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**Mystical Textile:
Vision of the Heavenly Curtain in the *Apocalypse of Abraham***

In the *Apocalypse of Abraham* the seer receives an enigmatic vision encompassing the span of the entire creation from its protological beginnings to its eschatological end. The patriarch's vision occupies a substantial part of the pseudepigraphon stretching from chapter 19 to the end of the apocalypse. It includes the vision of the several "levels" of created order – including the structure of the celestial realm, the earth and the underworld. This portentous revelation begins in chapter 19 where the Deity's voice orders the seer to behold the heavenly "levels,"¹ situated under his feet, while opening earthly and subterranean realms to the gaze of the visionary.²

It appears that Abraham's vision encompass two distinctive dimensions – one spatial and another temporal. Although it is difficult sometimes to separate the contents of these two dimensions it is possible that the first part of the disclosure occupying chapters 19-23 emphasize "vertical" spatial aspect of the vision – when the seer gazes from highest point of creation to its lowest level, while remaining chapters starting with chapter 24 emphasize the "horizontal"

¹ Cf. *Apoc. Ab.* 19:4 "And while he was still speaking, and behold, the levels opened, <and> there are the heavens under me." Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 25.

² Cf. *Apoc. Ap.* 21:1-2: "And he said to me, 'Look now beneath your feet at the expanse and contemplate the creation which was previously covered over. On this level there is the creation and those who inhabit it and the age that has been prepared to follow it.' And I looked beneath the expanse at my feet and I saw the likeness of heaven and what was therein." Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 26.

temporal aspect – when the content of the vision unfolds from the protological to the eschatological points. The initial verses of chapter 24 underlines this transitional switching point between the spatial and temporal aspects of the disclosure. Thus in *Apoc. Ab.* 24:1-5 both protological and eschatological markers are invoked when the Deity promises to the hero of the faith to tell him “what and how it will be in the last days” and the visionary sees “what had been in the world before.”³

Background of Abraham’s Vision

In order to fully comprehend the scope of the patriarch’s vision we now must recall some of the traditions narrated earlier in the text. As we remember the apocalyptic portion of the Slavonic apocalypse begins with the Deity ordering the hero to prepare sacrifices. It is important that this command for sacrifices coincides in the text with the promise of vision and the revelation of secrets. Thus in *Apoc. Ab.* 9:5-9 the Deity promises “to set ages” before the patriarch:

Go, take for me a heifer in her third year, and a she-goat in her third year, and ram in his third year, and a turtledove, and a pigeon, and set out for me a pure sacrifice. And in this sacrifice I shall set before you the

³ “And he said to me, ‘Such is the near future of the nations of peoples which are set apart for you after you from your progeny, as you will see in the picture, what is destined to be with them. And I shall tell you what and how it will be in the last days. Look now at everything in the picture.’ And I looked and saw there what had been in the world before. And I saw, as it were, Adam, and Eve with him, and with them the Evil Adversary and Cain, who acted lawlessly because of the Adversary, and the murdered Abel, the perdition brought and given to him through the Lawless One.” Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 28.

ages and make you know secrets And there shall I show you the ages: things built and firmed, made and renewed by my word.⁴

It has been previously noticed that the order of the sacrifices offered by Abraham is reminiscent of the account found in Genesis 15 “with an allusion to Gen 22 insofar as the sacrifices in located on a high mountain.”⁵ These sacrifices of the patriarch appear to play an important part in his transition to the heavenly realm where he later will receive the vision of history and its climatic end. Some sacrificial items even play an unusual technical role in his ascent serving as psychopomps for the seer and his celestial guide Yahoel.⁶

But what are the exegetical roots of this paramount connection between the sacrifices of the hero and his visions? Already in the biblical account found in Gen 15 it is hinted that Abraham’s sacrifice is coincided with the visionary experience in the “dream”: “As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him” (v. 12); “then a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces” (v. 17).

⁴ Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 17.

⁵ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 226.

⁶ “And he said to me, ‘Slaughter and cut all this, putting together the two halves, one against the other. But do not cut the birds. And give them [halves] to the two men whom I shall show you standing beside you, since they are the altar on the mountain, to offer sacrifice to the Eternal One. The turtledove and the pigeon you will give me, and I shall ascend (*воздѣ*) in order to show to you [the inhabited world] on the wings of two birds....’ And I did everything according to the angel’s command. And I give to the angels who had come to us the divided parts of the animals. And the angel took the two birds” (*Apoc. Ab. 12:8-13:1*). Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 19-20; Philonenko-Sayar and Philonenko, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, 64.

In this respect George Herbert Box in his study underlines the initial “visionary” background of the biblical account noting that “the apocalyptic part of the book is based upon the story of Abraham’s sacrifices and *trance*, as described in Gen. xv.”⁷

Some early extra-biblical Jewish accounts elaborate the patriarch’s trance as a vision. Thus, authors of Jewish pseudepigraphical writings appear to be cognizant of the revelatory context associated with the patriarch’s sacrifices in Gen 15. The author of 2 *Baruch* 4:2-4 affirms the visionary thrust of the biblical account by saying that God showed Abraham some protological events including the creation of paradise at night between the pieces of the slain animals:

And the Lord said to me: ... 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 already prepared from the moment that I decided to create Paradise. And I showed it to Adam before he sinned All these things I showed to my servant Abraham in the night between the portions of the victims. And again I showed it also to Moses on Mount Sinai....⁸

The interesting feature of this account is its sacerdotal dimension since the patriarch’s visionary experience is mentioned here in the context of the disclosure of the idea of the true sanctuary. The tradition of the revelation of the pattern (תבנית) of the temple to Moses and David is well known from biblical accounts. Here in 2 *Baruch* Abraham along with Adam enlisted in the chain of distinguished seers to whom the temple was revealed. It affirms the sacerdotal thrust

⁷ Box and Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, xxiv.

⁸ A.F.J. Klijn, “2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch,” *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1985 [1983]) 1.622.

of Abraham's vision between the pieces which in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* receives such an extensive and profound elaboration.

Another Jewish pseudepigraphical account, *4 Ezra* 3:15, again affirms of the reception of the divine mysteries by the hero of the faith during his night vision:

And when they were committing iniquity before you, you chose for yourself one of them, whose name was Abraham; and you loved him and to him only you revealed the end of the times, secretly by night.⁹

This emphasis on eschatological dimension of the disclosures is intriguing here since in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* the seer too sees the end of everything.¹⁰

Pseudo-Philo's *Jewish Antiquities* 23:6-7 also appear to deal with eschatological subjects as it provides a vivid description of the grim eschatological destiny of the wicked through the reference to the specific fiery "place" of punishment – the symbolism which might represent a veiled reference to Gehenna:

And I said to him, "Take for me a three-year-old calf and a three-year-old she-goat and a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a dove." He took them as I commanded him. I cast upon him a deep sleep and encompassed him with fear and <set> before him the place of fire wherein will be expiated the deeds of

⁹ B.M. Metzger, "The Fourth Book of Ezra," *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1985 [1983]) 1.528.

