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# Yahoel and Metatron

*Texts and Studies in  
Ancient Judaism*

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## Yahoel as the “Second Power”

[an excerpt from A.A. Orlov, *Yahoel and Metatron: Aural Apocalypticism and the Origins of Early Jewish Mysticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017)]

... In his evaluation of Alan Segal's seminal study, “Two Powers in Heaven,” Daniel Boyarin pointed out that Segal's study treated the “two powers heresy” as a phenomenon external to rabbinic Judaism.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Segal viewed the underlying ideology as being foreign to the core of rabbinic orthodoxy,<sup>2</sup> and for him, in Boyarin’s words, the problem was “to discover which of the heretical groups were actually called ‘Two Powers in Heaven’ by the earliest tannaitic sages.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, Boyarin argues that this so-called “heresy,” as in many other instances in Judaism and Christianity, appears to represent not external, but internal development. Boyarin reminds us that, “almost always the so-called ‘heresy’ is not a new invader from outside but an integral and usually more ancient version of the religious tradition that is now being displaced by a newer set of conceptions....”<sup>4</sup> For Boyarin, the “two powers controversy” thus represents “internal” development, and “it was the Rabbis who invented the ‘heresy’ via a rejection of that which was once (and continued to be) very much within Judaism.”<sup>5</sup> The difference between the two approaches, then, is the following: “where Segal seems clearly to imagine an ‘orthodox core’ to Judaism that pre-exists and then develops into what would become rabbinism,” Boyarin

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<sup>1</sup> Boyarin, “Beyond Judaisms,” 324.

<sup>2</sup> Segal argues that, although some scholars have suggested that there was no concept of orthodoxy in rabbinic Judaism, “two powers in heaven” reports show “that the rabbis, in common with their brethren in the diaspora, were concerned about the theological and orthodox center of Judaism when other sectarian groups of their day seemed willing to compromise Judaism’s integrity.” Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, x.

<sup>3</sup> Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 89. Segal notes that “it became clear that ‘two powers in heaven’ was a very early category of heresy, earlier than Jesus, if Philo is a trustworthy witness, and one of the basic categories by which the rabbis perceived the new phenomenon of Christianity. It was one of the central issues over which the two religions separated.” Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, ix.

<sup>4</sup> Boyarin, “Beyond Judaisms: Metatron and the Divine Polymorphy of Ancient Judaism,” 325.

<sup>5</sup> Boyarin, “Beyond Judaisms: Metatron and the Divine Polymorphy of Ancient Judaism,” 326.

envisions “a Judaism that consists of manifold historical developments of a polyform tradition in which no particular form has claim to either orthodoxy or centrality over others.”<sup>6</sup> Boyarin’s methodological approach is helpful to our study, since it enable us to see an interaction between older and newer paradigms of theophanic and mediatorial symbolism. For Boyarin, this more ancient ideological trend is represented by various mediatorial figures, like the Son of Man or translated Enoch, characters endowed with distinctive theophanic features of the ocularcentric *Kavod* ideology. Following Boyarin’s methodology, I would like to suggest that this ancient “enemy,” which eventually becomes the focus of the “Two Sovereigns in Heaven” controversy, is not only this particular cohort of mediatorial characters decorated with theophanic attributes of the deity, but also the distinctive ocularcentric ideology that stands behind the formation of such figures. It is this theophanic paradigm that eventually gave us so many mediators mentioned in Boyarin’s study, the peculiar theophanic mold that became influential in so many apocalyptic currents, including the Enochic tradition and the lore concerning the Son of Man. Moreover, it is possible that the polemical pool of “second power” candidates for the rabbinic controversy was supplied not only by figures that directly emerged from the ocularcentric currents, like Enoch of the early Enochic legends or the Son of Man of the *Book of the Similitudes*, but also from polemical reactions to the *Kavod* paradigm found in such “aural” accounts as the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, where the theophanic qualities of the deity are polemically transferred to the “second power” in the form of Yahoel.

