

Sapphiric God:
Esoteric Speculation on the Divine Body
in Post-Biblical Jewish Tradition

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Brief Abstract

A sapphiric-bodied deity, that is to say a deity (often a creator-deity) with an anthropomorphic body the color and substance of the mythologically significant semiprecious stone sapphire/lapis lazuli was a common ancient Near Eastern motif. As participant in the shared ANE mythological tradition could Israel envision her god similarly? We suggest that Israel could. By examining a number of post-biblical Jewish literatures we seek to demonstrate the existence in (at least) post-biblical Judaism(s) of a probably esoteric tradition of a sapphiric-bodied Yahweh. We also make an attempt to understand the mythological significance of a 'sapphiric Yahweh' in the context of the ancient Near Eastern tradition. While a much more comprehensive study is required in order to determine whether this Jewish 'Sapphiric God' tradition is indigenous or the result of some later syncretism, the former seems more likely. If so, this tradition further demonstrates that the god of Israel and the gods of the ancient Near East differed less than has been traditionally supposed.

1. Introduction

In a famous haggadah the second century Tanna R. Meir, apparently referring to the blue cord (כחיל) woven into the fringes (ציצית) of the prayer shawl as stipulated in Num. 15:37-41, makes the following observation:

Why is blue specified from all other colors [for this precept]? Because blue resembles the colour of the sea, and the sea resembles the colour of the sky and the sky resembles the colour of [a sapphire, and a sapphire resembles the colour of] the Throne of Glory, as it is said: *And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone* [Ex. 24:10], and it is also written, *The likeness of a throne as the appearance of sapphire stone* [Ez. 1:26]¹

While it will attract significant mystical speculation,² the implications of this haggadah itself seem unremarkable: the Throne of God, like the sea and sky, is blue. As the cited proof-texts show, this rather exoteric doctrine is plainly biblical. Speculation associated with the divine throne is of course an important strand of Jewish mysticism and esotericism (referred to as *ma'aseh merkabah* or the “Work of the Divine Chariot-Throne”), but there the ‘throne’ is a metonymic reference to the divine *body* established thereon.³ We are here given to believe as well that something more than the color of divine furniture is alluded to.⁴ Num. 15:39 says of the blue cord: “And it shall be for you (pl.) a fringe (lit.: ‘for a fringe’ לציצית), that you may look upon it (וראייתם אתו) and remember all of the commandments of the Lord...” The אתו is usually translated “it” under the assumption that the reference is to the blue fringe, but R. Meir suggested the reading, “that you may look upon Him.”⁵ The tassel thereby came to be associated with the visible presence of God, a symbol of the Shekhinah itself.⁶

¹ *b. Men.* 43b (Soncino translation); *b. Sot.* 17a; *b. Hull.* 89a.

² On these speculations v. Ben Zion Bokser, “The Thread of Blue,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 31 (1963): 1-31; David Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1988) 217-19; Gershom Scholem, “Colours and Their Symbolism in Jewish Tradition and Mysticism: Part I,” *Diogenes* 108 (1979): 90-92.

³ C.R.A. Morray-Jones, “The Body of Glory: The *Shi'ur Qomah* in Judaism, Gnosticism and the Epistle to the Ephesians,” forthcoming in Christopher Rowland and C.R.A. Morray-Jones, *The Mystery of God: Jewish Mystical Traditions in the New Testament* (CRINT 3; Assen and Minneapolis: Van Gorcum/Fortress) 99. My thanks to Morray-Jones for providing the author with a manuscript copy. See also Maria E. Subtelny, “The Tale of the Four Sages who Entered the *Pardes*: A Talmudic Enigma from a Persian Perspective,” *JSQ* 11 (2004): 3-58; Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1974) 16.

⁴ Pace Halperin, *Faces*: “The essential point (is) that God's throne is blue (219).”

⁵ *Sifré Num.* 115:2.

⁶ Thus *Sifré Num* 115:2: “Why is it called show-fringes (deriving לציצית from צוץ II, ‘to look, gaze’-WW)? Because the Omnipresent showed himself over the house of our fathers in Egypt.” Translation by Jacob Neusner, *Sifré to Numbers: An American Translation and Explanation Volume Two: Sifré to Numbers 59-115* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986) 178. See Bokser, “The Thread of Blue,”⁶ n. 4 citing *b. Men.* 43b. Christopher Rowland suggested that these speculations were connected with certain mystical visionary preparations. The mystic prepared himself to gaze on the divine throne, and its divine occupant, by gazing at the blue tassel: “Looking at the thread of blue in the tassels on the *tallith* may have assisted the visionary in his vision of the throne-chariot and the glory of God himself.” *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 302-05

In this regard, two later versions of this haggadah are significant. Both are attributed to R. Ḥezekiah, though it is suggested that he related one of them on the authority of R. Meir. In *Midrash Tehellim* (hereafter *MT*) 24:12, R. Ḥezekiah is quoted:

In what way does blue differ from other colors, that God should have commanded that it be inserted in the fringes? Because blue (resembles grass, grass) resembles the sea, the sea resembles the sky, the sky resembles a rainbow, a rainbow resembles a cloud, a cloud resembles the heavenly throne, and the throne resembles the divine glory (כבוד), as it says, ‘As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud, etc. (Ezek. 1, 28).⁷

Num. R. 14.3 glosses this haggadah with: “He accordingly gave to those who fear Him the color blue which resembles His own glory.”⁸ In *MT* 90:18, the climatic finale is the divine Likeness itself (דמות), citing as the proof text Ez. 1:28: ‘As the appearance of the bow in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about; this was the appearance of the likeness (דמות) of the Glory (כבוד) of Yahweh”.

The כבוד, in biblical and post-biblical Jewish tradition, is often a *terminus technicus* for the luminous, anthropomorphic form of God.⁹ דמות, often interchangeable with כבוד in some rabbinic texts, likewise refers to the divine, enthroned anthropomorphic form.¹⁰ Is it therefore possible to interpret R. Ḥezekiah’s statements as found in the later sources as alluding to a dark blue¹¹ anthropomorphic form of God? Ben

⁷ Translation from William G. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms*, (2 vol.; Yale Judaica Series 13; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959).

⁸ H. Freedman and M. Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah: Numbers* (trans. Judah J. Slotki; London and New York: Soncino Press, 1961) 573.

⁹ On the anthropomorphic *kābōd* in biblical and post-biblical tradition v. *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (12 vols.; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans’s Publishing Company, 1975-) (hereafter *TDOT*), VII:23-38, esp. 27-31 s.v. כבוד, by Moshe Weinfeld; idem, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972) 191-209, esp. 200-206; Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking and Pieter W. van der Horst, eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, (2nd Edition; Leiden and Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brill and Eerdmans, 1999; hereafter *DDD*) s.v. Glory by J. E. Fossum, 348-52; idem, “Jewish-Christian Christology and Jewish Mysticism,” *VC* 37 (1983): 260-287; Rimmon Kasher, “Anthropomorphism, Holiness and the Cult: A New look at Ezekiel 40-48,” *ZAW* 110 (1998): 192-208.

¹⁰ On the *dēmūt/panim/kābōd* equation see *Ex. R.* 23.15; *Gen. R.* 21.7; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 45-48. On *dēmūt* as demiurgic, enthroned divine anthropos in rabbinic tradition v. Saul Lieberman, “How Much Greek in Jewish Palestine,” in *Biblical and Other Studies* (ed. Alexander Altmann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963) 141; Michael Fishbane, “Some Forms of Divine Appearance in Ancient Jewish Thought,” in *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest of Understanding* (ed. Joshua Bell et al; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) 261-270; idem, “The ‘Measures’ of God’s Glory in the Ancient Midrash,” in *Messiah and Christos: Studies in the Jewish Origin of Christianity* (ed. Itamar Gruenwald, Shaul Shaked and Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa; Tübingen: Mohr, 1992) 53-74; idem, “The Measure and Glory of God in Ancient Midrash,” in idem, *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998) 56-72; Jarl Fossum, “The Adorable Adam of the Mystics and the Rebuttals of the Rabbis,” in *Geschichte, Tradition, Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag Band I: Judentum* (Tübingen: J C B Mohr, 1996) 529-539.

¹¹ The exact source and hue of *tēkhēlet* has been a matter of dispute. Whatever the dye-source of *tēkhēlet* turns out to be (if ever that secret is rediscovered) it is clear that in rabbinic tradition the color was dark blue, even blue-black. Rabbi Isaac Herzog demonstrated this in his D. Litt thesis submitted to London University in 1913 on the subject *tēkhēlet* (now translated and published as “Hebrew Porphyrology,” in *The Royal Purple and the Biblical Blue, Argaman and Tekhelet* (ed. Ehud Spanier; Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd, 1987)). See also Rabbi Leibel Reznick, “The Hidden Blue,” *Jewish Action* 52 (1991-92): 54. On the controversy over the source and hue see e.g. Irving Ziderman, “Seashells and Ancient Purple Dyeing,” *BA* June (1990): 98-10; Baruch Sterman, “The Science of *Tekhelet*,” in *Tekhelet: The Renaissance of a Mitzvah* (ed. Rabbi Alfred Cohen; New York: The Michael Scharf Publication Trust of Yeshiva University Press, 1996); Ari Greenspan, “The Search for the Biblical Blue,” *Bible Review* (February 2003): 32-39; Mendel E. Singer, “Understanding the Criteria for the Chilazon,” *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* (hereafter *JHCS*) 42 (2001): 5-29 and the ensuing debate between he and Sterman: *JHCS* 43 (2002): 112-124; 44 (2002): 97-110 and Rabbi Yechiel Yitzchok Perr’s contribution to the debate, “Letter to the Editor,” 44 (2002): 125-128.

Zion Bokser, in discussing the mystical interpretations of the blue tassel, interprets R. Ḥezekiah's statements thus: "The thread of blue links its wearer with the *mysterious substance* which robes the Eternal Himself (emphasis added)."¹² What is this 'mysterious substance' that robes the divine, to which the blue tassel mystically alludes? Rabbinic tradition frequently associated the blue of the tassel with the sapphire stone.¹³ Are we then dealing with a tradition among some rabbis of a saphir-bodied deity similar to the deities of the ancient Near East (ANE)?

In biblical tradition and in ancient and medieval texts generally the term 'sapphire' denoted the semiprecious stone lapis lazuli.¹⁴ Considered the "ultimate Divine substance," sapphire/lapis lazuli possessed great mythological significance in the ANE.¹⁵ In its natural state lapis lazuli is deep blue with fine golden spangles, recalling the "sky bedecked with stars"¹⁶; thus the frequently encountered motif of a sapphiric heaven.¹⁷ This sapphiric heaven, as the 'sky-garment' of the gods, was often associated with the divine body, 'garment' being an ancient and widespread metaphor for body.¹⁸ Thus, the leading deities of

¹² "Thread of Blue," 12.

¹³ See the sources cited and discussed in Bokser, "Thread of Blue," 12-13.

¹⁴ Michel Pastoureau, *Blue: The History of a Color* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 7, 21; *Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. James Hastings; New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1988) 497, s.v. "Jewels and Precious Stones," by J. Patrick and G.R. Berry.

¹⁵ F. Daumas, "Lapis-lazuli et Régénération," in *L'Univers minéral dans la pensée Égyptienne* (2 vols.; ed. Sydney Aufrère; Le Caire: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire, 1991) II:463-488; John Irwin, "The **Lāṭ Bhairō at Benares (Vārāṇasī)**: Another Pre-Aśokan Monument?" *ZDMG* 133 (1983): 327-43. This is not to suggest that sapphire/lapis lazuli does not appear in ancient literature in more mundane, non-mythological contexts. It certainly does. In the Amarna letters lapis lazuli is listed among the presents exchanged by oriental potentates (see Lissie von Rosen, *Lapis Lazuli in Geological Contexts and in Ancient Written Sources* [Partille: Paul Åströms förlag, 1988] 34). The royal associations are prevelant, but it is not possible to definitively determine whether the royal use of this and similar colors (e.g. 'royal' purple) is meant to imitate the divine, or whether they are being used to accord royal characteristics to the divine. The predominantly blue robe of the Jewish high priest (Exod. 28 :31) has royal associations. See Thomas Podella, *Das Lichtkleid JHWHs: Untersuchungen zur Gestaltbarkeit Gottes im Alten Testament und seiner altorientalischen Umwelt* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1996) 67-8, but at Qumran it was also associated with the divine *kabōd*, e.g. in the 12th and 13th *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice* 4Q405 20 ii-21-22; 23 ii. See Carol Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) 315; idem, "Shirot 'Olat Hashabbat," in *Qumran Cave 4: VI, Poetical and Liturgical Texts, Part 1* (DJD 11; ed. E. Eshel et al Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 352; **Himmelfarb, Ascent to Heaven, 19-20**. Crispin H.T. Fletcher-Louis, "Heavenly ascent or incarnational presence: a revisionist reading of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice," *SBL Seminar Papers Series* 37 (1998) 367-399, esp. 385-99; idem, *All the Glory of Adam*, 346-50). In a number of Rabbinic texts the 'royal' garments of the high priest are specifically said to be "after the pattern of the holy garments," i.e. God's own 'royal purple' garments (e.g. *Exod. R.* 38:8). Nevertheless, it is clear that in the mythological texts/contextes cited below the reference to sapphire/lapis lazuli has cosmogonic significance and is not "merely (a) sign of regal fecundity and prosperity."

¹⁶ On Lapis Lazuli v. Lissie von Rosen, *Lapis Lazuli in Geological Contexts and in Ancient Written Sources*; idem, *Lapis Lazuli in Archaeological Contexts* (Jonsered: Paul Åströms förlag, 1990).

¹⁷ Exod. 24:10; Ez. 1:26 (LXX); Pliny the Elder described lapis lazuli as "a fragment of the starry firmament" (*Natural History, Book* 37). Nut, the ancient Egyptian sky goddess, "glistens like lapis lazuli." See J. Assmann, *Liturgische Lieder an den Sonnengott. Untersuchungen zur ägyptischen Hymnik I* (MÄS 19; Berlin, 1969) 314ff. text III 4. For the sapphiric heaven in Babylonian texts see Wolfgang Heimpel, "The Sun at Night and the Doors of Heaven in Babylonian Texts," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 38 (1986): 132, 133 [art.=127-151].

¹⁸ On the 'sky-garment' of the gods see especially Asko Parpola, *The Sky-Garment. A study of the Harappan religion and its relation to the Mesopotamian and later Indian religion* (SO 57; Helsinki, 1985); idem, "The Harappan 'Priest-King's' Robe and the Vedic Tārypa Garment: Their Interrelation and Symbolism (Astral and Procreative)," *South Asian Archeology* 1983 1: 385-403; A. Leo Oppenheim, "The Golden Garments of the Gods," *Journal of Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 8 (1949): 172-193. This designation arises from the golden star-like ornaments or appliqué work sewn into the garment recalling the star-spangled night sky. On the somatic associations see the Egyptian Amun-Re who is "beautiful youth of purest lapis lazuli (*ḥwn-nfr n-ḥsbd-m3*)" whose "body is heaven" (*ḥt. K nwt*). See J. Assmann, *Sonnenhymnen in thebanischen Gräbern* (Mainz: a.R., 1983) 5, #6:5, 124, # 43:14; A.I. Sadek, *Popular Religion in Egypt During the New Kingdom* (Hildsheim, 1987) 14. On the 'garment-as-body' metaphore in antiquity

the ANE had sapphiric-blue bodies. In Egypt, “The traditional colour of (the) gods’ limbs (was) the dark blue lapis lazuli.”¹⁹ The ANE cult statue, i.e. the earthly body of the deity,²⁰ was ideally made of a wooden core platted with red gold or silver, overlaid with sapphires,²¹ all of which signified substances from the body of the deity: “his (i.e. Re’s) bones are silver, his flesh is gold, his hair genuine lapis-lazuli.”²² But the hair too was a metaphor for rays of light emanating from the hair-pores covering the body and lapis lazuli was considered ‘solidified celestial light’.²³ The whole body was therefore depicted blue.²⁴ This is particularly the case with deities associated with fecundity or creation.²⁵ Mediating between the gold flesh and lapis lazuli ‘hair’ or ‘surrounding splendor’ of the creator deity is divine black skin, signified by the hide of the black bovine (usually a bull),²⁶ the paramount attribute animal of the ANE creator-deity.²⁷ The

see Geo Widengren, *The Great Vohu Manah and the Apostle of God: Studies in Iranian and Manichaean Religion* (Uppsala: A.-B. Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1945) 50-55, 76-83; J.M. Rist, “A Common Metaphor,” in idem, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 188-198. On the garments of the gods motif see also Herbert Sauren, “Die Kleidung Der Götter,” *Visible Religion* 2 (1984): 95-117.

