive the status of preordained events. The relevance of the vision spreads from the personal to the meta-personal. Thus, one may give a positive answer to the question whether there is a connection between the preparatory rituals and the epistemological status of the ensuing vision. Allegedly, the preparatory ritual facilitates visions with an emphatic connectedness to historical events.

However, the criterion of a historical, meta-personal realization of the contents of the visions at hand may not necessarily apply to other visions, such as the ones referred to in the *Hekhalot* writings. With the exception of one part in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, which tells the mystical version of the legend of the ten martyrs,⁴⁸ these writings lack any historical connectedness. In my opinion, the borrowing of names of Tannaitic sages, including the names of the ten martyrs, creates a literary as opposed to a historically realistic setting to

45 It is an open question, whether the angelic being referred to as “man” (*’ish*) in verse 5 is identical with Michael, “one of the chief Princes (*sarim ha-rishonim*)” mentioned in verse 13, or another angelic being.

46 Visionary wars are attested in several apocalyptic writings, notably the War Scroll in the Qumran library.

47 The biblical term *ktav* refers to any written document, whether scroll, letter or royal decree. The qualifying term *’emet*, truth, reminds of the Gnostic text “The Gospel of Truth” from Nag Hammadi.

48 See R. S. Boustán, *From Martyr to Mystic: Rabbinic Martyrology and the Making of Merkavah Mysticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). The name of the book makes evident what Boustán tries to show, namely, that post-Talmudic martyrological residues shape the mysticism of the people behind the *Hekhalot* literature.

the visions at hand. Hence, looking for a valid answer to the question asked above, one has to look in an altogether different direction. *Hekhalot Rabbati* contains a long section (see below), which is set in a specific social domain and is positively envisioned as the venue for the enactment of a mystical experience and the attainment of knowledge. This section gives an interesting report of a mystical session shared by a group of initiated mystics. In my view, the fact that the visionary's experience is shared with other people contributes to a paradigmatic assessment of the desired epistemological validity of the experience described. In the case of Daniel, discussed above, one finds the comment, "I Daniel, alone saw the vision. And the people who were with me did not see the vision" (10, 6). Comparatively speaking, the epistemological assessment of Daniel's visions depends on a different criterion than the one we intend to apply in the study of the *Hekhalot* writings.

The passage in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, which we have in mind, refers to a mystical session in which a group of mystics, with assumed Tannaitic names, gathers around the medium-mystic called Rabbi Neḥunya ben Ha-Kanah. The people

came and sat down before him, while all the multitude of fellows [*hamon ḥaverim*] were standing upon their feet, for they saw balls of fire and torches of light separating between them and between us. In addition, Rabbi Neḥunya ben Ha-Kanah was sitting and setting before them all the matters of the Merkavah, the descent and the ascent: how the one who descends, descends and how the one who ascends, ascends (*Synopse*, § 203).

Who are the people mentioned in connection with this mystical séance? The answer is given in another passage that precedes the séance and strengthens the notion of sharing experiences and information with a select group of people. The passage gives a detailed portrayal of the qualities required of the people worthy of hearing the secrets of the Merkavah and participating in the relevant mystical session (*Synopse*, §§ 199–202). Eight basic qualities are required in this connection: anyone wishing to descend to the Merkavah and receive information about celestial realms must be "clear of any guilt of idolatry and adultery and of murder and of slander and vain oaths and of blasphemy and presumptuousness and of groundless enmity, and observe every positive and negative commandment (*or thou shalt and thou shalt not*).” Rabbi Yishmael gathers such a group, referred to as "the mighty ones of the company and all the mighty ones of the study house [*giborey ḥavura ve-adirey yeshivah*]," whereupon Rabbi Neḥunya ben Ha-Qanah tells him to summon them so that he will be able to expound to them "the hidden and concealed secrets, wonders

of the ascent, and the weaving of the web upon which the perfection of the world and its architectural embellishment rest.”⁴⁹ The absence of any esoteric restriction, typical, as we have said, of apocalyptic, makes clear that what happens is openly realized, though within a select group of people. Although the realization of epistemological issues does not necessarily depend on an act of sharing information, this act may indicate the conscious awareness of a valid cognitive stance in relation to these issues. This is the precondition in conceptualizing the unique ontology that is the center of our discussion.

One further point has to be addressed which concerns the notion of the axial connection between hymns and divine inspiration. We have already mentioned that at one point *Hekhalot Rabbati* refers to the fact that “All these hymns Rabbi Aqiva heard when he descended to the Merkavah. He grasped them and learned them before the Throne of God’s Glory, for His servants were singing them before Him” (*Synopse*, § 106). Thus, hymns should be viewed as unusual entities, learned from the angels during their heavenly liturgy. It is reasonable to argue that their initial setting in an angelic ritual excludes their alleged affiliation with an adjuratory component. Angels do not need incantations in their hymnic ritual! Consequently, in the context of their use by the mystics, it is their celestial origins, and not any added incantatory component, that makes them instrumental in establishing the inherent validity of the visionary material. A passage from the Babylonian Talmud (Tractate *Ḥagigah* 14/b) which discusses issues of the study of Merkavah lore makes this point clear in a different manner. The Talmud reports, “... Then Rabbi El’azar ben ‘Arakh began an expounding discourse on the subject of the divine chariot. And fire descended from heaven and began to scorch (a textual variant reads: “encircle”) all the trees in the field, which thereupon opened a song.” The song in this case was Psalms 148, of which three verses (7, 9, and 14) are partially quoted. Consequently, the Talmud continues, “An angel answered from the fire: This is the real/genuine subject of the divine chariot.”⁵⁰ The Talmud does not refer to a heavenly ascent. However, the angelic confirmation, which follows the descent of the fire and the hymnic praise of the trees, has paradigmatic relevance to the present discussion and brings us to the major subject of the present chapter, namely, what kind of ontological status do the hymns have in creating the visionary components of the mystical experience? In the context of Hebrew apocalyptic literature and mysticism, the ability to hear and even share celestial doxologies and hymns is an innovative experience in both

49 A discussion of nature of these secrets follows in the chapter on *Hekhalot Rabbati*.

50 D. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, p. 14, discusses this story and its variant readings.

essence and function.⁵¹ In their experiential configuration, these doxologies and hymns create an epistemological factor in the assessment of the materials at hand.

D

To speak of ontology in the intellectual venue pertaining to religious belief may sound as though I am driving the discussion into a theological corner. I am aware of this problem and want to make clear that I maintain the restrictions needed to hold theology and ontology apart. I avoid the temptation of using ontology for theological purposes. My major argument concerns the manner in which the cognitive stances that emanate from the assumed ontology ultimately sustain the unique nature of the hymnic materials at hand. To express this somewhat paradoxically, the hymnic materials contain the notion of the prevalence of that ontology. Furthermore, I would like to argue that the mystic sees or hears exactly what the words that he uses say. No metaphoric insinuations, or crossing of linguistic borderlines and bridges, are involved. Previous studies have shown that the words and the related mystical experience evolve in the cultural context into which they belong.⁵² We have explored the venues of biblical hymnology and the related religious experiences in which this context can be viewed as their source of crystallization.

Under normal conditions, words have an informative and descriptive function. Their aim and function is to give a true-to-life expression to existing situations, matters, and ideas. However, it is in the nature of the verbal expression that its essence is not identical to what it relates. Usually, even when words are viewed as verbal reification of the objects to which they relate, their linguistic domain is the symbolic. In the mystical realm, though, words have a different uniquely creative and evocative status.⁵³ There are various empowering components intended to be functional in configuring meaning in which words receive the status of an independent reality. This happens in conceptual

51 This fact in almost universally ignored by scholars studying the nature and history of Hebrew liturgical poetry, the *piyyut*, and its derivate offshoots.

52 See S. T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism", in S. T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 22–74; R. M. Gimello, "Mysticism in Its Context", in S. T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 61–88.

53 See M. Idel, "Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism", in S. T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 42–79.

domains that branch off from ordinary factors of reification. Normally, words shift between signification and interpretation. Often the notion of symbolism is chosen to describe this situation. However, I think that the transposition from the level of being to that of meaning is not exhausted in the realm of the symbol. In the case of the Hekhalot hymns, it presupposes a bi-directional transition from the earthly-historical to the heavenly-metaphysical and the other way around. Furthermore, words have unique forms of transition from one semantic stratum to the other. When such a shift occurs, matters of ontology are inevitably involved. This marks the transition from the scriptural materials that we have discussed to the linguistic stratum of the Hekhalot hymns and to their contents.

At this point, attention must be given to the visionary materials in the literature of pre-Talmudic apocalyptic. Several cases refer to imaginatively descriptive materials that include doxological oeuvres. It may be argued that the combination of visionary and doxological materials enhances the creation of that which the people concerned yearn to live through as an experienceable reality. I use the notion of *creating* as a complementary notion to that of fulfilling the human desire to experience a theophany.⁵⁴ In this context, the notion of “creating” indicates experiencing something that is not ordinarily accomplished in the normal cognitive capabilities of human beings. It entails special acts of making experientially present that which otherwise is un-experienceable. Normally, obtaining from the divine any kind of human aspiration—be it knowledge, daily needs, or any other kind of wishes—uses petitioner’s stances. It does not necessarily apply mystical hymnology or any other kind of linguistic or literary oeuvre, including magical adjurations. However, what may endow these stances with potentials that have special intensity is the sophisticated array of psychic expressions, some of which entail intense formulations in the course of which magical components are allowed to enter. In the scriptural context, the divine may become present in a theophany. When it transcends regular descriptive and laudatory forms of expression, it may indicate the epistemological transition from theophany to mystical experience. One may argue

54 See Michael Schneider, *The Appearance on the High Priest: Theophany, Apotheosis and Binitarian Theology From Priestly Tradition of the Second Temple Period Through Ancient Jewish Mysticism* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2012) [in Hebrew]. Schneider’s is an erudite discussion of materials and sources that refers to humans who envisioned themselves as approaching divine beings in various situations and aspired to gain divine qualities and powers. Schneider’s impressively informative monograph contains a rich array of parallels and scholarly references.

that it signifies a transition from something experienced as a physical representation to something that is realized as a cognitive entity.

Since the religious provenance of the Hekhalot literature unfolds in a variety of literary forms—prose, hymns, and adjuratory incantations—the question may be asked whether the materials at hand can serve as guides to identify specific groups or sub-groups.⁵⁵ In light of Mishnah *Ḥagigah* ii, 1, which states that the discourse in matters relating to the Merkavah lore is restricted to highly qualified individuals, the answer to this question may appear negative. We have already referred to the special qualities demanded of the Merkavah mystics. From a scholarly point of view, though, the historical and sociological factors of the Hekhalot writings have not yet left the domain of debated issues: the question of social setting is still an unsettled matter. In any event, literary forms reflecting the perspective of the writers and sociological gleanings as conceived by scholars are not necessarily interconnected. They may have only a limited bearing on the manner in which we understand central issues in the Hekhalot writings.⁵⁶ The question we have raised is related to a more essential issue, one that concerns the framework where the reader's perspective and insight can contribute to conceiving the historical validity, even the ontology, embedded in specific writings.

Finally, I have pointed out elsewhere that liturgical formulae recited in the synagogue may be helpful indicators in our ability to identify the historical provenance of the composition of the Hekhalot writings.⁵⁷ Interestingly, one

55 One point needs to be made, though, in this connection. It concerns the fact the ethnographic and anthropological materials that can be adduced show that similar events usually involve the active participation of congregational, often tribal, groups. In this respect, affinity to the practice of “anthropological” magicians strikes an interesting chord.

56 Notable samples, in this respect, are given in A. Kuyt, *The 'Descent to the Chariot': Towards a Description of the Terminology, Place, Function and Nature of the Yeridah in Hekhalot Literature* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1995). Kuyt's approach to the subject matter comes from a semantic angle. J. R. Davila, *The Descenders to the Chariot: The People behind the Hekhalot Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), who explores the shamanistic nature of the Hekhalot mystics with a special emphasis on magic. It must be admitted that the anthropological materials to which Davila refers are worth taking into consideration. However, I still hold to my view, on which Davila expresses some critical comments, to the effect that the ascension mysticism of the Hekhalot literature shows no clear-cut similarities with shamanistic phenomena. See also C. R. A. Morray-Jones, *A Transparent Illusion: The Dangerous Vision of Water in Hekhalot Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2002). As the second subtitle of the book says, it is “A Source-Critical and Tradition-Historical Inquiry”.

57 See I. Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988), pp. 145–173: “Angelic Songs, The Qedushah, and the Problem of the Origins

of the conclusions to which our analysis has led shows the prevalence of a “Babylonian” provenance for liturgical practices of the synagogue, which, with their ample use of Merkavah materials, are not identical with the ritual practices of the Hekhalot hymns. Indeed, the Hekhalot rituals, particularly those embedded in the “prayers” of the *Ma’aseh Merkavah* text, call for a different assessment from that of the prayers in the synagogue, which do not presuppose a heavenly ascent. They are descriptive rather than prescriptive.⁵⁸

N. Janowitz drew attention to “the ritual dimension [which] stems in part from the fact that these [Hekhalot] texts include commands, which indicate practice.”⁵⁹ Janowitz offers an insightful discussion of the Hekhalot prayers. However, her discussion of ritual goes in a different direction than the one offered here, particularly in the last chapter of this book. Janowitz focuses on a detailed analysis of the ritual efficacy of language. However, one consequence of my work on rituals and ritual theory, published after Janowitz’s book, is that the issue is more complex than its discussion on the linguistic platform. I agree with Janowitz that the performative factors of rituals should be viewed as effective on a transformative level, that is, as effecting substantial changes on a number of levels. However, our ways part when behavioral and cognitive considerations come into play. Janowitz remains in the realm of words and other linguistic units. As can be seen in the last chapter below, my position takes a more complex view of the subject, emphasizing the need to consider the magical act in its minutely detailed constitutive structure. In this respect, words and other linguistic units are but one part of the whole structure of the magical act.

In any event, I believe that Janowitz would agree that the vantage point of ritual studies contributes to the scholarly assessment of the hymns as an active factor in sustaining the visionary experiences, shaping their functionality, and, consequently, validating their ontology. However, it is not only a matter of the Name, magical or otherwise, but of the entire structured process of the ritual, verbal and otherwise. In short, the ritual configuration of the hymns empowers the coherence of the mystical reality and sustains it.⁶⁰

of the Hekhalot Literature” [previously published in Hebrew]. For a different approach, see R. Elijor, “From Earthly Temple to Heavenly Shrines: Prayer and Sacred Liturgy in the Hekhalot Literature and Its Relation to Temple Traditions”, *Tarbiz* LXIV/3 1995, pp. 341–380 [in Hebrew].

58 See B. Nitzan, *Qumran Prayer and Poetry* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1996) [in Hebrew]. Nitzan’s study is more inclusive than the title of the book indicates.

59 See N. Janowitz, *The Poetics of Ascent: Theories of Language in a Rabbinic Ascent Text*, p. 13.

60 In contrast, Mishnah *Berakhot* ii, 3 and the respective discussions of that Mishnah in Talmudic literature make clear that the verbal recitation has vital capacity in the ritual

The notion of the “numinous” is frequently used to refer to the religious mood that is invoked. The term is embedded in Protestant theology. However, since the sixties of the last century, its usage, originally designated to serve universal purposes in the phenomenology of religions, has been subjected to criticism. We need not enter a detailed discussion of the debate over the applicability of the term. In my opinion, though, the rather profuse application of the term by scholars has little to justify itself.⁶¹ Inasmuch as it can show relevance to the ontological discussion, this happens in the experiential rather than the theological domain.

Two factors, which cast light on the religious background of the Hekhalot literature and its hymnic components still have to be brought to the foreground. They are (a) the “cultic songs of praise” ritually performed in the context of what Sigmund Mowinckel called “Enthronement Psalms,”⁶² and (b) recent studies in religious techniques used in entering alternate states of consciousness. Referring to the second factor, a comparative study of ancient and other ethnographic materials and their ritual forms of expression, as well as matters that play a role in social anthropology, show valuable points of relevance to the study of the Hekhalot literature and its hymnic components.⁶³ There

enactment of the “shem’a” prayer. It is clearly preferred to a silent meditation on the words. It should be noted the Mishnah avoids any expression of magical concerns.

- 61 In the realm of the scholarly study of the Hekhalot literature, R. Elijor is a notable example that justifies this observation. See R. Elijor, “The Concept of God in Hekhalot Mysticism,” in J. Dan (ed.), *Early Jewish Mysticism: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism* [= *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, Vol. VI, 1–2 (1987)], pp. 13–64. The English title as printed in the “table of contents” does not reflect the Hebrew one, which reads (in my translation) “The Unique Nature of the Religious Phenomenon in the Hekhalot Literature, the Image of God, and the Expansion of the Cognitive Limits.” For a shortened reprint of this article, see R. Elijor, *Heikhalot Literature and Merkavah Tradition: Ancient Jewish Mysticism and its Sources* (Tel Aviv: Yedi’ot Aharonot, 2004) [in Hebrew], pp. 60–118. Other chapters in the book also deal with the religious phenomenon, though the terminology used is mostly theological. The notion of the numinous is a key one, in this respect.
- 62 S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* [English Translation by D.R. Ap-Thomas] (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962). Specific “Enthronement Psalms” are 29, 47, 93, 95–99, but a number of other Psalms may be included in the group. J. M. Kugel, “Topics in the History of Spirituality of the Psalm,” in A. Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality From the Bible Through the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 113–144. Among other things, one may find in Kugel’s study a balanced attempt to contextualize Mowinckel’s theory in modern research of The Book of Psalms.
- 63 See the references to Davila and Morray-Jones above, footnote 56.

is much to say about mystical experiences in the context of anthropology.⁶⁴ However, for practical reasons I shall skip a detailed discourse of this aspect of comparative study. Briefly, though, in distinction from phenomenological and comparative studies of magic, modern studies of anthropology, which are relevant to the present study, focus on musical rituals. They include repetitive songs and frenzied fits of dancing rather than sophisticated verbal expressions like hymns.⁶⁵

In order to nuance our discussion of the hymnic materials I shall refer to the first factor by referring to Sigmund Mowinckel and his study of the Psalms. Mowinckel stresses the cultic provenance of certain psalms. In his view, several psalms—specifically 29, 47, 93, 95–99, and indirectly several other psalms—reflect the chief festival of the year, the cultic provenance of which was enacted in the temple worship.⁶⁶ Mowinckel argues that the cultic enactment reflected in these psalms was tantamount to rituals whose purpose was the enthronement of God. Various rituals of similar nature are known from the ancient Near East, particularly in relation to the re-enthronement of kings. However, Mowinckel specifically refers to the enthronement of God. Whether Mowinckel's thesis reflects a historical reality in Ancient Israel or not, the Psalmist gives poetic expression to God's kingship in terms of His dominion over nature, the nations, and their gods. The reinstitution of God's kingship in a hymnic oeuvre aims at establishing His omnipotence in irrefutable terms. The Hekhalot hymns set similar tones, though in a somewhat less emphatic manner than do the Psalms. The predominant terms used in the Hekhalot hymns relate to cultic praise in which more emphasis is given to regal holiness than to dominion over natural powers, the nations, and earthly regents.

The scriptural references given above are not the only ones in which God's potent kingship is described in its full glorious majesty and magnitude. For instance, the "Song of the Sea" (Exodus 15, 18) ends with the statement that "Yahweh will reign forever and ever [RSV]."⁶⁷ The depiction of God sitting on a [heavenly] "throne" (Hebrew: *kisse* = chair) is known from 1 Kings 22, 19, Isaiah 6, 1, and elsewhere. However, one has to keep in mind another difference. The hymnic process of the cultic "Enthronement" as conceived by Mowinckel is

64 See the reference to the work of D. Merkur, above footnote 30.

65 See S. L. Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), bears relevance to the social aspects of the present discussion.

66 The "Enthronement Prayer" (*Malkhuyot*) is a central part of the New Year (Rosh Ha-Shanah) prayers. See Mishnah *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 4, 5–6.

67 See also Psalms 10, 16.

connected to a specific date in the cyclic calendar.⁶⁸ Time, ritually enacted in the monarchic system, is an important factor in the process. There is no indication that the Hekhalot hymns require or presuppose any calendric connection.⁶⁹

In many ways, ritual holiness and exalted sublimity set the multi-vocal tone of the Hekhalot hymns.⁷⁰ The holiness of God, which has become one of the predominant features of the Hekhalot literature, explains the many facets of the danger, which the Merkavah mystic has to overcome during his sojourn in the heavenly realms. These dangers have been subject to a number of studies. Their prevalence is discussed in later chapters of this book. However, in the context of the discussion of issues pertaining to ontology, these dangers play an interesting role. They are a central factor in establishing important aspects in the validity of the experience of the divine.

In this respect, the royal Throne of Glory (*Kisse Ha-Kavod*), too, plays an important role. It possesses features of an animated being. One section of *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, §§ 251–257) describes a song of praise sung by the Yored Merkavah. The scribe of Manuscript Vatican 228 calls it *Shir Kisse*, the “Song of (the) Throne”. It is the song, which the Throne allegedly sings to God as a daily practice. This “song” is set in a majestic pitch suited to glorify the various aspects of God’s exalted forms of appearance and dominion. Earlier in the text (§ 99), the Throne of Glory prostrates itself and invites God to be seated on it. In fact, typical to the special layout of *Hekhalot Rabbati* is the reference to a mystical symbiosis among the Throne of Glory, the seated appearance of God on it, the angelic beings, and the Merkavah mystic. The celestial rituals give intense expression to this symbiosis, which entails a theurgic stance. This stance is enhanced on various occasions. When the people of Israel say their Qedushah prayers, God embraces the figure of Jacob that is engraved on His

68 This idea is repeatedly mentioned in the prayers of Rosh Ha-Shanah, New Year Festival, which falls on the last day of the Month Elul and the first day of Tishri. According to Mishnah *Rosh Ha-Shanah* i, 1, the first day of the Month Nissan is the official “birthday” ([re-]installment) of Kings. The same Mishnah says that the first of Tishri is New Year’s Day.

69 D. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, p. 355, suggested, though, that “the clue to the genesis of the Hekhalot lies in the Shavu’ot cycle”. *Shavu’ot* (Pentecost) is axiomatically the day on which the Torah was given on Mount Sinai. In rabbinic tradition, it falls on the sixth day of the Month Sivan. The Bab. Talmud *Shabbat* 86/b, though, quotes an alternate view to the effect that the event happened on the seventh day of that month. However, both views are said to agree that it was on Shabbat!

70 In this case, I would agree that Rudolf Otto’s characterization of the holy in the polarized sense of the mystic’s fascination with the divine over against the fearful attitude of the divine beings against the intruding mystic applies to the mentioned situation.

Throne of Glory (*Synopse*, § 164). While the people of Israel say their prayers, God rejoices, and the angelic figures that carry the Throne are asked to increase their hymnic performance (*Synopse*, § 172). Finally, during the three daily prayer sessions of the people of Israel, God is described as descending from the upper heaven to his Throne in the seventh heaven (*Synopse*, §§ 100–102). In fact, the heavenly rituals entail complex events of a cultic nature. In the course of these cultic events, the angelic beings that carry and surround the Throne recite hymns, play musical instruments, and dance.⁷¹

E

The unfolding of mystical dimensions in the relevant texts is embedded in structured rituals. The aim of the rituals is to secure a mental disposition in which participation in heavenly events becomes a likely and, in heaven, acceptable possibility. No wonder, then, that at one point the text in *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, § 216) states that God “rejoices in those who descend to the Merkavah (*Yordei Merkavah*). And He is sitting and expecting each one of Israel to descend and perceive the wondrous glory, the unique dominion, the glory of exaltation, and the dominion of divine light (*Zihayon*) that is in joyous commotion before His Throne of Glory three times every day from the time of the creation of the world until now in praise.”⁷² In another passage (*Synopse*, § 236), the text says that the person who has been proven worthy of the vision is seated next to the Cherubim, Ofanim, and the Living Creatures (*Ḥayyot Ha-Qodesh*) to see the wondrous and holy vision of the divine presence.

The kind of attention we have given to the scriptural material indicates the direction that we should look in order to assess the uniquely innovative features of the Hekhalot hymns. This assessment links to a profound statement of religious faith and, thus, entails a unique epistemological stance. In this context, one may argue that the Hekhalot hymns explore new zones of maintaining religious experience. Where scriptural poetics exhausts its thrust as a major form of expressing religious belief and experiential possibilities, the Hekhalot writings open gates to mental activities in which different religious realms unfold. The Hekhalot hymns deserve the kind of assessment they receive because essential aspects of the Hekhalot materials evolve in, and are part of, these hymnic materials. These hymns do not speak of God and the celestial world as they do in Scripture; rather, they make things happen in an

71 The relevant passages are discussed below in the chapter on *Hekhalot Rabbati*.

72 For a similar description, see § 227.

experienced reality. Consequently, the exclusive emphasis on their poetic and semantic qualities does not exhaust their role in the context of ritually enacting and configuring divine sanctity.⁷³

However, taking into consideration the line of argumentation drawn so far, one must be aware of the fact that any reality that finds itself crystallized in words raises serious questions. What is the status of these words, or how can words escape the fate, which T. S. Elliot perceptively diagnosed in *Four Quartets*? Elliot says, “Words strain/Crack and sometimes break”. This is particularly the case when words build situations, which, as Elliot says in the same poem, are likely to “slip, slide, perish, /Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place . . .” A notable example, which shows that Elliot’s perception is not just a poetic nightmare, is the reference found in rabbinic literature to the Tablets of the Law broken by Moses. A rabbinic tradition reports that once the Tablets had been broken, the letters written on them flew back to heaven.⁷⁴ The words engraved by the “Finger of God” (Exodus 31, 18; 32, 16) retract to their initial status as single units that return to their origin in heaven. Another tradition refers to the fact that the letters had even faded away before Moses broke the Tablets.⁷⁵

The example of the script on the Tablets of the Law teaches an interesting lesson: the indispensability of words in establishing essence. They are functional modes on more complex levels than just the communicative ones. The covenantal message, which the Tablets conveyed, depended on the words inscribed on them. *Mutatis mutandis*, the letters that compose the words made only provisional sense: As long as they were on the Tablets, they held together and made sense. However, once the Tablets had been broken the letters composing the words lost their cohesive sense and returned to heaven or faded away. Without the words on them, the Tablets have become a material object that could be broken. Furthermore, in face of the imminent fate of the Tablets, the words, too, lost their coherent meaning. Moving our attention to the

73 In this respect, the present discussion moves on different lines of argumentation than the one offered by J. Dan, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 687–743.

74 Bav. *Pesaḥim* 87/b (bottom).

75 An early instance of this tradition is recorded in [*Pseudo Philo*] *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 12, 5: “Moses descended in haste and saw the calf. He looked at the tablets and saw that they were not written upon, and, agitated, he smashed them.” See H. Jacobson, *A commentary on Pseudo-Philo’s Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum with Latin Text and English Translation*, Volume One (Leiden-New York-Köln: E. J. Brill, 1996), p. 490. Jacobson discusses various parallels, which mention the fact that the result of the fading away of the letters or their flying back to heaven was that the tablets became too heavy for Moses to carry.

Hekhalot hymns, we have seen that the presence of God and everything that it entails evolves in the *hymnic*, that is, in the verbal activity of the Merkavah mystics. The verbal rather than any other activity makes God present in modes that, in the words quoted in the opening sections of this chapter, are “above all [other] hymns or praises”.

In short, the ontology of the hymns derives from the existence of the being to which they refer. *Mutatis mutandis*, that existence evolves in hymnic forms of speech. In this connection, one is reminded of magic, in which individual words and even newly formed ones with no comprehensible lexical meaning are infused with creative potency. Similarly, *Sefer Yeẓirah* shows that in the creative mind of God, clusters of alphabetic letters become potent elements functional in the creation of the physical world. This appears to be an interesting extension of a Logos theory with certain affinities to magic.

F

The next step leads us to a more focused discussion of additional, mostly linguistic, aspects of the Merkavah hymns. Awareness of the unique nature of hymnic activity in the wider context of mystical language has grown in recent years. A considerable number of studies applying various research methods, particularly those dealing with issues of mystical empowerment, are at hand.⁷⁶ This is particularly true of studies that discuss medieval Jewish mysticism.⁷⁷

76 For a general discussion of the notion of empowerment in Jewish mysticism, see J. Garb, *Manifestations of Power in Jewish Mysticism: From Rabbinic Literature to Safed Kabbala* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005) [in Hebrew]. Garb does not refer to the materials and the issues as presented here. However, the gap is filled by R. M. Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power: Angels, Incantations and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), though her approach to the issue raised here is different from mine. In any event, consideration of the anthropological notion of “empowerment” and “possession” could have given a wider scope to Garb’s study. For a methodologically valuable sample of the vast literature on the subject, see S. J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). For a more recent study of the issue from the vantage point of the socio-psychological aspect of comparative anthropology, see L. K. Suryani and G. F. Jensen, *Trance and Possession in Bali* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995).

77 See A. Goldreich, *Automatic Writing in Zoharic Literature and Modernism* [in Hebrew] (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2010). See also M. Idel, *Enchanted Chains: Techniques and Rituals in Jewish Mysticism* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2005); M. Hellner-Eshed, *A River Issues Forth from Eden: On the Language of Mystical Experiences in the Zohar* (Tel Aviv:

However, the present chapter approaches the subject with a view toward early Jewish mysticism and its hymnic components. It must be clear by now that I do so from a new angle, that of the ontological, or cognitive, provenance of the Hekhalot hymns. Much has already been said in this chapter about this perspective. A further perspective concerns ritual studies with its unique terminology and concepts. To the best of my knowledge, the combination of these approaches has not been applied in the study of early Jewish mysticism.

Speaking about details of mystical rituals in the Hekhalot writings, I refer the reader to the concluding chapter of this book. It discusses at some length questions of ritual performance, which in the case of Hekhalot mysticism shows a noteworthy resemblance to magic. Rituals, however strange or idiosyncratic they may look to us, have a logical structure of their own. Deciphering that logic requires a scholarly approach that has not received the kind of attention it deserves. However, as indicated above, I do not consider the overall assessment of the magical components of the hymns as shaping the qualifying delineation of the essence of the Hekhalot literature as a whole. Many of the Hekhalot hymns contain no magical configuration and comprehend no magical purposes, and so should not be treated in that context. In short, those sections of the Hekhalot writings that do have magical configurations should be taken in the right proportion. The hymns have a unique transformational quality, but this quality does not confine them to the realm of the magic. Even the transformational elements underlying the assumption of Enoch into Metatron, which constitute the core feature of *Sefer Hekhalot* ("3 Enoch") lack any magical features.⁷⁸

As we shall see in the last, concluding, chapter, magic is ritually configured to bring about and establish changes in matters relating everyday life.⁷⁹

'Am Oved, 2005) [in Hebrew]. Relevant to the subject is A. Afterman, *"Devekut": Mystical Intimacy in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2011) [in Hebrew]. These books contain ample references to previous studies of the subject.

78 M. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) offers a detailed analysis of the materials contained in title of her book. She does so with an eye toward later developments, particularly of the Hekhalot literature, and especially on the notion of "transformation" (see Chapter 3 in her book).

79 In this respect, I am supplementing the discussion in I. Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003). As mentioned, the last chapter of the present edition creates the bridge between the two books. The bibliography in that chapter makes clear my position on magic, though I feel that much more has to be said on the subject. See also, D. Stein, *Maxims Magic Myth: A Folkloristic Perspective of Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2004), pp. 169–267.

Essentially, the unique practices in the Hekhalot writings are used to bring about cognitive changes that enable visionary experiences. In this respect, the kind of connection existing between the respective preparatory acts in magic and Merkavah mysticism go together, but they also part ways. In their unique terms of reference, both domains share a principle claim to ontological validity. However, one should keep a significant difference in mind. The applications of the preparatory rituals, even those containing magical elements, in the context of the Hekhalot hymns mostly relate to celestial and divine realities, while the magical rituals, proper, are primarily concerned with the material world.

As mentioned, one important factor in assessing the reality of these visions and their connection with hymns is the infusion of an energizing “power” (חַב, δύνάμις) into the soul of the visionary.⁸⁰ Rabbi Yishmael in *Sefer Hekhalot* reports of his spiritual empowerment in the following manner:

Then I entered the seventh palace and he [= Metatron] led me to the camp of the Shekhinah and presented me before the throne of glory so that I may behold the chariot (*Merkavah*). But as soon as the princes of the chariot looked at me, and the fiery seraphim fixed their gaze on me, I shrank back trembling and fell down stunned by the radiant appearance of their eyes and the bright vision of their faces,⁸¹ until the Holy One, blessed be he, rebuked them and said, “My servants . . . , hide your eyes from Ishmael my beloved son and honored friend, so that he does not shrink and tremble so.” At once Metatron, Prince of the Divine Presence, came and revived me and raised me to my feet, *but still I had not strength enough to sing a hymn* before the glorious throne of the glorious King, the mightiest of kings . . . until an ‘hour’ had passed. But after an ‘hour’ the Holy one, blessed be he, opened to me gates of Shekhinah, gates of

80 See the discussion in H. D. Betz, *The “Mithras Liturgy”: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), p. 94. Betz rightly refers to “. . . the divine power (δύνάμις) energizing the ritual as a whole, a term occurring often in magical texts.” I return to this subject in Section VI of the last chapter in this book. However, the passage in *Sefer Hekhalot*, to which I refer below, is not necessarily magical. In any event, Betz’s detailed discussion of the ritual aspects of the *Mithras Liturgy* exposes an interesting spectrum of similarities between the rituals mentioned and prescribed in Hekhalot writings. It should be pointed out, though, that the main subject matter of the *Mithras Liturgy* is not mysticism in the visionary sense discussed here. It emphasizes the factor of “immortality” (ἀθανασία).

81 The notion of the hostile and destructive look of the heavenly beings is a recurrent theme in the Hekhalot literature. See, for instance, *Synopse*, §§ 246–248.

peace, gates of wisdom, gates of strength, gates of might, gates speech, gates of song, gates of sanctifying praise, gates of chant. He enlightened my eyes⁸² and my heart⁸³ while uttering jubilation, praise, song, thanksgiving song, glory, majesty, laud, and strength. And when I opened my mouth and sang praises before the throne of glory, the holy creatures below the throne and above the throne responded after me, saying 'Holy, holy, holy' ...⁸⁴

This passage is part of the opening section of *Sefer Hekhalot*. Its subject matter speaks for itself in the context of the present study. However, it has not yet received the kind of attention it deserves, probably because there is a scholarly consensus that *Sefer Hekhalot* is a latecomer in the corpus of Hekhalot writings. It highlights the experience of the visionary, not necessarily the adoration-functional context of our subject matter.⁸⁵ Indeed, one may argue

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- 82 Rabbinic literature contains a variety of cases which exemplify the notion of divinely enlightening one's eyes to see matters that otherwise are not seen or observed. The subject deserves a separate study in order to show its diverse applications. In any event, Tosefta *Kippurim* iv, 4 discusses the case of a person who is seized by ravenous hunger (βούλιμος) during the fast of the Day of Atonement. People are allowed to feed him "until his eyes light up". The Tosefta asks, "How do they know that his eyes have lighted up?" The answer given is, "When he is able to tell the difference between the decent (*yafeh*) and bad."
- 83 The concluding hymn of the Qumran *Rule of the Community* (1QS, Col. XI) includes an interesting parallel: "For from the source of his knowledge he has disclosed his light, and my eyes have observed his wonders, and the light of my heart the mystery of the future". [The English translation is by F. Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scroll Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), p. 19]. Does this passage include mystical overtones? The answer to this question depends on how one assesses the whole question, whether there is a mystical component in the Qumran writings or not. It is still a debatable issue. I incline to concur with the balanced and careful approach to the subject as outlined and discussed by P. Alexander, *op. cit.*, who does not discuss the subject of the visionary ascension-hymns. Apparently, he avoids the discussion, because there are no such hymns in the Qumran literature. The "mystical" aim as expressed in the Qumran writings is to join the angels in the songs of praise to God, or as Alexander calls it "angelification, possibly even apotheosis" (p. 90).
- 84 See, *Synopse*, § 2. The English translation is by P. Alexander (with my italics and slight modifications), in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. I: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1983), pp. 14–15.
- 85 M. Idel, "Metatron—Notes on the Development of Myth in Judaism" [in Hebrew], in H. Pedayah (ed.), *Myth in Judaism* [in Hebrew], *Eshel Beer-Sheva: Occasional Publications in Jewish Studies*, Volume Four (1996), pp. 29–44. In this and other publications on the

that the absence of the adjutory component confirms the late dating of the book. However, as argued above, many of the hymns, too, lack a magical component. It is worth noticing that, in the passage quoted, the recitation of the hymns has a reciprocal effect on Rabbi Yishmael: "He enlightened my eyes and my heart while uttering jubilation, praise, song . . ." This enlightenment of the eyes enables the ensuing visionary experience.

Furthermore, the saying "He enlightened my eyes and my heart while uttering jubilation, praise, song . . ." brings to mind the biblical case of Jonathan, the son of King Saul, whose eyes were "enlightened" by the little honey that he had tasted (1 Samuel 14, 27–29). This association makes sense in light of Proverbs 25, 16: "If you have found honey, eat only enough for you, lest you be sated with it and vomit it." Tosefta *Hagigah* ii, 3 quotes this verse referring to the fate of Ben Zoma, about whom it is said that he was afflicted when entering the Pardes. He had eaten too much of "the honey" that he had found. Whether the "author" of *Sefer Hekhalot* had this line of associations in mind is an open question. It should be added that "eating through the eyes" is a common notion in Midrashic literature referring to visionary experiences of the Shekhinah.⁸⁶

We have referred to the rather ephemeral status of words as stated in T. S. Elliot's *Four Quartets*. However, one may approach the issue of verbalization in a different manner. The externalization of the poet's inner event in the form of a poem can posit that inner events comprise a more solid existence than do objects in the physical world—even, and this is of more importance, as mental or cognitive stances.⁸⁷ Words may have a longer life expectancy than the objects or events to which they refer. Definitely, they live longer than the people who have created them. This fact may have implications on the subject addressed here, namely, the ontology of the motifs embedded in the Hekhalot hymns. If our approach makes sense, the hymns indeed do what I believe they are expected to do: They endow the relevant realities with an ontological status.

subject, Idel inclines to view the issue of Metatron in a mostly mythic context. See also E. Wolfson, "Yeridah la-Merkavah: Typology of Ecstasy and Enthronement in Ancient Jewish Mysticism", in R. A. Herrera (ed.), *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics, and Typologies* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), pp. 13–44.

86 See I. Chernus, *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism: Studies in the History of Midrash* (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1982), pp. 74–87: "Nourished by the Splendor of the Shekhinah: A Mystical Motif in Rabbinic Midrash." See also S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah*, Part V: Order Mo'ed, p. 1291.

87 See M. Idel, *Enchanted Chains: Techniques and Rituals in Jewish Mysticism* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2005), pp. 76–121.

G

At this point, there is room for adding a new perspective to our discussion. I shall refer the reader to an example taken from Porphyry's *The Life of Plotinus*. I do so because I think that details in *The Life* are relevant to the study of the Hekhalot hymns and their cultural dating. Porphyry tells of himself

At Plato's feast I read a poem, "The Sacred Marriage" (τὸν ἱερὸν γάμον); and because much of it was expressed in the mysterious (μυστικῶς) and veiled language of inspiration (ἐνθουσιασμοῦ . . .) someone said, "Porphyry is mad".⁸⁸ However, Plotinus said, so as to be heard by all, "You [Porphyry] have shown yourself at once poet, philosopher, and expounder of sacred mysteries."⁸⁹

No details are given of the contents of the poem and its unique title "The Sacred Marriage". The Hekhalot writings do not include any features that resemble a "sacred marriage". However, Plotinus told Porphyry that he had shown himself "at once poet, philosopher, and expounder of sacred mysteries". What does he mean by "sacred mysteries"? There is one detail in *The Life*, which bears comparison to the beginning of *Hekhalot Rabbati* and may suggest an answer to the question. As previously indicated, *Hekhalot Rabbati* begins with a question, which addresses the issue of the hymns that facilitate heavenly visions. However, instead of giving a direct answer to the question, the text specifies the unique practical qualities, which the mystic gains. He is likely to look at people, identifying among them criminals and transgressors of various aspects of religious law. Furthermore, they are proficient in giving prognostic utterances concerning the future of the people concerned. Above all, they acquire potential protection from all kinds of harm and violence (*Synopse*, §§ 82—92).

In this connection, it is interesting to note that Porphyry tells of Plotinus, "[H]e had a surpassing degree of penetration into character. Once a valuable necklace was stolen . . . The slaves of the house were assembled before the eyes of Plotinus, and he looked carefully at them all; then, pointing at one of them he said: 'This is the thief!'"⁹⁰ As indicated, the Merkavah mystic, too, is able to

88 This reminds us of *Tosefta Hagigah* 2, 3 and the fate of one of the four sages who allegedly entered the Pardes. According to the respective textual versions, the story concerns either Ben Zoma or Ben 'Azzai.

89 Porphyry, *The Life of Plotinus*, §15, translated by A. H. Armstrong in Loeb Classical Library vol. 440, p. 43.

90 *The Life of Plotinus* § 11, p. 37.

look at a person's face and "know and recognize" hidden information like a criminal involvement in theft.⁹¹ With all due caution, I would like to suggest that these passages impart a reasonable hint to the nature of the "sacred mysteries" mentioned above.⁹² Previously, it was customary to consider the opening sections of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, in which these qualifications of the Merkavah mystic are mentioned, as non-integral interpolations. However, by now it is clear that the ability to read hidden information on the faces and other parts of the body, technically called *Hakarat Panim we-Sidrei Sirtutim*, is an ancient "art" which Jewish mystics adapted.⁹³ It is a well-documented "art" in Jewish esoteric lore from Qumran to Lurianic Kabbalah.⁹⁴ It requires special cognitive qualifications, which, in the context of the Hekhalot mystics, are dependent on and equal to mystical transformation. The fact that the Hekhalot hymns are related to these materials shows that these hymns may have a wide spectrum of contextual references to various mystery traditions, not least among them those recorded in third century Neo-Platonism.⁹⁵

91 *Hekhalot Rabbati* 1, 3; *Synopse*, § 83.

92 It should be noted, though, that the Hekhalot writings contain numerous references to secrets and mysteries (*raz* and *sod*) the nature of which is not always specified.

93 The relevant texts are discussed in Part Two of this book under "Physiognomy, Chiromancy, Metoposcopy".

94 See now T. Liebes (ed.), *Devils, Demons and Souls: Essays on Demonology by Gershom Scholem* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2004) [in Hebrew], pp. 246–301. See also Y. Liebes, "Hakarat Panim ba-Qabbalah" (Lecture), pluto.huji.ac.il/~liebes/Zohar/hakaratpan.doc. In that article, Liebes concentrates on the Jewish Kabbalah, though he mentions the name of Jamblichus, a Syrian Neo-Platonist of the mid-third century, which may be supplemented, in this respect, from the side of the Greek mystery religions of the time, like that of the "Chaldean Oracles".

95 To the best of my knowledge, the fact that a Neo-platonic mystical strain touches the Merkavah tradition has not yet been explored in the scholarly discussion. However, it is variously discussed in the study of medieval philosophy. See in this respect the seminal discussion of F. Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1958). See also I. Gruenwald, "Maimonides' Quest beyond Philosophy and Prophecy," in J. L. Kraemer (ed.), *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 141–157. Recently, M. Lorberbaum, *Dazzled by Beauty: Theology as Poetics in Hispanic Jewish Culture* (Ben-Zvi Institute: Jerusalem, 2011, pp. 32–33 [in Hebrew], pointed to the work of A. Altmann, P. Merlan, and others in connection with the mystical strain in medieval philosophy. The context of that strain was Neo-platonic. Lorberbaum was unaware of the work of Rahman and my own study of the subject (in which I regrettably ignored the work of D. Blumenthal).

The cross-cultural correspondence that we have just discussed is likely to suggest a new perspective for the dating of the Hekhalot materials. The revival of interest in these materials in the middle of the third century C.E. becomes a likely possibility for defining the spiritual climate, in which reference to that material made sense. Furthermore, the recent re-publication of the so-called *Mithras Liturgy*, with its breath-taking ascension account, though for purposes of becoming immortal, may suggest an even earlier date. At least it may strengthen the third century as a likely historical and cultural provenance. However, the dating of the Hekhalot texts remains a complex issue, depending, *inter alia*, on the various literary layers of the texts in question. What Porphyry and the *Mithras Liturgy* suggest is a telling phenomenological comparison. It may have intriguing, though not conclusive, consequences for the issue of dating certain aspects of the Hekhalot literature.

To conclude this discussion, two issues need to be pointed out. The first concerns the common reader: The Hekhalot writings are written reports of mental/psychic experiences. The reader is led into a wonderland of heavenly visions allegedly experienced by another person. He has a number of options as to how far to follow that person, if at all. Belief, or the “suspension of disbelief”, is the key notion here. However, the second, and more important, point concerns the scholar who has to assess these visions and suggest a coherent explanation of the unusual reality, which the visionary experiences and describes. His ability to accomplish this depends on establishing a solid cornerstone upon which to build his arguments. As may be inferred from the foregoing discussion, my position on this matter is that the hymnic materials can be viewed in the framework of a process in which the words used function in creating modes of cognitive transformation, which are vital to the realization of the relevant realities. Although this may seem like a magical procedure, to my mind it is primarily a cognitive one. Words used in a ritual context have ontology of their own.⁹⁶

Furthermore, from the vantage point of ontology, mystical poetry, not unlike religious poetic hymnology in general, has its own unique qualities. My argument takes the position that the kind of hymnic poetry discussed here transcends its artistic features. Its words can configure a mythic reality, the unique

96 A noteworthy attempt to bring the subject discussed here under one roof is E. T. Lawson and R. N. McCauley, *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). It should be noted, though, that the authors do not include mysticism in the framework of their study. Their book concentrates on the subject of language and ritual. Thus, one can find in it relevant implications for the study of words used in hymnic rituals.

validity of which is tested, among other things, in its applicability in various forms of ritual.⁹⁷ In short, the shift here is from the poetically impressive or descriptive to the epistemologically creative. In cases of intentional perception, then, the psychological point of view prevails: one can see only what one induces oneself to believe that exists. This is the essence of myth and its epistemological or cognitive status.⁹⁸ Hymnic expositions have an indispensable role in the process.

97 See M. Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), who links early Kabbalah to rabbinic mythmaking. Unfortunately, Fishbane ignores the Hekhalot literature, and, for that matter, my contributions to the study of the relationship between myth and ritual. Both domains could have added important scholarly dimensions to his otherwise insightful and finely nuanced discourse. See also next footnote.

98 See the detailed discussion of this issue in I. Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 94–138: “The Relevance of Myth for the understanding of Ritual in Ancient Judaism”. See also I. Gruenwald, “Myth in the Reality of Epistemology, History, and Research” [in Hebrew], *Jewish Studies* [= *Mada‘ey Ha-Yahadut*], Volume 38 (1998), pp. 187–210. See further G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden-New York-Köln: E. J. Brill, 1996), pp. 11–26: “Myth as Enigma: Cultural Hermeneutics in Late Antiquity.”

Two Essential Qualities of Jewish Apocalyptic

A

In spite of a century of intensive studies, the rise of Jewish apocalyptic still seems to be a riddle. Nothing can better illustrate the uncertainty of modern scholarship with regard to the various problems involved in the study of apocalypticism than the title of Klaus Koch's book: *Ratlos vor der Apokalypitik*.¹ Admittedly, there are many studies which have considerably contributed to our understanding of the phenomenon,² but Jewish apocalypticism is still, by and large, a conundrum, particularly so if we consider its rather vague origin and proliferation as a uniquely developed religious experience and literary genre in Second Temple Judaism. No attempt will be made here to lift the mists that overhang its prehistory, though the writer agrees with the view that Jewish apocalyptic had a considerably long history before it entered the literary stage in Second Temple Judaism, roughly from the third century BCE. The earliest datable documents are probably those referred to by Józef Milik as *The Books of Enoch*. The relevant texts and the Aramaic in which they are written were dated, on linguistic grounds, by Jonas Greenfield in a lecture in 1976.

This chapter will attempt to discuss briefly the place which Jewish apocalyptic occupies in the history of Jewish religious thought and literature. We shall focus our attention on two religious phenomena in Scripture, and specifically in Prophecy and Wisdom, and in their light examine some of the particular qualities of Jewish apocalyptic. Naturally, our discussion of biblical prophecy and wisdom literature does not strive to be exhaustive. We shall touch on these two fields only inasmuch as they can help us in outlining what is new and original in apocalypticism.

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- 1 Klaus Koch, *Ratlos vor der Apokalypitik* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag Gerd Mohn, 1970). The German title of the book expresses the idea of perplexity better than that of the English translation, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* (London: SCM Press, 1972). See also P. D. Hanson, "Prolegomena to the Study of Jewish Apocalyptic," in F. M. Cross, *et al.* (eds), *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1976), pp. 389–413.
 - 2 See particularly, H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1963); J. M. Schmidt, *Die Jüdische Apokalypitik* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969); *idem*, "Forschung zur jüdischen Apokalypitik," *Beihefte zur Evangelische Theologie Verkündigung und Forschung* I: Altes Testament (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1969), pp. 44–69.

We shall examine Jewish apocalyptic in the light of its relationship to Scripture.³ It is natural that, whenever the proponents of some new ideas in Jewish religious thought sought to introduce them, they found themselves obliged to do so within the framework of some kind of relationship to Scripture. This is the essence of Jewish tradition: people look for the authority of Scripture even in cases where their ideas do not explicitly concur with what Scripture plainly says. In this respect, it seems safe to argue that midrashic ways of thinking—whether they involved explicating, or even rewriting Scripture—were much older and more widely spread than is sometimes assumed. This relationship to Scripture, which Jewish religious thought seeks to bear, does not limit its own relative independence. New and quite daring modes of thinking could be introduced on the assumption that they really were the hidden sense of Scripture. Medieval Jewish Kabbalah is a notable example of how completely novel ways of expression and thought could be introduced as the hidden and, for that matter, symbolic content of Scripture.⁴ Long before that, chiefly during the last two-hundred and fifty years of the Second Temple, a kind of literature developed which, in the framework of peculiar religious experiences, brought forward a series of ideas and concepts which, when viewed in their relationship to Scripture, were quite revolutionary.

Revolutionary they were since they purported to disclose, at least to a select group of believers, things that Scripture did not explicitly say. Furthermore, they were declared to be beyond the reach of common, uninitiated, human beings. Of course, not everything contained in apocalyptic literature belonged to these two categories, but the material that does belong to them is, from the point of view of Scripture, absolutely rule breaking. To illustrate our argument, we shall first take up certain features of the Book of Job and examine them in the light of what happened to them later on in apocalyptic literature. Whenever the Book of Job was composed,⁵ it clearly expresses a basic mood found in Scripture, particularly in the so-called wisdom parts, namely, that man cannot understand everything and hence is not justified in questioning the ways of God. According to the Book of Job, there is a correlation between

3 The problem of Scriptural apocalyptic, which has been variously discussed in recent years, can be left out of consideration in the present context. See further below, footnote 43, and P. D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

4 See G. Scholem, *Zur Kabbala und ihrer Symbolik* (Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, 1960), pp. 49–116, 159–207.

5 For a brief and recent summary of the views concerning the date and the authorship of the Book of Job see M. H. Pope, *The Anchor Bible: Job* (Garden City – New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), pp. xxx–xxxviii.

man's inability to understand the basic laws of Nature and his inability to understand the principles of God's justice. Job's friends repeatedly draw his attention to the wondrous ways in which Nature operates.⁶ When they do so, they mean to imply that the human intellect—as is so drastically illustrated by its confrontation with Nature—is incapable of grasping the relation between man's just behavior and the amount of suffering which befalls him. This is also the conclusion that God wants Job to draw when He reveals Himself in the storm at the end of the book. In fact, God endorses what has previously been implied by Job's friends.

Briefly, the line of these arguments in the Book of Job goes as follows. First, in answer to Job's curse on the day of his birth, Eliphaz says: "... to God would I commit my cause; who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number: He gives rain upon the earth and sends water upon the fields; He sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety" (6, 8–11; RSV). God's omnipotence is here illustrated by His wondrous works in Nature and by His care for those who are most in need of it. When Job stresses again that he still expects God to repay accordingly those who trust in Him, and when he expresses his dissatisfaction with what the second of his friends, Bildad the Shuhite, suggests, Zophar comes and, in line with what Eliphaz has already implied, says: "Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? The heights of heaven... Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?" (11, 7–8). It is impossible to grasp God's wisdom, so what one must do is to trust in Him and hope. These and some other arguments are repeatedly brought forward until we reach the turning point of the book. In the speech, which begins in chapter 27, Job once again concludes: "As God lives, who has taken away my justice, and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter" (27, 2). That is, Job is convinced of his integrity. However, he is now also ready to accept the fact that only in God is wisdom to be found and that only He knows what wisdom really is. The conclusion for man is "... the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (28, 28). This conclusion, common in biblical wisdom-literature,⁷ could be interpreted here to mean that, since man cannot attain wisdom, he must content himself with

6 G. von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970), pp. 267 ff.; *idem*, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1965), pp. 262–271.

7 See J. Maier & J. Schreiner (eds.), *Literatur und Religion des Frühjudentums* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1973), p. 44/5, footnote 6; W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament II* (London: SCM Press, 1967), p. 92.

the fear of God. The inaccessibility of divine wisdom should not lead to rebellion but to respectful submission.

Since Elihu's discourses do not add anything substantial from our point of view, we may directly turn to God's answer from the storm. Actually, God's "answer" is a long series of questions to which Job is unable to find any answer. Hence, he is driven to the conclusion that there is no point in arguing against God. What Job did find in God's questions is an extensive list of His activities in Nature, activities which man can neither directly experience nor reasonably explain. In fact, this long list of activities is a catalogue of deeds or subjects supposed to be beyond the reach of the human mind. Under such discouraging conditions, man has to give in, as Job actually does: his relative ignorance is a *conditio sine qua non* in any moral argument with the Deity.⁸ Thus, the solution suggested in the Book of Job for the problem of human suffering is, in this respect, a "negative" one: no satisfactory explanation can be given from the point of view of the suffering human being. Man has to concede that his intellect allows only a partial, and hence insufficient, understanding of the ways of God. The "happy ending" in the case of Job, if it really belongs to the main body of the book, has an obvious mitigating effect, but it is an indirect way of approaching the painful problem of human suffering. The restoration of happiness and wealth to Job and his family is no real answer in principle: it only bids us view Job's case in a broader perspective. In terms of the "happy ending", the period of suffering becomes an unpleasant interlude and is no challenge to the justice of God. Yet, as we are going to see, Jewish tradition did not see in the suggestions made in the Book of Job a conclusive solution to the problem of the lack of any explainable coordination between moral integrity and human suffering. The same questions were repeatedly forced on the minds of the people, and, in the framework of different historical circumstances and novel intellectual climates, new solutions were considered.

As we have already seen, God challenges Job's competence to argue against Him by asking him a long series of questions about the wondrous ways of Nature. These questions include references to the creation of the world (38, 4 ff.), the structure of the universe (38, 5 ff.), meteorological phenomena (38, 22 ff.), astronomical laws (38, 31 ff.), animal life and feeding (39, 1 ff.), Behemoth (40, 15 ff.), Leviathan (40, 25 ff.), and ancient mythology (41, 5 ff.). All these

8 See I. Gruenwald, " 'Knowledge' and 'Vision': Towards a Clarification of Two 'Gnostic' Concepts in the Light of Their Alleged Origins", *Israel Oriental Studies* III (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1973), pp. 69–107. Reprinted in I. Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism: Studies in Apocalypticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988), pp. 65–124.

items of knowledge are riddles to the mind of man. They reflect the contents of God's wisdom, as it was outlined by Job himself in chapter 28. Indeed, the Book of Job advances the idea, that, in the performances of Nature, we get a deeper view of how God manifests His wisdom:

When He gave to the wind its weight, and meted out the waters by measure; when He made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder (28, 25–26).

God, and only He, knows the right proportions of everything, and only He is able to control and regulate natural phenomena.⁹ A similar idea is expressed by the prophet Isaiah when he refers to the creation of the world:

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? (40, 12).¹⁰

The idea that order depends on correct measurement and right proportion is in itself neither unique nor new: it may be found implied in the writings of the Greek philosophers, and it still holds true in modern science. What is, nevertheless, noteworthy in biblical thought is the fact that God is there believed to know and to be responsible for these right quantities and proportions, and that they are beyond understanding. It is here that Job sees the essential difference between the capabilities of the human intellect and the wisdom of the Deity. Since scientific research and knowledge begin with the attempt to find out what these quantities and proportions are, it may be inferred that the view expressed in the Book of Job runs counter to the scientifically oriented mind.

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- 9 See *art. cit.* (previous footnote), p. 70, footnote 29. To the references cited there, one may add *The Wisdom of Solomon* 11, 20: "But by measure and number and weight thou didst order all things". As for the weight of the wind see further, *Bereshit Rabba*, ed. Theodor-Albeck, (Jerusalem: Vahrman, 1965), p. 232: "Rav Huna said: Because of three winds which came out (= from their treasure houses into the world) without weight there came destruction on the world". See also *4 Ezra* 4, 5: "Or measure me the measure of the wind".
- 10 For the idea of the measurement of the seawater, see further Bav. *Horayot* 10/a (end) where two sages who lived in the days of Rabbi Aqiva are mentioned as being able to calculate the number of the drops in the sea, but who nevertheless had nothing to eat and to wear. Cf. also footnotes 14 and 22 below. See also A. Wasserstein, "Astronomy and Geometry as Propaedeutic Studies in Rabbinic Literature," *Tarbiz* XLIII (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1973), p. 54 [in Hebrew].

The limits put here before the inquisitive faculties of the human intellect should not, however, be interpreted in terms of the suppression of all scientific activity and knowledge. The particular position taken by the Book of Job means that since man is limited in his ability to understand the wisdom of God in the various operations of Nature, he should withhold any criticism of God's wisdom in His attitude towards man. This is no direct prohibition of scientific inquiry, but a rather skeptical view of what the human intellect may expect from and attain in such an inquiry. It is in this light that one should view the innovation in the lists of revealed knowledge concerning natural phenomena as found in some of the apocalyptic books, mainly the so-called Enoch literature. Once man is to receive information about the principles of divine retribution, there is no longer any reason to withhold the secrets of nature from him. The two go hand in hand: where there is no possibility of knowing the secrets of nature, it is assumed that there is no possibility of grasping the ways of God with man; where a revelation of the ways of God with man is given, it is simultaneous with a revelation of the secrets of nature. In this respect, apocalyptic revelations claim to bring about a substantial expansion of the capabilities of the human intellect, not only in matters that pertain to man's understanding of the operation of natural phenomena but also in his understanding of history and divine retribution.

B

References to revealed knowledge concerning natural phenomena can be found in 1 *Enoch* (*Ethiopic Enoch*) 17–18; 22; 23–26; 41, 1ff; 43–44; 52; 59; 60, 11 ff.; 69; 71; 72–80; 93, 11–14,¹¹ in 2 *Enoch* (*Slavonic Enoch*)¹² 5–6; 11–16; 24–30; 40; 47–48; and in 3 *Enoch* (*Hebrew Enoch*)¹³ 11; 13; 14; 17; 41–42; 48(d). Similar

11 To these one has to add the revelations of secrets by the evil angels in Chapter 7, 65 and 69. For a recent discussion of the various traditions concerning the evil angels and the secrets which they revealed see, D. Dimant, *The Fallen Angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphic Books Related to Them* (Diss., Jerusalem, 1974).

12 The chapter numbering here is according to the one found in R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, and it holds true for the long recension (A). A. Vaillant, *Le Livre des Secrets d'Hénoch* (Paris: Institut d'Études Slaves, 1952), has a different chapter numbering.

13 Ed. H. Odeberg, 3 *Enoch*, with a Prolegomenon by J. C. Greenfield (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973). A more recent translation is that of P. Alexander in: J. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City-New York: Doubleday & Company, 1983), Vol. I, pp. 223–315.

references may be found also in 2 *Baruch* (*Syriac Baruch*) 48, 2–14; 59, 5–11, and in some of the other apocalyptic writings which will be discussed later on. All these references to the revelation of secrets concerning the operation of the various parts of Nature go hand in hand with revelations concerning the angelic world and the divinity. But our interest, for the moment, lies in the revelations concerning natural phenomena only, and what is implied by them for our understanding of Jewish apocalyptic in relation to the idea of the inaccessibility of divine wisdom as asserted in the Book of Job.

Reading the various parts composing 1 *Enoch* (*Ethiopic Book of Enoch*), one easily observes that revelations of all kinds of cosmological secrets occupy a prominent role in the apocalyptic experiences described. The apocalyptic visionaries are said to ascend to heaven, and there, with the guidance of various angels, see and learn about the operations of a number of natural phenomena. Thus, Chapters 17–36 contain a series of visions, which the apocalyptic visionary believes that he saw after he had been lifted up to heaven. In the course of these visions, he saw various cosmic places and events. In fact, he experienced a comprehensive view of the cosmos.¹⁴ What is particularly noteworthy in these revelations is that the visionary learns the laws and rules by which God controls and operates these phenomena.

Similar information is described in Chapter 41, which belongs to a different part of the book (possibly its latest part).¹⁵ It records the essential mood sustained throughout the corpus of the Enoch literature. The visionary is translated to heaven and there is instructed on the rules and laws of nature. In principle, these rules and laws are referred to in terms of measurement, location, quantity, and proportion. In some instances (as, for example, in 1 *Enoch* 72–80, “The Book of the Heavenly Luminaries”) the purpose of the respective revelation of astronomical matters is to advance the idea of the sectarian solar calendar. However, the overall purpose is to induce the notion of order and regularity in nature. Where there is disorder there is either wickedness—as

14 For the ideas of order and regularity in Nature as described in Wisdom literature, see P. von der Osten-Sacken, *Die Apokalyptik in ihrem Verhältnis zu Prophetie und Weisheit* (München: Ch. Kaiser Verlag, 1969), pp. 53 ff.

15 Chapters 37–71, generally referred to as the Book of the Similitudes (or Parables), are not represented in the finds from Qumran. Hence the conclusion, that they probably belong to a post-Qumranic period (Qumran was most certainly destroyed in 68 C.E.). See J. T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judea* (London: SCM Press, 1959), p. 33. More recently, M. Black, “The Fragments of the Aramaic Enoch from Qumran”, in W. C. van Unnik (ed.), *La Littérature Juive* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), p. 19, argued for an early Christian and Jewish post-exilic origin of these chapters.

the introduction to *1 Enoch* (chapters 1–5) so clearly implies—or the coming of the Day of God.

Order and regularity in nature are sometimes conceived as being bound to a secret oath. *1 Enoch* 41, 5 mentions the astronomical order which is preserved “in accordance with an oath”. An oath, probably the same one, is later on mentioned in connection with the creation of the world (Chapter 69). Although not everything said is as lucid as one could wish, it appears that Michael is in possession of the knowledge of a secret oath, and possibly also of a secret name—the two are not necessarily identical—which sustains the whole work of creation. That there was such a secret principle, which the ancients believed to be operative in the creation of the world and in its subsequent government, is neither new nor unique to the “Book of Similitudes” (*1 Enoch* 37–71). At any rate, the idea and its parallels are amply documented in post-biblical Jewish literature. Thus, for instance, the major Hekhalot text, *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, § 166),¹⁶ contains a brief reference to the “. . . wondrous and strange and great secret; the name through which the heaven and the earth were created, and all the orders of the creation of the world (Hebrew: *sidrey bereshit*) . . . were sealed by it”.¹⁷ Presumably, the “secret name” and the “oath”, or the “great secret”, in these sources refer to the same cosmic principle. Indeed, the secret name, or names, of God played a great role in some of the ancient Jewish concepts of creation. Thus, we find in *Jubilees* 36, 7 that Isaac makes his sons swear “a great oath—for there is no oath which is greater than it—by the name glorious and honored and great and splendid and wonderful and mighty, which created the heavens and the earth and all things together . . .” Later on, in the third century C.E., we hear from Rav Yehudah in the name of Rav that “Beṣal’el (Exodus 31, 2) knew how to form the combinations (Hebrew: *le-ẓaref*) of the letters (of the Alphabet) through which the heaven and the earth had been created”.¹⁸ Again, *3 Enoch* 41 refers to a series of letters by which several things were created.

16 All the references to the Hekhalot literature have been changed in this edition to the paragraph numbering in P. Schäfer, *Synopse, zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1981). Don Karr’s publication of Morton Smith’s translation of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, mentioned in the “Foreword”, was not available in 1980, the publication date of the first edition of this book. However, Morton Smith read a draft of the first edition. He saw my translations and usually accepted them without comment. After the publication of the first edition, Smith and I worked together on a new translation of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, but this work was abruptly discontinued, when Smith began to suffer from health problems.

17 See G. Scholem, “Der Name Gottes und die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala,” *Judaica III: Studien zur jüdischen Mystik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), pp. 7 ff.

18 Bav. *Berakhot* 55/a. The Gemarā continues with quotations of verses in which divine wisdom and knowledge are mentioned in connection with the creation of the world. See

Nothing is said about the letters used and how they were combined. In fact, one may find in Jewish writings of the Talmudic times a number of theories with regard to the question, which were the letters of the Alphabet used by God in the creation of the world. We cannot enter here a full-scale discussion of these theories, the most noteworthy of which constitutes the second part of *Sefer Yeẓirah*.¹⁹ One may argue that these theories thrived on the borderline between magic and mysticism.²⁰ They may be connected with speculations concerning the uttering of the Tetragrammaton in its different combinations.²¹

The secrets and oaths used in the creation of the world and in sustaining the existence of the cosmos reflect a significant change in the religious attitude. Not only do the apocalyptic visionaries believe in the possibility that such secrets are accessible to humans—at least under certain conditions which still need to be discussed—but the knowledge of these secrets opens the way for man's understanding of divine justice. The restrictions and limitations maintained in such books as *Job* are thus suspended, and, consequently, man is ready to receive the hitherto inadequate explanations for the existence of evil and suffering in a world ruled by a benevolent God. The apocalyptic visionaries, who lived in the deep conviction that the days of the eschatological fulfillment were imminent, believed that whatever had been concealed from man because injustice reigned in the world could now be released for the knowledge and benefit of the just. It must be remembered that the apocalyptic point of departure was that these secrets had been disclosed long before they were withdrawn from the knowledge of such people as Job. This belief belongs to the heart of apocalypticism as a pseudonymous literary genre. The secrets had been disclosed to the legendary sages of antiquity who in turn wrote them in book form. These books were sealed away until the eschatological time came to open them.²²

It must be noted that the disclosure of cosmological secrets is not found in all apocalyptic writings. In 4 *Ezra* 4, the angel Uriel asks the apocalyptic visionary three questions concerning natural phenomena, the purposes of which

further G. Quispel, "The Jung Codex and its Significance," in: *Gnostic Studies* I, (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archeologisch Instituut, 1974), pp. 21 ff.

19 See I. Gruenwald, "Some Critical Notes on the First Part of *Sefer Yeẓira*", *Revue des Études Juives* CXXXII (1973), pp. 475 ff.

20 Cf. N. Séd, "Le Sefer Ha-Razim et le Méthode de 'Combination des Lettres'", *Revue des Études Juives* CXXX (1971), pp. 295 ff.

21 See G. Alon, *Studies in Jewish History*, I, (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1957 [in Hebrew]), pp. 194 ff.

22 See, for instance, 1 *Enoch* 82; 4 *Ezra* 12, 36–38; 14, 24ff. For a different attitude see Daniel 12 and Revelation 10 and 22, 10.

were to induce in Ezra, the apocalyptic visionary, the same conclusion that had been induced in the Book of Job.²³ However, 1 *Enoch* 93, 11–14 contains a list of questions the purpose of which is to make the visionary realize enormous fields of knowledge that are closed to ordinary people. However, “the elect ones of righteousness” will receive that information outlined in a series of questions.

For what kind of a being is there that is able to hear the voice of the Holy One without being shaken? . . . What kind of a person is he that can (fully) understand the activities of heaven . . . or even if he ascended (into the heavens) and saw all (these heavenly beings and) their wings and contemplated them; or, even if he can do (what heavenly beings) do? . . . What kind of a person is anyone that is able to understand the nature of the breadth and the length of earth? . . . Is there perchance any human being that is able to understand the length of earth, the extent of its altitude, upon what it is founded, the number of the stars, and (the place) where all the luminaries rest?²⁴

These questions obviously originated from the need to outline the unique qualities of the apocalyptic visionary in contrast to biblical figures who were deprived of this knowledge.

In a different context, we meet yet another list of questions in what is likely the oldest Hekhalot text we know of, *Hekhalot Zutarti*,

And who is there who is able to ascend on high, to descend below . . . to behold what is on high, and to behold what is below . . . to explore the cosmos . . . to combine the letters, to say the names . . . and to know the lightning . . .²⁵

23 The Armenian text has even a more extensive list of such “impossible” subjects. See J. Issaverdens, *The Uncanonical Writings of the Old Testament Found in the Armenian MSS. of the Library of St. Lazarus* (Venice: Armenian Monastery of St. Lazarus, 1934), pp. 388–391. See the extensive discussion of the nature of such lists by M. Stone, “Lists of Revealed Things in the Apocalyptic Literature,” in: *Magnalia Dei* (see above footnote 1), pp. 414–454.

24 The English translation is by E. Isaac in R. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (above, footnote 13).

25 *Synopse*, § 349. See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, Second, Improved Edition (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965), p. 78.

If taken together, these question-lists can lead to an interesting conclusion. In contrast to the biblical view, according to which humans should draw conclusions from their inability to understand the secrets of nature and, thus, avoid questioning “the ways of God to man”, there prevailed the apocalyptic idea, according to which visionaries received revelations, and in the framework of which they learned the secrets of nature and were consequently able to understand the ways of God in history and in planning the future of elect and righteous people. The eschatological context implied in apocalyptic literature was crucial in shaping this difference. It placed human suffering in an informative realm that endowed it with an acceptable *raison d'être*. In this respect, one may even consider such questions as in *1 Enoch* 93 as rhetorical questions that are explicitly and affirmatively answered in the other parts of the book. In addition, if one compares these questions with the ones in *Hekhalot Zutarti*, quoted above, then the conclusion must be that—whatever their tone and purpose—certain apocalyptic modes of expression and thought were adapted by the Merkavah mystics.²⁶

Yet again, one has to consider that, according to a tradition preserved in *1 Enoch* 8–11 and 69, 1–12, the rebellious angels taught mankind various kinds of secret knowledge, some of which were also shown to the apocalyptic visionaries. On the other hand, it is stated in *2 Enoch* 24, 3²⁷ that God did not tell the secrets of the creation to His angels. Thus, we may once again surmise that a number of parallel, sometimes even conflicting, traditions with regard to the revelation of cosmological secrets were circulating among the apocalyptic visionaries. One can only speculate as to what made each of them adopt this or that attitude. We know that heavenly ascensions, or descents to the underworld, were practiced in many religions in the ancient world. We know, too, that, in the intellectual world influenced by Greek thought, a deep interest in Nature motivated and directed an intensively philosophical, or scientific, activity. Often this interest was shrouded in esoteric garbs.²⁸ The alleged resentment expressed by some of the apocalyptic visionaries with regard to the revelation of cosmological secrets could have been motivated by a deeply felt opposition to these kinds of non-Jewish activities. This resentment toward all kinds of foreign influence may at least partly be attributed to the fact that some of the apocalyptic visionaries were driven by strong nationalistic emotions: those who had to fight a bitter battle for their true national identity were obviously

26 Cf. I. Gruenwald, *art. cit.* (above footnote 8), pp. 75–76.

27 Both recensions, the long and the short ones (A and B), testify to the same tradition.

28 See, G. G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden-New York-Köln, 1996).

zealous in their preservation of the genuine Jewish spirit.²⁹ However, the constant that remained was the new, cosmologically related, understanding which apocalypticism suggested for the problems of evil and human suffering.³⁰ Seen in a broader cosmological and eschatological context, both evil and suffering received different proportions. Their meaning and function was no longer to be decided in relation to the perspectives embedded in temporary pain and grief, but within the framework of the plans of the cosmos and history as totalities regulated by God from creation to the end of times.

Thus, we may summarize, within the wisdom tradition of ancient Judaism, apocalypticism introduced a number of new ideas and notions. We have followed one of them in detail, namely the revelation of cosmological secrets and its relation to the problem of theodicy. While such books as 2 and 4 *Maccabees* already contain an eschatological solution to the problems of evil and suffering,³¹ the apocalyptic books which we have reviewed relate the eschatological solution to the possibilities of enlarging and deepening man's knowledge of the cosmos.³² This knowledge does not come as a direct result of the inquisitive curiosity and efforts of man, but as a special supernatural revelation. The contents of these supernatural revelations were often seen as an anticipation of what the righteous ones were to experience in the world to come. Thus, the so-called "Apocalypse of Weeks", 1 *Enoch* 92–93, contains the promise that at the end of the seventh "week" (i.e., unit of seven years), the

29 See M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1974), pp. 175–218. Hengel discussed apocalypticism within the framework of Hasidism, and it is indeed in such pietistic circles that one has to look for the documentary traces of anti-Hellenistic opposition. On the other hand, apocalypticism as such could be a much more widely spread literary phenomenon than is sometimes maintained. For a priestly orientation in the interpretation of apocalypticism, see K. Schubert, "Das Zeitalter der Apokalyptik," in F. Leist (ed.), *Seine Rede Geschah zu Mir* (München: Manz-Verlag, 1965), pp. 265–285.

30 It must be left for further consideration whether there were any differences among the apocalyptic visionaries with regard to the inclusion of mythical material. At any rate, there are some apocalyptic books, such as 4 *Ezra*, which are more reserved in their references to material that came from mythical sources.

31 Scholars rightly debate over the question, whether 4 *Maccabees* really contains the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. At least, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is not as straightforwardly expressed there as it is in 2 *Maccabees*. See, G. W. Buchanan, "Introduction" to R. H. Charles, *Eschatology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), p. xviii.

32 In an interesting passage in *The Wisdom of Solomon* 7, 15–21, the author, who hides behind the name of King Solomon, speaks of his great knowledge, and says, among other things, "For He has given me an unerring knowledge of the things that are, to know the constitution of the world, and the operation of the elements." In the context of wisdom literature, this comes close to the apocalyptic concept of revealed knowledge.

righteous shall be elected “for true witnesses of the eternal plant of righteousness, to whom shall be given sevenfold wisdom and knowledge”.³³ In another place, Enoch summons his family to give them his spiritual testament, and, among his prophecies for the eschatological future, he mentions the fact that “the righteous shall arise from their sleep, and wisdom shall arise and be given to them”.³⁴ If the wisdom granted to the apocalyptic visionaries corresponds to that promised to the righteous in the days to come, then apocalyptic revelation is one of the first and necessary stages in the process of salvation. No wonder then that the Qumran-psalmist quite often repeats his thanks to God for the revelation of secrets that were disclosed to him.³⁵ This assumption of a relation between the revelation of secrets to the apocalyptic visionaries and the future revelation of knowledge to the righteous may antecede the Gnostic notion that knowledge is a *conditio sine qua non* for salvation. Although the Gnostic concept of knowledge is more complex than the one we find in apocalypticism, it is reasonable to argue that the relation between knowledge and salvation was one of the major elements that Jewish apocalyptic contributed to the development of Gnosticism.³⁶

C

We have begun our discussion of Jewish apocalyptic with some remarks concerning the place it holds within the framework of Jewish wisdom literature. Before we continue our discussion, it seems fitting to quote yet another source, which significantly bears on the problems raised in the previous section. *The Testament of Job*, which is based on the story of the biblical Book of Job 36,

33 *1 Enoch* 93, 10. The translation here is that of the Aramaic text which has been found at Qumran. See, M. Black, “The Fragments of the Aramaic Enoch from Qumran”, in W. C. van Unnik (ed.), *La Littérature Juive entre Tenach et Mishna* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), p. 24. Charles’s translation of the Ethiopic text reads: “And at its close shall be elected the elect righteous of the eternal plant of righteousness, to receive sevenfold instruction concerning all His creation”. Notice the difference between the Aramaic and the Ethiopic texts: While the Aramaic refers to “sevenfold wisdom and knowledge” in general, the Ethiopic text specifies the “sevenfold instruction concerning all His creation”.

34 *1 Enoch* 91, 10. As has been variously observed, the Ethiopic text here preserves a corrupt order of chapter and verses.

35 See, for instance, *The Psalms Scroll (Hodayot; 1QH)*, IV, 27–29; XI, 15–17. Cf. W. D. Davies, “Knowledge in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in *Matthew* 11:25–30”, *Harvard Theological Review* XLVI (1953), pp. 113–139.

36 See I. Gruenwald, in *Israel Oriental Studies* III (1973), pp. 75 ff.

8–38,³⁷ quotes a conversation between Bildad and Job. It refers to the wonders of nature and the human body. The conclusion one is expected to draw from the inability of the human mind to explain or account for these wondrous processes is to accept one's inability to understand heavenly matters.

The *Testament of Job* was written most probably at the time when Jewish apocalyptic flourished, and it may be asked whether the tones struck by the writer are not a kind of reaction against the higher kinds of heavenly knowledge that some of the apocalyptic visionaries claimed to have received. Of course, one may see in the conversation between Bildad and Job a reflection of the mood, which already prevails in the *Book of Job*. This interpretation of the conversation is strengthened by *Ben-Sira* 3, 21–24:

Seek not (to understand) what is too wonderful for thee,
And search not out that which is hid from thee.
Meditate upon that which thou must grasp
And be not occupied with that which is hid.
Have naught to do with that which is beyond thee,
For more hath been shown to thee than thou canst understand.
For many are the conceits of the sons of men,
And evil imaginations lead astray.³⁸

Two contrasting interpretations have been proposed for these verses. According to the one, Ben Sira simply intends to discourage people from engaging in matters and problems that are beyond their physical or spiritual reach.³⁹ According to the other interpretation, which is supported by the contexts in which verses 21 and 22 (“seek not . . . is hid”) are quoted in Talmudic and midrashic sources,⁴⁰ these verses contain a more inclusive call to refrain from exploring the kind of secret information referred to in apocalyptic revelations. These secrets include

37 For an “Annotated Chronological Bibliography” of the various problems involved in the study of *The Testament of Job*, cf. R. Spittler, in R. A. Kraft, (ed.), *The Testament of Job according to the SVText, Greek Text and English Translation* (New York: Society of Biblical Literature & Missoula [MT]: Scholars' Press, 1974), pp. 17–20.

38 The English translation is that of Box and Oesterley in R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. I, p. 325/6. For the textual problems involved in these verses see, H. P. Rüger, *Text und Textform im Hebräischen Sirach*, Beiheft CXII zur *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1970, pp. 30 ff.

39 See Y. Gutman, *The Beginnings of Jewish-Hellenistic Literature* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1958), vol. I, p. 173 [in Hebrew].

40 See M. Z. Segal, *Sefer Ben Sira Ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1958, pp. 17–18 [in Hebrew]).

the heavenly world and the celestial abode of God and the angels. Both interpretations are in a way justified, and there is no decisive proof in favor of either. It may, however, be argued that, from the way in which Ben Sira refers to the heavenly translation of Enoch⁴¹ and to the vision of Ezekiel,⁴² one may infer that Ben Sira was familiar with some early kinds of apocalyptic or mystical traditions. Thus, the above quoted verses from Chapter 3 may be an exhortation directed to the uninitiated public to refrain from speculations that involve visionary experiences.

Thus, two conflicting views with regard to the question of the revelation of cosmological secrets may be detected in the ancient Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. According to one view, represented chiefly in the Enoch corpus of writings, certain privileged people received supernatural revelations concerning natural and heavenly phenomena. According to the other view, no such revelations are possible, or at least they should not be desired or trusted. Even if people experience them, they should not treat them as having any relevance to the basic problems of human existence. As we know, the literary prehistory of apocalypticism is rather vague, and the attempts to reconstruct it are highly speculative. It is therefore difficult to tell whether the above-mentioned conflict began with the rise of apocalypticism itself or whether it is older. Since the needed literary evidence is lacking, no decisive conclusions can be drawn in this respect.

Furthermore, what in modern scholarship is rather loosely called "biblical apocalyptic"⁴³ can be considered with due reservation as the forerunner of post-biblical, pseudonymous apocalyptic. In any case, it does not contain any descriptions of heavenly ascents and the secret knowledge gained in the course of such alleged experiences. In addition, although it may seem an overstatement, it still does not fall short of the truth to say that some of the basic attitudes maintained in apocalyptic were formed in confrontation with prevailing ideas found in Scripture. This particularly holds true, when one examines some of the utterances found in apocalyptic with regard to

41 Ben Sira 114, 14–16. For the problems involved in the study of the text, see Y. Yadin, *The Ben Sira Scroll from Masada* (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, 1965), p. 38. See further, J. C. Greenfield, "Prolegomenon" to *op. cit.* (above footnote 13), p. xlvii, footnote 27; D. Lührmann, "Henoch und die Metanoia", *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* LXVI (1975), pp. 103 ff.

42 Ben Sira 49, 8. See I. Gruenwald, "The Jewish Esoteric Literature in the Time of the Mishnah and Talmud," *Immanuel* IV (1974), pp. 37–46.

43 See J. Lindblom, *Die Jesaja-Apokalypse: Jes. 24–27* (Lund und Leipzig: Lund Universitets Arsskrift, N.F. I, 34, 3, 1938); J. Schreiner, *Alttestamentliche jüdische Apokalyptik* (München: Kassel Verlag, 1969).

biblical prophecy. Thus, one may look at the apocalyptic ascensions as a kind of challenge to basic beliefs postulated in Scripture. When we read Psalm 115, 16—"The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth he has given to the sons of men"—in combination with Book of Proverbs 30, 4—"Who has ascended to heaven and come down"—then it clearly appears that these biblical writers were, so-to-speak, geocentrically minded. Indeed, the wisdom of Israel was the Torah—"for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples" (Deuteronomy 4, 6)⁴⁴—and the Torah clearly is on earth: "For this commandment . . . is not in heaven . . ." (*ibid.* 30, 11–12). Yet, some of the apocalyptic visionaries thought otherwise, and, as we shall see later on, the debate over the question whether heavenly ascensions were possible or not was still carried on in Tannaitic circles.

