

FORM(S) OF GOD:  
SOME NOTES ON MEṬAṬRON AND CHRIST\*

Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa  
Hebrew University of Jerusalem

For Shlomo Pines

Although the importance of anthropomorphic conceptions in rabbinic thought is widely recognized, their original nature and significance are still in need of clarification.<sup>1</sup> A major difficulty in this task stems from the scarcity and the obscurity of some of the most important texts, which, moreover, cannot be dated with any precision.

The purpose of this article is to call attention to some early Christian and Gnostic texts which bear upon Jewish conceptions of the Divine Body or of the Hypostasis, or both, and might shed new light on the origin and evolution of these conceptions. I wish to emphasize that in the present state of research, only tentative conclusions can be reached, and that there will be no attempt here to deal with all sides of the problem.

A tendency to attribute to God not only human feelings, but also a body of gigantic or cosmic dimensions is not, of course, a specifically Jewish phenomenon in Antiquity. Indeed, such representations, which had been current in Greek thought for a very long time, find their probable origin in pre-Platonic Orphic conceptions. Inside the Greek world, representations of the cosmos as a macranthropos, with a head (the heaven), a belly or a body (the sea or the ether), feet (the earth), and eyes (the sun and the moon) are found, with some variations, in the Greek Magical Papyri, the Oracle of Sarapis in Macrobius, the

\*An earlier version of this paper was read at the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem, August 1981). I would like to thank Professors F. P. Dreyfus, O.P., S. Pines, J. Strugnell, and E. E. Urbach for useful remarks.

<sup>1</sup>The classic study remains that of A. Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God* (London: Oxford University, 1927). For a modern theological assessment of rabbinic anthropomorphism, see F. Rosenzweig, *Kleinere Schriften* (Berlin: Schocken, 1937) 531.

Hermetic Corpus, and already in an Orphic fragment, where the cosmos is the body of Zeus.<sup>2</sup>

In Christian as well as in pagan thought, however, the pervasive influence of Platonism—with its insistence on the total immateriality of God—permitted the development of a theology free from anthropomorphic representations.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the Christian Fathers soon adopted the Academy's devastating critique of traditional religion and of anthropomorphism in particular.<sup>4</sup> Thus the path was opened to Christian theology for a non-anthropomorphic exegesis of Gen 1:26 and for a purely immaterial conception of God.<sup>5</sup> In Christianity, therefore, anthropomorphic conceptions of God soon became peripheral, and, as it would seem, of no major importance.<sup>6</sup>

The encounter between Jewish thought and Platonic philosophy, on the other hand, was severed soon after Philo, and Jewish exegesis was left to struggle with biblical anthropomorphisms without the help of the most effective of tools: the Platonic conception of a purely immaterial being.<sup>7</sup> One of the consequences of this state of affairs was the

<sup>2</sup>See the material collected by A.-J. Festugière, *Corpus Hermeticum* I (3d ed.; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1972) traité X, Appendice A, 137–38. Cf. the demonstration of the antiquity of these conceptions by R. van den Broek, "The Sarapis Oracle in Macrobius, *Sat.* I, 20, 16–17," in M. B. de Boer and T. A. Edridge, eds., *Hommages à Maarten J. Vermaseren* (EPRO 68; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 1. 123–41.

<sup>3</sup>See my "The Incorporeality of God: Context and Implications of Origen's Position," *Religion* 13 (1983).

<sup>4</sup>See H. W. Attridge, "The Philosophical Critique of Religion under the Early Empire," *ANRW* 16:2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980) 45–78.

<sup>5</sup>For a typical view, see Augustine *Epist.* 148 (*PL* 33, 622 B). On the early Patristic exegesis of Gen 1:26, see R. McL. Wilson, "The Early History of the Exegesis of Gen. 1.26," *StPatr* I; (TU 63; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957) 420–37.

<sup>6</sup>For a general statement of the problem, see G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (2d ed.; London: SPCK, 1950) chap. 1. The most notorious exceptions to the prevalent belief in God's incorporeality are, on the one hand, Tertullian's view, based on the Stoic conception that there can be no incorporeal being (see, e.g., *Adv. Prax.* 7) and, on the other, the Audians and the Anthropomorphist monks of the Egyptian desert, who insisted on a literal reading of Gen 1:26. See H.-C. Puech, "Audianer," *RAC* 1, 910–15, and A. Guillaumont, *Les 'Kephalaia Gnostica' d'Evagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'Origénisme chez les Grecs et les Syriens* (Patristica Sorbonensia 5; Paris: Le Seuil, 1962) 59ff. On the link between corporalist conceptions of God and of the soul, see E. L. Fortin, *Christianisme et culture philosophique au Ve siècle: la querelle de l'âme humaine en Occident* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1959) 60–64. The affirmation (traditional from Origen to Bardenhewer) of Melito of Sardis' anthropomorphism is unfounded; cf. O. Perler, ed., trans., *Méiton, Sur la Pâque* (SC 123; Paris: Cerf, 1966) 13 and n. 1.

<sup>7</sup>For Philo's rejection of anthropomorphism and his immaterial conception of God, see, e.g., *Op. mund.* 69 and *Vit. Mos.* 1.158. In the second century C.E. Numenius still testifies that Jews consider God to be incorporeal (Origen *C. Cels.* 1.15; SC 132. 116 Borret).

development or the increased importance, inside Judaism, of macrocosmic representations of the Divinity.

It must first be noted that Jewish anthropomorphism seems to have been notorious in the first centuries C.E.: Patristic literature retains traces of Christian rejection of such conceptions. In this regard, the best-known testimony is probably that of Justin Martyr, who refers, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, to the belief of the Jewish teachers who imagine "that the Father of all, the unengendered God, has hands, feet, fingers and a soul, just as a composite being."<sup>8</sup>

A rejoinder to this text is provided by Origen, who notes, in his *Homilies on Genesis*, that the Jews—as well as some Christians—conceive God in human terms, when they imagine him to possess members and faculties just like a man. Origen adds that they claim to establish this fancy on biblical verses, such as Isa 66:1: "The Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool."<sup>9</sup> According to such a conception, God's body would be of cosmic dimensions: seated in heaven, he would touch the earth with his feet. The value of this testimony has been unduly belittled in recent research.<sup>10</sup> Origen's knowledge of Judaism was based not only upon Jewish Alexandrian traditions transmitted through Christian writings, but also on third-century Palestinian rabbinic thought. There is little doubt that Origen's remark reflects a rabbinic conception known to him.

That this Jewish macrocosmic anthropomorphism was well known to, and attacked by, Christian theologians is emphasized by the testimony—hitherto ignored—of two fourth-century Patristic writers, who are usually far away from Jewish matters. The value of these two texts is strengthened by the very fact that they seem to reflect stock arguments of the *adversus Judaeos* literature: it shows how widespread these arguments, and the *termini* used, were.

In the first of his *Homilies on the Origin of Man*, Basil the Great inquires about the real meaning of "the image and the similitude of God" (Gen 1:26), and rejects the "vulgar perception" and the "stupid conceptions" of God, according to which he would have the same form as us: a body.

Empty from your heart all misplaced imagination, throw away from yourself a conception which is unfitting of God's greatness. God has no form

<sup>8</sup> *Dial.* 114; Justin refers to anthropomorphic interpretations of Ps 8:4.

<sup>9</sup> In *Gen. hom.* 1.13 (GCS 6. 15–17) and *ibid.* 3.1 (6. 39).

