

Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism

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# Hekhalot Literature in Context

Between Byzantium and Babylonia

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Mohr Siebeck

“What is Below?”  
Mysteries of Leviathan in the Early Jewish  
Accounts and Mishnah Hagigah 2:1

ANDREI A. ORLOV

In chapter 9 of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, a Jewish work composed in the early centuries of the Common Era, God promises Abraham that He will reveal to him the utmost secrets of the universe.<sup>1</sup> The following chapter unveils Abraham’s encounter with his angelic guide, a celestial creature named Yahoel. The great angel introduces himself to the patriarch by explaining his roles and functions. While some of the angel’s offices look familiar, others are not. Yahoel’s enigmatic responsibilities include not only guardianship over angelic or human beings, but also over dwellers of the demonic realm. In *Apoc. Ab.* 10:9–10, Yahoel says that God appointed him to rule not only over the living creatures of the divine throne but also over the Leviathans. This association of the angelic bearers of the chariot with the creatures of the underworld has long puzzled students of the Slavonic apocalypse. This juxtaposition of the domain of the chariot with the domain of the Leviathans that occurs in the beginning of Abraham’s initiation into the heavenly secrets is invoked again later at the pivotal point of the text when Abraham receives a vision of the underworld while standing near the divine throne.

Thus in chapter 21 of the text, the patriarch, brought by the angel Yahoel to the deity’s throne room, is given a vision of the “likeness of heaven,” a puzzling disclosure portraying the domain of the Leviathans.<sup>2</sup> Several words must be said

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars noted that the peculiar formulation of these mysteries betrays the subtle similarities with early Jewish mystical conceptual developments. Thus, Alexander Kulik argued that the terminology of secrets used in *Apocalypse of Abraham* is reminiscent of the terminology found in the Hekhalot tradition (*Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham*, Text-Critical Studies 3 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2004], 86–87).

<sup>2</sup> On the Leviathan traditions, see Cyrus H. Gordon, “Leviathan: Symbol of Evil,” in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966) 1–9; Jefim Schirmann, “The Battle between Behemoth and Leviathan according to an Ancient Hebrew Piyyut,” in *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 4 (1967): 327–69; Michael A. Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 41–55; Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 273–85; Moshe Idel, “Levi-

about the peculiar arrangement of the patriarch's vision during which the exalted hero of the faith literally gazes into the abyss from the heights of his most elevated position near the theophanic abode of the deity. In this ultimate revelation of the divine mysteries, the patriarch's vision of the divine chariot is paradoxically conflated with his vision of the realm of the Leviathan. This setting seems to provide important evidence for a correspondence between the lower and upper realms, a parallelism that is already hinted at in the double duties of the great angels in chapter 10 of the Slavonic apocalypse.<sup>3</sup>

It is worthwhile to examine Abraham's vision in closer detail. In the beginning of this mysterious disclosure, the deity orders the seer to look beneath his feet and "contemplate the creation." Abraham looks down the expanse and beholds what the text calls the "likeness of heaven."<sup>4</sup> The reference to the "likeness of heaven"<sup>5</sup> has baffled many scholars<sup>6</sup> because the authors of the text include as part of the "resemblance of heaven" the lower domain resting on Leviathan.<sup>7</sup>

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athan and its Consort: From Talmudic to Kabbalistic Myth" [in Hebrew], in *Myths in Judaism: History, Thought, Literature*, ed. Ithamar Gruenwald and M. Idel (Jerusalem: Z. Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2004), 145–86; K. William Whitney Jr., *Two Strange Beasts: Leviathan and Behemoth in Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006); J. Yahalom and B. Laffer, "Mi lo Yirekha Melekh: A Lost Siluk by Kalir for Rosh Hashanah," in *Studies in Hebrew Poetry and Jewish Heritage: In Memory of Aaharon Mirsky*, ed. Ephraim Hazan and Joseph Yahalom (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2006), 127–58; Alexander Kulik, "'The Mysteries of Behemoth and Leviathan' and the Celestial Bestiary of 3 Baruch," *Le Muséon* 122 (2009): 291–329.

