

## Beyond Judaisms: Meṭatron and the Divine Polymorphy of Ancient Judaism<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

My specific project in this paper is to combine several related and notorious questions in the history of Judaism into one: What is the nexus among the semi-divine (or high angel) figure known in the Talmud as Meṭatron, the figure of the exalted Enoch in the Enoch books (*1-3 Enoch!*), “The One Like a Son of Man” of Daniel, Jesus, the Son of Man, and the rabbinically named heresy of “Two Powers/Sovereignties in Heaven?” I believe that in order to move towards some kind of an answer to this question, we need to develop a somewhat different approach to the study of ancient Judaism, as I hope to show here. I claim that late-ancient rabbinic literature when read in the context of all contemporary and earlier texts of Judaism—those defined as rabbinic as well as those defined as non-, para-, or even anti-rabbinic—affords us a fair amount of evidence for and information

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<sup>1</sup> This essay began its life as one of the hundredth series of Haskell lectures in Middle Eastern literature in its relation to the Bible and Christian teachings, entitled “The Son of Man and the Genealogy of Rabbinic Judaism,” which were delivered by me in the Spring of 2007 at Oberlin College. I am very grateful to Prof. Abraham Socher who invited me to deliver these lectures. I thank him as well for his wonderful hospitality to me during very trying times in his life. These were intended to form a manuscript of the same title to be published by Fordham University Press. At the eleventh hour, however, I realized that the argument of one of the lectures seems to me fatally flawed, and I abandoned the monograph sadly (Helen Tartar of FUP was wonderfully generous in not making me feel guilty; Helen I owe you one). This essay is, therefore, a brand saved from a fire (the rest of the salvage will be incorporated, DV, into my forthcoming, tentatively entitled: *How the Jews Came to Believe that Jesus was God*). I wish to thank the following who read early versions of this manuscript and helped me to improve it: Carlin Barton, Ra’anan Boustan, Jonathan Boyarin, two anonymous readers, and Elliot Wolfson. Alon Goshen-Gottstein also provided critical commentary, some of which I have been able to incorporate.

about a belief in (and perhaps cult of) a second divine person within, or very close to, so-called “orthodox” rabbinic circles long after the advent of Christianity. Part of the evidence for this very cult will come from efforts at its suppression on the part of rabbinic texts. I believe, moreover, that a reasonable chain of inference links this late cult figure back through the late-antique Book of *3 Enoch* to the Enoch of the first-century *Parables of Enoch*—also known in the scholarly literature as the *Similitudes of Enoch*—and thus to the Son of Man of that text and further back to the One Like a Son of Man of Daniel 7.

### Keywords

Ancient Judaism, Judaisms, Meṭaṭron, Son of Man, Talmud, *3 Enoch*

Ruth Stein, *in memoriam*

### “Two Powers in Heaven” as the Older Orthodoxy

When Alan Segal, three decades ago in his landmark book, *Two Powers in Heaven*, wrote about the eponymous alleged heresy, he treated it as a phenomenon external to rabbinic Judaism and “reported” on in rabbinic texts: “Not unexpectedly, the sources showed that some mysticism and apocalypticism, as well as Christianity and gnosticism, were seen as ‘two powers’ heretics by the rabbis,” and, “it was one of the central issues over which the two religions separated.” His project then was the reconstruction of the “development of the heresy.”<sup>2</sup> For him, “the problem is to

<sup>2</sup> A. F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (SJLA 25; Leiden: Brill, 1977), ix. In addition to Segal’s work, parts of this question, or rather various of the questions that go to make up this synthetic form of the question have been treated in M. Idel, “Enoch is Meṭaṭron,” *Immanuel* 24/25 (1990): 220-40; idem, “Meṭaṭron: Notes Towards the Development of Myth in Judaism,” in *Eshel Beer-Sheva: Occasional Publications in Jewish Studies* (Beersheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 1996), 29-44 [Hebrew]; idem, *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism* (Kogod Library of Judaic Studies; London: Continuum, 2007); N. Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate: Angelic Vice Regency in Late Antiquity* (BSJS 22; Leiden: Brill, 1999); P. S. Alexander, “The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch,” *JJS* 28 (1977): 156-80; idem, “3 Enoch and the Talmud,” *JSJ* 18 (1987): 40-68; C. Morray-Jones, “Hekhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition: Alexander’s Three Test Cases,” *JSJ* 22 (1991): 1-39; C. Rowland and C. R. Morray-Jones, *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament* (CRINT 3.12; Leiden: Brill, 2009); G. G. Stroumsa, “Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Meṭaṭron and Christ: For Shlomo Pines,” *HTR* 76 (1983): 269-88; A. A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Meṭaṭron Tradition* (TSAJ 107; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), inter multa alia. These and other works, cited and uncited, have all played a role in the synthesis hypothesized here.