In this respect, it remains puzzling that the ocularcentric details that permeate the story of the infamous seer of the two powers controversy have consistently escaped scholarly attention,

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<sup>6</sup> Boyarin, “Beyond Judaisms: Metatron and the Divine Polymorphy of Ancient Judaism,” 326.

and yet, as we have already witnessed in our analysis of the Aher episodes found in the Babylonian Talmud and the Hekhalot literature, they clearly lie on the surface of these accounts.

Thus, the main antagonist of these “two powers in heaven” episodes, Aher, is clearly an adept of the ocularcentric praxis who is portrayed as the one who “came to behold the vision of the Chariot” (בצפייית המרכבה) “and set eyes” (ונתן עיניו) upon Metatron.<sup>7</sup> Following his erroneous perception of the false divine Form, whom he takes for the Chariot, represented by the enthroned Metatron, he is then reprimanded and corrected in a distinctively “aural” way – through the manifestation of the divine Voice. Furthermore, the object of Aher’s visionary praxis, Metatron, is also demoted in the story through a humiliating flagellation. Commenting on Metatron's punishment, Boyarin suggests that, based on the evidence from *b. Bava Metzia* 47a, “this practice represents a particularly dire form of anathema or even excommunication. The dual inscription of excommunication in the narrative, that of Metatron on the one hand and of his ‘devotee’ on the other, suggests strongly to me that it is the belief in this figure as second divine principle that is being anathematized....”<sup>8</sup>

For the purposes of our study, it is instructive to draw our attention to another cluster of rabbinic and Hekhalot materials closely associated with the “two powers in heaven” controversy, namely, the story concerning the four rabbis who entered Pardes, since these accounts often constitute the immediate context for Aher’s vision of Metatron.

Some scholars argue that the earliest specimen of this story is attested in *Tosefta. T. Hag. 2.3-4* unveils the following tradition:

Four entered the garden [Paradise]: Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, the Other [Elisha], and Aqiba. One gazed (גזי) and perished, one gazed (גזי) and was smitten, one gazed (גזי) and cut down sprouts, and one went up

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<sup>7</sup> Schäfer et al., *Synopse*, 10.

<sup>8</sup> D. Boyarin, “Two Powers in Heaven; or, the Making of a Heresy,” in: *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel* (eds. H. Najman and J.H. Newman; JSJSS, 83; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 331–70 at 356.

whole and came down whole (עלה בשלום). Ben Azzai gazed and perished. Concerning him Scripture says, Precious in the sight of the lord is the death of his saints (Ps 116: 15). Ben Zoma gazed and was smitten. Concerning him Scripture says, If you have found honey, eat only enough for you, lest you be sated with it and vomit it (Prov 25: 16). Elisha gazed and cut down sprouts. Concerning him Scripture says, let not your mouth lead you into sin (Qoh 5:5). R. Aqiba went up whole and came down whole. Concerning him Scripture says, Draw me after you, let us make haste. The king has brought me into his chambers (Song of Songs 1:4).<sup>9</sup>

This story again appears to exhibit a polemic against ocularcentric ideology, a tendency which has consistently escaped the attention of almost all modern exegetes of this passage.<sup>10</sup> It portrays four adepts who entered the mysterious garden. The experience of three adepts, represented respectively by Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, and Elisha ben Avuya (Aher), is portrayed as negative and unfavorable. One of them died, another “was smitten,” and the third became a heretic. It is noteworthy that their praxis in the “garden” is rendered in distinctively ocularcentric formulae, involving the term *הצי”י*<sup>11</sup> – all three of them “gazed” or “peered.”<sup>12</sup> It appears not to be coincidental that in all three instances, when reference to visionary praxis is made, it repeatedly coincides with negative results: “...one gazed (*הצי”י*) and perished, one gazed (*הצי”י*) and was smitten, one gazed (*הצי”י*) and cut the shoots...”

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<sup>9</sup> J. Neusner, *The Tosefta. Translated from the Hebrew with a New Introduction* (2 vols.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002) 1.669.