¹⁹ Lise Manniche, “The Body Colours of Gods and Man in Inland Jewellery and Related Objects from the Tomb of Tutankhamun,” *AcOr* 43 (1982): 10. On the color of the god’s skin as indicative of its status and role, with the sapphiric-bodied deity as ‘king of the gods’ v. Gay Robins, “Color Symbolism,” in *The Ancient Gods Speak: A Guide to Egyptian Religion* (ed. Donald B. Redford; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 58-9; Monika Dolińska, “Red and Blue Figures of Amun,” *Varia aegyptiaca* 6 (1990):3-7. On the association of a deities skin color and character see also John Baines, “Color Terminology and Color Classification: Ancient Egyptian Color Terminology and Polychromy,” *American Anthropologists* 87 (1985): 284.

²⁰ On the ANE cult of divine images v. Neal H. Walls, ed., *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East* (American Schools of Oriental Research Books Series 10; Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2005); Michael B. Dick, ed., *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1999); idem, “The Relationship between the Cult Image and the Deity in Mesopotamia,” in *Intellectual Life of the ancient Near East: Papers Presented at the 43rd Rencontre assyriologique internationale, Prague, July 1-5, 1996* (ed. Jiří Prosecký; Prague: Oriental Institute, 1998) 11-16.

²¹ On the materials used for the construction of divine images v. Victor Hurowitz, “What Goes In Is What Comes Out – Materials for Creating Cult Statues” in *Text and Artifact – Proceedings of the Colloquium of the Center for Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania, April 27-29, 1998* (ed. G. Beckman and T.J. Lewis; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006). My thanks to professor Hurowitz for providing a manuscript copy of this work.

²² Gay Robins, “Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt,” in Walls, *Cult Image*, 6; idem, “Color Symbolism,” 60; Dimitri Meeks, “Divine Bodies,” in Dimitri Meeks and Christine Favard-Meeks, *Daily Life of the Egyptian Gods* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996) 57.

²³ Ad de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery* (Amsterdam and London: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1974) 39 s.v. Beard; Marten Stol, “The Moon as Seen by the Babylonians,” in *Natural Phenomena: Their Meaning, Depiction and Description in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Diederik J.W. Meijer; North-Holland, Amsterdam, 1992) 255. On lapis lazuli as “solidified celestial light” see Robins, “Color Symbolism,” 60. On rays of light emanating from the divine hair pores see for example the Mahābhārata 5.129.11 which mentions “rays of light, like the sun’s, [shining] from [Kṛṣṇa’s] very pores.” Trans. James W. Lane, *Visions of God: Narratives of Theophany in the Mahābhārata* (Vienna 1989) 134. On ANE parallels see e.g. the hymn to the god Ninurta: “O Lord, your face is like the sun god...the lashes of your eyes are rays of the sun god.” Trans. T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven, 1976) 235-236; Parpola, *Sky-Garment*, 74.

²⁴ See e.g. Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* (III, 115a, 7) who quotes from Porphyry’s lost *Concerning Images* concerning the Egyptian deity Kneph: “The Demiurge, whom the Egyptians call Cneph, is of human form, but with a skin of dark blue, holding a girdle and a scepter, and crowned with a royal wing on his head.” Trans. E.H. Grifford, 1903.

²⁵ John Baines, *Fecundity Figures: Egyptian Personification and the Iconology of a Genre* (Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips and Chicago: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1985) 139-142.

²⁶ See e.g. the black skin of the Egyptian deity Min, the sapphiric “creator god *par excellence*.” Robert A. Armour, *Gods and Myths of Ancient Egypt* (Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 1986, 2001) 157; Veronica Ions, *Egyptian Mythology* (Middlesex: The Hamlyn Publishing Group Ltd., 1968) 110. While Min was associated with a white bull in New Kingdom Panopolis and Coptos it seems that at an earlier period in Heliopolis he was associated with the black bull Mnevis. See G.D. Hornblower, “Min and His Functions,” *Man* 46 (1946): 116. On Min and black bovins see also H. Gauthier, *Les personnel du dieu Min* (Le Caire, 1931; IFAO. Recherches d’Archéologie 2) 55-57. On the mythological significance of the black bovine skin see especially René L. Vos, “Varius Coloribus Apis: Some Remarks of the Colours of Apis and Other Sacred Animals,” in *Egyptian Religion: The Last Thousand Years, Part 1. Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Jan Quaegebeur* (ed. Willy Clarysse, Antoon Schoors and Harco Willems; Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oosterse Studies, 1998) 709-18.

black bovine was associated with the black primordial waters from which the creator-god emerged;²⁸ it thus came to symbolize the material body that the creator-god will don, the black skin of the bovine signaling the black skin of the deity.²⁹ We should probably imagine the light of the ‘golden flesh’ passing through the hair-pores of the divine black skin producing the sapphiric ‘surrounding splendor.’ The black bull, Ad de Vries informs us, “mediated between fire (gold) and water (lapis lazuli), heaven and earth (inserts original)”.³⁰

Now Jewish myth owes a great deal to the mythology of the ANE.³¹ Ancient Israel stood in linguistic, cultural and religious continuity with her neighbors in the Levant.³² Morton Smith suggested in a classic article that Israel participated in “the common theology of the ancient Near East.”³³ However ill-defined this concept of an ANE ‘common theology,’ it is clear that the god(s) of Israel and the gods of the ANE actually differed less than has been supposed.³⁴ It would therefore not surprise to discover that Israel

²⁷ The bull represented potency, fecundity, and primordial materiality, all essential characteristics of the creator-deity. On the creator deity and the bull v. Vos, “Varius Coloribus Apis,” 715; Harold Bayley, *The Lost Language of Symbolism: An Inquiry into the Origin of Certain Letters, Words, Names, Fairy-Tales, Folklore, and Mythologies* (2 vols.; London: Williams and Norgate, 1912) I:323-4. On the symbolism of the bull see further Michael Rice, *The Power of the Bull* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); Jack Randolph Conrad, *The Horn and the Sword. From the Stone Age to modern times – the worship of the Bull, God of power and fertility*. (New York: E P Dutton and Company Inc., 1957). On the ‘attribute animal’ in ANE religion see Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: the One and the Many* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982)109-25; P. Amiet, *Corpus des cylindres de Ras Shamra-Ougarit II: Sceaux-cylindres en hematite et pierres diverses* (Ras Shamra-Ougarit IX; Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1992) 68.

²⁸ Askö Parpola, “New correspondences between Harappan and Near Eastern glyptic art,” *South Asian Archaeology* 1981, 181 suggests that ‘the dark buffalo bathing in muddy water was conceived as the personification of the cosmic waters of chaos’. See also W.F. Albright who noted that “the conception of the river as mighty bull is common”: “The Mouth of the Rivers,” *AJSL* 35 (1991): 167 n.3. The black bull (*k’km*) of Egypt, Apis, personified the waters of the Nile which was regarded as a type of Nu, the dark, primeval watery mass out of which creation sprang: see Émile Chassinat, “La Mise a Mort Rituelle D’Apis,” *Recueil de travaux relatifs a la philologie et a l’archeologie égyptiennes et assyriennes* 38 (1916) 33-60; E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead (The Papyrus of Ani). Egyptian Text Transliterated and Translated* [New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1967] cxxiii). On the black bull and the black waters of creation see also Vos, “Varius Coloribus Apis,” 715, 718.

²⁹ See Dieter Kessler, “Bull Gods,” in Redford, *Ancient Gods Speak*, 30. In one description of the Babylonian *kalū*-ritual the slaying and skinning of the sacrificial bull, ‘black as asphalt,’ is mythologized as the god Bēl’s slaying and flaying of the god Anu, whose characteristic attribute animal was the black bull. See Alasdair Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2007) 117 (VAT 10099); Werner Daum, *Ursemitische Religion* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1985) 204. This association between divine and bovine skin is made in Indic tradition as well. See for example *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* 3, 1, 2, 13-17. This divine skin/bovine skin identity is further illustrated by the chromatic assonance between the black skinned deity Yamā, the primordial god-man, and his *vāhana* (animal attribute/vehicle) the black buffalo. See P. van Bosch, “Yama-The God on the Black Buffalo,” in *Commemorative Figures* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1982) 21-64; Parpola, *Sky-Garment*, 64-71. See also the black-skinned Osiris, called the ‘big Black Bull,’ and his earthly representative, the black bull Apis. On the black-skinned Osiris as ‘big, Black Bull’ see Vos, “Varius Coloribus Apis,” 716; idem, “Apis,” *DDD* 70.

³⁰ *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery* 69 s.v. Bull.

³¹ Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), lxiii; Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (New York: Oxford, 2003).

³² Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (2nd Edition; Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2002) 19-31; Michael David Coogan, “Canaanite Origins and Lineage: Reflections on the Religion of Ancient Israel,” in *Ancient Israelite religion: essays in honor of Frank Moore Cross* (ed. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) 115-124; John Day, “Ugarit and the Bible: Do They Presuppose the Same Canaanite Mythology and Religion?” in *Ugarit and the Bible: proceedings of the International Symposium on Ugarit and the Bible, Manchester, September 1992* (ed. George J. Brooke, Adrian H.W. Curtis and John F. Healey; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1994) 35-52.

³³ “The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East,” *JBL* 71 (1952): 135-147.

³⁴ Bernhard Lang, *The Hebrew God: Portrait of an Ancient Deity* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2002); Nicholas Wyatt, “Degrees of Divinity: Some mythical and ritual aspects of West Semitic kingship,” *UF* 31 (1999): 853-87; Edward L. Greenstein, “The God of Israel and the Gods of Canaan: How Different were they?” *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of*

participated in this Blue Body Divine tradition. We hope to demonstrate here that, indeed, a sapphiric-bodied Yahweh was an important feature of post-biblical Jewish (esoteric) tradition.³⁵ Divine polymorphism is attested in a number of haggadic and midrashic texts³⁶; one of the several forms the God of Israel can assume is apparently that of a dark blue *anthropos*. What is the significance of this divine sapphiric body? What is its relation to the more widely attested luminous *kābôd*? These questions we hope to answer in the following. We find evidence of Blue Body Divine speculation in apocalyptic, rabbinic, and Heikhalot literatures. We do not suggest that there is any historical continuity or connection between the various traditions of speculation evinced in these disparate literatures (though such may be possible in some cases), only mythological. This myth of the blue-bodied deity, which may go back to biblical times, confirms Israel's participation in the ANE mythological tradition.

2. Yahoel and the Divine Body

In the Jewish document *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, believed to have been written sometime during the first or early second century,³⁷ we meet what appears to be a most exalted angel named Yahoel, sent by God to lead the patriarch on a journey to heaven. Yahoel introduces himself as “a power through the medium of his (i.e., God's) ineffable name in me (10:3-9).”

And I (Abraham) stood up and saw him who had taken my right hand (Yahoel) and set me on my feet. The appearance of his body was like sapphire, and the aspect of his face was like crysolite, and the hair of his head like snow. And a kidaris (was) on his head, its look that of a rainbow, and the clothing of his garments (was) purple; and a golden staff (was) in his right hand. And he said to me, “Abraham...Let my appearance not frighten you, nor my speech trouble your soul. (11:1-6).”

The exact nature and identity of this angel has been the subject of significant disagreement. Is Yahoel merely an exalted angel, ontologically distinct from the divine³⁸? Is he the result of a “bifurcation” within

Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, July 29-August 5, 1997, Division A (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1999) 47-58; J. J. M. Roberts, “Divine Freedom and Cultic Manipulation in Israel and Mesopotamia,” in idem, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Collected Essays* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2002) 72-85; E. Theodore Mullen, Jr. *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 24; Chico: Scholars Press, 1980).

³⁵ We hope to treat biblical tradition in another writing.

³⁶ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 33-41; Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, “Polymorphie divine et transformations d'un mythologème: L'«Apocryphon de Jean» et ses sources,” *VC* 35 (1981): 412-34; Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977) 33-59.

³⁷ R. Rubinkiewicz, “Apocalypse of Abraham (First to Second Century A.D.),” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; ed. James H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1983) 683-93; idem, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham* (Lublin: Société des Lettres et des Sciences de l'Université Catholique de Lublin, 1987).

³⁸ As argued e.g. by Peter R. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 53ff; Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) 79ff.

the Godhead-i.e., is he an aspect of God that has been split from God and personified³⁹? Is he the personification of the Divine Name itself or the Divine Glory⁴⁰? Or is he God himself, maybe in his “Angel of the Lord” disguise⁴¹? The text shows a tension between the first and the last suggestions. First, Yahoel’s very name is twice-theophoric, composed of both Yahweh (*Yahu*) and El (*’El*). In 17:13, this turns out to be God’s very name, as is the case in the *Apocalypse of Moses* 29.4 and 33.5. This seems to be accounted for, however, in 10:3, where we are told that he and God are of the same name and (10:8) that the ineffable name dwells in him.⁴² This may identify Yahoel with the Name-bearing Angel who personifies the divine Name and mediates God’s divine presence to creation.⁴³ The confusion between God and this Name-bearing Angel is rooted in the patriarchal יהוה מלאך tradition. This “Angel of the Lord” seems to be God himself manifest in a non-lethal, and therefore humanly accessible, human form; it is this “angelomorphic God,” to use Charles Gieschen’s term, whom humans encounter during theophanies.⁴⁴

That Yahoel was understood as God’s anthropomorphic form is suggested by the physical description given of him by Abraham. He came “in the likeness of a man,” an obvious allusion to Ezekiel’s vision of God “in the appearance of the likeness of a man (1:27).”⁴⁵ Yahoel is further connected with God’s anthropomorphic Glory in Ezekiel through his turban that is “like a rainbow (11.3).” This brings to mind Ezekiel 1:28 where God’s Glory is said to be “like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day.”⁴⁶ That the author had Ezekiel on his mind is clear from the description of the (empty) divine throne (18:3ff); it is transparently modeled off of the throne-chariot upon which Ezekiel’s man-like deity sat (1:4-26).⁴⁷ Another possible mark of divinity is Yahoel’s hair that is “like snow (11.2).” This might associate Yahoel with the Ancient

³⁹ Christopher Rowland, “The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature,” *JSJ* 10 (1979): 137-154; idem, “The Vision of the Risen Christ in Rev. i. 13 ff.: The Debt of an Early Christology to an Aspect of Jewish Angelology,” *JTS* 31 (1980): 1-11; idem, *Open Heaven*, 101-04; idem, “A Man Clothed in Linen: Daniel 10.6ff. and Jewish Angelology,” *JSNT* 24 (1985): 99-110.

⁴⁰ Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 196; Fossum, *Name of God*, 318f; Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 142ff.

