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A SEXUAL IMAGE IN HEKHALOT RABBATI
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

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A passage in *Hekhalot Rabbati*,¹ evidently a part of R. Nehuniah b. ha-Qanah's instruction on the "descent to the *merkavah*,"² describes a terrifying experience which the visionary must face at the gate of the seventh palace. In this description there is something odd and uncanny, which we cannot easily put our finger on but which seems in some way to account for the visionary's terror.

My purpose in this article is to explain what it is that inspires his dread, and to draw certain inferences from it about the *Hekhalot* and the ecstatic experiences that they purport to describe.

Nehuniah's instruction has taken us to the gate of the seventh palace, and introduced us to its guards. Chief among them is the great "prince" 'Anafiel (§241). We learn that 'Anafiel is one of the most exalted beings in heaven, comparable to the Creator. He appears, like Metatron in other sources, as "a servant who is named after his master" (§§242, 244).³ He opens and shuts the doors to the seventh palace,

and he stands by the gate of the seventh palace. The holy *hayyot* are by the gate of the seventh palace. The cherubim and 'ofannim are by the gate of the seventh palace. The two hundred and fifty-six faces of all the holy *hayyot* are by the gate of the seventh palace.⁴

[£246] Greater than all of them⁵ are the five hundred and twelve eyes of the four holy *hayyot* by the gate of the seventh palace. They have all of the facial forms of the sixteen faces of each of the *hayyot*, by the gate of the seventh palace.⁶

[§247] Whenever someone wants to descend to the *merkavah*, prince 'Anafiel opens for him the doors of the gate of the seventh palace. The man goes in and stands on the threshold of the gate of the seventh palace. The holy *hayyot* then look at him with their five

hundred and twelve eyes. Each one of the eyes of the holy *ḥayyot* is split open, the size of a large winnowers' (?) sieve [*pequ'ah keshi'ur kevarah gedolah shel...*];⁷ and their eyes look as if *they race like lightnings*.⁸ Besides them, there are the eyes of the mighty cherubim and of the '*ofannim* of the Shekhinah, which look like torches and flaming coals.

[§248] The man shudders and trembles and recoils; he faints in terror and collapses. But prince 'Anafiel, and the sixty-three guards of the gates of the seven palaces, all support him and help him. "Don't be afraid, child of the beloved seed," they say to him. "Go in, see the king in his beauty. You won't be destroyed and you won't be burned up."...⁹ [§250] They give him strength.

A trumpet then blows *from above the firmament that is over their heads* [Ezekiel 1:26]. The holy *ḥayyot* cover their faces; the cherubim and the '*ofannim* turn their faces away. [The man] goes in and stands before the throne of glory.

"Imagine," writes David Blumenthal, annotating Lauren Grodner's translation of this passage, "the gates to the seventh palace open, and you see the four Ezekielian Hayot, all of towering proportions. There are 256 faces and, hence, 512 eyes staring at you. Note the vivid description of the eyes."¹⁰ Grodner's translation of the crucial passage seems to me mistaken.¹¹ But Blumenthal has nevertheless correctly seen that the *ḥayyot's* eyes are essential to the effect this passage creates. It is not the "towering proportions" of the *ḥayyot* that generates terror — the passage does not even mention their size — but something about their weird, enormous eyes.

What that "something" is, we must now investigate.

Why do the *ḥayyot* have five hundred and twelve eyes? And what does it mean for each to be "split open" (*pequ'ah*), and likened to a sieve?

The first question is the easier to answer. An exegetical tradition, rooted in the Targum to Ezekiel 1:6 and developed in the *Hekhalot*, multiplies to a fantastic degree the faces and wings of the *ḥayyot*. Ezekiel 1:6 credits each *ḥayyah* with four faces and four wings. These figures are evidently too tame for the Aramaic translator, who gives each creature sixteen faces (total: sixty-four) and sixty-four wings (total: two hundred and fifty-six). An Aramaic passage near the beginning of *Hekhalot*

Zutarti draws on the Targum, but betters it: "Each one has four faces; four faces to a face; four faces for each face; sixteen faces for each face; sixty-four faces for each creature [*birya*]. The total number of faces of the four creatures [*biryan*] is to hundred and fifty-six." The author then applies the same calculations to the wings.¹² A Hebrew passage, found in MS New York of *Hekhalot Zutarti*, repeats these numbers: "Each one has four faces; four faces to a corner;¹³ four faces for each corner; sixty-four faces for each *ḥayyaht*."¹⁴

Given this tradition, which the *Hekhalot* authors seem to have gotten from the interpretations of the *merkavah* that were preached in the synagogue (as on Shavu'ot, when Ezekiel's vision was used as *haf-tarah*),¹⁵ we need not wonder why the four *ḥayyot* should be credited with two hundred and fifty-six faces and hence five hundred and twelve eyes. But why *such* eyes?