D

The attitude of the apocalyptic writers towards biblical prophecy is somewhat provocatively stated in several apocalyptic writings, including, for that matter, some of the Qumran writings. The Qumran sectarians were justifiably called an apocalyptic community,⁴⁵ and although, as far as we know, their apocalyptic experiences were of a more literary character, the contents of their interpretive revelations were in many instances similar to those received by apocalyptic visionaries.

In principle, they claimed that among the revelations contained in them were the correct explications of Scripture.⁴⁶ Some of their writings were in fact eschatological commentaries to Scripture. The authors believed to have uncovered in their exclusive mode of thinking the inner meaning and terms of reference of the biblical text.⁴⁷ The Qumran people devoted much of their

44 Cf. M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 244.

45 See chiefly, F. M. Cross, Jr., *The Ancient Library of Qumran* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1961), pp. 76–78.

46 See H. Braun, *Spätjüdisch-häretischer und frühchristlicher Radikalismus* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1957), vol. I; F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1959); O. Betz, *Offenbarung und Schriftforschung in der Qumransekte* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1960).

47 See I. Gruenwald, "The Jewish Esoteric Literature in the Time of the Mishnah and Talmud," pp. 37 ff.

routine daily schedule to the study of the Torah.⁴⁸ If we may generalize certain of their rulings, they were so organized in order to ensure that every group of people should consist of at least one priest whose duty was to study the Law and to lay its explication before the members of the group.⁴⁹ The Word of God, they appear to have believed, was given in at least two principle stages of revelation: before and after the formation of the New Covenant in the “Desert of Damascus”.⁵⁰ The New Covenant did not mean the giving of new Scriptures but the revelation of special methods of discovering the inner and true sense of the old ones. In fact, the Qumran sectarians believed in a series of additional stages in which this inner sense of Scripture came to the fore. Nothing specific is said about the number of these additional stages and when they would be initiated, but the idea is stressed several times in their writings.⁵¹ It is juxtaposed to the complementary idea about the various individual degrees in knowledge of Scripture.⁵²

At face value, the attitude of the Qumran sectarians to Scripture can be viewed as a process of bringing Scripture up-to-date. In their *Pesharim* (= commentaries), they interpreted the biblical verses mainly in the light of events happening in their lifetimes or of events which they believed were imminent in the near future. Much of what is found in those *Pesharim* is in the form of what was later called *Midrash*. However, in contradistinction to the material found in the rabbinic midrashic literature, many of the Qumran *Pesharim* proclaim themselves exclusive revelations of secrets. We shall illustrate the Qumran *Pesharim*-method by referring to a passage from the *Pesher Habakkuk*

48 According to 1QS (= *The Manual of Discipline*) VI, 7 each member of the community had to spend at least one third of the nights of the year in the reading of the Book, in the study of the Law and in the communal meals or gatherings.

49 1QS VI, 3; CD (= *The Damascus Covenant*) XIII, 2ff. In both cases, the number of the members of the group is ten; but in 1QS VIII, 1 a group consisting of twelve laymen and three priests is mentioned, while CD X, 4–6 mentions six laymen and four priests. The age of the officiating priests should be between thirty and sixty (CD XIV, 7).

50 See mainly the first four pages of CD. For a recent discussion of the various theories with regard to the history of the sect cf., J. Murphy-O'Connor, O.P., “The Essenes and their History,” *Revue Biblique* LXXXI (1974), pp. 215 ff.

51 See, for instance, 1QS VIII, 15/6; IX, 12–14, 20.

52 See particularly, 1QS V, 23; VI, 14, 18. It seems that, at least among some of the sectarians, additional means of gradation were applied. Thus in 4Q186 astrological, physiognomic and similar techniques are applied in defining the qualities of those who desired to become members of the sect. See I. Gruenwald, “Further Jewish Physiognomic and Chiromantic Fragments,” *Tarbiz* XL (1971), pp. 301 ff. [in Hebrew]. See also the thoroughgoing discussion of J. Licht in *Tarbiz* XXXV (1966), pp. 18–26 [in Hebrew].

(1QpHab) VII, 1–13. The passage is often quoted by scholars in order to illustrate the *Pesharim*-method, yet its radical qualities have not always been adequately stressed. Briefly, what the passage says is that the *Moreh Ha-Zedek* (“the Teacher of Righteousness”), the spiritual leader of the Qumran sect, received information about the true meaning of the prophecy which Habakkuk, the prophet, had received. Referring to the Book of Habakkuk 2, 1–3 the Qumran-commentator says:

And God told Habakkuk to write down that which would happen to the final generation, but He did not make known to him when time would come to an end. And as for that which He said, That he who reads it may read speedily, interpreted this concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of His servants the prophets . . . the final age shall be prolonged, and shall exceed all that the prophets have said; for the mysteries of God are astounding . . . For all the ages of God reach their appointed end as He determines for them in the mysteries of His wisdom.⁵³

As a careful reading of the passage shows, it is not only the true meaning of Habakkuk’s prophecy that the Teacher of Righteousness received, but also some additional information concerning the prolongation of the eschatological end. The words uttered by the prophet contained secrets the revelation of which was reserved for the Teacher of Righteousness. Whether the prophet Habakkuk himself was aware of the fact that he was talking in riddles or in a code that had to be deciphered, or whether he was quite ignorant of the inner layers of meaning that had to be attached to his prophecy, it is clear that the revelation of that secret meaning had to wait for the spiritual leader of the sect. All this, the passage repeatedly says, was according to the wondrous secrets of the Deity. What made God reveal to the Teacher the inner mysteries of the Habakkuk-prophecies, was the approaching time of fulfillment. In the age, which Habakkuk had referred to in his prophecy, the time was ripe for making the necessary exegetical connections between the words of the prophecy and the events which they were thought to indicate.

The prophetic utterances had to await an apocalyptic revelation for their inner truth to be made explicit. For the first time we hear that Scripture cannot, and should not, be read only for its external meaning. This awareness of the existence of an inner truth was complemented by the revelation of that

53 English translation: G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962), pp. 236–237.

very truth. If there was any crisis with regard to prophecy because people saw that a lot of what was enunciated in the prophetic word of God remained unfulfilled, then the apocalyptic process of updating prophecy was to remove the skepticism of the people.⁵⁴ However, the essence of the esoteric approach to Scripture is to see in the written word of God a vessel containing an inner truth, and this apart from the obvious external meaning.

Apocalypticism has often been described as being esoteric in nature⁵⁵ mainly because it pertained to being an exclusive revelation of secrets.⁵⁶ Added to this was the pseudepigraphic mode of writing, which was sometimes interpreted as the result of a desire to enhance the element of secrecy. Of course, one cannot altogether dismiss the exclusiveness and the secrecy of the revelation, or even the pseudepigraphic way of writing. They are weighty factors in shaping the special qualities of apocalypticism.⁵⁷ However, what makes some of the apocalyptic books esoteric is the special attitude maintained in them regarding their relationship to the previous revelation in Scripture. "Esotericism", thus, is here taken to mean a special attitude towards Scripture and the explication of its content. The passage from *Pesher Habakkuk* makes clear that Scripture is considered a code, the indications for the decipherment of which are given in a special revelation. As such, it is a classic example of an esoteric text.

The degree to which the apocalyptic revelation finds itself disentangled from and independent of the biblical text on which it leans varies from one apocalyptic text to the other. In the Qumran *Pesharim*, eschatological and messianic meanings are read into the biblical text. In other words, historical references are attributed to texts, which seem to lack precise historical specifications. Comparatively speaking, however, the *Pesharim* do not entail drastic changes or additions to the biblical text. They are the product of a group, which believed that it lived in an age of the fulfillment of Scripture and of the desire to view current and future events as part of that fulfillment.

However, the esoteric element of the *Pesharim* is not as radical as the one we encounter in other pseudepigraphic apocalyptic books.⁵⁸ A typical example

54 See P. von der Osten-Sacken, *Die Apokalyphtik* (above footnote 14), p. 33.

55 See D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: SCM Press, 1964), pp. 107 ff.

56 See A. Böhlig *Mysterion und Wahrheit*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), pp. 3–40.

57 See M. Hengel, "Anonymität, Pseudepigraphie und 'Literarische Fälschung' in der jüdisch-hellenistischen Literatur", *Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique XVIII* (1972), pp. 191 ff.

58 The esoteric qualities of the Qumran writings have been discussed also by H. Braun, *op. cit.* (above footnote 46). However, Braun limits his understanding of esotericism to the exclusiveness of the revelation.

of a pseudepigraphic book in which esotericism receives noteworthy radical dimensions is the *Book of Jubilees*,⁵⁹ which purports to be the revelation dictated to Moses by the Angel of [Divine] Countenance [*mal'akh ha-panim*] during a second ascent on Mount Sinai. Allegedly, its "written" source was in Heavenly Tablets, called "the tablets of the division of times" (1, 29). The notion of such tablets is familiar from various traditions in the ancient Near East and second temple Judaism. It tells the story of the world from the days of the creation until the theophany on Mount Sinai, and in many respects it poses as a rival version to the one found in Scripture. It is exactly here that the esoteric qualities of the *Book of Jubilees* come to the fore. Reading the book, one gets the impression that the author wants to convince his readers of the existence of two parallel versions of the biblical story: one, the exoteric revelation given by God himself and recorded in Scripture, and the other, the esoteric revelation given by the angel and recorded in the *Book of Jubilees*. The very fact of the revelation of the *Book of Jubilees* can be interpreted to mean that there are, so-to-speak, two complementary versions of the truth: one given exoterically to the whole of the People of Israel, and the other given esoterically to Moses, "the initiate".⁶⁰ In the first, God is the "literary authority" behind the text, while in the second an angel, told by God to do so, plays a major intermediary role. The shift is noteworthy, and in no way undermines the prominence of the second one.

The essential difference between the exoteric and esoteric revelations of Scripture in *Jubilees* lies in a variety of details. In the eyes of the author(s) of *Jubilees*, the story in Genesis and in Exodus lacked essential details, which pointed to an essential variety of notions and ideas. Hence, the purpose of the *Book of Jubilees* was to disclose those details. Allegedly, they related to the inner ideological patterns underlying the scriptural story. We need not enter here a detailed discussion of these ideological patterns. Briefly, they concerned the inner structure of the history of the world and that of the People of Israel.⁶¹ Only with the disclosure of these patterns and related ideas was the scriptural story believed to receive its true meaning and perspective. No event in the history of the world and of the People of Israel from biblical times onward could

59 In spite of a considerable number of studies concerned with the dating and the evaluation of the book, many of the more essential problems, which the book raises for the scholar, are still unsolved.

60 M. Segal, *The Book of Jubilees: Rewritten Bible, Redaction, Ideology and Theology* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2007) [in Hebrew], emphasizes editorial and exegetical issues, but fails to consider the esoteric elements of the book.

61 See G. L. Davenport, *The Eschatology of the Book of Jubilees* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971).

be properly understood and evaluated unless, conceptually and practically speaking, it had become part of the underlying time-scheme (a sevenfold year pattern leading up to jubilees), the details of which are revealed in the book. This was believed to add extra dimensions to the scriptural story. Its full scope and dimensions were withheld, or else not explicitly expressed, in Scripture. They were revealed in a special way to Moses on Mount Sinai, and henceforth their revelation was restricted to a limited number of those who were to be guided by them in their daily life, beliefs, and practices. In contrast to the Oral Law, which, allegedly, was revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai, the revelation of the contents of the *Book of Jubilees* was in the hands of the Angel of [Divine] Countenance.

Thus, what really gives the *Book of Jubilees* its unique esoteric character is neither its secrecy of revelation nor its exclusiveness. Even the pseudepigraphic attribution of the book to the Angel of the [Divine] Countenance cannot epitomize the esoteric quality of the book. All these factors should be viewed only as formal aspects in qualifying esotericism. Where the real qualities of esotericism assert themselves in the contents of *Jubilees* is the new contents and format of the previous revelation in Scripture. The disclosure of the underlying structures of the scriptural story is the basic component in endowing the new revelation with its esoteric essence. It is imposed on the biblical story in its different delineations, including matters that concern the manner of practicing the religious Law.⁶² Furthermore—and this certainly is the most crucial point of all—the *Book of Jubilees* explicitly advocates a solar calendar as opposed to the lunar calendar, which allegedly prevailed in Scripture and was officially observed at the time.⁶³ What all this amounts to is a process of rewriting Scripture. Since this rewritten version of the biblical story is revealed to Moses himself by an angel, the problems that arise cannot be easily sidetracked.

As Gershom Scholem rightly observed,⁶⁴ it was only natural for Jewish groups who propagated dissident views to base their views and ideas on Scripture. This was generally done by claiming an exclusive revelation of the true meaning of Scripture. Whether this allegedly true meaning of Scripture was presented to the public in the form of a running commentary or in a

62 The subject of the Halakhah in the *Book of Jubilees* was treated in Ch. Albeck, *Das Buch Jubiläen und die Halacha* (Berlin: Bericht der Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, 47, 1930). See further G. Vermes, "Sectarian Matrimonial Halakhah in the Damascus Rule," *Journal of Jewish Studies* XXV (1974), pp. 197–202.

63 See, S. Zeitlin, *Studies in the Early History of Judaism* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973) I, pp. 183–211; and further II (1974), pp. 116–164.

64 See above footnote 4.

rewritten version of Scripture makes no real difference, particularly if both are attributed to some kind of supernatural revelation. Thus, one may argue that esotericism should be qualified more by virtue of the content of the revelation than by the formal, and mainly literary, modes of presentation. The content of the revelation is mostly connected with Scripture and claims to expose its latent, inner, and exclusive sense. The authority of an angel is, in this case, an almost inevitable ingredient, even more so, when to it is added the authority of one of the illustrious sages of antiquity to whom the angel presented the revelation.

E

It must, however, be noted that not all the pseudepigraphic books are necessarily of an esoteric nature in our sense of the term. A notable example of an apocalyptic book, which has no full esoteric qualities, is *4 Ezra*. The book contains angelic revelations, and is pseudepigraphically attributed to Ezra the Scribe. However, it does not claim to uncover systematically hidden layers of any specific scriptural passages. In addition, the book contains a well-defined eschatological scheme, but, as it does not always bear a direct relation to Scripture, it cannot be called esoteric in the sense, which we have defined above.

Apocalyptic, as we saw, does not always coincide with the re-writing of Scripture. *Jubilees* certainly rewrites Scripture, but so does *Pseudo-Philo Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*,⁶⁵ which tells its own version of what happened from the days of the creation of the world till the days of King Saul. There is no angelic revelation connected to it. As indicated, *The Book of Jubilees* does pose as an angelic revelation. Thus, it presses some kind of additional ideological authority on its historical scheme and the religious practices to which it refers. *The Book of the Antiquities* is more in the manner of a running midrashic commentary, which adds or subtracts from the biblical account of events but

65 See lately, D. J. Harrington, "The Original Language of Pseudo Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*", *Harvard Theological Review* LXIII (1970), pp. 503 ff.; idem, *The Hebrew Fragments of Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum Preserved in the Chronicles of Jerahmeel* (Missoula, Montana: Society of Biblical Literature, 1974). A. Zeron, "Einige Bemerkungen zu M. F. Collins 'The Hidden Vessels in Samaritan Traditions,'" *Journal for the Study of Judaism* IV (1974), pp. 165–168, repeats the theory that one can trace anti-Samaritan polemic in the book. See now H. Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum: With Latin Text and English Translation* (Leiden-New York-Köln: E. J. Brill, 1996), who offers detailed discussions of the nature of the book and its literary and contextual provenance.

does not claim angelic authority for itself. Yet, there are several passages in the *Book of Antiquities*, which freely rewrite Biblical stories, and hence it holds partial resemblance to *Jubilees*. The process of rewriting Scripture was more widely spread and applied than in esoteric writings. In fact, traces of rewriting Scripture can already be detected in Scripture itself: The Deuteronomist, the Chronicler and the Psalmist(s) are noteworthy examples of that. In a wider sense, one can regard the writings of Philo as drastic examples of rewriting Scripture, though his allegorical method of exegesis involved additional and complicated ways of interpretation. Even Josephus Flavius, who wanted to reconstruct the ancient history of the People of Israel in his *Jewish Antiquities*, applied certain features of rewriting Scripture. Finally, rabbinic Midrash contains passages, which, *de facto* at least, render Scripture in a rewritten form.⁶⁶ However, in none of these does the re-written product claim to be a secret angelic revelation of the ultimate meaning of Scripture.⁶⁷

As indicated, the process of rewriting Scripture is a widespread and acknowledged method in handling biblical texts, and is not restricted to esoteric writings. From Judaism the method was transferred to Christian writers, and especially to the writers of Gnosticism.⁶⁸ Several of the major Gnostic texts, including those found at Nag Hammadi, based their subject matter on biblical stories, and presented them in a rewritten form. The Book of Genesis played a major role in this respect.⁶⁹ Furthermore, most of these Gnostic texts are in one way or another attributed to supernatural revelations, and at least in one of them we find the angel saying that the new revelation is not as Moses said.⁷⁰ It is here that the delicate borderline between esotericism and heresy has been crossed. The attribution of the revelation to an angel who claims to disclose

66 This aspect in rabbinic Midrash has not yet been studied. For a general discussion of the problems involved in the process of rewriting scripture see, G. W. E. Nickelsburg, "The Bible Rewritten and Expanded," in M. E. Stone (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarians Writings, Philo, Josephus* (Assen: Van Gorcum and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 89–156.

67 Unfortunately, L. Hartman, *Prophecy Interpreted* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1966), softens the theological radicalism of apocalyptic mainly because he does not pay full attention to the esoteric qualities of that literature.

68 See R. M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 32 ff.

69 Two important examples are R. A. Bullard (ed.), *The Hypostasis of the Archons* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1970); and A. Böhlig and P. Labib (eds.) *Die koptisch-gnostische Schrift ohne Titel aus Codex II von Nag Hammadi* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1962). See further, below Chapter Five, footnote 62.

70 See S. Giversen (ed.) *Apocryphon Johannis* (Copenhagen: Prostant Apud Munksgaard, 1963) plates 61,20; 70,22; 71,3; 77,6.

the innermost secrets implied in the scriptural text allowed the esoteric writer to propagate his unique, heretical, messages. Since everything bore the trademark of an exclusive secret, there was neither a limit nor a criterion as to what should or could be said. Thus, to come back to Jewish apocalyptic, a considerable amount of mythical material found its way into that literature. Generally, as we know, Scripture maintained a somewhat reserved and hesitant attitude towards mythological material. At least, very little of ancient mythology found its way into Scripture.⁷¹ Apocalypticism, however, could digest a more heavy diet, particularly if it contributed to furthering the ideological purposes of the writer, and had the authority of an angel and of antiquity.

Thus, some of the apocalyptic visionaries preached the existence of dualistic forces in the world.⁷² We find in apocalypticism a developed angelology, the characteristic features of which most likely derived from foreign sources. These sources, whatever their nature and quality, reached the apocalyptic visionaries in a variety of ways, most of which are no longer recognizable. Yet, the place they succeeded in occupying in apocalyptic is so dominant as to give the whole of this literature some of its idiosyncratic character. What is outstanding in this mythological material in general, and in its angelic materials in particular, is the fact that it poses as the real, true and inner meaning of Scripture. Scripture is rewritten in such a way as to include the whole lot of these foreign elements. The legitimacy of this material comes, as we saw, from the fact that it has the authority of the angelic revelation, and partly also from the fact that the revelation is—fictitiously so—given to one of the sages of scriptural times.

The conclusion that can be reached from the previous discussion is that apocalypticism transcended the world of Scripture, not only in supplying information, which is not explicitly contained therein, but in attempting to open to people, at least an elite section among them, a wider range of religious and intellectual experience. Whatever purposes apocalypticism consciously served in the eyes of those who cultivated its ideas and forms of expression, it also paved the way for the experiences and literature of the mystical circles from the time of the Tannaim onwards. Before we turn to the Jewish mysticism of the time of the Tannaim and Amoraim, we shall look at the mystical passages found in some of the apocalyptic books.

71 For a discussion of the mythological elements that found their way into Scripture, see F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973).

72 For a detailed discussion of the dualism of the Qumran sect, see I. Gruenwald in *Israel Oriental Studies* III (1973), pp. 77 ff.

The Mystical Elements in Apocalyptic

A

The present chapter is devoted to a discussion of the mystical elements in apocalyptic. Particular attention will be given to those apocalyptic books, which describe heavenly ascensions and contain relatively detailed accounts of visions in which God and His hosts of angels appear to the apocalyptic visionaries. In the previous chapter, we discussed several elements of Jewish apocalyptic in the light of some characteristic notions found in biblical Prophecy and Wisdom. Apocalyptic is much too complex a phenomenon to be explained by an either/or-theory, that is, in the light of *either Prophecy or Wisdom*.¹ Nor can justice be done to the phenomenon if only *one* central quality is selected as its more characteristic feature, and the one that allegedly can best explain it. Prophecy and Wisdom both had their respective share in the formation of apocalyptic, but there were also other factors, which contributed in their own ways to endow apocalyptic with its idiosyncratic shape and content.

Mystical visions had their antecedents in biblical literature. However, the manners, in which these visions are described in apocalyptic, and the place they occupy there, make it clear that a new religious mood and interest prevails in these books. It would be difficult to assess with certainty the role and place that these mystical visions occupied within the general apocalyptic experience. In any event, it seems safe to say that, in comparison to the parallel material in Scripture, the mystical visions found in apocalyptic literature are much more intense and elaborate in terms of content and literary embellishment. The main passages in Scripture, which contain relevant materials, are 1 Kings 22, 19; Isaiah 6, 1 ff.; and Ezekiel 1; 3, 22–24; 7, 1 ff.; 10.² In a broader sense, one can include here the theophany at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19, 16–18; 20, 15–18; 24, 16–18; Deuteronomy 5:19–24), and the prologue to the Book of Job. Finally, we find the vision of *Daniel* 7, 9–10, which evidently is in line with the visions described in Isaiah and Ezekiel. However, due to its date of composition it is

1 In recent years, it was G. von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (München: Ch. Kaiser Verlag, 1966), Band II, p. 327, who advocated the Wisdom-origin of apocalyptic: “die apokalyptischen Schriften . . . in der Überlieferung der Weisheit wurzeln”.

2 A similar vision is referred to in 43, 3–4; but the vision in 8, 2 is most probably that of an angel. Compare also Daniel 10, 5–6.

often considered an example of apocalyptic literature. Referring to certain features in the theophany-tradition in the early history of the people of Israel, F. M. Cross observed that, "It is not coincidental that the language of theophany and the imagery of revelation derived from the mythology of the storm-God largely fell out of use, beginning in the ninth century, and including the two centuries to follow, in prophetic Yahwism. The prophets chose another language, other imagery with which to describe their intercourse with Yahweh, drawn as we have seen from the concept of the messenger of the Council of 'El... Nevertheless, they used a refined or purged language of revelation, because Yahweh, so to say, no longer used the storm as a mode of self-manifestation".³ It appears that Cross had in mind the difference in language and imagery between such scenes of theophany as those described in 2 Samuel 22, 8–16 on the one hand, and those described in Isaiah and Ezekiel on the other. Schematizations, though, whenever they are made, should be applied with caution, and it seems that Ezekiel 1, 4, for instance, still has something in common with the storm-God kind of theophany. Noteworthy is the fact that God is described in the theophany of 2 Samuel 22 as riding the stormy clouds, yet He still occupies there a palace (*Hekhal*; v.7) as He does in Isaiah 6, 1.⁴

There is a vast literature in which the various types of biblical theophany are extensively discussed.⁵ We may, therefore, immediately turn to those visions in Scripture which are more mystically oriented, that is, visions in which God appears in a man-like form and seated upon a throne. The relevant visions in this respect are those in 2 Kings, in Isaiah, in Ezekiel and in Daniel. Taken together these visions display the following characteristic features:

- a. God is sitting on a throne;
- b. He has the appearance of a man (in the Book of Ezekiel) and particularly that of an old, white-haired man (in Daniel);

3 F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 191.

4 It is useless to enter here the discussion whether Isaiah saw the *Hekhal* in heaven or on earth in the temple in Jerusalem. A rather fantastic view on the subject is expressed by A. Aptowitzer in *Tarbiz* II (1931), pp. 144–145. According to Aptowitzer, Isaiah actually saw the *Hekhal* in the Jerusalem-Temple, but in the course of the vision, Isaiah himself translated the whole scenery unto heaven!

5 Some of the more recent extensive studies of the subject of biblical theophany are: J. Lindblom, "Theophanies in Holy Places in Hebrew Religion," *Hebrew Union College Annual* XXXII (1961), pp. 91–106; J. Jeremias, *Theophanie: Die Geschichte einer alttestamentlichen Gattung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1965); F. M. Cross, *op. cit.*, pp. 147 ff.

- c. God is sitting in a palace (2 Kings, Isaiah, and Daniel);⁶
- d. Fire occupies an important position in the vision (Ezekiel, Daniel and indirectly also in Isaiah);⁷
- e. God is accompanied by angels who minister to Him (2 Kings, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel);
- f. The angels recite doxologies (Isaiah and Ezekiel).

All these elements became major components in the mystical visions found in apocalyptic visions and later on in the Merkavah visions of the Hekhalot literature. If one can speak of a Jewish mystical tradition in post-biblical times that showed homogeneous features, then, it seems, those enumerated above are the most characteristic ones in that tradition. This does not mean that these elements are all simultaneously found and equally presented in all the visions we know of. Although later visionaries allowed themselves freedom of cognitive and literary imagination, it may be said that they followed some kind of standard, the nature of which was modeled on these features.

We shall now turn to an analysis of the various mystical visions in apocalyptic literature. Our attention will be given chiefly to those elements in the visions, which were dominant in later developments of Jewish mysticism.

B

First, we will deal with the two visions contained in the *Ethiopic Enoch* (1 *Enoch*) chapters 4 and 71. These two visions do not belong to the same literary stratum, and it is generally believed that the second one belongs to the latest part of the book. What, however, they have in common is that in contradistinction to the mystical visions in Scripture, they maintain that the visions were granted in

6 As for Isaiah, see above footnote 4. The visions in 2 Kings and in Daniel do not explicitly mention a palace, but there is nothing in them that contradicts the assumption that a divine palace is actually presupposed there. In Ezekiel, however, it is clear that God is moving about in the cosmos. The visions in Amos 7, 7 and 9, 1 seem to belong to a different type of theophany: their allegorical features are predominant.

7 Decisive in this respect was the theophany on Mount Sinai where God revealed Himself in the Great Fire (Deuteronomy 4, 7). See E. E. Urbach, "The Traditions about Merkavah Mysticism in the Tannaitic Period", *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), Hebrew Section, pp. 7 ff.—It should be noted that crystal and sapphire play a major role in mystical visions. We shall come back to this point soon.

the course of heavenly ascensions.⁸ It has been noted in the previous chapter that in Scripture nothing attainable to man is to be searched for in heaven. Everything that humans need to know is revealed in such a manner that they need not search for extraordinary and supernatural experiences to attain that knowledge. Unfortunately, lack of literary evidence makes it difficult for us to state with certainty when heavenly ascensions were first systematically practiced in Judaism. What can be said is that, at least at the time of the composition of the Book of Enoch, the practice was already seriously considered by the people to whom the book was addressed.

The vision of 1 *Enoch* 14 comes in the middle of the scene where Enoch is described as having ascended unto heaven to intercede on behalf of the fallen angels. It is introduced in 14, 8 where Enoch says that in his dream vision he saw himself uplifted to heaven by clouds.⁹ The first thing which Enoch says he saw in heaven is a wall which is built of white marble and surrounded by tongues of fire (14, 9). As it turned out, the wall surrounded a house. The house, no doubt, is identical with the heavenly divine palace,¹⁰ yet the manner in which it is described requires our comment. The house, its walls, its floor and its groundwork, were built of crystal.¹¹ Now, this description of the marble-like

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- 8 Aramaic fragments of this vision as they were found in Cave 4 at Qumran are now published by J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 348–351. Unfortunately, the texts are too fragmentary to draw relevant conclusions from them, and Milik's attempts to reconstruct the text cannot be discussed here. According to J. Daniélou, *Théologie du Judéo-Christianisme* (Tournai: Desclée and Co., 1958), pp. 131 ff., heavenly ascensions are the trade-mark of Jewish-Christian apocalyptic. Yet, this view has its obvious tendentious shortcomings. See G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapter 1–36; 81–108* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2001). Nickelsburg offers an up-to-date and detailed assessment of the materials discussed here. See, further, I. Gruenwald, "The Commentary on 1 Enoch," in J. Neusner & A. Avery-Peck (eds.), *George Nickelsburg in Perspective: An Ongoing Dialogue of Learning*, Vol 2 (Brill: Leiden – Boston, 2003) pp. 395–408.
- 9 The details of the ascent are not sufficiently clear, though the whole description most likely derives from 2 Kings 2, 11. See further 1 *Enoch* 39, 3; 52, 1; 70, 2; 2 *Enoch* 3, 1 (version A). In one midrashic source, we hear that Moses ascended to heaven in a cloud: *Pesikta Rabbati*, ed. M. Friedmann, 96/b (= A. Jellinek, *Bet Ha-Midrash*, vol. I, p. 59). In *Tanḥumā* (ed. Buber), "Zav", Parag. 16, it is said that righteous people ascend to heaven in clouds which God supplies for that purpose.
- 10 The analysis of this vision as found in H. Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1951), p. 54, by no means exhausts the material.
- 11 The Greek fragments of 1 *Enoch* here use two separate terms: of the wall surrounding the house (verse 9) it is said that it was built ἐν λίθοις χαλάζης (= of hailstones; cf. Isaiah 30,

appearance of the walls most probably derives from Ezekiel 1, 22, where the prophet says that “Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of a firmament, shining like crystal” (LXX).¹² This description of what the walls of the house looked like is quite rare, and actually its main parallel is to be found in two places connected with the visions of the Hekhalot mystics.¹³ What equally strikes the eye in the sight of the walls is the fact that they are surrounded by fiery flames. This fire is mentioned in this vision twelve times. This naturally enhances the “numinous” quality of the vision.¹⁴ The fact that Enoch went into the tongues of fire without being burned could be reminiscent of Isaiah 43, 2—“when you walk through fire you shall not be burned”—with all its eschatological connotations. Yet, it also bears resemblance to 2 *Enoch* 22, which tells that in order to protect him against the dangers that might befall a mortal who is bodily translated onto heaven Enoch was divested of his earthly

30), while of the walls mentioned in verse 10 it is said that they were in the likeness of snow (*Telag* is the Aramaic term used in the text published by Milik). The existence of hailstones in heaven could be inferred from Joshua 10, 11 and Job 38, 22; see also 1 *Enoch* 69, 23, to say nothing of the fact that hail comes from the sky! See further Ezekiel 38, 22; Revelation 16, 21. Cf. also *Mechilta d'Rabbi Ismael*, ed. Horovitz-Rabin, p. 111. Job 38, 22 likewise mentions the heavenly origin of snow. In Bav. *Ḥagigah* 12/b, the treasures of snow and hail are said to be found in the sixth heaven, *Makhon*, while 2 *Enoch* 5, 1 locates the treasures of hail in the first heaven! Rivers of hail and treasures of snow are also mentioned in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (ed. G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*: Appendix C, pp. 103 ff.) §§ 3 (p. 103) and 10 (p. 108; rivers of hail only). See further *Tanḥumā*, “Terumah”, Parag. 11. The heavenly snow is actually considered as the material out of which the earth was created: *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, chapter 3; Rabbi Yoḥanan in *Bereshit Rabbā*, ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 75. Cf. H. F. Weiss, *Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie des hellenistischen und palästinischen Judentum* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1966), pp. 96–97. The material collected in L. I. J. Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), pp. 118–119, by no means does justice to the wealth of material available.

12 The Hebrew text here implies a slightly different sense: “awesome crystal”. All this provided that the Hebrew *qeraḥ* really is the equivalent to the Greek ‘krystalos’.

13 *Hekhalot Zutarti* (quoted and translated in G. Scholem, *op. cit.*, p. 15), and Bav. *Ḥagigah* 14/b. We shall come back to this point in the next chapter.

14 Urbach, *art. cit.*, p. 18.

garments and clad in heavenly, priest-like, ones.¹⁵ G. Scholem rightly explained such experiences in terms of a mystical transfiguration.¹⁶

They certainly belong to the heart of the apocalyptic and mystical experiences.¹⁷ In any event, Enoch had to pass twice through such fiery flames, first when he passed through the wall and then when he entered the house.

When he entered the house, Enoch was overwhelmed with fear. Typical of such a state of extreme terror, he felt cold and hot almost simultaneously (verses 14–15).¹⁸ Then, as it turned out, he saw another house, which was within the first one.¹⁹ The second house, Enoch says, “excelled [the first one] in splendor and magnificence”, but, apart from the ceiling, it more or less resembled the first one.²⁰ The second house contained the Throne of God, about which

15 See, similarly, *Ascension d'Isaïe*, 9, 9, ed. E. Tisserant (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1909). See further J. Maier, “Das Gefährdungsmotiv bei der Himmelsreise in der jüdischen Apokalyptik und ‘Gnosis’”, *Kairos* V (1963), pp. 18–40.

16 Scholem, *op. cit.*, p. 60. To the parallel material adduced by Scholem (pp. 56–64 and 132), one should add *Pistis Sophia*, English Translation G. R. S. Mead (London: John M. Watkins, 1963), p. 18. In *Pistis Sophia*, Jesus is reported to tell his disciples that he had clad himself in special light-vestures by the help of which he succeeded in passing the various heavenly evil-beings without being harmed by them.

17 M. Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 243–244, sees in the synoptic tradition about the transfiguration of Jesus a piece of key information about the mystical activity of Jesus. Yet, the way in which Smith infers the kind of baptism-mysticism, which Jesus allegedly practiced, seems to be rather hypothetical.

18 The terror seizing the apocalyptic visionary is a recurring topos in apocalyptic and mystical visions. A notable exception is Revelation 4, where no such feelings are reported.

19 H. Bietenhard, *op. cit.*, p. 54 sees in the first house “eine Vorhalle”. Yet, we know from the *Hekhalot* literature that the seven palaces in the seventh heaven were like “a room within a room”. See, for instance, *Hekhalot* (*Synopse*, § 206). However, the Aramaic fragments of *1 Enoch* published by Milik (above, n. 8) make the impression that the visionary saw only one “house”. Compare the expression *hadrei hekhal demamah* in *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, §§ 97 and 157). It should be noticed that the term *demamah* does not imply here quietness but a whisper. See E. Y. Kutscher, in: *Archiv of the New Dictionary of Rabbinical Literature*, I, (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1972 [in Hebrew]), pp. 77–78. See further *Sifre to Numbers* (ed. Horowitz), p. 56, where the angels are said to speak in low voice.

20 While it is said of the ceiling of the first house that it was “like the path of the stars and lightning between which (stood) fiery cherubim, and their heaven of water” (14, 11), the ceiling of the second house is only briefly described: “as for the ceiling, it was flaming fire” (v. 17). It should be noticed (1) that cherubim are seen only in the ceiling of the first house; (2) the “heaven” in connection with the first ceiling is not quite clear; and (3) both descriptions are only loosely influenced by the way Ezekiel describes the firmament which he saw above the heads of the Creatures.

Enoch says: “its appearance was like crystal,²¹ and its wheels like the shining sun;²² and (I heard?) the voice of the cherubim” (v. 18).²³ From underneath the throne there came out streams of fire,²⁴ which made it difficult for Enoch to look at the Throne.²⁵

From the vision of the Throne Enoch continues to the vision of the Godhead, and says that “the Great Glory²⁶ was sitting upon it. As for his gown, which was

21 The description of the “lofty throne” (θρόνον ὑψηλόν) derives from Isaiah 6, 1 (LXX: θρόνου ὑψηλοῦ) and from Ezekiel 1, 26. The “crystal” of which the throne is made of is unique. Ezekiel says that the throne was “in appearance like sapphire” (1, 26; 10, 1). Sapphire was generally believed to be the stone of which the throne was made of. See Exodus 24, 10; Bav. *Hulin* 89/a: “. . . and the firmament is like the sapphire, and the sapphire is like the throne of the Glory”. Similarly it is said of the rod of Moses that it was made of sapphire; *Tanhumā*, “*Beshalah*”, xxi. Likewise, the Tablets of the Law were hewn from the Sapphire (*Tanhumā*, “*Ki Tisā*”, xxix). In one place, we also hear that the ark was made of sapphire! (*Tanhumā*, “*Beshalah*”, xxi; compare Exodus 25, 10 ff.). As for the color of the sapphire, it is generally considered as blue (Bav. *Hulin* 89/a: “. . . since blue is like the sea, and the sea looks like the firmament, and the firmament is like the sapphire, and the sapphire is like the throne of the Glory”). One source, though, (*Lekah Tov*, to Exodus 24, 10) says that the color of the sapphire is white! See further, G. Scholem, “Farben und ihre Symbolik in der jüdischen Überlieferung und Mystik,” in: *Judaica* III (Frankfurt am Main.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), pp. 117–119.

22 See Ezekiel 1, 16 and Daniel 7, 9.

23 The English Translation is that of E. Isaac in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1983), I, pp. 5–89. There is a vast literature dealing with the cherubim. Still relevant is the discussion of W. F. Albright, “What Were the Cherubim”, *Biblical Archeologist* I (1938), pp. 1–3. See further P. Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975), pp. 18–20.

24 1 *Enoch* 14, 19: ποταμοὶ πυρὸς φλεγόμενοι. Compare Daniel 7, 10, where only one ποταμὸς πυρὸς is mentioned. In 3 *Enoch* 19 and 33 four and seven streams of fire are mentioned respectively. In *Ma’aseh Merkavah* § 3 (Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 103) twelve thousand streams of fire are referred to, while in Revelation 4, 5 no streams of fire are mentioned at all. See also G. Scholem, *ibid.*, pp. 56–57.

25 The idea that no human being can see the face of God and survive is first expressed in Exodus 33, 20. *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, § 189) contains a description of how the four Creatures come out from underneath of the Throne and dance before God. The text there says that in the course of their dance they uncover their faces, while God covers His own. In another place (§ 159) it is said that he who looks at God is immediately destroyed. Even the angels cannot serve Him but for one day “since they were utterly weakened and their face was completely burned; their heart was totally confused and their eyes were darkened” (§ 159).

26 14, 20: ἡ δόξα ἡ μεγάλη.

shining more brightly than the sun, it was whiter than the snow.²⁷ None of the angels was able to come in and see the face of the Glorious One, and no one of the flesh could see him²⁸—the flaming fire was round about him, and a great fire stood before him. No one could come near unto him . . .²⁹ Enoch mentions the number of the angels that minister unto God. There are “tens of millions (that stood) before Him” (v. 22). Furthermore, God “needed no council,³⁰ but the most holy ones who are near to him neither go far away at night nor move away from him”.³¹

These are a few samples taken from what might be the oldest Merkavah vision in post scriptural sources. They contain, on the one hand, several motives already found in the “Merkavah” visions in Scripture, and, on the other hand, considerable features in this vision became typical of later Merkavah visions. Indeed, one can consider this particular vision a model-vision of pre-Merkavah mysticism. Notably, however, it lacks the magic or theurgic practices characteristic of the Hekhalot literature.

Enoch 14 contains many important features, which point in the direction of the mystical visions of the Merkavah. To begin with—as we have already noted—it presupposes a heavenly ascent. However, quite unlike other heavenly visions in apocalyptic literature and in the Hekhalot mysticism, no angel is reported to accompany Enoch on his heavenly journey.³² The fact that Enoch makes this heavenly trip with no angelic accompaniment is even more emphatically stressed when Enoch says (v. 21): “none of the angels was able to

27 God's raiment is a central theme both in Jewish apocalyptic and in Merkavah mysticism. See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 56 ff. It should be noticed that contrary to Daniel 7, 9 and *1 Enoch* 46, 1 and 71, 10, Enoch does not describe here the hair of God. See further Revelation 1, 14.

28 See above note 25. See also *Hekhalot Rabbati* (Synopsis, § 102).

29 Compare Deuteronomy 4, 36; 5, 21–24. See also above footnote 7.

30 It is interesting to notice, that in both Merkavah visions in *1 Enoch*, here and in chapter 71, no angelic song is mentioned, but there is one in 39, 12–13.

31 The presence of angelic beings at night is noteworthy for two reasons: (1) In Bav. *Avodah Zarah* 3/b it is said that what God does at night is to hear the song of the Creatures (in Bav. *Hulin* 91/b another tradition states that the angelic song is recited only at daytime). (2) In *Hekhalot Rabbati*, we find that God descends from the eighth heaven to His throne in the seventh only at the hours of prayer of the People of Israel, in the morning and in the afternoon! Cf. *Hekhalot Rabbati* (Synopsis, § 100) and §§ 162–174. We shall come back to this interesting point later on.

32 For the function of the *angelus interpres* see P. Schäfer, *Die Rivalität*, p. 10. M. Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens in vorrabbinscher Zeit* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992) discusses various aspects of this issue in the literature referred to in this study.

come in and see the face” of God.³³ In this respect Enoch is more privileged than all the angels, and even more so when God addresses him directly (14, 24–16, 4). Thus, it may be said that in the eyes of the apocalyptic visionary Enoch enjoys a qualitative superiority over the angels. However, it is difficult at this stage to say with certainty whether this vision can be considered as the direct source of the Enoch-Metatron speculations, or whether we have to look for their source in a completely different direction.³⁴ What, however, is certain is that the remark made in 15, 1 about Enoch to the effect that he is a “righteous man and scribe of righteousness” brings this part of the vision very close to that of the Enoch-Metatron tradition.³⁵ In addition, it should be noted, that Enoch sees two houses, one inside the other. This we find later on to be characteristic of the Hekhalot visions.³⁶ We also have the terror, which overwhelms Enoch just before he reaches the climax of his vision. This is typical of many apocalyptic and Merkavah visions.³⁷ One may argue that this terror, which results in a trance, is later on, in the Merkavah visions transformed into the danger motif.³⁸ Finally, the detailed vision of the Godhead seated on His throne with a great number of angels ministering to Him has since the days of Book of Daniel and the Enoch cycle become classical.

Before we continue to discuss the second central Merkavah vision in *1 Enoch*, that of chapter 71, mention should be made of an interesting series of visions (chapters 17–36), which contain cosmological details in which Merkavah-like passages are included. A short reference to the “throne of God, which is of

33 There seems to be some kind of discrepancy between this verse and the next one, where it is said that the angels *do* stand before God.

34 We need not enter here the difficult problem of the identification of Enoch with the Son of Man, as it occurs in the Book of Similitudes (*1 Enoch* 37–71). See mainly E. Sjöberg, *Der Menschensohn im Äthiopischen Henochbuch* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1946). Notice, too, the detailed discussion in H. Odeberg, *3 Enoch* (reprint: New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973), pp. 69 ff., and the commentary there pp. 6 ff.

35 See also 12, 3. Charles in his commentary overlooked the technical implications of the terminology used here in connection with Enoch. Compare *Jubilees* 4, 16–17 with the tradition preserved in the *Targum Yerushalmi* to Genesis 5, 24 (version A). Cf. *3 Enoch* (*Sefer Hekhalot*) 8–11. See further our discussion of *3 Enoch* (= *Sefer Hekhalot*), in Part Two of this book.

36 See above footnote 19.

37 In this sense, it may reflect what R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1959), pp. 26 ff., has identified as the “Mysterium Tremendum” in religious experience.

38 See J. Maier, “Das Gefährdungsmotiv bei der Himmelsreise in der Jüdischen Apokalyptik und ‘Gnosis’”, *Kairos* V (1963), pp. 18–40.

alabaster, and whose summit is of sapphire" (18, 8) draws our attention. Here the throne is not in a house, as is the throne, which Enoch described in chapter 14, but on the peak of a mountain (25, 3). As indicated, this series of visions, which begins in chapter 17, contains several cosmological features in the center of which are seven mountains, which Enoch is allowed to see. The theophany which Enoch experiences thereon is obviously of a unique nature. It may be explained as taking after the model of the theophany on Mount Sinai, particularly so, since Enoch mentions the fact that he saw "a flaming fire".³⁹ The numerous angelic beings that Enoch sees in the various locations to which the accompanying angels take him create a special atmosphere, too. According to the accompanying angels, the places which Enoch reached are defined as "the [four] extreme ends of the earth". Enoch says that he has reached a place from where he could see the gates of heaven open. The series of visions consists of a unique sequence of experiences.⁴⁰ When Enoch inquires the accompanying angels for the meaning of what he sees, one of them,⁴¹ Michael, says: "This tall mountain which you saw whose summit resembles the throne of God, is (indeed) his throne, on which the Holy and Great Lord of Glory, the Eternal King, will sit when He descends to visit the earth with goodness" (25, 3).⁴²

Another Merkavah-like passage in *1 Enoch* belongs to the so-called Book of Similitudes (36–71). In Chapter 39, Enoch describes his vision of "other dwelling places of the holy ones, and their resting places too". All this occurred in the course of a heavenly ascent (39, 3), which is of great interest for our study. The place to which Enoch is translated is most probably the Paradise of Righteousness (Aramaic: *Pardes Qushtā*),⁴³ though the term itself occurs only elsewhere, *i.e.*, in 32, 3 and 60, 23.⁴⁴ Enoch sees not only the dwelling places

39 On the theme of the divine throne and temple situated on mountains see, J. Maier, *Vom Kultus zur Gnosis* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1964), pp. 97 ff.

40 The relationship between the various visions is still a subject that deserves discussion.

41 In fact, various angels are mentioned in the course of these journeys. The change of names is noteworthy, but has no explanation in the text.

42 For a discussion of the parallels in other Jewish writings see, I. Gruenwald, *Re'uyot Yehezkel*, in: *Temirin* I (1972), p. 138.

43 In Greek: παράδεισος τῆς δικαιοσύνης. See next footnote.

44 There is a vast literature dealing with the idea of the Paradise, both from the eschatological and theosophical points of view. See lately, M. Stone, "Paradise in *4 Ezra* 4, 8 and 7, 36, 8, 52", *The Journal of Jewish Studies*, XVII (1966), pp. 85 ff.; M. Gil, "Enoch in the land of Eternal Life," [In Hebrew], *Tarbiz* XXXVIII (1969), pp. 322 ff.—It should be observed that the term "Paradise of Righteousness" is used in apocalyptic literature as the heavenly equivalent for the Garden of Eden in *Genesis* ii. As far as our knowledge goes, Hebrew texts in Tannaitic times, and even later on, always referred to the eschatological "Garden" as the

of the righteous of Israel, but also the dwelling places of the angels⁴⁵ and the Messiah.⁴⁶ Several scholars have been inclined to detect in the messianic passages of the Book of Similitudes Christian influence; yet, it should be observed that the inclusion of the Messiah in Merkavah visions is also known from the Hekhalot literature.⁴⁷ Since there is much more in this vision that has its parallel in Jewish sources—such as the notion that “all the righteous and elect before Him shall be shining as fiery lights”⁴⁸—the Christian origin of the Book of Similitudes is not from this point of view as self-evident as some scholars take it to be.⁴⁹ At what might be a concluding section in this series of visions, Enoch describes the angels and the doxologies recited by them (Chapter 39).

Garden of Eden, while the term “Pardes” was reserved to designate mystical speculations. It seems that the turning point in the use of the word “Paradise”, from an eschatological to a mystical sense, could be traced back to 2 Corinthians 12, 4, which should be compared with *Vita Adae et Evae* 25, 3. Compare also the terms “Paradise of God” in Ezekiel 28, 13 and 31, 8–9 (LXX!) and “Garden of Life” in 1 *Enoch* 61, 12. Yet, see *infra* our discussion of 2 *Enoch* 8–9.

- 45 The heavenly, and possibly the earthly, participation of human beings in the angelic community is one of the most striking features of the eschatology of the Qumran sect. See P. Alexander, *The Mystical Texts: Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and Related Manuscripts* (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2006).
- 46 See 39, 6: “And in that place mine eyes saw the Elect One . . . and I saw a dwelling-place underneath the wings of the Lord of the Spirits.” Later on, in Kabbalah-literature, the Messiah was allocated a heavenly (mystical) palace. See G. Scholem, “The Sources for ‘The Story of Rabbi Gadi’el, the Infant’ in Kabbalistic Literature,” *Devarim Bego* (Tel Aviv: ‘Am Oved, 1975 [in Hebrew]), pp. 270–283. See also the vision described in 1 *Enoch* 46, 1.
- 47 See, the references in P. Schäfer, *Konkordanz zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988), II, p.439. See further Y. Even-Shemuel, *Midreshei Ge’ulah* (Jerusalem-Tel Aviv: Bialik Institute, 1954), p. 7.
- 48 See *Sifre* on Deuteronomy, ed. L. Finkelstein, pp. 104–105, and parallels. Notice also the famous saying of Rav (*Berakhot* 17/a), that in the world to come the righteous will sit peacefully before God with “their diadems on their heads, enjoying the divine Glory” (Hebrew: *ziv ha-shekhinah*). “To enjoy the divine Glory” (Hebrew: *Lehanot mi-ziv ha-shekhinah*) is a technical expression in rabbinical literature and its meaning is: to have all the physical needs supplied from the divine Glory.
- 49 The case for the Early Christian origin of the Book of Similitudes has gained new momentum: it has been observed that the only part of the Book of Enoch not represented in Qumran is that very Book of Similitudes. See J. T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judaea* (London: SCM Press, 1959), p. 33. Strong as this argument from Qumran may resonate it is still nothing but an *argumentum ex silentio*. And even when the an early Christian date of its composition is taken for granted, the Jewish origin of the Book of Similitudes is not necessarily challenged. See E. Sjöberg, *op. cit.* (above note 34), p. 39.

There are two doxological formulae mentioned here. The first one, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of the Spirits; the spirits fill the earth" takes as its model the "Sanctus" of Isaiah 6, 3, and the second, "Blessed are you and blessed is the name of the Lord of the Spirits forever and ever" is reminiscent of the "Benedictus" in Ezekiel 3, 12. In either case the biblical opening phrases are, as it were, the doxological constant, while the main body of the doxology is more or less in the form of a free variation on the biblical *Vorlagen*.

It goes beyond the purpose of the present study to investigate those doxologies for all their morphological and theological content. However, some scholars have attempted to show that certain principles underlie these changes in and deviations from the biblical models. While to others, interpretative tendencies could be detected in the post-biblical doxologies.⁵⁰ It was also argued that theological considerations, both Jewish and Christian, appear to determine the variations in the wording.⁵¹ However, if all the extant examples of angelic doxologies are taken together, it appears that a variety of factors has to be considered.⁵² In addition, certain liturgical formulae taken from the Temple service were introduced into these doxologies.⁵³ It deserves our attention that, when the biblical doxologies were not considered as strictly binding in their wording, significant changes could be introduced into them. The way stood open for the composition of the more elaborate hymns of the kind and lyrical quality one finds in the Hekhalot texts. However, what needs to be said is that inner developments in those apocalyptic doxologies could not in themselves pave the way for the lyrical, and structurally more complex, composition of the Hekhalot hymns. The same holds true for the doxologies in the Book of Revelation. The doxological elements there had to undergo certain inner developments, from the point of view of the structure as well as of the diversification of themes, before they could become Hekhalot hymns. More relevant to this issue are the hymnic materials in Chapter 69 and those in the Apocalypse of Abraham, which will be discussed below.

50 See D. Flusser, "Sanktus und Gloria," in O. Betz, M. Hengel, P. Schmidt (eds.), *Abraham unser Vater: Festschrift für Otto Michel* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), pp. 129–152.

51 See the survey of views in E. Werner, *The Sacred Bridge* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), pp. 282 ff.; see also H. Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt*, pp. 137 ff.

52 For a survey of some of the motives that played their respective role in the development of the Jewish *Qedushah*-liturgy see I. Elbogen, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann, 1931; reprint: Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1962), pp. 61 ff., 521–522.

53 See E. Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, pp. 277–291.

Of much greater importance for our study is the angelic liturgy of the Qumran sect. In 1960, Professor John Strugnell published two fragments from a liturgical corpus found among the manuscripts of the fourth cave at Qumran.⁵⁴ Strugnell was inclined to date these manuscripts between the years 75 and 50 B.C.E., though the liturgy itself could go back to an earlier date. In other words, these fragments belong to the flourishing days of Jewish apocalyptic. This material shows the interest of the Qumran people in various aspects of heavenly liturgies and hymns. It is greater than evidenced by the brief references in the Scrolls themselves.⁵⁵ It is difficult to tell from these Qumran texts whether real heavenly ascensions are involved or whether the Qumran writer only gave picturesque descriptions of the orders of the angels who are said to sing the hymns. (We have given attention to this matter in Chapter One.) Furthermore, the language of these fragments is so rich that it is very often difficult to decide whether a hymn is quoted or if only a poetic description of how it is performed is given. The bad condition in which these manuscripts are preserved makes it even more difficult to decide where a description ends and a hymn possibly begins. At any rate, now that the materials are published, they constitute a major contribution to our understanding of one milieu in which the doxologies found in apocalyptic grew, and of the literary and conceptual background of the hymnological material in the Hekhalot literature. It seems that if certain hymnological passages in rabbinic literature⁵⁶ are added to the evidence from apocalyptic and at Qumran, then the sort of literary sources behind the Hekhalot hymns can be fairly well ascertained.

Before we reach the concluding vision in Chapters 69–71, we shall turn to the series of Merkavah-like visions in *1 Enoch* as described in 47, 3 and 60, 1–4. First, in 47, 3, the visionary says that he saw “the Antecedent of Time, while he was sitting upon the throne of his glory, and the books of the living ones were

54 J. Strugnell, “The Angelic Liturgy at Qumran, 4Q Serek Sirot ‘Olat Hashabat,” *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* VII (1960), pp. 318–345. Professor Y. Yadin unearthed in *Mezadah* another fragment of the same angelic Shabbat-liturgy. In the meantime, a critical edition of these texts was published by C. Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985). See also P. Alexander, above footnote 45, and our discussion in Chapter One of this book.

55 See, for instance, 1 QH (= *Hodayot*) III, 21–23: “... Thou hast made a mere man to share the lot of the Spirits of Knowledge (= the angels) to praise thy name in their chorus...” (English translation: Th. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., 1964), p. 145. See the relevant discussion in Chapter One.

56 See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 22 ff. It must be remarked that the Song of the Kine quoted *ibid.*, p. 25 is in form and style closer to the angelic liturgy of Qumran than (as Scholem thought) to the Hekhalot hymns.

opened before him . . . and his escorts stood before Him". Apart from the fact that the description follows in its general lines those found in 1 Kings 22, 19 and in the Prologue to the Book of Job, a similar vision is recorded in 46, 1–2, where the Messiah is included as well. What should be noticed about the vision in 47, 3 is the fact that the scene is that of the final, eschatological, judgment.⁵⁷ The vision described in 60, 1–4, however, is interesting, because it contains a report of the great excitement that overcame the visionary, and because of the fact that the righteous are described there as standing before God together with the angels. This last point reminds of the previously mentioned notion which characterizes the Qumran writings, namely, the eschatological participation of the angels in the community of the righteous, and, *mutatis mutandis*, of the community of the righteous in the heavenly orders of the angels. It should be noticed, too, that the inclusion of the righteous among those who stand before God is once again stressed in the Merkavah vision in Revelation 4. There, apart from the four Creatures, the Messiah, and the seven Spirits of God, only the twenty-four elders are present before God. The angels are not mentioned there, which is quite remarkable in comparison with other pre-Hekhalot visions.

C

The second major Merkavah vision of *1 Enoch* is the one found in chapters 69–71. Although some of its characteristic features are in a way a repetition of those already found in the first major Merkavah vision (chapter 14), there are some new items, which this vision presents. Most noteworthy is that Enoch is taken up into what could be interpreted to be two separate heavens, and that God is described as leaving His palace in order to welcome Enoch (v. 13). However, before we go into the details of that vision, some remarks are in order concerning its place in the book. In chapter 70, the final translation of Enoch is described, that is, the translation after which he did not return down to earth.⁵⁸ It is, therefore, quite peculiar to hear once again in chapter 71 about yet another translation of Enoch. Indeed, several of the interpreters of the Book of Enoch considered this chapter to be an artificial addition to the main body

57 For the biblical background of this idea, see Charles' Commentary *ad locum*. See further H. Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt*, pp. 116 ff.

58 The idea of Enoch being translated at least twice, once in his lifetime and once to mark his death, is obviously inspired by the twice repeated phrase "Enoch walked with God" in Genesis 5, 22 and 24. The notion of his final translation derives from the concluding remark in verse 24 to the effect that "he was not, for God took him".

of the book, and there are excellent reasons for accepting arguments that follow this line of thinking. However, there is also another way of looking at the problem. *1 Enoch* has long been thought to be composed of at least five main parts. Chapter 71 was most probably a loose fragment, which the editor(s) of the book did not exactly know where to place. Realizing that this fragment bears a number of similarities to the other visions contained in the Book of Similitudes, the editor(s) decided to place it at the end of this part of the book. Thus, it happens that after Enoch had been finally translated onto heaven, another translation comes in the form of an appendix.

Let us turn to the vision itself. It falls into two parts:⁵⁹ verses 1–4 describe Enoch's journey through what appears to be the first heaven, while verses 5–17 apparently describe his journey through the second heaven.⁶⁰ In the first heaven Enoch sees "the holy sons of God",⁶¹ that is, the angels, and his description of them—"their garments were white . . . and the light of their faces was like snow" (v. 1)—should be compared to the description of the angel whom Daniel saw (Daniel 10, 5–6).⁶² Typical of such visions, Enoch sees fire all around,

59 There is no absolute necessity to distinguish between two separate visions in this chapter, as suggested by Charles and others. Yet there is some difficulty with the literary structure of the chapter. In verse 3, Michael is the guiding angel of Enoch during his tour of the first heaven. In verse 8, Michael is once again mentioned, but this time as one of the four archangels in the second heaven. In addition, at the end of verse 2 we read, "Then I fell upon my face before the Lord of the Spirits", though God actually appears only later on in verse 10, that is in the second heaven! It should be noticed, too, that in the first part of the chapter God is referred to as the "Lord of the Spirits", while in the second part He is called "Antecedent of Time". However, if we consider verses 2 and 3 as a later interpolation, then these difficulties could be ignored.

60 Actually, this vision of the journey through two separate heavens is nowhere else found in *1 Enoch*, though it is typical of *2 Enoch*, and several other apocalyptic books. This, too, may account for the fact, that the vision of chapter 71 found no integral place in the book.

61 It seems that the derogatory associations in connection with the appellation "Sons of God" given to the evil angels in Genesis 6, 2 did not persist for long. See *Encyclopaedia Biblica* [in Hebrew], vol. II (1954), coll. 172–174. Still, it is noteworthy, that they are here called "the holy Sons of God".

62 Compare Revelation 1, 13–15; 10, 1; and 18, 1. It seems that the supernatural appearance of the angels, as described in Daniel and in other apocalyptic books is a comparatively late development in Jewish angelology. In Judges 13, for instance, Mano'a wife sees the angel and yet confusedly thinks him to be 'Ish Elohim, "a man of God" (verse 6), an appellation generally given to the prophets. Even Abraham, the Patriarch, seemingly could not distinguish between angels and human beings (Genesis 18, 1). Nor did Joshua for that matter realize that the figure confronting him with his sword drawn was an angel (Joshua 5, 13–14). However, for a different interpretation of the angel-scene in the Book of

though, in contradistinction to the vision in Chapter 14, Enoch also receives here information about the secrets of nature. In verse 5, the second part of the vision begins. Actually, it is here that the more interesting Merkavah material of the vision is found. Enoch says that the angel Michael “carried off my spirit, and I, Enoch, was in the heaven of heavens.”⁶³ Furthermore, he says that he saw “a structure built of crystals”. This structure obviously corresponds to the house or houses, which Enoch saw in the vision of chapter 14. Once again, Enoch saw “tongues of living fire”, and he remarks that the house itself was surrounded by “a ring which encircled this structure of fire.” Four classes of angels—Seraphim, Cherubim, Ophanim and ‘Irim—together with countless other angels are present on the scene, the first ones (those distinguished as classes) guarding the throne of God and the second ones encircle the house. There Enoch also sees the four angels, Michael, Raphael, Gabriel and Phanuel, who, together with other angels, “go in and out of that house”. Actually, these four angels, accompanied by the other angels, escort God, called “the Antecedent of Time”, when He comes out of the house to welcome Enoch! The idea of God coming out of His palace to welcome the visionary is found only here in the apocalyptic visions that we know of. It could be explained as a reflection of the biblical notions of theophany in which God is said to come out of the heavens.⁶⁴ When Enoch sees God, his whole body and soul are transfigured: “I fell on my face, my whole body mollified and my spirit transformed”.⁶⁵ Then Enoch sang songs of praise to God, a fact not mentioned before in *1 Enoch*. This could therefore be considered one of the earliest references to a Merkavah hymn recited, not by the angels, but by the visionary himself!⁶⁶ The vision ends with a comparatively long reference to the Son of Man and a description of some of his eschatological functions.

Joshu’a see A. Rofé, *Israelite Belief in Angels in the Pre-Exilic Period as Evidenced by Biblical Traditions* (Dissertation. [In Hebrew]), Jerusalem, 1969, pp. 271 ff.

63 In *Temirin* (above footnote 42), pp. 116 ff., I pointed out that the designation ‘Heaven of Heavens’ (in Hebrew: *Shmey Ha-Shamayim*) is current in Palestinian lists of seven heavens. It designates the second heaven. If our interpretation of this vision is correct, and it really describes the ascent to two heavens, then this seems to be the first literary evidence for the name given here to the second heaven. However, compare 1 Kings 8, 27 (King Solomon’s prayer)!

64 See, for instance, 2 Samuel 22, 10–11 = Psalms 18, 10–11; and also the visions described in Ezekiel 1 and 10.

65 For a characterization of such feelings in the course of ecstasies see, E. Underhill, *Mysticism*, (London: Methuen, 1912; reprint, 1960), pp. 359 ff.

66 A parallel to this is to be found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.

The purpose of this extensive analysis of the so-called Merkavah passages in *1 Enoch* was to stress some of the more characteristic features of these passages in comparison with the parallel biblical material, and in anticipation of the corresponding material in the Hekhalot literature. The second chapter of the present book offers a general outline of essential qualities of Jewish apocalyptic in relationship to Scripture. The aim of the present chapter is to exhibit yet another quality of Jewish apocalyptic, that is, its inclusion of sections that later on became the core of mystical lore. We wish to argue that certain mystical elements found in Scripture were picked up by the apocalyptic visionaries and worked into a model of mystical experience. In fact, Merkavah-like materials in Jewish apocalyptic had an important share in shaping the mystical experience of the kind later on found in the Hekhalot writings. Although it is quite difficult to show the direct *historical* connection between Jewish apocalyptic and the Hekhalot literature, the *literary* connections between these two types of literature are almost self-evident. The similarities between these two kinds of literature are too striking to be ignored. However, it must be admitted that it is more difficult to show the connections of the mystically oriented passages in scriptural prophecy to the visionary/mystical preoccupation in Jewish apocalyptic.

A mystical sensibility is a common phenomenon in almost all the religions of the world. The rise of an interest in mystical speculations, or even in mystical experiences themselves, in one age or another, could be explained either by some kind of now unattested traditions about the ages, or by an independent mystical impetus that annexed itself to traditional modes of expression, or, most likely, by both. Whether we view these connections as merely of a literary kind or as real historical affiliations, the fact that the ancient Jewish mystical tradition is mainly focused upon *visions* of the divine world is more telling from the point of view of the historical connections than is sometimes admitted by scholars. A different, though in many respects connected, story is embedded in the parts of apocalypticism and Merkavah mysticism that report of angelic descents from heaven to reveal secrets to initiated people. More difficult, in this respect, is the question of the connection between Merkavah mysticism and later medieval developments of Jewish mysticism. The book which marked the change from Merkavah mysticism to the kind of mysticism which was later on designated by the term “Kabbalah” (= literally: tradition), was *Sefer Yezirah* (“The Book of the Formation of the World”).⁶⁷

67 There is a vast literature on the book; see G. Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), pp. 205–206.

It was compiled sometime at the beginning of the Islamic period,⁶⁸ but some of its more characteristic elements belong to a much earlier time. Although it contains some references to the Merkavah lore (paragraphs 5, 8, 14, and 38), it is the starting point for quite a new language and direction in the history of Jewish mysticism, and hence presents new historical and literary problems.

Returning to the Merkavah passages in Jewish apocalyptic, they show an extensive interest in mystical experiences, an interest that increased, at least in some Jewish circles, once Jewish apocalyptic was no longer in the vogue. In addition, there is still much left for further investigation and thought concerning the place—or, as some would like to call it, the “*Sitz im Leben*”—of these mystical scenes in Jewish apocalyptic. But, in the present study, considerations of the kind known as *Formgeschichte* would lead us off the main track, which is a thematic description of the Merkavah-tradition in Jewish apocalyptic, in the Talmudic literature, and in the *Hekhalot* literature. We shall now turn to the Merkavah passages found in some of the other texts of Jewish apocalyptic and first to the so-called *Slavonic Book of Enoch*, or 2 *Enoch*.

D

The Merkavah material in 1 *Enoch* belongs to the period preceding the destruction of the Second Temple. This is probably also true for the material found in the so-called Book of Parables (“Similitudes”), that is, chapters 36–71. Although reasons could be found for dating this particular part of the book to a later period, it seems quite certain that the Merkavah material contained therein is similar to the Merkavah material included in the earlier parts of the book. However, all the other apocalyptic books that we shall discuss hereafter belong to a period close to the destruction of the Temple. It may be said that the writers had some particularly pressing problems to solve. As was said

68 N. Allony published a series of articles in Hebrew in which he argued for the Islamic provenance of *Sefer Yeẓirah*. Allony argues that the linguistic theory embodied in *Sefer Yeẓirah* could be explained only on the ground of the *Kitāb al-ʿEin* of the first known Arab lexicographer, Ḥalil ibn Aḥmad (died in 797). It must be admitted, that the arguments presented by Allony cannot be easily dismissed as wrong, yet there is still a lot in the *Sefer Yeẓirah* that has its origin in earlier speculations, and particularly so the doctrine of the ten *Sefirot*. Whatever its date, the book had a tremendous influence on all later developments of Jewish mysticism. The part of the book that exercised the greatest conceptual influence is the first one, that is, the older one dealing with the *Sefirot*, and not the second, and later one, which deals with the morphological and phonetic aspects of the three groups of letters, which compose the Hebrew alphabet.

in the previous chapter, some parts of Jewish apocalyptic seem to express a crisis regarding the fulfillment of prophecy. Since a considerable part of the Scriptural prophecies remained unfulfilled, apocalyptic came to reassure people of the expanded validity of biblical prophecy. With the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, however, apocalyptic had to face a bitter crisis regarding its own intrinsic messages. Indeed, it appears that Jewish apocalyptic hardly overcame this crisis. Within thirty or forty years from the destruction of Jerusalem, Jewish apocalyptic literature disappeared—at least for the time being—from the literary scene.

Yet, before it finally did so, it underwent a noteworthy change. Its natural interest in the world of the divine Merkavah gained more power and significance. Thus, one can find in the apocalyptic texts written under the tragic impression of the destruction of Jerusalem, a marked interest in theosophical subjects. In addition, the very rise of the rabbinic interest in Merkavah mysticism was connected with the name of Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Zakkai, who was himself an eyewitness to the events that led to the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus, in a sense, the preoccupation with mystical problems could be interpreted as one of the ways in which people reacted to the disasters befalling them. Presumably, when the cultic center of the nation was no longer available, people adapted new modes of life and practice that could also replace experiences, which had previously been connected with the now-destroyed Temple and the immanence of God signified by it. Yet, again, this is not to say that the *Sitz im Leben* of Jewish Merkavah mysticism was in the Temple cult.⁶⁹ It seems safer to say that the experiential events connected with destruction of the Temple brought about a reaction which may be characterized as mystical escapism. The stresses and distresses of reality in which the temple could not, or could no longer, satisfy religious and social needs, pushed people to find comfort and consolation in super- or infra-realistic realms. Thus, we find a marked intensification in the interest in, and preoccupation with, celestial

69 See J. Maier, *Vom Kultus zur Gnosis: Bundeslade, Gottesthron und Märkbh* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1964) *passim*. My article “The Impact of Priestly Traditions on the Creation of Merkavah Mysticism and Shiur Komah,” in J. Dan (ed.), *Early Jewish Mysticism* [Proceedings of the First International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* VI, 1–2, pp. 65–120, stimulated a scholarly discussion of the priestly (including the Qumran writings) impact on Merkavah mysticism. See also I. Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988), pp. 125–144: “Priests, Prophets, Apocalyptic Visionaries, and Mystics”. This subject is now discussed in detail in M. Schneider, *The Appearances of the High Priest: Theophany, Apotheosis and Binitarian Theology—From Priestly Tradition of the Second Temple Period Through Ancient Jewish Mysticism* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2012) [in Hebrew].

speculations. These often entailed apocalyptic and, later on, heavenly ascents. However, even here it would be incorrect to see in this increase in mystical speculation only a result of the disappointment and grief felt at the destruction of Jerusalem. This intensified interest in mysticism could also, at least partly so, be inspired by parallel phenomena in the Hellenistic culture of the period.⁷⁰ Other literary and historical connections, mostly of a Mesopotamian provenance, could also have been contributing factors in instigating the apocalyptic and mystical speculations of the period.⁷¹ Thus, internal and external as well as literary and historical factors played their respective roles in shaping the conditions for the flourishing of mystical trends in the pre- and post-destruction period.

We shall now turn to the apocalyptic writings, which were, in all likelihood, composed in that period. These apocalypses still reveal a marked interest in eschatology while the curiosity in cosmological and natural phenomena which is characteristic of *1 Enoch* is somehow suspended. Since the apocalyptic writings of the period, which we shall discuss here, describe ascents to a number of heavens, one may be justified in qualifying them as entailing visionary experiences without indeed overlooking their focused interest in eschatological matters. The number of the heavens to which the apocalyptic visionary is said to ascend is generally seven, though Paul describes an ascent to the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12, 2; see also *Testament of Levi* 3). Seven heavens are mentioned or described in *2 Enoch*, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (they are referred to in 19, 4), in the *Ascension of Isaiah*, in the *Greek Baruch* (only five heavens are described) and in the fragment of the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* which was preserved by Clement of Alexandria (only the fifth heaven is briefly described). It seems that only in the Book of Revelation we find the (older?) concept of the existence of one heaven.

We shall now discuss the Merkavah material in the Slavonic Book of Enoch, or *2 Enoch*. It is quite likely that its date of composition coincided with the events that terminated in the destruction of Jerusalem, yet the historical references in the book are rather vague and have left room for a various scholarly speculations.⁷² In addition, the book presents some extreme textual problems,

70 This is the subject of E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge: University Press, 1968).

71 See H. S. Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic: The Mesopotamian Background of the Enoch Figure of the Son of Man* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1988). See footnote 124 below.

72 A. A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), offers a detailed and thorough discussion of the various problems involved in the study of this text and its assessment, particularly in relation to the figures mentioned in the title of his book.

the most difficult of which involve the differences underlying the two versions of the book. In our discussion of the Merkavah material found in the book, we shall pay equal attention to the two recensions, represented by two manuscripts, one long (J) and another short (A).⁷³ *2 Enoch* contains, among other things, a description of the ascent of the hero to the seven heavens. The great interest of the description lies in the details it gives of the things, which the hero saw in each of the heavens. This extensive description of the contents of the seven heavens has a number of parallels in Jewish apocalyptic literature as well as in later Jewish mystical and cosmological writings.⁷⁴ However, since not all the details of this description directly belong to our subject, we shall limit the discussion to those details, which directly concern us.

Generally, the descriptions of what the seven heavens contain reveal a cosmological, or astronomical, interest. Yet, when it comes to the description of these things, one can always find a basic interest in mystical matters.⁷⁵ Whatever one finds in heaven always has a close connection to the divine and, thus, even the heavens below the seventh include elements worth noting in connection with the Merkavah lore. This, naturally, reminds us of the fact already observed by various scholars, that the interest in cosmological and theosophical matters goes hand in hand in apocalyptic literature and in later mystical writings.

When we come to *2 Enoch*, the interesting feature in chapters 8–9 is the fact that the hero saw Paradise, the place of retribution for the righteous and compassionate ones, in the third heaven. This is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, because in *1 Enoch* this Paradise is located in heaven, while here, in *2 Enoch*, its location is in the third heaven. That location is also known from *Apocalypse of Moses* 38, 4, and it holds true in the case of Paul (2 Corinthians 12, 2; 4).

Secondly, the word “Paradise” in *2 Enoch* is still a place in heaven and not a *terminus technicus* for theosophical speculations. The technical change in the use of the word can almost certainly be observed in Paul’s account in 2 Corinthians, and it is already taken for granted in the story about the four sages who entered the *Parades*. Thus it appears that *2 Enoch* was composed

73 The English translation and valuable Introduction are by F. I. Andersen in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, I, pp. 91–221.

74 The relevant writings are: *Re’uyot Yehezkel*, *Beraitā De-Ma’aseh Bereshit*, Bav. *Ḥagigah* 12/b, and *Sefer Ha-Razim*. Among the apocalyptic writings, mention should be made in this connection of *Greek Baruch* (= *3 Baruch*) and the fragment of the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* found in Clement, *Strom.* V 11 77.

75 See F. Cumont, *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912), particularly pp. 101 ff.

either at a time when the shift in the terminological usage, already imminent in Paul, was not yet known, or else by someone who was not aware of that shift.

In some sense, however, the Paradise description in *2 Enoch* is already connected with the Merkavah lore. In 8, 8, it is said that many angels (in J: three hundred) keep the garden and that “with never ceasing voice and pleasant singing they worship the Lord every day and hour.” This is a characteristic feature of *2 Enoch*, where the song of the various angelic beings is repeatedly referred to. Only the angels in the fifth heaven do not sing their celestial song. More important in this respect is the fact that the apocalyptic visionary says that “in the midst (of them was) the tree of life, at that place where the Lord takes a rest when he goes into Paradise” (8, 3; J and A). Charles remarked in his notes *ad locum* (p. 434), “this is a familiar feature in Jewish Apocalypse”.⁷⁶ We may add that, wherever this particular idea occurs, it refers to the original abode of *Shekhinah* before it ascended to heaven in reaction to the sins of mankind. Thus, we read in *3 Enoch* (*Sefer Hekhalot*) 5, 1–3, that “From the day that the Holy One, blessed be he, banished the first Adam from the garden of Eden, the *Šekinah* resided on a cherub beneath the tree of life. The ministering angels used to muster and come down from heaven in companies . . . to execute his will in all the earth. The first man . . . dwelt at the gate of the garden of Eden so that they might gaze at the bright image of the *Šekinah*”.⁷⁷ This description has obvious points of connection with the one found in *2 Enoch*, the only difference being that the Garden of Eden described in *2 Enoch* is the celestial abode of retribution while the Garden of Eden as described in *3 Enoch* is still in its original terrestrial environment. Wherever this Paradise is located, either on earth or in heaven, the Tree of Life is conceived as the place on which God dwells.

Thus, God’s theophany on that tree is a counterpart to His presence in the Temple and on His celestial throne.

Most important, of course, is the description of what happened to Enoch in the seventh heaven.⁷⁸ When Enoch reached that heaven with the two men

76 Cf. indirectly Ezekiel 28, 13, where it appears that the notion of God’s abode in the Garden of Eden is an ancient oriental tradition.

77 The English translation is by P. Alexander in J. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, I, p. 259. For a slightly different English translation, see H. Odeberg, *3 Enoch* (Cambridge: University Press, 1928; Reprint, New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973), p. 13 ff. See also Odeberg’s commentary, *ibid.*, where parallels are cited. We shall discuss *3 Enoch* (= *Sefer Hekhalot*) in Part Two of this book.

78 In version J, there seems to be confusion in the enumeration of the heavens. In 20, 3 a tenth heaven, Aravat (= ‘Aravot; see Bav. *Ḥagigah* 12/b), is mentioned; and in 21, 6 the names of Muzaloth (= Mazaloth) and Kuchavim (= Kokhavim) are given to the eighth and

who lifted him up to heaven,⁷⁹ he became afraid and began to tremble in great terror. The two men encouraged Enoch and showed him “the Lord, from a distance, sitting on his exceedingly high throne” (J 20, 3). Around the throne were the various classes of the angelic beings who served God. Then the two men departed and Enoch was left alone in great fear (21, 2). Consequently, the archangel Gabriel was sent by God to carry Enoch and place him before His face. When Enoch fell prone and worshipped God, he heard God telling Michael to undo Enoch from his earthly clothing, and to anoint him with delightful oil, and put him into clothes of glory (22, 8). Michael did so, and consequently Enoch was transfigured and looked “like one of his glorious ones” (22, 10). Then God summoned one of His angels⁸⁰ to bring forth books and a pen so that Enoch could write down in them all that had happened to him in heaven together with some other secrets that were revealed to him (Chapter 23).

The book contains two additional references of Merkavah material. In chapter 31 (version J only), a Merkavah vision of Adam is briefly referred to, and in 37 Enoch experiences a final vision of most fearful angels.

E

We shall now turn to the *Apocalypse of Abraham*,⁸¹ Chapters 9–19 of which contain an interesting sample of a Merkavah-like vision in an apocalyptic setting. It is introduced in the course of the apocalyptic retelling of the story of the Covenant described in Genesis 15. In fact, as Box has already remarked in his notes to his translation of the book, Genesis 15 became a *locus classicus* for the introduction of all kinds of apocalyptic speculations. The *Apocalypse of Abraham*, however, is unique in the significance that it bears also on the study of ancient Jewish mysticism in general.

This part of the *Apocalypse* begins with the description of Abraham being ordered to bring a pure sacrifice to God and being promised that through that

the ninth heavens, respectively. Only these three heavens are mentioned by name and it thus appears that B, which has only seven heavens, preserves the more original version.

79 The fact that two men (= angels) escort Enoch in his heavenly journey is quite remarkable since it is similar to the idea of the two angels who carry the Merkavah mystic when he passes from one palace to the other. See *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, §§ 219–224).

80 In J the name of the angel is given as Vrevoil or Pravail, and in A as Vereveil.

81 G. H. Box, *The Apocalypse of Abraham* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1919), p. 44. After the publication of the first edition of this book, a new translation by R. Rubinkiewicz was published, “Revised and Added Notes”, by H. G. Lunt, in J.H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, I, pp. 681–705. All my quotations are from that translation.

sacrifice God would bestow upon him a revelation of future events together with some other “guarded things and you will see great things which you have not seen” (9, 6). Very soon, however, the story in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* branches off from its biblical roots and Abraham is told, “for forty days abstain from every kind of food cooked by fire, and from drinking of wine, and from anointing (yourself) with oil” (9, 7).⁸² These preparatory practices, which Abraham was instructed to follow, are familiar ones and occur in other apocalyptic writings. In our discussion of the Hekhalot literature (Chapter Five), they will receive proper attention.⁸³ The narrator goes on to state that Abraham was overwhelmed with fear and, consequently, fell down upon the earth in a trance. In that trance, Abraham heard a voice speaking to the angel Iaoel telling him “through the mediation of my ineffable name,⁸⁴ consecrate

82 The forty days are certainly an allusion to the forty days during which Moses stayed on Mount Sinai abstaining from sustenance. See Deuteronomy 9, 11. As we are going to see in Chapter Five, different periods of time were prescribed as a preparation for the apocalyptic and mystical experiences.

83 I have discussed their essence in Chapter One.

84 This practice of speaking out holy names in order to bring about a mystical experience is well known from the Hekhalot literature. In *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopsis*, §§ 204–205) we read: “And when a man wants to descend unto the Merkavah, he should conjure Suriah, the Prince of the Countenance, and call him a hundred and twelve times by the name of Totrosiai . . . He should be careful neither to add to that number of one hundred and twelve nor to subtract from it; for if he adds or subtracts, he is liable to die: but his mouth should speak out the names and his fingers should count a hundred and twelve. Then, for sure, he descends and masters the Merkavah”. Rashi, in his commentary to Bav. *Ḥagigah* 14/b (s.v., “They entered the Pardes”) says, “They ascended to heaven by means of a Name”. This explanation evidently displays Rashi’s acquaintance with the mystical lore. See also Rav Hai Ga’on’s *Responsa* in B. Lewin, *Otzar Ha-Geonim*, vol. IV, Jerusalem, 1931, “Tractate Chagiga”, pp. 22 ff. See also G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 54. It should be noticed that in Mishnah *’Avot* i,13, Hillel the Elder is reported to have said: “He who uses the Crown (Aramaic: *Taga*) is to pass away”. According to the explanation found in *’Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* (ed. Schechter) version A, chapter xii, the meaning of Hillel’s saying is: “He who uses the *Shem Ha-Meforash* (= the “Ineffable” Name) has no share in the world to come.” It should be noticed that while Hillel warns him who “uses the Crown” of real death, the Scholion of *’Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* threatens only with the loss of future life. It is a well-known fact, not only in the case of Ben ‘Azzai who entered the Pardes (see next chapter), but also from the Hekhalot literature in general, that people who were not careful enough in their mystical experience were liable to suffer severe affliction and sometimes even death. We know of a certain tradition, which speaks of the Name that was pronounced by the priests while reciting their Benediction in the Temple; see Bav. *Qidushin* 71/a, where the Gemarā refers to two views, namely, one about the Name that consisted of twelve letters, and the other one about the Name which consisted of

this man [Abraham] for me and strengthen him against his trembling" (10, 3). Iaoel came to Abraham, introduced himself, and led him up to heaven.

Some of the things said by Iaoel when introducing himself to Abraham merit our discussion. Iaoel says that he is called by that name "by him who causes those with me on the seventh expanse, on the firmament, to shake, a power through the medium of his ineffable name in me" (10, 8). The firmament is here, as also in the *Ascension of Isaiah* 7, 9, a domain distinct from the seven heavens.⁸⁵ Yet, in spite of the fact that Iaoel here mentions the "seventh expanse", Abraham is not described as having in reality experienced an ascent through seven heavens. At the end of the vision (19, 2–3), Abraham was granted a vision—from above—of the seven unnamed firmaments that were so to speak below him.