¹⁰ It is possible that the early Christian accounts might also cognizant of Abraham's visions and revelation of the upcoming events to him. Thus, Louis Ginzberg suggests that some New Testament materials like the Gospel of John 8:56 and Acts 7:7 might also allude to the fact that the future course of Israel's history was revealed to Abraham. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 5.228-229.

those commit iniquity against me, and I showed him the torches of fire by which the righteous ones who have believed in me will be enlightened...”¹¹

Targumic and rabbinic interpretations of Genesis account further unfold the hidden revelatory thrust of the patriarch’s dream, bringing some traditions found in the pseudepigrapha on a new symbolic and conceptual level. Thus, *Trg. Neof.* on Gen 15:17 elaborates the vision of Gehenna, a revelation received by the hero of faith between the parts of the sacrificial animals:

And behold the sun set and there was darkness, and behold Abram looked while seats were being arranged and thrones were erected. And behold, Gehenna which is like a furnace, like an oven surrounded by sparks of fire into the midst of which the wicked fall, because the wicked rebelled against the Law in their lives in this world. But the just, because they observed it, have been rescued from the affliction. *All was thus shown to Abram* when he passed between these parts.¹²

The important feature of this description pertinent to our study is that according to the targumic interpretation Abraham sees both “thrones” and “Gehenna” – a peculiar constellation of the revelatory subjects which will play such a portentous role in the paradoxical dualistic framework of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, where the patriarch beholds a vision of Gehenna while standing next to the divine throne. As in the Slavonic apocalypse it reaffirms the spatial,

¹¹ Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo’s Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, 1. 129-130. In the same text - Pseudo-Philo’s *Bib. Ant.* 18:5 Abraham is raised “above the firmament” and is shown “the arrangements of all the stars”: “And I said to him, ‘Was it not concerning this people, that I spoke to Abraham in a vision, saying, ‘Your seed will be like the stars of the heaven,’ when I lifted him above the firmament and showed him the arrangements of all the stars.’” Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo’s Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, 1.118.

¹² McNamara, *Targum Neofiti I: Genesis*, 96-97.

vertical axis of the vision of the patriarch who is able to see the highest and lowest points of creation. The horizontal, temporal axis also seems to be invoked in Neofiti. Thus, in this Targum, as in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* the Deity shows to Abraham the destiny of the wicked and the righteous in the eschatological age.

The already familiar cluster of the distinctive visionary motifs, including the revelation of Gehenna and fiery annihilation of the wicked appear also in another Palestinian Targum, the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Gen 15:17:

When the sun had set and it was dark, *behold, Abram saw* Gehenna sending up smoke and coals of fire, and sending forth sparks of fire with which to judge the wicked. And *behold it passed between these parts*.¹³

In the *Fragmentary Targum* on Gen 15:17 the patriarch again sees the vision of Gehenna and the upcoming eschatological judgment of the wicked and salvation of the righteous:

And it was: And the sun was about to set, and there was a darkness; and Abram watched as seats were arranged and thrones were set up, and there was Gehenna which was prepared for the wicked in the world to come, like a furnace surrounded by sparks of fire and a flame of fire, into which [all] the wicked fell because they rebelled against the Torah during their lives; but the righteous will be saved, because they observed it [even when] under oppression; all of this was shown to Abraham when he passed between these pieces.¹⁴

¹³ Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 61. On Abraham's vision between pieces see also *Targum of Isaiah* 43:12: "I declared to Abraham your father what was about to come; I delivered you from Egypt, as I swore to him between the pieces." *The Targum of Isaiah* (ed. J.F. Stenning; Oxford: Clarendon, 1953) 146.

¹⁴ Klein, *The Fragment-Targums of the Pentateuch According to Their Extant Sources*, 2.13.

The theme of the arrangements of the seats and thrones here invokes the memory of peculiar symbolism found in Daniel 7 and hints to the peculiar settings often associated with the imagery of the divine court at the time of the eschatological judgment.

It is also noteworthy that all three aforementioned Palestinian Targumim attest also to the patriarch's vision of the "four kingdoms" rising against people of Israel, the feature which is reminiscent of Abraham's vision of the entire history in the Slavonic apocalypse:

When the sun was about to set, a deep sleep was cast upon Abram, and behold four kingdoms were rising to enslave his children: "Dread" – that is Babylon; "Dark" – that is Media; "Great" – that is Greece; "Fell" – that is Edom, which is destined to fall and for which there will be no rising; from there the people of the house of Israel will come up. (*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Gen 15:12).¹⁵

Yet, unlike in the Slavonic apocalypse where the seer beholds visions of the history and the end after his bodily ascent into heaven, here the patriarch sees his disclosures in a dream. Still, the reinterpretation of biblical story found in the targumic accounts betrays several important conceptual connections with the apocalyptic elaborations of Abraham's vision found in the pseudepigraphical writings including the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. While in Genesis 15 the

¹⁵ Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 60-61. *Targum Neofiti* on Gen 15:12: "... and behold Abram saw four kingdoms rising against him: dread: that is Babylon; darkness: that is Media; great: that is Greece; fell upon him: this is Edom, the wicked which will fall and will not rise again." McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, 96. The *Fragment Targum* on Gen 15:12: "And it was: And the sun was about to set; and a deep, pleasant sleep fell upon Abram, and Abram saw the four kingdoms that were to rise up and enslave his children: A Great Dark Dread Descended Upon him: dread is Babylon; Dark is Media; Great is Greece; Descended upon him is the wicked Edom which is the forth kingdom that is destined to fall and will not have any revival forever." Klein, *The Fragment-Targums of the Pentateuch*, 2.13.

patriarch receives aural revelation from God about the upcoming events, in the Targums, like in the Slavonic apocalypse, the visionary aspect of the revelation is emphasized as the patriarch is now able to behold these historical or eschatological realities.

Mysteries of the Pargod

We already noticed in the course of our investigation the fact that some aforementioned pseudepigraphical and rabbinic accounts attempt to emphasize the sacerdotal thrust of Abraham's vision. It seems to be not a deliberate and unusual exegetical move since even the original biblical account tries to put emphasis on the sacerdotal settings by telling its readers that the patriarch's trance occurred *during* his sacrificial practice. Subsequent pseudepigraphical and rabbinic elaborations of the story preserve this initial cultic emphasis by insisting that patriarch's vision occurred while *passing* the pieces of the sacrificial animals. In the *Apocalypse of Abraham* the sacerdotal elaboration of Abraham's trance comes on a new, one might say, cosmic level which now envisions the patriarch's visionary experience as an eschatological reenactment of the central sacerdotal rite of the Jewish religious tradition, the Yom Kippur ordinance. Our previous investigation already explored some of the details of this complex sacerdotal setting including Abraham's participation in the Scapegoat ritual. We have been able to see that another important aspect of this rite, namely, entrancing a human celebrant into the realm of the divine presence, has not been forgotten by the authors of the Slavonic apocalypse. In this respect it is not coincidental that the scapegoat rite has occurred right before seer's entrance in the heaven which understood in our text as the temple.