<sup>10</sup> Yet, some scholars have previously noticed such a stance against “ocularcentric” traditions. In his analysis of the Story of the Four, Alon Goshen Gottstein notes the polemics against the visionary praxis. He observes that “the editor’s point is basic: visionary activity is a form of uncontrolled pleasure seeking, and whoever tries it is doing something other than studying Torah. The sages who engage in visionary activity therefore contradict their own teaching.” A. Goshen Gottstein, *The Sinner and the Amnesiac: The Rabbinic Invention of Elisha ben Avuya and Eleazar Ben Arach* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000) 56.

<sup>11</sup> On various occurrences of this term in rabbinic literature, see D. Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) 93; Schäfer, *Hekhalot-Studien*, 241, n. 50.

<sup>12</sup> David Halperin notices that in rabbinic literature *הצי”י* “is used for examining an infant; for peering into a pit (to examine a fetus thrown there); for the crowd’s straining to catch a glimpse of the scarlet cloth hung inside the Temple vestibule; for peeping into other people’s windows; for God’s gazing down upon His people’s suffering.” He argues that the closest English equivalent to *hetzitz* is “to peer.” Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature*, 93. In relation to the Hekhalot tradition, Peter Schäfer observes that “few passages in the Hekhalot literature combine *hetzitz* with an object that relates to the Merkavah: God’s robe, his beauty, and the vision of the Merkavah.” Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 198.

Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, and Elisha ben Avuya thus belong to the chain of practitioners of the same ocular paradigm, as their approach to the divine presence is repeatedly defined through the formula of “gazing.” Yet, in the case of the adept who ended his experience positively and favorably (Rabbi Akiva), the visionary praxis of “gazing” is not mentioned, and the corresponding terminology is not applied.

A similar contrast between the ocular terminology applied to the first three visionaries and a lack of such terminology in relation to an exemplary adept – R. Akiva – is attested in other versions of the story found in the Palestinian<sup>13</sup> and Babylonian<sup>14</sup> Talmuds,<sup>15</sup> *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah*,<sup>16</sup> and Hekhalot literature.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> y. Hag. 77b reads: “Four entered the Garden, One peeked (רָאָה) and was hurt; one peeked (רָאָה) and died; one peeked (רָאָה) and cut saplings, one entered in peace and left in peace. Ben Azzai peeked (רָאָה) and was hurt; about him the verse says, if you found honey, eat your fill. Ben Zoma peeked (רָאָה) and died, about him the verse says, dear in the Eternal’s eyes is the death of his pious. Aher peeked (רָאָה) and cut saplings.” *The Jerusalem Talmud. Tractates Ta’anot, Megillah, Hagigah and Mo’ed Qatan. Edition, Translation and Commentary* (ed. H.W. Guggenheimer; SJ, 85; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015) 421-422.

<sup>14</sup> b. Hag. 14b: “Our Rabbis taught: Four men entered the ‘Garden,’ namely, Ben ‘Azzai and Ben Zoma, Aher, and R. Akiba. R. Akiba said to them: When ye arrive at the stones of pure marble, say not, water, water! For it is said: He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before mine eyes. Ben ‘Azzai cast a look (רָאָה) and died. Of him Scripture says: Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. Ben Zoma looked (רָאָה) and became demented. Of him Scripture says: Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it. Aher mutilated the shoots. R. Akiba departed unhurt.” Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud. Hagiga*, 14b.

<sup>15</sup> For comparisons pertaining to the Tosefta and the Talmuds accounts, see Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature*, 86-87.

