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Celestial Choirmaster: The Liturgical Role of Enoch-Metatron in *2 Enoch* and the Merkabah Tradition

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Abstract

This article investigates the roots of Enoch-Metatron’s liturgical office of celestial choirmaster which plays a prominent role in the Merkabah tradition. Although references to this office of the exalted patriarch are absent in *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, *Genesis Apocryphon*, and the *Book of Giants*, this article argues that the roots of Enoch-Metatron’s liturgical imagery can be traced to the Second Temple Enochic lore, namely to *2 Enoch*, the Jewish apocalypse, apparently written in the first century CE. This article investigates a tradition found in *2 Enoch* 18 where the translated patriarch encourages the celestial Watchers to start liturgy ‘before the Face of the Lord’, that is, in front of the divine *Kabod*, the exact location where Metatron will later conduct heavenly worship of angelic hosts in the *Shi’ur Qomah* and Hekhalot accounts.

Introduction

In one of his recent publications, Philip Alexander traces the development of Enoch’s image through the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period up to the early Middle Ages. His study points to ‘a genuine, ongoing tradition’ that shows the astonishing persistence of certain motifs. As an example, Alexander explicates the evolution of Enoch’s priestly

role which was prominent in the Second Temple materials and underwent further development in Metatron’s sacerdotal duties. He observes that ‘Enoch in Jubilees in the second century BCE is a high priest. Almost a thousand years later he retains this role in the Heikhalot texts, though in a rather different setting’. Noting the long-lasting association of Enoch-Metatron with the sacerdotal office, Alexander


draws attention to the priestly role of this exalted figure attested in 3 Enoch 15B where Enoch-Metatron is put in charge of the heavenly tabernacle. The passage from Sefer Hekhalot reads:

Metatron is the Prince over all princes, and stands before him who is exalted above all gods. He goes beneath the Throne of Glory, where he has a great heavenly tabernacle of light, and brings out the deafening fire, and puts it in the ears of the holy creatures, so that they should not hear the sound of the utterance that issues from the mouth of the Almighty.4

This passage portrays the translated patriarch as a heavenly priest in the celestial tabernacle located beneath God’s Kabod. Along with the reference
to Metatron’s role as the sacerdotal servant, the text also alludes to another, more enigmatic tradition in which this angel is depicted as the one who inserts ‘the deafening fire’ into the ears of the hayyot so the holy creatures will not be harmed by the voice of the Almighty. This reference might allude to another distinctive role of the exalted angel, to his office of the celestial choirmaster, that is, one who directs the angelic liturgy taking place before the Throne of Glory. The tradition attested in 3 Enoch 15B, however, does not explicate this role of Metatron, most likely because of the fragmentary nature of this passage which is considered by scholars as a late addition to Sefer Hekhalot.5 A similar description in Synopse 3906 appears to have preserved better the original tradition about Metatron’s unique liturgical role. The text relates:

One hayyah rises above the seraphim and descends upon the tabernacle of the youth (הנהל) whose name is Metatron, and says in a great voice, a voice of sheer silence: ‘The Throne of Glory is shining’. Suddenly the angels fall silent. The watchers and the holy ones become quiet. They are silent, and are pushed into the river of fire. The hayyot put their faces on the ground, and this youth whose name is Metatron brings the fire of deafness and puts it into their ears so that they could not hear the sound of God’s speech or the ineffable name. The youth whose name is Metatron then invokes, in seven voices (הנהלות), his living, pure, honored, awesome, holy, noble, strong, beloved, mighty, powerful name.7

Here again the themes of Metatron’s priesthood in the heavenly tabernacle and his duty of bringing the fire of deafness to the hayyot are conflated.

5. The literary integrity of Sefer Hekhalot is a complicated issue. The form of the work in the major manuscripts demonstrates ‘clear signs of editing’. Scholars observe that ‘3 Enoch has arisen through the combination of many separate traditions: it tends to break down into smaller “self-contained” units which probably existed prior to their incorporation into the present work… It is not the total product of a single author at particular point in time, but the deposits of a “school tradition” which incorporates elements from widely different periods’ (Alexander, ‘3 Enoch’, p. 223). Alexander also observes that ‘an inspection of the textual tradition shows that chapters 3–15/16, which describe the elevation of Enoch, circulated as an independent tract…and it is intrinsically probable that these chapters formed the core round which the longer recensions grew’ (Alexander, ‘The Historical Settings of the Hebrew Book of Enoch’, pp. 156-57). The detailed discussion of the literary character of 3 Enoch and its possible transmission history transcends the boundaries of current investigation.

6. MS New York JTS 8128.

This passage also indicates that Metatron is not only the one who protects and prepares the heavenly hosts for their praise to the deity, but also the choirmaster who himself conducts the liturgical ceremony by invoking the divine name. The passage underlines the extraordinary scope of Metatron’s own vocal abilities that allow him to invoke the deity’s name in seven voices. Yet the portrayal of this celestial choirmaster intentionally ‘deafening’ the members of his own choir might appear puzzling. A close examination of Hekhalot liturgical theology may however help clarify the paradoxical imagery. Peter Schäfer points out that in the Hekhalot writings ‘the heavenly praise is directed solely toward God’ since ‘for all others who hear it—men as well as angels—it can be destructive’. As an example, Schäfer refers to a passage from Hekhalot Rabbati which offers a chain of warnings about the grave dangers encountered by those who dare to hear the angelic praise. James Davila’s recent study also confirms the importance of the motif of the dangerous encounters in the course of the heavenly worship in Hekhalot liturgical settings.

This motif may constitute one of the main reasons for Metatron’s preventive ritual of putting the deafening fire into the ears of the holy creatures. It is also helpful to realize that Youth-Metatron’s role of safeguarding the angelic hosts stems directly from his duties as the liturgical servant and the director of angelic hosts.

It should be stressed that while Enoch-Metatron’s liturgical office plays a prominent role in the Merkabah lore, this tradition appears to be absent...
in early Enochic texts, including the compositions collected in *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, *Genesis Apocryphon* and the *Book of Giants*. Despite this apparent absence, this paper will argue that the roots of Enoch-Metatron’s liturgical imagery can be traced to the Second Temple Enochic lore, namely, to *2 Enoch*, the Jewish apocalypse, apparently written in the first century CE. Some traditions found in this text appear to serve as the initial background for the developments of the future liturgical role of Enoch-Metatron as the celestial choirmaster. This study will focus on investigating these developments.

**Priestly Role of the Seventh Antediluvian Patriarch in Early Enochic Traditions**

Before this study proceeds to a detailed analysis of the liturgical role of the translated patriarch in *2 Enoch* and the Merkabah tradition, a brief introduction to the priestly and liturgical function of the seventh antediluvian hero in the pseudepigraphical materials is needed.

In early Enochic booklets the seventh antediluvian patriarch is closely associated with the celestial sanctuary located, as in the later Merkabah lore, in the immediate proximity to the Divine Throne. Enoch’s affiliations with the heavenly Temple in the *Book of the Watchers* (*1 En.* 1–36), the *Book of Dreams* (*1 En.* 83–90) and the book of *Jubilees* can be seen as the gradual evolution from the implicit references to his heavenly priesthood in the earliest Enochic materials to a more overt recognition and description of his sacerdotal function in the later ones. While later Enochic traditions attested in the book of *Jubilees* unambiguously point to Enoch’s priestly role by referring to his incense sacrifice in the celestial sanctuary, the earlier associations of the patriarch with the heavenly Temple hinted at in the *Book of the Watchers* took the form of rather enigmatic depictions. A certain amount of exegetical work is, therefore, required to discern the proper meaning of these initial associations of the patriarch with the celestial sanctuary.

Martha Himmelfarb’s research helps to clarify Enoch’s possible connections with the celestial sanctuary in the *Book of the Watchers*, the account of which appears to fashion the ascension of the seventh antediluvian patriarch to the Throne of Glory as a visitation of the heavenly Temple.13

*1 Enoch* 14.9-18 reads:

And I proceeded until I came near to a wall which was built of hailstones, and a tongue of fire surrounded it, and it began to make me afraid. And I went into the tongue of fire and came near to a large house which was built of hailstones, and the wall of that house (was) like a mosaic (made) of hailstones, and its floor (was) snow. Its roof (was) like the path of the stars and flashes of lightning, and among them (were) fiery Cherubim, and their heaven (was like) water. And (there was) a fire burning around its wall, and its door was ablaze with fire. And I went into that house, and (it was) hot as fire and cold as snow, and there was neither pleasure nor life in it. Fear covered me and trembling, I fell on my face. And I saw in the vision, and behold, another house, which was larger that the former, and all its doors (were) open before me, and (it was) built of a tongue of fire. And in everything it so excelled in glory and splendor and size that I am unable to describe you its glory and its size. And its floor (was) fire, and above (were) lightning and the path of the stars, and its roof also (was) a burning fire. And I looked and I saw in it a high throne, and its appearance (was) like ice and its surrounds like the shining sun and the sound of Cherubim.14

Commenting on this passage, Himmelfarb draws attention to the description of the celestial edifices which Enoch encounters in his approach to the Throne. She notes that the Ethiopic text reports that, in order to reach God’s Throne, the patriarch passes through three celestial constructions: a wall, an outer house, and an inner house. The Greek version of this narrative mentions a house instead of a wall. Himmelfarb observes that ‘more clearly in the Greek, but also in the Ethiopic this arrangement echoes the structure of the earthly temple with its vestibule (הֵיכָּן), sanctuary (הֵיכָן), and holy of holies (םֶלֶךְ ההָּבָּד)’.15 God’s Throne is located in the innermost


chamber of this heavenly structure and is represented by a throne of cherubim. It can be seen as a heavenly counterpart to the cherubim found in the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple. In drawing parallels between the descriptions of the heavenly Temple in the Book of the Watchers and the features of the earthly sanctuary, Himmelfarb observes that the ‘fiery cherubim’ which Enoch sees on the ceiling of the first house (Ethiopic) or middle house (Greek) of the heavenly structure represent, not the cherubim of the divine Throne, but images that recall the figures on the hangings on the wall of the terrestrial tabernacle mentioned in Exod. 26.1, 31 and 36.8, 35, or possibly the figures which, according 1 Kgs 6.29, 2 Chron. 3.7 and Ezek. 41.15-26, were engraved on the walls of the earthly Temple.

Several words must be said about the servants of the heavenly sanctuary depicted in 1 Enoch 14. Himmelfarb observes that the priests of the heavenly Temple in the Book of the Watchers appear to be represented by angels, since the author of the text depicts them as the ones ‘standing before God’s Throne in the heavenly temple’. She also points to the

16. One comment must be made about the early traditions and sources that may lie behind the descriptions of the upper sanctuary in 1 En. 14. Scholars observe that the idea of heaven as a temple was not invented by the author of the Book of the Watchers since the concept of the heavenly temple as a heavenly counterpart of the earthly sanctuary was widespread in the ancient Near East and appears in a number of biblical sources. Cf. Himmelfarb, ‘The Temple and the Garden of Eden’, p. 68. Students of Jewish priestly traditions previously noted that the existence of such a conception of the heavenly sanctuary appears to become increasingly important in the times of religious crises when the earthly sanctuaries were either destroyed or ‘defiled’ by ‘improper’ rituals or priestly successions. For an extensive discussion of this subject, see B. Ego et al. (eds.), Gemeinde ohne Tempel/Community without Temple: Zur Substitution und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum (WUNT, 118; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1999); R. Elior, ‘From Earthly Temple to Heavenly Shrines: Prayer and Sacred Song in the Hekhalot Literature and Its Relation to Temple Traditions’, JSQ 4 (1997), pp. 217-67; idem, ‘The Priestly Nature of the Mystical Heritage in Heykalot Literature’, in R.B. Fenton and R. Goetschel (eds.), Expérience et écriture mystiques dans les religions du livre: Actes d’un colloque international tenu par le Centre d’études juives Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne 1994 (EJM, 22; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), pp. 41-54.


18. Himmelfarb, ‘Apocalyptic Ascent and the Heavenly Temple’, p. 211. David Halperin also supports this position. In his view, ‘the angels, barred from the inner house, are the priests of Enoch’s heavenly Temple. The high priest must be Enoch
possibility that in the *Book of the Watchers* the patriarch himself in the course of his ascent becomes a priest similar to the angels. In this perspective, the angelic status of the patriarch and his priestly role are viewed as mutually interconnected. Himmelfarb stresses that ‘the author of the *Book of the Watchers* claims angelic status for Enoch through his service in the heavenly temple’ since ‘the ascent shows him passing through the outer court of the temple and the sanctuary to the door of the holy of holies, where God addresses him with his own mouth’. It is important for himself, who appears in the celestial Holy of Holies to procure forgiveness for holy beings (Haplerin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, p. 82).

19. Halperin’s studies also stress the apocalyptic priestly function of Enoch in the *Book of the Watchers*. He observes that ‘Daniel and Enoch share an image, perhaps drawn from the hymnic tradition of merkabah exegesis (think of the Angelic liturgy), of God surrounded by multitudes of angels. But, in the Holy of Holies, God sits alone… The angels, barred from the inner house, are the priests of Enoch’s heavenly Temple. The high priest must be Enoch himself, who appears in the celestial Holy of Holies to procure forgiveness for holy beings’ (Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, pp. 81-82).


21. George Nickelsburg’s earlier study on the temple symbolism in *1 En.* 14 provides some important additional details relevant to our ongoing discussion. Nickelsburg argues that Enoch’s ‘active’ involvement in the vision of the Lord’s Throne, when he passes through the chambers of the celestial sanctuary, might indicate that the author(s) of the *Book of the Watchers* perceived him as a servant associated with the activities in these chambers. Nickelsburg points to the fact that Enoch’s vision of the Throne in the *Book of the Watchers* is ‘qualitatively different from that described in the biblical throne visions’ by way of the new active role of its visionary. This new, active participation of Enoch in the vision puts *1 En.* 14 closer to later Merkabah accounts which are different from biblical visions. Nickelsburg stresses that in the biblical throne visions, the seer is passive or, at best, his participation is reactional. In contrast, in the Merkabah accounts, Enoch appears to be actively involved in his vision. In Nickelsburg’s view, the verbal forms of the narrative (‘I drew near the wall’, ‘I went into that house’), serve as further indications of the active ‘participation’ of the seer in the visionary ‘reality’ of the heavenly Throne/Temple. On the other hand, biblical visions are not completely forgotten by Enochic authors and provide an important exegetical framework for *1 En.* 14. Comparing the Enochic vision with the Ezekielian account of the temple, Nickelsburg suggests that the Enochic narrative also represents a vision of the temple, but, in this case, the heavenly one. He argues that ‘the similarities to Ezek. 40–48, together with other evidence, indicate that Enoch is describing his ascent to the heavenly temple and his progress through its temenos to the door of the holy of holies, where the chariot throne of God is set’ (Nickelsburg, ‘Enoch, Levi, and Peter’, pp. 579-81).

our investigation to note that, despite the fact that Enoch appears to be envisioned as an angel by the authors of the text, nothing is said about his leading role in the angelic liturgy.

The traditions about the seventh patriarch’s heavenly priesthood are not confined solely to the materials found in the *Book of the Watchers*, since they are attested in other *1 Enoch*’s materials, including the *Animal Apocalypse (1 En. 85–90)*.

It is noteworthy that, whereas in the *Book of the Watchers* Enoch’s associations with the heavenly Temple are clothed with rather ambiguous imagery, his depictions in the *Animal Apocalypse* do not leave any serious doubts that some of the early Enochic traditions understood Enoch to be intimately connected with the heavenly sanctuary.

Chapter 87 of *1 Enoch* portrays the patriarch taken by three angels from the earth and raised to a high tower, where he is expected to remain until he will see the judgment prepared for the Watchers and their earthly families. *1 Enoch* 87.3-4 reads:

And those three who came out last took hold of me by my hand, and raised me from the generations of the earth, and lifted me on to a high place, and showed me a tower high above the earth, and all the hills were lower. And one said to me: ‘Remain here until you have seen everything which is coming upon these elephants and camels and asses, and upon the stars, and upon all the bulls.’

James VanderKam notes a significant detail in this description, namely, Enoch’s association with a tower. He observes that this term is reserved in the *Animal Apocalypse* for a Temple. The association of the patriarch with the tower is long-lasting, and apparently he must have spent a considerable amount of time there, since the text does not say anything about Enoch’s return to the earth again until the time of judgment. So the patri-
arch is depicted as present in the heavenly sanctuary for most of the *Animal Apocalypse.*

Although the traditions about Enoch’s associations with the heavenly Temple in the *Book of the Watchers* and in the *Animal Apocalypse* do not refer explicitly to his performance of the priestly duties, the account attested in the book of *Jubilees* explicitly makes this reference.

*Jubilees* 4.23 depicts Enoch to be taken from human society and placed to Eden ‘for (his) greatness and honor’. The Garden is then defined as a sanctuary and Enoch as one who is offering an incense sacrifice on the mountain of incense: ‘He burned the evening incense of the sanctuary which is acceptable before the Lord on the mountain of incense’.

VanderKam suggests that here Enoch is depicted as one who ‘performs the rites of a priest in the temple’. Furthermore, he observes that Enoch’s priestly duties represent a new element in ‘Enoch’s expanding portfolio’.

29. VanderKam argues that there are other indications that in the book of *Jubilees* Eden was understood as a sanctuary. As an example, he points to *Jub.* 3.9-14, which ‘derive the law from Lev 11 regarding when a woman who has given birth may enter the sanctuary from the two times when Adam and Eve, respectively, went into the garden’ (VanderKam, *Enoch: A Man for All Generations*, p. 117).
30. One must note the peculiar details surrounding the depiction of Enoch’s priestly duties in early Enochic lore. While the *Book of the Watchers* does not refer to any liturgical or sacrificial rituals of the patriarch, *Jubilees* depicts the patriarch offering incense to God. The absence of references to any animal sacrificial or liturgical practice in Enoch’s sacerdotal duties might indicate that his office may have been understood by early Enochic traditions to be of the ‘divinatory angle’, that is, as the office of oracle-priest, practiced also by the Mesopotamian diviners who, similarly to Enoch’s preoccupation with incense, widely used the ritual of libanomancy, or smoke divination, a ‘practice of throwing cedar shavings onto a censer in order to observe the patterns and direction of the smoke’ (M.S. Moore, *The Balaam Traditions: Their Character and Development* [SB LDS, 113; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990], p. 43).
33. VanderKam, *Enoch: A Man for All Generations*, p. 117. Scholars point to the possible polemical nature of the patriarch’s priestly role. Gabriele Boccaccini observes that ‘Enochians completely ignore the Mosaic torah and the Jerusalem Temple, that is,
The purpose of the aforementioned analysis was to demonstrate that, despite that the early Enochic materials found in 1 Enoch and Jubilees emphasize the patriarch’s association with the heavenly sanctuary, they do not contain any references to his role in directing the celestial liturgy. Unlike the later Merkabah materials where the priestly duties of Enoch-Metatron are often juxtaposed with his liturgical activities, early Enochic lore does not link these two sacerdotal functions. Moreover, it appears that in 1 Enoch and Jubilees Enoch does not play any leading role in the celestial liturgy. Thus, for example, in the Book of the Similitudes (1 En. 37–71), where the celestial liturgy plays an important part, the patriarch does not play any significant role (1 En. 39). Moreover, the text stresses that Enoch is unable to sustain the frightening ‘Presence’ of the deity. In 1 En. 39.14 the patriarch laments that during celestial liturgy his ‘face was transformed’ until he was not able to see. This lament makes clear that Enoch’s capacities can in no way be compared with Metatron-Youth’s potentialities which are able not only to sustain the terrifying Presence of the deity but also to protect others, including the angelic hosts during the celestial liturgy.