As we are already able to see that in our text the symbolism of the heavenly Temple is shrouded in the paradoxical and often puzzling metaphors which attempt to bring the traditional

Ezekelian imagery on a new conceptual level through its radical reformulation with the language of the aural paradigm. It leads to formation of the novel symbolic features which will become so important for the later Jewish mysticism.

Many features of the heavenly sanctuary's depictions therefore appear to anticipate the future peculiar cultic traits prominent in the Merkabah and Hekhalot traditions, the esoteric lore where the sacerdotal concerns were not only not forgotten but further extensively elaborated. Thus, these traditions often strive to endow their angelic and human protagonists with the high priestly credentials depicting them as the cultic servants in the heavenly sanctuary. Furthermore, like in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, these later Jewish traits are permeated with the stories of the sacerdotal initiations in which the angelic guides reveal to human visionaries mysteries of the heavenly worship, preparing them for the service in the celestial sanctuary. Moreover, some of emblematic sacerdotal symbols associated with both the terrestrial and the heavenly sanctuaries themselves become a focus of intense attention and elaboration. Thus, in one of the prominent Hekhalot accounts, the heavenly priest Metatron reveal to his human apprentice R. Ishmael several peculiar features of the heavenly Temple – including the marvelous curtain *Pargod* – a portentous celestial boundary, which like the veil in the terrestrial sanctuary intends to separate the holy abode of the Deity from the profane realm of the rest of creation. In *3 Enoch* this cosmic curtain serves as the medium of revelation by unfolding before the eyes of the seer the whole picture of the human history. It is possible that this tradition of the revelatory instrument represented by the boundary between various realms is already present in its rudimentary form in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. We should now proceed to the close investigation of this imagery.

It already has been noted that the peculiar arrangement of the patriarch's acquisition of revelations in the heavenly throne room is reminiscent of the vision of the *Pargod*,¹⁶ an enigmatic entity which in later Jewish mystical accounts is often depicted as the mystical textile which miraculously reflects the history of all creation. In this respect some perceptive students of the Slavonic apocalypse previously commented on the fact that the unique way in which Abraham receives the vision of the ages is reminiscent of disclosures often revealed to the Hekhalot mystics on the celestial curtain and by the apocalyptic seers on the heavenly tablets.¹⁷

Thus, already Gershom Sholem in his seminal work *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* drew attention to a connection between the vision of the end time given to Abraham in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the revelation of *Pargod* which Metatron discloses to R. Ishmael in

¹⁶ On the *Pargod* traditions, see: Alexander, "3 Enoch," 1.296; D. Arbel, *Beholders of Divine Secrets: Mysticism and Myth in the Hekhalot and Merkavah Literature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003) 39, 100; H. Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum* (WUNT, 2; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1951) 73ff.; F.T. Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth* (NHMS, 10; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 55; D. Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven, American Oriental Society, 1980) 169, note 99; O. Hofius, *Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes* (WUNT, 14; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1972) 17ff.; G. MacRae, *Some Elements of Jewish Apocalyptic and Mystical Tradition and Their Relation to Gnostic Literature* (2 vols.; Ph.D. diss.; University of Cambridge, 1966) 1.49-78; C.R.A. Morray-Jones, *A Transparent Illusion: The Dangerous Vision of Water in Hekhalot Mysticism: A Source-critical and Tradition-historical Inquiry* (JSJSup, 59; Leiden: Brill, 2002) 164ff; Morray-Jones and Rowland, *The Mystery of God*, 372; Oboderg, *3 Enoch*, 141; S. Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation: Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994) 5.

¹⁷ Cf. Stone, *Jewish Writings*, 417, n. 190. B. Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, "Apocalypse d'Abraham," in: *La Bible. Écrits intertestamentaires* (eds. A. Dupont-Sommer et al.; La Bibliothèque de la Pléiade; Paris, 1987) 1691–1730, esp. 1720, n. 9.

Sefer Hekhalot,¹⁸ seeing the imagery found in the Slavonic apocalypse as a crucial formative step which anticipated these later Jewish mystical developments. He writes,

Among the most important objects which Metatron describes to Rabbi Ishmael is the cosmic veil or curtain before the throne, which conceals the glory of God from the host of angels. The idea of such a veil appears to be very old; references to it are to be found already in Aggadic passages from the second century. The existence of veils in the resplendent sphere of the aeons is also mentioned in a Coptic writing belonging to the Gnostic school, the *Pistis Sophia*. Now, this cosmic curtain, as it is described in the Book of Enoch, contains the images of all things which since the day of creation have their pre-existing reality, as it were, in the heavenly sphere. All generations and all their lives and actions are woven into this curtain; he who sees it penetrates at the same time into the secret of Messianic redemption, for like the course of history, the final struggle and the deeds of the Messiah are already pre-existent real and visible. As we have seen, this combination of knowledge relating to the Merkabah and the Hekhalot with a vision of the Messianic end – the inclusion, that is to say, of apocalyptic and eschatological knowledge – is very old. It dominates the Apocalypse of Abraham and the Book of Enoch no less than the various Hekhalot tracts four or eight centuries later.¹⁹

Indeed, in *3 Enoch* 45²⁰ the translated seventh antediluvian hero reveals to R. Ishmael the heavenly entity on which this visionary like Abraham is able to see the whole span of the human history.²¹ *3 Enoch* 45:1-6 reads:

¹⁸ For the *Pargod* traditions in rabbinic literature see also; *b. Yoma* 77a; *b. Ber.* 18b; *b. Hag.* 15a-b; *b. Sanh.* 89b; *b. Sota* 49a; *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 4,6; *Zohar* I.47a; II.149b-150a; *Maseket Hekhalot* 7.

¹⁹ Scholem, *Major Trends*, 72.

²⁰ The disclosure of the curtain to R. Ishmael in *3 Enoch* is not a unique rabbinic tradition. Other rabbinic materials also make reference to visionaries that were privileged to behold *Pargod*. According to the Babylonian Talmud and the *Book of Zohar*, the Protoplast was the first human being who received a peculiar vision of every

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,²² 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....²³

generation and its leaders. Thus, *b. Sanh.* 38b reads: “And that is what Resh Lakish meant when he said: What is the meaning of the verse, This is the book of the generations of Adam? It is to intimate that the Holy One, blessed be He, showed him [Adam] every generation and its thinkers, every generation and its sages. When he came to the generation of Rabbi Akiba, he [Adam] rejoiced at his learning but was grieved at his death, and said: How weighty are Thy friends to me, O God.” Epstein, *Soncino Hebrew-English Talmud. Sanhedrin* 38b. In the *Alphabet of R. Aqiba* the famous tanna receives the revelation of the future sages of Israel on the curtain. Cf. A. Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash* (6 vols.; Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1967) 3.44.

²¹ According to *b. Sanh.* 38b. the similar vision was given to Adam when to the first human was shown every generation with its learned man. Odeberg compares this tradition to the revelation of the *Pargod* to R. Ishmael. See Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 141.

