

ESCHATOLOGICAL CONSUMPTION OF LEVIATHAN AND BEHEMOTH AS REVELATION OF THE MESSIANIC TORAH

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Praised be He who permits the forbidden.
- Sabbatai Ševi

The notion that the righteous would one day feast on Behemoth and Leviathan occupied a prominent place in early Jewish pseudepigraphical accounts, including testimonies found in the *Book of the Similitudes*, *4 Ezra*, and *2 Baruch*. Thus, from *1 Enoch* 60:24 one learns that “two monsters, prepared according to the greatness of the Lord, will provide food for the chosen and righteous.”¹ *4 Ezra* 6:52 claims that Behemoth and Leviathan have been kept in order “to be eaten by whom thou [God] wilt, and when thou wilt.”² *2 Bar.* 29:4 also seems to demonstrate familiarity with the eschatological feast on the monsters, when it records that “Behemoth will be revealed from his place, and

¹ George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch 2: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch. Chapters 37–82* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 233.

² Michael Stone, *Fourth Ezra* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 178-179.

Leviathan will arise from the sea ... and then they will be food for all who remain.”³ Scholars often see these pseudepigraphical speculations as elaborations of earlier biblical traditions. Thus, for example, reflecting on *4 Ezra’s* eschatological meal’s traditions, Michael Stone suggests that “this idea of the messianic banquet made by God for the righteous has biblical roots in Isa 25:6 and Ps 74:14.”⁴

Although much ink has been spilled in discussions about this eschatological feasting, scholars have often encountered difficulties in grasping various conceptual facets of this tradition, and, especially, its possible connection with the acquisition of esoteric knowledge. Yet, it is possible that such eschatological “nourishment on the monsters” was somehow understood as a revelation about the mysteries of Behemoth and Leviathan.⁵

ESCHATOLOGICAL FEEDING ON THE MONSTERS IN BIBLICAL, PSEUDEPIGRAPHICAL, AND RABBINIC ACCOUNTS

The theme of the righteous’ eschatological nourishment on Leviathan and Behemoth received unprecedented attention in later rabbinic and Jewish mystical accounts. Yet, the roots of this tradition can be discerned already in biblical texts. Scholars often see the background of this motif in Ps 74:14, where the psalmist describes God as the one who crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave him as food (מאכל) to the creatures of the wilderness.⁶

³ David M. Gurtner, *Second Baruch: A Critical Edition of the Syriac Text. With Greek and Latin Fragments, English Translation, Introduction, and Concordances* (Jewish and Christian Texts in Context and Related Studies 5; London: Continuum, 2009), 67.

⁴ Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 188.

⁵ Later Jewish mystical testimonies often link the monsters’ flesh consumption with an apprehension of divine knowledge. Thus, some kabbalists believed that “the flesh of the Leviathan ... purifies the body, leading to the ultimate religious aim, apprehension of God in the purest sense.” Joel Hecker, *Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals: Eating and Embodiment in Medieval Kabbalah* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 106.

⁶ It is interesting that the recipients of the meal (לעם לציים) are rendered by Theodotion as “(λαῶ) τῶ ἐσχατῶ.” Frederick Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum quae Supersunt* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875), 2.218.

Indeed, the motif of God's defeat of the monster followed by its consumption occupies a prominent place in later Jewish accounts, where Behemoth and Leviathan will be slayed by the deity immediately before the messianic meal. Ezek 29:3-5,⁷ Ezek 32:3-4,⁸ and Ezek 39:17-19⁹ also narrate the demise of various antagonists and the consumption of their corpses after their defeat. As we have already witnessed in our study, some of these passages, like Ezekiel 29, will be used extensively by various Jewish interpreters in their speculations about Leviathan. Reflecting on these Ezekielian traditions, William Whitney points out that

all of these texts are suggestive of the late motif of the consumption of Leviathan and Behemoth at the eschatological feast. In no case, however, do they provide a close parallel to it. Rather they represent a specific genre ("the carrion motif") with the function of casting shame and dishonor upon a despised foe (either real or imaginary), by depicting that foe's defeat in a way which does not anticipate, or even allow, the dignity of "proper burial." The words which Ezekiel is

⁷ Ezek 29:3-5 reads: "Thus says the Lord God: I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon sprawling in the midst of its channels, saying, 'My Nile is my own; I made it for myself.' I will put hooks in your jaws, and make the fish of your channels stick to your scales. I will draw you up from your channels, with all the fish of your channels sticking to your scales. I will fling you into the wilderness, you and all the fish of your channels; you shall fall in the open field, and not be gathered and buried. To the animals of the earth and to the birds of the air I have given you as food."

⁸ Ezek 32:3-4 reads: "I will throw my net over you; and I will haul you up in my dragnet. I will throw you on the ground, on the open field I will fling you, and will cause all the birds of the air to settle on you, and I will let the wild animals of the whole earth gorge themselves with you."

⁹ Ezek 39:17-19 reads: "As for you, mortal, thus says the Lord God: Speak to the birds of every kind and to all the wild animals: Assemble and come, gather from all around to the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you, a great sacrificial feast on the mountains of Israel, and you shall eat flesh and drink blood. You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth – of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan. You shall eat fat until you are filled, and drink blood until you are drunk, at the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you."

commanded to address to birds and to wild animals depict those creatures as feasting upon the remains of those who, under the leadership of Gog, have opposed God and God's people. Though "the carrion motif" genre and its function may have influenced later "banquet" traditions to some degree, that influence was at best indirect.¹⁰

Furthermore, later Jewish traditions often render the Hebrew expression יכרו עליו חברים found in Job 40:30(41:6E)¹¹ as "(the scholarly) companions shall eat of him [Leviathan]."¹²

While the symbolism of the messianic feast on Leviathan and Behemoth is not present unambiguously in the biblical text, in the aforementioned pseudepigraphical passages found in the *Book of the Similitudes*, *4 Ezra*, and *2 Baruch* this motif receives a clear expression. Although the elaborations about the messianic meal on the primordial monsters are still rather terse and limited just to a few short references in the aforementioned biblical and pseudepigraphical accounts, this motif receives unprecedented elaboration in later rabbinic and Jewish mystical lore.

One can find these traditions, for example, in the targumim, which expands on familiar biblical lines by adding some novel details about the eschatological feast. Such allusions are present, for example, in the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Gen 1:21, where one learns that "God created the great sea monsters, Leviathan and his mate, that are designated for the day of consolation."¹³ Reflecting on these targumic additions, Michael Maher suggests that *Pseudo-Jonathan's* expansion on Leviathan and his mate demonstrates that its authors knew about "the traditions that are

¹⁰ William Whitney, Jr., *Two Strange Beasts: Leviathan and Behemoth in Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 63; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 172.

¹¹ NRSV translates Job 40:30(41:6E) as "will traders bargain over it [Leviathan]?"

¹² On this, see Michael Fishbane, "Rabbinic Mythmaking and Tradition: The Great Dragon Drama in b. Baba Batra 74b–75a," in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg* (ed. M. Cogan, B. L. Eichler and J. H. Tigay; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 273–284 at 246.

¹³ Michael Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis* (The Aramaic Bible 1B; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 19.

recorded in the midrashic and apocalyptic texts.”¹⁴ Furthermore, some other Greek and Aramaic targums directly speak about the eschatological banquet. Although the theme of the righteous’ nourishment on Leviathan is not explicitly manifested in the original text of the Book of Job, or at least it is not reflected in modern translations of this book, it is possible that such a motif could be present in Job 40:30(41:6E), a passage which asks: “Will traders bargain over it? (יכרו עליו חברים).” Interpreting this passage, *b. Baba Batra* 75a claims that “Rabba says that Rabbi Yoḥanan says: In the future, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will make a feast for the righteous from the flesh of the leviathan, as it is stated: ‘The *ḥabbarim* will make a feast [*yikhru*] of him’ (Job 40:30). And *kerā* means nothing other than a feast, as it is stated: ‘And he prepared [*va’yikhreh*] for them a great feast [*kerā*]; and they ate and drank’ (2 Kings 6:23).” This interpretation is not a product of rabbinic “imagination,” but a tradition with ancient roots. Thus, already the Septuagint exhibits such an understanding of יכרו by adding a theme of “banquet” to its rendering of Job 40:30: “And do nations feed on it (ἐνσιστοῦνται δὲ ἐν αὐτῷ ἔσθῃ)?”¹⁵ One can find a similar exegetical move in *Targum on Job* 40:30 : “Will the companions, make a banquet (שיירותא) over him?”¹⁶ *Targum on Psalm* 104:25-26 also knows about the messianic meal:

¹⁴ Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 19, note 36.

¹⁵ Joseph Ziegler, *Job: Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Göttingensis editum* (XI/4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 402; Albert Pietersma et al., *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 695.

¹⁶ Céline Mangan, *The Targum of Job* (The Aramaic Bible, 15; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical/Edinburgh: Clark, 1991), 88. David M. Stec, *The Text of the Targum of Job. An Introduction and Critical Edition* (Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 20; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 294. Sung Jin Park notes that “for כרה of MT, *TgJob* reads ‘to give a banquet,’ similar to the LXX rendering (ἐνσιστοῦνται).” Sung Jin Park, “The Text and Translations of Job: A Comparative Study on 11Q₁₀Job with Other Versions in Light of Translation Techniques,” *Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament* 2.2 (2013): 165-190 at 173.

This is the sea: great and wide of boundaries, where there are creeping things without number, beasts both small and great. There the ships go; (and as for) Leviathan that you created to sport at the banquet of the righteous (it is) his dwelling house. All of them look to you to give their food in due season.¹⁷

Targum of the Canticles 8:2 is also cognizant of the “feast of Leviathan ... prepared for the righteous in the Garden of Eden”:

I will lead you, O King Messiah I will bring you up into my Temple, and you will teach me to fear the Lord, and to walk in His ways. There we will partake of the feast of Leviathan and we will drink [from] old wine which has been preserved in its grapes from the day that the world was created, and from pomegranates and fruits which are prepared for the righteous in the Garden of Eden.¹⁸

The tradition of the eschatological meal is also unfolded in both Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds. Thus, *y. Megillah* 1 conveys the following tradition:

(Antolinus) [Antoninus] said to Rebbi, can I eat from the Leviathan in the World to Come? He said to him, yes. He told him, from the Passover lamb you would not let me eat, but from Leviathan you make me eat? He answered, what can we do for you since about the Passover lamb it is written that no uncircumcised man may eat from it. When he heard this, he went and circumcised.¹⁹

Here, the motif of the eschatological consumption of Leviathan appears in the midst of a discussion about the forbidden and permitted foods, an important concern that will be discussed later in our study. The version found in the Babylonian Talmud, in *b. Baba Batra* 75a, offers some additional details about the eschatological feasts on the primordial monsters:

¹⁷ Stec, *The Targum of Psalms*, 189.

¹⁸ Philip S. Alexander, *The Targum of Canticles, Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* (The Aramaic Bible 17a; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 190-191.

¹⁹ Heinrich W. Guggenheimer, *The Jerusalem Talmud. Tractates Ta’aniot, Megillah, Hagigah and Mo’ed Qatan (Mašqin). Edition, Translation and Commentary* (Studia Judaica 85; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 268.

Rabbah said in the name of R. Johanan: The Holy One, blessed be He, will in time to come make a banquet for the righteous from the flesh of Leviathan; for it is said: Companions will make a banquet of it. Kerah must mean a banquet; for it is said: And he prepared for them a great banquet and they ate and drank. Companions must mean scholars; for it is said: Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken for thy voice; cause me to hear it. The rest [of Leviathan] will be distributed and sold out in the markets of Jerusalem; for it is said: They will part him among the Kena'anim, and Kena'anim must mean merchants, for it is said: As for kena'an the balances of deceit are in his hand, he loveth to oppress. And if you wish you may infer it from the following: Whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth.²⁰

Certain midrashim also demonstrate knowledge of the eschatological meal motif. One can find references to this theme in *Lev. Rab.* 22:10,²¹ *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 11,²² *Num. Rab.* 21:18,²³

²⁰ Isidor Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra* (London: Soncino, 1935–1952), 75a.