These conceptual developments indicate that in the early Enochic materials the leading role of the translated patriarch in the sacerdotal settings remains solely priestly, but not liturgical. Unlike the later Merkabah materials where the theme of the celestial sanctuary (the tabernacle of the Youth) is often conflated with Metatron’s role as the celestial choirmaster, the early Enochic materials associated with 1 Enoch and Jubilees show only one side of the story. Our study must now proceed to the testimonies about Metatron’s priestly and liturgical activities in the Hekhalot and Shi‘ur Qomah materials.

*Tabernacle of the Youth: Priestly and Liturgical Roles of Enoch-Metatron in Merkabah Tradition*

It has been already mentioned that, in contrast to the early Enochic booklets which do not provide any hints to Enoch’s leading role in the heavenly the two tenets of the order of the universe’. In his opinion, ‘the attribution to Enoch of priestly characteristics suggests the existence of a pure pre-diluvial, and pre-fall, priesthood and disrupts the foundation of the Zadokite priesthood, which claimed its origin in Aaron at the time of the exodus, in an age that, for the Enochians, was already corrupted after the angelic sin and the flood’ (G. Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: The Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], p. 74).

liturgy, in the Merkabah tradition the priestly role of Enoch-Metatron is closely intertwined with his pivotal place in the course of the angelic worship. Since both of these sacerdotal functions are closely interconnected, before we proceed to a detailed analysis of the liturgical imagery associated with this exalted angel we must explore Metatron’s priestly duties, which in many respects echo and develop further the earlier Enochic traditions about the sacerdotal duties of the seventh antediluvian hero.

**Heavenly High Priest**

While the early Enochic materials depict the seventh antediluvian patriarch as a newcomer who just arrives to his new appointment in the heavenly sanctuary, the Merkabah materials portray Metatron as an established celestial citizen who is firmly placed in his sacerdotal office and even possesses his own heavenly sanctuary that now bears his name. Thus in the passage found in *Merkabah Shelemah* the heavenly tabernacle is called the ‘tabernacle of Metatron’ (מֵאֲטְרוֹן הַקְּדָשׁ). In the tradition preserved in *Num. R.* 12.12, the heavenly sanctuary again is associated with one of Metatron’s designations and is named the ‘tabernacle of the Youth’ (חֵן מֵאֲטְרוֹן):35

R. Simon expounded: When the Holy One, blessed be He, told Israel to set up the Tabernacle He intimated to the ministering angels that they also should make a Tabernacle, and the one below was erected the other was erected on high. The latter was *the tabernacle of the Youth* (חֵן מֵאֲטְרוֹן) whose name was Metatron, and therein he offers up the souls of the righteous to atone for Israel in the days of their exile.36

This close association between the exalted angel and the upper sanctuary becomes quite widespread in the Hekhalot lore where the celestial Temple is often called the tabernacle of the Youth.37

A significant detail of the rabbinic and Hekhalot descriptions of the tabernacle of the Youth is that this structure is placed in the immediate proximity to the Throne, more precisely right beneath the seat of Glory.38

35. It should be noted that the expression ‘the tabernacle of the Youth’ occurs also in the *Shi’ur Qomah* materials. For a detailed analysis of the Metatron imagery in this tradition, see Cohen, *Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 124-32.


38. *3 En.* 8.1: ‘R. Ishmael said: Metatron, Prince of the Divine Presence, said to me: Before the Holy One, blessed be he, set me to serve the throne of glory…’
As mentioned in the introduction, 3 Enoch 15B locates Enoch-Metatron’s ‘great heavenly tabernacle of light’ beneath the Throne of Glory. This tradition appears to be not confined solely to the description attested in 3 Enoch since several Hekhalot passages depict Youth (who often is identified there with Metatron) as the one who emerges from beneath the Throne. The proximity of the tabernacle to Kabod recalls the early Enochic materials, more specifically 1 Enoch 14, where the patriarch’s visitation of the celestial sanctuary is described as his approach to God’s Throne. Both Enochic and Hekhalot traditions seem to allude here to Enoch-Metatron’s role as the celestial high priest since he approaches the realm where the ordinary angelic or human creatures are not allowed to enter, namely, the realm of the immediate Presence of the deity, the place of the Holy of Holies, which is situated behind the veil, represented by heavenly or terrestrial curtains. Metatron’s service behind the heavenly curtain parallels the unique function of the earthly high priest who alone was allowed to enter behind the veil of the terrestrial sanctuary. It has been mentioned that the possible background of this unique role of Metatron can be traced to the Enochic materials, more specifically to 1 Enoch 14 where the patriarch alone appears in the celestial Holy of

(Alexander, ‘3 Enoch’, p. 262). Metatron’s prominent role might also be reflected in the fragment found on one magic bowl where he called ‘the great prince of the throne’; see C. Gordon, ‘Aramaic Magical Bowls in the Istanbul and Baghdad Museums’, Archiv Orientální 6 (1934), pp. 319-34 (328).


41. Cf., for example, Synopse 385: ‘when the youth enters beneath the throne of glory’ (Schäfer, Synopse, p. 162). Another text preserved in the Cairo Genizah also depicts the ‘youth’ as emerging from his sacerdotal place in the immediate Presence of the deity: ‘Now, see the youth, who is going forth to meet you from behind the throne of glory. Do not bow down to him, because his crown is like the crown of his King…’ (P. Schäfer, Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur [TSAJ, 6; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1984], pp. 2b.13-14).

42. On the imagery of the Celestial Curtain, see also b. Yom 77a; b. Ber 18b; 3 En. 45.1.

Holies while the other angels are barred from the inner house. This depiction also correlates with the Hekhalot evidence according to which only Youth, that is, Metatron, similar to the earthly high priest, is allowed to serve before as well as behind the heavenly veil. The inscription on one Mandeian bowl describes Metatron as the attendant ‘who serves before the Curtain’. Philip Alexander observes that this definition ‘may be linked to the Hekhalot tradition about Metatron as the heavenly High Priest…and certainly alludes to his status as “Prince of the Divine Presence”’. It is true that Metatron’s role as the Prince of the Divine Presence or the Prince of the Face (sar happanim) cannot be separated from his priestly and liturgical duties since both the tabernacle of this exalted angel and the divine liturgy that he is conducting are situated in the immediate proximity to God’s Presence, also known as his Face. In relation to our investigation of the liturgical imagery, it is worth noting that by virtue of being God’s sar happanim Youth-Metatron can unconditionally approach the Presence of the deity without harm for himself, a unique privilege denied to the rest of the created order. He is also allowed to go behind the Curtain and behold the Face of God, as well as to hear the voice of the deity. This is why he is able to protect the hayyot against the harmful effects of the Divine Presence in the course of the angelic liturgy. Such imagery points to the fact that Metatron’s bold approach to the Divine Presence is pre-determined, not only by his special role as the celestial High Priest, but also by his privileges in the office of the Prince of the Divine Presence.

It should be noted, that in contrast to the early Enochic traditions which hesitate to name explicitly the exalted patriarch as the high priest, the Merkabah materials directly apply this designation to Metatron. Rachel Elior observes that Metatron appears in Genizah documents as a high priest who offers sacrifices on the heavenly altar. She draws attention to the

44. D. Halperin argues that in I Enoch ‘the angels, barred from the inner house, are the priests of Enoch’s heavenly Temple. The high priest must be Enoch himself, who appears in the celestial Holy of Holies to procure forgiveness for holy beings… We cannot miss the implication that the human Enoch is superior even to those angels who are still in good standing’ (Halperin, The Faces of the Chariot, p. 82).
47. The passage found in Synopse 385 relates: ‘when the youth enters beneath the throne of glory, God embraces him with a shining face.’
important testimony attested in one *Cairo Genizah* text which labels Metatron as the high priest and the chief of the priests. The text reads:

> I adjure you [Metatron], more beloved and dear than all heavenly beings, [Faithful servant] of the God of Israel, the High Priest (*רבי סֵסלָתב*), chief of [the priest]s (*ירש רַבִּי אֶלִיעֶזֶר*), you who possess seven names; and whose name is like your Master’s... Great Prince, who is appointed over the great princes, who is the head of all the camps.49

It is also noteworthy that Metatron’s role as the heavenly high priest appears to be supported in the Hekhalot materials by the motif of the peculiar sacerdotal duties of the terrestrial protagonist of the Hekhalot literature, Rabbi Ishmael b. Elisha, to whom Metatron serves as an *angelus interpres*. In view of Enoch-Metatron sacerdotal affiliations, it is not coincidental that Rabbi Ishmael is the tanna who is attested in *b. Ber.* 7a as a high priest.50 R. Eior observes that in *Hekhalot Rabbati* this rabbinic authority is portrayed in terms similar to those used in the Talmud, that is, as a priest burning an offering on the altar.51 Other Hekhalot materials, including *3 Enoch*,52 also often refer to R. Ishmael’s priestly origins. The priestly features of this visionary might not only reflect the heavenly priesthood of Metatron53 but also allude to the former priestly duties of the

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52. Cf., e.g., *3 En.* 2.3: ‘Metatron replied, “He [R. Ishmael] is of the tribe of Levi, which presents the offering to his name. He is of the family of Aaron, whom the Holy One, blessed be he, chose to minister in his presence and on whose head he himself placed the priestly crown on Sinai”’ (Alexander, ‘3 Enoch’, p. 257).

53. N. Deutsch observes that in *3 Enoch* ‘likewise, as the heavenly high priest, Metatron serves as the mythological prototype of Merkabah mystics such as Rabbi Ishmael. Metatron’s role as a high priest highlights the functional parallel between the angelic vice regent and the human mystic (both are priests), whereas his transformation from a human being into an angel reflects an ontological process which may be repeated by mystics via their own enthronement and angelification’ (N. Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate: Angelic Vice Regency in Late Antiquity* [BSJS, 22; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999], p. 34).
patriarch Enoch known from 1 Enoch and Jubilees, since some scholars note that ‘3 Enoch presents a significant parallelism between the ascension of Ishmael and the ascension of Enoch’.54

Celestial Choirmaster
Unlike the early Enochic booklets that unveil only the patriarch’s leading role in the priestly settings, the Merkabah materials emphasize another important dimension of his activities in the divine worship, namely, the liturgical aspect of his celestial duties. The passages from 3 Enoch 15B and Synopse §390 that began our investigation show that one of the features of Metatron’s service in the heavenly realm involves his leadership over the angelic hosts delivering heavenly praise to the deity. Metatron is portrayed there not just as a servant in the celestial tabernacle or the heavenly high priest, but also as the leader of the heavenly liturgy. The evidences that unfold Metatron’s liturgical role are not confined solely to the Hekhalot corpus, but can also be detected in another prominent literary stream associated with early Jewish mysticism which is represented by the Shi’ur Qomah materials. The passages found in the Shi’ur Qomah texts attest to a familiar tradition in which Metatron is posited as a liturgical servant. Thus, Sefer Haggomah 155-64 reads:

And (the) angels who are with him come and encircle the Throne of Glory. They are on one side and the (celestial) creatures are on the other side, and the Shekinah is on the Throne of Glory in the center. And one creature goes up over the seraphim and descends on the tabernacle of the lad whose name is Metatron and says in a great voice, a thin voice of silence, ‘The Throne of Glory is glistening!’ Immediately, the angels fall silent and the ‘irin and the qadushin are still. They hurry and hasten into the river of fire. And the celestial creatures turn their faces towards the earth, and this lad whose name is Metatron, brings the fire of deafness and puts (it) in the ears of the celestial creatures so that they do not hear the sound of the speech of the Holy One, blessed be He, and the explicit name that the lad, whose name is Metatron, utters at that time in seven voices, in seventy voices, in living, pure, honored, holy, awesome, worthy, brave, strong, and holy name.55

A similar tradition can be found in Siddur Rabbah 37-46, another text associated with Shi’ur Qomah tradition, where the angelic Youth however is not identified with the angel Metatron:

The angels who are with him come and encircle the (Throne of) Glory; they are on one side and the celestial creatures are on the other side, and the Shekhinah is in the center. And one creature ascends above the Throne of Glory and touches the seraphim and descends on the Tabernacle of the Lad and declares in a great voice, (which is also) a voice of silence, ‘The throne alone shall I exalt over him’. The ofanim become silent (and) the seraphim are still. The platoons of 'irin and qadushin are shoved into the River of Fire and the celestial creatures turn their faces downward, and the lad brings the fire silently and puts it in their ears so that they do not hear the spoken voice; he remains (thereupon) alone. And the lad calls Him, ‘the great, mighty and awesome, noble, strong, powerful, pure and holy, and the strong and precious and worthy, shining and innocent, beloved and wondrous and exalted and supernal and resplendent God.56

In reference to these materials M. Cohen notes that in the Shi‘ur Qomah tradition Metatron’s service in the heavenly tabernacle appears to be ‘entirely liturgical’ and ‘is more the heavenly choirmaster and beadle than the celestial high priest’.57

It is evident that the tradition preserved in Sefer Haqgomah cannot be separated from the microforms found in Synopse 390 and 3 Enoch 15B since all these narratives are unified by a similar structure and terminology. All of them also emphasize the Youth’s leading role in the course of the celestial service. It is also significant that Metatron’s role as the one who is responsible for the protection and encouragement of the servants delivering praise to the deity is not confined only to the aforementioned passages, but finds support in the broader context of the Hekhalot and Shi‘ur Qomah materials.58

Thus, in the Hekhalot corpus, Metatron’s duties as the choirmaster or the celestial liturgical director appear to be applied, not only to his leadership over angelic hosts, but also over humans, specifically the visionaries who are lucky enough to overcome the angelic opposition and be admitted into the heavenly realm. In 3 En. 1.9-10 Enoch-Metatron is depicted as the

58. This tradition is not forgotten in the later Jewish mystical developments. Thus, Daniel Abrams notes that in Sefer ha-Hashek ‘Metatron commands the angels to praise the King of the Glory, and he is among them’ (Abrams, ‘The Boundaries of Divine Ontology’, p. 304).
one who ‘prepares’ one of such visionaries, Rabbi Ishmael, for singing praise to the Holy One:

At once Metatron, Prince of the Divine Presence, came and revived me and raised me to my feet, but still I had no strength enough to sing a hymn before the glorious throne of the glorious King…

59

It is possible that these descriptions of Enoch-Metatron as the one who encourages angels and humans to perform heavenly praise in front of God’s Presence might have their roots in early Second Temple materials. Our investigation must now turn to analyzing some of these early developments that might constitute the early background of the Merkabah liturgical imagery.

The Beginnings: Liturgical Role of Enoch in Slavonic Apocalypse

One of the texts which might contain early traces of Enoch-Metatron’s liturgical imagery is 2 (Slavonic) Enoch, the Jewish apocalypse, apparently written in the first century CE. In contrast to other early Enochic materials, such as 1 Enoch and Jubilees, which emphasize only one side of the patriarch’s heavenly service through the reference to Enoch’s priestly activities, the Slavonic text appears to encompass both sacerdotal dimensions—priestly as well as liturgical. Allusions to the priestly office of the seventh antediluvian hero in the Slavonic text demonstrate marked difference in comparison with the testimonies found in 1 Enoch and Jubilees. Thus, unlike the aforementioned Enochic tracts, 2 Enoch does not associate the translated patriarch with any celestial structure that might remotely resemble the descriptions found in 1 Enoch 14 and 87. On the other hand, the Slavonic text contains a number of other indirect testimonies that demonstrate that the authors of this apocalypse were cognizant of the patriarch’s priestly role. Thus, scholars previously observed that Enoch’s anointing with shining oil and his clothing into the luminous garments during his angelic metamorphosis in 2 Enoch 22 appears to resemble the priestly vesture.

60 Another possible sacerdotal association comes from


60. M. Himmelfarb observes that ‘the combination of clothing and anointing suggests that the process by which Enoch becomes an angel is a heavenly version of priestly investiture’ (M. Himmelfarb, Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses [New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993], p. 40).
2 Enoch 67–69, where the descendent of the seventh antediluvian patriarch, including his son Methuselah, are depicted as the builders of the altar which is erected on the place where Enoch was taken up to heaven. The choice of the location for the terrestrial sanctuary might allude to the peculiar role of the patriarch in relation to the heavenly counterpart of this earthly structure. The Slavonic text also appears to refer to the sacerdotal office of Enoch by portraying the patriarch as the one who in 2 Enoch 59 delivers the sacrificial instructions to his children. All these testimonies show that 2 Enoch’s authors were familiar with the traditions about the priestly affiliations of the seventh antediluvian hero attested also in the early Enochic booklets. However, in contrast to these early materials that mention only Enoch’s priestly role, the authors of the Slavonic apocalypse also appear to have knowledge about another prominent office of the translated patriarch—his liturgical activities and his role as the one who encourages and directs the celestial hosts in their daily praise of the creator.

Entertaining this possibility of the Enochic origins of Metatron’s role as the leader of the divine worship, we must direct our attention to the passage found in 2 Enoch 18 where the patriarch is depicted as the one who encourages the celestial Watchers to conduct liturgy before the face of God. The longer recension of 2 En. 18.8-9 relates:

> And I [Enoch] said, ‘Why are you waiting for your brothers? And why don’t you perform the liturgy61 before the face of the Lord? Start up your liturgy,62 and perform the liturgy before the face of the Lord, so that you do not enrage your Lord to the limit.’ And they responded to my recommendation, and they stood in four regiments in this heaven. And behold, while I was standing with those men, 4 trumpets trumpeted in unison with a great sound, and the Watchers burst into singing in unison. And their voice rose in front of the face of the Lord, piteously and touchingly.63

One can notice that the imagery of this account represents a vague sketch that only distantly alludes to the future prominent liturgical role of Enoch-Metatron. Yet here, for the first time in the Enochic tradition, the seventh

63. F. Andersen, ‘2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch’, in OTP, I, pp. 91-221 (132).
antediluvian patriarch dares to assemble and direct the angelic creatures for their routine job of delivering praise to the deity. The choice of the angelic group, of course, is not coincidental since in various Enochic materials the patriarch is often described as a special envoy to the Watchers, the fallen angels, as well as their faithful celestial brothers.

It is significant that, despite the fact that in 2 Enoch 18 the patriarch gives his advice to the angels situated in the Fifth Heaven, he repeatedly advises them to start liturgy ‘before the Face of the Lord’, that is, in front of the divine Kabod, the exact location where Youth-Metatron will later conduct the heavenly worship of the angelic hosts in the Shi‘ur Qomah and Hekhalot accounts.

The shorter recension of the Slavonic text\(^64\) adds several significant details among which Enoch’s advice to the Watchers to ‘perform the liturgy in the name of fire’\(^65\) can be found. This peculiar terminology involving the symbolism of fire appears to allude to the concepts found in the aforementioned Hekhalot liturgical accounts where the imagery of fire, in the form of the references to the deafening fire and angels ‘bathing’ in the fire, plays an important role. The shorter recension also stresses the importance of Enoch’s leading role, specifically underscoring that the angels needed ‘the earnestness’ of his recommendation.\(^66\)

The reference of 2 Enoch 18 to the later Youth-Metatron office as the heavenly choirmaster does not appear to be happenstance, since the Slavonic apocalypse alludes to some additional features that recall the later Merkabah liturgical developments. The present study will concentrate on two of such characteristics that enhance Enoch’s connection with his newly acquired liturgical office. Both of them are linked to Enoch-Metatron’s designations, namely, his titles ‘Youth’ and the ‘Servant of the Divine Presence’, which appear here for the first time in the Enochic tradition. These titles seem to have direct connection to the liturgical imagery found in the Hekhalot and Shi‘ur Qomah materials where the offices of the

\(^{64}\) The shorter recension of 2 En. 18.8-9 reads: ‘‘‘And why don’t you perform the liturgy before the face of the Lord? Start up the former liturgy. Perform the liturgy in the name of fire (\textit{vo imja ogne}), lest you annoy the Lord your God (so that), he throws you down from this place.’ And they heeded the earnestness of my recommendation, and they stood in four regiments in heaven. And behold, while I was standing, they sounded with 4 trumpets in unison, and the Grigori began to perform the liturgy as with one voice. And their voices rose up in the Lord’s presence’ (Andersen, ‘2 Enoch’, p. 133).