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., N. De Lange, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in the Third Century* (Cambridge Oriental Publications 25; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1976) 44. Cf. my "The Hidden Closeness: on the Church Fathers and Judaism," *Mehqarei Yerushalaim bemaḥshevet Yisrael* 2 (1982) 170–75 (in Hebrew).

(Ἄσχημάτιστος ὁ θεός), he is simple. Do not imagine a form (μορφήν) for Him, do not belittle Him, who is great, in Jewish fashion (ιουδαϊκῶς); do not enclose God in corporeal concepts, do not delimit Him according to the measure of your mind.

Since God is in no way comparable to us, it is not our body which represents his image: the corruptible, concludes Basilus in true Platonic fashion, is not the image (εἰκών) of the incorruptible.<sup>11</sup>

Arnobius of Sicca also accuses the Jews of anthropomorphism. In order to refute a pagan argument against Christian conceptions, he writes:

And let no one, here, oppose to us the Jewish fables and those of the sect of the Sadducees, as if we too give forms (*formas*) to God—for this is said to be taught in their books, and to be affirmed therein as certain, in a peremptory way.<sup>12</sup>

I have dealt elsewhere with Arnobius' mention of Sadducean anthropomorphism.<sup>13</sup> In the present context, what is significant, in both his and Basil's testimony, is the use of the word *form*, or *forms*, of God as a *terminus technicus*.<sup>14</sup> This expression recalls the Hellenistic notion of *μορφή θεοῦ*, which is well known and has been studied at length.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Basil of Caesarea *Hom. de hominis struc.* 1.5 (SC 160. 176–78).

<sup>12</sup>*Adv. nationes* 3.12 (CSEL 4. 119–20).

<sup>13</sup>See "Le couple de l'Ange et de l'Esprit: traditions juives et chrétiennes," *RB* 88 (1981) 42–61.

<sup>14</sup>It should be noted that the same ambiguous use of the "form" or "forms" of God is also found in Medieval Jewish texts. For instance, in the *Sefer ha-Bahir* (the very first writing of Medieval Kabbalah, which first appears in late twelfth-century Provence, but no doubt retains many earlier traditions), the "Holy Forms" (*ha-šurot ha qedoshot*) refer sometimes to the angels, and sometimes to the manifestations of God himself in the members of Primordial Man. See G. Scholem, *Les Origines de la Kabbale* (Paris: Aubier, 1966) 64 n. 10. One of the central symbols developed in the *Sefer ha-Bahir* and in later kabbalistic literature, the Cosmic Tree, can also be found in Gnostic teachings, as A. J. Welburn has pointed out: "The Identity of the Archons in the 'Apocryphon Johannis,'" *VC* 32 (1978) 245–46. Related, no doubt, to the same ancient speculations is Sa'adia Gaon's notion of "Created Glory," superior to the angels, supreme revelation of God and the figure seen by the prophets in their visions. This "Created Glory" (*ha-kavod ha nivra*) is said to have "a human form." See A. Altmann's discussion, "Saadya's Theory of Revelation: its Origin and Background," in *Studies in Religious Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1969) 140–60, esp. 157.

Similarly, R. Judah ben Barzilai (eleventh century) states that when R. Ismael had seen one of the forms of the primordial light, he had in fact seen the angel Akhatriel; see Sh. Halberstam, ed., R. Judah b. Barzilai, *Perush Sefer Yeširah* (Jerusalem: Maqor Reprints, 1971) 20–21. On Akhatriel, cf. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (2d ed.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1965) 43–55.

<sup>15</sup>See, e.g., the bibliographical references given by B. Behm, "μορφή," *TDNT* 4 (1967) 742–59, esp. 746–48. Cf. Reitzenstein's analysis of the notion in Hellenistic mysteries and magic: the essence of the god is known through his name and his form(s), which

My intent here is to focus on one of its aspects which may give a clue to the origin and nature of this Jewish anthropomorphism. In order to do so, I shall first review some Hermetic and Gnostic texts that seem to contain traces of early Jewish conceptions.

The *Poimandres*, the first text of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, "that grab-bag of Graeco-Roman spirituality,"<sup>16</sup> stands at the confluence of various traditions. On the one hand, it represents the mythical expression of pessimistic conceptions close to Gnosticism and originally related to popular Platonism. On the other, its Jewish affinities have long been noted. Its cosmogony, in particular, shows close contacts with the Genesis account, and points to Jewish Hellenistic connections.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the *Poimandres* has recently been shown to display some remarkable parallels with the Slavonic *Enoch*,<sup>18</sup> a work in which Scholem has found the exact translation of the notion of *shi'ur qoma*, the expression used in Hebrew texts of the rabbinic period to refer to God's body.<sup>19</sup>

Now in the anthropogonic myth of the *Poimandres*, one reads that:

The Noûs, Father of all beings, being himself life and light, gave birth to an Anthropos similar to Himself, whom He loved as his own child. For the Anthropos was very handsome, since he possessed the image of his Father (*τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς εἰκόνα ἔχων*): indeed, it is his own form (*τῆς ἰδίας μορφῆς*) that God loved.<sup>20</sup>

---

thus "almost reach an independent existence of [their] own" (*Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen* [2d ed.; Leipzig: Teubner, 1926] 357–58).

<sup>16</sup>W. Schoedel, "Topological Theology and Some Monistic Tendencies in Gnosticism," in M. Krause, ed., *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honour of Alexander Böhlig* (NHS 3; Leiden: Brill, 1972) 107.

<sup>17</sup>These were mainly studied by C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935) 99–209.

<sup>18</sup>See B. A. Pearson, "Jewish Elements in *Corpus Hermeticum* I (*Poimandres*)," in R. van de Broek and M. J. Vermaseren, eds., *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions, presented to G. Quispel* (Leiden: Brill, 1981) 336–48.

<sup>19</sup>Scholem refers to the two expressions in Vaillant's translation of 2 *Enoch*: "l'étendue de mon corps" and "l'étendue du Seigneur" (19.11, 12–13; 39 Vaillant). See his *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1977) 165 (in Hebrew). The expression itself, denoting a tall structure, is also found in *Ps.* 151a from Qumran, as S. Talmon has convincingly argued. See J. A. Sanders, *The Psalms Scroll of Qumrân Cave 11 (11 QP5<sup>d</sup>)* (DJD 4; Oxford: Clarendon, 1965) 55, 11. 8–10, and S. Talmon, "Apocryphal Hebrew Psalms from Qumrân," *Tarbiz* 35 (1966) 223–24 (in Hebrew).

<sup>20</sup>*Corp. Herm.* 1.12 (1. 10 Nock-Festugière). For an analysis of the figure of Anthropos and its place in the mythical structure between Nous and the earthly man, see H.-M. Schenke, *Der Gott-'Mensch' in der Gnosis: Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Beitrag zur Diskussion über die paulinische Anschauung von der Kirche als Leib Christi* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962) chap. 5. Schenke distinguishes between two types of Gnostic conceptions of the God-Man; in the first one, mainly represented by the *Apocryphon of John*, the earthly Adam is the direct image of the God-"Man"; the other type, to which the *Poi-*

This Anthropos, then, piercing the envelope of the heavenly spheres, is reflected below in the water, and thus reveals himself to Physis: "he shows to the Physis from below the beautiful form of God" (τὴν καλὴν τοῦ θεοῦ μορφήν).<sup>21</sup> This *μορφή θεοῦ*, with which Nature immediately falls in love, is then explicitly identified with "the beautiful form of the Anthropos" (τῆς καλλίστης μορφῆς τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου).<sup>22</sup> In other words, the *Poimandres*' myth makes it clear that there is a basic difference, an essential duality, between two divine entities: Nous, the supreme God, who remains invisible and formless, and his hypostatic Form, who is his Son, the Primordial Man.