As indicated, Iaoel mentions that he possesses "a power in virtue of the Ineffable Name that is dwelling in me." This may be the earliest occurrence of the idea found also in several midrashic sayings that "a tablet with the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, is engraved on the heart of each angel, and on it the name of the Holy One, blessed be He".⁸⁶ In all likelihood, the idea behind this midrashic saying is that the suffix "el" at the end of the names of many angels indicates not only their divine origin, but also the divine power or authority (*exousia*) which they possess. In the case of Iaoel, his name is a combination of the three root-letters of the Tetragrammaton with the usual "el" ending (the Hebrew transliteration of his name most likely being *Yhwel*). This is what Iaoel seems to imply, when he refers to the power of the Ineffable Name dwelling in him.⁸⁷

forty-two letters! Now, Hillel, who lived in the days of the Temple, could have meant that no one who was not authorized should "use" the Names for whatever purpose. He could have had in mind a priest who abuses the knowledge he gained in the Temple for a variety of theurgic purposes, which were not connected with the priestly Benediction. Likewise, Hillel could have meant people who gained knowledge of these Names and who were liable to use them for profane purposes.

85 In the *Ascension of Isaiah*, this is the place where Samael and his hosts are.

86 For the discussions of the different versions of this saying, see G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 71, 133. See further E. E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975; English translation, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 135–185: "The Celestial Retinue" (particularly p. 150).

87 It goes beyond the present discussion to decide whether Iaoel is actually identical with Metatron, who is also called "little Iao" (3 *Enoch* 12, 5 "... and He called me 'The lesser YHWH'"), or whether at this stage Iaoel is another angelic being not connected in any way to the Metatron tradition. See further, G. Scholem, "Über eine Formel in den

After Iaoel has introduced himself by name and mentioned the special rank he enjoys among the angels, he proceeds to refer to his functions in heaven. First, he says, "I am the one who has been charged according to his commandment, to restrain the threats of the living creatures, the Cherubim, against one another" (10, 9). This hostility of the living creatures, the *Ḥayyot* of the Merkavah, is nowhere else mentioned, at least not in the apocalyptic texts that we know. The hostility of the angels is usually directed only against human beings who ascend to heaven; thus, the idea expressed here in connection with Iaoel is quite extraordinary. Yet, it should be remarked that there are some rabbinic sayings to the effect that hostility does in fact exist among the angels,⁸⁸ so the tradition preserved in *Apocalypse of Abraham* does not stand altogether alone.⁸⁹

Next Iaoel says that he teaches those who carry [the throne?—see 18, 3] the song of the seventh hour of the night of man (10, 9). The references given by Box *ad locum* make it sufficiently clear that there circulated a view according to which the angels did not recite their hymns to God during the day-hours, thus avoiding any interference with the prayers of the Sons of Israel. Yet, the more common view, which is also represented in the Hekhalot literature, is that the angels wait till the Sons of Israel have finished their day-prayers, notably the *Qedushah*, before they begin their own songs of praise (*Synopse*, § 174). However, what Iaoel says is not sufficiently clear, and it is only with reservation

Koptisch-Gnostischen Schriften und ihren jüdischen Ursprung," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* XXX (1931), pp. 170 ff.

88 The most striking rabbinical parallel is in *Pesiktā Rabbati*, ed. Friedmann, fol. 97/b. It refers to *Galizur* whose "wings are spread out to receive the vapor of the *Ḥayyot*, for if he does not receive it, the ministering angels are burned by that vapor". See also the material collected in the next footnote.

89 First, we find the saying attributed to Bar Kapara in *Shir Ha-Shirim Rabba* VIII, 11: "Why the ministering angels are called 'fellows' (*Ḥaverim*)—because there is neither hatred nor jealousy nor enmity nor hostility . . . among them". Whatever its original purpose, this saying has obvious hostile overtones that can be heard, if due attention is given to such sayings as: "Rabbi Yoḥanan said . . . 'Dominion and fear are with Him, He makes peace in his high heaven' (Job 25, 2)—'Dominion' this is Michael, and 'Fear' this is Gabriel, 'With Him' and He makes them live in peace, and none of the two does any harm to the other"; *Pesiktā de-Rav Kahanā*, ed. Mandelbaum, p. 5. In *Devarim Rabbā* (ed. Lieberman, p. 100) Reish Lakish is quoted as explaining this to be the result of the fact that Michael is made of snow while Gabriel is made of fire. See further Bav. *Sanhedrin* 99/b: "Rabbi Alexandrei said: He who studies the Torah for its own sake causes peace to reign among those above and those below". See also Rav Safra's prayer in Bav. *Berakhot* 16/b–17/a; and *Agadath Shir Hashirim*, ed. Schechter, p. 4.

that it can be viewed as a parallel in apocalyptic literature to the idea that the angelic song is heard only at night.

At the beginning of Chapter 11, a detailed description is given of the appearance of Iaoel: "The appearance of his body was like sapphire, and the aspect of his face like chrysolite, and the hair upon his head like snow. And a kidaris (=cap) [was] on his head, its look like that of a rainbow, and the clothing of his garments [was] purple; and a golden staff [was] in his right hand" (vv. 2–3). The essential details of this description are quite unusual and deserve further investigation. So does the following description of the manner in which Abraham is taken up to heaven by Iaoel. Abraham says that "the angel took me with his right hand and set me on the right wing of the pigeon, and he himself sat on the left wing of the turtle dove [both of] which were as if neither slaughtered nor divided. And we ascended as if [carried] by many winds to the heaven that is fixed on the expanses" (15, 2–4).

Upon his arrival in heaven, Abraham experiences the main part of his Merkavah vision. This part of the vision is important for two reasons: First, it contains the longest heavenly hymn in apocalyptic literature; and second, it contains a detailed description of the Throne of the Glory. We turn first to the celestial hymn, which was recited while Abraham and the angel arrived in heaven and Abraham was overcome with fear and "wanted to fall down on the earth" (17, 2). It is of a composite nature and in spite of its various hymnological elements it has very little in common with the unique qualities of the Hekhalot hymns, as discussed in Chapter One.⁹⁰ In form and content it resembles a sapiential psalm which extols the omnipotent grace of God and His glory.⁹¹ The song is recited by Iaoel who tells Abraham to join him in reciting it. The context makes clear that the song had a protective function. The risky situation is indicated by the fact that Abraham realized that there was "no earth to fall upon", and Iaoel told him to "recite without ceasing" (17, 4–6).

Next follows the Merkavah vision itself (Chapter 18). In its general form it reminds the reader of the vision of Ezekiel, except that Ezekiel did not experience an ascent, which Abraham is here described as having experienced. This part of the vision begins when Abraham sees "the mouth of the fire which was on the firmament fire rising up on high" (18, 1). He hears "a voice like the roaring

90 See also J. Maier, "Serienbildung und 'Numinoser' Eindruckseffekt in den poetischen Stücken der Hekhalot-Literatur," *Semitics* III (Pretoria University of South Africa, 1973), pp. 36 ff.

91 Because of textual problems, it is quite difficult to tell what in this Celestial Song really belongs to the original and what was later on added.

of the sea" (18, 2).⁹² As "the fire rose up, soaring to the highest point", Abraham saw "under the fire a throne of fire, and the many-eyed ones round about,"⁹³ reciting the song" (18, 3).⁹⁴ Under the throne, Abraham saw "four living creatures, singing" (18, 3). Each of the Ḥayyot had four faces—of a lion, of a man, of an ox, and of eagle. "Each one had four heads on its body so that the four living creatures had sixteen faces."⁹⁵ And each one had six wings; two on the shoulders, two half way down, and two at the loins. With the wings which were on their shoulders they covered their faces, with the wings at their loins they clothed their feet, and they would stretch the two middle wings out and fly, erect" (18, 4–7).⁹⁶ Apart from its unique features, this description fuses details from the depiction of the Ḥayyot in Ezekiel 1 and the *Seraphim* in Isaiah 6, 2.

Then the *Apocalypse* refers once again to the hostility of the Creatures, "And when they finished singing, they would look at one another and threaten one another" (18, 8). Iaoel intervened and "turned the face of each living creature

92 This could be a reference to Ezekiel 1, 24.

93 Ezekiel 1, 18 mentions the fact that the backs of the four creatures were full of eyes. This gave rise to a number of similar descriptions in apocalyptic and Hekhalot literature. In several cases, the alleged number of those eyes is given as well as their measure. In general, the subject of the eyes of the celestial beings is a subject that still deserves discussion. See the references to "[celestial] eyes" in P. Schäfer, *Konkordanz zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, pp. 510–512.

94 In light of the description of the wings of the holy creatures, the reference here can be to the Celestial Song, which according to a current tradition, was voiced with two of their wings. See, for instance, Bav. *Ḥagigah* 13/b. There "the wings with which they say the song" are said to have been taken away from the Creatures, when the Temple was destroyed. See also *Tanḥumā*, "Qedoshim", paragraph vi; *Pesiktā de-Rav Kahana*, ed. Mandelbaum, p. 151; *Pirkei de-Rav Eliezer* 6; Bav. *Sanhedrin* 37/b (Tosafot, s.v. "Miknaf Ha-'Aretz"); *Arugat Ha-Bosem*, ed. E. E. Urbach, vol. I, p. 213.

95 The number of the Creatures' faces was an important issue in Jewish mystical speculations. In *Hekhalot Zutarti*, Rabbi Aqiva teaches the secrets of the corporeal structures of the Ḥayyot, including the number of their faces and the wings of the Ḥayyot (*Synopse*, §§353–356). Interestingly, the number of faces is also specified in the *Koptisch-Gnostische Schrift ohne Titel aus Codex II von Nag-Hammadi*, ed. A. Böhlig and P. Labib, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1962), pp. 52–53. The Aramaic Targum to Ezekiel 1, 6 mentions sixty-four faces and two hundred and fifty six wings.

96 Similarly, the Living Creatures in Revelation 4, 8 are said to have six wings, and it may be argued that in this particular detail, some Christian translator or editor of *Apocalypse of Abraham* adapted the irregularity found in Revelation. See further Bav. *Ḥagigah* 13/b. Compare the Aramaic Targum to Isaiah 6, 2: "with two (wings) they cover their faces so as not to see (the Godhead); and with two they cover their bodies so as not to be seen (in their nakedness), and with two they perform (their) service (to God)".

from the face which was opposite it so that they could not see each other's faces threatening each other" (18, 10). In addition to that, Iael "taught them the song of peace" (18, 11). A description of the Throne of Glory, which takes after the vision in Ezekiel 1, ends with the remark "And I heard the voice of their sanctification like the voice of a single man" (18, 14). This part of the book ends with a description of what Abraham saw looking down from the firmament upon which he was standing.⁹⁷

F

Another vision of the Merkavah is included in *The Ascension of Isaiah*. There it comprises the second part of the book (chapter 6 onwards) and from the date given at its beginning, the twentieth year of the reign of Hezekiah (6, 1), it appears that the writer did not intend to align it with the vision described in Isaiah 6. In fact, the case of a Christian provenance has recently been brought to the foreground.⁹⁸ The vision begins when King Hezekiah and all the prophets and people gathered at his court, together with the prophet Isaiah, heard "a door being opened and the voice of the Spirit" (6, 6).⁹⁹ This idea of a door, which is heard or seen being opened at the beginning of an apocalyptic vision, is also known from Revelation 4, 1, and it may reflect a mystically oriented interpretation of the words "the heavens were opened" in Ezekiel 1, 1. Yet, while Ezekiel experienced no ascension, an experience of this kind is presupposed in *The Ascension of Isaiah* and in Revelation.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the idea of a door opened in heaven is characteristic of the tradition describing heavenly

97 This unique description is reminiscent of what Rabbi Yuda said in the name of Rabbi Yohanan about the experience which Abraham had had: "He raised him above the dome (Hebrew: *Kippah*) of the firmament. God told Abraham: 'Look at the heaven', and 'Look' (Hebrew: *Habet*) implies a look from above to below". *Bereshit Rabbā*, ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 432–3.

98 See particularly M. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 55–58. See, however, the balanced view expressed by M. A. Knibb, "Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah: A New Translation and Introduction," in Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, II, pp. 143–176. My quotes are from this translation.

99 This door is only mentioned in the Ethiopic text of the *Ascension of Isaiah* but not in the Latin texts. See R. H. Charles, *The Ascension of Isaiah*, London, 1900, p. 99. See further E. Tisserant, *Ascension d'Isaie*, Paris, 1909, p. 136.

100 Compare also *Syriac Baruch* 22, 1, where the words of Ezekiel are repeated and again no heavenly ascension is presupposed.

ascensions. Thus, the so-called Mithras Liturgy mentions such doors,¹⁰¹ and in *Hekhalot Zutarti* such a door or gate¹⁰² is said to have been pre-established by God before he made heaven and earth.¹⁰³ In *Hekhalot Rabbati*, the gates of the seven palaces (*hekhalot*) and the special means, which should be applied in order to pass through them safely, become a central theme. However, there are several instances in Jewish mystical literature in which the phrase “the heavens were opened” or “the heavens were torn asunder” occur, but then they do not indicate a heavenly ascension.¹⁰⁴

Soon Isaiah fell into a trance,¹⁰⁵ and an angel came to show the vision to him. Isaiah describes in some detail the glory of that angel: he was “a glorious angel; his glory was not like the glory of the angels which I always used to see” (7, 2). Obviously, this remark is directed toward distinguishing between this vision, which entailed a heavenly ascent, and the one in Isaiah 6, which the writer apparently believed entailed no such experience. In fact, the angel said that he had come from the seventh heaven (6, 13) and that he did not want to reveal his name to the visionary (7, 4–5).¹⁰⁶

Then follows the description of what Isaiah was shown in each of the seven heavens. Before he reached the first heaven, however, he had to pass through the firmament, which was between the earth and the heaven.¹⁰⁷ Isaiah reaches the first heaven after having passed through that firmament, in which he saw “Sammael and his hosts” (7, 9). In principle, the description of each of the first six heavens is more or less the same, though every new heaven is depicted as

101 A. Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie* (Leipzig and Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1910; reprint: Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966), p. 10/11, lines 19–20. See also H. D. Betz, *The “Mithras Liturgy”: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), p. 43, ll. 625–628 [English translation, p. 54].

102 The word used here is a *hapax-legomenon*. See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 78, n. 9. See further, E. Ben Iehuda, *Thesaurus*, vol. IV, p. 1821, s.v. “*Ḥatirah*”.

103 See further 3 *Maccabees* 6, 18, and *Testament of Levi* 5, 1.

104 See G. Scholem, *op. cit.* p. 68. See further Gospel of Mark 1, 10 (and parallels), and Revelation 19, 11: “Then I saw the heaven open”, where once again—in contradistinction to 4, 1—no heavenly ascension is maintained.

105 Interestingly, the physical symptoms of that trance are given in the following words: “he became silent, and the mind in his body was taken up from him . . . His eyes indeed were open, but his mouth was silent . . . But his breath was (still) in him for he was seeing a vision” (6, 10–12).

106 Indirectly, this could reflect the Essene practice of not revealing the names of the angels. See Josephus, *Bellum* II, viii, 7. Generally, the apocalyptic writers did keep secret the names of the angels, while of the Merkavah mystics the contrary can be said.

107 This is quite a unique concept. Yet see Charles’s commentary *ad locum*.

more glorious than the preceding one. Isaiah saw in each of the first six heavens “a throne in the midst, and on its right and on its left were angels.”¹⁰⁸ This is probably the only occurrence in Jewish apocalyptic of the idea of the existence of a throne in each of the heavens. The idea is repeated in an early Merkavah-midrash, *Re’uyot Yehezkel*, where Ezekiel is said to have seen a Merkavah in every one of the seven heavens.¹⁰⁹ In *Re’uyot Yehezkel*, we also find the idea, which is first mentioned in the *Ascension of Isaiah*, that the Lord (depicted as Christ) is sitting only on the throne of the seventh heaven. It is interesting to note, though, that, while thrones are seen in each heaven, there is no specific indication as to who, if at all, is the “one” sitting on the throne. One thing is made clear, namely, that it is a unique being, whose glory is greater than that of the angels standing on the right of the throne. One may suggest, though, that the full identity, or *exousia*, of that being unfolds only in the seventh heaven. Furthermore, as *Ascension of Isaiah* 7, 15 reports, the angels “who stood on the right had more glory and they all sang praises with one voice.”¹¹⁰ And the throne was in the middle, and it they praised, and those on the left [gave praise] after them; but their voice was not like the voice of those on the right, nor their praise like the praise of those (on the right).¹¹¹

Then the visionary passes upward to the second heaven. First, he remarks, “the height of that heaven is like that from heaven to earth and to the firmament” (7, 18). Similar notions can be found in rabbinic literature¹¹² and in some of the Merkavah texts.¹¹³ The occurrence of this measure in *The Ascension of*

108 Charles thinks that the ‘throne’ is an angel of the class of the θερόνοι and, therefore, translates: “on *his* right and on *his* left . . .” Yet, according to the Latin text, the throne is an actual throne: *vidi ibi sedem*. The accompanying angel remarks, though, that the praise of the angels is allegedly directed to the one in the seventh heaven, that is, to God. However, the description of the seventh heaven insinuates that it is Christ!

109 In *Re’uyot Yehezkel* each of the seven *Merkavot* has a mystical name. See the discussion of that book in Part Two. A plurality of chariots is also mentioned in the angelic liturgy found at Qumran and in *Mezadah*. See the references in C. Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, p. 430.

110 For the idea of the angels singing in one voice see G. Scholem, *op. cit.*, pp. 30, 129, to which, however, more material could be added.

111 A difference between those standing on the right and those standing on the left is in a way repeated in *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, §§ 219–224), but not in the same connection as in *The Ascension of Isaiah*.

112 In *Beraita de-Ma’aseh Bereshit* (ed. N. Séd, in: *Revue des Études Juives* CXXIV [1965], p. 58), the distance is given as 502 “years of walking”, which equals the total sum of the years which Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived. These were later on rounded out to become 500 “years of walking”. See next footnote.

113 See the material collected in my edition of *Re’uyot Yehezkel*, in *Temirin* I, pp. 121 ff.

Isaiah could be attested to be the first of its kind in Jewish apocalyptic and mystical tradition. When Isaiah, the visionary, ascends to the second heaven, he once again sees a throne with two groups of angels standing on its right and on its left. However, according to at least some of the manuscripts, the text can be understood to imply that somebody is seen sitting on the throne. Yet, it has been argued that the readings in the manuscripts could be a result of the misunderstanding of the copyist(s).¹¹⁴ The words of the *angelus interpretes* in 7, 21—"Worship neither throne nor angel which belong to the six heavens"—seem to imply that the throne did not remain unoccupied and that some kind of angelic being was envisaged as occupying it, which seems to defy the Jewish tradition that angels cannot fold their legs and, thus, cannot sit.¹¹⁵ In any event, the "one who sat on the throne" is again mentioned in the third heaven (7, 27), in the fourth heaven (7, 31) and in the fifth (7, 35). In the sixth heaven, however, "there are no longer angels on the left, nor a throne set in the midst" (7, 7).¹¹⁶

When Isaiah reached the seventh heaven, he heard a voice saying: "How far will he ascend that dwelleth in the flesh?" (9, 1). This question reflects the traditional theme of the angelic opposition to the ascent of humans to heaven.¹¹⁷ But another voice proclaims that "It is permitted to the holy Isaiah to ascend hither; for here is his garment" (9, 2). As it turned out, this was the voice of God,

114 Thus we find in 7, 21 that L² (in Charles' edition, p. 109) reads "*ut adorem eum*", while S (= the Slavonic version) implies "*adoravi eos*". The "eum" could refer to God who is in the seventh heaven, and not necessarily to the throne, or to the alleged being who is sitting thereon.

115 See *Bereshit Rabbā*, ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 738, and parallels. See further the discussion in *Temirin* I, p. 129. Only Metatron could enjoy the privilege of sitting, and this most probably because he had once been a human being (= Enoch). See Bav. *Ḥagigah* 15/a.

116 The special numinous quality of the sixth heaven reminds us of the special quality of the sixth palace as described in the Hekhalot literature.

117 In the case of *The Ascension of Isaiah*, the voice came from the angel who "is over the praising of the sixth heaven". See further J. Schulz, "Angelic Opposition to the Ascension of Moses and the Revelation of the Law", *Jewish Quarterly Review* LXI (1970/1971), pp. 282–307. Schulz rightly observed that "there appear to be two lines of thematic development, one in which the angels serve as guides for the ascending hero, the other in which they protest or try to prevent his ascension", (p. 288). In *Pesiktā Rabbati* (ed. Friedmann) p. 96/b, the opposing angels are referred to as "angels of destruction" (*Ma'akhei Ḥabbalah*), which obviously means that the author was disturbed by the idea that good angels could oppose the ascension of Moses to receive the Torah. See further P. Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975), pp. 128 ff. For the development of the term *Ma'akhei Ḥabbalah*, see in *Israel Oriental Studies* III (1973), p. 97. See further, *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13, where this type of angelic opposition is put into the mouth of Azazel!

who here and elsewhere in parallel cases sets out to protect the ascending hero from the wrath of the jealous angels (9, 5). First, in the seventh heaven, Isaiah saw Enoch and (all) those who were with him, “stripped of (their) robes of the flesh” (9, 9). They were, in fact, like angels, “in their robes of above” (*ibid.*).¹¹⁸ What makes Isaiah wonder is the fact that the righteous ones dwelling in heaven “have received these robes, but are not on (their) thrones nor in (their) crowns”.¹¹⁹

This is explained by the angel thus: “They do not receive the crowns and thrones of glory . . . until the Beloved descends in the form in which you will see Him descend” (9, 12). This part of the vision obviously indicates a Christian setting. It links, though, to a traditional Jewish theme, the wearing of diadems by the righteous ones in heaven.¹²⁰ We shall discuss this subject below in connection with the visions described in the Book of Revelation.

In fact, the description of the seventh heaven in *The Ascension of Isaiah* is saturated with Christian material. It is quite difficult to decide whether the Christian writer was aware of the Jewish sources he used or not. In any event, a few matters should be noticed in this part of the vision. Isaiah was transformed into an angel (9, 30).¹²¹ He could not see the Great Glory, but noticed that the righteous could (9, 37–38).¹²² Isaiah heard the celestial song of praise (9, 40 ff.).

118 These “garments of the upper world” could have two distinct functions: (a) They are the white garments of the righteous as described several times in Revelation (see mainly 4, 4), and in *Vita Adae et Evae* (Greek version), 40 (in: Tischendorf, *Apocalypses Apocryphae*, p. 21). In all these cases, they are eschatological garments; but we do have another type of heavenly garments. (b) There are also mystical garments. These garments most likely are to protect the mystical visionary from all kinds of dangers. This could be the meaning of God’s words in 9, 2. See further 2 *Enoch* 22, 3; *Pesiktā Rabbati*, ed. Friedmann, fol. 98/a (= Bav. *Shabbat* 88/b). It should also be noted that one of the liturgical poems of Amram Dare, a Samaritan poet of the fourth century, says of Moses’ ascension: “And the Good says: ‘Let my prophet be exalted. Let the prophet be great and let him be beautiful and let him grow and reach the heaven. Indeed he will be vested by me in a garment that no being is worthy to wear’”. English translation in: S. Leiter, “Worthiness, Acclamation, and Appointment: Some Rabbinic Terms”, *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, Vol. XLI–XLII (1973–1974), p. 156. Unfortunately, Leiter was not aware of the possible mystical connotations of this passage.

119 Compare Revelation 4, 4.

120 Bav. *Berakhot* 17/a.

121 This, as we have already seen, signifies a mystical transformation. Compare also the transformation of Enoch into Metatron in 3 *Enoch*.

122 Compare *Sifrā*, ed. Weiss, fol. 4/a–b. It should be noticed that some of the mss of the *Ascension of Isaiah* here read “Him” referring to the celestial figure of Jesus and not to God!

He saw the descent of the Messiah into the terrestrial world (10, 8 ff.).¹²³ Finally, Isaiah saw the Messiah ascending again through the heavens and reaching the seventh heaven. The terminology here comes quite close to the terminology used in some of the Gnostic texts from Nag Hammadi. Indeed, it may be asked whether the Christian part of the book was not recast in some Gnostic circles.

G

The Merkavah vision in Revelation (the *Apocalypse of John*) 4 is an interesting example of how Jewish Merkavah material was recast in the new Christian environment. It is generally believed that Revelation was composed by a certain John of Patmos (an island in the Aegean), who shows acquaintance with Jewish apocalyptic lore. Although the *Apocalypse* received its final shape some twenty years after the destruction of the Temple, its Merkavah material is typical of its Jewish counterpart before the destruction. There is no plurality of heavens in the book; this might mean that the book was primarily conceived, either in circles which had not adapted the idea, or by someone who had simply ignored what was becoming a central concept or characteristic in Jewish apocalyptic. In addition to that, it is believed that the *Apocalypse* is the only one of its kind that is not attributed to a biblical figure. This may be explained by the fact that the book purports to be a prophecy, which should be revealed to the community of the believers (1, 3; 22, 6 ff.). There are some discrepancies in the vision described in chapter 4 and they, in turn, could be explained by the rather eclectic nature of the material contained in the vision. As we shall see, the vision brings together several visionary traditions, and one may ask whether it describes a genuine experience or is a mere compilation of literary motifs. The question of the genuineness of the vision is quite a difficult one, and skeptics could find a great number of reasons to justify their doubts. Generally, though, discussions of this kind do not lead very far in any attempt to understand and evaluate the experience once it is cast as a literary document.

John, the apocalyptic visionary, introduces his first vision with the remark that he saw a "door opened in heaven". This expression may be reminiscent of the opening words used by Ezekiel to describe the beginning of his vision. However, since John does not literally repeat the words of Ezekiel "the heavens were opened" (Ezekiel 1, 1), we may infer that John used current technical

123 The description here comes very close to the description of the descent of the Savior at the opening pages of *Pistis Sophia*. Yet, it would be beyond the scope of the present discussion to compare in detail *The Ascension of Isaiah* and *Pistis Sophia*.

terminology. Indeed, the reader may remember that the Ethiopic text of *Ascensio Isaiae* 4, 9 says that Isaiah *heard*, not *saw*, a door being opened, and then his vision began.¹²⁴ The technical sense in which John's words, "a door opened in heaven", becomes evident when they are compared with another of John's introductory remarks in 19, 11. There John, like Ezekiel, says that he "saw the heaven opened". In this last case, as also in that of Ezekiel, no heavenly ascent is assumed, while the phrase "a door opened in heaven" usually assumes that such an ascent has occurred. The opening of the door in heaven in Revelation 4, 1, though, is not directly preceded or followed by John's ascension. He first heard the voice, which he had previously heard (1, 10), calling him "come up hither . . . At once I was in the Spirit."

In contradistinction to similar experiences in apocalyptic literature, the writer does not state how he actually arrived in heaven,¹²⁵ although his manner of imparting what happened to him may be in line with Paul's description in 2 Corinthians 12, 2–3.¹²⁶ Then John says that he saw that "a throne stood in heaven, and one seated on the throne" (4, 2). It is noteworthy that—unlike Ezekiel, Daniel and Enoch—John does not refer to the "one" seated on the throne in anthropomorphic terms. Instead, John says that "he who sat there appeared like jasper and carnelian" (4, 3). While Ezekiel (1, 27–28) refers to the appearance of fire in connection with the "one" seated on the throne, Daniel (7, 9) says that the "throne was fiery flames" and that God himself appeared to him

124 See also *Testament of Levi* 5, 1. In Yer. *Sanhedrin* 28/c (bottom) we hear of the secret opening, which God opened under His throne in order to receive the prayer of the repenting King Manasseh.—The cosmological concept of gates that mark the entrance to the upper world and mainly to the netherworld is, in fact, very old and almost universal. For ancient Greece see G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) pp. 10 ff. Scholars are often inclined to see the origin of certain Greek concepts and beliefs in the East and sometimes in Egypt. See the interesting text published in H. Frankfort and others, *Before Philosophy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1954), pp. 167 ff. The mystical implication of this cosmological concept, however, becomes evident only in such passages as Revelation 4, 1. See further S. Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997). Parpola offers a wide-ranging discussion of the presence of Assyrian religious ideas and practices in Jewish apocalyptic and mysticism.

125 See our discussion in chapter Five.

126 For the problems involved in the interpretation of this verse, see R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (*The International Critical Commentary*) Vol. I (Edinburgh, 1920), pp. 109–111. For the present study, the commentaries of W. Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannes* (reprint Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), and of H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1911; reprint Ann Arbor, Michigan: Cushing-Malloy, Inc., n.d.) have been consulted too.

as “ancient of days” and that “his raiment was white as snow and the hair of his head like pure wool”. Indeed, there are two traditions, so to speak, concerning the description of the appearance of God on His throne. The one, initiated by the vision of Ezekiel, stresses the appearance of fire, while the other refers to God in terms of an old man dressed in white. *1 Enoch* 14, 20 describes “the Great Glory” on the throne thus: “his gown shone, which was shining more brightly than the sun, was whiter than any snow”. Similarly, *1 Enoch* 71, 10 speaks of the “Antecedent of Time” in terms that are reminiscent of Daniel 7: “His head was white as pure wool, and his raiment indescribable”. In the Hekhalot literature, however, the fiery appearance of God is a key notion, and particular attention is given His gown, (Hebrew: *Haluq.*)¹²⁷

Before John continues describing the Throne of God, he says that he was struck by the vision of twenty-four elders who were sitting on twenty-four thrones. Scholars have expressed different opinions on the question of who these elders were and what they signified in this particular vision. Their number, twenty-four, was considered as pointing to the twenty-four divisions of priests as they were first enumerated in 1 Chronicles 24.¹²⁸ Indeed, their priestly, or levitical, function is further enhanced by the fact that they sing songs of praise (4, 10–11; 5, 9; 7:12; 11, 17; 19, 4) just as the levites were used to doing in the Temple-service; and the “kithara” which each of the elders held in his hands (5, 8) is reminiscent, again, of the traditional Temple-psalmody.¹²⁹ In addition, the golden bowls of incense, which they hold in their hands, are more than a clue to their priestly function.¹³⁰ The same can also be said concerning the white garments in which the elders are clad (4, 4).¹³¹ White garments are taken in the *Apocalypse of John* to signify the special status of those who believe in Jesus.¹³² The same kind of garments is also mentioned in connection with angels.¹³³ Indeed, the elders have an angelic function too: the incense, which they present before the Lamb (= Jesus) is considered “the [celestial] prayers of

127 G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 26–27; 58 ff.

128 Cf. W. Bousset, *op. cit.*, *ad locum*.

129 See H. B. Swete, *op. cit.*, *ad locum*. This could imply conditions conceivable after the destruction of the Temple. See further 10, 21–22. Cf. A. Büchler in *Zeitschrift für Alttestamentische Wissenschaft* XIX (1899), pp. 93–133; 329–344; XX (1900), pp. 97–135. We have discussed the notion of playing musical instruments during the heavenly liturgy in Chapter One.

130 Revelation 5, 8.

131 The holy linen-garments worn by the High Priest (Leviticus 16, 4) are called “garments of white” in Mishnah *Yomā* iii, 6. See also Ezekiel 44, 17.

132 Revelation 3, 4–5; 7, 13–17; 9, 8. Compare *Ecclesiastes* 9, 8.

133 *1 Enoch* 71, 1.

the saints" (5, 8).¹³⁴ As Charles has pointed out in his commentary (pp. 145–146), the idea of an angel, or archangel, offering the prayers of the People of Israel to God is found quite often in apocalyptic literature. In rabbinic literature, however, it is a more complicated issue. In three places in the Bab. Talmud, it is stated that Michael, the archangel (or, in Hebrew, *Sar Ha-Gadol*) is ministering before the altar.¹³⁵ In a different context, we hear that the angel Syndalphon ties crowns to the head of his Creator (Bav. *Hagigah* 13/b). S. Lieberman collected material, which shows that in several instances this singular tradition about Syndalphon was interpreted as meaning that the crowns are made of the prayers of the angels.¹³⁶ This particular interpretation of the Syndalphon tradition is very close to the idea of the elders in Revelation who offer incense composed of the prayers of the saints. It is, of course, quite difficult to say whether there exists any direct connection between the two ideas or whether what John says is derived only from parallel material found in apocalyptic literature (as collected by Charles). One thing seems to be clear: John here attributes to the elders an angelic function and this apart from their levitical and priestly functions discussed above. Although it may be explained partly by the kind of Christian-priestly theology developed in the Letter to the Hebrews, the fusion of these three functions is nonetheless highly peculiar. This may again be related to the suggestion made before, namely, that John's manner of writing (and eventually his visionary imagination) is of a highly eclectic nature.

134 Charles, *op. cit.*, *ad locum* (p. 400, footnote 3), considers this phrase to be a gloss, but his reasons for doing so, as expounded in his commentary, are not conclusive.

135 Bav. *Menaḥot* 110/a; *Zevaḥim* 62/a; *Hagigah* 12/b. See Scholem, *op. cit.*, pp. 47 ff. Scholem also discusses there the relationship between the traditions about Michael and Metatron. See further I. Gruenwald, *Re'uyot Yehezkel*, p. 128–129.

136 S. Lieberman, *Shki'in* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1939), p. 13 f. As for the crowns which the elders put before the throne (Revelation 4, 10) compare 3 *Enoch* 18. It must be noticed that in *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, § 170) the Angel (of the Divine) Countenance (= *Mal'akh Ha-Panim*) ties crowns to the Living Creatures. In *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, § 217), and elsewhere, God is called the Lord of the Crowns (= *Adon Ha-Ketarim*). According to the Sepharadic (East European) Prayer Book, the *Musaf-Qedushah* of Shabbat and Festivals opens with the words: "A Crown will be offered to you by the multitude of the angels on high together with your people gathered below". J. N. Epstein in: *Revue des Études Juives* LXXIII (1921), p. 33, drew the attention to the magical implication of the Hebrew term *qashar*. This may apply to what is said about Syndalphon in Bav. *Hagigah* 13/b: "He (= Syndalphon) says (a magical) name and the crown of its own goes up and places itself on the head of God". See also *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, § 98), where the Living Creatures are called 'those who bind crowns' (= *Qoshrei Ketarim*).

An additional word must be said about the crowns of gold, which the elders were wearing on their heads. The closest Jewish parallel to this element of the vision is Rav's saying about the eschatological reward of the righteous ones: They are sitting before God with diadems (*Atarot*) on their heads (Bav. *Berakhot* 17/a). The eschatological context of this saying of Rav is very similar to the vision of the elders in Revelation. It is also noteworthy that in both sources the people are seen sitting. We know that according to one tradition, Elish'a ben 'Avuya saw Metatron sitting. (Bav. *Hagigah* 15/a; *Sefer Hekhalot* [3 *Enoch*] chapter 14). Knowing that nobody is allowed to sit in heaven, Elish'a ben 'Avuya reached the conclusion that there must be two powers in heaven.¹³⁷ Furthermore, it is said about the angels that they cannot fold their legs into a sitting position.¹³⁸ The elders (πρεσβύτεροι) are here described sitting in the presence of God. This is a privilege that angels do not have.¹³⁹ In a different context, we hear that "In the days to come, God will sit (in judgment) and the angels will offer thrones to the illustrious ones among the People of Israel and they will be sitting, and God, the president of the court, with them, in judgment on the nations of the world".¹⁴⁰ It must, however, be remarked that the elders in Revelation have no judiciary function¹⁴¹ and that what is said about their doxologies is similar to what several sages say about the future heavenly banquet presided over by God and in which the righteous say words of praise to Him.¹⁴² Although the frequent doxologies recited by the elders in Revelation may be associated with the Merkavah hymns of the Hekhalot literature, they still lack the lyrical pathos of those hymns. On the other hand, the Merkavah

137 We shall come back to this point in our discussion of 3 *Enoch*.

138 *Bereshit Rabbā*, p. 738: "... there is no sitting in heaven ... they have no joints". Yer. *Berakhot* 2/c: "The angels have no joints". Both sayings are introduced by Rabbi Ḥaninah b. Andrei in the name of Rabbi Shemuel b. Sitir (or Sotr). Rabbi Ḥaninah could be the same Rabbi Ḥaninah who is quoted as saying that the names of the angels are of Babylonian origin: *Bereshit Rabba*, p. 485. If so, he most probably belongs to the Palestinian Amoraim of the third century.—In *Wayyikra Rabbah*, (ed. Margalioth) p. 135, Rabbi Shemuel bar Naḥman is quoted as saying that "the angels of destruction (*Mal'akhei Ḥabbalah*) have no joints". See also *Temirin* I, p. 129, footnote 115.

139 See also the quotation from Qaraite sources in S. Lieberman, *op. cit.*, p. 14 (bottom).

140 *Tanḥumā ad Leviticus*, ed. Buber, p. 72. The Midrash is an attempt to explain the plurality of thrones mentioned in Daniel 7, 9.

141 However, compare the scene described in 1 *Enoch* 60, 2.

142 Yer. *Megilah* 73b. See S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), p. 15/6; W. C. van Unnik, "A Note on the Dance of Jesus in the *Acts of John*", *Vigiliae Christianae* XVIII (1964), pp. 1–5.

hymns serve many purposes,¹⁴³ but they definitely lack the eschatological and messianic tones of the doxologies in the Book of Revelation.

Particularly interesting is John's description of the Divine Throne. Although there are many peculiar items in this description, we shall concentrate here on two of them. It is said, firstly, that the four Living Creatures are "[a] in the midst of the throne and [b] round about the throne". The two phrases are generally considered to be self-contradictory, and, hence, it was argued that the first one—"in the midst of the throne"—is an interpolation. Logically speaking, this phrase really causes difficulties, yet some kind of solution may be found in Rabbi 'Akiva's saying in *Sifrā* about the throne and the Living Creatures. In a passage dealing with the question of who may see God and under what circumstances, it is said (according to the correct reading of MS. Vatican 66, fol. 9/a): "Even the Living Creatures who are carried in the Merkavah cannot see the Divine Glory". Although Ezekiel clearly says that the Living Creatures carry the firmament over their heads, and it is on this firmament that the Throne of God is placed (Ezekiel 1, 22 ff.), the Midrash conceives of the Creatures as being on the same plane as the firmament and as being carried by the Merkavah. Exactly the same concept is found in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, Chapter iii. The discussion in Bav. *Ḥagigah* about the seven heavens and what they contain mentions that the Creatures are placed in the seventh heaven together with the Divine Throne. Only after Bav. *Ḥagigah* referred to Ezekiel 1, 22 in a manner questioning this description, was the tradition of an eighth heaven introduced.¹⁴⁴

In addition, it is said in Revelation 4 that the four Living Creatures, which were seen by John were like a lion, an ox,¹⁴⁵ a man, and a flying eagle. These are the same creatures as those mentioned by Ezekiel, though the latter introduced them in a different order: man, lion, calf, and eagle.¹⁴⁶ While Ezekiel stresses the fact that each of the creatures had four faces, nothing explicit is said in

143 See A. Altmann, in: *Melilah* II (1964) [in Hebrew], pp. 1 ff.

144 See also *Hekhalot Rabbati*, iii. For discussions of the traditions about the existence of eight, and not seven, heavens see G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 65 ff.; I. Gruenwald, in *Temirin* I, pp. 116 ff.; *idem*, in *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Jerusalem, 1977, pp. 52 ff.

145 The distinction made in Bav. *Ḥagigah* 13/b between the ox (Ezekiel 1, 10) and the *Keruv* (Cherub) in Ezekiel 10, 14 is midrashic but rather questionable from a philological point of view. Though the exact etymology of the word *keruv* is not quite clear, there are good reasons to relate it to an ox. See *Encyclopedia Biblica* [in Hebrew], vol. IV, coll. 238 ff. In post-biblical Merkavah literature, the ox was frequently changed into a calf. See further, S. Lieberman, in Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 122/3.

146 The order of appearance of these creatures seemingly did not bother Ezekiel himself. At least there is a change in their order between chapters 1 and 10. In Bav. *Ḥagigah* 13/b, the

Revelation about the fourfold structure of the Creatures' faces.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, while Ezekiel says that each of the Creatures had four wings, John describes them as having six wings, the number of the wings of the Serafim in Isaiah 6.¹⁴⁸ Again this blending together of motifs may be proof of the eclectic qualities of our visionary, particularly so since John hears the Creatures sing the "Sanctus" in Isaiah 6.

H

Naturally, not every apocalyptic vision, which contains Merkavah material, can be included in our discussion. The choice fell upon the main texts and upon those visions that are most clearly of Jewish origin. There is still relevant material to be found in such books as the *Testament of Levi*¹⁴⁹ and *3 Baruch*,¹⁵⁰ yet the Merkavah materials contained therein do not warrant discussion here. However extensive our discussion of the Merkavah material found in Jewish apocalyptic might be, it should be noticed that a number of important philological problems had to be left unsolved. The reason for this is that almost none of these texts is preserved in its original language of composition. Presumably, many changes have been introduced into the texts in the course of

order is: lion, calf, eagle, man; and in *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, § 273) the order is: man, calf, lion, eagle. In the *Apocalypse of Abraham* 18 the order is: lion, man, calf, eagle.

¹⁴⁷ See above footnote 94.

¹⁴⁸ For an attempt to harmonize between the number of the wings of the Seraphim in Isaiah 6 and the number of the wings of the Creatures in the Book of Ezekiel see Bav. *Ḥagigah* 13/b.

¹⁴⁹ The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* are a famous case of the debate concerning Jewish or Christian origins. It is here assumed that the *Testaments* are of Jewish origin, although they include obvious Christian interpolations. In the case of the *Testament of Levi*, the Merkavah material can be briefly summarized thus: Levi describes his ascent to the third heaven where the angels showed him "the holy Temple and upon a throne the glory of the Most High" (5, 1). In that Temple, Levi is ordained for his priestly offices. Yet, before this, in the first two heavens, Levi saw the places where every act of unrighteousness and iniquity is punished.

¹⁵⁰ *3 Baruch*, or the Greek Book of Baruch, contains the description of an ascent to five heavens. It is full of allegorical visions and one may, therefore, assume that in spite of its clear mythological and pagan overtones, the vision of the sun in the third heaven (6, 1–2) is an allegorical Merkavah vision. However, compare the magical practices in connection with the desire to "see the sun at daytime sitting in the Merkavah and rising", in *Sefer Ha-Razim*, pp. 97 ff. It should be noted that *3 Baruch* is unique in having a door at the entrance of each heaven. See Psalms 78, 23.

their respective translations. Some of the texts may have undergone multiple series of translations. Thus, they suffered from the hands of interpolators, who used the opportunity to introduce Christian *theologumena* into them. Room must likewise be left for the supposition that some Jewish *theologumena* were dropped by those interpolators or translators. However, it is reasonable to argue that the Merkavah sections were less affected by these processes than the rest of the material, particularly because the Church adapted Jewish angelology and the related subjects almost *en bloc*. Thus, we find in one of the first and most important Christian apocalypses, the *Apocalypse of Paul*, to which we shall immediately turn, a statement to the effect that the celestial song is recited in Hebrew!

In fact, the *Apocalypse of Paul*, in spite of its Christian origin, leans heavily on Jewish materials. The Apocalypse describes, among other things, two visions of Paradise, and it is particularly here that the Jewish material most clearly comes to the fore. In chapter 30, the visionary asks the guiding angel, “What is Alleluia?”¹⁵¹ The angel replies that, “Alleluia is spoken in Hebrew, that is, the speech of God and of the angels”. Notwithstanding the controversy found in rabbinical literature as to whether the Torah was given in “Assyrian” (that is, the common Hebrew letters) or in the old “Canaanite” script,¹⁵² it is quite evident from a number of sources, that Hebrew is the language of God.¹⁵³ The angel’s reply mentions Hebrew as the language of the angels, too. There are parallel statements in the rabbinical writings, notably Rabbi Yohanan’s saying

151 Thus according to the English translation of M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 527 ff. The Greek text, however, has here: λέγεται Ἑβραϊστί θεβελ μαρηματά, λαλιά τῷ θεῷ τῷ θεμελιοντι τὰ πάντα... The sentence is not very clear, particularly the words θεβελ μαρηματα. On first sight the Greek θεβελ seems to be a transcription of the Hebrew *Thevel* = ‘world’. The phrase, though, remains unclear. Professor S. Liebermann suggested to me to interpret θεβελ as a corrupt rendering of the Aramaic *Ṭav El* = ‘God is blessed’ or ‘the good God’. As for μαρηματα, Professor Liebermann suggested to view it as a corrupt rendering for the Aramaic *Maranā atā* = ‘our Lord will come’. The Syrian version of the *Apocalypse of Paul* here reads: “Hallelujah in the language of the Hebrews means: Praise the Lord. Praise God, who was the first of all. Unto him do the angels, without ceasing, raise Hallelujah, and praise him who sent us salvation and created for us all things” (English translation in Tischendorf, *Apocalypses Apocryphae*, p. 56).

152 See Yer. *Megilah* 71/b–c, and parallels.

153 See *Jubilees* 12, 25–26: “‘Open his (= Abraham’s) mouth and his ears that he may hear and speak with his mouth, with the language which has been revealed... and I (= Abraham) began to speak with him in Hebrew in the tongue of the creation”. For further references, see L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. V (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), p. 205/6.

that “He who prays for the fulfillment of his needs in Aramaic, the ministering angels do not come to his help, since the ministering angels do not understand Aramaic”.¹⁵⁴ Elsewhere it is explicitly said that the ministering angels speak Hebrew.¹⁵⁵ Such sayings regarding the language which the angels speak and understand, could have polemical functions, since we know that particularly within those circles which practiced magic, angels were conjured in Greek¹⁵⁶, in Aramaic, and in other “languages”.¹⁵⁷

In addition, the guiding angel also has something to say about the way the angelic song is recited:¹⁵⁸ “[I]f any sing Alleluia, and they that are present sing not with him, they commit a sin in that they do not sing together with him”. This passage resembles, though not exactly, the one found at the end of *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, § 306) in which the angels sing “in perfect unison, in one voice . . . and there is no one who precedes his fellow or follows him in the recital of the song. And he who delays his voice in the spelling out of your name even at a hair’s breadth is turned out and burning fire devours him”.¹⁵⁹

In chapter 44 of the Apocalypse, Paul, the visionary, experiences another vision of the Merkavah: “I beheld and saw the heaven shake like a tree that is moved by the wind: and suddenly they¹⁶⁰ cast themselves down upon their faces before the throne: and I saw the four and twenty elders and the four beasts worshipping God”. This part of the vision most obviously depends on the vision of Revelation 4, particularly so since the twenty-four elders are mentioned in both cases. The second part of the vision, however, is even more

154 Bav. *Shabbat* 12/b; Sotah 33/a.

155 Bav. *Ḥagigah* 16/a: “*mesaprin bilshon ha-qodesh*.” See also *Wayyikra Rabbah* (ed. Margalioth), p. 28.

156 Particularly interesting in this respect are the Greek prayers—in Hebrew transcription!—in *Sefer Ha-Razim*, pp. 80, 99. See also *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, § 233), and J. H. Levi, *Studies in Jewish Hellenism* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1960) [in Hebrew], pp. 259 ff.

157 See, for instance, the text published in Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 111 (paragraph 20). See also J. A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1913). See B. Levine, “The Language of the Magical Bowls”, an appendix to J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, vol. V, pp. 343–375.

158 In the additions to *Tanhumā* from ms Oxford 183 S. Buber published a passage, which refers to the *Takhsisei Ha-Shir*, that is, the “orders” (τάξεις) of the angelic song”. See Buber’s “Introduction”, pp. 126–127.

159 See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 29–30, 129. See also *Apocalypse of Paul* 43 (end): “And they, when they heard these words cried out and wept sore, and all said *with one voice*: Have mercy upon us, O Son of God”.

160 It seems that the angels are implied, though the “they” in text here generally signify those “which say that Christ rose not from the dead, and that his flesh riseth not again.”

interesting because of the new material that it contains: “and I saw the altar and the veil and the throne and all of them were rejoicing, and the smoke of a sweet odor rose up beside the altar of the throne of God”. The altar and the veil make it evident that the heavenly Temple is meant. What, however, is the throne of God doing in the heavenly Temple? It may be argued that the visionary here links himself to the vision described in Isaiah 6, 1, where God is seen sitting on His throne *in* the Temple. Yet, there are here some peculiar details of the vision not mentioned in the Book of Isaiah: The altar and the veil are not referred to in the Book of Isaiah, though their existence there may be inferred from the context. However, apart from Isaiah 6, a Temple is nowhere mentioned in any Merkavah vision.¹⁶¹ On the contrary, in the list of the seven heavens and what is contained therein as described in Bav. *Ḥagigah* 12/b, the heavenly Temple is said to be in the fourth heaven, *Zevul*. There it is said, too, that Michael, the archangel, offers sacrifices on the altar found therein.¹⁶² In *Re’uyot Yehezkel*, the heavenly Temple is said to be located in the fifth heaven, *Sheḥaqim*.¹⁶³ In any event, no Temple is mentioned in the seventh heaven in which the Throne is placed. Thus, it seems that, both in Revelation and in the *Apocalypse of Paul*, the visionaries or the writers brought together inconsistent literary elements, which were not found in this manner in other Merkavah visions. This may be explained by the fact that, once “ecstatic” apocalyptic declined, an allegedly new type of apocalyptic arose. In this new type of apocalyptic, mere “literary” motifs were blended together. A full discussion of this new type of apocalyptic, however, is not within the scope of the present study.

161 In *Testament of Levi* 5, 1, however, a Temple and a divine Throne are mentioned in the third heaven.

162 These sacrifices are generally explained to be the souls of the righteous. See also Bav. *Menaḥot* 110/a, *Zevahim* 62/a. In the *Apocalypse of Paul* only “the smoke of a sweet odor” is mentioned, but it is not said who offers the incense. See further Revelation 5, 8 and Charles’s commentary *ad locum*.

163 See the discussion of this matter in the Part Two of this book.

The Attitude Towards the Merkavah Speculations in the Literature of the *Tannaim* and *Amoraim*

A

In the previous chapter, we discussed the Merkavah material in apocalyptic literature. We now turn to the attitude towards the Merkavah materials in the literature of the Tannaim and Amoraim. However, before doing so, it should be remarked that, in considering the mysticism of the period, it would be wrong to restrict ourselves only to Merkavah mysticism.

There are several utterances in rabbinical literature, which refer to the Godhead in quite unusual terms. Consequently, one may ask whether they entail a kind of mysticism that is not directly related to the Merkavah tradition.¹ These utterances, few as they are, are highly important and, despite the fact that they are sometimes far from clear, they reveal traces of a concept of God that shows mystical affiliations.² In addition, several passages in the writings of

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- 1 There are not many examples, which reflect this kind of apparently non-Merkavah mysticism, but a discussion of them all requires a study in itself. Two examples from the *Mechiltā d'Rabbi Ismael* (ed. Horovitz-Rabin) may give the reader a clear idea of what could be meant by this non-Merkavah mysticism. Regarding the words "And all the people were seeing the sounds" (Exodus 20, 18) Rabbi 'Akiva is quoted as having said, "Seeing and hearing that which is given to sight; they saw a word (Hebrew: *dibber*) of fire coming out of the mouth of the *Gevurah* (= *dynamis*) and being hewed on the Tables" (p. 235). For a discussion of this saying and its parallels in rabbinic literature, see my comments in *Revue des Études Juives* CXXXII (1973), pp. 501 ff. The other example from the same Midrash concerns the words "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb" (Exodus 17, 6; rsv). The *Mechilta d'R. Ismael* says "God told him (= Moses), wherever you find a place with the imprint of a man's foot, there I am in front of you!" (p. 175). See, however, Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 129, who, wrongly it appears, suggests that this version of the saying in *Mechiltā d'Rabbi Ismael* is secondary to the one found in *Mekhilta de-R. Shimon ben Yoḥai*, which contains a gloss referring to Ezekiel 1, 26. See further the Targum Yerushalmi to Exodus 17, 6.
 - 2 In this respect, the various sayings, which refer to God in terms of place, are of relevance for our discussion. See the extensive discussion of Urbach, *The Sages*, pp. 66–79. See further the various sayings about the *Shekhinah* and the space it metaphorically occupies, *Pesiktā de-Rav Kahanā* (ed. Mandelbaum), pp. 1–8. Some of the sayings there are of great importance and need detailed explication.

Philo have been taken as evidence of a Jewish Hellenistic mystery-mysticism.³ Considering the discussion in the previous chapter, one may speak of a variety of mystical tendencies in the Judaism of post-biblical era and in the time of the Mishnah and Talmud. The existence of these tendencies and their essence has not always been admitted without controversy.⁴

We shall now turn to that literature and to the views expressed by some scholars regarding the mystical utterances found therein. Yet, before doing so, I think that it can be shown that mystical components are present in the Judaism of post-biblical times up to the present day. In spite of the inclination to view Judaism as essentially unfolding in Halakhic domains, it does consist of predominant features that show a persistent inclination to unfold in mystical domains. Merkavah mysticism, including the Hekhalot literature, played an indelible role in this respect, particularly in the area of liturgical expression. Later developments and ramifications of mysticism in Kabbalah need not to be outlined in the present context.

The technical terms that designate the mystical traditions of the Jews during the Talmudic period are *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (= the work of the divine chariot) and *Ma'aseh Bereshit* (= the work of the creation of the world). Both terms occur for the first time in Mishnah *Ḥagigah* 2, 1 (= Tosefta *Ḥagigah* 2, 1). The term *Merkavah*, however, was used with reference to the visions of Ezekiel (although not by Ezekiel himself) in *Ben Sira* 49, 8. The Hebrew text there reads “*Z'nei Merkavah*” while the Greek has “ἄρματος χερουβιν”. The sense of the Greek is clear, meaning “the chariot of [the] cherubim”. However, the Hebrew, *z'nei*, probably follows the Syriac *genasa*, and means “the kinds” of the chariot, which is a little vague.⁵ The term *Merkavah* is found in the angelic liturgy of Qumran mentioned in previous chapters. The term *Merkavah* is also used in Mishnah *Megilah* iv, 10 and applied there to chapter 1 (and possibly also chapters 8 and 10) of the Book of Ezekiel. Finally, the mystics of the time of the

3 See especially, E. R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (Reprint: Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1969). Goodenough's thesis has been subject of stimulating discussions. Attention to this matter has been given in Chapter One.

4 See I. Gruenwald, “Methodological Problems in Researching Rabbinic Mysticism,” in: I. Gafni, A. Oppenheimer, and M. Stern (eds.), *Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple, Mishnah and Talmudic Period: Studies in Honor of Shemuel Safrai* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1993), pp. 297–315.

5 For the suggestion that Ezekiel 1 originally contained yet another—now lost—vision, see Sh. Spiegel, in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LIV (1935), p. 168. However, see Rashi to Ezekiel 1, 9. For the term *Minei Ha-Kavod* (= the kinds of the Glory) see *Midrash Ha-Gadol* to Genesis 17:22 (and parallels).

Talmud are called *Yoredei Merkavah*, that is, those who *descend*, so-to-speak, into the mystical vision of the divine chariot.⁶

The central utterance in rabbinic literature with regard to the speculation of the Merkavah is to be found in Mishnah *Ḥagigah* ii, 1: "It is forbidden to discourse . . . on the Creation of the World in the presence of two, and on the Merkavah in the presence of one, unless he is wise and able to understand of himself".⁷ The ensuing discussion in Bav. *Ḥagigah* 11/b, and the text of the Mishnah as it is explicated in Tosefta *Ḥagigah* 2, 1, make clear that the meaning of the Mishnah is that "it is forbidden to discourse on the Creation of the World with two (attending students), or on the *Merkavah* with one, unless he is wise and able to understand of himself". The technical details as to how this particular kind of discourse on the matters of the Merkavah was conducted in Tannaitic circles is exemplified in a much-discussed story about Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai and his disciple Rabbi El'azar ben 'Arakh recorded in Tosefta *Ḥagigah* 2,1 and in two major parallel versions in Yer. *Ḥagigah* 77/a and Bav. *Ḥagigah* 14/b.

The story tells of Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai who was travelling on a donkey while his disciple El'azar ben 'Arakh was walking behind. At a certain point on their way, the student requested that his master teach him "a chapter in the Work of the Divine Chariot." The master, however, was reluctant to fulfill the student's request and said: "Did I not teach you that one should not discourse on the Merkavah with a single (student) unless he is wise and able to understand of himself." Rabbi El'azar promptly grasped what his master had implied and, as the version found in Yer. *Ḥagigah* explicitly says, asked for permission to hold a discourse himself before his Rabbi. This was to convince the master of the abilities of his pupil before the former revealed his knowledge. Soon, Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai descended from the donkey, put on his *Tallit*, as the custom was in many religious and legal practices,⁸ and both men sat down on a stone in the shade of an olive tree. After Rabbi El'azar ben 'Arakh had finished his discourse, Rabban Yoḥanan stood up and kissed him on his head and blessed him for "knowing how to understand and to discourse in matters

6 Cf. the bibliography listed in G. Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), pp. 204–206 and 459. For the earliest recorded occurrence of the term 'Merkavah' in a context relevant for our discussion, see 1 Chronicles 28, 18.

7 For the text of the Mishnah see Y. N. Epstein, *Mavo LeNusah HaMishnah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1964), p. 115; *Idem*, *Mevo'ot LeSifrut HaTannaim* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1957), p. 48. See D. J. Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980).

8 Compare Tosefta *Pisha* ii, 16 (ed. Lieberman, p. 147 f.).

pertaining to the Glory (*Kavod*) of his Father in Heaven.” In addition, Rabban Yoḥanan praised his student for being one “who discourses well and performs well”.

Now, this last sentence has been considered to be out of place.⁹ However, in this particular context it can mean that Rabbi El’azar ben ‘Arakh was not only able to discourse correctly but that he also knew, as the first part of the story so clearly shows, how to apply the discourse on the Merkavah to his own experience.¹⁰ Indeed, the parallel versions of this story about Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi El’azar ben ‘Arakh in both Talmuds contain the description of a mystical experience that took place while Rabbi El’azar was discoursing before his master. We shall come back to this experience only after making some additional comments regarding the story as it is told in the *Toseftā*.

The terminology used in this story clearly indicates that the *Ma’aseh Merkavah* speculations in Tannaitic circles were primarily of a midrashic nature. Such terms as *Darash* (discourse), *Shanah* (teach), *Pereq* (a chapter), clearly show that no substantial difference existed between the way the Scriptural Merkavah material was studied and the way other biblical passages were handled in rabbinic circles.¹¹ Yet, there was a major difference between the two, namely, in the number of those allowed to participate in the study.

9 See E. E. Urbach, “The Traditions about the Merkabah Mysticism in the Tannaitic Period,” *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem on his Seventieth Birthday* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), Hebrew Section, p. 3.

10 This notwithstanding the fact (recorded in Bav. *Ḥagigah* 14/b) that later in his life Rabbi El’azar ben ‘Arakh fell out of grace in the eyes of his colleagues, and Rabbi Yehoshu’a was then considered to be Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai’s senior student in the matters of the Merkavah. Here he is said to be one of those who discoursed before their master but before whom nobody later on discoursed. On the grounds of several Tannaitic sources (*Kohelet Rabbā* vii,1, 7; *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, Version A, ch. xiv, and Version B, ch. xxix (ed. Schechter, p. 58/9); and Bav. *Shabbat* 147/b), it appears that Rabbi El’azar ben ‘Arakh either did not follow his master to Yavneh or else soon left that place. Rabbi El’azar is reported to have followed his wife to Emmaus, where he forgot all that he had learned. The tragic end of Rabbi El’azar was often discussed by scholars. See, J. Neusner, *A Life of Yoḥanan ben Zakkai* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), p. 249. The change in the attitude of the sages towards Rabbi El’azar ben ‘Arakh is best reflected in Mishnah *‘Avot* Chapter Two, where Rabbi El’azar is still considered Rabban Yoḥanan’s favorite student, while a preceding statement considers Rabbi Eli’ezer ben Horqenos as the most deserving of Rabban Yoḥanan’s students. Nonetheless, Abba Shaul still tried to insist on the priority of Rabbi El’azar ben ‘Arakh.

11 See my article “Yannai and the Hekhalot Literature” [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* XXXVI (1967), p. 258/9. We shall later on come back to the “midrashic” terminology found in the Hekhalot literature itself.

Otherwise, the technical procedure of the study seems to be the customary one in both cases.¹² Moreover, Bav. *Ḥagigah* 13/a raises the question, "Which verses (in the first chapter of Ezekiel) correspond to the *Ma'aseh Merkavah*?" Two answers are given to the question. They vary from verse 28 (according to Rabbi Yehuda Ha-Nasi) to the word *Ha-Ḥashmal* (according to Rabbi Yizḥak who most likely refers to v. 27).¹³ Thereafter, several suggestions are made as to how the material in its various parts should be studied: According to one view, till the word "*wa-'ere*" (Ezekiel 1, 4) one may teach in the regular manner, while from that word onwards only *Rashey Peraqim*¹⁴ should be taught. According to another view in the Gemara, until the word "*wa-'ere*" one may teach *Rashey Peraqim* while the rest could be taught only when the student is "wise and

12 One should keep in mind the fact that, in the case of the midrashic discourse of the Merkavah lore, the student, and not the master, is expected to begin the discourse. As we are going to see, even this procedure was later on reversed.

13 The Hebrew text here reads *Ḥashmal* (without the definite article). Doubtless, the word *Ha-Ḥashmal* (with the definite article) in verse 4 could not be meant here. It limits the scope of the prophet's visionary experience. The word *Ḥashmal* itself had an interesting role in the rabbinic Merkavah speculations. First, we hear of two cases in which young and inexperienced students discoursed on the word *Ḥashmal* and a fire came out and devoured them (Bav. *Ḥagigah* 13/a). Then, we also know that the *Ḥashmal* occupied a special chapter in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* speculations; see *Midrash Mishlei* x. See also E. E. Urbach, *art. cit.* (above footnote 9), p. 26. In addition, the word *Ḥashmal* is interpreted in Bav. *Ḥagigah* 13/a–b as indicating alternate modes of the angelic song. Angelic beings called *Ḥashmalim* are quite frequent in Jewish liturgical poetry. In the "*Hekhalot Fragments*" published in *Tarbiz* XXXVIII (1969), p. 370.1.48 we find: "And the *Ḥashmal* is singing before you". Finally, *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, § 258) contains an inserted section which reports the perils that might befall the unworthy mystic at the gate of the sixth palace. Since at that stage of the text *Hekhalot Rabbati* is already discussing matters that pertain to the seventh palace, this section is clearly misplaced. It begins with a quotation from Ezekiel 1, 27—"wa'ere ke'e'in *Ḥashmal*"—and may constitute an independent Merkavah-midrash. In some of the mss. of the *Hekhalot* literature this section is quoted separately (*Synopse*, § 258) and not in this place in *Hekhalot Rabbati*. It should also be noticed that in no other case in *Hekhalot Rabbati* are any of the sections introduced by a quotation of a scriptural phrase.

14 For a definition of the term, see Yer. *Megilah* 72/a. It appears that *Rashei Peraqim* are the first verses of a biblical ["open" or "closed"] section in the biblical text. See also G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 25 footnote 14; Sh. Spiegel, in *Journal of Biblical Literature* LIV (1935), p. 166, footnote 7; S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Kiṭṣutah: Shabbat*, p. 104. In the angelic liturgy from Qumran (Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath*, p. 209, l. 31) one finds the term *Rashei Tushbaḥot*, which could well correspond to the *Rosh Shirot* found in *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 94, but may also indicate a class of angels.

able to understand of himself".¹⁵ All these, as well as some additional elements which we shall presently discuss, clearly testify to the midrashic character of the Merkavah study in Tannaitic and Amoraic circles. Thus, the principal meaning of *Ma'aseh Merkavah* in these circles was a midrashic explication of the text of the first chapter in the Book of Ezekiel. Later on in our discussion, we shall address the question whether any mystical experiences were involved in that study or not.

As for the terminology used in the story about Rabban Yoḥanan and Rabbi El'azar, it would be best to begin our discussion with the term *pereq* (a pericope). As W. Bacher indicated, in Tannaitic literature, the term *pereq* designated a section of the oral law,¹⁶ while in Amoraic usage, it also referred to the chapters of the *Mishnah*.¹⁷ Generally, a *pereq* may equal a pericope of midrashic exposition, that is, a passage in which a biblical section is explicated word by word in a midrashic mode. When Rabbi El'azar ben 'Arakh asked Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai to teach him one chapter of the *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, he most probably meant that Rabban Yoḥanan should quote any of the biblical phrases found in Ezekiel 1 and offer his own midrashic interpretation to it. Rabban Yoḥanan refused, and as we have seen, Rabbi El'azar ben 'Arakh "opened and discoursed",¹⁸ that is, he cited a biblical phrase and interpreted it accordingly. We do not know what the student discoursed before his master, but we know what his discourse was believed to have brought about. To this part of the story, however, we shall turn later.

In the time of the Amoraim, the term *pereq* was used in a new combination: *Rashey Peraqim*. Rabbi Ḥiyya is quoted in Bav. *Ḥagigah* 13/a as allowing a single student wishing to study the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* to "deliver *Rashey Peraqim*". From the way Rabbi Ḥiyya's words are introduced after the quotation from the *Mishnah*, "and not (in the matters of the) *Merkavah* to a single (student)", it appears that Rabbi Ḥiyya intended to relax the ruling of the *Mishnah*. He says, "But one may deliver to him *Rashey Peraqim*". This phrase most likely means that the teacher could refer the student to the opening phrases from Scripture upon which the student was allowed to introduce his own exposition. In giving the student the specific biblical reference, the master already asserts a great deal, particularly in stimulating the topic and direction of the student's

15 See, Bav. *Ḥagigah* 13/a.

16 W. Bacher, *Die Exegetische Terminologie der Jüdischen Traditionsliteratur*, Leipzig, 1899, Erster Teil: "Die Bibelexegetische Terminologie der Tannaiten," p. 154.

17 *Ibid.* Zweiter (Schluss-) Teil: "Die Bibel- und Traditionsexegetische Terminologie der Amoräer," p. 163 f.

18 For the technical use of *PATAH* see *ibid.*, Erster Teil, p. 162/3; Zweiter Teil, pp. 174 ff.

discourse. However, Rabbi Zeyra (the first, who came from Babylonia) did not agree to this procedure and said, "One should deliver *Rashey Peraqim* only to the head of the study house (*Beyt Din*) and to him who sincerely worries".¹⁹ In both cases, what seems to be almost certain is that more toleration towards the procedure of the study of the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* was shown in certain Amoraic circles than among their Tannaitic predecessors.²⁰

A similar change in the attitude of the Rabbis towards the Merkavah material can also be derived from the story told about Rabbi Yoḥanan and Rabbi El'azar (both Palestinian Amoraim of the third century C.E.).²¹ Rabbi Yoḥanan offers to instruct Rabbi El'azar in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (Bav. *Ḥagigah* 13/a). Rabbi El'azar declines the offer, saying that he is not old enough for that kind of study. No details are given here as to what the proper age for the study of the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* was. It is hardly conceivable that the subjective feeling of the candidate could be accepted in that matter.²² When Rabbi El'azar reached the right age, Rabbi Yoḥanan had died. Therefore, Rabbi Assi came forward with a similar offer to Rabbi El'azar. Obviously, all this runs counter to the ruling of the *Mishnah* and, consequently, the Gemārā finds it necessary to state that Rav Yoseph refused to teach the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* to the Elders of Pumbedita, even in exchange for their teaching him the *Ma'aseh Bereshit*. It should be noticed that Rav Yoseph lived in Babylonia, while the other Amoraim mentioned in the Gemārā lived in Eretz Yisrael. Thus, one may argue that there

19 The Gemārā here adds a comment that there were some who said that the words "he who sincerely worries" refer to the head of the study house. Heads of Yeshivot were later on, in Ge'onic times, considered recipients of esoteric knowledge. See *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eli'ezer*, ch. viii, in comparison with Bav. *Qidushin* 71/a.

20 Here the writer agrees with Urbach's contention, *art. cit.* (above footnote 9), *passim*.

21 Do the names insinuate a sharp contrast to Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai and El'azar ben 'Arakh about whom we have just seen the opposite procedure recorded?

22 From the text of *Ma'aseh Merkavah* § 11 (G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 108), it appears that the age of thirteen (!) was already considered the ripe age for the study of esoteric lore. Compare *Mishnah Avot* v, 21 where it is said in the name of Yehuda ben Theimā that the proper age for the study of the *Mishnah*, while fifteen was considered as the suitable age for the study of the *Talmud*. The Qumranites, however, considered the age of twenty as the right age for the esoteric study of the *Torah*. Finally, the *Sefer Razi'el* (ed. Amsterdam, 1701), which collects several ancient texts related to magic and Merkavah mysticism, says that "this book which is called *The Secrets of Razi'el* should be delivered only . . . to him who has reached the middle of his life". This is based on Bav. *Qidushin* 71/a, which lists the conditions for the revelation of God's secret name. In fact, there was a consensus that the age of thirty was the earliest date for the study of Jewish Kabbalah. See G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 114.

was a difference in the attitude to the study of the Merkavah lore between those living in Babylonia and those living in Eretz Yisrael.

Indeed, Bav. *Shabbat* 80/b mentions a certain Galilean who came to Babylonia, and was asked by the people there to discourse on the matters of the Merkavah. When he did so, he was afflicted and died. This anecdote speaks for itself, showing that the Baylonian rabbis were strict in observing the rulings of the Mishnah (*Hagigah* 2, 1), while certain sayings in Yer. *Hagigah* 77/a make clear, that later generations in Eretz Yisrael tried to relax the strict ruling of the Mishnah.

In any event, the Talmud Yerushalmi asks: “How does he do (= how is the study of the *Ma’aseh Merkavah* carried out)?—At the beginning the master opens with the *Rashey Pesuqim*²³ while the pupil listens in silence and examines if his own speculations concur with those of his master”. Obviously, this procedure is diametrically opposed to what Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai thought was the proper one in studying the Merkavah lore.²⁴ In any event, in those instances in which the terms *Rashey Peraqim* and *Rashey Pesuqim* are referred to—as in Bav. *Hagigah* 13/a and Yer. *Hagigah* 77/a—one finds a break with the ruling of the Mishnah. Thus, under certain circumstances, the master was allowed to open the discussion in the Ma’aseh Merkavah with either *Rashey Peraqim* or *Rashey Pesuqim*. One might even go as far as to say that the idea of *Rashey Peraqim* or *Rashey Pesuqim* was introduced to legitimize the deviation from the sweeping rule of the Mishnah.

The less rigorous attitude towards the study of the Merkavah lore as shown by some of the Babylonian sages reflects a more intensive interest in the mysticism of the Merkavah than in Tannaitic times. One may argue that the strict observation of the ruling of the Mishnah as seen in the circle of Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Zakkai’s students continued to be the prevailing norm as long as the tradition of the Merkavah speculations flourished in Eretz Yisrael. When, arguably, it ceased to be so, a more lenient attitude was adopted. We know that certain Merkavah texts initially composed in Eretz Yisrael were transferred to Babylonia and adapted there for local purposes.²⁵ Eventually, the Merkavah

23 See above footnote 14.

24 One may suggest that the opposite procedure, namely that the master opens the discourse, was aimed at keeping a uniform procedure of study in the old Yeshivot even in matters of the Merkavah. See Yer. *Bava Metzi’a* 8/d: “Who is to be considered one’s teacher that taught him wisdom?—Anyone that opened to him the discourse—this is the opinion of Rabbi Me’ir”.

25 The fragments of the Hekhalot text published by the present writer in *Tarbiz* XXXVIII (1969), pp. 354 ff. and discussed in Part Two, mention a certain sage connected to the

tradition in Babylonia outlived its counterpart in Eretz Yisrael. The more lenient attitude shown by the Amoraim of Eretz Yisrael to the Merkavah lore may reflect the fact that the Merkavah speculations became known in wide circles. Eventually, the previously felt need to keep these speculations under secretive restrictions expired. However, whatever the reasons and whatever the practice, the control required on the part of the master over his students was relaxed, but not altogether cancelled. Finally, it remains for the moment an open question whether or not the above-mentioned difference in the attitude towards the Merkavah-midrashim reflects a parallel attitude towards the Hekhalot literature.

B

We shall now turn to the verbs *DARASH* and *SHANAH* found in the story of Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi El'azar ben 'Arakh. These two verbs, which imply the study of the subject of the Ma'aseh Merkavah, are in line with the ruling of the Mishnah, *'ein dorshin*, "one should not discourse". It thus appears that a study with no mystical experience is implied. These two verbs and the verbs *GAMAR* (to study and to teach), *PATAH* (to open a midrashic discourse usually by quoting a biblical verse),²⁶ and *HIRZAH* (to discourse), which are repeatedly used in Tractate *Hagigah* in both Talmuds, make clear that the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* speculations of the Tannaim were of a midrashic nature. Moreover, the words "many have discoursed in the Merkavah and have not seen it during their lifetime" (*Tosefta Megilah* iii (iv), 28) show that in Tannaitic circles a clear distinction was maintained between the midrashic

Merkavah circles who was to occupy a prominent position among the Jews in Babylonia. See, *ibid.*, p. 357, n. 13 ff. The text is based on *Hekhalot Rabbati*, and in some cases even quotes from it. Yet, it comes even closer to the *Sar Torah* passages, which are generally appended to *Hekhalot Rabbati* (ch. xxvii–xxx). In some of the MSS of the *Sar Torah* we find the following passage: "This (i.e. the conjuration of the *Sar Torah*) was done by Rabbi Eli'ezer and he was answered, but did not trust (his success), and it was repeatedly done by myself and I did not trust it (my success) either, until I brought a fool who repeated what I had done. (Consequently) they told Rabbi 'Akiva to go abroad . . . and when Rabbi 'Akiva descended to Babylonia, and conjured (the angel) and was answered, he returned and told us (of his success) and we rejoiced" (*Synopse*, § 305). The passage obviously stresses the fact that the theurgic practices connected with the conjuration of the *Sar Torah* could be perfected (a) by a nonprofessional; and (b) not only in Eretz Yisrael but also—and most significantly so—in Babylonia.

26 See above note 18.

speculation about the Merkavah and its mystical perception.²⁷ In other words, an experiential transition from discourse to a mystical vision is conceivable. However, no detailed descriptions of such visions were preserved in Tannaitic sources.

One may still ask whether Urbach's contention to the effect that (a) the mystical lore of the Tannaim is devoid of any real ecstatic elements, and (b) "the prevailing tone (in the esoteric tradition of the Tannaim) is that of an ascetic ecstasy" is valid.²⁸ Apart from the fact that the idea of an "ascetic ecstasy" is far from being clear, it must be admitted that the nature of the mystical experience in Tannaitic circles is rather vague. It may be argued that the appearance of angels and the descent of fire (as described in the texts, which we shall immediately discuss) is too little evidence for the existence of a fully-fledged mystical experience. However, these texts show an explicit attempt to go beyond the ordinary forms of midrashic discourse. In the case of the story about Rabban Yoḥanan and Rabbi El'azar, there are two, almost parallel, additions to the text in Tosefta in the versions found in Bav. *Ḥagigah* 14/b and Yer. *Ḥagigah* 77/a.²⁹ According to the version in the Yerushalmi, when Rabbi El'azar began his discourse, Rabban Yoḥanan "descended from the donkey, saying: 'It is not proper for me to hear the Glory of my Creator while I am riding the donkey' ". When both of them sat down beneath a tree, "fire came down from heaven and surrounded them, and the ministering angels were dancing in front of them as groomsmen rejoicing before the bridegroom". It is furthermore reported in the Yerushalmi that "one angel was speaking from within of the fire saying: 'It is as you say, Rabbi El'azar ben 'Arakh, this is what the Ma'aseh Merkavah is!' ". The end of the story follows using the same words as in the Toseftā. According to the version found in the Talmud Bavli, after Rabban Yoḥanan had descended from the donkey, Rabbi El'azar asked him, "Why have you descended from the donkey?"—Rabban Yoḥanan answered: "It is not proper for me to ride a donkey while you are discoursing about the Ma'aseh Merkavah, the Shekhinah is with us, and the ministering angels are accompanying us." Immediately, Rabbi El'azar ben 'Arakh began his discourse about the *Ma'aseh Merkavah*.³⁰ As the story in Talmud Bavli tells, only then fire came down from heaven and surrounded all the trees in the field. Thereupon, they began to sing a song of

27 See Urbach, *art. cit.*, p. 7, footnote 25.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

29 See also *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Sim'on b. Jochai*, ed. Epstein-Melamed, p. 158/9.

30 According to this version of the Bavli, before Rabban Yoḥanan descended from the donkey Rabbi El'azar asked him for permission to say something that "you have taught me".

praise,³¹ and only afterwards, the angel who spoke from within of the fire confirmed, "This is the Ma'aseh Merkavah!"³²

Although it is quite likely that the version found in Bavli is dependent on the one in Yerushalmi, it is equally possible that both versions are dependent on a common source, introducing their respective changes. It remains to be considered what kind of relationship this alleged source and, consequently, the two versions in the Talmuds, bear to the story as it is told in the Toseftā. On the one hand, according to Urbach, the two versions of the Talmuds reflect the more lenient attitude towards the Merkavah material as it is found in Armoraic circles. Thus, Urbach argued, the original version of the story is that of the Toseftā: it is short and truly expresses the reserved mood of the mysticism of the Tannaim. On the other hand, I suggested in an earlier study that the stories found in the Talmuds, in spite of the differences between them, reflect the mystical mood of the original, while the Toseftā, which is more concerned with halakhic matters, represents a quintessential form of the story.³³ Urbach, furthermore, maintained that the fire-motif, in both versions of the Talmuds does not necessarily indicate a real ecstatic experience. Urbach quoted the sayings and stories of several sages in which the vision of fire is introduced in association with the fire seen at the theophany on Mount Sinai. Only the song of the trees, which is recorded in both Talmuds, was viewed by Urbach as expressing the ecstatic experience of the mystics. It may be argued, however, that fire

31 Corresponding to Psalms 148, 7–9.

32 The Talmud Bavli adds another story about Rabbi Yehoshu'a and Rabbi Yossi Ha-Kohen, who also discoursed in the matters of the Merkavah. It tells that, "Clouds gathered in the sky, and a rainbow was seen, and the angels were gathering and coming to hear, as people who come to watch the festivities performed in honor of the bridegroom and the bride". Rabban Yohannan also had a special blessing for these two Rabbis. In Yer. *Hagigah*, almost the same story is told about Rabbi Yossef HaKohen and Rabbi Shim'on ben Netan'el. Urbach, *art. cit.*, p. 7, inclines to distinguish between two branches of the tradition: the one concerning Rabbi El'azar ben 'Arakh, and the other about Rabbi Yossi Ha-Kohen and Rabbi Yehoshu'a. Concerning the rainbow which is seen by the two sages, it must be remarked that Ezekiel's vision mentions the "appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain" (1, 28; RSV). Hence, the description in the text of *Shi'ur Qomah* (*Synopse*, §§ 367 [only in Ms. N8128], 398): "the body (of the Godhead) is like a rainbow". See also Bav. *Berakhot* 59/a: "Rabbi Alexandrei in the name of Rabbi Yehoshu'a ben Levi said: Whosoever sees the rainbow must fall upon his face, as it is said (Ezekiel 1, 28): 'And when I saw it, I fell upon my face' ". See also Bav. *Hagigah* 16/a: "Everybody who looks at three things is liable to lose his eyesight: at the rainbow . . ." The visionary in the Book of Revelation 10, 1 reports, "I saw a mighty angel . . . with a rainbow over his head".

33 See the article quoted above in n. 11, pp. 260 ff.

connected with a theophany is frequently expressive of a mystical experience³⁴ and the theophany-fire seen on Mount Sinai is, for that matter, no prototypal exception to the rule. Moreover, I find it difficult to follow Urbach, who argued that the relative freedom of expression of the Amoraim when they discuss the Ma'aseh Merkavah shows that, in comparison to the Tannaim, they were more familiar with the esoteric doctrines of the mystics. We have already observed a noticeable difference between the Palestinian and Babylonian Amoraim with regard to the attitudes they maintained towards the study of the Merkavah lore. However, I find it difficult to follow Urbach's unnuanced generalizations about these differences.

One must admit, though, that it is indeed difficult to reach conclusions concerning the nature of the Merkavah speculations of the circle of Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai. The reported information in the rabbinic sources concerning these speculations is so restrained in matters of content and literary expression that almost anything could be said about it with equal justification. One may say, with Urbach, that what was said is, materially speaking, everything that was known; but one can equally maintain that a great deal more than what was said was in fact known and experienced. Admittedly, it is quite reasonable to say that the Tannaitic speculations about the Merkavah did not depend on the Hekhalot literature, which was composed at a later stage. However, it seems equally reasonable to say that the Tannaim did not have to wait for the Hekhalot literature to discover the ecstatic potentials of the Merkavah lore.

Hence, one may argue that the original version of the story of Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi El'azar ben 'Arakh is hidden within the realm of vagueness. Was it the short version of the Toseftā or perhaps a presently unknown source from which both the Yerushalmi and the Bavli drew their respective versions and from which the editor of the Toseftā formed his shortened version? Of course, the answer to the question of whether the original story contained an ecstatic experience at all decisively depends on what the original version was or how we interpret gaps in our knowledge. Nevertheless, whatever the conclusion on this particular issue might be, one cannot ignore the likely conclusion that ecstatic experiences were familiar to those who explicated the Ma'aseh Merkavah in Tannaitic circles. In this respect, one has to take into consideration the materials discussed in the previous chapter about the experiences of the apocalyptic visionaries and, further, the comments made in Chapter One as well as our discussion below about the story of the four who entered the "Pardes".

34 J. Abelson, *Jewish Mysticism* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1913), pp. 39 ff.

Indeed, a discussion of the famous story about the four sages who “entered the Pardes” will show that it is a good example in which, in spite of the lack of straightforward evidence in the Talmudic and midrashic sources, one has to assume that the existence of an ecstatic experience was nonetheless implied. The main versions of this story³⁵ do not contain any explicit references to an ecstatic experience. However, on the grounds of a comparative examination of the terminology, one is entitled to reach the conclusion that such an experience was *a priori* assumed. To this, one should add that the version of the story found in Bav. *Ḥagigah* 14/b and 15/b (bottom) contains noteworthy references to a kind of experience known from the Hekhalot literature.