²¹ “R. Menahma and R. Bebai, and R. Aha and R. Johanan in the name of R. Jonathan expounded: As recompense for what I have forbidden you, [says God], I have reserved something for you. As recompense for the prohibition of certain fish you will eat Leviathan, a clean fish; as recompense for the prohibition of certain fowls you shall eat Ziz, which is a clean fowl.” *Midrash Rabbah* (eds. Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon; 10 vols; London: Soncino, 1961), 4.289.

²² “The waters of the Jordan give him water to drink, for the waters of the Jordan surround all the earth, half thereof (flow) above the earth and the other half below the earth, as it is said, He is confident, though Jordan swell even to his mouth. This (creature) is destined for the day of sacrifice, for the great banquet of the righteous, as it is said, He only that made him can make his sword to approach unto him.” Gerald Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (2nd ed.; New York: Hermon Press, 1965) 76.

²³ “It was taught in the name of R. Meir: In the text, But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee, Ask now the beasts (behemoth) refers to Behemoth, And the fowls of the heaven’ refers to the Ziz of the field. Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee refers to the Garden of Eden, And the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee refers to the Leviathan. Who knoweth not among all these, that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?” Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 6.846.

Midrash on Psalms 18:25²⁴ and 23:7,²⁵ *Pirke Mašiah*,²⁶ *The Secrets of R. Šimon b. Yohai*,²⁷ and *Midrash vaYosha*.²⁸ Various *piyyutim* are also familiar with this motif. It is found in Qallir,²⁹ *Akdamut Milin*,³⁰ Yose ben Yose's *Atah Konanta 'Olam be-Rov Ḥesed*³¹ and

²⁴ "My children, that in the time-to-come, a great banquet shall be prepared for you out of Leviathan's flesh, out of Behemoth and out of Ziz of the field, as is said Ye shall eat in plenty and be satisfied (Joel 2:26)." William G. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms* (2 vols.; YJS, 13; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 255.

²⁵ "Thou preparest a table before me (Ps. 23:5), a table upon which the flesh of Leviathan, of Behemoth, and Ziz of the field shall be set out." Braude, *Midrash on Psalms*, 334.

²⁶ "At that time the Holy One, blessed be He, will arrange tables, slaughter Behemoth, Leviathan, and the wild Ziz (בהמות וליותן זיז), and prepare a great banquet for the righteous. Each one of them will be seated (at the table) in accordance with their honor." John Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic: A Postrabbinic Jewish Apocalypse Reader* (Resources for Biblical Study 45; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 165; Adolph Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* (6 vols.; Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1967), 3.76.

²⁷ "Israel will dwell in peace for two thousand years. They will feast upon Behemoth, Leviathan, and Ziz. They will slaughter Behemoth; Ziz shall rend Leviathan with its ankles; and Moses will come and slaughter the 'wild Ziz' (Ps 50:11; 80:14)." Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic*, 86.

²⁸ "Israel shall dwell there for two thousand years, eating Leviathan." Rachel S. Mikva, *Midrash VaYosha. A Medieval Midrash on the Song at the Sea* (Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism 28; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 241.

²⁹ "Behemoth arches his horns, Leviathan rears his fins – but now He makes an end of the pair, to slaughter, prepare, and consecrate them. They shall be served up as a dish to the faithful people." T. Carmi, *Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 232.

³⁰ "Leviathan contends with Behemoth; they are locked in combat with each other. Behemoth gores mightily with its horns; the sea-monster counters with potent fins. The Creator slays them with his great sword, and prepares a banquet for the righteous, who sit in rows at tables of precious stones, while before them there flow streams of balsam, and they indulge themselves and drink full cups of the precious old wine preserved in vats." Philip Birnbaum, *Daily Prayer Book. Ha-Siddur Ha-Shalem* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1949), 654.

³¹ "You made, as a sign for those who know You, those who are clad with scales, and a fleeing serpent for the meal in eternity. Did you not make

his *Azkir Gevurot Eloah*,³² and in the anonymous liturgical composition *Az be-‘En Kol*.³³

ACQUISITION OF THE DIVINE MYSTERIES THROUGH FEEDING

For our study, it is important that the reception of the divine mysteries by the seer in various Jewish accounts is often described through the symbolism of nourishment. The formative biblical account found in Gen 3, for instance, connects the protoplasts' acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil with their nourishment on the forbidden fruit from the infamous tree. Such an understanding of nourishment as the revelation of knowledge, and in particular, divine knowledge, becomes a popular *topos* in various ancient Jewish and Christian accounts, ranging from the tradition of Moses' feeding on the luster of the *Shekhinah* during his encounter with God on Mount Sinai³⁴ to the Apostle Paul's understanding of the utmost divine mysteries as

out of the earth in great abundance cattle and crawling creatures and the beasts of the earth? You set signs to be known of edibility and purity and for the company of the righteous you made the Behemoth fit to eat. And when the world was built, in wisdom, and when the table was set, and its bounty, You resolved to invite a guest and to feed him your choice food." Michael D. Swartz and Joseph Yahalom, *Avodah: Ancient Poems for Yom Kippur* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 296.

³² "There arose from the water the fugitives of the deep, and the sea serpent protected by scales and sharp arrows. fins He set some of them aside for an eternal feast, and prepared a prison in them for the deserting messenger." Swartz and Yahalom, *Avodah*, 228. "He pastured the Behemoth with the produce of a thousand mountains, for on the day when it is slaughtered, He will put His sword to it." Swartz and Yahalom, *Avodah*, 230.

³³ "You appointed over them great chiefs: the elusive serpent and the twisting Leviathan.... The virtuous shall feast on him; the pious shall divide him up." Swartz and Yahalom, *Avodah*, 120-122.

³⁴ Exod 24:9-11: "Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, and they ate and drank."

“solid food.”³⁵ This motif can be found also in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, where its hero, Abraham, talks about his nourishment on Yahoel’s revelations when he states that his vision of the great angel was his food and the angel’s words were his drink.³⁶ In this context, Yahoel’s disclosure about Leviathan(s), which represents a part of *Ma’ase Bereshit* esoteric lore, can also be seen as an element of Abraham’s supernatural feeding. This feeding, moreover, proleptically anticipates the final eschatological banquet when not only Abraham, but all the righteous of the world will be eventually nourished on the monsters’ mysteries. Yet, such an association cannot be established with certainty. What is clear, however, is that the tradition of supernatural nourishment found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is based on the established pattern of supernatural feeding, the roots of which can be traced to the biblical story of Moses. In light of these connections, we should now explore more closely the motif of nourishment as an acquisition of divine knowledge in the Mosaic lore.

The sustenance of Moses on Mount Sinai, as a theme, has received unprecedented attention from later Jewish and Christian interpreters. One encounters a panoply of rabbinic witnesses, which link the theme of heavenly nourishment to the story of the great Israelite prophet. For our study, it is also important that in them, like in the formative biblical account, such nourishing routines coincide with the revelation of the utmost divine knowledge – the Torah. Thus, for example, *Exod. Rab.* 47:7 communicates that, during his reception of the Torah from the deity on Mount Sinai, Moses was satiated by a vision of the luminous divine form:

³⁵ 1 Cor 3:1-3: “And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh.”

³⁶ *Apoc. Ab.* 12:2: “And I ate no bread and drank no water, because [my] food was to see the angel who was with me, and his speech with me was my drink.” Alexander Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham* (Text-Critical Studies 3; Atlanta: Scholars, 2004), 19.

It was for the benefit of Moses that he fasted a hundred and twenty days, so that he might receive the Torah; and from whence did Moses receive nourishment? From the splendor of the *Shekhinah*, for it says, Thou preservest them all (Neh 9:6).³⁷

Here, as in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the seer's feeding on the celestial form presupposes his abstinence from human food.³⁸ *Exod. Rab.* 47:5 even compares Moses' celestial nourishment to the sustenance of the Living Creatures of the divine Throne:

He did neither eat bread, nor drink water, that is, in this world; but in the World to Come he will eat of the bread of the Torah and drink of its waters. For this reason he did neither eat bread, etc. Whence did he derive his nourishment? From the lustre of God's presence. Lest this seem surprising, then remember that the *Hayyot* who bear the Divine Throne are also nourished from the splendor of the *Shekhinah*.³⁹

In this passage, the angelic creatures that hold the deity's seat are said to be nurtured by the presence of the divine Form situated on the *Merkavah*. *Exod. Rab.* 47:5 thus may point to a connection between Moses' supernatural nourishment and his angelic state. Furthermore, *Exod. Rab.* 47:5 makes a similar conceptual link even more explicitly by stating that the prophet's supernatural sustenance emulates the condition of the celestial citizens.⁴⁰ The angelic food often serves as an eschatological marker, which

³⁷ Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 3.542. Regarding the rabbinic traditions of Moses' nourishment on the splendor of the *Shekhinah*, see Ira Chernus, *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism: Studies in the History of Midrash* (Studia Judaica 11; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1982), 74-87.

³⁸ The visionary nourishment on the deity's fiery form is also reminiscent of the tradition found in *4 Ezra* 14:37-48, where the scribe is offered a fiery drink from the arms of the deity. Reflecting on this tradition, Michael Stone notes that in the ancient world "drinking and drunkenness were terms used for the experience of inspiration." Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 439.

³⁹ Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 3.54-541. Cf. also *b. Ber.* 17a and *Pesikta Rabbati* 16.2.

⁴⁰ "If thou goest into a city, thou must act according to its customs.' When Moses ascended on high, where there is no eating or drinking, he emulated the heavenly example." Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 3.539.

signals the seer's transition to the original prelapsarian condition of the protoplast. Rabbinic materials have too often interpreted the heavenly nourishment not only as the habitual means for the sustenance of the angelic being⁴¹ but also as the means of nourishment for the protological and eschatological humankind.⁴² Thus, *b. Ber.* 17a reads:

A favorite saying of Rab was: [The future world is not like this world.] In the future world there is no eating nor drinking nor propagation nor business nor jealousy nor hatred nor competition, but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads feasting on the brightness of the divine presence, as it says, And they beheld God, and did eat and drink.⁴³

⁴¹ See *Gen. Rab.* 2:2: "R. Abbahu said: ... The celestial beings [sc. the angels] and the terrestrial ones [sc. man] were created at the same time: yet the celestial beings are fed by the radiance of the *Shekhinah*, whereas the terrestrial beings, if they do not toil, do not eat. Strange it is indeed!" Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 1.15; *Exod. Rab.* 32:4: "The angels are sustained only by the splendour of the *Shekhinah*, as it says, And Thou preservest them all, and the host of heaven worships Thee (Neh 9:6)." Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 1.15.

⁴² Cf. *Zohar* II.63a: "Rabbi El'azar taught, 'From this manna the righteous are destined to eat in the world that is coming.'" Daniel C. Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition* (12 vols.; Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003-2017), 4.342.

⁴³ This idea of the humankind's eschatological feeding is often juxtaposed, in the rabbinic materials, with the imagery the study of the Torah. Thus, *b. Baba Batra* 10a reads: "What is the meaning of the words, I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness? R. Nahman b. Isaac said: This refers to the students of the Torah who banish sleep from their eyes in this world, and whom the Holy One, blessed be He, feasts with the resplendence of the Divine presence in the future world." Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud. Baba Batra*, 10a. See, also, *b. Sotah* 49a: "R. Judah, son of R. Hiyya said: Any disciple of the Sages who occupies himself with Torah in poverty will have his prayer heard; as it is stated: For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; thou shalt weep no more; He will surely be gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when He shall hear, He will answer thee, and it continues, And the Lord will give you bread in adversity and water in affliction. R. Abbahu said: They also satisfy him from the lustre of the *Shekhinah*, as it is stated: Thine eyes shall see thy Teacher." Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud. Sotah*, 49a.

