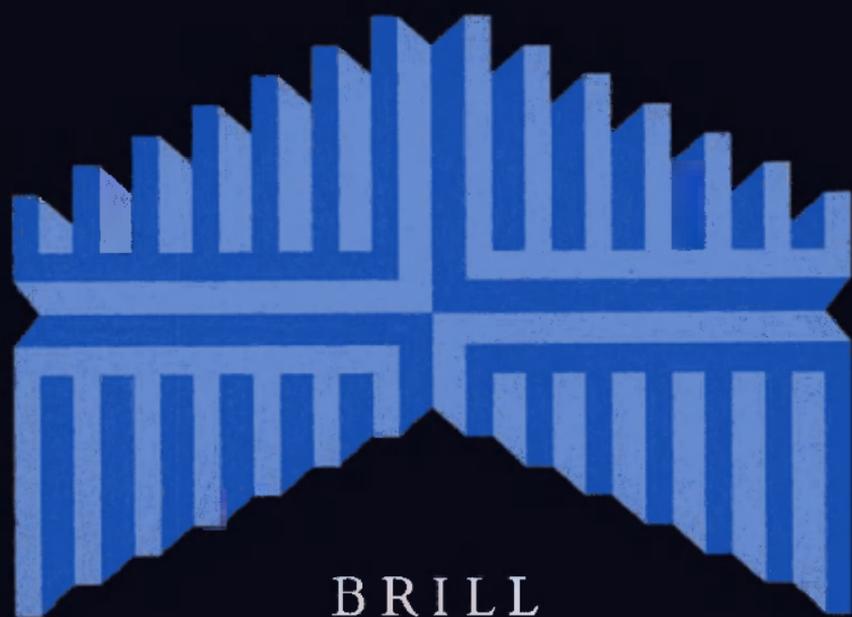


James R. Davila

Descenders to the Chariot
*The People behind
the Hekhalot Literature*



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DESCENDERS TO THE CHARIOT

The People behind the Hekhalot Literature

BY

JAMES R. DAVILA



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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

To my mother

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St. Andrews
11 April 2001

ABBREVIATIONS AND SIGLA

Abbreviations

<i>FJB</i>	<i>Frankfurter judaistische Beiträge</i>
<i>SH-L</i>	Peter Schäfer et al., <i>Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur</i> (TSAJ 2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981). Hekhalot texts published in the <i>Synopse</i> are cited by the traditional name of the given “macroform” (<i>Hekhalot Rabbati</i> , <i>Hekhalot Zutarti</i> , etc.), followed by the relevant section number(s) in <i>SH-L</i> . Passages not found within the boundaries of the traditional named texts are cited as <i>SH-L</i> followed by the relevant section number(s).

Sigla Used in Translations of Primary Texts

[. . .]	Unreadably damaged or missing text
<i>text</i>	The translation of the italicized primary text is uncertain
text	Text marked for deletion by being crossed out or erased
<text>	Material written supralinearly in the manuscript
[text]	Restoration of text in a lacuna. For biblical quotations, the part of a verse not actually written in the manuscripts
text(!)	The translation corrects a mistake in the Hebrew or Aramaic text
(text)	Explanatory comment inserted in a quotation from a translated primary text
{text}	Text missing in the manuscripts but restored on the basis of context
<<text>>	Text to be ignored as an inadvertent dittography
???	A Hebrew or Aramaic word I do not know how to translate

Additional Sigla

//	Marks a parallel passage found in two different texts or manuscripts (e.g., §§258–59//§§407–408)
G	Refers to Geniza fragments of Hekhalot texts published by Peter Schäfer in <i>Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur</i> (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984). These are cited with the siglum “G” followed by the text number in Schäfer’s edition and, when relevant, the column and line numbers. For example, “G11 2b 2–4” means lines 2–4 of column 2b, text 11 in this edition.

All other abbreviations and sigla may be found in *The SBL Handbook of Style for Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies*, ed. Patrick H. Alexander (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999). All translations of primary texts are my own unless otherwise indicated.

CHAPTER ONE

THE HEKHALOT LITERATURE

And what mortal man is it who is able
to ascend on high,
to ride on wheels,
to descend below,
to search out the inhabited world,
to walk on the dry land,
to gaze at His splendor,
to dwell with His crown,
to be transformed by His glory,
to recite praise,
to combine letters,
to recite their names,
to have a vision of what is above,
to have a vision of what is below,
to know the explanation of the living,
and to see the vision of the dead,
to walk in rivers of fire,
and to know the lightning?
And who is able to explain it,
and who is able to see it?
(*Hekhalot Zutarti* §§349–50)¹

Who indeed? Who is this profoundly mighty human being who rides a divine chariot on high and knows the place of the dead below, who gazes directly at God and is thereby transformed into a creature who wades in the celestial rivers of fire, and who exercises his powers on earth to understand the lives of those around him? This figure is the subject of the corpus of texts known as the Hekhalot literature and also the focus of this book. As a foretaste of many of the themes I will be exploring, I quote a passage written by a Soviet ethnographer about the experiences and characteristics of the spiritual intermediary generally, although not uncontroversially, called the “shaman”:

¹ For linguistic and textual comments, see the discussion of this passage in chapter 9.

Convinced of his connection with the spirits, the shaman expected of himself the behavioral characteristics that conformed to this connection. Having assumed the role, he would live it, no longer straying from the pattern. An important part of this role were [sic] the imaginary wanderings and encounters with the spirits during the seance. While conducting the ritual, the shaman was in the power of his visions. The spirits and scenes from other worlds would appear before him. He would experience all the details of his journey. For example, a Chukotka shaman in his hallucinations would fly through the air and shoot up to the stars, travel under the earth and beneath the water, change his form, encounter and converse with the spirits of his ancestors. It should be kept in mind that these hallucinations were not arbitrary, but connected with the purposes of the ritual.²

The similarities between the Chukotka shaman and the figure described in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* are obvious, and such similarities will be explored in detail in the following chapters. Some of the terms employed in the quotation, most of them loaded, are critical for the case I intend to make. The most important of these is, of course, "shaman." But before I discuss terminology, I must introduce the corpus of texts I shall be exploring and their accompanying phenomenological construct, Merkavah mysticism.³

The Hekhalot literature is a bizarre conglomeration of Jewish esoteric and revelatory texts produced sometime between late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. The name comes from a Hebrew word (הַיְכָלוֹת) meaning "palaces." The Hekhalot literature is the literature of the celestial palaces. These documents have strong connections with earlier apocalyptic and gnostic literature and claim to describe the self-induced spiritual experiences of the "descenders to the chariot" (a difficult phrase, used in some of the texts but not all, but the

² V. N. Basilov, "Chosen by the Spirits," in *Shamanism: Soviet Studies of Traditional Religion in Siberia and Central Asia*, ed. Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer (Armonk, N.Y., and London: Sharpe, 1990) 3–48; the quotation is on p. 10. This essay is highly schematic and permeated with the heavy-handed dialectical materialism obligatory for the era, but it is still quite useful.

³ The Hebrew word *merkavah* literally means "chariot," but it is used in rabbinic and related texts to refer to the vision of God's heavenly "throne-chariot" described by the prophet in the first chapter of Ezekiel—this despite the fact that the word itself never occurs in the book of Ezekiel. As will become clear in the next chapter, the terms "mysticism," "magic," and "theurgy" are highly problematical for etic discourse. In my summaries of the secondary literature in this chapter I will sometimes echo the imprecise usage of these words in the literature, since their use is one of the problems to be faced in the current state of the question.

only attested title for these magico-religious practitioners).⁴ The narrators and protagonists are almost always three prominent rabbis of the Tannaitic era: Akiva, Ishmael, and Nehuniah ben HaQanah. The texts are clearly pseudepigraphic, written long after the lifetimes of these men, although it is not impossible that some of the Hekhalot traditions go back to their teachings. But in any case, not only do the texts purport to tell us stories of their adventures; they also claim to reveal the very techniques that permitted the rabbis to view for themselves Ezekiel's Merkavah as well as those that gave them control of angels and a supernatural mastery of Torah. This material is of particular interest for the study of divine mediation and revelatory experiences, because the Hekhalot documents claim to detail actual practices used to reach trance states, gain revelations, and interact with divine beings. The basis for deducing the existence of Merkavah mysticism as a religious movement is largely exegesis of the Hekhalot literature. *I intend to show that this literature preserves the teachings of real religious functionaries, the descenders to the chariot, who flourished in late antiquity and who were quite like the functionaries anthropologists call shamans.*

One of the best-known stories in the Hekhalot corpus is that of the four who entered paradise, which is also found in the Babylonian Talmud and in various forms elsewhere in the rabbinic literature. The following version appears in a manuscript (New York, 8128) of the work that is the source of the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter.

And these are they who entered paradise (or "the garden"—פרדס): Ben Azzav, Ben Zoma, the Other,⁵ and R. Akiva.

⁴ The mysterious designation "descender to the chariot" (יורד ל/במרכבה) or יורדי (מ)מרכבה is found frequently in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (e.g., §§94, 163, 234, 236); the Geniza fragment G8 (e.g., G8 2b 3, 8); and in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §407. For some reason the Hekhalot texts often—though not always—speak of "descending" to God's throne-chariot in heaven and "ascending" on the return to earth (again, especially in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* and G8; but cf. also *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§335; *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §565; *Merkavah Rabba* §§672, 685). Numerous explanations of the paradoxical idiom have been offered, none compellingly persuasive. See Annelies Kuyt, *The "Descent" to the Chariot: Towards a Description of the Terminology, Place, Function and Nature of the Yeridah in Hekhalot Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995). In this book I will use the term "descenders to the chariot" when referring in general to the practitioners described in the Hekhalot literature, but not when referring to the contents of specific documents or "macroforms" (see below) that do not use the idiom "to descend to the chariot."

⁵ An unfriendly nickname for the infamous heretic Elisha ben Avuyah.

Ben Azzay peered into the sixth palace and saw the splendid atmosphere of the alabaster stones that are paved in the palace. And his body could not endure it, and he opened his mouth and asked them, "What is the nature of these waters?" and he died. Concerning him the Scripture says, "Worthy in the eyes of YHWH is the death of His saints" (Ps 116:15).

Ben Zoma peered at the splendor in the alabaster stones and supposed that it was water. And his body endured that he not ask them, but his mind could not endure it, and he was struck down. He lost his mind. Concerning him the Scripture says, "Have you found honey? Eat (only) your fill, lest you become sated and vomit it up" (Prov 25:16).

Elisha ben Avuyah descended and cut the plants. How did he cut the plants? They say that when he would come to the synagogues and to the schools and he saw youngsters there excelling in Torah, he would recite (a spell) against them and they were silenced. And concerning him the Scripture says, "Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin" (Qoh 5:5).

R. Akiva ascended safely and descended safely, and concerning him the Scripture says, "Draw me after you, let us run. The King has brought me into His chambers" (Cant 1:4). (*Hekhalot Zutarti* §345)

As it stands, the story is about four rabbis who made the perilous journey to the celestial paradise, a journey so dangerous that only one returned unscathed. Whether or not this was its original meaning has been stridently debated in recent years.⁶ This controversy is not new: a *responsum* survives from the eleventh century in which the head of a Babylonian rabbinic academy, Hai ben Sherira HaGaon, addressed a number of questions sent to him about the story.⁷ The questioners ask,

What is this garden? And at what did he "peer and was struck down"? And what is this stroke? And what is "he cut the plants"? And what are these plants? And R. Akiva who entered—into what place did he enter, and why did he enter safely and go forth safely? If you say, because of his righteousness, behold, Ben Azzay and his companions were righteous! May our master explain to us this tradition, for the opinions are many.

⁶ For a discussion and recent bibliography, see my article "The *Hodayot* Hymnist and the Four Who Entered Paradise," *RevQ* 17/65-68 (1996) 457-78.

⁷ B. M. Lewin, *Otzar ha-Geonim: Thesaurus of the Gaonic Responsa and Commentaries*, vol. 4: *Tractae Jom-Tov, Chagiga and Maschkin* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press Association, 1931) 13-15.

The text of the story available to the questioner is somewhat different from the one quoted above. For example, in their text R. Akiva "entered . . . and went forth" rather than ascending and descending. Nevertheless, their questions are essentially the same as those that might arise in the mind of a reader of our version.

Hai replies as follows:

Perhaps you know that many of the sages thought that one who is worthy of certain designated and elucidated traits, when he seeks to have a vision of the chariot and to peer into the palaces of the angels on high, has ways to do it. He sits in fasting a certain number of days and rests his head between his knees and whispers to the ground many songs and praises which are specified. And so he peers into its (or "his") inner rooms and chambers like one who sees seven palaces with his eyes, and he has a vision as if he were entering from palace to palace and seeing what is in each. And there are two compilations that the Tannaim taught on this matter—they are called *Hekhalot Rabbati* and *Hekhalot Zutarti*, and this matter is publicized and well known.

He then proceeds with a detailed exegesis of the story, the gist of which is that the garden, according to context, represents the celestial palaces, and the four passed through these palaces in order to see the Merkavah. He quotes a passage in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* (still extant in our manuscripts) which warns that the pavement of the sixth palace looks like overwhelming waves of water, but one must never mistake it for what it appears to be. Ben Azzay died because he made this mistake and referred to the waters; Ben Zoma was driven insane from the confounding visions; "the Other," Elisha ben Avuyah, became a heretic as a result of his experience; and only R. Akiva was able to bear what he saw and return unharmed.

As we shall see, Hai's interpretation of the story and its implications is not without difficulties, and it has been challenged. But let this be our starting point: by the eleventh century, a major Jewish authority in Babylonia believed that in the time of the Tannaim there had been established a group of ascetic practices which allowed one to experience a celestial ascent and view the Merkavah. The instructions for these practices were found in two works that pertained to the heavenly palaces (at least one, and perhaps both of which survive today). Later in the *responsum* Hai acknowledged that some denied that visions could be had or miracles performed except by the prophets. But he himself disputed this view, believing instead "that the Holy One, blessed be He, does miracles for the righteous

and great wonders, and -it is not far from Him to show in their inner rooms these visions of His palaces and the station of His angels." Moreover, this belief goes back to the ancients.—

Was Hai right or wrong? Were there Jewish sages who used ascetic rituals in order to have visions of heaven and to perform wonders on earth? In the rest of this chapter I survey the views of modern scholars on the authorship, date, and social location of the Hekhalot literature, and above all on its nature: is it literature arising merely from exegesis of scripture and rabbinic myth, or does it preserve a residue of genuine experience and praxis? But first some things need to be said about the texts and the manuscripts that contain them.

The Nature of the Texts

In order to study these documents, we must get clear in our minds just what we mean by the Hekhalot literature. This question is far more difficult than one might expect, even on the most basic level. Our main source for the texts is a group of about fifty medieval manuscripts in Hebrew and Aramaic which contain, *inter alia*, copies of the works generally assigned to the Hekhalot corpus.⁸ Until 1981, these were available only in descriptions and excerpts in secondary sources, on microfilm, or in uncritical editions drawn from a very limited manuscript base.⁹

All this changed with the publication of the *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, a synoptic edition of seven of the most important manuscripts containing the major works in the Hekhalot corpus.¹⁰ Why a synoptic edition and not a full-scale critical text? Because, as Peter Schäfer, the chief editor of this edition has been pointing out in articles published both before and after the appearance of the *Synopse*, a close analysis of the manuscripts makes the concept of a Hekhalot "work" or "text" difficult.¹¹ Certainly, scholars speak of individual

⁸ Peter Schäfer describes forty-seven manuscripts in "Handschriften zur Hekhalot-Literatur," in *Hekhalot-Studien* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988 [first published in 1983 in *FJB* 11, 113–93]) 154–233.

⁹ For details and bibliography, see David J. Halperin, "A New Edition of the Hekhalot Literature," *JAOS* 104 (1984) 543–52.

¹⁰ Peter Schäfer et al., *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981).

¹¹ These articles are collected in *Hekhalot-Studien*.

works and texts, and some of the titles assigned to these works have been used since the Middle Ages, as we saw from Hai's reference to the *Hekhalot Rabbati* and the *Hekhalot Zutarti* in the eleventh century, although these titles generally do not appear in the manuscripts. But the textual basis for most of the corpus turns out to be exceedingly fluid, varying widely from manuscript to manuscript. Indeed, there is often no clear indication where one document ends and another begins. Schäfer uses the term "macroform" for these larger, constantly shifting units. They are composed of smaller blocks of tradition ("microforms," in Schäfer's terminology) which can appear in more than one work or in different places in different manuscripts of the same work, often with significant textual variants, but which are, by and large, more stable than the macroforms. The extent and nature of the textual problems vary from macroform to macroform. The manuscripts of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, for example, have relatively little internal variation, and it seems likely that a traditional critical text could be produced for it.¹² But the manuscripts of the *Hekhalot Zutarti* vary so much, in so many ways, that it is difficult to speak of it as a document whose Urform might be reconstructed.¹³

Most of the manuscripts discussed in the previous two paragraphs come from the textual tradition that passed through the editorial hands of the *Haside Ashkenaz* in the Middle Ages. When we take into account the earlier Hekhalot material that does not come from this tradition, the textual picture becomes murkier and still more complex. The Cairo Geniza, a synagogue repository for discarded manuscripts in Hebrew script, preserved numerous fragments of Hekhalot texts which did not undergo European editing, and where these overlap with the European manuscripts there are often substantial differences. In addition, a number of fragments from the Cairo Geniza contain parts of texts that are entirely unknown in the European manuscripts.¹⁴

¹² I have argued the case in more detail in "Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*," *JJS* 45 (1994) 208–26.

¹³ See: Schäfer, "Aufbau und redaktionelle Identität der *Hekhalot Zutarti*," in *Hekhalot-Studien* 50–62 (first published in 1982 in *JJS* 33, 569–82). Rachel Elior's edition does not obviate this conclusion, nor does it claim to do so (*Hekhalot Zutarti* [Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, Supplement 1; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982] in Hebrew). See also the remarks of Halperin, "A New Edition of the Hekhalot Literature," 546–49.

¹⁴ Some of the Hekhalot fragments from the Cairo Geniza were first published by Ithamar Gruenwald in "New Passages from Hekhalot Literature," *Tarbiz* 38

Our analysis of the Hekhalot literature must proceed, therefore, on multiple levels. It is helpful to structure the treatment broadly around the larger units, the macroforms, because in a rough and ready way these tell us how some tradents organized and transmitted the material. But this must be done with constant attention to variant arrangements in the manuscripts and, especially, alongside a detailed analysis of the shorter units of one or a few paragraphs—the microforms—in whatever macroform they occupy. The microforms are likely to give us older information than the macroforms. The starting point for the Geniza material should be the individual fragments that now survive. For all our evidence, textual criticism, redaction criticism, and form criticism must work together to help us isolate textual units of different length, and these must be studied on their own terms as well as in the context of the larger, blurry macroforms and of the individual Geniza manuscripts.

Since the broadest angle of attack will aim at the traditional macroforms and the Geniza manuscripts, it is worthwhile to survey these at this point, both to give a general idea of their content and to signal particular redactional problems associated with each one. The most important macroforms are the following.¹⁵

The *Hekhalot Rabbati* (“The Greater [Book of Celestial] Palaces”; roughly §§81–121, 152–73, 189–277). A fairly stable collection in Hebrew of miscellaneous hymns and traditions about the heavenly realm, incorporating a version of the story of the ten martyrs and a narrative about an ascent of R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah. Other episodes and mythic material are included in some of the manuscripts. The fragments from the Cairo Geniza suggest that earlier, somewhat different redactions once existed.¹⁶

The *Sar Torah* (“The Prince of Torah”; §§281–306). A set of instructions in Hebrew for invoking the angelic Prince of Torah in order to compel him to descend and give the adept supernatural knowl-

(1968–69) 354–72 (in Hebrew) and “Remarks on the Article ‘New Passages from Hekhalot Literature,’” *Tarbiz* 39 (1969–70) 216–17 (in Hebrew). Peter Schäfer has republished these, along with many others, in *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984).

¹⁵ All section numbers are those of Schäfer’s *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*.

¹⁶ See Schäfer, “Zum Problem der redaktionellen Identität von *Hekhalot Rabbati*,” in *Hekhalot-Studien* 63–74 (first published in 1985 in *FJB* 13, 1–22); “Ein neues *Hekhalot Rabbati*-Fragment,” in *Hekhalot-Studien* 96–103; Peter Schäfer et al., *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur*, vol. 2: §§81–334 (TSAJ 17; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987) xiv–xxxvi; and n. 12 above.

edge of Torah. This macroform usually follows the *Hekhalot Rabbati* in the manuscripts. The last third of the text contains substantial variations in the manuscripts.¹⁷

The *Hekhalot Zūtarti* ("The Lesser [Book of Celestial] Palaces"; roughly §§335–68, 373–74, 407–26). A highly unstable Hebrew and Aramaic conglomeration of adjurations, stories about heavenly ascents, and instructions for undertaking heavenly journeys. One manuscript includes cosmographic myths found in other manuscripts in contexts outside the *Hekhalot Zūtarti*.¹⁸

The *Ma'aseh Merkavah* ("The Working of the Chariot"; §§544–96). A fairly stable collection in Hebrew of Merkavah hymns, adjurations, and ascetic practices for controlling angels and ascending to the chariot. One manuscript adds an adjuration; another preserves an earlier recension that lacked §§579–90; and there are other minor variations.¹⁹

The *Sar Panim* ("The Prince of the Presence"; §§623–39). A highly stable, extended Hebrew adjuration for the purpose of forcing the angelic Prince of the Presence to descend from heaven and grant the wishes of the practitioner.²⁰

The *Merkavah Rabba* ("The Great [Book of] the Chariot"; §§655–708). A rather unstable Hebrew compendium of instructions for ascetic practices, adjurations, hymns, and Shi'ur Qomah speculation (see below).²¹

3 *Enoch* (chaps. 1–48; §§1–79). The macroform takes the form of a Hebrew apocalypse describing the ascent of R. Ishmael to heaven, where he meets the great angel Metatron, who was once the patriarch Enoch before he was assumed into heaven and transformed into a fiery angel. Metatron then takes R. Ishmael on an extended tour of the celestial realm. The macroform seems to be built around an

¹⁷ See n. 16.

¹⁸ See Peter Schäfer et al., *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur*, vol. 3: §§335–597 (TSAJ 22; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989) vii–xxvii and n. 13 above.

¹⁹ See Schäfer et al., *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur* 3:xxvii–xliii; Michael D. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkavah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992) esp. pp. 41–62.

²⁰ See Peter Schäfer, "Die Beschwörung des *sar ha-panim*. Edition und Übersetzung," in *Hekhalot-Studien* 118–53 (first published in 1978 in *FJB* 6, 107–45).

²¹ See Peter Schäfer, "Prolegomena zu einer kritischen Edition und Analyse der *Merkava Rabba*," in *Hekhalot-Studien* 17–49 (first published in 1977 in *FJB* 5, 65–99); Schäfer et al., *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur IV §§598–985* (TSAJ 29; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991) xvii–xxx.

earlier microform (chaps. 2–15; §§3–19) containing the story of the ascent and exaltation of Enoch. As it stands now, *3 Enoch* is notably lacking in ritual material and adjurations, although a fragment from the Cairo Geniza indicates that a substantially different recension of the material once existed which included such material.²²

I will have occasion to cite a number of other macroforms which must be mentioned here. First, the *Massekhet Hekhalot* (“The Treatise on the [Celestial] Palaces”) is a carefully constructed and detailed description in Hebrew of the seven heavens and their supernatural structures and denizens. It was probably composed later than the other documents, since its cosmography is given without an ascent account or ritual instructions, and thus it is of minimal interest for our purposes.²³ Second, the *Shi'ur Qomah* is a loose compilation in Hebrew of detailed descriptions of the various enormous body parts of the enthroned deity. Some *Shi'ur Qomah* passages are found in the *Synopse* (e.g., §§939–78), but the material is preserved more fully in other manuscripts.²⁴ It, too, is of limited use to us. Third, a Hebrew cosmological treatise covering the heavenly and infernal realms exists in a number of recensions, one of which is known as the *Seder Rabba di Bereshit* (“The Greater Order of Creation”; roughly §§428–67,

²² See P. S. Alexander, “The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch,” *JJS* 28 (1977) 156–80; Peter Schäfer, “Ein neues Fragment zur Metoposkopie und Chiromantik,” in *Hekhalot-Studien* 84–95 (first published in 1985 in *FJB* 13, 61–82); Peter Schäfer and Klaus Herrmann, *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur*, vol. 1: §§1–80 (TSAJ 46; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995) vii–lxiii; James R. Davila, “Of Methodology, Monotheism, and Metatron: Introductory Reflections on Divine Mediators and the Origins of the Worship of Jesus,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism. Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, ed. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 3–18. The *Synopse* has only two of the manuscripts of *3 Enoch*. The textual data from the rest may be found in the apparatus of the edition of Hugo Odeberg, *3 Enoch, or the Hebrew Book of Enoch* (1928; rpt. New York: Ktav, 1973). Note also the English translation by P. S. Alexander in *OTP* 1:223–315. I cite *3 Enoch* according to Odeberg’s edition by chapter and verse, followed in parentheses by the section numbers in the *Synopse* (except when the latter lacks the passage).

²³ The *Massekhet Hekhalot* has been edited by Klaus Herrmann in *Massekhet Hekhalot: Traktat von den himmlischen Palästen. Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentar* (TSAJ 39; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994).

²⁴ See Martin Samuel Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983); idem, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions* (TSAJ 9; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985); Schäfer, “*Shi'ur Qomah*: Rezensionen und Urtext,” in *Hekhalot Studien* 75–83; Schäfer et al., *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur IV §§598–985 xxxi–xlv*, 136–202.

518–40, 714–853).²⁵ It presents cosmographic and cosmological traditions almost entirely without reference to visionary experience or ritual praxis, but it will have some relevance for my analysis. In addition, I note that MS New York 8128 (whose text was published in Schäfer's *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*) contains numerous additions to the various macroforms, some of which are of considerable interest and will be discussed in later chapters.²⁶ Other works have a close relationship to the Hekhalot traditions, but they are usually considered magical rather than mystical texts and will be discussed below in chapters 2 and 8.

Schäfer has also published twenty-three fragmentary Hekhalot documents in Hebrew and Aramaic from the Cairo Geniza. Many of these are copies of already known documents, although often in a rather different form,²⁷ but some of them contain entirely new material. G8 has been called the Ozhayah fragment, after the name of the angel who figures in the ascent account. G11 begins with a passage about Metatron, the angel of Israel, then continues with previously unknown *Shi'ur Qomah* material. G12 bears the title "A Good Omen" (סימן טוב) and consists of passages found in 3 *Enoch* about the ascent of R. Ishmael and the heavenly tour that Metatron gives him, along with new physiognomic and astrological speculation. G13–G17 are copies of an adjuration text called *Sheva' Zutarti* or *Sheva' Eliyahu* ("The Lesser Seven" or "The Seven of Elijah"), another copy of which (in MS Michael 9/Oxford 1531) was published in transcription by Rebecca Macy Lesses.²⁸ One may question whether it belongs with the other Hekhalot texts, and I will consider it in

²⁵ Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer and Abraham Joseph Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashot: Twenty-Five Midrashim Published for the First Time from Manuscripts Discovered in the Genizoth of Jerusalem and Egypt with Introductions and Annotations* (2nd ed.; Jerusalem: Ktab Yad Wasepher, 1968) 1:3–48 (in Hebrew); Nicolas Séd, "Une cosmologie juive du haut moyen âge: la Bérāyā dī Ma'aseh Berēšit," *REJ* 123 (1964) 259–305; *REJ* 124 (1965) 23–123.

²⁶ See Klaus Herrmann and Claudia Rohrbacher-Sticker, "Magische Traditionen der New Yorker *Hekhalot*-Handschrift JTS 8128 im Context ihrer Gesamtedaction," *FJB* 17 (1989) 101–49.

²⁷ G1–G6 (*Hekhalot Rabbati*); G7, G18 (*Hekhalot Zutarti*); G9–G10 (*Shi'ur Qomah*); G23 (*Pereq Shirah*, a poetic text with some relationship to the Hekhalot literature).

²⁸ Rebecca Macy Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power: Angels, Incantations, and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (HTS 44; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 1998) 381–94. A translation of these Cairo Geniza fragments with commentary has now been published by Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked in *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997) 2:27–95.

my discussion of magical texts in chapter 8. Other fragments are G19, a ritual and adjuration for invoking Metatron; G20, some leaves from a handbook of rituals; G21, an adjuration describing the revelatory ascent of Moses to heaven; and G22, adjurations and Merkavah hymns, some of which also appear in the major macroforms.

Literature or Experience?

What, then, are the Hekhalot texts? Who wrote them, and to what end? For the last generation the question of the purpose of the material has been debated. Broadly speaking, two positions have been defended. The first is that the Hekhalot literature describes certain otherworldly experiences (especially ascents to heaven but also the summoning of angels to earth) as well as the means to achieve them. The second is that the alleged experiences described in the texts (again, especially the heavenly ascents) are primarily literary constructions based on creative exegesis of scripture and rabbinic myth, and it is doubtful that any genuine experience lies behind them.

More than any other scholar in the twentieth century, Gershom G. Scholem is responsible for setting the study of Jewish mystical literature on a sound scientific basis. He built on and transcended the nineteenth-century study of the Hekhalot literature, substantially revising the understanding of the material. In a number of discussions he argued that the Hekhalot literature described the religious experiences of a school of practitioners which originated in Palestine in Talmudic or even Tannaitic times, but which is now known primarily from literature transmitted to Western Europe from Babylonia. These practitioners made use of ascetic practices to experience the "ascent" or "descent" to the chariot. Recitation of prayers and hymns, along with the invocation of divine names and other magical practices, served to generate a state of ecstasy which allowed them to make the perilous journey through the gates of the seven celestial palaces in order to stand before the throne of God, where they faced the danger of a fiery and potentially fatal transformation into an angel. Although magic and theurgy were integral to its practices from the beginning, this school of ecstatic mysticism gradually "degenerated" in different directions to produce, first, a more or less purely magical literature exemplified by tractates such as the *Sar Torah* and the *Harba di Moshe*; second, a moralizing reinterpretation that devel-

oped into later devotional literature such as the Midrash of the Ten Martyrs and the Alphabet of R. Akiva; and third, a group of Hekhalot texts (*Hekhalot Rabbati*, 3 *Enoch*, *Massekhet Hekhalot*) purged of magical elements. Aspects of Merkavah mysticism also informed cosmogonic and cosmological speculation that united with Hellenistic and Neoplatonic streams of thought to produce medieval Kabbalah.²⁹ Scholem took it to be the case that Merkavah mysticism developed out of apocalyptic movements in the Second Temple period and that these traditions were alluded to, albeit in cautionary contexts, in the classical rabbinic literature. Ithamar Gruenwald defended these views in more detail in a monograph and a collection of essays.³⁰

David J. Halperin mounted the first thoroughgoing challenge to the framework established by Scholem, arguing that the traditions about the Merkavah in Palestinian sources are based on scriptural exegesis and that ecstatic journeys to the otherworld appear first in Babylonian sources.³¹ He reconstructs a tradition of synagogue exegesis associated with Shavuot sermons which he believes generated the traditions found in the Hekhalot literature. These creative reinterpretations of scripture combined Ezekiel's vision of the Merkavah with the account of the revelation of the Torah at Sinai in the book of Exodus and in Psalm 68. While allowing for the possibility that the writers sometimes had visionary experiences or "hallucinations," Halperin sees the major developments as literary. In addition, he questions an important assumption of previous work on the Hekhalot literature, that at its core or center is the theme of the ascent (or descent) to the celestial chariot. He sees the ascent motif as at most

²⁹ Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (3rd ed.; New York: Schocken, 1954) 40–79; idem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (2nd ed.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965); idem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Meridian, 1974) 10–21, 317–19, 373–81.

³⁰ Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (AGJU 14; Leiden: Brill, 1980); idem, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism: Studies in Apocalypticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1988).

³¹ See esp. David J. Halperin, *The Merkavah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1980); idem, "A New Edition of the Hekhalot Literature," 549–51; idem, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988) esp. pp. 359–63. Halperin builds on the earlier challenge by Ephraim E. Urbach in "The Traditions about Merkavah Mysticism in the Tannaitic Period," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem on His Seventieth Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends*, ed. Ephraim E. Urbach et al. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967) 1–28, Hebrew section.

As usual, the consequences of failing to follow directions are dire: "And he must invoke the name of RWZYY YHWH, God of Israel, before he writes them. If he writes them without-invocation, he will go mad."

This episode introducing the *Merkavah Rabba* is typical of the role of the otherworldly journey in this document. R. Ishmael has a vision of the angel Sandalphon, who has important, if obscure, duties in the celestial throne room. A Merkavah hymn intervenes, then the focus shifts to the "mystery of Sandalphon," some sort of ritual of power further illuminated, or at least discussed, in §§656–57. The revelation of the angelic names by R. Akiva fills R. Ishmael's heart with light, but this flash of insight scarcely counts as a visionary journey. In fact, the vision that began the section seems to be little more than window dressing, and it no longer figures after the first few lines.

The next pericope (§§658–70) involves a ritual invocation of angels is associated with the festivals. Following this is another account of the four who entered paradise (§§671–74), corresponding more or less to §§344–46 (§348) of the *Hekhalot Zutarti*.⁵⁶ The passage ties the adventure of the four to an ascent of R. Akiva, so presumably the editor believed that the entrance into the garden corresponded to an otherworldly journey. But once again, the interest in the journey is tangential.

Later, in the middle of an episode analyzed in detail in chapter 4 (§§677–84), regarding the Sar Torah praxis he has just learned,

(§680) R. Ishmael said:

As soon as my ears heard this great mystery, the world was changed for me to purity, and my heart became as if I had come into a new world. And in every single day it seemed to me as if I stood before the throne of glory.

The language here is very attenuated. By saying it was "as if" he stood before the throne, he seems to acknowledge that in fact he did not. Further on (§685) we read, "R. Ishmael said: Concerning this matter R. Akiva descended to inquire of the chariot." "This matter" appears to be the "secret of Torah" and its attendant rituals revealed in §§677–84. The rest of the section contains a gram-

⁵⁶ Manuscripts New York 8128 and Oxford 1531 give the full text, except that they abbreviate §348; MS Munich 40 abbreviates the story to two lines, while MS Munich 22 ends the *Merkavah Rabba* with §670.

matically obscure pronouncement by R. Akiva on some of the divine names associated with Metatron. Then we read:

(§686) R. Akiva said:

When I went and made this inquiry before the throne of glory, I saw YHWH, God of Israel, Who was exceedingly happy. And He stretched out His hand—His right hand—and slapped the throne of glory, and He said:

Akiva, my son, this throne of glory on which I am seated is a lovely furnishing that My hand, My right hand, founded. Even if one has been a proselyte for only an hour, and his body is innocent of idolatry and bloodshed and incest, I am bound to him. I bind to him Metatron, My servant—to his steps and to much study of Torah.

And when I was dismissed from before the throne of glory to descend to be with mortals, He said to me:

Akiva, My son, descend and bear testimony of this praxis to beings. And R. Akiva descended and taught beings this praxis.

