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Israel Among the Angels: A Study of Angels in Jewish Texts from the Fourth to Eighth Century CE

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Princeton, NJ : Princeton University

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ISRAEL AMONG THE ANGELS:
A STUDY OF ANGELS IN JEWISH TEXTS FROM THE FOURTH TO EIGHTH CENTURY CE

Mika Ahuvia

A DISSERTATION

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY

OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE

BY THE DEPARTMENT OF

RELIGION

Adviser: Peter Schäfer

November 2014

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how Jews conceptualized angels in rabbinic, liturgical, ritual, and early mystical sources from the fourth through the eighth century C.E. in Palestine and Babylonia. While some rabbinic traditions uphold the angels as messengers of God, others were more ambivalent toward them, discouraging attention to angels and privileging the close relationship between Israel and God instead. Chapter two centers on the liturgical works of the sixth century poet Yannai and his synthesis of diverse Jewish traditions about angels in his liturgical texts. This chapter contextualizes Yannai's encouragement of his audience to think of themselves as praying with the angels, and examines how Yannai singles out certain authorities within the synagogue for comparison with the angels. Chapter three highlights the variety of ways in which Jews invoked angels and other authorities for assistance in so-called "magical" or ritual bowls, amulets, and manuals from Babylonia and Palestine. Ritual texts in particular show that named and unnamed angels were part of a spectrum of authority figures to which ancient Jews appealed in their times of need. Alongside angels, Jews turned to ritual practitioners, folk heroes, and rabbis for guidance and intercession with God. Chapter four investigates the early mystical treatise *Hekhalot Rabbati*, which captures the worldview of those Jews most preoccupied with angels. Jewish mystics strove to live in synchronicity with the angels, to achieve angelic status, and even to command the angels. As each chapter demonstrates, no systematic angelology predominated among Jews in late antiquity. Rather, different circles of Jews upheld different traditions about angels. Ancient Jewish texts on angels reveal a diverse and dynamic society, where many mediating figures bridged the gap between Israel and God and served a variety of functions for individuals and communities.

Acknowledgements

Writing a dissertation about angels, I have often thought about the many wonderful people who have supported me throughout this process. It is a pleasure to finally acknowledge them here. Peter Schäfer and Martha Himmelfarb guided this project from its very beginning. The intellectual curiosity and collegiality they displayed in the classes they co-taught and conferences they organized at Princeton sparked my interest in ancient Jewish magic, mysticism and liturgical poetry. I thank Peter for encouraging me to argue boldly, and Martha for encouraging me to argue carefully. This project is stronger for their complementary approaches.

Harriet Flower's ruminations on ancient Romans' fear of stumbling into spirits and Peter Brown's descriptions of late antique saints surrounded by angels (hovering just at the height of the Princeton chapel) inspired me to think about ancient Jews' interaction with angels in their daily life. I deeply thank Moulie Vidas for helping me think about the potential of this project both at the dissertation level and beyond. Likewise, Naphtali Meshel read several incarnations of this work and offered many insights that improved my first chapter; I am grateful for his wise and witty observations on ancient Jewish texts.

AnneMarie Luijendijk's encouragement was instrumental at every stage of my graduate career. I thank her for her angelic guidance every step of the way. Likewise, I am so grateful to John Gager, who treated me like a colleague from my first semester at Princeton; I benefitted from his guidance often in the last five years. Elaine Pagels' exhortations have often echoed in my mind while composing this dissertation and I thank her for challenging me to be a better writer. I am so grateful to Leora Batnitsky, Wallace Best, Eric Gregory,

Judith Weisenfeld, and Jeff Stout, who were so generous with their time, advice, and encouragement over the years.

My colleagues in the Religions of Late Antiquity subfield were my teachers and interlocutors everyday. I could not have asked for a better friend, colleague, mentor, and editor than Sarit Kattan-Gribetz. I thank her and Jonathan Gribetz for their steadfast support through the best and worst of days. Studying with Lance Jenott, Geoff Smith, and Alex Kocar, I received the best and most inspiring training in heterodox Christianity possible. I have especially benefitted from Alex Kocar's perceptive questions in almost every seminar I undertook at Princeton. They, along with A.J. Berkovitz, David Grossberg, David Jorgensen, and Eva Keisele, made our subfield workshop a critical component of the dissertation-writing process. I cherish my peers, many now alumnae, who made the Religion department such a rich and friendly intellectual place: Shira Billet, Joel Blecher, Molly Farneth, Clifton Granby, Rachel Gross, April Hughes, Leslie Ribovich, Philippa Townsend, Kevin Wolfe and many others not enumerated here. Friends in Classics including Nicole Brown, Samuel Cooper, John Tully and Aaron Kachuk brightened my days at Princeton. Both in Princeton and Brooklyn, Leah Hunt-Hendrix always returned my awareness to the present and she continues to inspire me to be a better person.

I am grateful to Princeton for enabling me to spend a year at Tel Aviv University, where I benefitted from studying with Ishay Rosen-Zvi and Gideon Bohak. During my time at TAU, Gidi introduced me to the field of ancient Jewish magic and helped me with early formulations of this project. Ortal-Paz Saar generously shared her research with me, helped me to think about my approach to the field of ancient magic more rigorously, and supported

me at key moments. Similarly, Alessia Bellusci has been a wonderful colleague and interlocutor. Rebecca Lesses, whom I had the pleasure of running into at the National Library often, also welcomed me to the field of ancient ritual studies and I am thankful for her encouragement. Sharon Weisser was an endlessly generous friend who enabled me to stay and research in Jerusalem often. While I was in Israel, Ophir Münz-Manor also introduced me to the field of liturgical poetry. I am deeply thankful to him for encouraging me to pursue this direction and for reading drafts of my chapter. Laura Lieber also graciously met with me and offered invaluable advice and feedback on the second chapter of this dissertation.

In the summer of 2011, I had the privilege of being a fellow at Yeshivat Hadar and learning from Aryeh Bernstein, Amit Gvaryahu, Shai Held, Avital Campbell Hochstein, Elie Kaunfer, Aviva Richman, Ethan Tucker, and Dena Weiss. I cannot express enough gratitude to the community of Yeshivat Hadar, who made living in Jerusalem such a pleasure and who continue to support my growth as a scholar and human being. Joel Mittleman, Mordy Walfish, and Micah Weiss must be singled out for their support this past year. I especially thank Elie Kaunfer and Tzemah Yoreh for helping me with translations of Yannai's poetry.

I would not have made it to Princeton without the support of the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan, where I completed my master's. I cherish the memories of learning and laughing with Anita Norich. I am thankful that I went to Michigan to study Roman archaeology with Sharon Herbert and that Gabriele Boccaccini's and Yaron Eliav's classes called me back to Judaic Studies. Gil Klein, Oren Gutfeld, and Aharon Oppenheimer were fellows at the institute while I was there and I am so thankful to them for their mentorship.

In my final year at Princeton University, I was heartened by the support and recognition of The Foundation for Jewish Culture, which awarded me the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship in Jewish Studies. My dissertation was greatly improved by my participation in the Center for the Study of Religion's Religion and Culture workshop (2013-14), which fostered an amazingly positive and productive learning environment. I am most grateful to Jackie Stone, Jessica Delgado and the other participants for their feedback. Additionally, the Program in the Ancient World, the Program in Judaic Studies, Hellenic Studies, and the Religion Department have given me generous financial and administrative support throughout my graduate career. Pat Bogdziewicz, Mary Kay Bodnar, Lorraine Fuhrmann, Jeff Guest, Kerry Smith, and Baru Saul have been my angels at Princeton.

I thank Sarit, Shira, Joel, Temim Fruchter, Sarah Legowski, and Matthew Myers for proofreading sections of this dissertation and helping me bring this project to a close. Matthew's technical expertise saved this dissertation from certain technological oblivion. Family and friends saved me from even worse: my gratitude to the Ahuvias in Hawaii, NYC, Japan, and Israel as well as Tara Bognar, Helen Dixon, Anya Erokhina, Dasi Fruchter, Micki McCarthy, Courtney Rothbard, Sigal Samuel, Shayna Weiss, and Sarah Zarrow.

Mika Ahuvia
Brooklyn, 2014

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INTRODUCTION

> After the victorious advance of the Cabala, opposition to the highly fanciful belief in angels was no longer made; and mystical Angelology lured the Occident as well as the Orient into its charmed circle, from which a portion of Judaism has not yet liberated itself.[1]

Thus Ludwig Blau summed up Jewish beliefs in angels in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, published in 1901. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* was, of course, the great achievement and legacy of the nineteen-century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (the "science of Judaism"), a movement of learned men in Europe and America, which aimed to subject all biblical and Jewish traditions to rigorous criticism and research. Through such publications, Jewish scholars responded to anti-semitic bias in academic circles and sought to provide ordinary Jews with a history and religious heritage to be proud of rather than discard (as some assimilating Jews chose to do).[2] Though they acknowledged the popularity of angels among Jews, the Jewish belief in angels was an embarrassment to these scholars.

The ambivalence about angels among Jewish thinkers stems from their complex depiction in the Hebrew Bible. According to Deuteronomy 4:19 Moses said to the people of Israel: "And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the

1 Ludwig Blau, "Angelology" *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901-6, available in public domain).

2 Benzion Dinur, "*Wissenschaft des Judentums*," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 112.

stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which *the Lord* your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven."[3] This prohibition warns Israel not to worship the host of heaven, which includes the celestial planets and stars, who were understood to be angels by ancient interpreters. Deuteronomy's text does not deny the divinity of the sun, moon, stars and the host of heaven—it only states that the celestial bodies are properly worshipped by other peoples, not Israel. This source also makes clear that these celestial figures are subordinate to God.[4]

Jews also inherited, however, biblical traditions that celebrated the holy beings who form the heavenly council of God,[5] his retinue of myriad holy figures,[6] and the stars in the night skies.[7] In Job 38:7 God asks Job where he was "while the morning stars sang together / and all the angels (*bnei elohim*) shouted for joy?" This rhetorical question is meant to intimidate Job into ceasing his relentless questioning of God's inscrutable ways, but it also personifies the stars along with the angels. The prophet Isaiah witnessed and directly overheard the angelic praise of God. In his vision the six-winged seraphim surrounded god's throne in the temple and sang "Holy, Holy, Holy, the whole earth is filled with his Glory" (Isaiah 6:1-6). As I will discuss in the second chapter, this praise was deeply valued by ancient Jews and Christians, who incorporated this praise into their liturgy. Ezekiel's vision of God's chariot departing from the temple added the cherubim, *ofanim*, and the divine living

3 The interpretation of this prohibition by late antique Jews will be discussed in the first chapter.

4 Isaiah 40: 26 states "Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: / Who created all these? / He who brings out the starry host one by one / and calls forth each of them by name. / Because of his great power and mighty strength, / not one of them is missing.

5 Zechariah 3:18 on high priest gaining access to the divine council. See Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai; Zechariah 1-8: a new translation with introduction and commentary* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987), 197.

6 Deuteronomy 33:2 "*The Lord* came from Sinai…from the midst of ten thousand holy ones."

7 Job 38:7 and 38:31-33; Isaiah 40:26 and 45:11-12; Ps. 147: 4. See more traditions in Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 75ff.

creatures to ancient Jews' repertoire of angels (Ezekiel 1 and 10). These figures with their four faces and four wings resemble composite quadrupeds known from ancient Near Eastern temples. Ezekiel 3:12, "Blessed be the glory of the Lord in his place," was also understood as a verse of liturgical praise and became an integral part of the Jewish liturgy.[8] Deuteronomy might have warned the Israelites not to worship the celestial angels, and yet we see that ancient Jews showed a keen interest in the angels and a desire to imitate them.

In late antiquity Jews were laying the foundations for what would become normative Judaism in the medieval period, honoring their inherited biblical traditions even as they interacted with the peoples of Byzantine Palestine or Persian Babylonia. As we shall see in our examination of late antique Jewish texts, ancient Jews might have disagreed on whom God loved more (the angels or Israel), the names of the angels, what language the angels spoke, and how much angels could do for individual Jews, but none denied that the same angels who dwelled in the heavens with God moved among the members of Israel as well. The chapters that follow examine the role that angels play in different texts—some prescriptive, some descriptive. I will argue that while there was no single view of angels in Jewish antiquity, angels were a significant part of ancient Jewish daily life. To ascertain their roles, we will analyze the sources in all of their contradiction and complexity.

Scholars of post-biblical Judaism could not fail to notice the number of traditions about angels in rabbinic texts and they wrote analyses of these materials, paying careful attention to the theological implications of traditions about angels in rabbinic literature.[9]

8 Biblical scholars have long noted that this text was corrupted in transmission and did not originally convey words heard by Ezekiel as God's chariot departed from the temple. See James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scriptures Then and Now* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2007), 605-6.

9 Ephraim E. Urbach, *Hazal: Pirkei Emunot ve-Deot* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1969) and trans. Israel Abrahams, *The Sages: their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975); Peter Schäfer, *Rivalität Zwischen Engeln Und Menschen: Untersuchungen Zur Rabbinischen Engelvorstellung* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975). These

Likewise, specialists in more neglected areas of Jewish studies such as magic, mysticism, and liturgy also noted the role that angels fulfill in these texts, but their findings remained limited to publications in their respective fields.[10] Finally, scholars writing about Jews through a comparative lens mentioned that the world of ancient Jews was filled with angels, but they have not elaborated on this assertion.[11] I intend for my project to fill this gap, both by bringing relatively understudied texts into conversation with the far more studied rabbinic evidence and by drawing out the roles of angels in late antique Jewish daily life. I will argue that the discussion of the roles of angels in ancient Jewish life cannot be separated from a discussion of authority and mediation in ancient Jewish society. This project is in line with recent works that define religion "as a network of relationships between heaven and earth."[12] In the case of ancient Jews, we shall see how important angels were alongside other human leaders as well as alongside the heroes of Israel's past.

The studies that have been devoted to angels on a corpus by corpus basis in recent decades, e.g. in the Bible, in the literature of the Second Temple period, in rabbinic literature, and in patristic literature, now enable a more comprehensive study of angels in Late Antique Jewish sources. While Jewish angelology has been a topic of study in the past, lack of

contributions have not been sufficiently integrated into contemporary research on Jewish social history. I will discuss them in the first chapter on angels in rabbinic literature.

10 Lawrence Schiffman and Michael Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts from the Cairo Genizah* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992); Schäfer, "Engel und Menschen in der Hekhalot-Literatur," *Karios* 22 (1980): 201-25 (reprinted in *Hekhalot-Studien,* Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988); Laura Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis: An Invitation to Piyyut* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 2010).

11 Seth Schwartz writes that "The rabbis' world was, in contrast to ours, pervaded with gods" in *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 185. See also, Keith Hopkins, *A World Full of Gods*: *Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Roman Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999). Peter Brown laid the foundation for the field of late antiquity and discusses the role of invisible beings in several of his books. See his *Body and Society*: *Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 161-6 and 259; ibid., *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

12 Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: the religious Worlds People make and the Scholars who Study them* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005)l 2.

diachronically and synchronically sensitive study has allowed for tensions between different corpora to go unanalyzed. My research will foreground the significance of angels for Late Antique Jews, showing the diverse ways the rabbis imagined the angels, the ways attendees of ancient synagogue encountered angels in their liturgy, the ways other Jews might imagined angels in their homes, and still other Jews imagined themselves achieving angelic status. As we shall see, Jewish liturgical texts imagined the angels in the heavens, mystical texts commanded them to descend to earth, and other Jewish texts acknowledged the angels' presence, even if they preferred to focus on their relationship with God instead. Analyzing conflicting conceptions of angels in these corpora, I highlight ancient Jewish disagreements about intercessors, mediation, and leadership in Jewish society. As we shall see, the traditions about angels that came to embarrass the *Wissenschaft* scholars had precedents in ancient Jewish discussions of angels as well.

Some Definitions

In this dissertation, I examine conceptions of angels in rabbinic, liturgical, ritual, and mystical texts. Before we begin examining Jewish conceptions of angels on a corpus by corpus basis, it proves helpful to make some general observations about angels in ancient Judaism.

What are Angels?

The term angel derives from the Greek word *angelos* (ἄγγελος), which could refer to a human or divine messenger. The same double-meaning prevails with the Hebrew term for angel/messenger, *malach*. The last prophetic book in the Hebrew canon is not named for a prophet, but simply named Malachi, "My (divine) messenger." Like Jews, polytheists of the Greco-Roman Mediterranean believed in angelic messengers (see *angeloi* of the *Illiad* 2.26, 2.63, and 18.165) as well as daemons, which were mediating spirits of neutral character. The Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo wrote that those beings whom the philosophers call daemons, Moses calls angels (De Gigantibus 1:6).[13]

Along with traditions that prohibited worship of the angels, ancient Jews inherited stories about angels delivering messages from God to humanity and protecting Israel. In the book of Daniel, Gabriel is sent by God to assist Daniel in the interpretations of his visions and to reveal to him what will happen in Israel's future; Michael is briefly mentioned as the angelic prince fighting on behalf of Israel. The book of Daniel is the only biblical book that names the angels Michael and Gabriel.[14] The angel Raphael appears only in the non-canonical book of Tobit.[15] The most famous angelic tradition, however, may be from Genesis 18, which recounts how three angelic visitors came to Abraham and Sarah at the Oaks of Mamre and foretold the birth of Isaac. Later interpreters identified these angels as Michael,

13 Philo's statement highlights the neutral disposition of angels, who could be sent on beneficent or maleficent missions by God. These will be discussed in the following sections.

14 Daniel 8:16, 9:21 and 10:13. Notably, Daniel is the latest book in the Hebrew canon, dating to 164 BCE.

15 Tobit likely dates to the second-century BCE. Hebrew copies of this book have been found in Qumran and the Cario Genizah, but it was incorporated only into the Christian Apocrypha.

Gabriel, and Raphael.[16] This is one of the few angelic traditions celebrated by Jews, Christians, and Muslims.[17]

Conversely, biblical traditions also describe angels whom God sends to deliver death on earth. For example, in 2 Samuel 24, king David has taken a census of the people of Israel, an unnecessary procedure reeking of pride, which leads God to send a pestilence upon Israel. The text states:

> So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning until the appointed time, and seventy thousand men of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. When the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, *the Lord* relented from the calamity and said to the angel who destroyed the people, "It is enough! Now relax your hand!" And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Then David spoke to *the Lord* when he saw the angel who was striking down the people, and said, "Behold, it is I who have sinned, and it is I who have done wrong; but these sheep, what have they done? Please let Your hand be against me and against my father's house."

God sends pestilence upon the land through an angel; the angel's outstretched hand delivers death to Israel, not God's hand. God commands the angel to desist when he threatens Jerusalem. The text makes it evident that David saw the angel and knew that he was subordinate to God. Hence, David addressed God directly. Jews in late antiquity knew of beneficent angels and angels of death and though they understood all angels to be God's subordinates, they still sometimes chose to address God through his angels.

Ancient interpreters of the Bible also understood "sons of God" (*bnei elim* and *bnei elohim*) to refer to angels.[18] Additionally, *elohim*, another appellation for God, was sometimes understood to refer to angels. So according to Genesis 5:23 the patriarch Enoch "walked with

16 Genesis Rabbah 50:2, discussed in second chapter.

17 David Albert Jones, *Angels*, 1-3.

18 See Genesis 6:4 or Job 1:6.

God (*elohim*); according to biblical interpreters, Enoch must have walked with the angels.[19] Likewise, in a mysterious passage in Genesis 32:24-32 Jacob wrestles with "a man," who refers to himself as *elohim*, understood to mean an angel of God.[20] Finally, Psalm 8:5 states "What is man that You have been mindful of him, mortal man that You have taken note of him, that you have made him a little less than *elohim*..." The first-century CE Epistle to the Hebrews understood *elohim* as angels. As previously mentioned, the seraphim, cherubim, and *ophanim* of the visions of the prophets would also come to be understood as angelic beings.

Ancient Jewish sources agree that angels were made of fiery substance,[21] which emphasizes their aethereal character, but otherwise there is much disagreement about their appearance. Contrary to Yehezkel Kaufmann's description of the angels as non-individuated and sexless, early Jewish traditions describe angels as masculine.[22] Stories in the Bible describe visitors who look like men and only with their dramatic exit makes evident that they were angels.[23] In Isaiah's vision, the seraphim have six wings, in Ezekiel only four wings, and probably under Hellenistic influence, ancient Jews would come to think of angels as having only one pair of wings like the *Nike* of Greek art.[24] Of course, in Jacob's dream the

19 Hence, *The Book of the Watchers*. See James Vanderkam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1984).

20 See verse 28: "For you have striven with *elohim*..."

21 Genesis. Rabbah. 78:1, Babylonian Talmud Chagigah 14a, Yannai's *qedushta* to Exodus 3:1, *Hekhalot Rabbati* §213, *Sepher Ha-Razim*: "And all of them were created from fire and their appearance is like fire, and their fire is blazing, for from fire they emerged" (Morgan, trans., *Sepher Ha-Razim,* 21; §31 of *Sefer ha-Razim*, ed. Rebiger and Schäfer).

22 See Kaufman, *Religion of Israel*, 63. The gender of the angels is never stated explicitly, but the six-winged seraphim in Isaiah covered their "legs" (6:1), the book of Jubilees states that the angels were created circumcised (15:27), and Paul is worried about women's uncovered hair seducing angels (1 Corinthians 11:10), which may relate to the idea that the fallen angels were seduced by women (Testament of Reuben 5:5-6).

23 See Judges 13:15ff. (on Manoah and his wife) and as previously mentioned, the angelic visitors to Abraham in Genesis 18.

24 Extant texts are not explicit about how many pairs of wings the angels had, but depictions of angels on a synagogue gateway (no longer extant), on Aaron's robes in the fresco in the Dura Europos Synagogue, and in the illuminated manuscript of the Cotton Genesis, suggest just one pair was imagined by Jews in Palestine and in the Diaspora. See "F. Landsberger, "The Origin of the Winged Angel in Jewish Art." *Hebrew Union College*

angels are using a ladder to ascend and descend from the heavens so the angels probably have no wings in this vision (contrary to Chagall's depiction of them in his painting).[25] Later Jewish sources mention that the angels have wings, but do not comment on other aspects of their appearance.

While biblical and Second Temple period compositions almost uniformly depict people responding with fear, awe, and a mistaken desire to worship the angels, late antique Jewish texts take the presence of the angels for granted.[26] Many texts depict Jews welcoming angelic accompaniment and intimacy. The rabbis show no fear of the angels, more often depicting the angels as guardians and cheerleaders.[27] Likewise, ritual texts suggest that ancient Jewish men and women found that imagining themselves surrounded by angels was comforting.[28] Mystical texts paradoxically depict angels as frightening, friendly, and biddable.[29]

Annual 20 (1947): 227-54. See the Nikae sarcophagus in the cemetery of Beit Shearim in Nahman Avigad, Beth She'arim: Report on the Excavations During 1953–1958 (Vol. 3; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1976), no. 125.

25 Genesis 28:12. Marc Chagall, *Jacob's Ladder* (1973, Saint-paul-de-vence, France)

26 See Revelation 19:10, Tobit 12:16-22; Apocalypse of Zephaniah 6:11-15; Ascension of Isaiah 7:18-23; Joseph and Aseneth 14:9-11. These are collected and discussed in Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1995), 75 ff.

27 Babylonian Talmud Chagigah 14b; *Midrasch Tehillim*, Mizmor 17:8, p.131 (Ed. Salomon Buber, Vilna, 1891).

28 See James Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia, 1913), text 13; Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1985), amulet 1. See also Naveh and Shaked's *Magic Spells and Formulae*, 130 (Bowl 22 from the Einhorn Collection).

29 See *Hekhalot Rabbati* §213 for terrifying angels; See §122 following B238 for a depiction of sage sitting in the lap of an angel.

Angels & Jewish Monotheism

The relationship between Jewish monotheism and the presence of angels in ancient Jewish traditions is a massive topic in its own right, which I will only address briefly here and as will become necessary in successive chapters. As the title of one article suggests, monotheism may be a misused term in Jewish studies.[30] Peter Hayman argues that Deuteronomy achieves a level of transcendental monotheism that is not matched by other books of the Bible nor later Jewish texts; he mainly points to the profusion of angels in Jewish sources to argue against a strict Jewish monotheism.[31] In his excellent review of this topic, Michael Mach notes that "the sheer existence of angels need not necessarily be interpreted as an obstacle to 'monotheistic' beliefs, at least not if one allows for an 'inclusive monotheism.'"[32] Indeed, many kinds of monotheisms prevailed and coexisted in Jewish history.[33] Mach distinguishes between the strict monotheism of the book of Judith, which asserts that the God of Israel is the Creator of the Universe and the only true God, and the monotheism of letter of Pseudo-Aristeas, which identifies the God of Israel with the Greek God Zeus, and finally, the monotheism of the Book of Jubilees, which is strongly anti-idolatrous while also upholding a belief in angels and demons. This latter kind of inclusive monotheism, which allowed for a belief in angels that are subordinate to God, prevailed in

30 Peter Hayman, "Monotheism-a Misused Word in Jewish Studies." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 42.1 (1991): 1-15.

31 Hayman, "Monotheism," 9.

32 Michael Mach, "Concepts of Jewish Monotheism in the Hellenistic Period," *Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism* (Boston: Brill 1999), 23. Mach also wrote a monograph on angels in Second Temple Judaism, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens in vorrabbinischer Zeit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992).

33 William Horbury employs the terms "exclusive" and "inclusive" monotheism to describe how second temple Jewish texts treat foreign deities. In Horbury's usage, exclusive monotheism denies the potency of other gods while inclusive monotheism simply subordinates other gods to the God of the Jews.

late antiquity. It seems that it is more problematic for modern people to reconcile monotheism with other divine beings than it was for early Jews and Christians.

Loren Stuckenbruck researched the question of Jewish attitudes to angels extensively in his monograph *Angel Veneration and Christology*. He demonstrated that in early Jewish texts, Jews never turned angels into objects of cult or worship. The opposite is usually the case: where Jews encounter angels and fall to their knees in awe, the angels refuse their obeisance. As we shall see, Jewish texts depict Jews praying through the angels to God, but their prayers make clear that they believed they were staying within a monotheistic framework. My findings in this dissertation are in line with Stuckenbruck's conclusions. Jews prayed through angels to God, a practice that was likely confusing to outsiders and may have been understood as worship of angels.

Angels & Demons

Angels and demons are often thought of as opposite beings in the popular imagination. Demons, however, are rarely juxtaposed with angels in most late antique Jewish texts. Comparisons of angels and demons in rabbinic literature are also rare.[34] Instead, as we shall see, Israel is juxtaposed with angels in rabbinic literature. Similarly, in ritual texts I will show that angels and demons are presented in opposition to one another in only one third of incantation texts. Indeed, I will argue that angels are invoked for a variety of reasons in ritual texts, not only in the battle against demons.

34 *Sifrei Numbers*, *Naso*, §40, on Num 6: 24, ed. Horowitz p. 44; Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 16a compares and contrasts angels, demons, and humans.

Jewish sources agree that God created angels (though they disagree on which day this occurred).[35] Jewish sources offer three explanations for the source of demons: the mating of fallen angels and humans created demons, God created demons, or Adam created demons. Chronologically the earliest, the second temple period *Book of the Watchers* offers an extended narrative about the terrible consequences of the angels that left their heavenly posts and produced offspring with earthly women: these hybrid demonic offspring wreak havoc on the earth.[36]

The foundational rabbinic document of the second century CE, the Mishnah asserts that demons were created by God at twilight on the sixth day.[37] A later tradition associated with R. Yirmiyah b. Elazar states that Adam begat "spirts, demons, and liliths" in his first 130 years, and only afterward did he beget offspring in his likeness and form.[38] Other rabbinic stories offer yet another origin story for demons: the mating of Adam and the first woman (before the creation of Eve), later known as Lilith.[39]

Scholars, meanwhile, emphasize Iranian demonology as a source of Babylonian rabbinic conceptualizations of demons.[40] My preliminary analysis of Jewish amulets suggests

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35 According to the Book of Jubilees 2:2, God created the angels on the first day of Creation; *Genesis Rabbah* 1:3 places angels on the fifth day of creation of the world. *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 4:6 places their creation on the second day.

36 For the development of the myth of the fallen angels, see the *Book of the Watchers*; Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

37 See the *mezikin* of mAvot 5:6; ms. Kaufman 345.

38 Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 18b.

39 Yuval Harari, "The Sages and the Occult," *Literature of the Sages* (vol. II; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 536; see Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 18b for "*ruhin*, *sheidin*, *lilin*" and *Genesis Rabbah* 17:6 for the tradition that *satan* was created at same time as the first woman.

40 Isaiah Gafni, "Babylonian Rabbinic Culture," *Cultures of the Jews* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 246; Edwin Yaumauchi, "Aramaic Magic Bowls" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85 (1965): 511-23. There he writes that "many of the spirits themselves are lineal descendants of Babylonian originals, such as the *lilith* and *sedin*" (523).

that Babylonian incantations were directed at demons twice as much as Palestinian incantations were directed at them. This suggests that demons loomed larger in the Babylonian Jewish imagination than in the Palestinian environment, where sometimes illnesses are just illnesses and not perceived as demonic invasions of the body. Highlighting the syncretistic nature of Babylonian Jewish demonology, scholars have pointed to evidence of Jewish ritual practitioners faithfully reproducing lists of threatening demons from other languages, but changing the names of the angelic forces they appeal to.[41] This suggests that Jews were more invested in knowing their angelic deliverers than their demonic enemies.

Angelic Aspirations and Angelic Fellowship

In the following chapters we will encounter some Jews who sought to imitate the angels. Some Jews, for example, wished to sing praise to God like the angels of Isaiah's and Ezekiel's prophecies (see the chapter on liturgical poetry); some sought to acquire the power of the angels over demons and other enemies (see the chapter on ritual texts); some sought the knowledge and wisdom of the angels (see the chapter on mystical texts). In Jewish texts we will find that becoming angelic often also implied joining the company of the angels. Once one had become like the angels, one could sing in union with them, speak with them, and tour the heavenly realms with them. Liturgical texts speak only of synchronicity in time with the angels, but mystical and ritual texts conceive of far more mingling with the angels, both in the heavenly and earthly realms.

41 Tapani Harviainen, "Syncretistic and Confessional Features in Mesopotamian Incantation Bowls," *Studia Orientalia* 70 (1993): 29-37.

Angels and Authority in Late Antiquity

This dissertation examines angels in texts composed by different learned Jews in late antiquity both in Palestine and Babylonia. These texts, therefore, represent the views of an educated Jewish elite. However, it is rare that we are able to gain perspective on how different Jews might have viewed each other or viewed the authorities available to them within their communities. Through magical or ritual texts in particular, we are able to view the spectrum of authority figures available to ancient Jews. By "authorities" I mean, those people to whom ordinary Jews could turn for help, guidance, and as mediators to God. In ritual texts we see that Jews appealed to invisible beings like the angels and heroes from Israel's past as well as the ritual practitioners themselves for help. Stepping back from all the extant Jewish texts, we can see how their composers—ritual practitioners, rabbis, prayer-leaders, and others—were all authority figures available to ancient Jews, each with their own perspectives on the meaning of mediation and the angels. Analyzing angels in ancient Jewish texts thus brings into view the spectrum of authority figures available to ancient Jewish men and women. I argue that when ancient Jews sought help to cure illness, to solve marital problems, to promote their business, or to have children, they could turn to many different kinds of authorities, both human and supernatural.

My decision to examine evidence from Jewish communities as far apart as Roman Palestine and Sassanian Babylonia is based on two considerations. First, religious ideas and rituals were not always limited by geographical boundaries in late antiquity. Like Paul's epistles, which offer evidence of widely scattered religious communities communicating with each other, Jewish sources also provide a window onto a time when religious ideas were

shared over a vast geographical area, despite the boundaries of the Roman and Sasanian empires. Most famously, rabbinic traditions traveled with learned disciples from Palestine to Babylonia and back again.[42] Likewise, magical spells from Palestine influenced Babylonian incantation formulas.[43] While a few traditions in the *Hekhalot* literature point to a Babylonian context,[44] its complex literary development suggests development "at different places and different times," potentially in Palestine and in Babylonia.[45] Fully appreciating the complexity of the rabbinic and magical sources may require considering the possibility that ideas traveled from afar and were adapted.

When I analyze the Jewish and Christian liturgical practices, I will limit my comments on angels to Palestine. Although Jewish synagogal poetry also became exceedingly popular in Babylonia and Christian hymns in the region were reaching fruition at a similar pace, the earliest datable Babylonian authority that mentions *piyyut* is from around 800 CE, and thus beyond the scope of this study.[46]

42 Seth Schwartz, "The Political Geography of Rabbinic Texts," *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 91.

43 Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1993), 21.

44 Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), 307

45 Schäfer, *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 347; Schäfer, "Tradition and Redaction in Hekhalot Literature," *Hekhalot-Studien*, 15.

46 Ruth Langer, *To Worship God Properly* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1998), 53.

Chapter 1: No Angels (rabbis and *Imitatio Dei*)

In this chapter, I build on previous surveys of angels in rabbinic literature to show the diversity of attitudes towards angels in rabbinic angels: some rabbinic traditions show a desire to repress interests in angels while others acknowledge and accept that Jews pray through angels to God. Still other rabbinic sources emphasize that Israel's relationship with God is paramount and that Jews, particularly the sages, ought to model themselves after God. At a time when Christian leaders were emphasizing the angelic ideal, it is noteworthy that the rabbis rejected it.[47] This was by no means an inevitable trajectory of thought in the ancient world.

Imitation of God, *imitatio dei*, was a foundational part of ancient Jewish thought since the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26). Though this Latin term has no exact translation in Mishnaic Hebrew, the idea may be implicit in the rabbinic emphasis on *halakhah*,[48] walking in God's ways (cf. the *derech* in the Qumran sources and ἡ ὁδός in the New Testament[49]). In this chapter, I draw out the evidence for *imitatio dei* in Mishnaic and rabbinic sources and the development of this ideal at the expense of the angels.[50]

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47 Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, reprinted 2008), 171. For example, describing Origen's exhortation to a celibate life, Brown explains that "Not to belong to married society was to belong more intensely to others. The invisible world was magnificently sociable. It was a 'great city' crowded with angelic spirits. The sense of an invisible, alternative society, of a great communion of human and angelic beings, was central to Origen's notion of the virgin state."

48 Yair Lorberbaum, "Imago Dei: Rabbinic Literature, Maimonides and Nahmanides" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1997) [Hebrew]; David S. Shapiro, "The Doctrine of the Image of God and *Imitatio Dei*," *Contemporary Jewish Ethics* (ed. Menachem Kellner; New York : Sanhedrin Press, 1978), 135-136. See also the helpful discussion of imitation of God in Martin Sicker, *Between Man and God: Issues in Judaic Thought* (London: Greenwood Press, 2002), 114-127.

49 See Gospel of John 14:6, Acts of the Apostles 9:2, Hebrews 10:20.

50 Examples of *imitatio dei*: God studying Torah by day and Oral Torah by night (Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 3b; Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 15b; *Pesikta Rabbati* 19:7; *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 46; *Midrash Tehillim* 19:7; God putting on *tallit* and *tefillin* (Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 6a); God Praying (Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 7a).

Chapter 2: Praying with the Angels (Yannai's *piyyut* in Late Antique Palestine)

From the diverse, anthological traditions of rabbinic literature, we turn to the work of one poet and examine how he conceived of angels and depicted them in his poetic compositions. Though hundreds of poets were active in Palestine between the sixth and eighth century CE, only the work of a few has survived.[51] Among the extant poets, the sixth century CE poet Yannai proved not only most popular in late antiquity, but also the poet who was most devoted to angels. Yannai's popularity ensured that his work was copied for centuries and carried to Egypt when Jews fled the Crusaders in Palestine. The oeuvre of his poetry was recovered in the Cairo Genizah and is firmly dated to the pre-Islamic period. It also proves most accessible as it has been delimited, published, and commented on by several scholars.[52] This oeuvre consists of a poetic composition for each weekly Torah portion according to the triennial cycle used in ancient Palestine.[53] Liturgical poetry provides an entry point into the sights and sounds of the Late Antique synagogue. By examining his corpus, we will learn how Yannai invited his congregation to join in the angelic praise and elevated all of Israel to the level of the angels. I close the chapter by analyzing Yannai's composition for Yom Kippur, which of all Yannai's *piyyutim* features the greatest preoccupation with the topic of angelic and human relations.

51 Fleischer, *Shirat Hakodesh*, part III, ch. 1, lists Yose ben Yose, Yannai, Hedutha, Shim'on bar Megas, and Qallir as poets of the pre-Islamic period (there seems to be no consensus on how to spell Qillir's name in English—elsewhere Qilir, Qillir or Kalir, Kallir, Killir, later ha-Kaliri).

52 Rabinovtiz, *Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Yannai*; Norman Bronznick, *A Corrective and Supplementary Commentary to Maḥazor Yanai* (Jerusalem: R. Mas, 2000) [Hebrew]; Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*.

53 Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 191 fn. 78. Leiber speculates that either Yannai wrote a single *piyyut* for each weekly Torah portion or that only the best composition for each portion survives.

Chapter 3: At Home with the Angels (Magical materials from Palestine and Babylonia)

What happens when we follow ancient Jews from the synagogue back to their homes? In this chapter, I examine the role of angels in the incantation bowls, Palestinian amulets, and a magical treatise from Late Antique Palestine. These texts reveal how Jews imagined angelic and human interaction in the domestic realm. As mentioned earlier, this corpus in particular brings the spectrum of authority figures available to ancient Jews into view. We shall see that ritual practitioners often ask the angels for their assistance alongside God. In one popular incantation, they liken themselves to angels in order to achieve their aims. The ritual sources also have the advantage of bringing us closer to the interests of women, often out of sight in literary sources. Though work remains to be done, significant publications and surveys of Jewish magical material have emerged in recent years that enable researchers to productively engage with this corpus.[54]

Chapter 4: Angels all the time (*Hekhalot Rabbati*)

In my final chapter, I turn to the evidence of the mystical treatise *Hekhalot Rabbati*. Angels, angelic names, and angelic praise of God fill the pages of this corpus, which was composed over the course of the fifth to ninth centuries CE and circulated in Palestine and Babylonia. Angels play a major role in *Hekhalot* literature, some helping the mystics, some

54 Ludwig Blau, *Das altjüdische Zauberwesen* (Berlin: L. Lamm, 1914); Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (New York: Behrman's Jewish book house, 1939); Schäfer, "Jewish Magic Literature in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 41 (1990): 75–91; Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Yuval Harari, *Early Jewish Magic, Research, Method, Sources* (Jerusalem: Bialik institute, 2010) [Hebrew]; Harari,"What is a magical text? Methodological reflections aimed at redefining early Jewish magic" in *Officina Magica: Essays on the Practice of Magic in Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 91-124. Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae*; Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998); Dan Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls* (London: Routledge, 2002).

contending against them as they try to ascend from one heaven to another. Schäfer's *The Hidden and Manifest God* (1992) traced and delineated the functions of angels in each of the *Hekhalot* macroforms.[55] He determined that there was no consistent angelology in this corpus. I build on his findings to examine the hymns more closely and to draw out what they can teach us about the fellowship of men and angels in *Hekhalot Rabbati*. In the main, I found that paying attention to the sense of time in the hymns shows us how its users wished to live in synchronicity with the angels. Moreover, in this corpus, we find men who not only liken themselves to angels, but even dare to command them. In these texts, Jewish preoccupation with angels reaches its climax.

55 Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); see also, "Engel und Menschen in der Hekhalot-Literatur" *Kairos* 22 (1980): 201-225 (republished in *Hekhalot-Studien*, 250-276). More recently, Schäfer returned and developed these findings in *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* and "The Angels," chapter 6 of *The Jewish Jesus*.

CHAPTER 1: ANGELS IN RABBINIC LITERATURE

Introduction

Until recently, when scholars sought to reconstruct Jewish social history after the temple's destruction, they relied solely on rabbinic literature. Rabbinic literature contains a vast sea of source material, redacted between the third and sixth centuries CE. The traditions of the rabbis capture the ideals of a learned male community and rarely acknowledge external forces like the Roman occupation or the growth of the Christian movement. The genre itself resists synthetic treatment: many opinions from different regions and time periods of the movement are captured within terse traditions that were brought together by later redactors. Rabbinic literature was never intended for an outside audience and is not in the genre of systematic theology; it is a record of internal traditions, which take for granted many concepts.[1] As we shall see, the angels are rarely the main topic of discussion, but only discussed obliquely by the rabbis. I am not attempting to piece together a rabbinic theology of angels, which is doubtful ever existed, but ascertaining what—if any—role angels fulfilled in the life of the rabbis.

The rabbis, like the rest of the Jews, inherited mixed messages about angels and the

1 Martin Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE-400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

host of heaven from biblical writings. Their corpus reflects this legacy, containing contradictory and competing traditions about angels. The tannaitic, amoraic, and later rabbis encountered angels in their exegesis of the Torah, in the developing liturgy of the synagogue, through interaction with other Jews in their communities, and according to some traditions, a few sages encountered them personally, too. Thus, we should expect that even within the same generation of rabbis interpreting the same foundational texts, we would find different attitudes towards angels and multiple ideas about their relationship to Israel and humanity more generally. With this in mind, I seek to understand rabbinic beliefs about angels in the context of other Jewish writings about angels.

The texts of the rabbis, which became authoritative for Jews in the Near East and Mediterranean world only in the medieval period, were still in the process of composition and consolidation in late antiquity. In this period the rabbis were still aspiring to be authoritative leaders in the Jewish communities of Palestine.[2] I will argue that this circumstance also impacted the way the rabbis conceive of angels.

In this chapter I aim to highlight representative sources that attest to the diversity of opinions among the rabbis as well as to their distinctive perspectives on angels among other Jews. Unlike previous studies, my analysis is particularly attuned to how beliefs about angels might have shaped the daily life of ancient Jews, the rabbis among them. How do rabbinic traditions show ancient Jews encountering angels on a weekly or daily basis or acknowledging them not at all? My main innovation is to suggest that the way the rabbis treat angels is bound up with their developing sense of identity and authority. I will only make

2 David Goodblatt, "The Political and Social History of the Jewish Community of Palestine c. 235-638," *The Cambridge History of Judaism* (vol. 4; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 404-30.

preparatory remarks in this chapter as we will need to delve into the liturgical, magical, and mystical sources in turn to fully illuminate the rabbis' contribution to the religious landscape. In this chapter, I will survey the rabbis' conceptions of angels and Israel and I will return to situate the rabbis in their Late Antique context in the conclusion.

What distinguishes my survey from previous treatments of rabbinic literature is that it is attuned to the daily life of ancient Jews and it is placed within a wider context of contemporary Jewish sources. My analysis of liturgical, mystical, and magical sources approach angels in complementary and contradictory ways. In general, rabbinic sources can be neutral in their treatment of angels, but among Jewish sources in late antiquity they stand out in that some of them discourage attention to the angels, inveighing against invocation of the angels. Genre is certainly one reason for this: the legal writings of the rabbis were prescriptive in a way that the writings of the liturgical poets, of the ritual practitioners, and of the mystics were not. Still, rabbinic writings reveal another possible response to angels in antiquity. In contrast to Christian leaders that upheld the angelic ideal for their human communities, some rabbis emphasized Israel’s superior status to the angels and thus the irrelevance of angelic ideals. These traditions emphasize that imitation of God, walking in his ways, is superior than any attempt to be angelic.

The topic of angels in rabbinic literature is well-researched: A. Marmorstein's study was the earliest while Ephraim Urbach's (1969) and Peter Schäfer's (1975) studies were most comprehensive and highlighted many important themes and tendencies in the rabbinic corpus.[3] I build on their research to foreground the sources that will prove especially useful

3 Ephraim E. Urbach, *Hazal: Pirkei Emunot ve-Deot* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1969) and trans. Israel Abrahams, *The Sages: their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975); Peter Schäfer, *Rivalität Zwischen Engeln Und Menschen: Untersuchungen Zur Rabbinischen Engelvorstellung* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975).

as we begin to delve into conceptions of angels in other Jewish bodies of evidence. I will also be in conversation with other more recent surveys and discussions of angels.[4]

In *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God: Essays in Anthropomorphism*, Marmorstein suggested the key to understanding rabbinic sources about angels was recognizing that two underlying and opposing interpretive forces operated in the foundational sources in Rabbinic literature. Marmorstein asserted that literal and allegorizing approaches to the body of God operated side by side in the *tannaitic* (pre-200 CE) sources, both of which have implications for the rabbis' treatment of the angels. Rabbis of the allegorizing school (like R. Ishmael and his students), assigned every anthropomorphic depiction of God to the angels. They took for granted the presence of angels in many biblical episodes, even as they emphasized the angels' subordination to God. In contrast, rabbis of the literalizing school were not bothered by the anthropomorphic descriptions of God and were not inclined toward seeing angels in every theophany; they viewed the action of angels as undermining signs of God's devotion to Israel. Though Marmorstein's conflation of rabbinic hermeneutic and theology has been challenged,[5] and much has changed since Marmorstein's day in religious studies, some of his insights about the rabbinic motivations for diverse depictions of the angels hold true. His work serves to remind us not to essentialize rabbinic sources and to keep in mind the internal interpretive motivations for diverse conceptions of angels.

Urbach, in his chapter on the angels in *The Sages: their Concepts and Beliefs*, noted

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4 Meir Bar-Ilan, "Prayers of Jews to Angels and other Mediators in the First Centuries CE," *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 79-95; Jonah Steinberg, "Angelic Israel: Self-Identification with Angels in Rabbinic Agadah and its Jewish Antecedents," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia Univeristy, 2003); Gerald Septimus, "On the Boundaries of Prayer: Talmudic Ritual Texts with Addressees Other Than God" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 2008).

5 Alon Goshen Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 87/2 (1994): 171-195.

that the rabbis were well aware that the bible had no consistent angelology and they developed their own decisive ideas about angels, always careful to maintain God's omniscience and omnipotence. In his reading of the sources, Urbach sought to discern prevalent theological ideas about the angels and he privileged the allegorical school of thought in rabbinic literature which multiplied angels in the sources in order to maintain the transcendence of God. While his collection of the sources is most impressive, the shortcoming with Urbach's approach is that he reads early and late rabbinic literature as speaking in one voice and often reads later sources into earlier ones. His analysis is focused theological implications as well, not the practical implications of Jewish belief in angels. Furthermore, Urbach took rabbinic authority in late antiquity for granted, which I argue prevented him from understanding the function of some traditions about angels.

Peter Schäfer's *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen: Untersuchungen zur Rabbinischen Engelvorstellung* (1975) surveyed and analyzed the diverse conceptions of angels in the bible and non-canonical Second Temple period sources, and traced continuities and innovations in traditions about angels in rabbinic interpretive literature (*midrashim*). Schäfer shed light on the theme of human and angelic community in the sources from Qumran, the theme of human and angelic rivalry in the *midrashic* sources, and the (particularly Palestinian) tendency to uphold the status of Israel over that of the angels. Moreover, he stressed that the rabbis lacked a defined angelology and, instead, addressed beliefs about angels on an *ad hoc* basis. With these observations, I am in agreement. Moreover, as opposed to other scholars who sought to explain the rabbinic attitude to angels as a reaction to Gnosticism,[6] Schäfer focused on the internal Jewish interest that led to such

6 Alexander Altmann, "The Gnostic Background of the Rabbinic Adam Legends," *JQR* 35 (1944/45): 371-

motifs, namely election theology. As he asserted,

> Der einzig adäquate Kontext für die rabbinische Engelvorstellung ist das Bewußtsein von der Erwählung Israels und der Hinwendung Gottes zu seinem Volk. Das den Aussagen über die Engel zugrundeliegende Weltbild ist deutlich anthropozentrisch ausgerichtet: Der Mensch ist Höhepunkt und Ziel der Schöpfung; die Engel sind für die Vollendung der Schöpfung in der Geschichte Gottes mit Israel nicht von Bedeutung und rücken an den Rand des Interesses.[7]

Keeping these internal motivations in mind is essential to proper appreciation of the evidence on angels in the rabbinic sources. The rabbis were intent on conveying God's faithful and loving relationship to Israel in spite of a political reality that might indicate the opposite. Insisting on Israel's superiority to the angels was one way of accomplishing that.

Additionally, the roles that angels were fulfilling in other Jewish practices of the period may also have impacted how the rabbis handled angels. My project seeks to situate Schäfer's foundational findings in a wider cultural context. Building on Schäfer's work in rabbinics as well as in the fields of mysticism and magic, I will argue that the rabbinic traditions allow us to make observations about the daily life of the rabbis and that the rabbis' self-conception as leaders and mediators in late antiquity may also shed light on their approach to the angels.

In his more recent book *The Jewish Jesus*, Schäfer again addressed the topic of angels, this time in the context of Jewish and Christian interaction in late antiquity.[8] Here he writes that "there can be little doubt that Judaism was well on its way to developing or even institutionalizing an intermediate level of angelic powers between God and his creatures and

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91; Joseph Schultz, "Angelic Opposition to the Ascension of Moses and the Revelation of the Law," *JQR* 61 (1970/71): 282-307.

7 Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen*, 233.

8 Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity shaped each other* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

that the rabbis consciously and quite effectively put a halt to this trend."[9] I am less sure that the rabbis succeeded in their efforts than Schäfer. While there is no evidence to suggest a cult of angels existed among late antique Jews, certainly not from the rabbis, other corpora of evidence helps us see the broad appeal of angels and what the rabbis may have been reacting to. It is not only that the rabbis found the idea of "an intermediate level of angelic powers" offensive, it is that they found in the angels a threat to their own position of mediation. Along with the evidence from other corpora, this suggests that angels played a larger role in Jewish religious life than has been recognized. In this chapter, I lay the necessary groundwork to understand the rabbis' views and how other Jews agreed and disagreed with their conceptions of angels.

There is some slippage in rabbinic sources between the rabbis themselves, Israel conceived more broadly, and humanity. When the rabbis contrast God's and the angels' attitude toward Adam for example, it is not clear if Adam is a stand in for humanity or only for Israel. When angels are said to accompany righteous men on journeys, they likely mean only Jews, but it is hard to be certain. Some traditions are clearer: when a sage says that one acquires an advocate angel or an accusing angel based on his deeds (*mitzvot*), it is likely he is thinking of Jews only. When a rabbi suggests that judges model themselves after God and consult with others in making their legal decisions, it would seem to be an inwardly directed statement, even if the language is general. In the end, we must remember that rabbinic traditions were meant for internal consumption, not for unlearned Jews, let alone gentiles.[10]

9 Schäfer, *Jewish Jesus*, 196.

10 A. Marmorstein, "Anges et hommes dans l'Agada" *Revue des études juives* 84 (1927): 37-50 and 138-40. His is the earliest analysis asides from the comprehensive encyclopedia articles on angelology in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, mentioned in the introduction. In his brief and sweeping article he offered a typology of Jewish sources from the Second Temple period through late antiquity on the angels' relationship to humankind. He recognized that behind many traditions about angels, Jews were asking questions such as for whom was the

Here I review only a representative sample of sources from the Mishnah, halakhic midrashim, the talmudim and the more firmly dated late antique aggadic midrashim including Genesis Rabbah and Leviticus Rabbah.[11] Exodus Rabbah, redacted after the Islamic conquest, reflects a different social reality than these earlier rabbinic compositions. It shows synthesis of earlier materials and conveys a much more positive attitude toward the angels. Exodus Rabbah has, indeed, played a much larger role in previous surveys. I refer to it here only to highlight how different it is from earlier rabbinic traditions.

I will begin by surveying cases where it seems the rabbis are ignoring or downplaying mention of angels in biblical sources or in their own legal statements. I then turn to sources where the sages address Jewish interest in angels more explicitly, legislating against invocation or depiction of angels. In the background of traditions that downgrade the angels are several considerations. While the sages take the existence of angels for granted, they are confident in God's preference for Israel over the angels. And more than that, imitation of god (*imitatio dei*) is a foundational principle for them. This aspiration toward godliness, I argue, was of particular significance to the rabbis and limited their idealization of the angels in late antiquity. While the first part of my chapter highlights the distinctive attitudes towards angels that emerge in the rabbinic corpus, I do not want to paint the rabbis into a corner. Many beliefs about angels in rabbinic literature parallel traditions found in the liturgical, magical, and mystical texts. Hence, the next section highlights the complexity and diversity that remains in the rabbinic corpus. To show how ideas about angels evolved after the classical

world created, who is godlike, and who can aspire to angelic status.

11 In the following survey, I cite Ms. Kaufmann for the Mishnah, Zuckermandel's critical edition of the Tosefta, Horowitz-Rabin's critical edition of the *Mekhilta d. R. Yishmael,* Albeck's critical edition of Genesis Rabbah, Mirkin's Exodus Rabbah, Margalioth's Leviticus Rabbah, Schäfer and Becker's *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi* for the Palestinian Talmud, and checked all available manuscripts of the Babylonian Talmud in the Lieberman database, noting variants when relevant. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

rabbinic period, I highlight ideas that emerge in later *midrashim* like Exodus Rabbah. To conclude, I paraphrase one the most famous sections of the Babylonian Talmud, which encapsulates the contradictory and peculiar views of the rabbis on angels.

No Angels? Arguments from Silence

Before turning to the many rabbinic sources that discuss angels, it proves worthwhile to note where the rabbis ignore, repress and replace angels in foundational biblical or legal texts.[12] At first sight, the angels seem conspicuously absent from the Mishnah, the foundational document of the rabbis, especially considering that the creation of demons (*hamazzikin*) is mentioned.[13] Meir Bar-Ilan writes that "as is well known, there are no angels in the Mishnah, and only the biblical expression "who dwells upon the cherubim" is mentioned in Berakhot 7:3 in a formula of a benediction that ought not be said according to R. Akiva."[14] Was Judah haNasi, who is said to have redacted the Mishnah two generations after Akiva, opposed to mention of angels in the foundational document of the rabbinic movement? The common term for angels (*mal'kh/mal'khim*) is not used in the Mishnah. However, the angels actually do make two subtle appearances in the Mishnah, but even these may hint at an attempt to hide them from view.

In the same tractate that demons in which mentioned, tractate Avot,[15] a sage named R.

12 Urbach mentions this problem in *Hazal*, 117 (Hebrew).

13 Demons are mentioned among the ten things created at twilight on the sixth day of creation (Ms. Kaufman, Mishnah Avot 5:5).

14 My translation of Meir Bar-Ilan, "Names of Angels," *These Are the Names: Studies in Jewish Onomastics* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1997), 39.

15 Some scholars question question tractate Avot's antiquity, suggesting it post-dates the rest of the Mishnah. See A. Guttmann, "Tractate Abot - Its Place in Rabbinic Literature," *JQR* 41 (1950): 181-93. For the most comprehensive treatment of this topic, see Amram Tropper, *Wisdom, Politics and Historiography: Tractate Avot in the Context of the Greco-Roman Near East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2004. See also

Eliezer ben Yaakov states that "he who performs one precept acquires for himself one paraclete (loan word παρακλητος), and he who commits one transgression acquires for himself one accuser" (4:11).[16] This teaching gives external, albeit invisible, reasons for performing biblical commandments. While the term angel (*malach*) is not used, the teaching refers to the acquisition of heavenly intercessors or accusers, i.e. angels that speak on a person's behalf or against him in the heavenly court. Later rabbinic traditions understood this statement to refer to angels, but made the angels presence explicit by using the word *malach*.[17] In the Targum to Job 33:23, paraclete is also used to translate a messenger angel (*mal'akh melitz*).[18] It possible this statement once did refer to angels, but was edited to be more reserved? This certainly seems to be the case in Mishnah tractate Hullin 2:12, which states:

> השוחט לשם הרים לשם גבעות לשם ימים לשם נהרות לשם מדברות שחיטתו פסולה.
>
> He who slaughters for the sake of mountains, for the sake of hills, for the sake of the seas, for the sake of rivers, or for the sake of wildernesses, his slaughter is invalid.

Ostensibly, this prohibition is directed at Jews who slaughter for the sake of[19] particular places personified. In the Biblical as well as the Greco-Roman world, spirits were believed to inhabit particular rivers, caves, mountains, and other natural features. In Greco-Roman Palestine, Jewish ritual objects show that Jews associated spirits with particular rivers and

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the section on Avot in Schäfer, "Rabbis and Priests, Or: How to Do Away with the Glorious Past of the Sons of Aaron," *Antiquity in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 155-72.

16 Following ms. Kaufmann 4:9.

ר אליעזר בן יעקוב או' העושה מצוה אחת, קנה לו פרקליט אחד; והעובר עבירה אחת, קנה לו קטיגור אחד.

17 *Tanhuma Mishpatim* §19 on Exodus 23:20, will be discussed later in this chapter.

18 My thanks to Naphtali Meshel for pointing out this verse to me.

19 *L-shem*, literally "in the name of" seems to connote "for the purpose of, for the sake of, with reference to" here (see Jastrow 1590).

places as well.[20] Some Jews may have understood these spirits or as angels and thus as proper intermediaries. The presence of angels in the background of Mishnah Hullin's becomes more apparent when we look at its parallel in the Tosefta.[21]

> השוחט לשום חמה לשום לבנה לשם ככבים לשם מזלות לשם מיכאל שר צבא הגדול ולשום שלשול קטן הרי זה בשר זבחי מתים.[22]

> He who slaughters for the sake of the sun, for the sake of the moon, for the sake of the stars, for the sake of the planets, for the sake of Michael the great commander of the host, and for the sake of the small earthworm— lo, this is considered flesh derived from sacrifices to the dead.

The structure of the prohibition is the same, repetition of "for the sake of" (*l'shem*), but instead of earthly bodies like rivers and the sea, the Tosefta lists the celestial bodies and most explicitly, the angel Michael. This tradition likens sacrificing to the celestial bodies and angels to idolatry or sacrificing to dead gods.[23]

Did any Jews sacrifice to angels? While no archaeological evidence that I know of survives to attest to this practice, one biblical tradition may have mitigated the biblical prohibition against sacrificing to angels. Judges 6 relates the story of the hero Gideon, whom God selects to lead the Isrealites against the Midianites and concomitantly, to eradicate Israelite idolatry. An angel of *the Lord* appears to Gideon to enlist him, Gideon asks for proof

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20 See the bronze amulet from Horvat Kannah, which adjures to the spirits of the rivers and roads, discussed in the chapter on angels in Jewish ritual practices.

21 Both the Mishnah and Tosefta version are discussed in Schäfer, "Jewish Jesus," 191. There and in *Rivilitat*, 69, he suggests that a *baraitha* in the Babylonian talmud that combines these two lists was the original version.

22 Tosefta 2:18, ed. Zuckermandel p. 503.

23 While Neusner translated this as flesh derived from sacrifices of corpses ((*The Tosefta*, 1997, p.73), I think "flesh derived from sacrifices *to* the dead" is a better translation. The term *zivchei metim* appears once in the biblical sources in Psalm 106:28, "They joined themselves also to Baal-peor, / And ate sacrifices offered to the dead." And compare Mishnah Avot 3:4 where eating from sacrifices to the dead and eating from the table of God are contrasted.

> רבי שמעון או' שלשה שאכלו על שולחן אחד ולא אמרו עליו דברי תורה הרי אילו כאכלי זבחי מתים שנ' "כי כל שולחנות מלאו קיא צואה בלי מקום" (ישעיהו כח, ח) אבל שלושה שאכלו על שולחן אחד ואמרו עליו דברי תורה כאילו אכלו משולחנו של הקבה שנ' "וידבר אלי זה השולחן אשר לפני יי'" (יחזקאל מא, כב).

from the angel and God, and Gideon makes him an offering of meat and unleavened bread to the angel. The angel touches the offering with the tip of his staff and consumes the offering with fire. The angel's acceptance of Gideon's offering is proof that God supports Gideon. The Mishnah's and Tosefta's rulings then, may have been an attempt to clarify biblical precedent that misled some Jews into thinking offerings to angels were appropriate.

Two more aspects of the Tosefta's statement require explanation: Michael bears an unusual title here: "commander of the great host"[24] and the *halakha* includes an idiosyncratic term for earthworm.[25] It turns out the choice of Michael's title and the description of the earthworm are not unrelated.[26] In Hebrew, the contrast between "the great" Michael and the "small" earthworm is more easily heard as is the alliteration of the series of terms linked by "for the sake of" (*l'shem*), ending with the earthworm (*shilshol*).[27] Literary reasons rather than realia may have motivated the arrangement of this statement. What we see overall is that whereas the Tosefta preserved a tradition prohibiting sacrifice to angels and other celestial beings, the Mishnah has preserved the tradition without any mention of an angelic name, the term for angels, and even the more obvious celestial bodies (mentioned in Deuteronomy). In no other place that I know of are angels mentioned in the Mishnah. As we shall see, while there is no evidence that Jews performed sacrifices to angels or celestial beings, Jews certainly prayed to them, depicted them, and believed they fulfilled important functions in their lives.

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24 Michael's title comes from the unnamed angel in Joshua 5:14, who introduces himself as *sar tzeva YHWH* (Bar-Ilan, "Names of Angels," 40).

25 We would expect *tola'at*, much more common in biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew.

26 I thank Tzemah Yoreh for making this suggestion to me in private communication.

27 Naphtali Meshel pointed out this tradition in Genesis Rabbah 8:1 (cited in Ben Yehuda's dictionary), which also contrasts the ministering angels and the *shilshol*:

אם זכה אדם אומרים לו אתה קדמת למלאכי השרת ואם לאו אומרים לו זבוב קדמך, יתוש קדמך, שלשול זה קדמך

The biblical texts themselves provide the basis for seeing angels as redeeming figures. A passage from Genesis, from Jacob's deathbed blessing of his son Joseph and his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:15-16) make this clear:

ויברך את־יוסף ויאמר
האלהים אשר התהלכו אבתי לפניו אברהם ויצחק
האלהים הרעה אתי מעודי עד־היום הזה:
המלאך הגאל אתי מכל־רע
יברך את־הנערים ויקרא בהם שמי ושם אבתי אברהם ויצחק
וידגו לרב בקרב הארץ:

> And he blessed Joseph saying:
> The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
> the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day,
> the angel who has redeemed me from all evil,
> bless the boys and in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;
> and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.

According to the text, Abraham and Isaac walked before God, God looked after Jacob all his life, and it was the angel who redeemed Jacob from harm. Jacob invoked the God of his fathers and the angel that protected him to continue to be beneficent to his offspring.[28] It is noteworthy that an angel is credited with Jacob's redemption here. The Bible scholar James Kugel has pointed out that angels are often stand-ins for God in the earliest biblical layers. In other words, angels are never actually angels—they turn out to be God. However, ancient interpreters did not have this principle at hand and as we shall see, the rabbis struggled with this issue.