To answer this question, we must turn to another passage of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, which uses the image of a "sieve" that is "split open."

When the time for the afternoon prayer arrives each day, the splendid king sits and raises up the *ḥayyot*. Before he is through speaking, the holy *ḥayyot* come out from beneath the throne on glory. Their mouths are full of song, their wings full of joy; their hands play music and their feet dance. They surround their king, one on his right and one on his left, one in front of him and one behind him. They hug him and kiss him, and uncover [*mefare'ot*] their faces. They uncover, while the king of glory covers his face.¹⁶ The firmament 'Aravot splits open like a sieve [*mitbaqqa' kikhe-varah*] before the splendor, radiance, beauty, appearance, desire [*ḥemdat*], compassion, passion [*ta'awat*], shining light, magnificent appearance of their faces.¹⁷ So it is written: *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory* [Isaiah 6:3]. [Schäfer, §189; Wertheimer, 13:4].

We can hardly understand why the *ḥayyot's* actions should cause the heaven to "split open like a sieve," unless we are prepared to suppose that these words have a sexual meaning. The context in which they appear is openly erotic, with its hugging, kissing, and dancing. Its sexual overtones, indeed, are even stronger than appears on the surface. Two of the words in the long string of nouns describing the faces of the *ḥayyot*

are regularly used of sexual lust (*hemdah* and *ta'awah*, particularly the latter). *Pr'*, used here for the "uncovering" of the *hayyot*, suggests the uncovering of the corona during circumcision (*peri'ah*), as well as a person's uncovering himself to defecate.¹⁸ When, therefore, the heaven "splits open" before the splendor and passion of the *hayyot's* denuded "faces," we may take this to represent the climax of the sexual excitement that pervades the entire passage.

We may well assume that the sieve, a concave instrument whose function involves being penetrated,¹⁹ would be a natural symbol for the vagina; and we will presently see that rabbinic and classical sources confirm this assumption. We may further imagine that, if part of the sieve's meshwork were to give way, the resulting hole would suggest the vagina both in its shape and in the ease with which the materials being sifted would come pouring through it. This, I suggest, is what "splitting open like a sieve" means. It is a metaphor for the opening of the female genitals, here projected onto the heavens.

This gives us the key to interpreting the passage with which we began. The eyes of the *hayyot*, "split open" and compared to sieves, partake of the character of vaginas without thereby ceasing to be eyes. While their *number* can be explained as a conscious and deliberate allusion to an exegetical tradition rooted in the text of Ezekiel, their *description* points instead to the kind of symbolization that we know from our dreams, where different people or objects can be condensed into a single image, and the meanings that they individually have for us thereby coalesced.²⁰

Freud describes at one point a dream reminiscent of the experience of the *merkavah* traveller. The dreamer saw himself chasing a boy, who "*fled for protection to a woman, who was standing by a wooden fence, as though she was his mother. She was a woman of the working classes and her back was turned to the dreamer. At last she turned round and gave him a terrible look so that he ran off in terror. The red flesh of the lower lids of her eyes could be seen standing out.*" Analyzing the dream, Freud argues persuasively that the woman's terrible red eyes are the dreamer's distorted memory of a childhood view of female genitals.²¹

Vagina-eyes, it seems, could induce terror in nineteenth-century Viennese bourgeois as well as in Jewish visionaries of late antiquity. We must consider why this should be so, and what it has to tell us about the nature of the visionary experience. But first we must turn aside and consider

evidence supporting the conjecture that the sieve would have been used in antiquity as a vaginal symbol.

Rabbinic sources regularly use *kevarah* to describe the well of Miriam which, according to these sources, accompanied the Israelites on their wanderings through the desert.²² "It resembled a rock the size of a sieve [*melo' kevarah*], and would come bubbling up as if from the mouth of a jar" (T. Sukkah 3:11). "R. Hanina said: It was as big as the opening of a small sieve [*kimelo' pi kevarah qetannah*]" (*Gen. R.* 70:8; ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 805). Since those days it has been hidden away, somewhere under water. "R. Hiyya said: If you want to see Miriam's well, go to the top of Mount Carmel and look for something like a sieve in the sea [*kemin kevarah bayyam*]. That is Miriam's well" (BT Shabbat 35a). A parallel Palestinian tradition, again attributed to R. Hiyya, represented the well as being in Lake Tiberias, visible from a nearby mountain as "a small sieve" (*kemin kevarah qetannah*).²³ All of these passages, we may suppose, envision the sieve primarily as a concave object, not as a perforated one. Thus, we best understand R. Hiyya's statement as referring to a spot in the ocean (or lake) where water currents created something resembling a dimple on the surface.