discover which of the heretical groups were actually called ‘two powers in heaven’ by the earliest tannaitic sages.”<sup>3</sup> Following, however, some brilliant rethinking of method in the study of Christian heresiology, in which the matter has been shifted from the histories of alleged heresies to the history of the episteme (in the Foucauldian sense) of heresy itself and its functions in the formation of an orthodox Church,<sup>4</sup> we can shift our own attention from the development of “Two Powers” as a heresy “out there” to the discursive work that its naming as such does in order to define and identify rabbinic orthodoxy. Moreover, in some of the best work on the use of heresiology to produce orthodoxy among Christians, it has been shown that almost always the so-called “heresy” is not a new invader from outside but an integral and usually more ancient version of the religious tradition that is now being displaced by a newer set of conceptions, portraying the relations almost mystifyingly in the direct opposite of the observed chronologies.<sup>5</sup> We can accordingly reconfigure the study of the relations among such entities as the apocalyptic literature (especially in this case the Enoch texts), the Gospels, the texts of late-ancient para-rabbinic mysticism, known as the Merkabah mysticism (the Hekhalot texts and their congeners), and classical rabbinic literature, including especially the Talmud, in the same vein, namely, as the history of the invention of a heresy, of the displacement of a religious conception formerly held by many Jews by a new-fangled orthodoxy. To forestall one kind of objection to this thesis, let me hasten to clarify that I am not arguing that the idea of a single and singular godhead is the *invention* of the Rabbis, nor that there was no contention on this question before them, but I do assert that the evidence suggests that the issue was by no means settled in biblical times nor yet even in the Middle Ages and that, therefore, the notion of a polyform Judaism (rather than orthodoxy/heresy or “Judaisms”) has quite substantial legs to stand on. It is the purpose of this case study to show how the genealogy of rabbinic Judaism can be shown to be in some measure a product of such a development of a “notion of heresy,” in which a rabbinic orthodoxy (not nearly, to be sure, as detailed or as precise as that of Christian orthodoxy) was formed out of

<sup>3</sup> Segal, *Powers*, 89.

<sup>4</sup> A. Le Boulluec, *La notion d'hérésie dans la littérature grecque I<sup>er</sup>-III<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> C. Kannengiesser, “Alexander and Arius of Alexandria: The Last Ante-Nicene Theologians,” *Comp* 35 (1990): 391-403.

a much more multiform set of religious ideas and even practices of worship than “orthodoxy” would allow for.<sup>6</sup>

Earlier iterations of this line of argument<sup>7</sup> have been misunderstood, certain scholars thinking, it seems, that I have assented to Segal, rather than dissenting from his approach (after having learned much from him, to be sure).<sup>8</sup> I want, therefore, to make as clear as possible the crucial difference between my approach and that of my predecessor. Perhaps the clearest way that I can articulate the difference in our methods or approaches is that where he can imagine asking (and answering) a question about the existence of the “heresy” before the Rabbis, for me, since it was the Rabbis who invented the “heresy” via a rejection of that which was once (and continued to be) very much within Judaism, that question is, of course, impossible. This goes to the heart of our respective portraits of ancient Judaism. Where Segal seems clearly to imagine an “orthodox core” to Judaism that pre-exists and then develops into what would become rabbinism, I imagine a Judaism that consists of manifold historical developments of a polyform tradition in which no particular form has claim to either orthodoxy or centrality over others. Accordingly while I am reading many of the same texts as Segal, my overall way of putting them together is almost diametrically opposed to his and many of the individual readings are quite different as well. I say this not to engage in a

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<sup>6</sup> This represents a distinct refinement of the position I took in D. Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religions; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), perhaps even a border correction. Rather than concluding, as I did then, that ultimately the rabbinic tradition rejected an “orthodox” formation, I would now rephrase that to suggest that a virtual orthodoxy was continued (excluding, for instance, Christians who considered themselves Jews after the third century, for sure); rather, it was the concept of theological *akribeia*, precision or exactitude, that never seems to have developed among non-Christian versions of Judaism including rabbinism. This not minor shift, will, I hope deflect some of the charges of apparent triumphalism or apologetic that the formulation in the book brought in its wake. See especially V. Burrus, R. Kalmin, H. Lapin, and J. Marcus, “Boyarin’s Work: A Critical Assessment,” *Henech* 28 (2006): 7-30, especially the essay by Joel Marcus there.

<sup>7</sup> D. Boyarin, “Two Powers in Heaven; or, the Making of a Heresy,” in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel* (ed. H. Najman and J. Newman; JSJSup 83; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 331-70.

<sup>8</sup> Schäfer, for instance, regards my own earlier renditions of this theory as “inspired by Segal,” while I quite clearly and explicitly disagree with him, P. Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 323 n. 367. Goshen-Gottstein mistakes me in the same way (See appendix below in this article). Idel, *Ben*, 591 clearly and precisely understood what was at stake between Segal and me.

competition with Segal's thirty-year old work. I learned much from it then and still do, and he too has moved on, but simply to make clearer the methodological difference between our projects so that readers won't have to work so hard lest they miss the point, as some earlier readers have clearly done. That out of the way, let me get on to the major theoretical intervention about Judaism that I wish to make here, moving beyond "Judaisms."<sup>9</sup>

Since the 1970's it has become fashionable to speak of Judaisms, rather than of Judaism. To be sure, this move was part of a salutary attempt—initially on the part of Jacob Neusner<sup>10</sup>—to open up our study of Judaism to include non-rabbinic religion as part and parcel of Judaism and thus not to write the history of Judaism as the history of the winners.<sup>11</sup> Having learned the lessons of that move, I think it is time to move beyond it, seeing Judaism as the sum of the religious expressions of the Jews.<sup>12</sup> We need