<sup>3</sup> Several scholars have previously noted the dualistic tendencies of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Thus, Michael Stone draws attention to the traditions found in chapters 20, 22, and 29 where the reference to Azazel's rule, which he exercises jointly with God over the world, coincides "with the idea that God granted him authority over the wicked" (*Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984], 418). Stone suggests that "these ideas are clearly dualistic in nature" (*ibid.*, 418). Stone further makes a connection between dualistic tendencies found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the traditions from the Qumran documents. He observes that "the idea of joint rule of Azazel and God in this world resembles the doctrine of the Rule of Community, according to which there are two powers God appointed to rule in the world (cf. 1QS 2:20–1)" (*ibid.*, 418). It should be noted that the connections between the dualism of the Slavonic apocalypse and the Palestinian dualistic traditions have been recognized by several scholars. Already George Box, long before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, argued that the dualistic features of the Slavonic apocalypse are reminiscent of the "Essene" dualistic ideology. Thus, Box suggested that "the book is essentially Jewish, and there are features in it which suggest Essene origin; such are its strong predestinarian doctrine, its dualistic conceptions, and its ascetic tendencies" (G. H. Box and J. I. Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, Translations of Early Documents [London: SPCK, 1918], xxi).

<sup>4</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 26.

<sup>5</sup> Slav. подобие неба. Belkis Philonenko-Sayar and Marc Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, Semitica 31 (Paris: Librairie Adrien-Maison-neuve, 1981), 84.

<sup>6</sup> Cf., for example, Horace Lunt's comment in R. Rubinkiewicz, "The Apocalypse of Abraham," *OTP*, 1:699.

<sup>7</sup> *Apoc. Ab.* 21:1–4 (Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 26) reads: "And he said to me,

The focal point of this puzzling depiction is Leviathan,<sup>8</sup> depicted here as the cosmic foundation of the lower realm. Reference to the idea that “the created world (universe) ... lies upon him [Leviathan]” is especially important.<sup>9</sup> It portrays Leviathan as the “holder” and “the foundation” of the lower created order. From the highest point of heavens the throne of the deity, sustained by the efforts of the Living Creatures, the hero of the faith beholds another mysterious “holder” of cosmic dimensions in the lowest point of creation, the abyss. This curious correspondence between the upper and lower points of creation with their respective “sustainers” or “holders” does not appear coincidental. Similar to the *ḥayyot*, the living creatures that sustain the upper foundation of the deity’s throne, Leviathan, too, can be seen as the pivotal holder of the lower foundation.

In light of these correspondences, it become clear why earlier in the text, in the introduction of Yahoel’s duties, the Leviathans are mysteriously paired with the *ḥayyot*. It suggests that the Leviathans might fulfill the same function in the lower realm as do the *ḥayyot* in the upper realm. The parallelism between the *ḥayyot* and the Leviathans in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is also reinforced in the aforementioned terminology of “likeness” when the seer beholds the realm of Leviathan as “likeness of heaven.”

The positioning of the enigmatic conjunction of the realm of the chariot and the realm of the Leviathan(s) at the starting and final points of the patriarch’s initiation into the heavenly secrets appears to be deliberate and might be of special significance to the writers or editors of the text. This combination appears to reveal some similarities to the Jewish understanding of esoteric subjects in some early Jewish and rabbinic materials. This correspondence, therefore, should be explored more closely in the light of relevant early Jewish and rabbinic sources.

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‘Look now beneath your feet at the expanse and contemplate the creation which was previously covered over. On this level there is the creation and those who inhabit it and the age that has been prepared to follow it.’ And I looked beneath the expanse at my feet and I saw the likeness of heaven and what was therein. And [I saw] there the earth and its fruits, and its moving ones, and its spiritual ones, and its host of men and their spiritual impieties, and their justifications, <and the pursuits of their works,> and the abyss and its torment, and its lower depths, and the perdition which is in it. And I saw there the sea and its island<s>, and its animals and its fishes, and Leviathan and his domain, and his lair, and his dens, and the world which lies upon him, and his motions and the destruction of the world because of him.”

<sup>8</sup> Or maybe even a pair of Leviathans. Louis Ginzberg previously argued that *Apoc. Ab.* 21:4 which tells about the Leviathan and “its possession” might represent a mistranslation of a Hebrew phrase – “the Leviathan and his mate.” Ginzberg notes that “the Apocalypse of Abraham 10 speaks of Leviathans (i.e., the male and female monsters), which the archangel Jaol holds in check; in another passage (21; the text is not quite clear) Leviathan and his possession are spoken of, where, perhaps, the Leviathan and his mate should be read.” L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), 5:45n127. See also Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 51n73.

<sup>9</sup> Philonenko-Sayar and Philonenko, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham*, 84.