<sup>16</sup> *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* 1:27 reads: “Four entered the Garden, Ben ‘Azzai, Ben Zoma, Elisha b. Abuya, and R. Akiba. Ben ‘Azzai peered (רָאָה) [into the mysteries] and became demented; and of him it is said, Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee (Prov 25:16). Ben Zoma peered (רָאָה) and died; and of him it says, Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints (Ps 116:15). Elisha b. Abuya began to ‘lop the branches.’ How did he ‘lop the branches’? When he entered a synagogue or house of study and saw children making progress in the Torah, he uttered incantations over them which brought them to a stop; and of him it is said, Suffer not thy mouth to bring thy flesh into guilt (Eccl 5:5). R Akiba entered in peace and came out in peace. He said: It is not because I am greater than my colleagues, but thus taught the Sages in the Mishnah: Thy deeds bring thee near [to heaven] and thy deeds keep thee far. And of him it is said, The King hath brought me into his chambers.” Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 9.46-47.

<sup>17</sup> *Hekhalot Zutarti* (Synopsis §338) and *Merkavah Rabbah* (Synopsis §671) read: “R. Akiva said: We were four who entered paradise. One peered in (רָאָה) and died. One peered in (רָאָה) and was struck down. One peered in (רָאָה) and cut the plants. I entered safely and I went forth safely.” Davila, *Hekhalot Literature in Translation*, 202.

Furthermore, a textual unit that follows immediately the story of the four who went into Pardes in the *Tosefta* also appears to exhibit a polemical attitude against ocularcentric praxis.<sup>18</sup> *T.*

Hag. 2.5 reads:

To what is the matter to be compared? To a royal garden, with an upper room built over it [to guard it]. What is [the guard's] duty? *To look, but not to feast his eyes from it.* And they further compared the matter to what? To a platoon passing between two paths, one of fire and one of ice. [If] it turns to this side, it will be smitten by fire, [and if] it turns to that, it will be smitten by ice. Now what should a person do? He should go right down the middle, and not turn either to this side or to that.<sup>19</sup>

Here again one can see a distinctive polemical stance attempting to challenge visual praxis. In the parable from *t. Hag. 2.5*, such an attitude is rendered through the phrase, “to look, but not to feast his eyes from it.” Reflecting on this passage, David Halperin notices that the *Tosefta*’s passage “distinguishes between two types of visual enjoyment: ‘looking’ (*lēhašiš*), and ‘feasting one’s eyes’ (*yazun ‘et ‘cenaw*); the latter is forbidden. The distinction is apparently between a quick glance and protracted gazing.”<sup>20</sup>

Although, traditionally, scholars have considered the versions of the Pardes account, which are reflected in the *Tosefta* and *Talmuds*, as the earliest specimens of this tradition, there are researchers<sup>21</sup> who argue that such priority should be given instead to the *Hekhalot* renderings of the Story of the Four, which in their opinion are stratigraphically earlier and can be placed, at

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<sup>18</sup> Similar polemical markers against visual praxis are found in a parable from Version B of *Avot de Rabbi Nathan*, which presents the following tradition: “Ben Zoma says: ‘Who is a wise man? He that learns from all men, as Scripture says: From all my teachers I have got understanding.’... He used to say: ‘Do not look into a man’s vineyard. If you have looked, do not go down into it. If you have gone in, do not gaze. If you gazed do not touch. If you touched, do not eat. If a man eats, he removes his soul from the life of this world and the life of the world to come.’” In relation to this parable, which has long been recognized as relevant to the Pardes passage, Alon Goshen Gottstein notes that “it employs the same verb for ‘looking’ as found in the *Tosefta*, it contains a warning not to do that which the Pardes story reports was done, and it warns of dire consequences, some of which are expressed in the Pardes story.” Goshen Gottstein, *The Sinner and the Amnesiac*, 57.

<sup>19</sup> Neusner, *The Tosefta*, 1.669-670.

<sup>20</sup> Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature*, 93.