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<sup>9</sup> I should, perhaps, however, modify an impression easily gathered from my earlier work. I certainly made it seem as if my argument was that the production of rabbinic Judaism out of the multiform Judaism from which it emerged was primarily a theological matter (see Idel, *Ben*, 591-93; A. Goshen-Gottstein, "Jewish-Christian Relations and Rabbinic Literature—Shifting Scholarly and Relational Paradigms: The Case of Two Powers," in *Interaction Between Judaism and Christianity in History, Religion, Art, and Literature* [ed. M. Poorthuis, J. Schwartz, and J. Turner; Leiden: Brill, 2008], 15-44). Both of these critics of my earlier work are correct in taking me to task on this matter; there was much more going on than just a theological "conspiracy." Nonetheless, I do claim that the repeated attempt to portray "Two Powers in Heaven" as a heretical divagation from the essential and ancient norm, the "orthodox" core, of Judaism that we find in the late-ancient texts, represents classical heresiological practice, as in the rethinking of the Arian controversy that we find argued in Kannengiesser, "Alexander and Arius." The rabbinic texts are, themselves, almost telling us that they had met the heretic and he is us (viz. Rabbi Akiva). The Rabbis were apparently no more successful in defeating this deeply ancient religious idea than the Fathers were in eradicating the ancient theology that they had named "Arianism." I also believe that the Rabbis were under theological/hermeneutic pressure from interpreters of the biblical texts in question, as well they might have been, as these texts do strongly tend to support that ancient (ex hypothesi) Jewish theological mythologoumenon.

<sup>10</sup> See, just for example, J. Neusner, W. S. Green, and E. S. Frerichs, *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>11</sup> A. F. Segal, *The Other Judaisms of Late Antiquity* (BJS 127; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> Note that this is a very different move from that of E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* (London: SCM Press, 1990), who sought to discover some constant that subtended all the Judaisms (and excluded thereby Pauline Judaism, for instance).

to more clearly distinguish among histories of the Jews, histories of Judaism, and histories of rabbinic Judaism. Getting clearer on the ways that these are separate, if obviously imbricated, projects will help to clarify some confusion (and undoubtedly, perhaps in a salutary way, introduce new confusion). If we think of “the Jews”—anachronistically from a terminological point of view—as an ethnonym that includes all the people of Israel,<sup>13</sup> then Judaism is all of the complex of related and contending religious forms comprehended by those folks, including the figures of Enoch, Moses, Jesus, and all.<sup>14</sup> It is all-important, however, to emphasize that these different religious forms do not necessarily resolve themselves into separate social groups (and this is not just a failure of our knowledge); they overlap and interact.<sup>15</sup> As much as it has been proven that the history of Judaism is not the history of rabbinic Judaism with all other forms of Judaism as either marginal, inferior competitors or worse, it is still wrong, I think, to think of separate Judaisms that belong to separate social groups. In this sense, the history of Judaism, the religion of Jews, is not the same, at all, as the social history of Jews. It is indeed part of the process of production of rabbinic Judaism as orthodoxy that it will seek to define and exclude various internal others—and not so others—as external others and members of particular groups, and scholarship should not be complicit with this at all, although it seems that positivist scholarship will somehow always be. Part and parcel of this genealogy then will be to show how muddy are the lines in the sand that supposedly divide rabbinic Judaism from its others, including but not limited to that form of Judaism that eventually is called Christianity. I return, then, to the

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<sup>13</sup> A better term might be, then, Israelites but it is hard to go against convention in such matters.

<sup>14</sup> For a precisely opposite view, arguing for a “normative Judaism,” as a phenomenological entity, see E. E. Zuesse, “Phenomenology of Judaism,” *The Encyclopaedia of Judaism* (ed. J. Neusner, A. J. Avery-Peck, and W. S. Green; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 3:1968-86. Phenomenology in this case seems to mean deciding in advance that rabbinic Judaism is Judaism, *tout court*, marking its central norms as definitional for Judaism, and then writing out other Jews as they deviate from those norms. This may be good philosophy—I don’t know—, it bears little relation to critical, historical scholarship. Furthermore, much in Zuesse’s “factual” account of Christianity is simply false historically, reading back later forms into earlier periods, but maybe that too is phenomenologically acceptable, since I suppose Christianity too must have a time-and-place transcendent phenomenological essence.

<sup>15</sup> As recently as Boyarin, “Two Powers,” I was completely enthralled by the notion of “Judaisms.”

study of Judaism, a reconfigured post-Judaisms Judaism that comprehends all of the forms of religious expression of the Jews without centralizing, marginalizing, or reifying any of its forms. In what follows, then, I shall be reading certain key religious texts in the Babylonian Talmud as integral expressions of a polymorphous Judaism of which rabbinic Judaism is, in part, a special articulation, in part, simply a post factum rhetorical construct.<sup>16</sup>

## Meṭaṭron, the Son of Man

In the Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 38b, we read:

Rav Naḥman said: A person who knows how to answer the *minim* [sectarians or heretics]<sup>17</sup> as Rav Idi,<sup>18</sup> let him answer, and if not, let him not answer. A certain *min* said to Rav Idi: “It is written, ‘And to Moses he said, come up unto the YHWH [Exod 24:1].’ It should have said, ‘Come up to me!’”