T. Sukkah 3:11 continues:

The princes of Israel would come and surround it [the well] with their rods, and utter over it the song: *Rise up, O well! sing to it! Rise up, O well! sing to it!* [Numbers 21:17]. The water would bubble up and rise like a pillar, and each one would lead it off with his rod, to his tribe and to his family. So it is written: *The well which the princes dug, which the nobles of the people delved, with their scepters and with their rods* [Numbers 21:18].

We would do this lovely fantasy an injustice if we were to interpret it purely in terms of sexual symbolism. But it is hard to deny that element is present, in the interaction of the sieve-like well with the rods of the princes. While the column of water that rises from the well has a phallic quality, the well itself is seen as female. That is presumably why the rabbinic tradition (not, admittedly, in this passage) associates it specifically with Miriam.

The well is depicted on the walls of the Dura-Europos synagogue as a concave vessel. A small figure, perhaps Moses, stands beside it and dips

his rod into it.²⁴ We may infer that the tradition the artist followed gave the well a sexual, though surely not exclusively sexual, significance. What is important for our argument is that the rabbis could find no better way to describe this well than to liken it to a *kevarah*.²⁵

We may find an analogy in the symbolism that Greeks, from classical down to Roman times, attached to a similar implement called the *liknon*. The *liknon* was admittedly not a sieve, but a three-sided basket which was used, shaken deftly, to winnow grain.²⁶ Nevertheless, the Septuagint translator of Amos 9:9 chose to render *bakkevarbah* with *en tō likmō* (*likmos* is a variant form of *liknon*), showing that he regarded the two instruments as comparable.²⁷

The precise role played by the *liknon* in the religious life of the Greeks, and particularly in the mysteries of Dionysus, remains a matter of some controversy.²⁸ But surviving depictions, buttressed by literary sources, make fairly clear that the *liknon* was used in myth and presumably also in reality as a cradle for babies, including infant gods. It is shown containing fruits and, often, a phallus. It was carried in marriage processions. A vase of the sixth century B.C., depicting one such procession, shows two women carrying *likna* and a third carrying a vessel that Harrison thinks may have been a sieve. "Pollux states that the bride carried a sieve. If she did it was, like the *liknon*, a symbol of fertility rather than as Pollux suggests the 'symbol of her proper work'."²⁹ This last datum suggests that some of the winnowing-basket's associations may have spilled over to the kindred sieve.

These associations were clearly with the female sexual organs, including the womb that holds the infant ("fruit") as well as the vagina that holds the phallus. (In depictions of the *liknon* that I have seen, the phallus *emerges* from it, in a way that reminds me of the phallic water-column emerging from Miriam's well.) The Greek evidence thus offers indirect confirmation of what we have gathered from rabbinic sources; that in the world of the *Hekhalot* authors, a sieve would have seemed an appropriate symbol for female genitals. When, therefore, one of these authors likens the split-open eyes of the *ḥayyot* to huge sieves, he is not only indicating their size. He is also, no doubt unconsciously, calling our attention to the sexual concerns that lie behind his image.

This brings us back to the question of why the vagina-eyes are terrifying. Thoughts of sex, after all, are normally pleasant. The legends

surrounding Miriam's well seem to point to the comforting, nourishing aspects of sexuality. The well turns the Israelites' desert camp into a Venice, overflowing with "all the world's delicacies" (T. *Sukkah* 3:12-13). It heals a leper who accidentally bathes in it (*Lev. R.* 22:4). Why, in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, do the female genitals appear as images of dread?

In a short paper written in 1922, Freud suggested that Greek myths about the horrifying face of Medusa reflect the horror felt "when a boy, who has hitherto been unwilling to believe the threat of castration, catches sight of the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair, and essentially those of his mother."³⁰ (We recall that Medusa's face is surrounded by writhing snakes, corresponding to the pubic hair.) This "face" arouses terror, Freud thought, because the boy sees it as the wound left by a mutilation, which he himself may also suffer.