According to the language of the *Poimandres*, moreover, *εἰκών* seems to be equivalent to *μορφή*: the form of God is also his image. We shall find elsewhere this identification between the two words in Hellenistic usage.<sup>23</sup> In any case, the same ontological differentiation between God and his hypostatic image, or form, also occurs, with some variations, in other Hermetic treatises. These contexts emphasize the theological problem which this conception seeks to solve. In one of the texts, for instance, the world, which is God, is called the "pleroma of life," "the image of the All," and of the Greatest God.<sup>24</sup>

More precisely, a fragment of the *Pseudo-Anthimus* points out the difference between the Supreme God and his image: "The Son of God, although he possesses all qualities similar to his Father, is nevertheless defective on two points, in that he has a body and in that he is visible."<sup>25</sup>

The basic problem behind these various formulations is best expressed in the subtitle of *Corp. Herm. 5*: "that God is both non-apparent and most apparent." Although God is invisible, according to Platonic theology, a way to see him must nevertheless be found—and this way is the very essence of Hermetic initiation.

Indeed, the possibility of the supreme God to reveal himself, which leads to this duality of the invisible God and his form or image, seems to have been a major preoccupation in various Gnostic trends, and the same basic structure also appears in Gnostic mythology. Such a hierarchical duality is of course very different from what is usually considered to be the typical Gnostic dualism, which implies not only a

---

*mandres* belongs, adds an intermediary figure, and implies a Jewish allegorical exegesis of Gen 1:26 as its basis.

<sup>21</sup>*Corp. Herm.* 1.14 (1. 11).

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup>See n. 73 below.

<sup>24</sup>*Corp. Herm.* 12.15 (1. 180). Cf. *Asclepius* 31 (*Corp. Herm.* 2. 339): "huius dei imago hic effectus est mundus," or *ibid.* 8 (2. 308): "dei, cuius imagines duae mundus et homo."

<sup>25</sup>*Ps. Anthimus* 14–15 (*Corp. Herm.* 4. 143–44).

hierarchy of, but also and mainly an opposition between, the two Gods. This opposition is supposed to answer another major problem of Gnostic thought: its intense desire to solve the problem of evil, that is, to discover its source. It is reasonable to assume, however, that a genetic study of Gnostic dualism should point out some relationship between these two different kinds of break in the Godhead.

As in the *Poimandres*, so also in some of the other texts the image of God is said to appear in the water. Thus, in the *Apocryphon of John*, the Son of Man reveals upon the water the appearance in human (*ἀνδρικός*) form (*τύπος*) “of Anthropos, the invisible Father of the All.”<sup>26</sup> In the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, the image of Incorruptibility revealed upon the water is explicitly called the image of God.<sup>27</sup> In the *Origin of the World*, it is Pistis who reveals the likeness of her greatness (*μῆτις*) upon the water.<sup>28</sup>

The same duality appears in *Eugnostos*, where God, who has no human form, is revealed in his form, a great power, or a light, who is an immortal and androgynous man.<sup>29</sup> This perfect and true man is called Adamas in Irenaeus’ account of Barbeloite doctrines.<sup>30</sup> In another Nag Hammadi text, *Zostrianos*, the revelation of the hidden God plays a central role. Ephesech, “the child of the child,” is the messenger who reveals his invisible Father. For he is called both the Son of God and the Perfect Man.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup>CG II, 14:20–24; text in M. Krause and P. Labib, *Die drei Versionen des Apocryphon des Johannes* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1962) 149. For a provisional translation of the new Gnostic texts, see J. M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977).

<sup>27</sup>CG II, 87:11–33. I use the following edition: B. Layton, “The Hypostasis of the Archons,” *HTR* 67 (1974) 351–425 and “The Hypostasis of the Archons (Conclusion),” *HTR* 69 (1976) 31–101. In one of the earliest stages of Gnostic thought, this image of God reflected in the water is explicitly identified with God’s Spirit (Gen 1:2); see the *Megale Apophasis* attributed to Simon Magus, in Hippolytus *Refut.* 6.14.5f. (139–40 Wendland).

<sup>28</sup>CG II, 103:28–30. Text in A. Böhlig and P. Labib, *Die koptisch-gnostische Schrift ohne Titel aus Codex II von Nag Hammadi* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962) 48.

<sup>29</sup>CG III, 76:19–24.

<sup>30</sup>*Adv. haer.* 1.29.3 (1. 224 Harvey).

<sup>31</sup>CG VIII, 13:7–11. See also the *Paraphrase of Shem*, where Derdekeas (cf. Aramaic *dardaka*, “youth”), who is the son of the incorruptible and infinite light, reveals the “hidden form” of God (CG VII, 8:4–25). Cf. *Allogenes*, where the aeon Barbelo is called “the image of the Hidden One” (CG XI, 51.11–17). On Jewish mythological conceptions of the first Adam and his cosmic dimensions, see E. E. Urbach, *The Sages* (2 vols.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975) chap. 10; cf. B. Barc, “La taille cosmique d’Adam dans la littérature juive rabbinique des trois premiers siècles après J.-C.,” *RechSR* 49 (1975) 173–85, where the relevant texts are translated. Barc’s late dating for these teachings (end of the third century), however, remains unconvincing. In the Nag Hammadi texts, the figure of *Geradamas* (or *Pigeradamas* = ὁ γεραιὸς ἄδαμας) is best understood as a rendering of *adam qadmon* (a figure hitherto found only in Medieval Hebrew texts)—or

The major point of interest in the Gnostic texts referred to above is that the mythical structure they reflect is clearly untouched by Christian influence. It is worth noticing that, under a veneer of Christian language, basically the same non-Christian structure is also carried by the Valentinian traditions. In those texts, too, the image of the invisible God is his Son. The *Tripartite Tractate* speaks about "the Son of the unknown God," about whom one did not speak previously, and who could not be seen."<sup>32</sup> This image, adds the same text, is corporeal: "The Savior was a corporeal image of the Holy One. He is the Totality in corporeal form."<sup>33</sup> Similarly, in the *Extracts of Theodotus*, the Son is called *μορφὴ τῶν αἰώνων*, and Christ, *εἰκὼν τοῦ πληρώματος*:<sup>34</sup> the corporeal image of God is, here again, his form.

The most clearly anthropomorphic, or rather, macrocosmic conceptions of the deity in late antique Judaism are expressed in the book *Shi'ur Qomah* ("Measurement of the [divine] stature"), which is extant only in fragmentary form.<sup>35</sup> This work, which has been called "the most obnoxious text of Jewish mysticism,"<sup>36</sup> claims, on the basis of an exegesis of Song of Songs 5:11–16, to give the measurements of the limbs of the divine figure, who is identified with the Beloved.<sup>37</sup> Such extreme representations were to have a tremendous echo in Jewish thought: the medieval polemics between Rabbinites and Qaraites, as

---

its Aramaic equivalent, *adam qadmaia*. See G. Quispel, "Ezechiel 1:26 in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosis," *VC* 34 (1980) 1–13, esp. 3–4. For a listing of the other suggestions see B. A. Pearson, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X* (NHS 15; Leiden: Brill, 1981) 36–37. About Gnostic *Urmensch* myths and their Jewish background, see G. Quispel, "Der gnostische Anthropos und die jüdische Tradition," *Mensch und Erde: ErJb* 22 (Zürich: Rhein, 1954) 195–234; K. Rudolph, "Ein Grundtyp gnostischer Urmensch-Adam-Spekulation," *ZRGG* 9 (1957) 1–20; and M. Tardieu, *Trois Mythes Gnostiques: Adam, Eros et les animaux d'Égypte dans un écrit de Nag Hammadi (II, 5)* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1974) 85–139.