If YHWH is speaking and he says to Moses, Come up to YHWH, the implication seems to be, according to the *min* that there are two persons up there, or, as the Rabbis usually name the heresy: “Two powers in heaven.” But:

He [Rav Idi] said to him: “This was Meṭaṭron, whose name is like the name of his master, as it is written, ‘for My name is in him’ [Exod 23:21].”

“But if so, they should worship him!”

“It is written, ‘Do not rebel against him’ [Exod 23:21]—Do not confuse him with me!”

“If so, then why does it say ‘He will not forgive your sins’?”

<sup>16</sup> This is nearly opposite to the position taken, e.g., by J. Fraenkel, *Sipur Ha-Agadah, Ahdut Shel Tokhen Ve-Tsurah: Kovets Mehkarim. [Agadic Narrative]* (Sifriyat Helal ben Hayim; Tel-Aviv: Ha-Kibuts ha-meuhad, 2001), 339 who draws a firewall between the Rabbis and the Hekhalot literature and explicitly regards the classical rabbinic literature as nearly totally isolated from the surrounding religious worlds.

<sup>17</sup> The precise meaning of this term (I’m speaking now on the lexical level) has been much contested. As I have written elsewhere I believe that it is related to Justin Martyr’s *genistai* and *meristai* as names for Jewish heresies and thus, almost literally, just means sectarians without defining the content of their dissension.

<sup>18</sup> This is the correct reading of the name, according to manuscript evidence.

“We have sworn that we would not even receive him as a guide, for it is written ‘If Your face goes not [do not bring us up from here]’ [Exod 33:15].” (*b. Sanh.* 38b)<sup>19</sup>

This extraordinary bit of rhetoric needs some glossing and then a deeper consideration of how to read it than it has received so far.<sup>20</sup> The *min* produces a seemingly compelling argument that there are two powers in heaven, and this the primary, perhaps sole, focus of rabbinic heresiology.<sup>21</sup> Following then the above-mentioned well-known principle in the study of heresiology that most often what is now called heresy is simply an earlier form of a religion which has now been discredited by an important and powerful group of religious leaders, we might well hypothesize that such belief is both ancient and entrenched in Israel.

So let us see what these *minim* are made to claim here. God has been addressing the Jewish People as a whole (in Exod 23), informing them that he will send his angel before them and instructing them how to behave with respect to this angel. He then turns to Moses and tells him to come up to YHWH (the Tetragrammaton), implying quite strongly that “YHWH” of whom he speaks is not the same “YHWH” who is the speaker of the verse: Two YHWHs.<sup>22</sup> This is, in fact, precisely the sort of argument that a Justin Martyr would have produced from Scripture to argue for a “second person” (the Logos). It is, moreover, very much reminiscent of the talk about the Name of the Lord of Spirits in the *Parables of Enoch*, and, if Steven Richard Scott’s interpretation of that text is accepted, that Name is the Name of the Son of Man and thus Meṭatron.<sup>23</sup> And so

19) אמר רב נחמן: האי מאן דידיע לאהדורי למינים כרב אידיית – ליהדר, ואי לא – לא ליהדר. אמר ההוא מינא לרב אידיית: כתיב +שמות כ"ד+ ואל משה אמר עלה אל ה', עלה אלי מיבעי ליה! אמר ליה: זהו מטטרון, ששמו כשם רבו, דכתיב +שמות כ"ג+ כי שמי בקרבנו. – אי הכי ניפלחו ליה! – כתיב +שמות כ"ג+ אל תמר בו – אל תמירני בו. – אם כן לא ישא לפשעכם למה ליה? – אמר ליה: הימנותא בידן, דאפילו בפררוקא נמי לא קבילניה, דכתיב +שמות ל"ג+ ויאמר אליו אם אין פינד'הלכים וגו' (text from Bar Ilan Rabbinic Texts Project).

20) For previous readings, see Segal, *Powers*, 68-69, whose interpretation is quite close to mine in large part and Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate*, 49. For a much older reading, see R. T. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (New York: Ktav, 1978), 285-90.

21) See appendix below for discussion of an opposing position recently argued by Goshen-Gottstein, “Jewish-Christian Relations.”

22) The medieval Bible commentary of Ibn Ezra solves this problem by referring to other verses in which a speaker refers to himself by his own name.

23) S. R. Scott, “The Binitarian Nature of the *Book of Similitudes*,” *JSP* 18/1 (2008): 55-78, esp. 71-72. On the Name as belonging to the second person, see Stroumsa, “Form(s),” 283, comparing Christ to Meṭatron.



the *minim* conclude that there is a second power in heaven. Rav Idi, in refuting them, turns back to the previous chapter and remarks that verse 21 there explicitly says, "My name is in him [that is, in the angel]."<sup>24</sup> Meṭaṭron, that angel, therefore, could be called by the name "YHWH," and it is to him that Moses is being instructed to ascend. What this amounts to is the Rabbi proclaiming that there are not two divine powers in heaven but only God and an angel whom God Godself has named God as well.