At this point (§687) R. Ishmael intervenes with a Merkavah hymn to be recited by “every wise disciple⁵⁷ who learns this great mystery.” Then he gives us another account of a vision in which he solicits and receives an account of the Shi‘ur Qomah from the Prince of Torah.

(§688) R. Ishmael said:

I saw the King of the world seated on an exalted and lifted-up throne. And all His armies stood, and the whole host on high in heaven prostrated themselves, stationed before Him to His right and to His left.

I said to him, to the Prince of Torah:

My master, teach me the stature of our Creator. And he recited the stature of our Creator, he recited the Stature of the Body (*Shi‘ur Qomah*), may it be adorned, may it be blessed.

Most of the rest of the *Merkavah Rabba* (§§689–706) is taken up with adjurations and *Shi‘ur Qomah* material that seem to function as an answer to R. Ishmael’s questions. We have already learned in chapter 3 of the benefits promised the practitioner who recites this material (§§705–706).

One more Geniza text, G21, contains material that bears on the otherworldly journey. The first of the four preserved leaves begins with an incantation involving twenty-seven mysterious letters. Midway through an incantatory prayer the writer says,

⁵⁷ Or “disciple of a sage.”

(G21 1a 11–13a) Seat me in the chariot in the midst of the twenty-seven letters, for among them [. . . g]reat forever and ever and ever. Hear me! I am Pinhas Your servant where to [. . .] on account of You, for the sake of Your great name, which remains forever. Amen. Selah.

A string of *nomina barbara* follows, then we read: “All your letters—by them You answer me and You save me. Kings and gods of [. . .] my Rock and my Fortress, and You will save me from all *jealousy*. So do carry out what I ask and my request—everything pleasing, etc.” (1a 17b–19a). Later Pinhas asks for protection from evil spirits (1a 25–26), and at the end of the page he repeats his request for a granted wish: “Answer me at this time, and carry out what I ask and my request” (1a 28).

There are parallels between this document and the ascent passage in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* (§§413–19), which ends with the adept sitting on the lap of God or another divine being and asking for whatever he wants. In G21 the practitioner seeks to be seated on the divine throne chariot (and thus presumably on God’s lap), whence he repeatedly demands that anything he asks be given him. It is particularly significant that, unlike in the vast majority of *Hekhalot* texts and other texts of ritual power, the name of the practitioner is given: a real person named Pinhas actually used this ritual.

The reverse of the page concludes the incantation in the first two lines, and a blank space is left in the second half of line 2. Line 3 launches a new narrative, this one describing the well-known myth of the ascent of Moses to heaven to seize the Torah in the face of angelic opposition. This document is not of great importance to us, except perhaps to confirm that the writers of the *Hekhalot* literature used the myth for their own inspiration. It is also worth noting that, according to this text, adjurations of healing are among the powers Moses seizes in heaven. References to healing are quite rare in the *Hekhalot* traditions. We read:

(G21 2a 9b–13a) The prince of the head came to [him] (Moses). He (the prince) said to him (Moses), “This is my adjuration.” The prince of the eye came to him. He said to him, “This is my adjuration.” The prince of the ear came to him. He said to him, “This is my adjuration.” The prince of the mouth came to him. He sa[id] to him, “This is my adjuration.” The prince of the whole body came to him. He said to him, “This is my adjuration, and such is my healing.”

Conclusions

In this chapter we have looked at specific examples of the shamanic cosmology described by Hultkrantz and Eliade, and have found this framework to fit very accurately the cosmology presented in the *Hekhalot* literature. The seven-tiered heavenly realm appears in all macroforms and many Geniza texts, usually in the form of seven concentric celestial temples, with the divine throne room centermost, but sometimes also as seven firmaments. The *Hekhalot Rabbati* describes the descent to the chariot in terms of a kind of world ladder that is consistent with the idea of the shamanic world tree. Some of the accounts of shamanic otherworldly journeys share other themes with the *Hekhalot* literature, such as the terrible dangers of the journey, the testing of the adept along the way, and the use by the shaman of spells for protection, although these themes are not discussed explicitly by Hultkrantz or Eliade as part of the model.

We have also explored the complex aims of the otherworldly journey. In the *Hekhalot Rabbati* the journey is used to obtain divine revelations—the heavenly view of the political situation on earth—and to allow the adept to join in the celestial liturgy with the angels. In the *Hekhalot Zutarti* its culmination is the lap of God, where the divine wish granter may be asked to do the will of the practitioner (as in G21, another part of which also refers to the acquisition of healing powers). The *Hekhalot Zutarti* also connects the visionary ascent with revelations of Sar Torah praxes and generally beneficent adjurations. The *Ma'aseh Merkavah* hints of great worldly benefits to be had from the vision of the otherworld, but does not explain these in detail. In the *Merkavah Rabba*, the visionary ascent is used primarily to obtain knowledge of divine mysteries and secrets of ritual power: the “secrets of creation,” Sar Torah praxes, and the Shi‘ur Qomah. Fragment G8 seems to say of the descent to the chariot that “by it the world is redeemed” and also to associate it with revelations concerning scripture. The encounter of the practitioner with the Youth may also involve the granting of wishes, as in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §418 and in G21.

In the next chapter we take another look at the powers attributed to the descenders to the chariot, but from a somewhat different angle. We shall see that their abilities, like those of the shaman, are channeled primarily through their power to control the spirits.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONTROL OF THE SPIRITS

One of the central functions of the shaman is to control spirits. Almost every other shamanic activity depends on this control, which serves many purposes: the spirits may aid the shaman with visionary journeys, exorcisms, healings, or other acts of power; they may endow the shaman with clairvoyance, or they may help guide the dead to their proper place of rest. Control of the spirits is the *sine qua non* of shamanic competence: not all shamans engage in otherworldly journeys or heal, but all must have some power over the spiritual world. Likewise, in some cultures in which shamans play a part, anyone can have visionary or ecstatic experiences, so the mark of a shaman is not contact with otherworldly reality alone but control over elements of it. As noted in chapter 4, any Lakota man can engage in a vision quest for any number of reasons. Likewise, Merkur says regarding the Inuit:

The Inuit denotation of a shaman as the possessor of a helping spirit differs significantly from Western scholarly approaches, which tend to emphasize that shamans are professional ecstasies who conduct seances. This difference in the perception of what is distinctive about shamans reflects a difference in what Inuit and Western cultures regard as normal and presuppose when speaking of shamans. For Western scholars, ecstasy is worthy of remark, whereas for the Inuit it is not. . . . Because the Inuit are no strangers to ecstatic religious experiences, only the particular morphology of shaman's ecstasies, the possession of helping spirits, strikes them as distinctly shamanic.¹

This chapter begins with an overview of shamanic powers over the spirits, illustrated by examples from traditions we have drawn on in previous chapters. We then turn to the Hekhalot literature to look at the significance of control of the spirits for the descenders to the chariot. Some of the cross-cultural material and most of the relevant Hekhalot texts have been covered already in earlier chapters, so a good bit of this short chapter will summarize previously treated

¹ Merkur, *Becoming Half Hidden* 63–64.

evidence. But in this case brevity is not an indication of insignificance. Rather, it shows that control of the spirits is a centrally important element that permeates both shamanism and the Hekhalot literature.

Shamanic Control of the Spirits

Siberian Shamanism (Sereptie)

The initiatory vision of Sereptie introduces numerous spirits and explains the relationships the shaman must cultivate with them. He was guided through the nine tents of the underworld by a spirit who elicited answers from him about the spirits in the tents. Dwelling in the first tent was the spirit of madness, by which Sereptie was to initiate new shamans. The second tent belonged to spirits of the Tungus, who would help him use the proper materials for healing stomach diseases, insanity, and epidemics.² In the fourth tent he met a spirit in the form of an old woman who was to help him locate places to hunt and fish. The fifth tent held reindeer spirits, whose permission he needed to make his shaman's costume (of reindeer hide), and who would help him find the tree out of which to make his shaman's drum. He also needed the permission of the forging spirits in the sixth tent. The spirit of the seventh tent was called the mother of measles and "the mistress of the earth who has created all life." He was to ask her help to heal measles and also to intercede with the dangerous inhabitants of the eighth and ninth tents, who could help him recover the souls of the dying and cure the sick. Beyond the tents and the seven stone peaks, two other peaks represented the mistress of water who provides fish and the spirit who heals children of diseases.

After the description of the vision, Sereptie relates how he practiced shamanism for the next twenty years. First he explains how he tracked the souls of the sick and dying:

When I am shamanizing, I see a road to the north. When I am looking for a sick man, the road is narrow like a thread. I do not know who is leading me, in front I see the sun and the moon. On (the lower) part of the narrow road there are conical ramshackle tents; on this (road) you go for the breath of the man. The other part of the

² The third tent contained an aged and disfigured woman called the spirit of the afterbirth, but her relationship to the shaman is not explained.

road (leading upwards) is quite entangled—I do not understand why. The man who is to recover has a breath like a white thread, while he who dies has one like a black thread. Going along the road, you look sideways and you proceed. Then you find the man's *nil'ti* [life force or soul] and take it.³

He discusses the procedure for finding the proper tree from which to make his shaman's drum, then concludes by explaining his method of placating evil spirits.

When, for a man's illness, I make ceremonies to the evil spirits, the latter would say: "Here, I have surrendered to you, what is he going to give me?" I ask: "What you require for him I shall settle." "The ill man has to kill a certain wild reindeer," says the disease. The man indeed kills such a wild reindeer, gives me its hide and I make a new dress of it for myself. It may happen that the spirit does not speak sincerely and says: "He should kill a wolf, a fox or some other game." But in reality, the ill man kills a reindeer.⁴

Inuit Shamanism (Igjugarjuk and Autdaruta)

At the end of his dreadful ordeal in the snow hut, Igjugarjuk was visited by a spirit in the form of a beautiful woman who came as a sign that he was to become a shaman. He tells the story as follows:

Only towards the end of the thirty days did a helping spirit come to me, a lovely and beautiful helping spirit, whom I had never thought of; it was a white woman; she came to me whilst I had collapsed, exhausted, and was sleeping. But still I saw her lifelike, hovering over me, and from that day I could not close my eyes or dream without seeing her. There is this remarkable thing about my helping spirit, that I have never seen her while awake, but only in dreams. She came to me from Pinga and was a sign that Pinga had now noticed me and would give me powers that would make me a shaman.⁵

He was rescued shortly thereafter by his mentor and father-in-law but had to undergo more than a year of additional purificatory disciplines. He continues,

Later, when I had quite become myself again, I understood that I had become the shaman of my village, and it did happen that my neigh-

³ Popov, "How Sereptie Djaruoskin of the Nganasans (Tagvi Samoyeds) Became a Shaman," 145 (author's parentheses and brackets).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Rasmussen, *Observations on the Intellectual Culture of the Caribou Eskimos* 53.

bors or people from a long distance away called me to heal a sick person, or to "inspect a course" if they were going to travel. When this happened, the people of my village were called together and I told them what I had been asked to do. Then I left tent or snow house and went into solitude. . . . If anything difficult had to be found out, my solitude had to extend over three days and two nights, or three nights and two days. In all that time I had to wander about without rest, and only sit down once in a while on a stone or a snow drift. When I had been out long and had become tired, I could almost doze and dream what I had come out to find and about which I had been thinking all the time.⁶

Thus Igjugarjuk was granted his shamanic powers by a visit from a spirit who represented Pinga.⁷ After his final course of training and purification he became a shaman who served his local area. By means of "spirit wandering in solitude," he was able to draw on the power of the spirits to aid his community. He once even healed a sick man from another village by wandering in isolation for five days while concentrating on the man's recovery.⁸

Autdaruta also owed his shamanic powers to his helping spirits. After allowing himself to be eaten by the bear spirit, he concluded, "From that day forth I felt that I ruled my helping-spirits. After that I acquired many fresh helping-spirits and no danger could any longer threaten me, as I was always protected."⁹

To illustrate this claim, he then tells how once when towing home a seal attached to his kayak after a successful hunt, he was accosted by spirits who tried to abduct both him and his catch. He was rescued by a group of the "fire people," one of whom then became one of his helping-spirits. All of these helping-spirits abandoned him when he converted to Christianity.¹⁰

Lakota Shamanism (Nick Black Elk and Others)

Walker's informant George Sword describes three types of intermediaries among the Lakota. The "medicine man" (*pejuta wicasa*) treats disease by means of medicines and song. There are different kinds and orders of medicine men, and a given one may specialize in a

⁶ Ibid., 53-54.

⁷ On whom see chapter 4 n. 9.

⁸ Rasmussen, *Observations on the Intellectual Culture of the Caribou Eskimos* 54-55.

⁹ Rasmussen, *The People of the Polar North* 307.

¹⁰ Ibid., 307-308.

single medicine. They use drums and rattles in their healing rituals and keep their medicine in a "medicine bag." The "magician" (*wapiya wicasa* if a healer, *wakan skan wicasa* if one who brings illness) is a kind of sorcerer who can heal or harm, bring victory at games, harm enemies, and produce love charms. The "holy man" (*wicasa wakan*) has a "ceremonial bag," tied to a specific spirit, to which he sings and prays. The holy man heals the sick through the ritual invocation of the spirit or familiar (*sicun*) connected with his ceremonial bag. It is possible for a single person to hold two of these offices at once. It is the holy man who fits the model of the shaman and who is used for comparative purposes here.¹¹

Another informant, Little Wound, describes the powers of the shaman as follows:

A *wakan* man is one who is wise. It is one who knows the spirits. It is one who has power with the spirits. It is one who communicates with the spirits. It is one who can do strange things. A *wakan* man knows things that the people do not know. He knows the ceremonies and the songs. He can tell the people what their visions mean. He can tell the people what the spirits wish them to do. He can tell what is to be in the future. He can talk with animals and with trees and with stones. He can talk with everything on earth.¹²

Still another informant, Ringing Shield, adds,

If a man is good and wise, he may become a shaman and be the friend of the spirits. He must learn the songs and the ceremony. Shamans will teach him these. If he is a wise shaman, the spirits will teach him how to do mysterious things. They will give him mysterious powers over other men. The spirits love a generous man. They love an industrious woman and will help her in all her work. The shaman should know the word[s] of a shaman. He talks in the spirit language.¹³

Once again, Nick Black Elk serves as a good example of a specific shaman. We have already seen how two spirits took him into the sky for his great vision and then returned him to his body. During the vision he encountered numerous spirits of many kinds. After it, he was bound by the Thunder-beings to carry out a number of cer-

¹¹ Walker et al., *Lakota Belief and Ritual* 91–93 (cf. pp. 80, 95–96). Powers notes that medicine men and holy men can be either male or female (*Oglala Religion* 56).

¹² Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual* 69.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 114 (author's brackets). Compare p. 117 (which mentions the danger of communicating with spirits) and p. 119.

emonies in order to enact elements of the vision on earth. At age seventeen he revealed the contents of the vision to a medicine man, who advised him to engage in a horse dance ceremony. He did so, then the next year he carried out a vision quest in which the Thunder-beings appeared to him again, then he performed a *heyoka* ceremony.¹⁴ After this, he carried out his first act of healing, during which he invoked the Great Spirit to cure a very sick four-year-old boy. After this success he healed many other people.¹⁵

Japanese Shamanism (Mediums, Ascetics, and Deguchi Onisaburō)

Blacker describes four types of spirit with which Japanese shamans have to do: sacred powers in the physical and human world (*kami*), souls of dead people (*tama*), neglected and malevolent human ghosts, and "witch animals" who parasitically possess human beings.¹⁶ As outlined in chapter 2, female mediums (*itako*) and mostly male ascetics (often but not always *yamabushi*) exercise their powers over the spirits in somewhat different and often complementary ways.

The medium functions as an intermediary between the community and the spirits (both *kami* and the ghosts of the dead), and these spirits speak through her mouth while she is in, or pretends to be in, a trance. The *kami* are summoned at key points during the annual calendar to give supernatural guidance. A Japanese scholar, Sakurai Tokutarō, who has carried out extensive studies of contemporary *itako* in Japan, described rituals and séances in the Rikuzen district for calling up both the recently deceased (new ghosts) and those who have been dead for some time (old ghosts). Blacker paraphrases one of his accounts of a séance led by a local medium (*ogamisan*).

Sakurai described an old ghost-calling which he witnessed at the spring equinox of 1966 at the village of Kisenuma in Miyagi prefecture. Ten women of all ages were crowded into a six-mat room, one of whom acted as *toiguchi* or interrogator to the medium. This assignment

¹⁴ DeMallie (ed.), *The Sixth Grandfather* 3-7, 214-35. The *heyoka* cult was composed of people who had had a vision of the Thunder-beings and who were accordingly obliged at times to behave in a clownish or aberrant manner (Powers, *Oglala Religion* 57).

¹⁵ DeMallie (ed.), *The Sixth Grandfather* 235-40. As noted in chapter 3, María Sabina used the mushroom spirits as visionary guides and to reveal knowledge to be used in healing.

¹⁶ Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow* chaps. 2-3.

was held to be an important one, since on the skill of the questioner largely depended the success of the medium's utterance.

As in the case of new ghosts, it was necessary to summon myriads of *kami* first, who were present in a tutelary capacity throughout the rite. Then, one by one, in due order of seniority, all the family's ancestral ghosts were summoned. First the corporate Ancestor was called, then the grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins.

The interrogator called upon the Ancestor, "*Hai, senzosama, o-tanomi mōshimasu . . .*" Whereupon the Ancestor launched into a long admonitory speech. Always remember to be courteous to friends and relations, he advised. Don't neglect the mortuary tablets. Be extra careful on May 6th . . . If a member of the company sought his counsel on any particular subject—on building a house, for example, or arranging a marriage—she could put the question to the Ancestor through the interrogator.

When the Ancestor's speech was concluded, the interrogator called, "Next, father-in-law!" The *ogamisan* then transmitted father-in-law's message: work hard, don't forget to pay attention to us, and be careful not to catch cold next month.

The interrogator then called, "Next ghost, mother-in-law!" Through the medium, mother-in-law described her grief in leaving all her family and friends so suddenly, told her daughter-in-law to take care to bring up the children properly, and warned the company against colds and accidents on certain dates.

Thereafter ghost after ghost was called; the husband's sister, his younger brother, his nephew, the wife's parents, brothers and sisters, the daughter's husband, the small nephew drowned at the age of five, and lastly the *muenbotoke*, any "unrelated ghost" who might wish to speak.

Some of the ghosts were extremely talkative, their utterance continuing for some forty or fifty minutes. Others were briefer. But irrespective of the length of the speech, the medium received 30 yen for each one. The audience eagerly took notes of what each ghost had said. Most utterances, however, Sakurai recognised as falling into fixed types or *kata*, with which the audience was familiar.¹⁷

The ascetic exercises mostly practical powers for the benefit of the community or the ascetic's own personal benefit. These include the ability to perform exorcisms (of ghosts or witch animals), to sanctify a temple or mountain ("to 'open' a holy place"), and to control and communicate with animals. The *yamabushi* also sometimes exercise more showy powers such as walking on fire, dousing themselves with

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 152-56; the quotation is on pp. 155-56.

boiling water, and ascending a ladder of sharp swords. The exorcisms can be done alone or with the help of a medium.

As an example of an ascetic, I have chosen Mrs Hiroshima Ryūun, who wandered through Japan as a peripatetic healer in the years before and during the Second World War. One of her disciples recorded some of her adventures in a handwritten book, which Mrs Hiroshima's daughter made available to Blacker in 1972. Mrs Hiroshima was called to shamanhood by the legendary ascetic Enno Gyōja in a vision. After three years of intensive *gyō* she gained mighty powers of healing and vision, along with a patron deity who aided her work. Blacker relates the exorcism of a wandering ghost which is described in the book:

Mrs Hiroshima, respectfully referred to throughout the book as "sensei," master, was summoned to the house of a Mr Morimoto near Nara, whose baby was suffering from an obstinate swelling on the shoulder which the doctors were powerless to cure.

Sensei at once began to recite the Heart Sutra in front of the sick child. Soon there appeared to her clairvoyant eyes three spirits flashing like stars.

"Who are you?" she enquired.

"We are spirits belonging to this house," they replied. "We all died young and poor, with no descendants to care for us. We therefore make the Morimoto child sick in order to draw attention to our plight. Please tell the people here to recite requiem masses for us, and then we will let the child get well and act as guardians to it into the bargain. We are buried in the ground to the south of this house."

When Mr Morimoto was told the tale, he remembered that some years before an uncle of his had been buried near the house, together with his two wives, who one after the other had died without children. Thus the family had died out, and no one had performed any of the necessary requiems for the dead spirits. It was quite natural, he realised, that they should call attention to themselves by making his baby ill. But as soon as the correct masses were said and offerings made, needless to say the child recovered at once.¹⁸

Finally, we note again that Deguchi Onisaburō was guided through many other worlds by a divine messenger and was told by the king of the underworld that "he was to become the messiah between the two worlds." This spirit gave him a spell that protected him in the

¹⁸ Ibid., 172-73, 235-43; the quotation is on p. 243. For more exorcisms and miracles by Japanese ascetics see *ibid.*, chaps. 12 and 15.

underworld and allowed him to redeem the souls of the dead. His vision led him to become cofounder of the new religion Ōmoto.¹⁹

These examples illustrate Hultkrantz's point that the visionary otherworldly journey is not a requirement for shamanism. Shamans frequently have such experiences: Sereptie, Nick Black Elk, and Deguchi Onisaburō were taken on otherworldly journeys in which they were guided by helping spirits. But the two Inuit shamans as well as Japanese mediums and modern Japanese ascetics experience no such journeys. Indeed, shamans invoke spirits for many other purposes. In the examples given above, spirits were called to aid in a wide array of activities, including divination, healing, psychopompy, prognostication, protection of the shaman, interpretation of visions, necromancy, and exorcism of ghosts. A central feature of shamanism is control of the spirits, not visionary journeys.

Control of the Spirits in the Hekhalot Literature

The control of spirits (almost always angels) is also central to the practices attributed to the functionaries of the Hekhalot literature. Indeed, it is not too much to say that this power is the linchpin that holds together the disparate praxes and concepts in the Hekhalot texts. The power of spirits is bent to the will of the practitioner for a number of purposes. I have divided the relevant texts into three categories below (although it will become obvious that there is considerable overlap). First, the Prince of Torah and other angels are summoned or invoked so that they will give the human adept, immediately and without effort, the knowledge of Torah which is normally acquired only after years of arduous study. Second, angels may be called on to guide the initiate on the otherworldly journey, or contrariwise, angels guarding the entrances to the various levels of the otherworld may be placated or neutralized by the recitation and presentation of names and seals. Third, a scattering of passages involve several other uses of spirits. They can be adjured to grant wishes or give generic power, to pass on knowledge, or to protect the practitioner from other (hostile or demonic) spirits.

¹⁹ Ibid., 133, 138, 202–207.

Invoking the Prince of Torah

Many of the texts translated and analyzed in chapter 4 have to do with compelling angels to grant instant knowledge of Torah. Material in the *Sar Torah* text (§§299–303) involves ascetic practices, the invocation of the Prince of Torah, and the adjuration of numerous angels. Although the passage promises that the practitioner will be granted knowledge of Bible, Mishnah, and the vision of the chariot, no actual interactions with angels are described.²⁰

Such is not the case with many other texts in this category. The *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (§§560–65) prescribes a rigorous ascetic regime that includes forty days of fasting, the drawing of a circle of power, incantations, and invocation of the Prince of Torah and other angels. R. Ishmael follows these instructions, but when he tries to give up his fast on the twelfth day, the angel of the Presence descends and wrathfully orders him to finish the full forty days. R. Ishmael dismisses the angel with a spell but is cowed into completing his fast. Afterward, the angel of the Presence, accompanied by angels of mercy, descends once again, this time benevolently, and grants the adept esoteric wisdom.

A similar story appears in *Perekh R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah* (§§307–14). R. Ishmael tries unsuccessfully to learn scripture for three years. Then his master, R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah, takes him into the Temple treasury and teaches him a technique that includes the adjuration of Metatron with many names and the recitation of a set number of divine names. After learning the name of the Prince of Torah from his teacher, R. Ishmael fasts for forty days and invokes this prince. Unfortunately, the angel takes the summons with exceptional ill grace, demanding to know who Ishmael thinks he is to disturb the heavenly realm and addressing him as “Mortal, putrid drop, maggot, and worm!” The last section of the unit consists of further instructions for invoking the Prince of Torah, and these may or may not have been construed by the editor as the concluding comments of the inconvenienced angel.

²⁰ In *Hekhalot Zutarti* §336, R. Akiva ascends to God, who teaches him divine names to invoke in order to obtain a perfect memory of Torah. Although the praxis is revealed by God and not the spirits, the recitation of divine names is a sort of adjuration and it is unclear here, as often, whether these names are of God or of angels. A very similar story about Moses is found in §340 (MS New York 8128 only).

The *Merkavah Rabba* contains a narrative (§§677–84) that overlaps a great deal with this one. The passage describes R. Ishmael's frustration with learning and R. Nehuniah's revelation that ended the problem. No encounter with an angel occurs, but the praxis in §682, like its parallel in §310, includes an adjuration of Metatron under numerous other names. In addition, R. Nehuniah warns his protégé that he is in danger of being assaulted and killed by angels unless he carefully carries out the ascetic practices and adjurations prescribed in the text (§681).

Another passage in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (§§573–78) combines the manipulation of *materia* with ascetic praxes and the adjuration of angels to give the practitioner perfect memory of Torah. Finally, a passage in G8 describes how R. Ishmael invokes the Prince of Torah and through him adjures three other princes so as to fall into a visionary trance that gives him the power to expound the scriptures for the next year and a half.

*Negotiating the Otherworldly Journey*²¹

Control of angelic beings is also crucial for the otherworldly journey. The most detailed account of the journey is found in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§§198–237). In an assembly of the academy, R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah describes the ritual praxes to be used in the descent to the chariot. First, Suriah, Prince of the Presence, must be adjured by reciting the proper divine names exactly 112 times. This act starts the practitioner on his way. He must then pass through the gateways of the seven concentric heavenly palaces until he reaches the enthroned Deity in the central throne room. Each gateway is guarded by increasingly horrific hostile angels who must be placated by the presentation of "seals" (*nomina barbara*) as the adept approaches them. At the sixth palace, in addition to presenting the proper seals, the descender to the chariot must assure the angel Dumiel of either his knowledge of Torah or his pious conduct on earth. Then the adept rides in a luminous wagon to the seventh palace, where he must show the angels there "a great seal and a fearsome crown." Only after successfully negotiating all these obstacles is he permitted to listen to the heavenly choir around the throne of God.

²¹ Most of the passages cited in this section have been translated or discussed in chapter 6.

Two other well-known tests by spirits appear in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*: the threshold test (§258), in which the descender to the chariot must wait until the second invitation from the angels before crossing the threshold of the sixth palace, and the water test (§259), in which he must avoid being taken in by the illusion of being engulfed by waves of water. Failure in either test can result in instant death at the hands of the angels.

The overcoming of hostile spirits during the otherworldly journey is also a theme in the *Hekhalot Zutarti*. In §346 (*//Merkavah Rabba* §673), R. Akiva reports that he made marks on the entrances to the firmament, which gave him protection from angels of violence. Accounts of the threshold test and water test are repeated in §§407–408, followed by additional instructions on how to negotiate the water test and the angels in the sixth palace (§§409–10). The successful adept is seated before God's throne and is allowed to gaze at him (§§411–12). Another set of instructions for the journey to the throne of God appears in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§413–19 in the name of R. Akiva. According to this passage, one must learn the names of the angelic gatekeepers of the seven palaces as well as the seal that controls each. The names and seals are given, and the practitioner is told to show each the proper seal until in the seventh palace he is placed in the bosom of 'ZBWGH YHWH, God of Israel, a name of either an angel or of God himself, and this divine being will grant whatever the practitioner requests.

In *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §595, R. Ishmael asks R. Akiva how to direct one's visionary gaze above the seraphim who are above God's head. R. Akiva then tells his disciple how he himself ascended to the seventh palace and, once, there invoked two angels, whom he names. These angels, it appears, enabled him to see above the seraphim.²²

In *3 Enoch*, R. Ishmael is protected from the hostility of the angels by the mighty angel Metatron and then is led on a tour of the otherworld by the same angel.

²² Two other passages in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* may bear on the control of angels during the visionary journey. R. Ishmael is told in §565, "A man like you—if he descended without the permission of PNKRM YHWH, God of Israel, He destroyed him." It is not entirely clear whether the divine being whose permission is needed is God or an angel. And in §570, R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah tells R. Ishmael that one who wishes to have a vision of the Shekhinah by means of recitation of divine names "prays a prayer with all his vigor and the Shekhinah is beloved to him, and He gives him leave to have a vision, and he is not harmed." The nature of the potential harm is not specified, but normally harm on the visionary journey comes from hostile spirits.

In the Seal of the Descent to the Chariot (G8), the angel Ozhayah gives R. Ishmael instructions on how to negotiate the descent to the chariot safely, without suffering attack from other angels. The adept must invoke the name of this angel and call on him at each palace to receive his protection. Ozhayah also promises to come to his aid to keep him from expiring on the floor of the sixth palace. In the seventh palace the adept is welcomed by the angelic Youth, who must not receive worship but who will seat any human being who has come this far on his lap. The purpose of the seating is not mentioned, but it may involve the granting of wishes as in §419 and G21 1a 11–13a. A vision also seems to be involved in the adjuration passage in G8 titled the Prince of Torah That Belongs to It, a vision that seems to deal with both the heavenly palaces and Sar Torah knowledge.

*Other Uses of the Spirits*²³

The Hekhalot practitioners often call on the angels for other services. In the story of the ten martyrs in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§§107–21), R. Ishmael is made to descend to the chariot by his mentor, R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah. There Suriah, Prince of the Presence, explains the reasons in the celestial sphere which led to the current persecution of Israel by the Romans (§108). Later in the story (§§117–19) R. Ishmael receives three more revelations from Suriah about the persecution, which are narrated without any indication that he descended to the chariot first.²⁴

I have already noted the climax of the ascent in §§418–19 of the *Hekhalot Zutarti*, wherein the ascender is told to request whatever he

²³ Most of the texts discussed in this section have been translated or analyzed in chapter 4 or 6.

²⁴ A number of texts are included in one or a few manuscripts of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* but are separate compositions whose connection with the Hekhalot literature is debatable to a greater or lesser degree. I note relevant material from these for the sake of completeness. The David Apocalypse (§§122–26) appears only in MSS New York 8128, Budapest 238, and Leiden Or. 4730. In this narrative R. Ishmael is seated on the lap of the Prince of the Presence and given revelations about the fate of Israel and a vision of David enthroned in messianic glory. In the *Aggada* of R. Ishmael (§§130–38, MS New York 8128 only), he receives angelic revelations about future history. In the Messiah Raises the Dead (§§140–46, MS New York 8128 only), Metatron and another angel reveal to R. Ishmael the career of the coming suffering and victorious messiah, and still another angel shows R. Ishmael cosmological secrets.

wants. Another passage a few sections later, just preceding instructions for a forty-day ritual, tells how to gain control of the angel Anaphiel.

(§421) Anaphiel said:

Anyone who seeks to pray this prayer and to obtain understanding of the work of his Creator must invoke for himself one of these letters. Again, I will not turn to my right or to my left until I turn and do his will for him. And anyone who tells gossip about him—at once I smite him and destroy him, apart from the angel who is sent by the King of Glory, HY YWD 'LP HY YWD G'YYH SSYH 'LPP THŠ MŠYYM H' 'YHH RWQ WYW HY WHY HY 'BDR HYM M'HWBYM YS' NYS H' MLYYS YHW YHW 'Y HYY HH, the great, mighty, fearsome, grand, and strong God Who is hidden from the eyes of all creatures and kept secret from the attending angels, but is revealed to R. Akiva by the working of the chariot to do his desire.

As it is written, "each who calls on My name, and for My glory I created him" (Isa 43:7), so let him do my will and my desire and my request and all that I ask. Amen. Amen. Selah. YHWH is King, YHWH is King, YHWH will be King forever and ever.

Although it is not entirely clear from which letters the practitioner is to choose or where the incantation starts, this passage certainly maintains that one can compel Anaphiel both to grant wishes and to give protection.²⁵ The ritual in §§422–24 is linked not only with ascent and descent to the chariot, but also to the promise of general blessing and protection against the accusation of "satan and stroke" during the year. A gloss in the last section indicates that the ritual may be used to escape from prison.²⁶

The *Sar Panim* promises similar benefits to those who follow the procedures it gives for controlling the Prince of the Presence. In the introductory section, R. Akiva asks R. Eliezer the Great, "How do they adjure the Prince of the Presence to descend to earth in order to reveal to a man mysteries above and below, and some of the

²⁵ Another version of this section is found in G8 2b 44–49, in which the same angel asserts that, far from granting aid, he will attack and destroy anyone who invokes him!

²⁶ In MS New York 8128 §§511–16 (§§512 has parallels in MS Oxford 1531 and in §543 of MS Munich 22) we find a group of adjurations of divine names and angels, mixed with Merkavah hymns and ascetic rituals, which are intended for various purposes including protection from harm and demons, healing of the sick, general success, extinguishing of fire, and even raising of the dead. It is unclear to what degree we should consider this material to be part of the Hekhalot literature. For the dream interpretation adjurations in §§501–507, 17, see chapter 8.

searchings of the foundations of above and below, and the dark things of wisdom, and the shrewdness of abiding success?" (§623). Although he is warned by his master of the extraordinary dangers involved in invoking this angel, R. Akiva insists on learning the ritual and adjurations for doing so. One of the adjurations commands the Prince of the Presence, "I adjure you and I decree concerning you that you must again be bound to my will and accept the adjuration of my decree and do what I ask and fulfill my request," and then orders the angel not to do the adjurer any harm (§627). Amid a flurry of adjurations and fragments of cosmological speculation we also read the following:

(§634) By them (inscrutable divine names enumerated before this section) I adjure you, I decree and establish concerning you that you must make haste to descend beside me—I am so-and-so, son of so-and-so—you, and not your emissary. And in your descent you must not prey on my mind. You shall reveal to me all of the searchings of the mysteries of above and below and the secrets of the stored-up things above and below and the mysteries of understanding and the shrewdness of abiding success, like a man who talks with his associate.

The text concludes with an Aramaic adjuration against evil spirits:

(§639b) With these fearsome and powerful names that darken the sun and thrust aside the moonlight and overturn the day and split the stone and quench the fire, I adjure spirits and dēws, demons and satans: you must go far and depart from so-and-so, son of so-and-so.

The *Ma'aseh Merkavah* provides seals, invocations, and rituals for protection from hostile angels and harmful demons in §§560–66, and incantations in §§568–69 designed to protect against "angels and harmful demons" and "the angels who stand behind the holy living creatures." In *Merkavah Rabba* §§659–70 we find a passage that is closely related to the Sar Torah material in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§573–78, but which includes the recitation of the prayers of the angels in the various firmaments for the purpose of having one's prayers heard. The *Merkavah Rabba* also describes in detail the earthly and spiritual benefits of reciting *Shi'ur Qomah* traditions (§§705–706), including protection from spirits and demons. In G19 there is an adjuration of Metatron which seeks a favorable answer to prayer. G21 seeks the granting of wishes and protection from evil spirits, and the myth of the ascent of Moses on the same fragment implies that the readers had an interest in spirits of healing.