\(^{65}\) Andersen, ‘2 Enoch’, p. 133.

\(^{66}\) Andersen, ‘2 Enoch’, p. 133.
Youth and *sar hapanim* help unfold Metatron’s liturgical activities. Our study must now proceed to the investigation of these two titles in *2 Enoch*’s materials.

The Servant of God’s Face

It has been already observed that Metatron’s sacerdotal and liturgical duties cannot be separated from his office as the *sar hapanim*, the one who can approach God’s Presence without limit and hesitation. It is not surprising that in *2 Enoch*, which attests to the origins of Enoch-Metatron’s liturgical imagery, one can also find for the first time in the Enochic tradition an explicit reference to the patriarch’s role as the Servant of the Divine Presence.67

Hugo Odeberg may well be the first scholar to have discovered the characteristics of ‘the Prince of the Presence’ in the long recension of *2 Enoch*. He successfully demonstrated in his synopsis of the parallel passages from 2 and 3 *Enoch* that the phrase ‘stand before my face forever’ found in the Slavonic apocalypse does not serve there merely as a typical Hebraism, ‘to be in the presence’, but establishes the angelic status of Enoch as Metatron, the Prince of the Presence, מֱטַרְטָן מָשָׁא.68 In *2 Enoch* therefore the patriarch is depicted not as one of the visionaries who has only temporary access to the Divine Presence, but as an angelic servant permanently installed in the office of the *sar hapanim*. The title itself is developed primarily in chs. 21–22, which are devoted to the description of the Throne of Glory. In these chapters, one can find several promises coming from the mouth of archangel Gabriel and the deity himself that the translated patriarch will now stand in front God’s face forever.69

67. Although the imagery of Angels of the Presence was widespread in the pseudepigraphical writings and specifically in the early Enochic pseudepigrapha, it was never explicitly identified with the seventh antediluvian patriarch. 1 En. 40.9, however, mentions the four ‘Faces’ or ‘Presences’ of Ezek. 1.6 identifying them with the four principal angels: Michael, Phanuel, Raphael, and Gabriel.

68. Odeberg, 3 Enoch, p. 55.

69. Cf. 2 En. 21.3: ‘And the Lord send one of his glorious ones, the archangel Gabriel. And he said to me “Be brave, Enoch! Don’t be frightened! Stand up, and come with me and stand in front of the face of the Lord forever”.’ 2 En. 22.6: ‘And the Lord said to his servants, sounding them out: “Let Enoch join in and stand in front of my face forever!”’ 2 En. 36.3: ‘Because a place has been prepared for you, and you will be in front of my face from now and forever’ (Andersen, ‘2 Enoch’, pp. 136, 138, 161).
In terms of the theological background of the problem, the title seems to be connected with the image of Metatron in the Merkabah tradition, which was crystallized in the classical Hekhalot literature. According to the legend of the Hekhalot tradition, Enoch ‘was raised to the rank of first of the angels and סְּרוּאָלָא פֶּסֶטָא (literally, “Prince of the Divine Face”, or “Divine Presence”).’ 3 Enoch, as well as other texts of Hekhalot tradition, have a well-developed theology connected with this title.

Youth
It has been already shown that in the descriptions related to Metatron’s sacerdotal and liturgical duties he often appears under the title ‘Youth’. Such persistence of the Hekhalot writers who repeatedly connect this designation with Metatron’s priestly and liturgical service may be explained by

one of the possible meanings of the Hebrew term יְהֹוָה, which also can be translated as ‘servant’. It should be stressed that the sobriquet ‘Youth’ is never applied to designate the seventh patriarch in 1 Enoch, Jubilees, Genesis Apocryphon, and the Book of Giants. Yet, it is significant that in some manuscripts of the Slavonic Enoch for the first time in the Enochic tradition the seventh antediluvian patriarch becomes associated with this prominent Metatron’s title. Despite that this designation occurs only in several Slavonic manuscripts, the author of the recent English translation, Francis Andersen, considered this reading as the original. He was also the first scholar to propose that Enoch’s designation as ‘Youth’ in 2 Enoch recalls the identical title of Metatron attested in 3 Enoch and other Hekhalot writings. In his commentary to the English translation of 2 Enoch in OTP, Andersen wrote:

The remarkable reading yunoše [youth], clearly legible in A, supports the evidence of V, which has this variant four times (not here), and of other MSS, that there was a tradition in which Enoch was addressed in this way. The similarity to the vocative enoše [Enoch] might explain the variant as purely scribal slip. But it is surprising that it is only in address, never in description, that the term is used. The variant jenokhu is rare. There is no phonetic reason why the first vowel should change to ju; jenokhu is never found. But it cannot be a coincidence that this title is identical with that of Enoch (= Metatron) in 3 Enoch.

The employment of the designation ‘Youth’ in the Slavonic apocalypse cannot be separated from its future usage in the later Merkabah materials, since the context of the usage of the sobriquet is very similar in both traditions. Thus, according to the Merkabah tradition, God likes to address Enoch-Metatron as ‘Youth’. In 3 Enoch 3, when R. Ishmael asks Metatron, ‘What is your name?’, Metatron answers, ‘I have seventy names, corresponding to the seventy nations of the world…however, my King calls me “Youth”’. The designation of the translated patriarch as ‘Youth’ seems to signify here a special relationship between the deity and Metatron. One can see the beginning of this tradition already in 2 Enoch where in ch. 24 of the shorter recension the following tradition can be found:

73. Slavonic junoše.
74. Professor Francis Andersen reassured me in a private communication about the originality of this reading, referring to it as ‘powerful evidence’.
75. See, for example, 384, 385, 390, 396 in Schäfer, Synopse, pp. 162-63, 164-65, 166-67.
And the Lord called me (Enoch) and he placed me to himself closer than Gabriel. And I did obeisance to the Lord. And the Lord spoke to me ‘Whatever you see, Youth, things standing still and moving about were brought to perfection by me and not even to angels have I explained my secrets…as I am making them known to you today…’

It is significant that the title ‘Youth’ here is tied to the motif of Enoch’s superiority over angels and his leading role in the celestial community which will play later a prominent role in the Merkabah liturgical community.

It is possible that the title ‘Youth’ also signifies here Enoch’s role as a very special servant of the deity who has immediate access to God’s Presence which is even closer than that of the archangels. In this context it is not surprising that in the shorter recension of 2 En. 24.1-2 the patriarch is depicted as the one who has a seat left of the Lord, ‘closer than Gabriel’, that is, next to God.

Finally, we must note that several important readings of ‘Youth’ in the materials associated with the Slavonic Enoch can be found in the Vienna Codex. In this manuscript Enoch is addressed by the Lord as ‘Youth’ in the context of angelic veneration. The passage from 2 Enoch 22 of the Vienna Codex reads:

And the Lord with his own mouth called me [Enoch] and said: Be brave, Youth! Do not be frightened! Stand up in front of my face forever. And Michael, the Lord’s archistrateg, brought me in the front of the Lord’s face. And the Lord tempted his servants and said to them: ‘Let Enoch come up and stand in the front of my face forever’. And the glorious ones bowed down and said: ‘Let him come up!’

78. Andersen, ‘2 Enoch’, p. 119.
79. The assigning of the left side to the vice-regent might be seen as puzzling. Martin Hengel, however, rightly observes that this situation can be explained as the correction of the Christian scribe(s), who ‘reserved this place for Christ’ (M. Hengel, Studies in Early Christology [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995], p. 193). Hengel points to a similar situation in the Ascension of Isaiah where the angel of the holy spirit is placed at the left hand of God.
80. I want to express my deep gratitude to Professor Francis Andersen who generously shared with me the microfilms and photographs of MSS V, R, and J.
81. Unfortunately, Friedrich Repp’s research on the Vienna Codex failed to discern the proper meaning of ‘Youth’ in this important manuscript. See F. Repp, ‘Textkritische Untersuchungen zum Henoch-Apokryph des co. slav. 125 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek’, Wiener slavistische Jahrbuch 10 (1963), pp. 58-68 (65).
82. Slavonic junoše.
83. MS V (VL 125), [Nr. 3], fol. 317.
This veneration of the Youth by the heavenly hosts in the context of God’s speech recalls the liturgical accounts found in *Synopse* 390 and *Sefer Haqqomah* where the angelic hosts prostrate themselves before the Youth in the Presence of the deity allowing the exalted angel to insert the fire of deafness into their ears. It is not coincidental that scholars previously pointed to the liturgical coloring of this scene from *2 Enoch* 22 where the patriarch changes his earthly garments for the luminous attire which now closely resembles the priestly vesture. 84

**Conclusion**

The liturgical tradition found in *2 Enoch* can be viewed as a bridge that connects the early traditions about the sacerdotal duties of the patriarch found in *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees* with the later Hekhalot and *Shi’ur Qomah* lore where references to the translated hero’s priestly role are juxtaposed with his liturgical performances. Scholars have previously noted that Enoch’s figure portrayed in the various sections of *2 Enoch* appears to be more complex than in the early Enochic tractates of *1 Enoch*. 85 For the first time, the Enochic tradition seeks to depict Enoch, not simply as a human taken to heaven and transformed into an angel, but as a celestial being exalted above the angelic world. In this attempt, one may find the origins of another image of Enoch, very different from the early Enochic literature, which was developed much later in Merkabah mysticism—the concept of the supreme angel Metatron, the ‘Prince of the Presence’. 86 The attestation of the seventh antediluvian patriarch as the celestial liturgical director in *2 Enoch* gives additional weight to this hypothesis about the transitionary nature of the Slavonic account which guides the old pseudepigraphical traditions into the new mystical dimension. In this respect the tradition found in *2 Enoch* 18 might represent an important step towards defining and shaping Enoch-Metatron’s liturgical office in its transition to his new role as the celestial choirmaster. 87 It is also significant that the

87. It is intriguing that a similar or maybe even competing development can be detected in the early lore about Yahoel. Thus, *Apoc. Abr.* 10.9 depicts Yahoel as the
beginning of Enoch’s liturgical functions in 2 Enoch is conflated there with the development of his new titles-offices as the Youth and the Servant of the Divine Presence which will later play a prominent role in the Merkabah passages pertaining to Metatron’s liturgical actions.

one who is responsible for teaching ‘those who carry the song through the medium of man’s night of the seventh hour’ (R. Rubinkiewicz, ‘Apocalypse of Abraham’, in OTP, I, p. 694). In ch. 12 of the same text Abraham addresses to Yahoel as ‘Singer of the Eternal One’.
Philo’s Therapeutai: Philosopher’s Dream or Utopian Construction?

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Abstract
This article takes issue, on rhetorical and geographical grounds, with Engberg-Pedersen’s (1999) argument that Philo’s De Vita Contemplativa is a ‘philosopher’s dream’. Further, it is argued that while Philo’s description of the Therapeutai/Therapeutrides is shaped by Hellenistic utopian conventions, particularly Iambulus’ account of the Islands of the Sun (Diodorus Siculus 2.55-60), Philo’s account is sober and realistic enough to suggest that he was describing a real community of Jewish contemplatives of which he had direct knowledge.

In a recent article, Troels Engberg-Pedersen (1999) makes an interesting case that Philo’s account of the Therapeutai/Therapeutrides in De Vita Contemplativa is not, as most scholars have assumed, a (more or less idealized) description of an actual, historical Jewish monastic community, but rather it is a ‘philosopher’s dream’, a fictional story (πλάσμα) written for the serious purpose of illustrating the life of δεωρία (Vit. Cont. 1; for a recent article that presupposes the historical existence of an Egyptian Jewish monastic community on the shores of Lake Mareotis much as described by Philo, see Taylor and Davies 1998). Engberg-Pedersen admits that Philo might have known of a conclave something like the Therapeutai in the vicinity of Alexandria, but asserts that it doesn’t matter much ‘whether there were people a little bit like Philo’s Therapeutai or not’ (Engberg-Pedersen 1999: 48), since, methodologically, it is impossible to choose between the suggestion that Philo’s description of the sect is ‘fairly extensively idealized’, and the supposition that it is all fiction (p. 48). For
Engberg-Pedersen, *De Vita Contemplativa* belongs to the ancient genre of fictional accounts of the ideal society (e.g. Plato’s *Republic*, Zeno’s *Republic*), which by Philo’s time had been jumbled together generically with fantastic travel narratives (e.g. the marvellous tales in Herodotus, the Hyperboreans of Hecateaus of Abdera, Euhemerus of Messene’s *Sacred Inscription*) (p. 48). Engberg-Pedersen (pp. 44-48) offers slighting references to literary accounts of ideal societies in Lucian of Samosata and Josephus as evidence that in Graeco-Roman times, the genre (whether philosophical or fantastic) had fallen into disrepute (Lucian, *Vera Historia* 1.1-4; Josephus, *Apion* 2.220-24). Philo wanted to describe an ideal Jewish society, argues Engberg-Pedersen (p. 46), but he did not want to invite incredulity by presenting the account as his own creation, or to dissociate it from Judaism by placing it outside the boundaries of the known world. Therefore, he chose ‘to present his ideal state as a historical fact…*without* admitting its fictitious character…and to locate it *within* the confines of the known world’.

While Engberg-Pedersen’s hypothesis is intriguing and his case vigorously argued, he does not adequately address three aspects of Philo’s presentation of the Therapeutai that point to the historical reality of the Egyptian Jewish contemplatives. First, Philo begins his treatise with a reference to a previous discussion of the Essenes (*Vit. Cont.* 1), who are offered as an ideal example of the active life (*πρακτικὸν βίον*).¹ Whether Philo’s reference to the Essenes refers to his discussion in *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit* (75-87), in the *Hypothetica* (11.1-18), or to a third, no longer extant account,² there is no doubting the historical reality of the Essenes, who are referred to by both Pliny the Elder (*Hist. Nat.* 5.17.4) and Josephus (*War* 119-27; *Ant.* 15.373-79), and are widely identified with the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Philo’s prior use of the Essenes as an example of the active life leads the reader to expect that his account of the contemplative life will also draw on a real-life example, the Therapeutai/Therapeutrides (*Vit. Cont.* 2), a class of philosophers who exist ‘in many places in the inhabited world’ (*Vit. Cont.* 21), but the best of whom are an Egyptian Jewish sect known to the author (*Vit. Cont.* 22).³ Second, Philo

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¹ References to Philo refer to Colson 1985.
² As argued by Engberg-Pedersen 1999: 42; for an argument that Philo’s reference in *Vita* 1 is to *Quod Omnis probes liber sit*, see Taylor and Davies 1998: 8-10.
³ Although, as Taylor and Davies point out, Therapeutai/Therapeutrides is not the actual name of the group described by Philo (1998: 4-10), but a general term used by Philo to denote a certain class of philosophers, for the sake of convenience, I shall
begins his treatise with a strong statement of his commitment to conveying the actual truth (σωτηριον ἐλεημονίας) (Vit. Cont. 1); Engberg-Pedersen’s assertion that the emphatic truth-claim was meant to conceal the fact that the Therapeutai were non-existent seems contrived (Engberg-Pedersen 1999: 43). Third, Philo gives a fairly detailed account of the location of this sect, ‘situated above the Mareotic Lake on a somewhat low-lying hill very happily placed both because of its security and the pleasantly tempered air’ (Vit. Cont. 23).⁴ Engberg-Pedersen (p. 46) argues that Philo refrained from revealing the fact that the Therapeutai were his own invention in order to avoid the criticism that his account of the ideal state was based on ‘impossible premises’, but the observable geographical fact that no such community dwelt on the shores of Lake Mareotis in his time would have been much more damaging to Philo’s case. Therefore, Taylor and Davies surmise that the community of De Vita Contemplativa was ‘very small and composed of certain people from an affluent, educated circle in Alexandria, a circle in which Philo himself participated’, who followed a lifestyle distinct from that of the Essenes in Judea, seems more plausible than the suggestion that they were a ‘philosopher’s dream’ (Taylor and Davies 1998: 24).

Although Engberg-Pedersen’s hypothesis is not altogether persuasive, the suggestion that there is a relationship between ancient fictional accounts of ideal societies and Philo’s De Vita Contemplativa invites further investigation. Doron Mendels has argued that the primary template for the Essenes in their attempt to create an ideal Jewish society was the Hellenistic utopia,⁵ particularly Iambulus’ Islands of the Sun (Diodorus Siculus 2.55-60), ‘fleshed out with a Jewish theology which was influenced by a pagan environment’ (Mendels 1998: 423). Mendels adduces an impressive list of parallels between the Essenes and the Heliopolitans: location in isolated areas; distinctive ‘national identities’; emphasis on internal harmony; leadership of elders; no private property; common meals; asceticism; uniformity of dress; natural derivation of subsistence; ritual baths; rejec-

⁴ On the possible location of the community, see Taylor and Davies 1998: 10-14.

⁵ Of course, the term ‘utopia’ was not coined until the sixteenth century, but utopian thinking has a history that goes back thousands of years, and was very much a part of Hellenistic/Graeco-Roman political theorizing and literary expression (see Herzler 1926: 7-98; Ferguson 1975; Manuel and Manuel 1979: 33-92).
tion of marriage; communal child-rearing; rejection of temple worship; simple burial system; dualistic worldview; association of the deity with the sun; love of learning, especially astrology; cryptic writings; special skill in healing (Mendels 1998: 424-36). Mendels argues that all of these parallels are supported not just by the descriptions in Philo and Josephus, but also by references in the Dead Sea Scrolls; consequently, the resemblance is more than the construction of the Essenes in utopian terms by Hellenized Jews for a pagan audience (Mendels 1998: 436-37). At the very least, the idea that the Jewish authors presented the Essenes using utopian motifs familiar to their Greek-speaking audiences is appealing.

Both Philo and Josephus show an awareness of the genre of the Hellenistic utopia. In the midst of his account of the Essenes in *Bellum Judaicum* (2.155-56), Josephus refers to the Greek belief that good souls find their final reward in the ‘isles of the blest’:

> beyond the ocean, a place which is not oppressed by rain or snow or heat, but is refreshed by the ever gentle breath of the west wind coming in from ocean… The Greeks, I imagine, had the same conception when they set apart the isles of the blessed for their brave men, whom they call heroes and demigods.7

As Mendels notes, ‘The “isles of the blessed” is a well-known motif in Greek literature… e.g. Hesiod, *Erga* 17073; Plato, *Gorgias* 523a-b; Plutarch, *Sertorius* 8… Euhemerus refers to it: 2.55.3-4’ (1998: 437 n. 55). In *Contra Apionem* (2.220-24), Josephus argues that the Jewish nation and its laws are so extraordinary that if

> some one had delivered a lecture to the Greeks which he admitted to be the outcome of his own imagination, or asserted that somewhere outside the known world he had met with people who held such sublime ideas about God and had for ages continued steadily faithful to such laws as ours; his words would, I imagine, astonish all his hearers, in view of the constant vicissitudes in their own past history’. (221)8

He goes on to refer to Greek writers who have composed accounts of ideal societies and are accused of writing tales of wonder (θαυμαστεία), impossible to implement (222). That is, a Gentile who did not know of the actual existence of the Jews would mistake a *truthful* description of their way of

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life for a Hellenistic utopian fantasy, or a philosopher’s dream of an ideal state (cf. *Apion* 2.222b-23). Somewhat similarly, Philo insists in *De Vita Contemplativa* that his narrative will not ‘add anything of my own procuring to improve upon the facts as is constantly done by poets (ποιητοί) and historians (λόγογραφοι) through lack of excellence in the lives and practices which they record’ (*Vit. Cont.* 1.1). He continues by asserting that the virtue of the philosophers he is about to describe is enough to unnerve the greatest orator, but that such excellence must not go unrecorded. Like Josephus, Philo compares the actual lives of Jews (in this case, the Therapeutai and Therapeutrides) with the exaggerated accounts of poets and prose-writers.9 If, as I shall argue below, Philo’s account of the Therapeutai resembles the fantastic tales of poets and historians, this is because (as Philo might have argued) the reality of these Jewish philosophers was so superlative that others might mistake it for invention.