<sup>21</sup> See C.R.A. Morray-Jones, *A Transparent Illusion: The Dangerous Vision of Water in Hekhalot Mysticism: A Source-Critical and Tradition-Historical Inquiry* (JSJSS, 59; Leiden: Brill, 2002) 17-19; J.R. Davila, “Review of *A Transparent Illusion: The Dangerous Vision of Water in Hekhalot Mysticism: A Source-Critical and Tradition-Historical Inquiry* by C. R. A. Morray-Jones,” *JBL* 121 (2002) 585-588.

the latest, in the early fourth century CE.<sup>22</sup> *Hekhalot Zutarti* (*Synopse* §§338–348) and other parallels<sup>23</sup> offer the following rendering of the familiar account:

R. Akiva said: We were four who entered paradise. One peered in (רָאָה) and died. One peered in (רָאָה) and was struck down. One peered in (רָאָה) and cut the plants. I entered safely and I went forth safely. Why did I enter safely and go forth safely? Not because I was greater than my associates, but my works accomplished for me to establish what the sages taught in their Mishnah, Your works shall bring you near and your works shall make you far away. And these are they who entered paradise: Ben Azzay, Ben Zoma, the Other, and R. Akiva. Ben Azzay peered and died. Concerning him the Scripture says, Worthy in the eyes of YHWH is the death of His pious ones (Ps 116:15). Ben Zoma peered and was struck down. Concerning him the Scripture says, Have you found honey? Eat (only) your fill, lest you become sated and vomit it up (Prov 25:16). Elisha ben Avuyah peered and cut the plants. Concerning him the Scripture says, Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin (Qoh 5:5). R. Akiva entered safely and went forth safely. Concerning him the Scripture says, Draw me after you, let us run. The King has brought me into His chambers (Cant 1:4). R. Akiva said: In the hour that I ascended on high, I laid down more markings on the entrances of the firmament than on the entrances of my house. And when I arrived at the curtain, angels of violence went forth to do me violence. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: Leave this elder alone, for he is fit to gaze at Me. R. Akiva said: In the hour, that I ascended to the chariot a heavenly voice went forth from beneath the throne of glory, speaking in the Aramaic language. In this language what did it speak? Before YHWH made heaven and earth, He established a vestibule to the firmament, to enter by it and to go out by it. A vestibule is nothing but an entrance. He established the firm names to fashion by means of it the whole world.<sup>24</sup>

If this variant of the Pardes story, narrated by Rabbi Akiva himself, indeed represents the original version, as Christopher Morray-Jones<sup>25</sup> and James Davila argue, it is intriguing that in

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<sup>22</sup> Analyzing Morray-Jones' hypothesis regarding the priority of the Hekhalot evidence, James Davila offers the following reflection: "Morray-Jones begins in the first two chapters by recapitulating the convincing case he has made elsewhere that the recension of the story of the four found in the Hekhalot texts known as the *Hekhalot Zutarti* (§§338-39) and the *Merkavah Rabbah* (§§671-73), when cleared of obvious redactional elements from another, third-person version, preserves a first-person account that clearly takes 'paradise' to mean the heavenly realm and which predates the versions in the rabbinic 'mystical collection.' It follows that we must place this recension at the latest in the early fourth century. This early Hekhalot account did not include the warning about water, although a different version of it, the "water vision episode," appears elsewhere in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* (§§407-8), with a parallel version appearing in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§§258-59). In ch. 3 he argues, again convincingly, first that the latter version (in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*) is a garbled abbreviation of the former (in the *Hekhalot Zutarti*) and, second, that in manuscript New York 8128 aversion of the water vision episode has been secondarily combined with the story of the four in the *Hekhalot Zutarti* and the *Merkavah Rabbah* and that it is this combined passage that is assumed by the Babli, and not the other way around, strongly implying that the Hekhalot traditions are stratigraphically earlier. Indeed, other evidence, especially from the Qumran Hodayot, implies that the concept of hostile waters of chaos associated with the celestial temple may go back to the Second Temple period." Davila, "Review of *A Transparent Illusion*," 585-586.

<sup>23</sup> *Merkavah Rabbah* (*Synopse* §§671-674).

<sup>24</sup> Davila, *Hekhalot Literature in Translation*, 202-204. Schäfer et al., *Synopse*, 145.