One would think this phrase "The angel who redeemed me," which has become so

28 As with many biblical poems, the relationship to the prose description of Jacob life is not direct. Jacob is most famous for wrestling with an angel (thus receiving the name Israel) and seeing a ladder of angels climbing up to and down from heaven, not being saved by an angel. It is likely the blessing was a separate and independent tradition before being incorporated into this location in the biblical text. In its current form, the poem credits God and the angels for the patriarchs' well-being and fortune, which he hopes they will continue to provide to his offspring for generations.

popular in the nightly fixed liturgy would merit some discussion by the sages on the role of angels, especially as they intervene to save individuals from harm.[29] However, commentary on this passage appears in only two manuscripts of Genesis Rabbah [30] and in a parallel in the Babylonian talmud (Pesahim 118a). Where they do discuss it, the rabbis cite this text only to deride the significance of angelic redemption and uphold God's sustenance of humankind.

> אמר רבי יוחנן קשין מזונותיו של אדם יותר מן הגאולה דאילו בגאולה כתיב "המלאך הגאל אתי מכל רע" מלאך בעלמא ואילו במזונות כתיב "האלהים הרעה אתי."[31]
>
> R. Yohanan said [providing] the sustenance of a person is harder than [bringing about his] redemption, as about redemption it is written "the angel who has redeemed me from all evil" (Gen 48:16), merely an angel, and about sustenance it is written, "the God who shepherds me..." (Gen 48:15).

In the manuscript tradition, the statement is attributed either to R. Yohanan (one of the most influential Amoraim in early third-century CE Palestine) or his student R. Levi. Two motivations seem to operate in this tradition: the rabbinic desire to uphold God's magnanimity in caring for humanity or the motivation to deride angelic redemption. In its present context, the purpose of this citation is not to address the importance of angels in Jewish life, but to uphold everyday acts of sustenance over intervening acts of redemption. And yet, when future redemption is tied to God, it is, of course, prized. When the concept of redemption is coupled with an angel, this tradition chooses to devalue it. I suggest that this is not incidental, but part of some rabbis' distrust of over-reliance on angels. Later in this chapter I will review the evidence for guardian angels in rabbinic literature. I find it telling that this biblical blessing is never cited to bolster even some of the rabbis' belief in guardian

29 Urbach mentions this problem in *Hazal*, 120 (Hebrew).

30 Genesis Rabbah 97:3 (ed. Albeck, 97, 3, p. 1245) appears in two manuscripts, one in the Vatican, the other in a Yemenite manuscript of Adler's in London.

31 Following the Vilna ms. (paralleled byVenice Print 1520); Other mss. cite R. Levi as the speaker of this statement (see JTS 1623, Vatican 109, Munich 6; New York Columbia X 893). Ms. Oxford Opp Add. Fol. 23 has R. Eliezer.

angels.

Angels also figure in the narratives of the book of Exodus, leading the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness (Exodus 14: 19, 23:20-23, 32:34 and Numbers 20:16, 22:22-7). After Israel receives the ten commandments and the laws at Mount Sinai, directly after the prohibition on boiling a kid in its mother's milk, the text has God state (Exodus 23:20-23):

> הנה אנכי שלח מלאך לפניך לשמרך בדרך ולהביאך אל־המקום אשר הכנתי: השמר מפניו ושמע בקלו אל־תמר בו כי לא ישא לפשעכם כי שמי בקרבו: כי אם־שמע תשמע בקלו ועשית כל אשר אדבר ואיבתי את־איביך וצרתי את־צרריך: כי־ילך מלאכי לפניך והביאך אל־האמרי והחתי והפרזי והכנעני החוי והיבוסי והכחדתיו:
>
> Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him.
> But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.
> For behold, my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I blot them out.

This text states that God is sending an angel to guard Israel on their journey to the promised land. Obedience to the angel brings God's beneficence while rebellion against the angel will bring God's wrath. The text states that the name of God is in the angel, which seems to mean that the angel possesses God's authority to act in his name.[32] The *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael,* whose subject is the laws of Exodus, stops just before this verse, evidently because it is no longer entirely legal in character. Contributors to the Mekhilta de R. Simeon bar Yohai (fourth century CE) apparently did comment on these verses.[33] Let us examine this source

32 See discussion of this passage in Peter Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 105-7.

33 However, this section of the Mekhilta is dependent on Midrash HaGadol, whose antiquity is suspect. *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai, kaspa* 81:1*;* ed. and trans.W. David Nelson, p. 370. If this tradition is not

and see how it treats this important angel:

> הנה אנכי שלח מלאך לפניך: זה נביא וכן הוא אומר ויעל מלאך ה' מן הגלגל אל הבוכים לפניך.
>
> "I am sending an angel before you [to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have made ready]" (Exodus 23:20): This [refers to] a prophet. And thus Scripture says, "An angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim" (Judg. 2:1).

Though in the context of Exodus, it is clear that a divine angel was appointed by God for leading the Israelites, the sages that authored this tradition chose to understand this as a prophet instead. They cite a prooftext from the Book of Judges, where an angel (or messenger) reproves the Israelites in the style of the prophets (Judg. 2.1-5); since the next section of the text (Judg. 2.6-9) discusses the death of Joshua ben Nun, they could interpret this messenger as the prophet Joshua. This may be a reflection of a larger strategy. A tradition Leviticus Rabbah (dated to the fourth-fifth century CE) where the role of a different angel in the Exodus event is also mentioned, also replaces the angel with a prophet, and gives a more totalizing explanation for this replacement. The prooftext being discussed is Numbers 20:16, where Moses himself is the speaker and is recounting the Exodus event to the king of Edom.

> וישלח מלאך ויוציאנו ממצרים וגו', וכי מלאך היה והלא משה היה, ולמה קורא אותו מלאך? אלא מכאן שהנביאים נקראים מלאכים.[34]
>
> "And he sent an angel, and brought us forth out of Egypt." But was he an angel, was it not Moses? and why then was he called an angel? This teaches us that the prophets are called angels.

Reading the angel as Moses goes against the plain reading of the prooftext. Contrary to the meaning of the texts of Exodus 23:20 and Numbers 20:16, the rabbinic traditions asserts that the appearances of angels in the Torah refer to prophets. Jonah Steinberg sees in such a

ancient then only a Babylonian Talmudic source remains that refers to this verse (discussed below).

34 Leviticus Rabbah I, 1, ed. Margulies, p. 2.

tradition an "angelification" of the prophets.[35] I contend the rabbis have less interest in promoting the ancient prophets to the status of angels than in reducing the roles of angels in the Israel's foundational stories. These *midrashim* suggest that some rabbis were uncomfortable with assigning the angels any significant role in the redemption from Egypt. This is an especially striking tendency as it is the opposite of the tendency that we see in the Aramaic translations of the biblical writings and the liturgical poetry of the synagogue, which, as we shall see, inserts and multiplies angels in biblical traditions.[36]

Returning to the biblical text in Exodus 23:20-5, ancient readers noticed that it not only featured an angel, but that it also shifted between God's and the angel's authority, suggesting that the angel was the deputy of God.This aspect of the passage is discussed is in the context of a disputation with a heretic (Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 38b).[37] The heretic challenges a Babylonian sage named Rav Idith (either mid-fourth or mid-fifth century CE[38]) by asking him the meaning of Exodus 24:1 "And he said to Moses: Come up to the Lord." The question is why would God refer to himself in the third person. Rav Idith uses Exodus

35 Steinberg, "Angelic Israel, 352 ff.

36 The most striking example is perhaps from Yannai's *qedushta* to Numbers 25:10 on the zealous Phineas ben Eleazar, where the poet describes how the angels assisted Phinehas in his execution of the Israelite and the Midianite woman. Likewise, the *targums*, especially to the prophets, multiply angels in their translations. See Rimmon Kasher, "Angelology and the Supernal worlds in the Aramaic Targums to the Prophets," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 27.2 (1996): 168-91.

37 This tradition falls into the category of the "two powers" problem, which has received a great deal of scholarly attention recently most recently by Menahem Kister, "Metatron, God, and the Problem of the Two Powers: Investigating the dynamics of a tradition, interpretation, and polemics," *Tarbiz* 82.1 (2013): 43-88; Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus,* 104ff.; Daniel Boyarin, "Beyond Judaisms: Metatron and the Divine Polymorphy of Ancient Judaism." *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 41 (2010): 323-65. These traditions have been understood to reflect Jewish responses to Jesus or Jewish reflections on the issue of a divinity secondary to God in heaven. Where Kister asserts that these traditions may be the result of inner Jewish debates about the meaning of sitting in heaven or the meaning of angelic names, Schafer asserts that these traditions do indeed reflect the status of Metatron as a Jewish Jesus. Because these traditions are analyzed so thoroughly by Kister, Schäfer, and Boyarin, I refer to them only briefly. "Only fools rush in where angels fear to tread comes to mind" (Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism,* 1709).

38 Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus*, 114.

23:21 as a prooftext to respond to the heretic.

> אמר ליה [רב אידי]: זה מטטרון ששמו כשם רבו דכתיב "כי שמי בקרבו" (שמ' כג 21)
> [המין:] אי הכי פלחו ליה?!
> [רב אידי:] כתיב אל תמר בו – אל תמירנו בו.
> [המין:] אם כן "כי לא ישא לפשעכם" (שמ' כג 21) למה לי?
> אמר ליה [רב אידי]: הימנותא בידך דאפילו בפרוונקא נמי לא קבליניה דכתיב "ויאמר אליו אם אין פניך הולכים אל תעלינו מזה" (שמ' לג 15)[39]
>
> R. Idith said to him: This was Metatron, whose name was like that of his master, as it is written "for my name is in him" (Exod 23:21)
> [The heretic:] If so, they should worship him!
> [R. Idith said:] It is written "do not rebel against him" (ibid.) – [this means] Do not exchange him for Me.[40]
> [The heretic:] If so, then why does it say "for he will not pardon your transgression" (ibid.)?
> He said to him: Here you see that we would not even receive him as a messenger as it is written, "Then he [Moses] said to him, "If You Yourself do not go *with us,* do not lead us up from here."

R. Idith explains that the angel who figured in the previous chapter (Exod 23) was the one who invited Moses into God's presence in Exodus 24:1 and he asserts that this angel's name was in fact Metatron, whose name contains God's name.[41] However, the heretic pounces on R. Idith's prooftext, which indeed attributes to this angel a great deal of power, to ask why the angel is not worshipped. R. Idith responds that they (the Israelites? The Jews?) would not deign to hearken to an angelic messenger, let alone worship him. R. Idith closes by attributing to the angel far less power than the biblical text itself does. It seems likely that the polemical stakes caused R. Idith to overstate this case. Biblical heroes certainly hearken to angelic news or angelic warnings and as we shall see in the ritual texts, Jews certainly appealed to angels to convey petitions to God and to aid them in their daily life. R. Idith's

39 I follow Kister's layout of the text (Kister, "Metatron," 75).

40 Following standard rabbinic practice, R. Idith slighly amends the conjugation of the verb in his prooftext in order to fit his argument.

41 See discussion of the problem of Metatron's name in Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus*, 110-114.

response, however, is in line with one tendency in rabbinic literature to minimize the role of the angels in Isrealite history and in Jewish life.

Finally, we may note the early rabbinic expression "not by means of an angel, nor by means of an emissary," which is found in several places in tannaitic midrash as well as in all the recensions of the passover haggadah.[42] The passover Hagaddah celebrates God's redemption of the Israelites from Egypt through narrative, benedictions, midrashic comments, and psalms states:

> ויוציאנו ה' ממצרים. לא ע"י מלאך ולא ע"י שרף וכו אלא הקב"ה בכבודו ובעצמו ביד חזקה.
>
> 'And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt,' not by means of an angel, and not by means of a seraph, etc., but the Holy One blessed be He, himself in his glory, with a mighty hand.

In the main, the text asserts that God alone is responsible for all the saving interventions in Egypt—not the angels in all their various manifestations.[43] Implicitly, this emphasis suggests that some Jews believed that God acted through mediators and that others sought to repress this idea. According to Goldschmidt, even Genizah fragments of the passover haggadah which are missing every other midrash still cite this statement.[44] While Israel Yuval placed this expression in the context of Jewish polemic against intermediate figures like Jesus, the

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42 Goldschmidt, *Hagadah Shel Pesah*, 1960. See also in *Mekhilta d. R. Yishmael*, *Pisha* §7, Horowitz-Rabbin 23;

"'והכתי כל בכור.' שומע אני על ידי מלאך או על ידי שליח. תלמוד לומר ויי הכה על בכור בארץ מצרים לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שליח."

Mekhilta De Rabbi Ishmael on Exodus 12:12, ed. Lauterbach, p. 38: "And I will smite." I might understand this to mean, through an angel or through an agent. But it says: "that the Lord smote all the firstborn" (v. 29)—not through an angel nor through an agent.

43 This is one of the Jewish texts that makes clear that angels, seraphim, and divine messengers were understood as equivalent divine creatures in late antiquity, divine creatures entirely subordinate to God. Yannai's *qedushta* to Numbers 20:14 (examined in the next chapter) also makes this clear.

44 Judah Goldin collected all the mentions of this expression in rabbinic literature, particularly elaborating on philological aspects of this expression in *Sifre Deuteronomy*. He was not interested in its historical or theological implications. See "Not by Means of an Angel and Not by Means of a Messenger," *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1970).

plain meaning of the expression emphasizes God's active and direct role in Israelite history over and against the angels.[45]

The expression appears elsewhere in tannaitic midrashim, affirming God's role as rain-maker (reminiscent of R. Yochanan's affirmation of God's as provider of sustenance) and God's role as judge and executor of justice. Here I quote two biblical texts, each followed by the rabbinic interpretation of them in *Sifrei Deuteronomy*:

> והיה אם־שמע תשמעו אל־מצותי אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום לאהבה את־יהוה אלהיכם ולעבדו בכל־לבבכם ובכל־נפשכם: ונתתי מטר־ארצכם בעתו יורה ומלקוש ואספת דגנך ותירשך ויצהרך:
>
> If you will only heed his every commandment that I am commanding you today—loving the Lord your God, and serving him with all your heart and with all your soul—then he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil (Deuteronomy 11:13-14).
>
> ונתתי, אני לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שליח.[46]
>
> 'Then I will grant': I—not by means of an angel and not by means of a messenger (*Sifrei Deuteronomy* 42).
>
> לי נקם ושלם…
>
> Vengeance is mine, and recompense…(Deutereonomy 32: 35).
>
> לי נקם ושלם, אני נפרע מהם בעצמי לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שליח...[47]
>
> I personally will exact retribution from them, not by means of an angel and not by means of a messenger (*Sifrei Deuteronomy* 325).

In both these cases, the sages make explicit that what God promised he would do for the Israelites—whether providing rain or executing justice—would be handled by him personally

45 Israel Yuval, *Two Nations in your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 79-81.

46 *Sifre Deuteronomy* 42, ed. L. Finkelstein, p. 88.

47 *Sifre Deuteronomy* 325, ed. L. Finkelsten, p. 376.

and not by angelic messengers. While in Deuteronomy these statements are soon followed by reaffirmations of God's singularity (reflecting Deuteronomy's exclusive monotheism), the need to exclude angels in particular likely arose in a context where some Jews were speculating that angels handled the details of God's affairs. These sages strive to make it clear that God is omnipotent and needs no angelic assistants.

So far, we have seen how traditions in the Mishnah inconspicuously acknowledges angelic presence in people's lives, how the Tosefta explicitly prohibits the sacrificial cult to angels, and how several midrashim downplay the role of angels in Israel's narrative history and present. In the background we can sense that Jews were invoking angels and seeing them as playing active roles in their lives. It is difficult to pin down evidence for instances where Christian reading of scriptures influenced Jewish interpretation of biblical traditions, but it likely played a role as well. Now let us move to examine traditions that make the Jews' invocation of angels more explicit.

Invoking Angels

The fifth-century CE historian Sozomen is one of several Christian historians to attest to a cult of angels in Late Antique Palestine.[48] The Oaks of Mamre, the location where the angels had appeared to Abraham, was a site of Jewish, Christian, and pagan pilgrimage and festivities in late antiquity. According to Sozomen:

> Here the inhabitants of the country and of the region round Palestine, the Phoenicians, and the Arabians, assemble annually during the summer season to keep a brilliant feast; and many others, both buyers and sellers, resort

48 Eusebius and Socrates Scholasticus also discuss this festival. See Ranger Cline, *Ancient Angels: Conceptualizing* Angeloi *in the Roman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 106 ff.

> thither on account of the fair. Indeed, this feast is diligently frequented by all the nations: by the Jews, because they boast of their descent from the patriarch Abraham; by the Pagans, because angels there appeared to men; and by Christians, because He who for the salvation of mankind was born of a virgin, afterwards manifested himself there to a godly man. This place was moreover honoured fittingly with religious exercises. Here some prayed to the God of all; some called upon the angels, poured out wine, burnt incense, or offered an ox, or he-goat, a sheep, or a cock.[49]

This is one of the key sources we have for the cross-cultural appeal of angels.[50] Jews, Christians, and Pagans considered the site holy and particularly noteworthy because of the angelic epiphany to Abraham. Even if Sozomen only singles out the pagans for angel-worship, part of what made the site sacred was Abraham's encounter with the three angels of God. Rabbinic and liturgical sources in late antiquity identified these angels as Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael.[51] At the very least, here Jews celebrated their forefather Abraham and affirmed the role that angels played in his life and Israel's own foundation story. Believing that angels were consequential for Abraham likely permitted Jews to believe that angels could be active in their own lives too.[52]

Some Jews certainly prayed to angels, understanding the angels to be mediators between the heavens and earth. The above-mentioned story about R. Eleazar b. Dordia showed him (unsuccessfully) pleading to the angelic beings for intervention with God. However, the tradition that makes it most apparent that some Jews addressed angels as intermediaries comes from R. Yochanan again, here quoted by Rav Yehuda:[53]

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49 Sozomen, Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 2, p. 260.

50 See Ranger Cline, *Ancient Angels*, and A. R. R. Sheppard, "Pagan Cults of Angels in Asia Minor," *Talanta* 12-13 (1980-1): 77-101.

51 Yannai, *qedushta* to Genesis 19:1; Genesis Rabbah 50:2. Discussed in chapter on angels in liturgy.

52 Lieber makes a similar observation in her commentary to the *qedushta* to Genesis 18:1 on the angels visitation of the Oaks of Mamre, *Yannai on Genesis*, 496.

53 Also, see discussion of this passage in John Poirier, *Tongues of Angels: Concept of Angelic Languages in Classical Jewish and Christian Texts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 15ff.

> תפלה. רחמי היא, כל היכי דבעי מצלי. ותפלה בכל לשון? והאמר רב יהודה לעולם אל ישאל אדם צרכיו בלשון ארמית, דאמר רבי יוחנן: כל השואל צרכיו בלשון ארמי אין מלאכי השרת נזקקין לו, לפי שאין מלאכי השרת מכירין בלשון ארמי![54]
>
> Prayer: It is supplication, and may be said however one wishes. And may prayer [be said] in every language? Rav Yehuda said: a person ought never ask for his needs in Aramaic as R. Yochanan said, "whoever asks for his needs in Aramaic, the angels do not attend to him, as the angels do not understand the Aramaic tongue!"

Although this statement can be read as meant to discourage people from praying to angels, it actually accepts that the angels fulfill an important intercessory function in people's lives. In discussing which language the angels speak in, R. Yohanan affirms that angels hearken to people's prayers and attend to them.[55] He only suggests that Jews use Hebrew, the holy tongue, instead of the vernacular Aramaic. At stake for R. Yochanan, of course, is the language Jews ought to pray in. The rabbis were upholding the status of Hebrew in the multilingual milieu of Late Antique Palestine, where Aramaic and Greek could be found in the synagogue as well. This statement likely reflects the rabbis' attempt to consolidate the status of the Hebrew prayer at this time.[56] At the same time, it reflects a reality where Jews were praying to angels and expecting their attention.

Despite R. Yochanan's statement, Jews continued to pray to and through the angels in Aramaic. Perceiving Michael or the celestial creatures as proper representative of God, Jews

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54 Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 12b and Sotah 33a.

55 Here I translated *nizkakin* as "attend to." In much later Jewish texts, especially *Hekhalot* texts, the verb *z-q-q* is used often in conjunction with angels, in the connotation of adjuring, compelling or binding them. This is not the connotation here, but the appearance of this verb is noteworthy. It also appears in Genesis Rabbah 20:6, a text discussed later in this chapter on whether God ever attended to the prayers of a woman or always sent angels in his stead.

56 Joseph Yahalom, "Angels Do Not Understand Aramaic: On the Literary Use of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic in Late Antiquity" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 47.1 (1996): 33-44. He cites Rav Sherira and his son Gaon's responsum on this topic: "'Never', the two geonim informed their correspondents, 'have we seen or heard that the sages refrained from praying in the Aramaic tongue...'Is is possible', they ask with great logic, 'that angels who are appointed to inscribe all that a man says would not know the Aramaic tongue?'" (33-4).

probably felt that addressing their prayers to angels did not undermine the sovereignty of God. Prohibiting slaughter to Michael as we saw in Tosefta Hullin 2:18 may have been an attempt to set the upper limit for acceptable attention to or worship of this figure.[57]

In mid-fourth century CE Palestine, R. Yudan was still encouraging Jews to pray to God directly and not to invoke Michael or Gabriel. He explains that unlike in day-to-day life, where people seek help through hierarchical social arrangements, when it comes to the divine realm, Jews ought to appeal directly to God, bypassing his angelic servants.[58]

> רבי יודן אמר משמיה דידיה בשר ודם יש לו פטרון. אם באת לו עת צרה אינו נכנס אצלו פתאום. אלא בא ועמד לו על פתחו של פטרונו וקורא לעבדו או לבן ביתו והוא אומר איש פלוני עומד על פתח חצירך שמא מכניסו ושמא מניחו. אבל הקב"ה אינו כן אם באת על אדם צרה לא יצווח לא למיכאל ולא לגבריאל אלא לי יצווח ואני עונה לו מיד הה"ד כל אשר יקרא בשם ה" ימלט.[59]

> R. Yudan said on his own authority: If a man of flesh and blood has a patron, when he is in trouble, he does not suddenly enter his [patron's] presence, but comes and waits at the entrance and calls to a slave or a member of the household, who tells the patron: "there's a man waiting at the entrance to your courtyard," to ascertain whether or not to let him in. But the Holy One, blessed be He, is not like this: "If a person faces trouble, he should cry out neither to Michael nor to Gabriel, but should cry out to Me, and I will answer him immediately."

R. Yudan's pronoucement suggests Jews were still petitioning Michael and Gabriel for God's intervention in the fourth century. In the text R. Yudan does not just advise Jews to cry out directly to God, but has God assert in the first person that people ought to appeal to him directly. In doing so, he portrays God as less transcendent, and more like the approachable angels. Perhaps he worried that invoking angels to carry one's prayers to God could easily

57 Peter Schäfer and Meir Bar-Ilan collected all the references to practices suggestive of angel-worship in rabbinic literature. Schäfer, *Rivalität,* 65ff.; Bar Ilan, "Prayers of Jews to Angels and Other Mediators in the First Centuries C.E."

58 Cf. discussion in Schäfer, *Jewish Jesus*, 194. Schäfer rightly highlights that this tradition appears in the talmud in the context of rabbinic polemic against the Roman system of patronage, but I do not think that it renders the tradition irrelevant to understanding Jewish attitudes towards angels.

59 Palestinian Talmud Berakhot 9.1, 13a, p. 224-7 of *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi.*

transition to invoking angels alone, in other words worshipping them.

The rabbis' attempt to legislate acceptable limits on depiction of personfications in the synagogue suggests the limited scope of their influence. Scholars have spilled a lot of ink trying to solve "the problem" of the Helios mosaics in late antique Palestine.[60] Beginning from rabbinic texts that prohibit depiction of the angels indeed makes the mosaic in the synagogues difficult to understand:

> ...אבל יעשה לו דמות חמה ולבנה וכוכבים ומזלות ת'ל ופן תשא עיניך השמימה וג' לא יעשה כל אלה אבל יעשה דמות מלאכים כרובים ואופנים ת'ל אשר בשמים אי אשר בשמים יכול דמות חמה ולבנה וכוכבים ת'ל ממעל לא דמות מלאכים לא דמות כרובים ולא דמות אופנים לא יעשה לו דמות כל אלה.[61]

> But perhaps he may make an image of the sun, the moon, the stars, or the planets? Scripture says: "And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven," etc. (Deut. 4:19). He shall not make an image of any of these, but perhaps he may make an image of the angels, the cherubim or the *ophannim*? Scripture says: "Of anything that is in heaven." As for "that is in heaven," one might think it refers only to sun, moon, stars, and planets? But it says: "Above," meaning, not the image of the angels, not the image of the Cherubim, and not the image of the *ophannim*. He shall not make an image of any of these.[62]

The sages here elaborate on the biblical commandment, which prohibits making idols and any likeness of what is in heaven or on the earth, by making explicit that the celestial bodies, cherubim, *ophannim*, and the angels were not appropriate objects for depiction. Schäfer, noting that the rabbis' only innovation here is to explicitly prohibit depiction angelic beings, states that"it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the rabbis polemicized against images of

60 Morton Smith, "Helios in Palestine," *Eretz-Israel* 16 (1982): 199-214; Gideon Foerster, "The zodiac in ancient synagogues and its place in Jewish thought and literature" *Eretz Israel* 19 (1988): 225-254 [Hebrew]; Zeev Weiss, "The Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic and the Role of Talmudic Literature in Its Iconographical Study," in *From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in Late Antiquity,* (Portsmouth, RI: JRA, 2001), 15-30; Stuart S. Miller, "'Epigraphical' Rabbis, Helios, and Psalm 19," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94 (2004): 27-76; Jodi Magness, "Heaven on Earth: Helios and the Zodiac Cycle in Ancient Palestinian Synagogues," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 59 (2005): 1-52.

61 *Mekhilta d. R. Yishmael***,** *Behodesh*, §6, Horowitz-Rabin 225.

62 Trans. Lauterbach, *Mekhilta d. R. Ishmael,* 321-2.

angels because such images could be venerated—just as images of the sun, moon, stars, and planets could be and were indeed venerated."[63] Several late antique synagogue mosaics depict the zodiac encircling the personification of the sun, who bears the accoutrements of the Greek sun god Helios. Indeed, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Jews who constructed synagogues in the Galilee did not heed the biblical law or rabbinic prohibitions.

The liturgical poetry of the synagogue, which will be analyzed in the next chapter, makes it explicit that the sun and moon were considered subordinate angelic beings. The Jews who sponsored the mosaics likely felt they were merely depicting images of God's subordinate angels. Moreover, if some Jews prayed through angels, it makes sense that they depicted them in their synagogues too. Some Jews saw angels as figures that fulfilled a significant role in their own life as well as in the cosmos.

It is interesting that the rabbis make a point of prohibiting depiction of cherubim and *ophannim* in particular, divine creatures associated with Ezekiel's vision of the chariot of God, which would also become a part of the synagogues liturgical poetry. The rabbis recalled the presence of the carved cherubim, the cherubim woven into the tapestries of the tabernacle (Exodus 25:20), and the depiction of the cherubim in the First temple (1 Kings 8:7; 2 Chronicles 5) in one vivid tradition (Babylonian Talmud Yoma 54a):

אמר רב קטינא בשעה שהיו ישראל עולין לרגל גוללין להן את הפרכת ומראין להן כרובים המעורין זה בזה ואומ' להן ראו חיבתכם לפני המקום כחבת זכר עם נקיבה.[64]

> Rav Kattina said: whenever Israel would make pilgrimage [to Jerusalem], they would roll back the curtain and show them the cherubim intertwined with each other and they would say to them: 'Behold you are beloved before God like the love of a man with a woman.'

63 Schäfer, *Jewish Jesus*, 191.

64 Following JTS Rab. 1623/2 (EMC 271).

Rav Kattina, a Babylonian Amora, is said to recall a tradition about the first temple here, which was destroyed in 586 BCE. Whether or not it is accurate, what is interesting is that the cherubim were remembered to have been part of the temple's furnishings, and their intertwining pose was understood to reflect God's love for the cherubim (perhaps because they posed in embrace above the space where His presence dwelt?). I wish to linger on the exclamation that is addressed to the cherubim, "you are beloved before God." It is not often that God's love of the cherubim or the angels is emphasized although I believe that it lies in the background of many traditions.

Superiority of Israel to the Angels

Indeed, many rabbinic traditions emphasize how much God loves Israel, how much more he loves them than the angels. This seems to have been another strategy used to discourage attention to angels by the sages. So according to a statement attributed to the second-century CE rabbi Yose "Beloved are Israel, for scripture did not require them to have an intermediary."[65] Other rabbis elaborated on this tradition with other proofs that Israel was more beloved than the angels.[66]

> אמר רב שלש כתות של מלאכי השרת אומרות שירה בכל יום: אחת אומרת קדוש ואחת אומרת קדוש ואחת אומרת קדוש ה' צבאות.
> מיתיבי: חביבין ישראל לפני הקב"ה יותר ממלאכי השרת שישראל אומרים שירה בכל שעה ומלאכי השרת אין אומרים שירה אלא פעם אחת ביום ואמרי לה פעם אחת בשבת ואמרי לה פעם אחת בחודש ואמרי לה פעם אחת בשנה ואמרי לה פעם אחת בשבוע ואמרי לה פעם אחת ביובל ואמרי לה פעם אחת בעולם
> וישראל מזכירין את השם אחר שתי תיבות שנאמר שמע ישראל ה' וגו' ומלאכי השרת אין מזכירין את השם אלא לאחר ג' תיבות כדכתיב קדוש קדוש קדוש ה' צבאות ואין

65 Babylonian Talmud Yoma 52a (Vilna):

ורבי יוסי אמר לך חביבין ישראל שלא הצריכן הכתוב לשליח.

66 Babylonian Talmud Hullin 91b (Vilna).

מה'ש אומרים שירה למעלה עד שיאמרו ישראל למטה.

> Rav said three classes of ministering angels sing praise every day: "One says Holy, another says Holy, and another says Holy is the Lord of Hosts."
> Others objected saying, "Israel is more beloved by god than the ministering angels. Whereas Israel recite prayers repeatedly, the ministering angels recite only once a day. Some say [they recite] only once a Sabbath; some say only once a month; some say only once a year, and some say it once a week [of years, i.e. 7 years] and some say only once a Jubilee, and some say just once forever.
> Moreover, Israel invokes God's name after only two words as it is said "Hear Israel, the LORD, etc" [Deut. 6]. And the ministering angels do not invoke the name until after three words as it is written [Isaiah 6]: Holy Holy Holy the LORD of Hosts. And the ministering angels do not recite prayers up above until Israel says them below.

According to this text, proof that Israel is more beloved by God than the angels is shown in that they pray more often than the angels, in that Israel's prayer, the Shema, declares God's name earlier in their liturgical verses than the angelic Qedushah,[67] and in that the angels have to wait for Israel's prayers.[68] Notably, both R. Yose's statement and the anonymous sages use the frame "beloved are Israel" (*havivin Israel*).

This framing device was likely established by R. Akiva. I would like to posit that the influence of R. Akiva may have played a role in the development of attitudes of superiority toward angels based on God's love for Israel. It seems likely that he set the precedent for this idea when he stated (Mishnah Avot 3:17):

67Notably, the rabbis privilege the Shema prayer, associating it with Israel while they associate the Qedushah (also known as the trisagion or sanctus) with the liturgy of the angels. See Ezra Fleischer, "*Qedushat HaAmidah* and the rest of the *Qedushot*: Historical and Ideological Perspectives," Tarbiz 67.3 (1971): 311. As we shall see in the next chapter, the liturgical poet Yannai would compare Israel's Qedushah with the angelic Qedushah. In the Jewish communities of late antique Palestine, popular participation in the Qedushah would become an increasingly important phenomenon, albeit one that the rabbis barely comment on (Fleischer, "*Qedushat HaAmidah,*" 303).

68Compare Genesis Rabbah Genesis Rabbah 65:21 (ed. Albeck, p. 739-40), which also states that the angels must keep silent while Israel says the Shema.

> בשעה שישראל א[ומרים] שמע ישראל [המלאכים] שותקין ואחרכך בעמדם תרפינה כנפיהן
> ומה הן א[ומרים] ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד...

At the time that Israel says "Shema Israel," they [the angels] are silent, and then they relax their wings, and what do they say? "Blessed is the Glory of the Lord forever…

הוא היה אומ' חביב אדם שנברא בצלם; חיבה יתרה נודעת לו שניברא בצלם אלהים (שנ' "כי בצלם אלוהים, עשה את האדם" [בראשית ט,ו])[69].
חביבין ישראל שנקראו בנים [למקום]; חיבה יתרה נודעת להם שנקראו בנים למקום,(שנאמר "בנים אתם, לה' אלוהיכם" [דברים יד,א]).
חביבין ישראל, שניתן להם כלי שבו נברא העולם; חיבה יתרה נודעת להם שניתן להם כלי שבו נברא העולם (שנאמר "כי לקח טוב, נתתי לכם; תורתי, אל תעזובו"[משלי ד,ב]).

> He [R. Akiva] would say: Beloved is man for he was created in the image [of God]; still greater was the love in that it was made known to him that he was created in the image (of God, as it is written, "For in the image of God he made man" [Genesis 9:6]).
> Beloved are Israel for they were called children of God; still greater was the love in that it was made known to them that they were called children of God (as it is written, "You are the children of the Lord your God" [Deut 14:1]).
> Beloved are Israel, for to them was given the precious instrument; still greater was the love, in that it was made known to them that to them was given the precious instrument by which the world was created (as it is written, "for I give you good teachings; do not forsake my Torah. (Proverbs 4:2).[70]

The first statement is most broad, asserting the beloved status of humanity before God. God's love for humanity is made known in that they are made in God's image. The next two statements are directed specifically at Israel— they are beloved because they were called the children of God and because they alone were given the Torah. Other sages restated this and said that "the Torah was not given to the ministering angels."[71] R. Akiva's formulation may echo Rav Kattina's tradition about the cherubim in the temple, here reformulated it to exclaim about God's love for Israel. This may be coincidental, but what is important is that R. Akiva's principle would resonate in rabbinic literature and impact the rabbis' treatment of the angels. Indeed, R. Yosi, cited above as saying that Israel was so beloved they required no

69 All the biblical prooftexts are in the marginalia of ms. Kaufmann.

70 Trans. Danby, with updated translations of Bible.

71 לא נתנה תורה למלאכי השרת

(Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 25b; Babylonian Talmud Yoma 30a; Babylonian Talmud Meilah 14b). It is alternately attributed to the fourth-century Babylonian Amora Rava or his student Rav Pappa.

intermediary, was a student of R. Akiva's.[72]

Schäfer already recognized that part of the rabbis' attitude to angels lay in election theology, but here I draw on some different evidence to support this conclusion. He analyzed the sources that dwell on angelic and human rivalry in particular.[73] Here I argue that the complex and diverse attitudes toward angels in rabbinic literature can in part be explained by reference to the importance of the idea of imitation of god (*imitatio dei*) and Israel's beloved status before God, which as we see in R. Akiva's statement are intertwined—Israel is beloved because they were made in the image of God and because they are privileged to know it.

In his book, *Image of God: Halakhah and Aggadah*, Yair Lorberbaum advances the thesis that in crucial rabbinic writings, we find the foundational idea that man is not just created in the image of the God, but that each human is an icon of God, actually containing a

72 Another student of R. Akiva's, R. Simeon ben Yohai, is attributed the statement: "Come and see how beloved are Israel before the Holy One blessed be He—everywhere that they were exiled, the *shekhina* went with them" (Babylonian Talmud Megilla 29a). About the manna in the wilderness Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel (also of the generation of R. Akiva's students) said "Come and see how much beloved the Israelites are by him by whose word the world came into being. Because they are so much beloved by him, he made for them a change in the natural order of things. For their sake he made the upper region like the lower and the lower like the upper (*Mekhilta d. R. Yishmael, Vayassa*, §3; trans. Lauterbach). And elsewhere, an anonymous sages teaching states "Beloved are Israel that the Holy One blessed be he surrounded them in *mitzvot*, *tefillin* upon their heads, *tefillin* upon their arms , and *tsitsit* on their clothes and a mezuzah for their gates" (Babylonian Talmud Menhahot 43b).

73 Schäfer foregrounded these sources in his work *Rivalität Zwischen Engeln Und Menschen (*1975) and revisited the problem in his more recent work, *The Jewish Jesus* (2012). The chain of traditions that is most representative of this motif comes from Genesis Rabbah 8:4-5, which comments on the ambiguous phrase "Let us make man" (Genesis 1:26). The rabbinic discussion of this phrase targets the idea God had assistance in the creation of humanity. As Schäfer shows, the response of some rabbis was to downplay the role of the angels, portraying them either as only nominally involved in discussing the potential creation of humanity or as actively opposed to humanity' creation. It is the last line of the midrash that encapsulates the latter motif: "R. Huna Rabbah of Sepphoris said: While the ministering angels were arguing with each other and disputing with each other, the Holy One, blessed be He, created him [Adam].He said to them what can you avail? Man is already made!" This story pits the perfect angels against the creation of Adam and the imperfect people who would descend from him and Eve. A more hostile tradition from the Babylonian talmud suggests God burned the angels when they protested humanity's creation. The main purpose of these traditions, however, is to assert God's role in the creation of humanity completely apart from the angels. From the perspective of these origin stories, it is irrational to pay attention to angels, who had no care for humanity's creation in the first place. While this story is about humanity broadly, not specifically Israel, as we shall see, the next step of rabbinic exegesis was often to narrow in on Israel. See also the echo of this angelic hostility toward the sages themselves in Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 15b, discussed in the conclusion.

part of God within himself.[74] Lorberbuam argues that this foundational idea is reflected in *halakhah* and *aggadah* and can be seen most vividly in the laws related to the death penalty. His thesis is relevant for this work, too, because it provides a framework for the rabbinic conceptions of self, the angels, and God. I argue that part of the reason that some rabbis were resentful of attention to angels was because *imitatio dei* was foundational to their way of life and to their *halakhah*.

A tradition in *Sifrei* emphasizes the importance of *imitatio dei* when it interprets Joel 3:5 "And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered." The sages asks whether a man can really call on the *name* of God. Their answer is that rather than reading "whoever calls on the name of God," one should read "whoever is called in the name of God" (reading the verb passively rather than actively):

> וכי היאך איפשר לו לאדם ליקרא בשמו של הקב״ה? אלא מה המקום נקרא רחום וחנון אף אתה הוי רחום וחנון ועשה מתנת חנם לכל. מה הקב״ה נקרא צדיק שנאמר צדיק יי' בכל דרכיו וחסיד בכל מעשיו אף אתה הוי צדיק. הקב״ה נקרא חסיד שנאמ' וחסיד בכל מעשיו אף אתה הוי חסיד לכך נאמר כל אשר יקרא בשם יי' ימלט.[75]

> And how can a person call on the name of the Holy One blessed be He? Rather, just as God is called compassionate and gracious, so you be compassionate and gracious and give freely to all. Just as the Holy One is called righteous as it said "The Lord is righteous in all His ways And kind in all His deeds" (Psalm 145:17) so you be righteous. The Holy one is called kind as it is said "Kind in all His deeds" so you be kind. Hence it was said "whoever *is called* in the name of the Lord will be delivered."

In Hebrew, the phonetic similarity of 'calling on the name' and 'being called in the name' allow the sages to encourage fellow Jews to act in Godly ways. According to their teaching, being called in the name of God means imitating God and this is the act that brings about deliverance.

74 *Zelem Elohim* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2004).

75 Finkelstein ed., *Sifre Deuteronomy* §49 p. 114.

The interrelationship of the *imitatio dei* and the angels can be seen in a tradition preserved in *Midrash Tehillim*.[76] Although traditions *Midrash Tehillim* span centuries, the loan words preserved in this text suggest a Greco-Roman setting. The saying is attributed to a sage who lived at the beginning of the third century CE.

> אמר ר' יהושע בן לוי: בשעה שאדם הולך בדרך, איקוניא של מלאכים מהלכין לפניו, ומכריזין ואומרים: תנו מקום לאיקוניא [צ"ל לאקוניו[77]] של הקב"ה וכן הוא אומר כי מלאכיו יצוה לך לשמרך בכל דרכיך (תהילים צא יא).
>
> R. Joshua ben Levi: At the time that a person sets out on a journey, a procession of angels walks before him, declaring and saying: "Give way before the icon of the Holy One Blessed be he!"

The procession, itself a fixture of religious life in the Greco-Roman world, which would usually bear the icons of a god is here assigned to every Jew, who himself is the icon of God. This play on words is more readily seen in the Hebrew, where the Greek loan word *eikonya* (plural of Greek εἰκόνιον) appears twice in the Hebrew, once signifying the kind of icon-laden procession of angels that sets out and once referring to the individual, who is the icon of God. This tradition affirms the dignity of each human being, but it seems likely that R. Joshua ben Levi has Jews in particular in mind: Jews do not process with false icons like the gentiles do, but recognize they themselves are icons, representatives, or images of God. In this tradition, it is the relationship between God and humanity that is paramount with the angels as the supporting cast only.[78] Here, The angels are only the guardians of humanity in

76 *Midrash Tehillim*, *Mizmor* 17:8, p.131 (Ed. Salomon Buber, Vilna, 1891).

77 Jastrow suggests the singular possessive makes more sense here (60), the doubling of form *ikonya* is likely a copyist error.

78 Another tradition about individuals and angels on the road makes it clear that it is not all of humanity that receives angelic guardianship, but only the righteous (and perhaps Jewish) among them (Tosefta Shabbat 17:2, here following Lieberman's edition of the Tosefta).

R. La'azar, the son of R. Yose the Galilee said "If you see a *tzadik* set out on a journey and you wish to journey the same way, precede him within three days or follow him within three days so that you may journey with him. Why? Because the angels of peace accompany him as it is said "for he will command his angels concerning you" (Psalm 91:11). If you see an evil man set out on a journey and you wish to journey the same way, precede

their capacity as the servants of God.

Another tradition from the Palestinian talmud uses *imitatio dei* to teach the importance of judging with peers, in the framework of a rabbinic court-house, rather than alone. Here the encouragement to being God-like is specifically directed at the sages, not all of Israel.

> ...דתנינן אל תהי דן יחידי שאין דן יחיד אלא אחד. א"ר יהודה בן פזי אף הקב"ה אינו דן יחידי שנאמר וכל צבא השמים עומדים עליו מימינו ומשמאלו. אילו מטין לכף זכות ואילו מטין לכף חובה.[79]

> As it is taught, do not judge alone as no one may judge alone except one. R. Judah b. Pazzi said even the Holy One, blessed be He, does not judge alone, as it is said "And all the host of heaven standing by him on His right and on His left" — these inclining toward acquittal and those inclining toward conviction.

A sage ought not judge alone because God does not judge alone. According to R. Judah b. Pazzi, God judges with the host of heaven. By analogy, a sage ought to judge alongside other sages. Thus, other or disciples are likened to angels, but only implicitly and for the sake of emphasizing the importance of godly behavior—that is, not being so presumptuous as to judge alone.[80]

It is well known that the sages imagine that God has a heavenly court-house that both

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him by three days or follow him after three days so that you do not journey with him. Why? Because angels of satan accompany him as it is said: "appoint an evil man over him" (Psalm 109:6).

ר' לעזר בנו של ר' יוסי הגלילי או' אם ראית צדיק שיצא לדרך ואתה מבקש לצאת לאותה הדרך הקדים על ידיו שלשה ימים או אחר על ידיו שלשה ימים כדי שתצא לדרך עמו. מפני מה? מפני שמלאכי שלום מלוין אותו שנ' כי מלאכיו יצוה לך וגו'. ואם ראית רשע שיצא לדרך ואתה מבקש לצאת הדרך הקדים עליו שלשה ימים או אחר עליו שלשה ימים כדי שלא תצא עמו לדרך. מפני מה? מפני שמלאכי סטן מלוין אותו שנ' הפקד עליו רשע.

79 Palestinian Talmud Sanhedrin 1.1/5, 18a, p. 157 of *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi* IV.

80 Just after the saying of R. Judah ben Pazzi cited above is a tradition from R. Yohanan which asserts that God does not take any action until it is affirmed by the heavenly courthouse. (Palestinian Talmud Sanhedrin 1:1/5, 18a, p. 157 of *Synopse Zum Talmud Yerushalmi* IV; source cited as Palestinian Talmud Sanhedrin 2a and discussed by Schäfer in *Rivalität*, 41-2)

אמר רבי יוחנן לעולם אין הקב"ה עושה בעולמו דבר עד שנמלך בבית דין שלמעלן מה טעם ואמת הדבר וצבא גדול. אימתי חותמו של הקב"ה אמת בשעה שנמלך בבית דין שלמעלן.

corresponds to and is subordinate to the rabbinic court-house.[81] One story in the Palestinian Talmud describes a scene in heaven in which the rabbis establish the date of the New Year. God orders the angels to set up the podium for the heavenly advocates and prosecutors to begin the judgment proceedings. After describing God's assembling of his heavenly court, the text is quick to mention that if the sages change their mind and decide that the New Year actually begins the next day, God duly orders his angels to take down the platform, presumably to be assembled on the new date set by the sages.[82] According to this conception of the heavenly sphere, the court-house of the rabbis and its decisions dictate reality, most importantly in establishing the new month and the new year, which depend on empirical observation of the moon.[83] Since the moon was part of God's heavenly host, the establishment of the calendar according to the rabbis' observation of the moon may also be seen as an expression of the rabbinic attitude of superiority to the angels.[84] This is in keeping with rabbinic preoccupation with their own authority over heavenly sources of authority: with the rabbis, legal and calendrical decisions are achieved through legal exegesis and consensus, no longer by revelation or even divine intervention from God and His angels.[85]

81 Palestinian Talmud Berakhot 9:5, 14c "The earthly court decreed three things and the heavenly court assented." The phrase heavenly court-house also appears in *Sifre Numbers* 92, ed. Horowitz, p. 93; Babylonian Talmud Pesahim 53b, Baba Metsia 85a and 86a. See discussion of these and other sources in David Goodblatt, *Rabbinic Instruction in Sasanian Babylonia* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 68ff.; See alsoIsaiah Gafni, "Yeshiva and Metivta," *Zion* 43 (1978): 23, and especially 29ff. [Hebrew].

82 The sages read Psalm 81:4, "this is a statute for Israel, a law of the God of Jacob" as if it states "this statute for Israel *is* a law *for* the God of Jacob." This tradition is also discussed by Schäfer in *Rivalität*, 234. See Palestinian Talmud Rosh ha-Shanah 1.3/14, 57b, p. 188-9 of *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi* II/5-12:

אמרו ב"ד היום ראש השנה הקב"ה או' למלאכי השרת העמידו בימה יעמדו סניגורין יעמדו קטיגורין שאמרו בני היום ראש השנה. נמלכו ב"ד לעברה למחר הקב"ה אומר למלאכתי השרת העבירו בימה יעברו סינגורין יעברו קטיגורין שנמלכו בני לעברה למחר מה טעמא? (תהילים פא) כי חק לישראל הוא משפט לאלהי יעקב אם אינו חוק לישראל כביכול אינו משפט לאלהי יעקב.

83 See Mishnah Rosh Hashanah chs. 1-3, which discuss the laws of witnessing the new moon and establishing the months and feast dates and especially 2:8-9, which describes the famous controversy between Rabban Gamaliel and R. Joshua about the date of the Day of Atonement.

84 I thank Naphtali Meshel for suggesting this to me.

85 The locus classicus for this idea is the story known as the "oven of Aknai," Babylonian Talmud Baba Metsia 59b.

Because the relationship between God and Israel is the foundational one, traditions that emphasize angelic and human resemblance may have been seen as problematic. It seems likely that for this reason, R. Akiva opposed ideas that misconstrued the relationship of humanity, the angels, and God, as in the following discourse with a rabbi named Pappias.

> דרש רבי פפייס הן האדם היה כאחד ממנו, כאחד ממלאכי השרת. אמר לו רבי עקיבא דייך פפייס.[86]

> R. Pappias also interpreted: "Behold, the man is become as one of us" (Gen. 3:22), like one of the ministering angels. Said R. Akiva to him: "That is enough, Pappias."[87]

R. Pappias proposed that humanity was made in the image of the angels, partially because of the first person plural pronoun in the verse, but perhaps also because such a conception distances God from anthropomorphic imaginings. In this vein Marmorstein argued that Pappias belonged to the allegorical school of thought within the rabbinic movement that preferred the idea that humanity was made in the image of the angels. Marmorstein located R. Akiva, on the other hand, in the literal school of thought, which was more comfortable with anthropomorphic depictions of God. As we saw, R. Akiva upheld the idea that humanity was created in the image of God.

Nonetheless, R. Pappias was not alone in his belief that humanity resembled the angels. As I will show in other chapters, other non-rabbinic Jewish sources voice this belief quite explicitly in the same milieu as the rabbis. However, it is questionable how useful or inspiring the rabbis who composed the talmudim and late midrashim themselves found the idea of angelic resemblance. When the rabbis do discuss the Jews' resemblance to angels, usually in response to biblical citations, they are more ambivalent than other

86 *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, *Vayehi* 7 (ed. Horowitz), p. 112.

87 *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, *Vayehi* 7:72 (trans. Lauterbach), p. 164; cf. Bereshit Rabbah 8:4ff.

contemporaneous Jewish thinkers. The reception history of Malachi 2:7 is illuminating in this regard:

כי־שפתי כהן ישמרו־דעת ותורה יבקשו מפיהו כי מלאך יהוה־צבאות הוא:

> For the lips of a priest preserve knowledge and they shall seek Torah from his mouth for he is an angel of the Lord of Hosts.

The plain meaning of this line is that in the priest's capacity as guardian of biblical knowledge, he acts as a messenger of God to the people of Israel. The sixth-century CE Jewish poet Yannai applies this prooftext to priests and to the sages, both equally positively, praising their respective merits. In contrast, this quotation appears in three contexts in rabbinic literature and in each case, the rabbis mitigate the statement, adding disclaimers to the analogy of an angel, whether they apply to the priests or to members of their movement. The key to the rabbinic interpretation of the verse is reading the conjunction "for" (in "for he is an angel") as "if," a possible, but non-contextual meaning. This turns what was an unqualified statement into a conditional one.

In *Sifrei Numbers*, the rabbis offer a vivid interpretation of Jacob's dream of the ladder of angels, reading it as an allegory for the Jerusalem temple and its priests, ascending and descending the ramp. Thereafter comes the statement:

> (חביבין כהנים) כשהוא מכנן אין מכנן אלא במלאכי השרת שנא' כי שפתי כהן ישמרו דעת ותורה יבקשו מפיהו כי מלאך ה' צבאות הוא (מלאכי ב ז). בזמן שהתורה יוצאה מפיו הרי הוא כמלאכי השרת ואם לאו הרי הוא כחיה וכבהמה שאינה מכרת את קונה.[88]

> Beloved are the priests. When he refers to them, he compares them to the ministering angels as it is said, "For the lips of a priest preserve knowledge and they shall seek Torah from his mouth *if* he is an angel of the Lord of Hosts" —when the Torah is in his mouth, behold, he is like a ministering angel, but if it is not, behold, he is like an animal and a beast that does not recognize its creator.

88 *Sifrei Numbers*, *Korach*, §119, on Num 25:53, ed. Horovitz p. 143.

While the rabbis allow that Jacob's dream of angels refers to the priests, the effect of the rest of the interpretation undermines this positive description. The rabbis manage to limit the truth-value of Malachi's statement: angelic status is contingent on pious behavior. No priest is inherently angelic from this perspective. A certain tension with priests may have provoked the particularly negative description of the priest.

Elsewhere, they employ the saying from Malachi to qualify the authority of one of their own disciples.[89]

> ההוא צורבא מרבנן דהוו סנו שומעניה. אמר רב יהודה: היכי ליעביד? לשמתיה - צריכי ליה רבנן, לא לשמתיה – קא מיתחיל שמא דשמיא. אמר ליה לרבה בר בר חנה: מידי שמיע לך בהא: אמר ליה: הכי אמר רבי יוחנן, מאי דכתיב "כי שפתי כהן ישמרו דעת ותורה יבקשו מפיהו כי מלאך ה' צבאות הוא? אם דומה הרב למלאך ה' - יבקשו תורה מפיו. ואם לאו - אל יבקשו תורה מפיו. שמתיה רב יהודה.
>
> There was once a young scholar whose reputation was bad. Rav Judah asked: what it is to be done? To excommunicate him? But scholars can still make use of him. Not to excommunicate him? But the name of heaven is profaned. He said to Rabbah b. bar Hana: Have you heard of such a case? He said to him, thus said R. Yochanan: what can be learned from "For the lips of a priest preserve knowledge and they shall seek Torah from his mouth *if* he is an angel of the Lord of Hosts"? If a scholar resembles an angel of God, they ought to seek Torah from his mouth, but if he does not, they should not seek Torah from him. Rav Judah excommunicated him.

Again the rabbis use this prooftext with a disclaimer. They do not to claim that they inherently resemble the angels in their role as custodians of the Torah, but to say that sometimes scholars do and sometimes they do not achieve angelic semblance. In the two instances this prooftext is employed with regard to rabbinic scholars, the scholars in question fail and are excommunicated.[90] These statements do not necessarily reflect a polemic against angels, but they do show, I contend, a disinterest in the relationship between the sages and

89 b. Moed Kattan 17a.

90 The second instance, employed in a discussion of Aher, will be discussed in the conclusion.

the angels.

Despite the title of Steinberg's dissertation, *Angelic Israel: self-identification with angels in Rabbinic Agadah and its Jewish Antecedents*, he does not cite a single source which shows the rabbis unequivocally identifying with the angels or aspiring to angelic status. At best, scouring all the haggadah, he can state that "the angelification of the Patriarchs, of Moses and the Prophets, of Israel at Sinai, and of the righteous in the time to come, *amounts to* an angelic anthropology of Jewish humanity that includes the rabbinic proponents themselves as well" (emphasis added).[91] In describing the glorious past and glorious future to come of Israel, the rabbis used angelic imagery, but I argue that this attitude is absent among the rabbis with regard to themselves precisely because it undermines rabbinic self-understanding.

In the only instance I found where the rabbis liken themselves to angels, they also distance themselves from the angels: "Said R. Zeira in the name of Rabba bar Zimuna 'If the earlier [sages] were like angels, we are like mortals. If the earlier [sages] were like mortals, we are like donkeys, and not like the donkey of R. Hanina ben Dosa and that of R. Pinhas ben Yair, but like the common donkeys."[92] The rabbis model themselves after God. As such, they are already superior to angels.

A tradition in the Babylonian Talmud makes the superiority of the sages over the angels clear: "R. Pinchas bar Hama taught: whoever has a sick person in his house ought to go to a sage and ask for mercy as it is said, 'the wrath of the king is angels of death, but a

91 Steinberg, "Angelic Israel," 382.

92 Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 112b (only Vilna begins the quotation with "like sons of angels"):
א"ר זירא אמ' רבא בר זימנא אם ראשונים מלאכים אנו בני איש. אם ראשונים בני איש אנו חמורים ולא כחמורו של ר' חנינא בן דוסא ושל ר' פינחס בן יאיר אלא כשאר חמורים.

wise man will appease it'" (Proverbs 16:14).[93] This statement happens in the context of a discussion of the tragedy of not leaving behind a male heir, which leads to mention of Job's hardships, bereaved not only of his sons, but also struck with poverty and plagues. The *sugya* closes on a more uplifting note with R. Pinchas bar Hama's statement that the sages can serve as intercessors and thus avert the wrath of God. The biblical prooftext makes the sage more powerful than the angels of death, saving the sick member of the household. Where other Jews may have been turning to angels or others as petitioners for God's mercy in cases of sickness,[94] R. Pinchas asserts that the sages themselves are the appropriate intercessors.

According to the teachings associated with R. Akiva in tractate Avot, all of humanity was created in the image of God, but Israel in particular ought to live up to this privilege because it was made known to them through the Torah. I suggest that the value placed on *imitatio dei* may have been in the background of traditions about Israel's superiority to the angels. Other sages developed this theme with traditions like Israel is so beloved that it needs no intermediaries, Israel's Shema is superior to the angelic Qedushah, etc. Elsewhere, a Babylonian rabbi makes of the sages proper intermediaries with God over and against the angels. Imitation of God is particularly meaningful for the sages, while imitation of the angels was not valued by them.

93 Unlike, Vilna, Paris, and the Bologna ms., the Hamburg ms. attributes the tradition to R. Pinchas ben Zoma

דרש ר' פנחס בר חמא כל שיש לו חולה בתוך ביתו ילך אצל חכם ויבקש עליו רחמים שנא' (משלי ט"ז) 'חמת מלך מלאכי מות ואיש חכם יכפרנה.'

94 And as we shall see in the ritual sources, some Jews did turn to angels or ritual practitioners for help in such cases.

Other attitudes to angels in Rabbinic literature

The traditions highlighted above showcase the distinctive conceptions of angels found in Rabbinic literature. Again, these themes, which are neutral or negative toward the angels, may be due to genre: only rabbinic traditions are prescriptive, prohibiting depiction of angels and discouraging praying through them. However, the rabbis also interpret angels out of the biblical narratives in a way that other Jewish sources of the time period do not. As I have tried to show, it is not that some rabbis were necessarily hostile to angels, it is simply that they held values that made them less interested in the angels than other Jews, namely *imitatio dei*.

In order not to paint an overly homogeneous view of the angels in rabbinic literature, here I briefly review other traditions that complicate the picture. Overall, angels appear a few hundred times in the firmly dated late antique rabbinic sources.[95] Other traditions in rabbinic literature show more positive attitudes toward angels and parallel conceptions of angels found in other Jewish literatures of the time. Most often the rabbis envisioned the angels as the supporting cast in the drama that stars Israel and God throughout time. Sometimes, angels are mentioned in traditions that reflect a belief in guardian angels, one that was widespread in antiquity, and maintained by some rabbis as well. Many isolated traditions about angels are difficult to cateogrize, but ought to be acknowledged as evidence of the power of the angels in the religious imagination.

95 This includes Mishnah, Tosefta, both talmudim, the halakhic midrashim, and from the homiletical midrashim only Genesis and Leviticus Rabbah. Within this narrowly defined definition of Late Antique rabbinic documents, there are 83 mentions of the ministering angels and 63 of messenger angels. More broadly conceived, rabbinic literature has 460 mentions of the ministering angels plus 300 mentions of the generic angels. Most of these are quotations of the bible that refer to angelic messengers or to rabbinic interpretation that reference the ministering angels. I wish to briefly illustrate the scope of the rest of these traditions in the following section.

While some rabbinic traditions sought to limit undue attention to the angels, the rabbis do not hesitate to describe their appearance when it serves to glorify God or to demonstrate God's devotion to Israel. Interpreting Numbers 10:36, a rabbinic tradition explains that just as God dwells among thousands of angels in the heavens, during the sojourn in the desert, God dwelled among the thousands of Israel.[96] Here the comparison of Israel and the angels serves to emphasize God and Israel's close relationship during the desert wanderings. Indeed, a good number of mentions of angels in rabbinic literature are related to God's attention to Israel while they were in Egypt and in the wilderness. Another tradition states that just when the Israelites were losing steam on their journey through the desert, God showed them the angels surrounding them:

> התיצבו וראו. אמרו לו אימתי? אמ' להם משה למחר אמרו לו יש' למשה רבינו משה אין בנו כח לסבול. נתפלל מש' באותה שעה והראה להם המק' טורמיות טורמיו' של מלאכי השרת עומדין לפניהם...[97]

> "Stand Still and see [the Salvation of the Lord]." The Israelites asked Moses: "When?" He answered them: "Tomorrow!" Then the Israelites said to Moses: "Moses, our Master, we have not the strength to endure." At that moment Moses prayed and God caused them to see squadrons upon squadrons of ministering angels standing before them…[98]

Seeing the squadrons of angels surrounding them restores Israelites' resolve. This is the sentiment behind many traditions about angels in religious texts: the presence of invisible beings (especially ones subordinate to a loving God) is encouraging. Some may have believed, as we saw in the tradition from *Midrash Tehillim* that angels always surround (the

96 *Sifrei Numbers* §84, on Num 10:36, ed. Horowitz, p. 83-4, states "Just as the *Shekhina* abides in heaven above only among thousands and myraids, so the *Shekhina* abides on earth below only among thousands and myriads"

וכשם שאין שכינה שורה למעלה אלא באלפים וברבבות כך אין שכינה שורה למטה אלא באלפים ורבבות.

97 *Mekhilta d. R. Yishmael, Besh.*, §3, Horowitz-Rabin 94.

98 *Mekhilta d. R. Yishmael, Besh*., §3, trans. Lauterbach, 141.

pious of) Israel, but they cannot be seen. Similarly, the angels encourage Israel when they receive the Torah at Sinai.

> באותה שעה אמר הקב״ה למלאכי השרת רדו וסייעו את אחיכם שנאמר מלכי צבאות ידודון—ידודון בהליכה וידודון בחזרה.[99]
>
> Then God said to the ministering angels: Go down and assist your brothers, as it is said: "The angels[100] of the Host move (Ps. 68:13)—they move with them when going, they move with them when returning.[101]

In contrast to traditions that present the angels as hostile, here the angels are named Israel's brothers. This tradition, like the one before, does make it evident that the angels appear only at the instigation of God, not at the request of the Israelites or Moses. The tradition glorifies God, whose love for Israel is demonstrated through the angels he can send to them.

Overall, it is important to observe that many rabbinic traditions that involve angels are not about the angels themselves, but may be about emphasizing God's mercy and kindness. It is important to think about related angelological traditions, but to pay attention to the context of a tradition and not to read one tradition through another. For example, a tradition from the Palestinian talmud states that even if 999 angels convict a person and only one angel plead his innocence, God deliberates in the person's favor.[102] The context in the Palestinian talmud is a discussion of one's lifespan in the land of Israel as it relates to his good and bad deeds: each person receives his comeuppance, a longer life if he does good (and/or merely abstains from evil), but God is so gracious that one good deed may outweigh many bad ones. Two other traditions on angels intersect here: the Mishnaic principle that one

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99 *Mekhilta d. R. Yishmael, Bah.,* §9, Horowitz-Rabin 236.