⁴¹ As argued by David B. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul’s Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1992) 170-173.

⁴² According to Andrei Orlov “Yahoel can be seen as both a manifestation and a nonmanifestation of the divine name”: “Praxis of the Voice: The Divine Name Tradition in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*,” *JBL* 127 (2008): 63.

⁴³ Hugo Odeberg, *3 Enoch or The Hebrew Book of Enoch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928; repr. New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1973) 139, 144.

⁴⁴ Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 55. On the Angel of the Lord tradition see further and anthropomorphism v. David D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), Chap. 1; *DDD*, s.v. “Angel of Yahweh,” by S. A. Meier, 53-58; James L. Kugel, *The God of old: inside the lost world of the Bible* (New York: Free Press, 2003) 5-36; James Barr, “Theophany and Anthropomorphism in the Old Testament,” *VTSup* 7 (1959): 31-38.

⁴⁵ Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 144; Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 102f.

⁴⁶ Rowland, “The Vision of the Risen Christ” 7; Fossum, *Name of God*, 320.

⁴⁷ Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 102f; Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980) 56-57.

of Days of Daniel's vision (7:9) whose hair was similarly described.⁴⁸ But the most definitive mark of divinity is surely found in 11.2: "The appearance of his body was like sapphire." As we discovered above, in ANE tradition such a body was reserved for the most important deities. Thus, as Andrew Chester observed, "at the very least it can be said that the angel Iaoel is portrayed in terminology usually reserved for God alone."⁴⁹ This would include this sapphiric body for, as Andrei Orlov puts it, Yahoel is "a representation of the divine body."⁵⁰

Yahoel of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* suggests that Israel inherited, or at least participated in this blue body divine tradition. His sapphiric body marks him as a divinity, and the cumulative evidence argues in favor of identifying him with the God of Israel. But in the *Apocalypse* Yahoel is clearly not simply God.⁵¹ He worships God (17:2) and he is specifically called an angel (10:5, 12.1, etc.). Two things seem certain here (1) Yahoel is currently not the divinity in the extant text of the *Apocalypse* and (2) at some point in the early transmission of the myth of Yahoel, if not the text of the *Apocalypse*, he was identified with the God of Israel or at least his manifest form.⁵² His apparently reduced status in the *Apocalypse* may be evidence of early efforts to suppress the widespread tradition of God's hypostatic form, as C.R.A. Morray-Jones has argued.⁵³ We have already witnessed such a fall with Metatron and Akatriel, both of whom started their careers as hypostatic forms of God, but ended as demoted archangels.⁵⁴ Orlov has quite convincingly

⁴⁸ Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 144; Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 54; Andrew Chester, "Jewish Messianic Expectations and Mediatorial Figures and Pauline Christology," in *Paulus und das antike Judentum* (ed. Martin Hengel and Ulrich Hechel; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991) 52; Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts*, 171 n. 375. But cf. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 80.

⁴⁹ "Jewish Messianic Expectations," 53.

⁵⁰ Orlov, "Praxis of the Voice," 63.

⁵¹ Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 56-58; Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 83ff. On this ambiguity see especially Orlov, "Praxis of the Voice," 62-63.

⁵² M. Scopell notes: "Yaoel n'est autre que le Tétragramme": "Youel et Barbélo dans le Traité de *L'allogène*," in *Colloque International sur Les Textes de Nag Hammadi* (ed. Bernard Barc; Quebec, Canada: Les Presses de L'Université Laval, 1981) 377. See also P.S. Alexander, "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," *Journal of Jewish studies* 28 (1977): 161. Yahoel carried the appellation "little Yahweh (יהוה הקטן)," which "is evidently meant to denote this being as the lesser manifestation of, the second to, the (inscrutable) Deity (the First Mystery)." Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 189; Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965) 43; idem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (3rd ed.: New York: Schocken Books, 1961 [1954]) 68-70. Gedaliah Stroumsa interprets the early Yahoel as "God's archangelic hypostasis," by which he means the hypostatic form of God: "Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ," *HTR* 76 (1983): 278.

⁵³ C.R.A. Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkabah Tradition," *JJS* 43 (1992): 9-11; See also idem, "The Body of Glory."

⁵⁴ Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism"; idem, "Hekhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition: Alexander's Three Test Cases," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 22 (1991): 1-39; Nathaniel Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate: angelic vice regency in late antiquity* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999) Chapter Four; Daniel Abrams, "The Boundaries of Divine Ontology: The Inclusion and Exclusion of Metatron in the Godhead," *HTR* 87 (1994): 291-321; idem, "From Divine Shape to Angelic Being: The Career of Akatriel in Jewish Literature," *The Journal of Religion* 76 (1996): 43-63.

argued that the *Apocalypse* evidences a subtle ‘anticorporeal’ polemic against divine body traditions.⁵⁵ This would well account for Yahoel’s ambivalent “God...not God” role in the Slavonic pseudepigraphon.

3. *Shi’ur Qomah: Measure of the (Dark) Body Divine*

Gershom Scholem suggested that Yahoel in the *Apocalypse* was part of a Jewish esoteric tradition.⁵⁶ That an esoteric doctrine regarding a sapphire-like Divine Body was part of post-biblical Jewish esoterica is demonstrated by the *Shi’ur Qomah* tradition. Literally “measure of the [divine] stature,” the *Shi’ur Qomah* texts graphically enumerate the astronomical measurements of the limbs and body parts, as well as their secret names, of a divine anthropos called *Yôṣer Bēre’sît*, “creator of the beginning,” i.e. demiurge. The extant recensions of these texts are generally dated to the Geonic period (ca 7th century),⁵⁷ but Gershom Scholem has demonstrated that the tradition itself probably dates to the Tannaic period (ca. 2nd century C.E.).⁵⁸ Howard Jackson and C.R.A. Morray-Jones have supplemented Scholem’s evidence.⁵⁹ Thus an early second-century date for the *mythologoumenon*, if not the texts, is likely.

The bold anthropomorphism found in the *Shi’ur Qomah* texts proved scandalous to both medieval Jewish rationalists and some modern scholars.⁶⁰ Alexander Altmann famously dubbed it “the most obnoxious document of Jewish mysticism”⁶¹ and Joseph Dan could only accept the gigantic figures and unintelligible names as proof that the anonymous author’s intent was *anti-anthropomorphism* via *reductio ad absurdum*.⁶² Besides historical-critical issues, the main problem regarding the *Shi’ur Qomah* literature, as Dan remarked, is whether “shi’ur qomah” concerns a demiurge ontologically distinct from a putatively

⁵⁵ Orlov, “Praxis and the Divine Voice”; idem, “‘The Gods of My Father Terah’: Abraham the Iconoclast and the Polemics with the Divine Body Traditions in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 18 (2008): 33-53.

⁵⁶ *Jewish Gnosticism*, 42.

⁵⁷ Martin Samuel Cohen, *The Shi’ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983) 52ff; idem, *The Shi’ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions* (Tübingen, 1985); Pieter W. van der Horst, “The Measurement of the Body: A Chapter in the History of Ancient Jewish Mysticism,” in *Effigies Dei: Essays on the History of Religions* (ed. Dirk van der Plas; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987) esp. 57-58.

⁵⁸ Scholem’s major discussions on *Shi’ur Qomah* include *Major Trends*, 63-67; “Shiur Komah,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica* 14 (1972): 1417-1419; *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts of the Kabbalah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1991); *On the Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987) 20-4; *Jewish Gnosticism*, 36-42; *Kabbalah*, 16-17.

⁵⁹ Howard Jackson, “The Origins and Development of *Shi’ur Qomah* Revelation in Jewish Mysticism,” *JSJ* 31 (2000): 373-415; Morray-Jones, “The Body of the Glory,” 99-102.

⁶⁰ For medieval reactions to *Shi’ur Qomah* v. A. Altman, “Moses Narboni’s ‘Epistle on *Shi’ur Qomā*.’ A Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text with an Introduction and an Annotated Translation,” in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (ed. Alexander Altmann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967) 225-288.

⁶¹ Altman, “Moses Narboni’s ‘Epistle on *Shi’ur Qomā*,” 239.

⁶² Joseph Dan, “Shi’ur Komah,” in idem, *The Ancient Jewish Mysticism* (Tel-Aviv: MOD Books, 1993) 74f; idem, “The Concept of Knowledge in the *Shi’ur Qomah*,” in *Studies in Jewish and Intellectual History, presented to Alexander Altmann* (ed. Siegfried Stein and Raphael Loewe; University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1979) 67-73.

invisible, ineffable High God, or whether it concerns the High God itself.⁶³ Dan argued for the former.⁶⁴ Following the lead of such medieval thinkers as Moses Narboni (14th cent.), some scholars argue that the measured body belongs to a hypostatic angel or a “created glory.”⁶⁵ Most commentators, however, seem to accept that it is in fact God’s body who is here enthroned and measured; that in some paradoxical way *deus absconditus* and *deus revelatus* were one and the same.⁶⁶ In any case, what is certain is that the measured anthropomorphic divinity is the creator, whatever his relation to the “High-God.”⁶⁷

The demiurgic anthropos of the *Shi’ur Qomah* tradition is attributed incomprehensibly gigantic limbs. Divine gigantism is likewise presupposed in some biblical texts (E.g. Is. 6:1-3, 66: 11). But measurements and secret names is not the only information we get on the body divine. In a passage often commented on, but never truly elucidated, we read:

גוייתו כתרשיש
ופניו וזיווהי מבהיק ונהיר מתוך החשך וענן והערפל שמקיפין אותו

His body is like *taršiš*.
And His face and the splendor thereof shine forth and give light from within the cloud of thick darkness⁶⁸ that surrounds Him.⁶⁹

Commentators have generally refrained from proffering interpretations of “His body is like *taršiš*.” This is a clear allusion to the description of the exalted being seen by Daniel (Dan. 10:5-6; “I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like *taršîš*, his

⁶³ Dan, “Shi’ur Komah,” 71. On evidence in the texts themselves of a debate over the relation of the measured anthropos and the High God see Daniel Abrams, “The Dimensions of the Creator-Contradiction or Paradox? Corruptions and Accretions to the Manuscript Witnesses,” *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 5 (2000): 35-53.

⁶⁴ See also idem, “The Concept of Knowledge in the *Shi’ur Qomah*,” 67-73.

⁶⁵ Stroumsa, “Form(s) of God,” 277ff; Fossum, “Jewish-Christian Christology and Jewish Mysticism,” 262; Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Gnostic Imagination. Gnosticism, Mandaism and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995) 88ff; idem, *Guardians of the Gate*, 43ff. On Scholem’s ambiguous position v. Abrams, “Dimensions of the Creator,” 35-38; Deutsch, *Gnostic Imagination*, 60ff. C.R.A. Morray-Jones understands the figure to be the “embodied form of God’s Name,” i.e. the *kābôd* which, though distinct from “God as He exists in Himself,” is not discontinuous with the divine identity. See Morray-Jones, “Transformational Mysticism,” 2f; idem, “Body of Glory,” 103. On Metatron and the *Shi’ur Qomah* tradition v. Elliot R. Wolfson, “Metatron and Shi’ur Qomah in the Writings of Haside Ashkenaz,” in *Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism. International Symposium Held in Frankfurt a.M. 1991* (ed. Karl Erich Grözinger and Joseph Dan; Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995) 60-92; idem, *Through a Speculum*, 214-216.

⁶⁶ van der Horst, “Measurement of the Body,” 66; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* 213; Naomi Janowitz, “God’s Body: Theological and Ritual Roles of *Shi’ur Qomah*,” in *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective* (ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) 183-201; Chernus, “Visions of God,” 141-115; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 85-87, 107-108; Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) 149-150.

⁶⁷ Dan, “The Concept of Knowledge in the *Shi’ur Qomah*,” 71; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 89.

⁶⁸ Lit. “from within the darkness, and cloud, and ‘*ārāpel* that surrounds him.” The latter term has a basic meaning of “(thick) darkness”; *TDOT* 11:371 s.v. ערפל by Mulder; Chaim Cohen, “The Basic Meaning of the Term ערפל ‘Darkness’,” *Hebrew Studies* 36 (1995): 7-12.

⁶⁹ *Synopse* § 949 in *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (ed. Peter Schafer, Margarete Schlüter and Hans Georg von Mutius; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1981).

face like lightning...”), but what does it mean in Daniel? David Halperin glossed Daniel’s statement with “whatever that means.”⁷⁰ The difficulty lies in the Hebrew term itself. *Taršīš* is used in the Bible to designate a geographical location (Jer 10:9; Ezek 27:12; 38:13), a precious stone (Exod 28:20; 39:13; Ezek 28:13; Cant 5:14), and a proper name (Gen 10:4; I Chr 1:7).⁷¹ The term is sometimes taken as a cognate of the Akkadian *rašāšu*, “to be smelted,” and meaning “refinery,” but this is unlikely.⁷² As a stone, the term is usually translated either as the sea-blue beryl (Targum Onqelos *ad* Exod. 28:20; 39:13, AV, RV, JB) or chrysolite (LXX, Quinta and Sexta, Aquila, Vulgate, RIV). The latter term is taken to designate Spanish topaz, a yellow rock-crystal. On the assumption that the geographic Tarshish is to be identified with Tartessus in Spain, where chrysolite is found and not beryl, some scholars assume the former is the correct stone.⁷³ Thus, the *BDB* defines *taršīš* as “yellow jasper or other gold-colored stone.”⁷⁴ But the identification Tarshish/Tartessus is unsound.⁷⁵ The most we can state with confidence is that “The location of Tarshish is uncertain, since the biblical references are vague and apparently contradictory.”⁷⁶

On the other hand, strong arguments have been advanced suggesting that *taršīš* has the meaning “sea-like.” The Targums (Onqelos, Jonathan) often translate the term by “sea,” and Jerome informs us in his commentary on Isaiah 2:16 that he had been told by his Jewish teachers that the Hebrew word for “sea” was *taršīš*. While Sidney Hoenig understood the term “throughout the entire Bible” as a general expression for ‘sea,’⁷⁷ Cyrus Gordon notes that, when designating the jewel, it signifies the color of the sea in particular, as already perceived by *Tg. Ong.* (Exod. 28:20; 39:13).⁷⁸ Gordon argued that the term is from a

⁷⁰ Halperin, *Faces*, 75.

⁷¹ For a look at these various occurrences and some possible etymologies v. Federic W. Bush and David W. Baker, *ABD* 6:331-333, s.v. “Tarshish (Person),” “Tarshish (Place).”

⁷² *Encyclopedia Judaica* 15:825, s.v. “Tarshish”; W.F. Albright, “New Light on the Early History of Phoenician Colonization,” *BASOR* 83 (1941): 14-21, esp. 21. See Cyrus Gordon’s arguments against this etymology in “The Wine-Dark Sea,” *JNES* 37 (1978): 52.

⁷³ G.R. Driver argues for instance: “The Targum’s ‘beryl’ ...cannot stand if the name means ‘the stone of Tarshish’ and Tarshish is Tartessus in Spain, since beryl is not found there.” *Dictionary of the Bible*, 497, s.v. “Jewels and Precious Stones”. For arguments supporting the identification of Tarshish with Tartessus v. M. Elat, “Tarshish and the Problem of Phoenician Colonization in the Western Mediterranean,” *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 13 (1982): 55-69.

⁷⁴ The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (1906; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996; hereafter *BDB*) 1076 s.v. תַּרְשִׁישׁ, followed by *IDB* 4:517, s.v. “Tarshish,” by B.T. Dahberg; *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1979-; hereafter *ISBE*) IV:733, s.v. “Tarshish,” by W.S. Lasor.

