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**HARVARD SEMITIC MUSEUM  
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**HARVARD SEMITIC MONOGRAPHS**

edited by  
Peter Machinist

Number 63  
**TWO STRANGE BEASTS:  
LEVIATHAN AND BEHEMOTH IN SECOND TEMPLE  
AND EARLY RABBINIC JUDAISM**

by  
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EISENBRAUNS  
Winona Lake, Indiana  
2006

which depends for its stability and its life on the power of God to hold those forces in check. The magical power of the divine name which resides in the angel Iaoel assures the continued restraint of these forces and thereby guarantees that the proper relationship of the three realms is not disrupted. I suggest that such a tradition arose in circles where speculation upon the cosmic order was influenced by imagery of the temple and thereby also by imagery of the mountain of God. The concern to discover the angelic hierarchy's role in maintaining that order may well have joined with magical notions concerning the divine name to yield the figure of Iaoel, the angel who bears the power of the name of God and uses that power to control the forces which threaten the very order of creation.

### 2.3.2 Ladder of Jacob 6:13 (long recension 6:3)<sup>177</sup>

And they (the people) will cry out, and the Lord will hear them; and he will pour out his anger on Leviathan the sea monster, and kill the heathen Falkon with the sword, for against the God of gods he will exalt his pride.<sup>178</sup>

Like the Apocalypse of Abraham, the fragmentary apocryphon designated by scholars as "the Ladder of Jacob" is preserved only in a Slavonic version. Unlike the Apocalypse of Abraham, however, it has received very little treatment in the scholarly literature.<sup>179</sup> On the basis of several linguistic features, Lunt has speculated that the original language of the text was Greek and that it was intended

<sup>177</sup>Throughout this section we will use the enumeration system of Lunt's eclectic translation. For the methods of verse enumeration see p. 31, n. 1 above.

<sup>178</sup>Translation: A. Pennington, "The Ladder of Jacob" 462. The chapter and verse divisions of Pennington's edition differ from those of H. G. Lunt, "Ladder of Jacob: A New Translation and Introduction," *OTP* 2, 401-411, who designates this verse as 6:13. I will use the translations of both Lunt and Pennington in this section. Chapter and verse according to Pennington's edition will be noted occasionally in parentheses.

<sup>179</sup>The history of the early publications of the text of the "Ladder" is tied up with that of the Explanatory Palaea of the Slavonic church of which it is a part. For a discussion of this history see Lunt, "Ladder" 402-3. In 1900 the work was translated into German and given brief comment by N. Bonwetsch, "Die Apocryphe 'Leiter Jacobs,'" *Nachrichten von der Königl. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologische-historische Klasse* (1900) 76-87. In 1920 it was translated into English (apparently from Bonwetsch's German edition) and was briefly discussed in an appendix to M. R. James, *The Lost Apocrypha of the Old Testament: Their Titles and Fragments* (London: SPCK, 1920) 96-103. Other than a brief discussion of the work in H. Weinel, "Die spätere christliche Apokalyptik" *ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ: Studien zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments Hermann Gunkel zum 60. Geburtstag, dem 23. Mai 1922 dargebracht von seinen Schülern und Freunden*, Hans Schmidt, ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1923) 2:172-173, and a mention of it in Denis *Introduction* 34-35, no further treatment is found until its inclusion in two of the collections of Old Testament apocrypha and pseudepigrapha which appeared in the 1980s, *OTP* and *AOT*.

for readers with some knowledge of Hebrew.<sup>180</sup> The question is far from settled, however, and awaits a more thorough treatment of the language of the work.<sup>181</sup> As to date, most commentators remain uncommitted. Pennington, in her discussion of the textual transmission of the work, notes that the Greek version of the Ladder "must be pushed back into the seventh- or eighth-cent. at the latest, and it may well be very much earlier."<sup>182</sup> Lunt speculates further that the work may stem from a "Jewish story composed in Jewish-Greek for a Palestinian audience."<sup>183</sup> This story, he proposes, was transmitted through Byzantine circles where it eventually was translated into Old Church Slavonic around the year 900 and found its way into the Palaia by the thirteenth or fourteenth century.<sup>184</sup> In the title heading of his introduction the work is dated sometime around the first century C. E.<sup>185</sup> No further reason for this is given however.

The text of the Ladder of Jacob as it is presently constituted comes from the Explanatory Palaea of the Slavonic church. The Palaea is a retelling of the stories of the Old Testament into which are placed anti-Jewish commentaries on the narratives. Within the Palaea tradition, the Ladder of Jacob exists in two recensions. The first, or "shorter" (A), recension is attested in three manuscripts<sup>186</sup> and lacks the material usually assigned to chapters 6 and 7 of the work. The second or "longer" (B) recension includes chapters 6 and 7 and also has, at several other points in the narrative, material not found in the "shorter" version. Though James believed the first recension to be closer to the original text of the "Ladder",<sup>187</sup> it is best to understand both to be products of an ongoing process of textual development and to treat them as such.<sup>188</sup>

Lunt has noted that the editorial activity which went into the compilation of the Palaea is extensive and has resulted in considerable alteration of the original narratives as they were received by the redactors.<sup>189</sup> Precisely because of this the Ladder of Jacob is an extremely difficult text to interpret. Several points, however, are clear. First, the narrative is based on the account of Jacob's vision of the ladder

<sup>180</sup>Lunt, "Ladder" 403.

<sup>181</sup>Pennington, "Ladder" 453, while noting that the "Ladder" probably came to the Slavonic church by way of Greek, adds: "There are no solid arguments for suggesting a Semitic original, though obviously such a possibility cannot be altogether excluded."