<sup>25</sup> Thus, reflecting on the priority of rabbinic and Hekhalot accounts of the story, Christopher Morray-Jones argues that "the Hekhalot sources have preserved a version of the Pardes story – the first-person narrative in *Hekhalot Zutarti*/*Merkavah Rabbah* A-C – which is different from and much simpler than that found in the talmudic sources and *Canticles Rabbah*. A subsequent redactor has expanded this first-person narrative by inserting third-person materials taken from the talmudic tradition in section B, but, when this additional material is discounted, it



addition to the already familiar depictions of the problematic ocular practices of the three infamous practitioners, one also encounters here a curious reference to Rabbi Akiva's own praxis, which is surrounded with peculiar aural markers. The first important detail in this respect is God's speech that protects the adept against the hostile angels. The deity *speaks* to his servants, asking them to leave Rabbi Akiva alone. The most important feature, however, is R. Akiva's own encounter with the divine presence, which is rendered in a distinctively "aural" way, namely, as the epiphany of the heavenly Voice.<sup>26</sup> *Synopse* §348 reports the following: "R. Akiva said: In the hour that I ascended on high I heard a heavenly voice that went forth from beneath the throne of glory and was speaking in the Aramaic language...."<sup>27</sup> In contrast to the aforementioned seers, Rabbi Akiva does not "gaze"; rather he "hears." Furthermore, the symbolism of the divine Voice streaming from beneath the divine Seat vividly reminds us of Abraham's encounter with the divine presence in the Slavonic apocalypse. As in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, despite the fact that the throne is mentioned, the deity's epiphany is rendered as the Voice. The auricularcentric praxis of R. Akiva<sup>28</sup> thus represents a striking contrast to the aforementioned ocularcentric practices of Ben Zoma, Ben Azzai, and Aher. The third important

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can be seen that the hekhalot version was originally a statement by or attributed to Aqiba that he and three unnamed individuals went into Pardes, that the other three met with disaster, and that he alone went in up and came out/down safely, despite the opposition of the angels, through the merit of his deeds. ... I conclude, therefore, that the version preserved in *Hekhalot Zutarti* /*Merkavah Rabbah* A-C represents the original form of the Pardes story and that the redactor of the mystical collection adapted this source to suit his purpose by adding the names of the three רַבִּי אֶקִיבָה, thereby turning it into an illustration of *m. Hag. 2:1* ... Thus, once the priority of the hekhalot version (A and C) has been established, it is clear that the story is concerned with a visionary ascent to the heavenly temple, in the face of fierce opposition on the part of the 'angels of destruction.' These angels seem to be the terrifying guardians of the gateways, who are described in other passages of the hekhalot literature and will be encountered again below." Morray-Jones, *A Transparent Illusion*, 17-19.

<sup>26</sup> On this tradition see Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 77-78.

<sup>27</sup> Davila, *Hekhalot Literature in Translation*, 204.

<sup>28</sup> Morray-Jones compares Akiva's aural encounter with Paul's experience described in 2 Cor 12:1-12, noting that "Aqiba, like Paul, heard words when he ascended to paradise." C. Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1-12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate Part 2: Paul's Heavenly Ascent and its Significance," *HTR* 86 (1993) 265-92 at 280.

aural detail is the reference to the “names,” by means of which the deity fashioned the whole world. Such onomatological features further solidify the aural proclivities of R. Akiva’s report.

