

Yeridah la-Merkavah: Typology of Ecstasy and Enthronement in Ancient Jewish Mysticism

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I

It has been long recognized, following the pioneering research of Gershom Scholem, that one of the salient features of early Jewish mysticism—known technically as *hekhalot* (palace) or *merkavah* (chariot) speculation—is heavenly ascent.¹ The motif of the heavenly journey is, of course, not unique to Jewish mystical sources, but is found rather in a host of variant texts from the Greco-Roman period.² As is to be expected, the phenomenological content of the ascent as it appears in these diverse apocalyptic, gnostic and mystical-magical writings is not identical. In the case of *merkavah* mysticism, as may be gathered from some of the principal texts, the mystic ascends through seven palaces which are located in the seventh heaven, reaching his ultimate destination in the innermost palace where the throne of glory is situated. The culmination of the ascent is a direct vision of the divine glory (*kavod*) or Power (*gevurah*) referred to by various technical expressions including, most prominently, the beholding³ of the King in his beauty (*yofi*).⁴ While several scholars of late have criticized Scholem's identification of the visionary ascent as the essential feature of the *hekhalot* corpus,⁵ it nevertheless remains the case that in a significant body of texts included within this corpus the visionary component assumes a central position and functions as the organizing literary principle.

A problem that has plagued the minds of scholars for some time is the seemingly paradoxical way that certain of the texts, primarily *Hekhalot Rabbati* and a fragment from the Cairo Genizah which a copyist has conveniently called *Hotam ha-Merkavah*, "The Seal of the Chariot," but which scholars name the Ozhayah text, refer to the ascent as a descent to the chariot (*yeridah la-merkavah*). In a lengthy article on the subject published in 1893, Philipp Bloch concluded that the journey to the throne of glory was rightfully called a descent

because it involved something akin to an ecstatic fall of the body.⁶ Scholem suggested that the origin of the terminology *yored la-merkavah* is to be found in the liturgical expression *yored lifne ha-teivah* as is attested in the practice of the synagogue.⁷ Scholem's conjecture has been accepted by several other scholars, including, for instance, Ithamar Gruenwald⁸ and Ira Chernus.⁹ Three other theories that have emerged in recent years are noteworthy. The first is that of Joseph Dan who suggested that the term *yeridah* (descent) in this context reflects the influence of Song of Songs 6:11, "I went down to the nut orchard," אֶל גִּנַּת אֲגוּז יֵרַדְתִּי.¹⁰ Underlying Dan's hypothesis is the further assumption that the nut orchard symbolizes the chariot. Evidence for such a symbolic association, however, is found in textual fragments copied and preserved in the literature of the German Pietists of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. While these texts may indeed be older than their late medieval appearance, as Dan in fact surmised,¹¹ the fact is that the image of the chariot as a nut does not play a significant role in the main *hekhalot* texts that describe the ascent or descent to the chariot. It thus seems, as Alexander Altmann suggested,¹² that the linkage of the *merkavah* to Song of Songs 6:11 represents a later exegetical reading that connects the technical idiom *yeridah la-merkavah* to the expression "I went down" (*yaradeti*) used in the relevant verse. Another explanation for *yeridah la-merkavah* was offered by Gedaliahu Stroumsa who noted that the expression should be seen as a linguistic analogue to *katabasis* in Greek magical papyri¹³ which designates the preparatory rite for a mystical vision.¹⁴ More recently, David Halperin has proposed yet another explanation which is based on a midrashic passage in *Exodus Rabbah* concerning the Israelites who crossed the Red Sea. In that context the Israelites are first called *yorede ha-yam*, "descenders to the sea," and afterwards *'ole ha-yam*, "ascenders from the sea."¹⁵ Halperin is led to propose this passage as a possible source for the peculiar terminology, *yored la-merkavah*, because of the association of the visions of the glory and the crossing of the sea. Indeed in that very passage the Israelites are further described as beholding the divine glory at the sea.¹⁶

While all the views mentioned above are interesting in their own way, it seems to me that the original conjecture of Scholem can still be defended as the best explanation for the term *yeridah la-merkavah* and related expressions. Nevertheless, Scholem, and others who have followed him, are left with the apparent paradox that an ascent should be referred to as a descent.¹⁷ It is my intention to show in this paper that a careful reading of the relevant passages wherein this term occurs will demonstrate that, in fact, there is no paradox here at all, i.e., the expression *yeridah la-merkavah* does not signify an ascent

referred to paradoxically as a descent, but means rather going before the chariot.¹⁸ Henceforth I will thus translate the idiom *yeridah la-merkavah* as entry to the chariot, a connotation that is well attested for the root *yarad* in other contexts in rabbinic sources.¹⁹ By grasping the intended meaning of this expression one can attain a better understanding of the magico-mystical praxis cultivated by these anonymous Jewish writers. To anticipate my conclusion at the outset: in *Hekhalot Rabbati* the *yeridah* to the chariot was a necessary prelude to the mystic's vision of the glory and his liturgical participation in the celestial choir. In the Ozhayah fragment, by contrast, the "seeing of the King in His beauty" is emphasized as the sole goal of the *yeridah la-merkavah*. Moreover, in the case of both sources, but especially the latter, we find the additional element that the *yeridah* results in the mystic being seated alongside or facing the throne of glory. Occupying this seat represents a process of enthronement which signals that the visionary has become a full-fledged member of the throne-world, attaining the rank of the highest angel.

II

A perusal of the places in which the term *yeridah la-merkavah* occurs in *Hekhalot Rabbati* and the Ozhayah text reveals that in the vast majority of cases the *yeridah* does not refer to the entire ascent, as has been previously thought, but refers rather to the culminating stage of the ascent, the last phase of the heavenly journey. To support this rather startling revelation, I would like to cite some of the relevant sources. I will begin with *Hekhalot Rabbati* and will then turn to the Ozhayah fragment.

(1) *Hekhalot Rabbati*

- [A] "All these songs R. Akiva heard when he entered the chariot (כשירד למרכבה) and learnt them before the throne of glory, for His angels were singing before Him" (Schäfer, *Synopse*, § 106).²⁰
- [B] "Let His heart rejoice at the time of the prayers of His children. He seeks out and finds those who enter the chariot (יורדי למרכבה) when they stand before Him, before the throne of His glory" (§ 172).
- [C] "He enters (יורד) [the chariot] and beholds the wonderful loftiness and strange lordship, loftiness of exaltation and lordship of

pride,²¹ which are activated before the throne of His glory three times a day" (§ 200).

- [D] "Those who enter the chariot (יורדי למרכבה) ascend [to the seventh palace] and are not harmed . . . they enter safely (יורדים בשלום), and come and stand and give testimony, and recount the awesome and frightful vision of which there is no equal in all the palaces of mortal kings, and they bless, praise, applaud, glorify, exalt, honor, and attribute glory, splendor, and greatness to ʿŲtʳosiai Lord, God of Israel, for He rejoices at those who enter the chariot" (§ 216).
- [E] "When a person desired to enter the chariot (לירד במרכבה), Anafiel would open up for him the doors [of the] entrance of the seventh palace" (§ 247).
- [F] "The one who is worthy to enter the chariot (לירד במרכבה), when he stands before the throne of glory, he opens and begins to utter song" (§ 260).

There is thus in *Hekhalot Rabbati* a clear linkage between the *yeridah la-merkavah* and the last stage of the ascent at the seventh palace. Although this is implied in all the sources cited above, perhaps it is most striking in [D] and [E]. In the case of the former [D] we find the combination of *ʿaliyyah* and *yeridah*: the mystic ascends to the seventh palace and then enters before the chariot. The reference at the beginning to the ascent in the words, "those who enter to the chariot ascend and are not harmed," is not to the ascent through all the heavenly palaces. It is such an interpretation which has led scholars to posit that the *yeridah* likewise must refer to the entire ascent. Yet this interpretation is wrong for it fails to note the specific context in which the passage occurs, viz., the mystic has already passed through the first six palaces, and thus is ready to proceed to the seventh, the place where the *yeridah* occurs. This is the meaning of the continuation of the passage, "they enter safely, and come and stand and give testimony, and recount the awesome and frightful vision . . . and they bless, praise, applaud, glorify, exalt, honor, and attribute glory, splendor, and greatness to ʿŲtʳosiai"—all this comes to pass within the seventh palace. It is thus incorrect to interpret the expression used in this context, *yoredim be-shalom*, as referring to the descent from heaven to earth. The recounting and retelling of the vision does not occur below before human beings, but rather above before the divine glory. The narration of the "frightful vision" is a

testimony ('*edut*) offered to God which functions as a means of praise or glorification, a usage evident in other passages in this redactional unit.²² It is only in light of this explanation that one can make sense of the continuation of this section: "In the same degree that Totrosiai YHWH, the God of Israel, looks forward to the redemption and the time of salvation reserved for Israel since the destruction of the last Temple, He desires and looks forward to [the time] when the one who enters the chariot will enter, when he will see the loftiness on high, when he will see the time of the salvation, when he will hear the time of miracles, when he will see that which no eye has seen, when he will rise (יעלה) and tell [his experiences] to the 'seed of Abraham, My friend'²³" (§ 218). Just as in this context the term *yored* connotes entry to the chariot, the word *ya'aleh* signifies the departure from there; hence, the mystic is implored to exit from the throne so that he may relate his otherworldly experiences to fellow Jews who are designated by the biblical locution, "the seed of Abraham, My friend."

The reading I have proposed is confirmed by the second passage [E] where it says explicitly that when a person desired to enter the chariot the angel Anafiel opened the doors of the entrance to the seventh palace. The entry to the chariot occurs specifically at the seventh palace. It is thus no mere coincidence that in one section of *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§ 234) the angel of the sixth palace, Dumiel, announces that "he who enters the chariot does not enter" (אין יורד) (היורד למרכבה) if he has not both mastered all forms of Jewish learning and fulfilled all the commandments. This pronouncement is especially relevant at this juncture of the journey for one is approaching the seventh palace where the entry to the chariot will take place.²⁴ Indeed, in the continuation of the text (§ 236) the guardians of the seventh palace are described as covering their faces when they see "the angels Dumiel, Gabriel and Qaspiel [or, according to some manuscripts, Qafsiel] coming before the carriage of the person who merits and enters to the chariot" (אדם שזוכה ויורד) (למרכבה).²⁵ In yet another passage in the same text a figure described as having the appearance of the Hashmal (based on Ezek. 1:27 which is explicitly cited) is said to "select from amongst the ones who enter the chariot those who are worthy of entering and those who are not" (§ 258). In this case the process of selection occurs not at the sixth palace (cf. §§ 224-25) but at the seventh palace, at the stage right before the entry to the chariot.