<sup>32</sup>CG I, 133:18–21.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 116:28–32.

<sup>34</sup>*Exc. ex Theod.* 31.4 and 32.2 (SC 23; 128–30 Sagnard).

<sup>35</sup>The parallel versions are published in Sh. Musajoff, *Merkavah Shelemah* (Jerusalem, 1921) 32a–43a. Cf. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 36 n. 1. Cf. Scholem's interpretation of the text in *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit: Studien zu Grundbegriffen der Kabbala* (Zürich: Rhein, 1962) 7–48. For an English presentation of the fragments' content, see I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (AGJU 14; Leiden/Köln: Brill, 1980) 213–17.

<sup>36</sup>A. Altmann, "Moses Narboni's 'Epistle on *Shi'ur Qomā*,'" in *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism*, 195.

<sup>37</sup>J. Dan has recently argued that the *Shi'ur Qomah*'s *reductio ad absurdum* of God's dimensions actually implies a non-anthropomorphic attitude; see "The Concept of Knowledge in the *Shi'ur Qomah*," in S. Stein and R. Loewe, eds., *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History presented to A. Altmann* (University of Alabama, 1979) 67–73.



well as Maimonides' preoccupation with the subject testify to their persistence.<sup>38</sup>

The almost complete lack of internal criteria for the dating of this text has strongly impeded the proper understanding of its abstruse conceptions. In opposition to those scholars for whom the *Shi'ur Qomah* book stemmed from the Gaonic period, the late Gershom Scholem, who devoted much attention to this text over an extended period of time, reached the conclusion that it was probably redacted in "either the Tannaitic or the early Amoraic period."<sup>39</sup>

More precisely, J. Dan tends to accept the alleged authorship of the document (Rabbi Aqiva and Rabbi Ishmael) as an indication of the *milieux* in which the mystical exegesis of Song of Songs was first developed.<sup>40</sup> This assessment stands to reason. No claims will be made here, however, about the dating of the *Shi'ur Qomah* book itself. Our present interest is not in the textual problem, but in the origins of the mythologoumenon. In that respect, it would seem that some of those elements integrated and developed by Palestinian Rabbis of the early second century were already present in first-century Judaism, at least *in nuce*. In other words, there is strong reason to presume that the original Jewish speculation on the macrocosmic divine body is pre-Christian.

One should point out that even the most basic question, the identity of the divine figure whose dimensions are given in the *Shi'ur Qomah*, seems to remain unanswered. In this regard, some remarks of Scholem deserve more attention than they have received until now. He writes:

We may ask whether there did not exist . . . a belief in a fundamental distinction between the appearance of God the Creator, the Demiurge, i.e. one of His aspects, and His indefinable essence? There is no denying the fact that it is precisely the "primordial man" on the throne of the Merkabah whom the *Shiur Komah* calls *Yotser Bereshith*.<sup>41</sup>

and adds, a little further:

The *Shiur Komah* referred not to the "dimensions" of the divinity but to those

<sup>38</sup>Cf. Altmann's article cited above (n. 36). In all probability, Maimonides' statement at the very beginning of his *Guide of the Perplexed* (1. 1) is intended to counter Jewish rather than Moslem anthropomorphists (against H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām* [Cambridge: Harvard University, 1976] 98–111). See also I. Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières: A Twelfth-century Talmudist* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1962) 283–85.

<sup>39</sup>*Jewish Gnosticism*, 40.

<sup>40</sup>In the article cited in n. 35 above.

<sup>41</sup>*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (3d ed.; New York: Schocken, 1961) 65.

of its corporeal appearance. This is clearly the interpretation of the original texts.<sup>42</sup>

Scholem's conclusion was founded upon the analysis of the Hebrew traditions, and in particular upon the description of Yahoel, the angel with the twice-theophoric name who appears first in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (chap. 10), then to become Meṭaṭron in Merkavah and Talmudic literature.<sup>43</sup> There is no doubt that Yahoel-Meṭaṭron, whose name is said to be identical to his Master's name,<sup>44</sup> is conceived as God's archangelic hypostasis. It comes as no surprise, therefore, when the *Shi'ur Qomah* attributes cosmic dimensions to Meṭaṭron's body.<sup>45</sup> The scarcity of Hebrew sources, however, and their relatively late dating require an appeal to outside testimonies and parallel traditions in order to unveil more precisely the original place and function of such conceptions and their evolution.

An unambiguous testimony exists about the probable existence of a strikingly similar conception of a divine archangelic hypostasis in first-century Judaism. We know from the reports about the sect of the Maghāriya and their doctrines (one of Qirqisānī in the name of el Muqāmmis and another by Shahrastānī) that in opposition to Sadducean anthropomorphism, Maghāriya theology, "four hundred years before Arius," referred all anthropomorphic biblical verses to an angel, whom it considered to be the creator of the world.<sup>46</sup> This angel, moreover, was said to bear God's name, while his appearance among men was presented as God's own appearance.<sup>47</sup>

A text from the fringes of early Christianity provides us with another parallel to the *Shi'ur Qomah* material. The Jewish-Christian book of Elchasai, which can be dated to the end of the first century,<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>43</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 68–69, and *Jewish Gnosticism*, 41–42.

<sup>44</sup>Meṭaṭron, *šē-šēmō kē-šēm rabbō*, b. *Sanhedrin* 38b.

<sup>45</sup>Musajoff, *Merkavah Shelemah*, 39b: *ve-ha-na'ar qomato male' 'olam . . . ve-ha-na'ar haze Meṭaṭron sar ha-panim*. On the appellation *na'ar* (youth, servant) for Meṭaṭron in Merkavah literature, see Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 50. I have studied some implications of this term's amphibology in "Polymorphie divine et transformations d'un mythologème: l'*Apocryphon de Jean* et ses sources," *VC* 35 (1981) 412–34.

<sup>46</sup>On the Maghāriya and their theology, see N. Golb, "Who Were the Magāriya?" *JAOS* 80 (1960) 347–59.

<sup>47</sup>According to Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa'al Niḥal* (169 Cureton). This text is translated and analyzed by H. A. Wolfson, "The Pre-existent Angel of the Magharians and Al-Nahāwandī," *JQR* 51 (1960–61) 89–106, esp. 92.

<sup>48</sup>According to Hippolytus, the book proclaimed a new remission of sins in the third year of Trajan's reign (ca. 101); *Refut.* 9. 13.4. The heresiographical texts about Elchasai are conveniently reprinted and translated in A. F. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (Suppl. to *NovT* 36; Leiden: Brill, 1973). The relationship between the book of Elchasai and the *Shi'ur Qomah* material, was already pointed out by

gave the huge dimensions of a couple of angels, male and female, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit. This Elchasaite representation, which reflects Jewish esoteric traditions, turns that angelic hypostasis of God, which is elsewhere described as single and androgynous, into two.<sup>49</sup> Yet this duplication does not change the basic structure of the original conception, which attributed a human form and gigantic dimensions to an angelic being, while God himself remained unseen and formless.

The various traditions about God's hypostatic form seem to converge upon the Judaism of the first Christian century. The cumulative evidence leads to the tentative conclusion that there existed then a cluster of mythologoumena about the archangelic hypostasis of God, also identified with the First Adam (and therefore the true image of God), whose body possessed cosmic dimensions. This figure, moreover, who bore God's name, had created the world at his command.