Philip Slater, followed by Melford Spiro, accepts Freud's identification of Medusa's face with the vagina. Spiro invokes in this connection an impressive array of evidence, from Greece, India, Burma, and the Trobriand Islands, that many men in many cultures indeed look upon the female genitals with awe and dread. But Slater and Spiro suggest a different explanation for this fear. It is rooted in the little boy's traumatic experiences with a mother who is angry and sexually frustrated, who turns to her tiny son with frightening sexual demands he cannot possibly fulfill.³¹

I cannot pass judgment on this issue. It appears to me, however, that our *Hekhalot Rabbati* passage fits in well with the view of Slater and Spiro. The visionary, who finds five hundred and twelve gigantic vaginas staring at him, seems very much a little boy caught in a bewildering and physically overwhelming world of adult sexuality, which seems on the verge of consuming him.³²

He faints. The comforting male figure of 'Anafiel hurries to his side, assures him that he is indeed a beloved child (*ben zera' 'ahub*), that he need not fear being consumed. The *hayyot* cover their terrible "faces." This gesture is the opposite of the one described in Schäfer, §189 (above). In that passage, it introduced the climax of the scene's sexual excitement. Here, its reversal means the relief of the scene's sexual anxiety.³³

Following Gershom Scholem, modern writers have tended to stress

the reality of the ecstatic experiences that lie behind the *Hekhalot*. There is a certain justice in this approach, especially insofar as it checks any tendency we might have to treat the *Hekhalot* as mere paper-and-ink exercises. But it can also be dangerously misleading. To the extent that we are rationalists, we must deny any objective reality to the things that the *Hekhalot* writers speak of seeing. However real they may have been to those who described them, we must consider them hallucinations which the visionaries created out of their prior beliefs, experiences, needs, and fears — just as they created their night-time dreams, just as we create ours.³⁴ We will not then be surprised to find sexual anxieties among the components of their hallucinations, as they are among the components of our dreams. Nor will we be surprised to find these anxieties represented, as in dreams, in a more or less distorted and disguised form.

I stress the word “among.” I have no inclination to explain everything in the *Hekhalot* as deriving from sexual concerns of individual visionaries. (In this paper itself, I have pointed to one feature, the number of the *hayyot*'s eyes, which seems to me to come from the synagogue exegesis of Ezekiel 1:6.) My claims have been more limited. I have argued that the description of each of the *hayyot*'s eyes as *pequ'ah kesh'ur gedolah*, which seems incongruous at best and unintelligible at worst, makes perfect sense when understood as a sexual image. I hope to have shown, further, that it makes psychological sense of the scene in which it occurs, and explains the powerful effect that the scene undoubtedly has upon the reader.³⁵

But this study does have implications for the rest of the *Hekhalot*. Certain common features of the *Hekhalot* seem to me best to make sense if understood as reflections of a child's contemplating the adult world. The most obvious of these is the enormous size the *Hekhalot* attribute to the heavenly beings. To say that this is “natural” is to evade the question. Given that these beings do not exist, it would be no less “natural” to imagine them as tiny as Tinkerbell than as the giants that inhabit the world of the *Hekhalot*. But, of course, from the child's point of view all adults are giants.³⁶

The aim of the *merkavah* traveller is to make his way safely through this realm of sometimes friendly, sometimes unfriendly giants. One of these giants, who occasionally functions as his patron and guide, was

once a human like himself. This is Metatron, formerly Enoch, who was raised to the realm of the angels, transformed into one of them, and given a place among them.³⁷

Metatron's appellation is *na'ar*, "youth." It is not at all clear why he should be called thus. Most scholars have been content with Scholem's explanation that his title does not mean "youth," but "servant," as often in the Bible.³⁸ This view is indeed plausible, and is supported by specific evidence within the *Hekhalot*.³⁹ But it is not completely satisfactory. If the *Hekhalot* writers meant to say that Metatron was a "servant," why did they not use some less ambivalent term, like *'eved* or *mesharet*? By choosing *na'ar* for this purpose, they surely invited confusion.

But, translated into terms of human development, Enoch-Metatron's achievement is that of the adolescent. He grows (= ascends) into the adult world; his body is transformed into that of an adult; he takes his place among adults. The myths of Metatron are celestial projections of this feat. When the authors of the *Hekhalot* called him *na'ar*, they did no less than tell us who he originally was.