The Spirits in the Hekhalot Literature

According to the model of the shamanic complex presented in chapter 2, the spirits normally associated with shamans can be either those of animals, or of human ancestors, or of deceased former shamans. The cross-cultural evidence surveyed in this chapter compels us to nuance this generalization. The Siberian, Inuit, Lakota, and Japanese shamans we have looked at indeed have to do with theriomorphic spirits, and the Japanese shamans with ancestor spirits or ghosts as well, but they also encounter other types. Perhaps it would be most accurate to say that these other spirits represent or embody natural forces (madness, illness, thunder, fire, *kami*, etc.). I might add that the exact nature of some of the spirits who act as guides on visionary journeys remains elusive.

When we turn to the Hekhalot literature, the picture is somewhat different. Almost all of the spirits encountered by the practitioners are angels, and most of these appear to be in human form. A few of the most exalted and least controllable angels—the living creatures and perhaps the cherubim—come in roughly theriomorphic form, but they do not represent specific earthly animals. Two other classes of angels, the *galgalim* and *ophannim*, apparently take the form of wheels (of the chariot), since this is what the words mean. The subduing of demons is also mentioned. Ancestor spirits are alluded to briefly in 3 *Enoch* 43–44 and G12 but these play no active role in either narrative. The only deceased (or more accurately, deified) former practitioner who appears is Metatron, the translated patriarch Enoch, but he plays an important role in the Hekhalot literature as guide and model for the practitioners. Animal spirits and forces of nature do not figure in the corpus at all.

A number of reasons for the differences from the model can be advanced. Angels are the most important spirits in the Jewish tradition, so it would be natural that Jewish shamans should encounter them, just as Japanese shamans encounter the *kami* of the Shinto tradition. Spirits in the form of animals are not found in the biblical and Jewish traditions, perhaps because of the hostility in the Bible to the indigenous Palestinian nature worship (Deut 7:1–5; 12:1–4) and to iconographic representation of divine or earthly creatures (Deut 4:15–18; 5:8–9), and also due to caution toward theriomorphic representations arising from the story of the golden calf (Ps 106:19–20). Likewise, necromancy is strictly prohibited in the Priestly

and Deuteronomistic traditions (Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut 18:9–12; 1 Samuel 28), which presumably would have deterred practitioners from consulting dead intermediaries. Nevertheless, it is duly noted that the preponderance in the Hekhalot literature of humanoid but nonhuman spirits with no connection to specific natural forces is a departure from the model.

Conclusions

Control of the spirits is central both to shamans and to the practitioners portrayed in the Hekhalot literature. Shamans wield power over and communicate with animal spirits, the human spirits of ancestors or shamans of the past, and spirits of the forces of nature. The spirits are used for a wide variety of purposes, such as to guide the adept on the otherworldly journey, to help in healing and exorcism, and to grant knowledge of earthly and unearthly matters. The descenders to the chariot usually deal with anthropomorphic angels, although one of these is also a divinized human being. The angel is made to grant immediate knowledge of Torah or other revelations, to act as guides on the otherworldly journey, to refrain from harming the practitioner or even to protect him from misfortune and demons, and to grant wishes. One passage hints at the use of spirits for healing, but this idea is not developed. There is undoubtedly a significant overlap with the shamanic model, but there are also deviations. Angels are rather different creatures from the spirits usually associated with shamans, and the use to which they are put is mostly directed to the benefit or protection of the practitioner rather than to the service of a community. But it is precisely at this nexus between the last two elements of the model that the problems our analysis faces become more complicated.

The ideas of control of the spirits and service to a community confront us with a difficulty that for the most part has been avoided in previous chapters: how exactly are we to define the parameters of the Hekhalot literature? Up to this point I have focused on the traditional macroforms and microforms in the medieval manuscripts or on the closely related Geniza fragments published by Gruenwald and Schäfer. But even so, we have noted certain ambiguities, such as whether the David Apocalypse, the adjurations in §§511–17, or the *Sheva' Zutarti* belong to our corpus. It is to some degree a cir-

cular question, since the contents of the corpus depend on how we define it in the first place. For the purposes of this analysis, however, the most useful definition is as follows: we are interested in any and all texts that present themselves as instruction for the constellation of Jewish intermediaries whom this literature sometimes calls the “descenders to the chariot.”

We have already encountered one genre of texts outside the Hekhalot canon which gives us additional information—the physiognomic tractates. Does this exhaust the relevant literature? There are good reasons for thinking not. The texts surveyed in chapter 2 under the elusive rubric “magical literature” have many close connections with the Hekhalot literature. We turn to these in the next chapter in order to learn what portion of this material can be assigned with confidence to the people who produced the Hekhalot literature, and what else the relevant texts tell us about rituals these people transmitted for making use of the spirits as well as the life situation and social context of the writers and of the people who used these rituals. Thus the eighth chapter is a transitional one that addresses the last two elements of the model. Chapter 9 will conclude the exploration of the communities behind the Hekhalot literature.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE HEKHALOT LITERATURE AND OTHER JEWISH TEXTS OF RITUAL POWER

Aims and Methodology

In the next two chapters I move to considering broadly the people who produced the Hekhalot literature and the social situation they inhabited. The question to which I return at the end of chapter 9 is, To what degree did the life situation and vocation of these practitioners, as described in the texts and deduced from whatever other resources we can recover, correspond to shamanic-service to a community. But the path to the answer to this question is a meandering one. This chapter explores the connections between the Hekhalot literature and the texts of ritual power generally known as the Jewish "magical" literature. This is a very large topic, more than one element of which deserves a full-scale study in its own right. In the limited space available I can hope only to hit the high points that are directly relevant to the problems explored in this book.

It has often been noted that the Hekhalot literature and the Jewish "magical" literature have numerous similarities, most of which are not characteristic of other Jewish literature. They assume similar cosmologies, employ rhetorically similar adjurations for practical (and impractical) purposes, invoke *nomina barbara*, and fairly frequently write out the Tetragrammaton instead of using an abbreviation. Medieval manuscripts often have both types of text together.¹ The problem that I will address in this chapter is that of explaining these similarities. What is the relationship between the two types of texts of ritual power, and what connections are there between the two groups of writers which produced them? It is reasonable to guess that there is some overlap, but its nature cries out for elucidation. I begin the comparison and analysis on a strictly literary level, but

¹ Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic," 361-64; Schiffman and Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts* 24-26; Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae* 17-20; Davila, "The Hekhalot Literature and Shamanism," 783-84; Shaked, "Peace Be upon You, Exalted Angels."

in due course I explore the implications of the literary parallels for the life situations and social contexts of the people who produced the documents.

The method for evaluating the literary parallels requires some discussion. The first aim of the comparison is to locate texts of ritual power outside the Hekhalot corpus which share significant concerns with the Hekhalot literature, so some types of parallel are more important than others. The criteria, in ascending order of significance, add up to something like the following. Less significant parallels are the more general ones attested widely not only in texts of ritual power but also in Jewish literature overall, such as the celestial cosmography involving seven heavens, multitudes of angels, and speculation about the scene in the divine throne room. Somewhat more significant are ideas and practices central to the Hekhalot literature, but so widely attested in the other texts of ritual power that they offer little focus to our analysis and put us in danger of circular reasoning if overemphasized. These include adjurations and seals of power to control angels and demons for various purposes, the use of ascetic practices to gain power, and invocation of angel names and *nomina barbara*. Both sorts of parallel become more significant as they deal with figures of particular importance in the Hekhalot literature, such as the angels Metatron, Anaphiel, Suriah, the Prince of the Presence, and Rabbis Ishmael, Akiva, and Nehuniah ben HaQanah. A sustained complex of such parallels in a given text is of considerable interest but ultimately must count as only circumstantial evidence.

Very significant evidence includes, first of all, texts of ritual power which have embedded in them passages found also in the Hekhalot literature. In such cases one could always argue that another type of practitioner was quoting a Hekhalot passage for a purpose outside its original intent, but the burden of proof would be on the one who made such a claim. The Babylonian incantation bowls and many of the ritual power texts from the Cairo Geniza provide evidence dating from some centuries earlier than the medieval manuscripts containing the major Hekhalot macroforms, and Hekhalot passages found in them are our earliest evidence for how the material was used and thus must be taken very seriously.

Another very significant type of parallel would be texts that use terminology or concepts central to the concerns of the Hekhalot literature, peripheral to the interests of other Jewish texts of ritual

power, and unattested or exceedingly rare elsewhere in Jewish literature. These would include mention of the Prince of Torah, the use of ascetic practices and adjurations to compel him to grant a perfect memory of Torah, claims that a practitioner ascends to heaven to gain divine power or to participate in the celestial liturgy, and references to the “descent to the chariot” or “descenders to the chariot.” The more circumstantial parallels accompanying the significant ones, the more compelling becomes the case for a direct connection with the authors of the Hekhalot literature.

Comparison of the Hekhalot Literature to Other Texts of Ritual Power

The Metal Amulets

These amulets, of roughly the Talmudic era, have numerous superficial similarities to the Hekhalot literature, such as the adjurations of angels and demons, the invocation of angels, the use of *nomina barbara*, and references to the throne of God.² The most significant one for our purposes is A21, inscribed on silver and of unknown provenance.³ The right column, of which twelve lines are fairly well preserved, consists mostly of *nomina barbara* with a list of names of angels in approximately alphabetical order. A similar list appears in the work *Sheva' Zutarti*, a work whose relationship to the Hekhalot literature is discussed below.⁴ The middle column consists simply of the word מְכוּנָה, “their abode,” above a crude drawing. The word “Abode” is traditionally a name of one of the seven firmaments and is used of the divine celestial abode in the Hekhalot literature. The drawing can be interpreted to be a ladder, in which case the implication is that it portrays a ladder leading up to the heavenly abode of the angels. We saw in chapter 6 that the *Hekhalot Rabbati* compares the descender to the chariot to someone with a ladder that leads to the throne of God. Thus this amulet may hint at a heavenly ascent along the lines of that found in the Hekhalot literature. This being the

² See, for example, Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* A7, pp. 69–77; idem, *Magic Spells and Formulae* A28, pp. 95–98; Kotansky, “Two Inscribed Jewish Aramaic Amulets from Syria,” Amulet B, pp. 274–80.

³ Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae* 68–72.

⁴ G13 2a 4–7. For lists in this work arranged along the same principle, cf. G13 2b 9–11; G14 1a 9–11; G16 1a 1–3; 1b 9–13; G17 1a 21–26.

case, the purpose of the amulet is noteworthy. The six surviving lines in the lefthand column reads as follows:

[. . .] the great God Who will
 give healing to MLK
 son of GWZW from a spirit
 and from a demon and from [. . .]
 and from [. . .]
 Amen. Amen(!). Amen.

The purpose of the amulet is to heal the client of affliction by hostile spirits, and one might speculate that the practitioner associated his own heavenly ascent with the process.

Inscribed Bowls from Babylonia

The contents of these inscribed bowls indicate that they were produced in various subcultures: a given bowl may be of Jewish, Christian, Mandaean, or indigenous polytheistic origin, although there is frequently much overlap in the traditions. I have limited my consideration here to those bowls transmitting clearly Jewish traditions. Most of these are written in the square Aramaic script, although two bowls important for our purposes are written in the Syriac script. The Babylonian bowls have many superficial similarities to the Hekhalot literature, overall rather more than those found in the Syro-Palestinian metal amulets. These will become apparent in my analysis of more significant parallels below.

At least one inscribed bowl includes adjuration text found also in the Hekhalot literature. I translate Montgomery's bowl 25 in full, taking into account corrections and restorations suggested by Epstein and Lesses.⁵

¹[He]aling from heaven for GWRYW, son of T'ṬY, and for 'HT, daughter of DWD', his wife. May there depart from them all dē[ws and may] they [be healed] by the mercies of heaven from children who die to them, so that they may have children and they l[ive. ²May those who] have died find themselves in the presence of the gods and

⁵ Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantations Texts* 207–208; Epstein, "Gloses babylonaméennes," *REJ* 74 (1922) 53–54; Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 354–59. See also Alexander, "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," 165–67; Shaked, "Peace Be upon You, Exalted Angels," 201–203. Unless otherwise noted, I follow Epstein's readings where they differ from Montgomery's and Lesses's readings where she differs from either of them.

goddesses,⁶ and the gods and goddesses ???.⁷ You are a pr[ince over pr]inces, and your chariot is over all the ophannim. Send to them⁸ LHRDRBDWBR [. . .]⁹L, the lord of all, Whose [Tor]ah⁹ of mercy is placed in my mouth and all of [his]¹⁰ w[ays] are law. Blessed are You, YHWH, on account of the words of the name. In the name of ⁴YWPY'L—your name is YHW'L, they call you ŠSNGY'L YH YH—and all the re[st of] their names. [R]MSH Metatron YH. In the name of ṬGYN ⁵TRYGYS BLBYS ŠNGS ŠDRPS. These are the angels who bring healing [to all] the sons of men. May they ⁶come and ascend with the healing of the people of [his] household and of his cattle and of his wife and of [his] so[n] and of his daughter and all the people in his household, ⁷for this GWRYW, son of ṬṬY, from this day and for eternal ages. Amen. Amen. Selah. Hallelujah.

⁶ For line 2a I follow the interpretation of Shaul Shaked, given in a private communication.

⁷ I do not know how to translate this damaged word. One could read [ב]שֵׁם, “[in] the name of,” with Montgomery, but this reading is difficult to make sense of in context; or one could read [ה]שֵׁים, “May (the gods and the goddesses) hurry” or “attend to (the ghosts)” with Epstein, but mimmation of the plural participle is Hebrew, not Aramaic.

⁸ Reading לְהוֹם, with Montgomery, rather than לְהִיָּה, which Epstein takes as a mistake for לֵה or לִיָּה, “to him.” The copy could support either reading, but Montgomery’s makes better sense in context (the antecedent is the husband and wife in line 1) and requires no emendation.

⁹ Reconstructing אֲוִרִיָּהָ, with Lesses. The reconstruction is based on the parallels in the *Ši'ur Qomah* (see n. 11, below). Shaked reads the parallel in the Hermitage bowl as מַרְהוֹן מִשְׁרִיזִיָּה, “the lord of his camp,” and suggests that a similar reading (אֲוִרִיָּהָ מִשְׁרִיזִיָּה, “the lord of the whole [camp]”) be restored here, although, curiously, he translates the phrase in Montgomery 25 as “the master of all the [deities?]” (see “Peace Be upon You, Exalted Angels,” 201, 203 and n. 44; the Hermitage bowl is published by A. Ja. Borisov in “Epigraficeskie zametki,” *Epigrafika Vostoka* 19 [1969] 3–13, esp. pp. 9, 11). Shaked’s suggestion is possible, but as Lesses notes, the parallels to Montgomery 25 cease immediately after this break in the Hermitage bowl, so there is no certainty that the two bowls are parallel in the lacuna (*Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 357 n. 386). A number of considerations favor the reading “Torah” in Montgomery 25. There is the unanimous testimony of the *Ši'ur Qomah* manuscripts and the Cairo Geniza text for the reading; moreover, the angel adjured here is Metatron, the Prince of Torah, so it is entirely reasonable that the practitioner should call on the power of the Torah. The mention of “law” (דִּין) later in the same line also coheres with the reading. The phrase “lord of all” is attested in the Hekhalot and related literature in both Hebrew (אֲדוֹן הַכֹּל; e.g., *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §551; *Sar Panim* §636) and Aramaic (מַרְהוֹן; *SH-L* §493), whereas the phrase “lord of (all) the camps” is not attested elsewhere in the inscribed bowls or in the Hekhalot literature. Finally, although the phrase “the Torah of mercy” is not found in these texts, the Hekhalot literature frequently associates the idea of Torah with that of mercy (*3 Enoch* 8:2 [§11]; *SH-L* §§149, 326; *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§549, 565; *Merkavah Rabba* §706; cf. Ps 119:77).

¹⁰ Perhaps reconstruct “[my].”

Alexander, Shaked, and Lesses have pointed to numerous connections between this bowl and the Hekhalot literature. Lesses notes that lines 2–3 are closely related to a passage found in various recensions of the *Shi'ur Qomah* and in a Geniza fragment of Sar Torah material. These texts aid the reconstruction and interpretation of the damaged and difficult text of the bowl.¹¹ An important aspect of the adjuration is the request of the practitioner to have Torah placed in his mouth, an element shared with the Sar Torah adjurations. Alexander points out that the angel Metatron, who is mentioned frequently in the bowls, is also known by the names YWPY'L and YHW'L (*3 Enoch* 48D:1 [§76]) and variants of SSNYGY'L (*3 Enoch* 18:11–12 [§25]), and that he seems to be identified with YHWH (both are addressed in the second person in the same blessing).¹² Shaked draws attention to a close parallel to the names and phrasing of line 4a in *SH-L* §397, more general parallels to the same line in *SH-L* §387 (cf. *Hekhalot Rabbati* §277), and many *nomina barbara* in the Hekhalot literature which resemble the name LHRDRBDWBR in line 3. He also points out that a bowl in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg contains the same text as lines 2b–3a (see n. 9).

This bowl is thus filled with both highly significant and circumstantial parallels with the Hekhalot literature. It was composed by someone who knew a version of a surviving Hekhalot adjuration that, at least in its later form, was used for gaining knowledge of

¹¹ The *Shi'ur Qomah* passages are in *Sepher Razi'el* 13–22 and *Sepher HaQomah* 6–9 (Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions* 78, 126). The Sar Torah text is G4 1a 9–14. The word אַרְיִיחָא is almost obliterated in the last text, but an *aleph* survives at the beginning of the word, precluding the reading of the Hermitage bowl.

¹² Other mentions of Metatron in the Babylonian bowls include the following. Gordon D, lines 10–11, refers to God “Who sent ‘Z’ and ‘Z’L and Metatron, the great prince of His throne” (cf. *3 Enoch* 4:6 [§6]; 5:9 [§8]) (Gordon, “Aramaic Magic Bowls in the Istanbul and Baghdad Museums,” 328–30). Gordon L, lines 12–13, invokes him in an exorcism: “and in the name of Metatron, the great prince of the whole world” (Gordon, “Aramaic and Mandaic Magic Bowls,” 94–95). Ashmolean 1932.620 invokes ‘Z’ and ‘Z’L in quadrant 1, lines 14–15, and in quadrant 2, line 10, reads, “In the name of Metat[ron], the great prince who is *king* over all . . .” (the word “king,” מֶלֶכָא, is damaged and uncertain) (Gordon, “Aramaic Incantation Bowls,” 279–280). In Gordon Teheran 1, line 5, the demons are subdued and sealed away from the client’s household “by the talisman of Metatron, the great prince, who is called the great healer of mercies . . .” The meaning of the damaged last two words, מְבַרְכֵי אֲשֵׁרָא, is uncertain.; Gordon translates tentatively, “that bless the season” (“Two Magic Bowls in Teheran,” 307). McCullough D, line 6, invokes for protection of a client “Metatron HLDH, who serves before the curtain” (McCullough, *Jewish and Mandaean Incantation Bowls* 30, 32, 35). The phrase “Metatron, Prince of the Presence” appears in Shaked Moussaieff 1, line 13 (see the discussion of this bowl later in this section).

Torah. The composer drew on names and beliefs about Metatron characteristic of the Hekhalot texts. In addition to confirming the early existence of such material in Babylonia, it also gives us valuable information about how the practitioners used this material. The bowl was composed for the “healing” (אָרְוִיחֵן) of a named couple and their household who seem to be suffering affliction from the restless spirits of deceased children. If the restoration in line 3a is correct, the practitioner is filled with the power of Torah, then invokes Metatron and his cohorts and calls on them to descend and heal (i.e., exorcise ghosts from) the household and then return to heaven. In chapter 6 we saw a hint of interest in healing in the story of Moses’ ascent (G21 2a 9b–13a), in which a series of princes of various human body parts come to him in heaven and reveal the adjurations to heal the member in question. In 3 *Enoch* 48D:6–10 (§§78–80) we are also told that Metatron (called, *inter alia*, the Prince of Torah) revealed a secret to Moses which could be used for the healing of diseases. This bowl provides concrete evidence for the actual use of such revelations for healing by a tradent of Hekhalot traditions.

Three bowls with nearly identical texts make explicit mention of the Prince of Torah. I translate the parallel texts of the two published by Gordon in 1934. The passage is repeated twice in both bowls.¹³

Sealed and resealed is the house¹⁴ of DZYDYN ŠBWR, son of ʿYLYŠBʿ, with seventy knots, with seventy fetters, with seventy seals, with ropes, with ???,¹⁵ with the signet-ring of YWKBRYWʿ, son of RBY, and with the signet-ring of mighty KSDYʿL, the angel prince of the Chaldeans, and with the seal-ring of mighty Michael, the Prince of Torah, and with the seal-ring of mighty Gabriel, the angel prince of fire, and with the seal-ring of ʿSPNDS DYWʿ, the jinnee of King Solomon, son of David, and with the great seal of the Lord of the world, Whose knot is not loosened and Whose seal is not broken. Blessed are You, YHWH, God of Israel. Amen. Amen. Selah.

¹³ Gordon, “Aramaic Magical Bowls in the Istanbul and Baghdad Museums,” 331–34 (bowls E and F). I have ignored obvious errors in both bowls (see Gordon’s commentary for these). The third text was published by H. Hyvernat in “Sur un vase judéo-babylonien du musée Lycklama de Cannes (Provence),” *Zeitschrift für Keilschriftforschung* 2 (1885) 113–48. This bowl is written for different clients and is somewhat longer, twice including an adjuration against a long list of specific demons, but it adds nothing else notable for our purposes.

¹⁴ Bowl F adds “and orchard.”

¹⁵ Gordon conjectures that the word זַמְרִי is a synonym for שְׁשִׁירָא, which I

We see in this text, first of all, the same preoccupation with seals and rings for controlling angels that we find in the Hekhalot literature.¹⁶ But the most notable point is the invoking of “the signet-ring of mighty Michael the Prince of Torah (אִיסְרָא דְאֹרִיחָא).” As far as I can determine, this is the earliest attestation of the angelic title Prince of Torah, which is elsewhere found only in the Hekhalot literature and a few other texts discussed below. Gordon takes it to mean merely that Michael is the prince of Israel (cf. Dan 10:13, 21) and therefore also prince of Israel’s Torah, but the evidence of the Hekhalot literature suggests a different interpretation. As has been noted often, Michael and Metatron have many similarities. For example, Alexander writes,

A proper estimate of Metatron must begin with the fact that he bears a striking resemblance to the archangel Michael. Both these angels stand in a peculiar relationship to Israel as Israel’s special heavenly advocate; both are High Priest of the heavenly tabernacle; both are chief of the angels; what is said in one text about Metatron is said in another about Michael, and *Metatron* appears as a manuscript variant for *Michael*.¹⁷

There is probably some sort of genetic connection between Michael and Metatron, although they are almost always distinguished in surviving literature. In the Hekhalot literature, according to *3 Enoch* 17:1, 3 (§21); *SH-L* §148; and *Merkavah Rabba* §664 (cf. §667), Michael is a separate angel; but a list of angels in *SH-L* §363 (MS New York 8128 only) identifies Metatron with Michael (and Gabriel, Raphael, and many others). In *Ma’aseh Merkavah* §576 (MS New York 8128 only), although Michael is not addressed as the Prince of Torah, he is invoked in a ritual for gaining supernatural aid in Torah study. Given the comparatively early date of this bowl incantation,¹⁸ it seems likely that in it Michael is thought of as another name for Metatron, who is often called the Prince of Torah.

translate as “ropes.” In place of these words, Hyvernat’s bowl reads כְּשִׁשִׁין אֲבָנֵי זִמְרָא, “with sixty stones of melody,” which may be closer to the original text.

¹⁶ Compare, for example, *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§219–36 and *Hekhalot Zūtarti* §§413–17.

¹⁷ Alexander, “The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch,” 162.

¹⁸ Perhaps late in the seventh century CE. The archaeological context of the bowls excavated in Nippur places them in the sixth or early seventh centuries (Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts* 102–105), but the presence of the word “jinnee” (גִּינְנִי or גִּינְנִי) in these bowls indicates that the text was composed long enough after the Islamic conquest for an Arabic word and Islamic concept to have been absorbed into the speech and folklore of the natives (cf. Gordon, “Aramaic Magical Bowls in the Istanbul and Baghdad Museums,” 320).

In Gordon's two bowls the angels and spirits are invoked to protect the named household, but the threat is not made explicit. In the third bowl, published by Hyvernāt, the sealing is against a long list of demons and spirits who are adjured to leave clients alone. Thus the practitioner includes the Prince of Torah among his divine allies against the forces of evil.

Heavenly ascents by practitioners are mentioned twice in the inscribed bowls. Two copies of a text in Syriac script (Montgomery 32 and 33) preserve a Jewish Aramaic adjuration containing a significant *historiola*. I translate the full text.¹⁹

¹This bowl is appointed for the sealing of the house ²and of the wife and of the son of DDYNWY, son of 'YSPNDRMYD, that there may depart from him the tormentress ³and bad dreams. I raise and I lift up a vessel;²⁰ it is a work that has been made ⁴like that which Rav Joshua bar Peraḥya sat and wrote against them: a dismissal²¹ against all the demons, dēws, ⁵satans, liliths, and no-gooders that are in the house of DDYNWY, son of 'YSPNDRMYD. Again, he wrote against them an eternal dismissal ⁶in the name of letter from within letters, letters from within letters, letters of the name, blank space from within blank space, by which were subdued²² ⁷heaven and earth and the mountains, and by which the heights were uprooted and by them were delivered up²³ sorcerers, demons, dēws, satans, liliths, and no-gooders,

¹⁹ Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts* 225–30. I give the lineation of Montgomery 32 and draw on the texts of both 32 and 33 to fill in damaged passages. Unless otherwise indicated I follow the corrections of Epstein in "Gloses babylo-araméennes," *REJ* 74 (1922) 46–49.

²⁰ For the meaning and etymology of פִּירָא, see Stephen A. Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) 84. My translation of the two preceding verbs presumes that before burying the bowl, the practitioner lifted it up while reciting the adjuration inscribed on it. But the meaning is not clear. Following Epstein, Shaul Shaked translates the phrase "I cast a lot and draw (?)" in "The Poetics of Spells: Language and Structure in Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity 1: The Divorce Formula and its Ramifications," in *Mesopotamian Magic: Textual, Historical, and Interpretive Perspectives*, edited by Tzvi Abusch and Karel van der Toorn (Groningen: Styx, 1999) 173–95; the quotation is on p. 176.

²¹ For this word (רִסְחָבְרִיאַ), see Shaul Shaked, "Bagdāna, King of the Demons, and Other Iranian Terms in Babylonian Aramaic Magic," in *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce*, ed. Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin and Pierre Lecoq (Acta Iranica 24–25, 2nd series; Leiden: Brill, 1985) 511–25, esp. pp. 512–13.

²² I translate line 6 as it appears in Montgomery 32, although it is probably somewhat corrupt. For possible emendations, see Epstein, "Gloses babylo-araméennes," *REJ* 74 (1922) 47; note the parallels in Montgomery 33 (the other copy) and 9 (translated below).

²³ I take אִירְחַסְרַךְ to be from the root $\sqrt{\text{סר}}$, "to transmit, deliver," which makes sense in this context.

⁸and by which he crossed over from the world and ascended above you on high and brought against you spells²⁴ of destruction for destruction and brought (them) out to bring you out ⁹of the house of DDYNWY, son of 'YSPNDRMYD, and from all that belongs to him. You are divorced by the dismissal, and it is bound and sealed and resealed, just as the demons of old did not break their word ¹⁰and the men of old were not diverted. Again, bound, sealed, and resealed is this dismissal in the name of YH YH YH YH YH YH YH YH¹¹. Amen. Amen. Selah.

¹¹Sealed and guarded are the house and residence of DDYNWY, son of 'YSPN[DRMYD], from the tormentress and bad dreams and curse. And may his wife and son be sealed and guarded ¹²from the tormentress and bad dreams and curse and vow and sor[cerers . . .] Amen.

The *historiola* in this bowl is of great importance for our analysis. In it we are told that Rav Joshua bar Peraḥya (a figure known from the rabbinic literature and other incantation bowls, on whom more below) produced adjurations like this one which involved manipulation of the letters of the divine name (cf. line 10) and which gave the user great powers over nature, spirits, and sorcerers. Moreover, he used these same adjurations to ascend to heaven and to return with spells of destruction to use against hostile spirits. The general similarities with the Hekhalot literature are obvious, but it is worth noting a close correspondence with a specific passage, *Hekhalot Zutarti* §349, which was quoted at the beginning of chapter 1 and which is analyzed along with its parallel (§361) in the next chapter. Like Rav Joshua, the figure in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* “is able to ascend on high . . . to descend below,” and “to search out the inhabited world.” He is also able “to recite praise, to combine letters, to recite their names”—in other words, to manipulate letters and divine names to create words of power. This person also has great powers over the natural and spiritual worlds, for he is able “to see a vision on high, to see a vision below, to know the explanation of the living, and to see the vision of the dead, to walk in rivers of fire, and to know the lightning.” In this text Rav Joshua conforms well to the description of the practitioners in the Hekhalot literature.

The purpose of this bowl is to protect a particular man and his family (the names differ in the two bowls) from malign influences, including various types of hostile spirits, sorcerers, and bad dreams.

²⁴ For the word אַבְלָטִי, see Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:65.

As with the previous bowls, these applications are somewhat atypical compared to the adjurations in the Hekhalot literature. True, in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §566-R: Ishmael seals his body with seven seals against the angel of the Presence who figures in §§560-65; in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §83 it is said that the descender to the chariot "recognizes all sorcerers"; and easy dreams are promised to the reciter of the *Shi'ur Qomah* in *Merkavah Rabba* §705. But such benefits are mentioned only rarely and apply to the practitioner or his disciple rather than to a client.

The third bowl that mentions an ascent, Montgomery 9,²⁵ is written in the Aramaic language and script. Its contents are closely related to those of the two bowls in Syriac script, so much so that we must conclude that they are based on the same template, but this bowl is in some ways even more striking.

¹I raise and I [lift-up]-a vessel, and a work.²I have made, and it was at the court se[ssion] of Rabbi Joshua ³bar Peraḥya. I write for them bills of divorce, for all liliths who appear to them in this (house) ⁴of BBNWŠ son of QYWMT[^T], and of P(!)DR<D>WST, daughter of ŠYRYN, his wife, in a dream of the night and in sleep ⁵of the day, that is, a bill of divorce of dis[charge] and of release. In the name of letter from within letter and letters from within letters ⁶and name from within the names and blank space from within [the blank spaces] by which heaven and earth were subdued, the mountains were uprooted, and by them the heights were abased.²⁶ ⁷O demons, sorcerers, dēws, no-gooders, and liliths, by them perish from the world! Therefore I have ascended above you(!)²⁷ on high and I brought against you ⁸a destroyer to destroy you(!)²⁸ and to bring y[ou out] of their house and out of their residence and out of their threshold and from every [. . .] place of the bed of BBNWŠ, son of QYWMT, and of PDRDWST, daughter of ŠYRYN, his wife. And again, [may they] not [appear to

²⁵ Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts* 161-64. Unless otherwise indicated I follow the corrections of Epstein in "Gloses babylo-araméennes," *REJ* 73 (1921) 37-40. I have also taken into account Shaked's translation, commentary, and transcription in "The Poetics of Spells," 176-80, 188. In the same article, pp. 188-89, Shaked publishes a transcription of Bowl 11 in the Moussaieff collection, which is written for different clients but overlaps most of the text of Montgomery 9.

²⁶Or "were delivered up," as in Montgomery 32.7. But Epstein's derivation from $\sqrt{\text{סרע, סרר, סרה}}$ makes better sense here. On the basis of Montgomery's copy, Shaked prefers Montgomery's reading $\sqrt{\text{איחמסיאה}}$ and translates "melt away." The latter reading is supported by the text of Bowl Moussaieff 11.7.

²⁷Emended to $\sqrt{\text{עליכון}}$, with Montgomery 32.8. The text reads "above them" ($\sqrt{\text{עליון}}$).

²⁸Emended to $\sqrt{\text{עליכון}}$ on the basis of context. The text reads "against them" ($\sqrt{\text{עליון}}$).

them,] either in a dream of the night or in slee[p of the da]y. I discharge and dismiss y[ou] with a bill of divorce of disch[arge and] a dismissal document ¹⁰and a letter of release according to the law of the daughter of Israel.

(On the exterior of the bowl.) ¹¹I have made (it) for Your (sg.) name, YHWH, God of hosts, Gabriel and Michael and Raphael. Your (sg.) seal is on this sealing and on this threshold.²⁹ Amen. Amen. S[elah.]

In this bowl too we have manipulation of letters and divine names to generate ritual power. Although it appears in a quite different context here, the sealing of thresholds is reminiscent of the descenders to the chariot crossing the thresholds of the various celestial palaces by means of seals that subdue their guardians (e.g., *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§219–36). We should remark also on the apparent identification of YHWH with the three angels. The Hekhalot literature also sometimes fails to distinguish clearly between God and the angels (e.g., *Hekhalot Zutarti* §419; §597; but see also n. 29 above).

But the most notable parallel to the Hekhalot literature is the use of powerful adjurations, not by R. Joshua, but by the practitioner himself to ascend on high. This ascent is especially significant in that it is tied directly to the purpose of the bowl, to drive away demons who have been troubling the sleep of the clients. The practitioner serves these demons with divorce papers, a common strategy in the inscribed bowls, and then ascends to heaven to bring down a destroying angel who expels them from the household. The last element is somewhat reminiscent of the summoning of the Prince of the Presence in *Sar Panim* §§623–39. For good measure, the threshold is also sealed with the divine name to prevent any repossession. Once again, ritual practices found in the Hekhalot literature are used for the benefit of clients rather than just for the practitioner.

Leses has drawn attention to another bowl that contains traditions related to the Hekhalot literature, although in this case there are no verbal correspondences.³⁰ Bowl Moriah 1, published by Gordon in 1984, is a complex of adjurations for the protection of MH'NWS,

²⁹ For Montgomery's חזמוך ("Your [sg.] seal") Shaked reads חזימו ("they have sealed") and, putting a full stop after "God of hosts," he translates the rest of the line "Gabriel, Michael and Raphael signed this seal and this threshold. Amen. Amen, Amen, Selah." Shaked's reading is a possible emendation but the final *kap* is clear on Montgomery's copy.

³⁰ Leses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 359–62.

son of 'ZRMWDWK, his wife, Eve, and their children from the attacks of demons and "hated dreams."³¹ Their house, residence, and threshold are sealed and resealed against them with seven charms, seven fetters, seven seals, and seven other things, perhaps primordial names. Numerous kinds of demons are exorcised. The bowl goes on to mention a great seal (line 14), the sealing of the throne (line 15), and the wheels and living creatures (lines 15–16). After another adjuration against demons, we read, "For sealed and resealed in the name of Anaphiel, the angel who is different from after them, whose name is called MRGWG" (lines 17b–18a).³² More invocations of names to drive away the demons follow. Then we read,

^{21b}In the name of the epiphany of YHWH of hosts, enthroned over the cherubim (cf. Ps 80:2, 5, 20), blessed be His name. Selah.