In the case of [C] the entry is placed in a visionary context, i.e., the one who enters the chariot is said to have a vision of the various hypostasized attributes which are before the throne of glory. In still other cases, such as [B], [D], and [F], the entry is decidedly liturgical

in its orientation. The mystic stands in the place of the angels before the throne and utters the appropriate testimony or praise to the glory. Indeed, the wording of [D] describing the *yoredei merkavah*, "they blessed, praised, lauded, glorified, exalted, honored, and gave glory, splendor, and greatness to ʿŌṭrosiai, Lord, God of Israel" should be compared to the *qedushah de-yoṣer* which is the narrative account of the angelic hymning of God that is recited as part of the traditional morning service: "And they all opened their mouths in holiness and purity, in song and melody, and they blessed, praised, glorified, worshipped, sanctified and enthroned the name of God."²⁶ The *merkavah* adept thus takes the place of, or participates with, the celestial angels, a motif that is repeated throughout these texts. That is, an essential characteristic of the entry to the throne, which follows the ascent to the seventh palace, is the utterance of hymns before the glory. This is implied as well in [A] where R. Akiva is said to have heard and learnt the songs of praise when he entered the chariot and stood before the throne of glory. Similarly, in another passage in *Hekhalot Rabbati* the entry to the chariot is placed in an obvious liturgical context: "R. Ishmael said: What is the recitation²⁷ of songs that a person chants when he enters the chariot (יורד למרכבה)? He begins and utters the first of songs, the primary praise . . . and the first melody which the attendant angels sing each day to the Lord, God of Israel, and to His throne of glory" (§ 94). The proper understanding of this passage is predicated on our previous discussion: the *yeridah* occurs at the seventh palace when the mystic enters before the throne and joins the angelic choir in uttering song and praise to the divine glory. The heavenly status of the mystic is manifest in his ability to sing in accordance with the *hymnologia* of the angels.²⁸

It is quite clear from the lengthy description of the *yeridah la-merkavah* in *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§ 233ff.) that this occurs at the seventh palace. There can be no question that the *yeridah* technically refers to the last stage of the journey and not the whole process of ascent.²⁹ Accordingly, it is inaccurate to consider the expression *yored la-merkavah* paradoxical for, in fact, it refers to one who enters before the chariot. When it says, then, that R. Neḥuniah ben ha-Qanah sat before the fellowship of rabbis and arranged (מסדר)³⁰ before them matters pertaining to the techniques of *yeridah* and *ʿaliyyah* (§ 203),³¹ it means the entry before the chariot followed by an exit from it. That is, in this context the "ascent" does not signify the journey heavenward, but rather the rising from the immediate vicinity of the throne after one has entered into that stage of the experience. The phrase ירדה ועלייה is equivalent, in my opinion, to the Talmudic

expression used in connection with R. Aqiva, "entered safely and exited safely,"³² or, according to an alternative reading, "ascended safely and descended safely."³³ That is to say, within the framework of *Hekhalot Rabbati* the expression ירידה ועלייה indicates a successful and completed journey to the throne: one enters and afterwards exits.³⁴ Interestingly enough, in the very first passage of *Hekhalot Rabbati* the expression "enter safely and exit safely" is used in conjunction with the mystical experience of contemplating the chariot: "R. Ishmael said: What are the songs that the one who desires to behold the vision of the chariot, to enter safely and exit safely (לירד בשלום ולעלות בשלום), must say?" (§ 81). The twofold process of *yeridah* and *'aliyyah* is a technical way of referring to the vision of the chariot. Hence, in this case as well the *yeridah la-merkavah* is followed by an *'aliyyah*.³⁵

The same meaning seems to be implied in yet another passage that appears only in the longer recension³⁶ of the text known as *Ma'aseh Merkavah*.³⁷ The section (§§ 586-91)³⁸ consists of R. Neḥuniah ben ha-Qanah teaching R. Ishmael five prayers intended to strengthen him so that he may "make use" of the secret (סוד),³⁹ i.e., theurgic use⁴⁰ of the divine or angelic names.⁴¹ Before the five prayers are specified R. Ishmael reports: "When R. Neḥuniah ben ha-Qanah arranged before me these five prayers, each day I would recite every one with its names, in the entry (ירידה) and in the exit (עלייה), and all my limbs did benefit"⁴² (§ 586). It is noteworthy that this locution contradicts the view that is prevalent in other sections of this very text, including the opening passage,⁴³ where the heavenly journey to the chariot is referred to as an ascent.⁴⁴ The fact that in this section the approach to the chariot and/or throne is called *yeridah* is yet another indication that this section is an interpolation inserted by the redactor of the longer recension. The use of the expression ירידה ועלייה suggests the influence of *Hekhalot Rabbati* or a similar text, such as the Ozhayah fragment, that shared this nomenclature. In any event, it is reasonable to conclude that in a given stage in the development of *hekhalot* mysticism the successful experience was referred to as ירידה ועלייה, the former signifying the entry to the throne-world and the latter the subsequent departure from there.⁴⁵

(2) *Ozhayah Text*

When we turn to the other major source wherein the terminology of "descent" to the chariot is employed, the so-called Ozhayah text, we find similar support for the interpretation that I have suggested. In the first instance we read: "It is written on the seal of the chariot (חותם המרכבה) [how] to enter to it [the chariot] to see the King in His

beauty" (לירד כה לראות מלך ביופיו).⁴⁶ There is here an indisputable link between the *yeridah* and vision of the anthropomorphic form of the divine glory. This is further confirmed in a second passage from the same fragment: "You shall write and place the seal of the entry to the chariot (חותם ירידת המרכבה) for people of the world, for you and for whoever wants to enter to behold the King and His beauty (לירד ויראה) (להציץ במלך ביופיו). Grab this path, enter and see (לירד ויראה), and you will not be harmed for I have given you [the seal] as a scroll."⁴⁷ In yet another passage we read of the *yeridah*: "When you desire to enter to the chariot to contemplate the King and His beauty (לירד ויראה), (למרכבה להסתכל במלך וביופיו), you and whoever else desires to enter, whether of your generation or other generations, should mention My name at each and every palace and call Me in a quiet voice; immediately no creature will harm him."⁴⁸ Although in this last case the gradual ascent through the various palaces is alluded to, it is clear that the *yeridah* to the chariot refers in this case as well to the ultimate stage in the process and not to the whole journey. This is confirmed by the obvious connection between the *yeridah* and the contemplative vision of the King in His beauty, i.e., the anthropomorphic glory. It is this process that is designated in the same text as the "teaching of the entry to the chariot" (תלמוד ירידת המרכבה) that the angel Ozhayah arranges before R. Ishmael, i.e., the mystic or the recipient of the text, which includes the techniques of how one enters and departs (כך יורדין וכך עולין).⁴⁹

At the end of this fragment there is one of the most vivid descriptions of the visionary's "actual" entry into the throne-world. In this case, moreover, the *yeridah* involves a process akin to enthronement. When R. Ishmael reaches the seventh palace God welcomes him with these words: "Whoever knows that he is pure from sin⁵⁰ [and] bloodshed, and possesses Torah, should enter and sit before Me."⁵¹ It is not specified that the mystic who is worthy should sit on a throne, but only that he should sit before God. Nevertheless, from the continuation of the text it is abundantly clear that the *yeridah la-merkavah* is followed by the enthronement of the visionary:

Look at the youth who comes forth from behind the throne to greet you; Zehubadiah is his name . . .⁵² He will take your hand and seat you in his lap.⁵³ It is not only because you come with his permission; he seats others as well on a seat (מִרְשָׁב)⁵⁴ that is fixed before the [throne of] glory.⁵⁵ This is the quality [or attribute] of the sign (מִדַּת טִימָן) for the seventh palace.⁵⁶

The first thing to note is that the angel Zehubadiah is in all probability identical with Metatron, for the name 'youth,' *na'ar*, is a frequent epithet used to describe the latter in *hekhalot* literature.⁵⁷ In

the seventh palace, then, the highest of all angels takes the mystic in his lap which is compared to his placing others on a seat that is set before the throne of glory. It is of interest to note that the word used in the above passage for seat, *moshav*, is connected in several other sources with the throne of glory; indeed on occasion the words *moshav* and *kisse* (throne) function as parallel terms. I will mention in this context only some of the pertinent sources. Thus, we find in one of the fragments of the so-called angelic liturgy at Qumran, the 4Q *Serekh Shirot* 'Olat Ha-Shabbat (4Q S1 40 24 4), the expression, "the seat of His glory," *moshav kevodo*⁵⁸ which, as scholars have already pointed out, clearly refers to the divine throne or chariot.⁵⁹ Similar to this expression is another one widely attested in *hekhalot* literature, *moshav yeqaro*, "the seat of His honor," which likewise is a technical designation for the divine throne.⁶⁰ There is yet a third expression, semantically related to the first two, found in *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§ 159) as well as in a *merkavah* hymn (§ 969),⁶¹ which refers to the throne of glory as *moshav hadaro*, "the seat of His splendor." Elsewhere in this literature, in *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§§ 94, 154), in a text which Peter Schäfer has called "Die Beschwörung des sar ha-panim" (§ 634),⁶² and in a titleless Genizah fragment,⁶³ the throne of glory is referred to as *moshav 'elyon*, "the lofty seat." The use of the word *moshav* for the throne may be adduced from other texts as well, such as *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§ 170), *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (§§ 590, 591, 596), a *Shi'ur Qomah* fragment that has been copied as part of *Hekhalot Zutarti* (§ 367), and 3 *Enoch* or the *Hebrew Book of Enoch* (§§ 34, 72). Finally, in one passage it is stated explicitly that "the throne of glory is the seat of His glory," *we-khisse' kavod hu' moshav kevodo* (§ 373). From all this evidence, then, it may be safely concluded that the word *moshav* in these texts is basically interchangeable with *kisse*.⁶⁴ If that is so, it is reasonable to conclude that the reference in the Ozhayah text to the "seat (*moshav*) that is fixed before the [throne of] glory" is meant to convey the image of a specially designated throne upon which the mystic himself sits. The act of sitting on that seat, therefore, amounts to an enthronement.⁶⁵

That the process of sitting functions here as a kind of enthronement may be gathered from the use of the image of sitting before the throne in other *hekhalot* texts. Before discussing these, however, it is necessary to point out that the majority of texts within this corpus emphasize that the *yoredei merkavah* stand before the throne. Furthermore, in most of these cases the standing before the throne is connected with the liturgical act of uttering hymns and praises before God.⁶⁶ Terminologically, this is related to at least two standard themes known from rabbinic literature⁶⁷: first, prayer itself

is connected with the act of standing as is attested by the technical expression to begin prayer, *la'amod bi-tefillah*⁶⁸ (for the central liturgical unit, the *shemoneh 'esreh*, is called *'amidah*, i.e., the prayer uttered in a standing position⁶⁹), and, second, the angels are characterized as standing before the throne.⁷⁰ Evidence of both is to be found in the *hekhalot* literature.⁷¹ Indeed, on more than one occasion the description of the angels as standing is connected with the specific task of praising God with songs or hymns.⁷² Hence, the description of the mystic standing before the throne conveys the notion of liturgical participation that I mentioned above: the *yored merkavah* stands before the throne and joins the angels in uttering hymns before God.⁷³