It is possible that these midrashic testimonies do not merely represent a later rabbinic invention but a *topos* with very ancient roots, possibly predating the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. The account of Abraham's unconventional nourishment, found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, seems to point to the ancient roots of Moses' feeding on the *Shekhinah*, since the theme of Abraham's sustenance on Yahoel is situated within a cluster of distinctive Mosaic motifs. Other studies have noted the "Mosaic" flavor of the celestial feeding in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which suggests that the authors of the apocalypse were possibly drawing on these traditions. David Halperin, for example, reflecting on the tradition of the heavenly provision found in *Apoc. Ab.*, suggested that, like Abraham,

Moses also discovered that the divine presence is itself nourishment enough. That is why Exodus 24:11 says that Moses and his companions beheld God, and ate and drank. This means, one rabbi explained, that the sight of God was food and drink to them; for Scripture also says, In the light of the King's face there is life ... We may assume that the author of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* had such midrashim in mind when he wrote that "my food was to see the angel who was with me, and his speech – that was my drink."⁴⁴

It is also evident that the Mosaic tradition of celestial nourishment has priority over the Abrahamic developments since this motif is deeply rooted in early biblical and extra-biblical Mosaic testimonies. As one might recall, Exod 24:11 already testifies that Moses and his associates "beheld God, and they ate and drank." Such nourishment likely did not involve conventional human sustenance, since Deut 9:9 and 9:18 state that the prophet did not eat bread or drink water. Moreover, the prophet's forty-day ordeal, when he was sustained by the food of the angels, has been set in parallel by early Jewish interpreters to another account of the supernatural feeding, namely, the story of the Israelites' forty years of wandering in the Egyptian desert, during which the

⁴⁴ David Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Response to Ezekiel's Vision* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 16; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), 111

people of God were nourished on the food of angels, that is to say, the manna.⁴⁵ The LXX version of Psalm 77(78):25 makes this connection explicit by identifying the manna of the wilderness as the bread of angels.⁴⁶ *Wisdom of Solomon* 16:20 also affirms such a connection. In Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, Moses himself tells the Israelites that they have eaten the bread of the angels for forty years.⁴⁷ Later rabbinic sources also envision the manna as the angels' food.⁴⁸

An important feature of the aforementioned traditions of supernatural nourishment is their emphasis on the visionary nature of these experiences. This visionary dimension will play a crucial role also in the legends about the eschatological feast on Behemoth and Leviathan and the elect's contemplation of the monsters' fight. This understanding of supernatural nourishment as a visionary endeavor has ancient conceptual roots. Already, in

⁴⁵ Concerning the manna traditions, see Rudolph Meyer, "Manna," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich; 10 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), 4.462-66; Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 10; Leiden: Brill, 1965); Bruce J. Malina, *The Palestinian Manna Tradition* (Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 7; Leiden: Brill, 1968); P. Maiberger, *Das Manna: Eine literarische, etymologische und naturkundliche Untersuchung* (2 vols.; Ägypten und Altes Testament 6.1-2; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983); Dan Merkur, *The Mystery of Manna: The Psychedelic Sacrament of the Bible* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 2000).

⁴⁶ See David Goodman, "Do Angels Eat?" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37 (1986): 160-175 at 161; Horace Hodges, *Food as Synecdoche in John's Gospel and Gnostic Texts* (Ph.D. diss.; University of California at Berkeley, 1995), 308-309.

⁴⁷ Pseudo-Philo, *Bibl. Ant.* 19:5 reads: "You know that you have eaten the bread of angels for forty years. And now behold I bless your tribes before my end comes. You know my toil that I have toiled for you from the time you went up from the land of Egypt." Howard Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum, with Latin Text and English Translation* (2 vols.; Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 31; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 1.121.

⁴⁸ Thus, *b. Yoma* 75b reads: "Our Rabbis taught: Man did eat the bread of the mighty, i.e., bread which ministering angels eat. This was the interpretation of R. Akiba." Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud. Yoma*, 75b.

the formative Genesis account, the protoplasts' feeding on the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil coincides with the motif of their eyes being opened.⁴⁹ Scholars have noted⁵⁰ that Philo, in his *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Exodum*, underlines the visual nature of Moses' celestial nourishment, calling his vision the food of souls. *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Exodum*, then, depicts Moses' visionary experience in the following way:

What is the meaning of the words, "they appeared to God in the place and they ate and drank?" Having attained to the face of the father, they do not remain in any mortal place at all, for all such places are profane and polluted, but they send and make a migration to a holy and divine place, which is called by another name, logos. Being in this place, through the steward, they see the master in a lofty and clear manner, envisioning God with the keen-sighted eyes of the mind. But this vision is the food of souls, and true partaking is the cause of a life of immortality. Wherefore, indeed, it is said, "they ate and drank." For those who are indeed very hungry and thirsty did not fail to see God become clearly visible, but like those who, being famished, find an abundance of food, they satisfied their great desire.⁵¹

Andrea Lieber has proposed that, in this Philonic passage, Moses' encounter on Mount Sinai is spiritualized in such a way that "the vision of the divine presence satiates, like the sacrificial meal."⁵² Further, Lieber suggests that Philo appears influenced by the tradition, witnessed also in pseudepigraphical, rabbinic, and patristic literature, that there is no "eating" in heaven; angelic

⁴⁹ See Gen 3:6-7: "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves."

⁵⁰ Andrea Lieber, "I Set a Table before You: The Jewish Eschatological Character of Aseneth's Conversion Meal," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 14 (2004): 63-77 at 69-70.

⁵¹ Ralph Marcus, *Philo, Questions and Answers on Exodus* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press/Heinemann, 1949), 81-82.

⁵² Lieber, "I Set a Table before You," 70.

beings do not require food like humans, yet their “bodies” are nonetheless sustained by divine means.⁵³ Furthermore, the supernatural feeding on God’s Glory by the angels and chosen human adepts is envisioned as a revelation of the divine mysteries, concentrated in the pivotal nexus of the divine theophany.

The understanding of the supernatural nourishment as a revelation of divine secrets and a visionary encounter is found also in *Joseph and Aseneth*, another early Jewish pseudepigraphical text. There, Aseneth’s celestial revealer feeds the female seer with the honeycomb as a part of her initiation into the divine mysteries. In *Joseph and Aseneth* 16:14, the angels’ food is said to be made from the dew from God’s paradise:

For this comb is (full of the) spirit of life. And the bees of the paradise of delight have made this from the dew of the roses of life that are in the paradise of God. And all the angels of God eat of it and all the chosen of God and all the sons of the Most High, because this is a comb of life, and everyone who eats of it will not die for ever (and) ever.⁵⁴

⁵³ Lieber, “I Set a Table before You,” 70.

⁵⁴ Christoph Burchard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; ed. J. H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1983-1985), 2.177–247 at 2.229. The parallelism between the dew and the manna is found also in *3 Bar.* 8:9-11 (Greek version): “And I said, ‘Lord, what is this bird, and what is its name?’ And the angel told me, ‘His name is Phoenix.’ ‘And what does he eat?’ And he told me, ‘The manna of heaven and the dew of earth.’” Harry E. Gaylord, “3 (Greek Apocalypse of) Baruch,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; ed. J. H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1983-1985), 1.653–79 at 1.671. Cf. also *Zohar* II.62b: “The holy tree was arranged with twelve boundaries on four sides of the world, fortified by seventy branches, all corresponding to the pattern above. At that moment, holy dew trickled from the Concealed Ancient One, filling the head of the Short-Tempered One, the place called Heaven. Some of that dew of supernal holy light flowed and descended below, and as it descended, it dispersed into frozen flakes congealing below, as is written: fine as frost on the ground (Exodus 16:4). All those scions of faith went out and gathered and blessed the supernal Name over it. That manna emitted a fragrance like all the spices of the Garden of Eden, since it had flowed through there in descending. Once they placed it in front of them, they tasted whatever taste they

Scholars have noted that the honeycomb that Pentephres' daughter consumes, from the angel's hand, is reminiscent of the manna once sent from Heaven⁵⁵ to the Israelites in the wilderness.⁵⁶

In light of the aforementioned testimonies, it is possible that the eschatological meal in which the monsters were eaten could be more than just an ordinary meal; it could be a visionary apprehension of the eschatological mysteries.⁵⁷ In this respect it

desired and blessed the supernal King." Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, 4.338.

⁵⁵ Ps 78:23-5 reads: "Yet he commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven; he rained down on them manna to eat, and gave them the grain of heaven. Mortals ate of the bread of angels; he sent them food in abundance."

⁵⁶ Regarding the identification of Aseneth's honeycomb with the manna, see Victor Aptowitzer, "Asenath, the Wife of Joseph: A Haggadic Literary-Historical Survey," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 1 (1924), 282-83; Christoph Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth: Überlieferung, Ortsbestimmung* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 8; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1965), 130; Marc Philonenko, "Initiation et mystère dans Joseph et Aséneth," in *Initiation* (ed. C. J. Bleeker; Studies in the History of Religions 10; Leiden: Brill, 1965), 147-53 at 152-53; Randall Chesnutt, "Perceptions of Oil in Early Judaism and the Meal Formula in Joseph and Aseneth," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 14 (2005): 113-132 at 117-118; Anthea E. Portier-Young, "Sweet Mercy Metropolis: Interpreting Aseneth's Honeycomb," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 14 (2005): 133-157. With respect to connection between the manna and the dew, see Portier-Young, "Sweet Mercy Metropolis," 142-43. Cf. also *Zohar* III.208a, in which the manna is identified both with the celestial dew and with the angelic food; it reads: "Come and see: The manna that descended for Israel in the desert—that manna came from dew on high, descending from the Ancient One, concealed of all concealed. As it descended, its light illumined all worlds, and the Apple Orchard and celestial angels were nourished by it." Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, 9.458-459.

⁵⁷ Consumption of the messianic agent's body as revelation of mysteries comes to its fore in Christian tradition of the Eucharist. On the Eucharist as *mysterion*, see Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 281ff.; José Granados, *Introduction to Sacramental Theology: Signs of Christ in the Flesh* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 72-73; Karl Prumm, "'Mysterion' von Paulus bis Origenes. Ein

is noteworthy that, despite the plethora of statements anticipating this event, the depictions of the monsters' actual consumption are strangely absent in pseudepigraphical or rabbinic literature. Whitney points out that

accounts of the meal itself are remarkably silent concerning the creatures. When reference is made to the role of Leviathan and Behemoth in the meal, that reference is generally brief. When the description of the meal is more elaborate, interest focuses instead on other features.... Later descriptions of the banquet continue this trend. Leviathan and/or Behemoth are mentioned only briefly or not at all. Interest focuses instead on elaborate descriptions of the meal's participants and their actions. ... These traditions focus less on the actual banqueting of the righteous and more on the events which bring the monsters to the eschatological dinner table. The traditions fall into two broad categories: those dealing with the primordial preservation of the creatures as food for the righteous; and those dealing with the eschatological battle which leads to their slaughter before the meal.⁵⁸

Such scarcity of details about the actual physical consumption of the monster again points to the possibility that such an endeavor is not an ordinary dining but rather a revelatory and visionary effort.

MYSTERIES OF THE MONSTERS AND THE HEAVENLY MANNA

The aforementioned traditions of eschatological nourishment are instructive for understanding the final feast on the monsters as a revelation of mysteries. Several details of Moses' feeding on the *Shekhinah* correspond to similar developments found in the Leviathan lore. One of these details is that the interpretation of the celestial nourishment as manna and also the understanding of manna as a divine revelation are often associated with the Torah. These themes are relevant for our study of the monsters because the theme of the eschatological nourishment on Behemoth and

Bericht und ein Beitrag," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 61 (1937): 391-425.

⁵⁸ Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 127-129.