Perhaps traces of these mythologoumena may also be discerned beneath some traits of Philo's theology, in particular his complex conception of the Logos as God's intermediary in the creation of man.<sup>50</sup> Although the Philonic Logos is the invisible, intelligible, and incorporeal image of God, some of the metaphorical descriptions of him might point to origins in mythological traditions: he is called God's name, his image, the Beginning, and also "Man after the Image." Ruler of the Angels, he is also identified with Wisdom and Israel; like Israel, he is called "he who sees God," and, like Wisdom, "vision of God."<sup>51</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that the idea of a divine intermediary, playing an active role in creation, is even present in rabbinic literature. As S. Liebermann has pointed out, the notion that heaven and earth were created by "the likeness on high"—the same notion developed at length in Gnostic sources—is also found in an important rabbinic text.<sup>52</sup>

---

M. Smith, "Observations on *Hekhalot Rabbati*," in A. Altmann, ed., *Biblical and Other Studies* (Philip W. Lown Institute of Advanced Judaic Studies, Brandeis University; Studies and Texts 1; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1963) 151.

<sup>49</sup>Cf. "Le couple de l'Ange et de l'Esprit" (cited n. 13 above). For a parallel to this duplication of the divine hypostasis, see also *Ps. Clem. Hom.* 3.2, where it is attributed to Simon Magus.

<sup>50</sup>See, e.g., Ch. Kannengiesser, "Philon et les Pères sur la double création de l'homme," in *Philon d'Alexandrie* (Actes du Colloque de Lyon, 11–15 septembre 1966; Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1967) 277–96. For a discussion of the "image of God" in Philo and in rabbinic literature, see Schenke, *Der Gott-Mensch*, 120–34. For a recent evaluation of the dualistic tendencies implicit in Philonic anthropogony, see R. van den Broek, "The Creation of Adam's Psychic Body in the Apocryphon of John," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions* (cited n. 18 above) 44–45.

<sup>51</sup>See, e.g., the famous passage in *Conf.* 146; *ibid.* 41; *Leg. All.* 1.43; *ibid.* 65; *Quaest. in Gen.* 1.4.

<sup>52</sup>"How Much Greek in Jewish Palestine?" in Altmann, ed., *Biblical and Other Studies*, 141. The passage referred to by Liebermann is *Aboth de - R. Nathan*, chap. 39 (116 Schechter). Cf. the Marcasian doctrine about man's creation *κατ' εικόνα τῆς ἄνω*

The most striking parallel to the *Shi'ur Qomah* fragments, however, is probably the conception of the divine hypostasis developed by the Valentinian Markos. This parallel has been noted long ago by Moses Gaster, who called attention, in particular, to the Marcosian conception of "the Body of Truth,"<sup>53</sup> According to Markos, "the first Father, unbegotten, unthinkable, and unsubstantial (ἀνούσιος), neither male nor female, wanted to bring forth what is ineffable to Him and give form to the invisible (καὶ τὸ ἀόρατον μορφωθῆναι); He opened His mouth, and sent forth a Word (*logos*) similar to Himself, who, standing, showed Him who He was, revealing Himself as *the form of the invisible* (αὐτὸς τοῦ ἀοράτου μορφή φανεῖς)." <sup>54</sup>

It is this *Logos* that will then become the *Body of Truth* (σῶμα τῆς ἀληθείας), a divine figure also called Anthropos whose twelve members are composed of the twenty-four letters of the alphabet, grouped in symmetrical couples of opposite letters.<sup>55</sup> The text leaves no doubt that the body composed of these letters, or elements (στοιχεῖα); is macrocosmic since each letter is spelled by other letters, in an unlimited process.<sup>56</sup> Now the letters which build the body of Truth are also called its *forms*, more precisely those "which the Lord has called angels, and which continually behold the face of the Father."<sup>57</sup> For Markos, then, God does not have in the Body of Truth only one form, but many. In other contexts, too, *form* is closely connected to angel: in the *Extracts of Theodotos*, it is said that "spiritual and intelligible beings, as well as archangels, have each one his own form and his own body."<sup>58</sup> Similarly, the Nag Hammadi tractate *On the Origin of the World* mentions the seventy-two forms (μορφή) of the divine Chariot (the *Merkavah* of Ezechiel and of early Jewish Mysticism), the "Cherub," and the seven archangels.<sup>59</sup>

δυνάμεως, Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 1.18.1 (1. 170 Harvey).

<sup>53</sup>M. Gaster, "Das Schiur Komah," in his *Studies and Texts* (London: 1923–28) 2. 1330–53, esp. 1344. Cf. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 65. On the mythologization of ἀλήθεια, cf. *Gos. Phil.* 62,14–15, which may ultimately stem from John 14:6.

<sup>54</sup>Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 1.14.1 (1. 129 Harvey).

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.14.3 (1. 134 Harvey). This system of grouping the letters of the alphabet is also known in kabbalistic literature, where it is called *atbash*. For similar techniques in Antiquity, see F. Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1922). Islamic anthropomorphists also know of this conception according to which God's body was made up of the letters of the alphabet. See Ibn Abī al-Hadīd, *Sharḥ Nahg al-balāghah* (ed. M. Abū al Faḍal Ibrāhīm; Cairo, 1959) 3. 227. (I owe this reference to Sarah Stroumsa.)

<sup>56</sup>Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 1.14.2 (1. 133 Harvey).

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.14.1 (1. 131 Harvey).

<sup>58</sup>*Exc. ex Theod.* 10.1 (76 Sagnard).

<sup>59</sup>CG II, 104:35–105:20 (52 Böhlig-Labib). Cf. the seventy-two δυνάμεις in *Eugnostos*, CG III, 93:14–15.

Its polymorphy is a major aspect of the Meṭaṭron figure in the *Shi'ur Qomah* fragments and in *Merkavah* texts. I have analyzed elsewhere this two-fold polymorphy, pointing out its striking similarity to the polymorphy of Christ in both Gnostic and early Christian texts.<sup>60</sup> Like Christ, Me Da Dron appears both as a child and an old man (*na'ar-zaqen* = *puer-senex*) and both as in the form of God and in the form of a servant (compare Phil 2:6–11). I cannot rehearse my argument here, but would like to call attention to a puzzling detail, hitherto unnoticed, which proves to my mind a genetic relationship between the two traditions.

In the longest preserved passage of the *Shi'ur Qomah*, Meṭaṭron is said to possess two names, the first in twenty-four letters, the other in only six (*mṭṭrwn*).<sup>61</sup> Markos Gnostikos, similarly, conceived Christ as bearing two names: one exoteric, in twenty-four letters, and the other esoteric, in six letters (*ιησους*).<sup>62</sup> It is more reasonable to assume that the Gnostic conception here retains traces of a Jewish tradition, rather than to postulate an influence from Valentinian circles upon the Hebrew milieu in which the *Shi'ur Qomah* conceptions were first developed.

There is no reason, however, to assume a direct link between Markos and esoteric (?) Jewish circles. Further references to the cosmic divine hypostasis might help us in tracing the proximate channels through which such Jewish conceptions could have reached Markos. In particular, would it be possible to go back from the second to the first century, and find in the New Testament itself traces of this very conception?

Scholem once made a random suggestion that the notion of the *guf ha-kavod*, or *guf ha-shekhina*, which appears in the *Shi'ur Qomah*, might be related to the Pauline or deutero-Pauline notion of Christ's "body of glory" (*σῶμα τῆς δόξης* [Phil 3:21]).<sup>63</sup> Oddly enough, however, the possibility has not been investigated that Paul (and the writers of the deutero-Pauline letters) knew of such conceptions of the cosmic body of the divine hypostasis, which he would have radically transformed and spiritualized when he developed his new and very personal conception of the mystical "Body of Christ" (*σῶμα Χριστοῦ*) as

<sup>60</sup>"Polymorphie divine et transformation d'un mythologème," cited above n. 45.