As is well known, the story tells of the four sages, Ben ‘Azzai, Ben Zomā, Rabbi ‘Akiva and Elisha ben Avuyah, who “entered the Pardes”. It is said that Ben ‘Azzai (Tal. Yerushalmi: Ben Zoma) “cast a glance and died”; Ben Zoma (Tal. Yerushalmi: Ben ‘Azzai) “cast a glance and was afflicted” (Rashi explains:³⁶ went out of his mind); Elisha ben Avuyah “cast a glance and cut down the saplings”; and only Rabbi ‘Akiva “ascended (or, as another version says: entered) safely and descended (departed) safely”. G. Scholem³⁷ rightly interpreted this story in terms of the ascension stories known from apocalyptic literature and particularly from the ascension into Paradise described by Paul the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 12, 1–4.³⁸ Even Urbach admitted that, in this case, the *Pardes* should be interpreted in terms of the vision of the Merkavah,³⁹ although he parted ways with Scholem in his interpretation of the words attributed to Rabbi ‘Akiva in Bav. *Ḥagigah* 14/b. Rabbi ‘Akiva is reported there as warning the other sages involved in the experience (or, more generally, to his initiated students): “When you reach the pure marble stones, do not say: ‘Water, Water!’, as it is said: ‘no man who utters lies shall continue in my presence’” (Psalms 101, 7 RSV). Urbach admits that terms like “enter the Pardes”, “cast a glance” (*Hiziz*), and “ascend” (*‘Alah*) evidently point to experiences quite different from those

35 Tosefta *Ḥagigah* ii, 3; Yer. *Ḥagigah* 77/b; *Midrash Rabbā to Shir Ha-Shirim*, ed. Vilna, 7/d–8/a.

36 Rashi writes here in accordance with the tradition preserved in the *Responsa of Rav Hai Ga’on* (cf. *Otzar ha-Ge’onim*, vol. IV, to *Ḥagigah*, p. 14/5). Rav Hai Ga’on actually quotes there from *Hekhalot Zutarti* (see the two versions of the text quoted in Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 15, footnotes 2 & 3).

37 G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1955), pp. 52–54; *idem*, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 14–19.

38 Cf. also H. Bietenhard, *Die Himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1951), pp. 161 ff.

39 *Art. cit.*, p. 13.

implied by the terms of midrashic activity discussed above. However, Urbach argues that these terms are worlds apart from “the imaginary compositions about ‘ascensions’ in apocalyptic literature, in Hellenistic literature, and in the late Merkavah literature”.⁴⁰ Moreover, Urbach argues that Rabbi ‘Akiva’s utterance concerning the marble stones is to be interpreted as metaphorically indicating a warning against certain spiritual processes, the likes of which are known as *Sobria Ebrietas* or sober drunkenness.⁴¹ More relevant to our discussion is Scholem’s analysis, which interprets Rabbi ‘Akiva’s warning in the light of the information that can be gleaned from the Hekhalot literature.

In two of the Hekhalot writings, *Hekhalot Zutarti* and *Hekhalot Rabbati* (the Small Book of the Palaces and the Great Book of the Palaces, respectively), there are descriptions of the special experience that the mystics are likely to encounter at the gate of the sixth palace.⁴² They see there the glistening marble stones and are warned against crying out, “Water, Water!” If they are not able to restrain themselves, the mystics endanger themselves physically and mentally. Now, this is exactly the context out of which come the words attributed to Rabbi ‘Akiva. One should notice, though, that Rabbi ‘Akiva merely warns his colleagues, while the materials in the Hekhalot literature contain detailed descriptions of what happens at the gate of the sixth palace. Although Rabbi ‘Akiva does not mention the gate of the sixth palace as the Hekhalot tractates do, the relationship of his words to those found in the Hekhalot texts seem to be self-evident. The purpose of the descriptions in the Hekhalot literature is to warn those who are not fully qualified from undergoing experiences, which they are unlikely to survive. Actually, the behavior of the mystics at the gate of the sixth palace is considered the final ordeal, which they undergo before they are granted the right of passage into the sixth and then the seventh palace found in the seventh heaven. Admittedly, Rabbi ‘Akiva’s words are quoted in Bav. *Hagigah* out of the particular context of an ordeal at the entrance to the sixth palace, but this fact does not invite a metaphorical interpretation. It is, therefore, closer to the truth to maintain with Scholem “that the later Merkavah mystics showed a perfectly correct understanding of the meaning of this passage (= Rabbi ‘Akiva’s words), and their interpretation offers striking proof that the tradition of the Tannaitic mysticism and theosophy was really alive among

40 *Ibid.* p. 14.

41 *Ibid.* p. 17, and the references there.

42 For an examination of the relevant texts see J. Dan, “The Entrance to the Sixth Gate” [in Hebrew], in: J. Dan (ed.), *Early Jewish Mysticism* [*Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, VI/1–2] (1987), pp. 197–220.

them, although certain details may have originated in a later period".⁴³ On the grounds of Scholem's presentation of the relationship between the utterance of Rabbi 'Akiva and the Hekhalot literature, I suggest viewing the words of Rabbi 'Akiva as reflecting the same tradition, which is incorporated in the above-mentioned passages in the Hekhalot literature. It is not, as Scholem argued, that the Hekhalot literature contains the correct interpretation of the saying of Rabbi 'Akiva, but that the words attributed to the sage are virtually taken from what already was, or was soon to become, the established milieu of the Hekhalot literature. It should be added that it is a question of a different order whether the words of Rabbi 'Akiva are authentic or apocryphally attributed to him, as are some of the Hekhalot writings themselves.

Since it is unanimously agreed that the entrance into the *Pardes* is not synonymous with a vision of the Merkavah, it remains to be asked what exactly was meant by a mystical vision of the Merkavah in Tannaitic circles. There are some hints found in the *Bavli*. The first one has already been discussed; it concerns Rabbi 'Akiva's utterance about the pure marble stones. The second also focuses on the figure of Rabbi 'Akiva. The Talmud (*Bav Hagigah* 15/b, bottom) reports: "And the ministering angels wanted to drive away [or: kill] Rabbi 'Akiva, too, but God told them: 'Leave that wise man alone, as he is worthy of experiencing my Glory'".⁴⁴ This peculiar remark reminds us of the hostile attitude that the angels showed against Moses when he reached Heaven to receive the Torah,⁴⁵ and it reflects the general theme of the angels' hostility to the ascension onto

43 G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 52.

44 For a discussion of the theurgic term "*le-histamesh ba-kavod*" (literally, to use the Divine Glory) see Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 54/5. The parallel text of *Hekhalot Zutarti* here reads "*le-histakel bi-khvodi*" (= to look at my Glory). See Scholem, *ibid.* p. 77, footnote 7.

45 *Bav. Shabbat* 88/b, refer to Moses who is said to have been afraid that the angels were going to burn him with the vapor of their mouths. In a different context, it is said that when Moses was due to descend from heaven, angels again came to kill him (*Shemot Rabbā*, xlii, 4; and parallels). In *Pesiktā Rabbati*, ed. Friedmann (Wien, 1880), fol. 96/b it is told of Qemu'el, "who was in charge of 12 000 angels of destruction" (*Mal'akhei Habalah*—see *Israel Oriental Studies* III [1973], p. 97, footnote 36), and of his colleague, Hadarniel, who intimidated Moses upon his ascension to heaven to receive the Torah. *Pesiktā Rabbati* also mentions the name of Galizur, who, among his other duties, "stretches out his wings to receive the vapor of the Living Creatures. For if he does not do so, the ministering angels might be burned up by the vapor of the Living Creatures". The hostility of the angels against each other was discussed in Chapter Three in connection to the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, chs. 10 and 12.

heaven of human beings.⁴⁶ This hostility of the angels is known from apocalyptic literature⁴⁷ and from the Hekhalot literature,⁴⁸ and it may be said that the Gnostic concept of the Archons who try to prevent the soul of man from returning to its Source of Light is a noteworthy development of this motif.⁴⁹ In the case of Rabbi 'Akiva, the comment regarding the angels may be a late phase of the tradition about those who entered the *Pardes*. However, it is likely that as a *topos* it derived from apocalyptic literature, which preceded Tannaitic times. Thus, it could fit into the original milieu of the *Pardes*-story. The third clue concerns Elish'a ben Avuyah. It is asked in the Gemārā (Bav. *Ḥagigah* 15/a): "What did he (Elish'a ben Avuyah) actually do?—He saw Metatron, who was given permission to sit and write the merits of the people of Israel.—He (Elish'a) said: We have learnt that up in heaven there is no one sitting... can it be that there are two *reshuyot* (= two authorities)?—So they pulled Metatron out and beat him with sixty lashes of fire. They asked him: 'Why didn't you stand up when you saw him (Elish'a ben Avuyah)?' ".⁵⁰ Much has been written about the angel Metatron,⁵¹ and, in spite of all that we now know about the development of the traditions concerning his name,⁵² it would be too daring to maintain that this Metatron-passage in connection with the name of Elish'a ben Avuyah actually belongs to the original phase of the story.

46 See J. Maier, "Das Gefährdungsmotiv bei der Himmelsreise in der jüdischen Apokalyptik und 'Gnosis' ", *Kairos* V (1963), pp. 18–40; J. P. Schultz, "Angelic Opposition to the Ascension of Moses and the Revelation of the Law", *Jewish Quarterly Review* LXI (1970/1), pp. 282–307. See P. Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen: Untersuchungen zur rabbinischen Engelvorstellung* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1975).

47 See, though indirectly, *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13, 5. The unclean bird tells Abraham: "... if you ascend to the height, they (the angels) will destroy you." As it turns out, this was the voice of Azazel.

48 Actually, the whole of the Hekhalot literature is full of materials that make clear how dangerous it was for the mystic to carry out his journey in heaven. See specifically 3 *Enoch*, Chapter 6.

49 Actually, the motif—in various variations—is known from many ancient cultures. See, for instance, N. K. Sandars, *Poems of Heaven and Hell from Ancient Mesopotamia* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 117 ff. For the Greek sources, cf. W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 9–13.

50 See also 3 *Enoch*, ch. 16.

51 See Scholem, *Kabbalah* (above footnote 6), pp. 377–381; M. Black, "the Origins of the Name Metatron", *Vetus Testamentum* I (1951), pp. 217–219. See also Appendix A to the present book.

52 See, A. A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

Thus, we find in the discussion of the Pardes story in Talmud Bavli three passages: one of which (the angelic hostility towards Rabbi 'Akiva) could go back to Tannaitic times; one (the saying concerning the pure marble stones) which could also go back to Tannaitic times; and one (the Metatron passage) which most probably belongs to a later period. All of these passages, however, are fragmentary hints to the solution of the problem of what exactly was the nature of the Merkavah-experience of the Tannaim.

A more significant answer to the question may be found in the term Pardes itself. The term was used by Paul in a context of what appears to be a unique experience of being taken up to the third heaven. The context may be apocalyptic, as discussed in the previous chapter, and thus crucial in the characterization of the nature and scope of visionary experiences with a mystical core in pre-Tannaitic times. Paul says, "I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was raised up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was raised up into Paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter" (2 Corinthians 12,1–4). Assuming that Paul is speaking about himself ("a man in Christ") and that verses 2 and 4 reflect two stages in one and the same experience, one may conclude that, for Paul, "Paradise" was a place in the third heaven.⁵³ It was common to associate the heavenly Paradise with the place of divine retribution for the just, or for their souls.⁵⁴ It is interesting, however, to notice that Paul, who most probably was aware of the terminology used in apocalyptic literature, did not use either the term "Paradise of Righteousness,"⁵⁵ found in the Greek translations of apocalyptic literature, or the Aramaic term *Pardes Qushtā*.⁵⁶ Paul simply uses the word "Paradise" without any qualifying

53 There are various theories about the location of the heavenly Paradise. The clearest parallel to its location in the third heaven, as Paul assumes, is in *Apocalypsis Mosis* 37, 4, in: K. von Tischendorf, *Apocalypses Apocryphae* (Leipzig: H. Mendelssohn, 1866), p. 20. See also A. Vaillant, *Le Livre des Secrets d'Hénoch* (Paris: Institut d'Études Slave, 1952), pp. 8–11. The idea of the location of Paradise in the third heaven was later on exchanged for the idea of its location in the seventh heaven.

54 See D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 283/4; M. E. Stone, "Paradise in 4 Ezra 4, 8 and 7, 36, 8, 52," *Journal of Jewish Studies* XVII (1966), pp. 85–88.

55 For a discussion of the various references in apocalyptic literature, see, H. Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt*, pp. 168 ff.

56 The Aramaic *Qushtā* translates both Hebrew terms: *Zedek* (= righteousness), and *'Emet* (= truth). See further M. Gil, "Enoch in the Land of Eternal Life" [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz*

terms, and this brings his experience close to the story of the four who entered the Pardes. It therefore seems safe to maintain, with Scholem, that Paul and the Rabbis who told the story of Rabbi 'Akiva and his colleagues used the same technical language, that is, of ecstatic heavenly journeys. Thus, we may assume that, at a certain point in Jewish thought and terminological usage, the term Pardes designated not only the place, where the just and the righteous received their after-life reward, but also a visionary experience. In that experience a man saw himself translated up to heaven to see, *in his lifetime*, celestial abodes and all that they contained, including, as one may argue, the divine throne. No detailed records are left of that particular experience,⁵⁷ but it is no longer singularly associated with a place of retribution.

When Paul uses the term *Pardes*, it already designates the more general "visions and revelations . . . (and) things that cannot be told, which man may not utter." No further specifications are given and the same holds true concerning the story about the four who entered the *Pardes*. While in the case of Paul almost no clues are given, the Talmud Bavli at least tries to make things a little more explicit. Hence, we must conclude that if the term *Pardes* relates to an ecstatic experience, the nature of this experience is nowhere explicitly described. However, one may get a clearer picture of that experience based on a comparison between the three short passages in Bav. *Ḥagigah* and the materials contained in a more explicit form in the Hekhalot literature. Those, however, who insist on denying the intrinsic connection between the additional reports given in Bav. *Ḥagigah* and the story as it appears in its short form in the Toseftā are prevented from maintaining that the Pardes-story is in any way connected to the mystical vision of the Merkavah.

We may, therefore, conclude that both stories, that of Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi El'azar ben 'Arakh and that of the four sages who entered the Pardes, do not explicitly supply everything one wishes for a clear proof that the Merkavah speculations in Tannaitic circles corresponded to the mystical milieu unfolding in the Hekhalot literature. What may be maintained with relative certainty, though, is that the Merkavah lore of the Tannaim entailed visionary experiences, the nature of which may be surmised from a comparison between the various versions of the stories under discussion. It should, however, be noticed that, while in the case of Rabban Yoḥanan the visionary

XXXVIII (1969), p. 329/30. Gil presents a comparative study of the *Pardes*-terminology in Ethiopic, Aramaic, and Greek.

57 See further J. T. Milik in *Revue Biblique* LXV (1958), pp. 70–77. See also F. Nötscher, *Altorientalischer und Alttestamentlicher Auferstehungsglauben* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970), p. 282 f.

experience was restricted to an earthly surrounding, the story about the four who entered the Pardes allegedly entailed a visionary translation onto heaven.

C

We shall now turn to the controversy among the Tannaim regarding the possibility of experiencing heavenly ascensions. Based on Psalms 115, 16—"The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth he has given to the sons of men"—Rabbi Yossi is quoted as saying: "Neither did Moses and Elijah ascend to heaven nor did the Divine Glory (*Kavod*) descend to earth".⁵⁸ This controversial utterance, which runs counter to a number of verses in Scripture, becomes the subject of a discussion in Bav. *Sukkah* 5/a, where it is finally modified to say that Moses ascended to God "but did not come nearer than ten hand-breadths", while God descended on Mount Sinai "but did not come nearer than ten hand-breadths". There are good reasons to believe that the aim of Rabbi Yossi was to express criticism of those who claimed to have practiced heavenly ascensions or believed in the truth underlying the descriptions of such ascensions. Thus, one may also see in the words of Rabbi Yossi a polemical response to the experiences implied by the term *Pardes* as it was used by Paul and, conceivably, in the story of the four who entered the *Pardes*. However, Rabbi Yossi seems to be in the minority among the Tannaim; the silence of his colleagues may be interpreted as an acceptance on their part of the possibility of heavenly ascensions. The same problem was raised again in the circles of the Palestinian Amoraim, this time concerning the figure of Enoch.⁵⁹ One may assume that these polemical utterances could entail anti-Christian overtones too, that is, they gave expression to a polemic against the physical resurrection of Jesus.

Connected to our discussion is another problem, namely, the controversy among the Tannaim as to whether it is possible to see God and, if so, when and under what conditions. In an interesting attempt to define the nature of the prophecy of Moses, it is said that only Moses could hear the voice of God, while those standing outside of the Tabernacle heard nothing.⁶⁰ Rabbi Dosā is quoted in this connection as saying, "It is said: '... for man shall not see my face

58 See, *Mechiltā d'Rabbi Ismael*, ed. Horovitz-Rabin, p. 217. Some of the mss. drop the name of Moses, and others the name of Elijah. See also *1 Macc.* 2, 58, which mentions the heavenly ascension of Elijah.

59 *Bereshit Rabbā*, ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 238–239. See *Israel Oriental Studies* III (1973), pp. 66–67, n. 20.

60 *Sifrā (Torat Kohanim)* quoted from MS. Vatican 66, fol. 9/a–b.

and live' (Exodus 32, 20)—during their lifetime they do not see, (but) they do see when they die". To this Rabbi 'Akiva makes the following comment: "Even the Living Creatures (*Ḥayyot*) which are carried (in the Divine Throne) do not see the Divine Glory (*Kavod*)". Rabbi Shim'on ben 'Azzai in turn adds, "Even the ministering angels, whose life is eternal,⁶¹ do not see the Divine Glory".⁶² It is certainly pertinent to note that two of the Tannaim mentioned here, Rabbi 'Akiva and Shim'on ben 'Azzai were also involved in the above-mentioned Pardes experience. This can be interpreted to imply that whatever Rabbi 'Akiva and his colleagues said in the matters of the Merkavah was based on their alleged visionary experiences. In fact, the idea that humans and angels alike are unable to see God is also stressed several times in the Hekhalot literature. Despite the daring modes of expression in that literature, the direct physical encounter with God is generally ruled out.⁶³ The mystics whose experiences are described in the Hekhalot literature expect to see "the King in (all) His beauty", but when it comes to a face-to-face meeting with God, one repeatedly hears of what is and should be done in order to avoid the damaging consequences of the experience.

However, we have seen that Rabbi Dosā said that one might see God after one's death. The belief in the afterlife encounter of the just with God is quite a common idea in midrashic literature.⁶⁴ The idea is also previously found in apocalyptic literature and it plays a prominent role in the Book of Revelation.⁶⁵ Yet, a visual encounter with God is also presupposed by the *Shi'ur Qomah* speculations, that is, detailed speculations concerning the measurement of the different parts of God's body and the mystical names attributed to them.⁶⁶ Apart from the texts, which specifically deal with the subject,⁶⁷ there are quite a number of midrashic sayings based on the Song of Songs, which Lieberman

61 The eternal life of the ministering angels is not always maintained. See, for instance, *Bereshit Rabbā*, p. 916 (and parallels); 3 *Enoch*, ch. 47; *Hekhalot Rabbati*, ch. xxx.

62 Compare *Siphre ad Numeros*, ed. Horovitz, p. 55/6 and 101/2. Cf. Urbach, *art. cit.*, p. 19, footnote 8i. See further Bav. *Yevamot* 49/b.

63 See *Hekhalot Rabbati Synopse*, § 102.

64 *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, ed. Finkelstein, p. 18 and 105; *Sifrā (Torat Kohanim)* ed. Weiss, p. 111, col. b; Bav. *Sanhedrin* 102/a; *Wayyikra Rabbā* (ed. Margulies), p. 32; *ibid.*, pp. 240–242 (and parallels) and, finally, Matthew 5, 8.

65 Revelation 4, 4.

66 G. Scholem, *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit* (Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, 1962), pp. 7–47: "*Shi'ur Qomah*; die mystische Gestalt der Gottheit"; *idem*, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 36–42. See also the chapter on *Shi'ur Qomah* in Part Two.

67 *Synopse*, §§ 376–406.

considered to be related, in rabbinic thought, to the Merkavah and *Shi'ur Qomah* speculations.⁶⁸

Several midrashic sayings related to the Song of Songs reveal two views. One, attributed to Rabbi 'Akiva and his followers, according to which the Song of Songs was recited at the theophany on Mount Sinai. The second, attributed to Rabbi Eli'ezer and his followers, which maintains that the Song of Songs was said when God revealed Himself personally at the Red Sea. Particularly noteworthy is the saying of Rabbi Eli'ezer: "A maidservant at the Red Sea saw things that were not even seen by Ezekiel... When God revealed Himself on the Red Sea nobody had to ask: 'Who is the King', but as they saw Him, they (immediately) recognized Him".⁶⁹ Although there is no exact parallel saying attributed to Rabbi 'Akiva with regard to the theophany on Mount Sinai, he is quoted as saying in a different context, "This (= the renewal of the moon in the month Nissan) is one of the things which God showed Moses as if with His finger."⁷⁰ This saying of Rabbi 'Akiva may be interpreted as implying that at least Moses saw a certain corporeal manifestation of God. Now, it may be argued that this saying of Rabbi 'Akiva contradicts the one we have already seen to the effect that even the Living Creatures cannot see the Divine Glory. However, the prophecy of Moses was never intended to be a criterion for the prophecy and the mystical experiences of others. It must be noted, though, that Rabbi 'Akiva is reported to have considered the Song of Songs to be the holiest book,⁷¹ and that it was allegedly recited at the theophany on Mount Sinai. In light of what has been said, one may conclude that the report about Rabbi 'Akiva's *Pardes*-experience contained elements of biographical truth, though this does not mean that it entailed a direct and immediate vision of the Godhead. What exactly happened could only be guessed on the grounds

68 See, S. Lieberman, "Mishnath Shir Ha-Shirim," in: G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, Appendix D, pp. 118–126. See also J. Maier, *Geschichte der jüdischen Religion* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1972), p. 201. Maier inclines to date the *Shi'ur Qomah* speculations in "der spätmittelalterlichen und gaonäischen Zeit". From the evidence produced by Scholem and Lieberman, it appears that the *Shi'ur Qomah* belongs to the earlier phases of the Hekhalot literature.

69 *Mekhila d'Rabbi Ismael*, pp. 126–7. Compare *Mekhila d'Rabbi Sim'on b. Jochai*, ed. Epstein-Melamed, p. 154/5. Rabbi Eli'ezer seems to extend here the view expressed by his father, Rabbi Yossi HaGlili, that even babies and little children saw the Shekhinah at the Red Sea. Yer. *Sotah* 16/c; *Mekhiltā d'Rabbi Sim'on b. Jochai*, p. 73/4. See Lieberman in Scholem, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

70 *Mekhila d'Rabbi Ismael*, p. 6 (emended according to parallels).

71 Mishnah *Yadayim* iii, 5.

of the different versions of the *Pardes* tale, mainly those recorded by Paul, in the *Talmud Bavli*, and in the Hekhalot literature. However, it is certainly important to notice that the tones struck by Rabbi 'Akiva's saying that no man can see God⁷² are repeated in the Hekhalot literature too. However, a different view may be attributed to Rabbi 'Akiva in connection with *Shi'ur Qomah* (*Synopse*, § 376). The text there (though not the one in *Synopse*, § 728) states that the mystical information about the measures of the body of God was revealed to Rabbi 'Akiva by Metatron.

In completing this picture of the mystical concepts in the writings of the Tannaitic period, mention should be made of the belief that priests could have special experiences when they took the incense into the Holy of Holies.⁷³ Thus, we hear of the High Priest, Shim'on the Just, who, on entering the Holy of Holies, used to encounter on every Day of Atonement an old man dressed in white (cf. Daniel 7, 9);⁷⁴ another High Priest, named Yishma'el ben Elish'a, is reported to have seen God Himself sitting on His throne (see, Isaiah 6, 1).⁷⁵ Yoḥanan, the High Priest, heard a prophetic utterance from the Holy of Holies,⁷⁶ and the Gospel of Luke reports of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, to whom an angel appeared in the Temple.⁷⁷ Naturally, it would be going too far to say that all Jewish mysticism from the times of the Tannaim onwards derived in many essential ways from the cultic life of the Temple.⁷⁸ It must equally be noticed, however, that some of those Tannaim who dealt with the

72 S. Safrai, *Rabbi 'Akiva ben Joseph: His Life and Teaching* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1970), p. 59, comments that the ministering angels do not deserve the privilege of seeing the divine glory, while a human being who is exalted by his good deeds does deserve that privilege. Rabbi 'Akiva's words in *Sifra* are not in opposition to the words of Rabbi Dosa, but, on the contrary, they complement them. This is the meaning of the word "even" which introduces Rabbi 'Akiva's saying to the effect that the *Hayyot* do not see the divine glory.

73 See J. Z. Lauterbach, "A Significant Controversy between the Sadducees and the Pharisees", *Hebrew Union College Annual* IV (1927), pp. 173–205. Lauterbach's "Sadduceean" interpretation of these stories was variously challenged.

74 Yer. *Yoma* 42/c. Compare also Yer. *Sotah* 24/b.

75 Bav. *Berakhot* 7/a. See Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 51 ff.

76 Toseftā *Sotah* xiii, 5 (and parallels).

77 Luke 1, 8–22.

78 J. Maier, *Vom Kultus zur Gnosis* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1964). See K. Schubert, "Das Zeitalter der Apokalyptik", in: F. Leist (ed.), *Seine Rede geschah zu Mir* (München, Manz-Verlag, 1965), pp. 265–285.

Ma'aseh Merkavah were priests.⁷⁹ At any rate, if the experiences recorded in the Tannaitic sources and which refer to Temple life really occurred, the Judaism of that period must have been prepared for mystical experiences of the kind we find in the Hekhalot writings—and in a manner seriously misrepresented by the skepticism of some of the scholars who have discussed the phenomenon.

79 Although several scholars thought that Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai himself was a priest, it seems safer to maintain with G. Alon, *The History of the Jews in Eretz Yisrael in the Time of the Mishnah and Talmud* [in Hebrew], second edition (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 1954), vol. I, p. 56, that no conclusive proof could be produced for the priesthood of Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai. See further G. Alon, *Studies in Jewish History* [in Hebrew], (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 1957), vol. I, pp. 255–256. Alon discusses a rift between Rabban Yoḥanan and the priests. However, Rabbi Yossi and Rabbi Shim'on ben Netan'el were Rabban Yoḥanan's students and engaged in the Merkavah speculations (Yer. *Ḥagigah* 77/a). Both were priests, though they seem to have left their master after the destruction of the Temple. See G. Alon, *Studies*, vol. I p. 256, footnote 9. According to a report in Bav. *Ḥagigah* 14/b, Rabbi Yehoshu'a took the place of Rabbi Shim'on ben Netan'el. It must be remembered, that Ezekiel, the prophet, also was a priest.

The Hekhalot Literature

A

In the present chapter, we shall discuss some of the general characteristics of the Hekhalot literature. In the second part of the book, a detailed introduction to each of the Hekhalot texts will be given.

The first scholar who attempted a serious evaluation of the Hekhalot literature, and suggested a historical sequence for its composition, was H. Grätz.¹ In a series of three articles published in the *Monatsschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums* VIII (1859), Grätz reached the conclusion that the so-called Hekhalot literature was composed in post-talmudic times, and that the first text in the series was *’Otiyot de-Rabbi ’Akiva*. Grätz’s dating of that literature is still considered by some people to be correct, though the sequence, which he suggested for its composition is no longer accepted. In a series of studies on the Hekhalot literature, G. Scholem proposed a different order and a much earlier date of composition.² Scholem’s views on these two issues are adopted in this book. However, our discussion will deal with some aspects of that literature, which still deserve attention. In addition, Scholem’s suggestion to interpret the Merkavah mysticism as a Jewish concomitant to Gnosticism will be re-examined.³

1 Grätz dismisses the chapter dealing with Jewish mysticism in L. Zunz, *Gottesdienstliche Vorträge*, 1832, pp. 165–170, as “so nichtssagend als nur möglich”.

2 See mainly his: *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1955), pp. 40–79: “Merkabah Mysticism and Jewish Gnosticism”; *Jewish Gnosticism Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, Second, Improved Edition, (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965); *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbalah* (Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1962), pp. 15–20: “Die vor-kabbalistische jüdische Geheimlehre über die Schöpfung und die Merkaba-Literatur der *Hekhaloth* und jüdische Gnosis”; *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit* (Zürich: Rhein Verlag, 1962), pp. 7–47: “*Schi’ur Koma*; die mystische Gestalt der Gottheit”; *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, Keter Publishing House, 1974), pp. 14–22; 373–376.

3 Here the writer mainly follows his article, “‘Knowledge’ and ‘Vision’—Towards a Clarification of Two ‘Gnostic’ Concepts in the Light of their Alleged Origins”, *Israel Oriental Studies* III (1973), especially pp. 88–107 [reprinted in: I. Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988), pp. 65–123]; and: “The Jewish Esoteric Literature in the Time of the Mishnah and Talmud”, *Immanuel* 4 (1974), pp. 37–46.

The main subjects of the Hekhalot literature are (1) the complex and dangerous procedures involved in heavenly ascensions and the ritual processes required to overcome them; (2) detailed descriptions of various visions of heavenly journeys, including the vision of the angelic world and the throne of God; (3) various mystical experiences of the Godhead; (4) celestial hymnology; (5) revelation of cosmological and other secrets; and (6) the special secret method of studying and memorizing the Torah. From the point of view of literary and experiential genre, the Hekhalot literature embodies two types: the description of heavenly ascensions and the description of the appearance on earth of angels who reveal secrets. A similar distinction with regard to the literary genre can be made concerning apocalyptic literature, but in contradistinction to that literature, the Hekhalot literature gives detailed descriptions of the various means and practices by which the desired experiences or revelations are gained. This issue has already received attention in Chapter One. In fact, the whole of the Hekhalot literature might be defined as technical guides, or manuals, for mystics. A lot of the material contained therein is introduced by technical questions or directives. A key phrase summarizing their essence would be "What is the initiate required to do if he wishes to bring about this visionary or mystical experience?" The respective technical details, the "praxis" of the mystical experience, generally consist of special prayers or incantations, prolonged fasts and special diets, the utterance of magical names, the application of magical seals, and the ritual of cleansing the body. Although some of these means are already known from apocalyptic literature, their description in the Hekhalot literature is more detailed. These practices are also known from non-Jewish mysticism and magic.⁴ This fact creates interesting points of discussion in the study and assessment of the Hekhalot literature.

In contrast to prophecy, which seems to be spontaneous and at times even inspires those least desiring it, the kinds of experience described in apocalyptic and Merkavah mysticism necessitated a series of preparatory practices.⁵ As mentioned in Chapter One, Daniel—the visionary "author" of [the Hebrew part of] the book bearing his name—marks a transition from prophecy to apocalypticism. He refers to an extended period of fasting and praying before he

4 See W. Bousset, *Die Himmelsreise der Seele*, (Reprint: Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960); H. D. Betz, *The "Mithras Liturgy"* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), pp. 283–311.

5 For the question whether prophecy was spontaneous or not, see, for instance, J. Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 1 ff. For a discussion of some psychological and phenomenological aspects of prophecy, see J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), pp. 6 ff.

received a vision: "In those days I Daniel was mourning for three whole weeks, pleasant food I did not eat, nor did flesh and wine come to my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, until the fulfilling of three full weeks" (Daniel 10, 2–3).⁶ This kind of self-preparation for the apocalyptic experience is also known from later Jewish apocalyptic. Thus, we find in 2 (Syriac) *Baruch* 9, 2 that Baruch and Jeremiah rent their garments, wept, mourned, and fasted seven days, before God revealed himself to Baruch.⁷ These fasts in apocalyptic literature, whether they meant total abstention from any kind of food or simply entailed special diets, were usually practiced over periods of seven days, and repeated two or three times. In 4 *Ezra* the apocalyptic visionary is repeatedly (5, 13–20; 6, 31–35; 9, 24; 12, 51) told to fast for seven days and do some other preparatory rituals.⁸ The three books mentioned here, *Daniel*, 2 *Baruch*, and 4 *Ezra*, do not contain heavenly ascents, though the practice of fasts was also known whenever ascents were experienced. Thus, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* 9, 7, the visionary is told to abstain for a period of forty days from every kind of food cooked by fire, and from drinking wine and from anointing himself with oil. This period of forty days is likewise known from other sources.⁹ Most certainly, it was influenced by what we know of Moses¹⁰ and Elijah.¹¹

6 Compare also 9, 3. See J. A. Montgomery, *The Book of Daniel* (ICC), p. 407, and the discussion and references in Chapter One above.

7 To be exact, these practices were initially performed as a sign of mourning over the destruction of Jerusalem. However, it is no coincidence that following these practices, God revealed himself to Baruch. Other fasts are reported in 2 *Baruch* in 12, 5 and 21, 1.

8 For further examples of this kind, see D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: SCM Press, 1964), pp. 169–173. In his commentary, M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), suggests the context of mourning as the one preferred for assessing these practices.

9 See the text published in Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, Appendix C, § 11, p. 108 and § 14, p. 109. There are other periods mentioned in the Hekhalot literature. See, for instance, *Synopse*, § 300, where twelve days are the time required in preparation for the study of *Sar Torah*.

10 Exodus 34, 28; Deuteronomy 9, 9; 18. In a tradition preserved in Bav. *Yomā* 4/a (= *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, Version A, Chapter i), Rabbi Nathan is quoted as saying that six days had to pass before Moses could receive the word of God. This had to happen "so that he would be cleansed of all the foods and drinks in his bowels, and thus become like the angels". Bav. *Hagigah* 16/a mentions the fact that the angels do not eat. See further the discussion between Rabbi 'Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael in Bav. *Yomā* 75/b as to whether the angels eat and what their nutrition consists of.

11 1 Kings 19, 7–8. See further, R. Arbesmann, "Fasting and Prophecy in Pagan and Christian Antiquity", *Traditio* VII (1949/1951), pp. 1–71; S. Lowy, "The Motivation of Fasting in Talmudic Literature", *Journal of Jewish Studies* XIX (1958), pp. 19–38.

Sometimes only special diets were prescribed instead of the prolonged fasts. Thus, while *4 Ezra* 9, 24, 51 says that the visionary sustained himself on a vegetarian diet of the flowers of the field, in Merkavah texts all vegetables are strictly forbidden during the time in which the initiate prepares himself for his ecstatic experience.¹² In addition, one section, written in Aramaic, says that he should bake his bread himself from flour that he has ground himself, and particularly avoid bread baked by a woman. Furthermore, he should eat no meat, fish, onion and garlic, and abstain from all kinds of alcoholic beverages.¹³ In the Merkavah texts, fasts and ascetic diets are alternate practices, and it is not sufficiently made clear when the one or the other is practiced. In any event, these ascetic practices are known from other sources,¹⁴ some of which have already been discussed in the previous chapters.¹⁵ Presumably, certain rabbinic circles maintained that the study of the Torah entailed an ascetic, or austere, way of life.¹⁶ But when we come to the Hekhalot literature, and particularly to those sections which describe the practices of conjuring angels to reveal secrets, these ascetic means become a major issue. Conceivably, they induced alternate states of consciousness.¹⁷

Together with these diets and fasts, ritual baths are taken, once again, specifically in connection with the conjuration of angels in order to adjure them

¹² See, for instance, *Synopse*, § 299.

¹³ *Synopse*, § 489.

¹⁴ For asceticism as it is viewed by Philo, see H. Leisegang, *Der Heilige Geist*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), p. 215.

¹⁵ See M. D. Swartz, "Hekhalot Rabbati §§ 297–306: A Ritual for the Cultivation of the Prince of the Torah", in V. L. Wimbush (ed.), *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Source Book* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 227–234.

¹⁶ Mishnah *ʿAvot* iv, 4: "This is the way of the Torah: A morsel with salt shalt thou eat and water by measure shalt thou drink; and thou shalt lie upon the earth, and thou shalt live a life of hardship, and labor in the Torah" (English translation: R. Travers Herford, *The Ethics of the Fathers*, [New York: Schocken Books, 1962], p. 154). For a general summary of the rabbinical views on asceticism, see E. E. Urbach, "Ascesis and Suffering in Talmudic and Midrashic Sources" [In Hebrew], in S. Baron et al. (ed.), *Y. F. Baer Jubilee Volume*, (Jerusalem: Historical Society of Israel, 1960), pp. 48–68. See also the methodological discussion of S. D. Fraade, "Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism," in A. Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible Through the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 253–288.

¹⁷ We shall come back to this point in Part Two of our book, where a detailed description of the texts will be given. We also know from rabbinic sources that fasts were in practice when people desired the revelation of Elijah the Prophet, see Yer. *Terumot* 46/b.

to descend to earth and reveal secrets.¹⁸ The initiate preparing himself for his mystical experience is told to take these ritual baths every evening before eating the daily meal. Sometimes, the number of such ritual baths is given: in one case we find twenty-four,¹⁹ and in another seven.²⁰ In one or two cases, specifications are given as to how the ritual baths are to be taken: “at the end of his fast-days and his ritual cleansing he should go and sit in water up to his neck...”²¹ Yet, whatever is prescribed in these cases is quite simple in comparison to the elaborate magical practices known from the Greek magical papyri and the Hebrew magical treatises such as *Sefer Ha-Razim* and *Sefer Ha-Malbush*. In these magical texts, the performer is told to bring animal offerings, wine libations, and all kinds of tools and objects which are said to aid the magical performance. Those who still argue that the main aim and purpose of the Hekhalot writings was their adjuratory features should consider the fact that sacrifices and libations, which are absent from the Hekhalot literature, are a clear demarcation line between magic and Hekhalot mysticism. However, it is probably through the influence of these magical rites that we find in some Hekhalot texts the idea that certain practices are useful only for bringing about certain experiences at specific times or dates. Thus, we find special practices for mystical experiences and revelations, which are to be accomplished on the

18 The technical term for this process in Hebrew is: *zqq*, literally ‘to bind (by an oath)’. See in *Tarbiẓ* XXXVIII (1969), p. 365, note to line 31.

19 *Ma’aseh Merkavah*, § 11, p. 108. It should be noticed that it is difficult to harmonize this number—twenty-four—with the forty days of fasting prescribed in the same context.

20 See *Merkavah Rabbah*, *Synopse*, § 623.

21 *Ibid.* A similar procedure is described in the case of Adam’s penitence in *Vita Adae et Evae*, chapter 6. Adam was spending forty days fasting and told Eve to go to the Tigris and lift up a stone and stand on it in the water up to her neck. Adam also told Eve to stand in the water of the river for thirty-seven days. He himself spent forty days in the water of the river Jordan. In 7, 2 it is again said that Adam walked to the Jordan and stood on a stone up to his neck in the water. A similar tradition is preserved in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 20. It tells of Adam’s penitence: “Adam went to the upper *Gihon* until the water reached his neck, and he fasted seven weeks . . .” For the whole subject see L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. V, pp. 114–115. However, Ginzberg observed that “both sources (= *Vita Adae et Evae* and *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*) go back to the old Halaka.” In Bav. *Yomā* 78/a (not 87/a, as indicated by Ginzberg) Rav Yoseph is quoted as saying that a ritually unclean woman may take a cleansing bath while she is immersed only up to her neck in water. The Gemarā, however, remarks that this is not the accepted ruling (and a woman is cleansed only if she immerses completely in the water; see also *Slavonic Vita Adae et Evae*, 36, 4, in Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, p. 135). See further Toseftā *Kippurim* iv (v), 5, and Bav. *Yomā* 77/b (twice); Bav. *Berakhot* 25/b.

Feast of Shavu'ot ("a ζ eret"), on New Year's Day, the Day of Atonement, at the beginning of every month, etc.²²

In the Hekhalot tractates that deal with heavenly ascents, the complex practices, which are prescribed, are mainly incantations (or hymns), the saying of "strange names" (*vores magicae* or *nomina barbara*), charms and magical seals. As for the incantations or hymns, they have already been discussed above in Chapter One. To remind the reader, *Hekhalot Rabbati* opens with the question: "What are the incantations which should be said by him who wants to contemplate the vision of the Merkavah, to descend safely and to ascend safely?" As the last words indicate, the function of these incantations is to conduct the visionary safely through all the dangerous events or moments, which he might encounter in the course of his mystical journey. Indeed, we have already seen that in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* the angel Iaoel told the visionary to worship and utter the song, which he had taught him. It appears that he did so in order to protect the visionary and to strengthen him against the "adventures" he was to experience in heaven. The theurgic quality of these incantations becomes evident from two passages in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. Both passages are introduced as questions, which Rabbi Yishmael asked Rabbi 'Akiva. In the first one, Rabbi Yishmael enquired, "How can a man gain a vision of what is above the Seraphim who stand above Rozaya, Lord God of Israel?" To which Rabbi 'Akiva answered, "When I ascended to the first *Hekhal*, I said a prayer, and [then] I saw from the first *Hekhal* in heaven to the seventh *Hekhal*."²³ The second passage asks, "How can a man have these visions and see what Rozaya, Lord God of Israel, is doing?" Rabbi 'Akiva's answer accordingly was "I prayed a prayer of compassion and thus I was saved."²⁴

Attention has been given to these hymns in Chapter One. The focus there was on issues concerning the epistemological essence of the hymns and this in terms of establishing the ontology of the mystical experience. In the past, the protective, that is magical or theurgic, function of the hymns received primary attention. They were viewed as incantations with adjuratory components.

22 Synopsis, §§ 424 and 659–663.—Compare, for instance, K. Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, (Stuttgart: Verlag Teubner, 1974), vol. II, p. 13, where the days which are unsuitable for magical performance are listed. In *Sefer Ha-Razim*, one may find several references to the days of the week and the hours that are most suitable for specific magical performances.

23 § 33, p. 116.

24 § 4, p. 103. See also § 9, p. 107: "I (Rabbi 'Akiva) said the *Qedushah* before him who created and ordered (into being) all the creatures, so that the ministering angels should not consume me". See also there § 17, p. 110.

Indeed, this function, often though not always, seems present. At the same time, these hymns are unique compositions with a strong lyrical component. Indeed, their general features are those of songs of praise that betray their primary, practical, function. Thus, for instance, one of these songs in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, § 16, p. 110) contains this request: "And rescue me from all these hostile ones (= the angels of destruction) which stand [behind the Holy Creatures], so that they shall become the bearers of my love before you". The theurgic functions come to the fore even more emphatically in the "five prayers" which constitute a central place in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, (§§ 26–31). These prayers combine lyrical poetry with magical names.²⁵ The prayers begin with the remark, attributed to Rabbi Yishmael: "I was praying each of these prayers with its names, both on my descent unto and ascent from the Merkavah, and thus no harm was caused to my limbs." Notwithstanding these examples, the truth remains that these songs are presented in *Hekhalot Rabbati* as songs of praise recited by the angelic beings, and even by the Throne of Glory, to God.²⁶ In the first place, the mystic who had ascended to heaven learnt them in order to apply them for theurgic purposes. However, whether these hymns were said as autohypnotic means or whether they were recited in heaven as protective means, their unique quality establishes them as outstanding specimens of mystical poetry. To remind the reader, I attempted to show in Chapter One that the contents of these hymns mark an epistemological passage from theurgy to ontology.

Even more important from the magico-theurgic point of view is the saying of names, mainly the secret names of the Deity and of the angels. We already saw that there were various traditions going back to the ritual practice of the second Temple, which refer to the secret names of God. Thus, we know of the secret name spoken out by the priests in their blessing in the Temple.²⁷ In another connection, we hear of a secret name that was enunciated in the special oath, which God used in the creation of the world.²⁸ Mention should be made in this connection of the so-called *voces magicae* and *nomina barbara* that are the

25 See G. Scholem, "Der Name Gottes und die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala", in *Judaica III* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), pp. 7–70.

26 See the discussion and references in Chapter One.

27 See L. H. Schiffman, "A Forty-Two Letter Divine Name in the Aramaic Magic Bowls", *Bulletin of the Institute of Jewish Studies*, vol. I. (1973), pp. 97 ff. Schiffman's explanation seems rather hypothetical.

28 1 *Enoch* 69, 14 ff. Compare also *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, ed. Finkelstein, paragraph 330, p. 380.

core of adjurations.²⁹ Further, we should refer to the theurgic material found in the magical papyri,³⁰ which shows affinity to old Jewish magical practices.³¹ In short, much in the traditions of the time preceding the Hekhalot literature can explain the background of the names-praxis of the Hekhalot mystics.

Names empower the adjurations that constitute the major theurgic means found in the Hekhalot literature. Most illuminating in this respect is the following passage from *Hekhalot Rabbati*: “When a man wants to descend to the Merkavah, he should call Suriya, the Prince of the Countenance, and conjure him a hundred and twelve times in the name of Tetrasii, Lord God . . . He should neither add nor subtract from that number of a hundred and twelve, for if he does, he fatally endangers himself. His mouth should utter the names and his fingers should count a hundred and twelve, and he immediately descends and masters the Merkavah” (*Synopse*, § 205).³² It is interesting that not only does the exact number of the names guarantee the success of the mystical experience, but that, in fact, any deviation from the exact number physically endangers the mystic.

In fact, there are other sets of numbers prescribed for the conjurations, mostly connected with the number twelve.³³ The subject of the name-clusters and the numbers they consist of still deserves special attention. In *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§ 195–196 we read that God is conjured by a series of sixteen names all of which begin with “tetra” (or “totro”, as some of the Hebrew manuscripts reproduce the name). They have to be recited from beginning to end. In addition, the text says (in Aramaic), “And the sign of this Halakhah is to learn these

29 See S. Lieberman, “Some Notes on Adjurations in Israel”, *Texts and Studies* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1974), pp. 21–28; and more specifically in *Toseftā Ki-Fshutah to Shabbat*, pp. 91 ff.

30 See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 75 ff.: “The Theurgic Elements of the Lesser Hekhaloth and the Magical Papyri”. See also E. E. Urbach, *The Sages*, Chapter Seven: “The Power of the Divine Name”. Urbach, however, does not refer to the materials contained in the Hekhalot literature.

31 For the relevant eastern and Hellenistic magical material, see J. M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 1974). Hull was not acquainted with the Jewish sources and thus his treatment of the subject is incomplete. More relevant for our discussion, however, is M. Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973) pp. 220 ff. Most valuable too is E. R. Dodds’ article “Theurgy” reprinted as Appendix II to his *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), pp. 283 ff.

32 *Ma’aseh Merkavah* § 30, p. 114, lists the magically effective names.

33 See, for instance, *Synopse*, §§ 300–304.

Great Names³⁴ from Tetrasii to Tetrasi: he should learn them in the following sequence . . .”³⁵ Interestingly, the importance of the correct sequence is stressed here, but never do we hear anything about the importance of correctly uttering the names. We know of the great importance attached in the magical papyri to the correct pronunciation of the names of the conjured gods (ἐχφώνησις), but nothing of the kind is explicitly stated in our texts.

All in all, the theurgic elements of the Hekhalot literature have a decisive share in endowing this literature with its idiosyncratic character, and they have their share in establishing the unique ontology of the situation that is created. In contradistinction to the view expressed by A. Jellinek that the theurgic content of the Hekhalot literature was introduced (“untergeschoben”) at a comparatively late period, it must be maintained, with G. Scholem, that this particular element in the Hekhalot literature belonged to its very heart, and this almost from its very beginning.³⁶ In fact, one of the earliest Merkavah texts we possess, *Re’uyot Yehezkel*, explicitly refers to those who are in possession of the mystical secret knowledge as “*Meshamshin Ba-Shum*”, which is the Aramaic equivalent for theurgists, that is, those who “act upon” the gods by the power of their secret names.³⁷

Mention should also be made of the seals, which the mystic who descends to the Merkavah has to prepare and then show to the gatekeepers at the entrance of each Hekhal. These seals grant him passage through the various gates and protect him against the hostility of the gatekeepers. Apart from the

34 ms. Budapest (Kaufmann) 238, p. 174: *shmahatā ravrevayā*. This is the plural of *shmā rabbā*, the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew *shem gadol*, which is to be interpreted as “a most powerful magical name”. See the opening three paragraphs of *Hekhalot Zutarti*, (especially nos. 2 & 3) in Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 77, footnote 6. To this compare also *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§ 166 and 241. See further B. A. Levine, “The Language of the Magical Bowls”, Appendix to J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, vol. V, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), pp. 372–373. The “Great Name” also occurs in a text describing the *Ascension of Moses*: “The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Michael, Go and teach him (i.e., Moses) my Great Name, so that the flame of the Shekhinah shall not consume him . . .”. See *The Ascension of Moses and the Heavenly Jerusalem*, translated by H. W. Attridge, in *Studies on the Testament of Moses*, edited by G. W. E. Nickelsburg, Jr. (Cambridge, Mass.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973), p. 123. See also Mishnah *Ta’anit* iii, 8.

35 There follow the sixteen letters which correspond to the various endings to the “Tetra” root-form. See also *Ma’aseh Merkavah*, § 30, p. 114, where the “Tetra” root-form was not corrupted.

36 See A. Jellinek, *Bet Ha-Midrash*, vol. VI, Introduction, p. XXVII f. See further G. Scholem, *ibid.*, p. 75.

37 Compare E. R. Dodds, *ibid.*, pp. 283 ff.

secret names, which they bear, nothing is said in the Hekhalot texts about the detailed contents of those seals. However, we hear in *Hekhalot Rabbati* that at each of the first six gates the mystic has to show two seals, one to the gatekeepers standing to the right, and one to those standing on the left. The seals are designated by their mystical names. As in the case of the names uttered in the magical adjurations and invocations, many of these names are vague, and often give the impression that they are codes that the initiate is supposed to know how to decipher. Scholem pointed out that at least in two cases the numerical value of pairs of letters, which build up the names of the seals can explain the forms of the names.³⁸ However, although some additional formal principles, such as changes in the order of the letters or in the endings of the names, could be pointed out, the real contents and meaning of these seals are still by-and-large obscure. Much work has still to be devoted to deciphering the names of the seals and of the spells scattered in the literature of the period. In fact, only the combined efforts of scholars from different fields of knowledge can bring about the desired progress in the study of the magico-theurgic practices found in the magical papyri, in the amulets and bowls, in the writings of Gnosticism, and in Jewish mysticism and magic. Only a comprehensive and comparative study of all this vast material will enable us to understand the technique underlying the creation of these names and spells. It is very likely that in many cases the names were obscured on purpose in order to prevent people from using or misusing them for their own unauthorized purposes. In addition, it should be noticed that errors and confusion were often introduced by uninformed copyists.

One fact still deserves our attention, namely, the occurrence of these theurgic practices in the Hekhalot literature. Such occurrence makes it evident that at least in one of its more central features this literature came under the spell of parallel elements found in the pagan religious surroundings of the time. Indeed, it is quite tempting to argue that, in this respect, the Hekhalot literature betrays indebtedness to pagan magic. If we take into account the fact that the Hekhalot mystics were in no way opposed to rabbinic Judaism, the presence of such "syncretistic" elements cannot be taken as a failure of nerve on the part of these mystics. As Scholem pointed out, these mystics were learned Jews who greatly valued the study of the Law and advocated strict obedience to its rulings.³⁹ Thus, the magical and theurgic elements in their writings can really be taken to imply a challenge to some of the established views on the nature of Judaism in Talmudic times. Having in mind our brief observations concerning

38 G. Scholem, *op. cit.*, pp. 65 ff.

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 9–13. See also Appendix B, below.

the theurgic elements in the Hekhalot literature, it seems quite safe to say that the last word in the characterization of that Jewry, or at least of certain parts of it, has not yet been determined. (Later on—in the Introduction to Part Two—we shall have an opportunity to come back to this point.) In addition, *Sefer Ha-Razim* confronts us with equally grave questions connected with the discussion of the theurgic elements in the Hekhalot literature. Suffice it to say that the picture of the life and beliefs of the Jews in the Talmudic times, as we are used to viewing it from the commonly studied rabbinic sources, will have to be supplemented with less commonly studied sources, among which we include the Hekhalot literature.

Today, however, there is nothing new or strange in the recognition that one form or another of magic was known and practiced in the circles of the Jewish sages of the Mishnaic and Talmudic era. There is a lot in the rabbinical sources that points to the fact that magic was not spread among the unlearned and vulgar people alone.⁴⁰ It may be argued that magic was almost universally taken for granted, and even practiced by many, without the least concern for the fact that Scripture fought a bitter fight against it and the pagan world-view that it entailed. No wonder, then, that theurgic practice found its way into Merkavah mysticism. Actually, where auto-hypnotic and auto-suggestive experiences were cultivated, one is likely to find the suitable soil for the theurgic and magical seeds to grow. Having in mind these observations, Rashi's commentary to the story of the four who entered the *Pardes* is most telling: Rashi explains the words "entered the *Pardes*" by saying: "They ascended to heaven by means of a Name"! The matter-of-fact way in which Rashi speaks, almost succeeds in diverting the attention from the theological problem involved. Behind his comment, one finds scenery rich in theurgic and magical prescriptions and practices.⁴¹

Finally, it should be noted that the theurgic means which we have just discussed, were also applied in the cases of the conjuration of angels. Thus we hear in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (§ 12, p. 109) that Arpedes,⁴² the Angel of the

40 See the references to the studies of G. Bohak, Y. Harari, and R. Lesses in Chapter One.

41 E. Kanarfogel, *Peering through the Lattices': Mystical, Magical and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 2000) [Hebrew translation Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2011], has lifted the curtain behind which the knowledge and practice of magic and mysticism played a significant role in medieval Europe.

42 The name of an angel Arpada, or Arpeda, is known from *Sefer Ha-Razim*, p. 82, l. 27. It should be noted that many of the names of the angels occurring in the Hekhalot literature do in themselves sound like magical names; and, in any event, those engaged in the study

[divine] Countenance, told Rabbi Yishmael that “he who wants to make use of this great secret (= of the *Sar Torah*) should . . . invoke⁴³ those three names, and I shall descend”.⁴⁴ Similarly, seals were also used on other occasions: “Rabbi Yishmael said: I sealed myself with seven seals, when Padkeres, the Angel of the Countenance, descended” (§ 15, p. 109). A detailed description follows of how the initiate applies seals. He should tie one on his (right?) leg, his heart (= chest), his right arm, on his left arm, on the neck, one ‘to protect my body’,⁴⁵ and one on the top of his head.⁴⁶

B

All in all, the practices we have discussed here almost amount to a magical ritual.⁴⁷ Yet, we should be careful not to confuse magic with mysticism. In spite of all the similarities between the two, Hekhalot mysticism cannot be classified in terms of magic or theurgy. There are magical and theurgic elements in Merkavah mysticism, but Merkavah mysticism is neither a magical nor a theurgic experience. E. R. Dodds described theurgy as “magic applied to a religious purpose and resting on a supposed revelation of a religious character.”⁴⁸ Dodds also remarked that, “whereas vulgar magic used names and formulae of religious origin to profane ends, theurgy used the procedures of vulgar magic primarily to a religious end.”⁴⁹ It should be noted that Dodds here uses the

of etymologies may quickly find out that the etymology of the angels' names are slippery ground.

43 The verb here used is *qa'ra*. The root QRA is generally used in the Aramaic and Mandaic incantations in the sense of evil invocation against which one seeks protection. See, for instance, C. H. Gordon, “Aramaic Magical Bowls in the Istanbul and Baghdad Museums”, *Archiv Orientalni* VI (1934), p. 324, Text B, line 6; *idem*, “Aramaic and Mandaic Magical Bowls”, *Archiv Orientalni* IX (1937), p. 96, Text M, line 11.

44 A series of nine words here follows, though their meaning is not clear. The next paragraph mentions “the three names which are said by the Angels of the Glory”. Again nine unidentifiable words are given. In addition, this paragraph (13) mentions the “three letters which are uttered by the *Ḥayyot* when they see *Archas* (= *Arche?*), Lord God of Israel”, and the “three letters which the wheels of the (divine) chariot say when they sing their song to the Throne of the Glory”.

45 Apparently, this seal is put on the chest. See *Song of Songs* 8, 6.

46 See also § 11, p. 108.

47 See further the comparative references given by M. Margalioth, *Sepher Ha-Razim*, pp. 8 ff.

48 E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, p. 291.

49 *Ibid.* See further A. D. Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), vol. I, p. 189, footnote 81.

word magic in the sense applied to it in the Greek magical papyri, and not in the sense in which the anthropologists in the nineteenth century understood it, that is, as a rudimentary form of religion. In any event, practices known from the domain of sophisticated and popular or vulgar magic crossed over into the various forms of Merkavah mysticism. This does not mean that magic shaped the content and nature of Merkavah mysticism.

It should be noted, though, that some of these magico-theurgic practices—and specifically ritual baths, seals and names—bear strong resemblance to practices and to the religious layout known from various Gnostic writings.⁵⁰ It may therefore be asked whether the occurrence of these practices in the Hekhalot literature is not indicative of either a real Gnostic influence, or, at least, of the existence of certain points of connection between Hekhalot mysticism and Gnostic beliefs and practices. As is well known, Scholem argued that the Hekhalot writings are a Jewish concomitant to Gnosticism. The present writer, however, expressed the view that, since these writings are mystical with no immediate redemptive claims, they are to be strictly distinguished from the Gnostic concepts and writings, which have an emphatic redemptive message.⁵¹ In this respect, one has to distinguish between certain eschatological hopes mentioned in the Hekhalot writings or attached to their mystical activity,⁵² and the basic redemptive functions of Gnosticism and related literature. Essentially, Gnosticism means the ultimate escape from the bonds of the material and evil world, while Merkavah mysticism presupposes that the soul of the mystic always returns from its celestial journeys to its body on earth. If it fails to do so, that is, if the mystic dies in the course of his experience or as a result of it, this shows that he did not “deserve to see the King in His beauty”, as a common phrase in Hekhalot literature indicates.⁵³

Moreover, the angels who try to stand in the way of the ascending mystic do not share the evil qualities of the Archons (= the evil rulers of this world)

50 See W. Bousset, *Die Himmelsreise der Seele*, Reprint: (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, (n.d.)), pp. 5 ff. Bousset's arguments that the practices applied in ascension-experiences should be viewed in light of similar practices known from the Iranian religion are no longer valid.

51 Cf. *Israel Oriental Studies* III (1973), pp. 88 ff.

52 There are clear eschatological passages in the Hekhalot writings. The most emphatic eschatological claim, in this respect, is attached to the study of the *Shi'ur Qomah* (*Synopse*, § 377), which states that the reward of after-life is guaranteed to everyone who knows the mystical dimensions of the divinity.

53 See S. Leiter, “Worthiness, Acclamation and Appointment: Some Rabbinic Terms”, *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, Vol. XLI–XLII. (1973–1974), pp. 143 ff.

who try to capture the soul of the redeemed person and to prevent it from ascending to Incorruptibility, or to the Source of Light. Although the angels in the Hekhalot literature—and in the rabbinic literature related to it—are sometimes referred to as ‘angels of destruction’, their essence neither shows nor implies evil intentions. On the contrary, they show their zeal in keeping the holy purity of the domains in which God resides. It is only when God intervenes on behalf of the initiate or when the appropriate seals are produced that passage is granted to the ascending human being. Thus, the relevant material in the Hekhalot writings bears only a formal resemblance to concepts and practices known from Gnosticism. In any event, suggestive as this resemblance may be, it does not justify the interpretation of Jewish Merkavah mysticism in terms of Gnosticism. Admittedly, in tentatively following such an interpretation, one may come across features that may be helpful, mostly by contrast, in understanding certain details in Merkavah mysticism. At the same time, though, one should be careful not to follow comparisons without paying full attention to factors that establish difference. We always have to keep in mind that Gnosticism was a religious phenomenon diametrically opposed to everything Jewish; in fact, the God of the Jews was considered by the Gnostics an evil deity. Consequently, it becomes evident that the Jewish mystics, who were everything but downright heretics, avoided all conscious contacts with the Gnostics, their concepts, their practices, and their writings.⁵⁴

On the other hand, recent research shows that many of the Gnostic writings were in one way or another influenced by Jewish thought and beliefs. Although the exact way these Jewish ideas reached Gnosticism is still a riddle, one may assume that certain Jews who underwent conversion to Gnosticism, probably after converting to Christianity, brought their knowledge along with them.⁵⁵ Christian writers familiar with Jewish writings could have served as literary intermediaries, too. In any event, it is clear today that a number of Jewish ideas and concepts found their way into Gnosticism, and this in spite of the fact that Gnosticism totally rejected Judaism. In this manner, we may understand the occurrence of two Merkavah passages in two of the Gnostic writings: in the

54 On this, see further, D. Flusser, “Scholem’s Recent Book on Merkavah Literature”, *The Journal of Jewish Studies* XI (1960), 59–68.

55 See I. Gruenwald, “Jewish Sources for the Gnostic Texts from Nag Hammadi?” *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress for Jewish Studies*, Jerusalem, 1977, pp. 45 ff. See also the curious statement made by Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, I, xxiv, 6, that the Gnostics claimed that they were no longer Jews or Christians.

so-called “Die Schrift ohne Titel vom Ursprung der Welt”⁵⁶ and in the “Hypostasis of the Archons”.⁵⁷ Both texts contain detailed descriptions of the creation of the world. The background of the descriptions is the biblical story in Genesis, which is interpreted as latently containing a Gnostic doctrine. Both treatises are strongly interrelated, and it seems that they derive from a third, common, source, which is no longer known to us.⁵⁸

We begin with the “Untitled Work on the Creation of the World”. Its declared purpose is to tell about that which had existed before Chaos came into being and its nature. Furthermore, it pertains to the knowledge of what happened to Chaos when it was shaped into the material world. Briefly, the theory developed in this treatise informs of an immense domain of light beneath which a veil (παράπετασμα) was spread. That veil created a shadow, and in that shadow, Chaos came into being. Pistis, who is also called Sophia, and who came from above the veil, created a ruler over that Chaos. This ruler, or Archon, was called Yaldabaoth,⁵⁹ and he was responsible for the creation of everything that came

56 A. Böhlig and P. Labib, *Die koptisch-gnostische Schrift ohne Titel aus Codex II von Nag-Hammadi*, Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1962.

57 See B. Layton, “The Hypostasis of the Archons”, *Harvard Theological Review* LXVII (1974), pp. 351 ff., and R. A. Bullard, *The Hypostasis of the Archons* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1970). My quotations, however, are from Layton’s English translation of the Coptic text.

58 J. Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (New York: The Viking Press, 1960), p. 163, assumes that “much of this treatise (= *The Hypostasis of the Archons*) is manifestly an abridgement of a certain *Book of Norea*”.

59 The name “Yaldabaoth” has caused difficulties and a number of theories were suggested for its explanation. See G. Scholem, “Jaldabaoth Reconsidered”, in *Mélanges d’Histoire des Religions offerts à Henri-Charles Puech* (1974), pp. 405–421. Scholem writes (p. 418): “...Jaldabaoth is a composite of *jald-abaoth*. I propose that it owes its invention to a heretical Jew familiar with Aramaic, the Hebrew Bible and the literature or practice of the magicians, a Jew who, in the context of the Ophitic myth, created it as a secret name of Samael”. The element *Yald* designates, according to Scholem, not the son but the begetter (p. 419), and the element *abaoth* “originated as an abridged form, or substitute, of Sabaoth” (p. 420). Scholem’s explanation is the best so far, though it may cause etymological difficulties. The Hebrew root YLD is used for “child” and, as a verb in the sense of “to beget” and “to be born”. However, the Aramaic use of the term is mostly used in connection with the mother giving birth to a child. It may, indeed, be argued that the ‘yald’-element conveys Yaldabaoth’s double role as the one begotten (by Pistis Sophia, and hence called in the Untitled Work νεανίσκος) and the one who begets. That in the explanation of the alleged etymology of the name Yaldabaoth one should not overlook his status as the *begotten* one becomes evident from the *Untitled Work* 148, 1 ff. (p. 40/1 f.), where among the things mentioned as Yaldabaoth’s roles, nothing is said of his role as the one who begets. It is here that Pistis Sophia calls him by the name of νεανίσκος, that is

into being beneath that veil. Among the things created by him were seven archangels, who possessed masculine and feminine qualities and names, and to whom he allocated heavens. These heavens contained, among other things, thrones, temples and chariots (150, 11 ff.). When Yaldabaoth saw all the magnificence of his creation, he boasted and declared himself the only God (151, 12). Pistis, who heard this blasphemy, condemned Yaldabaoth and told him that a 'Son of Light' would come and destroy him and all his Creations. However, Sabaoth, one of the offspring of Yaldabaoth, heard the voice of Pistis, praised her, and joined her in her condemnation of his father and mother. As a reward, Pistis stretched out her finger and poured Light over him. Consequently, Sabaoth was endowed with great power and became the Lord of all the Powers (152, 9). He loathed all his kinsfolk, and they in turn waged war against him in the seven heavens. Pistis, who saw what was going on, sent seven archangels to rescue Sabaoth. They snatched him up to the seventh heaven. There, she erected for him a heavenly kingdom (152, 23). In addition, Pistis gave him the Place of Rest (τόπος ἀνάπαυσις) for his repentance (μετάνοια). She also brought to him her daughter Zoe so that she might teach him about all that existed in the Ogdoad, that is, in the eighth heaven (152, 26 ff.). Then Sabaoth, who was very powerful indeed, made for himself a dwelling-place, which was big and wonderful. In fact, this dwelling-place was even bigger than the ones in the other heavens (152, 31–35). In front of that dwelling-place he created a big throne which was placed on a chariot (ἄρμα = Merkavah!). The chariot had four faces (πρόσωπον), and it was called Cherubin. Now, the Cherubin had four forms (μορφή), one on each of its four corners: lion forms (!) calf forms, human forms, and eagle forms. The number of all the forms amounted to sixty-four. Seven archangels stood before the throne. Sabaoth himself was the eighth; thus, all the forms amounted to seventy-two, which the "Untitled Work" assumes is the number which corresponds to the number of the nations of the world.

Before we continue with this description of the installment scene in the "Untitled Work", a few remarks are in order concerning the preceding part of the narrative. To begin with, the description of Sabaoth's throne is quite peculiar and causes some difficulties, the main one being how exactly the author conceived of the faces of the "Forms"? He says that each of the four corners of the throne, called "Cherubin", had eight forms, that is, the four forms—the lion, the calf, the human, and the eagle—which were all placed at every corner and had two faces each. This is quite remarkable in itself, and when we multiply

"child", or in Hebrew *Yeled*. Only later on does the Archon discover in himself the desire to create and to beget offspring. Then the shift occurs from the status of the one begotten to the one who begets.

the eight faces by four (= corners) we get only thirty-two faces, and not sixty-four, as the author himself counts (153, 9). Elsewhere, in *Hekhalot Zutarti* we read that each of the Holy Creatures in the divine chariot had four faces, and since there were four creatures at every corner of the throne, there were all in all sixty-four faces (4 creatures $\times$ 4 faces $\times$ 4 corners = 64!).⁶⁰ A similar calculation is preserved in the Aramaic Targum to Ezekiel 1, 6: every creature had four faces, and there were four creatures at every corner, so that the sum total of the faces was sixty-four. Evidently, the tradition preserved in the “Untitled Work” is dependent on such Merkavah-speculations, and it may be argued that its details should be emended in order to fit the Merkavah material known from *Hekhalot Zutarti* and the Targum to Ezekiel. As for the order in which the “Forms” are enumerated in the Untitled Work, it should be noticed that it preserves the order in Revelation 4, 7.

Another point deserving attention is the instruction given by Zoe⁶¹ concerning all that is in the Ogdoad. Though nothing explicit is said in the text about the contents of Zoe’s teachings and the Ogdoad, we may conclude that, since the Ogdoad represents the domain of light of the Imperishability, the teaching about it is of a theosophical nature, and may include the secrets of redemption. The idea that whatever belongs to the Ogdoad is top secret is also found in the Jewish Merkavah speculations. Bav. *Ḥagigah* 12/b gives a detailed description of the seven heavens and of what they allegedly contain. Then (13/a, top) the Gemarā quotes Rabbi ‘Aḥa bar Ya‘aqov’s question to the effect that there is yet another, eighth heaven, which is above the heads of the *Ḥayyot*. The question refers to Ezekiel 1, 22 ff., where the prophet sees a firmament stretched above the heads of the Holy Creatures. The response given in the Gemarā is “Till this place (= the seventh heaven) you may discourse, from here onwards (= the eighth heaven) you have no permission to discourse”. The Gemarā also refers the student to *Ben Sira* 3, 21–22, which is taken to support this idea. However, it should be noticed that while the Gemarā forbids any speculations on the eighth heaven, the “Untitled Work” maintains that knowledge of the Ogdoad was granted to Sabaoth. Now, in some respects, Sabaoth in the “Untitled Work” brings to mind the fate of Enoch, who was translated to heaven, transformed into the angel Metatron, and thus received all kinds of honors and revelations

60 See, *Synopse*, § 354. The text does not make a clear distinction between the Aramaic *‘apin*, faces, and *gapin*, wings.

61 In 154, 6, however, it is Pistis Sophia herself who is instructing Sabaoth. However, from the parallel passage in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, it becomes evident that Zoe, and not Pistis Sophia, instructs Sabaoth. See also “Untitled Work”, 155, 4.

of secrets.⁶² Both Enoch-Metatron and Sabaoth enjoyed exceptional fates, yet the different contexts of their experiences forbid us from pushing the points of resemblance beyond their formal aspects.

The Merkavah-like account in the "Untitled Work" ends with the description of how above that throne, Sabaoth created a host of angelic beings (153,16 ff.). One class of the angels was called "Seraphim". Their form was that of serpents⁶³ and they were always praising Sabaoth.⁶⁴ Sabaoth also created a first-born one called "Israel", which in a common etymology of the time⁶⁵ was taken to designate "the man who sees God".⁶⁶ It is noteworthy that, in this text, the People of Israel receive a place of honor among the celestial beings. Yet, whatever their status, they still belong to the unredeemed world of the Archons. They are among the hosts of the angels serving Sabaoth, who, to be sure, though he had been transferred to the seventh heaven, did not reach the Domain of Light of Imperishability. Concerning that Domain, he received only oral instruction. In addition to these angelic beings, Sabaoth created another being called "Jesus Christ", who resembled the savior who was in the Ogdoad. This "Jesus Christ" had a special throne on the right of the throne of Sabaoth,⁶⁷ while on its left was sitting the virgin, which represented the holy spirit of Christian theology. Standing before Sabaoth were also seven other virgins in whose hands were zithers, psalteries, and trumpets. Finally, Sabaoth himself is described as

62 This is the main subject of 3 *Enoch* to be discussed in Part Two.

63 This is a rather peculiar—yet typically Gnostic—interpretation of the snake called in Numbers 21, 6 *saraf*. See also the next footnote. The Coptic text here uses the Greek word *δράκων*. In Jewish laws of idolatry, the dragon-form received special attention: Mishnah *Avodah Zarah* iii, 3. According to Yeush. *Avodah Zarah*, fol. 42/d, a dragon has spikes growing out of his neck. See further Bav. *Avodah Zarah* 43/a.

64 See Isaiah 6, 2–3 in comparison to 14, 29 and 30, 6. It is still an open question, What made Isaiah call the holy angels by a word he uses also for dragons.

65 See J. G. Kahn, "Israel—*Videns Deum*", (in Hebrew), *Tarbiz* XL (1971), pp. 285–292. Kahn (= Y. Cohen-Yashar), however, was not aware of the existence of the Gnostic parallels, as given by A. Böhlig in his notes, p. 54. See also J. Z. Smith, "The Prayer of Joseph", in J. Neusner (ed.), *Religions in Antiquity* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), pp. 262–268.

66 The end of *Midrash Konen* (in A. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, vol. II, p. 39) mentions a Creature (*Hayyah*), called "Yisrael", which stands in the middle of the firmament and says praises to God. In all likelihood, this Creature is meant to be a mystical representation of the People of Israel in heaven.

67 This is in line with the Christian interpretation of Psalms 110, 1.

sitting on a Throne of Light⁶⁸ which was surrounded by a great cloud. This description of the throne is familiar from Jewish sources.⁶⁹

As already mentioned above, a similar description of the installment of Sabaoth in the seventh heaven is found in another Gnostic text, *The Hypostasis of the Archons*. There, the description is part of the instruction of Eleleth to Norea,⁷⁰ after she had resisted the temptation of the Archons to lead her astray. In its form and content, the description there is an abridgement of the source from which it drew.⁷¹ In any event, as becomes clear from a number of differences between the two narratives, the account of the installment of Sabaoth in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* does not derive from its counterpart in the “Untitled Work”. For instance, in contradistinction to the “Untitled Work”, where to the left of Sabaoth’s throne one can find the Virgin of the Holy Spirit, *The Hypostasis of the Archons* reports that on the left of the throne was placed the Angel of Wrath. Thus, one finds Unrighteousness occupying the left of what may be called the sub-Ogdoadian Deity. This fact implies a symbolism, which probably draws dualistic concepts like those known from the Qumran writings and which later on constituted key notions in the Kabbalah.⁷² Since Sabaoth,

68 A literal translation of the Coptic text here reads, “upon a throne in the light in a great cloud.” As Professor Bentley Layton observed in an English translation of these pages, which he kindly prepared for me, the text seems to be corrupt. Layton suggests reading it as “a luminous throne in a great cloud”. “A luminous throne” may reflect the Greek θρόνος δόξης [*Kisse Kavod*], the Throne of Glory in Jeremiah 17, 12.

69 See *Mechilta d’Rabbi Ismael to Exodus* 20, 18 (p. 238).—The idea that a cloud covers God from the sight of men and angels is also known from a so-called Jewish Orphic poem from the second or third century B.C.E. The poem was preserved in two versions, which were recently re-discussed in Y. Gutman, *The Beginnings of Jewish-Hellenistic Literature* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1958), pp. 153 ff. In the first version, which is preserved in *Cohort. ad. gent.* (attributed to Justin Martyr), God’s invisibility is accounted for by the cloud which covers him. And in the version attributed to Aristobulus (quoted in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* XIII,12) God is hidden from the sight of men by “a tenfold mist” (νέφος . . . δεκάπτυχον). The so-called tenfold mist most likely corresponds to the ten heavens known by the Pythagoreans.—For the Palestinian nomenclature, which refers to the fourth heaven by the name of ‘Arafel (νέφος), see my edition of *Re’uyot Yehezkel*, p. 118.

70 For the studies dealing with the figure of Norea, see B. Layton, *art. cit.*, p. 388.

71 See above n. 63.

72 In the “Untitled Work” 154, 12 ff., Pistis Sophia is said to call Sabaoth to her right and the Archigenetor (= Yaldabaoth) to her left, thus forming a cosmic scheme of righteousness versus unrighteousness. This division reminds of the one portrayed in the Qumran *Rule of the Community* (1 Q S), III,13 ff. See G. Scholem, “Gut und Böse in der Kabbalah”, in *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit* (Zurich: Rhein Verlag, 1962), pp. 49 ff.

in spite of his substantial prominence over the other Archons, still occupies the place which is beneath the veil that separates the "Above" and the "Below", he cannot fully equal the qualities of the God of the Jews in Jewish thought. The degraded status of Sabaoth signals a Gnostic concept, he belongs to the inferior world of the Archons. Thus, even in the conceptual framework of *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, the existence of the Angel of Wrath in the realm of the seventh heaven next to Sabaoth cannot be viewed in such radical dualistic terms as one is used to consider evil in Gnostic thought. It has to be noticed too that, in the "Untitled Work" (154, 11 ff.), Pistis Sophia places Sabaoth on her right while the Archigenetor (= Yaldabaoth) is called to occupy a place on her left. Thus, both texts conceive of evil as existing near a divine or semi-divine being. This emphasizes the reality of its existence, and even more so, makes it clear that however rebellious the powers of evil may appear, they are still under the control of the supreme divinity. Thus, we once again realize that dualistic religious systems may nonetheless be monistic at their very heart.⁷³

We have gone into some detail in our presentation of certain Merkavah-like passages in two Gnostic writings in order to suggest that just as a number of Gnostic elements found their way into Merkavah mysticism, so did certain Merkavah elements find their way into Gnosticism. A comparative study of Merkavah mysticism and Gnosticism will certainly render important results, which will prevent us from overdoing our job by interpreting one phenomenon in terms of the other. The points of connection between Merkavah mysticism and Gnosticism can tell a lot about their respective spirit and their character in the framework of the "syncretism" of the first centuries C.E. Speaking of "syncretism", the term can mean many things. Here it is understood to imply modes of transferring and inclusion of religious beliefs and practices that come from different sources and directions. The degree of receptivity, which some Jewish circles showed to ideas originating from pagan sources, is still one of the most tantalizing problems that students of the Judaism of Talmudic times face. It will in no way ease the problem, if we assume that certain Jewish circles timidly and carelessly collected whatever they found in the international market of religions. Yet, it is equally true to maintain that, once foreign ideas had found their way into Judaism, they were not—or even could not be—easily swept under the carpet. Although one may argue that in certain cases the Jews were not fully aware of the real qualities—and of the imminent dangers—of the beliefs and practices, which they adopted, this argument can hardly explain the whole of the truth. In most cases, however, the impression one gets is that those who were attracted by complex pictures, even when they

73 I have discussed this issue in *Israel Oriental Studies* III, (1973), pp. 77 ff.

were composed of the most heterogeneous elements and details, could easily find them and create new ones. The artificial combination of various and sometimes even conflicting religious elements was the fashion of the day, and if this was believed to enrich the religious experience, the question of the cost was put aside. On the contrary, the gain appeared to be enormous, and people seem to have been sure that nothing was lost in their own integrity. Thus, Gnosticism could refer to the Jewish Scripture and “discover” there its own cosmology, while the Jewish mystics partook of rites and practices that grew on the soil of magic and Gnosticism. Nonetheless, neither side believed that it lost anything of its own identity. On the contrary, new possibilities opened their gates for incomers from all directions and this in turn resulted in deepening the experience.

C

In the previous section, we discussed some problems in connection with the relationship between Gnosticism and Merkavah mysticism. It must be remarked, though, that Gnosticism owed much more to Judaism than *vice versa*. In fact, there is very little in Judaism that was inspired—even negatively so—by Gnosticism. The various sayings, for instance, refuting the two powers (*Shtey Reshuyot*) doctrine need not necessarily be an explicitly anti-Gnostic theologumenon. As for the theurgic elements in Hekhalot mysticism, it may be argued that they were so common and widely spread in those days that their attribution to Gnosticism alone cannot be conclusively proved.

In this section, we shall make some additional remarks about the techniques of the ascension, both in apocalyptic and in Merkavah mysticism. Apocalyptic literature reports of at least three kinds of ascensions. The most common description is that of a heavenly ascent on clouds during a storm. In this connection, the following description in *1 Enoch* 14, 8–9 is a noteworthy example: “And behold I saw the clouds: And they were calling me in a vision, and the fogs were calling me; and the course of the stars and the lightnings were rushing me and causing me to desire; and in the vision, the winds were calling to fly and rushing me high up into heaven.”⁷⁴ No doubt, the description takes after a scriptural model: the ascension of Elijah (2 Kings 2, 11). However,

74 Compare the description of the ascension of Moses in *Pesiktā Rabbati* (ed. Friedmann, 96/b): “When Moses was about to ascend to heaven, a cloud came and prostrated itself before him. However, Moses did not know whether to ride on it or to hold it, so the cloud opened and Moses entered . . . and the cloud carried him and he walked in the heaven”.

the visionary clearly distinguishes between reality, *i.e.*, his nocturnal sleep, and his dream vision, in which he experienced ascension. Elijah's ascension also left its traces on the description of the three other ascensions accounts in *1 Enoch* 39, 3 ("In those days, a whirlwind carried me off from the earth"); 52, 1 ("... I had been carried off in a whirlwind"); and 70, 2 ("... and it [Enoch's 'living name'] was lifted up in a wind chariot and it disappeared from among them. From that day on, I was not counted among them"). Although in the last instances no dream is explicitly mentioned, one may assume that the manner in which the ascension is accomplished in *1 Enoch* 14, 8–9 still holds true in the other cases. In *2 Enoch* 3, however, the visionary is described as being raised on the wings of two angels.⁷⁵ In like manner, as we already noted in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, both the visionary and his guiding angel were raised to heaven on the wings of a bird. In *Greek Baruch* 2, 1 and in the *Ascension of Isaiah* 7, 2, it is simply said that an angel carried the visionary to heaven. In *Testament Levi* 2, 6–7 and in Revelation 4, 1–2, it appears that the visionary did not need any assistance in his ascent. Yet, the expression "and I was there in spirit" (Revelation 4, 2) apparently was a technical term used to designate experiences which the visionary saw in a trance.⁷⁶

More elaborate, however, are the details given about the ascensions in the Hekhalot literature. A recurring image in *Hekhalot Rabbati* is the ladder, which the mystic is said to use as a means for his ascension. Thus, we read that the Merkavah mystic is like "a man who has a ladder in his home which he ascends and descends, and nobody can interfere with what he does" (*Synopse*, §§ 199; 237). In yet another instance, we read of a "heavenly ladder which stands on earth and reaches up to the right leg of the Throne of Glory" (*Synopse*, § 201). The idea behind this description evidently is Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28, 12), though the ones using the ladder were the angels.⁷⁷ In one late *Hekhalot*

75 See also *1 Enoch* 87, 2–3: "And I saw in vision, and behold there came forth from heaven beings who were like white men ... and those three that had last come forth grasped me by my hand and took me ..."