100 The rabbis read "angels of the hosts" instead of "kings of armies" out of Psalm 68:13.

101 My translation.

102 Palestinian Talmud Qiddushin 1.10/4, 61d, p. 396 of *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi* III; Shabbat 32a (Job 33:23 is likely in the background).

אפי' תשע מאות ותשעים ותשעה מלאכים מלמדין עליו חובה ומלאך אחד מלמד עליו זכות הקב"ה מכריעו לכף זכות.

acquires heavenly advocates and accusers based one the number of one's good/bad deeds (cf. Mishnah Avot 4:11) and God's role as a judge who deliberates with the angels (cf. Palestinian Talmud Sanhedrin 18a).[103] However, the tradition that guides the discussion in the Palestinian Talmud is God's caring for Israel because they are his children (cf. Mishnah Avot 3:17). Hence, God's lenient and merciful nature toward them in spite of the just accusing angels.

Guardian Angels

The conception of guardian angels was particularly important in the Late Antique religious landscape.[104] Indeed, the belief in guardian spirits was a Mediterranean-wide shared phenomenon.[105] Texts from the Torah and Psalms set the precedent for the Jewish belief in guardian angels, which flourished in apocryphal writings, and continued through the rabbinic period.[106] Members of the Jesus-movement and ancient Christians maintained beliefs in angelic-doubles and guardians as well.[107] Hence, the rabbis never needed to explain the belief in guardian angels, but took it for granted.

I have already made mention of Jacob's blessing, which mentions an angel that

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103 Compare also the tradition that each person has two angels that testify against him, Babylonian Talmud Haggigah 16a, Babylonian Talmud Taanit 11a, and Palestinian Talmud Berakhot 8d.

104 Peter Brown, "The Rise of the Friends of God," *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

105 Some polytheists of the Greco-Roman mediterranean also believed that each individual had a daemon, a spiritual double that accompanied him/her.

106 Discussed in Schäfer, *Rivalität*, 60-62. Psalm 91:11 states "For he will give his angels charge concerning you, / To guard you in all your ways." This psalm makes it clear that God appoints angels for individuals. It is cited in two contexts in rabbinic litearture : 1) to prove that God protects people from demons through his angels (*Sifrei Numbers*, *Naso*, §40, on Num 6: 24, ed. Horowitz p. 44).

ד"א וישמרך מן המזיקים וכן הוא אומר כי מלאכיו יצוה לך לשמרך בכל דרכיך.

2) One sage states that two ministering angels attest to a person's deeds at the end of his life (Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 16a and Taanit 11a).

107 See Matthew 18:10 especially. Louis Ginzberg already collected the Christian references to this idea in *Legends of the Jews:* Hermas Pastor, Visio, V, 6.2; Clemens Alexandrinus, Stromata, 6.17; Justin Martyr, Dialogue, 5, and 2 *Apologia*, 5; Athenagoras, *Legatio*, 10.20; Visio Pauli, 14.

redeemed him from all harm. As we saw, early rabbinic interpretation of that text denied the angel an important role. Similarly, regarding guardian angels, R. Meir stated that everyone knows "the guarded is better than the guardian."[108] R. Meir acknowledges the existence of guardian angels even as he affirms Israel's superiority over them. Since the textual sources for guardian angels have been discussed in depth by Schäfer, I only wish to point to a few examples of this idea that can complicate conceptions of the angels among the rabbis.[109] The first two traditions come from the Babylonian Talmud and I will discuss each in turn:

> אמ' רב חסדא אמ' מר עוקבא כל המתפלל בע"ש ואומ' 'ויכולו' שני מלאכי השרת המלוין לו לאדם
> מניחין לו יד על ראשו ואומ' לו 'וסר עונך וחטאתך תכופר.'[110]

> Rav Hisda said in the name of Mar Ukba: any one who prays on the eve of the Sabbath and recites "Thus the heavens and earth were completed..." (Genesis 2:1), the two ministering angels that accompany the person place their hands on his head and say to him, "your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven" (Isaiah 6:7).

Here Mar Ukba (a first generation Babylonian amora, third century CE) tries to encourage fellow Jews (and presumably only rabbinic Jews) to integrate a biblical verse into their prayer on the eve of the Sabbath. In Mar Ukba's lifetime the liturgy had not yet been standardized or become authoritative among Jews. In order to make his case for the inclusion of the verse from Genesis, he employs the belief in guardian angels. To understand his innovation, we must revisit Isaiah's vision of the seraphim in the Temple: there, Isaiah felt too guilty ("I am a man of unclean lips" he cries) to stand before God and so a seraph took a coal from the temple's altar, touched it to his lips, and told him that now his sins were forgiven

108 Genesis Rabbah 78: 1, Albeck p. 918.

109 Cf. Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 18a on whether one receives accompanying angels or accompanying demons .

110 Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 119b (following Oxford Opp add. Folio 23).

and he could stand before God without fear (Isaiah 6:5-7). Here Mar Ukba imagines the angels similarly blessing and exonerating any ordinary Jew who prayed on the eve of the Sabbath in the synagogue. The idea that these angels could forgive sins is intriguing, especially in light of Exodus 23, which states that the angel will not pardon transgressions) and its citation by Rav Idith in his polemic with the heretic, where he rejects attributing even God's highest angel Metatron any such power (Babylonian Sanhedrin 38). Did some Jews believe that their guardian angels could forgive their sins? There is no other evidence that I know of to corroborate this tradition, but it serves as a reminder that some sages saw angels as playing a significant role in their lives, not just accompanying them, but even rewarding their pious deeds.

The next tradition in the talmud is also about two angels and a Jew on the eve of the Sabbath, but this tradition introduces the trope of the good angel and bad angel:

> תניא ר' יוסי בר יהודה אומ' שני מלאכי השרת מלוין לו לאדם בערב שבת מבית הכנסת לביתו אחד טוב ואחד רע וכשבא לביתו מוצא נר דולק ושלחנו ערוך ומטתו מוצעת מלאך טוב אומ' יהי רצון שתהא שבת אחרת כך ומלאך רע עונה אמן על כרחו ואם לאו מלאך רע אומ' יהי רצון שתהא שבת אחרת כך ומלאך טוב עונה אמן על כרחו.[111]

> It was taught: R. Yosi bar Yehuda says two ministering angels accompany man on the eve of the Sabbath from the synagogue to his home, one good and one bad. And when he arrives at his house, if a candle is lit and a table is prepared and his bed covered, the good angel says may it be like this on another Sabbath too and the bad angel answers 'amen' against his will. And if it is not, the bad angel says may it be like this on another Sabbath too and the good angel answers 'amen' against his will.

Here R. Yosi also builds on the belief in guardian angels to encourage fellow rabbinic Jews to prepare their homes for the Sabbath. The tradition imagines that angels accompany Jews from the synagogue through a town to their homes. It may be that the idea of a good and bad

111 Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 119b (following Oxford Opp add. Folio 23).

angel is related to Mishnah Avot 4:11, where a good deed grants a person an angelic advocate and a bad deed grants him an accuser. In different terms, the contemporary Christian thinker Origen, who lived and wrote in Caesarea at the end of his life, believed that people either had a good angel or a wayward daemon coupled to them, depending on the merits of their behavior.[112] R. Yosi attributes these two angels little active power of their own, except the power to bless or curse, but presumes that thinking about their presence will encourages Jews to think about their behavior on the eve of the Sabbath more carefully.

It is in the context of belief in guardian angels that I believe we ought to place one anomalous rabbinic tradition, which records prayers to the angels (Bavli Berakhot 60b). The context in tractate *Berakhot* is a discussion of the proper prayer to say upon entering a privy:

> הנכנס לבית הכסא אומר התכבדו מכובדים קדושים משרתי עליון תנו כבוד לאלהי ישראל הרפו ממני עד שאכנס ואעשה רצוני ואבא אליכם.
> אמר אביי לא לימא אינש הכי דלמא שבקי ליה ואזלי אלא לימא שמרוני שמרוני עזרוני עזרוני סמכוני סמכוני המתינו לי המתינו לי עד שאכנס ואצא שכן דרכן של בני אדם.
>
> He who enters a privy should say: 'Be honored, you honorable and holy ones, the minister to the Most High, give honor to the God of Israel. Leave me alone until I enter and do what I will and I return to you.'
> Abaye said: a person should not say, "separate from me," lest they abandon the person and go their way. Rather, he says: "Guard me, guard me. Assist me, assist me. Wait for me, wait for me until I have entered and exited, for thus is the way of human beings."

Here, R. Abaye, an influential figure, is not making a broad theological statement about the role of the angels between Jews and God, but suggesting a prayer for a personal, vulnerable, and human moment. His statement affirms that the presence of angels among Jews was taken for granted among some rabbis as well. Gerald Septimus' dissertation discusses this prayer,

112 See Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 13.26-8 and discussion of this topic in Muehlberger, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity*, 98.

"the only explicit, statutory ritual text addressed to an angel in talmudic literature."[113] Septimus is much worried by this prayer, believing it contradicts Jewish monotheism and subverts proper liturgical rules. He writes that "The best solution to the problem might then be to allow for a broader definition of monotheistic prayer and to allow that a monotheistic worshipper can legitimately address angels as a part of worshipping God" (51). I think it is important not to try to reconcile this tradition with other rabbinic liturgical traditions or legal statements that reject prayer to mediators like angels. As we have seen, rabbinic traditions about angels show much diversity. For some Jews, including some sages apparently, angels were proper mediators of Jewish prayer, invisible companions that protect, bless and aid individual Jews. In this context, a single prayer addressed to an angel from a Babylonian rabbi is not surprising. It is necessary to keep in mind that such contradictory ideas stand alongside each other in the vast corpus of rabbinic literature, which reflects the ideas of generations of rabbis who are geographically diffuse. The rabbis inherited beliefs about guardian angels along with many others, and while some sages downplay the angels' significance, others, perhaps especially in Babylonia, uphold their role in Jewish daily life.

Angels and Esoterica

Indeed, even if some rabbis tried to limit others Jews' attention to the angels at times, the rabbis still lived in a world pervaded by angels. And in that realm, they found angels useful for the same reason people all over the Mediterranean world did: encounters with angels were personal and usually private; experiences with angels could be used to discuss

113 In his dissertation, "On the Boundaries of Prayer: Talmudic Ritual Texts with Addressees Other than God"(Yale University, 2008), Gerald Septimus, examines angels as receivers of prayer among others in late antiquity. His study is devoted to rabbinic prayers that address not God, but instead the community, friends, judges, mourners, the dead, angels and possibly demons.

challenging topics, bring to light hidden knowledge, or express counter-cultural messages.[114] For example, the presence of angels could be affirming, showing the rabbis have heavenly sanction to discuss esoteric teachings, especially in contested circumstances:

> מעשה ברבן יוחנן בן זכאי שהיה מהלך על הדרך רוכב על החמור. ורבי לעזר בן ערך מהלך אחריו. אמר לו רבי השניני פרק אחד במעשה המרכבה. אמר לו ולא כך שנו חכמים ולא במרכבה אלא אם כן היה חכם ומבין מדעתו. אמר לו רבי תרשיני לומר דבר לפניך אני אמר לו אמור. כיון שפתח רבי לעזר בן ערך במעשה המרכבה ירד לו רבן יוחנן בן זכאי מן החמור אמר אינו בדין שאהא שומע כבוד קוני ואני רכוב על החמור. הלכו וישבו להן תחת אילן אחד וירדה אש מן השמים והקיפה אותם והיו מלאכי השרת מקפצין לפניהן כבני חופה שמיחין לפני חתן. נענה מלאך אחד מתוך האש ואמר כדבריך אלעזר בן ערך כן הוא מעשה המרכבה .מיד פתחו כל האילנות פיהן ואמרו שירה ״אז ירננו כל עצי יער״.[115]
>
> Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was going along the way, riding a donkey and R. La'azar ben Arach was walking after him and said to him, "Rabbi, teach me one chapter of the works of the chariot." He said to him, did not the sages teach that only one who is wise and understands on his own may contemplate the chariot? He said to him, give me permission to speak one matter before you and he consented. Because R. La'azar opened his mouth to speak of the works of the chariot, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai dismouned from the donkey. He said: it is not fitting that I should hear about the glory of my maker while I am riding a donkey. They went and sat under one tree. And fire descended from the heavens and surrounded them and the ministering angels were skipping about before them like groomsmen rejoicing before the groom. One angel answered from the fire and said "Just as you say Alazar ben Arach, thus is the work of the chariot. Immeidately, all the trees joined in song and said praise: "let all the trees of the forest sing for joy" [Psalm 96].

In this tradition the presence of the angels alleviates any anxiety about whether the sages may or may not discuss this works of the chariot. In this vivid story, the angels dance before the rabbis, celebrating their wisdom in discussing the most esoteric forbidden topics of the Torah. Considering that the angels usually flutter before God, the creator of the universe, and that the rabbis are discussing the esoteric secrets of God, we may also think of this example in the

114 David Albert Jones, *Angels: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 135-9.

115 Palestinian Talmud Hagigah chapter 2.1/9-10, 77a, p. 320 of *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi* II/5-12. See also the article by Urbach, which collects and analyzes the parallels to this passage: "The Traditions on Merkavah Mysticism in the Tannaitic Period," *Studies in Mysticism and Religion* (Magnes Press, 1967), 1-28 (Hebrew).

context of *imitatio dei*: when the rabbis discuss the ways of God, they themselves are most god-like and the angels affirm the rabbis' status by surrounding them with divine fire and dancing around them, much like they would in the heavens.

Elsewhere, we find traditions about angels communicating the rabbis, providing them with exhortations, warnings, and teachings about more personal matters (Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 51a).

> אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי, שלשה דברים סח לי מלאך המות: אל תטול חלוקך שחרית מיד השמש ותלבש; ואל תטול ידיך ממי שלא נטל ידיו; ואל תעמוד לפני הנשים בשעה שחוזרות מן המת, מפני שאני מרקד ובא לפניהן וחרבי בידי ויש לי רשות לחבל.
>
> R. Joshua ben Levi said "the angel of death told me three things: do not take your undershirt in the morning from your attendant and put it on; do not wash your hands with the help of someone who has not washed his hands; do not stand before women at the time when they return from the cemetery, because I dance before them and my sword is drawn and I have permission to harm.

These warnings from the angel of death address personal habits related to dressing, washing, and chance encounters on the road— usually unseen interactions. One can imagine that the angel of death lingers in the cemetery, but his relevance to the other daily rituals in the home is less obvious. The underlying idea seems to be that the angel is witness to transference of impurity usually hidden to mortal eyes: employing a servant for dressing and bathing in the morning creates opportunity for impurity, some sort of destabilization, or harm analogous to encountering women who have just contracted impurity from their interaction with the dead. R. Joshua relies on the authority of the angel of death to convey the importance of vigilance around these habits in the home. In relating this tradition, he also acknowledges that he converses with angels and learns from them. Such a tradition only works in a worldview where angels are at home with Jews.

Angels weigh in on even more intimate matters in Babylonian tractate Nedarim 20b: R. Yohanan b. Dahavai states that the ministering angels revealed to him four types of improper intercourse that lead to unhealthy fetuses. Here angels are authorities on intercourse apparently because they can attest to the resultant formation of the fetus, processes hidden from the human eye. Interestingly, this tradition is immediately contradicted by the wife of a rabbi and again contradicted by other sages themselves, who claim that the *halakhah* is not according to R. Yohanan b. Dahavai. A sage named Amemar asserts that R. Yohanan b. Dahavai's sources could not have been the ministering angels, but must have been other rabbis. Amemar asserts that R. Yohanan b. Dahavai must have referred to them as angels because they are just as respectable-looking as the angels. Indeed, the rabbis did not resort to insights from angels often, relying on their own learning and exegesis of the Torah alone. Only in the high medieval period will we find angels and rabbis communicating at length again.

Angels and Women

The way the rabbis handle communication between God, the angels, and women is noteworthy. As far as I know, it is a topic that the rabbis address only in their commentary on biblical sources featuring women. In the Torah, divine communication with women, whether involving God or the angels, usually centers on the topic of pregnancy and conception: the plain meaning of the text in Genesis 18:15 is that God spoke directly to the matriarch Sarah about her imminent pregnancy and so, too, to the matriarch Rebekah in Genesis 25:23 about the twins she was to bear; Hagar has a conversation with an angel in Genesis 16:7-14 about

the impending birth of Ishmael. The following tradition recurs in Genesis Rabbah three times virtually verbatim (20.6; 45:10 and 48:20). The first time it appears in the text, it is used to explain Genesis 3:16 "To the woman [Eve] he said, 'I will great increase your pangs in childbearing:"

> רבי יהודה בר' סימון רבי יוחנן בשם ר' אלעזר בר' סימון מעולם לא ניזקק הקב"ה להשיח עם אשה, אלא עם אותה צדקת אף היא על ידי עילא. ר אבא בר כהנא בשם ר' ביריי: כמה כירכורין כירכר בשביל להשיח עימה, ויאמר לא כי צחקת, והא כת' ותקרא שם ה' הדובר אליה וגומ', רבי יהושע בר נחמ' בשם ר' אידי: על ידי מלאך [והכתיב כה ויאמר ה' לה, רבי לוי בשם רבי חמא בר חנינא אמר על ידי מלאך,] רבי אלעזר בשם רבי יוסי בר זימרא אמר על ידי שם.[116]
>
> R. Judah b. R. Simon and R. Yohanan in the name of R. Eleazar b. R. Simon said: The Holy One, blessed be He, never was moved to speak directly with a woman save with that righteous woman [Sarah], and that too was due to a particular cause. R. Abba b. Kahana said in R. Biryi's name: and what a roundabout way he went in order to speak with her! As it is written, "And he said: No, but you did laugh." But it is written, "And she [Hagar] called the name of the Lord that spoke to her? R. Joshua b. Nehemiah answered in R. Idi's name: That was through an angel. But it is written, And the Lord said to her—Rebekah? R. Levi said in the name of R. Hama b. R. Hanina: That was through an angel. R. Eleazar said in the name of R. Jose b. Zimra: That was through the medium of Shem [the son of Noah].

Using God's reprimand of Eve as a starting point, the rabbis choose to make a generalization about God never speaking with women, singling out Sarah as the exception. They bolster their case with the example of Hagar, who clearly conversed with an angel. They deny, against the literal meaning of the text, that God spoke with Rebekah, and suggest that an angel spoke with her instead and finally, they go even a step further and suggest that Rebekah might have spoken not even to an angel, but to the patriarch Shem, the son of Noah. The rabbis do not rule out that angels can interact with women as some ancient Jewish sources do (especially mystical and magical treatises as we shall see), but neither do they linger on this possibility (as liturgical poetry does). First and foremost, the rabbis are concerned with their

116 Genesis Rabbah 20:6, ed. Albeck p. 188. Notice the use of the verb *z-q-q* once more in the first line.

own relationship with God, next Israel's relationship with God, and men's relationship with the divine in general. As supporting cast, women and the angels have in common the fact that they are sometimes only an afterthought for the rabbis.

Angels in Later Rabbinic Sources

Whereas earlier sources are complex, ambivalent about the angels, later rabbinic sources tend to synthesize earlier sources, and be more univocally positive as they celebrate the angels' contributions to Israelite history. For example, a midrash in Exodus Rabbah states:[117]

> אמר ר' נחמיה בא וראה אהבתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא על ישראל, שהרי מלאכי השרת שהן גבורי כח עושי דברו, עשאן הקדוש ברוך הוא שומרין לישראל, ומי הם מיכאל וגבריאל, שנאמר(ישעיה סב) על חומתיך ירושלים הפקדתי שומרים, וכיון שבא סנחריב מיכאל יצא והכה בהם,מיכאל יצא והכה בהם וגבריאל הציל במצותו של הקדוש ברוך הוא לחנניה וחביריו.[118]
>
> R. Nehemiah said: Come and see the love of the Holy One, blessed be He, towards Israel, for the Ministering Angels, who are the mighty of strength that do his bidding were appointed by the Holy One, blessed be He, as the guardians of Israel. And who are they? —Michael and Gabriel, for it is said 'I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem' (Isiah lxii 6); and when Sennacherib came, Michael went forth and smote them, and Gabriel, by the command of the Holy One, saved Hananiah and his companions.

Whereas earlier rabbinic sources stress God's direct and non-mediated interventions on behalf of Israel, this tradition takes pride in angelic intervention and celebrates Michael and Gabriel as warrior angels.[119]

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117 Discussed in Urbach, *Hazal*, 142.

118 *Exodus Rabbah*, *Bo*, §18: 5, ed. Mirkin vol. 1, p. 213.

119 As Urbach observes, even though the rabbis were familiar with protector role of Michael in the book of Daniel (Daniel 10:13 and 7:1), they gave no credit to Michael in past wars of Israel (*Hazal*, 121). Though Michael and Gabriel are associated with intervention on Israel's behalf in the Book of Daniel, they do not enjoy the prestige of warriors or protector angels in rabbinic literature. In fact, a tannaitic tradition states that God goes to war alone and is only accompanied by myriads of angels at peaceful events (*Sifrei Numbers*, *be'healtecha*, §102 on Num 12:5, ed. Horowitz p. 100). Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael are named by the rabbis only to clarify the identity of Abraham's three angelic visitors at the Oaks of Mamre, similarly to identify the angels sent to destroy Sodom, and to identify who saved Daniel's three companions from the fire. The rabbis are

Many traditions that we have encountered about God's angels, from Exodus 23:20, through Psalm 91:11 to Mishnah Avot 4:11, are brought together and synthesized in the early medieval commentary *Midrash Tanhuma* on Exodus 23:20:

> 'הנה אנכי שלח מלאך' (שמות כג) זש"ה 'כי מלאכיו יצוה לך לשמרך בכל דרכיך' (תהלים צא) עשה אדם מצוה אחת מוסרים לו מלאך אחד,[120] עשה שתי מצות מוסרין לו שני מלאכים, עשה כל המצות מוסרין לו מלאכים הרבה שנאמר 'כי מלאכיו יצוה לך.' ומי הן המלאכים? אלו שמשמרים אותו מן המזיקין שנאמר 'יפול מצדך אלף ורבבה מימינך' ....אריב"ל מהו יפול מצדך אלף הקב"ה מוסר לכל אחד ואחד מישראל רבוא ואלף מלאכים שיהו משמרין אותו ועושין לו דרך, ואחד מהן מכריז לפניו ואומר 'תנו כבוד לצלמו של הקב"ה לפי שכל העולם כלו מלא רוחות ומזיקים...'[121]
>
> "Behold I send an angel before you" (Exodus 23:20). This refers to what is written "For he will give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways" (Psalms 91:11): If a man performed one precept, he is given one angel; if he performed two precepts, he is given two angels; if he did all the precepts, he is given many angels as it is said "For he will give His angels charge concerning you, / To guard you," etc. And who are the angels? Those that preserve him from the demons as it is said "A thousand may fall at your side / And ten thousand at your right hand" [Psalm 91:7]….R. Joshua ben Levi said: what is meant by "a thousand may fall at your side?" That the Holy one, blessed be he, assigns each and every one from Israel a myriad and one thousand angels that will guard him and make way for him, and one of them declares before him and says "Give honor to the image of the Holy one, blessed be He" as the entire world is filled with spirits and demons.

The homily quotes Exodus 23:20 without any of the reservations of previous Rabbinic commentary. And whereas this text refers to an angel that will precede the Isrealites as a whole, here it is made to apply to individual Jews and joined with the text from Psalm 91. Next, the interpreter restated Mishnah 4:11, explicitly awarding each good deed with an angel instead of the more vague "intercessor" of the original. Here, the angels are further

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determined to give God all the credit for Israel's glorious past even when the biblical sources mitigate this portrait.

120 Compare Mishnah Avot 4:11

ר אליעזר בן יעקוב או' העושה מצוה אחת, קנה לו פרקליט אחד...

121 *Tanhuma Mishpatim* §19, on Exodus 23:20 (Warsaw ed., 1873). Buber's recension of *Tanhuma*, which only circulated in Ashkenaz, does not contain this text.

identified as the ones that guard Jews from demons.[122] R. Joshua ben Levi, whom we encountered earlier speaking with the angel of death[123] and describing individuals as icons of God with heralding angels,[124] is here attributed the idea that each Jew is assigned over a myriad of angels to protect him, apparently from demons who are common in the earthly realm. Such synthesis about the place and role of angels between God and the Jews is found only in the later strata of Rabbinic literature.

I have also found that later sources are more likely to engage in speculation about the high number of angels surrounding God, which we will see is in interest of Hekhalot literature as well.[125] Finally, later sources are more likely to use angelic imagery to describe Israel. In his book on *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings*, Sacha Stern devotes a section to "Israel and the Angels." When he reflects on the superiority of Israel over the angels, described above, he similarly relies on the Talmudic sources. When Stern discusses the equality of the angels and Israel, most of the sources he cites are are from the latter homiletical midrashim like Exodus Rabbah, Song of Songs Rabbah, and Deuteronomy Rabbah. The later the rabbinic traditions, the more welcoming they are of angels, angelic intervention, and angelic descriptions.

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122 *Sifrei Numbers*, *Naso*, §40, on Num 6: 24, ed. Horowitz p. 44, discussed above in fn. 30.

123 b. Berakhot 51a, see above, p. 70.

124 *Midrash Tehillim*, see above, p. 52.

125 *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* 12 (ed. Mandelbaum, p. 219).

'I am the Lord thy God' etc. [Exodus] — This is to be understood in the light of the verse 'The chariots of God are myriads, even thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in holiness' [Psalm 68]. R. Avdima of Haifa said: "I recited in my Mishna that there came down with the Holy One, blessed be He, to Sinai twenty-two thousand bands of Ministering Angels"…Another opinion, 'The chariots of God are myriads, thousands of angels,' teaches that the Holy one, blessed be he, came down with twenty-two thousand chariots, and each and every chariot looked like the one that Ezekiel saw. The group that came up from Babylonia said that with the Holy One blessed be he descended twenty-two thousand chariots. Thus also taught Elijah of blessed memory.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have highlighted the diversity of the sages' attitudes towards angels from a variety of rabbinic documents limited to the Late Antique period. Inheriting complex biblical sources on angels, the rabbis respond in a variety of ways to them. While some early tannaitic sources repress the role of the angels in Israel's foundational narrative, others reveal that some sages did envision the active role of angels in Jewish life. Some legal sources merely discouraged use of the vernacular to address the angels while others set the limit at sacrifice to angels. I have argued that R. Akiva's foundational statement about humanity's creation in the image of God may have played a significant role in the sages' attitudes toward the angels. The rabbis ultimately model their self-conception and self-understanding on God, not the angels, and this principle impacts their treatment of His divine servants. Still, ideas about the role of angels in the daily life of ancient Jews are taken for granted among the sages, both in Babylonia and in Palestine. Once we review the reception of angels in other Jewish sources, we will be able to better understand the rabbis themselves and their relationship to the angels in a more nuanced way.

To end on a more vivid note, I would like to offer a brief overview of a section from the Babylonian tractate Hagigah. This is the tractate with the most sustained examination of the angels in rabbinic literature. A tour of a section of chapter 2 of this tractate reaffirms many of the ideas discussed in this chapter. The sages like other ancient Jews were interested in the divine inhabitants of the heavenly realms, but whereas other Jewish leaders likened themselves to angels, the rabbis do not show this inclination, establishing their own superiority to angels instead.

The basic teaching that frames this section of the tractate (12b-16a) is Mishnah Hagigah 2:1, which states "The subject of forbidden relations may not be expounded in the presence of three, nor the work of creation (*ma'aseh berashit*) in the presence of two, nor [the work of] the chariot (known as *ma'aseh merkavah*) in the presence of one, unless he is a sage and understands of his own knowledge."[126] This statement, unusual in rabbinic literature, has provoked a great deal of scholarship.[127] It is the latter two topics mentioned, creation (cosmogony) and the chariot (God's heavenly throne, as described in the prophecies of Ezekiel), that provoked discussion of the angels.

The section most relevant to this study begins when the sages speculate about the seven heavens in connection with the works of creation (12b). Here they put forth one version of the seven heavens (*Vilon*, *Rakia*', *Shehakim*, *Zebul*, *Ma'on*, *Makon*, *Araboth*), suggesting that the planets and constellations are set in *Rakia*, that *Zebul* contains the heavenly Jerusalem where the angel "Michael the great prince" is high priest; *Ma'on* is where the companies of ministering angels dwell, singing by night and silent by day so that Israel's prayer may be heard from below. In *Araboth* dwell the souls of the righteous, the spirits and souls yet to be born, as well as the *ofanim*, the seraphim, the holy living creatures, more ministering angels, and the throne of God. Further speculation is silenced with a quotation from Ben Sira: "seek not things that are too hard for thee, and search not things that are hidden from thee" (3:21-22). The *sugya* closes with speculation about the size of the angelic creatures and another warning not to seek to attain the heights of the throne of God

126 Mishnah Hagigah 2:1

אין דורשין בעריות בשלשה ולא במעשה בראשית בשנים ולא במרכבה ביחיד אלא אם כן היה חכם ומבין מדעתו כל המסתכל בארבעה דברים ראוי לו כאילו לא בא לעולם מה למעלה מה למטה מה לפנים ומה לאחור וכל שלא חס על כבוד קונו רתוי לו שלא בא לעולם

127 See David Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekie's Vision* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988), 23ff.; Michael D. Swartz, "Jewish Visionary Tradition in Rabbinic Literature," *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007);

(13a). Like other Jews, here we see that some rabbis were fascinated by the make-up of the heavenly realms. In the next chapter on the liturgical poetry of the synagogue, we shall also find descriptions of the seven heavens and the heavenly creatures that dwell there. In the last chapter, we shall encounter Jewish mystics who did seek to attain the heights of the throne of God.

The warning against speculatoin transitions well to a section interpreting the prohibition of studying the work of the throne-chariot in the company of others. R. Ami is attributed the statement that "We do not transmit the mysteries of Torah except to those having these five qualities 'one having charge of fifty men, one of rank, a counselor, a man learned in charms, and skilled in enchantments' (Isaiah 3:3)." After a long digression, this statement is elucidated, and we find out that the authorities listed in Isaiah 3:3 are each interpreted as members of the rabbinic movement: masters of the bible, masters of the Mishnah, masters of Aggadah, masters of traditions, masters in disputation in warfare of Torah, judges, elders, expounders of the Torah, those in charge of intercalation, etc. In other words, only learned rabbis have the authority to engage in speculation about God's throne in the heavens and they should not share their discussions with others.

Immediately following the quotation from Isaiah is a tradition from R. Johanan, which conveys the idea that there's a proper age to study the works of the Chariot. Speculation follows on what sections of the book of Ezekiel constitute the works of the Chariot. A tradition relates the story of child reading Ezekiel, who dared to expound on c*hashmal*, and was consumed by heavenly fire. Here (13b) the rabbis define *chashmal*, *ophan*, cherubim, and seraphim. The rabbis engage in an interesting comparison of Isaiah's

and Ezekiel's visions of divine creatures, recognizing that the conceptions of angels vary significantly between the two prophets (Isaiah sees seraphim with six wings, Ezekiel sees four-winged creatures). Anonymous teachings correlate the destruction of the first temple with the loss of a pair of angelic wings and perhaps the diminution of the number of angels in the heavenly family. This is one of the few rabbinic traditions that dwells on the nature of the angels directly and it is interesting that the rabbis posit that angels changed through history (as, indeed, conceptions of them did change in the Hellenistic period).

However, a tradition is raised that rejects this line of thought and asserts that angels are created on a daily basis from a fiery stream only to sing praise and to disappear (14a). Other traditions suggests angels are created from God's breath or from His every utterance. Into this context is placed a heated argument about divergent descriptions of God, as young and old, and speculation about the two thrones. R. Akiva betrays his messianic expectations and suggests the other throne is for David; he is accused of being too literal (and yet too daring) in his interpretations. While his opinion is rejected here, his ideas about *imitatio dei* and creation in the image of God remained influential and are revisited later in this section of *Hagigah*.

The redactors of *Hagigah* took this opportunity to reflect on the destruction of Jerusalem and the temporary loss of capable leaders among the Jewish people. Returning to a more positive tradition, they interweave the story of R. Yohanan b. Zakkai and R. Eleazar b. Arakh discussing the works of the chariot (14b). Here we have a parallel of the story discussed earlier, wherein the angels descend, offer songs of praise, and an angel affirms the brilliance of the rabbis in expounding on this esoteric heavenly topic. The redactors here

share another story about another set of rabbis on a journey, also expounding the works of chariot, wherein again ministering angels descend and celebrate the teaching of the rabbis as if witnessing a wedding. Here, the angels prove useful to affirming the rabbis authority.

From stories about angels affirming righteous rabbis, we turn to stories of angels punishing a wayward rabbi. After bringing in the famous story of the four rabbis who entered the *pardes*, the redactors continue to trace the life story of the most famous rabbinic heretic Elisha ben Abuyah, later known as Aher ("the Other"), and his encounter with the great angel Metatron (15a-b).[128] Elisha ben Abuyah, seeing the angel Metatron sitting above, a privilege he thought was reserved for God only, asks whether there are not two powers in heaven, a question which leads to his permanent excommunication and Metatron's punishment. In connection with Aher, Malachi 2:7 is cited again: "If a sage was angelic, they ought to seek Torah from him. And if he was not, they should not." The rabbis conclude that Elisha ben Abuyah was found wanting and that his disciple R. Meir should not have learned from him. A biblical citation meant to encourage thinking of priests as angels is discarded and applied to a rabbi who proved unworthy. Misconstruing angels in the heavens proved to be Elisha ben Abuyah's downfall.

Still ruminating on Aher, the next tradition is a story about Rabbah b. Shila who encountered the prophet Elijah and asked him what God occupies himself with in heaven (15b). Elijah answers that God spends his time uttering traditions in the names of all the rabbis except R. Meir (the student of *Aher*). Rabbah b. Shila pleads on Meir's behalf and God relents. God then quotes a tradition attributed to R. Meir, which reinforces the principle of *imitatio dei*: R. Meir states that God personally suffers whenever a person is executed

128 See fn. 32 on the "Two Powers" problem.

(because each person is an icon of God); this serves as reminder to the sages to use the death penalty sparingly. It also reminds us that God values Israel over the angels, experiencing their pain as his own.

Next we find R. Judah experiencing a crisis, wondering about his worthiness as a rabbi and the worthiness of other rabbis in general. Perhaps to counterbalance this grave anxiety, the redactors return to R. Akiva, who successfully engaged in esoteric speculations, entering and leaving the *pardes* unharmed. Moreover, when he entered the *pardes*, the ministering angels sought to push him away, but God himself said: "Let this elder [enter] who is worthy to avail (himself) of my honor." The rabbi comes into God's presence over the resistance of the angels and God himself affirms his worthiness. Thus, R. Akiva exemplifies the underlying idea that Israel is loved by God more than the angels.

In closing (16a), the rabbis impart a tradition on the relationship or resemblance between demons, angels, and mortals:

> ת"ר ששה דברים נאמרו בשדים: שלשה כמלאכי השרת ושלשה כבני אדם. שלשה כמלאכי השרת: יש להם כנפים כמלאכי השרת וטסין מסוף העולם ועד סופו כמלאכי השרת ויודעין מה שעתיד להיות כמלאכי השרת —יודעין ס"ד אלא שומעין מאחורי הפרגוד כמלאכי השרת.
> ושלשה כבני אדם אוכלין ושותין כבני אדם פרין ורבין כבני אדם ומתים כבני אדם.
> ששה דברים נאמרו בבני אדם שלשה כמלאכי השרת שלשה כבהמה. שלשה כמלאכי השרת יש להם דעת כמלאכי השרת ומהלכין בקומה זקופה כמלאכי השרת ומספרים בלשון הקדש כמלאכי השרת. שלשה כבהמה אוכלין ושותין כבהמה ופרין ורבין כבהמה ומוציאין רעי כבהמה.
>
> The rabbis taught: six things are said about demons; in three respects [they are] like ministering angels and in three respects like humans. In three respects they are are like ministering angels: they have wings like the ministering angels and they fly from one end of the earth to the other like the ministering angels and they know the future like the ministering angels. They know? They hear from behind the veil like the ministering angels. And in three ways they are like mortals: they eat and drink like mortals, multiply like mortals, and die like mortals.
> Six things were said about humans, in three respects [they are] like the ministering angels and in three respects like beasts. In three respects they are

> like the ministering angels: they have knowledge like the ministering angels, they move about like the ministering angels, and they speak the holy tongue like the ministering angels. In three respects like beasts: they eat and drink like beasts and multiply like beasts and they defecate like beasts.

Even here, the angels themselves are not the main topic of speculation. The nature of demons and humans is explored and the angels are used "to think with." We learn that the angels have wings, they fly, they know the future, and that they speak Hebrew, lest anyone be tempted to speak to them in another language. However, the rabbis themselves do not show any interest in becoming more like the angels. In the rest of this dissertation, we shall examine texts that show Jews interested in praising like the angels and even achieving angelic abilities like flying and knowing the future.

In these few pages of talmud, we see the rabbis grappling with the variety of biblical angelic creatures, depicting angels as celebrating their teachings, reminding the sages that humans are icons of God, and describing angels who seek to push the sages away, but are overruled by God. Finally, the angels are indirectly described while the rabbis define demonic and human nature. The structure of this section of the talmud, while a product of redaction, reminds us of variety of ways rabbis approached the subject of angels, with curiosity about biblical texts, about the nature of angels, about their presence in the temple, their fellowship on the way, the dangers inherent in over-speculation, and most germane for this project, their usefulness for rabbinic conceptions of the self and authority.

CHAPTER 2: ANGELS IN THE ANCIENT SYNAGOGUE

Introduction

Recent scholarship has shed light on the Late Antique Palestinian synagogue as a communal institution attended by men and women,[1] full of sights and sounds evoking scripture,[2] where the languages of Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic intermingled (at the very least on the mosaic floors, if not in the recitation of Torah).[3] Unlike the dominant custom today, which is to read the five books of the Torah over the course of the Sabbaths of one year, in antiquity Jews that attended the synagogues of Palestine would hear the Torah read over a three or three and half year cycle, in short portions, which left time for hearing a line-by-line translation into Aramaic as well as for communal and individual prayer, and for the performance of a homily or sacred song.[4] The performance of sacred song or liturgical poetry

1 See Lee Levine's chapter on "Women in the Synagogue" in *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 499-518; Bernadette Brooten, "Female Leadership in the Ancient Synagogue," *From Dura to Sepphoris* (Portsmouth, R.I.: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2000), 215-23.

2 For the mosaics of Palestinian synagogues, see Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), esp. p. 185ff.

3 The synagogue in Sepphoris has inscriptions in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. See Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient mosaic pavements: themes, issues, and trends* (Boston: Brill, 2009) 236.

4 Joseph Yahalom has suggested that it was the brevity of Torah portions in the triennial cycle, which created the space and time that encouraged the prolific growth of interpretive literature and poetry in Late Antique Palestine. See Yahalom, *Poetry and Society in Jewish Galilee of Late Antiquity* ([Hebrew: *Piyyut u-Metziut*] Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz Hameuchad), 182, where he writes that "one can hypothesize that in effect the shorter readings gave rise to the great creative act of liturgical poetry in Eretz Israel" (my translation).

was an especially important development, one which revolutionized the late antique religious landscape.[5] Sacred song proved popular among Syriac- and Greek-speaking Christians in the Roman Near East as well as among Jews in Palestine.[6] How Jews encountered the angels in their worship in late antique synagogues and particularly through sacred song has not been addressed in depth *and* is the subject of this chapter. I will argue that the encounter with the angels in the synagogue, particularly in the genre of liturgical poetry called the *qedushta*, reflected and reinforced ancient Jews' preoccupation with achieving resemblance and fellowship with the angels.

One of the most significant developments in Late Antique worship was the increasing importance of the liturgical use of the verses "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts / the whole earth is full of His glory" (quoting Isaiah 6: 3), verses of angelic praise, known as the Qedushah in Hebrew, the Trishagion in Greek, and the Sanctus in Latin. Indeed, Isaiah's vision of angels praising God's holiness in the Temple served as the paradigm for prayer for generations of Jews and Christians.[7] In the late antique Hebrew genre of liturgical poetry (*piyyut)* called the *qedushta*, the recitation of the Qedushah was the culmination and climax of prayer.[8]

5 After reviewing the evidence particular to the synagogues, I will close my chapter by discussing sacred song in the wider Near Eastern context.

6 Though it may have been widespread, we do not have evidence for *piyyut* in Jewish Babylonia until the eighth century CE. The letter of Pirkoi ben Baboi (ca. 800 CE) is seen as the earliest evidence for opposition to *piyyut*. See Ruth Langer, *To Worship God Properly* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1998), 117-8.

7 For more on the different trajectories of these liturgical verses, see Albert Gerhards, "Crossing Borders—the Kedushah and the Sanctus: A Case Study of the Convergence of Jewish and Chrisitan Liturgy," *Jewish and Christian Liturgy and Worship: New Insights into Its History and Interaction (B*oston: Brill 2007). Following a separate trajectory, the thrice-repeated "holy" would become part of the fixed Christian liturgy in the fifth century, mainly due to John Chrysostom's influence.

8 To be clear, the Qedushah refers to the basic verses of the angelic praise from Isaiah ("Holy, holy, holy"). The *qedushah* (N.B. in lower case italics) refers to the ninth poem of the composition of the *qedushta* (plural *qedushta'ot*), which refers to the nine-part compositions for Sabbaths and holidays that culminate in the *qedushah*. All of these are based on the Hebrew word for "holy," *qadosh*. For more on the composition of this poetic genre, see Laura Lieber, "'Anatomy of a *Qedushta*:' How Form Shapes Meaning and Meaning Shapes

The history of the development of the fixed Jewish liturgy, the Qedushah, and liturgical poetry are important topics in their own right and cannot be treated fully here, but I will provide a few brief comments so that the importance of late antique Jewish developments can be appreciated.[9] In the Palestinian context, it seems that originally the verses of the Qedushah were recited only by the prayer leader as part of the fixed liturgy, but sometime in late antiquity the congregation began to participate in the recitation of the Qedushah, joining in its recitation once a week on the Sabbath or on holidays.[10] The rabbis do not comment on this important development, much in the same way they do not comment on the rise of Christianity or other important events that were not germane to their sense of identity. Due to the influence of Babylonian rabbis in the early medieval period, the public recitation of the Qedushah began to be performed on daily basis as part of the fixed liturgy, and this remains the custom in synagogue worship to this day.[11] However, in the period we shall be focusing on in Palestine, the Qedushah was recited aloud in the synagogue only on the Sabbath morning.

Ezra Fleischer suggests it was the work of the *chazzanim*, prayer leaders, who composed sacred song, which established the Qedushah as a central ritual of worship. Alternatively, it may have been popular desire to recite the angelic verses that eventually led

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Form," *Yannai on Genesis: an Invitation to Piyyut* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 2010), 35-92.

9 The standard and most approachable text on Jewish liturgy is Ismar Elbogen's *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (New York: Jewish Publication Society and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993). For a briefer introduction, see also Stefan Reif, "The Early Liturgy of the Synagogue," *The Cambridge History of Judaism* 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For a state of the field article on liturgical poetry, see "The Hebrew Liturgical Poetry of Byzantine Palestine: Recent Research and Perspectives" *Prooftexts* 28.2 (2008): 232-46.

10 Ezra Fleischer, "*Qedushat HaAmidah* and the rest of the *qedushot*: historical and liturgical and ideological perspectives," *Tarbiz* (1971): 41-63 [Hebrew].

11 Langer, *To Worship God Properly* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1998), 197.

to the congregation's participation in the recitation of the Qedushah.[12] Although we lack the evidence to reconstruct the details, the figure most closely associated with this development was the *chazzan* and poet (Hebrew *paytan*) Yannai, whose work will be the main focus of this chapter. The popularization of the poetic-liturgical genre of the *qedushta* is attributed to Yannai. Poeticizing the Qedushah on a theme related to each week's lectionary reading, Yannai turned the angelic praise into a participatory event in the synagogue. While Yannai was not the first to compose *qedushta'ot*, he is the only poet who always embellished the Qedushah itself with poetry.[13] It seems that Yannai was committed to the embellishment of angelic praise more than his contemporaries and successors. His successor, Qaliri, also composed *qedushta'ot* for holidays that were enduringly popular. While a comparison of Yannai and Qiliri's corpora of poetry remains a desideratum, it is beyond the scope of this study. Yannai's corpus proves rich enough to merit treatment on its own terms. Here I endeavor to demonstrate how Yanna'is conceptualization of angels may have reflected and/or modeled Jewish imaginings of angels in Late Antique synagogues.

After a few more brief introductory and historiographical comments, I will detail what Yannai reveals to us about Jewish beliefs in angels, both as an individual Jew in Late Antique Palestine and as a prayer-leader in the synagogue. Next, I will demonstrate how

12 Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 233. The two approaches to this topic may be said to encapsulate the scholastic differences in the study of piyyut and liturgy: Fleischer takes an institutional perspective, focused on how the rabbis shaped the liturgy and what philological analysis of the Hebrew liturgy may reveal. Lieber also engages the broader historical, social, and cultural evidence and leaves open the possibility that factors outside the rabbinic movement have may shaped the liturgy. The former considers the reasons for the development of public recitation of the Qedushah as ultimately mysterious and unknowable; the latter sees it as a natural outgrowth of popular fascination with angels, recognizable in surviving literary evidence from Qumran and elsewhere, including non-Jewish sources. For more on different approaches to the study of the liturgy, see Ruth Langer, "Revisiting Early Rabbinic Liturgy: The Recent Contributions of Ezra Fleischer," *Prooftexts* 19.2 (2000): 179-94.

13 Fleischer, *Shirat Hakodesh*, 140, writes that "Yannai poeticized the sections of the Qedushah in all of his *qedushta'ot*, while Haduta and Shimeon beirebbi Mages always (according to the extant sources) ended their *qedushta'ot* before the Qedushah. In the corpus of the Qaliri both approaches are found."

Yannai uses angels in his *qedushta'ot* to elevate the congregation of Israel as a whole to the level of the angels. Delving more deeply into the corpus, I will show how Yannai singled out priests and the sages for angelic description, thus describing figures of authority and holiness within the congregation. Following this, I show how Yannai subtly reveals his own self-conception as a *chazzan* and as an intermediary figure between Israel, God, and the angels, especially on the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, Yom Kippur. Finally, I close by discussing the context of this genre of liturgical poetry in the Late Antique Near East. If the traditions of the rabbis showed ambivalence toward the angels, Yannai's corpus of the liturgical poetry shows the opposite: an unabashed celebration of the angels as well as a desire to aspire to their company.

Yannai's qedushta'ot

The Amidah, the standard fixed prayer of the Sabbath, includes seven benedictions addressed to God. The first of these benedictions, the *magen,* praises God as the Lord and protector and "shield" of the forefathers; the second, the *mehayyeh*, praises God for his powers of resurrecting the dead; the third, the famous Qedushah*,* praises God by quoting the aforementioned two verses from Isaiah 6:3 and another angelic exclamation from Ezekiel 3:12 ("Blessed is the Lord's glory from His place").[14] As Ezra Fleischer wrote, "With the recitation of this stanza, the congregants take upon themselves, upon the earth, the role of the ministering angels above. Hence the Qedushah is thought of as the most holy and important among the stanzas of public prayer."[15] Yannai embellished the first three benedictions with

14 Biblical scholars now know that a textual corruption led to this reading. See Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now*, 605.

15 Ezra Fleischer, *Shirat Hakodesh Ha'ivrit Biyemei Habeinayim* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975), 32 (my translation).

poems, incorporating the benedictions into a nine-part poetic composition, which he would recite or sing to the congregation.[16] This genre of liturgical poetry was termed the *qedushta*. The *qedushta* embellishes the first three benedictions of the Sabbath or Holiday Amidah with poems that draw on the themes of that week's Torah portion.

Yannai wrote about angels in two ways: both in response to biblical passages that already featured angels and in response to the third benediction (the Qedushah), which he lingered on at length. With the former he is focused on interpreting the role of the angels in Israel's narrative history and with the later he ruminates on the relationship of the angels with the congregation before him.

With her foundational work, *Yannai on Genesis: An Invitation to Piyyut*, Laura Lieber opened up the field of liturgical poetry for non-specialists. This book is one part commentary on each of Yannai's piyyutim for the lectionary cycle of Genesis (printed in Hebrew and translated into English on facing pages) and one part general introduction to the role of liturgical poetry in Late Antique culture.[17] The value of Lieber's contribution cannot be overestimated.[18] Lieber positions Yannai as an influential Late Antique thinker, creative in his own right, even as he is in dialogue with the members of the rabbinic movement. As she

16 For a diagram of this composition, see Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, especially Appendix II, 783. Yannai also composed liturgical-poetic compositions for the fixed prayer of the afternoon (*minha*), evening (*arvit*), and *musaf* prayer services, where the Qedushah was not recited aloud and therefore did not receive special attention. This type is called the *shivata*. For more on this type of composition, see Fleischer, *Shirat HaKodesh*, 182ff.

17 Lieber took on the monumental feat of translating and commenting on all of Yannai's compositions for Genesis. Where I discuss Yannai's piyyutim from Genesis, I cite her transcriptions and translations unless otherwise noted. In general, I have aimed to complement her work and draw on examples from elsewhere in Yannai's corpus, thus translating and making more of his corpus accessible to readers and showing how including him as a source of evidence can enrich our understanding of history. I am indebted to her and Ophir Munz-Manor for introducing me to this field of study. Other piyyutim transcribed and translated here are drawn from the critical editions of Zvi Rabinovitz, *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Yannai* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1985). I also relied on the two volumes of corrective and supplementary commentary by Nachum Bronznick (Jerusalem: Re'uven Mas, 2000).

18 See Debra Blank's review of Lieber's book on http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=30605.

writes, “Yannai was shaped by and was a shaper of the culture of exegesis in which he lived and for which he wrote.”[19] His extant corpus of over one-hundred and sixty *qedushta'ot*, almost entirely recovered from the Cairo Genizah, stands to teach us a great deal about the culture of the synagogue in late Antqiue Palestine.

In a section on “Poetry, Angels, and the Heavenly *Hekhalot*,” Laura Lieber discussed Yannai's interest in the angels and Jewish preoccupation with angels in late antiquity.[20] Lieber observed that Yannai generally agrees with statements about angels in rabbinic literature, although he tends to view Israel’s and the angels’ relationship as more harmonious than the rabbis do.[21] She suggests Yannai's *qedushta'ot* represent the popular front of esoteric mystical preoccupation with angels seen in Hekhalot literature.[22] It seems more likely to me that Yannai capitalized on the prevailing popularity of angels in Jewish society and incorporated them systematically into his poetry. Although he cannot be said to present a systematic treatise on angelology, his writings attest to how one learned figure in late antiquity synthesized diverse Jewish traditions about angels.

While building on Lieber's foundational work, I wish to delve more deeply into the topic of Yannai and the angels and situate Yannai's views amongst other Jewish views, especially in light of my studies of rabbinic, ritual, and mystical texts. Lieber's interest was not in Jewish attitudes to angels per se nor the power dynamics related to such views. My work more squarely focuses on how Yannai treats angels in the biblical texts and how he uses

19 Ibid, 132.

20 Ibid, 227-241.

21 Ibid, 495.

22 Ibid, 233. We shall examine the mystics' preoccupation with angels in the last chapter of this dissertation. It seems more likely to me that the mystics radicalized the values of the Beit Midrash and Beit Knesset (the rabbinic school house and the synagogue).

the Qedushah to relate the angels an the people of Israel.

Foundational beliefs about Angels

Yannai's *qedushtah* for the first lectionary reading of Genesis sets forth his basic understanding of the angels' relationship to humanity. Although the first five poems of this *qedushtah* are no longer extant, the sixth poem picks up with a concise summary of each of God's creative acts:

פיקדתה נעשה אדם
בדמות פניהם פני אדם
צעקו מה תפקוד אדם
וביקר לא ילין אדם
קרצתה עפר מאדמה
וגלמתו היות על אדמה
ריש...לאילי מרום אותו דימה
וחאטא ולהבל דמה

You gathered (your host): "Let us make man"
According to their likeness is the likeness of man
They cried out: Why are you mindful of man
When man does not abide with honor?
You plucked dust from the earth
With its body being of the earth
…To the angels
Though she would sin and he resemble nothing[23]

Similarly, in the penultimate poem in this composition (the *silluq*), Yannai reaffirms angelic and human resemblance, despite the sin of the Adam:

ועוד בשישי יצרתה אדם מן האדמה
וכאחד מבני אלים נדמה
וחטא...מה ולדין הובא באימה

23 Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 304-305. Lieber points out that unlike traditions that place the blame for the fall solely on Eve, Yannai places the blame equally on both Adam and Eve. However, as Lieber reminds me, his *qedushta* on the ordeal of the adultress, described in Numbers 5:11, portrays women in a more ambivalent manner.

> And also on the Sixth Day You created the human from the earth
> And like one of the divine beings he seemed
> But he sinned…and to judgment he was brought in terror[24]

According to Yannai God created the first man and woman in the image of the angels over and against the angels' objections. Yannai's poem emphasize that though in appearance Adam and Eve resemble the angels, their actions would betray their inferior nature. These texts suggest that Yannai was familiar with Rabbinic traditions on God consultation of the angels about the creation of man.[25] Indeed, several midrashim interpreting Genesis 1:26 depict the angels objecting to humanity's creation with the quotation from Psalm 8:5 ('What is man that you have been mindful of him, / mortal man that You have taken note of him").[26]

We have already encountered the idea that humanity resembled the angels, not God, in rabbinic traditions.[27] Yannai's view here is most closely paralleled by a rabbinic tradition that suggests man was made in the image of the angel Gabriel.[28] The source of this rabbinic tradition is probably the book of Daniel (8:15), where the prophet beholds a figure whom he describes as looking like a man (Hebrew root *g-b-r*) and whom God introduces as Gabriel. Additionally in Daniel 10:5, Daniel encounters a man (*ish*), whose body is like "beryl, his face like the apperance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude." Based on these sources, some sages posited that the angels resembled men. Yannai makes a broader statement, suggesting the physical resemblance of humanity as whole to the angels. In doing

24 Ibid., 314-15.

25 See Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus*, Chapter 6, especially 165ff. and for more parallels and discussion, see Schafer, *Rivilitat*, 85ff.

26 Genesis Rabbah 8:3-5; cf. Pesikta Rabbati 14:9.

27 Discussed on page 55; see R. Akiva's and R. Pappias' argument on this topic in *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, *Vayehi 7*.

28 Genesis Rabbah 21:5 has the rabbis saying humanity is in the image of Gabriel. See Schafer, Rivilitat.

so, Yannai contradicts other Rabbinic traditions, which insist that Adam and Eve were made in the likeness of God and that human descendants were made in "their" likeness—i.e. in the likeness of Adam and Eve.[29]

Context and audience may be crucial here. Some Rabbinic traditions, perhaps in dialogue and/or polemic with Christian views on Jesus' involvement in creation, insisted on God's singular role in creating and imaging the first humans. Additionally, the rabbis' commitment to the principle of Jews as icons of God may be at play here.[30] Alternatively, the need to avoid anthropomorphizing God may have encouraged some Jews to by insert angels in between God and humanity. Yannai may have had these concerns in mind, but as we shall see, placing the angels and humanity on the same level seems to be a central concern of his.

In this *qedushta*, we also begin to see the variety of ways Yannai refers to the angels. In the sixth, Yannai refers to the angels as *elei marom*, which literally means "the lofty divine beings," a term found neither in biblical nor in rabbinic literature. In the 8th poem he will refer to the angels as *bnei elim*, a term found once in the Psalms (29:1) and often repeated in rabbinic literature. From this opening *qedushta* we also learn that Yannai views the stars, planets, moon and sun as angelic beings.[31] Expanding on Gen 1:14 (God's creation of lights in the heavens) in the sixth where he writes:

כיללתה אור ומאורות
אשנבי שמים ביום מאירות
לילה להיות מזהירות
צבא כוכבים ומזרות

29 Genesis Rabbah 8:9; Palestinian Talmud Berakhot 9:1. These midrashim are discussed in Schafer, *Jewish Jesus*, 27ff.

30 Discussed in the previous chapter, see "

31 This idea has roots in biblical and second temple traditions, see Job 38:7 and 38:31-33; Isaiah 40:26 and 45:11-12; Ps. 147: 4. See discussion in James Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: a guide to the Bible as it was at the start of the common era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 75ff.

You complete lights and lamps
Windows of the heavens during the day making light
Night to be brightened
By the host of stars (*tzeva kochavim*) and planets.[32]

The term *tzeva kochavim* is not found in the Hebrew Bible. Instead, there *tzeva shamayim* is more common, usually in context of prophets condemning Israelites for their idolatrous worship of the celestial realm. Yannai takes for granted that the host of stars is subordinate to God and appropriate subject of poetic praise (he is the "Lord of Hosts" after all). In no way do his *piyyutim* betray a need to offer a disclaimer for his praise of the orderly celestial realm. After describing the movement of the constellations he writes:

ואין מספר ושעור לשאר הכוכבים
ולכולם בשם יקרא שוכן כרובים

וביום רבעי גברו מפני שהם חביבים
ושני מאורות יצאו מחלון אחד כאוהבים
ובדוק שלישי ניתנו כקאמין וייציבין

The rest of the stars can neither be counted nor reckoned,
Yet all of them are called by name by the Dweller upon the Cherubim

And on the fourth day they prevailed because they are beloved
And the two lights went forth from a single window, like lovers
And within the curtain of the Third Heaven they are set as attendants.[33]

The two lights are the sun and moon, of course, who are God's servants.[34] In light of such attitudes to the celestial realm in the liturgical poetry, the portrayal of Helios in the synagogue seems far less surprising. As divinely appointed luminaries, the angels are fitting both in the architecture and in the liturgy of the synagogue.

32 Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 304-5.

33Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 310-311, her translation with minor modification.

34 Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 311, fn. 32: "The heavenly luminaries, like the angels, stand ready to obey divine commands."

Another of Yannai's *qedushta'ot* addresses the heavenly dwelling of God and the angels more precisely. In the eighth poem for the lectionary reading on the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1), Yannai first describes the heavenly realms and then God's creation of divine beings there:

משמים לשמי השמים \ משמי שמים לערפל \ מערפל לזבולה \ מזבולה למעונה \
ממעונה לשחקים \ משחקים לערבות \ מערבות לרום כסא \ מירום כסא למרכבה
...
ורכובך על כרוב \ ודיאתך על רוח \ ואורחך בסופה \ ודרכך בסערה \ ושבילך במים \
ושליחותך באש \ אלף אלפים וריבי רבבות \ נעשים אנשים \ נעשים נשים \ נעשים
רוחות \ נעשים זיקים \ נעשים כל דמות \ ועושים כל שליחות \ באימה ביראה בפחד
ברעד ברתת בזיע \ יפתחו פה להזכיר זיכר קודשך...

> From the heavens to the heavens of heavens / from the heavens of heavens to the Concealed Heavens / From the Concealed heavens to the Lofty Abode / from the Lofty Abode to the Hidden Lair / From the Hidden Lair to the High Clouds / from the High Clouds to the Highest Heavens / From the Highest Heavens to the Exalted Throne / from the Exalted Throne to the Heavenly Chariot.
> …[skipping two lines]
> And your mount is a cherub / Your flight is on the wind / Your road is in the storm / Your path is in the gale / Your way is on the water / Your mission is through fire / Thousands upon thousands, myriads upon myriads / Become men / Become women / Become spirits / Become demons / Become every form / And perform every mission / With terror, with dread, with fear, with trembling, with quaking, with shaking, they open their mouths to mention Your holy name...[35]

Yannai lists the seven heaven as he knew them.[36] Yannai's list of the seven heavens does not match the one in Rabbinic literature, but this is not surprising; such knowledge was not systematized or fixed yet in the Late Antique period.[37] Yannai paints a picture of God in a

35 Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 384-5.

36 In Hebrew these are *Shamyim, Shmei Shamayim, Arphel, Zevula, Me'ona, Shehakim, Aravot, Rom Kisa, Merkavah*. Lieber writes that "this list attests both the widespread concept of the "seven heavens" and the diffuse nature of ideas associated with *Hekhalot* mysticism (*Yannai on Genesis,* p. 384, fn. 34). I do not think that mystical interests are necessary for interest in cosmology in antiquity.

37 Compare with Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 12b: *Vilon*, *Rakia*, *Shehakim*, *Zebul*, *Ma'on*, *Makon*, *Araboth*. See Peter Schäfer, "In Heaven as It Is in Hell: The Cosmology of *Seder Rabbah Di-Bereshit*." *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), especially 252-266.

distant heavenly abode where diverse kinds of divine creatures are created at His will.

Several more aspects of this passage are striking: first, Yannai takse for granted that myriads of creatures including angels and demons are subordinate to God. This is paralleled by a tradition in the Mishnah, which states that demons were created by God at the twilight of the sixth day (Mishnah Avot 5:6).[38] This idea upholds God's total mastery over the universe. Secondly, Yannai mentions that God creates both men and women, which in context seems to refer to male and female divine figures. This is an *unparalleled* tradition, which might hint that Yannai's outlook on the angelic world was more broad than his contemporaries and/or his predecessors.[39] Certainly, as I will show, he was also singular in including women in community with the angels.

The next composition is more specific about how and where angels were created. In the eighth poem to the lectionary reading on the burning bush, Yannai meditates on the attributes of fire (*qedushta* to Exodus 3:1). This leads itself to a discussion of the origin of the angels in divine fire.

> [אש]/ מתחלפת ברב דמיונות / על הסנה בלהבים / ועל סיני בלפיד[ים] למעלה
> שביבים תלהט / ולמטה רשפים תלחך / ומינה גבילת השרפים / לכן בה לא נשרפים /
> ומזיעה אשר הם מזיעים נהר / דינור מושיך אור / ...

> [Fire] transforms into many appearances / upon the bush in flames / upon Sinai in torches, above with flashes it blazes / and below it licks with lightening bolts[40] / and from it [the fire of the heavenly realm] is the creation of the seraphim / thus in it they do not burn / and from the sweat that they

38 See the *mazzikin* of Mishnah Avot 5:6, ms. Kaufmann 345, discussed in first chapter.

39 Two exceptions: Zechariah 5:9 describes the inverse of angels, inferior female spirits with wings like stork's wings. They were understood by the rabbis in Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 24a to symbolize the measures of hypocrisy and arrogance that descended to Babylonia. In the Bablyonian Talmud, the angel "Layla" protects the fetus while it is in gestation. This name, which means Night, is grammatically masculine, but phonetically feminine, and seems to be the counterpart to Lilith.