And in the name of Anaphiel, His angel, by this mystery and by this name, sealed and resealed and closed is this house and residence ²²and threshold and bed, wife; sons and daughters, and all the household of this MHP'NWS', son of 'ZRMWDWK, and of this Eve, his wife, from demons and from dēws and from satans and from lilitis and from hated dreams and from all evil spirits from this day and forever.

In the name of 'ZYZYH BWRY SWRY, ²³the Good W'ZGD, by this mystery and by this great name and with this seal of authority by which Anaphiel, His angel, is sealed. And with the seal-ring of 'DWNWNY'L which cursers³³ fasten.

The text concludes (through line 26) with more adjurations and invocations of names against the demons.

Aside from numerous less significant references to ideas found in the Hekhalot literature (the great seal, seven seals, *nomina barbara*, the throne, wheels, living creatures, and cherubim), this bowl contains a fairly important complex of traditions about the angel Anaphiel. Lesses notes three parallels to ideas about Anaphiel in the Hekhalot literature. First, the *nomen barbarum* MRGWG applied to him in line 18 is similar to names applied to Metatron in *Pereq di R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah* §310 (MDGWBY'L, MRG, MRGWBY'L) and in *Merkawah Rabba* §682 (MRGYWWY'L and variants). Second, the mention of Anaphiel being sealed by a "seal of rulership" brings to mind the tradition in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §241 that "the seal ring of the seal of

³¹ Gordon, "Magic Bowls in the Moriah Collection," 220–25.

³² The exact meaning of the phrase and what precisely is being sealed is not entirely clear. I interpret the participle מְסֻלָּם as an Itp'ael form.

³³ The word is not clear, but I follow Gordon's reading (מְסֻלָּם).

heaven and earth is delivered over to" this angel. There is a hint here of the special status ascribed to Anaphiel in the Hekhalot literature as God's second in command. Third, we are told in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §421 that if he is properly invoked, Anaphiel can be adjured to do the will of a practitioner and to avenge any slander against the practitioner. This bowl is a concrete example of such an invocation, with the purpose of protecting and purging specified clients from demonic harassment. I would add that the reference to Anaphiel as "the angel who is different from after them" may imply a special status for him with reference to the other spirit beings. And in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §242 he is granted a very special status, for he receives adoration and perhaps even worship from most of the other angels:

And as soon as all who are on high see him, they bow down and fall and prostrate themselves before him. This is unheard-of on high. If you say they do not fall before the Prince of the Presence, rather apart from those who stand before the throne of glory—for they do not prostrate themselves before the Prince of the Presence—they prostrate themselves before Anaphiel the prince with permission and willingly.

Bowl Moriah 1 does not touch as directly on the central ideas and practices of the Hekhalot literature as the other bowls analyzed above, but it does parallel Hekhalot traditions about the exalted angel Anaphiel who may be adjured to do the will of a properly instructed human being.

Finally, Shaked has published an inscribed bowl, Moussaieff 1, whose text has numerous general connections to the Hekhalot literature, although it does not reproduce any specific passages or mention any crucially significant doctrines or practices.³⁴ The bowl invokes the name of God to heal a named woman from spirits who are afflicting her with numerous health problems. It also includes an invocation of the angels which reads as follows:

^{8b}Peace to you, angels on high! ⁹Peace to you, bands of the host! Peace to you, seraphim of flame! Peace to you, wheels of the chariot! Peace to you, ophanim and cherubim! Peace to you, living creatures of glory(!) Peace to you, spirit of fire that comes from the north! (Cf. Ezek 1:4.) Peace to you, ¹⁰spirit of fire that comes from the south and kindling flame "and brightness to Him all around" (Ezek 1:27), "the

³⁴ Shaked, "Peace Be upon You, Exalted Angels," esp. pp. 198–200, 207–11.

likeness of four living creatures and this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man" (Ezek 1:5)! Peace to you, attending angels who attend before Him Who sits enthroned over the four ¹¹cherubim, who have sixty-four faces!

May she have life—MHDWK, daughter of NYWNDWK, who has fixed to her a spirit in her temple and in her ear, and it is making use of the seven orifices of her head. It closes her mouth, impales her face, and confuses her tongue ¹²in her mouth and is fixed to her in the inside of her navel and in her bowels and rules over the two hundred fifty-two members in her.

The text in the rest of line 12 and line 13 is damaged and its meaning not entirely clear, but the practitioner makes a request and refers to "Him Who is enthroned about the four cherubim who have sixty-four faces." Seraphim named ZNPY'L and ZBPY'L stand before God, as does "Metatron, Prince of the Presence," and two other angels named ḤWPNY'L and QṬNY'L. In addition, Isa 6:3 (the trisagion) is quoted in line 14.

As Shaked demonstrates, nearly every phrase in the first paragraph has a parallel in the Hekhalot literature. The writer is familiar with the liturgical traditions associated with these texts and connects them to the idea that angels may be called upon to heal victims of demonic oppression.

Many other Babylonian Aramaic bowls have a scattering of parallels to the Hekhalot texts, but the ones surveyed in this section have the most significant ones and demonstrate adequately the close relationship between the two corpora.

Amulets and Handbooks from the Cairo Geniza

An initial word is in order concerning the physical characteristics and literary forms of the texts of ritual power which have been recovered from the Cairo Geniza. Such texts may come in the form of individual "amulets," that is, single spells copied onto one or more pages for the use of a client, who is often named. Texts of ritual power may also appear in a codex. Such codices usually come down to us in very fragmentary form; often only one or a few pages from a given codex survive. A codex may consist simply of a group of (often unrelated) rituals or spells collected within the same binding, presumably for the convenience of a particular practitioner. I refer to such collections as "handbooks." But a codex may also consist of what I term a "treatise," that is, a text that has collected spells and

traditions of ritual power and redacted them in such a way that they now form a single work with defined boundaries. Handbooks and treatises may appear together in a single codex.³⁵

In this section I first analyze individual spells that appear in either amulets or handbooks, with careful attention to their form and genre. In the next section, I then survey the treatises that are preserved only or completely in their earliest forms in codices from the Cairo Geniza. Finally, I look at a treatise of ritual power which survives mainly in later medieval manuscripts preserved outside the Cairo Geniza. As with the metal amulets and the inscribed bowls, the aim is to collect significant parallels to the Hekhalot literature.

We find a passage from the *Hekhalot Zutarti* in a single leaf of a codex written in Hebrew and Aramaic in an oriental semicursive script of the eleventh century.³⁶ The text on the leaf reads as follows:³⁷

(1a) ¹[. . . exp]licating from ²[. . .] His name. Blessed be ³[. . .] blessed and blest be His name ⁴[. . .] blessed and blest be His name ⁵[. . . King of] kings of kings, blessed be He, ⁶for He is from of old³⁸ from all creatures and kept secret ⁷from the attending angels. "This is my name forever." ⁸"This is my name forever." "This is my name forever" (Exod 3:15). ⁹And what is His name? HMGPG HBR ZGL HQKR ¹⁰GGLP 'Z 'N 'T SY BYH ṬY 'GLG ¹¹LPY WW' WWY BYWHWN, which is the explicit name.

¹²In the name of HY YWD 'LP HY YWD G'YH SSYH ¹³ŠLPN THŠ MMYŠY YS H' Y'Y 'H DYQ ¹⁴[. . .] WTYH 'BR RHYM M'PH WBYM YŠ' ¹⁵MLMM YHY Y'Y 'Y HYY HH, the God ¹⁶[great] and mighty, the glorified and strong, W[h]o i[s] ¹⁷[hidde]n from the eyes of the creatures and kept secret from [the attendi]ng ¹⁸ang[els] but is revealed to R. Akiva for the working of the cha[riot], ¹⁹[to d]o his desire. This is "each who calls on [My] name, ²⁰[and for] my [glo]ry I crea[t]ed him" (Isa 43:7); so may he do my wish and my desire ²¹[and what] I [ask] and my every request. Amen. Selah. YY' is King, YY' is King, ²²[YY' will be Kin]g forever. Amen. Selah.

(1b) ¹This is the name that [. . .] ²and to make understand and to teach [. . .] ³in all that he [. . .] ⁴the names on each day after your prayer and [. . .] ⁵evil, may these words be abolished from you. ⁶HY

³⁵ See Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic* 7–8; Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:5–10.

³⁶ T.-S. NS 91.53, in Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 3:185–90.

³⁷ The transcriptions of the *nomina barbara* are not always certain.

³⁸ As noted by Schäfer and Shaked (*Magische Texte* 3:189), the word "of old" (בְּעוֹלָם) is a corruption of "is hidden" (נִסְתָּר); cf. *Hekhalot Zutarti* §421).

HW HW YH Y' WHW HW 'Y HW HW YK HWW 'WYHYK 7at Sinai BYH is His name 'HY WH HĻKH glory Š[M] 8ML L'.

Koinologia —

9You holy letters and these holy names, 10guard me—I am DRKWT, son of YPT, and all m[y household](?) from every 11satan and from every evil stroke and from every human being who [...] 12[and g]live me grace and kindness and mercies in the eyes of all [...] 13[...] WGTYH T'WN YHWN YH [...] 14This is the name of the twenty-two l[ette]rs [...] 15YH YHWH YH' YHWH H [...] 16upon the holy diadem and [...] magnificent [...]

This leaf seems to come from a handbook of spells. The second paragraph (1a 12–22) appears in much the same form in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §421 as part of an incantation prayer revealed by the angel Anaphiel. In the present context it is part of a larger incantation prayer (or series of such prayers) that extends from 1a 1–1b 8. The rest of the page (1b 8–16) preserves the first part of a “koinologia.” The Greek word, meaning something like “common speech,” is written in Hebrew letters; it is a technical term that appears elsewhere in the ritual power texts from the Cairo Geniza.³⁹ The first three paragraphs invoke various divine names in order to gain the granting of the user’s wishes and protection for the user. There is also mention of the teaching of something, presumably to the practitioner (1b 3), and a reference to daily recitation of the names after prayer (1b 4). The koinologia invokes sacred letters and names for the protection of a specific practitioner and for the granting of favor to him.

There is nothing to indicate that the passage paralleled in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* has been lifted out of that work and placed in this incantation prayer. It fits perfectly well in its current context, which is the earliest one attested in terms of the dates of the manuscripts, although it fits just as well in §421. But it makes no difference which, if either, context is original. The important point is that Anaphiel indicates that it is to be used, and the Geniza fragment preserves it in the context of a handbook of rituals meant for use.

The invocation of the Prince of Torah is also attested in the Cairo Geniza texts. Two contiguous leaves survive from a handbook of recipes, which bear four pages of Aramaic written in an oriental semicursive script of the twelfth century.⁴⁰ The last page concludes with the following passage:

³⁹ Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 3:190.

⁴⁰ T.-S. K. 1.19: Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae*, 158–64 and pls. 37–38.

(4) ⁷For the opening of the heart and for forgetfulness.

⁸Write on 7 leaves of myrtle and blot them out ⁹with wine and let him drink and imbibe: NYSTWKWS ¹⁰B' B' B' TRMYWS LLSMS 'RY GSP. ¹¹Wisdom is given to the sage and Torah ¹²to the insightful, and by it shines [*sic*] the eyes of the unfortunate and there is opened ¹³the heart of the dullard. So may my own heart shine and be opened—I am ¹⁴so-and-so, son of so-and-so—that I may learn Torah and I may become occupied with wisdom, ¹⁵that I may learn Torah and not forget. In your name I call on ¹⁶Metatron, the Prince of the Presence, who is the Prince of Torah. ¹⁷'MY'L is your name; KNYNY' is your name; MYQWN 'YṬMWN ¹⁸PYSQWN STGRWN is your name, you whose name is like your master's.

Although it does not appear in the Hekhalot literature, this recipe was written by someone very familiar with Hekhalot traditions. In *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§573–75, leaves are inscribed with *nomina barbara* and blotted out in spells involving Metatron and Torah proficiency. Myrtle leaves are put to the same use in a recipe for answered prayer in *Merkava Rabba* §660. Metatron is called both Prince of the Presence and Prince of Torah in the Hekhalot literature;⁴¹ the names MYQWN, 'YṬMWN, and PYSQWN are applied to him (see *3 Enoch* 48D:1 [§76] and G12 2a 10–11); and he is addressed in an adjuration with the phrase “you whose name is like your master's” in *Merkavah Rabba* §706.

The context of this passage is illuminating. It is preceded by a series of recipes to call up ritual power for numerous situations. The first page begins with the end of an incantation prayer concerning the enthroned God, a prayer to be inscribed on an earthenware bowl, which is then broken (1.1–6a). It is followed by an amulet for curing a sterile woman (1.6b–16);⁴² an invocation of angels for help in opening locks (1.17–18); another invocation of numerous angels, including ones who are appointed over the thresholds of the third through sixth firmaments, for the same purpose (2.1–18); a recipe for curing a scorpion sting (2.19–3.5a); another recipe for the cure of a sterile woman (3.5b–12); a recipe to prevent miscarriage (3.13–16a); a recipe for aiding a woman during difficult childbirth (3.16b–4.2); and a recipe for helping someone who has chronic fear and

⁴¹ For example, *3 Enoch* 1:4 (§1) and passim; *SH-L* §389//§959; §397; §947; G11 1a 18 (Prince of the Presence); *3 Enoch* 48D:6 (§77); *SH-L* §389 (MS New York 8128) (Prince of Torah).

⁴² Note that the amulet cites Cant 1:4, which is quoted for a very different purpose in the story of the four who entered paradise in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §345.

trembling (4.3–6). In other words, the Sar Torah praxis is one of a series of recipes intended for practical use. Presumably the practitioner carried it out along with the others.⁴³

More spells for Torah learning are preserved in two badly damaged but contiguous leaves from a handbook written in Hebrew in an oriental semicursive hand of the fourteenth or fifteenth century.⁴⁴ The first page includes three recipes (numbers 1–3 in the text): for protection in a dangerous place (1a 1–4); for protection while one is traveling (1a 5–8); and for deliverance from robbers (1a 9–17). Then on the verso we read,

(1b) ¹Whoever studies but does not <remember> and recites in his heart, let him explicate and he shall remember.

²I, so-and-so, son of so-and-so, adjure Šāqād Hōzay, Prince of the Presence, who is called ³by the 5 names that I invoke: []mi⁴el, Gözt⁵el, ⁶Ōzi Z(Y)rta⁷, Dakēr⁸el YY⁹ ??, [God of I]sraēl. Immediately ⁵his eyes are illuminated and as for water his heart thirsts for the learning of Torah. ⁶And when he occupies himself with Torah, he shall forget nothing. The End.

There follow fragmentary praxes for protection from an evil man (1b 7–10) and from robbers (1b 11–17). The next leaf commences with an amulet for safety in the water (2a 1–5?), followed by what appears to be a recipe for helping a woman during difficult labor (2a 5–8). The verso begins with a spell for teleportation from place to place (קפיצת הדרך; 2b 1–6). The last lines that survive on the leaf read:

(2b) ⁷15. Whoever wishes to learn much Torah must do (what) Rabban Gamaliel (did) ⁸for Rabbi Nehuniah ben HaQanah. He must make a cake w[ith]thou[t . . .] ⁹and he must bake it with [. . .] ¹⁰[. . .]

⁴³ The handwriting, layout, and physical characteristics of T.-S. K 1.19 appear to be identical to T.-S. AS 142.13 + T.-S. NS 317.18, two noncontiguous leaves of recipes of ritual power written in Hebrew and Aramaic with some Arabic words. Certainty is impossible without a direct examination of the manuscripts, but it is very probable that all four leaves come from the same codex and perhaps from the same handbook, although the leaves of T.-S. K 1.19 are not contiguous with either of the others. T.-S. AS 142.13 was published by Schäfer as G20 in *Geniza-Fragmente* 169–70, then again with T.-S. NS 317.18 by Schäfer and Shaked as no. 69 in *Magische Texte* 3:143–52.

⁴⁴ T.-S. AS 143.171; Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 3:134–42.

The first passage adjures the angel Šāqād Hōzay (the vowels are given in the manuscript), who is also called the Prince of the Presence. The name, which appears with many variations in the Hekhalot literature, is applied to the “angel of the Presence” in *Ma‘aseh Merkawah* §§561, 584, and 585; to Metatron in *Merkawah Rabba* §682 and G19 1a 26; to “Metatron, Prince of the Presence,” and “Metatron, angel of the Presence,” in G19 1a 16–19; and it is given as the name of one of “the Princes of Torah” in G22 1a 37. It appears in a list of angels to be adjured in *Sar Torah* §301. Likewise, the Prince of the Presence is identified with Metatron frequently,⁴⁵ and with the Prince of Torah in *3 Enoch* 48D:6 (§77) and *Ma‘aseh Merkawah* §560. The second passage ties the learning of Torah to a ritual associated with R. Gamaliel and R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah, which involves the baking of a cake. R. Gamaliel never figures in the Hekhalot literature, but R. Nehuniah is one of the three major human characters in the texts. Special rules regarding the preparation of food are characteristic of *Sar Torah* praxes (e.g., *Sar Torah* §299). Thus this handbook too is well acquainted with Hekhalot traditions. And like T.-S. K 1.19, it indicates that at least some practitioners who used *Sar Torah* praxes also used many other rituals of power, some for themselves and some for clients.

One more Geniza text has a direct reference to *Sar Torah* traditions. It is a single leaf, which Naveh and Shaked describe as “a dedicatory text written on a codex of the Pentateuch.”⁴⁶ Anyone who sells, steals, or removes it is cursed with a series of curses:

^{6b}And may he be excommunicated in the name of 'KTRY'L YH YH YHWH of hosts. ⁷And may he be excommunicated by the mouth of Him Who is enthroned above the cherubim. And may he be excommunicated by the throne of glory. ⁸And may he be excommunicated by the living creatures and the ophanim. And may he be excommunicated by the mouth of Metatron. ⁹And may he be excommunicated by the mouth of YPYPHYH, the Prince of Torah.

The writer is well aware of Hekhalot traditions, including the name YPYPHYH applied to the Prince of Torah (cf. *3 Enoch* 48D:6 [§77]). I am not aware of the Prince of Torah being invoked in a curse

⁴⁵ See n. 41.

⁴⁶ T.-S. 12.41: Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae* 212–14; the quotation is on p. 214.

elsewhere, but this dedication demonstrates once again that he was drawn on for ritual power.⁴⁷

Shaked has drawn attention to two consecutive leaves from a Geniza codex (T.-S. K 1.35 + T.-S. K 1.48) which have parallels to the visionary ascent tradition and to the adjuration of angels in the Hekhalot literature.⁴⁸ This Hebrew text, written in an oriental semi-cursive hand of the eleventh to twelfth century, contains a prayer text of uncertain purpose (1a 1–15a) followed by a carefully structured set of recipes for ritual power. It is these recipes that is our focus. Each begins with the formula “If you seek . . .” (אם ביקשת),⁴⁹ followed by the aim sought, a list of *nomina barbara* to be recited to accomplish the aim, and a concluding formula from one of the eighteen benedictions of the *Amida*, each in its correct consecutive order. The work concludes with an unofficial but traditional-sounding benedictory prayer at the bottom of the recto of the second leaf. The verso contains the beginning of another work, the treatise *Sheva‘ Ma‘alot*. Shaked aptly sums up the implications of the structure of the composition: “It seems that this arrangement was chosen so as to introduce the various magic recipes into the prayer book, or (what amounts to nearly the same thing) to use the prayer book as a magical handbook.”⁵⁰

The relevant sections read as follows:

If you seek to see the angels so that they show you all your desires and everything you seek from them . . . (1a 26b–27)

⁴⁷ Other Cairo Geniza texts include spells for aid in remembering Torah. See T.-S. K 1.28 3a 10–13 (Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:133–50); T.-S. K 1.162 1b 37–39, 40–45 (*ibid.*, 3:65–88); T.-S. NS 322.59 + T.-S. AS 143.169 2a 2, 12–13, 18–20; 2b 1 (*ibid.*, 335–56). Still others provide rituals to aid memory in general; see T.S. K 1.132 1.1–8 (Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae* 181–88); JTSL ENA 1177.20 20b 2–4 (Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 3:55–59); T.-S. Misc. 11.12 1a 1–8 (*ibid.*, 107–10); Westminster College Misc. 117 1a 8–9 (*ibid.*, 167–73); T.-S. NS 324.92 1b 9–19 (*ibid.*, 357–65).

⁴⁸ Shaked, “Peace Be upon You, Exalted Angels,” 204–205. The text is published by Schäfer and Shaked in *Magische Texte* 2:100–117. Peter Schäfer has also analyzed it in “Jewish Liturgy and Magic,” in *Geschichte—Tradition—Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*, vol. 1: *Judentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996) 541–56, esp. pp. 544–49.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of this formula, see Schäfer, “Jewish Magic Literature in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages,” 85–88.

⁵⁰ Shaked, “Peace Be upon You, Exalted Angels,” 204.

If you seek to speak wi[th] the four-faced [living crea]tures, to have made known to you your d[esi]re . . . (2a 2–3a)

If you seek for the prince of the hosts of YY' to speak with you, that he may make known to you your request . . . (2a 5b–6)

If you seek to see “the wonders of the One perfect in knowledge” (cf. Job 37:16) and the throne of glory and the attending angels . . . (2a 8b–10a)

The first three passages describe how to make divinatory use of angels, the living creatures before God's throne, and “the prince of the host of YY’,” respectively. The title of the last angel is from Josh 5:14–15, but Schäfer and Shaked note that it is also applied to Metatron in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §341 (MS New York 8128). The last passage gives a praxis to obtain a vision of the throne of glory, with no particular additional aim attached to it. The ritual praxis prescribed is simpler than those found in the Hekhalot texts. It seems to amount merely to reciting a few *nomina barbara*—perhaps, by implication, during one's daily prayers. The recitation of divine names appears in many of the Hekhalot rituals, but they are nearly always accompanied by ascetic praxes. The instructions for the descent to the chariot given by R. Nehuniah in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§203–205 include only the recital of divine names, but structured in a context of hypnotic repetition. The same sort of repetition may perhaps be assumed here, but it is never mentioned. Perhaps the closest parallel to the practice in this text is the aside in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §564 which encourages readers who find it too difficult to carry out the prescribed ascetic practice to inscribe three *nomina barbara* on a cup instead, and tells them “do not trouble yourselves with the words of the mighty.”

In any case, in this document the command of angels and visionary experience are connected once again with numerous other goals, including to revive the dead (1a 21); to have a request granted by a sultan (1b 8); to save someone from death (1b 11); to speak with wisdom (1b 23); to speak with the moon and the sun (1b 26b–27a, 29b); to make demons perform services (2a 12b–13a); and to make animals perform services (2a 15b–16a).

I have found only one reference to ascending or descending to the chariot in the ritual power texts outside the Hekhalot literature. It occurs in an execration written in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Judeo-Arabic on one side of a single leaf, inscribed in an oriental semicursive script

of the thirteenth century.⁵¹ The practitioner, Mashiah son of Şemah, invokes a curse on a thief. The other side of the leaf is a private letter. The relevant passage of the execration reads:

(1a) ^{20b}And excommunication ²¹from the mouth of Judah bar Ezekiel and Joshua ben Levi and Jonathan ben Uzziel and Joshua ben Perahya; ²²and from the mouth of Nehuniah ben HaQanah and Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva, they who ascended and descended ²³to the chariot.

All of the figures listed in this passage have some connection with Hekhalot traditions. In the rabbinic literature, the first three transmit material about the Merkavah. According to the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, Joshua ben Uzziel was a member of R. Nehuniah's inner circle (§203). We have encountered Joshua ben Perahya in the texts of the inscribed bowls, and I will say more about him below. The last three are grouped together as those who ascended and descended to the chariot, and indeed they are the major protagonists in the Hekhalot literature. The curses of these men are apparently especially effective, presumably because of their closeness to the divine. The text shows that the composer was aware of Hekhalot traditions but adds little to our knowledge of their social background.

These are the most significant parallels to the Hekhalot literature in the texts of ritual power from the Cairo Geniza. In addition, there are countless minor connections. A good example of a text containing many such details is T.-S. K 1.68, a long amulet in Hebrew and Aramaic commissioned by a husband to restore his wife's love and to protect her from enemies and sorcery.⁵² In passing, this incantation prayer refers to the 390 firmaments; the four living creatures that bear God's throne; a heavenly high priest who has seventy names and who is also the great prince (the name is destroyed, but it was probably Metatron); God enthroned above the cherubim; and the angel Akhatriel.

Some Geniza texts also prescribe ascetic regimes similar to those found in the Hekhalot literature. The most significant of these is T.-S. K 1.28, two leaves from a Hebrew handbook written in an oriental semicursive script of the eleventh century.⁵³ A third page of

⁵¹ T.-S. K 1.148: Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 2:305–11.

⁵² Schiffman and Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts* 143–59.

⁵³ Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:133–50. Others include JTSL ENA 2643 6b 1b–7a 25 (ibid., 67–78), which has a parallel in Westminster College Misc. 16

the codex survives which contains material from the *Shimush Tehillim*, a treatise on the use of the Psalms to gain ritual power. The relevant passage of the handbook gives a set of praxes for dream inquiries:

(1a) ¹¹Request for a dream, tested ¹²and tried:

Purify yourself for 3 days and ¹³fast all day long for 3 days ¹⁴and wear pure, clean, washed clothes ¹⁵and write on the left hand:

On behalf of so-and-so, son of so-and-so. ¹⁶Holy, holy, holy, holy, holy. "This is My name forever and this is" (Exod 3:15) ŠDY ŠDY. ¹⁷"I am Who I am" (Exod 3:14). "Puissant" (Ps 89:9).

(1b) ¹"YH is One" (cf. Deut 6:4). Whose name is YY' of hosts, YY' of hosts, ²YY' God, YY' God, Who is enthroned above the wheels of ³the chariot. I myself call to you, Michael, the great prince, ⁴that you may come beside me and show me everything that I seek ⁵from you on this night in truth and fasting.

And you may not eat and you may not ⁶drink for ²⁵⁴ days and one night. And you must be sleeping in a pure ⁷place, and he shall make known to you all that you desire.

⁸Another good and fine and tested and truthful one:

⁹Fast for 3 days, and on the third night ¹⁰go to sleep without eating and wear pure clothes ¹¹and go far away from the house that has a woman in it, and say ¹²⁷ times, "YY' is my Shepherd, I shall lack nothing" (Ps 23:1)—the whole psalm. ¹³Then you must say:

I adjure you (pl.) that you show me whatever ¹⁴I seek and you make known to me what I ask and my request.

2a 1b–2b 13 (Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 3:21–29); T.-S. K 1.1 (Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:79–82); T.-S. K 1.74 2b 6–11 (Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 2:118–25); JTSL ENA 2871 7b 1–16 (*ibid.*, 126–31); Westminster College Misc. 117 1b 1–7 (Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 3:167–73).

In addition, the text of a book of ritual power appears in several of the Hekhalot manuscripts (*SH-L* §§489–97). It opens with a claim the book was revealed by God to the angels, who in turn revealed it to human beings, then continues with detailed instructions in Aramaic for an ascetic regime to be followed by whoever finds this book, instructions generally quite similar to those for such regimes in the Hekhalot literature (a long partial fast, self-isolation, avoidance of impurity, a special diet, and numerous immersions). The practitioner must then study the book until he receives a revelation from it. The document continues with a description of the dire torments awaiting the one who sells the secret, followed by an equally enthusiastic account of the material and spiritual blessings that attend the one who keeps the secret (§490). Most of the rest of the text consists of adjurations and divine names to be used by the practitioner (§§491–94). The next section repeats the order to read the book in an isolated place near a river, gives another incantation, and promises safety and prosperity to any household that owns the book. The document closes with a corrupt account of R. Akiva's ascent in a wagon of fire (cf. *Hekhalot Zūtarti* §366) in §496 and an adjuration for binding the earth in §497. The ascetic rituals and the ascent of R. Akiva are points of contact with the Hekhalot literature.

⁵⁴ Emending "42" (דב) to "2" (ב), with Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:147–48.

¹⁵And go to sleep and you shall see a wonder, for they shall come to you and say ¹⁶to you your wish and what you asked.

Other surviving recipes from the same handbook include a love charm (1a 2–11a); ways to identify a thief (1b 16–2a 19); a treatment for insomnia (2b 2–7); a spell to cure a wife's hatred of her husband (2b 8–13a); and an adjuration ritual to compel a man to become pious (2b 13b–21). The similarities of the translated passage to the Hekhalot literature are fairly general, but also pervasive. As we have seen, especially in chapter 4, Hekhalot praxes include fasting, the wearing of clean clothes, isolation from women, recitations, and adjurations of angels, including Michael. The Merkavah scene is mentioned briefly in this passage as well. The most that can be said is that such a text might easily have been composed by a tradent of the Hekhalot literature and that someone who performed Hekhalot rituals might well have performed this one, but we cannot be sure that either was the case.⁵⁵

Two Treatises from the Cairo Geniza

The *'Inyan Sotah*, a treatise on “the matter of the straying wife,” survives in a single manuscript, JTSL ENA 3635.17, on a leaf with two columns on each side, written in Hebrew in an oriental semicursive hand of the twelfth century.⁵⁶ The first column contains some material of minor significance, but which is worth noting.

(17a) ¹The *'Inyan Sotah*. Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingdom forever and ever, ²He Who created the world with the attribute of mercies ³and created the angels in heaven, group upon ⁴group and hosts upon hosts. And He created ⁵the spirits and the demons and the harmful demons ⁶a thousand years before He created Adam, ⁷and all the names He nicknamed the angels ⁸who attend before Him with praise and with song—⁹they wrote all of them down from the mouth of R. Ishmael, the high ¹⁰priest. And R. Ishmael (did so) from the mouth of Metatron, the Prince of ¹¹the Presence, and from those who

⁵⁵ One of the major Hekhalot manuscripts (New York 8128) includes some dream inquiry rituals in §§501–507, 517. These give praxes for summoning the Dream Prince (שר דלום) and having him reveal information during one's sleep. The praxes include three-day fasts, recitation of scriptural verses and adjurations, procedures for preparation for sleep, and rules of etiquette for one's encounter with the Dream Prince. Lesses has translated the passage and collected other dream inquiries (*Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 395–411; she discusses them in detail, including the one translated above, on pp. 230–54).

⁵⁶ Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:17–28.

revealed them to Moses at Sinai ¹²and at the bush, and from those who revealed it to Elijah at Mount Carmel ¹³and from those who revealed it to every single prophet from the mouth of ¹⁴MSMRYH, who stands before the curtain, until ¹⁵the time of the Sanhedrin of Israel, who knew the 70 ¹⁶names and the name in purity and the name in impurity ¹⁷and each root of usage; they knew everything. ¹⁸So know and understand these names that have been kept secret, ¹⁹which as the explicit name they made the ²⁰straying wife drink. And from the power of the names her stomach would swell ²¹and her thigh would collapse.⁵⁷

The remainder of the work gives an updated praxis for the ritual in Numbers 5, one that takes into account the present unavailability of a high priest to perform the ritual. The main point of comparison with the Hekhalot literature is the assertion that R. Ishmael received revelations from Metatron, Prince of the Presence.

The contents of the *Sheva' Zutarti* or *Sheva' Eliyahu* are more important for our purposes. This work consists of seven adjurational passages that seek power from God.⁵⁸ The writer is well aware of Merkavah traditions, to which the text alludes frequently. Schäfer has shown that it also alludes to the seven *Amida* benedictions for the Sabbath or holidays.⁵⁹ The first section begins with a blessing on God, then adjures numerous angels and *nomina barbara*, including "YWPY'L, Metatron, Metatron" and the spirit PYSQWNYT (3a 16–17), and refers to the cherubim, Metatron, and chariotry (רכב) of fire (3a 18–19). The second section refers to a palace of light and hail (3b 9), to Metatron and the throne on which he is seated (3b 10), and to the Hashmal (3b 14). The sixth section opens, "And again I adjure you, SYRWYH, angel of the Presence, that he do my will and all my request from before the throne of glory" (5a 15–16).⁶⁰ And in the seventh section we read:

⁵⁷ This passage also appears in almost exactly this form in T.-S. K 1.56 1b 3b–23 (Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:29–45). This manuscript comprises two contiguous leaves written in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Judeo-Arabic in an oriental script of the eleventh century. The leaves contain various instructions regarding rituals of power. In a few places I have followed its reading rather than that of JTSL ENA 3635.17.

⁵⁸ Unless otherwise noted, I quote from T.-S. K 1.144 + T.-S. K 21.95.T + T.-S. K 21.95.TP (Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 2:27–78 = G13–15), a manuscript written in Hebrew and Aramaic in an oriental script of the eleventh century.

⁵⁹ Schäfer, "Jewish Liturgy and Magic," 549–50.

⁶⁰ The corresponding text of Oxford 1531 (Michael 9) reads, "And again I cast

(6a) ⁶By the word of fire and by the speech of fire, and by the chari-
 otry of ⁷fire and by horses of fire and by the thousands of thousands
⁸and by the myriads of myriads of His bands and of ⁹the seraphim
 and of the holy living creatures ¹⁰that stand in awe and in fear ¹¹and
 run before the wheels of the chariot, ¹²may he accomplish redemption
 and save ¹³from harm the one who carries a load; may he heal ¹⁴and
 pursue every spirit from my body and every ¹⁵demon from me. Amen,
 3 times. ¹⁶Selah, 3 times. Hallelujah, 3 times.

The refrain in lines 12–16 appears in each section, with variants. Thus the *Sheva' Zutarti* adjures Metatron and Suriah and refers to details of the scene of the chariot in heaven. But it does not mention Sar Torah powers or the heavenly ascent. Instead it asks generally that the spirits do the will of the practitioner and that they protect him from spirits and demons. Lesses has noted that the copy in MS Oxford 1531 gives the name of the practitioner, demonstrating that these adjurations may still have been in use as late as the fourteenth century.⁶¹ There is considerable overlap in this work with the ideas and practices found in the Hekhalot literature, but it is not certain that it comes from the same circles.

Another Treatise: Sepher HaRazim

When we come to works of ritual power preserved mainly in manuscripts from the later Middle Ages, we move into a very difficult area. As with the Hekhalot texts, the tradents have sometimes exercised a freer hand than we would like, so it is often difficult to determine how old or how heavily reworked a given composition is. My focus is on the social background of the Hekhalot texts in their earliest life situation, which a mass of evidence places securely well before the editorial work of the *Haside Ashkenaz*, so I expend relatively little effort on texts that have likely gone through the hands of these redactors. But in order not to neglect the subject entirely, let us look at one such work, *Sepher HaRazim*, “The Book of Mysteries.” Some manuscripts of this work survive from the Cairo Geniza, but the complete document is known only from later copies and redactions. Nevertheless, there is good evidence for a strong degree of redactional integrity to the work, and its many parallels to the Greek

it before you, Suria', Prince of the Presence, that you do my will and all my request from before your throne of glory.”

⁶¹ Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 261.

magical papyri of the third to fifth centuries CE tend to indicate that its original composition fell sometime in late antiquity.⁶² It also has some material relevant to our inquiry.