<sup>182</sup>Pennington, "Ladder" 453.

<sup>183</sup>Lunt, "Ladder" 404, n. 3.

<sup>184</sup>Lunt, "Ladder" 404, n. 3.

<sup>185</sup>Lunt, "Ladder" 401.

<sup>186</sup>Lunt, "Ladder" 402.

<sup>187</sup>James, *Apocrypha* 96.

<sup>188</sup>Pennington, "Ladder" 454, after a brief discussion of the textual differences between the two recensions note, "In a situation like this such terms as 'original' and 'interpolation' tend to lose their meaning. In both recensions, it seems, we are dealing with a document in an almost permanent state of literary flux."

<sup>189</sup>Lunt, "Ladder" 401.

at Bethel in Genesis 28. That account actually provides the framework for the first two chapters of the work:

Gen 28	Lad.Jac	Comments
10-12a	1:1-3	Introduces the vision. The passage in Ladder of Jacob is a summary of the Genesis material.
	1:4-7a	A detailed account of the vision. Not found in Genesis.
12b-14	1:7b-13	Rejoins the Genesis material at the notice of the ascending and descending angels. 1:10 draws its wording from Genesis 23:17. Some material with an eschatological focus has been added at 1:11-12
15		Omitted by Ladder of Jacob.
16-19	2:1-4	The Genesis material is rearranged slightly in order to fit a different chronology in the Ladder of Jacob.

Chapters 5-7 purport to be the angelic interpretation of the vision of chapter 1. Chapter 7 is clearly Christian and was probably added in part or possibly in toto at the time the Ladder of Jacob was incorporated into the Palaea.<sup>190</sup> Chapters 5 and 6 appear to be a composite document in which several different pieces of traditional material have been joined. M. R. James has noted three sections, the first dealing with the temple and the exile, the second with the Romans, and the third with Egypt.<sup>191</sup> Though the tripartite structure which he proposes may be correct, the identification of the "grandsons of your brother Esau" with Rome (in the second section) is by no means as certain as James appears to assume (though his assumption may be "correct" — in a somewhat shaded form; see below pp. 82-83). His identification of Egypt as the object of the third unit is argued even less convincingly.<sup>192</sup>

These three units may best be understood as three pieces of traditional material which have been joined to form an extended interpretation of the dream vision of Jacob from chapter 1. The first of these units (5:1-11) is the direct interpretation of the vision. The second (5:12-17) and third (6:1-15) are accretions to the interpretation.

Because of its fragmentary nature, 5:1-12 is extremely difficult to explicate. 5:7 states that "this place will be made desolate." 5:7-8 develops this, noting first

<sup>190</sup>Lunt, "Ladder" 404-5.

<sup>191</sup>James, *Apocrypha* 100-101.

<sup>192</sup>Lunt, "Ladder" 402 does not identify the descendants of Esau with Rome. Though he does follow James in his identification of the wicked in chapter 6 with Egypt, he does not give any compelling reason for this identification.

the building of a temple and then its desolation. It appears that the text associates the site of Jacob's vision with the site of the temple. This is supported by 2:5 where the name Bethel of Genesis 28:16 receives full translation as "the House of God." Identification of the site of Jacob's vision with that of the temple also appears in Rabbinic literature.<sup>193</sup>

The cryptic references to "four ascents" in 5:9<sup>194</sup> and to "four busts" in 5:10-11 have posed interpretive difficulties for commentators.<sup>195</sup> I suspect that the problem results from a poor Slavonic translation and may never be resolved. It is striking, however, that a series of Rabbinic haggadic treatments of Jacob's vision interpret the angelic figures upon the ladder as a series of earthly kingdoms, rising and falling one after the other.<sup>196</sup> Among the kingdoms mentioned are Babylon, Medea/Persia, Greece, and Esau/Edom. This is clearly an adaptation of the "four kingdom" motif familiar from works such as Daniel, the Sibylline Oracles, and the Babylonian Dynastic Prophecy.<sup>197</sup> Ladder of Jacob 5:9-11, with its mention of "four ascents" and "four busts" may also reflect such a motif.

One form of the aggadic midrash on Jacob's vision focuses its eschatological concern on the prince of Edom:

... And [God showed him] the Prince of Edom ascending, but he [Jacob] could not discern how far. At that moment, our father Jacob was afraid and said, "Am I to understand that this one will have no descent?" The Holy One (blessed be He) said to him, "And as for you, do not be afraid, O my servant, Jacob. Even if he should ascend and sit beside me I shall bring him down from there. This is the one about whom it is written, 'Though you be proud as an eagle, and though you place your

<sup>193</sup>b. *Sanh.* 95b and *Pirqê R. El.* 35 (1 edition: Avraham Aharon Broda, *Pirqê de-Rabbi Eli'ezer* [Tel Aviv: Defus, 1962-63]).

<sup>194</sup>The word here translated "ascents" is the Slavonic *vûxody*, "ascents." The majority reading, however, is *sxody*, "descents." Lunt, "Ladder" 409, n. 5d adopts the former reading (see also Weinel, "Apokalypik" 172f.). Other interpreters have adopted the latter, see Pennington, "Ladder" 459f. and James, *Apocrypha* 99f. In neither case is there agreement among critics as to what is meant.

<sup>195</sup>James, *Apocrypha* 98-99 follows the reading "descents" (see previous note) and understands the term to refer to movements away from Jerusalem (i.e., exiles). Pennington, "Ladder" 458 and 461 also reads "descents" and translates the term as "generations." She understands it to refer to divisions of the age. Lunt, "Ladder" 409, in a difficult note (5d), appears to associate the "four ascents" with the four thresholds which had to be crossed in order to enter the Holy of Holies. This, however, does little to elucidate his translation at this point.