**Similarities between the Therapeutai and the Heliopolitans**

Iambulus’ account of the Islands of the Sun is preserved fragmentarily in Diodorus Siculus 2.55-59.10 To summarize:

Iambulus is a young merchant who is seized by brigands and abandoned in Ethiopia. As part of a ritual to purify their land, the Ethiopians send the captive and a companion off in a boat, ordering them to sail until they find a blessed isle, inhabited by virtuous people. After four months, they reach such an island, where the natives welcome them. The isle is one of seven, all of them perfectly spherical and similar in size, located at the equator. The inhabitants of the islands all practice the same customs. The climate is temperate, and food is abundant. Day and night are of equal length, and the constellations are entirely different. Clothing is made easily from local reeds, and dyed purple with pounded oyster shells, so that everyone is clad royally. The people are over six feet tall, very strong, with flexible bones, hairless except for that which covers their heads and faces. Their ears are large, with valve-like coverings, and their tongues are divided so that they can speak every language, imitate any bird and carry on two conversations at once. They live in clans of not more than four hundred members, ruled by the oldest man, who is obeyed by everyone. The leader commits suicide when he reaches the age of 150, and the next oldest succeeds him. The people serve one another, performing necessary duties in rotation. Marriage is unknown, and children are raised as much-loved wards of the community.

10. All references to Diodorus Siculus follow Oldfather 1935.
Communal harmony is their highest goal. Babies are tested as to whether they are worthy of life by being made to ride of the backs of giant birds; those who fail the test are cast out of the community as unlikely to survive long. Despite the abundance of their environment, the Heliopolitans live simple lives and eat only what they need. While they eat meat and cooked foods, they do not indulge in sauces and condiments. Certain days are specified for the consumption of certain foods. The people are long-lived and free of disease. Those who are maimed must commit suicide, as must everyone else when they reach the age of 150. This is accomplished voluntarily and painlessly with the aid of a soporific plant. The dead are buried simply and naturally. They worship the heavens, the celestial bodies, and especially the sun, which they celebrate with hymns and songs. They have a strange alphabet, and pursue all learning enthusiastically, especially astronomy. They have a strange, small animal whose blood has miraculous healing properties; its blood can be used to glue a severed, non-vital body part back on if the cut is fresh. After seven years with the islanders, Iambulus and his companion are forced to leave on account of their evil ways.11

Superficially, Philo’s relatively sober and realistic description of the Therapeutai seems far removed from Iambulus’ marvellous tale of the Heliopolitans. However, on closer inspection, the Therapeutai and the islanders share a long list of similarities:

**Location and Climate**
Both are located in isolated areas: the Heliopolitans on their remote islands (Diodorus Siculus 2.55.6); the Therapeutai in general ‘outside the walls pursuing solitude in gardens or lonely bits of country’ (*Vit. Cont.* 20). The Egyptian Jewish ascetics in particular reside in a place ‘secured by the farm buildings and villages round about’ (*Vit. Cont.* 23a). Both enjoy salubrious climates (Diodorus Siculus 2.56.7; *Vit. Cont.* 23).

**Simple, Natural Diet**
The Therapeutai eat an extremely simple and pure diet of bread, salt and hyssop with spring water to drink (*Vit. Cont.* 37a, 73-74, 81-82). The Heliopolitans differ from the Therapeutai in that they do eat meat or drink wine, which their islands spontaneously produce in abundance (Diodorus Siculus 2.59.2-3). However, both groups eat simple, natural foods, unaccompanied by elaborate sauces or condiments (Diodorus Siculus 2.59.1, 5; the salt and hyssop eaten with the bread of the Therapeutai have ritual connotations; cf. *Vit. Cont.* 81-82). Both groups practice restraint in their eating habits:

Although all the inhabitants enjoy an abundant provision of everything from what grows of itself in these islands, yet they do not indulge in the enjoyment of this abundance without restraint, but they practice simplicity and take for their food only what suffices for their needs (Diodorus Siculus 2.59.1).

For as nature has set hunger and thirst as mistresses over mortal kind they propitiate them without using anything to curry favour but only such things as are actually needed and without which life cannot be maintained. Therefore they eat enough to keep from hunger and drink enough to keep from thirst but abhor surfeiting as a malignant enemy both to soul and body (Vit. Cont. 37).

Uniformity of Dress

Members of both communities wear simple clothing. The Therapeutai wear ‘a thick coat of shaggy skin’ in winter and ‘a vest or linen shirt’ in summer (Vit. Cont. 38); at their communal banquets, however, they all dress in white (Vit. Cont. 87). The Heliopolitans make their clothing from a native reed, whose fibres are mingled with crushed seashells to create ‘remarkable garments of a purple hue’ (Diodorus Siculus 2.49.4a).

Rejection of Marriage/Communal Child-Rearing

The Heliopolitans do not marry, and practice communal child-rearing (ὡς κοινός; Diodorus Siculus 2.58.1). The Therapeutai divest themselves of possessions and leave behind their families, friends and homelands (Vit. Cont. 18). Among them are ‘aged [female] virgins’ who have voluntarily eschewed marriage in favour of the pursuit of wisdom (Vit. Cont. 68). According to Philo, the (widowed male?) Therapeutai leave their biological offspring behind, while the women ‘desire no mortal offspring but those immortal children which only the soul that is dear to God can bring to the birth unaided because the father has sown in her spiritual rays’ (Vit. Cont. 68). The younger Therapeutai treat the elder men and women like fathers and mothers, ‘judging them to be the parents of them all in common (κοινῶς οὕτως γοεῖσι), in a closer affinity than that of blood, since to the right minded there is no closer tie than noble living’ (Vit. Cont. 72).

Testing of Children/Neophytes

As noted earlier, the children of the Heliopolitans are subjected to an initiation which tests their spiritual worthiness and determines whether they will survive or perish (Diodorus Siculus 2.58.5). The Therapeutai only admit those junior members who are ‘chosen on merit with all care
who as becomes their good character and nobility (ἐν γευσθείς) are pressing on to reach the summit of virtue’ (Vit. Cont. 72). The juniors among the Therapeutai are not necessarily chronologically young, but those who have recently been admitted to the community (Vit. Cont. 67).

Dining Habits
Philo’s description implies that the Therapeutai normally dine separately, after sunset (Vit. Cont. 34); some are so disciplined that they eat only after three or even six days (Vit. Cont. 33-34). They eat communally every seven days (Vit. Cont. 37) and at a festival celebrated ‘after seven sets of seven days’ (Vit. Cont. 65). The Heliopolitans ‘do not all take their food at the same time nor is it always the same’ (Diodorus Siculus 2.59.5); unlike the Therapeutai, there is no mention of meals associated with their festivals (2.59.7).

Leadership by Elders
Each clan of the Heliopolitans is led by an elder (πρεσβύτερος) who is universally obeyed (Diodorus Siculus 2.58.6); similarly, the Therapeutai are taught by the senior (πρεσβύτερος) among them at their weekly assemblies, where they listen to him with great attention (Vit. Cont. 31). The neophytes wait on the elder men and women (Vit. Cont. 67-68).

Love of Learning
The Heliopolitans are described as attending to ‘every branch of learning and especially to astrology’ (Diodorus Siculus 2.57.4). The Therapeutai spend their days closeted with ‘laws and oracles delivered through the mouth of prophets, and psalms and anything else which fosters and perfects knowledge and piety’ (Vit. Cont. 25). Scriptural reading and allegorical interpretation are an important element in their spiritual pursuits (Vit. Cont. 28-29).

Association with Healing
Philo explains the term θεραπευταῖ/θεραπυρίδες as denoting ‘an art of healing better than that current in the cities which cures only the bodies, while theirs treats also souls oppressed with grievous and well-nigh incurable diseases, inflicted by pleasures and desires and griefs and fears’ (Vit. Cont. 2-3). The Islands of the Sun are home to a species of animals

12. Taylor and Davies note that the term θεραπευταί is used in Greek literature, especially in Egypt, to refer to those who serve the gods (1998: 5); Philo goes on to mention that the term has the sense of worship (Vita 3).
whose blood has miraculous bodily healing properties (Diodorus Siculus 2.58.4); the waters of the island have medicinal qualities, ‘the warm springs serving well for bathing and the relief of fatigue, the cold excellent in sweetness and possessing the power the contribute to good health’ (Diodorus Siculus 2.57.3). Healing of the soul is not mentioned with respect to the Children of the Sun, presumably because it is not required in an ideal society.

**Physical Peculiarities**
The Heliopolitans are described as being physically very different from other people (Diodorus Siculus 2.55.2-6). While the Therapeutai are not described as having notable physical peculiarities, Philo says that the most rigorous devotees ‘have become habituated to abstinence like the grasshoppers who are said to live on air…’ (*Vit. Cont.* 35), that is, through self-discipline, they have become physically unlike the majority of humankind.

**Absence of Slavery**
The topic of slavery is not explicitly addressed by Iambulus, but it is evident that there are no slaves among the Heliopolitans, who ‘take turns in ministering to the needs of one another, some of them fishing, others working at the crafts, others occupying themselves in other useful tasks, and still others, with the exception of those who have come to old age, performing the services of the group in a definite cycle’ (Diodorus Siculus 2.59.6-7). According to Philo, the Therapeutai repudiate slavery ‘as they consider the ownership of servants to be entirely against nature’ (*Vit. Cont.* 70a; cf. 71). Philo mentions that the junior members of the community wait on the elders at their banquets (*Vit. Cont.* 72). Taylor and Davies surmise that the neophytes played a key role in the economic life of the Therapeutai, and in supporting the elders in their spiritual endeavours (1998: 20-23).

**Association of the Divine with the Sun**
The Heliopolitans ‘worship as gods that which encompasses all things and the sun, and in general all the heavenly bodies’ (Diodorus Siculus 2.59.2); they sing ‘especially in honour of the sun, after whom they name both the islands and themselves’ (2.59.7). Of course, the Jewish ascetics know better than to worship the sun or the heavenly bodies (*Vit. Cont.* 5), but each day they pray at dawn and at sunset (*Vit. Cont.* 27), and philosophize only during the daylight hours, since this is work worthy of the light (*Vit. Cont.* 34). At the close of their 49th-day banquets ‘they stand with their
faces and their whole body turned to the east and when they see the sun rising they stretch their hand up to heaven and pray for bright days and knowledge of the truth and the power of keen sighted thinking’ (Vit. Cont. 89).

**Hymn Singing**
The Heliopolitans both pronounce and sing ‘hymns and spoken laudations’ in honour of their deities, especially the sun (Diodorus Siculus 2.59.7). Philo gives a lengthy description of the choral singing and dancing of the Therapeutai and Therapeutrides at their 49th-day banquets (Vit. Cont. 83-89).

**Numerical Symbolism**
There are seven Islands of the Sun (Diodorus Siculus 2.58.7b); and the Heliopolitans’ alphabet consists of seven letters, each of which can be formed in four distinct ways (2.57.4); Iambulus is expelled from the Islands after seven years (2.60.1). The maximum lifespan allowed to the islanders, 150 years (2.57.5), is, of course, three times fifty, called by Philo ‘the most sacred of numbers and the most deeply rooted in nature, being formed from the square of the right-angled triangle which is the source from which the universe springs’ (Vit. Cont. 65). The Therapeutai venerate both the seventh day ‘as one of perfect holiness and a most complete festival’ (Vit. Cont. 36), and the sabbath of weeks, ‘venerating not only the simple week of seven days, but also its multiplied power, for they know it to be pure and always virgin’, celebrating their most sacred rites on the eve of the fiftieth day (Vit. Cont. 65).

**Love of Harmony**
The Heliopolitans are free of rivalry, ‘and they never cease placing the highest value on internal harmony’ (τὴν ὀμονοίαν; Diodorus Siculus 2.58.1b). Philo emphasizes the musical and social harmony of the Therapeutai at their great banquets (αὐτιφωνοίς ὀμονοίαις; ἐναρμόνιον συμφωνίαν; Vit. Cont. 84, 88).

**Simplicity and Self-Control**
As noted above, the Heliopolitans practice restraint and discipline in their eating habits, child-rearing practices, method of government and rotation of labour. Children and adults who are less than perfect are euthanized (Diodorus Siculus 2.57.5; 2.58.5). According to Philo, self-control
(ἐγκράτειαν) and simplicity (σταφίαν) are foundational values among the Therapeutai (Vit. Cont. 34, 39).

Blessed Existence
Iambulus and his companion are sent by the Ethiopians to find a land where they would lead a ‘blessed life’ (παρ᾽ οἷς μακάριῶς ζήσεται, Diodorus Siculus 2.55.4); Philo describes the Therapeutai as desiring ‘a deathless and blessed life’ (ἀθανάτου καὶ μακάριας ζωῆς, Vit. Cont. 13), and as citizens of heaven and of the world (οὐρανοῦ...καὶ κόσμου πολιτῶν, Vit. Cont. 90).

Differences Between the Therapeutai and the Heliopolitans
Of course, there are significant differences between the Jewish sectarians and the Children of the Sun. The Therapeutai live near Philo’s metropolis of Alexandria, whereas the islands of the Heliopolitans are so remote that different constellations appear in their night sky. The Therapeutai are (for the most part) physically indistinguishable from other human beings, whereas the Heliopolitans have distinctive bodily characteristics. Strange animals and plants with miraculous properties inhabit the islands; Philo describes no such phenomena among the Therapeutai. The infant children of the islanders are required to mount the backs of giant birds to prove their worthiness to live, whereas neophytes are admitted by the Therapeutai on the basis of their lofty aspirations. The Heliopolitans self-euthanize at an advanced age and are buried in a simple manner; Philo does not mention the death-rites of the Therapeutai. The Children of the Sun inhabit seven islands which are their native home, and live in clans of 400 members, whereas the Therapeutai are a small, identifiable Jewish sectarian community who choose to leave family and friends behind—or, in the case of the women, eschew them altogether—in order to pursue the vita contemplativa. The Heliopolitans spend their days working to provide for the needs of their people; the Therapeutai are ascetics who spend their days in solitary study and meditation, communing only at their sabbaths and pentecosts. Possibly, as Taylor and Davies argue, their economic needs were attended to by the younger members of the community.

Most of the differences between the Therapeutai and the Children of the Sun can be explained by the difference in genre between Iambulus’ and Philo’s narratives. While the Heliopolitans are, indeed, the figments of the imagination of the kind of writer criticized by Philo at the beginning of his treatise (Vit. Cont. 1), the Therapeutai are an actual community known to
him. Because the Therapeutai actually exist, and because he has personal knowledge of them, Philo describes them in a truthful manner (ςυμφής… τῆς ἀληθείας, Vit. Cont. 1), that is, without the kinds of fantastic details characteristic of Hellenistic utopists like Iambulus (e.g. giant birds, miraculous animals, superhuman inhabitants). Perhaps because Philo regarded the Therapeutai similarly to the way that Josephus viewed the Jews in general (Apion 2.220-24), as a community whose actual way of life was so sublime that a Greek reader would hear it with wonder (θαυμάσαοι) as a marvellous tale (θαυμαστά), his description of them includes Hellenistic utopian τόποι that would be recognized by his educated Alexandrian audience, including members of the Therapeutai. Possibly, the Alexandrian Therapeutic sect was deliberately founded on Hellenistic utopian principles, although the paucity of evidence about them would make this difficult to establish.13

Thus, contrary to Engberg-Pedersen’s assertion that it is methodologically impossible to decide whether Philo’s account of the Therapeutai is idealized fact or purely a ‘philosopher’s dream’ (Engberg-Pedersen 1999: 48), it has been shown above that there are good reasons to conclude that the former is the case. The Therapeutai, like the Essenes, were an actual group of Jewish ascetics known to Philo. They lived in a specific geographical area, explicitly described by Philo, that could easily have been checked by his readers. Philo’s description of them deliberately accentuates the similarities between the ‘blessed lives’ of the Therapeutai and those of imaginary ideal societies like the Heliopolitans, but is realistic enough to justify his assertion that his narrative is true.14 Rather than being a philosopher’s dream, Philo’s account of the Therapeutai in De Vita Contemplativa is a utopian construction of a real (ἀληθεία) community.

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13. Although Taylor and Davies surmise that the Therapeutai emanated from a small, elite, educated circle of Alexandrian Jews would support this suggestion (1998: 24).

14. The term ἀληθεία has the sense of both ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ (BDAG: 42-43).


On Women and Honor in the Testament of Job

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Abstract

A variety of explanations has been offered for the prominent role women play in the Testament of Job. This article argues that the women should be understood within the context of the Testament’s larger theme of prescribing a response to sudden loss of wealth and honor. The Testament serves as a lesson on the transience of acquired honor in contrast to the permanence of honor ascribed by God. The women of the account were essential to this lesson’s clarity, epitomizing both of its parts: the anxieties and failures of the Egyptians Sítidos and the maidservant embody the futility of clinging to acquired honor and the fate of Job’s Israelite daughters signals the merit of trusting in honor ascribed by God.

The women of the Testament of Job draw considerable attention to themselves, and well they should given the prominent roles they play in the pseudepigraphon. The Testament is Job’s deathbed speech in which he explains that his earlier afflictions resulted from his opposition to Satan and that his restored prosperity and family bliss were God’s reward for his perseverance in faith under adversity. Chapters 1–45 prominently feature Job’s female servant and his first wife Sítidos. Both women embody the same contradiction inasmuch as their loyalty to Job is matched only by their inability to recognize Satan when he seeks to use them as tools against

Job. By contrast, chs. 46–53 highlight Job’s daughters from his second wife, Dinah. Against all the rules they boldly claim from their dying father an inheritance equal to that received by their brothers, and upon receiving their patrimony they possess insight beyond human measure and the capacity to speak the language of the heavenly angels. No wonder, indeed, that these women so readily turn heads.

While most observers assign the women’s unusual prominence and divergent depictions to authorial intent or editorial tampering,2 Pieter van der Horst takes a different tack. He suggests that an author wove a source, chs. 46–53, into his composition to create the Testament as a whole.3 Noting the contrast between the spiritually sightless Sitidos of chs. 1–45 and the religiously vigorous daughters of Job of chs. 46–53, van der Horst writes that in the latter chapters ‘women take the spiritual lead and become superior to men’. He avers that the section was a haggada based on Job 42.154 that ‘originated in ecstatic–mystical circles of early Judaism from about the beginning of the Common Era…in a group in which women


4. Job 42.15: ‘And there is not found women so beautiful as Job’s daughters in all the land, and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers’.
played a leading role by their greater ecstatic gifts and their superior spiritual insight into heavenly reality’. ⁵ In short, van der Horst sees in these chapters traces of a woman-dominated, even ‘feminist’ movement within early Judaism.

Susan Garrett vigorously contests van der Horst’s thesis. She declares that the Testament is uniform in its treatment of women, and that it never reveals the gender sensitivity van der Horst attributes to it. ⁶ By considering the women’s eminence throughout the Testament as a function of the text’s and its early readership’s ‘ideological construction of the female’, ⁷ she concludes that the Testament’s portrait of women is consistent within itself and with the cultural norms of its day. In the persons of Sitidos and the maid, women are effortlessly victimized and manipulated by Satan so long as they behave as women were presumed to behave in the Greco-Roman world: creatures keen for worldly, transient, and perishable things, and anxious for the fortune of their husbands or male patrons and the fate of their offspring. By contrast, Job’s daughters show that when women cast off their feminine ways to focus on celestial matters—when they become more male in their habits—they escape being Satan’s victims and tools and ascend to heights of glory usually unknown to their kind. ⁸ Thus Garrett surmises, pace van der Horst, that the Testament’s estimate of women would hardly have been liberating to female recipients of yore, for to attain spiritual enlightenment the Testament required them to shed precisely those characteristics which marked them as women.