The aforementioned tensions between ocularcentric and aural currents, detected in the Story of the Four,<sup>29</sup> are important not only for our current study, but also for ongoing scholarly debates concerning the two powers in heaven controversy and its roots in early Jewish and Christian materials. Although in previous studies it has often been acknowledged that the rabbinic discourse regarding two powers in heaven was possibly directed against anthropomorphic understandings of the deity, these hypotheses very rarely take into consideration the peculiar tension existing between aural and ocular ideologies found in these materials. Yet, attention to the existence and peculiarities of such interactions can greatly contribute to understanding the conceptual dynamics of such debates. As has already been demonstrated in our study, the materials associated with the two powers in heaven controversy often exhibit a polemical strain between the aural portrayals of the deity, who is often presented in these accounts as *בת קול*, and the ocular depictions of the “second power,” which are often endowed with theophanic attributes of the *Kavod* paradigm. In this respect, the two powers in heaven debate itself might represent one of the stages in the long-lasting interaction between the *Shem* and the *Kavod* streams, which receives its controversial afterlife in various rabbinic and Hekhalot contexts.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> This polemical tension between aural and ocular praxis found in the Story of the Four appears to be further perpetuated in rabbinic lore concerning Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, and Aher. Thus, for example, in *Genesis Rabbah*, two of the aforementioned infamous seers offer an interpretation of the aural manifestation of the deity (divine Voice) as the vision of Metatron. From *Gen. Rab.* 5:4 we learn the following: “Levi said: Some interpreters, e.g. Ben ‘Azzai and Ben Zoma, interpret: The voice of the Lord became Metatron on the waters, as it is written, ‘The voice of the Lord is over the waters’ (Ps 29:3).” Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 1.36.

<sup>30</sup> Thus, Daniel Boyarin suggests that “Aher represents older theological traditions which have been anathematized as heresy by the authors of the story.” D. Boyarin, “Is Metatron a Converted Christian,” *Judaïsme Ancien-Ancient Judaism* 1 (2013) 13-62 at 41.

It is worth noting that both Yahoel's and Metatron's developments often demonstrate a peculiar tension in the seers' perception of these mediatorial figures, whose appearance, enhanced by familiar theophanic attributes, usually reserved for the deity, puzzles and perplexes the infamous visionaries and their modern interpreters. As we have already witnessed, the seer's perplexion in Aher's episode represents a major twist in the story. The *Apocalypse of Abraham* similarly attests to the perplexed reaction of its visionary when Yahoel lifts Abraham from his knees because the patriarch wants to offer him veneration.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, the influence of such polemical developments, which help shape and enhance the theophanic profile of the "second power," on early Christian materials, must not be overlooked. The incorporeality and invisibility of the "aural" deity provides new theological possibilities. It enables one to connect the previous interpretive tradition of ocularcentric divine apparitions with a new "guardian" of this theophanic trend – the "Second Power" or the "Second Person" who now inherits the ocular theophanic features of the "old" Divinity. When viewed through the spectacles of older traditions, this "Power" becomes virtually indistinguishable from God.

Such contrast between aural, incorporeal expressions of the first "power," and corporeal, "visible" features of the second "power," is clearly discernible in some of the earliest Christian materials where Christ is named the "image of the invisible God." Often, such Christian accounts, like developments found in Yahoel and Metatron lore, depict Christ as the personification of the divine Name. One prominent specimen of such an adaptation is found in the first chapter of the Book of Revelation, where one discovers an already familiar tension

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<sup>31</sup> Daniel Harlow notes that, in its portrayal of Abraham's interactions with Yahoel, the text rejects the granting of undue veneration to God's angelic intermediaries." Harlow, "Idolatry and Alterity," 328.

between the divine Voice and the visible manifestation of the divine Name in the form of the Son of Man, who, like Yahoel, paradoxically adopts the features of the Ancient of Days.<sup>32</sup>

The “second power” thus becomes an “icon” or an “image” of the aniconic, “invisible” deity. In this transference of the “visibility” from the deity to its “icon,” the second power receives the distinctive attributes of the deity of the “visual” corporeal paradigm – usually features attested in Ezek 1 and Dan 7. Although the whole range of divine attributes is often missing in these theophanic presentations of the “second power,” the peculiar “markers” of these apparitions, such as the rainbow-like appearance of the *Kavod* or white hair of the Ancient of the Day, often serve as portentous reminders.<sup>33</sup> Such transferences are discernible, for example, in the Son of Man traditions found in the *Book of the Similitudes* and the Book of Revelation, but we can also see traces of this development in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, where Yahoel absorbs both the features of the Ezekielian *Kavod* and the traits of the Ancient of Days, while the deity is portrayed as the aniconic Voice. A Christian example of this contrast is found in the Gospels’ scene of Jesus’ baptism, in which the aniconic voice of the deity introduces its anthropomorphic icon in the form of Jesus, who becomes the embodied image of God.<sup>34</sup> This portentous introduction is then reaffirmed in the Temptation Story through a set of Adamic allusions in which the image of the invisible God is venerated by the angelic hosts.