<sup>196</sup>*Pesiq. Rab. Kah.* 23:2 (ed. Mandelbaum, 2, 334.9-335.5); *Midr. Exod. Rab.* 32:7; *Midr. Lev. Rab.* 29:2; *Pirqê R. El.* 35. This final account is intriguing because of the concern for "faces" which characterizes it. The enigmatic faces of the vision in the Ladder of Jacob I may be related to this.

<sup>197</sup>See Dan 2 and 7, Sib. Or. 4:49-101. For the Babylonian Dynastic Prophecy, see A. K. Grayson, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975) 24-37. For a discussion of the "four kingdom" motif in relation to Jewish apocalyptic literature, see Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination* 74-78.

nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down.' An utterance of the Lord" (Obadiah 1:4).<sup>198</sup>

Jacob, having seen no limit to the ascent of Edom, receives assurance from God that Edom's rule shall not endure forever. That assurance is given in the form of a citation from scripture.

A similar situation pertains to the second unit of materials, Ladder of Jacob 5:12-17. Following the interpretation of the "four ascents" in 5:10-11, there is an oracle concerned with "kings from the grandsons of your brother Esau."<sup>199</sup> This oracle concludes in 5:16-17 with the citation of Genesis 15:13-14 by which Jacob is assured that Edom's rule will not last forever. The fact that this citation makes no direct reference to Edom and only the most general reference to the circumstances described in 5:12-15 may indicate that the oracle concerning Edom in 5:12-15 was originally independent of the citation in 5:16-17.

The oracle in 5:12-15 poses considerable difficulties for the critic. Like 5:1-11 the text appears to have suffered some disruption. Most notable is the confusion concerning the grammatical number of the object of the oracle, the "king(s) from the grandsons of your (Jacob's) brother Esau." Both plural and singular pronouns appear in reference to this (these) figure(s). The problem is exacerbated by the ambiguity of the Slavonic, which can be read as either plural or singular.<sup>200</sup>

The resolution of these difficulties depends on the identity of the object of the oracle, the "king(s) from the grandsons of your (Jacob's) brother Esau." This could originally have referred either to the Herodian house or to Rome. The former was of Edomite extraction and at least one feature of the description in 5:12-15 may refer to it.<sup>201</sup> An identification with Rome, on the other hand, would be consistent with later Jewish practices. In Rabbinic literature references to the Roman empire are often concealed behind the name "Edom."<sup>202</sup>

For this reason I believe that in its current setting the oracle in Ladder of Jacob 5:12-15 does refer to Rome. The citation of Gen 15:13-14 in 5:16-17 alludes to exile in a foreign land. This could not refer to Herod or the Herodian house. If it

<sup>198</sup>Midr. Lev. Rab. 29:2; see also Pesiq. Rab Kah. 23:16 and Pirqe R. El. 35.

<sup>199</sup>Lunt, "Ladder" 409 translates "kings". Pennington, "Ladder" 458 translates "a king".

<sup>200</sup>Personal communication from H. G. Lunt.

<sup>201</sup>The description in 5:12 of the king(s) receiving "all the nobles of the tribes of the earth" could refer to Herod, whose court was well known for its cosmopolitan nature [Emil Schürer, ed., *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C. - A.D. 135)*, rev. Eng. ed. Geza Vermes and Fergus Millar (Edinburgh: Clark, 1973-1987) I, 310-11]. If Herod is the object of the oracle then the "they" of 5:13 refers to the "seed" of Jacob, since the authority of Herod did not extend to "all the nobles of the tribes of the earth."

<sup>202</sup>A detailed study is found in Gerson D. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann, Philip W. Lown Institute Studies and Texts 4 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 19-27. Stone, *4 Ezra* 556-558, especially n. 84, argues convincingly that 4 Ezra 6:8-10 equates Esau/Edom with Rome. If so, it would be the earliest text to do so.

points to Rome it probably arose sometime after 70 C.E. when Jews were enslaved by the Romans following the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>203</sup> The fact that 5:12-17 is attached to 5:1-11, where the text clearly refers to the destruction of the temple (5:9), strengthens this dating.

The narrative of the Ladder of Jacob 6 is extremely difficult and reflects the fluidity of the textual tradition underlying the two recensions of the work present in the Slavonic Palaea. Almost all of the material present in the short recension occurs in the long recension as well. The material is, however, presented in different sequences in the two recensions. Furthermore, material which is not found in the shorter versions appears as a more or less integral part of the narrative in the longer one.

I note the following concerning the two recensions. First, both clearly take the citation of Genesis 15:13-14 which concludes the Edom material in 5:12-17 as their starting point. Second, both include two virtually identical sets of material in their narratives. The following diagram of the two recensions illustrates this:<sup>204</sup>

**Recension 1  
(Short Recension)**

**A**

And your descendants, Jacob, will be like strangers in a foreign land; and they will be ill-treated, and made slaves of, and flogged daily. But the heathen, to whom they will be subject, God will judge.

**Recension 2  
(Long Recension)**

**A**

Know, Jacob, that your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land; and they will be ill-treated, and made slaves of, and flogged daily. But that people, whose slaves they are, the Lord will judge.

**B**

for the Mighty One will feel compassion for their suffering. For the angels and archangels will pour out their prayers before him for the deliverance of your race,

**B\***

that the Most High should have mercy.

<sup>203</sup>Schürer, *History* I, 508-9.