While Garrett deserves credit for providing a more period-appropriate appreciation of the gender ideology that informed the Testament and its early recipients, her reading nonetheless labors under the weight of anachronism too. By focusing solely on the gender ideology of the text and its earliest audience, she (perhaps unwittingly) conveys the impression that especially because of their prominence the women of the Testament might

⁵ Van der Horst, ‘Images of Women’, p. 113.
⁸ In support of her reading, Garrett cites the comparable understanding of women found in Philo and 4 Maccabees (‘The “Weaker Sex”’, pp. 64-65, 66-69). She rightly observes (pp. 63, 69) that in the Testament the women ‘improve’ precisely when their heart (ἡ καρδία) is changed so that it focuses not on earthly but heavenly things, just as Job’s heart is set on celestial matters (see T. Job 23.13; 24.5-6; cf. 36.5; 48.2; 49.1; 50.1). For more on the disposition of heart shared by Job’s daughter, see n. 45 below.
have been considered by the work’s earliest recipients apart from the larger themes of the text. But, given the degraded role the female gender played in the ancient imagination—a role Garrett lifts up to make her argument!—it seems certain that the Testament would have been received not first as a work that features women prominently, but as a work about what stands at the forefront in its storytelling: the proper response to the sudden and wrenching loss of wealth and honor. Indeed, our argument is that the Testament was sure to be heard as a lesson on the transience of acquired honor in contrast to the permanence of honor ascribed by God. Moreover, the women of the account were essential to this lesson’s clarity in that they strategically epitomize both of its parts: the anxieties and failures of the Egyptians Sitidos and the maidservant embody the futility of clinging to acquired honor when external forces shatter it; the fate of Job’s Israelite daughters by Dinah signals the merit of trusting in the honor God ascribes to the loyal ones of Israel.

1. An Early Receptive Context for the Testament of Job

It is useful to begin with a sketch of the likely setting for the Testament so as to provide the social and historical framework within which it and its women would have made their impression on recipients.

Readers have long surmised that the Testament was targeted at Jews living in Roman-era Egypt sometime in the second half of the first century CE.9 So what circumstances did Jews face in that time and place? In gen-

9. Though some dispute this provenance, several things in the text favor it strongly. Job is described as a king of Egypt (28.7) and he is known for collecting gems (28.4-5; 32.5; cf. LXX Job 31.24), ‘an Egyptian royal pastime according to Theophrastus (De lapidibus 24.55)’ (Spittler, ‘Testament of Job’, in OTP, I, p. 833). The author relies on LXX Job, almost certainly a product of Egyptian Jews (see B. Schaller, ‘Das Testament Hiobs und die Septuaginta-Übersetzung des Buches Hiob’, Bib 61 [1980], pp. 377-406), and the book’s contents resonate well with Joseph and Aseneth and the Testament of Abraham, both works that are routinely assigned to Egypt (for Testament of Abraham see OTP, I, pp. 871-902 (875); A.M. Denis, Introduction aux pseudépigraphe grecs d’Ancien Testament [SVTP, 1; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970], p. 36; G.W.E. Nickelsburg, Studies on the Testament of Abraham [SCS, 6; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976], p. 63. It is hard to dispute that Joseph and Aseneth is Egyptian in origin; for an overview and brief statement of the evidence for its Egyptian provenance, see R. Chesnutt, ‘Joseph and Aseneth’, in ABD, III, pp. 969-71). As for dating the Testament to the first century CE, its reliance on LXX Job likely places it after 100 BCE (Schaller, ‘Das Testament Hiobs’, passim). More importantly, its focus on perseverance in the face of colossal loss of wealth, honor, and status suggest that it may
eral terms, life for many of them is perhaps best described as experiencing diminished status under Roman rule relative to the privileges they enjoyed under the Ptolemies. The distinctions between citizens and non-citizens under the Ptolemies were so vague as to permit many Jews to exercise privileges usually associated with citizenship without the legal status. For instance, many were enriched by enlisting in the Ptolemaic military, and others achieved wealth and status as civil servants, particularly as tax collectors. But Rome eliminated these important routes to advanced social and economic standing. It disbanded the Ptolemaic army, preferring its own legions instead, and it employed wealthy urban Greeks as civil servants because they could pay the associated taxes Rome imposed on possessors of public office.

have been in particular a response to the disruptions some Alexandrian Jews experienced as a result of the changes brought by Roman rule and especially the Edict of Claudius in 41 CE (see below). It must also have been intended for Jews before the devastating revolts of 115–117 CE, after which time such urgings to perseverance would surely have rung so hollow as to be unthinkable (Collins, Between Athens and Jerusalem, p. 241). For fuller discussions of the Testament’s date and provenance, see Collins, Between Athens and Jerusalem, pp. 240-41; Schaller, Das Testament Hiobs, p. 311; Russell Spittler, ‘The Testament of Job’, in OTP, I, pp. 833-34. Russell Spittler, ‘The Testament of Job: A History of Research’, in M. Knibb and P. van der Horst (eds.), Studies on the Testament of Job, pp. 7-32, also provides a comprehensive history of scholarship on the Testament’s origin.

10. See Victor A. Tcherikover and A. Fuks (eds.), Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum (3 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977–64), I, pp. 11-15, for a discussion of the advantages to Jews of service in the Ptolemaic military (henceforth commentary in these volumes is cited by the editors’ names, followed by CPJ, volume number, and page numbers; when citing a papyrus, only CPJ followed by the papyrus number appear); see also CPJ 1, 2, 4, 5, and 24 for papyri that provide primary evidence of Jewish military service to the Ptolemies.

11. Tcherikover and Fuks (eds.), CPJ, I, pp. 17-19, discuss the civil services Jews rendered to the Ptolemies. For primary evidence of such service, see CPJ 25 (policeman; see also W. Horbury and D. Noy [eds.], Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], inscription 27, where a Jew serves in the role of police chief); 127 and 132 (high officials); 137 (secretary); 65, 97, 99-103, 105 (bank managers and chaff-store officials); and 90 (also a wealthy landowner), 107, 109, 110 (tax gatherers; on this role, see all of Section V in volume I of CPJ). Tcherikover and Fuks (eds.), CPJ, I, p. 19, note that tax gatherers had to have enough personal property of their own to guarantee the outcome of the tax harvest granted to them to collect; this surely indicates the wealth of the Jews engaged in tax collection.

12. On the disbanding of the army and Rome’s preference for Greeks as civil servants, see Tcherikover and Fuks (eds.), CPJ, I, pp. 52-53, 55.
Even more vexing to Jewish fortunes was Augustus’ imposition of the *laographia*, a poll-tax that functioned not only to enrich Rome, but also to distinguish clearly citizens from non-citizens. Romans and Greeks living in Greek-speaking cities (Alexandria, Naucratis, and Ptolemais) were exempt, but all others—Egyptians and other non-Greeks—were required to pay the tax. Also, in 4/5 CE a third class was established when Rome permitted those who had completed a gymnasium education to pay at a reduced rate. Liability for the tax was certainly a fiscal burden, but it also served to stigmatize its payers publicly as non-citizens. Some Jews (particularly in Alexandria) may have escaped tax liability for a few decades and perhaps continued to enjoy quasi-citizen status. However, the conflict over Jewish privileges with the Greeks of Alexandria from 37 to


14. The evidence for this is limited, but highly suggestive all the same. First there are the complaints of the Greeks against Jews in Alexandria reported by Philo in *Against Flaccus* and *On the Embassy to Gaius* which suggest that Jews enjoyed privileges that provoked Greek resentment, privileges that in some cases may have included exemption from the *laographia*. Another piece of evidence is the so-called *bolē* papyrus (*CPJ* 150), an appeal from the Greeks of Alexandria for restoration of their council that includes their promise to see that no one illegitimately escaped liability for the poll-tax by (falsely?) claiming entry into the *ephebeia*. Although the perpetrators of this practice are not named, it is likely that some of them were Jews. Another papyrus (*CPJ* 151) also suggests that not all Jews were subject to the tax right away. Here a Jew named Hellenos appears to petition the prefect Gaius Turranius for relief from the poll-tax on the basis of his father’s status as an Alexandrian, his own education, and/or his own experience of the *ephebeia*. Lastly we note Claudius’ urging that the Jews not ‘force their way into’ (*eip Sophiai*) the games associated with the *ephebeia* (*CPJ* 153, ll. 92-93) to claim possession of the gymnasium education so important for achieving tax relief. Note, however, that the exact meaning of the key verb *eip Sophiai* remains elusive; in contrast to the translation offered above, see Erich Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 67, who translates the verb as ‘pour into’ and takes its use to mean that Jews were attempting to disrupt the games; Aryeh Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1985), pp. 314-21, accepts the reading of the original editor (H.I. Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt: The Jewish Troubles in Alexandria and the Athanasian Controversy: Illustrated by Texts from Greek Papyri* [Oxford: British Museum, 1924], p. 24), *eip Sophiai*, ‘to harass’, with the same effect as Gruen’s reading.
41 CE, and Claudius’ edict that settled the dispute almost certainly brought an end to even that respite in the decline of Jewish fortunes in Egypt.¹⁵

¹⁵. Just what privileges were disputed is not certain, especially given the tendentious, conflicting, and vague nature of the sources relating to the dispute and to Claudius’ edict (Philo, Against Flaccus and On the Embassy to Gaius [on the dispute’s origins and the appeal to Gaius]; P. London 1912 [= CPJ 153]; Josephus, Ant. 19.280-85 [the two conflicting versions of Claudius’ edict]). The problems with relying on these sources are manifold. I name only a few of them. First, Philo and Josephus are both unabashedly biased in their accounts of events: Philo treats his story of Flaccus as a morality tale, and Josephus’ reputation for willfully rearranging the facts to meet his apologetic purposes is in full view in his report of Claudius’ edict. Second, the contradictions between Ant. 18.280-85 and P. London 1912 are well known, not the least of which is Josephus’ insistence that Jews had ἴση πολιτεία (‘equal citizen rights’) with the Greeks from the days of the Ptolemies in contrast to the view expressed in P. London 1912, ll. 85-88, that the Jews had at most the right to practice their ancestral religion. Third, P. London 1912 has, in turn, its own interpretive problems. I noted in the previous note the difficulty with the crucial verb in l. 92, ἐπισπασειν. Also, Claudius’ statement in ll. 90-91, though grammatically unproblematic, is difficult inasmuch as his reference to the Jews sending two embassies, ‘as though they lived in two cities’, has no correspondence in Philo’s account of the legation. Fourth, Philo’s Against Flaccus and On the Embassy to Gaius contradict one another. For instance, in Embassy the anti-Jewish riots precede the Greeks’ desecration of the Jews’ synagogues, while in Flaccus the order is reversed.

One attractive solution to this welter of interpretive and historical problems is provided by Barclay, Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora, pp. 65-71. Building on Claudius’ complaint to the Jews in P. London 1912, ll. 90-91, that they sent two embassies, Barclay asserts that the evidence favors the notion that a single group had two aims, prompting Claudius’ complaint. The foremost objective of the Jewish delegation to Gaius was to overturn Flaccus’ denigration of their communal status as ἐπιτίμω κάτοικοι (‘privileged residents’) to ἔξοι (‘foreigners’) (Philo, Flacc 54, 172; Barclay rejects the view of Kashar, The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, passim, that the Jewish delegation sought to renew a lost πολίτευμα, apparently in part because he seems to agree with G. Lüderitz, ‘What is the Politeuma?’, in J.W. van Henten and P. van der Horst [eds.], Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994], pp. 183-225; and C. Zuckerman, ‘Hellenistic politeumata and the Jews: A Reconsideration’, Scripta Classica Israelection 8-9 [1988], pp. 171-85, both of whom reject the existence of a Jewish politeuma in Alexandria, citing in part the lack of evidence for politeumata elsewhere in the Hellenistic diaspora; see, now, however, the undeniable evidence for politeumata in Ptolemaic-era Herakleopolis and the surrounding region in James M.S. Cowey and Klaus Maresch [eds.], Urkunden des Politeuma der Juden von Herakleopolis [144/3-133/2 v. Chr.] [P. Polit. Iud.]: Papyri aus Sammlungen von Heidelberg, Köln, München und Wien [Papyrologica Coloniensia, 29; Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2001]; thus it may be that ἐπιτίμω κάτοικοι denotes a πολίτευμα). But the delegation’s ancillary purpose was to protect the full citizenship in Alexandria
There are still other reasons to suspect that Jews living in Egypt in the second half of the first century CE experienced increasingly difficult circumstances. For instance, prior to Roman domination the Jews of Alexandria and the *chora* made clear their preference for the Ptolemaic leaders who were allied with Rome; so when Rome took control they were natural targets for those who resented Roman rule, especially native Egyptians and Greeks. There were also considerable tensions with Egyptians over the Jewish view of the animal cult practiced by the native peoples, as well as the popular notion that Jews were isolationists and atheists. And in the last third of the century Vespasian’s escalated collection of the temple tax after the Jerusalem temple’s destruction in 70 CE to pay instead for reconstruction of the Roman temple of Jupiter Capitolinus (destroyed by fire in 69 CE) drove many Jews, especially those in the *chora*, into even deeper fiscal woes. The tax also diminished Jews’ status by marking them out as a distinct, poorly regarded class in the Roman world.

All in all, then, the evidence portrays the Jewish experience in Egypt (and particularly in Alexandria) in the second half of the first century CE as one of adjusting to an accelerating diminution of social and economic fortunes relative to the prospects they enjoyed under Ptolemaic rule. Of course, such diminished status was avoidable at least in part if Jews were willing to abandon their ancestral traditions and accommodate to the Roman imperium. The well-known proof of this is Philo’s nephew, Tiberius Julius Alexander. Accepting to Roman requirements, Tiberius eschewed his heritage to experience enormous success among Romans. It was in this of a small but important group of Jews (evidence for the existence of which Barclay provides on pp. 67-69). As our analysis of the *Testament of Job* will demonstrate, one could well imagine that if Barclay is correct, and if the Jews who did possess the privileges of citizenship lost them as a result of Claudius’ decree, they may well have been a particularly suitable target audience for the *Testament.*

18. Josephus, *War* 2.218; Dio Cassius 66.7.2. Whereas the tax was levied against males of 20 to 50 years of age before Vespasian’s intervention, by his decree it was to be paid by all Jews between 3 and 62; see Tcherikover and Fuks, *CPJ*, I, pp. 80-82; II, pp. 204-205. For more on the tax, see Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, pp. 76-77.
19. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, pp. 105-106, summarizes Tiberius’ career this way: ‘In 42 CE...he was made epistrategos of the Thebiad, and in 46–48 CE appointed the Roman procurator of Judaea (Josephus, *Ant* 20.100-3). Beyond that point his stages of ascent up the ladder of equestrian office are not known, but he
environment of being invited to choose between tradition and assimilation and their respective fates that we may imagine Jews in Egypt experiencing the Testament of Job in the second half of the first century CE.20

Since our interest is in how the women of the Testament relate to its impact as a whole, it is also important to observe the way women were perceived by the work’s earliest recipients. Across the Roman world there was a generally accepted portrait of the virtuous or proper woman no matter her status or location: a woman should be self-effacing, dutiful to males in authority over her, modest in behavior, speech, and dress, and devoted to sustaining the reputation of her male relatives and/or master and to meeting her family’s needs.21 Among the elite this was certainly true. Pliny the Younger offers charming anecdotal evidence of this when he describes a certain Ummidia Quadratilla on the occasion of her death. He admiringly notes that although she was well past the age of caring what others thought and wealthy enough to indulge her socially suspect interests in pantomime artists and draughts, she always had the good taste to dismiss her dependent grandson and heir when she watched her mimes and played her games so as not to corrupt him with such trivial pursuits.22 At the other end of the socio-economic status spectrum numerous funerary inscriptions provide abundant evidence for the notion of the ideal woman: complementary epitaphs praise the deceased for her love of family, dutiful behavior, and intense devotion to her husband’s reputation.23 One poignant inscription from northern Africa gives the flavor of these laudatory epi-

emerges again in 63 CE as a high-ranking officer in the Eastern army (Tacitus, Ann 15.28), and in 66–69 CE with the highest equestrian office of governor of Egypt (Josephus, Bell 2.309)... [I]n the course of his governorship he was obliged to suppress a Jewish uprising in Alexandria, and he spent the final year of the Jewish war as Titus’ second-in-command at the siege of Jerusalem (Bell 5.45-46; 6.237-42). Thereafter he may have become prefect of the praetorian guard.’

20. We fully acknowledge Barclay’s nuanced definition of the degrees of assimilation among Egyptian Jews (Barclay, Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora, pp. 103-24), and in no way suggest that the Testament is seeking to address any one particular level of potential assimilation. It is enough for our purposes to observe that assimilation of one degree or another for the sake of preserving honor status would almost inevitably have been on the minds of the Testament’s recipients in first-century CE Egypt.


23. See the inscriptions recorded and discussed in Fantham et al. (eds.), Women in the Classical World, pp. 369-84.

The husband, Januarianus says of his wife, ‘I competed with you, wife, in devotion, virtue, frugality, and love, but I lost’.24

As Garrett points out, Jewish texts of the era, especially Philo and 4 Maccabees, confirm that this notion of the virtuous woman—one who controls her passions, especially for the sake of service to the men of her world—carried over into the imagination of Jews in the diaspora. For Philo in particular this self-denial was equated with the rejection of womanhood, and when achieved fully, resulted in a woman becoming in practice, if not essence, male.25 What Garrett misses is that this emphasis highlights the true essence of womanhood in the Greco-Roman imagination: she had to be encouraged to devotion, frugality, and self-restraint because it was in her true nature to be loyal above all to herself, overweening in her desire for possessions and profligate in her use of them, and sinister in her sexual, corporeal self-expression.26 This factor, as we shall see, is significant for understanding more fully the role women play in the Testament.

There is one other thing that requires our attention in constructing the backdrop against which the Testament would have been received. There can be little doubt that the content of the biblical book of Job would have formed a part of the late first-century Egyptian Jews’ religious expectations as they encountered the Testament for the first time.27 And the content of the Testament would certainly have provided a stark contrast with the book of Job and its well-known story of the heavenly wager between God and Satan and Job’s rebellious and complaining response.28 The Testament’s removal of all ambiguity with respect to why Job was afflicted and how he managed to win all back would have contrasted sharply with the biblical book’s abiding ambiguity on both questions and on the larger

27. Indeed, it is assumed that LXX Job served as a major source for the author in composing the Testament. See Schaller, ‘Das Testament Hiobs’, passim.
issue of God’s justice. As Cees Haas has argued, the Testament uses ‘perseverance rewarded’ for its central theme, a topos found in a number of Jewish-Hellenistic works of the era.\textsuperscript{29} By contrast, this is hardly the theme of the book of Job, where the protagonist is anything but patient and perseveres mostly in a self-righteousness proven to be futile by the closing, whimsical speech of God. Indeed, if the book of Job did form something of first-century CE Egyptian Jews’ religious horizon of expectations, it is not inconceivable that the shadow it cast over the notion of God’s justice may have served as an implicit invitation to apostasy. The example of someone who achieved status through assimilation, Tiberius Julius Alexander, surely provided powerful evidence for the wisdom of rejecting the capricious God of the book of Job for the happier, surer fate obtained through accommodating to the dominant culture.

2. Reading the Testament of Job as a Story of Honor Lost and Found

Although it has gone unrecognized until now, a close reading proves that the Testament of Job tells a tale of honor once possessed in abundance but abruptly wrenched away, a tale that surely resonated with the experience of late first-century CE Egyptian Jews. Let us say at the outset that concern for honor permeated every aspect of public life in the ancient Mediterranean world. Honor was the fundamental value. Honor came in two varieties: ascribed and acquired.\textsuperscript{30} In either case it was public reputation, one’s status or standing in the community together with the public recognition of it. Indeed, public recognition was all-important: ‘Honor is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society’.\textsuperscript{31} To claim honor that was not publicly recognized was to play the fool. To grasp more honor than the public would allow was to be a greedy thief. To hang on to what honor one had was essential to life itself. Dealing with this


\textsuperscript{30} Regardless of type, it was the core, the heart, the soul. Philo speaks of ‘wealth, fame, official posts, honors and everything of that sort with which the majority of mankind are busy’ (\textit{That the Worse Attacks the Better} 122). He complains that ‘fame and honor are a most precarious possession, tossed about on the reckless tempers and flighty words of careless men’ (\textit{On the Life of Abraham} 264).

ancient-world fact of life is the theme at the heart of the Testament of Job. The evidence in the Testament for this claim is overwhelming.