## Secrets of the *Hayyot* and Secrets of Behemoth and Leviathan

It is possible that the juxtaposition of the *hayyot* and the Leviathans amid the revelation of secrets is intended to identify two subjects of esoteric knowledge, one of which is tied to the vision of the chariot and other to the vision of the creation. An important question arises, however: how unusual is this conjunction of the secrets of the realms of the merkavah and the realm of the Leviathans in early Jewish writings and rabbinic literature?

A well-known tradition in *m. Hag. 2* outlines several fields of esoteric knowledge, delimiting strict boundaries for their study. The mishnaic passage specifically mentions the Account of Creation (*ma'aseh vereshit*) and the Account of the Chariot (*ma'aseh merkavah*), saying that “the forbidden degrees may not be expounded before three persons, nor the Account of Creation before two, nor the Chariot before one alone, unless he is a sage that understands of his own knowledge.”<sup>10</sup> These two important esoteric subjects, one consisting of *ma'aseh merkavah* and the other, *ma'aseh vereshit*, will eventually give rise to prominent interpretive traditions in later Jewish mystical speculation. It is intriguing that in later rabbinic materials the theme of the great primordial monsters, Leviathan and Behemoth, became very important and is often developed in the course of *ma'aseh vereshit* speculation. Further, the great monsters became an emblematic feature of the Account of Creation to the point that some rabbinic passages even speak, not about *ma'aseh merkavah* and *ma'aseh vereshit*, but about the secrets of the chariot and the secrets of the monsters. One of the examples of this peculiar juxtaposition is *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:28 where the revelation of the secrets of the chariot is conflated with the revelation of the secrets of Behemoth and Leviathan. The text reads: “For whence was Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite to know how to reveal to Israel the secrets of Behemoth and Leviathan, and whence was Ezekiel to know how to reveal to them the secrets of the chariot. Hence it is written: The King hath brought me into his [secret] chambers.”<sup>11</sup>

In his analysis of the first part of this passage about the secrets of Leviathan and Behemoth, Michael Fishbane suggests that “we are not informed just what this disclosure consists of; but it undoubtedly involves the esoteric nature of these monsters as part of the work of creation, since this instruction<sup>12</sup> is mentioned together with the fact that Ezekiel will reveal to them the secrets of the chariot.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 212–13.

<sup>11</sup> *Midrash Rabbah*, ed. Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon, 10 vols. (London: Soncino, 1961), 9:47–48.

<sup>12</sup> In relation to this passage other scholars also suggested that “it is conceivable that just as there was a *baraita* devoted to the subject of *ma'aseh merkavah*, so some kind of compilation may have existed containing material relating to Behemoth and Leviathan.” Irving Jacobs, *The Midrashic Process: Tradition and Interpretation in Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 158.

<sup>13</sup> Fishbane, *Biblical Myth*, 278.

Fishbane argues convincingly that the lore about the great monsters often serves in the rabbinic materials as an important marker of the subject of the *ma'aseh vereshit* that is juxtaposed there with the subject of the *ma'aseh merkavah*.<sup>14</sup>

It might be tempting to view these later rabbinic testimonies about the *hayyot* and the Leviathans as inventions that have little to do with the early Jewish traditions about the great monsters. A close analysis of the early sources, however, demonstrates that already even in some Second Temple materials esoteric knowledge about the Leviathans became juxtaposed with the secrets of the chariot. These important developments should be explored in detail. We will begin our investigation of this early evidence by returning to the aforementioned tradition from *m. Hagigah*. There one can find a cryptic warning about the study of esoteric subjects: “Whosoever gives his mind to four things it was better for him if he had not come into the world – what is above? what is beneath? what was beforetime? and what will be hereafter.”<sup>15</sup>

What this formula means has long been debated among scholars.<sup>16</sup> Some argue that this mishnaic formulation of esoteric subjects encompasses two dimensions, first spatial, realms above and beneath, and second, temporal, which includes protological and eschatological markers (what was beforetime and what will be hereafter). Others recognize in the formula only one dimension, spatial, suggesting, for example, that the mishnaic expression might intend to describe

<sup>14</sup> Fishbane, *Biblical Myth*, 273–285.

<sup>15</sup> Danby, *The Mishnah*, 213.