⁷⁵ Arcadio del Castillo, “Tarshish in the Esarhaddon Inscription and the Book of Genesis,” *Bibbia E Oriente* 222 (2004): 193-206; Gösta W. Ahlström, “The Nora Inscription and Tarshish,” *MAARAV* 7 (1991): 41-49, esp. 45-49. The Tarshish-as-Tartessus theory was already refuted in 1894 by P. Le Page Renouf, “Where was Tarshish?” *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 16 (1894): 104-108, 138-141.

⁷⁶ *Encyclopedia Judaica* 15:825.

⁷⁷ Sidney B. Hoenig, “Tarshish,” *JQR* 69 (1979): 181-182; See also *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (12 vols.; New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Company 1901-) 11:65, s.v. “Tarshish,” by M. Sel.

⁷⁸ Gordon, “The Wine-Dark Sea,” 51: “That the *taršīš* gem is translated ‘color of the sea’ indicates that *taršīš* literally designates a color.”

qaṭlil formation of the denominative root *trš*, “wine” or “wine-dark,” signifying the wine-dark sea.⁷⁹ This seems correct, but the association of this term with the sea suggests a dark blue, not a dark red as Gordon supposes.⁸⁰ It is therefore more likely that *taršīš* refers to the sea-blue beryl.⁸¹

That this interpretation of our *Shi'ur Qomah* passage is correct is confirmed by lines from certain 'Avodah piyyutim (sing. piyyut), liturgical poems written (mainly) between the fourth and seventh centuries. These poets show some knowledge of *Shi'ur Qomah* tradition. Thus, in the anonymous piyyut called *Attah Konanta 'Olam me-Rosh*, “You established the world from the Beginning,” we find a description of the high priest in his blue robe that exactly parallels our *Shi'ur Qomah* passage:

His likeness is like *taršīš*,
Like the look of the firmament
When he puts on the blue robe,
Woven like a honeycomb. (line 103)⁸²

Draped in his blue robe, the high priest's likeness is like that of *taršīš*. “His body is like *taršīš*” would thus mean that the demiurge's body is a dark blue body.

Some midrashic passages understand *taršīš* in Dan 10:6 as a reference to a long sea and therefore as an indication of the great size of the angels.⁸³ This certainly works well with the gigantism of *Shi'ur Qomah*, but most commentators, rightly it seems to me, assume that the stone is in view here.⁸⁴ Naomi Janowitz insightfully observed that the Divine Body of *Shi'ur Qomah* seems to be “made of the mysterious element ‘tarshish’.”⁸⁵ This mysterious element is undoubtedly that ‘mysterious substance that robes the Eternal himself,’ i.e. sapphire. Morray-Jones has tried to demonstrate the existence of a possibly second-third

⁷⁹ Gordon (52) challenges W.F. Albright's derivation of the term from a *taqṭil* form of *ršš* “to smelt.”

⁸⁰ Gordon understands the term to signify a “wine-red” hue (“The Wine-Dark Sea,” 52), but this is unsupported and unnecessary. A “wine-blue” is likely intended here. A reference to “wine of *Kh*” chiseled on an early wine decanter possibly from Judah may be a reference to the color of such wine. A. Demsky argued that the כחל here is a reference to the wine's color: “‘Dark Wine’ from Judah,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 22 (1972): 233-234. In late Hebrew כחול means “blue” and in rabbinic sources a dark shade inclining to black (see e.g. *Num. R.* 2:7). While these are late sources, there is no *a priori* reason to assume that the color connotation has shifted. The association of the wine color with the sea further confirms that dark blue is the intended color.

⁸¹ Athalya Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1982) 166-67; Hoenig, “Tarshish,” 182. Christopher Rowland's description of the angel's body (Dan. 10:6) as “yellow-coloured brightness” should therefore be replaced with “blue-black brightness,” an apparent contradiction to be encountered in rabbinic tradition. Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 466 n. 54.

⁸² See discussion of this passage in Michael D. Swartz, “The Semiotics of the Priestly Vestments in Ancient Judaism,” in, *Sacrifice in Religious Experience* (ed., Albert I. Baumgarten; SHR 93; Boston: Brill, 2002) 77. On piyyutim and *Shi'ur Qomah* tradition v. Martin Samuel Cohen, *Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy* 61-65. On the history of the 'Avodah piyyutim v. Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (1913; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society and New York: Jewish theological Seminary of America, 1993): 219-271.

⁸³ b. Hull.91b; *Gen R.* 68:12. See also M. Mishor, “Taršīš,” *Leshonenu* 34 (1969): 318-319 [Hebrew].

⁸⁴ van der Horst, “Measurement of the Body,” 66; Cohen, *Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy* 209; Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 466 n. 62; Janowitz, “God's Body,” 189, 197 n. 31; Christopher Morray-Jones, *A Transparent Illusion: The Dangerous Vision of Water in Hekhalot Mysticism. A Source-Critical and Tradition-Historical Inquiry* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 211.

⁸⁵ Janowitz, “God's Body,” 189.

century CE *Heikhalot* tradition connected with the enigmatic “Water Episode” found in several *Heikhalot* and rabbinic sources in which the stone *taršīš*-sapphire was understood to be “solid air” with the look of turbulent water.⁸⁶ The substance of this “solidified transparent air” is the stuff from which the heavenly (Torah) tablets, the celestial pavement (firmament), the Throne of Glory, the bodies of angels and, most importantly, the Body Divine is made.⁸⁷ This “stuff of heaven,” Morray-Jones argues, is known scripturally under different designations: ספיר, תרשיש and חשמל.⁸⁸ Whether or not Morray-Jones is correct, *Shi’ur Qomah*’s *taršīš*-bodied demiurge and the *Apoc. Abr.*’s sapphire-bodied Yahoel clearly derive from the same or similar traditions of speculation on the body divine and may have some roots as far back as Mesopotamia,⁸⁹ in which case we would be back at the ANE tradition of the divine sapphiric body.

3.1. Aquatic Bodies

Shi’ur Qomah’s dark blue demiurgic anthropos seems indeed to be rooted in the ANE myth of the sapphiric-bodied deity, and I suspect that the use of the term *taršīš* instead of the traditional sapphire makes the same mythological statement about the deity: association with the primordial waters. As noted above, the sapphiric body of the ANE creator-deity is frequently associated with the sapphiric primordial waters from which he emerged.⁹⁰ Speaking in another context, Morray-Jones noted that the significance of the term *taršīš*, when used of the Divine Body (and other contexts), is its dual meaning: a precious stone and water.⁹¹ I believe this observation is applicable here. The substance of the demiurge’s body connects it (the body)/him (the demiurge) with the primordial waters. We are immediately reminded, not only of the ANE *mythologoumenon*, but also of the various Gnostic myths of the ‘sunken god:’ the deity who, having glanced at and/or descend to the waters below, became engulfed by them and embodied within them.⁹²

⁸⁶ *Transparent Illusion*, *passim*, but esp. 96, 109, 192-214. On the Water Episode in general, see *ibid.*, *passim*; Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate*, 109-123; *idem*, “Dangerous Ascents: Rabbi Akiba’s Water Warning and Late Antique Cosmological Traditions,” *JJTP* 8 (1998): 1-12; R. Reichman, “Die ‘Wasser-Episode’ in der *Hekhalot*-Literatur,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 16 (1989): 67-100 and the sources discussed there.

⁸⁷ *Transparent Illusion*, 90, 89-100, 201, 205-214.

⁸⁸ Morray-Jones, *Transparent Illusion*, 199-214.

⁸⁹ On the possibility of *Shi’ur Qomah* being influenced by Mesopotamian and Egyptian mythology see Arbel, *Beholders of Divine Secrets*, 122-138; *idem*, “Junction of Traditions in Edessa: Possible Interaction Between Mesopotamian Mythological and Jewish Mystical Traditions in the First Centuries CE,” *ARAM* 11-12 (1999-2000): 335-356; Jackson, “Origins.”

⁹⁰ Daumas notes: “Le lapis-lazuli paraît avoir été associé à deux principaux aspects de la nature : la nuit...et l’eau primordiale”.

“Lapis-Lazuli et Régénération,” 465 and *passim*.

⁹¹ *Transparent Illusion*, 212. Morray-Jones is elucidating *Cant. R.* 5.12, on which see below.

⁹² See e.g. the Mandaean demiurge Ptahil (*Right Ginza* III, 98-100); the divine anthropos of the Naassens (Hippolytus, *Ref.* V 6, 3-11); and the divine anthropos of Poimandres (*Corp. Herm.* I 1-32). On the Gnostic myth of the sunken deity see Maria Grazia Lancellotti, *The Naassenes: A Gnostic Identity Among Judaism, Christianity, Classical and Ancient Near Eastern Traditions* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000) 87-120, esp. 110-11; Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion, the Message of the Alien God & the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 62-65, 116-29, 156-65; *idem*, “Response to G. Quispel’s ‘Gnosticism and the New Testament’,” in *The*

Some myths claim that it was not the deity him/herself that ‘sank,’ but the deity’s image (*eidolon*) reflected on the waters.⁹³ This *eidolon*, now possessing an ‘aquatic body,’⁹⁴ becomes the demiurge, routinely identified with the biblical creator god.⁹⁵ According to Gilles Quispel this demiurge-as-*eidolon* motif is a primitive and quite important Jewish Gnostic *mythologoumenon*.⁹⁶ Plotinus’s Gnostics (*Enn.* II, 9.10.3) who show a relation to both Sethians and the ‘Gnōstikoi’ of Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 1.25.6; 29.1.), both of whom seem to be rooted in Jewish tradition,⁹⁷ describe the Demiurge as a dark image (*eidolon*) in matter of

Bible in Modern Scholarship. Papers read at the 100th Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, December 28-30, 1964 (ed. J. Philip Hyatt; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1965) 279-93; Gils Quispel, “The Demiurge in the Apocryphon of John,” in *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis. Papers read at the First International Congress of Coptology (Cairo, December 1976)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978) 7-9; idem, “Gnosticism and the New Testament,” in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, 260.

⁹³ See e.g. Plotinus’ Gnostics (*Enn.* II, 9.10.3) and the (Gnostic) source cited by Basilides in Hegemonius, *Acta Archelai* 67, 7-11. On the relation of this fragment to Gnostic myth v. G. Quispel, “Gnostic Man: The Doctrine of Basilides,” in idem, *Gnostic Studies* (2 vols.; Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1974) 105-107. See also J. Zandee, *The Terminology of Plotinus and of Some Gnostic Writings, Mainly the Fourth Treatise of the Jung Codex* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1961) 17; Gilles Quispel, “Der gnostische Anthropos und die jüdische Tradition,” *Eranos Jahrbuch* 22 (1953): 213.

⁹⁴ See e.g. Plato’s description of the fallen and embodied soul: Plato, *Republic* 611c-612A.

⁹⁵ On the gnostic demiurge and biblical deity see Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, “The Demonic Demiurge in Gnostic Mythology,” in *The Fall of the Angels* (ed. Christoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck; TBNJCT 6; Leiden: Brill, 2004); Simon Pétrement, *A Separate God. The Christian Origins of Gnosticism* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 1990) Chap. I; Ingvald Saelid Gilhus, “The Gnostic Demiurge-An Agnostic Trickster,” *Religion* 14 (1984): 301-310; E. Aydeet Fischer-Mueller, “Yaldabaoth: The Gnostic Female Principle in its Fallenness,” *NovTest* (1990): 79-95; Ioan P. Couliano, *The Tree of Gnosis: Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 1992) Chapt. 4; idem, “The Angels of the Nations and the Origins of Gnostic Dualism,” in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions, presented to Gillel Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (ed. R. van den Broek and M.J. Vermaseren; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981) 78-91; Stevan L. Davies, “The Lion-Headed Yaldabaoth,” *Journal of Religious History* 11 (1981): 495-500; Jarl Fossum, “The Origin of the Gnostic Demiurge,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 61 (1985): 142-52; Nils A. Dahl, “The Arrogant Archon and the Lewd Sophia: Jewish Traditions in Gnostic Revolt,” in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale New Haven, Connecticut, March 28-31, 1978* (2 vols.; ed. Bentley Layton; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981) 2:689-712; Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996) 63-79; idem, “The demonizing of the demiurge: The innovation of Gnostic myth,” in *Innovation in Religious Traditions: Essays in the Interpretation of Religious Change* (ed. Michael A. Williams, Collett Cox, Martin S. Jaffee; Religion and Society Series 31; Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992) 73-107; idem, “The Old Testament God in Early Gnosticism,” MA thesis, Miami University, Ohio, 1970; Howard M. Jackson, *The Lion Becomes Man: The Gnostic Leontomorphic Creator and the Platonic Tradition* (SBLDS 81; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).

⁹⁶ Quispel, “Der gnostische Anthropos,” idem, “Valentinian Gnosis and the Apocryphon of John,” in *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 1:118-29. This motif was no doubt influenced by the Greek myth of Narcissus: see Quispel, “The Demiurge in the Apocryphon of John,” 7-9.

⁹⁷ On Plotinus’s Gnostics and Sethianism see Alastair H.B. Logan, *The Gnostics: Identifying an Early Christian Cult* (London and New York: T. & T. Clark Publishers, 2006) 46-48; Kevin Corrigan, “Positive and Negative Matter in Later Platonism: The Uncovering of Plotinus’s Dialogue with the Gnostics,” in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts* (ed. John D. Turner and Ruth Majercik; SBLSS 12; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) 19-55; John D. Turner, “Gnosticism and Platonism: The Platonizing Sethian Texts from Nag Hammadi in their Relation to Later Platonic Literature,” in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism* (ed. Richard T. Wallis and Jay Bregman; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) 425-59; Birger A. Pearson, “Pre-Valentinian Gnosticism in Alexandria,” in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (ed. Birger A. Pearson et al; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 455-66; idem, “Gnosticism as Platonism: With Special Reference to Marsanes (NHC 10.1),” *HTR* 77 (1984): 55-72; M.J. Edwards, “Neglected Texts in the Study of Gnosticism,” *JTS* 41 (1990): 26-50; idem, “Gnostics and Valentinians in the Church Fathers,” *JTS* 40 (1989): 2647. For an alternative view see Jean Pépin, “Theories of Procession in Plotinus and the Gnostics,” in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, 297-335; Howard M. Jackson, “The Seer Nikotheos and His Lost Apocalypse in the Light of Sethian Apocalypses from Nag Hammadi and the Apocalypse of Elchasai,” *NovTest* 32 (1990): 250-77; J. Igal, “The Gnostics and the ‘Ancient Philosophy’ in Plotinus,” in *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought: Essays in Honour of A.H. Armstrong* (ed. H.J. Blumenthal and R.A. Markus; London: Variorum, 1981): 138-52. For Sethian Gnosticism see John D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* (Québec, Paris: Les Presses de l’Université Laval and Éditions Peeters, 2001); idem, “Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History,” in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, & Early Christianity* (ed. Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson, Jr.; Peabody, MASS: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986) 55-86; H.-M. Schenke, “The Phenomenon of Gnostic Sethianism,” in Layton, *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 588-616. On Jewish traditions in (Sethian) Gnosticism v. P.S. Alexander, “Jewish Elements in Gnosticism and Magic c. CE 70-c. 270,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism, III: The Early Roman Period* (ed. William Horbury, W.D. Davies and John Sturdy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 1052-1059; Kurt Rudolph, “Ein Grundtyp gnostischer Urmensch-Adam-Speculation,” in idem, *Gnosis und spätantike Religionsgeschichte: gesammelte Aufsätze* (NHMS 42; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996) 123-43; Gilles Quispel, “Anthropos and Sophia,” in *Religion im Erbe Ägyptens: Beiträge zur spätantiken*

the (S)oul's reflection. Similarly, for the Docetists of Hippolytus (*Ref.* VIII 9.4-10.1) the creator god of Genesis is an impression in dark matter of a higher light Aeon.⁹⁸ The Mandaean demiurge Ptahil is a reflection in black water of his father Abathur, an *uthra* (divine light-being).⁹⁹ These two figures show some relation to the biblical El (Abathur) and Yahweh (Ptahil).¹⁰⁰