Ascribed honor comes primarily from honorific bloodlines. That is why genealogies are so important. They establish honor claims and the authority that goes with them. Thus, in order to command a hearing from both his children and the reader, Job provides his lineage right at the beginning of the Testament (1.3, 4). In addition, two other references in the text signal the magnitude of Job’s honor/authority claim: he is given a name by God (2.1) and is the father of many children (1.1a, b). Both imply an ascribed honor granted from on high.

Ascribed honor can also come from role or position. In the world of honor and shame, recognition from peers is the prize sought above all else, and in 3.6 we read that Job rules the region and thus has the status of royalty. In 28.8b he is acknowledged as the ruler of all Egypt. In fact it is obvious that he is a king among, but also above, other kings, for everyone acknowledges that his wealth exceeds that of all his fellow kings put together (28.6-7). Even more, in 3.5–4.2 Job asks for and receives authorization as no less than an agent of the divine Patron (and thereby remains under his protection).

If ascribed honor comes from bloodlines or position, acquired honor is the result of (publicly recognized) virtue. The catalogue of such items in the story leaves no doubt about Job’s honorific status. Honorable men of wealth are expected to display compassion and generosity and thereby acquire a multitude of clients. Job follows the pattern. In the list of Job’s losses in chs. 9–12 we learn of his compassion for widows, orphans, the poor, the helpless, and his debtors, and his vigorous hospitality. All of this charitable activity engenders Job’s multitude of clients (9.6). More remarkably, his generosity attracts others whom he enables to act as patrons themselves (chs. 11–12). It is thus important that in the end of the story, after he has lost everything, the capacity to aid the needy is among the things restored (44.1-5).

Also, like all honorable persons, Job is obedient (4.3b), respectful of divine authority (19.2a-4), and pious (15.1-9). In fact his piety encourages others to offer praise to God as well (14.3-5). Moreover, like all honorable men his life is open to all; he has no secrets (9.7). His trust of

32. Note that Josephus does the same thing in War 1.3 and Apion 1.54. Matthew (1.1-17) and Luke (3.23-38) do the same for Jesus.
33. Cf. Jacob (Israel), John the Baptist and Jesus.
others indicates he is secure, unafraid, in control without careful guarding (11.6-7). Best of all, in 1.3a (also 5.1a; 7.13), Job claims to possess endurance, one of the quintessential masculine virtues. In 4.6 he is offered a divine grant of honor if he proves to be a man who can endure. This virtue will provide the ultimate honorific reward: widespread renown.

As with virtuous behavior, acquired honor can also be the result of winning public honor-challenges that come from one’s opponents. The long section in chs. 20–27 in which Job is ruined (shamed) and in which he does battle with Satan is an extended example. Note Job’s incredible direct challenge to Satan in 27.2c: ‘Come out and battle with me!’ Satan does, and is reduced to tears (27.3a). Here we get a supreme moment of acquired honor for Job: he has persevered (27.7) and shamed no less than Satan (27.9). It is one thing to acquire honor by winning honor challenges with peers; to do so with agents of the spirit realm is super-human.

As Job recounts for his children the story of his life, however, we soon learn that his status as a man of honor, a royal patron, a man of mercy and compassion, comes under heavy assault. First his reputation as a man of hospitality is attacked via the unknowing doormaid (7.1-13). Then his possessions are destroyed (8.1–16.4), including the stores set aside to aid the needy. Job’s ability to act as patron to the poor is gone. His fellow countrymen even steal his herds (16.3).

Then Job’s reputation comes under attack. The devil, disguised as the king of the Persians, spreads gossip aimed at destroying Job’s honor. He is accused of using up the good things of the earth and leaving nothing

36. Job is also able to win a challenge from the kings who interrogate him about his miserable condition near the end of the story. He confounds them with a riddle—a common technique to shame an opponent in public repartee. Cf. the similar use of riddles by Samson (Judg. 14.14-18) and Jesus (Lk. 20.41-44).
38. It is also worth nothing that when the devil comes to Job’s city to try to undermine his public reputation he disguises himself as another king, the king of the Persians (17.2). Serious challenges must always come from peers.
for others (17.2b). The charge justifies more violence against his possessions. Even the opportunity for revenge (essential in an agonistic society) by his family is taken away from him. His children are destroyed (18.1–19.4) and he is not even able to bury them (39.5a).

But the ultimate shame for Job is that he cannot protect his own wife (25.2). While he sits helplessly on a dung heap, she desperately struggles to find him bread. When she has no money, a disguised Satan offers to sell it to her for the crowning symbol of her own honor as a woman: her hair (23.7). Bitterly, it is taken from her in the market place, the most public place of all, the place of reputation.

Finally, Job’s condition is so bad his peers hardly recognize him anymore (31.3b). They observe repeatedly that he stinks, a further sign of diminished honor (31.2; 32.8; 34.4). 40 Elihu’s lengthy list of Job’s losses includes everything for which he was formerly renowned. Everything is gone. And when in the dialogue with his visitors Job claims a compensatory heavenly honor and an eternal throne (33.1-9), he is publicly scorned and ridiculed. Honor claimed but unrecognized by peers is the talk of fools. Job’s shame is complete.

The Testament, however, does not let matters rest at this abysmal nadir. It goes on to urge, though the example of Job, patience and endurance in the face of such shame, such loss of honor status, for as things turn out, God ascribes unassailable honor to the children of Israel and to those who remain faithful to God.

At first Job’s boast of a throne in the supra-terrestrial realm is seemingly empty, though surely a boast of the highest sort. He claims his throne comes from the right hand of the Father in the heavens (33.3b), that is, from the most honorific source of all. Given Job’s circumstances when he makes his boast, the reaction of Eliphaz is therefore understandable: ‘This one sits in the humiliation of worms and in a stench and at the critical moment arouses himself against us: kingdoms are passing away, as are their rulers, and he says, “Mine shall be forever”!’ (34.4). Job’s friends are justifiably incredulous.

Yet a foretaste of the glory that will be revealed for Job comes in the midst of his darkest moment. Sitidos, fleeing the bitter servitude into which she had fallen, arrives wearing the tattered garments of a beggar (39.1-2). As she bemoans the loss of her former splendor, Eliphaz tries to comfort

her with his own purple robe (39.4-7). But Sitidos can think only of her unburied children (39.8-10). Nonetheless Job forbids any attempt to bury them, claiming instead that they have been taken up into heaven (39.11-12). His friends think he is raving mad, but after Job offers a great prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord, all look to the east and see the children crowned alongside the splendor of the Heavenly One (39.13–40.3).

Not long after this, though, Elihu ignores the foreshadowing of Job’s future glory in his children and denounces Job for grandiose and excessive claims (41.1-6). This is the trigger for God’s intervention to fulfill the promise of great rewards for Job’s patience and endurance. After Elihu’s verbal assault the divine voice from heaven reveals that Job was, in fact, just in his actions (42.1-6). Job then offers sacrifices for the forgiveness of his friends (42.7-8; Elihu excepted). After Eliphaz’ hymn against Elihu Job asks that each of the remaining friends bring him a lamb in order that he resume his patronage on behalf of the poor (44.4-5). As his possessions multiply he is again able to play the honorific role he had once enjoyed. It is the Lord’s blessing (44.7) that makes this possible. Significantly, the term used here, ἐυλόγησεν, literally means ‘to speak well of’, ‘to praise’ or ‘honor’. Coming from on high, it is unassailable honor recognition; although seemingly acquired through endurance, in fact it is entirely ascribed honor from the Heavenly One.

The restoration of Job’s honor is acknowledged on earth as well, as is the fact that his honor is ascribed to him from God. After Job’s death his brother Nereus cries out:

Woe to us today, for today there has been taken away the strength of the helpless, the light of the blind, the father of the orphans. Taken away is the host of strangers, the path of the weak. Taken away is the clothing of the naked, the protector of widows. Who then will not weep for the man of God? (53.1b-4)

Then as Job is laid to rest, he receives the ultimate accolade, won not through acquisition, but given through ascription:

‘He had received a name renowned in all generations forever’ (53.8).

41. The reason for this is unclear, but one possibility is that Elihu serves here as the epitome of accommodation, the Testament’s Tiberius Julius Alexander. In fact, one wonders if Eliphaz’ hymn against Elihu (43.5-17) is not an indirect attack on figures like Tiberius.
3. The Role of the Women in the Testament of Job

We turn now to the roles Sitidos, the doormaid, and Job’s daughters play in this drama of acquired honor lost and ascribed honor found. Quite simply, they are essential in conveying the Testament’s perspective. Job’s Egyptian maidservant and wife, Sitidos, exemplify the Testament’s negative view of clinging tenaciously to vanquished acquired honor. Meanwhile, Job’s daughters confirm that enduring honor is ascribed by God to the children of Israel, and that it is more than enough to compensate for the loss of acquired honor.

First, the case of the doormaid. After destroying Satan’s temple and retreating home to await Satan’s promised attack, Job orders his servants to turn away any who seek an audience with him (6.3). Yet out of concern for Job’s honor as a charitable man the doorkeeper troubles him when Satan comes disguised as a beggar (6.6). Job frustrates her attempts to uphold his (and her own) honor by instructing her to give the beggar a burnt loaf and send him away, saying, ‘Don’t expect to eat from my loaves any longer, for I have become a stranger to you’ (7.4). The doormaid is ashamed of the treatment Job uncharacteristically offers the beggar and takes matters into her own hands by delivering her own good loaf to Satan (7.5-6). Doing so she sets out to preserve the honor of her patron, but as the ensuing dialogue reveals, she does so for her own sake, not his. Caught in the act by Satan, who mysteriously knows Job’s instructions to her, he sends her back for the burnt loaf intended for him (7.7). When she returns with the burnt loaf she reports in 7.10-11 what most commentators think is entirely Job’s address to Satan:42

Thus says my Lord, ‘You shall no longer eat from my loaves at all, for I have been estranged from you. Yet I have given you this so that I cannot be accused of refusing an enemy who asked of me.’

Yet only the first half of her speech are the words Job gave her to say (cf. 7.4), and there is no indication between 7.4 and 7.10 that she returns to Job

for further instructions. That leaves the audience to conclude that the words of v. 11 are the maid’s own, spoken about the good loaf she gave first (7.5-6). But her effort to preserve her own honor when Job seemed bent on discarding his led only to shame. This is clear from her response to Satan when he accuses her of being an evil servant and sends her back to do her master’s true bidding (7.8-9):

And the girl wept with deep grief, saying, ‘Truly, you well say that I am an evil servant. For if I were not, I would have done just as it was assigned to me by my master.’

As for Sitidos, her passion at first is also to preserve honor for her husband because she is convinced that her status, like the maidservant’s, depends on his. She devotes herself in the midst of her grinding poverty to curtailing Job’s experience of its effects (21.1–22.2). Faced with ever-diminishing food supplies, her plaint is, ‘Woe is me! Soon he will not even get enough bread’ (22.2). A stark gauge of how dependent Sitidos is on Job’s honor is her witless accession to Satan’s wiles. Blinded to his identity by her passion for her husband’s honor, she permits Satan to shear from her head her womanly source of honor, her hair, and this in the open market (22.3–23.11), the place of reputation.

But Sitidos is also like the servant in turning in the end to preserving her own honor. When it becomes apparent that Job will not cooperate in preserving even the shreds of remaining acquired honor, she abandons him to protect and defend what vestiges of it she might have herself. She rebukes her disobliging husband (24.1-6) and bemoans the losses she has endured, losses that betray her precipitous fall from honor to shame (see the evidence in the neighbors’ lament in 25.1-8). Despairing of Job’s capacity as patron to let his honor serve her, she finally begs Job to ‘curse God and die’ so that she—tied to Job’s vanquished honor—may rest at last (25.9-10):

Job, Job, many things having been said generally, but I say to you briefly, the weakness of my heart crushes my bones. You, then, stand up, and taking the loaves to be satisfied, say a word against the Lord and die. Then I also shall again be free from the tiredness that comes from labors for your body.

Notably Sitidos’ advice to Job in 25.9-10 does not betray despair, but rather her enduring hope for herself. Her declamation exceeds her biblical admonition that he curse God and die (Job 2.9) with the words, πάλιν ἀπαλλαγήσομαι ἀκηδίας διὰ πόνων τοῦ σώματός σου (‘again I will be free from the tiredness that comes from labors for your body’). This sentiment

already reveals her turn toward preserving her own interests if Job cares nothing for his honor.

But Sitidos’ reappearance in ch. 39 testifies even more clearly that her aim is finally to preserve her own honor in the absence of her patron’s interest in preserving his. Her plea to the kings for help in recovering her children’s bodies from the wreckage of the house in which they perished may be seen in several respects as an expression of this decision. First, she greets Eliphaz by focusing on her lost status, saying, ‘Do you remember me, Eliphaz, you and your friends, what sort of person I was among you, how I used to dress? But now look at my attire’ (39.4). Then she implores Eliphaz to use the soldiers at his disposal to recover her children ‘so that at least their bones might be preserved as a memorial… Let us see them, even if it is only their bones. Have I the womb of cattle or of a wild animal that my ten children have died and I have not arranged the burial of a single one of them?’ (39.8b-10). Both declamations are the words of a woman anxious for her own shattered honor. Her words are a plea that there at least be a memorial to her, a signal of her honor, no matter how vestigial it may be.

Like the lament of the maidservant at her failed attempt to preserve personal honor (7.8-9), the nature of Sitidos’s death and burial poignantly reveal that her efforts to preserve her transient acquired honor were also defeated. After seeing the vision of her children in heaven, Sitidos returns to the stable she shared with the beasts of her master and dies, only to be found later by her owner when he sought her for more labor (40.7-9). Besides the animals she dwells with who mourn her passing—itself a sign of dishonor, for animals were viewed in antiquity as irrational43—only the poor lament her, but not for her sake, but for her lost ‘pride and splendor’ (καυχήμας and δόξα) which had served them so well (40.13). As with the servant girl, the recipient’s last image of Sitidos is one of a woman mired in shame, the very opposite of what she sought for herself. Together the doormaid and Sitidos send an unmistakable message: clinging tenaciously to vanquished acquired honor can produce its exact opposite, shame.

While Sitidos and the maid prove the transient character of honor acquired through wealth and its beneficent use, Job’s daughters uniquely demonstrate that honor status ascribed by God endures. To this end it is important that at first Job’s daughters appear to be more like Sitidos and

43. Garrett, ‘The “Weaker Sex”’, p. 66 n. 31, cites Philo, On the Contemplative Life 8, Who is the Heir? 138, and Baer, Philo’s Use of the Categories Male and Female, p. 43, to make this point.
the maidservant, like the ‘typical’ women of their era, overweening in their desire for possessions and profligate in their use of them. Their plaint that Job has neglected them in distributing his inheritance betrays them as consumed with concern for creature comforts, and thus for wealth-based honor (46.2). Job responds by giving them the cords God gave him when God commanded Job to gird up his loins (38.3). Even then they are still preoccupied with transient honor status, worrying in 47.1 that the cords will not provide an adequate living: ‘What then is so unusual about these cords? We will not be able to sustain our life from them, will we? (μὴ ἐκ τοῦτων ἐξομεν τοῦ ζην).’ But they soon discover the power of the cords to bestow gifts of wisdom, insight regarding heavenly things, miraculous powers, and the capacity to speak in tongues, all signs of high honor status.44 Donning the sashes they forget their pecuniary interests and begin to sing hymns of praise to God in heaven, for their hearts have been changed (48.2; 49.1; 50.1).45 Like Job, who has received the promise of a throne in heaven and a name of renown, the daughters possess ascribed honor from God above.

But why should this be possible for Job’s daughters, but not for Sitidos and the doorkeeper? The answer to this completes our explanation of the role women play in advancing the Testament’s larger agenda. First, as Egyptian women the maidservant and Sitidos are convenient characters for demonstrating the shame that comes from seeking to preserve shreds of tattered acquired honor. Neither male nor Israelite, their story could convey the painful lesson rather innocuously to what was likely a largely


45. In support of her view that the Testament is consistent and period-coherent in its treatment of the women, Garrett, ‘The “Weaker Sex”’, p. 63, rightly observes that throughout the Testament the disposition of the women’s hearts reflects their relative ‘merit’ in the narrative: in contrast to the daughters whose hearts are changed, Sitidos’ heart was typical of the era’s notion of women, preoccupied with earthly realities, lacking in virtue, and easily led astray (23.13; 24.5-6; 26.7). What Garrett does not observe is the way the two-heartedness of the Testament’s women correlates with the honor they seek and the honor they possess: Sitidos’ heart drives her to cling to vanquished honor; the daughters’ changed hearts signal their possession of ascribed honor. Indeed, the text emphasizes that the daughters’ new hearts are not of their own making (Hemera ἐνέλαβεν ἀλλὰν καρδίαν, ‘received another heart’ [48.2], Kassia ἔσχεν τὴν καρδίαν ἄλλοιοθεῖσας, ‘had her heart changed’ [49.1], and Amaltheias-Keras also saw αὐτῆς ἡ καρδία ἄλλοιοθότο, ‘her heart changed’ [50.1]). The language signals not only what Garrett asserts—that women are not able to make their own choices—but also that the honor that endures is not acquired, but ascribed.

male, and exclusively Jewish target audience in the Egyptian diaspora. It is
in noting the origin of these first two women that the contrast provided by
Job’s daughters becomes clear: though born in Egypt, they have a share in
the family of Israel through their mother, Dinah. In 1.5b Job pointedly tells
his children, ‘But you are a chosen and honored race from the seed of
Jacob (ἐκ σπέρματος Ἰακώβ), the father of your mother’ (cf. 1.6). Job’s
dughters by Dinah are therefore Israelite women to whom comes ascribed
honor status, completely unearned. Just as the maid and Sitidos are con-
venient characters for proving the futility of trying to preserve damaged
acquired honor, Job’s daughters are essential in underscoring the enduring
nature of honor ascribed by God to Israel. Lest anyone think that Job
acquired his renewed honor status—wealth restored twofold and a throne
in heaven and a name of renown—here are the daughters to remind the
audience that that is not so. After all, they are women, afflicted with the
same feminine foibles as Sitidos and the maid (46.2; 47.1), who nonetheless
have high honor. Moreover, they could hardly obtain this honor by
their own effort, as some might think Job had through endurance, for the
same gender ideology that portrayed women as weak, worldly creatures
keen for comfort and material goods also mandated that they could acquire
honor only through denying themselves for the sake of their male patrons.
The magnanimity of Sitidos and the doorkeeper that gives way to vanity
proves this to be true. So it becomes apparent that only because the
daughters are Israelites, part of God’s elect people, do they receive the gift
of honor from on high. Indeed, who better than women to prove to all
Israel that God will assure God’s people an honor status above all others,
no matter what?

4. Conclusion

Just as the women of the Testament of Job readily turn heads among con-
temporary readers, we can be sure that they drew their share of attention
from their earliest audiences too, but for very different reasons. It was not
that they were seen to hold an exalted role in the story or in their recipi-
ents’ world. It was instead the way they epitomized the impact of the
Testament as a whole: they revealed to Jews of early Roman-era Egypt the
folly of clinging to acquired honor shattered by Roman policies and the
wisdom of relying instead on the unassailable honor God ascribes to the
faithful children of Israel. Their fates were an argument against choosing
the way of Tiberius Julius Alexander and an argument for following the
path of patient loyalty to the God of Israel.
I Set a Table before You: The Jewish Eschatological Character of Aseneth’s Conversion Meal

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Abstract

Food is a powerful symbol in Joseph and Aseneth in that it sharply defines the social boundaries that are so important to the text as a whole. Jews and Gentiles portrayed in the novella differ primarily with respect to their theological beliefs, and this difference is both reflected and incorporated through acts of eating. Employing classical anthropological and sociological approaches to the relationship between sacrificial meals and kinship, this essay explores the symbolic and literary function of the conversion meal in Joseph and Aseneth. Viewed as a symbolic expression of mediation between humanity and the divine, Aseneth’s meal is compared with similar passages from Philo and Rabbinic literature that depict mystical or eschatological meal scenes.