To appreciate the specific intent of the image of sitting as employed in the Ozhayah text, it is necessary to review briefly the usage of this image in two other *hekhalot* texts, *Hekhalot Rabbati* and *Hekhalot Zutarti*. I confine my remarks here to only those passages dealing with the experience of the mystic in the celestial realm.⁷⁴ In *Hekhalot Rabbati* there are only a few cases in which the activity of sitting is used to characterize the *yored merkabah*. In one passage, R. Nehuniah ben ha-Qanah, while in a trance-state, is described as sitting before the throne (§ 227). What is particularly striking about this passage is that at the same time that R. Nehuniah is said to be sitting before the throne he is supposed to be sitting below in the Temple.⁷⁵ In another passage the angel at the sixth palace, Dumiel, is said to receive the mystic and "seats him on a bench of pure stone,"⁷⁶ and he sits next to him on his right side" (§ 233). Shortly after that text we read that the angelic gatekeepers of the seventh palace together with the mystic "entered before the throne of glory, and they brought out before him all kinds of melody and song, and they sang until they lifted him up and sat him down next to the Cherubim, the Ophanim, and the holy Hayyot. He saw miracles and wonders, [the qualities or attributes of] pride, greatness, holiness, purity, fear, modesty, and justice" (§ 236). According to this text, then, the mystic first takes a seat at the sixth palace on the bench next to Dumiel and then in the seventh palace, presumably on a separate seat or throne but possibly on the chariot itself, alongside the various classes of angelic beings who bear the throne and minister to the glory. It is instructive to compare this account with an exact parallel in *Hekhalot Zutarti*. In that text one finds as well an elaborate description of the reception of the mystic by the different angels presiding at the seventh palace: "The mighty Ophanim embraced him, the glorious Cherubim kissed him, the Hayyot carried him, the Nogah danced before him, the Hashmal serenaded him . . . until they

lifted him up and sat him down before the throne of glory, and he beheld and saw the King in His beauty" (§ 411). The language in the two texts, *Hekhalot Rabbati* and *Hekhalot Zutarti*, is very close. Both employ the critical phrase, "until they lifted him up (מעלין אותו) and sat him down" (מושיבין אותו). Nevertheless, the differences are also of significance. In the former it is specified that the mystic is given a seat alongside the Cherubim, Ophanim, and Ḥayyot; the reader is not told if the mystic has a seat of his own or if he sits upon the chariot itself.⁷⁷ In the case of the latter it is specified that the mystic is placed in front of the throne of glory, apparently on his own seat. Both texts likewise connect the sitting down in the seventh palace with an extraordinary visionary experience, though the immediate object of vision differs in the two accounts. In the case of the former the mystic is said to see wonderful and marvelous things, consisting largely of hypostatized ethical and pietistic qualities, whereas in the case of the latter it is specified that the mystic sees the divine King in His radiant beauty.

It may be concluded, therefore, that sitting before the throne was considered to be an important stage in the ecstatic experience of the *merkavah* mystic. Three major literary units that I have discussed, *Hekhalot Rabbati*, *Hekhalot Zutarti*, and the Ozhayah fragment, provide textual evidence to the effect that the mystic occupied a seat alongside the throne of glory. Although not much detail is given about the process of the mystic being seated before the throne, we have seen that in the relevant passages the act of sitting down was followed by a vision of some sort. I would venture a suggestion and propose that whereas the recitation of hymns and praises on the part of the mystic was accomplished in a standing posture, the visionary experience was facilitated by his sitting down before the throne of glory.⁷⁸ This observation corroborates the claim I made above that the sitting of the mystic must be viewed as a kind of enthronement.⁷⁹ That is to say, the act of sitting and the consequent vision of things divine indicates that at this moment the mystic has attained the rank of an angelic being and can thus see things which were hitherto invisible from the mortal perspective. To be sure, as I remarked above, standing and not sitting is the salient characteristic of the angels' ontic status. Yet, in this body of literature on several occasions angels are said to be seated upon a throne.⁸⁰ The first two examples come from the magical text, *Sefer ha-Razim*, which has great affinity with *hekhalot* mysticism. In the description of the third heaven mention is made of three archons who sit on fiery thrones,⁸¹ whereas in the description of the fifth heaven mention is made of the twelve glorious princes who sit on thrones of splendor whose appearance is likewise characterized

as that of fire.⁸² A third example is that of the archon of Sabbath (*sar shel shabbat*) who, according to a passage in *Seder Rabbah di-Bereshit*, is said to be placed on the throne of glory by God (§ 852).⁸³ The fourth example is from a description in *Masekhet Hekhalot* of seven ministering angels, the first born of all created entities, who sit on seven thrones set before the curtain behind which is the throne of glory.⁸⁴ The fifth and final example of an enthroned angel, and by far the most important for the purposes of this analysis, is that of Metatron (cf. §§ 13, 20, 856, 894). It has even been suggested by some scholars that the name Metatron itself is based on the Greek *μεταθρονος* which is semantically related to *συνθρονος*, signifying that Metatron occupied the throne alongside that of God.⁸⁵

That sitting on a throne represents a highly privileged status,⁸⁶ indeed one that proximates divinization, is evident from a number of relevant sources, mostly apocalyptic in nature, that describe the enthronement of select figures. In this context I will mention only a few of the most obvious examples: Moses in the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel the Tragedian, 68-76;⁸⁷ Sophia according to the apocryphal *Wisdom of Solomon* 9:4 (cf. 8:3, 15),⁸⁸ the Son of Man in *1 Enoch* 69:29;⁸⁹ Enoch in *2 Enoch* 24:1; Adam in *Vita Adae et Evae* 47:3 (= *Apocalypse of Moses* 39:3), the *Testament of Abraham*, recension A, 11:4-12, and the *Testament of Adam* 3:4; Jesus in Mt. 22:44 (Mk. 12:36, Lk. 20:42-43) and 26:64 (Mk. 14:62, Lk. 22:69), based on an interpretation of Ps. 110:1;⁹⁰ and the twenty-four elders in Rev. 4:4 (cf. 3:21 and 20:4).⁹¹ That the righteous in the celestial Paradise occupy thrones is alluded to in some Jewish sources and stated quite explicitly in others.⁹² Elsewhere in rabbinic literature Abraham⁹³ and David⁹⁴ are said to occupy thrones in the heavenly realm alongside that of God. The enthronement of Adam also seems to be implied in a statement attributed in *Genesis Rabbah* to R. Hoshaya commenting on the verse, "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'" (Gen. 1:26). According to R. Hoshaya's interpretation, when God created Adam the angels mistook him for God and desired to say the *Trisagion* before him. In order to make a sharp distinction between divine and human God is said to have caused Adam to sleep so that the angels would know that he is human. This is compared to a king and his servant who ride together in a chariot (קרוכין, from the Greek *χαρrouxa*). The people of the country wish to bestow honor on the king by proclaiming "Lord" (*domine*) before him but they cannot differentiate between the king and his servant. The king therefore pushes the servant out of the chariot so that all would know who is the king.⁹⁵ It is not stated explicitly that Adam occupied a throne or sat on the chariot but it is implied in the notion that the

angels wanted to utter the *Trisagion* before him. In this passage not only is Adam depicted as sitting on the throne, but the whole issue is placed in a polemical context which emphasizes that enthronement is a sign of divinity. Thus, commenting on this passage, Saul Lieberman noted that "the people did not realize who is the *synthronos* and who is the master. By being thrown out of the chariot the subordinate position of the *synthronos* was revealed."⁹⁶ Lieberman goes further and suggests that the legend regarding Adam is comparable to that of Metatron who is described as sitting and recording the merits of Israel,⁹⁷ a position developed in more detail by Moshe Idel.⁹⁸ I shall return to the case of Metatron momentarily.

The divine status accorded to sitting upon a throne is also evident from the polemical statements of the rabbis directed against the heavenly enthronement of the angels: "there is no sitting above"⁹⁹ or, alternatively, the angels "have no joints."¹⁰⁰ A statement in *3 Enoch* is particularly revealing of the need to emphasize that angels are not enthroned. After describing the two angels, Soperiel and Shoperiel, who act as scribes respectively registering the appropriate record of death and life of individuals, the author reminds the reader: "So that you should not suppose that since the Holy One, blessed be He, sits on a throne, they too sit and write, Scripture states, 'all the host of heaven standing in attendance [to the right and to the left of Him]' (1 Kings 22:19). It does not say, 'host of heaven' but 'all the host of heaven,' which teaches that even the great princes who are without peer in the heavenly height only attend to the needs of the *Shekhinah* while standing" (§§ 28, 864). This polemical stance is also implied in the famous legend which attempts to explain the apostasy of Elisha ben Abuyah (first half of second century C.E.) found in B. Hagigah 15b and in *3 Enoch* (§§ 20, 856) where it is obviously a secondary interpolation.¹⁰¹ According to this account, Elisha is misled by Metatron's sitting on a throne and writing the merits of Israel into believing that there are two divine powers since a being which occupies a throne must be divine.¹⁰² Interestingly enough, a later authority, the German Pietist, Eleazar ben Judah of Worms (d. ca. 1230), applied the view expressed in *3 Enoch* with respect to Soperiel and Shoperiel, to Metatron himself, also known as the heavenly scribe: "He [Metatron] stands, as it is written, 'all the host of heaven standing in attendance [to the right and to the left of Him]' (1 Kings 22:19), he has no throne upon which to sit. When he writes it appears as if he is sitting, but it is not so in reality."¹⁰³ Such a view, which openly contradicts traditions that affirm Metatron's sitting on a throne, is rooted in the other view widely attested in rabbinic sources, viz., only God sits above. Thus, an anonymous midrashist flatly

states: "Is there sitting above? You find rather that all [of the angels] are standing . . . No one sits there but the Holy One, blessed be He."¹⁰⁴

What is relevant to our discussion is that, insofar as sitting most properly characterizes God, or at the very least the vicegerent of God who is His anthropomorphic representative, it follows that the mystic being seated in the throne-world symbolically depicts the narrowing of the gap that separates divine and human nature. It thus makes perfectly good sense that at some stage in the literary development of *hekhalot* mysticism a book such as *3 Enoch* would have been composed in which the prototype of the *merkavah* mystic is Enoch who is transformed into Metatron, the very angel who occupies a throne alongside that of God. Here the apocalyptic tradition of the apotheosis of Enoch reaches its fullest expression.¹⁰⁵ In the case of the *hekhalot* material discussed above this last step is not taken, for the distinction between God and human in these texts is never fully blurred, as Scholem already observed.¹⁰⁶ It is nevertheless evident that in the key texts examined in this paper one of the features that results from the entry to the chariot is the mystic's being seated upon a throne. This fact, in turn, signifies his elevation to the status of not just an angel, but the highest angel who alone, apart from God, occupies a throne in the seventh palace of the seventh heaven. In that sense, I submit, the enthronement of the mystic should be understood as a form of quasi-deification.¹⁰⁷ While the vision of the divine glory does not make the mystic divine or equal to the glory, as is implied, for instance, in 1 John 3:2,¹⁰⁸ the entry to the chariot does culminate with what may be called a deifying vision. At the very least, it is in virtue of the enthronement that the *merkavah* mystic can see that which is ordinarily concealed from mortal eyes.