<sup>204</sup>The translation in the diagram is drawn from Pennington, "Ladder" 459 and 461-2. Since this is the only place in which English translations of both recensions, clearly delineated, are to be found. The designation of certain blocks of material by letters (A, B, C, . . .) is for comparative purposes only and does not reflect any assumptions concerning unity or origin.

**C**

Then will their women be fruitful;  
and after that the Lord will defend  
your race

**D**

with terrifying and mighty signs a-  
gainst those who enslaved them.  
Their storehouses, which were full,  
will be found empty of wine and  
every kind of corn: their land will  
seethe with reptiles and all kinds of  
deadly things; and there will be many  
earthquakes and catastrophes.

**E**

Then will the Most High execute  
judgment on that place.

**E**

When a king shall rise up and  
execute judgment, then there will be  
a place for him:

**F**

Then will your descendants, Israel,  
be delivered from the oppression of  
the heathen, who have held them by  
force, and they will be free from  
every reproach of their enemies;

**G**

for the king will be the source of all  
vengeance and retribution upon those  
who have afflicted you, O Israel.  
And at the end of the age, those who  
have suffered bitterly will rise up and  
cry out, and the Lord will hear them

**G\***

and be moved.

**B**

and the Mighty One will feel  
compassion for their suffering. For  
the angels and archangels pour out  
their prayers before him for the  
sparing of your tribe.

**C**

Then will their women be fruitful:  
and then will the Lord protect your  
race.

**H**

And he will pour out his anger on  
Leviathan the sea-monster and kill  
the heathen Falkon with the sword,  
for against the God of gods he will  
exalt his pride. Then, Jacob, will  
come your vindication, and that of  
your forefathers; and others too will  
come after you and share also in your  
prosperity. And then will your  
descendants blow the trumpet and  
the whole kingdom of Edom will  
perish together will all the rulers and  
the tribes of the Moabites.

Note that in both recensions, **E**, **F** and **G** appear together. There are, however, profound differences in the way these materials are understood in each recension. These differences center on the reading which each gives to **E**. In the short recension the passage concerns a king who will "rise up and execute judgment" and for whom there will then be a "place." The reader is not told who this king is. In the long recensions the "Most High", presumably God, will "execute judgment" on that "place", presumably the land in which the descendants of Jacob are enslaved. As a result of these two readings, the "king" who is the central figure of **G** is depicted in a radically different light by each recension. In the short recension he becomes a figure of salvation. In the long recension he is a figure of oppression. Both of these depictions are accentuated by the manner in which the reference to "bitterness" in **G** has been understood. In the short recension those who have "suffered bitterly" will "rise up" and "cry out", while in the long recension the king will "rise up in bitterness" against the descendants of Jacob, who in turn will "cry out." In both recensions God responds to that cry.

We cannot assert with any confidence that either of the recensions represents a "more original" reading than the other. Both appear to stem from a common base, perhaps a version of **E** in which the "executor of judgment" was represented by a single pronoun, "he." In the short recension "he" would have been identified with the "king" of **G** which thus would have received a positive reading. In the long recension "he" would have been identified with God and the "king" of **G** would have been understood as related to the oppressor of the preceding oracle.

The second sequence of material which is common to both the short and the long recension is that of **B** and **C**. Both recensions preserve this material in

essentially the same form, though one brief piece of material (**B\***) not found in the short recension appears between **B** and **C** in the long recension. That brief piece of material, however, is important, since it appears to be a secondary addition to the material in **B** and **C**. In **B** God is referred to by the title "the Mighty One." The fact that this title occurs at no other point in either recension and that both recensions agree in their use of it in **B** indicates that it was probably original to the tradition. In **B\*** the epithet "the Most High" is used. This epithet appears at only one other place in chapter 6, in **E** as it occurs in the long recension.<sup>205</sup> I have argued above that the designation of "the Most High" as the executor of judgment in **E** is the product of a redactor who identified an original "he" in that passage with God as he is described in the citation of Genesis 15:13-14 concluding the oracle of 5:12-17. If this is the case, then the addition of **B\*** to the **B-C** sequence must be the product of the same redactor. The use of "the Most High" in **B\*** serves to solidify the connection between God in Genesis 15:13-14, "the Mighty One" in the **B-C** sequence, and the executor of judgment in **E**. The addition of **B\*** explicitly brings "the Mighty One" of **B-C** into that sequence and indicates that those pieces of material may not have appeared in their present location in the tradition as it was received by the redactor. The short recension may, therefore, preserve a more original sequence in which **B** and **C** followed **E-G**. If this is the case, however, then the sequence **E-G**, **B**, **C** could not originally have been attached to **A**. If **E** had directly followed **A** in the tradition as it was received by the short recension, the redactor could not have failed to identify God as the antecedent of the "he" in **E**.

On the basis of this analysis, I postulate an originally independent tradition which lay behind chapter 6 and from which each of the recensions have separately derived. In each case, when that tradition was brought together with the oracle in 5:12-17, a particular interpretation was given to it. In the case of the long recension, it was understood, in light of the specifics of the citation of Genesis 15:13-14, to refer to God and was adjusted accordingly. In the case of the short recension, it was read messianically and was understood in light of the general theme of judgment which was imparted by the same citation. The latter reading would need a specific stimulus, however. A messianic reading of the text does not seem self-evident. If 5:12-17 stems from the period shortly after 70 C.E. (as has been argued above, p. 85), then I would tentatively suggest the messianic disturbances surrounding the revolt of Bar Kokhba around 132-136 C.E. as a point of origin for this tradition. As for the long recension, the non-messianic reading could indicate either an earlier or a later date than that of the short recension. The latter seems more likely to me. The messianism of the period before the Bar Kokhba revolt is well known. The strong rejection of such messianism after the failure of the rebellion was dictated by the need to survive in the face of severe persecution.<sup>206</sup>

<sup>205</sup>It also occurs at 5:12, but only in the short recension.