Leviathan in 2 *Baruch* coincides with the motif of the eschatological manna. 2 *Baruch* 29:1-8⁵⁹ brings these two important motifs about nourishment together:

And he answered and said to me, "Whatever will happen then will belong to the whole earth, so that all who live will experience (it). For at that time I will protect only those who are found in those very days in this land. And it will be that when all is accomplished that was to come to pass in those parts, that the Messiah will then begin to be revealed. And Behemoth will be revealed from his place, and Leviathan will arise from the sea; those two great monsters (*tanninē*) which I created on the fifth day of creation, and will have kept until that time. And then they will be food for all who remain. The earth also will yield its fruit ten thousandfold, and on each vine there will be a thousand branches, and each branch will produce a thousand clusters, and each cluster will produce a thousand grapes, and each grape will produce a cor of wine. And those who have been hungry will rejoice; and also they will see wonders every day. For winds will go out from before me to bring every morning the fragrance of aromatic fruits, and at the end of the day clouds distilling the dew of health. And it will happen at that very time that the treasury of manna will again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years because these are they who have come to the completion of time."⁶⁰

Scholars have previously noted the curious parallelism between the release/consumption of Behemoth and Leviathan in the eschatological time and the release/consumption of the manna during the last days in 2 *Bar.* 29:4 and 2 *Bar.* 29:8. Thus, reflecting on the theme of nourishment in 2 *Bar.* 29:4-8, William Whitney points out that "the author has selected traditions for this unit which embody the 'sustenance' theme. Hence, he draws on

⁵⁹ Whitney suggests that 2 *Bar.* 29:4-8 "represents independent traditional material inserted into the larger unit of 2 *Bar.* 28:3-30:5." Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 41. In another part of his study he reiterates this assumption by noting that "scholars generally agree that 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 29:4 is part of a unit beginning at 21:1 and ending at 34:1." Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 39.

⁶⁰ Gurtner, *Second Baruch*, 65-67.

Leviathan and Behemoth material at this point precisely because of the tradition which sees the monsters as eschatological food for the righteous.⁶¹ The parallelism between sustenance on the manna and nourishment on the monsters, then, receives further development in the rabbinic lore. *Midrash Tanhuma Buber, Beshallah* 4 unambiguously links the motif of manna to the eschatological feast on Leviathan and Behemoth:

The Holy One said: In this world you have eaten manna through the merit of your ancestors; but in the world to come I will feed you cattle, i.e., Ziz and Leviathan. You will eat through your own merit. Thus it is stated: Shall trade associates make a banquet of him? Shall they divide him up among merchants?⁶²

Here again, similar to *2 Baruch*, the monsters are envisioned as the “manna” of the last days. Scholars of these rabbinic developments have previously proposed that the eschatological nourishment on the monsters is related to the revelation of the divine knowledge since the manna is often linked with the revelation of the Torah to Israel in the wilderness.⁶³ Thus, reflecting on a tradition found in *Pesikta de Rav Kahana* (Sup. II.5) which states that “everyone who has obeyed the command of going up to Jerusalem in pilgrimage come and partake of the Leviathan’s head, whose delicious taste is like the taste of the head of a fish from the Great Sea,”⁶⁴ William Braude suggests that

the Leviathan, like the manna provided for Israel in the wilderness, was one of God’s special creations, and, like

⁶¹ Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 40.

⁶² John T. Townsend, *Midrash Tanhuma: Translated into English with Introduction, Indices, and Brief Notes (S. Buber Recension)* (3 vols.; Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1989), 2.94-95.

⁶³ *Zohar* II.183b expresses this belief in the following way: “Therefore when the blessed Holy One gave Torah to Israel, He let them taste the supernal bread of that place, and from that bread they knew and perceived mysteries of Torah, so as to walk in the straight path.” Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, 6.30.

⁶⁴ William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana. R. Kahana’s Compilation of Discourses for Sabbaths and Festal Days* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975), 470.

manna, was intended by Him to serve a purpose beyond the bodily nourishment of Israel. The miraculous nature of manna was such that it was absorbed into all two hundred and forty-eight parts of the body: hence unhindered by the ordinary processes of digestion and excretion the people of Israel were ready to receive the revelation at Sinai (*MTeh* 78:3). In the days of the Messiah, the Leviathan's head was to serve the same purpose as manna and thus prepare the people of Israel for instruction in Torah, instruction which God Himself was to impart.⁶⁵

Elsewhere in his study, Braude adds that “with redemption and the coming of the Messiah, the righteous will receive their final reward: they will dwell in sukkahs of transcendent beauty made from the skin of Leviathan, and they will feast upon Leviathan's head, the greatest of delicacies. This, like the manna which Israel

⁶⁵ Braude and Kapstein, *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*, 470. It is also interesting that the *Targum Neofiti* and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Num 21:7-9 connect the manna motif with the serpents who do not lament about their food. *Targum Neofiti* on Numbers 21 reads: “The Bath Qol came forth from the earth and its voice was heard on high: ‘Come, see, all you creatures; and come, give ear, all you sons of the flesh: the serpent was cursed from the beginning and I said to it: ‘Dust shall be your food’ I brought my people up from the lands of Egypt and I had manna come down from heaven, and I made a well come up for them from the abyss, and I carried quail from the sea for them; and my people has turned to murmur before me concerning the manna, that its nourishment is little. The serpent which does not murmur concerning its food will come and rule over the people which has murmured concerning their food.” Martin McNamara et al. *Targum Neofiti 1 and Pseudo-Jonathan: Numbers* (The Aramaic Bible 4; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 115-116. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Exod 21 reads: “A divine voice came from the heaven on high and so said: ‘Come, all mankind, see all the goodness that I have done to the people. I brought them up, redeemed, from Egypt. I sustained them with manna from the heaven, and so they turned and grumbled against me. But behold, the serpent about whom I decreed from the day of the beginning of the world that dust shall be its food does not grumble because of it, while my people grumbled against their food. Now, then, the serpents, which do not grumble against their food, shall come and bite the people who grumbled against their food.” McNamara et al. *Targum Neofiti 1 and Pseudo-Jonathan: Numbers*, 247.

ate in the wilderness, will give them the capacity to receive instruction in Torah from God Himself.”⁶⁶

The earliest Christian accounts may also link the manna traditions to the eschatological nourishment on the monsters. In the story of feeding the 5,000, attested in all four canonical Gospels,⁶⁷ and the account of feeding of the 4,000, attested in the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Matthew,⁶⁸ one finds a curious juxtaposition between the symbolism of manna, expressed through references to bread,⁶⁹ and the symbolism of Leviathan expressed through references to the fish, which in the Gospels serve as ingredients of a proleptic eschatological meal offered by Jesus to his followers. Scholars have previously noted these connections.⁷⁰ Reflecting on the aforementioned biblical passages, Davies and Allison note that “both bread (or manna)

⁶⁶ Braude and Kapstein, *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*, xx.

⁶⁷ Mk 6:31-44, Matt 14:13-21, Luke 9:12-17, and John 6:1-14.

⁶⁸ Mk 8:1-9 and Matt 15:32-39.

⁶⁹ The association between bread and manna comes to its most forceful expression in the Gospel of John 6, where Jesus utters the following words after the episode of miraculous feeding: “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.” On associations between manna and bread in the Gospel stories of miraculous feeding, see Wayne Meeks, *The Prophet-King. Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 14; Leiden: Brill, 1967) 91-98, 291; P.-B. Smit, *Fellowship and Food in the Kingdom: Eschatological Meals and Scenes of Utopian Abundance in the New Testament* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.234; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 69-71.

⁷⁰ Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (13 vols.; New York: Pantheon Books, 1953-68), 5.52, 6.3-61; Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress, 2003), 168; Andrei G. Berman, “Farshirovannyj Leviafan: Eshatologicheskie motivy v evangel’skom sjuzhete ob umnozhenii hlebov (religovedcheskij etud),” in *Dorozhno-transportnyj kompleks: Sostojanie, problemy i perspektivy razvitiya. Sbornik materialov 5-oj nauchnoj konferencii 17 maja 2012 goda* (Cheboksary: Madi, 2012), 162-165; Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2013), 57. For criticism of such associations, see Smit, *Fellowship and Food in the Kingdom*, 72.

and fish (or Leviathan) are associated with the messianic feast in many Jewish texts (cf. *2 Bar.* 29:3–8; *4 Ezra* 6:52).⁷¹

ESCHATOLOGICAL BEHOLDING OF THE MONSTERS AS A REVELATION OF MYSTERIES

Later Jewish accounts narrate that before the eschatological feast, the chosen ones will be invited to behold the fight between Behemoth and Leviathan. This tradition of beholding the monsters alive in the battle, before consuming their dead bodies, may also be related to the revelation and acquisition of Behemoth and Leviathan's mysteries. In this respect it is not coincidental that the early pseudepigraphical accounts that detail the traditions about the messianic feasting on Leviathan and Behemoth describe the monsters' apparition in the messianic time as revelation.⁷² Thus, for example, *2 Bar* 29:3-4 juxtaposes the appearance of the Messiah with the revelation of Behemoth and Leviathan.⁷³ Although *2 Baruch* does not mention the monsters'

⁷¹ William D. Davies and Dale Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 2.481.

⁷² Whitney notes that *2 Bar.* "29:4-8 thus represents three units of traditional material joined by the author of *2 Apoc. Bar.* in order to describe the Messianic age. The author places the Leviathan-Behemoth tradition of 29:4 at the head of these traditions. Why? First, the word 'be revealed' (Syriac, *netgle*) in 29:3 is echoed one word later in the opening of 29:4. I believe that it served as a 'catch-word' which triggered the inclusion of the Leviathan and Behemoth materials as the first of the three traditions. This indicates the probable presence of the theme of 'revealing' in the Leviathan-Behemoth tradition as it was received by the author of *2 Apoc. Bar.* The description of the monsters as 'nourishment for all who are left' at the end of the unit led, in its turn, to the choice of the catalogue of eschatological foods as the second tradition in the series. The transition to the third unit of material was more difficult and required the expedience of the less subtle thematic shift of 29:6, 'And those who are hungry will enjoy themselves and they will, moreover, see marvels every day.'" Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 43.

⁷³ "And it will be that when all is accomplished that was to come to pass in those parts, that the Messiah will then begin to be revealed. And Behemoth will be revealed from his place, and Leviathan will arise from

fight, later Jewish traditions often suggest that at the end of times Behemoth and Leviathan will be revealed to the righteous in their battle with each other. In such an arrangement, a disclosure of eschatological secrets will take the form of a spectacle when the righteous are entertained by the fighting monsters. The traces of this motif can be found in various rabbinic corpora, including targumim, midrashim, and *piyyutim*. Thus, *Targum on Psalms* 104:25-26 states that God created Leviathan in order to sport at the banquet of the righteous.⁷⁴ It is possible that here the tradition about God's "sporting" with Leviathan is interpreted through the spectacles of the monsters' eschatological fight. Reflecting on this connection, Mulder observes that

the Targum on this verse connects this 'sporting' again with the banquet, as it is interpreted as a play to entertain those who are seated at the table of God's dwelling place Related to this is the tradition that Behemoth and Leviathan will perform a kind of bullring fight for the righteous in the world to come. In the context of this midrash watching this fight is a reward, similar to the banquet motif comforting the righteous.⁷⁵

Lev. Rab. 13:3 also portrays the righteous as spectators of "a wild-beast contest":

the sea; those two great monsters which I created on the fifth day of creation, and will have kept until that time." Gurtner, *Second Baruch*, 65-67.

⁷⁴ "This is the sea: great and wide of boundaries, where there are creeping things without number, beasts both small and great. There the ships go; (and as for) Leviathan that you created to sport at the banquet of the righteous? (לויתן דין בריחא למינתך בסעודה צדיקיא) (it is) his dwelling house. All of them look to you to give their food in due season." Lois D. Merino, *Targum de Salmos. Edición Príncipe del Ms. Villa-Amil n. 5 de Alfonso de Zamora* (Biblia Poliglota Complutense. Tradición sefardí de la Biblia Aramea IV, 1; Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas Instituto "Francisco Suárez," 1982), 80; Stec, *The Targum of Psalms*, 189.

⁷⁵ Michael Mulder, "Leviathan on the Menu of the Messianic Meal. The Use of Various Images of Leviathan in Early Jewish Tradition," in *Playing with Leviathan. Interpretation and Reception of Monsters from the Biblical World* (ed. K. van Bekkum et al; Themes in Biblical Narrative 21; Leiden: Brill, 2017), 115-130 at 126, note 27.