²² It is intriguing that this reference to the Omnipresent Deity in the beginning of the narration might implicitly reaffirm that the curtain spread before Him will include everything in creation.

²³ Alexander, “3 Enoch,” 1.296-299. Jewish mystical lore attempts to explicate how the omniscient historical and physical reality can be constantly present before the eyes of the creator. In *Zohar* 1.90b-91b this tradition takes the following form: “See now what R. Simeon has told us, in explanation of the verse ‘This is the

It is curious that the mystical screen of *3 Enoch*, like the medium of revelation in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, unveils the order of events from the generation of the protological couple until the generation of the Messiah. It is also noteworthy that the vision of the curtain *Pargod* in *3 Enoch*, similar to the developments found in the Slavonic apocalypse, is surrounded with the plethora of the distinctive sacerdotal motifs. Both texts underscore that the recipients of the unique revelation are high priestly figures. The cultic credentials of the main angelic character of the *Sefer Hekhalot*, Enoch-Metatron, are well known from early Enochic and rabbinic materials.²⁴ It also appears that the angelic protagonist of *3 Enoch* and his human apprentice, R. Ishmael, similar to Yahoel and Abraham in the Slavonic apocalypse, are interconnected with each other through the set of the peculiar visionary and sacerdotal motifs that underline the cultic pedigree of the human seer.²⁵ In this respect it is not coincidental that

book of the generations of Adam,' that God showed Adam every generation and its students, etc. This does not simply mean that he saw through the spirit of prophecy that they were destined to come into the world, like one who in wisdom foresees the future, but it means that he literally saw with his eyes the form in which they were destined to exist in the world. He was able to do this because from the day on which the world was created all the souls which were destined to come to life among mankind were existing before God in that very form which they were destined to assume on earth (in the same way that the righteous after death are clothed in a form similar to that which they wore in this world), and so Adam saw them with his eyes. . . . When God showed Adam all future generations, he saw them all in the Garden of Eden in the form which they were destined to assume in this world. . . ." Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*, 1.298-299. As we can see the revelation to Adam has very similar content that the revelation given to R. Ishmael in *Sefer Hekhalot*. The first human too sees each generation and "its students."

²⁴ On priestly role of Enoch-Metatron, see Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition*, 113-20.

²⁵ See, for example, *Synopse* §3: "Metatron replied, 'He [R. Ishmael] is of the tribe of Levi, which presents the offering to his name. He is of the family of Aaron, whom the Holy One, blessed be He, chose to

the recipient of the *Pargod's* vision in the *Sefer Hekhalot* is the tanna who is attested in *b. Ber.* 7a as a high priest.²⁶ Rachel Elijor indicates that in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, this rabbinic authority is portrayed in terms similar to those used in the Talmud, as a priest burning an offering on the altar.²⁷

Further, it is not coincidental that in *3 Enoch*, as in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the revelation of the *Pargod* occurs in the course of the sacerdotal instruction and more precisely during the reenactment of some Yom Kippur settings when the angelic guide endowed with the priestly credentials leads the human seer into the celestial Holy of Holies. As one can see, both accounts are permeated with the dynamics of sacerdotal instruction and initiation where the revelation of the celestial curtain plays a pivotal role.

Before we proceed to the analysis of the *Pargod* traditions in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, a short excursus into early Jewish *Pargod* traditions is needed. Although the aforementioned attestations to the *Pargod* traditions are found in later rabbinic and *Hekhalot* accounts, scholars previously argued that their early roots are possibly traceable to the imagery of the heavenly tablets found in Mesopotamian and early Enochic materials. Several Second Temple Jewish materials report that these media of revelation, as in later *Pargod* tradition, are able to communicate to the seer a disclosure of the “ages.” Thus, for example, according to 4Q180 1.1-3 “all ages” are engraved on the heavenly tablets:

minister in his presence and on whose head he himself placed the priestly crown on Sinai.’ ” *3 Enoch* 2:3.
Alexander, “3 Enoch,” 1.257.

²⁶ See also *b. Ketub.* 105b; *b. Hul.* 49a.

²⁷ Elijor, “From Earthly Temple to Heavenly Shrines,” 225.

Interpretation concerning the ages which God has made: An age to conclude [all that there is] and all that will be. Before creating them he determined [their] operations [according to the precise sequence of the ages,] one age after another age. And this is engraved on the [heavenly] tablets [for the sons of men,] [for] /[a]ll/ the ages of their dominion.²⁸

Moreover as in the aforementioned tradition found in *3 Enoch* where the seer is able to see a record of every act of each generation, “whether done or to be done,” the heavenly tablets also able to reveal the record of every individual act. Thus, according to *1 Enoch* 81:1-2, by looking at the heavenly tablets the seventh antediluvian hero is able to learn about every human action:

And he said to me: “O Enoch, look at the book of the tablets of heaven, and read what is written upon them, and learn *every individual act*.” And I looked at everything in the tablets of heaven, and I read everything which was written, and I noted everything.²⁹

In *1 Enoch* 93:2 and 106:19 the same visionary is depicted as acquiring the eschatological mysteries through the media of the heavenly tablets – an important subject of the disclosures in later rabbinic *Pargod* accounts:

²⁸ García-Martínes and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 1.371. It is intriguing that further in this passage similarly to the *Apocalypse of Abraham* the seer receives a revelation about Azazel and his angels.

²⁹ Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, 2.186. Cf. also *1 Enoch* 103:1-2: “... I swear to you that I understand this mystery. And I have read the tablets of heaven and seen the writings of the holy ones, and I found written and engraved in it concerning them” Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, 2.240.

And Enoch said: “Concerning the sons of righteousness and concerning the chosen of the world and concerning the plant of righteousness and uprightness I will speak these things to you and make (them) known to you, my children, I Enoch, according to that which appeared to me in the heavenly vision, and which I know from the words of the holy angels and understand from the tablets of heaven.” (*1 Enoch* 93:2)³⁰

But after this there will be yet greater iniquity than that which was committed on the earth before. For I know the mysteries of the holy ones, for that Lord showed (them) to me and made (them) known to me, and I read (them) in the tablets of heaven. (*1 Enoch* 106:19).³¹

These striking portrayals did not remain unnoticed by the perceptive students of the *Pargod* traditions. Thus, Hugo Odeberg has previously argued that the depictions of revelations on the heavenly tablets found in early Enochic writings are corresponding to the revelation of the *Pargod*.³² Recent illuminating studies of Daphna Arbel also highlight the formative importance of the heavenly tablets imagery for the development of the later Jewish mystical accounts about the celestial curtain.³³

Furthermore, the descriptions of the veil of the terrestrial temple found in Philo and Josephus might also attest possible early developments formative for later *Pargod* imagery. In these traditions the earthly counterpart of the celestial curtain, the veil guarding the terrestrial

³⁰ Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, 2.223.

³¹ Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, 2.247-48.

³² Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 141, 147.