III

In sum, it may be said that, contrary to accepted scholarly opinion, the expression *yeridah la-merkavah* according to the authors of *Hekhalot Rabbati* and the Ozhayah fragment, does not refer paradoxically to an ascent, but rather names the last stage in the ascent that actually involves an entry into the throne-world. As we have seen, moreover, the *yeridah* results in the mystic's being enthroned, having a vision of the glory or the divine attributes that surround the throne, and uttering hymns together with the angels before God. Whereas the vision is attained after the mystic has been seated, the liturgical element is only realized when the mystic stands before the glory. Yet, in both respects—the sitting and standing—the model is that of an

angel. Within these texts there are clearly two distinct views on the nature of angelic existence, and both provided ideal-types for the mystic.

At the outset of the paper I remarked that the thesis that I would put forth in this paper would strengthen Scholem's conjecture that the term *yeridah la-merkavah* is patterned after the liturgical locution *yeridah lifne ha-teivah*. Although the *yeridah la-merkavah* comprises both a visionary and liturgical component, it seems to me that the language of *yeridah* is in fact based on the liturgical expression that Scholem suggested. On the other hand, it would be wrong to separate these two elements in too sharp a fashion. Here we would do well to consider Schäfer's conclusion that a careful scrutiny of the ascent passages in the *hekhalot* literature demonstrates that "the ascent does not culminate in a vision, but rather in the merkavah mystic's participation in the heavenly liturgy."¹⁰⁹ Schäfer is right in making the distinction between vision and the liturgical act, the recitation of the doxology. The distinctive quality of these two categories does not, however, imply that they can in any meaningful way be isolated. On the contrary, participation in the angelic choir arises precisely in virtue of the mystic's *yeridah* to the chariot and consequent vision of the enthroned glory. One cannot separate the visionary and liturgical aspects of this experience; indeed, it might be said that in order to praise God one must see God.¹¹⁰ The point was made already by Samuel Leiter in his study on acclamation in rabbinic writings. Leiter cites various rabbinic sources that emphasize that praise of God is dependent on seeing God.¹¹¹ One such source worth repeating is a passage in the *Midrash 'Otiyyot de-Rabbi 'Aqiva* that draws upon chariot imagery: "When the time for the *qedushah* arrives and the Holy One, blessed be He, does not descend from His exalted height and dwell in the chariot, the two (letters that make up the *mem* when written in full) approach one another and say: When will the Holy One, blessed be He, descend from the exalted heights and descend to the chariot¹¹² so that we will see the image of His countenance and utter song before Him."¹¹³ Leiter goes so far as to assert that the "paradoxical situation" of having to praise an invisible God "stimulated merkavah mysticism. Just as the letters wait to see God on the Merkavah so that they can praise Him, so the mystic's aim is to see the Divine Presence on the Merkavah."¹¹⁴ While it may be somewhat of an exaggeration to say that this is the theoretical issue that stimulated early Jewish throne-mysticism, it is nevertheless instructive that Leiter has recognized the inherent connection of the visionary and liturgical components of these texts. In this context it is of interest to note the following passage from a German Pietistic commentary on the

merkavah hymn, *Ha- 'Aderet ve-ha-'Emanah*, preserved in manuscript: "The Holy One, blessed be He, shows the angels the greatness of His glory, and the angels must delve into the secret according to the greatness of His glory, how to bless Him . . . According to the greatness that He shows them they give praise."¹¹⁵ The meaning of the expression *yored la-merkavah* that I have proposed lends considerable support to the view that the twin goals of the mystic ascent, vision and liturgical hymning of the glory, are interrelated.

Notes

- * This paper has gone through various permutations. I have benefited from the comments and criticisms of several colleagues who read the different drafts: Moshe Idel, Ithamar Gruenwald, Peter Schäfer, Lawrence Schiffman and Michael Swartz.

- 1 See, e.g., G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (N. Y., 1954), pp. 43-50, 72; idem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 14-21. Scholem's emphasis on ascent as the essential feature of *merkavah* mysticism is no doubt related to his view that the *hekhhalot* literature is an offshoot of Jewish apocalypticism. This thesis has been most fully worked out by I. Gruenwald in his monograph, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden, 1980), as well as in other studies; see, e.g., "Priests, Prophets, Apocalyptic Visionaries, and Mystics," in *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), pp. 125-44. See, however, the author's more nuanced analysis in the same volume, "Two Types of Jewish Esoteric Literature in the Time of the Mishnah and Talmud," pp. 53-64. See also J. Maier, *Vom Kultus zur Gnosis* (Salsburg, 1964), p. 106. For a critique of the Scholemian approach, see P. Schäfer, "The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism," in idem, *Hekhalot-Studien* (Tübingen, 1988), p. 288, n. 44; D. Halperin, "Ascension or Invasion: Implications of the Heavenly Journey in Ancient Judaism," *Religion* 18 (1988): 47-67; idem, *The Faces of the Chariot* (Tübingen, 1988), pp. 451-52.

- 2 The scholarly literature on this subject is vast. A classical study of this motif is W. Bousset, "Die Himmelsreise der Seele," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 4 (1901): 136-69, 229-73. For some of the more recent surveys, see A. F. Segal, "Heavenly Ascent in Hellenistic Judaism, Early Christianity and their Environment," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt, Principat* II, 23 (1980): 1333-94; M. Smith, "Ascent to the Heavens and the Beginning of Christianity," *Eranosjahrbuch* 50 (1981): 403-29; I. P. Coulianu, *Psychanodia I: Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and Its Relevance* (Leiden, 1983); idem, *Out of This World: Otherworldly Journeys from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein* (Boston & London, 1991); M. Dean-Otting, *Heavenly Journeys: A Study of the Motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984); J. D. Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts* (Lanham, MD, 1986), pp. 57-111; M. Himmelfarb, "Heavenly Ascent and the Relationship of the Apocalypses and the *Hekhalot* Literature," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 59 (1988): 73-100.

- 3 Several verbs are used in the *hekhhalot* corpus to denote the contemplative vision of God: *lehistakkel*, *lehasif*, *lesappot*, *lahazot*, and *lir'ot*. I cannot detect any significant variation in meaning or nuance between these different terms.

- 4 Cf. P. Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen, 1981), §§ 198, 248, 259, 407, 408, 409, 411, 412, 545; idem, *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen, 1984), pp. 103, 105. For a comprehensive analysis of this and related expressions, see R. Elior, "The Concept of God in Hekhalot Mysticism," in the "Proceedings of the First International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 27-31 (in Hebrew) [English translation in *Binah: Studies in Jewish History, Thought, and Culture*, vol. 2, ed. J. Dan (New York, 1989), pp. 97-120]. See also S. Leiter, "Worthiness, Acclamation and Appointment: Some Rabbinic Terms," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 41-42 (1973-74): 143-45. It should be mentioned that in *Synopse*, § 198 the mystic is said to have a vision of eight things that correspond to the eight earthly vices specified in § 199 that the mystic has to master. Cf. N. A. Van Uchelen, "Ethical Terminology in Hekhalot-Texts," in *Tradition and Re-Interpretation in Jewish and Early Christian Literature: Essays in Honour of Jürgen C. H. Lebram*, ed. J. W. Van Henten, H. J. De Jonge, P. T. Van Rooden, and J. W. Wesselius (Leiden, 1986), p. 256.
- 5 Cf. Schäfer, "The Aim and Purpose," pp. 285-89; Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, pp. 370-75.
- 6 Cf. P. Bloch, "Die Yorede Merkavah, die Mystiker der Gaonenzeit, und ihr Einfluss auf die Liturgie," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 37 (1893): 25. Cf. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, p. 145, n. 15, where the author explains that the current usage of the verb "to descend" in the *hekhalot* literature means "to enter into the trance of the Merkavah experience." For a criticism of Bloch's view, see *Major Trends*, p. 359, n. 23.
- 7 G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1965), p. 20, n. 1. Cf. *Major Trends*, p. 47. Concerning this expression, cf. I. Elbogen, *Der Jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Leipzig, 1913), pp. 469-76, and 575, n. 1; E. Levy, *Yesodot ha-Tefillah* (Tel Aviv, 1947), pp. 79-82. See also the use of the Aramaic idiom *naheit qammeih* in B. Megillah 25a. It is noteworthy that in one place, *Kabbalah*, p. 6, Scholem offers an entirely different explanation, suggesting that the expression *yoredei merkavah* "means those who reach down into themselves in order to perceive the chariot." To the best of my knowledge scholars have not taken sufficient note of this view expressed by Scholem.
- 8 Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, pp. 170-73. See, however, Gruenwald's earlier view mentioned above, n. 6. In a private letter to me Ithamar Gruenwald emphasized a key difference between his analysis and that of Scholem: whereas the latter explained the expression *yored la-merkavah* in structural terms, the former stressed its functional usage. To cite the relevant text in *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, p. 171: "according to *Hekhalot Rabbati*, the person who is called 'Yored LaMerkavah' is a kind of public emissary or more precisely: a medium entering into a mystical trance, describing to his fellow mystics that which he sees in heaven."
- 9 I. Chernus, "The Pilgrimage to the Merkavah: An Interpretation of Early Jewish Mysticism," in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 5 (English section). See also references to Schäfer and Smith given below, n. 17.