The opening sections of the Hellenistic romance known as Joseph and Aseneth describe in detail the unique beauty of its female protagonist.

1. The two major editions of the text are those edited by C. Burchard and M. Philonenko, respectively known as ‘long’ and ‘short’ recensions. For a history of scholarship on Joseph and Aseneth, see Randall D. Chesnutt, From Death to Life: Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth (JSPSup, 16; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 20-95; Christoph Burchard, ‘Joseph and Aseneth: The Present State of Research’, in idem, Gesammelte Studien zu Joseph und Aseneth (Studien in Veteris Testamenti pseudepigrapha, 13; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996); Burchard’s text is translated with an introduction in Charlesworth’s OTP, and, for many recent scholars of the text has been employed as the authoritative version. In addition to Chesnutt, Death to Life, see Gideon Bohak, Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis (Early Judaism and its Literature, 10; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996); Richard I. Pervo,
Admired for her exceptional good looks, Aseneth is desired by noblemen throughout the world. Despite her impressive Egyptian pedigree, in her beauty she is said to resemble the ‘daughters of the Hebrews’ in every way. Yet, unlike the lovely Hebrew women, Aseneth eats food that is unclean. Though she shares the finest attributes of the Jewish matriarchs, Sara, Rebecca and Rachel, her mouth is defiled by the food she eats because it has been consecrated to her pagan gods. Because Aseneth eats unclean food, she herself is unclean. Thus, Aseneth is sadly rejected by the one man she loves: that powerful one of the ‘most high God’, Joseph.

Meals that Mediate

Food is a powerful symbol in *Joseph and Aseneth* in that it sharply defines the social boundaries that are so important to the text as a whole. Jews

‘Aseneth and Her Sisters: Women in Jewish Narrative and in the Greek Novels’, in A.J. Levine (ed.), *Women Like This*: *New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* (Early Judaism and its Literature, 1; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), pp. 145-60. However, for an alternative, see the most recent study of the material in Ross Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and his Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), and Angela Standhartinger, *Das Frauenbild im Judentum der Hellenistischen Zeit: Ein Beitrag anhand von ‘Joseph und Aseneth’* (Arbeiten zur Geschichte des anktiken Judentums und des Urchristentums, 26; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995). Standhartinger argues that the two recensions actually present two distinct portraits of women in antiquity, and thus were perhaps redacted with different intentions or for different audiences. Both the ‘long’ and ‘short’ texts share the centrality of the heavenly meal shared between Aseneth and her angelic visitor. The narrative embellishments of Burchard’s text do not effect my reading of this meal and its significance within the novella. The following discussion is based upon the longer text of Burchard; the Greek text is published in Burchard, *Gesammelte Studien*, and his English translation is found in Charlesworth’s *OTP*.

2.  *Jos. Asen.* 8.5-7: ‘Joseph said, “It is not fitting for a man who worships God, who will bless with his mouth the living God and eat blessed bread of life and drink a blessed cup of immortality and anoint himself with blessed ointment of incorruptibility to kiss a strange woman who will bless with her mouth dead and dumb idols and eat from their table bread of strangulation and drink from their libation a cup of insidiousness and anoint herself with ointment of destruction. But a man who worships God will kiss his mother and the sister who is born of his mother and the sister who is born of his clan and family and the wife who shares his bed, all of whom bless with their mouths the living God. Likewise, for a woman who worships God it is not fitting to kiss a strange man, because this is an abomination before the Lord God.”’

and Gentiles in the text differ primarily with respect to their theological beliefs—and this difference is both reflected and incorporated through acts of eating. Meals are thus a central symbol for constructing identity in the text. Emile Durkheim’s exploration of the relationship between eating and kinship in his classic work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, provides a helpful lens through which to view the role of the meal in *Joseph and Aseneth*. Durkheim commented that the cult-meal in many societies is eaten in common to create a bond of artificial kinship among the participants. ‘Kin’, he writes, ‘are beings who are made of the same flesh and the same blood. And since food constantly remakes the substance of the body, shared food can create the same effects as shared origin’. In the sacrificial meal, the food that is ‘eaten’ by the deity, the sacrifice, has become sacred through its consecration. The sacred offering thus serves as a mediator between human and divine. For the human participant, ingesting the sacred causes the sacred to become part of oneself.

Durkheim’s observations about the symbolic function of the sacrificial meal is indeed a fitting introduction to an analysis of *Joseph and Aseneth*, as in this text it is the idolatrous nature of Aseneth’s cultic food that transmits its very impurity to her person, alienating her from Joseph and the Jewish people. Likewise, it is the meal she shares with the heavenly angel that effectively seals her conversion and demonstrates her purification. The meal is thus a vehicle that facilitates the crossing of well-established boundaries: eating angels’ food, Aseneth herself is transformed into an angel. In a more recent discussion informed by Durkheim’s work on sacrifice, sociologist Nancy Jay developed this idea further in her posthumously published work, *Throughout Your Generations Forever*.4 Jay makes the important observation that while shared food establishes a bond of inclusion, it simultaneously accomplishes exclusion. Referring to the complex dynamic of alimentary sacrifice, Jay writes:

> In a formal sense, communion is a kind of integration, and expiation a kind of differentiation, and these are always two aspects of the same process. Integration, constituting the oneness of anything, is not possible without differentiating it from other things. Conversely, we cannot differentiate something from the rest of the world without at the same time identifying it as a recognizable whole, without integrating it. So, in sacrifice, as that

wonderful English word reveals, atonement is also always at-one-ment. Communion sacrifice unites worshipers in one moral community and at the same time differentiates that community from the rest of the world.\(^5\)

The dining table is thus a powerful symbol of inclusion. How we eat, what we eat and with whom we eat are critical elements in the definition of social and communal boundaries.\(^6\) But, with every act of inclusion, comes an act of exclusion.

Scholarly discussions of Aseneth’s conversion meal have centered around its possible relationship to the Christian eucharist or to ritualized meals among Jewish or Jewish sectarian groups.\(^7\) Such discussions have been preoccupied with the attempt to understand what practical, ritual structures might underlie the seemingly formulaic bread–cup–ointment triad. This focus on the practical implications of Aseneth’s meal overlooks the important literary and symbolic function of this mystical moment in *Joseph and Aseneth*. Though Aseneth’s conversion precedes the meal, as Chesnutt has convincingly argued, the meal itself effects her transformation from death to eternal life.

Viewed as a symbolic expression of mediation between humanity and the divine, Aseneth’s meal bears a striking resemblance to a variety of ancient Jewish texts. Early rabbinic Judaism develops a fairly rich legendary tradition dealing with what one might call a ‘mystical eschatology’, where the divine–human encounter is envisioned as a sacred meal. Despite the late date of compilation attached to these *aggadic* sources, it is clear from the near-verbatim parallels in Philo and scattered hints in other early texts that these traditions have a long pre-history. In what follows, I will attempt to demonstrate the resonance of the conversion meal as a literary and symbolic device in *Joseph and Aseneth* with parallel traditions in Jewish texts that share mystical and eschatological motifs. It is not my intention to suggest that the text is in any way a product of a Jewish mystical

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6. A similar point is the focus of Dennis Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1998), pp. 1-12.
sect, or that it represents a work of so-called ‘merkavah mysticism’. I do maintain, however, that the text shares affinities to that body of literature beyond the surface comparisons that have been pointed out by scholars in the past, though an explicit relationship between them and Joseph and Aseneth cannot be established. Nonetheless, in comparing the function of meal-imagery in Joseph and Aseneth with parallels in Jewish material, we can read this enigmatic text through a new lens, and perhaps shed increased light on its origins.

The signal barrier between Joseph and Aseneth is indeed the difference between life and death—Joseph’s mouth blesses the ‘living God’, eats the ‘bread of life’ and drinks the ‘cup of immortality’. To kiss the mouth of a woman who blesses ‘dead and dumb idols’ and who eats ‘bread of strangulation’ and drinks the ‘cup of insidiousness’ would be an abomination to him, because in kissing her, he would assimilate her defilement into himself. In her prayer of repentance, Aseneth repeatedly laments the soiled condition of her mouth—it is defiled from the sacrifices of the idols, and thus is not worthy of addressing the living God.

Aseneth is then visited in her chamber by a heavenly anthropos, who announces himself as the ‘chief of the house of the Lord and commander of the whole of the Most High’. Her chamber is configured like a temple. Her bedroom is situated in the third, innermost chamber of the palace, and she is attended by seven virginal guardians. Her bed-chamber is also the site of her pagan altar, the table from which she eats meals consecrated to her idolatrous gods. Bread, wine and oil are construed as cultic items. The combination of symbols—bread, cup and ointment—is indeed a priestly combination; all three items represent an integral part of cultic ritual, and all three (bread, wine, and oil) are highly subject to ritual impurity. That the anthropomorphic angel appears in such a space is no surprise, as the setting is actually rather appropriate. Aseneth’s chamber is the central component of what is effectively both palace and temple.

8. This view was put forth by Kee, ‘Socio-Cultural Setting’, pp. 406-408. His work has been criticized as a superficial comparison of the Hellenistic text with certain motifs of merkavah mysticism. See Chesnutt, Death to Life, p. 25.

9. Gideon Bohak noted the centrality of cultic imagery in the text in his Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple at Heliopolis. He concluded that the temple-symbolism indicates the text’s affiliation with the Oniad temple at Leontopolis, and argued that the mysterious bee/honeycomb scene in Joseph and Aseneth enacts the departure of the Oniad priests from Jerusalem and their building of a rival temple in the Egyptian diaspora. As creative a thesis as this is, it is based upon very thin evidence.
The extraordinary appearance of the *anthropos* has been compared to the similar enthroned mediators featured in Jewish apocalyptic material, most notably, Daniel and Ezekiel. His fiery and luminous qualities, along with the inscription of his name are important motifs held in common with a variety of Jewish angelic figures.

Aseneth offers to place a meal before the *anthropos*, in keeping with biblical traditions of hospitality associated with both Abraham in the Genesis narrative and Gideon in the book of Judges. She sets up a table—a new table, symbolically rivaling the pagan altar that was situated in her bed-chamber. The meal with the angel will counter the meals formerly eaten among the idols. Instead of Aseneth’s own bread and wine, the *anthropos* shares with Aseneth a honeycomb. The association of the honeycomb with *mannah* is explicit: it was like dew from heaven, white like snow, containing the breath of life. Indeed the honeycomb, like *mannah*, is identified with the ‘word’ of the angel—the *anthropos* spoke and the comb came from his angelic mouth. It is further identified as the source of eternal life, from which the angels and the elect of God are nourished. She shares the honeycomb with the *anthropos* and thus assimilates the benefits of immortality—she is transformed into an angelic being—the eternal ‘city of refuge’.

*Ecstatic Vision and Exegesis of Exodus 24.9-11*

The visionary component of this mystical meal is noteworthy. The *anthropos* is an angelic, divine mediator; Aseneth gazes at his luminous body and at his volcanic hand as he reveals his message to her, and as she eats from the comb. A similar pairing of visionary phenomena with meal symbolism is an important motif in Jewish sources as well. Sacrifice in biblical narrative is often accompanied by an anthropomorphic vision, hinting at the possibly theurgic dimension of the rite. A fine example is Exod. 24.11, where we find a description of a covenant ceremony that weds these themes:

> Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel ascended; and they saw the God of Israel: under God’s feet there was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire, like the very sky for purity. Yet God did not raise a hand against the leaders of the Israelites; they beheld God, and they ate and drank.¹⁰

In celebration of God’s miraculous revelation at Mt Sinai, the leaders of the Israelites ascend the mountain and are permitted to gaze upon God’s

¹⁰. Exod. 24.9-11 (all biblical translations follow the NJPS version).
anthropomorphic form. The experience culminates in a communal meal, sealing the berit, the covenant, between God and Israel in a sacred feast. It seems clear from the context of Exodus 24 that this feast is indeed a covenant or cult meal. Immediately preceding the ascent of Moses and his entourage, Moses performs a sacrifice and recites aloud the terms of the covenant. He sprinkles the blood of the slain animals both upon the altar and the Israelite people, a gesture that is here also symbolic of kinship in signifying ‘shared blood’. He then ascends with his brother, nephews and the seventy elders, where they enjoy a meal and a privileged vision of the divine anthropos. The meal affirms kinship among the Israelites, and between God and Israel, and performs a function similar to the sacrificial meal offered by Jacob in sealing his covenant with Laban in Gen. 31.54.

Yet, the earliest exegetical commentaries on Exod. 24.11 suggest a somewhat different interpretation of the sacred meal. According to Philo, who is the first witness to a metaphorical interpretation of the feast, the leaders of Israel at Sinai experienced a heavenly ascent and their meal was in fact a taste of immortality. His text, from Quaestiones et Solutiones in Exodum, reads:

What is the meaning of the words, ‘they appeared to God in the place and they ate and drank’?11 Having attained to the face of the father, they do not remain in any mortal place at all, for all such places are profane and polluted, but they send and make a migration to a holy and divine place, which is called by another name, logos. Being in this place, through the steward, they see the master in a lofty and clear manner, envisioning God with the keen-sighted eyes of the mind. But this vision is the food of souls, and true partaking is the cause of a life of immortality. Wherefore, indeed, it is said, ‘they ate and drank’. For those who are indeed very hungry and thirsty did not fail to see God become clearly visible, but like those who,

11. It is important to note here that Philo is working with the Septuagint version of the biblical text, which translated Hebrew yehezu as ophtheisan tou theou. Hence Philo’s reading, ‘they appeared in the place of God’, rather than the Hebrew, ‘they saw God’. Nonetheless, as we will see here, Philo does preserve the tradition that Moses and company ‘envisioned’ God, and it is this vision which provides the ‘food of the soul’. This Septuagint reading, and Philo’s failure to note the difference between the literal version of the text and his interpretation, is paralleled in the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible, Exod. 23.17—‘Three times in the year all males shall appear (literally, be seen) before (lipnei) the Lord God’—and the various rabbinic sources that read it as a visionary episode. There is much debate over the pointing of this text, and conflicting interpretations appear at various points in rabbinic texts. See Max Kadushin, The Rabbinic Mind (New York: Bloch, 3rd edn, 1972), pp. 239-40.

being famished, find an abundance of food, they satisfied their great desire.\(^ {12}\)

Philo’s reading of Exod. 24.11 is predicated upon the idea that the ascent at Sinai was a heavenly ascent. The cultic encounter is spiritualized such that the vision of the divine presence satiates, like the sacrificial meal.

Philo appears influenced by the tradition, witnessed also in rabbinic, patristic and pseudepigraphic literature, that there is no ‘eating’ in heaven; angelic beings do not require food like humans, yet their ‘bodies’ are nonetheless sustained by divine means. Philo’s understanding of the ascent upon Sinai as heavenly ascent, requires that the meal be understood as metaphorical, as there is no human food in the celestial realm.\(^ {13}\) His use of the verb *tropheo* to describe this noetic nourishment connotes nurturing—the type of nourishment provided through the act of nursing. In ancient Greek philosophical literature, *tropheo* was commonly employed in connection with and as a synonym for *paideia*, implying that the cultivation of an individual mind through education parallels the physical nourishment of a growing child.\(^ {14}\) The image depicted here is thus one of children being nourished or nursed by a mother, being raised to spiritual adulthood by means of this divine, contemplative feast, despite Philo’s explicit use of male imagery to describe the divine presence.\(^ {15}\)

\(^{12}\) Translations from Philo are taken from H. Colson’s LCL edition. Manuscript variants are noted where pertinent. *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Exodum* is extant only in Armenian and Latin translations from the Greek, along with a few Greek fragments.

\(^{13}\) This is a basic assumption shared by Philo and Josephus as well as a number of other ancient rabbinic, patristic and pseudepigraphic sources. The underlying idea is that there is no eating in heaven. Rather, angels are sustained by the divine presence in the form of ‘spiritual’ food. The need for food is explicitly bodily, and heavenly bodies are sufficiently refined so as not to require food. Cf. *Gen. R.* 18.4; 48; *Exod. R.* 47.4-5; Tobit 12.19; *T. Abr.* 15; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 56; *Did.* 9-10; Ignatius, *Rom.* 4; *Letter to the Smyrneans*. Also see Goodman, ‘Do Angels Eat?’, pp. 160-78.


\(^{15}\) Note the vivid image of the soul as a furnace for consuming knowledge: ‘The soul of him who loves learning and hopes for its consummation [is like] a furnace or oven, because each serves as a vessel wherein is prepared nourishing food, in the one case the food of corruptible meats, in the other that of incorruptible virtues’ (*Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres* 311). Ovens prepare food for the body, the soul prepares virtue as its own nourishment. Several studies have examined Philo’s gendered language. See Sharon Lea Mattila, ‘Wisdom, Sense Perception, Nature, and Philo’s Gender Gradient’, *HTR* 89.2 (1996), pp. 103-29; Richard Baer, *Philo’s Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970); Judith Romney Wegner, ‘The
According to Philo, the transfer of the covenant meal to this transcendent dimension is largely bound up with Israel’s privileged status in the eyes of God. Israel is distinguished from other nations of the world by its ability to ‘see’ God. In his Letter to Gaius, Philo says of Israel that ‘to behold the uncreated and divine, the prime good, the excellent, the happy, the blessed’ is the gift of the people that ‘is called in the Hebrew tongue Israel, but expressed in our tongue, the word is “he that sees God”’ 16. Philo depicts Israel, the seeing nation, as a nation of philosophers: ‘Israel is the mind contemplative of God and the cosmos, for Israel means “seeing God”, while the house of the mind is the whole soul, and this is that most holy vineyard which has for its fruit that divine growth, virtue’ (Somn. 2.173).