<sup>206</sup>Schürer, *History* 1:544-5, 552-557; Samuel Abramski, "Bar Kokhba" *EncJud* 4:230-31.

The materials found in **D** and **H** remain. Each contains a description of events which will occur at the end of time. **D** is a listing of eschatological woes which will befall the earth during the final days and consists of three "signs": the barrenness of storehouses; a plague of reptiles; and the occurrence of earthquakes and other catastrophes. **H** begins with the mythic account of the defeat of Leviathan and a mysterious figure named "Falkon", continues with the vindication of Israel, and concludes with the defeat of Edom and (somewhat strangely) Moab.

The cataloging of the signs of the end is a feature found in many apocalypses.<sup>207</sup> In several of these, the catalogue of signs is joined to a description of God's destruction of evil and/or his vindication of the righteous.<sup>208</sup> Two texts may serve as illustrations of this. In Apoc. Abr. 30:1-31:8, a list of ten plagues which will precede the end (30:1-8) is immediately followed by the appearance of the "chosen one" who summons God's people while those who have oppressed them are destroyed by fire in Hades. As this takes place the righteous rejoice over the downfall of the wicked (31:1-8). In 2 Apoc. Bar. 26:1-30:5 a similar catalogue of woes is described as representing the twelve "parts" of the time of the end (27:1-13). After some discussion of the significance of these woes, the temporal progression is continued at 29:3 where, following the note that when these parts are accomplished the Anointed One will begin to appear, a description of eschatological plenitude opens with the revealing of Behemoth and Leviathan as food for the righteous who survive to that time (see discussion above, pp. 38, 40-41).

The catalogues of eschatological signs noted above are coupled with descriptions of God's destruction of evil and/or his vindication of the righteous. It is striking, therefore, that the materials in **D** and **H** comprise both of these elements. I believe that they represent a single unit of eschatological material which was incorporated into the narrative of chapter 6 by the redactor of the long recension. The division into two parts may have resulted from the presence in **C** of a reference to the fruitfulness of women. The bearing of children is a feature which occurs in positive or negative forms in several lists of eschatological signs.<sup>209</sup> Especially striking in this regard is the list which occurs in 4 Ezra 6:20-28, in which an unusual reference to childbirth is followed by a description of the barrenness of storehouses which is strongly reminiscent of the first of the three signs given in **D**:

<sup>207</sup>E.g., Apoc. Abr. 30:1-31:8; 2 Baruch 26:1-30:5; 2 Baruch 73:1-7; 4 Ezra 5:1-13; 4 Ezra 6:20-28; Greek Apoc. Ezra 3:11-15; Apoc. Elijah 5:1-39; Apoc. Daniel 10:1-14:3; Mark 13:5-27. See the discussions of Michael E. Stone, *Signs of the Judgment, Onomastica Sacra and the Generations from Adam*, University of Pennsylvania Armenian Texts and Studies 3 (Chico, California: Scholars, 1981) 15-16; Russell, *Method and Message* 271-276; and, briefly, John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semina* 14 (1979) 7.

<sup>208</sup>E.g., 4 Ezra 6:20-28; Apoc. Dan. 10:1-14:3; Apoc. Elijah 5:1-39. Note that in the first of these evil is discussed only in the most general terms, while in the latter two (both heavily influenced by Christianity) it is given personification in the form of the Antichrist. In the text from Apoc. Abr. 30:1-31:8 discussed below, the personification takes the form of those who have oppressed God's people.

<sup>209</sup>E.g., 2 Apoc. Bar. 73:7; 4 Ezra 5:8; 4 Ezra 6:21.

<sup>620</sup>And when the seal is placed upon the age which is about to pass away, then I will show these signs: The books shall be opened before the firmament, and all shall see it together. <sup>21</sup>Infants a year old shall speak with their voices, and women with child shall give birth to premature children at three or four months, and those shall live and dance. <sup>22</sup>Sown places shall suddenly appear unsown, and full storehouses shall suddenly be found to be empty.

Though in 4 Ezra 6:21 the unusual circumstances surrounding birth are probably seen in a negative light,<sup>210</sup> in 2 Apoc. Bar. 73:7 they are seen in a positive one. Furthermore, the list in which this reference occurs (2 Apoc. Bar. 73:1-7) also contains a reference to the appearance of “asps and dragons” (who will submit themselves to children) which may be the only parallel in such a list to the reference to reptiles which occurs as the second element in **D**.

The third “sign of the end” which occurs in **D** is that of earthquakes. This is a common eschatological motif which occurs in many of the catalogues of signs identified above.<sup>211</sup> In the numbered list of eschatological plagues in Apoc. Abr. 30 “earthquake” appears twice, as the fifth plague (“among the rulers, destruction by earthquake and the sword”) and as the tenth (“thunder, voices, and destroying earthquakes”). In 2 Apoc. Bar. 27 it appears as the sixth “part” of the eschatological age (“earthquakes and terrors”). Finally, the late text “The Signs of the Judgment,” which enumerates the events that will occur on the fifteen days preceding the day of judgment, expects an earthquake of cosmic proportions to occur on the eighth day of that period.<sup>212</sup>

The catalogue of eschatological signs found in **D** is remarkable in its brevity. The listing of such signs stems from an impulse toward elaboration and development of eschatological narratives. Most of the catalogues cited above are composed of more than three signs, even if they represent only a single verse of text. Why, given the wide range of traditional signs available, does this text mention only three (possibly four, if the reference in **C** to fruitfulness of women in its present form is to be included in the list)? If **D** and **H** do represent a single unit of traditional material (as has been argued above, p. 87) then the reference to Leviathan with which **H** opens may provide a key to answering this question. In Apoc. Abr. it was noted that Leviathan is associated with two things. In 10:10 the power of Iaoel to hold the Leviathans is linked to his power to “subjugate the attack and menace of every reptile.” In 21:4, the world is described as resting upon

<sup>210</sup>Stone, 4 Ezra 592-3, noting the common background of this list with that found at 5:1-11, equates the unusual births in 6:21 with the monstrous births seen at 5:8. He further recognizes (602-3) that the situation described here has to do with the eschatological compression of the human life span which is seen in other apocalyptic works.