The context of the later manuscripts links the work as a whole with the Hekhalot tradition. The six copies with relatively uncontaminated texts are bound after the *Massekhet Hekhalot* and before the *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and the *Shi'ur Qomah*.⁶³ In addition, a Geniza fragment of *Sepher HaRazim* written in the early thirteenth century was originally bound together with a copy of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (G6).⁶⁴ The basic structure of the work as reconstructed by Margalioth is as follows. It describes seven firmaments, each with its own angelic retinue. The first firmament has seven camps of angels with angelic overseers; the second, twelve steps on which angels stand; the third, three princes of fire; the fourth firmament contains the bridal chamber of the sun, which is led by angels of fire by day and by angels of water at night. In the fifth firmament are the twelve angelic princes who preside over the twelve months of the year. The sixth firmament has the place prepared for the deceased righteous spirits as well as two camps of angels, one on the west and one on the east, each ruled by a holy angel. Finally, the seventh firmament is the site of the throne of glory. After the descriptions of each of the first six firmaments, the text gives detailed recipes for calling on its particular spirits for aid. These recipes prescribe adjurations and rites for healing, cursing, divination, necromancy and the calling up of spirits, influencing people, and many other goals.

A note of caution about the text is in order, since Margalioth's reconstruction has been criticized as excessively heavy-handed.⁶⁵ Based on evidence from the Geniza fragments, however, it appears that *Sepher HaRazim* circulated in pre-Ashkenazic copies in something reasonably similar to the form preserved in the later manuscripts and the text reconstructed by Margalioth. The carefully crafted structure of the work allows us to test the redactional integrity of fragmentary copies. For example, MS Oxford Heb. C. 18.30 contains the

⁶² For a detailed comparison of adjurations from *Sepher HaRazim*, the Greek magical papyri, and the Hekhalot literature, see Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 278–325.

⁶³ Margalioth, *Sepher Ha-Razim* 48–49.

⁶⁴ Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente* 82–85.

⁶⁵ E.g., Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* 225–34; Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic," 347–50.

preface of the work and goes up to line 6 of the section describing the first firmament. It thus attests to a recension that included the preface, the first firmament, and an account of its seven overseers. And a first firmament, of course, implies others. MS Cambridge T.-S. K 1.145 contains II 100 to IV 47, thus witnessing to a version that included the twelve steps of the second firmament, the three princes of the third, and the bridal chamber of the sun in the fourth, besides the implication of a first firmament and perhaps others as well.⁶⁶

A number of elements of *Sepher HaRazim* show parallels to the Hekhalot literature. The cosmology is similar, although not identical. It has seven firmaments with attending angels for each and with God enthroned in a Merkavah scene in the seventh firmament. Much of the work consists of instructions for gaining control of the angels of each firmament through ritual power. But there is no mention of celestial palaces or gatekeepers. The introduction makes extravagant claims on behalf of any practitioner who uses the work. We are told that Noah received it from the angel Raziel, inscribed it on a stone of sapphire, and passed it on to his descendants.

⁴And from it he learned working of wonders, and mysteries of knowledge, and arrays of understanding, and thoughts of humility, ⁵and devices of counsel; to take a stand on the searching out of the steps of the heights, and to rove about everywhere ⁶in the seven habitations, and to gaze at all the constellations, and to gain understanding of the custom of the sun, ⁷and to make clear the searchings out of the moon, and to know the highways of the Great Bear and Orion and Draco (Job 9:9); and to tell what are ⁸the names of the overseers of every single firmament, and their kingdom, and how they can bring success in every matter, ⁹and what are the names of their attendants, and what is libated to them, and which is the proper time when you will be heard, ¹⁰for them to do the whole desire of anyone who approaches them in purity; to know from it the working of ¹¹death and the working of life, to understand the evil and the good, to search out seasons and moments, to know ¹²the time to be born and the time to die, the time for smiting and the time for healing (cf. Qoh 3:2-3), to interpret dreams ¹³and visions, to stir up battle and to quell wars, and to rule over spirits and smiters, ¹⁴to send them away so that they go like servants, to look at the four winds of the earth, to be made wise ¹⁵in the

⁶⁶ Margalioth, *Sepher Ha-Razim* 47-48. One Hebrew manuscript includes additions from an expanded Latin translation. Two fragments of the Arabic translation omit the fourth firmament, but this is a secondary bowdlerization of a passage with blatant pagan content, including a Greek prayer to Helios (*ibid.*, 50, 54).

sound of thunderclaps, to recount what is the working of lightning, to tell what will be in every single ¹⁶New Moon, to stand upon the business of every single year, whether for plenty or for famine, whether ¹⁷for provision or for dearth, whether for peace or for war, to become like one of ¹⁸the fearsome ones, and to have insight into the songs on high.

To some degree these claims have analogies in the Hekhalot literature. In *Hekhalot Zutarti* §349//361, for example, we are told that the practitioner is able “to ascend on high” and return. Perhaps something similar is described in *Sepher HaRazim* lines 5–6, where he learns “to take a stand on the searching out of the steps of the heights, and to rove about everywhere in the seven habitations.” Certainly, as in §349//361, he is able to “search out the inhabited world” (cf. lines 6–7, 14–17); “to combine letters” and “to recite their names” to gain power over angels (cf. lines 7–10); “to know the explanation of the living” and “to see a vision of the dead” (cf. lines 10–11); and if not “to walk in rivers of fire,” at least “to know the lightning” (cf. lines 14–15). Likewise, just as in the boastful hymns opening the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§§81–93), the practitioner of *Sepher HaRazim* knows heavenly songs (§81; cf. line 18); knows whether his neighbors are good or evil (§§82–83, 86; cf. lines 10–12); and becomes “like one of the fearsome ones” (lines 17–18).

Most of these parallels might be made by any claimant to great skill in matters of supernatural ritual power. The most significant connection is the apparent claim in lines 5–6 “to take a stand on the searching out of the steps of the heights, and to rove about everywhere in the seven habitations.” I take the phrase “the steps of the heights” to refer to the twelve steps of the second firmament and “the seven habitations” to mean all seven firmaments. If so, it is most natural to read the lines as a claim to experience ascents to heaven. However, no recipes or instructions are given for such ascents in the body of the work, so the claim may come down to the practitioner’s ability to learn about the heavenly realms merely by reading and meditating on the work.

Another parallel is the frequent demand for and instructions regarding ritual purity when carrying out the prescribed praxes. The following is a typical admonition from the section on the second firmament:

(II) ^{6b}And if you seek to ask ⁷something from any who stand on the steps of the second firmament, cleanse yourself for three weeks of ⁸days

from all fruit of the palm tree(!),⁶⁷ and from all small and large intestines,⁶⁸ and from wine, and from the intestines of fish,⁶⁹ and from all things⁹ that bring forth blood. And do not approach a woman during her impurity, and do not come up to any dead bodies,¹⁰ and do not approach a leper or one with a flux, and guard against chance pollution and a seminal emission. And guard¹¹ your mouth from every evil word and from every sin, and sanctify yourself from all' sin.

We have seen numerous Sar Torah praxes that have many similarities to this ritual. These include a long period of fasting, the prohibition of specific foods, and the avoidance of sources of ritual pollution.

The descriptions of the angels in the various firmaments are also often similar to descriptions in the Hekhalot literature. For example, compare the following enthusiastic account of the angels standing on the ninth step of the second firmament in *Sepher HaRazim* to the account of the angels at the gate of the seventh palace in §§213–14 of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*.

(II) ¹³⁰These are the ones who stand on the ninth step: ¹³¹forceful ones in valor flying swiftly in the air, their might is dominion and the likeness of swords is in their hand; ¹³²ready for battle, they grasp a bow; they hold a javelin; they leap higher than fire, and they have ¹³³horses of fire and juniper. Their chariots are fire, and there is fear of them wherever they turn.

(§213) And at the gate of the seventh palace all the mighty ones stand raging; (they are) frightening, powerful, hard, fearsome, and confounding, higher than mountains and sharper than hills. Their bows are drawn, and in their hands are sharp swords. In their faces lightning drips and goes forth from their eyeballs, *globes* of fire from their nostrils, and torches of glowing coals from their mouths. They are wreathed (with) helmets and coats of mail and lances, and spears are hung on their arms for them.

(§214) Their horses are horses of darkness, horses of deep darkness, horses of gloom, horses of fire, horses of blood, horses of hail, horses of iron, horses of the misty cloud. The horses on which they ride stand over mangers of fire filled with glowing juniper coals, and they eat glowing coals out of their mangers, a measure of about forty seahs in

⁶⁷ Emending פרי דקה "small fruit," to פרי דקל, "fruit of the palm tree," with Margalioth.

⁶⁸ Emending ומכל מיני דקה ונסה, "and from all kinds of small and large (?)," to ומכל מעי דקה ונסה, "and from all small and large intestines," with Margalioth.

⁶⁹ Emending וממעי דנים, "and from (different) kinds of fish," to וממעי דנים, "and from intestines of fish," with Margalioth.

one mouthful. The measure of the mouth of every horse is three times as much as that of the gate of Caesarea, and the measure of the mouth of every single horse is three times more than the manger of Caesarea.

Although we have found some parallels between *Sepher HaRazim* and the Hekhalot literature, when all is said and done they are not very significant. It is fair to say that *Sepher HaRazim* and the Hekhalot literature share a generally similar thought world, but they have numerous differences in cosmology and praxis and no parallels that suggest common authorship. There may be a hint of the idea of a visionary journey at the beginning of *Sepher HaRazim* but it is not mentioned again, let alone followed up with concrete rituals for embarking on such a journey. There are no passages shared with the Hekhalot literature, no recipes for compelling angels to grant knowledge of Torah, and no mention of any of the rabbis or angels centrally associated with the Hekhalot traditions. The ideas in *Sepher HaRazim* seem to me to be closer to those of the Syro-Palestinian metal amulets and to the Greek magical papyri than to the Hekhalot literature.

The Social Background of the Tradents of the Hekhalot Literature

In the previous section we saw that there is a close relationship between the Hekhalot literature on the one hand and the Babylonian inscribed bowls and the texts of ritual power from the Cairo Geniza on the other. Hekhalot passages and central Hekhalot teachings and rituals are found in both groups of texts, and thus these texts provide our earliest surviving contexts for the Hekhalot traditions. There is some evidence for similar traditions in the metal amulets and in *Sepher HaRazim*, pointing perhaps to a Palestinian tradition of ascent and adjuration of angels in the Talmudic era, but the connections with the Hekhalot literature are more extensive and compelling in the inscribed bowls and the Cairo Geniza documents. In this section I survey what we know about the social background of these documents in particular, with a view to elucidating the life situation of the creators and tradents of the Hekhalot literature.

Information from the Babylonian Inscribed Bowls

Relatively little work has been done on the specific social locus of these texts and a full-scale study remains a desideratum. But a pre-

liminary look at the evidence suggests some useful generalizations. Babylonian society in late antiquity was based on agriculture and highly structured and stratified. The Jewish people in the region were a minority living under Sasanian rule. They tended to try to live quietly among their neighbors but did not escape periodic official persecution and were not immune to bouts of revolutionary messianism. The Sasanian empire, which had been weakened by wars and palace intrigues, emerged with new vigor in the sixth century, repelling both internal and external foes. Little is known about the vicissitudes of the Jewish people in this century, although legend says that in the first part of it they rebelled and founded their own state for a short time. The seventh century was a period of great political turmoil which saw vast military exploits by Khusro II but which ended in his defeat and the collapse of the empire after his death. The Muslim conquest was complete by about the middle of the century and was a welcome change for Babylonian Jews, since it resulted in the restoration of Jewish public institutions such as the office of exilarch.⁷⁰

According to Montgomery, the bowls from Nippur were recovered in an area identified by the chief excavator as a Jewish settlement dating to at latest the seventh century. Almost every private house excavated had one or more such bowl, and some were also recovered from a cemetery among the buried coffins. Many bowls were fakes—inscribed with arbitrary sequences of letters or even meaningless scrawls, perhaps produced to fool illiterate clients. As for the bowls containing genuine incantations, the skill of the scribes varied widely. Some are well written, but Montgomery judges that many were inscribed by illiterate laymen.⁷¹

Some of the formal characteristics of the inscriptions provide us with more information. Most of them are composed by an unnamed practitioner who speaks in the first person and who writes on behalf of named clients referred to in the third person. The spirits (angels, demons, gods, or God) can be addressed in the second person or mentioned in the third person. By implication, then, the practitioner is normally distinguished from clients and is assumed to be a different

⁷⁰ For a detailed discussion of Babylonian society and the place of Jews within it during this period, see Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, vol. 5: *Later Sasanian Times* (SPB 15; Leiden: Brill, 1970).

⁷¹ Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts* 13–15, 27–28.

person. In a number of cases, however, the practitioner has produced the bowl on his or her own behalf, speaking in the first person and giving his or her name. In Montgomery 2, two named practitioners have together inscribed for one another spells of protection against demons.⁷² A different man and his wife used the same template in Montgomery 27 for their own protection.⁷³ In Montgomery 13 the client, a childless woman seeking fertility and the love of her husband, is referred to in the third person, but once (line 5) she and the practitioner speak together as “we.”⁷⁴ In Montgomery 17, a named woman speaking in both first and third person divorces demons from herself.⁷⁵ In bowls 6, 17, and 23, published by Naveh and Shaked, the practitioners repel enemies, the evil eye, and sorcerous and demonic attacks.⁷⁶ The named speaker of Gordon L repels evil attacks from himself, as does the speaker in Gordon N, who is referred to in the first and third person.⁷⁷

The contents of the texts themselves suggest that the composers had some education but were not rabbinic scholars. The texts consistently show a good, accurate knowledge of the Hebrew Bible.⁷⁸ They draw on a creative and detailed mythology involving angels, demons, and the celestial realm.⁷⁹ They use cryptograms, some of which are known from elsewhere in Jewish tradition.⁸⁰ There are hints of interest in legal issues, such as the ban and divorce decrees against demons, but this quasi-legal material does not correspond to the canonical rabbinic traditions.⁸¹ Aggadic knowledge is present too, but again, it is nonrabbinic. Examples include the traditions about Joshua ben Peraḥya, to which I return below, and the appearance

⁷² Ibid., 121–26.

⁷³ Ibid., 212.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 178–82.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 190–92.

⁷⁶ Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* 164–68; idem, *Magic Spells and Formulae* 120–22, 132–33.

⁷⁷ Gordon, “Aramaic and Mandaic Magic Bowls,” 93–95, 100–102.

⁷⁸ Charles D. Isbell, “The Story of the Aramaic Magical Incantation Bowls,” *BA* 41 (1978) 5–16, esp. pp. 13–14.

⁷⁹ Baruch A. Levine, “The Language of the Magical Bowls,” in Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia* 5:343–75, esp. pp. 371–73.

⁸⁰ Charles D. Isbell, “Some Cryptograms in the Aramaic Incantation Bowls,” *JNES* 33 (1974) 405–407.

⁸¹ Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia* 5:236–39; Shaked, “The Poetics of Spells.”

of a forty-two-letter divine name in a form different from that given in the Geonic *responsa*.⁸²

Indeed, the bowls show evidence of a competent and longstanding scribal tradition. Many of the documents exist in multiple copies prepared for different clients, indicating that the practitioners drew on a corpus of set texts. The *Vorlagen* generally show a fairly high literary standard, even if many of the surviving copies are carelessly executed and corrupt. The Torah incantation in Gordon Moriah 1 was transmitted in a stable form for many centuries, since it resurfaces in medieval European manuscripts. Likewise, the *historiola* about Sideros the child killer (which is known also from medieval Christian traditions in many forms and languages) appears in five Babylonian bowls and a (probably) Palestinian amulet. The texts of the bowls and amulet are nearly identical throughout.⁸³ In other words, the Babylonian bowls emerged from a scribal tradition that encompassed a wide geographical area and a vast span of time.

The evidence for the social situation that produced the incantation bowls is complex, but it adds up to something like the following. The composers of the texts were skilled scribes who were members of an influential guild. They were well educated in Bible and in their own mythological traditions and legends, and they had a smattering of knowledge about the sorts of traditions that appear in the classical rabbinic texts. The practitioners who copied and used the texts came from a much wider cross-section of society. Presumably they included the scribal composers, who produced bowls for clients and perhaps sometimes for themselves. But they also included semiliterate nonspecialists who copied set texts to make their own bowls or bowls for their friends, and even semiliterate or illiterate nonspecialists who produced imitation bowls with faux writing, either as outright frauds to dupe illiterate clients or perhaps as bargain-basement facsimiles for clients who were not overly particular.⁸⁴

⁸² Lawrence H. Schiffman, "A Forty-two Letter Divine Name in the Aramaic Magic Bowls," *Bulletin of the Institute of Jewish Studies* 1 (1973) 97–102. The name is found in bowl Gordon 5, published by Gordon in "Aramaic Incantation Bowls," 123–24.

⁸³ Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* 104–22 (A15) and 188–97 (B12a–b); Gordon, "Aramaic Incantation Bowls," 346–47 (Hilprecht g); Müller-Kessler, "Eine aramäische Zauberschale."

⁸⁴ I assume that the incantation was recited when the bowl was installed. As long as the practitioner knew the incantation by heart and gave a satisfying performance, the illiterate client may neither have known nor cared whether the writing on the bowl was genuine.

Another oblique line of inquiry gives us more information about the composers of the bowl texts. Six or seven of the bowls refer to a practitioner who functions as an ideal figure whom the writer seeks to exemplify. R. Joshua ben Peraḥya was an early Tanna' who is cited twice in the Mishnah: in *Hag.* 2.2, which says that he served as president of the Sanhedrin (נשיא בית דין), he expresses a view on the propriety of the laying of hands on an animal to be slaughtered on a festival day; and in *'Abot* 1.6 he advises the reader to obtain a teacher and a fellow disciple and to be careful in judgment of others. In *t. Makš.* 3.4 he gives a purity ruling with which the sages disagreed, and there is a *baraita* in *b. Menah.* 109b which transmits a saying by him concerning the dangers of accepting a high office. The most important rabbinic tradition about him is *b. Sanh.* 107b//*b. Soṭa* 47a, which describes the stormy relationship between R. Joshua and his disciple Jesus. They traveled together to Egypt but fell out during the return trip, with the result (to some degree laid to R. Joshua's discredit) that Jesus became an idolator. This passage is the only hint in the rabbinic references to a connection between R. Joshua and practitioners of supernatural power.

The picture we build up from the references in the inscribed bowls gives us some sense of the ideal practitioner in the minds of the composers of the incantations. R. Joshua is portrayed as a mighty exorcist who brought bans,⁸⁵ bills of divorce,⁸⁶ and a "dismissal"⁸⁷ against demons. The last involves the manipulation of letters to subdue the forces of nature and the forces of evil. He also sealed the demons with his seal-ring.⁸⁸ He is called a "healer" (סוֹאֵן) in Montgomery 17.12 and perhaps in 34.2.⁸⁹ He is labeled as a producer and user of incantation bowls.⁹⁰ He ascended on high and brought back spells of destruction against demons.⁹¹ He is given the title Rav (רַב) or Rabbi (רַבִּי),⁹² titles which are associated in the

⁸⁵ Montgomery 8.6, 8; 17.8, 9–11 (*Aramaic Incantation Texts* 154–55, 190–91).

⁸⁶ Montgomery 8.7, 8–9; 17.10.

⁸⁷ Montgomery 32.4–7//33.3–9 (*ibid.*, 225–30 and translated above).

⁸⁸ Montgomery 8.11; 17.12.

⁸⁹ Montgomery, *ibid.*, 231. Bowl 34 is written in Syriac and invokes "the valor of Joshua the healer" (דוּלַ דְּיִשׁוּעַ סוֹאֵן). The reference could be either to R. Joshua or to Jesus.

⁹⁰ Montgomery 9.1–3; 32.3–4//33.1–4 (*ibid.*, 161, 225–30, translated above); Moussaieff 11.2–4 (Shaked, "The Poetics of Spells," 177–78).

⁹¹ Montgomery 32.8//33.9–10.

⁹² Montgomery 32.4//33.3 (רַב); 8.6, 8; 9.2; Moussaieff 11.3; Naveh and Shaked B5.5–6 (*Amulets and Magic Bowls* 158–60) (רַבִּי).

Babylonian Talmud not only with halakhic expertise but also with miraculous powers arising from knowledge of Torah.⁹³ Finally, there is a brief *historiola* about him which tells how he sent a ban against a lilit who used to strangle people, but the ban was ineffective because he did not know her name. Only after he wrote the name in a bill of divorce was a decree promulgated against her in heaven.⁹⁴ In short, the ideal practitioner of the ritual power of the bowls is a figure who appears peripherally in the canonical rabbinic tradition but is assigned both religious and political authority. He used powerful spells of various types to heal people of demonic affliction and even ascended to heaven to bring back more antidemonic charms.

Information from the Cairo Geniza Texts

Considerably more work has been done on the social background of the Cairo Geniza texts. S. D. Goiten has published a massive social history of the corpus,⁹⁵ and Schiffman and Swartz have drawn on Goiten's work, alongside a close reading of the amulets they have published, to reach some important conclusions about the background of the works of ritual power.⁹⁶ The writers of these amulets were well versed in the Bible and quoted from it frequently, if sometimes inaccurately. Biblical figures associated with ritual power, such as Joseph and Solomon, are also mentioned, sometimes with allusions to midrashic material that resembles but is not identical to canonical rabbinical literature. Clients are sometimes named in the amulets, but little else can be deduced about them. It was not uncommon for a practitioner to write an amulet for himself. Many of the texts were written with the skill of a professional scribe, but others were composed with much less care and sophistication. Swartz and Schiffman note the existence of a letter from the Geniza which has a profes-

⁹³ Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, vol. 2: *The Early Sasanid Period* (SPB 11; Leiden: Brill, 1966) 126–59, 187, 195, 201; vol. 3: *From Shapur I to Shapur II* (SPB 12; Leiden: Brill, 1968) 102–22; vol. 4: *The Age of Shapur II* (SPB 14; Leiden: Brill, 1969) 279–86, 324–62, 392–99.

⁹⁴ Naveh and Shaked B5.5–7 (*Amulets and Magic Bowls* 158–60); Moussaieff 2.5–7? (Shaked, "The Poetics of Spells, 192).

⁹⁵ S. D. Goiten, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* (6 vols.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967–93).

⁹⁶ Schiffman and Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts* 32–62.

sional scribe write a "charm" of protection for a new mother and her baby son.⁹⁷ They add,

It should also be recognized that professional scribes were often not members of the most educated class. They were trained to copy books and documents and compose letters, but were not necessarily legal scholars or philosophers. They certainly would have received an adequate education, but were more likely to be petty bureaucrats than members of the elite.⁹⁸

They characterize the practitioners of ritual power and their clients in these terms:

They represent a Judaism in which traditional Jewish practice was overlaid with rich folklore customs, itself often rooted in earlier literary sources. These people did not adhere to the philosophical approach to Judaism which would have led them, as it did the elite (Moses Maimonides is but the most extreme example), to eschew magic and "superstition."⁹⁹

It is worth pausing to look a little more closely at the social group described by Schiffman and Swartz as the probable context of the texts of ritual power from the Cairo Geniza. Concerning levels of Jewish education in the world that produced the Geniza texts, Goiten writes,

A Jewish scholar from Iraq, writing in Egypt around the middle of the twelfth century, described the various stages of study approximately as follows: If we disregard uneducated persons, people can be classified in three categories: the broad masses, scholars, and doctors. The masses have learned the written and the oral law, namely the Five Books of Moses and Saadya's prayerbook (which comprised also the religious injunctions connected with prayer and the keeping of the Sabbath and the holidays); the scholars have studied, in addition to the Pentateuch, the other sections of the Bible, as well as the "ordinances," that is, codified law (the work the writer recommends for the purpose is of enormous length); the doctor is at the highest level, a man who has also made himself familiar with the Mishnah, the Talmud, and their commentaries.¹⁰⁰

Thus we have four levels of education: the uneducated or illiterate; the masses, who are generally familiar with the Pentateuch and the

⁹⁷ Ibid., 49.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 50.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 50-51.

¹⁰⁰ Goiten, *A Mediterranean Society* 2:205-206.

prayer book; scholars, who have studied the Bible and a digest of the legal traditions; and doctors, who are also versed in the rabbinic scriptures. This overview is admittedly schematic, but it is a reasonable starting point for thinking about the social location of the writers of the ritual power texts. These people fall somewhere between the second and the third categories. They know biblical stories and texts and have some familiarity with law and lore, but their competence in both is limited.

An important point to keep in mind is that learning to write was a specialist's skill in this society. Goiten writes that, "[f]our types of students were trained in calligraphy: future government officials, physicians, religious scholars, and merchants. Thus the art of writing—not of reading, which was far more widespread—was the distinctive mark of a person belonging to the professional or higher classes."¹⁰¹

He adds later:

"A scholar should learn how to write" [*b. Hul.* 9a]. This amazing item in the list of accomplishments required of a scholar in the Talmud is to be understood in the light of medieval conditions and ideas about the subject. While the knowledge of reading was fairly common, writing was an art acquired just by persons who had a special reason to do so, mostly, as we have seen . . . those who prepared themselves for the profession of clerk, copyist, scholar, teacher, physician, and merchant.¹⁰²

It is indeed quite likely that many of the texts of ritual power from the Cairo Geniza come from the circle of professional scribes. But other circles are also possible sources. Teachers at the level of elementary education needed to be able to write well, and thus they sometimes also served as scribes.¹⁰³ And among synagogue functionaries, cantors in particular required linguistic and writing skills.¹⁰⁴ The ritual power texts from the Cairo Geniza often show familiarity with the Jewish liturgy (T.-S. K 1.35 + T.-S. K 1.48, discussed above, is a good example), as does the *Hekhalot* literature. Indeed, the Jewish liturgy is another corpus of texts of ritual power, although a type of power more communally focused and less immediately con-

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 223–24.

crete that the power of the documents we have covered in this chapter. More exploration of the relationship between the Hekhalot literature and the Jewish liturgy would no doubt be quite illuminating.¹⁰⁵

Conclusions

The central conclusion I wish to draw from the material covered in this chapter is that the Hekhalot literature is a body of real ritual instructions drawn up for real practitioners. Although the attribution of these instructions to specific Tannaitic rabbis is to a greater or lesser degree pseudepigraphic and the events described in the Hekhalot literature are presumably largely or entirely fictional, the instructions were meant to be used (as shown on other grounds in chapter 4) and in fact were used.

We have recovered two concrete life situations for this material. The first is the Jewish community in fifth- to seventh-century Babylonia. The practitioners who produced the ubiquitous incantation bowls drew on a version of at least one Hekhalot text of Torah adjuration known from the much later European manuscript tradition; they called on the Prince of Torah for help; and they practiced heavenly ascents to bring down spells and angels to help their clients. The composers of the bowl texts belonged to a cosmopolitan scribal tradition, although the texts were adopted, imitated, and forged by less educated or perhaps even illiterate contemporaries.

The second context consists of Jewish circles in the Middle East who transmitted and used texts of ritual power in the eleventh to twelfth centuries, fragments of which texts survived in the Cairo

¹⁰⁵ Such a study is outside the scope of this volume. I note, however, that the Hekhalot literature frequently connects and coordinates the angelic worship in heaven with the earthly liturgy (*Hekhalot Rabbati* §§161–97; *Sar Torah* §300; *SH-L* §385; *Hekhalot Zutarti* §423; *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§565, 576; *Merkavah Rabba* §682; G19 1a 14–15). I have more to say on this relationship in chapter 9. Ithamar Gruenwald has drawn attention to numerous points of contact between the Hekhalot literature and the work of the sixth-century Palestinian liturgical poet Yannay. These consist mainly of cosmological terminology rather than central concepts such as *Sar Torah* praxes or descent to the chariot (“The Piyyutim of Yannay and the Literature of the Descenders to the Chariot,” *Tarbiz* 36 [1967] 257–77 [Hebrew]). Michael D. Swartz has analyzed the use of the prayer *‘Alay le-shabbeah* in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §551 (“*‘Alay le-shabbeah*: A Liturgical Prayer in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*,” *JQR* 77 [1986–87] 179–90; cf. idem, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism* 118–25). He has also drawn attention to the potential importance of synagogue and liturgy for our understanding of the life situation of the Hekhalot literature (*Scholastic Magic* 218–21).

Geniza.¹⁰⁶ These practitioners included in their handbooks, *inter alia*, an adjuration known from the *Hekhalot Zutarti*, a Sar Torah praxis, and instructions for having visions of angels and the heavenly chariot scene. The texts of ritual power stored in the Cairo Geniza were produced by people who were educated in a scribal or synagogue tradition but did not have a formal rabbinic education. Again, it is likely that people with less education made frequent use of the texts once they were composed and circulated.

The key point is not so much that we find evidence for the transmission of Hekhalot traditions from the seventh to twelfth centuries (as well as later and quite possibly earlier), although this in itself is significant. It is the contexts in which these traditions are embedded. The incantation bowls are not theoretical or fictional literature. We have them because real clients commissioned them and real practitioners produced them and buried them in the clients' houses to exorcise demons from the household. Likewise, the Cairo Geniza handbooks that contain the passage from the *Hekhalot Zutarti*, the Sar Torah praxis, and the praxis for seeing visions are practical works that purport to tell the practitioner how to protect clients from demons, cure sterility, open locks, aid women in pregnancy and childbirth, divine useful information, and control demons and animals. Whether or not we think of these incantations, adjurations, exorcisms, and spells as practical devices, the people who used them did, and they made no distinction between the Hekhalot traditions and other texts of ritual power.

Up to this point I have been building the case for a particular reading of the Hekhalot literature, one that takes seriously its claims to describe the rituals used by a particular constellation of intermediary figures and ritual practitioners. The cumulative force of the anthropological and historical data now leads me to this conclusion. *The religious functionaries portrayed in the Hekhalot texts, the "descenders to*

¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately, the "oriental" scripts of this period are not easy to assign to specific geographical locations. Malachi Beit Arié says of this script type that "[i]t encompasses the variety of handwritings used in the Middle East, covering eastern Asia Minor, Iraq, Persia and its surroundings, Syria, Palestine and Egypt (including Libya), all of which were included, at the time of the earliest surviving codices produced in these areas, in one political unit, the Abbasid Caliphate. . . . Although some differences have already been noted in morphological research between north-eastern regions and south-western ones, they are not yet clear enough to be applied systematically" (*The Makings of the Medieval Hebrew Book: Studies in Palaeography and Codicology* [Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1993] 27).

the chariot" as they are sometimes called, were real people, practitioners of the rituals described in the Hekhalot literature and the writers of that literature. The texts were composed by people who knew the intimate details of the practices and their outcomes, both of which we have discerned in this chapter in real-life situations. The central microforms must have been written by those who used the traditions. I do not doubt that the microforms were adapted and reworked in a complex editorial process as they were redacted and assembled into the jumbled macroforms of the late manuscripts. But the descenders to the chariot were by and large also the composers.

Another implication arises from the material explored in this chapter. The descenders to the chariot made use of other forms of ritual power as well, forms only hinted at in the Hekhalot texts themselves. At the end of chapter 7, I concluded that the Hekhalot literature teaches its practitioners how to compel angels to grant supernatural knowledge of Torah, to act as guides on the otherworldly journey, to offer protection, and to grant wishes whose content is not specified. The focus of these services is on the practitioner, whereas a shaman would be expected to use such powers to help members of the shaman's community. The evidence of the other texts of ritual power fills out this picture and shows that the tradents of the Hekhalot literature used their powers to heal, protect, and exorcise demons from clients. This minimalist conclusion is inescapable, since it is based only on bowl incantations and Geniza handbooks that contain indubitable Hekhalot traditions inextricably joined to these other rituals of power. It is entirely likely that the practitioners used a wide range of other rituals of power. The texts of some of the amulets found in the Cairo Geniza would have generated no particular surprise if they had been found in a Hekhalot manuscript,¹⁰⁷ and one could easily imagine the descenders to the chariot using dream inquiry rituals such as those in T.-S. K 1.28 1a 11-1b 16 or a handbook like the *Sheva' Zutarti*.

I am content, however, with the minimalist conclusion, and on its basis I propose a preliminary interpretation of the Hekhalot literature as a whole. The Hekhalot literature is a body of instructional texts created with the purpose of teaching chosen disciples how to become a type of magico-religious practitioner—a type who so far

¹⁰⁷ E.g., T.-S. K 1.71 and T.-S. K 1.128 (Schiffman and Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts* 93-98, 128-30).

has many similarities to the shaman. This practitioner engages in otherworldly journeys, and in the summoning of angels to grant him knowledge of Torah. The Hekhalot literature is essentially esoteric, at least insofar as very few disciples would have been likely to have carried out fully the rigorous ascetic regimes it demands. But it has an implicit exoteric side in that the practitioner was expected to use his powers for the practical benefit of his community. The emphasis on the individual practitioner gaining a supernatural knowledge of Torah must not deceive us into thinking that the goals of the Hekhalot literature revolve only around the individual practitioner. As Jacob Neusner has shown, in rabbinic thought Torah is a source of vast supernatural power, power upon which the sage can draw.¹⁰⁸ We see this power being used, for example, in the inscribed bowls Gordon E/F/Hyvernat, where the practitioners invoke the Prince of Torah to protect the households of their clients and (in the Hyvernat bowl) to drive evil spirits away from them.

To put my point another way: we have seen that many Hekhalot texts call on God or the angels to grant the prayer of the practitioner or to do whatever he asks, to sign a blank check so to speak.¹⁰⁹ The texts of ritual power covered in this chapter give us some idea of how the blank was filled in. The power of the heavenly ascent or the adjuration of angels was, at least in some cases, cashed in for the benefit of clients or members of the community. It may be that the emphasis in some texts—such as *Hekhalot Rabbati* §236, on the adept joining in the angelic liturgy—had a similar outcome in view. Some texts of ritual power drew on liturgical material, and one might speculate that the clients of a practitioner who was believed to sing with the angels would regard him as especially mighty. But in any case, the Hekhalot literature gives instructions on how to obtain the power over the spirits that allows one to serve the community.

¹⁰⁸ See n. 93.

¹⁰⁹ *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§419, 421; *Sar Panim* §§627, 634; *Merkawah Rabba* §670; G19 1b 14–17; G21 1a 17b–19a.

CHAPTER NINE

LOCATING THE DESCENDERS TO THE CHARIOT

The Hekhalot Literature and the Community

In the first section of this chapter I return to the Hekhalot literature to ask what it says about the relationship between the descenders to the chariot and their communities. I will seek information about the nature of these communities and the social roles and powers the descenders to the chariot possessed within them. There are many questions to be asked, such as whether the descenders to the chariot are portrayed as central or peripheral intermediaries; whether and to what degree they are shown holding political or judicial power; what socio-economic and moral status is assumed about them; whether they appear to operate in groups or as individuals, on their own behalf or on the behalf of clients or congregations, as part- or full-time practitioners, as specialists or general practitioners, and under gender restrictions; and how they seem to be trained.¹ Naturally, we can hardly expect that the texts will answer all these questions.