At this point, the *min* responds by saying that if Meṭaṭron is indeed called by the ineffable name, then we ought to worship him as well; in other words, that Rav Idi's own answer can be turned against him. To this, Rav Idi retorts that the verse also says "Do not rebel against him," which by a typical midrashic sleight of hand can be read as "Do not substitute him," that is, even though Meṭaṭron is called by God's name, do not pray to him. *Al tamer bo* [Do not rebel against him] has been read as *Al tamireni bo*: Don't substitute him for me. The very verse in which Israel is enjoined to obey the second YHWH has been turned by a pun into its exact opposite. The *min* says if that is what is meant, then why does it continue in the verse and say that he, Meṭaṭron, will not forgive sins? The *min* is arguing that if the people are being warned not to rebel against Meṭaṭron, because he is as powerful as God, then it makes sense to tell them that he will not forgive their sins if they do rebel, but if he is no God at all, then it is otiose to tell them that he will not forgive sins. Only if he has the power to redeem sins does it make sense to declare that he will not forgive their sins if they rebel against him. (Of course, the rabbinic reading is: Don't confuse him with me for he cannot redeem sins but only I can. The "heretical" reading, I'm afraid, is much stronger and more adequate to the language.) In other words, the *min* argues that Meṭaṭron seemingly has precisely the redeemer features that are characteristic of his direct ancestor, Enoch the Son of Man, or for that matter Jesus, the Son of Man as well, including the power to forgive sins (Mark 2:10). According to the sectary, the verse must read: He has the power to forgive sins but will not for those who rebel against him. Two Powers in Heaven, indeed.

<sup>24</sup> Segal makes the interesting point that in its original form the protagonist must have been named not yet Meṭaṭron but some theophoric name, such as (I suggest) Akatriel, or Anafiel-YHWH, as we find later in the Merkabah texts.

I would suggest, moreover, that, in typical midrashic fashion, another verse underpins this comment of the *min*. Joshua 24:19 reads: “It will be very difficult for you [lit. you will not be able to] to worship YHWH, for He is a holy God; He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your sins and your iniquities.” In other words, the logic would run: if there it remarks of YHWH that he will not forgive sins and iniquities, then if the same language is being used here, ought it not indicate that the divine figure being spoken of has the same attributes as YHWH?<sup>25</sup> Moreover, if there the context is one of worshipping YHWH, then here too worship of Meṭatron, the second Lord or lesser Yahu, would seem to be implicated as well. The comparison is rendered even stronger when we notice that exactly the same context is involved in both the Exodus and the Joshua verse, namely the expulsion of the Canaanites from the land of Israel and the warnings to the people of Israel to be worthy of this benefit and to worship YHWH, or their sin will not be forgiven at all. It certainly seems as if the verse in Exodus can be read as equating Meṭatron to YHWH and therefore demanding worship for both figures.

To this the Rabbi answers that “we” the Jews, through our leader Moses, already have declared that we do not even want him, Meṭatron, to be our guide in the desert, as the cited verse says: “If *Your* face goes before us not.” In other words, the angelic regent was of such non-importance that, far from considering him worthy of being worshiped, Moses would not even accept him as guide. In order to escape the seemingly ineluctable conclusion that there is indeed such a second divine figure, Rav Idi proposes to read the verse as if saying, “Be careful before him and obedient to him. Do not confuse him with me, for he will not forgive your sins, though my name is in him.” Aside from the fact that this translation renders the verse considerably less coherent in its logic, the *min* argues that it makes this angel seem absolutely insignificant, hardly worthy of mention, to which Rav Idi answers (and this is his brilliant move) that indeed that is so. The Israelites have already registered their rejection of any interest in this insignificant angel when they insisted that God Himself must go before them and no other, thus dramatizing the rejection of the Son of Man theology, a rejection that the Rabbis themselves perform. Although much of what I’ve just said can be seen in Segal’s analysis of this text as well, it is here that there is a parting of the ways between us, for he writes,

<sup>25</sup> Segal, *Powers*, 131-32, shows that this verse was a locus for controversy between Rabbis and others independently of this particular text.

based on the comparison with the Gospel that “if we take the literature in the New Testament as characteristic of some kinds of heresy in the first century,” then, “it seems clear therefore that some varieties of the heresy go back to the first century, even if the rabbinic texts do not.”<sup>26</sup> I would propose rather that the Gospel text is evidence that these religious ideas were present among Jews in the first century and are being first named and excluded as heresy in the rabbinic text, in other words that there is no a priori reason to regard this as heresy in the first century at all before the talmudic intervention. Do not worship a second God as (many of) you have been accustomed to doing so far is the burden of the Talmudic narration of the interaction with the *min*.

Let me draw out the implication of this reading a bit more. It is important to note that Rav Idi does not deny the existence of Meṭaṭron; he does not finally, cannot it seem, deny even the power of Meṭaṭron, of his capabilities as Second God. What he claims, rather, is that Israel has rejected such *worship*, even refused to entrust Meṭaṭron with leading them in the desert. Or as the Haggadah has it: Not by means of an angel, and not by means of an agent, and not by means of the Logos (that one’s only in old manuscripts). You may exist, Meṭaṭron, say the Rabbis, but we will not worship you. Somebody, it would seem was doing just that.