40 Following Bronznick's commentary on Yannai, volume 1, p. 122 who suggests interpreting *reshafim* in light of Psalms 78:48.

sweat / the river *dinur* flows fire /...[41]

God creates angels from the same fire that illuminated Sinai and the same fire that appears occasionally in stormy skies. The river *di-nur* (in Aramaic 'of fire') is famously mentioned in Daniel's vision of God (7:10). Because the book of Daniel includes the most angelic descriptions of any book in the biblical canon, it makes sense that its images and vocabulary loom large in Yannai's imagining of the angels. The idea that angels are created from divine fire is in general agreement with traditions in Genesis Rabbah as well as in the magical literature.[42] In this rare instance the liturgical poetry, rabbinic exegesis, and ritual practitioners were in agreement about the origin the angels.

My survey of his corpus suggests that Yannai used many terms for angels and understood them as synonymous, not distinguishing a hierarchy among them.[43] In the following composition, he brings together all the known synonyms for angels. This *qedushta* is on the confrontation between Edom and Israel in the desert as well as in the future, when God will finally appear to set the evil kingdom in its place (*qedushta* to Numbers 20:14). In the eighth poem, in an alphabetic acrostic and pairs of alliterative phrases, he writes:

ותמלוך במחן / ותינשא בנס / ותשא בסער / ותעוז בעוז / ותפואר ב [פל]א / ותצרח
בצבא / ותקרא בקול / ותרכב ברוח / ותשובח בשם / ותהולל בתוקף / בתלתלי שנאן /

41 My translation from Rabinovitz volume 1, p. 272-3. Compare also with Yannai's *qedushta* to Num 8: "the heavenly bodies arise at night/ to declare Your faith by night / trembling like slaves before You / those who are made according to Your plan/ who run alongside the wheels of Your chariot / who face the surfaces of Your throne / but see not the likeness of Your face / but rather the luster of the light of Your face / surrounded by snow and fire / and its wheels are burning fire/ and a river of fire is drawn out before it / from it they are created and through which they pass…" (translated by Seth Schwartz in *Imperialism and Jewish Society* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001], 269).

42 Genesis. Rabbah. 78:1; *Sefer Ha-Razim* "And all of them were created from fire and their appearance is like fire, and their fire is blazing, for from fire they emerged" (Morgan, trans., *Sepher Ha-Razim,* 21; §31 of *Sefer ha-Razim*, ed. Rebiger and Schäfer,).

43 We first witness Jewish angelology in much later works, like those of Maimonides, 3 Enoch, and Kabbalistic treatises. See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: Yesodei ha-Torah* 2: 4-3:11; Elazar of Worms' *Sefer HaMalachim.*

ברצי קלל / בצדודי פנים / בעירי שרפים / בניצוחי מלל / בלוהטי כיתים / בירואי
טפסר / בחזיזי זיקים / ב[וו]דוי המולה / בדאי גובה / בבהקי אור / במשלשי
קו[דש] ככ (וקרא)[44]

> And you will rule camps [of angels] / and you will be carried miraculously / and you will ride a storm / and you will be majestic in majesty / and you will be ornamented in wonder / and roar among the hosts / and call out aloud / and ride the winds / and be praised in the name / and lauded powerfully / by countless *shenan* / by those swiftly running ones / by all the sided faces[45] / by the seraphim watchers / by the symphony of those saying / by the blazing ranks / by the perceiving *tephsar* / by the glinting (ones of) lightening / by the thanking tumult / by those of height / by flashes of light / by those thrice saying kadosh….

Here angels are called the camps, the hosts, the *shenan*, the seraphim, watchers, *tephsar*, as well as by other substantive phrases. Yannai knows of all of these diverse kinds of angels from biblical sources. Hence, he imagines that angels look human or like fiery creatures of lightening, beings with six wings as in Isaiah's vision, or creatures with straight legs and four faces as in Ezekiel's vision; in the same poetic phrase he brings together Isaiah's seraphim and Daniel's "watchers," those ever vigilant beings who stand in God's presence. For Yannai, cataloging the many kinds of angels and their countless number is a way of glorifying God, but at the same time it reveals that he imagined a complex and diverse angelic realm, one completely anchored in biblical sources. He read the multiplicity of angelic types in scripture not as problematic or in need of organization, but as a glorious manifestation of God's power.

There may be one corollary to this: the one classification that does prevail in the last poem of each of the *qedushta'ot* is the division of the angels into the *hayyot*, *ofanim*, and cherubim.[46] These three divine types appear only in chapter 10 of the book of Ezekiel and

44 Rabinovitz vol. 2, 88.

45 Bronznick vol. 1, 317 "the meaning is that each and every one of the four creatures had four faces and each looks in one direction" (my translation).

46 In one instance in his extant corpus, Yannai groups the angels as those of mercy, peace, and the hosts (Genesis 28:10). "'Holy' from the angels of mercy that accompanied Jacob on his journey/ 'Holy from the angels of peace that guarded him where he slept / 'Holy' from angels of the hosts who were revealed to him in his

even there they do not form a series or a triad. Rather the prophet Ezekiel witnesses the departure of God's glory from the temple and realizes that the frightful divine creatures (*hayyot*) he saw in his first vision of God are the cherubim, those responsible for carrying god's throne alongside the divine wheels, the *ophanim*.[47] Yannai makes a traid of the divine creatures, the ofanim, and the cherubim and makes this triad a refrain in his *qedushta'ot.* While Late Antique interpreters like Yannai began to collect terms for angels from the biblical corpus, only much later medieval interpreters showed interest in creating a systematic angelology based on these types.

Individual names of angels are also rare in Yannai's corpus. In the biblical canon most angels remain anonymous, passing for human until they depart. Similarly, Yannai leaves almost all the angels he mentions unnamed. The biblical record left only two precedents in this regard: the book of Daniel names Michael and Gabriel. The apocryphal book of Tobit and the pseudepigraphic books of 1 Enoch also name Raphael among others. Traditions in rabbinic literature mention these three angels too and record a few more angelic names like Metatron, Akatriel, and Layla.[48] In the extant corpus of his *piyyutim*, Yannai invokes only these three angels by name, and only once and all together in his *qedushta* to Genesis 19:1.[49] Where the biblical source states only that two angels came to Lot in Sodom, later interpreters

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dream" my translation, Rabinowitz 1, 170-1).

47 Ezekiel 10:9 "Then I looked, and behold, four wheels [*ophannim*] beside the cherubim, one wheel beside each cherub; and the appearance of the wheels was like the gleam of a Tarshish stone" and Ezekiel 10:20 "These are the living beings (*hayyah*) that I saw beneath the God of Israel by the river Chebar; so I knew that they *were* cherubim.

48 Metatron appears in Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin; Akatriel in Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 7a; Layla, an angels appointed over pregnancy, appears in Niddah 16b. See Meir Bar-Ilan, "The Names of Angels," *These Are the Names: Studies in Jewish Onomastics* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1997), 33-48 [Hebrew].

49 Commenting on this *qedushta*, Lieber writes that "it creates a sense that the Jews of the sixth century in the Galilee are living in the midst of an almost-invisible cosmic drama just as much as Abraham was" *Yannai on Genesis*, 496.

such as Yannai and the sages identified these angels as Gabriel and Raphael.[50] According to Yannai and the sages, Gabriel was sent "to overturn Sodom and her suburbs" and Raphael sent "to spare Lot from being swallowed in the enveloping shroud."[51] They attribute to Michael the role of announcing a son to Abraham and Sarah (the topic of the previous lectionary reading and *kerova*).[52] Yannai emphasizes that each of them was sent for one task:

> דבר שליחות אחת בשניים לא תישׁשׁה
> ושתי שליחויות...
> הלא כל אחד שליחותו יעש
> אם לטוב אם לרע אם לרצון אם לכעס
> ומעשׂה למשׁמע מקדימים במשׁלחתם
>
> The matter of the mission was singular; it would not be doubled
> and two missions [fall not upon one]
> Does not each his mission do,
> Whether for good or ill, whether of favor or anger?
> Good as done as soon as heard, they rush to their mission.[53]

Indeed, the attribution of a single particular mission to each angel is also a principle that was shared by ancient learned Jews. As Lieber noted in her commentary to Yannai, both Genesis Rabbah and Targum Neophiti state the principle that "it is impossible for any angel from on high to be sent for more than one thing."[54] I think that this idea probably relates less to what angels are capable of than to a certain conception of wealth and power in antiquity. The more powerful an individual, the more servants he has at his service, each responsible for a particular duty. The underlying principle in these traditions is that God has so many

50 Genesis Rabbah 50:2.

51 Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, p. 492 (see the sixth and ninth *piyyutim* of this *qedushta*).

52 Traditions likely assigned each of these angels their particular mission partially because of their name—Raphael, whose name is composed of the root verb R-P-A, which means to heal is sent for saving Lot and his family from death; Gabriel, whose name contains the trilateral root G-B-R, man, denotes manliness and power is sent for great destruction. Michael, whose name means "who is like God" is the angel associated with the nation of Israel in the Book Daniel, and so it is fitting that he perform the task of telling Abraham of his progeny, who contains within him the destiny of Israel.

53 Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 488-9.

54 Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 488, fn. 9.

ministering angels, each need only go out on one mission at a time and the entire world in all its details functions as he wills it. Indeed, *Sefer Ha-Razim* offers no such disclaimer for angelic missions, but does offer six firmaments, each composed of many encampments of myriad angels, each assigned a different sphere of influence. From theperspective of the author of *Sefer Ha-Razim*, it is not that an angel cannot perform more than one mission, but why would one ask an angel to do multiple activities when there are so many available?

For the purposes of my study, it is important to ascertain in what sense Yannai imagined the angels to be physically present with his congregation. Although Yannai is clearly interested in bringing angels and Israel into the same realm, it seems that Israel and the angels achieve only temporal, not physical commingling. The sixth poem of the *qedushta* to Genesis 28:10 states:

המונים לא יאמרו קדוש במעלה
עד אמונים יאמרו ברוך במטה
ועת עומדם [ו]לחישה בפיהם במטה
בעומדם תרפנה כנפיהם במעלה[55]

> The masses [of angels] do not recite "Holy" above,
> Until the faithful [Israel] recite "Blessed" below;
> When they stand below with words of prayer in their mouth,
> The angels standing above let down their wings[56]

According to Yannai, Israel and the angels are synchronized in prayer. Where the prophet Isaiah witnessed two choirs of angels reciting "holy" antiphonally, in Yannai's poems Israel forms one choir and the angels the other. Yannai adds that Israel's recitation of the Qedushah

55 Wout van Bekkum and Naoya Katsumata published a transcription and translation of this poem in "Piyyut as Poetics: The Example of Yannai's Qedushta for Deut. 6:4," *Giving a Diamond: Essays in Honor of Joseph Yahalom on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 88, poem 6, line 9. Compare with a tradition in Genesis Rabbah 65:21 (Albeck pg. 739-40):

בשעה שישראל א]ומרים[שמע ישראל]המלאכים[שותקין ואחרכך בעמדם תרפינה כנפיהן ומה הן א]ומרים[ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד

56 Translated by van Bekkum and Katsumata, "Piyyut as Poetics," 94.

comes first. This may be contrasted with the tradition in Babylonian Talmud tractate Hullin 91b, where the rabbis claim that Israel pronounces God's name in the Shema before the angels do in the Qedushah, thus proving Israel's superior status over the angels. For the rabbis, the Shema is Israel's prayer, which is juxtaposed with the angels' Qedushah. For Yannai, both Israel and the angels say the Qedushah, but Israel says it first.[57] Yannai thus vividly describes the sequence of sounds and of movement as he models a way of praying with the angels. When the congregation adopts the posture of prayer (standing, itself an imitation of the angelic stance), the angels above relax their wings, perhaps with their wings behind them (not extended) angels look more human too, bringing them visually closer together.

We might compare and contrast this with the way ancient Christian theologians brought angels into the Church, a topic recently foregrounded by Ellen Muehlberger.[58] John Chrysostom, from fourth-century Antioch, wrote that "the angels stand around the priest and the *bema* and the place around the altar are all filled with heavenly powers in honor of the one laying (there)."[59] In other words, because of Jesus presence in the church sacraments, angels are present too. Not so in the synagogue, where angelic companionship is maintained at a distance.

Another Christian thinker, Cyril of Jerusalem, also from fourth-century Palestine, advises Christians to call to mind the angels, archangels, dominions and the seraphim of

57 Similarly, in the Aramaic translations of the Torah, the *targums*, a tradition states that the ministering angels do not say the name of God until Israel has said the Qedushah (Targum Neofiti and Fragment Targum of Ms. Paris Hebr. 110 and Ms. Vatican 440 to Deut 32:2). See Shinan, "The Angelology of the 'Palestinian' Targums on the Pentateuch," *Sefarad* 43.2 (1983): 187.

58 Ellen Muehlberger, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

59 On the Priesthood 6.4; *Sur la Sacredoce,* ed. Anne-Marie Malingrey, Sources chrétiennes 272 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1980), 316. Translated and discussed by Ellen Muehlberger, "Angels in the Religious Imagination of Late Antiquity" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2008), 119.

Isaiah's vision when they pray. Cyril writes "For the reason why we recite this doxology which the Seraphim taught us is to share in the singing of the celestial armies."[60] On this point, Jews and Christians in Palestine seem to have been in agreement.

Israel among the Angels in Yannai's piyyutim

Yannai's transference of the voicing of the Qedushah from the angels to the protagonists of each week's lectionary reading and the members of the congregation was his most significant contribution to Late Antique Jewish religious life. Yannai's point of departure is always the Torah portion for that week, but he is never limited in his choice of figures. His ability to conjure up voices from each section of the Torah, even ones lacking identifiable individuals, is a testament to his creativity and dedication to the Qedushah as a ritual practice for participants. My examination of how Yannai leads up to and parses out holiness in the ninth poem, the *qedushah,* sheds light on how Yannai taught his congregation to understand themselves in relation to the angels and other biblical figures.[61]

In *Yannai on Genesis*, Lieber devotes a section to "The Concept of 'Holiness'"[62] and there she discusses holiness as a descriptive concept in Yannai. She places this analysis in the context of Late Antique emphasis on the sacred, for example in the architecture of synagogues, but not in a socio-historical context. I intend to pursue a socio-historical approach to holiness and to show how Yannai's innovations in poeticizing the Qedushah

60 Mystagogic Catechesis 5.6-7; Edward Yarnold, trans., *Cyril of Jerusalem* (New York: Routledge, 200), 183.

61 Yannai remained extremely popular in successive generations. See Fleischer, *The Pizmonim of the Anonymus* (The Israel Academy of Sciences and humanities, 1974.

62 Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 241ff.

might be meaningful for construing or constructing social relations in the congregation.[63] I argue that in Yannai's *qedushta'ot*, what began as a verbal and embodied imitation of the angels in the fixed prayer became a more complex ritual that cultivated new modes of Jewish self-conception,[64] one *qerova* at a time.

If Yannai's entire corpus of *piyyutim* survived, we would have *qedushta'ot* to 166 lectionary readings composed for the triennial cycle in use in his environs.[65] As it stands we have fragmentary or whole *qedushta'ot* to 130 ordinary Sabbaths plus about 18 fragmentary and whole *piyyutim* for festivals and holiday Sabbaths, which brings his *piyyutim* to a total of 148. Of these, 75 are fragmentary and lack the final one or two poems relevant to my analysis. To give a brief overview of my findings: out of the remaining 73 piyyutim, only 8 describe the angels alone reciting the *Qedushah* (as in the vision of Isaiah). By comparison, 24 of Yannai's *qedushtaot* uphold the recitation of "holy, holy, holy" from the congregation of Israel alone, variously described and celebrated, implicitly placing them on the same level as the angels. A further 10 *qedushtaot* explicitly stress the synchronicity and commingling of the voices of Israel and the angels. Of the *piyyutim* with emphasis on Israel, several uphold specific subgroups within Israel/the congregation like those the patriarchs, those of old age, priests or levites, and women. Nine of Yannai's *piyyutim* give voice to particular biblical patriarchs and heroes.

In the survey which follows, I will describe how Yannai engages and elevates the

63 I am also thinking here of Geertz' theory that religious symbols function both as models of and models for behavior in any culture.

64 Here I borrow Derek Krueger's turn of phrase for developments in Christian piety and practice in the sixth century CE. See his *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

65 Additional fragments of Yannai are still occasionally being published. I base my findings on Rabinovitz' critical edition and all recent publications of his poetry.

congregation of Israel as a whole and then I will describe how his *qedushta'ot* give us further evidence of social structures in late antique Jewish society. The prevailing theme in Yannai's *piyyutim*, is the elevation of the entire congregation (on account of various merits, practices, and qualities) to liturgical union with the angels.[66] Whereas Lieber states that *piyyutim* may reflect the popular front of *hekhalot* mysticism on account of their angelic and heavenly imagery, I would say that the basic goal of *Hekhalot* and the *piyyutim* may be the same, with the members of the *hekhalot* circles taking the practice of liturgical union with the angels to esoteric extremes.[67] Judging by this corpus, it seems that all Jews shared a fascination with assuming angelic status and the synagogue as the institution of the Jewish people, reflected and reinforced this ideal.

Each of Yannai's *qedushta'ot* invited the members of the congregation in direct and lucid language to sing the prayer of the angels, now closely associated with a biblical figure, ancestral custom or more recent ritual. Some customs that Yannai invokes with the Qedushah are quite basic, but by connecting them with the song of the angels, they would be infused with new meaning. For example, in the *qedushah* to Exodus 16:28 on the Sabbath, Yannai led the congregation in saying:

למול שלשה דברים אלה שבת ומילה ותושיה משולשים ישלשו
קדוש קדוש קדוש | יי צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו
קדוש משובתי שבת / קדוש משומרי מילה / קדוש ממשנני תורה[68]

Against these three things, which are Shabbat and circumcision and Wisdom,[69]

66 Purposefully employing Schäfer's term for the goal of *Hekhalot* mystics. See his O*rigins of Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009).

67 It is also worth noting that the circulation of *Hekhalot* literature in sixth-century CE Palestine is difficult to establish. For a discussion of this topic, see Michael Swartz "Hekhalot and Piyyut: From Byzantium to Babylonia and back," *Hekhalot Literature in Context: From Byzantium to Babylonia* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 41-64.

68 Rabinovitz vol. 1, 314.

69 Yannai uses the word *Tushiya* here to stand in for the Torah. Compare Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer 3: "at once

they will thrice say
Holy Holy Holy, the whole earth is filled with His glory
Holy from those keeping the Sabbath
Holy from those observing circumcision
Holy from those reciting Torah…

Here Yannai ties angelic praise to particular Jewish values: Sabbath, circumcision, and Torah, thus opening up a space for the Jews before him to be the reciters of the angelic praise. He makes it clear that the congregation itself, by virtue of upholding these fundamental values, is on par with the angels. It is likely that he picked the verb "recite" (sh-n-n; לשנן) in order to invoke the recitation of the oral Torah, which the rabbinic movement upheld as integral to a full understanding of Jewish Law.

In other compositions, Yannai lingers and makes sure to praise the aspects of observance that were the object of gentile criticism. So in his *qedushah* for Leviticus 17:1, he states:

נשחטים על שמך וזובחי שחיטתם לשמך עונים ואומרים
ק[דוש] ק[דוש] ק[דוש] יי צבאות
ק[דוש] ממשמרי שחיטה ק[דוש] ממטהרי אכילה ק[דוש] ממתעבי זרה
ק[דוש]ק[דוש]ק[דוש] יי צבאות
ק[דוש] בעבור להכשירנו צונו הכשר שחיטה
ק[דוש] בעבור לטהרנו צונו טוהר אכילה
ק[דוש] בעבור לצדקנו צונו ריחוק זרה
ק[דוש] מחיה ק[דוש] מאופן מאופן ק[דוש] מכרוב[70]

Those being slaughtered for your sake and those who offer sacrifices for your sake answer and say:
Holy Holy Holy, etc.
Holy from those observing [the rules of] slaughter
Holy from those purifying eating
Holy from those abominating the foreign
Holy Holy Holy
Holy for the sake of making us pleasing, he commanded us the ritual slaughter

the Lord took counsel with the Law, whose name is *Tushiyyah*, as to creating the world" (Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1659).

70 Rabinovitz vol. 1, 444.

> Holy for the sake of purifying us, he commanded us purity of eating
> Holy for the sake of justifying us, he commanded us to keep afar from foreignness
> Holy from *chaya*, Holy from *Ofan*, Holy from Cherub.

Martyrdom, proper slaughter, and kashrut are intertwined by Yannai in this *qedushah*. And moreover, those observing these precepts for which Jews were so widely disparaged are placed in parallel with the three classes of angels.

We can compare the Jewish customs that Yannai enumerated with the way contemporary Christians discussed achieving angelic status. Peter Brown famously brought attention to the phenomenon of celibate Christians aspiring to the angelic life in the Late Antique Mediterranean, writing that "Not to belong to married society was to belong more intensely to others. The Invisible world was magnificently sociable. It was a 'great city' crowded with angelic spirits."[71] He cites the Patriarch Athanasius of Alexandria, who wrote to Emperor Constantius II that one of the benefits bestowed by Jesus' intercession was that humans "should possess upon earth, in the state of virginity, a picture of the holiness of the angels….For indeed, this holy and heavenly profession is nowhere established, but only among us Christians, and it is a very strong argument that with us is to be found the genuine and true religion."[72] According to Athanasius, not only did Christian virgins achieve angelic status on earth, but their unique status was proof of the truth of Christian claims over and against Judaism and more established Mediterranean religions. Since most Jews did not value

71 Peter Brown, *Body and Society*, 171.

72 Athanasius, *Apologia ad Constantium imperatorem* §33; Patrologia Graeca 25: 640B; trans. Miles Atkinson, *Historical Tracts of Saint Athanasius* (Oxford, 1843), 185.

Ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ υἱός, ὁ κύριος καὶ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, ἄνθρωπος γενόμενος δι' ἡμᾶς καὶ «καταργήσας τὸν θάνατον» «ἐλευθερώσας τε τὸ γένος ἡμῶν ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς» ἐχαρίσατο πρὸς τοῖς ἄλλοις πᾶσι καὶ εἰκόνα τῆς τῶν ἀγγέλων ἁγιότητος ἔχειν ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ γῆς τὴν παρθενίαν... παρ' οὐδενὶ γὰρ ἀληθῶς τοῦτο τὸ σεμνὸν καὶ οὐράνιον ἐπάγγελμα κατορθοῦται ἢ παρὰ μόνοις ἡμῖν τοῖς Χριστιανοῖς. μάλιστα γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο μέγα τεκμήριόν ἐστι τοῦ παρ' ἡμῖν εἶναι τὴν ὄντως καὶ ἀληθῆ θεοσέβειαν.

celibacy per se, Yannai shows us how Jews could seek angelic resemblance in other ways that honored their inherited traditions and distinctive practices.

The *qedushta* to Numbers 15:1, a chapter on the sacrifices that the Israelites will offer God once they settle in the Land of Israel becomes in Yannai's treatment an ode to the merits of prayer in place of sacrifice, again elevated through angelic praise. Both its eighth and ninth poem are worthy of closer examination. Yannai poignantly contrasts a future when God will return to His temple with the present condition of Israel under Byzantine rule, where the temple lies in shambles. Here his description of Israel's intermingling with the angels becomes a particularly comforting message:

> ותא[מר ב]אתי לגני אחותי/ זה הוא מקום מנוחתי / אשר הייתי מעי..והנה ל.... קרי / פה אש[ב
> על] כסאי / ופה אלין על ערסי / ואסב על שלחני / ואתיצב על מזבחי / ואעמוד על משמרתי /
> ואוכל קרבני לחמי/ ואשתה ייני נסכי / ואריח ריח ניחוחי / ואיתעלס בזיבחי
> ולפניך אין אכילה / וגם לא מסך שתייה / ועליונים לא יכלכלוך / ותחתונים לא יכלוך /
> וקורבנינו היו עליך כמו אכלתה ושבעתה / ונסכינו עליך כמו שתיתה ושכרתה / ומקדשנו היה
> עליך כשמים ושמי השמים זבול ומעון וערפל ושחקים וערבות וכסא הכב[וד] ומכון המרכבה /
> וכל כהן המשרת / כשירות מלאכי שרת / ולוים המשוררים זמר / [כחיות] הפוצחות רינן /
> וישראל המקדי(שי)ם ועונים אמן / כשרפים אשר פותחים בקדוש / וחותמים [בברוך][73]
>
> And You will say: I came to the garden, my sister / this is my resting place / where I … / here I will sit [upon] my throne / and here I will recline upon my bed / and I will sit at my table / and stand by my altar / and stand upon my watch / and eat the sacrificial bread / and drink the libated wine / and smell the fragrant aroma / and take pleasure in my offerings.
>
> And before You there is no eating / and no mixed drinking. / and the heights cannot comprehend you / nor the lower realms contain you / But our sacrifices were to you as though you ate and were sated[74] / and our libations were to you as though you drank and were cheered[75] / And our temple was to you like the heavens / and the higher heavens,[76] *zevul*, *maon*, *shehakim*, *arvot*, and the throne of glory, and the *merkavah*/
>
> And each priest who ministers / ministers like the ministering angels

73 Rabinovitz vol. 2, 56.

74 Quotation of Deut 11:15, biblical verse said in the traditional blessings over meals (*Birkat HaMazon*).

75 I thank Elie Kaunfer for pointing me to the source Yannai likely alludes to here, Genesis 43: 34.

76 Zvi Novick translates this middle section in "'Who resembles you? But they resemble you': Israel and the apophatic in Yannai" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 63.2 (2012): 280.

And the levites composing song / are like the hayyot breaking into joy
And Israel sanctifying and answering amen / is like the seraphim which open with "holy" and close [with baruch].

In this *piyyut* Yannai seems to be caught between two worldviews, one where the rebuilding of the temple is necessary and another where it is not. In the first vision, Yannai describes a temple that can contain God's glory and where God looks forward to making his home on earth. Then Yannai seems to have second thoughts about all this anthropomorphism as well as the interim status of Jewish life without a temple, which he then quickly tries to make up for in the second vision, by praising the current habits of Jewish life as equally worthy in God's estimation:

מרצים כקרבנות הם דברי עם רצוייך עונים ואומרים
קדוש קדוש קדוש | יי צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו
קדוש מקוראי שמע קדוש מ[עו]רכי תפילה קדוש מעוני כל ברכה
קדוש קדוש קדוש | יי צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו
קדוש כקרבן עולה ירצה מינו עירך תפילה
קדוש כניסוך היין ירצה עיניין כל ברכה[77]

Pleasing as sacrifices are the words of your desired people who answer and say
Holy Holy Holy, etc.
Holy from the reciters of Shema
Holy from those who prepare prayer
Holy from those who answer each blessing
Holy Holy Holy, etc.
Holy—like a sacrificial offering, the recitation of Shema pleases him
Holy—like a whole offering, the offering of prayer pleases him
Holy—like the libation of wine, the saying of each blessing pleases him.

This is one of the few mentions of the Shema in the poetry of Yannai, which are so focused on the Qedushah. Yannai differentiates the Shema (recited twice daily according to biblical law), the prayer (*tefillah*, which usually refers to the fixed prayer of the Amidah), and blessing (*berakhah,* which in this context probably refers to the blessings said outside the

77 Rabinovitz vol. 2, 57.

synagogue, e.g. after meals and such). The idea that prayer substitutes for sacrifice, taken for granted today, was still a relatively new development in Judaism at this time.[78] Thus, Yannai's poem to be seen as part of the effort to endow prayers and benedictions with value in Late Antique Jewish culture. By tying them to the angelic praise, he succeeds in conveying their holiness to the congregation.

Yannai and the women of Israel

In Yannai's poetry, even the Biblical laws of menstruation (Lev 15:25) can be elevated to subject matter worthy of angelic praise. Where even the slightest hint of menstruation is quick to repel the angelic realm in Jewish magical and mystical writings, Yannai creatively juxtaposes pious observant women with the reciting angels. He accomplishes this with an unusual poetic device, weaving the biblical hymn to the "woman of valor" (Proverbs 31:10ff) into the *qedushah*. Thus he can celebrate the ideal woman even as he discusses the laws of menstruation. In the final stanzas of this composition, Yannai quotes the biblical poem and interprets each of its verses in relation to laws pertaining to women, both menstrual and otherwise. I quote sections from the beginning and end:

אשת חיל מי ימצא	ארחה לא טועה כגפן נטועה לא חטאה ולא החטיאה לא נטמאה ולא טימאה
בטח בה לב בעלה	בשלטון אשר נתן לה ברשיון אשר הואמן לה לומר טמאה אני ולומר ט[הו]רה אני
…	
פיה פתחה בחכמה	פילול וברכה ומזוזה הערוכה ובשלוש מצות אשר לה מצוות

78 See Ophir Münz-Manor, "Narrating Salvation: Verbal Sacrifices in Late Antique Liturgical Poetry," in *Jews, Christians, and the Roman Empire: The Poetics of Power in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 154-166. See also Reif, "Some liturgical Issues in the Talmudic Sources," *Studia Liturgica* 15 (1982): 193.

צופיה הילכות ביתה צועדת בזריזות ומשמרת בנקיות
ומשמשת בטהרה ועושה בקדושה

קמו בניה ויאשרוה קדושה כי קידשה בם לכן מום אין בה
כי לא הרה בעין ולא הרהרה בלב

…

תנו לה מפרי ידיה תמנה חלק לשבעה תשא גורל לשמונה
צדקות תנו לה נטעי חמר ומצבת קודש
מעריצים בק[דש] לנאדר בסוד קדוש כך וקרא[79]

'A woman of valor, who shall find…'
She never forgets her cycle / she is planted like a grapevine[80]
She neither sinned nor makes others sin / she neither contracts impurity nor imparts it
'With a whole heart her husband trusts her…'
In the authority which is given her / in the license which is entrusted to her
To declare 'I am impure/ and to declare 'I am pure'
…
'She opens her mouth in wisdom…(Prov. 31:26)
in prayers and blessing / and in the preparation of the mezuzah
and in the three commandments, which are to her commanded
'She oversees the activities of her household…
she conducts herself swiftly[81] / and preserves cleanliness
And uses [the bed] in purity / and consummates in holiness
'Her children arise and maker her happy…
She is holy because she made them in holiness / hence there is no blemish in her
Because she did not conceive with [a wandering] eye nor with misgivings in her heart..

And the last lines are:

'Give her the fruit of her hands'
If she apportions the seven days / she is fated for the eighth[82]
Give her righteousness, the finest grapevines, and a monument of

79 Rabinovitz 1, 440-1.

80 The idea seems to be that grapevines are well-tended just as a careful woman tends herself.

81 According to Bronznick vol. 1, 235: the meaning of this line is that the woman of valor is careful in the observance of these laws: she takes care of her impurity efficiently, and preserves in cleanliness the seven clean days; according to the next line, she engages in sexual intercourse in purity with her husband (after she has immersed and was purified) without intrusive thoughts.

holiness—

> Those praising in holiness the majestic one in a holy council as it is written 'and this one called…

Though the *qedushah* is not extant in this case, the extremely ornate and extended final poem celebrating the pious woman which ends with the word "holy" (*qodesh*) would have implicitly joined together the recitation of the Qedushah from pious women and the angels. This positive engagement with the feminine is rare in late antique Jewish literature as a whole. What is also fascinating is that later Jewish interpreters came to interpret Proverbs 31 as applying to a personification of the Sabbath or the Torah personified or an immanent manifestation of God—any theological concept except an actual woman, which is clearly whom Yannai has in view before him in the synagogue. This unparalleled portrayal should not be overlooked.

Asides from the one exception in Yannai's poetry noted above (the qedushta to Genesis 11:1, where God creates male and female divine spirits), the angels are only masculine in the biblical and Jewish traditions; still, Yannai finds ways to include women in the idealized angelic community. The stories about the matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah offered such opportunities.[83] In biblical and Jewish thought, the patriarchs and the matriarchs' merits protect and benefit their descendants. This idea is known in rabbinic literature too, where rabbinic treatise *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*'s opening section crescendoes with mention of Rachel as the meritorious ancestor who guarantees continued communication

82 According to Bronznick vol. 1, the meaning is that if a woman maintains menstrual purity in conceiving a child, when she bears a son, he will live for the 8th day of circumcision, joining the covenant.

83 Ophir Münz-Manor, "All About Sarah: Questions of Gender in Yannai's Poems on Sarah's (and Abraham's) Barrenness" *Prooftexts* 26.3 (2006): 344-74.

with God.[84]

In a similar vein, the *qedushtah* to Genesis 30:22 ruminates on Rachel's role in biblical history. Following the *qerova* to the lectionary reading on Leah's experience as the "hated" wife (Genesis 29:31), whose divinely favored status is the opposite of her earthly condition, the *qedushtah* on Rachel focuses on her experience as a silent, long suffering barren wife, whom God remembers and redeems. Lieber notes that the composition has subtle but clear analogies to the national suffering and redemption of Israel, a prominent theme in Yannai's *piyyutim*. With that in mind, there are additional levels of meaning that inhere in its structuring of holiness that I would like to bring to the foreground.

ערבות תשקוד
עקרות תפקוד
קברות תפתח

בעם אומ' לשמך קקק
ק[דוש] מערבות כי יניעם[85]
ק[דוש] מעקרות כי יפקידם
ק[דוש] מקברות כי יפתחם

ק[דוש] מיוצאי רחם כי עימם יעש חיים וחסד
ק[דוש] מיוצאי קבר כי תחיים ותעמידם ברוב חסד
ק[דוש] ממזכיריך במסגר [ק]רוא למו ויצאו
בדבר חפץ חסד וגו לעו כל [=וגומר לעומתם כל]

מם שמע תפלת רחל ויזכרה
מם הקשיב נאקת תחנונה ויפקדה
מם ראה שחקה כי נישכחה מבן ויפקדה[86]

A. You watch over the firmaments
You recall the barren
You open the graves

B. Among the people saying for your sake "Holy Holy Holy...
"Holy" from the firmaments that he steers[87]

84 See Susan Niditch, "Merits, Martyrs, and 'Your life as booty,': An Exegesis of Mekilta, Pisha 1" *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 13 (1982): 160ff.

85 Following Bronznick's suggestion, vol. 1, p. 64.

86 Rabinowitz, vol. 1, p. 179-80.

87 Following Bronznick in contradistinction to Lieber.

"Holy" from the barren whom he will remember
"Holy" from the graves that he will open

C. Holy from those coming forth from the womb,
for upon them he will bestow life and grace
Holy from those coming forth from the grave
for you will resurrect them and make them stand again with abundant grace
Holy from those remembering you in prison[88]
for you call them and they will go forth [free]
At a word from the One loving graciousness
All towards one another….

D. "From his place" he heard the prayer of Rachel and he remembered her
"From his place" he heard her groaning plea and he recalled her
"From his place" he saw her weariness at being deprived of a son and he recalled her.[89]

Three groups are juxtaposed in parts A and B: the celestial bodies (which, as we've seen, are the angelic beings), barren women, and the dead. In sections A and B, barren women are at the center of the stanzas, between heavenly firmaments and the holy earthly dead. Section D focuses solely on the suffering matriarch's prayer and God's response to her. This stands as the only extant Qedushah where Yannai depicts women explicitly as participants in the most climactic moment of the liturgy.[90] Indeed, though the matriarch Sarah has a strong presence in the *piyyut* on her struggle with barreness, she never addresses God and God never directly addresses her.[91] By contrast, Rachel here is depicted in close relationship with God.[92]

Section C strikingly breaks the pattern: the order of has changed. Yannai shifts from emphasizing the voicing of holiness from the barren women to those coming forth from

88 Bronznick explains that prison is a reference to exile based on Isaiah 42:7.

89 My translation, with some agreements with Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 582.

90 The last sections of the *kerovot* to the lectionary reading on Sarah and Leah are no longer extant; the matriarch Rebecca probably received some attention in a *qedushta* to Genesis 24 that is not extant.

91 See Lieber's commentary to the *qedushta* for Genesis 16:1, 464. Interestingly, the rabbis deny that God ever spoke to women directly with Sarah being the only exception (see Genesis Rabbah 20:6, 45:10; 48:20). See also Genesis 18:15, where God does seem to address Sarah directly about her imminent pregnancy.

92 Perhaps Jeremiah 31:15 plays a role here: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

them, and places this recitation first (where it was structurally second in A and B). Indeed, Bronznick wonders if this section was not rearranged in transmission.[93] The second line emphasizes those to be resurrected (previously in the third place) and the third introduces another idea altogether: here Yannai invokes those imprisoned, another way of referring to those in exile. This may be what hinted to Lieber that Yannai was using the individual suffering of the barren matriarch as a metaphor for the cosmic and national anxiety of Israel, awaiting redemption from the heavens. Another way of reading the *qedushah* is to notice how Yannai generalizes from Rachel to all the barren matriarchs and even to all barren women in general. The barren women are under God's care as much as the firmaments above them and the un-resurrected buried below.

Death is also a theme in this poem. Yannai reaffirms a worldview in which barrenness is likened to a living death, a theme he develops in the sixth poem, picking up on Rachel's statement to Jacob "Give me children, or I shall die" (Gen 30:1), and again by juxtaposing barren women with the dead. It is worth noting here that the verse "the dead cannot praise the Lord" (Psalm 115:17) is prominent in the fixed liturgy. Against it, Yannai's emphasis in this *piyyut* on the recitation of "holy" from the yet to be resurrected dead is surprising. How can this image be reconciled with taboos of impurity associated with the dead? Yannai seems to be reflecting a view here that is absent from Rabbinic sources, but was perhaps rather common.

In a fascinating and neglected book, *The Commerce of the Sacred*, Jack Lightstone argued that underlying assumptions about the normativity of Rabbinic Judaism have marginalized important sources for understanding the configuration of the sacred in late

93 Bronznick vol. 1, p. 64.

antique Jewish society. His examination of sources relating to diasporic Jewish communities in particular led him to the conclusion that alternative configurations of holiness were prevalent among ancient Diaspora Jews. For Jews without access to the temple, (1) holy men, (2) synagogues, and (3) the burial sites of certain individuals became loci of divine mediation. Holy men evinced their power through their intervention in the supernatural sphere (a claim further bolstered by my examination of the practitioners in magical sources); the holy Torah scroll in its niche shaped like a portal linked heaven and earth and made the synagogue a staging ground for access to blessing;[94] finally, the power of patriarchs, matriarchs and even some sages, extended beyond the grave to aid their visitors. His conclusions for Diaspora Jews have relevant implications for Jewish life in Palestine in the aftermath of the temple's destruction.

I believe that Yannai's inclusion of the unresurrected dead in this *qedushah* supports Lightstone's view of diffuse sources of the holy in late antiquity. In this *piyyut*, the dead are already participants in the heavenly community. The grave of the matriarch Rachel near Jerusalem, already a pilgrimage site in antiquity,[95] not to mention the Cave of the patriarchs in Hebron, a monumental pilgrimage site thanks to Herod's efforts,[96] may have played a role in Yannai's imagination of the ideal community that joins in the recitation of the Qedushah. Overall, in Yannai's imagination, the definition of community broadens to include the highest

94 This aspect of the synagogue is beyond the scope of this study, but I argue for the importance of the synagogue as an institution for ancient Jews in the conclusion to this chapter.

95 See Lightstone, Chapter 3: "The Dead and their Tombs," which discusses tombs as sites of pilgrimate in Jewish Palestine and Babylonia. See also Gunter Stemberger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land: Palestine in the Fourth Century* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 102. The Bordeaux pilgrim visits the grave of Rachel as do Paula and Eustochium with Jerome in the fourth century CE. It is also portrayed on the mosaic map in Madaba (sixth century CE). For the evidence for the cult of Rachel in biblical and rabbinic sources, see Susan Starr Sered, "Rachel's Tomb: The Development of a Cult," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2:2 (1995): 103-148.

96 Ehud Netzer, *Architecture of Herod, the Great Builder* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 228.

firmaments, the lowliest buried souls, and women.

A close reading of the *piyyutim* illustrate Yannai's basic conceptions of angels and how much he shared with (as well as departed from) the rabbis.[97] From Yannai's corpus, we learn that the term angels covers a broad category of fiery beings: stars, sun, moon, and God's many winged servants, sometimes male and female, located in the heavens, but at times visiting the congregation below. The many ways Yannai used the Qedushah to elevate Israel to the status of the angels is his innovation. As the prayer leader sings each verse and Israel sings along, they explicitly join their voices to the angelic praise, within the confines of the synagogue. To offer some informed speculation, we might say that the congregation, male and female,[98] experienced elevation to the status of the angels with each weekly performance of the Qedushah.

Yannai, other authorities, and the angelic Qedushah

Where the above examples show Yannai performing the Qedushah in such a way as to elevate all of Israel to the angelic level, and modeling new ways of thinking about Jewish customs and rituals, the following examples show how he elevated specific groups within Israel like the sages and priests. I argue that these configurations of holiness are important for detecting power dynamics in the Jewish society of Yannai's time.

97 Other good examples are *qedushah* for Genesis 28:10, Jacob/Israel/Angels, commented upon by Lieber, and the *qedushah* to Deuteronomy 6: 4, with translation and commentary by Wout van Bekkum and Naoya Katsumata, see their "Piyyut as Poetics: The Example of Yannai's Qedushta for Deut. 6:4," *Giving a Diamond: Essays in Honor of Joseph Yahalom on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 83-107.

98 Levine, "Women in the Synagogue," 499-518; Brooten, "Female Leadership in the Ancient Synagogue," 215-23.

The Sages and the Angels in Yannai's corpus

Though the *piyyutim* of Yannai show that he was deeply conversant with rabbinic traditions found in the *midrashim*, explicit reference to the sages (*chachamim*) as a group occurs only twice in the extant *piyyutim*.[99] Returning to the *kerova* to Lev. 15:25 on the laws of niddah, we find Yannai in the fifth saying: "Sages you educated and you agree with their deliberations // between blood which is blood and blood which is not blood" (line 49) …"Sages will check her stains and she will check her walled spring" (line 61). Yannai affirms rabbinic practice and self-description in the realm of menstrual laws, reflecting rabbinic norms he upheld and perhaps, also advertising them to the congregation.

The *qedushta* to Num 11:16, a Torah portion ostensibly on the appointment of elders to lighten the load on Moses, provides an opportunity for Yannai to ruminate on the Jewish legal scholars of his day.[100] Yannai seems to imagine the biblical elders through the lens of the present, where legal experts meet in a *boule*:[101] "When the committee of the *yeshiva* gathers / they resemble a round-millstone-halved and filled with equanimity."[102] In the sixth, unfortunately fragmentary, Yannai subtly shifts from the elders of the wilderness generation to idealizing the legal authorities of his own day in Palestine:[103]

99 Rabinovitz reads many other subtle and implicit references to the yeshiva of Tiberias in Yannai's corpus, but I find these too speculative.

100 Rabinovitz understands the description here to refer to the Palestinian Yeshiva in Tiberias.

101 The *boule* was part of the archaeological landscape of late antique Palestine. According to Ariel Lewin, "a coin minted at Sepphoris at the time of Caracalla [early third century CE] commemorated a treaty of friendship between the senate and city of Rome on the one hand, and the holy *boule* (council) of Sepphoris on the other" (*The Archaeology of Ancient Judea and Palestine* [Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, 2005], 89).

102 Qedushta to Numbers 11: 16, line 12 (Rabinovitz, vol. 2, p. 45). Translation following Bronznick's interpretation (vol. 1, p. 286).

דומים בועד ישיבה // כגורן עגולה חצוייה ומיושבה

Rabinovtiz points out the parallel in Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:3-4, which states that the "Sanhedrin was arranged like the half of a round threshing-floor so that they all might see one another."

סנהדרין הייתה כחצי גורן עגולה, כדי שיהו רואין זה את זה

103 See Tzvi Novick for a discussion of the function of the sixth poems in Yannai's qedushta'ot: "The

...חכמים מחו[כמים]
...[לשונם] כחרב חדה...
...אמ[ת] // לכולם [זר]ע אמת...
...אנשי [אמת //] אומרי אמת ושונאי בצע
לא כאורחות כל בו[צע בצע] / לשלם בצע
תחת פצע / וליפרע פצע תחת פצע
משכילים בשכל תבונות // בעלי ...וצרופות ובחונות
נבונים יודעים במדע בינות // דבריהם כדרבונות

שבים מורישים בכל סעיפות // הריגות חניקות סקילות שריפות.
עינייניהם בשערי סיפות / כמסמרים בעלי אסופות[104]

…Sages made wise
…Their tongues, sharp as swords
…Truth // to all the seed of truth
…Men [of truth], speakers of truth and reviling violence
Not like the ways of those profiting by violence[105] // paying with ill-gains[106]
For a wound / and repaying wound for wound.
They are wise in the wisdom of insights // masters of … and refined and tested
Insightful, learned in the reasoning of judgment // "their words are like goads[107]."
Elders, capable in all divisions // beheading, strangling, stoning, and burning.[108]
Their matters are at the thresholds of the gates[109] // "the masters of these collections are like well-driven nails."[110]

Yannai praises the famously sharp-tongued Sages, both with biblical and rabbinic quotations. He shows knowledge of their legal categories and singles out for praise their reinterpretation of the biblical "wound for wound" laws.[111] In the following poem, Yannai continues blurring the lines between past and present, this time invoking angelic resemblance for the sages:

Poetics of Yannai's Sixth: Between Scripture, God, and Congregation," *Giving a Diamond*, 69-81.

104 Rabinovitz vol. 2, 46-7.

105 Jeremiah 6:13 and Proverbs 15:27 are likely in background here.

106 Translation "ill-gains" based on Bronznick's commentary, vol. 1, p. 287.

107 Rabinovitz vol. 2, 47, points to Ecclesiastes 12:1 and see its continued quotation two lines later; cf. Tosefta Sotah 7:11, "The words of the sages are like goads."

108 See Mishnah Sanhedrin 7:1 for the four types of death penalties according to rabbinic law.

109 Following Bronznick vol. 1, p. 287.

110 Ecclesiastes 12:11.

111 See Mekhilta DeRabbi Ishmael, Mishpatim, chapter 8.

אז בסייף ובסיפר אחיזתם // במעשה ניסים בחירתם
גם כאש אוכלה גחלתם // דמות מלאכים דהרתם
...
ממעלה חוזק מנייתם // נשיכת שועל נשיכתם[112]

Then by sword and by scroll, their being grasped // in a miraculous act their being chosen
Like a consuming fire, their embers[113] // in the image of angels you elevated them
[Skipping 4 lines]
From above their appointment is strengthened // "their bite is the bite of a jackel."

In this *rahit*, Yannai alludes to Malachi 2:7 likening the rabbis to angels. He also interweaves a saying found in Mishnah tractate Avot 2:14 "warm thyself before the fire of the Sages, but be heedful of their glowing embers lest thou be burned, for their bite is the bite of a jackal and their sting the sting of a scorpion and their hiss the hiss of a serpent, and all their words are like embers of fire."[114] Yannai compares the fiery awesomeness of the angels and the brilliance of the rabbis. It is unfortunate that the *qedushah* of this composition does not survive. Though Yannai clearly admires the sages (*chachamim*) and knows of their laws and interpretive traditions, in what survives of his corpus they are not singled as a collective group to voice the *qedushah*. Conversely, the poets of the synagogue are not mentioned in rabbinic literature.

Priests and the Angels in Yannai's corpus

In general Yannai laments the contemporary condition of priests and the priesthood even as he recalls their former glory and hopes for their return to glory in the future. Yannai's starting point is Malachi 2:7, "For the lips of a priest preserve knowledge and they shall seek

112 Rabinovitz vol. 2, 47-8.

113 See Mishnah Avot 2:14 (ms. Kaufman) for this verse and the last verse of the *rahit*.
והוי מתחמם כנגד אורן של חכמים, והוי זהיר מגחלתן שלא תיכווה שנשיכתן נשיכת שועל, ועקיצתן עקיצת עקרב, ולחישתן לחישת שרף, וכל דבריהם כגחלי אש.

114 Mishnah, ed. and trans. Danby, p. 449.

Torah from his mouth for he is an angel [*malach*] of the Lord of hosts." Where the sages interpret this verse conditionally,[115] in several of his *qedushta'ot*,Yannai reaffirms the plain meaning of this text. Angelic resemblance begins with Aaron and applies to all priests that follow from him: "For permission was not given / except for Aaron to minister / he who looks like the ministering angels...." [116] Elsewhere in the *qedushtah* on the ordination of Aaron and his sons, Yannai states this resemblance most succinctly:

ישועה ילבשו כוהניך בקדש / היות כאלי קדש / בהדרת קדש
נצבים כמלאכים / ברגש מתהלכים

> Your priests will wear salvation in holiness [They] being like divinities of holiness / In adornment of holiness / Established like angels/ going about in excitement"[117]

The *qedushtah* to Lev. 21:1 is particularly interesting because Yannai dwells on the destruction of the priesthood and its manifestations in his time. In the third poem Yannai writes:

ידידות נווך / בה גוועו כהנים / ונשפך דמם / כמו נוב עיר הכהנים
[ניט]מאו כהנים / במקום אשר היו מכהנים / כי ני[ש]רפו כהנים /
במקום מסילת תיקרת בית כהנים
יאכלו לחמם טמא / כי כל לחמם טמא / וערל וטמא יונונו / סורו טמא[118]

> Your abode of friendship / where the priest died / and their blood was spilled / like the Nob the city of priests[119] /
> The priests have been defiled / in the place where they used to minister / the priests were burned / in the place of the house of the priests
> They eat their impure bread / because all of their bread is impure /

115 See the discussion of the interpretation of this verse among the rabbis in the first chapter, p. 56-63. In two of the three instances where this verse was quoted, the rabbis applied it to failed members of the movement (Aher and an unnamed young scholar). When it was applied to a priest, it is read conditionally, to say that if a priest preserves knowledge, he is angel of God, but if he does not, he is not.

116 *Qedushta* to Numbers 17:16, line 104-5:

כי רשות לא הנתן / כי אם לאהרן לשרת / דומה למלאכי שרת

117 The third piyyut in the *qedushta* to Exodus 29:1, Rabinovitz vol. 1, 346.

118 Rabinovitz vol. 1, pp. 455-6.

119 1 Samuel 21 describes David's meeting with a priest in the city of Nob; David asks the priest for bread to feed his men and the priest gives him consecrated bread because no other bread is on hand.

> And the uncircumcized and impure mock away [saying] / "Go Away! Unclean!"[120]

Using the language of the Scripture, Yannai describes his view of priests in Late Antique Palestine. The memory of the destruction of the temple in 70 CE and its lingering implications are mourned by Yannai. According to the poem, the non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine even mock the Jewish priests, who can no longer achieve cultic purity. Yannai's tone changes in the sixth poem, however, when he describes how priests as a class are destined to resemble the angels in the future. There he states, speaking in God's voice: "My priests who (are) above are pure / my priests who (are) below will be pure // above in fire they purify // below in water they will be purified[121]…Your service will be in holiness // like the ministering angels, the servants of the Holy."[122] The priests below are compared with the angels above and promised parity in the future.

More than any other extant *qedushtah,* the *qerova* to Exodus 19:6 lingers on priestly imagery. The opening crucial line of that week's lectionary reading is "you shall be to Me a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation'"(Exodus 19:6). As Martha Himmelfarb discussed in *Kingdom of Priests*, this universalistic statement stands in tension with the exclusive, genealogical framework of the priesthood.[123] Yannai too shifts between these two models of the priesthood in the fifth poem of this *qerova*:

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120 The last line here quotes Lamentations 4:15 (Leviticus 13:45 may also be in the background—my thanks to Martha Himmelfarb for pointing this out). Bronznick vol. 1 comments that the meaning is that "the Christians treat the Jews like lepers" (my translation, p. 247).

121 Line 60, p. 459 of Rabinovitz, vol. 1:

כהניי אשר במעלה טהורים כהניי אשר במטה יהוא טהורים / למעלה באש מיטהרים למטה במים יהוא מיטהרים

122 *Qedushta* to Lev 21:1, line 70, p. 460 of Rabinovitz, vol. 1:

שירותכם יהיה בקודש כמלאכי שרת משרתי קודש

123 Martha Himmelfarb, *Kingdom of Priests Ancestry and Merit in Ancient Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

המסיני זיכתנו לחיי עולם // למלכות עולם / ולכהונת עולם וכחטאנו נחזר /
ומות עלינו ניגזר // ונימענו ממלוכה / וניגרענו מכהונה
זה מרוב אהבה אשר אהבתנו // ומעוצם חיבה אשר חיבבתנו / חוסן מלכות יקר /
וכיהון המיוקר // ממנו כל עיקר / לא נעקר
טימינו כהונותינו / ומרדנו במלכותינו // וטמאים העבידו בנו / ועבדים משלו בנו
יה במלכך על-ממלכת כהנים // תעש כולם מלכים וכולם כהנים[124]

Though at Sinai we merited eternal life, eternal kingdom, and an eternal priesthood, we sinned again / and death upon us was decreed // and we were divested of the kingdom / deprived of the priesthood

This was on account of the great love with which you loved us / and on account of the great affection with which you held us dear /

The might of the glory of the kingdom / and the precious priesthood / from it all essence was not extracted[125]

Our priesthood was concealed / and we rebelled against the kingdom / and impure ones enslaved us / and slaves rule us

God in Your reign over the kingdom of priests / you will make everyone kings and priests

In Yannai's poem the "we" is Israel, which in the idealized past merited a class of priests and a kingdom. Yannai hints at the contemporary reality, where the Roman Empire deprived Israel of its kingdom and its priests of their cult. According to Yannai, remnants of the priesthood still exist as do heirs to the kingdom. Hints of Israel's glory remain. In the idealized future, all of Israel will be a kingdom of priests. Meanwhile, the distinct classes within Israel remains. Hence the *qedushah*:

בצבאות מחנות מלאכים כהנים לוים ישראלים
יקדישוך מלך מלכי המלכים
ככק יי צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו
קדוש ממעמד כהנים קדוש ממשמר לוים קדוש ממצב ישראלים

124 Rabinovitz, vol. 1, p. 320, lines 22-29.

125 Interestingly, in these lines, Rabinovitz and others read a reference to Yannai's contemporary political reality. Rabinovitz thinks "the might of the glory of the kingdom" refers to the heads of yeshivas of Palestine of Davidic descent and the patriarchs of Beit Hillel. And with regards to the priesthood, he believes this is a reference to the priestly watches in the Galilee, who await the rebuilding of the temple (see p. 64 ff). I do not agree with his analysis here.

קקק יי צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו
קדוש יחזיר דוכן לבני כהנים
קדוש יעמיד שירה במשמרות לוים
קדוש יגלה מלכותו לממלכת ישראל
קקק יי צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו
קדוש מחיה קדוש מכרוב קדוש מאופן[126]

In the hosts of the camps of angels / Priests Levites Israelites
Will sanctify you as the king of kings of kings
Holy, holy, holy etc
"Holy" from the standing[127] priests
"Holy" from the watch of the Levites
"Holy" from the course of the Israel
Holy Holy Holy
Holy He will return the podium to the sons of the priests
Holy He will instill song in the Levites' watch
Holy He will reveal his kingdom to the Kingdom of Israel
Holy from Chaya Holy from Cherub Holy from Ofan

Yannai describes the congregation in terms taken from biblical traditions and incorporated into the Mishnah as legal categories.[128] In the end, the emphasis is on unity of distinct worshippers, juxtaposed with the three classes of angels. Overall, his depiction of priests in *piyyut* affirms the priests have a distinct sense of identity, but that the priests are important symbolically for the nation as a whole.

The fragmentary *qerova* to Numbers 6:22, the section of the Torah that contains the priestly blessing (*birkat HaCohanim*), offers a few tantalizing fragmentary lines about the priests and their role in the synagogue. Yannai writes that God peeks out between the fingers of the priests during their benediction over the people[129] and that to hear their benediction many Jews run to the synagogue.[130] Furthermore, Yannai writes that the priestly benediction

126 Rabinovitz, vol. 1, p. 321, poem 9, lines 33-42.

127 Bronznick vol. 1 suggests that "*ma'amad*" here refers specifically to the priestly blessing which the priests recite during the Amidah (fixed prayer).

128 The Mishnah already takes these categories for granted: Peah 8:6, Ta'anit 4:2, Middot 2:5, and Sanhedrin 4:2.

129 Rabinowitz vol. 2, p. 29.

130 The fourth poem, Rabinowtiz vol. 2, p. 32; here the synagogue is referred to as *sha'ar rabim*.

contains sixty letters, much like the sixty swords around Solomon's bed (a quotation of Song of Songs 3:7 common in ritual texts),[131] and the sixty tractates of the Mishnah that are perfectly arranged.[132] Strikingly, Yannai brings together the priests' most important ritual function in the synagogue, a motif often quoted by ritual practitioners against demons, and the sages' legal code. This boundaries between liturgy and so-called magical texts was not firm. We should take note that for Yannai, these sources of authority in no way conflict, but the authority inherent in each allusion enlivens the other. Yannai offers us a crucial window into a time in Late Antique Jewish life where priests, ritual practitioners, and sages coexisted on a spectrum of authority. This observation may help us understand Yannai's poems on the power of God's name, which can be used to heal, exorcise, and bless (*qedushta* on Exodus 6:2).

שמך אין לפרש | [שמך] אין לקוב | שמך אין לחלל / שמך אין לחקור /
שמך אין לידע / [ואין] יודע מה הוא שמך / אתה הוא שמך ושמך הוא אתה /
[ארבע שורות]
והנקראים [בשמך יק]ראוך בשמך / והנשבעים בשמך ישבעוך בשמך
[הוא] השם אשר מזכירים אתו על האש והיא כבה / על המים [והם] יבישים /
על הים והוא נבקע / על האבן ו[ה]יא מתפוצצת / על [הנח]ש והוא משלים /
על המזיק והוא בורח / על החולה והוא נינוח / [על] המת והוא חיה /
על העולם והוא עומד לעולם / ולנצח נצחים
[שלוש שורות]
לשמך ולזרכך מזכירי שמך בקדושה עונים ואומרים
קדוש קדוש קדוש יי צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו
קדוש מברית אברהם קדוש משבועות יצחק קדוש מהבטחת יעקב
קדוש קדוש קדוש יי צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו

131Song of Songs 3:7 lends itself to anti-demonic purposes, stating "Behold, it is the litter of Solomon! Around it are sixty mighty men, of the mighty men of Israel, all equipped with swords / and experts in war, each with his sword at his thigh / guarding against the terrors of the night." This motif in ritual texts is discussed in Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae*, 25ff. The combination of Song of Songs 3:7 with the priestly blessing is now part of the nightly Shema, which entered the fixed liturgy in the thirteenth century CE (see footnote 121 of the next chapter on angels in ritual sources). As we shall see in the next chapter, Solomon is commonly cited in ancient Jewish and Christian ritual texts. See Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 100ff.; Jesse Rainbow, "The Song of Songs and the Testament of Solomon: Solomon's Love Poetry and Christian Magic," *Harvard Theological Review* 100.3 (2007): 249-274.

132 Rabinowtiz vol. 2, p. 32.

קדוש מברית אברהם קדוש משבועת יצחק קדוש מהבטחת יעקב
קדוש קדוש קדוש יי צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו[133]

> And Your name is not to be explicated | [Your Name] is not to be pronounced
> …Your name is not to be profaned Your name is not to be analysed
> Your name is not to be made known And no one knows Your name
> You are your name and your name is You.
> [Skipping four lines]
> And those called in Your name will call you in your name //….and this is the name said over the fire and it goes out // upon water and it dries up / upon the sea and it bursts/ upon stone and it explodes // ..upon the demon and he flees// upon the sick and he heals / upon the dead and he lives// upon the world and it stands forever….
> [Skipping 3 lines]
> For your sake and your legacy those saying your name answer and say
> Holy Holy Holy, the whole world is fillwed with His glory
> Holy from the covenant of Abraham,
> Holy from the oath of Isaac,
> Holy from the promise of Jacob

Yannai elevates God's name here with references to well known bible stories (e.g. Moses' parting of the Red Sea, Moses' drawing of water from stone), but also with reference to ritual practices, wherein ritual practitioners invoked God's name to exorcise demons and heal the sick. Whereas contemporary sociologists might distinguish invocation of God's name by religious authorities and individual ritual practitioners, Yannai and his congregation did not—Yannai undermines our dichotomization of "magic" and religion.

In the last section of this poem, Yannai invokes the triad of biblical patriarchs and the holiness that emanates from each of these historic moments in the biblical tradition. Ritual practitioners occasionally invoke the power of the patriarchs. For example, in an incantation from Nippur, the ritual practioner addresses a litany of forces with the formula "I adure you by the valorous one (*abir*) of Abraham, the rock (*tzur*) of Isaac, the *shaddai* of Jacob, by his

133 Rabinovitz, vol. 1, 278-9.

name...."[134] In this formula God's commitment to the Jewish people is expressed through the covenants and the power of his name is made available to their descendants through His name. This name was available to the priests in their benediction, to ritual practitioners in their healing, to the sages in their legal and exegetical work, and to the prayer leader in his praise. Ruminating on angelic holiness, Yannai is able to bring all of these figures together.

Yannai Among the Angels

The previous examples have shown how on a weekly basis, Yannai reinvented and reimagined praying with the angels. Yannai not only vividly conveys the synchronicity of the congregations of Israel and the angels in prayer, but he also uses the matriarchs, patriarchs, the holy dead, and priests and sages to infuse the Qedushah with fresh meaning. Ordinary Jews, the heroes of the biblical past, and the present leaders of Jewish society sing with the angels. In this section I draw out how Yannai conceived himself in relation to the angels. In this section, I turn to the poet himself and his relationship to the congregation before him, to the angels, and God.

The strongest piece of evidence to suggest that Yannai had a self-conscious sense of himself as an author is the fact that he signed his name in acrostic in all of his *qedushta'ot*.[135] The next generation of poets, like Shimeon haCohen beiRebbi Mages and Elazar beiRebbi Qallir sign their names and identify themselves with priestly and/or rabbinic titles as well.[136] Yannai does not identify himself as such and he mentions the profession of the *chazzan* only

134 Montgomery, *AIT* 8, p. 154, discussed in next chapter.

135 Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 172. Ophir Münz-Manor, "The Birth of the Author: Piyyut, Midrash and the Question of Authorship," Presentation at Genesis Rabbah Conference, Princeton University, March 4, 2013.