³³ See Arbel, *Beholders of Divine Secrets: Mysticism and Myth in the Hekhalot and Merkavah Literature*, 39, 100; idem, “Divine Secrets and Divination,” in *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism* (ed. A.D. DeConick; SBLSS, 11; Leiden: Brill, 2006) 355-79, esp. 372.

Holy of Holies, appears to be understood as the fabric that somehow mirrors the entire universe. This view appears to reflect Mesopotamian and biblical notions that the temple “was a microcosm of the entire heaven and earth.”³⁴ Scholars trace the early roots of this idea to such biblical texts as Psalm 78:69 where the psalmist tells his audience that the Deity “designed Israel’s earthly temple to be comparable to the heaven and to the earth.”³⁵

The tradition found in Josephus’s *Jewish War* attests this belief that the veil somehow represents the entire created order, being like “an image of the universe”:

Before these hung a veil of equal length, of Babylonian tapestry, with embroidery of blue and fine linen, of scarlet also and purple, wrought with marvelous skill. Nor was this mixture of materials without its mystic meaning: it typified the universe. For the scarlet seemed emblematic of fire, the fine linen of the earth, the blue of the air, and the purple of the sea; the comparison in two cases being suggested by their colour, and in that of the fine linen and purple by their origin, as the one is produced by the earth and the other by the sea. On this tapestry was portrayed a panorama of the heavens, the signs of the Zodiac excepted. (*Jewish War* V. 212–214)³⁶

As we can see the account emphasizes the combination of the colors of the veil that in author’s view symbolize four elements of the universe – fire, earth, air, and water. In Josephus’ reflection on the curtains of the Tabernacle in his *Jewish Antiquities* one can find a similar portrayal which again alludes to the cardinal elements and corresponding to the colors:

³⁴ Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 31.

³⁵ Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 32. See also J.D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988) 87-88; V.A. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House* (JSOTSS, 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) 335-37.

³⁶ Thackeray and Markus, *Josephus*, 3.265.

The tapestries woven of four materials denote the natural elements: thus the fine linen appears to typify the earth, because from it springs up the flax, and the purple the sea, since it is incarnadined with the blood of fish; the air must be indicated by the blue, and the crimson will be the symbol of fire. (*Ant.* III. 183)³⁷

Moreover the early roots of the curtain imagery as a representation of the universe might be reflected not only in the imagery of the *paroket*, but also in the symbolism of priestly garments. In this respect it is also noteworthy that both in Josephus and in Philo the robe of the celebrant is often paralleled with the veil of the temple, since the high priest is understood as the temple and his garments as the veil of this anthropomorphic sacred entity.³⁸ It parallels later Hekhalot developments where the robe of the chief sacerdotal mediator, often represented by the angel Metatron, is put in correspondence to the curtain. In *3 Enoch* 10 the heavenly veil is described in almost identical terms as Metatron's robe in *3 Enoch* 12, being depicted as decorated with "all kinds of lights":

³⁷ Thackeray and Markus, *Josephus*, 5.405.

³⁸ Robert Hayward reflects on this parallelism between the temple and its distinguished celebrant who is also understood as the temple. He argues that "the cosmos itself may be viewed as a Temple ... yet the cosmos, which is the macrocosm, finds its microcosm in human beings, who themselves may function as a Temple." Hayward, *Nonbiblical Handbook*, 110-11. This idea appears to be reflected in one passage found in Philo's *De Somniis* I.215: "For there are, as is evident, two temples of God: one of them this universe, in which there is also as High Priest His First-born, the divine Word, and the other the rational soul, whose Priest is the real Man; the outward and visible image of whom is he who offers the prayers and sacrifices handed down from our fathers, to whom it has been committed to wear the aforesaid tunic, which is a copy and replica of the whole heaven, the intention of this being that the universe may join with man in the holy rites and man with the universe." Colson and Whitaker, *Philo*, 5.413.

... R. Ishmael said: Metatron, the Prince of the Presence, said to me: All these things the Holy One, blessed be He, made for me: He made me a Throne, similar to the Throne of Glory. And He spread over me a curtain of splendour and brilliant appearance, of beauty, grace and mercy, similar to the curtain of the Throne of Glory; and on it were fixed all kinds of lights in the universe. (3 *Enoch* 10:1)³⁹

He made me a garment of glory on which were fixed all kinds of lights, and He clad me in it
And He made me a robe of honour on which were fixed all kinds of beauty, splendour, brilliance and majesty. . . . (3 *Enoch* 12:1-2)⁴⁰

The early roots of these later Jewish correspondences can be traced to some Second Temple accounts. Thus, in the already mentioned passage from the Third Book of the *Jewish Antiquities*, Josephus' portrayal of the veil mirrors his description of the sacerdotal garments of the celebrant:

The high-priest's tunic likewise signifies the earth, being of linen, and its blue the arch of heaven, while it recalls the lightnings by its pomegranates, the thunder by the sound of its bells. His upper garment, too, denotes universal nature, which it pleased God to make of four elements; being further interwoven with gold in token, I imagine, of the all-pervading sunlight. The *essen*, again, he set in the midst of this garment, after the manner of the earth, which occupies the midmost place; and by girdle wherewith he encompassed it he signified the ocean, which holds the whole in its embrace. Sun and moon are indicated by the two sardonyxes wherewith he pinned the high-priest's robe. As for the twelve stones, whether one would prefer to read in them the months or the constellations of like number, which the Greeks call the circle of the zodiac, he will not mistake the lawgiver's intention. Furthermore, the head-dress appears to me to

³⁹ Odeberg, 3 *Enoch*, 27-28.

⁴⁰ Odeberg, 3 *Enoch*, 32.

symbolize heaven, being blue; else it would not have borne upon it the name of God, blazoned upon the crown – a crown, moreover, of gold by reason of that sheen in which the Deity most delights. (*Ant.* III. 184–187).⁴¹

Robert Hayward brings attention to a very similar tendency in Philo by noticing that in *De Spec. Leg.* I. 95–96 the great Hellenistic exegete “remarks that the garments are a copy of the universe, an ‘icon’ of the all which the high priest wears, so ... the whole cosmos may perform the liturgy with him.”⁴² Philo’s *De Spec. Leg.* I.84 affirms the same idea even more forcefully:

... The high priest is bidden to put on a similar dress when he enters the inner shrine to offer incense ... it would seem to be a likeness and copy of the universe. This clearly shewn by its design. ...⁴³

In *Life of Moses* II.117–21, Philo offers more elaborate description of the high priestly garment:

Such was the vesture of the high priest. But I must not leave untold its meaning and that of its parts. We have in it as a whole and in parts a typical representation of the world and its particular parts. Let us begin

⁴¹ Thackeray and Markus, *Josephus*, 5.405-7.