Likewise, this analysis operates under two obvious limitations that must be kept firmly in mind. The first is the frankly propagandistic nature of the documents. Whatever the intended audience (and I think it likely that it was disciples and trainees), the texts tell us what the composers wished the audience to believe about the descenders to the chariot, which may (or may not) be quite different from what others may have accepted or what twenty-first century scholars might accept. Second, there is the fluid text and highly redacted nature of the major macroforms in the surviving manuscripts. Although the composers of the bulk of the microforms were clearly the descenders to the chariot themselves, as I argued in the last chapter, their work has been edited and adapted by later tradents. The agendas of some of them may have been quite different from the composers

¹ This list is inspired in part by the lists of socio-political powers, social characteristics, and professional characteristics included by Winkelman in his analysis of mediating practitioners (*Shamans, Priests and Witches* 19–20).

(§83) Greatest of all is that he has a vision of every deed that mortals do, even in inner rooms, whether fine deeds or corrupting deeds. He knows and recognizes the thief; he knows and recognizes the adulterer; he knows and recognizes the murderer; he knows and recognizes the one who is suspected (of contact with) the menstruant; he knows and recognizes the one who tells gossip. Greatest of all is that he recognizes all sorcerers.⁴

(§84) Greatest of all is that anyone who raises his hand against him and strikes him—they clothe him with plagues and cover him with leprosy and wreath him with skin blemishes. Greatest of all is that anyone who tells gossip about him—they attack and cast on him all strokes of skin eruptions and sores and wounds from which raw boils emerge.

(§85) Greatest of all is that he is set apart from all mortals and he is confounding among all his peers and he is honored over heavenly beings and earthly beings. And anyone who stumbles over him—great, evil, and harsh stumbling blocks fall on that person from heaven. And anyone who stretches out his hand against him—with a bill of divorce of the heavenly law court they stretch out a hand against him.

(§86) Greatest of all is that all beings shall be before him like silver before a refiner, whether it be refined silver, whether it be unfit silver, or whether it be pure silver. And also he will have visionary insight into a family, (knowing) how many bastards there are in a family, how many sons of a menstruant, how many wounded by crushing, how many whose male member is cut off, how many sons of slaves, how many sons of the uncircumcised.

(§91) Greatest of all is that anyone who insolently defies him—they make dim the light of his eyeballs. Greatest of all is that anyone who despises him does not leave behind root or branch, nor does he leave an inheritance. Greatest of all is that anyone who tells of his shortcomings—they bring the decreed annihilation upon him and have no compassion on him.

(§92) Greatest of all is that they blow a sustained, a quavering, and a sustained blast on the horn, and afterward they excommunicate and take captive and excommunicate and ban (him) three times every single day from the heavenly law court, from the day that permission was given to Israel, to the upright, to the ritually fit, to the meek, to the humble, to the sensible, to the chosen, and to the ones set apart, to descend and to ascend to the chariot. They say, "Let him be banished from T'SŠ YHWH, God of Israel, from him and from His throne of glory, from the crown of His head, from the heavenly law court, from the earthly law court, from the whole host on high, from all his attendants who stand before him considering the chariot but leaving it alone."

⁴ Another reading is "all who know sorceries."

(§93) R. Ishmael said: -

Such are they who study the vision of the chariot. The one who considers the chariot is not permitted to stand except before three figures alone: before a king, before a high priest, and before the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin only at a time when it has in it a president. If it lacks a president, he may not stand even before the Sanhedrin, and if he does stand, behold whoever he stands before is culpable for his own life, because he lessens his days and shortens his years.⁵

Three points stand out immediately from this remarkable passage. First of all, the glorified figure is unambiguously the descender to the chariot, and his access to the heavenly liturgy is tied directly to his powers. He sees what happens before God's throne and at the same time is granted knowledge of the future of the world.

Second, he knows the most intimate secrets of the people around him: their future fates, their private actions and sins, and the physical defects of their bodies and their family lines. This is a claim to extraordinary power indeed. The practitioner can detect clandestine violations of the Decalogue or the purity laws (§83; cf. Deut 5:17-19; Lev 18:19-20) or hidden blemishes that would render someone unfit for full participation in the community (§86; cf. Deut 23:1-3). Like Elijah, the forerunner of the messiah, he tests and refines the people like silver and gold (§§83, 86; cf. Mal 3:2-5, 23-24).⁶ The implication is that he is the primary policer of the social and moral boundaries of the community.

Third, he is a man who has enemies but enjoys divine protection from them. People gossip about him, despise and defy him, find him a stumbling block, and even attack him physically. If he really did try to expose their private failings as the text seems to imply, such enmity is hardly surprising. But the attacks of his enemies fail, for "they" (the angels) strike the enemies with defiling skin diseases, stumbling blocks, and the "decreed annihilation" (Isa 28:22; Dan 9:27). They also serve them with a heavenly bill of divorce, uproot their line, and excommunicate them.

⁵ Arnold Goldberg suggests that the first sentence of §81 is an editorial addition echoing the beginning of §94 and added when the hymns of boasting were incorporated into the *Hekhalot Rabbati* ("Einige Bemerkungen zu den Quellen und den redaktionellen Einheiten der Grossen Hekhalot," *FJB* 1 (1973) 1-49, esp. pp. 3-5. Gerd A. Wewers appears also to exclude §93 from the original unit, but this is far less certain ("Die Überlegenheit des Mystikers," *JST* 17 [1986] 3-22, esp. p. 8).

⁶ Wewers, "Die Überlegenheit des Mystikers," 15-18; Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* 41-43.

The means by which the practitioner acquires his dangerous knowledge and angelic support are not made explicit, although it is not unreasonable to tie them to his vision of God's throne in §81. We have seen that the physiognomic tradition discussed in chapter 3 uses somewhat similar terminology and promises to give somewhat similar sorts of knowledge. For example, the *Physiognomy of R. Ishmael* §14 describes the appearance of a man who covets his neighbors goods and swears falsely. It is notable that the enemies of the descender to the chariot are treated here in much the same way as demons in the Babylonian incantation bowls. Both are divorced and excommunicated by the heavenly council. And there are other parallels to these bowls and to the Cairo Geniza texts. For example, Naveh's and Shaked's Bowl 6 gives an incantation for defeating the enemies of the practitioner.⁷ Lurid curses are brought down on the heads of enemies in the amulets T.-S. K 1.42, 24; T.-S. K 1.169; and T.-S. K 1.148.⁸ Spells for identifying a thief appear in T.-S. K 1.28 1b 16–2a 19.⁹ It seems likely enough that this passage celebrating the powers of the descender to the chariot assumes the use of rituals of power like these.

How literally should we take the exalted claims in this passage? Or to put it another way, to what degree were these claims recognized by outsiders and to what degree were they merely asserted within the group of practitioners? This is a very difficult question and I am not sure how to answer it. I note simply that the similar assertions in the texts of ritual power mentioned in the previous paragraph (along with many others) imply the existence of a clientele who took such things quite seriously—to the point of commissioning the practitioners who made the claims to act on their behalf.

The second grouping of material in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* is §§94–106 and §§152–73, 189–197, two collections of traditions about the celestial liturgy which may have been a single unit before the third section, the story of the ten martyrs, was added. I will consider §§94–106, 152–73, 189–197 together here, since the material is thematically similar throughout. Most of it consists either of songs sung by the

⁷ Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* 164–68.

⁸ Schiffman and Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts* 83–92, 160–64; Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 2:305–311.

⁹ Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte* 1:133–50.

angels or descriptions of angelic worship, but a few passages mention or address the descenders to the chariot. The first collection opens,

(§94) R. Ishmael said:

What distinguishes songs that a man sings and descends to the chariot? He opens and says: The head of songs is the beginning of praise and the start of a song is the beginning of rejoicing and the start of a chant. The attendants sing the songs each day to YHWH God of Israel, to the throne of His glory.

The stage is set: the descenders to the chariot must learn the songs the angels sing in their daily liturgy. The only other passage in the first collection that refers unambiguously to human beings is §§101–104, which describes the initiatory death and resurrection of the adept when he comes before God's throne, as I argued in chapter 5.¹⁰

In the second collection we find our first passage of interest in the midst of a series of songs in praise of the angels, the *qedushah*, and God.

(§163) Blessed to heaven and to earth are the descenders to the chariot, if you recite and tell my sons what I do at the morning prayer and at the afternoon and evening prayer, every single day and every single hour that Israel says before Me, "Holy." Teach them, say to them, "Lift up your eyes to the firmament corresponding to your house of prayer in the hour that you say before Me, 'holy.'" There is nothing as fine to me in all my world that I created as that hour when your eyes are lifted up to my eyes and my eyes look into your eyes in the hour that you say before me, "Holy." For the voice that goes forth from your mouth in that hour drips and ascends before Me as a soothing odor.

(§164) And testify to them whatever testimony you have. You see Me—what I do to the visage of the face of Jacob your father which is engraved for Me on My throne of glory. For in the hour that you say before Me, "Holy," I kneel on it and embrace it and kiss it and hug it and My hands are on its arms three times, corresponding to the three times that you say before Me, "Holy." As it is written, "Holy, holy, holy" (Isa 6:3).

On the face of it, the descenders to the chariot are ordered to describe to the earthly community, God's "sons," perhaps to be taken as "Israel," what they see happening in the celestial liturgy during

¹⁰ I take the mysterious dialogue in §§96–97 to be between God and an angelic being, perhaps Metatron (following Schäfer, *Übersetzung* 2:14 n. 2).

their visionary journeys. The celestial liturgy corresponds to the earthly liturgy: heaven corresponds to the house of prayer; the *qedushah*, the recitation of Isa 6:3, occurs in both at the same times each day; God looks down into Israel's eyes as they look up into his; their prayers act as soothing offerings; and God embraces the image of Jacob carved on his throne. Schäfer takes this passage to say that the descender to the chariot acts as an emissary and representative of the nation Israel.¹¹ Chernus, however, on the basis of his interpretation of material in the *Sar Torah* text, interprets "Israel" here to mean "the mystical community as the 'true Israel.'"¹² I will address his arguments when we come to the *Sar Torah*. Either interpretation of this passage is defensible.

The same theme is picked up again several sections later:

(§169) The decree of heaven is against you, descenders to the chariot, unless you say what you have heard and unless you testify to what you have seen concerning the Presence, the Presence of exaltation and might, majesty and grandeur, which is lifted up, borne, stirred up, and magnified. The Presence is declared lofty and declared mighty three times a day on high, and there are no mortals who know and recognize it.

Here the descenders to the chariot are threatened unless they testify (to whom is not indicated) concerning their vision of God, which again is tied to the schedule of the earthly liturgy. The last passage that mentions them in this section is the following, addressed to the four living creatures:

(§172) Please, you beings who carry the throne of glory wholeheartedly and with a willing soul, magnify rejoicing and chanting, song and melody before the throne of glory of ʿTWʾRWSYʿY NBWBMRTSʿN (and some say NDYB MRTSʿN) YWY: God of Israel, that His heart may rejoice in the hour of the prayer of His sons, and He may seek and find them, the descenders to the chariot, in the hour that they stand before His throne of glory.

This passage hints at a topos in this section which Schäfer has noted. The angelic beings who bear God's throne on their back are given high praise throughout the section (§§152, 154, 156–58, 160, 167, 168, 171, 173, 184–85, 187–90), but "[t]he texts leave no doubt that Israel's liturgy, in the end, is more important than that of the *hayyot*"

¹¹ Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* 45–46.

¹² Chernus, "Individual and Community," 261.

(the angels in question).¹³ Here the praise of the throne-bearing angels serves merely as background music to the main event: the participation of the descenders to the chariot in the celestial liturgy. I note in passing that the use of the phrase "His sons" here is most naturally applied to the descenders to the chariot rather than Israel as a whole, a point in favor of Chernus' view that the revelations required of the adepts are to their own esoteric group rather than to exoteric Israel.

The third section of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* is §§107–21, the story of the ten martyrs. The narrative is put in the mouth of R. Ishmael, who reports that a proclamation came from Rome ordering the execution of four eminent Jewish sages. When R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah heard it he had R. Ishmael descend to the chariot. There he learned that the heavenly law court had decreed that the evil angel of Rome, Sammael, had been granted the lives of ten sages (the discrepancy in number is never explained) in exchange for his own destruction. After the agreement with Sammael was sealed, God rained plagues of skin diseases down on Rome for a year. Meanwhile, R. Ishmael returned from heaven and reported to the associates (חבריים), who threw a party along with R. Nehuniah and the president when they got the news. Then the heavenly law court ordered the angels of destruction to bring the "decreed annihilation" down upon "Lupinus Caesar." They killed his entire family and court, then when anyone attempted to gather the corpses for burial, the Deep would swallow them and disgorge them as soon as the attempt was given up. Thus the bodies were left to lie rotting in the palace.

The angel Suriah reported to R. Ishmael that these horrors were visited upon Lupinus Caesar because he had ordered the execution of R. Hananiah ben Tardion and even now he refused to relent. But, Suriah reported, he himself descended at God's command and gave R. Hananiah the appearance of Lupinus, then switched their places. R. Hananiah ruled Rome for six months, during which time he had six thousand Roman generals executed. Meanwhile, Lupinus was given the appearance, one at a time, of each of the ten condemned rabbis, and was burned to death as each of them. After each execution he was restored to life and made to suffer the death of the next victim.

¹³ Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* 46.

The narrative is very uneven and not entirely consistent and I have tried to avoid imposing harmony on the disparate elements in my summary. Evidently various versions of the story, and perhaps other stories as well were drawn on in the composition of this one.¹⁴ But in any case, it has points of interest. The descent to the chariot is made on behalf of the Jewish community at large, to discover the origins and outcome of a persecution by the colonial authorities. The results are reported to the "associates," presumably the conventicle of descenders to the chariot, but also to the president of the Sanhedrin, who rejoiced with them. However, according to later passages in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§§ 203; 238–40), Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel was president in the time of Ishmael and Akiva (this much appears to be historically accurate) and he was also privy to the esoteric secrets of the descenders to the chariot, so the mention of the president here does not necessarily imply that the contents of R. Ishmael's vision were shared with those who were not associates. Aside from several references to revelations to R. Ishmael by the angel Suriah, the rest of the story is composed of miracle stories unrelated to the Hekhalot traditions.

The fourth and final component of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* is the account of the instruction of matters pertaining to the descent to the chariot by R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah, and some related material (§§198–277). In the surviving redaction this instruction has been transformed into an account of an actual descent to the chariot by R. Nehuniah, but the secondary nature of this redaction is obvious. This section is composed of a number of subunits that probably circulated independently before being incorporated into the *Hekhalot Rabbati*. The account of the instruction is narrated by R. Ishmael in §§198–237. Another instruction, concerning the names of the guardians of the seventh palace, is found in §§238–46. This passage segues into a second description of the entry into the heavenly throne room which leads to the adept reciting the songs that the throne of glory sings each day (§§247–51). These songs are given (§§251–57//260–67) followed by versions of the threshold test and the water test (§§258–59).

¹⁴ For other recensions of the story of the ten martyrs, see Gottfried Reeg, *Die Geschichte von den Zehn Märtyrern: Synoptische Edition mit Übersetzung und Einleitung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985).

The work concludes with more songs and a list of the names of Metatron (§§268–77).

The relevant material is all found in the first two episodes, §§198–237 and §§238–46. In §201 R. Ishmael is ordered to bring “all the mighty men of the association (חבורה) and all the magnificent ones of the academy (שיבטה).” Accordingly he “assembled the whole Sanhedrin, great and small at the third entrance that is in the House of YHWH.” In §203 a group of ten named inner disciples sit at R. Nehuniah’s feet while a “whole crowd” of “associates” stand around them, separated from the inner circle by a row of torches.¹⁵ The greater Sanhedrin had seventy-one members and the lesser had twenty-three (*m. Sanh.* 1.6), so although some of the ten disciples were Sanhedrin members (such as Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel), the crowd of standing associates must be taken to be the bulk of the Sanhedrin. Yet in §237 “all the associates” are attributed the ability to descend and ascend the world ladder. It seems that this passage means to describe a special revelation of esoteric lore to the leaders of Israel because of the imminent danger of persecution from Rome. Here we have an unambiguous statement that such revelations could be passed on to outsiders, and this supports the possibility that the traditions discussed above about the descenders to the chariot and the celestial liturgy teach that the visionaries should testify about their visions to exoteric Israel and not just to other insiders.

In R. Nehuniah’s instruction, three passages provide relevant information about the descenders to the chariot. After the terrifying description of the guardians of the gate of the seventh palace and their horses (§§213–15), we read,

(§216) And all the descenders to the chariot ascend and are not harmed; rather they see all this violence and descend safely and they come and stand and testify to the fearsome and confounding sight, the like of which is not in all the palaces of kings of flesh and blood. And they bless and praise and laud and exalt and adorn and give glory and ornamentation and greatness to TWTRWSY²Y YWY, God of Israel, Who is happy with the descenders to the chariot and Who sits and waits for every single one from Israel when he descends and feasts his eyes on the wonderful majesty and the strange rulership, on the majesty

¹⁵ The names of the ten members of the inner circle in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §203 are almost the same as the names of the ten martyrs given in two manuscripts of *Hekhalot Rabbati* §109.

of exaltation and the rulership of grandeur that throngs before the throne of glory three times every single day on high since the world was created and up to now for praise.

Once again we are told that the descenders to the chariot return to earth to testify concerning their visions (again, to whom is not specified). This passage adds that God eagerly watches the progress of the descenders to the chariot, "every one from Israel," as they come and see the vision of the celestial liturgy.

After a Merkavah hymn (§217) we read,

(§218) $\text{TW}^{\text{R}}\text{RSY}^{\text{Y}}$ YHWH God of Israel covets and waits in the same way that He waits for the redemption and for the time of salvation for Israel after the destruction of the former Temple. When will the descender descend to the chariot? When will he feast his eyes on the majesties on high? When will he hear the end of salvation? When will he see "what eye has not seen" (Isa 64:4) and ascend and report to the seed of Abraham His beloved?

The same points as in §216 are repeated and reinforced here. The arrival of the descender to the chariot is greeted by God with the same enthusiasm as the arrival of the eschaton. Indeed, the experience of the visionary is the same as "the end of salvation." And he returns and reports his experience "to the seed of Abraham," the "beloved" of God. It is difficult to take the recipient of the report to be other than exoteric Israel.

Finally, near the end of the instruction, we are told that the angel Dumiel gives the adept a solemn warning in the sixth palace to the effect that one who descends to the chariot must already be a master of Torah, either in theory or in practice, before he is permitted to proceed and join the celestial liturgy (§234). Obviously, this section stands in tension with the Sar Torah traditions, which have the purpose of teaching Torah instantly to anyone. Later, of course, we are told that he must also present a "great seal and a fearsome crown" to the angels in order to pass them (§236), which is more reminiscent of the sorts of ritual power tied to the descent to the chariot and the adjuration of the Prince of Torah elsewhere in the *Hekhalot* literature.

The account of the recall of R. Nehuniah during his descent to the chariot (§§224–228) is a secondary addition that is marked by redactional seams and is missing in the earliest manuscript of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, so we should consider its evidence separately. It fea-

tures a request from the “whole association” (כל חבורה) for R. Ishmael to bring back R. Nehuniah so that he can explain some difficulties in his instructions about the angels of the sixth palace, who sometimes attack some of the descenders to the chariot (§225). In passing, it also mentions the “association” as a body that makes legal pronouncements, with no particular esoteric connections (§226). R. Ishmael brings his master back, using a strange technique that involves ritual elements similar to those found in the texts of ritual power surveyed in chapter 8, but in a context that assumes standards of ritual purity that greatly exceed the rabbinic standards (§227). Once recalled, R. Nehuniah explains who the victims of the attack were.

(228b) He said to us:

These are mortal men whom the descenders to the chariot take and they station them above them and seat them before them and say to them, “Watch¹⁶ and see and give ear and write everything that we say and everything that we hear from before the throne of glory.” But these mortal men are not fit for such, therefore the guardians of the gate of the sixth palace attack them. Be careful that you select for yourselves ritually fit mortals and that they are of the well-tested associates.

His answer seems to say that the descenders to the chariot make use of amanuenses to take down by dictation the accounts of the descents to the chariot as they happened, but that the scribes are sometimes found ritually unfit and are attacked by the angels of the sixth palace. It is difficult to know what to make of this interpolation in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*. The application of extreme standards of ritual purity is characteristic of the *Hekhalot* literature,¹⁷ and the references to the “association” are compatible with the story into which the interpolation has been inserted, but the description of the people who risk their lives to act as secretaries to the enraptured visionaries is unique and rather implausible. It is not impossible that early details of the ritual practices of the visionaries are preserved here, but it is at least as likely, if not more so, that this passage is a late composition that does not accurately reflect praxes that were actually used.

¹⁶ Or “Have a vision.” The verb $\sqrt{\text{צפד}}$ usually has the latter technical sense in the *Hekhalot* literature, but that sense does not seem to fit this passage.

¹⁷ See Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 117–34.

Finally, there is the episode in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§238–46 in which R. Nehuniah reveals the names of the guardians of the gates of the seventh palace. After R. Ishmael is rebuked by Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel for not revealing them to another rabbi, R. Ishmael goes to R. Nehuniah complaining, “The president is angry with me! Why do I live?” R. Nehuniah replies,

(§239b) “Son of the proud, if not, what honor do I have among you? I have placed in your mouths Torah, Prophets, and Writings, Mishnah¹⁸ and midrash, laws and lore, and the interpretation of laws—forbidden and permitted action. Did any of you come and appear before me except for the secrets of Torah that I have entered?”

I take R. Nehuniah to be chiding his disciple gently, reminding him that he has prepared all his disciples for the visionary journey, teaching them both sets of requirements laid down by the angel in §234. Nevertheless, he does reveal the names after having R. Ishmael gather and instruct the group on how to receive them:

(§240b) “Now, since you say to me, specify (the names), come in and stand on your feet, and every single one of you, when His name issues from my mouth, bend down and fall on your faces.”

At once all the mighty ones of the association and all the magnificent ones of the academy came in and stood on their feet before R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah. He would recite (a name) and they would fall on their faces and the scribes would write (it).

This passage echoes §201, when R. Ishmael calls together the inner disciples and the whole Sanhedrin to hear the first instruction. Evidently they are all privy to the second one as well.

The Sar Torah

The *Sar Torah* text (§§281–306) begins with a legend about the revelation of the *Sar Torah* praxis. It is placed by R. Ishmael in the mouth of R. Akiva, who speaks in the name of R. Eliezer, and asserts that although the Torah was given long before, its true power was not revealed until the time of the building of the second Temple, when the returned exiles complained to God that they were too busy toiling at rebuilding the Temple to study Torah. God accepted their complaint and promised to give them their desire (§§281–86). I translate the rest of the legend, which contains the relevant material.

¹⁸ Or “tradition.”

(§287) "I know what you seek and My heart recognizes what you desire: you seek an abundance of Torah and a tumult of Talmud,¹⁹ you hope for a multitude of legal discussions and to ask about the law. You long for a tumult of My mysteries in order to multiply testimony—mountains and mountains of it; to set down sound wisdom—hills and hills of it; to enlarge Talmud¹⁹ in the streets and dialectics in the squares; to multiply law like the sand of the sea and masters like the dust of the inhabited world; (§288) to found academies in the gates of tents (cf. Gen 25:27), to explain what is forbidden and permitted, to declare impure the impure, to declare pure the pure, to declare ritually fit the ritually fit, and to disqualify the disqualified; to recognize bloods among them; to teach menstruants what things should be done; to bind crowns onto your heads and garlands of kingship onto the heads of your sons; to compel kings to abase themselves before you and to oblige potentates to prostrate themselves before you; to crack your name into every rock and your remembrance in the sea towns; to enlighten your faces like the brightness of the day and your forehead like the morning star.

"If you merit this seal so as to make use of this crown, the people of the land (*'am hā-'āres*) shall not be found in the world and there shall be no fool or dullard among you.

(§289) "You are happy but My attendants are sad, since this mystery is one of the mysteries that comes from My storehouse. All your academies are like calves of the stall; you no longer learn with labor nor with toil, but rather by means of the name of this seal and by the invocation of the crown. The astounded one is astounded by you and the miserable one is miserable over you. Many die from grief over you and their soul departs upon hearing of your glory. (§290) Riches and wealth grow mighty upon you; the great ones of the world cling to you; pedigree surrounds on all sides the family you marry into. The one blessed by you is blessed and the one praised by you is praised. You are called those who make many righteous (cf. Dan 12:3; Isa 53:11); they call you those who make beings meritorious. The proclamation of new moons goes forth from you and intercalated years from the prudence of your wisdom. (§291) By your hands the presidents are anointed and when you speak the fathers of the law court stand. You give standing to the chiefs of the exiles; the judges of the cities act on your authority. The reform of the world issues from you and there is none who opposes it.

"The attendants of the celestial prosecutor, the greatest of the attending angels, battle against Me greatly." This is His answer.

(§292) "Let this mystery not go forth from Your storehouse, and the secret of prudence from Your treasuries. Do not make flesh and blood like us, do not think of mortals as our substitute. Let them labor at Torah to the same degree they have labored over generations to the

¹⁹ Or "learning."

present. Let them establish it with toil and with great anguish. This is Your glory, this is Your ornamentation, when they praise²⁰ and turn in order before You, calling with a whole heart, supplicating with a willing soul:

“May what we read remain in our hands. May what we have taught be established in our hearts. May our kidneys grasp whatever our ears heard. May our heart hold onto the paths of learning which we heard from the mouth of the master and may one honor the other.’

“But if You reveal this mystery to Your sons, the lesser will become like the greater and the fool like the wise.” This is the answer of His servants.

(§293) “Do not, My attendants, do not My servants, do not pester Me about this matter. This mystery shall go forth from My storehouse, and the secret of prudence from My treasuries. I am revealing concerning it to a beloved people and I am teaching it to a faithful seed. It was hidden from days of old but from the days of creation it was perfected for them, yet it did not come upon My heart to tell it to all these generations from the days of Moses until now. It was kept for this generation, to make use of it until the end of all generations. For they have gone forth from evil to evil and they did not know Me, since their heart was squashed from the exilings, so words of Torah were as hard as bronze and iron to them. It is fitting to make use of it to bring Torah like water into their midst, and like oil on their limbs.

“This is how Israel was from the day My wrath burned against it and I struck it down: the mountains were perturbed and their corpses were like dirt in the midst of the streets.

(§294) “With what will I have favor on him? With what shall I comfort him or what good dispensation of compassion is there on high that I may bring it out and give it to him and make him happy with it? I looked and saw gold with Me—gold is in the world. Silver is with Me—silver is in the world. Precious stones and pearls are with Me—precious stones and pearls are in the world. I have already put wheat and barley, honey and oil into the world, but what does the world lack? It is this mystery and this secret that are not in the world. Therefore I will give them a dispensation of majesty with which My sons may make themselves majestic.”²¹

(§297) R. Ishmael said:

R. Akiva said this in the name of R. Eliezer:

Our fathers did not take it upon themselves “to set stone upon stone in the temple of YHWH” (Hag 2:15) until the King of the Universe determined it and all His attendants were bound to Him, and the

²⁰ Manuscript Vatican 228 reads “when they forget.”

²¹ Sections 295–96 are found only in MS Budapest 238 (//§§405–406 in MS New York 8128). They contain material about Metatron and the heavenly throne room and are unrelated to the Sar Torah myth.

Prince²² of Torah revealed to them how they should act and how they should make use of him.²³ At once the holy spirit appeared from the third entrance that is in the House of YHWH, since the Shekhinah had not descended nor been in attendance at the most holy House because of the decree. As soon as our fathers saw the throne of glory that *towered* and stood between the porch and the altar—although until that time they had not rebuilt the building, but (it was) on the place of the forms which were forms and stood; according to them the vestibule and the Temple, the altar and the whole house were to be completed.²⁴

(§298) And as soon as our fathers saw the throne of glory *towering* from its midst and standing between the vestibule and the altar and the King of the world on it, at once they fell on their faces. And about that moment He said, “Greater shall be the glory of this latter House than that of the former’ (Hag 2:9), since in the former sanctuary I was not bound to My sons except by a voice. This one is Mine and for My throne and for all My attendants. May it be established!”

“My sons, why do you fall down and are thrown down on your faces? Stand and sit before My throne in the same way that you sit in the academy. And take the crown and receive the seal and learn the order of this Prince²⁵ of Torah: how you do it, how you inquire about it, how you make use of it, how (you) raise up the paths of your heart, how your hearts may have a vision of Torah.”

At once Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel answered and stood on his feet before Him like an interpreter. He explicated the names of the Prince of Torah, one by one, by His name, the name of the crown and the name of the seal.

This text puts in God’s mouth what appears to be the agenda of the group promoting the Sar Torah praxis. Their agenda has parallels to the claims in the opening section of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*. They long for knowledge of Torah, but for them knowledge is power. An expert in Torah can control the lives of those around him by judging their ritual purity and fitness. He is revered by the rulers of his people and his fame reaches far and wide (§§287–88). The text promises all this to anyone, no matter how stupid to start with, who

²² Other readings include “secret counsel,” “mystery,” and “book.”

²³ Or “it.”

²⁴ The translation of this aside is conjectural and the text seems to be corrupt. I take it to mean that the fathers had a vision of the heavenly Temple superimposed on the spot where the earthly Temple was to be built.

²⁵ I take the reading “the order of this Prince” from MS Oxford 1531. Other readings include “the prince of this order,” “the crown,” “the order of the book,” “the secret,” and “the order of this secret counsel.”

“merits this seal” and knows how to make use of (i.e., ritually manipulate) “the crown.” This last sentence of §288 brings to mind the mention of the “great seal and fearsome crown” elsewhere in the *Hekhalot* literature (e.g., *Hekhalot Rabbati* §236 and *SH-L* §§318–21// §§651–54), as praxes used to control angels.

This “mystery” (מֵסֵתֵר), the seal and crown, was hidden by God in his special storehouse, and it allows the academies to learn Torah astonishingly effortlessly (§289). The worldly benefits accruing to the practitioner are piled up: the family he marries into is revered, he has the reputation of a great and righteous man, and he gives authority to the Jewish rulers in Palestine and the diaspora (§§290–91). The power of the mystery is so great that the angels beg God in vain not to reveal it to mortals, since it will make all of God’s “sons” like the sages (§292). But God insists that he will indeed reveal it to “a beloved people” and a “faithful seed” (§293) who have suffered enough and now deserve a special gift (§294).

The actual revelation of the mystery is described in §§297–98. The holy spirit appears in the “third entrance that is in the House of YHWH” (the same place where R. Nehuniah’s instruction concerning the descent to the chariot is given according to the *Hekhalot Rabbati*). Although the text is corrupt, it appears that the “fathers” are granted a *Merkavah* vision: a view of the heavenly Temple containing the throne of glory, superimposed on the site of the soon to be built second Temple. The mystery is then revealed and its details explicated by the restoration leader Zerubbabel (cf. Hag. 2:23).

Gruenwald and Chernus consider this revelation to be aimed at an esoteric community as the “true Israel” rather than to exoteric Israel as a whole, but I do not find their arguments persuasive.²⁶ The word “Israel” appears four times in the legend, always with an exoteric sense (§§281, 282, 284, 293). God refers to his “sons” in §283 in a context that identifies them with Israel. It is true that the revelation is called a “mystery,” but this is because it was hidden up to the time it was revealed. But the revelation comes to the “beloved seed,” the “faithful people,” and the “fathers” in a very public place. It is also true that the practitioners are promised a special status in the world, but these promises appear alongside the assurance that anyone can achieve the status if they just carry out

²⁶ Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* 170–71; Chernus, “Individual and Community,” 259–262.

the proper praxes of the mystery. The express goal is that “the people of the land shall not be found in the world.” Every Jew in the world will become a sage.

The mystery itself is not given in the text of the legend, but the next part of the work (§§299–303) gives a complex and detailed praxis for the adjuration of the Prince of Torah and his minions. It is not clear that this is the praxis the legend had in mind and there is some reason to believe the two sections were composed independently. For example, the praxis is never called a “mystery” in the second section and the second section refers to it as the “great seal” and “fearsome crown,” not just the “seal” and “crown” as in the first section.²⁷ Moreover §§281–98 appear as a separate unit in one manuscript (Parma 1287/1) and §§299–306 in another (London Add. 15299).²⁸ But in any case, the praxis only refers once to its intended users and the reference is ambiguous: “For the learning is in our hands, the remedy of the olden ones and the tradition of the ancients, which they wrote and set down for generations (to come), for the humble to make use of it. And whoever is fit shall be answered by them” (§303b). The “humble” and “whoever is fit” could be taken to mean potentially any Jew in general or a member of an esoteric group.

This praxis is followed in thirteen of the seventeen complete manuscripts of the *Sar Torah* by the following brief episode:

(§304) R. Ishmael said:

Thus said R. Akiva in the name of R. Eliezer the Great:

Blissful is the one whom the merit of his fathers assists and for whom the righteousness of his forebears remains. He will make use of this crownlet and this seal, and they shall be bound to him, and he shall be declared majestic with the majesty of Torah.

(§305) R. Ishmael said:

This thing was done by R. Eliezer and he was answered, but he did not believe it. It was done again by me but I did not believe it until I brought in a certain dullard and he became equal to me. It was done again by the shepherds and they became equal to me. They brought R. Akiva out of the Land (of Israel) with the permission of the law court and he tarried until it was done by the multitude who did not read or study and they became equal to the others and were made like the disciples of the sages (כתלמידי הכהנים). He came and estab-

²⁷ In the first section MS New York 8128 does give the terms as “great seal” and “fearsome crown,” but this is surely a harmonistic expansion.

²⁸ Schäfer, “Handschriften zur Hekhalot-Literatur,” 208.

lished and agreed with their testimony in the law court of the president, saying, "This thing was done even outside the Land and it succeeded." But R. Eliezer the Great and the sages said that perhaps by the merit of the Land of Israel it sufficed for us, and they did not believe until they sent R. Akiva away to Babylon and it was done and it succeeded and he testified and after that we rejoiced.

This unit, which uses slightly different technical terminology from either of the other two,²⁹ coheres well with the ideas in §§281–98. The praxis is effective for the sages, for dullards, for shepherds, and for uneducated people in Israel or outside it—even in Babylon. The point about it working outside the holy land may be implied in §291, which refers to the activity of the practitioners in association with "presidents" and the "fathers of the law court," but also with the "chiefs of the exiles." In addition the word "academy" is used in §288 and §298 in the Babylonian sense of a session of Torah study.³⁰ But the explicit mention of Babylon in §305 is helpful in that it turns our mind to the most important external and physical evidence we have about the descenders to the chariot: the Babylonian inscribed bowls and their archaeological context in the Nippur excavations.

Halperin has proposed an overall interpretation of the *Sar Torah* text which he then uses to undergird his understanding of the Hekhalot literature as a whole. He argues that it was composed in the circles of the "people of the land" (*'am hā-'āreṣ*), mentioned in §288. On purely exegetical grounds I find this argument unpersuasive. The texts picture a wide range of social groups using the praxis and seem to say that any Jew may use it. Thus the references to dullards, shepherds, and the people of the land probably function as a kind of *gal vaḥomer* argument—an argument from the lesser to the greater. In other words, if the *Sar Torah* praxis can empower the stupid and uneducated with expertise in Torah, how much more can it empower others with more ability and education and make them like the sages. If it works for the least sagacious it will work for anyone.