136 Fleischer, *Shirat HaKodesh*, 128.

once in the extant corpus.[137] I believe this is a significantly telling fact. On my reading of the *qedushta'ot*, Yannai stood apart from priestly and the rabbinic circles, even as he embraced their ideals as part of his worldview.[138] In the following sections, I will point out some of the ideals that Yannai emphasizes, some examples of where he speaks for God in the first person to Israel, the rare and elusive moments that Yannai speaks for himself in the first person, and finally becomes the intercessory par excellence on the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur.

Rabbis and priests are the recognized, if debated, sources of authority in late antique Jewish society. More recently, Michael Swartz suggested considering the liturgical poet as another potential source of authority.[139] Based on his studies of the genre of liturgical poetry devoted to Yom Kippur, the *Avodah piyyutim*, where the poets celebrate priestly piety as well as rabbinic interpretations of the Torah, Swartz argued that in the synagogue the *chazzanim* "constituted an alternative source of cultural power."[140] Swartz suggests that because the poets are so modest, "we must derive our understanding of their religious role from the context of the poems themselves, and the implications of their recitation."[141] While Swartz is surely right that context is key to understanding the the role of the poetic prayer leader, I believe traces of the *piyyutim* themselves do reveal the *chazzanim*'s ideology, especially the importance of prayer above all else. Yannai and the contemporary Christian poet Romanos are similarly light on their feet, taking on voice of other characters at length, even God's, but never their own, and they always emphasize the paramount value of prayer. Like the angels

137 Ibid.

138 Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 193. She writes that Yannai "overlaps in highly suggestive ways with rabbinic (exegetical-methodical) and priestly (ritual-performative) roles."

139 Swartz, "Sage, Priest, and Poet: Typologies of Religious Leadership in the Ancient Synagogue," *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 101-17.

140 Swartz, "Sage, Priest, and Poet," 110.

141 Ibid.

of the biblical tradition, they interfere in people's religious lives only as representatives of God and to model prayer to humankind.

In one of his *qedushta'ot* on Noah and his sons, Yannai emphasizes that liturgical praise is the purpose of human existence. In *qedushta* 9:18 on Noah's sons and their descendants, Yannai writes:

כי לריק לא ניבראו / ובעבור זאת נבראו / לברך שמך / להלל זירכרך / ולהודות לך
ולהאמין בך / ולהקדישך ולהאדירך / כאדירי מעלה באדרת קדושה / נאדר בקודש / אדיר וקדוש

> because not for nothing were they created
> And for the sake of this one [purpose] they were created
> To bless Your name
> To praise Your recollection
> And to thank You
> And to believe in You
> And to sanctify You and to proclaim Your majesty
> Like those majestic ones on high, with the glory of holiness,
> Majestic in holiness,
> Majestic and holy one.[142]

If the priests' purpose was to offer sacrifices at the temple, the rabbis' proffered the new ideal of Torah study, it is not surprising that Yannai elevates liturgical praise to this level. Yannai writes that just as the angels' main function is praise of God, Noah's descendants' function is the same.[143]

In several other *piyyutim*, Yannai departs from the biblical prooftext to emphasize the value of prayer.[144] In the foundational *qedushta* to Genesis 1, Yannai describes the first incidence of human prayer, which he relates to the Sabbath. Yannai explains that Adam and

142 Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 360-1.

143 At the same time, Torah study is not devalued: God selects for each son of Noah a different way of acting out this praise: for Israel, this the Torah; for Yafet (the forefather of the Greeks), a "choice tongue" into which to translate the Torah; and for Ham, righteous converts to the one and only God.

144 The *qedushta'ot* to Genesis 1:1, to Genesis 16:1 on Sarah, to Genesis 29:31 on Leah, to Genesis 30:22 on Rachel; the *qedushta* to Genesis 35:9 God teaches Jacob the mourner's prayer and to Genesis 43:14 on Jacob's prayer.

Eve's punishment was mitigated by the arrival of the Sabbath and that though Adam was sentenced to work the land, he was also destined to rest on the Sabbath and sing songs of praise to God.[145] Yannai contributes the idea that liturgy has been present for humanity's benefit since their exit from Eden. And lest one think that prayer is the domain of Adam and men, one should note that in Yannai's *piyyutim*, the matriarchs are each described as praying too. Sarah "trusted in her prayer, she did not whitewash her plea."[146] Of Leah, he writes "The hated woman, with her weakened eyes, was in prayer to You with uplifted eyes"[147] and "She prayed to You, the One who sees everything, bad and good."[148] As quoted earlier with regards to Rachel, "God heard Rachel's prayer and remembered her." And according to Yannai, prayers were taught in memory of the matriarchs as well: God consoles Jacob over the death of his mother by teaching him the prayer for mourners.[149]

In one *qedushah*, Yannai looks forward to the day when God would lead the congregation in prayer. In a composition on Jacob, Yannai writes the "pure one [Jacob] prayed for his descendents; / and also now may You lead those who say: 'Holy,' 'Holy,' 'Holy,' etc."[150] In Yannai's worldview, a day may come when only God Himself need be the *chazzan* and no intermediaries intervene. According to Yannai, God also established the times for prayer:[151]

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145 *Silluq* translated by Lieber, p. 314: But he sinned … and to judgment he was brought in terror / And in the twelfth (hour), at the setting of the sun, / The Sabbath approached [and alleviated his guilt] / And his sentence was tempered: to work the land / And 'a hymn: a song for the Sabbath day" [ps. 92:1] — to sweetly sing / and also "to give thanks" (Ps. 92:2) to the Artist whose works were thus perfected.

146 *Qedushta* to Genesis 16:1, poem 4; see Lieber, *Yannai on Genesi*s, 450.

147 From the first poem to his *qedushta* for Genesis 29:31, see Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 542.

148 From the fifth poem to his *qedushta* for Genesis 29:31, see Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 548.

149 See the 5th poem of the *qedushta* to Genesis 35:9; a tradition paralleled in Berashit Rabbah 81:5

150 *Qedushta* to Genesis 43:14, Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 716.

151 *Qedushta* to Deut 3:23, Rabinovitz, vol. 2, 137.

[קדוש] עתים קבע לשערי תפילה
[קדוש] קיצים קיצם היכין לפיתחי תחינה
[קדוש] שעות...

Holy! He established the times for the gates of prayer
Holy! He designated the times for the opening of [the gates of] mercy
Holy! from the hours….

Interestingly, the rabbis tie prayer times to precedents in the temple (so Mishnah Berakhot 1:1) or to observations of the natural division of the day. When the rabbis imagine how God divides his day, prayer or God's hearkening to prayer does not enter into the equation.[152] The Rabbis imagine God spending His day studying Torah, much like themselves.[153] Yannai imagines God listening in to prayer from the congregation below as well as prayer from the angels above. Overall, we can discern that he has a sense of the paramount role of prayer and the divinely established rhythm of liturgical life.

In only two extant compositions does Yannai speak in the first person singular and even there, the appearance is very brief. While Yannai speaks in the first person plural for the congregation as a whole when he pleads for communal forgiveness, he speaks in the first person singular when he is voicing the concern of God or a biblical figure. In only one composition for an ordinary Sabbath does he speak in the first person singular for himself. From discussing the laws of forgotten sheaves (a type of agricultural charity), Yannai shifts to ruminating on the temple's destruction, Israel's exile, and the end days when the world will dramatically be restored to order. These poignant ruminations do come up in Yannai's *piyyutim*, but in this particular instance, Yannai begins the hymn by stating: **"**God of the

152 For more on this topic, see Sarit Katan-Gribetz's dissertation conclusion, 251-253.

153 Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 3b; Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 15b.

world *I* will bring up your praise among your people and the congregation."[154] This sounds like a short and general preface to a hymn. What follows is not praise, however, but a reminder to God to look upon the plight of Israel and to do right by them, gather them from exile, rebuild the temple, and punish the evil kingdoms for all the injustice they committed. In a similar vein, in the *piyyutim* for the three Sabbaths before 9 Av, Yannai begins in an apologetic tone, about to criticize Israel: "My sleep has fled from bitter groans // my stomach churns / Even in *my reciting I* will speak of bitter things // of matters which torment me...."[155] In the closing of a *qedushah* to a composition for the same Sabbath, Yannai writes "*I* will recall days with days, the days of Jeremiah with the days of Moses."[156] A poignant comparison of the period of liberation and the period of destruction follows. Again, Yannai in the first person intrudes only in a tone of regret, and only to discuss harsh matters that have befallen Israel. These examples give an inkling into just how rare Yannai's personal voice and presence is.

Yannai, Israel, and the angels on Yom Kippur

As the climactic holy day of the Jewish liturgical cycle, it is unsurprising that Yannai's composition for Yom Kippur is unusual from a formal perspective and complex in its transmission history.[157] From the standpoint of content, we see Yannai emphasizing the

154 Rabinovitz, vol. 2, 174.

155 Rabinovitz, vol. 2, p. 300:

אדדה בנאנח מר בביטני אשר חמרמר \ גם בקוראי אומר אשר הומר דברים אשר ענתותי אמר

156 Rabinovitz, vol. 2, 309.

157 An Outline of the cycle of poems to Yom Kippur:

1. On Abraham.
2. On Isaac.
3. On Jacob.
4. Unique Hymn that declares parity of Israel and the angels (full translation offered below).
5. Attribution to Yannai is uncertain: declaration of eternity of covenant.

parity of Israel and the angels more explicitly than in any other composition. Interestingly, just as comparison of Israel with the angels reaches a fever pitch so too is the profile of Yannai himself raised. Yannai speaks out in the first and fourth *piyyutim*. He prefaces the first poem by stating "From the council of sages and the learning of colleagues // I will open my mouth and I will praise the Creator."[158] Rabinovitz interprets this line as a request for permission from the sages to lead.[159] This seems to me go too far. Yannai, is obviously in conversation with the sages, but he is an innovator and creative voice.

In the fourth poem, Yannai makes an extraordinary move. Whereas he usually signs his name in acrostic in the third poem, here he signs his name in the fourth, but the nature of the fourth itself is striking: each verse the *chazzan* sings requires an answering refrain, and there are two refrains which the respondents alternate in voicing back. One refrain assumes an angelic voice, the other refrain assumes Israel's voice. Both refrains contain an acrostic of Yannai's name.

אשנן פילאך אלוה | אזמרה עד איגע
יגדלך־נצחך יהללך יקרך קדוש
במי יש בינה באר קינצי בדיך
יהי נועם יום יופי עלינו להקדישך קדוש

I will declare your wonders God / I will sing until I am exhausted

6. A call to praise God.
7. Description of the throne.
8. Attribution to Yannai is uncertain: perhaps Qiliri's. A hymn that focuses on each body part's experience of the fast.
9. Description of the five kingdoms.
10. Attribution to Yannai is uncertain: condemnation of Christian Empire.
11. Attribution to Yannai is uncertain: curses upon Israel's enemies.
12. Description of God's love for Israel.
13. Prophecy of the end days
14. Short description of God's might in the end days.
15. Final summation and comparison of Israel and the angels (full translation offered below).

158 Rabinvotiz vol. 2, 210:

מסוד חכמים ומלמד חבירים // אפתח פי אהלל לצורי

159 Rabinovitz vol. 2, 210, fn. 1.

Let your eternity glorify you / Let your dear ones praise you *HOLY* [Acrostic YNYY]
Who has understanding? Who can elucidate the limits of your strength?
May the beauty of the day of homage be upon us to sanctify you *HOLY* [Acrostic YNYY]

גווייות צבא גדודיך גצי אש גחלים — יגדלך־נצחך יהללך יקרך קדוש
דרוש ענות דלותנו די תשורת דברים — יהי נועם יום יופי עלינו להקדישך קדוש
הוד כבוד הדרך המולת שיוי הוגים — יגדלך
והיום דומים ושוים ועדי מעלה ומטה — יהי
זה לזה זועקים זר שילוש זמר — יגדלך[160]

The creatures of your host battalions/ sparkling embers of flame
[Angels say] — Let your eternity glorify you / Let your dear ones praise you *HOLY*
Demand our humble humility / as prayer of confession
[Israel says] — May the beauty of the day of homage be upon us to sanctify you *HOLY*
Beauty of the glory of your adornment / the cacophony of harmonizing reciters
[Angels say] — Let your eternity glorify you ...
And today they are alike and equal / the committees above and below.
[Israel says] —May the beauty of the day of homage ...
Each to the other shouting out/ a garland of tripled singing…

Yannai trademarks this poem with his name specifically in the lines of the refrains intended for the audience, here envisioned as two groups, Israel and the angels. While ostensibly keeping the earthly and heavenly adorers distinct, Yannai subverts this distinction through a performance that involves members of the congregation, reciting refrains that alternate between the angelic and human personas. Moreover, he states that on Yom Kippur, the differences between angels and the people of Israel has faded. In a dramatic finale, the closing *piyyut* makes this unity of earthly and heavenly explicit:

אז עליונים עם תחתונים // ביום זה שווים שלימים ונווים
גיל קדושת היום בשפה ברורה // די מעלה ומטה קדושה בחורה
המון קדושי מעלה כערכך קידשתה // וועד אשר אין שם אכילה ושתייה
זרע קדושי מטה ביום זה יקודשו // חדילי אוכל ומשקה ויום עשור בפימו
טפסרי מעלה שלום מותווך בינימו // יחד כירצון צור רצויים זה לזה
כל איש ירצה חבירו ביום זה // למען יוטל שלום בין זה לזה
מעטה לבוש מעלה בדים לבנים // נקיי כל שימץ ומחט מלובנים
סות עם זו במטה היום לבנים // עבור כי מחטאימו הם מיתלבנים
פליאי מעלה אין למו קפיצת רגל // צעידתם ישרה יחיפי כף רגל
קהלינו היום ביושר מצב רגל // רעדה בצעדה מיוחפי רגל
שמך בשווי יקדישו כאחת // ביום אשר אחת היא ברום ובתחת

160 Rabinovitz, vol. 2, 214-5.

תערב ותנעם כקוראי זה על זה // קדושת עם זה בקידוש יום זה[161]

Then heavenly with earthly // on this day are equal, perfect, and beautiful
The joy of the sanctification of the day in a clear language // from above and below the select *Qedushah*
Myriads of heavenly holy ones sanctified you // a (school) place where no eating or drinking
The Holy seed below on this day will be sanctified // who desist from food and drink on the tenth day
Peace is negotiated among the creatures above // together as the Creator desired they are pleasing to each other
Each man will desire his friend on this day // for the sake of making peace among themselves
Above they wear white garments // clean from all stains and bleached from sins
Likewise below the cloaks are white today // because from sins they are whitened.
Tis one of the wonders of the heavens that they have no knees//their step is straight and barefoot
Our congregation today too in straightness of leg // trembling in barefoot steps
Your name above they will sanctify as one// On the day on which it is One above and below.
You will be pleased and comforted as they call one to the other // the sanctification of this people / in the sanctification of this day.

In appearance, in character, in their actions, and in status before God, Israel and the angels have finally achieved identification on Yom Kippur. On this holy day both the angels and earthly Israel are devoted entirely to prayer; in fasting, the people of Israel resemble the angels, which never require food or drink; like the angels, people set aside their differences on Yom Kippur and coexist in complete harmony; both the angels and the people of Israel dress in white raiment on this day; the people, standing straight as they pray, imitate the angelic posture. Yannai brackets the fact that only sinful mortals would require a day of atonement like Yom Kippur. Instead, he emphasizes the aspects of Yom Kippur that lend themselves to angelic and human parity.

While the heavenly and earthly realms are separated in the abstract, this separation is subverted by shared recitation on Yom Kippur: in the synagogue at that time, Israel and the

161 Rabinovitz, vol. 2, 225-6.

angels are one. Yannai is the authority whose performative utterance creates this reality. To us, his presence is obvious only textually, in acrostic. To the congregation witnessing his performance, his authority as a mediating figure, leading the people in prayer, standing front and center, would have been obvious. On this day above all, he is a pious intermediary, asserting Israel's— and his own— identification with the angels.

The Revolution of Sacred Song

To place Yannai's contribution in its appropriate context, I close this chapter by ruminating on Yannai's innovations within the revolution of sacred song in late antiquity. *Piyyutim*, liturgical poetry, are still a rather peripheral area in the field of Jewish Studies. Partially, this is because liturgical studies in general are marginalized in religious studies, but liturgical poetry has suffered especially because scholars find its language inscrutable. I will revisit this topic shortly, but first I argue for the relevance of this Hebrew poetic genre by placing sacred song in its Jewish and wider Near Eastern context.

In the sixth century CE, Greek, Syriac, and Hebrew poets revolutionized the late antique religious landscape with the introduction of sacred song into their respective institutions. The new genres of sacred song brought together music, prayer, poetry, biblical stories of the lectionary, expansive dialogue, and authorized interpretation of the scripture. It is difficult to find a term that encapsulates every facet of this genre. They've been called "sung sermons," "liturgical story-telling," or "liturgical poetry" and each of these terms highlights a different aspect of their nature.[162] For this reason, I prefer the term "sacred

162 Terms used by McGuckin, "Poetry and Hymnography," 649.

song"[163] as it captures the musical nature of this genre and its belonging to the sacred and authoritative realm of churches and synagogues respectively.

As one would expect, within each cultural tradition the genre had its own particular trajectory of development, but as scholars have long noted the similarities are striking. As best scholars can tell, the new genre of sacred song appeared first in the Syriac churches in the fourth century CE.[164] By the age of Justinian, the genre flourished in the Greek churches of the Byzantine capital as well as in the synagogues of Palestine. In Syriac churches, Ephrem (d. 373 CE) pioneered *madrasha*, in the Greek tradition Romanos (485 – after 555 CE) "perfected" the genre that would later be called the *kontakion*,[165] and Yannai (fifth-sixth century CE) popularized the so-called genre of the *qedushta*.[166] Each of these poetic genres were composed with the lectionary cycle of the liturgical calendar in mind. Certainly, hymns had been sung in the churches, and Aramaic poetry had been incorporated into the targumic tradition before the sixth century, but dramatic, sophisticated, and lengthy sacred song related to the lectionary within the respective religious institutions was a new development.

More and more scholars are pointing to the Greek genre's indebtedness to the compositions of Ephrem. As Sebastian Brock writes, "[w]hile the *kontakion* cannot be called a straight borrowing from Syriac poetry, I think there can be little doubt that the creation of this completely new poetic form in Greek owes not a little inspiration to Syriac religious poetry."[167] Ophir Munz-Manor has also foregrounded the formal, stylistic, and thematic

163 Translating Fleischer's "*shirat hakodesh*."

164 Brock, "Poetry and Hymnography: Syriac" *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*.

165 It received this name centuries later. Derek Krueger, "Textuality and Redemption: The Hymns of Romanos the Melodist," 168.

166 Laura Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, "A Poet lost and found," 12.

167 Sebastian Brock, "Syriac and Greek Hymnography: Problems of Origin." See also John A. McGuckin, "Poetry and Hymnography" in *the Oxford Handbook of early Christian Studies*.

similarities of Syriac Christian, Samaritan, and Jewish poetry of the Levant. He points to the "active cultural-religious dialogue that took place" in late antique Near East rather than trying to pinpoint precedence between the coexisting communities.[168] Other cross-cultural links have been speculated on: for example, Romanos is said to have been a Christian convert from Judaism, was certainly from Emesa and was a deacon in Beirut. He styled himself Romanos the humble in acrostic and the few times he speaks of himself in his songs, he is self-effacing.[169] Of Yannai we know even less.

Much that we would like to know is out of reach. We do not know exactly how or where the popular phenomenon of sacred song began in Palestine. We do not know where (presumably in the Galilee) Yannai performed. We do not know the order of events in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Yahalom hypothesizes that *chazzanim* led the morning prayers and then later in the same service, served as the translators for the recitation of the Torah.[170] We are ignorant of what these compositions sounded like. The entire musical dimension of this poetry is lost. While we know the Syriac church employed female choirs and the Greek church had all male choirs, there is no mention in the Jewish sources of the choirs of the synagogue—Were there male or female choirs in some synagogues? Female participants should not be excluded out of hand.[171] The prohibition on hearing a woman's voice in the synagogue is a much later medieval development with surprisingly little basis in the talmudic

168 Ophir Munz-Manor, "Liturgical Poetry in the Late Antique Near East: A Comparative Approach." One might also keep in mind that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (then known as the the Anastasis Church) was a major center of liturgical production (McGuckin, "Poetry and Hymnography").

169 Krueger, "Textuality and Redemption," 172ff.

170 Yahalom, *Poetry and Society*, 216.

171 See Yannai's "Celebrate with fitting songs, with proper melodies, men and women making music upon every melodic instrument" (Qedushta for Gen 28:10, the 7th).

sources.[172] One should also keep in mind that women maintained the role of public mourning and keening from the Second Temple period through the Crusades.[173] It is entirely plausible that women as well as men participated in singing in the synagogue.

We know that in the generation after Yannai sung refrains became increasingly popular and concomitantly the choir became a professional function within some synagogues.[174] Yannai's *qedushta'ot*, though they lacked lengthy choral refrains, were so popular that later poets inserted additional refrains in them rather than discard them. Fleischer discusses a corpus of refrains, recovered from the Cairo Genizah, that an anonymous poet wrote for the *qedushta'ot* of R. Simeon b. R. Megas (he wrote three or four refrains for each *qedushta*); some of these ended up accompanying the *qedushta'ot* of Yannai as well.[175] Audience participation was increasingly popular with the generations, but the foundation was already in each of Yannai's compositions, which drew the congregation into the angelic mode, especially in the ninth poem which led into the Qedushah.[176] Interestingly, unlike Yannai, the poet R. Simeon b. R. Megas did not embellish the Qedushah as part of his compositions.

The theory that fixed prayer became boring to Jews, but that they were stuck with it, and so *piyyut* developed to enliven prayer again seems reductive at best.[177] It also does not

172 Saul Berman, "Kol 'Isha," *Rabbi Joseph H. Lookstein Memorial Volume* (New York: Ktav Publishing, 1980), 45-66.

173 Yahalom, *Poetry and Society*, 51. According to Karaite testimony, professional mourning women (cf. Mishnah Ketubot 4:4), would crowd Jerusalem in the summer, mourning in Hebrew, Persian, and even Arabic.

174 See Fleischer, *The Pizmonim of the Anonymus* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974).

175 Fleischer, *The Pizmonim of the Anonymus*, 20, 22 fn. 36.

176 Where I have particularly focused on how Yannai's culminating ninth poems drew in the audience, Lieber highlighted how the seventh poem in each of Yannai's compositions (called the rahit and full of repetitions and rhymes), likely drew in the congregation. See *Yannai on Genesis*, 66-73.

177 Fleischer, "Inquiry into the problem of the liturgical function of the genre of early piyyut," *Tarbiz* 40.1 (1970): 54 (Hebrew). Elsewhere, Fleischer suggests that the disappearance of the homily in Palestine gave rise

account for the way in which *piyyut* took part in a cross-cultural, regional phenomenon. Something was afoot in the Late Antique Near East. Georgia Frank and Derek Krueger offer more persuasive explanations for the emergence of this genre. As Christianity climbed the echelons of society, went out of hiding and out of doors, Christian leaders explored new ways of Christian self-expression and understanding. The *kontakion*—the Greek form of dramatic dialogic sacred song—was one of those modes of expression. As Jews in Palestine were confronted with an imperial Church that exerted authority over the religious landscape, Jewish leaders may have fought back in traditional ways— incorporating and adapting prevalent strategies to Jewish needs (expressing Judaism through the culture of Hellenism[178]). The obvious Greek etymology of *piyyut* may hint in this direction.[179] The Hebrew language of sacred poetry may also suggest a nationalistic emphasis. In other words, I am suggesting that Hebrew liturgical song was a mode of prayer and song and that reflected and modeled ideals of Jewish identity.

At the very least, we may note that we have names of celebrated men attached to the emergence of sacred song in each culture. They ensured their legacy by including their name in acrostic in each of their respective compositions. Ephrem and Romanos were canonized as saints while Yannai was remembered as one of the ancient poets (so Saadia Gaon[180]) and one of the early rabbis (so Rabbenu Gershom Meir HaGolah[181]).

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to the performance of *piyyut* in the syangogue ("Annual and Triennial Reading of the Bible in the Old Synagogue," *Tarbiz* 61 [1991]: 25-43). See Ruth Langer's review of his work in "Revisiting Early Rabbinic Liturgy," 179-94.

178 Seth Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in ancient Judaism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

179 Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 7. Ibid, "*Piyyut*" *Encyclopedia of Judaism* 3: 2000-2019.

180 *Sefer ha-Egron* (Jerusalem: Ha-Akademya La-Lashon Ha'Ivrit, 1969), 154; Cited in Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis,* 1).

181 Rabbenu Gershom wrote "Indeed, Rabbi Yannai was among the first sages and he poeticized *qerovot* for each and every seder of the entire year." See his responsa in *Sefer Shibole ha-leket haShalem* (ed. Salomon

Whereas scholars of Christian hymnography have no doubt that these compositions were intended for the laity as well as clergy members, monks, and nuns, Jewish historians have expressed more skepticism about the comprehension of Hebrew *piyyutim* in Aramaic speaking Palestine.[182] The language of these poetic compositions is indeed inventive and drew on a fluency in the biblical sources only the best educated likely possessed. It has seemed easier to presume that no one except the poet himself and a couple of sages perhaps understood the meaning of these poems.

In his book *Poetry and Society in Jewish Galilee of Late Antiquity*, Yoseph Yahalom emphasizes that Late Antique Israel experienced a Hebrew renaissance, with literary creations such as the *Tanhuma* midrashim and legal works such as the *Maasim L'Bnei Israel*.[183] The magical handbook, *Sepher haRazim* (discussed in the chapter on ritual sources) was written in fluent expressive Hebrew in Palestine likely in the fourth century. Furthermore, it was in Tiberias around the year 1000 CE, that experts in Hebrew finally added vocalization marks to the Torah. Yahalom believes that "Hebrew speech likely carried connotations of roots, and was spoken still in villages by women and elders dedicated to tradition."[184] Michael Swartz suggests that the availability of basic education in late Antique Palestine ought not to be underestimated: "Elementary education in this period was available to some if not all."[185] We may never have decisive proof either way, but I argue that the

Buber; Vilna: Rom, 1886), 13a or *The Responsa of Rabbenu Gershom Meir Hagolah* (New York : Yeshiva University, 1955), 55-57,1. See discussion of this topic in Ruth Langer, "Kalir Was a Tanna: Rabbenu Tam's Invocation of Antiquity in Defense of the Ashkenazi Payyetanic Tradition," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 67 (1996): 95-106.

182 For example, see Schwartz, who writes "we have no more grounds for thinking that the *piyyut* was generally fully understood than that most of Libanius's audience grasped the dense webs of classical allusion that constitute his speeches (*Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 267).

183 Yahalom, *Poetry and Society,* 49.

184 My translation of Yahalom, *Poetry and Society,* 49.

185 Michael Swartz, "Translation and Comprehensibility of Early Piyyut," in *Giving a Diamond: Essays in*

picture of total linguistic estrangement between congregation and prayer leader may be just as speculative and unfounded as its opposite.[186]

Josephus and Philo may have exaggerated the people's devotion to their ancestral law each Sabbath, but at the very least, it is obvious that everyone had an expectation that Torah would be made comprehensible in the synagogue. Esotericism was for different settings. Scholasticism could be found elsewhere. The synagogue meetings each Sabbath morning were for the community. The Torah was read out loud in Hebrew. Aramaic Targum did not just translate the Torah, it embellished, reinforced and reinterpreted Torah to the congregation. And the triennial reading cycle with its short portions left plenty of time for targum as well as other activities like communal prayer and a homily—all activities that engaged the congregation.[187] *Piyyut* ought to be included in this picture of accessibility.

Indeed, homilies were didactic, popular because they educated and entertained Jewish listeners. Likewise, the visual program of the synagogue was paid for by many members of the community. We today might argue about what the mosaics mean, but their images were in a vocabulary shared by ancient Jews. The synagogue as an institution was accessible to all Jews (and in the Diaspora, accessible even to Christians as John Chyrsostom complains[188]).

Honor of Joseph Yahalom on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 39-50.

186 I wonder if such skepticism is not retrojecting the lamentable conditions of certain contemporary synagogues, where a certain pedagogic failures alienate congregations from their institutions.

187 Yahalom, *Poetry and Society*, 182.

188 See Meeks and Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries*, 86. John Chrysostom: "What is this sickness? The festivals of the wretched and miserable Jews which follow one after another in succession—Trumpets, Booths, the Fasts [Shavuot, Sukkot, Yom Kippur]— are about to take place. And many who belong to us and say that they believe in our teaching attend their festivals, and even share in their celebrations and join in their fasts. It is this evil practice I now wish to drive from the church (845) Sermons against the Anomoeans [Arians] can be delivered at another time and the delay would not work any harm. But if those who are sick with Judaism are not healed now when the Jewish festivals are 'near, at the very door,' I am afraid that some, out of misguided habit and gross ignorance, will share in their transgressions, and sermons about such matters would be pointless. If the offenders are not present to hear what we say today, afterward medicine would be applied in vain because they would already have committed the sin. This is the reason I am in a hurry to take up this matter before the festivals. That is the way doctors do things. They deal

And *piyyut*, although portions of it were in ornamental Hebrew with complex allusions, also participated in this expectation. Shulamit Elizur has shown how the densely packed beginning poems of Yannai's *qedushtaot* give way to much more direct and straight forward poems toward the end of each composition.[189] My own analysis of the *piyyutim* confirms her suggestion. The final two poems of the *qedushtaot* are in far simpler Hebrew than the rest of the composition. As for the opaque beginning portions, some mysterious language in sacred song was likely considered desirable, in the same way scripture was prized for being both elusive and charged while other parts of it were more directly comprehensible.[190]

Laura Lieber takes another approach, reminding us of the fact that *piyyutim* were prayers: "these works were not simply recited or read but prayed, and as prayer, they constitute a kind of conversation between the prayer leader (the poet) and his congregation and between the congregation and God."[191] She foregrounds the *rahit* in particular, the seventh poem characterized by a staccato rhythm, which elicits congregational participation through repetition of a keyword at the beginning or end of each verse, thus inviting the audience's joining in the performance of the poem. Moreover, Lieber shows how Yannai's compositions employ dramatic dialogues that collapse the historical distance between Israel past and the present hearers.[192] It is hard to imagine these dialogues falling on deaf ears. These devices, she asserts, were designed to draw in and engage listeners in the synagogue.[193]

with the most urgent and acute sicknesses first."

189 Shulamit Elizur, "The Congregation in the Synagogue and the Ancient Qedushta," *Knesset Ezra: Literature and Life in the Synagogue*, 171-190.

190 Suggested by Yochanan Breuer in a seminar at Princeton, spring 2013.

191 Laura Lieber, "The Rhetoric of Participation: The Experiential Elements of Early Hebrew Liturgical Poetry," *The Journal of Religion* 90 (2010): 119-47.

192 Lieber, "The Rhetoric of Participation," 125.

193 In another article Lieber highlights what role the meturgamen might have played in making the language of the piyyutim accessible to the congregation. See "'Oh My Dove, Let Me See Your Face!' Targum, Piyyut, and the Literary Life of the Ancient Synagogue," *Paratext and Megatext as Channels of Jewish and*

The performer of *piyyut*, the *chazzan*, was key to making sacred song accessible to the congregation. It is not farfetched to suggest the *chazzan* himself may have introduced or told the congregation what to expect to hear in his sung performance. The *chazzan* performed his compositions in the framework of communal prayer. He, himself, was a leader, an authority figure, and intermediary among others in Jewish society. Yannai not only explicated basic beliefs about angels to his congregation, but also employed angels to uphold the status of Israel and specific groups within it. Thus, he elevated the people of Israel, the matriarchs, the holy dead, priests, sages, and finally even himself to the status of the angels.

Christian Traditions: The Textual Markers of Contextualization (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 109-35.

CHAPTER 3: ANGELS IN RITUAL TEXTS

Introduction

In this chapter I analyze ritual texts from Late Antique Jewish communities in Palestine and Babylonia. Incantations and amulets in particular allow us to view men's and women's relationship to angels away from communal and institutional spaces, in the domestic space of their homes. These texts reveal that angels were imagined to function in a variety of ways in the lives of ancient Jews: healing sickness, restoring love in a marriage, bringing in business, or protecting a home from harm. Through incantation bowls and amulets we can see how angels can be said to pervade the life of ancient Jewish men and women. In this chapter I examine the authority of angels in ritual texts, which leads to an analysis of the authority of ritual specialists, clients, and others in relation to the angels. As I will show, the evidence necessitates transitioning from discussing the authority of the angels over human affairs to human authority over and alongside the angels.

The category of magic and Jewish sources

Ritual practices that we might characterize as magical were commonplace among the peoples of the Mediterranean.[1] In late antiquity Jews increasingly commissioned objects inscribed with incantations for personal and household use.[2] Starting with the legal text of the Mishnah (ca. 200 CE), we have literary evidence that Jews were wearing such objects for apotropaic ends. While discussing Sabbath laws related to clothing and jewelry, the Mishnah prescribes that a man may not wear an amulet that was not prepared by a specialist—in other words, he *may* wear one prepared by a specialist whom the Rabbis find trustworthy.[3] Archaeological excavations of ancient synagogues in Palestine (fourth to seventh century C.E.) and settlements have uncovered many amulets, personalized with the name of the client, usually including biblical quotations, and invoking God and often the angels as well to protect the client. Such amulets were composed of narrow strips of metal sheets inscribed with texts and rolled-up to be worn in small cases around the neck.[4]

Meanwhile, from Babylonia, incantation bowls have come to light, composed in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic. Almost all of the recently published bowls are without provenance. However, the first few dozen that came to light were from Nippur, one of the most important ancient Mesopotamian cult centers, about 100 miles southwest of Baghdad, once on a canal connected to the Euphrates river. Nippur was one of the longest continually

1 For general introductions, see Bohak*, Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Michael Swartz, "Jewish Magic in Late Antiquity," *Cambridge History of Judaism: The Late Roman Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

2 Asides from two intriguing silver amulets found in a late seventh-century BCE tomb CE near Jerusalem, there is a surprising dearth of evidence for the use of amulets in the second temple period (Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 30 and 114).

3 Mishnah Shabbat 6:2.

4 Amulets were commonly worn objects in the Mediterranean world. See the introduction and several articles in *Magical Pracice in the Latin West* (ed. Richard Gordon and Franciso Marco Simon; Boston: Brill, 2010).

inhabited cities in the Near East: its golden age was 2500-1800 BCE, but it was inhabited until the 8th century CE. We find evidence of Jewish settlement in Nippur from the 4th to 8th centuries CE.

The texts of both the ceramic bowls and the metal amulets refer to themselves as an amulet (*kameah*), suggesting they served similar purposes in the minds of their users.[5] About the size of modern cereal bowls and inscribed with incantations, the bowls were buried upside down, under the thresholds of homes or in the corners of rooms. Jews as well as Mandean and Syriac-speaking Christians used incantation bowls, each in their respective dialect of Aramaic (which while similar, employ different scripts[6]). In his survey of 119 households represented by incantation bowls from Nippur, Michael Morony notes that the language distribution is as follows: "73 percent (87) were [Jewish] Aramaic, 21 percent (25) were Mandaic, and 5 percent (7) were Syriac."[7] Neusner suggests that Jews made up between one eighth and one tenth of the population of Sasanian Persia, probably constituting one of the largest minorities alongside Mandeans and Syriac Christians, with whom they coexisted relatively peacefully.[8]

The above mentioned statistical evidence belie the complicated situation of analyzing the ritual evidence for the respective communities. Sometimes a legendary Jewish figure is

5 For example, see bowl 10 in James Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia, 1913), hereafter cited as *AIT*; see Bowl 1 in Julian Obermann, "Two Magic Bowls: New Incantation Texts from Mesopotamia," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 57.1 (1940): 1-31.

6 Michael Morony, "Religion and the Aramaic Incantation Bowls," *Religion Compass* (2007): 414-429.

7 Morony, "Magic and Society in Late Sasanian Iraq," *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 95. Morony accounts for the "mixture of religious content" in the incantations by hypothesizing "the presence of different religious traditions in the same household or the existence of syncretistic sorcerers."

8 See Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia: The Early Sasanian Period* (Vol. 2; Leiden: Brill, 1966), 241-250. Unfortunately, we do not know their proportion to each other or any exact demographic numbers.

cited in Syriac incantations.[9] There are exceptional cases of Christian elements in Jewish incantations as well.[10] Similar ritual formulae have also been found in Talmudic Aramaic and Mandaean, suggesting ritual practitioners shared formulae.[11] Further complicating the situation, since many Jews took Persian names, names are not necessarily a reliable indicator of ethnicity. Such blurring of communal boundaries is reflected in the excavation of a Mandaean and a Jewish Aramaic bowl in the same courtyard, suggesting that people of different ethnicities shared living quarters and likely shared ritual practices too.[12] In spite of these complications, I will argue that the majority of Jewish-Aramaic incantation texts were intended for clients who spoke Jewish Aramaic.

For several reasons, I eschew the category of magic in my analysis of ritual texts from Palestine and Babylonia. While I concur with Peter Schäfer's view that magical practices ought to be seen as comprising a subset of ritual practices within religious ritual and that they were particularly integral to religious vibrancy in late antiquity,[13] at this time I find the category to be too tainted to be of use. As Versnel notes, "common sense" characteristics of "magical" practices include descriptors such as "instrumental, manipulative, mechanical, non-personal, coercive, with short-term, concrete and often individual goals…"[14] Such adjectives do not do justice to the texts from Babylonia and Palestine.

9 R. Joshua b. Perahia is cited in two Syriac incantations from Nippur, see Montgomery *AIT* 32 and 33. He will be discussed below.

10 M163, published by Dan Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls: Incantation Texts in Jewish Aramaic from Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2002); Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 278.

11 See Christa Müller-Kessler and Theodore Kwasman, "A Unique Talmudic Aramaic Incantation Bowl," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120, no. 2 (2000): 159-65.

12 Erica Hunter, "Aramaic-Speaking Communities of Sassanid Mesopotamia," *Aram* 7 (1995): 319-35.

13 Schäfer, Magic and Religion in Ancient Judaism, *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar & Symposium* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). Schäfer reviews various theories he finds fruitful in this article and highlights the contribution of Dorothy Hammond ("Magic: A Problem in Semantics," *American Anthropologist* 72:6 (1970): 1349-1356.

14 H.S. Versnel, "Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion," *Numen* 38:2 (1991): 186.

The incantation texts themselves do not claim to be engaged in "magic," they claim to fight spells, charms, sorceries, and witchcraft.[15] Where coercion of divine forces is seen as the key to differentiating "magical" ritual from a religious ritual,[16] in the Babylonian incantation texts, which form the bulk of the survey in this chapter, such a coercive attitude toward God and his angels is largely absent (rather, more often, demons are adjured only to be commanded to depart). I follow the lead of Olof Pettersson,[17] John Gager,[18] Marvin Meyer,[19] Rebecca Lesses,[20] and Jonathan Z. Smith[21] in avoiding use of the category of magic for the texts I examine. Instead, I favor the term "ritual practice" and "practitioner" rather than magician or sorcerer. As they argue, magic as a polemical term has accrued a great deal of baggage from ancient Jewish and Christian sources, not to mention early twentieth-century scholarship, and in effect tends to marginalize objects and people associated with it. Rather I will argue that these ritual texts may represent the beliefs of a broad swath of the Jewish population, not a view from the fringe as the term "magical" might suggest.

The category of magic turns out to have implications for the study of gender in the

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15 Marvin Meyer, *Ancient Christian Magic*, 2. For examples of incantations that fight magic see Erica Hunter, "Two Incantation Bowls from Babylon." *Iraq* 62 (2000): 139-47, where she discusses IM 9726 or see 034A published by J. B. Segal, *Catalogue of the Aramaic and Mandaic Incantation Bowls in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 2000).

16 From Frazer down to present anthropological research, "the terms most frequently associated with magic are 'impersonal,' 'mechanical,' 'automatic,' 'compulsive,' 'coercive,' 'efficient,' 'learned techniques,' and 'acquired skills' (Dorothy Hammond, "Magic: A Problem in Semantics." *American Anthropologists* 72, no. 6 [1970]: 1352.)

17 Olof Pettersson, "Magic—Religion: some marginal notes to an old problem," *Ethnos* 22, nos. 3-4 (1957): 109-119.

18 John Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

19 Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith, eds. *Ancient Chrisitan Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994).

20 Rebecca Macy Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power: Angels, Incantations, and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1998).

21 Jonathan Z. Smith, "Trading Places," *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (eds. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki. New York: Brill, 1995).

ritual sources as well.[22] Historians of religion rightly point to the use of the category of magic as a tool of polemical discourse, often directed at women and minorities. From this perspective, we ought to be suspicious of rabbinic statements about women's engagement in magic.[23] Men, even the the sages, might engage in the same ritual practices as women, but they would never refer to their activities as magical.[24] Only disempowered people can engage in magic. On the other hand, viewing magic as the category that designates "the large corpus of Jewish magical texts and objects, a corpus which is characterized by its specific technical-professional nature" tends to preclude the involvement of women a priori, since they are presumed to lack access to literacy or technical training in the ancient world.[25] In my view, the scholarly position that only men engaged in magic is as generalizing and problematic as the rabbinic position that only women engage in witchcraft. As Rebecca Lesses points out, though there is much that we cannot know, it is evident that rabbinic literature preserves the anxieties of men only, whereas the incantation bowls preserve the concerns and anxieties of both men and women.[26] In the incantations texts from Babylonia and Palestine, we will have

22 For a more comprehensive treatment of this topic, see my entry on "Popular Religion and Magic: Early Judaism" in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Bible and Gender Studies,* forthcoming.

23 From the Mishnah through the talmudim, the rabbis are consistent on the point that all Jewish women are likely engages in magic: Mishnah tractate Avot 2:7, Hillel is quoted as saying "the more women, the more witchcraft;" Palestinian Talmud Sanhedrin 7:13, 40b, comments on Exodus 22:17 "scripture teaches you about the way of the world in which the majority of women are witches;" Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 67a, "most women engage in witchcraft;" Palestinian Talmud Kiddushin 4.11: "even the best woman is an expert at magic;" Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 53a, similarly states on smelling incense near a town, "even if the majority [of the town] is Israelite, you do not say a blessing because the daughters of Israel burn incense for magic."

24 Bohak discusses the evidence for the rabbis' engagement in Jewish magic in "Magic and Magicians in Rabbinic literature," in *Ancient Jewish Magic.* Naomi Janowitz writes that "authorities cannot – by definition – engage in magic. They can, however, bless, curse, heal, exorcise, predict the future, and put angels to work" (*Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews, and Christians* [New York Routledge, 2001], 99).

25 Bohak, "Prolegomena to the Study of the Jewish Magical Tradition." *Currents in Biblical Research* 8.1 (2009): 111; see also his comments in *Ancient Jewish Magic,* 393.

26 Rebecca Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power: Women as Sorceresses, Exorcists, and Demonesses in Babylonian Jewish Society of Late Antiquity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, no. 2 (2001): 343-75.

a chance to glimpse men and women's religiosity while the treatise *Sefer Ha-Razim* will allow us to see how gender is constructed in ritual texts.

In scholarship on amulets and incantation bowls, the energy invested thus far has been in the foundational work of publication and translation of the ritual texts.[27] Ritual incantation texts are difficult to decipher and translate; when scholars have offered commentary on them, they have focused primarily on the formula's structure, its language, and its sources. When the *use* of incantation bowls is analyzed, it has been to ascertain the "magical" rationale behind them (i.e. what magical techniques did the specialist believe caused his incantation to be effective?).[28] The primarily philological analysis of incantation texts thus far has resulted in their interpretation as specialists' texts, as texts belonging to a magical tradition, separate though in dialogue with mainstream religious institutions.[29] In other words, these are texts transmitted from one specialist to the next, with no input from others. In this perspective, prefabricated bowls composed by specialists were purchased and buried in a client's home with little or no involvement on the client's part. This approach perceives the incantation bowls as the domain of specialists only. While my work builds on their foundational research, I also hope to take their findings one step further, shedding light on the ritual context of the incantations bowls. The ritual context of the incantation bowls

27 The efforts of Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked in particular deserve mention: see their *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* Jerusalem (Magness Press, 1985), *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1993) and their many articles over the years, many of which will be cited below. See also Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls*.

28 Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls*; Charles Häberl's analysis of the performative context of Mandaic incantations is an important contribution, which has yet to be matched (to my knowledge) in the study of Jewish Aramaic incantation bowls. I discuss his findings below. See Häberl, "The Production and Reception of a Mandaic Incantation," *Afroasiatic Studies in Memory of Robert Hetzron: Proceedings of the 35th Annual Meeting of the North American Conference on Afroasiatic Linguistics* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009),168–89. Mandaic and Jewish incantations have much in common and Haberl's insights on the oral composition of Mandaic texts stands to teach specialists in Jewish incantation texts a great deal.

29 Bohak, "Prolegomena to the Study of the Jewish Magical Tradition," *Currents in Biblical Research* 8.1 (2009): 107-150.

makes it apparent that specialists and clients shared (or at least informed each other's) religious worldviews. If this is the case, incantation texts can reveal much more to us about late antique Jews than has been previously recognized.

The texts can be analyzed on three levels then: firstly, simply as disembodied fixed formula intractable for social analysis; secondly, as reflecting the views of practitioners; thirdly, as reflecting the views of clients who used them in their homes as well. The significance of my observations regarding angelic authority in these texts will depend on one's approach to texts and their reception in antiquity.[30] To lay the groundwork for my contributions, I begin by briefly presenting the ritual context of the amulets.[31]

My first contribution is to explicate the functions of angels in the incantation texts. These sources have not been utilized thus far in the study of Jewish beliefs about angels. My survey of the function of angels in Jewish incantations and amuletic texts fills this gap in scholarship. My analysis will correct a misconception about angels in Babylonian incantation texts. When the function of angels in Babylonian incantations has been gestured at in the context of analyzing Jewish magic, scholars have positioned angels against demons and have asserted that through incantations angels were rallied to fight demons.[32] As I will

30 Ultimately, one's approach to this topic is subjective.

31 I have presented papers on this topic on two occasions: at the Association for Jewish Studies Conference in Boston in December 2013, I presented a paper titled "At Home with the Angels: The Spatial and Social Dynamics of Jewish Babylonian Incantations." In March 2014, I presented further research on this topic at a conference I co-organized at Princeton on "Placing Ancient Texts: New Approaches to Ritual Texts." I thank the conference participants for their affirming feedback.

32 Levene, "Curse or Blessing: What's in the Magic Bowl?" (edited by Parkes Institute Pamphlet. Southampton, 2002), 15. Such a view may have arisen from how a few traditions in rabbinic sources discuss angels, which is to say, as God's messengers against demons. See *Sifrei Numbers, Naso,* §40, on Num 6: 24, ed. Horowitz p. 44, which cites Psalm 91:11 to prove that God protects Jews from demons through his angels; see also discussion of *Tanhuma Mishpatim* §19, on Exodus 23:20 19 in the first chapter. In this early medieval source which also comments on Psalm 91:7, R. Joshua ben Levi is attributed the saying "what is meant by 'a thousand may fall at your side?' That the Holy one, blessed be he, assigns each and every one from Israel a myriad and one thousand angels that will guard him and make way for him, and one of them declares before him and says 'Give honor to the image of the Holy one, blessed be He' as the entire world is filled with spirits

demonstrate, a close analysis of the evidence shows that this is an oversimplification and that angels are appealed to for a variety of reasons in incantation bowls and amulets, and not just in the battle against demons.[33] Properly contextualized, I will argue that the texts from Babylonia and Palestine as well as *Sefer HaRazim* depict angels as just one possible (albeit popular) source of authority on a spectrum of possible authority figures in late antique Jewish communities.

My second contribution is to map out the different approaches to authority revealed by the ritual texts. Closely analyzing the text of the Babylonian incantation bowls in particular, I observed that different conceptions of authority are revealed therein, arguably reflecting the beliefs of different Jewish ritual practitioners and their clients. From this dataset, we stand to learn a great deal about the views of Jews in late antique Palestine and Babylonia.

The Ritual Context of ancient Amulets[34]

As mentioned above, it is my contention that incantation bowls have not been subjected to sufficient socio-historical analysis. Two important exceptions to this statement

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and demons.

33 See introduction for explanation of the origins of demons.

34 Research of Aramaic incantation texts is an especially collaborative effort, building on the work of many specialists. James Montgomery's *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (hereafter *AIT)* require cross-reference with J. N. Epstein's corrections of the texts (see his "Commentary on Babylonian-Aramaic words" *Mehkarim beSifrut haTalmud ve-beLeshonot Shemiot* 1(1921-2): 329-374 [Hebrew]); Corrections to J. B. Segal's transcription of texts in the *Catalogue of the Aramaic and Mandaic Incantation Bowls in the British Museum* (hereafter *CAMIB*) can be found in Christa Müller-Kessler in "Die Zauberschalensammlung des British Museum," *Archiv fur Orientforschung* 48/9 (2001/2002): 115-145. Where I cite these texts, I have taken into consideration all publications and corrections known to me. *CAMIB* offers only a transliteration of the original and thus I have reconstructed the Hebrew here for longer quotations, with the help of photographs of the bowls available on the British Museum's website.

are Ortal-Paz Saar and Michael Morony. Saar, a specialist in Cairo Genizah magic, has lectured on the possible location of the composition of incantation texts among the rabbinic class.[35] Citing examples from the Babylonian Talmud of people approaching the rabbis for help against demons (e.g. Babylonian Talmud Pesahim 111b), she argues that rabbis represent themselves as the proper source of authority for confronting demons and/or unsavory opponents through magical techniques. If magic is finally being accepted as an integral part of Jewish culture, Saar takes it to the next level, implying it may even have been produced by the learned rabbis. The reception of the incantations, however, is not an area of study she explores. Her insight is extremely important and I will return to it in this chapter.

Morony is a specialist in the social and economic history of the transitional period between late antiquity and the early Islamic period in Western Asia.[36] He draws out intriguing demographic data from prosopographic analysis of the incantation bowls. He notes that 119 households have been identified in bowl texts and that most of them were "two generation nuclear families."[37] He further asserts that from the language of the incantation texts, we can see that 61 percent of households were headed by men while "30 percent (24) of monogamous households were what might be called joint families, in which the house, possessions, and children belonged to the man and woman equally."[38] Overall, he notes that "There were at least seven types of households: those with male heads, joint male and female households, and those with female heads among monogamous couples, polygamous,

35 Ortal-Paz Saar, "Who Wrote the Babylonian Incantation Bowls? On Literacy, Pseudo-Script and the Earnestness of Magic." Institute for Advanced Studies, Princeton. February 20, 2013.

36 Morony's 2003 article "Magic and Society" offers new research while his 2007 article is a summary of the state of the research on incantation bowls.

37 Morony, "Magic and Society," 107.

38 Morony, "Magic and Society," 105.

multiple, and those with a single woman or a single man."[39] His work is intriguing and crucial to our ability to imagine the households in which incantation bowls were used. I wish to build on his work and go further in reconstructing a view of the Jewish communities of Babylonia. Indeed, the social context of the employment of incantation bowls has yet to be studied. I intend to explicate, as much as the evidence allows, the full ritual process surrounding the use of Babylonian incantation texts.

At the very least, it is not speculative to assert that there was a moment where a client (male or female) decided that an amulet was necessary to confront a problem, a moment where the client encountered a specialist and explained his/her predicament, there was process of composition (which may have been shortened by some pre-fabrication of amulets) by the ritual specialist, and there was a process of conveying the amulet to the home, a process of introducing it into to the home, likely with a recitation of the incantation, and finally, the burial of the amulet at a fitting location(s) within the home.

Although removed by two centuries and in a different part of the Near East, John Chrysostom is the only eyewitness to comment on the practice of inviting a Jewish ritual practitioner into one's home. In a homily preached soon after the Jewish high holidays, Chrysostom reacts to the problem of many Christians taking an interest in Jewish festivities, revealing that some Christians in Late Antique Antioch went to the synagogue to procure the services of ritual practitioners.[40] Holding up the example of the suffering of Job and Lazarus —pious men who never resorted to incantations, charms or amulets—Chrysostom asks his

39 Morony, "Magic and Society," 107.

40 "If some healing remedies are shown to you, and someone says that they are able to heal, and for this reason he goes to the Jews, expose their magical tricks, their spells, their amulets, their potions" (John Chrysostom, Homily 8 Against the Jews [*Patrologia Graeca* 48.927-942], translated in Meeks and Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the first four centuries of the common era*). Discussed in Lightstone, *The Commerce of the Sacred*, 119.

congregation: "What kind of excuse will we give, if, when we suffer and undergo such misfortunes because of fever or bodily hurts, we run to the synagogue and invite sorcerers with their potions to come to our homes?"[41] Despite the polemical context of this accusation, I think it reflects a reality in which Christians, and all the more so Jews, could find specialists in the synagogue to help them, who would then be invited to come and perform rituals in their homes.

The archaeologists who excavated the bowl texts from the Jewish neighborhood in Nippur found them *in situ* at the endpoint of an involved process.[42] The bowl texts themselves provide us with some hints of the rituals involved in their use before their burial. An amulet excavated in Nippur suggests the specialist himself came and performed the ritual of burying the amulet to protect a home from demons. The amulet states: "A press which is pressed down upon demons…And I come and put a spell for them in the thresholds of this their house, and I seal and bind them. Fastened up are their doors and all their roof."[43] The shape of the bowl itself functions to contain the demons, but it seems to require the activating power of the specialist. He both recites the protective incantation on behalf of the clients and leaves the amulet as lasting evidence of his recitation.

On the other hand, an amulet from Borsippa suggests that the client himself had to bury the amulet.[44] The exterior of the bowl states "For the edge," which probably means it was intended for the threshold of the dwelling. The amulet, which will be discussed more below, asks the angels to help bring in customers to help a business prosper. If the specialist

41 Section 936 of PG; Meeks and Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch*, 118.

42 Segal, *CAMIB*, 27.

43 Montgomery *AIT* 6.

44 Segal, *CAMIB* 021A. This amulet will be discussed at greater length below.

himself was burying the amulet, he probably would not need this instruction. This amulet suggests that the specialist expected the client to have some level of literacy as well. The client completed the ritual by burying the amulet himself, an action that was likely witnessed by others.

Some amulets make even clearer the spatial context of the location in which they were buried. One from Nippur addresses the demons, stating "Now you are conquered, you are bound; bound, you are bound and sealed in each one of the four corners of his house."[45] The bowl-incantation is seen to contain or cover the demons physically. For the full protection of the house, amulets were buried in each of the corners. Similarly, an amulet from Teheran emphasizes the spatial aspect of the spell: "Conquered are invocations of witches… from the four borders of the house.[46] It is not unlikely that at one time three other copies of these amulets existed for each of the corners respectively. Thus Levene published the text of an amulet targeting demons and curses, which has four duplicates written for the same client by the same specialist (Levene M103), likely for the corners of her home. This apotropaic ritual was thus a prolonged one, requiring burial in several locations. We must remember that in the late antique Mediterranean, privacy was not common: at the very least the client and the members of his or her household were witness to this burial ritual, if not the neighbors as well.

At least two amulets depict a more public and "performative utterance" against demons.[47] An incantation bowl in the Iraq museum portrays a specialist going up to the roof

45 Montgomery, *AIT* 4, will be discussed more below.

46 Gordon, "Aramaic Bowl from Teheran."

47 Here I borrow Stanley J. Tambiah's terminology. See Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality*, Henry Lewis Morgan Lectures (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

to broadcast his counter-attack on evil forces sent to the home of his client: "I went up to the roof at night and said to them: (if ye are hungry, come) eat! And if ye are thirsty, come drink! And if ye are dry, come be oiled [i.e., anointed]! But if ye are not hungry, nor thirsty, nor dry, return and go by the way on which ye have come and enter the house from which ye went and enter the mouth from which ye went."[48] Similarly, another amulet depicts a couple confronting demons sent their way from their roof: "And we went up to the roof and we said to them….come! Here is meat to eat and here is wine to drink…But go return upon those that sent you. Go and eat it in his basket of bread and in his pitcher of water! And let him drink water and be harmed and let him rub ointment and smart!"[49] These incantations suggest that reverse-psychology is effective against demons: once they are acknowledged and invited in, their harmful power is neutralized and at that point they can be sent back against the antagonist who conjured them up in the first place. Still, the public performance of the recitation, as well as its recording in writing, was equally important.

It is not clear if the people who buried these amulets in their homes performed or were witness to this recitation, but these scenes offer us another way of thinking about the praxis associated with these incantations. The texts were not just intended to be written—though the power of the written word is essential—the amulets had a performative or recitational dimension as well. Before they were buried near the foundations of the home, it is possible that the specialist made his counter-attack against curses very public: literally by

48 Trans. Gordon, "Aramaic Incantation Bowls," *Orientalia* NS 10 (1941): 349, bowl No. 9731.

סליקית לאיגרא בליליה ואמרית להון (אם כפניתון איתו) איכלו ואם צחתון איתו אישתו ואם חרביתון איתו אידהנו ואם לא כפניתון ולא צחתון ולא חרביתון חדרו ואזילו כאורחא דאתתון בה ועולו לביתה דנפקתון מיניה ועולו בפומא דנפקתון מינה.

49 Trans. Gordon, *"Aramaic Incantation Bowls," Orientalia* NS 10 (1941): 342-4, bowl cataloged as British Museum 91776 and 036A, also published by Segal in *CAMIB*.

סליקנן לאיגרא ואמרנן להון ... איתו הא בישרא למיכל והא חמרא למישתי ...אילא איזלו חדרו על עבדנא דעבדינכו ועל משדרנא ושדרינכו זילו וכולו ליה בסליה דלחמא בחצביה דמיא ולישתי מיא ולזוק ולישוף מישתה וליכוב.

shouting it from the rooftop. One can imagine that such a declaration against enemies may have indirectly affected the way the clients were treated in their community. Alternatively, if the clients felt they were under demonic attack from unknown enemies (which is why they went to the specialist in the first place), this counter-attack transformed them from passive victims into active agents. The Babylonian amulets, then, offer some clues as to the activities surrounding them. Though the incantations directly address God, the angels, and long lists of demons in the second person, the implied audience is the clientele, which is specifically named with their respective matronyms, often repeatedly within the same incantation.

Charles Häberl has come to similar conclusions about the oral and public performance of ritual texts through his analysis of Mandaic incantation texts (found in the same milieu as our Jewish Aramaic texts).[50] He points to the importance of Walter Ong's studies of oral cultures and Milman Parry's recognition of the oral (rather than literary) methods of composition of Greek epic, which opened a new chapter in the study of Homer's works. Häberl applies their methods to Mandaic incantation texts and makes several important observations: the grammar of the incantation formulas suggest that "writing the text, described as taking place while seated upon a stone, was actually part of the ritual."[51] Additionally, he notes aspects of the compositions that betray oral performance: formulaic expressions, paronomasia (puns), and coordinating conjunctions rather than subordinating conjunctions. The same features are found in Jewish Aramaic incantation bowls. The incantations read like run on sentences, containing lists of demons, lists of the family members names to be protected, and repeating opening and closing formulas. Haberl argues

50 Häberl, "The Production and Reception of a Mandaic Incantation."

51 Ibid., 132.

that the grammar of the incantation formulas suggest that "writing the text, described as taking place while seated upon a stone, was actually part of the ritual." The Jewish incantations do not refer to writing, but they do refer to pressing bowls down, performing, directly addressing demons, sealing demons away from the home and its members in the present tense. Where Mandaic formulas mention circumambulation of the residence,[52] Jewish incantions mention the interior perimeter of the room, the four corners. Häberl concludes that "[i]n a primarily oral milieu such as that of the Middle East in antiquity, such compositions were made not to be recited alone but rather in the presence of others, as a kind of performance."[53] The Mandean incantation bowls are again from the same milieu, not from Egypt or elsewhere. What held true for Mandaic incantations, I argue holds true for Jewish ones as well. As public performances in the presence of paying clients, their contents mattered: the divinities that the specialists address and the sources of authority they rely on for their efficacy had to satisfy the clients as well.

Some scholars take the perspective that some clients were illiterate and had no inkling of the contents of the incantation bowls.[54] They can point to the minority of incantation bowls filled with pseudo-script and hypothesize that clients took home bowls much like people today might take home a pill from the pharmacist with no idea of its ingredients or its inner workings. I strongly disagree with such a characterization. To continue with the modern analogy for a moment, even people that do not read the instructions on their prescriptions generally know to take pills with water or food, that there's a daily limit they can take, and that perhaps they should not administer their own drugs to their children. It is likely there

52 Cf. *AIT* bowls 2 and 4, which mention bronze wall surrounding home.

53 Häberl, "The Production and Reception of a Mandaic Incantation," 144.

54 Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 185.

was general knowledge about the use and function of amulets, even if people could not read the exact formulas. They likely the basic ingredients of the invocations and believed that the amulets could help them.

In my opinion it is more productive to think of the Babylonian and Palestinian amulets as results of a somewhat collaborative efforts, a kind of collaborative ritual. The example of Christian oracles from Late Antique Roman Egypt may be of relevance here. AnneMarie Luijendijk calls the interaction with books of lots "a three-way conversation" between the ritual object (the book), the diviner (the ritual-specialist), and the client. She emphasizes that these interactions did not take place in private, but amidst crowds or with the company of the client. She notes that "Upon request, such an expert might also visit people at home."[55] While making sense of an oracle requires more of the client's input, it is similar to incantation texts in respec to the tension between the formula the ritual-specialist produces and the personalized way that the client receives ritual utterance. The ritual-specialist mediates a text with divine authority to a client. And the client went to the specialist because he believed both in the specialist's expertise and in the divine powers that the specialist relied on. In other words, Christian clientele went to Christian lot-diviners and in Luijendijk's study, it seems some particularly preferred Mary as a source of wisdom.

Specialists in Jewish magic often emphasize that because foreign magic was seen as more powerful, people preferred the *Others'* magic.[56] While this is an important point, it is over-emphasized as well. The Jewish God and his angels are certainly prevalent in

55 Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles*? *The Gospel of the Lots of Mary*, 109. I thank AnneMarie Luijendijk for sharing with me the manuscript of her forthcoming book.