In an important variant of this myth, the biblical creator-god is somatically associated with both the blue waters and firmament. According to Irenaeus' Ophites (*Against the Heretics* I.30) Sophia descended and was entrapped by the waters below, from which she acquired a watery-body. After garnering enough strength ("power from the moisture of light"), she was able to escape from the waters and re-ascend upwards. She then spread herself out as a covering, her (blue) watery-body serving as the visible heaven.¹⁰¹ She finally abandoned this blue celestial, aquatic body, which then became Yaldabaoth, the God of Israel.¹⁰² This heaven/waters/divine body nexus recalls also the magical invocation to the Jewish God found on a

Religionsgeschichte zu Ehren von Alexander Bohlig (ed. Manfred Görg; Ägypten und Altes Testament 14; Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988) 168-85; idem, "Der gnostische Anthropos;" idem, "Ezekiel 1:26 in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosis," *VC* 34 (1980): 1-13; Gedaliahu Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984); Birger A. Pearson, "Jewish Sources in Gnostic Literature," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. Michael E. Stone; Assen and Philadelphia: Van Gorcum, Fortress, 1984) 443-481; idem, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); Madeleine Scopello, "The Apocalypse of Zostrianos (Nag Hammadi VIII.1) and the Book of the Secrets of Enoch," *VC* 34 (1980): 376-385; Francis T. Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth: Jewish Elements in Gnostic Creation Myth* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978); Ithamar Gruenwald, "Jewish Sources for the Gnostic Texts From Nag Hammadi?" *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (3 vols.; Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1975-77) 3:49-52 (=idem, *From Apocalyptic to Gnosticism* [Frankfurt am Main, etc.: Peter Lang, 1988] 207-220). For a negative view see Alastair H.B. Logan, *Gnostic truth and Christian heresy: a study in the history of Gnosticism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); Pétrement, *A Separate God*; Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Jewish Gnosticism? The Prologue of John, Mandaean Parallels, and the Trimorphic Protennoia," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions* (ed. R. van den Broek and M.J. Vermaseren; Leiden: Brill, 1981): 467-97; "The Descent of Ishtar, the Fall of Sophia, and the Jewish Roots of Gnosticism," *TynBull* 29 (1978): 143-75; C.P. Luttikhuisen, "The Jewish Factor in the Development of the Gnostic Myth of Origins: Some Observations," in *Text and Testimony: Essays on New Testament and Apocryphal Literature in Honor of A.F.J. Klijn* (ed. T. Baarda et al; Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1988) 152-61.

⁹⁸ Regarding the Docetic demiurge Couliano notes: "He is the image in Darkness of an aeon whose transcendence has been forever separated from the lower world by the firmament. His substance is Darkness..." *Tree of Gnosis*, 95. On the similarity of the Docetic demiurge to that of Plotinus's Gnostics v. Pépin, "Theories," 320-323.

⁹⁹ *Right Ginza* V 1, 168, 6.

¹⁰⁰ See especially the discussion by Nathaniel Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate*, 94-5; idem, "Abathur: A New Etymology," in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys* (ed. John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane; Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1995) 171-79. On Mandaeanism and Jewish tradition see Deutsch, *Gnostic Imagination*; Jarl Fossum, "The New Religionsgeschichtliche Schule: The Quest for Jewish Christology," *SBL Seminar Papers* 30 (1991): 638-646; Dan Cohn-Sherbok, "The Mandaeans and Heterodox Judaism," *HUCA* 54 (1983): 147-51; idem, "The Alphabet in Mandaean and Jewish Gnosticism," *Rel* 11 (1981): 227-234; Gilles Quispel, "Jewish Gnosis and Mandaean Gnosticism: Some Reflections on the Writing *Bronté*," in *Les Textes de Nag Hammadi. Colloque du Centre d'Histoire des Religions (Strasbourg, 23-25 octobre 1974)* (ed. Jacques-é Ménéard; NHS 7; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975) 82-122. Compare Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1970) 53-67; idem, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences* (London: Tyndale Press, 1973).

¹⁰¹ A.J. Welburn reads this myth as a commentary on the Ophite Diagram described in Origen's *contra Celsum* VI, 24-38. In his reconstruction of the diagram Welburn associates the blue circle (see *contra Celsum* VI, 38) with Sophia's 'watery-body' of the above myth. "Reconstructing the Ophite Diagram," *NovT* 23 (1981): 262-87, esp. 280-87.

¹⁰² Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism*, 203: "her abandoned body fathers the Archon Yaldabaoth"; Tuomas Rasimus, "Ophite Gnosticism, Sethianism and the Nag Hammadi Library," *VC* 59 (2005): 237: "The remains of her body fathered the demiurge Ialdabaoth." On various scholarly derivations of the name 'Yaldabaoth' see Joseph Dan, "Yaldabaoth and the Language of the Gnostics," in *Geschichte, Tradition, Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. Peter Schäfer; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1996) 557-64; Howard M. Jackson, "The Origin in Ancient Incantatory *Voces Magicae* of Some Names in the Sethian Gnostic System," *VC* 43 (1989): 69-79; Matthew Black, "An Aramaic Etymology for Ialdabaoth?" in *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in honour of Robert McL. Wilson* (ed. A.H.B. Logan and A.J.M. Wedderburn; Edinburgh: T&T Clark Limited, 1983), 69-72; Gershom Scholem, "Ialdabaoth Reconsidered," in *Mélanges d'Histoire des Religions offertes à Henri-Charles Puech* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974) 405-421; Robert M. Grant, "The Name Ialdabaoth," *VC* 11 (1957): 148-49.

Greek-Hebrew amulet and in a Greek magical papyrus¹⁰³: “Thou (whose) form is like heaven, like the sea, like darkness/cloud, the All-shaped.”¹⁰⁴

Reflexes of this myth are found in non-Gnostic Jewish sources as well, as pointed out by Halperin.¹⁰⁵

One of the several relevant texts he cites is *Re'uyot Yehezkel* ('Visions of Ezekiel'), a possibly fifth century *merkavah* text.¹⁰⁶ Here Ezekiel's vision of God at the river Chebar (Ez. 1-3) is expanded and interpreted.

The relevant portion reads:

...God opened to Ezekiel the seven subterranean chambers, and Ezekiel looked into them and saw all the celestial entities...

R. Isaac said: God showed Ezekiel the primordial waters that are bound up in the great sea and in layers; as it is written, *Have you come to the layers of the sea* [Job 38:16]. He showed him a mountain underneath the river, by means of which the temple vessels will return.

While Ezekiel was watching, God opened to him seven firmaments and he saw the *Geburah*.¹⁰⁷ They coined a parable: to what may the matter be likened? A man went to a barber-shop, got a haircut, and was given a mirror to look into. While he was looking into the mirror, the king passed by. He saw the king and his forces through the doorway. The barber turned and said to him, 'Turn around and see the king.' He said, 'I have already seen the mirror.'¹⁰⁸ So Ezekiel stood by the river Chebar and looked into the water, and the firmaments were opened to him and he saw God's glory (*kabod*), and the *hayyot*, angels, troops, seraphim, and sparkling-winged ones joined to the *merkavah*. They passed by in the heavens and Ezekiel saw them in the water. So it is written: *At the river Chebar* [Ez. 1:1].¹⁰⁹

Ezekiel sees in the primordial waters the image/reflection of the divine anthropos enthroned¹¹⁰ along with his host. As Halperin has seen and as the parable leaves no room to doubt, behind this haggadah is clearly the myth of the sunken image of the (yet unfallen) deity. Hans Jonas describes this mythic motif:

(The motif) implies the mythic idea of the substantiality of an image, reflection, or shadow as representing a real part of the original entity from which it has become detached...By its nature the Light shines into the Darkness below. This partial illumination of the Darkness..., if it issued from an individual divine figure such as Sophia or Man, is in the nature of a form projected into the dark medium and appearing there as an image or reflection of the divine...though no real descent or fall of the divine original has taken place, something of

¹⁰³ PGM IV. 3065. On the amulet see Josef Keil, "Ein rätselhaftes Amulett," *Wiener Jahreshefte* 32 (1940): 79-84, esp. 80 and Scholem's discussion, *Mystical Shape*, 28.

¹⁰⁴ Our translation. We have modified the translation in order to bring out what we believe is the true sense of this passage. The amulet reads: ουρανοειδη, {θ}σοχοειδη θαλασσοειδη και παντόμορφε which Keil translates "du Himmelsgestaltiger, Meeresgestaltiger, Dunkelgestaltiger, du Allgestaltiger" (80). PGM IV. 3065 reads: ουρανοειδη, θαλασσοειδη, νεφελοειδη, which is translated in Betz as, "[the] skylike, sealike, clouldlike": *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells* (ed. Hans Dieter Betz; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press) 97. See also Adolf Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East. The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-roman World* (trns. Lionel R. M. Strachan; Grand Rapids, Mich.; Baker Book House, 1965) 262. The Betz translation of PGM IV 3065 obscures the obvious morphic focus of the passage. Keil seems right in his translation because the amulet, by adding παντόμορφε, seems to parallel *eidos* and *morphos*.

¹⁰⁵ *Faces*, 211-249. See also Alexander Altmann, "Gnostic Themes in Rabbinic Cosmology," in *Essays In honour of the Very Rev. Dr. J.H. Hertz: Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew congregations of the British Empire: on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, September 25, 1942 (5703)* (ed. I. Epstein, E. Levine and C. Roth; London: Edward Goldston, 1944) 19-32.

¹⁰⁶ On which see also Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 134-141.

¹⁰⁷ "Power," an epithet for God.

¹⁰⁸ *Mar'ah*, a play on *ma'reh*, "vision."

¹⁰⁹ Trans. in Halperin, *Faces*, 230.

¹¹⁰ As Gruenwald noted (*Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 136 n. 7) *Geburah* or 'Power,' and *kabod*, Glory, are interchangeable in this text. In the mystical literature both are often technical terms denoting the divine anthropos upon the *merkavah*. See Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 47-8, 193; Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism," 2-6.

itself has become immersed in the lower world...in this way the divine form...becomes embodied in the matter of Darkness...¹¹¹

The cited parable distinguishes between the king and the king's image seen in the mirror. The customer's declaration, "I have already seen the *mirror (mar'ah)*," is a play on *mar'eh*, "vision/appearance." For him, seeing the image in the mirror is tantamount to seeing the king himself. This word-play also implies some sense of identity between the image and the medium. This identity is explicitly articulated in later mystical and esoteric tradition. In zoharic Kabbalah the *Shekhinah* or God's visible, blue-black body (*Malkhut*) is the "mirror in which another image (i.e. His luminous image, *Tiferet*) is seen, and all the upper images (the *sefirot*) are seen in it"¹¹²; she is also the Sea (*yamah*), the waters in which and through which the divine image can be seen.¹¹³ As the Sea, the zoharic *Shekhinah* is symbolized by blue, which color denotes the luminous presence of the divine image (*Tiferet*) within the dark waters.¹¹⁴ Thus, returning to the *Visions of Ezekiel*, Halperin reasons:

When the *merkabah* appears in the waters, the upper realms are merged into the lower. Ezekiel...looks into 'the subterranean chambers' and sees in them what ought to be in heaven...The paradox of the *merkabah* in the waters...brings the upper world into the nether world; it makes the distinction between *above* and *below* insignificant; it turns the *merkabah*, like any reflection in water, into part of the fluid and shapeless chaos that God once had to defeat...

God had indeed, as the old traditions claimed, suppressed the chaos-waters. But chaos had its revenge. The water, by virtue of its power of reflection, ensnared its enemy's image, assimilated the *merkabah* to itself, and thus infected God with its own formlessness...But Ezekiel saw something else beneath God's throne: *a firmament the color of terrible ice* (Ezekiel 1:22). To the early Jewish expositors, I suggest, this meant that God had frozen solid the terrible waters against which he fought, and thus defeated them. By its fluidity and formlessness, chaos is the enemy of order and structure...the hardening of water into glass symbolizes God's triumph over chaos.¹¹⁵

In the light of Morray-Jones' discussion of *taršiš* we suspect Halperin's reasoning is correct.

3.2. Dark Clouds, Divine Bodies and Rainbows

¹¹¹ *Gnostic Religion*, 162-3.

¹¹² *Zohar* I:149b; MS New York-JTSA mic 1727, fols. 18a-b (quoted in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 273-4. See also *ibid.*, 310-11). On *Shekhinah/Malkhut* as the visible body of see *Zohar* III, 152a; *The Wisdom of the Zohar: an anthology of texts, systematically arranged and rendered into Hebrew* (3 vols.; ed. Fischel Lachower and Isaiah Tishby; trns. David Goldstein; London; Washington: The Littman Library of Jewish civilization, 1991), III:1127 n. 30; Moshe Hallamish, *An Introduction to the Kabbalah* (trans. Ruth Bar-Ilan and Ora Wiskind-Elper; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999) 137. On *Malkhut* and the material body v. also Hopking, *Practical Kabbalah Guidebook*, 25; Hallamish, *Introduction*, 137. On the blue-black color see *Zohar* I, 50b-51b; Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar* III: 1183; Aryeh Kaplan, *The Bahir. Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1989), 153-55; Bokser, "The Thread of Blue," 19-21; Gershom Scholem, "Colours and their Symbolism in Jewish Tradition and Mysticism (Part II)," *Diogenes* 109 (1980): 67. On the *sefirot* v. Arthur Green, *A Guide to the Zohar* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 28-59; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, I:269-307; Elliot K. Ginsburg, "The Image of the Divine and Person in Zoharic Kabbalah," in *In Search of the Divine: Some Unexpected Consequences of Interfaith Dialogue* (ed. Larry D. Shinn; New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1987) 61-87. There are different Kabbalistic conceptions of the *sefirot* and their relation to the divine; v. Idel, *Kabbalah*, 136-153.

¹¹³ *Zohar* I:85b-86a. See Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, I:351; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 239-43.

¹¹⁴ "Malkhut is symbolized by the color blue, because it is the color of the sea into which the rivers (i.e. the *Siferot*) are emptied." Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, I:291.

¹¹⁵ Halperin, *Faces*, 237-8

The continuation of our *Shi'ur Qomah* passage is illuminating: “His body is like *taršiš*. And His Face and the splendor thereof shine forth and give light from within the cloud of thick darkness that surrounds Him.” The “cloud of thick darkness” from within which the splendor of God’s Face, i.e. His luminous anthropomorphic form (*kābôd*), shines forth seems somehow related to the ‘body like *taršiš*,’ though just how is not obvious. The idea that God surrounds his luminance with dark clouds is biblical: ‘He made darkness His covering around him, his canopy thick clouds dark with water. Out of the brightness before him there broke through his clouds hailstones and coals of fire (Ps. 18:12-13).’ In a number of post-biblical texts the cloud has somatic significance. Adam’s pre-lapsarian body, his “garment of light,” was a “cloud of glory.” This cloud of glory, lost after Adam’s sin, will again clothe the elect in the new paradise.¹¹⁶ In a third century Samaritan hymn cycle describing the Sinaitic glorification of Moses, we read: “Exalted be the Prophet, and exalted be his prophethood!...Verily he was clothed with a garment with which no king can clothe himself. Verily he was covered by the cloud and his face was clothed with a ray of light”.¹¹⁷ “Clothed with a garment” is here parallel to “covered with a cloud.” As Jarl Fossum notes: “The cloud functions as an outer garment, as it were.” He argues that “the brilliant garment and the cloud...are variants of the same theme.”¹¹⁸ As he and April De Conick have pointed out as well, garment and cloud here denote the Divine Form or Body with which Adam was initially vested, but lost, and which was regained by Moses on Mt. Sinai: “He (Moses) was vested with the form which Adam cast off in the Garden of Eden; and his face shone up to the day of his death.”¹¹⁹ In kabbalistic tradition, the black rain cloud (וענן חשך) and intense darkness (ערפל) which served as Yahweh’s covering and as the sign of his theophanic presence during the wilderness wandering can be identified with the Shekhina or rather the black ‘divine skin’ veiling the divine luminosity.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ PRE 14.20. On these pre-lapsarian ‘garments of light’ see below. On the cloud as eschatological vestment of glory in Jewish tradition v. Leopold Sabourin, “The Biblical Cloud: Terminology and Traditions,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 4 (1974): 303-04, 309-10.