## Meṭaṭron and Enoch

### *Where Did Meṭaṭron Come From?*

In order to answer this question, *3 Enoch*, a relatively late Hebrew mystical apocalypse from the end of late antiquity (the last gasp as it were of the Enoch tradition) and probably roughly contemporaneous with the final production of the Babylonian Talmud itself will prove of crucial importance. One of the most important investigations of this text is that of Philip Alexander.<sup>27</sup> In this article, “The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch,” Alexander argues that a pivotal development that is found in this text is the combination of Enoch and the archangel Meṭaṭron, arguing that “these two figures originally had nothing to do with each other; there are texts which speak in detail of Enoch’s translation but

<sup>26</sup> Segal, *Powers*, protasis on p. 70, apotasis on p. 71.

<sup>27</sup> Alexander, “Historical Setting.”

know nothing of Meṭaṭron, while there are other texts which mention the angel Meṭaṭron without linking him with Enoch. The Meṭaṭron of *3 Enoch* marks the confluence of two initially quite independent streams of tradition.”<sup>28</sup> But, of course, this is the story of the Son of Man of the *Parables of Enoch* too. There too, two originally independent figures, translated Enoch and the Son of Man have been conflated.<sup>29</sup>

The *Parables of Enoch* themselves are not necessarily or even probably to be seen as sectarian. In a very important recent paper, Pierluigi Piovanelli has used rhetorical analysis “in order to reconstruct the profile of the implied audience and community” of the *Parables of Enoch* and compellingly argues that the producers of this document did not belong to an embattled and oppressed sect but identified themselves, in fact, in some important sense with Israel as a whole. His interpretative assumption is that the “kings and the mighty” who are the declared enemies of the author(s) of the *Parables* are gentile (probably Roman) rulers.<sup>30</sup> Piovanelli has posed the question of the connections of the *Parables* to Qumran, on the one hand, or to *3 Enoch*, on the other. It seems to me that Piovanelli is right to stress these different alternatives, not only as mere matters of literary history but as powerful and significant indicators of the social location of the group that formed the text. Whether or not the text was in Hebrew or in Aramaic seems to me irrelevant, and the connections with *3 Enoch* compelling ones. Piovanelli’s demonstration of the non-sectarian nature of the book is thus of signal importance.

In his landmark article, Alexander also argues that Enoch’s transformation into divine Son of Man in the *Parables* and especially *2 Enoch*<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Alexander, “Historical Setting,” 159. On the origins of Meṭaṭron himself, Alexander points us to H. Odeberg, *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch* (New York: Ktav, 1973), 79-146 and G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (2d ed.; New York: Jewish theological seminary of America, 1965), 42-55 inter alia. See Idel, “Enoch”; idem, “Meṭaṭron”; Stroumsa, “Form(s).”

<sup>29</sup> For my reading of this text, see “The Birth of the Son of Man: From Simile to Redeemer in *3 Enoch*.” See on this also Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate*, 32. For Meṭaṭron as Enoch, see Idel, “Enoch.”

<sup>30</sup> P. Piovanelli, “‘A Testimony for the Kings and Mighty Who Possess the Earth’: The Thirst for Justice and Peace in the Parables of Enoch,” in *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables* (ed. G. Boccaccini; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007). J. C. Greenfield and M. E. Stone, “The Enochic Pentateuch and the Date of the Similitudes,” *HTR* 70 (1977), 51-56, at 56-57 argue that it is a sectarian work but I find the arguments of Piovanelli persuasive.

<sup>31</sup> This text, once referred to as the “Slavonic Enoch” cannot be so styled any more, since Coptic fragments have now been found for it.

enabled the later Merkabah and Kabbalistic identifications of Enoch with Meṭaṭron, the highest of the angels, arguing that “if such a development had not taken place, Enoch could never have been identified with the archangel Meṭaṭron.”<sup>32</sup> We can thus take the roots of that transformation back to *1 Enoch*, that is to the *Parables* and emphasize the generativity of that transformation in the production of both rabbinic (para-rabbinic) and Christian Jewish Christology. As Alexander concludes, “We must postulate in consequence an historical link between the Hekhaloth mystics and the circles which generated these pseudepigraphic Enoch traditions.”<sup>33</sup> A genetic relationship, or better, a genealogical relationship between the Son of Man of the Gospels and Meṭaṭron of late ancient Judaism cannot be gainsaid, in my opinion.<sup>34</sup>

Once more, my question is not to what group did the *min* (that one conversing with Rav Idi, or any other one) “really” belong but, rather, what are the Rabbis seeking to accomplish by representing a *min* who argues in this way? This suggests to me that in their project of producing an orthodoxy for Judaism, the Rabbis were disowning a common (how common, I think, we will never know) Jewish practice of worship of the second God, actually named within mystical texts, the lesser YHWH [My name is in him], Meṭaṭron, who is Enoch, the Son of Man.