56 Bohak, "Jewish Myth in Pagan Magic in Antiquity," *Myths in Judaism: History, Thought, Literature* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2004): 97-122 (Hebrew).

polytheistic Greek incantation texts from Egypt and non-Jewish clientele may certainly have gone to a Jewish ritual-specialist because they believed in the power of Jewish divinities. The Jewish-Aramaic texts' reliance on the Jewish God, angels and other Jewish authority figures mattered particularly to members of the Jewish community as well. Again, if the performative aspect of this magic is foregrounded, i.e. if the importance of the clients' understanding the incantation is highlighted, then it seems unlikely that Jews were going to foreign ritual specialists for amulets in Syriac or Greek that called upon figures that they did not identify with. And conversely, although it may be that occasionally a Syriac-speaking Christian went to a Jewish specialist, this was likely not the dominant custom.

In incantation texts angels, God, or other heroes are appealed to in a wide variety of permutations. In my opinion, the variation in the incantation-texts cannot be explained by reference to the ritual-specialists' discretion alone. Rather, the preferences of clients likely determined which ritual-specialist they solicited and which sources of authority the incantations appealed to. A closer examination of the incantation texts will elucidate this claim.

Angels in Babylonian Incantation Bowls

To understand why Jews angels call on angels in general, it is important to acknowledge that incantations show great variation in the powers they invoke—sometimes, incantations do not invoke angels at all. The following table summarizes the powers invoked in incantation bowls and distinguishes texts with provenance and those without provenance. I began with sixty bowl-incantations with a provenance excavated mostly in the beginning of

the twentieth century. I found that when I included the data from an additional forty bowls published in successive decades without provenance, the proportions did not change significantly. Thus, this survey may be seen as a representative sample of bowl-incantations.

	God 24%	Angels 5%	God & Angels 35%	God & Angels & hero 14%	God & hero 3%	Practitioner & God 9.5%	Practitioner 5%	Other 3%
Incantation Bowl texts with provenance (63 total)	1. 014A 2. Gordon 9 3. 015A 4. 026A 5. AIT 3 6. AIT 11 (x6) 7. AIT 16 8. AIT 18 9. AIT 1 10. AIT 24 11. AIT 26 12. AIT 30 13. Kauffman 14. Oberman1 15. Gordon H	Isbell 60 IM 9736 021A	1. 013A 2. Hunter IM 9726 3. Gordon 8 4. 017 5. 028A 6. 065A 7. AIT 5 8. AIT 7 9. AIT 12 10. AIT 13 11. AIT 15 12. AIT 20 13. AIT 25 14. AIT 28 15. AIT 29? 16. Isbell N-IV 17. Faraj-Moriggi 71180 18. Gordon I (x2) 19. Oberman 2 20. Isbell-De Menil 21. 017A	1. 034A 2. Gordon E (x3) 3. Gordon 1932.619 4. AIT 8 5. AIT 9 6. AIT 10 7. AIT 14 8. Faraj-Moriggi 62265 9. Cook.	AIT 17 Gordon A	1. 049A 2. AIT 2 3. AIT 27 4. Gordon K 5. GIM9731 6. IM5947	AIT 4 AIT 6 AIT 21 (x3)	047A (planetary deities) AIT 19 (long list of gods) Gordon-Teheran (Joseph ben go'el)
Incantation Bowl texts without provenance	16. Gordon 2 17. Gordon 4 18. Gordon 10 19. 038A 20. Gordon G 21. M107 22. M108 23. M112 24. M117 25. M121 26. Shaked *Officina* 6	IM 19745 S3	23. Gordon 1 24. Gordon 5 25. Gordon 6 26. Gordon 7 27. Gordon D 28. Gordon C 29. Gordon L 30. M101 31. M102	M50 Shaked *Officina* 4 Shaked *Officina* 5	Gordon B	Gordon 11 M-K "Unique"	036A	Angels & Heroes-Gordon 1932.620 God, Angels & Sorcerer M103 SBF quotes Mishnah (x2)

Interestingly, only 5% of Babylonian incantation bowls call on angels alone. An additional 35% call on angels and God, and yet another 14% call on angels, God, and a heroic figure to achieve their aims. In other words, just over half of the bowls invoke angels to accomplish their aims. Just under one quarter of the bowls call on God alone and 15% rely on the powers of the specialist. Angels and demons are opposed to each other in 30% of incantations. My survey of incantation texts will explain the meaning of these permutations.[57] Paying attention to why are angels adjured by some incantations and not in others may hold the key to understanding their function in incantations.

Calling on Angels

To understand the role of angels in Jewish magic, it is best to begin with the words of the incantations themselves. In the following amulets, we see that angels are invoked for a variety of reasons. The first amulet we will examine, although without provenance and from the seventh century CE, has the advantage of bringing into relief the make-up of a particular household in an ancient community in Iraq.

אסותא מן שמיא וחתמתה ונטרתא לדירתיה ולאיסקופתיה ולמותביה [ול]ביתיה ודאיסקופתיה
דהדין פרוכדר בר זבינתא ודקאמוי בת זארק וכל שום דאית להון דיתנטרון פרוכדר דנן בר
זבינתא וקאמוי דא בת זארק אינון ובניהון ובנתהון ותוריהון וחימאריהון ועבדיהון ואמהתהון וכל

57 The bowls cited in this table can be found in the following publications (abbreviated here and cited in full in my bibliography): Montgomery, *AIT*; all bowls beginning with 0 and ending with (e.g. 015A) can be found in Segal, *CAMIB*; all bowls beginning with an M can be found in Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls* (2003); Gordon followed by a numeral (e.g. "Gordon 2") can be found in Gordon, "Aramaic Incantation Bowls," (1941, p. 116-41); Gordon 1932.619 and 1932.620 were published in "Aramaic Incantation Bowls," (1941, p. 279-80); IM stands for Iraq Museum, bowls published by Gordon in "Aramaic and Mandaic Magical Bowls" (1941, p. 339-60); Gordon followed by a letter (e.g. Gordon B) can be found in Gordon, "Aramaic and Mandaic Magical Bowls" (1934a and 1937); Gordon-Teheran can be found "Two magic Bowls in Teheran"(1951); GIM9731(Gordon, 1978); Kauffman, "A unique magic bowl from Nippur" (1973); Oberman, "Two Magic Bowls" 1940; Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, (1975); Isbell, "Two New" (1976) M-K stands for Müller-Kessler (2000); Shaked, *Officina* (2005); Faraj-Moriggi, "Two incantation bowls," (2005); Cook, "Aramaic Incantation Bowl," (1992); Hunter, "Two Incantation Bowls" (2000); SBF = Shaked, Bhayro, Ford (2013). I counted common formulas only once.

בעירא דרבא וזעירא דאית בהדא דירתא ואיסקופתא דאית בה ודהוי בה [מיכען] ועד עלם
ויבטלון מינה דהדא דירתא ואיסקופתא דהדין פרוכדר בר זבינתא ודקאמוי בת זארק חרשין
ארמאין חרשין יהודאין חרשין טיאעין חרשין פרסאין חרשין הינדאין חרשין יונאין חרשין די
כיתין חרשין דמיתעבדין בשבעין לישנין בין דאיתתא ובין דגברא כולהון שביתין ובטילין מן
מימריה דאל קנא ונוקים הוא דשלח עזא ועזאל ומיטטרון איסרא רבא דכורסיה אינון ייתון
וינטרון דירתיה ואיסקופתא דהדין פרוכדר בר זבינתא ודקאמוי בת זארק
(omitting repetition)
ויפתחן להון תרעי דימזונה מארבע כנפי ארעה מילעילא ומילרע בישמיה דכבשיאל מלאכה
דהוא כביש כל מידועם ביש מן איסקופתא דהדין פרוכדר בר זבינתא ודקאמוי דא בת זארק יהוה
שמו אמן אמן סלה.

> Salvation from the heavens, and sealing and protection for the dwelling, for the threshold, for the residence, for the house, and for the threshold of this Parrukdad the son of Zebinta and for Qamoi the daughter of Zaraq, and everything which they have, that they may be guarded— this P. the son of Z. and this Q. the daughter of Z., they, their sons, their daughters, their oxen, their donkeys, their slaves, their handmaidens, and all large or small cattle which is in this dwelling and threshold—which is in it and which is going to be in it--[from now] and forever.
> And there will cease from this dwelling and threshold of this P. the son of Z. and of Q the d. of Z, Aramean black-arts, Jewish black-arts, Arabic black-arts, Persian black-arts, Indian black-arts, Greek black-arts, black arts of the Romans, black-arts which are practiced in seventy languages, either by woman or by man.
> All of them are brought to an end and annulled by the command of the jealous and avenging God, the One who sent Azza, Azzael, and Metatron, the Great Prince of His throne. They will come and guard the dwelling and threshold of P. the son of Z. and of Q. the d. of Z.
> And may the gates of sustenance open for [them; omitting repetition] from the four corners of the earth, from above and below. In the name of Kabshiel, who conquers everything bad from the threshold of this P. the son of Z and of this Q the daughter of Z. *YHWH* is his name. Amen Amen Selah.[58]

This incantation opens and closes with the formulas typical of ritual incantations: to begin with it requests salvation or healing from the heavens[59] and it closes with "Amen, Amen, Selah." liturgical language known from biblical texts[60] and contexts of worship (if not in this

58 Gordon D (No. 6519), Baghdad Museum; Transcription and translation by Gordon, see "Aramaic magical bowls in the Istanbul and Baghdad Museums," *Archiv orientalni* 6.2 (1934: June), 319, 328-330.

59 Cf. the Aramaic phrase *Besiyata Dishmaya*, with the help of heaven, בְּסִיעַתָּא דִּשְׁמַיָּא , which became widespread among Orthodox Jews only in the beginning of the twentieth century. And the language for the ritual of circumcision in Seder Amram Gaon:

תשתלח אסותא דחיי ודרחמי מן קדם מימרא דשמיא...

60 Generally "amen" appears once in the saying of the people of Israel as in Deuteronomy 27: 15-26. See

combination exactly). This incantation was written for the protection of a household composed of a couple, their children and their animals, slaves, and servants. This seems to be a financially well-off household, who probably feared the jealousy of those around them.[61] Though their names do not sound like Hebrew names known to us from the talmud, one should not necessarily rule out their Jewish identity. Jews in antiquity often had names that accorded with their local environment.[62] On my reading, the fact this family chose a Jewish ritual specialist who appeals to the Jewish God and his angels suggests their Jewish affiliation.

The clients in this case are particularly worried about aggressive magic from others in their vicinity, which apparently had quite a diverse population: the ritual practitioner lists Christian Arameans (cf. the Syriac incantation bowls), other Jews, Shiite Arabs,[63] Persians, Indians, Greeks, and Romans as potential sources of aggressive magic. The incantation reveals a religious worldview in which the Jewish God is supreme and only he can bring an end to others' "black-arts" by His command, which is executed through His angels, who themselves descend to earth to guard this household. This ritual practitioner believed angels were the servants of God, available to help people on earth. The ritual practitioner does not order the angels to do his bidding. He only describes a reality in which God and the angels

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also Psalms 41, 72; "amen, amen" in sequence without conjunction appear only in the *sotah* ritual, Numbers 5:22 (known for its "magical" overtones) and Nehemia 8:6, just after Ezra opens the Torah and blesses God before the congregation of Israel. *Selah* is a more mysterious term, difficult to translate, which is found often in the book of psalms (Psalm 3, 4, 9, 20, 24, etc).

61 See Richard Kalmin, "The Evil Eye in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity," *Judaea-Palaestina, Babylon and Rome: Jews in Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 111-38.

62 The biblical heroes Esther and Mordecai have indigenous Persian names based on Astarte and Marduk. See also Tal Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity: The Eastern Diaspora 330 BCE-650 CE* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

63 The inclusion of Shiite Arabs in this list suggests that this incantation dates to a slightly later period than the rest of the amulets we shall survey, which are dated to the sixth century C.E.

protect the household as well as open gates of sustenance for it. The angels are seen as responsible for ensuring safety from all harm as well daily sustenance.[64] The practitioner closes the incantation by declaring that he acts in the name of the angel Qavshiel (whose name contains the Hebrew verb for "conquering," fitting for conquering others' black-arts), and the tetragrammaton, the mysterious ineffable name of God. This incantation therefore reveals a hierarchy wherein clients turn to a ritual-expert, who appeals to the angels, who are subordinate to God. This incantation appeals to angels in their role as servants of God to ward off a potential threat from other people, who could be employing their own ritual experts.

By contrast, an incantation bowl from Borsippa avoids using the name of God and aims at commercial success. A man named Aban son of Daday commissioned the incantations and buried two duplicate bowls at the entrance to his shop (which was also, quite probably, his home). This incantation paints a scenario in which the angels help men with their businesses:[65]

> לכינפא. קל קלה שמעית בשמיא ויולילאתא בארעה קלה בכל קרו ליה דיפתיחון תרעי שמיה ות — ארעא ורוחי שמיה. ל []נפא. מזינין לביתיה ולחנותיה דאבאן בר (דדי) לפרנסא ולסיעא יתיה ו(אותר) יתיה בטל כל עינא בישתא מן ביתיה ומן חנותיה. ובשום קנאיאל א(נג)גיאל ברקיאל גבריאל חסדיאל (ח)יזאל וחנניאל ואתריאל בשום שבעה מלאכין אילין אי — ין י(גער)ון ויפתחון תרעי דכל בני אדם וחוה לתרעוהי דאבאן בר (דדי) אמן אמן סלה הללויה.[66]
>
> For the edge [designates location of the bowl].
> Hark! A voice heard in the heavens and howling in the earth. A voice in all (things). Call him that they may open the gates of the heavens and [the gates

64 Compare with the discussion of Genesis Rabbah 97:3 in the chapter on angels in rabbinic literature: "R. Yohanan said [providing] the sustenance of a person is harder than [bringing about his] redemption, as about redemption it is written "the angel who has redeemed me from all evil" (Gen 48:16), merely an angel, and about sustenance it is written, "the God who has been my shepherd..." (Gen 48:15).

65 Another incantation with a similar purpose was recently published. See Dan Levene and Siam Bhayro, "'Bring to the Gates ... Upon a Good Smell and Upon Good Fragrances:' An Aramaic Incantation Bowl for Success in Business," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 51 (2005/2006): 242-46.

66 Segal, *CAMIB* 021A.

> of] the earth and the winds of the heavens. For the [ed]ge. Sustaining the house and the shop of Aban son of Daday to provide (for him) and to help him and to give him plenty. Cause every evil eye to desist from his house and from his shop. And in the name of Qanayel Anangiel Barqiel Gabriel Hasdiel Hizel and Hananiel (and) 'Atriel, in the name of these seven angels […],[67] they will drive out and will open the gates of all the children of Adam and Eve to the gates of Aban son of Daday. Amen Amen Selah Hallelujah.

This incantation begins with an instruction as to where to bury it: the edge of the shop. However, the oral dimension of the text is prominent. Here angels are portrayed as gatekeepers, essential to successful commerce on the earthly realm. The formula invokes a particular high angel to have other angels open the gates of the heavens for his client. He also hopes the angels will keep the evil eye from harming his business. In this incantation, as in the one before, the angels' role is not combative, but protective and beneficent. Unlike the previous incantation, there is no reference to God's sacred name, but only reliance on the angels for help. Perhaps the client thought that appealing to God for business matters was beneath his dignity and that appealing to the angels alone would suffice.

Another incantation text from Babylonia, found in a tomb, does position angels against demons.[68] This incantation formula has been found in over a dozen bowls in different locations.[69] Like the previous text, it avoids using the name of God in its efforts to chase away a litany of evil spirits ("idol spirits," "satans," "*Ishtarot*" [plural of Ishtar]). It is also concerned with overturning the curses of women in particular, who are believed to send demons upon their enemies.While there is much variation and personalization of this formula, its main feature is its focus on transformation of the present order. So it calls for

67 The scribe erroneously lists eight angels, probably because Anangiel is a misunderstanding of the Greek for angel, *αγγελος*.

68 Segal*, CAMIB* 7.

69 See Erica Hunter, "Manipulating Incantation Texts: Excursions in Refrain A," *Iraq* 64 (2002): 259-73.

"Overturning, overturning, overturned the earth, overturned the heavens, overturned the stars, overturned the planets, overturned the hour of all human kind, overturned the curse of the mother and of the daughter, of the daughter-in-law and of the mother-[in-law], [n]ear, that stood in the field and that stood in the town." To combat them, the client commissioned an incantation text and buried it in a tomb.[70] Whereas the incantation in the Baghdad museum envisioned that the "black-arts" were practiced by men or women, this text worries about the curses of women in particular. It retaliates with threats in the names of the angels Betael, Yequtiel, "and in the name of Yatba the angel who has eleven names [a list of *nomina barbara* follows] scorched in fire. Whoever transgresses against those names of the angels…" Though a lacuna obscures his threat, it is clear that the transgression is interpreted in the framework of dishonoring the names of the angels, not God.[71] The author of the text imagined that angels would attend to pleas for help in the cemetery.[72] In this incantation, the angels are pictured as avengers against demons. Again, however, they are not commanded directly, but only invoked to help the client.

Similarly, a bowl from Nippur imagines angels standing guard against demons. The incantation states "Salvation from Heaven for Gurio bar Tati and for Ahath bath Doda his wife, that there vanish from them all devils and that they be saved by the mercy of Heaven."[73] The incantation names several angels (Yophiel, Yehiel, Sasangiel, *YHWH*, Hermes-Metatron Yah) "who bring salvation to all the children of men. They will come and ascend with the

70 This is one of the few examples of an incantation bowl that was excavated in situ in a tomb, not in a domestic context.

71 See also Montgomery, *AIT*, bowl 15 and Segal, *CAMIB* 28.

72 Much like the angels of death imagined to linger around the cemetery in Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 51a.

73 Montgomery, *AIT,* bowl 25:1 (with Epstein's corrections):

[אס]ותא מן שמיה לגוריו בר טאטי ולאחת בת דודא איתתיה דיזה מינהון כ[ל] די[וא ויתס]ון ברחמי דישמיה

salvation of this house and property and dwelling of his, of his [family]…from this day even for the sphere of eternity."[74] This bowl reflects a worldview wherein the angels come and go, presumably between the heavens and the home of the client, and take the time to rid the home of demons, which do not belong to the proper hierarchy of human and divine relations.

Overall, then, we see that angels are named for a variety of issues—they provide protection from others' curses, they provide sustenance and enable commercial success, and they guard people from demons. They are seen as present in homes and cemeteries, where they are amendable to helping Jews who request their assistance through incantations. They are also seen as in charge of gates in the heavenly realm, which they can open to bring success to people in the earthly realm. The ritual experts invoked the angels by name, sometimes stressing their subordination to God and sometimes invoking the angels alone. Notably, they do not adjure or command the angels. Actions are accomplished in the name of the angels or by calling on them for their help, but verbs of command are absent. Only demons are adjured and commanded to depart. The ritual practitioners envision angels as mediators between God and themselves.

Are the Angels enough? Angels and Other mediating figures

To understand the role of angels in Jewish magic and the attitude towards them, it is important to observe the other intermediary figures that are invoked in the incantations. Another figure that comes up often in incantations along with the angels is R. Joshua b. Perahia. Although he has no such associations in Rabbinic literature, this first-century CE

74 Montgomery, *AIT*, bowl 25:5

אילה אינון מלאכיה דיממטין לאסותא [לכל] בני אינשא, אינון יתון ויסקון באסותא דהדין בית[ה] וקינינה ודאיתתיה ודיב[נה] ודבנתה ודכל אינשי דביתיה...מן יומא דין ולגליל עלם אמן אמן סלה הללויה.

rabbi seems to have gained a reputation in the battle against demons.[75] Jewish and Syriac amulets invoke his so-called "writ of divorce" to expel demons from people and homes.

Scholars have struggled to explain how the idea of the divorcing demons fit in ancient people's worldview.[76] Did they really believe they were married to demons and had to divorce them to exorcise them?[77] Or was the deed of divorce an act of sympathetic magic? In our study of Rabbinic literature, we encountered the tradition that demons eat, propagate, and die like human beings.[78] However, the worldview revealed by the incantation bowls does not accord with this principle. Based on the threats against demons found in incantation texts, demons could not be killed: at best one could expel them, contain them, or seal one's house against them.[79] The magical bowls tend to choose one or a combination of these methods: using the language of divorce, the incantation expels the demons from the home; using the language of conquest and covering, the bowls claim to contain the demons, perhaps within

75 The first-century BCE R. Joshua ben Perahia is cited in a few places in rabbinic literature. Once in tractate Avot in the Mishnah, where he is attributed the saying: "Provide thyself with a teacher and get thee a fellow[-disciple]; and when thou judgest any man incline the balance in his favor" (trans. Danby, Avot 1:6). Secondly, he features in a strange rabbinic story about Jesus, where he is assigned blame for Jesus' apostasy (bSotah 47a). See Peter Schäfer's discussion of this figure in *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 34-40. While scholars have studied this tradition for evidence about rabbinic views of Jesus, it seems to me that it is R. Joshua ben Perahia who the rabbis are interested in defaming here. Rather than explaining Jesus' apostasy, I think the point of this tradition is to taint a rabbi invoked by some Jews against demons. It is hard to muster evidence for this argument, but I can only speculate that the rabbis did not approve of people invoking this rabbi, rather than God directly, in the fight against demons. Jesus himself, of course, was associated with magical or miraculous practice (depending on one's perspective). For a more detailed investigation, see M. J. Geller, *Joshua b. Perahia and Jesus of Nazareth: Two Rabbinic Magicians* (Ph.D. Dissertation Brandeis, 1974).

76 Dan Levene reviews the literature on this topic in *Corpus of Magic Bowls: Incantation Texts in Jewish Aramaic from Late Antiquity* (New York: Kegan Paul, 2003), 18-21. Montgomery and Yamauchi detect Hosea 2:3-5 and Ezekiel 16:35 ff behind this ritual (Yamuachi, "Aramaic Magic Bowls," 520). See also Shaul Shaked, "The Poetics of Spells Language and Structure in Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity 1: Divorce Formula and Its Ramifications," *Mesopotamian Magic: Textual, Historical, and Interpretive Perspectives* (Groningen: Styx, 1999).

77 So Thomas Ellis, an early archaeologist believed. See his "Jewish Relics," *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (Ed. Layard, A.H. . London: John Murray, 1853).

78 Bavli Ḥaggigah 16b, discussed in chapter on angels in rabbinic literature.

79 My thanks to Gideon Bohak for pointing out this difference in the worldview of the bowls versus that of rabbinic literature in private communication.

the bowl itself.[80] Finally, the bowls, placed in thresholds and in corners of homes may ward off evil like other apotropaic objects in antiquity. Although R. Joshua b. Perahia is not cited every time a divorce is used in an incantation,[81] he appears often in Jewish and even in Syriac bowls.

Incantation text 9 from Nippur, which attempts an exorcism of a haunted home, is a good representative example of an incantation that calls on this rabbi (lines 1-6 of 10):[82]

> פורא רמינא ו[שקי]לנא ועובדא עבידנא והוא הוה במית[ביה] דרבי יהושע בר פרחיא כתבנא להין גיטי לכל ליליתא דמיתחזין להון בהדין דבבנוש בר קיומ[תא] ודסרדוסת בת שירין אינתתיה בחילמא דליליה ובשינתא דיממא דגיטא דפי[טורין] ודשבוקין בשום אות מתוך אות ואותיות מתוך אותיות ושום מתוך השימות ונקב מתוך [הנקבים] דיבהון איתכנעו שמיא וארעה טוריא איתעקרו ורמתא בהון איתמסראה[83]
>
> This lot I cast and take and this ritual I practice, and it was as in [the dwelling of] R. Joshua bar Perahia.[84] I write for them divorces, for all the Liliths who appear to them, in this [house of] Babanos bar Kayomta and of Saradust bath Sirin his wife, in dream by and night and in slumber by day; namely a writ of separation and divorce; in virtue of letter from letter, and letters from letters, and of words from words, and of gaps from gaps ; whereby the heavens and earth are brought low and the mountains are uprooted, and by them the heights are down cast.[85]

The exterior of the bowl adds: "In thy name have I wrought, *YHWH*, God, Sebaoth, Gabriel, and Michael and Raphael."[86] For this client and practitioner, the precedent of Joshua b. Perahia and his powerful method of divorce is key. Still the angels are necessary as witnesses to execute this divorce. We may add R. Joshua b. Perahia to the hierarchy of intermediate

80 E.g. *AIT*, bowl 4 from Nippur, mentioned above specifying the four corners of the house; it is described more fully below.

81 Montgomery, *AIT*, bowl 11 (has three parallels, one in Mandaic); Segal, *CAMIB,* 12.

82 Montgomery, *AIT*, bowl 9.

83 Montgomery's transcription of *AIT*, bowl 9 with Epstein's corrections.

84 Cf. the incantation text's similarity to Levene M50 (p. 32), which states:

פורא רמינא ושקילנא ועבדא והוא הוה במותב רבי יהושוע בר פרחיא....

85 Montgomery's translation with my corrections.

86 Montgomery's translation.

אני לישמך עשיתי יהוה אלהים צבאות גבריאל ומיכאל ורפאל

figures stretching from the client, the practitioner, through the angels to God.

Similarly, incantation bowl 8 from Nippur also appeals to Joshua b. Perahia and the angels for efficacy. Because the incantation is quite long, I will only summarize its many strategies.[87] Following the customary opening formula requesting help from God, it calls on the authority of R. Joshua b. Perahia, paints a scenario of the demons being expelled from the home the way divorced wives are, adjures the demons to leave, and declares that this divorce document has come down from heaven, even naming the parents of the demons, Palhas and Pelahdad. Moreover, the specialist threatens the demons with signet rings—another distinctive mark of status and authority in antiquity—one of God and one of the R. Joshua b. Perahia. Next, the specialist adjures the demons to leave by the authority of the God of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The formula then reiterates that the incantation has come down from heaven, through the angels. The incantation closes with repeated adjurations against the demons interspersed with mention of the angels, and the customary "amen, amen, selah." In the fight against demons, this practitioner apparently wanted to use all the methods at his disposal: the legal language of divorce, specifically the ban sent by R. Joshua b. Perahia, invocation of the angels, the signet rings of God and R. Joshua b. Perahia,

87 Montgomery, *AIT*, bowl 8 (with Epstein's corrections; scribal errors remains in text, N.B. פ for ב and אד for יד):

(1-7a)בישמיה דמרי אסואתא. מזמן הדין כסא לחתמתא דביתיה דהדין גיוגאי בר מאמי דתיזח מינה ליליתא בישתא בישמיה דפזר יהוה אל ליליתא לילי דיכרא ולייליתא ניקבתא ושלניתא וחטיפתא תליתיכין ארבעתיכין וחמי[שתיכין ערטיל] שליחיתין ולא לבישיתין וסתיר סעריכין ורמי אחור גביכין שמיע עליכין דאבוכין פלחס שמיה ואימיכין פלחדד שמה שמעי וצותי ופוקי מין ביתיה ומין דירתיה דהדין גיוגאי בר מאמאי ומין דשנוי איתתיה בת מארת ותוב לא תיתחזין להון לא בביתיה ולא בדירתיהון ולא בבית מישכבי[הון] מיטול דשמיע עליכין דאבוכין פלחס שמיה ואימיכין פלחדד שמה מיטול דשמיע עליכין דשלח עליכין שמתא רבי יהושע בר פרחיא. אומיתי עליכין בריקא דאבוכין וביקרא דאימיכון בשום פלחס. גיטא נחית לנא מין שמיא ואישתבח כתיב ביה לשימועיכין ולחירודיכין בישמיה דפלסא פליסא דהוא מתיב לכי גיטכי ופיטורכי גיטיכין ופטוריכין.

(10b-12a) ותוב לא תיתחזין להון לא בחילמא ד[לילי]ה ולא בשחרתא דיממא מיטול דחתימ יתי בעיזקתיה דאל שדי ובעיזיקתא דיהושע בר פרחיא ובשבעה דקדמוהי אנ[תי לי]ליתא ליל[י דיכר]א ולייליתא ניקבתא ושלגיתא וחטפיתא משבענא לכין פאביר אברהם בצור יצחק בשדי יעקב...

13a-14a) גיטכי וספר תירוככי ואיגרת שיבוקכי.. משלח באד מלאכין קדישין... נורא בגלגלי רכובו אופנים עומדים החיות מישתחות באש כיסאו ובמים דיגלי אהיה אשר אהיה שמו...

and the authority of the patriarchs, whose merits were believed to protect their Jewish descendants.

Incantations texts 8 and 9 from Nippur, where the angels and the folk-hero-rabbi are foregrounded, teach us that the angels can coexist on a spectrum of intermediary figures between the human clients and God. Neither intermediary figure alone is sufficient and one does not necessarily exclude or compete with the other. The incantation also invokes the patriarchs merit for added efficacy. For this practitioner or client in particular, several types of invisible intermediaries closed the gap between humans and the God.

No Angels Necessary? Practitioners as intermediary figures in incantation bowls

Another approach that can teach us about Jewish attitudes to angels is examining the commonalities of the incantations that *avoid* invoking the angels. Noting what powers or sources of authority they depend on instead can help us understand when and how angels and other intermediary figures stood in for other figures. I have observed that where angels are not invoked, the "I" of the practitioner and his powerful toolkit of ritual utterances come to the foreground. The following four bowls from Nippur highlight the power of practitioners in increasing degree of intensity.

Perhaps the most modest incantation is bowl 1 from Nippur, written for couple wishing to expel demons from their haunted home:

(1-9) הדין קמיעה דאפרה בר ש[ברדוך] דתיהוי ביה אסותא לה[דין א]פרה בר שברדוך ועים ולהדא בה[מנדוך] בת סמא דתיהי להון אסותא להדא א[פרה] בר שברדוך ולהדא בהמנדוך בת סמא אמין א[מ]ין סלה.
הדין קמיעה דליליתא דכתבית להון ולהדין אפרה בר שברדוך ולהדא בהמנודך בת סמא.

אשבעית עליכין כל מיני ליליתא בש[ום] זרעיתכין דילדין שידי ולילית לבני נירא[88] סטין
וימרדין ועברין [על] גזירתא דמריהון וימן זיקא פרח פרחין וימחבלין...
(14) בטום שעש גש גשך כתבית עליכי ליליתא בישתא וכלשום דאיתליכי אנחנא כתבנא ושמיה
יסיך אפרה אל עולם ועד.[89]

> This is the amulet of Ephra bar Saborduch, wherein shall be salvation for this Ephra b. S. and also for this Bahmanduch bath Sama, that there be for them salvation, namely for this Ephra b. S. and for this Bahmanduch b. S. Amen Amen Selah.
> This amulet of Liliths which is written for them for this Ephra b. S. and for this Bahmanduch b. S.
> I adjure you all species of Liliths in the name of your descendants, who are begotten by Demons and Liliths, who tempt the righteous, who rebel and transgress against the prescription of their Lord, fly with the wind, who destroy.... [skipping 4 lines of description of evil doing of demons]
> With the formula TWM SS GS GSK, have I written against thee, evil Lilith, whatsoever name be thine. We have written. And his name shall save thee, Ephra, forever and ever.[90]

This amulet uses no known angelic names and refers to God only indirectly, warning a long list of demons who transgress against God's laws that they will be punished. The first person "I adjure," "I have written," are the only signs of the intermediary function of the practitioner himself. He is the one that threatens the Liliths and uses a few magical words against this species of demon, whose exact name is unknown.

In the next incantation the voice of the practitioner comes through more assertively. This incantation aims to expel an evil demon from a home and seal the home from demonic invasion forever. The incantation bowl opens with the formula "In thy name, O Lord of Salvation, the great Savior of love." Here, however, the practitioner, after naming the demonic enemy takes on the role of the intermediary, adjuring the demon directly himself:

אומואי מומינא לך ואשבועי משבענא עלך דלא תיקטול ית הדין ארדוי בר הורמיזדוך מילות
אחת איתתיה דלא תיקטול ית אחת בת פרכוי מילות ארדוי בעלה ולא תיקטול ית בניהון וית

88 Epstein notes that *bnei nira* means the righteous, those "who bear the yoke of the Torah" (p. 330).

89 Montgomery, *AIT*, bowl 1, with Epstein's corrections.

90 Montgomery's translation with my corrections based on Epstein's comments.

בנתהון בין דאית לֿהון ובין דהון לֿהון מין יומא דנן ולעולם לא בליליא ולא ביממא בישמיה
דזעזעזע הסר הסר פעספעספע תמר תמר נקט זהזהזה הסר פעם חמר קק אסתו יופת יופתיה
מין אישתא יקידתא סקסן סקסין סקיון שמו קץ שמו.....הדין הוא שמא רבא דמלאך מותא
דח[י]ל מיניה וכד שמע יתיה דחיל ועריק ומיתבלע מין קדמוהי ומין קדאמיה דהדין ארדוי בר
הורמיזדוך ידחול ויעיר[יק].....מין אחת איתתיה בת פרכוי ומן כל בניהון ומין כל בנתהון דאית
לֿהון ודהון לֿהון.[91]

> By an oath I exorcize you and by adjuration I adjure you that you do not kill off this Ardoi b. H. from Ahath his wife, and that you do not kill of Ahath bath Parkoi from Ardoi her husband, and that thou do not kill off their sons and their daugthers, whether those they have or those they shall have, from this day and forever, neither by night nor by day. In the name of Z‘Z‘Z, HSR, HSR, HSR, P‘SP‘SP‘, TMR, KK, ‘STW, YWPT, YWPTYH, from the burning fire, SKSN SKSYN SKYWN; SK, his name KS his name. This is the great name before which the angel of death is afraid, and when he hears it, he is frightened and hunted and he is swallowed up before it, and before this Ardoi b. H. shall he fear and flee…and from Ahath his wife, bath P. and from all their sons and from all their daughters, whether those they have or those they shall have.[92]

The practitioner adjures the demons directly, perhaps invokes some obscure angelic names, and invokes the great name (presumably God's) before closing with the quotation of Zechariah 3:2. This biblical verse the most common biblical verse in incantation bowls; it states “And the Lord said to Satan: the Lord rebuke thee, Satan; the Lord rebuke thee, who chooses Jerusalem. Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?”[93] Apparently using the power of the ineffable name, which scares even the relentless angel of death, the practitioner sees himself as having the power to rid people and homes of demons. Although he invokes the names of some angels, showing his familiarity with the heavenly realm, he does not command the angels to intervene directly.

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91 Montgomery, *AIT*, bowl 3:3b-8a (out of 12 lines); Montgomery's transcription with Epstein's corrections, especially notable in first line quoted here.

92 Montgomery's translation with my corrections based on Epstein.

93 See Joseph Angel, “The Use of the Hebrew Bible in Early Jewish Magic,” *Religion Compass* 3.5 (2009): 785-98. Interestingly, the rabbis are aware that this verse is powerful. See the use of this verse to ward off the angel of death in Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 51b, mentioned briefly in the chapter on angels in rabbinic literature.

Two practitioners decided to cast protective spells together in bowls 2 and 4 from Nippur. Pabak and Abuna each identify themselves and cast a powerful spell against spirits that would seek to hurt them. Abuna's incantation states:

> מיטלי דלמיכל מלאכין קדישין וכל ורוחי בישתא ולישן חמרין זידני זידניתא אהשתא כבישיתון אסיריתון אסירין אסיריתון וחתימיתון בחדא מן ארבע זוית ביתיה מיחטא לא תיחטון ביה בפאבק בר כופיתאי ולא נסכלון ביה בכל אינשי ביתיה ולא בליליא ולא ביממא מיטול דאסרנא לבון באיסרא בישא [ובחתמא] מרירא תוב אסרנא לכון באיסורא דאסירי ביה אהניך אחוי בישי תוב אסרנא לכון באיסורא בישא ומרירא תוב אסרנא [לכון באי]סורא דאתסרו ביה שבעה ככבין ותרין עשר מלוי[ש]שין מלויאשין עד יומא רבא דדינא ועד שעתא רבתי דפרקנא דראישיכון לא תי … לא תיחטון בהון באבונא בר גריבתא ואסכלי לא נסכלון בהון בכל אינשי ביתיה דפאבק בר כופיתאי לא בליליא ולא ביממא מיטול דחתומ[י מחת]ם ביתיה וזרוזי מזרז ושורא רבה דנחשא אהדרית ליה אנה דבעית נקטית ודשאילית נסבת אתון בתריה דאבונא בר גריבתא ובתריה דפאבק בר כופיתאי[94]

> Covers to hold in sacred Angels and all evil Spirits and the tongue of impious Amulet-Spirits. Now you are conquered, you are bound; bound, you are bound and sealed in each one of the four corners of his house. You shall not sin against Pabak bar Kufithai, nor shall any do folly against him, against all the people of his house, either by night nor by day; because I have bound you with an evil binding and a bitter [seal]. Again, I have bound you with the binding which Enoch was bound by his wicked brothers. Again I bind you with an evil binding and bitter seal. Again, I bind you with the seal with which were bound the Seven Stars and Twelve Signs of the Zodiac unto the great day of judgment, and to the great hour of the redemption of your heads; you shall not…, nor sin against them, against Abuna bar Geribta, and none shall at all do folly against them, namely the people of the household of Pabak b. K, neither by night nor by day, because well sealed is his house and well-armed, and with a great wall of bronze have I surrounded it. I, what I desire I grasp, and what I ask, I take. You are in the place of Abuna b. G. and in the place of Pabak. b. K.[95]

To bind the demons, the incantation claims to do three things: 1) the bowl itself covers keeps the angels present, apparently to subjugate the demons, who are being bound and sealed by the practitioner; 2) Abuna claims to use a powerful binding used by the legendary Enoch to maintain the (personified) stars and planets in their place;[96] 3) the practitioner claims to have

94 The whole text of *AIT*, Bowl 4, transcribed by Montgomery with Epstein's corrections.

95 Translated by Montgomery with my corrections based on Epstein's commentary.

96 According to Montgomery, the practitioner drew on a legend of Enoch preserved only in Arabic sources

(figuratively?) surrounded the home with a wall of bronze, a material known to repel the demonic.[97] Abuna addresses the demons in the second person and appears so confident in his own power that he need not petition God, or any other being for assistance. The angels are only mentioned in passing at the beginning of the incantation. The practitioner boldly states: "I, what I desire I grasp, and what I ask, I take."

His counterpart Pabak, however, depicts the climax of such confidence using a more popular incantation formula:[98]

> תוב אזלנא אנה פאבק בר כופיתאי בחילי דנפשי בקומתי גציצא דפרזלא קרקפתי דפרזלא קומת דנורא דכיא ולבישנא לבושא דארמסא דביא וממללא וחילינא במן דברא שמיה וארעה. אזלית ופגעית בהון בסני בישי ובעילדבבי מרירי אמרת להון דאת מידעם חטיתון מיה באבונא בר גריבתא ואיבא בר זויתאי אישפנא לכון באישפא דיומא ואישפא דליויתן תנינא דאים מידעם חתחטתו ביה באבונה בר גריבתא ובאיתתיה ובבניה כי קשתא גיבנא לכון וכי יתרא פשיטנא לכון.[99]
>
> Again I come, I, Pabak bar Kufithai, in the power of my own self, on my person polished armor of iron on my body, my head of iron, my figure of pure fire. I am clad with the garment of Hermes, *Dabya* and the Word, and my power is in him who created heaven and earth. I have come and I have smitten the evil Fiends and the malignant Adversaries. I have said to them: if at all you sin against Abuna bar Geribta and against Ibba bar Zawithai, I will lay a spell against you, the spell of the Sea and the spell of the monster Leviathan. If at all you sin against Abuna b. G., and against his wife and his sons, like a bow I will bend you and like bowstring I will stretch you.

This formula declares that the practitioner not only does not need angels, but that the practitioner has himself become an angel, now possessing a figure of pure fire, the garments of the messenger Hermes, and spells powerful enough to subdue the sea and the monster

(Montgomery, *AIT*, 134-5).

97 Cf. Numbers 21:9 on Moses and the bronze snake. See also Haberl, "Production and Reception," 133 on the Mandaic ritual practice of circumscribing a home in a circle of flour to keep out demons.

98 Montgomery, *AIT*, Bowl 2 was also republished by Charles Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls* (Missoula, Mont. : Scholars Press, 1975), also as #2). This incantaiton has a duplicated published in Montgomery, *AIT*, Bowl 27 where a man uses this formula to protect himself and his wife. See this formula also in Gordon text 11, "Aramaic Incantation Bowls, *Orientalia* NS 10 (1941): 273.

99 Montgomery, *AIT*, Bowl 2:1-5a, with Epstein's corrections.

Leviathan. In this capacity he can threaten the demons. Like the angels, he affirms that his strength is from God, "him who created heaven and earth." His self-representation gives us a sense of how practitioners believed they could interact with the invisible realm.

Polytheistic incantation text from the Greek Magical Papyri often have the practitioner stating he is a divinity. To list a few examples: PGM I. 247-62 states "I am Anubis…I am Osiris"; PGM III 165-86 states "I am Adam the forefather"; PGM IV. 52-85 states "I am Sabertoush, the great god who is in heaven"; PGM IV. 1075 states "I am Horus.."; PGM IV. 2999 states "I am Hermes"; "I am Moses your prophet"[100] or see the Coptic invocation: "I am Mary, I am Mariham, I am the mother of the life of the whole world…"[101] One of distinguishing features of Jewish incantation texts is that Jewish practitioners only aspire to the status of angels and even then they make sure to affirm God's singular supremacy. This practitioner already sees himself as accomplished and able to deal with his foes. Both Pabak and Abuna have their own toolkit of spells and power and appeal to no other intermediaries. This shows us another option available in the religious landscape of late antiquity: one could appeal to a ritual practitioner alone rather than to God, his angels, or R. Joshua b. Perahia, or the patriarchs.

So far, we have discussed only male ritual practitioners, but a few incantation also express themselves in a feminine voice and declare they were composed by women. Since in the Jewish literary tradition, angels are only depicted as male,[102] what was a Jewish female

100 All the aforementioned quotations from PGM can be found in Hans Dieter Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

101 Marvin Meyer published this translation in "The Prayer of Mary in the Magical Book of Mary and the Angels," in *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univeresity Press, 2003), 59.

102 This is never explicitly stated, but the six-winged seraphim in Isaiah covered their "legs" (6:1), the book of Jubilees states that the angels were created circumcised (15:27), and Paul is worried about women's uncovered hair seducing angels (1 Corinthians 11:10).

ritual practitioner to do when she wants to assert her resemblance to the divine to dispel her enemies? One incantation from Babylonia—ironically, one of the few incantations in Talmudic Aramaic— gives us the answer.[103] This incantation describes a female practitioner, who relies on her own powers and God's approval to fight other ritual practitioners. Part of the incantation formula she employs, especially its metaphors, relies on a Mandean *Vorlage*. The rest of the incantation details how the "evil sorcerers" came to her and tried to command her to cast spells for them and how she refused them and drove them away with a spell of her own. The threat of the sorcerers seems to be in the past so it seems this incantation bowl is intended to reaffirm her power and the safety of her home. Instead of declaring that she has a body of fire or comparing herself to an angel, this ritual practitioner compares herself to local Babylonian goddesses, namely Bablita and Borsipita.

אבבי יתבנא אנה גושנזדוכת בת אחת לבבליתא דמינא
באסופי יתבנא אנה גושנזדוכת בת אחת לבורספיתא דמינא
בארעה פ(ת)תיתא אנה דאניש לא כיפלי
הי שמי דרמא אנה דאנשי לא מטי לי

I, Gusnazdukht daughter of Ahat, am sitting at my gate resembling Bablita.
I, Gusnazdukht daughter of Ahat, am sitting in my portico resembling Borsipita.
I am the wide earth so that no one (can) bend me
I am the high heaven so that no one (can) reach me

She closes the incantation with an appeal to God the Lord of Hosts, spelled out and in *atbash*, the ancient Hebrew cipher. Scholars may doubt whether women were practitioners and whether this was written by a Jewish woman, but this incantation operates entirely in the logic of Jewish ritual practices. Like other Jewish ritual practitioners, she stops short of stating she *is* the divinity. Because she is female and cannot identify with the angels, she

103 Christa Muller-Kessler and Theodore Kwasman, "A Unique Talmudic Aramaic Incantation Bowl," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120.2 (2000): 159-165.

claims resemblances to goddesses, invokes the names of goddesses that she knows from her environs and like other practitioners, she closes her incantation with an appeal to God's approval. This is a very rare, perhaps unique example shedding light on how an ancient Jewish woman might have conceived herself and expressed herself within the ritual and religious traditions available to her.

Conclusion: Babylonian Amulets and Angels

If clients chose to take their concerns (whether with human or demonic opponents) to ritual practitioners, they still had a variety of ways to interact with the invisible forces around them. Each bowl represents a negotiation between clients and a specialist and the mediating figures known from biblical traditions. Clients could go to a confident specialist who would write them a bowl promising them by his own power that their problems would be resolved. More commonly, they would go to a ritual expert for an incantation requesting the service of the angels and God. Some were offered or asked for the assistance of R. Joshua b. Perahia as well. It was rare, but possible, for incantations to mention no intermediary figures and to have biblical quotes alone and a pious petition to God instead.[104]

From the Babylonian incantation bowls, we learn that angels were of a spectrum of authority figures that ancient Jews could appeal to. They were imagined as present in people's homes, but also as opening gates of success for them in the heavens, or able to deliver heavenly divorce documents to demons. While the common angelic names Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael are found in the incantations, we find many more unfamiliar and even

104 Montgomery, *AIT*, 26. See a recently published bowl that relies entirely on quotations from the Mishnah in Shaked, "Form and Purpose in Aramaic Spells: Some Jewish Themes," *Officina Magica: Essays on the Practice of Magic in Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). This bowl text also happens to be among earliest witnesses to the Mishnah.

unpronounceable names. Notably, though the names of angels are often invoked and they are portrayed as helpful guardians, they are never directly commanded or adjured by these ritual practitioners. Actions are performed in the name of the angels and/or God, but demons alone are adjured directly. We will see this same principle adhered to in the Palestinian amulets as well. These ritual practitioners saw the angels as the servants of God alone, not their own.

Babylonian incantation bowls gives us but glimpses of ancient interactions between people and the way the conceptualized the invisible realm around them. Attempting to understand the Jewish individuals behind the bowls brings to mind Clifford Geertz' description of ethnography:

> Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading of") a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherences, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior.[105]

Attempting to study individuals through actual faded, foreign, incoherent texts dotted with emendations, the problems are only compounded.

I should make one disclaimer: the same clients we met above detailing their problems and their hoped-for solutions behaved differently under certain circumstances. The same client might commission a bowl with elaborate description of angels in the throne room and another bowl that avoids all reference to angels (e.g. AIT Bowl 12 and 16). One example from Nippur shows a woman with a very different incantation bowl than the one which she commissions alongside her husband. With her husband she commissions a bowl that is directed simply to God, but alone she chooses to address a few specific archangels for

105 Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 10.

assistance.[106] Did she feel a special connection to the angels that she felt uncomfortable expressing beside her husband? At a fifteen-hundred years remove, we might never know the exact reasons for this variation. What we can do is realize that people behave in complex and inconsistent ways and that their appeal to angels was a choice of one kind of intermediate figure among many. It is possible that this choice had less to do with the type of problem they were struggling with than with their confidence in the authoritative figures around them.

Angels in the amulets of the ancient Levant (Palestine and Jordan)

The objects of Palestine bring us into the orbit of Greco-Roman culture as it continued to develop under the auspices of the Christian emperors. Our main source of evidence for Jewish ritual practices in Palestine are amulets, composed of a text incised on a small sheet of metal or written on papyrus, rolled up and placed in a case, which was then attached to a string and worn around the neck. Amuletic texts are much shorter than the texts on ceramic bowls and often more fragmentary and challenging to decipher. Thus, it proves harder to unravel the process of composition that we witnessed in the ceramic bowls. Nonetheless, a few patterns emerge that indicate some of their operating principles and reveal important clues about ancient Jewish beliefs in angels.

Like the amulets from Babylonia, the amulets of Palestine do allow some emic explanation of their purpose. Two sixth-century CE amulets excavated in Horvat Kanaf (Golan) express their purpose most directly:

> קמיע טב מאסיה יאיתה בר[תה] דמרין מן אשתה ועריתה ועינה בישתה אברסכס יה יה יהו
> [שש שורות]
> בשם אהיה אשר אהיה. אמן אמן סלה. קמיע טב מגעור אשתה ועריתה ודקיקתה מן יאיתה ברתה
> דמרין בשם כריאל כסיאל זריאל צצצצצצצ בשם קקקקקקק בשם מיכאל ... עזריאל

106 Compare Bahmanduch bat Sama in Montgomery, *AIT* Bowl 1 and 13.

> An amulet to heal Ya'ita the daughter of Marian from the fever and the shiver and the evil eye. Abraxas Ya Ya Yahu
> [skipping six lines of names]
> In the name of I-am-who-I-am. Amen Amen Selah. An amulet proper to exorcise the fever and the shiver and the hectic (fever) from Ya'itha the daughter of Marian. In the name of Kariel, Kasiel, Zariel sssssss; in the name of qqqqqqq; in the name of Michael…'Ezriel[107]

The amulet declares that its purpose is to heal and to exorcise fever as well as to protect from the evil eye. The amulet relies on the power of divine names, both of God's and the angels' to accomplish its task. The figure of the specialist himself does not intrude explicitly into the formula. The divine names themselves are considered efficacious. Notably, the amulet invokes Abraxas, a figure very popular in ancient ritual practices of Jews, Christians, and polytheists. Abraxas in Greek is spelled with seven letters whose numerical values adds up to 365, a number sacred to Jews as well as to others in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean.[108] Scholars have long noted the cross-cultural vocabulary of ancient ritual practices so Abraxas' appearance here is not surprising. Some Jews, it seems, knew how to make demons out of old Babylonian deities and angels out of Greco-Roman divinities.[109]

Another amulet from Horvat Kanaf, which was composed for a client suffering from fever explains that "in every place where this amulet will be seen, you [the evil spirit] should not detain Eleazar the son of Esther. And if you detain him, you will be cast immediately into

107 Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, amulet 2, p.45.

108 Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 247ff.

109 Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Aramaic Magic Bowls" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85 (1965): 511-523. Yamauchi notes that in some amulets we see the degradation of Babylonian deities to demonic forces. Biblical texts already consider the celestial bodies as servants of God and liturgical texts (as discussed in Yannai) follow suit. See also William Hobury's discussion of how some streams of Jews, particulary in the late Second Temple period, viewed the gods of other peoples as subordinate to *YHWH*: "*Jewish and Christian Monotheism in the Herodian Age*," *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism* (North. New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 16-44.

a burning fiery furnace" (drawing on language from Daniel 3:6).[110] What is important about this amulet is that it highlights a different mode of operation—not calling for a divine confrontation of demons and angels, but only as an apotropaic object, a signal to evil spirits that this person is to be excluded from their demonic influence, much like the mark of Cain was intended to preserve him from hostile attack (Genesis 4:15). Threats of repercussion which draw on biblical language reinforce the power of the amulet.

One more amulet excavated in the apse of the synagogue of Nirim adds to our understanding of the culture of late antique Palestine.[111] The amulet from Nirim appeals to no angels or ritual names, but relies on the piety of its client and the promises of God in the Torah:

An Amulet proper for Esther	[ק](מ)יע טב לאסתר
daughter of Tatys,	[ב](ר)תה דטאטיס
to save her from	[ל](פ)לטא יתה מן
evil tormentors,	[מ]זקין [בי](ש)ין
from evil eye,	[מן] עין בישה
from spirit, from demon	[מן] רוח מן שיד
from shadow-spirit, from	[מ]ן טלני מן
[all] evil tomentors,	[כל] מזקין ביש[ין]
from evil eye, from	[מן] עין רעה מן
…from imp[ure] spirit	[ ] מן רוח טמ[אה]
…"If thou wilt diligently	[ ] אם שמו[ע]
hearken to the voice of the Lord	[ת]שמע בקול י[ייי]
thy God, and wilt do that	[א]להיך והישר
which is right in his sight,	[ב]ע[יני]ו תעשה
and wilt give ear	[והאזנת]ה
to his commandments,	[למ]צוותיו
and keep all his statutes,	[ו]שמרתה כל ח[וקיו]
I will put none of these	[כל] (ה)מחלה א(ש)[ר]
diseases upon thee, which	[שמתי במ]צרים
I have brought upon the Egyptians.	[לא אשים עליך]
For I am the Lord that healeth thee"	[כי אני ייי רפאך]

110 Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls,* amulet 3, p. 50, lines 13-18:
בכל אתר דיתחזה ית קמיעה דן לא תעכבין עלוי על אלעזר ברה דאסתיר ואן תעכבין עלוי בה בשעתה תתרמין לאתון נורא יקדתה

111 Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, amulet 13, p. 98ff; Geniza 8.

[Exodus 15:26].	...

This amulet for Esther seeks only to harness the promises already made to Israelites long ago. This verse conveys the idea that piety and observance guarantees freedom from plague. One might think such an amulet would have provoked no concern.

What's striking about this amulet, as other scholars have pointed out,[112] is that it precisely contradicts the dictum of the sages, which specifically prohibits using this biblical verse for healing. Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1 discusses the fate of Israelites who violate the fundamental principles of (what would become Rabbinic) Judaism: "And these are they that have no share in the world to come: he that says that there is no resurrection of the dead prescribed in the Law, and that the Law is not from Heaven, and an Epicurean. R. Akiva says: Also he that reads the heretical books, or that utters charms over a wound and says, 'I will put none of these diseases…'"[113] R. Akiva opposed the use of the biblical verse in this way and considered it tantamount to reading heretical books. Based on my reading of the amulets from Babylonia, I might speculate that uttering this verse might have likened the practitioner to God himself, which the rabbis were offended by. Alternatively, it may be that seeking a ritual-expert was considered the same as heeding a source of authority that competed with the rabbis. The rabbis too saw themselves as healers who accessed God through the proper channels of prayer.[114] In any case, this biblical verse had a long history of use in ritual activities and rabbinic prohibition could not discourage its use. [115] Indeed, it

112 Schäfer, "Magic and Religion in Ancient Judaism," 34-5.

113 Trans. Danby, p. 397.

114 Shlomo Naeh, "בוראני בשפתיים': פרק בפנומנולוגיה של התפילה על-פי משנת ברכות ד, ג; ה,ה." *Tarbiz* 63.2 (2003): 185-218.

115 See the discussion in Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 379.

continued to be part of the incantational tradition of healing.

Other amulets make it clear that the clients or specialists expect the angels to take up their cause fully. Amulet 26 (of unknown provenance) appeals only to angels to prevent evil interactions whether "with a male or female, with a man or a woman, with a gentile or with an Israelite" and with an evil spirit in any likeness.[116] Due to the shortness of amuletic texts, descriptions of the angels in amulets tend to be very short, but one amulet from Turkey describes the angels' presence in the throne-room:[117]

> שויו רחמין מן שמיה לשלונה בשם מיכאל רפאל עזאל עזריאל אריאל ס(רר)ו רבה אתון
> מלאכיה קדשיה דקימי[ן]קדם כרסיה דאלה רבה דיתכלון רוחה בישתה וטלניתה ושידה אן דכר
> ואן נקבה מן שלונה בר דמיטרין בשם...
> בשמ[ך] אלה דישראל לרקיעה מליה סלקה בסטר כרסיה דאלה רבה חסינה ודחילה מקדשה
> ומגדלה מ<פ>ארה ומרומה.
>
> Put mercy from heaven on *Slwnh*.
> In the name of Michael, Raphael, Azzael, Azriel, Ariel, the great dominion (?) you, the holy angels who stand in front of the throne of the Great God. May there be extinguished the evil spirit and the shadow-spirit, and the demon, whether male or female from Slwnh son of Demetrion.
> In the name of …
> In your name God of Israel, may the words rise up to heaven at the side of the throne of the great, powerful, awful, sacred, magnified and praised, and exalted God.

Here we see that the angels are named first and that invocation of God closes the text of the amulet. Both from the structure of the amuletic text and from its reference to words rising up to heaven, we see that the angels are expected to carry messages from the mortal realm to God's throneroom. The angels play a key role in conveying Slwnh's prayer to God and probably in executing God's command as well.

Even from the sample of amulets above, we can see that like their Babylonian

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116 Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae*, amulet 26, p. 88, lines 2-3.
עם זכר עם נקבה עם אי(ש) עם אשה עם גוי ים ישראל

117 Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, amulet 7, p. 68, quoting lines 1-8 and 13b-16).

counterparts, amulets in Palestine sometimes appeal to angels and sometimes appeal to God alone. More than the Babylonian bowls, however, the Palestinian amulets emphasize the power of the divine name of God. Almost all Babylonian incantation texts begin with the formula "In your name," sometimes followed by explicit naming of *YHWH* or the use of an epithet that describes him and his angelic helpers. The Palestinian amulets, on the other hand, seem to emphasize two particular configurations of naming God: the tetragrammaton as it was revealed to Israel's ancient heroes[118] and "I-am-that-I-am."

At least seven of the thirty-two amulets published by Naveh and Shaked invoke God by the name which he revealed himself to Moses—"I am that I am," a particularly cryptic saying that lent itself to incantational use (Exodus 3:14).[119] So a golden amulet written for a woman named Klara states:[120]

משבעת רוחה בשמה דאהיה אשר אהיה ובשם
מלאכוי קדישיה דתזוע ותגער ותרחק מן קלארא ברתה
דקיראנה ולא תהי לך עוד מכען רשו בה אסיר את ומרחק
מנה בשמה דאפרכאל אחיאל רפאל מפריאל אופפיאל
כפויאל עמיאל טוריאל ובשמה דמיכאל בסמאל נדבאל
חתימה מנך ועוד מן כל ביש בשמה דמימר קדיש עלמה דד ננן

Adjured are you, spirit, in the name of I-am-who-I-am and in the name of
His Holy Angels, that you may move away and be expelled and keep far from
Klara daughter of
Kyrana, and that you may have no longer from now on power over her. May
you [the spirit] be bound and kept away from her, in the name of

118 The tetragrammaton had a long history in Palestine as "the apotropaic mark par excellence" (Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 117). Gideon Bohak points to the example of the High Priest in the Jewish temple, who wore the tetragrammaton on a golden plate as part of his headdress (Letter of Aristeas 98; Wisdom of Solomon 18.24; Philo, Vita Mosis 2.114; Josephus, War of the Jews 5.235; Jewish Antiquities 3.178, 8.93, 11.331). Could amulets with the name of God be imitations of this accessory? For the tetragrammaton in amulets, see Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls,* amulet 17, lines 2-7 of 36 and ibid, *Magic Spells and Formulae*, amulet 27.

119 Amulets 2, 4, 6, 11, 12 in Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* and 18, 28 in ibid., *Magic Spells and Formulae*.

120 Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae*, amulet 18, p. 57-60, lines 1-6 of 12. Provenance unknown, but likely Levantine.

> Afarkha'el, Ai'el, Raphael, Mafri'el, Ofafi'el,
> Kefufya'el, 'Ami'el, Turi'el, and in the name of Michael, Besam'el, Nedav'el.
> May she [Klara be] sealed from you and also from all evil. In the name of the word of the Holy one of the World. dd*nnnnn*
> [six lines of magical names and characters follow].

The scene of the theophany where God reveals his name to Moses and his loyalty to the Israelites was likely a very evocative passage for ancient Jews. The "word of the Holy one" is a phrase often heard in Targum, where the translators piously state the word of God performs an action, rather than God himself. The ritual practitioner acts in the name of God and the angels, and he adjures the demon to depart from Klara. The adjuration of the demon is framed by the invocation of angels and God together.

Descriptions of angelic companionship or guardian angels appear in both Babylonian bowls and in Palestinian amulets (all of them, unfortunately, without provenance). As discussed in the chapter on angels in rabbinic literature, angelic companionship has deep and diffuse roots in the Mediterranean world. Amulets translated this belief into more concrete and specific terms: A silver amulet for Quzma son of Salminu states "On your right are very many, on your left is Uzziel, in front of you is Susiel, behind you is repose. Above these is the *Shekhina* of God."[121] Similarly, an incantation bowl published by Naveh and Shaked was written for Marutha daughter of Duda and provides her with an angelic escort: "On her right hand is Harbi'el, on her left hand is Michael, in front of her is Susi'el, and above her is the *Shekhina* of God and behind her is the word of Qaddish'el...".[122] Both of these incantations name four angels that surround the person and declare that the *Shekhina* dwells above

121 Amulet 1 from Naveh and Shaked, *AMB,* cf. amulet 14 and 25.

122 Published in Naveh and Shaked's *Magic Spells and Formulae*, 130 (Bowl 22 from the Einhorn Collection). David Sperling first pointed out the parallel of this formula to the *Shema al haMitah* now part of the Jewish liturgy. See Sperling, "A šu-íl-lá to Ištar," *Die Welt des Orients* 12 (1981): 9.

him/her. Whereas other incantations assure clients that angels are protecting their home, this text assures the clients that angels are their constant companions. For these clients, the idea that angels surrounded them as they go about their day was a reality.

The "invocation of angels on all sides" would enter the fixed Jewish liturgy much later. Although a version of it appears in Amram Gaon's ninth-century CE seder, it would enter the daily fixed liturgy only in the thirteenth century CE, where it would become part of the bedtime Shema.[123]

Conclusion: Palestinian Amulets and Angels

The amulets from ancient Palestine and its environs, though fewer in number and shorter than their Babylonian counterparts, also invoke angels for a variety of reasons. Angels are imagined as messengers and as protectors. Where Babylonian amulets have long lists of demons, Palestinian amulets do not, but rather target illness and angels assigned to the body. Like the Babylonian amulets, the Palestinian amulets were made for men and women, and imagined that angels could be the ongoing guardians of both males and females. Like the Babylonian ritual practitioners, Palestinian ritual experts who composed amulets acted in the name of the angels, but adjured demons only. Though we do not see other intermediate figures in Palestinian amulets, the sacred name of God assumed greater importance in this body of evidence alongside the angels.

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123 See Dan Levene, Dalia Marx, Siam Bhayro, "'Gabriel is on Their Right' Angelic Protection in Jewish Magic and Babylonian Lore," *Studia Mesopotamica: Jahrbuch für altorientalische Geschichte und Kultur* 1 (2014): 185-98. In the thirteenth century CE, this liturgical formula would enter *Mahzor Vitry* in the form "Michael is on my right, Gabriel is on my left, Uriel is before me, and Refael is behind me, and the presence of God is above my head, and Sanoy and Sansanoy and Sanmagly."

מימיני מיכאל משמאלי גבריאל מלפני אוריאל ומאחרי רפאל ושכינת אל על ראשי וסנויי וסנסנויי וסנמגלי.