76 See Charles's Commentary *ad loc.*

77 See A. A. Altmann, "The Ladder of Ascension," in E. E. Urbach, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, Ch. Wirszubski (eds.), *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to G. G. Scholem*, English Section (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), pp. 1–32. Altmann discusses a wide range of religious and philosophical sources. See further Bav. *Sotah* 35/a: "... if Moses is to tell us to make ladders and to ascend to heaven will we not obey him? ...". See also, E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, vol. VIII (1958), pp. 148–157. See also the next three footnotes.

fragment,⁷⁸ we find that the angels climb out of the ablution in the rivers of fire by help of a “ladder of fire”. Another ladder is mentioned in connection with the souls of the righteous who use it in the celestial Garden of Eden.⁷⁹ Finally, a ladder with seven rungs (κλίμαξ ἑπτάπυλος), which symbolizes the ascent of the soul through the seven gates of the heaven, is known from the temples of Mithra.⁸⁰

In several instances in the Hekhalot literature, various kinds of wagons or carriages are mentioned. In one instance, *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, § 231) we read that Qazpiel, one of the angels who stands at the gate of the sixth palace, “brings you a whirlwind, and he places you in a wagon of brilliant light (*nogah*)”.⁸¹ This wagon is used in the course of the passage from the sixth to the seventh palace (*Hekhal*).⁸² In 3 *Enoch* 6 we read of Enoch’s translation with the help of ‘Anafiel⁸³ in a carriage of fire.⁸⁴ Once again, we must note that the idea of the wagon or carriage is inspired by the description of the ascent of Elijah (2 Kings 2, 11). It should be noted, too, that in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (246–248) the wingless souls are described as ascending to heaven in divine chariots (θεῶν ὀχήματα) to gain what humans, for lack of a better term, call “immortality”. In *Hekhalot Rabbati*, the passage from one heavenly palace to the other is accomplished with the help of two angels who accompany the mystic on both his sides. New accompanying angels take the place of the former ones at the gate

78 In A. Jellinek, *Bet-ha-Midrash*, vol. III, p. 162. See also S. A. Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashot*, vol. I, p. 46.

79 A. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, vol. II, p. 28.

80 See A. Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, (Reprint: Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966), pp. 183–184. F. Cumont, *Die Mysterien des Mithra* (Reprint: Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), p. 123. All this material escaped the eyes of J. Danielou, *Théologie du Judéo-Christianisme*, (Paris: Tournai Desclée, 1958), pp. 131–138, where he discussed the subject of L’échelle Cosmique.

81 See also A. Dieterich, *op. cit.*, pp. 183–184; G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 18, 82. See further the expression “carriages of gold” in Bav. *Qidushin* 76/b.

82 The details of this stage in the mystical ascent are given in *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, §§ 231–235).

83 In *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§ 241–242 ‘Anafiel is described as a most distinguished angel, and some of his extraordinary qualities actually remind of the qualities of Metatron.

84 See further the so-called *Apocalypsis Mosis* 33, where Adam’s body is described as being carried up to heaven after his death in a chariot of light borne by four eagles. The Gnostic *Letter of James* says that when the revelations have ended, Christ rises to Heaven in a Chariot of Pneuma: see, G. Quispel, “The Jung Codex and its Significance”, in: *Gnostic Studies* I, Istanbul, 1974, p. 8.

of every new palace. In two cases, the mystic is dragged on his knees until he reaches the Throne of Glory.⁸⁵

To end this general introduction to the Hekhalot literature, two additional characteristics will be pointed out. We have seen in the previous chapter that the Ma'aseh Merkavah speculations in rabbinic circles were subject to severe restrictions regarding the number of those allowed to participate in the study and the manner in which the discourse on the Merkavah should be introduced. Briefly, we saw that the Merkavah material could be studied only in the presence of one student provided he was wise and able to understand by himself. Initially, the student opened the discourse, and only at a later stage of development was permission granted to the teacher to introduce the discourse by suggesting the *Rashey Pesuqim* or *Rashey Peraqim*. As we have indicated above, whole sections in the Hekhalot literature contain "open" instructions to those who intend to descend unto the Merkavah and emerge safely from that experience.

The Hekhalot writings do not contain a specific demand to keep the knowledge contained therein secret. Contrary to the tone struck in Jewish apocalyptic, there is no claim for the exclusiveness of the revelation. What one does hear repeatedly in the Hekhalot writings are details of the extraordinary dangers that the mystics have to overcome. Only those who carefully follow the instructions are likely to come out safely from the series of ordeals and tests that they undergo. The imminent dangers of the Ma'aseh Merkavah are already stressed in discussions found in both Talmuds on the first Mishnah of Tractate *Hagigah*. In the Hekhalot writings, the danger-motif comes even more emphatically to the fore, evidently in order to prevent the undeserving from realizing the experiences described. The theurgic elements in these writings also belong to this aspect of that literature. In fact, the mystic is taught all these theurgic means and practices in order to be able to overcome the dangers, which he encounters in the course of his mystical experience. Only the knowledge of their correct application can guarantee him physical and psychical safety.

With all this, it is interesting to note that the Hekhalot writings do not declare these practices as secret lore. In contrast to the reserve felt in the relevant pages in the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds with respect to everything relevant to the subject, the Hekhalot writings do not refrain from openly discussing the theurgic means to be used in every case. No secrecy is demanded on the part of the initiate, although we may assume that such secrecy was elementary and innately understood. One may argue that the lack of secrecy

85 See *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, § 96) and the *Hekhalot* text published in *Tarbiz* XXXVIII (1969), p. 359, ll.11. 30 ff.

is intentional: Its purpose is to ward off the undeserving intruders to engage in experiences that they should avoid. However, this fact did not prevent the knowledge from reaching people who were not able to comprehend fully its implications. Information about dangerous experiences only stimulates the curiosity of some people, and in many cases, nothing can stop them from trying out the mystical experiences described.⁸⁶

It is hardly conceivable that those who put the Hekhalot tractates into writing were not aware of the risks involved in making these writings available to people who lacked substantial requirements and responsibilities. Yet, they did so. Thus, the question arises as to whether we have to interpret this fact as indicating that the process of composing the Hekhalot literature took place only after Hekhalot mysticism had become a memory of the past and decayed so-to-speak into a mere literary phenomenon.

There is very little, if anything at all, in the Hekhalot literature that may justify its classification as esoteric, at least not in the sense in which esotericism was applied in Jewish apocalyptic, as discussed above in Chapter Two. Our discussion pointed out that the esoteric features were mainly those implied by the fact that what had been revealed to the visionary was, in many cases, an exclusive event in which angelic beings played a major role. Although secrets are sometimes referred to in the Hekhalot literature, that literature does not claim esoteric exclusiveness. What was implied by them was that the dangers described should prevent their contents from being misused. Presumably, the detailed description of these dangers was expected to be more effective in restraining people from misapplying the information than the mere formal demand to keep the contents secret.

86 See in *Tarbiz* XXXVIII (1969), p. 358.

PART 2



Introduction

Part 2

The first part of the book was devoted to an analysis of some of the major problems involved in the study of the development of the Merkavah traditions in the time of the Mishnah and Talmud. The new Chapter One proposed a new approach to the study and assessment of the hymnic materials in the Hekhalot writings. After an attempt had been made to qualify the essential features of Jewish apocalyptic (Chapter Two), we passed on to examine the place and nature of the Merkavah traditions incorporated in that literature (Chapter Three). In Chapter Four, the attitude to the Merkavah lore in rabbinic circles was examined. Finally, in Chapter Five, I presented a general introduction to the corpus of the extant Hekhalot writings, including the Gnostic writings.

The second part of the book contains detailed introductions to the major Hekhalot writings we possess. However, before these introductions are presented, several problems deserve additional attention. The first concerns the nature of the continuity of the Merkavah tradition. It has been argued that multi-layered similarities exist between the so-called Merkavah traditions in apocalyptic literature and those found in the Hekhalot literature. Furthermore, we have seen that the relationship between the Merkavah materials in rabbinic literature and the Hekhalot writings involves complex issues. No conclusive proof has been found to the effect that the Tannaim and the Amoraim were directly involved in the creation of the Hekhalot writings. However, it can be shown that several points of connection exist between the rabbinic texts and the Hekhalot writings.

Although the existence of alleged literary connections between all these corpora can be concluded from certain thematic affinities, which the writings under discussion display, no direct proof has yet been found for the existence of real historical connections between them. However, we have argued that one is likely to find in some of the versions of the Merkavah lore in rabbinic literature a reasonable degree of acquaintance with the traditions known from the Hekhalot literature. However, the questions of the cross-relationship and the alleged continuity of these corpora concerns issues of historical affiliation, on the one hand, and literary and thematic dependence, on the other. The answer to the question as to whether we can move from the stage of literary parallels to that of historical affiliation is still at the level of speculation. This is particularly difficult because we lack almost all the necessary literary and historical documentation needed for a full assessment of the pertinent issues. The affiliations can be assumed on literary grounds, but no direct historical proof is at hand.

Another question concerns the stages of development of the Merkavah traditions and experiences in post-scriptural times. No literary documentation is available from the days of the last prophets preceding the destruction of the first temple (586 B.C.E.) through the third century B.C.E., that is, the early Hellenistic period, when apocalypticism apparently began to emerge. This is a long period of silence. Undoubtedly, in that period all the foundations were laid on Judaic soil for the creation of Hellenistic spirituality and other phases of religious literature.

However, one exception must be taken into consideration in the Hellenistic period. We have in mind the play written by Ezekiel, the Tragedian. It describes events connected with the Exodus from Egypt.¹ Among other things, it contains a dream vision which Moses experiences when he is wandering in the desert with the flocks of Jethro, his father-in-law. In his vision, Moses sees himself on the top of Mount Sinai, where a high throne, which reaches to the heaven, is placed. Sitting on the throne is a figure who looks like a man wearing a crown on his head and holding a scepter in his left hand. With his right hand, the figure on the throne gestures to Moses to come forward and approach the throne. When Moses stands near the throne, the figure sitting on it gives him the crown² and the scepter, and points to him to take his seat on

1 Y. Gutman, *The Beginnings of Jewish-Hellenistic Literature* [in Hebrew], vol. II (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1963), pp. 66–69, argues that Ezekiel was a citizen of Berenice in Cyrenaica, and lived there in the first century B.C.E. However, M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 109, represents the more common view that Ezekiel, the Tragedian, lived in Alexandria in the second century B.C.E. It should be remarked that Gutman's discussion of Ezekiel and his work contains a number of rather hypothetical arguments. For example, in his interpretation of the vision of Moses on Mount Sinai, Gutman argues that the figure that Moses saw on the throne was not divine, but a real man. Gutman finds the reason for this in the word φῶς used by Ezekiel and which Gutman (probably following a remark in Liddell & Scott s.v. φῶς III) takes to be used only "opp. a god". Had Ezekiel used the word ἄνθρωπος, he would not have changed matters in any substantial manner. The term ἄνθρωπος received its divine or messianic connotations only in the Septuagint and in the New Testament. For the Greek text of Ezechielus Tragicus, see A.-M. Denis, *Fragmenta Pseudepigraphorum quae Supersunt Graeca* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), pp. 210–216.

2 The idea of a crown given to Moses is several times repeated in Jewish literature. It complements, most probably, the description of the skin of his face, which reportedly was projecting beams of light (Exodus 34, 29 ff.). The most striking parallel to *Ezekiel Tragicus* is the Shabbat morning service in which we find that God gave to Moses "a crown of glory" [*kelil tif'eret*] when he stood before You on Mount Sinai". See further J. Liver, *The House of David* [in Hebrew], (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1959), pp. 100–101, who pointed out the various functions of the 'atarah (στέφανος) in the ancient Near East. In the Qumran writings, we find that the members of the sect were to be endowed with a "crown of glory" (*kelil kavod*) as a sign of their eschatological blessing. See 1 QS IV, 7; 1 QH IX, 25. See further Bav. *Berakhot* 17/a where the

the big throne. Then the figure leaves the throne, and Moses has a vision from above of the whole earth.³ Finally, Moses says that he has seen the hosts of the heavenly stars falling down on their knees before him,⁴ and then marching past the throne. The vision obviously implies the initiation of Moses into the heavenly realms and his nomination to his royal office. However, it is quite doubtful whether this implies real deification. Deification, as we know, was generally believed to occur only after the hero's death and not during his lifetime. Thus, one may see in the vision a description of the enthronement of Moses as viewed within a mystical, or semi-mystical, framework.⁵

In spite of its obvious visionary setting, the experience described is certainly no Merkavah vision in the full sense of the term, and it is noteworthy that no angels are described in it.⁶ Yet, it is equally noteworthy that a Jewish drama written in Greek contains such a vision. This fact seems to be telling us something about the public for which the play was written: Apparently, they found nothing strange in its inclusion in that play, since they were familiar with such experiences, and understood what they implied. If we add the experience of which Paul spoke in 2 Corinthians 12, we may assume that mystical, or semi-mystical, experiences were part of the intellectual milieu of the Jewish-Hellenistic world.⁷

righteous, in the world to come, are described sitting in the presence of God with diadems (*atarot*) on their heads. The idea is also current in Christian theology and well known from Christian iconography. Morton Smith drew my attention to the fact that, in the Greco-Roman world, diadems were symbols of royalty.

- 3 See Y. Gutman, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–46. This part of the dream could have been the model for the writer of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* 19.
- 4 The reference here most certainly is to Joseph's dream in Genesis 37, 9. See also Nehemiah 9, 6, where the stars are said to be worshipping God in a similar manner.
- 5 For deification after death, see E. Rohde, *Psyche* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1925), pp. 524 ff. For the motif of the enthronement, see G. Widengren, "Iran and Israel in Parthian Times with Special Regard to the Ethiopic *Book of Enoch*," in B. A. Pearson (ed.), *Religious Syncretism in Antiquity* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975), p. 126 ff.. Widengren was unaware of Ezekiel the Tragedian and suggested that Indo-Iranian, as well as ancient Near-Eastern material, was the background of the kind of enthronement described in *1 Enoch* 71.
- 6 The absence of angels from the vision cannot be attributed with certainty to polemical motivations.
- 7 See M. P. Nilsson, *Greek Piety* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), pp. 124 ff., though some of Nilsson's generalizations, particularly those concerning Gnosticism, cannot be accepted without criticism. More important, however, for our purposes is the chapter "The Mystic Moses" in E. R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1969), pp. 199–234. This is not to say that the present writer agrees with Goodenough's thesis regarding the existence of a fully developed Jewish Hellenistic mystery religion.

This conclusion may also be inferred from Philo, *De Vita Mosis* 158, where Moses is described entering “into the darkness where God was, that is into the unseen, invisible, incorporeal and archetypal essence of existing things.”⁸ The reference here is to Exodus 20, 21, which in rabbinical literature was interpreted as implying a unique mystical experience.⁹ To be sure, what Philo describes in his writings is no Merkavah vision, but it points to a kind of awareness that in other cases could, and actually did, induce mystical terminology. Thus, to come back to the scene in Ezekiel the Tragedian, we hear that Moses sees himself elevated to encounter a divine being, apparently God, sitting on His throne. Evidently, his vision is reminiscent of its counterpart in Isaiah 6, yet there are already details in this vision that go beyond the vision in Isaiah. We have already mentioned that the being sitting on the throne offers Moses his crown, scepter, and even his throne. In addition, it should be noticed that unlike Isaiah 6, 1, the scene in the “play” does not take place in a palace but on the summit of Mount Sinai.¹⁰ Finally, as we already observed, in contradistinction to the vision in Isaiah, no angels are present on the scene. What was in apocalyptic and later in Merkavah literature—as already in Isaiah and Ezekiel—the function of the angelic beings, was here performed by the heavenly stars. Nevertheless, all the differences notwithstanding, we may see in the scene in the *Tragedy* a live link between Scripture and apocalyptic literature in the development of the topos of heavenly ascents. In any event, the inclusion of Merkavah material in Jewish apocalyptic is now more solidly accounted for. It is not merely the natural interest in things heavenly that explains the presence of this material in that literature, but also an allegedly live Judaic tradition, which sought soil for its growth.

The second question to which attention must be given is how widespread the Merkavah tradition was. We have already seen that there were various degrees of secrecy, which restricted the discourse in the matters of the Merkavah

8 Similarly, Philo, *De Mutatione Nominum*, 7, says, “So Moses the explorer of nature which lies beyond our vision, Moses who, as the divine oracles tell us, entered into the darkness by which figure they indicate existence invisible and incorporeal, searched everywhere and into everything in his desire to see clearly and plainly Him, the object of our much yearning, Who alone is good”.

9 See *Mechilta d’ Rabbi Ismael*, p. 238. See further Goodenough, *op. cit.*, pp. 212 ff.

10 Compare *Mechilta d’ Rabbi Ismael*, pp. 216 & 238 (= Bav. *Sukkah* 5/a), where it becomes clear that the virtual descent of the *Kavod* on Mount Sinai, as also the ascent of Moses, became a controversial subject in Tannaitic literature.—The picture of the divine throne which is placed on the summit of mountains is familiar in antiquity. See J. Maier, *Vom Kultus zur Gnosis* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1964), pp. 97 ff.

to a small and highly qualified number of students. No wonder, then, that only few, choice individuals enjoyed acquaintance with the subject. Furthermore, we saw that the kinds of experiences that the Hekhalot writings describe were connected with the knowledge of practices that verged on magic and theurgy. Magic and theurgy evidently were branches of knowledge and ritual that implied secrecy and could hardly be tolerated in so-called orthodox circles. Thus, one may reach the conclusion that Merkavah mysticism was confined to a small group of initiates who were exposed to practices, which could have been defined as idolatry. On the other hand, one can hardly avoid the conclusion that people who lived at the very heart of the Judaism in that era participated in practices that fell under the spell of pagan rituals. This conclusion decisively bears on our understanding and evaluation of the nature of Judaism in Talmudic times. It has been variously argued, mainly in connection with the problem of Jewish receptivity to customs emanating from idolatry, that the sages had no easy job in their attempts to control and limit the measure of the exposure to these practices. The practices we encounter in the Hekhalot writings only add fuel to the fire, and we are faced with the problem that, as it appears, traces of paganism which broke the rules of the Law reached the very heart of the Judaism of the period. More attention will be given to this problem in the last chapter of this book.

Since the Hekhalot writings are in no other way opposed to the concepts of the Law and obedience to it, our question becomes even more difficult to answer. In addition, the Hekhalot writings show distinctive literary qualities. With this observation in mind, it cannot be maintained that these writings were produced by illiterate, ignorant people who were not able to pass judgment on their own activities. The insistence found in these writings on the observation of the Law and the preoccupation with the problems connected with the study of the Law and its memorization make it evident that the solution to our problem cannot be sought in marginal heterodox groups or circles. The problem thus concerns the very heart of the Judaism of the period. We may say that the occurrence of magical and theurgic practices in these writings can illuminate issues that, in all likelihood, reflect a loose prevalence of tightly controlled norms. However, in comparison with the more vulgar forms of these practices, which included sacrificial acts, those found among the learned and pious circles of the Hekhalot writings contained a refined mode of magic and theurgy. Yet, it seems permissible to infer that certain elements of pagan rituals penetrated into wider Jewish circles than is commonly admitted. Consequently, the various degrees of intensity, which mark the proliferation of these practices, call for scholarly attention. As indicated, more will be said on these matters in the last chapter of this book. It is hardly conceivable that the

Jews who practiced these rituals did not believe in their efficacy. Thus, when it came to it, allegedly established standards of behavior and norms of belief were suspended. This was particularly the case when the end turned out to be worth justifying the means.

Another point that needs to be considered is the extent to which the knowledge of Merkavah lore reached the common people. The interest in what happens in heaven is a natural component of religion and should not necessarily to be identified with learned and mystical speculations. Various studies have shown that Merkavah lore was known to the people who shaped the Jewish liturgy of the time. The *piyyut*, poetic liturgy, contained mystical elaborations on the angelic doxologies quoted in Isaiah 6, 3 and Ezekiel 3, 12.¹¹ We have seen that this was also the case in apocalyptic literature. A more widespread inclusion of Merkavah materials is known from the liturgy of the synagogue, which developed in post-Talmudic times.¹² In my view, this point indicates that people who attended the liturgical service in the synagogues were exposed to, and familiar with, the religious milieu of the Merkavah lore.¹³ Indeed, there were cases in which the liturgy of the synagogue and the hymnology of the Church showed various degrees of influence of apocalyptic and Hekhalot materials.¹⁴ A question of a different order concerns how deep this knowledge of the apocalyptic and Hekhalot material really went. In my view, though, those who composed the liturgy connected with the three forms of the *Qedushah*¹⁵ were in fact more familiar with the mystical material alluded to in their compositions than those who participated in the daily service in the synagogues. It will not be far from the truth if we assume that the liturgical poets were responsible for the spread of Merkavah lore, sometimes even more than were the mystics themselves. Yet, it would be equally wrong to say that the common people were completely unaware of the mystical implications and connotations of the prayers they were quite used to saying.

Turning to the Hekhalot writings it should once again be observed that no voices of dissidence are heard in them. Nor can it be said that they contain

11 See, D. Flusser, "Sanktus und Gloria," *Festschrift für Otto Michel* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), pp. 129 ff.

12 See, I. Gruenwald, "Yannai and the Hekhalot Literature," [in Hebrew] *Tarbiz* XXXVI (1967), pp. 257 ff.

13 E. Fleischer whose prolific studies of these subjects cannot be ignored, expressed in these and in private written communication, skepticism with regard to the question of the knowledge of Merkavah lore among the liturgical poets of post Talmudic times.

14 See J. Schirmann, "Hebrew Liturgical Poetry and Christian Hymnology," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* XLIV (1953), particularly pp. 138–140.

15 See, E. Werner, *The Sacred Bridge* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), pp. 282 ff.

any explicit criticism of non-mystical circles. Contrary to some of the writings of Jewish apocalyptic, the Hekhalot writings bear no sectarian trademarks. Furthermore, the Hekhalot writings do not indulge in apocalyptic visions of the imminent end of the world, nor do they display the apocalyptic belief according to which the messianic future is reserved for a small group of the elite. The few instances in which the bliss of the world to come is promised to the Hekhalot mystics do not contradict the general non-eschatological tone of these writings.

Re'uyot Yehezkel

Re'uyot Yehezkel, or the Visions of Ezekiel, is listed by Professor Scholem as the earliest Merkavah text we possess,¹ though it is not a Hekhalot text in the strict sense of the term.² In fact, the word *Hekhal* does not occur in the text. *Re'uyot Yehezkel* is a mystical Midrash on the first chapter of the Book of Ezekiel; the work enumerates the various things that the prophet Ezekiel allegedly saw in his Merkavah vision. The names of the rabbinical authorities quoted in the text make it likely that the text was composed, or edited, in the fourth or the fifth century C.E. in Eretz Yisrael.

The mystical part of the book begins with the statement (p. 106) that “God opened to Ezekiel seven divisions of the lower world and as Ezekiel was looking at them, he saw everything that was in the heaven.” The divisions referred by their names are sub-terrestrial “earths”, that is, layers of seven earths, which correspond to the seven firmaments.³ *Re'uyot Yehezkel* incorporates elements of cosmological speculations, the nature and significance of which are generally

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- 1 A fragment of the text was first published by Marmorstein in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, VIII (1917–1918), pp. 367–378, from a Genizah fragment in the British Museum. (Marmorstein offers an English translation of this fragment, pp. 370–371.) Later on, J. Mann and Sh. A. Wertheimer published the whole text in two different editions. All these editions have been shown to be faulty, and the present writer has published a new critical edition and commentary in *Temirin I* (1972), pp. 101–139. The extent to which the previous editions were faulty can best be illustrated by the fact that the text became known as *Re'iyot Yehezkel*, while the colophons of the manuscripts read *Re'uyot*. Although the term is rare, it can be explained as “Visions”—[Notice that line 14 in my edition has been misplaced by the printer to become, erroneously, line 10 on p. 104; it should be replaced as the last line of the text on p. 105!]. After the publication of the first edition of this book, a new, one-page Genizah fragment of the text, T-S NS 252.7, has come to my attention. It contains the text relating the four uppermost firmaments: *Sheḥaqim*, *Makhon*, *Aravot*, and *Kissé Kavod*. Concerning the *Kissé Kavod* see the discussion below.
 - 2 *Re'uyot Yehezkel* has been translated into English twice from the text published by the present writer in *Temirin I*: (1) L. Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), pp. 27–31; (2) D. J. Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988), pp. 264–268. Halperin offers a wide-ranging discussion of the text, its inter-religious provenance, date [third century, p. 352], and cultic context [the synagogue preaching on Shavu'ot].
 - 3 The names of these divisions as they are given in *Re'uyot Yehezkel* are 'Adamah, 'Eretz, 'Heled, 'Neshiyah, 'Dumah, 'She'ol, 'Tit Ha-Yaven. In other rabbinical sources, different names are given. See my edition, pp. 107–108.

set beyond the common mystical interest.⁴ However, cosmological secrets are frequently referred to in the Hekhalot writings, though with only a few specifications. In *Re'uyot YeḤezkel*, the basic structure of the universe is conveyed, though, as might be expected, only the celestial world receives extensive attention.

Re'uyot YeḤezkel describes a unique mystical technique. Ezekiel is looking downward and sees what is above. As the text says, "Ezekiel was standing on the River Chebar looking down at the water, and the seven firmaments were opened to him and he saw the Glory of the Holy One." To illustrate this rather peculiar procedure, the text makes the following comparison: "This matter is like the following story: A man entered a barber's shop, and he cut his hair. He gave him a mirror and he looked in it. As he was looking in it, the king passed by. He saw the king and his retinue by the doorway. The hairdresser said to him, 'Turn around and see the king'. He said to him, 'I have already looked in the mirror'."

From a technical point of view, this passage is of great interest. It reveals something unusual about the apocalyptic and mystical technique: The visionary is standing near a river or a sea, and, while looking at the water, he sees the reflection of heavenly visions. From Scripture and from apocalyptic literature we know of several instances in which the prophet or the apocalyptic visionary describes himself as standing near water or at the banks of a river.⁵ Water in these cases served as a mirror of the things happening in heaven. This is reminiscent of the famous distinction drawn in rabbinical writings between the prophecy of Moses and that of the other prophets. It is said that all the prophets gazed upon nine mirrors, while Moses gazed upon one only, or that Moses gazed upon a shining mirror while the other prophets gazed upon an opaque mirror.⁶ Looking at a mirror-like surface of the water thus turns out to be—at least in some of the cases—an integral part of the prophetic and apocalyptic

4 There are several Jewish texts, which deal with such cosmological speculations. Two of these are the *Beraita de-Ma'aseh Bereshit* (ed. N. Sed, in *Revue des Études Juives* CXXIV [1965], pp. 23–123; with a French translation); and *Midrash Kohen* in *Bet ha-Midrash II*, pp. 23 ff. As for the *Beraita de-Ma'aseh Bereshit*, there are better manuscripts than those used by Sed. See, further, R. Leicht and J. Yahalom, "Sefer Zeh Sefer Toledot Adam: An Unknown Esoteric Midrash on Genesis 5:1 from the Geonic Period," *Ginzei Qedem* 4 (2008), pp. 9–81. However, Leicht and Yahalom were not aware of the relevance of the cosmological issues discussed in *Re'uyot YeḤezkel*.

5 Daniel 7, 2–3; 8, 2; 10, 4–5; 4 Ezra ix (xi)–xi (xiii); 2 Baruch xxi, 1; 3 Baruch ii, 1. Compare also 1 Enoch xiii, 7. See also G. Scholem, "Tradition und Neuschöpfung im Ritus der Kabbalisten," in *Zur Kabbalah und ihrer Symbolik* (Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, 1960), pp. 182–183.

6 *Wayyikra Rabbah*, ed. M. Margulies, i, 14, pp. 30–31; Bav. *Yevamot* 49/b.

technique. This procedure could be a means of avoiding the immediate sight of the Godhead and the heavenly beings. In any event, if our interpretation is correct, the passage under discussion in *Re'uyot YeḤezkel* sheds light on a most interesting detail in the visual experience of several prophets and apocalyptic visionary.

Looking at the waters of the River Chebar, Ezekiel is said to see the "Holiness" opening to him the seven firmaments thus giving him an opportunity to see the "*Gevurah*" (the Dynamis).⁷ Furthermore, it is said that Ezekiel not only saw the Divine Glory⁸ but also all the heavenly creatures as they were tied to the Merkavah. "They were passing in the heaven and Ezekiel watched them (reflected) in the water." The names of the seven firmaments are given: *Shamayim*, *Shemei Shamayim*, *Zevul*, *'Arafel*, *Sheḥaqim*, *'Aravot*, and *Kissé Kavod*.⁹ This is a rather peculiar list, which is nowhere repeated in the various lists of the names of the firmaments, either in rabbinical writings or in writings connected with the Hekhalot literature. The names of the first two firmaments make it clear that the list is of Palestinian origin.¹⁰ Interestingly, some of its idiosyncratic names also occur in the liturgical poetry of Yannai.¹¹

However, the list of the firmaments as it is repeated later on in the text includes a few changes: *Raqi'a*, *Shemei Ha-Shamayim*, *Zevul*, *'Arafel*, *Sheḥaqin*, *Makhon*, *'Aravot*, *Kissé Kavod*. In comparison to the first one, this list mentions *Raqi'a* (instead of *Shamayim*) as the first firmament, and it adds the name of another firmament, *Makhon*, thus bringing the total number of the firmaments

7 For a discussion of this sentence, see Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism* etc., p. 68. To the references given there for parallel expressions to the phrase "God opened to him the seven firmaments", one should add the following: *Tanḥumā* (ed. Buber), *Toldot*, paragraph 22; *Agadat Shir Ha-Shirim* (ed. Schechter), p. 39 (line 1134); *The Acts of the Apostles* 7, 55–56. See further H. Bietenhard, *Die Himmlische Welt*, pp. 7–8, n. 1, who observes that the plural *ouranoi* in *Acts* should not be interpreted as meaning that a plurality of firmaments is maintained. See also L. I. J. Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), pp. 41–42, where the view is expressed that *Shmei Ha-Shamayim* is "an all-inclusive term to denote the space above the earth" (p. 42). Yet, at least in *Re'uyot YeḤezkel*, the notions of a plurality of firmaments derives from the plural form of the verb "the heavens were opened" in Ezekiel 1, 1.

8 The terms *Gevurah* (= dynamis) and *Kavod* (= doxa) are used interchangeably in the text!

9 It should be noted, though, that the existence of separate firmament called *Kissé Kavod* can only be inferred from a single sentence: "From *'Aravot* to *Kissé Kavod* it takes five hundred years". In contrast to the other firmaments, the text says nothing about what it contains.

10 See the discussion in my edition pp. 116 ff.

11 See the present writer's article in *Tarbiẓ* XXXVI (1967), pp. 269–270.

to eight. In *Re'uyot Yeḥezkel's* second list, the eighth firmament is called *Kissé Kavod* (with no articulate article), which might be a clue to the notion that the throne of God is placed there. In addition, we may note that Bav. *Ḥagigah* 13/a quotes the view of Rav Aḥa bar Ya'aqov that "there is another firmament above the heads of the Ḥayyot". The biblical reference is to *Ezekiel* 1, 22–23. If we harmonize *Re'uyot Yeḥezkel* with *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, § 100–101), it appears that certain mystical circles conceived of the existence of eight firmaments. The eighth firmament is the place where God abides while he is not sitting on His throne in the seventh palace in the seventh firmament.

What is also unique in the seven-firmaments doctrine as it is displayed in *Re'uyot Yeḥezkel* is the idea, which is quoted in the name of Rabbi Me'ir, that "God created seven firmaments and there are seven chariots (*Merkavot*) in them".¹² This statement, which, apart from its clear reference to the existence of seven (!) firmaments, is reminiscent also of the idea which we met in *Ascensio Isaiae* (see above, Chapter Two), namely that a throne is placed in every firmament. However, in contradistinction to *Ascensio Isaiae*, in *Re'uyot Yeḥezkel* no one is seen occupying the Merkavah in the first six firmaments. In addition, each of the Merkavot in *Re'uyot Yeḥezkel* has a name, and, generally, these names are derived from biblical verses. Only the Merkavah in *Zevul* has a non-biblical name, *Haluyah*,¹³ and, as we have already said, there is no Merkavah in *Makhon* at all. In addition, the text states that "Thus did the Holiness, Blessed be He, say to Ezekiel: 'I am showing the Chariot to you on condition that you expound it to Israel... But you should convey them to the people only as much as the eye can see and the ear can hear.'" As we see in our discussion of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, there are several utterances in the Hekhalot literature that make clear that no special demand for secrecy was established in these writings. As we noted above, *Re'uyot Yeḥezkel* argues that Ezekiel was called upon to reveal to the People of Israel the content of his mystical vision of the Merkavah, though, of course, with a certain degree of reservation, *only what the eye can see and the ear hear*.¹⁴ No apocalyptic writer could conceive of this. The words allegedly addressed to Ezekiel by God are also important from another point of view:

12 Interestingly, in contradistinction to the other firmaments, no Merkavah is mentioned in *Makhon*. This by itself could support the view that *Makhon* was a later addition introduced in order to harmonize the list in *Re'uyot Yeḥezkel* with the lists found in other sources.

13 This may be a corrupt rendering of a name (Haleluyah?), though it can no longer be identified with any certainty.

14 A similar expression is found in *Mechilta d' Rabbi Ismael*, p. 235, in connection with the theophany on Mount Sinai. See also the notes in my edition, p. 121.

God says, "I am showing the Chariot to you . . .". "To see the Chariot" is used here in its plain sense and has no technical overtones.¹⁵ In the other Hekhalot texts, the expression "to see the Chariot" has a technical sense and stands for the mystical experience as a whole.¹⁶

When the text turns to the discussion of the seven firmaments and what they contain, it does so by quoting an introductory remark in the name of Rabbi Yizḥaq: "From the earth to *Raqi'a* there is a distance of a five hundred years' walk". Curiously, the biblical verse quoted as supporting this measure is Deuteronomy 9, 21: "That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the [land which the Lord swore unto your fathers to give them, *as the days of the heaven upon the earth*]"¹⁷ The cosmological measure given here in the name of Rabbi Yizḥaq is elsewhere¹⁸ attributed to Rabbanan: "(The width of the firmament) is like the years of the lives of the Patriarchs. [As it is written:] 'as the days of the heaven upon the earth'."¹⁹ The sum total of the years of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob amounts to five hundred and two; this is also the measure given for the distance between the earth and heaven in *Beraita de-Ma'aseh Bereshit* (ed. Sed, p. 58).²⁰ The measure of five hundred years' walk is repeated in *Re'uyot Yeḥezkel* as the regular distance between each of the firmaments. If we may learn anything from the description of the space between the first and the second firmament, it is that all the spaces between the firmaments are filled with water. It is said: "And the water which is above *Raqi'a* is five hundred years' of walk", and there are good reasons to believe that the same could be said of the other "inter-celestial" spaces too.

15 Compare Tosefta *Megilah* iii, 28 (ed. Lieberman, pp. 361–362): "They said to him (= to Rabbi Yehudah): many used to discourse in the Merkavah but had never seen it before". See also G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 358, n. 18.

16 Instead of the present expression "to see the Chariot", we find in later *Hekhalot* writings the expression "to see the King in His beauty". See S. Leiter, "Worthiness, Acclamation, and Appointment: Some Rabbinic Terms", *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* XLI–XLII (1973–1974), pp. 143–145.

17 The words in square brackets are not quoted in the text. Italics indicate relevance to the saying of Rabbi Yizḥaq.

18 In Bav. *Berakhot* i, 1 (2/c).

19 Compare also Yer. *Berakhot* ix, 1 (12/a), referring to Rabbi Levi, to whom the distance of 500 years is attributed.

20 In *Midrash Konen* (in Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* II, p. 27), the number of the years of the Patriarchs is wrongly given as 500. In any event, 500 years is a round number, which was probably preferred to 502 for the sake of convenience.

It would deflect us from the main course of our discussion if we were to enumerate all the details of the cosmological speculations of what all the seven firmaments contain. In fact, the whole subject deserves a separate study to do justice to the various elements involved and their occurrence in other sources. It should be remarked that, in addition to a few items which repeat themselves in all the parallel sources, there are many others that vary from source to source. Thus, we shall concentrate here only on those items that bear significantly on our subject.

The angels who say the *Qedushah* are said to be in the second firmament. Generally, these angels are described as being in the fifth firmament,²¹ and their existence here in the second firmament may reflect an ancient tradition according to which there were only two firmaments.²² Evidently, in the case of the existence of two firmaments, God and all the ministering angels abided there, too. Curiously then, *Re'uyot Yehezkel* conceives of the celestial world in such a manner that the angels who recite hymns to God are not located in the same firmament as the throne of God. According to *Re'uyot Yehezkel*, in addition to the "Merkavah" being located there, the seventh firmament contains only the hooves of the Living Creatures and their wings.

It is also said of these sanctifying angels that their existence in the second firmament is not permanent; in fact, their existence is renewed every day. This idea, which is also documented in midrashic literature,²³ might express the notion that, apart from God, nothing in the world, not even the angels, enjoys permanent existence. The substantial difference between the Creator and the things created by Him lies in the transiency of the created world. Whether the angels are destroyed because they do not recite their hymns properly²⁴ or whether they undergo a process of self-annihilation,²⁵ they carry out only one

21 Thus, for instance, according to Bav. *Hagigah* 12/b.

22 That tradition is explicitly assumed by Rabbi Yehuda in Bav. *Hagigah* 12/b. We also saw (above in Chapter Three) that *1 Enoch* lxxi, 5 ff. can also be interpreted as giving expression to the two-heavens doctrine. Indeed, the angels are described in *1 Enoch* lxxi as being in the second heaven.

23 To the literature referred to there, add E. E. Urbach, *The Sages*, pp. 181–182; one should add the references in my commentary *ad locum* (p. 125). Urbach does not discuss the theological implications of this idea.

24 *Hekhalot Rabbati*, *Synopse*, § 306 (end); 3 *Enoch* xl.

25 Bav. *Hagigah* 14/a: "Every day the Ministering Angels are created from the River of Fire (*'Nehar di-Nur*') and they utter a song and are annihilated!" *Hekhalot Rabbati* refers to the fact that the angels can serve God only once. Their faces and their eyes are burned by the beauty of their King (*Synopse*, §§ 158–159).

message or task and then new angels are created in their place.²⁶ According to *Re'uyot YeḤezkel*, the angels recite their hymns from sunrise till sunset, an idea that contradicts several midrashic sayings according to which the heavenly beings sing their songs only at night, while during the daytime God listens to the prayers of His People.²⁷

In the third firmament, *Zevul*, one finds the *Sar*, the Heavenly Prince. He is described as filling the whole of that firmament with his presence, and thousands upon thousands of angels are said to serve him. Daniel 7, 9–10 is quoted as supporting the idea, and one might rightly ask whether the author of *Re'uyot YeḤezkel* did not think that the *'Atiq Yomin* described in the Book of Daniel was identical with the *Sar* of *Zevul*. Admittedly, the identification is not explicitly made, but one may assume that it could have been implied when the relevant verses in *Daniel* are quoted in connection with the *Sar* of *Zevul*.²⁸ A number of names are suggested for this *Sar*, two of which are of particular interest for us.²⁹ The first of these is *Qomes*,³⁰ that is a minister in the king's court, and the other is Metatron. In Appendix One, S. Lieberman suggests that Metatron reflects

26 We shall see later on that there were two distinct theories concerning the creation of the angels. According to the one, the angels are created from the words that God utters; according to the other, they are created from the river of fire. See further *Sefer Hekhalot* xl.

27 See, Bav. *Ḥagigah* 12/b; *Avodah Zarah* 3/b. On the other hand, Bav. *Ḥulin* 91/b concurs with the idea found in the Hekhalot writings, namely, that the angels in fact sing in the daytime. They do so in correspondence with the prayers of the People of Israel. In the apocalyptic writings, which refer to the song of the angels, no explicit restriction is maintained regarding the singing hours of the angels. However, in 1 *Enoch* xxxix, 13 we read, "And here my eyes saw all those who sleep not: they stand before Him and bless and say . . ." Now, "those who sleep not" are in all likelihood those who say their hymns at night. As has variously been recognized, "those who sleep not" are a class of angels invented by a mistranslation. Daniel 7 mentions the Aramaic *'Ir* and the *'Irin* as a class of angels. If the word *'Ir* means "messenger", then the translation ἐγρήγορος, "wakeful" suggested in the LXX, is wrong. See, however, J. A. Montgomery, *The Book of Daniel* [ICC], (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1964), pp. 231–234. See further *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem), s.v. "Song, angelic".

28 It should be noticed that the *Sar* is mentioned three times in Talmudic writings: Bav. *Ḥagigah* 12/b; *Menaḥot* 110/a; *Zevahim* 62/a. All of these references mention the angel Michael, who is called "the Great Prince" (*Ha-Sar Ha-Gadol*) and is said to offer sacrifices on the heavenly altar. However, the *Sar* in *Re'uyot YeḤezkel* does not offer sacrifices, probably because the heavenly Jerusalem is located in another firmament. The term *Sar Ha-Gadol* derives from Daniel 12, 1, where it is the appellation given to the angel Michael.

29 In any event, the names seem to be "mystical" appellations.

30 In the manuscript wrongly: *Qimos*.

the older form of *synthronos*,³¹ that is, the God enthroned alongside with a major deity. This idea of the *synthronos*, or, as it was allegedly later on substituted by the *metathron(os)*, is also implied by the name *Qomes* given here to the *Sar*. It should be noted that the term *Metatron* is frequently qualified by such phrases as “whose name is like that of his master”,³² “whose name is like that of the Dynamis”,³³ and even the “Small Yah”.³⁴ All these qualifying appellations stress the close affinity between God and His *Sar*, an affinity that is adequately expressed in the names *Qomes* and *Metatron*.

The next firmament, *ʿArafel*, contains the “Canopy of the Law” and the Merkavah in which God descended on Mount Sinai.³⁵ The location of these two items in *ʿArafel* is easily explained by Exodus 20, 21. The fifth firmament, *Sheḥaqim*, contains the heavenly Jerusalem and all the vessels of the Temple. *Makhon* is the name of the next firmament; it contains the treasures of snow and hail, and the future rewards for the righteous and the wicked. *ʿAravot* is the seventh firmament, and it again contains both the treasures of snow and the future rewards for the righteous and the wicked. This repetition is rather peculiar, and it may perhaps be explained by the fact that the “firmament *Makhon*” was interpolated into the text of *Re'uyot Yeḥezkel* by a writer who wanted to harmonize the lists of the firmaments there with those found in other Jewish sources.³⁶ In any event, apart from these things, *ʿAravot* also contains the treasures of the souls.³⁷

Finally, the highest firmament, *Kissé Kavod*, contains the hoofs of the *Ḥayyot* and the edges of their wings as well as the Big Merkavah in which God will descend in order to judge all the nations. The text ends with the remark that God is above the wings of the *Ḥayyot*.³⁸

31 See Liddell & Scott, p. 1717. The prefix “syn” was gradually superseded by the prefix “meta”, which implied an even closer union than “syn”. See *ibid.*, p. 1108.

32 Bav. *Sanhedrin* 38/b.

33 *Re'uyot Yeḥezkel* may represent an older tradition than the one given in Bav. *Sanhedrin*. Another name, suggested by the theurgists (*Meshamshin Ba-Shum*), is SLNS QS BS BS QBS “like the name of the Demiurgos (*Yozer Ha-'Olam*)”.

34 3 *Enoch* xii.

35 For both details, see my commentary *ad locum*, pp. 131–132.

36 See my commentary, pp. 116–120. It should, however, be noticed that in Bavli *Ḥagigah* 12b, *Makhon* is said to contain the treasures of snow and hail.

37 In the list of firmaments mentioned in Bav. *Ḥagigah*, the treasures of the souls are likewise found in *ʿAravot*.

38 The fact that the wings of the *Ḥayyot* are mentioned twice in this firmament may be explained as indicating the two pairs of wings mentioned in Ezekiel 1, 6.

Hekhalot Zutarti

*Hekhalot Zutarti*¹ is in all likelihood the oldest Hekhalot text known to us. It is a composite collection of several short Merkavah-passages, many of which are in Aramaic. Jonas Greenfield, who undertook a linguistic study of the Hebrew and Aramaic sections of the book, inclines to locate the texts in Eretz-Yisrael, most probably in the second or third century C.E. This conclusion concurs with Scholem's view, which regards *Hekhalot Zutarti* as representing the Merkavah lore of the Tannaitic, possibly early Amoraic, era. The composite nature of the text and its linguistic and textual problems pose special difficulties for the scholar. The publication of *Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur* shows that none of the extant manuscripts makes clear where the text begins and ends.² Most characteristic, though, are the passages composed in Aramaic, which contain magical materials of various kinds. In all likelihood, these passages constitute the core of the book and reflect its earliest phases of concern. Since much of the material mentions magical adjurations, it presents special problems in deciphering contents and meaning. We shall discuss the text in as much as we see that it contains sections relevant to the discussion of the Hekhalot literature in general.

A paragraph prefixed to the text reads:

If you want to be singled out in the world and that the secrets of the world and the mysteries of wisdom should be revealed to you, you have to study this Mishnah and be careful about it until the day of your death.³

1 In the first edition, I was advised by a known linguist to refer to the text as *Hekhalot Zutreti*. I now follow M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002), p. 403, s. v. *zutar*.

2 The relevant passages in Schäfer's *Synopse*, §§ 335–375 show that the main text most probably begins in § 340. Its major feature is the Aramaic language and its theurgic import. (Sh. Musajoff's collection of Merkavah texts, *Merkavah Shelemah* does not contain the whole text.) R. Elior published an edition of the text in 1982 [Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, Suppl. II]. In English, Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones offers "A Version of Hekhalot Zutarti" in *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 265–301, which "includes all of the material included by both Schäfer and Elior (§§ 335–374 and 407–419) plus § 375 (included by Elior but not by Schäfer) and the 'Akiva 'post-script' (422–424)" (*The Mystery of God*, p. 268). The text remains the least discussed among the Hekhalot writings.

3 The term used here, *yom perishah*, could also be taken to mean 'as long as you are engaged in the ascetic practices connected with the Merkavah experience.'

You should neither try to understand what is behind you, nor inquire into the sayings of your lips.⁴ Just understand what is in your heart and keep quiet, so that you will be worthy of the Beauties of the Chariot.⁵ You should be careful about the Glory of your Creator, and do not cause Him to descend.⁶ And if you have caused Him to descend, do not enjoy anything of Him; and if you have enjoyed anything of Him you are likely to be turned out of this world. 'It is the Glory of God to keep (His) word secret',⁷ so that you will not be turned out of this world" (*Synopse*, § 335; in MS. JTS 8128 it ends with the remark "the rulings (*hilkhot*) of *Hekhalot Rabbati* end [at this point]").

This passage is one of the rare instances in the Hekhalot literature, which proclaims secrecy as being vital for the well-being of the initiate.

After this introduction, MS Oxford introduces a short paragraph connected to the *Sar-Torah* speculations.⁸ It says:

When Moses ascended on high to God, God taught him: Everybody whose heart is going astray,⁹ one should utter on him the following names . . .¹⁰ [and say this prayer] 'that I may keep in my mind everything

4 This is a mystical paraphrase of *Ben Sira* 3, 19–21. The phrase "Do not investigate the words of your lips" can be interpreted as meaning that one should not venture explaining words uttered as *glossolalia*. However, the more simple meaning, namely, that there are matters relating to the secret lore, which should not be discussed in public, cannot be ruled out. See further S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah to Hagigah*, p. 1295.

5 For the expression "the beauties of the Chariot" (*Yofiyot Ha-Merkavah*), see, S. Leiter, "Worthiness, Acclamation and Appointment: Some Rabbinic Terms," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, XLI–XLII (1973), p. 144.

6 S. Lieberman suggested to me to see in the Hebrew words *We'al tered lo* (= "and do not make him descend?") a reference to the saying in *'Avot de-Rabbi Natan* Version B, xxxiii (ed. Schechter, p. 72): "He (= Ben Zoma) used to say: Do not peep into a man's vineyard; and if you peeped into it do not enter (lit. descend unto) it; and if you entered do not look; and if you looked do not touch; and if you touched do not eat. For if a man eats, he loses his soul's share both in this world and in that to come". The notion of the partaking or losing the soul's share in the world to come is a recurrent one in the Hekhalot writings. It adds an eschatological dimension to that literature.

7 Proverbs 25, 2.

8 See our discussion of *Hekhalot Rabbati* (end).

9 The Hebrew here reads *shogeh*; however, one of the variant readings here has *shoneh*, that is, studies.

10 Among the magical names listed, one finds SMOSLM and MARMARAOT. Both names are known from the magical papyri, and their exact meaning is under dispute among

that I hear and study ... and I shall never forget it, neither in this world nor in the one to come (§ 336).

As we shall see, the *Sar-Torah* sections incorporated into the Hekhalot literature in all likelihood belong to a period when real mystical experiences were no longer practiced. If this is the case, then the *Sar-Torah* passage in *Hekhalot Zutarti* was introduced into the text at a rather late stage, probably in the sixth century C.E.¹¹ If not, then this very section was the model for the later Hekhalot texts, most of which contain material related to *Sar-Torah*. The gist of the *Sar-Torah* speculations is the secret of a theurgic method of studying the Torah (most probably the Oral Torah) and of its memorization. The text continues with this comment:

This book is (a book of) wisdom, sagacity and knowledge, and inquiries about the things above and the things below, the hidden things of the Torah and of heaven and of earth, and the mysteries which (God) gave to Moses, the son of 'Amram, ... and revealed it to him on Mount Horeb, and by the means of which the world is sustained. In addition, by the means of (this book) Moses performed all the wonders and the miracles in Egypt, and with its help he beat the Egyptians. It is the fire of the burning-bush. And Metatron revealed himself to Moses... (*Synopse*, § 341; compare § 336).

This passage is interesting for a number of reasons. It maintains the secret revelation of a certain mystical or magical book to Moses on Mount Sinai. In this respect, we are reminded of the *Book of Jubilees*, which also claims to be revealed by an angel to Moses when he ascended on Mount Sinai. In fact, the

scholars. See Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 76 and 134. On page 76 Scholem explains the first name as being "perhaps a corruption of the Hebrew *Shemesh 'Olam* (= Sun of the World)", while on p. 134 (in the Second Edition of the book) he writes: "... the magical name *Semiselim* so frequently used in the magical papyri, seems to come from the Aramaic. The word does not represent the Hebrew *Shemesh 'Olam*, but rather the Aramaic phrase *Shemi Shelam* which literally means: 'my name is peace' ". In the unpublished *Registers* to K. Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, p. 230, Preisendanz explains the word as implying "Ewige Sonne" (= Eternal Sun).—I am indebted to Morton Smith for preparing for me a copy of the *Registers*.

11 Scholem, *op. cit.*, p. 77 likewise assumes that the opening passages of *Hekhalot Zutarti* "may not constitute an original part of the *Urform* of the book." However, since the whole text is rather fragmentary it is quite difficult to decide what really belongs to its original layer of composition.

revelation of a secret lore to Moses in addition to the exoteric Law constituted an important branch of ancient Jewish esotericism.¹² We find it also repeated in other Merkavah texts,¹³ and in magical texts.¹⁴ In our case, however, we may assume that the book, which is meant, is none other than *Hekhalot Zutarti* itself. The book was believed to contain all the important secrets of the world and the Torah or at least to contain theurgic keys to their revelation.

Another paragraph apparently prefixed to *Hekhalot Zutarti* introduces

... the Name which was revealed to Rabbi 'Akiva when he contemplated the Ma'aseh Merkavah; and he descended¹⁵ and taught it to his students.

12 See B. Z. Wacholder, *Eupolemus* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1974), pp. 71 ff.: Chapter Three: "The Hellenized Moses—Jewish and Pagan".

13 See the beginning of the text *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (in Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 103: "... since you have revealed to Moses the secrets and the secrets of the secrets, the mysteries and the mysteries of the mysteries, and Moses [taught] them to [the People of] Israel, so that they can learn with them the Torah and multiply with their help the study of the Torah". See also 3 *Enoch* (*Sefer Hekhalot*), 15(b) and 43(d).

14 The famous magical text called "The Sword of Moses", first published by M. Gaster (London: 1896), begins in MS. Oxford 1531 fol. 35a, with the following statement: "This is the Sword of Moses which was delivered to him in the burning bush, and was (henceforth), revealed to Rabbi Yishma'el ben Elish'a in the Ma'aseh Merkavah." The "Sword of Moses" is a technical expression for magical practices connected in some way with the staff of Moses, regarding which we know several magical and supernatural traditions circulated in midrashic writings. See mainly *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Exodus 2, 21* and *Pirkei de-Rabbi 'Elie'zer*, xl. Both texts reflect a rather late stage in the transmission of a tradition that originated in Tannaitic, or early Amoraic, times. See *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* (ed. Mandelbaum), p. 308. As for the term "The Sword of Moses" see M. Magalioth, *Sefer Ha-Razim*, pp. 29–31, who rightly refers to the Greek term ξίφος (= sword) as implying also a magical formula. To the list of secret magical books attributed to Moses mentioned by Margalioth (p. 30, n. 8) one can add the title ἀρχαγγελική βίβλος attributed to Moses in one of the Paris amulets. See R. Reitzenstein, *Poimandres* (Reprint: Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966), p. 292 f. See further in *Tarbiz XXXVIII* (1969), p. 355. See also A. Böhlig and P. Labib (eds.), *Die Koptisch-gnostische Schrift ohne Titel aus Codex II von Nag Hammadi* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1962), p. 47. In one of the Aramaic magical bowls published by C. H. Gordon in *Archiv Orientalni IX* (1937), p. 87 we read, "By the Lord and the great throne belonging to the Master and 𐤆𐤍𐤅𐤍, the Ineffable Name that was revealed to Moses in the bush" (English translation on p. 88). See further, G. Scholem, "Der Name Gottes und die Sprachtheorie der kabbala," in: *Judaica III*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973), pp. 7 ff.

15 Contrary to the more current usage of the verb "to descend" (= to enter into the trance of the Merkavah experience), the verb here implies what was in other texts, designated by "to ascend".

He said to them: 'My children, be careful about the Name; this is a great name,¹⁶ a holy name, and a pure name.¹⁷ For whoever uses it in terror, in fright, in purity, in holiness and in meekness—his seed will multiply, and he will be successful¹⁸ in all his ways and his days will be long.'

In fact, a great part of *Hekhalot Zutarti* deals with magical and theurgic names, so that this kind of warning attributed to Rabbi 'Akiva is quite fitting. It is interesting to note that in *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 106 we read that Rabbi Yishmael said,

All these incantations Rabbi 'Akiva heard, when he descended unto the Merkavah: He caught them and taught them from before of His Throne of Glory, when His ministering angels were singing them to Him.

The purpose of such utterances is to show that the theurgic practices of the Ma'aseh Merkavah are no human invention but of heavenly origin. Consequently, one must be particularly cautious in their application. This idea is ritually implied at the end of this paragraph in *Hekhalot Zutarti* where a blessing is quoted for the purpose "of the sanctification of the Name".¹⁹

A central place in *Hekhalot Zutarti* is occupied by the story of the four who entered the *Pardes*. Since *Hekhalot Zutarti*, like *Re'uyot Yehezkel*, does not mention the seven palaces, it is of particular interest to notice that, in the version of this story as it is told in *Hekhalot Zutarti*, the sixth palace is mentioned. This can only be explained by the fact that *Hekhalot Zutarti* is a compilation of mystical passages, which represent different layers in the history of the *Hekhalot* literature. It has already been pointed out above in Chapter Four that the version, or, rather versions, of the story of the four who entered the *Pardes* as

16 The term "Great Name" is frequently used in Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew magical texts. Its meaning is "a most powerful Name".

17 "Purity" (*tahorah*) in connection with magical names implies the fact that this is the real name, in contrast to its corresponding *nomen barabarium*. See further G. Scholem, "Über eine Formel in den koptisch-gnostischen Schriften und ihren jüdischen Ursprung," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* XXX (1931), pp. 170 ff. See also below footnote 19.

18 The Hebrew verb *ṢLH* has a special meaning in a magical context. It implies that one's magical charm was efficacious. See further H. Tawil in *Journal of Biblical Literature* XCV (1976), pp. 405–413.

19 In this respect, *Hekhalot Zutarti* constitutes a mystical elaboration on the rulings regarding the transmission and study of the Ineffable Name in priestly circles in the days of the Second Temple. See Bav. *Qidushin* 71/a. See also the Responsum in *Otzar Ha-Geonim* to *Ḥagigah*, pp. 22–23.

told in *Hekhalot Zutarti* represent the true meaning and, possibly, the original setting of Rabbi 'Akiva's saying in Bav. *Hagigah* 14/b, to wit: "When you reach the pure marble stones, do not say: 'Water! Water!'" We need not repeat a full-scale discussion of the relation between the saying in *Hagigah* and the story in *Hekhalot Zutarti*. However, what requires additional comment is the fact that the so-called water-test episode is told in the manuscripts in three different versions.

- (a) Ben 'Azai cast a glance into the sixth palace and saw the brilliance of the air of the marble stones that were decorating the palace. His body could not endure (i.e., the magnificence of the vision) and he opened his mouth and asked them:²⁰ "These waters, what are they?" And he died (*Synopse*, § 345).
- (b) Ben Zoma cast a glance at the marble stones and thought that they were (made of) water. His body could endure not to ask them, nevertheless his mind could not [that ordeal]. And he went out of his mind (*Synopse*, § 345).
- (c) Rabbi 'Akiva said: Ben 'Azai was found worthy and stood at the gate of the sixth *Hekhal*. And he saw the brilliance of the pure marble stones. He opened his mouth twice and said: 'Water, Water'. Immediately they cut his head off and threw upon him eleven thousand iron bars. This should be a lesson for future generations, that a man should not commit the (same) mistake at the gate of the sixth palace (*Synopse*, § 410).

As we shall see in our discussion of *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§ 258–259, the gate of the sixth palace was the place where the last tests were put before the ascending mystic. The worthiness of the mystics was tested at every gate, but the sixth gate entailed several crucial tests and temptations, most of which may be called water-tests. The visionary saw marble stones, and the manner in which he reacted to the vision was taken to be a measure of his worthiness to proceed.

After the tale of the four who entered the *Pardes*, Rabbi 'Akiva is quoted as saying:

At that hour, when I ascended on high, I put a sign at the vestibules of the firmament. There are more of them (in heaven) than in my house, and when I approached the *pargod* (the heavenly veil spread out in front of the Throne of Glory), angels of destruction came out to beat me. But God

20 Probably, this alludes to the accompanying angels.

told them: leave that distinguished person (*zaqen*, literally: old man) alone, since he is worthy of gazing at my glory.

The last sentence comes close to the one quoted in Bav. *Hagigah* 15/b (bottom): “The ministering angels even wanted to kill Rabbi ‘Akiva, but God told them: leave that distinguished person alone, since he is worthy of using²¹ my glory”. Both passages respectively underline the extraordinary qualities of Rabbi ‘Akiva, which made him the model Merkavah mystic.

In contrast to the apocalyptic writers who selected their fictitious heroes from the gallery of biblical heroes, the Merkavah mystics were more selective in their choice and affiliated themselves to the great teachers of Halakhah in the Tannaitic period. Presumably, the purpose of this selection was to find authorization for mystical activities in quarters that had a decisive say in Halakhic Judaism. This does not mean that the historical founders of rabbinic Judaism were estranged from the *res mysticae*. On the contrary, we have seen that, from the days of Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai onwards, the leaders of Halakhic Judaism were involved in mystical activities and speculations.²² It is, however, remarkable that from Rabbi ‘Akiva onwards we lose track of the chain of mystical tradition. However, we may assume that it was continued, in spite of the fact that the links of that tradition seem to us today to be discontinued.

The accounts of the *Pardes*-story referred to above, bring to an end the Hebrew section of *Hekhalot Zutarti*. What follows is, first, a list of subjects that are revealed to the Merkavah mystic.²³ The list contains items relating both to cosmology and to theosophy. In fact, it becomes clear that in the Hekhalot literature the two subjects are closely interrelated, and that he who is worthy of the secrets of the Merkavah is also worthy of the secrets of the cosmos, and *vice versa*. It should be noted that these revelations are believed to come to the mystic in the course of a heavenly ascent: “Before God made heaven and earth, He had established a vestibule²⁴ to heaven, to go in and to go out” (*Synopse*, § 348). The mystic ascending to receive these secrets passes through this vestibule.

21 A common variant reading here is (as in *Hekhalot Zutarti*): “gazing”. For a discussion of the terms and their meaning, see G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 54.

22 See Bav. *Hagigah* 14/b.

23 See Scholem, *op. cit.*, p. 78, and our discussion above in Chapter Two.

24 See the short discussion of the terminology in Scholem, *ibid.*, footnote 9. One may add Bav. *Bava Batra* 74/a, which mentions the *khwata de-reqi’a* (in Aramaic, the window of heaven). In *Shemot Rabbā* xlii, 4 it is said that God opened to Moses a small window (*pishpash*) under the Throne of Glory so that he could escape from the wrath of the angels of destruction. Yer. *Sanhedrin* 10, 2 (28/c) mentions an opening (*hatirah*) under the Throne of Glory opened for those who wish to repent.

However, these ascents usually reach their climax with the mystical vision of the Deity.

The text continues with a comparatively long discussion of the question how a physical vision of God is possible when it is explicitly said that no man can see God and remain alive (Exodus 33, 20; compare Numbers 12, 6–8). Rabbi 'Akiva is quoted as settling the issue by saying:

It is as if He resembles us; but He is greater than everything else, and that is His glory which is hidden from us. And Moses says to those and to those: 'Do not reflect upon your own words, since He, blessed be He, is in His place' (*Synopse*, § 352).

The reference to Moses is not clear; however, the words reflect those in Ben Sira 3 discussed above in Chapter Two.

A central place among the things revealed to the mystic is occupied by the appearance of the Holy Creatures. The text calculates how many faces and wings the Creatures have, and what they do with their wings. It continues to describe everything that can be seen between the place occupied by the *Ḥayyot* (Holy Creatures) and the Throne of Glory. At its end follows a rather long discussion of various magical names, which are of a composite nature. This last part of the text is intensely technical and can hardly be summarized. It is mostly in Aramaic, and its textual status is problematic. However, once deciphered, it will be of great importance for a comparative study of magic and theurgy, and it may prove to be one of the earliest texts of its kind in that literature.

Hekhalot Rabbati

Hekhalot Rabbati is the major Hekhalot tractate we possess. It is preserved in a comparatively large number of manuscripts¹ and printed editions.² The main body of the text consists of twenty-six chapters (*Synopse*, §§ 81–280). The last four, or in some manuscripts five, chapters appended to them are known as *Sar-Torah* (= the Minister of Law) (*Synopse*, §§ 281–321), that is, the secret technique of the study of the Law and its memorization.³

The text begins with the question: “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?”⁴ This opening question is noteworthy for a number of reasons. First, it stresses the technical aspects of what follows. Indeed,

- 1 The two best manuscripts are Vatican 228 and Budapest/Kaufmann 238. Other manuscripts are Oxford, Neubauer 1531 (printed in Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* III, though in a rather negligent manner: both the person who copied the manuscript for Jellinek and, probably, the printer introduced misreadings and misprints); New York: Jewish Theological Seminary 8128 (this manuscript and the one previously mentioned seem to derive from the circles of the old Ḥasidim in Germany); Firenze Laurentiana 44.13; MS. Jerusalem 4 (Scholem, *Codices Codicum Cabalisticorum Hebraicorum*, Jerusalem, 1930, p. 22; this is the manuscript which Sh. A. Wertheimer printed in his *Batei Midrashot*, I, pp. 67 ff; see next footnote); Munich 22 & 40. There are also some manuscripts, which contain parts of the texts. Several Genizah fragments were preserved too.
- 2 The best known texts are those printed by A. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* III, pp. 83–108; V, pp. 167–169; and by Sh. A. Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashot* (see previous note). The text printed by Wertheimer has a different chapter division than all other texts known to us, and from xxxii,4–xl,5 it contains an apocalypse which uses old material re-written in circles connected with Sabbatai Ṭevi. A less known publication of *Hekhalot Rabbati* is the one incorporated in the collection of short writings by Isaiah Lev, *Sod 'Ez Ha-Da'at* (= “The Secret of the Tree of Knowledge”), edited by S. Musajoff, Jerusalem, 1891 (which also contains the text printed by Wertheimer).
- 3 Other texts which deal with the technique of the *Sar-Torah* consist of sections in the text called *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (published by G. Scholem in *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 103–117), and parts of the *Merkavah Rabbah* (published by Sh. Musajoff in *Merkavah Shelemah*, fol. 1a-6a). *Hekhalot Zutarti* contains *Sar-Torah* material, and, as we shall see, *Sefer Hekhalot* (3 Enoch) also.
- 4 My English translation is generally made from MS. Vatican 228; however, MS. Budapest/Kaufmann 238 has constantly been consulted. In fact, any future critical edition of the text will have to be based on these two manuscripts. See now my reference in the “Foreword” to Don Karr’s online edition of Morton Smith’s English translation. The chapter divisions in the manuscripts mentioned are the same as those in the text published by Jellinek, though there are slight differences in the paragraph numbering.

Hekhalot Rabbati and the other Hekhalot writings are cast as mystical manuals, describing at some length what should be done in order to achieve the desired experience and how to overcome the perils that stand in the mystic's way. In this respect, the Hekhalot writings are not mere descriptions of mystical experiences, but mystical guides to experiences the nature of which is described, so-to-speak, *en passant*. Second, the opening question indicates that mystical incantations occupy a central part in achieving the desired experiences. This aspect has now received full attention in Chapter One. In § 106 the text of *Hekhalot Rabbati* says that those incantations were acquired by a mystic ("Rabbi 'Akiva") during a vision of the Throne of Glory.

The opening question is repeated in § 94. It is followed by a short hymn, addressing the Throne of Glory, which allegedly engages in an intimate conversation with God. §§ 82–92 list the special accomplishments, which are attributed to the Merkavah mystics. These accomplishments endow the initiate with special knowledge and powers. Inevitably, they are supposed to upgrade his social status. For instance, the initiate is able to identify all kinds of criminals and transgressors of religious law. In addition, his social position is strengthened through his ability to know what will happen to people in the future. Finally, supernatural protection against enemies is offered to the Merkavah mystic. All this sounds rather peculiar. If this is not mere propaganda for recruiting novices, it may be argued that this section of the book belongs to a stage or place where mystical experiences were no longer in the reach of those who believed themselves worthy of having them. Otherwise, it is quite difficult to understand why the mystics had to praise themselves for having all kinds of unique and "forensic" proficiencies instead of being content with mystical experiences.⁵ In fact, the opening sections of *Hekhalot Rabbati* may be interpreted as reflecting a stage at which mystical initiates tried to benefit from the actual gathering of powers and proficiencies or from gaining a high reputation among colleagues or their communities.

As already indicated, the introductory question is repeated in § 94. It resumes the exposure to the Merkavah experience: "What is the utterance of the incantations which a man recites when he descends unto the Merkavah?" The song that is thereafter quoted maintains, as we have already observed, that the mystic recites the same songs of praise as the ones sung by the angelic beings. It is stated: "All these hymns Rabbi 'Akiva heard when he descended unto the Merkavah. He absorbed them and learned them as he was standing in front of

5 We have proposed a comparative assessment of this issue in Chapter One. Similar supernatural qualities are attributed to the initiates at the beginning of *Sefer Ha-Razim* and *Sefer Ha-Malbush*, both stemming from circles claiming to be in possession of magical powers.

the divine throne. (They were the very hymns) which His servants were singing to Him". However, hymns that were originally sung by the angels become theurgic incantations. Their aim was to help the initiate achieve his mystical goals.⁶ The idea of the mystics sharing the liturgical hymns of the angels comes close to the idea expressed by the Qumran sectarians, namely, that one special merit of the believers was to enjoy partnership with the angels.⁷ The Hekhalot mystic maintains that for his hymns to become effective they should have an angelic origin. G. Scholem referred to these incantations as "numinous hymns";⁸ and J. Maier specified some of their poetic characteristics.⁹ However, my opening chapter has drawn attention to the unique qualities of the Hekhalot hymns, in which epistemological issues have been brought to the foreground.

Chapter iii of *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§§ 96–97) begins with a short dialogue between a divine being, who is here called Zoharariel (= God of the Bright Light), and the "descending" mystic. A voice asks the visionary why he is so terrified. The mystic answers that he is called before God for six hours every day, and that the angels drag him on his knees until he reaches the divine throne.¹⁰ When the mystic learns that what the angels do is authorized by

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- 6 See A. Altmann, in *Melilah II* (1946), pp. 1 ff. Altmann, in fact, draws on the conclusions reached by G. Scholem in his analysis of the Hekhalot literature in general and of *Hekhalot Rabbati* in particular. See *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 40 ff. See also M. Smith, "Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati," in A. Altmann (ed.), *Biblical and Other Studies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 142–160. Smith's observations are most valuable to the study of the text of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, though the present description and analysis of the text differs on a variety of points from those of Morton Smith. See further A. Goldberg, "Einige Bemerkungen zu den Quellen und den Redaktionellen Einheiten der Grossen Hekhalot," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge*, Heft 1 (1973), pp. 1–49.
 - 7 See, for instance, 1 QS XI, 8; 1 QSb IV, 26. M. Weinfeld published comparative studies in which the idea of the liturgical partnership between men and angels is traced back to ancient Near Eastern, mainly Sumerian, parallels. See, M. Weinfeld, *Early Jewish Liturgy: From Psalms to the Prayers in Qumran and Rabbinic Literature* [in Hebrew], (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2004).
 - 8 *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 21.
 - 9 See J. Maier, "Serienbildung und 'Numinoser' Eindruckseffekt in den poetischen Stücken der Hekhalot Literatur," *Semitics III* (1973), pp. 36–66.
 - 10 The text reads, "a thousand times they drag me on my knees until I reach Your Throne of Glory". The Hekhalot text published by the present writer in *Tarbiz XXXVIII* (1969), p. 359, says of Ben Zoma that he was dragged "a hundred times on the first *Hekhal*, ... two hundred times on the second *Hekhal*, four hundred times on the third *Hekhal*, eight hundred times on the fourth *Hekhal*, one thousand and six hundred on the fifth *Hekhal*, three thousand and two hundred on the sixth *Hekhal*, and six thousand and four hundred

their King, he proceeds to describe the magnificence of the divine throne. The throne is described as hovering ever since the creation of the world. The Living Creatures are carrying it, but even they do not place their feet on the ground of the firmament.¹¹ There follows a most interesting account of the throne, which, so-to-speak, bows down before God, asking Him to descend and sit on it. What the throne is here described as doing and saying implies that God is not always present on His throne in the seventh palace. When God is absent from the seventh *Hekhal*—where he receives the prayers of His People and the songs of His angelic servants and where He is seen in a mystical vision—He, so the text of *Hekhalot Rabbati* evidently assumes, resides in the eighth heaven, which is above the heads of the Living Creatures.¹² Allegedly, God descends to his palace in the seventh heaven three times a day, corresponding to the prayer hours of the People of Israel. The rest of the time, we must assume, God resides in the eighth heaven. Presumably, *Hekhalot Rabbati* supposes a certain degree of divine transcendence.

The text in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, which describes God's descent to the seventh *Hekhal*, says:

Wonderful loftiness, strange dominion,
Loftiness of grandeur, dominion of *Zihayon*
that the Angel of the Countenance of God thus effects thrice daily in the heavenly court before Your Throne of Glory, when He comes and arrives on the firmament above the heads of the *Cherubim*, above the heads of the *Ofanim* and above the heads of the heavenly Creatures.¹³
And the *Cherubim*, *Ofanim* and the heavenly Creatures, bound, stand underneath the Throne of the Glory. And when they see Him coming upon the firmament which is above the heads of the *Cherubim*, the *Ofanim* and the Holy Creatures, they retreat and are frightened and fall back in swoon (*Synopse*, §§ 100–101).

on the seventh *hekhal*". The sum total here is 12700. The text there adds: "However, one does not suffer even one scratch!"

- 11 Compare *Pirkei de-Rabbi 'Eliez'er* iv: "... and His throne is exalted and suspended above in the air ..."
- 12 This is a clear allusion to Ezekiel 1, 22–23. See I. Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988), pp. 207–220.
- 13 Originally, there was no real difference between the Cherubim and the Living Creatures (*Hayyot*). Both terms are interchangeably used in the visions in Ezekiel 1 and 10.

Obviously, in the manner it conceives of God leaving His abode in the eighth heaven, the text constitutes a unique *topos*. When God appears on His throne in the seventh palace, He is clad in His divine garment (*Ḥaluq*).¹⁴

Let us return for a moment to the description of God's descent to the seventh *Hekhal* in the seventh heaven. As this part of *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§ 163) says, God's descents to His throne correspond to the three daily prayers of the People of Israel. They involve special hymns and activities of the angelic beings. The idea that there is a ritual and liturgical correspondence between the saying of the *Qedushah* by the People of Israel and that recited by the angels is common in Jewish and Christian sources.¹⁵ What is new in *Hekhalot Rabbati* is the concept that even the prayers said by those who are not practicing mystics do in fact have mystical consequences. This adds a new dimension to prayer, and it was the privilege of the Merkavah mystics to introduce it. The mystical aspects of prayer were considerably developed through the Middle Ages, both in Judaism¹⁶ and in Christianity,¹⁷ but attention has not yet been given to this aspect of the daily prayers. They are invocations to God to descend to His throne in the seventh *Hekhal*.

To complement this idea of prayer as it is conceived of in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, we must refer to §§ 172–174, which describe God as addressing words of blessing to those officiating before Him. When the heavenly beings say their morning blessings, God asks them to be silent so as to enable Him to listen first to the prayers of His “sons”, the People of Israel. In *Hekhalot Rabbati*, mystical ideas of prayer occupy a more prominent role than is usually given to them in the general study of prayer at the time. A considerable proportion of the descriptions found in the book is in one way or another connected with the appearance of God on His throne. As we have noted, God descends to the throne from his abode in the eighth heaven at the daily prayer times of the People of Israel. If this idea is carried to its logical conclusion, it appears that a mystical descent to the Merkavah was carried out during these institutionalized hours of prayer. Indeed, several instances in the Hekhalot writings make evident that mystical prayers, or invocations, were introduced into, or appended to, daily prayers. Furthermore, the various descriptions in *Hekhalot Rabbati* as to how the throne is prepared for that descent (chapters x and xi) are substantially

14 For a detailed discussion of the theme of the *Ḥaluq* see G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 58 ff.

15 See above, “Introduction to Part Two”, footnote 11.

16 See I. Tishbi, *The Wisdom of the Zohar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), Vol. III, pp. 941–1075.

17 See F. Heiler, *Prayer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), pp. 172–202.

connected with the prayer times of the People of Israel. Chapter x contains a mystical hymn which encourages the Holy Creatures to perform their heavenly duties, while chapter xi describes what the Prince of the Countenance does when he prepares the throne for God. In addition, § 172 refers to a request to the Holy Creatures to carry the throne willingly so that the one sitting on it will attend to the prayers of the Children of Israel and attend to the special expectations of Merkavah mystics. *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 175 (as well as § 189) describes the ritual dance of the celestial beings in front of the throne of God.¹⁸ Elsewhere, in § 192, the task of the angels is extended to include the intercession on behalf of the People of Israel.¹⁹ Consequently, perfect correspondence is achieved between the terrestrial—presumably even non-mystical—human prayer and the angelic liturgical performance. Briefly, the ideas of the angelic liturgy known from the texts from Qumran²⁰ seem to have undergone a substantial mystical transformation, in which a descriptive language turns into an experiential one.

Indeed, no mystical practices are connected with the Qumran texts. However, the richness of the style and the vividness of the description give the impression that, after all, real visionary experiences of the kind known from apocalyptic writings sustained these texts. However, in comparison with the parallel experiences in the Hekhalot literature, the visionary experiences in apocalyptic are in the realm of proto-mysticism. They contain noteworthy features that served as the matrix in which Merkavah mysticism grew. However, they do not focus on the hazardous course that leads into the celestial throne room and the experiences gained there. It seems that the ultimate goal of the apocalyptic visionaries was not to experience the Deity; they were uplifted to heaven in order to gain information about the secrets of the world. These secrets entailed information about cosmological and historical processes that link creation with redemption. Several apocalyptic visionaries, though, experienced visions of the Deity. In this respect, we argue, their visions established the matrix in which later phases of mystical experience unfolded. The Hekhalot mystic ascended primarily in order to attain a vision of the “Beauties (*yofiot*) of the Merkavah.”

Another substantial difference between Merkavah mysticism and apocalyptic is highlighted in *Hekhalot Rabbati* ix. In relation to the mystical ideas

18 See also § 160, which can be interpreted as implying that God's throne itself is revolving.

19 In medieval Jewish mysticism, this motive of the intercession of the angels on behalf of the People of Israel became a central issue in the concept of prayer.

20 See our discussion of these texts in Chapter One.

of prayer, God is quoted as asking the *Yordei Merkavah*²¹ to “tell my sons what I am doing during the morning and afternoon prayers²² . . . teach them and tell them . . . and testify unto them what you saw me doing to the countenance of the face of Jacob, your patriarch, which is engraved on my throne”. Here the mystics are explicitly asked to reveal to the common people (“to my sons”) this particular component in their vision. This is the opposite of the idea of secrecy maintained in apocalyptic, and it speaks to the non-esoteric quality of the rest of the Hekhalot literature. This non-esoteric quality of the Hekhalot literature is further stressed in § 169, which emphatically states, “May the decree of heaven be upon you, *Yordei Merkavah*, if you do not tell and say what you have heard; and if you do not tell what you have seen upon the countenance of grandeur, might, wonder and glory”. In §§ 216 and 218, God is described as waiting for the mystics to descend unto the Merkavah in order to be able to “see and tell to the seed of Abraham, His beloved,” everything that they have seen. Of course, one may argue that the ones to whom the mystics should report their experiences are none other than their mystical colleagues.²³ However, one should note that the Hekhalot writings never require secrecy. In addition, no esoteric layers of Scripture are revealed in them. As we have already seen, the dangers described in the Hekhalot tractates could prevent unworthy people from undergoing experiences that they could not endure, physically or emotionally. However, no straightforward requirement of secrecy is expressed therein.

Before we continue our discussion of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, a word is due regarding the ten-martyrs apocalypse incorporated into the text (*Synopse*, §§ 107–121).²⁴ It is not clear when this apocalypse was introduced, but it is clear that it belongs to a comparatively early stage of the text. All manuscripts known to the present writer contain the apocalypse, some with a longer version than usual.

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- 21 In spite of the many attempts to explain the term, *Yordei Merkavah* has not yet been satisfactorily explained. See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 20, n. 1. See also Ph. Bloch, “Die *Yordei Merkavah*, die Mystiker der Gaonzeit, und ihr Einfluss auf die Liturgie”, *Monatsschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums* XXXVII (1893), pp. 22 ff.
- 22 Some manuscripts here add the word for the evening prayer too: *’Arvit*. Yet, this addition, also found in some of the quotations of this passage in Halakhic sources discussing the *Qedushah* said in the daily service, seems to be out of place since the evening prayer never contained the recital of the *Qedushah*.
- 23 See the description of the mystical-“séance” in chapter xviii, and the comments thereon by M. Smith, *art. cit.*, pp. 144 ff.
- 24 See Ph. Bloch, “Rom und die Mystiker der Merkavah,” *Festschrift für Jacob Guttman* (Leipzig: 1915), pp. 113–124; and Scholem’s remarks in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 357, footnote 10. See the reference to R. Boustani, *From Martyr to Mystic*, above Chapter One, footnote 48.

In addition, the apocalypse is known as a separate composition in a number of manuscripts.²⁵ Since there are several historical or semi-historical figures to whom the text alludes, attempts have been made to date the apocalypse and determine the *termini a quo* and *ad quem* of the whole work.²⁶ However, it is always difficult to date and locate stories of religious persecution, particularly so when the sages of antiquity are called upon to serve as models of religious devotion for later generations.

The *raison d'être* for the apocalypse in *Hekhalot Rabbati* becomes clear in § 108, which reports that Rabbi Nehuniah ben Ha-Qanah asked Rabbi Yishmael to descend unto the Merkavah and find out the reason for the Roman decree to put to death four of the sages of the People of Israel or eight thousand students as their ransom. The four sages are Shim'on ben Gamli'el, Yishmael ben 'Elish'a, 'El'azar ben Dama and Yehudah ben Bava. Later on, in § 109, it becomes evident that the decree actually concerned ten sages whose names are not specified

25 See the detailed discussion of G. Reeg, *Die Geschichte von den Zehn Märtyrern: Synoptische Edition und Übersetzung und Einleitung* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1985).

26 See the suggestion concerning the dating of the apocalypse made by Morton Smith. He writes, "The use of the title 'Caesar' for the Emperor (= Lupinus, in the apocalypse) suggests a date prior to Diocletian, the *-inus* termination and the slaughter of the Roman administrators reflect the troubled years of the mid-third century, when relations between the emperors and the Senate were particularly bad... The folk-tale motif of transformation and substitution of persons was popular at the time; we find it, for instance, in the third century strata of the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies". See, *art. cit.* (above footnote 6), p. 149. However, this suggestion finds no support in S. Lieberman's summary of the historical and Halakhic evidence for alleged religious persecutions in the third and fourth centuries. See S. Lieberman, "Redifot Dat Yisra'el," in A. Hayman and S. Lieberman (eds.), *The Salo Wittmayer Baron Jubilee Volume On The Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* [Hebrew Part], (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1974), pp. 234 ff. Lieberman found no historical evidence for the existence of religious persecutions in Eretz Yisrael in the third and fourth centuries C.E. In a private conversation, Lieberman pointed out to me that Jewish stories of martyrdom could have arisen in the third or fourth century at the time when many Christians had suffered martyrdom. The alleged purpose of these stories was to show that Jews too were ready to pay with their lives for beliefs and religious practices. Indeed, these stories were pseudepigraphically projected back to the second century, when Jews had suffered religious persecution in the days of Hadrian. Attempts to historically retroject events of this kind were a common literary phenomenon in the literature dealing with martyrdom. For the Halakhic and historical sources dealing with second century religious persecution, see S. Lieberman, *art. cit.*, pp. 213–234.

in all the manuscripts at hand.²⁷ The reason for this savage decree was that the ten martyrs had to expiate the sin of the ten brothers who sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites (Genesis 37, 27–28). As Exodus 21, 16 states, “Whoever steals a man, whether he sells him or is found in possession of him, shall be put to death”, the ten martyrs had to pay with their lives for the sin of their forefathers. E. E. Urbach rightly traced threads of the legend back to *Jubilees* 34, 18–19, and pointed out the occurrence of the idea in several medieval midrashic writings, which in turn were probably influenced by the material found in *Hekhalot Rabbati*.²⁸ Urbach likewise remarks, “... when the Temple was destroyed, the sin (of the selling of Joseph) remained without an atonement, and it appears that the burden of expiation was imposed on the righteous in each generation” (p. 521).²⁹ However interpreted, the legend and its theological consequences are, to say the least, rather peculiar in Jewish thought, and they certainly contradict the basic Jewish concept of retribution as expounded, for example, in Deuteronomy 24, 16 and in Ezekiel 18.