R. Judan b. R. Simeon said: Behemoth and Leviathan are to engage in a wild-beast contest before the righteous in the Time to Come, and whoever has not been a spectator at the wild-beast contests of the heathen nations in this world will be accorded the boon of seeing one in the World to Come. How will they be slaughtered? Behemoth will, with its horns, pull Leviathan down and rend it, and Leviathan will, with its fins, pull Behemoth down and pierce it through.⁷⁶

An interesting detail of this passage is that this privilege will be granted only to the faithful ones who have not been spectators at the wild-beast contests during their earthly life. We will explore this detail more closely later in our study. Another important testimony to the tradition of the eschatological fight can be found in *Pesikta de Rav Kahana* (Sup. II.4) where it says God “will bring Behemoth to Leviathan, and they will engage in close combat with each other, as is said One is so close to the other, that no air (רוח) can come between them (Job 41:8). ... What will the Holy One then do? He will signal to Leviathan, who thereupon will strike Behemoth with his fins and thus slaughter him; at the same time He will signal to Behemoth who will strike Leviathan with his tail and slay him.”⁷⁷ *Midrash Tanḥuma Yelammedenu*⁷⁸ and *Aggadat Bereshit 76*⁷⁹ are

⁷⁶ Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 4.167.

⁷⁷ Braude and Kapstein, *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*, 462; Mandelbaum, *Pesikta de Rav Kahana According to An Oxford Manuscript*, 456.

⁷⁸ *Tanḥuma Yelammedenu, Shemini*, §7 reads: “And where will they be ritually slaughtered? – They will attack each other, as it is said, ‘one is so near to the other’; Behemoth draws near to Leviathan, seizes him with his horns and rips him open, and Leviathan, on the other hand, brings about Behemoth’s death, for he smites him with his tail and slays him. And the Righteous go and take their portions.” Jefim Schirmann, “The Battle between Behemoth and Leviathan according to an Ancient Hebrew Piyyut,” in *Ha-Aqademya ha-leummit ha-yisre’elit lemaddaim, Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* (Jerusalem: Academy, 1967), 327-355 at 339, note 25.

⁷⁹ “This is what Scripture says: One is so near to another that no air can come between them (Job 41:16). Is it not like Behemoth will do to Leviathan? Behemoth fights against Leviathan with his horns, and Leviathan expels fire and defeats Behemoth, as is stated: Out of its nostrils comes smoke.” Lieve M. Teugels, *Agadat Bereshit* (Jewish and Christian Perspectives 4; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 225.

also familiar with this motif.⁸⁰ Yet, one of the most elaborate portrayals of the battle can be found in Qallir's *piyyut*. The *piyyut* describes how at the end of times God will reveal to the righteous who will be gathered in the Garden of Eden⁸¹ three monsters: Ziz, Leviathan, and Behemoth.⁸² Then, Behemoth and Leviathan will be engaged in a combat that will lead to their final demise:

Then, at this signal, the north wind and the south wind awake and blow in all directions. Behemoth girds himself with strength and, gaining courage, turns back to Leviathan, who is prepared for battle. He moves at him, tensed for the combat, and again they grapple with each other. Behemoth, mad with rage, encircles him with his horns like a master warrior; while the Fish, facing him, wheels to the right, whetting his fins again and again, as he tries to gash him. Behemoth arches his horns, Leviathan rears his fins – but now He makes an end of the pair, to slaughter, prepare, and consecrate them. They shall be served up as a dish to the faithful people. Seeing that Israel has not been forsaken, they shall say: “Blessed is the Steadfast One. For everything that he ordained long ago, he accomplishes now, at the end of time!”⁸³

In Qallir's *piyyut*, God ends the battle by delivering the final blow to the monsters⁸⁴ and he is the one who will prepare the messianic

⁸⁰ For a comprehensive survey of rabbinic and postrabbinic testimonies containing this motif, see Schirmann, “The Battle between Behemoth and Leviathan,” 327-355.

⁸¹ Schirmann notes that “the great duel ... is the ‘sport’ arranged in honour of the Garden Dwellers or the Holy Ones, who are the inhabitants of the Garden of Eden – the Righteous.” Schirmann, “The Battle between Behemoth and Leviathan,” 335-336.

⁸² “Then shall the gates of the garden of Eden be opened, and the seven preordained companies of righteous men shall be revealed within the garden Whereupon He shall show them the three rewards: Ziz, Leviathan, and Behemoth.” Carmi, *Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, 227-228.

⁸³ Carmi, *Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, 231-232.

⁸⁴ Schirmann points out that “there is no way out but that God should intervene; He is compelled to enter the battle Himself, the details of which are not described.” Schirmann, “The Battle between Behemoth and Leviathan,” 335.

meal from the dead bodies of Behemoth and Leviathan.⁸⁵ Like the aforementioned *Targum on Psalms* 104:25-26, Qallir's *piyyut* also understands the biblical tradition of God "sporting" with Leviathan as an activity which is related to this eschatological fight.⁸⁶

The emphasis on the final battle between Leviathan and Behemoth as a *show* for the righteous ones further affirms the fact that this event is related to the process of disclosing the eschatological mysteries.

ONTOLOGICAL ACQUISITION OF THE DIVINE MYSTERIES AND ANCIENT EPISTEMOLOGY

It appears not to be coincidental that the righteous ones, in their acquisition of the mysteries of Leviathan and Behemoth, rely not merely on the conventional ways to transmit knowledge, which would include reading books or listening to instructions, but instead they directly "partake" in these mysteries through the physical routines of beholding and consumption. These epistemological settings appear not to be coincidental as they reflect an ancient understanding of the divine mysteries as an ontological reality.

Indeed, the direct acquisition of esoteric knowledge via a vision or participation in the meal does not appear to be unusual since it is closely associated with the ancient understanding of divine knowledge itself, envisioned not merely as a product of

⁸⁵ See also *Akdamut Milin*: "Leviathan contends with Behemoth; they are locked in combat with each other. Behemoth gores mightily with its horns; the sea-monster counters with potent fins. The Creator slays them with his great sword, and prepares a banquet for the righteous." Birnbaum, *Daily Prayer Book. Ha-Siddur Ha-Shalem*, 654.

⁸⁶ "He reclines like a king on his couch, till the appointed day, on which God shall sport with him and reveal him to the companies of the pious." Carmi, *Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, 228. Schirmann also points to the phrase in *Midrash Kohen* according to which the monsters "frolic" every day (ומשחקים בכל יום) in the Garden of Eden before God. Schirmann, "The Battle between Behemoth and Leviathan," 337, note 21; Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 2.26. On this tradition, see also Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 96, note 3.

introspection but as a reality which is *objectively* present.⁸⁷ In the context of the lore about Leviathan and Behemoth, the primordial monsters themselves appear to be understood as embodiments of the eschatological knowledge that have been kept by the Creator in his “hidden chambers” until the eschaton. Unfortunately, nowhere are the limits of our modern epistemological sensibilities manifested so clearly as in our misunderstanding of the ancient concept of divine knowledge and, more specifically, embodied divine knowledge.⁸⁸ However, in an ancient epistemological framework, shared both by the Greco-Roman philosophical traditions and by the Near Eastern mythological milieus, the very source of any true knowledge, including divine knowledge, was always situated as an objective reality in its proper abode – the upper realm.⁸⁹ This outlook appears in the dominating Platonic model, which postulated the existence of the noetic world of ideas, as well as in Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Greek myths about heavenly knowledge and its otherworldly revealers. It should be noted that there was no other religious epistemological model at the time when biblical and pseudepigraphical accounts were produced that construed the origin of knowledge without referring

⁸⁷ On this, see Andrei A. Orlov, *Embodiment of Divine Knowledge in Early Judaism* (Routledge Studies in the Biblical World; London/New York: Routledge, 2021), 3-4.

⁸⁸ Reflecting on these challenges, Zainab Bahrani notes that “in studying these cultures, our interpretive task is made all the more difficult since we are dealing with a system of thought, a worldview that existed long before ours, yet we have no means of approaching it from outside our own ontological system.” Zainab Bahrani, *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 122.

⁸⁹ In this system of belief, even the ways in which knowledge is transmitted, such as through an alphabet or writing, originate from above. Reeves and Reed note that in this worldview “writing and the material technologies associated with its practice are not considered ... to be human inventions. They belong instead among a revelatory knowledge which originates from the supernal world.” John Reeves and Annette Y. Reed, *Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, Vol. 1. Sources from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 56.

to the upper, divine realm.⁹⁰ Michael Stone suggests that the authors of early Jewish accounts “claimed – and presumably they believed – that the teachings they propagated stemmed from the trans-mundane realm.”⁹¹

In early biblical and extra-biblical materials, divine knowledge was depicted as originating, as well as permanently and objectively existing in the heavenly realm in celestial tablets, books,⁹² or

⁹⁰ As Markus Bockmuehl mentions “for these writers, ‘mysteries’ subsist in heaven at present but a glimpse of their reality and relevance can be disclosed to select visionaries who pass on this information to the faithful few (the ‘wise,’ i.e. the righteous) to encourage them in waiting for the impending deliverance (*1 Enoch* 1:1-9, 37:1-5, etc.). At present the divine wisdom is known only through such revealed mysteries, since her abode is in heaven (*1 Enoch* 42:1-3; 48:1; 49:1).” Markus Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 36; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), 31-32.

⁹¹ Michael E. Stone, “Pseudepigraphy Reconsidered,” *RRJ* 9 (2006) 1-15 at 11. Scott Noegel notes that “at the upper end of the scribal elite were the scholars, who referred to themselves as integral links in a chain of transmission originating from the gods.” Scott Noegel, “‘Literary’ Craft and Performative Power in the Ancient Near East: the Hebrew Bible in Context,” in *Approaches to Literary Readings of Ancient Jewish Writings* (eds. K. Smelik and K. Vermeulen; SSN, 62; Leiden: Brill, 2014), 21.

⁹² Robert Henry Charles argued that this concept can be “traced partly to Ps 139; Exod 25:9; Exod 26:30, where we find the idea that there exist in heaven divine archetypes of certain things on earth.” Robert Henry Charles, *The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch: Translated from the Editor’s Ethiopic Text* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912), 91. On heavenly books/tablets, see Leslie Baynes, *The Heavenly Book Motif in Judeo-Christian Apocalypses 200 B.C.E. – 200 C.E.* (Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period. Supplement Series 152; Leiden: Brill, 2012); Wilhelm Bousset and Hugo Gressmann, *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter* (Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 21; Tübingen: Mohr, 1926), 258ff.; Robert Eppel, “Les tables de la Loi et les tables célestes,” *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 17 (1937), 401–412; Florentino García Martínez, “The Heavenly Tablets in the Book of Jubilees,” in *Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (eds. M. Albani, J. Frey, and A. Lange; Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 65; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 244–60; Christoph Münchow, *Ethik und Eschatologie: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der frühjüdischen Apokalypstik mit einem Ausblick auf das Neue Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981) 44–

patterns.⁹³ These heavenly media were often understood not merely as “books” or “tablets” in their conventional sense, but also as attributes or parts of celestial organisms – forms, limbs, and garments of heavenly beings on which divine knowledge became permanently affixed or embodied.⁹⁴ Indeed, various Jewish apocalyptic and mystical accounts portray the celestial knowledge

49; Friedrich Nötscher, “Himmlische Bücher und Schicksalsglaube in Qumran,” *Revue de Qumrân* 1/3 (1959): 405–411; Shalom M. Paul, “Heavenly Tablets and the Book of Life,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 5 (1973): 345–352; Ekhard Rau, *Kosmologie, Eschatologie und Lehrautorität Henochs* (Diss. Hamburg, 1974), 345–98; Paul Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1934), 290–292, 303–304; Geo Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book* (Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift 7; Uppsala: Lundequist, 1950).

⁹³ Exod 25:8-9: “And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them. In accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.” Exod 25:40: “And see that you make them according to the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.” Exod 26:30: “Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan for it that you were shown on the mountain.” Exod 27:8: “You shall make it hollow, with boards. They shall be made just as you were shown on the mountain.” Num 8:4: “Now this was how the lampstand was made, out of hammered work of gold. From its base to its flowers, it was hammered work; according to the pattern that the Lord had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand.”