<sup>16</sup> See S. Löwenstamm, “On an Alleged Gnostic Element in Mishnah Hagigah ii.1” [in Hebrew], in *Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume: Studies in Bible and Jewish Religion*, ed. Menahem Haran (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1960), 112–21; Hans-Friedrich Weiss, *Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie des hellenistischen und palästinischen Judentums*, TU 97 (Berlin: Akademie, 1966), 79–83; Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology*, NovTSup 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 208; Gerd A. Wewers, *Geheimnis und Geheimhaltung im rabbinischen Judentum*, Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 35 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975), 46–45; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 75–76; Pieter van der Horst, “Moses’ Throne Vision in Ezekiel the Dramatist,” *JJS* 34 (1983) 28; David Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel’s Vision*, TSAJ 16 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), 4, 252; Alon Goshen-Gottstein, “One Does not Expound the Story of Creation: Why?” [in Hebrew], in *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies, August 16–24, 1989* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1990), Div. C, 61–68; Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 33; D.H. Aaron, *Polemics and Mythology: A Commentary on Chapters 1 and 8 of “Bereshit Rabba”* (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1992), 186–192; Alon Goshen-Gottstein, “Four Entered Paradise Revisited,” *HTR* 88 (1995): 69–133, at 75–76; Crispin Fletcher-Louis, “4Q374: A Discourse on the Sinai Tradition: The Deification of Moses and Early Christology,” *DSD* 3 (1996): 236–252, at 246; Marc Brettler, “Memory in Ancient Israel,” in *Memory and History in Christianity and Judaism*, ed. Michael A. Signer (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 1–7, at 3; Jonathan Schofer, “Spiritual Exercises in Rabbinic Culture,” *AJS Review* 27 (2003): 203–25, at 213; Christopher Rowland and Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament*, CRINT 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 221–27.

the dimension of the divine body.<sup>17</sup> The provenance of the formula has also been debated in an attempt to trace the roots of the mishnaic tradition to biblical, pseudepigraphical, or gnostic materials. It has also been suggested that mishnaic formulae might stem from the Mesopotamian materials.<sup>18</sup> In this study I would like to focus only on several early Jewish traditions in an attempt to clarify possible roots of the mishnaic formula.

It appears that the mishnaic formula reflects some settings found in early Jewish visionary accounts. If so, the formula found in *m. Hagigah* might serve as the crucial link between the early visionary traditions contemplating the subjects of the Account of Creation and the Account of the Chariot and later rabbinic developments. Let us first turn our attention to some early Jewish accounts.

Scholars have previously noted that the mishnaic formula appears to be reminiscent of the description of esoteric subjects conveyed in a vision to Moses in the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel the Tragedian.<sup>19</sup> Preserved in fragmentary form by several ancient sources,<sup>20</sup> *Exagoge* 67–90 describes Moses' vision on Mount Sinai. In his dream, the seer beholds a noble man seated on the great throne with a crown and a large scepter in his left hand. In the course of the vision the noble man vacates his exalted seat and instructs Moses to sit on it, transferring to him his crown. Then Moses is given a vision of the whole world: he has been enabled to see above the heavens and beneath the earth. Further, a multitude of stars fall before Moses' knees as he counts them. The stars parade before the dreaming prophet like a battalion of men.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Goshen-Gottstein, "One Does not Expound the Story of Creation: Why?" 61–68; Schofer, "Spiritual Exercises in Rabbinic Culture," 213.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Löwenstamm, "On an Alleged Gnostic Element," 112–21; Brettler, "Memory in Ancient Israel," 3.

<sup>19</sup> Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, 208. See also van der Horst, "Moses' Throne Vision," 28; Fletcher-Louis, "4Q374: A Discourse on the Sinai Tradition," 246.

<sup>20</sup> The Greek text of the passage was published in several editions, including: A.-M. Denis, *Fragmenta pseudepigraphorum quae supersunt graeca* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 210; Bruno Snell, ed., *Tragicorum graecorum fragmenta*, 4 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 1:288–301; Howard Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 54; Carl Holladay, ed., *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, 3 vols., Pseudepigrapha Series 12 (Chico, CA: Scholar Press, 1983), 2:362–66.

<sup>21</sup> *Exagoge* 67–90 (Jacobson, *Exagoge of Ezekiel*, 54–55) reads: "Moses: I had a vision of a great throne on the top of Mount Sinai and it reached till the folds of heaven. A noble man was sitting on it, with a crown and a large scepter in his left hand. He beckoned to me with his right hand, so I approached and stood before the throne. He gave me the scepter and instructed me to sit on the great throne. Then he gave me a royal crown and got up from the throne. I beheld the whole earth all around and saw beneath the earth and above the heavens. A multitude of stars fell before my knees and I counted them all. They paraded past me like a battalion of men. Then I awoke from my sleep in fear. Raguel: My friend, this is a good sign from God. May I live to see the day when these things are fulfilled. You will establish a great throne, become a judge and leader of men. As for your vision of the whole earth, the world below and that above the heavens – this signifies that you will see what is, what has been and what shall be."