Segal would have it that “other groups beside Christians were making ‘dangerous’ interpretations of that verse [Dan 7:9].” For Segal, the “enemy” is outside, external, marginal to the rabbinic community and religious world: “Identifying the specific group about whom the rabbis were concerned in this passage cannot be successful.”<sup>35</sup> He still worries that “determining the identity of the group of heretics in question remains a serious problem,”<sup>36</sup> as if there *necessarily were* a real, if unidentifiable, group of external heretics, as opposed to internal religious traditions, to whom the texts refer. In contrast to this fairly common, if not ubiquitous, way of presenting the matter, it is my contention that the Rabbis are effectively expelling the Two-Powers theology from within themselves by naming it as *minut*, heresy. The Enoch traditions were indeed, and continued to be right into and through late antiquity, the province of Israel *simpliciter* including early Jesus groups and not of a sect within Israel (of course this

<sup>32</sup> Alexander, “Historical Setting,” 160.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Stroumsa, “Form(s).”

<sup>35</sup> Segal, *Powers*, 71.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

doesn't mean that they were of interest to all Jews or all Jewish groups). The Rabbis indeed seek by means of various halakic rules "the exclusion of [the body of esoteric doctrine], as having no proper place in the public institutions of Judaism."<sup>37</sup> In contrast, however, to Alexander's own view which sees these exclusions as reflecting accepted norms, I would read them—some would say perversely—as an index of how widespread, and not esoteric at all, these traditions remained.

### *Suppressing the Son of Man*

One very rich example of such rabbinic expulsion of these ancient religious traditions and ideas is from the fourth-century midrash, the *Mekilta d'Rabbi Ishma'el* to Exod 20:2:

I am YHWH your God [Exod 20:2]: Why was it said? For this reason. At the sea He appeared to them as a mighty hero doing battle, as it is said: "YHWH is a man of war." At Sinai he appeared to them as an old man full of mercy. It is said: "And they saw the God of Israel" (Exod 24:10), etc. And of the time after they had been redeemed what does it say? "And the like of the very heaven for clearness" (ibid.). Again it says: "I beheld till thrones were placed, and one that was ancient of days did sit" (Dan 7:9). And it also says: "A fiery stream issued," etc. (v. 10). Scripture, therefore, would not let the nations of the world have an excuse for saying that there are two Powers, but declares: "YHWH is a man of war, YHWH is His name." He, it is, who was in Egypt and He who was at the sea. It is He who was in the past and He who will be in the future. It is He who is in this world and He who will be in the world to come, as it is said, "See now that I, even I, am He," etc. (Deut 32:39). And it also says: "Who hath wrought and done it? He that called the generations from the beginning. I, YHWH, who am the first, and with the last am the same" (Isa 41:4).<sup>38</sup>

This passage clearly projects to the exterior "The Nations of the World," the hereticized view that there are Two Powers in Heaven; it may even have in mind here Christians in this designation.<sup>39</sup> This suggests the pos-

<sup>37</sup> Alexander, "Historical Setting," 167-68.

<sup>38</sup> H. S. Horowitz and I. A. Rabin, eds., *Mekilta d'Rabbi Ishmael* (Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1970), 220-21.

<sup>39</sup> See discussion in Segal, *Powers*, 33-42 whose argument is, unfortunately, somewhat vitiated in my opinion by a lack of precision in interpreting how the midrash works. I am persuaded that in earlier iterations of this argument, I was mistaken in asserting that this

sibility that it was nascent Christianity that provided one of the impulses to so thoroughly delegitimize what I have every reason to believe was an earlier theological option even within rabbinic circles (See the story of Rabbi Akiva just below). Note that this does not mean that I read the passage as a polemic against Christianity, nor that the Rabbis identified Christians as Two Powers heretics any more than Athanasius, for instance, really thought that Arius was a Jew.<sup>40</sup> Be this as it may, it is the passage from Daniel that is alluded to, *but not cited* in this anti-“heretical” polemic, the “Son of Man” passage so pivotal for the development of early Christology, that is the real point of contention here and the reason for the citation of the verse Exod 20:2. Although in Daniel read on its own, it certainly seems that the thrones are multiple and set up for the Court, it is clear from here as well as from other passages that late-ancient Jews read the thrones as two, one for the Ancient of Days and one for the One Like a Son of Man. There are, moreover, two descriptions of God as revealed in the Torah, one at the splitting of the Red Sea and one at the revelation of the Ten Commandments at Sinai. In the first, God is explicitly described as a warrior, that is, as a young man, as it were, while at the latter, as the Rabbis read it, God is described as an elder, full of wisdom and mercy. This is, as Adiel Schremer has correctly observed, derived from the continuation of the verse not cited, in which it says explicitly “And they saw the God of Israel and his underneath which appeared to that as white sapphire,” and thus old.<sup>41</sup> Schremer goes on to argue, however, that all that the Rabbis of this midrash seek by citing the Dan 7 passage is another instance of God as an elder and that the rest of that context in Daniel is irrelevant to them.<sup>42</sup> This seems unlikely to me for two reasons. First of all, the matter of the multiple thrones is already present in Dan 7:9 and quoted in the midrash, and we know from other texts that this was

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term definitely means Christians here (For both points [Segal’s partly mistaken reading of the midrash and my own mistaken assumption that Nations of the World means Christians], see A. Schremer, “Midrash, Theology, and History: Two Powers in Heaven Revisited,” *JSJ* 39 [2008]: 230-54).