- 10 J. Dan, *Three Types of Ancient Jewish Mysticism*, The Seventh Annual Rabbi Louis Feinberg Memorial Lecture in Judaic Studies (University of Cincinnati, April 26, 1984), p. 34, n. 29; idem, *The Ancient Jewish Mysticism* (Tel Aviv, 1989), p. 60 (in Hebrew).
- 11 Cf. J. Dan, "Hokhmah ha-'Egoz, its origin and development," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 17 (1967): 73-83; idem, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism* (Jerusalem, 1968), pp. 207-10, 257-58 (in Hebrew); idem, "On the Development of the Text of Hokhmah ha-'Egoz," *'Ale Sefer* 5 (1978): 49-53 (in Hebrew). Concerning this text, see also A. Altmann, *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca, 1969), pp. 161-71; and the comprehensive study of A. Farber, "The Concept of the Merkavah in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Esotericism—Sod ha-'Egoz and its Development" (Ph. D., Hebrew University, 1986; in Hebrew).
- 12 Cf. Altmann, *Studies*, p. 161.
- 13 Cf. H. D. Betz, "Fragments from a Catabasis Ritual in a Greek Magical Papyrus," *History of Religions* 19 (1980): 287-95.
- 14 Cf. G. Stroumsa's review of I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* in *Numen* 28 (1981): 108-09. My thanks to Michael Swartz for calling my attention to this reference.
- 15 *Exodus Rabbah* 23:15.
- 16 Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, pp. 226-27.
- 17 Cf. Schäfer, "The Aim and Purpose," p. 281, n. 17; M. Smith, "Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati," in *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, MA., 1963), p. 150; idem, "Ascent to the Heavens," p. 412, n. 29. See also Chernus, "The Pilgrimage to the Merkavah," p. 30, n. 36, who suggests that the term "descent" in the *hekhalot* texts, like other terms in rabbinic literature, "is used euphemistically to denote its opposite." And see, most recently, A. Kuyt, "Once Again: Yarad in Hekhalot Literature," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 18 (1990): 45-69, who agrees with Scholem that the term *yarad* in this context denotes an outward journey to the *merkavah*, but disagrees with Scholem by arguing that this usage was in fact the more original one which was at some point changed to '*alah*, i.e., ascend. In this context it is of interest to consider the following comment in the Gnostic treatise, *The Three Steles of Seth* (VII, 5), 127, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. J. M. Robinson (San Francisco, 1988), p. 401: "For they all bless these [aeons] individually and together. And afterwards they shall be silent. And just as they were ordained, they ascend. After the silence, they descend from the third. They bless the second; after these the first. The way of ascent is the way of descent." It is curious that in this case the ascent from the third to the first of the aeons is described as a descent. The particular formulation of this text reminds one of the famous remark of Heraclitus reported by Hippolytus, *Refutatio* IX.5: "The way up and down is one and the same." On the possibility that Heraclitus' fragment already dealt with the upward and downward movement of the psyche, see C. H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 240-41.

- 18 See comment of Liebes noted below, n. 33. I do not wish to enter here into the larger question if the heavenly ascent is to be construed as veridical or merely hallucinatory. On this issue see M. Stone, "Apocalyptic—Vision or Hallucination," *Milla wa-Milla* 14 (1974): 47-56. A recent advocate of the second approach is D. Halperin. See his "Heavenly Ascension in Ancient Judaism: The Nature of the Experience," *SBL 1987 Seminar Papers*, pp. 218-32; *The Faces of the Chariot*, pp. 68, 441, 451. Another entirely germane question is to what extent the apocalyptic and/or mystical texts reflect actual personal experiences of ascent or are merely literary accounts. On this issue in the case of Jewish apocalypses, see S. Niditch, "The Visionary," in *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism*, ed. G. W. E. Nickelsburg and J. J. Collins, *Septuagint and Cognate Studies* 12 (Chico, CA, 1980), pp. 155-63; M. Himmelfarb, "From Prophecy to Apocalypse: The Book of the Watchers and Tours of Heaven," in *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible through the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Green (New York, 1986), pp. 153-54.
- 19 See the examples collected in Eliezer ben Yehudah, *A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew*, 8 vols. (Jerusalem, 1959), 3: 2148, s.v. *yarad*; and M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York, 1950), p. 594, s.v. ירד. The same claim can be made for the Aramaic root נחח as used in rabbinic sources; cf. M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (Bar-Ilan, 1990), p. 347.
- 20 Another treatise from this corpus, *Musekhet Hekhalot* ends with a parallel to this passage. Cf. *Bel ha-Midrash*, 6 vols., ed. A. Jellinek (Jerusalem, 1967), 2: 47.
- 21 The word translated as pride is זיהין. Cf. Nathan ben Yehiel, *Aruch Completum*, ed. A. Kohut, 8 vols. (Vienna, 1878-1892), 3: 273, s.v. זיהין; E. ben Yehuda, *A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew*, s.v. זיהין, 2: 1296. As ben Yehuda notes, the term also has the connotation of splendor, which accords with the translation of Morton Smith that Ithamar Gruenwald has kindly placed in my hands. (I am presently preparing for the Classics of Western Spirituality Series an annotated translation of *Hekhalot Rabbati* based on the work of Smith.) In private communication Professor Gruenwald reiterated his view that splendor is the correct translation of זיהין. A perusal of the contexts wherein this term appears in the *Hekhalot* literature, however, seems to support my translation. Thus, the word is coupled with the terms גאון, גבורה, and רוממה, i.e., pride, power, and loftiness. Cf. *Synopse*, §§ 100, 152, 167, 169, 216, 227, 251, 260, 974. See also J. Yahalom, *Liturgical Poems of Sim'on bar Megas* (Jerusalem, 1984), p. 85, n. 3 (in Hebrew), who renders זיהין as happiness in line with the suggestions of S. Lieberman, "Hazanot Yannai," *Sinai* 4 (1939): 245; Z. Ben-Haim, "Samaritan Poems for Joyous Occasions," *Turbiz* 10 (1939): 354, n. 6 (in Hebrew). Cf. J. Levy, *Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim* (Berlin-Vienna, 1924), 1: 514, s.v. זיהין.
- 22 Cf. *Synopse* § 164: "Testify to Me concerning the testimony for you see what I do to the visage of Jacob, your father which is engraved on my throne of glory." See also § 169, and the use of 'edut in the *Shi'ur Qomah* fragment, § 36 (and § 728). Consider too the title of Metatron as the *sara' rabba' de-sahaduta*, the great angel of testimony; cf. M. Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-*

Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism (Lanham, 1983), p. 190, n. 3 for discussion and other scholarly references.

- 23 Isa. 41:8.
- 24 For another account of testing at the sixth palace from the *Hekhalot Zutarti*, that parallels the famous statement in B. Hagigah 14b, see Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 52-53; *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 15. The account of the water episode has been discussed by several scholars; for recent analysis and review of previously expressed views, cf. R. Reichman, "Die 'Wasser-Episode' in der *Hekhalot-Literatur*," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 16 (1989): 67-100.
- 25 Cf. *Synopse*, § 232. For a description of this passage, see Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, pp. 166-67.
- 26 Cf. Elbogen, *Der Jüdische Gottesdienst*, pp. 66-67. On the relationship of the *qedushah de-yoser* to the *qedushah* hymns in the *hekhalot* texts, cf. Bloch, "Die *Yorede Merkavah*," pp. 305-07; A. Altmann, "Liturgical Poems in the Ancient Hekhalot Literature," *Melilah* 2 (1946): 8-10 (in Hebrew). See also L. A. Hoffman, "Censoring In and Censoring Out: A Function of Liturgical Language," in *Ancient Synagogues: The State of the Research*, ed. J. Gutmann (Chico, Ca., 1981), pp. 19-38. Cf. M. Bar-Ilan, *The Mysteries of Jewish Prayer and Hekhalot* (Bar-Ilan, 1987), pp. 109-20 (in Hebrew). For a strikingly close formulation to *qedushah de-yoser*, cf. Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente*, p. 132.
- 27 In six of the seven manuscripts utilized by Schäfer the reading here is פִּרְשׁ, which I have rendered as "recitation." MS Vat 228 reads: פִּרְשׁ. The translation was suggested by Ithamar Gruenwald in private correspondence. Cf. his *Apocalyptic*, p. 150, where he rendered this expression as "incantations."
- 28 For references to the notion of angelic language (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1) see, e.g., 1 *Enoch* 40; *Ascension of Isaiah* 7:15; *Apocalypse of Abraham* 15:7, 17:1 ff.; and references in rabbinic sources in P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, III (Munich, 1926), pp. 449-50. See also P. van der Horst, "The Role of Woman in the Testament of Job," *Essays on the Jewish World of Early Christianity* (Göttingen, 1990), pp. 102-03.
- 29 The same meaning is implied in other contexts as well; cf. *Synopse*, §§ 108, 204, 218, 672. For a different use of the root *yarad*, see § 123 which should be compared to an aggadic tradition attributed to R. Joshua ben Levi in B. Shabbat 89a that begins: "When Moses descended from before the Holy One, blessed He." See also the *Shi'ur Qomah* fragment, in *Synopse*, § 390: "One Hayyah rises above the Seraphim and descends (*yored*) on the tabernacle of the youth [i.e., Metatron; on this expression, see Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 49, n. 20; Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah*, pp. 133-34]." See also §§ 399, 488, 961; *Geniza-Fragmente*, p. 117. This imagery is transferred to the letter *kaf* in the *Midrash 'Otiyyot de-R. 'Aqiva*; cf. *Batte Midrashot*, ed. S. Wertheimer (Jerusalem, 1970), 2: 400.
- 30 On the technical use of the word מֶרְכָּבָה in *merkavah* sources, cf. Maier, *Vom Kultus zur Gnosis*, pp. 144-45.

- 31 Cf. *Synopse*, § 92: לִירֹד וְלַעֲלוֹת בְּמִרְכָּבָה. See, by contrast, *ibid.*, §§ 422-23, where one finds the expression מִידָּת עֲלִיית וִירִידָת מִרְכָּבָה, "the quality [or practice] of ascending and descending the Throne."
- 32 Cf. the various liturgical formulae in P. Berakhot 9:4.
- 33 For the variant readings, see S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah*, Part V: Order Mo'ed (New York, 1962), p. 1290, n. 21; see also Halperin, *The Merkavah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven, 1980), p. 92. Cf. *Synopse*, §§ 345, 672. Cf. Y. Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar," in *The Messianic Idea in Jewish Thought: A Study Conference in Honour of the Eightieth Birthday of Gershom Scholem*, (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 154-55, n. 240, who likewise suggested that the locution 'alah we-yarad semantically equals *nikhnas we-yāša'*, i.e., entered and departed.
- 34 In § 199 the descenders to the chariot, *yoredei merkavah*, are compared to a man "who has a ladder in his house upon which he ascends and descends" (see also § 237). The locution here may be due to the influence of the description of the angels ascending and descending upon the ladder beheld by Jacob (cf. Gen. 28:12). And cf. the usage of this image in *Seder Rabbah di-Bereshit*, §§ 436, 847, where it is said that the angels are "ascending and descending" upon ladders made by God, ascending to give praise and utter song and descending to propagate peace in the world. See also the mention of the "seal through which they [the angels] ascend and descend" in §§ 384, 485, 729, 957.
- 35 The more standard way of interpreting the expression employed at the beginning of *Hekhalot Rabbati* is to explain that the *yeridah* refers to the ascent to the chariot and the 'aliyyah to the descent from the heavenly realm. See, e.g., Dan, *The Ancient Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 63-64.
- 36 Cf. M. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkavah* (Tübingen, 1991), p. 103.
- 37 The text was published by Scholem in *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 101-26, and so-named on the basis of various medieval authorities who referred to the text using this title. See also Schäfer, "Tradition and Redaction in Hekhalot Literature," in *Hekhalot-Studien*, p. 13. Prior to Scholem excerpts of this text, without the title *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, were published by Altmann, "Liturgical Poems," pp. 1-24.
- 38 For a fuller description of this section, cf. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism*, pp. 95-99.
- 39 Cf. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism*, p. 81, n. 4, who remarks that the term "secret" (*raz*) in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* denotes "incantation or praxis." Underlying this meaning is the identification of *raz* as the divine names, or the Torah in its mystical sense which is made up of the letters of the divine names, a usage widely attested in the *hekhalot* literature as well as other mystical and magical sources. Cf. *Synopse*, §§ 79, 166, 292, 293, 294, 297, 499, 563, 569, 572, 586, 593, 655, 697, 823; and extended discussion in M. Idel, "The Concept of Torah in Hekhalot and its Development in Kabbalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981): 24-36 (in Hebrew). On the use of the word *raz* in *hekhalot* literature, see also Elior, "The Concept of God," pp. 35-37; Schäfer, "The Aim and Purpose,"

pp. 291-92. On the technique of employing the name in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* see the discussion in N. Janowitz, *The Poetics of Ascent: Theories of Language in a Rabbinic Ascent Text* (Albany, 1989), pp. 83-99.