<sup>61</sup>*Merkavah Shelemah*, 39b.

<sup>62</sup>Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 1.15.1 (1. 145–46 Harvey). Cf. *Gos. Phil.* (CG II, 3) 56,3–4: "Jesus' is a secret name; Christ' is a revealed name." On esoteric/exoteric names, see also Zosimos, *On the Letter Omega* (ed. and trans. H. M. Jackson; SBLTT, Greco-Roman Religion; Missoula: Scholars, 1978) 10. 28–29.

<sup>63</sup>*Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit*, 276 n. 19.

the Church (see, for instance, 1 Cor 12:12–26 or Rom 12:4).<sup>64</sup> Modern research has devoted much attention to this conception, which plays a central role in Paul's theology. Yet arguments have been adduced *either* for a postulated pre-Christian Gnostic *Urmensch* (Paul's conception being then a reaction against this *Urmensch*)<sup>65</sup> or for the possible Jewish origin of Paul's "categories of thought."<sup>66</sup> It would seem that New Testament scholars have not hitherto seriously considered the possibility of a Jewish pre-Christian *macranthropos*.<sup>67</sup>

Since, however, Paul's conception of the *σῶμα Χριστοῦ* is so radically new and spiritualized, any argument in favor of such a link must remain speculative. Rather, I would like to suggest other possible traces of the Jewish mythologoumenon in the New Testament, particularly to the two christological hymns incorporated into the Pauline corpus: Phil 2:6–11 and Col 1:15–20. Both hymns stem from the very first stratum of Palestinian Christianity and retain in all probability Jewish teachings. This Jewish background is by far more obvious than a problematic appeal to Gnostic myth. About Phil 2:6–11, which contains the oldest christology of the New Testament, Dieter Georgi has argued that the "form of the servant" is a reference to Isaiah's suffering servant. Georgi concludes that such traditions point to hellenistic Judaism, and more particularly to what he calls "speculative wisdom mysticism."<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup>The theme also plays a major role in other writings of the Pauline and deutero-Pauline corpus, particularly in Eph 4:12–16. For a bibliography of research between 1930 and 1960, see C. Colpe, "Zur Leib-Christi-Vorstellung im Epheserbrief," in *Judentum, Urchristentum und Kirche, Festschrift für J. Jeremias* (BZNW 26; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964) 172–87.

<sup>65</sup>See, e.g., H. Schlier, *Christus und die Kirche im Epheserbrief* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1930); or, more recently, P. Pokórny's studies, such as *Der Epheserbrief und die Gnosis: die Bedeutung des Haupt-Glieder-Gedankens in der entstehenden Kirche* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlaganstalt, 1965). The obvious problem with such an approach is the purely hypothetical character of this pre-Christian Gnosticism; it often implies understanding Pauline concepts through the prism of second-century technical Valentinian meanings, as Father Benoît points out. See P. Benoît, O.P., "L'hymne christologique de Col. 1:15–20: Jugement critique sur l'état des recherches," in J. Neusner, ed., *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for M. Smith* (SJLA 12; Leiden: Brill, 1975) 1. 226–63.

<sup>66</sup>See, e.g., P. Benoît, "Corps, tête et plérôme dans les Épîtres de la Captivité," *RB* 63 (1956) 5–44, esp. 17–18.

<sup>67</sup>This seems to be true even of those scholars who recognized traces of a "Jewish," or "Jewish-Christian," Gnosis in the Pauline corpus; see, e.g., H.-M. Schenke, "Der Widerstreit gnostischer und kirchlicher Christologie im Spiegel des Kolosserbriefes," *ZThK* 61 (1964) 391–403, esp. 399. See also E. Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 52 nn. 151–52 (on Col 1:18). Lohse cites parallel conceptions of the cosmic body of the divinity from Pahlavi literature, the *Mahabharata*, the *Timaeus*, the Orphic fragments and Magic Papyri, but makes no reference to Jewish texts.

<sup>68</sup>"Der vorpaulinische Hymnus Phil. 2:6–11," in E. Dinkler, ed., *Zeit und Geschichte*,

In this hymn, Christ is first described as having been “in the form of God” (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων [vs 6]). The incarnation is then presented as taking the form of a servant (μορφὴν δούλου λαβῶν [vs 7]). In order to achieve this metamorphosis, Christ is said to have emptied himself (ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν [vs 7]). Despite numerous studies, this *kenosis* of Christ has remained rather obscure. Does it refer not to the incarnation, but rather to the cross, as Jeremias holds? Does it mean that Christ divested himself from his divine privileges?<sup>69</sup> In my opinion, the notion can be best understood as reflecting an original mythical conception, rather than being simply metaphorical. We may assume that according to this original conception, when Christ was “in the form of God,” his cosmic body filled the whole world and was identical to the *pleroma*. Incarnation, therefore, literally implied that Christ emptied the world (or the *pleroma*) that is, in a sense, himself. The hymn adds that Christ was given by God “the Name which is above every name” (vs 9), in other words, the divine Name. This formula is strikingly similar to the tradition about Yahoel-Meṭaṭron, according to which he received his Master’s name.<sup>70</sup>

A related conception might be reflected in that puzzling work of early Christian literature, the *Odes of Solomon*:

For there is a Helper for me, the Lord  
He has generously shown Himself to me in his simplicity  
because His kindness has diminished his *rabūtā* (*Odes Sol.* 7:3).

I suggest that *rabūtā* should be understood here literally, as “greatness,” “size”—and not “dreadfulness,” as the editor J. Charlesworth, translates.<sup>71</sup>

The verse would thus be understood as reflecting the *kenosis* of the hymn in Philippians: incarnation implies for Christ giving up the greatness of his previous gigantic dimensions. This interpretation must remain hypothetical, but one should note that it is strengthened by the

---

*Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1964) 263–93, esp. 291. For many bibliographical references on the hymn, see also J. Murphy O’Connor, “Christological Anthropology in Phi. 2:6–11,” *RB* 83 (1976) 25–50.

<sup>69</sup>See J. Jeremias, “Zu Phil. II, 7: ΕΑΥΤΟΝ ΕΚΕΝΩΣΕΝ,” *NovT* 6 (1963) 182–88; for bibliographical references, see A. Oepke, “κενόω,” *TDNT* 3 (1965) 661–62.

<sup>70</sup>Cf. n. 4 above. The same conception about the esoteric name of the Father given to the Son is developed in Gnostic texts. See *Gos. Phil.* (CG II, 3) 54,5–13, and *Gos. Truth* (CG I, 3) 38,7–24; in this text the son *is* the Father’s name. For Jewish-Christian traditions about the divine Name, see J. Daniélou, *Théologie du Judéo-Christianisme* (Tournai: Desclée, 1958) 199–216.

<sup>71</sup>See J. H. Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon* (SBLTT 13, Pseudepigrapha Series 7; Missoula: Scholars, 1977) 36; cf. 37 n. 4. For the importance of the christological hymn of Col 1:15–20 in the *Odes*, cf. *ibid.*, 77 n. 20.

next verses in *Odes Sol.* 7: *demūtā* and *šurtā* in vss 4 and 6 would appear to stand for *μορφή* in the hymn of the Philippians.