In fact, the legend of the ten martyrs is an interesting specimen of the application of a Merkavah technique for non-Merkavah purposes. Among other things, it speaks of circumstantial phases in which non-esoteric aspects of the Merkavah lore prevailed. It should be noted, however, that later on (in chapter xiv)³⁰ the “ten martyrs” are summoned to form a mystical group, which participated in an ecstatic séance led by a medium descending unto the Merkavah. More attention will be given to this unique event in due course.

Chapters viii–xii give an extensive account of the angelic ceremony in heaven. They include long poetical passages, which are masterpieces of lyrical

27 In MS. Vatican 228, for instance, the names were added in the margin by a second hand. Of these names, two, at least, are erroneous: Rabbi Yishma'el and Rabbi Shim'on, known from the rabbinic sources as martyrs, were not the sons of 'Elish'a and Gamli'el respectively. Their exact identity is unknown, though it is clear that they were martyred before Rabbi 'Akiva had suffered martyrdom. See S. Lieberman, *art. cit.*, p. 227. Lists of the martyrs found in rabbinic writings vary considerably one from the other. Compare, for instance, the list found in *Hekhalot Rabbati* with the ones found in *'Eikhah Rabbā* ii (ed. Buber, fol. 50/b), and in *Midrash Tehillim* ix (ed. Buber, fol. 45a). See also next footnote.

28 E. E. Urbach, *The Sages*, p. 521, and footnotes 45–46, 921, which contain references to additional bibliography.

29 According to *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 108 the decree is to last until the future day of revenge, when Sama'el, the heavenly prince of Rome, will be slain together with the other heavenly princes. Samael and his cohorts will be lying slain “as lambs and sheep (offered on) the Day of Atonement”. The text here refers to *Jubilees* 34, 18.

30 See also chapter xviii.

composition. The description chiefly concerns the manner in which the angelic beings prepare themselves and the divine throne for the appearance of God in the seventh *Hekhal*. Long sections in these descriptions are devoted to the angelic ritual of singing and dancing.³¹ It is repeatedly emphasized that this angelic ceremony takes place when the People of Israel recite their *Qedushah*. Thus, the heavenly ritual perfectly corresponds with the earthly one. At one point, a section of *Shi'ur Qomah* speculation is introduced: "From the Throne of His Glory the height of God is a hundred and eighty thousand times ten thousand parasangs and from his right arm to his left arm His width is seventy thousand times ten thousand parasangs" (§ 167).³² These measures (unless interpolated) show that the writer of *Hekhalot Rabbati* was aware of the *Shi'ur Qomah* speculations and that they were part of the Hekhalot tradition.³³

Not only has the throne of God to be prepared, but also the Living Creatures who carry it. In chapter xi, the Angel of the Countenance crowns each of the Living Creatures with thousands upon thousands of "crowns." He prostrates himself every time he puts a "crown" on a head. When the Living Creatures see that God is angry with the People of Israel, they untie their "crowns" and beat them on the ground, thus asking forgiveness (chapter xii).

Chapters xiii–xxvi contain a long and detailed description of the descent unto the Merkavah.³⁴ It begins with a pseudo-historical paragraph that links this description with the ten-martyrs apocalypse: "Rabbi Yishma'el said: When Rabbi Neḥunyah ben Ha-Qanah saw Rome planning to destroy the mighty of Israel, he at once revealed the secret of the world: that is the virtue of the one who is worthy of gazing on the King and His throne . . .".³⁵ The impression one gets from this introductory note is that the revelation of the secrets of the world was made public because of religious persecutions. In both cases, the mystical services of a medium were required. In § 199 the virtues of the mystic are given:

31 *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 160. The paragraph can also be taken to mean that the throne revolves around itself. The angelic dance is again described in § 189.

32 The manuscripts at hand vary in the length of their respective versions of this *Shi'ur Qomah* passage. In any event, the *Shi'ur Qomah* passage in *Hekhalot Rabbati* is only partly known from the longest preserved *Shi'ur Qomah* texts.

33 See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 36 ff.; *idem*, *Von der Mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit*, Zürich, Rhein-Verlag, 1962, pp. 7 ff.: "Schi'ur Koma . . ."; S. Lieberman, "Mishnat Shir Ha-Shirim," Appendix D to Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 118–126.

34 See M. Smith, *art. cit.* (above, n. 6), pp. 144 ff.

35 The translation is—with some changes—that of Morton Smith.

What is the technique of the Merkavah mystic like? It is like having a ladder in one's house and being able to go up and down at will. This may be done by anyone who is pure of idolatry, sexual offenses, bloodshed, slander, vain oaths, profanation of the Name, impertinence, and unjustified enmity, and who keeps every positive and negative commandment."³⁶

The ladder-motif mentioned here³⁷ is known both from Greek philosophy³⁸ and from Islamic philosophy and mysticism,³⁹ but in our case it may likewise indicate the angel-like quality of the Merkavah mystic.⁴⁰ In any event, the ladder is used here only metaphorically.

When Rabbi Yishma'el heard what the qualifications of the Merkavah mystic were supposed to be, he felt discouraged and said to Rabbi Nehunyah ben Ha-Qanah, "If so, there is no end to the matter, for there is no living man so pure."⁴¹ In response to that, Rabbi Nehunyah ben Ha-Qanah told Rabbi Yishma'el to gather all the "heroes of the assembly and all the distinguished people of the academy" so that he might tell them the most secret mysteries of

the beam of the web upon which rest the perfection of the world and its beautiful construction; and the axle of heaven and earth to which are bound, sewed, connected, hung and fastened all the edges of the earth

36 See previous note. Scholem interpreted this passage as epitomizing "The Halakhic Character of *Hekhalot* Mysticism"; see *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 9–13.

37 See also § 201 (end) which should be compared with the text published by L. Ginzberg, *Genizah Studies in Memory of Doctor Solomon Schechter* I, (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1928), pp. 185–187. See also § 237.

38 David Winston drew my attention to the following references: Plato, *Symposium*, 211c: It is said of the candidate to be initiated into the mysteries of Love: "...he must for the sake of that highest beauty be ever climbing aloft as on the steps of stairs (ὥσπερ ἐπαναβαθμοῖς χρώμενον) ...". Philo *De Praemiis et Poenis* 43, mentions those who have by the power of their intellect recognized the operation of God in Nature, and says; "These no doubt are truly admirable persons and superior to the other classes. They have, as I said, advanced from down to up by a sort of heavenly ladder (διὰ τινος οὐρανόυ κλίμακος) and by reason and reflection happily inferred the Creator from His works". [Both translations are from the Loeb Classics; that of Plato, however, with a slight change according to Liddell & Scott, p. 606, s.v. ἐπαναβαθμός]. See also E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, p. 52.

39 See A. Altmann's article, "The Ladder of Ascension," mentioned above in Chapter Five, footnote 77. Although Altmann deals mainly with later medieval sources, his discussion is most relevant for our passage in *Hekhalot Rabbati*.

40 See Genesis 28, 12.

41 See above footnote 37.

and the universe and also the edges of the celestial firmaments; and the pathway of the heavenly ladder which leads from earth to the right leg of the Throne of Glory (§ 201).

This description of the creation of the world is also known from other sources,⁴² and its inclusion here speaks to the close connection between mystical and cosmological speculations. On the other hand, some of the Jewish cosmological texts, such as the *Beraita de-Ma'aseh Bereshit* and *Midrash Kohen*, contain important mystical sections. This link between mystical and cosmological speculations has already been shown to be present in several apocalyptic writings and is characteristic of medieval Jewish mysticism (*i.e.*, the Kabbalah). In principle, though, the secrets of the Deity and the secrets of nature may be classified as two distinct branches of knowledge; however, in practice, they are often interrelated, and so they appear in the Hekhalot writings.⁴³

To come back to *Hekhalot Rabbati* xiv, when Rabbi Yishma'el heard the request to gather the distinguished members of the academy, he

... assembled every Sanhedrin, great or small, at the third gate of the temple. Rabbi Neḥunyah ben Ha-Qanah was sitting on a bench made of pure marble which Elish'a my (= Rabbi Yishma'el's) father gave him from the property of my mother and which had been part of the dowry that she brought to him.⁴⁴

In § 203, the names of nine of sages are mentioned. Together with Rabbi Yishma'el, they were sitting before Rabbi Neḥunyah ben Ha-Qanah. All the rest of the *Haverim* (colleagues), however, were standing on their feet, because "they saw globes of fire and torches of light separating *us from them*." The italicized words indicate that three groups were involved.⁴⁵ The first group consisted of one man, Rabbi Neḥunyah ben Ha-Qanah. The second group consisted of the ten sages, whose names are given. The third group consisted of

42 See S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah to Tractate Kippurim*, pp. 772–773. See I. Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, pp. 207–220.

43 See also 3 *Enoch* ix seq., where the secrets of the Torah are added to the cosmological and theosophical secrets.

44 Here M. Smith translates only in a summary form; see next footnote.

45 Morton Smith informed me that he too noticed that three groups were involved, as can be seen from his translation of the passage: "... and R. Neḥunya sat and instructed the chosen few who sat before him, *while the rest of the scholars* stood at a distance, separated from them by globes of fire and torches of light."

those whom the text calls “the multitude of the colleagues” (*hamon haverim*). Only Rabbi Nehunyah ben Ha-Qanah “was sitting expounding all the matter of the Merkavah, the descent and the ascent, how one descends unto and how one ascends from (the Merkavah)”. The others were either carefully listening to him or writing down what he was saying.

Then follows a detailed description of the “praxis”, that is, how the descent should be carried out. This description of the descent unto the Merkavah, which is completely different from the ones mentioned earlier using the hymns technique, begins with the words: “When a man wants to descend unto the Merkavah he should call Suriyah, the Prince of the Countenance, and conjure him a hundred and twelve times.” In addition, it is said that the mystic should be careful neither to add nor to subtract from that number, for, if he does, he might fatally endanger himself. “He should utter the names while his fingers count a hundred and twelve times.”⁴⁶ A description follows of the seven palaces and of their respective gatekeepers. Rabbi Nehunyah ben Ha-Qanah says, “Totrosiʿi, Lord God of Israel, dwells in seven palaces, one inside the other, and at the gate of each palace there are eight gatekeepers, four on either side” (§§ 206–213). The names of the gatekeepers of the first six palaces are immediately given, while we have to wait until § 241 for the names of the gatekeepers standing at the seventh palace.⁴⁷ Here it is only said that those standing at the seventh *hekhal* are most fearful (§ 213). Chapter xvi describes in some detail the fearful horses on which those gatekeepers ride, and it is said that, in spite of everything, the *Yordei Merkavah* descend and are not harmed. The text says that God is waiting, almost impatiently, for the mystic to undergo a descent to the Merkavah (§ 216). Passage through the gates is granted only when two seals are shown, one to those standing on the right and one to those standing on the left (chapter xvii). At the gate of the sixth *Hekhal*, however, a slight change in the procedure occurs: two seals have to be shown to those standing on the right and one to those on the left (§§ 229–230). Only when the seals are shown, do the gatekeepers accompany the mystic to the next gate.

In (§ 226) an observation is made to the effect that the gatekeepers of the sixth palace are so fearful that they indiscriminately inflict destruction on those who descend unto the Merkavah regardless of the question whether they

46 A Genizah fragment found in Leningrad (Antonin Collection 186) contains a hitherto unknown Merkavah text. It specifies “How does he count?—On every finger he counts ten times; then he repeats and counts (ten times) on his first finger and once on his second finger, and matters work out for him”. See P. Schäfer (ed.), *Genizah-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1984), pp. 164–165.

47 The names of those who keep the gates on the way “up” are mentioned in § 243. Apparently, the names of those on the way “down” were different.

deserve to be included among the *Yordei Merkavah* or not. In spite of the fact that the gatekeepers were severely punished for that—they were burned and replaced—the new ones show no better attitude. When the members of the mystical group heard this, they asked Rabbi Yishma'el to call Rabbi Neḥunyah ben Ha-Qanah back from his celestial vision, so that he might identify this particular class of mystics called “those who descend unto the Merkavah but do not [really] descend unto the Merkavah”. Rabbi Yishma'el fulfilled their wish and woke Rabbi Neḥunyah ben Ha-Qanah from his trance. He did so in the following manner: he put on the knees of Rabbi Neḥunyah ben Ha-Qanah a piece of fine and white wool which had previously been touched very slightly by a menstruating woman who had been declared to be pure by a majority of the rabbinical court. According to Jewish law, menstrual blood renders women unclean and this unclean condition passes over to people and things, which are touched by the unclean woman or utensils and seats, which she used. We have already pointed out (in Chapter Five) that ritual purity was a necessary prerequisite for any mystical experience. The mystic had to undergo a series of ritual baths before he could begin with the more technical “praxis” of the mystical experience. Now, to wake him up from the trance a piece of fine and white wool—*mela parhava*, which was used in order to examine the color of the blood of a menstruating woman—was put on the knees of Rabbi Neḥunyah ben Ha-Qanah.⁴⁸

In discussing this passage in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, Gershom Scholem referred to it as a “set of fictitious circumstances”. However, in an appendix to this book, Saul Lieberman analyzes the details of this process, and reaches the conclusion that the story is an ingenious construction of mystical imagination based on Halakhic knowledge.⁴⁹ When Rabbi Neḥunyah ben Ha-Qanah was “dismissed from before of the throne of Glory where he had been sitting and beholding,” he was asked as to the ones who were called “those who descend unto the Merkavah but do not descend unto the Merkavah.” His answer to this question was that they were the ones whom the real *Yordei Merkavah* placed before them, either standing or sitting, and told them to keep alert and hear

48 Bav. *Niddah* 17/a mentions the *mela parhava* as a means of testing the menstrual blood. It is identified with a kind of material that is either *Pikkulin* (cotton?) or pure and soft wool. Rashi, however, explains *mela parhava* as cotton, but adds a parallel explanation: “a pure and soft wool”. As for the true meaning of *parhava*, it remains a riddle.

49 See now L. H. Schiffman, “The Recall of Rabbi Neḥuniah ben Ha-Qanah from Ecstasy in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*”, *Association for Jewish Studies Review*, I (Cambridge, Mass.: Association for Jewish Studies, 1976), pp. 269–281. Schiffman’s analysis misinterprets both the Halakhic and theurgic aspects of the passage!

and write down all that the mystic said and heard when reaching the throne of Glory.⁵⁰ If those people were not worthy of the experience, the gatekeepers of the sixth *Hekhal* beat them. It was, therefore, necessary to be very careful in the choice of those who participated in the mystical séance. Although those people were only amanuenses, they had to be men of purity and piety comparable the *Yordei Merkavah* themselves.

The sixth gate entails a series of particularly challenging tests for the mystic. Some of the tests are described here and some elsewhere (in § 259 and *Hekhalot Zutarti*). Qeṣṣiel (“The Wrath of God”) is the angel in charge of those standing on the right side of the gate. He holds in his hand a drawn sword (§ 229). This sword is a most fearful one: lightening bolts come out of it, and it shouts “destruction.” Dumī’el (“Divine Silence”) stands on the left side. The text has some interesting things to say about him. First, his real name is not Dumī’el but Averghidrihm. This curious name was rightly explained by J. H. Levy as a corrupt transcription of the three Greek words: ἀήρ, γῆ, ὕδωρ (air, earth, and water, respectively). These are three of the four elements in Greek philosophy.⁵¹ It may be argued that the reason for the change in the angel’s name was that an angel bearing a name composed of the three or four elements out of which the world was created could be taken for the Demiurge. Since we know that the angels were created,⁵² their participation in the creation of the world was considered in rabbinic thought a Gnostic blasphemy.⁵³ The reason given by the text for the change in the name is that “He should be called Dumī’el after my name: just as I see and remain silent so does he.”⁵⁴ His post of duty is at the right side of the gate-post. But Qeṣṣiel, the Prince, pushed him aside. Nevertheless,

50 In this respect, they resemble the scribes of the Sanhedrin. See Mishnah *Sanhedrin* iv, 3–4.

51 See J. H. Levy, *Studies in Jewish Hellenism* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1969), p. 261. Levy suggested seeing in the rather strange ending of the word a corrupt rendering of the Greek πῦρ, fire.

52 According to the *Book of Jubilees*, the angels were created on the first day. Later on, in rabbinic texts, their creation was said to have taken place on the second or even the fifth day. See *Bereshit Rabbā* iii, ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 24. The theological difficulties caused by Genesis 1, 26 (“let us make a man”) have given rise to a vast literature. See next footnote.

53 See E. E. Urbach, *The Sages*, pp. 203 ff.

54 See *Mechilta d’Rabbi Ismael*, p. 142, line 10, where it is said of God that before the time of the future redemption He watches the miserable state of His People without uttering a word. See further J. H. Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 262, who identifies in our paragraph a transcription of the Greek word σιγή, silence. In fact 1 Kings 19, 12 inspired a number of speculations about the divine silence.

he (= Dumi'el) felt towards him neither malice nor rivalry. Both of them do whatever they do in my honor" (§ 230).

When the mystic shows the proper seals, Qezfiel calls a whirlwind for him and puts him in a carriage of light and blows trumpets and rams' horns for him while Dumi'el paces in front carrying a "present" (§ 231).⁵⁵ What is this present? It has theurgic functions. It consists of the magical seals, which the initiate has to show at the gates of each of the seven palaces so that peaceful passage is granted to him. Even more important, it consists of the testimony in which his Halakhic knowledge and observance is recorded. This "document" is obtained in the following manner. When the Merkavah mystic arrives at the sixth gate, he is met by Dumi'el who is sitting on a bench made of a pure stone.⁵⁶ The angel greets the mystic with a Greek blessing: "*Extraordinary day. Show the seal. Shalom*,"⁵⁷ and invites him to take a seat beside him (§ 233). Then Dumi'el addresses the mystic, warning him that only he who has studied all the various categories of the written and oral law *or* (!) he who strictly observes all that is said therein may pass onward to the seventh *Hekhal* (§ 234). If the mystic claims that he possesses either of these qualities, Dumi'el calls Gavri'el, the Scribe,⁵⁸ and asks him to take note of this fact on a piece of paper (§ 235). This paper is hung on a mast⁵⁹ on the carriage of light in which the Merkavah mystic is placed before he passes through the sixth *Hekhal*. When the gatekeepers of the seventh *Hekhal* see Dumi'el, Gabri'el, and Qezfiel, they cover their faces and loosen their drawn bows and return their drawn swords to their sheaths (§ 236). Nonetheless, the mystic has to show the gatekeepers of the seventh *Hekhal* "a great seal and a fearful crown."⁶⁰ When the gatekeepers see all this,

55 The Hebrew text here uses a Greek loan word: δῶρον.

56 The word used here is λίθινος, which means "of stone". See Liddell & Scott, p. 1048, s.v. λιθ-ίδιον.

57 See J. H. Levy, *op. cit.*, pp. 260–261. Levy assumes that at least two more words can be identified in the corrupt Hebrew transcription of the Greek words. Upon examination of the good manuscripts, it appears that only three phrases can be deciphered with certainty.

58 In Jewish apocalyptic and mystical tradition, Enoch-Metatron is viewed as the heavenly scribe. The allocation of that function to Gabriel in *Hekhalot Rabbati* seems to be unique.

59 The word used here is SKRIYA. See *Aruch Completum*, vol. I, p. 199, s.v. ASKRAYA.

60 The transcribed version of the Greek words as suggested by J. H. Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 262, reads: θεὸς οὐρανὸς γῆ ὁ δεσπότης. However, Morton Smith, *art. cit.*, p. 146, suggests a slightly different reading. The opening prayer of *Hekhalot Zutarti* is sometimes called "The prayer of the Great Seal and of the fearful crown." See Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 6, footnote. 12;

they enter the seventh *Hekhal* to fetch all kinds of musical instruments,⁶¹ and thus they escort the Merkavah mystic and offer him a seat near the heavenly Creatures that carry the Throne of Glory and minister to it (*ibid.*).

Chapter xxi begins with a problematic issue: It turns out that the names of the gatekeepers of the seventh *Hekhal* were not specified. When the members of the mystical company appealed to Rabbi Neḥunyah ben Ha-Qanah, he told them that this was on purpose. The names of the gatekeepers of the first six Hekhalot could be revealed, and the mystics were allowed to make use of them. However, one was not allowed either to mention or to use the names of the gatekeepers of the seventh *Hekhal*. Once he was asked to reveal their names, Rabbi Neḥunyah agreed to do so on the condition that all the members of the company stood up. However, whenever he uttered a name, they had to fall on their faces. The chapter ends with the remark that immediately all the members of the mystical company “stood on their feet before Rabbi Neḥunyah ben Ha-Qanah. He uttered [the names], and they fell on their faces, and the scribes were writing”.

The names of the gatekeepers of the seventh *Hekhal* are given in chapter xxii. It becomes obvious that a difference is maintained between the names of those keeping the gates on the way of the descent and the names of those on the way of the ascent. A prominent role among the gatekeepers of the seventh *Hekhal* is given to ‘Anafi’el.

And why is he called ‘Anafi’el?—Because of the branch⁶² of the crown of the crowns that was placed on his head and used to cover all the chambers of the palace of the firmament *‘Aravot*. (And in this) he resembles the demiurge.⁶³ As it is pointed out about the demiurge: ‘His glory covers the firmament’ (Habakkuk 3, 3),⁶⁴ so it is also with ‘Anafi’el, the minister, who is a servant that is called after the name of his master.⁶⁵

For a description of God in similar terms, we can turn to § 253 which says,

pp. 54–55. See P. Schäfer, “Prolegomena zu einer kritischen Edition und Analyse der Merkava Rabba,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge*, Heft 5 (1977), pp. 65 ff.

61 Literally: “all kinds of music and song”.

62 In Hebrew: *‘Anaf*.

63 In Hebrew: *Yozer Bereshit*. See Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 28, 34 and 46–48.

64 G. Scholem has rightly identified the connection between the Psalm of Habakkuk and the Merkavah speculations.

65 The last words—“who is called after the name of his master”—are frequently found in connection with Metatron. See Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 46 ff.

King of Kings, God of Gods and Lord of Lords
 He who is exalted with tied crowns
 Who is encompassed by the branches of the rays of brilliance,
 Who covers the firmament with the branch of His glory.⁶⁶

The “branches” mentioned here might be a metonym for the crown. Indeed, ‘Anafi’el belongs to the category of angels of the highest rank. In this respect, he may be viewed as an equal to Metatron, ‘Akatri’el and Synadelphon. ‘Anafi’el opens the gates of the seventh palace for the Merkavah mystic. And when the holy creatures of that palace try to assault the mystic, ‘Anafi’el assists him, “he and the sixty three gatekeepers of the seven palaces”.

Chapters xxiv–xxvi contain the so-called “Song of the Throne”⁶⁷ which the mystic recites when he stands before the Throne of the Glory. § 258 describes how those who are not worthy of descending unto the Merkavah are prevented from entering the gates of the palaces. If the person is a true Merkavah mystic, then, when told to enter the gate, he does not stir. He only enters when he is invited a second time. The false Merkavah mystic has only to be invited once. He tries to force his way into the palace, but the angels stand in his way and throw upon him thousands of iron bars. Another test is the one at the gate of the sixth palace (§ 259). Here the gatekeepers throw upon the one who pretends to be worthy of descending unto the Merkavah something that looks like thousands upon thousands waves of water. In reality, there is not even a drop of water there. If he asks, “What are these waters?” the angels pursue him and reproach him: “Worthless man, are you of the seed of those who kiss the [idolatrous] calf,⁶⁸ and thus unworthy of beholding the King and His Throne.” Thereupon, a voice from heaven declares this suspicion to be justified, and they throw upon him thousands of iron bars.⁶⁹ A similar test is described in *Hekhalot Zutarti*, and its connection to a saying attributed to Rabbi ‘Akiva in Bav. *Ḥagigah* 14/b has already been discussed above in Chapter Four.⁷⁰ The text

66 With slight changes, the English translation is that printed in G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 62.

67 The term “Song of the Throne” is mentioned in MS. Vatican 228, and in the famous responsum of Rav Haj Ga’on (in Lewin, *Otzar Ha-Geonim to Hagigah*, p. 24).

68 The ones “kissing calves” are first mentioned in Hosea 13, 2. They are the worst type of idol worshippers. See also *Pirkei de-Rabbi ‘Eli’ezer*, xlv: “Rabbi Yehudah said: Sama’el entered into it (= the golden calf) . . . and when Israel saw it, they all kissed it . . .”. Kissing is a kind of idolatry; see Mishnah *Sanhedrin* vii, 6.

69 See 2 Samuel 12, 31.

70 Z. Werblowski drew my attention to the fact that the *Ami-tâyur-Dhyâna-Sûtra*, paragraph 10, contains a series of meditations, the second one of which—following the perception of

ends with another hymn at the end of which Metatron and his eight secret names are mentioned (§ 277).⁷¹

The last part of *Hekhalot Rabbati* does not belong to the main body of the text. Chapter xxvii begins the famous *Sar-Torah* section, which generally consists of five chapters. It deals with the secret theurgic method of studying and memorizing the Torah. Since several Merkavah texts deal with that subject, it seems that the problems discussed in the *Sar-Torah* persisted in the minds of the Hekhalot mystics. *Sar-Torah* passages are found in *Hekhalot Zutarti*, in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, in *Merkavah Rabbah*, in *Sefer Hekhalot* (3 Enoch) and in the "*Hekhalot Fragments*" published by the present writer. It may be argued that these *Sar-Torah* passages belonged to a period where real mystical experiences were no longer in vogue. New applications had to be found for the old theurgic practices.⁷² The text of *Sar-Torah* appended to *Hekhalot Rabbati* is in the form of a dialogue between God, the People of Israel, and the angels. The pseudo-historical circumstances are the days of the construction of the Second Temple.⁷³ The participants, however, are once again the pseudepigraphic Hekhalot mystics, Rabbi Yishma'el and Rabbi 'Akiva, who speak in the name of Rabbi 'Eli'ezer Ha-Gadol.

The text begins with the statement that, although the Torah had been given on Mount Sinai, its splendor and glory were not revealed until the days of the Second Temple. The splendor and glory of the Torah evidently are the new phases of the oral law unfolding after the destruction of the second temple. However, the historical aspects of that revelation are projected back to the days of the building of the second temple. When the people saw, so the text says, that two tasks—that of building the temple and that of studying the Torah—were incompatible, they felt an unbearable pressure and hence constrained to complain to their Father in Heaven. The two tasks were too much for them, they said, so they wanted to know which of the two they could suspend. God's answer to their complaint is quite remarkable. He says that as long

the sun—is the perception of water, "clear and pure". Then follows the perception of ice, and as "thou seest the ice shining and transparent, thou shouldst imagine the appearance of lapis Lazuli". See *Sacred Books of the East* XLIX part 2, p. 170. See also the writer's article "Mysticism, Science and Art," *Leonardo* VII (1974), pp. 123–130.

71 The number eight here is certainly significant. See, Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 102, footnote 6; and D. Sperber, "Ligaturae: Something about Amulets in the Talmudic Period," [in Hebrew], *The Bar Ilan Yearbook* XIII (1976), p. 128, footnote 21.

72 See E. E. Urbach in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem*, Hebrew Section, pp. 23 ff.

73 The expression used for the Second Temple—*Ha-Bayit Ha-Aharon*—is taken from Haggai 2, 9.

as His people were in exile (presumably, in Babylonia), they did not study the Torah, and now He desires to hear “the voice of my Torah from your mouth.” In addition, it is reported that God told His People that it was improper for them to disobey His commandments and that consequently He had to drive them into exile, but that He repented of His rash judgment against His people. As for their complaint itself, He thinks that it is justified, and He is thus ready to compensate them for the extra toil put upon them. They only have to express their wish, and God will supply everything from His infinite storehouses. Since God is aware of the fact that the People of Israel wish to study the Torah intensively, He is ready to do everything in His power to make them famous and respected throughout the world. For that purpose, He gives them “a seal” and “a crown”, that is, theurgic means, to use whenever they study the Torah. In this manner, neither fool nor stupid man will be found among their numbers.

However, in contradistinction to the theurgic practices connected with the descent to the Merkavah, it is here said that its counterpart in the study of the Torah is secret. God remarks that His servants, the angels, are sad about its being revealed. In addition, not only is the jealousy of the angels aroused by that revelation, but also everybody on earth that is informed about this secret practice becomes envious. In fact, with the knowledge of the Torah come fame, riches, and respect. It now becomes clear that “the People of Israel” to whom God is reportedly speaking are in reality the mystics of the Merkavah, to whom it is promised that they will be in full possession of the qualities required for the descent unto the Merkavah. This part of the *Sar-Torah* ends with God remarking that the angels opposed His decision to reveal these theurgic means.

The essence of the angel's opposition is that, once these secrets were revealed, men would become like angels. They argue that it is proper for the Torah to be studied with great effort, and it is to the glory of the Creator if people, because they forget what they have studied, have to repeat it constantly. People should pray to God to preserve their learning in their minds. However, “if you reveal that secret to your sons, a young man will be like an old one, and a fool like a wise man” (§ 292). The angels seem to reflect in their words the opposition of certain Jewish circles who criticized the practices and possibly also the arrogance of the mystics. God, nevertheless, decided to disclose the secret to “the faithful seed” in order to compensate His People for their troubles in the exile. God has already given His People everything that he has in His storehouses: gold, silver, precious stones, and all kinds of foods. “But what is the world still lacking? This secret and this mystery!” (§ 294). After this secret had been revealed, so the story goes, the people returned to building the temple. However, it is stressed that God did not reveal His secret before His People forced Him to do so by an oath. They refrained from putting “one stone

upon the other in the temple" before God acceded to their request (§ 297). The text tells how God descended on His throne into the temple. This happened only after the skeleton of the building had been finished. Allegedly, it proved Haggai's prophecy (2, 9) that the glory of the second temple would be even greater than that of the first one.

Thus, the author of the *Sar-Torah* believes that the revelation of the oral law together with the theurgic means of practicing it distinguishes the days of the second temple from those of the first.

The theurgic means mentioned in the *Sar-Torah* appended to *Hekhalot Rabbati* are comparatively scanty. Those enumerated in *Merkavah Rabbah* and in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* are much more detailed. The essence of them all is that one has to prepare oneself by observing absolute ritual cleanliness and special diets or even fasts. In the *Sar-Torah* of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, the preparatory practices are said to last twelve days, during which the initiate must live in absolute seclusion. Special prayers have to be said three times a day, in the course of which the *Sar-Torah* (= the Minister of Law) is conjured by twelve secret names. "And when the twelve days have ended he may engage in every activity he wishes in connection with the study of the Law: whether it is Scripture, the Mishnah or the Talmud, even beholding the Merkavah, for he now lives in purity and in asceticism. For it is a lesson in our hands, an ordinance of the patriarchs and a tradition of the ancient ones who wrote and issued the decree for future generations to the effect that only secretive people may use it. And he who is worthy is answered when using it" (§ 303). It should be noted that beholding the Merkavah is here considered part of the *Sar-Torah*!

The last part of the *Sar-Torah* tells how Rabbi 'Eli'ezer Ha-Gadol successfully performed the practice, yet he did not trust its efficacy. Even Rabbi Yishma'el did not trust its efficacy before he brought a stupid man who went through the practice "and he became like me." Then it was performed by simple and unlearned shepherds and they likewise were successful. Finally Rabbi 'Akiva was sent to the Diaspora and the secret of the *Sar-Torah* turned out to be efficacious even there (§ 305). Obviously, this last remark in connection with Rabbi 'Akiva indicates that people in Babylonia were anxious to show that the Merkavah practice was not limited to the Country of Israel. On the contrary, there are a number of instances—some of which will be discussed later on—which make clear that in later days the practices in Merkavah lore were performed in the Diaspora, first in Babylonia and then in Italy.⁷⁴ It is from

74 See, for instance, the Merkavah material incorporated in B. Klar (ed. B. Klar), *Megillat Ahima'az*, (Jerusalem: Tarshish Books, 1973). The "Scroll" describes events, which happened in Oria, in South Italy.

Italy that the Merkavah tradition was transmitted to the circles of the German Ḥasidim.⁷⁵ Parallel to the transmission of the Merkavah lore to the Diaspora, we find that the *Sar-Torah* speculations developed in the circles of the Ge'onim and the German Ḥasidim of the Middle Ages.⁷⁶

75 See G. Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), p. 33.

76 See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 13. Scholem assumed that "it is . . . quite plausible that procedures for getting this angel (= of the *Sar-Torah*) to impart some of his treasures to the students of the Law could have been very old". He admits, though, that, "we may safely assume that many of the injunctions for a perfect knowledge of the Law do in fact belong to a later stage."

Ma'aseh Merkavah

Ma'aseh Merkavah was published by Gershom Scholem as Appendix C in *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*.¹ (Our references will be to the paragraph division in Scholem's edition.) The text is an interesting combination of two kinds of Merkavah traditions: heavenly ascents and adjurations of angels in connection with the *Sar-Torah* practices.

The first part of the book consists of paragraphs 1–10 (in the text published by Scholem), the main subject matter of which is the incantations that should be said before and in the course of the ascents to the celestial palaces. It also contains a description of the seven palaces themselves. The text begins with a question which Rabbi Yishmael asks Rabbi 'Akiva: "What is the prayer which one should 'do' (in Hebrew: *'oseh*),² when ascending to the Merkavah?" In answer to that, a short prayer is quoted in which the mystic blesses God for revealing the secrets to Moses. As other texts make clear, the "secrets" mentioned here should be understood in a technical sense: they are magical or theurgic practices. In paragraph 3, Rabbi 'Akiva describes the heavenly bridges on which the singing angels stand. These bridges connect the vestibules of all the Hekhalot. They are stretched "like a bridge across the river so that everybody may cross them."³ There are a hundred and twenty million of such bridges, half of which are stretched above the celestial vestibule and the other half below.

- 1 The first edition of the book was published in 1960. Before the publication of the Second and Revised Edition (1964), the present writer had examined the manuscripts used by Scholem, and proposed a long list of corrections, many of which were incorporated into the second edition. An oblique reference to this fact is included in the "Preface" to that edition. In addition to MSS. Oxford and New York used by Scholem, one has to refer to MSS. Munich 22 and 40, both of which contain only parts of the text. See *Synopse* §§ 544–596. Recent scholarship has given intensive attention to this text. See N. Janowitz, *The Poetics of Ascent* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). Janowitz provides an English translation, a short commentary, and a detailed discussion of the text. Attention has been given to this study above in Chapter One. See also M. D. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Israel: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkavah* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992). Swartz provides a different, more rhapsodic, English translation of the text. Inasmuch as my initial translations required reconsideration in light of these translations, they have received the necessary attention.
- 2 For detailed discussions of the ritual sense of the term *'oseh* (do), see I. Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*.
- 3 The paragraphs that describe these bridges are also printed separately in *Bet Ha-Midrash* VI, pp. 153–154, and as chapter 22/b–c in Odeberg's edition of *3 Enoch*. See further G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 71; and *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 198.

There are also rivers of fire, rivers of hailstone, treasures of snow and wheels of fire—all of which encircle the angels that stand on those bridges.

In paragraph 4, the question is asked, “How can one look at them?” To this Rabbi ‘Akiva replies, “I prayed a prayer of compassion, and in this manner I was saved.” It is said that he who wants to study this secret (of the ascension) should “study it every day at dawn, and he should clean himself of all injustice, fraud and evil, so that ROZAYA, Lord God of Israel, will do him justice every day in this world . . . and it is promised that he will have a share in the future life.”

Next follows the first Merkavah hymn which the text contains. It should be noted that *Ma’aseh Merkavah* contains two types of hymns: The first type lacks the unique quality of the hymns we meet in *Hekhalot Rabbati* and thus resembles common religious poetry. These hymns are written like *Piyyutim*, liturgical poetry, giving expression to the poet’s praise of God and pronouncing His omnipotent acts in creation. The mystical setting comes to the fore almost in passing when the angels and their heavenly duties are referred to or described. A typical example of this kind of Merkavah hymn is the famous “*Alai le-Shabe’ah*” (“I have to give praise”) which, in its plural form “we”, is known from the New Year’s liturgy and the daily Jewish prayer book.⁴ Had it not been for their context, we would not have even noticed the relationship of this type of hymn to the Hekhalot literature.

The other type of hymn included in *Ma’aseh Merkavah*, referred to as “prayers”, constitutes its concluding part (paragraphs 26–33). Their major feature is the inclusion of the adjuratory sections, which make them a unique specimen of Merkavah hymns. In this respect, they resemble the magical prayers, the ἐπαοιδαι, of the magical papyri. In tone and structure, these “prayers” also resemble the hymns of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, the only difference being that the latter do not contain magical materials. It may thus be argued that the “prayers” of *Ma’aseh Merkavah* are the only ones of their kind that clearly expose their theurgic function. The contention that theurgy has an epistemological function may be inferred from our discussion in Chapter One.

The question arises as to whether the theurgic components were excised from their originally hymnological context in *Hekhalot Rabbati*. If this is the case, though there is no evidence for it in any of the manuscripts, then

4 In *Ma’aseh Merkavah*, this prayer is introduced in the singular form *‘Alai* (I have to) instead of the plural form known from the prayer books. See also I. Elbogen, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst*, (Reprint: Hildesheim: Olms, 1962), pp. 80–81, 143.

the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* "prayers" represent a unique, possibly early, phase of Hekhalot hymnology.⁵

However, a certain theurgic function of the hymns, allegedly belonging to the first type, is retained in their context. Thus, for instance, we read, "Rabbi 'Akiva said: 'After I had prayed this prayer, I saw 6,400,000,000 angels of glory standing before the Throne of Glory and I saw the knot of the *Tefilin* of Gedudiyah, Lord God of Israel, and I gave praise with all my limbs'" (paragraph 5).⁶ Paragraph 8 quotes Rabbi 'Akiva saying, "Blessed is the man who stands and with all his power sings hymns to Barukhiya, Lord God of Israel. He gazes at the Merkavah and sees all that is done before the Throne of Glory upon which Barukhiya, Lord God of Israel, is sitting." In paragraph 9 we read, "In the sixth palace I said the *Qedushah* before Him who said and created (the world); and He ordered that none of the Angels of the Service should destroy me". This last quotation refers to one of the most interesting problems connected with the Hekhalot hymns. It is generally believed that there is a strong connection between these hymns and the *Qedushah* liturgy in the prayer book. That the *Qedushah* (based on Isaiah 6, 3 and Ezekiel 3, 12) is an old element in Jewish liturgy requires no comment. We know that Jewish apocalyptic writings contain several liturgical components to which one may refer as *Qedushah* doxologies. This does not mean that the idea of the correspondence between celestial hymnology and human liturgical service is a registered patent of the apocalyptic visionaries. These visionaries developed the *Qedushah* into what it became, both in the *Hekhalot* writings and in the daily service. It is likely that those who composed the relevant sections in the prayer book were familiar with so-called esoteric hymnology, but this again does not mean that everything in the prayer

5 See, however, A. Altmann in *Melilah* II (1946), pp. 8 ff. [in Hebrew], who thinks that the second type of hymns of *Ma'aseh-Merkavah* belongs to a later age than the first. If Scholem's view, that the theurgical elements of the *Hekhalot* literature belong to the earliest stratum of that literature, is correct, then there is no basis for Altmann's view. See Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 75: "The theurgical element was not a later addition to the texts but a basic component, one which the editors of such books as the Greater Hekhaloth, 3 *Enoch*, and the *Massekheh Hekhalot* attempted to minimize or to discard entirely." Scholem recognizes the importance of *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, but I am reluctant to agree with him that the text represents a stage of "a progressive hypertrophy of this (theurgic) material as to amount to a process of degeneration" (*ibid.*).

6 Since no human or angelic being can see God, it is impossible to crown God with any material object. The solution suggested in Bav. *Hagigah* 13/b is that Synadelphion conjures the diadems (see Tosafot *ad locum*) or the lettered crown (in Aramaic: *taga*) and they go up and place themselves on God's head. Rabbi 'Akiva may have been allowed to see more than the angels do.

book that refers to angels derived from apocalyptic or Hekhalot writings. On the other hand, we may argue that, at least in the case of some of the later Hekhalot writings, knowledge of the prayer book can be assumed. But nothing absolutely certain in either direction can be proved, and we may leave the issue open at this point assuming that Jewish liturgy and the Hekhalot writings were mutually influenced in their concepts of the earthly and heavenly *Qedushah*.

Where the Hekhalot hymnology in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* also differs from its counterpart in *Hekhalot Rabbati* is that, according to *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, there are thousands upon thousands of chariots in each of the heavenly palaces, which are said to give praise to God. The praise they give is not in the form of hymns but in the form of short doxologies, which remind one of their counterparts in the various *Qedushah*-sections in apocalyptic literature and in the prayer book (see particularly paragraph 6).

The second part of *Ma'aseh Merkavah* belongs to the *Sar-Torah* practices (paragraphs 11–22). It is the longest and most detailed *Sar-Torah* text that we possess. However, in paragraph 17 an interesting transition occurs from the *Sar-Torah* to the Hekhalot speculations. Like the *Sar-Torah* section in *Merkavah Rabbah*, it begins with a statement by Rabbi Yishma'el to the effect that everything that he is about to tell happened when he was thirteen years of age⁷ while he was fasting in order to receive the revelation of the *Sar-Torah*. When Rabbi Nehunyah ben Ha-Qanah disclosed the secrets of the *Sar-Torah*, that is, after Rabbi Yishma'el had received the necessary theurgic information, Suriyah, the Prince of the Countenance, revealed himself to Rabbi Yishma'el and told him: "The Prince (= Sar) of the Torah is called Yofiel,⁸ and everybody who wants him (to appear) should fast for forty days.⁹ He should dip his morsel in salt and eat nothing that defiles the body. He should immerse himself twenty-four times,¹⁰ and he should not gaze on any colored clothes.¹¹ He should

7 See Mishnah *ʿAvot* v, 24.

8 See S. Leiter, in: *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* XLI–XLII (1973–1974), p. 144. However, this place escaped his eye.

9 The forty days are reminiscent of the forty days that Moses spent on Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. See Deuteronomy 9, 9: "I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water." See also 1 Kings 19, 8. See also the discussion, above in Chapter Five.

10 I find it difficult to account for that number.

11 See Mishnah *Megillah* iv, 8. It should, however, be noticed that coloured clothes worn by women were considered as having a tempting effect on men. See Mishnah *Zavim* ii, 2; Bav. *Yevamot* 76/a; Bav. *ʿAvodah Zarah* 20/a–b. See also *Yalkut Shim'oni* to *Bereshit*, paragraph 44. Compare 1 *Enoch* 8, 1 (Greek Version).

cast his eyes at the ground only.¹² He should say his prayer with all his might, and concentrate himself on his prayer. He should seal himself with his seals and say twelve spells.”¹³

In the Sar-Torah practices of *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, special attention must be given to the things that the mystic has to do in order to guard himself against evil demons (*Maziqim*). In fact, *Ma'aseh Merkavah* is one of the rare examples in the Hekhalot literature that refers to evil spirits. Generally, we know, the mystic has to protect himself against various angelic beings; however, no demonic features are attached to them. It is certainly noteworthy that in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* special acts are intended to protect against evil spirits. Thus, for example, we read, “He should lift his eyes to heaven lest he dies. He should stand up, pronounce a name, and give praise, so that all his limbs should be sealed. Wisdom and insight are in his heart. He should offer a prayer to the *Sar-Torah*. And he should draw a circle on the ground¹⁴ and stand in its midst, so that the evil spirits shall not come and appear to him as angels and kill him” (paragraph 11, end). In another place, the practitioner asks for protection against destructive angels and evil spirits alike, “And I said three names . . . so that the angels and the evil spirits should not touch me” (paragraph 15, end). In paragraph 14, Rabbi Yishma'el relates an interesting, though somewhat terrifying, experience he had: “I was fasting for twelve days, and when I realized that I could not endure it any longer, I used the name of forty-two letters and the angel PDKRS descended in anger. He said to me, ‘You, most disgraceful man, I am not going to give in before you sit (in fast) for forty days’. I was shocked and said three letters and he ascended . . . And I was fasting for forty days, praying three prayers in the morning, three at noon time and three in the evening, and every time I said twelve theurgic formulae. On the last day, I prayed three times and

12 For that kind of posture, see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 49.

13 The Hebrew word used here is *Davar*, which in a magical context always means “a spell” or “a charm”.

14 The drawing of circles for magical purposes is a widespread technique. However, in the Hekhalot literature this is the only occurrence of that particular practice. We know of Ḥoni, the circle maker, who drew a circle before he prayed to God for rain: “... I swear by Your great name that I shall not move until You have had mercy upon Your children”. See Mishnah *Ta'anit* iii, 8. In the light of what we have seen in the present study, the magical functions of Honi's practice and prayer need no further comment. See A. Büchler, *Types of Jewish-Palestinian Piety* (Reprint: New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1968), pp. 196 ff. Büchler collected many relevant sources but was not aware of their connection to popular magic. See also the discussion in G. Alon, *Studies in Jewish History* I, (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 1957), pp. 194 ff. [in Hebrew].

said twelve 'words'. Consequently PDKRS, the Angel of the Countenance and several angels of compassion descended and planted wisdom into my heart".

Another theurgic practice is described in the Aramaic part of the book (paragraphs 18–20). It is again connected with the secret of the *Sar-Torah*, but, in contradistinction to the other *Sar-Torah* practices, this one should be performed at the beginning of the Month of *Sivan*. Here too the mystic has to perform the usual practices of fasting, special diets, rituals baths and "prayers". However, in this particular case new elements have been added. First, it is said that the mystic should not sleep alone, so that he will not be harmed. This may be due to the role the evil spirits played in the mind of the writer(s) of this text. Then, the mystic has to take a leaf of a fig tree, leaves of an olive tree,¹⁵ a silver goblet, some wine, and an egg¹⁶ and perform magical practices with each of these objects. For example, the practitioner has to say an adjuration on the leaf taken from the fig tree: "I adjure you, Synadelphon, the angel who ties a diadem to his master that you shall go up (!) and tell those two angels, Metatron and 'AGMITYA, that they should (plant) wisdom into the heart of that man (= that is, the practitioner himself), so that I shall know and be wise, learn without forgetting, study without forgetting...". The other objects are used in similar manner.

Preceding this Aramaic part of the book, the text quotes another of Rabbi Yishma'el's questions: "I asked Rabbi Neḥunyah ben Ha-Qanah: when one says the twelve words how can one gaze at the glory of the *Shekhinah*?" (§ 17). Here an interesting transition occurs. Presumably, Rabbi Yishma'el believes that the theurgic practices used in the case of the *Sar-Torah* are applicable in the case of the descent to the Merkavah. We have already noted that the subject of *Sar-Torah* apparently developed from the Merkavah practices and that it constituted a substitute to the latter. Here, the mystic wants to reverse the process: from *Sar-Torah* theurgy to the Merkavah vision. Indeed, the subject of the Merkavah vision is again taken up in paragraph 21, but in paragraph 22 the two subjects are for a moment blended together: "Rabbi Yishma'el said: When I received this information from Rabbi Neḥunyah ben Ha-Qanah I stood on my feet and asked him all the names of the ministers of wisdom (*Sarei Ha-Hokhmah*).". Following the question Rabbi Yishmael says, "I saw light in my heart comparable to the light of the first days of [the creation] of heaven". When Rabbi Yishma'el stood up and saw his face shining with his wisdom,¹⁷

15 On the writing on olive-leaves, see S. Lieberman, *Toseftā Ki-Fshutah to Shabbat*, p. 176, n. 29.

16 For the use of eggs in magical practices, see S. Daiches, *Babylonian Oil Magic in the Talmud and in Later Jewish Literature* (London: Jews' College, 1913), pp. 7 ff.

17 See *Sifre to Numbers* (ed. Horowitz), p. 44, paragraph 41 (beginning).

he uttered the names of all the angels that were guarding the seven palaces.¹⁸ However, the names of these angels are not identical with the ones listed in *Hekhalot Rabbati* xv (*Synopse*, §§ 206–212). The differences could be explained either by the existence of parallel traditions, or by the fact that in the course of their oral or written transmission these lists underwent changes. In any event, the distinction maintained in *Hekhalot Rabbati* with regard to the alternate names of angels on the way in and on the way out is not repeated here.

The last part of *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (paragraphs 26–33) is devoted to the five prayers that should be said during the descent to the Merkavah and the ascent from it. As indicated above, these prayers include marked theurgic features. The flow of each hymn is broken in the middle by lists of theurgic names and magical words. The text ends with two additional hymns, which help the mystic gaze at the *Shekhinah* (paragraphs 32–33). With the exception of two lines at the end of the text, they lack any theurgic features. In sum, *Ma'aseh Merkavah* is a noteworthy specimen of the topic discussed in the concluding chapter of this book. Theurgy and mysticism meet at interesting intersections to create a unique Hekhalot composition.

18 In a sense this reminds of the procedure described in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§ 239–240.

Hekhalot Fragments

These “*Hekhalot Fragments*”, published by the present writer in *Tarbiz* XXXVIII (1969), pp. 354–372¹ from Genizah manuscripts at the University Library at Cambridge, are a clear proof that not all the once extant Merkavah texts have reached us.² Apparently, some of the writings were lost altogether; others were only fragmentarily preserved.³ However, it seems that the basic texts, which had a wider circulation than the others, were preserved.

The “*Hekhalot Fragments*”, which we shall discuss here, seem to be part of two different compositions, and they are of special interest for a number of reasons. Firstly, although they extensively quote from *Hekhalot Rabbati*, they contain material that was hitherto unknown to us. Secondly, one of these fragments contains historical—though enigmatic—references. Finally, they claim to be a systematic angelic revelation, that is, it is an angel who describes the celestial world to the mystic and explains to him how to ascend there safely, not the mystic who reports of his experiences during the heavenly ascent. In the words of the text, the angel teaches the mystic “the study of the descent unto the Merkavah”. It seems that the complete text described the details of the descent from the first stages of the preparation to the entrance into the seventh *Hekhal*. Unfortunately, what is preserved of the texts belongs only to

1 Additional notes were published in *Tarbiz* XXXIX (1969), pp. 216–217.

2 Since the publication of these “Fragments” and the first edition of this book, more material from the Genizah has become available to the scholarly world. Two recent discussions must be mentioned in this connection. P. Schäfer, “The Hekhalot Genizah” and G. Bohak, “Observations on the Transmission of Hekhalot Literature in the Cairo Genizah”, in: R. Boustani, M. Himmelfarb, and P. Schäfer (eds.), *Hekhalot Literature in Context: Between Byzantium and Babylonia*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), pp. 179–211 and 213–229, respectively. See also next footnote.

3 At the time of the first edition of this book, the present writer knew of the existence of more Genizah material relating to the *Hekhalot* literature. Meanwhile several of these texts, and more, have been published in P. Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1984). Schäfer published and discussed yet another Genizah fragment, which he, and later Bohak while discussing another fragment (see previous footnote), rightly characterized as representing a completely different, and hitherto unknown type of Hekhalot literature. See, P. Schäfer, *Hekhalot-Studien* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988), pp. 104–117: “Ein unbekanntes Geniza-Fragment zur Hekhalot-Literatur”. The “Fragment” published by Schäfer consists of four pages. In terms of structure and contents, these Genizah fragments are rather unique. Beyond pointing out idiosyncratic features, I find it difficult to offer a consistent discussion of them.

the last stage of the ascent. To make the loss even more painful, some of the lines are badly damaged and it is almost impossible to reconstruct them.

The MS begins with some mutilated lines, which make no sense. A description follows of the creation of the world in the metaphorical terms of the weaver's work. The description derives from *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 201,⁴ though interesting details are added.⁵ Then comes a considerably longer passage (lines 13–23) which—in a highly enigmatic manner—refers to one of the leaders of Babylonian Jewry whose name, consisting of five letters, “has been fixed from the days of the creation of the world.” The whole passage sounds like political propaganda in favour of a certain leader who seeks divine support for the position for which he is campaigning or who has to defend himself against some unidentified opponents (cf. *Synopse* §§ 303–305).

In line 23, the angel turns to the Merkavah mystic and says,

And now, my friend, return to the study of the descent unto the Merkavah, which I was explicating to you and teaching you: thus one descends and thus one ascends; this is the quality of the first *Hekhal*; and thus does one conjure, and thus does one adjure. For I have interrupted you! And now write it down, and leave the seal of the descent unto the Merkavah to all the people of the world, and to everybody who wants to descend and cast a glance at the King and at His Beauty. He will take that path and see without being hurt. I have written it for you on a scroll, you saw it, and then you descended and saw. You tried it out without being hurt, because I made all the paths of the Merkavah to you like light . . .”

The passage speaks for itself. It records a unique procedure: the angel has taught the mystic all the necessary steps connected with the mystical ascent. The mystic then follows these instructions, after which the angel and the mystic meet for a further discussion of the matters involved. No similar procedure is known from any of the other *Hekhalot* writings.

Then follows a long section (lines 28–38), which describes the various dangers and temptations that the Merkavah mystic is likely to encounter in his passage from one *Hekhal* to the other. The text relates that the mystic resembles

4 See our discussion in the chapter on *Hekhalot Rabbati*.

5 What is added is mainly the description of the whip with which God is said to have beaten heaven and earth after their creation. Professor S. Lieberman suggested to me that this part of the description is a reference to the stick, which the weaver uses to harden the finished piece of cloth. See Tosefta *Shabbat* viii(ix),2, and S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah to Shabbat*, p. 107. However, the description as a whole still seems to be enigmatic.

a man who loses his way in a wood and suddenly arrives at a place full of various kinds of beasts that attack him and threaten to tear him to pieces. However, the mystic who uses his seals correctly is not hurt. In line 38, we find the angel turning to the mystic: "And return, my friend, to the theurgic practices,⁶ about which you have been warned concerning the sixth *Hekhal*... so that you shall not be annihilated". The angel describes the various kinds of fires emerging from the seventh *Hekhal*; he tells the mystic that when he sees these fires, he should step aside and not stand in the middle of the doorway. However, knowing that the mystic will be frightened by that vision, the angel gives him the following instructions.

If you are standing, sit; and if you are sitting, lie down; and if you are lying on your back, lie with your face down; and if you are lying with your face down, stick the nails of your fingers and your toes into the ground of the firmament. And put cotton in your ears, and cotton in your nose, and cotton in your rectum so that your soul shall not depart from your body until I come [to your rescue] ...!

This again is a most extraordinary description; no parallel to it is found in any of the other Hekhalot texts.

The longest part of the text (pp. 361–367) describes what is happening in the seventh *Hekhal*. Again, many lines in the manuscript are badly damaged, but their subject matter seems to be the various steps that the angel takes to rescue the mystic. When the mystic enters the seventh *Hekhal*, he sees Metatron (*Na'ar*, "Youth") coming from behind the Throne of Glory. His appearance is most wonderful, and he places the mystic on a seat before the Throne of Glory. A great deal of what is said in the text hereafter is in the form of short remarks on various mystical subjects. Among the subjects mentioned is the *Sar-Torah* (p. 366, lines 36–37).⁷ In another place (p. 369, line 20) the *Sar-Talmud* is mentioned. Thus, it appears that our text maintains the connection between the Merkavah material and the *Sar-Torah* speculation.

We cannot end this short description of the text without pointing out its elaborate angelology. Many of the names of the angels mentioned in the text

6 The term used here is *siman*, (Greek: *σημα*) which may be taken to refer to the seal(s) with which the mystic protects himself against the hostile angels. However, similar terminology is used in *Hekhalot Zutarti* (in MS. New York [Jewish Theological Seminary] Mic. 8128, fol. 23a), where the *siman* is used in the sense of warning.

7 See also p. 371, lines 10–12; and p. 372, lines 20–28.

are unknown from other sources. In addition, some of the mystical names attributed to God here are likewise unknown from parallel sources.

With all its curiosities and oddities, the "*Hekhalot Fragments*" seem to represent a hitherto unknown line of development within the Merkavah tradition. On the one hand, we find in them long quotations from *Hekhalot Rabbati*; on the other hand, great portions of the text display completely new Hekhalot materials. The colophon, which is only partially preserved, mentions the "seven great and little palaces", which may be a reference to *Hekhalot Rabbati* ("The Greater *Hekhalot*") and to *Hekhalot Zutarti* ("The Smaller *Hekhalot*"), indicating some of the sources the text used without being exhaustive.

Sefer Hekhalot (3 *Enoch*)

Sefer Hekhalot (*Synopse*, §§ 1–80), or, as it became known, 3 *Enoch*, is probably the best-known Hekhalot text. Odeberg's famous 1928 edition of the book, which also contains an English translation and commentary, made the book available to the scholarly world. In spite of all its shortcomings,¹ Odeberg's edition has done considerable service to the subject, and in many respects, his commentary and long introduction contain interesting and valuable materials.

Sefer Hekhalot is the longest and most complex of the Hekhalot writings. By the manner in which it fuses several esoteric traditions, it can be viewed as a romance or as a grand summary of apocalyptic and mystical traditions. The book draws its material from a variety of sources, though it is not always possible to identify them or trace the rationale behind the manner in which they were integrated into the text. Curiously, even in the case of the Hekhalot material incorporated in the book, it is not always easy to show the source(s) from which it was derived.

Sefer Hekhalot is of a more composite nature than, for instance, *Hekhalot Rabbati*. In fact, *Sefer Hekhalot* epitomizes the composite nature of the Hekhalot texts, a fact that P. Schäfer has highlighted in several studies, mainly from a text-critical point of view. However, more has to be said on the subject from the point of view of content, literary features, and terminological usage. In every possible respect, *Sefer Hekhalot* deserves special attention. To start with, several of the major components of the Hekhalot writings are missing in this work. For instance, nothing is said in it about the special technique of the ascent, nor is there any reference to the theurgic means, which assist the mystic and protect him during his journey in heaven. Furthermore, it contains no hymnic materials. In spite of all this, *Sefer Hekhalot* is a treasure house of information about esoteric traditions at the time of its writing.

While *Sefer Hekhalot* seems to have been compiled in post-talmudic times, probably not before the 6th century C.E., any dating of the work remains speculative. In any event, it represents a rather late stage in the creation of the

1 For an excellent summary of the main problems of the book as seen by a modern scholar, see J. Greenfield's "Prolegomenon" to the Ktav Publishing House reprint (1973) of H. Odeberg, 3 *Enoch*. In spite of all its deficiencies, Odeberg's is the first *Hekhalot* text that received scholarly treatment. A new translation and commentary was prepared by P. Alexander and published in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. I: *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1983), pp. 223–315. In several cases, my translations here follow those of Alexander.

Hekhalot literature. Alas, J. T. Milik's attribution of the book to the Kabbalistic venue of the twelfth or thirteenth centuries only shows how little Milik knew of both the Hekhalot literature and of Kabbalah.²

From a literary point of view, the book is affiliated with the ancient Enoch tradition, and it appears that, in spite of its comparatively late date of composition, it contains a great deal that derives from the early traditions and literature connected with the name of its literary protagonist. The book may be divided into several parts, and this division may help us analyze and understand the special manner in which the writer employed his materials.

The first part of the book (chapters 1–12) begins with a description of Enoch's translation unto heaven and his transformation into the angel Metatron, who became the Angel of the [divine] Countenance (*Mal'akh Sar ha-Panim*). The angelic transformation of a human being is a unique "event" in Jewish mysticism. The major part of the book reports of the heavenly ascent of Rabbi Yishma'el and his various encounters with Metatron. The description of Rabbi Yishma'el's ascent and experiences in heaven are the literary core, which defines the setting and subject matter of the book. On the one hand, the book constitutes a mystical expansion of the apocalyptic Enoch traditions; on the other, it constitutes a unique expansion of mystical lore that either builds on or creates the Metatron traditions. In this manner, several traits of the apocalyptic Enoch traditions are preserved, though they are recast in a story that ultimately became part of the Hekhalot tradition.

In line with that tradition, Rabbi Yishma'el is described as passing from palace to palace until he reaches the seventh palace. Before entering there, he recites a brief prayer so that he might be saved from the wrath of Qeẓfiel and his angelic retinue. We have already met Qeẓfiel in *Hekhalot Rabbati* xviii, where he functions as one of the gatekeepers of the sixth *Hekhal*. Of course, his new post in *Sefer Hekhalot* at the gate of the seventh *Hekhal* may be explained by the acknowledgement of the occasional inconsistencies in the Hekhalot literature regarding the names of the angels and their roles in heaven. However,

2 See J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 125–135. There is nothing in *Sefer Hekhalot* that betrays either the style or the symbolism of Jewish medieval Kabbalah. Milik's contention that the identification of Enoch with Metatron does not "appear in Western Europe until the twelfth century" (p. 134) has no basis. Equally strange is Milik's dating of the Greek original of the *Slavonic Enoch* (2 *Enoch*) "to the ninth if not tenth century" (p. 126). A late or even a post-Byzantine dating of 2 *Enoch* is simply inconceivable to anyone who has the slightest idea of the history of that literature. In addition, Milik's explanation of the name Metatron as deriving "from the Latin *metator* through the Greek *μητάτωρ, μιτάτωρ*" (p. 131) has very little, if any, substantiation.

one may also argue that Qeṣṣiel's post at the seventh gate is a characteristic example of the idiosyncratic manner in which the writer of *Sefer Hekhalot* used his sources. (We shall have several occasions to show the idiosyncrasies of the writer, or compiler, of this book.) As said, Rabbi Yishma'el prayed that Qeṣṣiel might not prevail over him and cast him from heaven (1, 3). Metatron is sent to help the ascending mystic and save him from the threats of the angelic beings. Although this appears to be the only case in the book in which any semi-theurgic practice is mentioned, there is something in this prayer that prompts further comments. Usually in the Hekhalot writings, the angels threaten to kill the mystic or chase and hurt him, but nothing is said of throwing the mystic down from heaven. Thus, we may see in Rabbi Yishma'el's prayer an echo or interpretation of Talmudic comment, "The ministering angels wanted to drive Rabbi 'Akiva away" (Bav. *Ḥagigah* 15/b).³ On this particular occasion in *Sefer Hekhalot*, God himself interferes to save Rabbi Yishma'el. Sending Metatron to save Rabbi Yishmael means that the ascension is allowed, or better "enabled", in order to have a mystical realization of heavenly events and realms. In any event, the "prayer of compassion", which Rabbi 'Akiva teaches Rabbi Yishmael to utter on such occasions (*Ma'aseh Merkavah* §4), tells of similar situations and the manner in which they are handled in other Hekhalot texts. As we have noted, *Hekhalot Rabbati* repeatedly addresses this issue. Other literary parallels are Midrash *Ma'ayan Hokhmah* (= *Pesikta Rabbati* 97/a), where Moses expresses his wish to fall down from the cloud on which he ascends to heaven; and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, where the ascending visionary recites a special prayer to avert his fear of falling down from the cloud on which he ascended to heaven.

As indicated, on hearing Rabbi Yishma'el's prayer, God calls Metatron to his rescue. Metatron comes "with great joy . . . to meet me so as to save me from their hands." Metatron takes Rabbi Yishma'el by his hand and says to him, "Enter in peace before the high and exalted King and behold the picture⁴ of

3 However, it should be noticed that "to push him away" is a literal translation of the Hebrew verb used here *DAḤAF*. However, as can be seen from Bav. *Sanhedrin* 103/b (bottom), the technical sense of the term is "to kill".

4 The Hebrew word used here is *demut*, which is a synonym of *zelem*. Both terms indicate the corporeal appearance of God or man. See *Genesis* 1, 26; 5, 3. Here, as elsewhere in the text, terms which are loaded with meanings and associations are somewhat profusely used, or at least they appear to be arbitrarily introduced into new contexts and combinations. The term *Demut Ha-Merkavah* does not occur in the hitherto discussed Hekhalot writings. The equivalent technical term, which we met in *Hekhalot Zutarti* was *Yofiyot Ha-Merkavah* ("The Beauties of the Chariot"). In *Hekhalot Rabbati* we frequently find the expression "to look at the King and His Throne" [*le-histakel ba-melekh we-kis'o*] (§§ 198; 229; 259).

the Merkavah". However, when Rabbi Yishma'el enters the seventh *Hekhal*, he encounters other angelic beings that frighten him. Metatron again comes to his rescue, though by that time Rabbi Yishma'el is completely exhausted. As he himself says, "there was not in me strength enough to say a song before the Throne of Glory". However, after a short while, Rabbi Yishma'el recovers his senses and he is able to recite the proper song, which is promptly answered by the *Qedushah* of the angels.

The kind of reception that Metatron gives Rabbi Yishma'el arouses the envy and resentment of the angelic beings ministering to the Throne of Glory. They ask Metatron why he lets a human being look at the celestial Merkavah, whereupon Metatron replies that Rabbi Yishma'el is from the tribe of Levi and from the seed of Aaron, that is, Rabbi Yishma'el is a priest. This apparently convinces the angels, and they say, "Indeed, this man is worthy of beholding the Merkavah". G. Scholem rightly pointed out that the tradition, which presents Rabbi Yishma'el of the Hekhalot writings as a priest, is a fiction.⁵ We have already referred to the fact that, according to an ancient Jewish tradition, high priests could experience visions of the Divine Presence in the Holy of Holies.⁶ In a mystical setting, this temple tradition paved the way to a mystical transformation in which Rabbi Yishma'el, the alleged high priest, is given permission to gaze at the divine Merkavah.⁷ It should be noted, though, that a priestly origin is not included in the prerequisites of the Hekhalot mystics in the other Hekhalot writings.

To sum up our observations on the first two chapters of *Sefer Hekhalot*, we may say that they exemplify the way in which the compiler of that book worked. He put together several literary elements collected from a variety of sources. The ascent of Rabbi Yishma'el needs no further comment, though, as we saw, the description lacks many of the technical characteristics that are present in parallel descriptions in the Hekhalot literature. The angel Qezfiel is known from *Hekhalot Rabbati*, though what he attempts to do in our text does not exactly follow the same lines as his actions in *Hekhalot Rabbati*. While in *Hekhalot Rabbati* Qezfiel is one of the three angels that escort the wagon of the Merkavah mystic into the sixth *Hekhal* (§§ 229–231), here he appears

5 See G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 356, h. 3.

6 Recently, M. Schneider discussed these traditions at length. See, *The Appearances of the High Priest: Theophany, Apotheosis, and Binitarian Theology From Priestly Traditions of the Second Temple Period through Ancient Jewish Mysticism* [in Hebrew] to which we have referred above in Chapter One.

7 The fact that Ezekiel himself was a priest was certainly a major factor in the development of that tradition.

as the leader of a group of angels that stand in the mystic's way. In *Hekhalot Rabbati*, Qeṣṣiel is appeased by the seal that the mystic shows him, but in *Sefer Hekhalot*—in which no protective seals are applied—his opposition has to be overcome by another angelic being, namely Metatron. Furthermore, the manner in which the angels express their objection to Rabbi Yishma'el's ascent has no parallel in other Hekhalot writings. As we have seen, gatekeepers were appointed to check the passage of the mystic from palace to palace.

In *Hekhalot Rabbati*, the mystic has to show them seals and convince them of his moral integrity and intellectual accomplishments, but the gatekeepers rarely speak. All this theurgic procedure is missing from *Sefer Hekhalot*. There are no gatekeepers and no seals to be shown to them. Instead, the angels express their verbal opposition to the mystic's ascent. What they say is in line with similar utterances in Aggadic literature, and distinctly unlike what they do in the Hekhalot literature. Finally, it should be noted that, although Metatron is mentioned in other Hekhalot texts, he is nowhere else in these writings identified with the transfigured Enoch. In this way, *Sefer Hekhalot* presents a unique fusion of apocalyptic and mystical traditions.⁸

Regarding Metatron, not all the problems connected with his name, status, and offices have been satisfactorily solved. To begin with, we have to consider the name "Metatron" and its etymology. In the first appendix to the present book, S. Lieberman suggests that the name Metatron is a derivation from an earlier form: *Synthronos*. Lieberman argues that the title *Synthronos* was given to someone whose throne stood alongside the throne of a king or a deity. Lieberman maintains that the word *Synthronos* could be used either as a substantive or as an adjective, and that whatever we find about Metatron in our sources, both in midrashic literature and in the Merkavah writings, very well fits the idea of the ancient *Synthronos*, that is, the one who is seated on a throne next to God. Lieberman's explanation is convincing from the point of view of its concern with the etymology of the name. Of course, one may argue that no *Synthronos* is explicitly mentioned in any of the extant Jewish writings. However, Lieberman has shown that the idea of a *Synthronos* obviously lies behind the story of 'Elish'a ben 'Avuyah's blasphemy as described in Bav. *Hagigah* 15/a and *Sefer Hekhalot* xvi. The story there tells of how 'Elish'a ben 'Avuyah saw Metatron sitting in heaven. Knowing that angels cannot sit, 'Elish'a ben 'Avuyah was led to the erroneous conclusion that there were two powers

8 See the detailed discussion of this issue in A. A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). Orlov extensively refers to M. Idel and his studies of the Metatron traditions in Jewish mysticism and stresses the factor of apotheosis in the transformation of Enoch into Metatron.

in heaven. Indeed, Bav. *Sanhedrin* 38/b mentions the fact that Metatron's name is identical to that of his master. Thus, the status and offices of Metatron in heaven could really induce impressions of the kind 'Elish'a ben 'Avuyah had. In order to avoid such false impressions, so the story in Bav. *Ḥagigah* reports, Metatron was beaten with sixty lashes of fire and reproached for not standing up in the face of 'Elish'a ben 'Avuyah. However, *Sefer Hekhalot* x suggests a different solution to the problem: Metatron received a throne not in the seventh palace itself, alongside the Throne of Glory, but at the gate of that palace. True to his method of blending traditions, the writer of *Sefer Hekhalot* was not content with that solution, and when he retold the story of 'Elish'a ben 'Avuyah in chapter xvi, he changed the story again. In the new version, 'Elish'a ben 'Avuyah's heresy was not induced by the mere fact that he saw Metatron *sitting*, but by the fact that he saw Metatron "sitting upon a throne like a king with all the ministering angels standing by me (Metatron) as my servants and all the princes of the kingdoms adorned with crowns surrounding me." Whereupon, 'Elish'a ben 'Avuyah reached the conclusion, "indeed, there are two powers in heaven!"

In short, the name "Metatron" signified the office and status of the angel who acts as a vice-regent or divine plenipotentiary. Finally, it should be noticed that in Bav. *Sanhedrin* 38/b Rav Idit, who is described as an authority in the disputations between Jews and heretics (*Minim*), told one of the heretics with whom he argued over the status of Metatron that he would not even accept him as a (divine) messenger (the term used here for mission is the Persian word *Parwanka* = *Parwanak*). In this office, Metatron may be viewed as the Jewish counterpart to Hermes, who was the divine messenger in Greek mythology. In this connection, it is interesting to note that in one of the *Aramaic Incantation Texts* published by James Montgomery, Hermes and Metatron are mentioned in the same context.⁹

Sefer Hekhalot also refers to Metatron with the appellations *Yahweh Ha-Qatan* (the Small Yahweh, or, the Lesser Yahweh) and *Na'ar* (Youth). As Scholem has shown,¹⁰ the first appellation, *Yahweh Ha-Qatan*, may derive from the early tradition concerning the angel Yaho'el. Indeed, Yaho'el occurs as one of Metatron's names not only in the list of the seventy names of Metatron,¹¹ but

9 See J. A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia University Museum, 1913), p. 123; J. T. Milik, *op. cit.*, pp. 128–131. However, the reading Hermes is not certain!

10 In *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 43.

11 *Sefer Hekhalot* xlvi (D). The first two names there are Yaho'el Yah and Yaho'el. Compare also *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 277.

also in the Aramaic Incantation Bowls.¹² The term *Yahweh Ha-Qatan* apparently signifies—as S. Lieberman suggests—“a smaller god” (*deus minor*) referring to the semi-divine status of Metatron. It should be remembered that according to the story told in *Sefer Hekhalot*, Metatron had formerly been a human being,¹³ a fact that in principle diminishes his status vis-à-vis God.¹⁴ However, he was raised to a very high position among the angelic beings, and was made their superior. He was not deified but was turned into a major angelic being. Calling him *Yahweh Ha-Qatan* indicates the authority that the appellation lent. This authority is clearly implied by relating the term *Yahweh Ha-Qatan* to Exodus 23, 21: “For my name is in him” (*Sefer Hekhalot* xii).¹⁵ It is true that the Christian

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- 12 Misled by Montgomery, his followers, (including H. Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, p. 110) read Yehi'el instead of Yaho'el. See Plate XXIV (Text 25), line 7; Ch. D. Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975), has added nothing but his own mistakes to the *first editions and publications of the bowls*. Thus, on p. 87, he repeats Montgomery's misreading, Yehi'el. The bowl at the Ashmolean Museum, No. 1932.620, first studied by C. Gordon, *Orientalia* X (1941), p. 280, and re-studied by J. T. Milik, *op. cit.*, pp. 129–130, contains the name of Yaho'el and not of Yehi'el. Admittedly, Montgomery in his footnotes to Text 25 (p. 208) raises the possibility that the correct reading is Yaho'el and not Yehi'el. This may explain Epstein's silence on the issue in his “Gloses Babylo-Araméennes”, *Revue des Études Juives* LXXIII (1921), p. 53. Isbell and Milik could have avoided repeating the erroneous reading had they consulted J. C. Greenfield, “Notes on some Aramaic and Mandaic Magic Bowls”, *Gaster Festschrift [The Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University]* V (1973), p. 156, n. 40. It should be noted that Greenfield also discusses the alleged and the real “Enochian echoes in the magical bowls” (pp. 150 ff.).
- 13 The most important parallel to this identification of Enoch with Metatron is found in Targum of Jonathan to Genesis 5, 24. Milik, *op. cit.*, p. 128, remarks about the end of the verse (“and He called his name Metatron, the Great Scribe”): “But the second part of this passage is certainly, in my opinion, a very late addition, as it does not appear in other Palestinian Targums”. Could Milik really overlook a tradition that dates back to *Jubilees* v, 16–26?
- 14 It may be due to his previous human existence that Metatron is able to sit. Other angels, as we saw, could not fold their knees into a sitting position! It should be noted, however, that the class of the angels called *Shotrim* in *Sefer Ha-Razim* had chairs on which they were sitting. It is interesting to note that one of the appellations given to Metatron in the Aramaic Magical Bowls is: *Metatron 'Isara Rabba de-Kurseh* (“Metatron the Great Prince of the Throne”); cf. C. H. Gordon, “Aramaic Magical Bowls in the Istanbul and Baghdad Museums”, *Archiv Orientalni* VI (1934), pp. 328–329.
- 15 The same verse is quoted in relation to Metatron in Bav. *Sanhedrin* 38/b. G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 366, n. 107, pointed out, that the Qaraite author Qirqisani quoted the passage in *Sanhedrin* as saying: “...Metatron is *Yahweh Qatan*”.

Gnostics referred to a divine figure called “the little Jao, the Good”.¹⁶ However, unlike “the little Jao” of the Gnostics, Metatron, or *Yahweh Ha-Qatan* as he is called in *Sefer Hekhalot*, is the mystically transformed Enoch! One may assume that the appellation *Yahweh Ha-Qatan* was given to Metatron by people who knew of “the little Jao” of the Gnostics, but when they did so, they had in mind the special authority given to the angel and not his divine essence.

The other appellation given to Metatron is *Na'ar* (Youth), which was probably inspired by Exodus 33, 11. If this is the case, it could imply the status of a chief servant and even of a deputy.¹⁷ The explanation given in *Sefer Hekhalot* to the title offers the story of Enoch's ascent to heaven and his transformation into Metatron (chapter iv). The story tells that God elevated Enoch to heaven in the days preceding the Flood. When God saw the evil deeds of the generation of the Flood, He took Enoch up to heaven so that he could be kept as a witness against the sinful people of that generation.¹⁸ Enoch was expected to testify that not only did the people of his generation rebel against God but that their animals shared their sinful behavior. Thus, no injustice was done to anyone in the Flood.¹⁹ As far as we know, this part of the story derives from apocalyptic literature;²⁰ however, the second part of the story adds new tones to the original Enoch tradition. It is said that when Enoch came up to heaven, three angels, ‘Uzah, ‘Azah and ‘Azael,²¹ came forth and claimed that it was improper for a human being to ascend to heaven. Their claim was not solely directed against Enoch but against the whole of human species, of which he was to become the representative. Man is sinful and did not deserve to be created, in the first place. Now he is even permitted into heaven! In their objections, the angels combined two traditions of the angelic opposition to man. The

Scholem remarked that, “the name *Yahweh Qatan* was deliberately eliminated from the Talmudic manuscripts because of its heretical connotations.”

16 Cf. *Pistis Sophia* vii (in G. R. S. Mead's edition, p. 9); in chapter cxi we find several times the term “the little Sabbaoth, the Good”!

17 Obviously, this verse, which refers to Joshu'a ben Nun, could not be quoted in relation to Metatron. Consequently, we find later sources quoting *Psalms* 37, 25 and *Proverbs* 22, 6, as the biblical references to Metatron.

18 Compare Mishnah *Sanhedrin* x, 3 and parallels.

19 Compare *Jubilees* v, 2; *Bereshit Rabbā* (ed. Theodor-Albeck) p. 266.

20 See *Jubilees* iv, 22–24 and parallels.

21 Some of the manuscripts give only two names: ‘Aza and ‘Aza'el, and this appears to be the better reading. See Odeberg's note to the place (pp. 10 ff.). For the various spellings of the names of these angels see D. Dimant, “*The Fallen Angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphic Books Related to Them*” (Dissertation, in Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1974, pp. 55 ff.

first tradition speaks of the opposition of the angels to the creation of man,²² while the second speaks of their opposition to the ascent of human beings to heaven.²³ As we saw, the blending of traditions is a typical trait of the compiler of *Sefer Hekhalot*, and it appears that he misses no opportunity to do so.

God's answer to the angels' claim is resolute: He wants Enoch to be in heaven and to be their superior. In accepting Enoch into heaven and in transforming him into Metatron, God may be said to declare that He wants the chief angelic being in heaven to be of human origin. From a human point of view, this may be interpreted to imply that humanity needs a representative in heaven; this representative was even raised to occupy the highest angelic position. However, once Enoch had left his earthly existence to become a celestial being, he had in fact nothing to do with humankind. He became the *Na'ar* of God,²⁴ in charge of whatever the angels do. However, Enoch-Metatron himself explains his appellation thus: "And because I am small and a youth among them . . . therefore they call me *Na'ar*" (chapter iv, end). In fact, however, only God calls Metatron by that appellation, while the other heavenly beings call him by the seventy names he has, corresponding to the seventy languages in the world.²⁵ In our discussion of *Merkavah Rabbah*, we saw that some of the angels have at least two names. There is an exoteric and an esoteric mode of the angels' names. Metatron, however, has many names and appellations. *Re'uyot Yehezkel* mentions the *Sar* who dwells in the heaven *Zevul*. Several, mostly esoteric, names are suggested there for that *Sar*, one of which is "Metatron, like the name of the *Gevurah*" ("Dynamis").²⁶ In *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 277 Metatron is said to have eight names. In the Aramaic Magical Bowls Metatron is called *'Isara Rabba* ("the great minister"), and in an ancient *Shi'ur Qomah* fragment Metatron is called *Shamasha Reḥima Sara Rabba de-Sahaduta* ("the beloved servant, the great prince of the testimony").²⁷ This last appellation clearly includes the

22 See P. Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975), pp. 75 ff.

23 See J. Schultz, "Angelic Opposition to the Ascension of Moses and the Revelation of the Law," *Jewish Quarterly Review* LXI (1970/71), pp. 282–307.

24 Notable exceptions to this rule are Bav. *Avodah Zarah* 3/b, where Metatron is said to teach Torah to the souls of dead infants, and *Be-Midbar Rabba* xii, 12, where Metatron is said to sacrifice the souls of the righteous ones in the heavenly temple. Compare Bav. *Menaḥot* 100/a, where the angel Micha'el is described offering sacrifices on the heavenly altar.

25 In chapter xvii the parallel tradition of 72 languages is mentioned. The seventy names of Metatron are enumerated in xlviii(d).

26 See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 46, footnotes 13 and 14.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

various aspects of Metatron: he is God's choice servant;²⁸ he is the Great Prince;²⁹ and he is to bear testimony against the generation of the Flood.³⁰

We cannot enter here a detailed discussion of everything that the book says about Metatron and what he told and showed Rabbi Yishma'el. Sometimes parallel and conflicting episodes are piled one upon the other, as for example in chapters iv and vi where two different accounts are given of the angelic opposition to the Enoch's ascent to heaven. The one, as we noted, was put in the mouth of the evil angels, and the other, in the more traditional manner, was attributed to the angels of service. The eclecticism of the compiler may be viewed as his *felix culpa*: it enables us to get a panoramic view of the esoteric traditions in the post-Talmudic period. In this respect, it is interesting that Metatron is identified with Enoch, which happens nowhere else in early Jewish midrashic and Talmudic literature.³¹ On the contrary, we find that some of the Palestinian sages of the third century expressed negative views about Enoch.³² These views, which were expressed as polemical utterances in disputes with *Minim* ("heretics"), may be viewed as reflecting anti-Christian positions. Since Enoch and his like who experienced heavenly ascensions could have pre-figured the Ascension of the Christ,³³ some sages found themselves obliged to purge Jewish tradition from the events and experiences that served the early Christians in building up their religion. They thus claimed that Enoch was not entered in the book of the righteous and that he was not translated unto heaven but died a natural death, claims clearly aimed at depriving the Christians of some of their alleged roots in the Jewish religion. The sages who undermined the righteousness of Enoch could hardly comply with books such as *Sefer Hekhalot*. One may argue, though, that from their point of view, the identification of Enoch with Metatron could have served their alleged anti-Christian polemic. Enoch was not a messianic figure who was translated to heaven in order to fulfill his mission and function as Son of Man, as the Christians thought of their Christ, but a man who ascended to heaven to become an *angel*. Thus, one may see in the Enoch's metamorphosis into the *angel* Metatron an attempt to overcome the so-called Christian overtones that

28 See *Sefer Hekhalot* viii: "...Metatron...said to me: Before He appointed me to attend (*le-shamesh*) the Throne of Glory", and chapter x: "...This is Metatron, my servant..."