- 40 On the theurgic connotation of the word *lehishtammesh*, see Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 358, n. 17.
- 41 Cf. *Synopse*, § 569.
- 42 The Hebrew reads: *והיה רוח לכל אברי*. For an alternative translation, see Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism*, p. 95: "there was safety for all my limbs." See also Janowitz, *The Poetics of Ascent*, p. 56.
- 43 *Synopse*, § 544: "R. Ishmael said, I asked R. Aqiva about the prayer that a person recites when he ascends to the chariot."
- 44 Cf. *ibid.*, §§ 545, 546, 595. An exception to this usage is to be found in § 565 where PNQRS, the Angel of the Countenance says to R. Ishmael: "Descend (יד) and see that if anyone like you descends (ירד) without permission of PNQRS, Lord, God of Israel, he will be killed." In this context the *yeridah* is a *terminus technicus* for the mystical praxis, although it is difficult to ascertain if it names the heavenly ascent in general or the culminating stage of the ascent. Cf. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism*, p. 84.
- 45 In this context it is of interest to mention the following statement in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, ed. R. Margalio (Jerusalem, 1978), § 88: *המסתכל בצפיית המרכבה ירד ואחר כך יעלה*, which I would render: "The one who contemplates the vision of the chariot enters and afterwards departs." See *ibid.*, § 68: "Whoever turns his mind away from worldly matters and contemplates the chariot." Concerning the former passage, cf. Bloch, "Die Yorede Merkavah," pp. 22-24. For a later theosophic reading of this bahiric text, see J. Gikatilla, *Sha'are 'Orah*, ed. J. Ben-Shlomo (Jerusalem, 1981), 2: 95. See also Abraham ben Eliezer Halevi, *Iggeret Sod ha-Ge'ulah*, MS JTSA Mic. 1697, fol. 32b, who describes those who master the spiritual realities as "ascending to heaven and entering the chariot," *ויעלו שמים וירדו למרכבה*. To be sure, in the continuation of this very passage Abraham Halevi discusses a gradual ascent from grade to grade in the palaces. Yet, it is instructive that the expression "they ascended to heaven" is immediately followed by, according to my reading, the claim that they entered the realm of the chariot.
- 46 Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente*, p. 105; cf. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, pp. 369-70. The text was first published by I. Gruenwald, "New Fragments from the Hekhalot Literature," *Tarbiz* 38 (1968-69): 356-64 (in Hebrew).
- 47 *Geniza-Fragmente*, p. 103.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 No specific type of transgression is specified but only the generic term for sin, *עבירה*. It is possible, however, that this word connotes especially sexual immoral-

ity. For this usage in rabbinic literature, see, e.g., B. Sanhedrin, 70a; *Genesis Rabbah* 90:3, ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 1102. Mention should also be made of the talmudic expression הרהורי עבירה which is to be rendered as "sexual fantasy;" cf. B. Berkahot 12b; Yoma 29a (and see commentary of Rashi ad loc., s.v. הרהורי עבירה, which he interprets as "lust for women"). Finally, mention should be made of the parallel passage in *Hekhalot Rabbati* (*Synopse*, § 199) where sins of incestuous and adulterous relations (גילוי עריות) are specified as one class of actions from which the descender to the throne must be purified. Cf. *ibid.*, § 686.

- 51 *Geniza-Fragmente*, p. 105.
- 52 Cf. *Synopse*, § 682. According to MS Oxford, Neubauer 1531, Zehubadiah is given as a name of Metatron who is frequently designated as the youth (see n. 57).
- 53 The text as transcribed in Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente*, p. 105, reads here: ?? בחי. I have suggested to complete the last two letters as קר, thus making the word, בחיקר, i.e., in His bosom. Cf. Gruenwald, "New Fragments," p. 363, who suggested: בח[י]מ[ה]. My suggested reconstruction is based on similar expressions in other *hekhalot* texts; cf. *Synopse*, §§ 122, 417.
- 54 For the use of the term מושב in the sense of seat, see, e.g., 1 Sam. 20:25; M. Kelim 1:5.
- 55 I have restored the text according to the suggestion of Gruenwald, "New Fragments," p. 363.
- 56 *Geniza-Fragmente*, p. 105.
- 57 Cf. Gruenwald, "New Fragments," p. 362, n. 13. On the use of the term "youth" (נוער) as a name for Metatron, see Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 49-50; Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, pp. 421-27.
- 58 Cf. J. Strugnell, "The Angelic Liturgy at Qumran—4Q Serek Širôt 'Olat Hassabbat," *Suppl. To Vetus Testamentum*, VII (1959): 336-37; L. H. Schiffman, "Merkavah Speculation at Qumran: The 4Q Serekh Shirot 'Olat Ha-Shabbat," in *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians: Essays in Jewish Intellectual History in Honor of Alexander Altmann*, ed. J. Reinharz and D. Swetschinski (Durham, 1982), pp. 34-35 (Schiffman translates the key expression as "His glorious throne"); C. Newsom, *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (Atlanta, 1985), pp. 303-306 (Newsom translates: "His glorious seat"). For another important Qumran text (4QM) where reference is made to sitting above upon a throne, see below, n. 65.
- 59 Schiffman, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39; Newsom, *op. cit.*, pp. 314-315. See also M. Bar-Ilan, "The Throne of God: What is Under It, What is Opposite It, What is Near It," *Da 'at* 15 (1985): 30, n. 58 (in Hebrew).
- 60 For references, see Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 28, n. 18.
- 61 Cf. *Sefer ha-Razim*, ed. M. Margalioth (Jerusalem, 1966), p. 109; *Sefer Raziel* (Amsterdam, 1701), fol. 40a (there the reading is מושב יקר); S. Musajoff, *Merhavah Shelemah* (Jerusalem, 1921), fol. 42b.

- 62 P. Schäfer, "Die Beschwörung des sar ha-panim. Edition und Übersetzung," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 6 (1978): 107-45, reprinted in *Hekhalot-Studien*, pp. 118-53.
- 63 Gruenwald, "New Fragments," p. 369; *Geniza-Fragmente*, p. 185.
- 64 For exceptions, see *Synopse*, §§ 40, 274, 499.
- 65 The possibility of heavenly enthronement in a Qumran text has recently been proposed by M. Smith, "Ascent to the Heavens and Deification in 4QM," in *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls: The New York University Conference in Memory of Yiguel Yadin*, ed. L. Schiffman (Sheffield, England, 1990), pp. 181-88. The critical text as reconstructed by Smith reads as follows: "[El 'Elyon gave me a seat among] those perfect forever, a mighty throne in the congregation of the gods . . . And none shall be exalted save me, nor shall come against me. For I have taken my seat in the [congregation] in the heavens . . . I shall be reckoned with gods and established in the holy congregation" (p. 184).
- 66 Cf. *Synopse*, §§ 1, 126, 172, 216, 251, 260, 306, 558, 565, 585, 882. Occasional exceptions are to be found as well; cf. §§ 81, 680.
- 67 A possible third theme is suggested by the fact that the utterance of song and praises before God is considered to be a kind of testimony; see esp. § 216. The necessity for witnesses to stand is standard judicial procedure according to rabbinic law; cf. B. Shevu'ot 30b.
- 68 Cf. M. Berakhot 5:1. To be sure, as I. Gruenwald has reminded me, the verb עמד, to stand, is already employed in some biblical contexts in a liturgical sense. See, e.g., Deut. 10:8, 18:5; 1 Kings 8:11; 2 Chron. 5:4, 29:11.
- 69 Cf. *Masekhet Soferim*, ed. M. Higger (Jerusalem, 1970), 16:9, p. 295. In this connection it is of interest to note the technical use of the expression מעומד, i.e., in a standing position, in a statement in one of the *hekhalot* texts published by Schäfer in *Geniza-Fragmente*, p. 167: "This is the seal of R. Ishmael, it should only be recited when standing." In the printed text the word מעומד was transcribed as משומר (misreading the 'ayin as a shin and the dalet as a resh), though it is evident from inspecting the manuscript that the correct reading is the former. In Schäfer's *Konkordanz zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen, 1988), 2: 526, s.v., עמד, the mistake in transcription has been corrected.
- 70 The description of the angels as beings who stand is based on biblical statements and is reflected in later Jewish and Christian literature. Cf. 1 Kings 22:19; Isa. 6:2; Zech. 3:4, 7; Job 1:6; Dan. 7:10; Tob. 12:15 (the long recension); Rev. 5:11; *Ascension of Isaiah* 7:14-16; P. Berakhot 1:1; B. Berakhot 10b; Hagigah 15b; *Zohar* 2:170a, 241b; 3:260a. For counter-examples where angels are described as sitting on thrones, see below, n. 80.
- 71 On the use of expressions related to לעמוד בחפילה, cf. *Synopse*, §§ 1, 132, 143, 320 (MS Budapest 238), 565, 682. See also §§ 126, 557. On the use of the word עמוד to describe the status of angelic beings, cf. §§ 8, 20, 28, 29, 30, 40, 42, 45, 50, 52, 55, 144, 180, 183, 219, 220, 222, 242, 276, 306, 327, 384, 420, 469, 485,

505, 550, 569, 587, 623, 749, 785, 813, 881, 957; *Geniza-Fragments*, pp. 105, 142, 143, 151, 153, 156.