<sup>211</sup>In addition to those enumerated below, note 4 Ezra 9:3 and Mark 13:8. See Revelation 6:12.

<sup>212</sup>Stone, Signs 10, 27, and 37; see the Hebrew version of the text, 47 and 54.

Leviathan and suffering destruction because of his movements, an obvious reference to earthquakes. As I argued concerning Leviathan in Apoc. Abr. (above, pp. 76-78) these associations have to do with his power as a symbol of threatening and encroaching chaos. Both the reptile with its chthonic potency and the earthquake with its unpredictable destructive fury function as earthly expressions of that threat. The sequence reptile-earthquake-Leviathan which is found in **D-H** is, therefore, indicative of the escalating eschatological crisis precipitated by the oppression of God's people on earth.

Leviathan, however, does not appear alone in **H**. He is joined by the mysterious “Falkon.” There have been two explanations in the literature for this name. The first, suggested in 1877 by Porfir'ev, an early commentator on the text,<sup>213</sup> in his treatment of the cryptic form *kfalkongargailyuya* at 4:12, is that the name is a “corruption of the Greek *chalchos* (a bronze statue) and Hebrew *nergal* (a Mesopotamian idol, mentioned at 2 Kings xvii. 30).”<sup>214</sup> How this particular combination of words would have found its way into an interpretive retelling of Genesis 28 is unclear. This significantly weakens the argument. The second proposal, which is more likely, is put forward by Lunt in his treatment of the text. He suggests that the form *kfalkongargailyuya* is derivative from the *falkon* of chapter 6 and suggests that the association of that word with Leviathan may provide a clue as to the word's origin. He notes that in Isaiah 27:1 the Hebrew epithet *nahaš 'aqallāṭōn* is applied to Leviathan. If this is understood as a proper name and transcribed into Greek with the loss of initial *'ayin*, it would have yielded the form *kalthōn*, which by transposition of letters could have become *thalkōn*. The not terribly uncommon confusion of the letters *theta* and *phi* in East Slavic would then yield *falkon*.<sup>215</sup>

Despite the complicated nature of Lunt's suggestion, it remains the most plausible explanation yet offered for the mysterious *falkon* of chapter 6. A comparison of Isaiah 27:1 with the reference to Leviathan and Falkon in **H** shows clear parallels between the two passages:

## Isaiah 27:1

On that day, the Lord will bring punishment with his hard and great and powerful sword on Leviathan, the ancient serpent, and on Leviathan, the twisting

## Ladder of Jacob

And he will pour out his anger on Leviathan, the sea monster, and kill the heathen Falkon with the sword, . . .

<sup>213</sup>Ya. Porfir'ev, *Apokrificheski skazaniya o verkhovozvetykh litsakh i sobytiyakh po rukopisyam Solovetskoj biblioteki* (St. Petersburg: s.n., 1877) 138-149. This text was not available to me. It is cited in Pennington, “Ladder” 459.

<sup>214</sup>Pennington, “Ladder” 459, n. 9.

<sup>215</sup>Lunt, “Ladder” 404.

serpent; and he will kill the monster who is in the sea.

The references to the sword of God and the sea monster in Ladder of Jacob match those in Isaiah 27:1. Furthermore, in each text the action of God is described by two verbs. In both the second is "kill." The Hebrew root *pqd* probably lies behind the description of the first action (God's pouring out of his anger) in Ladder of Jacob.<sup>216</sup> Both texts agree that that action will be perpetrated "on" Leviathan.

As we began this brief discussion (p. 88) we posed a question as to why, given the wide range of traditional signs available (and often listed extensively in the eschatological catalogues of other texts), the writer of The Ladder of Jacob chose to list only three (or four) in his list. The reason appears to be the nature of the tradition upon which that author drew. Apparently, in that tradition, the victory of God over Leviathan provided the climax of the sequence reptiles-earthquakes-Leviathan noted above. Just as that sequence alludes to the ever increasing disruption of the cosmic order which accompanies the oppression of God's people, so the victory of God over Leviathan becomes the watershed from which the establishment of a new, eschatological order flows. In that order, the descendants of Jacob will be vindicated and will find prosperity, and those who oppressed them, "the whole kingdom of Edom . . . together with all the rulers and tribes of the Moabites," shall perish.<sup>217</sup>

### 2.3.3 The *Axis Mundi* tradition — A Summary

Though the Apocalypse of Abraham and the Ladder of Jacob differ in their treatment of the monster Leviathan, both appear to draw on a common traditional understanding of him. In that understanding, Leviathan is the mythic expression of the forces of chaos which threaten to disrupt the established order of the world. His

<sup>216</sup>The range of meanings is very broad. See J. B. Van Hooser, "The Meaning of the Hebrew Root PQD in the Old Testament," (Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 1962), and Gunnel André, *Determining the Destiny: PQD in the Old Testament*, Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series 16 (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1980). The nuance of "punishment" appears in the use of the word in many postbiblical texts, see Michael E. Stone, "Coherence and Inconsistency in the Apocalypses: The Case of 'The End' in 4 Ezra," *JBL* 102 (1983) 231, n. 9.