After the son of Amram receives this revelation, his mysterious interpreter, Raguel, informs the seer that his vision of the whole earth – the world below and above the heavens – signifies that he will see what is, what has been, and what shall be. Several scholars have previously suggested that the formula is closely connected to the rabbinic formulation from *m. Hag. 2*. It encompasses a distinctive spatial dimension, the world below and the world above, as well as a temporal dimension, "what is, what has been and what shall be." It is interesting that the *Exagoge* is not unique in its attempt to connect Moses with such an enigmatic formula. A later rabbinic tradition also ties Moses with the mishnaic formulation: "Moses did not do well in hiding his face, for had he not done so, God would have revealed to him what is above and what is below, what has happened and what will happen" (*Exod. Rab. 3:1*).<sup>22</sup>

Let us return to the *Exagoge*. Scholars' suggestion that the expression found there is reminiscent of the mishnaic formulation should be examined more closely in the context of the entire passage. The first thing that catches the eye here is that in the *Exagoge* the seer beholds the vision of the chariot, in the form of the divine throne with an anthropomorphic figure on it. Further, in the course of the vision the seer himself becomes enthroned on the merkavah. Scholars have previously argued that the passage from the *Exagoge* is a specimen of merkavah mysticism.<sup>23</sup> It is significant that, similar to the expression found in *m. Hagigah*, the *Exagoge's* formulation is also conveyed in the context of the merkavah tradition.

Another noteworthy detail is that the *Exagoge* passage mentions that Moses had a vision of things not only above the heaven but also "beneath the earth." This reference to the secrets of the underworld is intriguing, and it is possible that the sentence following it that deals with the "stars" is somehow connected with mysteries of the underworld. As may be remembered, the text tells that Moses saw a multitude of stars falling before his knees and parading before him like a battalion of men. It has previously been noted that the *Exagoge* passage might have been influenced by the Enochic traditions and attempts to rewrite the Enochic motifs from the Mosaic perspective.<sup>24</sup> In view of the Enochic connections, the imagery of the stars falling before Moses evokes the memory of the peculiar symbolism found in some Enochic writings where stars signify the fallen Watchers.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, in some Enochic texts, the Watchers imprisoned in the

<sup>22</sup> *Midrash Rabbah*, ed. Freedman and Simon, 3:58.

<sup>23</sup> van der Horst, "Moses' Throne Vision," 21–22; Silviu N. Bunta, *Moses, Adam and the Glory of the Lord in Ezekiel the Tragedian: On the Roots of a Merkavah Text* (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> van der Horst, "Moses' Throne Vision," 21–22; Andrei A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition*, TSAJ 107 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 262–68; Kristine Ruffatto, "Polemics with Enochic Traditions in the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel the Tragedian," *JSP* 15 (2006): 195–210; Ruffatto, "Raguel as Interpreter of Moses' Throne Vision: The Transcendent Identity of Raguel in the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel the Tragedian," *JSP* 17 (2008): 121–39.

<sup>25</sup> *1 En.* 86:1–4.

underworld or lower heavens are depicted as “falling down” before the seventh antediluvian hero during his visit to the regions of their punishment. One of the specimens of this tradition is found in *2 Enoch*, where the fallen Watchers are depicted as bowing down before the patriarch Enoch.<sup>26</sup>

Such a connection between the relevant Enochic developments and the formulas found in the *Exagoge* and *m. Hagigah* does not seem far-fetched, and it is possible that the early versions of the formula originated within Enochic lore, which portrays the seventh antediluvian hero traveling through the upper and lower regions and receiving knowledge about protological and eschatological events. Later Enochic traditions connect the knowledge received by Enoch-Metatron to the formulations echoing the famous mishnaic expression. Thus, in chapter 10 of *Sefer Hekhalot* the deity orders the Prince of Wisdom and the Prince of Understanding to instruct the visionary in “the wisdom of those above and of those below, in the wisdom of this world and of the world to come.”<sup>27</sup>

In view of these connections, I have previously proposed that already in the early Enochic lore one can find a designation of esoteric knowledge reminiscent of the formula from *m. Hagigah*.<sup>28</sup> Thus, in chapter 60 of the *Book of the Similitudes*, which deals with a constellation of the esoteric subjects, the interpreting angel reveals to the visionary a secret described as “first and last in heaven, in the heights, and under the dry ground” (*1 En.* 60:11).<sup>29</sup> This remarkable saying is reminiscent of both the above mentioned tradition from the *Exagoge* and the expression from *m. Hagigah*. Similar to the *Exagoge* and the mishnaic formulation, it appears to encompass the temporal (“first and last”) and spatial (“in the height and under the dry ground”) dimensions. The reference to the “first” and

<sup>26</sup> *2 En.* 7:4.