29 Cf. *Re'uyot Yehezkel*.

30 *Sefer Hekhalot* iv.

31 *Targum Yerushalmi* to Genesis 5, 25 is the only exception to the rule.

32 In *Bereshit Rabbā* (ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 238–239).

33 See Hebrews 11, 5, though the context there is not the question of the Ascension but of belief. Compare also Jude 14; and particularly 1 *Clement* ix, 3.

the apocalyptic legends about Enoch had. By merging apocalyptic and mystical traditions, the Enoch-Metatron legends could have helped, theologically speaking, certain esoteric groups in legitimating a tradition, which, under the circumstances, was no longer as fashionable as it had been in esoteric circles.

In chapter v, Metatron tells Rabbi Yishma'el another version of how he ascended to heaven. The story begins with Adam's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. At that time, God was dwelling upon a "*Keruv*" under the Tree of Life. God's initial presence in the Garden of Eden is a constant theme in Aggadic literature.³⁴ However, in contrast to the Aggadic utterances, which state that God ascended to the first heaven after the "original sin" had been committed, *Sefer Hekhalot* tells a different story. God ascended only later on, in the days of Enosh (Genesis 4, 26),³⁵ when the angels convinced Him that it would no longer be proper for Him to stay on earth among sinful people. It should be noted that the subject of God's ascent from earth to heaven is an Aggadic theme and has nothing to do with the subject dealt with in the Hekhalot literature. Even in apocalyptic literature God is always conceived of as dwelling in heaven; His presence in Paradise, as described in *Apocalypsis Mosis* xxii, 3–4, is an exception to the rule. What, then, is the purpose of this extraordinary chapter in *Sefer Hekhalot*? Odeberg may be right in saying³⁶ that this chapter provides another explanation for the translation of Enoch unto heaven. Nothing could prevent the writer of *Sefer Hekhalot* from introducing yet another explanation for this translation. It does not concur with the one given in chapter iv. Thus, Odeberg is certainly right in commenting (p. 13), "As regards the relationship between ch. iv on the one hand and chs. v and vi on the other, it might be safe to assume that they represent respectively two different lines of tradition as to the translation of Enoch".

However, Odeberg was not sufficiently aware of the problems emerging from the eclectic method, which the writer of *Sefer Hekhalot* applies in his book. Thus, for example, in chapter vi we hear that 'Anafi'el was sent to fetch Enoch up to heaven. In discussing this chapter, Odeberg quotes a number of literary parallels without qualifying or analyzing them. For instance, Odeberg should have noticed that this practice of sending an angel down to earth to fetch the visionary up to heaven is characteristic of certain apocalyptic writings but is not the case in the other Hekhalot writings. In 2 *Enoch* i–iii, we hear

34 See *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* (ed. Mandelbaum), pp. 1–3, and parallels. See also Odeberg's comments on p. 14.

35 According to *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, in the days of Enosh God ascended to the second heaven, while the generation of the Flood caused God to ascend to the third heaven.

36 See Odeberg's commentary, p. 13.

of two angels who came to take Enoch up to heaven, and in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* x we read that Yao'el was sent to raise the visionary to heaven. In *1 Enoch*, though, no angel comes down to fetch the visionary up to heaven; there are only angels who guide him in the course of his heavenly journeys. However, in *Sefer Hekhalot* 'Anafi'el was sent to bring Enoch to heaven. We have already met 'Anafi'el in *Hekhalot Rabbati* xxii–xxiii where he is described as one of the gatekeepers of the seventh *Hekhal*. It should be observed that some of the things that are said there about 'Anafi'el are mentioned elsewhere in connection with Metatron,³⁷ and it may be argued that Metatron received the status and offices of 'Anafi'el. Nevertheless, it is still an extraordinary fact that in *Sefer Hekhalot* 'Anafi'el is described as the divine herald who brought Enoch up to heaven. Since in *Hekhalot Rabbati* 'Anafi'el is described as ushering the Merkavah mystic into the seventh *Hekhal*, it appears that the writer of *Sefer Hekhalot* could not find a more distinguished angel to carry out the mission of translating Enoch onto heaven. As it were, Enoch ascended to heaven upon a fiery chariot with fiery horses, and in that he resembled Elijah (2 Kings 2, 11).³⁸ But Enoch and 'Anafi'el were not alone on that occasion: "And he lifted me up to the high heavens together with the *Shekhinah*".³⁹

When Enoch reached heaven, the angels gave expression to their "traditional" opposition to the ascent of man. However, as was customary on such occasions, God silenced them: "But this one whom I have taken from among them (the children of men) is a choice one . . . and he is equal to all of them in faith, righteousness, and perfection of deed."

From chapter viii onwards, Metatron describes the gifts and qualities, which God bestowed upon him. God adorned Metatron with special angelic features and attributes, and placed him on a throne at the gate of the seventh palace. This throne was made in the likeness of the Throne of Glory. Chapter viii describes the great wisdom granted to Metatron. The chapter bears likeness to

37 Just to give two or three examples: (1) It is said of 'Anafi'el (*Hekhalot Rabbati* §§ 244–245) that he is the "Eved ('Servant') who is called after the name of his master". We know that similar words are used in connection with Metatron (*Hekhalot Rabbati* § 277; *Sefer Hekhalot* x). (2) 'Anafi'el bears the ring with the seal of heaven and earth on it (*Hekhalot Rabbati* § 241), and we read of Metatron's name being "written in one letter with which heaven and earth were created and which was sealed by the ring of 'Eheyeh 'asher 'Eheyeh" (*Shi'ur Qomah* in: *Merkavah Shelemah* 39/b). (3) The angels worship 'Anafi'el (*Hekhalot Rabbati* § 242) in the same way they worship Metatron (*Sefer Hekhalot* xiv).

38 See also Odeberg's notes *ad locum*. It should be noted that in chapter vii Enoch says that he was raised on the wings of the storm. See *1 Enoch* xiv, 8 as compared to lxx, 2.

39 This is, of course, incompatible with the earlier description (chapter v) according to which God ascended to heaven in the days of 'Enosh.

a *Hekhalot* hymn. Chapter ix describes how Enoch-Metatron was transformed into a huge angel. In chapter x, Metatron tells Rabbi Yishma'el how he was appointed God's representative and ruler over all the celestial princes of the kingdoms. However, Metatron was not appointed over the eight high princes called by the name of the Ineffable Name. The names of these angels are not mentioned in the text, and all the attempts made by Odeberg to identify them either by their office or by their names only add to the confusion.⁴⁰ However, it appears that what the writer had in mind were the seven archangels described in chapter xvii, and which, together with 'Anafi'el, were appointed over the seven heavens. In addition, Metatron was appointed over secret knowledge and sciences; in fact, nothing was hidden away from him (chapter xi). God made for Metatron a garment of glory and put a royal crown on his head (chapter xii).

Most interesting is the description of Metatron's crown (chapter xiii). It is said that God wrote on it with his finger the letters with which he had created heaven and earth and all that they contain. The letters of the alphabet used by God in the creation of the world played a prominent role in Jewish mysticism,⁴¹ but it is only here that it is said that they are written on Metatron's crown.

In this respect, one could say that Metatron's crown contained the mystical or magical formula of creation. A similar idea is found in *Shi'ur Qomah*, where it is said that Metatron's name was written in "one letter with which heaven and earth were created."⁴² This idea is later (in chapter xiv) complemented by the idea of the celestial curtain, *Pargod*, which is said to be spread before the Holy One and upon which are engraved "all the generations of the world and all their doings".

Chapter xiv is the first of a series of chapters, which contain a most elaborate angelic system. It should be observed that very few of the angels mentioned in the other *Hekhalot* writings are found in *Sefer Hekhalot*. In fact, the angelology of *Sefer Hekhalot* is of a different kind from the mystical angelology of the other *Hekhalot* tractates. Most of the angels mentioned in our text perform cosmological duties, and their names derive from the Hebrew names of the objects and phenomena in Nature over which they are appointed. Thus, for example, the angels appointed over the day and the night are called *Shemeshi'el* and *Laila'el*, *Shemesh* being the Hebrew word for sun and *Lailah* the Hebrew for

40 The nearest parallel to our passage can be found in *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 277, where the *eight names* of Metatron himself are enumerated.

41 See G. Scholem, *Judaica* 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), pp. 7 ff.: "Der Name Gottes und die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala".

42 See in *Merkavah Shelemah*, 39/b.

night. It may thus be argued that the angelology of *Sefer Hekhalot* is of a cosmological nature. This type of angelology is known from the apocalyptic Enoch literature and it should be distinguished from yet another type of angelology, namely magical angelology, which is found in *Sefer Ha-Razim* and the Magical Papyri. Since the whole subject of Jewish angelology still requires more attention than was hitherto given to it, the three types of angelology referred to here (cosmological, mystical, and magical) should be considered only as provisional classifications. Although general classifications can never be conclusive, they are helpful in pointing out essential differences of context and function.

Curiously, in chapter xv we return to the mystical metamorphosis of Enoch into Metatron. A more suitable place for this chapter would have been after chapter viii, principally because chapter ix already described the huge angelic dimensions of Metatron. The opening words of chapters viii and xv are almost identical, and indeed the two chapters are artificially separated. In both chapters, we hear of what happened to Enoch before he became the chief servant of the Throne of Glory. The sequence of the chapters in *Sefer Hekhalot*, particularly in the first part of the book, raises a number of questions, which, unfortunately, have to be left unanswered. Since we do not know the literary sources used by the compiler of the book, we cannot determine the method he applied in organizing his source materials. The only thing that may be said with some certainty is that the book betrays that it was compiled from a number of sources, which were put together in a manner that leaves the reader with many questions. One also has to take into account the fact that some of the manuscripts add to the confusion by introducing heterogeneous materials. Thus, for instance, we find that some manuscripts interpolate into chapter xv a fragment describing the ascent of Moses!⁴³ As for the details of the mystical metamorphosis itself, they recall what is said in *2 Enoch* xxii about Enoch's mystical transformation, although a basic difference still exists between the two descriptions. In *2 Enoch*, the hero is anointed with special oils that enable him to stand in the presence of God, while in our text Enoch is said to turn into a fiery angel.

Chapter xvi tells the story of 'Elish'a ben 'Avuyah's apostasy. The story derives from Bav. *Ḥagigah* 15/a, though, as we have already seen, several details are changed or added. Unlike the story in *Ḥagigah*, the story here is told as

43 Printed in Odeberg's edition as chapter xv/b. It describes Moses' ascent to heaven, and it may be considered a mystical version of the story found in Bav. *Shabbat* 88/b. Another mystical version of the same story is found in *Pesiktā Rabbati* (ed. Friedmann), 96/b–98/b. A slightly different version of the story found in *Pesiktā Rabbati* is known as *Ma'ayan Ḥokhmah*; see A. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, I, pp. 58–61.

seen from the point of view of Metatron, and, most significantly, it is said that 'Anafi'el was the one who struck Metatron with sixty lashes of fire. We have already pointed out, in contrast to *Ḥagigah* where 'Elish'a ben 'Avuyah only saw Metatron sitting, in our text it is said that he also noticed the special services rendered him by the angels. Chapter xvii describes the seven arch-angels who are nominated over the seven heavens and the five angels who are appointed over the astral world. In chapter xviii, a description is given of the special manner in which the angels pay homage to their superiors, first the angels of the seven heavens and then the angels of the seven *Hekhalot*. The description appears to derive from *Hekhalot Rabbati* xi, though it is implied there (§ 242) that the angels do not pay homage to one another. According to *Hekhalot Rabbati*, only before the *Sar Ha-Panim* may the angels fall down, and this only by special permission from God (*Hekhalot Rabbati* § 242). The writer of *Sefer Hekhalot* may have overlooked this fact, but one may also argue that he did not feel himself dogmatically bound to the concepts and notions, which he found in the sources that he used. As we have seen, he felt free to invent new mystical situations and unknown classes of angels. Moreover, he describes the angels who inhabit the seventh *Hekhal*, and among the names mentioned, we find several that in *Hekhalot Rabbati* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* are stationed in other places in heaven.⁴⁴ To give only one example of this process of shifting angels from one station to another in heaven, we may mention the angel Gevurati'el, who, according to *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 210, is one of the gatekeepers of the fourth *Hekhal*, yet in *Sefer Hekhalot* xviii he was promoted to being one of the angels of the seventh *Hekhal*.

Referring to the angelology of *Sefer Hekhalot*, one should observe its richness in etymologies. It is not clear whether the compiler invented these etymologies or whether he found them in the sources he used. Comparatively speaking, the other *Hekhalot* writings only seldom engage in the discussion of etymologies, and, thus, the practice of our compiler deserves special attention. Chapters xix–xxii describe more angels who are stationed in the seventh palace before the Throne of Glory along with their roles and duties. These chapters are distinguished by their poetical richness. They are interrupted by two chapters—xxiii–xxiv—which enumerate the various kinds of spirits (*Ruḥot*) and chariots of God. Chapter xxv again takes up the subject of the angels. First we hear of Ofani'el, the prince of the 'Ofanim, and later (chapter xxvi) of Sarafi'el, the prince of the Serafim. The physical description of Sarafi'el is strongly influenced

44 It must however be admitted that in this respect there are even substantial differences between *Hekhalot Rabbati* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. Compare, for instance, *Hekhalot Rabbati* xv with *Ma'aseh Merkavah* paragraph 23!

by the *Shi'ur Qomah* terminology. In connection with Sarafi'el, an interesting etymology is offered to explain the word "Serafim": "Why are they called Serafim?—Because they burn (*sorfim*) the writing tables of Satan. Every day Satan is sitting together with Samael, the Prince of Rome, and with Dubiel, the Prince of Persia, and they write the iniquities of Israel on writing tables which they hand over to the *Serafim*, in order that they may present them before the Holiness, blessed be He, so that He may destroy Israel from the world. However, the *Serafim* know the secrets of the Holiness, blessed be He, that He desires not that the people of Israel should perish. What do the *Serafim* do?—Every day they take them from Satan and burn them in the burning fire which burns in front of the high and exalted Throne".

The presence of Satan here is rather unusual. Satan does not figure in the *Hekhalot* texts known to us, but Samael—who is generally taken to be his main configuration—is mentioned in the Martyrs' Apocalypse in *Hekhalot Rabbati*. The person of Satan is also rarely mentioned in the rabbinic writings of the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods. Living in an age in which Christianity and Gnosticism flourished, the rabbis probably felt that too much Satan material would draw attention in the wrong direction. It is noteworthy that, according to *Sefer Hekhalot*, the powers of Satan have access to heaven.⁴⁵ In fact, nothing is said of Satan's powers.⁴⁶ In comparison with later developments of Jewish mysticism, it may be said that the *Hekhalot* literature had little to say about the powers of evil. As we saw, *Ma'aseh Merkavah* mentions demons and Satan, too, and some of Satan's powers are specified, but these two exceptions to the rule cannot but bring us back to the conclusion that *Hekhalot* mysticism was only indirectly influenced by Gnosticism and the powers of evil.

The subject of the heavenly court is carried on until chapter xxxiii, and in chapter xxxiv a new angelic section is introduced. Its main subject matter is the heavenly *Qedushah*. A great deal is said concerning the details of the ritual, but no hymns are quoted. This section ends with chapter xl, and in chapter xli Metatron reveals to Rabbi Yishma'el a series of cosmological secrets.

45 Odeberg in his notes (p. 93) rightly observes that a similar concept is found in *1 Enoch* xl, 7.

46 See also *Sefer Hekhalot* iv and v, where 'Uza and 'Azael are twice mentioned in heaven. Compare Bav. *Yoma* 67/b: "It was learnt according to Rabbi Yishma'el: 'Azazel (Leviticus 16, 6 ff.) [is called by that name] because he atones for the deeds of 'Uza and 'Aza'el". See Rashi to the place. Compare also *Sifra* (ed. Weiss) 43/c (letter c), and L. Ginzberg, *Genizah Studies*, Vol. I (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1928), p. 83 and *Pesikta Rabbati* 191/a. It is interesting to note that Rashi in his commentary to Leviticus 16, 8 interprets Azazel as the name of a hilly or rocky location, while Nahmanides associates the name with that of Samael.

The descriptions here resemble those of the heavenly journeys known from apocalyptic literature, notably in the Enoch writings, though several details borrowed from the Merkavah writings are added. These descriptions lead practically to the end of the book (chapter xlviii), where some of the manuscripts add a number of appendices. It should be noted that chapter xlviii contains several references to the future redemption.

One of these appendices, printed in Odeberg's edition as chapter xlviii (d), is an interesting résumé of the Metatron legend.⁴⁷ Among other things, this résumé contains the list of the seventy names of Metatron, and it ends with a section that links Metatron with the *Sar-Torah*. After Moses had suddenly forgotten all that he had learnt from the mouth of God, Metatron is said to have revealed the secrets of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai.⁴⁸ This is a typical *Sar-Torah* episode, and its inclusion at the end of the book was probably aimed at reminding the reader of the parallel ending of *Hekhalot Rabbati*.

47 A similar résumé is also known from *'Otīyot de-Rabbi 'Akiva*, Version A, Letter Aleph.

48 Compare *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, paragraph 1.

Merkavah Rabbah

This is a compilation of several technical and difficult Merkavah sections. Its main subject matter is not heavenly ascents but the theurgic techniques connected with adjuring angels to descend to earth and reveal secrets to humans. In this respect, the contents of *Merkavah Rabbah* show significant similarities to the *Sar-Torah* sections in the relevant chapters bearing that name and annexed to *Hekhalot Rabbati* and also included in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. In fact, one may argue that the *Sar-Torah* sections display features that justify referring to it as a sub-genre within the Hekhalot literature. *Merkavah Rabbah* is printed in Musajoff's collection of Merkavah texts, *Merkavah Shelemah*. It is known from a number of manuscripts, though they do not agree in matters of contents and other details. Our quotations here are informed by these manuscripts. A major problem has arisen with the publication of the *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literature* and the P. Schäfer's assertions in *The Hidden and Manifest God*. These problems concern the textual delimitation of the text and, hence, the scope and contents of the ensuing discussion.¹ My initial (1980) description and analysis followed the text published under this name in Musajoff's collection of Merkavah texts. However, the term "Merkavah Rabbah" appears only once in the Hekhalot corpus (*Synopse* § 708), and indicates the end of a text that has no clear beginning.

The text begins with a question which Rabbi 'Akiva asks Rabbi 'Eli'ezer Ha-Gadol:

How is the Minister of the Countenance [*Sar ha-Panim*] adjured to descend on earth and to reveal to man the secrets of heaven and earth . . . ?"
Rabbi 'Eli'ezer answered: "My son, I once caused him to descend and he wanted to destroy the whole world. He is the most magnificent angel in

1 See Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 6, n. 15. See *Synopse* starting § 623. The end of the text (and the contents of the various paragraphs differ from one manuscript to the other). See P. Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 97–121: "Merkavah Rabbah". Schäfer, though, treats different sections of the *Synopse* under this heading. Michael Swartz provides an English translation of 623–639 in, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pages 136–142, along with a full analysis. See also P. Schäfer, "Die Beschwörung des *sar ha-panim*: Kritische Edition und Übersetzung", in *Frankfurter Judaische Beiträge*, vol. 6 (1978); reprinted: in P. Schäfer's *Hekhalot-Studien*, pp. 118–153.

the heavenly family, and is always standing and ministering to God... (*Synopse* § 623).

This opening passage sets the tone of the whole text. The answer seems to imply that the experiences referred to in the text, when inappropriately undertaken, are liable to cause disaster. We have already seen that unworthy mystics were likely to endanger themselves in the course of the heavenly journeys. In this case, the adjured angel threatens to bring destruction on “the whole world”, though the words “the whole world” may be understood as a metaphorical reference to the circle of initiates. Nothing is said about what has been done wrong to arouse the angel’s wrath, but his hostile behavior comes as no surprise to those who are acquainted with the angels’ generally negative attitude toward humans. However, the text describes in some detail what should be done to control the angel and protect oneself from his threatening behavior. The procedure consists of one day of fasting, seven days of purification by taking ritual ablutions in running water, and avoiding any conversation with a woman. Furthermore, one has to seal oneself with a magical seal with Name of Forty-Two Letters on it.² Consequently, the practitioner has to recite this adjuration:

I adjure you and bind you by an oath to continue to be bound to my will... and fulfill my wish: Do not frighten me, and do not make me tremble... And I shall be strengthened so that the oath shall be pronounced properly and the Name shall be configured correctly in my mouth³... Thus, I shall not be devoured by the fire, by the blaze, by the storm and by the whirlwind which are accompanying you (§ 627).

The enhanced theurgic practice shows a noteworthy difference between the means prescribed in cases in which initiates are to ascend to heaven and those to be followed when angels are adjured to descend to earth. Adjurations contain liturgical formulae, some of which include biblical quotes, but no detailed hymns as in the major Hekhalot writings dealing with heavenly ascents. Indeed,

2 The question what the Name of the Forty-Two Letters is has not yet been conclusively settled, and this in spite of the recent article published on the subject by L. H. Schiffman in the *Bulletin of the Institute of Jewish Studies* I (1973), pp. 97–102. In fact, one can find in magical literature a variety of ways in which this rather enigmatic name of Forty-Two Letters—first mentioned in a tradition that allegedly goes back to temple times—was to be rendered. See Bav. *Qidushin* 71/a.

3 The meaning of this request most probably is that the forty-two letters of the Holy Name should be said in the right order.

this difference speaks to two layers of theurgy in the Hekhalot literature. The more magic-related theurgy one encounters, the more a departure from practices entailing heavenly ascents is noticed. The question may be asked as to whether the practice of conjuring angles reflects a late stage in Hekhalot mysticism. A positive answer is quite likely, though the tradition of making angels descend to earth is already recorded in apocalyptic literature.

Referring to the names spoken in the *Sar ha-Panim* adjurations, there are two types: one is said in the mode called *Meforash*, and the other is referred to as *Kinuy* (§ 628).⁴ However, we are not in possession of the key to either the *Meforash* name or the *Kinuy* mode. In both cases, various combinations of the letters Y, H and W are appended.⁵ The number of these double-names in this case is fourteen, four of which should be engraved on the heads of the Holy Creatures, four on the four corners of the Throne, four on the four crowns of the *Ofanim* who stand opposite of the Holy Creatures, and two on the crown of God (§§ 630–633). Curiously, the names that are engraved are not identical with the ones that are uttered in the previously mentioned adjurations. After the names have been uttered, the mystic repeats his request:

I conjure you, I constrain you, and bind you to hasten and to descend to me I, N. son of N., you and not your messenger. And when you descend, I should not be driven out of my mind. And reveal to me all the hidden things that are on high and below . . . as a man who speaks to his friend . . . (§ 634).

However, it appears that one round of adjurations does not have its desired effect, and the mystic is compelled to repeat:

4 Scholem explains *Meforash* as “a secret name” while *Kinuy* is “a name that may be pronounced.” See in *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* XXX (1931), p. 175. The practice of giving multiple names to deities, and then to angels in magical texts, seems to be very old. In Jewish tradition, we know that the name of God was pronounced in one way in the temple and in another way out of the temple. See Mishnah *Sotah* vii, 6 and *Tamid* vii, 2. See also Mishnah *Sanhedrin* vii, 5 and the corresponding discussions in Bav. 56/a ff. and Yer. 25/a ff. There is a vast literature on the subject, so suffice it here to mention J. Z. Lauterbach, “Substitutes for the Tetragrammaton,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* II (1930–31), pp. 39 ff.; and Z. Ben Hayyim in *Sefer Eretz Yisrael* III (1954), p. 147 ff. [in Hebrew].

5 Sometimes, however, the difference between the two kinds of names is hardly discernable. Thus, for example, we find the name *Meforash* is KNGIALIYA while its *Kinuy* ZẒMKHT SYYHU YH WYHWH. The only difference that can be observed is the addition of Y-H-W element in the case of the *Kinuy*-name.

Once again I call you with five names, the holiest ones of your names . . . you have been ordered by God that when you hear an oath containing these names, you will do honor to your name. And hasten and do the will of the one who adjures you. And if you delay, I shall push you into a river of fire,⁶ and replace you by another one who is under your command . . . (§§ 635–636).

However, even this turns out to be insufficient; the angel still seems not to be constrained, so the mystic invokes him again:

I call you once again, in the greatest of your names, a lovely and pleasant (name), (by which you are called) in the name of your Master. For his name consists of one letter less than His name,⁷ and by it He created and founded everything and sealed by it all the work of His hands" (§ 637).⁸

Thus, the first part of *Merkavah Rabbah* ends with what seems to be a prayer to be said on the angel's departure, "so that I shall not be terrified at the hour of your departure from me" (§ 639). Names are to be uttered in combination with certain phrases from Scripture.

The second part of *Merkavah Rabbah* contains two prayers called "The Great Seal" and "The Awesome Crown" (§§ 651–655).⁹ There is nothing particularly magical, or theurgic, about these prayers, though it is said in the name of Rabbi Yishmael, "Everybody who practices the Great Seal and Awesome Crown¹⁰ and does not say prayers on each of them is likely to perish."

The third part of the book contains a mystical elaboration on the short Synadelphon passage in Bav. *Hagigah* 13/b. The "Secret of Synadelphon", as it is here called, is the theurgic practice that is to bring illumination ('Or) into

6 The word used here for river, *Rigyon*, is not clear. See J. H. Levy, *Studies in Jewish Hellenism* [in Hebrew], (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1969), pp. 264–265, who suggests to interpret the word as the stream of lava flowing from a volcano.

7 The *Hekhalot Fragments* published by the present writer in *Tarbiz* XXXVIII, pp. 257–358, mention the secret name of God that consists of five letters, TNRE'EL!

8 Once again it is said that the name unfolds in two modes. This time they are called *Perush* and *Leshon Tohorah*. These two modes are to all likelihood compatible with the ones mentioned before.

9 This part is not printed in *Merkavah Shelemah* 3/a. However, the prayer of the Awesome Crown is printed thereafter on page 6/a (at the beginning of *Hekhalot Zutarti*).

10 Here the terms are used to indicate certain theurgic practices, which are not specified in the text. See *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 301–302 (*Sar-Torah*).

the mystic's heart (§§ 656–657).¹¹ In all likelihood, what is meant is an inner illumination concerning the study of the Torah, a practice similar that of the *Sar-Torah*, which is also sometimes called *Or-Torah* (= the Light of the Torah).¹² New in our passage is the fact that the names of the angels are not only spoken but also written down. The practice of writing the names of angels for theurgic purposes is also known from the *Sar-Torah* passages in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* published by G. Scholem¹³ and is frequent in magical texts, such as *Sefer Ha-Razim*.

Another passage which follows this *Sar Torah* section contains a series of prescriptions for magical practices to be performed on certain dates throughout the year (§§ 659–663). These relevant dates are the Feast of the Weeks (*Shavu'ot*), New Year's Day, the Day of the New Moon, and the first day of the Month of 'Adar. It seems that these practices are connected with the prediction of events (nothing to the contrary is indicated in the text). The common procedure in all these practices is that the practitioner writes the secret names on leaves of plants or on his fingernails, and then puts them in his mouth in order to dissolve the holy names in his saliva. Only the practice of the first day of the last month of the year, 'Adar,¹⁴ breaks this rule. In this particular case, the names are written on the inside of a silver bowl; then wine is poured into it in order to dissolve the names in it. Diluting the names in liquids is part of the practice itself, and not, as may be surmised, an indication of its termination.¹⁵ The power of the spell or the charm is enhanced when the names are dissolved

11 In this respect, it is interesting to compare this passage with the ones containing the phrase "to lighten one's heart" and the like in the Qumran writings, 1 QS II,3; IV,2 etc. See now M. Kister, "Levi = Light" [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* XLV (1976), pp. 327–330.

12 That this is the case can be seen from the five shepherds who are referred to, here and at the end of the *Sar-Torah* sections appended to *Hekhalot Rabbati*.

13 Interestingly, the angel Synadelphon is also mentioned there—together with Metatron—in a similar context. See *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, paragraph 19, p. 111.

14 It seems that the magical year began in *Nissan*; see *Sefer Ha-Razim*, p. 101 (lines 13–14). New Year's Day, however, signifies the first of *Tishri*. See further Mishnah *Rosh Ha-Shanah* i,1. See also S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah* to *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, pp. 1017 ff.

15 Thus, the unfaithful woman (*Sotah*) is brought to test by drinking the water of bitterness into which the priest washes off curses written on a scroll. This water contains the dissolved Holy Name. See Numbers 5, 16 ff., and Mishnah *Sotah*, chapter ii. The water of bitterness which contains the washed-off ink in which the holy name was written retains its magical efficacy as long as the woman does not admit her unfaithfulness. Once she admits it, the water may be spilled. See *Tosefta Sotah* ii, 2.

in it.¹⁶ However, we know from *Sefer Ha-Razim* that in certain cases, the ink with which holy names had been written was diluted in oil and then a charm was said over that oil.¹⁷ In other words, the liquid that contains the diluted names becomes an energizing factor, a fuel.

The next section of the text is again devoted to the *Sar-Torah*.¹⁸ Of particular interest in this part of the text is the alleged sequence of the esoteric tradition in Judaism. God

revealed the secrets of the secrets and the mysteries of the mysteries to Moses, and Moses to Joshu'a, and Joshu'a to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets to the *Ḥasidim* (the Pious Ones), and the *Ḥasidim* to those who feared God,¹⁹ and those who feared God to the Men of the Great Assembly, and the Men of the Great Assembly revealed them to all the People of Israel.²⁰ And the People of Israel were learning with their help the Torah and multiplying its study, and utter separately every secret... (§ 676).

The fact that the secret of the *Sar-Torah* was revealed to all the People of Israel recalls the *Sar-Torah* text appended to *Hekhalot Rabbati*. However, there we saw that the words "all the People" could be understood in a less "democratic" way; in fact, they seemed to imply the "aristocracy" of the Merkavah mystics.

Another *Sar-Torah* section follows reporting what happened to Rabbi Yishma'el at the age of thirteen (*Synopse* §§ 677–678).²¹ Rabbi Nehunyah ben Ha-Qanah saw him "in great grief, in extreme abstinence, and great danger." The

16 In *Sefer Ha-Razim* we find magical practices which entail the saying of names or charms on vessels of water. See Margalioth's introduction, p. 5 (where also parallels from the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* are quoted).

17 See *Sefer Ha-Razim*, pp. 71–72; 102.

18 In MS. Oxford 1531 it is preceded by the story of the four who entered the Pardes. This version of the story is the same as the one in *Hekhalot Zutarti*. In *Merkavah Shelemaḥ* we find instead of the Pardes-story an interpolation of a mystical-eschatological nature, which is also printed in *Bet Ha-Midrash V*, pp. 167 ff.; and in *Midreshei Ge'ulah* (ed. Even Shemuel), pp. 3 ff.

19 Obviously, the term "those who feared God" (*Yir'ei Ha-Shem*) is not used here in its ancient technical sense as "half proselytes", or Jewish-Christians. The technical use of the term φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν is subject to numerous discussions particularly in relation to its use in the NT *Book of Acts* 10, 2.; 13, 16. 43. 50; 16, 13f; etc.

20 The dependence of this list on Mishnah *Avot* i,1 is self-evident.

21 This section bears strong resemblance to the *Sar-Torah* paragraphs in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, §§ 11 ff.

reason was that Rabbi Yishma'el was quickly forgetting all his studies. Nothing that Rabbi Yishma'el was doing helped that sad condition. He was leading an ascetic way of life and still no change occurred. Thus, Rabbi Nehunyah ben Ha-Qanah took him from his father's house, brought him to the temple, and there made him take the Oath of the Great Seal. As it happened, this oath was that of the Secret of the Torah. Immediately, so the story tells, Rabbi Yishma'el experienced a spiritual enlightenment and no longer forgot his studies. Evidently, Rabbi Yishma'el felt himself as if born anew, and "every day it seemed to me as if I was standing before the Throne of the Glory." This last remark is most interesting: Dialectically speaking, this shows that the *Sar-Torah* experience was considered a diminutive substitute for the ascension unto the heavenly Merkavah. When Rabbi 'Akiva saw all this, he told Rabbi Yishma'el to return to Rabbi Nehunyah ben Ha-Qanah and to ask him to reveal the details of that particular practice. Rabbi Nehunyah's answer ended with the words, "Go back and report the following answer: The servants are sworn in the name of their king and the slave²² is sworn in the name of his master" (§ 681). Rabbi 'Akiva easily understood this hint and consequently "his mouth pronounced names while his fingers were counting their number—one hundred and eleven."

As indicated above, even with the *Synopse Zur Hekhalot-Literatur* at hand, it is difficult to tell where *Merkavah Rabbah* begins and what it includes. However, we can still refer to the detailed description attributed to Rabbi Yishma'el of how the practice of the *Sar-Torah* should be carried out (§ 682). It is made clear that the main practice is to be performed in the morning when one gets out of bed. One should wash one's hands twice and anoint them with oil. Then, one puts on the *Tefilin* and stands before one's bed to pray. Evidently, the theurgic prayers are said in the course of the daily prayers which every Jew is expected to say. In addition to the names and theurgic prayers said in the course of the adjuration of the *Sar-Torah*, one has to lead an ascetic life for forty days (§ 684). It is important to note that in one of the concluding sentences of the text it is reported that Rabbi 'Akiva learnt all this from before of the Throne of Glory and was told to teach the secret to his colleagues (§ 686). §§ 687–796(7) in the *Synopse* contain a long *Shiur Qomah* section. I consider it an interpolation, and shall discuss its contents in due course.

22 It soon becomes clear that the slave, *'Eved*, is Metatron. For the appellation *'Eved* as directed to Metatron, see H. Odeberg, 3 *Enoch* x, p. 28, n. (3). The text which Odeberg identifies there as "Hekhalot Zotreti" in the Oxford MS. is in fact—as has already been recognized by G. Scholem—nothing but our *Merkavah Rabbah*.

Masekhet Hekhalot

Masekhet Hekhalot is the most frequently published Hekhalot text we have. Klaus Hermann has recently published a sophisticated edition of the text.¹ He closely examines the extant manuscripts.² Some of them refer to the text using different terms or titles: *Masekhet Merkavah*, *Sefer Ha-Merkavah*, *Sod Shem* (the secret of the name of) *Ha-Merkavah*, or *Pirkei Hekhalot*. Hermann shows that the questions of authorship and composition of *Masekhet Hekhalot* are rather complex. Their explication, though, does not render conclusive results. The writer, or better, compiler of this work allowed himself a considerable amount of freedom in his use of source material and composition. He did not feel himself bound by the Hekhalot texts, which he may have known, and there are good reasons to consider him an eclectic looking for artificial means of illustrating his subject matter. Thus, *Masekhet Hekhalot* shows interesting mutations of Merkavah traditions and terminology. Finally, in this connection, the writing style of *Masekhet Hekhalot* may betray traces of the circles of the German *Hasidim* (about 1150–1250), but, as Hermann has shown, several manuscripts point in different directions.

The text consists of seven chapters. The first chapter is divided in two: the first part mentions six names by which both God and His Throne are called. Biblical verses are quoted to substantiate this parallelism in the nomenclature. In the second part of the chapter, the question is asked, “How many thrones does God have?” The answer gives (depending on the manuscript) eleven or twelve names together with the biblical verses from which they allegedly derive. The material in this chapter bears the marks of a midrashic composition, and it has almost nothing to do with the material found in other Hekhalot writings. It is neither said where the thrones are placed nor is any explanation given for the different number of thrones in the first and second parts of the chapter.

The second chapter describes the huge dimensions of the Throne. In fact, the beginning of this chapter may be described as the *Shi’ur Qomah* of the

1 See, K. Hermann, *Massekhet Hekhalot: Traktat von den himlischen-Palästen, Edition, Übersetzung und Mommentar* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1994). Hermann offers a synoptic reading of ten major manuscripts. His pioneering commentary is rich in comparative information, and opens the way for a more detailed analysis of the exegetical characteristics of the textual data. In fact, in light of the rich and valuable information contained in Hermann’s edition, this chapter has to be more thoroughly rewritten than a revised version allows.

2 Hermann inclines to divide the manuscripts into seven text types.

Throne. In addition, it is said that God has “seventy thrones of kingdoms . . . which are like his own Throne”. The number of these thrones corresponds to the seventy kingdoms of the world. God also has seventy crowns of glory and seventy sceptres, and thus all the kings of the world are under His dominion. They depend on God for all the glory that they have. It should be noted for the sake of comparison that in *Sefer Hekhalot* (3 *Enoch*) Metatron is appointed over the kingdoms of the world.

The third chapter describes the magnificence of the Throne of Glory. The appearance of the Throne is “like *Hashmal*” (Ezekiel 1, 27). The numerical value of the term *Hashmal* is three hundred and seventy-eight, which sets the number of “the kinds of light” fixed in the throne. The throne is covered by a garment from which emanate all kinds of light. Thus, none of the heavenly beings can look at the throne and at God. This garment is reminiscent of the *pargod*, which, according to *Sefer Hekhalot* xlv, is spread before the Throne of Glory. However, it is interesting to note that the author/compiler of *Masekhet Hekhalot* does not use the term *pargod* (curtain), but the rather strange term *begeg* (garment). It appears that by doing so he wanted to allude either to the *haluq* (garment) of God described in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§ 102 and 105, or to the “cloth of all blue” (*begeg kelil tekhelet*) with which the ark of the testimony was covered when carried from place to place (Numbers 4, 6).³

Chapter iv introduces more familiar and interesting Merkavah material than that contained in the first three chapters, beginning with a description of the seven heavens and their luminous light. Particular attention is given to the seventh heaven, *Aravot*. It is said that four walls of fire—the names of which are given—encircle the Throne of Glory. Within these walls of fire, there are the seven *Hekhalot*, but the text does not explicate how these seven palaces are situated among the four walls of fire.⁴ Every palace has 8766 gates of lightnings, which correspond to the number of the hours of one year of 365 days.⁵ Every such gate has 365,000 kinds of light, and in every gate stand 3,650,000,000 angels. The chapter ends with a description of the eight angels standing at the gates of the seventh palace, and who check all those who enter to see the Throne of Glory.⁶

3 It should be noted that, in *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 189, a different procedure is recorded: When the angels uncover their faces to look at God, God covers His face. No garment or curtain is mentioned there.

4 It is unlikely that the writer of *Masekhet Hekhalot* conceived of four sets of seven palaces.

5 In reality, only 8760 divided by 365 makes 24!

6 In fact, the chapter has a short epilogue: a passage is quoted from Bav. *Hagigah* 13a in which the limbs of the *Hayyot* are described.

Chapter v describes in the seventh palace and all that it contains. We find in it a long list of the classes of angels who minister in this palace, some of which are not known from the other Hekhalot writings.⁷

In chapter vi more angelological material is introduced. Its main subject matter is the details of the celestial *Qedushah*. Among other things, we learn that clouds of fire envelop the faces of the angels so that they cannot look at the vision of the *Shekhinah*. This remark is particularly interesting since the text already said (chapter iii) that God is hidden away from the angels by the “garment” that is spread over the Throne of Glory. This discrepancy can be explained by the conflation of different sources or by an inventiveness that was not attentive to avoiding conflicting information. In any event, the writer also mentions the fact that a *parokhet* (curtain) is spread before the Throne. Seven angels, those who were first born, are said to serve God. In addition, a detailed description of the *Ḥayyot* is given. Parts of that description seem to be the result of the writer’s idiosyncratic handling of literary sources.⁸ The chapter ends with another angelological section, which describes a variety of angelological hierarchies.

The seventh chapter describes *Me’onah*,⁹ which is the firmament above the heads of the *Ḥayyot*. Although the writer does not explicitly allude to it, it appears that he has in mind the eighth heaven.¹⁰ However, what the text says about this heaven is not very clear, and the author/compiler seems to have used descriptions of the seventh heaven found in various sources, particularly in *Hekhalot Rabbati*. The text refers to the fact mentioned therein to the effect that God descends from the eighth heaven to His Throne in the seventh palace in the seventh heaven. However, the manner in which the author/compiler refers to *Hekhalot Rabbati* is another proof of the freedom he allowed himself in handling his material. Among other things, he assumes that a dialogue is held

7 Thus, for instance, we find a class of angels called *Ḥadudei Panim* (“the angels with the shining faces”). For *Ḥadudim* in the sense of rays of light, see “Livre de Noé,” in *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert I: Qumran Cave I*, ed. D. Barthélémy and J. T. Milik, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 85. See also E. Kimron in *Lešonenu* XXXVII (1973), pp. 96–98, to which one has to add the expression *Zinorei Shemesh* (rays of the sun) in *Sefer Ha-Razim*, p. 92, l. 5.

8 Thus, for instance, the writer says that each *Ḥayyah* has “four faces within four faces, and four wings within four wings”. He may have used *Hekhalot Zutreti*, but obviously, his interpretation of the relevant passage there does not fit the calculation of the number of faces and wings as it is explicated in *Hekhalot Zutreti*.

9 The name, which is unknown from other sources, derives from Deuteronomy 33, 27.

10 See our discussion of *Re’uyot Yehezkel*.

between the Angels of Houses of Idolatry¹¹ and the Angels of the Synagogues and Study Houses, as to the identity of God. Naturally, the Angels of the Houses of Idolatry are unable to recognize God when He descends from the upper heaven. They ask, "Who is the King of Glory?" to which the guardian angels of Israel answer, "The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory".¹² The chapter ends with a series of quotations from midrashic and Hekhalot sources, which discuss the creation of the world¹³ and the Throne of Glory.¹⁴ Once again, the text shows eclectic features, a fact that can easily be seen in the concluding sections, which quote sections from *Hekhalot Rabbati*.

One final example, in this respect is the following: In chapter iv, not only the angels, but also their horses, sing their celestial song. We have already met celestial horses in *Hekhalot Rabbati* xvi, where only their fearful appearance is described. In *Masekhet Hekhalot*, however, these horses are said to have four wings, like the angels who ride them, and like the angels, they speak seventy languages.

11 *Sarei 'Avodah Zarah*, which in this particular context seem to be the guardian angels of Christianity.

12 The reference is to Psalms 24, 8–10. I cannot find a parallel or source to this interpretation of the biblical text.

13 First he quotes *Bereshit Rabbā* xii (ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 108–109) on the creation of the world with the two letters *Yod* and *Hei*. Then he quotes *Sefer Yezirah* i, 13 (ed. I. Gruenwald, in *Israel Oriental Studies*, I [1971], p. 146, paragraph 15). Between the quotations from *Bereshit Rabbā* and that from *Sefer Yezirah*, a number of short aggadic sayings are introduced.

14 See *Hekhalot Rabbati* § 98.

Shi'ur Qomah

With *Shi'ur Qomah*, we begin the discussion of a series of texts which are not Hekhalot writings in the narrow sense of the word, but which inherently belong to an ancient mystical tradition.¹ Among these texts, the *Shi'ur Qomah* material is the most controversial.² It describes the physical measurements of God's limbs and other parts of His body and gives them mystical names. In contrast to the Hekhalot tradition, which refers back to the terminology and imagery of Ezekiel, the *Shi'ur Qomah* speculations attach themselves to the Song of Songs, particularly 7, 8.³

The term *Shi'ur Qomah* means "The Measurement of the Body". It is first found in Tannaitic literature in connection with the vessels of the Temple.⁴ However, 2 *Enoch* xxxix, 6 may contain the first allusion to the gigantic measures of God.⁵ In the middle ages, the singular content of *Shi'ur Qomah* was one of the targets of the Qaraites in their attacks against rabbinic Judaism.⁶ Some rabbis, too, were not happy with these provocative speculations.⁷ Interesting in this respect was the position taken by Maimonides. In his youth, he believed in the book, while in his later days he nervously rejected its Jewish origin.⁸

Since the book abounds in fantastic measurements and their corresponding mystical names, its contents are difficult to convey. Clearly, these measures and names enforce a theurgic thrust to the book.

1 For the connections between the Hekhalot tradition and the *Shi'ur Qomah* speculations, see G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism* etc., pp. 36–42. However, in his studies of the text, M. S. Cohen argued that *Shi'ur Qomah* is a text recited for liturgical purposes and is connected to Isaiah 60, 21. For further details, see below, footnote 10.

2 For the various theological problems involved in the *Shi'ur Qomah* speculations, see G. Scholem, *Von der Mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit* (Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, 1962), pp. 7 ff. For a survey of the medieval controversy over *Shi'ur Qomah*, see A. Altmann, "Moses Narboni's Epistle on Shi'ur Qoma", in: A. Altmann (ed.), *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 225 ff.

3 See S. Lieberman in G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 118–126.

4 Yer. *Shabbat* 2/d in the name of the 'Amora, Rabbi Hananiah bar Shemu'el.

5 The visionary says, "I have seen the measureless and harmonious (B: incomparable) form of the Lord. To Him there is no end."

6 See, for instance, Salmon ben Jeruchim, *The Book of the Wars of the Lord*, ed. I. Davidson (New York: Bet Midrash ha-Rabanim de-Amerika, 1934), pp. 114–124. See further, L. Nemoy, "Al-Qirqisani Account of the Jewish Sects and Christianity", *Hebrew Union College Annual* VII (1930), pp. 331, 350 ff.

7 See above n. 2.

8 See, S. Lieberman in Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 124.

At the beginning of the scholarly study of the Hekhalot literature, S. Musajoff's *Merkavah Shelemah* was considered the major source of textual information on *Shi'ur Qomah*.⁹ However, this situation has changed with the publication of the studies of P. Schäfer and, particularly, M. S. Cohen.¹⁰ *Shi'ur Qomah* deserves a more detailed discussion of its text(s) and terminology than is given here, but such a discussion would be quite difficult to develop in the present context. Furthermore, as it turns out, the second and third parts of *Shi'ur Qomah* as printed in *Merkavah Shelemah* are not attested in the manuscripts used by Cohen and Schäfer. Thus, I have to withdraw my discussion of them as printed in the earlier edition of this book. What follows, then, is a provisional description.

The text begins in a manner familiar from the Hekhalot literature: "Rabbi Yishma'el said: I saw the King of the Kings sitting on a high and exalted throne, and His Princes (!) of Divine Countenance were attending Him on His right and on His left" (*Synopse*, § 691). Apparently, they are the ones who reveal the secret of the *Shi'ur Qomah*. The description begins from the feet and goes up to the head. Every limb is measured in parasangs. In *Synopse*, § 703, the fantastic size of these parasangs is given: "every parasang equals four hundred ells." Even when the words make sense, the notions they refer to are far from being clear. Thus, for instance, it is said that the length of the small finger of God "fills the whole world".

It is hard to say whether any method or measuring system sustains these dimensions, but we may assume that originally the measures aimed at conveying the notion of ideal proportions. Allegedly, these proportions were shared by God and man alike. Thus, when Rabbi Natan, Rabbi Yishma'el's student, reports of these measures, he explicitly says, "and this is the measure of every man" (*Synopse*, § 701). One of the calibrated measures—that of the nose—is given: it is as long as the small finger.¹¹ However, the preceding statement that the shoulder is as long as the nose is enigmatic. Since man was created in the image of God, those engaging in *Shi'ur Qomah* speculations considered

9 The text printed there on pages 30/a–36/a comes from the sources of the German Hasidim. However, we shall refer here only to the text printed on pages 36/a–44/a.

10 See M. S. Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1985), which offers a close analysis and discussion of important textual information. See also M. S. Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, MD, and London: University Press of America, 1983). However, in the present context we use the text published in the *Synopse*. P. Schäfer, *Hekhalot-Studien* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988), pp. 75–83; *Shi'ur Qomah: Rezensionen und Urtext*,² offers a nuanced discussion of the textual situation.

11 *Synopse*, § 700. See S. Lieberman, *Shki'in*, Jerusalem, 1939, p. 12.

themselves to be entitled to make inferences from the physical proportions of the human body to that of God.

As indicated, every limb has a mystical, or theurgic, name. This may be explained in different ways: First, we already saw that, according to *Merkavah Rabbah*, the angels have two parallel sets, or modes, of names. Allegedly, one is their exoteric official name and the other is the esoteric mystical appellation. Thus, we may assume that, in the case of the *Shi'ur Qomah*, a similar method was employed. We may also say that since nobody was allowed to conceive the corporeal configuration of the Deity,¹² the mystics concerned used a binary method of metonyms to describe His corporeal features. Thus, the mystical language configured for that purpose aimed at suggesting a way of circumventing the anthropomorphic problem. However, there is yet another way of looking at these mystical names. At one stage the text says,

The appearance of the face is like that of the cheekbones, and the appearance of the cheekbones and the face is in the likeness of the spirit and in the form of the soul. Nobody can recognize Him. His body is like the *Tarshish*,¹³ and His glory flashes in an awesome manner from out of the darkness. Clouds and mists encircle Him . . . We do not possess any measure, but only the names are revealed to us (*Synopse*, § 699).¹⁴

If taken literally, these sentences, and particularly the last one, indicate that the mystical names metonymically replace the measures. Thus, the mystical name may refer to a particular limb and simulataneously indicate its measurement.

The anthropomorphism maintained in *Shi'ur Qomah* is remarkable. In fact, the text shows awareness of this unique position and says, "[This is something] that neither the mouth can pronounce nor the ear hear" (*Synopse*, § 697). In a text fragment that is somewhat loosely connected to the major part of *Shi'ur Qomah*, Rabbi Yishma'el says in the name of Rabbi 'Akiva that "everybody who knows this measure of our Creator and His corporeal configuration,¹⁵ which is hidden from the people, is guaranteed life in the world to come . . ." (*Synopse*, § 709). Apparently, these words had their expected effect, namely, to raise the

¹² See Exodus xxxiii, 20.

¹³ The reference here is to Daniel 10, 6, which describes one of the angels that Daniel saw. As for the *Tarshish* itself, it is generally believed to indicate the sea. See M. Mishor in *Lešonenu* XXXIV (1969–70), pp. 318–319, however, here its meaning is somewhat enigmatic.

¹⁴ *Merkavah Shelemah* 37/a.

¹⁵ The Hebrew term used here is *Shevaḥ*, and it resembles the Arabic *shabāḥ*, meaning "human figure indistinctly seen from a distance". See also A. Altmann, *art. cit.*, pp. 228–229.

curtain of secrecy. Consequently, Rabbi Yishma'el and with Rabbi 'Akiva could give their pledge that he who knows the measure of the Creator and the corporeal configuration of the Lord is promised life in the world to come, on condition that he studies it every day (*Synopse*, §§ 710–711). The condition expressed in the last words is reminiscent of the *Sar-Torah* speculations, which, as we saw, should be studied or recited daily.

Physiognomy, Chiromancy and Metoposcopy

In our discussion of *Shi'ur Qomah*, we noted the possibility that underlying it was a certain theory regarding the ideal proportions of the human body. Presumably, these proportions are shared by God and man alike. Naturally, man, who was created in the image of God, reflected the same ideal physical proportions as God. *Mutatis mutandis*, those who engaged in speculations regarding the anthropomorphic features of God could use their observations about the structure of the human body in relation to what they believed were the corporeal features of God. However, the human body was not only conceived as revealing a secret mystical doctrine of the “*Corpus Dei*”, but it also supplied necessary information about a man’s character and future fate. This information was gained by examining the shape and relative size of several parts of the body.

The earliest Jewish source known to us that refers to the examination of the human body in order to define the moral and spiritual qualities of a person is a cryptic document from Qumran now published as 4Q 186.¹ The quintessence of this document is that a man’s moral and spiritual qualities can be defined through an examination of the size and shape of his thighs, toes, fingers, hair, eyes, beard, teeth and height. Even the quality of his voice has something to tell about his righteousness or wickedness. When the information gained through such an examination is added to the zodiacal sign of a man’s birth, a perfect sketch of the moral and spiritual qualities of that man may be drawn. According to the theory maintained in that document, man has a share in either the House of Light or the House of Darkness. That share is determined by a proportional nine points scale. The ratio of 4:5 is always critical in determining to which of the two Houses he belongs. As J. Licht rightly observed,² the information gained by such an examination, together with the annual tests of a man’s intellectual accomplishments, helped the leaders of the Qumran sect to decide who was worthy of sharing the sect’s lot and who had to either quit or be rejected.

Another document found at Qumran (Cave 4), written in Aramaic, possibly defines the corporeal features of the future Messiah.³ Since these Qumran texts

1 See, J. M. Allegro (ed.), *Discoveries in the Judean Desert. V: Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 88–91. An English translation of this text is given in F. Garcia-Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), pp. 456–457.

2 In *Tarbiz XXXV* (1966), pp. 18 ff.

3 J. Carmignac, “Les Horoscopes de Qumran”, *Revue de Qumran V* (1965), pp. 206–217.

were preserved in a rather fragmentary condition, much that could help us in defining the scope and origin of their underlying theory is missing. However, we know that similar theories were spread in the ancient Near East, and since it has recently been argued that at least a certain fraction of the Qumran sect came from Babylonia,⁴ it is quite likely that the Qumranites adopted, in this case, an ancient Babylonian theory and practice. Unfortunately, no traces of such a theory are preserved in either the pseudepigraphic corpus of writings or the rabbinic writings. Admittedly, there are a few instances in these writings that could be interpreted as indicating a similar theory, but their true meaning could also lie elsewhere. To begin with, *Ben Sira* xix, 29–30 says, “A man is known by his appearance, / And the wise man recognizeth him by his look / ... / And his gait showeth what he is”.⁵ Indeed, these verses from *Ben Sira* can only be a paraphrase of Isaiah 3, 9,⁶ but the words *hakarat panim* mentioned in this verse became a technical term for metoposcopy, the art of reading the lines of the forehead specifically and for the art of reading special signs on one’s face in general. In addition, we find in *Testament Shim’on* v, 1 the notion that the face manifests some of the troubles of the spirit. Of course, this notion may be a general psychological observation with no technical implications of the kind dealt with here.

In rabbinic writings, we find at least two cases in which certain corporeal features were singled out to determine particular halakhic problems. In the first case, we have the abortion of an embryo. The degree of development is determined by the possibility of recognizing on the embryo what the Mishnah⁷ calls *Zurat Adam*, the shape of a human being. Referring to the same Mishnah, the Tosefta⁸ uses the term *Zurat Panim*, the shape of the face, and the *Talmud Yerushalmi*⁹ uses the term *Hakarat Panim*, i.e., that by which the individual features of the face are recognized. In another case, the finding of a corpse, the *Hakarat Panim* is determined by means of the nose, the cheekbones, and the

4 See J. Murphy-O'Connor, “The Essenes and their History”, *Revue Biblique* LXXXI (Paris: 1974), pp. 215 ff.

5 The text was preserved only in Greek. The English translation is that of Box and Oesterley in Charles, *Apocrypha*, p. 384. See the translators’ note *ad locum*.

6 It should, however, be noticed that the Greek of *Ben Sira* does not repeat the LXX of Isaiah 3, 9.

7 Mishnah *Niddah* iii, 2. Compare Mishnah *Bekhorot* viii, 1.

8 Tosefta *Niddah* iv, 6–7; see also Bav. *Niddah* 25/b.

9 Yer. *Niddah* 20/c. The terms *Hakarat Panim*, *Parzuf Panim* (Mishnah *Yevamot* xvi, 3) and *Qelaster Panim* (*Wayyikra Rabbah*, ch. xviii, ed. Margalioth, p. 391), all belong to the same semantic field.

forehead.¹⁰ As G. Scholem rightly remarked, this material can be taken only as a general background to the esoteric material, which we shall presently discuss.¹¹

We have already noted that the opening paragraphs of *Hekhalot Rabbati* mention the skill of the Merkavah mystic to make diagnostic observations about several qualities of human beings: their social and economic status, health, and future life. A number of texts published by G. Scholem¹² and the present writer¹³ give a wide picture of the scope of these speculations. Most probably, these traditions were part of the social settings of various esoteric groups. They had to apply some criteria for selecting members and testing their reliability. Unfortunately, what is said in these texts is of a highly enigmatic character. The technical terminology used in the texts is nowhere graphically displayed or analyzed, so the reader has to guess what the various signs really imply. Therein, particular importance is attached to the lines found on one's palm and forehead. These lines, particularly those of the palm, have long been the subject of all kinds of theories. Modern psychologists of the Jungian school find them helpful in their psychological diagnoses. The art of looking at the lines of the palm is called chiromancy, while the observation of the lines of the forehead—the younger of the two arts—is called metoposcopy. However, the Merkavah mystics did not confine themselves to the hand and the forehead but added speculations about the other parts of the body, including the sexual organs. On the whole, the discipline that is displayed in these

10 See Mishnah *Yevamot* xvi,3. The Mishnah states that a dead man's identity is determined by his face (*Parzuf Ha-Panim*) together with his nose. In Yer. *Yevamot* 15/c, Rav Yehudah is quoted saying that the nose together with the cheekbones determine the dead man's identity, while Rabbi Yirmiyah in the name of Rav quotes Isaiah 3, 19 and infers from it that the *Hakarat Panim* is qualified by the nose only. A similar view to the last one is brought there also in the name of Rabbi 'Abba bar Kahana. In Bav. *Yevamot* 120/a, Rabbanan are quoted as saying that the dead man's identity is determined by either the forehead or the *Parzuf Panim* and the nose. In any event, the nose is taken to be the most important part of the face in determining the identity of a dead man. In Yer. *Niddah* 20/c, it is said that the degree of development of an embryo is determined by an examination of the following "signs": the forehead, the eyebrows, the eye, the ear, the cheekbone, the nose, the cheeks (lit. the beard), and the jawbone. Rabbi Shim'on ben Yoḥai even adds the fingernails.

11 See G. Scholem in *Sefer Assaf* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1953, p. 462.

12 See previous note.

13 In *Tarbiz* XL (1971), pp. 301 ff. See also P. Schäfer, "Ein neues Fragment zur Metoposkopie und Chiromantik," in *Hekhalot-Studien* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988), pp. 84–95. Interesting information about the proliferation of this kind of materials in medieval literature is contained in R. Leicht and J. Yahalom, "Sefer Zeh Sefer Toledot Adam: An Unknown Esoteric Midrash on Genesis 5:1 from the Geonic Period," *Ginzei Qedem* 4 (2008), pp. 9–81. See also footnote 16, below.

texts is that of an occult science, with the help of which the Merkavah mystics either exhibited their superior modes of knowledge¹⁴ or tested the qualities of those who wanted to join their ranks.¹⁵

The physiognomic and chiromantic texts of the Merkavah mystics raise a number of interesting questions. In the present discussion, we shall refer only to those not discussed in the studies of Gershom Scholem.¹⁶ The first problem concerns the historical continuity of the physiognomic and chiromantic tradition in Judaism. Scholem states, "Chiromancy appears first in Judaism in the circle of Merkavah mysticism".¹⁷ The Qumran writings render a different picture.

The physiognomic tradition in Judaism is much older than Merkavah mysticism. The *Responsa* of Hai Ga'on and his father, Sherira Ga'on,¹⁸ supply the necessary documentary bridge between the chiromantic writings of the Merkavah mystics and the physiognomic and chiromantic passages in the *Zohar*;¹⁹ however, no such links are known to exist between the relevant texts of the Qumran community and the chiromantic texts of the Merkavah mystics. Admittedly, we found in some of the rabbinic writings certain terms that are key notions in the chiromantic texts of the Merkavah mystics. However, these terms, as they appear in the rabbinic writings, indicate only very general physiognomic notions, whereas the Merkavah mystics were in possession of fully developed disciplines of chiromancy and metoposcopy.

As already noted, several technical terms used in the Qumran texts do reappear in the chiromantic texts of the Merkavah mystics,²⁰ a fact that may be

14 See *Hekhalot Rabbati* i–ii, where the recurring phrase *yode'a u-makir bo* may be taken to indicate familiarity with the physiognomic tradition and terminology.

15 See G. Scholem in *Sefer Assaf*, p. 459.

16 Apart from the article published in *Sefer Assaf* [republished with important additional materials in T. Liebes (ed.), *Devils, Demons and Souls: Essays in Demonology by Gershom Scholem* [Hebrew], (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2004), pp. 246–304]. G. Scholem published "Ein Fragment zur Physiognomik und Chiromantik aus der Spätantiken jüdischen Esoterik" in *Liber Amicorum: Studies in Honour of Professor Dr. C. J. Bleeker* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), pp. 175 ff.; and the article "Chiromancy" in *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), pp. 317–319. "Ein Fragment etc." is a revised and updated German version of the article in *Sefer Assaf*; and the article "Chiromancy", which should have been an updated version of Scholem's article on that subject in *Encyclopedia Judaica Jerusalem*, was, unfortunately, printed without the additional footnotes. See also above footnote 13.

17 See *Kabbalah* (see previous footnote), p. 317.

18 Scholem, *ibid.*

19 See I. Gruenwald in *Tarbiz* XL (1971), p. 301, n. 3.

20 See my discussion in *Tarbiz* XL (1971), pp. 304–305. See also J. Greenfield. "Prolegomenon" to 3 *Enoch*, pp. XXXV–XXXVII.

interpreted as indicating the existence of a historical continuity between these two facets of the physiognomic and chiromantic tradition. N. Wieder discussed certain striking similarities between the Qumran documents and the Qaraite writings. He observed that it “may reasonably be assumed that the remnants of the Qumranites formed one of the dissident elements that went into the formation of the Qaraite sect, and that the Qumran element was able, either through sheer spiritual and intellectual weight, or through numbers, or both, to exert a preponderant influence on the medley of heterogeneous groups and individuals that rallied to ‘Anan’s banner.”²¹ However, Wieder had to admit that in “the absence of documentary data we are naturally thrown back upon theory and hypothesis, but, fortunately, not upon blind conjecture.”²² Wieder’s words stating the relationship between the Judaean Scrolls and Qaraism ideally fit the problem of the transmission of esoteric traditions in general. Esoteric traditions appear and disappear, and the assumption of underground streams that connect them gives rise to speculations. Hundreds of years passed between the composition of the Qumran texts and the relevant writings of the Merkavah mystics. Yet, one wonders whether it is a mere coincidence that the Merkavah mystics used some of the same technical terms that the Qumranites did, or do we have to assume that hitherto unidentified underground links are to account for the continuation of the physiognomic tradition through the ages?

One would expect, particularly in the case of the Merkavah mystics, that a fixed system would be found. However, this is not the case, and the impression one gets is of casual informality. Within the physiognomic texts of the Merkavah mystics, it is difficult to discern a coherent system; in fact, irregularities can easily be pointed out. For example, the texts frequently refer to certain letters of the alphabet, the shapes of which are inscribed in various parts of the human body. Neither is there any regularity in the enumeration of these letters, nor can any coherency be found regarding the parts of the body in which these letters are inscribed.²³ In another case, we find that a certain

21 N. Wieder, *The Judean Scrolls and Karaism* (London: East and West Library, 1962), pp. 254–255.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 254.

23 See, I. Gruenwald in *Tarbiz* XL (1971), p. 307, n. 16. It should be noted in this connection that some scholars claimed that they discovered certain secret letters in the Qumran *Rule of Discipline*. See, for instance, E. Ettisch, “Eschatologisch-Astrologische Vorstellungen in der Gemeinderegel (X,1–8)”, *Revue de Qumran* II (1959), pp. 3–19. However, almost everything that was said about the letters in question appears to be of a highly speculative nature. These letters are also mentioned in the chiromantic and physiognomic passages of the *Zohar*. In all likelihood, these passages belong to the heart of this kind of esoteric physiognomy and chiromancy.

term is used differently in two places in the text.²⁴ In yet another case, the same fate is obtained from two different signs of the body.²⁵ One may easily explain such discrepancies by the existence of parallel traditions or differences of opinion regarding the identification of the signs and their meaning. It may be argued that, in the case of such a popular science, no absolute consistency is to be expected. What really mattered in the eyes of those utilizing the art was the practice itself and its various functions, but not the methodological consistency of the technique.

Another problem that concerns the physiognomic writings of the Merkavah mystics is the inclusion of astrological speculations in some of these texts.²⁶ Judaism considered astrology to be idolatry, and from biblical times, it fiercely fought all kinds of astral beliefs. However, we know that there were times in which the belief in astrology—as with the belief in magic—was stronger than the laws forbidding its practice. In many countries and for long periods, astrology was the queen of the sciences, so it was almost inevitable that the Judaism of Talmudic times would succumb to the general—pagan—fashion of the day. There are a great number of utterances in rabbinic writings about the efficacy of the astral bodies and the dependence of man on their powers. However, just as many utterances against the belief in astrology could be heard. It may therefore be argued that the Judaism of that time maintained an ambivalent attitude towards astrology. On the one hand, one finds attempts towards systematizing astrological belief;²⁷ on the other, one finds views, which, in spite of their recognition of the efficacy of astrology, deny its power over an obedient Jew.²⁸ However, in our text, it appears that no room is left for ambivalence: astrology is taken to support and complement chiromancy and metoposcopy in their prognostic faculty. Indeed, if this text had been preserved in its entirety, it could have been a grand display of these occult disciplines. Unfortunately, only small parts of what seems to have been a detailed treatise on these subjects are accessible. In any event, very little can be confidently inferred from the few extant pages.

24 See Gruenwald, *art. cit.*, p. 311, n. 19.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 312, n. 7.

26 Particularly in the first text published by the present writer in *Tarbiz* XL (1971).

27 See particularly Bav. *Shabbat* 156/a.

28 See in *Tarbiz* XL (1971), pp. 302–303—to which one should add Tosafot *‘Avodah Zarah* 3/b (s.v. *Shomer Nafsho*).

Sefer Ha-Razim

The publication of *Sefer Ha-Razim* by M. Margalioth in 1967 drew the attention of the scholarly world to the existence of a fully developed magical literature in Hebrew.¹ The nature and scope of this literature does not fall short of the parallel Greek magical papyri and the Aramaic incantation bowls. In fact, in addition to *Sefer Ha-Razim* we know of the existence of a great number of Hebrew manuscripts and bowls, which contain similar materials of no lesser importance than *Sefer Ha-Razim* does.² The subject matter of *Sefer Ha-Razim* consists mainly of magical prescriptions for a great variety of purposes: medicine, subjugation of one's enemies, discourse with supernatural powers, etc. The technical term for these practices is *Baqashah* (Request), and most of them begin with the words *'Im Biqashta* (if you expressed the wish). The technical terms used in the book for magic, or magical practice, are *Davar*, *'Eseq* and *Hefez*. The common Hebrew term for magic, *K'shafim*, is only used twice in the book (p. 86, l. 95; p. 94, l. 42), and this only when the magical practice of one's enemy is mentioned. This is probably to say that the book does not designate itself as an inferior kind of [pagan or idolatrous] magic. Allegedly, the book does not contain black magic for subduing people to the powers of the devil; instead, white magic is used for constructive purposes.

Although we have dealt extensively in the present book with theurgic and magical practices, magic as such does not directly belong to our subject matter. It does so only in as much as it is connected to mystical practices and lore, which is now discussed in the "Concluding Chapter". Our concern with *Sefer Ha-Razim* results mainly from its unique combination of magic and Merkavah material, and our comments concentrate on this curious combination of literary elements.

1 For recent references to scholarly studies of this subject, the reader is referred to the "Concluding Chapter". More specifically, see J. H. Niggemeyer, *Beschwörungsformeln aus dem 'Buch der Geheimnisse* (Hildesheim & New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1975); and M. A. Morgan, *Sefer Ha-Razim: The Book of the Mysteries* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1983), which offers an English translation of *Sefer Ha-Razim* based primarily on Margalioth text.

2 Two such manuscripts—Sassoon 290 and Gaster 177 (now in Manchester)—are described by M. Benayahu in *Temirin I*, (Jerusalem, 1972), pp. 187 ff. Although the manuscripts are comparatively late—probably of the 16th century—they contain versions of *Sefer Ha-Razim*, *Harba De-Moshe*, *Sefer Ha-Malbush*.

One of the magical practices of the book contains a historical reference.³ This reference allegedly justified attempts to date the book in either the third or fourth century C.E.⁴ However, it appears that, although the book contains several early elements, it was in all likelihood compiled rather late (6th or 7th century C.E.) by a person who did not always understand the material in his hands.⁵ His use of poetic Merkavah—as distinct from Hekhalot—materials points to a rather late dating. In any event, the book presents a unique combination of esoteric beliefs and practices, which permeated certain circles in the Judaism of Talmudic times. In this respect, it gives us an opportunity to look back and reconsider some of the problems, which have been discussed in the present book.

A few words must be said about Margalioth's edition. To begin with, Margalioth published an eclectic text. The book should not therefore be quoted without a close study of the *variae lectiones* printed at the end of the text. In addition, Margalioth tampered with the text, in some cases even where the manuscripts supply good and interesting readings.⁶ After a careful study of the book, the present writer has reached the conclusion that a new critical edition of the text is required, including a commentary and *indices*.⁷

Sefer Ha-Razim begins with an "Introduction", which tells the "history" of the transmission of magic from the days of Noah. That Noah was chosen to be the first recipient of magic may be due to the tradition that goes back to *Jubilees* x, 12–14, where the angels teach Noah how to cure all kinds of deceases, and he writes down this information in a book. However, it should be noted that *Sefer Ha-Razim* was given to Noah before the onset of the Flood, while *Jubilees* x, 12–14 refers to events that took place after the Flood. The "introduction" to the book lists all the things that can be

3 See *Sefer Ha-Razim*, p. 68, ll. 27–28: "These are the angels who attend to the magical practice in the first and in the second year of the cycle of fifteen years reckoned by the 'Kings of Greece' ". See next footnote.

4 In a letter to the editor of *Sefer Ha-Razim*, A. Rosenthal interpreted the date quoted in the previous footnote as referring to the cycle of the *Indictiones* started by Diocletian in Egypt in 297, and by Constantine in 312. Rosenthal suggested dating the book in the fourth century C.E., while Margalioth himself argues for an earlier date (in the third century C.E.). See Margalioth's "Introduction", pp. 24–26.

5 This is particularly true in the case of the many "Greek" words, which the book contains. Not all the corrupt transcriptions can be attributed to careless copyists.

6 To give just one or two examples: On p. 66, l. 27 he omitted the word *Ha-Razim* after the third word in the line. In line 30 Margalioth changed the clear *Taskil* into the curious *Taskit*.

7 Only half of the book is contained in the Genizah fragments. Margalioth admits that parts of the book were previously known; still, he announced it as a sensation.

known or achieved with the help of magic. Yet, very little of what the “Introduction” lists as the efficacy of magic is later displayed in practice in the book. In fact, the introduction is also known from other books,⁸ and its omnibus catalogue of subjects could indeed fit various purposes.

The “Introduction” begins with the statement that *Sefer Ha-Razim* had been revealed by the angel Raziel to Noah before he entered the ark. From Noah, the book was transmitted down through the generations until it reached King Solomon. In fact, the “Introduction” speaks about a plurality of *Sifrei Ha-Razim* (“Books of Mysteries”). Thus, *Sefer Ha-Razim* is only one in a series of such books, and, according to the “Introduction”, it was one of the magical books, which King Solomon possessed.⁹

Reading the details of the “Introduction”, one notes that the efficacy of magic stretches over the whole of nature. Furthermore, magic may help man gain all kinds of secret knowledge, predict the future, and influence the course of events. Magic is efficacious in astronomy, astrology, meteorology, and other branches of knowledge. All that one has to do is to study the *Sefer Ha-Razim* and to learn its prescriptions and practices.

Not being fully aware of the prevalence of magic in rabbinic writings, the existence of such a book in Hebrew caused its modern editor some theological problems. Magic was strictly forbidden in biblical Judaism. Even in apocalyptic literature, the teaching of magic to humans was attributed to the evil angels.¹⁰ However, matters had changed by rabbinic times and a more complex view on magic is maintained in rabbinic writings. We cannot include here a detailed summary of the rabbinic views of magic,¹¹ but it may briefly be said that some of the sages were familiar with wide spectra of magical practices. In fact, magic was practiced by some rabbinic authorities. The official reason for this deviation from the obvious biblical prohibition against practicing magic was that one may study—and even perform—magic for the purpose of familiarizing oneself with the subject. This opened the way for a less conscientious observance of biblical laws restricting such practice.

8 See A. Jellinek's remarks in *Bet ha-Midrash* III, pp. XXX–XXXIII.

9 As far as I can see, the first writer that attributed the knowledge of magic to King Solomon was Josephus Flavius in *Antiquities* VIII, 45–48; at least, Josephus is the first datable written source pointing to the tradition that was variously dispersed in antiquity. See further, J. Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (New York: The Viking Press, 1960), pp. 170–172; and Pablo A. Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King: From King to Magus, Development of a Tradition* (Leiden, Boston & Köln: Brill, 2002).

10 See, for instance, 1 *Enoch* vi–viii, and lxix.

11 See E. E. Urbach, *The Sages*, Chapters vi–vii.

However, in *Sefer Ha-Razim*, magical practices are organized in what purports to be a systematic magical manual. This should no longer be a perplexing issue since the *Sefer Ha-Razim* is not the only systematic magical treatise we know of in (post?) Talmudic times.¹² The many Genizah materials, the Aramaic incantation bowls, and the various kinds of magical amulets and gems do not amount to the volume of “books”.¹³ All these magical documents are shorter or longer collections of magical practices, and no attempt is made in them to organize the material into any coherent method or system.

The way *Sefer Ha-Razim* organizes its magical subject matter is thus rather peculiar. The book is divided into seven parts corresponding to the seven heavens or firmaments. The names of the first two firmaments resemble those found in the so-called Palestinian lists of heavens,¹⁴ a fact that supports the assumption that the book was composed in *Erez-Yisrael*, or at least by someone who was familiar with peculiarities of the Palestinian Merkavah tradition.

The organization of this Merkavah material is particularly interesting. The “First Firmament” contains no Merkavah material at all. However, as the text progresses, the proportions change between magic and Merkavah materials: The higher one proceeds in the “Firmaments” the more Merkavah material and the less magical material is included. By the “Seventh Firmament”, no magical material is included at all.

Sefer Ha-Razim contains a rather elaborate angelology, which in itself underlines the structure of the book. In the “First Firmament”, we find a class of angels, called *Shotrim*, (“Scribes”), sitting (!) on seven thrones and presiding over seven camps of angels who serve them. Each camp of angels is responsible for a certain magical activity. In the course of his magical performance, the magician has to call out the names of the angels “in charge” or to write them down—usually in blood—and thus send them on their magical errands. In this sense, one may see the angels as magical apprentices or messengers. The number of the angels varies from camp to camp. Although some of the manuscripts mention certain numbers, the actual number of names does not

12 See the references above in footnote 2.

13 It should be noted that magical books are sometimes referred to in the Greek magical papyri published by Karl Preisendanz. A famous sample of these is PGM XIII, 343–646, which begins “The Sacred, Hidden Book of Moses called ‘Eighth’ or ‘Holy.’” See, H. D. Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 18–188.

14 Gruenwald, in *Tarbiz XXXVI* (1967), pp. 269–270. More evidence for the Palestinian origin of the book is supplied by Margalioth, though he inclines to locate its place of composition in Alexandria.

always correspond to the number given in the manuscripts. In all likelihood, the reason for this discrepancy lies in the fact that copyists had difficulties in deciphering the rather incomprehensible chains of letters and making words and names out of them. Nothing could direct them as to how to group these series of letters into clusters of words. The copyists found themselves on safe ground only when the names had the usual *-el* ending.

The "Second Firmament" is structurally divided into twelve classes of angels. They are called *Ma'alot* ("Steps"), reminiscent of the twelve steps on which the Levites stood in the Temple. Although many of these angels have the traditional *-el* ending, their names are almost as incomprehensible as the names which do not have that ending. Three angels are in charge of the "Third Firmament". As in the previous two Firmaments, these angels are in charge of groups of angels. Accordingly, this "Firmament" is sub-divided into three parts.

The "Fourth Firmament" is divided into two parts corresponding to the two classes of angels that inhabit it: the angels of the day and the angels of the night. The twelve angels that inhabit the "Fifth Firmament" are called "The Presidents of the Glory" (*Nes'ei Ha-Kavod*). The number corresponds to the twelve months of the year or their constellations. Evidently, these angels are in charge of information pertaining to what may happen in the respective months over which they preside. However, the "Fifth Firmament" is not subdivided into twelve corresponding parts. It contains only a general instruction of what one should do in order to know in which month one will die. The "Sixth Firmament" is once again divided into two parts, corresponding to the two groups of angels inhabiting the west and the east of that Firmament. Since the "Seventh Firmament" does not contain any magical practices, no specific classes of angels are mentioned in it.

When it comes to the magical practices described in the book, a number of interesting features should be noted. To begin with, the conjuration of the angels is frequently connected with ritual practices, which, according to traditional standards, are pure idolatry. One is expected to offer libations to the angels and incense to the astral bodies.¹⁵ In one case, one is told to sacrifice a white cock to the moon and the stars.¹⁶ Most surprising is the prayer to Helios, which one has to say if one desires to see the sun rising in its chariot.¹⁷ These and other idolatrous practices described in the book led Margalioth to

15 See Margalioth, "Introduction", pp. 10–11.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

the conclusion that *Sefer Ha-Razim* was in fact a book written by a heretic.¹⁸ Indeed, a book that contains a magical practice for necromancy¹⁹ cannot but stimulate orthodox antagonism.²⁰ However, the orthodox position taken by Margalioth cannot count as a scholarly, phenomenological assessment.

In the enlarged Hebrew edition of his book *Greek and Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, S. Lieberman discussed the problem of the penetration of heathen and pagan beliefs in astrology and magic into the world of the Jews in Talmudic times (pp. 73 ff.). According to Lieberman, it cannot be denied that the Jews of Talmudic times were influenced by the beliefs and practices maintained and performed among their non-Jewish neighbors. However, from that world the Jews absorbed only those aspects, which were commonplace in everyday life. Thus, the magical and astrological information contained in rabbinic writings still bears the marks of the strong resentment felt by the rabbis towards that kind of material.²¹

Yet, it may be asked whether a book such as *Sefer Ha-Razim*—and similar material contained in manuscripts—does not betray in a more reliable manner than do the rabbinic writings, the nature and scope of these occult practices among the common people. After all, the rabbis and those who put their sayings into writing had certain standards to maintain. Their responsibility and obligations as religious and social leaders imposed on them restrictions and modes of expression that were not always used among the common people. Despite the distinctive literary qualities of *Sefer Ha-Razim*, which may suggest that its origin was in literate and educated circles, it still seems to represent the popular spirit of the time, which engaged in magic and astrology. Magic and astrology, we should remember, were respected sciences in antiquity. In practicing these sciences, the Jews of the time were only following the cultural fashion of the day. If this is true, then halakhic and doctrinal considerations were suspended in the light of the practical functions that these sciences played in everyday life.

Even though *Sefer Ha-Razim* bears strong points of resemblance to the Greek magical papyri, one should not view it as a mere Hebrew imitation of the magical material contained in those papyri. There are some outstanding characteristics in the book, which make it an original contribution in the history of magical literature. The writer, or compiler, of the book was in all

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 14 ff. Margalioth quotes Church Fathers who attacked the Jews for (a) praying not to God but to angels and (b) practicing magic.

19 "First Firmament", ll. 176 ff.

20 Leviticus 19, 31 and Deuteronomy 18, 10–11.

21 See also the discussion of this issue in the "Concluding Chapter".

probability familiar with the material found in the magical papyri—he even used several Greek technical terms and signs found in them—but this fact makes the author's own contribution to the subject all the more interesting.

Like the magical practices found in the magical papyri and related contemporary guides to magic and theurgic practice, *Sefer Ha-Razim* repeatedly stresses the importance of the preparatory steps. Similar to the preparatory stages in the Hekhalot writings, these practices insist on the ritual purity of the performer and on the special diets that he has to keep. In addition, *Sefer Ha-Razim* sometimes refers to special magical signs and letters, the so-called *kharakteres* of the magical papyri, but it totally omits any reference to the magical words and formulae found in them. Instead, *Sefer Ha-Razim* displays a highly developed angelology, and the invocation of these angels often comes in the place of the magical formulae (*Zauberwörter*) in the magical papyri. It is interesting to note in this connection that the names of many angels in *Sefer Ha-Razim* sound like magical words, a fact that may not so much betray the mere caprice of the writer of the book but rather reveal his desire to “Judaize” certain essential elements of the magical papyri.

The magical papyri contain prayers and “requests” to the various magical spirits and demons, which are invoked. These magical prayers are sometimes replaced in *Sefer Ha-Razim* by semi-Merkavah hymns. The Merkavah material in *Sefer Ha-Razim* is interesting for a number of reasons. On close examination, its poetical quality is of a different nature from the hymns in the Hekhalot writings. It lacks the intense visionary connections of the Hekhalot hymns. In its style and form, it resembles the liturgical poetry, the *Piyyutim*, used in the service in the synagogue. The Merkavah material of *Sefer Ha-Razim* apparently derived from mystical sources that reflect a development of poetic qualities more or less independent from that of the Hekhalot literature.

As previously mentioned, there is no Merkavah material in the so-called “First Firmament”. The “Second Firmament” begins with a description of what it contains “Frost,²² treasure-houses of snow, treasure-houses of hail, angels of fire, angels of fright, spirits of fear and spirits of awe”. We know of similar lists, which enumerate what each of the Firmaments contains (Bav. *Ḥagigah* 12/b–13/a, *Re’uyot Yehezkel*, *Beraita de-Ma’aseh Bereshit*, etc.). However, one should note the significant differences between these lists. *Sefer Ha-Razim* does not follow any of the parallel sources, and it may be said that the writer of the book was not seriously interested in joining any established cosmological pattern or structure. The incorporation of cosmological material in his

22 The text uses two words, *Kefor* and *Qitor*, which appear to be synonyms.

book probably followed the fashion of the day with no apparent obligation to follow any specific tradition.

Ma'aseh Bereshit and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* went hand in hand, but the manner in which the writer of *Sefer Ha-Razim* used them for his magical purposes is unique. To give one example of the use the writer made of the cosmological material, one may refer to his description of what the first two Firmaments contain. In the parallel cosmological lists, one finds that the first two Firmaments are always connected with the operation of the heavenly luminaries. However, in *Sefer Ha-Razim*, nothing is said about the first Firmament apart from its being inhabited by the seven *Shotrim* ("Scribes"). The second Firmament in *Sefer Ha-Razim* contains elements, which, in the other lists, are contained in the sixth and seventh Firmaments. It should be noted, too, that the treasure houses of snow and of dew are found, according to 2 *Enoch* iv–vi, in the first heaven. Thus, it appears that *Sefer Ha-Razim* was not the first work to depart from established theories or cosmological speculations.