<sup>217</sup>The strange reference to the Moabites with which chapter 6 ends is without parallel either in the pseudepigrapha or in the Rabbinic literature. It may well be related to the explicit reference to "Edom" which precedes it. Biblically the two peoples occur together in judgment oracles at Isa 11:14, Jer 24:21, and Dan 11:41. In all three cases they, together with Ammon, are used to represent non-Israelite Transjordan. In Rabbinic literature, Moab and Edom are more likely to be depicted as enemies than allies. Perhaps the reference here is to the Nabateans whose kingdom occupied much of the former area of Moab and who were annexed to the Roman empire by Trajan ca. 106 C.E.. Their economic and political prosperity within the empire may have led to a negative view of them as allies of Rome following the harsh persecutions of the Jews under Hadrian.

association with earthquakes heightens the unpredictable and powerful threat which his existence poses for the world. In both works, it is only by the action of God that that threat is controlled. In each, however, that action is presented in a different way.

In the Apocalypse of Abraham the power of the divine name acting through the angel Iael restrains the menace of the living creatures beneath the divine throne, holds the Leviathans in check, and controls the gateway to the underworld. Iael functions to ensure that the center of the world—the point at which all these elements come together, the holy mountain, the temple of God—maintains its stability. It is this guarantee of stability that makes it possible for the writer of the work to have hope in the face of the destruction of 70 C.E. and to assert that even the oppression of that time will give way to a new order in which the fortunes of the people of God will be restored and those who mocked them will be destroyed.

In the Ladder of Jacob, the point is made more explicitly. The order of the world has been disrupted. The eschatological crisis is escalating. The oppression of God's people is a sign that the center is giving way. The chthonic forces are welling up. Reptiles swarm upon the land. The powers of chaos are loosed. Earthquake and catastrophe run rampant. It is only by the action of God that order may be restored. The defeat of Leviathan is the decisive moment of the eschatological crisis. A new cosmic order is established. The people of God receive their just reward. The oppressors perish.

The tradition which underlies these two documents is probably not as well articulated as that which lay behind 4 Ezra 6:49-52, 2 Apoc. Bar. 29:4, and 1 Enoch 60:7-10 and 24. There it was possible to suppose a unit which, though still fluid, did at least have a basic order and shape. In the case of the Apocalypse of Abraham and the Ladder of Jacob, however, only the broadest of descriptions is possible. It is a tradition of associations behind which lies an intuition concerning the mythic valency of the figure Leviathan. It is the inchoate nature of this tradition which allows it to be used in such different ways by these two works. Yet it is the intuition of Leviathan's crucial place in the myths of order and chaos that underlie both accounts that brings to both, in their use of the Leviathan figure, a similarity of function which is striking.



## Chapter 3 Leviathan and Behemoth in Rabbinic Judaism

### 3.1. Leviathan and Behemoth Materials in Rabbinic Judaism

The corpus of aggadic materials concerning Leviathan and Behemoth is extensive. In some texts major blocks of material appear with lengthy descriptions and narratives about one or both of the monsters (TABLE 3.1).

Major Rabbinic Treatments of Leviathan and Behemoth
<p><i>b. B. Bat. 74b-75a</i> (ca. sixth-seventh cent. C.E.) A collection of sayings and tales concerning Leviathan and Behemoth.</p>
<p><i>Midr. Lev. Rab. 22.10</i> (ca. fifth cent. C.E.) (parallels: <i>Midr. Num. Rab. 21.18</i> [ca. twelfth cent. C.E.]; <i>Pesiq. Rab Kah. 6</i> [ca. sixth-seventh cent. C.E.]; <i>Pesiq. R.</i> 16.4, 48.3 [ca. eighth-tenth cent. C.E.]) Describes the vast hunger and thirst of Behemoth and Leviathan.</p>
<p><i>Pirqe R. El. 9</i> (ca. sixth-eighth cent. C.E.) Description of Leviathan in context of a description of the fifth day of creation.</p>
<p><i>Pesiq. Rab Kah. suppl. 2.4</i> (ca. sixth-seventh cent. C.E.) (parallels: <i>Midr. 'Alpā' bēfōt.</i> [ca. ninth-tenth cent. C.E.] in <i>BM 2. 437f.</i>; <i>Midr. Lev. Rab. 13.3</i> [ca. fifth cent. C.E.]; <i>Midr. Pss. 18, 23</i> [ca. tenth cent. C.E.]; <i>Nisṯārōf</i> in <i>BHM</i> 3, 80f.; <i>Piyyūt</i> of Eleazar be-Rabbi Qallir [ca. fifth-sixth cent. C.E.]; <i>Midr. Tanhūmā' sēmīnī</i> [ca. eighth-ninth cent. C.E.]) Eschatological combat between Leviathan and Behemoth and their role as food for the Messianic banquet.</p>
<p><i>Pirqe R. El. 10</i> (ca. sixth-eighth cent. C.E.) (parallel: <i>Midr. Yōnāh</i> [ca. seventh-eighth cent. C.E.] in <i>BHM 1, 96-105</i>) The history of Jonah and his confrontation with Leviathan</p>

TABLE 3.1

In other texts, the creatures play a more peripheral role (TABLE 3.2).