⁴² Hayward, *Nonbiblical Handbook*, 116. *De Spec. Leg.* I. 95–96 reads: “The order in which the parts [of the high priest’s garment] are arranged is also admirable. At the very top is what he calls the breastpiece in which are placed the stones, a copy of heaven because heaven also is at the top. Then under it the full length skirt, dark blue right through because the air also is black and occupies the second position below the heaven, and the flower-work and pomegranates at the extremities because to earth and water is allotted the lowest place in the universe. Such is the form in which the sacred vesture was designed, a copy of the universe, a piece of work of marvelous beauty to the eye and the mind.” Colson and Whitaker, *Philo*, 7.153-55.

⁴³ Colson and Whitaker, *Philo*, 7.149.

with the full-length robe. This gown is all of violet, and is thus an image of the air; for the air is naturally black, and so to speak a robe reaching to the feet, since it stretches down from the region below the moon to the ends of the earth, and spreads out everywhere. And, therefore, the gown, too, spreads out from the breast to the feet round the whole body. At the ankles there stand out from it pomegranates and flower trimming and bells. The earth is represented by the flowers, for all that flowers and grows comes from the earth; the water by the pomegranates or flowing fruit, so aptly called from their flowing juice; while the bells represent the harmonious alliance of these two, since life cannot be produced by earth without water or by water without the substance of earth, but only by the union and combination of both. Their position testifies most clearly to this explanation. For, just as the pomegranates, the flower trimming and the bells are at the extremities of the long robe, so too what these symbolize, namely earth and water, occupy the lowest place in the universe, and in unison with the harmony of the All display their several powers at fixed resolutions of time and at their proper seasons. This proof that the three elements, earth, water and air, from which come and in which live all mortal and perishable forms of life, are symbolized by the long robe with the appendages at the ankles, is supported by observing that as the gown is one, the three said elements are of a single kind, since all below the moon is alike in its liability to change and alteration, and that, as the pomegranates and flower patterns are fastened to the gown, so too in a sense earth and water are suspended on the air, which acts as their support. (*De Vit. Mos.* II. 117–121)⁴⁴

It is noteworthy that some parts of the garments of the chief cultic celebrant of the Jewish tradition symbolize not only the earthly realities but also other details of the cosmic order, including the zodiac and planets. Thus, according to Philo, the details of the ephod contain the symbolic references to the celestial bodies:

As for the ephod, consideration following what probability suggests will represent it as a symbol of heaven. For first the two circular emerald stones on the shoulder-pieces indicate, as some think, those heavenly bodies which rule the day and night, namely the sun and the moon, or, as may be said with a nearer

⁴⁴ Colson and Whitaker, *Philo*, 6.505-507.

approach to truth, the two hemispheres of the sky. For, just as the stones are equal to each other, so is the hemisphere above to that below the earth, and neither is so constituted as to increase and diminish as does the moon. A similar testimony is given by their colour, for the appearance of the whole heaven as presented to our sight is like the emerald. Six names, too, had to be engraved on each of the stones, since each of the hemispheres also divides the zodiac into two, and appropriates six of the signs. (*De Vit. Mos.* II. 122–123).⁴⁵

In respect to this tradition Robert Hayward notes,

. . . the emeralds again feature as representing the hemispheres and the divided zodiac in *Quis Heres* 176; *QE* II.109. Set into the ephod is a breastplate, Hebrew hôšen. According to *De Spec. Leg.* I. 86, 94, both these items symbolize the heaven. The breastplate contained twelve precious stones in four rows of three. These are of different colors, and symbolize the circle of the zodiac, each group of three stones indicating the four seasons which recur according to stable principle. (*De Vit. Mos.* II. 124; *De Spec. Leg.* I.87)⁴⁶

Moreover, like in aforementioned depictions from Josephus where the cosmic nature of the terrestrial veil is reflected in its colors symbolizing the four elements of the universe (air, water, fire and earth), Philo's portrayal of the priestly robe also contains this allusion to the elements and colors of the created order:

Thus is the high priest arrayed when he sets forth to his holy duties, in order that when he enters to offer the ancestral prayers and sacrifices there may enter with him the whole universe, as signified in the types of it which he brings upon his person, the long robe a copy of the air, the pomegranate of water, the flower trimming of earth, the scarlet of fire, the ephod of heaven, the circular emeralds on the shoulder-tops with

⁴⁵ Colson and Whitaker, *Philo*, 6.507-9.

⁴⁶ Hayward, *Nonbiblical Handbook*, 115.

six engravings in each of the two hemispheres which they resemble in form, the twelve stones on the breast in four rows of threes of the zodiac. . . . he wears a vesture which represents the world. . . . (*De Vit. Mos.* II. 133–135)⁴⁷

Although the descriptions found in Philo and Josephus are different in several details,⁴⁸ they nevertheless share the common ideological tendency in which both the veil of the sanctuary as well as the garments of the highest cultic servant are understood as the reflection of the entire creation.

Wisdom of Solomon 18:24 seems to be reflecting the similar tradition by giving description of Aaron’s priestly robe as containing the depiction of the whole world and “the glories of the fathers”: “For upon his long robe the whole world was depicted, and the glories of the fathers were engraved on the four rows of stones, and thy majesty on the diadem upon his head.”

This projection of the entire creation on the sacerdotal fabric representing the veil of either cosmic or anthropomorphic sanctuary is intriguing as it might represent an important contribution to the concept of the heavenly curtain *Pargod*, which shows to apocalyptic or *Hekhalot* seers the entire universe. Yet, it should be noted, that while the early Jewish descriptions of the veil found in Josephus and Philo attempt to underline more abstract

⁴⁷ Colson and Whitaker, *Philo*, 6.513-15.

⁴⁸ Thus, Hayward points out that while in Josephus “the blue robe signifies both earth (being made of linen, like the Temple and Tabernacle veils) and heaven, since it is blue in color,” in “Philo, however, this robe is symbolic of the air and of the regions below the moon (*De Vit. Mos.* II. 117 ff.). . . . The ephod, which Philo understood as representing heaven (*De Vit. Mos.* II. 122 ff.), [in Josephus] indicates the universe made up of four elements, its golden parts symbolizing sunlight.” Hayward, *Nonbiblical Handbook*, 150.

cosmological aspects, the later *Pargod* accounts puts their main emphasis on biblical history, trying to depict generations of famous characters of the protological and Israelite history.

Some early Christian traditions also appear to be cognizant of the *Pargod*'s imagery.⁴⁹ Thus, scholars previously noted that in the temptation story found in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is depicted as a recipient of the peculiar disclosure on the cultic mountain when his eschatological opponent shows him the vision of all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. Here in Satan's ability to show Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor one might have a possible reference to a revelatory medium similar to the celestial curtain *Pargod*, the sacred veil of the divine Face, which in *3 Enoch* 45 is described as an entity that "displays" all generations and all kingdoms simultaneously in the same time.