The hymn incorporated in Col 1:15–20, which might have been chanted in the liturgy of the first Christian communities,<sup>72</sup> is directly relevant to us. Christ is not said here to be in the form of God, but is called “image of the invisible God” (*εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀοράτου* [vs 15]). Now *εἰκὼν* is, as we have already seen, and as most commentators point out, very close to *μορφή*.<sup>73</sup> Christ who is the first creature of God (*πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως* [vs 15]), is also the Creator of the world: “since it is in him that all things have been created . . . all has been created through him and for him” (vs 16).

Now the immediate evocation of the First Adam and the *Yoşer Bereshit* provided by these traits is much strengthened by the corporeal metaphor: “And He is also the Head of the Body” (vs 18),<sup>74</sup> and by the following description of the whole *pleroma* in Him (vs 19). Such an imagery clearly suggests the macrocosmic conception of Christ as the image, or form, of the invisible God.

The hypothesis developed above—that Jewish conceptions about the archangelic divine hypostasis were reinterpreted and attributed to Christ in some trends of earliest Christianity—can be proven, I think, from a passage in the Gnostic *Gospel of Philip*. This most interesting text reflects, as is known, some Semitic traditions. Moreover, it obviously stems from a *milieu* with a great interest, or stake, in Jewish identity, Jewish traditions, or both. “A Hebrew makes another Hebrew,” so begins the *Gos. Phil.* It would seem that the text originated in a Jewish-Christian *milieu*, or among gnosticized Jewish Christians: “When we were Hebrews, we were orphans . . . but when we became Christians, we had both father and mother.”<sup>75</sup>

It is noteworthy that the theme of God’s name given to his Son also appears in *Gos. Phil.*:

<sup>72</sup>See, e.g., J. Murphy O’Connor, *Colossians: a Scripture Discussion Outline* (London/Sidney: Sheed and Ward, 1968) 17.

<sup>73</sup>See, e.g., R. P. Martin, “*Μορφή* in Philippians II.6,” *ExpTim* 70 (1958–59) 183–84; G. Bornkamm, “Zum Verständnis des Christus-Hymnus *Phil.* 2:6–11,” in his *Studien zu Antike und Urchristentum: Gesammelte Aufsätze 2* (BEvTh 28; München: Kaiser, 1959) 179. Both scholars note that *μορφή*, which is identical to *εἰκὼν*, renders *demūt*, *demūta*. S. Bartina is of the same opinion: “‘Christo, imagen del Dios invisible’ según los papiros (*Col.* 1:15; 2 *Cor.* 4:4),” *SPap* 2 (1963) 13–33. C. Spicq, on the other hand, seeks to find a subtle semantic difference between *μορφή* and *εἰκὼν*; see “Note sur ΜΟΡΦΗ dans les Papyrus et quelques inscriptions,” *RB* 80 (1973) 37–45.

<sup>74</sup>The apposition of *τῆς ἐκκλησίας* to *καὶ αὐτὸς ἔστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος* is most probably an interpolation of the writer of the letter.

<sup>75</sup>CG II, 3; 52,21–24 (ed. J. Leipold; *Das Evangelium nach Philippos* [Patristische Texte und Studien 2; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1963]).



One single name is not uttered in the world, the name which the Father gave to the Son, the name above all things: the name of the Father.<sup>76</sup>

Similarly to Markos, moreover, *Gos. Phil.* differentiates between the exoteric and esoteric name of the Savior: “‘Jesus’ is a hidden name, ‘Christ’ is a revealed name.”<sup>77</sup>

Among some other interesting Semitic etymologies of the Savior’s name we read:

“Messiah” has two meanings, both “the Christ” and “the measured.” “Jesus” in Hebrew is “the redemption.” “Nazara” is “the truth.” “Christ” has been measured. “The Nazarene” and “Jesus” are they who have been measured.<sup>78</sup>

This strange passage has already received some attention. H.-M. Schenke, and after him W. C. van Unnik, have noted the existence of two different isomorphic roots *mšh*, in both Aramaic and Hebrew, meaning respectively “to oint” and “to measure.”<sup>79</sup>

Pointing out the Semitic original form of the word-play does not in itself bring us closer to a proper understanding of the intention that it obviously carried in its original form (and that *Gos. Phil.* may no longer understand). So far as I know, such a play on the two isomorphic roots is not found in rabbinic literature. The pun would thus seem to have originated within Hebrew- or Aramaic-speaking early Christian communities, that is, among Jewish-Christians. This supposition is strengthened by the other allusions in the text, referred to above, to such a background. It is difficult to make sense of this word-play if we do not suppose that its inventor(s) knew Jewish traditions about the figure of the divine hypostasis which was, in contradistinction to God himself, measurable and which had, in other words, a *shi’ur qomah*. These Jewish-Christians seem to have applied to Christ conceptions previously attributed to Yahoel. They did so without changing the structure of the relation between God and his hypostasis.

In his note on the passage in *Gos. Phil.*, van Unnik refers to an interesting tradition reported by Irenaeus and possibly related by “the

<sup>76</sup>CG II, 3; 54,5–8; cf. nn. 44 and 70 above.

<sup>77</sup>CG II, 3; 56,3–4; cf. n. 62 above.

<sup>78</sup>CG II, 3; 62,11–17.

<sup>79</sup>See W. C. van Unnik, “Three Notes on the ‘Gospel of Philip,’” *NTS* 10 (1963–64) 465–69, esp. 466 (reference to Schenke on 466 n. 4). This passage has also been discussed by my colleague, Yehuda Liebes, “The Messiah of the *Zohar*,” App. 6: “Shim’on bar Yohai and Jesus Christ in light of the Gnostic *Gospel of Philip*,” in *The Messianic Idea in Israel* (Jerusalem: Israel National Academy of Sciences, 1982) 230–32 and n. 16 (in Hebrew).

Presbyter" explicitly referred to elsewhere in the *Adversus haereses*:<sup>80</sup> "Et bene qui dixit ipsum immensum Patrem in Filio mensuratum: mensura enim Patrem Filium, quoniam et capit eum." In Greek, the last sentence reads: μέτρον γὰρ τοῦ πατρὸς ὁ Υἱός, ἐπεὶ καὶ χωρεῖ αὐτόν.<sup>81</sup>

The last clause is difficult to understand. From parallel uses of χωρεῖν—for instance, in *Adv. haer.* 1.15.5, where Irenaeus describes the Father as he "who contains all things, and is not contained," it would appear that the clause reflects Irenaeus' gloss on the citation "the Son is the measure of the Father," and that the subject of χωρεῖ is God. The verb, moreover, should be understood in a topological sense. This use of χωρεῖ and its equivalents in regard to God, who contains all, in early Christian and Gnostic literature has been remarkably analyzed by W. Schoedel, who has shown its ultimate Platonic origins.<sup>82</sup>

Elsewhere in his *magnum opus*, Irenaeus insists that since God is "of infinite greatness," he cannot be measured, and remains unknown with respect to this greatness. It is only through Christ, that is, through his love, that God can be known.<sup>83</sup> The mythologoumenon reported in *Gos. Phil.* is indeed the same as that reinterpreted by Irenaeus: being infinite, and including all things, God cannot in any way be known, or measured. Only his Hypostasis, his Son, can be measured. The Son is, therefore, the μέτρον of the Father.<sup>84</sup> Here again, the structural parallelism between this conception and that of the relationship between Yahoel-Metaatron and God in the Jewish sources is striking. Since its

<sup>80</sup>"Three Notes," 466. The text is in *Adv. haer.* 4.4.2 (and not 4.2.4. as stated). On Irenaeus' presbyter, see H. G. Sobosan, "The Role of the Presbyter: an Investigation into the *Adv. Haer.* of St. Irenaeus," *SJT* 27 (1974) 129–46.