Rabbinic Texts in which Leviathan and Behemoth occur but are not Central Figures	
<b>IN THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD (CA. SIXTH-SEVENTH CENT. C.E.)</b>	
b. <i>Abōd. Zar.</i> 3b	When God sports with Leviathan.
b. <i>Šabbat</i> 77b	(parallel: <i>Pirqē Rabbēnū haq-qāfōs</i> 6,6) Leviathan's fear of the stickleback.
b. <i>Hullin</i> 3	Is Leviathan a clean fish?
<b>IN THE MAJOR MIDRASHIM</b>	
<i>Mek.</i> 20.11 (ca. first-second cent. C.E.)	Leviathan is the most excellent creature in the sea.
<i>Midr. Exod. Rab.</i> 15.22 (ca. tenth-eleventh cent. C.E.)	Leviathan dwells in the sea.
<i>Midr. Cant. Rab.</i> 1.4.2 (ca. sixth-seventh cent. C.E.)	A reference to the mysteries of Behemoth and Leviathan in a listing of esoteric teachings.
<b>IN MINOR MIDRASHIM AND OTHER COLLECTIONS</b>	
<i>Bāraytā 'di Ma 'āšeh Bērē 'šit</i> 47 (ca. eighth-tenth cent. C.E.)	(parallels: <i>Sefer Rabbā di Bērē 'šit</i> 17; <i>Midr. Kōnēn</i> 32; <i>Midr. 'Aseret ha-dibberōt</i> 62-3; etc.) (All date ca. eighth-tenth cent. C.E.); see also Rashbam on <i>b. B. Bat.</i> 74b.
	The world rests on the fin(s) of Leviathan
<i>Minḥat Yehūdah</i> on Gen 3:21 (1313 C.E.)	(parallel: <i>Sefer Hādar-Zeqēnim</i> [1227 C.E.] on Gen 3:21)
	Skin of Leviathan used to clothe Adam and Eve.
<i>Pirqē Mašiah</i> (BHM 3, 75) (ca. tenth cent. C.E.)	Skin of Leviathan used to make <i>sukkōr</i> for the righteous at the end of time; remainder covers the walls of the temple.
<i>'Aggādāṭ Šir ha-Širīm</i> (ed. Schechter) 45	Leviathan authorized to "destroy the rivers."

TABLE 3.2

The amount and the scope of this material move far beyond that of the biblical or Second Temple materials. There is a recognized propensity for hyperbole among

the aggadic writers.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Leviathan and Behemoth the rabbinic imagination has been given full play. Descriptions of the size and the power of the creatures elaborate extensively upon their biblical counterparts. In *b. B. Bat.* 75a, for example, Rabbis Dimi (fourth cent. C.E.) and Aha ben Jacob (fourth cent. C.E.), drawing on Job 41:23-24, describe the effect of Leviathan upon the sea:

When R. Dimi came, he said in the name of R. Johanan: "At the time when Leviathan is hungry, he sends forth breath from his mouth and it causes all the waters which are in the deep to boil, for it is said, 'he makes the deep boil like a pot' (Job 41:23). If he did not put his head into the Garden of Eden, not a single creature could stand his smell, for it is said, 'He makes the sea like a perfumer's pot' (Job 41:23). When he is thirsty, he makes many furrows in the sea, for it is said, 'He causes a track to shine after him' (Job 41:24)." R. Aha ben Jacob said, "The deep does not recover for seventy years, for it is said, 'He reckons the deep as hoary' (Job 41:24). No one less than seventy [years of age] is hoary."

This imaginative exposition of Job 41:23-24 goes beyond the allusions to natural marine phenomena which are a part of the original biblical text. In Job 41:23a it is stated simply that Leviathan causes the deep to boil. R. Dimi, however, describes how this is accomplished. The boiling is caused by the expulsion of Leviathan's breath when he is hungry.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, though Job 41:23b metaphorically describes the boiling deep as a perfumer's pot (*merqāhā*), R. Dimi takes this same image as a description of the monster's intense smell. This smell, he says, is so strong that no creature in the world could be able to stand it were it not for Leviathan placing his head in Eden. The aromatic essences of the garden apparently overcome his strong scent.<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Dimi continues, interpreting the

<sup>1</sup>*EncJud.* s.v. "Aggadah" by Moshe David Herr.

<sup>2</sup>The specificity of R. Dimi probably goes even further. The word used to describe the sea's action in Job is the *Hiphil* imperfect of the root *rth* (*yartāh*). The root carries the sense of boiling by means of the application of heat. In Job 41:23 it is used metaphorically to describe the action of the waters in response to Leviathan's movements. In R. Dimi's comment in *b. B. Bat.* 75a it may still carry this metaphorical sense, describing the agitation caused by the simple expulsion of breath. It seems more likely, however, that R. Dimi takes the image of a boiling sea quite literally, reading *yartāh* in light of Job 41:13:

*napsō gchālim telahet [we-lahab mippiw vēsē]*

Hence, the boiling of the sea would be the product of the fiery breath of the monster.

<sup>3</sup>The presence of Leviathan's head in the garden of Eden is a striking and unusual image. It appears again in the thirteenth-century German Hasidic compendium *Šefer Hasidim* (ed. Jehuda Wistenetzki, 2 ed., [Frankfurt a. M.: Wahrman, 1924] §1954a [p. 477]). Gershom Scholem has traced the origins of German Hasidism back through Italy to the *merkābā* mysticism of the Mesopotamian Jewish community, and from there back to the early mysticism of Palestine in Amoraic and Tannaitic times (*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* [New York: Schocken Books, 1941] 84-87). Given this ancestry and the high degree of Talmudic learning among the proponents of the German Hasidic movement, it is striking that when the presence of the head of Leviathan in Eden appears in *Šefer Hasidim*.