In addition, the evidence for the social background of the composers of the Hekhalot literature built up in chapter 8 places them in scribal and perhaps synagogue circles of people who were fairly well educated but who lacked the specialized learning of the rabbinic sages in Torah and therefore also lacked the social status and

²⁹ The praxis is called the "crownlet" (קִרְיָן) and the "seal."

³⁰ See Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot* 435–36.

perquisites of the sages. One might object that the *Sar Torah* and probably the *Hekhalot Rabbati* teach that the powers coming from the vision of the chariot and the adjuration of the Prince of Torah were to be made available to all Israel, not just an even moderately elite conventicle. This is quite true and is an important piece of the puzzle, a piece that perhaps can be fitted into its proper place by another look at the Babylonian inscribed bowls.

The *Sar Torah* traditions indicate both implicitly and explicitly that Hekhalot traditions were used in Babylonia and the Babylonian bowls confirm this. We found in the bowls a version of a Torah incantation known also from the *Shi'ur Qomah* texts, an adjuration of the Prince of Torah, traditions of ascent to get power from heaven, and numerous other connections with the Hekhalot literature. The internal evidence of the bowl incantations also pointed toward the composers being literate scribes of the type described in the previous paragraph. But the physical evidence for the use of the incantations these scribes composed presented us with a very complicated picture. They could be used by the practitioner on his or her own behalf, but they could also be used on behalf of clients. And the practitioners who used the bowls were frequently not the composers of the incantations. All indicators are that bowls were produced by a socially very diverse range of practitioners for an equally diverse group of clients. Some practitioners were good scribes, others adequately if unimpressively literate, others semiliterate and careless, and still others evidently illiterate or at least serving illiterate clients. A good many bowls were excavated at Nippur bearing faux writing of nothing more than realistic squiggles.

I propose to read the *Sar Torah* material in the light of the Babylonian bowls along the following lines. The composers of the Hekhalot texts³¹ were scribes who envied the rabbinic sages and sought to compete with them using their own rituals of power. They

³¹ Given the Merkavah vision in §§297–98 and the reference to the vision to the chariot in §303, as well as the other evidence we have seen of overlap between *Sar Torah* traditions and ascent/descent traditions, it seems reasonable to me to take the composers of the *Sar Torah* to be members of the general constellation of practitioners which produced the Hekhalot literature. The *Sar Torah* does not use any form of the idiom “to descend to the chariot,” but the technical terminology of the Hekhalot literature varies widely from microform to microform, so one can still think of them as “descenders to the chariot” in the sense of ritual practitioners who sought visions of the Merkavah.

followed their own rigorous ritual praxes to wrest Torah power from heaven but they did not keep this power for themselves. It was part of their agenda to share it with all other Jews. In the Babylonian bowls we see how this was done. The composers made available incantations of Torah power to clients (presumably with rituals attached, although we know very little about these). We must recall that Torah power is a form of ritual power and the interest of these practitioners was in its practical applications: protection from demons and sorcerers, curses on enemies, personal charisma, and so on. Perhaps they charged their clients money, but perhaps they were paid instead or in addition by the status and respect they clearly craved, although probably not to the megalomaniac extent claimed by their propaganda. It may be that once the incantations were sold or given away, bootleg copies and unauthorized fakes were widely distributed. But given their explicit social goals it seems more likely to me that these practitioners gave out the incantations with the intent that they be used by anyone and everyone. The whole community could become the equals of the sages. Perhaps this is why nearly every house excavated in the Jewish settlement in Nippur had one or more incantation bowl buried in it.

The Hekhalot Zutarti

The *Hekhalot Zutarti* is a mass of Hekhalot traditions which appears to have congealed into its current shape (or better, shapes) with comparatively little in the way of deliberate redaction. No dialogues occur in it, but often a speaker (usually R. Akiva) opens a section. A number of passages give us some data on the social location of the practitioners described in the work. It opens with an admonition to be careful on the descent to the chariot, although just what one should be careful of is not very clear (§335). The next section gives a name and adjuration for remembering Torah which was revealed to Moses when he ascended to God and which is intended for "any man whose heart errs" (§336). The next section begins, "This is the name that was revealed to R. Akiva, who was gazing at the working of the chariot. R. Akiva descended and taught it to his disciples (תלמידים)." He addresses these disciples as "My sons" (§337; cf. §347). There follow some sections on the story of the four who entered paradise which appear in different forms from manuscript to manuscript. One manuscript also contains traditions about the ascent of Moses (§§338-45).

After this comes material on the ascent of R. Akiva to heaven (§346–48), followed by a passage of some interest. (It appears again in §361, still within the *Hekhalot Zutarti*. Significant variants are given in the notes.)³²

(§349) And what mortal man³³ is it who is able
 to ascend on high,
 to ride on wheels,
 to descend below,³⁴
 to search out the inhabited world,
 to walk on the dry land,³⁵
 to gaze at His splendor,
 to *dwell*³⁶ with His crown,
 to be transformed by His glory,
 to recite praise,
 to combine letters,
 to recite their names,³⁷
 to have a vision of what is above,
 to have a vision of what is below,
 to know the explanation of the living,
 and to see the vision of the dead,
 to walk in rivers of fire,³⁸
 and to know the lightning?³⁹
 (§350) And who is able to explain it and who is able to see?⁴⁰

This poetic rhapsody ties together many of the traits of the descender to the chariot we have seen thus far. He ascends on high and returns, he knows the secrets of this world and sees the splendorous

³² Sections §§349–50a have also been translated and discussed in chapter 1. The earliest copy of this passage is found in G7 (copied before the middle of the eleventh century). Its text appears to be quite corrupt, but I translate it here in full: “Who is able to ascend on high, to ride on wheels, to descend below, to uproot the inhabited world, to overturn the dry land, to *guard* His crown, to search out His glory, to have a vision of what is above, to have a vision of what is below, to gaze at the clouds of comfort, to know its [explanation], to recite His praises, to investigate in letters, in living letters, to know rivers of [fire, and to walk (?)] in the lightning and the rainbow. Who is capable of a vision and who is able . . .?”

³³ §361 reads “And who is the mortal man.”

³⁴ §361 reverses the lines to read “to descend below, / to ride on wheels.”

³⁵ §361 adds “to praise the glory.”

³⁶ This word is corrupt in both §349 and §361 and the meaning is uncertain. Perhaps emend to “to make use of” (לְהַשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ / לְשִׁמְשׁ) with Schäfer, *Übersetzung* 3:19 n. 12.

³⁷ §361 reads “to recite the names of God” or “to recite the names.”

³⁸ §361 reads “to ascend on wheels of iron.”

³⁹ The corresponding line is corrupt and indecipherable in §361.

⁴⁰ This sentence is not found in §§361–62.

beatific vision that transforms him into a being of fire, he participates in the heavenly worship, he carries out rituals of power involving combinations of letters and recitation of divine names, he sees visions of the celestial realm and, evidently, (as R. Ishmael in 3 *Enoch* and G12) visions of the realm of the dead as well. As noted in chapter 8, Montgomery's bowls 9, 32, and 33 present a similar picture of practitioners who ascend to heaven and return, and who use the same sorts of rituals of power. This passage in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* gives us little information about the relationship of the practitioner to clients or a community, but "to know the explanation of the living, and to see the vision of the dead" at least implies an interest in the lives of people other than himself.

The only other notable passage comes near the end of the *Hekhalot Zutarti*, in §420, which describes the immolation of R. Ishmael's hands and feet when he comes to the throne of glory. He is rescued by the angel PNYWYN, who stands before the throne and dresses God.⁴¹ Of this angel we read,

(§420b) All who see him—whether young man or virgin girl, whether youth or elder, whether man or woman, whether gentile or Israelite, whether slave or maidservant—run to meet him and they love him for his welfare and they run to do him a favor and rejoice in provision for him, whether or not he returns the favor.

This sentence is all the more surprising in that it is an aside that lacks any hint of a polemical edge. It seems to say that the vision of this exalted angel is potentially available to anyone at all: a man or woman of any age, gentile or Jew, slave or free. This openness is problematic in that the ascetic rituals described in the *Hekhalot* literature frequently assume the practitioner keeps standards of ritual purity available only to a male Jew. In *Sar Torah* §299 he must "immerse (in) a strict immersion as a safeguard in case of pollution (יִקְרָא)," the pollution in question being principally cultic defilement from ejaculation. He must also eat only "clean bread of his own hands," again to avoid potential defilement from a menstruating or otherwise defiled woman touching his food. The praxis in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §424 explicitly requires that a youth refrain from ejaculation and that a married man refrain from contact with his wife for three

⁴¹ Most of the first part of the section is translated in chapter 5. Another version of §§420–21 is found in G8. See below.

days in advance. The praxis in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §572 requires that he “bake a pot of bread with his (own) hands.” The user of the *Sar Panim* praxis must avoid sexual pollution for seven days and (according to one manuscript) refrain from conversation with a woman (§623). Temporary male celibacy is also part of the praxis of *Merkavah Rabba* (§677//278//308) as is the avoidance of sexual pollution and the preparation of one’s own food (§684). The practitioner in G19 1a 12 “eats no bread (made by) a woman and he gazes at neither man nor woman” and the one in G22 1b 28 must “eat in the evening [br]ead of his (own) hands.”

Referring to this evidence, Lesses writes:

As religious acts, the Hekhalot adjurations mediate between pure men on earth, who are fit to perform the adjurations by virtue of the purifications they have undergone, and God and the angels in heaven. Both the mystical ascent and the adjurations of angels mention women only because of the impurity they may transmit to the mystic. They do not appear as potential participants in the ascent or angelic adjurations. This does not mean that men are immune from impurity; indeed the Hekhalot texts are very concerned with the possibility of a man having a seminal emission, but this possibility is a challenge, not a barrier, to the proper state of purity. The texts thus enforce the requirements for purity unequally on men and women. Although one could theoretically imagine that a woman could be pure enough to engage in the Hekhalot adjurations or ascents, the authors of this literature seem never to [have] entertained this possibility. Women are primarily obstacles to the purity men must attain in order to adjure angels or ascend to heaven.⁴²

Her evaluation is correct except for one point. In this passage in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* (with its parallel in G8) the Hekhalot literature does at least entertain the possibility of women—and gentiles—engaging in the ascent and having to do with angels. Perhaps the assumption is that the gentile in question is a proselyte, but if so we would expect this to be made explicit as it is in the *Merkavah Rabba* (see below). According to the Cairo Geniza documents and related evidence, women could be Bible teachers, scholars, and calligraphers, so they were not unknown in the sorts of scribal circles that produced the Hekhalot literature.⁴³ In addition, at least one woman

⁴² Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 372. On pp. 117–44 she discusses these texts in the light of Jewish and gentile traditions of ritual power in late antiquity.

⁴³ Goiten, *A Mediterranean Society* 2:183–85.

inscribed and installed an incantation bowl (Montgomery 17), so we must reckon with the possibility that there were female practitioners among the descenders to the chariot. At the very least, women made use of bowl incantations composed in the circles that included the descenders to the chariot. Gentiles did as well, of course, but we can only identify them in bowls that use explicitly polytheistic or Christian traditions. We have no way at present of knowing what kind of collegial relationship there might have been between Jewish and gentile composers and users of the bowl incantations.

The Ma'aseh Merkavah

Like the other Hekhalot texts, the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* consists of numerous originally separate microforms redacted together without very tight editing, and the work appears in different forms in the manuscripts. R. Ishmael, who is the main narrator, has dialogues in which he is instructed by two different masters. He speaks with R. Akiva in §§544–47, 554–55, 558–59, 573–78 (MS New York 8128 only), 592, 595 and with R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah in §§556, 560–66, 569–70, 579–81, 586, 591. R. Ishmael speaks by himself in §§552–53, 571–72 (units found only in some manuscripts) and with an angel in §§583–85 (where he associates himself with R. Akiva). R. Akiva speaks by himself in §§550, 557.

The focus of the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* is on the relationship of disciple to master and little is said about their social context.⁴⁴ A community is mentioned only once, when the angel ZBWDY'L asks R. Ishmael, "Son of the proud, what merit did your father and your mother have that you merit taking your stand upon this mystery?" and R. Ishmael mentions in an aside, "For the whole, entire world did not merit it, but I and R. Akiva merit making use of it" (§583). The angel warns him,

(§584b) Son of the proud, do not declare yourself more majestic than all your associates, and do not say, "Indeed, I have more merit than anyone," for it is not from your vigor and your might, but from the vigor of the might of your Father Who is in heaven. But blissful are you in this world and it will be good for you in the world to come. And blissful are you and it will be good for you forever and ever and ever and for all the mortals who take hold of it and recite it from dawn to dawn in prayer like you.

⁴⁴ With Chernus, "Individual and Community," 262–65.

The other practitioners are called R. Ishmael's "associates" (חבריים), a term used in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* for the descenders to the chariot. The angel emphasizes that all mortals who make use of the "mystery" or praxis in question are just as blessed as the two ancient rabbis, a natural claim in a document written by much later disciples who look back to them. Likewise, in §591 R. Nehuniah assures R. Ishmael that "Anyone who prays this prayer with all his vigor is able to have a vision of the splendor of the Shekhinah and the Shekhinah is beloved to him." But the ideology of the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* is not entirely egalitarian, in that R. Nehuniah indicates at one point that R. Ishmael's priestly ancestry offers him some protection as a practitioner (§586).

The Sar Panim

The focus in the *Sar Panim* is almost entirely on the individual practitioner. It opens with a dialogue between R. Akiva and R. Eliezer the Great in which the former asks the latter to teach him how to adjure the Prince of the Presence (§623). The bulk of the work is a series of adjurations for this purpose, including one place where the practitioner is to insert his own name into the spell (§634). The only hint of an interest in anyone but the practitioner comes at the very end of the work, which reads,

(§639b) With these fearsome and powerful names that darken the sun and thrust aside the moonlight and overturn the day and split the stone and quench the fire, I adjure spirits and dēws, demons and satans: you must go far and depart from so-and-so son of so-and-so.

It appears that this adjuration of exorcism is to be made on behalf of a client, whose name is to be filled in at the end.

The Merkavah Rabba

Different forms of this work are attested in the manuscripts, three of which extend from §§655–708, although one stops at §670. Some shorter passages are found in some manuscripts and missing in others. As with other Hekhalot texts, the *Merkavah Rabba* is a loose collection of microforms, many or most of which existed before they were collected in this document. Once again, R. Ishmael is the narrator nearly throughout and there are dialogues between him as the disciple and his masters, R. Akivah (§§656–70) and R. Nehuniah ben

HaQanah (§§677–81). He speaks with both in one episode (§681) and mentions R. Akiva twice (§§685, 705). R. Akiva narrates in §686 and a R. Nathan, a “disciple” of R. Ishmael, is quoted in §700. In §687 (cf. *SH-L* §311), R. Ishmael refers generally to “every wise disciple (or “disciple of a sage”) who learns this great mystery.” Thus the relationship between master and disciple is quite central.

Nevertheless, their community also finds a place. In one passage R. Ishmael addresses his fellow practitioners, promising them blessings and giving a genealogy of the transmission of their mysteries and secrets.

(§675) R. Ishmael said:

Blissful is the man who completes this mystery from dawn to dawn. He acquires this world, and the world to come, and the worlds, and he merits greeting the future return of the Presence of the Shekhinah. Complete this with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might to do My will. Keep your mouth from all iniquity. Sanctify yourself from all sin and from all guilt and from all iniquity, and I am with you at every time and in every hour and in every moment and at every second.

You are declared holy, You are praised, You are lifted up forever, YHWH, God of Israel, King of kings of kings, blessed be He. For You dwell on an exalted and lifted-up throne in the chambers on high, the majestic palace. For You revealed mysteries and mysteries of mysteries, secrets and secrets of secrets.

(§676) You revealed (them) to Moses, and Moses to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the pious, and the pious to the fearers of the Name, and the fearers of the Name to the men of the great assembly, and the men of the great assembly revealed (them) to all Israel. And the sons of Israel were carrying out Torah by means of them and multiplying learning⁴⁵ by means of them and invoking before You every single, solitary secret, establishing and meditating and conducting themselves as sages and making themselves wise and making melody, Living One, mysteries of my power, mysteries my Rock, secrets. (*Nomina barbara* and hymnic material follow.)

The first section promises the practitioner general benefits in this world, the afterlife, and the eschaton. The second plays off the chain of tradition in m. *Abot* 1.1, replacing the Torah with the esoteric mysteries and carrying the revelation beyond the great assembly all the way to “all Israel.” Other reworkings of this Mishnaic chain of

⁴⁵ Or “Talmud.”

transmission in the Hekhalot literature include 3 *Enoch* 48D:10 (§80) and *SH-L* §397//474//734. Both also refer to esoteric revelations rather than Torah and both carry the list beyond the point the Mishnah does. In the latter it goes up to a R. Abbahu, and in 3 *Enoch* several links past him to the “possessors of faithfulness” (בעלי אמונות). Somewhat similar chains of tradition also appear in other books of ritual power, such as *Sepher HaRazim*. Swartz had collected and analyzed all these traditions and has concluded quite correctly that they serve as a counterclaim to the claims of the rabbis regarding their transmission of Torah. He says, “In these testimonies, charisma is vested not in a particular class and its intellectual process, but in a potent name, ritual, or text. This name or text is valid for anyone who holds it.”⁴⁶ In a word, the agenda of this passage in the *Merkavah Rabba* is the same as that of the *Sar Torah*: the special ritual of power was and should be revealed to all Israel so that they all may become sages.

Another episode in the *Merkavah Rabba* makes the same claim in even stronger terms. In §686, R. Akiva reports that during a visionary journey he saw God enthroned and God told him “Even if one has been a proselyte for only an hour, and his body is innocent of idolatry and bloodshed and incest, I am bound to him. I bind to him Metatron my servant—to his steps and to much study of Torah.” God also ordered him to “descend and bear testimony of the praxis to beings” (i.e., human beings). The section concludes, “And R. Akiva descended and taught beings this praxis.” Any Jew, even a brand new proselyte who is in a state of purity, can bind both God and Metatron to give him Torah power.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, as noted in chapter 3, the *Merkavah Rabba* does acknowledge in §681 that being of the priestly line, as R. Ishmael was, gives one special protection when carrying out the rites of power.

Finally, the practitioner is assumed to be a man of status in the community, for one benefit of using the *Shi'ur Qomah* is that “his good name goes into all the places of Israel” (§705; cf. §706).

⁴⁶ Swartz, *Scholastic Magic* 173–205; the quotation is on p. 205.

⁴⁷ Schäfer suggests that §686 “nicht in den text der MR (*Merkavah Rabba*) gehört,” on the grounds of its different emphases from the rest of the work (“Prolegomena,” 27). Compare Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* 117–21. He may be right, but this view involves a certain amount of circular reasoning, since the section is present in all three manuscripts and a similar if less strident egalitarian ideology informs §76, which he does not suggest is secondary.

3 Enoch

There is relatively little information on the social background of the practitioners in 3 *Enoch*, perhaps because it is a later work in the form of an apocalypse and in its current form it is nearly oblivious to the ascetic practices and adjurations of the Hekhalot tradition. As noted in chapter 3, it does affirm in the opening scene that R. Ishmael's priestly background gave him an edge when he had to deal with hostile angels on the heavenly journey (cf. G12 2a 5b-7). And the chain of transmission in 48D:10 (§80) has healing Torah power being dispensed to the "possessors of faithfulness," either an esoteric group or Israel as a whole.

Geniza Fragment 8

Geniza Fragment 8 is the only Hekhalot fragment from the Cairo Geniza which has decipherable content that tells us something about the communities associated with the descenders to the chariot.⁴⁸ Fragments of two works seem to be preserved in the part of this manuscript of interest to us. In the first, the "Seal of the Descent to the Chariot," the angel Ozhayah quotes the following cryptic speech of God, about a future sage in Babylonia.

(G8 2a 12b-23a)⁴⁹ And I heard Him Who said:

"ṬNR'L the angel⁵⁰—let this name be prepared and ??? not⁵¹ for the prince, and for all the princes, my attendants and also not for the angel of My Presence, but for a certain future sage, to be in the latter years in the future great house to be established before Me in Babylonia. And by that future house Babylonia shall bind on two crowns, one from the [s]ix days of creation and one for the latter years when I will bequeath this name to this future sage to be established before me in Babylonia [in] the great [hou]se. And I will call him, I and the whole creation, so-and-so ṬNR'L, for the number of the

⁴⁸ G22 ("Unicum") has a passage narrated by R. Ishmael (1b 7-31) which seems to refer to practitioners who are called "masters of Mishnah," "masters of lear[ning]" (or "of Talm[ud]"), and possibly "princes of prophecy to My throne of glory" (1b 11-12). But the text is badly damaged and obscure and I am unable to translate it at present. G22 was published by Gruenwald in "New Passages from Hekhalot Literature," 368-72 and by Schäfer in *Geniza-Fragmente* 183-89.

⁴⁹ Gruenwald, "New Passages from Hekhalot Literature," 357-58; Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente* 102-103, 110.

⁵⁰ Emending מלך, "king," to מלאך, "angel," with Schäfer.

⁵¹ Emending לו, "to him" to לו, "not" with Gruenwald.

letters of his name are the same as this name, for this has f[ive le]tters and the other name has five letters.

“And Ozhayah the angel of His Presence presses all generations from the six days of creation and [would ad]d to it an additional letter. And what is the letter? Such that one calls him ṬNRD’L. And I in my plan and he in the plan [. . . no]t saying (it) as if My name were six letters and the name of the future sage to be established before Me in Babylonia in the great house that I lead [. . .] letters.”

And I say, this name is my name because it is five letters and the name of this sage is five lette[rs]. And what is t[his] house [in] establishment? Indeed it is in establishment. And the number of the name is the letters of his name—five, and the number of my name is five. It shall be measure for measure, for I, Ozhayah am appointed over one of them whose name is Magog, like his name, And ṬNR’[L Y]HWH God of Israel is appointed over one of them to lift him up to the eyes of QHL QHLY QHYLWT.

This passage is corrupt and extremely difficult and I am not at all sure of the meaning of parts of it. The gist seems to be that an esoteric five-letter angelic name, ṬNR’L, has been prepared by God to correspond to the name of a future sage who will be active in an academy that is yet to be founded. The angel Ozhayah thinks to improve on the plan by adding a letter to the name, making it ṬNRD’L, an angelic name attested earlier in the work (2a 2). For reasons that are not very clear God objects to this plan and Ozhayah appears to accept the five-letter name. The discussion has to do with the number of the letters in each name and the relationship of this number to other names, apparently of God and Ozhayah.

This passage is exceedingly frustrating, for it seems to be saying something important about a school of descenders to the chariot, but what exactly remains opaque. The setting is Babylonia, but I cannot tell whether the future sage is a mythic figure still in the eschatological future for the writer or whether this is a prediction after the fact meant to validate the school of a particular Babylonian master in the writer’s present. The answer might be clearer if we could decode the cipher of the names. But in any case, the passage at least provides us with another connection between the descenders to the chariot and Babylonia.

Another reference to this “great house” comes in in the next column. R. Ishmael refers to a book of instructions he wrote for coming generations who wish to accomplish the descent to the chariot. Referring to the praxis in this scroll, he continues,

(G8 2b 21b–24a)⁵² R. Ishm[a]el said:

The thing was done by me but I did not believe it until the thing was done by a certain [di]sciple who was the most inferior of us all in the association. And he descended [and ascended?] and said to me:

“Ascend and testify in the association, for it is written four times concerning⁵³ the seal of the chariot. You feared⁵⁴ to descend by it⁵⁵ to see the King in [His] bea[uty], but at once the world was redeemed. These are the beloved and his disciple, behold (they are) two. And two are in the latter years in the days of the great house, and at once salvation comes to Israel.”

Thus far the Seal of the Chariot

As noted in chapter 6, the first section parallels the story of the Sar Torah praxis in *Sar Torah* §305, but applies instead to a praxis for descent to the chariot. The speech of the disciple seems to mention two practitioners, “the beloved” (evidently R. Ishmael) and his disciple, and two others in the eschatological future (the writer’s present?) associated with the school of the future sage. Whatever all this means, the passage attests to a group of descenders to the chariot who are called “disciples” and who are active in an “association,” a group connected on some level to a Babylonian school. These disciples are also called “associates” (G8 2a 30, 32) and to descend to the chariot it is required that each one “knows in himself that he is pure of transgression of bloodshed and he has Torah in himself” (G8 2b 12). Overall, the ideology and terminology of this work is quite similar to the ideology and terminology of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*.

The second work, “The Prince of Torah That Belongs to It,” commences immediately after the close of the “Seal of the Chariot.” The only passage of interest is a speech of Anaphiel (‘NP’L) that parallels *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§420–21:

(G8 2b 44b–49a)⁵⁶ ‘NP’L said:

I am ‘NP’L. Whoever invokes for me the name of one of His four attendants and adjures me by it—at once I do not turn either forward or backward, either right or left, until I strike him at once and

⁵² Gruenwald, “New Passages from Hekhalot Literature,” 363–64; Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente* 104–105, 111.

⁵³ Reading ע with Schäfer rather than ע, “testimony,” with Gruenwald.

⁵⁴ Reading אר.

⁵⁵ The scroll.

⁵⁶ Gruenwald, “New Passages from Hekhalot Literature,” 367; Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente* 104–105, 111.

widen him and knock him on his face, whether man or woman or youth or stripling or virgin girl or sage or dullard or poor or rich or warrior or weakling or chief or magistrate. At once I strike him and destroy him and I give him no hindrance, except for the king, for we do not set a hand against the kingdom, because of the distribution of the glory which He distributes to kings of flesh and blood. Thus far the might of 'NP'L.

In the *Hekhalot Zūtarti* §420 the angel is PNYWYN and he is either indifferent or grateful for the human attention. Anaphiel appears in §421, where he does the will of the practitioner and directs his hostility to the practitioner's enemies, "apart from the angel who is sent by the King of Glory." But in this pericope 'NP'L is universally hostile to anyone who calls on him, apart from the king. We seem to be dealing with free-floating traditions which have been incorporated into the documents in rather different ways.⁵⁷ In any case this passage allows for the possibility of female practitioners, although they, like everyone but the king, are destined to fail to control 'NP'L.

Summary

Consistently, the orientation of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* is toward the descenders to the chariot as an esoteric community as well as toward their relationship to the exoteric Jewish community. The first section describes the enormous, indeed terrifying powers the practitioner has over his fellow Jews, for which he is held in great respect and fear. The *Sar Torah* describes rather similar powers, but shows a stronger emphasis on sharing them with the exoteric community. The *Merkavah Rabba* also pictures the practitioner as blessed by God and a man of standing in the community, but it lacks the bombastic tone of the other two works.

The *Hekhalot Rabbati*, especially in the descent instructions of R. Nehuniah ben HaQanah, portrays the descender to the chariot as a master of Torah and ritual power who descends to the chariot in order to join in the celestial liturgy, presumably to add its power to his arsenal. The conventicle of practitioners is called the "associates" (חבריים) and the "association" (חבורה) and they belong to an "academy" or "session" (שיבה). These are similar usages to that of the

⁵⁷ As noted in chapter 8, one of the Geniza handbooks of ritual power (T.-S. NS 91.53 1a 12–22) also contains an adjuration with material parallel to §421.

rabbinic literature, but as applied to the descenders to the chariot rather than the sages. We have no way of deciding if the strange interpolation with the recall of R. Nehuniah contains early or late information. R. Ishmael also obtains revelations important to the whole Jewish community in the story of the ten martyrs, although it is not clear that these are revealed outside the conventicle. The first work in Geniza fragment 8, the "Seal of the Descent to the Chariot," has a similar emphasis, requiring that the practitioner be free of bloodshed and have Torah in himself before he attempts the descent. It too uses the term "associates" for the practitioners, and it refers tantalizingly to a Babylonian sage in a school set in R. Ishmael's future. But the second text in G8, the "Prince of Torah That Belongs to It," says that any Jew may attempt to adjure the angel Anaphiel, although the text asserts strangely that he or she is always destined to fail.

Regarding Torah power, the *Sar Torah* has a quite different perspective from that of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* and the "Seal of the Descent to the Chariot." The ritual practice it advocates, although given during a vision of God's throne and usable for the vision of the chariot, is designed to make Torah scholars out of all Jews everywhere, with the goal that the "people of the land," the unlearned and marginally pure, will cease to exist entirely. I have explained above how this agenda may have been carried out in sixth century Nippur by *Hekhalot* practitioners. To be fair to the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, its authors do require in the sternest terms that they bear witness to their visions when they return, although it is not clear whether the testimony is given to the conventicle alone or to all Israel. In at least one case, albeit in a time of emergency, this testimony included initiating the entire Sanhedrin into the praxis of the descent to the chariot.

The attitude of the other macroforms is less easy to delineate. The *Hekhalot Zutarti* offers its *Sar Torah* praxes to "any man whose heart errs," but it also speaks of R. Akiva's disciples (תלמידים). It quotes individual speakers, but never in dialogue. The most striking indication of its agenda is an aside (parallel to the strange passage in G8 but more coherent), implying that anyone, man or woman, Jew or gentile, slave or free, is welcome to practice the ascent to the chariot and the adjuration of angels.

The *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, the *Sar Panim*, and the *Merkavah Rabba* consist largely of dialogues between master and disciple and instructions of a master to his disciple, so their main focus is on this relationship.

Nevertheless, each also looks at times to a larger community. In one passage the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* says that "anyone who prays this prayer" can have a vision of the Shekhinah, but in another R. Ishmael is warned not to lord it over his fellow practitioners, who are called "associates." But otherwise it ignores the conventicle and the exoteric community. The conclusion of the *Sar Panim* is an exorcism with a space to fill in the name of a client. The *Merkavah Rabba*, which uses the term "disciple" for the practitioners, asserts in one place that its Sar Torah praxis was revealed to be used by all Israel, and in another claims that even a brand new proselyte, if he is unblemished, can readily adjure Metatron for Torah power. The *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, *Merkavah Rabba*, and *3 Enoch* agree that being of a priestly line gives one an advantage when attempting acts of ritual power, but none of them assert that such a lineage is a requirement.

Sometimes it is unclear if terms used in the corpus are meant to refer to a conventicle of practitioners or to the exoteric Jewish community. The words "sons," "his sons," and "my sons" may be used both ways. I am inclined to interpret all uses of "Israel," "the fathers," "the seed of Abraham," "a beloved people," and a "faithful seed" in an exoteric sense, but not everyone would agree with me. The reference in *3 Enoch* to the giving of healing Torah power to the "possessors of faithfulness" is ambiguous, but may be another name for an esoteric community.⁵⁸

Were the Descenders to the Chariot Magicians?

At last we have considered all the evidence I set out to examine and we may return to the cross-cultural questions raised in chapter 2. Before coming back to the main question, the relationship of the Hekhalot literature to the model of shamanism, I wish to digress briefly and consider the question of whether the descenders to the chariot should be counted as "magicians" in either of the legitimate senses discussed in chapter 2. That is, were they recipients of witch-

⁵⁸ Chernus also has some observations about community in the *Massekhet Hekhalot* and the *Re'uyot Yehezkel* ("Individual and Community," 270–74). But since the first work seem to be a late cosmology and the second is more a midrash than a Hekhalot text, and neither have clear connections with practitioners, I have ignored them in my analysis.

craft accusations or did they indulge privately in conscious, radical social deviance?

The answer to both questions is to some degree subjective, but my reading of the evidence is that the answer to both is no. The *Hekhalot* literature shows some hostility to the rabbinic authorities, but this hostility is offensive rather than defensive. Even the most polemical text in the corpus, the hymns of boasting at the beginning of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, boasts of how the practitioner's supernatural powers can bring harm to members of the community rather than trying to defend those powers against an accusation of sorcery. In fact, we are told in §83 that the practitioner "recognizes all sorcerers" or "recognizes all who know sorceries." Conceivably this could be an answer to a sorcery accusation—the descenders to the chariot are not sorcerers, rather their powers enable them to discern and oppose sorcerers. But it reads more naturally as a nonpolemical remark by a practitioner who unselfconsciously sees sorcerers as the excluded other. In addition I see no evidence that the writers of the *Hekhalot* literature were concerned about accusations of "witchcraft" or the "evil eye" (in the sense the terms are used in Winkelman's sorcerer/witch model). Although the descenders to the chariot wield terrible powers and are protected by angels, the damage they wreak on their enemies is either deliberate, through exposing their blemishes and sins, or divinely sanctioned and carried out by God's representatives.

In addition I see no evidence that the descenders to the chariot have a conscious attitude of radical social deviance. In a sense, of course, they do portray themselves as socially deviant. They claim to overturn the ruling power structures by means of their own divinely granted ritual powers. But in their own view—and it is only their own view that matters here—they are enforcing exacting divine standards on a lax society or, in the case of the Sar Torah tradition, passing the free gift of meeting those standards on to the rest of the community. They are socially hypercorrect rather than socially deviant. Their standards of ritual purity are often excessive by rabbinic standards. Their goal of making all Jews Torah scholars was shared by the rabbis, although their methods emphatically were not.

One wonders, of course, how the people who produced for their clients curses, love charms, and other spells of compulsion or harm viewed themselves and were viewed by their neighbors. I suspect that these practitioners usually considered themselves to be providing a

necessary social service. And I also suspect that their neighbors, perhaps grudgingly, agreed. A modern analogy would be the social role of lawyers. People complain about the litigiousness of Western society and bemoan stories in the news media about the awarding of excessive compensations in ridiculous cases or the release of clearly guilty defendants on legal technicalities. People tell lawyer jokes. Yet the same people, if their marriages break up or they feel they have been wronged, have no hesitation about retaining lawyers and paying them very well indeed. Lawyers provide a necessary social service, even if it is also a necessary evil. Practitioners of harmful ritual power were probably viewed in much the same way.

One also wonders, if some of the claims made about the descenders to the chariot were true, why they were *not* accused of sorcery. If they really did make accusations of hidden family blemishes or refused to stand for anyone but the king, the high priest, or the Sanhedrin, they must have made themselves very unpopular. I imagine such claims must be taken with a grain of salt. If they thought they knew the inner secrets of others, they need not have exposed these secrets and presumably did not unless the victim was powerless to retaliate. If they prosecuted with any diligence their plan to replace Torah study with ritual Torah power—and the physical evidence of the Babylonian incantation bowls indicates they may have—they cannot have been viewed with much favor with the rabbinic authorities. But we simply do not know what reaction the rabbis had to them, if they felt they needed to take any notice at all. In any case, the descenders to the chariot seem to fit Lewis's typology of the peripheral intermediary, but not mine of the magician or Winkelman's of the sorcerer/witch.

The Model: Shaman and Community

The last section was speculative and the questions it considered have no bearing on the main thesis of this book, although they are helpful as an imaginative exercise that contributes to the secondary goal of placing the descenders to the chariot in a broad social context. I return now to that thesis and to a consideration of the final element of the model: a shaman mediates between the divine world and a human group and in this way serves the people of this group. In chapter 2, I outlined five ways in which Hultkrantz found shamans

to serve their communities, along with a sixth proposed by Porterfield. Not all shamans performed all six services. We are now in a position to ask whether or to what degree the descenders to the chariot served their communities in these ways.