¹¹⁷ A.E. Cowley, *The Samaritan Liturgy* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1909) 1.40; Jarl Fossum, “Ascensio, Metamorphosis: The ‘Transfiguration’ of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels,” in idem, *The Image of the Invisible God. Essays on the Influence of Jewish Mysticism on Early Christology* (Göttingen/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 74.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 92, 93.

¹¹⁹ *Memar Marqa* 5.4; Fossum, *Name of God*, 92-94; April D. De Conick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996) 159-60. See also the exegesis of the fourth century Origenist Didymus the Blind on Isa. 19:1: “Behold the Lord sat upon a cloud and came into Egypt, and the idols-made-by-hands shook”. It is not to be thought that the Lord escorted [his] body in such a way that [first] he was born upon it [and] then he came into Egypt, an earthly spot. Rather, at the very moment he took bodily form, he was in Egypt.” “Mounting a cloud” is here an allegory for taking bodily form. Quoted from P. Nautin, ed., *Didymus L’Aveugle sur la Genèse I*, SC 233 (Paris: Cerf, 1976) 253-54.

¹²⁰ See sources and discussion in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 243-44, 274-75; Fishbane, *Biblical Myth*, 260-264. On the *Shekhina*’s blackness and divine skin see Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

But what exactly is the relation between the *taršīš*-blue and rain-cloud black? It appears that the former alludes to a blue iridescence produced by the *kābôd's/pānîm*'s presumably white brilliance as it flashes out of the dark cloud-like body. Thus *Synopse* §371: "And around the throne are pure thunder clouds, which give forth lightning flashes like jewels of *taršīš*." The light flashing through the "cloud" therefore has the appearance of *taršīš*. We recall the ANE tradition of sapphire light passing through the hairpits of dark-skinned deities. *Synopse* §371 continues: "As the likeness of them both, sapphire and *taršīš*, thus is the likeness of *hašmal*. It is like the appearance of fire, but it is not fire. Rather, it is like fiery flames of all kinds of colors mixed together, and the eye cannot master their likeness." The sapphire/ *taršīš* blue is here likened to a flame-like substance of "all kinds of colors mixed together". We are now in a better position to understand the rather enigmatic description of the divine glory or its 'surrounding splendor' as similar to a rainbow.¹²¹ As Ezekiel described it: "Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding splendor. This was the appearance of the likeness of the Glory of the Lord (1:28)." Based on this passage a tradition developed regarding God's rainbow-like body: "his body resembles a bow, and the bow is (something) like the semblence of fire..."¹²²

The relationship between the rainbow-like appearance of God described by Ezekiel and the dark, cloud-like body suggested in *Shi'ur Qomah* and Kabbalah is apparently the same as that between a rainbow and a rain cloud. As the cloud acts as a prism, refracting the sunlight and producing the beautiful colors of the rainbow, the "dark body" refracts the luminance of the divine *kābôd/pānîm*, producing a rainbow-like, or alternately, a sapphiric blue, "surrounding splendor (Ezek. 1:28)." As Elliot Wolfson so eloquently put it: "The divine woman (i.e. the *Shekinah*, God's corporeal manifestation) is an 'optical apparatus' that refracts the light and renders the veiled image visible, like a rainbow that is manifest in the covering of the cloud."¹²³ The rainbow-like appearance of the *kābôd's/pānîm*'s surrounding splendor therefore presupposes

2001] 48, 51-53; idem, "Torah: Between Presence and Representation of the Divine in Jewish Mysticism," in *Representation in Religion: Studies in Honor of Moshe Barasch* (ed. Jan Assmann and Albert I. Baumgarten; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 205. Idel uses the term 'divine skin' in reference to the white fire of the anthropomorphic Torah, the 'soul' or internal form (*Tefirot*), if you will. But in as much as the black fire denoted the external form, i.e. the body (see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* [New York: State University of New York Press, 1995] 59: "the [black] letters...comprise the visible form of God"), the term "divine skin" is more appropriate in relation to the black fire.

¹²¹ See also *Gen. R.* 35.3; *Exod. R.* 35.6.

¹²² *Synopse* §367. Thus the *Zohar* interprets the Talmudic dictum not to gaze at a rainbow (*b. Hag.* 16a): "It is forbidden for a person to look at the rainbow, for it is the appearance of the Supernal Image (3:84a)." See also *Gen. R.* 35.3, where "My bow (*qashti*) is read as "My Likeness (*qishuthi*). On the significance of the rainbow in Jewish mysticism v. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, index s.v. "Rainbow;" Halperin, *Faces*, 255-261.

¹²³ *Through a Speculum*, 274. See also *Zohar* II, 23b: "a light that does not shine (*Shekinah*) receives them (i.e. the shining lights), and these lights appear in it, as in a crystal ball against the sun."

the dark, cloud-like body.¹²⁴ This is surely the “crucial property” of the rainbow, rather than its ability to span heaven and earth as Halperin opined.¹²⁵ The rainbow splendor and *taršīš* -blue should therefore be seen as the visual effect of the divine luminance passing through the dark, cloud-like, anthropomorphic veil.

4. The Blue Body Divine in Rabbinic Materials

The origin, time and milieu of composition, and identity of the authors of *Heikhalot* literature are still unresolved issues.¹²⁶ Also unresolved is the relation between *Heikhalot* literature and rabbinic tradition. While some scholars, such as Sholem and Ithamar Gruenwald hold that the literature preserves esoteric traditions of the tannaim and amoraim,¹²⁷ others, such as Ephraim Urbach, Peter Schäfer and David Halperin, emphasizing the differences between rabbinic and *Heikhalot* literatures, argue that the traditions found in the latter are non-rabbinic and even literarily dependent on rabbinic sources.¹²⁸ But the existence of independent, maybe pre-rabbinic traditions that served as sources to the *Heikhalot* authors has been strongly argued and the likelihood some of these traditions provide the context for understanding the talmudic allusions to (possibly) esoteric doctrines is considerable.¹²⁹ We suggest that this is the case here as there are in some rabbinic sources evidence of (esoteric) Blue Body Divine speculation.

¹²⁴ According to *Lev. R.* 23.8 clouds are a prerequisite for a sapphiric blue heaven. Without the clouds, the firmament is clear and free of its “sapphiric” qualities.

¹²⁵ *Faces*, 260-61.

¹²⁶ For a summary of the various views on these questions see Daphna Arbel, *Beholders of Divine Secrets: Mysticism and Myth in the Hekhalot and Merkavah Literature* (Albany, NY.: State University of New York Press, 2003), Chapter One.

¹²⁷ On Scholem see works cited above, n. 53; Ithamar Gruenwald *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*; idem, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*. See also S. Lieberman, “Mišnat Šir ha-Širim,” (Appendix D of Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*); Morton Smith, “Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati,” in *Biblical and Other Studies* (ed. A. Altmann; Cambridge, Mass; Cambridge, 1963) 142-60; I. Chernus, *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1982); Rowland, *Open Heaven*; Alexander, “Historical Setting” (but cf. his reversal “3 Enoch and the Talmud,” *JSJ* 18 [1987]: 40-68).

¹²⁸ Ephraim Urbach, “Ha-Mēšorot ‘al Torat ha-Sod bi-Tēqūphat ha-Tanna’im,” in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Sholem on His Seventieth Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends* (ed. Ephraim Urbach, R.J. Zvi Werblowsky, and Ch. Wirszbuski; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967) 1-28 [Hebrew]; Peter Schäfer, “Tradition and Redaction in Hekhalot Literature,” *JSJ* 14 (1983) 172-181 (reprinted in idem, *Hekhalot-Studien* [Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1988], 8-16); idem, “Merkavah Mysticism and Rabbinic Judaism,” *JAOS* 104 (1984): 537-54; idem, “The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism,” in idem, *Hekhalot-Studien*, 277-295; idem, *Hidden and Manifest God*; David Halperin, *The Merkavah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980); idem, *Faces*, idem, “A New Edition of the Hekhalot Literature,” *JAOS* 104 (1984): 543-52. On the relationship between Hekhalot literature and rabbinic tradition v. also Joseph Dan, “The Religious Experience of the *Merkavah*,” in *Jewish Spirituality*, vol. 1, *From the Bible through the Middle Ages* (ed. Arthur Green; New York: Crossroad, 1986) 289-307; Rachel Elior, “Merkabah Mysticism: A Critical Review,” *Numen* 37 (191990) 233-249; C.R.A. Morray-Jones, “Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition: A Study of the Traditions Concerning *hammerkabab* and *ma’aseh merkabab* in Tannaitic and Amoraic Sources” (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1988); idem, “Hekhalot Literature”; James R. Davila, “The Hekhalot Literature and Shamanism,” *SBL Seminar Papers* 33 (1994): 767-89; idem, *Descenders to the Chariot: The People behind the Hekhalot Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Michael D. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma’aseh Merkavah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992) 211-23; idem, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) 21ff.

¹²⁹ Morray-Jones, “Merkabah Mysticism”; idem, “Hekhalot Literature.”

4.1. Divine Exiles and Sapphiric Bodies

An early piece of evidence of rabbinic Blue Body Divine speculation may be related to the rabbinic *Shekhinta ba-Galuta* (Shekhinah in Exile) tradition.¹³⁰ God went into exile with Israel; he shared in all of her afflictions and, when she is redeemed, so too will he be. In *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, a second century collection of midrashim on the Book of Exodus, we read:

‘Even the Selfsame Day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt (Exod. 12:41).’ The hosts of the Lord are the ministering angels. And so you find that whenever Israel is enslaved the Shekhinah, as it were, is enslaved with them, as it is said: “And they saw the God of Israel; and there was under His feet [the likeness of a pavement of sapphire]”. But after they were redeemed what does it say? “And the like of the very heaven for clearness” (Exod. 24:10). And it also says: “In all their affliction He was afflicted” (Isa. 63:10).¹³¹

Our midrashist here contrasts two divine states: the first, the Shekhinah’s enslavement in Egypt with Israel, is indicated by the sapphire pavement under God’s feet according to Exod. 24:10; the other, God’s own redemption, is indicated by “the like of the very heaven for clearness.” The latter quote, in the biblical text, is actually a description of the sapphire pavement,¹³² but for our midrashist it denotes a separate and contrary divine state. The sapphire pavement is associated with God’s suffering, an important rabbinic motif.¹³³ As commentators have pointed out, the connection between the sapphire stone and Israel’s sojourn in Egypt is made by reading *libnat ha-sappir*, “paved work of sapphire,” as an allusion to *lebenim*, “bricks” (Exod. 1:14), i.e. the brick-work characteristic of Israelite enslavement in Egypt. “(J)ust as Israel below is enslaved by the bricks of Egyptian servitude, so too God has to place bricks (i.e., sapphire stones-WW) beneath his feet.”¹³⁴ When Israel are redeemed, so too will God be redeemed from the sapphiric stones. As

¹³⁰ *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* (hereafter *MRI*), Pisha, § 14; y. *Sukk.* 4.3; *Exod. R.* 30.24; 33.1; *Lev. R.* 23.8; 32.8. See further Norman J. Cohen, “Shekhinta Ba-Galuta: A Midrashic Response to Destruction and Persecution,” *JSJ* 13 (1982): 147-159 and sources cited there. See also Paul Morris, “Exiled From Eden: Jewish Interpretations of Genesis,” in *A Walk in the Garden: Biblical, Iconographical and Literary Images of Eden* (ed. Paul Morris and Deborah Sawyer; JSOTSup 136; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 117-166; Fishbane, *Biblical Myth*, 132-77.

¹³¹ Translation by J.Z. Lauterbach in *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* (3 vols. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933) I: 113.

¹³² It reads in full, “and they saw the God of Israel. Under His feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness (NOAB).”

¹³³ See esp. Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, 36-40; Elliot R. Wolfson, “Divine suffering and the hermeneutics of reading: Philosophical reflections on Lurianic mythology,” in *Suffering Religion* (ed. Robert Gibbs and Elliot R. Wolfson; London and New York: Routledge, 2002) 101-162; Peter Kuhn, *Gottes Selbstniedrigung in der Theologie der Rabbinen* (Munich, 1968); idem, *Gottes Trauer und Klage in der rabbinischen Überlieferung* (Leiden: Brill, 1978). On God as mourner v. also Melvin Jay Glatt, “God The Mourner-Israel’s Companion In Tragedy,” *Judaism* 28 (1979): 72-79; David Stern, “*Imitatio Hominis*: Anthropomorphism and the Character(s) of God in Rabbinic Literature,” *Prooftexts* 12 (1992): 151-174. On the Old Testament background of the theme of divine suffering v. Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

¹³⁴ Elliot R. Wolfson, “Images of God’s Feet: Some Observations on the Divine Body in Judaism,” in *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism in Embodied Perspective* (ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 150.

Moshe Idel has pointed out, “An entire myth of the passage of Israel from slavery to freedom is here attributed analogically to God himself, described in highly anthropomorphic terms.”¹³⁵

While the sapphire is associated with the divine throne, a number of considerations make it clear that it is God’s own being that is afflicted here. R. Eleazar ha-Darshan in his *Sefer ha-Gematriyot* reports the following tradition from the lost *Midrash Abkir*: “The likeness of a pavement of sapphire – this alludes [to the fact that] just as Israel were treading the mortar with their feet to make bricks, so it was, as it were, above, ‘in all their troubles he was troubled’.”¹³⁶ One of the implications of this tradition is that, as the feet of the Israelites were soiled by an overlay of mortar during their labor, so too were the feet of the Shekhinah (*ragle Shekhinah*) covered with sapphire. The significance of this can be fully appreciated only when we consider the fact that *ragle Shekhinah* is rabbinic idiom denoting the anthropomorphic, terrestrial Presence of God, the lower Glory, if you will, cognate with *pene ha-Shekhinah*, the Face of the Presence, the fiery *kābôd* or upper Glory.¹³⁷ The further implication is that this anthropomorphic Glory is covered with sapphires like the feet of the Israelites.¹³⁸ This association of the biblical ‘pavement under God’s feet’ with a sapphiric ‘soil’ covering the *ragle Shekhinah* illuminates a midrash that seems to allude to the somatic transformation of the divine.

‘But they had no comforter.’ Says the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘It shall be My task to comfort them.’ For in this world there is dross in them, but in the World to Come, says Zechariah, I have seen them all gold, all of them pure gold: hence it is written, ‘I have seen, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a *gulah* (bowl) upon the top of it-*roshah* (Zech. IV, 2). Two amoraim differ on the meaning of ‘*gulah*’. One reads *golah* and the other reads *go’alah*. He who reads ‘*golah*’ explains it to mean that they had been exiled (*gulah*) to Babylon and the *Shekhinah* had accompanied them into exile; as it says, ‘For your sake I have been sent to Babylon (Isa. XLIII, 14)’. He who reads *go’alah* renders ‘redeemer’, as it says, ‘Our Redeemer (*go’alenu*), the Lord of hosts is His name (*ib. XLVII, 4*),’ and it is written, ‘The breaker is gone up before them; they have broken forth and passed on, by the gate, and are gone out thereat; and their king is passed on before them, and the Lord at the head of them-*berosham* (Micah II, 13).’¹³⁹

We first notice that our midrashist draws an analogy between the eschatological Israel and the golden menorah seen by Zechariah. Underlying this analogy is the widespread motif of the eschatological somatic

¹³⁵ *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 226.