⁹⁴ These traditions were perpetuated in Jewish lore for millennia. Moshe Idel points to an example of this belief in a late midrash, *Aseret ha-Dibberot*, where the following tradition is found: “Before the creation of the world, skins for parchments were not in existence, that the Torah might be written on them, because the animals did not yet exist. So, on what was the Torah written? On the arm of the Holy One, blessed be He, by a black fire on [the surface of] a white fire.” Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 47. See also *Midrash Tanhuma Yelammedenu*: “How was the Torah written? It was written with letters of black fire on a surface of white fire, as is said: His locks are curled and black as a raven.” Samuel A. Berman, *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu. An English Translation of Genesis and Exodus* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1996), 3. Idel suggests that in this passage the Torah is written on the “head of God, as the mention of the locks apparently implies.” Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, 49.

being inscribed on God's palms,⁹⁵ his throne,⁹⁶ his celestial curtain,⁹⁷ and his servants' bodies and accoutrement.⁹⁸ Like with any other

⁹⁵ Isa 49:16: "See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me." 2 Bar. 4:2-6: "Or do you think that this is the city of which I said: On the palms of my hands I have carved you? It is not this building that is in your midst now; it is that which will be revealed, with me, that was already prepared from the moment that I decided to create Paradise. And I showed it to Adam before he sinned. But when he transgressed the commandment, it was taken away from him – as also Paradise. After these things I showed it to my servant Abraham in the night between the portions of the victims. And again I showed it also to Moses on Mount Sinai when I showed him the likeness of the tabernacle and all its vessels. Behold, now it is preserved with me – as also Paradise." Albertus F. J. Klijn, "2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; ed. J. H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1983-1985), 1.615-652 at 1.622.

⁹⁶ 3 Enoch 41:1-3: "R. Ishmael said: Metatron said to me: Come and I will show you ... the letters by which wisdom and understanding, knowledge and intelligence, humility and rectitude were created, by which the whole world is sustained. I went with him and he took me by his hand, bore me up on his wings, and showed me those letters, engraved with a pen of flame upon the throne of glory, and sparks and lightnings shoot from them and cover all the chambers of Arabot." Philip Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth, 2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1983-1985), 1.223-315 at 1.292.

⁹⁷ 3 Enoch 45:1-6: "R. Ishmael said: Metatron said to me: Come and I will show you the curtain of the Omnipresent One, which is spread before the Holy One, blessed be he, and on which are printed all the generations of the world and all their deeds, whether done or to be done, till the last generation. I went and he showed them to me with his fingers, like father teaching his son the letters of the Torah; and I saw: Each generation and its potentates; each generation and its heads; each generation and its shepherds; each generation and its keepers.... And I saw: Adam and his generation, their deeds and their thoughts. ... The Messiah the son of Joseph and his generation, and all that they will do to the gentiles." Alexander, "3 Enoch," 1.296-299. For the *Pargod* traditions in rabbinic literature, see also *b. Yoma* 77a; *b. Ber.* 18b; *b. Hag.* 15a-b; *b. Sanh.* 89b; *b. Sotah* 49a; *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 4:6; *Zohar* I.47a; II.149b-150a; *Maseket Hekhalot* 7.

⁹⁸ For example, in 3 Enoch 13 God writes with his finger, "as with a pen of flame," upon Metatron's crown, "the letters by which heaven and earth were created."

celestial object, heavenly knowledge can also be written on celestial bodies instead of on paper and parchment. Furthermore, whole branches of celestial knowledge can be embodied or hypostasized in celestial beings. In some Jewish apocalyptic materials, various fields of heavenly knowledge receive their own angelic personifications. Early Jewish angelological lore reflected in the *Book of the Watchers* hints at the possibility of the embodiment of divine knowledge and divine secrets in the angelic figures. In this early Enochic text each fallen Watcher's name reflects a particular field of celestial knowledge which this fallen angel illicitly transmitted to humankind, signifying his role as a personification or hypostasis of such knowledge.⁹⁹ Joséf Milik argued that "the names of the twenty principal Watchers ... are for the most part derived from astronomical, meteorological, and geographical terms."¹⁰⁰ This reification of the divine knowledge in the fallen angels is relevant for our study since it illustrates that the celestial mysteries can be embodied not only in protagonists of the apocalyptic story but also in antagonistic characters such as Leviathan and Behemoth.

The embodiment of the divine knowledge in otherworldly characters, of course, was not exclusively an invention of the Enochic authors. This concept was deeply rooted in Mesopotamian lore. Thus, already in Mesopotamian *apkallus* traditions, which some argue constitutes the background of the Enochic Watchers traditions, one can see similar conceptual constellations. Reflecting on these similarities, Amar Annus points out that

the names of many antediluvian *apkallus* are fairly transparent titles or Sumerian incipits of learned scholarly compendia, or other cuneiform series. Giving to the antediluvian sages names resembling titles of scientific treatises served the purpose of establishing the explicit connection between con-

⁹⁹ On the correspondences between angelic names and areas of instruction, see Annette Y. Reed, "Heavenly Ascent, Angelic Descent, and the Transmission of Knowledge in *1 Enoch* 6-16," in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions* (ed. R. S. Abusch and A. Y. Reed; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 47-66 at 55-56.

¹⁰⁰ Józef T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch. Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 29.

temporary and primeval scholarship.... In comparison, the names of 20 principal Watchers in *1 Enoch* 6:7 are for the most part derived from astronomical, meteorological and geographical terms, their names being related to their areas of expertise.¹⁰¹

Annus further suggests that “in both cases the names of the antediluvian experts present them as *hypostases* of learned, and presumably secret, corpora.”¹⁰²

In this ancient epistemological framework, Leviathan and Behemoth appear also to be understood as “embodied mysteries” – the reified deposits of the divine knowledge which were “preserved” by God in his secret chambers in order to be revealed to the chosen ones in the last days.¹⁰³ In this eschatological moment, the righteous of the world will no longer merely listen to or read about the stories of Behemoth and Leviathan from their liturgies or their sacred books – they will behold them and taste them in reality. Furthermore, these final disclosures of the primordial monsters are endowed with the utmost significance which were often reserved in other Jewish texts only for the ultimate divine revelation in the form of the Torah, and they appear to be understood as an introduction of the eschatological Law. We should now explore more closely this significant connection.

BEHOLDING OF AND FEEDING ON THE MONSTERS AS THE REVELATION OF THE ESCHATOLOGICAL TORAH

One puzzling aspect of the aforementioned eschatological routines of beholding and feeding on Leviathan and Behemoth is that these practices clearly contradict the Written and Oral Torah’s regulations. The Written Torah dictates that it is forbidden to eat animals who were not properly slaughtered but died in vicious circumstances when their flesh was pierced and

¹⁰¹ Amar Annus, “On the Origins of Watchers: A Comparative Study of the Antediluvian Wisdom in Mesopotamian and Jewish Traditions,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 19 (2010): 277-320 at 287-88.

¹⁰² Annus, “On the Origin of Watchers,” 288. Italic is mine.

¹⁰³ Cf. *Shūr-ha-Shūrim Rabbah* 1:28: “domains (תּוֹרָי) of Behemoth and Leviathan.”

torn,¹⁰⁴ as would inevitably occur during the eschatological fight between Behemoth and Leviathan.¹⁰⁵ Thus, according to Lev 17:15, “all persons, citizens or aliens, who eat what dies of itself or what has been torn by wild animals, shall wash their clothes, and bathe themselves in water, and be unclean until the evening; then they shall be clean.”

It, therefore, appears not to be surprising that several rabbinic passages directly or implicitly point to the fact that eating the monsters’ flesh at the eschatological feast may indeed represent a praxis forbidden by the Torah. One such example, for instance, can be found in *y. Megillah* 1:

(Antolinus) [Antoninus] said to Rebbi, can I eat from Leviathan in the World to Come? He said to him, yes. He told him, from the Passover lamb you would not let me eat, but from Leviathan you make me eat? He answered, what can we do for you since about the Passover lamb it is written that no

¹⁰⁴ Beal points out that “the problem lies in the method of killing, for Leviathan’s fins are serrated, and therefore something like a saw, which is one of the instruments not permitted for slaughtering animals.... Beyond that, it is fascinating to note that the reason given for prohibiting the use of these particular slaughtering instruments is that they cause undue pain. To be killed with one of these instruments would feel like being choked or clawed to death. Perhaps even a monster should not be slaughtered in such a cruel and unusual manner.” Timothy Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters* (London: Routledge, 2002), 67-68. Kiperwasser and Shapira also note that “it is very surprising that one beast, killed by another beast and thus strictly speaking, a *treifa* (an animal forbidden for consumption), will be declared as permitted for consumption by God Himself, who appears in front of the astonished sages as *Deus ex machina*.” Reuven Kiperwasser and Dan D. Y. Shapira, “Irano-Talmudica II: Leviathan, Behemoth, and the ‘Domestication’ of Iranian Mythological Creatures in Eschatological Narratives in the Babylonian Talmud,” in *Shoshannat Yaakov: Jewish and Iranian Studies in Honor of Yaakov Elman* (ed. S. Secunda and S. Fine; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 203-235 at 225-226.

¹⁰⁵ William D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come* (Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 7; Philadelphia: SBL, 1952), 60-61.

uncircumcised man may eat from it. When he heard this, he went and circumcised.¹⁰⁶

Reflecting on this passage, Harry Sysling argues that this “dialogue between Antolinus (Antoninus) and Rabbi (Yehuda ha Nasi)” assumes that “Leviathan, although an unclean animal, serves as nourishment for the righteous in the world to come.”¹⁰⁷ Despite the fact that some rabbinic passages postulate that Behemoth is a “clean beast”¹⁰⁸ and Leviathan is a “clean fish,”¹⁰⁹ a frequent labelling of the monsters’ eschatological consumption as a “recompense” for the prohibition of certain fish once again points to their problematic nature in relation to the Jewish dietary laws. The theme of “recompense,” for instance, looms large in *Lev. Rab.* 22:10:

R. Menahma and R. Bebai, and R. Aha and R. Johanan in the name of R. Jonathan expounded: As recompense for what I have forbidden you, [says God], I have reserved something for you. As recompense for the prohibition of certain fish you will eat Leviathan, a clean fish; as recompense for the prohibition of certain fowls you shall eat Ziz, which is a clean fowl.¹¹⁰

Midrash on Psalms 18:25 again interprets the messianic meal of the monsters as a “recompense” for not eating forbidden foods in this life:

R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Jacob: It is written Ye shall not eat of anything that dieth of itself (Deut 14:21); neither shall ye eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field (Exod 22:30); and again The fat of that which dieth of itself, and the

¹⁰⁶ Guggenheimer, *The Jerusalem Talmud. Tractates Ta’aniot, Megillah, Hagigah and Mo’ed Qatan (Mašqin)*, 268.

¹⁰⁷ Sysling, *Teḥiyat Ha-Metim*, 64.

¹⁰⁸ *Targum on Psalms* 50:10 states that “for every animal of the forest is mine, and in the Garden of Eden (בגן עדן) I designated for the righteous the clean beasts and the wild ox that grazes all day long (on) a thousand mountains.” Stec, *The Targum of Psalms*, 104; Merino, *Targum de Salmos*, 36.

¹⁰⁹ *Lev. Rab.* 22:10: “As recompense for the prohibition of certain fish you will eat Leviathan, a clean fish (דג טהור).” Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 4.289.

¹¹⁰ Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 4.289.

fat of that which is torn of beasts, may be used for any other service, but ye shall in no wise eat of it (Lev 7:24). If you eat any of these in this world, you will finally be held to account; if you do not eat any of these in this world, by your lives I swear to you, My children, that in the time-to-come, a great banquet shall be prepared for you out of Leviathan's flesh, out of Behemoth and out of Ziz of the field, as is said Ye shall eat in plenty and be satisfied (Joel 2:26).¹¹¹

In the same vein, some rabbinic passages also suggest that watching the final fight of the monsters also represents a “recompense,” this time, for keeping the Oral Torah's precepts for not attending animal fights.¹¹² *Y. Avodah Zarah* 1, 7 warns that the one who sits in the stadium and watches animal fights is “a spiller of blood.”¹¹³ In the messianic time, however, these prohibitions will suddenly be abolished.¹¹⁴ *Lev. Rab.* 13:3 boldly announces this paradigm shift by revealing the following: “R. Judan b. R. Simeon said: Behemoth and Leviathan are to engage in a wild-beast contest before the righteous in the Time to Come, and whoever has not been a spectator at the wild-beast contests

¹¹¹ Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms*, 255.