The "Second Firmament" also contains twelve groups of angels that are described at some length. For example, the first group is pictured in the following manner: "They stand in a frightening position; / They are wrapped up in wrath; / They are girded with fear; / They are encircled by trembling; / Their garment is like that of fire; / Their face is like the vision of lightning; / Their mouth does not cease from many things; / But their voice is not heard; / Since their job is to silence and to terrify and to frighten him who stands up against the one who conjures them in ritual purity." Obviously, these lines mark a striking departure from what the Hekhalot writings state about the angles' actions. The twelfth group is described thus: "They are encircled by justice; / And they have rays of glory on their heads; / They are full of sagacity; / They are qualified by their song; / They stand in two groups; / Half of them sing, and half of them say the response; / There is healing in their tongue and binding up in their speech; / And you shall be successful in everything that they are conjured for." This is the style and form of the Merkavah material in the Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Firmaments. It mainly concerns the angels, their features, and their activity in heaven.

In the 'Seventh Firmament', which contains no magical material, a description is given of God sitting on His Throne of Glory. The fact that the writer was not familiar with the Hekhalot literature is clearly seen from the fact that no palaces and gates are mentioned in that heaven. Instead, God is said to be sitting in His Holy Abode, *Me'on Qodsho*, a term that derives from Deuteronomy 22, 15. Books of fire are opened before Him,²³ and streams of fire are pouring

23 Compare *Sefer Ha-Razim*, p. 89, ll. 142–143; 3 *Enoch* xxvii, xxviii, xxx, xxxii, xliv. See Daniel 7, 10.

forth from underneath the Throne.²⁴ God is not even seen by His angels. He is carried by the *Ḥayyot*. Before the angels sing the *Qedushah*, they immerse themselves in “streams of purity” (*Naharei Ṭohorah*) and wrap themselves up in garments of white fire.²⁵ The description ends with a Merkavah hymn, the phraseology of which is strongly influenced by biblical images. In contrast to the Hekhalot hymns, the lyrical elements of *Sefer Ha-Razim* owe a great deal to the poetry of Scripture. In fact, biblical verses are quoted in the Merkavah hymns of *Sefer Ha-Razim*, and, in this respect, we may repeat the observation that the Merkavah material in the book comes closer to the *Piyyutim* than to the Hekhalot hymns. In any event, most of them lack the ecstatic tone and style of the Hekhalot hymns.

To sum up, *Sefer Ha-Razim* was included in our discussion of the Hekhalot writings because of the Merkavah material it contains. It is no mystical treatise in the proper sense of the term, but it is an interesting example of the interplay between magic and mysticism in antiquity. Recently, the materials contained in the book have received increasing attention, which integrates the book into the scholarly study of magic in antiquity. *Sefer Ha-Razim*, though, deserves a detailed commentary before a full-scale assessment can be offered.

24 Compare *Sefer Ha-Razim*, p. 96, l. 3. Heavenly streams (of fire) are also mentioned in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, paragraphs 2 and 10, and in 3 *Enoch*, *passim*. The idea derives from Daniel 7, 10.

25 For the parallels in the Hekhalot literature, see the writer's notes to *Re'uyot Yehezkel*, pp. 126–127, n. 65. See also *Sefer Ha-Razim*, p. 96, ll. 6–7.

Concluding Chapter

When Magical Techniques and Mystical Practices Become Neighbors: Methodological Considerations¹

A

Magic has become a central area of study evoking research in religious and ritual studies, anthropology, psychology, ethnology, sociology, folklore, cultural studies, to say nothing of history and epigraphy. Today, one can hardly write a comprehensive phenomenology of the subject without taking into consideration every comparative aspect of the subject and its respective assessment. The more diversified our knowledge of the subject grows, the more demanding its study becomes. One solution to this problem is to limit the discussion to one of the less treated aspects of a subject with particular emphasis on one certain topic. In the present chapter, I shall try to give an example of what I have in mind, assuming that the examples at hand and the manner in which they are presented here have paradigmatic significance for a wide range of methodological issues.

The vantage point that serves us in this chapter is that of ritual studies and ritual theory. My line of argumentation runs as follows: Every magical act is either preceded or followed (sometimes both) by certain rituals. However, cursory readings of magical literature, a common habit among many scholars, do not make it evident that there might be an *inherent* connection between the ritual preparations and the magical act itself.

In my view, there is an interesting connection between the aims of the magical act, the core event, and the manner in which one prepares for doing it. This connection constitutes the ritual procedure and, hence, the *theory* of the ritual event. I have explored the subject in my book *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, and I shall try to show that the conclusions reached there are valid, too, in the case of magic in general and, by inference, in the case of the

1 This chapter constitutes the enlarged and revised version of a lecture I gave in the framework of the conference, "Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition," on July 17, 2006. Its initial publication is indicated in the "Foreword." The present version marks several changes and improvements. Since it is written in the form of a methodological essay, I consider it essential not to distract the attention of the reader from the major line of argumentation with details that usually belong to the footnotes. Thus, the number of footnotes will be restricted to those giving the essentials of background information.

adjuratory rituals done to prepare and protect the mystic as described in the Hekhalot literature.

For reasons dictated by the limited space at my disposal, I shall have to examine just one example out of the many available. I believe that the example chosen is strong enough to convince the reader that, in general, magical acts are shaped in the course of a uniquely configured procedure. Structurally, they function as rituals. This assumption reflects the quintessence of my understanding of what constitutes the ritual theory in each case. Since rituals are crafted to work for unique purposes, whether *ad hoc* or *ad hominem*, magical acts, too, should be studied in their individual contexts.

More specifically, this chapter aims at bringing to the table new agenda for the study of the relationship between essential aspects of magic and mysticism². It proposes to create a new map for the territory, which indicates routes to the two subjects at hand. I shall start, though, by reviewing a few scholarly approaches to the study of the relationship between Merkavah mysticism and magic. Then, I shall explain the contribution that the discussion of ritual and ritual theory as presented in my book can offer to the questions at hand.

In modern scholarship, the relationship between Merkavah mysticism and magic touches on three methodological issues. The first is represented by Gershom Scholem in his chapter on "The Theurgic Elements of the Lesser Hekhalot and the Magical Papyri."³ For Scholem, the magico-theurgic element in Merkavah mysticism is best explained in light of materials known from the Greek Magical Papyri. Scholem furthermore argues, "The theurgic element was not a later addition to the texts but a basic component, one which the editors of such books as the Greater Hekhalot, 3 Enoch, and the *Masekheh Hekhalot* attempted to minimize or discard entirely." Scholem makes this statement in reaction to a previous claim made by Adolf Jellinek to the effect that the mysticism of the Hekhalot literature was only combined with theurgic elements at a later stage of development.

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- 2 J. R. Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot: The People Behind the Hekhalot Literature* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2001), discusses this issue, citing many parallel sources. However, his major aim is to create a triangle in which magic, mysticism, and shamanism meet. He is aware of the essential differences between Merkavah mysticism and Shamanism (as I argued many years ago), but the many sources Davila quotes from the area of magic and the magical aspects of Merkavah mysticism are left without a proper analysis from the point of view of their ritual function and theory.
 - 3 Chapter X in Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960 and 1965; 1965 edition reprinted, 2012), p. 75. All the references here are mainly to that page.

Paradoxically, Scholem also subscribes to the view expressed by Karl Preisendanz, who argued that “As time progressed, the external paraphernalia of incantations, formulae, magic words, etc. in this literature [*i.e.*, The Greek Magical Papyri] gained continually in volume. What originally constituted a simple theurgic practice has finally grown into a highly pretentious and elaborate magical apparatus . . .” Scholem, though, found it difficult to form a conclusive picture. On the one hand, he said that, in their various phases of development, major texts of the Merkavah literature lost or minimized their theurgic elements. On the other, he followed Jellinek and Preisendanz, arguing that the theurgic materials gradually gained in volume and importance.

I approach the subject from a different angle. In my discussion of the issue in the first edition of this book, I disconnected the Hekhalot writings from their ultimate provenance in the (rather late) Greek Magical Papyri. I offered a more detailed and nuanced analysis of the problems at hand. My principal argument, which entailed an innovation *vis-à-vis* Scholem, suggested viewing the magical and theurgic parts of the Hekhalot literature not in light of the Greek Magical Papyri but in light of the wide spectrum of Judaic life and existential needs in which magic played various roles.⁴ My way led from the Hebrew Scripture, through Apocalypticism, to rabbinic literature. When I wrote the relevant chapter in my book (Chapter Five: “The Hekhalot Literature”), the Cairo Geniza materials were largely unknown.

Now, being aware of their existence,⁵ I am convinced that they could have supported my view and given it a larger spectrum and more existential depth

4 See the studies of G. Veltri, *Magie und Halakha* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1997); Jonathan Garb, *Manifestations of Power in Jewish Mysticism* [in Hebrew] (2005); Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Yuval Harari, *Early Jewish Magic: Research, Method, Sources* [in Hebrew], (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 2010), previously discussed in this book. See next footnote.

5 In recent years, Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked have published three volumes of *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994, 1997, and 1999). The enormous efforts of the editors in publishing these materials deserve our praise. Those familiar with the subject report that more material awaits publication, as well as the magical materials written on clay bowls. A word, though, is due on the tasks that still need to be accomplished. The general practice of publishing these materials is embedded in their identification, decipherment, translation, and short editorial comments. Important work in characterizing the Jewish provenance of these materials is found in the various studies of Giuseppe Veltri, Gideon Bohak, and Yuval Harari. The methodological context of their studies is mostly comparative, and they have already rendered valuable results. The number of studies of Mesopotamian, Greek, Coptic, and Mandaic magic is growing on a daily basis. However, the kind of work that this chapter wishes to present—namely the study of magical rituals in the context of their ritual

than was possible at the time. At the very least, I believe that knowledge of those materials in their astonishing number and variety would have strengthened my “Judaic” position. One must admit, though, that the magico-theurgic elements in the Hekhalot literature show a large variety of usages, depending on the author, place, and time of composition. One could add at this point that the factor of inner traditions in their various forms of development can be traced, albeit with difficulty. Taken together, all these factors do not always amount to clearly identifiable historical and literary positions. With all the historical differences, thematic stratification and structural diversification, they all point in one direction: their solid and indelible presence in the Judaic world of Talmudic times. Their ontological layout has been discussed in Chapter One.

Another approach to the subject of the relationship between Merkavah mysticism and magic was suggested by Peter Schäfer,⁶ to which I have already referred in Chapter One. Schäfer suggested seeing in the entire Hekhalot literature a compendium of magical adjurations, thus discarding the seminal value of that literature for gaining information about mystical experiences in late antiquity. Schäfer argued, “. . . [I]t is not the heavenly journey, which is at the centre of this mysticism, with adjurations on the edge, but rather the reverse. Magical adjuration is a thread woven throughout the entire Hekhalot literature. This is true to such an extent that a heavenly journey may even culminate in an adjuration.”⁷ Similar utterances in Schäfer’s paper give expression to the same assessment. I shall add another quote in order to convince the reader that I do not intend to misrepresent Schäfer’s view: “The world view which informs these texts is thus one which is deeply magical. The authors of the Hekhalot literature believed in the power of magic *and attempted to integrate magic into Judaism*. The central elements of Jewish life—worship and the study of the Torah—are determined, in the mystics’ understanding of the world, by the power of magic [italics added].”⁸ Most striking is the statement, “The authors of the Hekhalot literature believed in the power of magic *and attempted to integrate magic into Judaism*” [italics added]. Schäfer wanted us to believe that the magical components of the Hekhalot writings stretch beyond their primarily instrumental context, namely, facilitating mystical ascents and divine revelations, and “attempt to integrate magic into Judaism.”

theory and in comparison to the magical materials of Merkavah mysticism—is still *terra incognita* to many scholars in the field.

6 Peter Schäfer, *Hekhalot-Studien* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988), pp. 277–295.

7 *Op. cit.*, pp. 284–5.

8 *Op. cit.*, p. 290.

On the other side of the scholarly discussion, Jonathan Z. Smith marks a real shift in the study of magical practices.⁹ Smith examined at some length the scholarly output of category formations in the study of ritual and magic. For him, an initial reaction to the scholarly effort to place magic on the scale linking “religion” on the one hand, and “science” on the other, is problematic. It belongs to what is the apologetic zone in the study of magic.

For more than a century, the scholarly study of magic had to locate itself in the triangle marked by the notions of “science,” “religion” and “rationality.” We are now free to discuss magic as *magic*, and not as a by-product of other domains of religious and mental activity. Thus, I take an interest in Smith’s systematic study of the choice of locations for the successful performance of magical acts. Even though Smith, in his analysis of ritual theory relevant to the understanding of what is done and where, uses categories different from the ones I use, I find in his comparatively brief comments much that is helpful in bringing about a needed change in the scholarly climate affecting the study of magic and related subjects.

In fact, Smith’s analysis leads us to the very heart of the matter, namely, the essential connections that exist between the various stages of what is done, where, and for what purpose. On a wider scale, it brings us close to the discussion of the symbiosis that exists between the magical rituals of the Hekhalot writings and the parallel magical practices found in sorcery, healing, exorcism, adjurations, the writing of amulets, and other kinds of magic. As indicated above, scholars are inclined to highlight historical, philological, and comparative issues in their studies of magic. However, I think that the study of magic cannot be separated from a detailed analysis of the ritual(s) done to make the magical event happen. A *coherent connectedness* exists between the preparatory rituals and the respective efficacious acts. The same holds true for the adjuratory aspects of mysticism.

I do not think that I am exaggerating when I say that many scholars who are trying to assess magic still find it difficult to define the scholarly category which best suits its study in terms of its ritual application. The main question is how to move from the textual study of magic to a scholarly mode referring to its application. Thus, in the present context, anthropological considerations will be given their analytic chance. In short, we shall examine how the magical practices, done in the mystical and magical domains, are technically

9 See Jonathan Z. Smith, “Trading Places,” in Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (eds.), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 13–27 (reprinted in Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2004), pp. 215–229).

performed and to what extent they show similar structural forms of integration with a variety of spell-materials.

B

Most of the magical materials known to us consist of two parts. The first consists of descriptions of the ritual utensils, objects and other means that are used in the preparation and performance of the magical act. The second consists of the spells that make the objects used work and enable the desired reality to happen. From a literary point of view, adjurations are the most noticeable form used in both of the cases mentioned here—magic and mysticism. However, one difference must be kept in mind. Anyone studying the magical materials from the Cairo Geniza, the magic bowls, and other materials of similar nature, will notice that most of the texts concern earthly matters. They seek to intervene in social relations and to have decisive influence on material objects—animate and inanimate. However, as we have seen in the present study, the Hekhalot writings show other concerns and objectives. They deal with heavenly ascensions, the vision of the “beauty” of God, participation in the angelic liturgy, and the disclosure of special secrets. The revelation of these secrets presupposes the appearance of angelic beings on earth. They most often relate to cosmological matters in the past and to historical events in the future.¹⁰ The typical matters that constitute the magical acts relate to any conceivable need or desire, which human beings wish to be fulfilled.

“Theurgy” is often used to upgrade “Magic” in its application in the realm of mysticism. Indeed, they are rather flexible terms, “soft” and easy to move from one “location” to the other. However, when the applications of the various categories are either mixed up or allowed to fall into the traps of arbitrary parallels, one may conclude that the warning signals have not been watched carefully enough. When one studies the Hekhalot writings in order to compare the incantations contained in them with those found in magic proper, careful attention must be given to the major points of difference. Otherwise, one is likely to reach the point at which no demonstration can show that the assigned “homework” has been carried out properly. There are no sacrificial rites in the major Hekhalot writings, but there are such rites in the magical texts. Hence, blood serves only rarely in the preparatory practices of the Hekhalot writings. Comparatively speaking, libations of wine, oil, and water are also rather rarely

10 As we have seen in Chapter One, the *Mithras Liturgy* uses magic and adjurations to enhance states of immortality.

applied in the Hekhalot rituals. However, the names of angelic beings and the abundant use of *nomina barbara*, that is, words the decipherment of which is quite enigmatic, create a noticeable similarity between the Hekhalot writings and the magical materials. In another line of comparison, the lyrical character of the Hekhalot hymns and the coercive adjurations in magic show that the two kinds of literature are worlds apart. The hymns of *Sefer Ha-Razim* create a singular phenomenon. They show a striking affinity to the hymns of the Merkavah literature. However, the magical parts of *Sefer Ha-Razim* are quite different from the adjutory materials in the Hekhalot writings.

Since I do not have all the space I need to give a complete scheme of all the trails on the map that lead to every aspect of the topic at hand, I shall limit myself to the essentials that are needed for an initial fact-finding tour. As indicated above, the study that I am offering in the following pages contains a discussion of a number of features that have not yet been given the kind of attention they deserve in particular the ritual technique that facilitates achieving specific magical or mystical ends. Having in mind the discourse developed in Chapter One, I shall direct the reader's attention to the need for an additional venue for the discussion of the links that exist between what, how, and where something is done in order to make the magical act work. At the same time, we shall keep an eye on the mystical techniques in their theurgic affiliations. This does not mean that I direct either ameliorative or pejorative criteria in assessing the techniques used in Merkavah mysticism *vis-à-vis* those applied in magic and sorcery.

In short, my discussion focuses on the rituals that prepare the people concerned, whether magician or mystic, for their respectively transformed *habitus* in the framework of which the mind empowers the efficacy needed for what they, respectively, wish to accomplish. The essence of the ritual core and its corresponding theory is a growing area of scholarly interest. It creates the needed venue for the discussion in the pages that follow. Thus, if anything *new* can be said on the cases studied, entirely different factors from those, which sustained previous studies of the subject matter, will have to be taken into consideration. The new vantage point, as explored here, aims at providing a new scanning range. It consists mainly of the anthropological or behavioral aspects of rituals. These aspects are vital for establishing the hard core of the context in which ritual theory creates the links between the preparations and the act that follows. Viewed in its anthropological setting, the subject of rituals and ritual theory can function as the *tertium comparationis* in the study of Merkavah mysticism and magic.

My study of rituals convinced me that in order to understand rituals *qua* rituals, every ritual act should be viewed as embodying its own unique ritual

stance.¹¹ In other words, every ritual is embedded in its own theory of ritual. Ritual theory is closely related to the structural manner in which the ritual at hand creates the efficacy of its act. In this sense, ritual theory is not a factor that rests on forensic presuppositions, most conspicuously symbolism and theology. Rather, theology, and even more emphatically symbolism, should be eliminated from the performative assessment of the study of rituals. Contrary to what used to be common practice in the anthropological study of rituals, I consider it essential to minimize the role that referential symbolism played in such scholarly explanation. With regard to symbolism, I refer specifically to the work of Victor Turner who, in his study of rituals, highlighted symbolism. In my view, he did so in order to minimize the role of theology in the study of rituals. However, studies of rituals framed in a theological context still fill the shelves. In my view, modern anthropological studies will succeed in radically changing this situation. In this context, symbolism, too, is beginning to lose its interpretive impetus.

I think that modern anthropology has also extracted magic from the realms of fraud and deception. Twenty years ago, one could still find a statement like this one introducing a major compilation of magical texts:

... people are not interested in whether or not magicians' promises come true. People want to believe, so they simply ignore their suspicions that magic may well be deception and fraud. The enormous role deception plays in human life and society is well known to us. In many crucial areas and in many critical situations of life, deception is the only method that really works. ... Of course, it is all deception. ... Those whose lives depend on deception and delusion and those who provide them have formed a truly indissoluble symbiosis.¹²

Similar lines of thinking can still be found in what people write on myth, which I treated in my study of rituals and ritual theory as closely related to ritual. In the same vein, people prejudiced by rationalistic modes of thinking tend to relegate magic and mysticism to the realm of superstition.

It is futile to wage an intellectual war against such views. Let me say it as succinctly as possible: We have matured enough to live with the notion that one

11 See I. Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003).

12 Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986). The citation comes from the editor's "Introduction," p. xlviii.

person's deception is another's "reality." The history of almost every branch of scientific knowledge is full of such cases. In my view, approaching a phenomenological issue with a disputation over the validation of its truth is a waste of time. I would therefore prefer, with the delicate veil that overhangs them, the concluding words of Clifford Geertz about the sense of what a present fact is:

... the post-positivist critique of empirical realism, the move away from simple correspondence theories of truth and knowledge that makes of the very term "fact" a delicate matter. There is not much assurance or sense of closure, not even much of a sense of knowing what it is one precisely *is* after, in so indefinite a quest, amid such various people, over such a diversity of times.¹³

The magical and mystical texts that we read are a thick slice of the past. What do we know of that past and of the people who lived it? Using a qualifier in Geertz's text, I would say that the question is a "delicate matter." Trying to reach a conclusive answer, one can say, once again with Geertz, that it is "so indefinite a quest." Since magic and mysticism are still practiced in modern life, the stigma of "past"-ness and otherness can be removed from them, with all that such a removal entails for their empirical assessment. Those who practice magic do so because they believe in what it can accomplish for them.

C

Paradoxically speaking, rituals relate in a behavioral manner to the dynamics of the constant, including its regular patterns of change, which characterize any kind of normal reality. The changes from day to night, the transition from one season to the other, the collapse of the holy into the profane, the deterioration of health to illness, waking up in the morning and going to bed in the evening, all play their respective roles as endemic changes in the ongoing processes that mark the existential dynamic of constant reality. Every ritual relates to aspects of the expected and unexpected changes in either a normally stable or a disturbed reality. In many respects, rituals contribute to the solidification of the expected and the prevention of the unexpected.

However, if reality is exposed to unexpected and unpredictable changes, rituals are there insinuating themselves as effective means of reversing the

13 Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge [MA] and London: Harvard University Press 1995), pp. 167–168.

disturbed process and restoring the normal order. Specifically, when abrupt changes have interfered or even taken over, rituals are there to help in their own special way to restore the disturbed and damaged reality to its pristine condition. Under normal circumstances, the person concerned uses the prescribed rituals as he finds them in his cultural or religious manuals. However, in more extreme cases, he depends on other people, who apply different and more radical techniques. We refer to these as magic, that is, highly powered means of transformation. In any event, rituals have their inner logic, that is to say, rituals are structured in such a way that their efficacy comes into effect only in following the strict performative order that purports to be functional in shaping them into a working Gestalt. Only the strict performance of the various segments, of which every ritual is composed, guarantees success. Order and correct timing are essential in this respect.

In speaking of rituals, scholars often refer to the factor of transformation. In light of what is likely to happen to an existing order, even minor changes make a difference. In magical acts, unusual changes of processes connected with routine life occupy a special role. The same is true of rituals done in the framework of mysticism. In both cases, alternate states of consciousness occupy the center of the experiential scene. The human mind seeks modes of empowering its ability to control the physical, corporeal, and spiritual domains. These modes do not belong to the common forms of religious activity and experience. Their activation requires special rituals. Metaphorically expressed, magic and mysticism break the gravitational power that normally prevents matter from losing its bonds with the laws that govern the physical world. Conceptually speaking, the usual alliance, which religious forms of behavior try to maintain with the supernatural, remains on the level of belief. Religion aims to activate spiritual realms in which belief entails exercising special powers to achieve unique results. Miracles, and other components which need no specification, are part of this realm of belief. However, miracles are the domain of the charismatic performer. Unlike miracles, which are regarded as divine interventions showing the unique qualities of divinely inspired persons, magical acts belong in the sphere of the professional performers who maintain coercive contacts with angelic and demonic beings.

Briefly, then, magical and theurgic rituals create or aim at creating extraordinary transformative events. To be able to bring about these events, the people engaging in the respective rituals strive to reach unique states of mind. Allegedly, these states of mind empower the practitioners to achieve goals that cannot be reached in normal states of mind. Two spheres of transformation characterize the cases discussed here: one works on the performer and the other brings about the change intended by the magical or theurgic act. While

mysticism works in one positively constructive direction, magic can also bring about fatal breaches in regular life events. Death, physical incapacitation, illness, and infusion of hate are only a few examples of what magic can do when it is geared to do its negative, "black" job.

In this connection, one may mention the various acts of breaking vessels in the course of magical practices. The breaking of vessels is not just a symbolic act. It is an act in its own right. It works on the pro-active, or pre-active, level, bringing into effect a radical transformational event, preceded by an act of annihilation. Annihilation can enact a departure from, or reversal from the old order or an attempt to ward off evil powers that entail a damage that has been done. The magical procedure consists of two kinds of actions linked together by what I would here refer to as their embedded "ritual theory." The connections between each pro-active act and the core of the magical act are not always visible. We shall examine at least one case that shows how this connection works and makes sense. However, it is in the nature of the magical act, and, for that matter, of the mystical act, that two kinds of acts are carried out on parallel levels. One of them is the pro-active, or pre-active, practice, and the other is the magic, or the mystically oriented, act itself. In fact, the pro-active acts—that is, the rituals involved—become vital parts of the mechanism that make magic and mysticism work. They set into motion the desired process, and, in this sense, they are part of it. They are the pre-programmed activity closely related to the magical and the mystical event. To repeat: the manner in which they do what they do in order to accomplish their designated ends is part of the professional knowledge of the magician and the mystic and the ability to empower this knowledge. Evidently, the magician and the mystic share the belief that it is part of the secret inventory of their art.

Speaking of annihilation, we find that many magical acts entail the slaughtering of animals. One may think that these are enticement offerings given to the supernatural agents, the angels and demons that are called upon to assist the practitioner in doing the magical act. However, I believe that from a more professional viewpoint the sacrificial act has a more profound aspect. As we shall see in the example cited below, the blood of the sacrifice is considered a power-enhancing ingredient in the magical ritual, while the parts of the sacrificial animal (not necessarily one that is offered in the temple service) may serve other purposes as the case may demand. Slaughtering an animal is certainly a pre-active act that initiates a dramatic event, which intends to have dramatic consequences, either positive or negative. Epitomizing the transition between two extremely polarized conditions—life and death—it is the climax of ritual as a transformative act in which annihilating acts occupy a central

role. Further, the place and time of the relevant acts are deliberate choices closely related to the desired effects.

In short, the foregoing discussion and the one that follows show that when magic, and, for that matter, its mystical equivalents, become objects of a hitherto unexplored scholarly discussion, the specific terms of reference that come into play are those of ritual and ritual theory. It should be noted, though, that the words “ritual” and “rite,” which are frequently used in the study of magic and theurgy, seldom refer in a specific manner to the practiced magical or theurgic act. Hence, I believe that the subject of “ritual theory” and its implications have to be brought to the foreground in the study of magical ritual and, consequently, allowed to have its bearing upon the study of mystical practices of the same nature.

D

In the second part of this chapter, I shall refer to one complex instance from *Sefer Ha-Razim*, the Hebrew Book of Mysteries. It is magic, *par excellence*. The choice falls on *Sefer Ha-Razim* because it constitutes an interesting amalgamation of Merkavah-like hymns with magical practices. Paradigmatically speaking, the example at hand will give the reader a chance to realize for himself the similarities and the differences that are involved in comparing the two kinds of literature. It should be noted, though, that there are good reasons to think that the charm that we shall discuss has two parts. The second one will be discussed in due course.

I. If you wish to speak with the moon or with the stars about any matter, take a white cock and fine flour, then slaughter the cock (so that its blood is caught) in living water. Knead the flour with the water and blood and make three cakes and place them in the sun, and write on them with the blood the name(s) of (the angels of) the fifth encampment and the name of its overseer (in Hebrew, *shoter*) and put the three of them on a table of myrtle wood.

Stand facing the moon or facing the stars, and say,

I adjure you to bring the constellation of N and his star near to the star and constellation of N, so that his love will be tied with the heart of N son of N.

Say also this,

Place fire from your fire in the heart of this N [masculine] or that N [feminine] so she will abandon the house of her father and mother, because of love for this N son of N.

Then take two of the cakes and place them with the cock in a new spindle-shaped flask; then seal its mouth with wax and hide the flask in a place not exposed to the sun.¹⁴

Let us turn to a close analysis of the various components that constitute the essence of this charm. It combines a number of extraordinary elements. The presupposition that guides my analysis is that they are all interconnected. That is to say, the preliminary rituals and, for the most part, those that follow, are closely related to the spell itself. The technique and the essence of the act are two sides of the same coin. I would not have opened the discussion had I thought that the kind of interconnectedness that I have in mind belongs to a rare species of charms. I believe that if the right effort is invested in the study of the materials at hand and research imagination is applied, this kind of interconnectedness may be discovered in more charms than commonly found. It must be admitted, though, that many magical acts look like accidental piles of disconnected elements.

Thus, I find myself concurring with the point made by the English poet, Samuel Butler Coleridge, who urges us to succumb to

... the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of imagination.

The reader is furthermore asked

... to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination *that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment*, which constitute poetic faith.¹⁵

Although the poetic discourse moves in different spheres from those of the scholarly one, I believe that Coleridge's words have an evocative power that transcends their immediate context. No fruitful scholarly discourse that moves towards novelty can survive the separation from the "colors of imagination,"

¹⁴ *Sefer Ha-Razim* (ed. M. Margalioth), pp. 75–76. The English translation, with minor changes, is by M. A. Morgan (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), pp. 36–37.

¹⁵ *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XIV (italics added).

and consequently the treasured moments of “willing suspension of disbelief.” In my view, the study of magic and mysticism moves in these alleys.

The first impression one gets from reading the magical passage quoted above is that of a total collapse of empirical sanity. This impression increases when reading the second part of the same charm (see below in section V; the passage is marked “II”). The first part of the charm contains a prescription specifying what one has to do if one wishes “to speak with the moon or with the stars about any matter.” Such a conversation is rather odd, particularly in light of what is at stake, namely, the love between two people. To begin with, the charm aims at establishing a verbal exchange with inanimate objects; that is, it moves within a fetishist setting. This is one of the unique features of magic, and it is amply recorded in a variety of texts. However, the linguistic factor is only a formal part of the matter. It has endless parallels in the psycho-linguistic behavior of children and adults alike. In a sense, this is also the characteristic stance in prayers, particularly to idols. In the rational life experiences of adults, this is often viewed as an oddity, but, as long as it happens in the privacy of the locutor, it does not draw psychological attention. In our case, but not only here, it marks a major characteristic of the magical praxis.

The magical situation described above evolves in unique cognitive stances, or mental dispositions. A cognitive stance is based on the assumption that it makes communication possible. In the terms used by Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Language is whatever one can use to communicate.”¹⁶ However, Wittgenstein significantly adds,

What constitutes communication? To complete the explanation we should have to describe what happens when one communicates; and in the process, certain causal connections and empirical regularities would come out. But these are just the things that wouldn’t interest me . . .

Neither do they interest me, unless, of course, they give way to the expansion of our understanding of the communicative features of magic. If we want to understand the various kinds of communication that magic, and, for that matter, mysticism, facilitate and aim at establishing, then empirical modes of communication give only a vague idea of the unique diversity of roads that may be taken in this respect.

Communication with the moon and the stars requires what Wittgenstein calls a unique “keyboard”—that is, a new and completely different mode of

¹⁶ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), p. 191.

cognitive expression. The epistemological presuppositions that underlie magic and mysticism are not the same as those of the sciences and everyday religion. Among these presuppositions, I would point out that in both magic and mysticism one finds experiential stances in which the boundaries between the subject and the object on the one hand, and the spiritual and the material on the other, are eliminated. Allegedly, the subjective stance becomes an objective entity. Thus, in magic and mysticism we not only move into utterly new modes of cognitive perception but also into alternate states of elevated empiricism. We may allude to them as entailing extra-empirical modes of existence and, hence, of communication.

Next, we move to the magical recipe. Here, those familiar with magic find themselves in familiar territory. One is told to take “a white cock and fine cereal flour; then slaughter the cock in living water.” Living water is water drawn from a flowing source used, for instance, in the cleansing ritual of lepers (Leviticus 14, 5–6).¹⁷ There the priest takes two birds and slaughters one of them, letting the blood flow into an urn filled with living water. This special mixture is sprinkled on the leper though not used, as in the case of the magical practice, for the baking purposes as mentioned in the charm. There the instructions read, “Knead the flour with the water and the blood, make three cakes, and then place them in the sun.” On face value, this looks like a sacrificial performance familiar to those who have studied rites, in general, and magical ones, in particular. The mixing of blood with water is not a familiar rite in Judaic religion, let alone its magic; hence, its application here requires a few comments. On the one hand, the blood is diluted in water; on the other, the water is given a blood-like look. Scripture often mentions the fact that both blood and water are, though separately, instrumental in bringing about physical and moral purification. Reasonably, the act of mixing of blood and water hopes to accomplish, on the pre-active level, two complementary aims: enhancing the respective efficacy of these elements and assuring that this magical act will successfully create love between two people.

Although the person in question expresses his willingness to speak with the moon and the stars, the sun is the functional factor in the charm. The food ingredients, which he prepares, are exposed to “the sun” to dry and become cakes, that is, bonded wholes. As indicated, neither oven nor fire is mentioned. The heat of the sun does not equal a pot or any other cookware placed on a

17 Explicit allusions to parallels in the Hebrew Scriptures can tell more than we generally let them. Often, interesting points of contact that magical practices have with forms of institutionalized, normative, religion contradict the negative attitude that scriptural law expresses towards magic.

fire. However, its heat can be used to dry or harden food. Furthermore, the sun, which is “the big light,” is here used as the channel through which the request to the “smaller lights,” the moon and the stars, is transmitted. Finally, the cakes are stored away in a place hidden from the sun. This act, which marks the completion of this part of the ritual, involves the typical locale of darkness, so familiar to students of magic. As will be shown below, the liminal transition from the area of light to one of darkness is a transformational act. Transformational acts are an essential component in empowering magical performance.

In fact, the whole ritual entails a kind of logic that consists of transformational events. The shift from the moon and the stars to the sun introduces a factor of constellational change, which in itself is an essential element in magic and in the rituals that accompany it. We have just referred to the factor of transformation; it consists of changes of various kinds. If one accepts the characterization that magic is the art of efficaciously causing changes to happen in a manner in which they cannot in ordinary life, and then irregular shifts of role that the luminaries are made to induce, as mentioned above, become matter-of-fact events.

In this connection, it is worth reiterating that the word “sacrifice” is not mentioned in the material quoted above. Fire, which is essential to any sacrificial rite, is altogether missing from the ritual scene. This suggests to me that what we encounter here, as in many magical acts, is a *sui generis* mode of ritual(s) connected to a *sui generis* event or motive. Magical acts activate modes of behavior and events that are configured in the spells that follow the pro-active rituals. In our case, fire does not belong in the preparatory parts, but forges the core of the emotional shift that is the purpose of the magical act. However, one should notice that the fire here is intended to work in two opposing directions. The person who wishes to bring into effect the desired change turns to the moon and the stars and asks them to “place fire from your fire in the heart of this N or that N so she will *abandon* the house of her father and mother, because of *love* for this N son of N.” The added italics tell the whole story, moving from one pole to the other. On the one hand, there is fire that causes abandonment and, on the other, the love that creates unity.

One should note, though, that the emotional aspect of the charm is expressed in terms that describe the formation of astrophysical proximity:

Bring the constellation of N and his star near to the star and constellation of N, so that his love will be tied with the heart of N son of N.

Thus, magic causes the physical to have an effect on the spiritual-emotional and *vice versa*. Although the ritual begins with an act of slaughtering, much of

it prescribes the mixing of various ingredients and making them into a whole: a cake. In my view, these acts are not sacrificial gestures to please or win the attention of the angels and the other elements adjured in the magical act. Instead, I believe that the mixing indicates a pro-active stance, namely, one of bringing together or forced connection. The various ingredients are brought to a condition in which they make three separate wholes—that is, the cakes mentioned in the text. They are not consumed in any ritual way. On the contrary, at the very end of the first part of the spell, there is a prescription to store two of the three cakes. This brings us to a more crucial question: Does the fact that the cakes that are “baked” in the sun and then stored in a place that is not exposed to the sun indicate a process leading from being to non-being, from existence to non-existence, from creation to annihilation? Alternatively, does the separation of two out of three cakes indicate that a choice or selection is involved, and a third party is abruptly excluded?

In the case under discussion, the edibles are not consumed in the usual manner simply to empower or sustain those involved in the magical act or to preserve them from deterioration. Instead, they are stored in the shade: they are destined to decay in hiding. Whether this is the case here or not, the factor of annihilation by extinction may be viewed as entering through the back door. The question may be asked whether this is done by manner of substitution in order to replace annihilation in real life, or for some other purpose. Since substitution is part of a *symbolic* gesture, I tend to reject this option. Does it have apotropaic functions? This, too, is not an easy question to answer. More likely, it may have a pro-active, or pre-active, function. In pro-active cases, annihilation epitomizes what happens in the magical act: a temporary suspension, or cancellation, of the laws of nature or any other kind of connected relationship. Such a suspension may indeed indicate an abrupt interference with the established order or a disruptive disturbance that, in the eyes of the people involved, may amount to annihilation. Obviously, it may require reconstitution by a magical counter act.

As the charm we are studying shows, changing the location of the constellations to favor a person who wishes to find love with another clearly indicates such an *ad hoc* suspension of the laws of nature. It should be noted, though, that annihilating acts are performed in the course of many festivities. Notable examples are the breaking of plates at the doorsteps of the families celebrating betrothals, and, in Jewish weddings, the breaking of a glass underneath the wedding canopy. More will be said on this matter later.

There is another enigmatic segment in this ritual. The names of the relevant angels should be written with the blood of the cock on the cakes made with the same blood that had been mixed with the living water. Writing the names

of angels and other magical powers is a commonly known way of conjuring them and keeping them attentive to the needs requested. There are two principal ways of adjuring, or conjuring, angelic beings: naming them or writing their names. At times, this may involve secretly held ways of pronouncing the names, either from texts or from written scripts. Writing or even drawing their schematic figure is probably the more potent way of the two, more potent than just pronouncing the names orally. In some cases, the written names are put in water, making the water magically potent.¹⁸

In my view, all these cases epitomize the factor of causing the angelic or demonic beings to become present and under control, consequently at hand to assist or protect the magician. While in biblical literature angelic beings appear spontaneously, in post-biblical literature (Apocalypticism, magic, and Merkavah mysticism) their names are uttered or written in order to coerce them to make themselves present. Their very presence is vital to the success of the performance. In many ways, they are considered a substantial extension of divine power. Typically, magical artifacts, like amulets, bowls, and even parts of the human body, are covered with such names, sometimes the real names, but more often encrypted ones. They are viewed as embodying the *being* of the angels. In a way, the artifacts carrying the names are like a stage on which these beings live their performative lives in a visibly potency-enhancing manner. The artifacts provide a working space without which the efficacy of the ritual is likely to dissipate. The material artifacts bind the names of the angelic beings to the material platform on which they cannot but act on the requests of the owner. Since these names do not always have a familiar ring, various speculations exist concerning their nature and the contextual and cultural forms of diversification that they project.

In any event, these comments point to the existence of a cognitive cosmos that is utterly different from the one that we are accustomed to experiencing in everyday life. This cosmos unfolds as a reality, the parameters of which are definable by a variety of factors, most prominently in uniquely configured rituals. In my view, their respective ritual theory is equally applicable in the cases of magic and Merkavah mysticism alike. The bridge that connects this reality and ordinary life is difficult to define. Magicians and mystics are able to create this bridge in a manner that only they are able to sustain epistemologically. For

18 A notable example is Numbers 5, 21–24, where the Sotah (allegedly wayward) woman is told to drink the water which contains the diluted priestly written curse. For a discussion of this ritual, and the assumption that it was never done, see, Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *The Rite that Was Not: Temple, Midrash, and Gender in Tractate Sotah* [in Hebrew], (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2008).

magicians and the mystics alike, the existence of these kinds of reality creates no problem. Quite the contrary, they believe that they thrive in them and can bring into effect their respective initiatives to shape them as the center of the special experiences that they control. In them, they can display their professional proficiency. The ability to cross the borders between normal reality and their professional one is part of their respective art.

One factor in this process is that of coercion, whether on the level of making the angelic beings present or of forcing them to do the will of the people addressing them. It signifies a new phase in the development of the religion of Ancient Israel. Inasmuch as Scripture induces the impression that divine intercession is the unique prerogative of the divine, in magic, divine powers are conceived as no longer free to decide for themselves. They depend on what is done by the humans who are in need of their cooperation. What should draw our attention in the charm under discussion, though, is the fact that the cakes with the names of the conjured angels on them are doomed to disintegrate and decay. This is not the only case we know of in which such a procedure, one that leads to disintegration and annihilation, takes place in magical rituals. However, what does all this mean? Does it mean that, after the completion of their mission, the presence of these angelic or demonic beings is doomed to dissolve into non-beings, or to return to their original place? Those who make them present are also the ones who cause them depart. I believe that the essence of the two parts of this particular ritual is the fact that the special names conjured for any particular magical act are usable for no other purpose than the one for which they are devised. They, and particularly their unique combinations, cannot be used for any other purpose or on any other occasion, however similar they might be to the "original." They are exclusively used for one particular act and purpose.

If the last comments make sense, then we may reach the conclusion that magical rituals and acts are *ad hoc* events. They are potent only for the purpose for which they are prescribed and done. This may explain the fact that we possess so many magical texts and rituals. No amulet written for one person is useable for the needs of another. Duplication and reproduction render the artifact produced powerless. This also explains the fact that one needs direct contact with the magical craftsman who, purposefully oriented, writes the amulet, the inscription on the bowl, and the person performing the act of exorcism. It is a personal contact marking the *ad hoc* and *ad hominem* commission created in the special contact between the expert and the user.¹⁹

19 The same holds true of miracles. At one time Moses is told to beat the stone (*tsur*) in order to extract water from it (Exodus 17, 6); at another time, he has to speak to the rock (*sel'a*), for beating it was a fatal sin (Numbers 20, 8–10).

Finally, before the adjuration is said, the magician is told to put the cakes on a table made of myrtle wood, and then—as is often the case—direct his face toward the adjured objects. In religion, seeing the god/goddess means that one is also seen by him/her. This empathic encounter constitutes the essence of pilgrimage and of visits paid to temples.²⁰ This fact may be explained on a number of levels, including psychodynamic ones. Most likely among them is the fact, that vision creates a special empathic symbiosis between the one who sees and the one or the object seen.

A word is also due about the “table made of myrtle wood.” One can write detailed studies on the flora and fauna used in magic. The myrtle—in Hebrew, *hadas*—is a plant used on various occasions and in various rituals. The closest connection I can find here in terms of ritual theory is the statement made by Pliny to the effect that the myrtle tree and marriages are under the auspices of Venus, the Roman goddess of love.²¹ In rabbinic literature, the branches of the *hadas* are used as the crowns tied to the heads of bridegrooms.²² Myrtle branches have additional uses in betrothal and wedding festivities. Thus, if we keep in mind the fact that the main body of the adjuration is about the joining in love of two people, the myrtle emphatically shows the extent to which the rituals and their various segments are integrated into the essence of the magical act. They are not arbitrary superimpositions that create the formal frame.

E

The core of the adjuration consists of two parts. The first one expresses the wish “to bring the constellation of N and his star to the star and the constellation of N, so his love will be tied to the heart of N son of N.” Clearly, this part has a strong astrological component. The zodiac and its constellations play a major role in the religions of the ancient world wherein one does not have to look for

20 Pilgrimage [to the Jerusalem Temple] is technically referred to as “seeing (*re'iyah*).” The proof texts that the Talmudic Rabbis use in this case is Exodus 23, 17: “Three times in the year all your males should be seen in [lit. to] the face of the Lord God.” The Talmud, Bav. *Sanhedrin* 4/b, quotes Rabbi Yohanan ben Dehavai in the name of Rabbi Yehuda ben Teima: “A person with a blind eye is exempt from ‘seeing’; as it is said (Exodus 23, 17) ‘shall be seen’—in the manner that he comes to see he also comes to be seen. As the act of seeing means [using] both of one’s eyes, so the act of being seen means with two eyes.” Since God is physically perfect, those who come to see Him must be physically whole, too. No wonder, then, that the facial depiction of idols and effigies in many religions are marked by big and open eyes.

21 Pliny, *Historia Naturalis*, 15.29, 2; 35–38.

22 Tosefta Sotah 15: 8.

the extravagance of magical performances to find a heavy astrological influence. There is also plenty of rabbinical and extra-rabbinical material on this issue. The floor mosaics in ancient synagogues just repeat the familiar story.

What has magic to do with all this? It purports to be able to change the course of the stars and relocate the constellations—something that is *not* straightforwardly indicated in the mosaics and the relevant rabbinic texts. In a few words, it causes spectacular transformations to happen on the cosmic level.²³ These transformations are conditional to what follows: “Place fire from your fire of this N or that so that she will abandon her father’s and mother’s home because of love for this N son of N.” The two parts of the adjuration show some confusion in the use of gender. This gave rise to the speculation that homosexual love is included. In any event, what is described in Genesis 2, 24 as the natural procedure between lovers—“Therefore, a *man* leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his spouse, and they become one flesh”—is here viewed as requiring magical intervention. Apparently, this is the case because the person who is to leave the parents’ home is most likely a *woman* who thereafter has to disobey her parents’ wishes.

In its magical context, the notion of abandoning the parents’ home, as referred to in this adjuration, looks to me to be more dramatic than the way-of-the-world kind of reference to leaving one’s parental home, as mentioned in the Book of Genesis. The drama is created by an act of placing fire in the heart of the beloved person. Fire (in Hebrew, (*esh*) may be a referential expression of lust and passion, but it may also be a play on the terms *’ish* (man) and *’ishah* (woman) used in the Book of Genesis.

In any event, the adjuration sounds to me as if it wishes to bring about, in the first place, a break between a loving person and her parents. The parents may have expressed their objection to the love and the resulting marriage. Indeed, the act of slaughtering in the anticipatory ritual creates a perfect symbiosis with the magically induced departure from the parents’ home. Thus, cutting the cock’s throat is the first act in the coherently developing drama. In that drama, separation—a drastically enacted transformation—is the key issue. Yet, it is cosmologically anticipated in the realms of the stars and constellations.

23 Relevant to this discussion is M. Bar-Ilan, *Astrology and the Other Sciences Among the Jews of Israel in the Roman-Hellenistic and Byzantine Periods* [in Hebrew], (Jerusalem, 2010). Bar-Ilan deals mainly with *Sefer Yeẓirah* (“The Book of Creation”), but the material he considers may be used in the context of the present discussion. Less relevant, but still adding interesting aspects to the discussion, is A. Mastrocinque, *From Jewish Magic to Gnosticism* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 2005).

The whole event ends when two of the cakes and the cock are put in a sealed flask and stored in a “place not exposed to the sun.” The sunless environment fits well with the opening line: “If you wish to speak with the moon or the stars.” The fact that the sun, too, is involved may be indicative of the fact that, when magic is concerned, abrupt changes, which follow no logical rules necessarily prevail. Even when a specific time and place are indicated, the magical act is a map with no fixed boundaries. A final issue in this respect is the one that relates to the third cake: What does the magician do with it? Two answers suggest themselves. One is rather speculative, but it gives us a chance to raise a point in principle. It may be argued that three parties were involved—the third one, apparently, either the parents or an unknown lover from whom the woman’s mind or love must be distracted. That party must be extracted from the scene. Thus, putting the third cake aside signifies a pro-active act that will result in either exclusion or extraction.

On the speculative level, another explanation may suggest itself as a possible solution. We have already referred to the ritual of cleansing the leper as prescribed in Leviticus 14. The priest has to take two birds, one of which he slaughters over “living water” and the other one he sends to seek its freedom. Sacrificial acts entail a choice between two elements, one of which is sometimes not used for any ritual purposes. In Leviticus 16 the priest takes two goats, one of which is slaughtered, the other sent into the desert.²⁴ A somewhat similar procedure is known from the Temple service in Jerusalem, where the unused blood of the sacrifices is allowed to drain into the earth. Furthermore, in the Book of Judges 6, Gideon brings a sacrificial offering to the angel, and the angel tells him to put it all on the rock to be later on devoured by fire. However, the angel tells Gideon to spill away the soup that he has brought. One may argue that not everything that is a part of the intended sacrificial “meal” is used for that purpose. One may even argue that the sacrificial act includes the disposal of certain parts for whatever purpose. The sacrificial prescriptions in Leviticus are full of such examples. There is always more than is needed for the sacrificial act to “fill,” or fulfill, its tasks. Although it is not always specifically designated as fulfilling a specified purpose, it may be part of the sacrifice that is given away to satisfy the evil counteractive forces. Thus, commenting on Leviticus 9, 2, *Midrash Sifra* [*Torat Kohanim*] says that one of the sacrificial animals which Aaron the High Priest had to offer on the eighth day of the inauguration of the sanctuary in the desert was intended to be devoured by Satan so that he would not show his hostile hatred when Aaron entered the temple.

24 The reader may find a detailed analysis of this procedure in my book, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, Chapter Five.

However, the text of *Sefer Ha-Razim* treats the matter in completely different terms. It adds another part to the previous magical act.

II. If it concerns an act of loving kindness (*gemilut hasadim*), take the remaining cake, crumble it into aged wine in a glass cup, and say the names of the angels in face of the moon and the stars, using these words:

I adjure you that you will give favor, graceful kindness, and affection that radiate from your face, I, N. son of N., so that I will find favor, kindness, affection and honor in the eyes of every man.

Then blow into the wind and wash your face each dawn, for nine days, with the wine and the cake crumbled in it.²⁵

The logical connection of this passage to the one quoted above is far from clear. Were it not for the prescription regarding the third cake, it might look as if it were an altogether artificial annex. Let us, for the sake of the argument, see this passage as an integral part of the whole and discuss it accordingly. The blood mentioned in the first passage is no longer mentioned here. Instead, one finds old wine in a glass cup into which the third cake is crumbled. If Temple rituals are relevant to the understating of magical rituals, then one may infer from the *Minḥah* sacrifice (cereal offering) that the crucial stages in doing it properly are mixing it with oil, baking it, and then crumbling it and pouring oil on it:

And if your offering is a cereal offering baked on a griddle, it shall be of fine flour, unleavened, mixed with oil; you shall break it in pieces, and pour oil on it; it is a cereal offering (Leviticus 2, 5–6).

Oil, not wine or blood, is mentioned in this connection.

However, in line with the comments on ritual theory made above, the act of crumbling baked edibles marks disintegration, fragmentation and, in a sense, even annihilation. If this is the case, what is the causal connection between those elements and the magical act in which a person adjures the angels to “find favor, kindness, affection and honor in the eyes of every man”? In this case, a reasonable answer may be that a pre-active act has to eliminate the reverse of kindness and favor before the desired qualities can become effective.

Furthermore, smearing blood and red [often together with other] colors is known from the magical practices of various cultures. Wine—probably red wine is meant—is more rarely used. The cake that was prepared with the blood of a cock is now crumbled and mixed with aged wine. Along with this

²⁵ *Sefer Ha-Razim*, p. 76. Morgan 37–38 (minor changes added).

unique procedure, the person involved is told to “blow into the wind and wash your face each dawn, for nine days, with the wine and the cake crumbled in it.” It should be noted that neither the cake nor the wine are consumed as edibles. Furthermore, they are not offered to the angels. Their major use is “cosmetic”, which is functional in changing the [appearance of the] self.

What does all this signify? In my view, the key to understanding this ritual and its embedded theory is in the remarkable connection between the face of the moon and the stars, the affectionate qualities visible on the face of the angels, and the face of the person who wants to find various kinds of favorable attitudes in the eyes (= faces) of others. Smearing the wine with the crumbled cake on the face of the person involved, the magician covers his own face and, thus, directs all the attention on the other faces mentioned here. Is this the only way of attracting facial expressions in the context outlined in the charm? I believe that the question is relevant to our discussion, though I do not have a clear answer to give. In any event, I do not believe that the mixing of a baked cake with wine has a “Eucharistic” effect or resemblance.

F

To end the discussion, I would like to add a few comments on the nature of the magical materials in the Hekhalot writings. One should be reminded at this point that, in Merkavah mysticism, the magical or theurgic acts are not used to cause changes in other people or earthly objects. Principally, they intend to cause angelic and other divine beings to appear to those qualified to experience their revelatory presence. In many cases, they prepare the mystic for the kind of experiences he wishes to have. Elsewhere in this book, we have seen that the preparations include avoidance of wine, certain vegetables, and meat. This ascetic diet is carried out for a certain number of weeks, usually three. Purifying ablutions are added and the mystics are told to pronounce the names of angels and their secret appellations. Some of these procedures are known from apocalyptic literature. We have alluded to the ones mentioned in the Hebrew parts of the Book of Daniel. In later Kabbalistic writings, other ritual procedures are mentioned.²⁶

The aim in these cases is to enter a state of consciousness that facilitates a visionary experience. In Chapter One, we referred to the fact that several studies have been published in the last twenty-five or thirty years, which contain

26 Most of them are discussed by Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988).

detailed discussions of magical and theurgic rituals, particularly in the context of empowering acts. Both the mystic and the magician have to empower themselves, but they also empower the *acts* that they are doing and the *practices* they are exorted to undertake. In this context, the issue of incantations and adjurations, which belong within the sphere lately referred to by Fritz Graf as “Words and Acts,”²⁷ play a vital role. As indicated in Chapter One, the acts connected with empowerment are believed to be potent in their own right. They belong to the very heart of the experience at hand. However, in the present chapter additional indications are given as to how to approach the details of these acts of empowerment, particularly in their *doing* aspect.

To sum up, the general approach applied in most of the studies with which I am familiar is mostly descriptive. In many cases, though not in all of them, the discussions unfold within the sphere of the comparative phenomenology of religion and ritual practice. Rarely is the subject of these practices taken up in the detailed *doing* aspects, which are vital for any systematic attempt to develop a methodology of studying them in relation to the nature of magical ritual and its ensuing efficacy. As I have indicated above, my approach is informed by anthropology, which, in this respect, has opened up interesting channels of approaching and assessing rituals in their *doing* aspects. In that context, metaphors, symbolism, and theology lose much of their practical and methodological relevance. However, I would like to stress that my approach is informed by a careful analysis of textual prescriptions rather than by any kind of fieldwork and actual practice. In this respect, it has a more philosophical nature than that gained through fieldwork.

In this sense, I can point to significant results with regard to the kind of methodological oeuvre offered in the present chapter. In fundamental respects, our historical knowledge of magic and mysticism derives from textual sources. In essence, however, mysticism and magic evolve in experiential modes, which affect alternate states of consciousness. Thus, solid foundations have been laid for functional comparisons between the two, whether in divergent or convergent contexts. At stake are the special rituals, which are not used in the common practice of religion. These rituals assume an efficacious thrust that surpasses the capacity of normal human beings, both to perform and to achieve. In the framework of this efficacious thrust, things that other humans

27 Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 205–233. See also Hans Dieter Betz, *The “Mithras Liturgy”* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 2003), p. 119, who, typically for such discussions, laconically remarks, “As far as speech is concerned, the *voces magicae* empower it to make sure the prayer is being heard.”

are incapable of accomplishing are perceived as achievable. As has been indicated above, one has to accept as realizable matters that, in the eyes of many people, defy rationality and empirical experience. The way to account for them derives from the understanding of rituals and ritual theory in normal modes of life, in religion, and in more technically oriented fields. When it comes to mysticism and magic, a heavier strain on our scholarly imagination is required than in matters that are familiar to us from their occurrence in daily life. However, if stretching our imagination beyond certain experiential limits is the only effort we are required to show, then the gains are surely worth the effort.

Appendices

Saul Lieberman

1. Metatron, The Meaning of His Name and His Functions

The origin of the name מיטטרון was discussed by many scholars. The whole material was collected by H. Odeberg in his edition of *3 Enoch*, p. 137 ff. He first quotes the conjecture that Metatron is “equivalent to σύνθρονος, co-occupant of the Divine Throne”, and he then cites a number of other theories. In conclusion he summarizes: “Of these different modes of interpretation that regarding Metatron as equivalent to σύνθρονος can be easily dismissed. There is not a single instance in any known Jewish source of Metatron being represented as the co-occupant of the Divine Throne”.

The scholars took for granted that the use of σύνθρονος is similar to the use of σύνναος (sharing the same temple), i.e. sharing the same throne. Professor G. Scholem was therefore quite right in rejecting (*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 60–70) all the conjectures cited by Odeberg. However, the exact meaning of σύνθρονος was misunderstood by Odeberg and his predecessors. E. Cornemann (*Klio* I, p. 55) correctly pointed out that *living* dignitaries were often called σύνθρονοι θεοί, the technical expression for such honors was ἰσοθεοὶ τιμαί.¹ It appears that in our sources Μετάθρονος (= σύνθρονος) is a mere title, [ἄγγελος] μετάθρονος, as he is frequently called in *3 Enoch*: מטטרון מלאך.² This last source correctly understood that the chair of the angel stood alongside the Throne of his Master.³ *Genesis* (41:43) says about Joseph, the viceroy of Pharaoh: “And he (i.e. Pharaoh) made him ride in the second chariot etc.” which Rashi correctly understood to mean that Joseph rode alongside Pharaoh’s chariot. *Test. Levi* (xiii,9) uses the following expression: σύνθρονος ἔσται βασιλέων, ὥσπερ Ἰωσήφ ὁ ἀδελφός μου. Lucianus in his mockery oracle⁴ maintains: ἥρωα μέγιστον σύνθρονον Ἡφαίστῳ καὶ Ἡρακλῆϊ ἀνακτι. Peregrinus was eager that his throne should stand alongside the throne of Heracles, as Lucianus said

1 Comp. also the material adduced by A. D. Nock, *Essays in Religion* etc., p. 135 and notes *ibid*.

2 And not המלך המטטרון!

3 See *3 Enoch* ch. 7 and ch. 10. In ch. 48, p. 66 it is explicitly stated: ועשיתי לו כסא כנגד כסאי. In later literature σύνθρονος is simply a πάρεδρος, assessor. See further Liddell and Scott, s.v. σύν!

4 *de mor. Peregrini* 29.

above:⁵ συνοδεύει παρὰ τὸν Ἡρακλέα.⁶ For our purpose it is important to note that σύνθρονος is a common feature in the heathen temples (*heikhaloth*). In the earlier sources σύνθρονος represents the highest personalities in the temples, mostly the *living* emperors, or their immediate families.⁷

We shall cite here two inscriptions.⁸ An inscription of the first century C.E. mentions⁹ a “priestess of Athena Nikephoros and Athena Polias and Julia, *enthroned with her, as Young Nikephoros*, daughter of Germanicus Caesar”.¹⁰

And again an inscription published by A. von Premerstein¹¹ contains an order of the Athenian people that an image of the empress Julia Domna be dedicated under the same roof as Polias, in order that she should be *synthronos* with the god.¹²

Depicting a noisy heathen procession, the rabbis describe¹³ it as follows: “They carry a *great god* to a *small god*”,¹⁴ i.e. when the pagans want to increase the prestige of a temple they introduce a great god alongside with the smaller god dwelling in the temple. The rabbis were familiar with the term “small god”. And indeed, the heathen temples were replete with gods and goddesses, great gods and small gods (*di maiores* and *di minores*), half gods and even “small gods among the lesser gods”.¹⁵ The sources sometimes do not deign to mention the names of the subordinate gods,¹⁶ but simply state: Διὶ Ὀγμήνῳ καὶ τοῖς σὺν αὐτῷ

5 *Ibid.*, 24.

6 But, of course, after being cremated he might have aspired to become an equal of the gods, to become a god himself.

7 See Liddell and Scott, s.v. σύνθρονος.

8 Not referred to by Liddell and Scott, but one of them is listed in the Index of *OGIS*, the other is referred to by Nock, *Essays*, etc., p. 229, n. 155.

9 *OGIS* 474: ἱέρειαν . . . τῆς Νικηφόρου καὶ Πολιάδος [Ἀθηνᾶς καὶ] Ἰουλίας συνθρόνου, νέας Νικη[φόρου, Γερμα]νικοῦ καίσαρος θυγατρός.

10 On νέοι θεοί (like: νέος Διόνυσος, νέος Ἀπόλλων, etc.), see Nock, *ibid.*, p. 43, n. 84, p. 149, n. 73, p. 151, n. 82. On the meaning of νέος θεός, see *ibid.*, p. 149 and n. 73 *ibid.* Similarly Metathronos (= Synthronos), like our Julia Synthronos, was also styled יה קטן (see below, n. 24). In biblical Hebrew it could signify: Νέος Ιάω.

11 *Jahreshefte d. Österreichischen Arch. Inst.* XVI (1913), p. 250.

12 ἵνα σύνθρονος ᾗ τῇ θεᾷ. See *ibid.*, p. 254.

13 TP *ʿAboda Zarah* II, 3, 41b. Comp. Lucretius II. 608 ff.

14 מוליכין עבודה זרה גדולה אצל עבודה זרה קטנה. The reading of the text is sure. It is also corroborated by the commentary of Rabbenu Hananel TB *ibid.* 32b. Rabinovitz *Shaare Torath Eretz Israel*, p. 562, needlessly emends the text. He misunderstood the purport of the procession.

15 *Anthol. Pal.* IX 334: τὸν ἐν σμικροῖς ὀλίγον θεόν.

16 Comp. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, p. 115.

θεοῖς¹⁷ exactly as it frequently appears in the legal documents:¹⁸ ὁ δεῖνα καὶ οἱ σὺν τῷ αὐτῷ.

The ancients were much less sensitive to the term god than our modern society. Mortals are styled “gods” during their lifetime. The Jews living in a polytheistic society were very well aware of it. The term “small god” would be shocking to us, but it was not so to the ancient mind. As long as no worship is involved the “small god” remains a mere title (see below).

One rabbi maintained¹⁹ that Moses was a ἡμιθεός, a semi-god, his upper half a god, his lower half a man. According to other rabbis, he was sometimes a man and sometimes a god.²⁰

Again, we read in Ps. 8:6: “Yet Thou hast made him but little lower than God, and hast crowned him with glory and honor etc.” The rabbis understood²¹ this verse as referring to Moses and God.²² Symmachus translates the verse: καὶ ἑλαττώσεις αὐτὸν ὀλίγον παρὰ θεόν.²³

Similarly, Metatron was called²⁴ a minor god,²⁵ his name being like that of his master.²⁶ He is also styled in Palestinian Targum ספרא רבה, “the great scribe”,²⁷ a very important title.²⁸ He is credited²⁹ with the task of teaching

17 *Journal of Hellenic Studies* X, p. 227, cited by Nock, *Essays in Religion*, etc., p. 239.

18 See Preisigke, *Wörterbuch* II, p. 521, s.v. σὺν.

19 *Debarim Rabba* xi,4.

20 *Ibid.* and *Pesikta de Rav Kahana* (towards the end), ed. Mandelbaum, p. 443 ff. and parallels.

21 TB *Nedarim* 38a.

22 And not angels.

23 TB *ibid.* explains that Moses was only a little lower than God, because he was endowed with forty nine “gates of Binah”. Comp. 3 *Enoch*, ch. 48c, p. 67, in the variants.

24 See Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 366 *passim*, *Jewish Gnosticism* etc., p. 47.

25 In heathen literature, Enoch would never be able to escape this title. Any mortal who was taken up (bodily) to heaven becomes a god, See Bickerman, *Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique*, vol. XIX, 1973, p. 14–15. A monotheist would never accept it, but this mortal may become almost a god, a small god.

26 See Scholem, *ibid.*, p. 68, p. 366, n. 103. Comp. *Aggadath Shir Hashirim*, ed. Schechter, p. 9 and Brüll *Jahrbücher* I, p. 224 and n. 6, *ibid.* The association of the number “seventy” with that of the languages is a later speculation.

27 The same title is given to Moses in the Talmud and *Targumim*, See Lieberman, יונית ויונות הסופר שהיה סופרן של, p. 212, and notes *ibid.* Add: *Vayyikra Rabba* I,3, p. 12: ישראל The argument of Krauss in הגורן VII, p. 29 ff. is childish. Comp. Ezra 7: 11 *passim*.

28 See Lieberman *ibid.* The wording in TB *Hagiggah* 15a is probably a later sophistication, Comp. Scholem, *Gnosticism*, etc. p. 51, n. 24. With regard to the prophet Elijah, see V. Aptowitzer in *Tarbiz* II (1931), p. 260, n. 7.

29 TB *Abodah Zarah* 3b.

babies [who died in their infancy]. 3 *Enoch*³⁰ is more specific: "He is teaching the souls of the embryos that died in their mothers' womb etc."³¹ This is a very old legend. Clemens of Alexandria³² cites the Apocalypse of Petrus which in his turn asserts: "The *Scripture* saith (ἡ γραφή φησι) that the children who have been exposed are delivered to a care-taking angel, by whom they are educated and brought up etc.". The same fate is allotted to *abortive* babies,³³ exactly like in the tradition of 3 *Enoch*. According to one tradition of the Talmud³⁴ this function of Metatron was subsequently taken over by the Lord himself.

Here we have to note that there is no contradiction³⁵ between the different titles of Metatron. The rabbis saw a great similarity between the hierarchy of the kingdom on earth and that of the kingdom on heaven.³⁶ At a certain period during the imperial times the slaves and the *libertini* of the emperors exercised a great power over the empire, or, as the rabbis put it: "A slave of a king is a king".³⁷ However, at the very same time they could be humiliated and even decapitated at the whim of their master. A small god might wield a lot of power over mortals, but the greater god could destroy him at his will.

A *synthronos* could be the most powerful figure (call him: the Prince of the world), a minor god, but at the same time he is a servant, a slave of his master.³⁸ Metatron, the great prince (שרא רבא), the *Synthronos*, was also styled a נער, a servant,³⁹ in the same sense as "And his servant Joshua the son of Nun, the attendant (נער), did not budge from the tent" (Ex. 33:11). "He was tied to Moses".⁴⁰ Metatron was a servant, a קימוס (read קמים)⁴¹ an attendant,⁴² and a

30 Ch. 48c, p. 70; *Midrash Othioth de R. Akiba*, ed. Wertheimer, 1914, p. 11.

31 See Lieberman, *H. A. Wolfson Jubilee volume*, p. 523 ff.

32 *Eclogae Proph.* 41.

33 *Ibid.* 48: τὰ βρέφει <τὰ> ἐξαμβλωθέντα.

34 *Ibid.* (above n. 29).

35 As a rule, (repeated many times in Geonic literature, see Lieberman, *Shkiin*, p. 83) we do not ask questions with regard to contradictions in *Haggadic* (legendary) literature. Inconsistency is part of the very essence of that literature. But in our case there is not the slightest conflict between the functions of Metatron, as we shall presently see.

36 TB *Berakhoth* 58a.

37 *Sifre Deuteronomy* 6, p. 15.

38 Moses was a slave of God (*Deut.* 34:5), and it was considered a great compliment. See *Sifre* a.l. 357, p. 428.

39 See Scholem, *Gnosticism etc.*, p. 50, n. 23.

40 TP *Yebamoth* IV. 2, 6a, *Nidda* I, 4, 49b.

41 *Visions of Ezekiel*, ed. Grünwald in *Temirin* I, p. 129. See note *ibid.*

42 In the new fragments of *Heikhaloth literature*, published by Grünwald in *Tarbiz*, vol. 38, 1969, p. 367 (last line) קברקליאל השר is mentioned. Since the differences between נ and

great prince. The rabbis did not see any discrepancy in those terms; they were well aware of the realities of the Roman government.

However, the people could be sometimes inclined to consider the *synthronos* as an equal to his master. Diodorus Siculus (XVI, 92 and 95) stated that the image of Philip of Macedon (while alive) was borne alongside the twelve gods,⁴³ insinuating the arrogance of such behavior. The master would certainly not tolerate such confusion. We may cite two anecdotes to this effect. Midrash *Bereshith Rabba*⁴⁴ records in the name of Rabbi Hoshaya:⁴⁵ “When the Holiness blessed be He created Adam, the angels were about to recite the *Trisagion* to him. This [situation] could be likened to a king and an eparchus sitting together in one chariot⁴⁶ (קרויין, αγκρσῦχα) and the people wanted to acclaim one of them ‘Domine’, but they did not know which one of them was the king. What did the king do? He pushed the eparchus, and threw him out of the chariot”. In other words, the people did now realize who is the *synthronos*⁴⁷ and who is his master. By being thrown out of the chariot the subordinate position of the *synthronos* was revealed.

We find exactly the same situation with regard to Metatron. The Babylonian Talmud relates⁴⁸ that Aḥer (Elisha the son of Abuyah) once found Metatron *sitting*⁴⁹ and recording the merits of Israel.

He remarked to himself: We have a tradition that there is no “sitting on high”,⁵⁰ perhaps there are two Powers? Whereupon Metatron was carried out

* are indistinguishable in many manuscripts (see *Tosefta Kifshuta* IV, p. 583, note, p. 607 *passim*), we may perhaps read קביקליאל *Cubicularius*.

43 στῦνονον... τοῖς δώδεκα θεοῖς. See Nock, *Essays*, etc. p. 247, and Nock's conjecture with regard to Alexander, *ibid.* p. 135.

44 VIII, 9, p. 63.

45 Fl. in the beginning of the third century C.E.

46 i.e. the eparchus was the *synthronos* of the king. Socrates (*Eccl. Hist.* II, 16) depicts the following scene: Μακεδόνιος ἐν τῷ ὀγκήματι σύνθρονος τῷ ἐπάρχῳ κατλ. Makedonios was *synthronos* of the eparchus in the chariot.

47 See above n. 46.

48 *Hagiggah* 15a. Comp. 3 *Enoch* ch. 16, p. 23.

49 The Talmud does not designate explicitly the place from where he was taken out. But *Arukh* s.v. פלס quotes מאחורי הפרגור. From a new fragment of the *Hekhaloth literature*, published by I. Grünwald (*Tarbiz* 38, 1969, p. 362, line 13 ff.) it also appears that he was sitting in the ἄδυσον. He was therefore carried out from “behind the curtain”, and was flogged, exactly like the angel Gavriel, according to TB *Yoma* 77a (in the uncensored editions). However it is evident from the parallel passage in *Vayyikra Rabba* XXVI, 8, p. 608–609, that Gavriel was never admitted “behind the curtain”.

50 Comp. also *Bereshith Rabba* LXV, 21, p. 738. But the privilege of “sitting” was also granted to Moses, as it is explicitly stated in *Midrash Tannaim*, ed. Hoffmann, p. 19. Comp. also *Sifre*

and administered sixty fiery lashes.⁵¹ This passage of the Talmud and the parallel in the Midrash reflect the same situation. The Master showed who is the Master and who is the *synthronos*.⁵²

To summarize: We may say that when we combine all the sources, the earlier and the later ones, we gain the definite impression that Metatron is a title, and it could be used both as a substantive and an adjective (exactly like *synthronos*).⁵³ Metatron might have originally borne another name, but subsequently he was raised to the rank of Metatron, and finally assumed this name as a substantive. This is, of course, a matter of speculation, and we leave it to the specialists.

As for the spelling of מיטטרון,⁵⁴ it is perfectly normal. מיטטרון = μετάτρονος = μετάθρονος = σύνθρονος. The Semites transliterating Greek words which contain both a τ and a θ often spelled them with two ט, like טיאטרון (instead of תיאטרון) and אנטיפוטה (instead of אנתיפוטה).⁵⁵

The use of Metathronos instead of Synthronos appears to be a special feature of the κοινή. It was already established by A. Thumb that the κοινή abounds in Ionic and poetic elements.⁵⁶ Let us cite two instances which are very similar to our term. The usual Greek use for sitting together is συνίζειν. However, Homer (Odys. XVI, 362) uses μεταῖζειν.⁵⁷ Again, the normal verb for dwelling together is συνναίειν, but the Homeric hymns (*Ad Cer.* 87) use: μεταναίεταί. Similarly, in the Theogony ascribed to Hesiod 401 we read: μετανάετας. The Jews might have

Deut. 305, p. 326, and parallels. See further Gruenwald, in *Tarbiz* XXXVIII (1969), p. 362, l. 13, and p. 363, l. 17.

51 Comp. 3 *Enoch* ch. 28, p. 47, ch. 44, p. 57. This is of course, a *topos*, comp. above, n. 49. The same is said about Elijah the Prophet in *TB Baba Mezi'a* 85b, as a punishment for revealing heavenly secrets. However, other angels were exiled from their compartments for a period of one hundred and thirty eight years for the same misdemeanor, but were not flogged.

52 Rabbenu Hananel (a.l. 16a) records in the name of a *Gaon* that the purpose of the lashes was only to show that there is a Master over Metatron.

53 See Sophocles, s.v. σύνθρονος.

54 The י in מיטטרון indicates that it should be pronounced Metatron with an E (see Lieberman, *Tosefet Rishonim* II, p. 227, line 22; Epstein, *Introduction to the Text of the Mishnah*, p. 1242, p. 1243 s.v. מ ויוד אחרי מ), and not Mtatron. This is especially true in the transliteration of Greek words, see Krauss *LW* I, p. 16, § 24, A. 2–3. It is more frequently used in the middle of words like (μετάξιον) נומירון מיטכסון (μελία) מיטון מיליניה (מיתורין, מיטרפלין, טיטרטון, טיטרטון, מיילה, and many other words.

55 In Syriac it is also spelled אנטיפוטה. See also Odeberg, p. 140. For the interchange of θ and τ in Byzantine literature, see S. B. Paltas, *Grammatik der Byzantinischen Chroniken*, p. 69. Compare also Liddell and Scott, s.v. κολοκύνθη.

56 See the references by Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, p. 48, n. 111, p. 63, n. 226.

57 The Greek lexicons quote it as a *hapax*.

had serious reasons for avoiding the term *Synthronos* with regard to an angel. It was used by the Christians as a title for Jesus,⁵⁸ and it is not surprising that the Jews shunned this term as an appellation of the Angel.

2. The Knowledge of Halakha by the Author (or Authors) of the *Heikhaloth*

Chapter 18 of the *Heikhaloth* retains a puzzling and enigmatic passage. It can be understood only in the light of the specific, detailed, and minute laws governing the rules with regard to the impurity of a menstruant woman. According to the strict *Halakha* such a woman imparts impurity to any man who touches her body, or the cloth *on her body*.

Similarly, any cloth (or any object which is fit for sitting, or lying) on which this woman sits, or presses (leans against) with the greatest part of her weight⁵⁹ imparts impurity to any man who touches or carries it.⁶⁰ However, those objects which were merely touched by that woman (without sitting or leaning on them) do not impart impurity to either man or vessel.

However, we possess a strange book,⁶¹ in which these laws are pushed to the very extreme. Although this source is replete with absurdities and nonsense, many medieval rabbinic authorities treated it very seriously.⁶² It cannot therefore be ignored, since this work was current in rabbinic circles. We must add that this book contains some mystic elements,⁶³ and it stands to reason that the mystics considered the stringent laws of that source binding on persons who pretended to be admitted to the different precincts of heaven. According

58 See the numerous references by G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, p. 1331, s.v. σύνθρονος. 2. We may add the Christian epigram in *Anthol. Palat.* I, 24.: σύνθρονε καὶ συνάναρχε τεῷ πατρὶ.

59 *Mishnah Zabim* IV, 5.

60 *Ibid.* V, 5, *Ahiloth* I, 5, *passim*.

61 *Beraitha de Masseketh Niddah* V, (hereafter = *Beraitha d'Niddah*), ed. Ch. M. Horowitz 1890. The work was composed not later than the Geonic period (see below).

62 See the sources adduced by Horowitz *ibid.* IV (פתחי נדה) p. 7 ff. V. Aptowitzer (in his book *בחקרים בתקופת הגאונים*, Jerusalem, 1941, p. 168) bitterly complained against modern writers who treated the book earnestly. However, I know no modern scholar who acted in such way. The only exception is, apparently, Aptowitzer himself. See his notes to his edition of the *Sefer Rabiah* I, Berlin 1912, p. 45, notes 10-12. But here we are interested in medieval authorities only.

63 See *Beraithah d'Niddah*, *ibid.*, p. 45.

to that book the very sand on which a menstruating woman treads imparts uncleanness to man.⁶⁴

Now let us proceed with the explanation of the above mentioned cryptic passage of the *Heikhaloth*. Its essence consists of a plot devised by a group of rabbis which aimed at luring Rabbi Nehunya ben Ha-Qanah out of his place in heaven. The surest way would be by bestowing impurity upon him, and then he would automatically be removed from his place. But, firstly, it is not permitted to convey uncleanness to a man sitting in heaven, and, secondly, there is a risk that the rabbi might become aware of it and prevent the action.

In order to understand the plot and its denouement we must bear in mind the following laws and situations. The law requires women with fixed periods of menstruation to examine themselves at the beginning of those periods in order to learn whether they became impure. However if a woman neglected to do so, but subsequently tested herself and found that she is now pure, her status is questionable. According to the majority opinion she is considered ritually pure, but a minority, and it includes Rabbi Eliezer, dissented.⁶⁵

It could be expected that Jewish women would undergo ritual immersion in such cases,⁶⁶ but, under circumstances of inconvenience, they would certainly stick to the opinion of the majority.⁶⁷ The group of rabbis conceived the following plan. They instructed the slave of Rabbi Akiba to put a strip of Parhaba⁶⁸ woolen cloth [on the ground] next to a woman who underwent ritual immersion that turned out to be invalid.⁶⁹ According to the stringent laws of *Beraitha d'Niddah* the cloth would become unclean even if it was not touched by the woman.⁷⁰ The slave was then ordered to immerse the strip of cloth in ritual water to render it pure. This procedure was necessary in order to indicate that the immersion was performed with direct intention to purify it from stringent impurity (טומאה חמורה). In such way the cloth would be declared

64 *Ibid.*, p. 13. It appears that the source *mistakenly* compared the sand on which the woman trode to the *מסמא* stone (*Mishnah Kelim* i,3, and *Tosefta Parah* viii,2, *passim*), and it considered the sand as *Midras*, thus imparting uncleanness to both man and vessel. Compare also below n. 79.

65 TB *Niddah* 16a. Comp. *Tosafoth* a.l. s.v. *ורב*.

66 In order not to involve themselves in doubtful laws.

67 See *Tur Yoreh De'ah* 184.

68 The etymology of the word is obscure (see Geiger apud Krauss in his *Additamenta ad Librum Aruch Completum*, p. 337, s.v. *פרהבא*), but it is evident from TB *Niddah* 17a that it is a white soft piece of wool.

69 The slightest interposition between the nude body and the water would invalidate the immersion. See *Mishnah Mikwa'oth* IX,1–4 *passim*.

70 See above, n. 64.

pure even in the opinion of those rabbis who followed the strictest views of these laws.⁷¹ The woman was then advised to approach the rabbis and explain to them the ways of her periods. The result of the enquiry would be that the majority (i.e. of the group mentioned in the *Heikhaloth* ch. XIV) would declare her “pure”.⁷² But one of that group would rule her “unclean”,⁷³ and since her previous immersion was invalid, she is now impure.

They instructed the woman to touch the strip of cloth with the tip of her middle finger, but to be careful not to press it, but to touch it slightly, with “a light gesture, like a man who removes something that fell into his eye”.⁷⁴ But here again they run a certain risk. Some of the rabbis were able to detect menstrual blood by its odor,⁷⁵ and Rabbi Neḥunya might belong to this body of experts,⁷⁶ and he might be able to discover in time that the strip was touched by an impure woman. He would never permit the placing of that kind of cloth on his knees.

What did Rabbi Ishmael do? He pressed a myrtle twig full of *foliatum* soaked in pure balsam (אפלסמון, βάλσαμον) into this strip. This balsam was famous for its pleasant and very strong odor,⁷⁷ and the strip of cloth having been permeated with this balsam would repress any other odor. The rabbi would never be able to detect the suspicious odor. The plot was safe. The strip of cloth was placed on the knees of Rabbi Neḥunya, and he was immediately dismissed from his seat.

The rabbis legitimately achieved their purpose. According to the *Halakha* prevailing on earth no impurity was imparted to Rabbi Neḥunya. The woman was ritually pure, for such was the ruling of the majority of the rabbis. Moreover, even if the woman would be impure she would not confer *Midras* (מדרס) impurity on the cloth by merely touching it. Our Rabbi would, in any case remain pure when he carried the strip of cloth on his knees.

71 With regard to “intention” in immersion, see Lieberman *Tosefta Ki-fshuta* V, p. 1307 ff.

72 I.e. that immersion was not necessary, and it is therefore immaterial whether her previous immersion was valid or not.

73 The “one” is Rabbi Eliezer, see TB *Nidah* 16a.

74 The rabbis took precautions to instruct the woman not to press and lean against the cloth in order not to confer on it *Midras* (מדרס) impurity.

75 TB *Niddah* 20b.

76 Comp. *Baraitha d’Niddah*, p. 9. Rabbi Ḥanina ben ha-Kanah is certainly identical with Rabbi Neḥunya ben ha-Kanah.

77 See TP *Ma’asser Shenit* IV, 55d, TB *Sanhedrin* 109a, *Bereshith Rabba* XXVII, 3, p. 257. Compare also Gruenwald’s note in *Tarbiz* XXXVIII (1969), p. 370, n. 48.

In heaven, however, the rules of Rabbi Eliezer prevailed,⁷⁸ and in his opinion the woman was ritually impure. According to the laws of the *Beraitha d'Nidda* any object touched by a menstruating woman (not only *Midras*) imparts impurity to a man.⁷⁹

As surmised above, the mystics considered these stringent laws as binding on any man who wanted to be admitted to the precincts of heaven. Rabbi Nehunya carrying the strip of cloth on his knees became impure and consequently dismissed from his seat. The group of rabbis achieved their purpose without violating any principle of the *Halakha* valid on earth.

This passage of the *Heikhaloth* demonstrates that the Jewish mystics were not רבני דאגדתא (rabbis who dealt with *Aggadah* only), but were scholars also at home in the subtle intricacies of the *Halakha*.

78 See TP *Mo'ed Katan* III, 1, 81d, TB *Baba Mezi'a* 59b. Comp. also *Pesikta de Rav Kahana* IV, ed. Mandelbaum, p. 73, and parallels. *Beraitha d'Niddah* (p. 21) claims that in heaven they follow the rules of the school of Shammai.

79 See p. 50: דילמא נגע במידי דנגעה היא ואתי לאטמוי

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