Israel is thus set apart from other nations by virtue of its ability to ‘see’ or ‘contemplate’ God. Yet, Israel as a nation shares several other distinct traits that also link the themes of ecstatic vision, food and sacrifice. According to Philo, Israel’s talent for envisioning God is connected to its diet: Israel as a nation that eats mannah, or angel’s food. Peder Borgen’s classic work on the subject demonstrated the connection between Israel’s designation as a ‘nation of vision’ with the notion that the vision is a source of spiritual nourishment. Mannah and ecstatic vision of God are both sources of divine knowledge and angelic sustenance:

…while other men receive their food from earth, the nation of vision alone has it from heaven. The earthly food is produced with the co-operation of husbandmen, but the heavenly is sent like the snow by God the solely

16. This association of Israel with the ish who sees God effects a masculinization of the nation. Several scholars have noted that Philo’s use of gendered terms to describe the interplay of the sensible and intelligible worlds reflects a theme common among classical Greek thinkers. In Philo, we find the material world associated with the feminine and the rational faculty which ‘tames’ the material world of nature associated with a masculine potency. Indeed, Philo’s consistent association of Israel, the nation of contemplative vision, with a highly evolved noetic ability, is also a portrayal of the nation as masculine. The ability to contemplate God derives from Israel’s ability to order properly the masculine faculty of reason and the feminine faculty of sense. Perhaps this scheme sheds light on the cryptic passage that concludes the Gospel of Thomas: ‘Jesus said, “Behold, I shall guide her to make her male, so that she to may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven”’ (The Gospel of Thomas 114.2—following the translation in John S. Kloppengerg et al., Q Thomas Reader [Somona, CA: Polebridge Press, 1991], p. 114).
The miracle of mannah, which provided bodily sustenance, is interpreted instead as having provided spiritual sustenance. But this nourishment is intimately linked to Israel’s ability to envision or contemplate God. This food of the soul is knowledge, and as such is associated also with Torah:

When they sought what it is that nourished the soul...they became learners and found it to be a saying of God, that is the Divine Word, from which all kinds of instruction and wisdom flow in perpetual stream. This is the heavenly nourishment, and it is indicated as such in the sacred records, when the First Cause in his own person says, ‘Lo, it is I that am raining upon you bread out of the heaven’; for in every deed God drops from above the ethereal wisdom upon minds which are by nature apt and take delight in contemplation; and they see it and taste it and are filled with pleasure, being fully aware of what they feel but wholly ignorant of the cause which produced the feeling. So they inquire ‘What is this’ which has a nature making it sweeter than honey and whiter than snow? And they will be taught by the seer that ‘This is the bread, which the Lord hath given them to eat’... This divine ordinance fills the soul that has vision alike with light and sweetness, flashing forth the radiance of truth and with the honied grace of persuasion imparting sweetness to those who hunger and thirst after nobility of character. (Fug. 137-39)

They ‘see it’ (kai idousai) and ‘taste it’ (kai geusamenai) and are ‘filled with pleasure’. The feminine presence of God (here, divine ordinance) fills the visionary soul (ten horatiken psychen) with light and knowledge that is received like food among the hungry. Israel’s capacity for divine vision is linked to a consumption of ‘soul food’—the acquisition of esoteric knowledge that nourishes the mind the way food nourishes the body. Mannah has a mediating quality in Philo—the food mediates between the angelic/cognitive realm and the human realm of the senses. Mannah is identified with both Logos and Torah, and even with Moses himself in some cases. This is an intriguing tradition, as both Moses and the heavenly bread perform mediating activities. Similarly, that the vision of God’s

18. The Greek is he theia syntaxis aute, which I believe is better defined in a way that evokes the femininity of the image.
form nourishes like *mannah* suggests an identification between *mannah* and God’s image.

Rabbinic tradition follows Philo almost precisely—the following texts represent a sample of this motif, widely attested in aggadic sources. The first text is from *Leviticus Rabbah*, an exegetical midrashic collection redacted in the fifth century, but which, like most midrashim, likely has a very long pre-history. In its discussion of Exod. 24.11, this text reads:

R. Joshua said: Did provisions go up with them to Sinai, that you should be able to say: And they beheld God, and ate and drank? No, but it teaches you that they fed their eyes upon the Shehinah. ‘And they beheld God’, as a man looks upon his neighbor while in the act of eating and drinking. R. Johanan says: They derived actual nourishment; as is proved by the citation, ‘in the light of the king’s countenance is life’ (Prov. 16.15).

The Rabbis claim, like Philo, that it was the vision of the *shehinah*—God’s presence—that provided nourishment to its beholders: *she-zanu eineihem min ha-shehinah* (‘they fed or feasted their eyes on the brilliance of the *shehinah*’). Rabbi Johanan’s remark confirms that this vision provided ‘actual nourishment’ (*akhilah vadai*). A distinctive element of the rabbinic interpretation is the comparison of the vision-feast to the phenomenon of looking at a neighbor while in the act of eating and drinking. In other

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22. Lucretius devoted almost an entire book of his *De Rerum Natura* to the study of the ‘effluences’ that form the basis of sensory phenomena, most particularly the sense of sight. In this work, beauty is a physical emanation that radiates and flows in the form of a thin ‘membrane’ from the body of the beloved into the eye of the beholder. Receiving this efflux of beauty stimulates in the eye of the beholder an appetitive desire that is only satisfied through physical ‘possession’ of the beloved (*De Rerum Natura* 4.30-95; cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 255c). Also compare this excerpt from Achilles Tatius: ‘The dinner she provided was sumptuous; she took a portion of the meats set before her, so as to appear to eat, but could swallow nothing of the food; she did nothing but gaze upon me. To lovers there is no delight save in the object of love, which occupies the whole of their soul, and leaves no place in it for the pleasures of the table.
words, the shehinah can be understood here as a participant in the meal, sitting across the table from one who is eating and drinking, yet paradoxically, the shehinah is also the nourishing substance which is ‘ingested’ through the eyes.23

Feasting Among the Angels

Underlying both the Philonic and rabbinic interpretations is a well-known mythic tradition that differentiates human and angelic beings according to their dietary habits. When Moses and his company ascend upon the heavenly Sinai, they no longer require food and are instead sustained like angels. Genesis Rabbah, an early collection of tannaitic midrashim, also redacted approximately fifth century, expresses this idea in a discussion of the phrase ‘tohu va-vohu’ from Genesis 1 and offers the following midrash to explain why the earth at the time of creation was in a state of confusion:

So did the earth sit unformed and void. The earth said, ‘The creatures of the upper world and those of the lower were created at the same instant. But the creatures of the upper world draw sustenance from the splendor of the presence of God (nizonim mi-ziv ha-shehinah), while as to the lower realm of creation, if the created ones do not work, they will not eat.’24

The pleasure which comes from vision enters by the eyes and makes its home in the breast; bearing with it ever the image of the beloved, it impresses it upon the mirror of the soul and leaves there its image… I said to her, “How is this? Do you take nothing of the dainties you have yourself provided? You consume no more than those who are painted as eating”. [And she replies,] “What costly dish, what wine could be more satisfying to me than the sight of you?” ’ (Achilles Tatius 5.13—following the translation in S. Gaslee’s LCL edition).

23. An analogous episode is witnessed in the gnostic novel and its description of the bride/heroine who is rescued from ‘the world’: ‘Secretly her bridegroom fetched it (the word); he presented it to her mouth to make her eat it like food and he applied the word to her eyes as a medicine to make her see with her mind and perceive her kinsmen and learn about her roots, in order that she might cling to her branch from which she had first come forth, in order that she might receive what is hers and renounce matter’ (Authoritative Teaching, 22.23-25 [trans. G. MacRae, in James M. Robinson [Gen. ed.], The Nag Hammadi Library in English; Third, Completely Revised Edition [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988], pp. 304-10]. This passage is discussed at length in Madeline Scopello, ‘Jewish and Greek Heroines in the Nag Hammadi Library’, in Karen L. King [ed.], Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988], pp. 71-90 [74]). Ingesting the ‘word’ here brings noetic enlightenment. It is interesting to note that the knowledge gained by this heroine is that of her familial connection; she becomes aware of her true kinship.

24. Gen. R. 48; here following the text of Midrash Bereshit Rabbah: Critical
It is thus characteristic of the angelic beings that they are privileged to feast on the divine presence, and it is characteristic of the human condition to toil for food.

Drawing upon this dichotomy between the human and angelic realms, rabbinic tradition characterizes the messianic age as a time when the righteous will be elevated to angelic status—feasting like the angels in the world to come:

Rav was in the habit of saying: The coming aeon is not like this aeon. In the coming aeon there is neither eating nor drinking nor procreation nor trade and commerce, nor is there jealousy or hatred or competition; rather the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads (tzaddikim yoshevin veataroteihem b’roshei peh) and feed upon the splendor of the shekhina (nehenim meziv hashekinah), as it is said, ‘And they beheld God and ate and drank’ (Exod. 24.11). 25

In the world to come there is no eating or drinking in the conventional sense, but there is a heavenly banquet at which the righteous feed on the divine presence. The crowning imagery is significant, as it suggests a type of enthronement paired with the vision of the shehinah. (We are reminded here of the crowned bees in Joseph and Aseneth.) That the righteous too will sit, crowned, at the heavenly table symbolizes a narrowing of the gap between the human and divine nature in the world to come and during ecstatic heavenly ascent. Elliot Wolfson has discussed the importance of the enthronement motif as the final stage of ecstatic ascent in Hekhalot literature, which entails the visionary taking a seat before the divine presence. Taking a seat in heaven is an activity that usually characterizes God or God’s head administrative angel. 26

While the theme of the eschatological banquet is not what one might call a ‘major’ motif in rabbinic thought, nonetheless, it is one that reappears


25. b. Ber. 17a. On the issue of reading of lehanot as a feeding metaphor, see Arnold M. Goldberg, Untersuchungen über die Vorstellung von der Schekhina in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur—Talmud und Midrach (Studia Judaica, 5; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1969), p. 286, and Ira Chernus, Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism: Studies in the History of Midrash (Studia Judaica, 11; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1982), p. 79 n. 34. The strongest argument for this reading is the midrash itself, which associates the verb with the eating and drinking of the Exodus episode.

with some regularity throughout the corpus of rabbinic literature. Perhaps the most vivid picture of the eschatological meal is preserved in those traditions dealing with the Leviathan and Behemoth, the two mythic beasts engaged in primordial struggle and whose corpses are consumed by the righteous in the world to come.\(^{27}\) After the resurrection, judgment and cosmic wars have taken place, the righteous will be entertained at God’s table, where God joins them in this festive meal. Given the centrality of the slain animal within this tradition, it is likely that it has important connections to cultic sacrifice and may itself be a type of mythic transformation of that rite.\(^{28}\) God is unequivocally considered a part of the meal and is described in vivid anthropomorphic terms. In one midrashic exposition of Song of Songs (1.3), God is depicted as dancing among the righteous: ‘R. Berekhya and R. Helbo said: “The Holy One, blessed be He, will act as the head dancer for the righteous in the future to come… Righteous on this side and righteous on that side and the Holy One, blessed be He in the middle’.”\(^{29}\) In another formulation of the myth, after God’s righteous guests have been served a meal of Behemoth and Leviathan, God ‘fulfills the wishes of the pious’ by rising from the Throne of Glory, and sitting with them at the table. The narrative continues: ‘And each pious man will see God’s Glory, and each of them will point with his finger and say, “This is god, our God, forever and ever!” and they will eat and drink and rejoice…’\(^{30}\) While God is not consumed at this meal, God is certainly a participant in the banquet, eating among the righteous.

In the world to come there is no eating or drinking in the conventional sense, but there is a heavenly banquet at which the righteous feed on the divine presence.

The image of the sacred meal shared among angels symbolizes the transformative nature of the divine–human encounter. Feasting with the angels, the righteous assimilate the angelic qualities of blessedness and eternal


\(^{28}\) Whitney’s dissertation (see previous note) hints at theme throughout the work.

\(^{29}\) Song R. 1.3.3. Translation excerpted from Freedman and Simon (eds.), Midrash Rabbah. For a summary of textual issues and dating, see Strack and Stemberger, Talmud and Midrash, pp. 342-43.

\(^{30}\) Compare Alpha Beta de-Rabbi Akiba, in Adolph Jellinek, Bet ha-Midrash (6 vols.; Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1967), III, pp. 33-34 . For a summary of textual issues surrounding this late work, see Strack and Stemberger, Talmud and Midrash, pp. 381-82.
life. So, Aseneth’s encounter with the heavenly *anthropos* at the culmination of her conversion process is depicted as a meal which physically transforms her very being. Her conversion is not merely a *metanoia*, a change of mind, but a radical transformation of her ontic condition. Indeed, it appears that Aseneth in her conversion is herself transformed into an angelic object of vision, and perhaps eternal nourishment. On the eve of their wedding feast, Joseph and Aseneth are then described in a manner that strikingly parallels the structure of Exod. 24.11:

> And her father and mother and his whole family came from the field which was their inheritance. And they saw Aseneth like the appearance of light, and her beauty was like heavenly beauty. And they saw her sitting with Joseph and dressed in a wedding garment. And they were amazed at her beauty and rejoiced and gave glory to God who gives life to the dead. And after this they ate and drank and celebrated.

Viewing Joseph and Aseneth, enthroned, as it were, the family of Pente-phres praises the couple’s angelic beauty before God, and celebrates with a festive meal, perhaps re-establishing their own boundaries of kinship.

The meal as a symbol of mediation is a salient feature of both ancient Judaism and early Christianity. Indeed, the early Christians effectively ritualized and enacted what seems already to have been a symbolic belief in ancient Judaism: that the world to come will be like a banquet. Before drawing conclusions as to whether *Joseph and Aseneth* is a product of Christian, Jewish or even Jewish-Christian milieu, it is indeed fruitful to explore the conversion meal as an important component of the text which functions as a literary and symbolic device.
BOOK REVIEW


In his Introduction van Ruiten describes this study as an investigation into ‘the way Genesis 1:1–11:19 was rewritten in the Book of Jubilees’ and his methodological approach as an effort ‘to press the synoptic perspectives of Genesis 1:11-19 and Jubilees 2:1–10:36 to the utmost’ (5). *Primaevae History Interpreted: The Rewriting of Genesis 1–11 in the Book of Jubilees* does precisely that. The author divides the textual materials into seven sections—‘The Creation Story’, ‘The Garden of Eden’, ‘From the Garden to the Flood’, ‘The Story of the Flood’, ‘The Aftermath of the Flood’, ‘From the Vineyard Until the Division of the Earth’, ‘The Division of the Earth’. Within each subdivision he presents an analysis of the structure of Genesis, an overall comparison between the Genesis and Jubilees pericopes, a close analysis of the Jubilees rewriting, and a closing summary of his findings. Highlighting the central interests of the author, this structure contributes to the major strengths and to at least one of the weaknesses of the book.

Van Ruiten’s focus is directed toward the biblical text. Specifically, he is interested in which aspects of Genesis are altered in the interpretive rewriting, the nature of those alterations, and the issues or problems in the biblical narrative that invite the reworking in Jubilees. In his presentations of parallel texts, van Ruiten indicates not only the changes in the Jubilees rewriting, but also the means by which those alterations are effected—for example, omission, addition, rearrangement. This breakdown of the exegetical process is marred to a certain extent by the terminology. The author adopts a vague set of terms—‘variation’, ‘modification’, ‘alteration’—to describe certain textual changes, and employs the term ‘harmonization’ to refer to a technique that effects change rather to the impact that certain changes have upon a text.

Supporting the analyses are very helpful comparative charts of the texts under consideration. Generally, they involve Genesis and Jubilees materials; but in those instances where the author wishes to argue that another text functioned as a source for the Jubilees exegesis, they also include biblical passages outside of Genesis and non-biblical material from the Qumran and Pseudepigrapha collections. Overall, the approach offers the reader a clear overview of the textual relationship between Genesis and Jubilees, sensitivity to issues of language and syntax, and a rigorous analysis of the exegetical process.
Numerous passages are elucidated by van Ruiten’s readings. Particularly noteworthy for this reader are his suggestion that the tetragammaton, usually omitted in the reworked account of Creation, is retained in Jub. 2.8a and 9, because of the importance ‘attached to the creation of the sun’ (37); his scrutiny of 4Q218i and Exod. 31.14-15 to illuminate the basis for use of a feminine form of the verb in the Ethiopic text of Jub. 2.27b (56); his insights into the structure of Jubilees 7 in relationship to the overall narrative of the division of the earth (260-61); and his analyses of how the addition to the Babel story (Jub. 10.19-26) as well as the tale of Canaan’s usurpation of territory assigned to Shem (Jub. 10.29-33, 35-36) serve to resolve a number of tensions in the biblical narrative (359-63).

Not all van Ruiten’s analyses are so convincing. Occasionally the priority he gives to parallel syntactical construction and grammatical form appears to go beyond good judgment. Noting that a number of scholars have suggested that Jub. 2.1e and 19 might reflect the influence of Exod. 31.12-17, van Ruiten cautions against ‘attributing too much weight to a verifiable textual relationship’ because the grammar and syntax in the two passages differ (52-54). Totally lost in the details of his discussion of syntax is the question that actually prompted it—the omission of God’s blessing of the Sabbath (Gen. 2.3). In neither Exod. 31.12-17 nor in Jubilees is there a reference to God blessing the Sabbath. In both texts the Sabbath is presented as a sign (Exod. 31.13, 17; Jub. 2.17), and in both there is development (albeit more succinctly stated in Jubilees) of the motif of sanctification (וְאָסַף). God sanctifies Israel (Exod. 31.13; Jub. 2.19), the Sabbath is sanctified to God (Exod. 31.15; Jub. 2.19), and Israel is required to sanctify the Sabbath (Exod. 31.14; Jub. 2.20-21). Given these thematic similarities, is ‘a verifiable textual relationship’ rooted in common grammatical structures really necessary in order to assert the influence of the Exodus passage on Jubilees?

In its title, scope and methodology, van Ruiten’s study focuses primarily on exegesis whose point of departure begins with the biblical text (i.e. ‘pure exegesis’ in the terminology of Geza Vermes). Analysis of this type of interpretation is van Ruiten’s forte. When he goes beyond it (as he does on a number of occasions), his readings and analyses frequently lack textual support. For instance, it is clear that the book of Jubilees associates the Garden and the Temple (Jub. 3.12; 4.26; 8.19). But the related argument that the author of Jubilees portrays Adam as ‘the prototype of a priest’ (88) is not grounded in the text. As evidence, van Ruiten points to the description of Adam burning incense ‘at the gate of the Garden of Eden’, thus intimating the burning of incense ‘in front of the Holy of Holies’ — ‘a privilege given to the priests, namely the sons of Aaron’ (88). In a footnote to this passage he additionally argues that ‘according to the author of Jubilees, the meaning of Gen. 3:21 (cf. Jub. 3:26) is that God has clothed the man in priestly clothing. The use of בְּנֵי עַבְרָי offers him the opportunity for this interpretation’ (88 n. 54). In the relevant Jubilees passage (‘On that day, as he was leaving the Garden of Eden, he burned incense as a pleasing fragrance…’, Jub. 3.27)—a passage that van Ruiten cites in full—there is no reference whatsoever to ‘at the gate of the Garden of Eden’. Moreover, much as Jubilees stresses the role of the Levites, nowhere does the author mention either Aaron or his sons. As for the supplementary argument of God garbing Adam in ‘priestly clothing’, in Jubilees, as in Genesis, God
clothes the woman in the same type of garb. Priests do wear a חַיָּלִים; but so do a number of other non-priestly biblical characters, including Joseph (Gen. 37), David’s daughter Tamar (2 Sam. 13.19) and Hushai the Archite (2 Sam. 15.32).

Van Ruiten’s conclusion that the author of Jubilees ‘tries to avoid any association of sexual relations with the Garden of Eden’ (104) is comparably weak. In contrast to Genesis, in Jubilees the formation of the woman from the man’s rib occurs outside the Garden of Eden and immediately thereafter the couple sexually consummate a new, as it were, union (Jub. 3.6). The text does not support the connection van Ruiten makes between their consummation of sexual relations and the time periods prescribed for the separate entries of the first man and woman into the Garden (86-87). As for cohabitation in the Garden, Jubilees neither affirms nor denies cohabitation between the couple in Eden. The reader is only informed before the conception of Cain that ‘they were childless throughout the first jubilee’ (Jub. 3.33). Van Ruiten concludes from that statement that absence of children necessarily indicates abstinence from sexual relations.

In a similar vein, he attributes the delay in the naming of Eve until after the departure from Eden (Jub. 3.32) to the nature of her name: ‘It is said that the name “Eve” has something to do with childbearing. This has an association with sexual relations’ (104). While maternity usually permits presumption of prior sexual intercourse, there is no evidence that the author of Jubilees makes a ‘negative’ (104) association between the meaning of Eve’s name, maternity and sexual intercourse.

The other major weakness of the work is excessive repetition. To a certain extent, the reiteration of major points can be attributed to the structure van Ruiten adopts for the study. However, discussions that are repeated almost word for word (e.g. 19-20 and 52-53; 88 and 90-91), footnotes that repeat sentences that appear in the body of the work (e.g. n. 21, p. 191 and text, p. 192), and full documentation of works that were referred to earlier (notes to Chapter 5) convey the sense that parts of this study were initially developed as articles and were not reworked or carefully edited when incorporated into a book. A number of typographical and/or grammatical errors (e.g. 261, 285, 315, 372, 275) and typesetting problems with citations of Hebrew also indicate the need for more rigorous proof-reading.

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