<sup>40</sup> R. Lorenz, *Arius Judaizans? Untersuchungen zur dogmengeschichtlichen Einordnung des Arius* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979).

<sup>41</sup> Schremer, “Midrash, Theology, and History,” 17. I had, indeed, entirely missed this point in my own earlier treatment of this text.

<sup>42</sup> He thus argues that my interpretation of the passage as being troubled by the doubling of the Godhead implied by Dan 7 is a fantasy on my part, that I have written my own midrash, as it were.

also troubling to the Rabbis (see below).<sup>43</sup> Secondly, the citation of 7:10 “And it also says: A fiery stream issued,” etc. (v. 10) is totally otiose on Schremer’s reading. It is especially otiose in the form “and it also says” which should either be support for the first verse or a contradiction of it. Verse 10 is neither. I argue, using Schremer’s own correct notion that an “etc.” frequently hides and reveals the real force of the midrashic quotation, that citing v. 10 *etc.* is meant to include the whole following verses including the truly troubling vision of “One like a Son of Man.” To be sure, it is a bit of a stretch from v. 10 to v. 13, a stretch that I argue is an attempt to conceal more than reveal the real argument of those who would support “Two Powers in Heaven” from here. It would be, moreover, quite strange to assume that a text that is explicitly concerned with those who might say that there are two powers in heaven would cite Dan 7 where the “danger” of so “misreading” is palpable and *naively* ignore that danger. On my view, we thus now have two instances of the difficulty: one from Exodus and one from Daniel, for both of which the verse Exod 20:2 comes as a remedy.

The problem is the doubling of descriptions of God as Elder (זקן judge) and youth (בחור man of war) as implied in Exodus and the correlation of those two descriptions with the divine figures of Ancient of Days and Son of Man from Daniel, which together might easily lead one to think that there are Two Powers in Heaven, indeed that God has two persons, a Old person and a Young person. These were, of course, crucial loci for Christological interpretations. The citation of God’s Name in Exod 20:2, at the beginning of those same Ten Commandments, thus answers possible heretical implications of those verses by insisting on the unity of YHWH in both instances. The text portentously *avoids* citing the Daniel verses most difficult for rabbinic Judaism, 7:13-14: “I saw in the vision of the night, and behold with the clouds of the Heaven there came one like a Son of Man and came to the Ancient of Days and stood before him and brought him close, and to him was given rulership and the glory and the kingdom, and all nations, peoples, and languages will worship him. His rulership is eternal which will not pass, and his kingship will not be destroyed.”<sup>44</sup> Much more than the varying metaphors with which YHWH

<sup>43</sup>) These are, to be sure, later texts, so there is no absolute proof here but they are, nonetheless, suggestive.

<sup>44</sup>) For another instance in which, also in a polemical context, the Rabbis avoid citing the really difficult part of Dan 7, see Segal, *Powers*, 132.



is represented, it is this verse which would—and did—give rise to “the Nations of the World” claiming that there are two powers in heaven. Not citing them, is, accordingly to be understood as an enactment of the suppression of this view even more powerful than the explicit repression of the view that the midrashic text thematizes.

Furthermore, in a talmudic passage to be discussed immediately below (*b. Hag.* 14a), Rabbi Akiva himself is represented as identifying the “Son of Man,” that is the occupant of the second throne, with the heavenly David, and thus with the Messiah, before being “encouraged” by his fellows to abandon this “heretical” view.” The Targum identifies the Son of Man as the Messiah.<sup>45</sup> This would suggest the possibility that there were non-Christian Jews who would have identified the Messiah himself (necessarily incarnate) as the Son of Man. Altogether, in this extended passage of rabbinic literature which deals most extensively (if somewhat obliquely) with Son of Man traditions, namely the second chapter of *b. Hagiga*,<sup>46</sup> we find, on my reading some compelling evidence that such traditions were extant within the circles that produced the Babylonian Talmud itself and that *3 Enoch* cannot be separated from those circles at all. Let us then have a look at this text.

Let me be clear that in my view this is not evidence for early Palestinian rabbinic traditions, the *object* of the narratives of the Babylonian Talmud, but rather to the subjects of the enunciation of the narratives and their traditions that I assume were formed in late antiquity and in Babylonia, not to the Rabbis who are told about but to the Rabbis who did the telling.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> S. O. P. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism* (trans. G. W. Anderson; Oxford: Blackwell, 1956), 357. See also M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 89.

<sup>46</sup> There are other parallels as well, for instance, shared and extensive interest in meteorological phenomena.

<sup>47</sup> In his very interesting and important article, Adiel Schremer has proposed that the original context for talk of “Two Powers in Heaven” goes back to the second century and as a response to the Roman defeat of the two rebellions of the Jews (Schremer, “Midrash, Theology, and History”). Much of his argument is, to my mind, highly speculative and less than convincing (further detail will have to await another context), but there is certainly one early text that suggests a context in theodicy for the topos. The *Sifre* to Deut 32:39 reads that verse as denying three views: (1) that there is no power in heaven; (2) that there are two powers in heaven; and (3) that there is indeed only one but that he really has very little power at all. In a highly clever but hardly ineluctable (or refutable) move, Schremer reads this as a continuation of a previous passage in the context of the

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