- 72 Cf. §§ 43, 54, 58, 146, 406, 440 (MS Oxford, Neubauer 1531), 546, 558, 592, 714, 745. In this context it is of interest to consider the statement in the longer recension of 2 *Enoch* 22:2 to the effect that there were "choir stalls" surrounding God (*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* [hereafter: *TOTP*], ed. J. H. Charlesworth [New York, 1983], 1:136).
- 73 With regard to this notion there are precedents in Jewish apocalyptic literature as well. See, e.g., 2 *Enoch* 22:6 (*TOTP* 1: 138-39). From the context it is abundantly clear that the mortal Enoch is transformed into an angel.
- 74 In an anonymous fragment in the *hekhalot* corpus sitting down before God is placed in an eschatological context: the one who does not misuse knowledge of the divine names is guaranteed that he will "inherit the Garden of Eden and will sit before [God] like a disciple before his master" (§§ 500, 712). On the notion of a throne for the righteous in the celestial Paradise, cf. 1 *Enoch* 108:12; *Apocalypse of Elijah* 1:8, *Ascension of Isaiah* 9:9-10, 24-25 (see also 7:22 where the specific throne for Isaiah "above all heavens and their angels" is mentioned); Rev. 4:4, 20:4 (cf. A. Feuillet, *Johannine Studies*, tr. T. E. Crane [New York, 1965], pp. 182-214; other scholars reject the claim that the twenty-four elders refer to the righteous and suggest that they represent the angelic attendants who surround the throne of God; cf. C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Ancient Christianity* [New York, 1982], p. 224, and other references on p. 481, n. 24; according to Rev. 3:21 the righteous, or "those who conquer," are said to be granted to sit on the throne of the Son just as the latter sat on the throne of the Father); *Avot de-R. Nathan*, version A, chap. 1, ed. S. Schechter (Vienna, 1887), p. 5 and B. Berakhot 17a (no throne is mentioned in these contexts but the righteous are described in the World-to-Come as sitting with crowns on their heads and being sustained by the splendor of the *Shekhinah*); *Midrash Konen*, in *Bei ha-Midrash*, ed. A. Jellinek (Jerusalem, 1967), vol. 2, p. 29; *Midrash Gedullat Mosheh* in *Batte Midrashot*, 1:284-85; *Midrash 'Otiyyot de-R. 'Aqiva*, in *ibid.*, 2:375: "each and every one [of the righteous in Paradise] sits like a king on a throne of gold;" *'Alfa' beita' shel Metaṭron*, published by I. Weinstock, *Temirin*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1981), p. 69: "whoever humbles himself in this world merits to sit in Paradise on a golden throne with stones of the finest gold, in the company of King David and Jacob our patriarch, who humbled themselves in this world . . . Jacob merited to be engraved upon the throne of glory and David merited that his throne was set alongside the throne of glory." Concerning David's throne, see below, n. 77; on the motif of Jacob's image engraved on the throne, see E. Wolfson, "The Image of Jacob Engraved on the Throne: Further Speculation on the Esoteric Teaching of the German Pietists" (in Hebrew), *Efraim Gottlieb Memorial Volume* (forthcoming). See also the tradition of the twelve thrones set up for the apostles in order to judge the twelve tribes of Israel in Mt. 19:28 and Lk. 22:30, which should be compared to *Tanḥuma'*, Qedosheim, 1, where the "great men of Israel" are said to sit on thrones (derived exegetically from the plural "thrones" in Dan 7:9) so that they will judge the nations of the world together with God. (Cf. the tradition in the Falasha text *Tē'ezāzu Sanbat* to the effect that God sits upon twelve thrones in order to judge; cf. *Falasha Anthology*, trans. W.

Leslau [New Haven, 1951], p. 18, and p. 147, n. 99; S. Kaplan, "Tē'ēzāza Sanbat: A Beta Israel Work Reconsidered," in *Gilgul: Essays on Transformation, Revolution and Permanence in the History of Religions Dedicated to R. J. Zwi Werblowsky*, ed. S. Shaked, D. Shulman, G. G. Stroumsa [Leiden, 1987], p. 119.) According to another rabbinic tradition, which had a significant impact upon subsequent Jewish thought, the souls of the righteous are said to be hidden under the throne of glory; see B. Shabbat 152b; *Midrash Debarim Rabbah*, ed. S. Lieberman (Jerusalem, 1964), p. 131.

- 75 Cf. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 89. Cf. the description of Jesus in the *Gospel of Bartholomew* I, 31-32, where he is said to be simultaneously sitting at the right hand of God (cf. Mt. 22:44 [= Mk. 12:36, Lk. 20:42-43] and 26:64 [= Mk. 14:62; Lk. 22:69] based on Ps. 110:1; see below, n. 90) and teaching the apostles on earth; cf. *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. W. Schneemelcher, Eng. trans. ed. R. McL. Wilson (Phila., 1963), 1: 491.
- 76 In four of the seven manuscripts published by Schäfer the reading is יתוך which is the Hebrew corruption of the Greek λιθιχος which means "of stone." Cf. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, p. 166.
- 77 Cf. Tabor, *Things Unutterable*, pp. 88-89, who discusses this passage from *Hekhalot Rabbati* and duly notes the importance of the enthronement motif. See, by contrast, the description of David in an apocalyptic section which has clearly been appended to the main body of *Hekhalot Rabbati*: "He came and sat on his throne, set parallel to the throne of his Creator . . . David immediately rose and uttered songs and praises that no ear had ever heard" (§ 126). On David's throne see further B. Sanhedrin 38b, *Lamentations Rabbah*, Petihta 23, ed. S. Buber (Vilna, 1899), p. 18; M. Bar-Ilan, "The Throne of God," pp. 30-31. It is likely that the legends concerning David's throne are connected with the view that he is the Messiah; cf. L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Phila., 1968), 6:272, n. 128. According to *Exodus Rabbah* 14:3 Solomon sat on the divine throne.
- 78 The connection between enthronement and visionary experience is already evident in the case of the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel the Tragedian, 68-76, where Moses has a vision immediately following his sitting upon the throne. Cf. E. Starobinski-Safran, "Un poète judéo-hellénistique: Ezechiel le tragique," *Museum Helveticum* 31 (1974): 216-24; for other references, see below, n. 87. In this context it is also of interest to note the eschatological tradition found in rabbinic sources, e.g., *'Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, version A, chap. 1 and B. Berakhot 17a, to the effect that in the World-to-Come the righteous sit (!) with their crowns and derive pleasure from the splendor of the *Shekhinah*. That the latter involves a vision of God's Presence is evident from the key proof-text, "They beheld God" (Exod. 24:11). In this case as well, then, the visionary component is related specifically with sitting and not standing.
- 79 Cf. Smith's discussion of 4QM mentioned above, n. 65. Entirely different is the description in the *Sar-Torah* section of *Hekhalot Rabbati* where the divine voice reportedly says to the different rabbis who were standing before the throne of glory: "Rise up and sit before My throne in the way that you sit in the academy, grab the crown and receive the seal, and learn the order of the Torah, how it is

practiced, how it is interpreted, and how one makes use of it" (§ 298). In this case the sitting is not an enthronement but a reenactment of the appropriate posture for study. On the question of whether study requires a standing position or one of sitting, see B. Megillah 21a. Cf. *Midrash Gedullat Mosheh*, in *Batte Midrashot* 1: 280. After having ascended to the throne of glory in the seventh heaven with the assistance of Metatron (on the links between Moses and Metatron, see Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah*, pp. 135-36; Ch. Mopsik, *Le Livre Hébreu d'Hénoch ou Livre des Palais* [Paris, 1989], pp. 65-71; Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, pp. 417-27), Moses is said to have sat down before Zagzagel, the prince of wisdom and Torah, to learn the ten secrets. (Parenthetically, it will be noted that the name Zagzagel is composed of six consonants with the first two repeating themselves. The last two, 'alef and lamed, spell the name of God, whereas the combination of the first two, zayin and gimel, numerically equals ten. Perhaps there is an allusion in his name to the ten secrets—which are not specified—or perhaps later exegetes derived the notion of ten secrets using this numerological method.) See also the tradition in *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 11:10 that Moses learnt the divine name (*shem ha-meforash*) from Zagzagel. For alternative spellings of this angel's name, see text published in *Bet ha-Midrash*, ed. A. Jellinek, 1:120; see also a magical charm for illumination extant in MS JTSA Mic. 8115, fols. 133b-134a; and the statement of R. Eleazar of Worms, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS héb. 850, fol. 122a. Cf. R. Margaliot, *Mal'akhe Elyon* (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 54-55.

- 80 On the image of enthroned angels, cf. *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, cited in Clement, *Stromata* 5.11.77 (English translation in *TOTP*, 1:508); *Ascension of Isaiah* 7:13 (according to the second Latin and Slavonic versions; see *TOTP*, 2:166). Related to this notion is the technical use of the word "thrones" to refer to a class of angels. Cf. Col. 1:16; 2 *Enoch* 20:1 (the longer recension); *Testament of Levi* 3:8; *Ascension of Isaiah* 7:21; *Apocalypse of Elijah* 1:10, 4:10; *Testament of Adam* 4:8. For a discussion of angels sitting upon thrones in the apocalyptic literature, with special reference to *Ascension of Isaiah*, cf. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, pp. 59-60. See also *Exodus Rabbah* 25:2, where the angels' sitting and standing, as well as various other traits, is made subordinate to God's will. On sitting on a heavenly throne as an endowment of spiritual powers, see *The Teachings of Silvanus* (VII, 4), 80, 20-90, 2, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* p. 383. Concerning this work, see J. Zandee, "The Teachings of Silvanus" (NHC VII, 4) and Jewish Christianity," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. R. Van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden, 1981), pp. 498-584, esp. 507-08.
- 81 *Sefer ha-Razim*, p. 92.
- 82 *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- 83 For a discussion of this passage, see E. Ginsburg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah* (Albany, 1989), pp. 103-04.
- 84 *Bet ha-Midrash*, ed. Jellinek, 2:46.
- 85 Cf. Odeberg, 3 *Enoch*, pp. 136-38; Lieberman's appendix to Gruenwald, op. cit., pp. 235-41.