¹³⁶ Cited by Idel, *Kabbalah*, 382, n. 101.

¹³⁷ As demonstrated by Wolfson, “Images of God’s Feet,” 143-181.

¹³⁸ The idea that the sapphiric pavement of Exodus 24:10 symbolized the lower, anthropomorphic Glory through which the upper, luminous Glory is made visually manifest was the esoteric doctrine of the 10th century philosopher, scientist, and Jewish mystic of southern Italy Shabbetai Donnolo. See Wolfson, “Images of God’s Feet,” 155-156; idem, “The Theosophy of Shabbetai Donnolo, with Special Emphasis on the Doctrine of *Sefirot* in His *Sefer Hakhmoni*,” *Jewish History* 6 (1992): 281-316; idem, *Through a Speculum*, 127-144.

¹³⁹ *Lev. R.* 32.8, Soncino translation.

transformation of the righteous into luminous angelic beings.¹⁴⁰ In rabbinic tradition the golden menorah often symbolizes the luminous image of God, the Shekhinah, and the transformed righteous.¹⁴¹ The setting for this midrash is the Babylonian exile. Redemption from exile and the eschatological transformation are here conflated, and the use of Micah 2:13 suggests that God, in exile with Israel, will lead them in redemption.¹⁴² The implication is that God will lead Israel in experiencing this somatic transformation. The dross here parallels the mortar soiling the feet of the Israelite slaves in Egypt and, as in that case, the divine counterpart is signified by the sapphire throne.¹⁴³ The overall context therefore suggests that the sapphire has somatic significance: corporeal accretion from which Yahweh will be redeemed.

4.2. 'His body is ivory work, encrusted with sapphires'

Further evidence of Blue Body Divine speculation among rabbinic circles is certain midrashim on Cant. 5:14: "His arms are rounded gold, [covered with jewels (*taršîš*). His body is ivory work, encrusted with sapphires]." This of course is a description of the Lover, whom rabbinic tradition very early identified with the God of Israel both in the context of an allegorical love song between he and Israel (here the maiden), and as a literal description of Yahweh as he physically appeared to Israel at the Red Sea.¹⁴⁴ In *Cant. R.* 5.12, Cant. 5:14 is glossed: "This refers to the tablets of the covenant: And the tablets were the work of God (Ex. 32:16)." Morray-Jones, who has analyzed this midrash in the light of the Talmudic and *Heikhalot* Water Episode, finds this discussion "unsatisfactory and problematic." The main problem is lack of clarity: on what basis is this connection between God's hands and the tablets made? "Although the biblical account states that the tablets were made by God (Exod. 32:16) and that he wrote on them with his own finger (Exod. 31:18), the statement that the tablets *were* the hands of God makes no apparent sense

¹⁴⁰ Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism"; Willem F. Smelik, "On the Mystical Transformation of the Righteous into Light in Judaism," *JSJ* 26 (1995): 122-144; Gilles Quispel, "Transformation Through Vision in Jewish Gnosticism and the Cologne Mani Codex," *VC* 49 (1995): 189-191.

¹⁴¹ Morton Smith, "The Image of God: Notes on the Hellenization of Judaism, With Special Reference to Goodenough's Work on Jewish Symbols," *BJRL* 40 (1957/58): 497-512 [art.=473-512]; Rachel Hachlili, *The Menorah, the Ancient Seven-Armed Candelabrum: Origin, Form, and Significance* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 204-205.

¹⁴² As in *Pesiqta Rabbati* 8.4 the bowl (*gulah*) atop the lampstand is God.

¹⁴³ Though the throne is not mentioned here, it is implied by the Babylonian setting. In parallel midrashim God's accompaniment of Israel in exile in Babylon is denoted by the sapphiric divine throne encountered by Ezekiel at the river Chebar (Ezek. 1:26; y. *Sukk* 4:3).

¹⁴⁴ Arthur Green, "The Song of Songs in Early Jewish Mysticism," *Orim: A Jewish Journal at Yale* 2 (1987): 49-63; Gerson D. Cohen, "The Song of Songs and the Jewish Religious Mentality," *The Samuel Friedland lectures 1960-1966* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1966) 1-21. On Canticles and the theophany at the Red Sea v. Arthur Green, "The Children of Egypt and the Theophany at the Sea," *Judaism* 24 (1975): 446-456; Daniel Boyarin, "The Eye of the Torah: Ocular Desire in Midrashic Hermeneutic," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (Spring 1990): 532-550; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 33-41.

(emphasis original),” Morray-Jones argues.¹⁴⁵ He highlights a statement attributed to R. Joshua b. R. Nehemiah as the key to unraveling this “confused” midrash: “They were of miraculous construction, for they were rolled up. They were of sapphire¹⁴⁶”.

This association of the tablets with Cant. 5:14 seems to have originally pivoted around the term *sapphirîm*.¹⁴⁷ As Morray-Jones points out, tradition held that the tablets were cut from the sapphire pavement of the firmament beneath God’s throne.¹⁴⁸ While this accounts for the sapphiric tablets, it still does not elucidate their identity with God’s hands as Morray-Jones is given to believe.¹⁴⁹ We are thus still at a loss in terms of the connection between the sapphire tablets and the divine hands. But if indeed ‘sapphire’ is the link, it is reasonable to assume that the hands, like the tablets, are “of sapphire.” In fact, if the hands are the tablets, then the hands *must* be “of sapphire.” Indeed, a related midrash in *Tanḥuma*’ (*‘eqeb*, §9) declares: “as it is said: ‘His hands are rounded gold...wrapped with sapphires,’ for they were made of sapphire.”¹⁵⁰ The tradition lurking beneath *Cant. R.* 5:12 might therefore be a tradition that included speculation on the divine sapphiric body. This very passage (Cant.5:14) seems to confirm this: “His (i.e., God’s) body is ivory work, encrusted with sapphires.”

4.3. *Garments of (Divine) Skin*

There is a long tradition, going back at least as far as Philo of Alexandria (15 BCE-50 CE), of interpreting the “garments of skin” of Gen. 3:21 somatically, i.e. as Adam and Eve’s fleshy body.¹⁵¹ There is also a long tradition associating these ‘garments of skin’ with the high priestly garments, particularly the long blue robe (*me’il*) and golden/multicolored ephod.¹⁵² As Gary Anderson has shown, Gen. 3:21 was

¹⁴⁵ Morray-Jones, *Transparent Illusion*, 207.

¹⁴⁶ Morray-Jones’ reading of של ספירינין: *Transparent Illusion*, 206.

¹⁴⁷ Morray-Jones, *Transparent Illusion*, 207.

¹⁴⁸ See e.g. *Tanḥuma*’, *‘eqeb*, §9; *Sifre Num.* 101; v. also Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol. 7, index s.v. “Sapphire.”

¹⁴⁹ Morray-Jones, *Transparent Illusion*, 207.

¹⁵⁰ See also Morray-Jones’ discussion, *Transparent Illusion*, 208-9.

¹⁵¹ On the somatic reading of these garments in rabbinic literature v. especially Gary Anderson, *Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) 117-134; idem, “The Garments of Skin in Apocryphal Narrative and Biblical Commentary,” in *Studies in Ancient Midrash* (ed. James L. Kugel; Cambridge: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 2001) 110-125; Stephen N. Lambden, “From fig leaves to fingernails: some notes on the garments of Adam and Eve in the Hebrew Bible and select early postbiblical Jewish Writings,” in Morris and Sawyer, *Walk in the Garden*, 86-87 [art.=74-90]. On Philo see *QG* 1.53; *Leg. All.* 2:55-56; *Somm.* 1.43; Jung Hoon Kim, *The Significance of Clothing Imagery in the Pauline Corpus* (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2004) 44-52; April D. De Conick and Jarl Fossum, “Stripped before God: A New Interpretation of Logion 37 in the Gospel of Thomas,” *VC* 45 (1991): 123-150, esp. 128-130.

¹⁵² On Gen. 3:21 and the high priestly vestments v. *Num. R.* 4:8; *Tanḥuma* (Buber), 12. See also Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (7 vols; Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1911, 1939), 1:177, 332, 5:93; Stephen D. Ricks, “The Garment of Adam in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Tradition,” in *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communications and Interactions* (ed. Benjamin H. Hary, John L. Hayes and Fred Astren; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 209; M.E. Vogelzang and W.J. van Bakkum, “Meaning and Symbolism of Clothing in Ancient Near Eastern Texts,” in *Scripta signa vocis: studies about scripts. Scriptures, scribes, and languages in the Near*

understood in some rabbinic materials in a dual sense, referring both to Adam and Eve's prelapsarian "garments of light" and their opposite, the post-lapsarian bodies of flesh.¹⁵³ The former was a luminous body, the skin of which was in some way analogous to finger nails.¹⁵⁴ The luminosity of this prelapsarian body has misled many into associating it with the white linen robe of the priesthood or Christian baptism,¹⁵⁵ but this is certainly wrong, at least for some rabbinic materials. It was the colored garments, the robe and ephod, which served as metaphor for Adam and Eve's prelapsarian bodies.¹⁵⁶ According to *Gen. R.* 21.5 Adam in his glorious vestment in the Garden was like a snail "whose garment (i.e. shell) is part of his body." The point here is clearly a somatic interpretation of 'garment' with regard to Adam.¹⁵⁷ But this snail has a purple (read: blue, *tēkhēlet*) shell and the 'garment' to which it is parallel is a purple (read: blue) 'garment.'¹⁵⁸ The white robe may signify the resurrection body of the righteous;¹⁵⁹ it may signify the luminous body of *some* angels;¹⁶⁰ it may even represent God's 'garment of light' from which the *phōs* of

East, presented to J.H. Hoppers by his pupils, colleagues, and friends (Groningen: E. Forsten, 1986) 275; Sebastian Brock, "Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition," in *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter* (Eichstätter Beiträge 4; Regensburg 1982): 11-37; Philo, *Leg.* 2:55-56; Kim, *Significance*, 44-52.

¹⁵³ According to R. Jacob of Kefar Hanan *Gen.* 3:21 really belongs after *Gen.* 2:25, thus describing the prelapsarian garments of the first couple (*Gen. R.* 18.6). Its current placement in the text has only to do with *narratological* concerns, not *chronological*. See Anderson, "The Garments of Skin," 112-15. On the other hand, in *b. Nid.* 25a R. Yehoshua b. Haninah identifies the "coats of skin" of *Gen.* 3:21 with normal human skin, which is post-lapsarian. The Targums attempt to secondarily weave these two traditions together by identifying the garments of glory with the fleshy body (See Anderson's detailed discussion, *ibid.*, 120-123).

¹⁵⁴ These two possibilities derive from the *כתנות עור*, "garments of skin" of *MT Gen.* 3:21 and its homophonous equivalent *כתנות אור*, "garments of light," from a textual variant. See *Gen. R.* 20:12. On the prelapsarian garments of light v. *Gen. R.* 20:12; Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:103-104; Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature," *HTR* 87 (1994): 171-95 (but cf. the rejoinder by David H. Aaron, "Shedding Light on God's Body: Reflections on the Theory of a Luminous Adam," *HTR* 90 [1997]: 299-314); Lambden, "From Fig Leaves to Fingernails," 75-90; Anderson, "The Garments of Skin," 116-120; Ricks, "The Garment of Adam," 203-225; Vogelzang and van Bekkum, "Meaning and Symbolism of Clothing," 272-74. On the 'nail-skin' v. *Gen. R.* 20:12; *PRE* 14; Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:74, 5:69; Anderson, "The Garments of Skin," 118.

¹⁵⁵ E.g. Lambden, "From Fig Leaves to Fingernails," 80 who conflates "radiant" garments and "white robes." Also Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, "The White Dress of the Essenes and the Pythagoreans," in *Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome: Studies in Ancient Cultural Interaction in honour of A. Hilhorst* (ed. Florentino García Martínez and Gerard P. Luttikhuisen; Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003), 312; Margaret Barker, *On Earth as it is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995) 61-72, esp. 65; Erik Peterson, "A theology of dress," *Communio* 20 (Fall 1993) 565 [art.=558-568]; Erwin Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* 13 vols. (Bollingen Series 37; New York: Pantheon Books, 1953-) 9:169. On the other hand, Brian Murdoch, "The Garments of Paradise: A Note on the *Wiener Genesis* and the *Aneenge*," *Euphorion* 61 (1967): 376 [art.=375-382] based on his reading of Targum Ps.-John. *ad Gen.* 3:21, was aware of the alternative.

¹⁵⁶ The ancient versions of *Ezek.* 28:11-19 (e.g. LXX) which understand the precious stones as an allusion to the high priestly ephod presuppose the colored garments as Adam's prelapsarian vestments. See Dexter E. Callender, Jr., *Adam in Myth and History: Ancient Israelite Perspective on the Primal Human* (Harvard Semitic Studies 48; Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2002), Chap. 3.

¹⁵⁷ On the shell-as-body metaphor cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 250 C and Philo, *Vir.* 76.

¹⁵⁸ See Ginzberg, *Legends* 2:132, 237. The exact hue of the biblical *tēkhēlet* has been a matter of great discussion; see above. Ancients and moderns often translate it as "purple," identifying the *tēkhēlet* robe of the high priest with royal regalia. This is certainly the case in rabbinic literature (cf. *Pesikta Rabbati* [hereafter *PR*] 33. 10; *MT* 23.4)

¹⁵⁹ E.g. *Rev.* 3:4, 7:9

¹⁶⁰ On the white garment and angels v. *PR* 2:868; *1 Enoch* 71:10; *2 Enoch* [J] 37:1; Ricks, "Garment of Adam," 217-19, and sources cited there in n. 41; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 9:167-69. But according to *PR* 20.4, while in heaven Moses saw four sets of angels, the first of which were draped in garments "the color of the sea (i.e. *tēkhēlet*)." When Rebekah saw Isaac for the first time as he meditated in a field (*Gen.* 24:63-64) "she beheld him exceedingly glorious, garmented in and covered with a (blue-fringed) prayer shawl, his appearance like that of an angel of God (*MT* 90.18, trns. Braude, *Midrash on Psalms* 2:98).

Gen. 1:3 (LXX) emanated.¹⁶¹ But God also possesses a royal purple robe after which the colored high priestly garments are patterned.¹⁶² It is this ‘purple’ high priestly robe that signifies the divine Image.¹⁶³

Further evidence that the prelapsarian ‘garment’ was the colored high priestly robe is supplied by the tradition of Israel’s glorification at Sinai after the giving of the Torah. The Israelites were deified¹⁶⁴ and garmented in God’s own splendor as reflected in the ‘purple’ high priestly robe.¹⁶⁵ After the Golden Calf incident, however, they were stripped of this glory.¹⁶⁶ What is important here is that, according to a widespread rabbinic tradition, Sinai was a recapitulation of Eden.¹⁶⁷ Israel’s glorification at the former was tantamount to Adam and Eve’s prelapsarian glory in the latter;¹⁶⁸ Israel’s garments of glory, which they lost after ‘that deed’ were the same that Adam and Eve lost after their transgression in the Garden.¹⁶⁹ As Israel’s were the colored high priestly robe, so too was Adam and Eve’s.