¹¹² Regarding animal fights, Zeev Weiss points out that “the *tannaim* expressed an unequivocal disdain for Roman public spectacles, prohibiting any association with them whatsoever. Their staunch attitude is conveyed by words such as ‘forbidden,’ ‘not,’ and ‘no,’ which leave no room for doubt regarding their intention.... *Mishna 'Avodah Zarah* 1, 7 remarks: ‘None may sell them bears or lions . . . none may help them build a basilica, scaffold, stadium or judges’ tribunal.’ In other words, Jews are not to sell beasts to non-Jews for animal performances, nor are they to facilitate the building of stadiums for such spectacles.” Zeev Weiss, *Public Spectacles in Roman and Late Antique Palestine* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 201-202.

¹¹³ Heinrich W. Guggenheimer, *The Jerusalem Talmud. Tractates Šev'it and 'Avodah Zarah. Edition, Translation and Commentary* (Studia Judaica 61; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 237.

¹¹⁴ Beal points out that “just as the self-restraint of the righteous in refusing to participate in the Roman spectacles of human and animal contests means that they will enjoy a far more spectacular monster contest, so their self-restraint in refusing to eat torn animals in this world means that they will enjoy torn monster in the world to come.” Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, 68.

of the heathen nations in this world will be accorded the boon of seeing one in the World to Come.”¹¹⁵

One can see that an important aspect of the aforementioned accounts is that the eschatological revelation about Leviathan and Behemoth is unfolded in the midst of another crucial revelation, namely, the Written and Oral Law’s precepts about unclean foods and forbidden animal spectacles. In these expositions, one can detect a certain tension and also parallelism between the old revelation, which prohibits certain foods and actions, and a new disclosure that suddenly and paradoxically abolishes such prohibitions, which previously were deemed to be so essential for Jewish religious life and identity. Since the ways in which Leviathan and Behemoth are slayed for the meal in the eschatological fight, when their flesh is pierced and torn by the fins and tails of their opponent, clearly contradict the Mosaic Torah’s regulations about animal slaughter, one can see in these novel developments an attempt to introduce a new eschatological Law.¹¹⁶ In light of these developments, it is possible that by beholding the monsters’ fight and by consuming their improperly slaughtered bodies – the actions which clearly were forbidden in the Torah given to Moses on Mount Sinai – the righteous of the world would become aware of a new set of rules for slaughter and consumption – the eschatological or messianic Torah.

In his in-depth investigation of the concept of the messianic Torah in Judaism, Abraham Joshua Heschel points out that “many

¹¹⁵ Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 4.167. Scholars argue that the designation of the eschatological battle between Leviathan and Behemoth as a “hunt” (*kynegion*) points to the wild beast hunts that were staged in the theaters in Rome. On this, see Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 68-81, Kiperwasser and Shapira, “Irano-Talmudica II: Leviathan, Behemoth, and the ‘Domestication’ of Iranian Mythological Creatures in Eschatological Narratives in the Babylonian Talmud,” 223-225; Mark R. Sneed, *Taming the Beast: A Reception History of Behemoth and Leviathan* (Studies of the Bible and Its Reception, 12; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2022), 144.

¹¹⁶ Beal notes that “this entirely novel case of slaughter calls for a novel interpretation of the pertinent law, one which will allow Leviathan’s slaughter of Behemoth with its saw-like fin to be kosher.” Beal, *Religion and its Monsters*, 68.

Sages believed that in messianic days, when the earth will be filled with knowledge of God, humankind will merit hearing ‘the Messiah’s Torah,’ ‘the Messiah’s Teaching,’ even ‘Renewal of Torah.’¹¹⁷ Heschel insists that although some rabbinic passages argue for the eternity of the Mosaic Torah regulations,¹¹⁸ other

¹¹⁷ Abraham J. Heschel, *Heavenly Torah: As Refracted through the Generations* (ed. G. Tucker and L. Levin; New York: Continuum, 2005), 684. Scholem points out that according to such beliefs “in the messianic age, with the *tiqqun* accomplished and the effects of sin undone, all things will be restored to their pristine spirituality, and the traditional type of ‘material’ practice and observance of the commandments will automatically pass away.” Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi. The Mystical Messiah 1626-1676* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 320. On the messianic Torah, see also Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 73-77.

¹¹⁸ See, for example, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* to Lev 27:34: “these are the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses — and it is not possible to make any innovations in them — and he commanded them so that he would make them known to the children of Israel on Mount Sinai.” Martin McNamara et al., *Targum Neofiti 1, Leviticus; Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Leviticus* (The Aramaic Bible 3; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 211; y. *Sanh.* 2:6 (20c): “Rebbi Simeon ben Iohai stated: The book Deuteronomy ascended, bowed down before the Holy One, praise to Him, and said to Him: Master of the Universe, You wrote in Your Torah that any disposition which is partially invalid is totally invalid, and now Solomon wants to uproot a *yod* from me! The Holy One, praise to Him, said to it: Solomon and a thousand like him will disappear but nothing from you will disappear.” *The Jerusalem Talmud. Tractates Sanhedrin, Makkot, and Horaiot. Edition, Translation and Commentary* (ed. Heinrich W. Guggenheimer; Studia Judaica 51; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 102; b. *Baba Metzia* 59b: “Said R. Jeremiah: That the Torah had already been given at Mount Sinai; we pay no attention to a Heavenly Voice....” Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metzia*, 59b; b. *Shab.* 104a: “These are the commandments, [teaching] that a prophet may henceforth [i.e., after Moses] make no innovations!” Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud, Shabbath*, 104a; In Maimonides’ 13 principles of Jewish faith, principle 9 states: “I believe by complete faith that this is the Torah, and it shall not be changed and it shall not be replaced with another from the Creator, blessed be His name.” *Gen. Rab.* 98:9 specifically stresses that there will not be any messianic “teaching”: “R. Hanin said: Israel will not require the teaching of the royal Messiah in

passages postulate that the new Torah precepts will be revealed in the messianic time.¹¹⁹ Heschel also points out that “the desire for a renewal of Torah in messianic days was nourished by the sense that not all was revealed, and that not all that was revealed was sufficiently clear.”¹²⁰ This observation is especially relevant for the revelation about Leviathan and Behemoth which was partially unveiled already in the first days of creation but will be fully manifested before the eyes of the righteous only in the last days.

Some rabbinic passages devoted to Leviathan and Behemoth seem to suggest a similar course of events by juxtaposing the motifs of the eschatological fight of the monsters and consumption of their bodies with the pivotal statement from Isa 51:4, where God promises that the future “Torah (תורה) will go forth from Me.” Such a juxtaposition can be found, for example, in *Lev. Rab.* 13:3:

R. Judan b. R. Simeon said: Behemoth and Leviathan are to engage in a wild-beast contest before the righteous in the Time to Come, and whoever has not been a spectator at the wild-beast contests of the heathen nations in this world will be accorded the boon of seeing one in the World to Come. How will they be slaughtered? Behemoth will, with its horns, pull Leviathan down and rend it, and Leviathan will, with its fins, pull Behemoth down and pierce it through. The Sages

the future, for it says, Unto him shall the nations seek (Isa 11:10), but not Israel.” Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 2.957.

¹¹⁹ See, for example, *Gen. Rab.* 98:9: “He washeth his garments in wine, intimates that he [the Messiah] will compose for them words of Torah; And his vesture in the blood of grapes – that he will restore to them their errors.” Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 2.957; *Lev. Rab.* 13:3: “R. Abin b. Kahana said: The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Instruction [Torah] shall go forth from Me (Isa 51:4), i.e. new interpretation of Torah will go forth from Me.” Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 4.167.

¹²⁰ Heschel, *Heavenly Torah*, 684. *Midrash on Psalms* 146:5 reads: “Who are the blind? Men of the present generation who go groping like blind men in the Torah, saying We wait for light, but behold obscurity, for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind (Isa 59:9-10). All of them read, but do not know what they read. All of them study, but do not know what they study. In the time to come, however, The eyes of the blind shall be opened.” Braude, *Midrash on Psalms*, 367.

said: And is this a valid method of slaughter? Have we not learnt the following in a Mishnah: All may slaughter, and one may slaughter at all times [of the day], and with any instrument except with a scythe, or with a saw, or with teeth [in a jaw cut out of a dead animal], because they cause pain as if by choking, or with a nail [of a living body]? R. Abin b. Kahana said: The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Instruction [Torah] shall go forth from Me (Isa 51:4), i.e. new interpretation of Torah will go forth from Me. R. Berekiah said in the name of R. Isaac: In the Time to Come, the Holy One, blessed be He, will make a banquet for his righteous servants, and whoever has not eaten *nebelah* in this world will have the privilege of enjoying it in the World to Come. This is indicated by what is written, And the fat of that which dieth of itself (*nebelah*) and the fat of that which is torn of beasts (*terefah*), may be used for any other service, but eat it [ye shall] not, in order that you may eat it in the Time to Come.¹²¹

The significance of this passage is that the revelation about Behemoth and Leviathan in the last days is understood as a “new interpretation of the Torah” revealed by God in the eschatological time.¹²² A close look, however, reveals that it is not merely a new interpretation of the Law, but rather a new Law since it radically negates and abolishes the crucial precepts of the old one.¹²³

¹²¹ Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 4.167.

¹²² In his analysis of the tradition from *Leviticus Rabbah*, Timothy Beal points out that, in response to the question from the sages, “Abin ben Kahana explains that this is an exceptional case, and therefore these extraordinary methods of slaughter are permitted. He begins with a quotation, drawn from Isaiah 51:4, ‘a new law [*tora hadashah*] shall go forth from me,’ which he reads as, ‘a novel interpretation of the law [*hiddush torah*] will go forth from me.’ That is, this entirely novel case of slaughter calls for a novel interpretation of the pertinent law, one which will allow Leviathan’s slaughter of Behemoth with its saw-like fin to be kosher. The righteous will taste Behemoth.” Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, 68.

¹²³ Some later interpreters attempt to resolve the paradox of the improper slaughter of Leviathan by arguing that the laws of slaughtering apply only to human slaughterers and ordinary animals. They point out that since the eschatological slaughter of Leviathan and Behemoth is performed by God and they represent not ordinary animals, but rather

Reflecting on *Lev. Rab.* 13:3, William Davies suggests that it expresses “not merely the view that the Messianic Age would see changes in the Torah but also that it would bring with it a new Torah.”¹²⁴ The eschatological abolishment of the old Torah and the introduction of a new one, hinted at in several rabbinic passages,¹²⁵ have been proleptically rehearsed in some antinomi-

unique creatures, Torah’s laws of slaughter do not apply to them. Yet, the internal tensions found in *Lev. Rab.* 13:3 and other similar passages contradict these explanations.

¹²⁴ Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come*, 59.