To conclude: The terrifying "eyes" of the *hayyot* are representations of the vagina, which was evidently a source of anxiety for at least some of the *Hekhalot* visionaries. Distorted representations of this sort are familiar to us from our dreams. We do not create them consciously, and it is fair to assume that the *Hekhalot* authors did not either. My arguments in this paper therefore confirm that real visionary experiences — that is, bona fide hallucinations — underlie parts at least of the *Hekhalot*.

The anxiety expressed in the vagina-eye image is that of a child confronted with adult sexuality. Extrapolating from this, we may suspect that childish fantasies about the process of growing up into an adult were among the sources of the *Hekhalot* authors' fantasies of ascension and transformation.

1. I take my text of *Hekhalot Rabbati* from the seven manuscripts that Peter Schäfer has published in his *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen, 1981): New York (Jewish Theological Seminary) 8128, Munich 22 and 40, Oxford 1531, Dropsie University (Philadelphia) 436, Vatican 228, Budapest 238. None of these manuscripts seems to me consistently superior. I

- therefore translate an eclectic text, justifying my individual decisions in the footnotes. — I cite the text according to the brief numbered units (which I henceforth call “paragraphs”) into which Schäfer has divided it. §§240-245 correspond to chapter 23 of Solomon Wertheimer’s edition, §§246-250 to chapter 24 (Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashot* [Jerusalem, 1968;² originally published by Mosad Harav Kook, 1950-53]). Lauren Grodner’s translation (in David R. Blumenthal, *Understanding Jewish Mysticism* [New York, 1978], pp. 56-89) follows Wertheimer’s divisions of the text.
2. Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1965), pp. 9-13; Arnold Goldberg, “Einige Bemerkungen zu den Quellen und den redaktionellen Einheiten der Grossen Hekhalot,” *FJB* 1 (1973): 19-28; Lawrence H. Schiffman, “The Recall of Rabbi Nehuniah Ben Ha-Qanah from Ecstasy in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*,” *AJSR* 1 (1976): 269-281; Saul Lieberman, “The Knowledge of *Halakha* by the Author (or Authors) of the *Heikhaloth*,” in Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden, 1980), pp. 241-244; Margarete Schlüter, “Die Erzählung von der Rückholung des R. Nehunya ben Haqana aus der *Merkavah*-Schau in ihrem redaktionellen Rahmen,” *FJB* 10 (1982): 65-109.
 3. Joseph Dan discusses the problem of ‘Anafiel, and his relation to Metatron, in “Anafiel, Metatron, and the Creator,” *Tarbiz* 52 (1982-83): 447-457.
 4. So MSS Budapest, Vatican, Munich 22. The omissions of the other manuscripts can be explained as simple scribal error: the copyist’s eye jumped from *hekhhal hashshebi’* to *hekhhal hashshebi’i*. MSS Dropsie, Oxford, and Munich 40 read *kenafayim* or *kenafot* (“wings”) in place of *panim* (“faces”). This is probably a correction, in accord with Targ. Ezekiel 1:6; see below. 512 eyes imply 256 faces.
 5. *Gedolah mikkullam*. The formula is used repeatedly at the beginning of *Hekhalot Rabbati* (Schäfer, §§81-92; Wertheimer, 1:2-2:3), and in chapter 10 of *Midrash Mishle* (ed. Buber, pp. 33b-34a). It seems out of place here.
 6. I read *shellahem kol šurot panim* (MSS Dropsie, Munich 40); and take *shellahem* as the beginning of this sentence, not the end of the one that precedes. MSS Budapest, Vatican, Oxford, Munich 22 misread *kol šurot* as *shel šurat*, and mistakenly repeat *panim*; MS New York compounds the corruption by dropping *shel*. — This sentence contradicts what comes before it, in that it implies a total of 64 (not 256) faces for the four *hayyot*. I see no choice but to regard it as an interpolation, designed to bring the passage into agreement with Targ. Ezekiel 1:6 (see below).
 7. The copyists had immense difficulty with the last word. MSS New York and Vatican read של מבינים; Budapest, של מיבנים; Oxford, של (מי)בינים; (the