Sefer Ha-Razim (the Book of Mysteries)

To close out our survey of ancient Jewish ritual practices, we will briefly discuss how it relates to and differs from the magical treatise *Sefer Ha-Razim*. Unlike the Palestinian and Babylonian amulets, which represent a product of negotiation between ordinary Jews, practitioners, and perceived divine powers, *Sefer Ha-Razim* is a composition by a learned specialist for specialist consumption (or by a specialist for other would-be specialists).[124] This treatise, purports to be a manual transmitted from the angel Raziel[125] to Noah and promises its user the power and knowledge of the angels. Mordechai Margalioth, who first produced a critical edition of this composition, argued it dated to the third or fourth century CE based on internal references to the Roman calendar, its sophisticated Hebrew, the similarities of its contents to Greco-Coptic ritual practices, its use of Greek technical terms and loan words, and the cultural motifs in the work.[126] More recently, Bill Rebiger and Peter Schäfer reevaluated the evidence, noting the heterogeneous character of the text, that its Greek loan words could easily date to the Byzantine or early medieval period, and that no other sources refer to it before the ninth century CE. Acknowledging that the text has a long tradition-history, they place its final redaction in the late Byzantine or Geonic period (seventh-eighth century CE) either in Egypt or Palestine.[127]

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124 *Sefer Ha-Razim* survives in two versions, one reflecting its Greco-mileu and another, which is a later abridgement. Peter Schäfer and Bill Rebiger published the many manuscripts and Genizah fragments of these versions synoptically in *Sefer Ha-Razim* (2 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2009). My transcription and translations is based on a comparison of the different manuscripts and fragments available for the earlier version. An English translation was produced in 1983 by Michael Morgan, see his *Sepher Ha-Razim: The Book of the Mysteries* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).

125 It is fitting that name the angel who transmits the books is Raziel, whose name contains the hebrew word *raz*, which means mystery.

126 Margalioth, *Sefer Ha-Razim: a book of magic from the Talmudic Period* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 1966 [Hebrew]).

127 Rebiger and Schäfer, *Sefer Ha-Razim*, vol. 2, p. 9.

Although we must be careful not to read one body of evidence through the lens of another, *Sefer haRazim* has the potential to shed light on the moment before the composition of the amulet and the performance of the incantation. The incantation bowl or amulet is the created product, just one aspect of the ritual practice. By its very nature, the bowl or amulet will not necessarily tell us about the libation or offering made with it or the timing required to execute it properly. Read carefully, *Sefer Ha-Razim* may supply pertinent details to the understanding of the full context of the incantations.

Two strata of texts are readily discernible within this treatise: a cosmological narrative framework and a collection of ritual practices. The narrative framework does not match the spells contained within it. Interestingly, angels are treated differently in the framework and in the spells. While the framework bears some resemblance to the language and worldview of the ritual specialists that we have encountered, the spells reflect a different worldview that positions the ritual expert as powerful, independent, and willing to adjure the angels. I will examine the conception of angels in the framework and in the spells in turn.

Angels in Sefer Ha-Razim

The opening lines of the book, written in lucid Hebrew is worth quoting at length and analyzing closely, one section at a time:

> זה ספר מספרי הרזים שנתן לנוח בן למך בן מתושלח בן חנוך בן ירד בן מהללאל בן קינן בן אנוש בן שת בן אדם, מפי רזיאל המלאך בשנת ביאתו לתבה לפני כניסתו.[128]

> This is a book from the books of the mysteries, which was given to Noah son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son

128 §2 Following M248 and G1. Rebiger and Schäfer prefer M738 which states that "This is the book of the mysteries, which was revealed to Nuriel according to Raziel in the 300th year of Noah, etc." (see *Sefer Ha-Razim*, vol. 2, p. 126).

> of Mehallalel, the son of Kenan, the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, by Raziel the angel in the year when he came into the ark before his entrance.[129]

The first angel encountered in *Sefer HaRazim* is Raziel, a revelatory angel with a long afterlife in medieval mystical writings.[130] According to the opening lines of the treatise, Raziel conveyed this book, just one of many books of mysteries, to Noah in the year before the latter entered the ark. The choice of Noah, the last antediluvian patriarch, as the original recipient of the book, might have to do with his popularity in late antiquity, both among Jews and Christians.[131]

On the other hand, it may be that the myth of Genesis 5:21 (Enoch and the angels) and 6:1-4 (fallen angels and women) lie in the background too. Ancient interpreters imagined that angels and humans freely mingled between the centuries of Enoch's walking with *elohim*[132] and Noah's entering of the ark. According to the Book of the Watchers, in those days, the angels were conveying a plethora of secrets to humankind. Though the Book of the Watchers features Enoch as the hero and role model, other Jewish traditions, including *Sefer HaRazim*, feature Noah. Though the era of angelic and human commingling ended in total destruction, the treatise promises that angelic and human communication can continue productively because Noah recorded everything that he learned from Raziel for future generations.

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129 Morgan, *Sepher Ha-Razim*, 17 with minor corrections.

130 Mentioned also in Targum Ecclesiastes 10:20, "each day the angel Raziel, standing on Mount Horeb, proclaims the secrets of men to all mankind" (Gustav Davidson, *Dictionary of Angels* [New York: Free Press, 1971]).

131 Michael E. Stone, Aryeh Amihay and Vered Hillel, eds. *Noah and His Book(s)* (Atlanta: SBL, 2010). See also Laura Lieber, "Portraits of Righteousness: Noah in Early Christian and Jewish Hymnography" *Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte* 61.4 (2009): 332-55. Naomi Koltun-Fromm, "Aphrahat and the Rabbis on Noah's Righteousness in Light of the Jewish and Christian Polemic" in *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation* (Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 57-71.

132 Gen 5:22; *elohim* understood as angels.

ויכתבהו באבן ספיר באר היטב וממנו למד מעשה פלאים ורזי וערכי בינה ומחשבות ענוה ועשתונות עצה לעמוד על חקר מעלות מרומי' ולשוטט בכל אשר בשבעה מעונות להיסתכל בכל המזלות ולהתבונן במנהג ולבקר חקרי לבנה ולידע מסלות עש כסיל וכימה (איוב ט ט)
ולהכיר מה שמות שוטרי כל רקיע ורקיע וממלכתן ובמה יצליחו לכל דבר ומה שמות משרתיהם ומה יתנסך להם ואי זו היא עונה תשמע להם לעשות כל חפץ כל הקרוב אליהם בטהרה.[133]

> And he [Noah] inscribed it upon a sapphire stone very distinctly. And he learned from it how to do wondrous deeds and mysteries and categories of understanding and thoughts of humility and concepts of counsel, how to master investigation of the strata of the heavens, and to roam[134] in all that is in the seven abodes, to observe all the astrological signs, to examine the course and to explain the observations of the moon and to know the paths of the Great Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades (Job 9:9), to declare the names of the overseers of each and every firmament and the realms of their authority, and by what means they (can be made to) cause success in each thing (asked of them), and what oblations are to be poured out to them, and what is the proper time (at which they will hear prayer, so as) to perform every wish of anyone (who comes) near them in purity.

In this section the text transitions from what Noah did and learned to what anyone can do if they achieve the proper level of purity. The treatise promises that the practitioner can roam the heavenly abodes like the angels themselves. Achieving the power and knowledge of the angels is a prominent theme in the opening of the treatise, which we have seen described by practitioners in the Babylonian amulets as well. We will return to this theme shortly.

Moreover, the treatise explains that myriads of angels are distributed over the multilayered heavens under the authority of various overseers, ready for service in the earthly realm. What *Sefer HaRazim* explicates, that we might not have known from the Babylonian and Palestinian amulets is that the angels cannot go forth from the heavens without the approval of their overseers. This idea is explained in more detail in the framing description of

133 §3, following M248.

134 It may not be a coincidence that this is the same verb used by the Accuser (*Satan*) in Job 1:7 to describe what he has been doing (roaming the earth).

the first firmament, where we find seven overseers in charge of encampments of angels. The angels "do not go out without permission to perform any action, not until one of the seven overseers, who sits upon the throne and who rule them, gives them approval, for only according to their will and authority do they proceed."[135] The angels, then, do not quite have free will, but are subordinate to higher angelic authorities. This does make sense of one incantation bowl we examined from Borsippa, which states "Call him that they may open the gates of the heavens." Presumably, the ritual practitioner means calling the appropriate overseer angel (in the singular) to tell the subordinate angels (in the plural) to open the gates of success for the client. This section of the treatise also describes the biddable nature of the angels: "And each and every one of them goes about his work, set to hurry to all such (errands) to which he might be sent, whether for good or evil, for feast or famine, for war or peace. And they are all called by names from the day they are created." The mention of the names of the angels right after describing their nature is likely not coincidental—knowing the names of the angels is essential to requesting their help. It also echoes a motif that God knows the names of each angel, no matter how countless the host of heaven may seem.[136]

The treatise adds that to enlist the angels to perform any action, one must present the appropriate offering (libation or food offering) to them and be in a state of purity. Evidence for the offerings of food is rare in amulets, probably because it was part of the ritual that was acted out, not written about.[137] Purity in the ancient world generally meant avoiding certain

135 My translation of §31, M248.

136 Compare the silluq to Yannai's kerova to Genesis 1:1, "The rest of the stars can neither be counted nor reckoned, / yet all of them are called by name / by the One who dwells upon the Cherubim" (trans. Lieber, *Invitation to Yannai*, 310).

137 The rubric seems to intrude into a incantation bowl excavated in Nippur, stating only "something being kneaded" (Montgomery *AIT* 12). A bowl excavated at Kish, unfortunately in bad condition, has the tantalizing phrase "in a bowl of water and meat and of oil" clearly legible (Ashmolean 1931.177 published by Gordon, "Aramaic Incantation Bowls," *Orientalia* NS 10, 277). Food offerings to demons are explicit in two bowls

kinds of foods or fasting and abstaining from sexual activity for a certain period of time.[138] Indeed, the spells in the treatise imagines the feminine to be antithetical to the purity required for ritual activity; there are many warnings to stay away from women and especially the impurity of women in order to ensure the success of interacting with angels. And yet, the ritual-texts that protect women rely on the angels.[139] There's a tension between the expectations for ritual-purity expectations among men and the work that angels are expected to do for women. In ritual texts, it is a tension that remains unresolved.[140] Perhaps the association of women with witchcraft among Late Antique Jews compelled men engaged in ritual practices to rhetorically assert their distance from women.

This section of the treatise also mentions that knowing "the proper times" is necessary. This is elaborated more in the next section, which states that the person can learn from the treatise:

> לידע ממנו מעשה מות ומעשה חיים להבין הרע והטוב לחקור עתות ורגעים ולידע עת ללדת ועת למות עת למכה ועת לרפואה, לפתור חלומות וחזיונות לעורר קרב ולהשקיט מלחמות ולמשול ברוחות ובפגעים לשלחם וילכו כעבדים[141]

> To know from it rituals [that cause] death and rituals [that preserve] life, to understand the evil and the good, to search out [the right] season and moments [for magical rites], to know the time to give birth and the time to die, the time to strike and the time to heal, to interpret dreams and visions, to arouse combat, and to quiet wars, and to rule over spirits and over demons, to send them so they will go out like slaves.

published by Gordon and discussed earlier in this chapter.

138 Rebecca Lesses, "Speaking with Angels : Jewish and Greco-Egyptian Revelatory Adjurations," *Harvard Theological Review* 44 (1998): 41-60. See also Michael Swartz, "Like the Ministering Angels: Ritual and Purity in Early Jewish Mysticism and Magic," *AJS Review* 19.2 (1994): 135-67.

139 *Sefer Ha-Razim* §160. To protect a woman giving birth from demonic attack, the book prescribes making her (before she is even pregnant) a metal amulet inscribed with angelic names to be worn around her neck. Furthermore, at the time of childbirth, it recommends placing four silver *lamellae* inscribed with angelic names in the four sides of the house to keep out evil spirits.

140 In contrast, in Yannai's poetry, there is even a hint of female divine beings and several examples of women's elevation to a level of parity with the angels.

141 §10 following composite of M248 and TA42. .

Here *Sefer Ha-Razim* reveals another aspect of the amulets that we might not know about: timing is of the essence. The treatise promises to teach the right times and seasons. According to the book, both the calendric period and timing within the day is important. For the first camp of angels, ruling over matters of healing, we learn that "These are the angels that are biddable in every matter in the first and second year to the 15 year cycle according to the reckoning of the Greek kings."[142] Apparently, some years are better for healing than others.

Furthermore, and of particular interest for this project, here the opening of the treatise promises to teach how to rule over spirits and demons,[143] to send them out like slaves. We saw it in the Babylonian and Palestinian amulets that only demons are adjured, not angels. The framework of the treatise seems to agree: while it will teach the user the times at which the angels hear prayer and "perform every wish of anyone (who comes) near them in purity," it does not teach the user how to command the angels. Only the spirits and demons can be commanded like slaves.

In stark contrast with this principle, the spells contained within the treatise do adjure the angels (as well as demons and spirits). While some spells only act "in the name of the angels" as we saw in the amulets,[144] many more adjure the angels directly, particularly for love spells.[145] Other spells adjure the angels of death and wrath for more violent ends.[146] One

142 Trans. Morgan, *Sepher Ha-Razim*, 23.

143 Notably, the treatise does not use the term for demons found in rabbinic literature, *mezikin*, but calls demons *ruhot* and *pegaim* instead. Thus, while the rabbis certainly believed they could command demons too, this difference in vocabularly might indicates that the ritual practitioner operated in separate circles than the rabbis.

144 See §111 and §160 of *Sefer Ha-Razim* (ed. Schäfer and Rebiger).

145 See §67, §75, §93, and §96. Adjuration of angels may be paralleled in one amulet found in Horvat Rimmon, which was very fragmentary, but reconstructed by Naveh and Shaked based on a parallel from the Cairo Genizah. See *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, amulet 10, p.85-9.

146 §§48-49.

spell adjures the angels of the chariot races so that the client's team may win.[147] Another spell adjures the angels simply to create the illusion of fire within a house in order to impress people:

> משביע אני עליכם המלאכים העטופים אש במי שכולו אש ומושבו אש ומשרתיו אש לוהט ומחנות אש משרתים לפניו. בשמו אני משביע עליכם שתראוני הנס הגדול ותמלאו הבית הזה מאשכם ואראה אני וכל שעמי הנס הגדול בלא פחד.[148]
>
> I adjure you the angels wrapped in fire by him who is all fire and whose seat is fire and his servants are flaming fire and camps of fire serve before him. By his name I adjure you that you show me this great miracle and fill this house with your fire so that I and all that are with me will see this great miracle without fear.[149]

Unlike other incantations that we encountered for health or protection, this spell is for entirely recreational purposes. Its composer imagined being able to command the angels simply to impress his friends. What this difference may reveal to us is that there was a variation in religious worldviews even among Jewish ritual practitioners. Some viewed the angels as intermediaries to be respected, as divine messengers between Jews and God. Others viewed them in a more utilitarian way, as spirits to be commanded.[150] Nor can we blame "foreign influence" for this variation among Jewish ritual practitioners: equally complex attitudes towards the spirit world are found in the contemporary ritual practices of polytheists and Christians: coercion of spirits is present in some spells, but its hardly central.[151] Based on

147 §194.

148 Based on composite reading of manuscripts, especially §M248 and §TA42; some manuscripts have the "flying angels" rather than "the angels wrapped fire," מלאכים מעופפים אש rather than מלאכים העטופים אש.

149 My translation.

150 Blau, "angelology," *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901-6).

151 As Marvin Meyer put it in a panel discussion reflecting on Fritz Graf's *Magic in the Ancient World*, "coercion, although present, is not really constitutive of Greco-Roman magic, but is only one of the elements of a much more complex ideology." Through several examples, he shows the same complexity prevails in Christian magic. In closing, he warns agains the stereotypes that still mar study of religion and magic: "Christian practitioners of ritual power were - and are - quite capable of expressing deep humility and piety, even as leaders centrally placed within the orthodox churches were - and are - equally capable of reveling in power and coercion" (Numen, Vol. 46, No. 3 ([999]: 307-8).

talmudic and kabbalistic evidence alone, Ludwig Blau suggested that in "the Talmud, angels were the instruments of God; in the Middle Ages, the instruments of man, who, by calling their names, or by other means, rendered them visible." Because the subsidiary spells in this treatise are difficult to date, Blau's hypothesis cannot be ruled out and deserves more consideration. In the next and final chapter on angels in ancient Jewish mystical literature, we will encounter a group of Jewish men who believed that they could be angelic and command the angels. As we will see, there may have been internal factors that motivated this attitude towards angels.

The final lines of the introduction reiterate that the treatise will teach the practitioner how to become like the angels:

> להביט בארבע רוחות הארץ להיות מחוכם בקול רעמים לספר מה מעשה ברקים, להגיד מה יהיה בכל חודש וחודש לעמוד על עסק כל שנה ושנה, אם לשובע אם לרעב אם לתבואה אם לבצורת אם לשלום אם למלחמה, להיות כאחד מן הנוראים ולהשכיל בשירי מרום.[152]
>
> To watch the four winds of the earth, to be learned in the speech of thunderclaps, to tell the significance of lightning flashes, to fortell what will happen in each and every month, and to know the affairs of each and every year, whether for plenty or for hunger, whether for harvest or for drought, whether for peace or for war, to be as one of the awesome ones and to comprehend the songs of heaven.

From the end of this introduction, which culminates in a promise to become angelic, we can deduce what abilities were thought of as the preserve of the angels. To be an angel was to have 1) knowledge of the movements of the celestial bodies, 2) free movement through the seven heavenly realms, 3) proficiency in the hierarchies of the angels and their overseers, 4) the ability to properly interpret dreams 5) power over lowly spirits and demons (*ruhot* and

152 §10, lines 38-45, composite of M248 and G1. TA42 offers "to live like one of the seraphim and to humiliate like the Princes on high."

לחיות כאחד מן השרפים להשפיל כשרי מרום.

pegaim), 6) comprehension of natural phenomena (storms, lightning, etc.), 7) knowledge of the future and 8) knowledge of the heavenly liturgy. Because no Jewish texts that survives from this period takes angels as its subject, no texts states this explicitly. Indirectly, however, we may learn from this treatise how ancient Jews conceptualized angels and desired to become like them.

Although they are found in Jewish communities thousands of miles away, the assertions of specialists in the incantation bowls of Babylonia seem to reflect the fact that some practitioners believed they had achieved this level of expertise: e.g. Abuna, who could claim to possess the fiery body of an angels and the spells of the sea and monster Leviathan (*AIT* 2) and the ability to command demons to depart. What this book promised, some believed, acted out, and put in writing themselves as well.

Although *Sefer Ha-Razim* mentions antediluvian patriarchs like Enoch and Noah as well as figures like Moses and Solomon in the opening framework, they do not recur in the spells or other sections of the book. *Sefer Ha-Razim* has excluded them and instead foregrounded the role of the angels and of course, God. Even more central, is the specialist himself, who uses the angels to imagine another way of being in the world.

Conclusion: At Home with the Angels

Where liturgical texts equivocate on the presence angels of angels in the synagogue, the ritual texts present a picture of angels in close intimacy with Jews in their homes and everywhere they might go. The Babylonian incantation bowls explicitly invite angels into the domestic realm to help ordinary men and women. Similarly, the Palestinian amulets envision

angels surrounding Jews as they go about their daily life. *Sefer Ha-Razim*, written for the specialist, invites its reader to acquire the power and status of the angels. Indeed, the ritual texts reflect an aspiration among some Jews for achieving angelic and divine status. We will learn more about such aspirations in the next chapter.

When properly situated in their full ritual context, Babylonian amulets reveal the spectrum of mediating figures that ancient Jews appealed to and envisioned in their home. This reveals to us an aspect of ancient life that is implicit, but hidden from view in rabbinic texts. Ancient Jews were surrounded by many figures that they believed could assist them, the sages among them. Diverse ritual practitioners were another option. As were a range of invisible figures like the angels, heroes like R. Joshua b. Perahia, and the patriarchs were also imagined to help Jews with their daily problems. Whereas Christians appealed to angels, holy men, saints, Jesus as well as God and polytheists appealed to a wide range of divinities, Jews appealed to their own set of mediating figures, angels figuring prominently among them, but always subordinated to God.

From Palestinian amulets and the rabbinic sources, we might speculate that seeking a ritual specialist was considered the same as heeding a source of authority that competed with the rabbis, always problematic. A context in which ritual practitioners compete with the rabbis for the attention of Jews might help us understand R. Pinchas bar Hama's statement that “whoever has a sick person in his house ought to go to a sage and ask for mercy.” In other words, he ought not go to a ritual practitioner or the angels or anyone else. *Sefer HaRazim* provides an entry point to the interests and beliefs of other literate Jews of Palestine, potential ritual-experts possibly in competition with the rabbis. Their religious

worldview, which builds on the biblical sources, was not irreconcilable with that of the sages.

The ritual sources that appeal to angels help us understand why the rabbinic sources seek to delimit the acceptable range of behavior toward angels. Texts that discuss making offerings to angels help understand why the rabbinic sources like the Tosefta is explicit that Jews ought not to sacrifice to the angel Michael. Thus the Tosefta's legal statement may be seen as prohibiting the next level of worship, above leaving simple food offerings or incense, which the rabbis may have considered irrepresible. The ritual texts show us how interest in angels and their company prevailed among Jews and why some rabbinic traditions may have striven to discourage them.

Moreover, if the liturgical sources showed us how Jews desired to sing the angelic praise in coordination with angels in the heavenly realm, the ritual sources show us how such preoccupations continued outside the synagogue. *Sefer HaRazim* even promises to teach the songs of the angels. The liturgy of the synagogue also showed Jews thinking about the biblical matriarchs and patriarchs, figures that show up in incantation texts as well.[153] The incantations, as pleas for help from the divine realm, are thus in continuity with the liturgical realm, albeit reflecting more individual interests rather than communal ones.

Among all surviving Jewish texts, the ritual sources bring us closest to women's daily life. We witness women asking for help from the angels to cure illness, to deflect demons, to restore marriages, and to protect pregnancies and children. We also saw how the treatises use a purity-rhetoric that excludes the ability women from being practitioners, but a few surviving amulets suggest women composed amulets anyway. Moreover, while *Sefer Ha-Razim* and other amulets show a desire to become angelic, we saw how one woman may

153 See the *qedushta'ot* on the matriarchs discussed in the previous chapter.

have reacted to these strictures by likening herself to a local goddess, while maintaining the supremacy of the Jewish God.

Because ritual incantations are ultimately personal and private communications with the divine, at most shared within one household, they express themselves more freely than liturgical meant for community can. Since they are not meant to be pedagogic or prescriptive like rabbinic texts, they can also afford to take liberty with their religious vocabulary, making business requests from the angels or adjuring angels to help them win a chariot race. However, like some traditions in rabbinic literature, they show Jews walking about surrounded by angels, both on the street and in their homes.

CHAPTER 4: ANGELS IN MYSTICAL TEXTS HEKHALOT RABBATI

Introduction

The prayers of the synagogue and the temporary union they afforded with angels proved insufficient for some Jews, who wanted to linger in the presence of God and the angels. In this last chapter, we encounter the Jews most preoccupied with the angels and the heavenly realms in late antiquity. These are the circles of men that composed and transmitted what's come to be known as *Hekhalot* literature. Angels, angelic names, and angelic hymns to God fill the pages of this corpus, which is generally agreed to be comprised of the works *Hekhalot Rabbati*, *Hekhalot Zutarti*, *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, *Merkavah Rabbah*, and 3 Enoch. These texts were composed over the course of the fifth to ninth centuries CE, circulating both in Palestine and Babylonia.[1] In this chapter I focus my analysis on the earliest treatise in this

1 In his pioneering work on this corpus, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1946), Gershom Scholem asserted that *Hekahlot* literature was representative of "*Merkavah* mysticism," Jewish mysticism ostensibly centered on the divine throne-chariot described in the book Ezekiel. Scholem posited that this literature reflected the earliest phase of Jewish mysticism, preceding the medieval development of Kabbalah centered on the *Zohar* in the thirteenth century CE (*Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York Schocken, 1946). Whether the terms "mysticism" and "*merkavah*" correctly express and reflect the interests of the composers of this corpus has been questioned. As many have noted, historically the term mysticism belongs to the Christian tradition and only began being applied by scholars to Jewish and Islamic traditions in the nineteenth century. In its Christian context, mysticism refers to an experience of union with the Godhead. As Schäfer pointed out in a succession of studies, this is not the goal of so-called Jewish mystical texts. Peter Schäfer's publication of synoptic editions of several ancient manuscripts of this work (1981) furthered research on this corpus tremendously. See *Synopse Zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1981). A recent

corpus, *Hekhalot Rabbati.* Equipped with a deeper understanding of rabbinic and liturgical attitudes towards angels, we are in a better place to evaluate conceptions of angels in *Hekahlot Rabbati.*

This corpus defies precise textual delimitation as well as geographical and chronological location and thus, requires a different set of approaches than most ancient Jewish texts. With *Hekahlot* literature, there is no original ur-text to be reconstructed, no one person, group, or community that can be pinned down as its producer, and it is unwise to make broad generalizations about the people behind this corpus, not to mention seek direct continuities between it and other compositions from the Second Temple Period. When discussing the texts, specialists in this field use such terms as macroforms and microforms to refer to the different subsets of the literature, terms which serve to highlight the flexible boundaries of these compositions.[2]

Nonetheless, close reading of traditions within these texts does reveal conceptions of angels which are distinctive to this corpus, especially when compared with other Jewish texts of the period. In the *Hekhalot* literature, we encounter terrifying punishing angels, far more unpredictable and hostile than the angel of Death, who is only occasionally mentioned in rabbinic literature. More often the *Hekhalot* microforms portray the praising angels familiar from liturgical settings in much more vivid detail than in any other text. Far more explicitly

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conference marked thirty years to this landmark publication, convening an array of scholars from different disciplines and producing the volume *Hekhalot in Context*, and highlighting both the advances and lingering questions surrounding the corpus. Ra'anan Boustan, Martha Himmelfarb and Peter Schäfer, eds. *Hekhalot Literature in Context* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012). See also Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism (*Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009).

2 For an excellent introduction to the methodology of this field, see Ra'anan Boustan, "The Study of Heikhalot Literature: Between Mystical Experience and Textual Artifact," *Currents in Biblical Research* 6 (2007): 130-60. Also, David Halperin, "A New Edition of the Hekhalot Literature," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104.3 (1984): 543-52.

than in the liturgical texts, in these compositions men can aspire to the status of angels, reciting liturgical praise with them at any time and all the time. Moreover, they can communicate and make requests of the angels virtually whenever they wish. These distinctive conceptions of angels have much to do with the distinctive anthropology of this corpus, which assigns Jewish men far greater potential than the rabbinic or liturgical texts of the period. Although the men (and they were strictly men)[3] who composed this corpus shared the ideals and values of the rabbinic movement, their texts reflect some distinctive interests. The make up of *Hekahlot Rabbati* suggests that they valued liturgical compositions more than legal discussion and that they valued heavenly realities as much as or more than earthly realities.

It is likely that no one sociologically distinct group was responsible for the corpus of *Hekhalot* as a whole; generations of men composed the texts that have been transmitted through medieval copyists to the present. In his writings Schäfer avoids naming a specific group, stating s that the authors share the values of the rabbinic movement, but that their compositions are post-rabbinic.[4] While the stories of ascent feature famous rabbinic sages, the content of the corpus does not resemble the style or content of the writings of the rabbis. In his works, Schäfer adopts the terminology of the corpus itself, referring to "the descenders to the chariot" as *yordei merkavah* or *merkavah* mystics, adepts, or initiates. Himmelfarb adds that the diversity of surviving texts "suggests small circles of mystics operating independently of other such circles, shaping common traditions in different ways."[5] In

3 See Rebecca Lesses, "Women and Gender in Hekhalot Literature," *Hekhalot Literature in Context*, 279-312.

4 Schäfer, "The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism," *Hekhalot-Studien* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988), 293.

5 Himmelfarb, "Heavenly Ascent," 88.

Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: an Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkavah, Michael Swartz suggests that liturgical poets, synagogue officials, preachers and targumists, people "who would have been influenced by the academy yet did not participate fully in its intellectual life," are likely candidates for the production of these texts.[6] *Ma'aseh Merkava*h is, indeed, the *Hekhalot* macroform most interested in the power of liturgy.[7] When Swartz commented on *Hekhalot Rabbati*, especially on the *Sar haTorah* myth, he suggested that "secondary elites" or scribes were likely candidates.[8] Most recently, Boustan wrote that "the range of ideological perspectives articulated in various *Hekhalot* compositions undermines unitary or homogenizing accounts of the relgious phenomena or social groups thought to stand behind the surface of the *Hekhalot* texts."[9] I will return to questions of the identity of these authors later in this chapter. I follow Schäfer and Himmelfarb in referring to the composers and tradents of this literature as mystics, adepts, or initiates.[10]

Overview of Chapter

Much like traditions in rabbinic literature, the macroform of *Hekhalot Rabbati* evinces diversity in its attitudes toward angels. The mystics were much more preoccupied than the rabbis with the angels, but their attitude toward them is still ambivalent at best. Keeping the larger goals of this project in mind, the first section of this chapter highlights

6 Michael Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), 219.

7 In this macroform, it is clear that prayers are not to be devalued as compared with exegesis or dialectical argumentations—praying, like Torah Study, is a mighty act that requires strength and endurance.

8 Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 217.

9 Boustan, Introduction to *Hekhalot Literature in Context*, xiv.

10 I use the term "mystics" for simplicity's sake without taking a stand on how the users actually engaged with this literature. Schäfer frames it well when he writes: "As to the question of actual experience verses literary fiction, the Hekhalot literature has become one of the major battlefields of modern research addressing this problem" (*Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 346). See the summary of this issue in Boustan, "The Study of Heikhalot Literature," 143.

some distinctive conceptions of angels in this corpus, both positive and negative, and consider them in the context of other contemporary Jewish texts.

Next, I will draw out the underlying sense of time found in this *Hekhalot Rabbati.* Examining its hymnic sections, I draw out the evidence for the adepts' interest in living in synchronicity with the angelic realm, especially in light of the *Gedullah* hymns (§§81-93) and *Qedushah* hymns (§§94-106; §§152-69). I will also explain how these sections may be viewed as a prayerbook of the mystics.

In the third section, I will elucidate the mystics' self-conceptions and how their views of themselves influenced their conceptions of angels. I will argue that part of these mystics' attitudes towards angels can be understood as a radicalization of rabbinic attitudes to angels. The mystics' mixed feelings toward the obvious community leaders, the rabbis, has been emphasized by almost all scholars working on this corpus. Far more than the rabbis, these men seem to believe that angelic perfection is something desirable and achievable. The adepts seem more confident in their ability to be perfect in a way that the sages never seek to be. The men behind some microforms want to be judges, virtually as omniscient as God, so that they can receive respect in the earthly realm as well. Many rabbinic traditions state that God loves Israel in all of its human imperfections, but the traditions of the mystics seem to disagree. Whereas the rabbis say that the Torah was *not* given to the ministering angels, the microforms of *Hekhalot* literature seem to assert the opposite: the Torah was given to the angels and through the angels alone, whether by adjuration or achieving angelic perfection, can Israel attain it too. The adepts must access the angels or displace the angels to possess the Torah themselves.

Because the mystics believe they can achieve angelic perfection and even stand alongside the angels, they apparently acquired the temerity to command the angels. As we saw in the previous chapter, the amulets unearthed in Late Antique Babylonia and Palestine indicate that Jewish ritual practitioners did not adjure angels. In those ritual texts only demons were adjured; angels were invoked, implored, and imagined as helpers, but not commanded to serve the practitioner. Only the subsidiary spells of the treatise *Sepher Ha-Razim*, whose actual use is hard to reconstruct, uphold this attitude toward the angels as well. And in *Hekhalot* literature we find some context for this approach to the angels. Whereas God prefers Israel to the angels in rabbinic texts and some rabbis even claim to speak with the angels, the rabbis never claim to have power over the angels. In this final section, I highlight this peculiar approach to the angels among ancient Jews.

Overall, while these mystics in some sense want to be in synchronicity with heavenly time, they also seek to join the angels above in the heavens while taking on intercessory duties for them below, too. At the same time, because the initiates' views of the angels is ultimately instrumental, the angels are neither purely idealized nor derided in *Hekhalot* literature.There is some overlap with rabbinic values, but some distinctive values emerge too: diminished confidence in the human potential leads them to imagine achieving moral and intellectual perfection via ritual means.

Introductory remarks on conceptions of angels in Hekhalot Rabbati

The authors of this literature certainly shared some conceptions of angels with others in their communities like the rabbis, the liturgical poets, and the ritual practitioners. The

Hekhalot literature assumes a cosmology of seven-heavens, each filled with ranks of angels much like second temple period apocalypses, rabbinic literature and Yannai's liturgical poetry.[11] As in the corpus or ritual texts, we encounter angels in each of the heavens though they are not reproduced as systematically as they are in the magical treatise *Sefer HaRazim* (see *Hekhalot Rabbati* §232 in particular). At the entrances to each of the seven heavens, we encounter angelic gatekeepers, who only reluctantly welcome the ascenders' in (§206-218).[12]

Whereas the poet Yannai only names the angels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael and rabbinic literature records just a few more angelic names like Sandelphon and Metatron (respectively bHagigah 13b and bSanhedrin 38b),[13] in *Hekhalot Rabbati* a plethora of angelic names are introduced such as Anafiel, and Dumiel, and many more which are barely pronounceable. While angelic names might suggest that the angels here gain some individualistic personality, aside from a couple of exceptional angels, this is not the case. Only a Metatron and Anafiel receive more than a name and a title.[14] Rather *Hekhalot* literature shares with rabbinic literature the idea of the disposability of the angels, or in other words, their continuous creation and destruction. According to one microform, exposure to the radiance of God's countenance causes the angels to waste away (§184, §189).[15] Other

11 For apocalypses see Testament of Levi 2-5 or Ascension of Isaiah 6-11; in rabbinic literature see Bavli hagigah 12b and in Yannai's liturgical poetry see the silluq to the *qedushah* on Genesis 11:1. For a survey of ancient Jewish cosmologies see Schäfer, "In Heaven as It Is in Hell: The Cosmology of *Seder Rabbah di-Bereshit,*" *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 233-274.

12 Although angels as gatekeepers are more common, in one microform, §236 the reciter seems to have three guardian angels accompany him. We may understand the idea of angelic guards in light of Genesis 3:24, where God stations fierce cherubim with flaming swords to guard the entrance to the Garden of Eden. However, see discussion below of heaven as temple-like space with restricted access.

13 See Meir Bar Ilan, "The Names of Angels," *These are the Names: Studies in Jewish Onomastics* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1997); Gustav Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels: Including the Fallen Angels* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1967).

14 See §420 where Anafiel is described in a few lines; On Metatron, see §277, §310 in V228, §148 of N8128 = §316 of V228.

15 Schäfer*, Hidden and Manifest God*, 17.

angels are destroyed in rivers of fire because they accidentally depart from harmony when they sing in the heavenly choirs (§185).[16] While also glorifying them to the greatest extent, this is the corpus that also portrays the angels at their most disposable.

As in the liturgical poetry of the synagogue where Yannai depicted Israel singing in harmony with the angels, here the mystics depict themselves praying in coordination with the angels as well, sometimes on earth and sometimes in the heavenly realms. Much of the corpus consists of heavenly hymns that the authors pictured the angels reciting. In keeping with the interests of the synagogue poets, the predominant prayer in this macrofom is the Qedushah. Again, it is worth keeping in mind that the rabbis uphold God's preference for the Shema prayer as the prayer of Israel par excellence.[17] In *Hekhalot* literature, the Qedushah, either of Isaiah's vision or in its more contemporary incarnations in the synagogue, takes the place of honor. The only place the Shema is alluded to, in fact, is in a microform that asserts that the liturgical experience of the reciter is just as holy as the twice daily obligatory recitation of the Shema prayer (§93; mBerakhot 2:1).[18] More will be said in the next section on this topic.

Whereas statements in rabbinic literature assert that Israel needs no angelic intercessors (Babylonian Talmud Yoma 52a), traditions in this corpus describe angels whose exact function is to intercede for Israel before God (§158 and §190). The angels are praised as:

> מבטלי גזירה מפירי שבועה מעבירי חימה משיבי קנאה מזכירי אהבה
> אהבתו של אברהם אבינו לפני מלכם
> כשהיו רואין אותו שהוא כועס על בניו, מה הן עושין?

16 Schäfer, *Hidden and Manifest God*, 26-27.

17 b. Hullin 91b, see discussion in first chapter.

18 Schäfer, *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 253.

מחבטין כתריהן ומתירין את מתניהם ומכין על ראשן ונופלים על פניהם ואומרים
התר התר יוצר בראשית
סלח סלח אביר יעקב
מחול מחול קדוש ישר׳
כי אדיר מלכים אתה.[19]

> Those who annul decrees, those who unbind oaths, those who make [His] wrath pass, those who turn back [His] jealousy, those who mention love, the love of Abraham our father before the King
> When they see him angry at this sons, what do they do?
> They throw down their crowns, loosen their loins, and strike their heads, and fall on their faces and say:
> Release, Release, Creator of all creation
> Forgive, forgive, Noble one of Jacob
> Pardon, Pardon Holy one of Israel
> Because you are the most glorious King.[20]

While the rabbis take for granted that the angels convey the (Hebrew) prayers of Israel to God, here the adepts imagine that the angels play a far greater role, interceding on behalf of Israel whenever necessary. Here they imagine the angels adopting the pity-inducing behavior of human beings before a leader to elicit His mercy towards Israel.

Other traditions depicted angels as the avengers of the pious and righteous mystics (§84; cf. Anafiel §241-8):

גדולה מכולם שכל המגביה ידו עליו ומכהו מלבישין אותו נגעים ומכסין אותו צרעת ומעטרין אותו בהרת.
גדולה מכולם שכל מספר עליו לשון הרע מטילין ומשליכין עליו כל מכות צמחין וחבורות רעים ופצעים שירד מהן שחין לח.[21]

> Greatest of all is the fact that all who raises his hand against him and strikes him [the recitor], they [the angels] clothe him in plagues, and they cover him in leprosy and adorn him in blisters.
> Greatest of all is the fact that all who speak of him in gossip, they take up and throw upon him punishing blisters, terrible bruises and wounds, out of which

19 §190 of ms. O1531; also discussed in Schäfer, *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 267.

20 My translation; cf. Schäfer, *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 267 and see Morton Smith's translation, widely available online, *Hekhalot Rabbati: The Greater Treatise Concerning the Palaces of Heaven* (trans. Morton Smith; corrected by Gershom Scholem; transcribed and edited by Don Karr), 2009.

21 §84 according to ms. O1531.

moist boils seep.[22]

While angels are portrayed as executors of God's wrath in the Bible, this vivid portrayal of angels punishing mortals for personal and individual ends is, to my knowledge, unique. Even magical texts do not depict angels engaging in such dirty work. Indeed, the texts of this corpus present the angels acting in far more personal and mundane ways than any other Jewish texts.

Another microform depicts the angel Dumiel gifting the successful and deserving humans visitor to the heavens with a placard that declares his right to enter the seventh heaven (§§231-237). Joined by the angels Gabriel and Qatzpiel, who accompany him, the visitor is seated with the cherubim, *ofannim*, and holy creatures. We may recall the rabbinic tradition that imagines angels processing before righteous Jews on their journeys: here, the scene is transposed to the heavenly realms.

One more tradition is worth mentioning in this context although as Schäfer notes, it may be a later addition to *Hekahlot Rabbati*.[23] In the so-called David Apocalypse, the hero of the text R. Ishmael is depicted seated in the lap of an angel as the angel reveals the sad future history of Israel. The passage appears in the New York manuscript, but is also paralleled by a Genizah fragment:[24]

אמ' ר' ישמעל סח לי סנוניאל שר הפנים
ידידי שב בחיקי ואגיד לך מה תהא על ישראל.
ישבתי בחיקו והיה מסתכל בי ובוכה והיו דמעות יור]ד[ות מעיניו ונופלות (על פניו) פניי.
אמרתי לו הדר זיו מרום מפני מה אתה בוכה
אמ' לי ידידי בוא ואכניסך ואודיעך מה גנזו להם לישראל עם קדוש.

22 My translation, consulted Schäfer, *Origins of Jewish Mysticism,* 250.

23 Schäfer notes that it is "not the most characteristic of all *Hekhalot* texts" in *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 343.

24 §122 following B238.

> R. Ishmael said: Senuniel, the prince of the presence said to me
> "My friend, sit in my lap." And he was looking at me and was crying and the tears fell from his eyes upon my face and I said to him, "Splendid one of lofty radiance, why do you weep?"
> He said to me, "My friend come and I will take you in and show you what they have in store for Israel, the holy people."[25]

Angels have a history of revealing the past and future history of Israel to selected visionaries, but the intimate framework of this scene is particularly noteworthy in my opinion. The distance between divine and human realms is collapsed. Such intimacy between human and angels is also envisioned in a Jewish incantation text from sixth century Nippur (AIT 13), where angels embrace a woman and bring her into the heavenly chamber to bring forth her petition for restored love in her marriage. However, the idea of a human in the lap of an angel also brings to mind the image of Jesus in the lap of his enthroned mother Mary, an icon which became popular in the sixth century in the Eastern Empire.[26] Overall, it is noteworthy that the tradents of this literature could imagine the angels in intimate proximity to them.

While the aforementioned traditions about angels are positive, other traditions in *Hekhalot* literature depict the angels as sometimes hostile or terrifying in graphic detail, showing more similarity to some depictions of human reactions to angels in second temple period apocalypses[27] than to other Late Antique Jewish texts. In biblical and Second Temple period writings, the expected reaction to an angel is fright and awe, although the angels represent no genuine threat to their beholders.[28] In *Hekhalot* literature, the angels are

25 My translation.

26 See "Icons" in *Late Antiquity: A guide to the Postclassical world* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1999), 507.

27 Schäfer, *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 333. He discusses the Apocalypse of Abraham, the Apocalypse of Isaiah, and the Apocalypse of Zephaniah. Compare also Revelations 9:17-18 "And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: *the riders* had breastplates *the color* of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths."

28 The rabbis show no sign of intimidation from angels, emphasizing their own superiority to the angels.

threatening and dangerous to the would-be descender. Himmelfarb explains this hostility needs to be understood in light of the idea that the heavens mirror the sacred space of the Jerusalem temple, whose cult "is fraught with danger for those who are not fit or who err in its performance."[29] Those who ascend to the heavens are doing so by their own will, not God's invitation, and therefore warrant the skepticism and hostility of the gate-keeping angels.

In one microform of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, describing the entrance to the seventh heavenly palace, the angels are described in most frightful terms (§§213-4):

> ובפתח היכל השביעי זעופין ועומדין כל הגיבורים עריצים עזים וקשין נ(ו)ראים
> ומבוהלים גבוהים מהרים ולטושים מגבעות
> קשתותם דרוכות והן בפנים חרבות לטושות והן בידיהם
> וברקים טורדין ויוצאין מגלגלי עיניהם וביביות אש מחוטמם ולפידי גחלים מפיהם
> וכובעים ושיריונות הן מעוטרין ורמחים וחניתות תלויות להן בזרועות{ו}ם.
>
> …סוסיהם סוסי חשך סוסי צלמות סוסי אפילה סוסי אש סוסי דם סוסי ברד סוסי ברזל
> סוסי ערפך סוסים שרוכבים עליהם העומדים על אבוסי אש ומלאים || גחלי רתמים
> ואוכלים גחלים מתוך אבוסיהם…

> And at the entrance to the seventh palace, wrathfully stand all the mighty ones, warlike, vehement, harsh, awful, fearful, taller than mountains and more honed than hills.
> Their bows are strung and stand before them; their swords are honed in their hands.
> And lightning strikes and issues forth from the balls of their eyes,
> And lashes of fire from their nostrils and torches of fiery coals from their mouths.
> And they are equipped with helmets and with coats of mail, and javelins and spears are hung upon their arms.[30]
>
> Their horses are horses of gloom
> Horses of the shadow of death
> Horses of darkness,
> Horses of fire,

Liturgical poetry approaches the angels with more respect than the rabbis, but never fright.

29 Himmelfarb, "Heavenly Ascent," 85.

30 Based on Smith's translation, with my corrections.

Horses of blood
Horses of hail
Horses of iron,
Horses of fog
The horses upon which they ride,
Which stand before feeding troughs of fire,
Filled with glowing juniper coals.[31]

This conception of angels envisions them as freightening fiery horsemen,[32] standing guard at the entrance to the highest heaven.They are positioned so as to stand in the way of anyone unworthy of entering the presence of God.

Furthermore, some traditions depict these gate-keeping angels as not merely hostile, but as capricious and unreliable. For example, in one microform, the gate-keeping angels seem to invite the reciter in, but the trick is that he must only enter on the second invitation; if he immediately enters at their word, he is barred from heaven (§407):

את מי שהוא ראוי לראות מלך ביופיו, היו נותנים בלבו כיון שאומר לו הכנס לא נכנס מיד וחוזרין ואומ' הכנס מיד נכנס היו מקלסין לומר "פל' בוודאי ראוי לראות את המלך ביופיו. ומי שאינו ראוי לראות את המלך ביופיו היו נותנים בלבו וכיון שהיו אומ' הכנס היה נכנס מיד סוחטין אותו ומשליכין לתוך ריגיון גחלים.

Whomever was worthy of seeing the king in his beauty, they would set it into his heart. If they [the angels] said to him "enter," he did not enter immediately, and they repeated and said "enter," and he immediately entered, then they would praise him and say certainly he is worthy of seeing the King in his beauty.
And whomever was not worthy of seeing the king in his beauty, they would set it into his heart and since they said "enter," he would enter; immediately they seized him and threw him into molten coals.

This passage is difficult for a number of reasons, but interestingly it has a very close parallel in another section of the macroform (§258),[33] which makes it clear that the angels are testing

31 Trans. Schäfer, "Aim and Purpose," 281.

32 See also angry angels of *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §569.

33 Schäfer, *Hidden and Manifest God*, 37.

ואם היה ראוי לירד למרכבה כיון שאומרין לו היכנס ואינו נכנס וחוזרין ואומרין לו היכנס ומיד נכנס היו משבחין אותו לומר

the would-be mystic. The angels' invitation is not what it seems. It seems that even the early copyists themselves struggled with the apparent meaning of this passage, that angels would be so capricious, and changed the text in §258 so that the unworthy reciter was at fault for transgressing the angel's instructions. The point of this story seems to be to build up the sense of danger, secrecy and privilege surrounding the experience of ascent. It is noteworthy that the character of the angels is sacrificed for this depiction.

The adept is imagined to confront hostile angels in another scenario as well: reaching the sixth heavenly palace, he sees what appear to be hundreds of thousands of waves of water (in actuality the beautiful polished marble floor).[34] If he asks, "these waters, what is their nature?" the angels immediately pursue him to stone him and denounce him as a descendant of the sinful Israelites who kissed the golden calf in the wilderness (§408). These are no merciful angels tolerant of human musings. The next two microforms emphasize that this story ought to be a lesson to "future generations, that a person not misspeak at the entrance to the sixth heavenly palace" (§§409-410).

The angels of *Ma'aseh Merkavah* are similarly hostile. According to one microform, when R. Ishmael invokes an angel of the presence for help, the angel descends in a rage and says: "son of a stinking drop, I am not giving you [help] until you sit [fasting] for forty days" (§565).[35] Here the angel is imagined deriding R. Ishmael's lowly human origins from semen.

בוודאי זה מיורדי המרכבה. אבל אם אינו ראוי לירד למרכבה
כיון שאומ' לו אל תיכנס והוא נכנס מיד מטילין עליו מגזרי ברזל

If he is worthy to descend to the Merkavah If they [the angels] say to him: Enter!
[but] he does not enter [immediately], and they once again say to him: Enter!
and he [then] immediately enters, [then] they praise him and say:
Surely this one is [one] of the *yoredei merkavah*. If he however, is not worthy to descend to the *Merkavah*, [and] if they say to him: Enter!
and he [then immediately] enters, [then] they immediately throw pieces of iron at him.

34 This text has a parallel in Hagigah 14b; discussed in Himmelfarb, "Heavenly Ascent," 89 and Schäfer, *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 298.

35 Also discussed in James Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot: The People Behind the Hekhalot Literature*

R. Ishmael also warns his students about the threatening angels that stand behind the divine creatures of the throne (§569).

> א' ר' ישמע' אמ' לי ר' נחוניא בן הקנה אדם המבקש להשתמש ברז גדול הזה יזכיר מלאכים העומדים מאחורי החיות הק' מקלס אסגד נוסס ויתפלל תפילה שלא ישחיתו אותו שהן זעופין מכל צבא מרום.
>
> Said R. Ishmael: A person wishing to use this mystery should recall the angels standing behind the holy creatures praising [unpronounceable name] and pray this prayer that they do not slaughter him as they are the most wrathful of all the heavenly host.

The heavens are not filled merely with attendant obedient angels or angels coming and going conveying people's petitions; this corpus of writings shows ancient Jews imagining angels as territorial, wrathful, and hostile. Whether for good or bad, the angels are consequential to the authors of this corpus. They are depicted embracing mortals as well as casting them out from the heavens. They are close enough to punish gossip and any individual hurt, but also at times revolted by humans lowly origins. To understand the logic of these contradictory depictions of angels, we must look at the macroforms more closely. Only through close reading can we come to terms with how angels can be said to pervade the daily life of these initiates. Indeed, it seems that they have a different sense of what daily life means than other Jews.

Angels all the time? The hymns of Hekhalot Rabbati

Building on the findings of Peter Schäfer 's textual criticism of the *Hekhalot* corpus, here I focus on the most stable "poetic-liturgical" sections within the manuscript tradition[36] of *Hekahlot Rabbati*. Much has been written about the character and purpose of the hymns in

(Boston: Brill, 2001), 101.

36 Schäfer, *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 246.

Hekhalot Rabbati, especially as they relate to the ascent material.[37] Scholars have asked how the hymns put the mystic into a trance, assisted or protected him as he ascended to heaven or they have mined them for descriptions of the heavenly goals of the *yordei merkavah*. While scholars have studied the *Gedullah* hymns (§§81-93) and *Qedushah* hymns (§§94-106; §§152-69) productively as separate units, looking at these together as a liturgical collection (albeit one that may never have been fixed) proves compelling and productive.[38] Indeed, limiting the scope of my discussion to these microforms highlights their shared stylistic traits, content, and assumptions about time. As I explain the features of this liturgical collection, I will highlight how the mystics imagine themselves in sync with angelic time to an unprecedented extent.

In contrast to the rabbinic emphasis on calendrical time (e.g. development of *halakhah* around Shabbat and holidays), the hymns of *Hekhalot Rabbati* emphasize a present and continuous sense of sacred time. Indeed, there is no mention of Shabbat or any other holidays in *Hekhalot* literature. The liturgical collection of *Hekhalot Rabbati* is undergirded by a unique conception of time that focuses on the heavenly realm.

On the one hand, it is easy to miss the few references to time in the prayers of *Hekhalot Rabbati*. Here and there we encounter a reference to the time of creation (§166) and to dawn (§173 "at sunrise").[39] For the singing divine creatures there "is no night and no day"

37 A. Altmann, "Kedushah Hymns in the earliest Hechaloth Literature (From an Oxford Manuscript)" *Melilah* 2 (1946): 1-24; Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 57-63; John Maier, "'Attah hu' Adon (Hekhalot Rabbati XXVI 5)" *Judaica* 21 (1965): 129-33; Gerd Wewers, "Die Überlegenheit des Mystikers. Zur Aussage der Gedulla-Hymnen in Hekhalot Rabbati 1, 2-2, 3 " *JSJ* 17 (I986):3-22; Ithamar Gruenwald, "Angelic Songs, the Qedushah and the Problem of the Origin of the Hekhalot Literature" in *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism* (New York: Verlag, 1988); Michael Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Maaseh Merkavah* Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 1992).

38 Philip Alexander has suggested as much in "Prayer in the Heikhalot Literature," *Prière, Mystique et Judaïsme* (Paris: presses univrsitaires de France), 48.

39 "בהגיע עלות השחר"

(§270).[40] On the other hand, once you begin looking for them, you find that the references to the "day" and especially "every day" or "each and every day" are commonplace, but they carry no mundane connotation. Rather the opposite is the case: the "every-day" generally refers to the perennial, uninterrupted, and most holy heavenly activity of God and the angelic creatures.[41] For example, a Qedushah hymn §95:[42]

משבח ושירה של כל יום ויום
מגילה ורינה של עתים ועתים
ומהגיון היוצא מפי קדושים
ומניגיון המתגבר מפי משרתים
הרי אש וגבעות להבה נצברות ונגנזות נתיבות [ס״א נתינות] בכל יום
כדבר שנ׳ ק״ק״ק יוי צבאות

From the praise and song of each and every day
From the joy and exultation of each and every twenty-four hours
And from the recitation which comes from the mouth of the Holy ones
And from the melodiousness which wells up from the mouth of the servants
Behold fire and hills of flame are piled up and hidden and poured out each day.
As it is said, "Holy, holy holy, is the Lord of Hosts.[43]

Similarly, §168:[44]

כי כמה גבורים הם
מנטלי כסא של מלך גבור זה
טעונים ועומדים יום ולילה
ערב ובקר וצהרים בחרדה בבהלה באימה ברתת בזיע וביראה.
וכי כמה כח יש בכם משרתי אלהינו שאתם מזכירין ומשמיעים לו
זכרון שמו ברום עולם
אין חקר ואין מספר בקול [?] תוקף.
כדבר שנ׳ ק׳ק׳ק׳..

For how mighty are they
Who bear up the throne of the glory of this mighty King,
Weighed down and standing, day and night,
Evening and morning and noon, in trembling and in terror,

40 ״אין להם לא לילה ולא יום אלא באור נוגה זמרה והלל״

41 §§92, 95, 99, 100, 153, 159, 163, 165, 168, 169, 173, 189, 269

42 Based on Oxford 1531.

43 Translation by Smith, *Hekhalot Rabbati*.

44 Based on Oxford 1531.

In fright, in shivering, in shaking and in fear!
And how great strength is there in you, you servants of our God,
That you recall to him and cause him to hear
The reminder of his name, in the height of the world!
There is no searching out and no telling
In sound and the strength.
As it is said, "Holy, Holy, Holy…."

Only the joyous angelic activity happens every day and continually so that the "every day" takes on a sacred quality in the *Hekhalot* literature.

Within the framework of the day, the authors of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* foreground another way of ordering time, which is shared by the inhabitants of the heavenly and earthly realms alike: the punctuation of the day with three liturgical moments. The division of the day into three parts is emphasized in several contexts in the hymns:[45] the throne of God bows before him three times a day (§99); the Prince of the Presence comes and goes upon the firmament three times daily (§100); God tunes into Israel's prayers during morning, afternoon, and evening prayers (§163[46]); God embraces and kisses the icon of Jacob engraved on his throne thrice daily (§164); the exaltation of the faces of the angels on high three times each day (§169); the Prince of the Presence "kneels and falls and prostrates" himself before the holy creatures (three times a day according to the Oxford ms., but three thousand times according to the rest of the mss., §171); all creation declares His sanctification with triple *sanctus* (§273 and §274). The thrice daily occasion for intimacy between God and those praying with their eyes cast on heaven is most striking in §163. It is our only explicit

45 §§92, 99, 100, 164, 169, 171, and 273-4.

46 §163 is a bit out of sync with this conception of time, which some copyists tried to correct as some inconsistency in the manuscript tradition shows. God addresses the Yored Merkavah and tells them to relate to Israel what he does during the *scharit*, *minchah* and *arvit* prayer, everyday and every hour when Israel says "Kadosh." The problem is that the Qedushah is not said thrice daily and M22 does not mention the *arvit*. This will be addressed below.

depiction of coordinated earthly and heavenly activity in the liturgical collection (asides from God listening in to the morning prayers in §173). It is a much discussed passage, but worth reprinting:

> ברוכים לשמים ולארץ יורדי מרכבה אם תאמרו ותגידו לבניי
> מה אני עושה בתפילת שחרית ובתפילת המנחה וערבית בכל יום ובכל שעה ושעה שישר' אומ'
> לפני קדוש ולמדו אתם ואמרו להם שאו עיניכם לרקיע כנגד בית תפילתכם בשעה שאתם אומ'
> לפני קד'
> כי אין לי הנאה בכל בית עולמי שבראתי באותה שעה שעיניכם נשואות בעיניי ועיני נשואות
> בעיניכם בשעה שאתם אומ' לפני קד' כי הכול [הקול] היוצא מפיכם באותה שעה טורד ועולה
> לפני כריח ניחוח

> Blessed are you to the heavens and to the earth who descend to the chariot
> If you declare and say to my sons
> What I do during the morning, afternoon, and evening prayer
> On each day and at every hour that Israel say before me "Holy"
> Teach them and tell them lift your eyes to the horizon opposite your houses of prayer at the time that you say "Holy"
> [Teach them] that there is no greater joy before me in all the world that I created as in that time when your eyes are lifted to my eyes
> And my eyes are reflected in your eyes at the time that you say before me "Holy"
> Because the voice that comes from your mouth at that hour carries and ascends before me like a pleasant aroma.

This is a beautiful and moving text about a very intimate moment in prayer. Here the angelic Qedushah is at the center and serves as the moment when the select group of mystics can encounter the eyes of God, an activity it is not clear even the angels can partake in. In late antiquity, this angelic praise was recited communally only once a week on the Sabbath in Palestine. Today, following Babylonian custom, the Qedushah is recited in the morning and afternoon prayer as part of the fixed liturgy, but it is not clear when this custom was established.[47] The mystics seems to have adopted an idiosyncratic practice, perhaps reciting the angelic praise three times a day, at every prayer hour, in imitation of their sense of the

47 See discussion of this topic in Ruth Langer, chapter 4: "Individual recitation of the Kedushah," *To Worship God Properly: tensions between Liturgical Custom and Halakhah in Judaism* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1998).

divine time of the heavens, which was eternally holy, punctuated only three times a day by praise.

Whereas the rabbis are working away at consolidating a Jewish calendar with Sabbath and festivals, this circle of mystics is focused on angelic time, eternally holy, always in the company of God. Whereas the rabbis discourage angelic comparisons and try to demote the angelic liturgy to some extent, the mystics uphold the angelic praise and imagine reciting it even more often. In this microfom, the text states that those praying could make eye-contact with God (§163). Is this intimate eye-contact another way of viewing the *merkavah*? The equation of reciting the angelic praise with contemplation of the *merkavah* seems to be the assumption behind §93.[48] In this microform, the permitted exceptions for interrupting contemplation of the *merkavah* parallel the permitted exceptions for interrupting one's recitation of the Shema. The interruption of both activities is permissible only "if one needs to greet or return the greeting of a high-ranking person."[49] If my reading is correct, this is certainly a serious claim for the sacrality of their liturgy. The rabbis in their legal rulings, of course, never claim the Qedushah is as sacred as the Shema—this is a claim unique to this corpus.

On my reading, the macroform of *Hekhalot Rabbati* (before it received its apocalypses and ascent accounts) circulated as a collection of prayers—prayers for no occasion in particular, but so sacred in themselves that they would turn every moment into the most sacred moment. Reciting them, the individual could participate in the heavenly liturgy. The equation of reciting the liturgy and viewing the *merkavah* would also lend weight

48 Noticeably, the word for contemplating the *merkavah* in this microform is *hoshesh*, not *tsofeh* as elsewhere. Only §92 and §93 use *hoshesh*.

49 Schäfer , *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 253.

to Scholem's suggestion that the terminology of *yeridah la-merkavah* (descent to the chariot) is related to the idea of *yeridah lifnei ha-teiva* (descent to the ark in the synagogue, where the prayer leader would stand)—not because "the ark containing the scrolls of the Torah is like the throne,"[50] but because when one was outstanding in his devotion to prayer, he was, in effect, making eye contact with God and praying before the throne.

Certainly, the authors of this corpus valued the liturgy far more than the rabbis. In "Some Liturgical Issues in the Talmudic Sources," Reif draws attention to the controversial theological status of prayer in Late Antique rabbinic circles. Reviewing the Talmudic discussions of this topic, he writes that "The authentic successor to the Temple liturgy and, thus, the ideal form of worship is being portrayed as Torah-study, and Prayer is accorded no more than a junior place in comparison."[51]

Interestingly, some sages criticized the propensity to multiply the epithets of God, and were "anxious to limit the praise of God to statutory proportions."[52] Among other critics brought together in bMegillah 18a, R. Yochanan is quoted as saying that "the one who recounts the praises of Holy One Blessed Be He excessively will be uprooted from the world." Hamnuna seems to have been one to extend his prayers, perhaps in just such a manner, and in reaction, Rava complained that "some set aside the matters of the world to come and instead occupy themselves with transient matters" (bShabbat 10a). While this it not evidence of a divide between the circle of the sages and the circles of the *yordei merkavah*, Rava's words point to the tension between the valuation of Torah study as against liturgy in

50 Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: JTS, 1965), 20 fn. 1.

51 Reif, "Some liturgical Issues in the Talmudic Sources," 193 (his capitalization).

52 Reif, "Some liturgical Issues in the Talmudic Sources," 201.

late antiquity, a tension that might have left its imprint on our corpus.

Certainly, the rabbis, especially in Babylonia, came to oppose *piyyut* and Palestinian liturgical innovations.[53] The liturgical prayers adopted by the Babylonian rabbis looks very different from the corpus of *Hekahlot*. Comparing the liturgy of the *yordei merkavah* and the *siddur*, Philip Alexander comes to the conclusion that "We are dealing, in effect with two independent liturgical styles, two independent liturgical traditions;" he calls this "a startling fact, the socio-religious implications of which have yet to be properly assessed."[54] While the respective liturgies are both in rabbinic Hebrew and in Aramaic, the *Hekhalot* prayers' style, especially their propensity to stack up synonyms distinguishes them from the prayers of the *siddur*.

Angelic Time & Judgment time

Going a step further, I argue that the hymns of *Hekhalot Rabbati* reveal a conception of realized eschatology, by which I mean a sense of time where every day is celebrated in the presence of God and calls for the highest standards of conduct, on the same level as the most sacred day in the Jewish calendar, the day of judgment, Yom Kippur.[55] The mystics stand apart from their rabbinic (and Christian) counterparts in their conception of the judgment day. For the adepts, at least when they used this book of hymns, everyday was as holy as the judgment day.

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53 Ruth Langer, *To Worship God Properly* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1998).