¹²⁵ See, for example, *b. Ber.* 63a: “They have made void Thy Torah. Why? Because it is time to work for the Lord.” Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud. Berachoth*, 63a; *b. Nid.* 61b: “R. Joseph observed: This implies that the commandments will be abolished in the Hereafter.” Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud. Niddah*, 61b; *b. Men.* 99a-b: “Resh Lakish said: There are times when the suppression of the Torah may be the foundation of the Torah (ביטולה של תורה זהו יסודה), for it is written, ‘Which thou didst break’: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses, ‘Thou didst well to break!’” Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud. Menachot*, 99a-b; *b. Sanh.* 97a: “The Tanna debe Eliyyahu teaches: The world is to exist six thousand years. In the first two thousand there was desolation; two thousand years the Torah flourished; and the next two thousand years is the Messianic era.” Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud. Sanhedrin*, 97a; *Midrash on Psalms* 146: “The Lord will loose the bonds (Ps 146:7). What does the verse mean by the words loose the bonds? Some say that of every animal whose flesh it is forbidden to eat in this world, the Holy One, blessed be He, will declare in the time-to-come that the eating of its flesh is permitted... But why did God declare the flesh of some animals forbidden? In order to see who would accept His commandments and who would not accept them. In the time-to-come, however, God will again permit the eating of that flesh which He has forbidden.” Braude, *Midrash on Psalms*, 365-366. For discussion of these passages, see Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar* (trs. A. Schwartz et al.; Albany: SUNY, 1993) 47-48; Shaul Magid, *Hasidism on the Margin: Reconciliation, Antinomianism, and Messianism in Izbica/Radzin Hasidism* (Modern Jewish Philosophy and Religion. Translations and Critical Studies; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 123-124, 308; Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1941), 317 and 421, note 65; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 237; idem, “Hypernomian Piety and the Mystical Rationale of the Commandments in Nathan of Gaza’s *Sefer Haberiya*,” *El Prezente: Journal for Sephardic Studies* 12-13 (2018-2019): 90-153 at 93-95.

an practices of various Jewish messianic movements,¹²⁶ including the Sabbatian and Frankist communities.¹²⁷ Yet, such praxis represents not merely an invention of these Jewish sectarian groups, but rather a phenomenon with ancient roots that are reflected, for example, in some foundational Christian rituals.¹²⁸ Furthermore, the understanding of the antinomian practices as a revelation of divine mysteries appears to be implied in *m. Hag. 2* where the sexual aberrations (דורשין בעריות) are included in the list of subjects which are forbidden to reveal along with the secrets of Creation and the secrets of the Chariot.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ On antinomian practices in various Jewish messianic movements, see Ernst Bammel, "Nomos Christou," *Studia evangelica* 3 (1964): 120-128; Andrew Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation: Jewish Messianic and Visionary Traditions and New Testament Christology* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 207; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 499-450; Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Maiden of Ludmir: A Jewish Holy Woman and Her World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 154-155; Alejandro Díez Macho, "¿Cesará la 'Torá' en la Edad Mesiánica?" *Estudios bíblicos* 12 (1953): 127-134; Pawel Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755-1816* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Jay Michaelson, "Conceptualizing Jewish Antinomianism in the Teachings of Jacob Frank," *Modern Judaism* 37 (2017): 338-362; Peter Schäfer, "Die Torah der messianischen Zeit," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 65 (1974): 27-42; Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 393-403; Stephen Sharot, *Comparative Perspectives on Judaism and Jewish Identities* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 123ff; Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 237-238; idem, "Hypernomian Piety," 93-95.

¹²⁷ On this, see Wolfson, "Hypernomian Piety," 99. In his other study, Wolfson points out that in these communities "abrogation of the law was perceived as the ultimate means to fulfill it." Elliot R. Wolfson, "Coronation of the Sabbath Bride: Kabbalistic Myth and the Ritual of Androgynisation," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 6 (1997): 301-343 at 301.

¹²⁸ One can detect antinomian tendencies in relation to the Jewish dietary laws, for instance, in another messianic meal, the Eucharist, when the Torah's prohibition "You shall not drink blood" became replaced by the eschatological ritual of the messiah's blood consumption.

¹²⁹ The motif of acquisition of the divine secrets through antinomian praxis may be present in the aforementioned Eucharist where the Christians are privy to the utmost mysteries of God through their consumption of the messiah's blood. On this, see Andrea Lieber, "Jewish

Midrash Tanḥuma reinterprets the Torah's precepts about improperly slaughtered animals in light of the Behemoth and Leviathan traditions by postulating that, in the eschatological time, "there will be no ritual slaughter":

The Holy One (Blessed be He) said to Israel, "Be careful that you do not pollute yourselves with an unclean beast or an unclean creature." Thus David says, "As for God, his way is perfect; the promise of the Lord is true" (Ps 18:31), in order to purify his creations. He said to him, "Rabbi, what does it matter to the Holy One (Blessed be He) whether Israel eats what is not properly slaughtered, whether Israel kills by piercing and eats, or slaughters at the throat or at the thigh?" You should know that these things were not commanded for this reason but rather for the purification of Israel, for in the age to come he will make a banquet for the righteous from Behemoth and Leviathan, and there will be no ritual slaughter there.¹³⁰

and Christian Heavenly Meal Traditions," in *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism* (ed. April D. DeConick; SBL Symposium Series 11; Leiden: Brill; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 313-339 at 335; David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol Between Jews and Christians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 61.

¹³⁰ Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 147. See also *Midrash on Psalms* 146:4: "The Lord will loose the bonds (Ps 146:7). What does the verse mean by the words loose the bonds? Some say that of every animal whose flesh it is forbidden to eat in this world, the Holy One, blessed be He, will declare in the time-to-come that the eating of its flesh is permitted. Thus in the verse That which hath been is that which shall be, and that which hath been given is that which shall be given (Eccl 1:9), the words that which hath been given refer to the animals that were given as food before the time of the sons of Noah, for God said: 'Every moving thing that liveth shall be food for you; as the green herb have I given you all' (Gen 9:3). That is to say, 'As I give the green herb as food to all, so once I gave both beasts and cattle as food to all.' But why did God declare the flesh of some animals forbidden? In order to see who would accept His commandments and who would not accept them. In the time-to-come, however, God will again permit the eating of that flesh which He has forbidden." Braude, *Midrash on Psalms*, 365-366.

One can see in this passage a curious reversal: the adept will be rewarded in the eschatological time with what he abstains from in this world.¹³¹ The eschatological transgression of the Torah's precepts thus becomes a new legal norm.¹³² *Lev. Rab.* 13:3 effectively summarizes the gist of this legal revolution by stating that "whoever has not eaten *nebelah* in this world will have the privilege of enjoying it in the World to Come."¹³³ It pertains not

¹³¹ Schirmann notes that "in other words, in the world to come the Righteous would be vouchsafed to see a 'beast contest' of abnormal proportions, because they were unwilling to watch a 'beast contest' in this world." Schirmann, "The Battle between Behemoth and Leviathan," 338. Similarly, Sneed points out that in such reversal "the Jews will finally get to eat unclean food (a carcass) in the world to come in compensation for their diligent Kosher observance during their earthly lives." Sneed, *Taming the Beast*, 144.

¹³² Heschel notes that "it is commonly assumed that this idea concerning the voiding of *mitzvot* in the hereafter is an alien growth in the field of Jewish thought, a foundling of dubious parentage. All the more so is the reading of the verse 'The Lord releases the bound' as referring to permissions and prohibitions considered to be an unworthy exegesis, from which exudes an odor of heresy and frivolity. But note that already in the period of the Tannaim there was discussion concerning the continuation of certain *mitzvot* in the hereafter. Indeed, Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva themselves differed on the import of one explicit biblical text, which had the potential to support the idea of the voiding of certain *mitzvot* in the hereafter. For whoever argued that things currently forbidden are destined to be permitted by the Holy and Blessed One in the age to come would seek to demonstrate from a biblical verse that this permissiveness was from hoary antiquity; it was simply that something that the Holy and Blessed One forbade in a particular era He would once again permit in a subsequent era." Heschel, *Heavenly Torah*, 687.

¹³³ Although some rabbinic sources report that Leviathan is a clean fish (דג טהור), it is clear that during combat with Behemoth, when his flesh will be torn by the other monster, he will become an impure fish. Thus, *b. Hullin* 67b concludes that Leviathan is a clean fish because he has scales and fins: "It was taught: R. Jose, son of the Damascene, says: The Leviathan is a clean fish (לוייתן דג טהור), for it is written: His scales are his pride, and it is also written: 'Sharpest potsherds are under him.' 'Scales.' these are the scales that cover him; 'sharpest potsherds are under him.' these are the fins wherewith he propels himself." Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud, Hullin* 67b.

only to the consumption of the monsters but also to the viewing of their fight. Whitney notes that “only those who have refrained from witnessing the spectacles of the arena in their lifetime will be allowed to witness the eschatological spectacle staged by God.”¹³⁴ When one keeps in mind that the beholding of the monsters and their consumption constitute a revelation of mysteries, these actions can be interpreted as reenactments of a new Law that abolish the previous legal paradigm. What was evil and transgressive in the “old Law” suddenly becomes a new norm in a “new Torah” revealed by God by means of the monsters in the last days.¹³⁵

This paradoxical reversal provides an important perspective in the role of evil and its significance in the divine economy of salvation and restoration. It is no secret that the eschatological meal on Behemoth and Leviathan has often puzzled exegetes precisely because it involves the creatures which are known in Jewish lore for their unpredictable and even evil nature. The rabbinic tradition supplies an unusual answer for this perplexing issue by pushing the envelope even further. For rabbinic authors, the righteous will not only feast on the evil creatures, this eschatological destruction of evil will also be mitigated via even more paradoxical means, some of which would involve the violation of the Torah’s commandments.

These traditions provide a fresh outlook also on the mysteries of evil themselves. In this perspective, the adept’s acquisition of the Other Side’s secrets becomes not merely a trip to a library but instead a visionary journey into the mysteries of the eschatological Torah.

¹³⁴ Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 144.

¹³⁵ *Midrash Tanhuma Yelammedenu, Shemini* §7 reads: “And where will they be ritually slaughtered? – They will attack each other, as it is said, ‘one is so near to the other’; Behemoth draws near to Leviathan, seizes him with his horns and rips him open, and Leviathan, on the other hand, brings about Behemoth’s death, for he smites him with his tail and slays him. And the Righteous go and take their portions. *From this it may be deduced that ritual slaughter was enjoined only to test and purify Israel.*” Schirmann, “The Battle between Behemoth and Leviathan,” 339, note 25.

In light of the aforementioned conceptual developments, it is possible that, in the ancient epistemological framework, Leviathan and Behemoth were understood as reified revelation – the new Torah, hidden by God until the last times in order to be unveiled to the righteous in a special “performative way” through the consumption of previously forbidden food and beholding previously forbidden animal contests.

In this respect, it is not coincidental that the theme of the Torah appears in many rabbinic passages that speak about the messianic banquet. We have already witnessed a plethora of references to Torah’s dietary laws, many of which can be found in these passages. Yet, some accounts touch on the Torah’s other aspects. Thus, for example, a passage found in *Pesikta de Rav Kahana* (Sup. II.4) connects the eschatological feasting on Leviathan with study of Written and Oral Torah:

Another comment: The associates–members of many, many different associations–make a banquet of him, some of the associations being concerned with study of Scripture, some with study of Mishnah, some with Talmud, some with Haggadah (יש בעלי מקרא יש בעלי משנה יש בעלי תלמוד יש בעלי הגדה), some with deeds of charity, some with the proper performance of precepts; each and every association comes and takes its portion of Leviathan. Lest you suppose there is strife among the associations [over the various portions], the verse goes on to say, They shall part him as among merchants.¹³⁶

This passage mentions the expertise of the participants in the messianic meal by portraying them as students both in the Written and Oral Law, which again solidifies the aforementioned understanding of the banquet as the revelation of the messianic legal code. By introspectively “devouring” the Torah in their previous lives, these chosen students of the Law now will be physically consuming a “body” of a new revelation through their

¹³⁶ Braude and Kapstein, *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*, 470; Bernard Mandelbaum, *Pesikta de Rav Kahana According to An Oxford Manuscript* (2 vols.; New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962), 457.

nourishment on the monster's flesh.¹³⁷ In this context, Leviathan's physical form itself can be understood as the "body of the divine mysteries," thus representing a sort of a zoomorphic "scroll" of the eschatological Torah. This process of the Torah's reification in the form of an otherworldly being, in this case a monster, is a well-established tradition in various Jewish accounts.¹³⁸ Moshe Idel reminds us that in Jewish lore, the Torah is often conceived of as an organism which has an anthropomorphic form.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ In light of this, the tradition about the preserved body of the female monsters which had been salted away or cooled in the protological time and stored for use at the eschaton receives a new significance.

¹³⁸ On this, see Orlov, *Embodiment of Divine Knowledge in Early Judaism*, 6-7, 13-14.

¹³⁹ Moshe Idel, "Concepts of Scripture in Jewish Mysticism," in *Jewish Concepts of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction* (ed. B. D. Sommer; New York: New York University Press, 2012), 157-178 at 159. On this, see also Elliot Wolfson, "Iconicity of the Text: Reification of Torah and the Idolatrous Impulse of Zoharic Kabbalah," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 11 (2004): 215-242.