- parentheses mean that the first *yod* was added to the word); Dropsie, כִּינִים של מי; Munich 40, על מניני(ים), Munich 22 omits the last word altogether. I assume it must originally have been מנפים, "winnowers." The *nun* and the *pe* were accidentally exchanged, and the *pe* later read as *bet*; the other corruptions followed from these. (For the use of pi'el/pu'al *nph* with *Kevarha*, see *Pesiqta Rabbati* 3:4, ed. Friedmann, p. 11b.)
8. Nahum 2:5; cf. Ezekiel 1:13-14.
 9. I omit §249, which consists of a long string of attributes of God's royalty: "He is a righteous king, he is a faithful king," and so forth.
 10. Blumenthal (above, n. 1), p. 78.
 11. "Five hundred and twelve eyes, and each and every eye of the eyes of the Holy Hayot is hollow like the holes in a sieve woven of branches" (*ibid.*). I cannot imagine how Grodner justifies this translation.
 12. Schäfer, §354; lines 105-112 in Rachel Elior's edition of *Hekhalot Zutarti* (Jerusalem, 1982; *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, Supplement 1), which is based on MS New York. I translate MS Munich 22; MS New York has a similar text, but makes a clumsy effort to "correct" it by inserting Targ. Ezekiel 1:6 (Elior, lines 105-106). The writer's dependence on Targum is clear from the way he abandons his own term *ḥayyata* (an Aramaized form of *ḥayyot*) for the Targum's *biryan*. A little later, he speaks of the *ḥayyot* as singing hymns "before holy El Shaddai" (*qodam 'el shadday qaddissha*; Schäfer, §355, Elior, lines 118-119); this plainly echoes Targ. Ezekiel 1:24, *gala min qodam shadday*. His *Mishtatteqan* Elior, line 117) echoes Targ. Ezekiel 1:24, *meshatteqan gappehon*. His "when they speak, they shatter and shake the world with their speech" (MS Munich 22; cf. Elior, lines 117-118) combines Targ. Ezekiel 1:7 and 1:24. — I am deeply grateful to my friend Marc Bregman for calling my attention to Elior's *Hekhalot Zutarti*.
 13. *Pinnah*. The parallel in Schäfer, §954 (below), suggests that the author originally wrote *paneh*, a clumsy attempt to reproduce in Hebrew the Aramaic singular ('*appa*,') "face." This clearly points to an Aramaic tradition underlying the Hebrew text.
 14. Schäfer, §368; Elior, lines 245-246. The passage also occurs in MS Munich 40, amid material conventionally labeled "*Shi'ur Qomah*" (Schäfer, §954; cf. Martin Samuel Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* [Lanham, Md., 1983], pp. 227-229). A later passage of *Hekhalot Zutarti*, evidently connected with the same source, abandons this total of two hundred and fifty-six faces for the more modest Targumic figure of sixty-four (Schäfer, §371; Elior, lines 268-270).
 15. I argue this point in detail in *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish*

- Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen, forthcoming); more briefly, in "Origen, Ezekiel's Merkabah, and the Ascension of Moses," *Church History* 50 (1981): 261-275.
16. *Hen mefare'ot umelekh hakkavod mekhasseh panaw* (MSS Dropsie, Munich 40, supported by Vatican and Oxford). MS New York reads *mitpare'ot*, while Budapest and Munich 22 supply (*'et*) *penehem* after the verb. I prefer the shorter reading, since it is easier to understand a copyist's motive for inserting the object than for leaving it out. The original author, as we will see, had reason to introduce a touch of ambiguity as to what it is that the *hayyot* uncover.
17. *Wehayah 'aravot raqia' mitbaqqa' kikhevarah mippene hadar ziw yofi to'ar hemdat hemlat ta'awat zohar 'or shevah mar'eh penehem*. The first five words are so attested by MSS Budapest, Vatican, and perhaps New York (though the reading of *kikhevarah* is uncertain). The other manuscripts differ on their representation of the fifth word: ככברה (Munich 40), ככברה (Dropsie), כוכב דעא (Munich 22), כוכב דעח (Dropsie margin). MS Oxford omits it entirely. All of these readings obviously go back to ככברה; they indicate that some scribes found the expression strange, and did not know what to do with it. — I read *mippene hadar ziw* with MSS Budapest, Munich 22, and the original text of Vatican. MSS Dropsie and Munich 40 have *mippene melekh mippene hadar ziw*; MSS Oxford and New York, *mippene melekh hadar ziw*. (Someone accordingly inserted *melekh* into MS Vatican.) It is possible that the longest reading is the oldest, that the shortest reading originated when a scribe's eye skipped from *mippene* to *mippene*, and that other scribes omitted the second *mippene* as gratuitous but left *melekh* intact. It is the shortest reading, however, that yields the best sense. I therefore am inclined to suppose that it is the oldest, that *melekh* was inserted under the influence of the phrase *melekh hadur* ("splendid king") at the beginning of the passage, and that *mippene melekh mippene hadar ziw* is a conflation of these two readings. — All manuscripts but Budapest and Munich 22 corrupt *'or shevah* in one way or another. — I suspect, but cannot show from the manuscripts, that *hemlat* was originally a dittograph of *hemdat*.
18. Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (reprinted New York, 1971). The meaning "to castrate," for pi'el *pr'*, adds to the sexual connotations of the root, although in this case in a negative sense.
19. Gustaf Dalman describes the Mishnaic *kevarah* and its twentieth-century Palestinian counterparts: *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina*, 3 (originally published 1933; reprinted Hildesheim, 1964), pp. 139-143, plates 29, 31-33.