<sup>27</sup> Philip Alexander, “3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch,” *OTP*, 1:264.

<sup>28</sup> Andrei A. Orlov, “In the Mirror of the Divine Face,” in *Selected Studies in the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, ed. A. Orlov, SVTP 23 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 165–82, at 173.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch: A New Edition in the Light of the Aramaic Dead Sea Fragments*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 2:144. Chapter 60 of *1 Enoch* represents a mixture of Enochic and Noachic traditions. Since Dillmann’s pioneering research, scholars argued that this chapter represents a later interpolated “Noah apocalypse.” Cf. Matthew Black, *The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch*, SVTP 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 225. For a discussion of the composite nature of chap. 60 see Florentino García Martínez, *Qumran and Apocalyptic: Studies on Aramaic Texts from Qumran*, STDJ 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1992) 31–33. An in-depth discussion of the editorial history of chap. 60 transcends boundaries of current investigation. It is important for our study that the final constellation of esoteric traditions in chap. 60 most likely took place before the composition of *m. Hag.* 2:1. On the date of the *Book of the Similitudes* before the second century CE see Gabriele Boccaccini, ed., *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007). In his conclusion to the volume Paolo Sacchi writes: “In sum, we may observe that those scholars who have directly addressed the problem of dating the Parables all agree on a date around the time of Herod. Other participants of the conference not addressing the problem directly nevertheless agree with this conclusion” (*Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man*, 510).

"last" is especially noteworthy as it appears to be laden with protological and eschatological overtones.

It is even more intriguing that the formula found in the *Similitudes* (1 *En.* 60:11) is situated in the narrative dealing with the revelation of two esoteric subjects already mentioned in our study, the Account of the Chariot (1 *En.* 60:1–6) and the Account of Leviathan and Behemoth (1 *En.* 60:7–10). In view of these peculiar correlations, we should explore chapter 60 more closely.

In 1 *En.* 60:1–6 the seer, like Moses in the *Exagoge*, describes his vision of the deity seated on the throne of his glory and his own transformation during this vision.<sup>30</sup> This visionary merkavah account is situated in the text right before the tradition about two primordial monsters. The text then reports on the eschatological time when the two protological creatures will be separated from one another: a female monster, Leviathan, will dwell in the depths of the sea above the springs of the waters and a male monster, Behemoth, will occupy an immense desert named Dendayn.<sup>31</sup>

It is intriguing that the authors of the *Book of the Similitudes*, like the authors of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and *Song of Songs Rabbah*, attempt to conflate two esoteric subjects, the merkavah vision and the vision of Leviathan and Behemoth. This constellation is then followed in the Enochic pseudepigraphon by the expression about the secret described as "first and last in heaven, in the heights, and under the dry ground."

It should be also noted that in 1 *En.* 60 the formula is placed in a narrative with a rich, distinctive vocabulary that is applied not only to the disclosure of secrets but also their concealment. Thus, just before the formula is given in v. 11, in v. 10 an angel tells the seer that he will receive knowledge of the secret things to the degree it is permitted. This dialectic of revelation and concealment is reminiscent of traditions in *m. Hagigah* with its aesthetics of concealment.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper has suggested the possibility that speculation about the mysteries found in the *Exagoge*, the *Book of the Similitudes*, and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* might constitute a formative conceptual background for the later formulations of esoteric subjects found in *m. Hagigah* and other rabbinic materials. It is important that all the aforementioned early Jewish accounts portray transformation of the seers in the course of their encounter with and acquisition of esoteric subjects. This again might point to a possible visionary background of the early

<sup>30</sup> The text says that the visionary saw "the Head of Days sitting on the throne of his glory, and the angels and the righteous were standing around him." Knibb, *Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, 2:142.

<sup>31</sup> Knibb, *Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, 2:143–44.

<sup>32</sup> On concealment in *m. Hagigah*, see Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 25.

formulations of esoteric subjects reflected in the passage from *m. Hagigah* and might support the insights of previous scholars who argued for the continuity between the early Jewish accounts and later rabbinic mystical speculation about the Account of Creation and the Account of the Chariot.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1941), 43.