- 86 On the highest status accorded to sitting, see *Exodus Rabbah* 23:1.
- 87 See reference above, n. 78; cf. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, pp. 128-30; G. Quispel, "Judaism, Judaic Christianity and Gnosis," in *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honour of Robert McL. Wilson*, ed. A. H. B. Logan and A. J. M. Wedderburn (Edinburgh, 1983), pp. 48-49; P. W. van Der Horst, "Moses' Throne Vision in Ezekiel the Dramatist," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 34 (1983): 21-29, esp. 24-27; idem, "Some Notes on the Exagoge of Ezekiel," *Mnemosyne* 37 (1984): 354-75. Both papers have been reprinted in P. W. van der Horst, *Essays on the Jewish World of Early Christianity* (Göttingen, 1990), pp. 63-93. Cf. H. Jacobson, "Mysticism and Apocalyptic in Ezekiel the Tragedian," *Illinois Classical Studies* 6 (1981): 272-93; idem, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel* (Cambridge, 1983). See also the traditions concerning Moses' enthronement in apocalyptic, rabbinic and Samaritan sources discussed by W. A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King* (Leiden, 1967), pp. 147-49, 184-85, 232-38, 243; idem, "Moses as God and King," in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, ed. J. Neusner (Leiden, 1970), pp. 354-59. And cf. *Midrash Tanna'im zum Deuteronomium*, ed. D. Hoffmann (Berlin, 1909), p. 19, where Moses' level is contrasted with that of the ministering angels insofar as he was allowed to sit before God and they could only stand. See also B. Megillah 21b. On Moses' dwelling under the throne of glory, cf. *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 11:10. Mention should also be made of another ancient legend concerning Moses' saving himself from the hostile angels by holding on to the throne of God. Cf. *Exodus Rabbah* 42:4; B. Shabbat 88a; Ginzberg, *Legends* 5:417, n. 117; 6:46, n. 247, 53, n. 273. For other traditions regarding Moses' enthronement, cf. M. Bar-Ilan, "Moses' Stone, Seat and Cathedral," *Sidra* 2 (1986): 15-23 (in Hebrew).
- 88 Cf. Sirach 24:4 where Wisdom is said to dwell in the heavens and its throne to be in a pillar of cloud. See also *1 Enoch* 84:3; *On the Origin of the World* 105:30 (*The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, p. 176); Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.13.6. For the development of this motif in the medieval period, including iconographic evidence, cf. H. Adolf, "The Figure of Wisdom in the Middle Ages," *Actes du quatrième congrès international de philosophie médiévale*, 4th, Montreal, 1967: *Arts libéraux et philosophie au moyen âge* (Montreal, 1969), pp. 429-43.
- 89 Cf. *1 Enoch* 71:14-17. The account of Enoch is probably based on the description of one "like a human being" (lit., "son of man") in Dan. 7:13 who was said to have "reached the Ancient of Days" (who in 7:9 is described as sitting on a fiery throne) and to be "presented to Him." It says further (ibid., 14) that "dominion, glory, and kingship" were given to this man, but it does not say explicitly that he sat on a throne. On the other hand, in 7:9 the plural form "thrones" is used and this may imply that one throne was for the Ancient of Days and the other for the son of man.
- 90 See also *Ascension of Isaiah* 11:32 and Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, II. xxiii. 13. Cf. D. Flusser, "Melchizedek and the Son of Man," in *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 27-28; D. M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (Nashville, 1983). The Christian interpretation of Ps. 110:1 is evident in the Nag Hammadi text, *On the Origin of the World*, which in one context describes Sabaoth as being surrounded by a being called Jesus Christ

on a throne to his right and the virgin of the holy spirit on a throne to his left (*The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, p. 176). Cf. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, p. 186. In yet another Gnostic text, clearly related to the former, *The Hypostasis of the Archons* Sophia (Wisdom) is said to take her daughter, Zoe (Life), and to have her sit to the right of Sabaoth with the angel of wrath upon his left (*The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, p. 168). On the relation of this text to merkavah mysticism, see Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, pp. 196-200. The similarity between the description of Jesus as God's viceregent sitting on a throne and the description of Metatron has been noted by scholars; see, e.g., D. Neumark, *Toledot ha-Pilosfiah be-Yira'el* (New York, 1921) 1: 74; A. Murtonen, "The Figure of Metatrôn," *Vetus Testamentum* 3 (1953): 409-11; G. G. Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ," *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983): 281-88.

- 91 Cf. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, pp. 66-67.
- 92 For references, see above, n. 74.
- 93 See *'Aggadat Bereshit*, ed. S. Buber (Cracow, 1903), ch. 18, p. 37, where Abraham is described as the סֹנְקֵרְדִּים of God seated on His right side. (On the midrashic tradition of Abraham being God's advisor, סֹנְקֵרְדִּין, see also *Genesis Rabbah* 49:2, ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 500; elsewhere Moses' relation to God is compared parabolically to an advisor [סֹנְקֵרְדִּין] to the king; cf. *Exodus Rabbah* 43:1). Cf. Bar-Ilan, "The Throne of God," p. 31, who notes that the word סֹנְקֵרְדִּין or, in its more corrupt form, סֹנְקֵרְדִּים, is obviously based on two Greek words, the preposition συν (along with) and the noun καθεδρα (seat). The notion of Abraham's occupying a throne to the right of God is also implied in *Midrash Tehillim* 110:1.
- 94 See above, n. 77.
- 95 *Genesis Rabbah* 8:9 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 63).
- 96 Cf. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, p. 239.
- 97 *Ibid.*, pp. 239-40.
- 98 Cf. M. Idel, "Enoch is Metatron," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 153 and 164, n. 18 (in Hebrew; French translation, "Hénoch c'est Metatron," in Mopsik, *Le Livre Hébreu d'Hénoch*, p. 387).
- 99 *Genesis Rabbah* 65: 21, ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 738; B. Hagigah 15a; *Midrash Tehillim*, 1; *Tanhuma'*, ed. Buber, Beshallah, 13; Qedoshim, 6; *Exodus Rabbah* 43:4.
- 100 *Genesis Rabbah* 65:21; P. Berakhot 1:1; *Leviticus Rabbah* 6:3 (with respect only to angels of destruction); *Midrash Debarim Rabbah*, ed. S. Lieberman, p. 68.
- 101 See also *Synopse*, § 672. In that case it is difficult to maintain that the thrust of the polemic is against Metatron's sitting inasmuch as the reading is: "above there is no standing and no sitting," suggesting that angelic beings neither sit nor stand. A similar reading is attested in B. Hagigah 15b as well; cf. Rashi ad loc., s.v.,

לא עמידה; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesode Torah*, 1:11. On the other hand, it is difficult to maintain the view that angels do not stand as the overwhelming evidence is that this is their unique property. See reference to Liebes' study in following note.

- 102 Cf. A. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven* (Leiden, 1977), pp. 60-67. For a different interpretation of this legend, see Y. Liebes, *The Sin of Elisha, The Four Who Entered Paradise, and the Nature of Talmudic Judaism*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 29-34 (in Hebrew).
- 103 Paris, MS Bibliothèque Nationale, héb. 850, fol. 83b.
- 104 *Exodus Rabbah* 43:4.
- 105 Cf. M. Black, "The Throne-Theophany, Prophetic Commission and the 'Son of Man': A Study in Tradition-History," in *Jews, Greeks and Christians Religious Cultures in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honor of William David Davies*, ed. R. Hamerton-Kelly and R. Scroggs (Leiden, 1976), pp. 56-72. On the ancient Jewish concept of the transformation of human beings into angels, see J. H. Charlesworth, "The Portrayal of the Righteous as an Angel," in *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism*, ed. G. W. E. Nickelsburg and J. J. Collins, pp. 135-51. See also the instructive summary by van der Horst, "Some Notes on the Exagoge of Ezekiel," p. 82: "In early post-biblical Judaism there was, in some circles, a tradition in which the highest angel, called 'the angel of the Lord' in the Old Testament, was seen as God's primary or sole helper and allowed to share in God's divinity. It was part of this tradition that a human being, as the hero or exemplar of a particular group, could ascend to become one with this figure, as Enoch or Moses. So these angelic mediators often began as humans and later achieved a kind of divine status in some communities. They had charge over the world and became close to being anthropomorphic hypostases of God himself."
- 106 Cf. *Major Trends*, pp. 55-56.
- 107 The divinization of the one who ascends to the chariot is also evident from the description in *Hekhalot Rabbati* of the knowledge granted to such a person as a result of the mystical experience; cf. *Synopse*, §§ 81-86; Dan, *The Ancient Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 64-66.
- 108 Quispel, "Judaism, Judaic Christianity and Gnosis," pp. 53-54. Other examples of deification through vision are supplied by Quispel, op. cit., pp. 55-58. In this context it is of interest to consider the description in the Nag Hammadi text, *Trimorphic Protennoia* 45:13, in *The Gnostic Scriptures*, ed. B. Layton (New York, 1987), p. 97: "When you enter it [the superior, perfect light] you will be glorified by the glorifiers; the enthroners will give you thrones; you will be given robes by the enrobers, and the baptists will baptize you; so that along with glories you become the glory in which you existed, luminous, in the beginning." See also *Zostrianos* (VIII, 1), 5, 15, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, p. 405: "I was baptized there, and I received the image of the glories there. I became like one of them."
- 109 Schäfer, "The Aim and Purpose," p. 286.

- 110 I am thus in agreement with the following observation of Gruenwald, "Literary and Redactional Issues in the Study of the Hekhalot Literature," in *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, p. 184: "The main aim of Merkavah mysticism still seems to me to be the vision of God." This represents a modification of Gruenwald's earlier view; cf. *Apocalyptic*, p. 94: "Despite the daring modes of expression one can find in that [Hekhalot] literature about the contents of the mystical experience, the possibility of a direct visual encounter with God is generally ruled out." On the centrality of visionary experience in the *hekhalot* texts, see also I. Chernus, "Visions of God in Merkavah Literature," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 13 (1982): 123-46. See I. Gruenwald, "The Impact of Priestly Traditions on the Creation of Merkavah Mysticism and the Shi'ur Komah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 105, n. 7 (in Hebrew), where the author explicitly acknowledges the correctness of Chernus' critique (I thank I. Gruenwald for reminding me of this passage). See also Smith's observation with respect to the heavenly ascent narratives in general in "Ascent to the Heavens," p. 410. For a different approach by Schäfer, see now his *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany, 1992), p. 155, n. 19.
- 111 Leiter, "Worthiness, Acclamation and Appointment," pp. 141-48. Leiter does not deal with the interpretations of Exod. 33:20 attributed respectively to R. Aqiva and R. Shimon ben Azzai in *Sifra* on Leviticus, 1:12, to the effect that neither the celestial beasts who bear the throne nor any of the angels can behold the divine glory. Cf. *Siphre ad Numeros*, ed. H. S. Horowitz (Jerusalem, 1966), 103, p. 101. Such a view would, of course, render problematic the general thesis of Leiter that acclamation or praise is predicated on a prior vision. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, p. 94, maintains that this view is expressed in the *hekhalot* literature as well. He mentions, however, only one passage from *Hekhalot Rabbati*, cf. *Synopse*, § 102, which may be read in quite a different way; see Chernus, "Visions of God," pp. 128-29. See, however, *Synopse*, § 183. It must be pointed out that within various *hekhalot* texts there is a genuine tension between the stated goal of beholding the divine glory and the inherent dangers ensuing from such an experience. The theoretical issue of seeing God is treated explicitly, for instance, in *Hekhalot Zutarti*; cf. *Synopse*, §§ 350-52.
- 112 It seems to me that the expression used here to describe God's action, וִירָד בְּמִרְכָּבָה, reflects the technical term used in the *hekhalot* texts to describe the mystic's activity which forms the focus of this study.
- 113 *Batle Midrashot* 2: 378, cited in slightly different translation by Leiter, "Worthiness, Acclamation and Appointment," p. 147.
- 114 Leiter, op. cit., p. 148.
- 115 Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, MS Cod. ebraici 228, fol. 105b. A version of this text, with slight textual variants, is found in the prayer book with kabbalistic commentary by Naftali Herz Treves, *Mal'ah ha-'Ares De'ah* (Tiengen, 1560). Concerning this text, and its relationship to Eleazar of Worms, see J. Dan, "Ashkenazi Hasidic Commentaries in the Hymn *Ha-'Aderet we-ha-'Eminah*," *Tarbiz* 50 (1981): 396-404 (in Hebrew).