20. Frank J. Sulloway gives a useful summary of Freud's discussions of this and other dream-processes: *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (New York, 1979), pp. 335-339. Freud's own dream of "Uncle Josef" is a good example of the coalescence of several figures into one; see *Interpretation of Dreams*, tr. and ed. by James Strachey (New York, 1965), pp. 170-175.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 234-235.
22. Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 3 (Philadelphia, 1942-47), pp. 50-54, and notes (see Index, s.v. "Miriam, Well of"); Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-feshutah*, 4 (New York, 1962), pp. 876-879.
23. PT Kil'ayim 9:3 (32c; omits the word *qetannah*), Ketubbot 12:3 (35b); *Lev. R.* 22:4, ed. Margulies, pp. 510-511. All three passages apply R. Hiyya's utterance to the words of Numbers 21:20, "that looks out upon the *yeshimon*," and understand *yeshimon* as the name of the mountain from which the "sieve" may be seen. *Tanḥuma* midrashim offer a similar interpretation of this verse, but with an odd variation: The well "was concealed [*nignezah*] in the midst of Lake Tiberias. A person standing upon the *yeshimon* can see something in the lake the size of the opening of an oven [*kimelo' pi tannur*]. This is the well that looks out upon the *yeshimon*" (*Tanh. Ḥuqqat* §21; *Tanh. Buber Ḥuqqat* §48; cf. *Numb. R.* 19:6). Lieberman (above, n. 22) dismisses *tannur* as a scribal error for *kevarah*, based on M. Ta'anit 3:6. But the variant has a legitimacy of its own — at least from the viewpoint of the Freudians, who have long seen the oven as a common symbol for the womb; see B. Bettelheim, *Freud and Man's Soul* (New York, 1983), pp. 51-52. It is surely linked to the Koran's strange claim that "the oven gushed forth water" (*fara al-tannur*) at Noah's flood (Surah 11:40 and 23:27, tr. Pickthall), and must be taken into account in studying the Jewish background of early Islam. Cf. *Tanh.* (and *Tanh. Buber*) *Bemidbar* §2 where, following Buber, we may suppose the original reading to have been *sela' kemin kevarah*.
24. Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, vol. 10, pp. 27-41; rd. 11, plates XII and 331 (New York, 1964).
25. My colleague, Professor Terence M. Evens (Department of Anthropology), has reminded me that 'ayin can mean "spring" (of water, that is) as well as "eye." This double meaning, combined with the *haggadot* about Miriam's well, may point to a chain of associations linking the "sieve" with the "eyes" of the *ḥayyot*: sieve — well (of Miriam) — spring — eye.
26. Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (originally published 1903; reprinted New York, 1975), pp. 517-534; "Mystica Vannus Iacchi," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 23 (1903): 292-324. Unlike the Septua-