Several rabbinic sources therefore make it clear that it is the splendid colored high priestly garments, not the white linen tunic, that represent Adam’s prelapsarian body made as/according to God’s Image.¹⁷⁰ But this creates an immediate exegetical problem for us. How could a dark blue robe come to be regarded as a “garment of light”¹⁷¹? This interpretive difficulty probably encouraged some writers to associate the garment with the white tunic. But we get an adequate answer to this question from our sources. The blue robe is associated with a precious stone, usually sapphire. The blue of the robe, *tēkhēlet*, is a sapphire

¹⁶¹ On God’s garment of light v. Scholem, “Some Aggadic Sayings Explained by Merkabah Hymns. The Garment of God,” in idem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 56-64; Raphael Loewe, “The Divine Garment and Shi’ur Qomah,” *HTR* 58 (1965): 153-160. On this Garment and *phos* in Rabbinic tradition see Alexander Altmann, “A Note on the Rabbinic Doctrine of Creation,” *JJS* 7 (1956): 195-206; idem, “The Gnostic Background of the Rabbinic Adam Legends,” *JQR* 35 (1945): 379-385; idem, “Gnostic Themes,” 28-32.

¹⁶² *Lam. R.* 1.1, § 1; *Lev. R.* 2.4; *Exod. R.* 38.8; *Num. R.* 14.3; *PR* 27/28.2, 45.2; *MT* 9.13.

¹⁶³ *Exod. R.* 38.8; *Cant. R.* 3.11, § 2.

¹⁶⁴ See *Lev. R.* 11.1: “He attributed to them divinity (וְקָרָא אוֹתָן אֱלֹהִים).”

¹⁶⁵ See *Exod. R.* 45.2, 51.8; *MT* 23.4, 103.8. On these purple royal garments as high priestly robes v. *Cant. R.* 4.12, §2; *PR* 33.10. The original version of R. Simai’s remark that God “clothed them in royal purple” (*Exod. R.* 45.2, 51.8) may have read: “He clothed them with purple and the ineffable Name was inscribed upon it” (cf. *Num. R.* 16.24). As Gershom Scholem and Ira Chernus have observed, this reading connects these garments with God’s own which is described in *Heikhalot Rabbati* 3.4 as being “engraved from within and without YHWH YHWH.” Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965), 131-32; Ira Chernus, *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1982), 9.

¹⁶⁶ *Exod. R.* 15.2; 51.8; *Cant. R.* 1.4, §2; *PRE* 47.

¹⁶⁷ See Anderson’s discussion and sources cited in *Genesis*, 14-16.

¹⁶⁸ See esp. the sources cited and discussion by Joel S. Kaminsky, “Paradise Regained: Rabbinic Reflections on Israel at Sinai,” in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures* (ed. Alice Bellis and Joel Kaminsky; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) 15-43; Jacob Neusner, *Confronting Creation: How Judaism Reads Genesis, an Anthology of Genesis Rabbah* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991) 103-105.

¹⁶⁹ As Anderson points out: “In both the rabbinic and patristic traditions a close relationship has been drawn between Adam’s clothing in Eden and Israel at Sinai” (*Genesis*, 125). See also Kaminsky, “Paradise,” 26.

¹⁷⁰ Taken as a possible exception may be the description given in the name of Resh Laqish that they “were milky white [in color] and in them the first-born sons [prior to Sinai] served as priests (*Gen. R.* 20:12).” But as Gary Anderson has argued, this unit is secondary and refers to the first couple’s post-lapsarian garments. See “The Garments of Skin,” 116-17.

¹⁷¹ One could, of course, point to the precious stones affixed to the breastplate (*Exod.* 28:15-21). A number of Second Temple sources describe these stones as sources of light (See sources and discussion in Crispin H.P. Fletcher-Louis, *All The Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) 222-251; Robert Hayward, “Pseudo-Philo and the Priestly Oracle,” *JJS* 46 [1995] 43-54). But this explanation is unsatisfactory. The breastplate is not, per se, a garment, but an accessory. The Adamic ‘garment of light’ alludes to Adam’s prelapsarian body in a way that the breastplate cannot.

blue.¹⁷² With its deep blue color and fine golden spangles sapphire/lapis lazuli reminds one of both the ‘sky-garment’ of the gods and later representations of the priestly robe and ephod. In the mosaic from the synagogue in Sepphoris (ca. fifth century) Aaron’s robe is depicted dark blue with golden dots¹⁷³ and in a wall-painting at Dura Europos (3 cent. CE.) Aaron dons a wine-colored, jewel-studded cape, which some scholars take to be a representation of the robe or ephod.¹⁷⁴ The yellow jewels are similar to the gold dots on the priestly robe in the Sepphoris mosaic and the stars on the divine ‘sky-garment.’¹⁷⁵ The parallel between lapis lazuli, the ANE ‘sky-garment,’ and these depictions of the high-priestly vestments is unmistakable. The sapphire stone with its golden spangles was the source of great illumination according to a number of rabbinic sources: it illuminated Noah’s ark with a light as bright as day and in the New Jerusalem it will shine like the sun.¹⁷⁶ This ‘paradox’ of a dark blue stone giving off bright luminance was seen as an example of God’s ability to harmonize two antagonistic elements in creation.¹⁷⁷ Significantly this point is illustrated with the angel of Dan. 10:6 whose body is like the *taršīš* stone and whose face (i.e. inner glory?¹⁷⁸) is like lightning in appearance.

The space given here to a discussion of Adam’s prelapsarian garments is justified on two accounts. First, in Jewish and Christian tradition these garments are metaphor for Adam and Eve’s prelapsarian *bodies*.¹⁷⁹ Secondly, bodily descriptions of prelapsarian man in rabbinic texts as a rule apply equally to God, for “Adam originally had a physical appearance which was indistinguishable from that of God.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷² *Sifré to Numbers* 115.2; *b. Men.* 43b; *Num. R.* 4.13, 17.5.

¹⁷³ Ze’ev Weiss and Ehud Netzer, *Promise and Redemption: A Synagogue Mosaic from Sepphoris* (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1996), 20ff; Swartz, “The Semiotics of the Priestly Vestments,” 63 n. 16.

¹⁷⁴ E.g. C.H. Kraeling, *The Excavations at Dura Europos: The Synagogue* (Final Report vol. 8 Part 1) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956; repr. New York: Ktav, 1979) 127; Erwin R. Goodenough, “Cosmic Judaism: The Temple of Aaron,” in his *Jewish Symbols* 9:16.

¹⁷⁵ Swartz, “The Semiotics of the Priestly Vestments,” 63 n. 16; Weiss and Netzer, *Promise and Redemption*, 45 n. 31.

¹⁷⁶ On sapphires in the New Jerusalem v. *Exod. R.* 15.21. On the illumination of Noah’s ark v. Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:162, 5:177, n. 23.

¹⁷⁷ See *Cant. R.* 3.11, § 1.

¹⁷⁸ In rabbinic literature פניִים often has the meaning ‘interior’ or פניִי, ‘innermost,’ as in Holy of Holies and it is also equivalent to *kābōd* “Glory” and *demut*, “Likeness,” i.e. the demiurgic anthropos called the Glory and Likeness on High. *Midrash Tanhuma* [Buber], Bemidbar 20; *Shemot Rabbah* 23.15; Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic literature: with an index of Scriptural Quotations* (2 vols; New York, Pardes Pub. House, 1950) II:1190; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 45-51; Orlov, “Ex 33 on God’s Face”; idem, “The Face as the Heavenly Counterpart of the Visionary in the Slavonic *Ladder of Jacob*,” in *Of Scribes and Sages: Studies in Early Jewish Interpretation and Transmission of Scripture* (2 vols.; ed. C.A. Evans; SSEJC 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2004) 2:59-76; *DDD* 322-325 s.v. Face פניִים by C.L. Seow. We are not suggesting that this midrashic passage presents the angelic (?) being of Dan. 10 as the Divine Glory, but that the harmonious contrast between the former’s lightning-like face and *taršīš*-like body should be understood in terms analogous to the luminous Glory and its dark sheath. .

¹⁷⁹ Anderson, *Genesis*, 124; idem, “Garments of Skin,” 135; De Conick and Fossum, “Stripped Before God,” 124-25; Wayne A. Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of A Symbol in Earliest Christianity,” *HR* 13 (1974): 187-88; Smith, “Garments of Shame,” 231.

¹⁸⁰ Fossum, “Adorable Adam,” 532.

Jacob Neusner has demonstrated this point well.¹⁸¹ As the high priestly garments were associated with sapphire, we are presumably dealing with a sapphiric divine body. These apparent rabbinic allusions to a sapphiric-bodied Yahweh, when coupled with the explicit assertion in *Num. R.* 14.3 that the divine Glory is *tekhelet* and in *Midrash Tehilim* (90.18) that the divine Likeness has the appearance of *tekhelet*, give strong evidence of a Blue Body Divine tradition, one continuous with that evidenced in the *Shi'ur Qomah* materials and, more generally, ANE mythological texts.

5. Conclusion

Ben Zion Bokser pointed out that “Jewish mystics deemed the color blue a representation of the deity.”¹⁸² We now have a better understanding why. Like the gods of the ancient Near East the god of Israel, at least as represented in the various post-biblical literatures treated above, possessed a dark body. This body, the speculum that does not shine, was a dark bodily “veil” enveloping Yahweh’s *kābôd* or luminous anthropomorphic glory.¹⁸³ The radiance of the *kābôd* shining through the hair-pits of the divine black skin produced a beautiful blue iridescence or surrounding rainbow, like sunlight passing through a rain-cloud.¹⁸⁴ Like the god’s of the ancient Near East, this divine blue-ness was associated with sapphire/lapis lazuli, but also *taršîš*. The latter suggests a connection with the primordial waters, as did the sapphiric body of the ANE deities. This ‘sapphiric god’ motif thus further indicates the continuity between ancient Near Eastern and post-biblical Jewish tradition. This sapphiric-bodied deity found in the the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and *Shi'ur Qomah* appears to be esoterically alluded to in such rabbinic passages as *MRI*, *Pisha*, § 14 (and parallels); *MT* 24:12; 90:18; *Num. R.* 14:3; *Cant. R.* 5:12, among others.

¹⁸¹ He makes the point that, according to the theology of the Oral Torah, “God and man look exactly alike, being distinguished only by actions performed by the one but not the other.” *The Theology of the Oral Torah* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill and Queen’s University Press, 1999) 364-65. This applies especially to Primordial Man. See further Jacob Neusner, *Judaism When Christianity Began: A Survey of Belief and Practice* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002) 29-31.; idem, “Judaism,” in *God* (ed. Jacob Neusner; Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1997) 17-18; idem, *The Incarnation of God: The Character of Divinity in Formative Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) 14-15. See also David H. Aaron, “Imagery of the Divine and the Human: On the Mythology of Genesis Rabba 8 § 1,” *JJTP* 5 (1995): 1-62. On rabbinic anthropomorphism generally v. also Wolfson, *Through A Speculum*, Chapters One and Two.

¹⁸² “The Thread of Blue,” 14.

¹⁸³ See e.g. Schaya Leo Schaya, *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971) 68; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, I:376; Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, 15-16.

¹⁸⁴ See also Plato’s description of the origin of Blue: “White and bright meeting, and falling upon a full black, becomes dark blue.” *Timaeus* 68 (trns. Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, Volume III [Third Edition; Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1997] 368).

Cristopher Morray-Jones' argument that traditions found in the esoteric/mystical materials can provide the context for understanding certain allusions in the classical rabbinic sources is supported by our study.

A sapphiric-bodied God of Israel? While recognition and discussion of Yahweh's morphic luminosity is now quite common place, this trope of the Blue Body Divine is, as far as this author is aware, unrecognized; discussions of rabbinic anthropomorphism and the mystical conceptions of divinity make no mention of it,¹⁸⁵ nor does Howard Schwartz in his otherwise thorough presentation of Judaic "Myths about God."¹⁸⁶ Such imagery is antithetical to a fundamental axiom of the monotheistic traditions according to which God is a god of light and darkness participates none in his being. For sure, there is a hint of Gnostic dualism here, as argued by Octavius A. Gaba, but the seeds of the negative valuation of darkness and its alienation from the Godhead are found already in the Bible, particularly the New Testament (NT).¹⁸⁷ "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all (I Jhn 1:5)." Yahweh's *kābôd*, Jesus as Logos, and Allah's *Nūr* (Light) all reinforce the point: divinity is luminosity.¹⁸⁸ The recognition of this Judaic Blue Body Divine trope forces us to reevaluate this axiom, for the trope suggests that both light and darkness participate in the divine ontology. This duality in the divine nature is continuous with ANE mythic tradition, reinforcing the point that the god of Israel and the gods of the ANE differed less than has been supposed. Gershom Scholem therefore missed the mark by suggesting that 'pagan color symbolism' was nontransferable to the "unsensual" biblical and Judaic God.¹⁸⁹

Whence cometh this sapphiric God into Jewish tradition? Rachel Elior suggests that the *taršīš*-bodied demiurge of the *Shi'ur Qomah* materials was a new, revolutionary concept of God innovated by the anonymous authors of the Heikhalot literature and is discontinuous with the "supramythological, supernatural" God of biblical and rabbinic tradition.¹⁹⁰ Daphna Arbel has further suggested that this description of the divine found in the *Shi'ur Qomah* materials resonates with "echoes of Mesopotamian

¹⁸⁵ See e.g. the discussion of divine body traditions in biblical, pseudepigraphal, and rabbinic materials by Andrei Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (TSAJ, 107; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2005).

¹⁸⁶ *Tree of Souls*, 3-68.

¹⁸⁷ As demonstrated by Gaba as well: "Symbols of Revelation: The Darkness of the Hebrew Yahweh and the Light of the Greek Logos," in *The Recovery of the Black Presence: An Interdisciplinary Exploration. Essays in Honor of Dr. Charles B. Copher*, eds. Randal C. Bailey and Jacquelyn Grant (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 143-158.

¹⁸⁸ On the luminous *kābôd* v. *TDOT*, 7:23-38, esp. 27-31 s.v. כְּבוֹד by Weinfeld. On the Logos of John's Prologue see *TDNT*; 9:349-53 s.v. "φως IV. John's Gospel and Epistles" by Hans Conzelmann; Gaba, "Symbols of Revelation," 155-157. On *Nūr Allah* v. Qur'ān Surah 24:35; *Encyclopedia of Islam*, New Edition (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986-) 8:122-23 s.v. *Nūr* by Tj. De Boer.

¹⁸⁹ Scholem, "Colours and their Symbolism," 87-88.

¹⁹⁰ Rachel Elior, "The Concept of God in Hekhalot Literature," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6:1-2 (1987): 13-58 (Hebrew). Translated by Dena Ordan in *Binah: Studies in Jewish Thought* (ed. Joseph Dan; New York: Praeger, 1989) 99 [art.=97-120]; "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology: The Perception of Angels in Hekhalot Literature," *JSQ* 1 [1993/94]: 7 n. 13.

mythological patterns,” and that this might be explained by the type of pagan and Jewish syncretism as took place in Greco-Roman Edessa.¹⁹¹ Our study casts serious doubt on both of these suggestions. Such texts as *MRI*, *Pisha*, § 14 indicate that the trope is much earlier than what the *Heikhalot* literature might suggest. In another writing I argue that the priestly redactor of the Pentateuch (‘P’) and Philo of Alexandria give evidence of an ancient temple tradition of a sapphiric God.¹⁹² It is therefore more likely that the similarities between Mesopotamian and post-biblical Jewish descriptions of God evince not late antique syncretism but an indigenous, at least an ancient, part of Israel’s mythic tradition, which she shares in common with her neighbors in the ANE.

¹⁹¹ See above n. 84.

¹⁹² Forthcoming.