<sup>81</sup>I quote according to A. Rousseau's edition (SC 100) 420–21, whose translation is mistaken: "le Fils en effet est la mesure du Père, puisqu'il le comprend."

<sup>82</sup>"'Topological' Theology and Some Monistic Tendencies in Gnosticism," cited n. 16 above.

<sup>83</sup>See, e.g., *Adv. haer.* 4.20.1 (624–25 Rousseau) or 4.20.4 (634–35 Rousseau): ὁ κατὰ μὲν τὸ μέγεθος ἄγνωστος. In *Adv. haer.* 4.19.2 (618–19 Rousseau), in the context of his discussion of God's infinite greatness, Irenaeus refers to Eph 3:18 ("what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height"), a verse which probably refers to the immeasurable dimensions of the universe, as has been argued by N. A. Dahl, "Cosmic Dimensions and Religious Knowledge (Eph. 3:18)," in E. Earle Ellis and E. Grässer, eds., *Jesus und Paulus: Festschrift für W. G. Kümmel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975) 57–75. On other traces, in Patristic literature, of a "special" conception of God, see R. M. Grant, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1966), which I could only consult in the French translation: *Le Dieu des premiers Chrétiens* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1971) 114ff.

<sup>84</sup>Plato had insisted, in opposition to Protagoras, that it was God who was the μέτρον of all things; see, e.g., *Leg.* 4, 716C, *Thaet.* 152A, *Crat.* 385E. Same conception in Philo: *SacrAC* 15, 59 (2. 138 LCL); *De somn.* 2, 192–93 (5. 530 LCL); cf. *Quis div. her.* 47. 227–29 (4. 396–97 LCL).

preservation in *Gos. Phil.* points to a Jewish-Christian source, the ultimate origin of the mythologoumenon must be Jewish, rather than Christian.<sup>85</sup>

In conclusion, I would want to suggest a possible etymology for the name *μετατρον*. Both *μέτρον* and the Latin *metator*, a measurer, have been considered long ago as possible origins of *μετατρον*. Actually the etymology *metator* > *μετατρον* is already referred to in *Genesis Rabba*.<sup>86</sup>

These attempts, however, have lacked persuasive strength, as long as one could not point out that Yahoel-Metaτρον did not only carry God's name, but also measured Him—was His *shi'ur qomah*. In the light of the preceding pages, renewed attention should be given to *μέτρον* and/or *metator* (a conflation of the two terms should not be excluded) as a possible etymology of *μετατρον*—a name which does not appear before the Talmudic period.<sup>87</sup> Such a suggestion obviously implies some links between Christian and Jewish traditions in the first or second century, the nature of which has not yet been deciphered.

Scholem argued that the *Shi'ur Qomah* represented “an attempt to give a new turn” to Gnostic dualism, through its insistence upon the identity of the demiurge and the “true” God.<sup>88</sup> The results of the present inquiry strengthen the presumption that the direction of the influence might rather have been the opposite. It was Jewish speculations about the cosmic size of the demiurgic angel, the hypostatic form

<sup>85</sup>There is no way to know whether the *μέτρον* of God would have been, in Hebrew, his *shi'ur* rather than his *midda*. Both words would seem possible; see, however, Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 2.35.3 (l. 386 Harvey): “Eodem modo et Jaoth . . . mensuram praefinitam manifestat.” In his note, Harvey postulates *μέτρον* (for *mensuram*) in the lost Greek text, and suggests that the term might be a mistranslation of *midda*, which means, in its abstract sense, *attribute* of God (although he refers to a certain *middat ha-gezera* unknown in rabbinic theology). One should also refer to the seventeenth Pseudo-Clementine homily, which teaches that God, despite his invisibility, has a form—the most beautiful form (*καλλιστήν μορφήν ἔχει*)—according to which he has modelled man. See B. Rehm, ed., *Die Pseudoklementinen*, vol. 1: *Homilien* (GCS 42) 17. 7.2, 232. Cf. *ibid.*, 10. 6, 11. 4 and 16. 19, where the same conception is expressed. This doctrine, which is no doubt to be attributed to the Jewish-Christian background of the Pseudo-Clementine literature, has already been referred to in relation to the *Shi'ur Qomah* traditions. See Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 41.

<sup>86</sup>The various attempts to find the origin of the word *μετατρον* are listed and discussed by H. Odeberg, *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch* reprinted with a Prolegomenon by J. C. Greenfield (New York: Ktav, 1973) 125–34. Odeberg reports that A. Jellinek had suggested *μέτρον* as an etymology “on the assumption that Metatron was identical with Horos” (134). S. Liebermann has recently offered a contribution to the subject in an Appendix to I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (cited n. 35 above): “Metatron, the Meaning of His Name and His Functions,” 235–41.

<sup>87</sup>When I discussed with him the passage of Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 4.4.2, Prof. Pines suggested *μέτρον* as a possible etymology of *Μετατρον*.

<sup>88</sup>*Major Trends*, 65.

of God, that both Christians and Gnostics adopted and transformed, each in their own way. While the Christians tended to spiritualize these doctrines by incorporating them into christology, the Gnostics, on the contrary, consciously developed their mythological side, thus opening a gap between God and the demiurge who revolted against his Master.<sup>89</sup>

The deep ambiguity of the *Shi'ur Qomah* fragments about the identity of the divine figure whose dimensions are given might well stem from this absorption of the Jewish doctrines on the forms of God by both Christians and Gnostics. To the most serious challenge each posed to Jewish monotheistic theology, the *Shi'ur Qomah* preferred the dangers of crude anthropomorphism, those same dangers which, paradoxically enough, the earliest doctrine of the hypostatic form of God had tried to overcome. Rabbinic macrocosmic conceptions of God, indeed, testify to the same dialectic confrontation of problems raised by the biblical text as do some of the earliest strata of christology and of Gnostic dualism.

<sup>89</sup>This parallelism between Christianity and Gnosticism is well emphasized by G. W. MacRae: "The Gnosticism of the Nag Hammadi documents is not a Christian heresy but if anything a Jewish heresy, just as primitive Christianity itself should be regarded as a Jewish heresy or a set of Jewish heresies" ("Nag Hammadi and the New Testament," in B. Aland, ed., *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978] 150).

## LINKED CITATIONS

- Page 1 of 1 -



You have printed the following article:

**Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ: For Shlomo Pines**

Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa

*The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 76, No. 3. (Jul., 1983), pp. 269-288.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0017-8160%28198307%2976%3A3%3C269%3AFOGSNO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-1>

---

*This article references the following linked citations. If you are trying to access articles from an off-campus location, you may be required to first logon via your library web site to access JSTOR. Please visit your library's website or contact a librarian to learn about options for remote access to JSTOR.*

### [Footnotes]

<sup>27</sup> **The Hypostasis of the Archons, or "The Reality of the Rulers"**

Bentley Layton

*The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 67, No. 4. (Oct., 1974), pp. 351-394+396-425.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0017-8160%28197410%2967%3A4%3C351%3ATHOTAO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-2>

<sup>47</sup> **The Pre-Existent Angel of the Magharians and al-Nah#wand#**

H. A. Wolfson

*The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Ser., Vol. 51, No. 2. (Oct., 1960), pp. 89-106.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-6682%28196010%292%3A51%3A2%3C89%3ATPAOTM%3E2.0.CO%3B2-T>

**NOTE:** *The reference numbering from the original has been maintained in this citation list.*