This cluster of theophanic currents found in New Testament materials can be compared with the episode of Yahoel’s own introduction in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, where the great angel is also introduced by the divine Voice. Yet, one difference between these two accounts is

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<sup>32</sup> On Christ as the personification of the divine Name in Rev 1, see McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos*.

<sup>33</sup> In this respect, the transference of the features of the Ancient of Days to the Son of Man in later traditions is also noteworthy.

<sup>34</sup> Darrell Hannah proposed that “the Angel of YHWH . . . becomes to some extent an expression of the divine absence in that he is a substitute for Yahweh (Exod 33:1–3).” Hannah, *Michael and Christ*, 21. See also Boyarin, “Two Powers in Heaven,” 339.

that Yahoel prevents Abraham from venerating him, while Jesus does not oppose such veneration. This marked negation of veneration might hint at the fact that the authors of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* were possibly cognizant of such practices in relation to the “Second Power.” In light of our analysis of the polemical appropriation of *Kavod* imagery in the Slavonic apocalypse, it cannot be completely excluded that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* represents one of the earliest specimens of debate against the “Second Power.” If so, it is intriguing that in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* the mediator is connected with the formulae of “authority/power.” Yahoel’s self-definition as the “power” or “strength” (сила) in *Apoc. Ab.* 10 might not be coincidental. We will see that a similar appellation is later applied to Metatron in the *Visions of Ezekiel*.<sup>35</sup>

Yet, as in later rabbinic and Hekhalot accounts, where the story of the “Second Power” is often entangled in a paradoxical mix of exaltations and demotions, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* Yahoel can be seen both as a manifestation and a non-manifestation of the deity. He remains in many ways a controversial figure, at once affirming the divine presence through mediation of the Tetragrammaton and challenging its overt veneration.<sup>36</sup> Although in one section of the Slavonic apocalypse Yahoel prevents Abraham from venerating him by erecting the patriarch to his feet, in another section of the text, Yahoel teaches him a prayer that now paradoxically includes his own name, “Yahoel.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The *Visions of Ezekiel* reads: “Eleazar of Nadwad says: Metatron, like the name of the Power.” Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 267. In the same text, the *Kavod* is also labeled as “Power”: “What was special about Tammuz [the fourth month], that in it Ezekiel saw the [divine] Power?” Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 264. Reflecting on this terminology, Scholem argues that “the ‘Dynamis’ in the Hekhaloth texts has precisely the same meaning as ‘The Divine Glory’ can definitely be seen in the *Visions of Ezekiel*. There it is said that ‘The Holy One, blessed be He, opened to him [i. e. to Ezekiel] the seven heavens and he beheld the Dynamis.’ Some lines farther on the same sentence is more or less repeated, but instead of mentioning the Dynamis, it reads: ‘and he beheld the glory [Kavod] of God.’” Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 67-68.

<sup>36</sup> *Apoc. Ab.* 10:4: “...he took me by my right hand and stood me on my feet.” Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 17.

<sup>37</sup> *Apoc. Ab.* 17:7-13: “And I recited, and he [Yahoel] himself recited the song: O, Eternal, Mighty, Holy El, God Autocrat ... Eternal, Mighty, Holy Sabaoth, Most Glorious El, El, El, El, Yahoel...” Kulik, *Retroverting*

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*Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 23. Reflecting on this tradition, Idel notes that Yahoel “appears in the form of a man and describes himself as having extraordinary powers, similar to those of a vice-regent. However, it is also possible to understand the nominal relationship between God and the angel by assuming that God is also called Yahoel, as is clear from Abraham’s prayer....” Idel, *Ben*, 22.