After this short excursus into early *Pargod* traditions it is time to return to the developments found in the Slavonic apocalypse. Before we proceed to a close analysis of the revelation given to the patriarch, several words must be said about enigmatic settings that surrounds this disclosure. *Apoc. Ab.* 21:1-2 reports about the Deity's command which the visionary receives immediately before the disclosure was given to him:

And he said to me, "Look now beneath your feet at the expanse and contemplate the creation which was previously covered over. On this level there is the creation and those who inhabit it and the age that has been prepared to follow it." And I looked beneath the expanse at my feet and I saw the likeness of heaven and what was therein.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ On this tradition see A. Orlov, "Satan and the Visionary: The Temptation Story in the Gospel of Matthew," in: A. Orlov, *Dark Mirrors: Azazel and Satanael in Early Jewish Demonology* (Albany: SUNY, 2011) 110.

⁵⁰ Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 26.

Here the Deity orders the seer look beneath his feet in order to receive a most recondite revelation. At first such arrangement of the vision appears to be strange and quite different from the customary appearances of the *Pargod*, the revelatory medium which in rabbinic accounts is usually situated in vertical and not horizontal dimension. Yet, it appears that in the Slavonic apocalypse the curtain of the celestial Holy of Holies, unlike the *paroket* of the earthly adytum is depicted not as vertical but as horizontal entity. The arrangement of vision underlines the fact that Abraham looks from the heavenly Holy of Holies down on the medium of the divine revelation which situated under his feet. It affirms a paradoxical spatial structure of the celestial sanctuary in which the upper Holy of Holies is separated from the lower realms by the horizontal boundary labeled in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as “a spreading under one’s feet” – in Slavonic, простертие ножное.⁵¹ This tradition of the horizontal placement of the heavenly veil is not unique to the Slavonic apocalypse and can be found in other Jewish documents. Thus, for example, in some rabbinic traditions one of the heavens is sometimes understood as a veil that separates the celestial Holy of Holies from lower realms/heavens which often are envisioned there as the less sacred chambers of the heavenly Temple. Thus, George MacRae, in his in-depth investigation of the imagery of the heavenly veil,⁵² draws attention to a passage from the

⁵¹ Philonenko-Sayar and Philonenko, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, 84. The Slavonic term простертие can mean “spreading.” It is reminiscent of an already mentioned passage from *3 Enoch* 45 where the heavenly curtain is spread before the Deity: “which is spread before the Holy One.” Other Slavonic term used for the description of the medium of revelation is образование or образ – an image, a picture.

⁵² MacRae makes an important distinction between two concepts of the celestial veil: one horizontal and the other vertical. In his opinion, “two types of veil emerge: the Wilon or curtain dividing heaven from earth (or noetic

Babylonian Talmud in which the lowest heaven, Wilon (וילון),⁵³ is understood as the cosmic veil.⁵⁴ The passage from *b. Hag.* 12b reads:

R. Judah said: There are two firmaments, for it is said: Behold, unto the Lord thy God belongeth heaven, and the heaven of heavens. Resh Lakish said: [There are] seven, namely, Wilon, Rakia', Shehakim, Zebul, Ma'on, Makon, 'Araboth. Wilon serves no purpose except that it enters in the morning and goes forth in the evening and renews every day the work of creation, for it is said: That stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in. Rakia' is that in which sun and moon, stars and constellations are set, for it is said: And God set them in the firmament [Rakia'] of the heaven.⁵⁵

Here according to the rabbinic tradition the cosmic curtain, represented by the lowest of the seven firmaments,⁵⁶ Wilon, draws in every morning, revealing the light of day to the world.

world from sense-perceptible), and the *Pargod* or curtain before the divine throne in heaven.” MacRae, *Some Elements of Jewish Apocalyptic and Mystical Tradition and Their Relation to Gnostic Literature*, 68.

⁵³ The term is derived from Lat. *velum*. Alexander, “3 Enoch,” 1.269.

⁵⁴ MacRae, *Some Elements of Jewish Apocalyptic and Mystical Tradition and Their Relation to Gnostic Literature*, 49.

⁵⁵ Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud. Hagiga* 12b.

⁵⁶ Sometimes all the firmaments are understood as “curtains.” Thus, *Zohar* II.164b unveils the following tradition: “R. Hiya discoursed on the words: Who covers thyself with light as with a garment, who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain (*yeri'ah*) (Ps. CIV, 2). Said he: ‘These words have been interpreted as follows: When the Holy One was about to create the world He robed Himself in the primordial light and created the heavens. At first the light was at the right and the darkness at the left. What, then, did the Holy One do? He merged the one into the other and from them formed the heavens: *shamaim* (heavens) is composed of *esh* and *mayim* (fire and water, i.e. right and left). He brought them together and harmonized them, and when they were united as one, He stretched them out like a curtain, and formed them into the letter *vau*. From this letter the light spread, so that ‘curtain’

In the evening the same cosmic veil draws out and hides the daylight.⁵⁷ The important detail of the Wilon's description is that this cosmic curtain appears to be understood as decorated with the constellations of stars and planets, including the sun and moon. It recalls aforementioned portrayals of the sacerdotal veils found in Philo and Josephus where both the actual curtain and its anthropomorphic replica, in the form of garments of the highest sacerdotal servant, are said to be decorated with symbols of the Zodiac and the astronomical bodies.

The biblical roots of Wilon's imagery is usually traced to Isa 40:22, where the Deity is depicted as stretching heavens like a curtain: "It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in. . . ." ⁵⁸

became 'curtains,' as it is written: 'And thou shalt make the tabernacle with ten curtains.' Seven firmaments are stretched out and stored in the supernal treasure-house, as has been explained, and over them is one firmament which has no colour and no place in the world of cognition, and is outside the range of contemplation; but, though hidden, it diffuses light to all and speeds them each on its fitting orbit. Beyond that firmament knowledge cannot penetrate, and man must close his mouth and not seek to reflect upon it. He who does so reflect is turned backwards, for it passes our knowledge - The ten curtains of the Tabernacle symbolized the ten firmaments. . . ." Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*, 4.67-68. Cf. *Zohar* II.209a: "There are heavens and heavens; to wit, lower heavens with an earth beneath them, and upper heavens also having an earth beneath them. They constitute upper grades and lower grades, the two being counterparts of each other. The lower heavens are identical with the ten curtains, to which allusion is made in the words: 'Who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain' (Ps. CIV, 2)" Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar* 4.210.

⁵⁷ Cf. MacRae, *Some Elements of Jewish Apocalyptic and Mystical Tradition and Their Relation to Gnostic Literature*, 50. In this regard Philip Alexander observes, "It would seem, then, that the first heaven is regarded as a sort of veil or curtain which either conceals the heavenly world from human eyes, or which, by being opened and shut, is the cause of daylight and darkness." Alexander, "3 Enoch," 269.

⁵⁸ Hofius, *Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes*, 21.