- gint (below), Aquila uses *koskinon* (the normal Greek word for sieve) to translate *kevarah* in Amos 9:9, reserving *likmos* for the *mizreh* of Jeremiah 15:7 (Frederick Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum Quae Supersunt... Fragmenta* [Oxford, 1875]). Cf. Samuel Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie* (originally published 1910-12; reprinted Hildesheim, 1966), 1, pp. 97-98; 2, pp. 191-192, 577, n. 287.
27. Pointed out to me by my friend, student, and research assistant, Robert B. Spencer, to whose researches I owe most of the information on the *liknon* I give in this and the next paragraph. I am grateful, too, to my colleague Professor Edwin L. Brown (Department of Classics), who took the time to discuss with me the problems of the *liknon*.
 28. References in Albert Henrichs, "Changing Dionysiac Identities," in Ben F. Meyer and E.P. Sanders, eds., *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, 3 (Philadelphia, 1982), p. 148 and n. 109.
 29. Harrison, "Mystica Vannus Iacchi" (above, n. 26), p. 316.
 30. "Medusa's Head," in James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 18 (London, 1955), pp. 273-274.
 31. Philip E. Slater, *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family* (Boston, 1968), pp. 16-23, 317-324; Melford E. Spiro, *Oedipus in the Trobriands* (Chicago and London, 1982), pp. 113-140.
 32. That Jewish women in antiquity sometimes turned to their little sons for sexual pleasure is clear enough from T. Sotah 5:7, PT Gittin 8:10 (49c), BT Sanhedrin 69b.
 33. I note two other *Hekhalot* passages which speak of the covering and uncovering of faces: 1) A passage describing the hymning of the heavenly beings, which does not seem securely connected to any of the conventionally defined *Hekhalot* texts, tells how the *hayyot* cover their faces with lightning, while God uncovers His face: *mekhassot penehem bevaraq wehqb''h porea' panaw* (Schäfer, §534, cf. §184). But the parallel published by A. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 3 (originally published 1853-77; reprinted Jerusalem, 1967), p. 162, reads instead: *mekhassot penehem bekhanfehem wehqb''h yit' hozer panaw mehem*. 2) A Genizah fragment of an otherwise unknown *Hekhalot* text describes how the terrifying angelic guards "cover their faces [*mekhassin penehem*], and great silence is upon their faces": I. Gruenwald, "New Passages from *Hekhalot* Literature," *Tarbiz* 38 (1968-69): 362.
 34. Scholem claims that the Talmud's warning against saying "water, water" (BT Hagigah 14b) "clearly enough refers to a *real* danger in the process of ascending to 'Paradise'" (*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* [New York

1954], p. 52; italics are Scholem's). This remark illustrates how easily we can slip from a rational belief in the reality of the trance experience, into an irrational belief in the reality of the things "experienced" in trance. There is no "real danger in the process of ascending to 'Paradise,'" any more than the ascent itself is "real." The ascent and its dangers are both creations of the visionary himself, and must be explained in terms of his own background and motivations.

35. The twelfth chapter of the New Testament Book of Revelation offers an analogous case of a piece of sexual imagery cropping up in a document that does not seem, by and large, to yield to explanation along sexual lines. The chapter describes, in a sequence of apparently mythic images whose origin and meaning remain unclear, a conflict between a goddess-like "woman" and a "dragon" (Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* [Missoula, Mont., 1976]). The dragon (*drakōn*) chases the woman into a desert; then, at the very end of verse 14 (in the Greek), changes abruptly into a "serpent" (*ophis*; 12:9 and 20:2 make the equation that justifies this shift). "The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river which the dragon had poured from his mouth" (12:15-16, RSV). When we see a snake chasing a woman and squirting water at her out of his mouth, I can hardly doubt that the underlying thought is of sex. But I am not able to say how this contributes to our understanding of the passage's surroundings, or of the Book of Revelation as a whole.
36. Bruno Bettelheim describes a five-year-old boy's response to the story of Jack and the Beanstalk: "There aren't any such things as giants, are there?... But there are such things as grownups, and they're like giants." Like Philip Slater (above, n. 31), pp. 316-318, Bettelheim makes use of this principle to interpret the fairy tale; see *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York, 1977), pp. 27, 183-194. Freud used the same principle to interpret dreams: "A woman patient told me a dream in which *all the people were especially big*. 'That means,' she went on, 'that the dream must be to do with events in my early childhood, for at that time, of course, all grown-up people seemed to me enormously big'"; *Interpretation of Dreams* (above, n. 20), p. 443.
37. Most fully set forth in the so-called *3 Enoch*, chapters 1-16 (Hugo Odeberg, editor and translator, *3 Enoch, or, The Hebrew Book of Enoch* [originally published 1928; reprinted, with Prolegomenon by Jonas C. Greenfield, New York, 1973]). The literature on Metatron is considerable. Scholem's

- discussions remain basic to any study of the question; see *Major Trends* (above, n. 34), pp. 67-70; *Jewish Gnosticism* (above, n. 2), pp. 43-55.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 50; cf. Greenfield (above, n. 37), p. XXXI.
39. Scholem (*loc. cit.*) points out that Metatron sometimes appears with the Aramaic title *shammasha reḥima*, "beloved servant." We may add that one passage calls him *na'ar ne'eman* (Schäfer, §76; the text that Odeberg prints, as chapter 48(D):1 of *3 Enoch*, omits these words), which seems to correspond to *'ebed ne'eman* in one passage of *Hekhalot Rabbati* (Schäfer, §96; Wertheimer, 3:2; cf. Numbers 12:7).

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