54 Alexander, "The Heikhalot literature," 61.

55 Schäfer, Wewers, and Boustan have written about the heroes of Hekahlot literature as eschatological judges; my argument here builds on their research, and their work will be discussed more in the next sections. See Schäfer, *Hidden and Manifest God*, 42-3; Gerd A. Wewers, "Die Überlegenheit des Mystikers. Zur Aussage der Gedulla-Hymnen in Hekhalot Rabbati 1,2-2,3," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 17 (1986): 21. Ra'anan Boustan, *From Martyr to Mystic: Rabbinic Martyrology and the Making of Merkavah Mysticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 200.

Two conceptions of the judgment day seem to have existed among Jews in the first century CE. Jews in the schools of Hillel and Shammai as well as the nascent Jesus-movement conceptualized the judgment day as a single and final eschatological event.[56] Likewise, the first-century CE Jewish thinker Paul writes about a final judgment day in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, telling his followers to be prepared for day of the Lord that will come like a "a thief in the night," and reassuring his followers that those who have died in the meantime will be resurrected and precede those that are already alive, who will be granted eternal life, too.[57] For Christians through the centuries, the Judgment Day has remained a future (and ever-threatening) event.

In contrast, in the first century CE, Philo writes about the annual Day of Atonement, stating that even Jews who are usually not observant, show piety during this period.[58] In late antiquity the sages further de-emphasized the future judgment day and elaborated is meaning as an annual event, whereby humanity is judged on Rosh Hashana and its fate sealed on Yom Kippur (yRosh Hashana 57a and bRosh Hashana 16b).

A third position was offered by the authors of the *Hekhalot* literature, who in their corpus of writings convey the idea of an ever-present or every day judgment. Such a conception of time explains the features of §92, which seem to describe a scenario wherein judgment and excommunication takes place in the heavenly court three times every day:

> גדולה מכולם שתוקעין ומריעין ותוקעין ואחר כך מנדין ושבין ומ)נ(דין ומחרימים שלשה פעמים ... מי שעומד לפניו וחושש במרכבה ועוזב אותו.

56 See Babylonian Talmud Rosh Hashana 16b. The distinctions between earlier and later Jewish thought and Christian thought were pointed out by Isreal Yuval in his seminar in Princeton in the fall of 2010, Jewish and Christian Festivals: Temptation, Competition, and Rejection.

57 See also the Book of Revelation's lengthy depiction of the final judgement.

58 Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* 1:186; LCL, Philo 7:205-6.

> Greatest of all [is it] that the courthouse of the heavens
> Sounds the long blast, and the short blast, and the long blast [on the trumpet][59]
> and then excommunicates [*menadin*] and returns and excommunicates
> [*menadin*] and excommunicates [*machrimin*] three times on each day
> …
> the one who stands before him contemplating the *merkavah* and leaves it…[60]

Again, the emphasis is on daily recurring action, simultaneously celebratory and punitive. The penalty for neglecting or leaving the activity of contemplation of the chariot is great, indeed. Excommunication from God and the heavenly court seems to be the same idea as being written into the book of life and death. According to Simcha Assaf, "The *menudeh* and the *muchram* were thought of as dead, taken from life and distanced a great distance from the public."[61] Interestingly, in the Geonic period part of the ritual of excommunication was to blow the *shofar* in the synagogue; this heavenly court scene would have been familiar to contemporary Jews.[62]. Why the heavenly court is sitting in judgment thrice daily still needs to be addressed.

It turns out that the time of prayer is not totally unrelated to judgment and punishment. Assaf describes a form of punishment among Jews in the medieval period called the *koneh*, which may shed light on this scene:

> In one of the corners of the hallway of the synagogue—for the most part in the largest synagogue in the city—there were "*yotzei dofen*," two bands of iron. On this corner they would stand up the sinner and chains of iron, bracing his arms, would confine him upon the bands of iron. Another chain of iron was

59 The terms *teki'ah* and *teru'ah* refer to the two types of trumpet (or shofar) sounds to be made on holy occasions (see "Shofar" in *Encyclopedia Judaica* 18: 506-8). Jastrow translates *teki'ah* as the "plain note" and *teru'ah* as "to blow tremolo" (see "Rua'" p.1462).

60 N.B. that *nidui* is a lesser degree of excommunication than *cherem* (Jastrow 903).

61 S. Assaf, *Ha-Onashin Acharei Chatimat HaTalmud* (Jerusalem: HaPoel HaZair, 1922), 31. My translation.

62 Ibid, 32. It is also worth noting that during the Geonic period and the tenth century especially, the excommunications became more common and severe in their application. Israel Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1993,) 53; Assaf, *Ha-Onashin*, 32.

> placed upon his neck and confined him to the wall. In the *koneh* the sinner was presented for viewing in the time of prayer when the entire Kahal would go out and come into the synagogue, and all—especially, of course, the mischievous youth—would humiliate him or also spit in his face, and there is no greater humiliation than this.[63]

This description of the punishment may shed light on §259: "And he has barely moved when they load upon him thousand of thousands of pieces of iron." Moreover, this helps us see how times of worship coincided with times of communal punishment. Thus, the time when communities gathered for prayer served multiple functions, but for the circles of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, this time gained extraordinarily sacred proportions.

It is limiting to think about these texts apart from the dimension of time, whether its heavenly time or earthly communal time. It seems that for the users of this liturgical collection, time above and below operated on the same sacred tempo. At first glance, it seemed that there were scant references to time in *Hekhalot Rabbati*. On second consideration, the assumption of present, simultaneous, and an ongoing most holy time permeates many prayers dispersed in the macroform. For example, "each and every day, at the rising of the dawn," God asks his heavenly creatures to be silent while he listens to the prayers of his sons on earth (§173). The adherents of this liturgy began each morning imagining God in tune with their prayers. This inherently demanded the highest level of devotion.

U-Netanne Tokef, §82, and everyday holiness

The transition in Jewish thought between a future and annual judgment day may even be noticed in the ancient Byzantine *piyyut U-Netanne Tokef*, whose first half describes a final

63 Assaf, *Ha-Onashin*, 31.

day of judgment and whose second half explicitly refers to the annual holidays of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur where fates are decided and sealed, respectively.[64] Interestingly, this ancient *piyyut* shows a relationship with the opening of the treatise *Hekahlot Rabbati*.

In his book, *The Mysteries of Jewish Prayer and Hekhalot,*[65] Meir Bar Ilan provides a fascinating analysis of *U-Netanne Tokef* and points out one of its stanza's similarities to §82 of *Hekhalot Rabbati*. The parallels may be seen in the following table:

§82 of *Hekhalot Rabbati*	*U-Netanne Tokef*
למי משפילין למי מגביהין למי מרפים למי מגבירין למי מרוששים למי מעשירין למי ממיתין למי מחיים למי נוטלין ממנו ירושה למי נותנין לו ירושה למי מנחילין לו תורה למי נותנין לו חוכמה.	בראש השנה יכתבון וביום]צום[כפור יחתמון כמה יעברון וכמה יבראון מי יחיה ומי ימות מי בקצו ומי לא בקצו מי במים ומי באש מי בחרב ומי בחיה מי ברעש ומי במגפה מי ינוח ומי ינוע מי ישקיט ומי יטרף מי ישלו ומי יתיסר מי ירום ומי ישפל מי יעשיר ומי יעני:[66]
Whom they cast down, whom they exalt? Whom they weaken, whom they strengthen? Whom they impoverish, whom they enrich? Whom they kill, whom they let live? From whom they take an inheritance,	And on Rosh Hashana, they will be written and on Yom Kippur, they will be sealed: How many will pass away and how many be created Who will live and who will die Who at his time and who before his time Who by water and who by fire Who by sword and who by beast

64 For the dating of *U-Netanne Tokef*, see Avraham Fraenkel, "R. Amnon and the Penetration of 'Untanneh Toqef' into Italy, Ashkenaz and France," *Zion* 67.2 (2002): 125-138.

65 Bar Ilan, *The Mysteries of Jewish Prayer and Hekhalot* (Ramat-Gan: Hotsa'at Universitat Bar-Ilan, 1987), 51-3 [Hebrew]).

66 Edited by Daniel Goldschmidt, *Mahzor LeYamim Noraim* (Jerusalem: Academy, 1970), 170.

to whom they give an inheritance? Whom they bequeath Torah, to whom they give Wisdom?[67]	Who by storm and who by plague Who will rest and who will be restless, Who will be composed and who will be consumed Who will be serene and who will suffer Who will be exalted and who cast down Who will be enriched, and who impoverished.[68]

The compositions share the structure of juxtapositions, although the order of the negative and positive valuations are reversed in *Hekhalot Rabbati*. Additionally, the two compositions share vocabulary in four instances (underlined). The hymn in *Hekhalot Rabbati* does not linger over the manner of death, but seems particularly interested in the potential reversals in one's fortunes. Whereas the interrogative in the *piyyut* it is in the nominative case, in §82 it is in the dative case and somewhat awkwardly so.[69] Whereas in the *piyyut*, the verbs are in the future tense (reflecting a view of the judgment as annual or future event), the verbs in §82 are all in the present tense, implying a view of an ongoing daily judgment.

Meir Bar Ilan concludes that the similarities between the *piyyut* and §82 can be explained by their shared late antique milieu.[70] He cites a passage in the Palestinian Talmud, which also includes a short prayer resembling *U-Netanne Tokef* in structure, vocabulary, and content:

> (From) Rav's wording it follows that all of them are judged on Rosh Hashana and the (divine) sentence of (every) one of them is sealed on Rosh Hashana.

67 Here, I follow Schäfer's interpretation that the angels are the subject of the questions. See his explanation in *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 249ff.

68 Daniel Goldshmidt, ed., *Machzor L'Yamim Noraim* (Jerusalem: Koren, 1970), 230-31 (my translation).

69 The only other place in Hebrew texts where I could find a series of interrogatives in the dative case is in Proverbs 23: 29 and its interpretations in Midrashic lit: "Who cries, 'Woe!' who, 'Alas!'; Who has quarrels, who complaints; Who has wounds without cause; Who has bleary eyes?"

70 Bar Ilan, *The Mysteries of Jewish Prayer and Hekhalot*, 52 (my translation).

> For it was taught in Rav's Shofar Prayers: today is the day of the beginning of your works, a memorial to the first day (of Creation).
> "For this is a statute for Israel, a law of the God of Jacob," and on it [this day] the nations are judged
>
> which for the sword and which for peace
> which for famine and which for plenty
> and on it [this day] the creatures are called up to record them
> for life or for death.[71]

Here Rav asserts that there is an annual judgement day on Rosh Hashana. Directly after this tradition, R. Yose asserts that an individual is judged at every hour. This detail, alongside the *piyyut* in §82, may have led Bar Ilan to hypothesize that the adherents of the *Hekhalot* tradition were of R. Yose's opinion and believed that God judges his creatures every day.[72] To support this conjecture, he brings in one additional piece of circumstantial evidence:

> In light of this conclusion, a portion from the *Sefer Hasidim* can now be understood…wherein it states that "for this reason we do not say '*U-Netanne Tokef Kedushat Ha-Yom*' except on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur." It seems that the Hasidei Ashkenaz knew people that said *U-Netanne Tokef* every day, in the same way that the Hekhalot circles supposed that man is judged on each day, and hence, the opposition to the daily recitation of this *piyyut* [should be understood] against this background.[73]

The hasidim of Ashkenaz were the people that copied, transmitted, and (to scholars' chagrin), often emended the texts of *Hekhalot* literature in the eleventh-twelfth century. It is possible that the custom of reciting this *piyyut* (or one likeit) on a daily basis was ancient. An examination of the hymns of *Hekhalot Rabbati* has shown us how such a practice would have been in keeping with the sense of time of the mystics. Internal evidence from the hymns of

71 Palestinian Talmud Rosh Hashana 57a, 1.3/3 of *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi* II/5-12, p.186; I consulted Goldman trans., *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: Rosh hashana,* 40.

מלתיה דרב אמרה כולהום נידונים בראש השנה וגזר דינו של אחד מהן מתחתם בראש השנה. דתני בתקיעיתא דרב זה היום תחילת מעשיך זכרון ליום ראשון 'כי חוק לישראל הוא משפט לאלהי יעקב' (תהילים פא). ועל המדינות בו יאמרו אי זו לחרב ואי זו לשלום אי זו לרעב ואיזו לשובע ובריות בו יפקדו להזכירם לחיים ולמות.

72 Bar Ilan, *The Mysteries of Jewish Prayer and Hekhalot,* 53.

73 Ibid., my translation; Bar Ilan cites Vistinetski's edition of *Sefer Hasidim*, page 143 (Berlin, 1951).

Hekhalot Rabbati provides support for the idea that the circles associated with this macroform believed in an ongoing daily judgment for which a different attitude towards time was necessary.

One is inclined to question when and why the hymn in §82 came into the macroform. Beginnings and ends of compositions tend to be especially variable. Does the hymn belong to the milieu of the *Yerushalmi* and *U-Netanei Tokef* or is it much later and are the notoriously liberal copyists of Ashkenaz the authors of this insertion?[74] Indeed, the evidence from the *Sefer Hasidim* confirms that the *piyyut* had faithful followers and critics in the very circles that preserved this literature. Could it be that the very opposition to reciting *U-Netanne Tokef* daily brought about the inclusion of a similar hymn in *Hekhalot Rabbati*?

On the other hand, the beginning of *Hekahlot Rabbati* is rather stable in the manuscript tradition. While the textual evidence does not permit us to date this microform precisely, the placement of this hymn, first before all the others, suggests that individual judgment was a matter of highest importance to the adherents of this tradition. What the parallel of the *Yerushalmi* may teach us is that prayers that poetically juxtapose one's fate were strongly associated with Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur. To state the matter more strongly, this short hymn carried the connotation of judgment on these high holy days in the same way that the line "who's naughty or nice" conjures up Christmas for American children immediately. In this light, one might understand the macroform as setting the stage with the highest sense of sacred time by associating itself with the holiest days of the year, Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur.

74 See Israel Ta-Shma, "The Library of the Ashkenazi Sages in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," *QS* 60 (1985): 298-309. Also, Klaus Herrmann, "Re-Written Mystical Texts: The Transmission of the Hekhalot Literature in the Middle Ages" *BJRL* 75 (1993): 97-116.

Of Messiahs and Men and the Angels

My findings in the liturgical sections of *Hekahlot Rabbati* further corroborate Ra'anan Boustan and Peter Schäfer's work, which pointed out that the *yordei merkavah* seem to live in a world of realized eschatology.[75] That this sense of sacred time and realized eschatology was recognized by the transmitters of the *Hekhalot* corpus is confirmed by the way *The Story of the Ten Martyrs* was emended and inserted into *Hekhalot Rabbati*. Ra'anan Boustan explains that "this fantasy of revenge is recounted in the present tense. This temporal shift transforms what in the conventional martyrology is the *future* punishment of Rome into a tale of *immediate* revenge…like other parts of *Heikhalot Rabbati*, the 'inverted' martyrology emphasizes the immediate power of the mystical fellowship to intervene in worldly events."[76] The macroform's conception of time allows for the judgment and punishment of Israel's antagonists to be celebrated alongside other hymns that praise the daily activity of the king, the throne, and the angelic creatures. Each day is a day of judgment, victory, and occasion for partaking in prayers in tune with the angels.

Schäfer came to his conclusion based on his analysis of §86, which portrays the *Merkavah* mystic as a judge-like figure that bears much resemblance to Malachi 3's depiction of the messenger who prepares the people for the day of judgment.[77]

גדולה מכולם שיהיו כל הבריות לפניו ככסף לפני צורף
שמכיר איזה כסף צרוף ואיזה ככסף פסול איזהו כסף טהור
ואף הוא יהיה צופה כמשפחה כמה ממזירים יש במשפחה
כמה בני נידה]יש[כמה פצועי דכא כמה כרותי שפכה

75 Schäfer, *Hidden and Manifest God*, 43;

76 See Ra'anan Boustan, *From Martyr to Mystic: Rabbinic Martyrology and the Making of Merkavah Mysticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 200.

77 Schäfer, *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 252.

כמה עבדים כמה בני ערילים.

> The greatest thing of all is the fact
> that all the creatures will be before him
> like silver before the silversmith, who perceives
> which silver has been refined,
> which silver is impure,
> and which silver is pure
> He even sees (*tzofeh*) into the families,
> how many bastards there are in the family,
> how many sons sired during menstruation,
> how many with crushed testicles,
> how many with mutilated penis,
> how many slaves,
> and how many sons from uncircumcised (fathers).[78]

Here the participants in this tradition claim to achieve the power and perception to determine who is halachicaly Jewish in their community, a power usually reserved for God, the angels, or the God's chosen one—the messiah.[79] As Schäfer explains, "This is a devastating critique of the social makeup of the mystic's community because it presupposes that his purging act is sorely needed."[80] Schäfer emphasized that *yored merkavah*, in assuming an Elijah like role, "has rendered the Messiah superfluous."[81] As a virtually omniscient perceptive judge, he knows who is truly a member of the community he is in. This takes the rabbinic emphasis on *imitatio dei* to a much more radical level. Living on heavenly time, in the highest state of purity, these men achieve an ability to be god-like that exceeds their peers. Indeed, the reciter's conception(s?) of self in this corpus ought to be examined more closely.

78 Trans. Schäfer, *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 251.

79 See also discussion of this issue in Moulie Vidas, "The Bavli on Genealogy," *Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

80 Schäfer , *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 251.

81 Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, 43.

The Torah was ~~not~~ given to angels: the Sar haTorah myth

For many scholars, the identification of authorship of this corpus rests on their interpretation of one section of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, which has been termed the *Sar haTorah* myth (§§281-298). *Sar haTora*h refers to the angelic prince of the Torah and this myth describes the Jews of the second temple period (after the Babylonian exile, returning to Palestine to rebuild the temple) and their frustrations balancing their labor and their Torah study. In answer to their complaints, God agrees to reveal to them the means of calling up the angel of the Torah, who can grant them perfect memorization of the Oral and written Torah.

What kind of Jews would think up such a myth? Each hypothesis that has been suggested by scholars brings up important considerations. David Halperin believes the *am ha'aretz*, the non-rabbinic Jews of late antique Palestine,[82] who were derided in rabbinic literature, could have been responsible for conceiving this foundation myth and the *Hekhalot* corpus as a whole. His argument zooms in on a few microforms' emphasis on leveling the playing field, as it were, for the brilliant and the less gifted.[83] His reading may take this rhetoric too far. Swartz, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, locates the authors of these texts among secondary elites in the synagogue. Adopting a position between Swartz and Halperin, James Davila proposes that the same people who composed the incantation bowls found in Babylonia produced the *Hekhalot* texts. His anthropological and comparative approach highlights the "magical" and shamanistic themes in the corpus. He believes that ritual practitioners were the mediators who bridged the gap between the rabbis and other Jews. My research suggests that different worldviews about angels prevailed among ritual

82 Literally people of the land (compare with the original meaning of pagan, "people of the hills").

83 Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988), 437ff.

practitioners and the mystics. I will return to this topic below.

Moulie Vidas proposes identifying certain members of the rabbinic movement as possible authors and carriers of this text. He suggests locating the authors of the *Hekhalot* texts squarely within the rabbinic movement, among a group called the *tanna'im*, the Jewish men responsible for memorizing and reciting oral traditions (not the early sages who also had this designation).[84] In a scholastic environment before books, their role in the study house and academy as "living books" was crucial, albeit taken for granted among the scholars. Polemical accounts in the Babylonian talmud indicate that the *tanna'im* were of inferior status in the study-house, aspired to the status of the legal scholars, engaged in some of the same activities as the scholars (like juxtaposition and emendations of traditions), but that other scholars deeply resented them.[85] If the ideals and conceptions of angels contained in *Hekhalot* literature emerged from the subset of the rabbinic movement that Vidas posits, I would anticipate that their texts would share many values with the rabbis, but also some adapt traditions about angels for their own personal ends. And indeed, this is what the evidence suggests.

The rabbis are adamant that the Torah was not given to the ministering angels. The imperfect men of Israel, preferably in the guise of the rabbis themselves, are the ones God prefers. In the *Sar HaTorah* myth, however, we find the Torah in the possession of the angels, still in heaven. The angels themselves object when God grants Israel their desire for a shortcut to the Torah (§§291-2 of O1531):

...מלחמה רבה נלחמו עמי משרתי. קטיגור גדול מלאכי שרת זו תשובה שלו.

84 Vidas, "Hekhalot Literature, the Babylonian Academies, and the *Tanna'im,*" *Hekhalot Literature in Context*, 141-176.

85 See Babylonian Talmud Sotah 22a and Babylonian Talmud Baba Metsia 33a-b.

רז זה אל יצא מבית גנזיך וסתר ערמה מאוצרותיך אל תשם בשר ודם כמונו, אל תדמה בני אדם תמורתינו…
אם רז זה יצא לבניך ישוו קטן כגדול וכסיל כחכם זו תשובת עבדיו.

> My servants and I waged a great war,
> An accuser, the greatest of the ministering angels, [appeared and] this was his plea:
> "Let not this secret go forth from Thy storehouse,
> and mystery of prudence from Thy treasuries;
> Let not flesh and blood as our equals, suppose not the children of men our substitute.
> …But if Thou revealest this secret to Thy children,
> The small will be as the great and the fool as the wise."

As Halperin quipped, "Were there ever angels who wore their motives on their sleeves more patently than the ones of this text? Their slogan is inequality. Their demand is that inequality be perpetuated."[86] Indeed, he is right that these angels are most explicit in their opposition to Israel, but in this corpus (as opposed to the rabbinic corpus), they have good reason to be: here the Torah is in heaven.

Still, the hymns of *Hekhalot Rabbati* show us how some of the mystics, using liturgical language, tapped into heavenly time and the angelic rhythm. Schäfer and Boustan have also shown how these mystics conceived themselves as messianic god-like figures, superior to their fellow men, on the same level or superior to the angels. They aspire to this lofty status and in the process, already separate themselves from their fellow men. Hence one of the *Gedullah* hymns states (§85):

גדולה מכולם שהיה מובדל מכל בני אדם ונבהל מכל מידותיו ונכבד על העליונים ועל התחתונים.

> Greatest of all is the fact that he is distinguished from all humans and awe-inspiring by all accounts and honored by earthly and heavenly ones.

It is in this context, I think, that we must understand the idea, unique to this corpus, that the

86 Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 437.

Torah and its secrets is in possession of the Sar haTorah, who in turn grants it to Israel.[87] While the Torah is in the possession of the angels, the adepts already are as good as angels too. For this reason, they and their disciples deserve (but also need) the secret shortcuts to Torah mastery.

> …שבו לפני כסאי כמידה שאתם יושבים בישיבה ותפסו כתר וקבלו אות(ו)ם ולמדו סדר שר התורה זה היך תשמשו בו כי היך מעליו נתיבות לבבכם. היו צופין לבבכם בתורה מה נענה זרובבל בן שאלתיאל ועמד על רגליו לפניו כתורגמן היה מפרש שמות שר התורה אחד אחד כשמו שם כתר ושם חותם.[88]

> Sit before my throne as you sit in the yeshiva and seize the crown and accept the seal and study this order of the Prince of Torah, how you shall perform it, how you shall expound it, how you shall use it, how you shall raise the paths of your hearts, how your hearts shall gaze into Torah!"
> At once Zerubbabel the son of Shaltiel stood up before him like a *meturgeman* and explained the names of the Prince of the Torah, one by one, with his name, the name of his crown and the name of his seal."

The method by which the adepts gain the Torah from the angelic Prince of Torah is a ritual one, which requires knowing the names of the angel and the name of his crowns and seals. This brings up the final distinctive feature of the mystics' attitude to angels—the idea that the mystics can command the angels at will.

Adjuring Angels

Among late antique Jewish texts, the *Hekhalot* literature stands out for upholding the idea that men may adjure, bind, or command angels. Already in "The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism," Schäfer noted that adjuration was no minor theme in the *Hekhalot* literature, but central to all the works in this corpus, as central as the ascent itself. In "Engel

87 This ought to be distinguished from the idea that the angels conveyed the Torah to Israel at Sinai, which is assumed by Paul in his letters and elsewhere.

88 §298 of O1531.

und Menschen in der Hekhalot-Literatur," Schäfer further collected the literary evidence for adjuration in the corpus.[89] Here I review his findings and situate them in a broader literary context, one enabled by the publications of liturgical and ritual texts in the last thirty years. What this comparison highlights is that the adepts hold a very distinctive view of themselves and of angels among contemporary Jews. The authors of this corpus of literature, unlike all other contemporary Jews, believed they were entitled to command the angels to obey their will.

Hekhalot Rabbati opens with the saying that "The greatest thing of all is that they [the angels] are bound to him, to admit him and bring him in to the chambers of the palace of the seventh heaven" (§81).[90] To state it more directly, the mystics celebrate authority over the angels as the greatest feat. Because this is a text intended for exclusive circles, it is not surprising that the angels are taken for granted from the beginning and not named explicitly.

Among the four different ascent accounts described in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, the longest account is that one needs to adjure the angelic Prince of the Countenance to ascend to the chariot (§§203-218). Here R. Nehunia ben haQanah explains to an assembled group of famous rabbis that to descend to the chariot (§§204-5):

> וכיון שהיה אדם מבקש לירד למרכבה היה קורא אותו לסוריה שר הפנים ומשביעו
> מאה ושנים עשר פעמים בטוטרוסיאי יוי שהיה נקרא טוטרוסיאי צורטק טוטרביאל
> ...
> שלא יוסיף על מאה ושנים עשר פעמים ולא יגרע מהם
> או מוסיף או גורע דמו בראשו.
> אלא פיו יוצא שמות ואצבעות ידיו מאה ושנים עשר יספרו
> מיד יורד ושולט במרכבה[91]

89 First published in *Karios* 22 (1980): 201-25 and reprinted in *Hekhalot-Studien* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988), 250-276.

90 גדולה מכולם להזקק לו להכניסו ולהבי[או] לחדרי היכל ערבות רקיע based on O1531 and cf. N8128.

91 Based on O1531, my translation follows.

> When a man wishes to descend to the chariot, he should call to Suriya the Prince of the Countenance and adjure him 112 times in [various names]
> …
> and he must not to add to the 112 names nor subtract from them.
> If he adds or subtracts, his blood be upon his head.
> But if his mouth utters the names and the fingers of his hands count 112, immediately he descends and controls the merkavah.

Here adjuring a specific angel with secret names enables the reciter to descend to the chariot and employ its power (whatever that means). The ascent accounts in this section of *Hekhalot Rabbati* culminate not in a vision of God, but in the participation of the reciter in the hymns sung by the angels and divine creatures at the throne of Glory. The reciter employs the angels so that he may join them in the heavenly choir.

In microform §§302-4, after the Sar HaTorah myth, near the end of the macroform of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, adjuration is again the means of the ascent, but the goal is Torah mastery:[92]

> וישביע אותם לשנים עשר
> בשם יופיאל שהוא הדר מרום מרשות מלכו
> ובשם סרכיאל שהוא משרי מרכבה
> ובשם שהדריאל שהוא שר אהוב
> ובשם חסדיאל שנקרא לגבורה שש שעות בכל יום
> ויחזור וישביע אותם ארבעה שרים האחרונים בחותם הגדול ובשבועה הגדולה בשם אזבוגה שהוא חותם גדול גדול ובשם צורטק שם קדש וכתר נורא.
>
> ובכלות לו שנים עשר ימים יצא לכל מדות תורה שהוא מבקש
> אם למקרא או למשנה או לתלמוד ואפי׳ לצפיית המרכבה
> כי במדה טהרה הוא יוצא ומצטער ומסיגוף גדול כי תלמוד הוא בידינו תקנת ראשונים ומסורת עתיקים שכתבו והגידו לדורות להשתמש בו צנועים ומי שראוי נענה בהם.
>
> אמר ר׳ ישמעאל כך אמר ר׳ עקיבה משם ר׳ אליעזר הגדול אשרי מי שזכות אבותיו מסייעתו וצדקת יולדיו עומדת לו ויהא משמש בתג זה ובחותם זה ויהי נזקקין לו והוא מתגאה בגאותה של תורה.

> Let him conjure up those [previously mentioned] twelve [angels] by the name Yofiel:

92 Based on Vatican 228; trans. Schäfer, "Aim and Purpose," 282.

he is the splendor of [heaven on] high because of the permission of his King;
by the name Sarakhiel:
he belongs to the princes of the Chariot;
by the name Sahadariel:
he is a beloved prince;
by the name Hasdiel: six hours every day he is called to the divine power.
Let him again conjure up the last [named] four princes
by the great seal and the great oath,
by the name AZBWGH:
he is the great seal;
and by the name SWRTQ:
the holy name and the awesome crown.

After the course of twelve days
he will reach all the types of the Torah he desires,
whether that is Bible,
whether that is Mishnah,
whether that is Talmud,
whether it is even the vision of the Chariot.
…
R. Ishmael said:
So spoke R. Aqiva in the name of R. Eliezer the Elder:
Blessed is he to whom the merit of his fathers comes as aid
and whom the righteousness of his parents assists:
he will avail himself of this crown and this seal,
[the angels] will be bound up with him,
and he will rise up proudly in the sublimity of the Torah.

In this microform, mastery of the angels and of the Torah are inextricably tied together and the vision of the heavenly throne is placed on the same level of importance. Adjuration in various guises emerges in all of the macroforms of the *Hekhalot* literature, but it is perhaps most explicit in *Hekhalot Zutarti*, where the ascent to heaven culminates in the hero's request to God himself to put the angels at his disposal (§§417-19). Here the angels convey the reciter to the lap of God himself, where he is told to make his request. His response is:

יהי רצון מלפניך יוי אלהי ישרʾ אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו
…שתתיני לחן ולחסד לפני כסא כבודך ובעיני כל משרתיך
ותזקק לי את כל משרתיך לעשות כך וכך

> May it be pleasing before you, Lord, God of Israel,
> our God and the God of our fathers…
> [skipping one line interpolation]
> that you grant me grace and favor
> from your throne of glory and before all your servants,
> that you bind unto me [= place at my disposal]
> all your servants to do this and that...[93]

Neither liturgical union nor Torah learning is not mentioned here, mastery over the angels alone becomes paramount. This mastery is performed through recitation of the angels' names: knowing the name of an angel is tantamount to placing him at the practitioner's disposal. As Schäfer puts it, here we find "magical adjuration as the goal and climax of the heavenly journey."[94]

Microforms in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, which post-dates *Hekhalot Rabba*ti, largely repeat its traditions on the means of adjuration (see §§560-569) with microform §562 framing this practice more explicitly: "You are YY the living God in the heavens who gave permission to the ranks of your glory to be bound to human beings."[95] Like the ritual practitioners who see themselves as operating within a hierarchy that God created, the mystics see their adjuration of angels as acting out a world order that God put in place for them.

Mystics, Ritual Practitioners, and the Angels

The adjuration of the angels must be understood in the framework of the initiates' conception of themselves as godly or messianic. Whereas for the rabbis *imitatio dei* encouraged values that made them somewhat disinterested the angels, the self-conception of

93 Schäfer, trans. "Aim and Purpose," 285.

94 Schäfer, *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 300.

95 "אתה הוא יי אל חי בשמים שנתת רשות לגדודי כבודך שיזקקו לבני אדם"

the mystics encouraged an unprecedented preoccupation with and sense of superiority to the angels. Even the incantations of the most confident ritual practitioners show much more limited ambitions than the adepts' writings. Whether they sought to reenact the ascent experiences of their heroes or not, the mystics conceived a world with greater status for themselves both above and below. I believe that the mystics express an attitude of entitlement to angelic obedience that distinguishes them sharply from other contemporary Jews, including ritual practitioners. Paradoxically, the mystics' entitled attitude to angels may betray a deep lack of confidence in their own human potential.

Several scholars have highlighted the commonalities between the *Hekhalot* literature and magical texts.[96] In his study of the *Sar HaTorah* traditions in *Hekhalot* literature, Michael Swartz notes that while they resemble magical texts, they stand out "for the mythic framework into which they are set, and for their prominence in the *Hekahlot* corpus."[97] This mythic framework valorizes rabbinic heroes. Hence, he ascertains in these traditions the ethos of the rabbinic intelligentsia here "appropriated and recast by ritual practitioners and storytellers who wished to achieve for themselves the tangible benefits—honor, power, and wealth of that intelligentsia."[98] He further locates these Jews in the synagogue, where other literate Jews (like scribes, liturgical poets, preachers, targumists, etc.) could be found.

Davila begins his study from the anthropological standpoint that the descenders to the

96 Schäfer, "Jewish Magic Literature in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages," *Journal ofJewish Studies* 41 (1990), 75–91; Shaul Shaked, "'Peace Be Upon You, Exalted Angels': On Hekhalot, Liturgy, and Incantation Bowls," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2 (1995): 197-219; Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot*, especially chapter 8: "The Hekhalot Literature and other Jewish texts of ritual power;" Michael Swartz, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.); Joseph Dan, *The Ancient Jewish Mysticism (*Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1989); Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked. *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1998).

97 Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 209.

98 Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 220.

Chariot may be understood as shamans and sees the ritual texts as the practical counterpart to the *Hekhalot* texts. He writes that the "evidence of the other texts of ritual power fills out this picture and shows that the tradents of the *Hekhalot* literature used their powers to heal, protect, and exorcise demons from clients."[99] Rebecca Lesses also takes a wider cross-cultural perspective, arguing that "revelatory adjurations of *Hekhalot* literature, *Sefer ha-Razim*, the Greco-Egyptian ritual texts, and the Aramaic amulets all belong to a larger complex of practices of adjuration that was widespread in the Greco-Roman world in the late antiquity.[100] Swartz, Davila, and Lesses each highlight the commonalities of the ritual texts and *Hekhalot* texts, each according to his/her own methods.

Looking from the Palestinian and Babylonian ritual texts to the *Hekhalot* texts, Shaked noted cases where the "language and imagery are strongly reminiscent of the *Hekhalot* texts, as are the poetical sweep and the grandeur of the vision" of the magical texts.[101] In his publication of bowls, Levene is especially careful to cite parallels to *Hekhalot*-like phrases and descriptors of God. Like Davila, but based on his philological study of the bowls, Levene writes that the "magic bowls constitute the practical counterpart to above-mentioned texts (*Hekhalot* literature, *Sword of Moses*, and *Sefer ha-Razim*) which are all of a prescriptive nature, they are the only material evidence for magical practices that are implied in the *Hekhalot* texts."[102] While there is certainly dialogue and overlap between the Jews that engaged in *Hekhalot* literature and in ritual practices, I maintain that there are fundamental

99 In *Descenders to the Chariot*, Davila writes that the "religious functionaries portrayed in the *Hekhalot* texts, the 'descenders the chariot' as they are sometimes called, were real people, practitioners of the rituals described in the *Hekhalot* literature and the writers of that literature…" (254-5).

100 Rebecca Lesses, *Ritual Practices To Gain Power, Angels, Incantations, and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinigty Press, 1998), 284.

101 Shaked, "Peace be Upon You," 199.

102 See Dan Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls: Incantation Texts in Jewish Aramaic from Late Antiquity* (London: Kegan Paul, 2003), 15.

differences in worldview, which can be distinguished upon closer reading of the texts.

Schäfer wrote about the *Hekhalot* texts that "we are concerned here with eminently magical texts which deal with forceful adjurations….the objects of the adjuration are always angels."[103] This last point is the key to understanding the differences between the composers of *Hekhalot* literature and the ritual texts. Ritual practitioners are far more modest in their dealings with the angels, demons, and God. In my analysis of the incantation bowls and amulets with provenance, I found that as a rule Jewish ritual practitioners invoke angels as witnesses, but only adjure and bind demons and demon-like creatures. Jewish ritual practitioners may act in the name of God and the angels, but they usually do not command angels to do their bidding. This is a difference worth noting. The worldview of the ritual practitioners upholds a hierarchy in which they are mediators, usually between their clients and the angels and God, where they piously ask God for his intervention with demons or other earthly problems. Some ritual practitioners show more confidence, addressing demons directly without invoking angels, sometimes describing themselves with angelic traits and powers, but even in those cases, the angels are left out of the incantation, they are not made their servants.

The mystics' self-conception is markedly different: the idea that you can command angels implies a completely different attitude to the self, the heavenly realm, and to authority. The overwhelming majority of extant ritual texts with provenance do not reflect this worldview. I believe that the mystics and the ritual practitioners uphold distinctive world-views, both of which were expressions of Jewish identity in late antiquity and the early medieval period, and which could coexist and at times, indeed, overlap.

103 Schäfer, "Aim & Purpose," 282.

That overlap would look like this: in those rare cases where we do find adjuration of angels in ritual texts, we should also expect to find other marks of the mystics' idiosyncratic interests. The material evidence does bear this out. Dan Levene published an incantation bowl who liturgical language paralleled that of a microform found in *Hekhalot literature* (§503, N8128).[104] Both the incantation bowl and microform contained a variation on the first benediction of the amidah (underlined below).

M102, line 10-11
בשום גבריאל מלאכה ומיכאל מלאכה אחית אחוגואל אחודיאל גאו גואל טוריאל זבולא
זבולתיאל ומרגיותיאל ושמיה
ברוך אתה יהוה אלוהינו מלך העולם האל הגדול הגיבור והנורא ומופלא והמעולה
ומשבענא עלך מיכאל סר הגדול.

§503
וזה אשר תקרא
ברוך אתה אלהינו מלך העולם האל המלך הגדול הגבור והנורא והנשגב והנפלא
והעונה בעת צרה בקוראי עננו אלהי צדקי בצר הראתי לי חנני ושמע תפילתי.

104 Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls,* 44ff. This corpus of bowls was in a private collection and lacked provenance, but are share features with other Jewish Aramaic incantation texts from Babylonia.

M102, line 10-11
In the name of Gabriel the angel and Michael the angel, bring down Ahuguel Ahudiel GA'W GWA'L Turiel ZBWLA' Zbwltiel and Mrgywtiel, and his name:
Blessed are You *YHWH* our God, King of the universe, the great, mighty,' awful, wondrous and lofty God.
I adjure you Michael the great prince.[105]

§503
And this is what you shall recite:
Blessed are You [*YHWH*] our God, King of the universe, the great the might the revered and the wondrous God
Who answers in times of trouble; when I call answer me my God, justify me in difficult times; show me, pardon me and hear my prayer.

Immediately following the benediction in the incantation text, the author adjures an angel. I posit that this is an instance where a person familiar with *Hekhalot*-centered hymns and prayers engaged in the creation of an incantation text. Such an incantation text is not representative of ritual texts as a whole, but an interesting example, which shows that literate men engaged in *Hekhalot* devotions could bring their particular worldview to ritual texts. In doing so, they produce a curse texts that contradicts the worldview of most other Jewish incantation texts. The purpose of this incantation, which is a curse text is quite personal: the practitioner is cursing women in his community whom he believes have been directing sorceries against him. Apparently, he felt so threatened by them, he felt the need to adjure Prince Michael himself.

What would happen if a ritual practitioner became familiar with *Hekhalot* hymns and imagery and decided to draw on them *without* disrupting the self-conception typical of producers of incantations? I expect he would produce an incantation that was respectful of the angels and God, acting in their name, but adjuring only demons. Indeed, such a

105 Trans. Levene with my corrections. Levene notes how this benediction combines the language of Nehemiah 9:32 and Deut 10:17.

practitioner might produce an incantation that looked like Moussaief 1, published and translated by Shaked, specifically to highlight commonalities between *Hekhalot* and the magical literature).[106] This text only adjures the demons and spirits attacking the sick female client and wishes peace upon the angels on high.

> לישמך אני עושה קדישה רבה כי שם ייי אקרא הבו גדל לאלהנו בדין קמיעה יהי לאסו למהדוך בת ניונדוך ותיתסי מן רו)ח(צרדא...מן כל זיקין ומזיקין מן רוח טמאה מן רוחא בישתא מומינא ומשבענא עלכי דלא תישלטין בה במהדוך בת ניונדוך דתיזחין ותיפקין מן מהדוך בת ניונדוך מן מאתן חמשין ויתרין הדמין דאית בה שלם לכון מלאכי מרומה שלם לכון גדודי צבא שלם לכון שירפי להב (ה) שלם לכון גלגלי מרכבה שלם לכון אופנים ויכרובים שלם לכון חיות ה(כבוד)...
>
> By your name I act, the great holy one. "Because I call the name of God, proclaim our Lord's greatness" By this amulet may there be healing to Mãhdukh daughter of Nêwãndukh, and may she be healed from
> [skipping lines 3b-7a , which contain a long list of malignant spirits];
> from all blast-spirits and harmful spirits; from an impure spirit; from the evil spirit. I adjure and invoke against you, that you should not have power over Mãhdukh daughter of Nêwãndukh, that you should depart and go out of Mãhdukh daughter of Nêwãndukh, from the 252 limbs that are in her.
> Peace be upon you, angels on high; peace be upon you, cohorts of the army; peace be upon you, flames of burning; peace be upon you, wheels of the chariot; peace be upon you, *ofannim* and *cherubim*; peace be upon you, *hayyot* of the <Throne of> glory (?)...[107]

This ritual practitioner operates, while incorporating *Hekahlot* imagery, maintains a respectful attitude to the angels.

Schäfer points to the eight words used in the *Hekhalot* literature to adjure angels: *ShB'*, *QR'*, *BQS*, *ZQQ*, *ZKR*, *ShMSh*, *YRD*, and finally *GZR* and *QWM.*[108] *ZQQ*, a key word in the *Hekhalot* corpus (and used in a different connotation in rabbinic texts[109]), is as far as I know, not common in the incantation texts, nor are the other verbs found in ritual texts

106 Shaked, "Peace Be Upon You, Exalted Angels," 207.

107 Shaked's transription and translation, omitting lines 9b-12 for the sake of brevity.

108 Schäfer, "Engel und Menschen in der Hekhalot-Literatur." 258ff.

109 See discussion of R. Yohanan's statement about angels not speaking Aramaic (Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 12b and Sotah 33a) in first chapter, fn. 51.

excepting *ShB'* and *QR'*. Ritual practitioners often use the verb *ShB'* but direct it at demons in particular. Demons are mentioned only in passing in the corpus, hardly a major threat.[110] The distinctive attitudes revealed by the texts as they have come down to us suggest that while there is overlap between the composers of the *Hekhalot* corpus and Babylonian ritual practitioners, we can still distinguish between them. While their self-conception as powerful angelic mediators is similar on the surface level, these mystically inclined Jews conceive of themselves, of angels, and of demons quite differently and they use different vocabulary to enact their rituals. It is difficult to decide whether these adjurations of angels are an expression of the mystics' confidence in themselves or whether they betray a deep insecurity in their own potential.

Medieval copyists combined ritual incantations with *Hekahlot* texts, which suggests that the copyists understood the texts to be homologous, but studied on their own terms, the ritual and mystical texts reveal significant differences.[111] Rabbis and their disciples, mystics, and ritual practitioners, expressed their Jewish identity in strikingly different ways in Late Antique communities, but not so differently that they were no longer in dialogue with one another. In their texts we can see that the nature of authority, God, and the angels was still a matter for debate in late antique Jewish society.

110 *Hekhalot Zutarti* §356 (*Lilin*, found with assortment of other creatures in the liminal space between the feet of the divine creatures and the throne), *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §562 (knowledge of mystery protects from all harm and evil, including demons) and in *Merkavah Rabbah* §705.

111 See the Genizah fragment housed in the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTSL ENA 3635.17) and the fragment in the Cambridge University Library (K 1.56) published by Schäfer and Shaked in *Magische Texte,* vol. 1, pp.17-45. Discussed by Schäfer,"Jewish Liturgy and Magic," *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 541-555.

Conclusion

The *Hekhalot Rabbati* is chronologically the latest source examined in this dissertation. Angelic pervasiveness reaches its climax in this literature. While we find commonalities with rabbinic, liturgical, and ritual texts, we also find very distinctive views in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, which remind us of the diversity of Jewish society in late antiquity. The Jews who composed this macroform imagined the heavenly realms and the angels more vividly than any other of their counterparts. They pictured angels as their potential companions and avengers, as their challengers, but ultimately as their servants. They pictured themselves as far more angelic and powerful than the ritual practitioners do in their incantations and identified with godly attributes far more than the rabbis dared to. For these Jews daily life meant something completely different than for other Jews. They strove to live, not on rabbinic annual calendrical time, but according to the rhythms of the heavenly realms. I have suggested that they accessed this time through their prayerbook, within and outside the synagogue. What most Jews only experienced weekly in the Qedushah in Palestine or annually on Yom Kippur—utmost holiness and synchronicity with the angels—these Jews sought to experience all the time and embody completely.

CONCLUSION

My study of angels in Jewish texts from the fourth to eighth century aims to contribute to the understanding of one formative period in Jewish history, showing how Jews conceived of angels in scholastic, liturgical, ritual, and mystical settings. Though in the main, I sought to add depth and complexity to the picture of angels in ancient Jewish life, my study also proves relevant to disciplines beyond Jewish studies. My project contributes to the study of Mediterranean religions, shedding light on how Jews living among Christians and polytheists invoked angels in ways suited to their particular heritage; it contributes to religious studies, demonstrating how contemporary theories of religion can be mapped onto ancient Judaism; it contributes to gender studies, showing how even an analysis of sexless or masculine angels can brings women's interests into view. Finally, this project speaks to the interests of some contemporary Jews, who may mistakenly associate angels with Christian or pagan religious traditions.

Angels and the History of Late Antique Judaism

Jews inherited complex and contradictory traditions about angels in the Hebrew Bible. This dissertation surveyed how Jews responded to these traditions. I began by investigating traditions about angels from the rabbinic study houses of Palestine and

Babylonia, continued with an examination of angels in the liturgy of the Galilean synagogue, and then turned to examine the personal amulets that Jews wore or buried in their homes, and finally, I concluded with a close reading of the texts of certain circles of Jews, those most preoccupied with the heavenly realms. In each of these corpora, we found Jews using angels "to think with": the rabbis used angels to think through their relationship to God; Yannai used the angelic praise to think about the holiness of the members of Israel both as a whole and in subset groups; ritual practitioners invoked angels to give themselves or their clients affirmations of health and safety, and finally, the mystics used angels to conceive of their own holy and empowered identity.[1]

One of the aims of this dissertation was to develop a thick description of angels in the daily life of ancient Jews. Despite the wide geographical, chronological, and generic range of the textual and material evidence studied, however, the extant sources do not add up to a full picture of ancient Jewish life. Nonetheless, the extant evidence does give us a few tantalizing glimpses into how some Jewish men and women imagined themselves encountering angels. Based on this evidence, we can say that some rabbis imagined angels processing before them while others imagined angels blessing them in their homes. Yannai imagined the angels in the heavens singing praise in coordination with Israel below. Ritual practitioners invoked angels above to open gates in the heavens and angels below to guard homes and people on earth. The texts of the mystics show them commanding the angels to attend them on earth and fulfill their desires.

I began by reviewing how rabbis interpreted the contradictory biblical traditions on

1 I use Claude Levi-Strauss' famous aphorism on how women were useful for men "to think with"— useful for understanding themselves through contrasts with the other. See Claude Levi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962) and ibid., *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 61.

angels. Like the biblical record, the rabbinic corpus reveals different attitudes towards the angels. I showed how some sources seek to reaffirm God's role in Israel's foundational narratives at the expense of the angels. Other sources acknowledge the role that angels play in Jewish life in a neutral tone and still others take the positive role of the angels for granted, using angels to inspire fellow Jews toward right action. My main contribution in this first chapter was drawing out how the rabbinic principle of God's love for Israel was related to being made in the image of God, which in turn was related to the importance of modeling oneself after God, not the angels. Thus, I illustrated how traditions about angels arise in discussions of the rabbis' self-conception. Whereas one tradition from Palestine urged Jews to appeal to God directly for help, one from Babylonia urged Jews to appeal to a rabbi to act as a mediator (not the angels Michael or Gabriel).

My chapter on angels in the Yannai's liturgical poetry foregrounded how Yannai synthesized biblical traditions on angels and conveyed angelic aspirations to his hearers. In this chapter I showed how Jews in the Galilee could have encountered poetic descriptions of angels and the elaborate and holy Qedushah each week in the synagogue. Yannai's compositions asserted that all of Israel could achieve angelic status through fulfillment of Jewish precepts. Where Christian monks and nuns demonstrated their angelic status through virginity, Yannai depicted Jews achieving it through expression of Jewish identity: the keeping of kashrut rules, menstruation purity, and prayer in the synagogue. Through his corpus, we can see Yannai and the Jews of Galilean synagogues participating in wider Late Antique trends like seeking fellowship with the angels and expressing new modes of religious identity through sacred song.

If Galilean Jews faced a dilemma (health, marital, social), they could turn to their prayer-leader, a priest, a rabbi, or a ritual-practitioner for help, who might have appealed to God directly or through angelic intercessors. As Yannai's liturgical poetry suggests, all of these figures could have been found within the synagogue; Yannai likens all of these figures to angels. Jews seeking help would know that each of these authority figures would help them in their own way: some would appeal to God on their behalf, others would appeal to angels and God. Still others, like the ritual pracitioners, might take full responsibility for helping them on their own terms and through their own means.

The rabbinic evidence from Babylonia suggests that some rabbis imagined angels accompanying them from the synagogue to their homes. Some Jews, in the circles of the rabbis, might have lingered outside the synagogue to sing angelic hymns and maintain a sense of divine time. Some of them might have composed incantations too, which they buried in their homes. The incantations make it clear that some Babylonian Jews invited ritual practitioners and angels into their homes to guard against illness, the evil eye, and an assortment of demons.

I argued that the amulets reflect negotiations between clients and practitioners. More than any other corpus, the ritual texts show us the diversity of ways Jews sought remedies for their problems. My analysis of amulets demonstrated that most incantation texts addressed God and his angels in their pleas for help. Some asked heroes to intervene on their behalf. And some Jews sought confident ritual practitioners to take care of their problems. Most ritual texts address the angels respectfully as superior beings, but spells in *Sepher Ha-Razim* adjure the angels. I also found that this attitude of superiority to the angels is embodied by

the composers of the *Hekhalot* literature. The mystics' attitude to angels may be distinguished from the attitudes of other Jews toward angels. It may be that this attitude of superiority can be linked with a later time period, but it may also be the case that diverse attitudes towards angels coexisted among Jews.

Bringing ritual practitioners and mystics into view in the towns of Late Antique Palestine, we may better understand the rabbis' exhortations to address God directly or to turn to the rabbis themselves for mediation. The rabbis were aware of the many other sources of authority Jews were appealing to or invoking. In surveying the sources for angels, I found that angels were on a spectrum of mediating authority figures in late antiquity alongside rabbis, mystics, and ritual practitioners.

Men, Women, and the Angels

Studying the ostensibly sexless angels brought gender issues into view. One rabbinic tradition claimed that God only communicates to women through angels. In the ritual texts we found examples of women surrounded by angels. While the composers of ritual treatises and mystical texts encouraged practitioners to avoid the impurity of women, the same practitioners often helped women, writing amulets and incantations for them. In these amulets and incantations, the same angels that were supposedly repelled by feminine impurity can be found protecting women in childbirth and accompanying them as guardian angels. This was a enduring paradox in the ritual sources.

More than any other source we examined, Yannai included women in his conception of a holy and divine community. Yannai not only gave voice to the matriarchs in his

compositions, he also elevated ordinary women observing menstrual purity laws to angelic levels. In the end, we saw how Yannai could describe the rabbis, the priests, and all of Israel as achieving angelic status on Yom Kippur.

Male Jewish ritual practitioners and male mystics made explicit their aspirations to achieve angelic status, rather than identifying themselves with gods as Christians and polytheists did. Keeping in mind that in Jewish traditions the angels are always masculine, we only have one clue as to how Jewish female practitioners might have related to this practice. A Talmudic Aramaic incantation from Babylonia shows that in her quest for power, one woman preferred to liken herself to local goddesses rather than to angels. Thus, she took an inclusive monotheistic approach in order to express herself within a Jewish framework.

Depiction of angels as feminine began only in the nineteen century. Early Jews and Christians only depicted masculine angels with authority and gravitas. Nineteenth-century romantic painters began representing angels as feminine beings as well. The depiction of angels as women may be correlated with a diminution in the status accorded angels in religious thought.[2]

Angels in the Religions of the Mediterranean[3]

Angels were an integral part of the late antique religious landscape. Christian monks and nuns aspired to live as angels and sang with the angels in their worship services.

2 See discussion of this topic in David Albert Jones, *Angels: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 35-6.

3This section in part reproduces an entry I wrote on "angelology" for the *Routledge Dictionary of Mediterranean Religions* (forthcoming).

Christian leaders taught Christians that the angels were present at the Eucharist in their respective churches. We saw how Jews aspired to be angelic in ways that honored their own traditions. Yannai taught Jews to imagine themselves singing in coordination with the angels as well. Ritual texts in Greek and Coptic suggests that the reputation of the Jewish God and his angels traveled far: papyri with spells from Roman Egypt also invoke the Jewish God and his angels. Archaeological evidence from Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, Arabia, and Italy attest to diverse regional cults centered on angels that emerged in late antiquity among pagans. In these later contexts, angels were valued particularly for their mediating role between heaven and earth, but no extant texts elaborate on these forms of angelic cult.[4]

In the sixth century C.E., a Syrian Christian using the pseudonym Dionysius composed the *Celestial Hierarchy*, the first and most authoritative angelology until Thomas Aquinas' day. In conversation with Neoplatonic philosophy and drawing on Old and New Testament texts, Dionysius proposed a trifold angelic hierarchy, each with three orders: the first and highest order containing Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones, eternally absorbed with God; the second order containing Authorities, Virtues, and Dominions, concerned with order and regulation of authority; and the third order containing Angels, Archangels, and Principalities, who can communicate with humanity. While *Sefer Ha-Razim* does list the names and ranks angels in six of the seven heavens, late antique Jewish sources cannot be said to offer a systematic angelology.

4 Rangar Cline, *Ancient Angels: Conceptualizing Angeloi in the Roman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

The afterlife of angels in Jewish History

The complexity of attitudes towards angels captured by biblical traditions was mainted by the Rabbinic sources, and continued well through the medieval periods to modern times. While after the Talmudic period, some rabbinic authors become more preoccupied with the angels (the midrash Exodus Rabbah is the best example of this), it is likely others continued to oppose over-emphasis on angels. In part this has to do with the different kinds of monotheistic inclinations that have always prevailed among Jews.

It is true that in the medieval period, the rationalist philosopher Maimonides would devote sections of his treatises to angels and he counted ten ranks of angels, much like the kabbalists did.[5] Maimonides rationalized the angels, however, turning them into natural forces and intelligences.[6] Meanwhile, medieval mystics and Kabbalists imagined the world full of angels and wrote many treatises that elaborated on the cosmic and personal functions of angels.[7] The Kabbalah, was, of course, not without its detractors among Jews in the medieval period.[8] Still, the differences in attitudes towards angels ought not be reduced to rational versus mystical tendencies in Judaism. The influential legal thinker and mystic, Joseph Karo (1488-1575 CE), who composed the *Shulhan Arukh*, still the authoritative summary of Talmudic law for Orthodox Jews, is known to have communicated with a personification of the Mishnah, a *maggid*, understood by some witnesses to be an angelic

5 *Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:7; Kabbalists also hold that there are ten ranks, but their contents vary (see *Zohar*, Exodus, 43 or *Maseket Azilut*). Kauffmann Kohler, "Angelology-General Historical Development" *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901-6).

6 Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: Yesodei ha-Torah* 2: 4-3:11; see also Maimonides' *A Guide to the Perplexed* 1:39 and 2:6.

7 For example, Elazar of Worms (1165 – 1240 CE), one of the last great thinkers among *hasidei Ashkenaz*, the group which transmitted the *Hekahlot* literature to Europe, wrote *Sefer HaMalachim*, the Book of Angels.

8 Yaacob Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah: Leon Modena, Jewish mysticism, early Modern Venice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

being.[9] For Karo there was no tension between rationalist approach to text and belief in angels. It may be that something about his period allowed for such complexity.

Hayyim ben Joseph Vital (1543-1620), the leading disciple of Isaac Luria (a foundational figure in the world of Kabbalah) wrote that

> every word that is uttered creates an angel…Consequently, when a man leads a righteous and pious life, studies the Law, and prays with devotion, then angels and holy spirits are created from the sounds which he utters…and these angels are the mystery of *maggidim*, and everything depends on the measure of one's good works.[10]

We might compare this with the saying in the Babylonian Talmud that every utterance of God creates an angel (b. Chagigah 14a). Like in antiquity, Jewish thinkers still found angels useful to think with, but here each man is imagined to create angels with his utterances, an idea absent in earlier Jewish sources, that would multiply the angels ad infinitum.

Tendencies to multiply angels and minimize angels continued from the Hebrew Bible well into the present. The present underestimation of the role of angels in Jewish traditions is the expression of enduring historical trends. We may take note of the general decline in the significance accorded angels and other intercessory beings in all major western religions since the reformations and enlightenment. The Protestant emphasis on *sola scriptura* (direct interaction with scripture and God without the mediation of priests, saints, angels, etc.) may also be seen as the culmination of tensions within the Christian churches about angels. While angels may have remained popular in certain circles, scholarly enterprises that emerged out of a certain kind of enlightement thinking like the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, biblical studies, and the academic study of religion have tended to devalue angels.

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9 See R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* (Philadelphia: the Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977), 22-3.

10 Vital, *Sefer ha-Gilgulim* (Frankfurt, 1684), 32b; translated and quoted in Weblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 78.

I began this study with the words of the the nineteen-century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (the "science of Judaism"), a scholarly movement whose great influence likely played a role in the marginalization of angels in Jewish thought. The learned men who contributed to the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, sensed that there was opposition to the preoccupation with angels in the talmudic period, and attributed the diffusion of belief in angels to mystical and non-rational tendencies; they termed the belief in angels "highly fanciful" and betrayed a hope that Jews would relinquish their belief in angels in good time.

Likewise, mid-century contributions in biblical studies minimized the role of angels in Judaism. Yehezkel Kaufmann's influential and polemical *The Religion of Israel* argued that monotheism was the invention and contribution of ancient Israel, the popular expression of the Israelite people, who recognized an utterly transcendent God, devoid of myth and any idolatrous tendencies.[11] In this portrayal of the religion of Israel, only polytheists saw personalized mediators around them. Jews needed no mediators to fill the gap between God and themselves. While acknowledging that angels appeared in biblical texts, Kaufmann deprived them of any function or personalized aspect and relegated them to the distant heavens. While Kaufmann's work has been challenged, this view of angels as non-Jewish has persisted in some circles.[12]

Kaufman's contribution was in keeping with other trends in the academic study of

11 *The Religion of Israel* (1960) was an abridgment and translation of Yehezkel Kaufmann's eight volume work *Toldot HaEmuna HaIsraelit,* 1937-57, which was very influential at the Jewish Theological Seminary. See Benjamin Uffenheimer, "Some Reflections on Modern Jewish Biblical Research" *Creative Biblical Exegesis: Christian and Jewish Hermeneutics through the Centuries* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 161-174. Yehezkel Kaufmann's work was influential both in Israel and in America, especially through JTS. While Kaufmann acknowledged that God had a celestial entourage, his reconstruction of the religion of Israel relegated angels to the margins.

12 In *Angels in the Bible: Israelite Belief in Angels as evidenced by Biblical* Traditions (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2012), Alexander Rofé writes that the composers of Deuteronomy and the priestly sources subordinated foreign gods to angelic status in an attempt to reconcile popular polytheism with Israelite monotheism. In other words, Deuteronomy and the priestly sources were monotheistic and angels were their concession to polytheism.

religion. According to Robert Orsi, the academic study of religion has privileged a "true religion" that is

> rational, respectful of persons, noncoercive, mature, nonanthropomorphic in its higher forms, mystical (as opposed to ritualistic), unmediated and agreeable to democracy (no hierarchy in gilded robes and fancy hats), monotheistic (no angels, saints, demons, ancestors), emotionally controlled, a reality of mind and spirit, not body and matter.[13]

While such a definition of religion fits a particular American ethos, it obscures important aspects of ancient religious practice, especially vis-a-vis the role of angels.

Orsi is a scholar of contemporary American religions, but his approach to the study of religion, which endeavors to foreground the ways invisible beings operate in the lives of religious people has bearing for the study of ancient religion as well. My study described late antique Jews' engagement with beings like angels, the biblical patriarchs, and folk heroes as well as with authority leaders figures in their communities like the rabbis, ritual practitioners, and prayer leaders.[14] Focusing on angels brought a spectrum of authority figures available to ancient Jews into view.

This project began with a definition of Judaism that was polythetic, allowing that Jews in different communities and different periods upheld different configurations of holiness.[15] While previous reconstructions of Jewish social history have relied on rabbinic literature or attempted to reconstruct a "priestly" movement,[16] I have endeavored shed light on a more complex and ambiguous Jewish society with many leaders available for Jews to choose from.

13 Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 188.

14 Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

15 Jack Lightsone, *The Commerce of the Sacred: Mediation of the Divine among Jews in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

16 Philip S. Alexander, "What Happened to the Jewish Priesthood after 70?," *A Wandering Galilean: Essays in Honour of Seán Freyne*, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 5-33; Rachel Elior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* (Portland, Or.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization 2004).

My hypothesis builds on Jack Lighstone's important, but rather neglected work, which focused on Jews living in the Diaspora in the second temple period.[17] He wrote that for Jews without access to the Jerusalem temple, the loci of the sacred had to remain diverse and diffuse. He points to the memory of the dead and synagogues as loci of holiness. My research suggests that his findings prove true for Jews inhabiting Palestine (and Babylonia) in the aftermath of the temple's destruction. In his words, the "Diaspora cult identified a a host of places, means and persons who in each locale might mediate the sacred, just as the Jews themselves must maintain ethnic solidarity by mediating across wide geographical distances with their co-religionists and have meaningful dealings with their gentile and Christian neighbors."[18] The rabbinic sources together with the more marginalized sources, like the ritual, liturgical, and mystical texts, support this reconstruction of late antique Jewish life, where interaction with the divine took many forms.

Where some Jews might still wonder whether angels are not a pagan or Christian conception, my research clarifies that angels formed a rich part of ancient Jewish traditions and practices. This dissertation has demonstrated how belief in angels was used by ancient Jews to spur new customs, popularize the liturgy, heal from physical or social ills, and achieve wisdom and status. Indeed, angels pervaded the world of ancient Jews, especially during the formative period of late antiquity when Jewish men and women mediated biblical traditions into practices that would be continued for generations and into the present.

17 Ibid.

18 Lightstone, *Commerce of the Sacred*, 12.

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