Another talmudic passage found in *b. Ber.* 58b also connects the imagery of the celestial veil with Wilon: “R. Huna the son of R. Joshua said: Wilon was torn asunder and rolled up, showing the brightness of Rakia.”⁵⁹ For our investigation it is significant that in both talmudic passages the symbolism of Wilon is coincided with the imagery of firmament (רקיע). This connection is important in the light of the tradition found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* where the seer beholds the mysteries of creation and human history by gazing on the firmament at his feet:

And he said to me, “Look now beneath your feet at the *expanse* (простертие) and contemplate the creation which was previously covered over. On this level there is the creation and those who inhabit it and the age that has been prepared to follow it.” And I looked beneath the *expanse* (простертие) at my feet and I saw the likeness of heaven and what was therein. (*Apoc. Ab.* 21:1-2)⁶⁰

It is noteworthy that in the biblical materials the firmament or expanse (רקיע) is often understood as the diaphragm that separates upper waters from lower waters. From Gen 1:6 one learns that the Deity created a firmament (רקיע) in the midst of the waters in order to separate “the waters from the waters.” Some midrashic materials, similar to the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, also appear to envision the firmament’s separating function as the cosmic curtain by tracing the etiology of the sacerdotal veil to the division of upper and lower waters at the crucial point of

⁵⁹ On similar traditions about Wilon in *Midrash Konen* and other rabbinic materials, see Hofius, *Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes*, 20-21; MacRae, *Some Elements of Jewish Apocalyptic and Mystical Tradition and Their Relation to Gnostic Literature*, 50.

⁶⁰ Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 26; Philonenko-Sayar and Philonenko, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, 82-84.

creation. Thus, in *Midrash Bereshit Rabbati* on Exod 26:33 the veil of the terrestrial sanctuary is put in parallel to the firmament as the dividing line between upper and lower waters:

In the Tabernacle the veil divided between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, and in body the diaphragm divides the heart from the stomach, and in the world it is the firmament which divides between the upper waters from lower waters. . . .⁶¹

Numbers Rabbah 12:13 preserves the similar conceptual development:

. . . It is written, In the beginning God created the heaven, etc. (Gen. I, 1), and it is written, Who stretchest out the heaven like a curtain (Ps. CIV, 2), while of the Tabernacle it is written, And thou shalt make curtains of goat's hair for a tent over the Tabernacle, etc. (Ex. XXVI, 7). It is written in connection with the second day, Let there be a firmament . . . and let it divide, etc. (Gen. I, 6), and of the Tabernacle it is written. The veil shall divide unto you (Ex. XXVI, 33). Of the third day we read, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together (Gen. I, 9). . . .⁶²

The passage from the *Book of Zohar* underlines the sacerdotal significance of the firmament as the curtain by telling that it separates the more sacred realm from the less sacred:

Said R. Judah: "From this we learn that every division (of opinion) in which both sides act for the glory of heaven endures, since here we have a division which was for the sake of heaven. Through the firmament the heavens were established, as it is written, 'and God called the firmament heaven,' since this divides the more from the less holy, like the curtain in the Tabernacle." (*Zohar* 1.33a)⁶³

⁶¹ *Midrash Bereshit Rabbati* (ed. H. Albeck; Jerusalem: Mektise Nirdamim, 1940) 32.

⁶² Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 5.483.

⁶³ Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*, 1.124.

It appears that the aforementioned passages from *Midrash Rabbah* and the *Zohar* one can find a peculiar parallelism in which the dividing line between upper and lower waters is understood as the cosmic veil. This rabbinic understanding of the curtain as the cosmic diaphragm between more sacred upper regions and less sacred lower realms, a boundary represented either by lowest heaven or firmament appears to have quite early conceptual roots. George MacRae draws attention to some Nag Hammadi materials in which the cosmic veil is understood as the threshold that separates the divine Pleroma from the world of matter. This belief is accentuated, for example, in the *Hypostasis of Archons* 22 which tells that “. . . a veil exists between the world above and the realms that are below; and shadow came into being beneath the veil; and that shadow became matter; and that shadow was projected apart.”⁶⁴ Here is like in the Jewish texts attesting to the Wilon imagery the veil is understood as the horizontal entity dividing the divine realm from its material “shadow.” Another passage from the *Hypostasis of Archons* 28 again envisions the cosmic veil as the dividing border between upper and lower abodes: “And Sophia and Zoe caught him up and gave him charge of the seventh heaven, below the veil between above and below.”⁶⁵ In these heterodox Christian traditions, similar to the aforementioned rabbinic developments where the lowest firmament Wilon serves as the macrocosmic veil, the lowest region/aeon of the divine Fullness, Sophia, is often understood as the curtain separating the realm of the Pleroma from the realm of humans. Thus,

⁶⁴ *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2-7 (2 vols.; eds. B. Layton et al.; NHC, 20; Leiden: Brill, 1989) 1.253

⁶⁵ *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2-7, 1.255.

another Nag Hammadi text, *On the Origin of the World* 4, informs its readers, “. . . she (Sophia) functioned as a veil dividing mankind from the things above. . . .”⁶⁶

Now it is time to return to the Slavonic text. Horizontal spatial arrangement of the macrocosmic “veil” in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, in the view of the sacerdotal conceptual thrust of the text, might have not only cosmological but also cultic significance. Such arrangement might suggest that lower realms portrayed in the patriarch’s vision can be understood as exterior chambers of the temple of the universe, which corresponds to the less sacred chambers of the terrestrial sanctuary known as *devir* and *hekhel*.⁶⁷ Moreover it appears that in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* the courtyard of this cosmic temple might include not only the earthy realm but also the underworld.

As we recall from his exalted position in the celestial Holy of Holies, the patriarch beholds not only events of the earthly abode but also realities of subterranean realm when Abraham sees the Leviathan and its surroundings. If it is indeed the case, these developments might correspond to a tradition found in Josephus⁶⁸ and rabbinic accounts,⁶⁹ in which the

⁶⁶ *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2-7, 2.31.

⁶⁷ It appears to be not coincidental that in these lower “sacerdotal” chambers the patriarch also sees some cultic settings including the aforementioned theophany of Azazel.

⁶⁸ Cf. Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities* 3.180-181: “Thus, to take the tabernacle, thirty cubits long, by dividing this into three parts and giving up two of them to the priests, as a place approachable and open to all, Moses signifies the earth and the sea, since these are too are accessible to all; but third portion he reserved for God alone, because heaven also is inaccessible to men” (Thackeray and Markus, *Josephus*, 4.403).

⁶⁹ Scholars note the parallelism between the realm of sea and sacerdotal realm of the courtyard in *Numbers Rabbah* 13:19 where the courtyard encompasses the Tabernacle as the sea encompasses the world: “His offering was one silver dish, etc. The dish was in allusion to the court which encompassed the Tabernacle as the sea encompasses

heaven, earth and subterranean realm of the sea are understood respectively as corresponding to the Holy of Holies and less sacred chambers of the temple.⁷⁰

[an excerpt from *Heavenly Priesthood in the Apocalypse of Abraham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)]

the world.” Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 6.546. On the similar tradition in *Midrash Tadshe*, see MacRae, *Some Elements of Jewish Apocalyptic and Mystical Tradition and Their Relation to Gnostic Literature*, 55.

⁷⁰ MacRae, *Some Elements of Jewish Apocalyptic and Mystical Tradition and Their Relation to Gnostic Literature*, 55.