(1) *Shamans Act as Healers*

We have seen that the Hekhalot literature itself does not show much interest in healing. 3 *Enoch* refers once to the power of the Sar Torah praxis for healing illnesses, and in G21 Moses ascends to heaven and is given knowledge of the spirits who heal the human body. But otherwise the subject is ignored. However, when we turn to the texts that tell us how the descenders to the chariot used their powers, the picture is quite different. They frequently acted to protect their clients from evil spirits or to “heal,” that is, exorcise them of spirits that already afflicted them. We find such uses in amulet A21 and in many incantation bowls. In addition, the Cairo Geniza texts with strong connections to the Hekhalot literature include recipes for the healing of physical afflictions including female sterility, scorpion stings, and difficult childbirth. Usually the goal is accomplished by the adjuration of the angels or God and the angels to drive away the spirits or heal the victim, but sometimes an adjuration or ritual against the spirits or the affliction suffices. According to Hultkrantz, shamanic healing is accomplished either by retrieving the victim’s escaped soul or by removing an intruding object or spirit from the victim’s body. The descenders to the chariot seemed to have banished possessing spirits rather than recovering misplaced souls.

(2) *Shamans Act as Diviners*

“The divination,” writes Hultkrantz, “reveals unknown events in past times, things and persons lost, and future things to happen.”⁵⁹ By this definition the descenders to the chariot were certainly diviners. They seem mostly to have used spirits, although the hymns of boasting at the beginning of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* may imply that they drew on the power of the celestial liturgy. The composers of these hymns claim the power to know the private sins and family blemishes of their neighbors as well as their futures. Later in the *Hekhalot*

⁵⁹ Hultkrantz, “Ecological and Phenomenological Aspects of Shamanism,” 35.

Rabbati, in the story of the ten martyrs, the secret events behind the story are revealed to R. Ishmael by the angel Suriah. In the *Sar Panim*, the Princē of the Presence is adjured to give the practitioner knowledge of esoteric subjects and to do whatever else the practitioner wishes, which presumably could include giving answers to divinatory questions. In the “Seal of the Descent to the Chariot” in G8, we are told that R. Ishmael was given a cryptic (to us) revelation about a future sage in Babylonia who seems to be one of four especially revered sages, of which R. Ishmael was one. One Cairo Geniza text that has connections to the vision of the Merkavah gives instructions on how to interrogate angels on whatever subjects one likes. We have seen also that some dream interpretation texts from the Cairo Geniza and elsewhere have connections with the Hekhalot literature and may have been used by the same practitioners.

(3) *Shamans Act as Psychopomps*

The descenders to the chariot took some interest in the realm of the dead, and this seems even to have extended at times to the guiding of the dead to their proper place of rest. The *Hekhalot Zutarti* says that the practitioner is able “to see the vision of the dead,” and both G12 and *3 Enoch* 43–44 have Metatron guiding R. Ishmael through just such a vision. Moreover, in *3 Enoch* 48C:12 (in the short account of the elevation of Enoch) we are told that for three hours each day Metatron gathers the dead souls of children and the souls of the stillborn and teaches them Torah, obviously acting as psychopomp to prepare them for the world to come.

Granted, Metatron is a purely literary figure, even more so than R. Ishmael, but both were important role models for the descenders to the chariot. And one piece of external evidence survives that hints that these practitioners could act or at least pray on behalf of the deceased spirits of Jewish children. Montgomery’s bowl 25 is an adjuration of divinities and angels which seeks healing for a particular couple. The practitioner asks that the couple be granted children who do not die, but also intercedes on behalf of the children who have already died: “[may those who] have died find themselves in the presence of the gods and goddesses” (line 2a). It would be stretching a point to call this intercession psychopomy but it is notable that the chief angel adjured in the text bears the name Metatron; it is possible that the composer is aware of the tradition of Metatron as

psychopomp and alludes to this role when asking that the ghosts be welcomed into the realm of the divinities.

(4) *Shamans Act as "Hunting Magicians"*

The Hekhalot literature and related evidence do not use ritual power to aid the community in hunting. This not surprising, since the material has its life situation in a complex society with an agricultural and pastoral base. I will say more on the issue of shamanism and hunting cultures in the next section.

(5) *Shamans May Rarely Act as Sacrificial Priests*

We have one or two cases where the protagonists of the Hekhalot literature act as sacrificial priests, and we have seen that a fair bit is made of the priestly status of R. Ishmael. He is portrayed once as sacrificing a holocaust offering when he was shown a vision of the enthroned Deity (*SH-L* §151, MS New York 8128 only). In *3 Enoch* 15B:1 we are told that Metatron has "a great tabernacle of light on high," in which he acts as heavenly high priest, and there is a tradition about Metatron offering the souls of the righteous as sacrifices in heaven (e.g., *Num. Rab.* 12:12). But it is doubtful that much should be made of these references, inasmuch as by the time of the descenders to the chariot the Temple was long gone and we have no evidence that sacrifices were being offered in Jewish communities. Indeed, the historical R. Ishmael probably lived too late to have participated in the Temple cultus. It is possible that the Hekhalot literature preserves a dim memory of shamanic practitioners who were also sacrificial priests in the Second Temple period, but the descenders to the chariot themselves were not.

(6) *Shamans Address and Seek to Remedy Problems in the Community*

Porterfield sees the point of this service to be the reduction of unconscious psychological tensions within the community, and as a service it is double edged. On the one hand, by personifying these tensions in the form of spirits and reifying them in his or her body, the shaman can raise morale with symbolic performances that prompt specific changes in the group to lessen the tensions, or which at least offer a dramatic resolution. On the other hand, the means of resolving the tensions can sometimes cause considerable harm for individual

members of the groups (such a member scapegoated for a poor hunting season), and a shaman who seriously miscalculates the social forces involved can bring disaster on the group. Porterfield gives the example of the Ghost Dance movement, which promoted the invulnerability of Ghost Dance shirts to bullets and thus helped precipitate the slaughter at Wounded Knee.⁶⁰

There is ample evidence that the descenders to the chariot had a strong interest in the problems of the exoteric communities of which they were a part and that any actions they may have taken could easily have been similarly doubly edged. The actions of the sages during the Roman persecution in the stories of the ten martyrs and of R. Nehuniah's instructions for the descent the chariot provide a positive example. They use their powers on behalf of the community by gathering intelligence from heaven and by revealing praxes of ritual power to the exoteric leaders. But the hymns of boasting at the beginning of the *Hekhalot Rabbati* claim powers that are ideal for scapegoating. An authoritative practitioner could well have found ways to lessen group tension by accusing vulnerable members of secret and unprovable adultery, sorcery, or impure lineage, incidentally destroying the lives of the victims. The *Sar Torah* seeks to redress social inequalities within the Jewish world by making the learning, rank, and perquisites of the sage available to all. An attempt to carry out this agenda could have resulted in the release of some social tension but also in the creation of much more. The incantation bowls from Nippur provide physical evidence that hints at such an attempt, but unfortunately we have no idea what the social ramifications were. Similar agendas are implied in some passages of the *Hekhalot Zutarti* and the *Merkawah Rabba*.

The Results

When we compare the services shamans render to their communities to what we know or what is asserted about how the descenders to the chariot related to theirs, we find a close correlation. Of the five types of services frequently found among shamans, the descenders to the chariot provided three (healing and exorcism, divination, and addressing problems in the community) and perhaps to some degree a fourth (psychopompy). Only "hunting magic" is missing, under-

⁶⁰ Porterfield, "Shamanism: A Psychosocial Definition," 734-35.

standably in that we are not dealing with a hunting culture in this case. The sixth service, sacrificial priesthood, is not normally characteristic of either the descenders to the chariot or shamans. In a word, the descenders to the chariot correspond well to shamans in the services they provided for their exoteric Jewish communities.

Although this analysis has been quite illuminating, we should not forget that there are many things we still do not know about these practitioners even though we would very much like to. These include whether they called themselves rabbis; whether they practiced part time or full time; how and how much they were paid by their clients or, for that matter, if they were paid at all or if their reward came in more intangible forms of social status; what a course of training consisted of, and whether and how a disciple paid his master; and to what degree a practitioner specialized in some aspect of the lore. But nevertheless, we have enough information now to come back to the complete model of shamanism and evaluate its usefulness for understanding the descenders to the chariot.

“Shamans” and “Shaman/Healers”

What are we to make of the parallels between the descenders to the chariot and shamans? Overall, we have found a fairly close correspondence between the model of shamanism and what we can find out about the Hekhalot practitioners. They are chosen at least sometimes on the basis of physical characteristics or shaman's marks, although heredity and personal character seem to be factors as well. They use some of the same ascetic techniques used by shamans and report that the techniques produced the same results shamans report. One result is the experience of an initiatory death and resurrection which perhaps may be explained by the physiological toll of their particular ascetic regime. Another is the experience of a journey to an otherworld whose structure and relationship to our world fits the normal shamanic cosmology. Control of the spirits is central for the work of both shamans and the descenders to the chariot. And although the Hekhalot literature concentrates on how practitioners can gain power for themselves, the external evidence makes it clear that they use this power to serve their human communities in much the same way shamans serve theirs.

All this having been said, there are some elements of the model which do not fit the descenders to the chariot. They are not explicitly

called by the spirits, although such a call may be implicit in their use of physiognomic criteria. The spirits they control are normally angels, one of whom,—Metatron, is a deified human being.—They have nothing to do with animal spirits. They also do not engage in hunting magic. These anomalies are not overwhelming, but they point to a significant overall difference. Even though the descenders to the chariot are quite like shamans in many ways, they inhabit an advanced, highly stratified society based on agriculture and pastoralism. Yet Hultkrantz and others agree that shamans practice in simple hunting societies. Where does this leave us?

It is at this point that we would do well to return to the broad, indeed theoretically all-inclusive complex of magico-religious practitioners formulated by Winkelman. It will be recalled that Winkelman uses the four categories “shaman,” “shaman/healer,” “healer,” and “medium,” along with the tangentially related “priest” and “sorcerer/witch.” He posits an evolutionary relationship between the first and the second and perhaps the second and the other two. Despite my reservations about evolutionary theories of religious phenomena, these cautiously formulated suggestions seem reasonable. In any case, the typology also works on a purely descriptive level, especially if one keeps in mind that it is a continuum with several areas of significant clustering rather than four isolated and discrete categories. If we apply his typology to the cross-cultural array of shamanic practitioners I have used as examples in this book, the Siberian and Inuit practitioners as well as the Lakota *wicaša wakan*, “holy man,” who all inhabit hunting cultures, fall under his category “shaman.” Blacker’s Japanese shamanic complex of “ascetic” and “medium” would consist in Winkelman’s typology of the synergistic efforts of a “shaman/healer” (and perhaps sometimes a “healer”) with those of a “medium.”

Although I accept the usefulness of this typology, I note that Winkelman’s term “shaman/healer” is less descriptive than it might be and indeed could be somewhat misleading. Many although not all shamans and shaman/healers engage in healing, so the term shaman/healer signals no clear distinction from shaman. A better way of formulating the distinction between the two types of practitioner is to say they represent two types of shamanism. The first appears only in hunting societies, which have a very low level of social organization. The second, which may well evolve out of the first, is found in agriculturally based societies, which usually have at least a somewhat higher level of organization than hunting societies

and often a much higher level. The second sort of shaman has a lower social status, due to the parallel rise of the priest. This type of shaman can differ from the first in other ways, but the specific differences vary widely depending on the particular practitioner in question. The spirit allies are usually animal spirits but are not always; the practitioners may use spells and exorcisms along with direct control of the spirits; they may have other sources of power (*mana*) besides the spirits; they rarely have visionary journeys; and they may specialize more than the first type of shaman does. Since the main dividing line between shamans and shaman/healers is their cultural matrix, one might aim for more descriptive and accurate terms such as "hunting shaman" and "agricultural shaman," respectively.⁶¹ Nevertheless, it may be more confusing to introduce new terminology at this point, so having noted my reservations, I will continue to use Winkelman's terms "shaman/healer," "healer,"⁶² "medium," "priest," and "sorcerer/witch."⁶³

If we apply Winkelman's typology to our data for the descenders to the chariot, they share the most characteristics with the shaman/healer. They are like the shaman in that they engage in healing and divination; they are predominantly or entirely male; they serve clients and perhaps the local community by means of control of the

⁶¹ The point being that the "hunting shaman" lives in and serves a community in a hunting society, while the "agricultural shaman" lives in and serves a community in an agricultural or pastoral society. After this chapter had been written, it came to my attention that Roberte N. Hamayon has proposed a similar typology for shamanic intermediaries: she uses the terms "hunting shamanism" and "pastoral shamanism." She uses as examples the Buryat tribes who live respectively to the west (the Exirit-Bulagat) and to the east (the Khori) of Lake Baikal in Siberia. The Exirit-Bulagat worship an animal figure called "Lord Bull" and preserve an all-male hunting shamanism whose practitioners participate in the central, "life-giving rites" that have to do with the natural order. The Khori, who have introduced worship of the skies and whose main fertility deity—the White Old Man—is primarily anthropomorphic rather than theriomorphic, are heavily influenced by Lamaist Buddhism, and have pastoral shamans who are usually women and who perform only divination, healing, exorcism, and generally rites pertaining to private matters. Like the latter, the descenders to the chariot, although they seem to be primarily or entirely male, interact with cosmic or anthropomorphic deities and engage in private divination, healing, and exorcism. See Hamayon, "Shamanism in Siberia: From Partnership in Supernature to Counter-power in Society," in *Shamanism, History, and the State*, ed. Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994) 76–89.

⁶² Although one might prefer "healer/diviner," since this practitioner does not necessarily engage in healing.

⁶³ The problem of shamans active in modern urban environments still awaits a thorough inductive study along the lines of Winkelman's.

spirits; they endure an initiatory death and rebirth; they experience ASCs and engage in the soul flight/journey; and they use shamanic ascetic techniques. However, unlike the shaman they do not live in a hunting and gathering or nomadic society without social classes; they perform no hunting magic; and they have nothing to do with animal spirits or transformation into animals.

Many of the features of the shaman are the same for the shaman/healer. But where the two typologies differ, the descenders to the chariot are more like the shaman/healer. They live in an agricultural and pastoral society with a high level of stratification and political organization. Despite some of their more outrageous claims, they have a lower socioeconomic status than the shaman. The rabbis hold the higher position. They work with spirits (but never animal spirits), although one function of these spirits seems to be to give the practitioners access to forms of impersonal power, including Torah power and the power of the divine liturgy. They also use spells, exorcisms, and rituals. They are more like shamans in that they experience visionary journeys.

Overall the descenders to the chariot are quite unlike the healer, in that they perform no life-cycle rituals; they lack formal judicial and economic power; ASCs are central to their work; they engage in visionary journeys; they make extensive use of ascetic techniques; and their work is more with spirits than with the superior God of their culture. They do not seem to have charged high fees to limit access to their profession or to have performed at major public ceremonies. Only in one respect are the descenders to the chariot more like the healer than the shaman/healer: they never use animal spirits, nor are they ever transformed into the forms of animals. Instead, they use angels and, for what it is worth, are also transformed at times into the forms of angels.

They are least of all like the medium, who is usually female; uses fewer ascetic techniques; lacks impersonal sources of power; is possessed by her helping spirits rather than controlling them; and her personality is generally replaced by the spirits during possession, resulting in amnesia.

Thus we see that the application of Winkelman's typology of practitioners simultaneously validates and obviates Gruenwald's objection to the comparison of the Hekhalot literature with shamanism. Shamanism indeed originated and flourished in nonliterate hunting cultures that lacked social organization. This is hunting shamanism.

But the shamanic complex survived in a very similar form in highly organized agrarian societies in the role of shaman/healer. And it is to the model of shaman/healer that the descenders to the chariot correspond best.

It would be desirable at this point as a heuristic exercise to consider how the Jewish society that included the descenders to the chariot might be fitted into the overall pattern of Winkelman's typology, but the limitations of our surviving information make this a difficult task. We would expect there to be a priestly functionary alongside the shaman/healer, and certainly priests have always existed in the Jewish world. But the Israelite priesthood had its life situation in the cultus of the Temple in Jerusalem, and after the final destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, priests have never had a central role in Jewish society. To a large degree, their role was taken over by the sages or rabbis, who tell us about themselves in the rabbinic literature. Unfortunately, we have few outside controls on what they say. Nevertheless, one could make a good case for considering them to be priests in Winkelman's sense. They have a high socio-economic status and a positive moral status. They are concerned with worship, purification, and agricultural, communal, propitiatory, and calendrical rites. They derive power from God but generally do not control spirits. They sometimes can affect the weather. They do not engage in ASCs, radical asceticism, or (perhaps with a very few exceptions) visionary journeys. Yet in some ways also they resemble healers in that they can use Torah power for divination, curses, and healing. But given that the boundaries between Winkelman's categories are somewhat porous, and a practitioner in a particular culture may straddle two of them, it seems best to regard the rabbis as priests. We have already encountered the witch/sorcerer above, who existed at least as a potential accusation in Jewish society.⁶⁴ Thus we may conclude provisionally that the intermediaries in the Jewish society (especially the Babylonian Jewish society) of late antiquity could be modeled as the priest (the rabbis), the witch/sorcerer (the "sorcerers" alluded to in the literature), and the shaman/healer (the descenders to the chariot).

The model, then, proves to be useful. I should clarify here that I am *not* concluding that the descenders to the chariot *were* shamans

⁶⁴ Regulations for dealing with the "sorcerer" (המכשף) are given in *b. Sanh.* 67b, commenting on *m. Sanh.* 7.11.

or shaman/healers. The model is a theoretical construct based mostly on modern—albeit widely varied—cross-cultural data. One could legitimately debate whether the model is concrete and specific enough to justify using it to identify a well-defined role that appears in vastly different cultures, and even whether it is possible in principle to identify such cross-cultural roles. I assert, rather, that the comparison of the Hekhalot literature with the model has great heuristic value and substantially advances our understanding of the texts. Both the ascetic rituals of the descenders to the chariot and the uses and effects of these rituals as portrayed in the Hekhalot literature have many cross-cultural parallels, and it is therefore very likely that they reflect genuine rituals that were used by real practitioners for the purposes they claimed. The comparison also sets the disorganized mass of material in the Hekhalot literature into a clearer order, helping us to see it better as an organic whole.

The Evolution or Popularization of the Hekhalot Traditions

I should also note in closing that there is some evidence for a development or a bifurcation of the intermediating roles found in the Hekhalot literature. The clearest example is in the Sar Torah and descent praxis given in *Ma'aseh Merkawah* §§560–65. In the midst of instructions for an arduous and complicated ritual, we find instructions for a much simpler one involving the writing of *nomina barbara* in a cup and the drinking of the contents. The writer explains, “If you cannot perform (the ritual), engrave them (the *nomina barbara*) with a mark, and do not trouble yourself with the words of the mighty” (§564).

Another example is found at the end of the ascent praxis in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§413–19. The last section brings the practitioner to the lap of God or a divine being, where he sits and asks for whatever he wants. A quotation of the Song of Songs follows (Cant 5:10–16), which seems to be included as a *Shi'ur Qomah* text. Then the section concludes, “Recite this tradition each day after the prayer.” On the basis of this sentence, Halperin argues that the recitation of the instructions for the ascent is meant to give the reciter the same power as the ascent itself.⁶⁵ Lesses has rightly challenged his interpretation,

⁶⁵ Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot* 373.

pointing out that the “tradition” is not a description of a visionary journey, but a very concrete set of ritual instructions which would be irrelevant if the only point of the passage were to repeat the tradition.⁶⁶ She adds, “It seems to me that the phrase ‘repetition [*sic*] of this mishnah’ could have been added at a later redactional stage in an attempt to reposition the ascent/adjunction text within the context of the daily prayers.”⁶⁷ I have argued in chapter 4 against Halperin’s interpretation of the last part of the *Hekhalot Zutarti* and provided additional cross-cultural evidence in chapter 6 that §§413–19 is a real ascent praxis.

Lesses may be correct in suggesting that the problematic sentence is a gloss, but Halperin’s understanding of the material is more or less correct from the perspective of the glossator. In other words, at least some of the transmitters of the European Hekhalot manuscripts (if not earlier tradents) wanted to draw on the power of the Hekhalot praxes without performing the praxes themselves, and adjusted the manuscripts accordingly.

Another example of such adjustment appears in an early (eleventh- to twelfth-century) ritual power text from the Cairo Geniza. I discussed T.-S. K 1.35 + T.-S. K 1.48 in chapter 8, where I pointed out that its praxis for questioning angels and having a vision of God’s throne was much simpler than the praxes of the Hekhalot texts. It involves merely reciting a list of *nomina barbara* and a concluding formula from one of the eighteen benedictions of the *Amida*.

I can think of two interpretations of this type of radical simplification of the ascetic praxes. The first is a diachronic and perhaps evolutionary one. As time passed, the Hekhalot traditions survived but the practice of them died out, perhaps at first locally, then eventually completely. But the manuscripts and handbooks were adapted so that the power of the rituals could be retained long after the rituals themselves fell out of use. If we had more information we might be able to fit these new practitioners into Winkelman’s typology as healers or mediums.

The second interpretation is synchronic and is not incompatible with the first. It is also more speculative. We have seen that the Hekhalot tradition has a persistent radically egalitarian aspect to it.

⁶⁶ Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* 254–55.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 255.

At least some of the tradents wished to have the power of their secrets put in the hands of the masses so that everyone could be a sage and a master of Torah. I have raised the possibility that the distribution of bowl incantations at Nippur makes sense as the working out of this ideology. The composers may have willingly distributed their compositions so that even the illiterate could use their Torah power. Perhaps the hints in the other texts that the recitation of the rituals could give the same power as the performance of the rituals is the survival of something very old, something promoted by the practitioners themselves as part of their own ideology.

Some might say that I am undermining my entire argument with this suggestion, so I should reiterate that I have assembled a great mass of evidence in this book which proves that the Hekhalot literature preserves rituals and adjurations that were meant to be used; that they actually were used in specific social contexts for practical reasons and for named clients; and that the people who produced the rituals correspond well to the multifaceted cross-cultural typology of a recognizable intermediary or magico-religious practitioner—the shaman/healer. Although I know of no shamanic cross-cultural analogies for the democratization of ritual power I am postulating for the descenders to the chariot, their radical egalitarianism is an important component of the texts, and my speculations about how it may have been worked out in practical terms seek only to do justice to the totality of the evidence and to Halperin's important contributions to the debate.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have surveyed the Hekhalot literature as a whole to see what it tells us about the relationship between the descenders to the chariot and the people around them. Depending on the macroform and microforms in question, I found the material to have a strong interest in the relationship between master and disciple, but always with a recognition that they worked alongside other practitioners. The texts also show an interest in serving the exoteric Jewish community by locating blemished persons within it, by supporting it in times of crisis, and by sharing divine power with it through the Sar Torah praxis and perhaps through revelations about the practitioners' visions of the celestial liturgy.

When I turned to a continued examination of the shamanic model and related typologies, I found that the descenders to the chariot did not fit the category "magician," either as recipients of unwanted witchcraft accusations or as conscious social deviants. But they did perform three, and perhaps even four, of the five services normally performed by shamans for their communities. Although the descenders to the chariot lack the connections with hunting cultures central to shamanism as traditionally understood, they do resemble the shamanic equivalent in agrarian and pastoral cultures, the functionary called the "shaman/healer" by Winkelman. This is strong evidence that they were real magico-religious practitioners.

I sought to apply Winkelman's typology of practitioners to the broader culture of the descenders to the chariot and proposed tentatively that the practitioner complex makes sense when viewed in his terms as consisting of priests, witch/sorcerers, and shaman/healers. I also noted the evidence that some tradents used simplified versions of the Hekhalot rituals or even the mere recitation of the ritual instructions in place of the performance of the rituals. This evidence may indicate a later development of roles similar to Winkelman's healers or mediums in the Hekhalot tradition, or that the practitioners themselves recognized simpler praxes for the masses, or both.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSIONS

Main Conclusions

The most important contribution of this study is the demonstration that the descenders to the chariot as described in the Hekhalot literature closely resemble the model of shamanism generally accepted in the anthropological literature, with the exception mainly of elements associated only with hunting cultures. The six elements of the model are as follows.

(1) One usually becomes a shaman through election by the spirits, often due to a hereditary link with shamanhood. The election may be indicated through dreams, visions, or physical characteristics of the prospective shaman. Occasionally someone may also conceive a desire to become a shaman and take steps to cajole the spirits into accepting him or her. The Hekhalot literature shows some interest in the hereditary background of the descenders to the chariot (descendants of "those who kissed the calf" are less likely to succeed and members of the priestly line more likely), but it does not restrict entry into the group to particular families. Nevertheless, the physiognomic literature hints that special physical markings, much like shaman's marks, are associated with the practitioners and such marks may have been taken to indicate their election as intermediaries.

(2) Shamans achieve ecstasy or trance by means of a cross-culturally attested complex of ascetic techniques which seems to promote particular types of altered states of consciousness (the Shamanic State of Consciousness). Although the Hekhalot literature does not prescribe ingestion of psychotropic drugs or the playing of drums, it does give detailed instructions for rituals involving fasting and dietary restrictions, temporary celibacy, cultic purification, and isolation and sensory deprivation. The descenders to the chariot use the same ascetic techniques shamans use.

(3) Some shamans, particularly in Arctic regions, endure an initiatory experience of personal disintegration or dismemberment by the spirits, followed by a reintegration and resurrection that fills them

with power over the spiritual world. The Hekhalot literature reports a similar ordeal suffered by the descenders to the chariot: when faced with the view of the enthroned Deity they are burned and torn apart, but then they are resurrected as flaming angelic beings at home in heaven. Aspects of their ascetic regime which might lead to hypocalcemia offer a possible physiological explanation for this experience and its similarity to the Arctic accounts.

(4) Many shamans go on otherworldly journeys to a multi-tiered heaven or underworld via a world tree or world ladder. According to the Hekhalot literature, the descenders to the chariot travel through the sevenfold celestial palaces as though on a ladder until they come to the throne of God. They use the same techniques as shamans and see the sorts of visions shamans report.

(5) A central element of shamanism is the control of the shaman over helping spirits for various purposes. These are usually the spirits of either animals, ancestors, or departed shamans. The Hekhalot literature and other evidence portray the descenders to the chariot as practitioners who control spirits—almost always angels—for nearly everything they set out to accomplish.

(6) The shaman acts to serve a human community by various means, including healing and exorcism, divination, psychopompy, hunting magic, the remedying of social conflicts, and (rarely) acting as a sacrificial priest. The evidence of the Hekhalot literature and related practical texts of ritual power from late antiquity and the early Middle Ages indicates that the descenders to the chariot carried out three of these and perhaps, at least on an attenuated level, psychopompy as well. They did not engage in hunting magic or sacrificial priesthood.

Thus the descenders to the chariot correspond well to Winkelman's typology of the magico-religious practitioner he calls the "shaman/healer." They do not always embody the most common elements of the model, but they fit within the total range of possibilities. They resemble a type of shaman who survives in a complex agricultural and pastoral society and who has adapted accordingly.

This correspondence has a number of implications for our understanding of the Hekhalot literature. First, it gives the bizarre content of the texts a certain organic unity. Shamans use the same ascetic techniques both to summon and control the spirits and to go on otherworldly journeys, two elements of the Hekhalot literature which some exegetes have tried to separate in recent years. The

model reinforces the centrality of the control of spirits in the Hekhalot texts, whether they are made to act as guides on the otherworldly journey, to reveal esoteric secrets, or for some other purpose. And the hitherto mysterious fiery destruction of the adepts makes good sense when seen as an initiatory experience.

A second implication is that the Hekhalot literature does not consist of primarily fictional or literary compositions, as do the Second Temple apocalypses. The instructions for rituals and adjurations are practical; they were meant to be used and indeed were used. The results they claim to bring about are the results claimed for such rituals by shamans all over the world. The Hekhalot literature must be read on its own terms as the literary residue of a quasi-shamanic intermediary movement, not on the terms of the earlier and quite different apocalyptic literature.

Third, the natural inference is that the descenders to the chariot themselves wrote much of the material that survives in the Hekhalot literature. Although the texts have been redacted and shaped over many centuries, a good portion of the microforms preserve genuine instructions about ritual practices and visionary experience. This material is esoteric, in that it consists of instructions for disciples, but at least some of it also perpetuates an ideology of radical exotericism, on which more below.

Another main contribution of this book is that it establishes at least one geographical and chronological life situation for the descenders to the chariot—Babylonia (specifically the city of Nippur) in the fifth to seventh centuries CE. Here we can see these practitioners in action in their own community through the evidence they have left us in the buried incantation bowls. Hints about other life situations have surfaced as well. The metal amulets may indicate that similar practitioners were active in Syria or Palestine at the same time or a little earlier. And the texts of ritual power from the Cairo Geniza show that Hekhalot rituals, adjurations, and traditions continued to be used somewhere in the Middle East in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and even later.

Ancillary Proposals and Suggestions for Further Research

These are the major conclusions of this study, which seem to me to be very well grounded. But throughout this volume I have made a

number of other proposals that are supported by the current evidence, although they are not as certain as the points summarized above. I present these less as conclusions than as stimulants for further discussion.

First, I have suggested that the instructions, rituals, and visionary accounts found in the Hekhalot corpus as a whole can be explained synthetically along the following lines. The Hekhalot literature provides instructions for becoming a practitioner of three types of ritual power. The practitioner can call down the Prince of Torah to gain Torah power. Or the practitioner can bind spirits directly to grant wishes, either by adjuration or by ascending to the throne and sitting on the lap of a divine being. Or he can compel angels to lead him on a journey to the celestial throne room so that he can participate in the celestial liturgy, evidently in order to be filled with heavenly liturgy power. All three types of power—Torah power, the power to bind spirits to one's will, and liturgy power—were viewed in Jewish tradition as practical forms of ritual power, and I see the overarching goal of the Hekhalot literature to be the use of these powers for practical benefits to the exoteric community. We see the practitioners using Torah power to drive away the spiritual forces of evil in the incantation bowls Montgomery 25 and Gordon E/F/Hyvernat. They adjure angels for similar purposes in the *Sar Panim* and in bowl Moussaieff 1, and various Hekhalot texts make it clear that the adept seated on the lap of the divine figure can ask for whatever he wants. And although participation in the celestial liturgy is never explicitly tied in the Hekhalot literature to practical service to the community, the connection is supported by the evidence. Some of the texts from the Cairo Geniza draw on the Jewish liturgy as a source of ritual power as effective as spells and adjurations. If the goal of the ascent is to bring back such heavenly liturgy power, we can understand why the *Hekhalot Rabbati* finds it so important for the practitioner to bear witness on his return to what he saw in heaven, and where Joshua bar Peraḥya got the exorcism spells he brought down from heaven according to Montgomery's bowls 32 and 33.

In general, the relationship of the Hekhalot literature to the Jewish liturgy and of the descenders to the chariot to the social structures associated with the synagogue are areas where further study is desirable.

Second, I have come to doubt that the Sar Torah and descent/ascent materials should be separated as two distinct movements or traditions. I see these materials as too intertwined with one another and too internally inconsistent in themselves for such a bifurcation. Ascetic rituals are not limited to the Sar Torah praxis: we find them applied to the heavenly descent/ascent in *Hekhalot Rabbati* §§203–205; *Sar Torah* §303; *Hekhalot Zutarti* §§422–24; *Ma'aseh Merkavah* §§560–65; and perhaps G22 1b 27–30. A vision of God's throne is featured in *Sar Torah* §§297–98. *Sar Torah* §305 and G8 2b 21–22 use nearly identical language to narrate the success of an especially dull disciple at, respectively, the Sar Torah praxis and the descent to the chariot. Visionary journeys to gain Sar Torah powers are narrated in *Hekhalot Zutarti* §336 and G8 2b 36–37 (and one for a revelation of the *Shi'ur Qoma* in *Merkavah Rabba* §688). Some of these passages have been dismissed as glosses or contamination of traditions, but the overlaps between the Sar Torah and descent/ascent materials are pervasive enough that to explain them all in this way would be specious.

This is not to deny that there are differences between the two categories of material. It is true, for example, that ascetic praxes appear more often and consistently in texts pertaining to the adjuration of angels, particularly the Prince of Torah and the Prince of the Presence. It is also true that such texts almost never speak of the descent to the chariot. But the two categories themselves have many internal variations from microform to microform. I have isolated three sets of terms used for the Sar Torah praxis in the *Sar Torah* text, and it is well known that some texts concerning the visionary journey speak of an upward “descent” and a downward “ascent,” while others use the two terms in the opposite and normal way.

It may be helpful to change our thinking about the material, focusing less on a distinction between the Sar Torah praxis and the visionary journey and more on the variant practices and emphases of the individual microforms. These may well reflect different notions of individual groups and communities, notions that have been collected only secondarily into the macroforms. Some practitioners in some groups may have specialized in the Sar Torah praxis or the visionary journey, while others combined them. Synergistic combinations of specialist practitioners in a given community are possible—compare the Japanese shamanic complex of ascetic and medium. Or some may have specialized in a particular form of power (binding of spirits, Torah power, or divine liturgy power) but used more than

one means to gain it (e.g., both heavenly ascent and adjuration of angels to gain Torah power).

Third, I have found both esoteric and exoteric elements in the Hekhalot literature. The extraordinarily demanding rituals and the dangerous adjurations of angels and visions of the divine realm are esoteric—aimed at highly dedicated disciples. But even these practices and experiences ultimately have an exoteric agenda in that the power arising from them is to be used for serving the Jewish community as a whole. Some of the texts also promote a radically egalitarian agenda which demands that the secrets uncovered by the visionary journey and the revelations of the Prince of Torah be shared with all Jews and perhaps even all human beings. I have suggested tentatively that the acting out of this ideology may be reflected in the physical evidence of the Babylonian incantation bowls, which simultaneously manifest origins in an elite scribal guild and enthusiastic dissemination through all levels of Jewish society and even among gentiles. With this interpretation in mind, a thorough review of the evidence uncovered in the Nippur excavation, and indeed the archaeology of late antique Iraq in general, might prove illuminating.

The Hekhalot literature seems also to hint at a degeneration or popularization of the rigorous demands placed on the descenders to the chariot. Provision is occasionally made to replace a difficult ritual with an easy one advertised as equally effective. It is a question for future research whether these notes are glosses added at a time when the ascetic rituals had fallen out of use or concessions by the composers themselves for the sake of their own democratizing ideology. The evolution of the textual tradition from late antiquity into the Middle Ages as well as developments among the practitioners who used the texts are other areas for future research. A correlation of sophisticated text-critical study, using synoptic and hypertext approaches, with social-scientific analysis of the material which uses typologies like Winkelman's is likely to advance our understanding of the history of the descenders to the chariot.

In this book I have located the practitioners who produced the Hekhalot literature in a specific time and place and to some degree in a specific social context. We know when and where at least some of them lived and worked. We do not know any of their names for certain yet, but we have learned the names of some of their clients and neighbors, of whose personal lives we have caught glimpses. I have also set these practitioners in an illuminating cross-cultural

context by comparing them to a particular type of magico-religious functionary: the shaman and, more specifically, the shaman/healer. Although much about them remains obscure—and much always will—our lens for viewing them has gained a sharper focus and we have, so to speak, a few snapshots of them at work. We can now speak of the descenders to the chariot not only as literary constructs but as real people, the people behind the Hekhalot literature.

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